

魔法科高校の 劣等生 27

急転編

The irregular
at magic high school

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吉祥寺真紅郎

きちじょうじ・しんくろう

第三高校の三年生。将輝の親友で参謀役。
魔法式の『基本コード(カーディナル・コード)』の一つを初めて発見した天才少年。

一条 茜

いちじょう・あかね

一条家の長女で将輝の妹。中学二年生。真紅郎に好意を抱いているが……？

一条将輝

いちじょう・まさき

第三高校の三年生。九校戦に二年連続で出場した、十師族・一条家の次期当主。深雪へ正式に婚約を申し込んだ。

劉麗蕾

りう・りーれい

大亞連合の戦略級魔法『霹靂塔』の
継承者となった十四歳の少女。現在
は日本に滞在し一条家と接触する。



司波深雪

しば・みゆき

達也の妹。第一高校3年A組所属。生徒会会長を務める優等生。冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する『重度のプラコン』。

司波達也

しば・たつや

司波兄妹の兄。第一高校3年E組所属。妹である深雪を『ガーディアン』として守るべき存在だと認識していること以外、全てに達観している。

アンジェリーナ =クドウ=シールズ

Angelina=Kudou=Shields

—昨年アメリカから『交換留学』で魔法科高校にやってきた。類い稀なる魔法技術を持つ、金髪碧眼の美少女。その正体は、米軍最強の魔法師アンジー・シリウス少佐で『十三使徒』の一人。

「……ジョージ、俺は何をすれば良い?」

「新しい戦略級魔法を試して欲しい!
将輝、君の為の魔法だ!」

「真紅郎くん、血迷わないで!」

Volume 27, Chapter 1

July 1, 2097, late evening.

This evening was unlike the last few days – it was clear, and you could see the stars. It looked like this year's wet season might end earlier than usual. Such thoughts overtook Minami, who opened the window of her hospital room and looked at the night sky.

10 minutes ago, this chamber was filled with the voices of young women. Although Minami is a “young woman” herself, she is not usually as verbose. The atmosphere of live communication in her room was created as two high school students from her school - Miyuki and Erika - came to visit her.

After Minami's hospitalization, Miyuki made her daily visit without missing a single day. While Minami was delighted that her mistress spent time with her every day, she tried to argue against inconveniencing Miyuki, but Miyuki did not listen to her. Minami was able to come to terms with Miyuki's visits by assuring herself that Miyuki was only recognizing her loyalty. Minami was also glad that Miyuki was worried about her. Like Minami, Miyuki was involved in the incident which caused Minami to be hospitalized. Because of this, Minami did not consider Miyuki visiting as completely unusual. But the visit of Erika befuddled Minami. From an objective point of view, Minami and Erika were not close – they rarely contacted each other. They did not work together in the school council, as with Honoka, and they did not often meet face to face, as with Shizuku, who often came to the student council room. AND they did not have Senpai-Kohai relations in club activity, as with Leo. Erika and Minami were only seen together when Erika walked home with Miyuki and Minami, where they rarely even talked. Most of their exchanges happened when stopped at a café located on the way to the station.

Because of this, Minami guessed that Erika was probably a temporary replacement for Miyuki's “bodyguard” - yesterday, Tatsuya had told Minami, “I can't come tomorrow night”. He did not explain the reason, but it meant he is acting separately from Miyuki. Obviously, he had some very important business. Minami does not need to know the details of Tatsuya's work, but it concerned her from the

point of view that if the hospital was attacked, Tatsuya could not instantly come to the rescue. However, Minami did not blame Tatsuya for this, for from the very beginning, Minami was not in the position in which she must be protected. On the contrary, as Miyuki's guardian, she was supposed to protect Miyuki. Perhaps Tatsuya, worrying that he could not come accompany Miyuki himself, sent Erika as his replacement? Minami quickly rejected this thought in her mind. The hospital was guarded by subordinate magicians of the Yotsuba. Tatsuya would not have sent a classmate to do the job of these magicians. Minami felt ashamed of her previous thoughts, even though these thoughts were quite close to the truth.

The bustle taking place in Miyuki's room was not simple entertainment – it looked more like a study meeting, where Miyuki explained strange concepts from the textbook to Erika. Tomorrow, final exams for the first semester would begin at first high, so Erika and Miyuki were undoubtedly preparing for them. As Minami thought about this, she frowned. She was scheduled to be released from the hospital on July 9th, and her last exam would take place on July 6th. Given her circumstances, she would get a separate opportunity to take her exams. Minami was not worried about failing her exams – even if she got a zero due to omission of the exams, it would not hurt her, as Minami only attended first high to act as the guardian of Miyuki. It was simply the phrase “additional exams” that caused her gloom.

Minami waved her head slightly. She tried to think about something positive before her thoughts got bogged down in a swamp.

“I don't want you dead! But I don't want to take away your magic either! Please become as Parasite like me!”

Minami remembered the words Minoru had shouted that time. Not just his words, but she reproduced his desperate voice as well, so it sounded like she was hearing it right now. At that time, Minoru was serious. Minami felt his words were sincere. She instinctively felt that Minoru became a Parasite only for the sake of saving her. “Why did he?” she mumbled. The night carried this question unrequited off to nowhere, though she repeated it every evening, starting from that day.

No one could possibly give Minami an answer. But even knowing this, she could not stop asking.

“Why did he go so far for me?”

Minami spent just 3 days with Minoru. Moreover, their meeting a few days ago had been after more than six months without seeing each other. During that time, they did not talk even once.

Although it happened 8 months ago and lasted just 3 days, Minami remembered Minoru well. She remembered the time she spent with a guy of the same age, possessing beauty as if out of this world. She simply could not forget such blindingly bright events, this representative of the opposite sex with beauty comparable to even Miyuki.

His appearance was imprinted in her mind, even though Miyuki was in the same space most of that time. However, Minoru, as a member of the opposite sex, had a much stronger impression on her. Not only she, but any girl the same age would never forget time spent with such a handsome guy as Minoru, because like Miyuki, he was an exception to exceptions – Minami mentally convinced herself of this. It was not pretense of self-deception, either – she seriously thought so, at least for the surface part of her consciousness. Therefore, it was a mystery to Minami – though it was normal for Minami to remember Minoru, why would someone as ordinary as her become special for Minoru? Undoubtedly, Minami was not ordinary, but in her mind, she could not even begin to compare to Minoru.

She was not such a beautiful girl as to make a strong impression on the opposite sex. She had too ordinary of an appearance. One could say that she was “pretty cute if you looked closely,” but she was no comparison with Minoru. The only thing that came to her mind was that she could stay in the far corner of his memory as a supplement to Miyuki.

“I first met Minoru-sama on Saturday evening, October 6th last year. In the main house of the Kudou family...”

Minami was surprised that she remembered the date and even estimate time of day. However, she quickly decided that remembering the date was not that surprising, as meeting Minoru was quite a shocking event. And “shocking” in this case is not a figurative expression; when Minami first saw Minoru’s face, she genuinely

experienced shock and her heart trembled. This was not simple surprise. If it was only amazement, she would not have been speechless at that moment. Minoru was the owner of shocking beauty, but if it were only beauty... after all, Minami contacted daily with the owner of a beauty comparable to Minoru.

"The shock at that moment was not so simple that it can be attributed only to one kind of emotion...", Minami muttered mentally. Yes, it was not only surprise.

"If there was something else, then what?" she asked herself. But Minami had no answer to this question. Minami was not able to tell what her emotions were at that moment. She did not understand what feelings she experienced then.

"... then we met again the next day...." Minami thought.

Starting from the Katsuragi road in Nara, they visited the Kasihara temple, a mound Ishibutai, Mount Amenokagu, and Nara Park. Their goal was to find Zhou Gongjin, the magician of ancient magic from the continent, as well as traditionalists - a group of Japanese magicians opposed to the Ten Master Clans. Though they were not alone – Tatsuya and Miyuki were with them – the casual observer may have seen it as a double date... No, Minami quickly waved this thought out of her head. Although Tatsuya and Miyuki looked like a flirting couple, Minami and Minoru should not have looked like a pair. Minami thought back to what happened during those 3 days. At one point, Minami traveled with Minoru on a two-seater robo-scooter... there was also a moment in Nara Park where Tatsuya and Miyuki broke away from them, leaving Minami and Minoru walking shoulder to shoulder.

"Further! Next was...!" Minami remembered how she almost stepped on a mine and forced herself to rewind her memories.

Her next meeting with Minoru was two weeks later... Saturday, October 20... she not only remembered the day of the week, but the exact date. And during this meeting, she could not utter a single word, despite the fact that it was no longer their first-time meeting. She could not even look him in the eye. The Senpais from First High, who came with them, were clearly surprised, so her behavior was not noticed. But if she was only with Tatsuya and Miyuki, her behavior would seem very strange. They visited Oohara, Kinkakuji temple, and Kiyomizu-dera temple. Like 2 weeks ago, they

were looking for clues about the whereabouts of Zhou Gongjin, so it would not be a lie to say that the walk looked like an inspection. Perhaps this was because unlike searches in Nara, they did not encounter the enemy. However, while operating separately from Minami's group, Erika and the other Senpais were attacked by magicians using ancient magic who supported Zhou Gongjin.

Of course, Minami's group wasn't just hanging around the neighborhood. They discovered the base of some traditionalists, hidden on the way to the Kiyomizu-dera temple, and got a clue about Zhou Gongjin's whereabouts. However, this was the achievement of only Tatsuya. Miyuki and Minoru can be written as his assistants, and Minami herself was just their attendant.

"*The Yuba-nabe in that restaurant was delicious...*" thought Minami as she unconsciously drove away the thoughts of her worthlessness. Still, Minami was discouraged by the fact that she first thought about food. "Am I such a glutton?". Minami stopped playing memories and bashfully hid her face in the hands that had already recovered from the loss of motor function. Her hands made a little more than two laps before Minami resumed viewing her memories.

"*The next day, Minoru-sama suddenly fell sick....*"

She was surprised that Minoru's condition suddenly deteriorated. She had heard a little about his weak constitution, but she was not as motivated to take care of him because until the previous day he had not shown any sign of weakness. But as soon as her surprise passed, she was overwhelmed by her sense of duty. Though she was a maid, and not a nurse, care was included in her duties. As a result, she insisted on staying and taking care of Minoru. Thinking back on it, she realized that this feeling was mostly caused by the realization that in the previous days, she was useless. To get rid of the unpleasant feeling, she did the duty she felt most comfortable doing. But despite her enthusiasm, she could only sit and watch the sleeping Minoru. So, she sat staring at Minoru, and when he pointed this out, she burned with embarrassment. But when Minoru fell back asleep, until his condition deteriorated further, she sat next to him in a relaxed atmosphere.

Now, mulling over the events of that time again, something felt off to her. For the two weeks before this, Minami had experienced a feeling of being nervously

overworked, causing her anxiousness when visiting the hot springs with Miyuki. Though the circumstances were different, when she was alone with Miyuki who was same gender, she should have been more relaxed than when she was with Minoru, rather than the other way around. Being a beautiful first-class magician, he also had a gentle temperament and did not brag about his strength. Beautiful appearance, gentle nature, wisdom and courage... Kudou Minoru was a young guy who could not fail to be noticed by any girl of his age. So, Minami was surprised as to how she was so carefree. Although she was exceedingly nervous the day before, that day she was completely calm and did not catch her breath.

Had she gotten used to him in just 1 day? But Minami did not think that this was the only thing. Maybe it was a sense of duty as a maid? But in this case, she would have been even more nervous. Minami tried to remember more of how she thought and felt at the time. Sitting next to Minoru's bed, she...

"No... that wasn't true... I was far from relaxed..."

As she once again looked at the memories of that day, Minami remembered that her feelings then were very unstable. When Minoru had pointed out that she was staring, Minami had burned with shame. When Minoru fell asleep, she felt at ease sitting next to his bed. But at the same time, she came up with a similar question.

"... why could I feel at ease next to a guy my age?"

Minami finally realized the feelings she felt.

"I feel the same to Minoru-sama as he is to me..."

The feeling Minami first felt was "similarities".

"That means...? So, I caught the attention of Minoru myself..."

Finding this feeling in herself, Minami stiffened and blushed. From the very beginning, her modesty had a different meaning. How had she forgotten this?

"Because soon Minoru-sama's condition suddenly deteriorated."

Minami was so shocked by this that she forgot about her own feelings, and about his embarrassment. At the time, she could only think about how to ease the suffering Minoru. She was so nervous that she forgot her own thoughts.

"Maybe Minoru-sama too ...?"

She thought that Minoru probably also had similar feelings. Probably, Minoru, remembering the feeling of similarity from that time, wanted to take care of Minami like she took care of him.

"But why then ...?"

Minami thought she could understand Minoru's behavior if he experienced similar feelings. But if you think in this direction, you return to the original question. She did not see herself as "special" in Minoru's ideas.

"Why did Minoru go so far in trying to cure her that he even dropped his humanity...?"

However much Minami pondered this question, she could not find the answer.

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When Miyuki left the hospital where Minami lay, it was already past 9 pm. The usual visiting time ends at 20:00, so you could say that she was given a concession and was allowed to stay until they turned off the lights.

Tatsuya, who attacked the transport plane of the American army to prevent the invasion of new Parasites, had already completed his mission and returned home. His message, "Do you want me to take you?", was the main reason that Miyuki finally completed her hospital visit. If she continued to stay there, Tatsuya would come for her no matter how she answered him.

"Onii-sama must be tired after his mission, so I can't allow him to be loaded even more," thought Miyuki.

However, it was already late in the evening, so Miyuki did not go home alone on an unmanned taxi. Instead she asked Yuuka - “Yuuka-san, I'm sorry for such a request.”

“Everything is good. I, too, was about to go home,” she responded.

As this conversation states, Tsukuba Yuuka – heiress to the head of the Tsukuba family, the lateral branch of the Yotsuba family - acted as a chauffeur (or more accurately, her Guardian, Ozaki Chiho) for Miyuki. Yuuka was a graduate student at the University of Magic. She had completed her studies in March of this year, and now continues to work in a university Lab as she did the year before. Though Yuuka’s skill in the rare mental interference magic played a large part in her early acceptance into the lab, it certainly helped that the Yotsuba family contributed materials to the lab, so the professor accepted her with a special courtesy.

When Miyuki and Yuuka arrived at the high-rise building Miyuki had moved into in May, they parked in the underground parking and Miyuki, Yuuka, and Yuuka’s Guardian, Ozaki Chiho all got out. Chiho and Yuuka had also moved into this building about one month after Miyuki. This building was built to be the headquarters of the Yotsuba family in Tokyo, so the heirs chosen by the heads of the side branches moved here as directed by the head of the primary family, Yotsuba Maya. Shibata Katsushige, selected to be the next head of the Shibata side branch of the family, also plans on moving to this building once the Ministry of Defense finishes its checking procedure, and his new home will pass all necessary internal checks.

“Thank you very much,” said Miyuki.

Miyuki stepped out of the car and bowed slightly to Yuuka and Chiho. Chiho nodded silently in response, and Yuuka smiled politely and responded.

“It's my pleasure. How about dinner together next time?”

“Yes, we will definitely do this if our schedules coincide,” Miyuki answered.

After their exchange, Miyuki and Yuuka with Chiho split up in the elevator corridor. Miyuki entered alone in a special elevator that goes directly to the top floors. When

the elevator stopped and the doors opened, Miyuki saw Tatsuya open the door to the hallway, waiting for her.

“Welcome back,” he said.

“...I'm back.”

Miyuki was touched by this as Tatsuya exited the room to meet her. When she entered the hallway, she relaxed her tense face. From the entrance, they went straight into the living room, but only Tatsuya sat down. Miyuki put her handbag on the sofa and went to the kitchen. Instead of relaxing after coming home, she went to make a drink for Tatsuya. Miyuki showed no signs of fatigue, and in her usual caring manner, placed a cup of freshly brewed coffee in front of Tatsuya. After she did this, she sat on a sofa opposite Tatsuya, too shy to sit next to him because she was wearing an apron. Tatsuya, for his part, behaved differently than usual. Taking his cup, he stood up and went to Miyuki's side. Miyuki looked at him in confusion, but quickly turned to look at her cup. She showed an embarrassed smile of both shame and joy. Confused at her emotions, she quickly removed this careless (at least, she thought it was careless) smile, Miyuki made a firmer face and looked at Tatsuya again.

“Onii-sama, you did a good job today.”

Miyuki did not ask if Tatsuya completed his mission with success or failure, though not because she blindly believed in Tatsuya's unconditional victory. Miyuki did not doubt Tatsuya's victory and his success on missions, but it was natural for her to think that, regardless of success or failure, her statement should give at least temporary peace of mind to her beloved older brother.

“Miyuki, you also worked well. How are things with Minami?”

“If you look at the ability to perform ordinary everyday action, she looks completely restored,” answered Miyuki.

“I see. Yesterday, she, it seems, still experienced some inconvenience.”

“Yes. Now nothing of this is noticeable,” Miyuki responded, becoming calmer as they conversed.

Tatsuya nodded with relief on his face. Miyuki took a shallow breath. Tatsuya noticed this, noticing she was still a little tense. Tatsuya realized that she was collecting to say, “Minoru-kun never showed up.” Tatsuya was not surprised by this.

“He only recently fought with Fumiya and His Excellency Kudou. Injuries will disappear due to the Parasite's healing ability, but accumulated fatigue will remain.” Tatsuya said this to ease Miyuki's stress.

It was a concern that Minoru could appear in any moment to pick Minami, but Tatsuya's words erased signs of tension from Miyuki's face.

“Besides killing his excellency, Minoru made it very difficult for himself to move. Up to this point, he has only performed against the Ten Main Clans, which was good for him. But now the self-defense forces will join the search,” continued Tatsuya.

“Self-defense forces?” Miyuki questioned.

“Even after retirement, His Excellency had a very strong influence inside the self-defense forces. He lost some of his reputation due to the incident with the parasitic dolls last year, but some of the military sympathizes with his Excellency. Faith and dedication that took shape over a long period of time won't be so easily extinguished after one incident.” Tatsuya explained this to Miyuki, further easing her worry.

The development of the parasitic dolls was reckless, but from the view of the army, the concept was not wrong. The use of monsters threatening humanity was risky, but examples like Pixie prove that coexistence with parasitic dolls is possible. At least for Tatsuya, this was a fact. Still, the Parasites are dangerous. They are of a similar threat level to a carrier of a lethal, incurable, infection. Tatsuya's hostility towards Minoru was because of his attempts to infect Minami with a Parasite.

The military, which knew the circumstances, should be able to treat the parasitic dolls and the parasites separately. Military officers are not prone to act without thinking. However, the average soldier does not know the detailed information about the incident and does not know the reason for the loss of confidence in Kudou Retsu. Quite many people think that Kudou Retsu was a victim in the internal struggle for influence within the forces of self-defense. A platoon of strike

infantry belonging to the first division of the self-defense forces - also known as the "Swordsman" detachment - was almost in full force (according to the most modest estimates) sympathizing with Kudou Retsu.

"Does Onii-sama think it will be difficult for Minoru-kun to invade the metropolitan area again?" Miyuki asked.

"If it were not for the circumstances, then it would be really difficult for him. But, unfortunately, now...."

Normally, the SDF would want to respond to the threat of Minoru after his killing of Kudou Retsu. However, Tatsuya was aware of the clash of the Great Asian Alliance and the New Soviet Union, which is of a higher priority to the SDF.

"Onii-sama suggests that something concrete is going to happen? And should we remain vigilant?"

Miyuki hesitated for a while as she waited for Tatsuya to finish his statement, but Tatsuya did not dare continue his words. But in the end, she could not help asking. Because it was related to the safety not only of Minami, but of the whole family.

"The military clash between the Great Asian Alliance and the New Soviet Union. If there are any major changes in the position of the parties, the self-defense forces will turn their eyes to the north."

Even Tatsuya could understand the feelings that Miyuki had put into her question. He stopped talking evasively.

"And Minoru-kun will use this chaos to get in?" Miyuki continued her questioning.

"I think that the probability of this is quite high. More specifically, he will do it immediately after the defeat of the Great Asian Alliance. It seems to me that this will be the most opportune moment."

Tatsuya looked Miyuki in the eye. But Miyuki thought that Tatsuya's eyes were looking straight ahead.

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As in the past, students of the National Academy of Defense lived in a dormitory. However, students undergoing training as a magician officer were not required to follow this tradition. The fourth-year student Chiba Naotsugu studied at his home, and the sophomore Watanabe Mari rented an apartment near the Academy. Despite being past 9 in the evening, however, these two were not in Naotsugu's house or in Mari's apartment, and instead were sitting in one of the rooms for briefing the forces of the Asaka base of national defense. About 40 officers and soldiers were present in the room. Thirty of them were from a platoon of assault infantry, also known as the "Swordsmen" detachment, and the rest were commanders and junior officers from the first division of reconnaissance, supply, maintenance, and communications units. Naotsugu and Mari participated in this meeting as potential members of the strike infantry platoon.

“This is not only our own business.”

From the podium spoke the commander of the “Swordsmen” detachment. This meeting was organized by him, although it was scheduled by officers of higher status. This was clear from the content of his speech - the meeting began with the detachment commander stating the cause of death of Kudou Retsu as murder, with his grandson Kudou Minoru being the killer. This caused a slight uproar, and after the noise of various voices subsided, he suggested that the shock platoon of the assault infantry organize the capture of Minoru.

“The searching and arresting of criminals is the responsibility of the police - not a job for the army. However, there is a high probability that Kudou Minoru acts in collusion with foreign agents. The country affiliated with the agents has not been established, so this mission should be viewed as preventive measures against possible sabotage, instead of the searching and arresting of criminals.”

This time there was no uproar. All those present had strained faces, and they stared at the commander, without even making the sounds of rustling clothes.

“But even if we didn’t have such an excuse, we cannot ignore Kudou Minoru, who raised his hand to His Excellency — his own grandfather!”

The voice of the commander, who was previously restrained, suddenly became emotional.

“The criminal Kudou Minoru is infected with a Parasite. This information came from a reliable source.”

In the ensuing silence in which everyone held their breath, it was quiet enough to hear someone swallowing saliva. A platoon of strike infantry had advanced to capture the first Parasites in February of last year. Several soldiers looked at Naotsugu, sitting in the back row, because they remembered the moment in which he stood against the platoon with his sister, Chiba Erika.

- “The enemy of his excellency is a demon who is the enemy of all people.”
- “We have two reasons not to ignore Kudou Minoru. That's what I think!”
- “That's right!”

At this point, a chorus of voices spoke up in support of the searching and capture of Kudou Minoru - and not only members of the shock infantry platoon.

“We will request cooperation from the public security department, as well as from all divisions of the central region and the Kansai region. A platoon of strike infantry will wait in a state of readiness at the East Fuji training ground, and Kudou Minoru will rush there when he finds shelter. Depart from this base the day after tomorrow at 9:00. That's all.” Naotsugu and Mari rose and saluted the commander, along with members of the squad with drawn swords.

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Tatsuya and Miyuki lived by themselves once again. There was no longer a third pair of eyes watching them and shackling their actions. They were siblings, but cousins officially, as well as bride and groom. Although the groom was appointed by the Yotsuba, Miyuki truly loved Tatsuya. And though Tatsuya said he only viewed Miyuki as a younger sister, he had practically no sense of morality because of the experiment to create an artificial magic calculation area. Because of this, if Miyuki seriously wished for it, Tatsuya would not refuse her. Tatsuya would even agree to go to bed with her in the literal sense. Miyuki should have been only happy about that,

and she had no reason to fear making a mistake, as right now they slept in separate bedrooms. Though she had no reason to fear refusal, Miyuki did not dare ask Tatsuya to sleep in the same bedroom (not to even mention the same bed). Obviously, she feared emotions would get out of control, but she also abstained because of the state Minami was in.

Because Minami had protected her, Minami overheated her magic calculation area. It was clearly not even remotely Miyuki's fault; even Tatsuya was more to blame for being the target of attack. Still, Minami was in the hospital as a result of protecting Miyuki. This was an undeniable fact, and therefore not a situation in which Miyuki felt right having fun carefree. Though Minami would not want her to feel this way, Miyuki felt guilty about trying to immerse herself in happiness while Minami was recovering. These thoughts served as an effective "brake" for Miyuki's lust, so Miyuki went to bed alone in her room. She sat on the bed and turned off the light with a voice command, recalling a recent conversation with Tatsuya. Minoru was forced into a difficult position, but he still would not give up on Minami; or so Tatsuya said, but Miyuki held the same opinion. Minoru seemed to truly be in love with Minami. Miyuki did not know Tatsuya's opinion of this, but at least Miyuki felt this way. From her own experience, she saw love in his actions. However, she could not understand why this love existed. Miyuki realized her own feelings because of the dramatic events in Okinawa 5 years ago. Her obsession with Tatsuya seemed normal to her, given the situation. But what happened with Minoru? No "special incident" happened between Minami and Minoru. Unless, did something happen on the day Minami was left to look after Minoru? On the day when Minoru's condition suddenly deteriorated, Minami called Tatsuya him what to do. Minami could not do anything to improve his condition or alleviate his suffering except for stay close to him.

"But for Minoru-kun, this could be something special."

Events that are not significant to others could be unforgettable for him. Perhaps Minami gave Minoru valuable memories which he could not forget, memories which no one else knows. But Miyuki did not have any of these memories, and she did not see any clues she could use to speculate. However, no matter Minoru's intentions, he cannot be allowed to do whatever he wants. There was no doubt that Minoru only wanted the treatment of Minami, but his method for this requires her to sacrifice her

humanity. The life of the individual named “Sakurai Minami” can be saved. However, the woman named Sakurai Minami would cease to exist. It was unclear how much of her consciousness would remain after transformation. Would it be possible to say that she did not die? Or would it be that that as a person, she would be dead. Would only a ghost of her former self be left? Miyuki couldn't accept the risk. Never.

"But... What does Minami-chan think about it?"

Tatsuya claimed that if her magic was sealed, her life would not be in danger. Miyuki believed this. But what does Minami think? After all, this is her life. You can't force Minami to have the same absolute faith in Tatsuya's words. Miyuki would never doubt Tatsuya, but it was impossible and wrong to force this same thinking on other people.

Minami had already agreed with Tatsuya's treatment of “giving up magic.” However, in the depths of her soul, perhaps she thinks: “I don't want to lose my magic.”

“You have no right to take away the magic from Minami,” Minoru had said that time. Even Miyuki would not deny that she felt a sense of agreement with the words of Minoru. For a magician, magic is essentially their arms and legs. There exists no one who, knowing that they will die if they do not cut off the hand, is not disturbed. Perhaps the true feelings of Minami coincide with Minoru: instead of choosing to lose magic, she could choose to become a Parasite.

"What will happen if Minami-chan wants to do this ...?" worried Miyuki.

Miyuki shook her head, and long hair rolled over her shoulders to cover her face as Miyuki convinced herself that this would not happen. Losing one's limbs is scary... terrifying, even. But losing one's heart is even worse. To value one's humanity over one's magic - isn't that the same thing as changing one's heart for one hand? Such a choice. One would only make that decision if they would receive something comparable to the heart as well...

"What if Minami values Minoru-kun as such an object...?"

Miyuki thought about what she would do if Minoru and Minami were swapped for Tatsuya and herself.

"To abandon my humanity and follow Onii-sama... that would be my choice." Miyuki answered without hesitation.

Miyuki could not answer how Minami felt because she did not know how much Minami valued Minoru-kun.



There are no girls who would not be captivated by Minoru's appearance. Even Miyuki was unconsciously captivated by his beauty at first. If her heart had not been full of Tatsuya, then she might have even a vague sense of falling in love. Love is not built on appearances. Miyuki did not know if it was the same with men, but she felt that at least girls are not so simple about this. If Tatsuya did not exist, she still would not have chosen her beloved by appearance, and Minami was probably the same in that sense. Miyuki did not deny the possibility of "love at first sight," but she believed that this was not just a crush on appearance. Miyuki felt it that if it was anything, it was a crush on the impression of the person, conveyed along with the appearance, but showing the inner sides of the person.

Minami had not had enough time to get to know Minoru's character in detail, but Minami also showed no behavior hinting towards love at first sight. After the last time they split up in Kyoto, Minami never spoke about Minoru; at least not around Miyuki. Though Minami is not talkative, she is not very good at keeping secrets. Even when she tries to put on a poker face, it is easy to understand that something is wrong. When Minami reacted to Miyuki and Tatsuya's excessive flirting, they only pretended to not notice. Up until the meeting the other day, Minami did not show any interest in Minoru in front of Miyuki or Tatsuya. It was not clear how exactly Minami felt, but she at least was not consciously in love with Minoru.

"But if she noticed those feelings that she had not realized until now? What if these were feelings that were similar to mine for Onii-sama...?"

Maybe she was overthinking it, but perhaps there is a future in which Minami chooses Minoru.

Volume 27, Chapter 2

Local time: July 1, 17:00. In Japan's time, it is July 2, 8:00

Major Noah Capella, the fifth unit's commander, returned to Stars's base in the suburbs of Roswell, New Mexico, USNA.

"Horse's Head has been successfully delivered to the Hawaiian base with Major Canopus and two others."

"Good job. You may be dismissed." Colonel Paul Walker, the base commander, thanked and dismissed the chapel. However, the chapel remained standing in front of the table.

"Major, did you want to ask something?" Walker invited the chapel to speak. Capella's behavior clearly indicated that he had some questions.

"Colonel. In my humble opinion, the 'Illegal MAP' should not be released. Colonel, did you forget how much damage was done when they went out of control?"

Illegal MAP - Illegal Mystic Assassin Platoon - was a detachment of magicians specializing in murder missions that were not able to be made public. It consisted of three platoons: "Charcoal Sack", "Cone Nebula" and "Horse's Head". As they specialize in killing, they had extremely high abilities in combat against people, but as Capella said, this detachment had significant problems with insubordination. This was made worse because this detachment did not act in the regular composition of the troops, and Stars repeatedly had to make an effort to eliminate the consequences from the Illegal MAP's activities.

The "Hidden Arctic War", during which "Tuman Bomba" killed the previous Sirius, the Illegal MAP was pushed to their full extent in combat against a similar squad of the New Soviet Union. Though they did their job effectively, Stars lost quite a bit – in addition to losing Sirius, Stars also lost numerous members of the Star class. After they completed post-war processes with the New Soviet Union, command sent

the personnel in the Illegal MAP to Midway Prison. That was seven years ago, but their ability to perform tasks is undeniable.

“I would not call excessive slaughter the correct execution of the task,” the Chapel finished.

Walker sighed, not willing to back down. Walker outranked Capella – as a colonel, he was higher than a major - but Capella was older and had the benefit of a longer army career, so Walker could not chase away the Chapel (the most senior member of the Star Class of Stars) without an explanation. Had Walker been infected with a Parasite, he would not have been disturbed in doing this, but he was still a man - among the members of the Star class, still less than one-third of the personnel were Parasites. Most of Stars’s personnel, including Walker, only had a minor effect on their consciousness. The Parasites played off of the fear of the unofficial Japanese Strategic Class Magician (Tatsuya, in other words) to make them accept the Parasites and cooperate with their activities.

Still, the rest of the USNA army had not yet fallen under the control of the Parasites. Currently, the Department of Defense was divided into two main camps: one for the destruction of Tatsuya, and one for the use of his force in the USNA global strategy. Only the first of these two factions overlooked the control of the Parasites in Stars.

In these circumstances, Walker could not ignore tthe feelings of Capella.

“Under usual circumstances, it would not be a good idea to release the Illegal MAP, but the enemy is not so simple as to fall to usual tactics. It will be impossible to achieve the goal without going beyond the reasonable,” Walker responded to Capella’s arguments.

“Still, why use Horse’s Head?” Capella questioned.

Walker did not answer. Given their ranks, he was not obliged to answer Major Capella, but Walker didn’t want to give the answer “without comment”.

“Is their target Major Angie Sirius?”

“It is not.” Walker responded reflexively to Capella's assumption.

“The target is the Japanese Strategic Class Magician, Shiba Tatsuya.” Though he still had some indecision, Walker answered the question.

The chapel was not as close to Lina as Canopus was, and he was neutral about this rebellion. Capella was a typical military man - not good or evil, only showing dissatisfaction with acts such as killing the military, violating military laws, and hurting friendly soldiers, so though he technically remained neutral, he did not approve of the insurgency organized by Arcturus and the other Parasites. His feelings were only suppressed by his military discipline - to not wreak havoc during these times, Capella stuck to a neutral position. To keep Capella neutral, Walker avoided creating additional factors for the Chapel.

“In addition, they will act as if they received this job from the Chinese mafia. After the operation starts, all communications towards us will cease. The Horse’s Head consists of people from East and Central Asia, so they have an Asian appearance. The detachment was originally intended for subversive activities in Eastern Siberia and the Great Asian Alliance, so it is made up of magicians with a suitable appearance. From an appearance perspective, their cover of agents of the Chinese mafia is quite suitable.”

However, Capella believed that this was not such an effective disguise. If captured by magicians, there is the possibility of interrogation using external systemic magic systems of mind reading or puppet control.

“I understand you. But who will take care of them if they get out of control?” Capella asked.

Capella did not express his views on the risks behind capture, assuming that the plan accounted for this. Instead, he focused on a more significant issue: insubordination of the unit.

“This question is still under consideration.”

Walker finally fell back on an ambiguous answer, causing Capella to narrow his eyes. His face expressed the feeling of “I am so fed up with this.”

“...No more questions?”

Walker understood that his answer could not be called an answer, so he did not condemn Capella's behavior, instead hinting that he would not answer further questions.

"No, Colonel." Capella took the hint.

"Then you are dismissed, Major."

Chapel obediently left the office of the base commander. While seeing him off, there was an unknowable irritation of Walker's own.

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Regular exams began today at First High, but Tatsuya immediately left after accompanying Miyuki to school. After the reveal of his identity as the "Silver" half of the famous CAD engineer "Taurus Silver", Tatsuya was exempted from school tests and exams, and he didn't have a habit of doing things that he didn't have to do. His opinion on this coincided with the opinion of the majority, so nobody held it against him for not attending exams.

At the moment, Tatsuya was in one of the rooms of a research building on Miyaki Island trying to develop new magic using the Chain Casting technique. The building on Miyaki Island was positioned as a new FLT research center, but it could also be considered the FLT laboratory. Still, he would have preferred to transfer this development to the FLT lab that he worked at previously, but he continued here because he was afraid to leave Lina unattended for a long time. Tatsuya did not doubt Lina, confident that she was not a saboteur against Japan under the cover of "escaping from her own country". Tatsuya trusted Lina, to an extent, and knew that she was completely unsuitable for that type of deceitful penetration mission. Therefore, it was not a lack of trust that made Tatsuya want to stay around Lina, but rather that he felt she could do something stupid out of boredom or some other cause. She was not a small child, so she had at least some idea of common sense, but Tatsuya was not completely confident in this aspect of Lina.

