

# 魔法科高校の 劣等生

1

入学編(上)

The irregular  
high school  
at magic

佐島勤

Tsutomo Sato

illustration 石田可奈  
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電撃文庫

# 魔法科高校の少男少女

入学編上

魔  
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女

1

The irregular  
at magic high school

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「早上好」

## 司波达也

しば・たつや

司波兄妹的兄长。国立大学附属第一高校的新生。  
一年E班。被戏称为『杂草(weed)』的三科生。  
擅长领域是魔法术式辅助演算机(CAD)的设计  
等等的技术系。

## 西城雷欧哈鲁特

さいじょう・れおんはると

爱称『雷欧』。和达也同属一年E班。  
父亲是混血，母亲是四分之一混血。  
擅长『硬化魔法』。

「没错！」

『そろそろお兄様がお戻りになる時間ね……』

## 司波深雪

しば・みゆき

司波兄妹の妹。一年A組所属。魔法科高校に主席で入学したエリート。『花冠(ブルーム)』と呼ばれる一科生徒で、得意分野は『冷却魔法』。唯一の愛すべき欠点は『重度のプラコン』。



# 千葉エリカ

ちば・えりか

達也のクラスメイト。明るい性格で、周囲も巻き込むトラブルメーカー。実家は剣技と魔法の複合戦闘術である『剣術』の大家である。

「……見た？」

「見えた。すまない」

「服部副会長、俺と模擬戦をしませんか」

「……いいだろう。  
身の程を弁えることの必要性を、  
たっぷり教えてやる」

## 服部副会長少丞範蔵

はっとり・きょうぶしょうじょう・はんぞう

二年生。生徒会副会長。学籍登録名  
は「服部副会長」。『一科生(ブルーム)』  
であることにプライドを持っている。



## 中条あづさ

なかじょう・あづさ

二年生。生徒会書記。

## 渡辺摩利

わたなべ・まい

三年生。風紀委員会委員長。

## 市原鈴音

いちはら・すずね

三年生。生徒会会計。

## 七草真由美

しちぐさ・まゆみ

三年生。第一高校の生徒会会长。



## 魔法科高校とは——。

現代の魔法使い「魔術師」を養成することを目的とした国策高等学校の通称。全国に九校設置されている。設置場所は次の通り。

第一高校：八王子（関東・東京）

第三高校：金沢（北陸・石川）

第五高校：仙台（東北・宮城）

第七高校：高知（四国・高知）

第九高校：熊本（九州・熊本）

第二高校：西宮（近畿・兵庫）

第四高校：浜松（東海・静岡）

第六高校：出雲（山陰・島根）

第八高校：小樽（北海道）

この内、第一から第三までが一学年定員二百名で一科・二科制度を採っている（第三高校では一科のことを「専科」、二科のことを「普通科」と呼んでいる）。一科生と二科生の違いは指導教員の有無であり、教員の個人指導を受けられない点を除けば、一科と二科のカリキュラムは同一となっている。第四から第九は一学年定員百名であり、全員に指導教員が付くが、その質は第一～第三に比べてワンランク落ちると言われている。各校のカリキュラムは基本的に国立魔法大学の定める要綱に従っているが、特色ある校風を掲げる学校もある。例えば第三高校は戦闘系の魔法実技を重視しており、それと対照的に、第四高校は魔法工学的に見て意義の高い複雑で工程の多い魔法を重視している。魔法の方向性だけでなく、それが使用される環境で特色が表れている学校もある。第七高校は水上・海上で実用性の高い魔法を通常のカリキュラムとは別に教えており、第八高校は寒冷地帯や高山地帯といった厳しい生活環境において有益な魔法の野外実習を取り入れている。

## **Magic High Schools are—**

Nationally established high schools for the purpose of nurturing "Magicians", the practitioners of modern magic.

There are a total of nine such schools set up in the country.

The locations of the premises are as stated.

First High School: Hachioji (Kanto, Tokyo)

Second High School: Nishinomiya (Kinki, Hyogo)

Third High School: Kanazawa (Hokuriku, Ishikawa)

Fourth High School: Hamamatsu (Tokai, Shizuoka)

Fifth High School: Sendai (Tohoku, Miyagi)

Sixth High School: Izumo (Sanin, Shimane)

Seventh High School: Kochi (Shikoku, Kochi)

Eighth High School: Otaru (Hokkaido)

Ninth High School: Kumamoto (Kyushu, Kumamoto)

Among these, the First to Third schools have a fixed quota of two hundred students who are divided into two courses, Course 1 and Course 2 (The Third High School terms them as "Specialized Course" and "Normal Course"). The difference between Course 1 and Course 2 students lies in the availability of instructors; if we take away the availability of a personal instructor, then the curriculum between the two courses are the same.

While the Fourth to Ninth schools, each with a quota of a hundred students, provide instructors to all the students, the level of their instructors is a notch lower compared to those of the First to Third schools. Even though various schools follow the curriculum guidelines set by the National University of Magic, there are also schools that have their own special characteristics. For example, the Third High School places emphasis on practical battle magic, and, in contrast, the Fourth High School places emphasis on a large number of highly complex manufacturing magic which are valuable in areas of magic engineering. Aside from the different focuses in the types of magic, there are also schools that specialize in magic usable in a particular environment. The

Seventh High School teaches, separate from the normal curriculum, high level magic that has practical usability above water or seas, while the Eighth High School integrates practical outdoor lessons on magic useful in regions of extreme cold or mountainous regions where the living environments are extreme.

# Glossary

## 用語解説

### 魔法科高校

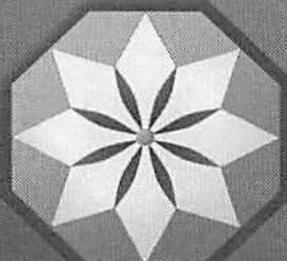
国立魔法大学付属高校の通称。全国に九校設置されている。  
この内、第一から第三までが一学年定員二百名で一科・二科制度を探っている。

### ブルーム、ウイード

第一高校における一科生、二科生の格差を表す隠語。  
一科生の制服の左胸には八枚花弁のエンブレムが刺繡されているが、  
二科生の制服にはこれが無い。

### CAD〔シー・エー・ディー〕

魔法発動を簡略化させるデバイス。内部には魔法のプログラムが  
記録されている。特化型、汎用型などタイプ・形状は様々。



一科生のエンブレム

### フォア・リーブス・テクノロジー〔FLT〕

国内CADメーカーの一つ。元々完成品よりも魔法工学部品で有名だったが、  
シルバー・モデルの開発により一躍CADメーカーとしての知名度が増した。

### トーラス・シルバー

僅か一年の間に特化型CADのソフトウェアを十年は進歩させたと称えられる天才技術者。

### エイドス〔個別情報体〕

元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてエイドスとは、事象に付随する情報体のことで、「世界」にその「事象」が存在することの記録で、「事象」が「世界」に記す足跡とも言える。  
現代魔法学における「魔法」の定義は、エイドスを改変することによって、  
その本体である「事象」を改変する技術とされている。

### イデア〔情報体次元〕

元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてイデアとは、エイドスが記録される  
プラットフォームのこと。魔法の一次的形態は、このイデアというプラットフォームに  
魔法式を出力して、そこに記録されているエイドスを書き換える技術である。

### 起動式

魔法の設計図であり、魔法を構築するためのプログラム。  
CADには起動式のデータが圧縮保存されており、  
魔法師から流し込まれたサイオン波を展開したデータに従って信号化し、魔法師に返す。

### サイオン(想子)

心靈現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、認識や思考結果を記録する情報素子のこと。  
現代魔法の理論的基盤であるエイドス、現代魔法の根幹を支える技術である起動式や魔法式は  
サイオンで構築された情報体である。

### プシオン(靈子)

心靈現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、その存在は確認されているがその正体、  
その機能については未だ解明されていない。  
一般的な魔法師は、活性化したプシオンを「感じる」ことができるにとどまる。

# Charactor

## キャラクター紹介

### ◆光井ほのか

みついい・ほのか  
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。

### ◆北山 雪

きたやま・しづく  
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。

### ◆森崎 駿

もりさき・しゅん  
1年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。

### ◆七草真由美

さんぐさ・まゆみ  
3年生。生徒会会長。

### ◆服部刑部少丞範蔵

はっとり・ぎょうぶしょうじょう・はんぞう  
2年生。生徒会副会長。

### 市原鈴音

いちはら・すずね  
3年生。生徒会会計。

### ◆中条あづさ

なかじょう・あづさ  
2年生。生徒会書記。

### 渡辺摩利

わたなべ・まり  
風紀委員会委員長。

### 辰巳鋼太郎

たつみ・こうたろう  
3年生。風紀委員。

### 沢木 碧

さわき・みどり  
2年生。風紀委員。

### 桐原武明

きりはら・たけあき  
2年生。剣術部所属。  
関東剣術大会中等部のチャンピオン。

### 壬生紗耶香

みぶ・さやか  
2年生。剣道部所属。  
中等部剣道大会女子部の全国二位。

### ◆十文字克人

じゅうもんじ・かつと  
3年生。全クラブ活動の  
統括組織である部活連の会頭。

### ◆小野 達

おの・はるか  
1年AE組の総合カウンセラー。

### ◆九重八雲

ここのえ・やくも  
古式魔法「忍術」の使い手。達也の体術の師匠。

Shiba Tatsuya

## 司波達也

しば・たつや

1年E組。『雑草』と揶揄  
される二科生(劣等生)。



Shiba Miyuki

## 司波深雪

しば・みゆき

1年A組。

主席入学した達也の妹。



Saijou Leonhart

## 西城レオンハルト

さいじょう・れおんはると

1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。



Chiba Erika

## 千葉エリカ

ちば・えりか

1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。



Shibata Mizuki

## 柴田美月

しばた・みづき

1年E組。達也のクラスメイト。



## *Chapter 0*

Magic.

It is a product of neither legends nor fairy tales, but instead has become a technology of reality since a time unknown to people.

The first verifiable record dates back to AD 1999.

The incident, in which police officers possessing special powers stopped a nuclear act of terror carried out by a fanatic group in order to fulfill the prophecy of destroying humanity, became the first verifiable case of magic in modern times.

Initially, that unusual ability was termed "Supernatural Power". An ability that was present in a person as a result of a purely inherent, sudden mutation, whose systematization as a technology which could be spread among the masses was thought to be an impossible thing.

That was an erroneous notion.

Through the research of "Supernatural Power" by both the influential Eastern and Western nations, the existence of people who were imparted "Magic" was gradually made public. It became possible to reproduce "Supernatural Power" through "Magic".

Of course, talent is required to do that. However, only those who are blessed with a high aptitude can attain a mastery that can put them at a professional level, much like those who possess ability in the fine arts or sciences.

Supernatural power became a technology systematized through magic, while magic became a technical skill. A "Supernatural Power User" became a "Magic Technician".

Skilled Magic Technicians, capable of suppressing even nuclear weapons, are powerful weapons to a country.

At the end of the 21st century — in the year 2095 -- the various nations of the world, which are far from unified, are locked in a race to nurture Magic Technicians.

The First High School is affiliated with the National University of Magic. It is an upper-level, magic institution known to send the most graduates to the National University of Magic every year.

At the same time, it is also an elite school that churns out the largest number of excellent Magic Technicians (in short, Magicians).

With regard to magic education, there is no official stance on providing an equal opportunity in education.

This country does not have the luxury to do so.

Furthermore, childish, idealistic debates revolving around the clear disparity that exists between the capable and the incapable are not tolerated.

Thoroughly talent-driven.

Harshly competence-oriented.

That's the world of magic.

In this school where only elites are accepted, right at the start of enrollment, the students are already divided into high achievers and low achievers.

Even if two individuals are both freshmen, they are not necessarily equal.

Even if they are blood-related siblings.

# Chapter 1

"I can't accept this."

"You're still going on about that...?"

It was the day of the school entrance ceremony, but it was still early morning, two hours before the start of the ceremony.

The freshmen whose hearts were filled with anticipation at the future their new life would bring, along with their even more exultant parents, still numbered few and far between.

Standing before the auditorium where the entrance ceremony was going to take place, a man and woman pair, clad in brand new uniforms, was for some reason locked in a verbal disagreement.

They were both freshmen, yet their uniforms were strangely and distinctively different.

We are not talking about the difference between slacks and skirt, nor the difference between a man and woman's attire.

But rather, on the female student's chest was the eight-petaled flower design of the First High School's emblem.

That emblem was not present on the male student's blazer.

"Onii-sama, why are you a reserve? Didn't you top the entrance exams? Typically speaking, the one who should become the freshman class representative should be you, not me!"

"Putting aside the question of where you got hold of the entrance exam results... since this is a Magic High School, it's obvious that they'd place more emphasis on practical magic skills rather than on paper tests, right?

Miyuki, you are well aware of the extent of my practical abilities, aren't you? I'm quite surprised that I even got accepted here as a Course 2 student."

It was a scene where the male student was trying to pacify the female student who had been lashing out angrily with her sharp tongue. From the fact that the female student had called the male student 'Onii-sama', we can probably presume that they are siblings. It is also not unlikely that they are closely-related relatives.

If they are siblings...

Then they are siblings who don't resemble each other at all.

On one hand, anyone who sets eyes on the younger sister will no doubt be captivated by her; ten out of ten people, or even a hundred out of hundred people, will agree that she is a lovely, beautiful girl.

On the other hand, for the elder brother, other than his erect back and piercing eyes, nothing in his ordinary appearance could be said to be attention-grabbing.

"How can you be so unsure of yourself?! Even when there's no one who's a match for you in studies and taijutsu! The truth is, even for magic-"

The younger sister reprimanded the elder brother for his weak proclamation, but,

"Miyuki!"

As he called out her name in an exceptionally strong tone, Miyuki sobered up and shut her mouth.

"You understand right? Even if you say that, it can't be helped."

"...I apologize."

"Miyuki..."

He put his hand on her lowered head and slowly stroked her glossy black hair, which had not a single frizz in it. "Now, what should I do to fix her mood..." the young man who was the elder brother pondered with a miserable face.

"...I'm really happy you feel that way. I always feel that I'm being saved whenever you get angry in my place."

"Liar."

"I'm not lying."

"Liar. Onii-sama, you're always scolding me..."

"I'm not lying, I said. But, I too hold you in my thoughts the same way you do about me."

"Onii-sama... 'hold me in your thoughts', you say..."

(...Huh?)

For some reason, the young woman blushed.

Even though the young man could feel that a seed of dissonance that he

could not ignore had been sowed, in order to resolve the most immediate problem, he shelved that doubt for now.

"Even if you back out of giving the reply address, there is no way I'll be selected as a replacement. If you back out at this eleventh hour, you won't be able to avoid a blemish on your appraisal.

You do understand that, right? Miyuki, you are a smart girl."

"But..."

"Besides, Miyuki, I'm looking forward to it.

Show this useless big brother of yours the glorious moment of his cute little sister."

"Onii-sama is not a useless big brother!

...But, I understand. Please pardon me for being willful."

"There's nothing to apologize for. I've never thought of that as being willful."

"Well then, I'll be taking my leave.

...Please watch me, Onii-sama."

"Yeah, break a leg. I'll be looking forward to your performance."

"By all means, see you later." The young woman bowed and disappeared into the auditorium. After ascertaining that she had left, the young man breathed a sigh of relief.

(Well... what should I do now?)

The young man who had escorted his little sister, who had reluctantly become the freshman class representative, to school before the ceremony rehearsal started, was now at a loss as to how he should spend the remaining two hours before the start of the school ceremony.





The main building, the practice building, and an experiment building made up three of the school buildings.

An auditorium/gymnasium whose internal layout can be altered via transformation machinery. A library with three levels above ground and two levels below. Two small gymnasiums. A preparation building equipped with a changing room, a shower room, an equipment-storage room, and club rooms. The canteen, the cafeteria, and the procurement department are in another building. And above all that, the various large and small annexes constructed make the design of First High School appear more like the campus of a suburban university than a typical high school.

The young man looked left and right as he walked along a path paved with a layer of bricks, searching for a place to rest until it was time for him to enter the auditorium.

The ID card that would allow him to use the school facilities would only be given out after the school entrance ceremony ended.

In order to avoid a scene of chaos, the open cafe that was meant to serve visitors was also closed today.

After five minutes of walking around while referring to the campus map displayed on his mobile terminal, beyond a row of trees, which were positioned in such a way that couldn't escape his field of vision, he spotted a bench in the courtyard.

*It's a good thing that it's not raining*, a frivolous thought entered his mind as he sat down on the three-man bench, opened his mobile terminal, and started accessing a book portal that he liked.

This courtyard seems to be a shortcut from the preparation building to the auditorium.

They were probably roped in by the management of the entrance ceremony to help out. That is, the current students (upperclassmen to the young man) who were passing the young man at a small distance. All of them had the same eight-petaled flower emblem on the left side of their chests.

As they passed by, a trail of artless, ill-meaning words escaped from their backs.

—Isn't that kid a Weed?

—He's early... he sure is enthusiastic for a reserve.

—In the end, he's just a spare.

A conversation, which he didn't really want to hear, flowed into his ears. The word, Weed, refers to a Course 2 student.

The students who have the emblem design of an eight-petaled flower on the left side chest area of their blazers are called "**Blooms**", while the Course 2 students who don't have that are likened to weeds that have no blooming flowers, and are sneered upon as "**Weeds**".

The quota for the freshmen in this school is two hundred.

Among them, one hundred of them enter this school as Course 2 students.

The First High School, which is affiliated with the National University of Magic, is an institution established under national policy for the purpose of nurturing Magic Technicians.

In exchange for a granted budget from the country, it has the obligation to produce definite results.

Every year, this school produces over a hundred graduates who either enter the University of Magic or enroll in a Magic Technical Institute of Specialized Higher Training.

While it's a pity, the fact is that magic education is a trial-and-error thing. Accidents, which go beyond the level of minor mishaps, can easily happen directly through magic slip-ups from practice training and experiments. Even while the students are aware of the dangers involved, one will bet one's future on one's own talent in magic and the possibility that exists in oneself, and walk the path to become a Magician.

When there are only a handful who possess such talent, and that talent is highly valued by society, few would throw it away, even more so for the young men and women who have yet to reach their individual maturity, rendering them unable to pursue a road outside of a 'brilliant future'.

Another fact, as a consequence of such a belief system getting fixed inside of them, is that, many children have been burdened with 'wounds' from that belief system.

Thanks to the accumulation of know-how, most accidents resulting in deaths or handicapped bodies have been eradicated.

However, one's talent in magic can be easily impaired via a psychological component.

Every year, the number of students who have dropped out as a result of being unable to use magic due to the shock of an accident is by no means

small.

The ones who fill the gap are the "Course 2 students".

Upon enrolling in schools, they are allowed to participate in classes, use the facilities and access data, but they lack the most important component in their studies, that they are not entitled to receive personal instruction in practical magic skills.

They can only learn on their own, and show results through their own efforts.

If they can't do that, they will have to graduate from a normal high school.

If one does not graduate from a magic high school, one cannot pursue studies in the university of magic.

Given that the number of people who can teach magic is very insufficient, it is unavoidable that the more talented ones be given priority. Right from the beginning, Course 2 students are accepted under the condition that no one will teach them.

Publicly, it is forbidden to call the Course 2 students "Weeds".

However, in part, one can almost say that this has become a well-known derogatory term for them, a term that is rooted even within the Course 2 students themselves. Even the Course 2 students have to recognize that they are no more than spares.

That was the same for the young man.

That was why there was no need for them to have spoken that aloud on purpose for him to realize that. He had entered this school while being fully aware of that.

*What an unnecessary favor from them,* the young man thought as he turned his attention to the book portal that had loaded on his data terminal.

◊ ◊ ◊

On the open computer terminal, a clock was displayed.

His consciousness, which had been immersed in reading, returned to reality.

There were another thirty minutes until the school entrance ceremony.

"Are you a new student? It's almost time for the ceremony."

Around the same time he was about to stand up, having logged out of one of his favorite reading portals and closed his computer terminal, a voice came from above him.

The first thing that came into view was the skirt of a uniform. Following that, wrapping around a left arm was a wide bracelet.

Broader and thinner than a normal bracelet, it was the latest model of a CAD that was made with fashion in mind.

CAD (Casting Assistance Device) —— spell support processor.

In this country, it is also known as a (Magic Operator).

Something that replaces tools such as spell chants, talismans, hand seals, magic circles, magic tomes, and other traditional methods of invoking magic, it is a tool of necessity for any modern Magic Technician.

These days, there is no research into using a single word, or a single phrase to invoke magic. When used in conjunction with talismans and magic circles and others, the shortest invocation will take around ten seconds, while the longer ones can take above a minute depending on the magic, and in place of that, the easy-to-use CAD can reduce that to under a second.

While it is possible for magic to be invoked without a CAD, the number of Magic Technicians who do not use CADs, which can rapidly accelerate the invocation of magic, equates to nil. Among those who have dedicated themselves to the specialization of one particular skill in bringing about supernatural phenomena with just their will alone, the so-called "Supernatural Power Users", the ones who seek the speed and stability that an activation system can bring and love using the CAD have become the mainstream crowd.

However, it does not mean that anyone who possesses a CAD can use magic.

The CAD only provides the activation sequence, and it is the ability of the Magic Technician himself that invokes the magic.

In other words, CADs are red herrings to those who can't use magic, and are only carried by those involved with magic.

And then, according to the young man's memory, the students who were allowed to persistently carry a CAD within the school compounds were

either executive members of the student council or particular committee members.

"Thank you, I'll be on my way."

