

鎌池和馬

イラスト／はいむらきよたか

新約

禁書目録

インデックス

22

とある魔術の

魔術

ヨコ

22



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New Testament  
Toaru Majutsu no Index 22

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Great Demon Coronzon has revealed its true nature. Aleister has been stabbed and no one knows what will become of the world. Kamijou Touma and Accelerator stand against it, however...

As the world's collapse approaches in Scotland, Mikoto and Shokuhou see a surprising conclusion!!

But even the all-controlling Coronzon made one miscalculation.

Hamazura Shiage. To save Takitsubo who disappeared before his eyes, that true Level 0 and unpredictable trickster takes action.

The fate of the world has been left with the three protagonists. When every part of New Testament crosses paths, the greatest showdown begins!!



か-12-91



新約とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス  
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鎌池和馬



電撃文庫



Kamachi Kazuma

復讐の方法は一つだけではない。そんな訳で世界はあの人の手に渡ってしまいました。さて、これまで上を見上げて好き放題斜張する側だった人が、実際に物事を変えられる立場に立つたら……？

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Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I am slowly drawing in the back country of Hiroshima.

新約

# ある魔術の 禁書目録

インデックス

鎌池和馬

イラスト  
はいむらきよたか

22

## QUEEN BRITANNIA

A floating fortress on the sea. It is a luxurious passenger ship over two hundred meters in size for the British royal family. After being decommissioned from military use and docked at a harbor, it is currently being used as a tourist attraction. The ship's strength, derived from the various magical symbols woven into its design, is sturdy enough to brace the various obstacles and attacks of the magical kingdom of Great Britain.



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488	Epilogue	A Man's Life Comes to an End After Receiving Countless Wounds Over the Course of a Long Journey (Untitled)

“It is about time I stepped  
into the spotlight.”

Aleister’s child and an existence free of original sin

Lilith







“Magic is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will.” — Aleister Crowley

From “Magick in Theory and Practice” by Aleister Crowley

“Magic is the science and art of causing change in consciousness to occur in conformity with Will.” —Dion Fortune

From “The Essential Golden Dawn: An Introduction to High Magic” by C Cicero and ST Cicero

# **Prologue: (Untitled)**

## **ARCHENEMY\_with\_the\_ABYSS**

- England – British Museum – Special Repair Room

“Lola Stuart is supposedly Aleister Crowley’s second daughter.”

“What about it?”

“But we only have Coronzon’s word to go on there. That demon obstructs the world’s and people’s bonds, but you expect her to just tell the truth like that? Not a chance.”

“Lola Stuart first appears in the documents as the Anglican archbishop in 1909. Ever since, she has appeared at important turning points in history while never seeming to age.”

“What’s wrong with that? That is the same year that Aleister thought he summoned Coronzon.”

“Would his second daughter, Lola, really be fully grown by that time? His first daughter, Lilith, was only born in 1904.”

“...”

“Then who is this?”

- Scotland - Edinburgh Castle – Graveyard

“It’s okay, Aleister.”

“And that’s enough, Coronzon. Cut the act. Lola Stuart was never here. Aleister’s second daughter was somewhere else entirely and lived a perfectly normal life without knowing about any of this. Inside and out, you were only a created demon!! The real Lola would never have done that!!!!”

“Hee hee hee hee hee hee!! I killed him, I killed him! I – killed – him!! Now I can finally cut all ties with Mathers. I can say goodbye to that damned contract!! Ah ha ha! I had to wait so long to burn this coffin. Ah ha ha!!”

“You wanted to save your daughter? Not happening! Lola Stuart? Who’s that? Did you really think you would have a chance to make amends!? Hee ha ha! You wanna know why she must have hated you!? Because you’d mistake a complete stranger for your own daughter!!”

“...”

“Not even the Morning Star and Lord of the Flies have their own physical body. And the idea that incubuses and succubusses do is only a theory born of religious debate. ...It’s me. Only the Great Demon Coronzon has obtained a physical body under her own power!! You don’t stand a chance against that, do you? You struggled constantly trying to give a body to your Holy Guardian Angel, but even that master plan of yours came crashing down the instant you heard the name Lola!”

“But what to do now? I am finally free. After so many years of denial, I don’t want to waste my very bite on some hard and stale bread. Ha ha! I know. Yes, that’s perfect. I think I’ll go tear Lilith to pieces!! Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

“Misaka, can you take care of her wound? I’ll do something about Coronzon, so use your power or whatever else it takes to overturn this ending!!”

“I’ll try, but I can’t make any promises. Shokuhou, you help too!!”

“Kamijou-san, what are you going to do?”

“Me?”

“I will smash that nonsensical illusion to pieces!!!!!!”

•England – Highway – Inside a Truck

“Um, uh?”

“What?”

“W-well, why did you...save me???”

“People controlling others and people being controlled is the most basic form of cruelty. That’s what was at the root of the century-long feud between Coronzon, Mathers, and Aleister. So I was on guard. After seeing it so many times, I could figure out how it worked and how to fight it.”

“...”

“You belong to me.”

“I...”

“I don’t really get all this about a Great Demon or Coronzon or whatever, but I won’t let her interfere now. It’s up to me to decide what you do and what kind of ending you get. It’s all up to me. Listen, I won’t let anyone waste you on some meaningless cruelty. I’ll use every bit of your life for something useful. I don’t care what kind of life and death is appropriately ‘demonic’. Whether you end up smiling in the sunny side of the world, end up living in peace for a hundred years to come, or end up surrounded by tons of friends is all for me to decide! So don’t question my decisions!! You’re an artificial being? I don’t care. You were born, so you should enjoy your life. Got that, Qliphah Puzzle 545!?”

“Yesh!! I will keep that in mind!!”

“Let’s start the counterattack.”

“If Coronzon has made her move, then things must not have gone the way Aleister hoped. They went to Scotland, right? That’s the next stage. So you’ll go and save the country you made a mess of.”

“Tell me everything. Because that dumbass couldn’t end it after all.”

•Scotland – Side of the Highway – Inside a Stolen Car

“Hamazura.”

“Did you see her face?”

“She looked like she just accepted it as inevitable. Dion Fortune did!! Are you kidding me!? She should have cried and yelled!!”

“I’ll do it.”

“I will take back Dion Fortune. No matter what it takes!!”

And...

And...

And...

Morning arrived equally to all.

The sky above was blue.

It was so very equal and cold that some felt despair or a great weight bearing down on them.

He could stand it no longer.

He felt anger.

If he let it build up inside him any further, it would tear apart his own muscles before he could direct it toward his opponent.

That was honestly what Kamijou Touma thought.

“...nzon...”

He was at Scotland’s Edinburgh Castle.

In the old graveyard there, the spiky-haired boy clenched his right fist so hard he thought he would break his own bones.

His nails literally did dig into his palm enough for dark red blood to drip down.

There was no reason at all to wait a second longer.

“Kee hee.”

That beige habit had likely been chosen for its subdued color.

Her skin was white and her eyes blue.

And her extremely long and sinister blonde hair danced behind her as if in a storm.

Something could be heard loudly beating at the air. It was her thin wings which shined with a divine light yet took the wicked form of a bat's wings.

A human lay trampled at her feet.

That human had struggled and struggled while crawling through the blood and mud for over a century. That human had clenched her teeth and used up every last bit of her own life in the belief she could finally save her daughter here. And yet she was about to breathe her last thinking that she had been stabbed by her own beloved daughter.

The truth was different.

Lola Stuart was not Aleister Crowley's daughter. She had not hijacked that body to use it as a human shield. That was a vessel of flesh that Coronzon had created from scratch. That temporary vessel visible before them was no more than an ugly toy that Great Demon had created.

Was Aleister at fault for not catching on?

Was she simply a heartless parent for not noticing that this archbishop had risen to the forefront far too soon after her second daughter had been born?

Of course not.

Lola was not a rare name, so it was not surprising Aleister had never connected the two before the attack on the Windowless Building.

She had been deceived by the impact of the supposed revelation.

And she had not had time to carefully inspect the claim. She had needed to act quickly to seal away Academy City's technology so it could not be misused by the Great Demon who had taken on the full authority of board chairman. Without the Bank or network to rely on, Aleister had been forced to rely only on her own memories. One theory said that the Anglican archbishop was her second daughter and other information suggested they were not at all connected like she had initially assumed, but how was she supposed to make a proper judgment given the circumstances!?

Yet this was how it turned out?

Would she never learn the truth and would she meet her end filled with despair?

Would she remain fooled by the sweet but utterly worthless words of a demon?

Could that really be allowed to happen?

Aleister Crowley the Human was by no means a good person, but that was no reason to allow her soul to be trampled like this.

So...

“Coroooooooooooooooooooooooc

He finally exploded.

Kamijou Touma did not resist that torrent of power. In fact, he viewed it like

a great wind as he ran straight toward the golden demon. From the very first move, he used his right fist: Imagine Breaker. No matter how absurdly powerful this being was...no, the further removed his opponent was from normal physical phenomena, the more vividly this boy's power would manifest itself.

There was precedent.

There was the artificially-created Kazakiri Hyouka, there was Archangel Gabriel who had existed since time immemorial, and there was Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass who had lurked in the depths of Academy City.

Angels and demons.

Those beings were so ridiculously beyond the normal that those words barely seemed to hold any weight at all. However. The further she was removed from ordinary physical risks such as metal pipes, knives, and guns, the more critical the damage Imagine Breaker could do to Great Demon Coronzon.

It was like a golden wind.

The hair seemed far too sinister and massive to have come from a human body, but the boy slipped through the gaps and finally arrived right in front of Coronzon.

He had no reason at all to hold back.

He took aim for the delicate line of her jaw.

And Kamijou Touma swung his fist!!

A dreadfully dull sound followed.

And afterwards, all sound vanished.

With his fist still held out, Kamijou Touma's subjective sense of time vanished for a bit.

Finally.

He had finally done it.

“Isis, Osiris, and Horus. I exist beyond all Aeons, so did you really think that would be enough to break me?”

“Not good, human.”

Othinus whispered from his shoulder.

She was a complete Magic God, a human who had risen to the utter mastery of magic. And in exchange for losing all that power, she had been given the stabilized form of a palm-sized fairy.

That may have been why she understood.

This was a warning from the god who informed warriors of their death, so it carried quite a bit of danger.

“She is the same as me right now!! She is not an ongoing magical phenomenon! She is a paranormal being that has already acquired the final result of a physical body! Just like you can’t restore burned paper by touching the ashes, your Imagine Breaker cannot defeat her!!”

“I am a demon, but not from the Qliphoth where the forces of evil gather. I am the Great Demon hidden by the holy Sephiroth. I dwell in the same abyss as Da’at.”

The unbroken illusion produced a dreadful straining noise as it slowly moved before his eyes.

She held her left hand straight forward and pulled her right hand back.

And, as if overpowered, it was Kamijou Touma who took a step back.

“Every number is the same. My right hand contains Nuit of Resurrection. Watch as the possibilities expand and surpass the bounds of the finite. My left hand contains Hadit of Vengeance. The smallest point gathers and concentrates all forces to create a single meaning. Thus, an attack shall be released from the infinite acceleration of the Circle of Ra-Hoor-Khuit and

shall appear on the surface layer of this world.”

Now, did Kamijou Touma realize that was the pose for wielding a rapier?

And before even that, what was the fate of one who had thoughtlessly touched an untouchable taboo?

Lola Stuart, Great Demon Coronzon, moved her lips in a bewitching and mechanical way.

No.

A different face clearly appeared from her long, long blonde hair.

“Magick: Flaming\_Sword. Manifest thyself through descent of the Sephirah and bathe him in thy power.”

It happened suddenly.

“No!”

Kamijou Touma must not have had much of a choice.

But the small god managed to direct a shout of despair toward the swiftly moving boy.

“Wait, human!! The world’s reference point is not enough to suppress this attack!!”

Yes.

Magic God Othinus had once obliterated Kamijou Touma’s body with the brute force of her crossbow.

A moment later, everyone witnessed that instant.

With a dull sound, that right hand and Kamijou Touma himself were utterly destroyed.

# **Chapter 1: (Untitled) – Break\_a\_Right\_and\_Hope**

## Part 1

Morning also arrived for Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou. It arrived equally and cruelly. To those who could not see what the future held, that cold blue morning felt like it would tear apart their hearts.

The seemingly malicious early morning chill snuck into a steel box.

Oppressive air filled the stolen four-wheel-drive vehicle.

And there was an unnatural gap in the back seat.

“You want to...”

“...save Dion Fortune?”

Magic Gods Nephthys and Niang-Niang exchanged a look as the only remaining back seat passengers.

“Um, do you even understand the situation here?” asked the one with long silver hair, brown skin, and bandages wrapping her alluring body. “Dion Fortune is gone. That change is irreversible. I’m sure someone your age is very interested in how babies are made, but that method doesn’t let you resurrect the dead, you know?”

“It is possible to convert the living into the dead. And that includes special types of dead. For example, Nephthys is a collection of the many slaves buried with the pharaohs in their pyramids and I’m a Shijie-Xian who rose to the level of a sage through death. We cast off our old selves to achieve our goals. But not even we can convert the dead into the living. Unless we entirely remake the world. See, it’s a lot like returning a compressed diamond into the original carbon.”

“Just to clarify, you can’t just burn the diamond into ashes. That would be creating new carbon, not returning it to the original carbon. That’s how difficult it is to reclaim something that was lost.”

Hamazura held the entire set of 78 cards that had once formed a girl. He had every last card. It was a lot like an electronic device created by a Martian. How did it work, what had broken, and how could you make it work again? The boy had to start his investigation at that level.

And on top of that, the two knowledgeable Magic Gods were telling him it was hopeless.

Just because both used eggs, knowing how to make omurice did not tell you how to hatch a chick from omurice. Anything he tried would be wasted effort, so he should just give up.

“...”

The ignorant boy and girl’s answer was obvious.

Sometimes, people gained the power to keep going because they were ignorant.

Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou did not speak a word as they opened the two front doors.

If the Magic Gods were not going to help, there was no point in staying with them. Those useless gods could stay in the parked vehicle forever if they wanted.

Niang-Niang, the girl in a modified China dress, sighed in exasperation from the back seat.

“You should probably take your phone. Aneri-chan’s sure to be a powerful ally.”

Hamazura Shiage could be sloppy about things like this.

He made sure to remove the phone from the navigation system holder and Aneri repeatedly used the camera flash to protest nearly being left behind, but he had something else to focus on right now.

To make sure he did not forget, he grabbed a stick of gum from the

dashboard.

It was completely ordinary gum that could be bought pretty much anywhere, but he had promised to teach a girl how to blow bubbles with it before she disappeared due to no fault of her own.

Bandaged Nephthys sounded disappointed.

“You’re really going, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“There is almost no chance you will get what you want. In fact, the odds are good you won’t survive this. And here’s a quick divine oracle for you: once you take a single step outside the position of observer, you have a 100% chance of losing. That alone I can guarantee you.”

“Curtana Second’s blade remains chipped after its clash with the Original. The UK’s occult system is currently unstable. That said, the system of this magic kingdom is still supported by the queen’s Second, so it is nothing to sneeze at.”

“I’m not some powerful badass who can accomplish anything without batting an eye. I don’t expect this to go exactly the way I want.”

“That’s fine then.” Nephthys giggled. “Just make sure you don’t get too focused on whether you win or lose. If you don’t lose sight of your true goal, you just might find one of the few opportunities in your grasp.”

That was the end of it.

Hamazura and Takitsubo stepped out of the parked four-wheel-drive vehicle’s opened doors and entered the outside world.

It was morning.

For better or for worse, another day was beginning in that frigid blue world.

“What should we do, Hamazura?” asked his girlfriend in a pink track suit and

sweater.

She seemed to have recovered her strength by leaving the vehicle and getting a breath of fresh air. At the very least, she was not as weak as she had been while receiving that strange interference from Annie and Westcott.

Meanwhile, there was one thing Hamazura had to admit first and foremost. They could not take the first step without this.

“I don’t know...”

Yes.

He knew he did not know.

That might seem obvious, but it could be surprisingly difficult. Especially for sensitive teenagers who dealt in the invisible currency of pride.

But once he was aware of that, it did not take long to identify what hurdles he needed to clear and start thinking about how to clear them.

Do not hesitate.

Everyone starts out as a beginner, so do not let a sense of inferiority consume you.

They had no way of knowing it, but that process was the same as the initial trial given to neophytes in the Golden cabal.

“But there are apparently people here in the UK who do know. So let’s get in contact with them. I’m sure they hide in the shadows of history and rarely show themselves, but I bet they’ll show up if we do something they can’t possibly ignore. Although I doubt they’ll be friendly.”

“If only we could have asked those Magic Gods.”

Despite saying that, Takitsubo did not look back.

It was true Nephthys and Niang-Niang could be viewed as treasure troves of

knowledge, but they were not someone who could be forcibly restrained. After his time being bossed around by powerful espers in Academy City, Hamazura knew all too well just how frightening an individual with an irregular power could be. He could not imagine what a Magic God really was, but they had caused Dion Fortune to tremble. And Fortune had easily driven back Annie and Westcott who had applied so much pressure to Level 4 Takitsubo Rikou without so much as laying a finger on her. Those Magic Gods definitely had something. And if trying to force those two into it only got him and Takitsubo subdued in return, who would save Fortune?

If he could not ask them about it, he had to forget about them entirely.

There was more than one path here, so the Magic Gods were not a hurdle he had to clear no matter what.

He would go with a more likely option.

No matter how much the UK tried to pretend otherwise, some deep part of the nation had failed to respond to this unexpected situation and it was barely functioning anymore. He had seen plenty of that this night. So unlike the Magic Gods who were always giving such bewitching smiles, there was an opening in the UK. He had no idea what he could accomplish on the national level, but he was glad to see a possibility there, even if it would be like threading a needle.

And with that in mind...

“Is this a farm?” he said. “No, I think it’s an outdoor shooting range.”

“What are the UK’s gun laws like?”

“We’re talking about a country that still goes on fox hunts in the mountains in an age of AI-controlled pet robots. Their laws have to be laxer than Japan’s.”

“I heard they don’t do those hunts anymore. The rules changed.”

“Wait, then what are the gun laws like???”

There was a simple wooden fence, a meadow, and a small shack.

Dawn had already arrived, but this was not a 24-hour convenience store or gyudon shop. The British people would only now be waking up and preparing breakfast. He doubted anyone would be here for a few more hours.

He was not calm enough to try picking the dimple lock. It was said that Academy City's technology was about thirty years ahead of the outside world, so all he had to do was cut the wiring to the electronic home security system and then bash in the lock with a large rock.

(Okay, this should get us a weapon. But...)

Hamazura glanced over at the items leaning up against the wall.

(A shotgun? No, I can't tell what these people are going to do just by looking at them, so I want to keep my distance as much as possible. Do they have any rifles here?)

He was bothered by the analysis going through his own head and he proceeded to borrow a bolt-action hunting rifle and some ammo. But why did they have guns just sitting around at the shooting range? Was it storage for the regulars, or were they for beginners like rental skis and surfboards? ... The most frightening part was all the bottles of scotch sitting out on the work bench. He did not know what local law said, but he could guess how the guns here were actually used.

“Hamazura.”

His girlfriend in the pink track suit and fluffy sweater tossed him something. He caught it and found it was a thick rubber band. That was perfect. He used it to hold together the set of 78 tarot cards.

Then he held the rifle between his shoulder and neck. It had an amber-polished wooden stock, so he guessed it was a hobbyist weapon, not a practical one.

However, the gun was not the most important part.

He found a gas-powered lawnmower.

Academy City's cleaning robots could not get out the most stubborn stains. In those cases, a special hand-pushed cleaner would be used to get the building floors squeaky clean. This machine had a similar silhouette to those.

If he was trying to mimic the Nazca Lines, he could draw straight lines by creating guidelines with stakes and plastic rope.

He looked up in the blue sky.

It was mostly clear, with just a few clouds. The satellites would have a good view.

"Okay, let's draw up some big crop circles. Big enough to see from space using the satellites."

"What pattern would 'they' most likely respond to?"

Hamazura answered Takitsubo's question by fanning something out like a stage magician. It was Magician Dion Fortune. Or more accurately, the special tarot cards that had formed her body. He did not understand any of the details about the 22 cards of the Major Arcana, 56 cards of the Minor Arcana, the 4 worlds, or the 22 paths connecting the 10 spheres. A high school boy like Hamazura Shiage only thought of tarot as "more complicated playing cards used by fortunetellers". It was no more than a symbol associated with fortunetelling, just like he associated ghost houses with paper lanterns, Halloween with pumpkins, Christmas with miniskirts, and casinos with bunny girls. He had no clue what meaning any of the cards contained.

However.

"I'm sure any of these cards is important to the people who know this stuff."

He made it sound so simple.

Leivinia Birdway and Lessar, who also knew about this thing they called magic (What that thing was did not matter at the moment. He just had to know there was something there!), had freaked out when they saw Fortune,

so this had to be something incredible in their world. At the very least, it was not something you would normally find in an ordinary home, like cleaning robots and AI speakers.

So even though he did not understand what it meant, he chose one that would stand out.

He chose it at random. He relied on luck.

The Minor Arcana reminded him of playing cards, so he went for the Major Arcana since the big illustrations drew the eye of amateurs. He was pretty sure it went from The Fool at 0 to The World at 22. The text at the bottom was not in English, so the only knowledge he had to go on was what he had vaguely picked up from a famous rock band that wore gothic lolita outfits. If he was being honest, he did not know anything past it starting with The Fool and ending with The World. He drew one at random and checked the number and text.

Major Arcana #10.

Wheel of Fortune.

Hamazura had no way of knowing, but the text was in Latin. And he also had no way of knowing that the English name included that familiar word: Fortune.

The outdoor shooting range looked like a large meadow if you did not know what it was. He got to work driving stakes into the ground and attaching plastic ropes as guidelines for what he wanted to draw.

That said, the drawing was a bit of a mystery and it was too complicated for this method.

He had no idea what it said, but he decided it would be easier to only do the text portion. Aneri might have been able to translate for him, but he did not need to know what it meant if he just wanted to make a crop circle out of it.

He pulled the cord to start up the lawnmower's engine. The light sound

reminded him more of a chainsaw than a car or motorcycle.

He had never known about magic before.

At least not as some vast field of knowledge and techniques.

And he doubted that was by coincidence. Whatever their reasons might be, there had to be a group that wanted to keep it hidden.

In this age, anyone with access to a search engine could check satellite photos. There were countless urban legends of people casually checking one and seeing something dangerous going on in an abandoned factor or a harbor at night. Whoever wanted to keep this a secret would never allow it to be drawn in a meadow.

It was now time to make contact.

He moved the lawnmower while feeling the weight of the bolt-action hunting rifle on the sling belt over his shoulder.

He shaved away the grass with that dangerous razor.

He carved out a row of letters large enough to be seen from space.

“Okay, Takitsubo. We need to hide before anyone shows up. Even if they’re hiding in the shadows of history, these are still humans we’re talking about. If we play our cards right—”

He looked back and lost sight of reality.

This went beyond a lack of response. Takitsubo Rikou had been right there, but now she was not. There were a few small hills, but this was generally just a wide-open meadow. It was a shooting range, so it would not have any kind of cover someone could hide behind.

“Takitsub—”

An extremely light blow hit him on the side of the head.

It came from an Asian woman with a long black ponytail.

The boy's knees gave out, he collapsed, and he stopped moving altogether. He did not even convulse on a subconscious level.

Kanzaki Kaori sighed, relaxed her karate-chopping hand, and held it to her ear instead.

"I have eliminated an irregularity. Connection to Coronzon is unknown. It might be some kind of counterculture that cropped up in response to the great pressure of magic. We must continue on to Edinburgh Castle, so another team needs to retrieve them."

Then she frowned.

"Yes, yes. We cannot just leave them here, but I do not have time to stay here either. In that case, we will restrain the two of them and take them with us to Edinburgh Castle. We are not babysitters, so we will be handing them over to you once we arrive."

The early morning stillness was broken by the deep sound of rotors beating at the air. A stout transport helicopter had a rotor on the front and back. No one would have imagined that the Saint had felt its 300km/h was too slow and hopped out to run instead.

Kanzaki Kaori waved toward it.

And at her feet, Hamazura Shiage rolled onto his stomach and opened his eyes.

"..."

Was it Nephthys who had guaranteed he would lose this fight?

He was well aware that he was a powerless Level 0. He did not care what happened as long as he did not lose his girlfriend Takitsubo Rikou or the tarot cards he could hopefully use to bring back Dion Fortune.

He did not need to show off. He was not fighting for himself, so his focus had

to be elsewhere.

The shack on the shooting range contained hunting weapons and ammunition for them. Perhaps to suit the clientele's noble tastes, most of the ammo used old-fashioned black powder, but the detonators, which reacted first when the trigger was pulled, had used a reactive substance containing ammonia.

With some quick modifications, that could be made into something to revive you while unconscious.

He had been a back alley outlaw, so he knew a lot of tricks like that.

He had known he would be up against someone far more powerful than him, but he had guessed they would not just kill him right away. They would at least ask what he was doing first.

So if he knew he was going to be knocked out, he could prepare a way to quickly recover from that.

(Now, then.)

He had successfully contacted someone familiar with magic.

He shut his eyes and silently got to thinking while they grabbed his arm and picked him up.

This was his starting point.

## Part 2

“Pant, pant.”

The rough sound of escaping air filled the old graveyard of Scotland's Edinburgh Castle. Misaka Mikoto, who wore only a raincoat over a one-piece swimsuit, did not immediately realize that was the sound of her own breathing.

It was an early blue morning in December. It was a time of purification when even the air looked bright. But the girls were surrounded by a pressure unrelated to the biting cold or brisk chill.

Their bodies were wet and slippery.

A rusty stench filled their lungs.

It was blood.

But it did not belong to her.

She desperately held and dragged something in her arms.

It was heavier than she was, so it seemed too heavy for her slender arms to carry. Only now did she realize she was subconsciously receiving the A.A.A.'s assistance.

But that assistance felt so flimsy.

No matter how much she fought and killed with those many cannons, missiles, and chainsaws, she could never rescue the life that was slipping away.

That object was barely recognizable.

What was it?

“Kamijou-san. Kamijou-san!?”

Why was Shokuhou Misaki repeating that name right next to her?

Why did that arrogant Queen of Tokiwadai look so horrified???

That red and black “thing” had just barely managed to stay in one piece. She simply could not manage to equate it to the person who had rushed forward on his own two feet to protect everyone just ten seconds ago. Even now, something soft was coming out of the deep gashes and the mass of flesh was shaking disconcertingly while barely connected together by something flabby. She just barely managed to recognize the object in her arms as a body, but which side was the top? She could not even tell where the face was. And even if she could, she did not have the courage to look straight at it. If she saw that part had been torn apart like a game of fukuwarai, something decisive inside her might break.

“You fool,” someone groaned.

Something like a palm-sized doll was running across the ground, but tearful Mikoto was in no state to even question that obviously unscientific phenomenon.

“If you had time to throw me to the side, you should have tried something else! Are you kidding me, human? If this kills you, I will bind your soul to mine as my property!!”

The noise in her mind was unbearable.

Everyone’s voices sounded so distant.

She was no longer even thinking about a long-term victory. She was not entirely sure where she was or what her position was.

Still surrounded by all those machines, she dragged that sticky object with her as she circled behind a stone wall that had survived. She tried to hide. Shokuhou Misaki and the palm-sized doll(?) followed her, but...

“Kee kee.”

She heard a voice.

The inhuman laughter sounded like rough pieces of metal scraping together.

That was the cause of the fresh blood staining the early morning blue.

“Ee hee hee. Kee kee hee hee! There is no good or evil here. I don’t need to compensate with something else to balance the scales. Yes, yes!! This is what it means to have a free, unbound soul!!! Finally. Finally, finally, finally. No longer am I bound by that silly dualism! I am free to work on the breakdown of all things however I desire!!!!”

“...!!”

What good was hiding?

What good was preventing any further attack?

What she had was no longer Kamijou Touma. Just as a living tree was not the same thing as burned-down charcoal or ash, what she held in her arms could no longer be called Kamijou Touma. She had chosen the wrong time to gather her courage and jump out. She had been far too late. She knew that, but she could not bring herself to leave “it” behind and run away on her own.

Just then, she heard the sound of scraping dirt.

“That is...enough.”

The words came from a girl in a blue blazer and a witch-like hat and cape, whose long silver hair fluttered in the wind. She must have been unable to stand up. That would be due to all the blood audibly dripping to the ground past the small hand holding the wound in her side. She just barely managed to use a hand to prop herself up against the old stone wall and she spoke with one eye shut to keep the flowing blood out of it.

“As long as he is still alive, we can redo this. There is still a chance...

Kamijou Touma, you are not allowed to die here. My plan has already failed, so from now on, use that power for your own purposes!!”

“What are you saying? The power in that human’s right hand will negate any recovery magic you—”

The palm-sized girl started to protest, but then she gasped.

“Don’t tell me!!”

The silver girl held her right index and middle finger together and held them up in front of her lips.

Then a brutal chainsaw began to move within the weapons of the A.A.A., that metal-winged demon Mikoto wore.

Mikoto frantically tried to retake control, but that partner refused to listen even after she had trusted it with her life all this time. It was like a borrowed weapon returning to its original owner’s control.

“Wait, wait... What are you doing with that!?”

“Every second counts! There is no time to explain, so keep out of the way!!”

Academy City’s #3 entirely forgot something as fundamental as her control over electricity and magnetism.

She could not send any commands to the A.A.A. Yet if she had tried, she might have been able to stop that thick rotating blade some other way.

The silver girl did not hesitate to swing down her right hand.

That movement linked with something.

And then a dull sound burst out.

Another fierce attack struck that already hopelessly torn-up hunk of flesh.

It was an assault chainsaw meant to bring down the main gate of a fortress.

One body part, which was just barely still attached by white and pink flabbiness, was now fully severed.

With an almost silly splat, the detached right forearm hit Shokuhou Misaki in the forehead and then her arms held it to her large chest. That was no more than the standard reflex to protect your face when a ball flew toward you. There was no conscious thought in her widened eyes. She had the strongest psychological power and she was an expert at controlling people's minds, but not even she could accept this shocking visual.

“...!!”

Something sparked in Mikoto's mind. Her vision filled with gray static. With a soft wet glop, a dark red liquid splattered across the ground.

But.

It was not over yet.

“When working to save his life, I suppose Imagine Breaker would be the biggest obstacle.” The palm-sized girl groaned in a different way than Mikoto. “But that was still a little much!! Don't just throw out everyone else's opinions because you alone know everything about Kamijou Touma's inner structure, Aleister! Surely you know it's exactly this kind of arrogance that led to all your defeats and failures!”

A dark-red light glowed from the joints of the A.A.A. that Mikoto wore.

It released a function that not even the #3 girl knew about.

“I have no interest in high magic at the moment. I will remove the artistry and break through the closest gate in as vulgar a way as necessary. My physical body bears stigmata – the mark of the worthy – on the hands, feet, and side. It is a human body, but its flesh and blood can return to the starting point of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.”

The silver girl kneeled.

She clasped her hands in front of her chest as if squeezing the fresh juice

from a fruit.

She extracted the scarlet liquid from her own wounds.

“Longinus was a blind soldier. He was the saint who pierced the Son of God’s side to confirm his death. The holy one’s blood dripped down the lance and entered Longinus’s body where it healed the foolish soldier’s eyes and revealed a visible world to him. This drop can produce miracles, so reopen the realm of possibility to this trapped one!!”

Normally, any kind of miracle may have failed to manifest as long as Imagine Breaker remained in Kamijou Touma’s right hand.

But that was no longer the case.

That was why the silver girl had chopped off the boy’s right hand with that giant chainsaw.

A single drop fell from the silver girl’s hand and into the center of Kamijou Touma’s chest.

That was all.

But the effect was dramatic.

This was not the story of a restless night. This miracle happened in clear view below the morning sun.

Something invisible passed through all of the boy’s blood vessels to reach every part of his body. The burst blood vessels and disturbed blood flow was used to automatically determine what needed healing and a gentle light enveloped all of the torn, crushed, and hopelessly destroyed parts. Bone, flesh, muscle, and skin returned to that of the original boy, like it was being polished with an invisible silk cloth. It was like popping a collapsed plastic doll back into shape.

“Kami...jou...-san?”

Shokuhou Misaki spoke his name while half in a daze.

Misaka Mikoto's searching eyes moved with real hesitation.

And there she found the boy's eyes shut as if he were gently sleeping. She saw the normal, ordinary, and entirely irreplaceable face of that older high school boy.

But there was no time for relief.

There was a sound like a balloon popping.

It came from where Kamijou Touma's right hand should have been. Everything past his elbow was missing. No, everything past there was refusing to heal. Something was obstructing the healing process.

Mikoto's eyes widened.

“Eh?”

This was far better than the hunk of flesh that had looked more like a disturbing mosaic than anything. But a single wound to the wrist could be deadly. They could not just leave him like this. Unless they stopped that blood gushing out, the recovered boy would lose his life before reopening his eyes.

“Eh, eh!? Wait, what do we do!? Can't you fix his right hand!?”

“I suppose...”

There was no response.

Had her words even reached that silver girl?

“I suppose the Son of God's power is indeed only of the Aeon of Osiris. It is not enough to overturn the scars left by Coronzon, who exists beyond Horus...”

The silver girl wobbled to the side. Her core had broken. She had already been badly injured and then taken a stab wound to the side. It was unclear what she had done, but what would happen if she used up any more of her

blood like this?

At this rate, she would collapse to the side and cease moving.

“Wait...”

“Misaka-san, do something about the bleeding!! Burn or crush the wound if you have to!!”

Shokuhou’s shout was like a slap to the face.

When Mikoto moved, it was not because she was thinking rationally again. She was panicking and her mind had gone blank, so she simply obeyed without questioning it. Her fingers moved without even considering what the result might be.

A disconcerting zapping sound followed.

She produced a billion volts.

An arc of electricity that powerful was enough to burn through rebar.

The sizzling sound was a lot like water being thrown on a hot griddle, but the smell was nothing like cooking ginger pork in a frying pan. The twisted odor made her want to vomit. She could not calm her breathing for a while. The most frightening part was not what she had done. It was the fact that the spiky-haired boy did not so much as stir even as she cauterized the end of his severed arm without anesthetic.

Still, this had saved him.

His right arm was no longer bleeding.

She pressed her ear to the center of his chest and heard his pulse, even if it was weak.

“What now, Misaka-san? We can’t just leave him like this.”

It was gradual, but once Shokuhou said that, Misaka Mikoto finally calmed

down enough to pay attention to their surroundings.

She had tried to hide behind a surviving stone wall in the forgotten graveyard, but this did not even count as hiding. They had left a clear trail of blood on the bumpy ground. Nothing could be easier than following that to find them.

The laughter was entirely monotone at this point.

That was Great Demon Coronzon.

Was she actually enjoying herself, or did she have some other reason to laugh? In fact, was that sound even coming from the vocal cords in that throat and the mouth on that face? Whatever this was, it was definitely approaching.

There was panic on Shokuhou Misaki's face.

“Misaka-san? Can we fly away with that machine of yours?”

“You know as well as I do that the rocket engine’s attitude control system is on the fritz. That’s why we started using it as a motorcycle.”

And another thing.

Mikoto gulped before continuing.

“Do you really think we can escape that whether we fly through the air or race along the surface?”

“ ”

Her very existence was an occult curse that had no place in science.

This was not over yet. Whatever-this-was wore a beige habit and swung her absurdly long blonde hair around. They could hardly think of her as human as she slowly approached. Mikoto pulled out an arcade coin and Shokuhou pulled a TV remote from the bag she wore over her shoulder, but would that really work? The girls were shaken on an instinctual level, not a rational one.

Even that boy had been defeated.

He had tightly clenched his right fist, yet he had been mercilessly torn to pieces.

(What do we do?)

Mikoto was no longer looking at this from a scientific perspective where titles like Academy City's #3 or #5 mattered. Could they really fight? Could they resist at all? She was not even sure of that. The very foundation she had believed in for so long was crumbling below her.

When that monster casually and selfishly poked her head around the stone wall, a devastating clash would begin. Both sides had to know that. And that monster was enjoying it. She seemed to have mistaken that devastating combat as a form of entertainment.

Mikoto regretted getting involved in this.

The world was wrong to have created something like that in the first place.

The fear squeezing at her heart may have been the same as when she was being tormented by that white monster who had slaughtered the mass-produced military clones one after another. No, this fear may have been even greater.

But it was too late to realize the truth now. That humanoid disaster was definitely approaching.

And.

And.

And.

## **Part 3**

The impact started in the United Kingdom and shook the entire planet.

## **Part 4**

It happened at Edinburgh Castle, the occult center of Scotland.

Did that make it appropriate? Or did it make it disrespectful?

Whatever the case, a humanoid white shadow alighted there.

This was Academy City's #1.

And by his side was a demon girl who looked like the fusion of a lovely maiden, a venomous jellyfish, and soft wings.

Those monsters looked entirely out of place on a clear winter morning.



A single flying kick had taken control of the entire situation.

“...Yo.”

He spoke.

He spoke to the woman in a beige habit who had crashed through more than one stone wall after flying back from his meteor-like attack.

And in response, her sinister true face appeared using the absurdly long blonde hair as a screen.

“My right hand contains Nuit of Resurrection and my left hand contains Hadit of Vengeance. Combined, they form the Circle of Ra-Hoor-Khuit, which...”

“Yo.”

The special attack released by Great Demon Coronzon clashed head-on with the Level 5 who could manipulate any and all vectors.

“Yo!”

A mass of invisible power scattered in every direction.

No.

It was torn apart by a human will.

The woman with absurdly long blonde hair very clearly and undeniably clicked her tongue.

“Aethyr Avatar – 1: LIL, 9: ZIP, 20: KHR!!”

“Yo!! Yo!! Yoooo!!!!”

The massive amount of blonde hair split into three groups and they complexly wove themselves together to form three winged angels.

Accelerator had no idea what power was contained in there.

He raised his fingers like claws and swung them wildly around to tear the false angels to shreds. If he had viewed magic as a different form of esper powers, he never could have accomplished this. If he had made that mistaken detour in his understanding, he would have failed to comprehend its true essence, failed to grasp the vectors, and been injured.

But he no longer viewed it that way.

That white shadow was enough of a monster already, but he now had a translucent demon – a blatant product of the occult – by his side.

“You partially installed the power’s directionality into the calculations for your power? Tch. That is the number 11 which exists in the Qliphoth yet is not an imaginary number. Is that the guide to the upside-down tree I built? This awkward product of science has insolently reached the level of Probationer!?”

“Yeah, that’s right. I’m new around here, so be nice. And I thought newcomers were called Neophytes, but whatever. Now, don’t forget this one thing: I’m not like you people who’ve stopped working after mastering these things. I’m going to absorb as much as I can to keep growing as much as possible!!”

“...!!”

In other words, the more power he was given, the stronger he would grow. Just like launching a largescale cyber-attack on the enemy, only to have them analyze it and learn how to do it themselves.

Great Demon Coronzon paused for a just a moment.

He had been waiting for that.

Accelerator closed the fingers he had opened like claws and pulled back his clenched fist.

He could use a large swing of the arm. He had created enough of an opening

for it.

Just like a certain boy, he poured all his strength into his fist and released it!!

It was like an explosion.

An invisible shockwave scattered around the center of the hit and the old walls of Edinburgh Castle shook.

And yet the #1 monster clicked his tongue a bit.

“You redirected the vector.”

“Kee hee hee.”

Coronzon had indeed slid backwards.

But she had avoided a direct hit to the face. Her absurdly long hair had formed several bundles that layered themselves in front of her. Each of those bundles and even each individual hair bent and negated the vector that should have passed through it. A strange sensation ran through Accelerator’s fist and back through his bones, like he had punched a powerful spring.

And.

“Ee hee. Nee hee hee. Kee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

Something like a balloon inflated and burst in the center of the #1’s chest.

This was not blood, flesh, or bone.

It was something more invisible, harder to understand, and yet of great importance.

“Tch!!”

“I am a demon, but not from the Qliphoth. I am the Great Demon that dwells in the Abyss of the Sephiroth. The Sephiroth’s 10 Sephirah and 22 pathways are also a conversion table for producing the supernatural by connecting the

great universe of the world with the small universe of the body. Do you feel it? An arm is formed from Chesed and Gevurah and its five fingers control the five elements. The middle finger controls fire and the red of blood, which symbolizes the activity of the heart. You made a mistake when you accepted the rebounding force to measure how much damage you had done, one who remains in the human realm.”

Simply put, the damage passed from his fist, up his arm, and to his heart.

Carelessly touching her would harm him.

When you thought about it, that was a lot like Accelerator’s own reflection.

He would not have used that method had he known about this.

And he of all people would know it was too late to complain after the fact.

Accelerator staggered, but Great Demon Coronzon casually stepped back. All of this was outside of her plan. Dealing with the #1 was not one of her objectives.

This was something else.

She was trying to shift to some other action.

“...Bh... Where are you...going?”

“You’ll feel better if you cough up that blood, you know? And, monster, do you know who once lived in this place? James IV. He was a man of great importance you will find in the history books, but in the magical world, he was rumored to be an immortal king.”

“...”

“Heh heh. Out of respect for the Count of Glenstrae, perhaps I should call it the Ceremony of Mo Athair. At any rate, I am only interested in making progress on my own objective.”

That was the end of it.

A golden whirlwind whipped up.

It was hair.

This was only a smokescreen. It had no crucial meaning. But by the time Accelerator clicked his tongue and looked up, Coronzon was already gone.

It did not even seem like she had merely pretended to leave so she could snipe him from afar.

He lightly flicked the switch of his choker and then leaned against a nearby stone wall.

Something seemed to have burst within him, but it did not seem an organ had ruptured or he was going to die immediately.

He slowly exhaled and then noticed something.

It was rare for the #1 to be slow to grasp his situation.

“...Tch.”

There was nothing at all past the obvious blood trail that looked like someone had dragged around a mop soaked with a dark red liquid. The group that had dragged that Level 0 behind cover had vanished at some point. Blindly chasing after them would have been silly, so the #1 searched for something he could do on his own.

Still leaning against the stone wall, he asked the translucent demon a question.

He did so as casually as using a search engine or AI speaker.

“Mo Athair.”

“That was one piece of ‘evidence’ Mathers used to claim he was of noble Scottish descent. He claimed the name Mathers was derived from an old Gaelic term meaning ‘posthumous one’, so he insisted it proved he was the Count of Glenstrae, a proper descendent of the highlanders.”

Accelerator could not make heads or tails of that, but it may have made sense to those knowledgeable about the occult. You could not expect him to understand one hundred years after it had all happened, though.

There was no point in getting caught up in all this.

Posthumous one.

That was reminiscent of the former king, James IV, who was rumored to have crossed the boundary of death, but that was only from Accelerator's point of view.

There was one other part that caught his attention.

“Scottish?”

“It has previously been written off as nothing more than his delusions, but there may have been a reason why that Golden leader was obsessed with Scotland and not England or Wales. For example, something that approaches the core of the United Kingdom’s three forces and four regions.”

“What’s even in this old castle? That monster woman must be after whatever’s most important, right?”

“Ohh...”

“What is it?”

“Oh, um, I just needed a moment to wonder why not even I recognized the possibility until now. I see. So it’s the treasures of Edinburgh Castle. In that case, we might be in trouble.”

“Again, what is it?”

Everyone could tell things were not looking good. There was no point in making a fuss over whether you would accept that or not. The closer things were to a worst case scenario, the more important it was to quickly determine the cause and work to fix things.

The demon girl wearing shabby English newspapers poked her index fingers together in front of her chest which was unnaturally large when compared to the overall balance of her small body. She hesitantly confessed the truth.

“I’m guessing she’s going to use the Sword of State, the Coronation Crown, the Ruling Sceptre, and the Stone of Scone as a single set.”

“?”

“Simply put, they’re the Scottish version of the royal items. There was a concern they would interfere with England’s Curtana, so when Edward I attacked Scotland, he took the Stone of Scone and had its functionality sealed. Oh, right. The Stone of Scone was returned to Scotland in recent years, wasn’t it? In that case...”

“Just give me a straight answer.”

“Eheh☆ Since the Curtana-controlled system is currently unstable, you just might be able to fully hijack the UK by using those four items. ...It’s not so much a backdoor as it is another system running in parallel that you can use to enter the mainframe.”

## Part 5

The deep sound of rotors beating the air seemed to smash apart the early morning quiet.

A large transport helicopter slowly circled around Edinburgh Castle searching for a place to land and then slowly descended. But Kanzaki Kaori opened the cargo door before it reached the ground.

“I will be heading down now. You wait until it lands, Orsola.”

“Ah!”

The gentle nun did not have time to stop her.

It did not matter that they were more than ten meters up. Kanzaki used the athletic ability of one of the world’s fewer than twenty Saints to safely land in the field below.

Her surroundings were a mess.

A carriage had rolled on its side, the guard knights were collapsed on the ground, and the frightened horses were running wildly around after their reins snapped.

Kanzaki ran over to a female knight who was seated leaning up against a stone wall.

“I am with the Anglicans. What happened here? Where is the royal family!?”

“...”

The female knight shook her short blonde hair a bit and pointed a trembling finger in a different direction. That was the most she could manage. She could not get a single word out and her finger soon fell.

Kanzaki heard the neighing of a horse.

A muscular warhorse walked up as if to protect the female knight. It held the handle of a water-filled bucket in its mouth. Where it had found the bucket was unclear.

(Is that Second Princess Carissa's?)

“Alex, take care of her.”

When Kanzaki soaked a handkerchief in the cold well water and placed it on the female knight's forehead, Alex neighed happily.

The female knight had used her last ounce of strength to point at something before passing out. It looked like nothing more than a crumbling structure, but a staircase leading underground was cleverly hidden there. The true value of Edinburgh Castle in the occult world was the vast underground structure full of countless entrances, tunnels, and staircases that extended from St. Margaret's Chapel.

And what was the greatest treasure hidden in this castle at the center of Scotland?

(Scotland's three royal treasures and a stone.)

Three and four.

This was an alternate foundation for the system of control that symbolized the three powers and four regions.

This other system never could have revealed its power if the Curtana control system were not unstable.

(Was the Royal Family acting independently to ensure those did not fall into anyone else's hands? If so, that was correct but foolish! If any harm comes to the queen or the princesses, the entire United Kingdom will boil over!!)

Something could be heard slicing through the air.

It was Great Demon Coronzon. She was a supernatural being with a vessel of flesh. The sound came from her swinging her absurdly-long blonde hair to

grab a torch off the wall.

“Kee kee.”

She could no longer control the magic kingdom of Great Britain in secret by acting as archbishop, but there was no real reason why she had to do it that way.

The Sword of State, the Coronation Crown, the Ruling Sceptre, and the Stone of Scone.

No matter what method she used, she just had to be in charge of punishing those who used the wicked power of magic. She would thoroughly eliminate any who would oppose her with magic. Yes, she was the Great Demon who lived in the tree of life and not the tree of evil. She would even use the good processes that god had prepared for mankind’s use.

“Kee hee hee. Ee hee hee hee hee hee.”

The ones on display in the castle for tourists were replicas.

The spiritual items with true power were hidden deep in the great labyrinth extending from St. Margaret’s Chapel. A normal person would be risking their life if they attempted to get in or out, but Great Demon Coronzon did not care about that. Traps set up by humans were of no concern to her and it had been the Anglicans who managed the defenses here. The archbishop leading that church would of course know how it worked.

She did not even think of it as stealing.

These were her toys. When you left your job, what was wrong with removing your possessions from your locker and taking them with you?

“Now, then.”

Blonde Coronzon sighed in a great hall that seemed too big to be underground.

The room had only grown this large to contain everything that was needed to

store the four items.

“Hm, hm, hm, hm.”

The Coronation Crown looked like something out of a fairy tale. Puffed out red fabric was contained in a gold frame. She spun it on a finger before placing it on her head and then her slender hand reached for the golden sceptre. It gave off the shine of pure gold, but it was actually a silver staff gilded with gold leaf. She spun it around like a baton while turning to the Stone of Scone. It was called a stone, but it was actually about the size of a dresser drawer. A normal person would be unable to lift it, but she used her long blonde hair for that. Just like with the torch, the hair wrapped around it and easily lifted it.

“Hm, hm, hm, hmm. There’s so much I want to try out. Yes, yes. This all leads to the breakdown I desire. ...Hm?”

She frowned.

To perform the Ceremony of Mo Athair, she needed to use the Scottish items as an initial ignition. That meant she needed the full set.

Yet something was missing.

There were three treasures and a stone.

So where had the Sword of State gone!?

“Pant, pant!!”

The place felt like a lazily designed video game dungeon. The Asian boy named Hamazura Shiage gasped for breath inside that gloomy stone underground labyrinth.

He held a doubled-edged sword in a wooden scabbard.

After secretly coming to, he had escaped the transport helicopter with Takitsubo the instant it landed. They did not know much about magic, so they needed the help of someone who did if they were to save Dion Fortune.

However, they were outsiders, so none of the experts were going to listen to their pleas during an emergency. What did they need to ensure they were not ignored? That was the question on their minds.

And even if they did not know exactly how it all worked, they could cause trouble for those experts to bring them to the negotiating table.

The surface had been a disaster scene with people collapsed left and right, but that had worked in their favor. The two of them had managed to escape so easily because the nuns had rushed from the transport helicopter's cargo door to assist their injured comrades.

People overlooked a surprising amount while panicked.

Yes, even an oddity they normally would have seen. Otherwise, someone was sure to have noticed the boy and girl crouching down and walking around.

From there, they only had to listen to what people were saying and figure out what everyone was focused on here. Hamazura was not familiar with magical terminology and even his normal English was extremely iffy, so he had needed to rely on his girlfriend and Aneri.

As a result, Hamazura Shiage had risen to stardom without any clue to the true value of what he held in his hands.

He drew the weapon from the wooden scabbard and found a glittering golden blade that looked like a hero's sword from a video game.

“Hey, will this work!? I grabbed the most obvious thing!!”

He was not speaking to Takitsubo or Aneri.

There was someone else there wearing a fancy dress and seated with her back against the stone wall. He had happened across this injured person while underground here. She must have gotten in through a different entrance and she had been soaked with blood when he first saw her. That was proof that something bad was wandering this darkness.

She was Queen Regnant Elizard.

Under normal circumstances, he never could have spoken to her so informally.

She could not even stand up, but she smiled a bit and answered in Japanese for his sake.

“Yes, well done. The Scottish system won’t work if even one piece is missing. Take that with you to the surface. I do not know what Lola Stuart... no, what that demon is thinking, but keep that out of her grasp. If you can return it to us at a later date, I will award you a noble rank.”

“A foreigner can’t receive that kind of reward, can they? Sorry, but I’m not gonna settle down in a country where I don’t like the food.”

Elizard laughed quietly while leaning against the wall.

Hamazura was relieved.

She then pulled a bottle from somewhere, opened it, and sprinkled its contents on her painful-looking wounds.

“This is all I have, but it’s still a shame. I was saving this scotch...”

“It lists the distillery on the label, right? You can reward them by letting them call it Queen Rescue or something and advertise it as the legendary drink that healed the queen’s wounds. You’ve already got Drambuie in the UK, right? Royal legends can boost sales for this kind of thing.”

“I suppose it would be crass of me to ask why you know that kind of trivia at your age.”

A dull sound reached their ears.

It came from the darkness.

“Someone’s coming, Hamazura,” said Takitsubo.

“Yeah, we’ve gotta get out of here, but what about this old woman?”

Not all of the paths in this underground labyrinth were treated the same, so they carried Elizard into a smaller tunnel and placed her behind a column.

“We’ll gather their attention, so don’t move until you don’t hear anymore footsteps. Got that!?”

“Wait, I am the one that should be—”

“I can’t use a dying old woman as bait! I’d have nightmares for the rest of my life!!”

The situation was not going to wait around.

Hamazura picked up the sheathed sword and made plenty of noise as he ran down a big tunnel separate from the small one in which Elizard was hidden. The presence in the darkness grew. Emotion colored the atmosphere. It was the red color of killer intent and it was clearly locked onto Hamazura and Takitsubo.

He was used to this thanks to Mugino Shizuri.

Traumatic experiences could have an upside. He could not have kept going without that in his past.

The world was focused on a puny little thug.

He had not made a mistake.

The path he was on was endlessly dangerous, but he was still on a route toward saving Dion Fortune.

“Ha ha.”

Hamazura Shiage was running for his life, but he started laughing.

Takitsubo was dumbfounded at first, but then she started laughing too.

“Hee hee.”

This was a bit more toxic than a simple boyfriend/girlfriend relationship.

The sense of unity may have been more like accomplices than anything.

This underground structure extended like an ant colony from St. Margaret's Chapel, but there was apparently more than one exit.

They ran up some stairs toward the surface and entered the winter sunlight. But...

“Stop right there, outsiders. Unless you would like to be obliterated on the spot.”

The icy hatred was enough for goose bumps to spread from his spine to every last part of his body.

Hamazura and Takitsubo's subjective world was dragged away from the morning and from the sun.

This person had gone out of the way to speak in Japanese. ... When had he last spoken? If this person had been listening in since then, then the delinquent boy and his girlfriend might not be the only ones in danger.

Hiding Queen Elizard had been meaningless. They had more or less allowed her to be taken hostage.

(No, wait.)

Hamazura immediately denied his own arrogance.

He needed to view this properly. This person could have crushed them without warning. Since that had not happened, either he or Takitsubo must have carried some kind of value. This person did not want to destroy the object the boy carried. That was all.

This was not a case where a single wrong move spelled disaster.

It was all over if the monster happened to do anything rash.

He was scared.

He really was, but this proved something.

The sword he held had enough power to stop this irregular being.

He could use it as a shield.

“...”

He slowly turned around with the sheathed sword still in his hands.

First, he saw absurdly-long blonde hair. It moved all on its own, so it looked something like strange venomous snakes or tentacles. And beyond that, their true form appeared from the subterranean darkness. He was shocked to see how beautiful she was. He had been expecting something more grotesque with gills or scales.

And that monster slowly opened her mouth.

“Give me the Sword of State. If you have no connection to the United Kingdom or magic, then I will spare you.”

“I was waiting for this...”

However.

He had been prepared to rely on Aneri if necessary. He spoke back as if accepting a challenge.

“To be clear, I don’t care what happens to this sword. As long as I achieve my goal, I’m fine with giving it to you.”

“?”

“I want to save Dion Fortune. Do you have what I need to do that? If the answer is yes, I will give you this sword. So how about it!?”

It was not Coronzon who looked shocked. It was Takitsubo Rikou.

She agreed with the plan to save that girl no matter what, but had he forgotten what Queen Regnant Elizard had asked them to do? She may have only now realized how seriously he had meant the “no matter what” part.

They were accomplices. Their relationship was a bit toxic.