Tatsuya had arrived on this island at 9:30 by flying not in his car, but in a small VTOL operated by Hyogo. Immediately after his arrival, he retired to the laboratory.

Current time: 11:50.

“Is it time to have lunch?”

Tatsuya thought this as he left the lab.

“Tatsuya!”

Lina called out to him in the corridor of the research building.

“Lina, do you need something?”

“Are you going to lunch now? May I join you?” Lina asked Tatsuya.

The building Lina lived in was towards the west of the island, and this research building was to the east. Miyaki Island was a small island with only 2 kilometers between these points, but it was still a surprise for Tatsuya to see Lina here.

Obviously, “having lunch together” was an occasion to discuss some business and not just a leisurely time.

“I do not mind, but will this take much time?”

Tatsuya did not want to spend too much time discussing business, as he needed the time to not only develop new magic using Chain Casting, but also master the magic of sealing Parasites.

“If you don’t have much time, let’s hurry,” Lina responded.

Lina was not bothered by the indifferent tone of Tatsuya. She simply turned and walked towards the dining room.

Miyaki Island’s logistics were still at the preparatory stage, so there was not a very wide variety of goods on the island. So far, delivery has only been arranged for vital items to allow comfortable living. Despite this, the food seemed delicious. The dishes in the local canteen, though not reaching the level of nicer restaurants, were at least on par with home cooking. Due to the lack of other pleasures, the food seemed all the better, so the food was overall quite enjoyable.

The research building had already been completed, so there were several other researchers. In order to not particularly distinguish themselves with the presence

of a personal butler, Tatsuya asked Hyogo to go separately from them while he went to lunch with Lina. While they were having coffee, Lina started to talk about the main topic.

“Tatsuya, I want to tell you something.”

“Is it a long story?” Tatsuya asked.

Lina shook her head negatively in response to Tatsuya’s question.

“Tell me briefly.”

Tatsuya put his coffee cup on the table and looked at Lina. Lina regarded this as agreement, and after a short “thank you”, she began her story.

“As I told you, an uprising took place at the headquarters of Stars, and I was able to escape with Ben’s help.”

“By Ben, do you mean Major Benjamin Canopus?” Tatsuya requested this clarification.

“Yes,” Lina responded.

“But as far as I know, Second Lieutenant Ralph Hardy Mirfak accompanied you to the airport, and the path of retreat to Japan was organized by Colonel Virginia Balance,” Tatsuya stated.

“That’s right. But it was Ben who asked the Colonel for help, and it was he who created the opportunity for escape.”

Tatsuya realized that Lina felt obligated to Major Canopus.

“So, what’s next?” Tatsuya asked.

“I think after I escaped, Ben probably surrendered,” Lina continued. “His ability is enough to run away, breaking through any entourage, but he is not the kind of person who runs alone, leaving the rest.”

“In my opinion, he could have suppressed a rebellion if he used all his strength.” Tatsuya stated his opinion.

At this, Lina opened her eyes and stared at Tatsuya, but there was not the slightest sign of a smile on his face.

“He is not the kind of person who will direct a sword to a friend,” Lina stated.

“I do not think that Parasites can be considered comrades, but this is a different question. Okay, so what’s next?” Tatsuya asked.

“Ben has personal connections beyond just Stars in the Pentagon and State Department. Parasites should not have executed him. Most likely, he was sent to a military prison. He has probably already been taken to the site,” Lina continued.

“But is there a prison capable of deterring a magician of First Star class?” Tatsuya asked. “Even if you restrict him from using CADs, he can still use magic. Unless there is a magic sealing technique for practical use?”

“There should not be such at technology, I didn’t hear anything like that from Abby,” Lina said.

“Is Abby the developer of the Brionac magical weapon?” Tatsuya asked.

“Yes, that’s right. Chief Engineer of Stars, Dr. Abigail Stewart,” Lina responded

“She has no military rank?”

Tatsuya, surprised that Lina revealed the full name of the developer of the Brionac, instantly asked another question far from the main topic. Still, Lina giving the name of Dr. Stewart was not negligence, and rather gave it as a demonstration of not hiding anything...probably.

“In that case, where is Major Canopus now?”

Tatsuya, who realized that his words had turned the conversation away from the main question, returned to the main topic himself before Lina also turned off the main road.

“I think he most likely went to Midway Prison,” Lina responded.

“That is, even if he escapes from the prison itself, there will be only the sea around,” Tatsuya clarified.

“This prison was apparently built with just such a concept. Even a magician of our own level would not be able to escape through 100 km of water without any devices.”

“So, what is next? What do you want from me, talking about the prisoner on the island of Midway, Major Canopus?” Tatsuya finally asked the main question.

Lina’s face tightened at this question.

“...The fact that Ben was sent to Midway Prison is not random speculation. Ben once said that if they ever decided to get rid of him for political reasons, he would bargain to go to Midway Prison. I was going to do it too,” Lina stated.

“This is quite a radical measure....”

“Ben said that the struggle for power is meaningless, and there is only justice when you win. No matter how right you are, how wrong your opponent is... in the end, the loser can only submit to the strong. But as long as this is not an absolute defeat, as long as there are opportunities for making deals, one cannot give up. Even if it seems that one has lost, that defeat is already inevitable, then lose with the maximum benefit for oneself. Ben constantly reminded me of that.”

“That point is not only relevant in the struggle for power. Often, that principle is used to end a war. Major Canopus is excellent not only as a combat magician, he is also a soldier, well versed in strategy.” Tatsuya complimented Canopus.

“He is a graduate of the USNA Military Academy.” Lina stated this fact.

“I see,” Tatsuya responded.

“*So, he became a military magician by chance?*” – thoughts such as this passed through Tatsuya’s head.

Tatsuya and Canopus had not met in the past. Tatsuya’s memory of Canopus only had an unpleasant memory of failure when Canopus had sunk the ship carrying Gu Jie right before his eyes, destroying the body with the magic Molecular Divider. After this incident, Tatsuya started to see Canopus as a person who could become a hindrance in the future and required special attention, but he was only able to access a file containing surface details, so the knowledge Tatsuya had of the man amounted to his age of 40 years old. If he had not serve in the army since his adolescence, then he had only joined the military after the end of World War III, entering West Point just

after the war ended. Using magicians as ordinary combat soldiers (at least as ordinary as one could be while possessing magic) was quite natural, and magician officers were rarer at that time, so if a magician wanted to join the military, then regardless of their intellectual abilities, they would not be able to enroll in an elite educational institution training officers. Because of this, it is quite likely that the qualities inherent in a combat magician were discovered during his training at West Point or after graduation from there.

These were Tatsuya's thoughts about Canopus. If Tatsuya's assumptions were correct, then Major Canopus was originally likely to become a high-ranking officer who managed the armies and plots of war. However, because he was a magician, he was forced to follow the path of a combat magician and get his hands dirty with the work of eliminating terrorists, and now even attack his comrades captured by the Parasites... this could explain why Major Canopus still thought of the Parasites as comrades and didn't suppress the Parasite rebellion himself. Tatsuya felt that Major Canopus likely had to often restrain his emotions about himself and his situation.

"Tatsuya?" Lina gently prodded. While he was thinking, Tatsuya was oddly silent.

"Oh, yes, sorry."

Tatsuya realized that his mind had been dominated by thinking about another person who wasn't Miyuki. Tatsuya could not help but grin as he thought that he would not be able to live normally if he was able to sympathize with the lives of everyone else.

"In short, can you argue without a doubt that Major Canopus is definitely on Midway Island?" Tatsuya asked.

"Yes. Ben should have been able to negotiate this. It's hard to escape from Midway Island, but it's also hard to send a killer there," Lina responded.

"But can other prisoners attack him?" Tatsuya speculated.

"The probability of this, of course, is not zero, but... everything there is arranged specifically. I only saw the prison cells through a picture from a security camera, but I saw enough to understand that all the prison cells are solitary and soundproof. Food delivery and dish collection are fully automated. Cells are equipped with both a toilet

and a shower. They are released solitarily to go to the gym or for a walk. There are essentially no interactions between prisoners,” Lina explained.

“To prevent collusion between prisoners?” Tatsuya correctly made this assumption.

“Yes. Ben said that this was also done because valuable combat magicians would not be wasted in prison.”

This was not only because the magicians hold value in combat, but also because it would be incredibly hard to stop powerful combat magicians. Brainwashing would be preferred as a last resort, even if it could lower combat ability.

“Though in prison, it seems that they live well enough,” Tatsuya said. “Probably to not lower the combat potential of the magicians. So it’s like this...” Tatsuya began.

Tatsuya talked about it as if it were completely normal, but Lina’s face expressed concern. She felt emotional shock as she realized once again that magicians are only seen as weapons.

“So, Lina wants me to pull Major Canopus out of Midway?”

Tatsuya did not ask this seriously. He did not think Lina would make such a bold request.

“...Yes.”

When Tatsuya saw Lina nod, he doubted his vision and hearing.

“...Are you serious?” he asked.

“I understand that this is an audacious request. But what is happening now in the States cannot be called an ordinary conflict. Even protected in Midway Prison as he is, we do not know what lengths the parasites will go to. Murder is definitely possible. In the worst case, Ben could even become infected with a Parasite.”

Tatsuya could not ignore the possibility of Canopus being infected with a Parasite. If the request was only for Tatsuya to save Canopus in order to make him an ally, Tatsuya would definitely refuse. Canopus would only become an ally temporarily, and would go back to being an enemy again once the Parasite infection was dealt with again. It makes no sense, then, to penetrate the military prison to kidnap Canopus from there. However, Tatsuya had to consider that Canopus could become a Parasite.

Tatsuya had already seen Canopus's abilities. One time was enough to evaluate his skills.

"There is not enough benefit covering the risks," Tatsuya responded.

The conclusion voiced by Tatsuya was no different from his reflections.

"To eliminate the risk of Canopus becoming a Parasite, it would be much easier to blow up the prison on Midway Island with my "Material Burst". With a pretext of "It was to stop the Parasite epidemic", it would be possible to avoid criticism from the international community."

"Wait! If you announce something like this, the States will...! If it becomes known that the USNA is doing nothing to stop the Parasites, trust in the USNA will plummet. It could cause internal strife and even disintegration of the state..." Lina pleaded.

"But if your country is planning to use the power of Parasites, then the threat of the parasites must be announced." Tatsuya's words were not a simple threat.

"...If there is a benefit for you, would you agree?" Lina asked Tatsuya with a persistent and intense facial expression.

"...Yes. I also do not want to resort to such an approach as the explosion of the whole island. Generating that much heat could have a negative impact on the global climate."

Lina felt a chill run down her back as she saw Tatsuya say this with a serious face. A single magic capable of harming the global climate... she knew that his words were not an exaggeration. The tension Lina felt showed on her face.

"I will become an ally of Tatsuya," Lina said.

Tatsuya did not understand what Lina was trying to say. He looked at her with doubt in his eyes.

"If I return to Stars, then I will stop any hostile activity towards Tatsuya." Lina collected her thoughts and gave her answer under Tatsuya's keen gaze.

"I don't think that you will be able to solve this issue only on your own," Lina said.
"If they don't listen to my opinion, I will leave the army and get Japanese citizenship.

I am the daughter of Shogun Kudou's niece, so I meet the requirements for naturalization."

"In your case, citizenship can be obtained without kinship, but will the USNA allow you to do this?" Tatsuya asked.

"It does not matter whether the army agrees or not. I've already ran from the military this time. By the time they could do anything, I would already be applying for demobilization and escaped from the States."

"*Do you think it will be that easy?*" Tatsuya wondered, but did not voice this doubt out loud so as not to destroy Lina's determination.

For Tatsuya, this benefit was enough for him to justify the risk. When this is over, and Lina returns to USNA before escaping from there again, the Yotsuba would undoubtedly become the receiving party again - inside Japan, there would not be anyone other than the Yotsuba who would be prepared to act aggressively against the USNA.

Lina is currently regarded as a guest, but if she escapes to Japan again and becomes a citizen, then she could be used as a fighting force. Not only this, this fighting strength would not belong to the Yotsuba, but would rather be the personal strength of Tatsuya. Lina had said: "I will become an ally of Tatsuya," and Tatsuya did not intend to hand her to Maya.

"I understood. I cannot promise that it will be quick, but I will work on developing a rescue plan for Major Canopus."

"Really!? Thank you, Tatsuya!" Lina enthusiastically jumped up with a radiant face, leaning over the table.

If there was no such table between them, she would have hugged him tightly.

"By the way, Lina."

"What?" Lina asked.

"The granddaughter of a brother or sister is called a great-niece. It is not accurate to say, 'the daughter of His Excellency Kudou's niece'. You should instead say 'the

great-niece of His Excellency Kudou'. It will be useful to remember this when you introduce yourself to someone."

Lina's face immediately became sad. Tatsuya had accidentally spoiled her mood, or was it on purpose? In any case, he, in his own words, "broke the flag."

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Classes ended just after noon during exam week in the national High Schools of Magic, but when Tatsuya returned to school, it was already 15 o'clock. The members of the student council were not required to stay, but the responsible female students of the student council stayed after in the student council room to prepare for exams.

"Shiina."

"Y-yes!?"

The freshman, with headphones hidden in aerial curly dark brown hair, responded to Tatsuya's voice. Her name was Mitsuya Shiina, and she was the youngest daughter in the Mitsuya family of the Ten Main Clans. She saw Tatsuya walk into the student council room, but she did not expect him to talk to her. When Tatsuya called out to Shiina, her voice was higher pitched in response than usual.

"I have a case in which I would like to hear the opinion of either your father, Mitsuya Gen-dono, or his eldest son Motoharu-dono. Could you ask them if they have time to talk with me?" Tatsuya asked.

"Um, I mean, do you want to meet and talk to dad?"

Shiina quivered slightly while saying this.

"Yes."

"Shiba-senpai, what do you want to talk about with Shii-chan's father?" Unable to look at the bewildered Shiina, Izumi intervened in the conversation.

"I want to know about the activities of the American army."

Tatsuya did not ignore this interference from Izumi. He answered her honestly rather than inventing an excuse.

“American army?” Honoka exclaimed from next to Izumi, surprised.

Miyuki told her in a whisper: “People from the Mitsuya family have detailed information about abroad military affairs.”

Izumi, being a part of the Ten Master Clans herself, already knew this. Tatsuya wanting to ask about the American army from the head of the Mitsuya family was quite reasonable, in her opinion.

“Shiba-senpai! I'll ask dad about his work schedule!”

Shiina hurriedly gave this answer to Tatsuya because she understood Izumi’s feelings. Because of her intervention, Izumi did not have to apologize. However, Izumi didn’t know which was worse: apologizing to Tatsuya or being protected by Shiina.

“Izumi-chan. Come on, let's see the tasks that will be on the practical exam.” Miyuki saw Izumi thinking and quickly moved on from the topic.

“Uh? Miyuki-senpai, are you sure?” Izumi responded.

“It's okay. I am well versed in the system of vibrations.”

“I agree! Okay, I’m counting on you!”

Miyuki left the student council room, taking Izumi with her, whose face expressed intense excitement. *“I have good support,”* thought Tatsuya.

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After seeing Miyuki disappear into the building used for practical exercises, Tatsuya went to the training forest.

“I’m sorry to distract you during the exams,” Tatsuya apologized to Mikihiko.

“What are you saying? This is much more important than exams.”

Tatsuya had sincerely apologized, but Mikihiko responded with a smile, as if he took it for a bad joke. He did not really laugh, but just smiled slightly, as if he had no alternative facial expressions – this was the kind of person he was.

“Besides, I’m not one of those who crams everything during the last night.”

“Wow”, thought Tatsuya. If Mikihiko said it seriously, then he deserves praise, even if he just pretends everything is in order.

“I’ll rely on you, then,” Tatsuya replied.

“In any case, let’s go home early today,” thought Tatsuya, and then gave Mikihiko a signal to start training.

Mikihiko created an independent informational body (a “spirit”), and Tatsuya quickly sent Psions to flow around the out of control mass, “swallowing” the Psion mass. On the third day of training, Tatsuya found that this method was much more effective than spreading a Psion cloud around the target and then compressing it.

Mikihiko had helped to train Tatsuya even on the Sunday before the exams, so today was the sixth day of training. So far, Tatsuya had managed to find that instead of sending psionic streams from six directions with the same pressure, it is more efficient to send psionic streams from four directions while installing flaps above and below it to keep the Psion mass from escaping. All Tatsuya had left to do was master the technique of compressing the Psions.

The shape of the spirit was not a cube, but rather a ball. From the view of efficiency, it was necessary to not only compress, but to apply pressure around the sphere equally in the shape of a sphere. To not just “squeeze” it, but to make a mold around it and apply pressure on every side at once.

It was not necessary to compress the sphere all at once. It was fine to make many smaller compressions to get a small, solidified sphere.

“...Tatsuya, this...” Mikihiko exclaimed, not really knowing what to say

“... It worked?” Tatsuya asked.

50 cm in front of Tatsuya hung a ball of high-density Psions. It was so stable that it seemed almost real. Tatsuya carefully extended his hand and grabbed the psionic sphere. The intangible psionic mass reacted as if it were solid, but it was not reacting with Tatsuya physically – rather with Tatsuya’s psionic field, which follows the shape of his physical body. There was no sign that it would collapse, even if it was grabbed even more.

“This is the Sealing Sphere, non-systematic magic for capturing Parasites with just a spell!” Mikihiko said delightedly.

The spirit was sealed by “technique”, without using help from amulets, dolls, or similar material tools. This magical technique gave Mikihiko a strange feeling. Tatsuya released the psionic sphere from his hand, controlling his own psionic field so as not to interfere with the sphere’s structure. Tatsuya and Mikihiko remained still, watching the psionic mass, which had become a pseudo-solid body until it self-destructed after 7 minutes.

During these 7 minutes, the “spirit” that was imprisoned inside did not show any activity. Over the next two hours, Tatsuya continued to practice, having several successful and unsuccessful attempts. Only approximately 30% of his attempts were successful, but in the last 10 minutes, he made 4 successful attempts in a row.

“Mikihiko, let’s finish today. I shouldn’t strain you further.”

“I’m all right, or at least I would like to say that, but.... Unfortunately, unlike you, Tatsuya, I have reached my limit today.” Mikihiko smiled, even though he was breathing heavily. “However, you are already close to the goal.”

“Yes. Thanks to you, Mikihiko.”

“Happy to help, but to be able to use it in real combat, you need to increase the success rate unfortunately.” Mikihiko maintained his smile despite his exhaustion.

“Sorry, but could you help me tomorrow too?” Tatsuya asked.

“Of course.”

Trying to smile wider, Mikihiko nodded. His smile expressed a sense of satisfaction as he was able to help his friend through these “workouts”.



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Tuesday evening, July 2.

In the mansion of the Saegusa family, Kasumi and Izumi diligently prepared for their exams. The detachment duty for intercepting Minoru was still going on today, but school was a priority for these two, so they were released from their work. In addition to these two, Mayumi also remained on standby tonight, so she was able to receive an unexpected guest.

“Mari ...!? You're here so suddenly - what happened?” Mayumi exclaimed.

“I want to chat about something. Am I distracting you?” Mari replied.

“No, you're not a distraction... come in!”

Mayumi pulled the unusually polite Mari inside the mansion and led Mari to her room. She prepared drinks herself as she ordered the mansion's servants not to enter the room in order to guarantee the privacy of their conversation. Mayumi's room was Western styled, with only a desk, bed, and low table. Mayumi put their tea cups on the table, brought cushions from the corner of the room, and sat opposite Mari.

“You should have called and informed me that you were coming! You're lucky I'm even home right now! If you had come last night, you would not have caught me.” For Mayumi, this was a chatter between friends, and her words did not carry that much meaning.

“Busy fishing for Kudo Minoru?” Mari asked.

But she caught her breath when she heard something completely unexpected from Mari.

“How do you know about Minoru-kun...?” Mayumi wondered.

“I knew that the Top Ten Clans were drawn into it. Is Juumonji involved as well?”

“So it was a suggestive question?” Mayumi thought and looked at Mari, frowning. However, Mari had not intended to trap Mayumi. She had only voiced her hunch as a prelude to the topic she was going to raise.

“In truth, now I am also connected to the prosecution of Kudo Minoru,” Mari explained.

“Uh, you? But why?” Mayumi asked.

"A pursuit team was formed from the main squad of a first division strike infantry platoon. I was ordered to join this operation as a participant," Mari said.

"But you are still a student..." Mayumi muttered.

"The meaning of the term 'student' is different from at the University of Magic. You should know that students of the Academy of Defense become soldiers at the time of admission."

There was no irony in Mari's voice. And she did not look dissatisfied with the fact that she was sent on a mission.

"A squad of shock infantry, you say...? From the "Swordsmen" detachment? The squad of melee magicians formed from passionate admirers of Elder Kudou?" Mayumi asked for clarification.

"Yes, it is this squad. If you know this much, this conversation will be short. A platoon of strike infantry is acting to avenge the Elder. Though I think using the army for an act of personal malice is bad, as far as I have heard, Kudou Minoru cannot be ignored," Mari explained.

"Revenge...? So Minoru-kun killed the Elder...?" Mayumi was in awe.

"This is reliable information," Mari stated.

"It can't be..." Mayumi could not hide her shock.

Mari was slowly sipping her iced tea, waiting for Mayumi to calm down.

"The self-defense forces have deployed a search network just West of Hakone, so we most likely will not see each other working, but I thought that just in case, I should warn you so that your family would not get confused if we so happen to meet." After Mayumi's complexion returned to normal, Mari said the main thing she wanted to say.

"...Be careful, Mari. Minoru-kun is very strong," Mayumi warned.

"He was able to defeat the Elder. I understand that I am not a rival to him in one-on-one combat. I'm not going to attack recklessly."

Mari responded to the anxious Mayumi while making a face that showed she had no desire to rush into battle. Looking at her, Mayumi thought: "*she is not at all what she was in her First High years.*"

Volume 27, Chapter 3

Though Edward Clark faced some obstacles while working on Project Dione, it continued to progress. The rate at which it progressed was accelerating, too: Clark no longer worked on the project alone, and at the moment, a group of independent scientists from the US National Science Agency were conducting simulations on the delivery of ice masses from Jupiter to Venus. Once these simulations were completed, the data would be used to create the necessary sequences of magic that take into account all possible factors.

The research staff of the National Science Agency were currently giving priority to providing water and lowering the temperature of Venus with a large amount of ice blocks being placed on Venus, and they planned on dealing with the problem of splitting up the atmosphere another time. Edward Clark did not object to these policies.

He didn't care.

The terraforming of Venus was only a formal goal. The real goal of Project Dione was the expulsion of Shiba Tatsuya from Earth out of fear of his magic that converted mass directly into energy. And from this point of view, Project Dione had already failed.

The magical thermonuclear reactor power plant project, designed by Shiba Tatsuya, was steadily moving towards its implementation. Being a key figure in this project, Shiba Tatsuya had an excuse for not participating in the Dione Project.

The concept of such an installation is not new: first, build a large-scale power plant. Using the electricity produced, extract hydrogen from ocean water while extracting useful minerals purifying them from harmful substances. Using ordinary technology, this plan was unprofitable, but the use of the Star Reactor - a thermonuclear reactor using gravity control magic – makes it profitable. Edward Clark couldn't find a way to deny this.

The need for the Project Dione, with the official purpose of preparing for a shortage of living space as population increased, is still there, but it was now impossible to insist that Shiba Tatsuya must join the project. The star reactor was not necessary for the promotion of the Project Dione. Employees of the NSA calculated that the power required to carry out the mission in Jupiter's orbit can be generated by solar energy. On the other hand, Shiba Tatsuya's plant project is based on the

construction of the Star Reactor. Star reactor plants can provide much more energy than other types of power plants. Because of this, many senators already felt that Tatsuya's "experiment" should not be hindered. If Edward Clark continued to insist that Tatsuya must participate, the world could guess the true purpose of Project Dione.

Edward Clark knew that if the world figured out the true purpose of Project Dione, then it could never be achieved. There were always journalists trying to reveal the truth, regardless of the consequences. There was also the possibility that conclusions formed on the guesswork of people that couldn't be called full-fledged journalists would reveal the truth. Still, even in the current situation, Edward Clark did not give up on Project Dione. Searching for a clue that could turn the situation around, he was now looking through the information collected Hliðskjálf.

He had not returned home for more than ten days, and he had not met with his son in more than half a month. Because of this, Clark did not yet know that Raymond had become a Parasite (though this was probably more negligence on his own part). Clark had given his permission for Raymond to go to Japan through a text message, but other than this, he did not know Raymond's situation.

Clark once again entered into the sea of information contained in Hliðskjálf today. Using the original terminal had its benefit, as well: unlike the terminals scattered around the world, the original supercomputer could analyze and process data in addition to accessing it. Using an AI helper, Clark was looking for a way to change the situation, but could not find a suitable plan.

Finally, at about 15 o'clock, as he was beginning to succumb to fatigue, he was distracted by a call.

"Dr. Clark, how are you?"

Igor Bezobrazov appeared on the display, who he had not been able to contact for a long time.

"Dr. Bezobrazov, long time no see. Honestly, things are not going very well with me."

"I see, but this is not my fault."

Clark could barely restrain the urge to swear in response, but Bezobrazov did not seem to care about this reaction.

“I failed - this is a fact, but the initial reason is that the project of the plant with the Star Reactor could not be stopped by political means.” Bezobrazov opted not to take blame for his failure to kill Tatsuya using his Strategic Class magic, “Tuman Bomba”

“In your position, doctor, it was inevitable.”

It was unnecessary to quarrel now. Still, Clark’s voice contained some barb to it that he could not quite remove.

“I appreciate your understanding. In my position, I could not let Shiba Tatsuya go.”

Bezobrazov chose to ignore the barb in Clark’s voice, rather focusing on his intent as he also realized the necessity of cooperation in their circumstances.

“But now the situation has become even worse!” Clark exclaimed.

However, Bezobrazov’s response, in which there was not even a hint of self-reflection, caused an explosion of anger in Clark.

“Killing Shiba Tatsuya. Wonderful plan! Nothing can be done that he failed. Just the enemy was stronger.”

Bezobrazov on the screen made a displeased face, but Clark had expected this.

“But thanks to your hostile actions, the peaceful nature of Project Dione is now in doubt,” Clark continued.

“Was there any reason to pretend to be a peaceful project?” Bezobrazov asked.

“Huh?” Clark replied, confused.

Even after seeing the anger evident on Clark’s face, Bezobrazov kept his cynic tone.

“The purpose of Project Dione is the elimination of the Strategic Class Magician Shiba Tatsuya. If this goal is achieved, the development of Venus will not matter.”

Clark had nothing he could object to in this statement. Bezobrazov had accurately stated the purpose of Project Dione.

“Then, Doctor, do you have any ideas?”

Clark’s question was from despair.

“I don’t know if you can call it much of an “idea”, but I do have a one-sentence offer,” Bezobrazov responded.

Bezobrazov's answer surprised Clark, as he did not expect Bezobrazov to have anything specific.

"I'm listening to you."

Even though Clark only asked this to gain time, he still desired to find a way out of the current impasse.

"The current conflict was launched unilaterally by the Great Asian Alliance, but tomorrow it is planned to end this war with the victory of our country." Bezobrazov stated this with confidence.

"Doctor, will you be using Tuman Bomba?" Clark asked.

"I am."

The view that the war would be over by the singular use of Strategic Class Magic seemed naïve at first glance. However, the Great Asian Alliance launched this war under the assumption of the absence of Bezobrazov. Clark understood that if Tuman Bomba was used, the Great Asian Alliance would quickly end the war.

The Great Asian Alliance initially invaded the Primorsky Territory of the New Soviet Union, and finding that there was not a counterattack with Tuman Bomba, continued their attack. Because of this, if they were to receive a powerful blow by the Bezobrazov's Strategic Class Magic, their morale would be broken and the war would be unable to be continued. Since the armies of the New Soviet Union and the Great Asian Alliance were approximately equal, the loss of morale of the Great Asian Alliance's army would be fatal. Thus, the Great Asian Alliance would soon opt out of the war and the victory of the New Soviet Union would be assured. At least, this was the reasoning of Clark and Bezobrazov.

"After this victory, our country will go south into the Sea of Japan."

"Are you planning an invasion of Japan!?" Clark exclaimed.

"Justification has not yet been invented, but don't worry. We're not going to land on Honshu because it will not be an invasion operation aimed towards getting new territories."

"....."

Clark was amazed that Bezobrazov was seriously considering invading Japan.

"You seem to understand. True, it will be a deceptive maneuver. I assume you know where the construction of the Star Reactor plant is taking place?" Bezobrazov confirmed.

"On a volcanic island called "Miyaki Island", located 180 kilometers south of Tokyo."

"Correct. This island is located on the opposite side of the Sea of Japan where our army will move south." Bezobrazov stated.

"That is, you suggest we sabotage the plant during your advance to the south?" Clark asked.

"It is possible, isn't it? If the plant become the target of terrorists, what do you think the investors will think? They will have no choice but to cancel the construction of the Star Reactor plant, and Shiba Tatsuya will lose the pretext for refusing to participate in Project Dione."

Clark could not give an immediate response to the proposal Bezobrazov. Under most circumstances, this was a disastrous plan that should be immediately rejected. If it was revealed that the USNA was behind the sabotage of the plant, their credibility would fall below the baseboard, and the risk of being revealed was relatively high. It was possible to hide the elimination of 1 or 2 people, but to hide the destruction of an entire plant? But for Clark, suffering from a sense of hopelessness, Bezobrazov's proposal seemed like the only way to get out of the current impasse. Bezobrazov's plan tempted Clark like the sweet whispers of the devil.

"...When is the navy of your country advancing?" Clark finally asked.

"If everything goes smoothly, in five days - July 8th."

"Five days...."

"I'll be in time," Clark thought. Preparation time was not an impassable obstacle in his mind.

"Okay. I understand," Clark responded.

"I thought you would agree."

Bezobrazov smiled contentedly.

On the other side of the call, Clark shivered at the coldness of the smile shown by the doctor.

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July 4, 2097, Thursday. The seventh day of the war between the Great Asian Alliance and the New Soviet Union.

Major events pertaining to the New Soviet Union's position in the war happened during the morning. To start, the army finished redeploying its forces to the East to the Siberian region of the New Soviet Union, and the armored forces responsible for defending the region south of Khabarovsk began to move south.

While this was happening, the naval forces of the Primorsky Territory, previously holding the Great Asian Alliance's army back in the vicinity of Ussuriysk, began to retreat towards the Muravyov-Amursky peninsula.

In doing this, the New Soviet Union aimed to capture the invading army with the help East Siberian District and Primorsky Territory forces. This gave the Great Asian Alliance two options:

The first was to concentrate troops on the western coast of Lake Khanka in order to strengthen control over that territory.

The second was to chase the Primorsky Territory's forces retreating to the south and capture Vladivostok before the arrival of the East Siberian District's army. If they successfully seized Vladivostok, they would no longer have to worry that their Naval forces heading to the north might be attacked from the side. This would allow the army of the Northeast region and the army of the Korean Autonomous Okrug to occupy the west side of Lake Khanka (from the Great Asian Alliance's perspective, return to) Primorsky Krai.

The Great Asian Alliance chose the second option.

The Great Asian Alliance began pursuing the retreating army. However, the time spent making this decision combined with the difference in the speed of military equipment, so the distance between the armies continued to increase.

As the distance between the 2 countries' armies exceeded 20 kilometers, a dramatic turning point came in the war.

Suddenly, the fog surrounding the Great Asian Alliance grew thicker.

For a short period of time, the fog covered the military equipment and vehicles carrying about 6,000 soldiers.

"Retreat!" shouted the commander, trusting his instincts that sensed danger.

"Remove the fog!"

The staff officer who ordered this knew the true nature of this white veil, and quickly called out to the squad of magicians. But this officer's quick realization, their reaction was too late.

No, it would be more accurate to say that their opponent - Bezobrazov - was too fast.

The white darkness created by the thick fog was filled with magic sequences in an instant, and there was a blast of explosive gas covering the super-wide region. It was a gas mixture made from splitting the molecular bonds of water - one part oxygen and two parts hydrogen. The temperature of this mixture can reach 3000 degrees when burned - quite close to the temperature at the epicenter of a nuclear explosion. However, unlike nuclear bombs, which concentrate the emission of heat at a single point, this explosion generated heat over an area of several hectares to several tens of square kilometers. In addition to this, the initial form of this Mist-bomb attack (a form in which attention is not even drawn to the enemy's magic defense) differs from fuel-spray bombs because it places all of the attack targets within the activation area inside the explosion's epicenter.

Rather than kill the enemy units directly with the heat produced by the explosion, this attack sends high pressure shockwaves below the explosion, annihilating everything in its path - and its maximum strike radius was comparable to a multiple warhead nuclear missile.

July 4, 2097, 8:55 local time. Japanese time: 7:55.

One attack destroyed more than 70% of the invading forces of the Great Asian Alliance.

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The study hours of every National High School of Magic – from First High to Ninth High - were the same, with the first class starting at 8:00. Schools only differed in the presence of a morning gathering/short class before the first lesson.

At First High, there were no morning meetings or class hours before school, so students only arrived at the beginning first lesson. Third High, on the other hand, had made a habit of holding morning meetings in which the teachers explained current events to the students. However, these meetings were only available to the "special

courses", equivalent to the first course of First High to which instructors were assigned. Though today was the third day of exam week, the morning meeting was still held.

Ichijou Masaki and his classmates were waiting in their seats for 10 minutes before class. The teacher, however, came into the classroom with only 1 minute before to spare. He was a 50 year old man with a strong build, and this teacher was not one to achieve the respect of students by being friendly towards them, but one who relied on their clear leadership qualities to command them.

At 7:55, as the teacher was relaying some of his experiences, powerful magic waves suddenly flowed through the classroom. Masaki almost jumped as he felt the strong waves of magic. He was not the only one to have this reaction as several students in this classroom actually rose from their seats.

The teacher did not reproach them for this behavior.

"The morning meeting is canceled. All wait in their places," the teacher said with a stern face as he gestured to the students who had stood up. After this, he left the classroom.

As he listened to the whispering voices of his classmates, Masaki pressed his lips tightly.

"The epicenter of the psionic waves was in the north... no, the north-north-west? The fluctuations were strong, but the epicenter was quite far away..."

Masaki only felt that this had happened "far away", but he automatically linked this incident with the conflict occurring between the New Soviet Union and the Great Asian Alliance.

At the training terminal, he opened a section of the world map around the Sea of Japan. The training terminals at Third High had access to all sorts of geopolitical data, including data on military use of magic.

"More than 800 kilometers away, but still containing so much power... Is this Tuman Bomba...?"

Masaki shuddered as he realized the true power of magic causing the psionic waves, thinking that this was the real power of the Mist-bomb.