On the left chest area of the other party, was of course the eight-petaled flower emblem.

The bulge from the chest that was pushing up the blazer did not stir any part of his consciousness.

He did not hide his left chest.

He did not do such a cowardly act.

But, it didn't mean that there was no ill feeling of any sort.

He could not imagine himself getting actively involved with a high achiever who appeared to be a student council executive member.

"I'm impressed. A screen type?"

However, the other person seemed to think otherwise. While looking at the film screen of the mobile data terminal that the young man had folded in three folds with his hand, the person grinned, as if delighted at something.

At this juncture, the young man finally looked at the face of that person.

The face of that person was twenty centimeters lower than the height of the young man who had stood up from the bench.

The young man's height was a hundred and seventy-five centimeters, as such, even for a female, she was short.

She was just at the right height to ascertain that he was a Course 2 student with her line of sight.

But her gaze did not have the slightest hint of belittlement, and was filled with a pure, innocent wonder instead.

"Our school disallows the use of virtual display terminals. But yet, it's regrettable that many students still use the virtual display type.

However, you are using the screen type even before enrolling into the school."

"The virtual type is not suitable for reading."

Anyone could tell that his terminal was a seasoned one with one look, so she did not bother asking further.

The young man's reply that sounded like an excuse was a fruit of careful

thought, since if he was excessively blunt, it would become more of a disadvantage to his younger sister than himself, as he was certain that his younger sister, who was the freshman representative, would probably be chosen by the student council.

Upon hearing that calculated response, the upperclassman became even more impressed.

"Instead of watching animation, you read huh? This is even rarer.

I also prefer book-based information to animation-based ones, so I'm kind of happy."

Indeed, while this is an era where virtual content is preferred over text content, book readers are not really that rare.

Somehow, it seemed like this upperclassman had an uncommonly sociable personality. Judging from her tone and speech, she appeared to be getting friendlier.

"Ahh, I beg your pardon. I'm the student council president of the First High School, Saegusa Mayumi. Written as 'seven grass', read as Saegusa. Nice to meet you."

Even though she added a wink at the end, there was not a hint of wonder in her tone. With a pretty girl's looks and together with a well-proportioned body despite her small frame, she radiated such an alluring atmosphere that it would not be surprising if newly matriculated male students misunderstood her intentions.

But yet, on hearing her self-introduction, the young man seemed to frown involuntarily.

"A number... and to top it off, a 'Saegusa (Seven Grass)'."

A Magician's ability is greatly influenced by heredity.

A Magician's qualities are greatly related to his lineage.

And in this country, the houses that possess a superior blood lineage in magic carry a number in their family name by tradition.

Among the numbered Magician lineages that carry a superior hereditary factor, the Saegusa is one of the two houses deemed to be the most powerful in this country currently. That young woman who was the student council president of this school was probably of their direct descent. In other words, she was an elite among elites. It might even be apt to say that she was the exact opposite of him.

Holding back a bitter mutter, and somehow managing to bring out a courteous smile, the young man returned his name.

"I'm, no, my name is Shiba Tatsuya."

"Shiba Tatsuya-kun... I see. You are that Shiba-kun huh..."

The eyes of the student council president went wide with surprise, after which, she nodded meaningfully.

Well, at any rate, while he was the elder brother of the freshman representative, the top entry student Shiba Miyuki, he was a dunce who flat-out couldn't use any magic. The 'that' was probably referring to that.

Thinking about that, Tatsuya politely kept quiet.

"Among the teachers, you have been quite a hot topic,"

Said Mayumi after a cheerful smile, appearing unconcerned with Tatsuya's silence.

It was probably due to how rare it was to have a pair of siblings who were that much of a far cry from each other, thought Tatsuya.

However, no such incredulity nor negative emotions could be sensed from her. He could feel no sign of ridicule embedded in that smile.

He could only feel a friendly positivity emanating from Mayumi's smile.

"Out of a hundred marks, the average mark of all seven subjects in your entrance exam was ninety-six.

Especially, the best were Magic Theory and Magic Engineering. Even though the average mark of those who passed was no more than seventy, you got a perfect grade without a hitch for both subjects that had essay-based questions.

It's an unheard of record high."

It wasn't his imagination at hearing those unreserved praises, thought Tatsuya. The reason was because,

"Those are merely paper test results. They are just data inside an information system."

In the appraisal of magic high school students, more emphasis was given to practical results, and not paper test results.

While a bitter civil smile surfaced on Tatsuya, he pointed to his own left chest.



It was not possible for the student council president to not understand. However, Mayumi shook her head with a smile at Tatsuya's words. Not vertically, but to the left and right.

"That kind of terrific score, at the very least, I won't be able to reproduce that, you know?"

I may not look like it, but I'm really much stronger in theory-based subjects. If my entrance exam had the same questions, I definitely wouldn't be able to score such a high mark like you, Shiba-kun."

"It's about time... please excuse me."

Tatsuya took his leave from Mayumi, who seemed to have something more to say, and turned his back towards her without waiting for her reply.

Somewhere in his heart, he feared the smiling face of Mayumi, and at what might happen if he were to continue talking with her.

Even though he was not conscious of what he was afraid of.

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As a result of the conversation with the student council president, by the time Tatsuya entered the auditorium, more than half the seats were already filled up.

Since there was no seat designation, be it the first row, the last row, right at the center, or right at the edge, he was free to sit anywhere.

Even now, depending on the school, there are schools that follow the traditional style of arranging the seats by class that will be announced prior to the entrance ceremony, but as for this school, one can only ascertain one's class upon receiving one's ID card.

Therefore, the seats were not arranged in class order.

However, there was clearly an order to the distribution of seats for the freshmen.

The first half at the front would be taken up by the Blooms. The students who wore an eight-petaled flower emblem on their left chest. The freshmen who would be able to receive the full benefits of the curriculum of this school.

The second half at the back would be taken up by the Weeds. The students whose left chest area was left blank. The freshmen who were only allowed to enroll in this school as reserves.

Even when they were the same freshmen, who were becoming the students of this school on the very same day, they were cleanly divided into a group with the emblem and a group without it.

And this was not something that was enforced.

(The people who were the most conscious of the discrimination accepted the discrimination, huh...)

It was certainly a kind of common sense in itself.

Without the intention of going against the flow openly, Tatsuya chose at his own discretion an empty seat near the center of the last one-third rows and sat down.

He turned his eyes to the clock on the wall.

Another twenty minutes more.

He couldn't access any site in that auditorium where electronic communication was restricted. The data saved in his terminal was also no longer new information to him, and more importantly, it was forbidden to open a terminal in this place.

Tatsuya tried thinking about his sister who should be doing her final rehearsal at this time... and shook his head.

That little sister wouldn't become flustered right before the main event.

In the end, Tatsuya, who did nothing, adjusted and sat himself upright on the hard seat and closed his eyes. Just as he was about to slip into a snooze,

"Er, is the seat beside you occupied?"

A voice called out.

He opened his eyes, and just as he thought, the voice had been directed at him.

As expected from the voice, it was a female student.

"Help yourself."

Even though he was bewildered why she purposely chose to sit beside a random male student, despite the fact that there were still many empty seats, on top of the seats here being made large enough with comfort in mind, the other party was a young woman with a slender build (note that

this is referring to the horizontal aspect), and thus, Tatsuya did not feel any unease with her sitting beside him. Rather, it was much more comfortable than if a filthy muscle block were to sit beside him.

Thinking about that, Tatsuya gave a polite nod.

Thank you, the young woman nodded as she took her seat.

Beside her, three other young women sat down one after another.

I see, Tatsuya acknowledged to himself.

It seemed like they were looking for a place that could accommodate all four of them sitting together.

They are probably friends, though it's quite rare to see four friends making it into a difficult school like this one and to be in Course 2 together on top of that, thought Tatsuya. It won't be strange even if one of them were a high achiever, he felt — but it didn't matter to him anyhow.

"Er..."

The voice called out to Tatsuya again, who had turned back to facing the front after having no further interest in the same year student beside him whom he had just met by chance.

What on earth does she want?

Clearly, she wasn't an acquaintance, and neither did he knock against her on the elbow nor on the foot.

If Tatsuya were to say it himself, he was sitting in a good posture.

He shouldn't have done anything that would warrant a complaint but —

"I'm Shibata Mizuki. Nice to meet you."

Unexpectedly, she introduced herself, in a seemingly timid tone, to Tatsuya who cocked his head. Even though it could be dangerous to judge one by appearance, she didn't seem to be the type who was good at impressing others.

She probably forced herself to do it, judged Tatsuya. She might have done it with the thought that they would need to help each other since they were both disadvantaged Course 2 students.

"I'm Shiba Tatsuya. Nice to meet you too."

Upon returning a soft introduction as he thought about that, the eyes beyond those large lenses appeared relieved.

In this era, it was quite rare for girls to wear glasses.

Since the middle of the twenty-first century, as a consequence of the vision correction procedure becoming widespread, the ailment known as myopia had become a thing of the past in this country.

Unless one was born with a hereditary form of vision abnormality at a serious level or such, one would not need any vision correction tool, and even in the event that one would need it, it was more common for people to affix ten-year long persistently worn contact lenses that were harmless to the body.

If she was wearing glasses despite this, it could be because it was her hobby, a fashion accessory, or due to —

(Over-sensitivity to spirit particle emission, huh...)

Just from a quick look, he could tell that there was no degree in the lenses. At the very least, he knew that they were not used for vision correction. From his impression of this young woman, rather than wearing them for fashion, it was more probable that she was wearing those glasses because of a particular need, Tatsuya thought naturally.

"Over-sensitivity to spirit particle emission" refers to a condition of the body where one can see spirit particle emission without conscious effort, and cannot shut them out with conscious effort, in other words, a type of disorder where complete cognizant control cannot be achieved. Thus, it was not really an illness, nor a handicap.

It was a disorder where one's senses were excessively sharp.

Pushion (Spirit Particles) and Psion (Thought Particles). Both were particles observed in "Para-Psychological Phenomena" — which included magic as well — comprised of non-physical entities that neither corresponded to Fermions, particles that make up the composition of matter, nor were they the same as Bosons, which bring about the interaction between matter. Psion were particle manifestations of intention and thought, while Pushion could be thought of as particle manifestations of the emotions brought about by intention and thought. (A pity that this was still at a hypothetical stage.)

Normally, it was Psion that was used in magic, and in the technology systems of modern magic, emphasis was placed on the control of Psion. Magicians first started from learning how to manipulate Psion.

People who suffered from "over-sensitivity to spirit particle emission", a

hereditary disorder, showed symptoms of being oversensitive to spirit particle emission — non-physical light generated depending on the activity of Pushion.

Those who were visually exposed to spirit particle emission would have their emotional state affected. Consequently, Pushion were hypothesized to be particles formed by emotions, and as a result, a person suffering from "over-sensitivity to spirit particle emission" tended to be susceptible to the breakdown of his or her mental stability.

Fundamentally, to prevent that, it required the control of Pushion sensitivity, and for those who were unable to do that, they would require a technology aid. One of these aids were glasses made from a special kind of lenses known as "Aura Cut Coating Lenses".

In reality, to Magicians, "over-sensitivity to spirit particle emission" was not that rare of a condition. Since a Magician's sensitivity to Pushion and sensitivity to Psion were more or less directly proportional, the number of Magicians who consciously manipulated Psion and were troubled by being oversensitive to the radiation of spirit particles fell on the higher side. One could even say that it was something that could not be helped.

However, it would indeed be rare to see a person who had it as a disorder such that he or she needed to constantly block the spirit particle emission with glasses. It would not be much of a concern if it was because of a lesser manipulative ability, but, if it was due to an extremely superior sensitivity, then it would be bad news for Tatsuya. (Though it would be the opposite for the person in question.)

Tatsuya had a secret.

It was a secret that could not be uncovered from his outward appearance alone, and as such, not of concern, but, if she did have those special eyes that would allow her to sense Pushion and Psion as if they were completely visible to her, his secret might be discovered by random chance.

—He would have to be much more alert and act cautiously whenever she was around.

"I'm Chiba Erika. Nice to meet you, Shiba-kun."

"Nice to meet you too."

The voice of the young woman sitting beside Mizuki cut off Tatsuya's thoughts.

But that was a welcome interruption.

Tatsuya's look had unconsciously turned into a stare, and Mizuki's bashfulness was pretty much approaching its limit, but it had gone unnoticed by Tatsuya.

"But, can I say that this is an interesting coincidence?"

Different from her friend, Erika appeared to be an extrovert and of an unreserved type.

Her short, bright hair and her distinct facial features amplified the impression of her being a lively girl.

"What is?"

"Well, you know, we are Shiba, Shibata, and Chiba right? Don't they rhyme somehow? Though they are a little different."

"...I see."

He could understand what she meant by that.

(But still, Chiba huh... another numbered one?[\[3\]](#) I didn't know that the Chiba House had a daughter by the name of "Erika", but it's possible that she's of collateral descent...)

As he thought about that,

*really interesting,*

a somewhat out-of-place laugh escaped from him, but it was not to the extent that drew cold looks from those around him.

After the remaining two students on the other side of Erika had finished introducing themselves, Tatsuya felt like satisfying his trivial curiosity.

"Were the four of you from the same middle school?"

Erika's reply was an unexpected one.

"Nope, all of us just met for the first time."

Tatsuya's surprised look might have been a strange one, for Erika started giggling as she explained.

"I didn't know where the place was and I was staring at the information board. That's when Mizuki called out to me."

"...Information board?"

That's strange, thought Tatsuya. The data for the school entrance ceremony included the location of the venue, and had been sent to all the new

students. By using the LPS (Local Positioning System), a standard feature in a mobile terminal, even if a new student didn't read the information board, or remember any of the information, one shouldn't lose one's way.

"The three of us didn't bring our data terminals."

"Well, the virtual-screen models are banned and I had the school entrance guide stored in mine."

"We managed to luck into this school after all. It wouldn't make sense to get marked off right at the school entrance ceremony."

"I forgot mine actually."

"So that's the reason for you, huh..."

He really couldn't accept it. It's your own school entrance ceremony; at least verify the location of the venue before coming, he thought honestly to himself, but didn't say a word.

There was no need to stir up any meaningless trouble — thinking about that, Tatsuya restrained himself.

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Miyuki's reply address was outstanding as expected.

Tatsuya never had the slightest thought that his little sister would fumble at something like this.

Even though she was fired up and included a number of pretty dangerous phrases like "everyone alike", "as a single body", "aside from magic" or "in an integrated manner", she managed to set them up properly and they didn't sound thorny at all.

Her openness, innocence, and modesty, coupled with her lovely, beautiful appearance, had captured the hearts of not just the guys, the freshmen, but the upperclassmen as well.

Miyuki would probably be surrounded by boisterousness from tomorrow onward.

That was not an unusual thing.

Using the society's standards, one could call Tatsuya a siscon from the way he pampered her. He wanted to commend her immediately, but unfortunately, what followed immediately after the ceremony was the

issuing of the ID cards.

Since the individual cards were not made beforehand, the arrangement was to have each and every person go to a certain place to personally have their data written into the cards meant for use within the school premises, so whichever counter they went to, the procedure could be completed, but here, a wall naturally appeared in Tatsuya's heart.

Miyuki probably, undoubtedly, skipped this step; as the freshman representative, she had probably already been conferred with this card.

And right now, in the midst of the visitors and student crowd.

"Shiba-kun, which class are you in?"

Erika, with a face that could not hide her excitement, asked Tatsuya, who was the last in line among the group (in other words, he was practicing the 'ladies first' rule).

"Class E."

On hearing Tatsuya's reply,

"Yay! We are in the same class."

Erika hopped up and down happily. She seemed to be overdoing it but, "I am in the same class as well."

With just the accompanying action missing, Mizuki also had a similar face, so this might be a natural reaction for freshmen.

"I'm in class F."

"I'm in class G."

Even so, it was not like the reactions of the remaining two were cold and unfeeling. After all, they were in high spirits about enrolling into a high school.

This school has eight year one classes, and each class has twenty-five students.

In this respect, they were equal.

In the first place, the Weeds who were not expected to bloom into flowers were placed in classes E to H, and the Blooms who were expected to bloom into large flowers were never mixed among them.

The two girls who were assigned to different classes naturally went along their way. It seemed like the two of them were headed towards their

homerooms. Even though classes A-D and classes E-H were located on different levels, it did not appear that their enthusiasm was any less from that.

It was not like all the Course 2 students would stick around together in one group.

There were also a number of them who would straighten their backs, and be proud about getting accepted into a reputable school.

Since this school was also ranked among the top in the country in areas not pertaining to magic.

The two of them probably went off to search for new friends among those whom they would spend the rest of the year with.

"What shall we do? Shall we go take a look at our homeroom as well?"

Erika asked as she looked up at the face of Tatsuya. While Mizuki didn't ask, she was also probably looking up at Tatsuya.

Save for a few schools who were continuing the old traditions, these days, high schools did not employ the system of having homeroom teachers.

Administrative circulars did not need to be handed out one by one, and besides, there was not that much extra budget to waste on such human resources, so the circulars were distributed through the terminals that were connected throughout the entire school.

A system of having one terminal for school use assigned to each individual had already been in existence decades ago.

Except for individual instruction or practical lessons, almost everything was done using the data terminals.

If more care were needed, counselors who held expertise in multiple disciplines would be assigned by the school.

So, the reason homerooms were needed was for the convenience of practical and trial lessons. When practical and trial lessons ended within time, so as not to have a time surplus, they needed somewhere to hold a certain number of people. (Notwithstanding, detention was a daily affair.)

Besides, with the personal terminal system, it also made some things very convenient.

No matter what background people came from, once the time they spent in the same room became long, they would mingle with one another naturally.

By dispensing with the homeroom teacher system, the bonds between classmates tend to strengthen.

At any rate, if one wanted to make new friends, going to the homeroom was the fastest route to that. But, Tatsuya shook his head at Erika's invitation.

"Sorry. I'm meeting up with my little sister."

There were no lessons nor further things to be communicated to them for today.

Tatsuya had an agreement with Miyuki to go back together immediately after the procedures were done.

"Heehh... if it's Shiba-kun's little sister, then she must be really cute right?"

On hearing Erika's thoughtful and questioning murmur, Tatsuya was troubled as to how he should answer her.

If it's his little sister, then she must be cute. What could that mean? thought Tatsuya. He felt that he couldn't quite connect the cause and effect well.

Fortunately, he didn't really need to force himself to answer that.

"Could your little sister be... the representative of the freshmen, Shiba Miyuki-san?"

Since Mizuki had asked a more primitive question.

This time round, there was no need for him to hesitate. A nod from Tatsuya was enough to ascertain the answer to that question.

"Eh? Really? Then, are you twins?"

The question from Erika was a natural one. To Tatsuya, it was a question that he had heard since young.

"I have often been asked that but we are not twins. I was born in April while she was born in March. If I were born one month earlier or she were born one month later, then we wouldn't be in the same school year."

"Hmm... I guess that really makes things complicated huh?"

With a little sister who was a high achiever in the same school year, it was bound to be complicated, but Erika did not ask that with any bad intent. Tatsuya smiled and let the question slide.

"That aside, it's surprising that you can tell. Shiba is not such a rare family name after all."

On hearing Tatsuya's counter question, the two young ladies smiled faintly.  
"No no, it's pretty rare."

However, the way she said it gave off a considerably different feel. In contrast to Erika's smile, which was mixed with a sense of wryness,  
"Your features look alike..."

Mizuki's reserved smile appeared to lack confidence.

"Do we look alike, I wonder?"

Tatsuya's head did not turn at Mizuki's words. In the same manner as Erika's words just now, as if his highlighting tone had taken root, Mizuki's words felt unreal to him.

Rather, he couldn't believe them.

Even if one didn't actively look for the good points in Miyuki, she was a rare beauty. Even if you took away all her superfluous talents, just by being there, she would not be able to help but gather attention -- A born idol. No, a star.

Looking at his little sister, he could understand that the idiom, "God does not give two gifts", was but an unpleasant lie.

Conversely, was he himself above the norm, or above average, perhaps? Tatsuya evaluated himself.

During middle school, to an onlooker, while love letters (to Tatsuya, they appeared as fan letters) were shoved to his little sister, Tatsuya had never once received such a thing.

Even if it were only partially, they should still inherit the same genes, but even Tatsuya had doubted not just once or twice whether they were blood-related or not.

"If you put it that way... uhn, you do look alike. Shiba-kun is quite the hunk as well. It just kind of feels like your features can't resemble any more than that."

Just as Erika replied to Tatsuya's query, Mizuki also nodded in agreement.

"'Hunk' you said, which obsolete word from which era is that... and doesn't that mean if you take away my face, there's no resemblance in us right?"

Feeling-wise, Erika's words might be a little difficult to understand, but it seemed like it was not just their faces that looked alike. After Tatsuya had interpreted as such, he made a dull jab at her.

"That's not it. Hmm, how should I put it..."

It seemed like Erika couldn't quite express it as well either.

If not for Mizuki's rescue boat, she would probably still be fumbling for a while.

"It's your aura. Your dignified features look alike. As expected of siblings."

"That's right! Aura, it's your aura."

Slapping her own lap, Erika gave a strong nod as well.

This time, it was Tatsuya's turn to smile wryly.

"Chiba-san... aren't you someone who gets carried away easily?"

Carried away? You're so cruel, she started protesting but he let it slide. From her tone, it was not like Erika was really flaring up at his comment.

"That aside, Shibata-san, it's amazing for you to be able to tell by our aura... Your eyes must be really good."

But it was Erika who jumped at his words with a deep tone woven into them.

"Eh? Mizuki is wearing glasses you know?"