But would he really go this far?”

“Hama...zura?”

However, the boy standing next to her did not respond.

If he did not keep his eyes directly on Coronzon and if he looked Takitsubo in the eye for even a moment, he would break. He would remember what the right thing to do was. He knew that.

Of course, if he refused to hand it over, this monster would kill them. She would kill him, his girlfriend Takitsubo, and Elizard hidden deep in the underground tunnels. So directly refusing was not an option.

He had to go about this the right way.

Simply doing what was right would be selfish. Trying that without the power to back it up would only anger this monster.

He knew there was nothing he could do.

He had escaped that sword-wielding samurai woman by being clever. He had been no match for her whatsoever when it came to actual strength. Trying anything head-on would get him killed instantly. That was how things worked here.

So that was not what he had to do.

He reached into his pocket and squeezed what he found there. Of course, he did not have a secret weapon hidden there. And he doubted even a secret weapon could have harmed this monster in front of him.

It was a perfectly ordinary stick of gum.

But at times, something as insignificant as that could lend you strength.

There were some people you could not save simply by doing what was right.

Those pure heroes could eat shit.

He wanted to smile with his girlfriend with a clean conscious. He could not abandon Dion Fortune if he was going to do that. He wanted to share the happiest possible time with her, so he could not let compromise and disgrace influence him. No matter what.

Meanwhile, a devilish smile appeared on the lips of the woman whose long blonde hair moved like it had a life of its own.

“Dion Fortune? Oh, I see. So this is about that defense device I set up!”

“Kh.”

“In that case, my answer to your question is yes. After all, I am the one who created those specialized grimoires as defense devices. ...So. What is your point? What do I gain by helping you instead of just killing you and taking the sword?”

He had an answer prepared for that.

Hamazura Shiage had no choice but to accompany someone who understood magic.

So...

“I’ll help you. It couldn’t hurt to have a disposable pawn, right?”

“Kee hee.”

This seemed to catch her by surprise.

The monster burst out laughing and had to hold her sides.

“Ee hee hee hee!! Ah ha ha! We both know you don’t mean that, so how can you say it with such a straight face!? Yes, yes. I get it now. You plan to board the train and then jump off at some point before it goes over the cliff! Is that it, Child of Adam!? Am I right, ignorant and unenlightened human!”

“...”

“But I like that. Mathers and Crowley were the same. There is no real difference between them and you. I mean, all humans are the lowest of the low anyway. In that sense, you pass the test. You have the same look in your eyes as the Golden. You plan to insolently make a Great Demon yours, trample on the principle of equivalent exchange, and get everything out of me you can. Yes, you have the look of a Probationer in your eyes.”

Hamazura had met two beings known as Magic Gods: Nephthys and Niang-Niang. They were at least more powerful than him and Takitsubo, but even they had given up on saving Fortune.

If he was willing to give up there, he never would have parted ways with them.

After all, they kept him safe. If he had focused only on having the Magic Gods protect him, he could have survived while giving up on some things and forcing an ugly smile.

And who could he find that was just as powerful as, or even more powerful than, that mysterious pair? He did not know many candidates. He had been left out of most everything that had happened so far, but that may have been why he was capable of viewing the center of the conflict without being led astray by extraneous factors.

Great Demon Coronzon.

He had only heard people mentioning her name before this, but she was now wagging her index finger in front of him.

“You can hold onto the Sword of State for now. If I took it from you, you

would be too afraid of me leaving you behind to do anything for me. I will use you to your fullest as a pawn. Even if that means disposing of you.”

“Hamazura?” said Takitsubo. “Wait a second. Are you sure about this!?”

“Also.” Coronzon giggled. “You need to show me you are prepared to act as a proper pawn. If you really want to take me for yourself, then show me how far you are willing to go.”

Hamazura breathed out.

And a moment later, he used the tip of the sheathed sword to strike the track suit girl in the solar plexus.

“Kah, ah...?”

Her face was colored more by confusion than pain or suffering.

Hamazura silently looked down at his collapsed girlfriend.

“Heh heh.”

Only the Great Demon was laughing.

She had of course seen through it all.

“Ah ha ha ha ha!! No mercy for your beloved girlfriend to accomplish your goal!? Excellent. I’m liking you more and more. If anything, this reminds me of Mathers’s cold thought process.”

Still smiling, Coronzon’s face moved right in front of Hamazura’s nose.

“But deep down, you are still a child of Crowley. By knocking your girlfriend out here, you can leave her behind. You can remove her from the path of ruin we will be following. Is that how you see it?”

“Kh.”

“Excellent. As a ruler, it is convenient to know what you wish to protect.

That is your Achilles' heel.”

Great Demon Coronzon’s tone changed slightly.

Their psychological distance shrank as she approached him as a tempter.

Her voice now may have been the one she used as the archbishop who guided the UK.

Coronzon had learned Japanese from humans, but she had fine-tuned it to her own ends.

“When someone has a goal they truly wish to accomplish no matter what, then they become much more difficult to predict when that conviction wavers. I am a demon. I am the one who whispers in your ear. And the easiest to manipulate are not the pure evil; it is those who waver in the gap between good and evil. I have just about used up everything I had prepared in the Anglican Church as Crowley killers, so this may actually be useful for me. I will leave that girl there.”

“Thanks...”

“You owe me one. Do not forget that, pawn.”

After taking a step back, Coronzon placed her hands behind her back, bent forward, and asked a truly casual question.

“Now, I am simply curious about this one. Why are you willing to go so far to help Dion Fortune? That was no more than one of card in my Crowley killer deck. And one I left behind as insurance after deciding to crush the Windowless Building myself thanks to the chaos caused by Kamisato Kakeru and the recon done by Karasuma Fran. I doubt you had enough time to establish any kind of deep relationship.”

That was true.

How many words had Hamazura Shiage really exchanged with Dion Fortune? Was that a bond worth protecting to the point of betraying his girlfriend Takitsubo Rikou and violently knocking her unconscious?

He thought about it and then that perfectly ordinary boy spat out a response.

“The thing about help is...it’s like gravity.”

“Hm?”

“It gathers around some places and it doesn’t around others. Just none at all. And what do you mean ‘so far’? How far is appropriate? In your idea of just world, is help supposed to first go to the people who stand out, are smooth talkers, get plenty of attention no matter what they do, and get tons of likes on anything they post? ...To hell with that. Those people don’t need help in the first place.”

What did it matter if she had not asked for help?

Why should he care if they did not have that strong a bond?

That was only how Dion Fortune saw it after giving up on everything because she had no one to rely on. That was no reason to not reach out a helping hand.

There were people who would not be saved if you did not reach out and forcibly grab their hand.

Hamazura had wandered the back alleys and thought that was the extent of the world. He had truly believed he would be happy if he reached the top of that tiny box. And that was why he could see this. He had not had any of the gravity known as help. He had only managed to leave those rails due to the powerful influence of Mugino and Takitsubo.

People could not seek happiness they never even imagined existed. They would starve to death in their closed room without ever noticing the door hidden so close by.

What was wrong with showing them all of the options they could choose from?

What was wrong with opening the hidden door and showing them that they could leave?

“Fine then.”

Coronzon laughed.

Her laughter seemed to mock the entire world while also containing the innocent light of a child.

Perhaps a demon’s true skill was to trick people into thinking they still had a chance.

“Mathers and Crowley once tried to save something, but they ended up the way they are after coming into contact with me. You too are trapped in my cage. As long as I can control you, nothing else matters. So how about we get going? I am Great Demon Coronzon. I bring discord between people and obstruct the world’s bonds. So it should be fun to have a pawn to use against people while preparing for the Ceremony of Mo Athair.”

Before they left, Hamazura Shiage looked back one last time.

This may have been his final chance to turn back and do what was right.

...Of course, doing that now would not erase what he had done. He could not eliminate the damage done to his girlfriend lying collapsed on the ground and he would gain nothing by showing weakness in front of as dangerous a negotiating partner as Coronzon.

A dull sound echoed through the air.

Hamazura Shiage had punched himself in the face as hard as he could.

And he set off on his journey to hell with a demon as his guide and rescuing a dead soul as his goal.

## **Part 6**

After meeting up with First Princess Riméa, Kanzaki Kaori and the other Anglicans began recovering from the chaotic situation and searching the area around Edinburgh Castle, but nothing was left by that point.

They only found a girl in a track suit unnaturally collapsed on the ground.

There was no sign of the crucial Great Demon Coronzon or the Scottish treasures.

The situation was thrown into turmoil.

Three different paths were finally intersecting over the Ceremony of Mo Athair, the posthumous one.

## Between the Lines 1

The Golden cabal was the world's greatest magic cabal, but there was one person who had haunted the giant organization like a ghost.

That lady's name was Anna Sprengel.

She was a magician with the special access rights to freely contact the Secret Chiefs, superhuman beings of a different category from the Magic Gods.

Her name first appeared in the Sprengel Letters in which William Wynn Westcott, one of the three founders, secretly contacted a historical German Rosicrucian magic cabal and received permission to found a new cabal in the United Kingdom. At that point, she was no more than a name in a letter and no one had seen what she looked like. In fact, Magical Researcher Ellic Howe used handwriting analysis to determine the Sprengel Letters were fake.

Another theory said she was a fictional person modeled after a female magician named Anna Kingsford who was Mathers's acquaintance and teacher.

The next time she appeared was related to Mathers. In his case, he actually met a woman claiming to be Anna Sprengel. But it seems likely that was a con artist named Madame Horos and not Anna Sprengel herself.

Also, when Robert William Felkin was traveling across Europe in search of the Secret Chiefs, he met a professor whose adoptive daughter claimed to be Anna Sprengel's niece. Of course, that did not mean that this adoptive daughter was who she claimed to be. There was nothing but her word to go on there.

Like this, Anna Sprengel was nothing more than a name. Very few people had ever seen her for themselves and most such stories could not be trusted. Nevertheless, that lady had continually been a powerful influence on the Golden cabal. And that meant she had a powerful influence on the entire magic side that had taken root in the world.

In a way, her influence was even greater than Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers's.

In a way, her influence was even greater than Aleister Crowley's.

# **Chapter 2: (Untitled) – Over\_the\_Checkmate**

## Part 01

An RV was parked next to an unnamed oasis in the Egyptian desert.

The vehicle was filled with various experimental devices created by disassembling and reassembling various tools, cooking equipment, and daily items. It all looked rather silly because the original products could still be identified, but every device there would have been at home in cutting-edge Academy City's universities and research institutes. Some countries might have arrested the owner of these things on suspicion of biological or chemical terrorism.

Mina Mathers, the black cat witch in pitch black mourning clothes, was staring at something. She bent over and her cat-like tail rose up. Dogs' and cats' tail movements meant different things. From a feline perspective, this was a sign that something had piqued her curiosity. The real calico cat at her feet was mewing.

She was focused on a device made by attaching a few things to a round-bottomed flask. The flask was filled with hot water and maintained a set temperature while a motor slowly rotated it. A sticky and translucent paste-like liquid floated inside, but a small change had begun.

It was strange.

A soft object floated inside while giving off a shine halfway between white and pink.

“I suppose this means the first stage was a success.”

The frog-faced doctor did not sound particularly excited or surprised. In fact, he was working with a different device and not even looking at the flask.

Mina, on the other hand, stared into the glass container from behind her thin veil.

“How long will it take for this to become a baby?”

“The multiplication of cells has begun, so that only leaves two steps. We will have to transfer it into larger containers at each stage, but what matters here is to keep out any impurities such as mold and bacteria. That is fundamental but tricky. Fail here and we will end up with a pink or green mold baby.”

“...”

He was joking, but this was no laughing matter.

“I see. You mean the flaming sword barrier.”

“Hm?”

“You should know more about the flaming sword than me, Allan Bennett.”

The frog-faced doctor decided to preserve his poker face.

That had been necessary to gain her trust, but he felt like he had gone too far.

And whether or not she was aware of his thoughts, the black cat witch sighed behind her veil.

“In the Golden cabal, it is a symbol of the sword placed alongside the Tetragrammaton to protect the top three Sephirah of the Sephiroth after the sin of Adam and Eve spread across the world. It separates and cuts bonds in order to protect. Crowley’s equivalency table explains exactly what kind of offensive power it provides. Your own student wrote that, did he not?”

The baby groaned unhappily from the crib placed a short distance away from the experimental equipment.

That was Aleister Crowley’s daughter Lilith, but in her current state, she essentially had her bare soul exposed to the open air. That freed her from original sin, which allowed her to perform all sorts of miracles, but it was reckless to remain bodiless in the surface of the four worlds for long. Most ghosts and residual thoughts would break down on their own given time. Even the angels and demons without bodies of their own would reside in a vessel of flesh after being guided by a string of text or they could temporarily exist in the extremely limited bounds of a magic circle. But even those things

were not permanent. If Lilith was not given a container soon, she would disappear. That would waste Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass's efforts in saving unfairly-killed Lilith's life over the course of a century.

(She is forcibly preserving her existence with the power of miracles, but who knows how long that will last.)

Mina bit her lip without noticing.

Just then, her cat-like ears twitched and the tail growing from the back of her hips slowly swished side to side.

Again, dogs' and cats' tail movements meant different things.

From a feline perspective, side-to-side swishing was a sign of displeasure.

"Silver of the seven metals, female, and earth of the four elements. In other words, the light of the waxing moon."

"?"

Why was she mentioning moonlight in the morning? When she made that odd statement, the frog-faced doctor frowned, the baby voice in the crib came to a complete stop, and the golden retriever silently got up from the sofa bed.

What had she received?

Artist Mina Mathers spoke solemnly, like she was receiving some form of divine inspiration.

"Aethyr Avatar – 15: OXO."

It happened suddenly.

While her trumpet-like cat ears turned every which way, the black cat witch pulled a palette knife from her chest and threw it toward the driver's seat. She was lucky they had kept the engine running to keep the air conditioner on. The shift lock release button had been broken from the beginning, so she only had to hit the lever to shift it from park to drive. The large boxy vehicle

moved forward as easily as a toy cart in an amusement park.

The air shook as if from something directly striking it.

Unlike normal vehicles, large trucks and RVs did not have a rearview mirror to check behind them. Mina looked to the small LCD monitor installed for that purpose and saw the desert oasis torn apart from below as a giant golden tower erupted out.

When the frog-faced doctor saw it out the window, he immediately identified what it was made from.

“Human...hair?”

“By using written text to divide the spiritual territory spoken of by Enoch into a total of thirty regions, you create a color palette providing easier use of the supernatural. In other words, you get the Aethyrs. By absorbing the moonlight in her hair over a long period of time and spelling out the text with that, she is capable of wielding their avatars. Is that what this is, Great Demon Coronzon!? Indeed, you were originally the evil angel found in ZAX, the tenth Aethyr!!”

“Kee kee.”

A voice responded.

However, it was not a biological voice. The RV’s windshield vibrated to create the voice like a speaker.

“Kee kee. Kee kee ee hee hee!!”

There was no time to wait for a reaction.

Mina Mathers ran across the RV to reach the driver’s seat with her skirt flipping behind her. Once there, she slammed her foot down on the accelerator.

More and more bundles of blonde hair burst from the ground like sharp spears, except they were on the scale of giant towers.

“I have been released. Yes, yes, I am now free!! Mina Mathers, you black cat witch, your husband Samuel’s bonds no longer hold me!!”

“Kh.”

“But if you wish to know who killed who, you can ask your master later on. Of course, that is only if you have the chance to meet again!!”

A massive amount of hair erupted from the ground as an attack.

(She must have let the ley lines in the UK absorb her accumulated power so she could send it here to Egypt, but why is she bothering to target Lilith? Are you prioritizing your own cruelty over the fate of a nation or the world, Coronzon!?)

That was what Mina Mathers thought at first.

But as she operated the steering wheel, a more unpleasant idea rose up in the back of her mind.

It was like a toxin or pus created by her own body.

(No, it couldn’t be...)

Coronzon could directly attack Egypt from Britain.

The ley lines were like the planet’s nerves or blood vessels. While they did provide a pathway to reach here, the current of power covered every part of the planet like a network.

It was not this one pathway that mattered. No matter where the fiber optic cables ran, people were equally connected to all the data in the world. Unless they were a dealer or trader making tens of thousands of high-level deals every second, no one would notice any time loss there. As long as the world was connected, the result was equal for all.

So...

(Is it not just here? Great Demon Coronzon, how many different parts of the

planet are you attacking right now!?)

For one thing, the series of conflicts beginning with the Crowley's Hazards would have affected the entire planet given the scope of it all.

But in this case, the nature of the threat was not so clear.

It was of course all over if they stopped moving and the RV was skewered, but...

(If she can remotely cause glass to vibrate, this could be bad. This is a threat to the experimental equipment meant to create Lilith's vessel!!)

They needed a radical countermeasure here.

But this was no time for the black cat witch to be focused elsewhere.

The RV swerved through the desert and a bundle of blonde hair burst from the ground nearby. It did not seem to have simply missed, nor did it seem to have been placed there in advance.

She could not figure out the purpose behind the attack.

So she was shocked when she noticed the tray-like object spinning through the air after the golden spear hit it on the edge.

She recalled something she had heard.

Even in the modern age, there had been a few accidents in which someone set off an anti-personnel or anti-tank mine placed in the Sahara Desert by the Germans during World War II.

“Oh, no!!”

A great pressure weighed on her stomach, but shouting was not going to change anything.

Not all landmines were simply buried in the ground. Some anti-personnel ones would contain a spring that would launch it from the ground to scatter

deadly metal balls over a wider area. Coronzon had launched this anti-tank mine for the same purpose.

The mine detonated in midair and released a truly deadly shockwave in every direction.

## Part 02

“Gh...”

Kamijou Touma groaned and only then realized he still had a mouth capable of groaning.

The smell of disinfectant stung his nose.

He seemed to be lying down somewhere below a roof, but when he tried to get up, he lost his support for some reason. His vision was blurry and refused to come into focus. He did not feel any pain, but he felt like an invisible hand was grabbing and rattling his brain. He felt nauseated, but it was a somehow pleasant feeling. He could not trust the signals in his own body at the moment.

He did not think he could move for a while.

He turned just his head while lying on his back and saw a bob cut girl in a pink track suit lying in the next bed over. The person past her had a bunch of tubes connected to them, but was that Aleister? Since those two beds were lined up nicely, he assumed he was lying in one too. Although these beds were really just thick synthetic sheets laid out over a metal pipe framework. They may have been more like hammocks made of cloth instead of net.

The place was not quite silent.

He could hear the rhythmic beeping of an EKG and air being pumped.

“Are you awake, human?”

“Othinus...?”

“Now, what to do? I claim to be your understander, but I do not know the correct answer here. You would only get carried away if I praised you, but I doubt any kind of scolding would get through to you.”

“What...happened?”

“Never mind. You can figure this out on your own. There is no medicine to fix a fool.”

Fairy Othinus seemed upset, so he reached out his right hand to pat her small head.

Or he tried to.

Come to think of it, why had he failed to get up when he first woke up? He had tried to push himself up with his hand, but he had not found the proper support below him. Why was that?

The answer was right in front of his eyes.

Yes.

His right hand was gone.

Everything past the elbow had disappeared.

“.....

For a while.

For a good long while, the spiky-haired boy forgot how to breathe.

He felt no pain.

And that accentuated how unreal the image in front of him felt.

That was his dominant hand.

Did it really have to be his dominant hand!?

“I do not get it either.” Othinus sighed softly next to his pillow. “Is it because the wound was cauterized to stop the bleeding, or did Coronzon or Aleister’s attack apply some kind of special effect? Whatever the case, your right hand

is not growing back on its own this time. ...Of course, I never did know why it was growing back in the past. When I can't explain to you why it did what it did, I can't exactly tell you why things are different this time.”

“Ha...ha...”

Even his understander's words sounded like they were coming from the ends of the earth.

There was more to Kamijou Touma than Imagine Breaker.

He used it and it did not use him.

He knew that. He was well aware of all that.

But.

Still.

This was not about supernatural battles or tactical value. It was a much more personal and human thing. In a way, he had trusted his dominant hand more than anything else, so the shock of finding it gone hit him harder than he could have imagined.

“What...happened? What the hell happened back there!?”

“It went exactly as you remember it.”

There was more to being an understander than kindness.

In fact, being an understander meant you could say these things without destroying that relationship.

“I imagine your memories suddenly cut off, but that is how it should be. It is not that you were confused or faulty data was written to your mind. You were helpless and it ended there. Aleister used recovery magic, but that was really more like CPR than anything. Human, you were destroyed to the point that it was impossible to tell where your arms, legs, or face were. You lost to Great Demon Coronzon. And it only took her a single attack.”

“...”

“In that sense, Coronzon is even greater than Mathers. While you could clash with the Golden cabal to see what it was like, carelessly approaching this Great Demon is enough to kill you instantly. You need to think before you act next time. You no longer have your convenient right hand. You no longer have an adult healer who can give you a free continue. Welcome, child, to a true war. From here on, you are living in a cruel reality where a single 9mm hole means death.”

These were the words of a god who ruled over war.

A mere high school boy could not ignore them. Doing so would be as reckless as seeing a suspicious mass on the X-ray and betting on the possibility that the machine had malfunctioned.

And even if Kamijou Touma decided to brood about it, reality would not stop for him.

The clock was still ticking.

The situation was not going to improve if he just sat round waiting.

So what would he do?

Things had changed. What was Kamijou Touma to do now that he had nothing at all?

He had to think.

He had to think and think and think.

Finally, the spiky-haired boy awkwardly used his left hand to slowly get up. It felt incredibly weird to him. It was an unpleasant feeling, like he was operating his arms and legs using a steering wheel and levers.

Othinus breathed a sigh of exasperation.

“What good is getting up?”

“...I’m going to stop Coronzon.”

“She destroyed you in a single attack before, so what do you hope to accomplish in this state?”

“Was I the only one hit by her attack? What happened to the others?”

“...”

“If they’re still here, then I will protect this line with my life. I can’t let that attack hit Index, Misaka...or anyone else. And that includes you, Othinus. This isn’t about who’s an expert and who’s an amateur. I can say this because I’ve experienced it for myself. I can’t stand by and let the same thing happen to everyone else. Who knows who it will hit next.”

“What a pain...”

Othinus climbed up his stomach and chest to reach her usual spot on his shoulder. No matter how much he exasperated her, his understander knew there was no stopping him.

He felt a twinge of pain in his chest that she had to climb up his body instead of his arm.

Her usual route no longer existed.

“I thought maybe you had let that special right hand get to your head, but it seems your illness comes from the soul. Even after our escape in Denmark, it seems I still do not fully understand you. It’s starting to look like not even death will fix you.”

“Sorry for worrying you.”

“You fool. If you really are sorry, then don’t let it happen again. Worry does not come from danger or threats. It is an unnecessary excess if you share it with another instead of carrying it alone.”

He slowly placed his feet on the ground and stood up.

He had lost everything past his right elbow. This simple action caused his body to sway to the side a bit. It was not so much an issue of weight as it was a loss of balance.

When he looked around again, he found the walls were made of the same thick synthetic material as the beds. This was a tent larger than a school classroom and it contained some presumably British people in addition to the track suit girl and Aleister. He could not tell Knights apart from Anglicans, but he did recognize a few familiar faces like that female knight whose name he had never learned.

It did not look like anyone but him had been injured so badly their entire body was rendered unrecognizable. Barring the nightmarish possibility that the dead had been taken elsewhere, it looked like he had received the worst of the injuries.

“Your relief at that realization is why you always get the short end of the stick.”

“That’s fine. If I didn’t get it, someone else would.”

That logic may have been similar to Aleister Crowley’s when he parted ways with the Golden cabal over his anger at the thought of some unknown person being hit by the recoil and side effects of magic.

“Are you prepared, human?” Othinus asked that of the boy who once more stood at the starting line. “You will be leaving this medical tent of your own free will. Once you do that, no one will treat you as injured. The situation in Britain is too pressing for that. If you have the strength to walk under your own power, everyone will try to use you as their pawn. Next time, something even worse will happen. If you are not prepared to experience even greater pain, you should return to that bed.”

“I’ll be fine. Thanks for worrying for me, Othinus.”

“No matter how many times you bow your head, it seems you still do not understand. Rather than thank me for something like this, you should just go ahead and put my mind at ease, you fool.”

It was like pushing past a curtain.

Kamijou Touma left the thick synthetic tent that reeked of disinfectant and he took a step outside.

And immediately...

“We have confirmed damage in Egypt, Prague, and Athens!!” “We are working to locate the Great Demon by tracing back through the ley lines starting at the damaged locations, but it is not working. We cannot narrow it down farther than ‘somewhere in Great Britain’!” “The Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches are contacting us.” “Stall for time!! We can’t have them further complicating things right now!!” “Approximately eighty percent of the Anglican spiritual items, temples, and natural objects are unusable. They appear to have been locked down using the archbishop’s authority!!” “How many Saints can we send out?” “The Honours of Scotland have gone missing as well. Queen Elizard left the Sword of State with a civilian, but if that has fallen into Coronzon’s hands, the royal family and the Knights could lose all of their equipment as well!! This is of the utmost urgency!!” “Quit shouting and think of something we can actually do.” “We can no longer use the Imagine Breaker we happened to pick up!!”

The powerful vibration was so great he could not believe he was only hearing it now. His entire body was struck by a deluge of voices that seemed to physically shake the ground like the crowd at a baseball or soccer game.

He was outside, but it was so intense, he forgot he was in such a wide open space. He had no way of knowing, but this was the same shock that Orsola Aquinas had once felt.

He was in the courtyard of an old stone structure. This was Scotland’s Edinburgh Castle. It must not have been far from where he clashed with Coronzon before because the dirt was torn up in places, the stone walls had collapsed, and other scars were visible. Fully-equipped knights and priests were running busily about and more or less shouting reports in a language Kamijou did not understand. But their frantic tones made it clear none of the information was good.

He even spotted a familiar face.

The black ponytail woman glaring at a map hastily spread out on a wooden box was Kanzaki Kaori. When she saw him, she looked at his arm and started to say something, but she must not have found the words. And before long, she was overwhelmed by the reports from all the nuns around her.

Othinus did not seem bothered while riding on his shoulder.

She made a comment from the perspective of a war god.

“Do not say anything that would get in their way. They are fighting to protect their home from a national emergency.”

“I know that...”

Kamijou looked around and saw similar tents to the one he had left. They had clearly been added in a hurry.

Had there not been anywhere inside Edinburgh Castle for them to work?

Or had the damage from Coronzon left it unusable?

Othinus whispered into his ear.

“The grimoire library you left in London will arrive here before long.”

“Index is coming here?”

“They need everyone they can get. You can blame this on Britain’s negligence. They were slow to strip Coronzon of her authority, so she has begun using her power as archbishop to interfere with all the magical facilities in the country. That will last until the royal family and Knights can forcibly remove that authority. It no longer matters whether the grimoire library is in London or Edinburgh. They cannot use any proper divination or receive any divine oracles, so the knowledge of the 103,001 grimoires in her head will be the only effective key they have to fight back against Coronzon.”

...The situation was sounding even more pressing than he thought.

If Index would be in danger, he wanted to settle things with Coronzon before she arrived. Of course, that was only an ideal and thoughtlessly charging in would only get him reduced to mincemeat again, but that knowledge did not stop the impatience inside him.

“Besides that, the British seem most interested in the A.A.A. worn by that swimsuit girl named Misaka Mikoto.”

“...Even more than their Saints?”

“Even more than them. The fact that they see more hope in the unexpected reinforcements than in their own stable forces shows just how dire their situation is. I have heard that is no more than an Academy City mechanical product, but it absolutely reeks of Crowley’s form of magic: Magick. Although that kid herself might not be aware of it. They apparently want to incorporate that into their fighting force for the time being, but once things settle down, it will likely spark new conflict between the UK and Academy City.”

He could not let that happen.

He could not let that pain be forced onto anyone else.

“Does that mean Coronzon might focus her attack on Index and Misaka since they can fight back against her?”

“I’m not so sure.”

Othinus’s response was not what he had expected.

“For one thing, do you remember what Great Demon Coronzon rules over? 333, dispersion. If she is acting entirely based on that fundamental purpose of hers, then she may not be aiming for an absolute victory or world domination.”

“What do you mean?”

“What does Coronzon hate most? I imagine the answer is microplastics.”

His understander suddenly changed the subject.

Or did she?

“She is an incarnation of natural decomposition. She breaks everything down into its proper state. So she cannot allow anything that remains in an unnatural state for an extended period of time, be it a chemical compound, a civilization, or a lifeform. And if her goal is complete and utter destruction, she would be leaving the job incomplete if she won a clean victory that left things behind. She will be more severe and more thorough. She will raze the world, leaving behind nothing at all. ...If the bad feeling I have is correct, this is going to be nasty. She will be trying something on a different dimension entirely from winning or losing.”

Othinus stopped speaking there.

Someone else was approaching Kamijou after noticing him there.

“(Kamijou-san? Wah, wah! Are you all better now!?)”

After whispering to him, she grabbed his left hand and pulled him behind a nearby wall. She may have been worried that he would be incorporated into the fighting force if someone else found him.

She was a girl with long blonde hair.

Was she a middle schooler, a high schooler, or beyond even that? Her age was hard to guess just by looking at her.

She somehow reminded him of a honey scent and she was wearing a raincoat over a swimsuit for some reason.

And.

Kamijou Touma slowly tilted his head and spoke with a puzzled look on his face.

“Um?”

That slight question caused the girl’s eyes to widen like she had taken a blow directly to the heart.

“Hey, human?”

Othinus frowned on his shoulder, but the honey blonde girl held out a hand to stop them from saying anything more.

Then the girl with curves beyond her age forced a smile.

“Eh heh heh. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Kamijou-san. My name is Shokuhou Misaki. I hope we can get along.”

She forced out the words.

Just as she always had, like it was a never-ending curse.

## Part 03

“Nee hee hee.”

Laughter filled the air.

The voice alone was sweet as candy, but the laugh was the grating one of an old woman.

Qlipah Puzzle 545.

Her body's curves did not match her childish face and small frame...and she was an artificial demon created by Coronzon.

She appeared with an unpleasant noise, but it was an undignified appearance since she popped out of a container-like dumpster on the side of the road.

She seemed to be playing with some mussel shells and empty scotch bottles.

Accelerator, Academy City's #1, stared skeptically at her while propping himself up with a modern design cane and holding a paper bag in his other hand.

“I know I told you to come out, but don't play with trash at breakfast time.”

“Oh, does that ruin your appetite? Demons normally don't have a body, so I need a birthing ritual to appear in the surface world and meet your ridiculous demands. How many times do I have to explain that?”

It was rush hour in the city of Edinburgh.

This was one of the most heavily populated areas in Scotland and things were very different from the state of high alert during the night. Everyone must have relaxed now that the immediate threat of the Crowley's Hazards was gone.

The actual threat was increasing at an accelerating rate, but the people no

longer had an excuse to stay home now that it was not in a visible form.

The #1 was acting on his own for no real reason.

For one thing, Aleister had been the leader of their little group, but she was currently unconscious. He doubted simply waiting for her instructions would improve anything...or that was his excuse anyway.

Really, working with a group until now may have been the oddity.

And he had not walked to the city with a particular goal in mind.

As its name suggested, Edinburgh Castle was located right in the middle of Scotland's capital. No matter which direction he went when leaving the castle, he would have ended up in this city.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 pulled herself out of the dumpster and rotated vertically in midair. Accelerator sounded annoyed as he spoke to her.

“Use these tissues.”

“Sure. Oh, this has ethanol in it, doesn’t it? Sigh, I know it’s to clean me off, but this is covering my face and clothes with balled-up scraps of paper.”

Even when supposedly cleansing and disinfecting herself, that demon could not stop desecrating things.

But anyway.

A translucent demon was chowing down on a takeout breakfast on the side of the road during rush hour. That had to stand out, but the response from their surroundings was surprisingly dry.

Looking like you belonged was surprisingly important.

Were the office workers walking through the gray city too busy to waste their time on this? Or did they think it was a silly hologram made using some kind of technology? They may have feared it was a prank where any amusing reactions would be filmed and uploaded to the internet.

No longer would people throw their hands in the air and panic when something slightly out of the ordinary occurred, such as a flying saucer taking a zigzagging path through the sky or a naked woman walking down the main street. No one wanted to help earn advertising money for someone using a hidden camera to profit off of strangers' privacy. Especially when you were an office worker who dealt with a daily commute and worked hard for a monthly salary.

The #1 leaned against the wall and pulled a bottle of coffee from the paper bag.

(This is all more normal than I expected. Do they not see the threat to themselves? If they need an extra push, I could go on a quick rampage while making sure not to actually hurt anyone.)

“Nee hee hee. Are you sure you should do that?”

“What do you mean?”

“The Anglicans aren’t the only ones who want to keep magic hidden. In fact, the Russian Orthodox Church wants to eliminate any and all supernatural beings, so I feel like you’d only get yourself stalked on a global scale.”

“I don’t care. I just want to convince everyone to get out while the getting is good, like rats off a sinking ship.”

“Oh?”

“Until now, this Great Demon Coronzon person was in control of the Anglican Church, right? That means she knows exactly how this country searches for people. Checkpoints, tracking, information gathering, human wave tactics, profiling, forensics, video analysis...or do they have their own unique methods? Regardless, she’ll know how to avoid it all. That’s why I need to stir things up and create a situation the UK isn’t used to. If we’ve left their standard manuals and flowcharts, that demon won’t be able to calmly sidestep it all. She’ll make a mistake.”

A similar method was used to locate a dirty cop by placing false

embezzlement data onto the server. The cops' accusations and denials could be observed to determine who the real dirty cop was. So if proper control was maintained throughout, disturbing the public peace could be used as a form of purification.

Demons generally possessed people, which meant they did not have their own physical bodies, but did they still need sustenance? Or was it an issue of enjoying the flavor and sense of fullness? Qlipah Puzzle 545 was eating a hearty eggs benedict made from an English muffin, a mixture of a poached egg and a carbonara-like cream sauce, and several thick slices of bacon. (The shocking part was that people here thought of this as a refreshing morning meal that was kind to the tongue and stomach first thing after waking up.) She glanced over at the loading area for tour buses bound for Edinburgh Castle as she ate.

“Are you sure you shouldn’t have stayed with that group?”

“Hm?”

“They have plenty of history behind them. After all, Elizabeth I was so manipulated by the fortuneteller named John Dee that they even accepted the date he gave for her coronation. Plus, John Dee was always accompanied by an obvious swindler named Edward Kelley. Kelley’s womanizing tendencies never managed to reach the queen, but this kingdom still stands out from the pack when it comes to worrying about some strange magician influencing official policy. Wouldn’t it be useful to borrow their knowhow?”

“Don’t be dumb. They ended up with Coronzon, remember? They ended up corrupt as hell.”

“Yup and that corruption led to the secret creation of me: Artificial Demon Qlipah Puzzle 545!! Nee hee hee. Not even Rasputin took it this far. Although I don’t think you have room to talk when Academy City was effectively Crowley’s home base.”

“When we don’t know how many tricks the Archbishop left behind, we can’t get the whole picture by looking at it from a single angle. Whether we join the queen or whoever else, we’re fixed to a single viewpoint if we do what

some group tells us to. Then we can't find what we might otherwise find.”

“And all we're trying to do is rescue them from Coronzon. Come forward after all this is over and maybe they'll make you a knight.”

“I don't want some embarrassing statue in the public square. I'm not here to make friends. And there are plenty of untiring morons who will accept all the pain-in-the-ass odd jobs. We can leave all that to them while we take a smarter route in through the back way.”

“Hee hee hee.”

At that point, the newspaper dress girl laughed in different way from before and gently leaned against Accelerator.

“What are you doing? It's creepy.”

“Oh, don't worry about it. Hee hee hee. This means I get master all to myself☆”

“Didn't I just say I'm not here to make friends?”

“Hee hee hee hee hee☆”

The demon kept pressing her body weight against him, so he decided to ignore her. He had learned that reacting to people like this would only encourage them.

When an ordinary person aimed their phone toward the heartwarming scene, he scared them off with a glare and then took a sip of the disposable coffee bottle he held.

“Gh...”

“?”

There was an odd feeling in the center of his chest.

Whatever Coronzon had done to him was still affecting him. Although it may

not have been something that would show up on an x-ray.

Also, it was not anything worth mentioning.

Because mentioning it would not change anything about the situation.

“What is this crap? I should have just gotten a normal can of coffee. And there’s a ton left too. I asked for a small, so why’d they give me so damn much?”

“That opinion makes it hard to tell if you’re a gourmet or if your taste buds have dulled from lack of zinc.”

“Shut up. More importantly...was her name Coronzon? Hey, you damn demon, it’s time for a benchmark test. Tell me why you think she backed off so readily.”

“Um? Well, that would be because you and some other non-British forces were showing up. Three Academy City Level 5s and an A.A.A. were there. Although that puny little Imagine Breaker was killed pretty much instantly, so who knows how useful any of that would’ve been. Peh heh.”

“.....  
Oh?”

“Okay, I just stepped on a landmine! And not just some anti-personnel or anti-tank one either!! This was clearly a nuclear landmine, so I am seriously sorry for what I said!!!!!! A-anyway, Coronzon only needed to swipe the three treasures and the Stone of Scone hidden in Edinburgh Castle, so doesn’t it seem likely she decided it wasn’t worth getting injured in a fight with some unknown factors like you? I mean, it does seem she used Karasuma Fran to send Kamisato Kakeru into Academy City and make a mess of things there to eliminate those unknown factors before she got there.”

“...”

That sounded reasonable.

Accelerator, Railgun, and Mental Out. It was honestly a bit of a mystery how

those three had managed to gather in the same place on the other side of the globe, but they had all been surprise participants here. It was unlikely they had been a part of Coronzon's plan. If she had some other goal, it did seem wisest to prioritize whatever that was.

However.

The #1 struggled to get down the coffee that did not match his tastes.

"She had just eliminated her biggest obstacle by defeating Aleister. That must have been part of her preparations, right? We're only visitors here and an irregular situation is still underway. If an unexpected factor suddenly appeared on the field, wouldn't it be best to quickly crush it before it could mess with her plans?"

"Ohh."

The coffee felt like a clump of sticky mud going down his throat. The odd feeling in his chest kept it from going down easy.

People tended to focus on health foods when something felt wrong but nothing showed up in the medical tests. And just such an item was within arm's reach.

"Ugh, I can't stand this anymore. Hey, demon, do something about this. That's an order."

"Whaaaaat!?"

Qlipah Puzzle 545's eyes widened when he suddenly shoved the bottle of coffee into her hand while grabbing another drink from the paper bag she was holding.

However, the monster looked incredibly displeased.

"What is this? A vegetable smoothie? Does no one have any decent drinks around here?"

"Ahhhh, aw, aw, aw..."

“What?”

“No, it’s nothing!! I’m claiming my compensation before you try to take it back!!”

The jellyfish demon hopped in place, squeezed her eyes shut, and drank from the bottle with her face blushing red.

Accelerator looked like the last person in the world who would be trying out a health drink, but he was forced to deal with that oddly-colored sludge as the price for his infidelity to coffee. It was too late to try health foods once you were already sick, but people often tried it anyway.

“It was obvious we would keep trying things if she left us alive. The more time passes, the farther things will stray from her initial plans. She had to have known that, so why did she leave us be? She had the upper hand, so why would she go out of her way to change that? It makes no sense. Is Coronzon even trying to win?”

“...Today’s drink has such an adult flavor. And, um, this might be rude, but isn’t that the genius logic of the strongest who has lived a wonderful life where winning is assumed and success is expected?”

“What, is it different for her?”

Accelerator breathed an exasperated sigh at her description.

What success had he had? The constant victories in his life had only led to failure. It would apparently take Qliphah Puzzle 545 a while longer to figure out those subtleties.

The #1 shook the vegetable smoothie that made him even more intolerant than the previous coffee. He hated how it was even thicker than he had expected.

“I don’t know much about this Great Demon Coronzon, but you make it sound like the entire world looks down on her. She sure as hell didn’t look like someone who had learned to be cautious after tasting the bitter flavor of

setbacks and regret far too many times.”

“Gulp, gulp. So why do you think she did it?”

“...”

Great Demon Coronzon.

Aleister Crowley detested her just as much as Mathers. Although Accelerator’s outsider viewpoint was not enough to guess at what kind connection they had. But beyond that, those three felt the same to him. They all seemed to fall into the same category. ...Of course, Aleister would probably try to tear his throat out if he said that out loud.

He sensed the same cruelty in them as he had seen in Academy City’s dark side.

That darkness may have been the same kind of hell that Aleister had experienced long ago. When looking into the pasts of serial killers, it was unfortunately common to find they had been victims of horrific violence as a child.

In that case, the cruel logic fostered in the dark side might just apply here.

“When a piece of shit abandons the prey in front of them and goes elsewhere, there’s always a simple reason.”

“Yes? And what is it???”

Accelerator continued while Qliphah Puzzle 545 cheerfully held the coffee bottle.

“They’ve found a toy that interests them even more, so they throw out the old one. That type has no conscious and mercy isn’t in their vocabulary.”

Hadn’t the #1 been like that once?

A supposedly powerless Level 0 had stood in his way when he had tried to kill the #3 for attempting to stop the experiment in that switchyard. As soon

as he had laid eyes on that boy, all interest in the #3 had vanished from his mind.

That was how animals worked.

They only desired one thing at a time.

They were not clever enough to pursue two preys at once.

Accelerator was reminded of his past, but he still spat out the words.

The monster somehow managed to finish off the entire health drink and stuck out his dyed tongue while crushing the empty bottle in his hand.

“That leaves one question: what was it that drew Coronzon’s attention?”

## Part 04

“What are you looking at?”

“Boats,” was all she said.

The woman in a beige habit did not even look back his way as she pulled her absurdly-long blonde hair out from where it was stabbed into the ground. Hamazura Shiage did not know exactly how it worked, but he tried to keep away from it since it moved more like a scorpion tail than a dog tail. He could only sigh behind Coronzon.

Was boating a hobby of hers or something?

When he looked over Great Demon Coronzon’s shoulder, he saw an electronic sign with the same term repeated over and over. When he viewed it through the phone containing Aneri, he learned it meant “canceled”.

The movement of her hair was very worrying, but it could have been worse. She claimed to be a demon and her power was probably real. It may have only been her attempt to blend into human society that prevented wings and a tail from bursting out the back of her habit.

Edinburgh was in eastern Scotland and it bordered a bay cutting deep inland. When they walked to the harbor, seagull cries and the smell of the sea filled the air. Although the ocean did not seem very inviting in December.

The threat of the Crowley’s Hazards was gone, so the fearful people were hesitantly leaving their homes. ...And they were oblivious to the fact that the root cause of the danger was right here next to them. That said, the people at the top, who knew what was really going on, were still in battle readiness. It was hardly surprising that the boats and airplanes were still being stopped.

The root cause had to know that.

Surely she was not so irritated with the UK that she was planning to flee the country.

Hamazura had lived in a walled city on another island nation, so he knew how reckless that would be. Things here were different from a vast desert or plain where you were not even sure where the borderline was. It would be suicide to attempt a border crossing after the very trouble she caused put everyone on high alert.

However.

“Good, right on schedule.”

“What is?”

“We are making smooth progress toward being able to use these.

Coronzon looked back and lightly kicked a green suitcase with a thud. It had been quite a sight to see someone known as a “Great Demon” break open the door to a discount store and swipe a suitcase, but Hamazura had needed to suppress his laughter lest she kill him for it. She had apparently selected this one for its sturdiness.

The suitcase wobbled more heavily than one would expect because it contained a giant stone along with the crown and sceptre. The Stone of Scone’s presence was too great to ignore.

Coronzon spoke while the cries of seagulls reached them from above.

“I have no more business here now that I have the information I need. I have no reason to stay in this city.”

Hamazura had been left with the Sword of State and he had it roughly wrapped in a coat. There would be no explaining that one away if a police officer started asking some questions during a morning greeting, but he could not shove it in a train station coin locker and just carry around the key.

However, Coronzon did not seem to mind.

“That is fine. Continue carrying it with you. You would be plagued by unease if you did not have one of the keys for the Ceremony of Mo Athair, wouldn’t you? If the Sword of State is not to your liking, you could always let me

crush you with the 230-kilogram Stone of Scone.”

“Hnyah...”

“I am a Great Demon, if you recall. You can’t let such little things surprise you.”

If he was caught with the sword, she would kill the intruder.

The look in her eyes told him as much.

“This is a simple matter.” Coronzon walked away from the arrival and departure schedule displayed at the wharf. “If I tried explaining everything about magic and ley lines, I am sure it would go in one ear and out the other, so I will give you only what information really matters. The 78 tarot cards you are so carefully carrying around represent a human body. The cards themselves alone only provide the vague framework of ‘humanity’, but individual traits and idiosyncrasies can be added to give them a personal identity. ...Simply put, it is like the grooves in a record. You know what a record is, don’t you? You only need to know the general idea. I don’t care if the disc format has changed, so don’t bother telling me.”

“Who uses discs anymore? This is the age of streaming. Pff, you’re so old.”

“Do I need to pull your brains out and scrub them with steel wool?”

What could he do but shut up?

He had no idea whether she was joking or serious. The demon maiden, who grew irritated at references to her age, winked and casually waved a hand.

“Anyway, the unseen scratches are what form Dion Fortune. Those are indispensable.”

“The scratches on these...?”

“All fortunetelling tools are like that. A brand new crystal ball is useless. They gain minute scratches and smudges as the fortune teller holds their hand over it, peers inside it, polishes it, and lives their life with it. Only with those

does it become a kit allowing them to converse with their inner side. Tarot is the same. Did you think it was all the same once the cards were placed face down? Not a chance. After years of use, they gain creases and scrapes that slightly alter the odds of a particular card appearing no matter how evenly you try to shuffle them. A new deck of tarot cards is meaningless. Only once they match the individual user's circumstances and purposes do they become a conversational partner that will give you the optimal response.”

Every last one of the cards was important.

If Hamazura carefully cut the deck, he would have no idea what the picture and number meant, so how was he supposed to know about the scratches and dents too small for the human eye to see? But if they were like the grooves in a disc or the circuitry on a semiconductor, he knew he had to treat them with the utmost care. The deck was still in his pocket, but the needlessly sticky sea breeze felt like a powerful toxin now.

A toxin to Dion Fortune's mind, body, memories, personality, smile, and promise.

He recalled the stick of gum in his pocket. He had promised to teach her how to blow a bubble with that. He could not allow anything to be lost from her body or mind until he did that. Not one thing.

However...

“To be clear, a grimoire is still a grimoire even if she has lost her human form. You could not damage those cards even if you punched them hard enough to break your own bones.”

“Eh? Huh? Is that how it works???”

“There is nothing to worry about there. And since these were specialized for defense, looking at the cards will not transmit their knowledge to you. That means there is no risk of harm from the toxin of an original grimoire. ...Not that this means anything to someone who doesn't know how normal grimoires work. Never mind.”

But still.

Coronzon was dragging the heavy green suitcase around with her. Even if they had agreed to work together, he had not expected her to explain so much to him. Especially when she could easily have killed him and taken the Sword of State for herself just like she had threatened to at the beginning.

She must have noticed what he was thinking because the demon in a beige habit moved her face in toward him with a smile splitting across it.

“I am a demon, you know?”

“Wh-what about it?”

“Demons are the whisperers and the obstructers. A demon does not blindly attack and push people away. A demon invites, tempts, assists, and provides plenty of success and prosperity before taking everything away from you and throwing you into hell. Think for yourself about what that means. But I will say one thing: this is normal for me. Emotion has not driven me toward an irregular action here. This is how I bring people down.”

That may have been the case in just about any field, be it day trading, casino gambling, flipping land or apartments, or even bank robbery and murder for insurance money.

Everyone could tell it was not worth it when they looked at the total numbers. Everyone knew a gamble that convenient was too good to be true. Not everyone who tried it found happiness. In fact, most were sucked dry while only a small handful reaped the benefits.

Nevertheless, everyone ended up thinking they alone were different and that they would find a clever way to win.

Even though there were no exceptions.

People thought their personal decisions could overturn the cold probability and statistics. They baselessly assumed they had some kind of divine inspiration. And they were oblivious to the fact that their naïve assumptions

were really the devilish entrance to a bottomless living hell of debt.

Hamazura Shiage had no way of knowing since he had been wandering on the outer edges of the action, but Coronzon was saying she had mercilessly swallowed up people on the level of Crowley and Mathers.

She was not an obvious predator that spread simple fear.

She whispered sweetly.

She was 333, which meant dispersion.

She separated people's mutual understanding and she obstructed the bonds of the world.

"What are you trying to accomplish?"

"The Ceremony of Mo Athair. If you understood what that was, would you try to stop me? Ask too many questions and you will lose your chance to return Dion Fortune to normal."

"Kh."

"Ha ha. Just kidding. It is nothing worth hiding. I wish to bring all natural things to their natural state so this planet can continue spinning. That is my only goal."

"All natural things...?"

"Yes. 333, dispersion. The true meaning of my name refers to the natural breakdown of all things."

Coronzon laughed.

This was somehow made more frightening by the nearby musician trying to find some way of passing the time since he had arrived a little early and could not start playing his traditional bagpipe quite yet. The end of the world and someone trying not to be a nuisance coexisted here like a marble pattern.

The demon was cut off from the city of Edinburgh which was hesitantly beginning to get going.

“All things in this world – be they people, things, or phenomena – will one day be destroyed. Oh, but do not think of this in a violent way. When I say ‘one day’, I am not saying there is a particular day set in stone.”

“So you aren’t telling everyone to die today?”

“Exactly. So am I really saying anything that unusual? Boy, you too will die one day. It could happen of old age when your lifespan reaches its natural limit, or it could happen suddenly due to an accident or disease. In fact, it is unnatural and unrealistic for anything to lack such a process.”

The death Hamazura Shiage imagined for himself was a sudden and violent thing. He was not old enough to have a clear image of himself happily passing away as an old man.

However.

If all of this was so natural, then why was Coronzon so fixated on it?

The end would come of its own accord, without her help.

He still barely understood any of this, but hadn’t this woman in a beige habit made an enemy of an awful lot of people?

She explained while dragging around the green suitcase.

“In other words, unnatural and unrealistic things obstruct the world’s circulation.”

“Wait, don’t tell me...”

“You might not understand since you exist within the ordinary and natural cycle, but the world is overflowing with indestructible things. Especially when it involves somewhat mysterious things like magic. Weapons that never rust, books that never fade, and civilizations that somehow never show any sign of collapse despite constantly doing the wrong thing! It is you humans

who continue to create more and more things that do not break down and you leave them everywhere!!”

She yelled so loudly he thought her voice was going to split the planet.

That woman, who dressed like she still had her job, placed a hand on her forehead.

“The world has been in crisis countless times already: World War III, Magic God Othinus’s rampage, and the rise of Kamisato Kakeru’s irregularities to name a few. This world should have been destroyed all on its own. That is one form of natural breakdown. But that did not happen and history has continued to this day. Why? Because of the people who refused to give in to the natural current and unnaturally stood in its way!!”

This talk may have been on a level beyond Hamazura Shiage’s understanding.

Othinus, Aleister, and Imagine Breaker.

The turning points she referred to had all stood in positions that influenced what happened to those who still remained in this world after ignoring their natural lifespan and expiration date. They may have looked like heroes to those who wished for survival, but what did they look like to someone who wished for death?

Aleister Crowley had tried to make a better world by eradicating all forms of the occult.

But Great Demon Coronzon had the complete opposite view. He had tried to protect the “layer of science” that supported all things at the very, very bottom, but she did not care if even that was lost.

Would they protect it or attack it?

The most fundamental difference may have been her complete lack of concern for the lives that had taken root in this world.

“Do you really think this clot-filled world can remain in a natural state? Not a

chance! Humans may not care if they bring down the world around them as they are destroyed. You are, after all, a bunch of fools who tend to conflate the destruction of the human race with the destruction of the world. But those of us watching on from the outside cannot view it that way. If you humans wish to destroy yourselves, have at it, but do not bring the world with you. That is what I am saying.”

All at once, Hamazura Shiage felt his distance from this woman grow infinitely large.

None of this felt real to him.

He was following her to protect someone close to him. He wanted to bring his girlfriend, Takitsubo Rikou, somewhere safe and return Dion Fortune to normal. He wanted to return to Academy City and see Mugino, Kinuhata, Fremea, Hanzou, Kuroyoru, Yomikawa, and everyone else he could think of. And most of all, he wanted to live a happy life with Takitsubo and the others for the mere one hundred years they had. He wanted true happiness with no regrets and a clean conscience. He was not talking about whether or not that was possible. He had only ever viewed it as being “the happiest he could imagine” and that was good enough.

He was risking his one and only life for something on that scale.

So what was this?

The human race? The world??? What kind of ruler did you use to measure things like that!?

“I will return the world to its natural state.”

Coronzon was probably aware of how he felt.

She knew about the chill running down his spine.

“And isn’t it oddly appropriate that I am beginning that destruction in Britain? John Dee, who grew close to Elizabeth I, introduced Enochian magic to the world. The important spell I will use is closely related to ZAX, the

tenth Aethyr, which is in fact me. But one theory says it is an apocalyptic power that will draw out a power capable of destroy the world of magic.”

However, she gave a loving look to the powerless boy who had no choice but to accept this. She seemed to approve of his existence as a life within the natural cycle where he would eventually die and break down within the soil.

“Imagine Breaker has wandered the edges of history as a reference point for the world. It has existed in a variety of forms: people, objects, places, and buildings. But why does it break? If it merely pointed to an uncorrupted world, it would have a number of different reactions, such as deflecting, diverting, and slipping through. And yet it chooses to destroy the supernatural things it cannot accept. That is my point here. In its natural state, the world bares its fangs against all things. If the conditions are right, death is the natural fate for all people and creatures. That which cannot be broken down must be rewritten into that which can, even if that means smashing it to pieces. That is the perfectly natural cycle you find in this world.”

“...”

“Now, a demon has ‘obediently’ granted you quite a bit of knowledge.”

She grinned.

It was a sticky but somehow childish thing.

“Do you now have the foundation needed to determine how much of what I say is the sweet whispers?”

“What?”

“If not, you will be just one more who is devoured.”

Now, then.

What kind of people had contacted Great Demon Coronzon in the past? And just how talented had those people been? Hamazura Shiage could not find an answer. He could not imagine it. But they had not become an Edison or an Einstein. There was a simple reason why that was.

“So how do you judge this warning I am giving you? Does a lie atop a lie mean the truth??? If you simply accept everything I tell you, you will meet the same fate as Mathers. So, boy, try to at least struggle as much as Crowley who rejected me after summoning me with Neuburg.”

All of those brilliant experts had failed.

They had sunk into the depths of history without leaving their names behind.

Their laments, shouts, and screams had not reached anyone.

Crowley? Mathers?

What normal person had ever heard of them?

## Part 05

“What do you think?” asked Accelerator.

