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魔法科高校の 劣等生 23

孤立編

The irregular
at magic high school



『ディオーネー計画』

USNA国家科学局(NSA:National Science Agency)所属の技術者であるエドワード・クラークが提唱する国際プロジェクト。

魔法技術と魔法師を用いて、木星圏の資源で金星をテラフォーミングしようという壮大な宇宙開発プロジェクトである。

金星の直径は地球の0.95倍。重力は0.9倍。

この点では、火星よりも人類の移住先として都合が良いが、分厚い二酸化炭素の大気と硫酸の雲、温室効果によるものと推定される高温の為、環境改造は困難と判断されている。

通常技術では極めて困難な金星の大気改造を、魔法技術で実行しようというのが『ディオーネー計画』の趣旨とされている。

『ディオーネー計画』を構成する四つのスキーム

- ① 地上から宇宙に資材や組み立て済みのプラントを打ち上げる際に、加重系・加速系魔法を利用する。宇宙に大規模構造物を建造するに当たって最大の障害となる、地球の重力を脱するため既存のロケットを魔法で補助し、大質量を宇宙に運ぶ。
- ② 小惑星帯からプロジェクトに必要な金属資源を魔法師の手で採掘する。無重力空間での資源採掘において、移動魔法を用いることで推進剤の問題を解決する。
- ③ 木星から水素を採取し、金星に運ぶ運搬手段として魔法を使う。高温高圧下で水素と二酸化炭素を反応させ水とメタンを作り出すサバティエ反応で、水のない金星に水をもたらし、同時に二酸化炭素を減らそうというスキーム。①で採掘したニッケルはその触媒となる。
- ④ 上記③の結果、二酸化炭素に加えて、これを上回る温室効果を持つ水(水蒸気)やメタンに包まれることになる金星を冷却するために、ガリレオ衛星の一つであるカリリストの地表から氷を切り出して金星に向け射出、金星の大気圏に放り込むことによって気温を下げる。この巨大氷塊の切り出しと運搬に魔法を使用する。

二〇九七年現在の宇宙開発状況

世界の寒冷化による社会の混乱と、それに続く戦争の所為で中断してしまった宇宙開発は、依然として停滞したままである。有人宇宙飛行については、二十一世紀初頭からむしろ後退しているといえる。

プロジェクトに参加表明した イーゴリ・アンドレイビッチ・ベゾブラゾフのコメント

『金星のテラフォーミングには国家間の対立を超えた意義があると信じるからです。私たち人類は一世紀以上前から、世界総人口の限界に怯えてきました。それは遠くない未来、人類同士の破滅的な対立、人類社会の活力の低下を招き寄せます。生存圏の拡大は、人類の未来に待ち受ける破局を回避する唯一の解決策でしょう。』

Chapter 1

The end of April, 2097. The exact date and time isn't recorded. First of all, it should be mentioned that this meeting wasn't something that is kept in the official records.

"These are the details of the attack on the camp in Nanso, given in Sergeant Tooyama's report."

Director Inukai, the immediate superior of Tooyama Tsukasa, sat down having finished reading the report of his subordinate.

"So, the identity of the attacker couldn't be established?"

"Correct. We couldn't verify this" Inukai instantly answered the question of one of those present. "However, based on the circumstances it is obvious the attacker was. We cannot think of anyone else, but Shiba Tatsuya of the Yotsuba family."

"And this is the truth."

"Indeed."

There were voices of agreement with Inukai's opinion. And on the contrary, there were no votes of disapproval for hasty conclusions.

The leadership of the Intelligence Department of the National Self-Defense Forces gathered here to decide whether Tatsuya was involved in the attack on the secret camp in Nanso, which contained illegal agents from the USNA. Although this was true, they would not object even to false accusations.

Even in the Intelligence Department, they usually don't make decisions so quickly. The collection of evidence and data was only a formality.

But this meeting was a meeting of the secret leadership of the Intelligence Department of the National Self-Defense Forces . Such informal meetings were held only with special need. This meeting wasn't officially held, so the evidence wasn't needed.

This was the place where they subjectively judged whether a particular person or organization is harmful to the country as a whole.

"I believe that Shiba Tatsuya is a dangerous person and needs more surveillance."

"Should he not be eliminated immediately?" One of the votes in response to the Inukai's proposal asked about a more strict measure.

"The idea that he's extremely dangerous is true, but he undoubtedly has a rare, irreplaceable fighting power. Even if the Yotsuba family is behind him, his power, superior to the magic of the Tooyama family, is very attractive."

Continuing his speech Inukai, the Director of the first department on Special Issues rose. The Division for Special Issues was a unit whose existence was concealed even within the Intelligence Department, which itself was famous for its high secrecy. It was an irregular organization, which at one time consisted of one to thirteen departments.

"I want to add something about Shiba Tatsuya. There is unconfirmed information that should be paid attention to."

"Oh. And what is it Director Onda?"

The Deputy Director showed interest in these words and encouraged him to continue. The Director of the Intelligence Department was absent at this meeting. The Deputy Director who was present was also a person not disclosed to the public.

"I think you all already know that the Yotsuba family, to which Shiba Tatsuya belongs, is in a cooperative relationship with the 1-0-1 Battalion."

After Onda's words, those sitting at the table nodded.

"So what?" The Deputy Director showing that he's also aware, called on him to continue.

"Shiba Tatsuya, as a member of the 1-0-1 Battalion, may be the magician who destroyed the seaport of Zhenhai at the end of October of the year before last."

"...Scorched Halloween...?"

The Deputy Director, whose existence was kept a secret, was the one who deals with the shadow affairs of the National Self-Defense Forces . Therefore as expected he couldn't remain calm after this statement. No, not just him. For a while, the room was plunged into a heavy silence.

"...So you mean that Shiba Tatsuya is that Strategic Class Magician?" Replied Inukai. Although his daily illegal activities forced him to hide from society, but even he understood the importance of the Strategic Class Magicians for national defense. He thought that if Shiba Tatsuya is the magician who created "Scorched Halloween," it would not be easy to get rid of him.

"This isn't confirmed. But even if Shiba Tatsuya is a Strategic Class Magician, we cannot ignore him as a threat."

Onda responded to Inukai, who has the same position as the head of the department as he did, and the only one who didn't show shock on his face.

"More precisely, we must not lose sight of the fact that disproportionate force is concentrated in the hands of one person. This is my opinion."

Excluding military terms from his speech, he confirmed that he's a member of an organization that is above the law.

The Deputy Director calmed down under the influence of this unshakable position.

"...As you said. For Shiba Tatsuya we will designate a re-education policy."

"I support."

"I think it's reasonable."

After the Deputy Director's decision, words of approval were heard from members of the assembly one by one.

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End of April, Kazama's division returned to the headquarters of the 1-0-1 Battalion from Hokkaido.

"Lieutenant Colonel Kazama reporting all 195 of my subordinates have returned to base."

"Everyone has returned safe and sound."

The Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, which was under the command of Kazama, was positioned as a separate tactical unit called the battalion, but in terms of the number of soldiers it was only the size of 2 companies. And about half of the personnel were sent to this task. The number of people who returned to the base, voiced by Kazama, coincided with the number of people sent to the task. In other words, there were no victims.

Hearing the report of Lieutenant Colonel Kazama about the return of all people to the base, the battalion commander Lieutenant-General Saeki responded with relief on her face. The loss of soldiers in combat is an integral part of war, and there isn't anything better than the fact that there was zero lost.

Due to the positioning of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion as an experimental unit using magic weapons and magic tactics, it also contained many magicians with special abilities. Regardless of the system of moral values, the significance of these talented people was much higher than that of people from other divisions. Although she knew the situation from the daily reports, but confirming the return of everyone with her own eyes, Saeki was really relieved.

"Lieutenant-Colonel, give the returned soldiers a three-day leave. With permission to exit the base."

"Many thanks. The guys will be happy."

Standing at the "free" bar Kazama slightly softened in the face. Saeki nodded at his words, closed her eyes and sighed slightly. Opening her eyes,

Saeki, one of the best strategists in the Self-Defense Forces, looked at Kazama with all seriousness. Kazama also looked tense.

"Major Onda called yesterday."

"Major Onda... Who is that?"

As a member of the military system, Kazama constantly watched the news about military personnel. He couldn't say that he remembered everything, but he was sure of his knowledge of senior officers. But he didn't remember anyone with the name "Major Onda."

"Major Onda is the head of Special Issues."

"The Special Issues Section of the Intelligence Service...?"

Saeki didn't have the right to give orders directly to the Intelligence Department. And the Directors of intelligence units have no obligation to report to Saeki. In other words, the "connection" was private. That is, Major Onda is one of Lieutenant-General Saeki's sources of information. So Kazama interpreted the information received. Perhaps Onda also uses Saeki as a source of information.

"So, what did Major Onda say?"

Saeki answered Kazama's question honestly and without superfluous introduction.

"Special Officer Ooguro is included in the list of purge targets for the Intelligence Department. This is because of the attack on the secret intelligence camp."

"...Do they want to kill the Special Officer?"

Despite the fact that Kazama didn't raise his voice, his intonation conveyed the feeling "I cannot believe it."

"Not to execute. It seems that a decision was made to seize him and conduct re-education work."

"That is nonsense." Kazama put it like it wasn't an Intelligence Department.

"Really. Re-education... No, in this case there is no need to correct this word. Although brainwashing has a high probability of damaging your magical abilities."

"Your Excellency, I beg to differ."

Not understanding what Kazama wants to say, Saeki called with her eyes to continue.

"It may be possible to assassinate the Special Officer. But to capture him is absolutely impossible. It's okay if only the Intelligence Department is destroyed, but in the worst case, the whole of Tokyo will drown in a sea of fire."

Narrowing her eyes, Saeki looked at Kazama with a stern gaze. As if suspecting that Kazama himself is planning a large-scale diversion.

"...The Special Officer can go that far?"

"Your humble servant believes that the very fact that the Intelligence Department has recognized the Special Officer as a dangerous element is justified. He's the greatest egotist. The Special Officer cannot sacrifice himself or his loved ones for the sake of the country or citizens. He's from the category of people who are not at all suitable for the role of military."

"He's perfect in his abilities, and in character as the Lieutenant-Colonel said." Saeki had no objection to the words about Tatsuya's lack of motivation in the service.

"But their realization of the degree of danger is much too naive. Even without the use of Material Burst, Special Officer is capable of destroying an average city in one night."

"You value the Special Officer highly, don't you?"

"If there was a final boss in the real world, like in stories and games, it would definitely be him."

"The final boss? Then where is that brave hero who will end this story with a happy ending?"

"Such a person has not appeared yet. Therefore we should not provoke him, at least until such a hero appears."

Saeki and Kazama sighed at the same time. And they exchanged tense smiles. They thought it was funny how they seriously discussed the concepts, like the final boss and the hero.

"We will pass your opinion to the Intelligence Department through Major Onda. I don't know how much it will help... Thanks for the help. Lieutenant-Colonel, you are free."

"Understood."

Kazama saluted Saeki and left her office.

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Second of May, after school hours.

Not knowing that his friends consider him the King of Demons, Tatsuya returned to everyday life.

Not only him. The clash that occurred in the last week of April during the incident with the abduction of Shiina, was resolved as a misunderstanding due to lack of communication, and for First High this incident has already become a thing of the past. Miyuki and Minami, who were in a separate incident at about the same time as the kidnapping, didn't tell anyone else about it so as not to cause unnecessary anxiety.

As is usually the case after school hours, the members of the Student Council, including Tatsuya, were engaged in the usual affairs of the Student Council. Starting yesterday, in addition to normal work, the Student Council has started preparing for the Nine Schools Competition.

They haven't yet received a list of competitions for this year so they were only engaged in basic preparations, so that time wasn't wasted like last year, when unexpected changes occurred.

Tatsuya was looking through the CAD catalog for the competition. The CAD characteristics used in the competitions was limited. According to the requirements, the performance of the hardware had to be in a strictly limited range. Since there were no restrictions on the software unlike the hardware, the key factors determining victory or defeat were the speed of reading from the media and the convenience of using the OS.

Like the change in the competition last year, the limitations for CAD's could also change. But early information gathering wasn't a waste of time. Even Tatsuya, who is directly involved in CAD development under the pseudonym Taurus Silver, didn't know the latest models of equipment. It can be said that at the moment Tatsuya was enjoying the current work of the Student Council.

"Master" There was a voice interrupting this work. Pixie spoke to Tatsuya by voice, not telepathy.

"What?" Answered Tatsuya, without taking his eyes off the screen.

"I • received • important • news."

"Important news?"

Tatsuya turned to Pixie.

"News related to • Strategic • Class • Magic."

Tatsuya turned his gaze and his eyes met with Miyuki, who also raised her head to Pixie's voice.

"Bring it up on the wall."

Following Tatsuya's order, Pixie displayed a recorded news release on a large wall-mounted display. Not only Tatsuya, but all the members of the Student Council gathered in front of the screen to look at it.

However, interest on their faces quickly gave way to a touch of seriousness. During the video, someone made a sound that sounded like a muffled cry, but until the end of the news no one said anything.

"So this time Africa...?" The first one who said her thoughts aloud was Izumi.

"The Gulf of Guinea, the Nigerian Delta region... At the moment this area is actually under the control of the Great Asian Alliance."

"Yeah." Shizuku confirmed Honoka statement.

"This is a conflict zone. The probability of using it there was higher than, for example, in Europe or in North America..."

Tatsuya, apparently, also wasn't able to suppress thoughts like "this cannot be."

The news release told about the fact of numerous victims from using the Strategic Class Magic "Thunderclap Tower" in the area of the Nigerian Delta. And also about the statement of the army of the Great Asian Alliance which admitted this.

The use of Synchronized Linear Fusion in South America has indeed weakened the psychological barriers to using Strategic Class Magic.

But the view of society, that is, of the entire world, will only become tougher from this. And not just a passive outlook. A wave of criticism from around the world rolled into Brazil after its army used "Synchronized Linear Fusion." Even now a month later, the volume of criticism has not decreased.

And despite this, the Great Asian Alliance didn't even try to hide the use of Strategic Class Magic. On the contrary, they themselves announced the use of "Thunderclap Tower". As if they boasted to the rest of the world about their military successes.

"Was it a deterrent against France?"

"Apparently, that was the main goal." Tatsuya nodded at Miyuki's question, adding a clarification.

During the Third World War, the strongest forces of the world rushed to Africa in search of resources.

In the local countries there were both government troops and opposition forces. The activities of these powerful countries of the world, whether it was hidden manipulation to fuel a war, or a direct invasion to "guarantee" the hidden resources in the ground, ultimately destroyed all the countries of the African continent.

Even now when more than 30 years have passed since the end of the Third World War, conflicts there continue, although they have become much smaller. The competition between the forces of the Great Asian Alliance and France in the area of the Gulf of Guinea resembled a game in reverse, when a large number of independent small groups of local tribes were dispersed throughout the region.

The Nigerian Delta region has been under the control of the Great Asian Alliance for several years. But in the past few months, certain armed forces that proclaimed themselves to be the next generation of the international terrorist group MEND (the Movement for the Liberation of the Nigerian Delta), having received support from France, began to threaten the domination of the Great Asian Alliance in the region.

Deterring France's support was the goal of this Strategic Class Magic attack, was undoubtedly one of the true answers.

"So, there are other reasons?"

The question was asked not by Miyuki, but Izumi. It still couldn't be said that she had become open with Tatsuya. Usually she didn't start talking to him first, but this time her curiosity overpowered her.

"Strategic Class Magic "Thunderclap Tower" was used. However, the user of the magic declared by the Great Asian Alliance wasn't Liu Yunde, but a certain girl named Liu Li Lie."

"I was interested in that moment in the news too. This means that the reason was an announcement of the new officially recognized state Strategic Class Magician?"

"The meaning is definitely in the notification, because it was already impossible to hide it."

"What is there to hide?"

Not only Izumi bowed her head inquisitively. On Honoka and Shiina too, question marks were lit over their heads.

"Liu Yunde didn't show up at official events for more than a year. Last year, he was absent even at the annual military parade, which he had previously invariably visited. Since then, among the people associated with army affairs, there were rumors of his death, and as a result, they could no longer hide it."

Tatsuya learned about the death of Liu Yunde in "Scorched Halloween" almost immediately after the incident. However, the Great Asian Alliance did its utmost to hide this information. Therefore, he conducted his explanation without going beyond the level of knowledge of ordinary people.

"That means, if Liu Yunde is dead, then Liu Li Lie is his successor?"

"The official announcement of the existence of a Strategic Class Magician is a deterrent. This is a demonstration by the Great Asian Alliance: 'Although Liu Yunde is dead, we have another Strategic Class Magician.'"

"Sabotage against France, and a demonstration to the whole world?" Muttered Izumi with an understanding face.

Even after joining with Leo, Erika, and other third-graders at Eine Brise, the main topic of discussion was the Strategic Class Magic used in Africa.

"But doesn't this provoke neighboring countries?" Asked Erika

"It's probably done deliberately. This so-called deterrence is needed to intimidate other countries."

When Tatsuya went to answer, Mikihiko did it for him. Although he wasn't suited to such words because of his mild nature, but it wasn't uncommon for modern schoolchildren to express themselves in a similar manner.

"A new member of the Thirteen Apostles is only 14 years old? Even younger than us..."

Less than an hour after the first report, the Great Asian Alliance provided information to the press, containing details. Although the bulk of this report condemned the inhuman behavior of hostile armed groups and drew attention to the legitimacy of using Strategic Class Magic, it also found a place to advertise the new "Apostle."

In the first news, only the gender and name of "Liu Li Lie" was listed. When the Great Asian Alliance revealed that she was a fourteen-year-old girl, everyone was very surprised.

"The age is also surprising, but that such a small girl is a Strategic Class Magician..."

"Indeed. Although in another country there may be reasons, but it somehow does not fit in my head..." Mizuki agreed with the words of the frowning Honoka.

"I think the poor thing just has to do what the grown-ups say. It seems to me that recognition by an official of the state is a good situation for her." Erika spoke in a slightly annoyed tone, probably because she remembered about the incident with children of the same age who were victims of magical experiments conducted in Japan some time ago. There is no doubt that such tragedies occurred all over the world, and not only in Japan and the Great Asian Alliance. Among the numerous victims buried in the darkness, this exposed girl in some ways was lucky.

"I was surprised that she was shown."

Before Erika's words were drowned in the minds of others, Shizuku moved the interest in another direction.

"Right. Despite the fact that usually private information about the Strategic Class Magicians is hidden, now they have published not only her name and age, but also her photo."

Although Miyuki's intention behind backing Shizuku was to avoid depressing topics, but as she said, the publication of Liu Li Lie's appearance aroused surprise at everyone.



大里連合、戦略級魔法師の存在を発表

"Only if this girl really is the user of 'Thunderclap Tower.'"

After Tatsuya's words, not only Miyuki and Shizuku froze with their mouths open. Apparently, everyone forgot about the possibility that the girl, represented as Liu Li Lie, could be a figurehead.

"It seems that the army of the Great Asian Alliance is going to make her a symbol for the sake of morale."

"You mean that adults will be more motivated when they see that such a young girl is trying so hard?"

She herself regretted that some time ago she showed irritation, probably. Therefore, she courteously said Tatsuya's words more simply.

"Well, something like that." Understanding her feelings, he answered her with a tight smile.

"So, the Great Asian Alliance recognized the death of Liu Yunde, in order to strengthen the image of the 'brave girl who wants to succeed her grandfather'?"

"But we don't know if she's really his granddaughter." Erika responded to Mikihiko showing an evil grin. In the official announcement of the Great Asian Alliance, it was pointed out that Liu Li Lie is the granddaughter of Liu Yunde.

"Returning to our conversation..." Leo said, after which Mikihiko urged him to continue, asking "what is it?".

"...Is it true that there were 800 victims?" At first not daring to speak, but having decided to after Mikihiko's question, Leo expressed his question. "It's hardly a lie, that there were almost no civilians in the zone of the fierce fighting. But isn't that number too low? Well, you know, for Strategic Class Magic?"

For some reason they all looked at Tatsuya.

"Compared to Synchronized Linear Fusion, there will be fewer victims. Because Thunderclap Tower is a magic used for the destruction of factories and infrastructure, not for directly killing people."

"Thunderclap Tower is magic, causing something like a storm with thunder and lightning?" Mizuki asked with a puzzled face.

"Thunderclap Tower is a magic formed from two different types of magic. The first magic causes an avalanche of electrons above the target area. The second magic intermittently and unevenly lowers the electrical resistance in the target area."

Even after Tatsuya's words, Mizuki remained with an uncomprehending face. Tatsuya looked at Mikihiko, on his face was the question "Can you explain for me?".

Mikihiko responded to this look. If someone said that he had no intention of trying to be on Mizuki's good side, it would be a lie.

"In simple words, the magic that causes the avalanche of electrons is the process of creating the electricity necessary for lightning, and an uneven drop in resistance is a process that establishes resistance to a level when a dielectric breakdown occurs. As a result, lightning strikes are generated continuously, occurring at short intervals in different places."

"...In other words, is it magic that throws lightning left and right?"

With a serious face Mizuki looked at the explaining Mikihiko, trying not to lose a word, but in the end it was difficult to say how much she understood.

"Right. You've got it right."

But Mikihiko was soft with her "evaluation." In this case it was difficult to understand whether this understanding was limited to just Mizuki, or to all.

"A feature of Thunderclap Tower is that it pays more attention to the number of strikes, not the strength of each strike."

Mikihiko looked at Tatsuya. When he nodded his eyes, Mikihiko felt relieved. Apparently he wasn't very confident in his knowledge.

"...Instead of throwing one heavy-duty lightning bolt, with the help of a single magic cast, this energy is distributed over a wide space. For light infantry, this is a nightmarish magic, but if you take action against electricity, then fatal injuries can be avoided. But this magic has a different effect, surpassing all expectations."

"Destruction of infrastructure?"

"Yes. The lightning strikes that occur at short intervals signify a discontinuous oscillation of the electromagnetic field in this region. Moreover, for all objects in this region the resistance level is reduced to the state of breakdown of the dielectric. By omitting a detailed explanation, Thunderclap Tower is magic that causes serious damage to electrical equipment on a large scale."

"In other words, the true essence of the Thunderclap Tower a magical EMP weapon?" Leo said.

"The principle is different, but the effect is virtually the same."

Although their conversation with Mizuki was interrupted, Mikihiko didn't show that he was disturbed.

"There were few victims, because the direct damage factor is rather weak. As I understand it this is the main reason. That's why there is another question."

"What question?"

"This is a conflict zone, where the struggle for control has been going on for a long time. It is unlikely that they could build a high-tech city there. I think the main equipment that could be damaged by EMP weapons is equipment for extracting resources."

"I don't know the details, but I believe that is the case."

"But now the mining enterprises are under the control of the Great Asian Alliance? Wouldn't they themselves suffer from EMP weapons? Why did they use magic that would cause them losses?"

Not knowing what to say, Mikihiko asked Tatsuya for help with a look. Tatsuya didn't panic or complain, but simply spoke.

"Recently there have been reports that in the Nigerian Delta region, the Great Asian Alliance began to lose their positions. Using unmanned automatic weapons provided by France, local hostile armed groups have already occupied more than half of the territory."

These words were sufficient for Leo to understand something.

"Unmanned automatic weapons...? So, therefore...?"

"They gave priority to neutralizing drones, sacrificing mining equipment." Mikihiko came to the same conclusion.

However, these two didn't receive a higher score from Tatsuya.

"The motive for using Thunderclap Tower on its territory is countermeasures against unmanned weapons. However, don't forget that this magic also has the strength to kill. It will easily take the lives of those soldiers who don't have proper protection from the electricity, let alone civilians in ordinary clothes."

The faces of Leo and Mikihiko tightened. They had forgotten that the number of human casualties wasn't zero.

"So, the real number of victims... exceeds the announced number?"

"Another problem with the Thunderclap Tower is that it also paralyzes medical facilities. Most likely there are a lot of those who, although they didn't die instantly, but they will not be able to receive help..." With a grim expression, Tatsuya answered Miyuki's timid question.

Chapter 2

Two years ago, at the Nine Schools Competition in 2095, Shizuku used the magic "Active Air Mine" developed by Tatsuya. With this magic, Shizuku took the crown of the Newcomers Division Speed Shooting. As a new magic, "Active Air Mine" was to be recorded in the National Magic University Compiled Magic Encyclopedia Index of True Names.

However, Tatsuya couldn't become the center of attention because he had such a low status in the Yotsuba family at the time that he was ignored and considered a freeloader. Because of this he suggested registering Shizuku as the developer of "Active Air Mine."

But Shizuku would not agree with the proposal to take someone else's achievement. Eventually, the record of "Active Air Mine" was made in an incomplete form, with a note that "the developer is unknown."

In January of this year the recording of this magic was at last officially registered. Tatsuya received the status of "son of the head of the family" and "the groom of the next head of the family," so he no longer had to hide. But at the same time, Tatsuya himself didn't take any active steps to expose himself to the light. The truth was that ever since the National Magic University realized that Tatsuya was the real developer, they were gradually approaching the disclosure of the truth. After the announcement of Tatsuya's bridegroom, the next head of the Yotsuba family, someone at the National Magic University probably remembered what happened and realized the circumstances. At the very beginning of the year, they called Tatsuya to get permission. They tearfully pleaded with him, referring to the fact that the magic has been stored for so long in an unfinished form, and eventually Tatsuya surrendered and gave his consent.

That's why today he felt that agreeing to use his name was a good decision.

Well, at least that will not end up disturbing Shizuku, he thought as he saw the news this morning.

Tatsuya's place like last year, was near the window in the corridor. There was still time left before classes began, and classroom 3E was filled with whispering students looking at Tatsuya.

Erika, pushing the upper half of her body through the window leading into the corridor, glanced into the classroom. The students with whom she met her eyes turned away in confusion. Looking around the room with a gloomy look, Erika looked at Tatsuya.

"These conversations about the fact that armed guerillas used Active Air Mine, are they true? The destructive power was Tactical class. I didn't think that could have such power output." From Tatsuya's side of the blackboard spoke Mikihiko who came here from his class, but not out of curiosity, but because he was worried about Tatsuya.

"Active Air Mine does not have an upper power limit. Although there is a relationship between scale and speed, but depending on the magician the power can be higher. I appreciate your concern, but judging by the condition of the corpses, this magic was used." Tatsuya replied in an indifferent tone. Mikihiko's face darkened, and the whisper in the room became more active. Obviously, the topic of classmates whispers was this news, which this morning was spread by the media.

Two days ago, the use of the Strategic Class magic in Africa caused numerous deaths. In the summaries of the Great Asian Alliance controlling this region, the number of victims, as of yesterday is close to 900 people. Although it was already possible to say that the scale of the losses is quite large, but the Western media speculated that the losses among local people alone could exceed 3000 people.

Armed guerrillas can also be considered part of the "local residents". Also, those who can be called terrorists, and not guerillas, like to hide among residents. However, it was also obvious that most of these people were still ordinary civilians.

And last night they took revenge. The military base of the Great Asian Alliance in Central Asia was attacked by armed guerillas.

Responsibility for the attack was assumed by the organization "Army of Liberation of the Nigerian Delta" (EAND: Emancipation Army of the Nigerian Delta). It was the armed forces that proclaimed that they were continuing the case of the international terrorist organization "Movement for the Emancipation of the Nigerian Delta" (MEND: Movement for the Emancipation of the Nigerian Delta).

Given the coincidence in time, it seems that EAND planned an attack on this Great Asian Alliance military base long before, regardless of the use of the Strategic Class Magic Thunderclap Tower.

The answer to that indiscriminate attack was only a visible cause. But as a result, this sneak attack actually became an act of revenge.

In a statement reporting a successful attack, the key figure in the battle was a girl from the west coast of the Gulf of Guinea, a magician named Effia Mensah. And the magic she used was the same "Active Air Mine."

"Active Air Mine is magic that destroys solid objects with the help of vibration zones, in which compression waves are created. A person who falls into such a vibration zone will have all their bones shattered, and he will die by turning into a soft bag filled with bloody porridge. Now it is confirmed that Effia Mensah is the first person to use this magic against people."

"Although Tatsuya-kun is the developer of the magic, aren't the victims the responsibility of the participants in that conflict? Tatsuya-kun isn't responsible for this."

Erika bit her tongue in irritation. Because among the classmates with confused faces, Tatsuya had one exception.

"...The moral responsibility for creating inhuman magic lies just on him."

"Oh really?" Erika's caustic remark was answered in a menacing tone. This forced the speaker of those words, Hirakawa Chiaki to turn away.

"Erika, stop it."

Tatsuya stopped Erika whose eyes were dangerously lit while the students sitting near Chiaki, fussed.

"Moral responsibility...? The dynamite of Nobel, the atomic bomb of Einstein. You can give a bunch of examples." Muttered Leo in a bored voice. "Although those who say so, will have increased now..."

In this place, there was no one who could refute these words.

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"You insist that the National Magic University isn't responsible, right?"

"The Magic Encyclopedia Index of True Names is only a collection of magical science research, and the National Magic University only plays the role of a research organization."

On the television screen, a representative of the National Magic University responded to an arrogant reporter's questions, spoken with a firm voice, but his face expressed that he was almost ready to surrender under the pressure of the reporter.

"So, you mean that the responsibility lies with the student of First High, who developed this murderous magic?"

The representative turned pale and began to protest.

"The First High student does not bear responsibility!"

However this panicky voice wasn't completely knocked down by the aggressive attitude of the reporter.

"In fact, this magic, developed by a student of a magic high school for the use in the Nine Schools Competition, claimed the lives of more than a hundred people."

"This was a military attack. Responsibility is borne by armed guerillas who used the magic as a weapon, not a developer of the magic."

"Is this true?"

"...What do you mean?"

The reporter broke into a broad smile, showing that this moment was exactly what he was waiting for.

"Even among conventional weapons, all sorts of treaties forbid things such as poisonous gases or expanding bullets. At the international level, any inhumane weapon is considered illegal."

"Active Air Mine isn't a weapon!"

Realizing that the reporter wants him to say this, the representative of the university again changed their face. But even his heightened tone couldn't stop the reporter's language.

"But in fact it was used as a weapon."

"This... This means that the responsibility is borne by those who used it."

"But if it has the word "mine" in the title, does that not mean that it was originally understood that it can be used as a weapon?"

The representative of the university couldn't answer the reporter's question, to which he had been directing this conversation from the very beginning. Modern magic was originally designed as a weapon. The magic written in the Magic Encyclopedia was inherently suitable for military use, and it was difficult to call Active Air Mine an exception to this rule.