"I don't mean that. Besides, Shibata-san's glasses have no degree in them right?"

Huh? Erika peered into Mizuki's glasses with a bewildered face.

On the other side of those lenses, Mizuki's eyes widened and hardened.

Was she surprised at being seen through, or was she chagrined at a secret of hers being discovered? Whichever it was, it seemed to Tatsuya that it was something of no consequence to her.

As to why she had made such a face, he had no chance to inquire about it.

The time was just up. And it was probably for the best for now.

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"Onii-sama, sorry for the wait."

From behind Tatsuya and the rest, who were talking at a corner near the exit of the auditorium, the voice of the person whom he was waiting for called out.

Miyuki, who was surrounded by a crowd, slipped out from there.

Initially, Tatsuya felt that she was a little early, but thinking about his little sister's character again, it was perhaps just about time.

Even though she wasn't one who would shy away from socialization, it was undeniable that she had a tendency to be obsessively displeased with flattery and compliments. While you could say that she was behaving like a kid, since young, there had been no lack of opportunities for her to receive praise, and among them, the times when such compliments were coated with a mix of jealousy and envy numbered not just a handful.

If you think about that, then it was quite understandable that she would be somewhat suspicious of the adulation she received. You can even say that she was bearing it well for today.

*"You were quick"* was what he intended to say as he turned around, but even though the words remained the same as planned, his intonation turned into a questioning one.

Behind the one he had expected, was an accompanying one whom he didn't.

"Hello Shiba-kun. We meet again."

In response to that amiable, disarming smiling face and words, Tatsuya lowered his head without saying anything.

Despite his inadequate acknowledgement to her courteousness, the smile of the Student Council President, Saegusa Mayumi, did not give way in the slightest. Perhaps, it was a type of poker face of hers, or perhaps, this was something inborn in this young lady who was more senior in age.

Whichever it was, Tatsuya, who had only just met her, could not tell.

But, more than the elder brother's strange response to the student council president, his little sister appeared to be bothered by the two young ladies who had snuggled up (?) intimately to her big brother from beside him.

"Onii-sama, they are..."

Before explaining her own situation on why she was not alone, Miyuki was seeking out an explanation on why Tatsuya was not alone. Even though he was a little taken aback by her abruptness, he had nothing to hide. Tatsuya answered without a second's delay.

"This is Shibata Mizuki-san. And that is Chiba Erika-san. We're in the same class."



"I see... isn't it a little too soon to be dating your classmates?"

With her adorable head tilted to the side, *it's not like I have something against it*, Miyuki's face seemed to say as she asked. Her lips formed a lady-like smile. But, her eyes were not smiling.

Oh my oh my, thought Tatsuya.

It seems like immediately after the ceremony, she has been bombarded with flattery from left and right, setting her on edge, resulting in plenty of accumulated stress.

"There's no way that could happen right, Miyuki? We were just chatting while waiting for you.

You are being rude to both of them, aren't you?"

His little sister's pouting face looked cute to him, but to not give her own name after getting introduced to the other party might not look favorable for her reputation in front of the upperclassmen and the same year students. On seeing Tatsuya's slightly reproachful eyes, a look of resignation flashed across her face for an instant, and following that, Miyuki fixed up an even more gracious smile on her face.

"Good day, Shibata-san, Chiba-san. I am Shiba Miyuki.

I'm also a freshman just like Onii-sama, so I look forward to being in your care."

"I am Shibata Mizuki. Same here, I also look forward to being in your care."

"Nice to meet you. You can just call me Erika. Can I call you Miyuki?"

"Yes, please do. It'll be hard to distinguish between me and my brother from our family name."

The three young women introduced themselves to one another again.

The greetings exchanged between Miyuki and Mizuki seemed appropriate for people who have met for the first time. But for Erika, right from the start, she was surprisingly (if this is the right way to put it) friendly.

However, only Tatsuya felt bewildered at Erika's friendly manner of speaking.

There was no sign of Miyuki being bothered by the almost overly-familiar behavior from her nod.

"Ah-ha, Miyuki, I didn't expect you to be so sociable from your outward

appearance."

"You are just as open as you appeared to be. Nice to meet you, Erika."

After getting exasperated by all the flattery and compliments, it was understandable that she would be quite fond of Erika's frank attitude, but it seemed like both of them had somehow acquired a mutual understanding beyond that. Miyuki and Erika were both exchanging unreserved smiles with each other. While Tatsuya could not help but felt left behind, it would not do to remain rooted here. Since the group with the student council president who had followed his little sister were of the same crowd, they weren't really obstructing anyone, but because of this, if they continued to stand around here, they would become an obstruction to people who would want to pass through.

"Miyuki. Are you done with your business with the student council? If you are not, I can go kill some time myself, you know?"

"It's fine."

The one who had replied to Tatsuya's question and suggestion was the other party.

"I'm here just to say hello for today.

Miyuki-san... can I call you that as well?"

"Ah, yes."

As Mayumi addressed her, Miyuki nodded, her unreserved smile replaced by a solemn expression.

"Well then Miyuki-san, we'll catch up on another day."

Mayumi bade goodbye lightly with a smiling face and started to make her exit out of the auditorium. However, one of the accompanying male students at the back called Mayumi to a stop. On his chest, blooming proudly as if it were a natural thing, was an eight-petaled flower emblem.

"But President, what about the schedule on our side..."

"We didn't really make an appointment beforehand. If she already has another engagement, she should give that priority right?"

After the male student, who appeared to want to persist further, was restrained by her eyes, Mayumi gave a meaningful smile to Miyuki and Tatsuya.

"Well then Miyuki-san, I shall take my leave. Shiba-kun as well, I'd love to

catch up with you one of these days."

After bidding them off again, Mayumi left. Following that, the male student who was following behind her turned around, and he glared at Tatsuya so hard as if one could hear his tongue clicking.

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"...Now, shall we go back?"

While he had somehow managed to invoke the displeasure of not just the upperclassmen but the student council executive members when he had just enrolled into the school, it was something quite beyond his control. Of course, it was not like he was going to experience a smooth-sailing life where he could just brood over things like that. Despite having less than a full sixteen years of life experiences, Tatsuya had already experienced negativity of such degree.

"I'm sorry, Onii-sama. Because of me, people are getting a bad impression..."

"It's nothing you need to apologize for."

Without letting the distressed-looking Miyuki finish her words, Tatsuya brought his hand up and placed it on Miyuki's head from the side with a small knock. As he continued to stroke her hair in a combing fashion, her downcast face became tinged with an enraptured shade. To any onlooker, this pair of siblings appeared to be approaching a dangerous boundary, but perhaps, still withholding their reservations as a consequence of having just met the siblings, Mizuki, and Erika as well, said nothing about that.

"Well, since we are all here, why don't we go have a cup of tea?"

"Sounds great! There seems to be a nice cake shop around."

In other words, it was a teatime invitation.

There was no need to ask them whether their families were waiting for them. Asking such a thing would probably be a needless consideration. It was the same for Tatsuya and Miyuki.

That aside, Tatsuya had something else to ask. In truth, it was really an insignificant thing, but it was something that would gnaw at him if he didn't ask.

"You didn't check up on where the school entrance ceremony would be held, and yet you know where a cake shop is?"

It might be a question of a slightly teasing nature.

"Of course! It's something important, isn't it?"

But Erika nodded confidently without the slightest bit of hesitation.

"Of course', huh..."

His acknowledgement turned into a moan. But, as if it were somebody else's business, Tatsuya thought that someone would receive the brunt of that.

"Onii-sama, what do you think?"

But it seemed like Tatsuya was the only one shocked at Erika's rash remarks.

Even Miyuki did not appear to have paid heed to the lack of common sense in prioritizing a confectionary over the ceremony venue. —Though in the first place, Miyuki was not aware of the details of the whole story.

"Well, sounds good. After all, we just got acquainted with one another. Be it the same gender, or the same year, we won't find another friend too many."

Even though he said that, he had never really put much thought into his agreeing response. There was no particularly pressing matter awaiting him at home either. Originally, Tatsuya did think that they should go somewhere to spend the afternoon to commemorate his younger sister's enrollment before going home.

Since it was not a well thought out line, it reflected his offhand true voice.

Apparently aware that it was his true voice speaking, Erika and Mizuki returned their words in this manner.

"Shiba-kun I say, when it comes to Miyuki, you don't ponder too deeply over it..."

"You really care about your sister, don't you..."

Whether it was a compliment or a comment from blank amazement, before the combined respective differing gazes, Tatsuya could only remain silent with a bitter face.



The "cake shop" that Erika brought them to was in fact a "French cafeteria with delicious dessert". They took their lunch there and spent some time chatting merrily (it was the three females talking, and Tatsuya was only listening), and by the time they got home, it was close to evening.

There was no one to welcome them.

The house, which vastly exceeded average in size, appeared to be inhabited by just Tatsuya and Miyuki.

He returned to his room and took off his uniform first.

He really didn't want to think that such a 'makeshift mantle' could affect him that much, but, after taking off the blazer that was intentionally fashioned to look "different", he felt a little lighter. He clicked his tongue once at these feelings of his and quickly finished changing.

As he was relaxing in the living room, before long, Miyuki, who had finished changing, came down from her room.

Even though materials had made a large progress, apparel design had largely remained the same as a hundred years ago.

With her beautiful shapely legs revealed from below the short skirt of a style from the start of this century, Miyuki approached him.

For some reason, this little sister's fashion sense tended towards a more revealing nature at home. Even though he seemed to be more or less used to it, her considerably increased femininity from it frequently caused Tatsuya to feel troubled about where he should set his eyes on.

"Onii-sama, would you like something to drink?"

"Sounds good. I would like a coffee then."

"Certainly."

As she headed towards the kitchen, a banded loose tail of hair swayed behind her slender back. It was to prevent her hair from interfering with her kitchen work, but, from the fleeting glimpses of the fair nape of her neck, which was normally covered by her long hair, an inexpressible loveliness radiated from the wide center of the neckline of her clothing.

In an advanced country where the use of Home Automation Robots (HAR) was widespread, women — as well as men — who involved themselves with kitchen work belonged to the minority. There were few people who performed any actual cooking in general, such as toasting

bread or brewing coffee, with their own hands unless it was a hobby.

And Miyuki belonged to this minority group.

It was not because she was a machine moron.

When friends came to visit, she would normally leave it to the HAR.

But, when together with just Tatsuya alone, she would definitely opt to labor herself.

The grinding sounds of beans and bubbling sounds of boiling water reached Tatsuya's ears faintly.

She could be said to be pretty hung up to even go to the extent of using the simplest paper drip, rather than using an old coffee maker model.

He had tried asking her once, and her reply was that she wanted to do it that way, so it was probably indeed a hobby for her. He also recalled the time when he had asked her whether it was a hobby, and she had glared at him with a pouting face.

At any rate, the coffee Miyuki brewed was most suiting to Tatsuya's taste.

"Onii-sama, here you go."

She placed the cup on the side table, came around from the other side and sat beside him.

The coffee on the table was black, while the one she held had milk added to it.

"Tastes really good."

There was no need to compliment further.

Just from that alone, Miyuki broke into a grin.

Then, peering into the satisfied face of her elder brother with her smiling eyes, a relieved look surfaced on her face as she brought the cup to her mouth —— that was the usual Miyuki.

With that, the two of them savored their coffee.

Neither of them struck up a forced conversation.

Both of them were not bothered by the presence of the other person beside themselves.

The times when it felt bad to not speak to each other for a long period of time had long since passed.

The topics they could talk about were plenty. Today was the school

entrance ceremony. They had made new friends, and for some reason, they had encountered worrisome upperclassmen. Miyuki was invited by the student council as expected. The things that could be recalled, and the things that could be discussed, were too many for one night.

But, facing the sibling pair, in the house of theirs, were merely tilted cups in silence.

"—It's almost time to make dinner."

Holding her empty cup, Miyuki stood up. Handing over his coffee cup to his little sister's outstretched hand, Tatsuya also stood up.

The evening deepened into night as usual for the two siblings.

## **Chapter 2**

He awoke to the second day of his high school life, and it was quite ordinary.

Even though he had started to attend high school, it didn't mean that the earth's rotation cycle would be affected.

He lightly washed his face — since he was going to properly wash it again later — and put on his usual attire.

Then he went downstairs to the dining room and saw that Miyuki had started to make breakfast.

"Morning, Miyuki. You're quite early today."

It was still the break of dawn, and there was no sign of the Spring sun yet.

It was still too early to go to school. The first lesson was at 8am sharp and commuting to school would take roughly 30 minutes, so it would be ideal to leave the house at 7:30am. Preparing breakfast, eating, cleaning up... if we considered the time needed for all this, there would still be over an hour of extra time.

"Good morning, Onii-sama... please help yourself."

"Thanks."

She handed him a glass of fresh juice.

After a sincere word of gratitude, he emptied the glass in one breath, then returned it to Miyuki's outstretched hand. —Miyuki had a perfect grasp of Tatsuya's breathing pattern.

Just at the exact moment he was about to say "I'm leaving" to his little sister, who was once again facing the kitchen table, Miyuki's hands stopped and she turned around.

"Onii-sama, I was actually planning to go with you today..."

Upon saying that, she lifted a basket full of sandwiches. It seemed more accurate to say that she had "finished making breakfast" rather than "started to make breakfast".

"I don't really mind, but... will you be coming in your uniform?"

He asked while eyeing the school uniform under her apron, a stark contrast to the sweatshirt he was wearing.

"I haven't reported to sensei about school enrollment yet... and also, I can

no longer accompany you in your training, Onii-sama."

And that was Miyuki's answer.

The reason why she had already changed into her school uniform this early in the morning was to show her high school look to him.

"Understood. Miyuki, it's not like you need to carry out the same morning training as I do, but Master will probably be happy to see you.

...Though I hope that he doesn't start running amok from being overly happy."

"If that happens, then Onii-sama, please protect me."

The sweet wink from his little sister naturally brought a smile to Tatsuya's face.

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In the slightly chilly, refreshing air of the early morning, a young woman was gliding up the hill road on her rollerblades, her long hair and skirt fluttering in the wind.

Without kicking off the ground to propel her, she was zooming up the gentle but long hill road against gravity.

Her speed probably reached 60 kph.

Tatsuya was keeping pace beside her.

Though he was jogging, each stride he took went as far as 10 meters.

But, he did not look as relaxed as Miyuki did.

"Perhaps, I should slow down a bit?"

"No, then it wouldn't count as training."

Miyuki asked, having spun around, gliding backwards on one foot, to which Tatsuya replied without losing a single breath despite the evident fatigue.

Neither of them had any kind of propelling device installed in their shoes.

Needless to say, this speed was an effect of magic.

What Miyuki was using was a magic that decreased the acceleration due to gravity and a magic that would allow her body to follow the slope of the

road to move towards her destination.

What Tatsuya was using was a magic that would amplify both acceleration and deceleration forces generated when he kicked off the ground, and a magic that would suppress his upward motion in order to prevent him from jumping too high.

Both of them were using a simple combination of motion and acceleration spells. As a result of their simplicity, not just Miyuki, but even Tatsuya who could only enroll as a Course 2 student, was able to maintain a persistent invocation.

In such a situation, it couldn't be said which magic -- the one employed by Miyuki who was wearing rollerblades, or the one employed by Tatsuya who was running with his own legs -- was of a higher difficulty level.

At one look, with the rollers to reduce the burden of motion, it seemed like it was more effortless for Miyuki, but, without using her own feet, it meant that she had to control her motion vector completely with magic.

On the other hand, for Tatsuya, he could determine the direction of his movement with his running legs.

Tatsuya who had to continuously reactivate his spell at every single step, and Miyuki who could not release her control on her spell, even an instant.

The training each of them was imposing on themselves were of completely different natures.

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Their destination was about ten minutes away from their house — at the speed they were moving — on top of a slightly elevated hill.

If we were to use a single word to describe it, it would be "Temple".

However, the people who were gathered there did not resemble any "priests", "monks", nor even "novice monks" in the slightest.

If we are daring enough to put a fitting label on them, "Practitioners of Austerities" or "Soldier Priests" might be more appropriate.

Shrouded by the atmosphere of being rigid towards girls, especially towards young ones who would make them so fearful that they wouldn't be able to get close, Miyuki glided in on her rollerblades without a single

moment of hesitation. While it was an act that was unlike her usual courteousness, the head had repeatedly told her "It's fine" to the point of irritation, so she just dispensed with the formalities.

As to what Tatsuya was doing at that time, he had not kept up his pace. No, that wasn't it, he had in fact met with a violent reception as he passed through the temple gate.

When one first starts going to this temple, one would start off sparring with a single person at a time, but right now there were about twenty of the middle-ranked or lower disciples coming at Tatsuya all at once — not round-robin — an unusual thing.

"Miyuki-kun! Long time no see."

A merry voice suddenly called out from Miyuki's blind spot. Miyuki, while standing at the front yard of the main temple building, had turned around to look worriedly at her elder brother who was buried in a mass of people.

"Sensei... please stop erasing your presence and sneaking up on us. We have been looking all over for you..."

Despite any extra vigilance, the same kind of thing kept happening over and over again, to the point that it's not so much a shock as a pointless waste to Miyuki.

"Telling me not to sneak about, Miyuki-kun, is giving quite a tall order. I'm a 'shinobi'. Sneaking about is what I do."

Wearing the black robe of a monk, with a clean shaven head, he did not seem at all out of place here but did not give any impression of age.

The only description that could really be used was 'aloof', and even though he was dressed as a monk, that was impossible to believe.

"In this day and age, there's no such occupation as ninja. I wish you'd correct that as soon as possible."

Even as Miyuki earnestly protested,

"Tut tut tut, don't misunderstand by labeling us ninjas. We are fully legitimate 'shinobi'. It's a tradition, not an occupation."

He replied while wagging his finger back and forth. —It was altogether rather rude.

"We respect your legitimacy. So please stop it with all the mystery. Why is sensei so..."

Frivolous, she had been about to say, but gave up. It was pretty pointless, she had learnt that by now.

This wannabe monk — well, actually, he does have the qualifications of a genuine monk — Kokonoe Yakumo, is a self ascribed "shinobi".

Or more liberally, a "ninjutsu user".

Just as he insisted, he is an operative who draws the line with only surpassing physical capabilities, teaching the ways of ancient magic.

At a time when magic was becoming the target of science, yet still concealed from the public world, and thought of as fiction, it was revealed that masteries such as ninjutsu had somehow become classified not just as mere forms of medieval martial arts but categories of magic.

Yet rather than fiction, it's probably closer to think of it as a mysterious "art".

Naturally, as with other magic systems, the legend doesn't tell the whole truth.

The "transformations" in the ninjutsu of storytellers are just high speed movement and illusions.

Not just ninjutsu, but all traditional forms of magic rely on tricks like that, and things such as transformations, shape shifting, and alchemy are considered impossible in many fields of modern magic.

The Kokonoe Yakumo whom Miyuki calls sensei, and Tatsuya calls master, was one who passed on such traditional shinobi magic knowhow.

However, putting aside his priestly attire (which screamed of falsehood anyway), his appearance and residence notwithstanding, no matter how you look at it he lacked a sense of propriety-

"Is that the uniform of the First high school?"

"Yes, we had the entrance ceremony yesterday."

"I see I see. Mmm, it's nice."

"...Today, I knew you would be starting school..."

"That brand-new green uniform, neat and clean, has some sort of hidden charm."

"..."

"Almost like a flower bud that is about to open, a shoot about to sprout.

Ah yes... moe, this is truly moe! Mrrmph?"

At this massively rising tension Miyuki was slowly backing away, then suddenly Yakumo twisted around while raising his left hand above his head.

Thwak, the sound of an arm chopping down.

"Master, you're frightening Miyuki. Could you please calm down a bit?"

"...Not bad, Tatsuya-kun. Taking me from the back, hah."

Whilst blocking Tatsuya's right arm with his left, Yakumo lashed out from the right.

Weaving his arm in a figure 8, it was enveloped by a fist just as it was about to reach the side.

As Yakumo effortlessly somersaulted forwards, aiming a kick at the back of Tatsuya's head, Tatsuya deftly spun around and dodged.

The gap between the two closed.

A sigh rose from the spectators.

At some point in time, those two had been surrounded by a large circle of people.

Yakumo and Tatsuya exchanged blows again.

It was not just Miyuki whose hands were clenched in anxiety.

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Ever since Tatsuya was a junior high first year student, or to be precise since October, this kind of chaos would occur and finish before a relative peace would settle upon the grounds every morning. The disciples would return to their own exercises, and the only ones who would remain before the main building would be the siblings, Tatsuya and Miyuki, along with Yakumo.

"Sensei, here. Would Onii-sama like some as well?"

"Ooh, Miyuki-kun, thanks."

"...Please wait a little."

With one hand Yakumo, still sweating, took the cup and towel from Miyuki with a smile while Tatsuya, breathing roughly and sprawled out on

the ground, raised a hand in acknowledgement before painstakingly picking himself up.

"Onii-sama, are you alright...?"

As Tatsuya struggled to rise, Miyuki, with a worried expression, knelt down beside him without concern for her clothes and began to wipe him with a towel in hand.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

Neither of them noticed the warm expression Yakumo was making as Tatsuya took the towel from Miyuki and, after a pause, gathered his strength and sprang up.

"I'm sorry, I ended up getting your skirt dirty."

Tatsuya's jacket was, naturally, also stained with dirt, but Miyuki did not need to point that out.

"This much is nothing."

Miyuki smiled in response and instead of brushing off her skirt, took out a thin mobile terminal. The front of the device was almost entirely taken up by a force feedback panel, upon which she began entering digits.