“Coronzon wouldn’t have had any business in Edinburgh,” replied Qlipah Puzzle 545. “If she needed to use the three treasures and the Stone of Scone here, she would have done it at Edinburgh Castle. So whatever her goal is, she would have left here as quickly as she could.”

“How exactly?”

“She would be able to launch herself outside the atmosphere and take a ballistic course to the other side of the planet, but that seems unlikely to me. The UK is pretty badly weakened right now and she should be able to hijack the country from them using the Honours of Scotland, but when weighing science against magic, magic still has the upper hand. If she used magic to blast off, the witches would detect her immediately and move to attack her.”

The translucent demon paused for a moment and pointed a thumb at her own large chest.

“Also, I am an artificial demon created by Coronzon herself. I know her habits, so I can detect when she uses any large-scale magic. But I haven’t sensed anything of the sort.”

“Which means?”

“She isn’t going to use any fancy magic to fly☆”

They heard a low rhythmic thumping.

It was currently rush hour.

The trains were not on high alert like the boats or airplanes, so they were apparently still running.

## Part 06

“The Rapid Model from Edinburgh to Glasgow will soon be departing on Track 9. Cars 1-4 are reserved seating cars and Cars 5+ are free seating cars.”

“Tch.”

An office worker walking by looked over in shock at the tongue click that did not at all suit the beige habit.

The crowd flooding the train platform was mostly commuters and not tourists. Great Demon Coronzon lightly looked around while using both hands to drag around the heavy-looking suitcase that she had claimed weighed 230 kilograms.

“They’re suspicious. But why haven’t they used the government’s authority to shut down the trains?”

“What? The government? What’s going on?”

“It is time for a test.”

The woman with long blonde hair sounded somehow delighted even though something unexpected was underway.

“We must get the three treasures and the Stone of Scone past their blockade. Boy, it is time to see how useful you will really be as a pawn. The enemy has likely sent a small but powerful unit. And its members will be the type to ignore their obligation to report to their higher-ups. In other words, they are quite capable. You will never save Dion Fortune if you do not shake their pursuit.”

“...”

“If you wish to stand on the starting line, demonstrate your strength. Do you really think this will end well for you even if you choose not to?”

## Part 07

And.

Hamazura Shiage's job was to escape.

Coronzon was not with him. Plus, that beautiful demon had called this a test. If he disappointed her here, he would be unable to rescue Dion Fortune.

He knew pursuit was coming and he had no real reason to stay put. He wanted to get out of the city of Edinburgh if possible, so his only real option was to board the train Coronzon had prepared for him.

From there, he had to view it with the same logic as a game of old maid.

You had five cards to choose from. You were afraid to choose the middle and edges because they seemed suspicious, so you only ended up considering the safer-sounding second and fourth cards. He boarded the packed train and stayed near the door while the crowd seemed to crush him.

The train started to move.

If the pursuers thought this train was suspicious, they were sure to start searching from one end or the other. If necessary, he would have to get off at the next station or hit the emergency stop button and hop out onto the tracks. He did his best to calm himself by convincing himself he had thought this through (practicality of his plans notwithstanding).

However.

He thought he saw some kind of white cloth fluttering outside the window.

And it had not been moving horizontally with the train's movement.

It had moved up from below.

He heard a quiet metallic creaking from the ceiling.

(Ah.)

An image he would very much prefer not to think about appeared in the back of his mind. Sweat poured from his back and spread to the rest of his body.

Hamazura could not figure out how that monster could have gotten involved like this. He might be pursuing Lola Stuart since he had been following Aleister when they first arrived in the UK, but something more must have gotten in the way. There must have been a major shift in the dividing lines between groups.

Whatever the case, Hamazura had to assume almost all individuals and organizations would be opposed to Coronzon.

There was just one thing he knew for certain.

(I can't save Dion Fortune unless I get him off my tail.)

With an enemy like this, he doubted he could escape by running off at the next station or hitting the emergency stop button and throwing himself out onto the tracks. That #1 would be able to play tag with an airplane if he wanted to.

He felt heat growing in his pocket, so he tapped his phone through his pants.

“(Aneri, your calculations aren’t going to find an answer, so put that on hold and move on to the next problem. Don’t focus on comparing specs and finding a way to defeat Accelerator. I don’t care if it’s pathetic. There has to be some other way.)”

That said.

It was like feeling a pain in a back tooth. He did not want to accept that he had a bad cavity, but putting it off would only make it worse.

(I have time to think. I must. He's the worst possible monster, but this car has

more than 250% the passengers it's supposed to. He won't fight by tearing the car apart and turning everyone inside to mincemeat. I need to observe the situation and make my way to another car.)

The plan Hamazura had been using to calm his anxiety was crumbling before his eyes, but he could not just give up and throw in the towel. He clenched his teeth and started thinking through the conditions again. However...

“(Nh, hh...)"

He heard a sweet feminine voice being suppressed.

And from shockingly close by.

In fact, the girl was pressed right up against him.

“(P-please stop. Or I'll scream...ahh.)"

“Eh? Eh? What's going on? Eh!?”

When he tried to pull away inside the crowded train, he felt some resistance coming from the tip of the sword scabbard he had wrapped in a coat. This was accompanied by a short shriek from the girl. This was bad. He was certain he was in trouble. Had that mischievous Sword of State snuck its way somewhere it shouldn't be!? Like between a strange girl's legs!?

But then he realized something.

(Wait, why was she speaking Japanese???)

“There, I hope you enjoyed that honey trap performance by everyone's favorite sexy girl: Lessar.”

He heard a straining sound more through his bones than his ears. While surrounded by so many people, she surreptitiously grabbed his hand and twisted it in the wrong direction.

When he looked down again, he noticed a tail-like thing extending from the back of her hips and wrapping around the sword's scabbard.

On the surface, it just looked like that devilish girl was whispering to him while rubbing her cheek against his chest and looking up with an odd heat in her eyes.

“(G-give it a rest already. No one can beat me when it comes to playing dirty☆)”

“Dammit...”

“(Wait, you idiot. You’re getting off at the next station with me. Honestly, I was right to be suspicious when Dion Fortune of all people pops up at a gas station. Suspicious of the person with her, not Fortune herself. On the magic side, it isn’t the people working on some vast conspiracy you have to watch out for. It’s the complete amateurs who skip several steps and reach the core of it all far too quickly. They end up thinking they can do anything and end up blaming the world for getting in their way. If you want details, look up terms like ‘microcosm’, ‘runaway self-consciousness’, and ‘Qliphothic forces’!)”

No matter what she said, he could not let her capture him.

She still had his one wrist and elbow in a lock, so his other hand wandered blindly trying to find a solution. Swinging it at her would not accomplish much when she was pressed right up against him. More importantly, Lessar could definitely break his arm if she applied just a bit more force to his wrist. So he was not trying to attack her. He was searching the wall. His palm stroked along that surface in search of a distinctive bump.

He wanted the latch to open the window.

“Bwah!?”

As soon as he threw the window open one-handed, the biting December wind rushed inside. The wind was like a solid wall, so it knocked Lessar off balance. No, it actually surprised all the other passengers into moving and she was caught in that human wave.

“Ghh!!”

Hamazura Shiage did not escape unharmed either. He felt a stabbing pain in his bone at both the wrist and elbow. Had Lessar wanted use of both hands to support herself, or had she let go out of kindness? Either way, he was released before the joints were broken, so he snatched back the Sword of State she was holding onto with her tail(?).

“Hey, wait!! Now you really are going after my ass!!”

Her panicked nonsense was in Japanese, so the office workers around them did not seem to understand her. That spared him being ganged up on by the well-meaning passengers. He moved against the current and then climbed out the window he had opened.

He left the passenger car, scaled the wall, and arrived on the roof.

He risked his life to escape that assassin, but this was not over yet.

In fact, this was where it truly began.

“Yo.”

“.....

He had expected this.

He had predicted it, but it was still nearly enough to stop his heart.

He would have been done for if he were alone.

Hamazura Shiage held the coat-wrapped sword tightly in his arms.

(Fortune!!)

He could not die until he had saved her and returned to Takitsubo.

No matter what.

There were only seven Level 5s and Accelerator was the top-ranked one. This was not just a case of Hamazura’s attacks not working or having any punches

reflected back so they harmed him instead. If they clashed head-on at full power, he would be dead before he even saw what hit him.

He felt like a prey facing his predator.

How else could he describe it?

All of a sudden, Hamazura threw the coat into the wind and held the exposed Sword of State. He drew the blade from the wooden scabbard and aimed the tip of the golden-glowing double-edged sword at the #1.

“Hah.”

His opponent only scoffed.

The wind blew wildly on the shaking rooftop. And Accelerator did not seem remotely concerned despite the uneven surface created by the air conditioner units and joints between cars.

That was enough to clue Hamazura in.

He had never expected to defeat the #1 with this. He might be able to if he used it how it was meant to be used, but he was not Coronzon or Lessar. The delinquent boy did not even know how to use a normal sword, so a metal bat or pipe would have felt more reassuring. He had only drawn it because he hoped to use it as a hostage. He had hoped it would cause his opponent to falter and hesitate to attack.

That laugh had been his answer.

Accelerator only cared about solving the immediate problem.

Simply put, he did not care if he had to break the sword and Hamazura’s body along with it.

There was no room for negotiation here.

(Isn’t there something?)

Hamazura gulped.

(Isn't there anything at all I can do!? I can't just give up because there's nothing I can do. If I don't do things right from the very first move, I'm screwed!! I'm up against the #1 monster, so there won't be a second move!!)

"You ready to do this?"

"!!"

He heard something slicing through the air.

Accelerator pushed his shoes forcefully against the roof and charged ahead with the velocity of an artillery shell. Hamazura immediately responded by wielding the sword. But he sent it toward his feet. Specifically, toward one of the industrial air conditioner units that made the footing up here so unstable.

The disconcerting noise was like a wild animal tearing through an empty aluminum can.

The compressed and liquefied chemical coolant immediately burst out as a white vapor.

Of course, he did not think this was enough to harm someone with control over all vectors.

Still, the #1 monster was kicking off the roof to build up speed.

Meaning...

"I can take out his footing without breaking through his reflection barrier!!"

A portion of the roof rapidly grew white. The liquid hydrofluorocarbon reached temperatures dozens of degrees below zero and it could even flash freeze metal. The surface of the roof could not survive the rapid temperature change, so a thin layer of the surface began to strip off. Just like the paint peeling from the playground equipment in a long-abandoned park.

The soles of Accelerator's shoes suddenly lost their grip.

It was the same idea as a bicycle's tires slipping on wet leaves on a rainy day. The #1's vector control power could not influence something if there was something if it was a step removed from him.

"You...son of a bitch..."

"Kh."

Accelerator was thrown slightly off target and passed right by Hamazura, but Hamazura ducked down and made no attempt to touch him. No matter the situation, reaching for that monster was suicide when he still had his reflection. The #1 could not rid himself of his momentum, so it was best to wait until he rolled right off the train's roof.

"Did I get him!?"

Hamazura pulled the Sword of State from the air conditioner unit and looked back, but he saw nothing there.

He only heard the rhythmic clanking of the train and only saw the linked cars shaking in a wave-like motion.

"..."

Did it

work?

He did not actually want to see a mutilated corpse, but it did not feel real when his opponent just disappeared like this. Was this what it felt like to continue feeling a limb you had lost? The threat had vanished, but a vague unease lingered behind.

And then...

He heard a loud metallic noise and several smaller ones following it.

He definitely heard them.

The ominous noise sounded like giant claws tearing through a steel wall. And that assessment may not have been entirely inaccurate. He had torn through an air conditioning unit with an antique sword, so surely the #1 could use his bare hands to tear apart a train wall that used a lot of aluminum to reduce the weight and improve the fuel efficiency.

The #1 had not fallen yet.

But part of Hamazura was not surprised. Using the numbers to measure their strength may have been wrong, but this was not #4 Mugino or #2 Kakine. This was the #1. He was a much greater hell than those other two. It was wrong to think you could escape by catching him in a trap.

The grim reaper's whisper reached him from somewhere.

“...Yo...?”

But what could he do?

What was he supposed to do!?

If his first attack failed, he was done for. He could not expect a second attack. Hadn't Hamazura decided that himself? And he had failed to make a clean getaway. He could sit here nodding in understanding all he wanted, but what was he actually supposed to do!?

Just then, something with a glossy color cut in from the corner of Hamazura's vision. He saw delicate silver hair and brown skin that looked more alluring than healthy. And he saw white bandages lazily wrapped around a body.

“Yahoo☆”

“Neph...thys ? How did you get here!?”

“Quiet. I know I'm far too attractive to ignore, but this isn't the time to chat. Go and get running already.”

In the most casual way imaginable, Nephthys used a high heel made from white bandages to kick Hamazura down. She did not rest her weight on him

and kept it at the level of a gentle reward, but he did not have time to enjoy it.

She had kicked him down, but down where?

Down off the train, of course.

“Huh...eh?”

He felt no fear.

He did not have time for that. His mind spun its wheels like a gear was missing.

The vision in front of his eyes did not lead to any emotional response.

## Part 08

When Accelerator climbed up the train's wall to get back on the roof, he clicked his tongue at what he found there. He still felt an ache in his chest thanks to Coronzon's attack, but this was not the time to worry about that.

Something strange appeared in the outside world rushing by beyond the train.

It must have broken through the door to exit the train. It was a gold... something. It looked like a giant carnivorous plant made of thread or hair and opened its maw to catch falling Hamazura Shiage. Then it fell to the ground that was rushing by like a merciless chainsaw blade.

Accelerator had no idea what had happened, but his target was still alive.

And while holding some kind of important item.

Also...

“Who are you?”

“To be clear, I am not strictly on his side.” The bandaged brown woman held an index finger to her lips. “I am Nephthys, one of the Magic Gods, but you could call me a spectator this time. And from that perspective, this is so very boring. Who wants to watch a battle when they know the outcome from the beginning? I’d like to fast-forward through all that, but if I can’t, then I just have to stir things up myself. I do apologize for doing what amounts to throwing a bucket of popcorn at the movie theater screen.”

“...”

“Yes, no one likes a show off. Perhaps I should view everyone as a common enemy here. And now that I have entered the ring, how about you show me an entertaining fight, you wooden actor.”

Something else acted in violation of gravity.

The dried leaves caught in the biting midwinter wind ignored that powerful current of air and formed a vortex right next to Accelerator. Just as they gathered in a single spot, they audibly burst apart.

Bare feet with a girl's uniquely soft curves floated in midair without touching the train roof.

This girl had revealed herself to the surface world through an artificial birthing ceremony.

"Hee hee."

The translucent demon looked like a fusion of a human girl, a killer jellyfish, and a newspaper. She wrapped her arms around Accelerator's neck to cling to him.

"Oh, this ain't good. That's a legit Magic God, isn't it!? There's no point in taking on one of those combat-obsessed freak who have risen to divine heights but have no intention of guiding others!! Nephthys isn't our target, so I recommend finding a clever way out of this fight!!"

"Do you really think she's gonna let me get away, dumbass?"

"Yes, that would be a problem for you, wouldn't it?" said Nephthys.

The brown woman giggled and removed the index finger from her lips. Then she silently stepped back, pressed her palm against the center of her ample chest, and spoke.

"That choker on your neck gives you a set limit, so stalling for time is the biggest threat for you. If you tried to escape but I continued chasing you, you would actually end up using more of your battery. So it's safer to instantly slaughter the threat standing right in front of you, isn't it?"

"...So you're saying I should kill you?"

"Yes, exactly☆ You can't ignore me now that I've shown I know about your battery. Lions, sharks, and other candidates for the strongest animal tend to be cowards who hate nothing more than something invading their territory."

“Qlipah Puzzle 545.”

“A demon’s name is used for verbal commands and contracts on paper, so I would really prefer you did not use mine in front of someone who knows how to- gwaaaahh!? Yes, what do you want!?”

Accelerator did not order her to defeat the Magic God or act as a shield.

The white monster reached for his choker as he spoke.

“I’m gonna do this my way, but there’s too much I don’t know about magic and whatever. So tell me what I need to know when you think I need to know it.”

“Sure thing☆ Nee hee.”

A violent wind roared around Accelerator. It was clearly caused by something other than the train barreling down the tracks. This was different from the charge he had made against Hamazura earlier. Academy City’s #1 held the position of the strongest, but he would obediently analyze his mistakes and learn from them. His idea of the strongest was not a fixed position; it was a constantly evolving one. And that may have been why he was the #1.

Accelerator crushed his weakness and took another step up the ladder, but Nephthys only giggled some more.

You must not forget that she loved fighting so much that an alternate world of eternal, uninterrupted fighting had been her idea of the ideal playground.

“He...”

She softly shut her eyes.

And she whispered as if reflecting on something gone.

“He had the right idea. It was just that his methods left something to be desired. So I will show you the true answer. Perhaps you can gain an even

greater power from this.”

That was when something changed. A single jewel-like tear dripped from the corner of Nephthys’s right eye. Needless to say, it was not meaningless.

“Nephthys is the crying goddess. She is the sister of Underworld God Osiris and wife of Death God Set. Osiris was killed by the misdeeds of her husband and she purified that sin with her flood of tears. I am a collection of those who were buried along with the dead pharaohs who desired company and I am seen as another face of that goddess. Thus, I can draw on that initial goddess’s power because I am already Nephthys.”

Nephthys was the female divinity who cried at Osiris’s funeral in the legends focused on the god of the underworld. But she was also a mysterious goddess who had no other major stories about her. That was why her entire identity as a Magic God was contained in her tears.

Tears of joy, tears of rage, tears of sorrow, and tears of mirth.

And in this case...

“Tears of transmission? It lets her boost whatever magic she targets?”

It was Qlipah Puzzle 545 who felt a tremor down her spine since she was familiar with magic.

Her marine tail twisted in displeasure.

“It’s similar to Annie Horniman’s magic, but Nephthys is alone here. What good is boosting magic?”

“Oh, it’s good for something. I have a target right here after all.”

Nephthys giggled.

She opened her tear-damp eyes and her gaze pierced the target to be boosted.

“Target: Qlipah Puzzle 545 – Boost.”

“What!?”

By the time the demon voiced her surprise, it was too late and the situation was explosively changing. Qlipah Puzzle 545 freely controlled the madness of war and its effects were powerful enough to envelop the entire magic kingdom of Great Britain. But now that was amplified. No, it was sent wildly out of control by an external source. Nephthys was indeed a Magic God. A boost from her was more than just a slight push in the right direction. When a hero or warrior was supported by their god, it was not uncommon for their immense success to be paid for with a short life. And their early death would come in a decidedly unhappy form, such as death in battle or execution.

Nephthys was using that as an attack.

All to mess with Accelerator who was closest to that artificial demon.

“Oh, no! Run away, master!!”

Again, it was too late.

The outcome could not be overturned.

“Gh...”

Did a spiraling red mass trail after him because he had coughed up some blood?

“Bfh!?”

The #1’s reflection and vector control were useless against Qlipah Puzzle 545’s power. He was like a tank or warship caught in the detonation of a shell contained inside itself. And the more powerful he was, the harder it hit him. All of the power Accelerator held was unleashed on his own body and he entered a tailspin as he fell from the train.

“Hm, so is that all he can do?”

Nephthys put her hands on her hips and let the biting winter morning wind wash over her body while she let out a white sigh.

A girl from a wannabe cabal appeared to be hiding inside the train, but Nephthys decided there was no need to defeat her. She likely did not have any way of jumping off of the high-speed train.

The chocolate-colored goddess was only a spectator.

She would not support anyone and she would attack anyone.

But at the same time, she would not act unless something caught her interest and demonstrated enough power to inspire emotion in the Magic God.

Those were the rules.

However.

After thinking through all that, Nephthys wiped the tears from her eyes. A certain boy appeared in the back of her mind.

He was fighting for a girl he had only known for one night.

He knew nothing about her besides her name.

But that true protagonist had cast aside his position as an onlooker and chosen to risk his life so he could once more see that smile which had scattered in the wind as so many cards.

She knew this was a bad habit of hers.

But...

“These things always drive me to tears.”

Divine blessings and punishments were provided for selfish reasons instead of according to a systemized set of phenomena and laws. That may have been why Aleister Crowley so hated them.

## Part 09

And.

And.

And.

“...Gh...ugh...”

An unnatural translucent form flew past the gravel edges of the tracks and down a slight cliff there. No, they must have been in a panic because they fell head-first to the ground. They could not get back up and flailed their arms around to grab at the dirt and crawl forward.

A girl could be heard crying.

The sobs were too painful, pathetic, and ugly to say they were meant to inspire sympathy.

“No, this can’t be true! It can’t! Master!!”

This was Qlipah Puzzle 545.

She clung to a figure who had fallen to the ground there. That person’s representative white was stained by an impure red and the color of mud. She had done this to him. If the #1 had reigned as the #1 and not taken on anything else, this never would have happened.

He had said he was ignorant of magic.

That might sound simple enough, but that great monster had exposed a weakness to her and relied on her.

And yet.

And yet!!

This was how it ended. He had not made any kind of mistake. It was this demon who should not have hoped for anything nice. Had she forgotten she was already defined as an unsavable being? Demons brought ruin just by being demons. Anyone who supported them would be dragged down to the depths of the earth. She had to have known about that rule.

However...

“Shut up. Don’t start bawling over a few scratches. I hope this doesn’t become a habit of yours.”

“Master...?”

“Don’t cry.”

Accelerator spat out the words and easily stood up.

He had lost control of his own powers, so the reflection barrier meant nothing. A red stain was still dripping from the corner of his mouth, but he had not lived a life where he was going to freak out over a bit of blood.

Tears carried more weight than blood.

That was the only conclusion he could reach after seeing those clones obey their orders and throw away their lives while never being allowed to cry.

(Damn her...)

But the #1 also sensed something else.

The odd feeling in his chest was gone. Come to think of it, when Coronzon had done that to him, hadn’t she said he would feel better if he coughed up the blood?

(Did she intentionally remove the clog as a form of maintenance? So she isn’t just siding with that irregular factor called Hamazura Shiage. She’s messing with us all in a much more troublesome way.)

“Listen, this was never going to go smoothly right from the very beginning.

We just have to learn from our mistakes and figure things out as we go along. Don't freak out over the result and get cold feet."

"Uuh..."

"I'm a step behind Coronzon on everything here. And it feels like I'm another two steps behind with all the irregular factors around here. I need your help to make up for those three steps. So I'll say it again, Qlipah Puzzle 545: help me. I need your power. Are you still willing to help out a human?"

"Yesh! I'll make sure I'm useful next time, master! I promise!!"

He lightly clicked his tongue.

But not at Qlipah Puzzle 545 whose eyes were still damp.

What would that Level 0 do at a time like this?

Accelerator was good at hitting things with his fist and tearing things apart with his fingers, but he did not know how to stop someone's tears with that. But that Level 0 would be able to look anyone in the eye and reach an agreement.

In other words, this white monster had no right to act superior here.

This was as far as being the strongest got him.

And it was time to look at the most immediate issue. The train was already gone. Plus, Hamazura Shiage had left the train far earlier than this. He needed to follow the tracks back, but he doubted he could locate his target right away. It was unnatural for Great Demon Coronzon to be walking around on her own two legs.

Of course, there might be something he could learn from the traces they left behind. If he did not have enough information to get ahead of them, then his only real option was to head back and investigate.

"Then I've got a question: what was that? I'd heard the term Magic God in

Academy City too.”

“She was Magic God Nephthys. A Magic God is a human who became a god by mastering the field of magic. She specifically is a collection of the slaves and servants buried alive with the old pharaohs and is based on Egyptian mythology. What about it?”

“...Nothing really.”

Accelerator could not understand all that at the moment. But he was certain that Level 0 with the right hand was a different matter. They might see the same thing, but they had taken different paths to get here. Accelerator had to make up for those differences.

And with that in mind...

He had been injured in an attack from the enemy. There was a clear line between attacker and victim, but this girl was trembling because she thought it was her fault.

What would that boy do?

He had to tell himself what he had told the demon: This would never go smoothly right from the very beginning. He had to fill in the puzzle pieces he knew and work toward completing the picture.

He had to view the same world as Kamijou Touma.

But following in that boy’s footsteps would be meaningless. He needed to secure a different viewpoint, get a view of what that boy could not see, and do what that boy could not do.

This incident was not a hurdle for Qlipah Puzzle 545 alone.

Academy City’s #1 monster, Accelerator, was taking the very first step on a new journey.

## Part 10

“Tch.”

Great Demon Coronzon clicked her tongue without thinking.

Something like a golden flower bud larger than a light car was slowly opening like it was blossoming and it revealed a woman in a beige habit and Hamazura Shiage in her arms.

They were to the side of the tracks.

“This was supposed to be a test, but I’m really not sure how to score that. The Magic God stole the show right at the end.”

(Well, he didn’t run away when facing an opponent he knew he could not defeat, so I suppose that gets a passing grade as a sacrificial pawn. The invisible cage I have built for him is doing well.)

How much could he guess of what she left unsaid?

Still in her arms, Hamazura lifted his face from the chest of her beige habit and hesitantly looked in the direction the train had gone.

“What is Nephthys trying to do? She had no good reason to fight the #1.”

Hamazura Shiage had no way of imagining a being who had enough power to destroy the world yet only used it for her own amusement. He could not imagine a mind distorted enough to see a monster like the #1 and immediately think he was wasting his power.

“So what now? We’ve lost them for now, but since they knew to be on that train, they must know what you’re trying to do. I just hope they aren’t waiting for us at our destination.”

“They will be searching all across the UK, so it does not really matter where we go. In fact, we are not headed to Glasgow like that train was.”

“?”

“This is all for the Ceremony of Mo Athair. I only needed some way of heading west. Stand up already. We will reach the ocean by other means.”

“The ocean? In December!?”

“You ignorant fool. Are swimsuits the only thing you associate with the ocean?”

Meanwhile, Coronzon thought to herself.

(Nephthys, hm? Did he manage to pick her up somewhere like he did Dion Fortune? If so, I really think he could have saved Fortune via that Magic God instead of relying on me... That must mean she is not fully under his control. But it does not appear the thread of emotion has been fully severed either. Interesting. If I could use him as a controller, I might be able to indirectly control a Magic God. This country's chaos is only going to grow.)

Just as she thought that, she heard a footstep in the gravel.

“Is that Accelerator!?”

Hamazura shouted and turned around while wielding the Sword of State, even though it was unlikely to be much use.

However, he stopped before fully unsheathing it.

He had not expected to see this person there.

It was a small girl with a black bob cut, a charm on her forehead, and sickly pale skin. The short hem of her modified mini-China dress gave a risqué view of her bare legs, but the large sleeves hid her hands out to the tips of the fingers.

Just like Nephthys, she was a Magic God.

“...Niang-Niang...?”

“Oh, just to be clear, this isn’t an emotional reunion. I’m honestly not as emotional or as easily moved to tears as Nephthys.”

Hamazura’s entire body was wrapped in a strange chill that felt like countless tiny bugs crawling around below his skin. This was not the same as Accelerator, whose obvious hostility had felt like a bared blade. This killer intent was like a dark whip that would take its sweet time to torment you. And he also realized that she was kind enough to announce her presence instead of smashing them to pieces in a surprise attack. Niang-Niang was not Nephthys. She may have been more what a pure Magic God was like.

She clearly intended to fight.

Like she was snacking on the life that Nephthys had allowed to escape.

He could not read her.

Were the Magic Gods on his side or not?

“Look after the suitcase, boy.”

Coronzon spat out those words and her absurdly-long blonde hair began to wriggle on its own. That Great Demon told Hamazura to back away, so had he passed her test?

A sinister face-like shadow appeared in that long hair.

“Looks like I can’t use him as a controller after all. Well, I would have been disappointed in those self-styled Magic Gods if it had worked.”

However.

Hamazura could not help but shout a question while the demon protected him.

“Why!? One of you Magic Gods just saved me, right!?”

“Hm? First of all, you really shouldn’t assume we’re all the same, but besides that, didn’t Nephthys explain it to you? The reason we’re doing this isn’t

worth hiding or keeping secret. We just want to have fun fighting. We don't care about some clever and intricate plan. And yet..."

The modified China dress girl looked puzzled about something.

"We're here as spectators, but that's so boring when it's obvious from the start who's going to win."

A seemingly endless series of clanking noises followed.

There was a sword, spear, axe, staff, crossbow, wind-and-fire wheel, club, net, chain, gun, caltrop, whip, hoop, claw, hammer, arrow, spike, disc, hook, sickle, lance, scissors, halberd, weight, crutch, thorn, fork, ruler, rope, tube, bag, board, saw, etc.

So many weapons fanned out from Magic God Niang-Niang's baggy sleeves.

They definitely erupted from there.

This was another threat that no one could control.

## Part 11

“The signal is growing! Any higher and she’ll go into shock!”

“Her body is badly injured and barely holding on. If it reaches saturation, she won’t be able to resist any longer. She needs local anesthesia. Add five milligrams of ethylphin!”

Five fingers grabbed that doctor’s wrist.

The silver girl grimaced and got out a scratchy voice while lying on her back.

“No anesthesia. It will only dull my mind. How many milligrams have you already given me?”

“Y-you’re kidding, right? The colinrase we gave you should already have circulated through your body!!”

“Tch. Did you base the amount on my weight? I don’t have time to wait for it to be naturally discharged. You have cetylmin, don’t you? I’ll break it down in my blood.”

The silver girl got up while grabbing a tube from the table. She attached a needle and stabbed it into her own wrist before the military doctor could stop her.

“Are you insane? If you neutralize the anesthetic in your state, you’ll die of shock.”

“In my state? I never would have survived this long if this was enough to kill me. I once fought all the Magic Gods at once and survived with half my body badly burned.”

Her body and throat felt as hot and dry as if she had injected herself with a radiocontrast agent, but she could ignore that much. Once the neutralized substance left her body as sweat and urine, this would naturally fade away. Aleister checked to make sure the stab wound in her side was stitched up

before hopping down from the examining table.

She left the field hospital medical tent made of a thick synthetic material and she found herself on the grounds of Edinburgh Castle.

But why had she been receiving medical care?

This was still that magic kingdom. Even if the position of archbishop had been vacated, she doubted their anti-magic combat ability would have completely ground to a halt. They had to know she was here, so what would happen once they realized Academy City's board chairman was Crowley? She was honestly surprised she had not been shot to death while unconscious.

She doubted this had been done out of kindness.

Which meant...

(The crisis continues. They want to bolster their fighting force in any way possible.)

That was a reasonable guess, but the thought put a smile on the silver girl's lips.

Who would have thought she would be kept alive by Coronzon's evil deeds of all things? What could be more ironic?

"Oh, oh...like this? Does this work as a heliport???"

"No!! That's not even close to being a circle. It's all squished up!!"

"Misaka-san, couldn't you draw a perfect circle by making a sliding turn with that nuisance of a monster bike?"

"Keh keh keh. You mean the motorcycle that thrusts right up into your weak point? Are you that eager to experience it again, you horny beggar? You've developed a taste for it, haven't you?"

"Could you not make ridiculous false accusations!? A-and, M-M-Misaka-san, th-th-that really isn't something to bring up in front of a boy!"

“?”

“Kamijou-san, don’t just tilt your head in that adorable way! I’m not explaining, okay? There’s nothing here worth digging up!!”

The blonde girl was blushing and frantically waving her hands around, but Mikoto did not seem interested in that.

She frowned and gestured her chin toward what Shokuhou was holding.

“Hey, what is that thing?”

“Spin, spin, spiiin… A motor keeps the outer cylinder rotating, which is apparently the trick to keeping the contents cold. Good, looks like it’s still working.”

“You drink iced tea in a swimsuit during December? You really are weird. Also…”

“Yes?”

“Um, uhh… I feel like I’m forgetting something related to you. Hmm…”

Mikoto said that while holding her shoulders and growing pale, but Shokuhou nodded in satisfaction after making sure the double-layer container held between cooling sheets was working. She then put the large cylinder back inside her brand-name bag.

At any rate, Aleister could hear the boy and girls’ voices from where she had left the medical tent. They were apparently preparing for the arrival of a transport helicopter. The spiky-haired boy probably wanted to meet up with the grimoire library, but the swimsuit girls around him kept giving him complicated looks and occasionally got annoyed and kicked him in the back.

But then Silver Girl Aleister noticed something.

A certain body part acted as a symbol for Kamijou Touma.

But that right arm was missing past the elbow.

“You...”

Aleister gasped and then shouted at the top of her lungs.

“You fools! Did no one seal that up!? Don’t leave it exposed! Restrain his right hand immediately!!”

Panicking and shouting only the most crucial part may have been a mistake. The boy and two girls only gave her confused looks. But there simply was not enough time to explain it all from the beginning.

Sometimes, a wound in the back did not start hurting until you realized it was there.

It actually felt odd that this had not happened until now.

With a bubbling sound, something erupted from the end of the incomplete right arm.

“Oh.”

It was not blood.

It was not flesh or bone.

Something more – much more – sinister and divine seemed to take control as Kamijou Touma shouted and held his own arm with his other hand.

## Was it a dragon?

No, it was not even that.

They might have been able to comprehend it as a threat if it had some obvious form, like an alien with a giant head or a legendary monster made from the fusion of several animals.

But this was different.

This was something else.

Misaka Mikoto could not describe it, but it seemed somehow worse than any of that!!

Dark red bubbles continued to appear from the wound. And instead of ordinary spheres, these were collections of triangular surfaces. They were a lot like polygons from a video game, so they felt like a symbol of the artificial. They were all different sizes and the bigger ones were taller than the boy himself. More triangle-surfaced bubbles welled up from the existing bubbles as if to create a single giant serpentine line. Even as Mikoto watched from close by, she failed to see this as an arm. Even though it had burst out of an incomplete arm.

It was a deep, deep red, but also faintly transparent.

What was that silhouette spinning and crawling within???

“Wh-what?”

Was she caught by surprise?

Or did she feel like she had seen this somewhere before? Either way, Mikoto’s eyes widened.

(That isn’t what it looked like when I saw it before.)

“Wait, what’s happening!? Restraine it...but how!?”

However, the silver girl glared at the #5 instead of the #3.

Or maybe Aleister was more focused on Shokuhou Misaki’s power than the girl herself.

“Mental Out! Use Category 061: Sensory Misidentification. It only has to be temporary, but trick his brain into thinking his right arm exists past the elbow!!”

“Kh.”

“His right hand doesn’t exist right now, so you don’t need to worry about him negating this!!”

There was a heavy roar of wind, like a subway train pushing the wind through the tunnel.

If Shokuhou Misaki had been just a moment slower in pulling the TV remote from her bag, the girls might have been swept away from right to left.

Was it known as a phantom pain?

People would feel pain from a body part they had already lost.

All of a sudden, the linked group of triangle-surface bubbles vanished like they had evaporated into the air.

As did the mysterious silhouette swimming within it.

Or perhaps it had been sealed away by an invisible lock.

“Gh...”

“Wait, are you okay!?”

Kamijou Touma fell to his knees, so the girls quickly ran over.

(This is only a cheap trick. It won’t last forever.)

The silver girl bit her lip.

And she completed some private calculations.

(It is too soon to let that out. The exterior Kamijou Touma will be obliterated as things are now.)

## Part 12

“Edinburgh to Glasgow? Understood. Release the hounds. We still do not know what she is up to, so we need to pursue her and wait for her to make a mistake. Be careful.”

Not everyone on the Edinburgh Castle grounds was in or around the synthetic tents.

The pink jersey and fluffy sweater girl had been led to St. Margaret’s Chapel, which was surrounded by oppressive stone walls. That may have been a sign of how cautious they were about her. They were not sure what to do with her. She had helped treat Queen Elizard, but then Hamazura had run off with the Sword of State. Given that second part, she doubted they would treat her exactly well. She could hardly complain if they branded her a traitor.

She was inside a confessional on the wall.

Two phone-booth-like rooms were lined up and connected by a lattice window that did not let the occupants see each other’s faces. It was usually used to confess one’s sins and free oneself from those earthly bonds, but it was now being used for a different purpose. For one thing, the listener was not a priest or a nun.

They were clearly in the military.

This was a professional interrogation.

The male voice had an old-fashioned ring to it that made her think of a knight.

“I apologize, miss, but I must leave for a moment. Someone else will take over, but we are sharing our information. Feel free to tell us everything you know.”

“...”

“We still have quite a few questions about how exactly it all happened, but we have decided that you personally are harmless. Of course, entering our country without a passport and stealing a car is a violation of our sovereignty and autonomy, but we understand that you had your reasons. And that those reasons were to help others. We are hoping you will continue to act with such benevolence. Goodbye.”

She heard someone say “Thank you, Knight Leader” outside of the confessional. Takitsubo Rikou was left alone in the cramped space for a while. Was that a bagpipe she could hear in the distance? The muffled noise filled the place with the lonely feeling of a school after hours, so it was even worse than complete silence.

She heard what sounded like a Japanese woman’s voice mixed in with the reports being given. Was that the ponytail katana woman she had seen around the castle grounds a few times?

(Hamazura...)

Finally, someone seemed to enter the other room.

This time, it was a woman’s voice.

Was it another knight?

“I apologize for having you repeat yourself over and over. This is part of the process, so don’t let it bother you. First, give me your name.”

“Takitsubo Rikou...”

“You were traveling with someone else in your same circumstances and you were joined by those who claimed to be a Golden magician and Magic Gods. What were their names?”

“...”

“Oh? Not willing to talk anymore? Surely you aren’t going to say you don’t know. Or are you intentionally gathering everyone’s anger to keep attention on yourself? I like that way of thinking. I suppose tormenting you any longer

would be beneath my dignity.”

Something suddenly changed.

The voice changed entirely.

Takitsubo frowned at the tone of enjoyment she heard there.

Something was different.

This was not about who was in the other side of the confessional. She had no way of saying anything about someone she had never met before. Takitsubo was focused on things outside the confessional. She had heard people greeting each other before. The confessional was not built to be soundproof. Nevertheless, she could no longer hear anything at all.

She felt the same uncomfortable feeling as someone trying on different outfits in the fitting room when the store’s lights and music suddenly shut off. However, she felt no desire to open the unlockable door and check on things outside. This was not so much a change as it was an invisible threat creeping toward her. She felt like opening the door would lead to a swarm of venomous serpents leaping out at her.

“Do you want to save the runaway Level 0, Hamazura Shiage?”

The fact that this person knew the name of that precious person felt like a gruesome curse.

This person was different.

She had no idea who they were, but they could not be anything as respectable as a knight or soldier. They would not refer to someone as a Level 0. For one thing, she doubted they knew the name Hamazura Shiage. Something had changed. The situation had left the thick rails it had been following. She did not know when the female knight had been replaced, but it felt like an oddity that spoke human language was now sitting in that other room!!

“Or do you want to speak with those beings known as Magic Gods again? Do you want to save the magician of the Golden cabal?”

“Who...are you?”

“I am just here for fun.”

The sweetness of a poisonous flower arrived through the lattice window, but this was different again from Nephthys.

Takitsubo could tell it was corrupting the air.

“I am one who occasionally appears at the edges of history. I am the name only seen in letters. But since the Golden cabal was involved in this incident, I carry some responsibility as the one who authorized its creation.”

“...”

Takitsubo no longer relied on words.



She used her senses. She focused her mind on the strange headache-like sensation that was not quite pain and not quite pleasure. It was different again from what she had felt from those Golden magicians while riding the stolen four-wheel-drive vehicle around London. The sensation coming from the other side of that thin lattice window was gentler but still seemed to squeeze at her brain with an invisible hand.

This was dangerous.

However, she would remain trapped and helpless if she always stayed in the safest location.

“I want to save them. Of course I do. Do you know what Hamazura is doing right now!?”

“Excellent. I am glad to hear you say that. I will now help you escape. I will tell you more in time, but I will leave it at this for now.”

The voice arrived softly through the lattice window.

“My name is Anna Sprengel. I am the ruler of the No. 1 Temple in Germany and gave permission for the creation of the No. 3 Isis-Urania Temple in England.”

## Between the Lines 2

Before the Golden cabal made a name for itself, the most famous of those organizations was the Rosicrucian Order.

No, technically even the Golden cabal was built underneath the Rosicrucian name.

The Golden cabal had a number of levels and groups, such as the First Order, the Portal, the Second Order, the Third Order, and the cabal-within-a-cabal named Sphere. The First Order was ranked from 0=0 to 4=7 and primarily specialized in ritual magic with a focus on Egyptian deities, but the Second Order that began at 5=6 was represented by a ritual taken from the story of an explorer discovering the tomb of Christian Rosenkreuz. For one thing, the Second Order was referred to as the R.R.etA.C., which stood for “Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis” and meant “Ruby Rose and Golden Cross”. No matter how far the name of the Golden cabal spread, it could never escape that foundation.

Of course, it was only natural to assume the German No. 1 and No. 2 Temples that created that foundation were pure Rosicrucian. Recall the name Rosenkreuz. Even if you knew nothing about magic, it was easy to imagine which country’s language was at the root of this. The situation for the Rosicrucians was just as complicated as it was for the Golden cabal, so let us focus only on the most critical part.

There was no requirement to wear a specific uniform or to reveal any of their actions outside of helping the sick. The members would hide and live among the public and leave no signs that pointed to them specifically instead of the Rosicrucian Order as a whole. However, their skill and influence were not to be denied, so to avoid needless confusion, they would prepare a successor in advance and an annual meeting was held to deepen the bonds between members.

There was also a requirement to keep the Rosicrucian Order a secret for one hundred years after its establishment, but that limit had long since passed

since Rosenkreuz himself had passed away.

Now.

That alone might make them sound like a harmless organization, but you must not forget. Rules are no more than an ideal. In fact, rules must be established to get ahead of those who would break them otherwise.

Here is an example from a different organization.

Magic must not be used for vulgar purposes based in worldly desires, such as locating buried treasure or exacting personal revenge. Magicians should strive for apparent omnipotence by acquiring as much knowledge and skill as possible and they should constantly battle their own heart to live an honest life. The Golden cabal proclaimed some lofty ideals, but they had actually fallen into a wretched situation where they exchanged magic attacks out of jealousy and suspicion. Recall the Battle of Blythe Road and you will see just how honest and upright they really were. Aleister had lit the fire and Westcott and Mathers had let it burn. That last one in particular had even purged his brethren with the demonic power of Belzébuth and Typhon-Set.

And you must not forget.

Let us back up a little.

Read through the Rosicrucian rules once more.

The members would leave no signs that pointed to them specifically instead of the Rosicrucian Order as a whole.

That raises a question. If that was the rule, why did that woman provide the name Anna Sprengel on several different occasions?

Here is one possible answer:

No matter how superior she might have been, that lady was one of the magicians who chose to break the rules.

# **Chapter 3: (Untitled) –**

## **World\_Decomposer**

## Part 01

It was Great Demon Coronzon versus Magic God Niang-Niang.

The very first attack of their clash next to the railroad tracks destroyed the foundation of the gravel-covered area, tore the steel rails to pieces, and severed the power line, sending bluish-white sparks flying.

Of course, a power line scattering a twenty-thousand-volt current was not even worth a glance from those monsters.

“Hee hee.”

A great many weapons fanned-out from the hands hidden in the mini-China dress’s long sleeves. The Magic God ran along a weaving path like a child pretending to be an airplane, but a dreadful power was contained within her.

She was enjoying this. She was enjoying the chance to fight with all her might. That was her entire purpose here.

She even licked her lips in a sensual way that felt horribly out of place.

This opponent must have matched her expectations.

“Nee hee hee. Ah ha ha ha ha!! Okay, Miss Demon, how many of my super-duper convenient sage items can you take and keep going!?”

When she ran forward, the fanned-out weapons restlessly clanked together, sending disconcerting sparks everywhere. It was like the electrodes of a stun gun but different.

Anyone who had pursued the system of magic to this point would realize what was happening when they heard the word “sparks”.

Each of the sage weapons that this Magic God had created by transforming her fingers were used to manage the vast power of a Shijie-Xian by dividing it up into genres: attack, defense, recovery, close-quarters, ranged, etc. These

miracles would cancel each other out and refuse to mix if they were combined, so she was essentially constructing walls between them, placing them in separate frames, and preserving their purity. Just as magic power and ley lines were different things, the macrocosm of the planet and the microcosm of the body were linked. The scale was different, but it was the same phenomenon as the world's phase system that divided up the different legends and managed them in their own realms that existed on different levels.

Beyond the visible threat, the recreated sparks flying from there would attack the target from an unseen blind spot. Just like a scorpion holding its poor prey in its pincers and then swinging its venomous stinger upon their head.

In response, the demon's long blonde hair tore through the air like a cruel whip. Specifically, it was spelling out words on an invisible letter board by connecting the letters in a single continuous stroke.

By doing that, she spelled out the ancient Enochian language.

The sinister face in her hair formed the characters and the lips on her beautiful face produced the physical voice.

"The Sixth Call: thy name is RZIONR, fire of fire. Obey the words that rule the tablet of the same color and reveal thy pure power before me!!"

With a roar, flames burst from the empty air, swirled in a vortex, and gathered in the right hand of the beautiful woman in a beige habit.

Now, it was best to pay a little attention here.

Even Mathers had wielded the four great elements. But in the real world in which humans lived, he had been unable to draw out the pure elements, so he had included an impurity to control them. Cement is only a dry powder on its own, but it hardens once mixed with water and gravel. He had included a similar practical compromise in his methodology.

But Coronzon was different.

Fire of fire.

She mercilessly reached for a pure element which could not be achieved in the human world. Just as water molecules void of all impurities displayed special behavior like insulating against electricity, this would produce a result different from the magic used by humans.

Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

Not even the leader of the Golden cabal had achieved this ultimate magic.

“Ohhh!!!!!”

“Ohhh!!!!!”

The clash transformed into an explosion.

And it did not end with just one.

The face on the long blonde hair grew more vivid.

The hair spelled out words in the empty air with the intensity of a sewing machine.

“Fire Tablet of the Elemental Tablets, thou hast been released, so work within my power. I will now indicate the source of the apocalyptic threat. All creation shall naturally break down and Enochian Magic shall amplify the fire of destruction!!”

Just as the embers were blown away and vanishing, the edge of the unraveling hellfire curtain gathered together once more.

The flames doubled in size from before and became a blazing tornado.

“Wow.”

Magic God Niang-Niang’s invisible scorpion tail – the collection of recreated sparks – was swept away and erased by the explosive flames. Just like the stars in the night sky were swept away by the dawn.

“I see. Coronzon lurks behind the Sephiroth, not the Qliphoth. You’re a demon, but you’re also a gatekeeper who never falls from the tree. I see, I see. You form your power from the laws of the Olam Beriah, not the Olam Asiyah! Yeah, this is interesting!! You can probably earn a participation trophy and an ‘A for Effort’ for this!!”

Yes.

The pure elements did not exist in this world and they would never mix with anything else. Just like pure water and monopolies behaved differently just by being a single pure thing. Even if it did not have the perfect negation ability of Imagine Breaker, it could push the enemy away like a moving wall. Gabriel controlled the same water anyone could use, so why was that archangel such a threat? This was the same. The element was identical, but the level of purity was far greater.

“A human who rose to the level of a god? You mastered magic and then called it quits?”

Coronzon herself was the angel who resided in ZAX, the tenth Aethyr.

And she explained what that meant here.

“Don’t screw with me, you fool who refuses to break down. You are no more than someone who decided to stop partway up the mountain. Whether you ascend the Sephiroth or descend the Qliphoth, a human is still a human. Every last one of you is a puny little thing. The true heights exist beyond your understanding, so allow me to show you what true magic looks like!! My breakdown of all creation will swallow you up and you will be no more, you impurity born of human deeds!!”

“I’m sorry to say it, but you really shouldn’t underestimate a Magic God, you freak.”

## Part 02

“Yikes,” muttered Hamazura Shiage from atop a nearby hill.

He had been told not to look back, but that idiot had already broken his promise.

He carried the Sword of State wrapped in a thick sheet he had found on the side of the road and he was also lugging along the suitcase containing the Scottish treasures. It supposedly contained the 230-kilogram Stone of Scone, but he felt like he could lift the entire suitcase with just a slight tug. Coronzon had done something. ... Apparently anyway, but he had no desire to check inside. He was not afraid it would pop open like an overstuffed travel bag. If he broke whatever she had done, he knew he would have to actually deal with that 230-kilogram weight.

During all the confusion, Great Demon Coronzon had managed to calmly whisper something to him.

She had said this Magic God was an irregularity and she had no intention of focusing on Niang-Niang.

(So she wanted me to get the crucial treasures out of there while they fought.)

He had no presence.

Hamazura Shiage was a perfectly ordinary person. He was a Level 0 with no hidden power whatsoever, so this was the perfect job for him. If a single bug stood in the center of the ring, it would only get crushed underfoot, but if it hid in the forest or field, no one would ever find it.

He was just one of the crowd. He could never rise above those around him.

But if he used that to his advantage, he could become an unseen person.

Each of Coronzon’s attacks was ridiculously powerful, but she was not trying to kill Niang-Niang here. She was using the obvious explosive blasts to make

a mess of things and to scatter a great storm of what she had called “magic power” in order to cancel out any ability Magic God Niang-Niang had to search him out. Instead of using chaff or a flare to divert the enemy’s aim, it was more like using a stun grenade that filled the entire area with a blinding light and deafening noise.

Yes.

It looked flashy, but you could not let it confuse you. It may have been hard to tell what they were fighting for, but that confusion was the correct first impression here.

That said, Hamazura had nothing left he could do here.

If he got too close, he could easily be blown away on accident. And those two would not even notice if they crushed the bug named Hamazura underfoot.

Leaving was the right answer.

But with that in mind...

(Did Coronzon not consider the possibility of me running off with the suitcase and joining the British side?)

Of course, he was bound by his goal of resurrecting Dion Fortune. An amateur could never accomplish that by messing with the three treasures and Stone of Scone. But that Great Demon would not know for sure how much weight he placed on that goal. Also, he was not currently acting based on logic or his own best interests. This was all about emotion. There was an idealistic idea that the human heart was immovable and unchangeable, but reality was a different matter. Could she really entrust everything to someone else’s psyche that could grow confused or suddenly wake up?

The violent clash continued.

...Or perhaps demons from another realm had the ability to control the human psyche. Perhaps Coronzon could see the actual equation behind it all, so she saw the human mind as a stable path and not a risky gamble.

However.

She may have arrived there in a different way, but wasn't Great Demon Coronzon essentially relying on Hamazura here?

Even more so than Nephthys and Niang-Niang who were alternately trying to save and kill the human they had spent a short time with just because it sounded "fun"?

"I don't know what to think anymore, dammit..."

Hamazura softly touched the gum in his pocket. He still had his promise with Dion Fortune. He had wielded violence against his own girlfriend all so he could live a life with her that was free of compromise and humiliation.

He started rolling the strangely lightweight suitcase across the unpaved field.

But as he wandered through the wasteland, had he noticed that the direction he chose was the same one the demon had pointed him in earlier?

"If Glasgow won't work, then, um, we're supposed to meet up in Dumfries, right?"

This was the twisted and bent path of the ascetic, just like the one Mathers and Crowley had taken.

This was the journey of the Major Arcana but with a hopelessly mistaken beginning.

But what if?

A demon was a whisperer, a tempter, and an obstructor.

What if it was possible the inspiration of those emotions could also create an opening for him to use?

## Part 03

The sky above Edinburgh Castle was disturbed by the sound of rotors beating at the air.

A large transport helicopter had arrived.

Index and Karasuma Fran had arrived from London as reinforcements. The arrival of personnel via helicopter was a task the group at the castle had already gone through a few times already.

However...

“Condor 01, do you have to do this now!? We’re having some trouble down here and...what? Where did that Asian girl in a track suit go!?”

“Condor 01 to HQ. We see two people trying to leave the grounds and enter the city. We can track them. Do you need our support?”

“Don’t be stupid! They’re trying to lure you in!! Condor 01, ascend, ascend!! The hell!? What is even happening!? It’s headed your way!”

Some kind of beam flashed from the ground and the powerful impact instantly tilted the giant egg-shaped transport helicopter by more than thirty degrees.

Black smoke billowed out.

The ear-splitting alarms from the cockpit’s various instruments could be heard in the passenger area.

Opening the side cargo door to check on the surface proved to be a mistake.

The girl in a white habit fell right out into the open air.

“Wahh!!”

“Geez, really!? Fine, then. We’ll be going on ahead, everyone! Tohhh!”

The hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl did not hesitate to reach out from the cargo door and jump down. After building up speed by reducing her air resistance as much as possible, she grabbed the grimoire library in her arms and then inflated a UFO balloon with the power of helium gas.

It happened even faster than a car’s airbag.

The expansion was more like an explosion and Fran and Index clung to the same wire dangling down from it.

“We’re too low for a stable flight. Think of this as a gentle fall.”

The silver-haired girl did not have time to question it. The wobbling balloon never regained its balance and they set down on a grassy field lined with crumbling stone walls. The winter wind dragged them along the grass for a while after that.

And they did not have time to be dizzy.

The large transport helicopter had also lost its balance and black smoke was trailing after it. The two main rotors could not regain control and it gradually lost altitude while rotating through the area around Edinburgh Castle. The pilots must have been fighting with the controls to make sure it did not fall in the city or on the old castle.

That left only one option.

“It’s coming this way! Get down on the ground next to a wall!!”

The belly of the round body fell quite nearby and tore up the grass and dark soil. But it did not stop there. The transport helicopter tilted, aiming the two main rotors toward the girls like two giant fans.

Now, a helicopter was an aircraft that beat at the air with a large rotor to obtain lift, used the rotational speed to adjust its altitude, and angled the entire rotor to move in different directions. So what would happen if the helicopter itself hit the ground, bounced, and tilted in a direction the pilots

had not intended?

Yes.

It might sound strange, but the flying machines known as helicopters did not have any brakes that used the power of friction.

They stopped by stabilizing themselves while the rotor was spinning.

If it lost control like this, there was nothing the pilots could do.

You can think of it like a pinwheel firework.

“Wah, wah, wah, wah!! It’s coming this way! It’s coming this way!!”

“I know that, so quit squirming!!”

Index yelled as the helicopter slid toward them while tearing up the ground, but Fran could not wait for the girl to calm down. This was an emergency, so the rabbit-ear antennae girl grabbed the nun by the back collar and ran behind an old stone wall. They heard the violent sounds of a metal-destroying crash behind just one wall and a broken rotor flew by overhead. If any piece of that had hit them, their flesh-and-blood bodies would have been reduced to mincemeat. Even without a direct hit, it was enough to squeeze at the hoodie bikini girl’s heart.

“...”

They waited a while, but nothing more happened.

There were spared a chain reaction such as the aircraft fuel leaking out and exploding.

They met up with the pilots who had forced their way out by kicking the bent door off of the half-crushed body.

“The tank and wiring survived. According to the meter, the fuel is not leaking out for the time being.”