In reality, however, Masaki had underestimated the true power of Bezobrazov's Strategic Class Magic: Bezobrazov had carefully controlled the power of the explosion, and only a fraction of the true power was used.

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The Third High students were not the only ones who caught the residual psionic waves "Tuman Bomba". The large-scale oscillations produced disturbed the magicians all over Japan. Tatsuya felt them as he was returning home from First High before using his Elemental Sight to investigate.

"...The area covered by the explosions is about 3 square kilometers, and they extended about 20 meters upwards. The goal should have been the destruction of ground troops."

The area of the explosions this time had been expanded to destroy more of the military vehicles of the Great Asian Alliance, which were spread over a large area.

"The density of the magic sequences were low, but many explosions occurred simultaneously over the vast area. There will be significant damage to their own country. Is this some kind of scorched earth tactic?" Tatsuya wondered.

This was not the original meaning of the phrase, but they destroyed the enemy army at a cost of their own land. The government must be confident in the understanding of the people to use a tactic such as this. Still, the tactic was extremely effective. 150-200 tanks were destroyed in addition to the military equipment and infantry vehicles following, so the number of enemy soldiers killed should have been between 5 and 10 thousand people.

"This is slightly different than what I expected, but the winner of this war was predetermined."

Even Tatsuya could not have imagined that the New Soviet Union - or more accurately, Bezobrazov - would perform such a self-destructive counterattack. Still, this ruthlessness would only add to the psychological shock that Bezobrazov was still alive and well, so the Great Asian Alliance would almost certainly be unable to continue.

Tatsuya laid his head on the headrest of the car in the electric train and closed his eyes to focus.

"... It was a complete rout. The Great Asian Alliance will not be able to conduct military operations abroad for some time." Tatsuya concluded. "Now, if the New Soviet Union sends the Far Eastern fleet, they will not worry about an attack from the rear. I don't know what excuse they'll come up with, but... it must be that the fleet has already been mobilized."

“There is no more time to spare.”

Tatsuya said this out loud. He was developing new Strategic Class magic based on the Chain Casting of Tuman Bomba to prepare to stop the advance of the New Soviet Union fleet. Now Tatsuya realized he had to hurry with its completion. Tatsuya only had to wait a couple more minutes before arriving at the station closest to his home. However, even this slight loss of time now stressed Tatsuya.

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At the time of Tuman Bomba's activation, Liu Li Lei had not moved forward with the rest of the troops, staying behind in the rear. The plan was for the infantry following the tanks and transport workers to unite with the main forces after defeating the enemy. In compliance with this plan, the officer commanding Liu's escort squad daringly decided to head north to occupy the Vozdvizhenka airfield knowing that the army of the New Soviet Union was moving south from Khabarovsk. This plan saved Liu Li Lei from the Mist-bomb.

After the activation of Tuman Bomba, the officer commanding Liu's escort unit contacted headquarters ordering the unit to evacuate back to the territory of the Great Asian Alliance. Given the situation with the invading army being practically destroyed, this proposition was natural. However, the command Great Asian Alliance's military ordered Liu Li Lei and her escort detachment to remain in their current position.

Though the New Soviet Union had to know their location, they did not attack or surround the group Liu was hiding in.

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Tatsuya canceled both the trip to Miyaki Island and his training session for "Sealing Sphere" with Mikihiko. Having notified Mikihiko of this, he retired in the morning to the laboratory located in the basement of the building where he lived.

His research data for the new Strategic Class magic was with him on a flash drive that he updated daily. Because of this habit, he was able to continue work on the new magic in the basement of his home without delay.

The most surprising part of this was that he did not escort Miyuki. Of course, regardless of Tatsuya's presence, an escort always followed her at some distance, and Tatsuya always watched her with his Elemental Sight. Nevertheless, it was an exceptional case in which he allowed Miyuki to remain alone.

But in this case, Tatsuya felt that all of his time had to be spent designing the new Strategic Class magic.

He finished the basic design of the magic before dinner, but he did not have the activation sequence for the magic ready quite then. All he had was a blueprint describing the systems of the magic. After spending another day working, Tatsuya would have an activation sequence prepared for use, but he stopped at this stage for a reason.

"It would be best to entrust the completion of the activation sequence to an engineer close to the magician, who will be using it."

Because of this idea, he sent the project's data to the First Laboratory, now known as the Kanazawa Institute of Natural and Magical Sciences, specifying the recipient and user of the magic.

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After killing Kudou Retsu three days ago, Minoru hid in his hideout at the Kobe shelter. When he finally met up again with Raymond and Regulus, it was already evening of the day Tuman Bomba destroyed the Great Asian Alliance's army.

"Minoru, are you feeling better now?" Regulus inquired restrainedly. Minoru had locked himself away for the past few days under the pretense that he "felt bad".

"Almost everything is in order," Minoru responded.

What Minoru meant by "feeling bad" was not a deterioration of his physical condition, as might have happened before his conversion into a parasite, but rather guilt at killing his grandfather. Minoru just wanted to be left alone, so Regulus acted reserved just in case.

"I see."

As Minoru talked, Regulus got the feeling that Minoru was... different, somehow from the way he was when they first met.

...It was like he was no longer a man. He looked more like a Parasite.

That was the impression Regulus got as he looked at Minoru. Though he did not voice the thought, it was still conveyed to Minoru. However, Minoru acted as if he did not notice.

"Did you two also feel the magic this morning?" Minoru asked.

"Yeah. It was Tuman Bomba, right?" Raymond joined the conversation at this point.

"I am not yet sure, but I believe the USNA will make a move off of this. I cannot confirm yet with the country, but I will relay the information as I find out," Regulus stated.

Raymond only nodded with interest, but Regulus, as an elite soldier, thought about how this event would affect their actions.

"The Pentagon definitely has more detailed information than Stars. If you receive any instructions from America, give priority to them over our current goal. However, Jack, could you help me with something for now?" Minoru asked

"Now?" clarified Regulus, not quite understanding

The rainy season was not over yet. There was no rain today, but the sky was overcast so it was already dark outside. "Now" was the best time for doing an activity undetected. Even so, Regulus still thought that right "now" might not be the best time to start doing something.

"We'll be back before midnight," Minoru assured.

"...Alright. I will go with you."

In the summer, the time difference between New Mexico and Japan is 15 hours. At midnight, Japanese time, at Stars headquarters it would be 9 am. If everything worked as Minoru claimed, it would be unlikely for instructions from America to appear during their attack, and even if orders do come, Stars's fourth squad that had penetrated into Yokosuka would inform them about it later. Regulus was aware that the three members of fourth squad - Vega, Speke and Deneb – had successfully penetrated the base of Yokosuka as well as that Arcturus had failed his penetration and was sealed in the process. It was not only he who knew this, either. Both

Raymond and Minoru also knew this “shared” information through the telepathic network of Parasites.

“May I go too? I do not want to be alone,” Raymond asked.

After Regulus had agreed, Raymond intervened in the conversation once more, making a disgruntled face.

“You do understand that this will be a secret penetration mission, right? Raymond, I don’t believe that suits you,” Minoru said.

However, Raymond objected, saying “It’s not a problem,” in response.

“Minoru. Though Raymond lacks experience, he has potential. I’ll cover at difficult times, so let’s bring him as well.”

Seeing that Raymond was starting to boil, Regulus intervened in their conversation so that the matter did not come to an argument. Still, while he defended Raymond, he acknowledged that Minoru was right, so he offered to cover for him if necessary.

Upon hearing Regulus’ arguments, Raymond stopped complaining.

“Well, if Jack says so...”

Minoru also decided to yield, so they accepted the compromise.

They drove a car on the highway as they moved towards their destination. After driving for an hour, they arrived at their destination.

“Here we are, I suppose.”

“The main house of the Kudou family. *My* house.”

Minoru responded to Raymond’s hunch himself. In order to avoid detection, they stopped the car some distance from the Kudou house.

Kudou. It’s sad to have to sneak around his own home... Minoru came out of the car with a bitter smile. Regulus and Raymond followed him.

“My family should know by now that I have become a parasite, so nothing can be done,” Minoru said.

Shrugging, he headed for the back entrance to the house. Regulus and Raymond exchanged glances, then followed. Near the corner of the fence, Minoru stopped and looked at them.

“From here on, take care to not emit psionic waves,” Minoru warned.

“Got it.”

“Okay.”

Satisfied with their answers, Minoru went on. Both Regulus and Raymond had noticed Minoru use magic several times while they were walking, but neither of them understood what he had been doing. They walked right behind Minoru followed him inside the hedge fence. Once inside, they entered an imperceptible passage hidden by the fence.

Suddenly, they were in front of a small door made in an old style. Minoru felt his breath catch.

“Now you may use magic,” Minoru informed his companions, turning around. “Please neutralize the people on the 2nd and 3rd floors. I would prefer you not kill them.”

“Affirmative.”

Hearing Regulus's answer, Minoru nodded and opened the door. None of them took off their shoes, but that was quite natural given the circumstances.

“I'm so excited!”

“Just don't be silly, Raymond,” Regulus warned.

Glancing at his partners for this expedition, Minoru headed to the first floor dining room. *“This is about the time that my family would be dining...”* Minoru thought. Perhaps his two older sisters also came from their husbands' houses to attend the funeral of their grandfather.

“Though the funeral should be on Sunday in 2 weeks...”

While locked up in his room, Minoru hadn't been wasting his time – he was collecting information. When he heard about the plans for the funeral of his grandfather, he was shocked at his lack of emotions before he convinced himself that his emotions were simply paralyzed. He was unable to recognize the possibility that his mindset had become that of a Parasite, because in his mind, he was still himself.

This was the premise of Minoru's actions. If this were to be proven false, he would no longer have any justification for his actions.

Suddenly Minoru, sensing a sudden nausea, put his hand to his mouth. He took this as evidence that he had finally realized the death of Ojii-sama, but... "the sadness is already completely gone," Minoru realized, telling himself. He had automatically distracted himself from his thought that his mindset might be becoming that of a Parasite. Perhaps this was a self-defense mechanism.

The Kudou family's mansion was extensive. To get from the back door to the dining room, one had to go through many corridors and rooms, but Minoru had grown up in this house. He knew the corridors by heart and was able to reach the dining room unnoticed without getting lost.

Minoru instinctively reached out to knock on the door, but he realized what he was doing and stopped himself, smiling bitterly. He remembered that he was an "intruder", and shaking his head, he lowered his hand to the handle and opened the door.

"Who is this!? ...Minoru?"

This was the reaction of his second oldest brother who sat closest to the door. He acted surprised, but this was likely because he had his back to the door when Minoru entered. However, the main reason for his panic was that Minoru had ceased to hide the signs of the Parasite's presence.

"Minoru...!"

The eldest brother reacted a bit differently, but there he was similarly surprised: he jumped up so sharply that his chair fell. However, his surprise did not hinder his reaction as he pulled out his CAD and started an activation sequence.

The magic he started was called Luna Strike. Automatically accounting for the fact that they are in a small room, he started a Mental-Interference magic.

Kudou Haruaki, the eldest son of the Kudo family, was best at the external systematic magic of mental-interference of the Four Systems and Eight types of modern magic. Haruaki should not have been mistaken for attempting a basic attacking spell of mental-interference magic, "Luna Strike". However, even with his experience, he failed to activate even this magic.

"Haruaki's moon strike was canceled...?"

The eldest daughter of the Kudou family, Kudou Byakka, muttered this in a surprised voice. Haruaki was experienced with this type of magic, so his Luna Strike activation was very quick. None of his siblings would have been able to prevent the activation of Haruaki's magic.

"Why did you come?"

Kudou Shino, Minoru's "mother", asked Minoru this with a calm face and a calm voice.

"Father has not returned home yet?" Ignoring Shino's question, Minoru asked his own.

"Makoto-sama said he was late due to a factory inspection."

Shino was more than 12 years younger than Makoto, so she always spoke like this – not just in front of Minoru.

"At the factory?" Minoru continued his questions.

Although Minoru asked again with doubt in his voice, he immediately rethought his question, remembering that the Kudou family had invested in many military enterprises – there was nothing strange with him inspecting a factory.

"Would you tell me where this factory is located?"

"Yes, of course."

Shino instantly agreed, and gave him the address of a place located on the outskirts of the Ikoma city – the same city in which this mansion resided.

"If you have business with Makoto-sama, then you should have said so from the beginning. If you had, Haruaki and the others would not be in such an inappropriate condition right now."

Thus, she scolded them for such a cold reception from Minoru. Minoru was not shocked by her attitude.

"Kaa-san¹, I have no more questions for you."

Shino and his siblings Asuka and Byakka all frowned at this. Though the impoliteness of his phrase essentially saying "I don't need you anymore" also provoked discontent, they also had a vague feeling that his saying of "Kaa-san" had a meaning different

than “mother”. However, neither the eldest nor the second daughter had time to comprehend it.

“...but I want my brothers and sisters to become my strength,” Minoru continued.

“What do you mean?”

Asuka, the second daughter, asked this in an aggressive tone. However, her anxious face made it obvious that she was only pretending to be strong.

“Become my subordinates. Oh yes, I don’t mean that I want to become the head of the Kudou family - this will only be temporary until I reach my goal. However, I realized that I am not a match for the Saegusa, Juumonji, and Yotsuba families, so I request your assistance to achieve my goals.”

“Do you want us to betray families in the same position as us, the Ten Main Clans!?” shouted Soushi, the second son.

“What do you mean, Soushi-niisan? The Kudou family is no longer a member the Ten Master Clans,” Minoru retorted.

“...”

Soushi didn’t have any way to respond to Minoru’s parry, so he fell silent.

“Even if we are not a part of the Ten Master clans, we will not submit to a monster! Especially if it is you, the killer of Ojii-sama,” yelled the Haruaki. The willpower of the next head of the Kudou family was clearly strong. He once again tried to activate magic towards Minoru.

“Urgh...!”

¹Minoru’s words in the original kanji imply that he knows the truth about his origins: that his mother was not his real mother and his parents were siblings

Before he could activate his magic sequence, he grabbed his chest and bent over in pain. Minoru had activated a mental-interference magic causing pain with overwhelming speed.

“Please stop this useless resistance,” Minoru said in an indifferent tone, looking at Haruaki. “I understand that as former representatives of the Ten Master Clans, you

cannot kneel before a demon. That is why I do not wish to take the place of the head of the family and do not plan to ask for public cooperation. It is for you to secretly lend me strength in such a way that the Ten Master Clans are unaware of it.”

Minoru gave an innocent smile, like a child – containing no hidden meaning or flattery – while also giving the smile of a monarch – an uncaring smile that does not care about the feelings of others.

Minoru’s words were not answered. Haruaki did not know what to say, both daughters and the second son were intimidated by their difference in power. His “official” mother showed no fear on her face, but she pressed her lips together and turned away from Minoru’s gaze.

“I understand that you cannot agree to my request without the permission of my father. I’ll talk to him first, so please wait here,” Minoru told them.

As soon as he completed his speech, Minoru activated mental interference magic forcibly putting them to sleep. His “mother”, sisters, and brothers each fell from their chairs as if all their all of their strength had been taken from their bodies. Still, this could be called the better outcome as if they had fallen onto the table, their faces would have been covered in food.

Minoru had not limited his magic’s activation range to his family members. All of the servants and workers who were on the first floor fell asleep at the same time, and though some of them were injured as they fell asleep while working, Minoru found all the injured and applied healing magic to them. Once he was finished, Minoru met Regulus and Raymond in the hall leading to the main entrance.

“Minoru.”

When Regulus came down the stairs and called Minoru, he stopped and looked up at him.

“Have you finished?” Minoru asked.

“Yes, they are all sleeping. Three were able to provide some resistance, but in the end we managed to put them to sleep without killing them.”

“Excellent.”

Minoru nodded with a smile.

“By the way, I assume you asked us to put them to sleep and not to kill them because you want to use them somehow?” Raymond asked curiously as he came down after Regulus.

“I’m not looking for help from the servants of the main house, but rather from subordinates working outside the main family. However, since relatives and friends may be here, I would rather not make myself their enemy,” Minoru explained.

“Hmmm... Still, after killing Shogun Kudou, isn’t it a bit late to worry about that?”

“Raymond!” Regulus reprimanded.

Raymond sucked in his neck when Regulus chided him, raising his voice. “Minoru, that, well...”

“Jack, don’t worry about it.”

With a soothing tone, Minoru answered in a hurry to give an excuse for Raymond.

“I killed my grandfather - that is a fact. However, there are also many people who pledged allegiance to my father and not to my grandfather. These are the people I plan to ask for help.”

“Heh...”

Raymond’s answer had not contained any sign of having contemplated his words. This might have been why Minoru was not angry.

“Let’s go to where my father is now. Please follow me,” Minoru said as he left through the main entrance without waiting for an answer.

◊ ◊ ◊

The Kanazawa Institute of Natural and Magical Sciences (formerly the First Laboratory of the Development of Magic Abilities) had a dormitory with single rooms for researchers. Kichijouji Shinkuro, a student of the Third School of the National University of Magic, also worked as a researcher at the institute and lived in the afore-mentioned dormitory.

Third High, like First High, was in the middle of their examination week. However, Kichijouji did not need to spend much time preparing for exams, so he only planned to spend about two hours preparing for the next exam and spent the rest of the time on research. As he had discovered a Cardinal Code, he was free to spend his time and the budget of the institute to work to complete the theory of the Cardinal codes,

but his work was not limited to research on Cardinal Codes. Magic science had not yet reached a stage of development to have specialized sections, and leading researchers often put forward new hypotheses on a variety of different magical topics.

Kichijouji practically lived in the laboratories of the first institute, and recently the boundaries between his work time and personal time had began to blur even further. Even today, he returned to his laboratory after dinner and turned on his terminal, intending to continue his research. His plans were halted, however, as he discovered a message on his terminal. Outside messages were tested for security, so if it had reached his terminal, it was safe.

“From Shiba Tatsuya...?”

Kichijouji opened his eyes wide after seeing the name of the sender. He knew the message would concern theory of magic because it was sent to the institute, but Kichijouji and Tatsuya had no previous relationship in the form of exchanging research. They hadn't exchanged personal messages, either, so there was no precedent for this message. This message was completely unexpected for Kichijouji, but he began to read it with the thought, “*what did he send me?*”

“...What...!?” he exclaimed.

He accelerated the speed at which he was reading, but before he finished reading the message, he opened the attached file. The contents of the message were so shocking that he wanted to confirm it as soon as possible.

“....”

The file contained a blueprint of an activation sequence. The message contained a description of how the activation sequence would build the magic sequence: it described in detail what base magic to use in creating a working magic sequence in addition to describing what modules to include in the activation sequence. Kichijouji's eye caught an unknown module in the picture while skimming over it.

“Chain Casting?”

Kichijouji had never heard of such a technology before.

“*The technology on which Tuman Bomba is based...Is that true?*” Kichijouji thought. He still did not understand why Shiba Tatsuya provided him with such secret information.

He re-read the module entries, confirming that this was not an intricate joke.

“...The required ability to calculate this magic is too high. Even I couldn’t handle it.”

After reading the description of the Chain Casting module a few times, Kichijouji noticed this problem. When compared to the average magician, Kichijouji had a much higher ability to handle magic, but even with his abilities, Chain Casting was too much for him to calculate. Chain Casting was a technology that allowed one to perform large-scale magic by copying small sequences of magic in a chain. However, the amount of information caused from the "secondary" sequences of magic was quite simply, huge. In order to reduce the total amount of calculations required, the size of each magic sequence was compressed to the maximum, but even with this in mind, this was an impossible task for one magician to cope with.

“You can reduce the load on the magician by processing all of the variables with a high-performance CAD. But even doing this, Goki-san would probably not be able to handle it. But Masaki could succeed.”

Kichijouji stopped as he heard his own voice.

“Will this be used by Masaki?”

He thought this without speaking it out loud.

“...If you reorganize the activation sequence by specifying the desired size, would Masaki be able to use it?”

Kichijouji reread the basis of the project again before he understood the true meaning behind the planned magic.

“It can’t be...” Kichijouji thought. *“Is this the basic idea behind ‘Break’, a wide scale magic applied to the water surface with the help of Chain Casting!?”*

Kichijouji read through to the last lines of the text, which he had not reached earlier. They read:

“Kichijouji and Ichijou, I wish you luck.”

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As he arrived at the address he received from his foster mother, Minoru frowned at the building. As far as he knew, this factory produced androids, the production of which used the latest nanotechnology. They quickly entered through the

main entrance by using Golden Electronic Silkworms without bothering to conceal themselves.

As they expected, the “guards” soon appeared. They consisted of female-model androids – they were the so-called combat gynoids. Moving cleverly and quickly, these gynoids started to attack Minoru, but Raymond's psychokinesis pushed the robot soldiers back.

“Oh? They are sturdy?” Raymond said, surprised that his attack had not done much.

Raymond had applied psychokinesis with the intent to crush the gynoids. However, the mechanical bodies of the gynoids did not break, and gradually pushed forward against the psychokinesis. Suddenly, sparks flew as the gynoids experienced electric shock – caused by Regulus’ magic. The gynoids froze and fell to the floor.

“These robo-soldiers are quite effective. The strength of their enclosures is astounding.”

Regulus expressed his impressions of the gynoids as a soldier himself. However, Minoru’s was not focused on the performance of the machines, but on a different thought: *“Are these dummies for making parasite dolls...?”*

“Come on. Let’s not waste time.”

Minoru kept his suspicions to himself, and Regulus and Raymond hurried on. Minoru left them and searched for his father, eventually finding him on the production line.

“I thought you would be in the control room,” Makoto said.

Minoru did not respond to these words. Makoto may have had a desire to talk, but the crowd of people that had closed in on them made this impossible.

“Could you let go of your guard? I’m not going to cause trouble if you don’t attack me. You don’t need to worry about the factory.”

A group of workers hiding behind the most recently produced robots (non-humanoid robots) showed relief on their faces when they heard the words of Minoru. One person was in a shirt with trousers, but the rest were in work overalls. These were clearly employees of this factory. In contrast to the attire of the workers, the men in front of Minoru in dark suits - not suitable for wearing at the height of summer – rather than relief, their expressions grew more tense. Everyone there

was on their toes due to the intense atmosphere – even a slight sudden action could cause them to attack.

“Leave us.”

Kudou Makoto finally spoke, requesting privacy. After a bit of hesitating, the crowd of bodyguards finally parted.

“We have not seen each other for a while now, father.”

Minoru showed no signs of timidity towards his elder, but this was obviously due to their vast difference in strength. Still, given their relationship, this could be perceived as unnatural.

“I thought you would come much earlier,” Makoto responded.

Makoto should probably have shown a bit of guilt, but his expression was neutral.

“I originally thought that you were a defective product, but it turns out that you were just unfinished. Still, I didn’t expect you to become complete by becoming a monster.”

Minoru did not get angry or cry from Makoto’s harsh words, and instead he smiled coldly.

“Thank you for showing your true feelings. Thanks to this, now I, too, may not feel guilty,” Minoru said.

“I didn’t think that monsters would have emotions like guilt,” Makoto mused.

“There’s a theory that the true body of the Parasite arises from activities originating in the minds of people. If its true, then it’s not surprising that we have human emotions,” Minoru explained.

“That’s if its correct.”

Makoto’s aggressive behavior didn’t change Minoru’s attitude much, but Minoru lost the desire to continue this empty conversation with his father and got to the main point.

“This factory is making dummies for parasite dolls, isn’t it?”

“Did you come to ask about this?” Makoto avoided Minoru’s question.

“How many such dolls are in stock? Though, I guess you can not answer. Hey, you, over there, answer me.”

Minoru interrupted Makoto and turned to the man in the shirt.

“W-we have 24 fully completed dummies, and 12 completed by more than 50%.”

“In total, 2 times more than ready ones with a transplanted parasite? Father, I thought you abandoned plans to sell them to the SDF,” Minoru commented.

“Why should I have stopped? There were no problems with the dolls themselves my predecessor simply chose the wrong way to check them.”

By “predecessor,” he meant Kudo Retsu. Minoru also agreed with the utility of parasitic dolls, but Minoru grew colder at Makoto’s words reprimanding Retsu. Minoru silently condemned his father for his words.

“In that case, I ask the Kudou family to obey my orders regarding both completed and unfinished dolls.”

Minoru’s voice held a lot of pressure now that he had gotten colder.

“Alright,” Makoto said.

Minoru felt that Makoto had responded too easily, and wondered if Makoto had actually processed his demand.

“Head-sama, are you sure!?”

His bodyguards showed the natural reaction to Makoto’s agreement.

“Resistance is useless,” Makoto answered them in a lifeless tone. It was slightly different than the indifferent way he usually spoke. “Minoru is the finished product of the “ninth” magicians. He defeated the Patriarch, so now Minoru is the most powerful magician in the Kudou family. It’s natural for us to obey him,” Makoto finished.

Neither his voice nor his face expressed any discontent, and when Makoto said “finished product”, his voice had a feeling of satisfaction rather than discontent.

Makoto was proud of what his son had become.

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While Minoru was at the factory gaining the obedience of the Kudou family, Tatsuya and Miyuki were eating a late dinner.

“Sorry about today.”

Tatsuya suddenly apologized without any preliminary words.

“Onii-sama... I have no idea what you're talking about.”

Miyuki rolled her eyes as she asked what was going on.

“Today you had to return from school alone.”

“Oh, that's are you talking about...”

Miyuki had been slightly stressed from the misunderstanding, worried that her brother was apologizing in advance for some job he had to do.

“I know that Onii-sama is worried, but Onii-sama is no longer my Guardian, and the bodyguards do a fine job.”

“Even though you say you don't need it, I can't help but worry,” Tatsuya said.

“R-really? Thank you...”

Miyuki blushed, looked away, and whispered: “Onii-sama is so dishonest.” Tatsuya heard these words, but opted to ignore them. He was not sadistic enough to give Miyuki the stress it would take to explain herself. At this point, their conversation paused until they finished dinner, removed their dishes from the table, and sat across from each other drinking from coffee cups.

“May I ask what Onii-sama did today?”

Miyuki started with this question. She believed that Tatsuya should not have apologized, but also was interested in what her fiancé was doing.

“...Of course.”

Tatsuya hesitated momentarily, but nodded after a short delay. He had not originally planned to discuss it, but decided that there was no reason to keep this a secret from Miyuki.

“It is possible that the New Soviet Union, now victorious over Great Asian Alliance, will go south across the Sea of Japan.”

“New Soviet Union plans to start a war with Japan!?” Miyuki exclaimed.

“I doubt that they would suddenly declare war, but they can make up another reason to send a fleet. For example, to seize “war criminals” who allegedly fled to Japan after the end of the conflict,” Tatsuya explained.

“Is it possible that the Japanese government would accept soldiers who have escaped from the Great Asian Alliance?”

“In this situation, any justification will do. As for the purpose of the New Soviet Union, I have several guesses, but whatever it is, we must be prepared for a real invasion.”

“Will you act the same way as you did during the Yokohama incident?”

“I won’t be able to ignore it. One of the conditions for His Excellency Todo to provide support for the ESCAPES project was the formation of a force holding back the military ambitions of other countries. However, unlike the Yokohama incident, this will not end just by using Material Burst once.”

“...Why?”

“Unlike the Great Asian Alliance that time, the New Soviet Union is aware of the existence of an explosion from the direct conversion of matter to energy. If they resort to military action, they will likely take countermeasures to ensure that cities and bases are not destroyed,” Tatsuya answered.

“But I think that there is no way for the New Soviet Union to defend against Onii-sama’s magic...” Miyuki said.

“It is impossible to say for sure that there is no magical means of protection against the explosion of matter, but there is also a way to prevent me from carrying out an attack without applying magical counteraction.”

“How is this possible?” Miyuki asked.

“For example, they could declare Vladivostok to be ‘unprotected’.”

“What would this do?”

“By declaring a city ‘unprotected’, they are claiming that military facilities adjacent to it will not stop an attack on it. The existence of military objects makes them a military force, but if the military port of Vladivostok is attacked with Material Burst, the city will also be damaged. The magic is too dense to be used to attack a dense area. We

won't be able to use Material Burst if we don't want to become a criminal country known for ignoring international martial law," Tatsuya explained.

"I think that's a bit suspicious..." Miyuki responded.

"Indeed, it would be quite questionable. However, even if we know it to be a hoax, if they make the claim officially, we would have to respect it."

Miyuki did not even try to hide the fact that she couldn't accept this, but the rule was the rule, no matter how ridiculous. Excuses in international politics could be said to have an "attacking force" greater than nuclear weapons.

"There are also ways to prevent the use of Material Burst against naval forces. By preparing a fleet of refugees and keeping them at a distance such that stray bullets from conventional weapons would not be able to reach the fleet, the fleet would be safe from ordinary military fights, but I would not be able to use an explosion great enough to destroy the fleet without damaging the fleet of refugees.

"...All problems due to too much destructive power. Couldn't you regulate the power appropriately?" Miyuki asked."

"The destructive power is too difficult to regulate, and Material Burst is not a magic that can be practiced so easily. This is the greatest weakness of Material Burst: it is a weapon effective only for annihilating the enemy and not fighting with finesse. Because of this, a different method of interception is needed if the New Soviet Union chooses to attack."

"...So this is why Onii-sama has been developing new magic?"

Miyuki asked this with shining eyes, with no trace of her previously gloomy face. Tatsuya slightly smiled at this transformation, then nodded with a serious face.

"The basic blueprint has already been completed, and I left further work to those who will be using this magic," Tatsuya answered.

"Onii-sama will not use this magic?" Miyuki said, surprised.

"I can't use any magic except Decomposition and Recovery." Tatsuya smiled.

"...I apologize." Miyuki had momentarily forgotten about Tatsuya's weaknesses as a magician.

"It's okay."

Tatsuya, with his smile seeming to say, “don’t worry,” had still not told Miyuki about the basis of the new Strategic class magic using Chain Casting. He had only told this to Kichijouji in order to use Masaki. However, if one were to think only about suitability...

The system of Chain Casting was also suitable for Miyuki.

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The command system of Stars required orders for operations to be transmitted from the headquarters in the Pentagon directly to the commander in chief. However, due to the absence of the commander-in-chief, the order was instead delivered to the base commander.

Local time: July 4, 10:00. Japanese time: July 5, 01:00. Colonel Walker, the base commander, was speechless when he saw the order.

“I can understand the sabotage of the Star Reactor plant, but...”

The order contained a strategic plan that was written some time ago in order to eliminate the threat of the Strategic-class magician Shiba Tatsuya. The first part of the plan consisted of destroying the Star Reactor plant, followed by using international pressure to force him to take part in Project Dione. Though less reliable than a direct method such as the murder of Shiba Tatsuya, the level of risk of the operation was significantly lower in comparison so the command gave the go-ahead to the plan. The actual implementation had been canceled due to the reappearance of the Parasites, but the plan was still considered to be a reliable way to deal with Shiba Tatsuya so it was now being taken off the shelf. It was somewhat expected for the plan to be tried now that the matter with the Parasites had become somewhat stable, but still...

“We’re supposed to accomplish this during a diversion maneuver by the Far Eastern fleet of the New Soviet Union...?”

Walker was well aware that the USNA and NSU were collaborating on the Dione project, but he couldn’t fathom the idea that cooperation in military operations was in the realm of possibility. For the soldiers who had fought the NSU on the battlefield, this outcome was especially unthinkable.

“I guess one should not dwell on the past...”

However, Walker could not completely convince himself of this. Even high ranking officers could not help but be affected by their emotions on this topic, so the feelings

must be especially intense for the soldiers who had risked their lives on the battlefield. Walker was worried about having to choose candidates for this operation.

"I need to be careful with the choice of candidates, but... no, it's too late now."

The stars had already sent teams to Japan, and it would be too much to recall the current teams and send new ones to replace them. Regulus and Vega's squad had successfully penetrated Japan, so from this point on, there was no possibility for changes in the roster. People from another unit would be sent for support, but Walker was not involved in this. As he went through this chain of thought, Walker remembered something.

"...At the beginning of last month, the sabotage at the Star Reactor plant was entrusted to Arcturus and Vega...would Captain Arcturus be able to return to this mission despite being seriously wounded immediately after entering Japan?"

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July 5, early morning.

Two women wearing American Army uniforms entered Yokosuka Naval Base. A USNA aircraft carrier was currently in the base's port, so most officers and soldiers of the American army did not attract much attention. These two women, on the other hand, were noticeable because they both looked as if they had come off the covers of fashion magazines.

One was a typical "urban beauty" with short, brown hair and brown eyes. Her demeanor gave off an atmosphere that made her look stylish even in her short-sleeved training t-shirt.

The other was a charming beauty with a Scandinavian appearance: long, silver hair and deep blue eyes. She also had big breasts, which, only covered by a tank top, offered a significant distraction to the young male soldiers.

"Ahhh... the heat..."

Fanning her chest with her hand, Leila Deneb (the Scandinavian beauty) groaned as she completed the training. It was not just jogging: it was a tougher training that combined sprints, jumps, squats, and stretches.

"Ah...Japan...didn't expect...so hot..." Leila mumbled as she tried to get her point across.

“The high temperature and humidity are caused by the tropical ocean air mass typical for this time of year.” As she swept the sweat from her forehead, Charlotte Vega (the city beauty) responded articulately to the broken complaints of Leila.

“Now I understand why First Lieutenant Spica did not want to go out...” Leila had recovered her breath somewhat as she listened to Vega speak, and was now able to make sentences.

These three women, when including Lieutenant Spica, mentioned by Leila, were a squad of Stars currently infiltrating Japan. All three had been turned into Parasites before going to Japan, and even though they had been transformed against their will without any warning, after the assimilation was completed, they did not show any dissatisfaction with their situation. Their discontent at the moment was primarily because they still had to succumb to the heat despite having ceased being human.

“‘Independence’ is back,” Leila observed.

On the way back to their hostel, they saw outlines of the aircraft carrier that had penetrated Japan. This was the sixth generation of the Independence aircraft carriers – war veterans whose construction had begun even before World War III. The original blueprints required the ship to be equipped with a nuclear reactor, but since the installation of nuclear reactors on warships had been banned during the war, it had to be replaced with a hydrogen turbine engine.

“I hope for good news,” Vega responded.

Independence left the port at night to train the night departure and new arrivals, but behind this front was also a hidden goal: to obtain secret information and instructions that could not be transmitted by radio.

“I want to quickly find out where the traitor girl is hiding.”

In an annoyed voice, Leila continued following Vega. The “traitor girl” she mentioned was Lina.

“They would not send the message if they did not find her,” Vega stated.

They had managed to find out that Lina was not hidden by the Japanese government, but by some other organization. However, they were no closer to finding Lina as the Japanese government claimed to not know the location of this “other organization” that was hiding her. Despite this, Vega and Leila believed that the

Japanese army had to know the location of the “traitor” Sirius, and if they increased the pressure on them, they would eventually confess. In any case, they would probably loosen up if they destroyed a couple “suspicious” objects.

