

Fate/Apocrypha

フェイト／アポクリファ

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1 「外伝：聖杯大戦」
東出祐一郎
イラスト 近衛乙周

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ホムンクルス

Height/Weight: 165cm/53kg

Blood type: unknown

Birthday: unknown

An artificial life-form created using the techniques of the Einzberns in order to supply prana separately from the Yggdmillennia Masters.

He possesses first-class Magic Circuits, but he's a failed creation from birth.

ルーラー / ジャンヌ・ダルク

Height/Weight:159cm/44kg

Blood type:unknown

Birthday:unknown

Measurements:B85 W59 H86

The Heroic Spirit of ruling summoned by the Greater Grail in order to supervise the Holy Grail War. Her true name is Jeanne d'Arc. At first she thinks she was summoned in order to smoothly run the largest-scale Holy Grail War in history, but she eventually notices the existence of a secret plot beneath the veil of the war.



Saber of "Black"

“黒”のセイバー

Height/Weight:190cm/80kg

Blood type:unknown

Birthday:unknown



The Heroic Spirit of the sword contracted with Gordes.

A majestic knight that carries a holy sword.

He participates in the Great Holy Grail War while carrying a wish he couldn't fulfill during his lifetime, but he is forced to unwillingly shackle himself due to his cowardly Master.

ゴルド・ムジーク・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight: 168cm/98kg

Blood type: AB

Birthday: 1.1

A magus of the Yggdmillenia clan. Master of the Saber of "Black".

A prideful man who still stubbornly adheres to his lineage. He works out a plan to win the Great Holy Grail War by applying the alchemic techniques of his acquaintances, the Einzberns.



Gordes
Musik
Yggdmillenia

Lancer Of "Black"



Height/Weight: 191cm/86kg

Blood type: unknown

Birthday: 11.10

The Heroic Spirit of the lance contracted with Darnic. He is a king that once reigned supreme in Romania, and due to making use of his extensive fame, he is treated as the cornerstone to Yggdmillennia's strategy. He is fundamentally a man of character, but he treats harshly those he once considered enemies.

Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia



ダーニック・プレストーン・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight: 182cm/76kg

Blood type: O

Birthday: 5.2

A magus of the Yggdmillennia clan.
Master of the Lancer of "Black".
He should already be close to a hundred
years old, but no matter how you look at
him, his appearance is that of a man in
his twenties or thirties.

He stole away the Greater Grail in
Fuyuki with the Nazis in the past, then
concealed it in Romania. He declared
his clan's independence from the
Mage's Association and intends to
activate the Greater Grail to
symbolize this.

“黒”のバーサーカー

Height/Weight:172cm/48kg

Blood type:unknown

Birthday: A lonely night in November

Measurements:B74 W53 H71



The mad warrior Heroic Spirit contracted with Caules. She is unable to produce words, but she possesses extremely high level mental faculties, and can somehow manage simple communication. Thanks to her Noble Phantasm which absorbs excess prana from her surroundings, she can continue fighting nearly perpetually.

カウレス・フォルヴェッジ・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight:172cm/63kg

Blood type:A

Birthday:3.23

A magus of the Yggdmillennia clan.
Master of the Berserker of "Black".
Compared to his excellent older sister,
he is far inferior in terms of talent.
He is a mediocre magus, but he is
chosen as a Master and reluctantly
accepts it.



Caules Forwedge Yggdmillennia

Saber To Be Dressed



“赤”のセイバー

Height/Weight: 154cm/42kg

Blood type: unknown

Birthday: unknown

Measurements: B73 W53 H76

The Heroic Spirit of the sword contracted with Kairi Sisigou.

A knight overflowing with arrogance and excessive self-confidence.

In order to conceal her stats, she hides her face with her Noble Phantasm armor during battle.

獅子劫界離

Height/Weight:182cm/97kg

Blood type:B

Birthday:4.14



A freelance necromancer hired by the Mage's Association.
Master of the Saber of "Red".
He has a wish that can only be granted
by using an omnipotent wish-granting
device like the Holy Grail, and heads to
the enemy's territory Trifas.
Unusual for a magus, he uses guns.

A S S A S S I N O F T

“赤”のアサシン

Height/Weight: 167cm/51kg

Blood type: unknown

Birthday: unknown

Measurements: B89 W58 H87

The assassin Heroic Spirit contracted with Shirou.

A peerless beautiful woman who somehow gives off a decadent atmosphere.

While she was summoned as Assassin, she also possesses the abilities of a Caster.

She plots strategies to fulfill her own ambitions alongside Shirou.



シロウ

Height/Weight:169cm/59kg

Blood type:unknown

Birthday:unknown

One of the Masters of the "Red" Faction,
who was dispatched from the Holy Church.
Master of the Assassin of "Red".
He is using this Great Holy Grail War in
order to try to fulfill his own ambitions.





*"It is time for your execution. Come, meet an end worthy of an imitation,
Saber of Black—!"*

Saber of Red raised her grotesque sword.

It was clear to any who saw that it would be a killing blow—



After a series of banging noises, like what one would get from kicking an empty metal barrel, the truck settled and began to move. As the truck rumbled on, Ruler watched scenes of Bucharest pass by.



Prologue

It was a place which existed nowhere else. A world which existed nowhere else.

Released from the concept known as 'time', the place had neither morning nor night, sun nor moon. Only a pale aurora lit the sky.

There are no changes in this world. Its wide ocean did not know of waves, and the clouds in its sky did not know of flow. Unable to see the moon or stars, the man who inhabited this world lamented somewhat.

That was why the man closed his eyes. When he did, he could see memories of dearly missed days. There were many.

He was so very proud of his past, so much that even after repeating it thousands and tens of thousands of times, he still did not tire of it.

As always, the man had turned his head to the right, to the left, down towards the earth, up towards the sky, confirming that nothing is out of place as his eyelids closed. Then, he began to see the dream, the phantasm known as 'the past'.

Now, for the sake of his honor, something needs to be said.

This truly was the only thing left for him to do. To fight, to heal, to be saddened or angered - these were no longer necessary for him.

Was it tedious? He could only consent.

Was it painful? He would likely deny.

As always, moments from his past would be projected into his eyes, vivid and distinct. His past had been short and thus, its scenes were always clear. They would never fade - never be polluted - and never, ever be forgotten.

"Wake up, please."

To repeat once more... there are no changes in this world. Winds did not blow, waves did not break. It was simply a static place.

That is why, if change were to occur in this world... it would unmistakably be an interference coming from the outside.

The man opened his eyes. Seeing the unbelievable, he froze. Just how long had it been since his emotions were so swayed?

"It's been a long time."

Before him, *she* smiled. The man felt as though his brain was being jolted, and the sensation made him open the mouth from which words no longer came.

A lovely girl was there, her hair soft as the springtime sunlight.

The man knew her well. Every time he closed his eyes, she would appear. He would never mistake her for another. But why was she here? Why was she here... here, where she must never be?

The girl's brows knitted in sorrow, and she softly touched the man's face with her hand.

Her finger, pointing out as though in appointment, made the man breathe out a sound of joy.

"So many wounds... so alone, in this world."

This is my fault, the girl murmured sadly. That's not true, the man declared.

This is nothing you need to worry about. This is the domain of my pride. There is no perpetuity here, no eternity, no tedium, no despair, and no fear.

"I won't ever leave you by yourself any more."

Ah - and yet your words, the fact that you are here, brings me joy. Simply nothing but joy.

It should have been an unchanging, perfect world. A world where time was frozen.

But the girl is here now. And so perhaps it has fallen, no longer perfect, becoming a vulgar and common world.

The man could not contain his happiness.

The world will change.

Time will march on.

It would be no exaggeration to call this place a battlefield.

There were homunculi built for combat, swinging gigantic halberds and producing complex thaumaturgical rituals that brought massive destruction to the area around them. Not born naturally, these homunculi possessed corporeal defects which needed to be compensated for, resulting in an extremely short lifespan of two months. But it would make little difference even if it were just two weeks, as their lives were meant to be spent on this war.

From the moment they were born, forged by alchemy, the homunculi were well and fully matured. They were man-made organisms, born to fight, born to destroy, and born to die.

At the same time, there were golems constructed by Kabbalistic techniques, **doll servants** which executed the commands of their master. Compared to the homunculi, built to resemble the human form, these golems were inhuman creations of stone and bronze. What they lacked in number, they

made up for in sheer recklessness in face of any and all attacks, using their gigantic bodies and stone fists to crush and pulverize the enemy.

Any single homunculus or golem here would easily match an average magus in combat. However, both of these forces were being overwhelmed by the opposition in pure quantity.

Dragon tooth warriors - these were skeleton troops created using the fangs of dragons. By the power of the dragon race, and bestowed with knowledge from the earth itself, every fang buried into the ground becomes an inexpensive soldier. Although they were nearly powerless against the homunculi and golems that had been built for battle, they were legion.

Created for sport by a Servant of the **Red** camp, these warriors were thrown into the fray in numbers that might well be endless, wave after wave that gushed out from a massive swarm. And they would not stop until they were completely shattered. Wielding swords and axes made of bone which was tougher and sharper than steel, they came in droves, smashing golems and cleaving homunculi apart.

It was the very image of brutality. With their simple thought processes and emotions which barely existed, these golems, skeletons and homunculi simply performed the same attacks over and over, never stopping until their deaths, never resting their weapons while their enemies still existed.

Flames raced, and earth became shrapnel. Wounded soldiers immediately healed through recovery thaumaturgy, instantly returning to the field.

Let them fight. Let them break. This battle was defined by its expendability. Its soldiers were mere pawns, nothing more than a statistic... no, the battle would never be decided by them.

Every once in a while, parts of the field of battle would be engulfed by enormous explosions. They came from the powers that be, standing alone yet unmatched by thousands, scything down and breaking down entire hordes with one swing from their weapons.

For they were the greatest pieces in play, the ones who would decide the fate of this war. Nimble yet unyielding, they flashed like bolts of light, personifications of heroism.

Suddenly, the air brought violent quakes, bringing down the skeletons and golems in the surrounding area. Everything was scattered, shattered, and turned into rubble.

A peculiarly empty patch of land had formed on the field. And yet no one, be they homunculus, golem, or even the mindless dragon tooth warrior, would take a single step within. They understood that this one place was the pit of Hell. They would be shattered without reason if they were to fill the space.

Only those chosen - only Servants possessed the right to exist there.

Even now, two Sabers stood there.

On the one side was a silver knight whose small frame was entirely wrapped around by thick armor, making it one single mass of steel. Due to a face-concealing helm, the knight's race or gender was completely unknown. Its weapon was a silver sword adorned with splendid decorations.

On the other side was a tall man surrounded by an unusual air. The greatsword he held with both hands, much like the sword of his opponent, boasted a magnificence and enormity possible only for weapons which had been tended to by inhuman hands. The blue jewel embedded in the hilt stood out in particular.

The colors of their swords were silver and gold respectively, and while their shapes differed, both weapons had a brilliance worthy of being wielded by heroes. However, this battle was *impossible*. The era of swords had announced its end ages ago. Firearms ought to be the conquerors of the battlefield.

In that case, were they barbarians left behind by time, only existing to be mocked by the bearers of guns?

No, that would be *all the more* impossible.

"...Here I come, **Black** Saber!"

Then, gold answered the call of silver.

"...Come, **Rot**."

In an instant, the Red Saber leapt forth with a lion-like roar. The knight's stomp shook the earth, and the speed of the charge pierced the sound barrier. This jump was possible due to a skill Red Saber possessed, called *Prana Burst*. By instantaneously releasing the magic power carried by the arms or in the body, the knight could rush forward with a momentum like that of a bullet's, and swing the over-sized weapon with ease.

The force of the jump blew away the remains of golems and skeletons which had fallen to the earth. With such speed, such destructive power, even the strongest land weapon of modern war, the main battle tank, would be pulverized.

-However, while the leaping knight was one not of the ordinary, its opponent was also an existence who had reached the realm of demons.

With a fierce war-cry reminiscent of a massive dragon, Black Saber took several steps forward with his golden greatsword in hand. Not hesitating in the slightest at the enemy charging towards him at incredible speeds, the sword he held aloft was swung down.

If one were to call the silver onslaught a bullet, then what came to intercept it was a high-speed golden guillotine. Steel clashed with steel, and the destruction wrought upon their surrounding by the impact was almost surreal.

"Ha! That was weak, **Black**!"

"Unh-!"

Steel masses and fighting spirits clashed. Sparks flew. There was no pity, no

hatred, only powerful wills who would deny the existence of the other, as well as the whirl of utter joy found in facing a powerful enemy. Ever since the start of this battle, their swords had already crossed ten times. Unconsciously, Red Saber's cheeks drew into a grin.

Neither of them were supposed to exist in this world in the first place. They were the corporeal forms of extraordinary human beings who had left their names in history and made legends. Heroes whose names did not disappear even after their deaths but continued to live on in the hearts of people, they were known as **Heroic Spirits**, and the two of them were the duplicates of such - **Servants** who materialized in this world to follow another.

Their thirteenth clash - immediately, the world became silent. Their weapons not shattered, their flesh not scattered, the two knights displayed an equilibrium that could even be called elegant, their swords still locked with each other. At first glance, it was clear that the Black Saber held the advantage in terms of physique. The difference between him and the Red Saber was practically that between a man and a child.

However, it was in fact the golden knight who was being overpowered - the silver knight was overpowering him.

The reason was, as before, the *Prana Burst* skill. This time, the silver knight was not using magic power to charge forward, but to augment physical strength. Right now, Red Saber was like a shell with its fuse lit and about to be fired.

"Haaahhh-!"

The silver knight - Red Saber stepped forward, its foot crushing down into the ground, and gave a spirited roar.

Unable to hold on, Black Saber was blown backwards, but as expected of a hero, he simply leapt back instead of rolling around clumsily. His knees did not give out, and his expression did not change.

Red Saber thrust her sword out. Even without a face to see, one could tell that

the low chuckle emanating from the helmet was dripping with scorn.

"And you call yourself 'Saber', one who ought to be the *greatest* amongst all Servants? What a disappointment. Or perhaps this is as far as a forgery can go?"

"..."

Black Saber became quiet. Certainly, as the Red Saber said, he was a fake Heroic Spirit. There was no way for him to match a proper Heroic Spirit like his opponent.

Even so, that did not mean he could admit defeat. To save the fallen comrade behind him -- willing or no, he had to fight.

"...O sword,"

Black Saber chose the best course of action to bring down the enemy before him.

"Let thee be filled."

His voice was detached. He announced this, without a single change in expression despite the incoming death. The greatsword held above his head began to overflow with an orange light.

"So you would release your Noble Phantasm... excellent!"

Red Saber muttered with a growl. There was no trace of urgency in its tone.

A Noble Phantasm - it was the ultimate weapon of the Servant, something which activated by chanting its true name. It could be something which simply had incredible destructive power, or something with a special property of always penetrating and killing the opponent once released, or even something that was not a weapon at all, but the strongest of shields with a speciality against thrown weapons. There were as many Noble Phantasms as there were legends.

And of course, like Black Saber, the Red Saber also possessed a Noble Phantasm.

"...Well then, seeing as my Master has given me permission, allow me to respond in kind!"

Red Saber took a stance with the silver sword. At the same time, the heavy face-covering helmet split into two and became one with the armor.

Their eyes met. Black Saber raised his eyebrows a little, as though in slight surprise. But of course, for the Red Saber had the face of a young girl. Normally, Servants were summoned in the form of their peak. As such, most heroes were in their twenties and thirties, their prime. However, she was clearly too young. It was likely that she hadn't even reached twenty.

Besides, the fair features of the girl did not conceal her brutal nature - rather, she did not bother to conceal it in the first place. In her eyes, glaring fixedly at Black Saber, there was a mix of the joy found in battle, and cruelty.

"...Why did you remove your helm?"

Red answered the question of Black, sounding irritated.

"It's nothing. I just can't activate my Noble Phantasm without taking it off first. Do you not have more pressing matters at hand, Black?"

In an instant, the space centred around the Red Saber and her sword became stained with blood. What was more, the blade of her sword was enveloped by a radiance of blood and, giving off bizarre noises, began to transform.

Of course, this was not the original appearance of the Noble Phantasm. The pure, beautiful and famous sword was being transfigured by her wanton hatred into a sinister and wicked blade fit to be wielded by a demon.

"It is time for your execution. Come, meet an end worthy of an imitation, Black Saber-!"

Red Saber raised her grotesque sword.

It was clear to any who saw that it would be a killing blow-

"...I come."

Black Saber, just as before, stood and faced her directly without any hesitation. Whether he had a winning chance or not meant nothing to him.

...It needed to be done.

Black Saber understood that. He was not risking his life, because *he had no life to risk to begin with*.

The orange light and blood radiance swelled instantly. The whirling air around them screamed, letting all around them know that the two Noble Phantasms were completely released.

They were truly the swords of legend. They thundered, as the stuff of dreams, phantasms which slaughtered foes and pierced demons in the hands of heroes who raced across the fields of battle.

In their hands were swords. They were two Servants of the Saber class. And they were both of them, enemies whom the other must defeat.

Clarent
Rebellion

...

Red Saber raged.

Bal-
Phantasmal Greatsword,

Black Saber bellowed.

...

Blood Arthur
Against My Beautiful Father

!!

-mung
Felling of the Sky Demon

!!

Twilight and crimson lightning raced out and crashed into each other. The two streams of light, like surging waves with simply the purpose of destruction, attempted to swallow one another.

It was the most unlikely scene possible in the history written by man. It was a clash of two deadly Noble Phantasms, from two heroes who were born in different eras and flourished in different lands.

Light filled the space and annihilated everything in the surrounding area. The

golems and skeletons crowding around them were overcome and faded into dust.

Everyone who witnessed this majestic, unrelenting scene swallowed their breath. The space filled with Red and orange seemed as though it was declaring the end of the world.

However, all stories must have an end. The light that had only swelled began to calm, and disappeared like specks of dust.

The ground where the two had stood was a tragic sight to behold.

Imagine a butterfly spreading its wings. Such a mark had been carved into the ground. It was the trace of an explosion, so enormous it could be seen even from far up in the sky.

How many would be able to believe that such a trace was left behind by the slash of a sword? It was certain that a new legend had been born today on this land.

The impossible clash between the legendary holy sword and the anomalous demonic sword gouged out the earth.

What decided the battle between them was not their skill, their power nor the difference in power between their Noble Phantasms.

The Noble Phantasm released by Black Saber spread a wave of twilight in a semi-circle centred around him. On the other hand, Red Saber released a straight line of red lightning from the tip of her sword. What decided the battle was the qualities of their two Noble Phantasms, and the distance at which they chose to take on their opponent. If Black Saber had been a few steps closer, the battle might have gone differently.

In any case, the victor and the defeated were determined. One Servant had fallen. The other was unable to stand. Brought down to one knee, Red Saber stood back up while shaking with shame.

Filled with murderous intent, she glared at the fallen Saber.

"Why are you still alive...?!"

The Noble Phantasm should be a weapon which ensured death, and at the same time, a source of enormous pride. Its true name having been released, it would be a matter of honor if it did not kill its enemy. And with a Noble Phantasm crowned with the name of her father, the King of Knights, it was not truly pride to Red Saber but closer to a sort of grudge.

Thus, to Red Saber, the mere survival of Black Saber was unforgivable. Continuing to grip his sword would earn him her hatred. That he would raise his head and even attempt to stand up was something Red Saber could never accept even if it meant she could slash him apart a hundred more times.

Intense pain racked her body, but it would be no obstacle to any act of battle. Having used her Noble Phantasm to such a degree ought to have exhausted an incredible amount of prana, but her Master was exceedingly competent, so much so that she had the strength to move immediately after using her Noble Phantasm.

"Don't you dare move, Black Saber. I, and nobody else, will be the one to kill you...!"

She would lop off his head, and run her sword through his heart. It was a privilege only allowed for her.

Red Saber took a step forward.

-At least, I am still alive. Or perhaps I am only alive.

As always, my heart played its powerful rhythm. The magic circuits in my body sparked, trying desperately to *continue being Saber*. However, that last attack scattered every last drop of prana I had accumulated. There was no

longer anything left for me with which to continue being Saber.

The armor covering my entire body disappeared, like it was being stripped away. The golden greatsword symbolic of Saber followed, dissolving into the air.

At this moment, Black Saber vanished from the world.

When that happened, my consciousness was overwhelmed by the pain of *when I had been Saber*. Blood spewed from my mouth; tears welled in my eyes from the pain of severed nerves, the force which tore apart my flesh, the impacts which crushed my bones. I desperately tried not to scream, but unable to endure it completely, I began to moan.

After a while, the pain began to subside, but I could no longer swing a sword. Besides, having lost the power of Saber, there was no way for me to overcome this situation. I still possessed two Command Spells... but my voice would not sound. It was not due to a lack of courage, but the physical pain on my body raising an alarm instinctively. Transformations could only be done in certain intervals. If I were to attempt another transformation, my body would not be able to hold together.

Red Saber approached, her thoughts filled with murder. There truly was nothing that could be done. A miracle did not occur. No - even after accepting a miracle, this was as far as I could go.

It was the regrettable truth, but one I must accept.

I did not feel much fear for death. In my case, it was the same as simply disappearing. I did not have any great regrets. If I had one, it would have been the fact that I failed the ones whom I ought to protect.

But that was it. It was no great regret.

It was not wished of me, nor was I asked for help. It was simply a purpose which, for the first time since I was born, I considered and chose for myself. I only wanted to hold to it.

I did not regret this result. The only thing left was to wait for death. As it drew closer, time stretched out like melted toffee. Unconsciously, I wished for it to come more quickly. Because the more time slowed down, the more I would have to think about that forbidden question.

-For just what reason did I live for?

There was no answer. Rather, I wished for there to be none. I never wanted to accept the answer - that I was born to be *expended*.

Yes... to die here without care or thought had been predestined of me. There was nothing which I must do, nothing to call a purpose.

"It humiliates me to no end, not to have finished you in that one blow... but not so much that I would let you live."

Red Saber glared at me with the cold eyes of a warrior. Even a novice such as myself understood that the sword she held was aimed for my neck.

"Time to die, Saber of the black."

Her words were dispassionate; her blade, swift. And white filled my eyes-

Chapter 1-1

It is strange how the dim, empty room seems to twist all sense of distance. It appears unbelievably wide, and yet makes one feel uncomfortably pressed. The candles placed in its center faintly lit the faces of the men in the room, their features unclear and indistinct. The air within the vague boundaries of this room was filled with an inexpressible anguish.

"So... only one has returned."

Three gathered here. One is an old man, short but straight-backed, the creases on the skin of his face gleaming like he were a statue carved of wood - Rocco Belfaban, the head of the Department of Summoning who is said to have held this position for over fifty years, though no one is certain.

Another nodded at Belfaban's hoarse murmur.

"I witnessed the battle for myself, as well... it was a fearsome sight. That *thing* should not be allowed to exist."

It was a younger man, handsome and with red hair. With a single glance at his strong, high-minded gaze and refined features, you can perceive that he is a member of the elite. There was a strong sense of duty in his words.

His name is Bram Nuada-De Sophia-Ri, the successor of the head of the Department of Evocation, and one of the first-class instructors employed by the Clock Tower.

The old man nod in agreement and shifts his gaze to the last person in the room who continue to maintain his silence. It is a man with loose long hair, furrowing his brows in seeming displeasure.

"What do you think, Lord El-Melloi?"

Lighting the cigar in his hand with the candle's flame, the man called El-

Melloi shook his head slowly from side to side.

"El-Melloi the *Second*. As much as I appreciate questionable respect coming from an elder such as yourself, keep the 'II'. That name is unbearably grating without it."

"My mistake. How do you perceive the situation, El-Melloi II?"

"Well... it's clear that we must alter our approach. After all, we just lost forty-nine magi. One of them survived, but he won't be of much use any more."

Their operation had been planned in detail, organizing fifty magi. When it began, it was proceeding perfectly in every respect. However, everything was ruined by *a single familiar*.

As a result, forty-nine magi perished, and only the last one managed to retaliate.

"Thanks to his efforts, the chance has come for us to counter-attack. If we can assemble **seven Masters**, victory may yet be ours."

"But who can go? Any half-wit magus wandering in would only suffer the same fate. The area of Trifas is under their control."

After a brief silence, El-Melloi II gives the clear and simple truth.

"We need to bring in the professionals from the outside. This Holy Grail War is on an utterly different scale from the ones we have experienced so far. The Clock Tower must still provide at least one or two magi, of course."

The other two signal their agreement. They must choose the seven Masters now. However, there are pressing issues at hand. It would be a great undertaking to choose from the great families of the Clock Tower. It would likely require over three months before the selection can be confirmed due to a variety of reasons, not least the succession and safekeeping of family thaumaturgical crests. It will be far more effective to contract the more readily available freelancers.

"Then we shall begin gathering the ones whom we feel best for the situation. Let the Holy Church send the last Master. We must obtain their involvement in this war by any means necessary to let all know of our legitimacy."

"In that case, I will make the selection regarding the holy relics. Time is not on our side, but it should be possible to gather catalysts which will give us strength on par with the enemy's."

Hearing Bram's words, Belfaban struck the stone floor with his rod as he announced.

"This is completely unlike all the imitations of the Holy Grail War rituals of our time. In scale alone, it is beyond the Grail War which took place thrice in Fuyuki. We must brace ourselves for what will come. Let them fully regret sullying the name of the Clock Tower."

Without another glance at one another, the three men each left the room in separate ways.

* * *

It was the night before Nazi Germany invaded Poland, beginning the Second World War. The city of Fuyuki in Japan was holding its third Holy Grail War ritual. Seven Servants and seven Masters, for the sake of their own desires, began a battle royale until only one would be left standing. But in the course of the war, circumstances occurred which led to the shattering of the Lesser Grail. It was then that that Grail War came to a close, unsettled.

The problem was what came *after*.

The Greater Grail, an omnipotent wish-granting device, had been hidden in the caverns of Mount Enzou. Through a quirk of fate, it was discovered by a magus supporting the Nazis, who then attempted to remove it using military aid.

There was hard fighting as the three great families of Einzbern, Makiri and Tohsaka, as well as the Imperial Army, attempted to thwart this plot, but coming immediately after the end of the Grail War, they were in a weak position and thus defeated. The Greater Grail, forged by the combined labor of all three great families, was plundered by the Nazis.

This battle was written in no texts, recorded on no images, existing not even in the minds of the people. However, it was the indisputable truth that a terrible war between guns and thaumaturgy had taken place.

Now, with the Greater Grail in their hands, surely Nazi Germany would be able to rule the world as they saw fit.

Of course, such a future did not arrive. As it was being transported to Germany, the Greater Grail mysteriously disappeared. Perhaps it was stolen back by the Imperial Army, or raided by Soviet forces.

In any case, the Greater Grail which could have become the symbol of the Third Reich and realized the dream of world unification, *vanished* without passing into the hands of any man.

With its caretakers having been dismissed and all individuals related to it being sent onto the fields of battle, even the Nazis - the supposed victors - did not know the whereabouts of the Greater Grail; to begin with, there was no one left who even knew of its existence. The magus who took part alongside the Nazis, known as 'Yggdmillennia', had disappeared as well.

The Greater Grail disappeared. Like a mist, the dream of the three great families - or perhaps it had only been a tenacious attachment to their own mistaken vagaries - dissolved, and Fuyuki was able to welcome the end of its war in tranquillity.

And so the years went by, until even the youth became elderly...

* * *

England - where the so-called headquarters of the Association of Magi, the **Clock Tower** resides. Based in the British Museum of London, here is where aspiring tyrants who wish to lay claim to his or her own section of thaumaturgical history, and many other magi filled with their own ambitions, gather from all around the world.

It is a fact that, out of one thousand magi, every single last one of them will be met with failure somewhere along this path... but it is well within their rights to dream, after all.

That is the opinion of former student Shishigou Kairi, in any case. Something hit his shoulder. Apparently, he was so deep in thought that he ran into one of the students. He was about to apologize when said student, face stiffening, escaped from him as quickly as possible.

He sighed. Then again, this was the usual for him.

Due to the chemicals they deal with, or perhaps the kind of thaumaturgy they work with, magi will sometimes have their own appearance distorted. It is nothing to be ashamed about; in fact, it is the norm for magi to see it as a source of pride rather than humiliation.

Yet... Shishigou wondered if his treatment was rather unfortunate.

Simply walking down the street brought police officers to perform body searches three times (and every time he would escape by casting a suggestion on them). After arriving at the Clock Tower, he was heavily questioned by security magi four times. He no longer remembered how many times students he met in the hallways looked at him with fear in their eyes.

This is racism! Discrimination! Shishigou wanted to complain, but they would definitely give him this answer.

"No, but you scare me."

It is a sorry tale indeed. True, he will admit that he looks rather formidable;

he will admit that the clothes he wears is somewhat different than that worn by regular magi. But he is sure that he never forgot to smile...

That he would think this at all shows that Shishigou Kairi does not really understand what makes him fearsome. It is in his scarred face, his razor-sharp eyes and gaze, his muscular frame, and his black jacket fashioned from hides skinned from magical beasts. On top of that, having lived through many battlefields as a freelance bounty hunter, a thick stench of blood and gunpowder emitted from his entire body. Even to a magus for whom ethics might well be anathema, the horrible is still horrifying.

"Your smile truly is a horror in and of itself."

The old man soothed the discontent Shishigou even as he gasped sharply between guffaws. They are in the room of Rocco Belfaban, the head of the Department of Summoning at the Clock Tower.

In a display case mounted on the walls, there is the skull of some beast that looks like a chimera of ape and elephant. Beside it is a scroll which is clearly over a thousand years old, but rather than carefully kept, seems like it was left there without a care. Recklessly placed on top of the case is a heavy glass bottle, containing a small snake with its head split in nine, preserved in formalin.

"You really can find anything in this place..."

If his expert's eyes are correct about the formalin-preserved lizard, it is quite likely one of a kind in the entire world. As he thought this, Shishigou lowered himself onto the guest's sofa.

"Hardly. It is rare, but serves little purpose. Is it really so valuable?"

"You mean the preserved juvenile Hydra? Is 'valuable' even the right word to use?"

"It is a forgery."

Belfaban let out a low chuckle, as though ridiculing him. Shishigou simply glanced at him and, without any gesture suggesting that he wanted to dispute, sipped his medicine wordlessly. The taste was horrible enough to choke on, but Shishigou contented himself with its recovery effects in dealing with fatigue.

"Now, there is only one reason for me to call for you. Do you know about the *Fuyuki* Holy Grail War?"

Shishigou frowned slightly.

"Well, yeah. I do."

A Holy Grail War is any battle that revolves around an omnipotent Holy Grail which is said to be capable of granting any wish. However, when preceded by 'Fuyuki', any magus knows that it refers to an exceedingly unique conflict in which Heroic Spirits are summoned as Servants to fight each other to the death.

Perhaps due to Association supervision being rather light in this small nation of the East, this Holy Grail War had repeated three times without drawing much attention. It was a poor joke to even suggest that an omnipotent wish-granting device could manifest in some Far East farmland - that was all the recognition the Association gave it.

However, that all changed by the third Holy Grail War. The Second World War likely had an effect, as due to the intervention of various nations, the Holy Grail War of Fuyuki ended in unusual circumstances. At the same time, information on the system behind this Grail War propagated throughout the magi of the world.

It was proof of how superior the Holy Grail War ritual constructed by the three great families of Einzbern, Makiri and Tohsaka was.

To pose a what-if question to this moment of history: what if the third Holy Grail War did not expand to such a scale? This Holy Grail War would likely remain a ritual unique to Fuyuki. The fourth Holy Grail War would likely

have taken place just ten years before now. However, the Greater Grail having been lost, the Holy Grail War can no longer occur in Fuyuki.

Today, variations of the Holy Grail War ritual unfold across every continent. Of course, the majority of them are small in scale, with most only capable of summoning five Servants; even were the ritual itself established, it could not proceed to the point where it could grant any wish.

"Do you know the true purpose behind the Holy Grail War of Fuyuki?"

"That I don't know."

Belfaban looked at him with an unpleasant smirk. Shishigou frowned and urged him to continue.

"It was meant to pierce a hole to the **Swirl of the Origin**."

"What did you say?"

Shishigou was dumbfounded by the unexpected answer. According to what Belfaban said, what the ritual truly needed was not Masters, but Servants. In other words, the souls of Heroic Spirits.

The Lesser Grail would temporarily prevent the souls from returning to their throne. With the powerful souls of seven Heroic Spirits, they would open a path to **Akasha**. That was the true purpose of the Fuyuki Holy Grail War.

"So, basically, it's different from all those other Holy Grail Wars?"

Belfaban nodded.

"The essence of the ritual is unlike any other imitation which copied only the purported purpose of 'granting any wish'."

The ability to grant any and all wishes was only a torch with which to draw moths to the killing. Even the free-for-all between Servants was essentially meaningless. The format of the ritual was simply too excellent and had to be

hidden, though it was ironic how the three great families ended up having to participate fairly as well.

It is true that Shishigou felt surprise. Surprise - but not much besides. Yes, perhaps that was the true meaning behind the Fuyuki Holy Grail War. However, there was no one left who truly knew this Holy Grail War. The Greater Grail having been stolen from them, the three great families did not conduct a fourth Holy Grail War.

While Shishigou is unmistakably a first-class magus, it is impossible for him to reproduce the Holy Grail War of Fuyuki. Even amongst the instructors at the Clock Tower, the core of the Association of Magi, just how many would be able to completely replicate such a system?

Basically, it is a precious piece of knowledge, but a worthless piece of information.

"So, Gramps... what am I supposed to do about it?"

Slow down - Belfaban held the impatient Shishigou in check.

"This is where the complications begin. The most important foundation of the Fuyuki ritual, the Greater Grail, disappeared from knowledge after the third Holy Grail War. You know this, don't you? Well... three months ago, we finally found it. Or rather, we finally found out where it was hidden."

"So... where is it?"

"Romania, in the city of Trifas on the outskirts of Transylvania. We believe it has been installed in the oldest building of the city - the fortress of Millennia."

"And you want me to secure it?"

"Hm, well, the request is something like that, I suppose - but before that, there is more troubling news. The one who brought this information to us was the elder of the Yggdmillennia clan, Darnic."

"...You mean *that* Darnic?"

"Yes - the 'Eight-Forked Tongue'."

Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia - the elder of the clan of Yggdmillennia, supposedly having lived for over a century. He attained the rank of **Grand**, the highest within the Association, and was a second-class instructor in elemental conversion, but his students had a rather low opinion of him. Rather than education, he exercised his true worth in politics.

Factional infighting, power struggles, competitions for budget - these were all ordinary occurrences within the Clock Tower. However, exhibiting extraordinary political skills, he manipulated and cheated anyone who trusted him, and even those who didn't, betraying and double-crossing - truly, a first-rate swindler.

"So Darnic is the problem?"

Knowing him, he likely wanted to involve some sort of transaction regarding the Holy Grail. However, Belfaban shook his head, and a very rare expression appeared on his face - one which twisted his features with displeasure, revealing his anger.

"The problem is not with Darnic, but *the entire Yggdmillennia clan*."

"What do you mean?"

"The clan owns the fortress of Millennia... and they have elected to secede from the Clock Tower."

Chapter 1-2

In a way, this piece of news was far more shocking than the previous revelation of the Fuyuki Holy Grail War's true purpose. After all, it just should not be possible.

Generally speaking, the Association of Magi is divided into three groups. One is the **Atlas Academy** - an organization centred around alchemy, having existed since before the Common Era and based in the Atlas Mountains of Egypt. Another is the **Wandering Sea**, which roams the coastal lands of Northern Europe, and can be said to be prototypical thaumaturgical organization. Last is the Clock Tower, the central pillar of the Association and the newest and greatest research institute.

Even within the Association, there are certainly those who defect due to heresy... or perhaps, due to being so powerful that they had to be designated for sealing. The act itself is not so rare. However, that is not the case when an entire clan secedes.

"They all defected at once? What the hell?"

"You know that the Yggdmillennia clan are not **Lords**."

The quality of a magus is influenced by how much time they have spent with thaumaturgy - in other words, their history. One of the oldest of the royal families, those who have studied thaumaturgy since ancient times, is said to have a history which dates back over two thousand years.

There are three royal families, with twenty clans related to them. But the clan of Yggdmillennia does not belong in nor has any connections with either groups. The reason for this is not certain, though they certainly did not have a short history. It is rumored that they lost a power struggle in the past and have been on poor terms with the three royal families ever since. Others say that they were estranged from the others due to the poor quality of their

magic circuits.

Whatever the case, they are often not recognized as a noble thaumaturgical family. But they did not sit down and take this without a fight.

The clan abandoned the common methods among magi of thickening the blood of thaumaturgical potential over generations, and mastering the thaumaturgical system chosen by the first generation. Instead, they scraped together all the magi who had the faintest of connections to them from all over.

They aimed for the clans who had little history and possessed weak magic circuits. Or clans which have begun to decline, their magic circuits becoming weaker with every generation. Clans which have been defeated in power struggles and were forced into ruin. Or those magi who had a price placed on their head as punishment by the Association. In other words, those who have strayed from the core of the Association and yet refused to give up the path to the Root.

The Yggdmillennia whispered to them. Do you not wish to leave behind the legacy in your blood? Do you not wish to proclaim ownership over the fruits of your own research? Do you not wish for your clan to leave its mark upon history?

The middle name of each Yggdmillennia comes from the names of the clans they have absorbed. Even their thaumaturgical crest is not unified. The family crests of past clans continued to be passed down.

As for thaumaturgy, the area of their study is also broad: Western alchemy, dark arts, witchcraft, astrology, Kabbalah, runology, even the Onmyodo of Japan - each has one member of the clan pursuing it.

Be that as it may, they are in the end simply a loose alliance of the new, the weak and the dying. The Lords laughed and let them be with their trivial, insignificant arts.

On average, most Yggdmillennia magi can only reach second-class, except

for those rare cases of first-class. They are many in number, but pose little threat. Of course, it was mostly due to Darnic's political finesse that they were left at large, but in the end, the only merit to their clan was that of quantity - or so it should have been.

"It is not known to us how much anguish it had meant for them, but one day, they came forward saying that they would secede from the Association - that they would form a new Association of Magi around their own clan."

What a sorry lot, sighed Belfaban. Shishigou agreed. Clearly stating your defection from the Association is essentially a declaration of war. They might as have thrown their gloves and spat on their faces.

It is true that, as long as they remain in the Clock Tower, the chance of the Yggdmillennia clan being added to the Lords is close to non-existent. Without a major revolution, they would never be rescued from their supposed inferiority in a hundred or even a thousand years.

But that did not mean they must resort to secession. At the very least, it would be impossible for an entire clan to defect unless they had something exceptional on their hands.

Then again... speaking from another perspective, if they *did* possess something significant, it could be more than enough of an incentive to begin a secession. Yes, for example - an omnipotent wish-granting device, a Greater Grail which could show them the path to reaching Akasha.

Shishigou's expression showed that he had reached the answer. Seeing this, Belfaban nodded satisfactorily.

"Yes, the Greater Grail of Fuyuki is to be the symbol of their new 'association'. The surviving magus brought this message to us."

"...The surviving magus?"

Belfaban scratched his head and took out a piece of parchment, tapping it with one finger. It activated a thaumaturgy which played images from the

past. Shishigou would not have minded a photo or video, but to an old man like Belfaban, even video camera technology would probably be unacceptable.

What appeared in the image was something that Shishigou was fairly used to seeing. A man showing clear signs of having been tortured was sitting in a chair, staring into space and muttering something with an empty expression.

"This is the magus who delivered the message. He was already in this state when we found him; the surgery was successful and he is now in deep sleep. It will likely take six months before his mind is fully cleansed."

"What's he saying?"

"We of the Yggdmillennia have freed ourselves from the petty political bickerings of the Association of Magi and aim to establish a new association here in Romania, a true place of inquiry for the pursuits of thaumaturgy. For we possess the 726th Holy Grail, and when it is brought to life with the souls of seven Heroic Spirits, we shall be one step closer on the path to brilliant glory... just that, over and over again."

The 726th - that was the Holy Grail observed in Fuyuki. If they can activate it, then even as a rough estimate, they will have free access to an enormous source of prana which will not run dry for several centuries. It might even be possible to reach the Root.

"Can I just ask something? You said he's the surviving magus. So there were deaths?"

"As a matter of course."

"How many died?"

Belfaban hesitated somewhat before answering frankly.

"Forty-nine. We had sent fifty specialized 'hunters' in an assault, but only one returned alive."

"..."

There was a sigh. It is difficult to say who it belonged to.

Specialized hunters - in other words, magi in the same line of work as Shishigou. Of course, these were not freelancers and belonged to the Association, but fifty was still far too large a number. From this alone, one can infer that it was a force meant from the start for extermination.

It was only natural, considering the scale of the defection. It would dishonor the Association to simply laugh it off. And above all, the trampling of two thousand years of thaumaturgical history was an insult that required no less than the most severe of retribution. Fifty would have been suitable for such a purpose.

And yet, it was not enough.

"It was not even a matter of numbers. They were on another scale entirely. They met the attack with *a Servant*, of all things."

After Belfaban's words, the annihilation of the fifty magi made clear sense.

"...So that's it. They didn't stand a chance."

It would have made no difference whether there had been fifty magi or a hundred. Whoever it was, it had become an existence known as a Heroic Spirit. To someone like that, all modern magi might as well be infants.

"The familiar we sent there saw everything. The Servant suddenly appeared before the magi, waved his hand with a smile - and it was over. In an instant, every single magi save one was impaled on long stakes."

"Stakes in Romania. You don't say..."

In any case, it seems they have already summoned a Servant, although this might actually be to their advantage.

"So Gramps, if the Yggdmillennia have summoned a Servant, doesn't that mean we can just join in as Masters?"

If the Greater Grail has been activated, other magi should be qualified to become Masters as well. The Association can send magi there to summon Servants which can oppose the Yggdmillennia.

"It's too late. They have already assembled **seven** Masters. The summoning might not have taken place just yet, but the Grail will never brand Command Spells onto any magi we send."

"...So are they planning on killing each other?"

"Perhaps. Or perhaps one of the clan will lead the rest and command the other Servants to commit suicide. Whichever it may be, the fact remains that we have no way to thwart them."

"I'll just say this now, but I'm not going to be fighting any Servants."

Shishigou declared, just in case. You could assemble strategies and organize tactics, and have all the luck and miracles in the world on your side, and the odds would still be against your defeating even a single Servant. Defeating seven would be a true miracle. Yes - that would truly be something worth requesting from the Holy Grail.