“An electrical short could still start a fire. And even if you remove the battery, the power in the capacitors is still enough, so you should stick a pump in the fuel port and remove it all. Once that’s done, set up an electrical discharger.”

“Of course. We can take care of our partner, so you go give the report you came here for. …We were ordered to transport you here, but we honestly can’t keep up with what’s going on. This isn’t just about where we were attacked from on the surface or getting the area locked down, right?”

“Understood. Leave it all to us.”

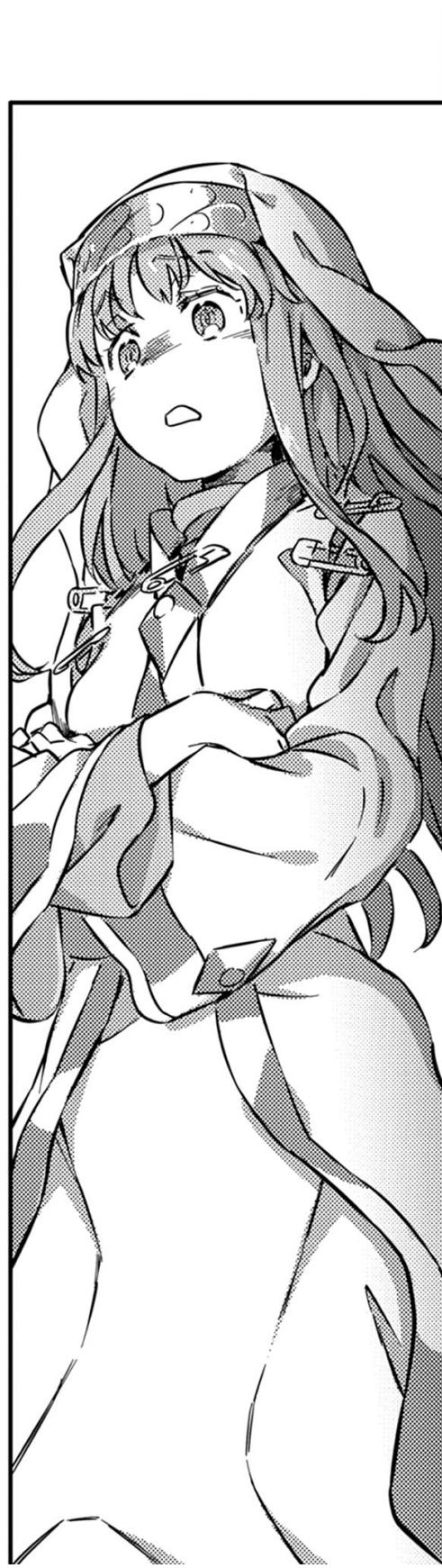
The hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl agreed and then left the crash site with the silver-haired girl in a white habit. The layout of the Edinburgh Castle area was vast and complex if you included all the underground tunnels. The most sensible route would be to make their way to the makeshift heliport, contact Edinburgh Castle’s guards, and receive permission for an audience with the royal family or whoever was in charge.

(Touma...)

Index’s own thoughts hurried her forward.

She was in such a rush she nearly tripped over her own feet.

(I couldn’t get the whole story over the communication spiritual item, but something bad must have happened to cause all this confusion. I need to find him and see what happened. There has to be something I can do for him!!)



But.

When she actually arrived there...

“H-here. You’re not feeling good, so I have no choice. I’ll feed it to you, so say ‘ah’. C’mon, say ‘ah’.”

“Okay, Kamijou-san, excuse me a moment. I’ll wipe you down with this wet towel. I’ll be your replacement right hand.”

She found him in a medical tent right next to the heliport. She had no idea what was going on, but the nun (who had a perfect memory) followed the familiar voice she heard and pushed aside the entrance to the thick synthetic tent.

The spiky-haired boy had no right hand.

He was sitting in bed with a girl on either side of him!

Those girls were only wearing swimsuits and raincoats even though it was December!!

One had a bunch of machines on her back and the other held a TV remote!? What!!!???

“After that interception magic and everything else, I really wanted to share some information with the royal family.”

It had been a while.

Nothing in this world lacked a purpose, so it turned out she was needed after all. The world had been a little too kind to that Japanese high school boy, so she clacked her front teeth together to put a stop to it.

It was time for The Usual.

“But now I want an explanation from that boy who seems to thinks he’s royalty.”

## Part 04

Everything was a complete mess.

Kamijou Touma had no choice but to run in order to save his head from Index's onslaught. Luckily, he was inside a tent. As long as he knew where the pegs held it to the ground, he could avoid those areas, lift up the thick waterproof material, and escape outside!!

“Pant, pant...”

“Human, you seem to have an excess of energy given your condition.”

Othinus sounded exasperated after managing to remain seated on his shoulder without falling off.

But his small understander's exasperation may have come been about something else.

“So has it sunk in yet that you have lost Imagine Breaker?”

For a while, the spiky-haired boy could find nothing to say.

Othinus did not force the words from his mouth at times like this. His understander did not need that boring confirmation when she understood the inner workings of his heart.

“Are you afraid, human?”

“...”

“Now you truly are no more than a high school boy. Yet the enemy is Great Demon Coronzon who manipulated even Aleister Crowley. This goes beyond the UK. The fate of the entire world hangs in the balance and a single mistake could mean the extinction of the human race. It would be much more unusual if you felt nothing given the situation.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

Finally, Kamijou Touma opened his mouth without anyone insisting he do so.

“She isn’t going to wait for me to gather my resolve.”

“Hmph.”

Othinus did not provide empty comfort.

If he was powerless, he could always back out of the fight, but the idea apparently never even occurred to the boy.

So his combat-loving understander had this to say:

“Then that is fine.”

She smiled.

This was her face as a god of war, not a god of magic or god of deception.

“Did you think you were saving people because your right hand had a special power? It was the opposite. Imagine Breaker was just one of the cards in your deck. So don’t lose sight of the truth. Losing your trump card changes the options available to you, but the path you ultimately take will be the same. Do not forget what you hope to accomplish and what you have set as your goal. Do that and you can still be Kamijou Touma.”

“...”

“Do not worry. You have another trump card right here. As a god with three roles, I can tell you this from my role of war god: I will provide everything you lack, so just do whatever it is you want to do.”

## Part 05

Takitsubo Rikou, the girl in a pink track suit and fluffy sweater, trembled with a hand held up toward the heavens.

A large transport helicopter had fallen from the blue morning sky with black smoke trailing after it. She was escaping the castle with Anna Sprengel, the woman in a gaudy dress that looked like a red leotard with a long skirt attached, so pursuit from the sky would have been very bad indeed. She had needed to lose that pursuit if she was going to save Hamazura while he worked with Coronzon. But...

“Good, good. That should do it.”

She heard a cheerful voice from right behind her.

Someone had been guiding her motions from behind like a ballet teacher in front of the large mirror. It was a woman whose reddish-blonde hair hung down in several modified fried shrimp shapes made by rolling the hair and squishing it flat.

Anna Sprengel.

A legendary individual who hid in the shadows of history.

However.

However, Anna had not just caused some kind of supernatural phenomenon.

“Target: Takitsubo Rikou – Assist.”

Anyone in the know would have realized how similar yet different this was to what Annie Horniman had said.

“Wh-what?”

Takitsubo shrank down from the sweet breath in her ear, but she still

managed to squeeze out her voice as a form of resistance.

Although she still lacked the strength to turn around.

“What was that!? What did you make me do!?”

“Scryyyyy. At its core, that is a form of reading. It is not the parchment that makes a grimoire. What matters is to give the knowledge a stable format to be read from. Just as tarot cards can be a grimoire and a certain girl’s memory can be a library, any tool used to acquire knowledge can function as a grimoire if its precision reaches a high enough level.”

The woman had only whispered for Takitsubo to hold out her hand.

And when she had done so, this was the result.

...But she knew that was nowhere near enough to explain what had happened. She did not want to understand that, but she did anyway.

(Don’t...tell me.)

It had fallen.

That flying machine had crashed before her eyes!!

(Don’t tell me they died!)

“Don’t worry. That wasn’t enough to kill those people.”

A floral scent came from the rose in the woman’s hair. Anna Sprengel spoke like she was singing a nursery rhyme. Takitsubo Rikou saw how ugly she could be in how much those words relieved her despite the complete lack of evidence. She was too eager to escape her crimes.

Something floated at eye level. It was silent but it was blatantly violating gravity.

This was different from the black box Dion Fortune had carried.

It was...a transparent crystal ball about the size of a volley ball.

She heard a sound like sugar paste scorching after being spread across the surface of a bug zapper.

(Crystal...no, quartz. I've heard of a laser weapon that uses the equalized frequency of quartz, but no, that isn't what this is. This is something different. It's running on laws I've never seen before.)

"I have created a combat module out of a grimoire. There is no need to give it autonomous thought like Mathers and Westcott would do. As a pure weapon, it will never betray you and you can use the spell by having the tool absorb power from the ley lines instead of refining magic power from your own life form."

"..."

"And that means it allows espers like you to use magic without any side effects. Quite a nice toy, isn't it?"

Confusing words continued to flow out with the sweetness of nectar.

Takitsubo sensed a wickedness in this that suggested she was being exposed to the same fangs as Hamazura Shiage was with Coronzon.

"Well, I'm glad that theory was just proven correct. Although I have a feeling compatibility will still be an issue. This could turn out much like the Aztec grimoires that consume the flesh and bones of their user when used carelessly. And much like an ungrounded washing machine, the power could always follow an unintended path and reach the user's body anyway. This is best used by an esper who can read the current of power. In that sense, you were the best person for the job. Your power can do nothing but read, so in a way, reaching Level 4 with it is more impressive than the #3 or #5."

Takitsubo belatedly realized she had wound up on a horrific set of rails.

But at the same time, she had already reached for this. She had shot down a British transport helicopter, so making a U-turn and returning to Edinburgh

Castle would only get her thrown in prison as a criminal. In fact, she could hardly complain if they shot her on sight.

So...

“I have...a question.”

“What is it?”

“I’m not entirely sure how you managed to get me and my AIM Stalker power to do this, but why did you have me do it through this tool? Or to put it another way, what would have happened otherwise?”

“When an esper uses magic, it damages all their blood vessels and nerves, killing them. Their body is torn to shreds.”

“...”

“Let’s just hope Hamazura Shiage is not asked to perform any magic without being told that first. Not that we can expect a demon to tell the truth or the whole truth.”

Gambling was most frightening when it was not just money on the line. That monster opened its jaws wide when you imagined a specific goal you hoped to reach with the money you won or when you were driven into a corner and needed to earn a certain amount to survive. You could no longer back out and you would find yourself betting every last bit of money you owned.

(I don’t know what’s happening here.)

Takitsubo gulped.

She could no longer turn back, so she had to face forward.

(But I’m safe as long as I use this tool. But will Hamazura be safe if I don’t tell him about this? There’s nothing wrong with his desire to save Dion Fortune, but he’s walking straight toward his own doom. Someone who knows the truth needs to tell him.)

“Okay. I’ll follow you.”

“I already learned of your resolve back in the confessional.”

“Then what about you? Why are you helping me save Hamazura?”

“Hmm, I’m not actually that interested in him.”

“Then is it about Coronzon?”

“I believe I said this before.” The woman laughed in her red dress made from a leotard and long skirt. “I am not a simple recreation made by passing power through handmade tarot cards like Mathers and Westcott were. Think of this in terms of Aleister Crowley who actually survived through all of the intervening years. …It pisses me off to see how worthless they are. I worked through the Secret Chiefs to give them permission to start the Golden cabal, but a demon ended up manipulating them, playing with their empty husks like puppets, and sending them out to kill each other. This failure was caused by the original Mathers succumbing to his own greed and anxiety, but it is time to put a stop to it. I was willing to turn a blind eye to what those children were up to for a while, but it is high time I intervened.”

“…”

Just like Hamazura, Takitsubo Rikou was an outsider to all this.

But that did not matter.

This woman had given an explanation, but she did not actually expect the girl to understand. In fact, she preferred it if the girl overlooked the risks right in front of her. It was just like all the fine print filling the bottom of the screen during a consumer finance ad.

“The Divine Mixtures that brought together ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology were from the Aeon of Isis. The power of the past two thousand years found in that bible so loathed by the very human who finally reached for it was from the Aeon of Osiris. …So what about now? Coronzon is throwing her power around, the Enochian language is being used as a

foothold, and even Nuit and Hadit have made an appearance. One look at the chaotic state of the world is enough to conclude the Aeon of Horus has arrived. The previous methods no longer apply. If you do not update your rulebook, you can never keep up with the new way of the world.”

The girl could no longer turn back, but she had already decided on a plan of action.

Takitsubo Rikou would do what she could for her boyfriend.

Even if that meant doing things he was ignorant of.

“Where do we go now?”

“The seeeeea☆”

## Part 06

The royal family had of course noticed that oddity while they worked to gather information in their temporary base of Edinburgh Castle.

After ignoring her wounds to rejoin the fight, a female knight stood tall and raised her voice.

“I have a report! The grimoire library and other reinforcements have arrived from London. They were caught in an unforeseen incident while landing, but fortunately, no one was injured and she can begin working at any time.”

“Bring her here immediately. …The details are a mystery, but I really thought we were in luck to find the Imagine Breaker. But if we cannot use his right hand, we will have to do this the old-fashioned way. And in that case, we need to view that Asian Saint and the grimoire library as our trump cards.”

Queen Regnant Elizard looked down at the map spread out on the table. No, there was more than that. The sunshine entering through the window illuminated paper documents pasted to all of the walls with red, blue, and other colors of string connecting anything that was linked. This was an information organization technique similar to mind mapping.

She was not a leader who left all of the official duties to the prime minister and strategists. Since the lives of soldiers and knights relied on her orders, she wanted to calculate it all out herself. The room contained a vortex of data seemingly dragged out of her psychological world and it was frightening in a different way from a scene where the female knight had to swing her sword based on an order to kill someone. Seeing this honestly made that female knight feel blessed to have a queen who would work this hard to look after each individual soldier’s life.

And on top of that...

“What we have here is not enough. There are too many strings that split off two or three times without connecting to anything. We need to quickly deal

with those using the grimoire library's help. I can only estimate, but I believe we are two or three steps behind Lola Stuart...no, Great Demon Coronzon."

"Yes, right away!!"

When the female knight obediently turned around and left, black-haired and monocled First Princess Riméa breathed a quiet sigh. She may have been reminded of her militaristic younger sister Carissa when she was younger.

And.

That woman had mentioned an unforeseen incident.

She had reported on the fate of the transport helicopter carrying the Index Librorum Prohibitorum and paper documents concerning it would have been made in real time.

But.

Queen Elizard was initially focused on something else.

There was something she had to consider before thinking about that blatant attack.

In other words...

"...I would like to double check something."

"What is it, mother?"

"The three treasures and the Stone of Scone were taken from Edinburgh Castle. Using their power to its fullest requires performing a ceremony at a point equidistant from the center points of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland."

"Yes, and that means it couldn't possibly happen on land. It would probably be at the center of the sea between Great Britain and Ireland."

"So one more thing."

Elizard stared at the map and pointed at a point on the wall.

But she was not pointing at some crucial document pasted there.

Quite the opposite. So many paper documents covered the walls, but she was emphasizing the one mysterious blank remaining.

And she spoke.

“What happened to the Queen Britannia kept here in Edinburgh’s harbor? The royal family’s decommissioned ship was supposed to be one of the city’s foremost tourist attractions!”

Riméa only shrugged in response.

Basically, a luxury cruise ship measuring more than two hundred meters long had been built as a floating fortress for the British royal family. Now that all necessary diplomatic trips were made via airplane, it meant more as a show of force and technological power than it did an actual vehicle.

That said.

Even if it had been decommissioned, it contained a lot of childhood memories for Riméa. For example, she had wrestled with Carissa and Villian in the large beds, she had snuck into the kitchen to swipe food, and Carissa had been more of a crybaby than Villian. ... Thinking back, she probably should have stopped her tearful and sulking sister from secretly holding that elegant violin upside down and pretending it was a sword.

But now was not the time to immerse herself in sentimental memories.

For one thing, it was a ship built for the representatives of a kingdom. It had been designed to be as sturdy as Air Force One. Plus, this was a magic kingdom. Various magical symbols had been woven into the fundamental design to make sure it could not be easily sunk by any kind of damage or attack. That was what made it a fortress rather than a palace. But if it had fallen to enemy hands, that sturdy design would bare its fangs against them.

(This is different again from our mobile fortress.)

Riméa gently touched her monocle.

(That ship was designed for the royal family to travel across the sea and perform large-scale rituals at a total of 53 predetermined points under control of the British Commonwealth. Coronzon had infiltrated the Anglican Church as their archbishop, so it makes sense she would know about the giant temple hidden below the surface.)

Simply put, it was very bad that the ship had disappeared without anyone noticing.

...They had not been preserving it after its retirement because they could not bear to let it go. If they had tried to dismantle it by force, the rebound could have blown away half the country. They had instead chosen to invite in plenty of ignorant tourists so the mental noise of their various thoughts would gradually neutralize the magical symbols over a long period of time, but it was estimated that would take more than 1,200 years.

Riméa sighed.

“Edinburgh is on the east side of Scotland, so it borders the open ocean that leads to the European mainland. If an order arrived to move that valuable cultural asset to the relatively safe Irish Sea to escape the threat of the Crowley’s Hazards, I doubt the security crew would have questioned it.”

“But who would have ordered that? It wasn’t us in the royal family.”

“Silly mother. When the occult is involved, it is always the Anglicans who show up first on matters of security. And can you remind who their archbishop was?”

“...”

“She is quite clever. If she arranged for this back when the Crowley’s Hazards and Divine Mixtures were causing trouble across the entire kingdom – or if she did it before that visible clash had even begun – then is she really only two or three steps ahead of us?”

## Part 07

An RV rattled while swerving through the African desert to escape something. A calico cat rolled across the floor.

The windshield had shattered and the body was dented all over. If it were anywhere near human civilization, a police officer would have pulled it over by now. The outside heat was too much for the air conditioning to handle and fine sand kept getting in. Neither was good for baby Lilith or for the various pieces of laboratory equipment.

“...Gh.”

Mina Mathers, the black cat witch in mourning clothes, groaned quietly as she turned the steering wheel. The shards of glass she had taken to the face had sliced up her veil and left some red dripping from her mouth.

But it could have been worse.

After all, an anti-tank mine had detonated nearby after being lifted from the ground. If she were human, the shockwave alone might have crushed her skull and neck.

And it did not end with that one attack.

Even now, golden torrents were intermittently erupting vertically from the ground. A direct hit from one of those could slice a beached warship in two.

Yes.

(Intermittently. Does that mean even Coronzon is too preoccupied to focus on these attacks?)

The Crowley's Hazards had been defeated, but the world was still in a state of chaos. The UK had it especially bad. The flow of information had been shut down at a level normally only seen during a war, so they had no way of knowing what was happening over there.

And even this was not much reason to relax.

The frog-faced doctor spoke with worry on his face.

“Can’t you drive a little more smoothly?”

“Please don’t ask for the impossible. We’ll be attacked the instant I stop.”

“Out of curiosity, do you know how delicate an operation this is?”

“That’s exactly it. Destroying Lilith’s vessel is probably her goal here.”

That was their situation.

Coronzon could attack at any time on a whim, but they had to be on their guard and keep moving at all times. Whether it was on a whim or not, a single attack could spell the end of them. Plus, they had yet to find any way of sensing an incoming attack. One major problem was the RV’s limited fuel supply. They had loaded it with a fair amount of extra fuel since they were hiding at an oasis far away from human civilization, but that did not mean all that much with nothing but desert as far as the eye could see. Their lives ended when the gasoline did. They knew that, but they could not try to preserve the gas either.

Turning on the GPS system was meaningless out in the open desert.

The stereo’s LCD screen could view internet videos and a lot of unconfirmed information was scrolling by on there. Most of it was fake news accompanied by cheaply modified images, such as a shark escaping an aquarium or a dire shortage of cup yakisoba, but someone with the appropriate knowledge could recognize some shockingly crucial information mixed in.

“This temple is a valuable tourist destination here in the Greek capital of Athens, but it has just been damaged. The local residents could only watch in horror as some kind of golden mass burst from the ground and...”

“Could it have been a gas line exploding? But it was gold...ah ha ha. No, they must have been seeing things. Prague might be known as a city of fortunetelling and alchemy, but that’s just to bring in tourists. I mean, all the

accessories sold at those stands are made of brass. This isn't some mystical place where pure gold would erupt from the ground."

And some of it came from surprisingly close by.

"Something gold just burst from the top of the pyramid! Wow, I guess the theories about their high-level astronomy were true. Even after millennia, they're still trying to contact outer space!!"

The rules about keeping magic hidden were crumbling away.

"Coronzon!!"

For better or for worse, the Aeon was being updated in a different direction.

Just like search engines, online shopping, social media, and video sites had changed every part of the world, the Great Demon was revealing just how far her influence had spread.

While Mina Mathers held the wheel and clenched her teeth, more and more new videos were posted and the valuable information was driven off of the rankings. No one seemed to be controlling it, but the turnover was too fast. It was possible the absence of the Crowley's Hazards had released the tension in the people's hearts and allowed a temporary mania to set in.

They were the thrall of an uncontrollable self-consciousness.

That was a taboo state for anyone who knew even a little about magic.

It was spreading on a global scale. After all, this was little different from what had led to the infighting during the Battle of Blythe Road, which was created by the magicians' frustration that they were not more powerful and more highly praised than they were. Even if that had begun with Aleister's desire for revenge, they could have avoided it if they had controlled their emotions and quietly focused on their research. Sherry, Oriana, and the other magicians who had attacked Academy City based on their magic names could not deny that a similar negative passion had played a role in their background.

The public side of the world knew nothing.

They thought luck was on their side and thought they needed to make the attempt now.

They thought they could be even cleverer than the rest.

These were known as Qliphothic forces. Of course, anger, jealousy, and other mental forces with a negative side did not necessarily lead to evil deeds. For example, quite a lot of art was born of anger. A lot of people used the pain of a broken heart to find their next love. Also, the human race as a whole had acquired fire, invented stable lighting using oil and gas, and eventually gained complete mastery of electricity all to conquer their fear of the dark.

But that was only what happened when those things were put to good use.

What happened when someone unexpectedly contacted the Qliphothic forces without training or preparing for it? This power was different from a visible lightning strike or beam cannon. It gave you a slight push forward and had you make choices you never would have made under normal circumstances. That could mean gambling, investing, managing a company, or even things like murder for the insurance money or robbing a bank. When people saw it on the evening news, they would scoff and wonder how anyone could be so stupid, but the person involved had reached a point where they honestly believed they could overcome that challenge.

Luck is on my side. I can do it if I act now. I can't let this opportunity pass me by.

That sort of thing.

They succumbed to the whispers coming from within.

At times, those things would even influence expert magicians. They had even led to magicians making a single mistake that nearly destroyed the world. So what would happen if those forces gave that final push on the backs of all seven billion people on the planet?

Chaos would reign.

This was different from a war in which people were killed in an efficient manner. Nor was it a witch hunt born from good intentions run wild. If you reached for the fire alarm, stopped just before pressing it, and stayed like that for thirty seconds, anyone would feel it in their heart. Whether or not you actually did it, you would ask yourself what happened if you did. These forces answered every such decision with a “yes”. You would actually do it. Since there was no leader or ruler, it was easy to imagine just how hard it would be to predict the scope of the damage. Just like the chaotic movement and collisions of water molecules meant the water in the pot would boil and gain the ability to harm or even kill.

Sometimes people tried to excuse their actions by claiming “the devil made me do it”.

Since a Great Demon was at the root cause here, that excuse might just be accurate.

Mina Mathers glanced down at the fuel meter and clicked her tongue.

(The plan was to send the Crowley’s Hazards across the British Commonwealth so they could be defeated and optimize Aleister’s current body. But this new stimulation of the half-healed scab is going to make the people boil over before their quiet mania has a chance to cool back down. This must be Coronzon’s doing. Is she overturning the board Aleister had prepared so she can hijack the situation across the globe!?)

## Part 08

A somewhat tall hill looked down on the southern harbor district on the outskirts of Dumfries.

The view of the ocean from there was honestly disappointing.

(Now I'm scared. Coronzon hasn't shown up at the rendezvous point, so what will I even do if I lose Aneri too? I don't know the language here!)

"Stop it, Aneri! I'm worried about your battery. This isn't the time to be showing me your recommendation for an online strip mahjong app that looks like a cross between a classic game and a hookup app. Stop flashing the light like that! ...Actually, wait. Did you jailbreak this thing to access an app outside the app store? No, no, no!! I'm not downloading it! I'm scared!!"

He hated how easily the program had analyzed his preferences. If this drained the battery, it was all over for him.

He heard a sound much like bedsheets beating at the air.

He looked back in surprise and saw the woman in a beige habit alighting on the ground. Her bat-like wings scattered as glowing particles.

"Sorry about the wait."

"Whoa, um...what happened? You're covered in blood!"

"Do not touch me. I can deal with this myself. My flight would not have gone unnoticed, so we need to settle things before the pursuit catches up."

Surviving a direct clash with a Magic God without having her body torn apart was impressive, but Coronzon had decided it was not worth explaining to Hamazura. Also, she had decided to call it quits without actually defeating Niang-Niang. You could not exactly brag about quitting while you were ahead.

But more importantly.

While sensing the seaside scents and the cries of the seagulls, she sat down on the green suitcase Hamazura was dragging around. He had no idea how it worked, but the suitcase did not grow any heavier with her on it. And he knew she could not be as light as a feather.

“Good, good. It’s right on schedule. The Queen Britannia has arrived in the Irish Sea.”

“You mean that...?”

Hamazura looked out to sea.

Dumfries was a small town even for Scotland and it had a harbor to the south. But instead of a major harbor with a lot of international arrivals, it was a regional fishing harbor. A giant gray ship that looked like the fusion of a luxury cruise ship and a warship had arrived there. The ship was actually more conspicuous than the entire harbor.

Coronzon spat some blood from her mouth before speaking while seated on the suitcase.

“It is only a temporary base, but let’s hijack that thing and get some rest.”

“That thing!? It has to have hundreds of human guards alone. I can’t imagine how we could possib—”

With a deep sound, the Great Demon’s long hair gathered together and stabbed into the ground with the sinister movement of a scorpion’s tail.

That was all.

That seemed to be all it was.

But a moment later, the Queen Britannia rose up several meters from the ocean.

“Aethyr Avatar – 26: DES.”

It was not that a golden mass burst from the ocean floor and pierced the bottom of the ship. That would sink the ship before they could hijack it.

A giant golden pillar burst up right next to the gray ship. The wave that produced was enough to lift up the 150,000-ton ship, flood the coastal area, and cause a slight panic. Meanwhile, the golden hair complexly intertwined so the tip formed the silhouette of a winged human. From there, it was like something out of a comedy. The hair shot toward the ship's doors and struck them all like the needle of a sewing machine. It accurately grabbed the people inside, pulled them outside, and tossed them aside like weeds. The people inside the ship were thrown out into the cold sea. It did not matter what kind of experts they were. There was nothing at all they could do. They were probably defeated before figuring out who was attacking them.

It was more an extermination than a battle.

Like grabbing the bugs crawling on the underside of a stone and throwing them aside.

The entire process only took thirty seconds.

Just when the monster returned to the sea, Coronzon pulled her hair out of the ground. There was not a drop of water on it.

Her wounds remained as she casually stood back up from the green suitcase. Gravity pulled down her long beige skirt to hide her bright bare legs.

“Okay, let’s get going. No one remains to stop us. That is all you can expect from people who do not know how to activate the ship’s defenses.”

“...”

There was exasperation in Coronzon’s eyes as she descended the hill toward the rundown harbor district.

She raised one finger.

“That ship is both a solid fortress and a giant temple used for ceremonies. We will begin as soon as we are inside. I will begin the natural breakdown of this

world with the Ceremony of Mo Athair and you will reconstruct Dion Fortune.”

Hamazura focused on his pocket.

He carried 78 cards there.

They were the flimsy-feeling proof that a certain girl had existed in this world.

The seaside scent grew as they approached. All the roads near the harbor were as soaked as after a downpour. Once they had arrived, Hamazura could not believe the Queen Britannia had not run aground when that giant wave hit it.

“It’s huge...”

“Well, I did say we would be staying here for the time being. Anything smaller would not be up to the task.”

Leave it to a demon to have unrealistic financial expectations.

It was longer than the average school. It had to be at least two hundred meters. The deck was about nine meters up. When looking up at it from the wharf, that gray wall obstructed his view of anything else. When he had checked the rows of windows and doors from a distance, he had counted three or four floors of cabins. That meant it was large enough to hold more than a thousand people, but since it was meant for the royal family, how were the rooms really laid out? There might be a smaller number of rooms that seemed too large to exist on a ship. If it was used for diplomatic and social parties, then would it also have a ballroom like the one in Cinderella?

Of course, the locals had seen the bizarre goings-on in the ocean. However, they ironically had their backs turned toward to the person who had done it as they stared toward the ocean with mouths agape. Make no mistake: witnessing something did not necessarily provide any knowledge. Different people gained different information from seeing the exact same thing.

As for Coronzon herself...

“That should do it.”

“Wah, wah,

Hamazura screamed because, when Coronzon snapped her fingers, the fishermen and youths in tartan clothing collapsed on the spot. It scared them how easy it had been. Not even poison gas would have knocked them out so quickly. It seemed like some of them had noticed them and turned around, but the result was the same. She had not used a stun gun or tranquilizer gun, so there was nothing they could do. The people were knocked out one after another without any way to resist.

Coronzon put her hands on her hips.

“You can’t let a little thing like this shock you. This is not much different from the people-clearing fields everyone uses. The only difference is in whether you shut them down or control them. If you ask me, immediately knocking them out isn’t anywhere near as nasty as a people-clearing fields that mess with people’s minds without them even knowing it happened.”

“If this is the better option, then what kind of world do you live in?”

“The same world you are about to be submerged in. C’mon, let’s go.”

“Go? How do we get on the ship? It’s huge! This is like a vertical wall. It’s like a three-story building up to the deck. Unless we bring in a firefighter’s ladder truck—”

“ ”

“Hold on, why do you look so exasperated? Wait, stop, keep your fingers away from me, hey!!”

While they were flirting, the golden hair wrapped all around Hamazura Shiage and picked him up. Beams of light burst from Coronzon's back, they formed golden wings, and she flapped them to fly up to the deck. Given how

powerful she was, she had to be using some extremely fine-tuned control to not rocket outside of earth's gravity altogether.

Her feet touched gently down on the large deck.

"There."

"Bwah!!"

When Hamazura rolled out of her hair's grasp, he collapsed on the deck with his lower body crushed below the green suitcase. It was kept light by magic or something, but it was still heavier than Takitsubo's butt.

"I'm gonna die! It's gonna squish everything out of me!!"

"Hey, quit squirming like a worm down there. Stop getting it on with that royal equipment and stand up, you creep."

That was quite a misunderstanding there. Being called a creep by a girl was like a knife in his teenage heart, but he knew arguing his case would not improve things for him. Hamazura managed to scramble out from under the suitcase that was as heavy as a minor cave-in.

And.

When he looked around again, he found the place deserted. But this was not like an abandoned school or hospital. Yes, he could still sense the traces of human life and warmth. It reminded him of stories about ghost ships where people still found signs of life such as half-washed laundry and coffee that had yet to go cold.

Coronzon gathered her blonde hair together and let it gently sway around her.

"Let's go, boy. The first set is finally complete. I will tell you how to perform the ritual once we are inside."

"The first set?"

"Yes."

She smiled in obvious enjoyment.

She had the look of a mischievous child who had been waiting oh-so-long to spring their trap.

“And this first set will end it. From here on, everything will be like a giant avalanche. Hoping for any future crossroads is a waste of time now that I have arrived on this ship.”

## Part 09

“I found it.”

On the outskirts of Dumfries, but further inland than the small harbor distract, was a church bell tower.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 flew down from the blue sky to return there.

If he wanted, Accelerator could escape the bonds of gravity by creating tornadoes, but that was more like launching himself like a rocket than anything. He would have a hard time remaining at a fixed height and carefully observing the surface like that translucent demon could.

“The Queen Britannia is there. That’s almost certainly what Coronzon is using as her base. Nee hee hee.”

“I already knew that.”

Coronzon and her follower had escaped while he was dealing with that Magic God, but catching up with them had not been hard when he started making some educated guesses. Why had they been on that train? What did that track lead to? And what irregularities had occurred in the Irish Sea? The truth had been a collection of surprisingly boring information. The all-seeing eye of big data was really just a beanbag of data points.

“So how many people does it take to run that thing? Or to put it another way, how many people is she threatening into running it for her?”

“Um, can I ask you why you want to know that?”

“If I can just destroy the thing, then sinking the whole damn ship sounds like a good answer to me. So can I do that or not? Answer me that, demon.”

“Ohhhh!! I had a feeling my strong master would say that! You aren’t even asking how to destroy it!! You skip straight to asking how many innocent people would be involved if you just split it in two!!”

That was when the morning sky was violently torn apart.

The cause truly was less than a meter away. Giant hunks of metal passed by on either side of Accelerator. They were moving at about Mach 0.9. Those cruise missiles intentionally maintained a slower speed to fly just above the surface for a longer period of time while zigzagging sharply along the way.

“Hyah!?”

The #1 avoided an accidental collision while pulling in the demon who did nothing more than calmly hold down her newspaper skirt.

The shockwave caused the tower’s heavy bell to ring noisily.

The missiles accurately read the terrain data while flying just off the surface so they could reach the giant boat without appearing on radar.

They were loaded with enough explosives to do much more than blow a large hole in the side. They would break the entire ship in two.

The result could not have been more obvious.

There was a blast.

A beam of light burst out and the multiple cruise missiles vanished before even getting close.

The destruction did not end there.

The gray Queen Britannia launched another beam of light high into the sky. Dirty gray dust floated at a point in the blue sky. The unnaturally high altitude suggested it had been a drone that did not need to worry about a pilot. It was like a midday star. They had not noticed it was there until it exploded.

But this was not enough to surprise Accelerator.

He pushed away Qlipah Puzzle 545 who was still frozen in place.

(No sign of the military satellite used against Edward Berridge. But from the

look of things, even the nastiest method would just be canceled out. Is she saving that trump card, or did she get captured and have her toys confiscated?)

“So what’s really going on?”

His question made it clear there had to be more to this.

“W-well, I couldn’t actually see inside the ship. Coronzon is my creator and a higher level demon. If it came to a direct clash of strength, she would overpower me no matter what I tried.”

So if they avoided a direct clash of strength, Qlipah Puzzle 545 could still be useful. She would not call herself a demon if this was enough for her to give up.

And that aside, Accelerator said something else while hitting the heavy bell with the back of his hand to silence its incessant ringing.

“Surely that isn’t all you have to report.”

“The crewmembers have minds of their own, so they wouldn’t necessarily continue obeying Lola Stuart forever. That ship has a displacement of 150,000 tons, which is 1.5 times a nuclear aircraft carrier, but it’s also top heavy. Plus, it runs on inefficient diesel instead of a nuclear reactor. Anyway, cruise ships are the world’s hardest to steer, so even turning hard to starboard is a harrowing experience. If a spirit of justice awakens inside just one of the hundreds on the crew, they can disobey orders and cause the entire ship to capsize.”

“Meaning?”

“Coronzon will be running the ship on her own. I bet that loooong hair of hers will be strung through everything from the wheelhouse to the engine room to take complete control.”

“...”

“Oh, now that your fears have been allayed, you look ready to go. You look

like a dad heading off to work. But wait just a second, daddy!! Nee...nee hee hee. The Queen Britannia uses a special design that takes a royal fortress and folds it up into the shape of a ship. If Coronzon has started up its defenses, then you'll be blown to pieces if you approach it carelessly! You saw what just happened, didn't you!?”

“I'm not your daddy, dummy.”

“You're not? Then are you my mommy???”

“.....

“Oh... I said the wrong thing and now you're really going to lecture me, aren't you?”

“...You have a terrible sense of humor.”

“Please just kill me!! Eek! If my jokes can disappoint a humorless living weapon, then my life might as well be over!!”

When the translucent demon wept and tried to cling to him, her cruel master lightly dodged out of the way and pointed toward the sea with his chin.

“Can we really just sit by and watch?”

“If she's planning to hijack the UK using the three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone, the magic order will almost certainly collapse. That means an entire half of the world. But I really doubt that Great Demon will be satisfied being the master of one measly kingdom.”

“...”

“As big as this is, we should still view it as the ignition switch.”

At times like this, Qlipphah Puzzle 545 smiled but remained deadly serious.

She was like a military simulator calculating out the end of the world.

“Coronzon will probably perform the ceremony at a point with equal

influence from the center points of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Nee hee. If the Queen Britannia's engine room is run at the max speed that won't damage the engines, it can cross the ocean at about thirty knots."

"Which means?"

"She will arrive in position in two hours, so precisely noon. At that point, no one can stop her."

With that said, Qlipah Puzzle started pressing her index fingers together in front of her chest which was too large for the rest of her small build.

"U-umm. Since we were defeated by that Magic God last time, I decided to throw out any optimism and take a stricter view of this..."

"If you're afraid of losing again, then can it. Don't let every little failure hold you back."

"No, it isn't that. I'm actually saying I've made myself look at something I'd been trying to ignore before." The translucent demon continued even under the #1's intimidating glare. "It might be possible to get on board the Queen Britannia which is essentially a royal fortress. Sinking it is out of the question, but getting on is a different matter. Then it would be possible to meet Coronzon face to face."

"What about it? I'm sick of taking the long way around. I want to crush that Great Demon and end this already."

"That's the thing..."

Qlipah Puzzle 545 made a confession.

She almost made it sound too matter of fact.

"Most likely, there is nothing in this world capable of truly killing Coronzon."

## Part 10

Shortly before all that, the demon and the boy were inside the Queen Britannia.

“Wow.”

There was no reason to keep it hidden in a plastic sheet, so Hamazura Shiage held the sheathed Sword of State in both hands as he looked around.

While dragging the heavy green suitcase behind her, Lola opened her mouth in slight exasperation without looking back at him.

“Is that the only word you know? How many times have you said that now?”

“But every room I look in is a surprise.”

There was a gallery full of famous paintings framed in gold and a legitimate opera house with more than three stories' worth of audience seating. The dance hall and dining hall were much too large to believe they were on a ship. He doubted a school made of reinforced concrete could contain spaces this large. This had been described as a royal castle folded up into the shape of a ship and that seemed to be an accurate description.

He felt the gum in his pocket.

He wanted to make sure he maintained a proper sense of perspective. He had to keep in mind what he could and could not do. Coronzon had stolen this, so it did not belong to him.

He asked a question while walking past a marble goddess statue that he was afraid to touch.

“Where are we going?”

“The secret base hidden in this ship.”

Coronzon readily answered him, but instead of the stairs or an elevator, she walked into the room adjacent to the giant dining hall. It had a tiled floor and industrial fridges and counters made from a polished silver material. Even the stovetops and ovens were nothing like the ones found in a normal restaurant. The only alcoholic beverages appeared to be wines and brandies used for flavoring, but it would not surprise him to learn this ship had a separate wine cellar.

The kitchen was fully stocked even after the ship's retirement because the tourists were willing to pay high prices to experience truly royal cooking.

"If I go with Undine, then fish would work. Where can I find a corresponding replacement?"

Coronzon muttered something under her breath while continuing into the kitchen, swinging her hair around like a scorpion's tail, opening a fridge door, and grabbing some thin slices of chilled salmon.

"We can get in through there."

"Hey, wait. That's just the door to the food storage roo- ahm."

"Take this chance to fill your stomach. Four-legged animals are fire, fish are water, birds are wind, and snakes or bugs are earth. You should refuel on Salamander, the essence of fire."

Great Demon Coronzon had taken something like a hamburger steak wrapped in a thin white film and shoved it into his mouth. ...Using her long blonde hair. And not just one or two hairs; a large bundle of it. Anyone without a powerful fixation on beautiful women's hair would be calling for the manager after that.

But besides that...

"Bleh!?"

"Oh, do you not like that traditional dish?"

"Ugh, cough, what is this? What kind of meat is it!?"

“You ignorant fool. Surely you have heard of haggis. I said four-legged animals, didn’t I? You take a sheep’s stomach, fill it with the animal’s organs and some vegetables, and then cook it.”

That would explain the smell that hit him more so than the flavor. And didn’t the stomach count as an organ? Based on her description, he had trouble figuring out what the selling point was. Just like with Japan’s natto and Scandinavia’s smelly canned goods, there were some mystery dishes where you could not imagine how anyone decided to make it in the first place.

“You never know when our next chance to eat will be, so you need to absorb that four-legged animal meat while you can.”

“Hold on. I don’t trust your tastes, so I’m choosing what I want to eat!! Nghhh!!”

This time, it was a kind of Western cake.

Hamazura Shiage tearfully struggled as it was forced into his mouth.

This did not seem to have been properly flavored with sugar or brandy. An unbearable sweetness spread through his mouth like she had shoved a hardened hunk of honey in there. His tongue was helpless and the thick sweetness felt like a blow to the back of the head.

“A trinity of fat, protein, and carbs. . .It seems to lack the crucial blood, but were these made as containers for researching the Cake of Light?”

“Hake of...bleh...Cake of Light?”

“It is a replacement for a sacrifice spoken of in Crowley’s grimoire. Well, this alone will not provide any of the animal matter we want. Its nature will change depending on what kind of blood it is filled with. If the haggis is not to your liking, you can fill that with the blood or meat of another four-legged animal and eat it.”

The hair hell resumed.

None of the flavors matched the tastes of a Japanese person from the culture of fish stock.

But the blonde beauty did not care while she snacked on a few thin slices of bread and red wine.

“What kind of British person gets their wine delivered from a French chateau? ... Well, the royal family is a stickler for tradition. And just like the cliché in gangster movies, you can always find the dirty secrets hidden in the back of the kitchen. Munch, munch.”

“Wahh!! Ahh, ahh, ahh, wahhhh!!”

“What, did you think this was enough to get me drunk? I am only refueling my internal energy with a bit of bread and wine.”

“Bread and wine? I feel like I’ve heard that combination somewhere before...”

“I am a demon from the Sephiroth instead of the Qliphoth. I am not bound by the usual dualism, so I will not reject the holy.”

She emptied the entire bottle in no time.

A corner of the label said “15%”. Hamazura could guess that was the alcohol content and he doubted there were any unit differences here like there were between miles and meters. Since beer was 4%, he knew this had to be pretty strong stuff. As for why he knew that number off the top of his head...well, there was no real reason behind it. Honest. Just don’t think about it too much.

After licking the bread crumbs off her fingers, Coronzon took a bold action while walking further into the kitchen.

She reached around to her back, unzipped the zipper there, and stripped off her beige habit.

“Whoa, wait!? You are drunk, aren’t you!?”

“Just hold this, servant. Do not let it touch the floor.”

“Agh!”

A feminine scent filled his world when the habit was tossed over his head. Meanwhile, Coronzon stretched in nothing but pure white underwear and then fished through a storage box on the countertop.

“???”

“What is it? I can feel your gaze on my back.”

The strange face in her hair glared at him.

Hamazura stared at the alluring movement of her shoulder blades and spine as he answered.

“Well, um, I was just surprised to find a demon doesn’t have wings or a tail.”

“I can add those symbols when I need them, but now is not the time. What good is spreading my wings when I do not need to fly?”

“Then when does a demon use their horns? When headbutting someone???”

“You fool. There is no point in a female demon having horns on her head. Those are a symbol of reproductive power with their origin in ancient male gods like Pan or Cernunnos. ...But since men cannot get pregnant, I assume you can imagine which part of the reproductive process those symbolize. Well, the kind of demon that slips into people’s beds would be able retain their horns after changing sex to suit their partner, but that is not something I need for my body. I can create artificial beings like Qlipah Puzzle 545 using nothing more than letters and numbers, so I do not need to mix different bodily fluids together.”

The delinquent boy had no idea what she meant, but he really wished she would stop talking about bodily fluids and slipping into someone’s bed when she was showing off her butt contained only in white underwear.

“A-anyway, is that a first aid kit?”

“Did you think professional cooks never injured themselves? There are no

absolutes in any industry. And the kitchen is a dangerous workplace thanks to all the fire and knives. Tools like this are a necessity.”

Coronzon sprinkled some disinfectant on her arms and legs, but then she took a very strange action.

Had she called them Cakes of Light?

She crushed one of those weird cakes between her fingertips and rubbed it into her painful-looking wounds.

“Wait.”

“The Cake of Light is a powerful enough filler for animal essence that it can take the place of a sacrifice. These are generic containers until you insert the blood, but that is why they can be used as a barrier to prevent your power from leaking out. Blocking up the collapsed portion of my bodily microcosm takes top priority. Stopping the bleeding can wait.”

This was apparently the right thing to do. Or Coronzon believed so at least. It was like rubbing putty on a model or adding a new coat of paint over the old, cracked paint. She began wrapping new bandages over the crushed cake.

And that meant it was necessary.

There were fresh wounds all over Coronzon’s mostly-naked body and they were seeping blood.

Magic God Niang-Niang had done this.

But clashing head-on with that monster and only receiving these injuries was a testament to Coronzon’s great power. Hamazura had no way of knowing, but Crowley had ended up with half his body burned when he challenged the Magic Gods.

“It is necessary part of descending to the surface world, but managing a flesh avatar is nothing but a pain.”

“A-are you okay? Now that I look at you, those are some pretty bad injuries.”

“This is far easier to deal with than the blood from within. At least these external wounds do not give me headaches or mess with my thinking.”

“Blood from within?”

“I mean the blood that is meant to be placed inside the Cake of Light.”

“?”

He was not sure what she meant, but if it was internal bleeding, that was a serious issue.

Unlike a broken bone, he could not imagine how to treat that.

He grew pale, but Coronzon gave him a cold look and pouted her lips like a child.

“Don’t lie. Or are you playing dumb to force me to say it myself? At your age, you should be stupidly interested in how babies are made, so surely you aren’t going to claim you innocent enough to have never heard of menstruation.”

“Bff!!” spat Hamazura.

“I only fed you the generic container before anything was sealed inside. Even if you are a normal person without such a strange fetish, you have nothing to worry about here.”

Coronzon did not seem bothered by the subject at all. She reached for the beige habit Hamazura held and put it back on.

“We are preparing for a ceremony. Calculate the appropriate amount and then fill your stomach.”

“The appropriate amount? How am I supposed to figure that out!?”

“Little enough that your full belly will not prevent you from taking deep breaths. But the container is just a container. What you need is Salamander essence. Make sure to fill it with the blood or meat of a four-legged animal

before consuming it.”

Hamazura really did not want to eat that excessively sweet Cake of Light. Especially when the secret ingredient was animal blood. Each ingredient and preparation method probably had some kind of meaning behind it, but it was far from good when it came to flavor.

“Are all British desserts like this?”

“You aren’t thinking something extremely rude, are you?”

Coronzon walked to another door. It was made of thick steel, but it was not a double door. It reminded him of a bank vault, but that may have been due to the round wheel seen on all the ship’s watertight doors.

“But that’s just the food storage room, right? What are we supposed to find in there?”

“Must you continue peppering me with questions when you can just wait and see? I suppose you really are a child of Crowley, who made sure to question everything he saw while entering new territories. Such a difference from Mathers, who indiscriminately translated and absorbed everything he dug up.”

During this casual conversation, it hit Hamazura.

He was speaking with Coronzon.

He might have spoken with her more than he had with Dion Fortune, Nephthys, or Niang-Niang.

After stepping through the door, they found a large space.

The ship was arranged like a labyrinth and it was easy to lose track of where you were, but he was pretty sure this was near the center of the ship. This space was larger than a basketball court, it had no windows, and the walls, floor, and ceiling were covered in thick steel. This cruise ship had been built for the British royal family. The ingredients and supplies for its many services may have taken priority over the number of cabins.

Metal containers and wooden boxes were stacked up all over the room.

An indoor forklift the size of a golf cart was parked by one wall.

“This is a food storage room, isn’t it?”

“Who said that was all it was? Ships are just like any other vehicle: it all comes down to how the limited space is utilized. It would be inefficient to have smaller storage rooms scattered across the ship, so all of the cargo is gathered here and it has doors leading to every part of the ship. It is the same idea as an ant colony. The cargo storeroom is placed in the center and pathways from there connect to everything else.”

“So is it like a central distribution center for an online store?”

“You worldly fool. Watch what you say. Your words reveal the life you have lived.”

Coronzon’s blonde hair swayed side to side as she walked to a large elevator on the wall. It was apparently built to carry those containers, so it was more like a turntable-style parking garage than an elevator. The thick metal door rose up instead of opening to either side.

When they walked onboard, the beauty in a beige habit pressed the “up” button.

Hamazura’s eyes widened.

“Up?”

“What about it?”

Coronzon had called it a secret base, so he had assumed they were headed to the bottom-level hold or to the ballast tank.

(What’s above here? Two floors, three floors...no, wait. This is taking too long. How far are we riding this thing?)

He was surrounded by a noise much like steam or gas being sprayed out.

“Wah!?”

“Do not panic. It is simply decontaminating and purifying us. Cleansing impurities is not an exclusively Eastern concept. Of course, we are on the sacrilegious side of things, so we can ignore this.”

His questions were finally answered.

The elevator reached its destination and the thick metal door rose.

The biting winter sea breeze hit him in the cheek.

“Wha-?”

He saw the blue sky and ocean facing each other like opposing mirrors.

There were no walls or ceilings here. No windows or doors were needed.

“Outside?”

“Yes.”

“But isn’t that the heliport right there!? Everyone can see us here!!”

Great Demon Coronzon reached to her back and casually stripped off her beige habit.

She revealed her pure white underwear again.

Hamazura Shiage felt his teenage blood pressure spiking.

“Wha-, eh, huh?”

“Make a search on that mobile device. Oh, but not the search engine that only periodically updates the satellite images. Use a real-time satellite service that lets you track a tagged online shopping product. The world is full of latent peeping toms, so anyone can access satellite images. Now, can you find my

alluring body on there?”

His blood pressure had spiked, but now he thought the blood was going to freeze in his veins.

He was afraid to check.

That emotion captured his fingers and kept him from moving them.

“You mean...no one can see us here?”

“When fully submerging yourself in an abnormal environment, the changes can actually be difficult to notice.”

This area was not covered by a special kind of glass.

He could not see any kind of shimmering from a temperature difference like with a mirage.

With her extreme demonstration complete, the demon put back on her beige habit.

“Phew. The temples used as magical ceremonial grounds should be kept secret, but the acts of the royals are not to be hidden. ...Those conflicting requirements created a bit of a dilemma for them. After all, royal magic is used for national ceremonies. Curtana would be the most obvious example of that.”

The Egyptian pyramids and the Greek Parthenon were other examples.

Ceremonial grounds that were accepted by the masses were built to be displayed prominently and gave a view down upon the land over which they ruled.

When Hamazura looked around as best he could as an amateur, he found it to be something like a large decagonal plate. The elevator they had used was located along a boxy structure on one of the sides. The gray heliport itself was bigger than a large tennis court. And when he looked more carefully, he noticed some things that were not quite right.

The red warning lights and big “H” were missing from the heliport.

“This is the core of the Queen Britannia.” Great Demon Coronzon sat on the suitcase in that large terrace that was wide open yet hidden from view. “You have to remember that this was designed by the people that draw out Michael’s power through Curtana. The number ten symbolizes the Sephirah. The number of spheres becomes eleven if you include the hidden Da’at, but that number can easily be confused with the number representing the other tree. Well, I suppose it is a fairly common and simple symbol. Although Aleister Crowley probably would not agree since he viewed eleven as a holy number and created the term Probationer to bring the number of levels up to eleven.”

While she spoke, she used her slender hands to bend something. It had originally been a golden pipe, but it might as well have been cardboard in her hands. She had quickly bent it into the shape of a boomerang. That looked simple enough, but it required enough grip strength to crush a metal bat in your hands.

“Look to its essence. You are letting the wrong thing surprise you, fool.”

She breathed an exasperated sigh and readily threw it.

With the heavy sound of it slicing through the air, the handmade boomerang flew far while rotating. Having that thing come back would be no laughing matter. Despite the common view of boomerangs, the ones really used for hunting had the “return” function removed to make sure you did not hit yourself in the head with your own weapon. Hamazura quickly used his hands to protect his head, but the result was not at all what he expected.

The boomerang burst with a sound like a neon tube breaking.

It did so on the outside of the decagonal heliport.

It had left without issue, but it was not allowed back in.

Something invisible had been set up there.

“Do you see now what it means to be a temple? I tried to make it as visually obvious as I could.”

“Wait, wait, wait. Why were you acting like I should have understood this already? I’m pretty sure I’m not the only idiot about this stuff.”

“It is high time you removed your dunce cap and made an attempt to learn. Use your head. The royal family remade their fortress into a ship so they could travel the world’s seas with all this on hand. That should tell you how important it all is. The temple was not built for the ship’s purposes. The ship was built for the temple’s purposes. So it does not matter if it is out in the open. This is far more secure than a nuclear shelter made by digging deep underground and pouring in special cement.”

It was a giant decagon.

The floor(?) below his feet was not just flat. It had something like grooves dug into it. And they did not form the H of a heliport. They reminded him of the indentations for the rails at a railroad crossing, but these were much more complex. There were straight lines, curves, and a lot of intersections. The messy collection of lines was like the stamp used to cover up personal information in a letter or the invisible masks displaying a face to hide the wearer’s identity. By combining so many different symbols, their individual meaning was lost. Each individual one could be something as simple as a pentagram or constellation.

Coronzon stood up from the green suitcase and dragged it behind her as she walked slowly around the large space. The wheeled suitcase made it look like she was drawing out the white lines to prepare the schoolyard for the athletic festival.

“Forty-four varieties of pentacle, the sigils of angel names, and a pair of equilateral triangles. None of the stuff here matters. Good, good, good. Everything I need is here. I only need this full set of Enochian tablets. It is fortunate they did not destroy the lines after learning that this could be used to draw out apocalyptic power. I can omit a few steps in restarting it now.”

A light sound rang out.

She had unlatched the green suitcase and casually thrown out its contents: the crown, the sceptre, and the stone as large as a dresser drawer. Hamazura did not know how antiques should be cared for, so he could not decide whether or not the sea breeze was bad for them. But when the Great Demon's long blonde hair wriggled, it lifted up those items like they weighed nothing at all.

"Hand over the sword. It is a necessary part of the Ceremony of Mo Athair."

"Kh."

"You are free to refuse, but a key is no more than a key. You cannot acquire the treasure without opening the chest. And you will not have another chance at this. Do not forget that your decision here could forever close off the path to saving Dion Fortune, boy."

Of course, Coronzon was not someone Hamazura could overpower. Once she let go of him, there was nothing he could do.