Miyuki was holding a type of general mobile CAD. The most popular form is a bracelet, as the risk of dropping a mobile is considerable. The advantage of Miyuki's CAD is that it can be used with one hand. Since advanced magicians dislike having both hands occupied, these are preferred.

A complex pattern of light was drawn with the left hand holding the CAD, as the magic was initiated.

The tool of a modern magician, in place of wands and tomes, a machine produced by magical engineering: the CAD.

This device, which incorporates synthetic materials that convert psion signals into electric signals, uses the psion from a magic ritual to produce a collection of electronic magic—the activation ritual.

The activation ritual is the blueprint of magic. Within it exists information equal or greater to the combined data of lengthy incantations, complex symbols, and rapid shift mudras.

Mages infuse Psion particles inherent in their bodies into the activation sequence output by the CAD, and feed that from the subconscious magic processing system present in all magicians into the magic operations area.



Here the activation sequence is expanded, and all the necessary parameters input, in order to assemble the magic ritual.

In this way, the CAD allows the processing of all the necessary components for magic in a single moment.

Evanescence clouds appeared out of nowhere and wrapped around Miyuki from her skirt to her black leggings, all the way down to her sandals.

Particles also flew out from the air, and poured from Tatsuya's back all the way around his whole body.

After the thin mist cleared up, the uniform and jacket of the two were immaculate as ever.

"Onii-sama, would you like breakfast? If sensei wants, you may join as well."

Miyuki, as if that had been only natural, asked in a light tone as she raised the basket.

In fact, Tatsuya knew full well that such an amount of magic was indeed "nothing at all" to his sister.

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Both Tatsuya and Yakumo were sitting down on the veranda, stuffing themselves with sandwiches.

Miyuki held a sandwich in one hand, and with the other gallantly serviced Tatsuya by handing him tea and plates.

As he watched this scene with a smile, Yakumo had sensed ill will coming from somewhere. After wiping his hands and mouth with a towel held out by a shaven pupil, he put his hands together and bowed towards Miyuki, whispering something in a quiet voice,

"It's possible that I'm unable to beat Tatsuya-kun in pure martial arts already..."

There was unmistakable admiration.

If any other students had been around, envy would have been inevitable. Indeed, the disciples waiting on Yakumo were directing a mixture of jealousy and envy at Tatsuya upon hearing those words.

Miyuki was beaming as much as if those words had been directed at her. However, Tatsuya's heart was unable to be moved by such simple praise.

"I can't say I'm terribly gratified by those words, considering you just demolished me earlier..."

At Tatsuya's grumbling rebuttal, Yakumo gave a surprised laugh.

"That's only natural, Tatsuya-kun. I am your master after all, and I had faced you in an arena where I am dominant.

You are still fifteen. If I had fallen to someone who's only half my age, all my disciples would be running out on me."

"I believe Onii-sama should be more honest. It's rare to be praised by sensei, so I think you should take this opportunity to laugh proudly."

Miyuki was still preaching in her virtuous tone, but her mouth was shaped in a smile.

"...I think that would make me look just a bit like a prick..."

Both Yakumo and Miyuki were laughing happily, and even Tatsuya was not so stubborn as to not chide himself and join in.

Tatsuya's bitter smile changed into wryness, all the severity fading away.

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In general both commuting to work and school is now accomplished via mini railcars in depots that leave on a systematic schedule. The concept of the 'full train' is a thing of the past.

It's not just trains, but all major forms of public transportation have undergone drastic changes in the last century.

Large vehicles that accommodate dozens of passengers in designated seats are no longer used, except in some high speed long haul cases.

A small vehicle called the Cabinet, which consists of a small linear two or four seat car linked to a central control system, is now mainstream.

Both power and energy is derived from the tracks, so the size is about half of a self-propelled car of the same capacity.

People line up sequentially on a platform to board the Cabinets, that derive the destination from a ticket or pass, then move off along the tracks.

The tracks are divided into three speeds and there is a traffic control system that manages the flow of traffic, as well as overseeing the

transitioning of cars from the slow tracks to the high speed tracks, the shift from high speed back to slow as the car approaches the destination, and the docking of the car at the destination platform.

It's similar to lane changing while on a highway, and such a high density operation was only made possible thanks to advances in control technology, as it's necessary to securely consolidate the running of dozens of cars that transport the same amount as larger vehicles would have in the past.

In the case of medium to long haul commutes between cities, Cabinets are shelved and trailers run on a fourth high speed track instead. The larger trailers allow the passenger to travel in greater comfort with more amenities, but these are rarely used in regular commuting.

The romantic clichés of the past, such as the chance meeting on the train, can no longer occur on the daily commute to school anymore.

In return for not even being able to meet with friends, the threat of the 'chikan' is thoroughly eradicated.

Within the Cabinet there is no security camera or mike.

One cannot leave the seat while the car is moving, and there are emergency bulkheads that separate the seats. Furthermore, the public consensus is that privacy is preferred.

The train nowadays has the same privacy as a private car. There are Cabinets with security measures that seat only one passenger, or one can ride a two seat car alone (taking a four seat with two or fewer people incurs a surcharge), but of course, Tatsuya and Miyuki don't travel separately, and today they're commuting to school together as well.

"Onii-sama, the thing is..."

Tatsuya, who was looking at the news via the terminal screen, heard those hesitant words and looked up in a hurry.

It was rare for his sister to speak in such a reluctant manner. It had to be something bad.

"Yesterday evening, I received a call from those people..."

"Those people? Ahh... by that, did Father do something to anger you again?"

"No, it's..."

Those people, have been vigorously celebrating their daughter's school

admission. And... Onii-sama, have they really...?"

"Ahh, as you say... it's the same as always."

At her brother's words she dropped her face as her features clouded, and in the next moment the sound of her teeth grinding together in anger could be heard drifting out from under the long hair that hid her expression.

"I see... no matter how you look at it, it was a rather fleeting hope, but in the end, they didn't even bother sending an email to Onii-sama... those people are, those..."

"Calm down."

As Miyuki struggled against an anger that could not be expressed with words, Tatsuya who was sitting beside her, took her hands into his firm grip and gave a squeeze.

The temperature inside the car, that had suddenly plummeted, activated the heaters out of season, and a warm wind blew throughout the now silent cabin.

"...I'm very sorry. I became upset."

After making sure that the uncontrolled flow of magic had stopped, Tatsuya let go of Miyuki.

He then clapped lightly while looking into Miyuki's eyes, and smiled gently, showing there was nothing wrong.

"I ignored Father's wish of continuing to help with company work and entered high school. I didn't expect any congratulations at all. That much of Father's nature at least you should understand right?"

"For my own parent to act so pathetically childish, it's infuriating. In the first place if he wanted to separate me from Onii-sama, he should notify me and then Aunt first, but he doesn't even have the courage for that.

In any case, when will they stop thinking they can use Onii-sama however they please?

Is it not to be expected that a 15 year-old would enter senior high?"

The thought of her Aunt being notified and so forth caused him to recall severe discomfort — just because someone ordered it, Tatsuya would never have any intention of leaving Miyuki by herself — but without bringing that up, Tatsuya's face unintentionally slipped into a hollow mask and he gave a cynical laugh.

"There is no compulsory education, so it's not exactly expected per se. Both Father and Sayuri-san have approved my coming of age, so I'm sure they're simply trying to find a way to make me useful. If they think they can indebt me like that though, then I'll also show my true intentions."

"...If you say so, Onii-sama..."

There was considerable reluctance, but Miyuki gave a nod, and Tatsuya breathed a sigh of relief.

Miyuki does not know the full truth of Tatsuya's involvement with the Magical Engineer equipment maker, 'Four Leaves Technology', where their father serves as the developmental section chief.

He had made up many things in his spare time, so misinforming her into believing he had a reasonable job was a simple task.

If she knew that in truth he was merely used as a piece of recovery equipment for research samples, it was very possible that she could have paralyzed the entire transport system.

In spite of his fears, the train moved on steadily as it began the transition onto the slow lane.

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In the first year class E, there was a considerable sense of chaos. In all probability, a similar scene was playing out throughout the other classrooms.

Many students met each other just yesterday, and already small groups have formed up here and there chatting away.

With no new acquaintances to greet, Tatsuya was trying to find his own terminal by eyeing the numbers stamped into each desk when, suddenly his name was called unexpectedly, he looked up.

"Morning~!"

Erika's voice was as vibrant as ever.

"Good morning."

Beside her, Mizuki's smile was comparatively modest.

As if they were already on good terms, Erika was seated next to Mizuki waving her hand.

It seems like they had been talking until they found him.

Tatsuya raised a hand in acknowledgement, then walked over to the pair.

Rather than a coincidence, it seems like they had been sorted alphabetically. Hence as Shiba and Shibata, Tatsuya was next to Mizuki.

"It seems we'll be next to each other, pleased to make your acquaintance."

"Yes, I'll be in your care."

Mizuki answered Tatsuya's words with a smile. Beside them (or rather, above them), Erika had a rather dissatisfied expression, probably on purpose.

"For some reason, I feel left out?"

Her voice echoed out in a rather incredulous fashion.

However, this level of cuteness was not enough to reach Tatsuya.

"Leaving out Chiba-san would be an extremely difficult matter."

His tone and expression deadpan, he looked over at Erika with lidded eyes. He didn't seem like he was acting in the least.

"...The heck is that supposed to mean?"

"Simply that your sociability knows no bounds."

Despite Erika's unwavering gaze, Tatsuya's poker face didn't flicker an inch. Rather, it was Erika who broke first.

"...Shiba-kun, is actually a bad character?"

As Mizuki fell over laughing, Tatsuya set his ID card into the terminal and began an information check.

From course regulations, disciplinary regulations and rules concerning the use of facilities to admission associated events, automatic activity guides and the curriculum for the semester, countless flashes of information scrolled through his head as he operated the terminal with just the keyboard, and when he looked up, it was into the face of a male student looking back at him from the seat in front with wide eyes.

"...It's not like I have a problem with you watching me, but..."

"Eh? Ahh, my bad.

It's something pretty rare, so I ended up staring."

"Rare?"

"I'm pretty sure it's rare now, right? This is the first time I have seen someone only using keyboard input."

"If you're experienced, this method is faster. Although between this, visual pointers, and neural assistance, it's also the least accurate."

"Yeah. The speed is amazing. That should be enough to keep you comfortable for quite a while right?"

"No... possibly a part-time job at best."

"That so...?"

Whoa, I haven't introduced myself yet.

I'm Saijou Leonhart. My father's a half and my mother's a quarter, so while I look Japanese, my name is Western, and my specialty is Convergent Systematic Reinforcement magic. My desired course is to hone my body and become either riot police or a mountain corpsman.

You can call me Leo."

For the youth of today, to have a career they're already aspiring to by the time of high school is generally unusual, but magic high schools are the exception. The course that magicians (at this stage still eggs, or chicks) undertake are closely tied to their talent, or rather natural ability. That was why Tatsuya didn't find Leo's insertion of his hopes for the future in his self introduction strange at all.

"I'm Shiba Tatsuya, but Tatsuya's just fine."

"Ok, Tatsuya.

So, what magic do you specialize in?"

"My practical skills are severely lacking, so I'm planning on becoming a Magic Engineer."

"I see... no wonder you look so smart."

Magic Engineers, or Magic Artificers, are abbreviations for magical engineering specialists and refer to the ones who coordinate, develop and manufacture the machinery that amplifies, strengthens and assists with magic.

In terms of social standing they are below that of proper magicians, but their demand in industry is far greater than that of magicians. The income of a top Magic Artificer can readily surpass that of a top magician.

Because of that, it's not uncommon for those who lack ability in pure magic to aim for becoming Magic Artificers.....

"Eh, what's this? Shiba-kun, you want to become a Magic Artificer?"

"Tatsuya, who the heck is this random guy?"

At the sight of Erika bounding up with all the tension of one who's snooping around for a scoop, Leo pointed and asked with some distaste.

"Wha, calling someone a 'random guy' all of a sudden? Not to mention pointing? How rude, how rude! How absolutely rude! This must be why you're not popular!"

"The hell? The rude one here is you! Just cos you're slightly good looking, don't get all stuck up!"

"Looks are very important y'know? Although I suppose someone as sloppy and wild looking as you wouldn't understand.

And what's with that slang, that kind of thing is from the wrong century. Why don't you get with the times~?"

"Wha, wha, wha..."

Erika had a scornful sneer on her face, while Leo was speechless and sputtering.

"...Erika-chan, please stop. You went a bit far."

"Leo, just drop it. You're both wrong and further arguing will be pointless."

Both Mizuki and Tatsuya intervened, in an attempt to dispel the volatile air.

"...If Mizuki says so."

"...Got it."

The two of them averted their eyes while they turned around.

Tatsuya thought that with their similar strength of mind and unyielding nature, they were actually rather compatible.

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As the first bell rang, the students began to dissipate and make their way back to their own seats.

This system had not changed from the previous era, although there were some differences.

The offline terminals all started up automatically, and those that were already on refreshed their screens. At the same time, a message opened up on the screen at the front of the class.

"—Orientation begins in five minutes, so please wait at your desk. Students who have not yet inserted their ID card, please do so as soon as possible—"

The message was utterly meaningless for Tatsuya. It was just sundry matters such as registering for classes he had already selected, along with online guidance and excessive visual effects. Just as he was considering skipping the whole process and going to browse through the school reference room, two unexpected things happened.

First, accompanied by the class bell, the door to the classroom opened.

It was not a late student. Instead of a uniform, the lady was wearing a suit. As everyone watched, which wasn't an exaggeration, the beautiful and moreover exceptionally charming woman went up to the teacher's desk, set up a large mobile terminal, which she had been carrying under her arm, and then looked around the classroom.

It was not just Tatsuya who was surprised, but the whole class that was struck with a sense of confusion.

In schools that have adopted online courses, there is no teacher who stands at the front of the class. Since classes themselves are conducted through the terminals, there is even less reason to send staff members to classrooms simply to convey information. The only times the staff console is used in class is for exceptional circumstances, such as in the case of theory.

However, there was nothing to indicate that this woman was a faculty member.

"Alright, it doesn't seem like anyone is absent.

Then first of all, congratulations to everyone for entering the school."

There were quite a few students who returned the bow. In fact, the guy in the seat in front whom Tatsuya had just met actually answered "Ah, thanks", but Tatsuya simply tilted his head at her strange behavior.

Firstly, in order to verify attendance, there is no need to look around with the naked eye. The ID cards in the terminals updated seating status in real time.

Then, there was no need for school officials to carry around a terminal of such size. The campus was riddled with Consoles. In fact, there should be a console monitor built into the teachers desk where she was standing right now.

Finally, just what was she? From the information gathered, this school did not use such an outdated system as homeroom teachers, or at least it certainly wasn't in the prospectus—

"It's nice to meet you all. I'm the integration counselor for this school, Ono Haruka. I'm here to establish a mentoring relationship with each of you in case any of you feel like you would like counseling in regards to specialized aspects of your course.

(...Come to think of it, there was something along those lines...)

Having someone to talk to about your concerns, was a concept Tatsuya had completely skipped over as unnecessary, but the fact was that the counseling system was one of the selling points of the school.

"There are 16 such counselors in this school. We are grouped in pairs of men and women, and will be responsible for one class in each grade.

Yanagisawa-sensei and I have been assigned to this class."

At that she stopped talking and operated the console on the teachers desk; the upper body of a man in his mid thirties was displayed in front of the class.

"Good to meet you, I'm your counselor Yanagisawa. Along with Ono-sensei, I will be in charge of looking after you. I hope we will get along."

As the screen projected the image of counselor Yanagisawa, "Ono-sensei" continued her explanation on the platform.

"Counseling is available through the terminals, so you do not have to come to us directly. Communication is done through quantum encryption, and the reports are stored via standalone data banks, so everyone's privacy is secure."

As she said that, Haruka lifted the large data bank book, which Tatsuya had mistaken for an over-sized mobile terminal.

"The school will fully support you all, so that you can each live a fulfilling

life as a student to the fullest.

...As such, everyone, let's work hard together."

She had been speaking in a rather serious voice until now, but at that she switched her tone, and spoke softly.

All the energy seemed to leak out of the room.

Both tension and relaxation, even able to calculate her body language; her emotional control was superb.

Although outwardly she appeared young enough to be fresh out of university, her experience was palpable.

If you spoke to her one-on-one, you could easily end up saying more than you intended.

Such a quality is important for a counselor, but she seemed to possess enough to be a female spy.

This is someone to be on guard against, Tatsuya thought.

—That feeling only intensified as she turned to the screen in the background, bowed to her bemused looking senior colleague and cut the connection.

With a small cough her professional smile returned, and she continued as if nothing had happened.

"By now, the school curriculum and guides on the facilities should have been sent to your terminals. After that, you will register for your electives, and that will be the end of orientation. If there is anything you don't understand, please use the call button. Those who have already familiarized themselves with the curriculum and facilities can feel free to skip guidance and proceed straight to registration."

At this point, Haruka quickly glanced at the monitor on the teacher's desk, and made an 'oh?' expression.

"For those who have already finished registration as well, it's fine to leave. However you may not do so after guidance has started, so if you wish to do so, please leave now. If that's the case, please don't forget your ID card."

As if waiting for those words, the sound of a chair scraping across the floor echoed throughout the classroom.

It was not Tatsuya.

The one who stood up was sitting in the front row window seat, just a little distance away, a slender, nervous-looking boy.

He bowed towards the teacher's desk, then exited into the corridor near the back of the classroom.

He faced forwards the whole way, looking neither to his left nor right, and it was rather interesting watching that figure put on a brave face and leave the classroom proudly, but that was just for a moment. It was not just Tatsuya, but almost half the class that watched the back of the youth as he disappeared down the corridor, but soon all eyes were back on their desks.

It didn't seem like anyone else was about to go. Tatsuya did not want to leave so much that he was willing to risk all those stares as well.

Returning to the task at hand, Tatsuya placed his hands over the keyboard and considered things to do to kill time, when he sensed a glance and looked up.

From the other side of the teacher's desk, Haruka was watching him.

Even as they locked eyes she didn't look away, but went on to flash him a smile.

(What was that...)

As if even noticing that, Haruka's smile broadened. It wasn't for any length of time, rather so short and discreet that no other student noticed, but nonetheless carried an exaggeratedly secretive air.

He was certain that this was their first ever meeting.

Yet it was notably beyond a fake smile, so Tatsuya vigorously went through his memories.

Thanks to that, he killed plenty of time but...

(You should relax... was that the meaning behind it? Or is she trying to take away my composure...)

I won't even consider the possibility that she's come to a classroom in a school without teachers to try to hit on students...)

As he considered, he didn't follow the other students who had finished registration out of the class, but rather stayed in his seat pondering with interest. Then someone spoke up in a friendly tone.

"Tatsuya, what are you going to do until lunch?"

When he lifted his head, a voice rang out from the seat in front.

As if it were his signature pose, Leo was resting his chin on his arms crossed over his chair in the exact same position as earlier.

It is no longer customary, at both junior and senior high school, to eat in the classroom. Despite advancements in both waterproofing and dust-proofing technology, information terminals remain precision instruments. If you end up doing something like accidentally spilling soup all over one, a rather miserable outcome is to be expected.

It'd be better to find a more suitable place somewhere, like the cafeteria, courtyard, rooftop or club room.

Although it was one more hour until the cafeteria opened.

"I had been planning to go look through the reference room catalog from here but... OK, I'll accompany you."

At Tatsuya's reply Leo had mumbled dejectedly, but his eyes shone bright with enthusiasm. Tatsuya smiled at Leo's easy to read expressions.

"Then, what are you going to look at?"

Magic is not taught in public schools until junior high. For children with the aptitude of a magician, public cram schools after school are the foundations of their magic knowledge. This step is not to look for technical skill, but to determine for both themselves and their parents whether they have enough raw talent to make it as a magician.

While some private schools incorporate forms of magical education as extra curricular activities, it is stressed that they are by no means a reflection of magic performance.

Magic begins as a full-fledged education from the senior high school curriculum onward. Although among the magic high schools, the First high school is considered the most difficult to enter, there are many students who come from ordinary junior high schools. There are classes on specialized magic courses that some of the students have never seen before.

In order to alleviate confusion stemming from unfamiliarity with some of the specialized courses, they have the opportunity to go and observe classes in progress both today and tomorrow.

"Wanna go to the workshop?"

This was Leo's reply to Tatsuya's question.

"Not the arena?"

Taken aback by Tatsuya's next question, Leo grinned.

"I guess I would seem to be the type."

Well, you're not wrong."

Although not looking down on his intellectual ability as he did pass the entrance exams, the fact remains that this guy has a more 'lively outdoors' look to him, or rather, a mischievous air. Most likely it wouldn't have just been Tatsuya who felt he was more suited to the action of the arena than fiddling with precision machinery in the workshop.

Listening to Leo's next words however, Tatsuya admitted his mistake.

"Reinforcement magic produces the greatest effect when combined with weapon skill. I want to be able to maintain my own weapons as much as possible."

Leo's ambitions were the mountain corps or riot police. If those ambitions were realized, he'd have many opportunities to use simple weapons such as batons, shields, machetes, etc. Those are all compatible with reinforcement magic, and depending on the composition of the materials used, will produce different effects.

This classmate seems to have a far firmer grasp of what he is capable of than he looks.

"If you're going to the workshop, why don't you come with us?"

While the two of them talked, they received a sudden proposal from the seats next to them.

"Shibata-san's also going to the workshop?"

"Yes... I also want to be a Magic Artificer."

"Ah, I see!"