Seeming very pleased with himself, Belfaban smirked.

"I won't ask that much of you. What I want you to do is fight using a Servant *you* summoned."

"...You lost me."

What are you even saying? Shishigou thought. Under the system of the Fuyuki Holy Grail War, the maximum number of Servants is seven, and so is the number of Masters.

"That is the most intriguing aspect of this Holy Grail War. The number of Servants that can be summoned is twice the norm - fourteen."

"What...?"

"The last surviving magus discovered the dormant Greater Grail in the depths of the fortress. He managed to unlock the reserve system."

"Reserve?"

"Depending on the situation, the Greater Grail could support the Holy Grail War by once again distributing Command Spells. It was an auxiliary prepared as a countermeasure for the highly unlikely situation of all seven Servants joining forces."

"So basically... summoning another seven Servants to oppose the original seven Servants."

That makes fourteen in total. Shishigou understood the significance of this number.

"Exactly. The land of Trifas is positioned on the best leylines of Romania to begin with. Quite likely, it has been stockpiling prana at a higher speed than Fuyuki, to the point that it now possesses an inexhaustible amount of prana with which it can summon even fourteen Servants."

In Fuyuki, such a system would certainly have been an emergency measure. If worst came to worst, such an act might even have exhausted the leyline itself.

"What you're saying is, if the Yggdmillennia have already got seven Masters and seven Servants, then..."

"...then we will also assemble seven Masters and seven Servants, wage war upon the Yggdmillennia and claim our victory."

"What happens to the Grail if we win?"

"We will take it for safekeeping, naturally. Well, it is difficult to say how the surviving magi will be able to remain calm when faced with something that can easily lead them to the Root."

...So that's how it is. In other words, 'whatever happens after the Yggdmillennia are destroyed is your own responsibility'. You can make a wish upon the Grail, or you can prevent others from doing so - you can even destroy everything. Of course, this old fox will obviously be ready and waiting. A retrieval team is probably set to move in as soon as the war ends.

But, still, if he manages to get around them... he will surely have the chance to have his own wish be realized. A shiver ran up Shishigou's back, making his heart race. Seeing this clearly, the old man nodded in approval, as though this was what he had expected.

"So you will accept?"

However, Shishigou did not reply immediately. Agreeing so readily would only reveal his own weakness.

"I still have a few questions left. I'll decide after that."

"Very well."

"First, about the Masters on *this* side."

"Ah, yes. The remaining six Masters have all been decided on and sent to Trifas already - Rottweil Berzinsky, the 'Silver Lizard'; 'Storm Treads' Gene Rum; the 'Gum Brothers' of the Pentel family; and our own Feend vor Sembren, a first-class instructor. These are the five who we've sent."

Shishigou agreed with this selection as well. They are all magi known throughout the world - monsters specialized in combat who remove the opposition without mercy. He has worked with all of them before except Sembren. He should have no problem fighting on the same side as them.

"The last Master, and the overseer, will be sent from the Holy Church"

"...A Master acting as the overseer?"

"Indeed."

Due to its naming, the Holy Grail War will inevitably draw in another force, the only one in the world which can oppose the Association of Magi - that is, the **Holy Church**. Although it is almost certain that the Holy Grail in this case is a fake, they can hardly sit by and watch in silence as magi compete over a treasure crowned with its name. It is said that the Church had intervened during the third Holy Grail War of Fuyuki. According to some, it is in fact the three great families of Fuyuki that had began the tradition of Church intervention, but the truth has long been lost in the haystack of conflicting theories.

"But... do we even need an overseer for this war?"

The Holy Grail War of Fuyuki had need of an impartial judge between the three great families and outside Masters. It stood to reason that they chose the Holy Church, which had to be involved in some way regardless.

However, this war is different. This is a struggle between the Association and a force which opposes it, and a neutral overseer who would judge this conflict between magi is completely unnecessary. If anything, the Church would only be needed for the task of concealing the war, but the Association is not exactly lacking in terms of human resources.

"Well, we can hardly exclude them. It would only trouble us further if they sided with the Yggdmillennia instead. We should use this opportunity to proclaim ourselves as the only legitimate thaumaturgical organization."

As a result, the Holy Church will support the Association... for the time being. Of course, from the eyes of the Church, this is just another way to keep the Association in check.

"Second question: a holy relic is needed to act as a catalyst in summoning a

Servant. Have you got something prepared?"

Belfaban nodded. Strictly speaking, a catalyst is not absolutely necessary. When summoning a Servant without a catalyst, a Heroic Spirit will be chosen, not based in any way on the summoner's power, but similarities with his or her own nature. However, most Masters would avoid this in favor of summoning a particular Servant using a holy relic as a catalyst.

Of course, having such a catalyst does not guarantee that a certain Servant will be drawn. Suppose that a magus uses a remnant of the Argo, the ship which bore many a Greek hero, as a catalyst. Who would answer the call? The unparalleled Heracles? Captain Jason? Medea, the witch of betrayal? Or perhaps the 'god of medicine' Asclepius? None would know until the summoning. But it is possible to narrow the choice down, if you use a catalyst which was only ever connected to a single Heroic Spirit - for example, the skin of the first snake in the world to shed its skin, or a scrap of cloth from the mantle once worn by a certain king. With such relics, it would be possible to summon the exact Heroic Spirit you wish for regardless of affinity.

Then again, summoning without a catalyst is not without its merits. As the summoner and the spirit summoned will be similar in nature, it becomes easy to build trust with the Servant in a short time. In the Fuyuki Holy Grail War, poor affinity between Master and Servant would have been as fatal as carrying a time-bomb. It could invite tragedy if, in the very end, they did not have complete faith in one another. However, with a single misstep, it is not impossible for hate and distrust to surface due to that very same resemblance.

While affinity is certainly a matter which cannot be overlooked, the possible loss from such a high-stakes gamble as summoning without a catalyst is too great.

A catalyst would solve all these problems. This being the Association of Magi, they should be able to prepare holy relics with connections to the majority of Heroic Spirits.

Standing up, Belfaban took out an ebony case from the desk's drawer,

opening it carefully - inside is a piece of wood with signs of having been worked on. There is nothing remarkable about it... but when Shishigou opened his mouth, his voice became strangely shrill. There is some sort of heat within the wood.

"What's this?"

"The Round Table. The greatest of knights once talked with one another at this table. To protect Britain, their home, they fought not with swords, but with words."

"The Round Table of Britain... as in, King Arthur's?"

Without thinking, Shishigou reached out and attempted to take the catalyst, but checked himself just in time. The Knights of the Round Table - no introductions are needed for the followers of King Arthur. The Round Table was proposed by the King himself as away to remove the distinction between lord and subject.

Every single knight who sat at that table was a hero sung of in legends. King Arthur himself, of course, and also Lancelot, Galahad, Gawain, Tristan, Percival... any one of them summoned as a Servant would boast indisputable fame and strength.

"But... it cannot be known which knight will be summoned. It would unmistakably summon a Heroic Spirit based on your own nature."

"That's not a problem. Any Knight of the Round Table summoned as a Servant is a pass in my books."

"I see. By which you mean, you will accept?"

Shishigou gave himself some time to think. Everything has been set for him to summon a Servant. The Yggdmillennia will likely take full advantage of their location in Romania to draw the strongest possible Servant in that country. However, when it comes down to it, that is not such an overwhelming disadvantage.

After all, it is seven versus seven - they are numerically even. And most importantly, Shishigou also has a wish which can only be granted by relying upon an omnipotent wish-granter - Belfaban knows this.

....It's decided, then.

Shishigou nodded, and lit a cigarette. He breathed in the smoke deeply, relishing the poison filling his lungs for a moment. There was irritation on Belfaban's face - the man hated cigarettes.

"Then we have assembled seven Masters. The Yggdmillennia clan possesses seven; now the Association shall send seven. In other words, fourteen Servants will take form in this world. Never before in history has a ritual of such scale been conducted. This is not merely another Holy Grail War - but **the Great War** to *all* Holy Grail Wars."

"The Great War', huh..."

Seven Servants versus seven Servants. In the past, it has always been a free-for-all between all seven until only one is left standing, but this time - it will truly be total war between Servants. Having become the stage for this conflict, one dreads to imagine what state Trifas will be in after the war.

"I want half up-front. If you're okay with that, then let's sign on it."

Belfaban frowned at Shishigou's words.

"Is the contingency fee not enough?"

"This job doesn't have a very high survival rate. I'd prefer to take what I can right now."

"Oh? Do you already have something in mind?"

Standing up from the sofa, Shishigou walked over to the display case without any sign of hesitation and picked up the preserved juvenile Hydra.

"This."

"...And you are fine with a forgery?"

Shishigou gave his assent without a second thought. Belfaban's expression turned grim in the blink of an eye. But of course, for the Hydra was very much the genuine article. You could sell off every asset owned by the Shishigou family, and the amount would almost certainly not reach a third of its selling price.

"I'll take that as a yes, then."

Shishigou happily carried off the Hydra with one hand, and took the catalyst's case with the other.

"Off with you to Romania, then. I will be in touch with the overseer and the other Masters. They should make contact with you as soon as you pass the border."

"Oh, right. What's the name of this overseer?"

Shishiou asked offhandedly just as he was leaving. This war would likely warrant an assignment from the Assembly of the Eighth Sacrament. It might even be someone well known.

"I haven't met him personally, but, yes... it was a priest called *Shirou*."

Not a name he was familiar with, unfortunately.

Chapter 1-3

Shishigou Kairi immediately boarded a flight from London to Romania. Luckily, as soon as he was contacted for the job, he considered the possibility of it being another 'hunt'; all of his combat equipment were fully prepared, so he did not lose any time returning to his home.

During the flight, Shishigou perused the document on the Holy Grail War that Belfaban handed to him - regarding the seven basic **Classesthat** Servants are assigned to, and their characteristics; the **Command Spells** whose authority the Servants obey, able to enforce even an order to commit suicide; the only surviving account of the circumstances of the Third Holy Grail War

Just as he finished reading all of this, the plane landed in Romania. There are strict travel regulations to Romania for magi at the moment, to prevent Command Spells from manifesting on a weak third-rate magus, however unlikely that may be.

When he left the plane, he felt a numb sort of pain coming from his hand. When he checked it, there was a pattern carved on the back of his hand, like a tattoo. The Holy Grail had recognized Shishigou as a Master and allowed the Command Spells to manifest.

Although he had been expecting this in a way, Shishigou still felt some relief. If the Command Spells had refused to appear no matter how long he waited, there would have been no choice but to wretchedly drag himself home.

Shishigou did not immediately head from Bucharest, the capital of Romania, to Trifas, judging that the summoning of the Servant should come first. Trifas is the territory of the Yggdmillennia. Attempting to infiltrate it alone, without a Servant, will be nothing but suicide.

Fortunately, Bucharest possessed nearly six hundred years of history, and

many spiritually powerful leylines existed in the city. Shishigou had a look around as soon as he arrived in the afternoon, and fixed the candidates which would be compatible with him. The best choice would be one of the corners of a cemetery managed by the Stavropoleos Church - but of course, to a **necromancer** like Shishigou, a place stuffed with corpses would naturally be most fitting.

"Though I doubt a Servant would enjoy waking up next to a gravestone..."

Once the sun had set and the curtains of night descended upon the city, Shishigou got to work straight away. To start with, he laid out a bounded field around the graveyard to turn people away; the ritual for the field was not very complex, as it only needed to hold until the summoning was complete.

Next, using a chalk distilled from the dusted bones and blood of magi, he drew a magic ward: a ring of purification carved around a ring of four purging circles, surrounding a ward of summoning. In the center, he placed a crystal ball. It was an all-or-nothing ritual, but Shishigou nodded in satisfaction at the quality of his work.

The only things left now are the catalyst to be offered and the incantation for the spell. At first glance, this may appear all too simple for a ritual meant to evoke a Heroic Spirit. However, as the Master is nothing more than the string which ties the Grail and the Servant together, this will not prove to be a problem.

As he finished the preparations for the ward quicker than he had expected, Shishigou had some free time until the prana in his body was at its peak.

Unconsciously - probably because of boredom - he lit a cigarette. It was a Taiwanese product, but terribly rare. It was practically a miracle that he managed to get this one box from another magus. And yet, it tasted awful. However, it was this clash of rare status and foul taste that could make him clearly feel the transiency of the world.

Breathing in the smoke deliberately -almost mournfully, regretfully - Shishigou found himself a moment to reflect. The Holy Grail War is the

smallest and yet the biggest war in the world... with only one winner. The situation is quite different this time around, but in any case, what stood in his way were utter monsters - Heroic Spirits against which no thaumaturgy would work.

Vaguely, his mind turned to his own wish for the Holy Grail. What he wishes for is not really so excessive. To Shishigou Kairi, it is not even that urgent of a matter. In fact, he has lived his life so far believing that his hopes had already expired. Leaving the Clock Tower, choosing to become a bounty hunter and a freelancer, it was all because of this. And yet, the hope that he was sure he had thrown aside so long ago is right before his eyes, within his hand's grasp.

"...Can I really reach it, though?"

He does not know - not with this Great Holy Grail War. He might be heading to his death. Actually, that chance was extremely high. But...

- This is stupid. If I'd wanted to back out, I wouldn't have accepted this in the first place.

He knows this. He knows that there is no longer any place to run, for the bridge he crossed was burned by his own hands. Even if he turns back, there is no longer any place for him to return to. Shishigou is fine with that.

He stood before the magic ward.

It will soon be two o'clock. Even in Japan, it would be the dead of night. No other time could be more appropriately suited to Shishigou Kairi as he presides over death.

"Let's get this started."

Traces of tension tainted his voice - a good sign that he was maintaining a favorable mental condition, he analyzed himself. At last, he confirmed once more the color he would belong to. Apparently, the camps of the Servants for both sides have been decided; **Black** for the Yggdmillennia clan's Servants,

Red for the Clock Tower's Servants.

"*Let silver and steel be the essence.*

Let stone and the archduke of contracts be the foundation.

Let red be the color I pay tribute to.

Let rise a wall against the wind that shall fall.

Let the four cardinal gates close.

Let the three-forked road from the crown reaching unto the Kingdom rotate."

He began the incantation, and at the same time, he felt dull sense of discomfort, as though the hands of another were playing with his organs. The activation of his Magic Circuits converts the mana in the atmosphere, and his Thaumaturgical Crest awakens to support this.

His entire body is being turned into something human, yet inhuman. A piece of equipment bearing the miracles of the world, a component of a machine, or perhaps a gear - that is what he has become. Aware of this, Shishigou steps down on the pedal even harder, further accelerating the prana circulating within his body.

The summoning circle glows red; but now is not the time for Shishigou to be paying attention to what will finally be the realization of a miracle.

"*Let it be filled. Again. Again. Again. Again.*

Let it be filled fivefold for every turn, simply breaking asunder with every filling."

* * *

Transylvania, Romania

Trifas - a small city north of Sighisoara, the birthplace of **The Impaling Prince.**^{Kaziklu Bey} Its walls, built to defend against the invasion of the Turks during the Middle Ages, is still perfectly preserved, surrounding the citadel and one part of the city.

Many of the city's buildings were built during the Middle Ages and have undergone repeated repairs and reconstructions, making them no less valuable than those in Sighisoara. Its population of 20,000 is based mostly around the work of agriculture and textiles.

And of course, there is what you could call the symbol of the city, a gigantic castle which sat atop a small hill, towering above the streets: the Fortress of Millennia. This castle has never changed hands since the Middle Ages onwards and up to present day. The invasion of the Ottoman Turks, the outbreak of the Black Death, and the explosions of modern war - much hardship has befallen on Trifas, but the fortress and the clan which owns it still stand strong.

The name of the clan is Yggdmillennia. They were magi who in the past came to Romania from Northern Europe. And now, the castle thrived more than ever before.

It is not only the clan of Yggdmillennia within its walls. There are menials with fine features - no one knew where they came from - working various chores and patrolling the castle grounds with halberds in hand, something unthinkable in this day and age. Walking along the stone floor, one would find status with glowing eyes...

A sight that would shock any whose eyes laid upon it... but no simple resident of Trifas would be so reckless as to step within this strange castle. When the lights in the citadel are lit, they are forbidden from even stepping outside their homes.

That is why three months ago, when the lights which had been extinguished for so long became bright again, the people exchanged glances and gloom clouded their faces. The rulers of the castle, those bloodstained tyrants, had returned.

Praying for the safety of their home, the people of Trifas continued their daily lives...

Two hours past midnight, and the city of Trifas is already deep in slumber, with the Fortress of Millennia looking down upon it as though in contempt. There is a man standing beside a window in the castle, looking outwards. The eyes of the man, watching over the utter stillness of the streets below, burned with silent resolve.

The man is Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia, the elder of the Yggdmillennia clan. During the Third Holy Grail War, he participated as a magus on the side of the Nazis, and was the one who instructed that the Greater Grail be transported to Germany.

But that was more than sixty years ago, and yet there is not a single wrinkle on the man's face. Based on appearance alone, he would be in his late twenties. It would seem that time has stopped for him since the Third Holy Grail War.

"Yes, everything has been for the sake of this very day."

Truly, there were a thousand emotions surging in those words. He has been preparing for over sixty years, after all - ever since the Third Holy Grail War, he has been putting everything in order, discreetly in order to avoid drawing any suspicion.

His only misstep was allowing the information regarding the Fuyuki Holy

Grail War to spread; due to this, the holy relics which could act as catalysts disappeared left and right. The most venerable King of Heroes, the King of Knights with the greatest of holy swords, and the King of Conquerors who had controlled half the world - in time, all of their catalysts were scattered and became lost. Of course, the holy relics which the clan has gathered over the previous decades, under his orders, are enough to summon excellent Heroic Spirits. Certainly no less than the relics that the Association has independently gathered as well.

With the four simultaneous summons of tonight, they will have six Servants. Including the Assassin which was summoned in Tokyo due to certain circumstances, they have now assembled all seven.

This means that, in a few more hours, the Yggdmillenia will light the beacon of rebellion against the Association of Magi.

Everything has been proceeding as smoothly as he expected, save one. That the Clock Tower would attempt extermination after his clan declared secession was all within his predictions. That fifty magi would infiltrate Trifas, wait in the woods outside the city, and plan to end it all in one night was also within his predictions. That the Servant he summoned, Lancer, would take barely thirty seconds to annihilate fifty experienced hunters was beyond his predictions - simply wonderful.

The only loose thread that he did not expect was that the one surviving magus would activate the reserve system. But in a way, he had been prepared for that. He understood that the Association would most certainly hinder him once he commanded seven Servants. Seven versus seven - at least they were numerically balanced.

Of course, the opponent is the Association of Magi; doubtless they will summon high-ranking Heroic Spirits. However, no Heroic Spirit could possess greater fame in Romania than his Lancer. Ever since Lancer was summoned two months ago, he has been making full use of one of his innate skills to transform Trifas and the surrounding areas into a land he ruled over as **Lord**.

As long as he is within this territory, Lancer receives boosts in the ranks of all his parameters, and his Noble Phantasm becomes usable. The only difficulty has been the Servant's somewhat obstinate nature; however, Darnic is hopeful that, with their goals being the same, this will not prove to be a problem.

They have also grasped who the enemy will send. Aside from the overseer from the Church, all six are magi who specialized their arts towards warfare. However, they all suffer the fatal handicap of having to provide prana for their Servants. Having devised a way to resolve said handicap, the Yggdmillennia's victory is unshakable.

At the sound of creaking wheels, Darnic turned around.

"...It's nearly time, Grandfather."

Said the girl in the wheelchair in a soft and clear voice as she smiled. Darnic smiled back, as though infected by the girl's sweetness.

"Are you well, Fiore?"

"I'm all right. My little brother seems a bit restless, though."

Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia - the only magus within the Yggdmillennia clan with true talent, and Darnic's successor; in other words, she has been recognized as the future elder of the Yggdmillennia.

Generally, there are two kinds of 'geniuses' in the world. Either one is so gifted as to be able to master a vast range of studies, or one is in possession of a terrifyingly deep wealth of talent in a single field.

Fiore is the latter. Although she is weak at most types of thaumaturgy, in the fields of spiritual evocation and human engineering, her skills rival or even surpass the first-class instructors of the Clock Tower. In particular, the **Coupled Reinforcement Mystic Codes**^{Bronze-Link Manipulators} she produced, with her own original alterations, boast the power to allow even a third-class magus to bring down a first-class one.

Over the many generations of thickening blood in the Yddgmillennia clan, it is mostly likely that no magus has appeared with greater aptitude than her.

"Who could have expected that the Command Spells would appear on both of you at the same time? If we were under the original system of the Holy Grail War, this would have led to a tragedy."

"...Yes. I guess it would."

To magi, it is common sense for even teacher and pupil, or older and younger siblings, to go for each other's throats when met with a conflict of interests. However, that would not have been the case for Fiore and her brother, as there is simply too great a difference in power between them. It would only have ended unilaterally with Fiore murdering him as he cowered in fear. Truly, it would have been a tragedy.

"I heard that the Association of Magi has sent their last magus."

"Your ears are sharp."

Darnic gave a wry smile. It was about an hour ago that they received a report from people they have hidden in the Clock Tower.

"So it's finally starting, then..."

"Yes, with this day, the Servants of Black and Red shall begin this Great Holy Grail War. And we of **The Tree of a Thousand Realms**^{Yggdmillennia} shall take in our hands all the mysteries and miracles of the world."

The sorrow on Fiore's face is not simply due to a dislike of conflict. Like the average magus, she studied at the Clock Tower. Her friends are still enrolled there even now, and she was not particularly dissatisfied by the place. Of course, she will not be facing against her friends directly... but it still leaves a bad taste in her mouth.

Naturally, fear also played a part. In the thaumaturgical world, the Clock

Tower is an absolute symbol. Founded at the very beginning of the Common Era, this organization has gathered every kind of mystery, every kind of thaumaturgy.

It is the most cutting-edge thaumaturgical body in the world - things exist there which Fiore's mind cannot begin to imagine.

However, defying Darnic - the elder of the clan - would be out of the question. He is a monster who has maintained the fleshly vigor of a man in his thirties despite having lived for over a hundred years, and the possessor of the Thaumaturgical Crest of the clan itself. As soon as she defied him, she would find herself thrown out of the entire clan's network immediately; even were she to escape to the Association, as a blood relative of traitors, what waited there would be a life of nothing but misfortune.

Nevertheless, Fiore would have objected if their chance of victory had been non-existent. But what she then saw was a giant, bluish-white altar... and the throes of a great magic ward stockpiling pure prana.

"This is for your eyes only. Do not speak of it to the others."

Saying this, Darnic had invited her to see what was at the bottom of the Greater Grail, something that had always been hidden. It might not have been fully operational, but the sheer overwhelming amount of prana, the divinity of it, made her feel as though her soul had been pulled from her body.

"...With this wish-granter, your deepest desire can be granted with ease."

She could not resist Darnic's whispered words. For she possessed a dream as well, a wish that could never be granted no matter how much she refined her craft.

Opposing her friends is simply her sentimentality, not something which can obstruct her in the path towards her objective. She has already committed herself to a full confrontation with the Association.

"Now, accompany me to meet our Lord. Let us go to the summoning of the

knights who would protect us."

"Yes, Grandfather."

By the time they reached the throne room, where the ritual would take place, four other Masters have already gathered. There are also homunculi taking care of various menial tasks and silently bringing in the required thaumaturgical tools.

The magic ward itself has already been drawn. It uses a mixture of gold and silver, kept in a liquid state by a temperature-retaining technique. This complex and delicate ward was devised to summon multiple Servants at once.

All noise came to an abrupt stop. Darnic chose this moment to move to a spot next to the throne and declare with outspread arms.

"Place the catalysts you have each gathered upon the altar."

The Masters nodded.

The first - Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia, a portly man. With a single look at his expression, one can tell that he is a pompous man. His craft is alchemy. His catalyst is kept in a case, perhaps due to its value, or not wanting the other Masters to see it.

The second - Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia, the girl in the wheelchair. Her craft is spiritual evocation and human engineering. Her catalyst is an ancient arrow, its tip blackened by something - perhaps blood.

The third - Selenik Icecol Yggdramillennia. Her craft is the dark arts. Despite her clean-cut appearance, her entire body reeked of blood; likely it is due to her kissing the innards taken from the bellies of beasts and humans to be used as sacrifices. Her catalyst is a glass bottle. There are still stains of some kind of liquid remaining inside.

The fourth - Caules Forvedge Yggdmillennia, the younger brother of Fiore.

His craft is summoning. With the freckles on his childish face, one would not think that he is eighteen years old. Diffidently, he muttered the spell for summoning Heroic Spirits over and over again. His catalyst is an old piece of paper. On it is drawn a human figure, with the words '*the perfect human*' scribbled in the lower right corner.

And the fifth, who has already completed his summoning - Roche Flyn Yggdramillennia, the Master of Caster. He is likely the youngest among those present; the thirteen-year-old was watching the scene with interest from slightly further away.

"Rare of you to leave your workshop, Roche."

Roche shrugged when Darnic called out to him.

"Well, this *is* a Heroic Spirit summoning. You would be lucky just to see it once in your whole life. Even I'd leave my workshop if I can see it a second time."

He sounded adult, though he overdid himself. Then again, he is quite famous as a magus in the field of doll engineering, putting aside their appearance and design; his puppets, created with only the pursuit of function in mind, lacked somewhat in their artistry.

Caster had been summoned by Roche two months ago, at nearly the same time as Lancer, and they have spent the entire time manufacturing the golems they would need for the Great War in their workshop within the castle.

"Where is Caster?"

"Oh, **the master** will be coming soon. He's a bit busy with the design of his Noble Phantasm."

"Then I must give my apologies later. But let us gaze upon this mysterious ceremony once more."

"All right."

Roche shrugged. The boy called his own Servant his 'master' out of respect; to him, the legends that Caster gave rise to are worthy of worship. He has every trust in Caster, and feels genuine happiness at helping him in the workshop.

Caster materialized next to Roche before long, appearing in his blue mantle and full-body suit and wearing an eyeless, mouthless, featureless mask. Roche called out to his teacher in joy, and Caster wordlessly nodded.

Confirming the positions of the four summoners, Darnic lowered his head in reverence towards the empty throne.

"My Lord, we will now begin the summoning."

...Very well.

Particles of light gathered on the throne, massing together and creating a human form. The man whom Darnic called Lord was dressed in royal fashion, black as a shadow in the night. By contrast, his face was shudderingly pale, and his silk-like white hair stretched long.

The instant he appeared, the air in the throne room became tense. When the man stands, one feels overwhelming pressure; wherever he looks, there is ceaseless trembling. But make no mistake, it is not because the man who sat on the throne acted barbarously or violently. It is simply that, once exposed to his icy gaze, you would recognize yourself as a hopelessly weak and powerless existence.

He is the strongest trump card prepared by the elder of Yggdmillennia, the Lancer of Black - **Vlad III**.

The greatest hero of Transylvania, known fearsomely as the 'Impaling Prince' to the Turks, had also spread another name across the world.

The Little Dragon... or, the vampire Count Dracula.

Of course, the one before them is not a vampire at all. He was a man of devotion, and a hero who ascended to the throne, no matter how small the nation may be. Especially here in Romania, where his deeds of turning back the numerous invasions of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks who have trampled over every other country, made him a great hero.

Yes, as long as he is in Romania, he has possibly the greatest fame of all - a match for Heracles in Greece, or King Arthur in Britain.

After a glance at Darnic, Lancer's majestic voice echoed through the chamber.

"Now, call the Heroic Spirits who would serve under me!"

"As you wish."

With a respectful bow, Darnic then announced to the four Masters.

"Let us begin, proud magi of Yggdmillennia. With the completion of this ritual, we take our unretractable first step onto the path of war. Do you possess the resolve?"

The four Masters kept silent, revealing their conviction.

The air in the throne room changed again. The senses of the four Masters sharpened, so that even the pressure of the Impaling Prince watching them from behind was pushed aside for the time being.

It is true that the summoning of a Servant is simpler than the complications of a normal greater ritual. However, it is a clear truth that the ultimate mystery of summoning a Heroic Spirit is something that can take one's life if performed incorrectly.

One cannot charge forward recklessly, but inching forward and confirming the safety of every step is also the act of a fool. What is needed now is cold-heartedness and boldness - being able to point the barrel at your own head and pull the trigger swiftly.

"Let silver and steel be the essence.

Let stone and the archduke of contracts be the foundation.

*Let **black** be the color I pay tribute to.*

Let rise a wall against the wind that shall fall.

Let the four cardinal gates close.

Let the three-forked road from the crown reaching unto the Kingdom rotate."

They had not rehearsed this beforehand, of course, but they all spoke the incantation in harmony without a single word out of place.

With the first verse complete, the glow of the magic ward swelled. The raging prana trampled and assaulted them. But even Caules, the lowliest of the four, stood firm and continued the incantation without hesitation.

"Let it be declared now;

your flesh shall serve under me, and my fate shall be with your sword.

Submit to the beckoning of the Holy Grail.

Answer, if you would submit to this will and this truth."

The incantation - the prana that now races within their Magic Circuits - is calling for Heroic Spirits from their **Throne**. It appeals to the greatest of beings whose existence is carved in myths and legends.

"An oath shall be sworn here.

I shall attain all virtues of all of Heaven;

I shall have dominion over all evils of all of Hell."

Three of the Masters paused at this precise moment. Only Caules, watching for this opening, continued with another verse.

"Yet you shall serve with your eyes clouded by chaos.

For you would be one caged in madness.

I shall wield your chains."

The additional incantation for **Mad Enhancement** - with this, it is certain that the Servant he summons will be afflicted by madness to some degree. A weaker Servant will acquire the tenacious physical capabilities of a Berserker.

And now, the last verse.

Despite the torment of their rampaging circuits and the fear that they would run out of control, the four could feel some regret if only for an instant; that was the degree of exaltation they felt during this ritual. However, they continued regardless - to tightly grasp in their hands the greatest mystery of all.

Uncommon monsters flowing with light, brimming with miracles, and surpassing thaumaturgy - in other words, Heroic Spirits, were attempting to enter their world.

"From the Seventh Heaven, attended to by three great words of power,

come forth from the ring of restraint, protector of the holy balance!"

At the same time as these words were spoken, the raging storm made the homunculi cower in panic, and Roche covered his face with his hands. Lancer, Darnic and Caster let it wash over them like a cool breeze.

And so, *they* manifested.

There is a blinding light coming from the complex and elaborately drawn magic ward. It only took a moment for miracles to take form. They were heroes, taking the phantasms of men as their own flesh, humans who reached inhuman heights.

The storm became a whisper, and the blinding light dimmed and faded. There are four figures standing within the circle.

One is a petite girl in a white dress. In her hand, a giant mace. With empty eyes, she slowly looked at her surroundings.



One is a androgynous-looking boy, fancily dressed. Out of the four, only he is looking at the Masters with a wide smile on his face. One is a man with a bow in his hand. Wrapped around by a grass-colored cloak, he knelt on one knee and faced the ground.

And the last is another man whose entire body was encased in radiant armor. A greatsword is on his back. His silver-grey hair waved gently in the wind.

"Ahh..."

There was a sound of wonder from someone in the room. Even Darnic's eyes were stolen by their majestic appearance. As thus, the Servants spoke the words of the beginning as one - the words which would uncover the muzzles to this fierce Great Holy Grail War of seven versus seven.

"In accordance to the summons, we present ourselves - the Servants of Black. Our fates shall be with Yggdmillennia, and our swords shall be as your swords."

Chapter 1-4

In the cemetery of the Stavropoleos Church in Bucharest, Shishigou Kairi has also succeeded in summoning his Servant.

"...So you're my Master, then?"

A knight of small stature, covered head to toe in armor, asked this of him. The knight's clear and unclouded voice reached him even through the helm. Shishigou nodded and thrust his hand out.

"Shishigou Kairi. I'll be your Master. Looking forward to it."

"...Is this a graveyard? What a despicable place to summon me."

The knight ignored the hand Shishigou held out. Scratching his head, Shishigou began to explain his choice.

"Yeah, well... this is kind of like home ground to me."

"You were born in a grave?"

"My younger days were spent with corpses."

Having heard this, the knight nodded in understanding.

"I see... you are a necromancer."

"Spot on. And you're Saber, right?"

Shishigou asked, seeing the sword held by the knight.

"Isn't it obvious? You must have poor eyes and a poorer mind if you see me as a Caster or Assassin."

"Not that there's anything wrong with an assassin who clangs through the front door wearing a set of armor, in my opinion..."

It seems that such assassins existed as well.

"...Could it be that I have been summoned by a fool?"

"Not a chance. You just got summoned by the best Master there is, Saber. What I'm saying is, this Shishigou Kairi is a first-class Master and perfectly capable of commanding you."

"Hmm... I suppose a good command is well enough, even if it is only over your own tongue."

"Well then, Saber, can you tell me your true name first? Actually... why can't I see all of your parameters even though I'm your Master?"

Normally, a Master would be able to acquire some degree of information when faced with a Servant - valuable data such as physical strength and endurance, and any skill they might have. Details on their innate skills and Noble Phantasms would naturally not be available until they have been visually confirmed once, but what is there is still priceless for organizing one's strategies.

And of course, the first Servant a Master can visually confirm is the one they summoned. By understanding their specifications, they can make plans on how to wage their war.

However, while Shishigou can confirm the basic parameters of the knight before him, the personality of the Heroic Spirit, its innate skills, and data on its Noble Phantasm, are all hidden from him and cannot be read.

"This helm, most likely. I'll take it off."

Saber said, and the face-covering helm split and merged with the armor. When **she** revealed her face, Shishigou could not close his opened mouth.

"You're a girl...?"

No, perhaps he was a boy. In any case, the knight had quite a youthful appearance. This was so unexpected that Shishigou let his words slip out without thinking, and did not notice the knight's mood immediately worsening.

"Do not say that again."

"Say... what?"

Her chilling, murderous growl brought Shishigou back down to earth.

"Call me that again, and I will be unable to restrain myself."

The glint in her eyes told him of her killing intent. Shishigou's instinct whispered to him that she was serious.

"...Okay, my bad. I won't say it again."

Raising both hands into the air, Shishigou gave a frank apology. Despite the anger twisting her face, Saber managed to restore her mood. Taking a deep breath, she muttered with a somewhat sulky expression.

"I forgive you. And do not ever raise this topic for discussion again. Remember that."

"Got it. So then, what's your true name-"

"Hm? What is this, Master? I don't know what catalyst you used, but you called for me specifically, didn't you? Why would I need to tell you..."

"Ah, no, this was my catalyst."

Slowly backing away from the dissolving magic ward, Shishigou tossed her the catalyst. Saber looked quizzically at the thing she caught in her hand.

"And this is?"

"It's from the Round Table. The one you knights used."

In an instant, Saber's recently recovered mood plummeted. With a tut, she held her sword to it - that holy relic which would likely never appear again in the world - and slashed it apart.

"...Uhh."

Having literally reduced it to splinters, Saber then stomped on the remains with all the weight of her armor.

"Accursed thing! Never would I have imagined myself being summoned by *this!*"

Her expression was one of cold and utter hatred for the Round Table. That's odd, thought Shishigou. To its knights, the Round Table had been a place of lively discussion. Although those knights became divided into allies and enemies in the end, that was not by its design. If there ever was a knight who hated it to such a degree...

In an instant, Shishigou realized her true name. If there was a knight who hated the Round Table, it must be the one knight who had rebelled against the King.

"Saber, are you **Mordred?**"

Mordred frowned slightly at Shishigou's question. It seems she feels a degree of shame at having her identity correctly guessed from her actions just moments ago.

But her tone was resolute when she declared.

"It is as you say. I am Mordred, the only true successor of the King of Knights, Arthur Pendragon."

"...Didn't you rebel?"

As soon as Shishigou pointed this out, Saber's face flushed.

"Yes, that's right. I did. The King never recognized my power to the bitter end; even though, in matters of both rule and sword, I was on the same level - no, I could have done even better. But the King refused me the throne due to my pedigree."

The frigidness of her tone was certainly not her checking her wild emotions. If anything, it was the opposite, for she possessed within a rage and animosity which shook her entire body.

Her pedigree - that she was born of infidelity between King Arthur and the King's own sister, Morgan - had been simply too fatal a flaw.

"Thus, I let it all end in rebellion. I let all see the truth that there was no meaning whatsoever to the King's reign."

It is true that, according to legend, it was Mordred who drove Arthur to the brink. Even after being pierced by the holy spear, Mordred dealt a fatal blow to the King.

Close to death, King Arthur returned the holy sword to the Lake and headed for Avalon. Mordred's life ended on the hill at Camlann; the only thing she passed on was her infamous name, as the Knight of Treachery.

"Right... so your wish is to become king?"

To Mordred, who had been refused the throne, being crowned king must be her wish. But Mordred's tone became imperious when she replied to Shishigou's words.

"Far from it. I have no desire to become king through the Holy Grail. My father would never recognize it even were I to ascend to the throne that way. The only thing I wish for, Master, is the chance to challenge the sword of

appointment."

"...The one the King pulled from the stone?"

Saber nodded. It is said that a young Arthur gained the right to rule by drawing the sword which had beaten back all those who boast of their own strength.

Of course, if Mordred manages to pull the sword from the stone, then she would be recognized as worthy of being king. However, there is one gaping hole in what she planned to wish for.

"Hey, can I just ask you one thing?"

"Yes?"

"Assuming the Grail grants your wish, what happens if you can't pull the sword out?"

If she wants to challenge the sword of appointment, then naturally there is the chance that she cannot draw the sword. There was not a single man in the country who was deemed worthy by the sword, after all. Mordred may carry the blood of Arthur, but it is truly questionable whether she can pull out the sword.

"What nonsense, Master. *Of course I can pull the sword out!*"

Yet Saber puffed up with pride and so proclaimed. From the overpowering weight behind her words, one can see that she did possess a dignity befitting a king. Perhaps she might even be able to draw the sword out easily.

"Now, Master, let us not delay. Instruct me the whereabouts of the enemies I must strike."

Mordred pressed forward, a slight pant in her voice, but Shishigou held her in check.

"...You ever hear the saying 'look before you leap'?"

"And why would I care about such drivel? Was I not summoned to cut down seven Servants?"

It seems that the Grail has granted her knowledge regarding this Great War.

"That's true. But we have no idea what's going on with the seven on the other side."

Both of them raised their heads to the sound of small wings in the air above them. There was a grey dove sitting on a tree branch. Its eyes - those emotionless eyes unique to birds - moved restlessly, and it spat out a piece of paper it had been carrying in its mouth. The dove then flew off, as though its work was done here. When Shishigou picked up the paper, Saber peeked at it with apparent interest.

"Was that a familiar?"

"Looks like it. They want to meet us right away."

"Who?"

"People with the same interests as us."

Shishigou crumpled up the memo - on which was written '*tomorrow morning at nine, Sighisoara, church on the hilltop*' and nothing else - and crushed it in his hand.

* * *

It was magnificence in its splendor, solemn yet commanding. A hundred words of praise would not be enough to describe the scene.

The Saber, Archer, Lancer, Rider, Berserker, and Caster of Black - aside from the Assassin summoned in Shinjuku, all six Servants have been gathered in this chamber.

Under the Holy Grail War, it would be exceedingly rare for more than two Servants to exist in the same space at the same time. Regardless of whether they were fighting or working together, there would only be two or three Servants at most. And it would be normal for them to watch over each other carefully, leaving no openings for when the killing resumes between them.

But war has changed - and they have agreed to this Great War, readily accepting this united front.

"Ah, should we introduce ourselves first? We should, shouldn't we? I'll start! Servant Rider - my name is **Astolfo**. What about you?"

Before anyone could open their mouth, the Servant of the Rider class - Astolfo, uncovered another muzzle entirely.

The Servant next to him, a calm-looking man, seemed somewhat taken aback but smiled softly and answered.

"I am Servant Archer. My name is **Chiron**."

"Thanks, Chiron! Our time together may be short, but let's make the best of it!"

Rider held out a hand; Archer accepted it with a troubled expression.

"Do not use your true names, Rider. Call each other by your classes."

Darnic coolly reined Rider in. "Oh right," went Rider as he nodded, and he then called out to the Servant in the white dress.

"And you?"

"....."

The Servant remained silent. She shook her head from side to side, signalling her refusal.

"Oh, so sorry. It's all right if you can't talk. Hmm... where is her Master?"

Rider looked over the Masters and zeroed in on Caules when he reacted to his gaze.

"Hey, the Master over there, what's her name?"

"Uh, well, she's..."

Despite his flustered attempts to ward off Rider, Caules could not bear his approach, the way he stared as though trying to bore a hole through him, and mumbled out her true name.

"...Frankenstein."

"I see. Well, Pleased to meet you, Fran- I mean, Berserker."

Servant Berserker - Frankenstein, grumbled in displeasure at the revealing of her name.

Finally, Rider's eyes turned to the last Servant - Saber.

"So, what's your name?"

"Stop, Saber. Do not speak."

Before Saber could reply, his Master Gordes stopped him. He then proclaimed loudly to all those present, including Darnic.

"I will not disclose the true name of my Servant to any one of you but Darnic."

The entire room stirred. Selenik asked in a wintry tone.

"Didn't we all agree beforehand that we would disclose the true names of all our Servants? It's quite low of you to go back on that, isn't it?"

"I did not have this catalyst then."

Saying this, Gordes held the case closely as though it was precious. He plans to keep even his catalyst a secret.

"Is it really so important that you have to keep his name a secret, Uncle Gordes?"

Gordes nodded sourly in affirmation.

"...It would be fatal for my Servant to reveal his true name. I'd prefer reducing the number of mouths it might slip out of."

The true name of each Servant is a piece of information that should be kept secret if at all possible. However famous a hero might have been, it is often the case that he or she had met an untimely death in life.

Disclosing one's true name would reveal a fatal weakness - that is, the reason for the hero's death.

If he had been killed by poison, then simply find a way to deliver some. If he had been shot down by arrows, then open fire. If he had possessed a certain weak spot, then you need only aim for it.

Even if said reason is not tied to a certain weakness, a hero who inherits the traits of dragons would fare poorly against weapons made to slay dragons. And even if you do not by chance possess such a weapon, by revealing this information with other Masters it is highly likely that some form of countermeasure can be set up.

Naturally, there are also those Servants whose true names would bring them no trouble even were it revealed; for example, the Rider Astolfo is of this

type.

Darnic glanced at Vlad, who nodded with a grin. Vlad, being the Servant of Darnic, of course knew who the Servant of Black summoned by Gordes is. As such, the prince who had been known for his heavy hand generously gave his assent.

"...Very well. We shall make an exception in your case."