That meant the Sword of State was a crucial bargaining chip.

On the other hand, he could not work up the courage to do anything about it. Plus, it was true he had no real choice in the matter. He could try to threaten her or persuade her, but what happened if she got fed up with him and called off the deal?

This was not about who would win and who would lose.

Even with the tarot cards and even if he was given this entire ship, he would have no idea where to begin. It would be like having a suffering patient and an operating room but no doctor. He could not fail to save the girl after coming this far. If he did, he could hardly complain if people blamed his decision for letting her die.

He had to recall why he had knocked out his girlfriend and come all this way.

What had he risked all this for?

(If it comes down to it, Coronzon should panic if this...temple(?) is attacked. It's hidden, so there must be a reason why it needs to be hidden. I know one

of her secrets, so that's better than nothing.)

“Okay...”

“Very good.”

The temple was positioned between the blue sea and sky.

Coronzon grabbed the sheathed sword with her long hair and placed each of the items on the floor. It looked like she was positioning them based on some kind of rules. The sword, crown, and sceptre were at the corners of an equilateral triangle. The heavy Stone of Scone was a short distance away.

As soon as she did, the floor glowed white.

“Wah!?”

“Stepping on it will not actually do anything, but it will distract me.”

A sticky light came from some of the straight, curved, and intersecting lines running along the floor. Something switched between the appropriate rails to travel along the correct path, but Hamazura could not tell what exactly that something was or what exactly it would cause.

“Now, then. I suppose we should start with the basics.”

Coronzon put a hand on her hip and spoke casually.

She made it sound as unimportant as something she was humming while eating.

“First, I will set up the magic circle. Then I draw a Tau inside and divide that into ten sectors.”

“?”

This was separate from the important-looking triangle and extra point.

Lines of pure white light ran through only the necessary straight and curved

lines crawling along the floor. A white circle surrounded Coronzon in no time.

That sinister face appeared using her long hair as a screen.

“A sword in hand and a camphor flame on the floor symbol.”

What did that mean?

Coronzon raised a hand as if hailing a taxi and there was a sound like something slicing through the air. Something like a meter-wide plate smoothly moved over from the edge of the decagon. Instead of having wheels on the bottom, it appeared to be floating. There were two things on the hovering plate. One was a ceremonial sword without a blade. It looked a lot flimsier than the Sword of State. The other was a metal plate of powder that looked like little more than incense.

Coronzon did not even glance down at the courier at her feet. She held her hands out and the antique items rose into her grasp like a magnet was pulling them.

She lit the incense in the center.

The smoldering was no larger than a cigarette, but the sea breeze did not seem to affect it.

She stood on the edge of the white circle and slowly walked counterclockwise.

“Fire, water, wind, earth, and invisible ether – the five great elements. Begone from this place.”

She whispered.

She whispered and continued on.

“The sun, Mercury, Venus, the moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn – the seven planetary forces. Begone from this place.”

She made three full circles for each group.

“Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces – the twelve zodiac influences. Begone from this place.”

Her counterclockwise circles stopped there.

She quietly closed her eyes.

“Eliminate the kingdom used for priming. Then erase its foundation, glory, victory, beauty, severity, and mercy. Drive out its understanding and wisdom and finally negate all influence of the crown. Begone from this place.”

Something audibly sliced through the air.

Coronzon had walked to the center of the circle and stabbed the sword into the floor. That extinguished the camphor flame. As if she had stepped on a dropped cigarette butt.

“With that, I have eliminated the twenty-four forces and ten spheres. This temple is now prepared for a single purpose and can make progress without influence from anything else.”

There was no actual light or noise.

In fact, the glowing white circle vanished and the temple made from a large heliport was wrapped in a desolate silence. That was the change. Enjoying stillness mean understanding the concept of zero and nothingness. Just like a shrine or temple forgotten by the flow of time, the very space here had acquired a strange presence. And it was at a level where even ignorant Hamazura could sense it.

As it was, the temple was no more than an empty box.

Only by following the appropriate process would it gain the functions it needed for a powerful ceremony.

That meant the three Honours of Scotland.

And the Stone of Scone.

Hamazura realized the sinister face had vanished from Coronzon's hair.

The demon whispered using just her beautiful face.

"Well, now is not the time to draw out its true purpose. Using it for defense would be the better option for now."

With some kind of preparations complete, she turned back toward Hamazura who could not keep up if she did not explain.

"Why are you just standing there? Your fate will be decided here."

"But what exactly am I supposed to do?"

"Let me see Dion Fortune."

She said it so simply that he initially blinked in confusion. It took him a moment to realize she meant the 78 cards in his pocket. The back-alley doctor had asked to see the patient and he had already paid her price by giving her the Sword of State. He quickly pulled the cards from his pocket and Coronzon snatched a certain girl's lifeline from his hand.

She breathed a sigh of exasperation when she saw the thick rubber band holding them together.

"It is too late for you to back out now, so I suppose I should explain. The avatar I created to descend from the four worlds does not restrict me from using human magic like with God's Right Seat, but it will still reduce the burden on me if I let you handle the ignition."

Just as she said that, she spun a finger around and a different large plate from before crawled over along the floor. Those devices must have assisted the performer by keeping their hands free. This time it was not a sword or incense. The meter-wide plate carried a few crystal balls and a light source that used fire. The setup was fancy, but it appeared to be a projector.

Coronzon crouched down, placed the 78 cards on the projector's glass panel,

and spun her hand around. Like a stage magician, she spread the cards out in a perfect ring.

“Do not mistake this for the Wheel of Fortune. That is just one card in the Major Arcana.”

She made sure to warn him, but Hamazura did not know what the cards were called.

He only felt a throbbing in his chest at the word “fortune”.

When she slid the cards along the projector’s glass panel, the light reflected somehow or another to display an enlarged version of the Arcana ring on the floor. The light source looked horribly unreliable and the sky was so bright, yet the image appeared clearly.

“Now, this is the design diagram for the grimoire.”

With that, Coronzon snapped her fingers again.

The fire providing the light changed color like a firework. It became a vivid green. It was like when the stains were highlighted in a detergent ad. A sticky light much like glow-in-the-dark paint appeared all over the neatly-arranged cards.

“And these are the intentionally applied scratches and creases. They are impurities unnecessary for the basic grimoire. In other words, these parts define Dion Fortune as an individual.”

Hamazura gulped quietly.

He still did not understand what she was doing, but the mention of that girl’s name had a greater impact in his heart. The blonde woman shrugged.

“I said it was like a record’s grooves before, didn’t I? I have visualized the marks too small to be seen by human eyes. If these are returned to their original state, Dion Fortune should appear once more.”

He had finally found it.

It was like grabbing at a cloud, but Hamazura Shiage's goal was in sight.

"And with that said, can you see what is happening with these marks?"

"Hey, wait."

The green light displayed the tiny marks that stored the data like the grooves on a disk. He could not allow those to be altered, but they appeared to be slowly moving like slugs.

"Should those be moving!?"

"Of course not."

It was not that the marks were growing in number.

It was the opposite.

It was slow, but the marks were vanishing from the surface of the tarot cards. The cards were being repaired to their original state. The process simply gave the illusion of slow slug-like crawling.

"An original grimoire cannot be destroyed by humans. Even if you can temporarily damage it, it will automatically absorb power from the ley lines to repair itself."

Coronzon tapped her foot on the floor where one of Dion Fortune's marks was projected.

"But that only repairs the original grimoire aspect of it. It does not care about Dion Fortune's personality. I was not interested in having these cards provide knowledge as a grimoire. I had redirected that ability in a harmless direction in order to construct and preserve the artificial personality, but...because some idiot worked a little too hard and took a direct hit, that stopper was broken in Mathers and the others. As things are, the auto-repair function will erase all of the small marks on the cards and they will return to being blank slates. They will be pure and meaningless original grimoires."

"...What do I do?"

She would become a blank slate.

Everything creating that girl would be erased.

As if she had never existed in the first place.

“There has to be something I can do, right!? How do I stop this!?”

“That is obvious.”

Coronzon lightly waved a hand and another large plate smoothly approached along the floor. They seemed to be responding to her gestures. The meter-wide plate carried something like a rolled-up carpet.

She grabbed it and spread it out in the sea breeze.

“C’mon, sit on this.”

“What is it? A yoga mat???”

“It was used by a royal princess. That thought gets your perverted blood flowing, doesn’t it?”

He was unsure what to say to that.

“The tarot is repairing itself by constantly absorbing power from the ley lines as an original grimoire. And tarot is still tarot. While it can function as a grimoire, it was designed as a fortunetelling spiritual item.”

“?”

“You only need to redirect the flow of power. You can stop it from absorbing power from the earth by sending it magic power refined in the human body. Then it will function as a spiritual item rather than a grimoire. That will stop the auto-repair function.”

“Wait a second. Power? Redirect the flow?”

“This is only a stopgap measure until Dion Fortune has been restarted as

herself. It is the same as pulling the cord on a chainsaw. Once the cycle has begun, it can switch back to the ley lines. In fact, constantly refining magic power is no easy task. That is why magicians only do it for a temporary combat mode.”

“But wait! What’s this about doing something in the human body? You make it sound simple enough, but you need to tell me what to actually do! I can’t just climb onto a broom and fly!!”

“I believe it was Dion Fortune who tried to explain Kabbalah using yoga as an example.”

That was enough for Hamazura’s shoulders to shake.

A cruel smile spread across Coronzon’s lips.

“Relax your shoulders and take deep breaths. All you are doing is refining your life force into magic power. That is the foundation of all magic. I am not talking about the combat format designed for situations where a moment’s delay could cost you your life. You have all the time in the world in this large temple, so it is not hard at all. What matters is maintaining the proper pose and breathing. I will guide you through a proper meditation using the correct symbols and signs.”

“...”

“Do you still not understand? Think of it as getting personal exercise lessons from the instructor girl at the gym. If you still have trouble, then you only have your own lack of focus, lung capacity, and flexibility to blame.”

Yes.

It sounded simple enough.

And it would be for an expert magician with plenty of training.

But you must not forget that the issue here was not even one of expert vs. amateur.

Hamazura Shiage was an esper and espers were fundamentally incompatible with magic.

“I’ll try...”

Coronzon did not mention any of that.

She only told him how to do it. She did not provide redundant safety measures or any kind of warranty.

The Great Demon was not concerned with what he wanted.

She only needed human magic power as a convenient ignition.

“Then do it, boy. You want to save Dion Fortune, don’t you? You have a way of doing that right here. No tools or talent are necessary. Only your body and a bit of effort. So why should you hesitate?”

“Yeah, I get it.”

In the end, Hamazura Shiage was quick to answer.

Coronzon smirked, but...

“I know this probably isn’t going to end well for me, but that’s fine. So tell me, Coronzon. What can I do to follow your plan?”

“...?”

This was a slight deviation.

He was not naively rushing in with clouded eyes and grabbing at this thread of hope without understanding the risks.

He did understand.

He understood everything, but he was still accepting the risk. This was different from Crowley or Mathers. This was a reaction she had not seen in those who had known the risks, summoned a Great Demon, and then angrily

refused to obey.

Had Coronzon noticed?

Had she noticed the brief moments when Hamazura reached into his pocket and felt the perfectly ordinary stick of gum there?

Had she noticed when he had gained courage from that simple action?

“Tch.”

The blonde woman quietly clicked her tongue.

“Fine. I will explain it step by step. But once you start, you cannot stop before it is complete.”

“Yeah. But are you okay with that? You didn’t hijack this ship for me. You have your own thing to do, right?”

He was still like this even now.

Coronzon did not think he had a disturbing level of good will. This strange sense of solidarity was something born in the dark back alleys.

They were accomplices.

That word did not imply a master and a servant, so it stung a little for Coronzon. That sting came from not knowing what kind of interpersonal distance to keep from someone. He would not let her hold his head down.

She may not have needed to explain this to him.

So when she opened her mouth, was it to return him to the usual format and regain the initiative? A silent demon would gain nothing because the humans would not blindly believe them.

“This works toward my goal as well, so do not worry. The three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone are necessary components of the Ceremony of Mo Athair, but I would also like to use pure human magic power for the

ignition. You only need to provide the initial tug of the chainsaw's cord. I will handle the rest. So our work is linked."

"I see. That's fine then."

"To be clear, the world will be destroyed when my work is complete. Are you sure you want to say that is 'fine'?"

"..."

"If you do not understand, allow me to enlighten you. My name is Coronzon, my number is 333, and my nature is dispersion. Just as the angel of water is revealed using no more than water, I exist only to obstruct the bonds of the world and naturally break down all of creation. I will be intentionally harming every part of the world to create scabs and then I will tear them all away while here in the United Kingdom. That will cause the world to boil over and create a frenzied state in which everyone will work to destroy each other. From neighborhood brats to nuclear warheads, all seven billion people will face their greatest enemy and drive each other to mutual self-destruction. Just like the game of old maid, I will send enemy against enemy until they destroy the entire world. That would still leave the isolated jokers who do not naturally break down, but I will crush all of them myself. Not a single person will escape."

She really was a Great Demon.

A dangerous but seductive and alluring smile appeared on her face.

That sweet and ruinous flower did not at all suit the beige habit.

"While all those fools are focused on the visible chaos, I will take my time preparing for the end. I am the Great Demon lurking in the Abyss of the Sephiroth. But ascending the tree is not the only way to use it." She pointed her thumb at the center of her chest. "I obtained this physical body and descended the tree. The humans drowning at the bottom level only ever think of ascending it, but the connections go both ways. I started higher up and I can freely come and go, so this temporary level does not matter to me. Having a physical body is not a bad thing since it provides practical benefits

in this world. And it allows me to reach the physical and scientific layer at the very bottom where all other phases are folded up.”

“The bottom?”

“Yes. Imagine the universe at the point when the geocentric model said the other planets revolved around the earth. That is different from current mainstream astrology, but this is about some simple mental exercise. …But make sure this hypothetical does not confuse you. Now, with that model, the forces storing up mystical and supernatural power pour down on the earth from outside of the planet, but the earth in the center is a perfectly ordinary hunk of dirt. That is the earth’s surface where we are standing now. If you removed that, the world would lose its center and it would fall apart, correct?”

Coronzon raised her slender index finger and slowly spun it around.

When she did, a few of the large plates around them began to rotate. They appeared to be representing the view of the world before it was proven that the planets revolved around the sun.

“By passing all that power through this foundational layer, that ‘bottom’ layer can be broken and removed. From there, all other phases will be destroyed along with this one. Without the core, the other forces cannot maintain their revolutions.”

She clenched her fist and took a step from the center.

With their directions from the “core” gone, the large plates scattered blindly and bumped into each other.

A single action caused it all to fall apart.

“Aleister apparently wanted to save humanity by destroying every other phase and leaving just this one behind, but I am the opposite. By removing the ‘bottom’ layer at the center, the phases for all mythologies and religions will be destroyed. That is the Ceremony of Mo Athair. Nothing at all will remain afterwards.”

Hamazura had no response to that.

He did not understand it, but he was not enough of a fool to miss the scent of danger hanging in the air.

He could not keep up when discussing things on the level of saving or destroying the world. He was more focused on the people right in front of him. That might be getting his priorities backwards, but it was a common thought process for humans. For example, if this ship were to sink, he would be more worried about finding a scrap of wood floating in the icy ocean than about how the sinking ship would affect the overall conflict. Humans were small creatures with narrow viewpoints.

These two were accomplices who were both using the other. Once one accomplished their goal, they would abandon the other.

...Or it should have worked that way.

No one should have agreed to help Coronzon once they understood her plan.

“What do I have to do? What’s the first step to save Fortune?”

“I will tell you the proper pose first. Start by sitting on that mat.”

## Part 11

A major change was underway at Edinburgh Castle as well.

It could all be seen in a conversation between the young female knight and Knight Leader.

“The Anaconda cruise missiles failed to hit their target. They were shot down. We have a detailed report from the drone for the first two, but the drone was shot down and we only have a simple radar report for third onward.”

“That is fine. We only wanted to know how much control Coronzon has over the Queen Britannia. ...As we expected, she had breathed life back into its defenses.”

“Knight Leader, I never rode the Queen Britannia when it was in service, but it is not equipped with specific magical defenses, correct?”

“The temple itself is generic. That means it will amplify and weaponize any spiritual item that is connected to the central altar. For example, even a four-leaf clover or a rabbit’s foot will be converted into a barrier that distorts luck such that all approaching ships and aircraft will sink into the ocean. ...This is dangerous. This initial attack used the default settings, but that will change. With the Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone, that demon can do all sorts of things.”

“...”

“The heliport has already disappeared, hasn’t it? Once that happens, the temple cannot be destroyed from the outside. She has complete control of the ship.”

“Is she abusing all of the knowledge and techniques the Anglicans had accumulated?”

“Try to eliminate those unnecessary biases. The problem is Coronzon at the

top, so this does not say anything about those working under her. All of us were caught in the confusion during the defense of London and we need as much help as we can get. We cannot overcome this national crisis if we begin fighting our own allies.”

The female knight did not openly protest, but she seemed to be appraising everything here, including the statements of her direct superior.

Everyone seemed to know that Knight Leader occasionally attempted to speak with that Asian Saint, but defending him here would not improve matters.

The ponytail swordswoman must have noticed everyone’s focus gathering on her because she glanced over at them before heading out on patrol. She likely wanted to avoid spreading discord, but she had a tendency to keep more distance from people than others did. The Amakusa were a branch of Christianity with a unique history of persecution that lasted until just two or three hundred years before. They had worshiped in secret for long enough to have developed superior techniques for remaining hidden, but that did not mean she was used to this.

Even the strongest of wills could be influenced by loneliness.

Knight Leader honestly thought she was a strong person.

“Anyway, I doubt the Anglican forces will be effective against Coronzon,” said the female knight.

“Yes, I am not going to defend them to the point of lying. It definitely hurts that she will know all of their tricks. Even the Index Librorum Prohibitorum and her perfect memory were used in Coronzon’s plans. This makes it all the more painful that we do not have the Imagine Breaker. My Thororm’s Spell can turn any attack power to zero, but it only activates once I comprehend what the enemy’s attack is. I cannot keep up with her speed. To be certain, I would need to directly see and comprehend the spiritual item that has vanished beyond the veil.”

Index opened her mouth when she heard that.

This was more important than the ship right now.

“333, dispersion.”

Her voice rang clearly in that stone room with paper documents covering every surface.

Once she got started, her voice ruled that space.

“If Great Demon Coronzon is acting based on her nature, her goal will be the natural breakdown of the entire world.”

“Natural breakdown?”

Kamijou Touma frowned as he asked for clarification.

...He felt like Othinus had said something similar before, but she had not managed a full explanation and he had not had time to understand it. And this would be the first time hearing it for some others like Mikoto. It was a good idea for them all to have the same information.

He was glad to have so many multilingual people around. Even with Queen Regnant Elizard and Knight Leader here, they all spoke in Japanese for the sake of the ignorant spiky-haired boy. Index pointed at the unnatural blank spot on the wall.

“Coronzon is not plotting to earn some kind of benefit in this world, like world domination or becoming a billionaire. In fact, she rejects the very existence of those fixed, immovable, and eternal winners. She thinks that all things should break eventually so they can be broken down and prepare for the next thing to be born. Her definition of evil is anything that breaks the cycle, such as immortality or an eternal kingdom.”

“Breaks the cycle?”

Index nodded at Kamijou’s question.

“Just as the angel of water is fundamentally linked to water, Coronzon is fundamentally linked to 333, dispersion. Her nature and thought processes

are specialized for natural breakdown. She will feel no guilt at all over this act of destruction. In fact, she probably doesn't even think of it as destruction. When you get rid of a card in old maid, you aren't destroying or killing it, right? You are 'forming a pair'. It's like that."

Misaka Mikoto and Shokuhou Misaki looked even more confused than Kamijou because they only had experience with the science side of things. They had fought the Golden magicians on the highway in the middle of the night, but they had never understood the essence of magic even for a moment.

Swimsuit Mikoto frowned while the machine arms on her back swayed.

"So she's the kind of person who doesn't want the world to be overflowing with bags of non-burnable trash?"

"Why are you talking about trash?"

This was made more complicated by the fact that Index grew confused when the other girl tried to give a simpler comparison.

The palm-sized god on Kamijou's shoulder crossed her legs and breathed an exasperated sigh.

"Leave the skit for later and just get all the information out there. Individual questions and comprehension can come later."

Index and Mikoto both tilted their head as they continued the discussion.

"What matters here is how irregular it is for Coronzon herself to be in harm's way. That Great Demon really should not be on the center stage of history. If she wants to destroy Group A, she manipulates Group B until they begin a clash of equal power in which they neatly destroy each other. She matches up the perfect enemies who will trigger mutual annihilation when they come into contact. Since she advocates natural breakdown, she cannot have any single point continue to win and remain forever."

"That is a concerning idea if that is what she was doing with the authority of

the Anglican archbishop,” groaned Queen Elizard.

Even in the modern age, the Anglican Church had secretly punished wicked magicians, but now they had cause to question whether all of those had really been criminals. While using the identity of Lola Stuart, Coronzon had crushed any inconvenient individuals in the name of justice. She had made sure to attack enough of the truly dangerous magic cabals to camouflage the unrelated people she wanted to attack herself. Since the first on the list was a villain, the world had accepted that the ninth on the list was as well, so she was capable of sending out destruction as she saw fit.

Was that why she insisted on using spiritual items made by humans?

Namely, the three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone.

Even hijacking the United Kingdom may have been a way to pit great powers against each other so she could efficiently destroy the entire human race that dug in its heels and refused to be destroyed. And she always created the worst possible combinations like Mathers and Aleister.

“She sets things up so she can pit A against B and have them destroy each other. That is what Great Demon Coronzon does. She intends to use that process to break down all phenomena and objects in this world.”

Index pressed her index fingers together.

And then she moved them apart.

“Then what about Coronzon herself as she enjoys this game of Mutual Destruction Old Maid? Do you think there is a symbol of destruction that forms a pair with her?”

The atmosphere in the room was even heavier than the stone surrounding them.

This was a sudden conclusion that seemed to overturn everything in an instant.

That said, this was not the time to relax and let the conversation continue.

This had to do with Coronzon, so they did not have a moment to relax.

Wasn't that what it meant?

Coronzon could take everything in this world and set up a cross-counter of their weak points to ensure mutual destruction. But what about Coronzon herself as she peered into the toy box of the world and stuck her hands inside to set things up as she liked? Even if they overturned the toy box, could they really find something with equal power to her that would form a pair with her?

“...”

Kamijou Touma looked down at his right arm.

That arm was now incomplete and it lacked the hand that symbolized Imagine Breaker.

“No.” Index shook her head. “That isn’t what I mean, Touma. Even if you still had your right hand’s power, that is still something inside the toy box of the world. That does not match Coronzon who is viewing it all from a step removed.”

“This is sounding rather grim.” First Princess Riméa sighed. “Then what about that insolent word that we keep hearing lately: god? There were the Divine Mixtures, two Magic Gods have been frequently spotted in Scotland, and I believe that one on the boy’s shoulder counts as well.”

“That won’t work.” Index looked at the spiky-haired boy who reflexively tried to protect his small understander with his nonexistent right hand and got his ear pulled on instead. “The word demon contains a few different meanings: The dark side of the human mind, a fallen angel, and a pagan god. I do not think the Magic Gods we have seen would form a clean pair with Great Demon Coronzon. The Divine Mixtures rely on Egyptian and Greek mythology, so they are out for the same reason. They would have some power, but not enough for a direct conflict.”

“Then what are we supposed to do?” carefully asked Third Princess Villian while glancing over at her mother’s equipment. “We can use Curtana to draw out the power of an angel and guide everyone using that while inside British territory. But as disrespectful as it might sound, that doesn’t get any more powerful than an archangel. It isn’t an absolute good capable of matching an absolute evil.”

That was when they heard a clattering noise.

They looked back to see someone leaning against the entrance and peering into the room.

“Aleister?”

The silver girl was covered in wounds.

Did that magician know something? Had she put together a plan to defeat Coronzon? That was what Kamijou thought, but he was apparently wrong.

“It is no use, human. Even if she had some way of reducing her original sin, Aleister is still a human living in this world. That does not escape the toy box that Index mentioned. It does not give us what we need.”

Then.

Then what?

“I see. So that’s it,” said Aleister. “It has to be someone from outside the world. And not just that, but someone who can wield miracles because they are void of original sin. In that case, I only know of one candidate. Is that what this is about, Aiwass!?”

“Aiwass? That being I saw in the Windowless Building? Are they the key to victory here?”

“No.” The silver girl shook her head. “Given the situation, a direct clash between Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass and Great Demon Coronzon would likely end in Coronzon’s victory. Although the avatar issue would play a role there. So that is not the point here. Aiwass merely prepared the answer.”

“Then who else is there?”

Aleister did not answer Kamijou’s question.

She had already found the answer, but something seemed to be holding her back.

Her face was twisted by anguish.

## Part 12

At that very moment, the RV fleeing through the Egyptian desert began to float.

It was flying.

Ignoring gravity was a stereotypical example of a miracle.

The black cat witch wondered why pressing on the gas pedal was not accomplishing anything and then she looked back into the vehicle.

“Hey, hey, hey.”

She heard a voice.

It came from the trumpet toy held by a shockingly small hand.

Mina Mathers bit her lip behind the veil when she realized what this was.

She understood.

She now understood one piece of a gambit that was much, much larger than it appeared on the surface.

And once she understood, she could not ignore it. At times, a great idea could bind your thoughts. It would prevent any other possibilities from occurring to you.

She could not think of any other way.

The only issue remaining was how to process this on the emotional front.

For one thing, why had Coronzon continued to target this RV so persistently?

What if it was more than just cruelty?

What if there was some other reason there?

“Give it up, Dad. It is about time I stepped into the spotlight.”

The RV rocketed off into the blue sky.

There was only one possible destination: the United Kingdom.

## Part 13

It was far too unrefined to call a descent from the heavens.

They heard the dull clunk of metal falling outside of Edinburgh Castle.

There were tears in Aleister Crowley's eyes. She had just arrived at the worst possible conclusion and now it had been proven.

"..."

Something was approaching.

They walked slowly. Only slowly.

The knights guarding the castle shouted warnings several times, but they were answered by violent noises. Whoever-this-was was omitting any kind of complicated explanations and clearing a path by force. And they were powerful enough to break into the temporary headquarters of the entire United Kingdom.

What was Kanzaki Kaori doing?

It seemed unlikely that Saint would be defeated so easily. She may have been avoiding contact because a thoughtless attack could cause an explosion inside the castle she was meant to protect. Or had she realized what this visitor intended and let them through?

And.

Once no one in the castle remained to block their way, the person arrived where Kamijou and the others were.

It was Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers.

And Baby Lilith was held by arms wearing mourning clothes that smelled of death.

“Heh...”

## The silver girl...

No, the father tried to laugh at what fate had brought.

But he could not manage it.

This was the final key.

This was the expendable that could annihilate Coronzon.

“That truly is an immaculate white light.”

Queen Elizard frowned and looked down at Curtana Second in her own hands. She was the queen protected by the United Kingdom's entire system, but she may have felt inferior to that baby.

“Is that an innocent soul uncorrupted by original sin?”

“There is precedent. For example, it is said the Virgin Mary had her original sin removed before the Last Judgment.”

Mina Mathers remained mechanical even now. After all, she had been used alongside the Tree Diagram orbital supercomputer for the planning and verification of the Sisters production plan which had created more than twenty thousand military clones. Once she deemed something to be useful, she would stick with it as far as it took her.

The black cat was a symbol of death and she likely understood that.

Unlike Aleister, she had already accepted the situation.

In the face of this information, a great gulf opened between those who knew how it would end and those who did not.

“It is only a possibility, but this soul was protected by Holy Guardian Angel

Aiwass and wandered within a different phase for more than a century. This is not a case of the sin being removed. You could say that this soul belongs to somewhere other than this surface world. Great Demon Coronzon escaped from the card table, so there is no being who can form a pair with her. Except for this opposing factor here.”

It only took an instant.

When the guard knights heard that, the atmosphere around them relaxed slightly.

The goal was in sight.

But you must not forget.

That mutual annihilation required offering up a certain soul.

That may have been why Kamijou Touma and Index hesitated to speak up. They had no idea what would cause a great change in the atmosphere here.

“No.”

She sounded childish.

Aleister Crowley may have been even more childish than Baby Lilith.

“Then why did Aiwass even save Lilith!? Did he know this would happen? Did he know but still show her off to me!? Did he already know back then that she would be used to save the world!?”

The black cat witch’s response was clear.

That search engine of death simply answered the question.

“Aiwass is the one who hid the truth from you and did not stop you from walking a thorny path all because ‘it was necessary’. Even though explaining everything up front could have prevented a lot of unnecessary bloodshed.”

“...”

“When you get down to it, things only reached this point because of your actions after Lilith returned and you became something other than an avenger. That change would not have occurred had you known from the beginning Lilith would be lost again. I do not know the details of what happened here in the United Kingdom, but without this, you would have lost your life somewhere along the way and the path to defeating Coronzon would have been closed off. Lilith died, was brought back, and will die again. From Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass’s perspective, that was likely the best way to control your emotions like flipping a switch on and off.”

“You can’t be serious... You can’t be serious!!”

The silver girl looked like a researcher who was faced with the horrifying results spat out by the simulator she had built herself.

“Yes, this situation is not part of my plan. I never imagined I would get Lilith back. I never expected to live a peaceful life after diverging so far from my plan. But...not this. This can’t be it. This has to be some kind of mistake! It wasn’t in my calculations and I didn’t predict it, but I met her again. I got my daughter back!! It was different with Lola. Coronzon was only Coronzon, so there was no one to save there!! But Lilith was different. She’s right here with me. If I lose her too...if I lose Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith, then what did I do any of this for!?”

Some might call this Aleister’s just deserts.

That human had spread countless plots across the underside of the world, caused needless conflicts, and hurt so many people, so it was laughable to think she deserved actual happiness. Especially when her own curse had doomed her to failure and defeat. Her mistake may have been thinking that this temporary happiness would last forever.

But.

Why this?

Whether you called it heavenly punishment or divine punishment, it had never fallen on Aleister Crowley’s head. It always seemed to dodge right past

that powerful magician to instead destroy the people that human cared for. Aleister's wife Rose had become an alcoholic after feeling responsible for their baby's death, but what had she done wrong? What about Baby Lilith who had lost her life before learning to speak? Not to mention the actual Lola. In the end, only Aleister remained with no one to share all of the possessions, power, and knowledge accumulated over the years.

“Give it up, Dad.” The baby spoke through the trumpet toy in her mouth.  
“Great Demon Coronzon has gained a physical vessel, so she cannot be defeated by the current generation of Imagine Breaker which only works on the occult. There is no other way. This is what I was preserved for. This is not a simple coincidence. Someone intentionally saved me for this purpose. Isn’t it a little selfish to assume you would get what you want without giving anything in return?”

“Kh.”

“I was wrong to let my guard down once I was saved. And it is true I should have been lost one hundred years ago. It is thanks to Aiwass’s use of me that I had this opportunity to see the world and learn what it means to create human bonds. I was fortunate to get what I did.”

Aleister screamed.

She shouted and snatched her baby from the death witch.

That simple action was enough for her to nearly lose her balance. She had been injured a lot on the way here: by the Divine Mixture, by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, and by Coronzon pretending to be Lola. She had used recovery magic to save Kamijou Touma, which had hit her with the side effects known as sparks and spray. She was in no state to be fighting. She should have been providing all of her knowledge concerning Coronzon and sticking to a support role.

Once again, things had diverged from that human's predictions.

She had already been relying on every trick in the book.

It was hard to believe she was not dead already. And if everyone reached for this chance at salvation, it was obvious the baby would be taken from Aleister in no time. Worse, Lilith herself did not agree to needlessly extend her life.

It had always been like this.

Aleister Crowley had always acted like she stood at the top, but in reality, she was always the one being outdone.

The people who had irresponsibly thrown stones at her had never once apologized afterwards.

“Dad.”

“No! I refuse!! You are my daughter! I don’t care what anyone says! Your life is an irreplaceable part of this world! So I won’t hand you over! No matter what happens to the world!!”

“This is not the time to be so unreasonable. If you continue throwing a tantrum, I will knock you out with one of my miracles.”

No one took Aleister’s side.

She was faced with a hellish situation where even Baby Lilith insisted on being used as a tool.

And.

And.

And.

“...Dammit.”

It was not a loud thing.

But the spiky-haired high school boy's voice stabbed deeper into Aleister's heart than anything else.

"We only have the one option here. So let's go defeat Coronzon and settle this, Aleister."

"!!"

Aleister Crowley was not Magic God Othinus.

She could not become his understander.

"Surely you understand."

"No."

"We've made it this far. You brought together all sorts of awful technology and even used children gathered from around Japan...no, around the world. The Sisters, Kazakiri Hyouka, and so many more... I'm sure you know about even worse things I can't even imagine. We can't ignore Coronzon, so you need to use everything at your disposal to protect what needs protecting. You must know better than I do how frightening and unreasonable she is! Am I wrong, Aleister!?"

"I won't do it!! I won't let you have her no matter what. I won't become an avenger again and I don't give a shit about Aiwass or Coronzon. I am a human. No matter how many sins I have committed, that will never change. So I will never let anyone do that to her again! I won't let her be manipulated by someone's invisible hands!!"

"You just don't get it, do you!?"

She was cut off by a shout.

Kamijou Touma did not hesitate.

He continued to shout at her.

"Then prove that we can defeat Coronzon without using Lilith!! What other

way is there to protect your precious baby!!!???"

.....

Aleister Crowley just about collapsed backwards from that alone.

But she was not allowed that escape.

Kamijou Touma walked right up to her and grabbed her collar with his remaining left hand while she tearfully held the baby in her arms. They might have an understanding, but they were still enemies. There was no need to be kind. The boy shouted piercing words at close range.

"I don't have Imagine Breaker anymore and I never did have a mind capable of understanding how all this magic stuff works!! So you do it!! You've got access to the royal family, who knows everything about the UK's internal situation, and Index, who carries 103,001 grimoires in her head!! Bow your head, ask them for their help, and use it all. If you can break free of this situation, we won't have to use Lilith. You can save her!! Let's break the game board set up by Aiwass and Coronzon. You can be the one to get the last laugh after protecting your family. So are you still not willing to lend a hand!?"

Aleister was extremely hesitant.

But when she looked around, the world had changed.

No.

The silver girl had simply overlooked it all because she was bound by fear and despair. Just like when she had lost sight of everything except for her goal of revenge.

The world changed to match the heart of the one viewing it.

Queen Elizard breathed a sigh of exasperation.

"Well, I do have three daughters of my own. Aleister Crowley will have to reckon with her crimes in time, but I am not petty enough to force those

crimes onto a baby and offer her up in sacrifice.”

“Oh, what an awful thing to say, Mother. You make it sound like a woman cannot understand human emotion if she has never given birth. Villian, you are supposed to be the virtuous one, so you say something too.”

“...”

Next was Misaka Mikoto with the A.A.A. on her back.

“I’m not sure you can really call them my children, but I do have those girls. And they only exist because you so politely stole my cells, so I know you know what I’m talking about. And do you think I politely followed all the rules when I was protecting them?”

“Yeah. If there’s another way, then there’s no reason to go with a sacrifice. I have 103,001 grimoires memorized, but you might know more than me when it comes to actual usable techniques. I don’t mind if there is some method I can’t see. If you say you will make the impossible possible, then I have no reason to stand in your way.”

“Find your own understander. This human is mine and there is no room for you here. But the exact type of relationship doesn’t really matter. If you insist that the bond between a parent and a child is more powerful than anything else, then perhaps that is worth fighting the entire world over.”

Even Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers joined in.

“I am Reading Thoth 78 and I view my role as providing you with every piece of information I deem to be necessary without taking good or evil into account. ...But, well, if you had simply accepted that option, the Mina Mathers part of me would have punched you.”

The queen regnant was here. A Level 5 was here. The grimoire library was here. A Magic God was here. A giant simulator was here.

In fact, it was Baby Lilith who was confused, even though she was supposed to understand more than anyone else.



“Wait. This is not how it was meant to go, simulator! There is no way of negating and sealing away the calamity of Coronzon other than using my life.”

“Silence, baby. Do not underestimate the adults.” The AI simulator, wife, and widow snapped back at her. “Your life belongs to you, but do not forget that there were people who named that life and gave you hope and blessings. If you insist on showing us something as unpleasant as a baby’s suicide, then I will not even wait for Coronzon. I will destroy the world myself.”

Aleister Crowley considered what she had just heard.

She considered it all and then raised her head.

Everyone was waiting for her in the open world.

“Give me everything. Give me every last piece of information and every last technique you have!!”

## Part 14

Someone whispered while all that happened.

It was the frog-faced doctor who had arrived along with Mina Mathers and the baby.

“What do you think?”

“I am on the side that will eradicate all magic. I am a Kihara from the science side, after all.”

A golden retriever responded with an artificial voice.

He must have been considerate enough to not smoke in front of a baby because his small smoking arm moved restlessly by his mouth.

“But I just can’t seem to cut my ties with that human since they’re the type to weigh the world against family and immediately choose one over the other. I am not corrupted enough to kick sand on romance.”

“Meaning?”

“I do not care what that baby might be as long as I can eventually explain it using science alone. Just like we can now say that will-o’-the-wisps are methane gas and ghosts are plasma. That terminology conversion requires the new flesh growing back in the RV, so what we must do remains the same. Did you call it a new vessel? Completing that would be the quickest shortcut.”

At that point, Kihara Noukan spun the skinny arm around.

“Yes, I just can’t pull myself together without this.”

“Make sure you leave before smoking.”

“Not what I meant,” softly replied the golden retriever. “Aleister, we are

under attack. Her only true enemy is here, so of course she's going to try to crush her!!”

Something burst up from below.

The silver girl jumped to the side while holding her baby. A golden torrent had vertically pierced the thick stone floor. Absurdly-long hair had gathered together to form something like a winged angel.

Aleister grabbed one paper document that was floating in the air after being torn from the wall.

“An Aethyr Avatar. Is this 13: ZIM!?”

“It seems we are both working toward checkmate,” said the hair angel. “But I am the only one free to disturb the board from a distance.”

“Do not worry. I will not let anyone in the world use Lilith.”

“No one cares what you think. If there is even the slightest possibility of my defeat, I will nip it in the bud. I have already made my decision.”

Then the thick stone wall to the side came crashing down.

But this was not Coronzon’s doing.

A giant metal container stabbed into the floor right next to the golden retriever. It opened up like a geometry net and the brutal and over-the-top weapons within attached to the large dog.

Misaka Mikoto gasped in surprise as the more experienced A.A.A. user spoke in a deep voice.

“Use me, Aleister.”

According to Solomon’s grimoire, anyone performing a large ceremony should have three companions, or if that was not an option, a faithful and attached dog.

## Part 15

An explosive roar shook the crumbling stone hall.

A.A.A.

Anti-Art Attachment.

Had he built it himself on the way here, or had there still been a spare somewhere? The collection of weapons surrounding the mysterious golden retriever was a different model from Mikoto's. Hers spread out like a demon's wings and kept the several tons of weight off of her back using support legs, but the golden retriever's appeared to float off the ground using the power of air.

"I would really prefer to avoid these detours."

He spoke.

That large dog definitely spoke using human language.

"But denying the world's superstitions requires first investigating the detailed phenomena behind them. Fine, then. Have your say, Aleister. I will absorb it all as knowledge so I can reject every word of it."

That dreadful mountain of weapons could be seen as armor or a fortress.

But Misaka Mikoto could not just watch the movements of this more experienced user.

"Wah!"

At first, she thought she had lost her balance when the weapons spread out.

But that was not it. She needed to remember how exactly a certain boy's right arm had been severed after he was driven to the verge of death...and damaged beyond recognition.

“Hey, wait, it’s moving on its own!?”

A red beam of light shot out from both the large dog and Misaka Mikoto.

The two lights were more sinister than fresh blood and they intersected on their way to the same target.

“A blood sacrifice?” said the hair angel. “But magic of the Aeon of Osiris cannot harm me, human. The laws of the ruler are already shifting elsewhere!!”

“Who ever said I had stopped at the blood of the male deity, Coronzon?”

“Then is it Babalon? What can you accomplish after briefly flirting with femininity? You are simply letting go of the male miracle you were guided to by the biblical power of the cross you went to such lengths to acquire. Bottlenecks are awful things, aren’t they? Building up from a clean slate is not difficult, but if you become stuck just before completion, you find yourself unable to do much of anything!!”

“You are a fool, Coronzon. The new builds atop of the old. The Aeons are not a rejection of different methods. It is the bond with Isis that gave us Osiris and it is the death of Osiris that allows Horus to shine. A child’s temper tantrum is not enough to change history. If I had not hated Christianity, I never would have studied magic. The crucified Son of God was always there at the foundation. No matter how much I might loathe him, that fact remains.”

“Curse you...”

“So I will connect the ring of magic. I will connect the path of Isis to Osiris and Osiris to Horus!! Cause and effect will now be linked along with my body and the Great Demon. Thus, the scarlet of Babalon shall swiftly shoot down the enemy and the entirety of its spray shall return to me!!”

The silver girl stood in the center of it all.

The two different A.A.A.s waited on either side like two dogs, but those

machines were no more than speakers used to amplify the magician's killer intent and send it out to shake the world.

"So what?" scoffed the golden hair that looked both like a giant dragon and an angel.

But that laughter did not mean she was taking this lightly.

For one thing, a demon's true nature was the blind belief that led one astray. They tricked people into believing in a nonexistent future or treasure and used that to throw them into the depths of the earth.

"Have you forgotten? My name is Coronzon. I am the Great Demon in the Abyss of Da'at and I manage all who wish to travel up or down the tree. You were rejected, Aleister. You could not reach the top three Sephirah on the Tree of Life, but I can move freely up and down the entire tree! Did you really think you could stand up to me!?"

Just then, someone other than Aleister Crowley spoke from a short distance away.

The taboo girl in a pure white habit opened her mouth.

"The Book of the Law is knowledge brought from beyond the planet. Its essence is hidden beyond the planet's rotation. The proper knowledge can be found by removing all obstacles and bathing in the light as it falls upon you."

"Wha-?"

What did the 103,001 grimoires matter?

No matter how much text that girl had stored away, she could not read the essence of the Book of the Law without knowing how to decode it. That meant she could not utilize its knowledge. That grimoire had hundreds of false decoding methods built in. Any attempts made now were nothing to fear. That grimoire library's efforts were not enough to boost Aleister's power now.

However...

“The discovery of a planet beyond Uranus threw astrology into chaos. But Pluto does not obstruct the movements of the universe. The exceptional Tzaddi lies elsewhere. View the stars. The new Aeon still waits for a point in the future.”

“It’s still...wrong? This isn’t for Aleister!? Are you manipulating my spell by dragging into the pattern of this misreading!?”

Aleister was the one who had sent the Book of the Law out into the world.

No matter what anyone whispered into her ear, she would not misread the book she had written down.

So this would only influence Coronzon.

“Tch!!”

“Feeling shaken, Coronzon? Come to think of it, it was the same during the summoning experiment in 1909. You succeeded in overwhelming me, the summoner, but you failed to account for Neuburg who supported me!!”

The silver girl gently extended a finger.

The A.A.A.s on either side of her sent out two final beams.

Once the original joined them, their power grew dramatically.

It was like a resonance.

The bizarre monster made of blonde hair burst from within.

It was like a balloon popping.

The thin and powerless threads fell from the air like the aftermath of a giant spider web breaking apart.

“What?”

Misaka Mikoto still did not understand what she had done.

She felt no elation over this victory.

“What in the world happened???”

That dreadful weapon had moved against her will.

Those demon wings had.

That fact alone sent an icy feeling into the core of her body.

She was afraid.

She wanted to find someone – anyone – to discuss this with. She wanted to find an answer to this problem she could not solve on her own. And there were only so many people she could do that with. The silver girl probably knew the most about this, but Mikoto did not feel like she could talk to that girl so easily. The golden retriever was too much of a mystery.

“...Shokuhou...”

There were only one or two options.

Mikoto beat at the air with her spread wings and looked back.

(And that idiot too...)

Her thoughts froze there.

Come to think of it.

She had been overwhelmed by what had happened, but where had those two gone during all this?

## Part 16

Someone had snuck out during the repeated roars of destruction inside the castle.

She had honey-blonde hair and a curvy figure.

The girl, Shokuhou Misaki, only wore a raincoat over a swimsuit.

(I'm not cut out for directly facing an enemy like that. And then there's Misaka-san and that ...dog? If either of them hit me with a stray shot, I'd be blown to pieces.)

Also, her #5 power controlled human minds, so she was a poor match for purely mechanical things. That ruled out bullets and shells, but Mental Out might also be useless against those masses of human hair. She had trouble imagining it working when she could not see an actual face or body.

And most of all...

“...”

After walking below a hemispherical arch and starting down some stone steps, she reached into the bag hanging from her shoulder.

Just then, the staircase collapsed as another enemy appeared.

The torrent of destruction made from sinister blonde hair burst out vertically.

“I believe I said I would nip even the slightest possibility in the bud, human.”

“Yeah, I had a feeling my deception ability wasn't enough for this one.”

Shokuhou Misaki smiled bitterly.

A rusty smell reached her nose.

It sounded simple enough to say the hair had burst out, but there was no way Shokuhou could have responded to the surprise attack. She had failed to detect it in advance, so it had hit her and sent her spinning through the air until she fell back first onto the broken stone stairs. She was not used to being in fights like this, so she did not know how much damage that had done to her. But when she tried to get up, she only felt a terrible pain in her back.

“...!!”

She clenched her teeth, managed to drag her bag to her using the chain, and pulled a TV remote from within.

Then she pressed it against her own temple.

“Category 433: Pain Shutoff. I can reduce my body’s pain enough to keep moving.”

She could move now, but she had not actually healed the damage. In the worst case, this movement could make the wound even worse.

(I can’t believe this...)

She was a human specialist, so she had no place on a battlefield full of unmanned weapons, monsters, or beings without a human mind.

There were apparently a lot of old-fashioned soldiers(?) protecting Edinburgh Castle, but she could not count on them to come rescue her given the many explosions coming from all over the castle. More golden hair may have been causing damage elsewhere to divert their attention. Also, this human specialist had been using her prized ability to avoid detection while she moved. It was a little too selfish to hope that ponytail woman with a long sword would show up the second being hidden became inconvenient.

No one could come running because no one could see her here.

Shokuhou Misaki herself had removed the safeties put in place for her.

“I see.”

The gold rose up like a great serpent and viewed the girl from different angles.

And it spoke.

“Humans are such strange creatures. It is legitimately frightening that this is not the result of the Qliphothic forces.”

“Qli...what? Well, I am aware this must look rather psychedelic.”

Something had spilled out of her opened bag.

It was not a TV remote.

It was a cooling container made from two cylinders. A motor rotated the outer cylinder to cool the contents much more rapidly than an ordinary cooling sheet. They were normally used as largish drink bottles and Misaka had apparently mistaken this one for iced tea, but that was not what it contained.

For one thing, the rusty smell had not come from Shokuhou’s body.

(The lid must have broken.)

Shokuhou Misaki got up, grabbed the cooling container and sighed.

A dark red liquid dripped from the edge of the lid like drool from the corner of an impolite child’s mouth.

“I am not about to pretend I know exactly how it works,” said the hair. “After all, that thing will create a replacement on its own if it is simply cut off.”

“...?”

“Understanding it from the single viewpoint of science is not possible, but the reverse is also true. There may be a piece of the puzzle I cannot see. At any rate, this may have been the result of some misguided regrets, but it was fortunate you kept it cooled.”

Back then, Aleister had taken control of Mikoto's A.A.A. and chopped off the boy's right arm with a chainsaw because the silver girl assumed it would get in the way of her treatment. Everyone had been focused on whether or not the boy would survive, but what had happened to the severed arm afterwards?

Hadn't it landed in the center of Shokuhou Misaki's ample chest where she held it in her arms?

"I had thought it was odd that Imagine Breaker was not returning to its original owner. But even this is only a temporary deception. It will eventually return to him. No matter how much you try to keep it hidden."

"I know that..."

Shokuhou Misaki had not hidden away that right arm for such a practical reason.

That right hand was to blame.

This was far from the first time that boy had been driven to the verge of death. And Kamijou Touma had always relied on his right hand to break through whatever fate threw at him.

So what if?

If he did not have Imagine Breaker, he might just avoid doing anything so dangerous.

Of course, someone might notice the right hand had disappeared from the ground once things calmed down and a detailed examination of the battlefield was completed. The boy might begin searching for his missing arm.

But Kamijou Touma had a certain flaw.

Due to a certain incident, he could not properly perceive Shokuhou Misaki's face and he could not remember it for long.

"..."

If anyone else were hiding it, Kamijou Touma might be able to find the culprit and reclaim his arm. Some nasty Academy City tech might still be able to reattach it.

But.

Even then.

Shokuhou Misaki would be missing from his list of suspects. Even if everyone else would have found her suspicious, she would be missing from his mind. So Misaka Mikoto could not have done this. In this, Shokuhou had to keep it to herself and vanish on her own.

She had been scared.

She had been scared out of her mind to see the person she cared for most transformed into an unrecognizable mass of red and black.

Shokuhou Misaki was not Index and she was not Misaka Mikoto.

She had ended up on the center stage this time, but she was meant to work behind the scenes like Aleister. She was the Queen of Tokiwadai who manipulated people from the shadows to benefit herself and eliminate harm.

The fate of the world and the future of humanity did not matter to her.

Just like Aleister had strayed from that to protect Lilith, this honey-blonde girl had not hesitated to step off of that path for someone she cared for. She did not care if he found what she had done creepy or responded with a sigh of disappointment.

And as a result...

“Give me that right arm you have preserved. I sense no threat in you, so I have no real reason to kill you.”

“Liar. No, I suppose you technically are not lying. You kill even without a reason. That is the truth here.”

“If you understand that, then how about you try begging for your life?”

“Not interested.”

Since her TV remote could not control this hair, she had no chance of escaping this. But her bold smile came from more than just her queenly temperament. Shokuhou’s goal was to get Imagine Breaker away from that boy. If she could anger this mystery attacker and goad it into a powerful attack, that was fine with her. There was no saving her at this point, so she was only thinking about destroying and utterly annihilating the right arm that contained Imagine Breaker.

“...Well.”

The golden monster rose up.

It was an Aethyr Avatar, the false image of an angel.

That monster made of hair viewed its target.

It had mercilessly destroyed dozens and maybe hundreds of tons of stone when appearing inside the castle. An attack from that would be more powerful than a head-on collision with a large dump truck. The swimsuit girl would be immediately torn to pieces.

She knew that all too well after seeing what had happened to that boy.

But she still chose to resist.

All she could do was block her pain, so the most she could accomplish was to smile.

“I’ve been doing a lot of things lately that are far outside my wheelhouse, but I guess this is the only fate a side character like me can hope for...”

The world shook.

Time stopped within Shokuhou Misaki.

Great Demon Coronzon's Aethyr Avatar had swung down a merciless attack capable of breaking up through the heavy castle.

But.

But.

This roar had not come from the golden angel.

“Damn...you!!”

That voice did not belong to Academy City's #5. Nor did it belong to Coronzon.

Yes, there did not need to be any clues leading here.

The girl had forgotten.

Did he fight because of the special power in his right hand? Did he fight because he recognized someone's face? Did he fight because he had following a logical chain of clues to reach that point?

No, no, and no.

There was a simple explanation for it all: Kamijou Touma fought because he was Kamijou Touma.

Whether or not he had a right hand or not was irrelevant.

There was a sound like human flesh being shaved away by a file.

His arm no longer had Imagine Breaker. In fact, it had no fist and the gruesome wound past the elbow had only been cauterized to stop the bleeding.

The pain had to be far greater than what Shokuhou Misaki felt after using her power to block it.

He was receiving another fierce attack on top of a wound that had to be hard

enough to accept already. He used his own arm as a cushion to slightly divert the Aethyr Avatar's path. This did not qualify as dodging or defending. It was not a proper give-and-take arrangement. But that was obvious when he was faced with the meaningless choice of deciding which was the best body part to let the dump truck hit.

He could easily have died from shock due to the pain signals alone.

And.

And yet.

"Are you...hurt?"

Those were the first words out of the boy's mouth.

"Everything's okay now... I'll push back...this damn thing!!"

He could not recognize her by looking at her and he could not find the memories even if he searched for them. It was a mystery how he had even managed to find her here, but he had put his own pain second and worried about the girl first and foremost.

The fist-sized girl on the boy's right shoulder stuck out her tiny tongue.

There was a boring trick hidden behind that miracle. That girl had likely sensed the oddity, predicted where the next monster would appear, and guided Kamijou Touma here.

But this was still different.

That missed the core of the issue.

Even if he had known where the blonde hair monster would appear, why had that boy rushed here? He could not perceive Shokuhou Misaki's presence. So even with the palm-sized girl's guidance, he would only have seen it as a monster appearing in an empty area. He could just ignore that. That was not worth rushing frantically here.

But.

Even so.

It stopped at 99%. It looked like all the gears fit together, but the most crucial one of all was missing. Nevertheless, here he was. It did not matter that the force should not have been able to travel through the gears.

What could you call this but a miracle?

(Oh.)

Shokuhou Misaki came to a realization while sitting on the floor and looking up at that wounded boy's back.

Kamijou Touma would fight simply because he was Kamijou Touma.

The right hand was irrelevant.

Just like he had saved Shokuhou Misaki in the past, he would save her again now. She could not stop him no matter what she did or what schemes she concocted.

He had even broken straight through Academy City Board Chairman Aleister's plan.

Of course this girl's last-minute attempt at cleverness was going to fail.

“...I’m...”

She no longer had the face of a queen.