"The consensus opinion of the international community lies in the fact that the possession and development of inhumane weapons is illegal. In order to avoid accusations of inhumanity from the world community to our country, shouldn't the University pay more attention to proper guidance over its students and the students of the magic high schools assigned to it?"

"Our University believes that in the case of the magic developed by the Japanese used in the armed conflict in Central Asia, the responsibility lies with the party that used it."

In the end, the representative of the university was able to complete the interview with just such an argument.

"Onii-sama, is it true that the international community isn't allowed not only to own, but also to develop inhuman weapons?"

As an exception, this Sunday, a press conference was held at the National Magic University. It seems that the University decided that such a quick reaction is necessary in this case.

Immediately after the end of this live interview, Tatsuya, who was watching it at home in the living room, was asked this question.

Miyuki, who was watching TV with him asked. It's been 4 months already since they publicly ceased to be a brother and sister, but Miyuki's Onii-sama expression was absolutely not going to disappear anywhere. Recently, you could often see the defiant behavior which according to her attitude to this was read: "If no one hears, then it's okay."

"Who knows. Although the prohibition of possession is an obvious fact, but is it possible to completely prohibit the development of new types of weapons? After all, whether it's an inhumane weapon cannot be determined until it exists."

"You mean that you cannot say whether it will be inhumane until it is actually used for the first time?"

"You can tell that it will be a weapon, even at the design stage without using it. Because it is done for a specific purpose."

Turning to the interrogated Miyuki, Tatsuya shook his head with a smile.

"But when something is developed as a weapon, usually a lot of details are kept secret until the end of the manufacturing process. Because usually there is a certainty that if you publish details before the end of the project, then it will not be approved due to the recognition of them being inhumane weapons."

"Ah, that's the way it is."

"But in the case of magic, the situation may be different. For example, in the case of the airplane: it wasn't designed as a weapon, but can be used as a weapon. But if we exclude early cases of military use, modern aircraft are not used for battles, unless it is specially designed military aircraft. But in the case of magic, depending on the abilities of the magician even if he does not think to use it for military purposes, it can become both a simple weapon of murder and a weapon of mass destruction."

Tatsuya sighed slightly.

"To tell the truth, I didn't even think that there was another magician who can cope with this magic. I'm really glad that in the end it didn't affect Shizuku."

In Tatsuya's words, resignation was felt. But Miyuki didn't understand with what exactly he resigned himself. Therefore, she couldn't decide how to respond.

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If you think about it logically, then Tatsuya isn't responsible for the fact that the soldiers and personnel of that military base of the Great Asian Alliance were victims. But in society there have always been people who, at least in the short term, don't behave according to logic. However, even though Tatsuya understood this he didn't expect that this would cause such troubles.

After school hours, Friday, May 10, 2097.

"Guys, please listen."

When Miyuki returned from the teacher's room, she turned to the others as soon as she entered the Student Council Room. Everyone immediately realized that it was a serious matter.

Tatsuya, Honoka, Izumi, Minami, Shiina. Looking around at the five people, Miyuki continued to speak with a face that showed that she could barely restrain herself from crying.

"A message came from the committee for the Nine Schools Competition. The Nine Schools Competition for this year has been canceled."

Miyuki's voice trembled slightly. But we can say that she behaved perfectly.

Honoka and Izumi cried out in shock, and Minami and Shiina were frozen speechless.

"...Miyuki, can I have a look at the message?" "Even Tatsuya needed a few seconds to react to this.

"Yes... wait a little." Still standing at the door Miyuki awkwardly went to her place. "...Here it is."

After waiting for Miyuki to finish moving her fingers over the terminal, Tatsuya opened the document file that was copied to the general catalog of the Student Council.

The other four, coming out of the daze and following Tatsuya, also opened the shared document.

"...All clear. So, it's still my fault?" Tatsuya said sighing.

"This isn't true!" Miyuki said, suppressing the anger that filled her.

"This is an outrageous false accusation! Onii-sama does not bear any responsibility at all!"

Simultaneously with the cry, the temperature in the room fell sharply. Miyuki not only stopped playing her role, but even forgot about controlling her magic.

"Miyuki, calm down."

Tatsuya didn't raise his voice, because he realized that this anger was because of him. But this does not mean that he didn't do anything. He stretched forward the index and middle fingers of his left hand folded together, and slightly waved them from right to left. The room suddenly returned to its original state. The frost that covered the windows disappeared without a trace, not even leaving condensation.

"Rewind...?" whispered Shiina. However not only she, but all five girls including Miyuki heard an illusory sound, like a tape rewinding. This was a side effect of Tatsuya's use of "Regrowth" which reversed the raging cooling magic of Miyuki. As a result of the return of the information related to the "temperature" in the room to the state before the magic activation, ignoring all of its processes, the world itself returned to its original state, as if rewinding the phenomenon of cooling.

The illusory sound that the girls heard was the noise of psion waves born when the reversed causal relationships created in the information dimension collided with the normal causal stream.

"...I'm sorry, Tatsuya-sama."

The realization that Tatsuya had to spend energy on her out-of-control magic, finally cooled Miyuki's head. She calmed down, as if the evil spirit that had possessed her had left.

"But Tatsuya-sama does not bear any responsibility. The Nine Schools Competition was canceled due to the irresponsibility of the tournament committee. Indeed, in the last few days there has been a lot of criticism associated with the Nine Schools Competition, but wasn't it because of last year's changes?"

"That's right! The argument about Active Air Mine was only a little at the very beginning! Now the critics mostly focus on the strong military flavor that was present at last year's tournament!"

The attempts to console Miyuki and Honoka were related to a wave of hysteria in search for "responsibility for the creation of inhuman magic" which was raised in the media on Monday, the day after the press conference of the National Magic University. In particular, the adoption of "Steeplechase Cross-Country" as a competition at last year's tournament was criticized as being too militarized for high schools at the National Magic University.

There were certain reasons for this criticism. The "Steeplechase Cross-Country" was a training course used by the military in which they competed, comparing the results of their training.

And not only "Steeplechase Cross-Country". "Shield Down" was a competition organized for close combat training. "Rower and Gunner" from the Navy training program had an even stronger military flavor than "Battle Board." The competitors themselves also had a feeling that the Nine Schools Competition was leaning towards the training of future soldiers.

Such a change in the mood of the critics was undoubtedly the work of the media. Tatsuya also thought so. It was difficult to say whose work it was. Perhaps Shizuku's father put his hand to this before his daughter became a victim of the media. Or are these companies that manufacture conventional weapons trying to prevent magic from becoming a substitute for conventional weapons by trying to stop the military use of magic?

If the latter, then we can say that their plan was crowned with success.

As a result, the attacked tournament committee voiced their thoughts that they regret that "magic invented for healthy competition was used by the armed forces" and announced the decision to cancel the tournament this year in order to conduct a review of the information management system of the National Magic University.

"...Really. Sorry that I made you so excited."

Tatsuya accepted the arguments of Miyuki and Honoka and apologized for his words. More precisely, he pretended to apologize.

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Hearing the bad news about the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition, not all students considered that the cancellation of this major event was because of the naiveté of the management system, which allowed the abuse of magic. On the contrary, the students who agreed with the committees explanation for holding a review were undoubtedly very few.

"Shippou, did you hear?"

During club activities, Takuma was spoken to by his classmate and teammate Senkawa. These two were team mates in Monolith Code for the newcomer's division last year.

"If you are talking about the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition, then I heard." Takuma answered trying to look calm. But on the contrary the unnatural intonation of his voice was oozing disappointment.

"We have another year, but you can only feel sorry for the sempai's. For them this is their last year of school and they thought they would have another opportunity."

"True..." Takuma replied with a not very interested tone. Senkawa however didn't notice Takuma's message of "let's not talk about it."

"Listen, this cancellation it's only for this year right?"

"If they only need to revise the information management system, next year will everything be all right?"

"I would like this to be true." Senkawa honestly said in response to Takuma's words. "But still, using the information management system as an excuse? The truth is that if they don't eliminate the system of competitive competition and don't limit the use of magic, then next year, too, there may be difficulties?"

Takuma's face twitched. Senkawa took this as an agreement with his opinion.

"The magic made by a high school student would usually never be used in a war. Shiba-sempai most likely also didn't expect anything like this."

"...Shiba-sempai isn't responsible for the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition." Takuma's voice was more irritated than he had planned. And the answer itself was a surprise for Senkawa. He hurried to apologize.

"I don't think that sempai is to blame either. Now that you said that, I realized that he was only a victim of the media. But, you know..."
Senkawa glanced at Takuma's expression.

"But what?"

Takuma urged Senkawa to continue, and Senkawa had to do it without changing his face.

"What if Shiba-senpai knew about the possibility of using that magic for military purposes? Or that it could have such an effect."

Takuma again twisted his face not from Senkawa's words, but from remembering the photographs of the victims published by the Grand Asian Alliance. It was quite a terrible sight receiving a high age restriction, but Takuma was able to see these photos on the personal website of a journalist.

"With the abilities of Kitiyama-senpai, she could have won 'Speed Shooting' even without creating that magic. Did Shiba-senpai overdo it? From this point of view, it seems somewhat... reckless.

Since Takuma was silent and didn't say anything, Senkawa's speech was getting quieter towards the end, and as a result he hesitated. But it wasn't because Takuma didn't approve of Senkawa's opinion.

The fact was that everything was just the opposite, but Takuma didn't tell this to his friend.

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In First High there were relatively many students sympathizing with Tatsuya. The students of First High didn't forget that Tatsuya made a significant contribution to their overall victory last year and the year before. For this reason, there was doubt in their minds whether they should criticize Tatsuya.

However, it is quite obvious that in other schools the situation was completely different.

"Masaki!"

"Ichijou-senpai!"

The headquarters of the disciplinary committee of Third High. Despite the fact that Masaki wasn't the head of the disciplinary committee, all the students, including the nominal head of the committee, believed that the head of the disciplinary committee for Third High was "Ichijo Masaki."

Even the president of the Student Council recognized him as the head of the entire Third School. Probably just because the president of the Student Council was a girl who wasn't part of the 28 Houses, or the Hundred Families, Masaki could be considered even higher.

But back to the main topic.

At the headquarters of the disciplinary committee, where Masaki spent his time waiting for work (the Disciplinary Committee of Third High didn't focus on patrolling like at First High, but worked in the form of responding to reports from students), two students burst in: his classmate, and Kokhai a year younger.

"What happened, you two?"

They were both his teammates at last year's Nine Schools Competition. Kokhai was a student who hoped to become a team ace in the tournament next year.

"Is it true that the Nine Schools Competition was canceled!?"

Hearing the question of a classmate, Masaki sighed.

"True. I just heard too."

"They canceled it because of that guy from First High!"

When any pupil of Third High spoke of a certain "boy from First High", it always referred to Tatsuya. Having received bitter experience in the Nine Schools Tournaments last year and the year before last, in Third High they began to consider Tatsuya as the main villain.

"This isn't true. To prevent the magic published in the Nine Schools Competition from falling into the hands of armed guerillas or terrorists, the information management system will be revised."

Masaki also thought of Tatsuya as a "guy who is irritating." Cooperation in the affairs of Zhou Gunzin and Gu Jie gave rise to small signs of friendly relations, but for Masaki Tatsuya was still a rival.

But that's why the unfair treatment of Tatsuya as a villain didn't coincide with Masaki's opinion. For him it was an indisputable fact that Tatsuya was a "bad guy", but he felt that it would be cowardly to ignore the false accusations of such an enemy that should be defeated in a fair battle.

However, the classmate and the Kokhai were not attached to Tatsuya in the same way as Masaki.

"But this revision became necessary because this guy created inhumane magic?"

"Right. Whatever the excuses, the main reason is this asshole!"

Therefore, they didn't hesitate to use Tatsuya as a target, to which they concentrated disappointment and irritation.

"Maybe it's an excuse..."

For Masaki, all the pupils of Third High were "allies", and Tatsuya was "the enemy." He couldn't decide to defend Tatsuya before a classmate.

"Ichijou-senpai, please forgive me. But why is it because of this one guy that we all have to give up the Nine Schools Competition?"

"Indeed. For example, it was possible to not cancel the tournament but to hold it without the participation of First High. As a last resort, you could just forbid that guy to participate."

"No, they couldn't do that. Such discrimination would be criticized in the media."

Thinking that excluding Tatsuya from the tournament alone is an unheard-of exaggeration, Masaki with a reserved expression called on the guys to be more careful in terms.

"P-understandable. How many more problems is he going to deliver to us?"

"Whatever genius engineer he's called, does he really think that he will be forgiven for everything he's done?"

However, the true meaning of Masaki's words wasn't passed on to his classmate or to Kokhai.

Similar conversations have occurred in the other magic high schools.

But none of the schools sent protests to First High. Each school made an official statement that there is no direct link between the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition and the military use of Active Air Mine. However, the next day, on Saturday, when details about the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition became known to everyone, attacks against Tatsuya spread among students of all magic high schools.

And the news that flew in from America seemed as if it was designed to drive Tatsuya even further into a pit, from which he would not get out.

Chapter 3

The main theme of the morning news release on Sunday, May 12, was the announcement of an international project, held in Los Angeles, at 13 o'clock local time.

The speaker was Edward Clark. He was an engineer from a government agency known as the NSA: National Security Agency. In his statement it said that the NSA is calling for cooperation from all countries of the world.

In fact, nothing has been done yet as America has just launched this international project alone.

It was called "Project Dione". It consisted in realizing the dream of terraforming Venus with the help of resources from Jupiter and its satellites using magical technologies.

The diameter of Venus is equal to 0.95 of the diameter of the Earth. Gravity is equal to 0.9 of the earth. From these indicators, it looks much more suitable for human settlement than Mars. However the thick atmosphere of Venus, consisting of carbon dioxide and having clouds of sulfuric acid, had a high temperature due to the greenhouse effect. Many considered such conditions too difficult to change. As a result, most space exploration programs switched to Mars.

But from the perspective of a settlement colony, Venus remained preferable to Mars, because of Mars remoteness from the Earth and low gravity, which adversely affects the human body.

"With the help of magic technology to implement the extremely complex terraforming of Venus's atmosphere which was too difficult for conventional technology." This was the essence of "Project Dione.

Edward Clark voiced the names of nine people who, besides him are necessary for the implementation of "Project Dione." In this list were not only scientists. The names of the president of Maximilian Devices, Paul Maximilian, and the president of Rosen MagiCraft, Friedrich Rosen, were also mentioned.

That is, the cooperation of the two largest manufacturers of magic equipment was requested which was quite reasonable regardless of the possibility of obtaining this cooperation. The likelihood of obtaining the cooperation mentioned in the list of William MacLeod and Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazzoff, the world-famous "Apostles", was even lower, but their names could also be understood on the list.

The reason why the Japanese media drew attention to the project, which was only at the planning stage, was the tenth person on the list, whose name wasn't mentioned.

After voicing the names of nine people, Edward Clark looked at the camera and said:

"There is another technical specialist, whom we very much want to see on the project. We cannot give a real name, because according to the laws of the country of residence, he's still considered a minor. I can only say that this is a Japanese high school student, who acts under the pseudonym "Taurus Silver"

"This is an unpleasant situation..." Tatsuya muttered in an unhappy voice, watching the morning news recording, sitting on the sofa in the living room. The morning, which from the very beginning was far from good, became even worse.

Seated next to him, Miyuki looked at him with concern in her eyes. But she couldn't decide to speak. No, it seems that she simply didn't know what to say.

"...I'm sorry, Miyuki. Looks like I made you worry too much." Noticing Miyuki's eyes, Tatsuya said and turned to her with his usual soothing smile on his face.

However, this smiling face immediately froze. Miyuki's cheeks were shedding tears.

"....."

Now it was Tatsuya's turn to shut up, not knowing what to say.

"P-I'm sorry."

In a hurry, Miyuki tried to wipe the tears with her fingers. A clean handkerchief was stretched from behind her.

"Thank you, Minami-chan."

Miyuki looking back to thank Minami, took the handkerchief from her, but instead of wiping her tears, she simply dabbed it to her face, putting it to her eyes.

"...Miyuki?" Tatsuya timidly called her name.



Miyuki slightly lowered her handkerchief. Her face, looking out from under the bangs, was bright red.

"I apologize. To so suddenly cry... I acted like a child...?"

It seems that Miyuki was ashamed for showing her tears like this.

"No, I don't consider you a child... but what, has happened?"

Miyuki removed the handkerchief from her face. Her face still showed signs of redness.

"Um... Onii-sama. No, Tatsuya-sama." Correcting her appeal to Tatsuya, Miyuki involuntarily looked away. "I'm asking you... don't make yourself smile in front of me."

"I would not..."

Tatsuya couldn't finish the words of justification. Because he knew that he does not know how to lie well.

"I also understand that Tatsuya-sama was in a difficult situation. I cannot help but understand Tatsuya-sama."

"Really..."

"Maybe I cannot do anything... But, Tatsuya-sama, at least share your problems with me. Because I'm no longer your sister, but your bride."

Miyuki glanced sideways and looked at Tatsuya's expression. Although she didn't say anything strange, she was ashamed of her words.

Usually in such a situation, he would just tenderly embrace her without any reason.

But he didn't know how this would affect her in her current state.

At such times, you cannot let her lose control over herself, or you can lose your life.

These were Tatsuya's reflections, looking at the shy Miyuki.

Thanks to Miyuki, Tatsuya's mood improved, but that didn't mean that the problems that had fallen on him disappeared. On the contrary, from now on he will have to deal with them.

"...What matters most is..." In response to Miyuki's request, Tatsuya began to explain to her the current situation. "...that they could release the identity of Taurus Silver. And on this we cannot do anything."

"Erasing the memory of Edward Clark will not make sense...?"

"Right. We should think about what to do in a situation where the world has learned that I am Taurus Silver."

"You cannot accept Edward Clark's invitation?"

"I cannot. To find out Edward Clark's true purpose, we need to study the content of 'Project Dione'... But whether or not it will benefit magicians, in my current position I cannot go to the USNA."

"...And if you-yourself could, what would you choose?"

"Even if I could, I'm not going to leave you."

Miyuki turned away with a red face. Because of her recent statement "I'm no longer your sister, but a bride," she perceived the opposite sex in Tatsuya more than usual.

Tatsuya wasn't puzzled by Miyuki's different behavior. He already knew for himself that his words were rather embarrassing. You cannot help that she cannot cope with her shyness, being in a state where she's firmly aware of herself as a bride, and not as a younger sister.

But if I apologize, the awkwardness will only increase. Tatsuya decided not to look at Miyuki shivering with shame and continued to speak.

"Although I am not interested in international projects of non-military magic... Let's start by organizing the information we have."

"...I'll take a look."

The information provided by Edward Clark had a brief project plan. Tatsuya ran his eyes through the original document, and Miyuki read the translated text.

Minami placed a cup of freshly brewed tea in front of them. As if on a signal, Tatsuya and Miyuki simultaneously looked up from the electronic paper with the details of the project.

"...The so-called Dione, it does not seem to be Saturn's companion 'Dione', but the goddess of Greek myths."

"Right. Wife of Zeus, who gave birth to Aphrodite. From that version of the myth, where Aphrodite is born from sea foam."

"Zeus is Jupiter. Aphrodite is Venus. So this is... a project of a goddess who will revive Venus with Jupiter's resources?"

"I think you're right. In my opinion, this project in itself makes sense for humanity, but..."

Tatsuya again looked at the electronic paper and frowned. The project consisted of four stages.

The first stage was launching materials and finished equipment into space using Weight and Acceleration magic. It is the gravity of the Earth that becomes the biggest obstacle in the construction of large-scale structures in space. To deliver massive objects into orbit, powerful rocket engines with high thrust are required. To use extraterrestrial resources, the first equipment for construction and production must be delivered from Earth.

For this purpose, it wasn't planned to create high-thrust rockets, but with the help of Weight and Acceleration magic to help existing rockets deliver massive objects into space.

This has been done before. Before the war there was a project to create a platform in space shooting massive hypersonic shells that would become a new strategic weapon, to replace nuclear weapons. The project's bottleneck was the thrust of rocket engines. In order to be considered a strategic weapon, it was necessary to use a large number of massive shells.

It was necessary either to develop a rocket engine with high thrust capable of delivering such a mass into orbit, or launch conventional rockets many times. The cost was unacceptable, even under the pretext of replacing nuclear weapons.

Then it was thought to put two magicians in the rocket, which will use Weight and Acceleration magic. One person reduces gravity for the entire rocket, including cargo (rockets with massive projectiles and components for the construction of the platform), and the other adds to the acceleration force of the rocket engine. The US, the predecessor of the USNA, with the help of this method, in fact, was able to put into orbit a strategic military satellite that was to become a platform for launching missiles.

However this scheme was abandoned after the launch of just one strategic military satellite. All twelve magicians involved in six missile launches carrying 30 missiles and spare parts for the satellite were killed in orbit.

Not as a result of an accident. No, this definitely should be called an accident, because in addition to the magicians no more people died, neither among the pilots, nor among the technicians. The use of magic in conditions where an object weighing 600 tons for a short period of time strongly varies mass and gravity, caused the magicians magic calculation zone to overload.

Nevertheless, a new solution has already been invented on this issue. Although it has not yet been proven in terms of value, it was obvious that the experiments will prove successful. This part of the project didn't cause any concern to Tatsuya.

The second stage consisted in using magicians to extract from the asteroid belt the necessary metal resources for the project.

"Project Dione" required a large amount of nickel, and it could be obtained from "Class M asteroids". In addition to nickel, most of the metal resources needed to create space equipment could be obtained in space without using resources extracted from the earth's interior. However, extraction of resources in space with zero gravity has one significant drawback: fuel (propellant) will be spent for any, even minimal, movement.

In this project, it was proposed to solve the problem of the propellant, using Move-type magic for work in outer space. Indeed, using Move-type magic it will be possible to freely move asteroids and other small celestial bodies, using the main ship as a starting point. It would be nice if a magician who worked for a long time as a miner would join the project to work in the asteroid belt located far from the Earth.

The third stage consisted in using magic to collect hydrogen from Jupiter and transport it to Venus. It was planned to use the Sabatier reaction, in which hydrogen reacts with carbon dioxide, resulting in water and methane. This scheme will not only bring water to the dehydrated Venus, but also reduce the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere. And nickel is the catalyst for this reaction.

In orbit around Venus will be placed tethered (cabled to the surface) satellites, and on the cables will be fixed nickel specially shaped containers. The hydrogen delivered from Jupiter will be loaded into the main module of the satellite and sent along the pipe-shaped cable down into the nickel containers. Near the surface of Venus is a fairly high temperature and pressure, so the Sabatier reaction, using nickel as a catalyst, will occur without the addition of additional heat and pressure.

When a sufficient level of water is reached in the atmosphere of Venus, it will be possible to start producing oxygen with genetically modified algae.

According to the proposed scheme, magicians are placed in the orbits of Jupiter and Venus, where using a combination of Movement and Acceleration magic will control the process of sending cargo ships from Jupiter with hydrogen and the process of receiving them on Venus.

However, water (water vapor) and methane are gases that cause an even stronger greenhouse effect than carbon dioxide. As carbon dioxide decreases, the high temperature of Venus will become even higher. Therefore, from the surface of Callisto, one of the Galilean satellites, ice will be cut out, sent to Venus and discharged into its atmosphere, thereby lowering its temperature. The fourth point of the list suggested the use of magic to cut and transport these giant blocks of ice.

Since the combination of concentrated sulfuric acid and ice works as a cryogenic agent, it is expected that the atmosphere of Venus will be effectively cooled when a large amount of ice is thrown into it. It was assumed that this would be sufficient to complete the first stage for terraforming the atmosphere of Venus, even if the production of water according to Sabatier's reaction does not go with the expected efficiency.

However, these schemes of the third and fourth stages required that magicians live in the orbits of Jupiter and Venus. In order to continuously send cargo ships and ice blocks for a long time while overcoming the gravity of Jupiter, a considerable number of magicians would be required. Venus also required the presence of many magicians, since tethered satellites for effective work would not be 1-2, but many more. Magicians sent to Jupiter and Venus will not be able to return to Earth for many months, or even years. This also involved magicians sent as space miners in the second stage.

"I knew it was..."

"Is there something wrong?"

Still frowning, Tatsuya nodded at Miyuki's question.

"Maybe I'm exaggerating. More precisely, I would prefer for it to be so... But it seems to me that the goal of this project is the expulsion of magicians from the Earth, who are a threat to people."

"Expelling them... into space?"

There was no sense of danger in Miyuki's voice. It seems that she has not yet really understood the situation.

Perhaps it was inevitable. As a result of social upheavals caused by global cooling, and the subsequent war, the development of space technologies has stopped, and at the moment was at the same level. And manned space flights ceased to be carried out from the first half of the 21st century.

Even representatives of the elite profession of the "astronaut" stopped flying into space. Therefore, the parts about sending magicians to space, undoubtedly, was difficult to immediately grasp.

"Officially it will be the exploration of the cosmos. But the magicians involved in this project will not be able to return to Earth for a very long time. Even if they return due to exhaustion, they will be sent back again as soon as their condition improves."

Tatsuya spoke without taking his eyes off the electronic paper, and without looking up.

"Devote your whole life to exploring the cosmos. I think this is a wonderful way of life. But I..."

Tatsuya plunged deep into his thoughts, never looking at Miyuki.

◊ ◊ ◊

The next morning (Monday). Class 3A.

There was already more than half, but less than 2/3 of the students in the room. Miyuki had not yet appeared in the class.

Pupils in the classroom, gathered in groups of friends, chatted about different things. In this sense, high school students of magic were the most ordinary high school students.

Students who discuss the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition were very few. Not because they didn't care, but because they tried to avoid the feelings associated with it. After all, the user of the problematic magic "Active Air Mine" was present in this class, and class A students understood well that Tatsuya's helped to achieve victory last year and the year before last. In this class there were many participants in those competitions, so nobody wanted to choose this topic for discussion.

But this does not mean that they had nothing to talk about instead of this. Many students discussed yesterday's news about the USNA space exploration project.

Honoka and Shizuku were no exception.

"Shizuku, is that really true?"

"Is what true?"

"Well... The fact that Taurus Silver is really a high school student from Japan."

Like Honoka, interest in Taurus Silver's real identity was very high among high school students.

And suddenly it turns out that the ingenious engineer of magic hiding his identity is in fact the same as they are a high school student.

"You cannot immediately say that this is a lie. For example, there is Kichijouji-kun."

In the field related to the study of magic, there were no people who didn't know the famous pioneer of the "Cardinal Code", a third-grade student from Third High, Kichijouji Shinkuro. He made his discovery when he was only 13 years old. But since that time he had not had any special achievements, and the name of Kichijouji Shinkuro couldn't even get close to the name of Taurus Silver, who created flight magic, which was the solution to one of the "Three Great Puzzles of Magic."

Shizuku's theory was that having Kichijouji Shinkuro from Third High as an example, we can say that there isn't anything strange about Taurus Silver being high school student.

"Listen, Shizuku..."

They were old friends. Shizuku understood that Honoka herself couldn't say this, and decided to help her.

"What?"

Therefore, Shizuku decided to not hesitate to start talking to Honoka.

"Taurus Silver... this is Tatsuya-san?"

"It is a possibility."

It was an instant response. Honoka stared at her with wide-open eyes.

"What happened?"

"...I didn't expect to get such a quick response ..."

"It's just that I also thought so recently."

Shizuku again gave an immediate response.

"Do you mean that you thought the same when you heard that Taurus Silver is a high school student?"

"Yeah."

Shizuku nodded, completely unconcerned, after which she thought that only replying with that would be too impolite, and so with a little delay added a short explanation.

"If Taurus Silver is a Japanese high school student, then I can only think it would be Tatsuya-san."

"...Indeed, it looks like you're right."

Honoka made a pensive face.

"So..., ...!"

But Honoka couldn't finish speaking. When she saw Miyuki entering the class, she immediately closed her mouth.

"Good morning."

"Good morning Miyuki."

Shizuku responded first to Miyuki's morning greeting.

"Good morning Miyuki."

Honoka followed her example. She was unable to voice her fear that Tatsuya would leave for America before Miyuki entered.

◇ ◇ ◇

Tatsuya slipped into his class at the very last moment before the beginning of the lesson. However, after reading the message that came to the student terminal, he had to get up right after he sat down.

"Tatsuya-san, what happened?"

Mizuki, sitting next to Tatsuya as usual once he got back, asked with suspicion in her voice. At this school there was no such thing as changing places when going to the next grade.

"I was called to the teacher's room. So I went."

Mizuki's face darkened. In addition to Mizuki, other classmates who also heard Tatsuya's response followed him with uneasy glances.

It's good that I didn't tell the truth, Tatsuya thought, looking at that reaction. Because in fact he was summoned not to the teacher's room but to the principle's office.

In the office of the principle three people waited for Tatsuya: the director Momoyama, the vice principle Yaosaka, and the teacher from class 3E, Jennifer Smith.

Momoyama was sitting at a large desk, Yaosaka was standing at the side of the table, and Jennifer was standing diagonally behind Yaosaka.

"I'll get straight to the point. There is one thing that I want to confirm."

When Tatsuya stood in front of the table, Momoyama spoke, skipping the introduction.

"Shiba Tatsuya-kun. Are you Taurus Silver?"

"...How did you decide this?"

Instead of answering Momoyama's question, Tatsuya answered the question with a question.

Although this was unthinkably rude behavior for the relationship between the student and the principle, Momoyama didn't show that this affected his mood. This attitude was because he had previously assumed that Tatsuya would not respond.

"Through the American embassy, I received a letter from the NSA, the National Security Agency of the USNA. Yesterday an embassy employee brought it straight to my house."

Momoyama wasn't only the director of First High, but also the universally recognized authority of magical education. As a civilian, he wasn't engaged in diplomacy. It was rather unusual that an embassy employee brought a letter of diplomatic content to a simple civilian.

But Tatsuya didn't move his eyebrows when he heard this. Momoyama was also calm about the impudent behavior of the 18-year-old boy.

The views of Tatsuya and Momoyama collided with each other. Figuratively speaking, it wasn't throwing sparks in looks, but pressure on each other. Vice principle Yaosaka who was looking at the side of this confrontation between two people, had a pale face.

"Here is the letter."

Momoyama took out a white envelope from the drawer of the table and laid it on the table.

"Here is written the request "To make sure that Taurus Silver, Mr. Tatsuya Shiba was able to take part in Project Dione." The National Security Agency of the USNA has come to the conclusion that you are Taurus Silver, and requests your participation in the project."