Gordes gave a wide, satisfied smile at Darnic's words.

"My greatest thanks, Lord. Now, if you would excuse us."

Holding his head high, Gordes swept from the chamber with Saber in tow. Selenik muttered discontently as she watched them leave.

"Well, isn't he proud to have summoned Saber..."

"That's just the kind of creature he is."

Said Darnic with a wry smile. Gordes is the successor of the house of Musik that once boasted a skill with alchemy which rivaled the Einzbern. Then again, when the Musik family was folded into the Yggdmillennia, their thaumaturgical blood had already been in decay.

To a once-famous house, it must have been no small amount of shame to have been absorbed by the Yggdmillennia. From his youth, it was drilled into Gordes by his father and mother just what excellent alchemists their great family *had been*. Now at the age of thirty-six, he is still unable to separate dream from reality, having been raised to be proud of what once was.

That Gordes is a first-class magus, the first for a very long time ever since the name Musik became joined with Yggdmillennia, likely played a part in the excessive pride towards his own bloodline.

Besides, he certainly is a fine magus. He was the one who proposed and managed to realize a way to manipulate the system - the division of the prana

path-lines, which in this Holy Grail War might well be considered foul play.

However excellent the magi sent by the Association may be, the summoning of a Servant - and providing it prana - will pose a troubling burden. Simply by not possessing this, the Masters of Black will be able to markedly close the gap between them. Having an abundance of prana makes it possible to be less selective in the usage of Noble Phantasms, as well. The results that Gordes has shown certainly could not be ignored - such that there is no choice but to turn a blind eye to his hubris.

Chapter 1-5

In high spirits, Gordes returned to his room and turned to face Saber once again. His magnificent and majestic appearance would ensnare the eyes of any who saw him. Gordes was almost completely certain of himself, but he questioned Saber anyway, just to be sure.

"Answer me just one thing, Saber - your true name is **Siegfried**, correct?"

Seeing his nod of affirmation in response, Gordes reached the epitome of joy.

Siegfried - he is a national hero of Germany. Although his depiction differs in the various legends attributed to him, his most famous role is likely in the epic poem *Nibelungenlied*, 'The Song of the Nibelungs'. Born a prince of the Netherlands, he went through many adventures and was even crowned *dragon-slayer*.

He surmounted every field of battle without a single defeat, until losing his life at the blade of betrayal striking him in his back, his only weak point.

In his hand is the holy sword of the Nibelungs, Balmung. By destroying the evil dragon Fafnir with this sword, and bathing in its blood, he became invulnerable to any weapon.

But, however exalted the warrior may have been, his body had a single critical weakness - a spot on his back which was covered by a linden leaf that had just happened to stick to him when he was bathing in the blood of the dragon. That was the one weak point which would bring irrevocable death to Siegfried.

Gordes racked his brain for a while. It is all well and good to have summoned one of the greatest of Servants, but the truth is that his legend - and the fact about his back - is known far and wide. For just how long will he be able to hide such a deadly yet obvious weak point?

"Saber, from now on, keep your mouth shut unless you are unveiling your Noble Phantasm. You are allowed to speak only when I give you permission to do so."

By keeping Saber quiet, Gordes should be able to minimize to some extent the number of hints that could lead to his true name for the time being. Brandishing the Command Spells on the back of his hand, he emphasized the strictness of this order. However, there was some trepidation in his eyes. Would he be forgiven for dealing with a great hero in such a high-handed manner?

...Would *he* forgive Gordes?

Despite this, Gordes' mind could not help but recognize him as '*simply a Servant*'. After all, Saber is nothing but a temporary guest, brought to this world by Gordes, his Master.

For a moment, there was only tension in the room.

"..."

After a while, Saber answered with a nod in place of words, signifying that he had accepted Gordes' command. There are a number of tales regarding Siegfried's royalty, and his leading soldiers as a captain; but at the same time, he was a hero who answered the requests and calls of others.

If it is by necessity, he will not dispute a command to not speak. No command would be a burden to him as long as it leads to fulfilling his own desire.

...If, at this very moment, he had resolutely refused to the point of Gordes perhaps choosing to use his Command Spells, his fate might have been different. But Siegfried chose to submit, as a Servant of the Saber class - whereas Gordes recognized this exchange as a Master bending said Servant to his will.

In time, this misunderstanding between them will bring things to a fatal pass.

At the same time, the various Masters and Servants began interacting with one another in the king's chamber.

"I am your Master, please call me Fiore. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Fiore held out her arm, and Archer respectfully took her hand in both of his.

"Thank you, Fiore. Be assured that, as your Servant, I will not bring shame upon the name of Chiron."

"..."

Fiore became silent, appearing somewhat perplexed, and looked at Archer's face.

"Are you troubled?"

"Oh, no. You really are Chiron, aren't you? I know that you are, but..."

"Hard to believe, is it?"

Said Archer without ever losing his smile. Fiore gave a small nod.

"As it would. By my nature, I ought not to have been summoned in the form of man."

Chiron - a sage among the Centaurs, and teacher of many a great hero beginning from Heracles.

Half man and half horse, Chiron was born of Cronus, patron of the harvest and the earth, and the deity Philyra, thus being an entirely divine spirit.

However, after being hit by an arrow treated with Hydra poison, he abandoned his own immortality in order to be released from the agony. It was then that he lost his complete divinity along with his immortality, and became an existence that could be summoned by the Grail.

Of course, there would have been no problem with being summoned as a Servant in his Centaur form...

"...however, one will be able to guess at my true name by my appearance alone. I hope you are not taken aback."

To anyone who saw the form of Chiron, the Centaurs would immediately come to mind - narrowing it down to the more famous heroes, his would be the first name to appear, all the more given the bow in his hand. After all, Chiron is the Heroic Spirit who became the model for Sagittarius, the Archer in the sky.

As such, when Chiron was summoned, he took the form of a human. This costed him a lowering of rank for some of his parameters, but would not particularly affect his skill with a bow.

"Yes, of course. I understand."

Flustered, Fiore nodded. It is true that, aside from his somewhat archaic style of dress, he looked only to be a gentle man, with nothing to reveal his identity as the great sage Chiron.

However, now that she was talking with him directly, it took all the strength Fiore had not to be overwhelmed by the air Archer exuded. His presence is like that of a massive forest, its cool and clear air engulfing her minuscule existence...

"But it is all too simple to ask for your faith and trust. I am Servant Archer; watch for my bow on the field. There you will find proof that I am suited to be your Servant."

"Yes... I'm expecting great things, Archer."

Fiore dipped her head, looking embarrassed, and left the chamber with Archer.

"We're leaving too, Berserker. Go into spirit form, okay?"

"...aaah.... uuuuh....."

With a moan of something close to agreement, Berserker turned into specks and vanished.

Caules wiped the sweat off himself and sighed with relief. It had apparently been quite consuming for him. Truly, all the gifts of the Forvedge family had gone to his sister instead.

Unfortunately, while Caules himself possesses poor aptitude for being a Master, the Berserker he summoned - the man-made creature, Frankenstein - is a relatively new mystery, such that even with her parameters raised through Mad Enhancement, nothing about her particularly stands out. Then again, her true worth lies in a unique, innate skill of hers.

To be frank, Darnic simply does not expect much from Caules or Berserker. To begin with, the Berserker class does not accept any order once combat begins. It is their fate to rage about on the battlefield in their madness, and eventually fall. With good use of the Command Spells, she should be able to bring massive destruction to the field, making it possible to strike at several of the enemy's captains in the confusion. He simply needed to watch carefully for the right time.

Caules left the chamber, looking exhausted.

"Now, Rider, let me show you around the castle. You can't wait to have a look around, can you?"

The bashful Rider scratched at his head.

"You can tell, huh? So, well, I would prefer not having to go into spirit

form..."

"...All right. I will prepare a room for you, then."

"Really?! Heh, I'm so lucky to have such an understanding Master!"

Rider danced in a circle, cheering and throwing his hands up in joyous celebration that his wish had been granted.

He had probably been concerned about the liability of the prana needed to maintain a physical form continuously. The Masters may have the backing of the Holy Grail, but continually materializing a mystery is still a fair burden.

In fact, when it comes down to it, there is nothing wrong with keeping a Servant in spirit form except for battle. But that is purely from the perspective of the Master. Among the Servants, there are also those who are more concerned with the joys of a second life, and prefer to stay in physical form while turning a blind eye to the Master's troubles.

The Servant Rider, Astolfo is like curiosity in human form. If his Master Selenik allowed him - and even if she didn't - he would fly out of the castle this very instant and indulge himself in the pleasures of the streets below.

Among the Twelve Peers of Charlemagne, Astolfo is said to be the most handsome, eternally optimistic, and completely lacking in sense. To say that the form he came in was unexpected would be a great understatement, but it is only natural for legends to become distorted; his endearing appearance was well within the tastes of his Master, Selenik.

"The ritual's over, sir. Let's go back to workshop."

"...Yes, let us."

Roche and Caster also left the chamber.

Having seen off the Masters, Darnic dismissed the homunculi as well. Once they were alone, he turned to Lancer sitting on the throne.

"That makes six. And Assassin should be arriving soon."

Saber, Archer, Lancer, Rider, Berserker, Caster, Assassin - in previous Holy Grail Wars, it had been a matter of course for each of these seven Servants would formulate their own strategies and fight with their own tactics.

However, the situation has greatly changed in this war - for he wields not one Servant, but seven.

Everything is dependant on the class of one's Servant. Now, even classes which would have had immense difficulty lasting through the entire conflict in Fuyuki - classes such as Berserker, Caster and Assassin - would be able to exercise their true potential.

For instance, the Caster which Roche summoned is already in the process of manufacturing over a thousand golems. Divided into three groups by size, they eagerly await the moment of battle.

While they will never be a match for a Servant, they are valuable enough as stumbling blocks - and against Servants unsuited to close-range combat like Caster or Assassin, they might even get their own chance at bringing down a giant.

"...Do you know how I feel right now, Darnic?"

It was in fact plain as day, given the faintly pleasant smile on his face, but Darnic posed the question all the same.

"Lord, for a lowly magus such as myself, no amount of deliberation would allow me to concieve the same thoughts as the great Dracula."

When he said this, the seemingly irritated Lancer shot him a glance.

"Flattery in excess only reveals your own depth, Darnic. You may call me Lord, but I call you Master in turn. I will not deny that I am but your Servant."

"...Yes, Lord."

Internally, Darnic berated himself for going too far. Nevertheless, Lancer... that is, Vlad III, had once been sovereign over this land. However removed from the world a magus may be - even if he is able to impassively perform acts that go against all ethics - he should still readily give his respects to such a figure.

Of course, that is where the absolute divide of the Command Spells comes in. You could say that it is loyalty which comes only from the fact that they can be leashed in during a decisive moment.

"I spent half my life defending this nation from the Turks, Darnic. I ruled as best as I can, but there were things I simply lacked."

"By which you mean?"

"People, Darnic. I did not have great captains on whom I could leave companies of soldiers to. I gave my all in order to gain victory on the field, but that only means I could accomplish little else. But do not mistake this for an admission of incompetence. I simply..."

"...did not have enough people, and time."

Lancer nodded, content at Darnic's words.

"At long last, I have attained them: six irreplaceable Heroic Spirits, and Saber in particular... I cannot think of a more magnificent warrior than Siegfried!"

Yes... aside from Gordes, only Darnic and Lancer knew what Heroic Spirit the Servant of Saber was. Gordes' catalyst was a blood-stained linden leaf. It is likely that he secured it through good connections with his old friends, the Einzberns, but managing to acquire such a holy relic was certainly not just ordinary good luck.

"And it is not only Saber - there is Archer, the great sage Chiron of ancient

Greece; Rider, Astolfo of the Twelve Peers of Charlemagne; Berserker, the mad creation of Doctor Frankenstein; and the Caster Avicebron. An eccentric, to be sure, but the golem soldiers the man has created is an incomparable force of war."

"They are all of them yours to command, Lord. All of them, your captains."

"...Yes, it makes it all the more regrettable. Had they been by my side, I would not have been imprisoned in that fortress."

In 1462, King Matthias of Hungary captured Vlad on grounds that he was a collaborator to the Turks, and confined him for twelve years.

All that he had accomplished in the defence of his country was defiled, and before he realized it, the legend he passed down was that of a humiliating, blood-starved fiend.

"But that past is now as distant to me as a dream. What I must consider is the present - my pitiful name, smeared with blood."

"You need not worry, Lord. Once all seven Servants have been defeated, the omnipotent wish-granter that is the Greater Grail shall activate, and it will most certainly grant your wish."

The restoration of his name's honor, that is the wish of Servant Lancer, Vlad III - to wash away the stain of '*Count Dracula*' which has spread all over the world.

He is not denying the path which he has walked. His war against the Turks and period of unfortunate imprisonment were simply parts of his life which he has already been resigned to. However, he cannot possibly forgive his own name being dragged through the mud in matters which did not involve him in any way.

Among all the Servants, only Lancer possessed such a zeal and staked so much upon the Holy Grail War. His tenacity was yet another reason why Darnic liked him.

"So only the Servant of the Assassin remains, then. It is to be summoned in a small country in the Far East, yes?"

"Yes, Lord. It should originally have been summoned in London, but that is now enemy territory to us, after all. That is why we have chosen to summon the Heroic Spirit near a leyline which suited it."

"And what is the name of this spirit?"

"Jack the Ripper - the serial killer which shook England one hundred years ago."

* * *

Bucharest, Romania

The capital of Romania, Bucharest, was known as 'Little Paris' during the early twentieth century. However, due to the bombs of the Second World War, two earthquakes, and the megalomaniacal urban development of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, many of the exquisitely beautiful buildings of that period have been destroyed. Of course, they were not all gone. If you drive along the Calei Victoriei, cutting through the city from south to north, you can see many old churches and historically valuable buildings from the old city.

However, that was not the only wound carved onto this country by the Ceaușescu regime.

"...They call them 'the children of Ceaușescu', apparently."

A voice murmured in a decidedly sweet and unworldly tone; it came from an alluring woman who looked like she could drive men mad with a single

expression of melancholy. However, there exist no one near her who her voice would reach.

Passer-bys watched her warily as she whispered at the air. There were youths who wanted to call out to her but, perhaps sensing something close to madness in her eyes, they were crushed down and quickly gave up.

"Yes, that's right. It's so horrible... it didn't turn out like that for me. I just became like that before I even noticed."

As though speaking with someone else, the woman continued her side of the conversation.

The 'children of Ceaușescu' were part of the destructive legacy of the regime. It used to be that Romania outlawed contraceptions and abortions, and attempted to force all families to have at least five children. The youth whom no one could raise became street children in the end, slipping into lives of crime and human trafficking. The dictatorship may have ended in revolution, but lives that have been born cannot be returned. By criminal organizations, and by people of power, their small lives were devoured and scattered. Those who survived did so by turning from prey to predator before they even realized it.

The woman wandered through Bucharest at night as she continued talking with a partner only she could see. A young woman walking all by herself - it is like a magnet for trouble.

There were already two young men following her. Having been waiting for a place with few people and where the eyes of the authority could not reach, they immediately closed the distance.

The woman, with her light and fluttering steps, so recklessly entered an alleyway flanked by buildings on both sides. The men would no longer be satisfied by simply stealing her bag. No one would find out about one missing tourist; her money, her body, her entire life - they would utterly consume all that she owned. Thinking this, they reached out for her shoulders.

...No one would notice a scream back here.

So the men had thought... but they never could have imagined that the woman was thinking the same thing.

The woman only needed one of them alive. The other was unnecessary. And for the one who was so chosen... it was his luckiest day.

"Huh?" blurted out one of the men who reached out to her. For some reason, his hand could not reach her. He froze with horror for an instant, feeling as though he had just tried to touch a ghost. But the ejecting blood and intense pain coming from the cross-section of his own wrist finally allowed him to understand what happened.

Oh... my hand's cut clean off.

The man was puzzled as to why... but then finally figured out the severe truth.

"Aaaerrgh?!"

As soon as he yelled out, he was pressed by further pain. The suffering this time was slight, but his sense of loss became all the more terrifying great - for things which can never leave the body came tumbling out from his slashed abdomen.

There was a cry of exertion from an adorable voice. Truly, he was fortunate; to the man who survived, dying instantly by decapitation would be a fate worth trading for with everything he ever possessed in life.

"...Wha?"

The man who just so happened to have not been chosen stood there dumbly. The instant his partner had tried to reach out to the woman, his arm was cut off, his stomach was slashed open, and his head was blown clean off. He could not understand at all. It was simply too nonsensical. All his thoughts

stopped.

"Oh..."

After a while, he realized it - that they were nothing more than insects drawn to a light. And it was only natural that all those bugs would be decimated.

He felt a cold sensation between his legs, but before he could find out what it was, the man turned his back and escaped from the woman. No... he tried to escape.

The instant he turned about, someone's stuck-out leg casually tripped him. When he tried to get back up, that someone quickly held him down.

It was not the woman. She was watching the man, as vacant as always. So who was it that held him down with only one hand?

"What do we do with him,

**Master
Mother**

?"

...He was speechless.

The one who spoke with such a serene voice and held the man down was a child. In his moment of solace, the man gathered all the strength he possessed and grabbed her small arm, as though to throw her off.

But the arm of the child did not budge an inch. He grasped at her arm tightly, giving it everything he had. And yet, like a steel beam, her arm did not yield.

The man threw a punch. The soft sensation he felt when his fist made contact told him that her arm was not a prosthetic. But then, why? How is it possible that a punch with all the strength he could muster did not move her thin arm a single millimeter?

From his mouth came a pathetic shriek. He took a knife out of his pocket and thrust it at the girl's arm. Without a care for the unsightliness of his act, he stabbed at her again and again, trying only to escape from this aberrant scene.

He stabbed, and stabbed, and stabbed. So, *why... why, why can't I hurt her?!*

"Oh, my... doesn't it hurt?"

The child turned at the woman's question. Not noticing this, the man continued stabbing with his knife.

"We're all right. We're a Servant, after all. It doesn't hurt at all. It bugs us, though."

"Oh, well, then you can cut him a little bit. But not the throat. He still needs to talk."

"Okay, Mother."

The child nodded with knife in hand. To stop the prickling irritation, she severed the tendon in his wrist, and stained the areas around his chest, neck, thighs and face with blood - but not to a degree which would kill him, just as her Master instructed.

"Well done. Now, wait for a moment."

Stopping the child who was swinging a knife with precision, the woman called out to him.

"Hey... you have a lot of friends, don't you? Where are they? Would you minding telling me the name of the building, and which street it's on?"

The man lost his will to fight completely. When she asked her question, the truth came spilling out from him. Anything was fine with him. He was willing to do whatever it took. If she had told him to lick her shoes, he would have done it without the slightest hesitation.

While listening to the man's confessions, the woman confirmed the location he indicated on the map of a guide book. Perfect, murmured the woman as she lightly patted the child's shoulder.

"Jack? You can eat him now."

Eat... him?

Not understanding these words, the man attempted to ask. The child who was called Jack stared at his face... and he screamed, unable to bear it. Wearing those terribly emotionless eyes, Jack carved out the heart of the man.

More than the pain, he could not believe the briskness of the act. It was nothing to her - as though she was just picking a flower. As though she was just stepping on an ant.

Jack swallowed the heart of the man. And so the man died in agony, encased in his despair at the knowledge that one's life can be lost so easily.

"Hey, Mother? What are we going to do now?"

"The man just told us where his friends are, didn't he? Why don't we go there?"

"Will we get to eat a lot?"

"I think you will, Jack."

The woman, Rikudou Reika, stroked the head of the innocently joyful Jack, soothing her. Jack accepted it, shutting her eyes; there was no trace of the monster who had just dissected a human body and carved out its heart.

"Now, let's go."

"Okay. Bye-bye."

Jack shook her hand lightly at the two corpses. They were discovered the next day, and it also became known that their comrades were found slaughtered at a bar they had frequented. The police suspected it was infighting among criminal groups, but there was one mysterious point of note: every single one of the fifteen corpses had had its heart carved out.

Catching wind of this, one newspaper wrote up an amusing article on '*The Return of Jack the Ripper?*'. However, it never occurred to the police or the media that, going back to several days ago, an extremely similar event occurred in Japan as well.

Chapter 2-1

Thus, the Yggdmillennia clan have gathered the Servants of Black in their fortress of Millennia. They have already obtained every edge conceivable, but it is too early to lower their guard.

Archer and Lancer have already spoken with the Yggdmillennia magi on many occasions, spending the time by preparing measures against the enemy Servants.

Rider, despite his Master Selenik's strict control, still heads out from the castle and into the streets of Trifas below for his own pleasure. Of course, the clothes he was summoned in would draw too much attention, so he changed into a plain outfit for homunculus use.

As for Caster, having set up his workshop in the fortress, he has devoted himself solely to the production of golems. The workshop, formed by the Caster Class skill of Territory Creation, is more along the lines of a factory specialized in golem construction. Despite being subpar in terms of defence, it possesses the power to produce thirty golems in a single day, each of which a modern magus would barely be able to build even with a year's time.

At this very moment, two men are sitting on opposite sides of a table in the workshop. A slender golem made from spirit wood placed cups before the two of them, its actions fluid and without a trace of the awkwardness typical of golems.

Sipping the tea he was offered, Darnic looked around at the workshop which was brimming with activity. However, the ones busying themselves were not people, but golems - some built in the form of humans, some with several limbs like spiders, and more besides - who are going about cleaning the workshop and organizing tools.

"...Concerning the materials I requested several days ago, may I know when

they would arrive?"

Darnic nodded with a smile at Caster's question. Previously, he had requested jewels which would be used as the organs of golems, and parchment which would become their skin. Both must be at least eight hundred years old, he had implored, and in great amounts; even to the Yggdmillennia, whose blood had spread all over the world, searching for such things was most difficult a task.

"It should already be in our hands. The process took longer than expected as we could not go through the Clock Tower. On that front, I must apologize."

Being the headquarters of the Association, all manners of thaumaturgical implements circulate through the Clock Tower. Whether you are looking for eight-hundred-year-old jewels or even thousand-year-old parchment, as long as you have the resources and connection, getting hold of such things would be simple.

However, that route is no longer open to them now that they have seceded. They had no choice but to use other trade routes, or place orders under false names, or slip through the black markets searching for these items. Whatever the case, some time was needed in order to obtain such large amounts of items without drawing suspicion.

"Well, any amount would be welcome. Which leaves us..."

Royal Crown, the Light of Wisdom^{Golem Keter Malkuth} - the A-ranked anti-army Noble Phantasm boasted by the Caster Avicebron.

"My Noble Phantasm is made to consume. Once summoned, it will continuously require an infinite amount of prana. As such, it requires a core."

"Yes, I understand. But we must be prudent in our selection. After all, it does not yet exist."

Caster nodded at his words.

"That is true... perhaps I was being somewhat hasty. In any case, I will begin the casting for the components besides the core, and attune it so that the core can be inserted at any time."

"How long will this require?"

"If all goes well, it should take around three days."

"...That will not be a problem. I will leave you to it, then."

As Darnic was leaving, he passed by Roche returning to the workshop. He was carrying a large amount of parchment and jewels in his hands.

"They've arrived, sir."

"Excellent. Let us begin the production of the large models straight away."

"Yes sir!"

Roche gazed at Caster - his own Servant - with respect.

The normal relationship between Master and Servant has been reversed. If a Servant had been a king in his previous life, for example, then he should be treated as such to avoid hurting his pride; however, Caster was neither a king nor a knight. In life, he had been a mere philosopher - and a spell-caster, just as he is now.

But were you to consider the background of the two, it became clear that this relationship is only natural.

Roche Flyn Yggdramillennia - as magi go, the house of Flyn was quite well known in the field of doll engineering. The children of the house are left to be nursed by golems from the moment of birth, and until they reach the age when the family crest can be transferred to them, their parents practically never leave the workshop to see them. The golems have complete responsibility even for their education.

As such, every child of the clan becomes very familiar with golems. The acts and speech of these dolls modelled after human beings - the way they continue to work day and night - becomes what is common sense to them.

Having been raised on such an eccentric upbringing, they become magi for whom golems rather than other humans are the norm. They may have forgotten even the faces of their own parents, but they remember the form of every single golem who has cared for them.

Roche is much the same. He has no interests in another human being, or any sort of magus. He can exchange words with other people, of course; he has had dealings with people, just as he has fought others in deadly bids to secure precious resources. But he has none of the cordiality one would find between human beings, or between magi. To Roche, the act of speaking to a dog or a cat hardly meant they actually understood one another.

However, the Caster before him was an exception beyond exceptions.

Avicebron - **Solomon ibn Gabirol** - was a twelfth-century poet and philosopher, born in Málaga, Spain, and the one who brought Greco-Arabic and Jewish lore and enlightenment to the cultural circles of Europe. He had not achieved glory as a knight or a king would; nor had he produced works of art which would live on for a thousand years. However, he was one of the starting points for what eventually became the Renaissance in Europe. He was the father of the concept of Kabbalah - the Hebrew word for 'tradition' - and thus an entire thaumaturgical system; it cannot be denied that he was a 'hero' who heavily influenced the history of the world as well as of thaumaturgy.

In life, due to his poor constitution and pessimistic bent, he had been extremely reluctant to come in contact with others. While he obviously possessed enough rationality to be capable of holding conversations with others, he would never allow a single emotion into the exchange. On the other hand, having excelled at a single type of thaumaturgy as a magus, he had never needed to worry about the miscellaneous chores of his abode.

The reason why Roche respected Caster to the point where he called him 'sir'

was because Avicebron's expertise with golems surpassed even his own.

As such, even the peculiar cynic managed to form a very smooth relationship with his Master. To Roche, having been removed from his parents since birth and done nothing but create golems all his life, only one's ability in golem creation was a criterion in gaining his respect and trust.

"Sir... about the parchment, where should it be pasted?"

"For the large models, it is best to employ parchment in such a way as to reinforce their joints... you must take the greatest of care in handling the mercury."

"Got it!"

Even as he bustled about, Roche's eyes followed Caster's every move, filled with admiration. Caster is an ideal teacher to Roche, just as Roche is an ideal Master for Avicebron.

...For the time being, at least.

* * *

Servants of Black and Red - on this day, the actors have been gathered as ordained. The mighty Heroic Spirits number fourteen, making this undoubtedly the greatest Holy Grail War apocrypha of all.

But it cannot be overstated just how abnormal this situation is. The original Fuyuki Holy Grail War was a fight for dominance between seven Servants; however much one may alter the system, this abnormality encroaches on the authority of the Holy Grail itself.

The overseer is in itself nothing more than outside interference. Regardless of whether such an interloper existed, the Grail will by its own logic call upon a Servant to act as **Ruler** in this Holy Grail War. They serve not to take one side or the other, but to protect the concept of the 'Holy Grail War' itself.

The incomparable monsters that have been gathered for this Great War are too much to be ignored. As such, the eventual summoning of a Ruler-class Servant has essentially been accepted as fact by both camps.

...In a few more days, the Ruler shall appear before us.

Black Saber, Siegfried.

Black Archer, Chiron.

Black Lancer, Vlad III.

Black Rider, Astolfo.

Black Berserker, Frankenstein.

Black Caster, Avicebron.

Black Assassin, Jack the Ripper.

The Servants of the Black have been revealed. The question now is what Heroic Spirits will face them as the Servants of the Red... and whether they will have the means to resist Vlad, the greatest hero in Romania, and Siegfried, against whom any attack is meaningless.

But let none smear the name of the Association by underestimating their chances. This great organization has been passing down the esoterica of thaumaturgy, generation after generation, since the most ancient of times. The catalysts they possess which could bring back Heroic Spirits to our era number among the stars.

One of the magi hired by the Association, Shishigou Kairi, has summoned Mordred. The Knight of Treachery possessed a power befitting a Saber-class Servant. At this moment, Shishigou is heading to the church on the hilltop in

Sighisoara, with her in spirit form.

The city of Sighisoara was formed by a settlement of Saxons in the 12th century. Even within Europe, it is rare to find a city where the vestiges of the Middle Ages so strongly remain.

Sighisoara is also the closest city to Trifas outside the detection borderline of the Yggmillennia and their Servants. It was a wise choice for them to position themselves here. While Trifas is too dangerous to enter, being the enemy's home ground, Bucharest is also simply too far.

The status of the enemy Servants remain unknown, but it seems for their own - that is, the Red - side, it can be sensed that all the Servants have already been summoned. Saber has confirmed that the other six Servants have been gathered.

Seeing as they have been preparing for this for some time, it would not be strange for the Yggdmillennia to also have summoned all their Servants. In all likelihood, war will break out at any moment.

In any case, Shishigou walked up the dome-roofed staircase towards the designated location. Said to contain one hundred and seventy-two steps, this staircase as well as the Church on the Hill are both famous sights.

Suddenly, Saber spoke to Shishigou.

"...There's something I want you to do, Master."

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Buy me some clothes."

For a while, Shishigou could not find the words to respond to this utterly unexpected request.

"...Why?"

"Staying in this form makes me ill at ease. I cannot calm myself without my own feet planted on the ground. And I cannot walk around the city, even during the day, whilst wearing this."

It is true that her 'clothes', or rather, full suit of armor could not possibly be worn in public. Then again, the majority of the Holy Grail War is to be conducted during the night, so it is not exactly a pressing need...

"Do this for me. I trust that my Master is not such a miser that he would begrudge sparing some coin for mere cloth?"

"...Guess I don't have much of a choice."

Selfish git, Shishigou sighed. But it was nine in the morning, so they probably would not find any shops open yet. For the time being, he decided to leave it until after the meeting.

Just before he reached the top of the stairs, he saw the vaguely rocket-shaped church. Confirming that there was no one nearby, he reached out towards the door; it was nine o'clock, just as arranged.

When he stepped past the heavy doors and into the church... a man was standing before the altar at the far end of the nave. Judging by the way he showed no surprise at the appearance of the visitor, he must be the one who invited Shishigou.

"...Welcome."

Shishigou held up a hand and put a smile on his face.

"I've got an arrangement here. I'm guessing you're the one who called me?"

"Yes, of course."

Nodding, Shishigou walked down the aisle while muttering to Saber.

"...Are there any Servants here, Saber?"

"No... none that I can sense, but I've got a bad feeling about this. Watch yourself, Master."

She could not detect any other Servants, yet felt that something was not right - but the puzzled Shishigou did not have the time to figure out the meaning of her words.

When he sat down on the first bench and looked at the man again, it occurred to him that his host was younger than he had thought. It is quite possible that he has not even passed twenty years of age. Judging from his robes, he is likely the priest sent by the Holy Church.

With a very mature smile on his innocent boyish face, the priest said.

"It's my pleasure to meet you. I am Shirou Kotomine - the acting overseer for this Great Holy Grail War."

...Something brushed across Shishigou's mind when he heard that name. But it was very small, simply a trivial sensation of something seemingly out of place, and he let it pass without comment.

"Shishigou Kairi. I'm guessing you've done your homework, so I'll spare the introductions."

"You would be correct."

There was something quite crooked about the look on his face. It was a very judicious smile, not something that a boy not even over twenty should make.

"Could you please materialize your Servant?"

"No, I don't-

"Do it, Master... something's not right."

As soon as he heard those words, Shishigou immediately joined the link.

Specks of gold gathered at once, as Mordred made her appearance and began cautiously watching over their surroundings, as though defending Shishigou.

"Oh my..."

Shirou gently rubbed his eyes with his fingers, a frown on his face.

"What is it?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Now then, allow me to show you my Servant... reveal yourself, Assassin."

"As you wish, my liege."

Startled by the sudden ring of her voice, Shishigou jumped to his feet. Assassin had taken form on the bench right beside where he was sitting before.

"Tch. Assassin, huh..."

When an Assassin gains entrance into this world, it obtains the Class Skill of Presence Concealment. While under this skill, and in spirit form, an Assassin can never be detected by others unless she moves to attack.

"I am the Assassin of the Red. We look forward to your assistance... Shishigou, was it?"

A pleasing aroma emanated from the depraved beauty, who was wrapped around by a dress as dark as midnight. She wore a thin smile as her fingers crept towards Shishigou's hand.

"...Yeah, thanks."

With a stiff smile, Shishigou backed away from her. In Fuyuki, it had been fixed so that Hassan-i Sabbah would always have been summoned as Assassin. Is she one of them?

His instincts told him otherwise. **The Old Man of the Mountain**^{Hassan} was purely a killer; he erased his targets using skills obtained through training of the body and mind. That is certainly not the image that this woman gives. The deaths she caused were not done in secret, but deliberated and premeditated. All it took was a single word - a single glance - and her targets would die by the hands of others.

Chapter 2-2

"...Foul hag."

Shishigou could not agree more with Mordred's muttered words.

"Please don't trouble him like that, Assassin."

"Yes, yes, begging your leave."

Stifling her laughter, Assassin removed herself from Shishigou.

"Now, let us review the situation at once. The Yggdmillennia clan already possesses six Servants: Saber, Archer, Lancer, Rider, Berserker and Caster. It seems only Assassin has yet to join them."

"Any names that we know of?"

"At the moment, not one, unfortunately. Well, we have yet to engage them in combat, so I suppose it is only natural. However, we do have confirmation of the parameters of the six Servants."

Shirou reached into a pocket and pulled out a few documents. Thanking him, Shishigou took the papers and skimmed over their contents. They only contained the specifications of the Servants, with no mention of such critical information as innate skills or Noble Phantasms, but one can determine quite a few things from interpreting the data alone.

Naturally, the greatest obstacles appear to be the three knight classes of Saber, Archer and Lancer - each possesses superb parameters which tower above the rest. Also as expected, they used the Berserker class to strengthen a weaker Servant; but with such low specs, it is unlikely to become a significant threat. As for Rider and Caster, theirs is not an issue of numbers, but of Noble Phantasms and thaumaturgy, so for the time being, he will

reserve judgement on them.

"Any ideas as to who they may be?"

"...There *is* technically one. I'm guessing it's occurred to you, too."

Shirou smiled wryly as he nodded.

"Well, seeing as we are in Romania, it would be impossible for the great hero of this nation to not be called."

There is no reason why famous heroes of Romanian origin would not be summoned, with the war now taking place here instead of Fuyuki.

"Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia - if he's not with us, he's definitely against us."

Heroic Spirit Vlad Țepeș had been a great hero who fought against the invasion of the Ottoman Turks tooth and nail using guerilla tactics. While famous for being the model for Count Dracula, within Romania his heroic aspects are emphasized. The boost he gains from his fame must be at the highest possible for a Servant. The only remaining question should be what class he would be summoned into...

"...He has to be this Lancer. There aren't any episodes with Vlad III using swords or bows. Berserker and Assassin are out of the question, and the possibility of him being Caster is practically zero, meaning it has to be either Rider or Lancer. But all of Rider's specs are on the low side for someone with a fame boost. Which leaves this absurdly overpowered Lancer as the strongest candidate."

Shirou nodded in apparent agreement.

"Then Lancer is Vlad III... this news is not without its value. Far better than knowing nothing about all seven."

"What about the ones on our side?"

"Not bad at all. Your Saber appears to be quite excellent, and I can confirm that Lancer and Rider both have the strength to oppose Vlad III."

"...Huh."

It would seem the Association has managed to unearth some powerful Heroic Spirits as well. Lancer and Rider must have very great fame themselves, or power which exceeded even said fame, for Shirou to speak with such certainty.

"Could it be... Father...?"

Saber murmured, in a voice so low it could barely be heard.

"Calm down. There's no way... I think."

...He certainly hoped so. If something like that ever came to pass, their forces would be riven before the war even began.

"In any case, with your summoning of Saber, we have now assembled our seven. Now then... would you kindly tell me the name of your Servant?"

Assassin let slip a chuckle. At the same time, Saber bristled with enmity. But more so than the request for her true name, it seemed that she found Assassin's laughter highly grating.

"Ahh... well, do I have to?"

"Well, I'd certainly like to know why you cannot reveal it to me. After all, we are comrades in this war. Given that we are putting our lives in each other's hands, would it not be prudent to know the true names of each other's Servants?"

"I guess our lives really are in each other's hands... but..."

To start with, a Servant's name is the most important piece of information of all. It would be unthinkable to simply reveal it without a thought. The

grasping of a Servant's true name inevitably leads to everything from their Noble Phantasm to their strengths, and conversely, their weaknesses.

"And if the Servants are to stand together on the line of battle, they must know what kind of Noble Phantasm the others will use. In either case, once the Servant's Noble Phantasm is used, its true name might as well be revealed. There is little difference."

In truth, Shirou's proposition was very reasonable - but Shishigou could not help feeling some trepidation at the prospect of fighting on the same front as this Shirou... and his Assassin. It was a very odd and somehow chilling sensation. He smelled something which ought not exist in the heat of battle - the stench of deception.

Shishigou turned his back on the two, facing Saber and making his thoughts known via telepathy. Between Master and Servant, it is possible to exchange their intents to this extent, even without spoken words.

"What is your will, Master? In any case, I refuse."

"And I'd agree with you. But why?"

"...Instinct."

"I can put my faith in that. It's settled, then."

Shishigou tucked away the documents and walked down the nave, his back still facing the two.

"Oh? Where to?"

"Yeah, we're just going to go and do our own thing. Lucky me, 'cause I got a Saber, so I doubt working alone is going to be much of a problem."

Saber is said to be the greatest among the seven Servants. With their high parameters and attack power, it is unlikely for them to be defeated in a fight against any Servant.

"I see. So you will not join us in battle, then?"

"You guys already have six Servants, right? And if Lancer and Rider are as amazing as you say, there shouldn't be an issue."

"That is certainly the case, but... you have me at a loss."

Shirou scratched at his head, looking somewhat troubled. Assassin, her eyebrows slightly arched, exuded an air of displeasure.

"...So you claim that you have no need of our hand in waging war, but know that you forfeit all the counsel we could provide on Trifas."

"That would be a shame, because I'd love to get as much counsel as I can. How about I buy it off of you?"

Assasssin's brows rose ever further at his disagreeable words. Quietly, Shirou checked her.

"We will provide information on a regular basis. But this is most unfortunate. I truly did wish to stand alongside you."

Shirou murmured with regret.

As soon as Shishigou left the church, he had Saber turn into spirit form and gave his undivided attention to barrelling down the staircase without breaking his neck.

"Saber, is anyone following us?"

"...None that I can sense. But keep a watchful eye, Master. Assassin could be tracking us in spirit form. I shall cut her down if she ever attempts an attack."

"It's noon, so I doubt that... but I can practically see the writing on the walls. Let's get the hell out of here."

"Can I just say one thing?"

"Go ahead."

"That Red Assassin... she had the same smell as Mother. Questioning her loyalty is one thing, but pray that we would not meet our ends never suspecting the knife she planted in our backs."

Mordred's mother - in other words, King Arthur's sister Morgan - is said to have attempted at bringing down the King and having Mordred take over the throne, and had been as powerful a magus as Merlin. Given Saber's comment, Assassin must be quite the plotter as well.

"...However it may go, be sure to keep your distance from her."

Shishigou reached the end of the stairs and finally breathed a sigh of relief. Still, he made Saber confirm that there was no presence of any Servants nearby.

"Actually, Master..."

"Yeah, what?"

"It's simply that... it comforts me to know that my Master is not a man who would give a price for trickery and deceit. Not that I'm greatly relieved, mind. Just... well."

With some hesitant wording, she voiced her praise. At the very least, he had managed to benefit greatly from refusing Shirou's proposal - the Master had gained the trust of his Servant.

"You're welcome. Now, we go to Trifas. If worse comes to worst, we could be dealing with every Servant in the war. You okay with that?"

Saber declared herself loudly in response.

"Leave everything to me, Master, for I am Mordred, the only knight to have

surpassed my father!"

Shishigou accepted this internally. It is said that, in summoning a Servant, a Heroic Spirit with a mentality similar to the summoner's own will be chosen. And she truly did resemble him.

Yes... especially in her over-abundance of confidence.

Chapter 2-3

"That didn't go so well. I'm afraid that he might have sensed something."

"Was it not possible for you to perceive Saber's true name, Shirou?"

"It seems not. His Saber must possess some sort of skill or Noble Phantasm that can keep her identity secret. I was able to obtain her parameters, but aside from that..."

"As I see it, uncertainty is the first enemy we must eliminate. There is still time - could we not send an agent after them?"

"No, no, we shouldn't. It's still much too early for fighting among allies."

Shirou quickly rejected Assassin's merciless suggestion.

"Allies? Hardly."

"Our interests coincide, and that makes us allies. We can deal with them after the Servants of Black are defeated. And how is it going with your Noble Phantasm, Assassin? The materials you lack should have all been gathered by now."

"Yes, only the ritual required to establish it as my Noble Phantasm remains. I need three more days."

"I see. Then it seems we will be able to breach Trifas in three days' time."

"Yes, we need only to have the doves act as our scouts for these few days."

The two abruptly ended their discussion and looked towards the door. After a short while, it was thrown open by an intruder, but Shirou relaxed after identifying the man.

"Well hello, Caster. What are you doing here?"

The man called Caster, foppishly dressed in refined Medieval-esque clothing, walked briskly down the nave while spreading his arms wide and shouting.

"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

After a brief silence, Shirou - rather nervously, as though he felt somewhat apologetic - spoke.

"...Was that from one of your works?"

Caster's shoulders dropped as he sighed with disappointment at Shirou's words.

"Oh, *Master!* How can it be that one lives in this age yet does not know of one of my greatest works! You must take the time to read this!"

He held out a bulky hardcover - apparently, he had visited a book shop in order to buy his own work. The title read, *The Works of William Shakespeare*.

The Caster of Red, **William Shakespeare** - the only playwright whose fame had reached around the world. To say that one has no knowledge of his works is to be disparaged as ignorant. It is even said that if one were to trace the source of any piece of modern literature, one would always find a Shakespearean creation.

However, there is one thing he said just moments before that could not be ignored. 'Master', he had called Shirou - the one who already possesses Servant Assassin. Neither the priest nor the assassin had been taken aback by this. If this were true, then Shirou already had control of two Servants.

While such a thing is possible, it is rather irregular. There has never been a case of a single Master commanding two Servants in prior Grail Wars. One would barely be able to prevent a self-inflicted death via prana drain. In that

case, just how much prana does this man have reserved in him?

"I might have been summoned by the Holy Grail, but it could hardly have granted me such knowledge as details about your works. All you are to me is 'a famous writer of history.'"



Hearing Assassin's comment, Caster gazed upwards and lamented.

"O Queen of Assyria, let me hear no more of such painful words, I beg you. Every line you speak is a refusal of my very individuality!"

"...Yes, I suppose you would see it that way. But Caster, what has happened that required you to appear in material form?"