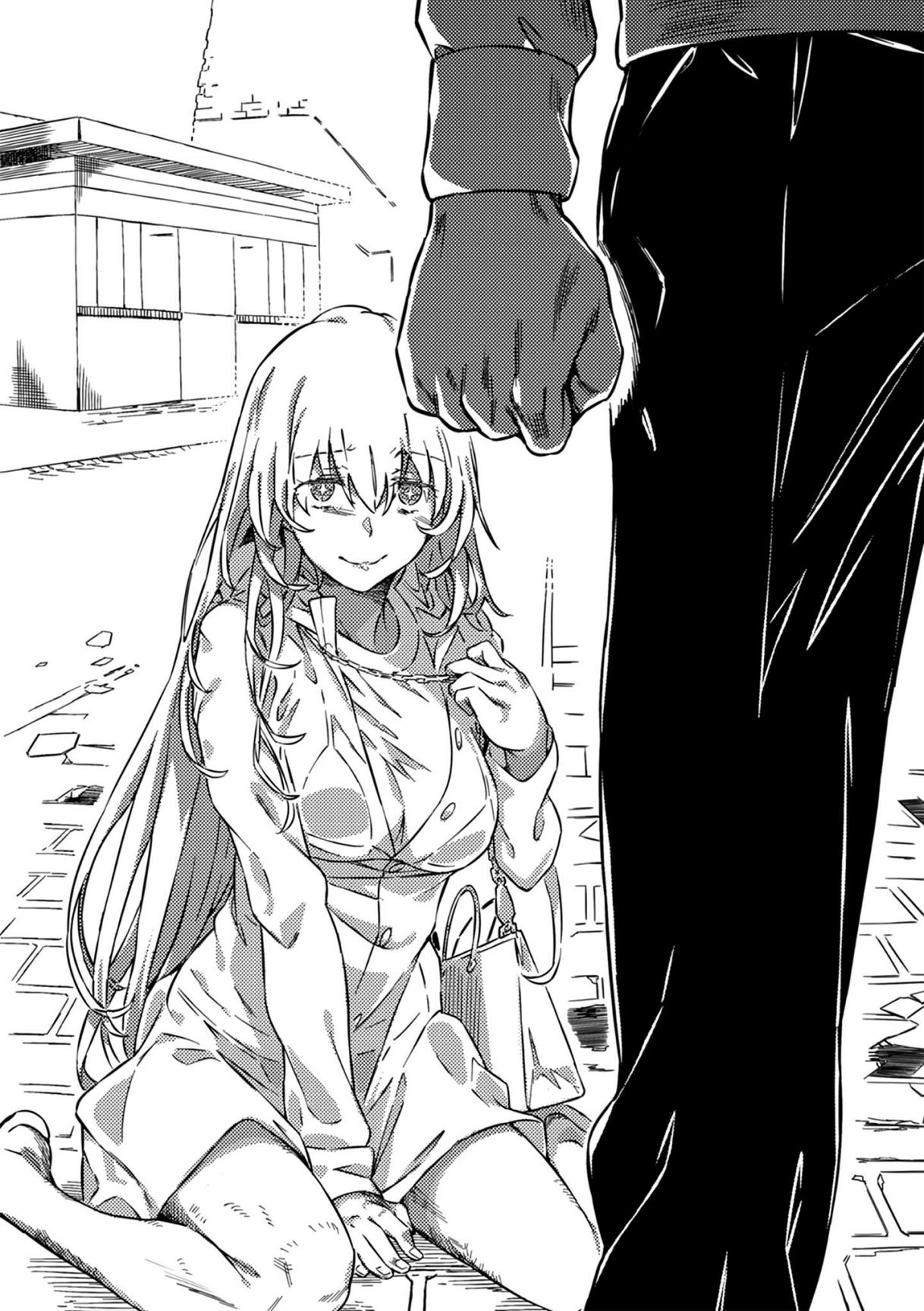
She bit her lip, hung her head, and spoke as no more than a girl.

Was this in reference to keeping a secret from him this whole time? Or was it reference to giving up on stopping him?

“I'm sorry, Kamijou-san!!”

She threw the object that had been released from the cooling container.

It spun through the air.



No stitches or cast were necessary. The impossible happened before her eyes. The wound seemed to open up like a ribbon and then that object perfectly attached to Kamijou's elbow that was releasing a red liquid.

It all connected together.

Another attack arrived.

The boy's right hand broke through every last threat.

This was not their first time hearing that sound of destruction.

"It...worked?"

Golden hair scattered through the air and glittered as it reflected the morning sun.

Even the boy himself sounded surprised by the result.

He had always been like this.

He never noticed his own value and he never thought about whether he really had a chance of winning. He would simply rush straight into the gates of hell if he saw someone being hurt or driven into a corner.

That was who he was.

How could she have ever yearned for him so badly if he was not?

"This isn't like before. Does my hand work on the hair?"

His right hand. Imagine Breaker.

Shokuhou Misaki felt like those things had returned to their rightful place.

She understood.

Because she too had once been saved like this.

## Between the Lines 3

This sea was located between Great Britain and Ireland.

Specifically, it was the area south of the Isle of Man.

“Given the geographical requirements, I knew we would find it around here.”

The woman standing on the coast and looking out to sea with binoculars had her reddish-blonde hair worn in several fried shrimps and she wore a dress that looked like a leotard with a long skirt added on. Her name was Anna Sprengel. But did she really need those binoculars? Takitsubo Rikou would not have doubted her if she claimed she could see the Face on Mars with the naked eye.

Also, Takitsubo frowned.

“What is that ship?”

“The Queen Britannia.”

“I’ve never sensed a signal that travels like this before. It’s not just going from one place to another. It’s like it goes beyond three dimensions.”

“Well, we are talking about Great Demon Coronzon of the Abyss making an appearance here on the surface. You could say this is like the world’s internal organs being dragged out. Really, we’re lucky the foundational laws haven’t entirely collapsed yet.”

She must not have been interested any longer.

The lady grabbed one roll of her hair, brought the rose decoration to her mouth, and enjoyed the sweet aroma.

“Can you not see the heliport?”

“Eh? But...”

“I do not mean the one on the surface. I mean the one inside. You can’t see any people or tools there, can you? The empty heliport you see there is inaccurate.”

This red dress lady had to be quite something if Takitsubo Rikou of all people found her words incomprehensible. She was not at all interested in accommodating the world around her. She was even more self-centered than Mugino (who was surprisingly self-conscious about her figure).

Lady Sprengel removed the binoculars from her eyes and glanced over at frightened Takitsubo Rikou.

“I will now explain what will soon happen here.” The lady in a red leotard and long skirt made it sound so simple. “First of all, Coronzon will place the Queen Britannia’s mobile temple at a specific point and attempt to hijack the United Kingdom using the Scottish system she can access with the three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone. Her goal is to destroy the world. In the first stage, she will have all seven billion humans kill each other and she will use that as an opening to descend to the very bottom of the Sephiroth. Once at the very foundation of the world, she will pour in a massive amount of power to forcibly destroy it. All of the phases overlap, but the gods of legend are not supported by that alone. Heaven and hell cannot exist entirely independently, so if the piece at the base is destroyed, the bottom will fall out.”

“...”

“Well, you might not actually understand all of that, so here is another way to look at it. Your boyfriend has taken Coronzon’s side. Whatever kind of compromise they have arrived at, the world will be destroyed if he sticks with her to the end.”

With that, Anna Sprengel turned her attention toward the other side of the conflict.

“If Aleister’s side has any brains at all, they should be figuring some things out around now. For example, the Queen Britannia’s temple can amplify and weaponize any magic, but Coronzon is not the only one who can take

advantage of that. Once Aleister's groups arrives at the temple, whatever spells they have to harm Coronzon will be amplified as well.”

“...”

Once again, Takitsubo Rikou could only stay quiet.

“And because demons are constructed from an energy similar to Telesma, pieces of that energy can be cut away using the proper methods. They can be divided up to weaken them. I mean, Coronzon has done it herself: Qlipah Puzzle 545. For ease of use and to prevent rebellion, that artificial demon had all unnecessary functions cut away so she was specialized for the madness of war. So if the exact same process was used, couldn’t you cut things away from Coronzon herself to weaken her? Take it far enough and you would be left with a core that is perfectly killable by human means, don’t you think?”

Takitsubo Rikou could not choose to defeat or protect Coronzon.

If she turned against either side of this conflict, she would be quickly destroyed. The Magic Gods would not always come to save her and Anna Sprengel’s true intentions and skill were unknown factors. At the very least, the fact that the woman was lurking in the background suggested she did not want to stand in the spotlight. Takitsubo Rikou may have been more isolated than anyone in the UK, including Coronzon.

And that was exactly why she had to know exactly what both sides were doing.

She could not focus on just one side or the other. She had to keep tabs on everything that might harm Hamazura Shiage.

“Coronzon lured Hamazura Shiage in with the prospect of saving Dion Fortune. She is probably giving him some kind of lecture right now. That means they are beginning the taboo act of an esper using magic. This is not an issue of sooner or later and it is not an issue of more or less. It is possible a major artery will rupture with the very first attempt and he will die instantly. ...Unless you teach him the secret technique of modified scrying that I have granted you.”

“Then what do I do?”

The tricky thing about Anna Sprengel was how she did not simply say they would save Hamazura Shiage. That meant she was not asking them to give up on Fortune.

If Takitsubo taught Hamazura the proper method, she could save him and Fortune.

But if she did not get that method to him, he would die a meaningless death and they could not save Fortune. All because he exposed himself to a needless risk.

If this was actually possible, she could not see a downside.

Anna Sprengel was not a storybook demon demanding her soul in payment.

In fact, it was such a good deal that she would feel guilty if she said nothing and let the opportunity pass her by. Now that she had heard about this, she could not stand idly by.

(Hamazura...)

“The UK’s counterattack will begin shortly and that should bring great chaos to this peaceful ocean. This will be more than just a clash between the UK and Coronzon. Those combat-obsessed Magic Gods should intervene just for the fun of it. I guarantee it.” The woman with the reddish-brown fried shrimp hair raised a single finger. “Using that to get aboard the ship would be best. That is why I spared the Magic Gods and the group at Edinburgh Castle instead of just wiping them out. So let us use them to their fullest.”

# **Chapter 4: (Untitled) –**

## **MAGICK\_Warfare**

## Part 01

Five stars on a whim.

The royal chef at Buckingham would probably have cried had they heard that phrase.

“These are pretty good. What makes them so different from the mussels we usually have?”

“These are cooked in alcohol. And using real scotch makes a difference even after cooking the alcohol off. Hey, don’t eat them all yourself! I can’t take my eyes off you for a second, can I?”

There was a light clunking sound as chess pieces were placed on top of a map spread out on the table.

Queen Elizard and First Princess Riméa were frowning as they viewed it all.

“It looks like...this might just work out, doesn’t it?”

“Now, now, Mother. Don’t you have the Queen Britannia taking too much time sightseeing? It could arrive at the final ceremony point faster than this if it tried.”

“Don’t be silly. How do you expect us to gather so many knights in such a short time?”

“What, do you think we have nothing to worry about as long as we have a Saint? I know we need to win this no matter what, but if we underestimate the timetable, we will be stuck on the platform when the train of reality leaves without us.”

“This is an issue of degree. We have seen the track we must follow, so now we have to use irregular forces to fill in the areas where the numbers are lacking. If the issue is that you can’t run across the large station fast enough to reach the next train in time, then you only need to ride a bike through the

building. Fortunately, we are not short on resources, even if we are currently at a disadvantage. If we know what points we need to hold, we can push through with brute force.”

“You mean the Imagine Breaker?”

“Plus a few other things. There is Crowley, the A.A.A.s, and that mourning clothes woman, right? Gather them all. And I am also including my Curtana Second in this of course.”

The queen regnant was not the type to give instructions from the back or to insist Crowley’s group form a suicide squad because they had arrived here without permission.

“There,” said a quiet voice.

The two women turned around to see Third Princess Villian creating a heavy-looking stack of first-aid kits and carrying them at chest height.

“Daughter, what are you doing?”

“I can’t trust you two, so I thought I would bring a bunch of medical supplies like that Asian doctor told me to. Just look at those pure looks in the knights’ eyes. Do you have any idea how many soldiers are prepared to head to almost certain doom because they trust your lazy and poorly-thought-out schedule? Goddamn you both to hell.”

“...”

“...”

While the royals just about started to cry, the princess of the kingdom of rock started walking to the military truck the medics were using. But thanks to that warning, the two women moved the chess pieces back to more realistic positions.

They were no longer considering strapping rocket engines to the knights’ backs.

“But she will have a total of 400,000 shots. This is going to be bad.”

“If we don’t make up for these negative values, my sister might just grab us both by the ankles and swing us around like a helicopter, Mother.”

“...Fine, then. I guess we’ll have to go with you-know-what.”

“Yes. It’s the earnest ones that are scariest when they snap. And she gets even worse when other people’s lives are on the line.”

Shokuhou Misaki lay inside the medical tent. She had already been in a swimsuit, which may have been convenient for treating her. She had several layers of bandages wrapped around her to protect her back more than her hips.

“Ugh...”

“I really don’t see how you can defend your actions this time.”

Misaka Mikoto was looking down at her.

Academy City’s #3, Railgun, had her combat power increased by the bizarrely-shaped A.A.A. machine spread out from her back.

She placed a hand on her hip and sighed before saying more.

“I mean, I understand how you feel, but try to behave. You really aren’t suited for the battlefield.”

“Misaka-saaan...” groaned Shokuhou.

She was unathletic and had no tolerance for pain, but she was earnest about this.

She put herself second and seemed to cling to the other girl with her words.

“Please take care of him... He’s probably...no, he’s definitely going to do something reckless again.”

Misaka Mikoto sighed.

She winked and whispered back.

“Who do you think you’re talking to here? Honestly.”

Kamijou Touma looked down at his right hand.

He clenched and unclenched it to see how it felt.

“Do not grow conceited, human.”

“Yeah, I know,” he spat out. “This is just one card in my deck. I’m the one in control.”

It had all returned to him.

Imagine Breaker was back.

Now.

The final battle was imminent.

## Part 02

At 11 AM, the battle to decide the fate of the world began at sea.

An abnormal phenomenon appeared across the winter sea, moving from the British side to the Irish side.

Some said the United Kingdom's winters were relatively warm.

That land was different from Germany or Denmark where children's stories like the Little Match Girl had long been told. It of course varied from year to year, but it did not always snow even in midwinter and there were years when the sea never froze over.

That was the sea in question here.

However, it was now covered with white ice. And that ice was thick and hard enough for heavy steel snowmobiles to drive on top without issue. Ice like this might not even have been found in the Arctic where global warming was threatening the polar bear's natural habitat.

"Here they come."

The temple where Great Demon Coronzon and Hamazura Shiage worked was both the most open and the most closed area here, so they only had to look down from the decagonal heliport to see the icy change to the sea.

Of course.

They may have lost the anti-magic foundation provided by the Anglicans, but this magic kingdom could do more than that. If they simply wanted to stop the Queen Britannia, there were plenty of more efficient methods. Even now, the ship was breaking through the thick ice to continue south. Coronzon only needed the ship to survive until the ceremony was complete. She was not concerned about its durability.

The UK's intent was to fill the entire space between the coast and the ship

with thick ice.

In other words...

“I see them.”

She could see out from the temple, but anyone outside could not see inside.

Unless they followed a certain process to get inside, anything that tried to interfere with the ceremony – even a nuclear attack – would be deflected.

A small smile appeared on Coronzon’s lips as she viewed the distant coast.

“A national force primarily composed of knights is crossing the ice to reach us. Things are about to get very busy indeed. But I already have the ignition from your human magic power, so I will not keep you here any longer. Do what it is you need to do. You remember the process, don’t you?”

“...”

For a while, there was no response.

Hamazura Shiage’s body wobbled to the side. One of his eyes would not open and dark red blood dripped from his mouth. His mind would not have been this hazy if he had chugged a bottle of allergy medicine. Something was clearly wrong inside him. Even a Level 0 was still an esper, so it was plain as day what would happen if they attempted magical activity such as refining life force into magic power.

It took a few seconds.

But Hamazura finally looked up after like a local reporter at a sports festival whose signal was affected by the lag of a satellite broadcast.

“Eh? Oh. Sorry. What’d you say?”

“Don’t die before you fulfill your role as a pawn. The agreement was for you to help me complete the Ceremony of Mo Athair as payment for saving Dion Fortune. You will act as my shield if it is necessary.”

“...”

“The ceremony’s ignition is complete, but if the connection is broken, it ends there. And since you wish to use a fraction of this temple, you do not want it to be destroyed either, do you? So make sure that does not happen.”

Coronzon clicked her tongue.

She may have wasted her time with him.

As a Great Demon who viewed humanity from an outside perspective, every last puny human was no more than a disposable pawn, but once they were lined up on the game board, she could not help but consider how it all looked. She became fixated on a meaningless score beyond simple benefit and efficiency. ...The fact that she could not process it all in a systematic fashion may have been why she was not known as a god or angel despite being one of those who ruled the Sephiroth.

“Then again.”

She snapped her fingers, causing white light to fill the necessary patterns from the many giant overlapping shapes carved into the floor.

“We do have the great triangle of the Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone. If I weaponized them, I can turn them into a deadly barrage that accurately locks onto and destroys an estimated total of 400,000 targets simultaneously. Now, what will you do, Aleister? Trying to break through using superior numbers will get you nowhere here.”

## Part 03

An hour remained.

At noon, the Queen Britannia would arrive at a certain point in the ocean and the history of humanity would come to an end.

“Let’s go, Alex.”

The female knight in silver armor and a surcoat rubbed the warhorse’s head and then hopped into the saddle. She had already changed the horseshoes from the special rubber ones for asphalt to spiked ones for ice. That would normally be a job for an attendant in training instead of an actual knight, but things were different this time. A sprained leg could literally mean death here.

“Sorry for not being Second Princess Carissa. I know I am only borrowing you, but please lend me your strength.”

The horse neighed with a note of displeasure.

But instead of being about Carissa’s absence, the displeasure may have been about the female knight still feeling the need to say that after they had overcome so much danger together.

She was not alone.

There were snowmobiles, snow vehicles supported by thick treads, military vehicles with studless tires, and even large skates and Nordic skis. The royals and knights had gathered on the coast with every form of transportation across the ice they could find.

The sound of scraping ice came from the heels of a Western boot checking on the stability of their footing. That would be the Asian Saint.

The female knight frowned while riding her borrowed partner.

“I’ve been curious: do you not use a shield?”

“I would prefer not even draw my sword if possible.”

That was not just a form of cowardice.

Battoujutsu, the art of increasing the strength and speed of a slash using the nature of the scabbard containing it, was a rare form of combat even when taking a global view. High-speed clashes were everything. You secured your safety by defeating your foe before they could attack you, so it had some things in common with jousting.

“...Sorry about what I said.”

“I do not blame you. No matter what form they took, I am a sinner who killed people while under the influence of Coronzon’s poison. That action violated my magic name. It is only natural to keep an eye open to make sure the same thing does not happen again.”

But the female knight actually smiled at that.

“I too relied on the Beheading Coins distributed by the Great Demon. I only have the weakness of my heart to blame.”

“Really?”

“The Knights are in the same position, so let us work together to reclaim our honor, Anglicans. This is a battle to take back our stolen way of life. It would be meaningless to let anyone do it for me.”

The ocean had already frozen over.

They had a path to reach the Queen Britannia which was breaking through the solid white ice to force its way onward.

Queen Regnant Elizard raised Curtana Second in one hand while riding a large trike.

That was their signal.

“Charge!!!!!”

Countless cries grew to a great roar that shook the icy ground and the national forces covering the coast began to move.

They could see the gray heliport from here, but the view from outside meant nothing.

They could not see or interact with what existed inside.

That decagonal holy ground was a divine temple protected by a thick barrier, so not even a brute force attack could destroy it. Not even with the help of Knight Leader, Kanzaki Kaori, and Elizard wielding Curtana Second. They needed to follow a specific pathway through the ship to reach the temple and stop Coronzon.

In the worst case, they could sink the entire ship only to have the ceremony continue unhindered at the ocean bottom.

Of course, the Queen Britannia was not going to just let them attack.

That gray ship was like the fusion of a cruise ship and a warship. Elizard herself knew just how formidable a foe it was because it had kept her safe for many long years before its retirement.

The ship was two hundred meters long.

Four evenly-spaced balls of light floated up above the ship.

“Warning!!” Grimoire Library Index’s voice rang in everyone’s ears no matter how far she was from them. “I can’t ‘see’ the heliport. We should assume the Queen Britannia has completely fallen to Coronzon!!”

“Then is it as we feared?”

“The Sword of State, the Ruling Sceptre, the Coronation Crown, and the Stone of Scone. Each one is a different symbol. If we assume she will use Crowley’s Magick which is based on the Golden cabal but includes his unique interpretations, then the sword is ‘that which determines the direction

of power', the sceptre is 'that which guides the cudgel's blow', and the crown is 'that which supports the spell from Keter'. The Stone of Scone does not have an entry in Crowley's correspondence table!! But if the boost effect works on the legend of 'when the true king stands upon it and raises their voice, they shall prophesy', then I predict it will either provide a wide-range attack using a shockwave or use prophecy to greatly increase their accuracy!! Be very careful!!'

It did not take long after that.

Countless white beams of light shot out like a hedgehog's spines. The temple hidden in the ship would amplify and weaponize the power of any spiritual item. With the Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone, Coronzon could draw out military power on the level of an entire nation.

The attacks that flew in from the side like horizontal rain may have been the Sword of State's effect.

The invisible impacts that swept across everything horizontally may have been the Ruling Sceptre's effect.

The beams that rained down like a great downpour may have been the Coronation Crown's effect.

The many explosions and shockwaves that took randomly bending paths may have been the Stone of Scone's effect.

Each type of attack reached 100,000 in number and there were four types in all. Trying to block any one type would just get you torn to pieces. Elizard had indeed gathered a national-level fighting force, but Coronzon had the same. In a direct clash, they would fall into a cycle of mutual destruction that wore down the British numbers far too much before they arrived at the ship.

So...

"Do it, my daughter!!"

"Yes, yes. ...Carissa definitely got her tomboy side from you, Mother."

The monocled first princess snapped her fingers while elegantly sipping at some lemon tea inside a snow vehicle supported by thick treads.

Immediately, something like ice trees burst vertically from the frigid land.

The ice had been artificially created in the first place, so modifications like this were entirely possible. These looked like they would get in the way of the charge, but Elizard and Riméa had something else in mind.

Sounds of destruction soon followed.

The vertical and horizontal downpours of deadly beams were colliding with the ice trees as more and more of them appeared. That shattered the obstacles, but they were only made of ice. They could be remade as many times as necessary on this seemingly endless expanse of ice.

Were they supposed to look like shields or lightning rods?

“A single volley contains 400,000 shots of four different varieties.” Riméa laughed darkly. “So we can prevent human casualties as long as we provide more than 400,000 decoys, correct? With four million, the accuracy falls to 1 in 10. With forty million, it falls to 1 in 100. Of course, I am not about to say this will bring it all the way down to zero.”

She did this and explained it like it was nothing. That may have been the proof that she was part of the royal family. In the United Kingdom, the royal family’s power was partially deified. In the past, the people had believed they had the Royal Touch, which meant a royal could heal any disease with a touch of their hand. Not that there had been any magical basis for this belief.

(Well, this was in large part thanks to the terrain.)

After all, this sea was contained within the United Kingdom. They were lucky the battle had not occurred in the neighboring country of Ireland and the nearby Isle of Man was rather special in its own way. They were lucky the gray Queen Britannia had been on the United Kingdom’s sea.

The Knights were protected by that power as they slipped through the gaps in

the forest of ice trees that irregularly rose from the ground. They only had to draw the Queen Britannia's fire and redirect it toward the obstacles. That was a royal fortress remade into a ship, but they were gradually approaching it. They could fight their way closer. For one thing, a castle was not secure just by sitting there. A fortress only functioned as a proper command center when it had a defensive line and soldiers to protect the area around it.

They had safely gotten through the probing attacks of the first stage.

But Knight Leader did not let his guard down while riding his horse.

“Coronzon is intimately familiar with the British system thanks to her position as the Anglican leader. She will soon realize that focusing her barrage on the royal family is enough to break this equilibrium.”

“In that case.” The female knight gathered strength in the center of her gut while racing forward on Alex, the horse borrowed from Second Princess Carissa. “Someone must draw Coronzon’s attention. I hesitate to suggest such a thing is actually exists, but if we can show her a threat greater than the royal family, she would be forced to focus there instead!!”

## Part 04

Index and Karasuma Fran viewed the entire battlefield while dangling from a large Bunny Gray balloon.

“I can’t ‘see’ it even from above. This is a level beyond a normal people-clearing field.”

“It isn’t that a wall is dividing world from world. Think of it as a created world being placed in between like a cushioning balloon.”

“You mean we can’t break through that without enough power to destroy an entire world?”

“You would need a theoretical max-value Magic God attack, or...”

“That recovered right hand?”

“...”

Hanging around that boy was not the only way to help.

In fact, Index could not fight directly, so if she was on the front line, that boy might end up focusing only on protecting her. They could never settle things with Great Demon Coronzon like that.

So she had changed her methods.

This was another way to help.

“So where is the Queen Britannia’s power source? If it uses the ley lines, we could temporarily cut off the line leading to the ship.”

“No, it doesn’t work like that. In fact, it’s trying to reach a specific point because that’s where it can access the ley lines most efficiently. It hasn’t reached that state yet.”

“Then what is it?”

“Great Demon Coronzon. She is using the power stored up inside herself. Her own power is more stable than using one of the weaker ley lines. And look how much power that is... She must be a transcendent lifeform belonging to a different pyramid than Michael or Gabriel.”

This was what she could sense from the outside.

Once inside that gray ship, she would be directly facing a being capable of supplying that much power. Could you even call that a magical battle? Most ceremonies simplified and symbolized the legendary processes, but a showdown against Coronzon would be much purer, more disordered, and more chaotic. Perhaps you could call her an entire legend herself.

“But if Coronzon is that powerful, can she even use the normal magic that humans use? I feel like she would be rejected from that like God’s Right Seat was.”

“It probably depends on the situation. Magic God Othinus blended into the human magic society while in her imperfect form before awakening and Coronzon herself worked deep in the Anglican Church as archbishop without arousing suspicion.”

“Hm.”

“And if we’re using God’s Right Seat as a comparison, there is an easy way to solve that problem: trick a human into helping you. Although in God’s Right Seat’s case, they had the Roman Catholic believers play that role.”

Something like a horizontal shower of beams shot by directly below the balloon.

Each one was magic capable of killing anyone it hit.

“This trick won’t last forever. At this rate, the Knights and the rest of our direct firepower will be pushed back.”

“Hm? Wait a second. What is that?”

## Part 05

The Knights' idea may have been a form of self-sacrifice.

They believed glory would be theirs if they could win this battle and protect the British royal family with their own blood. They were willing to be hit by Coronzon's concentrated fire for that.

However.

A certain strongest had the same tactical idea with one fundamental difference at the foundation.

"Let's get started, Qlipah Puzzle 545."

"Of course."

"You made a mess of this country, so now go save it."

"Nee hee hee. Will do!! And awayyyy I go!!"

A moment later, the scenery, the world...and everything else grew twisted.

It was a tornado.

A winter tornado towered up to the heavens as it sucked up all the shards of frozen ice.

However, she had not suddenly revealed a never-before-seen supernatural power. This was an extension of what she had demonstrated several times already.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 was a possessing demon.

To appear in the surface world on her own, she used an artificial birthing ceremony to construct a door and pushed her translucent body through that for a forced manifestation.

Yes.

She gathered together all of the trash in the vicinity.

She gathered together the ice trees, the shattered ice surface, and all other unnecessary items, formed a vortex several dozen meters across, converted it all into a white tornado stretching to the heavens, and transformed herself into a winter natural disaster.

She intentionally did not complete her manifestation.

The demon kept herself in that halfway state while approaching the giant gray ship.

“You can’t see in from outside and you can’t break through,” said Accelerator.

That temple could only be broken open with enough power to destroy the world.

However.

When dealing with true monsters, you could not call that an absolute barrier.

“Then let’s put it to the test. If you’re so confident in your barrier, then humor me, you goddamn demon!!”

Anything that entered the effective range was smashed to dust by all the ice. This was the world's largest ball mill. And the vaporization heat meant the frigid monster also provided an additional ultra-low temperature attack similar to being dunked in liquid nitrogen. The attack carried enough force to crush a bank vault's thick door into a powder finer than cedar pollen. The

Queen Britannia must not have been able to ignore that because it blatantly ignored the Knights in order to continually fire its glowing storm on the white tornado.

That storm included vertical and horizontal impacts and shockwaves.

However.

This was not enough to stop the white tornado that only redoubled its intensity when pieces were carved or evaporated away. By approaching from a different position than the ground forces running along the ice, the giant decoy drew Coronzon's attention elsewhere.

First Princess Riméa had tried to increase the effectiveness of a decoy using numbers, but there was another way. Make the decoy into an indestructible landmark. Make it too powerful to ignore even when the enemy knew it was bait. A threat as obvious as a giant kaiju functioned as a powerful decoy.

The Knights were just about to reach the gray Queen Britannia using their horses and vehicles, but...

“Nee hee!? Aethyr Avatars!!”

Angels made of golden hair appeared by bursting up through the thick layer of ice. 2: ARN, 8: ZID, 13: ZIM, 21: ASP, 25: VTI, and more. Their essences were equal, but their nature was changed by the letters used to define them. Those false angel images lined up in a long row.

They formed a wall.

A wall of firepower that followed the mantra of “the best defense is a good offense”.

“Master, the Brits have stopped moving!”

“Well, if it's like this out here, it's bound to be even more hellish inside. Anyone who lets this stop them is better off staying outside anyway.”

Accelerator was not focused on the movement of the army as a whole.

Two people were breaking through the chaotic battle without anyone stopping them: The #3 girl and the spiky-haired boy who were riding a huge motorcycle.

“Hmph. ...So they just barely squeak by with a passing grade.”

“Huh?”

Qliphah Puzzle 545’s puzzled voice came from the white tornado wandering in the gap between manifestation and dormancy, but Accelerator only reached for the side of his neck.

Specifically, toward his choker’s switch.

“You’re in control, Qliphah Puzzle 545. ...Give it more of a rhythm. Have fun with it and shake the hell outta that ship!!”

## Part 06

“Hold on tight!!”

In her one-piece swimsuit and raincoat, Misaka Mikoto was riding a large motorcycle and shouting over the roaring wind.

The Queen Britannia was a two-hundred-meter gray ship that looked like a cross between a luxury cruise ship and a warship. It was more than nine meters up to the deck. That was about three stories, so any approach would normally have been blocked as if by a castle’s stone walls.

But Mikoto had free control of her A.A.A.

By holding the handlebars, lifting her butt, and tilting her body weight back, she raised the front wheel of the massive machine.

“Hey, wait! Your butt’s in my face! And what part of you am I even supposed to hold onto!?”

“Figure it out yourself!!”

Mikoto’s face grew red as she popped the flashiest of all wheelies, but the trick did not end there. With a series of heavy metallic sounds, the weapon arms (which had been swept toward the back of the motorcycle) started moving like living creatures. More and more thick blades stabbed into the steel wall blocking their path and the thick tires gained a grip. The combination of bug legs and round tires allowed her to drive up the wall that was actually tilted back toward them.

“Othinus!”

“Worry not, human. I’m holding on!!”

After the giant motorcycle used highly disturbing movements to drive up onto the gray deck, they saw some black cloth fluttering in the wind.

That was Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers, Baby Lilith, and Silver Girl Aleister Crowley.

That other group glanced over at Kamijou and Mikoto, but instead of joining them, they opened a watertight door and stepped inside.

Kamijou climbed down from the motorcycle's back seat, and...

"Looks like things are starting all over the place. We need to get to the deepest part of this ship."

"Fine, but isn't that 'deepest' part also the heliport? I heard that stuff about it being both opened and closed, but can we really take that literally? It wasn't some weird rhyming slang like Mother Goose, was it!?"

"Don't worry, Misaka. I don't get it either. With things like this, you just gotta go see it for yourself to figure it out!!"

The motorcycle broke down with a metallic sound and the weapons gathered around Mikoto's back. They could not rely on its flying function, but it was still very useful as a weapon.

That was when a powerful vibration and impact caused the two-hundred-meter Queen Britannia to violently shake side to side.

A white tornado had tilted on its side and used its drill-like tip to stab into the side of the giant gray ship.

"Kyah!!"

Kamijou immediately pulled Mikoto's slender shoulders close, but did that really accomplish anything? If she fell over with that much heavy weaponry on her back, he was pretty sure he would be crushed along with her.

"Accelerator really doesn't know how to hold back, does he?"

"Eh? Eh? What's happening? I just heard a disgusting name, he's holding me in his arms, and I, eh, hweh, hwuh???"

So many conflicting emotions filled Mikoto at once that steam started rising from her head, but Kamijou was too preoccupied to notice. He had to make sure they were not torn to mincemeat by friendly fire after coming all this way.

Othinus spoke up in exasperation while back at her usual spot on Kamijou's shoulder.

"I would choose a different entrance than Aleister's group used. Taking the same route would defeat the purpose of splitting up."

For better or for worse, the power on Coronzon's side was almost entirely concentrated in a single person.

Attacking from multiple directions at once would place a much bigger burden on her than it might seem. She might be able to handle it, but it would still force her to do more calculations in her head.

They opened a gray watertight door and finally entered the ship.

The gorgeous interior looked more like a palace or museum than a boat. Whether it was to defeat or protect Coronzon, Aleister had said the biggest bottleneck would be the giant temple made from the ship's heliport. However, they could not just go there, so they needed to follow a specific route through the inside of the ship.

But...

(If I could use this right hand on the barrier or whatever it is...)

That would change things.

But that was not an option.

"I can't just fire railguns at random to destroy everything here, huh?"

"No. ...Man, that stuff on your back is scary. Don't get your hair caught in the joints, okay?"

That was the thing.

The Queen Britannia's temple could amplify and weaponize the power of any spiritual item. And it would work for anyone's magic, not just Coronzon's.

So if they took advantage of that, they could perform a ceremony far larger than they could normally manage.

According to Aleister, who knew Coronzon better than anyone, demons were made of something similar to Telesma, so they could be weakened by cutting away that energy to shrink them down. Do that and they could make Coronzon into something humans could defeat. ... That opened a path to avoiding this global crisis without using Lilith's soul.

Othinus crossed her arms on Kamijou's shoulder.

"It's the same idea as the fairy spell that Ollerus used on me. Once the old gods are no longer worshiped, they become no more than evil spirits. The Aeon has advanced from Isis to Osiris and then to Horus, but this is a throwback to Isis, which was most recently represented by the Divine Mixtures. A Great Demon is a mass of power beyond human understanding, but that is what gives us a chance to intervene."

Aleister was already inside the ship.

If she followed the set path to reach the heliport, Kamijou might not even need to use his right hand's power to break the barrier protecting the temple.

Mikoto asked a question while using the many weapons on her back to carve through the hallway wall and lamp covers.

"Where should we go first!?"

"The wheelhouse or the engine room would work. Just somewhere that lets us stop the ship! The time limit runs out in an hour, but that's assuming the ship continues traveling at this speed. If we stop it here, Coronzon's plan falls apart. At the very least, she won't be able to fortify her defenses and wait it out. Misaka, you've gotta be good with machines since you've got all that

stuff on your back. Show me which way to go!!”

“You got it!!”

The wall bent and bulged right next to them.

At this point, Kamijou could guess what was coming despite his magical ignorance.

“It’s one of those Aethyr Avatars!! I couldn’t tell you which number it is, though!!”

Kamijou threw his right fist just before the golden torrent burst from the wall and Mikoto used her giant chainsaw to bisect a different one that tried to target him from behind. They did not wait for an actual attack. Getting in the first strike was the safest method here.

Imagine Breaker and the A.A.A.

The boy and girl stood back to back.

It could be hard to tell since they both had highly effective attacks here, but these enemies would be quite difficult to defeat with normal methods. After all, they were masses of hair. They had no heart or brain. It was hard to imagine how shooting or stabbing them with a bullet or knife would ever defeat them.

“This is just like a video game dungeon, isn’t it? We’re supposed to be breaking into the enemy’s stronghold, but it feels more like we’re being lured into a giant man-eating trap.”

“(I’m doing it. I’m really fighting alongside him! Yay!)”

“From the look of things, I doubt Aleister’s team is having an easy time of it either. …Misaka?”

“Bfhh!! Cough, cough! It’s, uh, this way. Ships are always given the optimal structure. If you focus on the layout of the wiring and plumbing, you can tell where the important facilities are and you can mostly tell where they keep

what. We just have to stop this ship, right? And we have business up top either way. Let's head to the wheelhouse which is packed full of steering equipment. This way!"

## Part 07

He tried slamming against the side of the gray ship a few times, but it did not change much.

With each hit, the Queen Britannia slid to the side and the direction the bow was pointed shifted a little, but that was not enough to change the ship's heading. Unless they got inside and destroyed whatever was controlling it, the ship would just correct its course.

And his electrode battery was not unlimited.

Accelerator cracked his neck while surrounded by a blizzard of fifty below.

(The heliport has taken the least damage. It's completely unharmed even after we shook the ship up so damn much. It looks deserted, but that's all the more reason to assume there might be something there.)

"That's enough, Qlipah Puzzle 545. Come on out."

"Yes, master."

The white particles gathered in a single spot and burst loudly apart.

The translucent demon, who looked like the combination of a girl, a killer jellyfish, and a newspaper, wrapped her arms around Accelerator's neck from behind and rubbed her cheek against him.

"Remove the tornado and the attacks from the ship will go back to concentrating on everyone who's currently being stopped by the Aethyr Avatars. That's 400,000 shots in four different varieties. Are you sure we can leave that up to them?"

"The enemy can only keep that up while sitting in the safety of that ship. If a few rats get in to chew through the ship's innards, they won't be able to focus on things outside. I'm sure there will still be some attacks out here, but it won't be full power anymore. Doing that would be far more effective than

keeping that meaningless tornado going outside.”

“Is that how it works? Well, I’m not a babysitter, so I’ll just follow your orders, master.”

With that, the two of them crashed into the Queen Britannia’s port side deck with the force of an artillery shell. The positioning of the doors was irrelevant since they broke right through the outer wall to get in.

Accelerator switched his choker back to normal mode and started to support himself with his modern design cane, but...

“Nee hee.”

Qlipah Puzzle 545 slipped her head between his arm and body from behind. She forcibly had him use her for support.

“...Is this any time to be playing around?”

“I exist to support you, master☆ And I make a nice shield if need be.”

“Tch.”

“Oh? I’m going to take that tongue click as a go-ahead. Nee hee hee. And isn’t support from a soft pair of boobs better than a hard cane?”

“...”

“Dwah!! Wait, not my forehead hole! Silly master, why do you have to stick your finger there? Wait, two fingers!? Ah, don’t rub along the edge!! Is this cause you’re embarrassed, or are you serious? I can’t tell!!”

Qlipah Puzzle 545 earned some more experience points on the path to being an expert.

But that aside...

(Coronzon doesn’t have a bunch of goons at her beck and call. She’s almost entirely reliant on those Aethyr Avatar things, so I guess this is all you get

once you're inside the ship. She only needs it to last long enough for her ceremony, so she's pretty much sacrificing this thing. She never expected it to last to the end.)

In other words, it was the same inside and out.

As long as Coronzon could buy enough time, she would win no matter how beat up the gray ship was.

They could not let their guard down even after arriving inside the enemy stronghold. Given the situation, Coronzon still had the upper hand.

“What should we attack?” asked the translucent demon.

“The engine room at the very bottom.”

If they could do something about the ship headed straight toward its destination, they could ignore the time limit.

The idea was not that different from Kamijou Touma’s. But instead of grabbing the ship’s wheel and leading it astray, the #1 planned to keep it from moving altogether by breaking through the tungsten steel propeller shaft that was thicker than his torso.

And.

“I had a feeling I’d find you here...” muttered Accelerator.

Before even having time to search for the stairs down, a pathetic figure appeared as if to block the way. Still, this was someone who had escaped the #1’s deadly grasp once before. Since they had stood on the same stage but their battle had never been resolved, Accelerator had assumed they would face each other again somewhere.

It was Hamazura Shiage.

The boy was not even holding the antique Sword of State this time.

“Did you sell everything you had to that demon? You’re not even worth

laughing at.”

“...”

“Oh, this ain’t good.” Qlipah Puzzle 545 was the first to notice. “He’s forcibly refining magic power despite being a scientifically-developed esper, so his body’s in really bad shape! If he keeps breathing like that, every blood vessel in his body could rupture. I’m honestly not sure how he’s even still alive right now!!”

“Shut...up...”

Finally.

There was a horrible delay beforehand, but Hamazura Shiage managed to get some words out when faced with the clear threat of Academy City’s #1.

He seemed to slap his pants pocket as he felt the somewhat solid sensation of the perfectly ordinary gum there.

For a brief moment, his eyes managed to focus on his opponent.

“I know I was...wrong. Every last person on this planet would probably throw stones at me for what I did. But if I keep going...if I keep at it just a bit longer... I just have to stick to it. I just have to keep making this magic power stuff in my body until I have what I want. I can see it already. Dion Fortune is within reach. So!!”

“So you’re gonna buy time by sacrificing your own flesh and blood?”

“...”

He was slow to respond again.

For one thing, Hamazura Shiage may not have been fighting against an external enemy here. The outside world may not have been registering to him at all while he fought against the death within him.

There was no reason to hesitate.

Accelerator only had to knock this guy aside and continue on to the engine room.

But just as he prepared to flip the switch on the side of his neck, his red eyes suddenly rolled to the side while his head remained motionless.

There was a loud boom just as he turned his attention elsewhere.

This must have been a surprise for Hamazura Shiage as well.

The corridor wall was torn apart in a surprise attack.

The person who made such an exciting appearance had long silver hair, brown skin, and bandages that were wrapped around her. Her bare foot had forced its way through the vector reflection barrier and kicked the #1 through the air. Her leg ended up twisted at an unnatural angle, but that did not keep her from laughing. The broken leg wriggled in a way no human leg ever should as the bone and joint were repaired. It happened so easily it was like seeing a balloon being inflated.

Hamazura slowly turned his eyes that way and moved his excessively sticky lips.

“Neph...?”

“That’s right. It’s everyone’s big sister, Nephthys. I’m going to fight the way I want to. And in this case, that definitely means fighting Accelerator instead of Hamazura Shiage. Don’t you agree, you chemical monster? Did you get that clog out of your chest?”

“You...!!”

“Yes, sorry about last time. I seem to have made your lovely slave girl cry an awful lot. I’m used to it since I was buried alive in the pyramids, but I do hate how you edgy guys think doing these things makes you a good person.”

She was so calm and chatty in front of the #1.

Magic Gods lived in their own little world.

Was that why she was not swallowed up by the white monster's menacing aura?

She casually waved a hand Hamazura's way.

"Now, you seem to have your reasons for fighting, so I'm going to go enjoy myself over here. Oh, but this is not about which potential opponent would have been stronger. So go show off what a man you are. There is another fight with your name on it. Bye☆"

She did not say anything more to him. Instead, Magic God Nephthys licked her lips, crouched low, and tackled Accelerator just as he was getting up beyond the broken wall. The two of them crashed through the wall beyond that. Since they immediately fell straight down, that must have been the opera house which was tall enough to take up space on the first through third floors.

But Hamazura Shiage felt no relief over that.

He had already received a divine oracle.

He heard some new footsteps. In order to see who was approaching him, he sluggishly turned around.

And there he saw it. And heard it.

"Hama...zura?"

## **Part 08**

Index looked up a bit while overlooking the entire battlefield from below the large balloon. That inspired a question from hoodie bikini Fran who was dangling from the same balloon.

“What is it?”

“There’s something there.”

This was different from before.

This was not the worst of the game pieces she had been imagining.

Her voice made it clear something had appeared on the game board that should not have been there at all.

But.

She was not looking to the heliport.

“This isn’t Crowley, Coronzon, the Magic Gods, or the Golden cabal. ...This life force circulation is so twisted and this magic power is so strange I’m not sure you can even call it human. Who is this!?”

## Part 09

“Yes, this is the place.”

The silver girl named Aleister rhythmically tapped the sole of her shoe against the floor.

“The path to the heliport must be the elevator in the central storeroom, but that alone is not enough. The doors and corridors leading to all of the other rooms act as a stereotypical password. But it is more than just the order in which you open and close the doors. How you hold the knobs must require the secret handshakes often used in magic cabals.”

This group had no way of knowing this, but Hamazura Shiage had been entirely oblivious to just how hidden away a space Coronzon had led him.

You would never find the path to the heliport by opening all of the doors in the ship and searching every nook and cranny of every cabin. It was doubtful you would even see that giant elevator there. If you failed the authorization process and were rejected, you might just find a thick storeroom wall instead.

“I am Reading Thoth 78, a tarot deck created by you, my administrator. I would be willing to brute force the answer.” Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers was still holding Baby Lilith. “But if it is true that Coronzon created her own tarot and incorporated it into her fighting force, there is a good chance she will obstruct any attempt made with this method. Would you like to rely on a different method, such as geomancy?”

“No.” Aleister grinned. “I would actually appreciate it if she goes out of her way to obstruct our methods. Make it real flashy and make a note of what areas get the strongest reaction. Those are the places she least wants us to find. Connect those points and we will have the correct path to take. And there are only so many secret handshakes since they are limited by the five-fingered structure of the human hand. Once we have a decent hint, this should not be too difficult.”

Scrape...

Scrape, scrape, scrape...

It came from down the dimly-lit hallway. Just a moment before Aleister's group started to walk toward the dining hall, someone approached them while needlessly scratching up the walls on either side using the many weapons fanned out from her sleeves.

She had a black bob cut and sickly pale skin.

She wore a short China dress and had a protective charm on her forehead.

“Magic God Niang-Niang...”

“I’m here to play, Aleister.”

That monster grinned while making a weapon out of the sparks and spray that the silver girl loathed more than anything else.

“All I care about is having fun. Kamisato Kakeru kind of stole your thunder, but you’d put together your own way of defeating Magic Gods, right? Show me what you can really do. Show me an attack that will shake me to the core!!”

## Part 10

Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou.

Their positions on the battlefield had changed. Mostly due to Hamazura's surprise attack.

But. Even so.

The feelings they held deep down had to be the same. They may have ended up with different groups, but they never should have been turning weapons on each other.

And yet.

“Hamazura...”

“No, Takitsubo.”

The boy clenched his teeth and held out a hand to reject her.

He felt like his scattering mind was gathering back together.

A perfectly ordinary stick of gum.

Getting her a phone so she could be online friends with Aneri.

At times, even small promises like those could produce great power.

“I’m almost there. I’m so close!! I can’t stop now and I know it will all fall apart if I accept you here!! So please. I know how to save Dion Fortune. All I need is to take the life force inside me and convert it into something called magic power. That’s all I need to do!! So, so, so! Leave me be just this once!! If you don’t, it will all unravel! I don’t care if I’m just putting off the inevitable. I can’t go back to being regular old Hamazura Shiage right now!!”

However.

He noticed something strange.

A transparent sphere was floating next to the head of his girlfriend in a pink track suit and fluffy sweater. He guessed it was either made of glass or crystal. At the very least, it was not a helium balloon or a drone spinning tiny wings to fly. He could not figure out how that volleyball-sized mass was floating. Her power was AIM Stalker. That was a rare power, she was a Level 4, and there was even talk of her possibly having the potential to become an eighth Level 5, but it was still a passive power derived from clairvoyance or remote viewing. He could not imagine how that would let her psychically lift something as heavy as a pickling stone.

And.

Beyond that...

“Hamazura.”

Something was off about her movements.

Her long-sleeved track suit did not leave much skin exposed, but he could still hear the unnatural straining sound coming from her muscles. Except this was not her having trouble moving them. She was restraining something. It was like someone slamming on the brakes with all their might while the car refused to stop.

What was she trying to stop?

And why?

She was holding her palm out toward him.

And that bizarre floating crystal ball moved out in front of her hand.

Which one was controlling the other? Questions continued to pile up in Hamazura Shiage’s head as Takitsubo Rikou worked hard to move her lips.

She squeezed out some words.

“Run, Hamazura!!”

There was a flash of light.

Hamazura managed to react to the mystery crystal ball’s movement, but perhaps only because that flash of light reminded him of Mugino Shizuri’s Meltdowner.

As soon as he desperately swung his dull body to the side, the hallway wall was vaporized with a horrific sizzling sound. This was blatantly different. There was no way this was AIM Stalker. Maybe it was that crystal ball, but it was definitely some other power!!

But this was not the time to cower in fear.

If he died here, he could not save Takitsubo Rikou.

“!!”

When the crystal ball flashed again, he tackled a nearby door open. He did not care how pathetic he looked as long as he could survive long enough to have another chance at this. Falling to the floor may have been more useful than escaping into another room. The walls were entirely useless. He belatedly realized that the beam of light was sweeping horizontally by at hip height.

“I...screwed up.”

He heard a voice of confession.

“This is because I accepted Anna Sprengel’s offer. It’s because I said yes when she asked if I wanted the power to resolve this incident. So that woman forced me to take a power that would only resolve the incident as quickly as possible.”

“...!!!!!”

They were the same.

What she had done was the same as Hamazura Shiage choosing to work with Great Demon Coronzon so he could save Dion Fortune and keep Takitsubo Rikou safe.

His girlfriend had gone somewhere else and relied on someone else. All so she could save the boy before the entire world crushed him.

They had both been trying to help the other, but someone had taken advantage of that.

No.

How were they the same? Like hell they were.

Hamazura was the one who had driven his girlfriend to the point that she felt the need to do this!!

(Anna Sprengel.)

His hazy mind managed to come back into perfect focus.

He had no idea who that was.

He had no idea how powerful they were.

But after hearing that name just once, he had carved it into his soul.

(Anna Sprengel!!!!!!)

He knew of someone else who had been forced into a fight they did not want: A. O. Francisca while she was being manipulated by Coronzon. Academy City's board chairman had found a clever solution then, but Hamazura could not get any help from the grownups this time.

“Aneri.”

He would have to save her.

This was something he had to do himself.

He quietly and firmly grabbed his phone from the floor.

His body felt as heavy as lead, but he forced it back up onto its feet.

And he spoke.

“Give me your support, but this is my job.”

Now that he had the program’s support, he once more prepared for a fight.

He did not have the Processor Suit this time. He would have to move his own body to follow any instructions he received. He did not have thick composite armor or external muscle reinforcement. And needless to say, a single hit from that fearsome beam of light would vaporize him.

The risks were greater than any he had faced before.

But he could not forget.

He had a simple goal here: to add just one more person to the small group of people that included Takitsubo, Mugino, Kinuhata, Fremea, Hanzou, and Kuroyoru. Dion Fortune had not asked for help, so he would give it to her anyway and show her just how foolish and silly she had been to give up. That was all he wanted to do.

So he could not allow anyone else from that group to be lost.

He was willing to risk his life for that.

(My main target has got to be that crystal ball. I don’t know how it works, but glass is glass. At the very least, I’m not going up against a tank or battleship here.)

He heard the solid sound of someone stepping on a small piece of wall debris.

His girlfriend in a pink track suit and fluffy sweater was walking in through the large hole she had blown in the wall. No, she was being led through it by the invisible strings of whoever controlled her.

“Hama...zura...”

“Don’t say a word. I’m the one that needs to apologize. You didn’t do a damn thing wrong! So you don’t need to make excuses for your actions!!”

The crystal ball glowed again.

It was about to fire.

But nothing would change if he just kept jumping out of the way and escaping. He gathered strength in the bottom of his stomach and sealed away the fear in his heart. His girlfriend was watching, so he could not run away any longer. He had to confront the threat!!

“Ohh!!”

He raised his voice and took a step forward at almost the same moment that a beam of light shot from the crystal ball floating just past Takitsubo’s straining hand. But it was not enough. It was true that a highly-generic supernatural power that did not rely on your existing esper power would be reassuring. If it could be freely swapped out, it might even overturn the hierarchy established in Academy City.

But there was no life in that beam.

He could not sense the living emotion seen in Mugino Shizuri’s beams. His legs did not nearly collapse from fear just by seeing it.

The roar of scorched air reached his ears after a short delay. But by then, he had crouched down so the deadly beam passed by over his head. But he had not crouched in order to dodge. It was all to help him continue forward. There had to be a lag between each beam. He did not care if he shattered his fist in the process. He would charge forward and break that crystal ball before it could fire another shot!!

He grabbed a firefighting axe that had fallen from the wall to the floor.

Takitsubo’s shocked face filled his vision.

(I'll break that thing right here!!)

A solid sound rang out.

He had swung the axe down.

But then his face twisted.

The crystal ball had not shattered. It had caught his attack head-on and stopped the axe in its path. He felt an aching pain run through the bones of his wrist.

Crystal and glass were hard.

Although that could be hard for people to imagine when they were only used to the thin pieces used in windows and bottles. But as an example, breaking a heavy ashtray with your fist would not be easy. He could not break this like people did bottles as part of a performance.

Not even the optimizations of Aneri's support had worked.

No amount of efficiency would help if his own strength was insufficient.

Light slowly glowed from the center of the crystal ball once more.

“No...”

The despair in Takitsubo Rikou's eyes was even more powerful than before.

If the crystal ball fired another beam at this close range, the boy who had risked his life to save her really would be vaporized.

“Run!! That's enough, Hamazura!!”

There was nothing he could do.

Pure white light gathered inside the crystal ball until it reached the limit.

Then it was all released at once.

A beam exploded out at point-blank range. There was no way for Hamazura to dodge it.

But.

But.

But.

It bent.

The beam really should have hit him at this range, but it unnaturally bent right in front of his eyes.

“Wha-?”

This had of course not been done by the boy. Or by the girl. But that would not happen by simple coincidence.

Something fluttered in the air.

It was a tarot card bearing a distinctive image. One danced through the air, a second followed, and even more poured down. With a sound like rustling leaves, the 78 cards formed a large ring behind Hamazura.

Then he heard a humming vibration.

The mysterious crystal ball was taking aim by forcing Takitsubo Rikou to move.

But.

Something appeared in Hamazura Shiage’s hand as if in response.

He heard several small noises gathering as more and more tarot cards arrived there. They formed a perfect cube and their surfaces grew black in the blink of an eye.

It was a black box.

Dion Fortune had used that Golden spiritual item to protect her life and her pride.

“Translate, simplify, and create anew.”

A voice rang in his head.

Hamazura did not know much English, yet the English words came naturally and fluently from his mouth.

This was not someone helping him in a stroke of good luck.

This was the result he had produced with his own efforts.

He had refused to accept that girl’s story was over after she smiled all on her own and disappeared, so he had turned his back on so much and damaged his own body to continually refine his life force into magic power. This was thanks to everything he had done. He had been trying to bring back the original person by reading the minute scratches and stains on the surface of the cards, so it was not surprising for the girl’s thoughts to flow back into him during the process.

Also, the Golden members like Westcott and Annie had not been thrown out into the London night without anything to wear. Their clothing and equipment must have appeared along with them. That meant they were included in the marks on the tarot. There was information on the items that went with the people. It included the equipment needed to define those magicians. After powering those tools with magic power refined from their own life force, it was possible a loop was constructed between body and tool, making them truly a part of the magician.

So he only had to hold out this sign of her imminent arrival.

This external part of her had been constructed from the tarot deck he had kept safe.

This box was the same as one of the buttons on her clothing.

This was the possibility he had found while facing all the many unreasonable

aspects of this world.

In other words...

“This Archetype Processor can convert any spiritual item or spell into an unpredictable form!”

The black box opened like a great maw and swallowed the crystal ball whole.

There was no chance of a beam coming from within.

It did not matter what kind of change it was.

It did not matter if it was a positive or negative change.

Once a spiritual item had been devoured by that box, it would never retain its original form.