"Principle. I'm still a high school student at this school. I'm not going to interrupt my studies halfway."

Tatsuya didn't answer the question "Are you Taurus Silver?". He deliberately ignored this part, and fundamentally refused to participate in the project, or rather rejected it.

"A pupil of our school is invited to an international magical project. I believe that you are honored."

Momoyama broke off for a moment and looked at Tatsuya with a particularly strong gleam in his eyes.

"And not only me. The Director of the National Magic University is of the same opinion. If you take part in the NSA project, you will be counted as graduated from school and granted the right to enter the National Magic University. If you cannot attend the University due to the employment in the project, then during the period of participation in the project you will receive the marks automatically, and if participation in the project reaches four years, then you will automatically receive a diploma."

"Is this an official decision?"

"It's not officially decided yet, but I guarantee you this with my name and status."

Before Tatsuya could answer, Momoyama turned to Jennifer.

"Smith-sensei. Shiba-kun after all already has the knowledge and skills sufficient for the graduation of our school, is that correct?"

"It is as you say."

Jennifer replied in a reluctant tone.

"Even last year's "Stellar Furnace" experiment is enough to evaluate Shiba-kun as sineibe who has already reached the level of a graduate of the National Magic University."

"Understood."

Momoyama nodded to Jennifer and looked again at Tatsuya.

"Shiba-kun. Do you yourself not think that you're wasting your time here, the level of which is much lower than yours?"

"I don't consider education at this school useless."

"Don't be modest."

Momoyama didn't find Tatsuya's words insincere.

"I understand that you cannot make a decision so quickly. Fortunately, the NSA didn't set a specific deadline for an answer. Shiba-kun, from now on you are released from school, but in return, think it over."

"...Does this mean that you are suspending me from classes?"

Tatsuya asked Momoyama in a deliberately calm tone.

"It's not punishment. You can as before use school equipment at your discretion. Even if you don't attend classes, it will be as if you attended including practical classes. Periodic tests and practicals too are not necessary. All of them will be counted as passed with an A score."

Momoyama spoke not particularly demanding gratitude, but in a simple indifferent tone.

"I understand. Give me time to think, please."

Thus, pretending that he cannot give an answer, Tatsuya was able to earn some time.

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Returning from the director's office, Tatsuya began to study with such a face, as if nothing had happened. The last lesson before dinner was practical exams, but Jennifer didn't look at him with a suspicious glance, but also made a face as if nothing had happened.

The first actions, other than the usual ones, he took were only after class during the beginning of the school council.

"Miyuki, I need to talk to you about something."

"Understood. Will it be ok here?"

"Yes. I want the others to hear too."

At Miyuki's question, meaning whether they need to move to another place, Tatsuya replied that it is also okay. Miyuki was puzzled, not understanding what Tatsuya wanted to do, so she decided to listen first to what he would say. She rose from the desk of the president of the Student Council and went to the discussion table.

Tatsuya sat opposite Miyuki. Honoka, Izumi and Shiina, sitting in their seats, turned to the side of the table, and Minami stood diagonally behind Miyuki.

Pixie got up from her chair in the corner of the room and brought tea for those who sat at the table. Tatsuya could clearly see from his place that Minami was upset by this, although her expression didn't change at all.

"So, Tatsuya-sama, what did you want to talk about?" Waiting for Pixie to step back from the table, Miyuki began. All present strained their ears to not miss Tatsuya's answer.

"This morning I was summoned to the director's office, where they informed me that I had been released from school."

"Why!?" Miyuki stood up and leaned over the table, leaning on it with her hands.

Not just Miyuki. Honoka also jumped up from her chair.

"The reason I will explain at home. I was told that this isn't a suspension or a ban on going to school. The truth is that they don't seem to want me to go to school for a while."

"...The reason for suspension?"

Miyuki sat back down. With great effort to calm down, she asked to continue the story.

"That's right."

"...Is it because of the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition?" Izumi inserted her own question.

"This isn't a direct reason, but it could be part of it."

"Then the direct reason, is really..."

From the still standing Honoka, words broke out that couldn't be understood, it was a question or a conversation with herself. Honoka thought "Since Tatsuya-san is Taurus Silver, he was invited to the American project?". This was absolutely the right answer, but when Tatsuya looked at her with a glance inviting her to continue talking, she waved her head with the words "No, nothing" without asking anything. Tatsuya decided not to press on Honoka and turned back to Miyuki.

"Perhaps, on this issue, the "family" will also be able to tell us something."

Not only Miyuki and Minami, but also Honoka, Izumi and Shiina realized that when he mentioned the "family", he meant the Yotsuba family.

"I cannot deny the possibility that I will not be able to attend school for a while. Therefore, I want to leave the position of a member of the Student Council."

The Student Council room was covered by a veil of silence.

Miyuki was silent, Tatsuya was waiting for her answer.

Izumi looked silently at Miyuki, and Honoka on Tatsuya.

Shiina flicked her eyes from Miyuki to Tatsuya and back, and Minami stood with her eyes on the floor.

To replace the cooled tea, Pixie came over to pick up the cups. Minami, quickly figuring out, served a new tea for Tatsuya and Miyuki. Then she came back behind Miyuki with a satisfied smile.

"...I understand." At last, breaking the silence with pain in her voice, Miyuki squeezed out the answer. "But if you stop being a member of the Student Council, you cannot wear a CAD at school. I believe that even at least nominally, it's better to remain a member of the school council."

"But then it will not make any sense."

"No one will complain."

Miyuki talked about abuse for personal purposes. Tatsuya at first was going to reproach her. However, seeing the tragic sight of Miyuki, ready to cry at any time he abandoned this idea.

"...I understand. We'll do it like you said."

In fact, the order in the school for Tatsuya was absolutely irrelevant.

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They managed to sort things out with the Student Council, but Tatsuya and Miyuki had other problems that still had to be solved.

"Both of you, sorry for the late call."

It was impossible to keep silent to Maya about the letter received by principle Momoyama from the National Security Agency of the USNA. Picking the most suitable time, Tatsuya called the main house.

"It's okay. Do you've important business?"

Looking at the expression on Maya's face, Tatsuya felt slight discomfort. Because it seemed to him that Maya isn't pretending, but really does not know what business he called about. Trying to be much stronger than usual, so that thoughts don't affect the expression on the face, Tatsuya answered Maya's question.

"Yes. I think this is a serious situation."

Having said this as an introduction, Tatsuya continued before Maya said anything.

"Principle Momoyama of First High, vice principle Yaosaka, and a teacher named Jennifer Smith discovered the identity of Taurus Silver.

It seems that it was written in a document sent to principle Momoyama from the National Security Agency of the USNA through the American embassy."

"....Does this apply to that recent 'project'?"

Maya answered with a slight delay. It also proved that this information was unexpected for her.

"That's right."

"Tatsuya-san, you didn't... confirm it, did you?"

To the question "Are you Taurus Silver?" Tatsuya cannot just answer "True." Maya realized this in the middle of her question.

"No. However, it still does not make a difference."

Even if Tatsuya denies it, both Momoyama and Yaosaka will still believe the NSA. And not only them. Many people who know Tatsuya after hearing the statement that "the real personality of Taurus Silver is Shiba Tatsuya," immediately admit that this is true. Not because the NSA is an institution of the American government, but because by now, Tatsuya has already shown too many abilities that point to this.

"Really... Although this is much earlier than planned, we will have to give up hiding the identity of Taurus Silver."

Maya on the videophone's screen took a pensive look. Tatsuya didn't say anything and patiently waited for her to speak.

"...By the way, did Momoyama-sensei say anything else?"

Tatsuya told all about the conditions offered to him by Momoyama.

"Momoyama-sensei seems to be doing this to avoid interference by politicians and the media in the affairs of the school administration regarding the issue of my position."

"I also think so."

Maya's assumptions about Momoyama's motives coincided with Tatsuya's assumptions.

"I see... Tatsuya-san, it's best for you not to visit First High for a while."

"Do you want to keep me under house arrest at the main house?"

After the Yokohama incident, for using Material Burst, Tatsuya already received direct instructions from Maya to stay in the main house for a while.

Tatsuya asked, thinking that this time would be the same, but Maya shook her head on the screen.

"I would not say that this is 'house arrest'. Since after all tomorrow, annoying noise will begin to increase around you? I don't think that such things will violate your judgment, but is it not annoying? Therefore, I think to cool the public's fervor, you need to pretend that you are punished with house arrest."

Tatsuya couldn't just take and honestly believe Maya's words. He felt that behind these words something was hidden, although he couldn't say what exactly.

But Tatsuya couldn't disagree with the opinion that the public needed time to cool down, so he nodded with the words "I completely agree."

"Escape", contrary to the negative image of this word, was often an effective way of solving problems. And "patience", on the contrary, tended to lead to such concepts as "surrender," "submit," "acquiesce." And in the current case too, rather than clinging to First High, it is better to temporarily escape to wait for a change in the situation.

But for this...

"I don't mean that you need to start right away tomorrow. Since you and Miyuki-san will be separated for a while, then you need to make some preparations."

This is exactly what Tatsuya was thinking now. Only he was released from school, and Miyuki couldn't miss school with him.

If it will be a short period, less than a week, this has happened more than once.

However, this time there was a chance that this could drag on for a month or more. Although he could "watch" her from afar, but he couldn't stop worrying that Miyuki and Minami would be left alone in this house.

Maya on the screen looked at Miyuki standing next to Tatsuya, then diagonally behind her from Minami, then looked back at Tatsuya.

"We'll leave the security in the school to Minami-chan. Although Tatsuya-san may be worried..."

Looking directly at the camera, Tatsuya shook his head.

"No. I realize that Minami's abilities are impeccable."

Minami's cheeks were slightly pink. Knowing that Tatsuya never throws words into the wind, she was greatly encouraged by the trust shown to her.

"I see. Then, Minami-chan, I rely on you."

"Leave it to me, madam." Inspired by Minami. Maya nodded in satisfaction to Minami from the videophone screen.

"For the road to school and back we will provide additional people. It's not that I doubt the abilities of Minami-chan..."

"I understand." Minami nodded with a submissive face. She didn't have so much self-confidence to say "I'm enough alone."

"The problem is at night. When there are only two of you, if you're attacked during sleep, there is no guarantee that you will not make a mistake."

Neither Tatsuya, Miyuki, nor Minami had any objections to Maya's words. Even if they had thoughts like "There's nothing to worry about," it was silly to provoke Maya with such useless persistence. All three understood this perfectly.

"Miyuki-san."

"Yes."

"Though it's troublesome, but, I wonder, could you move to Chofu?"

Maya spoke with Miyuki, because these were measures for her.

"Speaking about Chofu, do you mean that building?"

"Indeed."

Answering Miyuki's question, Maya nodded with a smile.

"This building was built as the headquarters of the Yotsuba family in the metropolitan area, so I planned that Miyuki would move there in the near future. Although the schedule has greatly accelerated, there is now a good opportunity. Move next Sunday. I will organize the necessary preparatory activities."

Miyuki thought that everything was happening too quickly, but replied to Maya in an obedient tone.

"I understand."

Maya knew that Miyuki would not mind, so she immediately went on to the following instructions.

"Tatsuya-san, when you finish the move, go to the villa in Izu."

"Is there a Yotsuba base in Izu?"

The first thing that Tatsuya thought was "is it normal that it will not be the main house?". But being afraid to "wake up famously", he didn't voice this question. Instead, Tatsuya asked what is in Izu.

"Ara, I thought Tatsuya-san would know?"

Despite the fact that Maya deliberately showed surprise, Tatsuya didn't begin to voice the idea that came to his mind, but silently waited for the continuation of her words.

"There is a villa in Chofu that your mother used for rest, isn't there?"

"Have you not got rid of it yet?"

"I didn't get rid of it. Because it was your mother's favorite villa."

Tatsuya didn't think that someone in Yotsuba's family appreciates such feelings. But he immediately rethought it.

For the sake of one girl, they declared war on a whole country, and took revenge at the cost of half the family's lives. In a family like Yotsuba, the sentimentality, in which personal memories are carefully preserved, was important (or, I might say, appropriate).

"We will arrange for everything to be transported on Sunday. We will organize the research equipment on site so that you can work."

(What preparations have already been made if they can install workstations and equipment for customization in just a week? Maybe this villa was actually an external research base?)

Such thoughts came to Tatsuya's mind, but he doubted whether they should be voiced.

"We will do as you say."

Showing obedience, Tatsuya bowed to the image of Maya on the display.

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When she finished her telephone conversation with Tatsuya, Maya finished her cup of tea with a pleased face, after which the smile disappeared.

She held out a cup to bring back her table. However, before the cup touched the saucer, she threw it into the air.

Immediately after this, the room was covered by "Night".

It wasn't darkness. It was the night sky on which the stars shine. And the stars fell.

Falling stars from all directions rushed towards the tea cup.

The night was gone, room lighting returned, and the splinters of the cup fell to the floor.

"Someone, take it away." There was an unruffled voice from behind Maya. With the words "Yes, immediately", a maid appeared in maid's clothes, with a broom and a shovel in her hands. Quickly removing the fragments of the cup, the maid retired from the room.

As soon as she closed the door behind her, Hayama moved into Maya's field of vision.

"Madam, can I get you some more tea?"

"No, I don't need it anymore."

In Maya's voice, there was no longer the temper that was before the use of "Meteor Shower."

"This time the USNA beat us."

"...It looks like that." With reluctance in her voice, Maya answered Hayama's words.

"As Hayama-san said, it seems that I relied too much on Hliðskjálf. It's a pity that the system isn't available at this time."

Maya twisted her lips in a mockery of herself.

"No, madam. I believe that in this case we would not be able to prevent this, even if we knew in advance what they are planning. Our hands will not reach the state institution of the USNA."

"...are we not able to kill Edward Clark?"

"There's no point in that."

"...I see. I should stop talking insincerely and pretend to be strong?"

Even if it was possible, she would not have given the kill order. She admitted this when Hayama pointed it out to her.

"Madame. My humble opinion is that you should give special emphasis to disabling Hliðskjálf at such a time."

Hearing Hayama's remark, Maya slightly rounded her eyes.

"That is, there is some connection between Edward Clark and Hliðskjálf?"

"Hliðskjálf is a system of hacking the global message interception system Echelon III. One should take into account the possibility that the staff of the National Security Agency of the United States of America is involved."

"...Right. Although this should not be a factor having a direct impact on the situation, I will bear this in mind."

Hayama respectfully said this to Maya.

Chapter 4

The next morning. After their fight, in which they gave their best as never before, Tatsuya asked Yakumo for a respite.

"I don't mind. You are not my disciple, so you don't need to worry about such formalities. You can stop at any moment and at any time you can call me to fight if I'm free, of course."

"Thank you very much, Master."

Although he was just told that he wasn't a student, Tatsuya still said "master." Yakumo didn't rebuke or correct him. The usual grin on his face, was there too.

"However, I want to ask about the situation. As I thought, the reason is the US space exploration project?"

Yakumo's expression was full of curiosity. Here Tatsuya had to grin, but he was able to suppress the urge before his lips began to bend. The situation he faced was serious. When he thought about it, he didn't laugh.

"That is a direct reason. For some time, I will be sent under 'house arrest' at a villa in Izu."

Although Maya said that this isn't true, Tatsuya still felt this as a house arrest. Continuing, Tatsuya told about moving to Chofu.

"I see. It will be far away from here."

"This isn't an insurmountable distance. If you don't mind, I'd like to continue training after finishing house arrest."

"Of course I don't mind. Hmm..." After an immediate answer, Yakumo brought his hand to his chin and chuckled slightly.

"By the way, Tatsuya-kun, aren't you going to worry about Miyuki-kun? Izu and Chofu are not at one step from each other, you cannot move immediately."

"It would be a lie if I say that I will not worry, but Miyuki should not miss school."

"Even if the Yotsuba family organizes her protection, there will not be anyone who compares to your abilities with you. It will take some time to solve this problem... So I will also look after it."

"I will be much calmer if you do this... But why did you decide to do this?"

Tatsuya isn't a disciple of Yakumo. He himself said it recently. If the relationship between Tatsuya and Yakumo does not even reach the connection between teacher and student, the relationship between Yakumo and Miyuki does not go beyond mere acquaintance.

However, he immediately regretted thinking that it wasn't worth asking. Before Yakumo began to answer Tatsuya's question, the corner of his mouth curved upward, as if saying "I've been waiting for it."

"Because I don't want to die yet."

"...What do you mean?"

"If God forbid something happened with Miyuki-kun, you will destroy the whole world whole world? I'm not sure that I can survive in the flame of nuclear fission."

Tatsuya didn't know what to say. He could only keep silent, clench his teeth, and look bitter.

If something bad happens with Miyuki. And if this time he does not have time.

He didn't have the confidence that he would not do anything with the world that took Miyuki from him.

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On this day, Tatsuya didn't show up in the classroom.

He came to school. But he stayed in the library from the early morning, without even stopping for lunch. He left the library and met with Miyuki only when it was time to go home.

Tatsuya's friends also refrained from approaching him. Even Erika didn't intervene in their trip home. These two were accompanied only by Minami walking behind them.

The next day the situation didn't change.

And the day after that, too.

"Something bad is coming, is it not?"

Thursday, after school. 30 minutes before the closing of the cafe. This voice has sounded from someone from a group of people in this cafe.

"It's not good... are you talking about Tatsuya?"

When asked by Mikihiko, Erika gave him a look in which it was read: "Of course, what a stupid question?".

"Because of the exemption he does not have problems?"

"Yes... He said that the director personally freed him from his studies."

Honoka, who joined them after the end of the Student Council, answered Leo's question.

"And the truth is, it isn't good."

"Err? Shizuku-san, what is it?"

Mizuki bowed her head inquisitively, hearing the words of Shizuku, who apparently simply ignored the general flow of discussion.

"Tatsuya-san does not need to go to school anymore."

Shizuku answered directly. Without unnecessary embellishments, she clearly pointed out the situation. Mizuki widened her eyes and covered her mouth with both hands. Honoka lowered her eyes sadly.

"...That is, Shiba-senpai will not come to school anymore?"

Not only third-grade students were gathered here. Kasumi, forced to come for as company with Izumi, and feeling uncomfortable here, dared to voice something that no one else would have said.

"I think he will return when the situation calms down."

"B-true!"

Honoka supported the responding Shizuku. Her voice sounded as if she was clinging to the last hope.

"But will this situation improve?"

Erika's words spoken with anxiety in her voice, looked like a burning fire. Or, it can be said, on a block of ice, because the face of Honoka froze.

"Erika! Don't say that!" said Mikihiko. It wasn't a loud scream that would have been heard by other groups of people, but using other words, besides "shouting at someone" would be difficult.

"Mikihiko, calm down." The one who tried to ease Mikihiko was Leo, not Erika. "Erika didn't say anything wrong. I also cannot imagine that the current situation will improve within a month or two."

"I understand that! But you can at least not say it out loud!"

"Because it shocked Mizuki and Mitsui? I think you should not do this."

"...Are you saying that you don't care if Tatsuya-kun does not appear in school anymore?"

Leo tried to protect Erika. But it was Erika who was the one who stopped him.

"I care. Even if Tatsuya leaves school, we will not cease to be his friends." Erika silently slapped her eyes. Honoka and Mizuki had similar expressions.

"...In such situations, you are indeed completely unbearable." Erika muttered in an angry voice. "Even a simple fool can sometimes say well."

"Hey... is that praise or insulting?"

Narrowing his eyes, Leo stared at Erika.

"Who knows~. I just sounded the facts."

However, Erika, showing that she'sn't up to this matter, turned away in a defiantly daring manner.

"This girl..."

"Stop! Leo, you, too, calm down." Feeling signs of impending anxiety, Mikihiko stopped Leo.

"It seems to me that the friendship of Saijou-senpai is truly worthy of respect." Picking up at the right time, Izumi wedged into Erika deadlocked conversation. "I would not want Shiba-sempai to drop out of school either."

With a look of surprise on her face, Kasumi stared at Izumi. Even cowering in the environment of the sempai, Shiina made a puzzled face.

But they both made a mistake.

"If Shiba-senpai leaves school, then Miyuki-senpai will grieve ..." "

Kasumi whispered to herself: "I thought so...".

"It's clear! Then everything is in order."

"Er, what's clear?"

Shizuku banged her fist in the palm of her hand, as if she had made some discovery, and Honoka asked her to tell more.

"If Tatsuya-san is expelled, then Miyuki will also leave school."

Hearing Shizuku's suggestion, Izumi turned pale.

"But Tatsuya-san will not allow Miyuki to drop out of school."

The complexion of Izumi immediately returned to normal.

"Right! If this is for the sake of Miyuki-sempai..."

"Then Tatsuya-san will not leave school either." Shizuku finished for Izumi.

"...But if he does, then in the current situation without him something can happen?"

In the approaching atmosphere of the "happy ending" Saburo's timid words were heard. The mood at the table fell again below ground.

Saburo shrank under the strict look of Shiina, in which "what are you talking about!?" was read.

For some time they sat in awkward silence, the atmosphere gradually worsened, and suddenly the cafe monitor switched to news.

After listening to some of the news Leo muttered. "Hey-hey... are they serious?"

Although there were still other groups of people in the cafe, apart from them, there were no complaints from anyone. Most likely, everyone thought the same way he did.

The news was broadcast from Moscow.

The screen showed a leading scientist of the Academy of Sciences of the New Soviet Union, who was also the officially recognized state Strategic Class Magician, one of the "Thirteen Apostles", Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazzoff.

The news release showed an interview with him.

"Dr. Bezobrazzoff, please tell us, what prompted you to participate in the American 'Project Dione'?"

"As the Secretary-General said earlier, I also believe that the terraforming of Venus is important beyond conflicts between states. For more than a century, mankind has been afraid of the problem of overpopulation. In the near future, a catastrophe between all of humanity may begin, which will lead to the weakening of mankind. Expansion of the habitable zone is the only solution to this problem that awaits mankind in the future."

"That's why the doctor decided to actively participate in this project?"

"I did this because a technology called "Magic", instead of being used in battles between people, should be used to open the way for mankind in the future."

"If the project is really started, then the situation may arise that the doctor will be forced to leave our country in order to work in America. Did the government agree to this? If the doctor who is a Strategic Class Magician leaves the country for a long time, there may be concern about the defense of the country."

"Our peace-loving government promised full cooperation with the project for the development of Venus, even if it leads to a decrease in defense capabilities.

However, there is one delicate problem: where to place the research base. And as I understand, this location has not yet been determined."

"Do you mean that there is even such an opportunity that the research base will be located not in America, but in our country, in the New Soviet Union?"

"Of course, this is also possible. But my personal opinion is that, most likely the new base will be deployed in a neutral territory, or in a place where there is no outside political control."

"So you can expect significant conflicts already at the stage of choosing the location of the project base?"

"This is a grandiose project that has no analogues in the history of mankind. In addition to the location of the main base, many more problems can be expected. But we believe that we can reasonably overcome all this. I would like, in addition to the already announced consent to participate in the project of Lord William MacLeod and Mr. Maximilian, other people joining the project including Herr Rosen, as well as the young man from Japan, known as Taurus Silver. If we join forces, we will be able to overcome all difficulties on the way to the future of mankind."

"Dr. Bezobrazzoff, thank you very much for your time."

Then the news release switched to a detailed review of the "Project Dione". The views of schoolchildren, glued to the screen, finally broke away from him.

"...What is this 'our peace-loving government'? Hell, he's mocking me." Erika elegantly spit out the words. At the heart of her words were thoughts about the incident with the invasion of Sado 5 years ago. Simultaneously with the invasion of the Great Asian Alliance in Okinawa, unidentified armed forces landed in Sado. The attack was repulsed by an army of volunteers gathered by the Ichijo family, after which a hypothesis was put forward that detachments of the New Soviet Union were the enemy.

The New Soviet Union didn't admit that it was their work. But among the Japanese, few people believe that the New Soviet Union is innocent. Given this incident, Erika's reaction to the phrase about the "peace-loving government of the New Soviet Union" didn't seem strange to anyone.

"Regardless of the atrocities of the government of the New Soviet Union in the past, we must admit that Dr. Bezobrazzoff's speech was quite convincing."

Mikihiko didn't think Erika was right either. However, he decided to focus on the fact that the current problems should be treated separately from the incidents of the past.

"A Strategic Class Magician will leave his country to take part in non-military activities... Very bold, isn't it?"

"As Yoshida-senpai said, these words were for persuasiveness. The fact that the New Soviet Union agreed to participate, showing that it is serious about the peaceful use of magic."

After Kasumi expressed her thoughts, Izumi also expressed her own, turned out to be rather unfriendly.

"Do you think that he's pretending?" Leo asked with a wry smile. However, he quickly removed the smirk and frowned. "Bezobrazzoff's participation in the American project from the New Soviet Union is a fact. I don't know how seriously he will participate, but for America the New Soviet Union is a hostile country. Because they even announced cooperation, Japan, as an ally, will now find it difficult to refuse, will it not?"

"...And that's the truth.

"The Magic Association will want Taurus Silver to announce his participation... Voluntarily."

Shizuku unconditionally agreed with Leo's guess, and behind her Mikihiko developed this idea.

"I wonder if everything is all right with Tatsuya-san..."

Although Honoka muttered to herself, it was quite loud. The first years Shiina and Saburou, who had no connection in their minds between Tatsuya and Taurus Silver, without understanding the meaning of Honoka's words, exchanged glances with an inquiring expression.

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Tatsuya, Miyuki and Minami, who left the school before their friends, looked at this news recording.

"Is this really Bezobrazzoff from the Thirteen Apostles?" Was the first thing Miyuki asked after watching the news.

Strategic Class Magicians hid their personal data to avoid attacks. A Strategic Class Magician openly appearing on TV disagreed with Miyuki's common sense.

"It can be a front man."

Tatsuya didn't feel wrong in the fact that in this situation, Bezobrazzoff appeared before the media. But he also couldn't fully trust the information that came from the New Soviet Union.

"But whether real or fake, this is not the biggest problem at the moment."

"What do you mean?"

Tatsuya looked into the eyes of Miyuki, looked back at the screen and turned on the recording of the interview of Bezobrazzoff from the very beginning.

"It is important that the New Soviet Union demonstrated its position in cooperation with the USNA plan."

Steadily staring at the subtitles of the interview, Tatsuya continued with a voice as if trying to convince himself.

"The Great Asian Alliance and Indo-Persia are strong states, but the axis of world power is still the American-Soviet confrontation.

The center on which the modern world community is focused is the conflict between the New Soviet Union that returned after the Third World War and slowly but surely is increasing its national power vs the United States."

"Yes. I understand this part."

The basic international structure was part of the secondary school curriculum. An excellent student like Miyuki had no gaps in the subjects of the general education course.

"For the sake of "Project Dione" the New Soviet Union made an exception in the struggle for power of the international community. At this stage, it does not really matter if the New Soviet Union really contributes to the project. Since such a hostile country as the New Soviet Union announced its cooperation, the friendly countries will not be able to ignore Project Dione."

Tatsuya came exactly to the same conclusion as Leo and Mikihiko.

"...Perhaps the New Soviet Union and the USNA are in collusion in this matter."

Perhaps the reason that his guess was one step behind the truth wasn't a problem of the intellect, but a problem of character.

"But what is the goal of uniting the efforts of the United States and the New Soviet Union?" Miyuki asked, bowing her head. She didn't show a negative reaction to Tatsuya's own guess. If common sense and Tatsuya's opinion are put on the scales, then it was obvious to Miyuki that the second would outweigh the first.

"Even by the strength of the conventional army, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the USNA and the New Soviet Union are far superior to all other countries. The Great Asian Alliance has not yet recovered from the damage received in the fall of the year before, so it is temporarily forced to take the position of the catch-up."

Although Tatsuya himself was the one who caused this damage to the fleet of the Great Asian Alliance, he said that as if it did not concern him.

"Magic is more of an individual power, and the strength of a state is an ordinary military force supported by political power and economic power. Economic power begins to talk about itself in situations where nuclear weapons are actually prohibited. Countries with a weak economy, including Japan, cannot resist the USNA and the New Soviet Union by an ordinary army."

"...Do you think that the economic scale of Japan is so small?"

"The economic potential that can be invested in the creation of weapons is far behind USNA and New Soviet Union."

Tatsuya softly refuted Miyuki's involuntarily expressed doubt.

"The world still retains such a shaky form that many small countries haven't yet been absorbed by the strongest countries, only because of the presence of a factor like magic. In the current situation, small countries cannot resist strong countries without magic. In this sense, we cannot unequivocally deny the military application of magic..."

Tatsuya aspired to the non-military use of magic. His goal was to free the magicians from the role of being part of the military system. Tatsuya was forced to admit that he agreed with the fact that magic weapons make sense.

"...In other words, the purpose of the USNA and New Soviet Union is to weaken the magical military potential of other countries by collecting the strongest magicians in the project?"

Although not yet perfect, she began to understand what is now troubling Tatsuya. Miyuki asked her question, ignoring his last sentence.

"...If you think about it, it all adds up." Briefly answering, Tatsuya again plunged into his thoughts.

In the dialogue with Miyuki, he realized the weakness of his plan. It was a problem he had not realized before.

Free magicians from fate to be a living weapon. In this basic concept, there were no errors. He couldn't agree with the reality in which magicians are spent to use as weapons.

But what happens if in the military area qualified magicians no longer suffice because of the active promotion of the use of magic in the economy? What happens if cheap and powerful magic weapons disappear?

Small countries cannot resist large and strong countries anymore?

There will come a time when big countries will swallow up everything small, and a handful of large countries will rule the world.

Tatsuya could only imagine a future in which the whole world will again be drawn into the quagmire of regional conflicts.

"So, you still need some kind of deterrent...?"

He himself was the owner of an absolute weapon of mass destruction. In whatever direction the future moves, he will inevitably bear notoriety. Perhaps, it was on that evening that Tatsuya made this decision.

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When this top-secret transatlantic communication session was conducted, guarded by the Echelon III subsystem, it was late at night in Japan.

"Lord MacLeod we haven't seen each other for a long time. The last time we talked this way was about 5 years ago, if I remember correctly."

When the speakers appeared on each others monitors, Bezobrazzoff spoke first.

"It seems like that. Long time no see, Dr. Bezobrazzoff. However, I think I mentioned this before, but I'm not a 'lord.' I was only made a knight."

Responding to Bezobrazzoff's greeting, MacLeod spoke in such an indifferent tone that it wasn't clear, he was serious, stubborn or joking.

"Sir William. Should you speak so hard? Since this isn't an official conversation, there are no problems with the title of "Lord MacLeod", right?"