Her question immediately stopped all of Caster's exaggerated grievings.

With a cough, he spoke again with some discomfort.

"Ah, yes, well... **lovers and madmen have such seething brains**, as the phrase goes, but the one we know as Berserker at times conducts himself in a way most unappealing to logic..."

"...Has Berserker begun his rampage?"

"Oh, no," Caster answered Shirou.

"Then what exactly is the matter? Explain yourself."

Assassin approached Caster, her face contorted into an irritated scowl. With a smile like that of a jester's, Caster delivered the news.

"Berserker has begun his march on Trifas. It seems he has discerned the enemy which he must strike."

"...What?"

"Oh my... that *is* troubling news."

Assassin was lost for words whereas Shirou's murmur was practically casual.

"For now, Archer is in pursuit, but whether or not she can stop him may as

well be decided by the flip of a coin... well, it is mostly likely that she will fail."

"This is no laughing matter, Caster."

Assassin muttered bitterly. But of course, because while all the Servants of Red have been assembled, they are not fully prepared for war. This is without mentioning the Servants of the Yggdmillennia who await within the impregnable Fortress of Millennia, in perfect condition and awaiting their advance - Berserker has no chance of breaking through by himself. His march will only end in the meaningless death of a Servant.

"How will we proceed, Master? My Noble Phantasm is not yet prepared. In such a state, it would be senseless for us to make our attack. Our only choice is to leave him to his fate."

"Mischief, thou art afoot. Take thou what course thou will..."

"Oh? So it was you who spurred him, then, Caster?"

Caster ended all of his excessive gesturing and averted his gaze with seeming embarrassment.

"So it was *you* who told him of the location of Trifas! You little...!"

"Oh, but the pitiful berserker wishes only to seek the adversary for his rebellion - I can not possibly stand idle while he is filled with such anguish!"

To Shakespeare, this world truly is the greatest story ever told. Or rather, it *ought to be* so. For he loved from the bottom of his heart all who are out of the ordinary, and pursued the tales which they spun.

That is why he is willing to employ deception and provocation - anything for the sake of the story.

"More and more, you prove yourself to be nothing but trouble...!"

Assassin sighed, but Caster replied gracefully.

"Now you know that I am what they call a 'troublemaker'... or perhaps 'trickster' is more fitting."

"There's no helping it, then... we will have to ask Archer to support Berserker. But give her strict orders to retreat if the situation turns disadvantageous. Berserker cannot be stopped - even if his Master expends a Command Spell, it will only delay the inevitable."

"Yes, Master. My familiars shall pass your words unto Archer."

"And as overseer, I will have to follow Berserker and deal with whatever is left in his path. I will not be able to act for some time - do keep out of trouble, won't you, Caster?"

Because Shirou is also the overseer, he must of course do everything in his power to preserve the secrecy of thaumaturgy. After all, if Berserker is heading for Trifas in a direct line, it is highly likely that he has been seen. If only he were in spirit form - but, as overseer, he could determine that it would be meaningless to expect that sort of logical thinking in a Berserker... especially *that* one.

"Oh, yes. I understand, my Master..."

As though to encourage to disheartened Caster, Shirou said with a soft smile,

"Fear not, Caster. The battle shall soon be joined. With seven **Black** Servants and seven **Red** Servants, it shall be the greatest of Holy Grail Wars - the Great War of the Holy Grail. I do believe that this battle will satisfy your love of stories."

* * *

And so the night ended, with the assembly of the fourteen Servants. On one

side, the clan of the Yggdmillennia magi who have rid themselves of the Clock Tower - and on the other, the magi sent by the Clock Tower, who accepts no abdication and aims to seize the Holy Grail.

There will be no place for submission or reconciliation, no room for negotiations. For it will be a true war of annihilation, a fight to the death as the two sides slaughtered one another. However, as with most wars, the beginning of this war was quiet.

Kairi Shishigou and Red Saber reached Trifas after one night's journey. Shishigou, holding back Saber - enthusiastically pushing to start a fight as quickly as possible - and downing an herbal mixture to stave off his drowsiness, set about the business of creating a workshop.

He had considered renting a hotel room, but that place would most certainly warrant the greatest attention to the enemy. However he may alter a hotel room into a usable workshop, it does not change the fact that such a building is weak. And there are those in the world who think nothing of blowing apart an entire building to get at a single room.

"...And this is your solution?"

Saber voiced her complaints with some weariness.

As she had requested, Shishigou bought her some modern-style clothing at a boutique in Sighisoara. With a tube top that exposed her abdomen and a crimson leather jacket, it seemed quite chilly even for autumn. Of course, she is a Servant, so the weather probably poses no problem to her.

What Saber is disheartened by is the place that Shishigou chose for his workshop. Saber has dealt with magi in her life - her mother was a magus, after all - so she knew well that they were eccentric, obstinate and egotistic. But...

"...you want to make your *den* in the catacombs? Surely, you can't be serious..."

Saber is well within her rights to lament - the candles around them illuminated looming piles of bones. Two sleeping bags have been placed over a slightly more open area, seemingly an altar, confirming that Shishigou is planning on sleeping here.

"Don't be so demanding. There aren't many leylines of this quality, you know? This place will definitely help with recovering your prana."

"Damn the leylines. That's not the problem."

"Oh... are you scared?"

When Shishigou slapped his hands together in understanding, Saber made a face like a bellicose snapping turtle and yelled.

"No! I simply cannot stand this poor treatment! I was a *knight!* And even if I weren't, no one would be able to accept this!"

"Sigh... all right, fine. You can use that sleeping bag. It's more expensive, so it should be more comfy."

"..."

Saber's shoulders dropped.

As the adage goes... 'the key to dealing with a magus is to give up'.

Chapter 2-4

But Saber knew full well that Shishigou had not chosen this place to be his workshop on a whim or out of folly - not that this made the situation any less aggravating.

After all, his craft is necromancy. It is only natural that graves and morgues, and other such places which have been drenched by the deaths of human beings, will be most fitting for him.

In addition, this underground tomb has multiple exits, making the place easy to escape from as long as the routes are not all sealed at once. And if it comes down to it, one can simply bore a hole straight up towards the surface. It is also difficult to collapse the roof over their heads even with bombs - the tomb is bigger than one might think, so it would require a great amount of explosives or a high-level ritual to blow apart completely. None of this will be an issue as long as they remain vigilant and maintain a watch.

All in all, this place makes a surprisingly sturdy fortress... if you can get past the fact that it is a tomb.

For the time being, Shishigou deployed a detection field around the exit of the tomb. He may have chosen this place to be his workshop, but it is still nothing more than a temporary roost. Shishigou has decided not to lay traps until he is sure that the war will be drawn out, and only when he has the time.

Shishigou then took out a glass bottle from his backpack. It seemed to have managed to draw the attention of Saber - idly watching Shishigou as he labored - and she came to peek over his shoulder.

"...Is that a snake?"

"It's a juvenile Hydra, preserved in formalin. I doubt there's another one in the entire world."

"Huh... and what do you plan on doing with it?"

"Did you forget? You're talking to a necromancer. I'm going to process it."

"Process' it?"

Shishigou carefully removed the Hydra from the bottle and laid it down on the floor. Just as Saber nonchalantly reached out, as though to touch it, Shishigou snapped sharply.

"Stop! Don't touch it!"

"...What? I just want to take a look..."

Saber said somewhat sulkily. Shishigou sighed and explained.

"Look, Saber... You have knowledge of the legend of Herakles, don't you? So, what comes to mind when we talk about the Hydra?"

"...Well, it has nine heads..."

"And?"

"And it breathes poison... oh."

"Exactly. A Hydra's body is filled with poison. If this were an adult, our lungs would be rotting right now just by being near it. Well, this one's only a juvenile - and it's dead - so it's all right as long as we don't touch it."

Of course, unlike an ordinary man or woman, Saber would most likely not die. That said, the Hydra is still a demonic beast. As the adage goes: 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'.

Putting on a pair of thick leather gloves, Shishigou carefully removed the heads one by one using a knife. He then took the heads and submerged each in a reddish-black liquid.

"What are you doing?"

"If they were a bit longer, I'd be able to make a bolt. But, considering the size, a dagger is probably the best I can manage."

"Hmph... Will it take a long time?"

"Three hours or so, probably. We're not going anywhere until then, so get some sleep."

Saber, however, chose not to sleep and squatted down next to him.

"Interested?"

"If only. I have no interest in dissections or processes or what have you."

Saber rested her chin on her hands, looking bored. 'Then get some sleep and save me the prana' was what Shishigou wanted to say, but he was positive that she would not listen.

Using tweezers to pick up the Hydra heads from the liquid they had been submerged in, Shishigou held them over a candle's flame. It was a straightforward but extremely dangerous task which demanded his complete involvement.

"...Hey, Master? What do you desire from the Holy Grail?"

Even as Shishigou proceeded in his task - one which required absolute concentration, as a single misstep could lead to his death via the Hydra's poison - Saber asked him a question without a care in the world.

"If you're asking me about the wish I'm going to make to the Holy Grail... I'm going to have it bring prosperity to my clan. I *am* a magus, you know."

Saber looked disappointed at his rather pedestrian reply. It is only too natural that a magus wishes for the fortunes of his or her clan.

"Is that it? How dull."

"Don't be stupid - that stuff is important. A human being has a short lifespan, you know. You can't even live up to two hundred. But sons succeed the dreams of their fathers."

"Not all sons succeed their fathers."

"Are you speaking from experience?"

Instantly, a scowl appeared on Saber's face. Shishigou apologized with a bitter smile. But she did not respond to his apology, instead wordlessly crawling into her sleeping bag.

While Servants do not need to sleep, it is not without its use in controlling prana consumption. This is especially the case for Red Saber - Mordred - who devours an incredible amount of prana as payment for possessing incomparable strength. Having her save from using prana as much as possible will be for the better. Well... she is only sulking right now.

As he processed the Hydra, Shishigou chewed on some dried meat and fruits for nourishment. But, now and then, he would shift his eyes from the silently proceeding task before him to the sleeping girl. Every time he looked, he saw only the face of an innocent child - in some way, this depressed him.

Mordred, the Knight of Treachery, was one of those rare villains who, at the very end, managed to tarnish a glorious legend.

Having been left in charge while Arthur was out on an expedition, Mordred saw her chance, instigating the army and taking the throne that she so wanted. Upon the King's return, a battle immediately unfolded between the forces of Arthur and Mordred - what would be known as the great battle of Camlann.

Most of the King's famous knights were no longer present at this point and Arthur and Mordred engaged in one-on-one combat in the middle of the blazing battlefield. Even as she was pierced by the holy spear Rhongomyniad, Mordred dealt a fatal blow to the King.

Arthur commanded Sir Bedivere, who remained loyal to the King to the last, to return the holy sword. It is said that Arthur either passed away on the hill or was healed in the Isle of Avalon.

However, the only known fate of Mordred was that she was killed in the duel. But that is only natural - after all, Mordred is the antagonist who deceived the great Arthur Pendragon, the legendary King of Knights, whose name remains carved in Britain even today.

"...Okay, that's all nine. Now for the body."

Muttering to himself, Shishigou immersed himself in his thoughts. His views might be slanted due to how the summoning itself had went, but if he had the choice of having either Mordred or Arthur as his Servant, he would not hesitate to choose Mordred.

Between the King - wielding a shining holy sword as the very manifestation of chivalry - and the rebellious knight who attempted an insurrection with the King's own men, is it not clear that the latter is far more interesting a personality?

Shishigou did not fully understand whether Mordred felt love or hate for Arthur. After all, there is only a thin line between the two emotions. However, it is most certainly true that she was greatly influenced by Arthur. That was why she rebelled - to become more like her father or to deny the King's ways, Shishigou did not know - and, regardless of whether it was right or wrong, that took courage.

"...I guess now I know why I summoned her."

His smile was one of mockery for himself. A magus like him could never have summoned a proper Knight of the Round Table to begin with - so three

cheers for the Knight of Treachery.

Having completed his work, Shishigou crawled into his sleeping bag and slept like a log.

Trifas becomes a silent place in the dead of night. There are no lights shining from the houses and no stores that operate through the night. Only streetlamps illuminated the darkness - weak light that can do little against the deep shadows.

Mordred and Shishigou are searching for a place from which they will launch their assault on the Fortress of Millennia. In a regular Holy Grail War, it would be the norm to search for the workshops of enemy magi. But that is unnecessary in this case. After all, it is already certain that they will operate from that stronghold. There is no need to search for them, because there is no reason for an enemy Master nor Servant to be outside that stout fortress to begin with.

In other words, nothing can be done without first attacking that fortress - which means keeping a distance and finding a good place to observe it first.

The fortress is located north-east of Trifas and the three hectares surrounding it are forests. Trifas is situated on a plateau rising from west to east, so one can watch over the entire city from the highest point of the fortress.

As such, Shishigou and Saber began their search south of the fortress. The best choice would be a tall building, not so close to the fortress but not also so far that nothing can be seen.

"What about that?"

Saber pointed to the century-old town hall. Constructed in a Secessionist style, the entire building was made up of straight lines and smooth surfaces -

the vividly colored geometric tiles covering the roof stood out in particular.

It is a precious work of art and a historically important building. However, that is meaningless to the pair whose only interest is the excellent view it should provide.

"Looks good. Let's go up and take a look."

Shishigou murmured. But then, Saber grabbed him by his collar for some reason.

"...Uh."

"Let's go."

Getting a bad feeling, Shishigou tried to free himself from Saber. It was too late - with a sound of exertion, Saber used her Prana Burst to leap straight onto the roof. When they landed, the enormous stress pressing down on the back of his neck made Shishigou feel as though his consciousness floated away for a moment.

A brief silence ensued during which Shishigou wondered how to reprimand the smug-looking Saber.

"Don't do that again."

In the end, he went with a simple, harmless complaint. Saber nodded, clearly lacking any remorse.

"So how is this place, Master?"

"Well..."

The castle is close enough for them to watch over but the roof is far enough that observers on the other side should not be able to easily make them out. It truly is a perfect observation post. But...

"No, it's no good."

Shishigou sighed. Saber nodded in agreement with some annoyance. As they stood on the roof, a mass of what appeared to be birds flew out from the castle. Taking a closer look at the tiles beneath his feet, Shishigou saw that there was a disguised detection field spread around the roof.

"Saber!"

Before Shishigou could say another word, Saber had already changed into her suit of armor and was ready for combat.

"...Are those hawks?"

Due to the darkness of the night, it was difficult for even Shishigou to see anything beyond vague movements. However, with her extraordinary sight, Saber could clearly see the form of the coming attackers.

"No... golems!"

Four stone golems, seemingly modelled after dragonflies, descended upon them from all directions. Saber leapt and destroyed one, then landed on the closest one on the ground and hacked down the other two.

"Damn... there are more!"

Saber brought her sword to bear without a moment's pause. Humanoid and non-humanoid golems appeared from all around them - they must have been camouflaged on the roofs of the nearby buildings. But there were more - humans gripping halberds appeared seemingly out of nowhere and, together with the golems, surrounded the pair.

No... their faces were too expressionless for humans. In fact, their faces were all so similar to one another that they might be mistaken for siblings.

"They're... not humans. Homunculi, huh."

"..."

Saber stirred slightly at Shishigou's muttered words.

"What's the matter?"

"It's nothing... Your orders, Master."

"My thaumaturgy isn't quite powerful enough to take on those golems... Leave the homunculi to me. You take care of the rest."

"As you command!"

Crushing the tiles beneath her feet, Saber charged at the golems like a speeding bullet. The golems' stone and bronze bodies were shattered as though they were paper and wood. Another golem attempted to crush Saber with its immensely large body, but Saber simply roared and launched her sunken body upwards, blowing the stone puppet aside.

Her motions contained none of the elegance of knights or the beauty of swordsmanship - she was closer to a berserker or some wild beast. Saber swung her two-hander sword with one hand, leaving her other hand open. But rather than throw a punch, she instead threw her sword - the very heart and soul of the knight - at a golem coming from above, skewering it. Stopping the punch of a second golem, Saber gave a shout and threw her attacker away - sending it on a collision course with the skewered golem above and causing both to be shattered. Plucking her sword out from the raining debris, Saber resumed her onslaught.

Against the homunculi, Shishigou took out a large shotgun. Even the emotionless homunculi, slowly edging their way towards him, paused reflexively at the sight of the fearsome weapon.

It is an unbranded side-by-side sawed-off. With both the stock and barrel shortened, it is highly portable and suited to room-clearing, but the effective range is extremely short.

However, the parameters of the actual weapon meant little to the necromancer.

"Boom."

Turning the weapon towards the homunculi, Shishigou casually pulled the trigger. He was not aiming for anything to begin with - the key was that he was holding the gun. The firing pin and other components of his shotgun were treated with thaumaturgical rituals. The shots being fired, not the weapon, were the most important part.

The projectiles that were loaded into this weapon would freeze the blood of anyone who saw it. 'Disgusting' would be an understatement - they were *human fingers*.

There is a technique called 'Gandr' in Scandinavian runic thaumaturgy which placed a curse on the target by pointing at them. The curse can exhibit a physical force - becoming like a bullet - if constructed using great amounts of prana.

These finger 'bullets' created by combining Gandr and Shishigou's necromancy can only reach subsonic speeds, but they can adjust their course by detecting body heat like a snake. When the projectile burrows into the body of the target and reaches the heart, the curse ruptures - it is a true 'one shot, one kill' demon bullet.

The projectiles traced gentle curves through the air and killed several homunculi in the blink of an eye. But the shotgun only had two shots before it had to be reloaded. Not missing this chance, the other homunculi charged forward. Shishigou, still reloading, paused and took out a bizarre object - something slightly shrivelled and of a dark-red hue. It was a magus' heart.

Shishigou tossed the thing at where the homunculi were most concentrated. With a wet sound, the heart landed beside them - it rapidly expanded and then exploded. The teeth and nails of the magus that had been concentrated inside penetrated the homunculi. They soon died with expressions of agony, as though having been force-fed some kind of poison.

Of the many necromancers in the world, it is likely only Shishigou Kairi who have managed to turn the bodies of magi and magical beasts into such brutal killing devices.

While the homunculi certainly possess some combat ability, to the bounty hunter they are but simple prey. And that seems to be have been the case for Saber as well.

"It's over, Master."

"Yeah, well done."

Having crushed the last golem, Saber returned. She looked around at the corpses around him and let out a breath, sounding impressed.

"Not bad for a necromancer."

"I've seen my fair share of carnage."

As he spoke, Shishigou tore out a piece of parchment from a piece of a shattered golem. There were commands written all over it.

"This is old... over eight hundred years old."

Time was of exceedingly high value in thaumaturgical applications. A mystery strengthens the longer it has existed. For example, a family's thaumaturgical crest becomes strong by having new accomplishments added to it by every generation to have received it. With eight-hundred-year-old parchment, one may forge a golem that can easily destroy one or two experienced magi.

However...

"How were those golems, Saber?"

"This was my first time facing these stone puppets... but they did better than I

expected. The last one managed to endure three blows."

"A golem made by a modern magus couldn't possibly last even two hits from you, not even if he spent his entire life working on it."

There are exceptions, of course. The world is a big place and it is possible that a magus exists who can create golems on par with Servants. However, it does not seem likely that one would exist among the Yggdmillennia. The best golemancer within their clan is Roche Flyn Yggdramillennia and as good as his golems are, they will not be able to withstand even one of Saber's swings.

This means that the creator of these golems is *not* a modern magus.

Just as Shishigou was taking a closer look at the parchment in order to examine it in further detail, a great heat washed over his face.

"Ouch!"

He recoiled and let go of the blazing parchment. It was not only the piece that Shishigou picked up - all the parchment in the area around them were going up in flames. The remains of the golems quickly weathered and turned to dust.

"You all right?"

"Yeah, it just stung a bit. Careful bastards - there goes our clue. Looks like we can't set up here, not if they were ready with an ambush."

The Yggdmillennia had obviously considered the strategic importance of this place. Trifas is, after all, a small city. It would be best to think that the enemy already has some presence at every single location that could prove useful in the assault on the castle. And they did not simply send one or two defenders but a deluge of highly engineered homunculi and golems.

If they stand around looking confused for any longer, the Yggdmillennia may just send a Servant out to meet the attack. For now, it seems their only choice is to send familiars into the air to observe from a distance.

"I suppose we have no choice but to head back now?"

"Well, we did learn one thing."

"And that is?"

"Their Caster - or one of the other classes, but it has to be a Servant - is a heroic spirit skilled with golems."

That lowers the number of possibilities by a fair amount. Golems themselves are hardly rare, but there cannot be many individuals who were so deeply involved with them that they would become heroic spirits.

"By the way, Master, did you get the feeling that we were being watched?"

On the way back to the workshop, Saber suddenly said this as though she had just remembered it. Shishigou nodded in agreement. It was likely a magus utilizing some sort of far-sight thaumaturgy or sharing the senses of one of their familiars. Essentially, he and Saber had been watched in order to judge their combat strength.

"Well, as long as you wear that helmet, the information that we don't want anyone to know can stay that way. You can take it off now, right?"

One of Saber's Noble Phantasms, **Helm of Hidden Infidelity**^{Secret of Pedigree}, is able to hide certain sections of her parameters. While general data such as statistics and class skills cannot be hidden, this useful piece of armor can keep her true name, Noble Phantasms and unique skills a secret.

While her strongest Noble Phantasm cannot be activated in this state, it is an Anti-Army Noble Phantasm - it should be used when it is certain that the enemy will be destroyed. Once it is revealed, the target must disappear from the world.

"It's all right if I remove it out of combat, yes?"

"Yeah, go ahead."

A happy Saber began to whistle. Obviously, Shishigou is not permitting her to reveal her parameters. It seems that her statistics and data are only released for the first time when she 'takes off' the helmet while it is 'set' in the armor. Even if she were to remove her entire suit of armor and clothe herself in her modern costume, as long as she does not hold her weapon, the concealment continues to function even without the helmet.

As such, Saber immediately changed back to her clothes from before and sighed.

"That armor really is uncomfortable, isn't it?"

"It's only a matter of becoming used to it... but I feel much more free with it removed."

Saber gave a big stretch and skipped to the middle of the street where she spun round and round. The battle might have improved her mood, Shishigou thought faintly.

Stopping herself with one foot, Saber turned back to him and asked.

"Oh, yes - how did I do, Master?"

"Hmm?"

"What I mean is, what do you think of my fighting abilities? Well, the enemy was not a Servant, so I could not use my full strength..."

"Ah, that... Well, I'd have to say that you were incredible. You definitely showed me why you are a Saber-class Servant."

Saber puffed up proudly, looking satisfied.

"But throwing your sword at the end there? Really?"

"Don't be a fool, Master. The only thing that matters is that I win - nothing else. Swordsmanship is just another option in combat. I will punch, kick and bite if that is what it takes."

"...I agree completely."

Her mentality is so very close to his own that he almost wanted to shield his eyes from it.

Chapter 2-5

In the throne room of the fortress of Millennia, the Caster of Black used the flame of a Menorah to display the battle fought by that dog of the Association and his Saber of Red. The images were being projected onto the wall - like a movie - and watched by the Masters and Servants of Yggdmillennia.

All the Masters apart from Darnic looked crushed by Saber's fierce assault - one can feel overwhelming battle lust merely through the visuals on display. Despite being of short stature, the knight - a solid metal mass - sped around like a cannonball and disintegrated the golems.

The golems created by the Caster of Black are beyond comparison, possessing the power to fight evenly against low-ranking Servants. Yet they barely lasted one attack - three, at most - before being cut down.

"I suppose this is to be expected of Servant Saber."

Lancer said and Darnic nodded at his lord, unmoved.

"Strength rank B+, Endurance rank A, Agility rank B, Prana rank B... aside from Luck, all her parameters rank above C. Truly fitting for a Heroic Spirit of the Sword."

In particular, the Strength rank is extraordinary. A plus is a rare modifier that allows the particular value to multiply for an instant. And then there are the Anti-Thaumaturgy and Riding skills, both at B-rank - making Saber tenacious enough to only be damaged by A-rank thaumaturgy.

In the three Holy Grail Wars of Fuyuki, only the Servant of Saber ever manages to survive to the end - owing to their multifaceted strengths allowing them to cope with any situation, it is said. Anyone who witnessed the battle just now certainly cannot doubt this.

"What is particularly of note is that a certain section of her parameters are hidden."

As he is a Servant, Lancer did not understand, but Darnic can read the statistics of Servants as a Master. Yet he finds himself utterly unable to gain information on Saber's innate skills or Noble Phantasms. Despite feeling that he can recognize Saber's abilities or the design of the knight's sword, it seems as though he is prevented from recollecting.

Most likely, it is some kind of manifestation of a legend where Saber's identity was kept secret - perhaps an innate skill or a Noble Phantasm. In any case, this Red Saber is sure to be a formidable foe.

"And what of our own Servants? Saber, do you believe that you can defeat this knight?"

Saber nodded wordlessly at Lancer's question. As Gordes had commanded, he continued to maintain his silence even before his lord.

"O sage, how do you view this?"

Archer's smile was as calm as the windless sea when he replied.

"Certainly, this Saber is a difficult opponent. However, once we have determined the nature of the Noble Phantasm, I believe it will not bring us great trouble."

Lancer nodded, looking satisfied.

"Do you know who that Master is, Grandfather?"

Fiore asked.

"Yes, I have acquired information from our kin who infiltrated the Clock Tower. He is Shishigou Kairi, a necromancer and bounty hunter... a freelancer who takes any job."

"Earning money with thaumaturgy...? Filthy little peddler."

Gordes spat. To him, thaumaturgy is a field of research and not something that one should ever use to earn a profit. The other Masters feel much the same. There is great disdain - and in some cases, bewilderment - in their eyes. Only Darnic, having lived over a century on the path of thaumaturgy, and Selenik, who employs curses from the dark arts as part of her work, were coldly analyzing his actual strength.

"He is powerful."

"...Looks that way."

Necromancy is a thaumaturgy developed through corpses. Naturally, this craft - which raises simple zombies or gives birth to cobbled monsters - requires a large amount of dead bodies. And where does one acquire such an amount? No, not in the graveyard or the morgue - but on the field of battle. The greatest of necromancers flock to war. It can be said to be the fate of a necromancer to take the greatest of joys in gathering their resources after revolutions or coup d'etats... anything that results in genocide.

Since ancient times, there has never been an end to war - and necromancers have never been unaccompanied by danger. They experiment at the risk of putting their own lives on the line. They may even end up fighting their own rampaging creations. Still, there are few magi who would gladly throw themselves onto the battlefield - it was beyond irrationality.

The Shishigou family is already in its seventh generation of magi despite hailing from the Far East, where thaumaturgy can hardly be said to be flourishing. The treatise written by the sixth generation head, Shishigou Touki, had been highly praised at the Clock Tower so it was expected that his son Kairi would naturally pursue the path of a Clock Tower researcher. However, he was gone before the end of his third year, leaving his education behind.

Since then, he has trawled battlefields for corpses and stepped into the life of a bounty hunter, suppressing heretical magi for money.

His motives are unknown but, apparently, his skills and personality fitted the job. In ten year's time, the name of Shishigou Kairi had spread to the ears of even the thaumaturgical underground.

Of course, he had not completely cut off ties with the Association - doubtless he has been hired this time as well, working for some sort of great compensation. In fact, practically all of the Masters sent by the Association are of this type. The only exception is Shirou Kotomine, the priest sent by the Church.

There is absolutely no information on the priest aside from the fact that he belongs to the Assembly of the Eighth Sacrament. Of course, the Yggdmillennia has kin within the Church itself... but there is still little to no history concerning him. This means either his curriculum vitae is truly blank, or he is placed very deeply within the organization.

Regardless, aside from this unknown element, every single one of the other six Masters are elites among elites. Only Darnic and Fiore would be able to oppose them in a match of thaumaturgy.

But, unfortunately for the Masters of the Red camp, they must pay the price for using Servants by providing their own prana. That is *not* the case for the Yggdmillennia - although they are Masters and possess the Command Spells, the prana pathways supplying the Servants bypass them and lead to another. The Servants use up none of the Masters' own prana.

Of course, as a safeguard, they do provide the minimum amount of prana necessary - that is to say, the Masters are still the ones allowing the Servants to exist in this world. But aside from this core requirement being provided by the Masters, the prana that the Servants expend - using Noble Phantasms, auto-recovery or thaumaturgy - will all be shouldered by *something else*.

In this way, they can easily close the gap in terms of raw power. The more excellent the magus, the more prana his or her craft will consume - if it comes down to it, they may end up laughably struggling against their Servants for their own supply.

Anyone who believes that such a great war can be won with only ten days of preparation is greatly mistaken. The Yggdmillennia... no, Darnic has been putting everything in place since the moment the third Holy Grail War in Fuyuki ended.

"Battle approaches..."

The Lancer of Black murmured. Every Master and Servant in the room wordlessly agreed. In the depths of their hearts there is something inflaming each of them - and with this spark, they shall declare war.

It will not be long before the two sides commit and open hostilities. There is one thing that every participant of both the Yggdmillennia and the Association can agree on - this great war will revolve around the fourteen Servants.

But on that day... the fate of one moved.

* * *

Everything was in indistinct turmoil.

His bared nerves - his Circuits - pumped out prana. His soul was being melted... dissolved... disintegrated. He was clearly conscious yet unable to form thoughts.

A weak 'instinct' was protesting about some great pain... but to *him*, it sounded like nothing more than the cries of an insignificant creature.

No recognition... no thoughts... no formulation of logic possible. He could not assert himself. He could not even say for certain whether or not he was alive.

Yet there was something that he managed to gain simply by being *here* - 'information', for example, which led to 'time'. He received information and - given the time to process it - knowledge was created.

With knowledge, he was able to put into words the sensation that he could not have grasped before.

I am... alive.

It was a simple fact.

A fact that even a bawling baby would be able to unconsciously understand as obvious truth was, to him, something he had never even known until now.

Time flowed.

He acquired information.

He gained knowledge.

Once he became self-conscious, this cycle began to repeat at abnormal speed. From the start, he was a creature born with Magic Circuits as his foundation - his ability to comprehend knowledge was naturally incredible.

Many beings passed him by... humans, comrades and monsters.

The humans would watch them without much concern. Their comrades would look at them with some faint emotion in their eyes. The monsters' responses were various: some held no interest whatsoever; some had pity in their eyes; and some - appearing very curious indeed - wanted to investigate.

But there was still no change. The cycle of 'information' and 'knowledge' simply continued to repeat.

He took this rattling, chaotic mess of 'knowledge' and organized it, classified it, piled it up beautifully - like a library. However, as he stockpiled more and

more outside information, he felt as though his heart was being plucked.

Unconsciously, he turned his eyes away from this sensation and continued to collect even more information. But the more he collected - the more he understood - the larger the sensation swelled and it became impossible to ignore.

If he were to measure his heart, about sixty percent would be taken up by it. But even though he could no longer turn away from the thing right before his eyes, he chose to defer.

But no one can accuse him of cowardice - for cowardice can only come into existence after one has understood what an act of courage is. He did not even know that he was being a coward - he simply did not want to see the thing before him.

Fate flows... twisting and turning, straying into aberration.

One human and one monster stood before his eyes. Both were individuals who had passed before him countless times before.

The 'code' of the former was 'Roche'. He was Master.

The 'code' of the latter was 'Caster'. He was the teacher.

"Let us once more attempt the insertion of the Magic Circuits."

Roche nodded at Caster's words.

"Then, let's use the homunculi here..."

He scrutinized the contents of their discussion. 'Magic Circuits' are the pseudo-nerves necessary for the operation of thaumaturgy. They act as the

stem around which the flesh of the homunculi - like him - formed. So, what is the meaning of this 'insertion'?

He felt as though there were a worm crawling on his back. There was no mistake - it was his fate to die.

With this conversation which barely lasted a minute, his heartbeat - having maintained a steady pace ever since his forging - furiously surged.

He retrieved information on previous conversations. Caster and Roche had talked many times before regarding the golems... those puppets which were formed by earth and rock and rituals, more machines than artificial life. And the reason for the insertion of Magic Circuits... was to create golems that could perform thaumaturgy.

Consumption comes with the act of creation. If the creation is to be 'a golem that can perform thaumaturgy' then, naturally, the item to be consumed will be 'a homunculus that possesses Magic Circuits'.

He had felt a chill run down his spine. He finally understood why.

To be consumed is to be destroyed - and destruction equals *death*. He had known the word but could not understand it.

"Let's start with three units. Um... this one, this one and this one."

The finger pointed at him. The thought of such vivid death gripped his heart as though wanting to suffocate him. The sixty percent of himself that he had been averting his eyes from gave a solemn declaration.

You are going to die. You were just born - meaninglessly sealed in this prana supply tank - and you will now be consumed simply because someone laid eyes on you.

The pair left the room. He is certain that he has only a brief respite until death.

Despair assaulted him. This is what he has been turning his eyes away from. There was no meaning to his birth... no meaning for his existence.

And yet he cannot cry, scream or lament. He can only look on with his empty eyes.

But... is that really the case?

He thought and racked his brain. Is there really *nothing* that he can do? Or does he simply *think* that way? Right now, there is something that only he - and no one else - can do... at the very least, he can attain information, he can think, and he can fear the conclusion he has arrived at. He has managed to come so far.

So, let's try to take one more step forward.

Just as it was a coincidence which led to his being chosen, it was a coincidence that led him to grow an identity when he was shut in the supply tank and meant purely for supplying Servants with prana.

Nevertheless, these two coincidences coming together have the weight of fate to them.

Work...

For the first time since he was born, he moved a finger. Moving his hand and closing his fist, he attempted to raise his arm.

Chapter 2-6

Work...

He confirmed the situation once more. He understood that he was being preserved in a green jade solution to more efficiently provide a prana supply. By shelving for the time being the conundrum of his own existence, he was able to clarify his own objective - he must escape from here, right now.

Work...!

Moving both hands, he beat against the reinforced glass. But he quickly realized that it was pointless and stopped - this glass cannot be broken by any physical damage he can inflict.

After some thought, he scanned his own Magic Circuits. As he was made to take in mana from the atmosphere and provide the energy needed for the Servants to take form, his Circuits were already excited and prepared.

"Logic path\open."Straße\gehen

He cut the prana supply link and, using a language that he knew, powered the 'mystery' within himself. Placing both hands on the glass, he wished for the result of 'destruction'. The energy flowing inside his body found the intended outlet and instantly flooded through his palms.

Having understood what mineral the glass he was touching was made from, his prana transformed in a way that allowed for the smallest amount of 'destruction' required. Light filled his hands... and the reinforced glass burst into pieces as though it were a weak piece of wood.

At the same time, his body was pushed out of the tank and came into contact with the world which he should have been isolated from. Broken glass ripped

into his back. He was thrust into this small passageway - and into the real world.

Something hurt... something felt wrong. His chest itched and he tried to open his mouth only to find that he could not - there was some sort of breathing mechanism shoved into it. Pulling it out, he once again took in a breath.

"Ahh...!"

He choked. It felt as though his throat had been lit on fire and his lungs convulsed as he breathed in the incredibly thick air around him.

His limbs swung about weakly. Then, he remembered that he had only achieved one goal, not his final objective.

He has to escape... as quickly as he can!

Having fixed his objective, he tried to stand up... only to realize that the concept of standing was not one that had been imbedded into his framework. His weak legs gave way and he fell miserably. Unable to walk, he inched along the floor using his hands.

He slowly moved forward. Calm down, he told himself as he used his elbow to raise his upper body. Then, his feet touched the ground. His feeble ankles were screaming at him, but he ignored the pain and steadily stretched his knees.

And he took a step forward.

Gravity assaulted him every time his feet touched the ground, as though there were someone pushing down on him the entire time. Some utterly disgusting kind of fluid was sticking to him.

His breathing finally calmed but now he did not know where to go - only that staying here meant death.

He could not help but moan. Tears spilled from his eyes. He suffered so

much already and yet had only taken several steps - and those were enough to make him feel he was sacrificing his life for a fruitless struggle.

On the brink of collapse, he barked at himself to concentrate solely on the act of walking.

There were whispers behind him, making him want to turn around, but he gave his all not to. He knew what they were - what they meant - and could only try his best to ignore them. Right now, all that mattered was that he kept going.

Cautiously moving step by step with his hands on the wall, he somehow managed to move from the room he had been in to a hallway with a stone floor. Blood ran from his feet - they were soft as a newborn baby's and had only just touched the ground for the first time. Even pebbles easily sliced through his skin.

The blood flowed. The pain reached his mind. This mass of information - much different from the amount he received when he was in the preserving fluid - cut into his brain. At the same time, the thick air around him made him feel as though his lungs were being crushed.

Just how far did this body - never having been designed to walk - manage to go? The hall seemed to stretch on endlessly and never appeared to change. He dropped to his knees, understanding that he could go no further.

His breathing was weak... his heart raced, struggling against death. This body - not fit at all for living - refused to stand up, much less walk. There was such a lack of heat in his body that he could not stop his limbs from going cold. His vision became foggy. Sounds became distant. His mind no longer contained logical thoughts - only despair as death steadily approached.

What a meaningless life... What a meaningless existence I am.

He was born without meaning. Now he will die without meaning. All he could do was tremble before cruel reality.

He didn't want this... he didn't know *what* about this he disliked, but he didn't want it. He was too scared to even blink - in case he could not open his eyes again. He was scared of sleep, of being trapped in darkness, of the world. The only thing he did not fear was himself... because *he was nothing*. He possessed nothing, had received nothing... he was simply transparent and colorless.

"...?"

Suddenly, his heart skipped a beat.

He realized that there was someone else beside him - but he did not know when that someone came. With his thoughts in utter disorder, he was too scared to even admit knowing who the one before him was.

He could sense that he was being watched. He knew that he had to escape but he could not - his body was paralyzed with fear. His heart was pounding, unable to stand the crushing silence, until...

"What's the matter with you? You're going to catch cold like that, you know?"

The voice did not come at him with cutting and scornful words, and contained nothing but warm concern.

Reflexively, he looked up. Their eyes met.

He gave a small gasp. He had seen this face before... this monster who looked keenly at him. 'Rider', was it?

"You don't want to get sick, do you?"

Smiling, Rider spoke again. But he did not know how he should reply - only that Rider was waiting for him.

What should he say? What words are right for a situation like this?

"... me..."

Without realizing, he murmured something in a hoarse voice. As though he could not hear it properly, Rider put his face close and pricked an ear.

He knew nothing... what should he believe in? With what should he act? *I don't know, I don't know, I just don't know any more...*

His consciousness was interrupted. It seems he has fainted, he realized with some fear. And he wished.

Even though the act of walking alone has been so painful, he wished from the bottom of his heart that he will continue to be alive.

When the Rider of Black came upon the boy grovelling around in the hall of the fortress, he wondered what to do. But Rider already decided that he must help him - his only concern was 'how'.

"I guess I better start by picking him up."

His actions are swift once he has decided what he must do. Taking off his cloak, he wrapped it around the boy and put him on his shoulder. He is a Heroic Spirit - and even the leanest and most withered of Heroic Spirits will have no trouble carrying a single person.

But now, he is worrying about where to carry him. Not his own room - his Master Selenik calls for him once every few hours. Rider may be a Servant but he still wonders why she is so persistent.

"Sir Rider."

He turned around at the call. There are two homunculi staring at him and the boy he carried with pale, emotionless eyes.

"The master is searching for an escaped homunculus. Have you seen it?"

"Nope."

He answered in a second - so quickly that he did not even appear to have thought about it. After glancing at the boy he carried on his shoulder, the homunculi nodded and turned their backs on him.

"Good luck!"

Rider waved, thanking the homunculi as they left.

However, if Caster is chasing after this homunculus - for what reason, he did not know - then it becomes more and more difficult to help him. He wanted to discuss this with someone... but who? He is not familiar with the ever-silent Saber. Lancer does not care about the homunculi at all, meaning he would neither give chase nor help. Berserker is out of the question.

In that case, there is only one Servant left he can rely on. Rider headed to Chiron's room, knocked on his door and announced his presence.

"Hey, Archer? It's Rider... Is there anyone in the room with you?"

"Rider? No, no one."

Excellent, thought Rider as he opened the door. Seeing the boy he was carrying, Archer seemed to have immediately grasped the situation and led Rider to his bed.

"This is the homunculus that Caster is pursuing, yes?"

"Yeah, I think so."

Rider laid the homunculus onto the bed and removed his cloak. Archer offered him a towel and he used it to wipe the filth off the homunculus' body, then dressed him in a borrowed robe. The boy's expression was filled with pain and it seemed he was having trouble breathing.

"You're good with medicine, right, Archer? Can you take a look at him?"

"Very well."

Being the sage among the Centaurs and endowed with the wisdom of the Gods, Chiron was a teacher who taught such heroes as Heracles and Jason. Among others, he also taught Asclepius, who later even became the god of medicine. Naturally, Chiron himself is an expert of healing.

Archer took the unconscious boy's pulse and placed a hand over his heart. With his marksman's eyes, he surveyed every part of the homunculus' body.

"It appears he overused his Magic Circuits. He likely used thaumaturgy to destroy the glass tank holding him and the surplus prana ended up tearing through his veins. There is also one other, simpler reason... exhaustion."

"He's tired?"

"I fear that may have been the first time he has ever walked in his life. Today was probably the first time he tried standing up by himself."

"Oh... so, he's like a newborn baby."

Normally, a homunculus is a lifeform that is capable of operating from the moment of its creation. If made to perfection, homunculi will never die from old age. But - likely because his birth was twisted to begin with - this homunculus possessed many physical defects.

He was probably born to be physically weak... because he was not created to be a fighter, but to be a supply source. His Magic Circuits are first-class but his body cannot utilize them.

If he uses thaumaturgy... his Circuits may be able to withstand it, but his frail body will not.

"Is it all right if he doesn't use it then?"

"Yes, I suppose. Yet even so... simply living a normal life may be too trying for him. I am afraid he will last three years at most."

Silence descended upon the room. Three years... these cruel words made even Rider's shoulders sag. After a while - as though to shake off the unpleasantness of it - Rider spoke.

"I've dirtied your bed... sorry."

"It is no matter. But... there is one thing I wish to ask. Why did you save him?"

Rider answered Archer's question without hesitation.

"Because I wanted to."

His words were not a challenge. He saved the boy because he wanted to. It was so simple - so obvious - that it would have been a very difficult act, had it been anyone other than Rider.

"And what about Caster?"

"I dunno! Haha!"