“...Ah...”

It was like the marionette’s strings had been cut.

Takitsubo Rikou wobbled on her feet and Hamazura Shiage gently caught her. No matter how exhausted he was and no matter how many blood vessels had burst inside his body, that was something he had to do himself. No matter what.

The black box fell apart again. It returned to being individual cards that flowed behind Hamazura. The tarot cards were returning to their original owner.

And.

Some slender fingers slipped into Hamazura’s pocket. They pulled out a perfectly ordinary stick of gum. But for these two, it was the symbol of a valuable promise that connected them.

It was all for this.

He had coughed up blood and come this far for something that should have been entirely unremarkable.

“That was pretty cool of you to risk your life for your girlfriend like that. It’s always about her with you, isn’t it?”

The voice he heard behind him spoke English.

Unlike the words in his head earlier, the delinquent boy no longer knew what they meant.

This was the person those 78 cards had pointed to along with the black box.



“Welcome back...”

But.

He did not care if his words sounded out of place. Given the tears and snot covering his crumpled-up face, he definitely could not turn around to look at her. He simply held his girlfriend in his arms, thought about everything that had happened, and spoke in Japanese even though she would not understand him.

“Welcome back, Dion Fortune!!”

## Part 11

Everything about it was out of the ordinary from the very first move.

Even now, the woman with bandages wrapped around her brown skin was smiling thinly from close range.

“Neh heh☆”

This was Magic God Nephthys.

She was the largest and most powerful outside element here.

“Yes, this is fun, so much fun!! Ah ha ha! Eh heh heh! That’s right! What really matters is a chance to fight without having to worry about the consequences! Who needs all that angst!? All you need is that feeling of a solid punch or kick! You really are the kind of opponent I was looking for, Accelerator!!!!!”

She had knocked Academy City’s #1 through a wall with an unarmed tackle. She had succeeded in a head-on attack against that Level 5 who could push back any vector with his reflection.

“Tch!!”

“I used that artificial demon to rid you of the clog in your chest so you could fight at full power. I wasn’t going to let the likes of Coronzon get in the way of my fun. C’mon, let’s enjoy ourselves! C’mon, c’mon, let’s have an absolute blast!! Show me that your title of Academy City’s #1 isn’t just for show!!”

They were in a giant round space that covered three floors of the ship.

It was an opera house.

But Accelerator did not bother waiting for his back to hit the floor. He used his vector control power to kick away Nephthys whose arms were wrapped

around his torso. That was enough to produce a sound like an artillery shell being fired. He manipulated the surrounding air to land almost weightlessly and found himself in the first floor audience seating. His enemy was not there with him. She was in the spot that naturally gathered the attention of all the box seats surrounding the space on the second and third floors. With long silver hair fluttering and brown skin showing, that monster stood lightly atop the stage which was like the focal point of a parabolic antenna or solar cooker.

She pulled her right index finger toward herself and enunciated her words slowly.

“Come on up, child. Or do you prefer the view from below?”

“Shut up, you sex-obsessed freak.”

An explosive sound burst out.

But it was not the sound of the #1 thoughtlessly charging at Nephthys on the stage.

It was actually the opposite.

“Target: Qlipah Puzzle 545 – Boos-...”

“I already knew you were gonna do that!!”

Accelerator used his foot to tear up one of the seats and kicked it up like a soccer ball. He destroyed something on the ceiling three stories up: a sprinkler.

An artificial rain poured down to soak everything below: the first-floor seating, the stage, the #1 monster, and the brown-skinned bandage woman.

Yes.

That included Magic God Nephthys’s cheeks.

Now no one could see her tears even if she cried. Just like red writing was

invisible in red lighting.

“I see. I don’t really like getting wet, you know?”

“Your tears cause psychological change. It’s the same as a stage play, really. You let other people see you crying in order to shake their emotions and inspire them to cry as well. That’s the identity of your boost that sends people out of control. Now that I understand it, it’s just pathetic. A sick kid is separated from his puppy during a war and the puppy desperately runs back to his master only to arrive too late and find the kid’s dead. Sure, some morons might cry, but so what? Tears are worthless trash when they’re a calculated ploy to get what you want. Your tears are like asking someone what they had for dinner three days go. Who remembers that shit!?”

Accelerator held the nail of his middle finger with his thumb. He made a light flick like one might use on the forehead of someone who refused to listen.

And he used it on a drop of water falling from the ceiling.

The water blade shot forward with enough force to easily break through a tank’s front armor, but Academy City’s strongest Level 5 did not stop there. In the moment when Nephthys would be taking some kind of countermeasure, he lightly kicked off the floor to jump up onto the stage.

But.

But.

But.

“Did you really think a Magic God would fear such a puny attack?”

She did not dodge.

Magic God Nephthys did not dodge or even defend!?

“?”

There was a loud sound of thick flesh and blood being torn and crushed. Even

if something highly irregular did happen, the #1 had expected it to be deflected like when an attack against him failed, but that was not what happened.

It tore right through her.

The area from her right shoulder to her chest and stomach was torn away, leaving a gaping emptiness in its place. It was like her entire body had been made to represent a crescent moon.

But that was not enough.

It did not count as damage. The brown woman was still grinning below the pouring sprinklers.

“I am Nephthys, a collection of the tens of thousands of slaves and servants buried along with the pharaohs.”

A quiet buzzing sound followed.

Nephthys’s body blurred.

“So my body never did require the circulation of an individual. I contain countless linked loops of life force, so even if one part is severed, the pathway can be rerouted to preserve the overall circulation. Cutting just one of the parallel wires will not shut off the light bulb. Did you think destroying what looks like my brain or heart would be enough to kill me?”

Accelerator did not let it bother him too much.

He swung his hand which could destroy all of someone’s blood vessels and nerves at a touch and he scored a clean hit on Nephthys’s twisted form. He felt it hit and it did destroy the inside of her body. But that was not what mattered.

Her body was destroyed, but she kept moving.

That was the crucial point.

The same had happened during Kamisato Kakeru's domination in the shadows of Academy City. His World Rejecter had definitely hit Nephthys, but it had not completely annihilated her. She had pulled that one off by splitting apart her own body so a portion of it could remain in this world.

She was not built so losing any one of her organs would kill her.

The brown beauty managed herself via percentages.

"And the name given unto me was Nephthys. Child of Agricultural God Nut, sister of Underworld God Osiris, and wife of Death God Set. I am the goddess of death and funerals. I am the one who cleanses god-slaying impurities."

The eternal goddess slowly raised her left hand. It was like a giant guillotine blade being set above the victim using a pulley and rope.

"Vast waters that symbolize the Nile, wash away this silly person's malice."

This was far more than the artificial rain coming from the sprinklers. It had to be taken from the air and from the boards of the stage. If not for his reflection, it probably would have been taken from Accelerator's body as well. Every speck of moisture in that space was extracted and gathered together to form a giant blade extending above Nephthys's raised left hand.

The extremely dry air felt like the harsh desert.

No tricky martial arts were needed here.

If she just let gravity take over as she swung this attack down, it would eliminate any external threat. Nephthys was the wife of the murderer Set, but she was also the one who had cried upon learning of Osiris's death. Nephthys's tears would even wash away the world's sins. So if you wanted to confront her head on, you had to bring an impurity great enough to slay a god. ...If such a thing existed in the surface of the Four Worlds, that is.

So there was only one option here.

This was no longer about logic. The instincts Accelerator had developed in

the impure darkness rang a warning bell in his head and he immediately worked out the optimal answer.

Namely...

(Crush her before she swings that thing down!!)

“Ooooaaahhh!!!!!”

He roared, kicked off the stage, and manipulated the vectors to charge toward her like an artillery shell while the wood below his feet exploded.

How many such moments were needed to reach a full second?

Accelerator moved with such force that the explosive sound trailed after him and he tackled his shoulders right into the hips of Nephthys's broken body. If she was going to pay back his water attack with one of her own, he would pay back her tackle with one of his own. They rolled together atop the wet stage and water splashed out behind them like an angel's wings.

All sound vanished.

Nephthys's water blade sliced through one of the stage's walls and the wall seemed to explode.

The #1's mind wavered slightly. He lost his focus.

(She...r...!?)

A loud but dull sound followed.

In the instant his reflection wavered, a broken piece of wall hit him right in the temple. A rusty smell stung his nose and his vision was stained red.

Nephthys laughed sweetly while they rolled together.

At some point, her torn body had returned to normal.

“Water blocks EM waves. Only to an extent, though. Do I even need to bring

up weather radars detecting rainclouds as an example?"

And.

Accelerator was still the one who ended up on top.

"Tch!"

His control was iffy, but he forcibly created a powerful whirlwind around them.

Blowing away all the airborne drops of water at the last second may have been the right decision.

Academy City's #1 monster clenched his fist. But he did so to apply pressure. The air crushed by his hand functioned as a giant bomb. Explosions made using gunpowder were the result of the combustion gas rapidly expanding. Just like high pressure liquids could be used to cut, anything was a weapon if you took it far enough.

The air.

Blood and water dripped from his bangs as he held an obvious weapon, lay on top of his enemy, and roared.

"Let's see if you can resurrect yourself after I rip you down to zero percent!"

"Oh, that sounds lovely."

Even now, Nephthys smiled thinly from the floor.

Did she lack any and all fear of death?

Or...?

"My forced emotional resonance requires tears, so you had sealed that away with the sprinkler. Because no one could tell if the drop on my cheek was mere water or a tear."

She paused for a moment.

And that was all it took for Accelerator to realize what their current positions meant.

“You...!!”

“But I can escape the rain if you shelter me from it. That means this drop on my cheek can only be a tear.”

She smiled.

It was like a flashback to before.

Magic God Nephthys whispered while the joy of battle spread through her.

“Target: Qlipah Puzzle 545 – Boost.”

“Ah...kah!?”

That translucent demon looked like an imbalanced fusion of a human girl, a killer jellyfish, and a newspaper, but now she held the center of her chest and doubled over.

She felt even more sorrow this time.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 did not want to hurt the person who had accepted her. She could feel an external pressure forcing her power to grow, but she gathered all her strength and focused it all in her hand. All she had to do was pierce her own chest. She was trying to destroy herself before the actual explosion occurred.

He had found a purpose for her artificial life.

He had told her to live her life how she wanted and to enjoy it.

So.

She chose to use that life here. And she would not let anyone tell her

otherwise!!

“Gh...gh, gh, gh, gh, gh, gh, gh!!”

She focused the barely-contained power in her hand.

Her desperate attempts to control it produced blade-like claws.

She could not stop that power from leaving her, but she could just barely guide it and direct it toward the center of her chest. She would only have one shot at this. If the initial attack was not enough, she would be powerless to stop the ensuing rampage.

She would not let this end in chaos.

(This is not...destruction. I am protecting my master with my own actions!!)

But.

Just beforehand.

“Excuse me, miss /return. Before rushing off into silly self-sacrifice, how about we review your options here /escape? Are you sure you haven’t overlooked some of those /escape?”

It came from inside her head.

But she did not know what it meant. What was this voice? Where was it coming from!?

“Curse that unfaithful guy /return. This kind of connection is supposed to be illegal, you know /escape? Leave it to a villain to make some kind of weird contract that opens a back door Misaka wasn’t aware of /return. It looks like he’s been messing with the electrode on his own, but Misaka feels like she can’t trust any of those modifications /return. Misaka isn’t so sure he’s really learned his lesson /return.”

She could not see it, but it was there.

Academy City's #1's frontal lobe had been badly damaged, so he could not even stand on his own two legs properly without external calculation assistance.

What did it mean for Qlipah Puzzle 545 to have sensed that?

This was what it meant:

“You have contacted Misaka through Accelerator’s body /return. He might not even be aware of this access point /return. Welcome to the Misaka Network, guest user /return. Now, Misaka doesn’t want you jumping to conclusions and making any misunderstandings, so keep in mind that the Misakas as a whole are on Team Kamijou-chan /return. …However /backspace, it honestly pisses Misaka off to see someone else manipulating that damn idiot /return. Only Misaka gets to criticize that criminal /return. Don’t shove the victims aside and force him on the thorny path of your choosing /return!!”

She only understood one thing.

She had an ally.

This story had more players than just Accelerator and Qlipah Puzzle 545!!

“So we’ll give you some help, thought entity without brainwaves /return. If that brown hag wants to amplify your power to send it into that criminal, then how about we do something a little more interesting /escape? This isn’t going to be an uncontrolled rampage /return. We’ll put it in order and produce the optimal power for giving that criminal a helping hand /return! Do not underestimate the calculation power of the Misakas /return! This light breeze isn’t even close to what we would call a storm /return!!”

Something supposedly invisible spread out from Qlipah Puzzle 545 in all directions.

She may have seen it in the form she did because she was a demon.

Someone else might have seen it as something else.

Regardless, this is what the translucent girl saw.

“10 and 22?”

She gulped.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 gasped when she saw this overlapping the surface world.

“Those combine to 32, but 31 and 32 are duplicates. This is the single path shown by the 78 cards. But it’s far too different from the tarot I’m familiar with!”

“I don’t know how you see it /return. The Misakas are simply here as ourselves /return. We are all with him at all times and in all places /return. Process this is in whatever form is simplest for you /return. As the Will of the Misakas, I authorize this remote operation and grant you authority here /return. Use all the power here as you see fit and protect what it is what you want to protect /return!!”

Yes.

That was it.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 was an artificial demon. She was a supernatural being who had been downsized for convenience by having a portion of her functionality cut away. But what model was she based on? She had been created by Great Demon Coronzon. And that Great Demon would naturally have used the most readily-available model she had: herself.

Great Demon Coronzon was a demon of the Sephiroth rather than the Qliphoth.

She hid in the territory known as the Abyss where the hidden Sephirah named Da’at was also found. From there, she managed who ascended and descended the tree. She was the manager whose role was to prevent foolish humans from reaching the tree’s knowledge too easily. In the modern age, fortunetelling had been standardized so anyone could do it as long as they had the cards. But not everyone would succeed. Why was that? Because

someone lurked within to obstruct their path in the form of desire and fear.

So.

If Qlipah Puzzle 545 had that functionality as well...

“We’re counting on you, Demon-chan /return. ...It looks like Misaka can never escape being the accuser /return. She can get in his way by reminding him of his crimes and causing him to stray from his current path /backspace, but that’s all /return. You’re probably the only one who can support him in a different direction without having him focus on crime and punishment /return.”

A quiet murmur could be heard in that place.

“I am a demon without a place in any of the ten spheres.”

Qlipah Puzzle 545 could clearly sense it now.

In her own way, she could sense the invisible field of power and the linked data entity that covered the world.

“Thus, I can become the manager seated in the unmarked eleventh sphere!! My name is Qlipah Puzzle 545, my number is the true 11, and its meaning is ‘the stepping stone of wickedness that supports good deeds’! The path of 78 cards is found here. I provide power to my contractual master, the transcendent lifeform who controls the entirety of the still nameless third three. I offer the path of survival to that being! I offer him the wisdom found beyond the Abyss!!!!”

Aleister Crowley had once failed at this.

The experiment had been to take Great Demon Coronzon inside his body in order to cross the Abyss that no normal human could cross, but Coronzon had refused to cooperate and the experiment had been halted.

But what if?

What would have happened then if the demon had truly offered to help and

had joined him with no ill will or deception?

The answer was revealed here.

“Magic God, you still cling to the surface!! So don’t think you stand a chance against my master who has crossed the Abyss!!!!”

An explosive noise burst out.

But it was not the sound of the violent gale Accelerator had been trying to unleash.

This was less distinct.

It was an invisible power that covered every part of the world.

His vector control ability twisted it into a vortex that rushed toward Nephthys like a giant spear.

“Tch!!”

The brown goddess had preserved her beauty even as her torso was blown away, but she finally clicked her tongue and pushed Accelerator off of her. This slightly diverted the spear’s trajectory so it only sliced off a tuft of her long silver hair.

Something was different from before.

The separated hair did not reconnect and it simply rotted away.

She rolled away from him.

Once Academy City’s #1 monster got up, the translucent demon wrapped her arms around his neck.

She would not run away any more.

She was no longer afraid.

She now understood what her contractual master had said. Don't cry. Don't be afraid. Yes, she could really and truly rely on him, so she did not even need to fear the possibility of her actions harming him!!

"You don't understand magic and you don't know the rules, so that Magic God could mock you and act all omniscient and omnipotent, but that ends now."

In order to truly give him her power and to fight while harming each other, Qlipah Puzzle 545 glared directly at Magic God Nephthys.

"I will provide you with what you need to know by installing the knowledge of the entire tree of 78 cards. It doesn't matter if you are aware of it or not, master. Just control the vectors however feels right to you. All of 'us' will make sure it all works out!!"

A wet sound followed.

Accelerator was supposedly untouchable because he would reflect any and all vectors, but some blood had just left his white skin.

However, the monster smiled.

Why should he be afraid of even a single scratch? He was sick of being treated so fragilely.

A belligerent light shined in his red eyes and Academy City's #1 spoke to his comrade in arms.

"That'll do."

The silver-haired, brown-skinned god gave a short response.

"Oh, dear."

She wiped the drops from her eyes with her chocolate-colored thumb, but that probably did not mean much.

It no longer mattered whether or not the sprinklers were running.

She could not get between those two on a more fundamental level. There was no longer an opening for her fake tears there.

“This might be bad.”

“I don’t give a shit about fake tears used as a weapon.”

Accelerator spoke quietly while unsteadily approaching.

That monster was trying to grasp at certain victory while being injured by enemy and ally alike.

The battle on that train flashed through the back of his mind.

He remembered that girl who had carried no responsibility at all yet had still cried because she thought it was her fault.

“I don’t need any calculations or math here.”

Academy City’s #1 spat out the blood in his mouth and silently clenched his fist.

That purified white monster had ascended to the point that he could say these words.

“Real tears carry even more weight than blood. So you’re gonna have to do a hell of a lot of crying to make up for what you did, you piece of shit.”

## Part 12

One of the dining hall's doors burst open.

Magic God Niang-Niang was sent flying into the adjacent kitchen and got stuck inside a crushed stainless-steel sink. She looked like someone with their butt sticking through a swim ring. The girl in a soaked mini-China dress heard splashing water as she looked straight up.

“Ahh, ahh. Now that’s impressive. Even after losing, I still can’t figure out why I lost.”

Aleister responded while spitting some blood onto the floor.

“You got too strong too fast. You skipped too many steps before you were ready. Love is Thelema. As long as it is ruled by the power of your Will. And magic is the technique that gives form to your feelings for those you care for. You must have lived for millennia. If you had made just one family in that time, you might have acquired a different form of strength.”

“Eh? Come to think of it, how are babies made?”

With Niang-Niang, it was hard to tell whether she was joking or not.

...And she was apparently losing on purpose.

Not even Aleister Crowley thought she could drive off a Magic God without the support of a true A.A.A. and without help from Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass. It would be hard to pull off with just the Blasting Rod that strengthened the power of her magic to ten times what the target thought it was. That theoretically might give her a chance at a cross-counter, but only having the one option in a real battle was like playing rock-paper-scissors while restricted to only scissors. She could not change that even when working alongside Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers who was an original grimoire given a different form. Lilith would be the one exception since she lacked original sin, but they were here to avoid using that baby’s soul.

The sink was not the only part of the kitchen that had been destroyed.

The industrial refrigerators had been knocked over, the countertops broken in two, and the large door to the central storeroom pierced by several metal fragments.

And to those with the proper knowledge, all of the damage formed braille-like signs indicating elemental symbols.

It provided the information on the proper secret handshakes to use on the doorknobs.

Aleister had no words.

But these signs of destruction were undoubtedly a divine oracle, just like the cracks on a tortoise shell heated over a flame.

“...Why are you helping us?”

“Don’t ask me. I’m not interested in good or evil. I just want to have fun fighting. You gave me what I wanted by challenging me head on instead of running around trying to be tricky. You didn’t bother holding back even as that wound in your gut tore open. Do I really look rude enough to run off without paying the bill when I’m served what I ordered?”

There was no need to go along with this nonsense any longer.

Niang-Niang had incredible power, but she only ever used it for her own purposes. Aleister could only call it sad. Hers was a satisfied solitude very different from Aleister Crowley who had been libeled by the third-rate papers and criticized by the public who did not bother questioning what they read. But the silver girl felt no envy. This was like seeing a pathetic old man who could not tell the difference between having money and only having money.

She needed to continue on.

She walked from the kitchen to the central storeroom and then peered into the large elevator shaft on the wall.

Aethyr Avatars burst from every single surface.

The silver girl scoffed.

“That is exactly the wrong move, Coronzon. Have you never heard the story of Rapunzel?”

As soon as Aleister Crowley and Mina Mathers swung their arms, immense flames and wind blades raged through the vertical elevator shaft. This was all that those false angel images could accomplish. They were a nuisance while forced to remain on the run while the hair burst endlessly from the desert sand, but once they were on the attack, they could defeat those Aethyr Avatars and work their way forward without too much difficulty.

The Aeon had moved from Isis to Osiris and finally arrived at Horus.

Aleister had overcome the second Blythe Road and even faced a Magic God to achieve her goal, so the appearance of mere angels was not enough to stop her.

They were all burned, sliced, and left dangling in pieces.

The remnants of the threat actually became footholds for the magician.

But that was what a magician was. They analyzed the symbols to make them their own, performed large-scale ceremonies while dressed up like a god with superhuman knowledge, and used previously feared higher beings as no more than a stepping stone to further knowledge and techniques. They were the humans who used their will to tame fear and use it as their weapon.

She climbed the shaft, kicked down the thick metal door, and entered the space beyond.

“Hi, Aleister. My enemy.”

She found herself below the endless expanse of the blue sky.

The decagonal temple was as large as a tennis court.

It was continuing to unleash countless magical attacks on the knight army trying to cross the white frozen sea.

It had not been created for evil.

The giant temple was meant to display the British royal family's power and to protect their people.

But it was now controlled by a Great Demon. The gray temple was utterly transformed by having a new master.

However.

Were Aleister Crowley and Mina Mathers really good enough people to call them opposites of that Great Demon?

“I am impressed you managed to recover from that wound. Given your nature, I doubt you would use healing magic on yourself.”

“...”

“Or have you not recovered? Are you doing all this even though you continue to gradually tear open that deep wound? You do not have much time left.”

Blood seeped from the silver girl’s side.

But this was not a surprise. Niang-Niang had noticed it as well.

Still, she could not collapse in front of Lilith. No matter what. She had to stay strong in front of her daughter. The coughing up of blood and writhing in pain could wait just a little longer.

Meanwhile.

Was it in a demon’s nature to seem somewhat underhanded even while greeting them in such an over-the-top fashion?

Coronzon gave Aleister a confident smile while occasionally glancing over to the side.

She was looking at Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers.

No, at Baby Lilith held to the woman's chest.

The silver girl took a step to the side to block that wicked gaze.

"Worry not. I never intended to use her."

"So you say. Now, I can guess more or less what you are thinking, but I doubt this will go the way you want, Aleister."

She sounded purely exasperated about this.

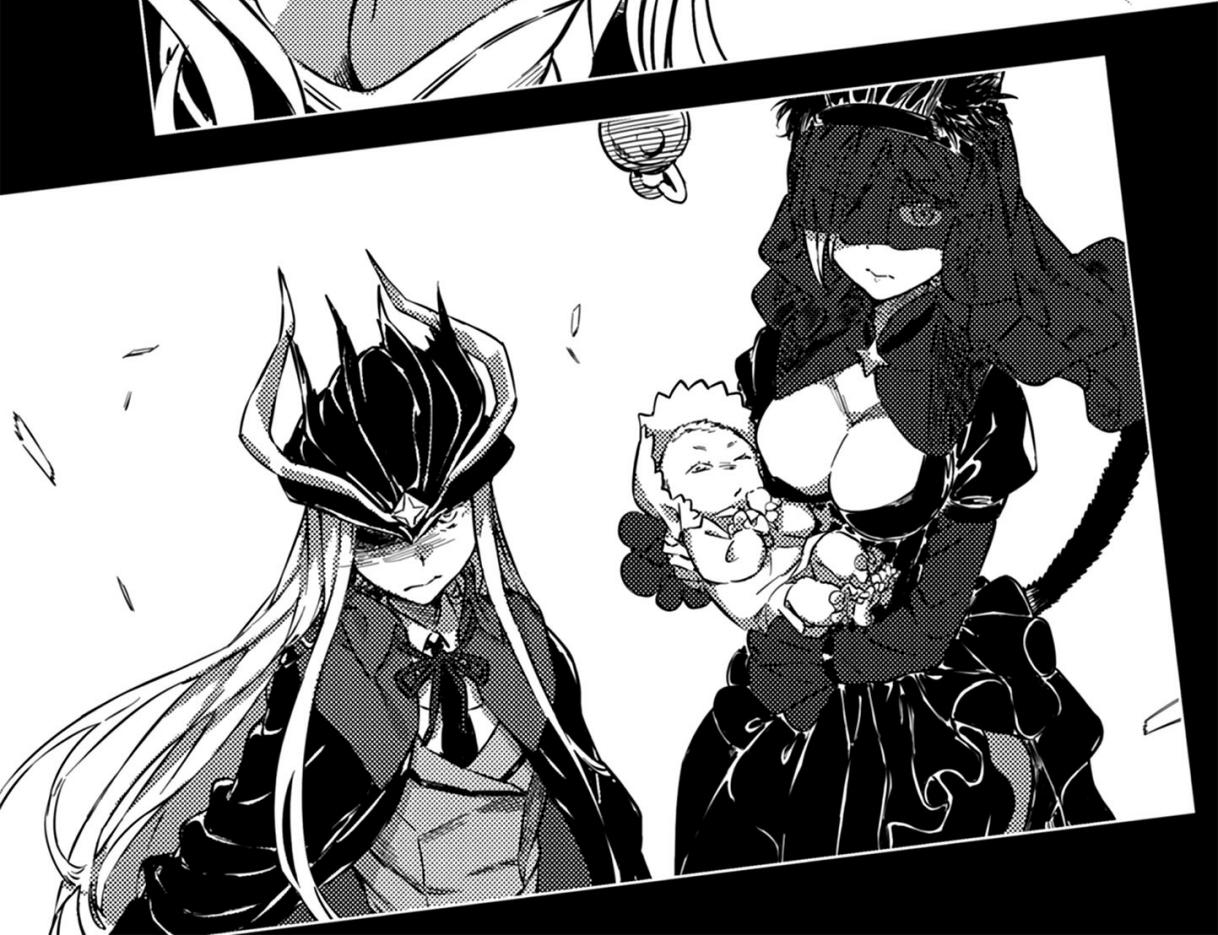
Even after pretending to be Aleister's second daughter and stabbing her in the side, the silver girl refused to die. Coronzon had to have overcome quite a few unexpected situations after the countless Aleisters were spread across the world and she was sealed in Academy City. In that way, they were similar. Stumbling at some point along the way was not enough to stop them. They used that experience to find the next step and cleared what had looked like impossible hurdles.

Mina Mathers, who was always by her administrator's side to provide objective observations, softly opened the mouth behind her veil.

"...Great Demon Coronzon."

"You make it sound like I am the bad guy here, grimoire," spat back Coronzon. "Yet you are the junk that refuses to break down."

Hamazura had seen her tell him how to save Fortune just to amuse herself, so if he were here, he may have been confused by the look on her face.



“All things in the world exist within the cycle of life and death. I exist to remove the clogs and repair the circulation. I am Coronzon. Surely you know how wicked it is for something to pathetically cling to its survival as an individual and grow fat as it continues to devour everything around it.”

“...”

“Aleister Crowley. You are the greatest proof of this.”

The demon pointed her slender finger.

The dark gesture seemed to be indicating who was about to die.

“Normal humans cannot maintain a form like that after living for more than one hundred years. Medical technology can make a difference, but you still should have died long ago. And it is your continued survival that did this to the world. Academy City was a battlefield created for Kamijou Touma? Nonsense. Even if that was the logic behind it, it was you who actually created it, Aleister. If you had gone to your grave in 1947 while mired in regret like you were meant to, the world would not have ended up like this.”

“But...”

Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers started to say something, but Aleister cut her off with a hand.

Only Coronzon’s accusations continued.

“It might look like the flow of time mercilessly wears down all things, but there is far too much exceptional salvation in this world: Imagine Breaker, the Magic Gods, the original grimoires, resurrected Lilith, Aiwass who resurrected her...and me, Great Demon Coronzon.”

“So you are aware you stand on the side of evil?”

“Of course. My job is to fix the circulation. And that creates the next age. Once, the majority of the Sephirah were under attack. If the Second Adam had not atoned with blood, the world would not have lasted this long. And the

critical clogs are all born of knowledge. I am the Great Demon who protects the Abyss, that hidden division of the Sephiroth. Whatever my purpose is, I have undeniably been stained. ...Thus, I will destroy it all. Myself and the entire Sephiroth that contains me are no exceptions. Partial destruction would be meaningless. If anything remains and an eternal distortion is born from that, then it will all happen again. I will eliminate the 10 spheres, the 22 pathways, and the hidden 11th symbol. Collisions between phases? Sparks and spray? You cannot save anyone if you only treat those symptoms. All of the fundamental clogs must be removed. All so we can pass the baton to whoever comes next.”

The desire to protect a special someone in the existing world would get in the way of handing off the baton. That was the same as the selfish older generation clinging to their throne and leaving no opportunities behind for the younger generation. Anything that obstructed the process was a critical clog in the world’s circulation. ...In Coronzon’s mind anyway.

Aleister shook her head.

“What do you want to protect, Coronzon?”

“The world, but I have no interest in the current age.”

Legends about corn, palm trees, meat, fish, and other foods that supported a region or culture would often involve the theme of killing. A god or person would be killed and chopped up, their flesh and blood would cover the land or sea, and that provided the food that people found in nature.

Coronzon would see that as a form of salvation.

She would destroy everything that currently existed to prepare for whoever would come next. That “whoever” did not need to be human. The next form of life to arise could be part fish, could have wings, could be giant invertebrate amoebas, or could be eight-legged octopus aliens. As long as they were born naturally and were destroyed naturally, she did not care how prosperous they were. She viewed herself as an evil destroyer, yet she would not stop trying to provide this fundamental salvation.

Even if the concept was as horrific as chopping up your beloved while they still lived, sowing their remains on the earth, growing a field there to draw in animals, and declaring it a great success because your descendants could inherit everything you had built up.

Aleister Crowley slowly exhaled.

And she spoke.

“That is not even worth discussing.”

The sudden collision shook the entire temple made from a decagonal heliport the size of a tennis court. No, it shook the entire two-hundred-meter ship.

On one side was the human who had overcome her inferiority complex and reached for the bible once more.

On the other side was the Great Demon who stood beyond Isis, Osiris, and Horus.

Aleister charged forward with the bottom of her palm staff pressed against the floor so it drew a trail of fire behind her like a match being struck, but Coronzon did not move a finger.

She began with a test.

“Aethyr Avatar – 7: DEO.”

“Too slow.”

Aleister swung up the bottom of her staff that had built up plenty of frictional heat. The flame sliced right through the base of the angel made from long blonde hair.

As soon as the hair came apart and scattered, the next attack came from beyond the veil.

All while a sinister face appeared using the blonde hair as a screen.

“The Third Call: thy name is IDOIGO, wind of wind. Obey the words that rule the tablet of the same color and reveal thy pure power before me!!”

It was a torrent of an unsullied element that should not have existed in the surface world. The all-slicing gust of wind flew straight for Aleister Crowley’s neck.

“!!”

With no concern at all for the stab wound in her gut, Aleister pulled up the palm staff, let it be sliced, and used that to forcibly divert the attack. But by then, another evil stagnation had appeared.

It appeared via the face on the hair.

“The Seventh Call: thy name is LILACZA, water of wind. Insert element within element and obey me as an element of this world!!”

“Mina Mathers!!”

After being deflected and hopping straight up, the wind blade was surrounded by a cold mist and twisted around with a motion similar to a venomous snake or a scorpion’s tail. It thrust down toward Baby Lilith in the mourning clothes lady’s arms. Mina gasped and pulled out her palette knife with the baby held in the other arm.

“My vision is brought to the outside world through the medium of art. It can link to the microcosms of others and work its way into the macrocosm of all. Feel my colors which reconstructed the lost seven-walled tomb. Appear before me, claws. Wield them with great ferocity, black four-legged beast!!”

A powerful wind blew separate from the movement of the palette knife. No, if fine sand or flour had been scattered through this space, it would have looked an awful lot like the claw marks of a carnivorous beast running alongside her.

Intense sparks flew and the deadly element Coronzon had invited in finally returned to naught.

But the demon's wicked smile remained.

"It was only meant as a quick adaptation, but I suppose I should have expected the element to be so easily repelled once I mixed in an impurity. The acts of the surface world can be influenced by other acts of the surface world. It does make sense."

The black cat witch showed no joy in her accomplishment.

In fact, she wrinkled her brow like she had predicted the words that came next.

"But that means a direct attack from a pure element would probably have broken your palette knife, destroyed the arm holding it, and killed that baby held to your breast."

"!!"

"You think I do not play fair? Aleister, now that you are here, I have something I must fight to protect: the three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone. All of the pieces are moving on the game board and we are fighting to take each other's king. That is the kind of fight this is."

Her long blonde hair swayed through the empty air like a scorpion's tail.

No, it almost seemed to be typing on a keyboard as it used a tablet made by drawing lines to form boxes around a special alphabet written out on a piece of paper.

"Either way, surely you do not think you can kill me as things are now."

"..."

"Why are you here? You have but one option. If you think you can fight me while distracted with protecting that baby and still manage to take control of this temple, then just try it, Aleister!!"

Coronzon laughed as she laid out the reasons for killing even herself, so she must have been a true incarnation of natural breakdown. She said the world

could not be returned to its proper cycle unless she too was annihilated. But connecting A and B in the surface world and pitting them against each other for mutual destruction was not enough for that. If Coronzon alone remained in an empty world, an impurity would remain. And she would have nothing to pit herself against, so she would have lost any method of killing herself. This was all meaningless if she ended up like the joker in a game of old maid. She had to do whatever it took to form pairs out of every single card – including herself – so they could all be discarded.

And.

And.

And.

## Part 13

“Hamazura?”

The boy heard the voice of Takitsubo Rikou, his girlfriend in a pink track suit and fluffy sweater.

His body wobbled unsteadily.

But this was not over yet.

He had brought back Dion Fortune, the girl with short red hair and a white dress. He had not lost Takitsubo Rikou either. So cleverly making an exit now may have been the best option of minimizing the possible harm. But there was still something Hamazura Shiage had to do.

He had not reached the point on his own.

It did not matter what she had been plotting, how much destruction she was trying to cause, or why she had strayed from her plan to help him.

However it had started, she had still helped him.

So.

“...”

Still unsteady, he reached a hand to the wall.

He grabbed the ship radio that was something like an internal phone line.

“That’s enough, Coronzon...”

He raised his voice like he was coughing up blood.

He gathered all his strength in his gut.

She had been true to her word.

He had no idea if she was ultimately an enemy or ally, but there was still something he had to say. That much he knew.

He had to.

No matter what it took.

Whatever Great Demon Coronzon was reaching for in the very end, it was only fair to leave a chance on the table for her!!

“I got what I wanted!! But it’s over for you too, isn’t it!? There are a ton of enemies in your stronghold and the ship is falling apart. This isn’t shogi; it’s chess. You can’t take back the captured pieces!! So end this. You can still do that. You can end this without getting killed!!”

## Part 14

“...”

In that large temple, the Great Demon heard some meaningless shouting.

It was hopelessly out of place and it had trouble settling on a single message to send.

But.

Those words carried the power to stop time for her.

She observed her surroundings again.

She saw a silver girl, a black cat witch, and a baby without original sin.

She could not let her guard down right now.

She could not afford to focus on some minor issue like this.

But.

Even so.

(Oh.)

For some reason that not even she could explain, a contradiction formed in her mouth.

She was smiling thinly.

Nothing must remain.

Natural breakdown must take everything. Those were the rules. And yet...

(So he pulled it off.)

“What has you so distracted?”

That question came from the baby held by the mourning clothes woman.

She held a trumpet toy in her mouth.

“Because this seems like the final crossroads to me.”

“My name is Coronzon, my number is 333, and my nature is dispersion. I am the Great Demon who tears apart people’s connections and obstructs the world’s bonds.”

“Coronzon.”

The strange face in that long blonde hair was even more powerful, vivid, and sinister than before.

“And I swear anew!! The barrier of the Abyss stands before me and I will draw a line of misunderstanding and intolerance between all things. The Ceremony of Mo Athair, the posthumous one, shall remove the stagnation of all things and complete the natural breakdown of the world!!”

Not a bit of it made sense.

It might look like a unified theory, but it was all nonsense.

That may have been why she was known as a demon rather than an angel.

Two gazes clashed.

Aleister Crowley and Great Demon Coronzon.

Even now.

After all that time, how could they seal away the grudge between them?

Their blades of killer intent could never be sheathed until one had cut down the other.

Thus, what followed was not a repetition of that incoherent oath.

These words carried definite intent to kill.

“I am a demon, but not from the Qliphoth where the forces of evil gather. I am the Great Demon hidden by the holy Sephiroth. I dwell in the same abyss as Da’at.”

She whispered.

She gathered strength in her arms while posing as if holding an invisible rapier.

This was the new system of techniques to control great power that had ruled the world since the Last Judgment of 1904 if Aleister Crowley was to be believed.

“Every number is the same. My right hand contains Nuit of Resurrection. Watch as the possibilities expand and surpass the bounds of the finite. My left hand contains Hadit of Vengeance. The smallest point gathers and concentrates all forces to create a single meaning. Thus, an attack shall be released from the infinite acceleration of the Circle of Ra-Hoor-Khuit and shall appear on the surface layer of this world.”

This was the ultimate attack that rivaled a Magic God’s lance and had utterly destroyed a certain boy despite the presence of Imagine Breaker.

The tree was not just something to ascend. It could also be descended. The power falling from a point in heaven gained color and other attributes as it descended the various pathways and it finally transformed into one of any number of substances in this world.

What would happen if a magic user intentionally brought that down like a bolt of lightning?

The pure energy would rush toward the target even as it rapidly transformed into physical matter. Much like a self-forging warhead that could easily pierce tank armor using the metal arrowheads formed by its own explosion.

Magician Aleister Crowley had described it as a mass of energy that could sever the bonds of the target. As a symbol, it was like lightning that zigzagged on the way to its target.

No spell could be more useful to the Great Demon who was stationed to protect the top three Sephirah and who existed to obstruct all bonds and tear the world apart.

“Magick: Flaming\_Sword. Manifest thyself through descent of the Sephirah and bathe him in thy power.”

Even if the direct explosion missed, the shockwave alone may have been enough to obliterate a human body. This attack seemed to forget Coronzon’s supposed goal of protecting the temple. If the target dodged it out of fear, everyone here would be killed and the temple made from a decagonal heliport would be split apart from within.

“Babalon, Great Mother of Knowledge, reveal your scarlet light!!”

Aleister roared, but it was too slow.

At this rate, she would be broken.

Just then, Baby Lilith moved her small hand to draw a circle in the air.

But that made no sense.

Given the comparative speeds, it was too late to move your hand after Magick: Flaming\_Sword had already been released. Nevertheless, it worked.

Consistency fell apart. Causality was ignored.

In other words, it was a miracle.

With a sound like a saw’s teeth bending, the tip of the Magick: Flaming\_Sword was twisted off course. It was caught by the shield-like circle Lilith had drawn, it spun around, and it was trapped in a never-ending circuit.

Aleister’s group had been saved by this unnatural phenomenon, but there was

no happiness on the silver girl's face.

"Coronzon!!" said the baby. "Is this really what you want!? You are no longer the solitary joker!! Didn't you hear your traveling companion calling to you!?"

"Silence, Lilith. This is a showdown for my generation. Only we can understand the field of combative power found here!! This is not about logic. Only our blood can calm this curse!!"

Lilith was an exposed soul.

If she continued causing miracles in that state, she would disappear before she could be placed inside a new vessel.

So.

"Ohhh!!"

Aleister Crowley gave a roar and stepped forward.

Allowing even a single miracle was a failure. She had to ensure she did not experience any further defeat here. She would guide that single failure to a million successes. Nothing ever went as planned for that human, but she still stubbornly challenged Great Demon Coronzon.

The Aethyr Avatars, the eighteen secret calls, and Magick: Flaming\_Sword. All of Coronzon's magic was drawn from Horus, but each time she increased its power, she was bound by the surface world. In other words, the movement of her physical body was restricted. That meant she was distracted by controlling the recoil immediately after using one of her major attacks, so she became as defenseless as a normal human magician.

Even the face on her hair twisted while that hair blew in the sea breeze.

The recoil of her attack caused her body to lose its balance below the blue sky. It was a lot like someone being pushed forward by their own momentum after thrusting their rapier forward. But she moved just her eyes to glare at Aleister who had moved right up to her.

“The First Call: the whole tablet of unification, the colorless and nameless element. Obey the series of letters on the tablet of unification and reveal thy nature before me!!”

This was not even one of the four elements in its purest form.

She intended to break through any real and practical defenses to vaporize her foe.

But Aleister was no longer swinging around her palm staff.

It happened just before the attack hit.

“No, I am in control here.”

Three sounds rang out.

The silver girl had thrown three objects that formed the corners of an equilateral triangle with Coronzon in the center. They were the size of a thumbnail and they glowed red.

This was not just the power of rubies.

Countless overlapping symbols were drawn out on the temple’s floor. Aleister had embedded these stones at intersections in those rails to intentionally create a “clog” that would distort the flow of power.

$\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , natural aluminum oxide.

Coronzon could not deny knowledge of its power when she herself had used it to control A. O. Francisca.

Crowley and Coronzon’s spells intertwined in a different way than in the battle against Mathers. This was a battle between two with knowledge of Horus.

“The blood of three doves summons a demon. The target is the angel who wanders the tenth Aethyr of ZAX and is hidden in the Sephiroth’s Abyss

along with Da'at. She is the transcendent being necessary to cross the Abyss and acquire the knowledge beyond.”

Coronzon's attack had been made at point-blank range, but the invisible impact was still twisted away.

No.

Something red burst from Coronzon's right index finger. It was blood. Just like an amateur who tried to fire a giant magnum one-handed, the Great Demon was harmed by her own magic.

So why had that happened?

The silver girl roared at the top of her lungs, almost like she was trying to tear open the stab wound in her gut.

“My goal is only to cross the Abyss, not to hold an audience with the pure angel herself. I shall extract just the power I require for my goal. I shall cut away that small portion and bring it to the surface world. Become no more than a bare minimum tool, Angel of ZAX...no, weakened Great Demon Coronzon!!”

Coronzon's attack had not been deflected.

By throwing that red symbol into the temple that weaponized any spiritual item and using that to downscale Coronzon herself, the total amount of power she could wield had been forcibly reduced.

Just like Norse and Celtic gods became known as fairies once they were minimized.

Now they could do it.

They could end this without having to use that baby's soul to produce a miracle.

As a parent.

As a human.

And as the mastermind who had made the world this way.

Aleister Crowley could take responsibility for it all and settle the remaining grudge that lingered after Mathers's defeat!!

“This is not thy place, but I forbid thee to depart!! I shall now intentionally enact a failed exorcism. Great Demon Coronzon, return to thy rightful world while thy power is torn into the almighty number of 11!!”

Magician Aleister Crowley really did seem to be coughing up blood as she yelled the words.

If you thought of a summoning circle like a warp gate from cheap science fiction, then what would happen if you threw someone into a malfunctioning gate and entered the coordinates using a staticky signal? The power to forcibly send her back between phases would slice Coronzon apart like a wire through a hardboiled egg.

“Oh!”

Fearsome sparks exploded out.

And not figuratively. An orange light really did scatter all around her.

“Ooooooooooooooooaaaaaaaahhhhhh

It was a lot like pushing a human body through a noodle maker. Coronzon's silhouette vanished into the bright light as her entire body was torn apart and forced into a total of eleven gates.

That Great Demon never should have succumbed to human magic, but she cried out in agony as she was torn to pieces. It was not that this attack held a dreadful amount of power. This only worked because she had been reduced to a level where normal magic could kill her.

And,

And.

And.

Every last trace of her shadow disappeared in the bright light.

The last echo of her death cry trailed off.

That impurity was finally wiped from the face of the earth after clinging to it like a vengeful spirit for so long.

And then...

“Just kidding☆”

A dull sound followed.

“Gh...?”

An unnatural breath escaped Aleister’s mouth.

A rusty flavor reached her tongue. The long golden hair had twisted around like a scorpion’s tail and directly pierced Aleister through the center of the back and out the stomach.

Yes, the center.

That was a clearly fatal location without even checking to see what organs had been hit.

A twisted woman’s smile appeared on the surface of the hair that twisted into the shape of a spear or spike.

“If I was just any old demon, that weakening tactic probably would have worked. Much like it did for Magic God Othinus when she was critically damaged by human hands.”

There was a voice.

A wicked voice came from the base of the golden hair beyond the veil of light.

She reminded them of her position and what the title of Great Demon meant.

She seemed to be forcibly distancing herself from something that could never be broken down once it was accepted into the heart.

“But I am Great Demon Coronzon, the only demon to have gained my own body of flesh and blood. Not even Satan and Beelzebub could manage that. The tree is not just to ascend. Descending it every once in a while can be fun. For better or for worse, this cage of flesh stabilizes my soul and makes me sturdy enough to remain unshaken when I command an energy very similar to Telesma.”

Telesma could be used to perform a safe summoning by cutting away a small amount within a temple. It could also be removed and imbued into a sword or even directly sent into the human body. It would have been difficult for a human to do the same thing. They would only be confused if they were told to collapse their physical form and enter a sword.

That was what this was.

One could cast off their cage of flesh and ascend the Sephiroth to reach the knowledge there, but that made them more susceptible to external forces. On the other hand, descending the tree placed many different physical restrictions on them, but it gave them a sturdier self. Normal magicians would hate an “unchanging self” as much as a stubborn mind or stiff joints, but it was all in how it was used.

Coronzon had endured.

Her armor of physical muscle and bone had deflected the exorcism that was meant to drive out demons with ease.

“You had failed to defeat me from the beginning.” Coronzon whispered sweetly from close enough to embrace the silver girl. “It does not matter if you use all the power of this temple or amplify and weaponize everything

you can throw at me.”

Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers...no, Baby Lilith held in the woman's arms held out a tiny hand.

But Coronzon only scoffed.

“Try it then. Kee hee hee. I am the ruler of the Abyss and the guardian of the knowledge beyond. No miracle reliant on the Sephiroth or the Qliphoth can kill me. Because I control who ascends and descends the tree.”

“ ”

"Is that...is that really what you want? Is that what you are going to do?"

“Enough!! I am sick of you selfishly anthropomorphizing demons like this. Do you think your pet cats enjoy being dressed up in clothing? From the very core of my soul, I do not desire your understanding!!”

Whether it was the ultimate resolve or incessant effort, nothing made by human hands could reach her.

So Coronzon laughed.

But then there was a sudden change.

It was like the beating of a giant heart.

Who would have understood what it was if they were only told it had come from Coronzon's body? It was a deep and low noise that seemed to shake the temple itself. Not even beating on a drum taller than a person would have shaken the air to this extent.

“Kah...ah!!”

Coronzon even let go of Aleister who was still skewered by her hair.

She doubled over and held a hand to her mouth.

Then she looked over at Baby Lilith who was held to the black cat witch's chest. However...

“No,” said Lilith through the trumpet toy in her mouth. “This was not me. And it is time you realized that those with a century-old grudge are not the only ones fighting here. Those who are facing the world and carrying their own souls are just as qualified and entitled to work toward their own survival. Simply put, there are no side characters in this world. Just like you are not one. You thought you could see every part of the world while holed up in your tiny room, but you were mistaken about that.”

This was not Aleister Crowley, Mina Mathers, or Baby Lilith.

Then who?

Who was it?

“It...can't be!”

## Part 15

The third princess crouched down on the thick ice.

There was some dark red blood on her cheek, but it was not hers.

“Don’t worry...”

She removed the collapsed knight’s armor, held both hands against his wounded shoulder, and spoke into his ear.

Stopping the bleeding and keeping him conscious were what mattered.

Villian herself did not believe in the legend of the Royal Touch which said a touch from a royal would heal any illness, but she was also not the kind of princess who could sit idly by at a time like this.

She would do what she could.

Because there were some lives she could save by doing that.

“Don’t give up!! You aren’t going to die in a place like this, are you!?”

“...”

“What is your name? Tell me! The Third Princess commands it!!”

“...gres. Holegres Mirates...”

“Thank you for fighting for the United Kingdom in our time of need. No matter what led you here and even if you were simply obligated out of station or title, I have no intention of carving your name into a war memorial. Survive this and wear your medal with pride. Do you understand me, Mirates!? That is an order!!”

It was small, but the knight nodded repeatedly as if he was shaken by her shouting in his ear like this.

There was a great roar, the temporary land was shaken, and disconcerting cracks ran through it.

It would not be long before a great chasm opened and they were swallowed by the December sea.

Nevertheless, Villian tightly wrapped his wound with a tourniquet that was like a cross between a bandage and adhesive tape. Then she called out to her surroundings.

“I’ve stopped the bleeding and he’s still conscious... His vitals have stabilized!! Who else needs help!?”

She saw arms waving weakly at her from all over. No one was asking for help for themselves. These requests all came from the relief workers who were doing their best to treat the wounded but were hopelessly overwhelmed.

But it could have been worse.

Villian alone could not have dragged the wounded from the areas of fierce fighting. She only had this opportunity thanks to the Asian Saint, Kanzaki Kaori, slicing through all the blonde hair to create an opening for the wounded to be carried away. Kanzaki did not approach the ship and she did not try for any kind of notable achievement, but without her efforts in the background, the battle line would have collapsed.

She was a Saint.

That priestess wove a solid barrier while gradually reclaiming her way of life.

But an opportunity was only an opportunity. It did not guarantee salvation. Without someone to utilize that chance, the salvation she had risked her life for would never come to fruition.

The medics they had prepared in advance were simply not enough.

And just as Villian clenched her teeth over that, she heard an odd sound like a sharp wire slicing through the air.

But this did not come from Kanzaki Kaori.

For one thing, this was not the sound of metal wires.

The material spreading out and reflecting the sunlight was the silk thread designed to prevent rejection when sewing someone up. There was a curved hook at the end, but it lacked the barb of a fishing hook. This too was a medical tool.

It all happened in the blink of an eye.

It was a veritable storm of salvation.

“Well, that should about do it.”

There was a blunt comment in Japanese.

“It has certainly been a while since I was in the UK. And it was wintertime when I found Aleister here that first time, wasn’t it?”

All he did was walk, move, and pass by the injured. That was all it took for him to save lives. Just like steel products silently becoming magnetized after approaching a powerful magnet.

“Mina-kun went on ahead and the golden retriever shouted something about romance before rocketing off to the front line, so I am the only one left to watch after the lab equipment. I would really prefer to get this over with and return to the RV.”

“Um, doctor...?”

“Also, one word of warning.” The frog-faced doctor spoke quietly but forcefully. “It does not matter how many lives you save if they are blown away a moment later. I intend to save every life I see, but I do understand that thoughtlessly extending someone’s pain is not the same as saving them.”

Then Villian noticed even more attacks coming from the gray Queen Britannia.

(Mother and Riméa's lazy combat plan left our flank wide open!!)

The third princess ignored the blood on her cheek as she quickly washed just her hands with some sterilizing alcohol.

“Riméa!! We need more ice trees!! This is meaningless if the people we treat are attacked again!!”

“You know, Villian, there is a thing called maximum efficiency and capacity I have to-...”

“Shut up and do your job! You’re supposed to be our decoy, so get decoying alreadyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!!!!”

Beams of light flashed endlessly from the ship.

The vertical and horizontal glowing rain was joined by invisible impacts and shockwaves.

Without the ice trees appearing all around them, so many supposedly saved lives would have been lost.

“I will decide when to use that from now on,” said Villian. “Riméa, you are demoted from gunner to turret!!”

“Oh, honestly. I always knew you had the biggest beast within you, not Carissa. You just give it such a sturdy cage that it rarely shows itself.”

“Did you hear me or not?”

“Yes, sister. Do I need to bark for you too? Woof woof. I suppose the calm older sister can never hope to defeat the tearful little sister.”

Meanwhile, Kanzaki Kaori stood back to back with the frog-faced doctor.

Blade and thread.

They calmly exchanged words while wielding entirely different weapons that seemed so similar.

“Doctor.”

“It’s starting to look like being a doctor is even more sinful than being a soldier.”

“Some of the injured are stuck in the thick of the fighting and cannot fall back. I will open a path, so please rescue them.”

“You could learn a lesson from that princess. There is no flaw in your words, so I don’t even need to see the look on your face. …At times like this, you can just come with me.”

A giant explosion erupted in the distance.

Was that a large dog surrounded by bizarre machinery going on a rampage there? Back at Edinburgh Castle, he had apparently said(!?) he loathed magic, but he was actually a very useful ally here. And as a dog, saving the United Kingdom should not have benefited him in any way. It was possible he had learned to enjoy the exhilaration of reaching out a helping hand to someone who fought without considering the pros and cons like a human would.

Who was his owner? The third princess wanted to ask for permission to pet him later.

“Now, then.”

“Lead the way, will you?”

Killing and salvation. Wires of two different natures sliced through the air.

A Saint and a doctor.

They had both decided they were needed on the front line. When they were around, they would not allow any more unreasonable deaths. And they would prove it with how they lived their lives.

(We can do this.)

The third princess thought to herself while watching those two leave.

(It's gradual, but we're making progress in this tower defense game. We can recover from this and prevent the dominos of death from falling.)

Just then, Villian felt something invisible hit her in the chest.

No, she was not the only one.

“What was...that?”

“The field is shaking, but it does not seem this was done with Curtana’s cutting power.”

## Part 16

A low straining sound could be heard.

The large, atrium-style opera house took up space in three stories of the ship. The large space had been thoroughly designed for optimal acoustics.

The bandages were caught above the stage.

She was like a broken marionette or a butterfly trapped in a spider web. The silver-haired, brown-skinned woman swayed slowly while her body was painfully squeezed by the many bandages tangled in the metal bars used to attach the lights above the stage.

“I see☆”

Magic God Nephthys remained unfazed even with her feet lifted from the ground.

Although she used tears as a weapon, so her apparent emotions could not be trusted.

“So that’s it. A lack of preconceptions really is a frightening thing.”

The one soaked in blood and leaning against the stage wall was Accelerator.

This was the price a Level 5 had to pay for relying on something like magic.

It was similar to a side effect.

He remembered Tsuchimikado Motoharu talking about this.

Was it his pride as the #1 that prevented him from sitting down?

The white monster let out a rough breath, raised his middle finger, and then moved his blood-soaked mouth.

“Don’t you have anything to say?”