Clark seems to have taken it as a joke. He slightly rebuked MacLeod. He wasn't going to seriously criticize MacLeod, he was only concerned with the fact that Bezobrazzoff didn't break the long-awaited conversation, spoiling the general mood.

But Bezobrazzoff himself reacted to Clark's concern.

"Thank you very much for your concern, Dr. Clark. I believe this is our first conversation?"

"That's right. Glad to meet you, Dr. Bezobrazzoff. My name is Edward Clark."

The greetings of these three have ended.

"Dr. Clark, I'm sorry to move right away, but is it true what you said earlier? The fact that the Strategic Class Magician who used the "Great Bomb" is Taurus Silver, and Taurus Silver's true personality is a Japanese high school student." Bezobrazzoff asked Edward Clark impatiently.

"That is correct. The official name of the "Great Bomb" in Japan is "Material Burst". It seems that this is the magic of direct conversion of mass into energy."

"Direct conversion...?"

"And really, very interesting. But right now there is no point in discussing this system, is it?"

MacLeod tried to politely hold back Bezobrazzoff, who showed strong interest.

"...That's right. There is no point in discussing the hypothesis when there is absolutely no data on it."

Bezobrazzoff relatively easily retreated by accepting MacLeod's proposal.

"It is supposed that "Material Burst", like the doctors "Tuman Bomba", can aim at any point of the globe on the basis of data from a reconnaissance satellite."

"This is a threat that violates the world military balance."

MacLeod agreed with Clark's words. Bezobrazzoff ignored Clark's hint, "I know the Tuman Bomba mechanism, too."

"We don't know how far "Material Burst" will go. However, we can expect that it will not reach Earth from the orbit of Jupiter."

"So, Dr. Clark's plan to drive Taurus Silver to Jupiter?"

"Yes, you understand correctly." Clark responded to Bezobrazzoff's question with an important tone. "The Ganymede stage of "Project Dione" is planned to be carried out in conjunction with the use of the achievements of Taurus Silver. For the sake of the future of mankind, he will spend the rest of his life on Ganymede."

"Dr. Clark. When will you disclose the identity of Taurus Silver?"

"I'll tell you when we meet directly."

"...All right. I'll wait with impatience."

"Where will the talks take place?" MacLeod turned to Clark.

"I planned to conduct them in the neutral waters of the Atlantic Ocean. I thought that it would be better if everyone were on equal terms."

"The meeting of the three countries will take place on a ship?"

Bezobrazzoff asked Clark.

"We have already sent the Enterprise to the designated area. I wanted to invite the two of you to get there by plane."

"The Enterprise...?" Bezobrazzoff muttered with interest.

The Enterprise (USS Enterprise) was a new aircraft carrier, inheriting the traditional name for USNA military ships. Despite the absence of an atomic reactor, its energy subsystem provided comparable power and duration of operation. The mystery of this system attracted the attention of the whole world.

"I get it. I'll get there by air."

"I, perhaps, will do so as well." Following Bezobrazzoff, MacLeod agreed.

"Thank you very much. Then, we'll discuss a couple more details..." At the initiative of Clark, the conference call lasted another 30 minutes.

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After the uprising in Mexico in April, several minor riots occurred in the USNA. However none of them reached the level that suppression troops were needed. The espionage mission in Japan continued, but on a much smaller scale. In addition to this, there were no other missions outside the country at the moment, so the "Star" magician subunit, directly subordinated to the Joint Directors of Staff of the USNA army, was simply engaged in daily training.

Today she had planned to train all day. However, finishing the morning exercises and going to the buffet Lina was stopped by the assistant commander of the base and asked to go with him to the commander's office.

Major Sirius arrived.

Lina, being in the guise of Angie Sirius, saluted Colonel Paul Walker the base commander. Lina was the head commander of Stars, but on this base the highest rank was with the base commander Walker. Walker, one might say, was responsible for watching the Stars battle magicians.

"Major Sirius, you've an order from the General Staff."

"Understood!"

Lina dropped her hand and stood in the rest position "quietly, hands at the seams."

"You're going to Washington, DC, where you'll meet Dr. Edward Clark. After that, accompany the doctor as a guard on the Enterprise, which is now in neutral waters of the Atlantic Ocean."

"I understand."

"An important meeting on "Project Dione" is planned on the Enterprise. Other participants in the meeting are William MacLeod and 'Igniter' Bezobrazzoff."

On Lina's face, surprise first arose, then understanding.

Despite the fact that it will be in neutral waters, but allowing on board the warship officially recognized Strategic Class Magicians of another country... this was something that is very hard to believe. But if the participants of the meeting are from the "Thirteen Apostles", then the presence of the same "Apostle" Lina for balance was clear.

"I think I should not mention that this meeting should be kept secret until its completion."

"I understand, Colonel." After Walker reminded the distracted Lina, she hastily gave an answer.

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The movement began not only in America, Britain and the New Soviet Union. Issues have also risen in Japan.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a spontaneous movement, but a forced attempt to show a reaction to an outside situation.

The chairman of the Japanese Magic Association was usually selected from among the Hundred Families. Elections were held annually in June, and in July the new chairman took office. Despite the absence of restrictions on re-election, this post didn't bring any benefit, so after more than three years no new chairman has been elected.

The current chairman, appointed in July last year, was named Tomitsuka Hitsui. This was the mother of the third-year student from First High, Tomitsuka Hagane. Despite the death of her husband, Tomitsuka's family didn't remain only as part of the wife's side.

The Chairman of the Magic Association must reside at the headquarters in Kyoto. On the other hand, the Tomitsuka family is based on the eastern coast of Tokyo Bay. For this reason, the duties were divided in such a way that the husband's side deals with family business, and the affairs of the Magic Association are the wife's side.

In June last year, Tomitsuka Hitsui put forward her candidacy for the post of chairman with a light feeling that "this will be a normal day-to-day job." But now she clutched her head, cursing last year's self.

On Sunday, when Edward Clark from America announced "Project Dione" there wasn't such a depressing feeling. Because then it seemed that even for the USNA it would be difficult to invite magical scientists from other countries. And the fact that other countries will lend their "Apostles" was estimated as an absolutely impossible event.

So thought all the employees of the Magic Association, not just Tomitsuka Hitsui.

However, yesterday, from the New Soviet Union, from the main enemy of the United States, came a notice of consent from "Apostle" Bezobrazzoff to participate in the project. As a result, it was no longer possible to delay the answer.

According to the concept of using magic for peaceful purposes to open the way for the future of mankind, there was no objection from the beginning. The anti-magic movement received wide support among people, drawing attention to the fact that magic is a dangerous weapon that kills and maims non-magicians.

Peaceful use of magic not only contributed insignificantly in the form of extinguishing fires or preventing floods, but also appeared as a large project, which in the future will bring prosperity to humanity. It was an extremely effective tool, which must strike back at the anti-magic movement.

You don't need to successfully complete the project, you don't even need to implement it. The mere fact that the project exists can be an argument against an anti-magic movement. Magicians can avoid the current difficult situation.

Considered a friendly country, Japan will not be able to refuse to participate in the project, for which even the two warring countries have joined their efforts. It is no longer possible to postpone the decision. It should be sent as soon as possible to the high school student, known under the pseudonym Taurus Silver.

In truth, Hitsui knew the identity of Taurus Silver. It was written in a letter sealed with an old-fashioned wax seal, which was brought to her by an employee of the USNA Embassy.

Hitsui lifted her head, lowered earlier in confusion, and removed her hands from her head. If you just grieve, this will not help the case. There was no suitable hero who could take on the current problems. She herself, too, didn't have the appropriate social status to enter the role of the heroine of the tragedy.

She decided to use the special right of the chairman of the Japanese Magic Association, which her predecessors had never used.

Convening a Conference of the 10 Master Clans.

Using special dedicated lines, Hitsui summoned the heads of the families of each of the Ten Master Clans to participate in an online conference.

Did the heads of families of the Ten Master Clans expect a call from the Magic Association?

Just one hour after the call, the heads of each of the families appeared on the monitor for Hitsui's conferences: Ichijou, Futatsugi, Mitsuya, Yotuba, Itsuwa, Mutsuzuka, Saegusa, Shippou, Yatsushiro and Juumonji.

"Yotuba-dono, please accept my thanks for that time."

"Ichijo-dono, have you already recovered?"

"Thanks to you, I fully recovered."

"I'm happy for you. So, chairman, for what problem did you collect us here?"

Futatsugi Mai, wedged into the conversation between Ichijo Gouki and Maya, called on everyone to pay attention to the ignored Hitsui.

Hitsui, feeling as if bathed in icy water, thanks to Mai was able to pull herself together.

"...Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for responding so quickly, despite your business."

"Because it was an emergency call. I would like to ask you to tell us what is this 'emergency situation'?"

Saegusa Koichi's impassive voice asked a sarcastic question.

Under this pressure it seemed that Hitsui was going to cry. She wasn't at all a weak-willed woman, but she wasn't used to confrontations that looked like a fight with sharp swords.

"Yes. As you all probably already guessed, it will be about a project for the development of Venus, proposed by the engineers of the USNA."

Clinging to her sense of responsibility as chairman, Hitsui somehow managed to move on to the main topic.

"Yesterday, when the New Soviet Union announced its participation in the project, the Japanese Magic Association also had an urgent need to react to this."

"And so is the Association? Edward Clark, after all asked for the participation of individuals?" Shippou Takumi asked in a tone like a scientist.

"Officially yes, but one of them nominated was a Japanese?" Yatsushiro Raizou answered with a crooked smile.

"This is American arrogance. We don't have to obey." Mutsuzuka Atsuko spat out words with an expression and a voice, as if she were going to vomit.

"But most likely it will not work. " Trying to hold back the nervousness, Hitsui said. The monitor still showed those faces staring at her. And it wasn't just Atsuko. Instead of falling into despair, Hitsui spoke, becoming serious. "At present, magicians are faced with unreasonable criticism, claiming that they are enemies of humanity. This is just primitive propaganda of anti-magic activists, but the Strategic and Tactical class magic, successfully used one after the other, has seriously increased the credibility of such propaganda."

The desktop monitor clearly showed how the eyes of all heads of families simultaneously moved. On such a small screen it was difficult to perceive, but it was obvious that Maya gathered the gazes of everyone. Everyone realized that the "Tactical class magic" which increased the credibility of anti-magic propaganda" is "Active Air Mine" developed by Tatsuya.

"Dr. Clark's "Project Dione" can be good material for demonstrating that magic serves humanity not only for military purposes. The headquarters of the International Magic Association is preparing to express its full support for "Project Dione". I also heard that the Associations of America, Britain and the New Soviet Union are also planning to publish their press releases. Germany is also discussing with the government of the USNA the possibility of participation, not limited to just one company Rozen MagiCraft. With this development, Japan simply cannot stand aside."

"I can understand the chairman's haste, but what exactly do you want to do? Find Taurus Silver and get him to join?" With a meticulous expression on his face, asked Itsuwa Isami. The year before last he had to bitterly send his daughter to the battlefield only because she was a "Strategic Class Magician".

Since then, he has been disgusted with such a manner of doing things, when all the burden is shifted to one person for the sake of preserving honor.

"...Actually, he does not need to be looked for."

Hitsui also didn't consider it a good thing to force people to suffer for a simple justification. On the contrary, this feeling led her to the tactics "I'd better get dirty in the mud."

"Taurus Silver... Yotsuba-sama, is this your son?"

In Maya's silent gaze aimed at the camera, the question "How did you decide this?" Was read.

"I received a letter from the American Embassy. Taking into account that he's a minor, they refrained from disclosing his name, but in return we were asked to help persuade Taurus Silver, that is, Mr. Tatsuya Shiba."

"Sounds like blackmail." Gouki murmured.

Not only he openly expressed his disgust.

"To be honest, Momoyama-sensei from First High also mentioned this."

However, the person closest to the one in question, Maya was calm, like no one else present.

"I leave this decision to Tatsuya's own judgment." Maya smiled from the screen when she answered.

Hitsui was almost the same age as Maya, but it took her a few seconds to suppress a shiver in her voice.

"...That is, Yotsuba-sama isn't going to participate in the conviction?"

"This is a question that will affect his entire life."

In an amiable voice, Maya hinted that this isn't a territory that can be claimed.

"If the conversation was just about that, I'd like to say goodbye."

And she showed that she takes the position of refusal from further discussion.

"...Thank you very much for your time."

"In that case, all the best."

The face of Maya disappeared from the monitor.

"I'm sorry, I'll finish this too."

"Then I too."

Following the example of Maya, Mutsuzuka Atsuko and Yatsushiro Raizou dropped out of the online conference.

Seven of the ten remaining heads of families, on the contrary, were not in a hurry to leave the conference.

"This may indeed be a matter of his life, but I would like to see a debt to the Japanese magical world also taken into account." Saegusa Koichi muttered in a disgruntled voice. It was difficult to understand, if he was saying it to himself or complaining to someone.

"You say that this isn't the case when they ask the opinions of the person himself?" Shippou Takumi asked in response to these words.

"For the magicians of the Ten Master Clans, it is inevitable to sacrifice yourself to some extent. The daughter of Itsuwa-dono has health problems, but still participated in the military sortie in the year before last. Itsuwa-dono, your daughter didn't go to the front on her own, is it not?"

"This is so..."

This question was difficult to answer negatively. Itsuwa Isami could only vaguely mumble the consent.

"But if you give the son of the Yotsuba family to this foreign planetary terraforming project, won't this be a big loss for national defense?"

"I don't know what kind of magic Shiba Tatsuya-san can use, but I think that the way of thinking, in which the magician is directly connected with the military force, will lead us to trouble. At present, the main threat not only to the Japanese magical world, but also to magicians around the world, is the anti-magic movement that began with the idea of 'Humanism', isn't it? If so, then consideration of this issue should be considered the highest priority."

Hitsui answered the question raised by Gouki.

"Although it is undesirable, but perhaps the best solution would be for Shiba Tatsuya-dono to go to America." Futatsugi Mai said sighing.

Votes against this decision were not heard.

"However, who will convince Shiba Tatsuya-dono? As I understand it, you cannot expect this from Yotuba-dono."

The problem voiced by Mitsuya Gen caused silence for a while.

"Juumonji-sama... You are personally acquainted with Shiba Tatsuya-san, are you not?"

Hitsui's words were spoken in despair. It was impossible to break the will of others alone with the connection of the senpai with the kohai, in order to change the personal opinion. In addition, if it was necessary to have a personal acquaintance, then the son of Hitsui herself, Tomitsuka Hagane wasn't only a fellow student of First High, but even a classmate of Tatsuya. It was a much closer relationship than Katsuto, who finished school in the spring of last year.

"...I don't know if Shiba Tatsuya-dono will listen to my words, but I'll try to talk to him."

However, Katsuto agreed to take up this difficult task.

"...Are you sure?"

"To begin with, we'll just talk. I cannot promise a positive result."

Katsuto answered Koichi's question.

Koichi couldn't understand what exactly Katsuto was up to when he agreed to take up negotiations with Tatsuya.

Chapter 5

"And yet... it's a bit sad." Miyuki said while leaving the door of a typical private house.

"We will not sell this house. We can return at any time."

Miyuki nodded in response to Tatsuya's consoling words.

"Tatsuya-sama, Miyuki-sama, if you don't mind, I think it's time to go."

A humble voice was heard from behind the two of them.

Tatsuya turned around and saw Hanabishi Hyougo standing there wearing a black suit and white gloves.

"Understood. Miyuki, Minami, let's go."

Tatsuya nodded to Hyougo and turned to his companions. The two girls responded with "Yes" and "I'm listening" and they followed Tatsuya.

Today was the day of the move in order to strengthen Miyuki's protection. From the house nominally owned by their father, to the building in Chofu, which is the Tokyo headquarters of the Yotuba family.

A large sedan was parked in front of the house. All the necessary luggage has already been transported. The furniture was organized on the spot, so under the luggage there were clothes and accessories, as well as personal training terminals.

Data from the laboratory on the ground floor has also been moved to the underground research center of the Tokyo headquarters building.

The data has been moved, not copied. This "private laboratory" will be completely destroyed in a few days.

Miyuki and Tatsuya sat in the backseat, then Minami boarded the passenger seat. Although it wasn't a limousine, the legroom was spacious, and it didn't seem that there wasn't enough space behind the driver's seat.

Making sure that everyone sat down, Hyougo took the driver's seat. The sedan moved smoothly from its place. They traveled from Futu* to Chofu. At such a short distance, the driving time on the private car and in the booth of the electric train was approximately the same. Of course, if you take into account the time of the trip from the station, the car was faster.

If memory serves me right, we were told for the first time where their house was. Futu and Chofu are next to each other, only 5 km. Both at the same time in 20-25 km to the west of the center of Tokyo.

Hyougo skillfully drove the car. Considering the features of the car, there was also no shaking or inertia. During this short comfortable trip, neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki said a word. Minami was silent as usual. Hyougo also read the atmosphere and was silent.

The car stopped at the buildings underground parking. It was a garage built on the style of the usual type underground parking, but equipped with automatic checking devices. The parking spaces marked with white lines had induction sensors for automatic parking.

"This way please."

At Hyougo's invitation they entered the elevator. This elevator goes directly to the entrance to the "apartment" where Miyuki will live from now on, and no one except Tatsuya and Miyuki can use it without a special key.

"During a state of emergency, it can be used to descend to other floors" Hyougo added with a moderate smile. It seems that at the same time they could only be used to get to the first floor, underground parking garage, the roof and to this apartment. On the roof was the helipad, which they'd used the other day.

The provided accommodations are luxurious. The furnishings were elegant and tasteful and Miyuki liked it at first sight.

"Tatsuya-sama, are you staying here tonight?" asked Hyougo.

"No, I will go to the villa as soon as the preparations are completed."

From today on, Miyuki will live here. Minami will live with Miyuki as her servant and guard.

However, Tatsuya, following Maya's instructions, will go to the villa in Izu. This isn't yet Tatsuya's home.

The main reason that Miyuki was sad about leaving the old house, wasn't that she left a familiar house, but that she would live apart from Tatsuya for a while.

"I'll handle this while you rest for a couple of hours."

Bowing respectfully, Hyougo left the room.

Tatsuya led Miyuki to the living room and sat her on the sofa.

In fact, the preparations for the move to Izu have already been completed. But Hyougo, who understood what was what, offered a two-hour postponement. Tatsuya and Miyuki both guessed this.

To move to Izu, a familiar vertical takeoff and landing plane (VTOL) was prepared.

The flight took about 30 minutes. The reason for this slow flight speed was crowded airspace. In the near future, jokes about "traffic jams in air traffic" will be made.

As expected, the villa was in the mountains. Izu used to be an air defense base during the war, but afterwards was converted into a golf course. Even before the war it was quite far away. This place was ideally suited for the role of a "quiet" environment where no one will be disturbed.

"Mother... that is, stepmother was treated in such an uncomfortable place?"

Without thinking, Tatsuya asked Hyougo a question which came to mind. But he corrected himself, calling Miya "stepmother", because now his real mother is Maya.

"I heard that for Miya-sama it was necessary to have a quiet environment."

Tatsuya immediately understood the meaning of Hyougo's abstract answer.

The point was that for her all sorts of psion noises, emitted by large clusters of people, were a heavy load. Tatsuya once again realized that Miya often overpowered herself for her children. But he couldn't understand if it was for his own sake or for Miyuki's.

Hyougo led Tatsuya to the villa. Inside the building, everything was prepared to live without any problems. The laboratory was fully equipped like the house in Futa.

"Please call me at any time if you need anything. I will deliver it as soon as possible. In addition, the 'Freed Suit' and 'Wingless' were delivered here so you can freely use them."

The "Freed Suit" is a flying combat suit disguised as an ordinary riding suit, and "Wingless" is an armored motorcycle with the function of connecting to the "Freed Suit". They will be useful not only if he's attacked by an armed opponent, but also for a simple exit into the city.

"Many thanks."

"You're welcome. Please rest easy here."

"Thank you for your concern."

"Then, on this I ask you to excuse me."

Hyougo went outside to VTOL.

Completely alone in this building, Tatsuya heard the sound of spinning blades moving off.

◇ ◇ ◇

The USNA's large aircraft carrier the Enterprise was anchored 500 kilometers east of Newfoundland, in the neutral waters of the Atlantic Ocean,

It belonged to the 2000-foot class, because it was about 600 meters long. The attention of the whole world was attracted by the technology that allows this giant without a nuclear reactor to move, yet be twice as large as the largest pre-war aircraft carriers with nuclear reactors.

Immediately after this ship was commissioned 4 years ago, it was suspected of having a nuclear reactor. However a short distance survey conducted by the International Magic Association, showed that it is clean. Given the circumstances under which the International Magic Association was founded, it possessed a technology absolutely reliable in detecting nuclear fission reactions. The Association has never been able to find traces of the use of nuclear energy.

Further examination could be carried out only by getting inside the ship, but USNA policy does not allow anyone to conduct inspections on their facilities or warships. As a result, the power plant of the Enterprise is still a mystery.

A small plane was approaching this giant aircraft carrier. It was a high-speed transport aircraft with 4 fighter escorts. Apparently, they didn't have the function of vertical landing, as in VTOL or STOVL.

"Bezobrazoff is on this plane..." Lina mumbled to herself, dressed in the official Stars uniform (but without a mask), watching the approaching airplane with golden eyes.

"Apostle" of the New Soviet Union, Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazoff. The owner of the nickname "Igniter" and the user of the Strategic-Class Magic "Tuman Bomba."

Before his appearance on a television interview a few days ago, his appearance was considered a military secret of the New Soviet Union, but the USNA army knew him. Bezobrazoff's location was also carefully monitored, although not always.

He was a member of the New Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences, as well as an influential authority in the field of modern magic education. We can say that in such conditions it was impossible to hide his appearance and location.

However, the true essence of Bezobrazzoff's Strategic-Class Magic "Tuman Bomba", has not yet been established. Not just the system of magic, even its effect wasn't clear. Only its name "Tuman Bomba" and the fact that it causes damage in an explosion over a very wide area. And also that it killed the previous Sirius in the armed conflict between the USNA and the NSS in the Bering Strait 8 years ago.

For Stars, he was a fateful magician, and for Lina an opponent standing on the road to the title of the strongest in the world. But that chance will not come if Bezobrazzoff takes part in "Project Dion."

The plane went to land. The approach procedures for aircraft carriers haven't made significant progress over the past 150 years. Aircraft without vertical landing functionality use a combination of an angular deck and a brake hook clinging to the brake cable.

Even the 600-meter deck isn't enough to ensure that only the reverse thrust brakes are enough to land. Although take-off technologies have made significant progress, landing technologies are limited by the need to mitigate the load from cable braking.

"...Was the brake hook not be released?"

Lina felt a strange discomfort from the sight of this approaching aircraft, and immediately realized its cause.

This wasn't noticed only by Lina. The sound of voices rose on the deck.

"The brake thrust is too weak!"

"It will fall...!"

The cries of the aircraft carrier's staff were heard.

To prevent an accident, Lina activated her CAD. The next moment the plane was enveloped by psion light. It was a non-physical light born of excessive psions, emitted by the activation of magic.

But Lina's magic has not yet been activated.

"This magic was activated from inside!?"

Lina noticed that the magic that acted on the transport plane was launched from the cockpit of this plane.

The landing gear touched the deck. A small braking jet smoothly reduced the speed, which would have been impossible normally.

"Inertia and acceleration reduction, but in order to so smoothly decelerate..."

From the moment of contact it usually requires about 1000 meters to stop, but now this distance has dropped to 100 meters. And it didn't look unnatural at all.

"Where does this precise control...?"

The enterprise boasts dimensions that can be called "gigantic", but that does not mean that there's no pitching. There is also wind. Lina believed that she herself would not be able to brake as accurately as possible considering all these factors.

"This is the 'Igniter'... his abilities were above all expectations."

Lina didn't doubt that this magic was the work of Bezobrazzoff.

Soon after Bezobrazzoff, MacLeod's plane arrived. Then the tripartite negotiations began.

In this room were: Edward Clark, Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazzoff, William MacLeod and the fourth man, Lina in the image of Angie Sirius. Lina was assigned to Clark, because he was an ordinary person who cannot use magic.

Bezobrazzoff and MacLeod are Strategic-Class magicians.

Hinting that "it would be better for Clark's guard to be a Strategic-Class magician" MacLeod requested Angie Sirius's presence in the negotiations.

"Dr. Clark. As you promised, please tell us the identity of the Japanese Strategic-Class magician, Taurus Silver."

This was the first phrase spoken at the meeting. Bezobrazzoff suddenly turned to Clark.

Lina shuddered at the news.

Now "Angie Sirius" was without a mask. Therefore, the other three could easily see her surprise.

"Doctor Clark, have you hidden this information from your side as well?"

There wasn't noticeable surprise in MacLeod's voice. From the unexpected reaction of Angie, even Bezobrazzoff showed impatience. However, this didn't affect the development of the situation.

"I recently received evidence of the person." Clark responded with an obvious lie, then continued:

"The real name of Taurus Silver is Shiba Tatsuya. He's from the direct line of the Yotuba."

Then they discussed the primary plan of action, and the meeting ended without much debate.

With the successful conclusion of the meeting, Lina's mission was over, but there was still some time before the departure of the aircraft to take her home. To occupy this time, she wandered through the Enterprise, with permission from the ship's captain.

She "examined the neighborhood" only nominally, because all her thoughts were now captured by one person who wasn't here.

(Tatsuya... is the Strategic-Class magician that caused "Scorched Halloween?")

Lina didn't remember what Clark, Bezobrazzoff and MacLeod were talking about after that. She didn't forget it, the conversation just didn't get to her memory from the very beginning.

From the meeting there were only scrappy memories. Perhaps it would be reasonable to say that she couldn't follow the course of the conversation because of this shocking information.

The magic that burnt out the southern tip of the Korean peninsula in October of the year before was called "Material Burst."

Shiba Tatsuya is the user of this magic.

The real name of "Taurus Silver", the ingenious magic engineer who developed flying magic, is also "Shiba Tatsuya."

(And it's true, because from the very beginning there was such an assumption!)

In January of last year, Lina was sent to Japan to determine the identity of the so-called "Great Bomber," the Strategic-Class Magician who summoned "Scorched Halloween," and then deal with them. Tatsuya was a candidate for the identity of the "Great Bomber," which Lina was instructed to follow. The investigation and conclusions of the Intelligence Department of the USNA army were correct.

(But Tatsuya never showed such behavior...)

(Tatsuya's magic was completely different...)

Thinking about it, in the mind of Lina arose the "other I", quietly arguing with herself.

(He didn't show such behavior? This is quite obvious. At least from the fact that he was a head taller, as an opponent.)



(Was Tatsuya's magic different? He just didn't have to show the Strategic-Class Magic.)

(I didn't even know that he was from the direct line of the Yotsuba line.)

(Tatsuya deceived me.)

(...Though, I was deceived by deceiving myself.)

But even with such thoughts, she didn't have a feeling of surprise or regret.

However, along with these thoughts came the realization of different things.

The sympathy she felt for Tatsuya.

And Tatsuya's sympathy for her.

This, of course...

(...Sympathy for like-minded prisoners of fate to be weapons.)

Lina waved her head, trying to shake out the endlessly arising negative thoughts.

"Ah ..."

At that moment, her consciousness finally returned to reality.

(It's bad... I wandered into the restricted area...)

Lina scolded herself for her gloomy thoughts. She decided to assign the responsibility of this to security officers, who somehow didn't stop her.

In any case, she should leave this compartment immediately. As the commander-in-chief of Stars, Lina had the right to access most secret information. However, the existence of rights and their actual use are two different things. There is always a good reason why information is marked as secret. When someone puts his nose into secrets which he shouldn't know, it's like suicide.

She went too far.

(What are these psion waves...)

Forgetting that she wanted to leave this place as quickly as possible, Lina frowned.

She didn't feel the psion waves until she entered this compartment. It seems that in the walls there are grids of induction stones built-in that weaken psion waves.

For a moment, Lina thought that this was a way to conceal the nuclear reactor, but then realized that she was mistaken. Induction stones convert psion waves into an electrical signal. The side effect is the attenuation of psion waves so that these waves can no longer be detected. However, induction stones didn't possess the ability to absorb or reflect radiation.

(Magic? But here...)

When thoughts of forbidden nuclear energy were gone, another suspicion arose in her mind.

Magic is used by one person. It is in principle impossible for several magicians to cooperatively activate one magic.

Magicians with this ability are very rarely born. But even in those cases, no more than 2-3 people can join together to summon magic.

But the psion waves that Lina felt now were...

(...More than ten people, maybe about twenty...)

So many magicians have invested their efforts in one magic.

(How to understand this? The coercion of magicians to use magic is prohibited by military regulations.)

While communicating with the developers of "Brionac", Lina heard about the experiments conducted during the war where they tried to cause large-scale magic by creating forced connections between many magicians. The experiment, which was conducted jointly with the Japanese army (Japan was a closer ally than now), was found to be unsuccessful, and the data on it had to be destroyed.

The recognized reason for the failure was the self-destruction of magicians, who became "guinea pigs". There began to be cases one after another of dulled thinking, which led to their inability to perform actions to maintain their own life. Lina was told that this was due to the forced connection of their minds. So she was told not to play with group magic.

But that wasn't all. It was just Lina's intuition, but this magic loaded all the components of the activation sequence into the magicians and forcibly activated the spell. This technology which ignores the will of the magician and makes him part of the magic machine, contradicted the USNA military statute of the army which guarantees the observance of the rights of servicemen...

(...The magic itself is simple enough it only rotates the flywheel.)

(But to continue to perform this routine action for a long time should be difficult because of accumulating stress...)

(More than ten magicians are involved because the mass of the flywheel is quite large and its rotation speed is quite high.)

"Really!?" Lina unknowingly said this out loud.

"Is this... a power generation system!?"

"Is this really the secret of the Enterprise's power plant!?"

Lina covered her mouth with both hands, so as not to let go of the new unconscious screams, and looked around in panic.

No one was around.

The surveillance cameras seemed to be functioning, so she should have been seen when she was in a state of confusion and mistakenly entered the forbidden compartment.

Lina convinced herself of this and quickly headed back to the exit.

Lina and Clark were coming back on the same plane.

Work as a security guard ended at the end of the meeting, but preparing another plane to return to the mainland was inefficient in terms of costs. Therefore it was inevitable that they became fellow passengers before Washington.

"Major Sirius, you've done a good job."

"Thank you." Lina laconically answered Clark.