Laughing, Rider threw his hands into the air. Even as he sighed, Archer felt that it was surely the correct decision to make. While winning battles is important, their present situation is not so perilous that they can afford to forget their duties as Heroic Spirits. Saving him - or, at least, overlooking him - is the right thing to do.

"I will take my leave for the time being... I doubt anyone will visit, but please do not answer if you hear a knock."

"Okay, thanks. I'll stay for a while, then."

Just before he left, Archer suddenly asked Rider a question.

"Will you shoulder this responsibility to the end?"

Hearing this question, Rider gazed at the homunculus sleeping on the bed. As he did, he remembered how terribly light the boy's body had been. His arms, wrapped around his head, were thin as withered branches. He was born to be weak... unable to steadily perform such basic actions as walking.

Even were he to break out of this fortress, it was doubtful that he would be able to survive. Archer was asking whether he would take responsibility for the boy's life. But Rider will not be able to stay with him for three years even if he wants to... the Holy Grail War will not last that long. Just how much should he help the boy until he considers his own wish fulfilled?

Rider did not know the answer. Whenever he does not know something, he leaves it to his heart to find a course. Rider will protect him... help him as he will, until he feels it acceptable.

"I'll keep helping him until I stop. I won't abandon him."

Chapter 2-7

After Archer left the room, Rider placed a hand on the homunculus' cheek and whispered.

"Come on... you're up already, aren't you?"

Hearing those words, the homunculus opened his eyes and, unsteadily raising himself off the bed, looked at Rider while quavering with unease. He's like a small animal that has nowhere to run, thought Rider.

"Hey..."

Rider tried greeting him for a start but got only silence in return.

"Um... so..."

"..."

"Well, how should I put this... uh..."

"..."

Rider tilted his head in doubt. In this situation, what should he do to express the fact that he is a friend? After puzzling over it for a while, he decided to wrap his arms around him and, while resting the boy's head on his own chest, said.

"You know what I mean, don't you? Nobody here is going to hurt you. I'm here, right now, to help you get your wish."

"...?"

He didn't understand. The homunculus could not understand what Rider said

- not the literal meaning of his words, but his intent.

"Tell me... what you wish for."

Rider whispered into his ear. The homunculus began to think. *Wish, wish, wish...* But does he even have the right to put his own wish into words? He has no power whatsoever, owns nothing, possesses no history at all and was made only to be a piece of equipment - an allotment that he himself had already abandoned.

However, even he has one desire unfitting for one of his station. A wish... a dream that he does not deserve. He did not expect it to be granted - but there was no harm in saying it, he decided.

The homunculus opened his mouth and used the vocal organs which he had almost never used before. It was a painful act but he had to put his wish into words.

"Save... me..."

Hearing this, Rider answered lightly.

"All right. I will."

In a literal instant - seemingly without even considering it - he replied. The homunculus looked at him incredulously. Rider simply wore a carefree smile.

"You said 'save me', right? I heard you. I *am* a Heroic Spirit, after all... so I'll save you, no matter what."

Will you? Will you grant my wish? Can I trust in you?

No, even if he couldn't... the boy wanted to.

Just how much luck was in play that the first to meet this homunculus would be the Rider of Black - the ideal paladin, Astolfo.

Rider swelled with pride and said.

"Now, then... first, we have to put our heads together and think of a way *to* help you. Oh, I would definitely suggest against leaving it entirely for me to decide. For no man can show as much a lack of restraint as I, Astolfo!"

The homunculus listened to Rider's words with widened eyes. His heart was deeply moved by Rider's innocence - only a fool would ever doubt the loyalty of Astolfo.

On this day... fate took a step forward.

Father Shirou, the overseer sent by the Church, knelt reverently before five of the other Masters chosen by the Clock Tower to suppress the Yggdmillennia.

There was quite some distance between him and them, as though this were some sort of throne room. In addition, there was a thin curtain between the Masters and Shirou, obscuring his view and rendering the five as indistinct shadows.

"...Report."

Shirou eloquently delivered the news to the other side of the curtain.

"The war is completely in our favor. Five of the seven enemy Servants have been defeated while all of ours are in good condition. We have captured the Masters who escaped. What would you have me do?"

After a while, a low chuckle began to echo.

"Kill them, of course. Kill them all. Bring us their heads - they are all the proof we need for the bounty. You can feed the rest of their worthless meat to the dogs."

"Understood... and what of the proposal I brought forth previously? Have you all considered it?"

Abruptly, the other side of the curtain became silent. It seemed that, unlike the resounding denial of the last time, there was some room for consideration here.

"We trust you - but there is no need for that. We are Masters, and we must control the Servants."

"There is no need to worry. I can carry out that role for you."

"You mean that... we no longer need them?"

It did not escape Shirou that the question carried emotions which had not been there before. Timidity, perhaps, or weariness for the war, or solace found in passing one's responsibilities onto another...

"Yes, of course."

Whispers were exchanged behind the curtain at Shirou's forceful words. Shirou continued to kneel and await the verdict.

"No... that is still too dangerous. Is it not safer to disperse these amongst all of us?"

"Yes, I understand."

'Safer', they said - even though the objects in question were never supposed to be handed over to anyone else in the first place. Yet they could not reject his proposal without reason. Their common sense had mostly collapsed - Shirou estimated that it would take only one more push.

"I shall take my leave. Please, enjoy your talk."

Shirou left with a bow and the five Masters hidden behind the curtain began to take part in idle chatter. They may be veteran magi, but they cannot blend

in with society if they do not possess a human side as well. They were enjoying their peace in earnest, sharing silly animal stories and tales of missteps.

"It didn't work... Perhaps it is time to set things into motion."

Assassin stifled her laughter as Shirou casually shrugged.

"Did I not tell you it would go this way? I won the bet."

"I suppose so... You can have the wine. But is that all you really want? I got the bottle from an elder at the Eighth Sacrament. It may be old but there is nothing especially magical about it."

"That is of no importance. I desire it simply for the taste of wealth."

"I see..."

Unexpectedly, Shirou nodded at Assassin as though in understanding.

"And what is it that you see?"

"Well, among the Servants summoned in Holy Grail Wars, there are those who dislike remaining in spirit form and actively eat and sleep - and many of those tend to be spirits of royalty."

"Yes, I do not doubt that. For that is what it means to be king - to be superior to and have more desires than others. That is the fate of those who would rule."

"Hmm... Yet, were there not kings who held to the principle of frugality?"

"Frugality is a sport played only by those who have gained authority - the most important possession of all. One who would rule is one who would commit

tyranny. One must be a tyrant to be king."

At that point, Assassin abruptly became quiet.

Shirou's expression did not change. After all, her argument was perfectly logical. There was no room for him to object.

"My apologies... There is no point to having you hear all this."

"Oh, no. I am quite used to the musings of regents... heh."

Shirou began to chuckle as though something funny occurred to him.

"What is the matter?"

"The more I consider the situation, the more it amuses me. It would make much sense if it were reversed instead - it would only be natural if I were the Servant and you were the Master. Yet, it is the opposite in reality. The Servant system of the Grail War certainly creates such curious situations at times."

"That is true - I am used to being served, but it is new to me to serve another. But there is still time, you know... Would you like to change places?"

Shirou shook his head.

"No, thank you. It seems you were quite the despot during your time."

With a mischievous glint in her lightly-colored eyes, Assassin murmured.

"Not for naught am I known as the world's oldest poisoner... Are you truly certain that you can wield Queen Semiramis?"

Those were the words that Assassin first said to him when she was summoned.

With a smile, Shirou repeated his answer once more.

"O Queen of Assyria - in this Great Holy Grail War, I aim not for victory or defeat but for another goal. Will you aid me?"

It is a rare thing to hear Assassin roaring with laughter.

"Haha! Yes, that's it! Honestly, I could not even begin to fathom what you were talking about then - I was considering simply searching for another puppet to be my Master instead."

"And now?"

"Do you still feel the need to ask? You are a *fascinating* one, Master. Your wish is as mine - that is why I will not hesitate to aid you."

As Shirou gave his thanks, a grey dove flew in before him.

Assassin is, at the same time, a Caster. She possesses the incredibly rare ability of being a 'Double Summon' - giving her the skills of both Classes. As such, the familiars she would possess as a Caster are also hers as an Assassin.

According to legend, she was abandoned by her mother shortly after birth and subsequently fed by doves. Even after she was full grown, doves continued to be her friends.

Semiramis is the oldest poisoner in the world - and the one she fed poison to was her husband, King Ninus, the one who seized her from her first husband, General Onnes. For the next several decades, she ruled as the Queen of Assyria.

"A notice... Our Berserker is about to reach Trifas. Archer and Rider stand prepared as the rear guard."

"Oh? Rider, as well?"

Shirou and Assassin knew that Archer had been tracking Berserker, but it seems Rider was also going along.

"He went after Archer, it seems... As expected of our Rider, I suppose. Archer and him hail from the same lands, after all - almost certainly, he is making advances at her even as they pursue him."

Assassin's voice became sharp. There was a fatal lack of compatibility between Rider - broad-minded and audacious and thinking little of kings - and Assassin, who had ruled as a queen. If this had been a standard Holy Grail War, the very first clash would have likely been between them.

Another dove descended. Shirou saw a faint smile appear on Assassin's face as she received the news.

"Shirou... it seems the one whom you are most cautious of has arrived."

Hearing Assassin's words, Shirou's eyes - always seeming to be calmly gazing at far-off places - showed clear animosity for the first time.

He did not hate her. She was simply the one existence in the entire world who Shirou was determined to crush.

"You mean... Ruler."

"Yes. It has been ascertained that she has infiltrated Romania."

Her network of doves covered the entirety of Romania, the state where the battle will be decided. As soon as Ruler took form in the world and passed the border, Assassin's flying vanguard sniffed out the inconcealable surge of prana she possessed as a Servant.

"What shall we do?"

"Kill her - or at the very least, keep her detained."

"In that case, we should send Lancer. Rider could have taken part as well if he had not run off..."

Compared to the other Servants of the Red camp - putting aside Saber, who was operating independently - Lancer and Rider are truly unparalleled. In particular, Rider's fame is comparable to Vlad III, even in Romania - he is a genuine hero of the world.

"I doubt that Rider would accept such a mission and do something he doesn't want to, not even if it is an order from his Master. He really is a hero in that regard."

While Rider is not a hero of rebellion like Berserker, he is far removed from the knights who had served kings. He once openly ignored the orders of a king which he disliked and only took up arms again for the sake of a slain comrade. It is unlikely that such a man would acknowledge the order to kill Ruler alongside Lancer.

"But Lancer would follow the orders of his Master with no particular objections."

On the other hand, Lancer is - to put in the simplest term - a soldier. When commanded, he behaves as though the very concept of defiance does not exist.

"Yes... let us give the order to Lancer."

Shirou commanded Lancer through the Servant's Master.

"I declare, Lancer of the Red - follow the guidance of Assassin and annihilate Ruler. The unveiling of your sacred relics will be left to your own discretion."

'Understood', came Lancer's short reply.

And so, sensing that Ruler has set foot in Romania, both camps immediately sprang into action - 'Black' seeking to secure their dominance and 'Red' moving to destroy its greatest enemy.

Chapter 3-1

"Kindness, Humility, Honesty, Purity, Faith - the Maid's heart carried only these things and nothing else."

Place du Vieux Marché, Rouen

...Words of damnation came to her, like a melody from an infinitely distant country. She paid them little mind. It would be a lie to say that she was not in pain - but that was something she could endure.

She also had also little fear. Such emotions as disappointment and regret had been left behind from the moment she decided to fight. They would no longer find their way back to her.

She did not want to be dragged about, so she walked without a falter in her step. Unconsciously, she reached for her chest - but her cross had been taken from her. There was no longer anything to support her heart. For this, she felt some sadness.

Just as she realized this, an Englishman ran up to her and reverently held up a wooden cross that looked as though he had just fashioned it then and there. She quietly thanked the man as he knelt, tears streaming down his face. Among the condemnation, there were still those who would cry for her.

As damnation is like a melody from far-off countries, grief is like a mother's lullaby.

Her hands were tied to a tall wooden stake behind her - rather tightly, perhaps to remind her that there would be no reprieve. But what meaning is there to escape after having come all this way?

The priest completed the recitation of her final judgement and promptly threw a torch, which slowly began to burn below her feet. They believed that

the loss of the flesh was the greatest of fears... To them, this was the cruellest punishment of all.

The flame burned her skin, scorched her flesh and charred her bones. Again and again, she spoke the name of the Lord and the Holy Mother.

...Your prayers were a lie.

They endlessly denounced her with their words of abuse. Yet she only found it strange... for a prayer can be neither false nor true. A prayer is simply that, nothing more. Its nature does not change based on who you pray to.

She wanted to tell this to them but no sounds came from her. Suddenly, the scene before her was one from the past. It was a rustic village... with an ordinary family. She saw herself, the fool who ran away and tossed all of that aside.

Yes... Perhaps she had been foolish. After all, she *knew* that it would end this way from the start. It was she herself who understood this fate better than any around her.

...Things would not have ended this way had you had simply turned away from it.

That was the truth. If she had just shut her ears from the voice and abandoned those soldiers to their lamentations - for what salvation could they possibly have? - she would have gone through her life, got married and lived with husband and child. It would only be natural. She knew that she once had such a future as well.

But she abandoned it in favor of pressing down a different path.

She chose to take up a sword, put on armor, raise a standard and mount a horse on the front line.

...Did you know that it would end this way?

Yes. Of course she did. She knew that as long as she fought on, this end would come to her. So of course, others would decry her for stupidity. However, she herself would never stoop to self-derision.

"There had still been lives that I saved... so it cannot have been a mistake to walk this path."

These images - of the past, of impossible futures, even of cruel reality - were meaningless before her prayers.

She simply prayed - and offered herself. Even if everybody were to condemn what she had done as wrong... *at the very least, I will not betray myself.*

She did not look back on the path she had not walked, or crave for a future to the one she had chosen... only wishing for silent rest.

Even in the midst of such brutal savagery, the only thing that stayed in her heart to the very end was a prayer - unblemished by regret, filled only with sincerity.

...O Lord, I give myself to You...

They were the words of the end. Her consciousness was ceased and she was released from all suffering.

The girl's dream ended in the face of reality. But it was not quite the end. Yes, the dream of the girl had ended... but the dream of La Pucelle was only just beginning.

SEARCH BEGIN
SEARCH COMPLETE

PERFECT MATCH.

PHYSICAL BUILD COMPATIBLE

SPIRITUAL BUILD COMPATIBLE
PERSONALITY COMPATIBLE
PRANA COMPATIBLE

BEGIN POSSESSION VIA PROVISIONAL SEALING OF FORMER PERSONALITY AND SPIRITUAL INSTALLATION OF HEROIC SPIRIT.

FORMER PERSONALITY CLEARANCE RECEIVED
CROSS-DOMAIN BASE ANATOMY BACKUP BEGIN
INSTALLATION COMPLETE.

BEGIN ADAPTATION OF PHYSICAL BUILD AND SPIRITUAL BUILD.

ASSIGNMENT OF CLASS SKILLS BEGIN

BEGIN INSERTION OF DATA PERTAINING TO ALL HEROIC SPIRITS AND MODERN ERA AS REQUIRED.

BACKUP COMPLETE

CLASS SKILL ASSIGNED. SKILL {SAINTHOOD} OPTION {HOLY SHROUD CREATION} CHOSEN.

INSERTION OF REQUIRED DATA COMPLETE.

ADAPTATION COMPLETE.

ALL CLEAR.

CLASS {RULER} SERVANT ACTUALIZATION COMPLETE.

She opened her eyes. The means by which she was summoned were so very unusual... There is no precedent for a summoning where the summoned is so weakly linked to the present world. Is it because this Great Holy Grail War is

just so irregular?

The girl had somehow managed to take form in the world. There are no problems with her specifications, either... but this body is unmistakably that of a French girl's. What's more, she possessed the majority of *her* memories. Yet rather than having two personalities in one body - a so-called split personality - it would be more accurate to say both personalities have merged into one. Perhaps due to her own acuteness and deep conviction of faith, *she* has recognized and completely accepted 'La Pucelle' within her.

"...Please lend me your body for a while, Laeticia."

The girl said to the owner of the body.

Having decided on her first task, the girl greeted 'her' friend - moving to the other bed and shaking her. After some groaning, she woke up and rubbed her eyes, looking half-awake.

"Mmn... w-what...?"

She was so clearly drowsy that the girl felt bad for waking her, but she spoke clearly.

"I will be leaving here for some time."

Perhaps not understanding the seriousness of the girl's words, she fell back onto the bed while waving her hand in farewell - then flung away her sheets a few seconds later and shouted.

"What did you just say?!"

"I'm sorry for leaving so suddenly, but time is of the essence."

"What? What essence? What is this, all of a sudden - you just said 'Good night' and 'See you tomorrow'! What are you saying?!"

The girl looked at her bewildered - and loud - friend with earnest and told her

three things:

'I'm going on a long trip.'

'I absolutely must go.'

'Don't worry.'

Her friend listened to those words with a blank expression, her mouth hanging open, but finally nodded in understanding.

"All right... There's no helping it if you absolutely must..."

"That's right. I will explain this to the teachers."

"Well, okay... Good night, then."

"Good night."

The girl did not use thaumaturgy to cast a suggestion on her friend. But as Servant Ruler, she has the ability to make others believe in her words.

She told her teachers and friends that she must go on a journey and made them understand that it was absolutely necessary. She was probably being more forceful than she should but there was no way around it - so she sighed and pushed away such idle concerns.

Luckily, the owner of this body lived in a student dormitory far removed from her parents. It was unlikely that they would notice even if she were gone for a month.

Packing a change of clothes, her passport and some textbooks into her bag, she left the dormitory. The owner of this body... Laeticia is still a student. *She*, on the other hand, came from the farmlands and never had the chance to learn to read and write - how strange it was to have been able to automatically acquire knowledge of modern languages, thanks to the Holy Grail.

"...Yet this is still all too strange."

She should have been summoned like any other Servant - actualized in the city where the battle would take place without needing to borrow the physical body of anyone else.

Nevertheless, she has been summoned this time via possession of another's flesh and what's more, she was summoned in her homeland - a France still with lingering vestiges of its past.

Besides, Ruler should have been the eighth Servant to be summoned - this time, she was the *fifteenth* Servant. Among all the Holy Grail Wars of the past, the scale of this one is most likely the largest. Perhaps there was some accident during last large-scale Holy Grail War...

In any case - having already been summoned - the girl is determined to surmount all difficulties in order to carry out her mission.

She is **Jeanne d'Arc** - the Master-less Servant of the **Ruler** class, and the absolute controller of the Holy Grail War.

Chapter 3-2

And so, Ruler headed straight to the airport via the night bus and took off for Bucharest, Romania. If she can only turn into Spirit Form ... but it seems that is also impossible for her. Left with no choice, she had to use her own money - or rather, Laeticia's - to buy a plane ticket. Perhaps I should make a request to the Church or the Association later, she thought, becoming somewhat gloomy.

On the plane, she sorted through the knowledge that she had been granted. She understood the place that would become the battlefield - the small city of Trifas in Romania. It is the Second Owner of that land, the Yggdmillennia, which arranged for this Great War. Standing against them are magi from the Clock Tower, which the Yggdmillennia seceded from. But the problem with the current situation is that it is not a free-for-all between seven Servants but a conflict of an unprecedented scale between two sides of seven.

It is hardly rare for a duel to the death between single Servants to leave surrounding buildings crushed in its aftermath. And this is seven against seven ... It is unnerving just to think about the kind of widespread destruction that a full confrontation between the two sides will bring about.

Is the scale of this conflict the reason why she was summoned as Ruler? Was she called by the Greater Grail, fearing the threat of an utter collapse in the Holy Grail War?

She does not know... and now is not the time to speculate.

First, she must reach Trifas - everything starts there.

It took her a day and a half to reach the Henri Coandă International Airport in

Bucharest, including transfer and waiting times. It is just past noon - thick, black-gray clouds filled the sullen sky, as though it were on the verge of tears.

Although she had been granted knowledge of this airport, built with the newest construction techniques, it still came across as novel to her.

Her legs felt heavy, probably because she has been sitting the whole time. During the long air journey, she spent half her time thinking about the Great War, and used the other half praying for a safe journey. Thanks to her knowledge as a Servant, she fully understands what kind of transport a plane is. But that is different from actually going inside one. The fact is, she did not want to understand why this mass of metal can fly through the air... In truth, she was simply glad that they did not fall out of the sky.

The sight of such a defenceless-looking girl tottering about with a bag in her hands must seem like the easiest mark in the world to the low-lifes that hang around the airport... but it never even occurred to them to lay a hand on her. They were not so unruly as to drag mud into a pure pond.

Trifas lays to the north-east. She will have to use some form of transportation to get there, either taking a bus or hitchhiking...

"...Hmph."

The instant she stepped out of the airport, multiple lines of sight pierced Ruler.

However, she can detect no Servants within the limits of the detection boundary centred around her - a radius of ten kilometers.

Ruler can nullify even the **Presence Concealment** skill of Assassins. If she cannot sense any powerful detection abilities despite feeling others' gaze...

"...then it must be remote viewing, or familiars."

Generally, there are two methods where thaumaturgy can allow one to see

far-off things. The first is remote viewing - using a crystal ball, a mirror or such to observe a distant location. As long as there is some form of medium you can observe the outside even from the safety of your own workshop. Hence, most magi have mastery of this type of thaumaturgy.

The other is by using a familiar - creating a pseudo-living being by modifying a small animal or organism. By joining the causal lines between master and familiar, one can share its five senses. This is also considered a basic type of thaumaturgy for most magi.

Scanning the grey skies, Ruler noticed innumerable doves looking at her direction. It would seem that they are familiars - but, try as she might, she could not see the light of intelligence in their eyes. Normally, by being granted the hair or blood of a magus, the creature that becomes a familiar gains a degree of intelligence. While it cannot quite speak, its intellect should be quite detectable.

Yet they look for all the world like simple doves, though it is unmistakable that they are observing her. Are they being controlled by hypnotic suggestions? That would be quite a roundabout method.

Ruler glared, first at the direction from which she is being observed from, then at the doves. Her gaze did not contain any sort of prana or power, but it made clear her thoughts.

The sensation of being observed disappeared, and the doves all flew off at once. Ruler sighed when she confirmed this.

In essence, a Ruler does not take part in the Holy Grail War... However, as the position demands that it brings judgment upon Servants and Masters that violate rules, a fitting amount of combat strength is required.

Not many have experienced the Holy Grail War twice or thrice and even amongst those, it is doubtful that any has ever taken part in one where a Ruler manifested. Perhaps they wanted to measure the power of such a Servant.

"More and more, it seems this war will require some difficult judgment on

my part..."

This Great War presents only one great point in favor of Ruler - the fourteen Servants are evenly divided into two camps, *Noir* and *Rouge*. In other words, it avoids a scenario where fourteen Servants are all acting independently. It is nightmarish enough just imagining all those Servants rampaging about at will - at worst, they can destroy the entire city.

"Whatever the case, I must first head to Trifas..."

Murmuring to herself, Ruler started looking for a bus, only to find that none headed directly to Trifas. She will have to head to Sighișoara first and proceed from there. But it turns out that there will not be a bus to Sighișoara until tomorrow. Left with no choice, Ruler asked around to see if there was anyone heading to Trifas. In the end, a lean old man wearing glasses and a deerstalker said that he could bring her along.

"Yes, I'm heading to Trifas myself."

"So, can you...?"

"But Trifas isn't really a tourist spot, you know. They've got that great big castle - but, funnily enough, it's private ground and off limits. Sighișoara is much better if you're interested in the history, being the birthplace of Vlad Țepeș and all..."

"I have some relatives waiting for me in Trifas. Could you please help?"

"Well, all right, if that's the case. But I've got some fragile cargo that I have to keep in the passenger seat, so that's no good. You don't mind sitting on the bed, do you?"

"Not at all. Thank you for your generosity."

"Just pray to your God that it doesn't rain."

The old man laughed as she clambered onto the back of the truck.

"Yes, I shall do that."

Ruler replied in earnest. Certainly, she can do little but pray when it comes to the weather.

After a series of banging noises, like what one would get from kicking an empty metal barrel, the truck settled and began to move. As it the truck rumbled on, Ruler watched scenes of Bucharest pass by.

The truck shook with a thud. Some black smoke began leaking out of the muffler.

"Yes... quite different from a horse."

There is a certain difference between the organic tremors of a horse and the repetitive shaking of a machine - perhaps, in exchange for speed and durability, they had to trade away a sense of comfort. She recalled the white horse that had once crossed the fields of battle with her. A good steed... but it went missing during the battle of Compiègne. Most likely it was killed, but perhaps it managed to find a new rider.

As the truck slowly picked up speed, several of the wooden crates it carried in the back began to wobble. Surprisingly, the truck is moving at the same speed as a horse now - but it is probably because this truck itself is below average in terms of performance. If it were a horse, it would be close to retirement.

Of course, most unlike a horse, a car does not run out of breath midway. The truck is moving towards Trifas at a slow but steady pace.

"Excuse me, sir. How long will it take to reach Trifas?"

Ruler called out to the humming old man in the driver's seat.

"Hmm... at this rate, it'll probably be twelve hours."

"Will it take that long?"

"Well, we have to stop for a rest at some point."

"I see... That will have to do, then."

Ruler felt somewhat disheartened but, on a whim, decided to take out a textbook from her bag.

"To think that a simple farmhand like myself would have a chance to be educated... What a wonderful world it has become."

However, while the Holy Grail had bestowed upon her the knowledge she needed to survive in the modern world, it did not go so far as to teach her the contents of this book. In other words, Ruler only knew as much as the girl she was possessed.

"...*Je n'ai aucune idée.*"

Ruler began with the maths textbook, as a sense of foreboding for the tribulations to come filled her.

* * *

The Transylvanian Motorway is the only national highway that can reach Trifas, which is not present even on the train network. Barely any vehicles head towards the 'last stop' that is Trifas. Over half of the traffic lights lining both sides of the road are damaged. Even the government has pre-emptively decided to cut back on the budget here, probably due to the lack of complaint from drivers.

The dim moonlight fails to steadily shine on the road and the signs. Under the circumstances, only the feeling of asphalt can readily tell you if you are driving along the right path at all.

...According to the doves' reports, Ruler has decided - for some reason - to hitchhike to Trifas, without even going into spirit form.

He does not need to track her down - only lie in wait for her transport to eventually pass through. That is why the Lancer of the Red has been waiting on the motorway in physical form, ready to carry out his orders.

To Lancer, there is no such thing as 'liking' or 'disliking' an order that has been given. He will even avoid considering how said order relates to the current situation. The fact that he serves the Master who summoned him is of utmost importance.

But even he has some slight misgivings regarding his current order. He has been tasked, not to kill an enemy Master or an enemy Servant, or even devour innocent civilians to replenish prana - but to obliterate Ruler, the fifteenth Servant who has been tasked to preside this war. He had no choice but to accept his Master's instructions.

In the first place, Servants of the Ruler class are not supposed to support one side or the other. They simply call attention to the breaching of rules and hand out punishment, in order to prevent situations where the Holy Grail war itself would become undone.

It is likely that Ruler has been marked for elimination in order to avoid later penalization for some form of rule-breaking... but it is too hasty a decision if that is the case. Yet he can find no other reason for his task.

In any case, orders are orders and Lancer is not one to raise objections. Rather, such thoughts have already been removed from his mind.

Once ordered to kill - he needs only to carry out his massacre without any mercy.

A single dove landed on his shoulder and hurriedly flew off once he pulled the piece of paper from its beak. It must have been a familiar of Assassin.

As much as the Caster of the Red camp is a unique Servant, Red Assassin is certainly no less of a maverick. Despite taking form as an Assassin, the Queen of Assyria possesses the incredibly rare skill of being a **Double Summon** and can function as a Caster as well. Thus, Assassin can fulfil the role of Caster where Caster himself fails to do so.

"...Hmph."

The message is truly concise - with only a vehicle type and the license number on the plate. That is more than enough for him to converge on the target.

Lancer sat down on top of a giant sign on the motorway, throwing one leg out and waiting for Ruler's approach. Truthfully, he knows next to nothing about what kind of Servant his target, in fact, is. The Greater Grail has probably secured all information regarding Ruler.

Servant Ruler is chosen by the Greater Grail to take up the duty of controlling the Holy Grail War. Somewhat like an overseer, a Ruler can impose penalties for those who involve outsiders in the conflict. However, this power is insignificant compared to that possessed by the overseer, an actual human. More important is that Ruler possesses a 'privilege' befitting her role as solitary controller of the entire Holy Grail War. Bringing a Ruler down would be a most difficult undertaking - all the more reason why such a Servant would be worth fighting.

In the distance, Lancer can see the faint headlights of a car.

She had dozed off for three hours during the trip. The truck carrying Ruler is finally beginning to approach Trifas when Ruler detects a Servant some

kilometers ahead of them.

In an instant, the alarm in her mind was raised.

He is a danger! That Servant is dangerous beyond compare!

"Stop the car here!"

Said Ruler to the old man, forcing the truck to stop.

"What're you..."

"Please wait until morning before driving again. It's all right, I will walk from here."

After making the frowning man understand and parting with him, the girl grabbed her bag and ran ahead at full speed. Perhaps a boundary field preventing the entry of others has already been erected - after advancing several kilometers, she cannot even sense the presence of any animals, let alone cars.

Putting her bag down, she immediately transformed into her battle-dress proper. Armor woven from prana enclosed her. The situation may be more critical than she imagined - enough to instil the will to fight in Ruler.

"...Servant Ruler, I take it."

A voice came from above her. Looking up, what she saw was a young man waiting for her, kneeling on one knee atop a giant motorway sign.

His hair is long, unkempt and so white that it appears transparent. His gaze is sharp like a steel blade, and the red stone buried in his exposed chest similarly projects an enthralling lustrousness. But what draws the eye more than anything else is what is wrapped around - or rather, has become *fused* with - his entire body: a set of golden armor that gives off a divine radiance.

While every single part is beautiful in its own right, once combined with the

man, they exuded far more ferocity than they did attractiveness. Truly, what a curious man.

Ruler watched him without lowering her guard in the slightest, and said.

"You are... the Lancer of the Red, yes?"

"Oh? So you can perceive such things without even seeing my weapon."

Sounding rather intrigued, the man - Lancer - nodded.

"Of course. And I know your true name as well - Heroic Spirit Karna."

"..."

It seems the name was enough to make Lancer stand up.

Karna is well known as the invincible hero of the *Mahābhārata*, an ancient Indian epic. Brought into the world by the Sun God Surya and the human woman Kunti, he was bestowed with a set of golden armor as confirmation of his heritage. Karna was born to become a great hero.

"I see... Yes, it is beyond doubt that you are Ruler. That you can perceive my true name when I have yet to draw my spear is proof of that."

"That's right. So, Lancer, what are you doing here?"

"...It is unwise to ask of matters you have already fully grasped. My presence here speaks for itself - it is clearly a declaration of war."

Although she was already certain that this was the case, it still depressed Ruler to hear it being made explicit.

"No, it is you and your Master who are unwise. What can come of killing me at this stage?"

"I do not know."

Lancer's brief reply utterly rejects all attempts at communication. He continued.

"But it is commanded of me that you die here. That is all - I act simply according to the contract."

Instantly, a bluish-white light seemed to penetrate through Lancer's right hand. However, he is only bringing form to the object that should have been there to begin with.

It is a massive spear, far longer than the man himself is tall. The spear is so enormous that it does not seem possible for a human to wield, and of such exquisite appearance that it is practically a work of art. It can only be described as a weapon granted by the Gods.

"Lancer...!"

"Here I come. Unfortunately, given your 'privilege' as Ruler, I cannot afford to underestimate you. Let my first strike decide our duel."

Ruler's eyes widened as his prana immediately surged - Lancer plans not to exchange blows but to definitively release the true name of his Noble Phantasm. It will act before she can exercise her 'privilege'...!

"Kuh...!"

Bracing herself, she summoned her weapon, the standard... and at the same time, sensed the presence of a second Servant.

Chapter 3-3

"Do it, Saber!"

At the same time, a man with a deep voice shouted and the metal pillar supporting the sign was cleaved in two by a single slash. The place where Lancer was standing on quickly collapsed - but of course, that is not enough to faze a Servant. Lancer leapt and landed firmly onto the asphalt, fully poised.

"You..."

Muttered Lancer, his voice like a chilled wind, as he turned to face the Saber who had just arrived. Next to Saber stood a portly man, whom glared at Lancer with obvious fear and animosity. It seems he is Saber's Master.

"You are the Saber of the Black, then. You certainly aren't Berserker or Assassin - not with such pressure coming from such an imposing sword."

The Saber who faced him nodded wordlessly.

"Hmm... so your objective is Ruler, as well."

Lancer glanced at her briefly. Their objective may be the same as his, but their goal is likely not to eliminate but to pen in. Whichever side that takes possession of the neutral Ruler will unmistakably gain an overwhelming advantage.

Saber's Master - perhaps acting as some kind of spokesman - took a step towards Ruler and respectfully held his hand out.

"You looked to have been in some trouble, O Ruler."

Ruler nodded lightly in consent.

"You are the Master of Saber on the Black camp, yes?"

"Yes... My name is Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia, and I am participating in this Great Holy Grail War as Master of the Saber of the Black. Now..."

His cheeks stretching into a grin, Gordes pointed a finger at Lancer and shouted his accusations.

"Vile Lancer of the Red camp! We have witnessed your attempt on Ruler's life! Plotting the erasure of the Heroic Spirit that guides the Holy Grail War is an utter transgression. This cannot be forgiven with a mere penalty... Stand and prepare to accept the sentence delivered by Saber *and* Ruler!"

His words were both an accusation and a proposal for co-operation. In Gordes' eyes, the power of the Noble Phantasm that Lancer was about to unleash cannot be ignored. For now, it is wiser to fight alongside Ruler - with that invincible 'privilege' of hers - in order to defeat Lancer.

Lancer's previous strike was most certainly aimed for Ruler. It is only natural that Ruler will accept this plan... or so Gordes assumed.

However, Ruler threw a sharp glance at Gordes when she heard his words.

"Saber of the Black, and Lancer of the Red - I have no objections to a battle between the two of you here. I will not be involved, I assure you."

"...Huh?"

Ruler coolly announced to the dumbstruck Gordes.

"Lancer's attempt on my life has absolutely nothing to do with a battle between the two of them. As Ruler, it is my duty to protect the direction of this conflict."

Gordes gave a low, wordless rumble. He cannot understand what values this Servant is basing her judgements on. Does she really plan to wait here until

the one who tried to kill her has finished fighting?

"Hmph... so you were attempting to tilt the situation by having me face two opponents? Is victory the only thing you care for? How despicable - though I suppose that is also one form of warfare. It makes little difference to me."

Utterly calm and assured, Lancer declared that he had no issue with facing both Servants simultaneously. His words spoke volumes for his enormous self-confidence. He speaks not out of haughtiness or arrogance, because to him, it is simple truth that he cannot be defeated.

"What...?"

Gordes was at a loss for words, shocked by both Lancer's insult and his calm words, even as Lancer stood before the Servant in whom Gordes had every confidence.

His shock immediately transforming into hatred, Gordes shouted in defiant anger.

"Kill him, Saber! Crush that Lancer into the ground!"

Saber - having never spoken a single word entire time - nodded lightly at his Master's words and strode forward, neither fearing nor faltering in his steps.

"...Very well. This duel is ours, Saber of the Black."

When he murmured this, Lancer saw something on the swordsman's face - a smile so faint and fleeting that hardly anybody could have perceived it. For an instant, Siegfried's lips had curled.

Lancer's vision was suddenly filled with reminiscences. But what could this Saber - clearly from a different age and land - have made him recall?

"I have met a man like you once. He had the same gaze as you."

For whatever reason, Lancer decided to waste a few words with him. Saber

nodded slightly, as though prompting him to continue.

"It is beyond doubt that he was a hero. And for you to look upon me with the same eyes... This battle between us is not a result of chance, but an inevitability."

Lancer's desire for combat flared like a blue inferno. Some sort of silent pressure began to seethe in the sword of the speechless Saber. A burning smell filled the air, like it was being scorched in the sun. It is hard to say whether it comes from the two's weapons or the intense fighting spirit of the two Servants clashing against one another.

Whatever the case, Lancer can see the one clear truth in this.

I see. So you wish to fight against me as well...

The belief brought great joy to Lancer. Yes... nothing can come between them now. They will fight, and kill, until the end.

We are both Heroic Spirits... madmen who walked our respective paths unto the bitter end even as we continued to fight. Not even gaining a second life and taking form in the present era will change our faith!

They did not roar. They did not scream or yell. Instead, their spirits turned white-hot and scorched the earth around them.

Ruler and Gordes quietly backed away from where they stood. The raging inferno spoke directly to their instincts as living beings, warning them that they were far too close.

Finally - when Ruler and Gordes finally retreated to what they assume will be a safe location - the two began their duel and with it, this Great Holy Grail War in its proper form: a death-match between Servants.

...His spear roared, cleaving the air apart.

...His sword shrieked, screaming with the wind.

They clashed. Sparks flew through the air like lost souls as two enormous forces resisted one another.

It does not even need to be said that Lancer and his spear holds the advantage in terms of range. The head of the weapon alone is easily over one meter in its fearsome length. However, having a wider range naturally slows the speed of attack. A small amount of time is lost with every thrust as the spear must be pulled back.

Of course, Lancer's spear-work does justice to Karna, whose name has echoed in every corner of the world. Being nothing more than a Master, it is likely that Gordes cannot begin to comprehend what is happening before him.

Yet this barrage of spear thrusts - seeming to form an impenetrable stone wall - is being received by Siegfried, the Dragon-slayer of the Netherlands, whose swordsmanship has long surpassed mankind. Making full use of every gap between thrusts, he began to close the distance one step at a time.

However, even for an excellent swordsman, it is not a matter of course that every spear thrust can be defended against without fail. It is all the more impossible to fully receive the constant attacks of a spearman that has stepped so far into the domain of Gods.

In spite of this, Saber calmly continues his advance - an act so astoundingly reckless that even Ruler, who knew of his legend, wanted to cry out for him to stop.

'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'. 'Finding life through death'. The words themselves are brutally simple. However, much difficulty lies in actually practicing them, and most who try will only end up as sunken corpses in the mud.

Saber takes yet another step further. Maneuvering his sword with the smallest possible movements, he wards off the spear's barrage. However, that is far from enough. Several thrusts connected directly with his vitals. His arteries were slashed apart, and his forehead was pierced - but it turns out that was

not the case.

"...?!"

Lancer immediately fell back from the bizarre scene. After gaining some distance, he looked at Saber coldly.

"Those wounds are shallow."

Lancer has already perforated Saber, not once, but seventy-eight times - with every single one of them being in a vital point. Yet Saber still calmly holds his sword.

It isn't as though he hasn't received any wounds, but the shallowness of each is too strange. With the amount of force Lancer had put into his spear, his arms should have been torn apart and his eyes should have been gouged out.

However, thanks to Gordes' healing thaumaturgy, all of Saber's wounds closed at once, proving that they were shallow enough to allow for immediate regeneration.

But that cannot be possible. It would at least be logical, albeit unbelievable, if Saber had somehow managed to handle his spear's barrage earlier. But receiving so little damage even after being hit directly simply cannot be...

It is an impossibility and, at the same time, a phenomenon that surely occurred - so there must be a reason. A reason why the Saber of the Black cannot be severely wounded... perhaps he is a favorite of the Gods, much like the Rider of his own side, or has trained his body to become like this, or...

"Ah... I see. Finally, I understand."

A feeling of exaltation - something Lancer had not felt in a very long time - took hold in his heart. Yes... this Saber truly is most similar to *him*.

Of course, Saber feels as shocked as Lancer. He possesses the **Blood Armor of the Evil Dragon**^{Armor of Fafner} - a cheat of an ability that re-enacts the legend of the hero who washed in dragon-blood, nullifying all attacks of rank B and below.

In other words, it should have been impossible for Saber to be hurt in this state... not by that spear, which had only been used as a regular piece of armament and not fully activated as a Noble Phantasm.

Yet every single one of the seventy-eight strikes by Lancer have caused damage to him. The wounds were light enough to be instantly healed by his Master's thaumaturgy... but they are more than enough to terrify Siegfried.

It means that Lancer's spear possesses power proportionate to an A-rank attack. But while the spear itself is certainly a rare gem, it never could have penetrated this dragon's body and landed a blow by itself. Lancer's destructive force comes from his immense physical strength and his transcendent technique.

Incredible...

Saber maintained his appearance while allowing his joy to be revealed within himself. Not even in life did he ever cross swords with such a mighty figure. Ever since defeating the dragon that had caused so many villages to wither, Siegfried created numerous legends thanks to his immortal body... but he had long since lost the sensation of struggling against death... grazing his soul against the point of no return.

With his body proofed against any and all attacks, Siegfried simply butchered his enemies with no thought in the deed. There was never a struggle. It was closer to a form of labor.

But this battle has none of that.

Witness his fiendish spear piercing my dragon's armor... his divine skills...

Just how many legends has this man created? Just how many trials has he overcome?

The mere thought fills Saber with admiration. And it seems that the spearman before him holds the same opinion.

In silence, they nod at one another - and indulge themselves in the duel once again.

The spear is brandished again at Saber. Between them, there is eagerness to fight, to battle and to kill - two wills of steel.

Saber corrects his stance with his greatsword. Lancer grips his spear with both hands.

The night is moonless, unlit... but it matters not, for a sun of high spirits and brisk winds is shining down on them - and these two uncommon Heroic Spirits cross blades once more.

Chapter 3-4

"Grgh..."

Gordes gnashed his teeth as he watched over the death-match between the Saber of the Black and the Lancer of the Red. There was no chance for him to use his thaumaturgy - the opposing Master wasn't even at the scene.

But what most displeased him was the fact that his Saber - the great hero Siegfried, the most powerful of Sabers who can ignore any attack below B-rank - was not winning.

Even Saber can not entirely defend against Lancer's assault. He must seek her aid.

"O Ruler, I beg of you. At the least, teach us his true name - "

"I cannot. That would against my position as a neutral Servant."

Ruler replied sharply. Gordes doggedly continued.

"But he tried to kill you! If the Servant of Black were to fall here, you would become his target again. We must - "

"As I have said before, that has nothing to do with it. I was summoned as Ruler - I cannot allow my personal matters to foul the battle between them."

"...!"

Gordes' impatience resurfaced. They were watching, of course they were - Darnic and the others, through Caster's remote viewing thaumaturgy and familiars.

They were watching him, the fool of a Master who can only stand there

frozen by the utterly dominating presence of two mere Servants, unable to give any commands or support with any craft.