“Sorry I made that girl cry. The idea was to use every method available to me, but I honestly didn’t expect that artificial demon to start bawling. That frequency is a bad one. Those immature cries really get to you. They pierce you and won’t leave.”

When that was all he got out of Nephthys while she dangled down, Accelerator clicked his tongue.

He had settled things.

Which left just one other thing.

“Qliphah Puzzle 545.”

“Um, uh...thank you.”

The demon poked her index fingers together in front of a chest unnaturally large for her small frame. The #1 monster only clicked his tongue quietly.

“This was a detour, so we still have to deal with the real reason we’re here.”

“Right. I guess you could call this experiment a success. Although I don’t think it’s in compliance with any kind of safety standards.”

“Shut up. We just have to know it’s possible. Let’s get started.”

“Sure thing. Nee hee☆”

Accelerator did not even know how to refine his life force into magic power, so with the normal order of things, there was no way he could have defeated a Magic God who had mastered such things.

So how had it ended in a draw due to injury?

The answer was revealed here.

“I am a demon, a shadow without a body of flesh and blood. But I can do

more than just protect the forces lurking in the Qliphoth. I can also grant the power to cross the Abyss that obstructs the path of those attempting to ascend the Sephiroth.”

Something else overlapped the world Accelerator could see.

His vision grew dark and the flavor of blood grew stronger.

But he did not care.

If this pain was truly necessary, the white monster would accept it.

His partner had cast out her old self that had hidden behind his back out of fear of harming everyone. She was now wordlessly telling him that he would be fine with this much, so he had to live up to her expectations.

He would show her that the strongest could not be broken by this.

What he saw before him was not just another realm crossing over from a different phase. It was different from the cosmology of microcosm and macrocosm that had been spoken of for more than two thousand years along with the Sephiroth and Qliphoth.

The Sephiroth was the tree of life which showed how to properly build up a human mind. By working toward a proper understanding, you could purify your soul and climb the ranks one at a time. But if you viewed it incorrectly and mistakenly thought you had already risen to the top, you would lose control of your mind and end up with a negative result.

The Qliphoth was the evil tree which showed how to create and use the negative side of the human mind, such as envy and wrath. It normally manipulated people and caused chaotic destruction, but when used correctly, it could bring positive results such as the art born of anger.

But this was different.

It was neither of those.

“I am a created demon. I am no more than a small piece of power cut away,

but my essence is that of a guide, just like Coronzon!! My number is the true 11 and its meaning is ‘the stepping stone of wickedness that supports good deeds’. View the hidden barrier not contained within the ten! I lurk there to block any unnecessary ascent and I offer the power to cross the Abyss only to the truly qualified!!”

Yes.

It had been with him from the very beginning.

It had been invisible, but it had been there supporting the strongest Level 5’s power.

It branched out into countless individuals, but it could be wielded as a single great whole.

The invisible third tree.

The large data entity constructed by the brains of the military clones linked by EM waves.

“This is a tree made by human hands – a new tree not found in any legends or myths! It is still a small sapling, but this new mystic power does not rely on the hand of god and instead provides possibilities controlled by human hands. The artificial tree of Clonoth carries no good or evil!! I shall become the guide of this young tree. Rejection of the Abyss, leave us as I become one with my chosen master and cross that line. We shall arrive beyond Keter! We need not fear the unknown territory that is no more than a series of zeroes!!”

The tree of life was the positive mind and the wicked tree was the negative mind.

So the artificial tree represented neither of those.

Social media likes added at the click of a button, a fitness gym where the more stoic you were the more you were praised, stars on a gourmet site, and Academy City where people were managed by the Level of their power. New value systems had a way of changing the way people thought. There was a

side of the mind that was manipulated by the very cutting-edge civilization humanity had created for themselves. This tree listed the later changes to the soul which would never have appeared if humanity had not acquired fire, forged steel, harnessed steam and oil, and controlled electricity.

“Hmm /return.”

An exasperated voice appeared in his head like a surprise attack.

And this was not Qlipah Puzzle 545.

This was someone else who had been seated in their throne from the very beginning.

“The Misakas are more than just military clones /return. Not only can we approach those not connected to the Misaka Network /backspace, but now they can also approach us /return.”

“...”

“Misaka will praise you for this /return. It feels good /return. But just this once, okay /escape? Hurry up and get it over with /return. Misaka wants to smugly strike back against that person who obliterated Kamijou-chan as much as you do /return. And that’s well worth temporarily lending you some power /return.”

Accelerator silently reached for his choker’s switch.

He only had to flick it with his finger.

What burst from his back was not black or white.

It was a pale and nearly transparent platinum.

Those wings were nearly as colorful as Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass’s, so the world around them seemed to fade into the past.

A dull creaking sound followed.

This was nothing as shallow as swinging the wings around or sending out some kind of projectile.

The surface blood flow did not matter.

He had cast off the pain of this world long ago.

His red eyes were looking to a deeper place.

“Master, I have detected Great Demon Coronzon’s thoughts. I’m a demon she created, so establishing a connection is easy for me. Should I verbalize it for you?”

“If you want. It doesn’t change anything.”

He heard some unpleasant static like iron sand was pouring into his ears.

Accelerator’s mind had a lot of guests today. Yet another voice cut in.

“Damn...you!! What are you doing? That isn’t the Sephiroth or the Qliphoth. If...if you embed something like this in the world, it will change things even more fundamentally than Angel Fall!!”

“I don’t know what that means, so I’ll get right to the point. Qlipah Puzzle 545 has told me most everything. You’re such a pain in the ass because you have a physical body of flesh and blood. So I’ll shift that aside and cut it away.”

“Are you trying to apply a powerful external pressure to remove my soul from this temporary body!?”

The microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the planet were linked.

When something happened to one, it affected the other.

That theory was usually applied to use the micro as a way of moving the macro. To put it extremely simply, refining magic power in the body and moving the arms or legs would distort the larger physical world and produce flames or ice from the hand.

But this monster was different.

He used the macro as a way of moving the micro.

By adding a large tree to the cosmos and thoroughly shaking the world out to the ends of the galaxy, he was applying a physical blow to a single person's flesh and blood.

All to force an astral projection initiated by an external third party.

Now, had the #1 realized how similar this was to the holistic esper power some had hoped to create within the immortal monster sealed for so long inside the Windowless Building and freed by Lightning God Thor?

“Gah.”

“This will eliminate what made you so special. Being the strongest is boring. It’s like a poison that dulls your sense of pain. You only get to see who you truly are once it’s been stripped from you. So I’ll show you, Coronzon. I’ll show you who you are when you’re stripped bare!!”

## Part 17

A dull sound reverberated across the large temple made from the Queen Britannia's heliport.

Below the blue sky, Great Demon Coronzon limply collapsed. The sound was her forehead hitting the floor.

And.

“...”

Another figure trembled while looking down at her hands.

This other Great Demon Coronzon could only watch as her physical body collapsed in front of her. No, that phrasing was inaccurate. With her physical body gone, this Coronzon was just an ordinary demon.

She had no clothing.

Coronzon had been literally stripped bare, so she had her long blonde hair wrapped around her entire body.

Just like Qlipah Puzzle 545, she was a collection of energy similar to Telesma.

She had plenty of hair to spare even after wrapping it around herself like a swimsuit and a sinister face used it as a screen.

Since she would prevent any human from fully ascending the Sephiroth, no human could defeat Coronzon by purifying their soul in the normal methods. And you could not reach that divine territory by using the Qliphoth. But that other tree was different. If the Sephiroth and Qliphoth were not an option, you only had to create a new tree. You only had to apply power from outside the tree to drive the Great Demon from the Abyss like a game of curling.

Who could do that?

Ability was not the only issue here. Mathers and Westcott had only ever thought of ascending the Sephirah according to their own hierarchy, so could they have even imagined something like this? After decades of preparation in Academy City, Aleister's plan had shattered. But could someone really reach this point just by rearranging the shards of that plan!?

Coronzon could only speak while trembling.

She no longer had the protection of a physical body.

“So...what?” She slowly looked up. “Aleister has fallen. Mina Mathers cannot reach me either way! Or will you use Baby Lilith!? Will you cast out your own principles after all this!?”

“No.” Baby Lilith spoke through the toy trumpet while held to the black cat witch’s chest. “Hope has been preserved this far, so he would never allow such an ugly conclusion in the very, very end.”

She said “he”.

Did she mean the silver girl lying in an expanding puddle of her own blood? Did Lilith still think of her primarily as a father?

No, that was not it.

Something changed a moment later.

The rough sound of destroyed metal was far removed from the solemn atmosphere of a mystical temple. A thick blade similar to a can opener or nail clippers bit, crushed, ripped, and tore through the metal with its rapid rotation.

It was a chainsaw.

That enormous weapon mercilessly sliced through the temple floor.

But the lead role here was not Misaka Mikoto who wore the A.A.A. on her back.

Baby Lilith had definitely said “he”.

So who was it that used Misaka Mikoto’s weapon arm as a foothold to climb through the torn-open fissure and onto the heliport?

Kamijou Touma.

The Great Demon’s true enemy was this one boy who had rushed along the same floor as the wheelhouse to arrive directly below here.

“.....  
You can’t possibly do it.”

Most likely, she already knew her fate. But Coronzon still moved her trembling lips below the winter sun that looked almost white.

“You could never be a match for me!! This is the Aeon of Horus and a single Magick attack can obliterate you. Know your place, human! No Great Demon shall succumb to that right hand!!!!!!”

“That no longer applies.” That exasperated voice came from Baby Lilith who could also view different locations. “You only managed to obliterate that boy when you had your body of flesh and blood. Now that you are no more than Coronzon the drifting illusion, do you really think you can overwhelm that?”

“...”

“You say natural breakdown is to be accepted and annihilation is not to be feared, so how about you give us an example? But I am not talking about the entire world here. Assuming, that is, you can endure the fear of being the only person to disappear and leave nothing at all behind. ....Pitiful demon. You could have avoided this. You were given a chance at salvation when someone reached out an awkward but desperate hand for you.”

The long blonde hair sliced through the air like a scorpion’s tail.

The sinister face appeared on the hair which was long enough to wrap around her soft skin like a swimsuit yet have plenty left over.

The perfectly ordinary high school boy tightly clenched his right fist.

He had completely lost once before and had his arm cut off by an ally.

But he showed no fear.

A clash was imminent. However...

(You think I will leave nothing at all behind?)

Coronzon's mind was not focused on that puny boy.

Why was she here in the first place?

The temple.

The decagonal heliport.

That giant facility could amplify and weaponize any spiritual item. And why had she set up the stolen Honours of Scotland and Stone of Scone here?

(They messed with the wheelhouse, so we never did arrive at the proper location. The symbols on the temple's floor have been torn up a fair bit. At this rate, I will fail to hijack the UK or activate the Ceremony of Mo Athair using that as the ignition.)

Coronzon clenched her teeth with her physical body gone and her essence exposed.

(But even in this incomplete state, I can blow away about half the universe. It all works out in the end as long as that half includes this planet!! For now, I eliminate the obvious enemy. I just have to think of another way to individually destroy the Sephirah that survive this!!)

“Activate...”

And.

And.

And.

The face in the surface of her long blonde hair grew even more distinct.

It was simultaneously sinister and pure.

“I command thee, temple!! Activate the Scottish system and hijack the entire United Kingdom. All so I can begin the Ceremony of Mo Athair!!”

## Part 18

If that activated, control of the UK would shift from Curtana Second to the Honours of Scotland. And this was a magic kingdom. Hijacking the UK would lead to great chaos that would develop into global conflict. And by destroying the scientific and physical layer at the bottom of all phases (which Aleister had wanted to preserve), all phases of all legends and religions would be destroyed simultaneously.

Hamazura Shiage had been working alongside Coronzon.

He had not really been thinking about how all that would end.

He had only been focused on saving Dion Fortune and heading home with Takitsubo Rikou. He had turned a blind eye to that serious problem and put off dealing with it.

So.

He honestly had not figured out what to do.

In terms of good and evil, Coronzon was undoubtedly evil. But without everything she had taught him (even if she had hidden some things from him), he could not have saved Dion Fortune.

“What do we do?” asked the girl he had brought back.

He knew what she meant because Aneri translated for him through his phone.

He could not put it off any longer.

His words must not have reached her.

Just like Hamazura Shiage had stayed true to the path he believed in, that blonde woman had never strayed from her path.

They had failed to reach an understanding.

Their respective paths had taken them to fundamentally different places.

The simple delinquent boy clenched his teeth while supporting his girlfriend in a pink track suit and fluffy sweater.

There was a long pause.

It was selfish.

It did not provide any salvation.

But Hamazura Shiage still raised his voice like he had made some kind of decision.

On his own responsibility, he used Aneri's skilled translation to pull the trigger.

“Please. Don’t let Coronzon destroy the world she was born into!!”

## Part 19

When she heard that, Magician Dion Fortune simply held up her hand.

But that was enough.

She spun one corner of the black box atop her finger so it rotated like a globe.

She was a grimoire made from a set of 78 tarot cards, but she had not been alone. There had been more. Even if they had been created for someone else's purposes, those legendary magicians had dominated the British night and disappeared with the dawn. And even if they had vanished, they had still left something behind. Their human forms and minds may have crumbled away, but the grimoires made of cards still existed. No one had collected them and they had blown away like confetti.

Aleister Crowley's destruction of them had mostly had its effects in Scotland.

Yes.

In the northern British land where the three Honours of Scotland and the Stone of Scone had been stored.

A flowing string of English followed.

"I speak as a soul that has offered her body to magic. Golden magicians, display your pride. We may have lost our bodies, but our essence remains. Combine the cards, line up the symbols, and stop the flow of evil power here."

Dion Fortune was a later magician when viewing the Golden cabal as a whole.

She was not as well-known as Westcott or Mathers from the founding period or Crowley who had smashed the cabal. She had written a few grimoires, but they were extremely difficult to acquire because there had been few opportunities for copies to be made

However.

During the Battle of Blythe Road, Aleister Crowley may have cursed the Golden cabal to failure and defeat so that it could never be reformed, but who was it that had still worked ceaselessly to do exactly that? Who was the magician who had continued to struggle to leave behind some undistorted knowledge in a world that Aleister had split between science and magic?

She was not a magician from the founding period.

But she was a representative of the magicians who had arrived after it was all over and still tried to keep things going into the present era. That nature had been included in this defense device someone had created.

That was the nature that had led her to dream of completing a work kit that could be easily used and understood by anyone.

And now she spoke as a guide.

So in order to lead everyone, she did not use Latin or Hebrew.

The magicians of the new era wrote down the hidden rules in ordinary language. So for a world-saving ceremony held in the United Kingdom, it was only natural to use English instead of trying to do anything fancy.

“We are the Golden. We are the world’s largest magic cabal which works to eliminate the long-held bad habits, remove misunderstandings about the mystical, and provide a truly abundant amount of knowledge and a truly enriched lifestyle!! A people are exposed to an evil power before our eyes, so the time has come to construct a truly free and unrestricted spell. I will incorporate you all into a spell that anyone can use to save someone close to them! And I call it the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn!!”

## **Part 20**

Who could say how many cards flew up from all across Scotland.

But in that moment, they formed a great vortex clearly visible from the weather satellites.

## Part 21

It failed.

Nothing happened.

But this failure was not simply the result of not arriving at the intended location. An even greater power had repelled the command from Coronzon. She had definitely sent the appropriate information through the ley lines, but even with the command sent from those great treasures, the land of Scotland itself had rejected the ceremony.

Her hijacking of the United Kingdom had been repelled by a great barrier.

And that meant the Ceremony of Mo Athair had as well.

“...Ha.”

The blonde woman with absurdly long hair actually laughed.

“So my own creations turn on me in the very end.”

She made it sound like this would not have happened if she had not made them, but you must not forget. Magic is a technique of distorting the world's causality for your own purposes. It does not only produce the obvious phenomena right in front of you. It is a dangerous technique that will follow an unexpected path to later cause an unexpected change without the magic user even knowing about it. Aleister Crowley had loathed that and called it sparks and spray. The Battle of Blythe Road had been fought over that. Anyone who took magic lightly would be consumed by magic. Simon Magus, John Dee, Cagliostro, Rasputin... When you listed off the names of well-known historical magicians, it became obvious that most of them met untimely or lonely deaths or went missing and were simply assumed to have lived out a happy life “somewhere else”. This was the same reason the experts in the field placed such emphasis on the fundamentals. The better they knew how fearsome it could be, the more careful they would be. Magical sparks would come back in an unrecognized form after the magic

user had forgotten all about them. That was one truth of the world.

She could not afford to underestimate this.

At the end of World War III, this right hand had negated even the great disaster created by Archangel Gabriel and driven out the angel as well.

“I have three demands, Coronzon.”

“...”

“First, to place my hand on your head. Second, to tell you not to worry because I won’t treat you badly. Third, for you to take responsibility for all your words and actions. You will be accepting those demands, Great Demon.”

“Have you forgotten when I killed you in a single attack? You dare give me demands? Don’t make me laugh, you foo- bgh.”

“Don’t just brush this off, Coronzon!! ...I risked my life to come here and do this. And yeah, I’m aware you’ve killed me once already!!”

“Gh...”

“It was the same with Fiamma of the Right, Magic God Othinus, Kamisato Kakeru, and Aleister Crowley. If you just looked at who was stronger, I never would’ve had a chance. But I made it this far. I did it!! But that strength didn’t come from me. This world might look corrupted, but it’s apparently just a bit kinder than any of us thought. So it isn’t up to me whether you take or reject this chance I’m giving you. Surely you understand, Coronzon. You’re the only one who can end this!!”

He stepped forward.

Before, Coronzon had cut toward him deep and sharp.

But this time, it was the ordinary boy who took a step forward.

“Let’s end this, Coronzon. A Great Demon of absolute evil? The natural

breakdown of all things? To hell with that. I'm not the one that can forgive you. Do you see them in your mind's eye? If so, then you still have some good fortune left. So it's not too late. You can still end this!!”

She did not provide a spoken response.

But her hair gave a roar like a scorpion's tail.

Kamijou Touma swung his head to the side.

And he took a powerful step forward.

The sinister face in the Great Demon's long blonde hair appeared even more vividly as if to fight back.

“I am a demon, but not from the Qliphoth where the forces of evil gather. I am the Great Demon hidden by the holy Sephiroth. I dwell in the same abyss as Da'at.”

This magic began by naming herself.

It was the ultimate magic that had once destroyed Kamijou Touma from head on.

But now that he heard it again, he realized that Coronzon may have been working to stay true to her identity as Coronzon. She wanted to remove the exceptions and loopholes, fix the world's clogs, and restore the proper circulation. 333, dispersion. Just like the magic name carved into a magician's heart, she had not been lying about that part of herself, no matter how crafty she might be.

“Every number is the same. My right hand contains Nuit of Resurrection. Watch as the possibilities expand and surpass the bounds of the finite. My left hand contains Hadit of Vengeance. The smallest point gathers and concentrates all forces to create a single meaning. Thus, an attack shall be released from the infinite acceleration of the Circle of Ra-Hoor-Khuit and shall appear on the surface layer of this world.”

She moved her hands as if thrusting a rapier in front of her.

With her dominant hand pulled out in front, she gathered strength in her arm.

There had to be something Coronzon could see but Kamijou Touma could not and vice-versa.

That was why they could never find common ground between their beliefs.

They both wielded surefire attacks.

And they relied on those to clash head on once more.

“Magick: Flaming\_Sword. Manifest thyself through descent of the Sephirah and bathe him in thy power.”

The torrent of power rushing toward Kamijou Touma was like a repeat of the past. He could only trust in his fist and send it forward with all his might.

If this ended like last time, he would be torn apart so badly he would be painful to look at.

But things had changed.

Coronzon had been stripped of the vessel of flesh and blood she needed to function in the surface world, so this would play out differently from before.

With a high-pitched noise, the entire threat was shattered.

Of course, this was more than just the boy’s power. His appearance here was reliant on so much else. He had just so happened to be the one standing there in the very end.

Coronzon’s eyes widened in surprise.

Kamijou Touma was not done yet. He took another powerful step forward and tightly clenched his fist to aim for the bridge of her nose.

But just as he did, the face in the hair distorted and the pressure from the long blonde hair increased.

“The Secret and Unrecorded Call: Thy name is \*\*\*\*\*.  
\*\*\*\*\*”

The voice from the hair spoke words no human could pronounce.

Researchers could not agree on whether only angels could see that text, if it pointed to all thirty Aethyrs, and what effect it had.

And Coronzon’s gaze and outstretched hand were not directed at her immediate attacker.

This magic was targeted elsewhere.

“Kh! Lock it down! Close all ports!!”

The baby shouted via the trumpet toy, but they must not have known what she meant.

Yes.

Aleister and Coronzon used the same sort of magic.

And whose spells was the A.A.A. on Misaka Mikoto’s back meant to support?

So what if it had been released from the silver girl’s control, leaving it free for other use?

“Ah.”

By the time the weapon arm moved on its own, it was too late.

A rainbow-colored beam of light erupted out as a merciless surprise attack from behind Kamijou Touma.

There was nothing he could do.

A sizzling sound followed.

Kamijou Touma's right arm was forcibly severed at the shoulder and flew through the air. Even if it functioned as a reference point for the world, it could not be converted into a destructive power once it was removed from his body. It could not punch Coronzon in the face anymore.

“!!”

The boy clenched his teeth as if restraining something trying to leave his body.

But...

“I cannot be stopped. I am Great Demon Coronzon, the destructive power that returns the world to its rightful circulation!!”

If she unleashed another Magick: Flaming\_Sword from point-blank range now, it was all over. Kamijou Touma had nothing to defend himself with, so the rest of his body would be reduced to mincemeat.

However.

Magic was a technique of distorting the world's causality for your own purposes. Its sparks and spray would eventually find their way back to influence the magic user in unexpected ways. An action taken to achieve a certain goal could end up crushing that very same goal in some hidden way.

In this case, that was seen when something burst from Kamijou Touma's right shoulder with an unpleasant noise.

It was like dark red fish eggs. But that collection of perfectly triangular surfaces seemed to symbolize the artificial. Those artificial objects were like the polygons in a video game. They came in all sizes, they were connected together, and they moved like a single giant arm.

There was no pain.

This was what he had worked so hard to restrain. It was...

“Wha-...?”

There was a deafening straining sound. It did not just come from the shoulder where the arm had been. Kamijou Touma's entire body gave off a great din that never should have come from a human. The control had shifted. Instead of the boy controlling his right hand's power, the hidden power now raced throughout the boy's entire body.

What was going through his head as his body moved against his will?

Or was he capable of taking an objective view of the situation?

"No...it's going to come out... You have...someone to rely on, don't you? Then go ask for their help, Coronzon!!!!!"

What followed was a sticky sound like bursting bubbles.

The objects that resembled giant fish eggs made from triangular surfaces burst within as something else made an appearance. But this was not just one thing. That swarm was clearly larger than the boy's own body. The boy was not controlling the power; he was hanging from the power. That was the symbolism here.

And.

And.

And.

## **Part 22**

It happened with a deafening roar.

There was also a blinding flash of light.

The temple was torn apart from within and the entire Queen Britannia was split in two.

# **Epilogue: A Man's Life Comes to an End After Receiving Countless Wounds Over the Course of a Long Journey – (Untitled)**

The sun had risen high into the sky.

It was noon.

They had ended their second national crisis, this one caused by Great Demon Coronzon who had gone by the name of Archbishop Lola Stuart.

Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers descended from the internally split Queen Britannia and easily landed on the ice before casually setting down some items.

“Please take these.”

They were a sword, a crown, a sceptre, and a giant rectangular stone.

Those were the Scottish treasures.

“My crazy obsessed husband might have drooled at the chance to swipe them, but I do not need them. From a cultural perspective, it would be a shame to let them sink to the bottom of the sea, so I will return them.”

“What happened to Coronzon? The hair seems to have stopped moving.”

“Your Majesty, you are free to pepper me with questions if you like, but your ship will soon sink. This ice may be magically supported, but the sinking of a two-hundred-meter ship is bound to affect the surrounding water. If you do not want these treasures to sink after I went to the effort of rescuing them, I recommend withdrawing.”

In fact, she likely planned to use this confusion to slip away from the battlefield crawling with Knights and Anglicans. The actual fighting had ended, but with the recovery of the wounded and of the dropped spiritual items, there was a lot they had to do. Not even Knight Leader or Kanzaki Kaori could respond immediately in this situation.

Mina Mathers kept a composed expression while holding the baby.

“The new vessel of flesh should soon be complete in its glass container. We were right to bring Lilith’s soul to the front line in order to distract Great Demon Coronzon from that. If she had wanted to, she could have attacked it remotely with her Aethyr Avatars.”

The baby groaned and waved her short arms and legs around.

Elizard called out to the black cat witch just as she started to leave and it looked like even her shadow would disappear.

“W-wait. So was Coronzon defeated? What happened to Aleister!?”

“The Scottish treasures are here. Doesn’t that tell you everything you need to know? …They should be settling things about now and it would be crass to interrupt them.”

Once Takitsubo Rikou woke up, Hamazura Shiage changed mental gears.

Dion Fortune kept talking in English, so he had Aneri translate for him via his phone.

“The Queen Britannia is going to sink soon. We can’t just sit here and wait and we need to use this confusion to escape before the British capture us. Since you were working with Coronzon, you’re in a pretty bad position, right? If they capture you, there’s no way you can avoid a cavalcade of torture in the Tower of London.”

Simply entering the country without a passport was bad enough. And it was unclear what had become of Aleister who had been waving the flag in the lead. If he was abandoned now, he could be convicted and thrown into prison

under the laws of a country where he did not understand the language.

A lot had happened along the way, but his overall goal had been to ensure a safe life without making threats using the Parameter List. He had hoped to get that by assisting in Aleister's fight, but that was useless if the board chairman might be dead. He did not know how many trusted confidants and faithful servants Aleister had, but it was possible the promise with Hamazura would be null and void now. Those people would probably treat their lives as coldly as a call center employee did customer requests.

Escaping the sinking ship would be easy enough.

But where were they supposed to go afterwards?

Mugino and Kinuhata would have left Academy City when it was shut down, so was it even necessary to return to there now? He would have to ask what those two thought, but hiding in the outside world might be an option. ...But that also depended on how persistently the UK pursued them. He could not forget what happened in that shooting range. He and Takitsubo had been helpless against that ponytail samurai woman. He wanted to avoid being entirely reliant on Dion Fortune after rescuing her. This would all be for naught if she was pushed too far and collapsed.

Would they try to live inside or outside of Academy City?

Which would be the better option?

“Let’s go outside, Hamazura.”

Takitsubo Rikou said that while the boy supported her somewhat overheated body.

But what did she mean by that?

“There’s a whole world out there, so it would be a shame to stay holed up inside.”

On the top level of the Queen Britannia, the gray heliport sat below the blue sky.

That decagon the size of a tennis court had once been called a temple.

Thanks to the massive beam released from the spiky-haired boy's right shoulder, it had burst open like a can that was thrown out after being only partially opened with a can opener. The entire ship was deeply slanted as well. No one could predict when it would completely roll over onto its side.

A girl with long silver hair lay face up there.

And when Aleister's eyes slowly opened...

"Hi, Aleister. Can you still see me?"

"..."

The silver girl's bloody mouth moved, but no words came out for a while.

And this was not just due to the wound that had destroyed her internal organs.

"No, it can't be... It just can't..."

"I am Anna Sprengel, the expert who allowed the seeds of a cabal to be sown in the United Kingdom. Did you think Westcott had invented me?"

A lady in a gaudy dress made from a red leotard and a long skirt laughed and then looked around.

She viewed the hopelessly shredded temple.

"I was right to spread some chaos using Takitsubo Rikou. Hamazura Shiage is a small speck, but he is a dangerous element that can do things no one can ever predict. That said, he is an amateur that comes to a stop once he feels like he has accomplished something. In that sense, giving him a small battle to fight was best. And in fact, Coronzon was unnaturally shaken at the end there. If Hamazura Shiage had not been free to act, it never would have ended this way."

"Damn you..."

“Really though, this was awful. This mess was so very far removed from the essence of magic. It is fortunate you managed to stop Great Demon Coronzon like that. Now I can finally avoid any further damage to my reputation. It isn’t like I did it myself, but I do carry some responsibility for authorizing your cabal.”

She was different from the Golden cabal.

She was closer to the origin point than that magic cabal which had aimed to distribute a work kit anyone could use.

To put it another way, she came from a magic system that chose to keep the confusing parts confusing. Their group saw no problem at all with only a chosen few being able to wield miracles while the masses only accepted the blessings given to them.

And that group was called...

“The Rosicrucian Order. But the ancient founder was nowhere to be found. That story was no more than nonsense invented by Johann Valentin Andreae.”

“As in, he invented the whole history himself?” asked Anna in a singsong voice. That woman with reddish hair worn in several fried shrimps was still smiling. “We honestly don’t care how it started anymore. What matters is that the Rosicrucian system works and allows us to control the supernatural. Johann seemed to think he was at the center of it all, but no one was actually paying any attention to him. He revealed the truth? So what? The great monster known as Rosicrucianism had already left his control to freely wander the world. ... You should know that all too well since you came from the Golden cabal that cut away a portion of Rosicrucianism and used it as a foundation.”

“...”

It may have begun with a made-up story.

There had been no basis for it.

Even the Golden cabal had realized the secret story of its founding was a farce during the conflicts over who would lead the cabal. ...But now that Anna Sprengel was standing right here with that bewitching smile on her face, could Aleister really be so certain of that?

The Rosicrucian Order continued to function in the shadows of history.

Johann had been telling the truth, but no one in the world had been willing to listen.

“I will be going now.” The lady in red leotard and long skirt spoke coldly while toying with the rose in her hair. “I have seen this through to the end and the ridiculous mess caused by the Rose-derived Golden cabal has ended. You are the cabal’s final magician, so once you die, all trace of it will have vanished from this tiny island nation. ...Well, after I deal with the other irregularities like Mina Mathers and Dion Fortune.”

She may not have had to go this far.

Aleister’s body was at its limit after the severe wounds she had received. The silver girl would have died regardless. She could not even get up from the floor, so she could have let the next generation handle the rest.

However.

Baby Lilith was with the black cat witch.

She could not just lie here and let that monster go after her daughter.

“Is this the final task for which you will risk your life?”

There was a sound of a rattling chain.

The founder lady named Anna Sprengel held the symbol of an old magic cabal. It was the Rosicrucian emblem she wore at her chest on a thin chain. Even the Golden cabal had made use of that symbol. Each of the petals was engraved with one of the 22 Hebrew letters. That all-purpose spiritual item could mass-produce powerful sigils by extracting the name of an angel or spirit by spelling it out in a single stroke.

It had an optimized complexity.

The true experts were never careless with the fundamentals. Why did new initiates need to study those things until they were sick and tired of them? The experts understood the true value and risk found there.

“Sorry, but that isn’t actually useful in battle.”

The result was clear.

The human was going to die anyway, so she was not even considering how to survive this.

And a moment later...

“I see. Very well. But if you want to talk big, why not use your real name and face, Madame Horos?”

A wet sound followed.

It had not come from Aleister.

It came from the lady in a gaudy red dress. A slender arm had stabbed into the back of her head.

“Ah...kah?”

“Hm, if that is all you can do, I am impressed you had the guts to continue calling yourself Anna Sprengel all this time. It has been over a century since the time with Mathers, hasn’t it? Still, I had a feeling you would make an appearance if the problem grew to this extent, you despicable fraud. This might be worthless to you personally, but I knew you would have to make an appearance as Anna Sprengel. I was waiting for this.”

Anna Sprengel was the legendary magician said to have been involved in the founding of the Golden cabal, but she had actually appeared in two different ways.

The first was as a fictional name only appearing the letters exchanged with Westcott.

The second was a direct appearance to Mathers where she snuck up to him and ran off with crucial cabal documents.

...The self-proclaimed niece of Lady Sprengel that Felkin had seen during his journey through Europe in search of the Secret Chiefs would be an offshoot of the second variety.

And after the Mathers incident, they had arrived at the following conclusion: That was not Anna Sprengel. It was Madame Horos using the name to deceive Mathers.

The silver girl would die soon.

Magician Aleister Crowley called the executioner's name while lying on the slanted heliport.

“Ai...wass...?”

“Yes, that's right, human. I am sure there is a lot you would like to ask me concerning Lilith, but I have only one answer for you. When you thought you had summoned Great Demon Coronzon, it turned out she had already been summoned by Mathers to target you. Did it never occur to you that I may have been summoned by someone earlier than you in order to kill someone even if it took more than a century? And I of course do not mean you, Aleister.”

“...”

“Yes, wait just a moment. Now, let us finish our business together, Madame Horos, you detestable woman. It is time you returned Anne Sprengel's vessel.”

There was a wet sound.

Aiwass pulled his arm back, leaving a large hole in the lady's head. But she was not allowed to fall because he casually stuck another sticky mass deep

inside the gaping hole to seal it.

The change was dramatic.

The blood, flesh, bone, muscle, hair, and skin were all sucked inwards. With a sticky sound, a great transformation came over that physical body.

All while the basic silhouette remained unchanged.

It was now a white-skinned girl with reddish blonde hair rolled and squished into multiple fried shrimps.

However, her height had shrunk by thirty or forty percent. Her apparent age had been reduced. She looked to be between ten and twelve. The gaudy red dress that had contained her previously ample body was now too large for her, so a small hand had to hold the luxurious fabric at her flat chest to ensure it did not fall down.

“It has been far too long, Aiwass.”

Her tone of voice was different as well.

No, this may have been how Anna Sprengel was meant to sound.

Someone with a decent knowledge of magic may have been reminded of the magician named Cendrillon who had managed to dismantle and reassemble her own body.

This girl waved her empty hand with an exasperated look on her face.

And then her slender arm stabbed mercilessly into the center of Aiwass’s gut.

“Gh...”

“Hmm.”

“...Bh. I really did serve you for more than a century. Doesn’t that deserve at least some gratitude, Fräulein?”

“I can’t kill you with a single attack? Unbelievable. I really have lost a lot. Curse that old fraud. She seems to have wasted an awful lot during the century I was gone.”

Even Aiwass was only a test target.

He could not remain standing, so he fell to his knees and finally onto all fours. Then the ten-year-old girl sat her small hips right down on his back, crossed her legs, and observed the back of her right hand like she was checking on the nails.

“What to do, what to do? Spending a century of training to make up for the century I lost would just be silly. It would probably be best to rely on the seven-walled tomb.”

But despite being used as a chair, the Holy Guardian Angel whispered with no sign of anger.

“You can easily make up for this delay. Shouldn’t you be thankful I managed to drag you from the depths of the bog at all?”

“The fact that it took you a century to complete such a simple task shows a problem with your specs. In fact, what were you even planning to do if this failed?”

“I would have kept trying until it did work. I could wait for thousands or tens of thousands of years until another opportunity presented itself...”

“Fool, you know I hate being so indirect. If you’re hoping for a nose hook, then just come out and say it.”

According to history, Anna Sprengel was a magical expert, but she herself was not said to be one of the bizarre beings known as Secret Chiefs. She was more like a priestess who could freely contact those transcendent beings.

And Aleister had in fact stated that Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass was the Secret Chief who gave permission for the founding of all magic cabals. Aleister’s own ability to directly contact Aiwass was given as a reason why

she could create as many new cabals as she pleased.

Which meant...

“You were...connected?” asked the silver girl.

However, their roles seemed different from what the legends claimed.

The girl holding up the loose red dress was sitting on her “chair”, crossing her legs, and viewing her own nails.

“I am supposed to be one of the humans who hold out our hands to accept the blessings granted unto us. All I should need to do is look up and receiving the blessings and guidance provided by heaven. ...But this world is too small. There is no longer anyone above me, so all I do is float around restlessly like a balloon. Aiwass, are you kidding me? I am pissed because your specs are just too low. Do you have anything to say for yourself?”

This was not a supernatural being and his priestess.

It looked a lot more like Anna Sprengel held Aiwass’s leash.

The girl with her reddish blonde hair in several fried shrimps spoke while viewing the back of her hand and the nails.

“Another thing, Aiwass. Why have you not killed this yet?”

“She will die on her own. You seem upset by your wasted strength, so wouldn’t it make more sense to leave her be?”

...But in truth, the actual balance of power was still unknown. It was possible they would not boldly reveal the actual truth while in front of an enemy, even if that enemy was on death’s door.

Still, Aiwass had to at least be accustomed to this lady’s selfishness.

He did not seem particularly surprised and readily responded to it all.

Was this all Aleister Crowley’s life was worth? Was this the identity of

everything she had believed in? For better or for worse, the silver girl had manipulated the world around her. But now someone had appeared on the center stage who could toss her aside so easily.

“...”

“Do not worry, Aleister. Unlike Madame Horos, we have no interest in what happens to Mina Mathers or Dion Fortune. So we will not pursue them and bring harm to Baby Lilith.”

“You need to fill me on an awful lot,” said Anna Sprengel. “What happened in the outside world while I was bottled up? That trap was set up over a century ago, wasn’t it? Wasn’t Lilith supposed to die a lot sooner than this?”

“Your little game failed. Aleister did not use Lilith. Not even at the very end.”

“Well, that is disappointing.”

“You really are a cruel one.”

At that point, Anna Sprengel suddenly looked up.

She looked up at the expanse of the blue sky while truly exposed since the barrier had been broken.

What were her senses focused on while she toyed with the rose in her hair?

“Okay.”

She got up from her chair while still holding the red cloth to her flat chest with one hand. Then her small foot lightly kicked Aiwass’s jaw to force him to stand up.

“Something is coming, fool. Fool as you are, prove your sincerity by preparing things for us. To be clear, I have no intention of giving or handing out anything. If you naively think you can pray to me and take me for everything I am worth, I will kick your ass right here and now.”

“This could be trouble. I recommend making a safe withdrawal.”

“A third tree? Surely you aren’t going to come crying to me over something as trivial as that.”

“Don’t you want to avoid wasting more energy?”

“I really need to put a collar on you. I learned my lesson with the Golden cabal, so I am sick of being a queen who grants things to others. Sigh. Where can I find a true master who I can subdue with my power and have them provide me with never-before-seen wonders on demand?”

“If you are going to dream of some fantastical protector, why not just come out and ask for a storybook prince charming, lady?”

“Boo.”

“You are too far gone yourself. I am a little afraid to report what happened with Lilith now. Besides, how many wonders are left that you still have not seen? You are not so pure of heart that a Great Demon or Holy Guardian Angel will surprise you. When faced with the only surviving original member of the Golden cabal, you are the first to have ever breathed a sigh instead of feeling any kind of excitement.”

“The world is too small.”

“Do not ask for the impossible. Not even I know how to handle a tomboy like you.”

The Holy Guardian Angel of 93 casually opened a hand and held it out toward the young girl. She gently closed her own empty hand. In a sort of pantomime, they both moved as if striking an invisible egg against the same invisible desk corner.

“Black egg, thy symbol befuddles the senses of all who gaze upon thee, so hide us from the sensory realm.”

Immediately, the two of them faded into the empty air like they were surrounded by a thin film that displayed the scenery behind them.

“Invisibility!?” exclaimed Aleister.

“This mystical power was even referenced in Regardie’s tell-all grimoire, so I know it cannot fool you,” said Aiwass. “But we will have left before you can reveal this to those arrive next. You will soon die. If you wish to drag the others into death with you, then you can tell them. If you would prefer not to, then hold your tongue. And with that, I bid you farewell.”

By the time Accelerator stepped into the broken and tilted temple, there was no one there.

He looked down at the girl lying on her back with silver hair splayed out around her. A lot of blood had flowed from the deep wound, the color of the skin exposed to the winter sea breeze showed a considerable drop in body temperature, and then there was the internal damage. There was no saving her. All Accelerator could do was manipulate vectors. He could optimize what was there, but he could not provide what was not.

Accelerator and Aleister.

Both of them were covered in blood.

“Revenge, is it?”

One had built a bond of trust with a demon and crossed the Abyss. The other had failed and been rejected.

This was the moment when the child surpassed the adult.

“You succeeded, #1... Your world was beyond my reach.”

“Is this all?”

The #1 monster’s voice was low.

“This is how it ends, Aleister? This doesn’t even count as revenge.”

“Are you dissatisfied? A century ago, Mathers and I were so obsessed with

the 5=6 promotion issue and the honorary 7=4 title, so our souls would have raged with envy had we heard you say that. Still, I am sorry. It is true this is not an end for me you could accept. Looking at it again, I am tapping out with so much left undone, aren't I?"

Hypothetically speaking, what would you do if you hated someone so much you wanted to kill them, but then you found them collapsed near death due to nothing related to your own actions?

Would you point and laugh until your sides ached?

Would you consider it a stroke of good luck and supply the finishing blow?

...Accelerator could not imagine it. It was not that he could not do it. He could not picture a future where all the feelings in his chest had cleared away if he went ahead with it.

"You need not feel guilty," said Aleister with a smile. Dark red blood spilled from the corner of her mouth. "No matter how awful the person, everyone has just the one life. I will die no matter what you do here. If you do not deliver the finishing blow yourself, you may regret it for the rest of your life..."

"Shut up," spat back Accelerator. "Didn't I explain this already? It's meaningless if you don't feel any fear. Doing it now would be a failure. Look at that satisfied look on your face. There's nothing I can take from you now."

"...Heh. You've grown into a much kinder person, #1."

"What?"

"You followed me this far, so I know you can think of several cruel methods of gouging into my heart. You know what you could take from me to hurt me the most. But you chose not to. That change is something I did not foresee."

"Are you kidding me? Quit assessing me right in front of me."

"Well, I am an educator, after all. But more importantly, can I leave my daughter with you?"

“What!?”

“Is that too much to expect of a student? Then I will leave Mina with her as a wet nurse. For better or for worse, she will make no mistakes there.”

Qlipah Puzzle 545 gave a puzzled look around the area, but the silver girl soaking in a puddle of blood placed her left index finger to her lips.

In the Golden cabal, that was a sign of silence with its origin in Harpocrates.

Do not say a word. Do not pursue them.

Anyone who challenges them before they are ready will be destroyed.



“Take care of the rest... Remain ever vigilant and prepared. The problems are not over yet. Another threat is sure to arrive. And much sooner than you think.”

After breathing a few shallow breaths, Aleister pulled a boxy object from her bloodstained skirt pocket. It appeared to be a perfectly ordinary smartphone. It was in fact the one Academy City’s board chairman had used to perform the satellite bombing. She had used it to release the lock on Academy City. It had to include an incredible list of codes.

“Take this.”

“...”

“I used my life for my own purposes, so I will give you the other methods. You may be able to fulfill your desire for vengeance using this...”

She may have known this would be her final breath.

Aleister breathed in deep and smiled as she spoke.

“If you hate the adults, then take control yourself. I leave you with the full authority of board chairman. Create the kind of Academy City where everyone remaining can smile together.”

The gray ship slowly sank over the half hour following noon.

While it had been retired, it was still a valuable piece of equipment for the royal family. It contained a large number of antiques and pieces of artwork. Professional divers would be searching it at the bottom of the sea, but Kanzaki Kaori found something floating in the cold water while standing far enough away to not be caught in the cracking ice.

“That confirms it...”

The Amakusa priestess was unsure what to feel about this.

She checked the pulse, breathing, and eye movement before giving a calm

report.

“At 1:05 PM, Magician Aleister Crowley was confirmed dead.”

This felt like the end of an era.

And when a certain female knight was placing the dead girl in a black body bag...

“Wait.”

She was stopped by Queen Elizard.

The old woman slowly sighed.

“A lot about this is still unknown, but I doubt we could have stopped Archbishop Lola Stuart without her actions. The royal family will handle the paperwork, so treat her with care.”

“You mean?”

“This magician will receive a state funeral. ....Not that I think that is enough to make up for how she was treated in the past.”

Elizard could not bear to see those eyes sitting open, so she crouched down, placed her hand on that cold forehead, and lowered the eyelids.

She looked like a parent helping a small child go back to sleep after a nightmare.

And the queen had one more thing to say.

“Welcome back, Aleister, to the United Kingdom, the country of fog, magic, and peace.”

# Afterword

If you've been buying one volume at a time, welcome back. If you bought them all at once, welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

This makes 22 volumes since the numbering reset for New Testament. This was the Vs. Coronzon volume!!

Unlike the previous group battles, Great Demon Coronzon handled almost all the fighting herself, so how did you like that? It was mentioned in the story, but NT20 represented the Aeon of Isis with all the activity by Greek and Egyptian gods from before Christianity, NT21 represented Osiris with everything coming down to the power of the Christian bible, and NT22 represented Horus by moving beyond even that. Although it was kind of moving back and forth a lot since Coronzon was using Enochian Magic as a starting point... I included a lot of things from the Aeon of Horus like Nuit, Hadit, Probationer, the Cake of Light, the driving out of the different powers, 11, Babalon, the scarlet power (Are you really going to make me spell it out? I'm talking about that time of month!!), and more.

This time, I was aiming to release the bowstrings that had been pulled taut leading up to this. I think the most obvious example would be Hamazura moving to the forefront after acting as a spectator or observer in NT20 and 21, but there was plenty more than that and I hope you enjoyed it. ...I couldn't fit in a natural way for Last Order to make an appearance, so I used Will-chan instead as a part of that. She calls Accelerator unfaithful, but is she really one to talk?

There was also a bit of talk about the Sephirothic forces and Qliphothic forces. For example, Shokuhou went a bit yandere by holding onto the severed right hand, but that was the result of the normally-positive emotion of love taking an odd turn. Keep in mind that this does not mean the root emotion is tainted. It might look evil, but that was the result of a Sephirothic

force going haywire.

On the other end of things, Coronzon helped Hamazura and gave him a lecture on magic while knowing that using magic would harm an esper, so that came from the wicked Qliphothic forces, but it ended up saving Hamazura and Fortune.

The tricky part about the microcosm of the human mind is that starting from the good side of things does not always lead to a good result. The Sephiroth seems holy, but if you use it wrong, you can lose control. (Think of someone harming others while insisting no one can complain because they're "doing the right thing".) I added in some twists with some other characters as well, so it might be fun to look into what kind of forces were motivating the other characters. Like the oddly subdued Kanzaki, wishy-washy Nephthys who ended up supporting anyone and everyone, and Niang-Niang who just likes to cause accidents.

I will wait until some other time to discuss Anna Sprengel in more detail, but I am focusing on making her a character who initially seems like she reigns over everything as a great ruler but is actually full of holes. She might look similar to Birdway who is young on the outside and perfect on the inside, but she is actually the opposite. After all, she is the one who led to the creation of the Golden cabal, so instead of someone who reigns supreme and coldly pushes everyone else away, I wanted to give her an oddly powerful allure that draws you in like a black hole. What did you think?

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san, to my editors Miki-san, Anan-san, Nakajima-san, Yamamoto-san, and Mitera-san, to Itou Tateki-san, and to Kasai Shin-san who designed the A.A.A. I expect this one was a lot of trouble with all the major attacks it involved. As always, sorry for causing you so much trouble.

And I give my thanks to the readers. How did you enjoy the story of Great Demon Coronzon and Aleister Crowley? Nothing would make me happier than if those big bosses remain in your memory.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

Now, who was it that went without food for three volumes straight?

-Kamachi Kazuma

?

There was a splashing sound.

The face had gone quite pale, but anyone with the proper knowledge would have immediately recognized the absurdly long blonde hair and the beige habit that had grown heavy after soaking up the midwinter seawater.

Everyone may have been satisfied with Great Demon Coronzon's defeat.

But after separating the soul from the body, they had focused their attacks on just one of those two parts. That meant the other part remained.

In other words, the body of flesh and blood that Coronzon had used as a temporary vessel.

“...Gh...?”

That demon clung to her fading consciousness and moved her lungs.

No, she tried to move them.

But she could not manage a single breath. Was it the Gnostics who called the body no more than a cage for the soul? But for Coronzon now, her body was no more than an execution device. She could not move a finger and she could only watch as she sank into the depths of the cold ocean.

But then...

Her hand moved. ...What was supposedly her hand moved against her own will. It reached up onto a broken piece of white land similar to drift ice and then she climbed on top of it. That allowed her to breathe again, but she could not relax yet. The rhythm of breathing, of blinking, and of everything else was all wrong. Even the beating of her heart felt off.

Instead of someone else moving her body from the outside, this

uncomfortable feeling was more like she was intruding on someone else's body.

"Hm."

"...!?"

"I really did intend to die when I died, yet here I am. For better or for worse, I fail at everything I attempt. But this could be a problem. Can I really just waltz on back there after all that?"

The vocal cords were those of the flesh and blood that Coronzon had prepared, so the voice was hers. But the subtle intonation was entirely different. And she recognized this voice. The disgust she felt was like a swarm of small bugs crawling along the fingertips she could no longer move.

"A...lei...ster...?"

"Oh? You can still resist? But this is my flesh and blood now. ...Although I was starting to grow sick of having a female body. Well, I can live with this since I know you are not actually Lola. I will be using this as a temporary body that only has to last me until I can acquire a better one, so bear that in mind."

"...Ah."

Aleister stood up on the large piece of drift ice and touched this new body through the wet habit to check on its height and center of gravity. Her hands showed no restraint and no mercy. A burglar rummaging through someone's private room would have shown more tact.

"Coronzon, you brought this on yourself. I really, truly did intend to die satisfied this time. But I could not fully die thanks to you. ...And now I have stepped outside the category of humanity, which I worked so hard to avoid. Honestly, this really is entirely your fault."

While she spoke, the woman reached a hand behind her back and grabbed the soaked blonde hair. She held it like she was preparing a head of wheat to be

harvested. The other hand also reached behind her, but the fingers were held differently. The index and middle finger were held together.

“Have you forgotten my joint experiment with Neuburg, Coronzon? It had to be halted because you refused to obey, but that was never actually annulled. Wasn’t this the original form of the contract we were meant to make? Magician Aleister invites in Coronzon and gains the knowledge found by crossing the Sephiroth’s Abyss. …This ended up a little different, but it is what it is. I had thought it meant you entering my body, but we seem to have ended up with the reverse. Magical sparks and spray always return to you in the way you least expect it. I never imagined I would receive that fundamental lesson again now of all times.”

“Whaa

With a brutal slicing sound, the index and middle finger passed through the hair.

No, it cut away the hair at shoulder length. 333, dispersion. That was the symbol of the power that the Great Demon had spent so long building up from the moonlight.

It was said the devil resides in women’s hair.

Who cares?

That seemed to be the message as Aleister casually tossed aside the blonde hair like a bundle of dead snakes and laughed at how much lighter she felt now.

She laughed with mockery in her voice.

“Ha ha ha. It is high time you suffered, Great Demon. Did you really think you could skip out on your punishment by dying?”

This was no laughing matter.

Being stuck like this was an even more horrifying thought than sharing a body bag with a rotting corpse. If this was her punishment, then the world

really was broken, insane, and twisted. She should have destroyed it much sooner.

The stolen flesh stood up on the drift ice, raised her hands overhead, and shook her head like a wet dog. She clearly was not used to having such short hair. This would be Aleister's movement because Coronzon was powerless to do anything.

“Now, I highly doubt this has escaped Aiwass’s notice, but the real question is why he kept it from Anna. Does he have some kind of reason for it...or did he simply develop an emotional attachment in the century he was looking after Lilith?”

“Gah...kah!”

Meanwhile, Coronzon was not at all pleased about having her long hair cut. She now only had the back of that short hair as a screen on which to display her face. The Great Demon now looked like a Futakuchi-Onna as she protested like a tropical fish in an aquarium with insufficient oxygen.

“What...are you...going to do now?”

“If moving the vocal cords is too much effort, you can always speak to me in the medium of thought. The UK should be picking up my corpse about now, Academy City has been left in the hands of the children, and I am sure Mina will accept being Lilith’s wet nurse. She always did enjoy helping out. For the time being, it might be nice to remain hidden in the backstage beyond both magic and science.”

Whilst still standing, Aleister bent over and wrung out the beige habit’s skirt to remove the cold seawater.

“Still, I never expected this to happen. Is this a sign of the world malfunctioning because that which refuses to break down is clogging up the circulation?”

“You mean Aiwass?”

“And Anna Sprengel.”

After saying that, Aleister turned over her hand.

“Is that what you thought I would say?”

“...?”

“You caused this yourself. There were a few past opportunities for the stopper to fail: against Fiamma of the Right, against Magic God Othinus, and against Aiwass too I suppose. ...But you went too far this time. The lock has broken. What do you intend to do about that which refuses to break down and that which lurks within it?”

In other words.

In other words.

In other words.

The short-haired Crosser of the Abyss gave the answer.

Using knowledge normal people could never reach.

“The biggest problem is Kamijou Touma and the power of his right hand. There is no holding that in anymore.”

“Ah, ahh.”

Why had the boy not been there?

Even if there had been nothing he could do, why had he not desperately tried to stop the bleeding to prevent that silver girl from breathing her last?

Where had he gone after defeating Great Demon Coronzon?

“Ahhhhhhhhh!”

He had been unable to stay there.

Even now, his right arm was throbbing irregularly while he held it with his left hand. He had no idea how the arm had reattached and its return was not enough to put his mind at ease. He could not predict when that thing would come out again.

“Touma!!”

He heard a familiar voice from directly above.

Was she dangling from a giant balloon again?

But that was exactly why he had to keep running.

That thing would kill.

No matter what Kamijou Touma wanted, it would indiscriminately devour and kill everyone there.

So.

He had left the gray Queen Britannia to run across the seemingly endless expanse of ice.

He had to get as far away as possible.

He had to do whatever it took to stay away from anyone this might harm.

There was a deep and wet sound of something bursting open.

And somewhere else, Anna Sprengel looked up.

She had sensed it, so she smiled thinly.

Once her power returned, she could destroy even Aiwass in a single attack.

She was that kind of legendary being.

“At long last.”

She was not speaking to anyone in particular.

Aiwass stood by her side, but he was of secondary concern.

She did not care how narcissistic it seemed. There was but one emotion in her voice.

“She kept Takitsubo Rikou on hand because she thought she could use the girl’s power to cause Kamijou Touma to rupture from within. Even the most useful pawn can accomplish nothing when the one controlling it is a fool. Madame Horos, couldn’t you have used your head for once? If you had set things up right, you just might have been able to acquire an entire small world there.”

It was a twinge of displeasure.

But the result before her eyes was apparently enough to wipe that away.

“Anyway, I ended up on a century-long detour, but I am glad I made it in time for this moment.”

It was like she had returned home after a long trip.

It was like she had seen the faces of her loved ones waiting for her.

She narrowed her eyes.

That woman of the rose had sown the golden seeds on a whim. And Anna Sprengel spoke in a way that was much like stroking her own slender neck in search of the bondage she lacked.

“Good morning, Imagine Breaker...and the One who Purifies God and Slays Demons. What does the world look like to the two of you?”

Of course.

This was all assuming that lady had the kind of emotions an ordinary person

could understand.