Erika was barging in all over Mizuki. It was a rather similar pattern to what had happened earlier, but Leo's face remained neutral.

"However you look at it, you're far more suited for physical courses. Go check out the arena."

"I don't want to be told that by a wild animal like you."

Tit for tat.

"What was that? You didn't even hesitate in the slightest!"

The quarrel between them possessed the breakneck quality of a typing

keyboard.

"Stop it both of you... You've only just met today right?"

Their compatibility really is quite something, isn't it? Tatsuya thought, while attempting to arbitrate with a sigh, but the two weren't about to be so easily stopped.

"Heh, you must be a bitter enemy from some previous life."

"You were some bear ravaging the fields, and I was the hunter hired to get rid of you."

"Alright, let's go! We're wasting time."

Mizuki had up to now patiently been refraining from interrupting, but now she finally weighed in and tried to forcibly change the course.

"Yeah! If we don't hurry, we'll be the only ones left in the classroom."

Immediately, Tatsuya also jumped in. With their rapid-fire argument interrupted, both Leo and Erika glared daggers at each other, then immediately spun around and turned their backs.

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As early as the second day of admission, there were some students who began to take action.

Tatsuya didn't know whether to think of it as too quick or just par for the course.

All he knew was that if it came to a confrontation or backing down, it would most likely be the former.

Both Erika and Leo were bright and optimistic, and Mizuki seemed shy yet carefree.

While fully aware of his own inclination towards cynicism and moodiness, Tatsuya considered himself fortunate that his first friends in high school were them.

However, most likely is not 100%.

There had remained about 10-20%.

It was nice they hadn't backed down servilely, but how would this turn out? Tatsuya was keenly contemplating the matter.

"Onii-sama..."

Miyuki was lightly grasping the hem of Tatsuya's uniform with her fingertips, and her face as she looked up at her brother was a mixture of anxiety and embarrassment.

"Don't apologize, Miyuki. You aren't at fault in the least."

In order to give strength to his sister, Tatsuya replied in a firm tone.

"Yes, but... will you stop them?"

"...That'd be counterproductive."

"... You're right. Still, putting Erika aside, for Mizuki to have that kind of personality was...unexpected."

"...I agree."

Watching from a step back — or in other words, directly in front of the siblings, was a group of new students glaring at each other with a volatile atmosphere simmering between them. One group was comprised of some of Miyuki's classmates, and the other was, needless to say, Mizuki, Erika, and Leo.

The first act was in the dining hall during lunch.

The dining hall of the First high school was considerably larger than the cafeteria found in most other high schools, but as the new students were still rather unaware and unsure, this time of year was generally crowded.

However, as the four of them had left the visit of the specialist classes early and came to the dining hall, they had secured a four seat table without any trouble.

It was a four seat but due to the facing benches, they'd probably be able to squeeze three of the more slender girls on one side.

When they were about halfway through their meals (Leo had finished eating already), Miyuki had arrived surrounded by a group of male and female students, spotted Tatsuya, and rapidly made a beeline for him. The dispute started from there.

Miyuki had tried to eat together with Tatsuya. It wasn't that she was the type who would refuse to interact with her classmates, but simply that, for Miyuki, the top priority partner would always be Tatsuya.

Only one more person could fit at the table. Whether to choose her classmates or Tatsuya was a matter Miyuki didn't even consider.

However, Miyuki's classmates, especially the boys, were of course striving to sit with her.

They had started off pretending to be polite saying things like "it's pretty cramped" and "sorry to be a bother", but seeing Miyuki's unwavering determination, had gone on to say that it was unsuitable for a first course student to share a table with second course students considering the gap between them, and ended up telling Leo who had finished eating that he was to vacate his seat.

At this selfish display of supreme arrogance, both Erika and Leo were on the verge of exploding. Tatsuya finished his meal in a hurry, talked with Leo and the still-eating Mizuki and Erika, then stood up.

Miyuki had soundlessly apologized to Tatsuya and the others, before walking past the vacated seat to stand by her brother.

The second act had been the afternoon visit to a specialist class.

In the remote precision magic laboratory otherwise known as the 'shooting range', a practical class was being carried out by 3rd year class A.

It was the class of the Student President, Saegusa Mayumi.

The student council was not necessarily chosen by grades, but the president this term was a once in a decade prodigy in remote precision magic, and had brought countless trophies to the school.

That was something even the freshmen had heard.

They had also confirmed the rumor of her coquettish nature at the entrance ceremony.

There were many students packed around the range trying to get a look at her skill, but the number who could visit was limited. Due to that, among the numerous ostensible reservists for first course and second course students, Tatsuya and co. had grandly camped up at the front row.

Naturally, he had been unwilling to stand out.

Then during the third act, in progress this very moment, Mizuki caustically spat out.

"Won't you all stop being such poor losers? Miyuki-san has said she wishes to go with her brother. It's not the place of anyone of you to say otherwise is it?"

Her opponent was a student from class A. It was the guy they had seen in the dining hall during the break.

Concerning the circumstances, after school, Tatsuya had been waiting for Miyuki, whose accompanying classmates had started to accuse. By the way, those classmates were girls. Obviously there was also a flock of male students in the vicinity (of Miyuki) who had started silent at first, but that restraint had already been lost and all decency rapidly followed.

"Hasn't Miyuki treated you guys well enough already? If she wanted to go with you, she would have said so. What right do you have to try and tear those two apart?"

The one who had lashed out first at the unreasonable behavior of the first course students was, surprisingly, Mizuki.

While maintaining her polite demeanor, she slammed into them mercilessly.

Even now as Mizuki argued against the first course student, her eloquence didn't give an inch.

Yes, everything had started out perfectly logically, but...

"I have to admit though, to say that they're trying to tear us apart..."

Tatsuya muttered under his breath. He distinctly felt that something was shifting rather decisively.

"Mi-Mizuki, aren't you misunderstanding something?"

Hearing her brother's murmurs, Miyuki for some reason asked in a hurry.

"Miyuki... you seem kinda rushed?"

"Eh? No, I'm no such thing?"

"And also kinda forceful?"

Initially glancing at the siblings with the too good relationship in confusion, their friends, full of compassion, began to heat up more and more.

"We've asked her!"

That was one of Miyuki's male classmates.

"That's right! We're sorry for Shiba-san, but we just want a little more time!"

That was one of Miyuki's female classmates.

At their selfishness, Leo gave a hearty laugh.

"Ha! That's just self-justification. Find a better time for it."

Erika also retorted with a smile and edged sarcasm.

"If you really had asked, maybe you would've had her consent from the start?"

You've ignored Miyuki's intentions and didn't consult her or anything. There're rules for that. You're high school students already, don't you know anything?"

Erika's words and attitude, designed to purposely offend the other party, as expected, affected one male student in particular.

"Shut up! Another class, much less Weeds, has no right to interfere in matters concerning us Blooms!"

Due to its discriminatory nature, the use of the word 'Weed' is prohibited by school regulations. It is a rule still gradually being learned, but even so it's not exactly a word to be used in this context with so many people listening.

The one who reacted to this rant head-on was, whether to say unexpected or to be expected (probably 'to be expected' really), was again Mizuki.

"We are all the same freshmen. You guys are Blooms, but right now just how are you any better than us?"

It wasn't particularly loud, but Mizuki's voice rang out through the schoolyard.

"...Well."

Thing's are going to get pretty bad, Tatsuya thought, while sighing under his breath.

His murmur was drowned out by the angry howls of the first course students, and only Miyuki who was beside him heard.

"...If you want to know just how much better, I can show you."

Although Mizuki's claim was legitimate according to school regulations, at the same time, it was refuted by the school system.

"Hah, interesting! By all means, show us!"

At the first course student's threat, Leo responded aggressively. Having come to this, no outcome other than 'tit for tat' could be expected.

The right lay with Mizuki.

Because they understood that full well, those complacent with the current system, both staff and students alike, stood aside.

Though there had been a clear violation of the rules here, the vast majority would ignore their situation and pretend to have seen nothing.

Even if the violation was not only of the school rules, but the law itself.

"Then I will!"

The only ones allowed to carry a CAD in the school were senior members of the student council and certain committee members.

The use of magic off campus was tightly regulated by law.

However, the mere possession of CAD off campus was not restricted.

There would be no point.

CADs are currently indispensable tools for magicians, but they are not essential for the use of magic. Magic can be used even without a CAD. Therefore, the law does not restrict the mere possession of a CAD.

The procedure for students who possessed CADs was to leave them at the office before classes started, and to pick them up upon returning home.

So it was not surprising for students to have CADs on the way back from school.

"A specialized CAD?"

However, if they were directed at fellow students, then it would become a situation... no, an emergency.

Especially if the aimed CAD was an attack power emphasizing specialized type.

The two types of CAD are general and specialized. The general type placing a larger burden on the user but capable of a wide range of up to 99 activation sequences, while the specialized type is only able to contain up to nine activation sequences but possesses subsystems able to reduce the load on the user, making it possible to invoke magic faster.

By its nature, aggressive combat type magic sequences are generally stored in specialized CAD.

To the BGM of screaming onlookers, the 'muzzle' of that specialized CAD, shaped like a small handgun, was thrust at Leo.

That student wasn't just spouting lip service.

The finesse with which he drew his CAD, along with the speed with which he took aim, were the movements of someone accustomed to fights between magicians.

A large portion of magic is dependent on talent.

At the same time, that means lineage plays a vital role.

There are many first course students who enter school with excellent results not as a result of studying magic at school but because of parents, family business, possibly even gaining combat experience from there.

"Onii-sama!"

Even before Miyuki had finished her cry, Tatsuya's right hand stretched out.

There was no way he could reach, but he reached anyway. Was it meaningful, or was it just a meaningless reflexive action.

Whatever it was, in this case, nothing came of it.

That was because—

"Eek!"

That scream came from the first course student aiming his CAD.

The handgun CAD had been knocked from his hand.

Before their eyes, casually swinging a baton that had suddenly appeared from somewhere, in a relaxed manner, Erika was smiling. There was no trembling or hastiness in that smile. Just by looking at that confident alertness, you could tell there was no such thing from the beginning. If the same situation had occurred 100 times, the first course student's CAD would have gone flying 100 times. That was a certainty.

"At this distance, the body moves faster."

"I agree, but you were planning on whacking my hand as well, weren't you?"

The one replying as Erika relaxed her guard and triumphantly explained was Leo, whose hands were frozen in the midst of a grab for the other's CAD.

"A~ra, I wouldn't do something like that."

"Don't laugh it off so unnaturally like that!"

As Erika put the back of the hand holding the baton to her mouth and gave off an 'ohohohoho', her deceptive laughter hiding her real intentions, Leo was nearing the end of his patience.



"I'm serious. Whether you were going to engage or not, I can tell from your stance.

You seem like an idiot, but your arm speaks otherwise,"

"...Are you making fun of me? You're making fun of me right to my face?"

"That's why I said you look like an idiot right?"

Forgetting the 'enemy' before them, as the two engaged in another comical confrontation, not only Miyuki and Tatsuya were taken aback but everyone else as well, but the one who recovered fastest was Miyuki's classmate who was facing them.

It wasn't the male student whose specialized CAD had been knocked away, it was the female student behind who was running her fingers across her bracelet shaped general CAD.

The inbuilt system started up, and began an activation sequence.

The activation sequence is a blueprint of magic, a program that directs the construction of a magic ritual.

After expansion, the expanded activation sequence is read by the magic processing area of the subconscious and variables such as coordinates, output, and duration are inputted, the result is inserted alongside the activation sequence and gives rise to the completed magic ritual.

This complete magic ritual is taken from the operations area of the subconscious and transferred to the lowest level of the conscious, the 'root', from the area between the conscious and the subconscious, the 'gate', whereupon it can be projected upon the outside world, as the magic ritual projects and targets 'information events' — in the study of modern magic, these are named 'Eidos' from Greek philosophy, and refers to the event where the information of the target is temporarily overwritten.

Information is associated with events.

If the information is rewritten, the event will be rewritten.

As the nature of phenomena is written in Psions, modifications to these will result in real world events being temporarily modified as well.

This is the magic system under the use of CAD.

The speed with which Psions are written is the processing power of magic, the scale to which they can be built is the capacity of magic, and the strength with which magic rituals can rewrite the Eidos is interference strength. Currently, these three comprehensively are called magic power.

Even the blueprint for the magic ritual, the activation sequence, is a type of Psion. However, the activation sequence alone cannot affect reality.

The Psions processed by the user would simply scramble then return.

Broadly speaking, this is the function of CADs, to take the Psions initially provided by the activation sequence, and form them into Psions the magician can use to rewrite phenomena: the magic ritual.

Specialized CAD are often shaped in the form of guns because using the auxiliary aiming systems incorporated in the area corresponding to the barrel, coordinate data is input at the moment the activation sequence is initiated, and in order to reduce the calculation load on the user, Psions aren't emitted from the muzzle.

From magician to CAD, then CAD back to magician.

If this flow of Psions is disrupted, then magic dependent on CADs will no longer work.

For example, if during calculation or expansion a load of Psions are fired from outside, the Psion pattern of the activation ritual will be scrambled, disallowing the building of an effective magic ritual and erasing the magic.

Like now.

"Stop right there! Using attack magic on others for any reason other than self-defense is not just a violation of school rules, it's a criminal offense!"

The expanding activation sequence of the female student was shattered by a bullet of Psions.

Releasing a Psion bullet, while in itself the simplest form of magic, requires extremely precise control in order to destroy just the activation sequence and avoid any extraneous damage, and shows superb skill on the part of the user.

Upon recognizing the owner of that voice, the female student who was intent on attacking Erika and company became pale, and not as a result of the magic. She fell into another female student, and they collapsed.

The one who gave the warning, and had fired the Psion bullet, was the Student Council president, Saegusa Mayumi.

Her — as far as Tatsuya had seen — ever-smiling face, even now, did not have much severity in it.

However in the eyes of someone capable in magic, her small figure was wrapped in an aura of Psion light far beyond that of ordinary mages,

giving her an inviolable air of dignity.

"You are students from 1A and 1E aren't you.

I will hear you out. Please come along."

A hard, even cold voice, came from the girl next to Mayumi. According to the introduction of the Student Council during the entrance ceremony she was the 3rd year Public Moral Chief, Watanabe Mari.

Mari's CAD held an already deployed and expanded activation sequence.

It was not difficult to imagine what any form of resistance here would lead to.

Leo, Mizuki, and Miyuki's classmates, without a word, stiffened up.

Moving not out of rebellion, stepping up next to his classmates frozen by the atmosphere, without a trace of haughtiness or pride, neither downcast nor timid, Tatsuya walked with an even measured gait, followed by Miyuki, to stand before Mari.

Mari cast a quizzical glance at these first years who had suddenly come striding up.

To Mari, these two had not seemed like involved parties.

Tatsuya took her gaze without flinching, and stopped a respectable distance from her.

"We're sorry, the prank went too far."

"Prank?"

At those unexpected words, Mari's eyebrows arched up.

"Yes.

Morisaki's quick-draw is famed, so I asked him to give a demonstration for future reference, but it became too lifelike and got out of hand."

The student who had confronted Leo with his CAD opened his eyes wide with surprise.

While the other first years were at a loss for words, Mari glanced at the baton in Erika's hand, the pistol shaped device lying on the ground, then after giving the two students who had tried to illegally use their CADs a bloodcurdling look, turned back to Tatsuya with a cold smile.

"Then why did that girl from 1A try to use attack magic?"

"She was taken by surprise. Being able to start up activation processes as a

conditioned reflex is truly worthy of a first course student."

His expression as he answered was deadpan, although his voice was somewhat shameless.

"Your friends were about to be attacked by magic, but you still insist it was a prank?"

"Even if you call it an attack, all she intended to fire was a flash of blinding magic. It wasn't on a level where it could have caused blindness or impairment."

Again, there was a collective intake of breath.

The sneer turned into admiration.

"Hou... it seems you're somehow able to read the activation sequence before it's deployed."

The activation ritual is a large block of data for building a magic ritual.

Mages can intuitively guess what kind of effect the ritual would have.

By looking at how the magic ritual would interfere with the Eidos, and what parts wouldn't be affected, it's possible to read and attempt a guess at the effect the magic ritual would have.

However the activation sequence alone is simply a chunk of data, representing a massive amount of information, and even the magician deploying it can only dynamically interact with it in the subconscious.

Therefore, the act of reading the activation sequence requires the enumeration of endless strings of image data, then reproducing an image from those in your head.

Normally, such things cannot be done in the consciousness.

"I'm no good at practicals, but I'm confident in my analyses."

As if it was nothing, Tatsuya dismissed that insane skill with the one word, 'analyses'.

"...Your misinformation skills are also quite something."

Her look was something in between an appraisal and a glare.

The person who stepped up to protect her brother bearing the brunt of the investigation, Miyuki, came forward.

"As my brother said, this was all really just a misunderstanding.

We are very sorry for bothering you all, senpai."

Without the slightest deceit, she gave a deep bow, and as if the miasma was dispelled Mari looked away.

"Mari, it's fine already.

Tatsuya-kun, that really was just a demonstration right?"

*When did she start calling him by name?* Tatsuya thought, but he couldn't refuse the timely help from Mayumi.

As he nodded with the same deadpan expression he had used up to now, Mayumi gave a somewhat triumphant — it was like she was saying 'loan~' — looking smile.

"It is not prohibited for students to teach each other, but in terms of exercising magic, you are prohibited from executing it.

This is taught in the first semester in the classroom.

In terms of self studying the exercise of magic, it's probably best to refrain."

Returning to her grave look after Mayumi finished her inspirational speech, Mari also gave a word on the matter.

"...Since the President has said so, I will refrain this time. I don't want there to be a second time."

Without looking like bitter enemies, together they straightened and gave a bow. Mari turned around.

But after one step, she stopped and asked a question with her back to them.

"Your name?"

As her head turned, Tatsuya's appearance was reflected in her long narrow eyes.

"First year class E, Shiba Tatsuya."

"I'll remember that."

Holding back his tongue just before he almost instinctively let slip a 'no problem', Tatsuya swallowed a sigh.

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"...Don't think I owe you anything."

After the officials had gone out of sight, the one who had acted first, in other words the first course student whom Tatsuya had protected, glared at Tatsuya and said as much in the same thorny voice.

Tatsuya's expression had a rather 'ah man' look to it.

All his friends had a face similar to his.

Relieved that this normally needlessly excited character wouldn't play up here at least, Tatsuya returned the gaze of the course A student who suddenly grew a spine.

"I don't think that at all, so don't worry.

What got you off wasn't my glib tongue but rather Miyuki's sincerity."

"I came along because even though Onii-sama is good at talking people down, he has problems convincing them."

"Indeed."

His artificial look of reproach faded, replaced by a wry smile.

"...My name is Morisaki Shun. As you thought, I am of the Morisaki house."

Seeing the warm banter between the siblings, his hostility faded somewhat, and he gave his name.

"I'm just saying it's not really that much of a big deal.

I've seen plenty of practical examples in visual materials."

"Ah, now that you mention it, I think I've seen them before too."

"You only just remembered it now didn't you. As I thought, Tatsuya's on a different level to you."

"How patronizing. An idiot who tried to grab a Houki in the midst of activation has no business talking about levels."

"Ah? Who're you calling an idiot, idiot?"

"Uhm... that really is dangerous. Psions produced by another magician's activation ritual would cause a rejection by your own subconscious..."

"What she said. Got it?"

"Erika-chan too all right? Don't use your hands directly, you'd receive the interference 1000 fold."

"It's fine. This is shielded."

As the talk between his friends, meaningful in it's own way, finally shifted back in their direction, Tatsuya and Morisaki shared a glance without moving.

"I still don't acknowledge you, Shiba Tatsuya. Shiba-san's place should be with us."

On that note without waiting for Tatsuya's reply, Morisaki left. He probably said it precisely because it was a line that didn't bear an answer, something his opponent was fully aware of.

"Suddenly calling me by my full name huh."

As Tatsuya muttered to himself at a volume just loud enough to hear, Morisaki gave an involuntary shudder. His obstinacy was unlikely to stop there. However, it seemed likely his pride was a part of his nature.

Beside him, hearing his murmur, Miyuki seemed disquieted. She had always been worried that her brother's knack for making enemies was a disadvantage for him.

But more than that, she had had enough of Morisaki's prejudices.

"Onii-sama, shall we head back?"

"Yeah, you're right. Leo, Chiba-san, Shibata-san, let's go."

Sharing a feeling of mental fatigue, the two of them nodded at the others, and began to leave.

As if to cut them off, to make things worse, a pair of class A girls stood in their way, but their body language clearly indicated they didn't intend to do any more today.

Exchanging looks with Miyuki, the moment dragged on.

Understanding her brother's intent, Miyuki was about to bid them farewell, but then the other opened her mouth.

"I'm Mitsui Honoka. I'm sorry for saying all those things earlier."

She suddenly bowed, fully honest, and Tatsuya was rather embarrassed.

This girl, who earlier wasn't hiding her elitism to say the least, seemed to have gone about a complete turnaround.

"Thank you for protecting me. Morisaki-kun waved it off, but it's thanks to Onii-san that it didn't become a huge issue."

"...It was nothing. Although, please stop with the Onii-san. We're same year students."

"I understand. Then, what should I call you..."

A fierce conviction blazed in her eyes.

It'd be nice if this didn't become troublesome, he thought, as he took care to reply in a manner that didn't come out displeased.

"Tatsuya is fine."

"...Alright.

And so, um..."

"...What is it?"

At the rapid eye contact, Miyuki stood before Honoka.

"...Is it alright to go together with you to the station?"