This is preposterous! Are we not fighting the Holy Grail War? Is it not supposed to be ultimate competition of thaumaturgy decided between two Masters and Servants? Where is the enemy Master? Why is he not here? Does he fear for his life? Come out and let me defeat you! I shall destroy you!

"Show yourself, Master of the Red! Let Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia see how a dog of the Association measures! You are watching this, are you not? Are you not?!"

There was no response. No one paid him any attention - not his own Servant, not even Lancer or Ruler.

The sensation of being left behind led Gordes to feel something he had not felt in a long time - embarrassment, and shame.

-- *I must do something.*

-- *I must have the power to do something.*

-- *I do. Yes, I do, right at my side.*

Gordes looked at the back of his right hand. Yes, the proof that he was a Master was right there - the bond between him and his Servant, the Command Spells which were carved out by enormous stores of prana.

That's right - use this Command Spell, and the Servant is effortlessly placed under his control. Gordes mustn't forget that his Servant is not a hero. He is nothing more than a puppet.

He cannot allow himself to do nothing but watch his Servant fight with blank amazement. As a Master, ought he not find victory through skill of craft and calm judgement?

However, even Gordes was calm enough to recognize that the present situation was not one he could interfere with. Perhaps it is better to say he was simply too intimidated.

Lancer's every thrust was like cannon fire, throwing out roaring gusts.

Saber's golden sword slashed the wind and cleaved the dark.

Every attack was met by its opposite, entwining together and scattering into sparks. The pinnacles of swordsmen and spearmen continued their struggle for dominance.

The superiority of Lancer's technique exceeded Saber's by a slight degree, but Saber was tougher in body. All things considered, they were more or less an even match in strength. A moment's carelessness could lead to a pierced heart or severed head.

Anyone would be hard-pressed to tell who had the upper hand, but there was the matter of Gordes. Due to the healing thaumaturgy of his Master, Saber could always recover from damage. However, Lancer's own ability to recover was also considerable, even by himself. He must be powerfully bound to his Master and supplied by substantial prana.

The clang of clashing steel rang out for over the ten thousandth time.

They were covered by over a thousand light, recovering wounds.

Finally, both knights stopped, but not from fatigue. For these matchless heroes, even three days' worth of fighting would not exhaust them. But time waits for no man - and the pitch-black sky was becoming a gloomy dark blue.

In fact, several hours had passed since they first began. Neither had used their Noble Phantasms - neither had even the chance to utter their true names.

"At this rate, we will be fighting under the sun, though that's of little concern to me. What of you and your wearied Master?"

"..."

Saber put away his sword, silent to the end. Gordes tried to say something but the words could not come. Crushed by the wills of the duelling men, he instinctively knew that there was no place for someone like him to open his mouth.

After some slight hesitation, Saber -- bound to silence by his Master -- also decided to speak.

"I dare to hope that our next meeting will allow us to do battle to our heart's content."

There was a curious earnestness to his words. The Lancer of the Red, Karna, knew nothing of what was behind Siegfried's brilliant epic. However, something in those ringing words made an impression on him. With a slight nod, Lancer showed his assent - it was also what he himself secretly wanted, after all.

To call it a promise or oath would be an overstatement. Both understood and saw the other as an enemy Servant. But that was all the more reason for them to share this feeling.

"I must say... luck has been on my side. I am grateful from the bottom of my heart that the first of my battles was with you, Saber of the Black."

Words of approval from Lancer were beyond any prize. Between them was the bond that existed between warriors - an almost innocent, adolescent hope that each would only be felled by the other's arm.

"Farewell, Saber."

"..."

Saber saw him off without a word. Abruptly, Lancer turned into Spirit Form and disappeared. The sky began to turn a light violet, signalling daybreak.

"...A splendid battle. As one would expect from the greatest hero of Germany."

Saber nodded quietly to Ruler's praise.

Gordes was glaring at Saber for momentarily speaking on his own accord, but pulled himself together and turned to face Ruler once again.

"O Ruler, would you come with us now? If you wish to continue surveying the war in Trifas, I can assure you that the Fortress of Millennia will be most welcoming of a guest such as - "

"I must decline. That would go against my impartiality. You need not worry for me - my powers of detection are many, many times beyond a normal Servant. I will be able to make my own way to any battle occurring within Trifas."

Ruler curtly refused. This Great Holy Grail War was an unprecedeted clash of two forces - under no circumstances should she appear to support one side.

"...We're leaving, Saber."

It was clear from the unhappiness in Gordes' tone of voice that it was his objective from the start to secure Ruler, but his plans were thrown into chaos by Lancer. And even if his Saber could forcibly restrain Ruler, he was out of time. Gordes was a magus, after all. He would never be so foolish as to fight with a Servant in broad daylight.

With Saber in Spirit Form, Gordes turned his back on Ruler - his shoulders trembling in shame.

With Gordes gone, Ruler once again looked upon the traces of destruction wrought by the two men. There was no sense, no order and no direction in the destruction - proof that it was not caused by malicious intent, but was simply the aftermath of the duel proper. Yes... the cloven highway sign and the crater in the ground, looking like the impact of a meteorite, came about simply from the shock waves of the battle.

Thank goodness this wasn't a bridge, Ruler thought. It would have buckled under them and they might have brought it down completely. It would not kill a Servant, but the reconstruction would require a very long time. That would be rather regretful.

In any case, the battle between the Saber of the Black and the Lancer of the Red had come to a draw. Neither had suffered a severe wound or expended a great amount of energy. It was only a scuffle - nothing more than a skirmish.

And yet a simple skirmish had led to such a scene.

From now on, the war will only intensify, and some Servants and Masters will likely attempt to break out from the framework. Was that what she - Servant Ruler, Jeanne d'Arc - had been summoned to watch out for?

Unsure, she could neither deny the possibility nor believe in it completely. Rumblings from within told her that something was amiss in this 'Great Holy Grail War'.

"...It's no help thinking about it now. I can only try my best."

Ruler told herself, tightening her fists. Then, feeling somewhat embarrassed to be standing in full battle dress in the morning light, she hurriedly released the magically woven armor and changed back to her normal clothes.

Under the faintly violet sky, the girl returned to the road, picked up her bag and began walking slowly towards Trifas.

Chapter 3-5

They are all calling out to me.

It hurts... Save us... from the pain...

Their cries were all, more or less, repeating these three things - but what they lacked in variety, they made up for in sheer volume. Their wordless calls for salvation, their screams telling of agony and hardship - they were the voices of the powerless, sobbing in fear of death, crushed and overwhelmed by their own fate.

No... they are not calling for me, he thought. They are simply crying out - and he can hear it all.

That was the true tragedy. If they were imploring someone to be their saviour, then they at least still had hope in their own deliverance. But they simply cried out, with no one to answer them... their voices melting away into silence.

Then, what does that make of me...?

And so, he awoke from his dream. He opened his eyes and looked at his own body. Yes... it was nothing more than a dream; his small hands cannot hold a sword, and his first-class Magic Circuits threatened to rip apart his body if he attempted to use thaumaturgy.

He has no power to save anyone. No power to take another's hand. Because he is only a homunculus, born a few months ago. He was born to be a battery providing prana to Servants, after which he was meant to die.

Who were the ones calling out to him, though? Was it the girl on his right? The man on his left? *Or those on the other side who cannot take human form?*

But whoever it was from, there is nothing he can do. The knowledge that the Holy Grail granted him allows him to understand just what an important role he - and they - will play.

There is essentially only one thing required by Servants to actualize in this world: prana. So in practice, the strongest Servant is the one with the greatest quantity of prana.

No matter how powerful a Servant's Noble Phantasm may be, without enough prana, they risk their own annihilation by calling its true name and awakening it.

On the other hand, while a Noble Phantasm with a lower cost may logically be weaker, it can be used repeatedly without prana concerns. Compared with a gun that only chambers and fires one shot, a bow that can always replenish its supply of arrows is clearly more advantageous.

Thus, the more prana the Master possesses, the greater an advantage they hold. That is where the Yggdmillennia managed to turn the tables on their enemies.

Their idea was simple, and brutal: use the prana of a third party, wringing out every drop until they are reduced to a corpse. They did not use normal humans for this purpose - not for any ethical reasons, of course - but simply because that would make it harder to conceal... just as it would be difficult to gather the sufficient number of magi to sacrifice. But who would grieve for a humunculus? They cost money and effort, but little besides.

By stealing from the Einzberns and other great alchemical houses, they have learned techniques that, to an expert, would be considered child's play - but that is more than enough to create living batteries meant only to act as a prana supply.

The Yggdmillennia have staked everything on this one Holy Grail War and they, the homunculus, were the key.

However costly the Noble Phantasm, they are there to replenish the prana instantly. This also leaves the Masters free to use their own thaumaturgies to the fullest without consideration for supplying their Servants.

For both Masters and Servants, this is the best possible situation... putting aside those behind the black putting down their very lives.

"That's right... I can't help any of them."

Saving them is a pipe dream. He can only shrug off their cries. After all, he does not even know what will become of himself.

* * *

It was the calm before the storm. The Masters and Servants at the Fortress of Millennia were spending what little free time they had left.

Ever since his summoning, it became Archer's task to push Fiore's wheelchair. Even compared to the others, the two had a great affinity for one another. Fiore has complete trust in Archer and spends nearly every waking hour with him.

"Are these what you wanted?"

"Yes, thank you."

Fiore took one more look at the medicinal solution Archer handed her, before swallowing it in one gulp. It was a painkiller that helped reduce the ache in her lifeless legs. As a side effect, the drug overwhelms her with drowsiness. It should be all right to rest for a while, she decided.

As she waited for the medicine to take effect, it suddenly occurred to her that there was one important question she never asked her own Servant.

"Archer... now that I think about it, I've never asked you what exactly your

wish is."

Fiore has yet to ask him what is likely the most important matter to the Servant - what they wish from the Grail. She tried asking him at the very beginning, but according to Archer: 'it is something small, and will cause none any trouble. Let us speak of it at a later time.'

At the time, Fiore put the matter on hold, as Archer is possibly the only Servant for whom integrity is a matter of pride, but as the skirmishes will soon begin, she feels it is time to know the answer.

"You mean that which I would ask of the Holy Grail? It... would be a lie to say that I have none."

Archer looked somewhat troubled, reluctant to speak. Among the 'Black' camp, it is Lancer's wish which is given the highest priority. While every Servant has their own intentions and will be watching for a chance to make their wish upon the Grail, that ultimately requires the victory of this Great War. They must first focus their attention on the battle with the 'Red' camp.

Perhaps Archer was concerned that openly speaking of his own wish might lead to friction in the 'Black' camp. Fiore shook her head and assured him otherwise.

"You don't need to worry. I won't tell anyone. I am your Master... of course I will place your wish above all else."

"Thank you, Master... and I hope that you will not find my answer laughable."

"Of course not."

Archer lowered his face in faint embarrassment.

"It is naught but my own selfishness... but I wish for the Gods to return that which they had granted me."

"The Gods...? Do you mean...?"

"Yes... I wish to have returned the **immortality** I passed to Prometheus."

Naturally, Fiore had done some reading on Chiron's legend after summoning him. From his uncommon birth to his tutelage of many a hero, Chiron left behind many legends - but most famous of all is the episode which led to him becoming the constellation of Sagittarius.

Caught in a conflict between the hero Heracles and his fellow Centaurs, Chiron was mistakenly shot by Heracles with an arrow tipped in the Hydra's poison.

Being immortal, Chiron could not die and so continued to suffer the agony of the poison. In the end, he passed on his immortality to Zeus to give to Prometheus, and finally died in peace. Lamenting his passing, Zeus gave him a place in the sky as the Archer.

"I do not miss my immortality - but it is a gift to me from my father and mother. Relinquishing it is a denial of everything I am."

The man quietly spoke of his own yearning.

"But, Archer, your parents..."

Fiore quickly shut up; speaking any more would bring him shame. According to legends, Chiron was born between the patron of harvest and earth, Cronus, in the form of a horse, and the nymph Philyra. Ashamed of her offspring's appearance - half man and half horse - Philyra was transformed into a linden tree.

Chiron's father and mother never loved him; he himself must know this better than anyone else.

Archer calmly looked straight into Fiore's eyes, his gaze unwavering.

"It is true... they never loved me. But it is proof that their blood flows through

my veins, and I wish to have it returned."

He murmured, looking rather apologetic.

"I cannot deny that it is a selfish wish. It changes nothing for me to become immortal once more. But..."

It was the leanest of bonds which connected him to them.

"Archer... my own wish is much the same. I only want to use the Grail to heal my legs."

Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia's disability deeply affects her thaumaturgy. Her Magic Circuits exist in her two legs - but a malformation in the Circuits since birth has led to the two limbs completely ceasing to function, sometimes causing her unbearable pain.

Of course, it is possible to heal them. However, it would involve removing the Circuits in her legs. In other words, it would mean giving up the life of a magus.

Studying the arts of human engineering and spiritual evocation, Fiore has learned ways to replace the functions of her legs. Her evocations can take up the tasks of her limbs, and she would be able to fly with a broom. But those are not the same as walking on her own two feet. Yet, as the successor of the Forvedge house, she cannot - and will not - abandon her thaumaturgy.

That is why she can only depend upon the Grail to keep her Magic Circuits as they are, and take back the full function of her legs. Yes... her wish is simply one of luxury.

"I see. You wish for a miracle so that you need not sacrifice either."

"That's right... my own desires are a trifle compared to your earnest wish. It's shameful, isn't it? How low of me."

"Do you think so? I can understand both the weight of abandoning one's craft,

and the joy of standing on your own two feet upon Gaia. You need not feel ashamed."

But this is exactly why, thought Fiore.

She knew in her heart that voicing her wish would lead to Archer comforting her like this. She did not lie, of course. That truly was her wish - and she truly did think of it as nothing more than a luxury. However, she had decided as a magus to acquire that omnipotent wish-granter. There was no reason to phrase it in such a feeble way, as though to invite pity.

But that was how she spoke of her own desires: timidly, without confidence, and with shame. Why would she feel like that about the condition she was born with? She acted modest and graceful to avoid expressing how she truly felt. She never thought she would feel shame in such an act... until now.

"Thank you, Archer."

Said Fiore, blushing. She wanted Archer to praise her, more than anyone else. She wanted him to place a hand on her head, and whisper kind words into her ear. But she hated herself for unconsciously attempting to elicit sympathy.

Yes... how low of me.

Still, she smiled at Archer's words. Carrying this feeling in her heart - something that is not affection or love, something seemingly pure and yet slightly twisted - Fiore closed her eyes softly.

"I can feel the medicine working, Archer. You can take your leave."

"Yes, Master."

Without a sound, Archer left Fiore's room.

Chapter 3-6

Caules Forvedge Yggdmillennia never wanted to join the Holy Grail War in the first place. As a matter of fact, he had not even wanted to be a magus.

He does like thaumaturgy itself - it isn't everyday one can have the pleasure of holding absurd, scientifically impossible phenomena in one's own hands. But he never wanted to devote his entire life to it.

Besides, magi are humans who become something less - they become truly *inhuman*. Frankly, he did not want to be exposed to the world as some monster who would massacre thousands for the sake of research, like magi used to in medieval times.

A magus is a seeker, removed from sentimentality, compassion and other such kind words. The path was not one that Caules had wanted to walk.

The reason why Caules began to study thaumaturgy is just as laughable; he exists only as a 'spare' for Fiore. Not that Caules does not want this for himself. The fate of their entire clan is a heavy burden to shoulder, but the only thing required of him is to study his craft, which is simple enough.

Months passed as Fiore became the head of the Forvedge family and, eventually, approached the highest seat of the entire Yggdmillennia clan. It was then that Caules also decided to explore other avenues. He can either spend the rest of his life as a piddling magus who never accomplished a thing - or he can pursue a different life. That was when the Holy Grail War came out of the blue, bearing down upon him.

At first, he was to serve as back-up to Fiore. However, when he arrived at Romania, signs of the Command Spells began to manifest. Caules no longer had a say in the matter - he must participate in the Holy Grail War as a Master, no matter how much the begrudging glares of the other, more experienced magi bothered him.

As luck would have it, they quickly acquired the holy relics needed as a catalysts. Fiore was able to buy **Frankenstein's blueprints** off a freelance magus she was acquainted with.

The summoning itself was a success. Even the biggest bottleneck for Servant Berserker - its great expenditure of prana - has a solution in the provision of homunculi, and her own Noble Phantasm being able to assist in the prana supply.

There is only one problem left now.

"Is she... really that strong?"

It is a simple but extremely important question. The Mad Enhancement rank of Berserker - true name Frankenstein - is surprisingly low. While having lost most of her linguistic ability, she can still separate friend and foe, and is able to communicate simple ideas.

However... he hadn't the faintest idea as to why Frankenstein, a giant of a man who should have stood over two meters tall - appeared in the form of a young girl - and a lovely one, at that. What happened to Boris Karloff or Robert de Niro? At first, he thought he had summoned the bride by accident, but there was no mistaking it; it seems that she truly is Frankenstein - or, more correctly, the homunculus created by Frankenstein.

Can this girl fight? That is what troubles Caules at the moment.

Paying no heed to the burden of the Master, the girl preferred to remain in material form, wandering the castle. Of course, Caules had the authority to order her into either form, but he would prefer not to force the issue and spoil her mood (after which her sullen moans would begin to echo in his head).

As a result, the Master is letting his own Servant be.

...Not that there is any chance of her running wild. She spent most of her time in the garden, picking at flowers or looking at the sky. Sometimes, Rider

would try to talk to her, though she rarely responded - and even when she did deal with him, it was out of annoyance.

caules took some pride to being a Master. If they could communicate, they ought to have a proper talk. If possible, he wanted her to understand the hierarchy of Master and Servant.

And so, Caules resolved to speak with the Berserker of the Black.

Moving to the courtyard, he found Berserker picking flowers in the garden. It would be a lie to say he didn't find the scene somewhat ominous, but Caules made a small sound of encouragement to himself before stepping forward.

"H-Hey, there."

Caules started with a wave of his hand and a light greeting. Berserker gave her Master a fleeting glance before turning her back on him. She clearly decided to ignore him, which annoyed him somewhat, but nothing would be served by him leaving now. He should take a firm stance and speak with her properly.

He took a deep breath... and said his first words to her.

"Uh, I just wanted to say... sorry."

He bowed his head in apology, his intentions of authority betraying him. Berserker looked at Caules once again.

"I mean, for back when I just sort of blurred out your true name."

"Uuuu..."

She gave a sudden moan of displeasure. So that *is* what's bothering her, Caules realized. It seemed Berserker felt some frustration towards herself.

"We won't know if they come back as enemies next time. So, I'm sorry."

"Uu..."

Berserker nodded. Her mutters did not sound as annoyed as they did before. Perhaps she felt assured after finding out that Caules understood what **followed** the Holy Grail War.

"Anyway, that's why I think we should just focus on surviving this Holy Grail War. What about you?"

Berserker, grasping the flower in her hand tightly, nodded wordlessly to show her agreement.

"Well, let's start by getting to know ourselves, then."

"...?"

Berserker tilted her to one side. Caules explained.

"I looked up some details on you before the summoning. But legends aren't always correct, and a single difference can lead to a critical situation. So, that's why I am going to tell you what I know about you, and you are going to correct me."

Berserker bowed her head, surprisingly earnest.

Victor Frankenstein was a student of the science of nature. Obsessed with the delusion of creating the 'ideal human', he spent two years on a patchwork of lifeless flesh, and succeeded in giving life to it.

His ideal was to give birth to a wise and beautiful human being, perfect in every way. However, what he created was an repulsive monster. In terror, Frankenstein disassembled her again and left it all behind...

But even in pieces, the monster still lived. Reconnecting and repairing itself, the monster doggedly pursued the escaping Frankenstein to Geneva,

Switzerland - a great chase built on hatred and admiration.

She appealed to Frankenstein, whom she looked up to as a father.

I never wanted to trouble you... but when you created me, you made me as only me.

I am all alone, and it's painful... it's agonizing... it hurts. So, please, just one more. Please, create one more of me. If anyone can, it is you.

Please... give me a mate.

Frankenstein flatly refused. It was not a matter of can or cannot. He had placed his entire focus on creating the homunculus before his eyes - and the result was the birth of a hideous creature. It was unthinkable to even consider creating a second.

Stopping for a moment, Caules glanced at Berserker. He did not understand whether Victor Frankenstein had possessed a twisted sense of beauty - or the girl possessed within her a foulness inconcealable despite her external beauty.

As the doctor denied it again and again, the monster grew to realize the truth, and fell into deep despair.

But, no matter what, it must have him create another.

So the monster killed: those acquainted with Frankenstein, those who had no relation whatsoever, and, in the end, even Frankenstein's beloved fiancee. And yet, Frankenstein continued to flee from the monster, denying it to the end.

The young man overflowing with livelihood and brilliance was long gone. With the frailty of an old man, Frankenstein died in madness, bitterly

regretting it all until his last breath.

The monster no longer had anyone to hate. The man whom the monster looked up to no longer existed.

She parted with Walton, the man who watched over Frankenstein's final moment, and traveled to the uttermost north. Then, she built herself a pyre and was consumed by the flames.

May my ashes be scattered across the seas...

So ended the monster born from the delusions of Frankenstein.

Caules concluded his tale of Berserker's previous life. She had not interrupted him once. Was it all correct, or did she simply not care?

"So... your wish, Berserker, is **a mate that is the same kind of being as you**, right?"

"*Uu...*"

She nodded up and down. It would seem he was correct.

"And the homunculi in the castle... they're not good enough, are they? I mean, they *are* pretty similar to you..."

"..."

Berserker simply shoved the flower in her hand into Caules' face. It did not hurt him so much as it surprised him.

"I'll take that as a no, then."

Berserker nodded strongly. In her own way, there were lines that she refused to cross.

Suddenly, she stared straight at Caules' face, her grey eyes peeking through the gaps between her long hair, her hand lightly tugging at him.

"You want to know what my wish is?"

Berserker shook her head up and down. Caules thought. It would be reasonable enough to say that he wanted to reach the Root, and the matter would be settled. That was something that a magus would give up his life for, after all. And Berserker, having been granted a certain amount of knowledge by the Holy Grail, would not find this questionable.

But Caules did not like to lie.

"Well, actually, I haven't decided it yet."

"..."

She was glaring at him. Caules scratched his head, looking apologetic.

"It's not that I don't have one. I'm a magus too, of course I want to reach the Root and all... but, I think, there are some other things I want."

Can the Root be so easily reached, even with an omnipotent wish-granter like the Grail? Caules greatly doubted it. Certainly, it would carve out the first step to reaching the goal. But the path would still be too far.

"Anyway, I won't know until we get to that point. For example, if my sister dies in the war, I may want to resurrect her. Something like that would overwrite my own wish. The sister I have now means more to me than the Root I'll reach in a hundred years."

Well... not that she'd bring *me* back if I died, Caules thought.

Amidst his absentminded thoughts, Berserker made a low sound. It would seem she approved, at least to some extent.

"It's fine as long as you understand. I'll be going back to my room now."

Caules stood up, but Berserker pulled at his shirt. Turning around, he suddenly found a flower held up to his face.

"You... want me to have this?"

Berserker nodded, and Caules accepted it with thanks. After that, she began picking at the flowers again. And then, seeing her begin to rip the flowers to shreds, one by one, he beat a hasty retreat. There's no lake here - and he wouldn't be able to stop her throwing him, anyway.

Chapter 3-7

Celenike Icecolle Yggdmillennia's cold tongue slowly crept around the nape of Rider's neck.

"Hey..."

He was lying stretched out on the bed, with both hands bound by leather straps. His mail and parts of his armor were removed, exposing his bare chest, slim collarbones and white skin. It was an incredibly suggestive position.

Celenike draped herself over him, cheeks flushed and gazing with lust-filled eyes at his lashes... his lips... his flesh.

However, Rider's expression was not one of shame or pain, but utter boredom. He said, sounding fed up.

"Could you give it a rest?"

"No. You're just so beautiful... I could taste you for an entire day and not be bored."

"But I will."

"I don't care. All that matters is what I want."

Rider made a noise of exasperation. Every day since he had been summoned, without fail, his Master would have her way with his body. Hers was a perverted love - her fingers and her slippery tongue would trace along his body, but it was never a 'normal' show of romance.

If anything, he felt he was being loved as a work of art - and he doubted many human beings would cover paintings and statues with their own drool.

"You really are breathtaking..."

Celenike sighed in amazement. Normally, he wouldn't hesitate to embrace anyone who said that to him - man or woman - but Rider wasn't particularly happy to hear this from her.

It was a small mercy that she had yet to do something impulsive and foolish like deploying a Command Spell to coerce him... but that could change if they were both still alive once the battle was decided. Being a form of thaumaturgy, Command Spells can be repulsed by his anti-thaumaturgy - but even with his A-rank skill, he would still only be able to go against a single command. If she were to use two, he would have no choice but to obey.

Now, if she could just waste a Command Spell on some other, meaningless order...

"It's such a shame... Why can't my knife cut you?"

Celenike made a disturbing observation.

"I was summoned to fight, you know... Oh, it's nearly time."

Good timing - Rider ripped apart his bonds and stood up. Celenike, pushed aside, pouted in protest.

"Do I really just not interest you?"

"That's not really the problem."

"As the legends goes... Astolfo was quite the ladies' man."

"That's got nothing to do with this! Geez..."

What she said may be true, but all it meant was he would romance the girl he wanted, when he wanted - which could not be further from being forcefully pursued by a single woman.

And most of all, the stench of death that followed the magus was far too thick. She has probably been covered in blood and gore since she was born. She can use perfumes and wash herself from the smell of it, but death itself will never leave her.

She was born in the Icecolle family, a fairly old bloodline of practitioners of the dark arts. Forced on the run by the devastating witch hunts of the Middle Ages - from western Europe all the way to Siberia - they lost the foundation of their thaumaturgy and eventually fell into decline.

Celenike was the first child to be born of the decaying bloodline in a long time. Her elders, who devoted their lives to perfecting the dark arts, doted upon her and poured every teaching they had into her.

The dark arts require a particular disposition, namely, one who would not hesitate to pull apart living sacrifices. One who would not falter at supplications until the required amount of suffering - from the offspring of beast and man, excellent human beings and kind animals, old men and old pets, the pregnant and the unborn - had been reached.

She was taught to present herself externally, and control herself internally. For only a failure would lose oneself in the joy of the slaughter.

Slaughter, but only when slaughter is required. Pain, but only when pain is required.

Celenike was an outstanding practitioner. When she offered her sacrifices, her iron will suppressed all emotions and allowed her to perform any amount of heinous rituals.

She truly had utter control over her passions. After all, the delight of causing pain and the joy of rendering abuse are the most dangerous things of all to those who practice the dark arts.

That is why all of Celenike's desires are forced out of her whenever she is not acting as a magus. No one has ever spent a night with her and remained in

one piece.

She would take a boy, innocent to the ways of the world, and defile and violate every single part of his body, lapping at his tears of suffering. She turned dark arts into a living, walking the line between a magus and a user. She made her employment something which would end with her smeared with blood. Such is the existence of the fiend called Celenike Icecolle Yggdmillennia.

The only reason why she never went beyond 'loving' the Servant she summoned was due to the absolute difference in power between them. Rider is, after all, a Servant - not something she can use violence against. As a magus, she also understood that until the war had been decided, he must be able to use his strength to the fullest.

Once the war has ended, though... she has very little doubt that she will lose all inhibitions and give in to her wants. Using her Command Spells, she would desecrate this Heroic Spirit, for whom only the word 'fair' can describe, and fill him with shame.

She cannot care less for the second conflict that would revolve around the Holy Grail. The only thing she wants is to be with Astolfo.

Hers was a rather... extremely... twisted love.

"I've got something to attend to. Excuse me."

Celenike laid on the bed, idly watching Astolfo as he hurriedly changed his clothes.

"You're not thinking of going out again, are you?"

"Mm, something like that."

Celenike's eyes narrowed at the vague reply.

"You haven't been messing around with the people in the town, have you?"

"I'm just out to have some fun. I'm back in the world with a body, after all. What's wrong with playing around a bit until the war starts?"

She could not even begin to tell him how wrong that was. A Servant spending all his time outside playing might as well be abandoning his duty. But Celenike knew this was not something she could fix with a scold. She murmured with some resignation.

"Of course, it's wrong. If Darnic gets mad at anyone, it'll be me..."

"Sorry! I'll be going now!"

Celenike watched as Rider left - and then noticed.

The blushing and hint of shyness on his face made it look very much like he was about to meet someone dear to him.

Chapter 3-8

"Well, first of all, I think you should get out of this wretched hive of scum and villainy as quickly as you can!"

Rider's suggestion was candid to a fault. They had barely started talking and the homunculus already felt somewhat taken aback, coming to vividly know of Astolfo's lunacy.

But... escape? Escape to where?

"Anywhere but here. It can't be any worse, right?"

He's right, the homunculus thought. But how could he escape?

"Well, let's not waste any time! We can ride out of here on my beloved steed! If we don't get a move on, my Master will probably call for me again."

Use Rider's steed? Yes, that could work... but the steed of Astolfo is...

"Oh? You know of my hippogriff?"

He did, as part of his knowledge on this Great War. Astolfo brought rise to various legends on the back of mounts like a griffin and the famous Rabicano, but particularly famous among them is something inconceivable for this world - the hippogriff.

This phantasmal horse was a magical beast born from the union of a griffin and a mare. With the upper body of an eagle and the lower body of a horse, this spawn between the two ought not have been possible.

Well... this is not much of an issue for the present. The problem lies more in the fact that the hippogriff is most certainly Rider's Noble Phantasm. By using it, Rider will expend an enormous amount of prana - and it will be none

other than the homunculi who will have to bear the cost. Even putting that aside, such an expenditure of prana will inevitably point to the use of a Noble Phantasm.

"But it's very fast, you know! It's like, *whooooosh!* We'll go as far as we can, then I can just *whoooooosh* my way back! I don't think it'll use up that much prana just flying."

Despite Rider's gracious attempts to confer the speed of his hippogriff through a variety of bodily gestures, he cannot accept this plan.

"Oh, okay. Hmm, what shall we do, then? Maybe we should discuss it with Chiron."

He suddenly blurted out Archer's true name. When the homunculus pointed this out, Rider's face quickly turned pale. It seems he does realize, to some extent, that that was a bad idea.

"Huh? Oh, right! Sorry! Forget I said that!"

The information wasn't particularly useful to him in any case.

"Phew. Good, good. Don't let the others know, okay?"

He could see little regret in Rider as the Servant roared with laughter. If an opposing faction can manage to restrain this Servant, they will definitely dominate their enemy on the intelligence front. So the homunculus thought.

After some thought, Rider gave a suggestion.

"What about this? This war between Servants will begin in earnest soon. In the middle of all that fighting, it'd be a bit hard spotting one escaped homunculus, don't you think? And even if we do get exposed, they won't have the resources to come after us anyway. So, I'll wait for the right moment to lead you out of this place."

It was a solid plan, a complete turnaround from his previous idea.

"Yes, that should do, Rider."

The homunculus tensed at Archer's words. The Servant had opened, gone through and closed the door, and moved behind Rider without the homunculus ever realizing.

On the other hand, Rider showed no surprise and seemed to have known about his presence. He turned his head towards Archer standing behind him.

"You think so, too, Archer?"

"Yes, I am Archer... please do not call me 'Chiron' by mistake again."

"All right, I get it... Sorry. I really do feel bad about it."

Archer took a seat at the writing desk and gazed at the homunculus.

"You are afraid."

"Well, of course. Who wouldn't be afraid of people like us?"

Rider interjected. Actually, the homunculus wasn't very afraid of Rider any more, but he decided not to argue the point.

"As such, I will put one more fear in you. I speak very clearly - at most, you only have three more years to live."

Archer dispassionately confirmed the cruel reality. The homunculus nodded in understanding. Archer's declaration at his bedside carved itself into his mind.

"If you were but a child, I would lament and give my sympathy. However, you are a homunculus - in a way, you were born *complete*. That is why you must now consider for yourself."

Consider what? The homunculus asked. Archer stared directly at him with his

sharp, piercing eyes.

"Consider *how* you will live."

To the homunculus, this seemed a task that would prove impossible within his lifetime.

Life itself is already a miracle to him. How can he possibly know *how* to spend it? However, Archer declared sternly.

"Even so, you must consider it. If you do not, then how would your life be any different - or end any differently - even if you were to survive this war? There would have been no meaning to any of this."

"Well, *I* think being alive is already a blessing..."

Rider muttered as an aside.

"That will not do."

Archer brushed aside Rider's opinion with a single, short reply.

The homunculus could not respond to Archer's words. He did not know how. What can he possibly think about? How should he think about it? He felt like a fallen bough, set adrift at sea.

"Well... you could always ask others. Luckily, Rider is here to help you. Ask him, if there is anything you are unclear about."

"Wait, why does this involve me all of a sudden?"

"That is what it means to take responsibility, Rider. Oh, yes, and one more thing - start by learning to walk. Your feet have become far too soft. Once you can walk, you may be able to use some simple thaumaturgy. That should lessen the strain to your physical being."

The homunculus no longer felt as burdened in mind, perhaps due to the clear

and understandable goal he had been given. After all, his walking around won't bother anyone. He can even start right away.

Archer stood up and patted Rider on the shoulder.

"Let us go, Rider. I will lock the door. No one will dare barge into this room during the meeting."

"All right..."

Rider stood up as well, looking annoyed. He was clearly dissatisfied, but the homunculus could not tell what the cause was.

"See you later, then. I'll be back, okay?"

Be careful, said the homunculus as he saw them off, and Rider shook his hand, looking strangely pleased. As soon as the door closed, he began to act. For now - he must begin to walk.

His two feet firmly gripped the floor. They were small and soft, but they could support his body - for a short while, at least. He took a step and felt some slight pain. His feet were dirtied. However, this time, he was not being driven by fraticness. With walking as his only goal, he will not be lost.

For now, I shall walk - walk, until I can no longer take another step.

Meanwhile, Rider promptly became annoyed again as they walked down the hall.

"Aren't you being too hard on him?"

"And you are being too soft. I only wished to strike a balance."

Archer smiled as he replied, but Rider sulked and grumbled.

"Aren't you being soft on your Master, too?"

"Ah, is that why your mood turned sour? Rider... the most fitting way to educate is dependent on and different for each person. My Master works hard to remove the handicap that she has borne since birth, as though it were a matter of life and death. But, as a magus, she has come to *accept* it as though it were only natural. She will fall apart, one day, if there is no one to praise her for her efforts, unconditionally."

"So you think he's not working hard, then?"

"He does not understand the difference between effort and sloth to begin with. Considering his short lifespan, he cannot be allowed to be lazy. That would only lead to regret at the very end."

Rider grumbled, but became quiet and did not speak further.

"Of course... your doting on him is another issue. Without someone to cling to, it is doubtful that he can escape this place. However, do not lose sight of why you were summoned here as a Servant."

"You sound like a teacher or something."

"Oh, but I am."

Archer answered brightly and tried to place a hand on Rider's head, but a peeved Rider brushed it aside.

It seems the two are the last to arrive at the throne room. At Darnic's signal, Caster manipulated the Menorah to display a scene from outside the fortress. This technique, utilizing airborne golems as a relay, far exceeded the maximum viewing range of the normal remote surveillance thaumaturgy used by magi.

The scene that the golem showed was rather difficult to describe - it was of a half-naked, enormous, oafish-looking man, marching through a forest.

Darnic was the first to speak.

"Soldiers of Yggmilennia - according to Caster, this Servant has been pushing through the forest day and night, on a direct course towards this castle."

The others were dumbstruck. They were at war, of course, so it is only obvious that they will be assaulted by a Servant - but there should be several attacks at once, some in ambushes and others in frontal assaults. And some, like the Lancer of the Red, will carry out other tasks as well.

But there did not appear to be any subordinates around this Servant - which means he is advancing on the fortress by himself. It was an act of utter foolishness - but there is one class of Servant that would calmly perform such acts.

"By my judgment, that is the Berserker of the Red. Most likely, he possesses a high rank in *Mad Enhancement* - running amok in his desire to fight the enemy."

Those summoned as Berserker will have varying ranks of *Mad Enhancement* based on the anecdotes of their past lives. Those with a low rank will not receive as great of a boost in parameters, but are able to deliberate and communicate with others to a certain extent. Those with a high rank can expect a great boost in parameters, but it becomes impossible for them to even follow commands, much less exchange ideas.

"What shall we do, Grandfather?"

"We will not let this chance slip by, of course. Sending three Servants ought to be enough. But this presents a unique chance - if all goes well, we may be able to make a pawn out of this Berserker of the Red."

At Darnic's declaration, a wave of whispers swept the hall. Lancer waited until the commotion died down before asking calmly.

"Let us hear concisely of this plan of yours. That is why you have gathered all the Servants here, no?"

"Yes, my lord."

Under the directions of Darnic, the ploy to seize the Berserker of the Red was organized. Said Berserker was charging along the shortest length of approach, but with his comparatively slow speed, it would take an estimated one or two days before his arrival.

Victory is all but certain - the problem is how to attain the objective of capture. Will six Servants be enough to restrain such a man?

Chapter 3-9

Arriving in Trifas at dawn, Ruler first tried to find a place to stay, but came up against an unforeseen difficulty.

It is as the old man said; Trifas does not have tourist attractions of any sort. There were only three hotels, and they were all full.

"This is a first for us as well... I'm terribly sorry."

Turning away from the apologizing hotelkeeper, Ruler glanced at the men and women chatting in the lobby. From the slight reaction of prana, it would seem they were magi - members of Yggdmillennia, most likely. They were probably all staying in the hotels of Trifas.

"It's all right if that's the case. Would you have any idea where else I could stay?"

"Perhaps you could try the church?"

Yes - there was a church. Ruler felt rather ashamed that she did not think of that first. All of this modern knowledge must have confused her. That should have been the first place she visited.

After asking for directions from the front desk, she began to walk to the church. Perhaps she was overheard at the hotel; she could detect several others trailing her.

"They should have been more attentive... I am a Servant, not a magus..."

It's likely due to the casual clothes she was wearing. And, unfortunately, the spirit form that all Servants should naturally be capable of taking was impossible for her, due to her possessing a host.

In any case, they know that she will be staying at the church. And, for the sake of her host, she would prefer not sleeping out in open air. Left with no choice, Ruler headed for the church. She knocked on the door of the small wooden church, asking to stay there for several days, and the sister agreed gladly.

"I'm sorry, but we only have the attic left. Is that all right?"

She was in no position to make demands on luxury - and she did not much care for it in the first place.

"Any place where I can lay down would be enough. Thank you very much."

Alma Petresia was the sister's name. The gentle woman truly suited one whom was raised in such an idyllic place - a woman who needed nothing more than the love of God.

"Please, come this way."

Alma offered to show her the way, and Ruler followed her to the second floor and up a staircase leading to the attic.

"Are you a tourist?"

"No, I'm here to study the history of medieval Romania."

"In that case, Sighișoara would probably suit your needs better. There are quite a few buildings from the Middle Ages still standing here, but I don't believe they have much historical value."

"Someone else is already researching Sighișoara."

"Oh, I see. Yes, I suppose there haven't been quite as many hands going over Trifas yet."

At the end of the creaking staircase, they reached the attic. The room was rarely used, according to the sister, but there was not a single speck of dust or

dirt to be found on the bed and lamp. The room seems to be have been cleaned regularly.

"I could prepare a meal as well, if you'd like."

"Oh, no - my eating patterns are rather erratic. I shouldn't trouble you."

On top of not being able to take spirit form, the girl must also eat. She wouldn't die from the lack of food like a normal human would, of course - but the girl's physical condition would worsen due to starvation. The fact is, since she hadn't eaten anything for a while, she was starting to feel pangs in her stomach.

In truth, while she felt highly grateful for Alma's suggestion, it would be rather careless of her to request such an arrangement - given the likelihood that she would be sneaking out during nighttime.

"It's quite all right. You'd only need to warm it up again."

"Warm it up...?"

Ruler tilted her head slightly. The sister looked at her strangely.

"That's right... with the microwave?"

"Oh... yes. The microwave."

Yes, of course - there was no need to start a fire just to warm up some food.

"Though I would much enjoy sharing my meals with another person."

After a quick moment of deliberation, Ruler decided to take up her offer. If the sister calls and she responds, they will eat together; if not, then she will leave her share in the refrigerator. That is the agreement they made. It would not be much trouble for either of them.

"Well, then... oh, I forgot one very important thing. May I know your name?"

"Ah, yes. Please, call me Jeanne."

She readily provided her true name. Ruler did not place much emphasis on its secrecy. She did not mind it personally, and it hardly represented a clear weakness, as it did for the Saber of the Black.

"Jeanne... that's a wonderful name."

"Thank you. There's actually one more thing I would like to ask. If there's time before our meal... may I enter the chapel to pray?"

"Yes, of course - that's why it's there."

Ruler stored her belongings in the attic. After that, she went down, knelt before the altar, clasped her hands together, bowed her head slightly, and closed her eyes.

It felt no different from when she had been alive. The moment her prayer began, she became separated from the world - removed from the past, the future, and reality itself. She was there not for any particular purpose, but simply to offer a prayer to God. By doing so, the course which she ought to take would come to be fixed.

To her, every second of prayer is as important as every breath she takes; a day will not pass where she does not pray. Having been born to a peasant family, Jeanne never knew the contents of the many books of prayer. She did try hard to learn them, but it seems she was simply born incapable of reading or writing. The most she ever managed was learning how to sign her name. While she worried about this, in the end, she decided that she needed little more in order to pray to the Lord. As she recalled, one of her comrades whom rode beside her, Gilles, once laughed and promised her that that was more than enough...

"Jeanne?"

It occurred to her that she had been kneeling in prayer for quite some time.

The sister said to her, looking apologetic.

"I'm sorry for interrupting."

"Oh, no - I tend to set my mind free and forget the time in spite of myself. I wouldn't want to starve myself into unconsciousness."

"It's a good thing I called out to you, then. Dinner is ready - let's tuck in."

"I see. Thank you."

Alma led her to the dining room. There was an ancient set of table and chairs made of oak, befitting this small church.

"Will anyone else be joining us?"

"Oh, I'm the only one here. They haven't decided on anyone to succeed Father Luxter ever since he passed away five years ago."

To begin with, Trifas is a small city with a population of less than twenty thousand. And there have been other churches built, as well. By now, the only visitors to this small chapel are the elderly whom live nearby. Although Ruler did not believe there to be any difference between places of worship, be they large or small.

"Now, shall we say grace?"

"Yes, let's."