Vega had never been a soldier who cared much about political gain, but she was also not a soldier who seriously thought about performing terrorist activities. However, once she became a Parasite, her mindset changed much more noticeable than that of the other members of the Stars.

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July 5, 2097, 8:00.

Regulus received an order from the headquarters of the Stars through the telepathic network of Parasites while returning to Kobe shelter. An aircraft carrier lying in the western part of the Pacific Ocean first received this order by telegram, and with the help of a fighter jet, sent it to the “Independence” aircraft carrier stopped in the port of Yokosuka. After that, Vega transmitted the order to Regulus through the Parasite collective consciousness. Since the information had been transmitted this way, the information was also transmitted to Raymond and Minoru.

“What do you think?” Regulus asked Minoru in a physical voice.

Although Minoru was a Parasite, he still retained his human individuality. Minoru could freely gain access to the collective consciousness of the Parasites, but Regulus, Raymond, and the other Parasites in Stars were unable to access Minoru’s thoughts.

“The Star Headquarters’ order coincides with the distracting tactics I wanted to ask you about, Jack. I would like you to join in the sabotage of the Star Reactor,” Minoru answered

“During that time, will you take that girl?” Raymond asked instead of Regulus this time.

“Exactly. Raymond, do you want to come with me?” Minoru asked

“No, I should help Jack.”

Minoru did not object to this distribution of roles.

“Even if you didn’t say anything, I was still going to follow orders from headquarters, but...” Regulus started.

“Does something bother you?”

After a direct question to Minoru, Regulus overcame his indecision.

“Before that, I would like to confirm the current status of Commander Arcturus, and, if possible, free it from sealing.”

Arcturus had been sealed by a Japanese magician of ancient magic immediately after arriving at Zama base and had remained in the transport plane since his arrival. Regulus felt it.

“Okay. Let's go and take a look at the state of Commander Arcturus,” Minoru responded.

Minoru could have denied Regulus's this, but instead he agreed to help.

“Should we go to Tokyo when the fleet of the New Soviet Union starts moving south, then?” Raymond asked.

Raymond's suggestion was entirely appropriate, but Minoru shook his head with a smile.

“If the situation develops in accordance with the strategy of the Stars, then neither the Ten Master Clans nor the self-defense forces will be able to check everyone who comes from the West.”

Minoru's voice was filled with confidence in their freedom of action.

Volume 27, Chapter 4

Japanese time: July 5, 9:00.

The government of the Great Asian Alliance met with the New Soviet Union to establish a truce. An hour after that, the government of the New Soviet Union presented the terms of the truce. These conditions included the extradition of war criminals.

Japanese time: July 5, 10:20. Local time: 11:20.

Liu Li Lei was hiding in Vozdvizhenka, located north of Vladivostok and Ussuriysk, and was summoned to the commander of the escort unit.

“The New Soviet Union demanded my extradition?”

In a strained voice, Liu Li Lei asked Lin, the commander of the escort detachment, confirmed whether she would be considered a war criminal.

“Right. The list of war criminals given by the New Soviet Union included the name of Second-Lieutenant Liu. This is reliable information,” Lin confirmed.

Liu’s escort consisted entirely of women, and the squad’s commander was no exception to this. Lin was more than 10 years older than Liu, but she had the same rank of Second-Lieutenant. However, Liu also had a special rank “school-officer¹”, used exclusively within the army of the Great Asian Alliance. This was a countermeasure made to avoid frontline commanders having the ability to give willful orders to Liu just because they are higher in rank. The rank made sure Liu did not submit to higher officers in accordance with the usual rank system, instead reporting directly to high command. This also meant that School-Officer Liu had a status immediately following the top command, so she was higher in status than the commander of the escort unit, Second Lieutenant Lin. The rank was comparable to Tatsuya’s rank of “Special Lieutenant”.

“War criminals...”

¹The title of Liu is written as “school” + “junior officer” in the original kanji. Though the result sounds silly, I used a more literal translation to try to keep accuracy. The

Russian translation used the translation of “special lieutenant”, and the wiki translates this as “captain”.

Liu Li Lei bit her lip. Despite her shock, she understood why. She knew that when using Strategic class magic, just as when using weapons of mass destruction, many civilians are killed. By being the victor, the magician can avoid their crimes, but if they lose... in the best case, the perpetrators would simply be sent to execution for having committed war crimes.

Commander Lin took Liu's right arm with both hands in an attempt to cheer her up.

“School-Officer Liu, let's run away.”

“Commander Lin?” Liu asked, not quite comprehending.

“You shouldn't be forced to submit to the court of the winner because you obeyed orders.”

“But if I run away, there will be no truce...”

“You shouldn't think about such things,” Lin comforted.

“But when the Motherland is in such a difficult situation...”

“Special Lieutenant Liu... No, Xiao²-Liu...”

²For those unaware, Xiao (小) is fairly common in Chinese nicknames. It means “little” and often conveys affection. As stated below, it can be compared to the Japanese honorific “-chan” (although I would consider the meaning to be kept in the literal translation).



The tone of commander Lin's voice changed from the tone of a higher officer to the tone of an adult talking to a child. "Xiao-Liu" can be compared to "Liu-chan" in meaning.

"You do not need to think about something that. Xiao-Liu, you're still a child."

"...I'm not a child. I am an adult magician," Liu protested slightly.

"No. You are only fourteen years old. If the Motherland protects you, you must repay your debt to the Motherland. But if the Motherland chooses to sacrifice you, then need not obey. Xiao-Liu, you must live."

"But..." Liu was still reluctant to abandon her home country.

"Then think about this: If School-Officer Liu is executed, then our Homeland will again lack a Strategic Class magician."

Commander Lin returned the officer's tone and continued trying to convince Liu Li Lei, who could not decide on this. In actuality, the Great Asian Alliance had 6 unofficial Strategic Class magicians, but this was an extremely well-kept secret of the Great Asian Alliance about which Junior Lieutenant Lin was not informed. However, each of the other six had significant flaws in their magic, and they would not be used until a crisis occurred calling into question the survival of the nation. Other than Liu Li Lei, there were no other Strategic Class magicians suitable for permanent use, so at least in this sense, the assertion of Second Lieutenant Lin about the absence of a Strategic Class magician was not wrong.

"If you run away now and get the mark of a traitor, in the future you will become a great asset to the Motherland."

"Yes..." Liu was finally beginning to be convinced.

Give everything up for the Motherland, including your reputation. The role of "tragic heroine" touched the Liu's heartstrings.

"I think you are right, commander."

"You decided? Thank god..."

Seeing the excessive emotion of Commander Lin, Liu felt her reliance on this woman in her heart.

"I will immediately prepare for the escape! I will definitely deliver Special Lieutenant Liu to a safe place," Lin claimed.

"I'm relying on you. Also, please call me "Xiao-Liu". I'm refusing my status as a soldier of the Great Asian Alliance and fleeing the country."

"Then you call me Lin-jiejie³. Wait here a little, Xiao-Liu."

Second Lieutenant Lin's voice became friendly again as she winked at Liu and left the room. Liu Li Lei, with embarrassment on her face, focused her gaze. The escort of Liu Li Lei was hiding at the civil airfield in Vozdvizhenka. Fortunately, there was a private plane capable of traveling up to 2000km as well as a tank of fuel large enough to fully fuel the plane.

"Hurry up with the preparation for departure! Have you finished refueling!?" Second Lieutenant Lin turned to her subordinates working in the hangar.

"We'll finish about five minutes!"

"All aircraft indicators are normal!"

"Runway check is complete! Everything is clear!"

They had begun aircraft maintenance the previous night under the assumption that they would be forced to run. It was obvious to them that they should leave the small jet plane with its larger radius of flight. In addition, the jet would fly faster and would not as easily give away the passengers.

Junior Lieutenant Lin went to the control room after she checked her subordinates' work. She was the only one there at the moment, and she sat down in front of the communication device and turned it on.

"Govorit Gospozha Tayga. Pozhaluysta, otvet'te."

Her full statement translated to mean "This is Ms. Taiga. Answer, please." The word "Gospozha" corresponded to the English title "Ms.", and "Tayga" corresponds to "Taiga", or a coniferous forest⁴ in the sub-arctic zone. "Gospozha Tayga" was the codename of Junior Lieutenant Lin, and it carried the word "tiger" pronounced in "tayga" - a military symbol of the Great Asian Alliance.

³The Russian translation had this as Lin-chie and put Lin-neesan in parentheses. Since “chie” is not any pinyin in Chinese, I’m assuming it was intended to be “jiejie” (姐姐) or older sister based on the context and reference of Lin-neesan.

“The hanzi (Chinese pronunciation of kanji, 汉字) for Lin is 林, meaning forest

“Govorit Snezhnyy Baran. Dolozhite o tekushchey situatsii.”

This translated to “This the Snow Sheep. Report on the current situation.”

“Ubezhdeniye Lyu Liley proshlo uspeshno. Teper', kak iyezhat' do etogo. planirovalos', my otpravimsya v Yaponiyu.”

“Prinyato. Voyska iz Khabarovska pribudut v Vozdvizhenka meneye chem cherez chas. Uspeyte sbezhat' do etogo.”

“Govorit Tayga, vas ponyala.”

Their conversation continued in Russian. Their exchange was as follows:

“Liu Li Lei was successful persuaded. Now, as planned, we will go to Japan.”

“Affirmative. The troops from Khabarovsk will arrive in Vozdvizhenka in less than a.n hour. Hurry up to escape before they arrive.”

“Taiga speaking, understood.”

Second Lieutenant Lin was an agent who had switched sides from the Great Asian Alliance to the New Soviet Union, and she had presumably been speaking with a member of the New Soviet Union.

Before noon, a small jet took off from Vozdvizhenka airfield heading South. Even though the conflict was still officially going on, as the truce had not yet been established, the army of the New Soviet Union only reacted when the plane flew east of Vladivostok. Pursuit fighters were raised, but the chase stopped as soon as the plane entered international airspace. Though the Japanese army caught these maneuvers on its radar, they were only interpreted as reluctance of the New Soviet Union to provoke Japan and America while the conflict with the Great Asian Alliance was still going on, so no one really thought about it.

The small jet was allowed to continue its flight over the Sea of Japan unhindered. Once it entered Japanese airspace, Japanese Air Force fighter jets were sent to intercept it, and it landed on the Komatsu base in the former Ishikawa prefecture.

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Edward Clark was at his private office in the California branch of the National Science Agency. He somewhat ignored his work schedule, and had been staying in this room overnight for quite some time.

Local time: July 4, 22:00 (Japanese time: July 5, 14:00). As Clark continued his work at his terminal, an encrypted message arrived in his mail despite the time close to midnight.

"...As planned."

After reading the message, deep wrinkles appeared on Clark's forehead.

"Liu Li Lei was allowed to flee the country, giving the Russian fleet their pretext to go South? It's a rather crude strategy, but this isn't the time to be clever..."

His unconscious mumbling was the result of mental shock. The reasoning behind the invasion of the Great Asian Alliance had been unfounded. They had begun the invasion based on inaccurate information and wishful thinking. It was a foregone conclusion that as soon as Bezobrazov used Tuman Bomba, the war would be over. However, while the original conclusion was widely known, Bezobrazov's predictions had been exactly what happened: there was not the slightest difference between his plan and actual events.

"With such intelligence and ability, why did he fail...?"

He couldn't help but shudder at the idea that Bezobrazov, with all the power he possessed in being able to toy with the Great Asian Alliance as if they were a child combined with his immense magical abilities, was still unable to kill Shiba Tatsuya.

Was it luck?

Or was the strength of Shiba Tatsuya just even higher?

Covering his eyes with his index finger and thumb, Clark shook his head. He had no time to think about unnecessary things. Bezobrazov had only passed his information to Clark, and now Clark needed to report to various authorities that the strategy had advanced to the next stage.

"It's early morning in London..."

The destinations for information to be sent also existed outside the country. Clark decided that because of the time difference on the other side, the information should be conveyed by message rather than a phone call.

Given that it was late evening in California, he decided that local calls should also be avoided, so he did the same as Bezobrazov.

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Tatsuya arrived home after 5:00 PM and saw that he had a message from over 17 hours ago. The message read, "There is one urgent matter. Please write when you are available for video," and one touch of the screen later, he sent a response. Almost immediately after that, the phone in the living room rang out.

Stopping Miyuki as she walked towards the videophone, Tatsuya got up from the couch to answer it himself. As he looked at the second display of the console, he made sure that the encryption was set to the highest possible level and pressed a button to establish a connection.

"Tatsuya, I'm sorry to disturb you during your home holiday."

The face of Kazama on the display expressed sincere apologies.

"It's alright if the case is urgent," Tatsuya reassured him. "So, what happened?"

"Liu Li Lei, the apostle of the Great Asian Alliance, fled to our country.

"How could that ever happen?" Tatsuya asked.

"This morning, the Great Asian Alliance proposed a truce to the New Soviet Union."

"A sensible solution."

"Shortly after the proposal, the New Soviet Union responded that it would agree to an armistice subject to certain conditions," Kazama stated.

"That is, it was not a requirement of unconditional surrender?"

"As far as we can judge at the moment, no."

The Great Asian Alliance was already facing political instability because of discontent with the humiliating truce with Japan after the Yokohama incident. This time, they were officially defeated, so national reserves would have to be spent on the

suppression of the opposition and separatist groups advocating for independence of their regions. This process would weaken the Great Asian Alliance, so disintegration of the state was no longer impossible. Because of this, if the New Soviet Union now started to pressure the Great Asian Alliance, the Great Asian Alliance would become more united in response to the external threat. In other words, the Great Asian Alliance faced internal strife in peace but could find unity in response to a common hardship. Understanding this, the government decided it would be less costly to move South now instead of waiting for the NSU to relinquish their control.

Both Tatsuya and the NSU agreed with this line of thought.

“One of the conditions imposed by the New Soviet Union was the issuance of war criminals,” Kazama continued.

“They are probably going to hold a demonstration of retribution. It seems that the name of Liu Li Lei was included in this list of war criminals,” Tatsuya speculated.

Ignoring Tatsuya’s cynical remark, Kazama signaled to return to the main topic.

“Is that why she ran away?” Tatsuya asked.

“So it seems,” Kazama answered.

“Have more soldiers escaped with her?”

“Yes. It seems that they served as an escort detachment Liu Lili.”

“Her escort unit? That’s a bit suspicious...” Tatsuya responded.

If a Strategic class magician betrays their country and goes to the enemy, there is a significant upset their military forces. Because of this, militaries strictly control their Strategic class magicians - an escort assigned to a strategic class magician would not just be protecting the magician; they would be observing the magician in order to prevent escape as well.

“The commanding officer claimed that this was done in order to preserve the Great Asian Alliance’s Strategic Class Magician for the future.”

“Their excuse seems reasonable,” Tatsuya said. “Still, our self-defense forces need to be wary of the fact that they could also be agents pretending to run away from their country.”

“No, you’re right. We need to be alert, but regardless of whether their escape was real or not, because we accepted them, their circumstances are being heard. That brings us

to the main point. Could was assist the help of a certain special officer?" Kazama asked.

"Well, I can cope with torture, but there will be no particular benefit in bringing me in for the interrogation..."

Kazama looked at Tatsuya from the videophone screen with such a look as if he was trying to understand the true meaning of his words.

"We are not asking for help with an interrogation," Kazama eventually responded.

In the end, Kazama took Tatsuya's words about torture as a joke and continued on.

"Special officer. Am I correct in that you have a technique to seal a magician's magic?"

"Do you mean 'Gatekeeper'?" Tatsuya asked.

"Would you be able to seal Thunderclap Tower with your magic?" Kazama answered Tatsuya's question with a question.

"Can't you take away her CAD? That is a much simpler way to prevent her magic."

"It seems that Liu Li Lei does not have a CAD," Kazama responded.

"...Do you mean that she does not use a CAD at all?"

"According to the commander of the escort squad, Liu Li Lei specializes in two types of magic: Thunderclap Tower and blocking electromagnetic waves. She does not need a CAD for these magic, but in exchange she cannot use any other magic," Kazama explained.

"She specializes in two types of magic..." Tatsuya felt a sense of sympathy for this magician, who, like Tatsuya, could only naturally use two types of magic. However, he wasn't sure if it was a coincidence or a natural limit: perhaps when using magic without the help of devices, two types is the limit?

"The base commander, concerned that Liu Li Lei cannot be prevented from unleashing her magic, asked for help from Her Excellency Saeki who he knew had a Strategic class magician as a subordinate."

Tatsuya was not actually subordinate to Saeki. He was a Special Officer who was only under the command of Saeki during hostilities, but Kazama was aware of this so Tatsuya did not bring it up.

“Which base it Liu Li Lei detained at?” Tatsuya asked.

“Base Komatsu,” Kazama answered.

“Would it be possible to transport her closer?”

“It will be difficult. We cannot bring a Strategic class magician to a metropolitan area when we are still unsure of their hostilities.”

“Understood. I apologize, but it will be difficult for me to help you,” Tatsuya gave his answer.

“Does you mean you can't leave Tokyo?” Kazama asked.

“If I leave Tokyo, there is a chance that the Parasites who penetrated Japan will attack. I can't leave Tokyo for long.”

“Regardless, the potential threat of Liu Lili also can not be ignored,” Kazama said.

“If Liu Li Lie is at Komatsu base, why don't you ask the Ichijou family for their cooperation?”

“Will Ichijou-dono be able to prevent the use of the Thunderclap Tower?” Kazama asked.

“The First Laboratory studied the effects of magical exposure on the human body, or in other words, magic causing a direct impact on the body. The magic should also be suitable for neutralizing the body in a way that will not come off as suspicious,” Tatsuya said.

“Do you mean to use Rupture should Liu Li Lei become a threat? If we, without reliable evidence, use lethal magic on a refugee, it would cause a wave of criticism both here and abroad.”

Kazama's main knowledge of the Ichijou family's magic was Rupture, a magic capable of evaporating all liquids in an object. He assumed Tatsuya intended to use in a worst-case scenario in order to kill Liu.

“From what I know, the wife of the current head of the Ichijou family came from the Isshiki family. The Isshiki family specializes in mental-interference magic and manipulating electrical currents in the nervous system. This is the perfect magic for neutralizing without killing. The Ichijou family may be known for Rupture, but both Ms. Ichijou and her daughter have inherited the magic of the Isshiki family. The eldest

son, Ichijou Masaki, could also have the ability but may currently be hiding it," Tatsuya explained.

"Then, wouldn't it be simpler to contact the Isshiki family directly?" Kazama asked.

"The Isshiki family will find it difficult to cope with an emergency."

By "emergency", Tatsuya did not mean a preventive neutralization of Liu Li Lei but the possibility that if Liu showed serious hostility and needed to be killed. Also, even if Liu Li Lei really had escaped, she was still a magician brought up in the Great Asian Alliance. If she felt that harming Japan was in her nation's national interests, she would likely do so without hesitation. However, Kazama understood Tatsuya's wording and did not need an explanation.

"The Ichijou family is also the closest to the Komatsu base... alright. I will tell the commander of this base that Her Excellency Saeki recommends contacting the Ichijou family."

"I am sorry for not being able to offer my own help," Tatsuya apologized.

"No, it is only expected as we have not offered our assistance in the case with the Parasites. Our team is currently fully occupied with the opposition of the New Soviet Union, and I am very sorry that we are unable to assist in the matter with the Parasites."

"Nothing can be done, given the situation."

"Thank you for saying so. Your recommendation for the Ichijou family is more than enough help," Kazama said.

"Thank you."

Tatsuya saluted, looking at the screen. Kazama did the same, after which the screen of the videophone went black.

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Current time: 8 pm

One of the rooms in the hostel on the Higashi-Fuji training grounds was "East Fuji." Chiba Naotsugu was a fourth-year student of the special department of martial arts at the National Academy of Defense. Despite still being a student, he held the rank of

Second Lieutenant. Watanabe Mari, a second-year student of the same department, was visiting, and she temporarily held the rank of Sergeant.

“Shu, take a break,” Mari said.

“I will. Thank you, Mari.”

They were in a long, narrow room with a bed, locker, and simple writing desk. The room was too small to hold a kitchen, and the iced coffee currently on the table had been purchased in the vending machine located in the corridor. Mari wished to treat her lover with a homemade drink rather than a cheap one from a vending machine, but she was not able to think about such luxuries during an operation. As for Naotsugu, as a man, even a drink from the vending machine tasted special when brought by his lover. Naotsugu drank all the coffee looking pleased.

Mari sat down on the bed with her own drink in her hands. She felt bit of shame as she sat on the bed Naotsugu used every night, but she had no other place to sit down as the room was too small

“Shu. You’re working too hard...”

“I have never been good at paperwork,” Naotsugu said with a bitter smile. Mari had an anxious look, but he still asked, “Mari, do you want to help me?”

“Xu, you know that I don’t know much about such things.”

“Haha, really.”

In order not to upset Mari who turned away confused, Naotsugu turned back to his work and started typing on his keyboard.

“It takes more time when there is nothing to write.”

Suddenly, as if he felt his eyes on his back, Naotsugu turned back toward Mari without taking his eyes off the display. His "hard work" was to compile a report daily. He would have felt more confident if he had done it each day, but there was a system of duties in place splitting the work between the unit. Today, the third day after departure, Naotsugu's turn to write it came for the first time. He could have asked what the others had written, but there had been only 2 reports prior to this one, so it would not have been enough for him to understand what he should write.

Usually, the lines could be filled with something like a description of training or of constructing the fortifications, but as Naotsugu said, today’s report was difficult

because they were just waiting at the ready. They were not assigned to the search as it was the responsibility of other departments, so their current task was to wait, combat ready, for some kind of clue to appear. However, as a consequence of this, Naotsugu had no events to write about.

“It looks like the information resources of the self-defense forces are engaged with the activities of the New Soviet Union.”

At Mari’s question, Naotsugu turned around completely to face her.

“It seems that way. Even though it is already the third day, there is still no information,” Naotsugu said.

“Maybe I shouldn’t say this, but wouldn’t it be better for us to regroup and return to Tokyo, since that girl Sakurai Minami, Kudou Minoru’s ultimate goal, is located there?”

After Mari’s question, Naotsugu almost laughed involuntarily. He managed to restrain himself, but it was still noticeable in his face.

“...What’s so funny?” Mari said with a slightly bashful face.

“It’s nothing, sorry. Sakurai Minami is only 3 years younger than you, isn’t she? Why did you call her ‘girl’?”

“Because there was no other suitable expression!” Mari exclaimed, indignant.

“Yeah, I guess. Yes, the goal of Kudou Minoru is the abduction of that girl.”

Marie pursed her lips in disgust. She was not very good at using female “tactics” to negotiate - in other words, she did not know how to sulk, grumble, or cry to bargain selfishly.

“I agree with your idea, Mari. However, our squad has to stay here for some reason unrelated to the original goal.”

Another reason different from the original goal to capture Kudou Minoru...

“The invasion of the New Soviet Union...?” Mari speculated.

She made a serious face at this. She had suggested a possibility to be taken seriously.

“We will be needed if a sudden landing occurs,” Naotsugu said in response to Marie’s speculation.

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Saturday, July 6th. Ichijou Masaki was called by his father Goki after finishing his final exam and returning home.

Without even having dinner, Masaki went to his father's office. Akane, one of his younger sisters – a second-year student in middle school, was also there.

There were two sofas facing each other in his father's study, and Goki was currently sitting opposite Akane. Masaki sat down at the other end of the triple sofa that Akane was sitting on.

“Dinner will be soon, so I will be brief.”

Hearing Goki's words, Akane's brow furrowed slightly. Masaki didn't really care, but Akane didn't like her father's rough manner of speaking. However, Goki ignored his daughter's reaction – he had probably gotten used to it.

“Liu Li Lei, the official Strategic class magician of the Great Asian Alliance, fled to Japan.”

“Liu Li Lei of the Thirteen Apostles?”

Masaki asked a useless question out of surprise.

“Yes.”

Despite delaying the conversation, Goki was not annoyed. He couldn't believe the news either when he first heard it.

“At the moment, hidden in Komatsu base.”

“Have the self-defense forces asked you for something related to this?” Masaki asked.

“It's good that you figured it out so quickly, but their appeal does not concern you. Rather, they want Akane,” Goki answered.

“Me?!”

Akane had been listening to her father and brother's conversation as if it was not her business, but the surprise at Goki's statement caused her to inadvertently let out this exclamation.

“To be precise, they require a magician from the Ichijou family with the ability to use Nerve Disturbance.”

"Nerve Disturbance" was officially called "Nerve electrical current disturbance," or "Nerve impulse jammer," and it was the trump card of the Isshiki family of the 28 houses. This magic disrupted the five senses and paralyzed the recipient's muscles by interfering with nerve impulses. Masaki's mother, Ichijou Midori, although from the Isshiki family, was not able to use Nervous Disorder as a representative of the lateral branch, but due to some genetic accident, Akane ended up suitable for the magic even though some members of the direct hereditary line of the Isshiki family could not even use it.

"F-for what!?"

Akane had no experience in affairs with the self-defense forces, and her cry was from the heart.

"Liu Li Lie's escape was somewhat suspicious," Goki answered.

"Is there a chance that the escape was a cover?" Masaki asked.

"Yes."

Goki nodded in response to Masaki's question.

"Thunderclap Tower deals significant damage to electrical equipment. If she uses it to sabotage the base's facilities, the air defense network may be paralyzed," Goki continued.

"Is there no countermeasure against electromagnetic radiation to protect electronic equipment?"

Goki shook his head in response to his son's obvious question.

"Any countermeasure we prepare can be overcome by a load exceeding its strength. We do not know the maximum power of Thunderclap Tower, but we don't want to experience it."

"So we use Nerve Disturbance to paralyze her if we are suspicious of her actions?" Masaki asked.

Goki answered with a nod.

"We can't carry out a deadly attack from suspicions alone. Killing a refugee taken under our care will worsen international relations, and it will be too late to neutralize

her after the activation of magic. Liu Li Lie apparently doesn't use a CAD, so if we lose our guard for even a moment, we could get hit by her Strategic Class magic.

"...I understand why we can't use Rupture, but why not turn to the Isshiki family?"

Though some members of the Ichijou family could use Nerve Disturbance, anyone knowledgeable about the internal affairs of the former First Laboratory knew that it was the Isshiki family's magic. The military was undoubtably aware of this.

"Y-yes! I'm still just a Junior-High student!" Akane shouted.

Akane's complaint was valid. She may have been able to use magic suitable to the situation, but her age and lack of experience made it unlikely that she would be able to understand the situation in the first place.

Goki hesitated for a second after the protest of his eldest daughter because he too did not want the self-defense forces to impose their work on his fourteen-year-old daughter. However, he quickly changed his appearance from that of a father to that of the head of one of the Ten Master Clans.

"The Isshiki family is not strong enough."

"...!? She does have a suitability with Nerve Disturbance, but ..."

When Masaki referred to his sister with "she" instead of her name, she puffed out her cheeks, but did not complain because she understood he was speaking in her defense.

"My strength will not be stronger than a member of the Isshiki family, right?" Akane added.

"That's not the point."

Goki replied in a serious tone and shook his head. Neither Masaki nor Akane had expected this answer and waited for Goki's follow up.

"They might not be planning to go about it secretly, and if Liu Li Lei goes to deadly measures, they will not be able to stop her. The magic of their family is too short range, and they do not have the combat prowess otherwise to go up against a Strategic Class magician," Goki explained.

Both Masaki and Akane understood what Goki meant. In order for the magic of the Isshiki family to work, the magician needs to get within a few meters of the target. If Liu was secretly planning an attack, in order to neutralize it, the caster of Nerve Disturbance needed to be near Liu. However, if Liu was prepared to kill the caster, the

Isshiki magicians would not be able to resist. In this case, the short range of Nerve Disturbance becomes a weakness.

“Because of this, Masaki, I also called you.”

“...Will I go along with Akane?” Masaki asked.

“Yes. In an emergency, you must protect Akane.” Goki did not say the words, “and kill Liu Li Lei,” but they understood.

Instead of replying, Masaki looked at Akane. Seeing this motion out of her peripheral vision, Akane turned to meet his gaze.

“Akane, despite what father says, you can refuse,” Masaki told her.

Akane opened her eyes wide and then turned away sharply.

“No... I will do it.” Akane replied, trying to act confident but still facing away from Masaki and Goki. “And I don't need Nii-san's protection... but the help of Nii-san would be useful if I have to deal the final blow...”

Masaki was speechless at the determination of his younger sister. He had always thought of her as an ordinary girl despite her talents, so her answer caught him off guard.

“Akane has answered. Masaki, what will you do?” Goki asked.

“I will accompany her of course.”

Masaki answered Goki without any delay. Masaki thought it was an incredibly dumb question: “Is it possible to do so badly as to force your younger sister to face danger all alone?”

“Okay. I will tell the self-defense forces that we agree.”

Goki nodded in satisfaction.

“By the way, would it not be safer for us to keep Liu Li Lie at our house instead of going to Komatsu base?”

To get rid of the current atmosphere, Masaki proposed an idea.

“Why do you think so?”

Without bothering to conceal his surprise, Goki questioned Masaki’s proposal.

“Well, if you take her away from the base, the risk of an attack on the base will be lower and it separates her from the soldiers with which she fled.”

“Ah. Liu Li Lie is only 14 years old; the same as Akane. If you remove her from the adults making the decisions, she would be less likely to do a suicidal sabotage...”

Goki murmured to himself in a tone that made it seemed as if this was not a response to Masaki.

“I will propose this to the self-defense forces,” Goki said with a contented smile.

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Local Time: July 6, 16:00

A military truck belonging to a division from the Kansai region arrived at Zama base. The truck passed through the checkpoint without any problems and swiftly entered the base.

“We arrived so easily.”

In a slightly disappointed tone, Raymond jumped out of the truck with Minoru, who followed him.

“Everyone in the truck was real. There is no reason to suspect anything.”

The truck on which they arrived had been given to the Kudou family by the self-defense forces. Strictly speaking, this practice was illegal, but most families from the Ten Main Clans had a relationship with the SDF similar to the Kudou. When the unit commander who had originally issued the truck received a request to go through from the Kudou, he did not show any suspicion.

Using Parade, Minoru disguised both Raymond and Regulus in addition to himself as young European men dressed in USNA uniforms. Though it was slightly unnatural for soldiers of the USNA army to be in the self-defense force's truck, the workers at the checkpoint did not look inside to notice this disparity.

“I do not feel that we were given a concession because of the Kudou; rather, it seemed that they simply did not have the ability to do more than necessary.”

Regulus had had this impression for much of the ride. Even though their truck had passed through the entire Tokyo-Nagoya highway and they were stopped several times, none of the stops looked into the body. They were not even stopped when they

passed the training grounds on East-Fuji where Naotsugu and Mari were stationed in order to capture Minoru.

“Their attention and resources seem to be directed mainly to the north.”

Minoru made this observation at Regulus’ comment.

“Everything went exactly as you expected,” Raymond said.

Minoru smiled slightly at Raymond’s words, but his smile held no pride.

All foreign units stationed in Japan returned to their home countries during World War III and American army bases located in Japan were closed. To replace them, bases were created on both sides for joint use, allowing the other side to use their base as their own. Zama Base was one of these joint use bases that housed both the Japanese and American armies. Because of this, no questions were raised to USNA soldiers walking around the base. If they wore their military uniforms, no one would even check their identification badge, so all three of them, Raymond, Regulus, and Minoru, were able to reach the transport plane Arcturus was on.

This transport aircraft was unable to take off because of the hole Tatsuya had made to escape combined with the holes in the wall made by the Arcturus’ Tomahawk. In a few more days, a replacement aircraft was expected to arrive, so there were only a few people on duty inside the plane. The rest of the team was in a dormitory designated for American soldiers.

Tatsuya’s attack was not carried out in the interests of either Japan nor the USNA, so the damage to the body of the aircraft had been attributed to an accident during landing. The Japanese army did not allow saboteurs to enter the base, and there were no victims of terrorists in the American army - Arcturus and the three other Parasites were not supposed to have been aboard the transport plane. Usually, a sabotage-like situation such as the current one would not have been buried, but the Great Asian Alliance’s invasion into the New Soviet Union’s territory shifted the army’s attention to the north. Nobody in the base wished to pick a fight with the USNA, so to speak, so the situation ended up being ignored by both sides.

Arcturus’ “corpse”, pierced with a mascot knife by which Mikihiko used his sealing spell, would be sent back to the USNA by the transport plane expected to arrive in the next few days. It was currently stored in a coffin-shaped container equipped with a cooling function. Zama base provided this container after a request from the crew, but the base personnel was a bit confused as to why this container was necessary.

“Lieutenant, here.”

The soldier on duty knew Regulus by sight, so he led the three Parasites to the “corpse” of Arcturus without questioning who the strangers were.

“Private, could you leave for a while?” Regulus ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

The soldier on duty obediently returned from the cargo hold to the cab without any suspicion. Once he was gone, Regulus opened the lid of the container where Arcturus lay in a funeral pose. The talisman used to seal Arcturus had long since been pulled out, but the seal remained just as strong. Regulus looked at Arcturus without commenting, sorrow in his eyes.

“This is powerful seal,” Minoru stated while looking into the container.

“It would have to be,” Raymond responded.

“Do you understand this!?” Regulus asked Minoru, somewhat wide-eyed.

“Yes, I know a little about some of the general stuff,” Minoru answered.

“Can you take it off?” Raymond asked as Minoru finished, already knowing the answer to Regulus’ question.

“I won’t know until I try. As I said, the seal is fairly strong. The Parasite body is being used as a talisman. I would say that this could only be undone by destroying the body to reveal the Parasite, but I assume you don’t want that?”

Minoru’s question was intended for Regulus.

“I would like to find a method that preserves the commander’s life.” Regulus came to Arcturus’ body because he valued Arcturus; not the Parasite contained.

If Minoru’s answer to this question was “I cannot,” the discussion would have gone down a different path in which the Parasites may have refused to help kidnap Minami.

“...I understand.” After thinking for a bit, Minoru nodded to Regulus.

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Tatsuya went to first high for the entire day on the last day of exams. He had free time as he was no longer needed in the development of the new Strategic Class magic designed in preparation for an attack from the New Soviet Union. It was

slightly reckless to leave Lina alone, but she was not a small child and would not do anything stupid, so Tatsuya convinced himself that it was pointless for him to travel to Miyaki Island every day.

While the exams were going on, Tatsuya stayed alone in the library, but as soon as the exams finished he began practicing the Sealing Sphere with Mikihiko. By the time he left school with Miyuki, it was past 6 in the evening. Despite the time, however, the two did not go home and instead traveled to the city of Machida. Together with Mitsuya Shiina and Yaguruma Saburou, they were visiting the home of the Mitsuya family of the Ten Main Clans in order to get information about the activities of the US Army. Tatsuya had wanted to find out more about the USNA's military stations on Midway Island and the north-western parts of the Hawaii archipelago, so he had asked Shiina to organize a meeting with the head of the Mitsuya family or his eldest son. Shiina had given Tatsuya her father's answer of "If you have time, come on the evening of the day when the last exam is held," which was another reason that Tatsuya had gone to school today.