Nervously, but with a determined conviction hidden in her face, Honoka asked to accompany them.

With a sense of surprise not so much at Honoka's words but the unexpectedness of the whole thing, Erika and Mizuki shared a look.

Though even then those two, plus Leo and of course the siblings Miyuki and Tatsuya, had no reason to refuse, and indeed didn't refuse.

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There was a delicate air on the way back to the station.

The members were Tatsuya, Mizuki, Erika, and Leo from class E, along with Miyuki, Honoka, and Kitayama Shizuku from class A, the girl who had caught Honoka during Mayumi's appearance earlier.

Next to Tatsuya was Miyuki, then for some strange reason, on the other side was Honoka.

"...Then, the one who assists with Miyuki-san's adjustments is Tatsuya-san?"

"Yes. I feel most at ease when entrusting things to Onii-sama."

In response to Honoka's question, Miyuki answered proudly.

"I just do a bit of arranging. Miyuki has amazing processing ability, so there's not much maintenance required on the part of the CAD."

"Even so, if you only have the knowledge to simply understand the device

OS you can't do much."

Peering out from beside Miyuki was Mizuki, who joined in the conversation. Judging from Tatsuya's light smile as he replied, it wasn't really effective.

"I don't have the skill to access the CAD core systems. That's too much."

"Tatsuya-kun, could you also look over my CAD?"

Looking back, Leo and Erika.

The reason Erika changed her way of referring to Tatsuya from 'Shiba-kun' to 'Tatsuya-kun' was because Mitsui-san called him that so it's fine, she had unilaterally declared. In exchange, you can just call me Erika as well, she had imposed conditionally.

Naturally, Mizuki also insisted on the trade, and everything became official pretty fast.

"Impossible. I have no faith in my ability to handle such a specialized CAD."

"Ah ha, you really are quite something, Tatsuya-kun."

It was hard to tell if Tatsuya was being serious or just humble, but Erika's reaction was simple praise.

"Why?"

"You realized this was my CAD."

At Tatsuya's question, Erika laughed merrily while twirling the retracted baton by the strap attached to the handle.

However, there was a glint in her eye that went beyond a simple smile.

"Eh? That baton's a device?"

Sure enough, as if right on cue, Mizuki's eyes went round with surprise, and Erika just gave two quick nods in satisfaction.

"Thank you for your normal reaction, Mizuki.

If everyone had already noticed, I would've face-planted."

Listening to that exchange, Leo inquired further.

"...Where is the system built in? From the feeling earlier, it's not totally hollow is it?"

"No luck. Apart from the handle it's totally hollow. It increases strength by using the technique of carving seals into it. Reinforcement magic is your

field isn't it?"

"...The technique takes a geometric pattern and engraves it into a sensitive alloy, which activates by injecting Psions, right?

If you do that, wouldn't it bleed a considerable amount of Psions? You'd run out of gas pretty often wouldn't you?

Carved seals are pretty inefficient in the first place, so I thought it's not a technique used very often nowadays."

At Leo's points, Erika's eyes widened a little in both surprise and admiration.

"Ooh, your field indeed.

But there's one more thing.

Strengthening is only needed during expansion and the moment of impact. If I limit Psion emission to those moments, I don't waste too much.

It's the same principle as the helm splitter. ...eh, what happened guys?"

As a blend of admiration and shock filled the air, Erika asked that question,

"Erika... I'm pretty sure something like helm splitter was classified as a secret or mystery technique.

That's far more amazing than merely emitting large amounts of Psion."

Miyuki answered on behalf of everyone.

It was pointed out rather casually.

Judging by Erika's expression, she was startled.

"Both Tatsuya-kun and Miyuki-san are amazing, but Erika-chan is also amazing..."

Are normal people rare at our high school?"

"I don't think there are any normal people in a magic high school."

At Mizuki's natural remark, Kitayama Shizuku, silent until now, dropped a supremely precise retort, and the core of the matter disappeared in various ways.



## **Chapter 3**

As the sign "First High School" obviously stated, this station was a mandatory stop for all attending students.

There was practically only one path between the train station and the school.

Due to the changes to the trams and their decrease in number, the event known as "riding the tram together" might be more accurately changed to "walking to school with friends". For this school, this event is still quite common. Indeed, this event could be seen many times yesterday, the day after commencement, today, and has continued since the beginning.

*Although it might not be so sudden,* Tatsuya thought.

"Tatsuya-kun... Are you acquainted with the President?"

"We met for the first time before the entrance ceremony... So, yes."

In regards to Mizuki's question, Tatsuya was just as confused as she was.

"It certainly didn't look like a first meeting."

"It's as if she intentionally sought you out."

Tatsuya had enough confidence in his memory to say that the day of enrollment was definitely the first time he met Saegusa Mayumi. However, just as Leo and Erika said, that approach did not seem like a first acquaintance.

"...Maybe because of Miyuki?" (!)

"...But she mentioned Onii-sama's name specifically?"

Tatsuya was surrounded by Mizuki, Erika, and Leo, people that could be called "familiar faces" without difficulty. Just like yesterday and most likely into the future, the group would gather around Tatsuya and Miyuki near the station, exchange greetings, and go to school together.

It wasn't a bad feeling at all.

In fact, it was quite a nice way to start the day.

However, just as the five of them were leisurely walking the short distance to school, they heard a call of "Tatsuya-kun~~" from behind them that any reasonable bystander would find embarrassing. It was accompanied by the rapidly approaching form of a petite individual and, according to Tatsuya's

groundless belief, the termination of peace and quiet.

"Tatsuya-kun, good morning~. And Miyuki as well, good morning."

Compared to Miyuki's greeting, the greeting directed towards himself was quite casual, Tatsuya thought. However, she was still the 3rd Year Student Council President.

"Good morning, President."

It was necessary to observe proper protocol, just to be on the safe side.

Immediately following Tatsuya, Miyuki also bowed respectfully. The other three offered polite, albeit slightly awed, greetings. It was only natural to have such a reaction.

"Are you alone, President?"

Although obvious at a glance, the question was still offered, with a subtle invitation to walk together to school.

"Hm. There isn't really anyone that walks with me to school in the morning."

A confirmation to both the obvious query and the subtle invitation.

Although, speaking of which... the President was quite the personable individual.

"I would like to speak with Miyuki about a few things... May I walk with you to school?"

The comment directed towards Miyuki was spoken in an approachable tone, but on a different level compared to their earlier conversation.

It did not look like Tatsuya was misreading the situation.

"Hm, if it's quite alright..."

"Oh, it's not like the topic is a secret. Or do you prefer to talk at a later time?"

As she said this, the President smiled at the three slowly retreating individuals, who immediately froze.

"President.. I feel as if your attitude towards one of us is slightly different... or is that just my misinterpretation?"

Of course not, the three of them responded verbally or with hand gestures. Mayumi smiled and nodded her head at the same time that Tatsuya displayed a disappointed expression. (!)

"Eh? Is that the case?"

By now, changing her word choice and pretending not to notice was too late. Her tone and expression had already betrayed her.

"Is the subject you wish to speak about related to the Student Council?"

At this point, Tatsuya did not plan on backing down, but he was feeling the pressure as well.

Miyuki frantically changed the subject back to herself.

"Hm, I meant to find an opportunity to speak with you in detail. Do you have any plans during lunch break?"

"I plan on eating in the cafeteria."

"With Tatsuya-kun?"

"No, Onii-sama and I are in different classes..."

It seemed like she remembered what had happened yesterday.

At the sight of Miyuki slightly lowering her head and lowering her voice, Mayumi nodded as if in understanding.

"There are quite a lot of students that care about these little things."

Tatsuya slightly glanced to his side.

To no surprise, Mizuki nodded in affirmation. It looked like yesterday's incident wasn't quite over yet.

However, if the President spoke like this, wouldn't this be a problem?  
Tatsuya thought.

"In that case, why not join me in the Student Council Room for lunch? If you don't mind bentos, the room has an automatic meal dispenser."

"...The Student Council Room is equipped with the Dinner Server Module?"

The normally composed Miyuki could not conceal her amazement as she replied.

Which was accompanied by a sense of befuddlement.

What was something that is normally seen in airline terminals or long-distance trains doing in a Student Council Room?

"Before entering the Student Council Room, I didn't want to talk too much about it. But it's for students working late into the day."

An embarrassed Mayumi smiled ashamedly while trying to persuade Miyuki.

"If it's the Student Council Room, it's not a problem if Tatsuya-kun tags along as well."

At that moment, Mayumi's smiling face became teasing and, to put it bluntly, mischievous. Hopefully, that was a mistake on Tatsuya's part.

Even if it was a misinterpretation, that particular way of putting it still gave him a headache.

"...Speaking of problems, there is one. There appears to be some conflict between myself and the Vice-President. I'm terribly sorry."

Tatsuya did not plan on interfering between Miyuki and the Student Council, and so he left the interruption at that.

On the day of enrollment, the male student behind Mayumi that continuously glared at Tatsuya was probably the Vice President.

That line of sight did not appear to be a misinterpretation.

If Tatsuya carelessly went to the Student Council Room to eat lunch, this undoubtedly would lead to conflict between the two of them.

However, it appeared that Mayumi had not grasped the meaning behind Tatsuya's words.

"The Vice-President...?"

Mayumi slightly tilted her head but quickly clapped her hands, in an action straight out of movie dramas.

"If it's Hanzou-kun, you don't have to worry about it, there won't be a problem."

"But even if that's the case...?"

In that instant, Tatsuya made up his mind to avoid the incident that led up to his sister receiving that nickname, no matter the cost.

"Hanzou-kun will be in the clubroom for lunch break."

It was completely unrelated to what Tatsuya was thinking — that was only natural — but(?) Mayumi's smile did not diminish in the slightest as she continued to speak.

"In that case, everyone can come as well. Letting everyone know about the Student Council's activities is one of our duties as well."

Despite that, there were people who directly refused Mayumi's social invitation.

"Even though it's a rare opportunity, I think we'll pass."

Even using the word "pass" in this way, it still conveyed a definite "refusal".

Erika and company's unexpected response caused the situation to become slightly awkward.

Nonetheless, trying to get their underlying feelings across, or even to smooth things over, was frankly impossible.

"Is that so?"

But there was one thing that did not change, and that was Mayumi's smiling face.

Was she simply obtuse or able to comprehend something that everyone else could not?

Tatsuya felt that she simply did not need a reason.

"In that case, just the two of you then."

What do we do? Miyuki's eyes silently asked Tatsuya.

Refusing was still a valid option up until that moment, but following the response from Erika's group, there was simply no way to smoothly decline.

"...I understand. Miyuki and I will be intruding on you then." (!) (!)

"Excellent. Then the details can wait until later. I'll wait for the two of you."

For some reason, Mayumi was very pleased by this response. Turning quickly, she left them with a spring in her step.

Even though they were all headed towards the same school, the footsteps of the five who watched Mayumi leave became quite heavy indeed.

Tatsuya sighed.

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Lunch break quickly arrived.

Footsteps remained heavy.

Just climbing two flights of stairs became an exhausting task, and it wasn't because of a lack of exercise.

The real weight came from the heavy mood; heavy footsteps was just a metaphor, though the reluctance towards going remained the same.

Compared to Tatsuya, Miyuki was the complete opposite. Her steps were light and energetic.

Tatsuya was not insensitive enough to completely misunderstand the cause of Miyuki's joy, so he remained silent.

Their destination was at the end of the hallway on the fourth floor.

From the outside, they were all the same. They all had the same wooden doors.

What was different was the wooden engraving embedded in the door, the speaker on the wall, and the cleverly disguised safety devices.

The sign on the door clearly displayed the words "Student Council Room".

The invitation was for Miyuki; Tatsuya was purely complementary. Thus, the job of knocking fell to Miyuki. (Of course, this is another metaphor, since communication is through the speaker rather than knocking.)

After Miyuki solemnly requested entry through the speaker, from the opposite end came a cheerful welcome.

With a slight noise, so slight that even pressing one's ear to the door would not have detected it, the lock opened.

Tatsuya placed his hand on the door knob and opened the door, adopting a stance that shielded Miyuki on the way inside.

In reality, there was nothing that called for such a response. Tatsuya was well aware of this point.

This behavior was something deeply ingrained into the siblings' daily activities.

—And of course, nothing happened.

"Welcome. Don't mind us, please come in."

Directly in front, a voice came from the opposite end of the table.

Tatsuya really wanted to ask Mayumi what caused her such happiness to greet them with a smile like that as she beckoned them in.

Miyuki led the way into the room, followed hurriedly by Tatsuya. He

stopped one step from the door, with Miyuki two steps from the door.

With both hands slightly before her, Miyuki bowed in greeting, a textbook example of formality.

When compared to such a honed movement, Tatsuya had no chance of imitating it.

Miyuki's speech and movement patterns were completely different from Tatsuya's. This was most likely the work of their deceased mother.

"Eh... No need to be so formal."

After watching Miyuki execute a perfect greeting that would not be out of place in a formal gala, Mayumi seemed to shrink a little.

Even though there were two other members in attendance, they seemed to be overwhelmed by the atmosphere as well.

There was one other person present that was not a member of the Student Council. The representative from the Public Moral Committee wore a mask of composure, but anyone could tell that was a brave front, not to mention a veteran observer like Tatsuya. Truly, my little sister is quite motivated today, Tatsuya thought.

The only thing that puzzled Tatsuya was exactly why Miyuki chose such an intimidation tactic.

"Please sit. We can talk while we eat."

Maybe it was because Miyuki's opening salvo rattled her, but Mayumi's voice had changed. To put it positively, the voice was still harmonious. To put it negatively, the intimate friendliness from before was gone.

She was probably referring to the long table in the meeting room.

At this moment, the signal reached the table interior, rearranging the table to be appropriate for dining. (!)

Regardless, the siblings approached the expensive table and chose their seats. Miyuki slid a chair out and sat down, while Tatsuya chose a seat just below hers.

For someone who always adamantly insisted that her elder brother take a seat higher than her own, the only reason Miyuki controlled her outburst was because of the understanding that she was the focus of today's meeting.

"Meat, fish, or vegetarian. Which do you prefer?"

What was amazing was not just the Dinner Server Module, but the complex selections available as well.

Tatsuya picked vegetarian, with Miyuki mirroring his choice. After receiving their orders, the 2nd Year student — probably the Secretary Nakajou Azusa — activated the large cabinet-like machine tucked near the wall.

Now the only thing that remained was waiting.

Mayumi was seated in the main chair. To her side and directly across from Miyuki sat another 3rd Year female student. One seat over was the Public Moral Committee member, who was across from Tatsuya. Azusa sat next on the other side of the committee member. After regaining her bearings a little, Mayumi began.

"Introductions were exchanged at the enrollment ceremony, but just in case, let's go over this again. To my side is our Accountant, Ichihara Suzune, also known as Rin-chan."

"...The only one who calls me that is the President."

Every part of her solemn face gave off a stern impression, though with her tall frame and willowy limbs, Suzune would have done full justice to the description of "beauty".

It must be admitted that "Rin-chan" fit her profile better than "Suzune".

"The two of you should know the one on Rin-chan's side, right? This is the Chair of the Public Moral Committee Watanabe Mari."

Mari didn't say anything, but her not taking exception to anyone would be natural.

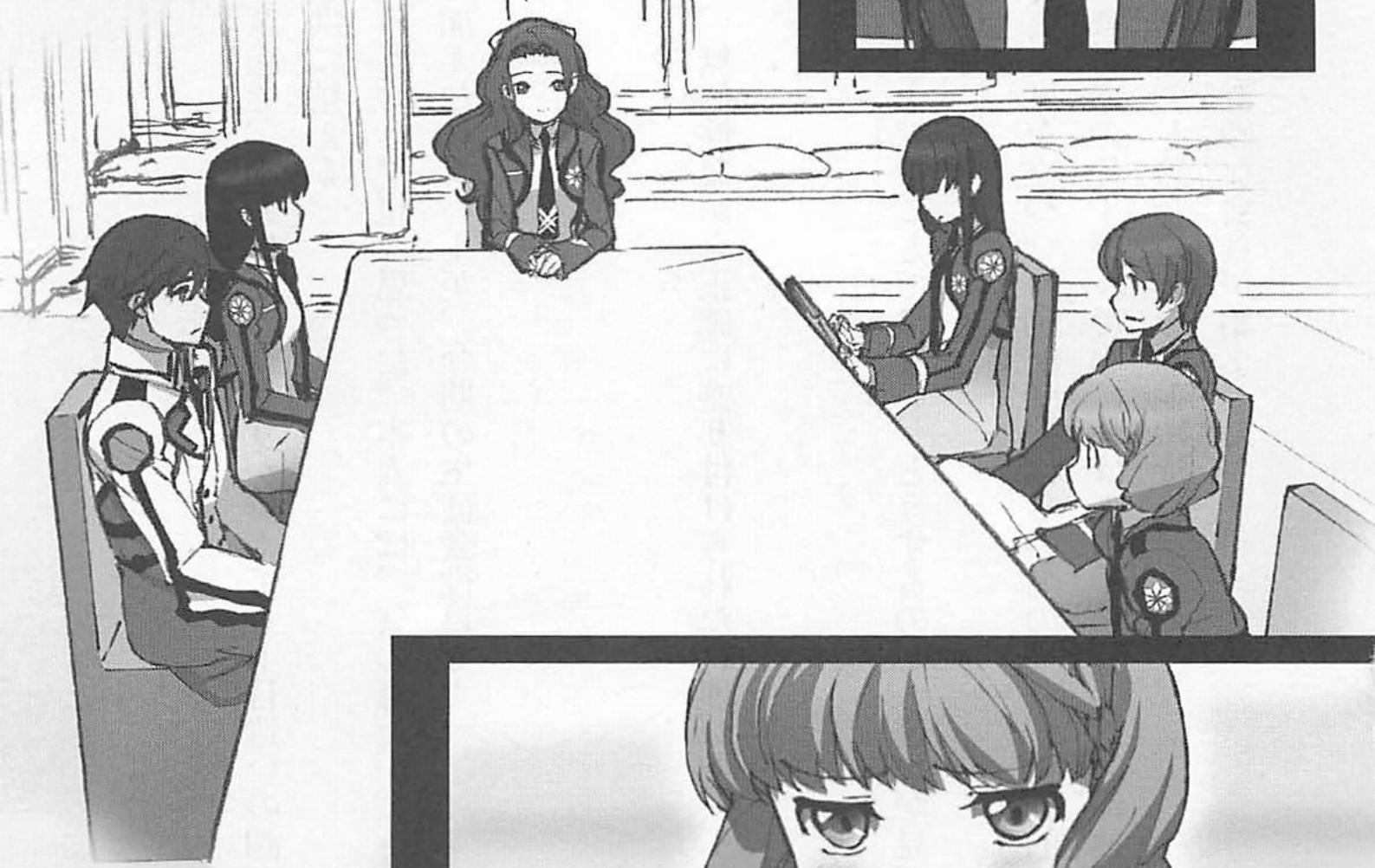
"And following that is our Secretary, Nakajou Azusa, also known as A-chan."

"Student Council President... Please don't call me 'A-chan' in front of the underclassmen. I have my position to think of too."

Because she was even more petite than Mayumi and possessed a more childish face, whenever Azusa directed a teary-eyed face upwards, she unintentionally gave off the impression of a child about to cry.

And that would probably be the reason she is called "A-Chan", Tatsuya thought. That might be too cruel a truth for the person in question.

"The last one would be Vice President Hanzou. And that makes up all the members of the Student Council Committee."



"Which I am not part of."

"Oh yes, Mari is not a member of the Student Council. Ah, the preparations are complete."

The cover to the Dinner Server opened, presenting neat and proper meals without a hint of character on a series of trays.

There were only five meals.

We're short one... Even though Tatsuya thought of this, he did not mention it aloud because he was thinking of a solution. While Tatsuya was processing this, Mari quietly took out a bento box.

Seeing Azusa stand up, Miyuki also left the table. As its name implied, the Dinner Server was capable of producing meals, but without a matching table set, it was more efficient to manually bring the trays over.

Azusa first put her tray on the table, then brought Mayumi and Suzune's portions as well.

Following that, Miyuki carried over the two trays for the siblings, and with that a most interesting lunch began.

In the beginning, the conversation was completely open.

Even then, Tatsuya and Miyuki had very few conversational subjects that coincided with the committee members.

The conversation naturally flowed towards the topic of food.

It couldn't be helped that the Dinner Server produced what was more or less fast food, but modern processed foods have nearly the same quality as normal cuisines. That being said, if it can only match "normal quality" cuisines, then the deficiencies of processed foods cannot be denied.

"Did you make that bento yourself, Watanabe-senpai?"

Miyuki's intention was simply to initiate a conversation with everyone else, and did not hide any other reason.

"Yes, are you surprised?"

However, when asked by Miyuki, Mari nodded and replied with a teasing question of her own that was difficult to answer.

In reality, Mari did not intend to torment Miyuki, but wanted to play a small joke on this sensible and polite underclassman.

"No, just a little."

Just as Miyuki was starting to panic, a voice from her side responded for her in the negative.

"...I see."

Tatsuya's eyes were watching Mari's hand motions, or her fingers to be precise. If it were made by a machine, or by hand, what kind of cuisines would, or would not, be possible...? It gave the impression that he could see through everything, causing Mari to feel quite embarrassed.

"Let's start bringing bentos of our own tomorrow."

When Miyuki spoke up as if nothing had happened, Tatsuya also shifted his line of sight.

"Miyuki's bentos are certainly incredible, but as to where to eat them..."

"Oh, yes... First we need to find somewhere to eat them..."