She was in such a mood that she didn't want to talk to anyone right now. She just wanted to remove the "Parade" disguise and sleep, not thinking about anything. She tried hard so that her voice didn't sound sarcastic.

It seems that Clark was wise enough not to show that he was concerned about Lina's behavior.

"Major I think I should repeat it once more, but don't reveal the secret identity of Taurus Silver to anyone, including Colonel Walker and Colonel Balance." He said, not paying attention to Lina's mood.

"...I have to report everything that happened."

"It's all right, Major. No one can blame you for this."

Clark wasn't a soldier. He was a scientist from the National Science Agency of the United States. In his position he couldn't influence the army's system of rewards and punishments. Lina wanted to point this out to him indignantly.

"If Taurus Silver learns that his identity was revealed by the major, then he in turn can reveal the true identity of the major."

However, Lina's language was numb with the words Clark said.

"Where did you hear this..." Lina was able to squeeze out a few words.

"I think it was a big mistake for the military when they contacted the major and Silver. You are still young. Emotional change is inevitable."

Clark said this without a smile on his face. He hinted that he knew what Lina was doing in Japan, even more than the army knows. Then he said something that made Lina completely shut up.

"By the way, besides the identity of Silver. The truth about the Enterprise is also not worth reporting."

Chapter 6

On Monday, Tatsuya stopped coming to First High.

Although he was still considered a pupil of First High, his absence caused a reaction in various unexpected places.

Somewhere in Tokyo. The conference room, the location of which will never be revealed, gathered people responsible for the dark side of the Intelligence Department of the National Self-Defense Forces.

"It seems that the high school student mentioned earlier began to live separately..."

"Is this our chance? Unlike in the city there won't be a problem of many people involved."

"Please wait." Suddenly, someone jumped up from their chair, leaned forward and spoke.

"Chief Inukai, what is it?"

The one who wedged himself into the conversation was Chief Inukai the direct commander of Tooyama Tsukasa. Of all those present, he was the most aware of Tatsuya's danger.

"We can send enough combat forces, so the other side is in an position where he cannot hold back. I consider an unprepared attack a risky business."

"Is it a trap?"

"No I don't think so, but have you forgotten that the enemy is the Yotsuba clan, who are called 'Untouchables'. It's likely that they have prepared something for this situation."

"I agree." Onda, the head of the department for special issues expressed his approval of these words.

"Despite the sufficient fighting strength of the garrison of the Nanso camp, you know what the result was. Although the roles of the attacker and the defender will change, I believe that we still should not take it on ourselves alone."

"Chief Onda, do you've someone who will help you?"

"I would not call it help, but as a result there's something we can use."

"Any special circumstances?" Inukai asked Onda in a mysterious voice.

"It seems that the head of the Juumonji family will arrive soon in Izu as a representative of the Magic Association." Turning to Inukai, Onda personally gave extracted information.

"I don't know why he's going there, but I believe this is about that 'project'."

Having changed the wording, he told it to everyone in the form of a "guess", so Onda concealed his lies. He knew that Tatsuya was Taurus Silver, and Katsuto was going to convince him to participate in the project. He just didn't disclose it to people from the same Intelligence Department as himself.

"The Magic Association seems to be interested in the project of the USNA. Do they want to try to persuade the Yotsuba to take part?"

The chief of another department expressed his opinion. None of those present associated the names of Tatsuya and Taurus Silver with each other.

All of them highly appreciated Tatsuya's fighting abilities, because they knew about it firsthand. But they didn't know about Tatsuya's intellect and technical skills. Therefore, they couldn't connect the high school student and the outstanding magic engineer with each other.

"...okay. This is our chance." The deputy director, who has the highest status among those present nodded in agreement. The Yotsuba's position with their refusal to cooperate was apparent even at the previous meeting.

The previous meeting was referring to the April meeting of young people from the 28 Houses. Regarding the current situation, she had nothing to do with it. But what the deputy director pointed out wasn't a conclusion, but rather a good guess, because the facts superficially matched.

"There is a high probability that a fight between Shiba Tatsuya and the head of the Juumonji family will occur. And if these two fight, then Juumonji Katsuto wins. Is that correct, Chief Inukai?"

"Yes." Inukai confidently nodded to the deputy director's question.
"Sergeant Tooyama... The Tooyama family came to the same conclusion."

Despite being among the 28 Houses, Tooyama's family has never been a part of the Ten Master Clans. It's never even become a candidate.

But if we're not talking about the simple combat use of magicians, but about their use in military affairs as a whole, they will be on a par with the Yotsuba and Juumonji. The Intelligence Department of the National Self-Defense Forces was confident of this.

Military magicians are capable of more than just fighting. Included in their official duties is analysis of combat strength and tactics, and the Tooyama family of the 28 Houses is the only family among the "Numbers" whose people have been trained in the army since birth.

Of course, the head of the Juumonji family will not kill Shiba Tatsuya. But after losing to Juumonji Katsuto, Shiba Tatsuya will have been weakened and be unable to resist.

"And the Juumonji family will not resist the Self-Defense Forces."

Inukai agreed with the deputy director.

"In that case, let's make our move when the Juumonji family acts. We will also send Sergeant Tooyama, but this time not as Shiba Tatsuya's opponent in order to eliminate any possible protection organized by the Yotsuba family."

"Got it."

Inukai's reply was a small indication of indecision.

"Don't worry, Inukai. The Yotsuba family seems to be confident in Shiba Tatsuya's fighting power. Because of that, they will not put their strongest fighters on guard. The most powerful will be focused on protecting his bride."

The Deputy Director turned to Onda.

"I think that everything is as you said." Onda said respectfully nodding to the deputy director.

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"I apologize...What?" Shiina said doubtfully after entering the Student Council Room after class.

"What's wrong, Shiina-chan?" Izumi asked Shiina, turning from her workplace.

"Oh, no, I just... did something happen to Pixie...?"

As Shiina said, Pixie who was always waiting in the corner of the Student Council Room, was missing.

"Because she's Tatsuya-sama's property" Minami answered while taking out napkins from the cleaning box (a drawer with various cleaning supplies, mounted in a multifunctional vacuum cleaner).

Shiina didn't offer to help wiping Minami's table. During the month since joining this school and working with the Student Council, she learned that Minami does not throw off work to the younger ones, as is customary.

"Pixie was sent to Tatsuya-sama to take care of his daily needs."

Entering into the already open door Miyuki said that instead of a greeting, perhaps she heard Minami's words from the corridor.

"Miyuki-sempai, today we will try together!"

"Let's work together, President. Um, so that means..."

In contrast to Izumi's always enthusiastic reaction, Shiina inclined her head with a misunderstanding on her face.

"Hya!"

Before Miyuki could respond, a hand came at Shiina from behind causing her to scream and jump from surprise. Shiina turned around in a hurry and saw Shizuku shaking her head with a reproachful look.

"Kitayama-sempai..."

"Shiina-chan, this is because of Tatsuya-san, do you understand?"

Honoka whispered while standing next to Shizuku. Thus, Shiina guessed the situation.

It was the next day after that Sunday, when she was separated from Tatsuya. As usual Miyuki spent time in class, and as usual with the Student Council.

The students of First High who don't interact with Tatsuya in any way, saw Miyuki the same as always. Friends with whom she had long been acquainted, on the way from school also didn't see any differences.

"Miyuki, um... are you okay?"

But as expected from friends, they could feel something "strange."

For example, Erika was in another class and wasn't involved in the affairs of the Student Council. They spent much less time together than that of Miyuki's classmates, but she was able to discover that "something is wrong here," not only because of her observation skills.

"Yes, everything is in order. Thank you, Erika."

Miyuki also understood her friend's attention and didn't complain to her. Miyuki wasn't ashamed to admit that she was lonely without Tatsuya. It was natural for her, because she lived for Tatsuya's sake and his presence was vital to her.

Miyuki thought that these friends have long understood this, so there is no reason to try to hide it.

"Where's Tatsuya-san now? If this isn't a secret..."

"I don't think there will be any problems if I tell you." Miyuki replied shyly to Honoka. "He retired to a villa in Izu. I wonder if he can at least rest there a bit?"

"Izu? ...If not for these annoying circumstances, then it would be enviable."

"But Tatsuya went to this villa precisely because of these annoying circumstances, right?"

"Shut up. I already knew. You're so unpopular because you don't know how to not talk too much."

Leo joked over Erika's words, which were either serious, or a joke. But Erika immediately responded with her horseshoe.

"Che...! These are unnecessary worries. Although not as much as Tatsuya, but I like girls too. Is it true, Sakurai?"

Today in the cafe not only third-graders gathered. With the addition of the trio from the second year of training, Kasumi, Izumi and Minami, as well as couples from the first year of training, Shiina and Saburo, they now formed a fairly large company.

Leo turned to Minami, because she was from the same "Mountaineering Club" as him. Due to her work in the Student Council she almost never showed up there, but she did the work of the "manager" there, for example, periodically they brought onigiri made by the cooking club.

"...Yes, probably."

Minami gave a noncommittal answer to Leo's question, which read a clear desire for agreement.

"Ah~, well, no. Use your power in this situation? I didn't know that you were like that..."

"What!?"

Ignoring the resentful protesting Leo, Erika turned to Minami.

"Minami, it's not necessary to cover him only because he's the president of the club."

"Yes..." Minami with confusion on her face looked alternately at Erika and Leo.

"Erika. Saijou-kun, too, don't embarrass Minami-chan."

Erika and Leo immediately exchanged glances, after which Miyuki bowed at the same time. Thus, Minami was able to avoid embarrassment with Miyuki's help.

"Tatsuya-san will not come here even on Sunday?"

Mizuki's question changed the general mood again. But there was no awkward pause. Miyuki just shook her head with a sad smile on her face.

"I think he will not be able to return to Tokyo for some time because there are a lot of annoying people here."

"Can we visit him?" Honoka asked having received a confidence boost after hearing Mizuki.

"It's not known whether circumstances will allow this." Miyuki answered reflectively.

"It is clear..."

"Unwanted guests can come to him."

Kasumi and Izumi reacted to those words

"Sempai, this means..."

"That it's likely."

Miyuki turned to the twin-kohai with a kind smile on her face.

"Izumi-chan, Kasumi-chan, if this happens, if the 'guests' are people from your family, then don't bother your father or brother."

"Miyuki-senpai! I'll be on your side no matter what!"

Izumi began to protest with passionate zeal. Kasumi, sitting next to her, couldn't hide her embarrassment.

"Izumi-chan, you're embarrassing Kasumi-chan."

"Kasumi-chan! You're on my side, aren't you?"

"Well... Of course I'm on Izumi's side, but..."

Kasumi's face became even more embarrassed.

"Izumi-chan." With a bitter smile on her face, Miyuki approached and stood between Izumi and Kasumi.

"You don't have to do anything, okay? Because neither Tatsuya-sama nor I are going to be at odds with Izumi-chan's father."

"...I understand."

It was her weakness before Miyuki's charm. Izumi couldn't go against Miyuki's request, which was said in words that cannot be misinterpreted.

"Miyuki, it's useless to deter us."

Turning, Miyuki saw on Erika's face a really mischievous smile.

"I would not want you to do something reckless..."

"Aren't you going to do something reckless?"

Erika looked like she had nothing to do with it. To this quite obvious facial expression, Miyuki could only respond with a vague smile.

◊ ◊ ◊

At the National Magic University there was no such thing as interest circles.

But there are club activities. Most sports clubs had coaches and suffered from an overabundance of participants. In most cases, the career of a magician requires physical strength and mobility, but in the curriculum there is no physical training, so additional classes are important.

However, not all students attended the clubs. After all club activity wasn't mandatory. Katsuto who in high school was the leader of the Club Management Group, was among those at the National Magic University who didn't join any club.

Katsuto who is the head of the Juumonji family, decided to return home as soon as possible. Few people went home at this time. Today he'd lingered with the preparation of practice reports, and it was already quite late. Concerned that his affairs were delayed by this unplanned accident, Katsuto walked to the station at an accelerated pace.

"Juumonji-kun!"

He heard a voice behind him calling out to wait.

It was a familiar voice that he recognized without turning around. Speaking frankly, it was a person who often interfered with his plans, but for some reason, regardless of family affairs she was the one who could stop him.

And now Katsuto stopped and looked back.

"Juumonji-kun!"

"Saegusa. I hear you, don't shout like that."

Mayumi caught up and stopped before Katsuto and smiled shyly. It felt like she had closed one eye and showed her tongue, even though she didn't really do it.

"Sorry to keep you."

"It's nothing. So what do you want?"

Without any introduction, he asked about the case.

Such a rude response wasn't because he didn't treat Mayumi like a woman. It just showed that for Katsuto she's a woman with whom he feels at ease.

"I wanted to ask you something. Can I go in the same cab with you?"

"Aren't we going different directions?"

"It's just an extra 20 minutes home. It's okay."

The modern system of public transportation for short distances are "personal booths on an electric train" which was based on a direct connection between the stations on which loading and disembarking was done. There was no such thing as "loading a passenger halfway between stations".

But that didn't mean that you cannot go together. If you're lucky, and there is no customer waiting for your booth at the destination station, the remaining passenger will be able to continue to his station. Even if there are other passengers on the station, you just have to wait a bit in the queue.

The level of privacy inside such personal booths has been perfected.

It is almost impossible for a conversation inside the booth to be heard by someone from outside. Entrepreneurs and even simple couples use this feature of the electric booths of an electric train for conducting private conversations.

Mayumi's invitation to go together was also meant to hold a private conversation. However, the first destination was the station closest to the Saegusa family house.

"Juumonji-kun is such a gentleman."

"Naturally." At Mayumi's giggles, Katsuto responded with an acidic face.

"So, what did you want to talk about?"

Immediately after Katsuto's question, the smile faded from Mayumi's face.

"Juumonji-kun, you're going to meet Tatsuya-kun, aren't you?"

"Did you hear about this from your father?"

"Yes, but he didn't say why you're going to meet him."

Katsuto leaned back in his seat, closed his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest.

"I cannot tell you."

"Thank you. I just realized why."

Katsuto opened his eyes. Mayumi winked at him.

"This could only be because of a Japanese high school student. And all these attempts at secrecy indicate exactly who I thought."

Mayumi said her conclusion without saying a single name. Katsuto was silent.

"Listen, Juumonji-kun."

"...What?"

Katsuto reluctantly responded, because in Mayumi's voice there were signs that she would ask something obvious.

"Will you take me with you?"

Katsuto looked at Mayumi with wide-open eyes, but immediately looked back and asked "...Why?"

"I don't think Tatsuya-kun will obediently accept the request."

"...Well, I think so too."

"But it's unlikely that after this, Juumonji-kun will simply go home empty-handed."

"....."

"I don't think that Juumonji-kun will lose to Tatsuya-kun. Tatsuya-kun is strong, but he certainly will not be able to reach Juumonji-kun."

"And what?"

"But I think that Tatsuya-kun will not be defeated so easily either. With Tatsuya-kun's healing magic, he may not stop until he dies."

"Shiba's healing magic... is that strong?"

Katsuto straightened his crossed arms and looked at Mayumi.

"Yes. More specifically, it's not really a treatment." Mayumi caught Katsuto's gaze, and looked into his eyes. "So let me go with you to prevent such an outcome."

"You say you want to help me convince Shiba?"

"I'm not going to get in your way."

Looking up from Mayumi, Katsuto took a deep breath.

"If only to participate in the negotiations... It is true if you are present everything can be resolved peacefully. You are more familiar with Shiba than I am."

"It sounds a little strange when you're talking about a close acquaintance... So when will you go to Tatsuya-kun?"

"If Shiba isn't busy, I thought about next Sunday. I'll be in my car, so I'll take you straight out of the house."

"Ara, thank you."

Mayumi smiled and turned forward. From this moment, there was no more talk between them, but an awkward atmosphere in the booth didn't arise.

◊ ◊ ◊

The day after returning from the security mission on the Enterprise, Lina looked quite sluggish during training.

"Commander-in-Chief. You seem to be feeling bad? How is your health...?"

"No, it's nothing like that. I'm sorry I was so sloppy Ben."

Having finished training and on the way to the barracks she met Stars number Two officer Canopus, who addressed her with a serious face.

"No, everybody has black and white stripes in his life... Has anything happened to you?"

"Yes. It wasn't like me, I was nervous in front of those two 'Apostles', Bezobrazzoff and MacLeod."

"It wasn't a battlefield, but a meeting place. There's nothing wrong with being mentally exhausted from trying to prevent an error in front of foreign guests."

"...Ben? Are you saying that I'm too inexperienced?"

"Oh, no, what are you saying?"

Canopus immediately looked away. Lina felt pressure in her temples. "The first thing is to get some rest Commander-in-Chief. Well, I'll go now."

Canopus showed a reassuring smile and left. Seeing the retreating figure, Lina thought that she couldn't afford to do it, no matter how much she was asked to. She turned and walked to her room.

Thanks to Canopus she felt much better, but she still couldn't get it off her mind. Even after taking a shower, she didn't feel refreshed.

She was aware of the reason. The fate of the magicians she saw on the Enterprise affected her feelings.

Prior to this, Lina didn't experience much discomfort or dislike of how magicians were treated as a weapon. Prior to that, she'd strongly considered this question when she was in Japan when she collided with Tatsuya, Miyuki and their friends... no, when she collided with Tatsuya.

Lina was sitting in front of the mirror, wrapped only in a towel. She barely realized what she was doing she was so absorbed in her thoughts.

(Tatsuya wasn't against the fact that magicians were forced to fight.)

(Tatsuya wasn't against magicians becoming soldiers.)

(Tatsuya didn't say that he was against magicians becoming weapons.)

(Tatsuya was against continuing to be a soldier.)

Listening to her thoughts, she remembered something. One thought occurred in Lina's mind.

(What is Tatsuya striving for? A world in which magicians don't need to become weapons.)

(Maybe I'm remembering wrong? Tatsuya didn't say anything like that.)

However, she felt that this thought was correct. The idea that Tatsuya seeks to create a society where magicians are not forced to become weapons.

When she returned from Japan and was far from Tatsuya, she felt no doubt about this matter.

She began again to think that using magic in combat is quite natural for magicians in the army. Therefore, she thought that the idea of a "world in which magicians aren't forced to be a weapon" is some kind of delusion.

She became a soldier of her own free will. Magicians play the role of weapons of their own free will. Regardless of how it looks from the outside, magicians have the freedom to choose.

(I thought so before.)

(Or so I imagined it.)

(But there...)

(That Enterprise system...)

(As Tatsuya said...)

(Right. I need Tatsuya...)

Reaching out to the videophone, Lina froze in this pose.

(What was I trying to do?)

(Warn Tatsuya?)

(About what?)

(The fact that Bezobrazzoff and MacLeod are targeting him?)

Lina's forehead broke out in sweat after just taking a shower, and an unpleasant chill ran down her back.

"Ha, ha ha, ha ha ha ha..."

The laughter that escaped from Lina's lips was half-unconscious.

(What the hell was I trying to do?)

If it wasn't for this laughter, she would be panicking right now.

It's good that she remembered Tatsuya.

But she won't be allowed to warn Tatsuya, because this will be considered leaking military secrets. The phone in her room is clearly tapped, so it cannot be used.

(This shocked me so much.)

(Finding out that magicians are used like spare parts, as fuel...)

(I thought I understood the limitations of the military's freedom.)

(I thought I agreed with that.)

(Tatsuya...)

(That's why you said that, huh?)

Lina remembered the words spoken at the parting that night.

("*If Lina wants to leave Stars... "*)

("*If you want to stop being a soldier... "*)

(Tatsuya: Did you know that I'm not fit to be a soldier...?)

All these thoughts of Lina were now unconscious for her.

She got up and went to the bathroom again to wash away the sweat and keep warm.

She took off the towel and put herself under a hot shower.

By this time Lina didn't even remember what she was thinking while sitting in front of the mirror.

Chapter 7

Tatsuya received a message from Katsuto on Wednesday night.

The message asked whether it would be convenient for him to meet on Sunday. And it came from the main Yotsuba house. This meant that the request for the meeting wasn't based on the sempai and kohai relations from First High, but was the request of the Juumonji family of the Ten Master Clans to the Yotsuba family of the Ten Master Clans.

"Tatsuya-oniisan, is this an urgent matter?" Kuroba Fumiya asked Tatsuya from the couch at the villa.

At this point Pixie brought two coffees. Tatsuya paid it no attention and answered Fumiya's question.

"No. The head of the Juumonji family is asking permission to come here on Sunday. It was an electronic message transmitted through the main house. Have you heard anything about this Fumiya?"

"No, nothing..."

Tatsuya reached for a cup of coffee and his eyes advised Fumiya: "Drink before it gets cold."

Fumiya stretched out his hand towards the table with his manicured nails, and with his other hand pushed back the medium length hair hanging over his cheek, and took a sip with his lipstick covered lips.

"I see. It's very rare for Fumiya and Ayako to act separately."



"Nee-san also wanted to see Tatsuya-Niisan, but it was an order."

Fumiya returned the coffee cup to the table. The skirt was a little wrinkled when he leaned toward the table, and the movement with which he adjusted it was completely automatic.

"Then tell me what order brought you here? Coming in this fashion was also part of the order?"

At Tatsuya's words "in this fashion", Fumiya's cheeks flushed. This look made him more attractive than most high school students.

"This is because many people now know my face..."

"Yes indeed. It would be bad if you contacted me while showing your real face."

It was understandable. Fumiya became widely known after the Nine Schools Competition last year. It seems that his connection with Yotsuba was no longer a secret, but apparently the main house had not yet planned to officially recognize Fumiya.

Fumiya who wasn't fond of dressing in women's clothes could only be pitied.

"So?" Tatsuya turned to him and asked again.

Before speaking, Fumiya straightened his back.

"The likelihood of this villa being attacked increased."

"The Self-Defense Forces?" Tatsuya ask, arching an eyebrow.

"Yes."

Fumiya couldn't remain as calm. His pretty, well-groomed face was very tense.

"Fumiya, did you only come to tell me about this?"

Fumiya decided that Tatsuya was trying to tell him "don't be afraid."

"More about that... the Yotsuba family cannot send reinforcements."

Fumiya squeezed the hem of his skirt in his hands. He assumed that Tatsuya would be angry.

"It's quite natural."

"Ha?" But he couldn't understand what Tatsuya said.

"The reason is because it's not an internal conflict between the Ten Master Clans. It isn't a good idea to deal with the Self-Defense Forces right now. Putting the family in danger for my sake alone is obviously an unprofitable action."

"Tatsuya-Niisan... you agree with that!?" Fumiya lost his calm at Tatsuya's cold-blooded logic.,.

"Why are you shaking?"

Tatsuya said that instead of "why are you worried". At those words Fumiya noticed that his hands were shaking, not because he was very worried. He realized that he was seized by fear.

"All I have to do is deal with this alone."

Tatsuya spoke as if explaining an elementary mathematical rule, like $2 \times 2 = 4$.

Fumiya's eyes opened wide and his mouth opened slightly. Although he didn't want to, his white teeth and pink tongue, peeping out of the slightly opened lips that were glistening with lipstick, seemed tempting for a man's gaze.

For a moment Tatsuya looked with pity at his younger cousin who radiated an indescribable maiden charm. But immediately his face returned to a cold-blooded expression.

"Fortunately, I have a suit and a motorcycle."

It wasn't a simple suit. It was an original flying armored suit developed by the Yotsuba family, and was created to work in conjunction with an armored motorcycle. Fumiya knew that these things were brought to this villa.

"Besides, my Torus, Trident and Lance Head were also brought. And in this mountainous woodland I feel at home, and I cannot feel other people's eyes. If there is an opponent of the 'Imakasina *' or 'Daitengu' class, then that is another conversation, but until that happens I'm not going to be defeated."

[In Volume 19, Todo Aoba called Yakumo "the reincarnation of Kasin-koji". "Imakasin" roughly means "Modern Kasin" or "Kasin of our days."]

The mentioned Torus is a CAD with full mind control, Silver Torus. Trident is his favorite CAD in the form of a pistol, Silver Horn custom modification of "Trident".

And Lance Head is a device for a CAD to use "Baryon Lance."

Indeed if Tatsuya has such equipment, then until such opponents as "Imakasin" = Kokonee Yakumo or "Daitengu" = Kazama Harunobu appear, then victory is guaranteed to him. Fumiya was sure of this.

Even if there are dozens of enemies. Even if there are hundreds of enemies.

Fumiya realized that his trembling had stopped.

Next to the villa was a taxi. It was the car that Fumiya used (in his female disguise).

Anyone would have thought that if the taxi had been waiting all this time, the fee would be huge, but Tatsuya didn't think so. He also didn't think that the car was rented. He realized that the driver was from the Kuroba family, wearing his black suit.

Tatsuya watched Fumiya who was wearing a wide-brimmed hat exit the Villa.

"I deleted the data from the hidden cameras, so you can safely go home."

"I'm sorry to trouble you with this."

Fumiya bowed with a grateful air. In his behavior, there was absolutely no discomfort from wearing women's clothes.

When Tatsuya said that he "destroyed the data," he meant that he erased the data from the cameras hiding in the vicinity of "spying lovers" (most likely these are people from the military Intelligence Department).

Because with the help of a photo you could identify him with facial recognition software, regardless of the fact that he's wearing women's clothes. Fumiya's women's disguise was a method of deceiving only the unaided eye. And his wide-brimmed hat was to hide from the view of the reconnaissance satellite and cameras on the stratospheric platforms.

"Since that message came to me through the main house, then mother should also know its contents. Although I will send a copy of the answer to the main house, but I would like you to verbally convey that I am going to respond with an offer to meet the Juumonji family."

"I understood. Tatsuya-oniisan, then see you."

"Yes. Thank you for your concern."

Fumiya smiled in response to Tatsuya's gratitude.

Scenes with farewell hugs and kisses on the cheek didn't occur.*

Joke of humor from the author. In Japanese, the negation follows at the end of the sentence. Therefore, in the original, the phrase sounds like this: "Fumiya hugged Tatsuya and kissed his cheek on farewell... no, it didn't happen."

◊ ◊ ◊

At the same time that Fumiya was talking to Tatsuya, Ayako was visiting Miyuki in the apartment in Chofu where she'd recently moved.

"I heard that you move here on Monday, but it seems that you've already finished moving in."

Ayako, sitting on the living room turned to Miyuki sitting opposite. These apartments were even more spacious than their previous separate house, and they had a great cozy living room.

"There wasn't very much luggage, and Minami-chan helped me a lot."

Miyuki responded to Ayako's flattery by glancing at Minami, who brought tea and sweets.

"She's pretty skillful, although we're the same age."

Minami bowed to Ayako's praise and said in a low voice, "Thank you." Minami also understood that Ayako's words were only formal courtesy.

After finishing serving tea, Minami left the room, closing the door behind her.

Miyuki and Ayako turned at the same time.

"Ayako-chan, I wonder what brought you to us today?"

"Today I am a simple messenger, Miyuki-oneesama."

Two girls exchanged smiles where there was a barely noticeable mixture of tension.

Now that there was no Tatsuya and Fumiya, who usually limited them. It seemed that the spirit of rivalry would grow forever, but Miyuki still looked away.

She looked away at the table, took an elegant cup from the tray with an elegant movement, and took a sip of not very hot tea. With a slight lag behind her, Ayako in the same refined manner, scooped out a piece of jelly pastry with a fork.

"Did both of you need something?" Miyuki asked after waiting for Ayako to finish eating.

"Yes, that's right." Ayako answered, silently returning the fork to the saucer.

"Then tell me."

"The probability that in the coming days the Self-Defense Forces will try to capture Tatsuya-san have increased."

"Why?" Miyuki calmly reacted to Ayako's bold statement about "capture."

"Aren't you surprised?" Ayako also spoke in an unsurprised voice.

"Because it was quite predictable. Unlike Tatsuya-sama, I don't trust the Self-Defense Forces."

"I don't think Tatsuya-san became a member of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, because he trusts them."

"Right. But if he met friendly people there, his feelings could change to some extent, couldn't they? Because Tatsuya-sama didn't lose all his emotions."

Ayako, who wasn't expecting Miyuki to talk about Tatsuya's lost emotions, couldn't find the words for an answer. Nevertheless, Ayako quickly took herself in hand and moved on to the main topic of her visit today.

"Details of the date and time will be reported once we've determined the Self-Defense Forces plans. But that's all we can do."

"...Can you express yourself more clearly?"

"In other words, it means that neither the main family nor the side branches can help with anything other than information."

"That's what Aunt Maya decided?"

"Yes."

"Understood..."

Along with this word, the temperature in the room fell sharply.

The tea on the table froze, and the surface of the jelly was covered with ice.

The cooling phenomenon wasn't limited to this, the ice also began to appear on Ayako's clothes and hair.

"Ayako-chan, if you don't really resist it, you'll freeze, won't you?"
Quiet, kind, soft, like freshly fallen snow, Miyuki reported the obvious.
"Please continue as long as you wish."

Although her pale lips trembled, Ayako answered in a firm, strong-willed voice.

"I see." Said Miyuki and the temperature in the room quickly recovered.
"...Miyuki-sama, what's going on!? Miyuki-sama!?"

There was an intense knock at the door and a desperate voice from Minami.

"Minami-chan, you can come in."

"I'm sorry!"

Minami entered the living room and lost the gift of speech from the horrifying picture before her. Everything in the room was covered with water condensation. Only a small area around Miyuki was untouched. Sitting across from Miyuki, Ayako's clothes and hair were completely drenched, and her face was completely pale.

"Minami-chan, lead Ayako-chan to the bathroom. I'll dry this room."

"S-listen. Ayako-sama, please follow me."

"Thank you."

Following Minami's invitation, Ayako stood up. She obediently followed Minami, but stopped in front of the door, as if she had planned it in advance.

"Miyuki-oneesama."

"What?" Miyuki responded to Ayako's call in a cold voice, and there wasn't a drop of guilt.

"The way it was, it was like head-sama."

"...As I mentioned earlier, the Yotsuba will not send reinforcements to Tatsuya-san. The only one who can help Tatsuya-san is you."

Ayako turned her back on Miyuki.

"I understand."

Miyuki only responded after Ayako had already disappeared behind the door.

"Ayako-sama, are you sure you don't need help?"

Minami asked because once they entered the bathroom dressing room, Ayako slowed her pace, and barely seemed to be able to stand on her feet. She was showing that her clothes might be difficult to remove herself. In such a situation, Minami would have offered to help, even if the behavior of the maid had not been imprinted in her mind.

"Everything is fine. Thank you for your concern."

"...Then I will prepare a change of clothes. Please let me know if you need anything."

"Thank you. I will be grateful to have something to change into." Ayako said, after which she undressed, went into the bathroom and closed the door behind her.