Tatsuya was traveling with Shiina despite knowing the location of the Mitsuya house because he was not personally acquainted with Mitsuya Gen, having never even spoken to him. By allowing Shiina to lead him, they would avoid any unnecessary trouble.

Tatsuya had only asked to meet either Shiina's father or her eldest brother, but they were both waiting, expecting Tatsuya.

Shiina led Tatsuya and Miyuki to the living room and left to get drinks. By the time she returned, the four had introduced themselves to each other.

"Thank you, Shiina. You may go."

Shiina was slightly disappointed with being asked to leave as she was curious about the conversation. Nonetheless, she obeyed her father, and Motoharu closed the living room door from the control panel as she left.

Once this was done, Gen turned back to Tatsuya.

"May I call you Tatsuya-dono?" he asked.

"Yes, please do. Likewise, may I call you Mitsuya-dono and Motoharu-dono?"

Tatsuya asked this for the same reason as Gen: in order to distinguish between members of the same family sharing a last name.

“I do not mind” was Gen’s answer to Tatsuya. With all the preparation out of the way, Gen finally brought up the main topic.

“I heard from Shiina that you need information about the activities of the American army.”

“Yes. In particular, I would like to learn about the military installations and troops deployed around Midway Island and the north-western parts of the Hawaiian archipelago.”

Both Gen and Motoharu appeared surprised to hear this. They had expected Tatsuya to ask about a different area, thinking he was looking for information pertaining to the situation with the New Soviet Union.

“... I would like to understand how this relates to the current situation?” Gen asked.

“This is not directly related to the conflict between the New Soviet Union and the Great Asian Alliance,” Tatsuya answered.

“...Then why do you need this information?” Gen continued his questioning with a confused look.

“I need to judge whether it will be possible to free a certain prisoner from Midway Island,” Tatsuya answered frankly.

“You are looking to rescue a prisoner from Midway Island? Does Yotuba-dono know about this?”

“Consent of the head of the family has already been obtained.”

This was not a lie, as on the same day that Lina requested Tatsuya’s help, Tatsuya reported the content of the conversation to Maya. Maya’s only request was “just don’t overdo it,” so Tatsuya decided to follow the policy “continue if possible, but quit if it’s hopeless.”

“...can we hear the reason?”

Motoharu asked the question this time.

“It was a request from a refugee protected by our family,” Tatsuya answered.

“A refugee? ...Our government received a request from America for the extradition of Major Angie Sirius... then, she is under the protection of the Yotuba family!?” Gen exclaimed.

“This request was not from Sirius.”

Tatsuya outright denied Gen’s speculation. He did not wish to lie, but he had no qualms with telling half-truths. He was hiding a girl named “Angelina Kudou Shields.” “Angie Sirius” was a pseudonym and mask given to her by the USNA army and government, and Tatsuya did not feel obliged to participate in these machinations. In any case, Motoharu did not suspect anything in Tatsuya’s statement so the conversation moved on.

“Whoever your client is, I can only say that trying to get into Midway Prison is recklessness.”

Gen’s tone indicated that he was still in amazement at the reasons behind this meeting.

“Then, you know what present Midway is like?”

Tatsuya understood Gen’s hints of “you must stop,” but he ignored Gen’s opinion for the moment.

“I do not know much about the inside of the prison, but the general situation is clear.”

Both Tatsuya and Miyuki continued looking at Gen, waiting for more. Gen had hoped that Miyuki would stop Tatsuya, but sighed as he realized it wasn’t going to happen.

“I will share what we know, but we will not be able to provide support.”

“I understand.”

Tatsuya didn’t need this extra warning from Gen. Neither he, nor Maya, nor anyone else in the Yotsuba family had planned on asking the Mitsuya family or any of the other families in the Ten Master Clans and 18 Assistant Houses for help. However, Tatsuya kept his tact and left his answer at that.

“Only defensive ground forces are located on Midway Island. Other than transport ships, no naval military ships are located there.”

Gen seemed to finally understand that the Yotsuba were set on this business, and he did not voice his warning again. After a short pause, he began to talk about the information Tatsuya wanted.

“There are no air forces either. Perhaps their is the fear that prisoners could use them to escape,” Gen continued.

“Are sea and air bases on another island?” Tatsuya asked.

“On an artificial one. There is a giant floating artificial island created in the Pearl and Hermes atoll. Troops were relocated there about six months ago, but...”

Gen paused for a moment before continuing.

“Pearl and Hermes is an atoll approximately 250 kilometers east-southeast of Midway Island. It belongs to the northwestern part of the Hawaiian archipelago, and it is littered with many sandy islands. A larger artificial island with a USNA military base is built around the outside of the coral reef.

“One aircraft carrier, two escort ships, two destroyers, and one submarine were assigned to the naval base. There is no runway on the artificial island itself, but there are more than 70 fighter jets on the aircraft carrier.”

Gen laid out this information as a brief report.

“This is a combat force that one person cannot hope to cope with unless he possesses Strategic class magic.”

Tatsuya had not yet been announced as the source of the “Great Bomb,” but from the meaningful tone and gaze of Gen, one could assume that he knew about it.

However, this was nothing to be surprised about. Based on Lina’s stories, it was clear that Stars knew quite a bit about the explosion of matter. It was also likely that Bezobrazov had told others in the New Soviet Union about this. Finally, when Bezobrazov had first learned about the user of “the great bomb”, William MacLeod from Britain was also present.

Information could have spread even more in Japan by word of mouth. The Mitsuya family had a widespread information network both inside and outside the country. It would be odd if the head of such a large information network was unaware of Tatsuya’s possession of Strategic class magic.

“What is the approximate size of the ground forces on Midway Island?” Tatsuya asked.

The fleet assigned to the Pearl and Hermes base was a significant military power, but it was intended for a battle between armies. Tatsuya did not intend to openly oppose the USNA so it was unlikely that the fleet would attack him, but the garrison troops on Midway Island would still be an obstacle.

“You’re still going to do it...?” Gen muttered, sighing. But he was not surprised. He did not think the Yotuba would retreat from such a minor obstacle as a naval fleet.

Gen looked at his son, but Motoharu had already brought the data up on his information terminal before he was given the signal.

“Other than the prison staff, there should be between 200 and 250 soldiers on the island. One of the squads consists of magicians, but they are not Stars.”

“What is the level of their weapons?”

“In addition to the personal weapons of the soldiers, there are two Fleming Launchers on the roof of the prison.”

Motoharu continued answering Tatsuya's questions. The Mitsuya family possesses quite a lot of detailed information, so it took some time to finish, but Tatsuya felt that the visit to the Mitsuya family had ended with a satisfactory result.

This was helped by the fact that the Mitsuya family did not demand any form of compensation or payment for this assistance.

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Miyuki asked Tatsuya about Midway after they returned home. Even though private transport cabins guaranteed privacy, she chose to wait until they returned home to discuss secure matters.

“Onii-sama, are you really going to go there?”

Miyuki had known about the operation to rescue Canopus from Midway Island even before Tatsuya reported it to Maya, but until now she was only in a position of passive denial. However, after hearing about the military power present, her anxiety grew.

“Yes. I have not decided on an exact time yet, but I will try soon.”

Tatsuya was more worried about Miyuki worrying about him than about himself, but he could not ignore her question either.

“...Is it because this is Lina's request?”

Miyuki's mood darkened further as she asked her next question. Even she realized that some of her behavior stemmed from jealousy, but it was also more than that. Miyuki's voice was too serious.

“This is just an excuse,” Tatsuya answered.

Tatsuya gave a vague answer because he wasn’t sure what Miyuki was currently thinking about Lina other than that it was complex. All Tatsuya could do was express his feelings and thoughts fully and truthfully.

“Canopus is a serious opponent, possibly more dangerous than Bezobrazov and Sirius as an adversary.”

Tatsuya specified “Sirius” in this situation. Ignoring her weak will to fight, Lina was similar to Tatsuya and Miyuki in magical power. When comparing her with Canopus Tatsuya’s impression was that he was an even stronger opponent than Sirius.

“If Canopus became a Parasite, he would be our unconditional enemy. We should try to avoid this situation if at all possible. Liberating him will remove the possibility of him being infected,” Tatsuya finished.

“But...”

Miyuki was still unsure. Midway Island was still territory of the USNA. While she could understand using a distant attack to eliminate Canopus, she felt it was too risky to break a prisoner out. However, Miyuki had already talked to Tatsuya about that idea when the plan was first brought up. The results are evident.

“I will not act recklessly. If the breakout proves to be impossible, I will blow the prison up.”

This was not the first time Tatsuya had stated this, and it was not just an excuse to appease Miyuki. Tatsuya had not abandoned the idea of blowing up Midway Prison with Material Burst. As always, his priority was eliminating the threat to him and Miyuki before appeasing Lina. It was what he was best at, anyway, so this was not surprising.

“Besides, the plan is not yet decided yet as the current situation is too unstable. I may still revise my opinion with further information.”

“I guess...”

Tatsuya had only given general reasoning and had not quite convince Miyuki, but the future was too fluid to accurately predict.

Neither of them quite believed that the current prevailing view would become the reality.

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Once Tatsuya and Miyuki left the Mitsuya house, the current and next heads of the Mitsuya family continued the conversation together.

“Father, should we inform the self-defense forces that the Yotuba plan to attack the prison on Midway Island?”

Motoharu was the first to speak.

“But we should also consider the possibility of information leaking to America...” Gen said. “No, this goes against the loyalty of magicians. I can’t betray one of the Ten Master Clans to the army or America.”

Gen rejected his son’s offer, but not without hesitation. His uncertain tone betrayed his true thoughts.

“But if you keep silent now, the Mitsuya family could be seen as an accomplice of the Yotuba.”

“We did not ask for compensation solely to avoid such thoughts.”

“I don’t think that would be convincing,” Motoharu responded.

Gen fell silent at his son’s statement. Gen understood that not asking for compensation for the release of information was too weak of a defense.

“...Leaking this to America is unacceptable. We won’t be able to explain ourselves at the Ten Master Clans conference.”

After a bit of silence, Gen said this while shaking his head.

“Still, we should at least notify the self-defense forces about Shiba-dono’s plan.

“...Alright.”

Gen couldn’t disagree this time.

“But we must choose the recipient of the information carefully. If the anti-magic movement finds out about this, we will have repeated the mistake of the Saegusa and Kudou families.”

Motoharu nodded in response to Gen’s words.

"We should talk to Lieutenant General Saeki from the 101 brigade, as she is associated with Shiba Tatsuya-dono," Gen said, now that they were in agreement.

"Yea, Lieutenant General Saeki should be able settle this without conflict."

"Then I will take care of it immediately," Gen responded and Motoharu stood up.

The conversation done, they prepared to leave, but neither Gen nor Motoharu paid attention to the hurriedly receding footsteps outside the door.

"I heard something terrible..."

Shiina ran into her room and sat on the carpet on the floor, still holding the tray she had used to bring the cups earlier.

Shiina's ears were exceedingly sensitive. She could hear tiny vibrations ordinary people could not, but this also made the everyday sounds feel like an attack of intolerable noise to Shiina. Her body was completely normal, so doctors hypothesized that she subconsciously activates magic to increase hearing. This is supported by the fact that her hypersensitive ears become normal as she sleeps. However, despite knowing the cause, nothing can be done to affect the magic as it can't be observed from outside information bodies. Since the magic exists entirely inside Shiina, no outside measures can be taken to detect the magic. The only treatment was the usage of soundproof headphones with a microphone on the outside and speakers inside to control the volume of noise. The sounds coming into the microphone are played at a volume harmless to Shiina through the speaker inside the cup.

Shiina usually only took off her headphones while swimming or sleeping, so she had them on when she went to pick up the empty tray she had brought cups on. Her headphones were only designed to lower the volume of loud sounds to a volume Shiina could withstand, so while they did not amplify weak sounds, they also did not block sounds that were originally harmless. Shiina's headphones were able to detect and recreate sounds to incredibly low volumes. This allowed Shiina's oversensitive hearing to hear her brother and father's conversation even though she did not intend to eavesdrop.

"When they said Shiba-dono, did they mean Shiba-senpai? Will they tell the army about Shiba-senpai?"

Shiina had heard the conversation from when Motoharu and Gen were still discussing "leaks to America," so while she didn't know Tatsuya's plan, from phrases like "antimagic movement", "mistake of the Saegusa and Kudou families", and "settle this without conflict", she understood that this was a rather suspicious conversation.

"What to do..."

Shiina had heard enough of the conversation to realize that her father and brother were plotting treachery against Tatsuya. Though she was much more loyal to her family than to Tatsuya, Shiina felt that treachery was evil. In her system of values, she felt that bullying like this was Tatsuya - she felt it would be wrong if she allowed the current atrocity to go on just because it was her family.

"Should I tell Shiba-senpai about this...?"

But if she did that, she herself would have committed treachery.

So at that, Shiina was trapped in her reasoning.

Volume 27, Chapter 5

Sunday July 7th. For students attending one of the 9 National High Schools of Magic, this was the weekend after the first semester's exams in addition to Tanabata.

Usually the student council was busy around this time as they selected players and actively prepared for the upcoming Nine Schools Tournament, but the tournament had been canceled this year, so the Student Council was able to rest today. This was the first day in a while that Miyuki had not had a timetable.

“Onii-sama, would you take me with you today?”

In a shy voice, Miyuki asked Tatsuya if she could accompany him during breakfast.

“To Miyaki Island?”

“Yes. I assumed you were going to visit Lina today?”

Tatsuya had not truly visited Lina since 3 days ago. He had gone to Miyaki Island the day before, but didn't stay long enough for it to be called a visit. He did not doubt Lina, but both Tatsuya and Miyuki felt it was safest to not leave a Strategic Class magician unattended.

“I planned to go there immediately after visiting Minami.” Tatsuya answered, immediately continuing to say, “Sorry. I should have planned that you would go too. I blithely forgot that today is Sunday.”

Miyuki giggled slightly from Tatsuya's comment that imitated that of a recluse who had forgotten about a national holiday.

“Then...”

“Yes. After visiting the hospital, we will go to Miyaki Island together,” Tatsuya responded.

“In that case...”

Miyuki folded her arms in front of her chest and looked Tatsuya in the eyes. She was much better than Mari at using female “tactics” to bargain selfishly.

“Can we go by car?”

“Of course. Wait a little, and enjoy your first trip on the surface of the sea.”

Hearing Tatsuya's answer, Miyuki smiled happily, her eyes glowing.

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July 7, 2097, 8:00. A helicopter of the USNA army flew to the base of Zama.

It flew in from the Independence Aircraft Carrier - currently stationed at Yokosuka base's port. Information about this flight had been sent from the Aircraft Carrier yesterday, and the flight's purpose was the transport of passengers from the damaged transport aircraft. The commander of the Zama base was informed about the transfer of half of the crew to Independence. Base Zama had no reason to refuse except that the notification of the flight came too late, barely before the event. All procedures had been followed, however, so on request from the aircraft, the dispatch issued a landing permit.

“Minoru, I leave the commander to you.”

Inside the transport plane, Regulus bowed to Minoru. He had been ordered to move to the Independence aircraft carrier to join the attack on Miyaki Island tomorrow. The container with the frozen body of Arcturus, however, needed to stay on the transport plane so as not to arouse suspicion.

“I will do everything in my power,” Minoru said.

Minoru was going to stay on the transport plane to try to remove the seal on Arcturus. He planned to kidnap Minami during the attack on Miyaki Island, so he was going to act separately from Regulus and the others anyway.

“Bye, Minoru. Even though our time together was short, it was fun.”

Raymond said goodbye to Minoru in a way that made it unclear whether he was serious or joking. Raymond was not a part of Stars and could do what he wanted, but he had no reason to stay with Minoru so he decided to stay with Regulus as he didn't know how else he would safely withdraw from Japan.

“Yes, but here we say goodbye. Contact me if you require assistance,” Minoru responded.

“You too, Minoru. I am not in a position to continue contact with you in the future, but I will do everything I can. After all, we are both parasites.”

“Yes. Agreed.”

Raymond’s words seem to hide some other meaning, but Regulus, plainly without any other intent, extended his right hand to Minoru. Minoru responded by sticking his own hand out to accept that handshake.

With an expression seeming to say “nothing can be done about this”, he also shook Raymond’s outstretched hand.

“I wish the success of your mission.”

With these words, Regulus and Raymond had to leave.

After watching Regulus and Raymond take off in the helicopter from the cockpit of the transport plane, Minoru headed back to the cargo hold. There was surprisingly little cargo considering it was a transport plane, but the main “cargo” the plane transported was people, as was fairly common for military transport aircraft. There was practically no other cargo in the hold other than the container holding Arcturus, so it immediately caught the eye when walking into the room.

“Seems to be a mixture of Yin-Yang techniques based on Shugendo and Western ancient magic - Enoch's black magic,” Minoru muttered to himself.

Touching the seal that had put Arcturus to sleep, Minoru knitted his brows.

“If it was based on Taoism, there would be no problem...”

Minoru had inherited a lot of knowledge about Taoist magic from Zhou Gongjin, but Zhou Gongjin only had slight knowledge on Western magic – mainly about the spells he needed to use. Zhou Gongjin was not a magician but a practitioner, so his knowledge of spells was based around his specialization.

“First you need to confirm his state of consciousness,” Minoru thought to himself.

His consciousness may still be functioning – just blocked out from the outside world, not allowing him to react to anything.

Minoru started by releasing psionic waves into Arcturus's body. These waves were used in external systematic magic meant for interacting with the mind. When psions are organized into an information body, they can influence the mind in addition to the physical body.

Psions meant for interacting with the mind are organized in a completely different manner than psions with meant for interacting with the physical body. In order to interact with the mind, psions must be organized into far more complex structures in order to be recognized as an information body. This is partly what determines someone's fitness for mental-interference magic – their ability to organize psions into more complex structures.

When Minoru was still human, he was not particularly good at making complex information bodies, but now that he was a parasite, he could clearly recognize pushionic information bodies. However, Minoru still could not detect the mind of the sealed Arcturus despite his increased abilities. He had no idea where he was hidden.

Minoru knew Arcturus's physical body had to be connected to his mind through the psionic information body sealing it, so Minoru sent a neutral psionic body – one that does not affect emotions or impulses – into Arcturus' body.

"It's weak, but..."

Minoru was sure that he had felt a response from the psionic information body connected to Arcturus' body, but as was clear from its name, **mental** interference magic, the magic can influence the mind but not the information body corresponding to the physical body. The change in Arcturus' psionic information body had not taken place anywhere except for the mind.

"Still, this approach was useful."

The fact that there was a response meant that Arcturus could be unsealed. By following the information body's reaction, the place where the mind was hidden could be found, and from there a method could be found to awaken it.

Minoru continued his magic trying to free Arcturus carefully – he was very careful to not be discovered by the base sensors.



Local time: 09:00, July 7

A high school student and a junior high school student were visiting the Komatsu base of the self-defense forces. The names of the two were Ichijou Masaki and Ichijou Akane - siblings from the Ichijou family of the Ten Master Clans.

Their father and head of the Ichijou family, Ichijou Goki, did not accompany them, but Masaki behaved with dignity – he did not show any concern at the lack of a guardian. He was still a high school student, but he could be considered a veteran in combat experience. He was not nervous at all while passing through the gates of the base. However, the same could not be said for his younger sister - Akane showed a few weak signs of anxiety.

Shortly after they showed their identification cards causing the dispatcher to call a car, the car arrived at the gate to pick them up. Their visit today was at the request of the army, so naturally the army was prepared for them.

“What do you think about her? Can we talk?”

Akane whispered to Masaki, unable to tolerate the silence. Though she usually teased Masaki while talking to him, she did not dislike him and she did not ignore him. She did not have any “special” feelings beyond being family, but her brother was the next head and hope of the Ichijou family.

“Lieutenant Liu is fluent in Japanese.”

The soldier driving the car answered Akane’s question. He wanted to lighten the atmosphere to get Akane to relax, and the soldier was young enough that he could behave somewhat naturally with a junior high school student.

“Having everyday conversations with her will not be a problem. If she did not possess Strategic Class magic, she would be a somewhat normal Junior High school student.”

“Therefore, we must be vigilant, so as to be careless not to say too much,” Masaki said after the soldier. “But we should be careful, as excessive caution could have the opposite effect we want.”

Despite the soldier’s intent, the conversation had only increased the siblings’ vigilance, and they drove up to the building Liu was in in that state. The soldier led

the two inside, and they were surprised at how much a “hotel” vibe was given off by the military residential building.

Masaki and Akane met Liu Li Lei in the first floor lobby. At first glance, she seemed to be alone, but of course this was a faked atmosphere: with his perception, Masaki found more than 10 magicians.

“Nice to meet you, my name is Liu Li Lei.”

After the driver brought Akane and Masaki to the location with Liu and Lin, Liu introduced herself. As the driver had said, her Japanese was completely natural.

“Nice to meet you too. My name is Ichijou Masaki.”

Masaki responded to Liu Li Lei in the same polite manner.

“Uwaa, what a cutie...” Akane let herself slip.

“Hey!”

Masaki hastily reproached her in a whisper.

“...My name is Ichijou Akane, and I am the younger sister of Masaki. Nice to meet you.”

Akane pulled herself together and hurried to introduce herself. She bowed sharply, and her cheeks were flushed.

Akane’s embarrassed introduction caused Liu to relax her overstrained face as a hint of a smile showed on her face.

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Today, Kichijouji Shinkuro woke up at 9:20. He had slept for exactly 3 hours and 30 minutes. This was not nearly enough, but as soon as he got up he swallowed a caffeine pill, washed his face, and put the TV on an interactive channel that broadcasts military information requested by the user. Upon learning that the fleet of the New Soviet Union had not yet advanced, Kichijouji sighed with relief.

“So I still have some time.”

He said this out loud to cheer himself up, then immediately grasped a CAD the size of a large suitcase, loaded with the activation sequence with the new Strategic Class magic, by its handle. He had finished creating the magic this morning.

The CAD was integrated into a medium-sized computer which shifted the target area of the activation sequence based on data from radar, optical sensors, and aerial photography, as well as the information for many thousand sequences of magic. All of this needed to be planned in 0.01 second intervals to cover the target area, so most of the suitcase's volume was occupied by the computer and its power source.

Fortunately for Kichijouji, this system of CAD-computer integration had already been developed in other labs for uses unrelated to this new magic. This allowed Kichijouji to focus entirely on developing the activation sequence of the CAD.

As of now, the software part of the CAD, the activation sequence was ready and the hardware was assembled, but the development was not complete without testing. Magic is done by the magician – even if one creates a flawless activation sequence, it can't be considered magic until a magician uses it.

"Masaki will be able to use this." He steeled himself from his doubts.

Kichijouji was confident that Masaki could use this new Strategic Class magic. At least, he wanted to believe in him – he wished he had blind confidence. But in the far corner of his consciousness, he still had the fear, "what if...". This fear turned into anxiety and prompted Kichijouji to take action quickly.

"In any case, we will test it soon, before the attack of the New Soviet Union."

Kichijouji had deep psychological trauma regarding the attack of the New Soviet Union.

Sado Island, his home until his first year of high school, had been attacked by a small, disguised fleet sent by the New Soviet Union. His parents had been killed by this attack, and though the New Soviet Union had denied involvement in the invasion five years ago, Kichijouji believed it was them. In his heart, he was convinced that it was the New Soviet Union that destroyed his home and killed his parents. The attack had

scarred him, and now the wound seemed to be re-opening: once again, the New Soviet Union was posed to attack.

"This time... I will not let you."

Kichijouji knew that he did not have the power to repel the New Soviet Union alone, but his heart warmed by the thought that his best friend would beat them using the magic **he** created. The warmth from that thought might be able to heal his injury.

He wanted to know as soon as possible whether his friend would be able to use the magic.

Kichijouji hurried to Ichijou's house without even bothering to find out Masaki's plans.

When he saw himself in the mirror installed at the entrance to the hotel, he finally noticed he was still wearing his pajamas. Embarrassed, he hurried back to his room.

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Tatsuya and Miyuki arrived at Miyaki Island at about 10:00. Miyuki was exhilarated during the journey across the sea at a speed of 300 km / h (reaching a maximum speed of 400 km / h). Despite its speed being extremely high for a car, the aircar was designed for flying – a maximum speed of 400 km / h is quite low when compared to commercial aircrafts.

When “driving on water,” the aircar actually flies slightly above the surface of the water and does not actually touch the water. This partly contributed to the excitement of riding in the car when compared to a plane ride, as the speed feels much higher when closer to the ground – with a lower field of view, objects move out of vision much quicker, giving the illusion of speed. Miyuki was not the type to seek speed, but she was still able to feel excited as the surface of the sea seemed to fly past them on both sides.

Shortly after arriving on the Island, Tatsuya and Miyuki found Lina.

“Lina, how are you?”

“Miyuki... You look like you’ve had quite the time.”

...Even Lina noticed the difference in Miyuki.

“Really? I did not notice at all.”

Miyuki was still in an excited state, so she responded differently than she usually would.

“So, what about you, Lina? Are there any inconvenience?”

“... Thank you, I'm fine.”

Realizing how different Miyuki's atmosphere was from usual, Lina refrained from asking further questions.

“I don't feel any discomfort thanks to you and your family. And the guys from the management staff are also very kind.”

“I see. That's good,” Miyuki responded.

“What are we talking about? Let's go sit down,” Lina said.

Lina's impression of this building was that it “looks like a condominium.” The building had a small separate side living room where Lina led Tatsuya and Miyuki from the entrance, inviting them to sit on the sofa.

“Would you like some iced coffee?” asked Lina, heading to the adjoining kitchen.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Then me too.”

Tatsuya and Miyuki answered without hesitation.

Soon, Lina returned with three glasses on a tray.

Tatsuya had his coffee black, with no milk or syrup, and Miyuki added some milk, but no syrup. Lina initially started to reach toward the syrup, but stopped herself, not wanting to be seen as a child. She eventually took the milk and added it in large quantities to her coffee.

Once the three finished drinking, all three returned their glasses to the table.

“Let's get straight to the point. I have bad news.”

Tatsuya's words were obviously not about the impression of the drink, so Lina was able to look Tatsuya in the eye and ask him to continue with her stare.

“No later than tomorrow, the Far Eastern fleet of the New Soviet Union will go south to the Sea of Japan. This time, our country is fully ready for interception: our fleet is ready to be sent at any time.”

“Is Japan going to directly clash with the New Soviet Union?” Lina asked doubtfully.

“It’s unlikely to reach total war, but a clash cannot be avoided.”

“The requirement of the New Soviet Union was the extradition of Liu Li Lei, right?”

Japan had not declared their giving of asylum to Liu, but the New Soviet Union had declared to the world that it "demands the extradition of the war criminal Liu Lily from Japan."

“Yes, but we understand that this runaway fourteen-year-old girl will be executed, so we cannot just give her away,” Tatsuya answered.

“Yes, they said on TV that the NSU is trying to create a pretext for war by putting together impracticable conditions.”

The TV Station Lina was talking about showed more than Japanese channels, and her residential building (built for administrative staff) was connected to various cable networks. The news channel she heard that from was an American cable network.

“I doubt the New Soviet Union will seriously try to assimilate Japanese territory. They have another, hidden purpose, but I can not say exactly what it is,” Tatsuya said.

“Isn’t the factory being built here? Tatsuya seems to be a real nuisance to their country.”

Miyuki slightly rounded her eyes, surprised at the unexpectedly harsh words of Lina.

“...What?”

Lina unintentionally frowned at Miyuki’s reaction.

“No, I just think so too,” Miyuki explained as she regained her calm face.

Lina stared at Miyuki, looking for the catch.

“That is one possible option.”

After Tatsuya’s statement, Lina returned her attention to him.

“If that’s the case, we need to consider the safety of Lina,” Tatsuya stated.

“I can fight too,” Lina said, protesting slightly.

“I have no doubt about you, but if their goal is different, then Lina will have problems that cannot be ignored.”

Tatsuya deliberately hinted in his words that their problems would be limited by Lina.

“I do?”

Lina’s question was obvious.

“Even if we repel the Far Eastern fleet this time, their will still be tension between Japan and the New Soviet Union. Japan will not be able to involve itself in the problems in the USNA.”

Never battle on two fronts. This is an absolute principle in more than war, and Tatsuya felt that those who choose a battle strategy on two fronts are infinite optimists who do not distinguish speculation from desires.

“As long as there is tension between Japan and the New Soviet Union, Japanese authorities will try to prevent our attack on the Midway prison. It will be difficult to prepare ships, even if they are private. It will be the same with aviation,” Tatsuya explained.

“...I understand.”

Lina did not blame Tatsuya. She understood that it would be unfair to blame and shift her anger to him.

“I am trying to come up with a plan to save Major Canopus, but I need some more time for this.”

“...I did not say that it needed to be done right away. I understand that preparation for something like this takes time. But please remember I’m relying on you, Tatsuya,” Lina said.

“It’s good that you understand that.”

Tatsuya comforted Lina, who was hanging her head in despondency. On the surface, they seemed to be speaking to each other with dry and cold phrases, but on a deeper level, their words held sympathy and respect... at least, that was how Miyuki saw their interaction.

This was also how Miyuki saw Tatsuya and Lina sitting across from each other on opposite sides of the table.

A weak fire of jealousy caught in her chest.

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The meeting between the Great Asian Alliance refugees and Ichijou family siblings was supposed to have a peaceful atmosphere, but this proved to be an overly-optimistic situation, and the meeting developed by exchanging requirements with strained faces on both sides. Though initially the conversation seemed to be heading in a more familiar direction with Akane's comment, that feeling quickly wore off and the strain of the situation became dominant once more.

"I'm telling you: considering that Lieutenant Liu is only 14 years old, she should be placed in the civilian sector, and not a military facility! We have no intention of brainwashing or something like that!" Masaki exclaimed.

"It is precisely because she is only 14 years old that her compatriots must stay with her! If you are trying to take her to a civilian object, we can only think that you want to separate us!" Lin responded.

"Our home is not a 'civilian object'! The Ichijou family takes its safety seriously!" Masaki responded. "Sorry for being rude, but mansions of the Ten Master Clans are not just civilian buildings: they are fortresses of civilian combat magicians. And as for your comment saying we were aligned with the military - it was really rude! The Ten Master Clans would never do what you're thinking! We are an organization providing mutual aid for magicians, therefore we want to protect Lieutenant Liu! Our goal is not just to separate you!" Masaki angrily added.

"Your assistance is not necessary! We have enough protection from the Japanese army!"

This dispute broke out between Masaki and Commander Lin. Masaki had already caught Commander Lin's intentions, but he still did not retreat from his position.

"Sorry for being rude, but Lieutenant Liu is still a child. A child must see the world outside the army!"

Masaki's words were based on a weak sense of justice - it could even be called idealism – and not on personal experience. Masaki had not experienced anything like what he was fighting against. He interpreted the independence provided to the Ten

Master Clans as an opportunity to use magic for their own benefit, and not as a weapon for the army.

In battle, Masaki felt that they decided everything themselves. Soldiers made their own decisions. He did not deny that magicians often became weapons, but he felt they must make this choice themselves - his youth forced him to cling to such ideals.

“Commander Lin, I wouldn’t mind if the Ichijou family took care of me.”

The subject of the argument, Liu Li Lei, intervened in the Masaki and Lin’s dispute.

“Special Lieutenant Liu, what do you mean!?”

Commander Lin was both surprised and nervous at Liu’s words supporting Masaki. Her surprise even caused her to unwittingly switch languages: Liu had spoken in Japanese, but Commander Lin had objected in Chinese.

“We may be in a position where we need protection, but as a School Officer, you do not need to make such concessions!”

Commander Lin hurriedly tried to convince Liu to change her mind, and her words were translated by the interpreter present at the meeting.

“Nii-san, we don’t need to rush this decision, do we? I don’t mind staying here for one night.”

Akane was tired of the strained atmosphere, so she suggested Masaki postpone the decision.

Apparently, the soldiers of the base present at the meeting also agreed that it was necessary to cool down, so everyone supported Akane’s proposal.

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Liu and Lin returned to their assigned rooms, and the soldiers and base officers returned to their duties, leaving Akane and Masaki alone.

“Nii-san, you are too hasty.”

“You think so?”

“Yes. What are you going to do now that you’ve pissed them off?”

“...I do not think they got angry.”

“It’s naive to think that they would openly show their anger, considering their position, but they got angry for sure.”

Now, with only the two of them in the lobby where the meeting took place, Akane and Masaki discussed the conversation.

“But Lieutenant Liu seemed to agree, didn’t she?” Masaki argued.

“It’s not like that! When someone becomes a hostage, they feel compelled to agree just to settle the situation. Surely you understand this, Nii-san!”

“...Sorry.”

“In fact, Nii-san, you don’t understand how to deal with girls. To say such a horrible thing as ‘Lei-chan is only 14 years old’ is unacceptably rude,” Akane said without a hint of irony.

“Come on, now. ‘Lei-chan’ – just to be sure, you’re referring to Lieutenant Liu, right?”

“Mm? Well, yes. She is Li Lie-chan, so Lei-chan. She’s such a cutie, it is a pity to call her something like ‘Lieutenant Liu’.”

“...?! It doesn’t matter if it’s a pity! She is one of the "Thirteen Apostles" and belongs to the Great Asian Alliance! Is it really alright to call her by an affectionate Japanese honorific?!” Masaki exclaimed.

“Mm, you think so?”

At that moment, with the conversation going towards a rather strange direction, one of the base’s soldier approached them, apologizing.

“Ichijou-san...”

The soldier paused for a moment, realizing his statement was unspecific.

“Ichijou Masaki-san, a visitor has come to see you.”

“In here?” Masaki exclaimed.

Masaki did not ask “to me?” but rather “here?” because he had not expected any visitors while at the military base. If the visitor was looking for him during his trip, it had to be quite an important matter.

“Excuse me. Could you take me to him?”

As soon as Masaki noticed that his question was meaningless, he got up and asked the soldier to show the way.

“Follow me.”

The soldier turned to the right and went, followed by Masaki who was followed by Akane.

“... You don't have to go,” Masaki told Akane.

“You want to leave me alone?”

Masaki did not answer Akane's question, but he also did not question her further.

Masaki thought that the visitor had come to the residential building, but the soldiers who had informed them about the visitor took them to a car and drove them to a building that looked like a laboratory. Upon arriving, the soldiers explained to them that this was a workshop in which war magicians serviced their equipment – primarily their CADs. They were led inside the building and escorted to a room on the second floor.

“Masaki!”

Masaki didn't even have time to step into the room before he heard his name called by a familiar voice.

“George? What are you doing here?”

He instantly recognized the voice of his best friend, Kichijouji Shinkuro.