The siblings' dialogue — not only the contents, but the atmosphere itself - seemed a little too intimate for a pair of blood-related teenagers.

"...Just like a pair of lovers."

Suzune adopted a smile that was not a smile, and dropped an explosive comment.

"Is that so? If we weren't siblings, then we would be lovers, is that what you think?"

Tatsuya calmly countered and quickly defused the explosion.

Or more likely accidentally detonated it.

"...Of course, that was a joke."

When facing a totally red Azusa, Tatsuya mirrored Suzune's earlier "smile" and calmly continued. His face was not disturbed in the slightest.

"You, are quite boring." (!)

Mari said in an exasperated tone.

"I think so too."

Tatsuya replied in an even manner.

"Ok, Ok, let's end this subject here. Mari, I know it's tough to swallow, but Tatsuya-kun is just a difficult person to handle."

Maybe it was because she foresaw that this conversation would go on perpetually, Mayumi intervened with a slightly bitter smile.

"...That's true. I take back my earlier comment. You are an interesting guy, Tatsuya-kun."

With a slight smile — and for a beautiful young lady, she often reveals a smile before a boy — Mari changed her earlier evaluation.

First the Student Council President, now the Chair of the Public Moral Committee. I guess I better get used to people calling me by name.

"It's about time we get to the point."

It might have been a little unexpected, but the time allotted for lunch break was limited.

After everyone finished eating, both Tatsuya and Miyuki nodded upon hearing Mayumi's words.

"Just as our school places heavy emphasis on self determination, the Student Council has been granted vast powers within the confines of the school. Not only our school, but most public high schools also adopt a similar method."

Tatsuya agreed with the principle. Management-centric and Deterministic-centric were like the ebb and flow of the tides, fundamentally different but at the same time impacting one another. With the victory in the Okinawa Defense Battle 3 years ago and the subsequent rise in international voice, the old management-centric style that led to diplomatic disadvantages and internal unrest was swept out in favor of self-determination becoming the theme of society. In time, there was another reverse; a portion of private high schools adopted a harsh management-centric philosophy. Thus, it is difficult to unilaterally calculate the progression of events. (!)

"Our Student Council uses the traditional method of concentrating the power and authority in the president. This presidential style can also be described as extreme centralization."

Hearing these words triggered some unease, though this would probably be discourteous to Mayumi.

Tatsuya tightly clasped his fist.

"The president is elected by the student body, the other members are appointed by the president. With a few exceptions, the president has the right of appointment and removal for all officers."

"My position as the Chair of the Public Moral Committee is one of those exceptions. The Student Council, the Club Management Group, and the

teachers each select a representative to determine this position."

"And because of this, on some level Mari holds the same authority I do. Under the rules, the president has a term period, but the others do not. The term lasts from October 1 to September 30 of the next year. Between this time, the president has the right of appointment and removal for all officers."

(About time to get to the point.) Tatsuya did not interrupt, but merely nodded to indicate he understood.

"There is an annual tradition to invite the 1st Year representative to the Student Council, with the intent of training them to become the successor. Hopefully, the 1st Year representative will be elected to be the next Student Council President. Although it is not a guarantee, this has been the case for the past 5 years."

"So the President was also a 1st Year representative? Quite impressive."

"Ah~, err, yes."

Mayumi blushed and stammered her reply.

Tatsuya's response was merely flattery, since he already knew the answer. The odd part was that Mayumi should already be inured to such flattery given her position, yet she still reddened in embarrassment. This was no act, but true embarrassment. This is certainly quite devious... She looks like a perfectly normal high school student. — It can't be that she intentionally lets people see that she is easily embarrassed, and that is the true acting portion?

"So... Miyuki, I hope you can enter the Student Council."

At this stage, saying "enter the Student Council" is essentially becoming a member of the Student Council.

"Are you willing to accept?"

Taking a breath, Miyuki looked down at her hands, before raising her eyes towards Tatsuya in question.

Tatsuya shrugged, suppressed his own feelings, and slightly nodded his head.

Miyuki lowered her head again before raising it. This time however, her eyes were lit in the manner of someone about to take a plunge. (!)

"President, are you aware of Onii-sama's entrance examination scores?"

"—?"

At this completely unexpected development, it was all Tatsuya could do to remain silent.

What are you trying to say, little sister?

"Hm, I know of it. Truly incredible... To be honest, when I stole a glance at the teacher's results, even I lost confidence."

"...If the student council accepts students with high test scores and outstanding abilities, I believe Onii-sama fits the criteria as well."

"Wait, Mi—"

"And in terms of Desk Work (Theoretical Manipulation), I believe that has nothing to do with practical skills and grades. In other words, knowledge and judgment are more important."

For Miyuki, not allowing the other person to finish their sentence and bulling right over them is quite the rare occurrence.

And if the other speaker is Tatsuya, then the frequency would drop even lower.

"I am honored to receive an invitation to the Student Council. I would be more than happy to accept even the lowest position, but is there any way for Onii-sama to join?"

Tatsuya really wanted to cover his face and look skywards.

Is it possible that his negative influence on his little sister had reached this extent?

Miyuki should know that blatant nepotism can only lead to others' discomfort.

"Alas, this is not possible."

The one who answered was not the President, but the council member sitting to her side.

"Student Council members must be selected from Course 1 students. This is not an unwritten rule, but an enumerated one. This is the only clause that is attached to the right of appointment and removal for the president. To change this requires a special amendment meeting with the attendance of the full student body and carried by a two-thirds majority. Since the number of Course 1 and Course 2 students are practically equal, this is realistically impossible."

Suzune softly said this in a tone that was slightly apologetic.

From her voice, it was obvious that she too was someone that was against the differential treatment between Blooms and Weeds.

"...I apologize. I said all of that without understanding the situation. Please forgive me."

Miyuki could only frankly admit her mistake.

Miyuki rose to her feet and bowed deeply in apology, but no one reprimanded her.

"In that case, Miyuki will join the current Student Council with the title of secretary, is that acceptable?"

"Yes, I will work hard to fulfill my duties. Please look after me."

Miyuki lowered her head again, but this time was more polite than apologetic. Mayumi nodded at Miyuki with a smile on her face.

"You can get the details from A-chan."

"As I just said, President... Please stop calling me A-chan..."

"If there are no complications, can you come today after school?"

Completely ignoring the tearful protests on the side, Mayumi continued her conversation.

"Miyuki."

Before Miyuki could turn and ask, Tatsuya stopped her with a short but powerful verbal tone. He nodded in agreement with Mayumi's suggestion.

Miyuki nodded as well, before turning to face Mayumi.

"I understand. However, would it be fine for me to come here after school?"

"Of course. I'll wait for you, Miyuki."

"Hey~. Why am I called 'A-chan', while Shiba is called 'Miyuki'...?"

On some level this was a valid question, but was once again ignored.

...Tatsuya started to pity Azusa a little.

"...There is still a little time left until the end of lunch break. May I say something?"

The reason that everyone ignored Azusa, and not out of spite or mischievousness either, was probably because everyone's attention was

directed towards the hand Mari raised in the air.

"The roster for the Public Moral Committee still has one empty spot that has not been filled."

"I just said that we are still reviewing possible candidates. Besides, school just started a week ago, right? There's no need to hurry, Mari."

Displeased with Mari's hastiness, Mayumi admonished her. However, Mari didn't seem to care.

"I think, according to the rules of the student council, all members aside from the president must be Course 1 students, right?"

"Yes."

Mayumi nodded in confirmation while her expression said that it couldn't be helped.

"Only Course 1 students are allowed to fill the positions of Vice President, Accountant, Secretary, and related roles, right?"

"Yes. The rules stipulate that the council is made up of the President, Vice president, Accountant, and Secretary roles."

"In other words, there is no restriction for bringing a Course 2 student into the Public Moral Committee."

"Mari, you..."

Mayumi's eyes widened, while Suzune and Azusa both wore similarly shocked expressions.

This proposal was every bit as surprising as Miyuki's earlier suggestion.

Apparently, the 3rd Year student known as Watanabe Mari is quite the practical joker, Tatsuya thought.

—However.

"NICE!"

"Ah?"

Coinciding with Mayumi's delighted outburst, Tatsuya let out a dull surprise.

"Yes, there's no problem with the Public Moral Committee. Mari, the Student Council nominates Shiba Tatsuya as Public Moral Committee member."

An unexpected development happened within an instant.

"Wait a minute! Shouldn't you take into account my thoughts on the matter? Also, you haven't told me what the duties of a Public Moral Committee member consists of."

Rather than objecting from a logical perspective, it was more important to listen to the instincts that warned of a dangerous development.

"We didn't really go into detail about your sister's duties on the Student Council, correct?"

"...No, that's true, but..."

—Unfortunately, Tatsuya's objection was immediately countered by Suzune's comment.

"Eh, Rin-chan, this is fine. Tatsuya-kun, the job of the Public Moral Committee is to uphold the public moral on campus."

"..."

"..."

"...Is that all?"

"While the job doesn't come with any sense of accomplishment, and is also quite troublesome... Err, it's still a rewarding task?"

First of all, disregard the fact that she tried to hide her words behind that smile. The more important thing is that Tatsuya didn't think they were going to listen to him seriously anyways. "That wasn't what I meant."

"Hm?"

Looks like they're not pretending to be ignorant.

Tatsuya shifted his gaze to the right.

In Suzune's eyes, he discovered a pitying look.

Despite that look, it didn't look like she was going to help.

And on Suzune's side.

Mari looked like she found this entire sequence of events very interesting.

And on Mari's other side.

When locking eyes with Azusa, her eyes betrayed a harried look.

He continued to stare at her.

Despite Azusa desperately glancing left and right, Tatsuya did not take his eyes off her and continued to stare.

"Um, our school's Public Moral Committee is an organization that is responsible for policing those who break school rules."

—Just like her outer appearance, Azusa is weak to pressure.

"In terms of public morals, they usually consist of things like uniform regulations or tardiness, but these are handled by the members appointed by the Self-Governing Committee."

In this outwardly conservative, but actually incredibly unique and diverse Student Council, she was probably the only one susceptible to this tactic.

Tatsuya started to become a little concerned about his future job duties.

"...Um, do you have any questions?"

"No, please continue."

"Ah, OK. The primary duties of the Public Moral Committee are to identify those that use magic against school rules and to subjugate those that use magic on campus to cause a disturbance. After the Public Moral Committee member decides the necessary punishment, he or she will present before the Disciplinary Committee alongside the President and Student Representative. In short, they are both the police and the prosecutor."

"Isn't that wonderful, Onii-sama."

"No, Miyuki... Please wait a little before giving off that 'Then it's decided' look in your eyes... Just in case, let me clarify a few things."

"Clarify what?"

Tatsuya was not focused on Azusa who just finished her explanations, but on Mari instead.

"According to the earlier explanation, the Public Moral Committee member's mission is to halt any conflicts upon discovery, correct?"

"Well, that's true. We also intercede on non-magical conflicts."

"Also, if magic was used, our intervention is mandatory."

"If possible, it'd be best if the conflict was resolved prior to use of magic."

"That's my point! My technical grade is terrible, and on top of that, I'm a Course 2 student!"

Finally, even Tatsuya started to raise his volume.

This task clearly requires overwhelming magical prowess to subjugate the

opponent.

No matter from what angle of consideration, this task was not suited for Course 2 students with poor technical skills.

However, despite Tatsuya's questioning, Mari remained completely unperturbed and replied with a simple comment.

"It's not a problem."

"What are you saying?"

"In competitions of power, I will handle it... Lunch break is almost over. Let's save the rest for after school, any objection?"

It was true that lunch break was about to end, and doubly true that this subject could not simply be glossed over.

"...I understand."

Tatsuya fully understood that if he entered this room after school, he would have to enter this quagmire again, but he didn't have any other choice.

"Then we'll meet again here."

Tatsuya suppressed any unreasonable feelings and nodded his head. To his side, while fully understanding her elder brother's thoughts, Miyuki could not hide her feelings of elation.

◊ ◊ ◊

Because education has finally reached a widespread status, the pointlessness of schools became a popular stance.

Since online classes became a reality, it was argued that spending time in actual classrooms was a waste of time and resources.

In the end, the pointlessness of schools only remained at the popular level and did not rise any higher.

No matter how advanced the interface, virtual experiences are not reality. Practice and experimentation must be paired with timely questions and answers. In addition, anything not conducted under real circumstances will not yield actual learning experiences. Students learning together in the same class can promote additional learning. These two points have been proven beyond doubt by mock experiments.

1st Year Class E was in the middle of a practice class.

Having said that, there wasn't a real-time teacher present. This is a simple example of when the results of research are not put into practice.

The students of Class E were following the instructions displayed upon the wall monitor to operate the built-in educational use CAD. Today's subject matter was the basic of the basics, which is the simple operation of this device.

While officially a guided learning session, there was still an assignment to complete. Because there was no supervising teacher, the completion of the assignment reports became the only criterion for this class. Today's assignment was to use the CAD to direct a flatbed car from one end of its track to the other, to be repeated three times. Despite the lack of a reminder, it was a given that manual operation is strictly forbidden.

"Tatsuya, how did the Student Council Room feel?"

While waiting in line to use the CAD, Leo asked after poking Tatsuya in the back.

His face didn't reveal any ulterior motive. He was simply curious.

"Turned into an intriguing conversation..."

"Intriguing?"

Erika, who was in front of Tatsuya in the line, also turned around to ask.

"They asked me to join the Public Moral Committee. How could it suddenly turn out this way?"

Tatsuya and Erika both tilted their head. Truth be told, the only way to describe it would be "how could things turn out this way".

"You're right. It is pretty sudden."

Leo also agreed that it was quite unexpected.

"But isn't it great to be scouted by the Student Council?"

Mizuki's opinion was different from the others. She stopped as she was on her way back to the end of the line to try the assignment again.

"Great? Isn't this merely a complementary bundle for my little sister?"

All the same, Tatsuya was unable to accept Mizuki's compliment.

Erika smiled slightly when she saw Tatsuya's suspicious and stubborn attitude.

"Well, well, let's stop with all that self-depreciation. So, what does the Public Moral Committee do anyway?"

After hearing Erika's question, Tatsuya repeated what he heard from Azusa. Hearing that, all three pairs of eyes widened.

"Quite the troublesome task..."

Leo sighed while Mizuki's expression became worried.

"If it's not safe, then... Erika-chan, what's wrong?"

Erika was extremely upset, though come to speak of it, since when did she become so enraged?

"...Really, so impulsive..."

Her eyesight drifted. Speaking towards thin air, it looked like she was scolding someone who wasn't present.

"Erika-chan?"

"Ah, eh, sorry. That really is going too far. Tatsuya-kun, you're better off declining such a dangerous task."

As that solemn expression turned into a mischievous smile, Erika's voice became noticeably brighter as she goaded him.

"Eh, it's still quite interesting! Why don't you accept, Tatsuya. I'll cheer you on."

Although it was understandable that Erika was joking to disguise what she said earlier, it appeared that she was still hiding something.

"But if you have to intervene in conflicts, won't you be the target of magical attacks as well?"

There was a reasonable guess as to who the "impulsive one" referred to.

"Yeah, and there will definitely be people who mistake good intentions for cold-blooded actions."

Yet, the exact details behind those feelings remain a mystery.

"On the other hand, rather than letting those pretentious Course 1 students hog the limelight, don't you think it's better if Tatsuya does it?"

Tatsuya wasn't rash enough to join their conversation.

"Hm... Well, that might be true."

"Erika-chan, please don't think of it that way! If we don't want that to happen, isn't it better to not get into fights?"

"But Mizuki, even if we don't plan on it, aren't there times where we have to put out fires? Like yesterday, for example."

"Well, that..."

"There is a lot of suspicion and injustice in the world. We can't always expect a positive result if we concede all the time."

Case in point, unconsciously Tatsuya felt that it was about time for him to end this conversation before it led to dangerous territory.

"Erika, it's your turn."

"Ah, sorry, sorry."

At Tatsuya's nudging, the slightly flustered Erika quickly assumed her position. Judging from her back, she was in a state of complete seriousness and was completely unaffected by the earlier conversation. It looks like she is the type that can effortlessly change from one mental state to the next. Despite an outwardly flighty appearance, her natural state is probably one of seriousness.

Erika's back shook a little, probably because she took a deep breath.

It happened in a second, although invisible to the naked eye, the fluctuations of the psions passed over Erika's back and could be "seen" in the form of a light that only Magicians could perceive. This was a sign that the activation and subsequent invocation did not consume all psions, as the leftover psions created this psion light. Highly skilled Magicians only leave behind small amounts of psion light, but for a high school 1st Year student, this was an acceptable level. When there are enough leftover psions, photon interference between psions result in a physical manifestation of light. An absence of psion light would denote excellent control over one's abilities.

The flatbed car in front of the CAD shifted forward, then returned to its original position. This occurred three times. "Yes!" It was obvious that Erika was very pleased with the result, as could be seen from her clenched fist and the way she turned to look at Tatsuya. Indeed, she was more deft this time compared to the first time they conducted this exercise, and there was marked improvement to both acceleration and deceleration.

The purpose of this exercise was to accelerate the flatbed car to the middle of the track, then decelerate to the other end, accelerate from that end back towards the middle, and decelerate to the starting point... To be repeated three times. The activation sequence inputted into the CAD was for these 6

acceleration and deceleration invocations. Because there were no set acceleration or deceleration vectors(?), this could be used to examine the skill level amongst the students. Whether the flatbed car moved in a stable motion was enough to gauge if the user was skilled or not.

Erika secretly displayed a hand signal for victory that was not snobbish at all as she moved towards the end of the line behind Mizuki. Next, Tatsuya took his place before the built-in CAD.

He stepped on the pedal switch to adjust the CAD height, placed his palm on the white, transparent touchpad that sat atop a large box, and began to manipulate the psion flow.

What returned was the sound of the activation confirmation, intermixed with various conflicting noise. Resisting the urge to wrinkle his eyebrows, Tatsuya began to build the invocation sequence.

The flatbed car stumbled two or three times before moving forward in a stable motion.

Because today's assignment was to get used to operating a CAD, there was no timer installed.

Besides Tatsuya himself, no one would know.

Until the moment the flatbed car started moving, the time exhausted was greater than Erika's by a large margin. Actually, not just compared to Erika. Out of the 25 people in Class E, he would definitely be one of the bottom feeders.

The only reason this was not immediately obvious was because the motion of the flatbed car was roughly the same as the others.

However, Tatsuya was well aware of his own disappointing performance.

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Thank God no one was jealous.

Despite the series of "Good luck~" calls from his friends, his mood did not improve, and instead was even more depressed.

The reason was probably because Tatsuya originally was not interested in the subject, thus leading to his further depression.

After school, Tatsuya headed towards the Student Council room, dragging

even heavier footsteps than during lunch break.

Although the atmosphere surrounding the circumstances was a little pitiful, because Miyuki could understand Tatsuya's feelings, she remained silent.

Thanks to the fact that the ID Card was already registered in the certification system --(Joining the Student Council is apparently considered a guarantee. Although resistance is possible, Mayumi and Mari would probably insist) -- the siblings entered the room. (!)

Immediately upon entering, there was a sharp gaze tinged with hostility. The source came from the opposite side of the machine in the wall, in a seat that was unoccupied during lunch break.

"Excuse us!"

It was hard to say whether it was out of sorrow or pride, but Tatsuya was already accustomed to this type of gaze and atmosphere. He maintained his poker face, bowed in silence, and with that the hostile gaze dissipated like rainclouds before the sun. Even then, it wasn't as if the hostility had disappeared completely, more like the previous hostile gaze was now directed in a more favorable light towards Miyuki, who was now standing in the front. The reasoning behind this should need no further explanation.

The owner of this gaze stood up and walked towards the siblings. No, more like walked towards Miyuki. Tatsuya remembered his face. On the day of enrollment, he was the 2nd Year student standing closely behind Mayumi as if awaiting orders, thus making him the Student Council Vice President.

The Vice President stood roughly as tall as Tatsuya. The difference was that his shoulders were a little narrower.

He had a handsome visage that did not warrant additional words to describe, and an unremarkable build. He did not give off a robust impression, but from the way psion light densely clung to the air around his body, he must be a young man with considerable Magic Power.

"I am the Vice President, Hattori Gyoubu. Shiba Miyuki, welcome to the Student Council."

His voice was a little abnormal, but considering his age he was probably suppressing any personal reaction.

His right hand shook a little, probably because the wish to shake hands was not completely erased.

As to why the shaking stopped, Tatsuya did not care to consider.

Hattori returned to his seat while completely ignoring Tatsuya. Behind Miyuki, a displeased aura was gathering, but that too disappeared in an instant. The only one who noticed was probably Tatsuya, thanks to his proximity. Thankfully she managed to control herself, Tatsuya patted himself discreetly on the chest.

The Vice President was completely unaware of Tatsuya's worries — though that shouldn't be surprising, given they just met — or the source of Tatsuya's worries. Just then, two very casual greetings flew in.

"Ah, you're here."

"Welcome, Miyuki. You too, Tatsuya-kun. Good work."

From the way Mari casually raised a hand in greeting, she was already treating Tatsuya as one of them. Mayumi was the complete opposite. Her attitude was much different from before. Then again, most groups would be upset if an outsider were to intrude, although no outburst actually happened. Tatsuya, much like everyone else, had long since arrived at the conclusion that trying to understand these two was a hopeless cause.

"In that case, no need to delay. A-chan, if you please."

"...Yes."

It appeared that she already gave up. For a moment, Azusa's head drooped with a sad expression before she put on a wooden smile and led Miyuki towards the terminal on the side.