This door between the dressing room and the bathroom wasn't translucent, as in some houses, but completely concealed what was happening in the bathroom. From the dressing room it was impossible not only to see someone in the bathroom, but it was also impossible to hear any sounds from there. Therefore, Ayako letting hot water out of the shower, settled down on the floor with relief.

"It was the power of Miyuki-oneesama... And she wasn't even serious..."

Despite the fact that she kept a calm face, tears appeared in her eyes.

That cooling wasn't even a conscious activation of magic. It was magical power running wild. Despite this, the cold created by Miyuki didn't have a direct impact on Ayako's body.

Naturally, Ayako defended her body with data fortification. And yet Miyuki's wild magic completely surrounded Ayako's body, separated from her by a distance of not more than the thickness of the skin.

The ice was caused not by the condensation of water from the hair itself, but by drawing moisture out of the surrounding air. The same thing happened with the clothes.

And her own magical defense was helpless against this phenomenon...

"It wasn't just a phenomenon modification..."

"It was as if the world had voluntarily submitted to Miyuki-oneesama."

"It was a magic that seemed to have charmed the mind of the world itself, captivated it and took it under direct control..."

It was something supernatural, different from the magic that Ayako knew. Such a crazy idea arose in her head. Despite the hot shower, Ayako's body felt a cold shiver.

◊ ◊ ◊

Thursday, end of May.

Lieutenant Colonel Kazama of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion received a phone call from Tatsuya.

"Sorry to tear you away from work, Lieutenant Colonel Kazama. This is Shiba Tatsuya."

"...I thank you for your cooperation in Okinawa."

Kazama correctly understood the sense that the speaker on the other side of the phone line introduced himself as "Shiba Tatsuya." He guessed that this meant that he didn't call as "Special Officer Ooguro" of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, but as a magician of the Yotuba family.

"So, what business did you call about?" He followed up with a leading question.

"I heard that the Self-Defense Forces plan to attack me. Is this true?"

This unfriendly question was asked in a completely formal tone, as if an artificial intelligence said it.

"This isn't entirely true."

Kazama didn't need to answer honestly, and had no intention to do it either, but for some reason, answering Tatsuya's question, he couldn't pretend that he didn't know anything.

"Then what is the truth?"

"The Intelligence Department of the Self-Defense Forces has set its eyes on you. This is the will of the Intelligence Department, and not the decision of the army."

After answering, Kazama thought about what if he had come under Mental Interference magic but immediately rejected that.

And the reason wasn't that Tatsuya cannot use Mental Interference magic. He realized that his speech was because of his guilt for passively watching while Tatsuya was in a quandary, as well as unconscious calculation that it was better to speak in some degree of honesty to keep Tatsuya.

"In other words, it's an Intelligence Department rebellion?"

With his tough statement, Tatsuya finally drove him into a corner.

"...You can say so."

But Tatsuya's words were not wrong. Kazama had to admit this.

Yes, Tatsuya attacked a secret army facility. For this he can in some sense be considered a criminal, and if you consider that he's a "special officer", then he can be considered a rebel.

However the use of military force without permission to control a civilian is a serious violation. If youI consider Tatsuya a rebel, then his crime should be considered in a military court. As Tatsuya said, the fact that the Intelligence Department independently sent out combat force without proper regular procedures was certainly a rebellion.

"In that case, if I defend myself, it will not be a problem for the brigade, will it?"

This time, Kazama didn't know how to answer.

The Intelligence Department's plan contradicted both the law and the army. If it leaks to the media, then the army will get a great deal from them, and the leadership will have to resign in full force. If Tatsuya himself wants to keep it a secret, then we must go to meet him.

However, it will be bad if it looks as if the 1-0-1 brigade gave the go-ahead for the destruction of the executive detachment of the Intelligence Department. "If there were three people it is already a faction" this meant that there were no organizations free from factional struggle. And the Self-Defense Forces were no exception to this rule.

The reputation of the 1-0-1 brigade was due to the high skill of the brigade commander, and Lieutenant General Saeki helps to avoid interference by bureaucrats and politicians, but there is still a weakness in terms of inter-factional relations. There are even attacks inherent in patriarchal society that Saeki takes too much on herself for being a woman, saying she cannot be trusted.

Considering that Saeki is among the most influential people of the Self-Defense Forces, it is necessary to avoid the possibility that she will be blamed for everything.

"There will not be any problems for the Independent Magical-Equipped Battalion."

In the end, Kazama was able to give an answer only within the limits of his responsibility.

"...I think you understand that the battalion cannot support you. We would like you to do it on your own."

"Of course, I understand."

For a moment, Kazama had a feeling that Tatsuya had a cruel, inhuman smile.

"It's enough for me that the lieutenant colonel understands the situation. Sorry to trouble you."

"Yes. I wish you a good battle... huh, that is, good luck."

There was no need to wish that the battle was a good one. Tatsuya's victory was predetermined. However, luck was necessary for this victory to not worsen the situation even further.

The video call was cut short before Tatsuya answered Kazama.

Kazama decided to forget Tatsuya's surreptitious smile.

The videophone on his desk had the function of automatically recording conversations. If he now includes the reproduction of this conversation, he will be able to understand whether this sinister smile was an illusion, as if turning him into another person.

So Kazama, without trying to confirm this, just pressed the delete record button.

◇ ◇ ◇

Thursday, during lunch. Katsuto sat alone drinking coffee in the cafeteria of the National Magic University when Mayumi showed up.

"Can I sit next to you?"

"Of course. Sit down."

After answering, Katsuto noticed that on Mayumi's tray there isn't anything but a cup of tea.

"Saegusa, have you already had lunch?"

Katsuto already had a bite, but he realized that he did eat pretty quickly. At a dinner party food is usually slowly eaten while conversing, but when he's alone, he eats fast.

Today it was so. He just finished eating in the dining room and moved to the cafeteria for coffee.

But even if women usually eat less, it was still too fast.

"Third lecture was canceled, and I went to the canteen early to avoid the crowd during break."

"I see."

Students of the National Magic University study diligently, because they have a lot to learn. The same applies to Katsuto. In the morning he has absolutely no spare time. In the afternoon there is free time, but this is the privilege of students who have a family job.

"Juumonji-kun, I'm talking about the situation that we discussed earlier."

When Mayumi sat down, she immediately switched to the main topic. Although this haste wasn't typical for her, it seems that she didn't want anyone to suspect that she would stay here for a long time.

"I received the answer yesterday. Consent was received, as expected." The specific names were not mentioned, but there was no need to explain that the "thing" mentioned was Tatsuya's consent. "So far, everything is going well. Will you be ready at 9 o'clock in the morning?"

"That's fine. Will the meeting be in the afternoon?" In Mayumi's voice it was read that it was unexpected for her.

"He's still a schoolboy. It will not be a meeting with alcohol. In that case, it's better not to go later."

With this Katsuto was quite reasonable, and Mayumi didn't have any doubts.

"But there may be a need to use force? Isn't it better to go after dark?"

Katsuto didn't stop Mayumi, who said such dangerous words. All the students around them knew that Katsuto is the head of the Juuonji family of the Ten Master Clans, and Mayumi also has a direct line of kinship with one of the Ten Master Clans. The fact that the Ten Master Clans are going somewhere to "use force" wasn't unusual.

Although the main reason was that they were surrounded by a sound insulation field, because of this not even neighboring tables heard them.

"In the dark, you can make unforeseen errors."

Mayumi shuddered, realizing what Katsuto had said.

"Juumonji-kun... you're pretty serious about this, aren't you?"

"Indeed, for Tatsuya the probability of victory will increase if instead of an open area it is dark or there are lots of obstacles to hide behind."

Katsuto will naturally avoid such a situation. Due to his manner of speech, Mayumi felt that Katsuto was going to crush Tatsuya with all his power.

"This is an opponent, that should be treated seriously." Katsuto answered in a resolute voice at Mayumi's question.

(Ah... He's 100% serious... I cannot possibly cope with this...) Sweating with a cold sweat (though in the imagination), Mayumi thought.

◇ ◇ ◇

On Friday, Miyuki spent the day (even in class) thinking about what she learned from the message from Ayako last night.

(The day after tomorrow...)

(The report referred to the date when Tatsuya would be attacked by the Self-Defense Forces. But other than that, there was something else.)

(If it's only the Self-Defense Forces, Onii-sama, Tatsuya-sama will not lose.)

(But if they join Juumonji-sempai...)

The message from Ayako said that the Self-Defense Forces would attack during Katsuto's visit.

(If the fight is one-on-one, he will surely defeat Juumonji-senpai, but...)

Miyuki took the opposite opinion of Mayumi about the relationship between the strength of Tatsuya and Katsuto. She didn't doubt that Tatsuya was the strongest, and that he would win. But Miyuki also understood that Tatsuya isn't invincible.

If Katsuto and the Self-Defense Forces unite, then it's impossible to ignore the possibility that Tatsuya, in the end may faint from overloading his Magic Calculation Zone.

(But even if they don't unite, then having exhausted his strength after the battle with Katsuto he can make an unforeseen mistake.)

(...Still, I'll go too.)

Miyuki made this decision while working at the Student Council.

Maya didn't tell Miyuki that she should not go to Tatsuya.

However, the attempt to go to Tatsuya's aid can be regarded as a protest against the order that they should live separately.

Ayako then told Miyuki: "Miyuki-oneesama, the only one who can help Tatsuya-san is you", but these were the words of Ayako herself. These words, on the contrary, should be understood in the sense that Maya does not want anyone to help Tatsuya.

But still Miyuki had no choice but to help Tatsuya.

(...That's right, I didn't have to worry about it from the beginning.)

It does not matter what they think and what they want, Maya, the Yotsuba family, the Self-Defense Forces, the country, the whole world.

Tatsuya. He's the meaning of her existence. Miyuki once again reminded herself of this.

Miyuki was going to the station in the company of Honoka, other members of the Student Council, Shizuku and Kasumi from the disciplinary committee, as well as Shiina and Saburou, when a voice called out behind her.

"Ara, Erika and the others are just now going home? Today we stayed late, and I thought that everyone else had already left."

As Miyuki said, today the student council work continued until the school closed. The day was long and it was still light, but in the winter at this time the sun would have already gone down. Almost all students, including those engaged in club activities, stayed at school until late.

"The patrol drove us out."

"We were studying for tests on the cafeteria terrace and didn't even notice how the time flew by..."

After Erika's scattered response, Mizuki shyly continued the explanation in response to Miyuki's question.

"Indeed, exams are coming up." Miyuki nodded when she heard Mizuki's answer.

Regular exams in magic high schools were conducted on both magical theory, and magical practice. Items from the regular course (not related to magic) were evaluated daily without any written tests. In the third year of school, nothing has changed.

Since Mizuki was taking the magic engineering course, the content of her tests was slightly different, but the tests for the first and second course were exactly the same, so it's no surprise that Mikihiko, Erika and Leo worked together.

"And I have never studied group training."

Shizuku's joke was inaccurate. That is, there wasn't enough words. More specifically, it was supposed to be: "I have never stayed in school after school to work in a company of friends."

"My grades have been improving lately and I've been thinking, maybe I should try to go to the National Magic University?"

Leo was speaking shyly, not at all worried about such things, that Shizuku's phrase lacked words.

"I don't think I want to go to the National Magic University, but if this idiot gets there and I don't, then I'll be a little ashamed. This inflames the spirit of rivalry in me."

Erika, as usual, inserted her own joke.

"Who did you call an idiot!"

"I just wanted to become a smart man? How rude."

"Yes, yes, Erika-chan and Leo-kun, let's finish your love quarrel."

Mizuki climbed into this comic verbal skirmish between Erika and Leo. Mikihiko, in turn, has decided "not to come nearer to danger".

"This isn't a lovers quarrel!"

"Erika-chan, you're smart enough, so if you start learning as early as possible, then you will succeed."

Mizuki completely ignored Erika's cry.

"Shibata-senpai, it was..." Kasumi said admiringly, and Izumi nodded strongly beside her.

"...I've already told you. I'm not going to go anywhere after school."

Erika probably decided that if she argued further, things would get worse, so she answered seriously.

"My father sent me to high school, and I couldn't object. Well, it turned out to be the right decision, and I'm even a little grateful for that."

Mizuki looked at Erika with a look in which she tried to convey the message "You don't need to be embarrassed...". Erika, of course, pretended not to notice.

"After graduation, I thought I'd go on a "warriors journey."

"What?"

"A warrior's journey?" Following the surprised Mizuki, repeated Honoka.

"Yeah. I don't want to learn magic, but the real old Kenjutsu styles. I've saved some money and I want to first visit all the master swordsmen of Japan, and then of the whole world... yes, somehow."

At the end, Erika laughed, apparently in order to hide her embarrassment but no one else laughed.

"...But can't you do that after graduating from the National Magic University?" Miyuki asked.

"Err? No, I don't think so. After graduating from university, I'll be quite grown up." Erika waved her hands in front of her panic stricken face.

"I don't think that age is important. This is a wonderful dream. If Tatsuya-sama allows it we can help so you don't have to waste time working on it."

"No, no, no, and again no!"

Erika seemed to be getting even more nervous. She probably wanted to escape far away.

"I also think that this is a wonderful dream."

"And I. Also I can become a sponsor."

"No-no-no-no-e-e-e... By the way, Miyuki."

Honoka and Shizuku continued to embarrass Erika, so she decided to change the subject.

"Is it possible to go to Tatsuya-kun this Sunday? Not just me, but all of us?"

Erika's words were desperate, and she was followed by Mizuki with relief on her face.

"When we studied a little bit earlier, we came up with this idea."

"We are not on any business, but simply..."

"Simply, I wanted to see..."

Continuing for Mizuki, Mikihiko and Leo explained the circumstances.

Miyuki felt that tears would appear before her eyes.

The Yotsuba family still uses Tatsuya. In addition to illegal activities, it receives a solid profit from Taurus Silver.

Tatsuya has also contributed much to the Self-Defense Forces. It is no exaggeration to say that in October of the year before last, the attack by the Great Asian Alliance was largely repelled thanks to the help of Tatsuya.

Tatsuya greatly increased the reputation of First High. No one could tell if the school could have won first place in points in the Nine Schools Competition last year without Tatsuya's participation. And the year before last, a lot of victories in the Nine Schools Competition were obviously due to Tatsuya's achievements. The Thesis Competition didn't yield any results, but last year's experiment "Stellar Furnace" compensated for it.

Although Miyuki didn't consider this prejudiced, it was also not her favoritism. She without a doubt had her own opinion on the contributions he's made.

The core of these achievements were an indisputable fact.

But, contrary to all this,
neither the Yotsuba family,
the Self-Defense Forces,
nor the school,
no one was going to defend Tatsuya.

And for the school it was generally a way to take the initiative to "shoot back" from attacks.

Nevertheless, these friends still..

"...Excuse me. But this Sunday another guest is coming to see him."
Therefore, Miyuki thought that we should not involve them in this.

Restraining her tears, and not even showing that she was ready to cry,
she answered with a reserved face.

Hearing this answer, Erika narrowed her eyes.
"Is this 'guest' undesirable?"

Miyuki smiled and shook her head.

"I cannot say exactly... but this guest is Juumonji-senpai."

With embarrassment on her face (apparently, this was due to a sense of guilt for saying something she should not have said), Erika mumbled
"Ah~, Juumonji-senpai..."

"Therefore, Erika. Please don't even think about doing something strange." Erika nodded obediently at Miyuki's warning.

◊ ◊ ◊

Raymond S. Clark. A guy who liked to use the title of "Seven Sages" for the sake of fun, was now in a bad mood. This was because he could no longer play with his favorite toy, Hliðskjálf.

It wasn't that he couldn't use it. His terminal was still working.

But the other 6 terminals stopped working when the system administrator turned them off. As a result, he couldn't enjoy peeking at what information other users gathered.

But that wasn't all. The fact that he alone could use a system equivalent to clairvoyance completely destroyed the thrill of the game. No matter what he did, there were no penalties for him. Look and listen as much as you want. This was no different from when a child is alone with only with his imagination to play with.

So it's boring.

So Raymond asked his father Edward Clark the developer and administrator of Hliðskjálf, to return the right to use the system to the others.

However, Edward didn't do this and told him to "Wait a bit".

Raymond didn't argue him. He was well aware that it's better to give up right away.

Instead, Raymond began to look for a new way to play his game.

To make it more exciting.

The most exciting part of his game with Hliðskjálf was when he played the role of an "advisor" in the "vampire incident". Although he sometimes played the role of "accuser" or "rescuer," but in such cases he never felt himself part of a global incident.

He wanted to experience again that same excitement... no, he wanted to experience something more exciting.

And something else.

Since he couldn't experience the thrill associated with the risk of using Hliðskjálf, this time he decided to take this risk on himself.

Except for one exceptional case, Raymond identity has never been revealed.

In addition, the risk of exposing his identity was almost zero.

But he decided to break this ban.

These were Raymond's thoughts.

Naturally, he wasn't going to do something as foolish as exposing his face for show.

He was going to change his face and voice with a computer system, and check how much he could hide his identity.

The "Apostle" of his country, Angie Sirius can change her appearance with magic.

How much will he be able to with this system?

Raymond couldn't suppress this and similar mischievous childish thoughts.

Chapter 8

Saturday evening.

The villa where Tatsuya lived had some unexpected guests.

Feeling their approach with "Elemental Sight" which he wouldn't confuse with anything, Tatsuya got up from the workstation and went to the parking lot in front of the entrance.

A large sedan with tinted windows stopped smoothly. A young man came from the driver's seat. Simultaneously with it, from the left rear passenger place there was a girl.

The young man was Hanabishi Hyougo. The girl is Sakurai Minami. After leaving, Minami remained standing, holding the door. Hyougo shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

Soon after holding Minami's hand, a beautiful girl emerged from the back door, as if coming from another world.

Miyuki raised her head and her black silky hair swung. Tatsuya and Miyuki's eyes met.

"Onii-sama...!"

With a voice full of emotion, Miyuki clung to Tatsuya's chest.

Tatsuya gently caught Miyuki's body, gently hugged her and whispered in her ear.

"You still came."

"I wanted to see you so badly Onii-sama .."

"Me too... But Miyuki, you were wrong to come here."

After Tatsuya's words, Miyuki's body quivered slightly, and she reluctantly backed away from him.

"...Tatsuya-sama and I haven't seen each other for a long time."

Miyuki completely forgot that Hyougo was there. But even without him, in this situation it isn't known where eyes and ears can hide. With a reserved face, she bowed to Tatsuya.

"Right. Even though it's been less than a week, it seems like we haven't seen each other for a long time."

This response with undisguised emotions was quite unusual for Tatsuya.

Having sent Hyougo away after asking him to return tomorrow night, Tatsuya led Miyuki and Minami inside the villa.

Each of them had a small bag of luggage. In actuality the villa wasn't just prepared in advance for Tatsuya's needs, but also changes of clothes for Miyuki and Minami.

Preparing for the trip here, Minami showed disgust on her face when she heard about it from Miyuki.

Her personal clothes were placed where she herself does not live, in addition to the place where a person of the opposite sex lives, almost no different from her own age. Although she didn't seriously think that he would be interested in her underwear, she couldn't do anything to get rid of this unpleasant discomfort.

Miyuki it seems didn't care at all.

That's why their bags were so light, but when they entered the house, Pixie took them both. Both Miyuki and Minami were strongly against Tatsuya carrying them. More specifically, the non-humanoid robot-porter, managed by Pixie politely took their luggage.

Since the bags were taken away, there was no need to go to the bedroom. So the two girls, following Tatsuya's invitation, sat on the living room sofa.

"You haven't had dinner yet have you? Let me prepare something."

Hearing this from Tatsuya, Minami immediately jumped from the sofa.

"Tatsuya-sama, I'll cook."

Her voice was relatively calm, but her eyes were shining with enthusiasm. Seeing this, Tatsuya immediately refused to discourage her.

"...Understood. Pixie, switch the equipment in the kitchen to manual mode."

"I refuse."

Pixie's answer was completely unexpected.

If this were due to the impossibility of executing an order (for example, there is no connection with the system), then this could be understood. But this is obviously not the case, since it's known that she has the ability to switch the equipment to manual mode.

But if this is so, then this should apply to some kind of malfunction. According to their programming, no machine can resist the orders of the owner. Realizing that Pixie isn't a simple machine, Tatsuya again gave the order.

"It is forbidden to refuse. Pixie, switch the equipment in the kitchen to manual mode. This is an order."

"Does the master prefer food cooked by this person?"

Tatsuya felt a headache. After coming to this villa he felt that Pixie had a little increased awareness of her "personality". Although she had just expressed her opinion against Tatsuya's order for the first time, but before that there were many cases when she did something, like making a decision herself before Tatsuya gave her any order.

But that's why you couldn't give her too much freedom.

"It's not about preferences. Pixie, it was an order."

"...I am obeying."

Perhaps it was only Tatsuya's imagination, because such a function wasn't built into it, but Pixie seemed to answer in a displeased voice when she switched the kitchen equipment into manual mode.

"All right. Pixie, enter standby mode."

"Yes."

It was definately 100% imagination that Pixie looked upset while walking to her place in the corner of the room, where she sat on a chair and froze like a doll.

In contrast to this, Minami happily went to the kitchen. Tatsuya and Miyuki decided to pretend that they didn't hear her whisper "I won."

After preparing the meal, serving Tatsuya and Miyuki, cleaning and washing dishes, preparing the bath and bed, Minami, at last, showed that she was satisfied. Recalling that facial expression with a desire to serve the master, Tatsuya brought Pixie out of the waiting mode and left the rest of the work for her. There wasn't any remaining housework, but there was still a security issue, so Pixie didn't complain.

With this, everything will be fine. Tatsuya mentally scolded himself for being "distracted," and turned his gaze to Miyuki, sitting relaxed on the opposite side.

They were not in the living room or in the dining room.

They sat opposite each other at a table on the balcony. (The table was taken to the balcony with the same kind of non-humanoid robot as the robot-porter. This villa used many different robots, but Pixie was the only humanoid type among them.)

It was already after 9 pm, but it wasn't cold outside even in light clothes. The peninsula of Izu is a mountainous area and it's near the end of May so it wasn't hot or cold. The temperature was just perfect and the breeze was refreshing, unlike near the urban area.

Miyuki narrowed her eyes and held her hair fluttering in the wind. She had a strange face, but it seems that the change of the location has improved her mood.

"Tatsuya-sama, this is a pretty nice place."

"Indeed. Another enjoyable season."

Penetrating the darkness of the night, the light emanating from the room fell on Miyuki's white skin. Black silky hair swaying in the wind flowed like flickering stars, and pearly black eyes glittered with their mysterious light.

After one glance at Miyuki, the sense of reality weakened. It was impossible to believe that this beauty exists in the same world as you. Even Tatsuya is now deep in this feeling.

This inhuman beauty, is it divine or diabolical?

"...Tatsuya-sama, when you look at me like that... it's embarrassing..." Miyuki's voice restored Tatsuya's composure.

Miyuki, sitting on the other side of the table, blushed, lowered her eyes and fingered her knees.

Tatsuya finally realized that he was staring at Miyuki, forgetting about everything.

"Sorry. I looked around."

"But that you... look at you? This is..."

Miyuki finally blushed and froze. Tatsuya realized that his restraint was broken.

He realized that the one that wanted to meet the most was not Miyuki, but himself.

Tatsuya thought that this is a serious problem, when emotions cannot restrain themselves. At the same time, he felt jealous of people around the world, because the enjoyment of this beauty wasn't limited to them alone.

"You're right, I'm sorry. Since I apologized, could you show me your face?"

"...Yes."

Miyuki slowly lifted her face, which still remained blushed. Her raised eyes met Tatsuya's gaze, and she looked away shamefacedly.

"...I need to talk seriously with you about something."

In fact, Tatsuya also felt uncomfortable, but fortunately, it wasn't difficult for him to suppress his emotions.

"...It's good."

What was the feeling in this voice?

Miyuki looked steadily into Tatsuya's eyes, although there were still signs of redness around her eyes.

"Did you come today because you know about tomorrow?"

"That's right." Miyuki sighed and asked in return. "And you, Tatsuya-sama, do you know about the fact that not only Juumonji-sempai will come tomorrow?"

"Yes. Fumiya told me."

"Thats how..."

There was a brief silence.

"...Miyuki. I don't want you to do anything dangerous."

"I know."

Again a short pause.

"I will not get involved in the battle between Tatsuya-sama and Juumonji-senpai."

"The purpose of Juumonji-sempai's visit is a conversation."

"Tatsuya-sama you too must understand that this isn't the only thing that will occur."

"Yes... probably."

Tatsuya sighed.

The sigh wasn't because of the predicament, but because of the expectation of an imminent collision.

Tatsuya acknowledged Katsuto as a strong enemy whom he didn't want to fight if there was a choice.

"Tatsuya-sama."

"What?"

"Juumonji-sempai will use that secret technique?"

"Who knows, because it shortens the life of the magician."

The two recently learned about the trump card of the Juumonji family.

After Katsuto took Tooyama Tsukasa under his protection, the Yotuba main house realized that the clashes with Katsuto couldn't be avoided and told them them the secret of the Juumonji family. For this they remained debtors to Maya.

"If he uses it, then I think that even for Tatsuya-sama the battle will be difficult."

"Miyuki. You got permission from Maya?"

Tatsuya already knew what Miyuki would say.

"No, this is my own decision."

"Stop it. This is my personal battle. It will be hard to convince her."

"There's no need to persuade them. I want it myself. I'll take responsibility for myself."

"Miyuki, calm down."

"I'm calm, Tatsuya-sama. No, Onii-sama..."

Miyuki's perseverance was enough to prevent Tatsuya from inserting a single word in response.

"In the end, I'm only the younger sister of Onii-sama. After becoming the next head of the Yotuba family, I will marry the son of the current head. I will no longer have the opportunity to be associated with Onii-sama like just now..."

Miyuki broke off because she realized she was going to cry.

"Even if I deserve Maya-sama's anger, I want to at least something to be useful to Onii-sama."

Miyuki hesitated only for a moment. Then she sent her determined eyes to Tatsuya.

"Onii-sama. I will remove your seal."

"Miyuki, what are you...?"

Not "Release" but "Remove."

"I meant exactly what I said. I want to make sure that Onii-sama is never again troubled by this limit imposed by other people."

"No, wait. This, of course, isn't impossible, but..."

Tatsuya got up, not even trying to hide that he was nervous.

"It puts a heavy load on users. Not only on those who are sealed, but also those who maintain the seal. Correct Onii-sama?"

However the determination on Miyuki's face made Tatsuya sit back down.

Tatsuya's "Material Burst" is sealed with the Outer-Systematic Mental Interference magic "Pledge" by Tsukuba Toki the head of the Tsukuba family, a side branch of the Yotuba family. In Tatsuya's case it not only blocks his greatest weapon, but his magical power is cut in half.

"Pledge" is a magic that prohibits specific decision, and limiting the magical power is just a side effect.

The unique feature of this magic is that in order to maintain the effect of mental intervention, the magical power of more than just the user themselves is needed.

When you try to prohibit something, it's meaningless if this effect can manifest only when you look at the object. Even prison guards don't watch prisoners constantly. In addition it's considered inefficient if one magician can control only one person.

Therefore the "Pledge" of a couple of people, the user himself and the subject of use, is usually supported by the magic power of a third person. If the decision-making constraint is non-permanent, then the use subject can do it himself. In the case where it is sometimes necessary to temporarily release the restriction, the third party that's close to the subject provides the magical power.

In the latter case, the "key" for the temporary removal of the restriction is transferred to the third party that provides magical power.

When using this key in the user's mind, the "prohibited" entry is rewritten to "temporarily released". To return the "prohibited" status you must again perform the ceremony, in which the owners "key" is reinstalled using the reactivation switch for the original user.

In Tatsuya's case, Miyuki is the owner of the "key". If Miyuki does not reactivate it then Tatsuya's seal will be removed, but the effect of releasing "Pledge" is temporary. As long as Miyuki continues to supply "Pledge" with magical power, the seal will gradually gain strength, so leaving it can be dangerous for Tatsuya.

Tatsuya's "Material Burst" was impossible to contain with the magical power of only Tsukuba Toki. For this reason, in the "Pledge" imposed on Tatsuya, the condition that "the Magic Calculation Zone be connected to Miyuki" was added. This is the so-called bilateral relationship between Tatsuya and Miyuki in their "Pledge." And that part of the "Pledge", which is imposed on Miyuki herself, can also be temporarily taken down by the "key" she owns, and which she supports with her magical power.

"Pledge" is arranged so that if you stop the supply of magical power from Miyuki, then the effect of the magic will naturally disappear in a short time. However, in the depths of Miyuki's consciousness, the rule "to supply Pledge with magical power" is set forcing her to do this.

Miyuki's words about the "heavy load on users" was not exactly accurate. After all, the user in this case was Tsukuba Toki. And the damage from the load will be given to Miyuki who was forced to supply the magic power for "Pledge" and maintain the seal.

"...I'm glad you want me to be in perfect condition. But still, a temporary release will be enough. Don't take risks of negative consequences from the removal of 'Pledge.'"

"No, Onii-sama. Miyuki cannot stand it any longer. The fact that I am Onii-sama's shackles. I cannot accept the fact that Onii-sama isn't comfortable being my fault."

Miyuki spoke the same way she did on New Year's Eve. As Miyuki said, she couldn't stand it anymore.

(I can't tolerate the Yotsuba family, who even though they've recognized Tatsuya as a member of the main family, but in an emergency situation, he can easily be given up.)

(Yes, they supply information. But what will that give? The information makes sense when you can cope with the approaching threat in the form of an attack. What the Yotsuba family is doing now looks like someone telling you that a rocket is flying to your city, and says that it's impossible to intercept it.)

(Of course, Tatsuya isn't a helpless civilian. He has the means to resist. There are abilities, but the strength of one person has its limits.)

The Yotsuba family must have enough strength to help Tatsuya. They are not called "Untouchables" for no reason. They must have the strength to resist even the government. And despite all this, he's forced to fight alone, moreover, he's restrained by his shackles. Such cruel treatment angered Miyuki to the core.

"All right, enough."

These were Miyuki's sincere thoughts.

"If Maya-sama wants Onii-sama to protect himself with only his power..."

In Miyuki's eyes, which were blacker than the clear night sky, a colorless fire was lit. With this look, she stared Tatsuya right in the eye.

"Then I would like that Onii-sama always had his real power."

Miyuki got up from her chair. To begin with, she wanted to make a temporary withdrawal of the seal.