“*And why did he come to me here on Komatsu base?*” Masaki thought.

“Hi, Shinkuro-kun. Is your business so urgent that you even visited Nii-san here?” Akane asked.

Akane didn't wait for Kichijouji to answer Masaki's question, instead asking her own in a dissatisfied tone. She felt unhappy because Kichijouji had not even notice her, looking only at her brother.

“Ah ... Akane-chan is also here.”

Kichijouji's response was completely inadequate considering Akane's psychological state.

“Sorry. No time to explain the details, every second counts.”

After Kichijouji asserted this earnestly, Akane stopped sulking. She understood clearly that Kichijouji was not the type of person who dropped in simply to visit very often, and he had to have come with an important purpose. For Masaki, this was even more obvious – the last time he had seen Kichijouji in this state, was the day before he had published the Cardinal System Weight Magic Code.

The discovery of the Cardinal code – considered a breakthrough in magical science for even 10 – 20 years later. It was an extremely important discovery, partially proving the “Cardinal code” hypothesis.

Kichijouji’s face was the same as that time.

“George, what’s your business with me? What do I need to do?”

Unable to suppress his excitement, Kichijouji grabbed Masaki’s shoulders to answer his question.

Masaki leaned back from Kichijouji’s approaching face.

“Shinkuro-kun, pull yourself together!”

Akane’s cry was not entirely inappropriate – it was not just her imagination that Kichijouji seemed to be approaching Masaki to kiss him – but Akane’s voice did not reach Kichijouji. He had to have physically heard, but he was too excited for his mind to react.

“I need you to test new Strategic Class magic! Masaki, it’s magic for you!”

As soon as Masaki processed what Kichijouji said, he, like Kichijouji, grabbed Kichijouji’s shoulders.

“New Strategic Class Magic!? George, you... created Strategic class magic!?”

“Ah, no, not from scratch...”

At Masaki’s question, Kichijouji’s excitement disappeared. He had not forgotten that he received the basic blueprint from Tatsuya, but his mind had been fully occupied with the desire to test the magic as quickly as possible to make sure Masaki could use it.

“So, you didn’t create it for me, George?” Masaki asked the stumbled Kichijouji with doubt in his voice.

“No, I finished it alone!”

When Masaki said the phrase “for me,” it pierced Kichijouji’s heart and he unwittingly asserted his achievement. Still, it wasn’t a lie, and Kichijouji should have said it from the beginning, but he had been focused on his rivalry with Tatsuya.

“I see.”

Masaki, not knowing the details, assumed Kichijouji had created it himself, but had used the results of the work of many other laboratory staff.

“It is necessary to immediately test? I assume you came here for this,” Masaki asked.

Their situations had shifted, and now Masaki was leaning towards Kichijouji.

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Kichijouji answered truthfully.

There was once a “subcritical experiment” to test the process of causing an explosion of nuclear fission by stopping it immediately before the critical point to collect data for the simulation. The experiment Masaki and Kichijouji were about to perform to test the Strategic Class magic was by nature similar to this “subcritical experiment”.

As the name “Strategic Class Magic” suggests, it is comparable in power to strategic class weapons, so it is difficult to test near civilian areas. Therefore, testing the new magic was done by canceling the magic sequences just prior to activation. Even though the result is canceled, it can be determined with a certainty of 80-90% whether the magic will function according to expectations. This method does not just prevent civilian casualties, but also prevents the information of the test from being leaked to other countries through military spy satellites.

Though a probability of error of 10-20% may seem large, the success rate of large-scale magic is usually low until the caster gets used to the magic. It is entirely possible for magic successful during testing to fail to activate during critical moments of battles. Because of this, unlike conventional magic tests, there was no need to cling to the ideal of “100% completion rate of all processes”.

To conduct the experiment, Masaki, Kichijouji and Akane moved from Komatsu airbase to Kanazawa naval base. It was relatively new, built on the site of a coastal golf course destroyed during the last war.

The base was small, but it was built for the use of magical tactics and the former First Laboratory took part in its design, so it was a suitable place for testing magic intended for sea battles.

“Masaki. I think you understand this, but you cannot mess up your control of the interference strength of this phenomenon,” Kichijouji warned.

“Of course I understand.”

Magic projects an activation sequence onto the Eidos of its target and activates by infusing the caster’s psions to give the sequence its interference strength. Usually, the projection of an activation sequence and the infusion of magic power into the phenomenon were performed simultaneously, but in the pre-activation experiment, the interference strength of the phenomenon is kept at a level just enough to confirm the activation of the magic.

Since the infusion of psions could not be controlled by hardware, it relied on the individual’s skill at performing magic. Because of this, experiments testing powerful magic are always accompanied by a risk.

“...Akane. Maybe you’d better hide behind cover.”

Both Masaki and Kichijouji had not wanted to bring Akane here with them and had initially tried to send her home.

“Why?”

“Eh?! What do you mean, ‘why’?! It’s dangerous!” Masaki exclaimed.

“You won’t mess up,” Akane replied, showing no intent to back off.

“I won’t, but...”

“Then there is no danger.”

Masaki could not refute Akane’s logic and was forced to allow her to go with them. Though he had still tried to stop her caustic phrases on Komatsu base like “nii-san, you are such an awkward child,” he could no longer hold her back.

“...Just don’t bother George.”

After saying this, Masaki forgot his worries about Akane to focus all his attention on the experiment. Realizing that Masaki had shifted to a serious mood, Akane did not respond sarcastically as she usually might, but stood silently next to Kichijouji.

Masaki took the sighting device which took his perspective outside the window and led him toward the sea. The length of the device was about 50 centimeters, and it resembled a short machine gun. It had uniform thickness and the handle was precisely in the middle, making the device well balanced and easy to hold with one hand.

However, Masaki was holding it with two hands. He was grasping the device a little closer to the barrel with his left hand, as if he was using a real weapon. One part of the handle was not actually attached to the aiming device, and rather ran through the body and rear part of the entire device – the parts performing the device's main function. The handle contained the induction stone, which converted electronic data from the computer into psionic signals, so it was easier to connect it to the computer more directly.

The special glasses Masaki was wearing projected a visual of the target area – they were a tool for visualizing the area to aim at. He was aiming at a rectangular plane on the surface of the sea, and the length and width of the target area could be configured with four buttons on the sides of the device. The top button stretched the width, both left and right, while the bottom did the inverse. Similarly, the front button increased the length, and the back button reduced the length. Changing the area also changed the field of view presented by the special glasses.

The glasses currently projected an image of the sea 20 kilometers from the coastline, superimposed over the Masaki's actual field of view. Using the buttons on the side of the aiming device, Masaki set a target area 1 kilometer wide and 500 meters long in the middle of the image.

"I am starting the test."

After this statement, Masaki, Kichijouji, Akane, and all the base engineers who were helping with the experiment held their breath.

Masaki removed his left hand from the buttons controlling the target area and brought it back under the barrel of the aiming device.

Gripping the handle with his right index finger, he pulled the trigger of the aiming device.

The computer converted the target effect on the target area into a format allowing the creation of activation sequences. The computer added coordinate data and timings to copy the magic sequences to each of the activation sequences stored, before sending all this data to the handle of the aiming device. The induction stone

embedded in the handle converted all this electronic data into a psionic information body, and the resulting activation sequence was output as a psionic signal that merged with Masaki's right hand.

The activation sequence had successfully been read.

The activation sequence was sent to the magic calculation zone existing in Masaki's subconscious.

The activation sequence had successfully been built.

From this point, Masaki was usually able to build the magic sequence in no less than half a second, but this time it took Masaki a full second after reading the activation sequence to even begin outputting the magic sequence. Despite the increase in time, however, Masaki was able to use the magic, and the magic sequence was projected onto the center of the target area.

...After that, the magic was interrupted.

But a moment before that, an essentially infinite number of magic sequences had filled the 1000-by-500-meter area of the sea surface.

“The test is successful!”

This statement from the smiling Kichijouji was drowned out by the joyful shouts of the base engineers.

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Local time: July 7, 6:00 p.m.

Before sunset, the Independence aircraft carrier emerged from the port of Yokosuka. It had arrived here 2 weeks ago and belonged to the USNA naval fleet.

According to the official schedule, Independence practiced the takeoff and landing of its fighter planes at night to the southeast of the Boso Peninsula before returning to the base in Hawaii.

Independence was a rather old and slow ship. After it left the port and went onto the open ocean, a high-speed catamaran boat with a breakwater hull approached it.

A small helicopter took off from the Independence to board the speed boat – named Midway. Once the helicopter had landed stably, four soldiers and one civilian left the

helicopter and boarded Midway. The people leaving were: three women officers; Captain Charlotte Vega, First Lieutenant Zoe Spick, and Second Lieutenant Leila Deneb; First Lieutenant Jacob Regulus; and Raymond Clark.

When the five of them stepped onto the deck, a junior officer on board the speedboat greeted them.

“Star dust, Soldier C13, Sergeant Charles Cooper at your service!”

Even the still-spinning rotor of the helicopter did not drown out his voice.

“The commander of the fourth squad of Stars, Captain Vega.”

Vega answered the sergeant. Among the four soldiers in the company, Vega had the highest rank, so it was decided without words that she would be in command.

“Twenty members of Stardust including myself are now under your command, Captain.”

“Including the Sergeant, I accept command of the twenty members of Stardust,” Vega answered.

“Ay!”

All the members of Stardust answered her words. The mental wave from twenty people (except the Sergeant, who answered aloud), merged into one thought and flowed into Vega's mind like a powerful stream. The wave reached the other four Parasites who had come off the helicopter, including Raymond. Every member of the Stardust detachment present on the transport ship was a Parasite.

The five arrivals led by Vega were first taken to a small briefing room inside the ship rather than the bridge. Vega had expected this, thinking there would be a discussion for the plan before they took control of the ship.

“We need to determine the arrangement for tomorrow.”

Vega skipped the intro and immediately brought up the main business.

“Right. The operation is tomorrow, so we have to hurry.”

Spica, accustomed to Vega's behavior, added her remark to smooth Vega's impression of excessive impatience.

“Commander, do you have any ideas?”

Deneb opened a map of Miyaki Island obtained by aerial photography on the table-shaped monitor and asked Vega about her plan. The fourth unit often left most of the decisions to Vega.

Vega pointed to the northeast coast of the island and answered her subordinate:

"Yes. Second lieutenant Deneb and I will take 10 Star Dust soldiers each and suppress any resistance. First Lieutenant Regulus will cover from the rear. Finally, First Lieutenant Spica and Raymond will stay on the ship to provide a path of retreat."

"I do not mind, captain, but what about the destruction of the plant?"

Raymond was the first to agree, but his tone lacked sincerity.

Vega slightly frowned at the tone of Raymond's question. On the surface, Raymond was simply reminding the Vega of the main purpose of the plan, but the implications that held made the comment seem condescending.

From Raymond's perspective, he and Vega just didn't get along - he felt that Vega was displeased with him because she had treated him like leftovers in her plan.

Still, the Parasites had a united consciousness, so Vega's decision was also Raymond's. Thus, Raymond's discontent was the conflict of his feelings and his reason, so he didn't complain about it openly. Vega also shared Raymond's feeling that "this is not very interesting," and they couldn't pretend they didn't notice it. This was not a conflict for another person for them, but a dispute with oneself.

"I will call you when we complete the neutralization of the enemy, so prepare a bomb on the ship."

"Okay. Understood, captain."

The feeling of discomfort in relation to each other was equivalent to aversion to oneself, so they were able to quickly move on.

"First Lieutenant Regulus, will that suit you?"

"Yes captain."

"Then it's settled. Everyone is free."

Vega finished the tactics meeting before the dislike of her began to intensify.

Volume 27, Chapter 6

July 8, 2097, 0:00 AM Japanese time.

The Far Eastern fleet of the New Soviet Union left the port of Vladivostok.

"The fleet of the New Soviet Union is approaching."

After this news, many enterprises and educational institutions located in the regions on the coast of the Sea of Japan took steps to suspend work and study.

People living along the coast in Sanin, Hokuriku, and Tohoku were ordered to advised to prepare for evacuation to shelters. The areas surrounding the cities were also encouraged to remain vigilant.

The Yokohama incident that took place the year before last was a sudden event – there was no time to prepare, and people were not afraid of the approaching army until after the fact. By the time most people knew about it, it was already over – and Japan had won. In contrast, this time the New Soviet Union advanced openly, putting heavy pressure on the people and damaging their psyche.

At noon Japanese time, the New Soviet Union's fleet stopped 30 nautical miles north-west of the Noto Peninsula. It was a convenient spot, located on the border of two adjacent waters.

The Soviet fleet was as follows:

Two ships with Fleming launchers as their main armament, designed to attack ground targets.

Four ships with anti-aircraft and anti-ship rocket launchers.

Four ships with weapons to combat submarines and anti-ship rocket launchers.

Twelve small ships in battle formation.

An aircraft carrier with two destroyers as escorts following 10 nautical miles behind the rest of the fleet.

Against this fleet, the Japanese army sent four ships with anti-aircraft and anti-ship rocket launchers as well as six ships with anti-ship rocket launchers and weapons to combat submarines. In addition, each of the nearby cities (Maizuru, Kanazawa, and Niigata) had 8 small ships ready for combat.

Both sides had submarines that might have detected each other somewhere under the water.

The New Soviet Union's requirement had not changed since the day before – they demanded the extradition of Liu Li Lei, a war criminal who killed many civilians with large-scale magic.

In response to this demand, the Japanese government had offered to hold a meeting in the International Criminal Court. They had responded from the perspective of human rights, stating that a unilateral New Soviet Union court was unacceptable to the rights of the refugee. However, the International Criminal Court had not functioned for more than half a century – it was currently a nominal organization, which, while technically existing, had no power.

Still, despite the government's stance on protecting human rights, the government received criticism for defending Liu – “Is it reasonable to endanger the lives of citizens for the sake of a foreigner?” they argued. However, when the news showed photos of Liu, the voices scorning the government lost their support as people felt sympathy seeing that Liu was just a 14-year-old girl. This might have been helped by the fact that Liu was beautiful.

Liu Li Lei was still at Komatsu base.

And today, Ichijou Akane visited Liu with her father, Ichijou Goki - head of the Ichijou family.

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Local time: July 8, afternoon. Masaki and Kichijouji were on Sado Island.

They had arrived there early in the morning, but not because they weren't aware of the movements of the New Soviet Union's fleet. The reports claimed the enemy was aiming west of Noto Peninsula, but Masaki trusted Kichijouji's opinion and instead headed to Sado Island while leaving the duty of guarding his sister while looking after Liu Li Lei to his father.

Masaki and Kichijouji stood on the upper observation platform of the lighthouse, located on the northern coast of the island. From there, it was possible to see the approach of enemy ships without letting themselves be detected easily.

“George... Will they really come here?”

Masaki asked Kichijouji this while looking at the horizon. Doubt had inevitably crept into his voice – the New Soviet Union’s fleet was located north-west of the Noto Peninsula in a location similar to what the reports had predicted. Masaki was ready to repel this fleet with great enthusiasm by using the new magic he had received yesterday, but Kichijouji had strongly insisted that the New Soviet Union would not invade Kanazawa or Komatsu, but rather Sado Island. Masaki could not ignore the words of his best friend, so he left the neighborhood of Kanazawa and Komatsu to his father and headed to Sado. However, the Ichijou family’s news and information network reported that the enemy fleet continued to be northwest of the Noto Peninsula – they would have to turn sharply east to head for Sado Island at this point.

“...At this rate, the new magic will be for naught” – this was the thought Masaki’s impatience associated with.

“They will come. I’m certain.”

In response to Masaki’s doubt, Kichijouji was somehow still unnaturally filled with confidence.

Kichijouji had wondered why Sado Island was attacked from the day he lost his life – his hometown and his parents. His conclusion was that the Island of Sado held significant military value.

The distance from Sado Island to Honshu was 30 kilometers, and though the island was not in Japan’s face, so to speak, it was still an island, and its proximity to the mainland made it a slightly unexpected target. Soldiers have to be sent by land – and there was enough space for invading troops, as well as a port ready for use by warships. It could be called a springboard for the New Soviet Union to invade Japan. Rather than capture Hokkaido and move south, Sado Island provided a more effective base for conquering the central part of Japan.

When setting up a beachhead, the main challenge would be to ensure air supremacy, but that would be a problem everywhere. This possibility of an attack was a serious problem for Japan, as despite the attack from five years ago, there was only a single small defense unit deployed there.

In any case, Sado Island should have had a base for intercepting hostile naval forces because of its special situation. The main reason it didn’t was likely because of overconfidence of the self-defense forces with the Niigata base nearby. Though this

gave some safety to the island, the forces still had to travel to the island, which took time. This made it an especially appealing target for the New Soviet Union.

But Kichijouji also had another rationale for his actions.

“The Japanese fleet is not weak. The New Soviet Union does not want to face it. Even though the Great Asian Alliance has already surrendered, its troops are not completely disabled.”

“Is that why they are planning a surprise attack?” Masaki asked.

“Exactly, Masaki.”

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The National University of Magic and its nine subordinate schools all responded to the approach of Soviet fleet by closing school indefinitely, regardless of location.

This was not for the same reason as conventional educational institutions, in which the evacuation of students, teachers, and other staff was given the highest priority. It was a measure organized to allow their presence in the defense force as volunteer magicians.

Tatsuya should have appeared at the 101 brigade because of this, but instead he stayed home with Miyuki after visiting Minami at the Aoba clinic.

“Onii-sama, thanks for waiting.”

After Miyuki finished cleaning the dishes from their lunch and dressed up, she came to the living room to get Tatsuya.

“Got it.”

Tatsuya, who was following the current situation through military data transmissions and communications, turned off the wall display and stood up. Together, they walked down to the underground garage and drove to the Aoba clinic in Chofu in Tatsuya’s new favorite car. The road they drove on was empty due to the Soviet invasion, so the drive only took 5 minutes.

“Minami-chan, may I come in?”

“Please do!” Minami answered energetically. She was wide awake after hearing Miyuki from outside the hospital room. She seemed like a different person compared

to the time she first went to the hospital, but this was natural as she was to be discharged the next day. Physically, she was nearly recovered.

“Tatsuya-san, Miyuki-san, thank you for coming. There are currently no anomalies.”

When they entered the room, Yuuka - the eldest daughter of the Tsukuba family, one of the side branches of the Yotsuba clan - spoke to them. The Yotsuba clan did not discriminate against either sex when choosing the heir, and she was the heir of the Tsukuba branch.

“Yuuka-san, thanks. Your help was appreciated.”

Tatsuya and Miyuki had asked Yuuka to guard Minami for them while they ate their lunch. Miyuki thanked Yuuka in past tense to indicate that they were once again taking the role of guarding Minami.

“It's my pleasure.”

Yuuka got up from the couch, currently pushed against the wall. Yuuka had brought it in order to have more comfortable seating, and the hospital room was spacious enough to hold it, but the couch did not belong to Yuuka – it was paid for by the main house.

The couch had been in the room for 1 week, the amount of time Yuuka had participated in Minami’s defense.

“I will be in the guard room on this floor, then.”

“Later, I will also go there.”

With a slight wave of her hand at Tatsuya, Yuuka left the room. Miyuki exchanged glances with Tatsuya, and after a bit of hesitation, she sat down on the sofa Yuuka had gotten up from. Tatsuya did not follow her – the sofa was single – and instead sat on the stool.

“Looks like you're prepared to be discharged,” Tatsuya said.

“What kind of preparation even is there... there isn’t enough baggage to make it tough...”

As Minami said, the suitcase at the entrance was very small, and considering she usually acted as a maid, it was unsurprising she would be ready.

“Tomorrow at 11 o'clock, right? If school's closure was only for today, then it will only be me here to pick you up,” Tatsuya said.

“Why waste so much time!” Minami exclaimed.

“It doesn't take much time.”

Minami opened her mouth several times before closing it, trying to come up with a way to deny the help. In the end, she only sighed a little and closed her mouth, realizing she would not be able to convince Tatsuya.

“Um, Tatsuya-sama...”

Still, she couldn't suppress her desire to ask a question.

“Speak.”

Hearing that, Minami asked her question.

“...Is it really okay for you to not go to the base?”

What she really meant to ask was, “why are you here?”

“It's all good. They sent someone as a replacement for me.”

... He cannot leave this location to others.

... He will personally protect Minami.

So, Minami understood Tatsuya's answer.

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The high-speed transport catamaran Midway went along the aircraft carrier Independence's course for some time, but they eventually split up as Midway turned south and west. The ship headed for an area about 90 km south of Boso Peninsula.

On that ship, Regulus, Raymond, Vega, Deneb, Spica, and the twenty Parasites of Star Dust all headed towards Miyaki Island.

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“Are they already starting?”

Minoru, though still at Zama Base, was able to “feel” the course of the Midway transport vessel change, signaling that the attack on the Star Reactor Plant was underway.

Minoru was still inside the USNA transport aircraft. The plane was damaged and could not fly, and the cargo compartment hid the body of the sealed commander of the third detachment of Stars: Captain Arcturus, as a Parasite.

Minoru had been relentlessly trying to remove the seal on Arcturus. He was currently at the final stage.

"After this, his consciousness has to awaken!"

After preparing the spell, Minoru sent it into Arcturus's mind. The sequence of the mental intervention magic he had prepared for the last several hours entered into Arcturus' pushion information body through the psionic information body connecting the physical body to the mind.

Once the spell activated, Minoru felt Arcturus's mind awaken. Though his body was still asleep, Minoru finally felt Arcturus's spiritual body react.

"Well... Now it's just a matter of time before the seal falls apart on the inside."

Based on his "inherited" knowledge, Minoru thought that the cracked seal would collapse from outside pressure if the shell was not repaired.

"That's just..."

Something bothered him. He had aroused the mind of the man named Alexander Arcturus - the seal on the parasite was extremely strong, and its system was different from the spells of Zhou Gongjin and the Kudou Family, so he had used a spell to awaken the human mind.

In Parasites, the original human mind merged with the body of the parasite, so there was a non-zero chance of the human mind rejecting the parasite if only the human mind is awoken.

"...Even if this happens, they should simply merge again."

Arcturus's brain had already adapted to the parasite, so Minoru convinced himself the reaction rejecting the parasite would not kill him.

Using Parade and Ghost Walker, Minoru hid himself and walked out of the plane. Ghost Walker covered the weakness of Parade – the unnatural refraction of light – by deflecting people's attention.

Remaining invisible, Minoru walked through the base's gate and crossed a nearby park on foot before getting into a van parked on the opposite side of the road. The car,

brought from Nara on the orders of Kudou Makoto, was designed to transport valuable materials or drugs requiring temperature control. Now, however, it had been filled with parasite dolls disguised as dummies.

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Masaki and Kichijouji did not have chairs or anything else to sit on while they waited on the observation deck of the lighthouse. There was the large CAD shaped like a suitcase, but it wasn't big enough for a high school student to sit on.

They were young enough that they didn't tire much from standing, but their youth did not affect their minds and they began to become bored and more relaxed. Still, they did their best to stay vigilant and overall were carefully watching for the New Soviet Union's invasion fleet.

"They're moving!" Kichijouji exclaimed while watching the movement of the Soviet fleet through a tablet terminal.

"Where!?" Masaki exclaimed.

"Small high-speed ships accompanied by ships with weapons designed to attack ground targets simultaneously began to move to the east. They have... monstrous acceleration. They will reach our location in less than an hour."

Hearing the answer, Kichijouji, Masaki sighed and said:

"Estimated maximum speed of about 140 knots...? Approximately the same speed as our fastest ships, I guess. What about the interception forces?"

Kichijouji began digging for information from the tablet to answer Masaki's question.

"It looks like our missile destroyers are restraining the enemy destroyers and are not letting them do anything. Komatsu base aviation is being used to deter enemy aircraft carrier fighters. Eight small ships departed from Niigata base, but... the unfavorable outcome is undeniable."

"So we use it?"

"Yeah."

Kichijouji nodded to Masaki.

"We'll interfere with the enemy operation. Before Bezobrazov attacks with Tuman Bomba, you'll hit them with Ocean Blast, Masaki."

“Yes, I'll do it!”

Masaki nodded back in response to Kichijouji.

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Tatsuya and Miyuki were still visiting Minami at Aoba Clinic. Though Miyuki was with them, Tatsuya was an eighteen-year-old boy and Minami was a girl turning seventeen later in the year, so Tatsuya's long stay in the small hospital room (when compared to the side of the Yotsuba houses; the hospital room was relatively large for a hospital room) created an awkward atmosphere. Tatsuya left and went to the security room to get rid of the feeling.

The hospital was mostly under the Yotsuba family's control, and the floor Minami's room was on was reserved for individuals associated with the Yotsuba. Because of this control, this floor had an additional security system installed in addition to the security equipment set up by the hospital. Among other purposes, this system was designed to track information from all over the hospital and display it in the floor's guard room.

“Ara, Tatsuya-san. Good job.”

As Yuuka said she would be earlier, she was waiting for Tatsuya in the guard room.

“Yuuka-san, thank you for your help. Are you replaced soon?”

“According to the schedule, I am, but I want to stay here for a while today.”

Though at times it made her seem impermanent, Yuuka was punctual. She was not the type of person to work overtime without a reason.

“Okay. To be honest, it will help me quite a bit.”

Tatsuya was thankful for the help, but he understood Yuuka's reason for staying.

“In the current situation, that Ministry of Defense Bureaucrat cannot prioritize personal conflicts.”

Yuuka was referring to Shibata Katsushige when she said “Ministry of Defense Bureaucrat” - the next head of the Shibata branch of the Yotsuba family. Katsushige's direct combat ability was probably the best among the side branches of the Yotsuba, and his inability to participate in the current battle against Minoru due to the situation with the New Soviet Union was definitely a hit to the force protecting Minami.

“...Listen, you think he’ll attack today, right?” Yuuka confirmed.

“I just do not know exactly when.”

Tatsuya answered with an indirect confirmation.

“I wonder if it was Kudou Minoru who created this situation.”

“Hardly. Still, there is a chance that he knew about it in advance, so he is probably prepared.”

“Maybe.”

They both expected that Minoru would attack today, and they both thought that this time, he would come with help.

“He’ll come with more than the Parasite dolls, right?” Yuuka asked.

Tatsuya had learned from Fumia and Yuuka from his report to Maya, but regardless of where they learned it, they both knew that Minoru had stolen Parasite dolls from the Kudou family.

“Minoru is no longer underestimating us,” Tatsuya answered vaguely.

“And yet, I wonder if there won’t be any trick to split our forces up. Do you think there’ll be an attack on Miyaki Island?”

“We know that at least 1 member of Stars is a Parasite, so there’s not a small chance for that to happen,” Tatsuya answered.

Lina had drawn Tatsuya’s attention to the possibility that the plant on Miyaki Island would be attacked, and Tatsuya was not the only one from the Yotsuba aware of the possibility of an attack on Miyaki Island. In addition to this, Lina had also confirmed that the soldier who had entered the country through Kansai International Airport was First Lieutenant Jacob Regulus of Stars.

“However, the other Parasites expelled were sealed in Zama, and since then, no military aircraft have flown in from the USNA. Local staff should be able to cope with defending Miyaki Island on their own,” Tatsuya continued.

Tatsuya had no way to know that new Parasites had penetrated the country from Yokosuka’s base. He also had no way to know that the soldiers infected by the Parasites had been transferred from the transport plane to a high-speed transport

vessel via a submarine. None of the Yotsuba were aware of these facts – even Maya herself.

“In an extreme case, it will be possible to count on the help of Shields-san,” Tatsuya concluded.

Neither Tatsuya nor the Yotsuba were omnipotent – they were far from even reaching omniscience, and did not know the whole situation.

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The catamaran Midway rested low on the surface of the water and had a long form, and being fast, it also was somewhat stealthy. Still, even if it were possible to hide from radar detection, the high-performance cameras located on the stratospheric platform would still detect them, so they should not have been able to come close to Japanese territory without being detected – even if their target was a small island.

“Lieutenant Regulus. Have you ever had such an effective optical camouflage before?” Vega asked.

In fact, Regulus had neutralized the observation systems around Japan by modifying both visible light and all other electromagnetic waves around the ship, providing a powerful optical camouflage.

“This spell was given to us by Kudou Minoru to ensure the success of this operation,” Regulus answered honestly.

By nature, the Parasites could not keep secrets from their comrades, but even if it was possible, even Regulus was too surprised with his new magic to even think about deception.

“Your magical skill improved dramatically after being given a single sequence of magic?”

Spica’s question was one Regulus had asked himself.

“Isn’t it because we are Parasites? Our minds are connected, so perhaps when we share sequences of magic with each other, we also share the skills in using them.”

“Isn’t it weird?” Raymond butted in.

“What’s strange about it?” Regulus asked.

“When a magician becomes a Parasite, they tend to specialize in the same magic as they did before.”

Raymond had more knowledge on this than the others because of his use of Hliðskjálf.

“Isn’t that because we keep the personality?”

Raymond shook his head at Deneb’s question.

“I don’t doubt Parasite individuality, but we, the Parasites, are parts of a whole. In other words, I’m talking about a division of labor.”

“Are you saying that’s why sharing skills is weird?”

This time he nodded at Regulus’s question.

“Giving another Parasite the ability to use one’s skill is like using one’s skill through the Parasite, so it’s weird – then again, Minoru is weird for a Parasite. He’s different.”

“I don’t like this...” Vega mumbled after she heard Raymond’s reasoning.

“It’s like Kudou Minoru is using Regulus as a familiar,” she thought.

“...At the moment, focus on successful implementation of the mission. Regardless of the nature of the optical camouflage magic, it’s proven useful by allowing us to get close to Miyaki Island.”

The five Parasites present understood what Vega meant without saying it.

They were all there, and Minoru wasn’t.

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Minoru smiled wryly while being driven from Zama to Chofu in the van he had received from the Kudou family. Though the beautiful and bewitching smile belonged to Minoru, the image of Zhou Gongjin peeked through.

Vega’s suspicion on the transport vessel had been correct. To ensure the success of the Stars’ sabotage mission, Minoru used optical camouflage magic through Regulus. Regulus believed he was using the magic himself, but in fact Minoru was controlling the magic.

No matter the knowledge Zhou Gongjin had possessed, Minoru would not have been able to do this if he tried it on a person. He could have made a puppet like Gu

Jie, but it would have been difficult to make the puppet act as if it had free will. However, unlike people, Parasites had a common mind that blurred their ego, so Minoru was able to use Regulus as a medium from which to activate the magic.

Minoru saw no reason to be discrete. He didn't consider Regulus and Raymond to be close – he only saw them as prisoners of Parasites, and himself the Parasite's master. He did not help Regulus and the others because they were Parasites. He helped them because their actions would give him a chance to abduct Minami. Still, the help went both ways – despite the lack of feeling, it was a mutually beneficial relationship, and this has not changed.

They helped each other to help themselves reach each of their own goals. He didn't care what they thought of him, because they would alienate themselves from each other once they reached their goals.

Minoru felt a breeze as the car entered Chofu. The van he was in, loaded with Parasite dolls, was not alone. Five cars of the same make and model were making their way to the same destination on different routes. Minoru knew this through traffic control information, and not some psychic line of communication with the Parasite dolls – despite his powers, modern technology was still convenient.

"Minami-san, wait for me ...!"

All that was left was to wait for a convenient moment. Minoru hoped that the sabotage of the Star reactor plant would at least be partially successful, for he needed a good distraction.

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When Minoru arrived in Chofu, Minami had changed her hospital clothes for casual everyday clothes and left her room with Miyuki.

They sat across from each other across the table in the visiting room. On the table lay a folding tablet the size of an A4 sheet of paper (210x297 mm, ~8½x11in). When unfolded, it became closer to the size of an A3 sheet (420x297mm). This terminal held all the second-year textbooks for First High.

The above makes it clear what they were doing: Miyuki was helping Minami with her studies.

Last week the final exams for the first semester were held. Minami, unable to take them due to her special circumstances, received the right to take the exams separately when she returned. However, she still needed to understand the content she had missed.

She had not had time to study during the first half of her month of hospitalization, so now she had to make up for lost time. Modern school education was not taught by a teacher and was instead student driven – the amount of knowledge learned depended on the student's drive for studying at the terminal. Unfortunately, Minami was not one to easily grasp magic theory.

Unable to listen to Minami's agonizing sighs, Miyuki decided to take on the role of a teacher and help Minami. In contrast to when she was learning from the textbook, Minami sat with a straight face listening intently to Miyuki explaining the topics gracefully and with a smile. This was in no small part due to her feelings of guilt at having made her mistress take on the responsibility of a tutor. She was worried about wasting Miyuki's time, so she focused too intently on Miyuki's every word as she read the texts and studied the graphics. Ironically, focusing too much on the action of listening distracted her and her learning productivity slowed down.

Suddenly, she heard her name whispered in her ear. Her eyes clouded over, and her face showed surprise.

“...Minami-chan, what happened?” Miyuki asked, concerned. Minami hastily focused on Miyuki.

“I apologize!”

“Don't overstrain yourself... is something bothering you?”

“No, nothing like that! I was just a distracted. I sincerely apologize for...” Minami started.

“You don't need to apologize.”

Miyuki interrupted the second attempt to apologize with a smile.

“Let's take a break. Want some tea?”

“Oh, let me!” Minami said, jumping up to go to the vending machine.

With a slightly bitter smile, Miyuki allowed Minami to do what she wanted.

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At the lighthouse on Sado Island, Masaki pointed the aiming device for Ocean Blast's CAD at the sea.

“Ah! Communication should now be established.”

Hearing Kichijouji, Masaki turned the aiming device towards the left.

“I see them! It’s just... there are only six outlines of ships. Weren’t there twelve?”

“I need to correct the scaling. I’ll do that now.”

Kichijouji used a tablet terminal connected by cable to the monitor and console to adjust the image projected by Masaki’s glasses.

“...it’s fine now!”

“Keep the sight in this position,” Kichijouji said as he got out another information terminal.

Using this, he sent a prewritten encrypted message to the Kanazawa base, reading: “Requesting permission to conduct an attack.”

Kichijouji saw the figures of ships heading north out of his peripheral vision - the high-speed warships from Niigata base. They were still accelerating, and their current speed was over 50 knots.

“George!?” Masaki shouted in urgency.

“Not yet!”

Kichijouji told Masaki to wait, as they had not yet received permission to attack.

“But it’s time!”

“No!”

Kichijouji tried to restrain the impatient Masaki from attacking without permission.

Masaki raised his glasses on his forehead and turned to Kichijouji, but Kichijouji opened his mouth to ask Masaki to return to aiming. However, at that moment their faces froze at the same time.

Beyond the horizon – directly above the friendly ships – signs of widespread magic appeared. Both Kichijouji and Masaki remembered the psion waves from the magic

three months ago that caused the explosion over the sea. At the time, Ichijou Goki had overheated his magic calculation area trying to block the magic.

The sound of an explosion roared, and water burst up above the horizon.