After they finish setting the table, Alma and Ruler seated themselves opposite of one another and whispered their words of thanks. By the time they finished, her hunger had reached its threshold. With knife and fork in hand, Ruler cut a portion of the steaming *sarmale* (Romanian cabbage rolls) and put it in her mouth. As soon as she did, the sweet-and-sour cabbages and tomatoes and juicy minced meat hit her taste buds.

"How is it?"

"It's... wonderful."

Ruler gave only a short reply before indulging in the meal. With every bite, her contracted stomach expanded - and the more she ate, the bigger it became, making her want more and more. It was a vicious cycle of increasing hunger.

"There's more, if you'd like."

"Yes, please."

Jeanne replied immediately, without hesitation. Having been a farmer's daughter, she boasted an appetite that had been more than a match for the ravenous ruffians that were her rank and file. The plain seasoning of traditional Romanian cuisine also fitted her tastes extremely well.

Ruler ate until she had her fill, so happily that she beamed at the sister whom had made the meal for her. After that, she borrowed the bathroom to wash herself clean.

Once night sets, the magi and Servants will make their move. That is when Ruler's real job begins.

* * *

The sky is its usual shade of grey. According to weather reports, there will a slight shower during the night. Shishigou Kairi and Saber walked the streets of Trifas - but not for pleasure, of course. They were surveying the city to determine locations suited and unsuited for battle.

But one place being suitable does not mean that it is usable. Trifas being literally under the authority of the enemy, it would only be natural for there to be clan members hidden amongst the populace. It is also likely that traps

have been prepared at ideal locations - much like the night before. And, as expected, they found numerous bounded fields - some with detection capabilities, others with various distractors - hidden around the places they checked.

"Damn it..."

"Things not going so well, Master?"

From atop a wall, Saber called out to Shishigou as he crawled on his hands and feet, looking for ways to destroy the bounded field. Her voice was devoid of any hint of sympathy.

Shishigou sighed and promptly decided to abandon this location as well. It would be all pain for the smallest of gains simply to secure it.

"What's better for you, Saber? Level ground or back streets?"

"Hmm... level ground, I would say. I've said this before as well, but my true Noble Phantasm is an anti-army armament. The more open the space, the more room I have to give it my all. A plain field would be most advantageous."

"In that case, maybe it'd be better if we just took the fighting outside."

"Outside?"

The Fortress of Millennia encircles a portion of Trifas within its walls. Outside those walls are various constructions, the number of which have steadily increased over the past three hundred years or so. The castle is located at the easternmost tip of the north side of the city. Beyond that, there is a great forest and grasslands further to the east - though they are on the other end of a sheer cliff. It would be difficult to infiltrate the castle from that way.

"Wait for them, to come to us."

"I see. That would be far better for me, as well - more so than fighting in this cramped little city."

"Yeah. Trifas is just a cluster of civilian houses that have been huddling together since the sixteenth century - though that's not much of a problem when you can just mow all of them down."

"What? Of course, that's a problem."

"Well... when it comes down to it, everyone - whether they're friend or foe - wants to *win*, no matter *what* it takes."

Magi are those whom are unbound by human logic. As long as they protect that one fundamental rule of secrecy, they can sacrifice as many of the civilians as they want.

Of course, one should have moderation in all things. A single death may cause little more than grief to those around them - but when one death becomes ten deaths, or a hundred deaths, public institutions will act. And if the situation becomes impossible for one person to conceal, the Association will act. That is why the fighting takes place at night, and why bounded fields should be placed before combat to turn back normal people.

But this is the Great Holy Grail War. Is there really a choice whether this city should be sacrificed to those heroes of myths and legends, called here to rampage about as they please? Besides, every stick and stone of Trifas belongs to the Yggdmillennia.

Saber remained unexpectedly quiet. A curious Shishigou turned around and saw that she was clearly cross.

"I would not stand for that."

"Stand for what?"

"Sacrificing the common folk. Why is it that magi never seem able to understand such a simple logic?"

Saber spat out in obvious disgust.

"Well, that's just what they are."

"Disgusting. I would never stoop so low, Master."

"Yeah, yeah... we'll try not to involve the peasantry, *Your Highness*."

Saber's legs, dangling back and forth from the top of the wall, came to a sudden stop.

"What... did you just call me?"

"Hm? I said 'Your Highness'. Well, you're the one calling them the 'common folk'. Only people in high places have the authority to do that. And isn't it your wish to become king? What's wrong with calling you that now if you're going to become one eventually?"

Saber's face froze.

"I... I suppose it isn't."

"So, anyway - it's your policy to involve normal people as little as possible. Is that right?"

It took a few coughs before Saber could unstuck her expression. As she stood atop the wall, haughty and proud, the king looked down upon Shishigou and proclaimed.

"That's right! And I won't attack them to replenish my prana, either."

"Yeah, I got it. We'll work based on that."

Shishigou is a full-fledged magus. Naturally, both of those acts have been incorporated into his strategies, as emergency measures. However, if the essential piece of said acts - the Servant itself - refuses to take part in it, then

it cannot be helped. It's all well and good if the Servant itself wishes to replenish prana in such a manner, but if it does not, then the issue should not be pressed.

Shishigou's policy is not to have Saber act as he wanted. It is to let Saber act as *she* wanted, for him.

In a regular Holy Grail War, there is little choice but for the Master and Servant to place their lives in each other's hands; it is a necessity, whether the two share a bond or not, when they are surrounded by six other pairs of enemies. In this case, though, Servants have an exceedingly high chance of surviving the deaths of their Masters. In extreme cases, a surviving Servant can even betray their own allies for a Servant-less Master on the other side.

What this means is that the Master who does not build a relationship of mutual trust with his Servant will only receive a knife in the back for his troubles - especially in the case of this Saber of the Red, who sees the Master-Servant connection as simply a 'pact'. If she ever feels that there is a difference in perspective, or that the alliance will not benefit her, she will most likely toss her Master to the wayside.

It would not be betrayal, but disposal. It is only fitting for one who would be king.

"Hold on... are you mocking me...?"

"Imagined slights, my king. Anyway, this place is no good. Next, we'll..."

They both turned their eyes to the sky at the sound of cries and beating wings. A single dove dropped a piece of paper at their feet and flew off. Only their mutual beneficiaries - Father Shirou and Assassin - would pass something along in this way.

"A message, huh..."

As soon as he read it, Shishigou's face became grim. Bad news, I take it - thought Saber as she jumped off the wall and peeked at the note.

"Berserker has gone wild and is advancing towards the castle'...?!"

"Hey, not so loud!"

Shishigou hurried to stop her. It was not something that should have been said under broad daylight. However, Saber replied calmly.

"What could an outsider possibly make of such words besides nonsense? More importantly, what do they mean by 'gone wild'?"

"Yeah... I'll explain once we're back at the workshop."

"Explain *now*."

The stubborn Saber refused to budge. Bluntly, Shishigou looked at her and sighed, but she did not care for that at all.

"Apparently, our Berserker has a pretty unique rank of Mad Enhancement. They could talk with him, so they thought they could actually communicate ideas, but..."

Shishigou threw his arms wide open.

"...he didn't understand them at all. Berserker would not change his mind, no matter what they said to him, and he would not stop. So, he's off to complete his objective now."

"Huh... and that objective would be?"

"A fight, probably. Well, what else is there? This is bad."

"Why is that bad?"

Shishigou stared at her in disbelief.

"This is a war of seven against seven. If he goes charging off by himself -

he'll die, obviously. And then it will be seven against six. Without anything that could replace the power of a Servant, we'll definitely be at a disadvantage."

As a rule, they should not be sending in their forces piecemeal. The fact that they have no reinforcements available only strengthens that. And yet, Berserker has begun his rampage. If they do not find a way to save him, the Berserker of the Red will most certainly meet his end.

To Shishigou - a Master of the Red camp - this was quite dismaying news. On the other hand, his Servant no longer seemed interested now that she knew the full story.

"What does it matter? He's but a mere Berserker, and Berserkers will always meet their end in wars like these. It is only a matter of time. I say we leave him be."

Saying this, she bit into the apple that Shishigou bought for her from the market - and then immediately frowned and passed it to him.

"What utter dross... you can have it back."

"You know you're terrible, right...? Geez, this *is* crap."

Shishigou took a bite as well, and frowned.

Once Alma was asleep, Ruler left the attic and stepped outside. Trifas at night once again returned to its dead silence. However, the smell of corpses, of prana, carried on the otherworldly air, was proof that these streets currently hosted a Holy Grail War.

Ruler dipped her right hand into the holy water collected at the church, and cast it into the air. The water gave a dim glow and then began to smoothly draw a three-dimensional map of the city. This is one of the many privileges afforded to the manager of the War: the function of locating Servants.

The search gave a result. Only a single Servant of the Red camp was confirmed to be in Trifas.

"Hmm..."

Tilting her head, she expanded the range of detection. Six Servants were assembled at the Fortress of Millennia. They were of the Black camp.

"Six Servants of the Red missing... and one of the Black, as well...?"

It seemed the Red camp was keeping away from the city and observing it from a distance, understanding that every part of Trifas was enemy territory. In that case, the single Servant there would be a scout.

Did that mean the single missing Servant of the Black camp was performing the same role? Most likely, the Red camp had established itself in nearby Sighișoara. Strictly speaking, the Holy Grail War only takes place within a single municipality. It could be considered a violation for participants to be stationed in a neighboring city.

"But, given the situation, I suppose they have little say in the matter."

After all, the land is managed by the Black camp. Unlike Fuyuki, where the three great families allowed for some form of fairness, one single clan is in absolute power here.

This is without mentioning the small size of the city, where the rustic streets were apparently forbidden from further development. Again, unlike Fuyuki, there is a severe lack of places where outside magi can hide. Conversely, the Yggdmillennia need only hold out within their unassailable fort.

Possessors of the Greater Grail or not, the situation is simply too imbalanced. At the very least, she should let them set up camp outside Trifas.

The streets were calm to a disturbing degree. Normally, there should have already been one or two skirmishes...

"...but as long as one side does not make a move, the other will not either."

Perhaps this will be a quiet night.

As though in open rebellion against her thoughts, the Servants within the castle began to move. They headed, not for the streets, but outside the city.

"The forest...?"

She changed the search area to the forest filling the area east of Trifas. She confirmed the presence of three Servants.

It seems they plan on fighting the war away from the streets, as though to maintain peace in the city.

"Well, as long as the population is safe..."

Although destruction of the environment is troubling in its own way. Hopefully, the forest will not end up being burnt to a crisp by the Lancer of the Red...

So Ruler thought, as she took off down the road and made her way towards the forest.

Chapter 4-1

The man was pure muscle.

However you think about it, that is the only word that can do him justice. Anyone who sees this giant of a man - over two meters tall - will find their eyes drawn to his extraordinary mass. The sense of hopelessness only increases as you tilt your head to try and guess at his height.

From the innumerable scars carved into his pale skin, one can easily imagine the immense amount of training and battle the man has overcome. However, it is obvious that not a single one of those wounds had truly pierced him.

After all, what could come of taking a paring knife to a ball of metal? The man's body is a steel mass in itself. A sharp blade may cut his skin - even draw some blood - but it stops there.

His arms alone are virtually the size of crocodiles. There is nothing covering his pectorals, but it is clear that the toughness of his body is practically armor. His legs trudge along with the force of mammoths.

Leather straps tightly coil around his entire body, including his face, but he does not appear to be suffering. In fact, the man is smiling, as though enjoying it - as though asking, is this all that constricts me? Certainly, the straps around his waist and between his legs cannot be considered protection at all.

That is fine; his flesh is not something meant to be contained within armor. If anything, it is unnecessary. That is the immensity of the man's mass.

The man crashed through the forests east of Trifas as evening set in. To the onlooker, a fish walking on land may be more believable; he stood out like a sore thumb against the abundance of nature that surrounded him.

He is the Berserker of the Red.

"Would you *stop*, Berserker?!"

Someone was pursuing this unchained brute. Leaping from branch to branch, a girl clad in verdant green called out to Berserker again and again. Her cold, sharp eyes contained a beastly glint. Her hair stretched out long and unkempt, utterly devoid of the silkiness that one would find amongst those of noble birth; however, it befitted someone which such an feral appearance. Yes... she may well be a beautiful beast in human form.

Berserker chortled and answered her words without ever breaking stride.

"Ha ha ha! I cannot respond to that order, Archer. I must bring myself to that castle, to where the oppressors are."

Archer shouted in exasperation.

"You gull! We merely wait until the time is ripe! Why do you not understand?"

However, Berserker did not stop. He continued to walk, one powerful step after another. He had been walking for two days already, and spotted by passers-by more than a few times. Archer could only pray that that shady priest had things under control.

"To me, the word 'wait' does not exist."

This is it - Archer decided to give up on him. More accurately, seeing as she could not persuade him, she chose to focus on supporting him instead, as ordered.

"Only a madman, in the end... this task is beyond me."

She sighed as she muttered to herself - but she was answered by another.

"I guess so... not for nothing is he a Berserker."

Archer looked up towards the source of the voice; standing on one of the branches was a man with a carefree smile on his face. He was pleasing to the eyes - but not in the way of knights of old whom softened the hearts of noble ladies with their courteousness. His eyes were those of raptors, he was of a strong and firm build, and yet he was free from any appearance of crudeness. He looked the image of a great hero - one adored and admired by any man and woman, young and old, who looked upon him.

He was the Rider of the Red - the man who, according to Assassin's Master, could match the invincible Karna.

"Rider... do you suggest we forsake him?"

He shrugged and replied.

"Do we have a choice? The only thing he can think about is fighting. You're the strange one here, trying to talk him out of it."

"I was rather skilled in the restraining of wild beasts. I did fancy putting a shaft through his knee and being done with it, but..."

If she had done so, Berserker would undoubtedly have changed his course and rounded on her instead.

"Well, I'm glad you decided not to."

"So, why did you come?"

Rider grinned affably, as though he had been waiting for her to ask.

"Why else? I wanted to make sure you were all right."

"Indeed."

Archer showed no embarrassment, surprise or even anger. She simply did not react to his words at all - even though said words, coming from someone of

Rider's demeanor, should have flustered even a virtuous wife.

But to Archer, who had lived in the wild alongside beasts, words of courtship hold no meaning. Rider scratched his head awkwardly as she shrugged off his sure-fire advance with ease. He coughed and returned to his original mission.

"Anyway... we were given the role of the rearguard: support Berserker if reasonable, and gather as much information as possible."

"The enemy is already close at hand. I dare say he will reach the fort in the small hours. No doubt he will be checked before then."

"Huh... well, in any case, here's hoping some of the *Melas* will grace us with their presence."

Both Archer and Rider are superb hunters and warriors. They hold no illusions about winning a battle against seven entrenched Servants with barely half that number.

"Stopping such a Berserker calls for two Servants at the very least - if they do not send their entire force."

Yes - stopping that man would require such an exceptional effort.

"Yet... he truly has leapt from our given understanding of what a Berserker is."

"I'll agree with that. You'd think his Mad Enhancement was low, seeing as we could talk to him..."

However, the Mad Enhancement of the Berserker of the Red is an irregularity. It is possible to talk to him, but it is impossible to communicate fully. He does not disobey commands as much as he simply does not understand them. Even an order given with a Command Spell will do nothing more than weigh him down; two Command Spells are required to stop him.

"The Thracian gladiator and symbol of rebellion, **Spartacus**... what an

obdurate man."

Spartacus was a Roman slave and gladiator who escaped with seventy-eight of his comrades. He later repulsed an assault force of nearly three thousand, becoming a hero and inspiring armed uprisings by slaves in many places. In the end, he was betrayed by the pirates whom he depended on, and cut down by the Roman legions - but until then, he had not lost a single battle. He remained a shining beacon of hope to the under trodden slaves.

He hated all oppressors, his will to fight set aflame by those with power. This mad warrior fought the masters to protect the weak - care for them, heal them - but moreso than anything else, to stand in defiance. That is the Berserker of the Red.

"Where is your mount, Rider?"

"Well, we're here to gather information... no need to give them any in return. I'm keeping them out of this."

"Hmm... I suppose that will not prove to trouble you. What of your weapon - is it a sword, or a spear?"

"A spear, of course."

Rider and Archer continued to pursue the loosed Berserker; there was no way they could lose track of his slow, unwavering stride.

"By the way, Archer, there's one thing I want to ask..."

"Ask, then."

"Have you seen your Master's face?"

"I have not... I have only met the mediator for my Master... that priest."

Chapter 4-2

As soon as she was summoned, Archer noticed that the man standing before her was not her own Master. After all, what was clearly a Servant was standing by his side and, more importantly, she felt no connection to him at all.

"I haven't, either. Then again, I suppose that's only to be expected for a bunch of magi..."

"Yet... it is still peculiar. But, considering what awaits all of us at the end, perhaps it cannot be helped..."

In this Great Holy Grail War, the biggest issue is not defeat, but victory - and what follows. Whichever camp survives, it is unlikely that all seven Servants will remain accounted for - but it is also highly unlikely for only one to remain. In the end, the Holy Grail will only grant the wishes of one Master and one Servant. As soon as victory becomes clear, the division will begin.

Who among the magi does not aim to reach the **Swirl of the Origin** that sits outside this world, where all futures and all pasts are recorded? With such a possibility contained within the Holy Grail before them, even the closest of comrades would gladly slaughter one another. Servants are certainly not exceptions; the only way to have their own wishes granted is to terminate the allies they stood shoulder to shoulder with. Therefore, any alliances will most likely last only until the winning side is decided.

"...hence their refusal to appear before us."

"I don't think so. They should at least show up... I just can't help suspecting that priest and his Servant."

"You refer to Assassin... Semiramis, was it?"

Both Archer and Rider became speechless when, meeting them, Assassin grandly revealed her true name.

'I am Assassin, after all... an unstable existence to begin with. Let my true name be proof of my willingness to stand together in battle.'

So she declared, with some wryness, but neither Rider nor Archer believed her. The air of decay that wrapped around her invited only irritation and mistrust from these true-hearted warriors.

"That's right, Semiramis... the queen of Assyria. Why does putting on a crown always turns you into a pompous git? Kings or queens, it doesn't matter - I can't stand them."

"Such is what becomes of one whom is served by others. It is to be expected for someone of their position... nothing you need to take to heart."

Three hours had passed. The sun had already set, the forest becoming enveloped by darkness. Berserker's steady march came to a pause.

"Is it the enemy?"

"It is... but they are not Servants."

As Archer pointed out, what stood before Berserker was the Yggdmillennia vanguard: combat homunculi and massive bronze golems that towered over Berserker. There were over a hundred.

"Should we help him?"

Rider suggested, sounding rather deflated. They were not facing Servants, after all; what was there to help with? Instead, the two Servants chose to observe.

The battle between the vanguard of the Black and the Berserker of the Red was completely one-sided.

The halberds of the homunculi bit into his shoulders. The fists of the golems buried themselves in his face, impacting directly with enough force to shatter steel. However, these attacks did not make the smile disappear from Berserker's face. If anything, his grin widened.

Berserker made no attempt to avoid their attacks in the first place. In fact, he seemingly took pains to leap into their paths.

He took their beatings again and again, simply taking it all. Regardless of pain and injury, his expression was always one of ecstasy. Soon, even his attackers - tireless homunculi and golems - hesitated and stopped. That was when Berserker moved.

"Wretched puppets of the oppressor - may you at least find peace by my blade, and my fist."

Berserker grabbed the face of one of the golems with his hand, effortlessly tossing aside the three-meter-tall construct and crushing the homunculi who had the misfortune to be standing where it landed.

"Yes, you too!"

Saying this, he swung his sword in a wide arc - and the homunculi nearby were relieved of their top halves. He threw a punch at a struggling golem, pulverizing its reinforced bronze head.

Berserker was unrelenting in his barbarity. Spreading both arms wide, he boldly advanced. Embracing five golems at once, he bent backwards and flipped the several tons of bronze to the ground, destroying their skulls.

The man was a walking disaster. Every slash and punch produced more corpses and debris. But what was truly nightmarish was the unwavering smile on his face as he swung his sword and his fists. Even the homunculi, with their diluted emotions, became infected by his madness and fled the battle.

Ripping the final golem apart limb by limb, Berserker looked around at the traces of destruction and carnage he had wrought, nodded in satisfaction, and began to walk again.

"He was smiling..."

"Yeah..."

Archer and Rider exchanged glances, their disquiet characteristic of those whom have just witnessed something highly unpleasant. It was only natural that Berserker had fought and won; they did not find the misery he had sown dismaying or impressive. However, the way that Berserker had beamed from start to finish sent a chill down their spines.

"Well... a Heroic Spirit like that certainly couldn't be anything but Berserker."

If he had at least shown some anger, Archer and Rider might have believed him to possess a measure of reason. But he did not; he fought, he killed, and he crushed, all the while wearing an entranced smile.

"Never the less, he has shown his true strength; without a mighty Noble Phantasm, one of his measure cannot be stopped."

"Huh... By your reckoning, do you think he can take down at least one Servant?"

"We shall see. It would not be unthinkable as long as his Noble Phantasm can act freely..."

"That's the biggest problem, isn't it? Letting him 'act freely' with his Noble Phantasm..."

Although they were allies, the Servants of the Red camp did not fully know

of each other's Noble Phantasms - except for Berserker's, which was explained by his Master.

This was because his Noble Phantasm - the **Howl of the Wounded Beast**^{Crying Warmonger} - possessed such an abnormal function that, in a normal Holy Grail War, would absolutely rule out his survival.

"...but, if the Servants of the Black were to assault him continuously without thought, this may prove intriguing yet."

Yes, with that Noble Phantasm - allowing him to become more powerful the more damage he receives - it may even be possible for this Great War to be settled in a single night.

"Hm..."

Archer's nose twitched in discomfort; the smell of metal and machine oil was an unbearable stench to the girl whom was more animal than human.

"What is it?"

"We are perceived. Servants of the Black are approaching."

Archer's senses were far beyond those of Rider's. If she were correct, they would be meeting the enemy very soon.

"Prepare yourself..."

"Got it."

The two Servants summoned their respective weapons.

The spear that Rider summoned was greatly different from Lancer's weapon. Lancer's massive length of iron utilized its sharp tip and immense weight to bring about destruction. However, Rider's spear was one of simple, sturdy workmanship, well designed for close combat. From the way he held it lightly in one hand, it could be thrown as well.

Rider intended to challenge the enemy at close range without using his rightful weapon, the 'mount'; while truly reckless of him, the air of composure he exuded proved just how much he stood out alongside other heroes.

On the other hand, Archer naturally called forth a bow - a jet black Western-style weapon, bigger than she is tall. It is a celestial bow said to be granted to her by Artemis, the goddess of the hunt; its name is Tauropolos, one of the titles of Artemis, the boar-killer. It was a rare gem befitting such an archer. There is nothing it cannot pierce.

"I will withdraw and aid you and Berserker from the rear."

Archer immediately retreated into the shadows of the forest. Although Rider watched her go and could sense her, he no longer knew where exactly she was; for such a peerless huntress, becoming one with the forest was an effortless task.

"All right, then... time to go a few rounds."

Finally, even Rider's eyes could clearly see two shadowy figures slowly advancing from the depths of the forest. He sensed that they were both Servants. Apparently, their enemy thought a mere two Servants were enough to bring him down.

"You underestimate me, Servants of the Black... or do you think you have any chance of victory against me without sending out your entire force?"

Rider sneered, overflowing with confidence. Despite not using his primary weapon, he surged with an enormous, electric will to fight.

"Aaaa..."

"..."

The two Servants appeared. One was the Berserker of the Black - a girl

wielding a giant battle mace - and the other was Saber, who was embroiled in a fierce duel with Lancer last night that lasted till nearly dawn.

"Hey, there - Saber and Berserker, I take it?"

Saber nodded wordlessly and Berserker made a noise of affirmation.

"I'm the Rider of the Red. Oh, you don't need to worry - I didn't already lose my steed before the war has even started. It's just such a waste to bring it out against just two opponents. I'd much rather ride out against all seven at once."

Rider said mischievously. In other words...

None of you are worth my time. Come at me with your full strength if you want to see what I'm capable of.

However, the ones who faced him were also proud Heroic Spirits. Berserker's moans became harsh; Saber arched his eyebrows, looking angered. The murderous air alone would crush the heart of a mere commoner - but Rider coolly received their deadly gaze. Faced with beastly ferociousness on one side and the forceful presence of a true hero on the other, Rider continued to smirk.

Killing intent and hateful animosity - the man was far too accustomed to both being directed at him. To the hero for whom one true friend and the women who loved him had meant all the world, this was but a slight breeze.

Nothing had changed - only the time in which they existed and the weapons that they wielded. It would always be the same... and he would always cut them all down like they were nothing.

That was how the Rider of the Red had striven to live his life.

"Come... I'll let you *feel* what a true warrior is."

He readied his spear - and his thirst for blood crushed the air. Saber stood his ground bravely, and Berserker's artificial mind allowed her to take it in stride,

but any normal humans would have their spirits utterly crumbled.

Three - so the countdown began.

The thick forest was unsuited to the swinging of swords and spears.

Two - and the air froze in an all-too-familiar way.

But, in this place, the spear was superior to any other weapon in one aspect: the thrust. With his hero-slaying spear, able to pierce hearts and penetrate skulls with every strike, Rider felt no disadvantage at all.

One - and time itself seemed to stop before the eruption.

And most of all, with one of the world's most famous archers at his back, nothing would shake his nerve.

Zero.

All things crude and impure were blown away, swept aside, as they stepped forward and leapt, swinging sword and mace and spear.

Chapter 4-3

The vanguard of homunculi and golems was meaningless before the Berserker of the Red, readily turned back in a single strike. However, the Servants of the Black were not perturbed. After all, that was how a Heroic Spirit ought to be in battle. There were no surprises.

"Well... a slaughter like that is pretty abnormal, if you ask me..."

"What a dreadful sight. That Heroic Spirit does not fight with skill, but fiendishly butchers the enemy with the power he takes such pride in. No need for technique, or judgment - it is as though he was born to fight and kill. Perhaps the class of Berserker did not enhance him at all... perhaps he was not fit for any other class to begin with."

Archer agreed with the murmurs of Rider.

Surrounding the two was a force of golems incomparable to the vanguard sent earlier. In fact, over half of the golems created as the fighting force for the Yggdmillennia had been mobilized for this operation.

"I wonder if he'd kill me and you like that, too."

"It certainly is possible with such absurd strength. Do not let him strike you directly."

"Yeah, all right... I'll do what I can."

There was no fight in Rider's voice. Against this obvious display of disinterest, Archer softly whispered into his ear.

"I understand you are distracted, but if the unthinkable were to occur, and you fell here... he cannot be saved. Do you understand?"

"I-I know that!"

Rider straightened himself, firing himself up again thanks to Archer's reproof. He raised his splendidly ornate golden lance, as though daring Berserker to come at him.

"In a way, it is you who must realize the most dangerous task, Rider. Remember - stay on your guard."

The Bowman turned into Spirit Form, returning to the top of the fortress wall where he ought to be. Left alone, Rider sighed and muttered to himself.

"Geez... I really wish I wouldn't get jobs like this... facing danger head-on? You can't be serious... well, I guess I don't have a choice!"

Rider said, boundlessly bright - and a tremor came from the depths of the woods to answer his call, coming closer and closer. However, the source of the noise was still sunken in the darkness of the night, imperceivable.

Is he here...?

An unexpected silence descended upon them. The noise stopped, and only a rushing wind came upon them. However, a Berserker cannot conceal his presence; even if he is not yet visible, it is fully clear that he is there.

Certain that his enemy is close at hand, Rider stepped forward.

"O oppressors, your time is nigh! Your pride shall be vanquished, your conceits of superiority routed!"

It was then that Berserker appeared, blowing aside branch and tree.

"Ugh..."

For the briefest of moments, Rider wanted to leave this place behind.

He was not afraid of giants; he had once fought the many-armed Caligorante,

and paraded him around the streets. He did not fear hard-faced men or rampaging beasts. But the soft smile on the face of this colossus was... unnerving.

Yes, the fact that he was smiling was the most frightening thing. To smile in the midst of the enemy meant he was either greatly confident in himself, or so insane that he no longer cared who had the upper hand.

The giant was over two meters in height and wielded a gladius. From the previous encounter, it was evident that his fists themselves contained quite some power. On top of that, his toughness was exceptional. Most likely, even if Rider could injure him, he would not be able to finish him off.

In other words, Rider cannot hope to hurt him. Nevertheless, he understood that the tip of the spear had been entrusted to him - he must lead the advance.

"But, well... that's why I've been summoned, right? There's no helping it, then. Let's go!"

With a wide, daring grin on his face to match Berserker's, Rider brandished his golden lance.

"Let those afar hear my voice! Draw near and witness my splendor! For I am Astolfo, one of the Twelve Peers of Charlamagne... prepare yourself!"

It was a phrase that he had wanted but did not have the chance to say for quite some time, and he shouted it as loudly as he could. In the end, he even revealed his secret without much thought but, luckily, his opponent did not have the mental capacity to form strategies based on his true name.

"Hahahaha! Good. What splendid arrogance. I shall crush it beneath my heel!"

Berserker laughed as he charged, unexpectedly nimble despite his size, raging like a great wild boar.

"Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

He swung his sword high and brought it crushing down. It was a fierce blow that likely could have squashed the diminutive Rider, whom avoided it cleanly.

"Guh...?!"

However, it was one of those attacks for which evasion meant nothing. Berserker's strike gouged the earth, blowing back Rider with the force of the attack alone.

"Owww... what a horrible attack."

Rider grimaced and got on his feet, rubbing his back where he was hit. There was still no fear in his eyes.

He was facing an enemy that could blow him away with a single touch, overcome him with raw strength, proofed against any of his techniques. However, Astolfo was a Heroic Spirit... a valiant paladin of Charlamagne, whose reason was said to evaporate, and an adventurer who flew to all over the world, creating many legends. Through his journeys, he had won numerous **Mystic Codes** - his flute, his grimoire, his Hippogriff, and his shining golden lance.

"Come, then... let's show them what you can do, Argalia!"

Rider dashed forward. Even without his mount, his charge became a bolt of lightning.

However, to the Berserker who was deprived of almost all emotions, Rider's attack was a thing of joy, and most certainly not of fear. For surely, the more intense his strike - the deeper he despaired - the more pleasurable Berserker's counter-strike would become. Even if the lance were to run him through, Berserker would deliver his riposte without fail.

Certain of himself, Berserker raised his sword again, compressing his abdominal muscles until they became stiff as steel.

"Down with a Touch!" Trap of Argalia!



Yet, killing is not the primary intent of Rider's lance.

A spear is a spear, of course. If stabbed into the enemy, it will draw blood. If pierced in the heart, it will kill. But it is nothing more than a cavalry lance; its force has not been strengthened by thaumaturgy, and it did not possess any special property to penetrate all defenses. It was not fated to pierce its enemy's heart in any way. Despite all of the above, the power of this lance is deadly in battle.

Berserker shook violently as he felt his body collapse to the ground. The solid earth which he stood firmly on disappeared, causing him to momentarily forget the sword he was supposed to swing down. Still, the smile remained on his face. He felt no shock at all. But no matter how hard he tried, it was impossible for him to overturn this preposterous condition.

The **Trap of Argalia!**, the carelessly named Noble Phantasm of Rider, was a spear that could only do what its name suggested. According to legend, this beloved lance of the Cathay prince Argalia causes anyone it touched to fall - and to heavily armored knights on the field of battle, a fall inevitably leads to death. Aside from that, it is not difficult to imagine how much glory the use of this lance brought its users in those pompous jousting tournaments.

Used on a Servant, this Noble Phantasm realizes its legend by forcibly returning its target to Spirit Form from below the knee. Regardless of where the lance hits - even if it is on armor woven by mana - the prana supply to that part of the body will be physically cut, rendering it temporarily impossible to take form as flesh and blood.

That being said, such a weapon would not be enough to stop Berserker. He still had his body from the knees upwards; he would still drag himself on to defeat his opponent.

"Depriving me of my legs will not stop me."

"Oh, I'm sure of that... which is why we are going to stop you now. Get him!"

At Rider's words, the golems standing by assaulted Berserker as one. The golems, weighing over a ton each, tried to press down and contain his arms. However, Berserker beat them back with ease, swinging his arms wildly. The upper bodies of the golems were shattered by his fists - but the strength of these constructs was that, even without a head, they did not completely lose their function.

Working like an army of ants overcoming their prey, they quietly overwhelmed Berserker. But their prey was not some powerless animal, and their endless bites could not stop the giant.

Berserker did not stop. Even after losing his feet, he still advanced headlong towards the castle.

"Hahaha! Yes! Wonderful! The enemy ranks are as a mist, covering me with wounds from head to toe! Yes, this... this is worthy of song when victory comes!"

Golems covered every single part of his body, their combined mass double his own. Enveloped by a suit of stone and bronze, he continued to advance.

Further, further, ever further. The Berserker of the Red might be a fool, but he was not delusional. By his skin, his ears, his eyes, his tongue - he knew that the oppressors were waiting for him.

"An admirable effort. You need not feel shame, Caster... your golems are great works. It is that Berserker that is abnormal."

".....!"

Berserker accelerated. Ripping away the golems covering his face, he saw for himself what stood before him.

"You..."

"Yes, Berserker of the Red camp. If you seek the oppressors - then I am the one who stands atop them."

"Ahh... ahhh... ahhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Berserker stretched out his hand in joy. Just a bit more, and he would be able to reach the heads of the oppressors. Joy and glory had always come after the clouds cleared and the suffering ended. There were no flaws in the mad warrior's logic. It was absolutely perfect.

However, he had forgotten one very important fact. What had awaited him at the end of his suffering was a cruel and tragic death.

Lancer - Vlad III - watched with an icy gaze as Berserker rampaged on. He was the hero who ruled Romania with an iron fist and grimly massacred all those who opposed him. And his enemies, with fear in their hearts, called him...

"Lord of Execution ."Kaziklu Bey

Lancer declared, and the ground nearby bulged.

"I shall... crush you, oppressor!"

Berserker did not falter at all despite the weight of the golems. He raised his sword arm - but it was pierced by a sharp stake. Regardless of whether he could feel pain, the stake still stopped his movement against his will.

"I have spent my entire life fighting against insurrectionists such as yourself. I destroyed them, leaving their meat to rot on my stakes..."

Stakes several meters in length pierced Berserker, along with the golems. Lancer did not refine his strikes beyond not aiming for Berserker's spiritual core. Although he actively avoided killing Berserker, he saw no need to trouble himself with further restraints.

It would be a shame if Berserker were to die, but if he did not - only a deeper level of Hell awaited him.

His feet turned immaterial, his body covered by innumerable golems, his entire being save for his heart and brain pierced by stakes - and still Berserker moved to bring down the oppressor right before him. His actions could no longer be contained by words such as 'hatred' or 'conviction'.

Yes, this was his faith. This was what Lancer sacrificed half of his golems to ascertain: whether he was a foolish barbarian who sought only to rebel against authority - or a man who, in spite of his madness, had carved an uncrossable line, an unbreakable resolve onto his own heart.

Lancer nodded in satisfaction and said quietly.

"...I understand now that I have come face to face with you. Your rebellion is the embodiment of your noble spirit. The strong will always trample over the weak... but you fight because you are unable to accept that. You fight until you have turned the strong into the weak."

He fought not for the sake of the weak. The mad warrior would not have come so far for such pretenses of altruism. No, it was simply that...

"Do you dream of a world where all are equal? Yet your dream is but a flight of fancy. For the first time... I feel I must show my respect to those we call the rebels."

Lancer snapped his fingers, and Caster by his side stepped forth.

"But, unfortunately for you... we shall change the direction of your rebellion. Berserker of the Red - you belong to *us* now."

"....."

The smile disappeared from Berserker's face. Instead, his expression became one of murderous rage. What Lancer said meant one thing - slavery. To Berserker, that was a disgrace greater than death. It was despair itself.

"Now, then..."

Caster dispassionately gave the command to the golems that pressed down upon Berserker. At once, they converted to a fluid form that coiled around both Berserker and the stakes. Even the hero of rebellion would not be able to escape this stone prison.

"I leave the dissection to you, Caster."

"Yes, lord..."

With that, Lancer lost all interest towards Berserker. He was now one of Lancer's subordinates, turning his fangs against not the Black, but the Red. That was all he needed to know.

As Lancer walked away, Rider called out to him.

"Well, it looks like you don't need me here anymore! I'll take my leave!"

Rider hastily turned into Spirit Form and returned to the fortress. Naturally, he wanted to take advantage of this situation. No one would concern themselves with one homunculus right now; it was their greatest chance.

* * *

The man was a tempest. He was invincible.

The Rider of the Red laughed mockingly at the fierce assault of Saber and Berserker. The two Servants released their attacks in the same breath, aiming both high and low.

Rider curled his body and leapt. With his single, short spear he deflected both attacks splendidly.

"Weak!"

At nearly the same time, he launched a kick. He fought not with the formality of a knight, but martial skill honed utterly on the field of battle.

Berserker was blown away but managed to right herself. She moaned with displeasure, and a strange grinding noise filled the air. However, Rider did not seem to pay her much attention as he clashed with Saber once again.

There was not a single wound on either of them, and both of their attacks were being nullified. With his blood armor, Siegfried cannot be hurt by attacks not B-rank or above - which allowed him to keep the fight balanced for the time being. But if this Rider's Noble Phantasm is capable of piercing dragon-blood...

'What are you doing, Saber?! There's not a scratch on him! Use your Noble Phantasm! Use it!'

He had no choice but to ignore his Master's urgings. Rider was not fighting seriously yet, and the riddle of his invulnerability had yet to be solved. Perhaps he had a Noble Phantasm with the same power as him - or perhaps he possessed something even stronger. It could even be that he could not receive damage without certain conditions.

If Saber were to reveal his Noble Phantasm now, it would mean giving away his identity, and that will unmistakably become a hindrance in the battles to come. Eliminating Rider now would certainly prove to be an overwhelming advantage - but what if he did not fall?

It hardly needs to be said. Saber would be the fool who used his Noble Phantasm purely to advertise his own name. Not to mention that, if Rider managed to escape the battle before Saber finished him off, Saber's identity would be completely compromised among the Red camp. After that, they would all know to aim at his weak point: his back.

Saber did not mind being brazen, but he did not want to be foolish. He could only let the command go by, unheeded. He wanted his Master to understand. While under normal circumstances, he would use words to explain to the

fullest, he had no chance to do so right now.

Rider jumped backwards, apparently wishing to start anew.

"This isn't going anywhere, huh."

"..."

As promised, Saber did not open his mouth. Rider looked rather irritated by his lack of response.

"You're a surly bastard, aren't you? Men who don't laugh on the field of battle, may forget how to by the time they reach Elysium. This world is enough of a gloomy, festering pus as it is - you should at least try to get a laugh in..."

He disagreed. Sometimes, laughter in the face of an opponent becomes nothing more than condescension. A cheery briskness in the duel due to mutual acceptance of one another's strength is a different matter entirely from mocking the corpse of the fallen.

Against Saber's wordless display of rejection, Rider chuckled.

"...before you die. You know?"

In the blink of an eye, an unseen arrow, flying faster than the speed of sound, impacted directly on Saber's chest.

Chapter 4-4

Saber flew backwards, head over heels, and crashed into several trees.

"Uu...?!"

Berserker could not make a sound. However, she immediately understood what had happened; the attack just now came from a Servant emplaced far behind Rider. Her thoughts were dispassionate and swift. An attack from long range, containing not thaumaturgy but pure physical energy... in other words, the work of an Archer!

It was likely that the hidden Servant had been watching the fight between them and Rider carefully, realized that a regular shot would not hurt Saber, and drew their bow to its limit to perform a physical attack of an even higher rank. The shot just now clearly exceeded A-rank, and thus penetrated Saber's defensive ability.

The problem, however, was that the attack came from so far away that neither Servants detected it. And they were hardly standing in the middle of a clear, open field; night had fallen and the trees surrounding them were dense and thick. From such a distance - even if said watcher could see in the dark - Saber must have been nothing more than a moving dot.

But the shot found its mark. That was the most terrifying truth. An extreme range attack with A-rank destructive power; the eyesight required to take aim in near zero visibility; and the supreme precision to thread such a needle of an attack... certainly, there existed bowmen who could accomplish every single one of these. But just how many would be capable of all of the above simultaneously...?

Rider suddenly made a sour face as he looked past Berserker into the woods behind her, and clicked his tongue.

"Looks like it's over for our Berserker. But *you're* still here, pretty girl... and it's only fair for us to go an eye for an eye. Don't you think?"

The Rider of the Red, with a cheery yet cruel smile, tightened his grip on the spear. Even the fearless girl felt something primal and base in his expression.

She fully understood from their fight earlier that her attacks were not 'enough'. She could not harm him in any way.

"How long do you think it'll take the *Melas* over there to recover? Ten seconds? Twenty? Well... it can't be faster than my spear."

Escape, oppose, surrender... all her options were being denied.

Berserker gritted her teeth, having no choice but to submit to her current predicament. Or... if she had to die here regardless, perhaps she could release her Noble Phantasm completely.

Having been forced to a decision, Berserker growled as she steeled herself. She will use every last ounce of strength to bring down Rider...

But, as soon as the thought entered her mind, the situation was reversed entirely. She sensed a great surge of prana coming from behind her and turned around reflexively. It was Saber, brandishing his greatsword in anguish.

* * *

Gordes was losing his patience. Saber not only ignored his suggestions, but even let his guard down and was sent flying. It seemed that the Rider of the Red was incredibly resilient. As far as he could perceive through the senses of familiars, his parameters were quite excellent as well. With the enemy Berserker now in the fold, victory was most assured for the Yggdmillennia if they could defeat this Rider.

"Saber! Saber! Use your Noble Phantasm! Use it!"

There was no Servant there lending their ear to the shouting Gordes. He was alone, sealed within his room as he continued to give his directives.

A normal Master would not presume to give precise instructions in battle. That is because they have absolute faith in their Servants in the matters of combat. At the very least, a Servant possesses far greater actual experience and capability than a magus. A normal Master only speaks on matters of strategy.

Aside from Saber and Gordes, the other Masters and Servants of the Black had been building on their relationships. Archer and Fiore had completely opened up to one another, acting more like a teacher and a familiar student. Lancer took no issue with Darnic as long as he served him faithfully. Celenike was at a loss with Rider's lack of inhibitions, but also had her heart stolen by his purity and innocence, and they were unlikely to break their pact outside of some grave circumstances. Caules' Berserker was loyal and, after some frank discussions between Master and Servant, she became a willing comrade in arms. And, of course, Roche admired Caster from the bottom of his heart.