"...I understand" said Tatsuya and got up from his chair. However, he didn't kneel before Miyuki.

"If so, then I, too, accept your determination...Come with me." Tatsuya said and went inside the villa.

"Y-yes."

Miyuki realized that she was distracted by her own enthusiasm. Disappointed, she followed Tatsuya. In the living room was Minami as expected and Pixie's out of standby mode.

"Minami. Take a bath with Miyuki."

Not knowing how to respond to such an unexpected order after the tension experienced a moment ago, Miyuki simply stood in wide-eyed silence.

"Together...?" With embarrassment on her face, Minami repeated, implying that she does not understand the true meaning of the order.

"Yes. There is enough space In the bathtub for two people. Help Miyuki thoroughly clean up. But don't use any fragrances or other things with scents this evening."

"Yes..."

"Pixie will prepare a change of clothes for Miyuki."

"...In other words, I should help Miyuki-sama change into ready-made clothes?"

"That's right."

"Yes, Tatsuya-sama. Miyuki-sama, with your permission please follow me."

Minami didn't understand why Tatsuya had ordered this. But an order is an order.

In addition, taking care of Miyuki is exactly what Minami wanted. Usually Miyuki refuses this, but now, using Tatsuya's order as an argument, Minami can "serve" her...

Fortunately for Minami, she managed to drag Miyuki into the bathroom before the sense of the conversation began to come up.

Quite "taking care" of Miyuki, Minami sent her to stay in the bath, and quickly washed herself. When they came out together from the bathroom, Miyuki looked completely exhausted, and Minami was in high spirits with a sense of accomplishment.

The clothes prepared there came as a surprise to Miyuki and Minami.

"Minami-chan, is this a white kimono...?"

"White kimono..."

Miyuki held in her hands an unfolded white kimono, the same as worn by Shinto priestesses.

"...And here we seem to have a red hakama."

"...It looks like it."

Nearby lay a bright red hakama skirt, which can be called a symbol of the priestess costume.

"It seems that there's no underwear under the kimono... This means that I need to wear this white kimono right away?"

"If you directly follow the words of Tatsuya-sama, it seems so."

"That's right."

With her face expressing "nothing can be done", Miyuki slipped her hand into the white sleeve. The sensation of the fabric was unexpectedly soft and pleasant.

Then she put on a red hakama. It felt like a normal skirt to the ankle, but wearing it without any underclothes was somehow embarrassing.

When they came out of the bathroom, Tatsuya entered. While he was in the bathroom, they began to dry their hair.

It takes some time to dry Miyuki's long hair. Especially if we take into account Tatsuya's current request "not to use things with a scent."

Tatsuya left the bathroom at about the same time that hair care was being completed.

"Miyuki, can I enter?"

"Yes, please."

Standing in front of the mirror, Miyuki turned to the door.

Tatsuya was in white clothes with short sleeves. On the clothes there were no patterns or drawings. Completely ordinary white fabric.

"Miyuki, follow me. Minami, you can rest now."

Again, without explaining anything, Tatsuya turned his back.

Miyuki and Minami exchanged glances, after which one of them followed Tatsuya.

Tatsuya led Miyuki to a room in the traditional Japanese style.

On the floor of the tatami was laid a red square carpet, and on each corner stood a saucer with salt, poured in the form of a hill.

In the middle of the carpet lay a wooden stand. On this stand was a white jug and two small cups of white porcelain.

Tatsuya sat down on his knees in front of this stand.

"Miyuki, please sit down."

Following Tatsuya's invitation, Miyuki sat on the opposite side of the stand.

"Now I will explain the nature of "Pledge."

The sudden words made Miyuki involuntarily straighten up even more, although she was already sitting upright.

"If we're not talking about the effect, but about how the Tsukuba family's 'Pledge' is arranged, then this is a spell that forces someone to use the magic that the spell user wants. Forcing them to use magic to control someone's mind. You can call it magic, interfering in the processes of other magic. Thus, it is ineffective for use by those who are not magicians."

Miyuki nodded her understanding.

"Because of its nature of interference in the processes of magic, 'Pledge' is established in the deep layers of consciousness, next to the 'Gates'. We can say that this system is close in that sense to 'Gatekeeper'."

"To the 'Gatekeeper', developed by Onii-sama?"

"Right. 'Pledge' is a spell that makes use of magic, and 'Gatekeeper' is a spell that prohibits using magic. Naturally, their systems are similar."

Miyuki nodded once more.

"Therefore 'Pledge' can be eliminated using 'Gatekeeper'."

Tatsuya took the cup from the stand and handed it to Miyuki.

Embarrassed, Miyuki took it. With his free hand, Tatsuya removed the lid from the jug, took it and turned to Miyuki.

"Is this...?"

"Don't worry, it's not alcohol."

Miyuki was embarrassed not because she thought he offered her alcohol. The thing is, she thought that this is the ceremony of "San-san-kudo" *.

San-san-kudo (3-3-9) is a ceremony that is conducted at the time of marriage. The newlyweds alternately make 3 sips from 3 cups with sake.

Although three cups of different sizes should be prepared for San-ku-kudo, but the atmosphere here was suitable.

Miyuki timidly set the cup and Tatsuya poured a clear liquid.

Miyuki put the cup to her face. There was no smell.

She gathered all her resolve and drained the whole cup in one gulp... After which her face finally relaxed. Because the liquid didn't have any taste either.

"Onii-sama... what is this?"

This water is highly purified. Although it is impossible to achieve a level of ultrapurity due to contact with the container and air, but this is the closest to that level of purity, excluding all other pollution factors. Tatsuya passed the jug to Miyuki, and she poured water into Tatsuya's cup.

"Um... Is that a farewell bowl of water?"

"Farewell bowls of water" meant the ritual of parting. Miyuki's voice trembled a little. Not only her voice, but both hands holding the jug trembled as well.

"No, it's different. Unless in case the use of clean water will not be an excessive difficulty?" Answered Tatsuya, having drunk clean water from the cup.

"Yes, really..."

Miyuki stopped trembling. Tatsuya returned the cup to the stand. After that, Miyuki first put the jug on the stand, and then the cup.

"It was a ritual to cleanse the body. Of course it's only symbolic. By accepting a pure substance, we increase the purity of the body and mind. If you look for the necessary pure substance, suitable for eating or drinking, and while not harmful to the body, then water is the best candidate."

Tatsuya pushed the stand aside. Now there were no obstacles between Tatsuya and Miyuki.

"To interfere with 'Pledge' located in the deepest layer of consciousness, we also need to get in touch on the deepest level."

"Onii-sama...?"

What is this, a joke? She wanted to ask, but...

"What?"

"...!"

She saw Tatsuya looking at her with an absolutely serious look, and her mind completely emptied, and her face turned red.



"Er, this is my... first time .. and if possible, it's better on the futon ..."'

Turning and trembling all over, Miyuki tried to complain with a thin voice.

Tatsuya's face was petrified. He showed absolute surprise.

"...I'm sorry!" Tatsuya suddenly bowed low.

"...Um, Onii-sama?" Miyuki asked after she timidly turned her head back and saw Tatsuya.

"Please forgive me for misleading you with an ambiguous phrase."

Tatsuya raised his head and met his eyes with Miyuki. There was shame in his eyes, which was very rare.

"Speaking about the deep level of contact, it was meant in the spiritual sense... In this case physical contact will disturb the mind and will interfere."

It took a second in order for Tatsuya's words to leak into Miyuki's mind. After that second, Miyuki tried to run away while covering her face with her hands. Tatsuya quickly reached out and grabbed Miyuki's shoulder.

"Let go, please! Onii-sama, I beg you!"

"It's my fault! So calm down!"

If he let her go now, then this problem will drag on for a long time...

Tatsuya had that feeling, and he desperately tried to reassure Miyuki.

Miyuki managed to regain peace after only 10 minutes of Tatsuya's persuasion.

"...I apologize. For this unsightly behavior..."'

"...No, I must apologize."

Tatsuya and Miyuki met with a glance. At first both were embarrassed, but in the end, their faces became serious.

"Let's start, Onii-sama." Miyuki was the first to speak.

"Ok, we will."

Tatsuya moved closer to Miyuki. When the distance became such that their knees touched each other, their eyes met again.

"I will now explain the spell."

"Yes."

"After releasing the seal, Miyuki will cease to supply 'Pledge' with magical power."

"Yes."

"The 'Pledge' spell will increase its activity, achieving the purpose of the Pledge. At this time, the true form of magic hiding in the deep layers of consciousness will become visible."

"Yes."

"Then I attack it with my 'Gatekeeper'. Though it's in a state mixed with consciousness and because I'm not able to use Mental Interference magic, I cannot get it. However, if the magic sequence appears then I can 'decompose' it."

"Yes. I rely on you, Onii-sama." Miyuki said while nodding. Staring Tatsuya directly in the eyes, she rose a little. Putting her hands on his shoulders to keep her balance, she put her lips to his forehead.

A flood of psion light erupted. In a raging psion vortex, the power came out of Miyuki's hands.

Tatsuya hugged Miyuki tightly. The warmth and softness of Miyuki's body, separated only by a thin white cloth, were transmitted to Tatsuya. But he wasn't even excited feeling it.

Hugging Miyuki, who was breathing heavily, Tatsuya sent his "Eye" into her.

He concentrated his mind.

Reason is the area that his "Eye" cannot reach. Suffering from excessive concentration that almost deteriorates the mind, Tatsuya directed his "Elemental Sight" at something that he should not be able to "see."

You cannot "see" the mind. But you can "see" the psion information body. Tatsuya was looking for hidden magic in Miyuki that didn't belong to her, and finally found it. His Elemental Sight aimed at the growing strength of the magic sequence of "Pledge."

Tatsuya activated gatekeeper.

This is the "Scattering spell" that targets the "Gate" (this is a kind of "exit" from the subconscious area from which magic sequences are released) of the magician. "Gram Dispersion" decomposes the psion information body, so that it can be called magic, which is a natural enemy of magic.

Even if magic affects the mind, its true form isn't an information body built of cells, but a psion information body. Therefore, it will not be able to avoid "Gram Dispersion."

Having manifested to begin fulfilling Pledge, the sequence of the magic of the "Pledge" showed its true form and was destroyed by Tatsuya's magic.

Tatsuya got his freedom.

Chapter 9

Sunday, morning.

As promised Katsuto came by private car to pick up Mayumi from the Saegusa mansion.

Katsuto had an impressive car. Size, power, reliability, everything was present.

Mayumi stared dazedly at this car, which looked as if it had been in the armed conflicts zone of Central Asia.

"Juumonji-kun. Did the Self-Defense Forces sell this to you?"

"This is a normal commercial vehicle."

This SUV really wasn't made to order, nor was it a converted car. It was a special limited edition model modification of an original model, but it was a purely commercial model car. Even if its design was copied from military vehicles.

But Katsuto, subjected to unfair accusations, also had something to ask Mayumi about.

"More importantly Saegusa, why haven't I heard from you that Watanabe was going too."

The look coming from Katsuto, who asked almost the exact same question as last month, was slightly more intense than usual.

Mari, standing next to Mayumi, nodded with a face saying "say something else."

Mayumi pulled a feigned smile, as if saying "what, for example!".
"So what? Mari also worries about our kohai."

"Hey! Don't say it as if I signed on at will!" Complained Mari, who was taken by surprise at such a shift of responsibility. However, even these words of protest couldn't hide the obvious lie.

"You are yourself Mari, don't be shy about it."

"Well, you..."

Mari couldn't find the words to answer the pretending friendly Mayumi.
"Instead of arguing, let's go! We will not waste time." Taking advantage of the pause, Mayumi offered to continue what they were here for.

"That's right..."

Nothing is planned for today, but it certainly will be a waste of time if you quarrel here, thought Katsuto and returned to the driver's seat.

With a satisfied face, Mayumi climbed onto the rear passenger seat. Mari followed Mayumi with a resigned face.

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Mayumi who had set off to Izu in such a triumphant mood, quickly came down to earth and was on the way to becoming depressed.

"I refuse." This was Tatsuya's answer.

These words were addressed to Katsuto sitting opposite Tatsuya in the villa.

Next to Tatsuya was Miyuki. Her expressionless face turned aside to Mayumi who sat next to Katsuto. Under the pressure of Miyuki's gaze, Mayumi was unable to maintain even the usual polite smile.

"Why?" Said in a terrible voice from Katsuto to Tatsuya, but Mayumi involuntarily almost jumped from the sofa.

Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki showed any reaction to such a powerful voice.

"I must ask this. Why do you think that I should participate in "Project Dion" Juumonji-senpai?"

Tatsuya refused Katsuto's request to participate in the American "Project Dion."

"Shiba, two years ago I told you that you must join the Ten Master Clans."

"Yes, I remember."

"The Ten Master Clans is part of the system of mutual aid for the magicians of this country created by Elder Kudo."

"I think this isn't part of the system, but its management link, but... I understand it too."

"I believe that those who have great power, those who have exceptional abilities, also bear responsibility."

Tatsuya silently waited for him to continue.

"Most magicians don't have much power. If you limit yourself to brute force, most magicians cannot compete with ordinary people who don't know magic, but have studied martial arts."

"So it seems because of different methods of evaluation. In addition, those magicians who don't serve in the army or the police are considered ordinary civilians."

"What a sophistry..." Mari mumbled in an irritated voice, sitting on the side opposite to Mayumi of Katsuto.

However, Tatsuya ignored this statement and Katsuto didn't care either.

"Non-magicians think that magicians are a different race, and this isn't limited to our country alone. This can be seen by looking at what is happening around the world."

"But not everyone thinks so. Let's skip that part for now."

Tatsuya's gaze called out for him to continue.

"I completely disagree with the idea that magicians are a different race from people. Don't forget the fact that magicians are a minority. Magicians should be friends and help each other. In this sense, I believe that the Ten Master Clans system created by the elder is correct."

"If this mutual assistance by magicians doesn't lead to contempt and exclusion of people who cannot use magic, then I also think that it is correct."

"...Do you mean that magicians look down on those incapable of magic, like some elite class looks at commoners?" Mari asked sitting next to Katsuto. The question clearly read the subtext "you think too much."

"In the near future it could become true." This time Tatsuya didn't ignore Mari.

"Shiba. Entering the Ten Master Clans, you should also give a helping hand to those same magicians." Katsuto ignored both Mari's question and Tatsuya's answer.

"Dear head of the Juumonji family. Sorry for being rude, but Tatsuya-sama is a direct descendant of the head of the Yotuba family." Miyuki said. After talking with Tatsuya last night, Miyuki finally admitted that for the rest of the world "Tatsuya-sama" is her fiancé.

"I know successor-donor of the Yotuba family. But I think that the Ten Master Clans is a duty, not a pedigree."

Katsuto returned his gaze to Tatsuya.

"Magicians who have great power, should help the weak magicians. Public opinion of magicians has been declining every day pushing magicians into a corner. Everything comes to the fact that they will slander us and say that wars only occur because magicians exist."

Katsuto interrupted his speech and looked at Tatsuya's reaction. Seeing that Tatsuya didn't change his expression at all, he continued.

"I'm not going to blame you for that Tactical Class magic. That would be an obvious mistake."

"Tactical Class Magic" was referring to the use of the "Active Air Mine" by a rebel girl in Central Asia. Although this incident led to the cancellation of the Nine Schools Competition which caused a wide-spread public reaction among magic high schools students, but Tatsuya didn't feel a drop of guilt from the very beginning, so now he didn't bow. Katsuto continued to talk while feeling that he had miscalculated a little.

"However if you take part in "Project Dion" then we can show everyone that magic isn't just for war. After the New Soviet Union's declaration of participation in the project, Japan can be considered as lagging behind in the peaceful use of magic. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the spread of slander against magicians in our country. Effective measures are needed."

"I can understand your concerns Juumonji-sama, but why Tatsuya-sama? There are professors at the National Magic University who are world-renowned authorities."

Katsuto hesitated to answer Miyuki's question. He understood that this was a fair argument. You cannot force one high school student to solve national problems. And yet he tried to give an answer, feeling his debt as the head of the Juumonji family of the Ten Master Clans.

"That's because, Miyuki-san..."

But then Mayumi spoke, ahead of Katsuto.

Katsuto should no longer carry this burden alone. I will take it upon myself to become Miyuki's opponent. This was the course of her thoughts.

"...Edward Clark said that Tatsuya-kun is Taurus Silver."

"What!?" Mari showed a powerful reaction to Mayumi's words.

Miyuki only frowned slightly. Tatsuya's face didn't have any noticeable movement.

"Even if this is supposedly..." Miyuki quietly retorted... "True that Tatsuya-sama is Taurus Silver, then what of it?"

"Er...?" Mayumi looked at Miyuki with an uncomprehending face after saying something completely unexpected.

"Even if Tatsuya-sama is Taurus Silver, this does not change the fact that he's a minor high school student."

Silencing Mayumi with these words, she continued on:

"Besides, the Yotsuba family isn't going to admit that Tatsuya-sama is Taurus Silver."

It was a hint that if they decided that Taurus Silver's real identity is Tatsuya, then they should be prepared for a total confrontation with the Yotsuba family.

Miyuki was prepared to simultaneously fight the Saegusa and Juumonji families. But Mayumi wasn't ready to provoke a comprehensive conflict between the Saegusa and Yotsuba families. That was the difference between them at that moment.

"Shiba." Katsuto's voice interrupted the silence. "Do you still stubbornly refuse to take part in the project?"

"I do. This project has ulterior motives."

"And this is a good reason why the magicians of this country will be in a difficult situation?"

"I don't mind if you think that way."

From the confrontations of Tatsuya and Katsuto sparks sprang.

"I understand... If you don't want it that way, then it's inevitable."
Katsuto stood up.

"Shiba, let's go outside."

Tatsuya stood up, looking Katsuto in the eye.

"Juumonji Katsuto, are you serious?"

Whether from Mayumi, or from Mari, a cry was heard.

The air around him began to get colder. The reason for this wasn't Miyuki. It was the coldness of steel emitted by Tatsuya.

"The situation cannot wait. Your refusal isn't accepted." Whether from Miyuki, or Minami came a restrained groan.

Katsuto's body exerted pressure, as if exceeding the gravity of the Earth several times.

"Fine." Tatsuya completely discarded the politeness of kohai towards the sempai. "Pixie, my CAD."

"Yes, Master."

On Tatsuya's order, Pixie went to the case with the CAD.

"I'll go on ahead."

Katsuto turned his back on Tatsuya and left. He had absolutely no fear of being attacked from behind. Minami hastily ran to open the front door.

"Saegusa-sempai, Watanabe-sempai."

Tatsuya softened his voice a little. Thus, these two woke up from their stunned state.

"You also need to prepare. Please, go on ahead."

"Do you mind if we help Juumonji-kun...?"

"It's too late to think about it, isn't?" Tatsuya responded coldly to Mayumi's question.

"You're very arrogant. Won't you regret it?"

"Regardless of what happens, I will not regret it."

On Mari's malicious remark, Tatsuya responded in the same tone as before.

"...Mari, let's go." Mayumi stood up and turned to Mari.

"Alright... Tatsuya-kun, don't forget about those words." Mari said and followed along with Mayumi.

The three led by Katsuto stood near the SUV and waited for Tatsuya.

Tatsuya left the villa with Miyuki and Minami. He headed towards Katsuto, but didn't stop as he passed by.

"Follow me. We can damage the villa from here." Tatsuya said, passing Katsuto.

When Miyuki and Minami passed by, Katsuto followed them with a small interval. Mayumi and Mari also excitedly went after Katsuto.

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In the shadows of the trees, someone was hiding and watching the developing events between Tatsuya and Katsuto. This man waited until Mari, who was last, went far enough, then brought his wrist with a wristwatch to his mouth.

The rat said "Shiba Tatsuya left the villa. Currently heading to a private golf course."

There was a built-in microphone in the strap of the wristwatches communication device.

The Boar said "Understood. Stop observation and reunite with the main unit." From the built-in dummy glasses of the speaker of the communication device, the answer of his accomplice was heard.

"Can't I check the destination?"

"Monkey is observing the area of the closed golf course, and if they turn at a fork then Bird is waiting in the other direction."

The rat said "Understood."

The person using the code name Rat was a secret agent of the special affairs unit of the National Self-Defense Forces Intelligence Unit.

The detachment planning to attack Tatsuya today consisted mainly of the counterintelligence unit to which Tooyama Tsukasa belonged. However to ensure they didn't lose sight of Tatsuya in the mountains, observers from the special affairs unit were also involved.

The other day, Rat made a mistake when the data from the photo of the girl who visited Tatsuya was damaged. On that issue, it was concluded that this was a camera hardware failure, and no one accused the Rat himself.

But to the Rat living in the world of shadow operations for more than 10 years, it was very worrying.

Although he was able to recover from the memory a portrait of the girl visiting Shiba Tatsuya, but it wasn't suitable for performing facial recognition to reveal their disguise. In fact, they haven't yet been able to establish the identity of this beautiful girl, from whom a strange sense of unfriendliness emanated.

For the Rat, today's mission was a struggle to regain his honor. He really wanted to continue monitoring until the destination was determined.

However, an order was given, and he had no choice. As he was ordered, he left the place to join the main squad.

Because his head was in the clouds, he didn't notice that someone was watching him.

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On the Izu Peninsula there were many golf courses that were confiscated during the last World War for use as air defense positions. They would be returned to the original owners after the war ended.

But among them there were also golf courses that the management companies refused to receive back, comparing the costs of restoration and possible income.

After the statutory compensation payment, such golf courses became state land, but they remained untouched after the anti-aircraft guns were removed from their positions.

Tatsuya brought Katsuto to one of these closed golf courses.

Here they won't need to be distracted by concerns that the buildings will be damaged.

Tatsuya stopped, turned around and said to Katsuto.

"Is it alright that we're in such an open place?"

The point of Katsuto's question was that he considered provocation as an invitation to become an enemy in an open area.

"Juumonji-dono wants excuses?"

Tatsuya's response was a standard phrase, but it seems to have worked.

"...Good. Shiba, I leave the first move for you."

Simultaneously with those words, Katsuto's barrier magic was deployed and the battle between them began. Katsuto's words were also another provocation: "Try and break my defenses if you can."

Unlike him Tatsuya didn't show any desire to continue fighting with words alone. In this situation, it is better to express your thoughts with magic.

In Tatsuya's right hand appeared a CAD in the form of a pistol. A moment later, the customized Silver Horn "Trident" was already fired at Katsuto.

Around Katsuto a lot of violent outbursts arose.

It was a light invisible to the unaided eye. However everyone present was an excellent magician. There were no people who couldn't see these bursts of psion light.

There were 18 flashes from Tatsuya attacks, and none of these attacks reached Katsuto's body.

"'Zone Interference', 'Data Fortification' and 'Psion wall'?"

"It's commendable that you saw this, but I cannot be defeated with one glance."

Tatsuya's words were only for distraction, but this plan was easily revealed. Tatsuya again activated decomposition magic.

Psion Wall as the name suggests is a magic that surrounds the user's body with a wall of high density psions. Although this magic looks similar to the barrier version of contact gram demolition, but unlike Tomitsuki's innate defense, this structure is created by artificial compression of psions. Therefore, it can be decomposed by Tatsuya's magic.

However, immediately after decomposing the Psion wall, a dome of powerful Zone Interference magic appears in the way. If you expand the Zone Interference Magic, then the shield comes up from the Data Fortification.

Even if you break it, then a new Psion Wall is coming. Zone Interference magic. Further it was expected Data Fortification, but again there was Zone Interference magic. A Psion Wall. Data Fortification. Zone Interference. Data Fortification. A Psion Wall. A Psion Wall. Zone Interference. Data Fortification...

Thus, three different anti-magic protections were created one after another.

Since they weren't created at the same time, you couldn't erase them in one go.

Due to the lack of a pattern it was impossible to prepare the necessary sequence of several decomposition magics in advance.

If several barriers of the same kind are created simultaneously, then Tatsuya can process them as one magic sequence. In other words, he can decompose them at the same time. This isn't limited to magic sequences and psion information bodies

If there are objects with a simple structure and the same properties, then they can be recognized as a single "set" allowing decomposition of the "set" rather than each object separately.

However, Katsuto's barriers were created one by one, using the destruction of the already deployed barrier as a signal to create the next barrier. But Tatsuya cannot decompose what does not exist yet.

When you find out what will be created, you can destroy the structure that creates this.

But every time this structure, which serves as a "factory," is destroyed, it is reproduced again. If this happens at the same speed as Tatsuya, then his decomposition will not be able to overtake it.

He already knew that his magic was very poorly compatible with the defensive version of Phalanx. Now Tatsuya realized this as a fact.

The outbreaks of psion light accompanying the destruction of barriers ceased. In order to overcome the situation as quickly as possible, Tatsuya stopped his attacks for an instant.

Immediately after this, a two-dimensional wall flew towards Tatsuya.

Magic, which is designed to crush the target, continuously striking with impermeable barriers to the substance.

The attacking version of Phalanx.

And it has already been activated. It already existed. And if it exists, then there is no sequence of magic that Tatsuya cannot decompose.

Tatsuya one "shot" erased all 24 layers that make up this magic barrier.
"Hou..."

Katsuto exclaimed out loud, and he grinned. Although he realized that the Attack Phalanx was completely incompatible with Tatsuya's magic, he showed no concern.

Katsuto sat down for a bit. Through his Elemental Sight, Tatsuya saw that Katsuto's Magic Calculation Area was lit by intense psion light.

Overclocking of the Magic Calculation Area.

Ichijou Gouki the head of the Ichijo family showed signs last month of overheating. Once upon a time, Yotsuba Genzo, the former head of the Yotsuba family also lost his life from overheating.

"Attack...!"

Tatsuya got ready. Katsuto's huge body flew.

Unfolding the anti-object barrier in a spherical shape in addition to the anti-magic barrier, Katsuto turned into a cannonball and flew forward. Tatsuya extended his left hand forward.

From this palm shot a stream of highly compressed psions.

Gram Demolition.

Having broken the anti-object barrier surrounding Katsuto, and passing through his Zone Interference, the stream of psions demolished the Acceleration magic.

However.

While Katsuto's body was still in the air, the Acceleration magic and the anti-object barrier were restored. No, they were reactivated.

Katsuto was approaching. On the verge of collision, Tatsuya successfully destroyed the anti-object barrier... But he couldn't neutralize the Acceleration magic. Katsuto's shoulder struck Tatsuya's shoulder.

"Tatsuya-sama!" This involuntary cry came not from Miyuki, but from Minami.

Tatsuya's body was thrown back, and he fell in the overgrown weeds. Miyuki clenched her lips, but looked patiently at Tatsuya.

While falling Tatsuya Flash Cast Move-type magic to gain some distance from Katsuto. Katsuto didn't pursue.

It wasn't because he had already recognized his victory, but because his goal was to force him to surrender.

"Did you even use magic?" Tatsuya muttered, rising.

After he was thrown back, Tatsuya noticed that just before the blow, Katsuto used Fortification magic on his jacket shoulder.

"There is no reason not to use it."

Katsuto again released light from the emitted surplus psions.

Over-clocking the magic calculation area, leading to its overheating. Tatsuya knew that Katsuto was doing it consciously.

The trump card of the Juumonji family "Over-clocking".*

[Here the author writes in English "overclock", and in previous mentions it is written in Japanese, but the literal translation there is "excessive activation."]

This is a magical technique that allows you to temporarily surpass your own limits by increasing the activity of the magic calculation area and also temporarily increasing your magical power.

This is a magical tactic that allows you to win at the cost of a lifetime as a magician.

This was the curse that haunts the "Capital's Final Defense" that isn't allowed to lose.

Juumonji Kazuki, the previous head of the Juumonji family, lost his magic ability due to the frequent use of over-clocking. And it happened right in front of Katsuto. And yet he used this technique to defeat Tatsuya.

Tatsuya decomposed the anti-object barrier flying towards him, and avoided the blow, taking a step to the side. But before Katsuto flew past, his anti-object barrier was redeployed and greatly expanded. Tatsuya was struck again.

Katsuto approached Tatsuya lying on the ground. Katsuto's right foot pressed down from above. Under his shoe, an anti-object barrier was deployed duplicating the shape of the sole.

Tatsuya escaped this attack at the last moment. However, when he managed to climb to one knee, Tatsuya received a fist from Katsuto. More precisely, it was an attack by the attacking version of Phalanx from a very close distance.

Tatsuya wanted to decompose it, but the fist approaching directly behind it was wrapped in an anti-object barrier and Zone Interference. The Zone Interference prevents the activation of magic for all but its user.

Tatsuya's hand which had blocked Katsuto's fist bent in an unnatural direction.

Tatsuya jumped back to avoid the full force of the punch. By the time his feet touched the ground, traces of the fracture were gone. However, immediately after landing his feet weren't firmly on the ground enough to make the next jump.

If he had a few fractions of a second more, he could have dodged this. However, Katsuto didn't give him even that much time.

Katsuto's shoulder struck Tatsuya again. Tatsuya's body was thrown back almost 10 meters.

You don't fly away, even when you're hit by a car. The force of the impact was probably equivalent to the impact of a heavy truck.

Tatsuya was lying on the ground with blood spattered around him. It was obvious to see that he had severe internal injuries.

"Tatsuya-kun!" There was a cry from Mayumi, who should be considered an enemy.

Miyuki clenched her fists and pressed them to her chest, but silently restrained herself while keeping her eyes on Tatsuya.

Katsuto extended his right hand toward Tatsuya.

"Hey, stop it!"

Ignoring Mari's cry, Katsuto released an attacking version of Phalanx in the direction of Tatsuya who was still lying face down. The two-dimensional barrier, capable of crushing an armored car, flew towards Tatsuya. However, just before touching him the 32-layer barrier disappeared.

"What...?" Katsuto said in astonishment. He didn't think that Tatsuya still had the strength to resist.

Tatsuya's hands moved. Pushing away with both hands, he lifted his upper body. And, finally, slowly got up.

There were no traces of blood around his mouth and the blood spots had also disappeared within the overgrown weeds.

"Shiba. This is your 'Regrowth'...?"

Katsuto couldn't hide his surprise. However, he quickly regained his composure and deployed the defensive version of Phalanx.

Tatsuya didn't say anything. His expression didn't show any emotion. It was completely lacking in humanity.

Tatsuya's left hand stretched towards Katsuto. This hand held the CAD in the form of a pistol. But it was slightly different from the one that was in his lowered right hand.

At the far end of the CAD on its "muzzle", something similar to a sharp spike was attached. A metal spike 15 cm in length.