“Tuman Bomba?!”

Kichijouji silently nodded at Masaki's question before trying to clarify the status of the allied ships through an information terminal connected to Masaki's CAD. However, in the short period of time since he had last checked, data from all eight ships sent by the Niigata base had stopped being transmitted.

“George! Please help with aiming again!”

Masaki put the glasses back on and aimed in the same direction. At the same time, a message arrived at Kichijouji's terminal: “the attack is allowed.”

His thoughts cursing the indecisiveness of the self-defense forces, Kichijouji once again brought the convoy of enemy ships to the monitor.

“Masaki, don't forget the time delay! Focus on the predicted frame!”

Kichijouji shouted to remind Masaki of the time lag before activation, before noticing some other ships on the monitor.

“It looks like there are fishing boats 20 kilometers to the north! Move the sight further south or you'll sink them!”

“Correcting it so the northernmost warship is on the border of the target area!” Masaki responded.

Masaki pulled the trigger after adjusting the scope. The activation sequence stored in the computer was recalculated based on the target dimensions and coordinates.

The resulting data was converted to an activation sequence before being sent to the induction stone. The induction stone transformed the data into a psionic signal and released it.

Masaki's magic calculation area took the activation sequence and built a magic sequence. The time delay was about 1 second.

The convoy of enemy ships was speeding across the sea at about 120 knots, or roughly 60 meters per second. Their current position perfectly matched the predicted frame.

“Done!”

Masaki shouted at the same time the magic was projected. The wedge shaped area containing all the enemy ships was filled with magic sequences. As soon as the copying was complete, all the sequences simultaneously overwrote the surrounding phenomenon.

The surface of the sea in the target area evaporated to a depth of 3 meters. This was the result of using Rupture with chain casting.



This was the Strategic Class magic Ocean Blast.

The water turned into steam expanded rapidly, causing an explosion as the water molecules accelerated. This high-power steam explosion blew up all 12 ships of the New Soviet Union.

Thus, the New Soviet Union's attack on Sado Island ended in failure. The Japanese army sacrificed eight ships, but due to Masaki's Ocean Blast, the entire "special" group of ships sent by the New Soviet Union fleet was destroyed.

July 8, 2097, 14:07.

Ichijou Masaki became the newest Strategic-Class Magician.

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Miyaki Island, northeast coast.

Lina was in the CAD development center which had been opened last month. Testing magic with a magician was necessary when developing CADs, and the higher the specification of CAD being developed, the higher the skill requirements for the magician.

It was not even worth mentioning that Lina was a world-class magician, and this made her an extremely valuable tester for developers. Combined with the fact that she had more than enough free time, she frequently visited the CAD development even when the researchers had not made a request – and both sides felt the exchange was for the others sake. Still, building a friendly relationship with those around her wasn't out of the ordinary, given her situation.

When Lina had first escaped, her CAD had been taken. When she asked Tatsuya to return it, Tatsuya responded by giving her a new CAD of the latest model, and Lina was satisfied with this result. She didn't have any reason to complain as her new CAD provided by Tatsuya was more efficient than the one she originally had, but she was still slightly dissatisfied – while fleeing from the USNA, she left her weapon armament "Brionac" in the weapons warehouse of Stars. She could not take the device on missions without permission from the general staff, so she naturally could not take it to Japan, but when one is separated from something they like, their heart starts to hurt. Just spending 1 tranquil week on the island was enough for Lina to miss her beloved Brionac.

Brionac operated based on the FAE theory, but Tatsuya had confirmed to Lina that he understood the theory. Lina believed that the team of scientists on the island would be able to create a copy of Brionac under the guidance of Tatsuya, so she had gotten close to the CAD developers based on the small chance that they would fulfill her selfish desire and create a substitute to Brionac for her. She was at the development center with this intention, so today, too, she enthusiastically responded to the requests of the developers in the hope that the opportunity would come that she could get them to create the armament. But in the midst of her work...

“Waa!?” Lina screamed, stunned at an unexpected surging psionic wave. “What was that!?”

The wave did not hold significant power, but she felt an unpleasant feeling around her resembling a stab in the back because of her surprise. Lina was not the only one to feel the wave – the other magicians in the engineering room frowned.

“Are these excessive psions from attempting to activate large scale magic? But to have this much power, the source would have to be Strategic Class magic...”

Given the current international situation, it would most likely be Tuman Bomba or Thunderclap Tower, but neither of the magicians responsible for operating that magic would have wasted their strength like a newbie.

“How new?”

Suddenly, Lina remembered something.

“When someone uses magic for the first time, the dispersion of wasted psions makes the magician’s inexperience clear... is this the new Strategic Class Tatsuya was developing?”

Lina had come to the correct conclusion, but she had no way to check her reasoning before an alarm sounded.

“A suspicious ship is approaching us!?”

“They managed to approach the inner boundary of the adjacent waters without detection by using stealth magic!?”

“This stealth magic!?”

Hearing the numerous shouts of technician, Lina shifted her attention to the sea.

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"What caused that wave just now!?"

Minoru's concentration was disturbed by the sudden surge of psionic waves originating from Masaki's Ocean Blast. He had been sitting in a van parked 1 kilometer from Minami's hospital in Chofu, waiting for an opportunity while maintaining the catamaran Midway's stealth magic through Regulus.

"Damn..."

His concentration lapse had caused him to lose control over the stealth magic. He immediately started to reactivate the magic, but decided it was meaningless. The transport vessel should have already been detected by both radar and stratospheric surveillance systems, so it would be impossible to hide again. Once tracking systems focus on the object, it becomes impossible to hide again in a way to deceive the observers.

"...The distraction should be more effective when they are detected just before the attack than with a completely sudden attack."

Minoru convinced himself with this argument and now focused completely on the hospital.

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The sudden psion waves startled the Parasites on Midway.

"Lieutenant Regulus!?" Vega yelled.

Vega was not the only one surprised at the suddenly disabled stealth magic.

"I apologize! I lost concentration because of the surge of psions!"

Regulus believed that it had been he who had lost concentration, not realizing that he was not the one controlling the spell.

"I'll restore it!"

Regulus hastily tried to re-activate the stealth magic.

"Don't bother, Lieutenant. That's enough," Vega said, stopping Regulus. "We're near the goal, so there's no need for the disguise anymore. Let's just start the invasion."

Following the orders of Vega, Deneb left the cabin. They were not using any flying combat suits for this operation because the Parasite-turned Star Dust soldiers had poor compatibility with flight magic. They planned to use traditional landing craft to reach the island, and Deneb had left to lead preparation of their landing craft.

“Lieutenant Spica and Lieutenant Regulus prepare to support the landing.”

“Yes, ma'am!”

Though Midway's main purpose was for transport, it was equipped with a small number of anti-aircraft, anti-ship, and anti-submarine weapons. Being a transport craft, it had no use for weapons against ground targets, so they would not be able to attack the island from the boat. However, the ship had an abundance of small bombs which Spica and Regulus could use to attack with the help of transport magic. They would support the landing by doing this.

“Raymond Clark. I ask you to protect the ship in the unlikely event of an attack,” Vega finished before leaving to prepare for the landing with Deneb.

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Miyaki Island was divided into an area that was previously used as a prison for criminal magicians and an area for construction of several new research facilities. The first area was located on the west coast, and the second – including the Star Reactor plant – was on the northeast coast.

A suspicious ship was approaching Miyaki Island from the northeast, and the research facility staff quickly realized that the target was the Star Reactor plant.

By the time the catamaran of unestablished affiliation began to decelerate, it was already in Japan's territorial waters, but had not yet attacked any of the objects on the island. Miyaki Island was defended by a small detachment of maritime police reinforced by the Yotsuba family, but they could not take any measures besides inspecting the vessel before hostile intent was established.

However, the police boat was not even dispatched for this because it was clear the suspicious vessel was pursuing military objectives. They would not be allowed to inspect the vessel, and the approach of a police boat would only result in the destruction of the boat and death of its operators.

The defense squad magicians took positions to be able to activate shield magic at any time, but as if reacting to it, the suspicious ship fired bombs as it approached the coast

from 4 kilometers away. These shots were not given velocity physically from something like a grenade launcher or Fleming launcher, but rather were produced by movement magic. The bombs were small but numerous, and under this hail of explosive shells, the members of the defense squadron created magic barriers.

One by one, light flowers bloomed in the air. The fragments hitting the magic barriers did not have much impulse, but the flashes from the explosions lowered the visibility of the defenders.

“Light grenades?” one of the magicians supporting the barriers shouted.

Though they were against light munitions, the defenders maintained the magic barriers on the chance that there could be a real bomb among the light shells. Meanwhile, the suspicious vessel continued to approach, and two amphibious vehicles separated from it. The administrative building immediately sent a command to intercept the vehicles, but there were not enough magicians to form a serious fighting force. Many of them were still needed to protect from the catamaran’s bombs.

First, the interception team attempted to prevent the vehicles from making it to land by knocking them over, but both amphibious boats were protected by counter-magic and the interception team was unable to directly influence the phenomenon around the ship. The magicians on the island quickly discarded the plan of directly attacking the boats with magic and instead used magic on the water.

They reproduced tidal currents to create streams of water from the coast.

They caused explosions on the surface of the water to create waves.

They made ice harpoons underwater and launched them towards the bottom of the boats.

However, movement-slowing magic was used to neutralize all of the physical attacks on the vehicles.

The interception unit’s failure was not due to a lack of magic power. They were subordinates of the Mashiba family, one of the side branches of the Yotsuba, and had been responsible for defense and security when the island was a prison. Though they were not blood relatives of the Mashiba, they had experience violently suppressing dangerous criminals, and held reasonable strength as magicians. They were strong, but the Parasites were stronger.

The magicians of the interception unit already knew their opponents were Parasites – Miyaki Island had been equipped with experimental radars for detecting Parasite activity.

The landing craft began to bombard the interception team with bullets and grenades as they got closer, putting the team in a position where they couldn't even look out from cover to see where the fire was coming from.

The defense team could not send reinforcements to assist the interception team. The bombardment from the catamaran continued periodically, so all of the defenders were necessary. Meanwhile, the staff of the administrative building notified the main house of the Yotsuba and asked for instructions.

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The administrative building was not the only area observing the attack on the island. Lina was also watching the transmission from a camera behind the defense squad through a large display in the CAD building. Suddenly, she took off her helmet used to measure CADs and went to the engineer in charge of the testing.

“Hey.”

“W-What?” he asked, slightly startled.

Lina’s beauty was comparable to Miyuki. The thirty-year-old scientist swallowed his tongue as the unmatched beauty stood in front of him and spoke.

“Other than this measuring helmet, is there anything that’s blast proof?”

Lina was accustomed to this place and spoke at ease, but her question seemed out of place in the CAD building. The researcher rounded his eyes at the request, surprised and suddenly feeling worried.

Ignoring the researcher’s surprise, Lina continued.

“Also, is there any armored-clothing that allows movement?”

Lina wore a protective suit while testing CADs in case her magic got out of control. The suit would at least work to soften the external shock, reducing Lina’s injuries. However, it wasn’t made taking into account the need to move, so it was unsuitable for battle.

“T-there is, but...”

“What’s the size?” Lina asked.

“I think it will fit,” the researcher responded.

“How fast can you prepare it?”

“But why?”

The last question did not come from the researcher Lina was talking to until now, but from a different employee who looked to be 25 years old.

“That ship is a USS Navy transport ship.”

Lina said this while looking at the catamaran from the satellite view shown on the display.

“The attackers are Parasites, so I should be the one to deal with them.”

“.....” The researchers didn’t have a response for Lina.

“I am not Sirius here,” Lina said as her tone changed, “but I am not going to silently observe the mistakes of my comrades.”

Even though she had been exiled, she still considered herself to be a USNA citizen and member of the USNA military.

Lina wanted to protect her army’s dignity, not as “Sirius”, but as an ordinary combat magician.

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Tatsuya received an emergency call from the main house while he was in the security room on Minami’s floor. It was a special emergency line and not the usual telephone line, and while Tatsuya knew of the system’s existence, he did not expect it would be used to communicate with him.

“Tatsuya-sama, I apologize, but this will only be a voice call.”

“Hanabishi-san, get straight to the point.”

Hanabishi Tajima spoke to Tatsuya through the dedicated wireline. He had the second highest rank among the butlers of the Yotsuba, and he was the father of Hanabishi Hyogo. One of his duties included the management of cases involving weapon usage – he worked to provide everything necessary for conducting combat.

The fact that Hanabishi had established contact combined with the current situation gave Tatsuya a rough idea of what happened.

“Miyaki Island was attacked, wasn’t it?” Tatsuya asked.

“It was. Amphibious boats were sent from the Midway, a high-speed transport vessel belonging to the US Navy.”

Unlike the Miyaki Island staff, the main Yotuba staff had been able to determine the affiliation of the ship by its form.

“That is to say, an army warship was used?”

Tatsuya was a bit astonished at the openness of the USNA in this attack. Was the USNA going to stop hiding its hostility towards Japan, or would they perhaps insist on an obvious lie such as “it was a rebellion”?

“The landing party consists of 22 parasites. There are also responses from 3 Parasites on the main vessel. There are also responses from ordinary people, but they can be ignored as a fighting force,” Hanabishi continued.

The ordinary people remaining on the transport ship were almost certainly the crew. Were they volunteers in taking part of the attack on Japan, or were they blindly following orders? Tatsuya thought there was a chance they were being manipulated, but that was not the main problem.

“The defense squad will fail, right?”

“Unfortunately. Two people in the boats and two people on the transport vessel exhibit power comparable to the ‘First-magnitude class’ of the Stars. Shields-san has presumably already identified the Parasites from Stars,” Hanabishi continued.

“...They will not be able to fight back against such a force.”

Tatsuya immediately came to this conclusion. He had been mistaken in thinking that he prevented the entrance of Stars reinforcements into Japan.

“Looks like they fooled us...” Tatsuya said, but he easily suppressed this regret as if it were someone else’s failure. “I’ll hurry to Miyaki Island.”

“Thank you. I will organize additional staff to protect the hospital.”

“Clear.”

“All the best,” Hanabishi finished.

The emergency voice call was ended here.

The conversation between Tatsuya and Hanabishi had taken place through a device with the same microphone and speaker as a regular videophone rather than a personal communication device, so everyone in the room had heard the conversation without even having to strain their ears.

“Will that be okay?”

Yuuka, sitting next to Tatsuya, was asking whether the protection detail for Minami would be alright without Tatsuya. They both believed Minoru would attack that day, so the question was founded.

“Nothing good comes from talking about what is good and what is bad,” Tatsuya vaguely replied as he slightly knitted his eyebrows. “I don’t have a choice about going: I cannot allow them to destroy the Star Reactor plant.”

“I don’t think I need to say this, but this is clearly a ploy to divert attention,” Yuuka responded.

“I understand that.”

Without waiting for Yuuka’s argument and without giving her the chance to stop him, Tatsuya headed to the dressing room. Once he changed, he headed to where Miyuki was helping Minami with her studies. They could not hide their surprise as Tatsuya’s look.

“...Onii-sama, are you leaving?” Miyuki asked.

Tatsuya was wearing a “Liberated Suit”, the flying combat armor developed by the Yotuba as a replacement for the 101 Brigade’s mobile suit.

“Miyaki Island was attacked by Parasites from the USNA military. There are a total of 25 enemies, and among them are four at the level of First-magnitude Star class according to Stars’s classification of magicians. The defense there cannot cope, even if Lina joins.”

Tatsuya’s answer provided enough justification for Miyuki.

“I understand. Onii-sama, good luck in battle,” Miyuki answered without any hidden feelings.

“You two should return to your room,” Tatsuya instructed them.

“Okay.”

“I will try to return as soon as possible... Miyuki, Minami, do not do anything reckless.”

Both Miyuki and Minami understood why Tatsuya was saying that. While Tatsuya was absent, Minoru would certainly attack. His departure was a planned measure to take him away from Minami’s defense.

“Of course,” Miyuki responded with a smile, even while knowing that Minoru would attack. “Don’t worry, Onii-sama. Leave this place to me.”

There was no sign of anxiety in Miyuki’s eyes.

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The resistance of Miyaki Island’s defense squad ended up being much more intense than Deneb expected. It was not that it was fierce - neither Deneb’s boat nor Vega’s boat had been damaged. However, they still had not managed to get close to the shore. Though the boats were not stopped or thrown back, they were slowed down greatly, delaying their arrival.

It was not easy to defend against attacks against boats. If it had been only the Star Dust soldiers, the boats definitely would have been damaged – possible even sunk. The boats were of a standard design and not especially sturdy.

“These are the untouchables, yes? So they weren’t just rumors.”

Deneb muttered this with a ferocious grin on her face. She wasn’t aware she had expressed her thoughts verbally. While she had always been a war-like character, Deneb had become especially so after her transformation into a Parasite. Despite her change, Deneb had failed to notice it, and her squad mates had not mentioned it, so she was still in the dark about her change in personality.

Although it took longer than planned, but continuing to move forward, after a while they approached the goal.

The moment of the landing was near. The faces of the enemies standing on the shore were already visible to the naked eye.

“Her...?”

Deneb frowned in doubt when she saw one of the people waiting on the shore. Gender did not affect magical ability, so it was not unusual for a female magician to stand on the front lines of a battle, but the enemy dressed in an armored suit and holding what looked like a grenade launcher attracted Deneb’s attention. It was not because she was a woman, but because the weapon triggered some of Deneb’s memories – she was sure she recognized it.

“That’s her!” Deneb exclaimed.

The answer to Deneb’s question arose in her subconscious and reached her conscious thought – it was the traitor disgracing the name of Sirius!

Deneb snatched her knife from her weapon belt and threw it towards the shore.

The knife flew straight towards the female magician, but just before it struck, she lost control over it and the knife fell to the cobblestone quay on which the magician stood.

Deneb specialized in melee combat because she was not very good at remote attacking magic. She really wanted to quit her duty leading the squadron and jump to the magician she had recognized as Sirius, but she restrained that desire with all her might.

"A little more... Just a little...!"

The magician she was looking at pulled the trigger of what looked like a grenade launcher. The barrel erupted fire and Deneb immediately felt it pierce the boat’s multilayered shield.

Deneb was not the only one to recognize her enemy. With the help of the built-in long range view function of her helmet, Lina saw that the boats were commanded by Vega and Deneb.

“Charlotte, Leila, you too!?”

She knew every Parasite on the boats. Her feeling upon seeing Vega and Deneb among them was not anger or distorted joy from thinking, “serves you right,” but compassion – Lina was truly good-natured.

“If they became Parasites, they should know the truth...”

But this logic was not enough to convince Lina, and her finger on the trigger was frozen by indecision. Psychologically, Lina lacked what it took to be a soldier. Though she had more than enough power, she was too soft, and she was not suitable for the occupation. The only mental quality making her a suitable soldier until now was that she would not sympathize with the enemy to the point of endangering allies, but even this trait was not all that suitable for soldiers.

The firearm Lina was holding had a thick barrel, like a grenade launcher, but the muzzle was more like a large-caliber rifle – this gave the weapon a weird look, with an unusually thick barrel for what seemed to be more of a rifle. The weapon was made weirder by the lack of rifling inside the barrel, giving the weapon some resemblance to a shotgun.

However, the weapon was not a firearm, but a magic device. It was a prototype weapon with an integrated CAD developed at Miyaki Island. Lina pulled the trigger of the device entrusted to her by its developers.

The electrical conductor at the base of the thick trunk began to create plasma. As it expanded, the pressure in the trunk increased, and the plasma tried to exit the trunk. However, the positive electric field generated by the barrel pulled electrons out of the plasma and repulsed the remaining cations, preventing them from exiting.

Once the electrons were separated from the cations, another electromagnetic field was created inside the trunk, accelerating the cations towards the barrel – the exit. At the same time, the original electric field created in the barrel was removed. The barrel was essentially turned into a miniature particle accelerator.

The cations ejected from the muzzle absorbed the released electrons, turning back into a cloud of neutral particles directed in a beam towards a target.

This weapon was a charged particle rifle. The principle was completely different than Lina’s Brionac, and it was worse in power than the Brionac. But...



“It’s quite powerful!”

The particle rifle was effective enough to excite Lina and make her forget about the depressing situation for a moment.

A beam of neutral plasma particles flew into the magic shield of Deneb’s vehicle. The barrier magic in place was effective against particles moving at up to 10 times the speed of sound. It was not nearly enough to stop the plasma, with a mass comparable to a rifle bullet, flying at a speed exceeding 100 times the speed of sound.

The ray of neutral particles pierced through the magic shield and the boat, causing an explosion of steam on the opposite side. The Parasites on Deneb’s boat all jumped into the sea. Now Lina turned the barrel towards Vega’s vehicle.

Vega used gravity magic to lift the water from the ocean and make a shield of sorts, seeming to have grasped the principle of Lina’s weapon. Lina reacted by activating gravity-neutralization magic with the thought-controlled CAD Tatsuya had given her. Lina’s magic did not interfere with the gravitational field – it overwrote it, returning the area to normal. Using gravity control magic, once can change the direction of the attraction force without changing its properties, and if Vega’s magic only changed the vector of the gravity, then Lina’s counter magic would not have had any effect. Instead, Vega changed the gravitational field in that area, allowing Lina’s magic to work.

Lina pulled the trigger of the particle rifle, and a bundle of neutral particles flew into Vega’s magic shield. However, her rank as commander of the 4th detachment was not just for show: her strength exceeded Deneb’s, and Vega’s barrier withstood the particle beam.

“That’s not all!” Lina shouted.

A moment later, the plasma that had seemingly scattered across the surface shone bright as its temperature shot up from Lina’s special magic Muspelheim.

Usually, this magic only transformed ambient air into high-energy plasma, but this time the plasma particles emitted by the particle rifle were still scattered in the area. Lina focused her magic on the area around Vega’s ship, increasing power as the affected volume decreased. Vega’s magic barrier collapsed as the area affected by Lina’s magic contacted it. At the same time, Vega and the Star Dust soldiers jumped out of the boat.

A second later, plasma swallowed the vehicle.

The heat from Lina's magic ignited the hydrogen fuel and the boat went down. Lina sighed with relief as she lowered her weapon, but she still kept her guard up, and her Mirror Shield magic reflected an infrared beam of light – Regulus's fast-firing, high-energy infrared laser bullet, Laser Sniping. Though the magic had “fast firing” in its title, the nature of the magic caused it to have about a 1 second gap between each shot.

As soon as Lina sensed the laser bullet's impact, she removed the shield and located Regulus. He was approximately 1 kilometer from the coast on the bow of the catamaran Midway. Once she found him, she restored her shield.

Lina's Mirror Shield blocked outside electromagnetic waves from getting in – it did not block particles going out and was like a one-way mirror.

Lina shot a beam of neutral particles through the mirror towards the ship.

“Huh?” Lina mumbled a moment after the shot. She had not felt the defeat of Midway after the shot.

Due to its nature, Mirror Shield blocked visible light coming from the outside, so Lina could not physically see what was going on, but Lina would hear an explosion if it reached the ship or feel psionic vibrations if the beam was stopped by a barrier. Lina quickly moved to a new position with movement magic in order to shoot straight down the laser snipers sights. She removed the mirror shield and looked at the transport ship.

“Zoe?!”

Zoe Spica stood next to Regulus on the prow of the ship. Her right arm was forward, pointing directly at Lina – she was in the process of activating Molecular Divider. However, this magic was only medium range, and would not reach Lina from 1 kilometer away.

“...clear!”

Lina once again pulled the particle rifle's trigger, sending a beam of particles forward, but about halfway to the ship, the beam dispersed. The particles ended up scattering without reaching the ship.

“I thought so!” Lina shouted.

Molecular Divider inverts the polarity of electrons, cutting molecular bonds. The electric field created in a straight line towards the particle beam inverted the polarity of the electrons present in the beam. This turned the neutral particles into positive particles that repelled each other, dispersing the beam.

Regulus jumped away from Spica as Lina aimed the particle rifle towards him. He moved forward in zigzags, using the water as a surface to prevent Lina from aiming. If Lina had been able to use Brionac, his attempts at evasion would have been useless – Lina could control Brionac’s plasma even after firing, so it was impossible to evade unless one was moving at a speed faster than Lina could follow. But the particle rifle only sent a beam in a straight line, so advanced rifle shooting skills were necessary – skills Lina did not have.

Lina threw the particle rifle to the side and pulled out a pistol – a gun with an integrated CAD. Weapons with magically increased penetration power had been produced in Japan for a long time, so Lina had asked the CAD development center staff to give her some equipment more similar to the weapons she was used to.

The transport ship began to turn away from the island, but Lina didn’t have the luxury to follow.

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A light blue car left the parking lot of Aoba clinic in Chofu with Tatsuya behind the wheel. He ignored the rules of the road and opted for flight, lifting off of the road. Minoru watched this occur through a camera in a combat quinoid that had not yet been turned into a Parasite doll.

“And so the mission begins,” Minoru muttered, seemingly talking to himself.

In reality, however, it was not a monologue – Minoru was giving the order to start to the driver of the van, who dropped him off at the curb. The driver was a member of the Kudou family assigned to Minoru.

Minoru transmitted the order to start to the other six vans by radio. In total, there were six, including the van Minoru was in. All six had parasite dolls and fighting guinoids in their cargo compartments, and though the vans were currently separated to avoid detection, they were heading towards the same destination – the hospital in which Minami lay.

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Tatsuya, ignoring the rules of the road and air traffic, flew off the public road directly, but the police did not bother to stop him and no chase was sent. The car, registered as an ordinary car – not an aircraft, had no need to keep the radio channel for aircraft open. Combined with the fact that police helicopters could not keep up with the air car and the Air Force wasn't about to send fighters to chase a car that had started flying from the main road, even if a chase had been attempted, it wouldn't have been successful. In other words, law enforcement agencies had neither the means to deliver the order or stop the pursuit whether they wanted to or not.

The car's license plate had probably been captured by the street cameras, so there was a chance that trouble would come later, but that was not important at the moment. Besides, Tatsuya still had the claim that the self-defenses forces hadn't done anything to stop Miyaki Island – Japanese Territory – from being invaded by a foreign military force. Still, Tatsuya didn't want to use this as justification for legal exemption but as a means for bargaining.

Reaching the coastline, Tatsuya put the car on course to cross Tokyo Bay and the Urag channel in order to avoid flying over land again.

Tatsuya raised the aircar's speed to 900 kilometers per hours, Tatsuya headed for Miyaki Island.

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Holding a gun in her right hand and a knife in her left, Lina stood ready, preparing to meet the oncoming Regulus. However, it was not Regulus, but Deneb who attacked first.

“Lina!”

Deneb called out to Lina, shortening her name not because they were close, but because the Parasite's conversation previously had used Lina's shortened name to reference her.

“Leila!”

Lina did not freeze from the change in enemy and changed her aim to Deneb who was jumping out of the water, rushing her in a top-down attack. Lina attacked Deneb with the weight magic Hammer, which tracks an enemy and applies pressure to a detected surface. The magic struck at Deneb from her left side, but Deneb softened the blow by using movement magic towards the right.

As this played out, Regulus began to activate Laser Sniping, but instead of activating her Mirror Shield, Lina sent a knife attached to her belt at Regulus. She was using her magic “Dancing Blades” through her thought-controlled CAD, so she didn’t even need to touch the knife with her hand – it flew out of the holster and rushed Regulus on its own.

Regulus’s concentration was broken as he was forced to dodge, and the laser bullet flew towards the sky. However, Lina’s attack was still not finished and she controlled the knife behind Regulus to strike the weapon device for Laser Sniping. Regulus threw the broken device with a knife now stuck through its hardware to the side, and as it fell into the water, the device blew up. Regulus quickly grasped the handle on his belt with his right hand and pulled – quickly turning what had been his thin belt into a rapier. The sword was not just sharp - Regulus had also added an electric shock over the entire blade.

Lina didn’t have time to continue her attack on Regulus, as now the weight magic Hammer was being used on her – and it was more powerful than magic she had used.

“Vega!?” Lina shouted.

Weight magic attacks flew at Lina one after another.

“...Your still being familiar?”

Vega still had a grudge against Lina for “betrayal.”

Lina quickly took a step backwards, but Vega followed her movement and went ashore. Holding her pistol and knife, Lina looked towards her left and right.

In front of her was Vega.

To the right, Regulus.

On the left, Deneb.

And behind them, the Star Dust soldiers-turned-Parasites began to come out onto the beach.

Despite Lina’s attempted intervention, the sabotage unit of Stars had successfully made it onto Miyaki Island.

Lina had struggled to fight the three opponents of First-magnitude Star class. With the addition of twenty Star Dust soldiers, she could not possibly cope alone.

“So, you’re also Parasites now?” Lina spoke.

Lina tried to change the situation by speaking to Vega and Deneb in her native language. Neither bothered to answer Lina, but Deneb raised her eyebrows slightly.

“Now that you are Parasites, surely you know the truth. It wasn’t me who caused the Parasites, and the idea that I have secret connections to Japan is also a false accusation!”

“If you have no connections with Japan, then why did you run here!?”

Deneb didn’t hide her passion as she spoke with anger in response to Lina.

“To escape. From you, the rioters,” Lina answered calmly. Though her heart raged towards Deneb, she suppressed her emotion and gathered her will into a fist.

“Right. Then it was a false accusation,” Vega responded.

Vega’s voice could not be called calm, but it also couldn’t be considered excited – it was more apathetic, and Vega grinned in her response, continuing.

“But now you are helping a Japanese private military organization. As an American soldier, you came out against the States.”

“Japan is a federal state. Planning an act as dishonorable as sabotage to take advantage of the New Soviet Union’s attack is unacceptable,” Lina answered.

“This was the decision made by the Pentagon – not we, simple soldiers fighting on the front line.”

“Wha-wow...”

Lina was surprised momentarily, but quickly accepted it as fact – if the government was willing to use Parasites, they should also have been willing to risk sabotage.

While Vega and Lina had their verbal struggle, the Star Dust soldiers attacked the rest of the defensive squad and slowly continued to move inland. Lina saw this, but could not offer any assistance – if she ignored the three around her, she would instantly die. Lina was trapped.

“Traitor Sirius. It’s good that you were here, because now, caught red-handed in a hostile act towards the States, we can shamelessly get rid of you!” Vega finished.

As soon as Vega finished her statement, Vega, Deneb, and Regulus – three members of Stars with the rank of First-magnitude class now merged with Parasites – simultaneously attacked Lina.

Deneb breached the peace first as she waved a large knife at Lina and used movement magic to close the distance. Lina reacted with the same magic in the same direction, keeping her distance. Realizing that she couldn't catch up, Deneb fired her pistol and Lina once again responded the same way, turning the battle into a shootout over shields.

Regulus followed Deneb, and using self-acceleration magic, he appeared in front of Lina. With his electrified blade, he struck her shield.

Stuck in place, Lina attacked Vega with gravitational magic, but Vega destroyed her gravitational field with Molecular Divider.

...more precisely, Lina's magic was interrupted because of the inconsistencies between the modification of phenomenon caused by Molecular Divider and Lina's gravitational magic encountered in the air, and the magics canceled each other out, destroying both Vega and Lina's magic.

As this was going on, Regulus continued to attack Lina's shield, and it began to tremble. The electrical surges emitted by Regulus' blade finally finished off Lina's barrier, breaking it. Deneb took her opportunity and shot Lina's left shoulder. While Lina's armored suit was able to stop the bullet from penetrating, the momentum of the bullet was transferred to her shoulder and the impact caused Lina to involuntarily drop her knife. She instantly activated Muspelheim in defense.

Vega, Deneb, and Regulus all leaped to the side to evade the generated plasma. When it dissipated, in the center of the area previously filled with high-energy plasma, Lina stood breathing heavily.

The three Parasites exchanged looks.

Lina pulled her pistol's trigger, but penetration magic was not applied to the bullet so Regulus stopped it with a magical barrier, and a Dancing Blade Lina had released earlier in the fight was knocked down by Deneb. Her two attacks stopped, Vega created a repulsive field which threw Lina back.

Lina was thrown down the road running along the cobbled promenade, and she fell onto the rocky surface of cooled lava. Vega, Deneb, and Regulus cautiously approached her, looking down at Lina.

Lina was unable to stand, barely finding the strength to climb onto one knee. Vega punched Lina back down, but despite her weakness, Lina's fighting strength had not faded. She grinned faintly.

Deneb pointed her pistol at Lina.

Regulus pointed the tip of his sword.

Lina bit her lip with regret.

But at that moment, a light blue car cut through the air and landed as if it was aimed at the three Parasites.

Vega attacked the car with her repulsive force field, but the magic dispersed before it was completed. Vega rounded her eyes, and Regulus and Deneb could hardly believe their eyes as the aero car landed about 10 meters in front of Deneb. The three had dodged the air car by jumping back to the embankment.

The driver's door opened, and Tatsuya stepped onto the Miyaki Island battlefield dressed in the Freed Suit.

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Tatsuya had flown from Chofu to Miyaki Island in 20 minutes. If he had flown at subsonic speed the entire distance, he could have made it in 10, but the flight from Chofu to the sea and over Tokyo Bay required him to go at a slower speed.

Tatsuya knew about the situation on Miyaki Island even before he arrived. He was receiving the data from the island in real time, in addition to monitoring the psion wave oscillations from Lina's fight. However, there was no magic for teleportation, so Tatsuya could not instantly move from Chofu to Miyaki Island.

Restraining his growing impatience, Tatsuya focused on controlling the aircar. A camera mounted on its nose caught sight of Miyaki Island, and without slowing down, Tatsuya headed towards the northeast coast that was now a battlefield. He didn't bother to use the runway at the airport and landed directly on the road running along the embankment where the battle was being fought. As he was landing, he

dispersed the magic of an anti-gravity spell that was trying to prevent him from landing.

There were fighters from the defense squad still on the road, so Tatsuya slammed on the breaks so as not to hit them. There were also enemies on the road, but Tatsuya didn't really care – his thought process amounted to "*if I hit them with the car, I can save time.*" Tatsuya had no doubts about his ability.

Three Parasites fled from the path of the air car by enhancing their jump with movement magic. Tatsuya could tell that they were the Parasites of First-magnitude Star class with only one glance using elemental sight.

Like the rest of Japan, driving was done on the left side of the road on Miyaki Island, but Tatsuya ignored the law and stopped on the right side of the road for his convenience. Lina was barely standing on one knee on the hardened lava next to the road.

“Lina, can you continue?” Tatsuya asked.

He had already checked Lina's state by looking, but still asked the insensitive question.

“Can,” Lina responded, not wanting to hold Tatsuya back.

With the last of her strength, Lina rose to her feet. She looked as if she was trying to stand during an earthquake, but she somehow managed to stay up.

“I will figure this out. Cover me.”

Without waiting for Lina's answer, Tatsuya turned towards the three Parasites who were now on the embankment. This was probably for the best, as Tatsuya's cold voice made her shiver all over her body as goosebumps formed on her back. She wouldn't have been able to answer even if Tatsuya had waited.