Yet Gordes had abandoned all attempts at communicating with his Servant soon after his summoning. He did not try to understand him, only fearing the exposure of his true name.

His heart was in the right place. However, his act proved to be the direst of mistakes... because Gordes hadn't the faintest idea what Saber was thinking.

How did he feel right now? Discontent? Rebellious? Murderous? Humiliated? Or was he not feeling anything at all?

They should have talked - about their views, goals and beliefs. Hearing each other talk was the least they should have done. But Gordes refused. He tried to treat his Servant as an accessory, a piece of armament.

Was it pride that led him to do this? Could he simply not rid himself of the

notion that a Servant was nothing more than another familiar?

Whatever it was, it was what led to the foolish restlessness that took over him during the battle with Lancer, and now with Rider; they failed, and continue to fail, to grasp victory even as the situation turned unfavorable.

If he had simply chosen to observe at his Servant's back... or perhaps, if this had been a regular Holy Grail War, where every Master and every Servant were constantly watched by six others...

...he would never have attempted something as foolhardy as he was about to now.

However, Gordes was watching over the battle in a safe location. Even if Saber were to be destroyed, and his honor be sullied, he would not be in physical danger. These absurd thoughts, one after another, piled atop one another and pushed Gordes towards a single conclusion...

"...Saber! I order you with a Command Spell...! Use your Noble Phantasm to defeat Rider!"

Gordes' words reached his Servant clearly. Even if Saber were on the opposite side of the world, words delivered by the power of the Command Spell would carve themselves directly onto his soul.

"...?!"

Naturally, Saber was shocked. He whipped around and stared at the castle - but, of course, he could not see Gordes. He brandished his greatsword, releasing the power it contained. The green jewel set in the hilt shone, as the blade began to give off an orange brilliance that split apart the night.

"Ugh...!"

No... he must not use his Noble Phantasm here. The instant he shouted its true name, his identity would almost certainly become known; after all, only one Heroic Spirit in the world wields the phantasmal greatsword Balmung.

His identity perceived, his fatal weak point would also become known. He would instantly lose every advantage he held.

If there was a chance that he could defeat Rider, then perhaps he would not reject the use of his Noble Phantasm. However, Rider was effectively immortal, and Saber could not imagine that his Noble Phantasm would work against him.

Rider's protection is not something that can be pierced by raw power. Something *more* is needed. It could be that one needed to use fire or lightning against him. It could be based on certain conditions; perhaps Rider was nigh invulnerable within a forest, or at night.

There are innumerable Heroic Spirits with such legends. For example - though this is not an anecdote about a Heroic Spirit - the God of War Indra once swore to the dragon Vritra not to hurt it with any weapon made of wood, stone or metal, dry or wet, nor attack it during the day or at night. Indra proceeded to defeat Vritra at twilight using, not wood or stone or metal, dry or wet, but a column of the ocean's foam.

Complete deathlessness does not exist.

They may be Heroic Spirits, but they can never go beyond the bounds of a human being. One who is capable of such things - an existence outside of common sense - cannot be summoned as a Servant in a Holy Grail War to begin with. It is the same for Saber; aside from attacks that exceed B-rank, there is also the weak point at his back where the dragon's blood did not touch him. Even the weakest of Servants can kill him by aiming there.

What kind of immortality did Rider possess? Master or no... relying on brute strength to force the issue without first solving this riddle was the act of an imbecile.

Saber resisted with all his might. However, an order given with a Command Spell is absolute. Prana filled his sword and he began to raise it slowly.

"What...? Saber...?!"

Rider noticed him. Even he appeared somewhat surprised as Saber held his sword high and began to release his Noble Phantasm. However, a smile appeared on his face, as though in mockery.

Saber no longer had a say in the issue of whether he ought to unleash his weapon. Judging from Rider's smirk, it would seem his worst fear was realized and his bitterness deepened. However, he could not stop his own arms. He must decide - and Saber, through gritted teeth, poured all his strength into this one attack.

"**Bal...** Felling... "

"Come on, then... Saber...!"

The surge of prana converged. For one brief moment, the night that swallowed the forest became dusk, lit by the light of the Nibelungs - the holy sword that felled the dragon.

However, Rider grinned confidently, contemptuously. Hateful as it was to admit, Saber knew this one strike would have no effect on him.

".....**mun...** ...of the Sky"

He could only pray that this attack would at least provide some hints as to Rider's mystery...

'I order you with a Command Spell! Do not use your Noble Phantasm!'

Just as the last syllable was about to leave his mouth, his Master expended another Command Spell. There is only one way to stop an order given with a Command Spell, and that is to use another Command Spell to overwrite it.

Saber dropped on one knee, unable to remain standing. Perhaps it was due to the intensity of the Command Spell acting on him. Rider shrugged in exasperation.

"What's this, then? Not going to use it? Well, I suppose you saved some prana this way, but it cost you regardless. You were ordered with a Command Spell, weren't you?"

Rider glared spitefully in the direction of the Master behind Saber.

"Ha! What a moron! So he ordered you to activate your Noble Phantasm with a Command Spell, then used another one to stop it? Does he not understand that expending Command Spells is the most dangerous act in a Holy Grail War?"

Saber had no retort. Rider was totally in the right. Even so, as long as the bond between Master and Servant remained strong, the situation could be salvaged - but Saber had yet to feel such a connection between his Master and himself.

"Well, I can't criticize, not when my own Master is skulking around in some hole somewhere. Sigh... you could have at least said the entire name..."

Rider broke off as both he and Saber stared at each other at a loss for words. Blood flowed - but it was not from Saber.

The man had ignored every slash and blow, his body stopping even Noble Phantasms. However, Rider's shoulder was clearly bleeding.

"Guh...!"

In an instant, as though in sync with the arrow, Berserker ran forth - not towards Rider, but the unseen Archer of the Red.

On the other hand, Rider pulled out the arrow that had embedded itself in him. Holding his punctured shoulder as though to maintain his hold on reality, Rider asked in a low voice.

"Who's there...?"

He no longer had eyes for Saber or Berserker.

Chapter 4-5

Berserker ejected prana violently behind her as she closed the gap between herself and Archer. She was not so much running as hovering, her feet barely touching the ground as she kicked off trees and branches, accelerating further.

The main cause of her increase in speed was her Noble Phantasm - the **Maiden's Chastity**.^{Bridal Chest}

It is not simply a weapon for bludgeoning the enemy; if anything, that is a secondary use. The true ability of her Noble Phantasm is to absorb prana. In any Holy Grail War - ruthless struggles between Servants and magi - converted prana will end up dispersed all over the place, eventually dissipating into the atmosphere.

Her Noble Phantasm, the 'heart' of Frankenstein's monster, holds the ability to absorb excess prana. This amassed energy can then flow through Berserker's heart and into her Magic Circuits, even allowing her to emulate a **Prana Burst**. Of course, it is not an all-powerful weapon - but having taken form as the Servant Berserker, one would have been hard-pressed to find a more convenient weapon. For a class known for sapping prana reserves dry in short order when fully active, this Noble Phantasm allows her to fight on like a perpetual motion engine.

She might appear prone to senseless charges, but Berserker was actually given a solid reason why she ought to aim at the Archer of the Red. Just now, before Rider was hit in the shoulder by that arrow, Berserker was telepathically contacted.

'Listen carefully. I shall deal with the enemy's arrows as well as Rider. Make all due haste towards the opposing Archer.'

Berserker moaned in disagreement. That wouldn't work - nothing worked against Rider.

'My arrows will prove to be the exception. Confronting him directly may be somewhat beyond me - but please, place your trust in me.'

Berserker did not protest further. She had no choices left to begin with; for now, she might as well do as Archer said.

The instant Archer's arrow pierced Rider's shoulder, Berserker ran forth without hesitation.

"Ooooooooooooooooh!"

Berserker roared as she raged and bound forward.

Her goal - the sly marksman hiding and taking aim in the dark. She will drag them out under the moon's light, and cave their head in...!

* * *

The Archer of the Black, standing atop the thick walls of the Fortress of Millennia, felt relieved when his arrows pierced Rider as expected.

"Master, please have Saber retreat. There is nothing he can do against Rider."

"Very well... I'll let Grandfather know."

Soon after Fiore contacted Darnic, Saber turned into Spirit Form and disappeared.

They have prevented the worst; his Noble Phantasm did not fully activate. There is a chance that his identity has not been exposed. However, the cost has been too great.

The Command Spells - the right to absolute commands - is not simply for the use of enforcing orders. With the enormous prana contained by the Spells, it is possible to utilize a number of miraculous powers. And yet, they have just forfeited two. Most likely, there is only one Command Spell remaining on Gordes.

"I fear further ambushes, Master... you should retreat as well. Summon me with a Command Spell if you have urgent need."

Fiore tilted her head gracefully and replied.

"I understand, Archer... good luck."

She looked pale and very lost. Archer put on a gentle smile to reassure her.

"It is going to be all right, Fiore. I am your Servant, after all."

Fiore left, and Archer turned his eyes to the depths of the great forest - towards the enemy Rider and Archer. He drew his bow and took aim at Rider, letting all thoughts become oblivion and devoting himself entirely to the bow. The form the Bowman took was utter perfection, as exquisite as the stars in the sky.

After all... this man, gentle like a calm sea, is the most famous archer in the world. Every arrow he lets fly is as swift as a shooting star.

* * *

"You *dimwit*. Have you not even the presence of mind to realize the most opportune time to release Saber's Noble Phantasm?"

Gordes could only hang his head, unable to argue against Darnic's cold words. Shame, despair, anger - all these emotions and more mixed together into a cocktail that permeated his heart and mind.

As soon as Darnic received Archer's urgent message, he immediately went to Gordes and forced him to use another Command Spell. Without Archer's warning - that "Saber's Noble Phantasm will not work against Rider" - Saber would have disclosed his true name for the sake of a meaningless attack.

"Two Command Spells... all that you have managed to accomplish is waste two Command Spells. And that was still a far better choice than revealing Saber's true name."

Their strategy revolves around maintaining Saber's secrecy until it becomes a necessity to release his Noble Phantasm. It was Darnic's decision that they must keep hidden Siegfried's one and only, yet highly public, weak point until Assassin and its **Presence Concealmentability** is removed from play.

They almost lost everything due to Gordes' uncontrolled actions. The Rider of the Red might have obtained Saber's true name. Even if he had not, whatever Rider had observed could give clues to the opposing camp as to who Saber was. The possibility that Saber had been compromised was high.

"Have Saber take form here."

"..."

Wordlessly, Gordes let Saber materialize next to him. Saber knelt respectfully before Gordes and Darnic.

"Be at ease, Saber. I only wish to ask you this: did the enemy Rider perceive your true name?"

"Answer him, Saber..."

Taking Gordes' words as approval, Saber spoke.

"I did not completely release my Noble Phantasm. It is not impossible for him to make a conjecture based on my appearance and my Armor, but..."

"...you believe the possibility to be low."

Saber nodded. Darnic sighed loudly.

"However, the possibility still exists... at the very least, we should have someone guarding your back at all times from here on."

After some thought, Darnic decided on Rider. Archer is acting commander and must give orders and directions. Their king, Lancer; Berserker; Caster; all are poor choices. Assassin has yet to appear. As such, the unfettered Rider is the best choice for standing next to Saber on the front line.

'Lord Darnic, if I may...'

A voice called out while Darnic was in deep in thought. Caster had spoke him via telepathy.

'What is it?'

'The homunculus I have been searching for... it seems Rider is leading it out in an attempt to escape. That homunculus is a highly valuable resource. I would like to have it back if possible...'

'What...?'

Darnic was bewildered by Rider's unprecedented act. Running away with a homunculus? Even outright betrayal would be easier to comprehend.

'I do not know why, but the homunculus...'

'Why is it so valuable?'

*'He is a possible candidate for the **core**.'*

'Oh? In that case... I will send a Servant after them.'

Greatly appreciated, came Caster's parting words. Darnic immediately ordered the idle Gordes to pursue Rider with Saber and bring back the homunculus. If they are fortunate, and it can be used as the 'core' as Caster suggested, then they should secure it. While obviously displeased by the triviality of the task, Gordes dared not go against the orders of the family head and began to track down the pair.

Certainly, the homunculus' escape was a shocking development. Who would have imagined that a weak prana provider - not even a combat model - could manage to destroy the containment glass with thaumaturgy? But it is only a homunculus. It can accomplish nothing by itself. Besides, it is physically defective. The homunculi hold no illusions regarding that. Letting it run off makes little difference.

In this case, however... they must retrieve it even if they have to use a Servant.

Yet why was Rider helping this homunculus escape to begin with? He certainly could not be planning to escape himself. He is a Servant; cut his prana lines and he will be reduced to the floundering familiar that he is, unable to survive on his own.

Darnic could not understand what Rider was doing at all. Was he trying to *save* the homunculus? How? Did he truly believe such a piece of rubbish could ever blend into the normal world...?

To the magus who had lived for over a century, this was utterly incomprehensible.

* * *

The wielder of the sword, of the spear, of madness, of thaumaturgy, of assassination - Servants are given a variety of classes. However, only the wielder of the bow possesses a hidden 'strength'.

In fact, it is a technique that anyone who lives by the bow will certainly obtain. It is an authority that they naturally possess, regardless of classes or skills. Simply put: the stronger the draw, the stronger the shot. Furthermore, the bow wielded by the Archer of the Red comes from the Goddess of the Hunt herself. By praying, by aiming, by drawing the bow with every ounce of strength in her body, drawing beyond all limits - it can strike with the force of gods.

All men possess the original sin for which even saints must answer for. However, it is an unconscious, instinctive act of all beasts. People call this sin 'to hunt'... and to her, the bow and the arrow are the tools to enact it.

She is a master of the hunt, born by the grace of Artemis. Her skill with the bow is divine, her fleet form unreachable by any man's dash. She is **Atalanta** - the greatest huntress of Greek mythology.

Now, she is not drawing her bow to the level of strength she had before. Instead, she prioritized speed. The issue was how quickly she could nock, draw and release.

The Berserker of the Black, unlike Saber, was not protected; not by divine powers, or demonic ones, or something else besides. Every shot she fires will pierce.

"Fool... have you gone completely mad?"

Archer allowed herself some aimless words as Berserker continued to approach. After all, no matter how faster Berserker could run, there was still a significant distance between them. Only with the support of a Command Spell would she be close in instantly. The closer Berserker came, the closer she drew to her own death.

"You will pay for your rashness..."

Archer's aim was already fixed. A bow is not aimed with one's hands but with one's senses. No matter how agile her prey is, her arrow will go through its heart.

"...in blood!"

The arrow she released was painted black, the better to erase all chances of detection in a night battle. Not to mention that it travelled faster than sound. It would only take an instant for her to see the arrow coming out of her prey's chest, and it would be all over.

But...

That... can't...

Finally, the Archer of the Red understood. She was forced to realize. In the Great Holy Grail War, there are two Servants in each class. Thus - the opposing camp could possess an Archer on the same level of skill as her.

My arrow was shot down...?!

Archer lost herself for a moment at this unbelievable event. If Berserker had dodged it, she would have accepted it; as a hunter, it was hardly rare for prey to suddenly sit down. If Berserker had counter-attacked, she would have understood; as a hunter, it was only natural that prey you aim to kill would respond in kind.

However, it was not coincidence that her arrow was intercepted. It was not done by the prey in question. No, it came from a third party removed from the hunt entirely. It could only have been the Archer of the Black.

"How is this possible...?!"

Archer had never felt so humiliated. *How could my own shot be knocked*

aside by someone else's...?!

"...ooooooooooooaaaaaaaahh!"

"Curse it, it's fast...!"

She silenced all thoughts of shame within her mind. Right now, she must fell the approaching Berserker. In place of artistry and technique, she chose a simple barrage for her next attack. Three arrows appeared instantly in her hand and she took aim at Berserker. Her arrows were not Noble Phantasms; they had no special functions such as independently tracking the enemy. In other words, she aimed for victory through quantity rather than quality.

Of course, any one of these arrows finding its mark would mean defeat for the enemy. The three arrows she drew back were aimed at Berserker's chest, head and leg - all vital points - with precision. Even if the first barrage did not end Berserker, if they could slow her while Archer drew again... With her preparations perfected and all possibilities of defeat eliminated, the huntress released her arrows.

Unfortunately, 'perfection' is but an apparition. Her mind so firmly believed that she was in perfect form but, turned on its head, her premature counter showed only her fear of defeat.

"Gaaaaah!"

Berserker intercepted only one of the arrows as the other two landed. Arrows pierced her leg and chest, but she hardly reacted. After all, she is Frankenstein's homunculus, an artificial creation; she can control her own pain receptors with ease. As long as the damage does not interfere with her body's operation, she cannot be slowed - let alone stopped.

"Hmph..."

In an instant, the Archer of the Red decided to abandon the fight. A prouder Heroic Spirit would consider standing their ground and fighting for supremacy, and Archer was still confident that she could defeat Berserker.

But she is a beast, and to her, pride is as worthless as the carrion fed to the wolves. She decided to retreat without hesitation. The objective of this skirmish was only to support Berserker. Said task having ended, there was no reason for her to stay.

She did not worry about Rider; he certainly had his own avenues of retreat. Shouldering her bow, she declared to the Berserker of the Black.

"We shall meet again, mad warrior..."

She turned around and dashed forth. Seeing no more attacks coming from range, Berserker pursued with all her might.

However, Atalanta is famous for being the most fleet of foot in the Greek myths. Every suitor attracted to her savage beauty had to complete in a footrace with her, hoping to win and take her as wife, but each were overtaken by her nimble legs and shot to death. Not even the prana support of the **Bridal Chest** can hope to fill the gulf between their physical capabilities. The Archer of the Red quickly disappeared from Berserker's view. She wandered around ruefully for a while before admitting that she had escaped, moaning with displeasure. Of course, her howling would not bring her back; Berserker gave up the chase and quickly retreated.

Chapter 4-6

"...!"

The Rider of the Red shook - not from shame, but from joy. He was truly thankful that in this Great Holy Grail War, he found *someone* capable of harming him. The Archer of the Black possessed such immense skill with the bow; it was embarrassing to have thought that no one could surpass the Archer on his side.

The enemy Archer fired again. Judging from the ripples in the air and slight whisper of wind, it was five arrows released in quick succession. It would be simple enough to avoid it by leaping backwards - but the last two times he tried that, his actions had been seen through and he had been pierced by more arrows.

Could the Archer of the Red read his mind? Did he or his Noble Phantasm possess some form of prediction skill? Either way, Rider could not even move a single step, much less pursue the Berserker of the Black.



But most importantly, Archer's arrows were piercing Rider's protection - meaning that Archer was the *same kind of existence* as him. Rider was convinced that the Archer of the Black - armed with both pedigree and skill - would be his greatest enemy in this war.

Against this third attack, Rider fearlessly stepped forward - but his intents were correctly gauged again. Before he realized it, another arrow was sticking out of his knee. The vivid pain that it brought him - something he had not felt in a very long time - made it impossible for Rider to contain his swelling passion.

"Haha... hahahahaha! Yes, this! This is splendid, Archer! So you can harm me! You can kill me! Then it must be fated that we face one another! O Gods of Olympus, may you bring glory and honor to this battle!"

However, it would be too regrettable for them to vie for supremacy here when Rider was not even properly mounted. It would be such a shame to settle their duel in this lonely forest, with no allies to witness their splendor.

With their team's Berserker having already been defeated, and Archer in retreat, there was little reason for him to remain and carry on by himself. Rider put his fingers in his mouth and whistled; a chariot drawn by three splendid horses promptly appeared from the sky and came to a rest besides him.

Leaping onto the driver's position, Rider exclaimed.

"We will settle this at another time, Archer of the Black! Next time - I will see who you really are!"

With a crack of the whip, the horses raised their head and neighed, dashing off majestically into the sky with great force. It was clear that Rider was not escaping; he was postponing the war for another time.

* * *

The recipient on the other end, Archer, also smiled. However, his was somewhat bitter.

"I see... I suppose this is not impossible in the Holy Grail War, but... it seems fate sometimes turns its fangs against even those already dead."

The Archer of the Black knew him; he knew the identity of the Rider of the Red.

That Servant is known as one of the greatest heroes in history, with numerous legends befitting his fame. Most likely, he is the sole true exemplar among the participants of this Great War.

Blessed and exalted by the Olympian Gods, the man can nullify and deflect any and all attacks. In essence, he cannot be defeated by physical damage or even the 'normal' attacks of Servants.

Only those who possess **Divinity** - those like him, in whose veins flow the blood of a god - are permitted to harm him. Among the seven Servants of the Black, only Chiron possessed this trait. In other words, there can be no victory in this Great War without him personally defeating Rider of the Red.

However, it did not seem as though Rider realized Archer's identity. Truly, his boundless pride was his fatal defect as a warrior. Of course, no one had ever once made use of that defect; such a minor shortcoming meant little when one was being crushed by his overwhelming strength.

This time though, that pride would become the poison that took his life. Not only could Archer harm him - but he knew his true name, and his critical weak point.

"Regardless of the pains you take to mask your identities... there is one facet of common sense you can never overcome. Your true name is undisguisable

to the ones who knew you in life."

Rider is a powerful and exceptional hero. That is precisely why this Great War will destroy him.

* * *

The homunculus was practising his walking when an out-of-breath Rider, appearing slightly injured, suddenly flung open the door. He smiled and held out his hand to the homunculus.

"Now's a good time. Let's make a break for it!"

The homunculus immediately grasped the situation; he took Rider's hand and they ran out together. It felt far easier than moving normally - probably because Rider was pulling him on. Sadly, as he was still rather frail, their escape was slow.

They crossed paths with a number of homunculi as they ran down the halls, but none of them challenged Rider or the escapee. Instead, the homunculi watched them leave with cold eyes embued with some hints of emotions - pity, and faint hope.

The golems, however, did not treat them the same way. Roche's surveillance golems, improved under the guidance of Caster, dashed along the flagstones in careful pursuit. Naturally, they did not dare to impede Rider. Caster also did not seem inclined to follow them himself; after all, this was not his part of his duties.

Gasping for breath, the two finally managed to escape the castle. As they passed through the back gate at the eastern walls, they saw a swift-flowing river. The pouring of muddy water, like a relentless flood, was clearly set by thaumaturgical means. On the other side was a precipitous mountain that

looked to be a very arduous climb. However, that was where his freedom laid. A freedom of faint joy and cruel truths - but that was enough to be worth living for.

"Hm... make sure you don't let go of my hand, okay?"

The homunculus shook his head. The surrounding area was obviously criss-crossed with thaumaturgical traps and boundaries. They would be little trouble for a Servant, but that was not the case with the homunculus; it would take less than ten minutes for them to do away with this defective product, for whom any use of thaumaturgy would bring it to death's door. However, Astolfo was filled with confidence as he chuckled.

"That's why I have this. Tadaaaaa!"

He took out a thick, leather-bound book. The words and shapes on its cover were subdued and rather unremarkable, but even the homunculus could tell that it was related to thaumaturgy.

"A long time ago, I was saved by the lady Logistica. She gave me this then. Just possessing it lets me break through any sort of thaumaturgy!"

That's amazing, said the homunculus in wonder. It would seem this was another one of his Noble Phantasms. The paladin Astolfo had gone on adventures whenever the mood struck him, with many exploits to his name, and even reached the moon in the end. Naturally, he possessed rare Noble Phantasms.

"There's just... one slight problem... I, hehe, don't remember what this Noble Phantasm is called..."

Rider grinned shyly as he quietly revealed the ridiculous truth.

"But it's all right! Mostly, I only need to hold the book for it to take effect. At the very least, no modern magus should be able to harm me... though it might be different for one not from the modern era, like Caster."

...or perhaps something that is infinitely close to magic such as a **Reality Marble**. However, bounded fields of that type cannot be laid about like this. Besides, why would they use such a great thaumaturgy in the pursuit of a single homunculus?

"Umm... what was it again...?"

Luna
Universal

...

Break
Magic

...

Manual
G-Guide

... was it? That sounds a bit like it, but..."

You... should probably try to remember it before the fighting starts, the homunculus advised him. It would be beyond ridiculous if he were to lose the war without ever remembering his one of his own Noble Phantasms' names,

"I suppose... anyway, let's go."

Rider gripped the homunculus' hand firmly and leapt forward. The water in the river tried to intercept them by wrapping around them, but was repulsed by the book with little fanfare.

"How do you feel? Can you walk?"

A little, the homunculus replied, refusing Rider's motion to carry him. The homunculus wanted to walk on his own two feet, at least until he could walk no longer.

"Hmph... Archer taught you that, didn't he?"

Rider muttered, sounding somewhat disgruntled. He seemed rather displeased that the mere minutes Archer had spent with the homunculus was enough to convince him to follow his teachings.

"All right, I'll stay by your side until you let me know otherwise."

The homunculus began to walk. Although his feet did not strain much, his stamina was a different issue. Naturally, the more tired he became, the slower his pace. His heels and thighs began to creak and screech. "Are you okay?" Rider asked again and again, and though the homunculus persisted, there was only so much he could do with one night's practice. After an hour, the homunculus could no longer take another step without leaning on Rider's shoulder.

"I think you did well."

Rider comforted him as he steadily navigated the mountain trail through the dark. When the homunculus looked up, he could not see a single star in the sky. Perhaps there was some sort of thaumaturgical glamor in place that caused those affected to lose their sense of direction. Most likely, compasses and maps would not work here either. However, Rider continued to walk in a straight line, as though sure of his way.

"Aren't you glad that I'm here with you?"

Rider wore a proud smile. *I won't be able to see this smile again by tomorrow*, the homunculus thought with some regret. Rider will return to the Great War - and he will have to think about how to live his life. It was highly likely that he would die; it was also quite possible that this Holy Grail War would end him. In all likelihood, this would be the last time they saw one another in life.

Rider is a hero, an adventurer and most importantly - a Servant, summoned to this era to fight. He is an entirely different existence from the homunculus who was made to be spent.

"Something on your mind?"

The homunculus was evasive in his response. Nobody needed to hear about his feelings of worthlessness and inferiority.

There was not a sound in the dark forest. He could barely hear anything, not even the cry of a bird, except for the rustle of swaying branches and grass. Was it some form of counter-measure against familiars? The forest was utterly covered with boundary fields.

"Ahh... this sure brings me back! Did you know I was once turned into a tree?"

Rider looked up and laughed as he talked about his past failures.

Although many are the glorious tales of Astolfo, it is said that he has made just as many mistakes. He was continually defeated in riding tournaments, fell victim to many thaumaturgical traps and even lost - in a matter of hours - the reason that he had picked up at the moon. However, Astolfo never faltered; he did not seem to consider failure or defeat as blunders in the first place.

"It's not bad being a tree, you know. Everything is calm and peaceful. Birds will sit on my arms without a care in the world. And the deer and wolves and such don't mind coming close to me."

How many in the world would be able to think like him? A normal person would feel only despair at such a fate. However - perhaps due to the light-hearted disposition he had been born with - Rider always lived positively.

"So how do you want to live from now on?"

Unexpectedly, Rider aimed a difficult question at him. Archer had asked the homunculus the same thing. However, at the moment, life itself was his goal; he did not yet have the luxury of considering *how* to live it. That was the only answer he could give.

The forest they were in was much like his own life - sunken in darkness and shadows. He wandered without aims or purposes, simply struggling to stay upright on the path.

"I see... well, I hope you find a way out soon."

Rider's voice was filled with sympathy from the bottom of his heart. His words shook the homunculus' small soul.

Yes, I truly hope so... I hope that afterwards, we can talk to our hearts' content.

Rider stopped. His grip on the homunculus' hand tightened, causing him some pain.

Saber was blocking their path together with his Master, Gordes. They must have gone ahead to wait for them. Saber was expressionless as always, while Gordes glared at the two of them with clear displeasure. Rider sighed and said.

"Are you sure you're not keeping a secret or two from me? You're not a Servant or something, are you?"

I don't think so, the homunculus thought. However, that was difficult even for Rider to believe. After all, why else would they go so far for a single homunculus?

Gordes did not hide his annoyance as he said.

"We cannot allow that homunculus to escape. Remove yourself, Rider."

However, it was obvious that Rider would not willingly accept that.

"Nope."

Rider rejected Gordes' words out of hand, so quickly that he did not even

seem to have considered them. Gordes became even more vexed, gnashing his teeth to control his emotions.

"Saber, restrain Rider. You can do that much, can't you?"

As commanded, Saber stepped forward.

"Huh? What? Has your Master lost his mind?"

Silent as ever, Saber stepped up to Rider in a single stride and grabbed his arm and neck, pulling him away from the homunculus and forcing him to the earth. Having lost his support, the homunculus collapsed like a marionette with its strings severed.

"Wha...?!"

The difference in power was too great between the two Servants. Rider kicked and thrashed with his legs even as Saber pressed down on him.

"W-Wait, stop! Let me go, Saber! Let me go!"

"How dare Darnic send me on such a menial task..."

The homunculus laid on the ground as he looked up at Gordes. His eyes did not express hatred or seek pity. Instead, those inorganic, reflective lenses peered directly into the human being called Gordes.

"...!"

Gordes clicked his tongue and grabbed one of the thin wrists of the homunculus. The act contained traces of both compulsive frustration and fear.

Why must I fear a simple homunculus...? It is unforgivable, as a magus...

"You have troubled me enough... Caster is going to grind you down and use you for a golem. You should thank him. He will turn this frail body into one

made of stone."

There was only silence. The homunculus waded through the sludge of his exhausted mind and thought. His wrist was being restricted, so tightly so that it felt about to snap apart; the man before him had captured him. It must have been under the directive of Caster. He did not understand why they were so obstinate about him. Nevertheless, if - as Gordes had suggested - it was his fate to be crushed, then he must make a choice if he wanted to escape this situation.

However, it was a choice that the homunculus simply could not make - for it was a decision that only living beings, with their own clear paths to the future, could take. After all, how could a transient existence such as himself subsist by trampling on the lives of others? It would go against the natural order of things.

Just before he stopped resisting entirely, Rider's shout pierced his ears.

"You fool! What are you thinking?! Don't hesitate! Don't give up! You want to live, don't you? You said you don't want to die! So keep trying until your last breath! You have that right! No matter what anybody else says - I, Astolfo, will accept you!"

His words forcibly pulled the homunculus' collapsing mind back together. Yes... at the very least, had he not made the decision to 'live'? Regardless of the misfortunes that might mire his life, he wished to live - so that he could stand before the one who had saved him without any hint of shame.

Taken aback by the sudden outburst, Gordes turned and shouted down on Rider instead. The homunculus tried to grasp the suitable means; what he needed right now was any form of 'destruction'. He made his decision - to pour every bit of strength he had into his restrained wrist, and kill the magus before him.

His Magic Circuits accelerated to the point of nearly incinerating his flesh. It was much the same as when he had destroyed the reinforced glass. He perceived the composition of the human body, attuned himself to it and

aimed to destroy it.

"What...?"

Gordes noticed the excitation of his Magic Circuits and stared at him in shock. The nameless homunculus gripped his arm and prepared himself as he wove the words of the beginning.

"

Straße \ gehen

Logic path \ open

...!"

The prana flowing through his entire body converted to a form most suitable for ripping flesh and crushing bone. His palm became the barrel of a gun - the sheath of a sword - and what it fired was a bullet or perhaps blade that would not only destroy Gordes' arm, but mercilessly devour his heart.

"*Kuh...Shapeshift iron arm!*^{Anamorphism eisen arm"}

Gordes' barked-out spell pierced through the fatal flaw of the homunculus' thaumaturgy, which brought destruction by appropriately converting the form of energy based on the target's composition. Gordes simply needed to change the composition itself, and the thaumaturgy would become little more than a small-scale explosion.

They were simply too ill matched. The homunculus - a failed product casted from appropriated Einzbern alchemy - was fatally incompatible with someone who had actually studied such thaumaturgy.

Gordes cowered in the face of the blast that had been meant to kill him. However, after the long escape, the homunculus had already reached the limits of his endurance.

"You... insolent...!"

Gorde shook with fury. He was not actually injured; the pain was lessening already and his wound would take mere seconds to heal with thaumaturgy. The issue, however, was that he was wounded by what was supposed to be nothing more than a prana battery - and with an attack that had unmistakably been meant to eliminate him.

It tried to kill me...!

Gordes was correct. In his own way, the homunculus had mustered as much killing intent as he could before unleashing his spell. It was an impossible mutiny. The prey which he ought to devour and expend suddenly turned around and bit him.

On top of all the stress that Gordes had already suffered - this was the worst, final blow.

"Enough! *You* would try to kill *me*?! A homunculus?! Kill me?! Never! Never, never, never...!"

Half-crazed, Gordes kicked at the homunculus with all his rage. Darnic's command had already completely left his mind. His voice was grating and shrill, with all the pride and elegance of magi thrown to the wayside.

Gordes went further. His iron fist punched again and again into the withered body of the homunculus.

The homunculus had already been close to death when he utilized thaumaturgy. He had no power left to resist and laid face-down on the cold dirt.

Ah... I'm going to die, the homunculus realized subconsciously. Even if by some miracle Gordes forgave him, he could no longer do a thing. After all, the punch just now had demolished his heart. Judging from the frenzied expression on Gordes' face, it also seemed unlikely he was in a forgiving mood.

Left with no choice, the homunculus gave in. In the end, it did not matter which card he played. The hand he had been dealt was simply too poor...

"Stop him, Saber! Stop your Master! Quickly...!"

Saber remained silent. Rider tried with all his might to throw off Saber's arm, but it did not budge in the slightest. Rider gazed directly into Saber's eyes and shouted.

"We took form in this world to have our wishes granted... but *that doesn't mean we can just accept anything that happens!* Have you forgotten how to be a hero?! I haven't! I am Servant Rider... but I was Charlemagne's paladin, Astolfo! And I won't abandon him! *I won't!*"

Saber's hand twitched.

* * *

The smell of dirt and grass and wood filled the homunculus' nostrils. It was not so bad to end up covered in mud, he thought. At the very least, he was going to die with the great sky overhead, and the vast earth underneath. This might be a more pleasant end than the one waiting for those homunculi left at the castle, he thought.

Although drained of emotions towards all other things, carved within him was a singular sense of guilt and regret towards Rider. He felt sorry that all of Rider's help had come to naught.

Gordes stood before him. The homunculus did not make a decision so much as let the flow take him where it would. He opened his mouth and panted as though having just completed a sprint.

The scene clouded over - perhaps from fear, or despair - and he was glad that he could no longer see the fist closing in on him.

And so the nameless homunculus, born into the world with no meaning, would now die in the same fashion. That was how it should have ended.

"Stop, Master."

Saber placed his hand firmly on Gordes' shoulder. Gordes turned around in disbelief. Saber had ignored his command to restrain Rider and was facing him instead. Rider rushed over to the side of the homunculus in panic.

"What did you say, Saber?"

"I said, stop. If possible, I would like you to heal him and let him go."

"What are you saying?"

Gordes' voice quivered. Such was his anger that he no longer had any expressions on his face. However, he took a deep breath and spoke in the strict tone of a Master.

"Do not utter such nonsense, Saber... why must we heal and release it?"

"I appeal to your good nature, Master. It would not disadvantage us greatly to grant him salvation."

"Enough. Just be quiet."

"Master..."

"Shut up! Shut up shut up shut up! You're my Servant, aren't you? So follow my orders! A mere familiar is not entitled to give me *any* opinions! Just shut up and do what I tell you to do!"

Having come to this stage, Gordes glared at Saber with clear enmity.

This treasonous worm would defy its own Master!

He truly regretted using that second Command Spell.

What 'hero'? What 'Servant'? It could not even accomplish the simpliest of orders...!

"Will you not save him?"

"I told you to shut...!"

In an instant, Gordes' consciousness was blown away by the fist Saber sunk into his abdomen. Completely ignoring the collapsing Gordes, Saber turned his back on him and looked straight at Rider, holding the hand of the homunculus.

"Saber...?"

Without answering Rider's call, Saber approached the two of them while dispelling his woven plates, sword and even armor, baring his chest.

Saber knelt before the dying homunculus. Rider glared at him angrily.

"It's too late... it's too late, damn it! Why did it take you so long?! We could have stopped that idiot of a Master before he did anything!"

It was only natural that Rider lamented. Saber should have stopped his Master as soon as he could. Even he would not be foolish enough to use a Command Spell here. If Saber had done everything he could, he would have prevented the death of the homunculus. He nodded sadly.

"Yes... you are right. Yet again, I have strayed onto the wrong path. In my doubt and bewilderment, I have elected for the worst option."

It was no different from then... he had thought that his acts would be able to end the conflict.

He had always made the wrong decisions at the most critical of moments. Bound to his own desires, he tried to overlook the weak who cowered before him. He did not seek salvation for himself - so he ignored the silent cries of those who had. Such meanness and wickedness were certainly not things he had striven for.

Would he repeat the same mistakes even in a second life? Saber's heart tightened in remorse and self-hatred.

"However... there is still a chance. It is not over yet."

"You think I believe you...?!"

Rider's temper flared again at his ridiculous words. Right away, he made a fist and tried to punch him - but then froze.

"Wha...?!"

The noise was deeply unpleasant, like the ripping of long, thick grass. And spraying in all directions, was blood, blood, blood...

It all came from Saber's chest.

Saber tore open a hole with his own two hands. All thoughts of violence forgotten, a dazed Rider could only watch the alien scene unfold as Saber gouged at his own innards.

"What, are you...?"

"Perhaps this is not enough to atone for my sins. In fact, I may simply be burdening him with the same ignoble fate and untimely end as I. But... this life is something I ought to offer him."

The heart that Saber had scooped out was unbelievably crimson. Raising the homunculus with one hand, he made him swallow the heart.

His act was unreal... grotesque... but it was not irrational. The swallowed

heart eventually reached where the heart ought to be and began to beat strongly. He was alive. The homunculus had undoubtedly been resurrected.

However, it was all an equivalent exchange. The price of saving the nameless homunculus must be paid by Saber. He must give up the Holy Grail, give up his second life - and give up all of his desires.

"Why... why did you...?"

Rider asked, dumbstruck. Saber smiled softly at him.

"Thank you, Rider. I have almost lost sight of the thing I was seeking."

Saber's feet began to turn into golden particles. He was not turning to Spirit Form, but into oblivion. As he had lost the pathway to remain in the current world, he must now separate from it and disappear. A Servant's spiritual core exists in the heart and head; having ripped it out himself, he could only fade away.

Saber was suffering a second death. There was no other way to put it. There must be so many things he had not yet accomplished. However, Saber seemed entirely at peace.

"No, Saber... you can't! Saber! Don't leave!"

Rider yelled at him with a mix of disbelief, grief and anger on his face. As he trembled and held back tears, Rider looked for all the world like a lovely maiden. The ones who had fought beside him must have done all they could to impress him...

To consider such trifling things even in such a state... I must be hardier a fool than I had realized.

A bitter smile appeared on Saber's face.

"Why did you do it...?"

Despite the pain in Rider's voice, Saber did not intend to explain his motives. How could someone as pure as Rider understand his agony? If anything, he would feel only shame if he were to ramble on at his moment of death.

However, there was one thing that Siegfried was certain of.

Yes... this is a good end...

As he murmured to himself, Saber was extinguished. For a moment, Rider sat on the ground in a trance, until the homunculus began to cough. He hurriedly checked his pulse and pressed an ear against his chest. He could feel a real, powerful pulse of life.

"You're alive... yes... thank you... thank you, thank you...!"

Rider pressed the homunculus' hand into his cheek, ignoring the blood and filth. He did not care about what would come. He only wanted to express his relief at this fortunate turn of events. After all, the Rider of the Black did not possess any reason. He did not care at all what would happen in the coming days of the war. More specifically... he forgot entirely about the fact that their camp had just lost its Saber and was now in a highly disadvantageous position.



The innocent Astolfo simply celebrated and cried. He did not think about the attacks to come; even if he had, he would only have come to the conclusion that he should celebrate the homunculus' survival first.

"Ahh..."

Rider was overjoyed at the small sound that escaped - not from him, but the unconscious homunculus.

"Are you all right?! You are, aren't you?! Can you stand? All right, good! Now you can..."

Rider could not speak another word. Having closed his eyes earlier, he had missed the transformation that the homunculus' body had undergone.

"What... happened to me?"

The homunculus managed to raised his upper body off the ground, his eyes filled with wonder.

It could hardly be helped. The nameless homunculus had became an existence that never once existed in the great annals of alchemy.

And so, the Great Holy War was thrown into chaos at its onset by the quick loss of the Saber of the Black. Things would only continue to spiral out of control from here on.

* * *

"This was my garden in ages past... the **Aerial Gardens of Vanity**.^{Hanging Gardens of Babylon} It has been too long... Well, what do you make of it, Master?"

Shirou breathed out in amazement at Semiramis' words. An unimaginably enormous construction stood before him, built from systematically ordered floating masses, floors of marble and many pillars. Every kind of plant life were entangled and intertwined all over in a unification of unsightly disorder and luxurious beauty.

This was less of a garden and more of a fortress... and less of a fortress and more of a floating weapon. There was no mistaking it; this aerial garden was a flying castle.

"Wonderful... and I trust my requests were properly met?"

"But of course, my Master... let us activate the Garden as soon as Rider and Archer return. Those dismal Servants of Black will certainly lose their wits when they witness this!"

Assassin cackled in glee.

"Thank you. This is a golden opportunity for us, now that the Saber of the Black has vanished due to some unforeseen trouble. No doubt the Saber on our side will move in as well."

"It will be the decisive battle, then... yes, a conflict never before seen, sprung from the very myths of yore!"

Although the Black camp had quickly lost their Saber, they still possessed six Servants. The Red camp had lost Berserker as well. Of course, losing a Saber was far more of a handicap. However, the tables could be turned at any moment.

"In any case, the next battle will decide whether we can obtain the Greater Grail."

Shirou's voice proved his determination - and by contrast, his indescribable calm; it was the pitilessness with which he would eliminate all who opposed him by any means necessary.

In order to take his wish into his own hands, he would not hesitate to loot and pillage until he acquired everything he needed. It was not cruelty in the slightest - but merely the act of an unshakable will of steel.

A long time ago, the boy had asked: why, *why* were we not permitted...? There had been no salvation - only the sweep of despair and regret.

This time, he would obtain the Holy Grail and devote his entire being into questioning Him.

Is my desire worthy of your blessing?

"Let us go, Assassin. I won't let that tragedy happen again... the Greater Grail is ours."

Shirou looked up at the tall, clear sky with eyes filled with resolve.

Even now, the boy carried the dream within his heart.

End Volume 1