What is this premonition? Katsuto couldn't decide whether to go on the attack. He tried to jump to the side, but Tatsuya pulled the trigger faster. No one, including Katsuto, could see what happened.

But everyone realized that magic was used.

"Ghuu..."

Katsuto fell to his knees.

"Juumonji-kun!?"

"Juumonji!?" Mayumi and Mari shouted.

With his right hand, Katsuto squeezed what remained of his left arm. The arm was charred at the elbow, the part below the elbow was torn off and was lying on the ground.

"What did you... do?"

He didn't have to answer. Katsuto knew this, but couldn't help but ask.



He couldn't help but ask about what could penetrate his barrier.

"Baryon Lance."

However, contrary to Katsuto's expectations, Tatsuya replied.

"It's anti-magic magic that decomposes the spearhead into electrons, protons and neutrons, after which the electrons are absorbed by protons and a neutron beam is released."

"A neutron beam...? This is a weapon with radioactive contamination, banned by the International Magic Association!" Katsuto overcome the pain and accused Tatsuya.

"There is no radiation contamination. No radioactive substances are left. Leaving the fact that the attack was carried out, all the neutrons used for the attack returned to their original position."

"Regrowth...?"

"That's right."

Tatsuya again aimed "Baryon Lance" at Katsuto. This time directly at his heart.

"Juumonji-dono, give up."

"....."

"Your Phalanx cannot stop my Baryon Lance."

Tatsuya explained how the Baryon Lance works to encourage Katsuto to surrender.

"Juumonji-kun!"

Mayumi activated her CAD. But the activation sequence was frozen during the output.

"This is Miyuki-san!?"

Mayumi looked angrily at Miyuki.

"Counter-magic 'Freeze Gram.' Saegusa-sempai, you cannot use your CAD." Miyuki said calmly. Her peaceful face radiated a feeling of love and kindness.

"In that case!"

For a modern magician a CAD is an indispensable tool, but this does not mean that it is mandatory for the activation of magic. From the very beginning, modern magic evolved from the supernatural ability to distort reality only by the power of thought. Magicians with great magical power can use magic that they're familiar with even without a CAD. This requires only a "spell" of auto-suggestion, which stimulates the Magic Calculation Area to create a magic sequence. It just takes more time to activate the magic without a CAD.

"Set: decreasing entropy • density control • phase transition • condensation • transformation of the form of energy • acceleration • sublimation: input! Perform a modification of the phenomenon! Magic 'Dry meteor'!"

If you are able to clearly define a concept with words, and introduce this concept into yourself, then you don't need to say it out loud.

But when you're in front of the enemy, it's too slow to do so. This is equivalent to being under attack all this time. Modern magic discarded casting tools and chose CADs to avoid this.

However, Miyuki didn't attack Mayumi while she was casting the spell. Because she didn't need to. Dry meteor wasn't activated.

"Such a strong Zone Interference... "

"It's useless. I will not let you interfere with Tatsuya-sama." Miyuki announced.

Mari ran in silence. In her hand was a battle knife drawn from somewhere. She decided that since magic won't work then she needs to neutralize Miyuki with physical weapons.

The idea was correct. If Miyuki was alone. If Minami corresponded to her appearance as an innocent girl.

Minami stood in the way of Mari. A gun barrel was pointed at her.

"Watanabe-sama. Please drop your weapon."

Even in this situation, Minami was polite. Mari clenched her teeth.

Pistols pose a threat to magicians, and even more so in the current situation when it's impossible to use magic because of Miyuki's Zone Interference. The way Minami held the gun in her hand obviously said that she knew how to use it, and there were no gaps in her defense.

Mari didn't say that it wasn't fair or cowardly. She herself only hid a knife, and this girl hid the gun. She understood her naivety. Mari's own pride didn't allow her to turn away from there.

"Juumonji! No matter how impressive it was, in the end it's a neutron ray! You can defend yourself with your neutron barrier!"

Instead, she shouted a "don't give up" speech at Katsuto.

But Katsuto continued to remain motionless on his knees.

"Unfortunately, the neutron barrier will not protect against Baryon Lance."

"What!?" Mari was surprised.

"He's bluffing, Juumonji-kun! The neutron barrier is a suitable magic. You can completely stop the neutron beam" Mayumi cried.

To this argument, Tatsuya returned a mysterious answer: "That's why."

No, it can be more precisely expressed by these words: "His answer was a mystery for Mayumi and Mari." Because Katsuto already understood the meaning of his words.

The neutron beam has a very high penetrating power. Since the properties of the substance are reflected in the "information", information is also embedded in the neutrons Eidos that its penetration power is high.

Magic is a technology that interferes with a phenomenon through information. It is difficult to block a neutron beam with magic, which is, with its information, designated as "having a high penetrating power". With this there is a definition of "difficult to block."

At the dawn of its appearance, modern magic was primarily aimed at preventing disasters caused by nuclear fission reactions. Blocking neutron beams was also an inevitable theme in modern magic. A lot of research resources have been poured into the search for ways to block neutron beams using magic.

The result of these studies was the Neutron barrier. This is a perfected magic whose only purpose is to block neutron beams.

To block neutron beams, magicians don't use any other magic except Neutron barrier. This is the only magic that is suitable for blocking neutron beams. Since the magic has already been perfected, no further spells have been researched, so there is no other example of a spell capable of stopping a neutron beam at this time.

The same can be said about the magicians of the Juumonji family.

Among the wide range of magic barriers included in Phalanx, only the Neutron barrier can stop neutron beams. Since the only useful spell is known ahead of time, then it cannot escape the fate of being destroyed by Tatsuya, because there is no magic that he cannot "decompose."

In addition to the process of converting the substance of the "Spear tip" into a neutron beam and the process of neutron return by "Regrowth", there is one additional process in Baryon Lance that is responsible for the "decomposition" of the neutron barrier.

Even if you defend yourself with the help of Zone Interference, this won't change anything. The neutron barrier is destroyed simultaneously with the neutralization of the Zone Interference and then the neutron beam reaches its target.

Katsuto had already used the Neutron barrier. The protective version of Phalanx is a magical defense that "can withstand any type of attack." In addition to protecting against high-speed objects, spraying liquids, penetrating gases, sound waves, electromagnetic waves, gravitational waves, psion waves, and so on, it also includes a barrier against neutron rays.

And Tatsuya's Baryon Lance passed through this defense. Both Tatsuya and Katsuto knew that trying to repeat would lead to the same result.

"...I admit defeat."

"Juumonji-kun!?"

"Juumonji!?"

Under the screams of Mayumi and Mari, Katsuto got up and raised his right hand, showing that he was surrendering.

◇ ◇ ◇

Watching the battle through binoculars, the intelligence agent code-named "Monkey," was shocked by such an ending. The Intelligence Department expected Katsuto to win after 2 strikes. After that, they planned to kidnap the weakened Tatsuya.

He hurriedly turned on the communication device. It was shut down because of fear of being detected by radio wave detectors. This, as well as the use of the old-fashioned purely optical binoculars these days, was a precaution against the accidental detection of observers.

And even turning on the communication device, he didn't do anything careless, like sending a voice. He only sent pre-determined signals.

The answer came quickly. Permission to interfere.

His soul dropped to his heels. He was a weak magician, and his morale was destroyed by the battle he had just seen. This isn't at the level which they can cope with.

"Monkey" belonged to the special issues unit. They couldn't rely on the Tooyama family magic like the counterintelligence unit, even though they belong to the same Intelligence Department.

He didn't think that the magic of the Tooyama family, not even one of the Ten Master Clans would help against this magician of the Yotuba family.

But an order is an order. The monkey rose to go to the main unit. He reassured himself that he wasn't good enough to be ordered to shoot at this monster. He cautiously stepped back so that the figures of Tatsuya and the others disappeared behind the trees, and then turned around, without looking away from that place.

At that moment a multicolored stream swept into his eyes. Light particles of all shades of color that a person can discern have filled his entire field of vision and moved chaotically. His mind went off in an attempt to escape from this insane glimmer.

◊ ◊ ◊

Tatsuya and Katsuto looked at each other. Katsuto's left arm has already been restored to its original state by Tatsuya's "Regrowth."

"Shiba. What are you going to do with me?" Katsuto asked for the terms of his surrender.

"You leave empty-handed and don't return with such conversations anymore." This was Tatsuya's only condition.

"...Understood."

Katsuto decided that this would be appropriate. More precisely, he understood that as the loser he couldn't object.

"Shiba. As I said earlier, the situation has reached a state where you cannot delay any longer."

He couldn't help but say this.

"The Magic Association will announce that you are Taurus Silver, despite the fact that this will irritate the Yotsuba family. And when this happens, public opinion will force you to take part in the project."

Tatsuya didn't say anything. It was clear that Katsuto didn't return to the previous conversation, but approaches him from the other side.

"If you refuse to participate in the project after that, you can hardly continue to remain in the Japanese magical community, no, in this whole country. I'm sure that even Yotsuba-dono will not be able to protect you."

"Even if this happens, I cannot participate in Project Dion." Tatsuya answered without hesitation.

"Why!?" The cry of Mayumi was filled with a misunderstanding emanating from the depths of the soul.

"Why are you so stubbornly refusing!? Going to America doesn't mean that you will become a guinea pig there, or you will work for free! In a sense Tatsuya-kun you are the official international representative of Japan. Invited to the project. And 'Project Dion' itself is trying to solve the difficulties facing the future of mankind! How can you talk about refusing, setting yourself apart from all of Japan!"

"The main advantage of the peaceful use of magic is that magicians themselves should enjoy it." Tatsuya answered Mayumi in the same tone as he had answered Katsuto's words before that. Mayumi became entangled in this game of words.

"...What do you mean?" Mari asked when Mayumi couldn't find the words.

"'Project Dion' has a hidden purpose behind it."

"What?"

"The official goal is the terraforming of Venus. The hidden goal is the expulsion of magicians who are considered a threat from the Earth ."

"...In what sense? Tatsuya-kun, what are you saying...?" Mayumi wondered.

"The more I think about 'Project Dion', the more I'm sure that this project is intended more to achieve the hidden goals."

"Explain it to us."

Tatsuya decided to respond to Katsuto's request.

"According to 'Project Dion', in the orbit around Venus, in the asteroid belt, close to the surface of Jupiter, on Ganymede a satellite of Jupiter, many magicians would be placed directly at the stages of the project. Given the current space flight technology, those who will do this work, will not be able to return to Earth for a long time. Even if there is a certain work schedule, then most likely you will have to return to your place of work immediately after recovery."

"It's unlikely that it will be so bad..."

"Magicians who meet the requirements of the project are too few in comparison to the number of people required."

Tatsuya rejected Mayumi's objection.

"Magicians who are abandoned for the implementation of the projects stages will be victims for the sake of the future of mankind. The scheme in which magicians are used as tools is no different from the current situation, where magicians are used as weapons."

◊ ◊ ◊

Receiving instructions from the special affairs unit agent who was watching the battle between Tatsuya and Katsuto, the Tatsuya abduction unit, prepared by the Intelligence Department, began to move.

Among them was Tooyama Tsukasa. She was shocked by Katsuto's defeat, but managed to not show it on her face.

Tsukasa's intuition whispered to her to abandon the operation and retreat. However, the current operation was the decision of the deputy director of the Intelligence Department. She didn't have the authority to stop this operation.

(Katsuto-san does not seem to have lost his fighting power... the young lady from the Saegusa family will also give us strength in the event of an emergency.)

Deceiving herself with such consolations, she silently moved forward along with the rest of the capturing squad.

The goal (Tatsuya) is on a closed golf course.

Tsukasa and her associates approached not from the side of the road leading to the golf course, but from the mountains surrounding him. Finally, from the top of the mountain they could see the goal. This moment was the beginning of the battle. At that moment, when they stepped on the densely overgrown hillside of the trees, their caution increased extremely.

Suddenly, a stream of chaotic color appeared in front of the Intelligence Department agents. The light particles at first glance seemed to shimmer in a random order, actually depicted a color pattern that caused people to fall asleep.

Half of the attacking team fainted. The remaining half somehow managed to avoid this fate with the help of Tsukasa's instantly deployed personal magic barriers that were capable of blocking light magic.

The lieutenant appointed the commander of this attack called for the restoration of positions. However, out of more than thirty people in the platoon, fewer than twenty remained capable. Of the three officers, there was only one left on his feet.

Due to the collapse of the command system, the detachment was disorganized.

She took advantage of this moment for a surprise attack.

From the slope the figure of a small-looking woman rushed at them.

No, their small size was an optical illusion. It was a girl with a medium height for a woman.

No one had time to blink an eye. She paid no attention to disturbing tree branches and overcame the distance between them approached the lead soldier, and waved her weapon with a sparkling silver gleam.

This weapon was a sword. Her blade stopped, crashing into the individual shield placed by Tsukasa.

However, the soldier, who receive a chopping blow, still fell.

"This is that previous hypnotic magic!"

At the moment when the barrier switched to anti-object mode, light magic attacked a friendly soldier knocking them asleep. Watching him fall, Tsukasa couldn't hide her confusion.

But the commanding lieutenant didn't understand this trick, and he didn't hesitate with his decision.

"Fire!"

By order of the lieutenant, the assault rifles were aimed at the girl. However, before they had time to open fire, the girl was overshadowed by a guy with a large build.

There were the sounds of gunfire and most of the shots hit the guy's body, but he didn't fall. There was no blood either. The bullets bounced off him.

"High-powered rifle detachment!"

The lieutenant's voice was close to screaming, but his decision was right.

Pushing aside the conventional assault rifles, 4 soldiers with high-powered rifles designed specifically to fight magicians readied their guns.

The thunder roared, but this wasn't the shots of high-powered rifles, nor the sounds of real thunder. A deafening roar shook the air around him. Tsukasa's individual shields protected against sound wave attacks and none of the soldiers received significant damage from this rumble.

But this prevented the execution of the order.

The rumble didn't just happen once. As if someone was beating a drum, the sounds that shook the air were repeated again and again, as if the god of thunder descended from the ancient paintings.

Even their bodies were shaking so the soldiers didn't notice that it wasn't just the air that was shaking. Suddenly the ground under them cracked.

The cracks ran in all directions. Trees began to fall, exposing their roots. The cracks were shallow. But that was enough to cause chaos in the soldiers ranks.

"Retreat! Exit the forest!"

After the lieutenant gave the order, the rumble suddenly stopped.

Intelligence officers rarely participated in open area group battles. Usually their field of activity is the urban area. Even when it was planned that there would be a firefight, operations were usually designed with one or two agents, no more. So their running retreat could be called unorganized.

Their legs tangled in the grass. It seemed like the grass itself wrapped around their feet.

Many of them couldn't stay on their feet and fell.

Tsukasa couldn't understand this confusing situation. Although she had information about the positions of the allies still on their feet, she lost the coordinates of the falling soldiers, because they disappeared from her field of vision.

The individual shields provided by Tsukasa disappeared at the same time she lost sight of the soldiers.

A rain of lightning struck them, despite the fact that they were in a dense forest. Lightning came not from the sky, but from the spaces between the trees.

We can say that the soldiers who managed to run out of the forest found themselves in a slightly better situation than their colleagues, who had fallen under the lightning. They probably just regretted it.

On top of them came shells with immobilizing nets, to be sure that none of the intelligence agents escaped.

Tsukasa was left alone in the woods and bit her lip when she saw this scene. Her personal barriers didn't miss bullets, bombs, or poisonous gases. However, they don't give the protected partner superhuman physical abilities.

When the entire shield is covered in a net, they cannot escape or resist. Tsukasa couldn't even think that these nets, designed to suppress rebels, could be a natural enemy of her magic.

So, there was only one left.

A sword girl with a katana, Chiba Erika turned to Tsukasa.

Tsukasa knew about her approach and about the fact that the way of retreat has already been blocked.

"Chiba Erika-san?"

"Yes that's right." Erika answered shortly. It wasn't expected by Tsukasa's talkativeness.

"I am from the National Self-Defense Forces, Sergeant Tooyama Tsukasa."

"Yes? Clearly."

Tsukasa tried to determine whether Erika's disinterested behavior was a real or an acting game, but it didn't work out.

"Chiba Erika-san. We were actually on a mission."

To begin with, Tsukasa decided to attack with words, ignoring the sword aimed at her.

"Hmm, so what?"

"Attacking, injuring, interfering in official state affairs, breaking the law on carrying weapons... all these accusations can be applied to you after you've stopped us."

Erika took a deep breath, keeping her eyes on Tsukasa.

"You don't study at all, do you?"

It seems that Erika wasn't even a little scared.

"What do you mean?"

"Even if you are a soldier of Self-Defense Forces, you need permission and notice to carry weapons with you outside the base and practice grounds. You've a firearm with which there was no notice. Therefore, it is you who violated the law by carrying weapons, not us."

"...You know quite a lot for a schoolgirl."

"You used guns without permission during these so-called exercises, don't you? The police were extremely unhappy about this."

"But you yourself are not a policeman?"

"There are real policemen outside the forest. Although I can say that you already know this."

Saying the last words in a slightly disgruntled voice, Erika lowered her hand with the sword. But from this, she didn't have any weaknesses.

Without any action, she was in the "Intangible Pose" *.

[Another translation option: "Intangible state". Although it sounds pathetic, but it's only a pose in kenjutsu, closed from attacks from all directions.]

"The police can request cooperation from civilian magicians to confront the magician-criminals. This is a fairly well-known exception for us, magicians, isn't it?"

A smile appeared on Tsukasa's face. This smile didn't carry in itself anything that could be called emotion.

"Therefore, please obediently let yourself be seized. Or do you want to have a little painful experience?"

At the moment Erika finished speaking, Tsukasa activated a magic barrier. After that she instantly activated move-type magic. The target of the magic was herself.

Erika, not panicking at all, took a step to the side, avoiding Tsukasa flying over her and hit her body flying past her in the torso.

With a sonorous metallic echo, the sword broke. The blade couldn't stand the stress from striking Tsukasa's barrier.

After that, Tsukasa tried to escape to the side of the mountain. But before that her way was blocked by Leo.

In the jump Tsukasa took the pose of a shoulder attack. Leo fortified the position of his body relative to the ground to meet this attack.

Tsukasa hit Leo's body.

Leo didn't move a millimeter, and Tsukasa jumped back. As a result, the effect of the move-type magic was canceled.

Erika ran smoothly at Tsukasa.

She had a stable posture, as if she was walking on a flat highway, and not making her way through the cracks and roots of trees.

Tsukasa got the impression that she would not be able to evade the movement to the left, to the right, or backward.

The only thing she could do was to protect herself with a barrier.

To be able to move at any time and not to run into obstacles, Tsukasa built a flat barrier in front of her body.

Erika swung her broken sword. The rest of the blade didn't reach Tsukasa nor her magic barrier.

She didn't calculate the length of the broken blade, it's unexpected luck, and it's a chance, Tsukasa thought.

Erika remained in a pose with the sword lowered. More accurately, she froze in it. She saw Tsukasa intending to run sideways from her, she started moving, taking the first step with her right foot.

The knee of this leg lost its strength and buckled. This didn't just happen with the right foot, but the left leg also suddenly collapsed. Strength disappeared from her whole body.

Tsukasa's body collapsed to the ground.

Erika came out of her fighting stance. Tsukasa looked up at her.

At this point, Tsukasa finally noticed that Erika's broken sword had, instead of a material blade, a psion blade that looked like a heat shimmer.

The hazy shimmering blade then disappeared.

"Ethereal Hidden Sword Technique - Kirikage" Erika muttered

At that moment Tsukasa lost consciousness.

◇ ◇ ◇

"...The plan where magicians are used as tools is no different from the current situation, when magicians are used as weapons. I would never submit to something like that."

Tatsuya's announcement suppressed Katsuto, Mayumi and Mari. All present understood that Tatsuya is refusing "Project Dion" not because of simple stubbornness.

"...But!"

Tatsuya's determination was clear. His convictions were understandable, but that's why Mayumi couldn't remain silent. With tears in her eyes, she couldn't stop her cry.

"Even if Tatsuya-kun's reasoning is correct! Tatsuya-kun will lose his home anyway! Tatsuya-kun will suffer in isolation!"

Tatsuya should not become a victim. This was the cry of Mayumi's heart.

Mayumi wanted to convey the idea that it would be better to pretend that he's participating, even if it's a lie to the people of America, Japan and the whole world. But the voice that came from the forest didn't allow Mayumi to finish speaking.

"Tatsuya-kun won't be isolated."

Tatsuya and the rest were now on the smooth field of the former first hole of the closed golf course. To the right was a mountain that preserved the original terrain.

From the dense forest that covered the mountain slope, came four familiar people.

Erika. Leo. Mikihiko. Honoka.

Mizuki and Shizuku also clearly were somewhere nearby, although they didn't show themselves.



"Because he has us."

Leo carried a woman on his shoulder. Seeing who it was, Katsuto frowned.

"She's familiar to Juumonji-senpai, isn't she? Could you take care of her?"

Leo fearlessly approached Katsuto and put Tsukasa on the ground next to him.

"W-we will not allow Tatsuya-san's isolation!"

Honoka was tense and couldn't hide her fear, but still collected all her will to say so.

Mikihiko, the last to speak looked Katsuto directly in the eye and said.

"We are Tatsuya's friends. No, not just friends. I owe Tatsuya so much that I will never be able to repay him. Even if Tatsuya becomes a criminal, I will not turn against him for anything. I will not allow Tatsuya's isolation."

"Hey hey, Mikihiko. What obligations? We're friends. No other reason's needed."

Leo wrapped his arm around Mikihiko's neck in a friendly manner.

"You're right" Mikihiko said with a strained smile.

Katsuto lifted Tsukasa from the ground and turned to Tatsuya.

"Shiba. You've good friends. I'm a bit jealous."

Katsuto turned around and went to the off-road vehicle left by the villa.

"Juumonji-kun, wait!"

Mayumi hurried after Katsuto.

"Well well. Still lost."

Mari shrugged and followed Mayumi.

With a puzzled face, Tatsuya looked at his friends. All of them wore embarrassed smiles. Only Erika tried to turn away, but she couldn't hide a smiling face.

Tatsuya turned to Miyuki. Tears flowed from her eyes, and she tried to wipe them with her fingers.

Chapter 10

Monday, morning.

Tatsuya was left alone again in the Izu villa. Last night Miyuki returned to her new home in Chofu before it got too late.

He ate Pixie's cooked breakfast and watched the news channel on TV even if most of it he ignored. It felt as if Miyuki were still sitting at the table in front of him.

This morning breakfast should have ended as usual. But this morning the TV gave disappointing news.

"This is a special news item."

Hearing the speaker's alarmed voice Tatsuya raised his head.

"Please watch this video message first."

The focus of the on-screen picture shifted to the large monitor to the side of the announcer. The monitor turned on and displayed the upper body of a suspicious looking person. At first glance it was difficult to understand whether it was a man or a woman. Not only was their sex indeterminable, but also their age and race.

This man was wearing a gray robe with a hood draped over, and his face was covered with a white plastic mask.

The voice of a mysterious person from the monitor's speakers was transmitted in the studio.

"I am one of the Seven Sages. With your permission, I'll be called Sage Number One."

The voice clearly went through electronic processing, and even using supercomputers the original voice would not be restored.

"I would like to tell the truth to the people of Japan."

Despite his fluent Japanese, Tatsuya thought he wasn't Japanese.

Thinking about this and the name "Seven Sages," he remembered the face of one guy. A guy from the "Seven Sages" who sent a videotape at the end of the vampire incident. The name of the guy who was friends with Shizuku while studying abroad, it seemed to be Raymond Clark.

"Clark..."

Tatsuya clung to this name, but first of all he decided to see what will happen next in the news.

"I wish that the proposed 'Project Dione' can be started as soon as possible. For this reason, I also hope for Taurus Silver's participation from Japan."

Three people were connected to each other in Tatsuya's head.

Edward Clark.

Raymond Clark.

The identity of this mysterious person.

"I want the participation of Taurus Silver, that is, Mr. Shiba Tatsuya."

The true identity of this mysterious person, "Sage Number One" is Raymond Clark.

Raymond Clark is a relative of Edward Clark.

"Taurus Silver is Mr. Shiba Tatsuya, a third-year student from the National Magic University Affiliated First High. People of Japan. I want you to persuade Mr. Shiba Tatsuya."

The video message then ended.

Raymond Clark's participation was unexpected for Tatsuya. He didn't take into account that Raymond would interfere.

He was preparing countermeasures in case the Magic Association discovers the identity of Taurus Silver.

He had measures in case of pressure from the government.

He even considered measures if Edward Clark's patience ran out.

But all these measures will not work in the circumstances.

Tatsuya realized that he's been hunted into a corner.

(To be continued in the "Escape" ark)

(Grammar and structure edited by englishmuffins10)

AFTERWARD

After the afterword there will be a few more explanations and a storyline, don't forget to read if you don't read the afterwords:

- Explanation of the magic of Erika, Honoka and Mikihiko from Chapter 9-2
- An explanation of how these guys got there at all

It was the 23rd volume in the series, "Isolation." Did you like it?

"Isolation" was an episode I wanted to write as quickly as possible, even from the start of my work on this story.

The name "Isolation" was given from the very beginning of the writing of this volume, but the basis leading to the culmination has not changed until

the very debut of this volume.

In short, the main idea was confrontation with "Katsuto, the strongest enemy at the moment." The new magic "Baryon Lance" was conceived for use here.

This episode, among other things, also had to lead to some reflection. When I wrote (Continuation in ...), along with a feeling of complete exhaustion, I got the idea "I finally wrote it ...".

Just because I have never written so well. All the prerequisites for the planned confrontation of those two turned out to be bricks ...

As a result, there were very few corrections. For example, when I wrote an episode with Fumiya's women's dressing, I remarked: "Didn't he show his face in the Nine Schools Competition ...?", So I had to rewrite it a little. ... Well, it really was fun.

As you probably already knew, this arch "Isolation" is one of the culminations of the entire series "The Unlucky Apprentice in the School of Magic." But this isn't the highest culmination.

The current confrontation was, one might say, a conflict between the allies. But real enemies are others. Perhaps the readers already had an idea who could become an enemy, corresponding to the "final boss". ... Even if you think so, you are waiting for one more "this is the turn."

Events in history will continue to heat up.

While the main stream of the story is being written, there are also aspects in it that make it unintentional to describe the circumstances and disclose the details behind them. This may seem correct for short novels, but with my writing style, I cannot deny my feeling of lack of explanation. Therefore, I think that I will just add further what I had to miss in this volume. Although many probably don't like superfluous text, I'll still add a few pages after the afterword.

This volume presented a fictional plan for the development of Venus, called the "Project Dion." Hiago Naoyuki-sama from JAXA, Sakurai Naoko-sama from the Japan Space Forum, as well as the author of scientific articles,

Kashiwai Isana-sama provided me with a lot of valuable information on this issue. In addition, Kashiwai-sama introduced me to the science fiction writer Fuji Taiyo. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you.

I write this afterword right before the movie is released. I myself haven't watched the preliminary show. Although I have only information from the production stage, but I'm sure it will be an interesting sight. It will be an exciting movie, worthy of large screens of cinemas. Everyone who came to the cinema, how do you like it? I believe that you were satisfied.

The name of the next volume is "Escape" *. I think it will be "Escape (part 1)".

[The author's name is written in English. Given his love of ambiguous phrases, it is still unclear how to translate this, "escape," "flight," "salvation." Given the explicit hint of E.S.C.P.E.S, I think it's better to leave it in Latin.]

Ranobeh version of the movie, I'll probably finish it sooner. I'm going to write a "full version", which also includes scenes cut from the theatrical version. However, we haven't yet decided how we will publish this. I'll let you know as soon as it's decided.

So, I sincerely hope to meet you again in the next volume, "Escape". And maybe the next will be "The Girl Calling the Stars (full version)."

© Shadow Cross Section

Concerning Erika's "Techniques of the Hidden Sword," Kirikage (literally the Shadow Section). You could see her for the first time in the theatrical version of "The Girl Calling the Stars". I imported a new magic into the novel, created specifically for the theatrical version of the film.

It refers to non-systemic magic. Having an immaterial blade created from compressed psions, it can cut the psion information body inside the human body.

The psion information body, which is the target of the attack, isn't the Eidos

of the human body, but something similar to a form-watching image formed in a natural way, repeating the contours of the body in the material world. There is no strong connection with the essence of Eidos, but advanced masters of martial arts control their body, moving first this "image-watching image."

The cut of the shadow is, it might be said, a dirty trick that uses the surprise effect and cuts the "shadow" of the enemy, depriving him of control of the body.

This technique Erika studied as a means of attacking the psion information body, since she had no means against the Parasites in the ark "Guest." It was a secret technique that only the head of Chiba's family, Chiba Joyiro, could use. But my father didn't teach her. She was able to comprehend it herself, having studied the secret texts.

© Magic, lulling a detachment of capture from the Intelligence Department

The light that put the intelligence squad moving through the forest to attack Tatsuya was the magic of Honoka's "Hypno-Eye."

It was an improved version of The Evil Eye that Honoka already used to lull intelligence officers in volume 11, page 134. Instead of specializing in the magical "sleepy" effect, parameters such as power, range, and number of targets were raised.

© Cracked earth and lightning bolts attacking the capture unit from the Intelligence Department

It was the same magic that Mikihiko used against Kichijouji on the Novelty Division's Monolith Code. This is a combination of magic from "Earthquake," "Split Earth," "Wild Hair," and "Descendant of Thunder."

© The reason that Erika and the others were present where this "raid" was conducted

Why Erika and others were able to defeat Tsukasa and the capture squad from the Intelligence Department?

I missed the explanation for this, because I thought that it would have a bad effect on the tempo set at the end of the volume, but after Katsuto, Mayumi and Mari left, there was such a conversation in the villa's living room.

"By the way, Erika, those people who came with you are SMAT from the police?"

M? Yes, that's right.

"It's not an accident, is it?" How did you know that today the Self-Defense Forces will come here?

"And we didn't know that it would be Self-Defense Forces ... Miyuki's behavior was a bit unnatural, and I realized that something will happen today."

Uh, my behavior?

"Miyuki, you said then that Juumonji-senpai will come today to keep us, isn't it?"

Y-yes.

"I mean, did you've to say this?" You could just say, for example, "this isn't the time." But if Juumonji-senpai comes to talk with Tatsuya-kun, then is it not necessary to keep it a secret?

Ah ...

Then I just obediently agreed. But I realized that something will happen there. I thought that unwanted guests could come in and collect people from the dojo.

With such a prehistory, Erika came to Izu with a squad of police special forces, assembled from the students of the Chiba dojo.

This concludes the additional materials. See you in the next volume "Escape."