Vega used magic to push Tatsuya back with his car, but the magic was demolished before the sequence had even been fixed on the Eidos of the target. Tatsuya had released a dense flow of psions from his whole body to vanquish the spell.

“Gram Demolition?!” Vega and Deneb cried out simultaneously.

Tatsuya raised his right hand. There was no gun-shaped CAD in his hand – he just pointed his finger and activated Mist Dispersion with the fully thought-controlled CAD built into his suit. The activation time was almost zero.

He erased the magic suppression zone almost instantly.

He tore down the Data Fortification magic around the Parasites so quickly that it could not be perceived.

He cut the intermolecular bonds of Regulus' tissues in essentially no time.

The man named Regulus had been completely erased, and all that remained of the Parasite was its true body. Now Tatsuya reached out with his other hand and shot Armor Piercing Psion Bullet. He wasn't aiming at the Parasite that had recently been in Regulus and instead shot at Vega.

Vega, struck in her chest by a dense shell of psions, fell backwards and violently convulsed. Rolling down the embankment in that state, she fell back into the sea.

In the blink of an eye, Regulus had been deleted and Vega thrown from the battlefield. Deneb was frozen in shock as Tatsuya sent another Armor Piercing Psion Bullet at Deneb. She fell back.

Deneb was not the only one frozen in place – Lina lifted her helmet flap and stared, dazed, at Deneb writhing on the road. She could hardly believe her eyes – Tatsuya had instantly neutralized these three whom she had been at her limit fighting against.

“Lina, look after this woman,” Tatsuya told Lina.

He realized she was in shock and that she would now overestimate his combat power because of a misunderstanding. Tatsuya had only been able to neutralize the Parasites so quickly because of surprise, but he didn't have time to explain himself. The true body of the Parasite in Regulus had appeared, and it began its activity as an intangible life form as it searched for a new host. The real battle was now beginning.

Tatsuya concentrated psions inside his body before releasing them into the Parasite. He attacked from all six sides – front, back, left, right, top, and bottom.

The Parasite attempted to push back against the psionic currents, but realized it was impossible and tried to escape by moving away. However, pressure was being applied from the front, back, left, and right, and the top and bottom sides were closed tightly.

Surrounded by walls, the Parasite created a shell in an attempt to protect its pushionic information body, but the walls quickly ate into the shell, penetrating it. Trapped, the Parasite shrunk and hardened, mixing with the walls.

Tatsuya's psionic currents continued to converge, concentrating a progressively smaller area. Finally, all the Psions were compressed into a sphere with a 3-centimeter diameter. The sphere hung intangibly about 10 centimeters above the concrete embankment.

Tatsuya had sealed the Parasite that was recently Regulus in his Sealing Sphere.

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Miyuki and Minami followed the instructions Tatsuya gave right before he left and returned to Minami's ward. Miyuki read while sitting on the single couch while Minami continued preparing for her exams, sitting on the bed which had been raised to support a sitting position.

Miyuki, turning the electronic pages of her book, suddenly looked up.

"...he was pretty quick. Have our guards already discovered them?" Miyuki said.

"...Miyuki-sama?" Minami asked, confused.

Minami turned to Miyuki and asked for her to clarify, but Miyuki's words had mostly been her muttering to herself.

"Minami-chan, he came."

Still, Miyuki didn't ignore Minami's question.

"Who... really?!"

Minami closed her textbook program and turned off her terminal as she got out of bed. She was not in pajamas, however, so she wasn't panicking about having to change her clothes.

"Yes," Miyuki said while nodding.

Miyuki didn't answer with the name of who had arrived because Minami had of course figured it out: it could only be Minoru.

Miyuki called the security intercom, and Yuuka appeared on the small screen of the terminal.

"Miyuki-san, the company has arrived."

Before Miyuki could speak, Yuuka explained the situation that she had already figured out.

“I feel signs of Parasites from six directions,” Miyuki responded.

“...So you already knew. The sensors are saying the same thing.”

Miyuki was so ahead of ordinary magicians in her magical perception that she seemed to be at a different stage of evolution. Yuuka’s surprise was based on this prejudiced notion, but Miyuki smiled broadly after hearing Yuuka’s astonished voice.

“Shouldn’t you expect this from the next head-sama?” Miyuki said, teasing Yuuka.

“In that case, perhaps you also know where Kudou Minoru is now?” Yuuka asked, moving on.

“The response from Minoru is quite blurry. It seems he is disguising himself by both Parade and Ghost Walker.”

Miyuki’s words made it seem like trying to detect him was pointless, but her tone contrasted this and Miyuki continued trying to find Minoru.

“I don’t feel Minrou-kun’s signs from other groups, so he’s probably inside a car or other vehicle approaching from the northeast,” Miyuki explained.

“A car from the northeast? Alright, I’ll pass this information to the Juumonji family then.”

“Thank you.”

“Miyuki-san, please do not leave the ward. Even if he gets into the hospital, we’ll figure this out,” Yuuka warned.

“I understand.”

“...Then I’ve said everything. Until next time.”

Yuuka was slightly suspicious of Miyuki’s quick agreement with the situation, but she didn’t ask Miyuki about it.

When the intercom went down, Miyuki sighed a little.

“...*Onii-sama will not have time to return,*” Miyuki assessed.

Miyuki was dissatisfied with the situation but held no grudge against Tatsuya for having left the defense against Minoru’s attack.

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Minoru got out of the van about 200 meters from the hospital. There were tall buildings all around, so he could only see the highest floor of the Aoba Clinic.

At the same time as Minoru, 6 Parasite dolls left the back of the van. The other cars held the same load. In total, Minoru had prepared a fighting force of 36 parasite dolls – 15 already made in the former Ninth Laboratory, and 21 made by Minoru using the dummies in the factory in Ikoma.

The base bodies (dummies) for the Parasite dolls were gynoids originally made for military use, but these dolls were dressed in casual clothes. They each had ankle-length pants combined with various blouses, T-shirts, and summer sweaters.

Since it was daytime, pedestrians were walking around. There weren't as many out as usual because of the New Soviet Union's invasion, but some people still went out for urgent errands. By giving the Parasite dolls casual clothes, the dolls could blend in with passers-by without giving off the feeling that something was wrong.

Contrary to the goal of blending in, however, Minoru didn't bother to hide his appearance at all with magic so his beauty stood out like a sore thumb. Pedestrians passing by even stopped to stare at him as if he had descended from heaven. Minoru couldn't even walk to a hospital without attracting attention.

Suddenly, Minoru stopped.

The crowd also stopped.

Minoru spoke, looking at the big young man who blocked his way.

"Juumonji-san, could you let me pass?" Minoru asked.

"I didn't think you'd appear at this time," Juumonji responded, ignoring Minoru's request.

"I'm not a vampire, so I don't have to wait until night," Minoru answered jokingly.

"You are not an ordinary vampire, but I wouldn't say that the description doesn't fit. Vampires suck the blood of people and turn good into bad – at least, that's how it is in fantastic stories, but you are real," Katsuto said with a serious face.

"It's a shame you think that. I'm not attacking people who accidentally stopped me on my way," Minoru said.

"But now you are trying to turn one girl into something inhuman."

Minoru and Katsuto's conversation took place in front of pedestrians walking by on the street, but none of them really understood what was going on through the metaphor the conversation was using. Some of the passerby were whispering phrases like "what is this, a movie shoot?", but these were the minority. Most felt that the conversation was real and not just a figment of some story.

"Juumonji-san. Let me pass." Minoru made his request again, this time more forcefully.

"Kudou Minoru. You are under arrest."

This time Katsuto answered, but his answer more than just denied it.

"What charges?"

"Unauthorized transportation of military weapons in public."

While Katsuto was speaking, a detective behind him hidden in civilian clothes and working under the Juumonji family appeared with a police warrant.

After Katsuto's words about weapons and the appearance of the police, unrest appeared in the crowd of passerby.

"Are you talking about the Parasite dolls? Well, you caught me, but can you fight in a place with civilians?"

Minoru provoked Katsuto.

"So you plan to involve the civilians in this?!"

Katsuto created a barrier to lock Minoru in front of him as he was talking. However, Minoru switched places with one of the Parasite dolls behind him at the same time – it wasn't teleportation but Parade he had kept active through the conversation with Katsuto.

Minoru used stun magic on the detective, but Katsuto defended his subordinate with barrier magic. To do this, however, he had to release the barrier around the Parasite doll that Minoru had swapped places with, and this doll attacked Katsuto.

Katsuto's barrier collided with the doll's barrier, giving off sparks of psionic light. This Parasite doll specialized in anti-object barrier magic.

Like Parasites, Parasite dolls tended to specialize in specific magic. Though they had a lack of diversity, they were able to demonstrate powerful abilities in their field to such an extent that the doll specializing in barrier magic could resist against Katsuto.

Still, this was not enough to make it a fight on equal footing. Katsuto was forced to take his focus away from Minoru, but as soon as he became serious, he destroyed the barrier around the Parasite doll and crushed her mechanical body, being careful to not completely destroy the doll – he knew that death of the physical body of the Parasite releases the true body, and it was safe to assume that it worked the same for Parasites in machines as for Parasites in humans. Still, Katsuto couldn't leave the doll in serviceable condition, so he destroyed the head and limbs, leaving only the electronic brain and fuel cell of the gynoid.

Until this point, everything had been within Katsuto's expectations, but what happened next went beyond. The Parasite doll exploded.

The explosion itself was blocked by Katsuto's shield, but the destruction of the body meant that the Parasite had been released.

This was not the only exploding doll – other parasite dolls attacked other magicians of the Juumonji family standing in Minoru's way, and the Juumonji family could not ignore them. To stop Minoru, the Juumonji magicians hurried to neutralize the dolls.

And each of the neutralized dolls exploded.

Many Parasites were released, searching for new bodies. The non-material life forms attacked the Juumonji family as well as nearby civilians and people hiding in buildings.

Katsuto and his subordinates were forced to protect the civilians from the Parasites.

They didn't have time to chase Minoru.

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After erasing Regulus' physical body and locking the released Parasite into a Sealing Sphere, Tatsuya did the same with Deneb. Two completed Sealing Spheres hovered about 10 centimeters above the ground, and they would remain for about 12 more hours in their current state without outside interference. Further processing of the seal should be performed by specialists, so Tatsuya left the spheres to be dealt with later. During his flight to Miyaki Island, Tatsuya had asked Hanabishi Hyogo to

send a magician with sealing skills, and Tatsuya had no doubt that Hyogo would find someone who could finish the job.

“Lina, I leave this place to you. Don’t let anyone get close to the Sealing Spheres.”

Lina was fascinated by Tatsuya’s actions in dealing with the Parasites so efficiently, but she came to herself when he assigned her a task.

“Sealing Spheres? Are you talking about these things?” Lina asked.

“Yes.”

Tatsuya replied to Lina without even looking before jumping onto the jetty. Lina only saw the back of his helmet and couldn’t see his expression, but she somehow got the feeling that he had smacked his tongue.

Tatsuya ran east of the embankment chasing Vega who had fallen into the water. After being hit by Tatsuya’s Armor Piercing Psion Bullet, Vega revealed the true nature of the Parasites.

Without bothering to breathe, Vega tried to swim underwater in an arc towards the east coast of the island. Still standing on the embankment, Tatsuya targeted Vega with Mist Dispersion. As if it were a survival instinct, Vega suddenly surfaced. Tatsuya detected an increased number of psions as this happened – meaning Vega was beginning a counterattack.

When Vega had became a Parasite, her rate of activation drastically increased. Now, with her true nature fully manifested, the speed increased even further, but.

Vega’s magic was not yet completed.

The magic she was in the process of building was dispelled.

The magic that protected her body was destroyed.

And then her physical body was erased.

The substances that made up the body of Charlotte Vega were divided into individual molecules. Once the body was deleted, the molecules dispersed – some remained in their form, other were used in chemical reactions or dissolved in seawater.

Until this point, everything had gone according to Tatsuya’s expectations, but at this point he miscalculated.

The true body of the Parasite was not exposed. The body appeared after erasing the physical body it had merged with, so Tatsuya could “see” the psionic envelope covering the Parasite, but he couldn’t analyze the information body – its core. He could only feel its existence, and the Parasite drifted underwater.

This contracted the current hypothesis about the true form of the Parasites – the current belief was that the Parasite would relentlessly seek out a human body to stabilize its existence. Initially not belonging in the physical world, the Parasite was believed to be drawn to strong thoughts and emotions from people. This theory assumed that after the disappearance of the host, the Parasite would give the most importance to search for a source of psions to stabilize itself in this world, which allowed for the creation of the Parasite dolls. Therefore, Tatsuya didn’t expect the Parasite to move away from potential sources of stability.

“Is it... afraid?”

Parasite’s were also a life form, so their behavior could be an instinct for self-preservation. The Parasite might just be frightened and trying to escape, but it was fairly difficult to be certain of that.

“...no, it doesn’t matter right now,” Tatsuya convinced himself.

The invasion of Miyaki Island was not over. The strongest 3 parasites had been defeated, but more than 10 were still fighting the defense squad. Tatsuya was also concerned about hurrying back to the hospital to take care of Minoru – he was convinced that the invasion of Miyaki Island was a diversion to get him away. Though he knew Miyuki was not the subject of the approaching danger, he didn’t want to take any risks and wanted to get back to Chofu as quickly as he could.

“...do I make it right there?”

The psions were intangible particles and could only interfere or be interfered with by structurally organized nerve cells – non-systematic magic is just as effective underwater as in the air.

While Tatsuya was thinking, the Parasite that had recently been Vega began to move towards the sea, trying to escape from Tatsuya. Tatsuya instantly released a mass of psions into the sea.

The mass released towards the Parasite overtook it and flew in front, destroying almost half of its psionic sheath and core. Tatsuya sensed that its thickness had halved.

Tatsuya applied Sealing Sphere to the Parasite that had been Vega.

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Still in Minami's ward, Miyuki felt the true bodies of the Parasites appear near the hospital. She quickly turned on the intercom and called Yuuka again.

“Yuuka-san.”

“What?” Yuuka answered.

Yuuka's voice was somewhat agitated.

“The true bodies of the Parasites have been released,” Miyuki said.

“...understood.”

“At this rate, civilians will suffer. Yuuka-san, please take your subordinates and seal the Parasites outside,” Miyuki ordered.

“But there will be no protection inside the hospital,” Yuuka protested.

“If ordinary people become victims, the antimagic movement will rise again – and we have finally calmed it down with peaceful magic projects.”

“But...”

“If the enemy gets inside, I'll think of something,” Miyuki reassured Yuuka.

“...fine. I understand,” Yuuka responded.

On the small display, Yuuka nodded reluctantly.

“You're right, Miyuki-san. I will seal the Parasites first so the city dwellers do not suffer. I leave the hospital to you for now.”

“I will try to hold out until you return, Yuuka-san,” Miyuki said modestly.

But despite Miyuki's modest words, Yuuka understood that she did not see Minoru as a threat.

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Focusing his magic on remaining hidden, Minoru made his way toward the main entrance of the hospital without being detected. He was joined there by four Parasite dolls who had made it past the Juumonji guards. Suddenly, about 10 magicians ran out of the hospital.

Minoru intuitively understood that the Yotuba would be the hospital's last line of defense, so he carefully directed his magical perception inside the hospital. He only used passive detection, not wanting to risk detection by using psions to actively search.

“Only Miyuki-san is left...?”

Miyuki was not hiding her presence, so he was able to detect her with passive detection. Minoru had expected only Tatsuya to leave the hospital, and Miyuki staying with Minami was within his expectations. He had seen some of her abilities in Nara, but he was not naïve enough to think that that had been Miyuki's full strength.

“Still, compared to Tatsuya-san...”

...she should not be such a strong opponent. Based on the current situation, Minoru assessed his chances of a successful invasion.

The hospital doors remained open as if inviting Minoru in, and there were no more signs that someone would come out of them. The Yotuba magicians were directing all their attention toward the released Parasites.

Minoru had not wanted to take the civilians hostage. He wished the Yotuba luck in sealing the Parasites while he penetrated the hospital, concealing both himself and the Parasite dolls with his magic.

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The Tsukuba branch of the Yotuba family specialized in mental interference magic, and among the people led by Yuuka, eight people had mastered methods of mental defense. These eight surrounded Yuuka, forming a circle (or more accurately, and octagon) with Yuuka in the center.

These eight people separated themselves by a regular distance and turned to face away from Yuuka.

The magician Northwest of Yuuka said “Ken.”

The magician in the West continued: “Da.”

The magicians to the Southwest, South, and Southeast of Yuuka followed in their order:

“Kon.”

“Ri.”

“Son.”

To the East and Northeast:

“Sin.”

“Gon.”

And finally, the magician in the North finished with:

“Kan.”

A barrier from mental interference magic appeared from using the ancient magic of the “Eight Trigrams”: Sky, Water, Earth, Wind, Thunder, Mountain, and Water.

Yuuka was at the center of the barrier.

The barrier was not just a barrier to defend against mental interference magic: it was an altar that both protected the spellcasters inside and increased the effectiveness of the magic from these spellcasters.

Yuuka took out a small piece of paper from her purse. It was cut to have a square center, square protrusions on the left and right, and a triangular protrusion on its top. The bottom was cut into two rectangles connected by the top. It was an amulet formed to be a paper doll, abstractly symbolizing a person. Yuuka placed the amulet between the index and middle fingers of her left hand, holding it to her face.



Yuuka managed the bracelet-CAD on her left wrist with her right hand to cast her magic. A sequence of magic was projected from Yuuka to the amulet doll, and the amulet jumped out from Yuuka's hand after the sequence of magic to fly towards a Parasite. It quickly sucked in the information body core of the Parasite, sealing it inside.

The amulet trembled, dancing in the wind before falling back down into the octagonal barrier formed from Mental Interference magic.

Yuuka quickly pulled out another amulet, but the Parasites were able to sense danger and attacked Yuuka with lighting magic.

But the physical magic was stopped by Katsuto.

"Ara, thank you," Yuuka said.

"The Juumonji family will protect you. Tsukuba-san, focus on sealing," Katsuto responded.

Katsuto and Yuuka had met a few days ago, so without wasting time on additional greetings, they each continued to perform their jobs in order to deal with the released Parasites.

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Tatsuya took the Sealing Sphere hovering over the surface of the sea and returned to Lina. The battle between the defense detachment and the Parasites from Star Dust was ongoing, but the situation was fairly stable and Tatsuya didn't need to hurry to help. If Tatsuya and Lina joined the fighting, it would end in less than 5 minutes.

"...or would it be better to finish it all at once?"

While Tatsuya pondered this, a small armored car drove up the road leading from the airfield. The door opened and Hanabishi Hyogo stepped out of the driver's seat.

"Tatsuya-sama, sorry for making you wait."

"No... Hyogo-san, you are just in time," Tatsuya replied while raising the helmet flap of his Freed Suit.

After greeting Hyogo, Tatsuya looked at the back of the armored car – Hyogo should have come with the spellcaster requested by him to seal the Parasites.

The rear right door of the armored car opened, and the person who stepped out turned out to be a girl younger than Tatsuya dressed in a bright dress unsuitable for the battlefield.

“Ayako?”

Tatsuya’s voice expressed his surprise.

There were 2 types of Yotsuba magicians: magicians with high aptitude for mental interference, and magicians with powerful and unique magic. Tatsuya and Ayako were both of the second type, unsuitable for using mental interference magic, but it should have been necessary to seal the Parasites.

“Hello, Tatsuya-san. Hey, Fumiya! Tatsuya-san is waiting. Hurry up and come out faster!”

Ayako’s words after her greeting instantly dispelled the doubts. Fumiya’s special magic “Direct Pain” used mental interference magic, and after he had been forced to retreat from Minoru, he had learned a sealing spell for the Parasites from the main house.

Fumiya, moving slowly for some reason, finally emerged from the armored car. However, Tatsuya did not immediately know how to greet him.

“Fumiya… that is, Yami?”

“Call me Yami, please…”

With a face the same color as his shirt (that is, red), Fumiya answered with a Tatsuya with a timid voice.

“I see… Yami, what is with this appearance?”

“I’ve already said I don’t like it!”

Fumiya replied in an angry, dissatisfied, and almost tearful voice.

“Nothing can be done because it’s necessary for the sealing spell.”

Ayako’s voice was tinged with detachment – she had already been forced to deal with plenty of complaints from Fumiya.

“Needed… for sealing?”

Tatsuya turned to Ayako as he asked his question. He was short on time, but he couldn't help but ask.

"It seems that more than 5 spellcasters are needed to use the original magic for sealing the Parasites."

Ayako said this as both a response to Tatsuya and encouragement for Fumiya.

"But our staff is currently located in Tokyo, so we have a shortage of people," Ayako continued.

"I see. So Fumiya came alone?"

Fumiya was the heir to the Kuroba branch of the Yotuba family. He was initially supposed to help his father take command of the Kuroba magicians, so the fact that he was sent to Miyaki Island showed how much his magical power was appreciated as a candidate for the head of the Yotuba.

Still, based only on this, it was still unclear why Fumiya was dressed as he was. "Apparently certain types of ancient magic have an increased effect when wearing clothes of the opposite sex."

Dressing as the opposite sex – a woman in male clothes, or a man in female clothes.

"So now we have Yami in the form of a temple priestess?"

"Yes."

Fumiya's clothing consisted of a white kimono top and a red hakama shit bottom. He wore sandals over white socks, and his wig was square like the one he usually used, but had long, straight hair tied behind his back.

No matter how you looked at it, he was a beautiful priestess-san.

"Yes. The head-sama said that since there are not enough people, I have to strengthen my magic like this," Fumiya said, somewhat dejectedly.

"Then... I offer my condolences."

Tatsuya was unwittingly serious as he apologized to Fumiya. He had sent a request for a sealing wizard, but his request had resulted in Fumiya becoming a toy in Maya's hands.

"...no, Tatsuya-niisan, you aren't guilty. Besides, I'm just doing my job!"

Fumiya absolved Tatsuya's guilt while encouraging himself. It was clear from his appearance that he hoped to complete the sealing as quickly as possible to be freed from this cosplay sooner.

"I see. Then seal these three first," Tatsuya said.

It was necessary to preserve Fumiya's motivation, at least for the start, so Tatsuya had him start with the weakened ones. Tatsuya showed him to the spheres in which the Parasites that had once merged with Regulus, Vega, and Deneb were locked.

"Tatsuya-san... did you do this?" Ayako asked.

Both Ayako and Fumiya stared at the Sealing Spheres curiously.

"But they look pretty sealed...?"

Tatsuya shook his head at Fumiya's question.

"After about 6 hours, the effect of these Sealing Spheres will disappear. It is also inconvenient to store and transport them like this."

"Indeed... well, I understand."

Fumiya went back to the back-left door of the armored car and came back with a wooden box which looked like a first aid kit. Inside were 16 Kokeshi dolls without painted faces. The armored car also held two more boxes just like the first.

Fumiya took one Kokeshi doll out of the box.

Ayako pulled a red mat out of a gym bag and spread it over the road.

"Starting."

Fumiya placed the Kokeshi doll in front of the Sealing Sphere, sat on the mat, and stretched his hand to his CAD – a long and narrow mobile terminal attached to his belt.

Tatsuya and Lina carefully stepped away from the twins.

"Tatsuya..."

Lina turned towards Tatsuya and spoke in a depressed voice. Tatsuya silently looked toward her and asked her to continue.

"And Fumiya...?"

For a while after her escape, Lina lived under the Kuroba family's protection, so she was already acquainted with Fumiya.

"...because he wants to change clothes quickly?"

"Let's hurry and neutralize the parasites still in the battle so Fumiya can seal them quickly," Tatsuya responded.

There were still 20 Parasites. Tatsuya replied to Lina with unconcealed pity on his face, and the tense atmosphere was finally becoming calmer with Fumiya's appearance.

However, the tense voice Tatsuya heard from his communication device smashed his ease to pieces.

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Minoru and the Parasite dolls who had infiltrated Aoba Clinic climbed to the 4th floor using the stairs to get to Minami's ward. Nobody had tried to stop Minoru during his trip from the entrance to the stairs, or while he climbed the stairs to the fourth floor corridor. He hadn't even seen any signs of being noticed.

"...is this a trap?"

Minoru found it hard to believe that there weren't precautions in place against Minoru, and he hadn't seen any patients or other hospital staff either. But if it was a trap, where was it? Minoru couldn't think of anything that could stop him.

Minoru only detected the presence of Miyuki and Minami inside Minami's ward, so it seemed to him like they were just telling him to come in and pick up Minami. Minoru was suspicious, but also a little relieved at the situation.

...premonition.

Minoru felt a slight pang of worry for a moment, and the steps felt heavy after it. The Parasite dolls had no feelings about the now sinister atmosphere, but they also slowed down after Minoru decelerated.

Minoru and the dolls took almost 3 times longer than they should have to get to the chamber. However, there was no indication that he was being attacked from within – his worries seemed for naught.

Minoru took a deep breath and ordered one of the Parasite dolls to enter. Opening the unlocked door, the doll entered the chamber. A moment later, Minoru glimpsed a sparkling white ice field.

“I am standing in a lifeless, icy world of absolute silence.”

This illusion was pressed on Minoru’s mind with such force that his heart felt ready to stop – so much so that it took him much longer than it should have to notice that the Parasite doll entering the ward had stopped.

The Parasite was not just frozen physically.

The Parasite’s true body – the difference between the fighting gynoids and the parasite dolls – had also stopped. The spiritual life form was frozen.

As if thrown back, the Parasite doll returned to the corridor and crashed into the opposite wall of the door. It fell to the floor of the corridor. Minoru didn’t know if the electronic brain inside the gynoid had been frozen, preventing body control, but it was clear that the Parasite doll was out of action.

The door to the chamber remained open, but Minoru did not feel an invitation to enter. However, there were no signs that someone would leave, so he would only seal his fate by waiting – either Tatsuya or the magicians from the guard could return. Minoru didn’t have much confidence that the Parasites on Miyaki Island would delay Tatsuya for long, and the chance of them defeating him was zero. Minoru’s main enemy was time, and he ordered the remaining three Parasite dolls to enter. Then, focusing all his strength into Parade and Ghost Walker, he followed.

As he entered, he heard a whisper:

“Cocytus.”

Minoru once again felt the lifeless, silent world of ice. The illusion of Parade was frozen; Ghost Walker was useless. If Parade had not protected Minoru, he intuitively knew that his body... no, his very soul would have frozen. The Parasite dolls, without any such protection, fell onto the floor without any sign of external damage.

When the vessels shaped like women became ordinary lifeless dolls, Minoru found himself facing Miyuki – he was frozen, and Miyuki calm.

Miyuki did not move.

Minoru could not move.

Miyuki was the first to speak.

“What an eyesore,” Miyuki said as she waved her right hand. The Parasite dolls that had fallen to the floor were pushed into the corner of the room.

“What was that, just now...?” Minoru asked, moaning. He was clearly not asking about the movement magic Miyuki had used to move the dolls. Miyuki also understood this and answered the real question.

“Cocytus: magic to freeze the mind. My trump card.”

Miyuki’s answer was cold, but it contained no hostility.

“Magic to freeze the mind...?” Minoru muttered, stunned. He couldn’t quite believe the events that had taken place as he entered the room, and his question was really asking “what does this mean?!”, but Miyuki didn’t answer that question.

“Minoru-kun. This is your miscalculation.”

“Miscalculation?”

“You thought I was weaker than Tatsuya-sama, right?”

“.....”

Minoru had no answer.

“I am weaker than Tatsuya-sama.”

Minoru unwittingly swallowed saliva. He was not frozen anymore by his shock after Miyuki’s magic, but by the tension her words brought.

“However, I am the natural enemy for the parasites. Jobs such as these... I am better suited for,” Miyuki said. The last of her friendless remaining in her tone disappeared as she said her next words.

“I can kill the true body of the Parasite.”

The Parasites were a spiritual life form and could not resist against Cocytus.

“Magic that freezes the mind... magic that freezes it to death?” Minoru asked.

“Cocytus is magic that stops the mind.”

Physically, it is impossible to achieve absolute zero – heat transfers from higher heat to lower heat, so as a substance approaches absolute zero, heat can no long be

removed. However, Miyuki's magic Cocytus could completely freeze the mind, and once frozen, the mind could never again be set in motion.

"Mental absolute zero...?" Minoru asked, still struggling to accept the events.

"A mind without material connections – without a physical body – cannot hold its information body and will eventually disappear... it will eventually just cease to exist."

"....."

Once again, Minoru was at a loss for words. Miyuki was telling the truth – Minoru was forced to admit he had miscalculated. Leading Tatsuya away was not enough – when planning a diversion, it was more important to lead Miyuki away.

"Minoru-kun. Please get out of here."

"Huh?!"

Minoru was not the only one surprised at this suggestion. Minami, next to Miyuki and watching the conversation unfold, could not hide her surprise.

"Your capture... it's the work of Tatsuya-sama. It is enough for me just to protect Minami-chan."

"....."

"Run away Minoru-kun. I will not chase you."

Even without giving a proper purpose, Minoru was sure Miyuki was telling the truth. If he retreated, he would be able to escape, and Minoru found himself considering the act, however cowardly. However...

"...I cannot."

Minoru couldn't accept Miyuki's offer.

"I came here to help Minami-san. I can not retreat for my own benefit."

Minoru realized he was being foolish, but he was not sure he would get another opportunity to "save" Minami.

"...perhaps this is the last chance..."

"...if I run away now, I will no longer be able to reach Minami..."

Minoru's reasoning didn't allow him to make a wise choice.

"... I see. I'm sorry."

Miyuki held her right hand towards Minoru. Cocytus did not need a gesture; she was giving Minoru the chance to change his mind, trying to push him through intimidation. She was not worried about Minoru attacking in response – she had sensed her previous Cocytus had affected Minoru, so his magical abilities were temporarily deteriorated.

But Minoru still didn't run away.

All of Miyuki's emotions disappeared from her face, and she stood with her arm extended. But right before she activated Cocytus, Minami shouted.

"Please stop!"

Minami called for Miyuki to stop and ran to Minoru, covering him as she spread her arms to the side. She got in Miyuki's way to defend Minoru.

"Minami chan, what are you..." Miyuki mumbled, astonished. Her eyes were round and she was frozen in place, but she quickly recovered.

She did not try to persuade Minami – Minami herself didn't understand why she was doing what she was doing.

...also, it wasn't clear how Minoru would act.

Miyuki started to activate Cocytus, but she was forced to ask Minami to stop instead.

"Minami-chan, don't do that!"

Minami was trying to activate her barrier magic.

"Miyuki-sama, please! Stop!"

"Why..."

Miyuki didn't know what to do – if she used magic, so would Minami. Minami's magic blocked physical events, and it couldn't stop Cocytus. However, Minami's magic calculation area had been overheated, and if she tried to use magic again... it could even deprive her of her life.

"Minami-san, I'm sorry!"

Minoru took advantage of Miyuki's indecision. He stretched his arm around Minami's waist and jumped back with her, slipping through the air towards the stairs. Miyuki quickly followed him out of the ward, but she stopped when she saw Minami's glance from over Minoru's shoulder.

If Miyuki attacked Minoru, Minami would defend him from it. Miyuki feared the consequences which bound her thinking.

Minoru escaped from the hospital through the window of the landing, but Miyuki did not see it.

She ran back to the ward, and after making several mistakes while operating the terminal, finally managed to call Tatsuya's communicator.

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"Onii-sama, Minami-chan...!"

Miyuki's desperate cry returned tension to Tatsuya's heart right as he calmed down.

"Miyuki, what happened?" he hurried to ask, trying to calm down as he held back the trepidation that came along with the tension.

"Minami-chan is with Minoru-kun!"

"He could still kidnap her!?" Tatsuya exclaimed.

"Yes! No!"

Miyuki's response was completely meaningless. She was clearly very worried.

"Miyuki, I'll be back as soon as possible."

Tatsuya didn't further interrogate Miyuki.

"Do you hear me, Miyuki? I'm coming back to you."

"...Yes."

Tatsuya's words diminished Miyuki's panic, if only a little.

"Miyuki. I'm leaving now."

"Yes, okay!"

After finishing his conversation with Miyuki, Tatsuya faced Lina.

“Tatsuya, go,” Lina spoke first. “I’ll figure it out here. You hurry to Miyuki.”

“I’ll rely on you then, Lina.”

Without saying anything to Ayako or Fumiya, Tatsuya ran to the aircar. It pulled forward as soon as he sat in the driver’s seat, and Ayako turned at the sound.

As Ayako, Lina, and Hyogo silently watched, the light-blue care flew off towards Tokyo.

(To be continued in the “Chase” chapter...)

(Grammar and structure originally edited by PieBob851 with light edits by englishmuffins10)

Volume 27 Afterword

So, that was the 27th volume of the "The Irregular at Magic Highschool", titled "Sudden Change". Did you like it?

I haven't had the chance to compare with something, so this may be prejudice, but it seems to me that I have problems with naming both the entire series and individual arcs. I usually come up the names after writing a general plot, but before writing the text, I always again painfully reflect on the name of the arc after reflecting on the plot.

There have been cases when I changed the name of the arc in this process. For example, at the stage of writing the plot of "City Insurrection", it had the name "Intrigue in Kyoto". There was also a case when writing the plot that there was not a single good option for the name of the arc, so it was with the "The beginning of unrest." I also wondered whether to give the arch of the "Ten Master Clans Conference" the title "Problems for the Ten Main Clans", but in the end I left the name "Ten Master Clans Conference".

This time I suffered the most. At the stage of writing 24 volumes, I completely revised the plot of the entire series and realized that the names of the arcs prepared in advance were no longer suitable for use. After the revision and prior to the direct writing of the text, I was tormented: would it be possible to make volumes 26 and 27 a two-part arc called "Invasion"? Or call it "Treason"? Or "Sudden Change"?

Time was running out, and it was necessary to decide whether the 26th volume would go to print under the title "Invasion (Part 1)". As a result, the idea of a two-volume arc was abandoned. We decided to use the name "Sudden Change", because the name "Betrayal" was too much of a spoiler. To be honest, I was tormented by the agony of the choice, even after writing the first version of the text.

Conversely, the title of the next arch "Chase" was coined without any suffering. I think everyone who read the current volume "Sudden Turn" understands why this title was chosen. The name for the next arc is also almost settled, but it also contains a spoiler, so for now this is a secret.

It was decided that the next arc "Chase" will consist of two volumes. I think you already understand that the main topic will be Tatsuya's chase for Minoru, but his classmates from the First School will also have a lot of activity. The story line Masaki, Akane and Liu Li Lei is also far from complete. The arch "chase" will be filled with a variety of events.

I hope that you will read to the end of the " The Irregular at Magic Highschool ", the plot of which continues to evolve rapidly.

Thank you again for continuing to read us. (Sato Tsutomu)