"Well, let's be off."

It hasn't even been a whole day yet and she's already speaking so casually. Maybe flightiness is part of her character, Tatsuya thought.

"Where to?"

Then again, Tatsuya's background was not privileged enough for him to care about anyone else's word choice. He replied in the shortest, most efficient method possible.

"Public Moral Committee headquarters. There's a lot of things you need to see firsthand to understand. It's located directly underneath this room. That being said, they're both connected."

After Mari finished speaking, Tatsuya took a breath before replying.

"...That's quite the strange design."

"I thought so too."

As she was saying this, Mari began to stand up. But just as she was about to leave the chair, a comment stopped her.

"Watanabe-senpai, please wait a minute."

The voice came from Vice President Hattori. Upon hearing this, Mari replied in a manner that to this day Tatsuya still cannot get used to.

"Is something the matter, Hattori Gyoubushoujou Hanzou?"

"Please don't address me by my full name!"

Tatsuya glanced at Mayumi.

Seeing Tatsuya's gaze, Mayumi tilted her head with a "Hm?".

You're telling me that "Hanzou" is actually his real name... Completely. Unexpected.

"Then let's go with Vice President Hattori Hanzou."

"Please call me Hattori Gyoubu!"

"That's your family's official title, isn't it."

"It has nothing to do with the title now. The school has already accepted the name 'Hattori Gyoubu'! ...No, that's not what I wanted to say."

"That's because you're too formal, isn't it?"

"Ok, ok, Mari, Hanzou also has things he won't back down from."

Everyone's gaze fell towards the speaker, Mayumi.

You're hardly qualified to say that. (!)

But Mayumi had no reaction at all.

Probably because she didn't realize it.

More to the point, why hadn't Hattori said anything?.

This was slightly different than not being accustomed to speaking with the President.

Even when confronting Mari, Hattori's expression had not changed. But compared to his expression then, Tatsuya found that to be very interesting.

—Of course, that was only under the condition that he was a spectator.

Alas, the time allotted to a spectator is very short.

"Watanabe-senpai, the topic I wanted to speak with you about is precisely regarding the replacements for the Public Moral Committee."

The blood that had originally caused Hattori's face to flush completely red had now receded. Just like the slow-motion screening for an animation, Hattori had calmed himself.

"What?"

"I object to you appointing this 1st Year student to the Public Moral Committee."

When Hattori stated his opinion, he was either perfectly calm, or was forcibly holding his emotions in check.

Mari's eyebrows wrinkled slightly, and that did not appear to be an act. Tatsuya couldn't tell if she was merely surprised or irritated by this.

"What is this nonsense? The one who nominated Shiba Tatsuya-kun is President Saegusa. Even though it was verbal, the right of appointment remains with her alone."

"I have heard that the receiving party has not agreed. Despite the nomination, the matter is unofficial until he personally agrees."

"That is up to Shiba Tatsuya-kun himself. The President has already elaborated on the decision of the Student Council. The final decision is his, not yours."

Mari's eyes were on Hattori while she said this.

Hattori never looked at Tatsuya. Or maybe it would be more correct to say that he was ignoring Tatsuya's presence.

Watching these two people, Suzune was very calm, Azusa was very nervous, and Mayumi was completely unreadable, sitting there with a traditional smile on her face.

Miyuki was staring at the terminal on the side with a subtle expression on her face. However, she was probably a hair trigger away from exploding at any time. For entirely different reasons, both Tatsuya and Azusa were growing very worried.

"There is no precedence for appointing a Weed to the Public Moral Committee." (!)

Hattori's rebuttal was laced with the derogatory term. Upon hearing this, Mari slightly raised an eyebrow.

"That's a taboo term, Vice President Hattori. A taboo term as banned by the Public Moral Committee. You have a lot of nerve using that in front of me, the Chair of the Public Moral Committee."

Facing Mari's reprimand, warning, or maybe a little of both, Hattori showed no sign of weakness.

"You can ban that term all you want. Do you plan on punishing a third of the entire student body? The difference between Blooms and Weeds is something that is written into the school system and acknowledged by the school itself. The source of the difference between Blooms and Weeds is the difference in ability. Public Moral Committee members are responsible for the task of subjugating students that break school rules. A Weed with inferior abilities is incapable of accomplishing that task."

To Hattori's proud assertion, Mari only smiled coldly.

"It is true that the Public Moral Committee is ability-based, but ability comes in many forms. If we need to use strength for suppression, that's what I'm here for. Even if I'm up against 10 or even 20 opponents, I can handle them alone. In this school, the only people that can go 1 on 1 against me are President Saegusa and Club Management Group Leader Juumonji. According to you, the people with low combat capability are unnecessary. So, do you plan to challenge me, Vice President Hattori?"

The only way that Mari would say this was because of her confidence and combat record. However, despite slightly backing down before this enormous pressure, Hattori had no plans to surrender.

"This isn't my problem. It's about his ability to adapt."

The bottom line was that Hattori believed his stance was correct. Course 2 students with inferior abilities could not handle the responsibilities of the Public Moral Committee that were so heavily reliant on ability. The fact that no Course 2 student had ever been appointed to the Public Moral Committee also supported this.

In spite of this, Mari's confidence surpassed Hattori.

"Did I not say that ability comes in many forms? Tatsuya-kun can read the activation sequence and thus accurately predict the magic being invoked with his eyes and brain."

"...What did you say?"

Upon hearing this unexpected detail, Hattori reflexively asked. Rather than saying this was unexpected, it would be more appropriate to say this was

impossible to believe.

Reading the activation sequence. This by all rights should be impossible. For Hattori, that was "common sense".

"In other words, even before the magic has been invoked, he already knows what magic his opponent is using."

However, Mari's answer did not change. This was the truth, was definitely possible, and Mari had no doubts whatsoever as she said it.

"According to our school rules, depending on the type of magic used, the level of punishment also changes. Unfortunately, if we were to disrupt the activation sequence before invocation like Mayumi did, there is no way to tell what magic was originally used. If we waited until the activation sequence finished, then that would defeat the entire purpose. Thus it is safer to disrupt magic during the activation sequence. Without any definite accusation of wrong doing, the only thing we can charge them with is attempted disruption and the subsequent lighter punishment. But with Tatsuya, we can properly catch those that have been using stronger magics."

"...But, if he ran across an actual crime scene, and was unable to stop the magic invocation..."

Hattori could not overcome his shock, but still managed to rebut.

"In that case, it would be beyond a 1st Year Course 1 student anyways. And probably beyond 2nd Year students as well. How many people do you know that are able to invoke second and still manage to deny their opponent from invoking first? Besides that, there is still one more reason I want him to join the Public Moral Committee."

Mari tabled the first reason and started another.

No matter what, Hattori couldn't come up with a counter argument on the spot.

"To this day there is no Public Moral Committee member that comes from Course 2 students. In other words, Course 2 students that improperly use magic against school rules are apprehended by Course 1 students. As you said, there is a wide divide between Course 1 and Course 2 students. Course 1 students can apprehend Course 2 students, but the reverse is not true. This configuration has only served to widen that divide. I do not like it that the committee members under my command are only serving to widen this differential impression."

"Ah... Quite impressive, Mari. You have even taken this into account? I thought you only cared about Tatsuya-kun."

"Please be quiet, President."

Mayumi wanted to change the surrounding atmosphere, but was stopped by Suzune.

A reproachful look.

A shaking head.

The former was from Mayumi, the latter from Suzune.

And so, two conflicting emotions were mixed together into one inseparable whole, and came bursting out with resentment.

"President... as the Vice-President, I object to appointing Shiba Tatsuya as a Public Morals Committee member.

While I accept that Chair Watanabe has got a point in her assertion, the original mission of a Public Morals Committee member is to uncover and subjugate the school rule breakers.

A Course 2 student who is lacking in magic ability can't perform the duties of a Public Morals Committee member. Such a misplaced appointment will surely damage your reputation as the President.

Please reconsider."

"Please wait!"

Tatsuya turned around frantically.

Just as he had feared, Miyuki could no longer bear with it.

Absorbed in Mari's speech, he had missed the right timing to restrain her.

While he frantically attempted to preemptively stop her, Miyuki, who had started speaking, was faster.

"This may sound audacious, Vice-President. My brother's practical magic results may indeed be unfavorable, but that was merely because the practical test was not effective in gauging my brother's strength.

In a real battle, my brother would not lose to anyone."

On hearing those words that were filled with certainty, Mari's eyes widened a little. Mayumi's faint smile disappeared as well, and her serious eyes turned towards Miyuki and Tatsuya.

However, the seriousness in the gaze Hattori returned on Miyuki became

thinner.

"Shiba-san."

The one Hattori was addressing was, needless to say, Miyuki.

"Regardless of what happens, a Magician must make judgments calmly and logically. Individual bias may be unavoidable for a normal person, but for one who is aiming to become a Magician, please bear in mind that you should not let your individual bias cloud your judgment."

There was no kindness felt in the admonishment. He was probably just acting as an excellent "Upperclassman", who despite his self-righteousness, was looking after his junior of the same Course 1. —But, under these circumstances, Tatsuya seemed to know that such a manner of speaking would cause an opposite effect, and the moment when Miyuki would rebuke Hattori.

Sure enough, Miyuki was getting increasingly heated up.

"Pardon me for saying so, but my judgment is not clouded! If Onii-sama could use more of his power—"

"Miyuki."

Tatsuya held his hand out in front of Miyuki, who had completely lost her cool.

With a startled face, Miyuki shut her mouth with a mix of embarrassment and regret, and hung her head in shame.

Having stopped Miyuki's words with a wave of his hand, Tatsuya walked up to Hattori.

Miyuki had indeed said too much. She had almost said the things that shouldn't be said. However, it was Hattori who had made Miyuki say that much. Tatsuya had no intention of putting all the blame on Miyuki alone.

"Vice-President Hattori, why don't we have a mock battle?"

"What...?"

The people who were lost for words from the surprise request were not limited to the challengee, Hattori, alone.

Mayumi, and also Mari, looked at the two of them in dumbfounded amazement from the unexpected daring retaliation.

Under everyone's gaze, Hattori's body started quivering.

"Don't be too conceited, for a mere reserve!"

The one who gave a small shriek was Azusa.

The other three, as expected of upperclassmen, remained composed.

And then, a small wry smile surfaced on the troubled face of the one who was getting verbally abused.

"What's so funny?!"

"A Magician should remain calm, right?"

"Kuh!"

Having his own words thrown back at him in ridicule, Hattori held his breath.

Tatsuya didn't stop there. He did not feel like stopping.

"As it is, I think that we won't know each other's anti-personnel battle skill without fighting.

It's not like I want to become a Public Morals Committee member but... if it's for proving that my little sister's judgment is not clouded, then it cannot be helped."

He seemed to be mumbling to himself.

To Hattori, it sounded like a challenge.

"...Fine. I'll give you a good lesson on what it is to know your place."

It was not just his mouth that had betrayed his agitation. His controlled tone, on the contrary, indicated the depth of his anger.

Without a moment's delay, Mayumi interjected.

"As the Student Council President, I authorize the formal mock battle match between 2nd Year Class B, Hattori Gyoubu and 1st Year Class E, Shiba Tatsuya."

"On the basis of the Student Council President's declaration, as the Chair of Public Morals Committee, I recognize that the match between the two of you as a legitimate extracurricular activity in abidance of the school rules."

"The time of the match will be thirty minutes from now, at the third practice room. The match will be a private one, and I authorize the use of CADs by both sides."

It was a measure to prevent the match from becoming a brawling incident — an act of violence forbidden by the school rules.

On the declaration from Mayumi and Mari with solemn expressions and nonchalant voices, Azusa started typing furiously into the terminal.

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"It's just the third day of school, and my cat is going to be out of the bag, huh..."

After retrieving his CAD case in exchange for the approval letter stamped with the student council president's stamp (even now, this sort of thing was still done on paper), Tatsuya grumbled just before the door to the third practice room, and from behind him, came a voice that was on the verge of tears.

"I'm really sorry..."

"It's nothing you need to apologize for."

"But Onii-sama, it's because of my fault that I'm causing trouble to you again..."

Turning around, and taking half a step, Tatsuya held his hand above his little sister's head.

Miyuki's body trembled as she closed her eyes. But, after feeling the gentle pat on her head, she timidly looked up.

Even now, her tears threatened to spill from her eyes.

"I said this too during the school entrance ceremony, right?

I always feel that I'm being saved by you whenever you get angry in my place, when I am unable to get angry myself.

...Don't apologize. Now is the time to say something more appropriate."

"Yes... please do your best."

Wiping off a tear with a finger, Miyuki smiled, and in similar fashion, Tatsuya smiled, nodded, and opened the door to the practice room.

"This is surprising."

Upon opening the door, this was the line said to him.

"What is?"

The one who was receiving Tatsuya at the door, was the appointed judge for this match, Mari.

"I was referring to your unexpected enthusiasm at fighting. I thought you were one who wasn't bothered by the remarks of others."

Even while she was talking about her surprise, her eyes were sparkling with anticipation. A deep sigh welled up in his throat, but Tatsuya, with his steel-like self-restraint — describing it in this manner may be a little exaggerating but — swallowed it anyway.

"I thought it was the job of a Public Morals Committee member to stop personal fights."

Instead of a sigh, he couldn't help but let loose a somewhat sarcastic remark.

While there was not a single sign of Mari rebutting that.

"This is not a personal fight. It's a formal match.

Mayumi said it too, didn't she?

The rule of strength is not something applied between the Course 1 and Course 2 students. Rather, it is something applied between Course 1 students themselves.

This is the very first time we are using such a method to settle things between a Course 1 and Course 2 student, you see."

*I see. On the contrary, it is encouraged to settle disagreements by force if they can't be settled by words alone. (!)*

"Didn't the number of 'formal matches' increase ever since you became the Chair of the Public Morals Committee, senpai?"

"Indeed, it did increase."

Her calm attitude caused not just Tatsuya, but even Miyuki who was waiting behind him to smile wryly.

Then, Mari suddenly turned serious and brought her face close.

"Well, are you confident?"

At a distance where he could hear her breathing, she asked in a whisper.

Miyuki's beautiful eyebrows rose at that overly close distance, but as Tatsuya's field of view was largely occupied by Mari's face which was giving off a meaningful smile, it was fortunate (?) that he could not see his little sister's overreaction.

With her head partially lowered with a pair of upturned, almond-shaped eyes, and in addition to that, a faint, sweet scent drifting toward him,

Tatsuya became conscious of his own sexual excitement.

In the instant he was conscious of it, to the object called 'himself', it became a phenomenon born from inside of him, which was then severed from himself. His excitement was converted to mere information inside of him.

"Hattori is skilled enough to be among the top five in our school. If I have to say, he's more inclined towards group battles, and individual fights are not his specialty, but still, there is hardly anyone who can win against him in one-on-one."

In an alluring high pitch voice, Mari whispered those words which were devoid of any sexual charm.

"I'm not thinking of fighting him head on."

But, without the slightest sign of wavering, Tatsuya replied in a voice which could be said to be more a mechanical than a cold one.

"You are pretty calm... I've lost a little confidence."

While saying that, Mari was clearly amused.

"Haah."

Without saying anything else, Tatsuya gave a vague nod.

"At a time like this, if your face turns red, which will make you cuter, the number of people who will lend you their strength will increase, I think."

Grinning as she stepped back, Mari then walked to the starting line in the center.

"What a troublesome fella..."

She's probably the type who would seek chaos in order and bring about order in chaos, thought Tatsuya.

To a person living in tranquility, she was a troublemaker.

While letting out his first sigh at his human relationships, which were filled with remarkable ups and downs ever since entering this school, he opened his CAD case.

The black attaché case contained a pair of CADs in the shape of handguns. He took out one of them, pulled out a cartridge shape from the place where a magazine would be lodged into a real gun, and exchanged it for something else.

Except for Miyuki, everyone watched him intently with deep interest.

"Sorry for the wait."

"Do you always carry additional storage cartridges with you?"

The number of activation sequences that could be used with a Specialized CAD was limited. In contrast to the Generalized CAD which could store up to ninety-nine types of Activation Sequences without regard to the systems of magic, the Specialized CAD could only store nine types of Activation Sequences of a single system of magic. To remedy this disadvantage, CAD devices that could store alternate, exchangeable Activation Sequences were developed, but since Specialized CADs were originally intended for Magicians who are strong in specific Magic Sequences, the need for an increased arsenal of magic is not too high. More often than not, even when multiple storage were carried, most still relied on using one type of magic.

However, from Tatsuya's answer to Mari's curiosity, it would have been safe to assume he belonged to the minority.

"Yes, I am unable to smoothly operate the Generalized CAD as I can't cope well with them."

Hattori, who was standing across from him, sneered slightly upon hearing this, but this did not impact Tatsuya's mindset in the slightest.

"Alright, allow me to explain the rules. In terms of either direct or indirect attacks, lethal attacks are forbidden. Techniques that deal permanent disabilities to the opponent are also forbidden.

Abilities that cause direct harm to the physical body are forbidden. However, direct attacks that do not result in anything greater than bone fractures are permitted.

No weapons at any time. Unarmed combat is allowed. If you plan on using kicking techniques, please remove your shoes and change into the school's soft boots.

The condition for defeat is when the judge has determined one side is unable to continue the battle.

Both sides please move behind your respective starting lines, and do not activate your CAD until I give the signal.

Breaking the rules results in an automatic defeat. I will use my full strength to stop it, so remember that. That is all."

Both Tatsuya and Hattori nodded at this, walked towards the starting lines that were five meters apart, and stood facing one another.

Hattori's expression was more solemn than mocking or challenging, but his face still betrayed an easy-going demeanor.

The initial position was out of physical reaching distance. Even if the opponent possessed the charging power of a professional soccer player, magic was still faster at this distance. Because this was a magic-based contest, the side with the superior magical attack would naturally have the advantage.

In this situation, the one who invoked their magic first would usually win. Even if the initial attack did not completely defeat the opponent, some degree of damage was unavoidable. There were very few people that had the mental discipline to absorb magical damage and still calmly work their magic. Since sustaining magical damage also disrupted the magic creation process, as long as one continued to attack, victory was assured.

Also, under the condition that both sides activated their CADs at the same time, Hattori firmly believed that he, a Course 1 student, had no chance of losing against an upstart Course 2 student. CAD was a tool that minimized casting time. Even if someone tried to secretly use a non-CAD based magical ability before the starting signal, it would still be no match against the CAD's speed. On top of that, how quickly one could invoke their magic using a CAD made up the bulk of an individual's magic technical score. This was the defining difference between Course 1 and Course 2 students.

Tatsuya held a handgun-shaped Specialized CAD.

Hattori wore a traditional bracelet-shaped Generalized CAD.

Specialized CADs had the advantage in speed, while Generalized CADs had the advantage in versatility.

Nonetheless, even if Specialized CADs had a speed advantage over Generalized CADs, that alone could not overcome the difference between Course 1 and Course 2 students. And the opponent was a new student. Hattori's conclusion was that there was absolutely no way that he could lose, a consideration that was neither conceited nor overconfident.

Tatsuya pointed the CAD he held in his right hand towards the floor, And waited for Mari's signal.

The simulation room returned to complete silence.

Just as that silence was about to fill every corner of the room...

"...Begin!"

The "formal match" between Tatsuya and Hattori officially began.

Hattori slid his right hand over the CAD.

While the action only consisted of tapping three key points, not a single spare movement was wasted.

Originally, his specialization was in medium-ranged wide area attack magic.

If anything, when it came to one-on-one close quarter matches, they were not his forte.

But even when we say that "they were not his forte", since entering high school the year before, Hattori still stood undefeated in battle.

While he might have yielded before the Big Three which consisted of Mari, a specialist in both individual and group anti-personnel combat, Mayumi, who could freely employ astounding, high-speed, high precision shooting magic, and Juumonji, a club captain who had gained a peculiar title known as "Iron Wall", Hattori had the confidence that he could hold his own against other students or even groups of teachers.

That pride did not come from overconfidence.

The simplistic Activation Sequence that heavily relied on speed was already complete, and in a flash, Hattori had already entered the Magic Invocation stage.

At this moment, he almost let out a cry of surprise.

His opponent, that arrogant 1st Year student, was somehow close enough to fill his entire vision.

He hurriedly changed his target, and prepared to unleash his magic.

Basic Single System Movement-Type Magic.

Any opponent caught by this magic would be flung back over a dozen meters and knocked unconscious by the impact, ending the battle.

But, the magic ended without invoking.

There should have been no problems with the Activation Sequence.

His opponent had vanished.

While the target of Magic Sequences did not have to be very specific, if

the target that was originally in the line of sight suddenly disappeared, spell failure was inevitable.

The Psion Information Aide that was supposed to keep track of his opponent's status and location vanished without any effect, just as a powerful "wave motion" approached Hattori from the flank, who was too busy looking left and right for his opponent. (!)

Three consecutive wave motions.

Each wave motion overlapped with one another inside Hattori's body, causing massive swaying to break out that ultimately resulted in Hattori losing consciousness.

Victory was decided in an instant.

The entire match lasted less than 5 seconds, and could be appropriately described as an instant win.

In front of Tatsuya's CAD, Hattori keeled over.

"...Winner, Shiba Tatsuya."

Mari cautiously announced the name of the winner.

There was not a trace of joy on the winner's face.

That expression was appropriate for someone who had merely arrived at the expected result.

He gave a short bow, then walked towards the table that held the CAD cases.

It wasn't just his posture; he was wholly uninterested in his victory.

"Wait."

Mari called out from behind him.

"That movement right there... Did you preemptively input a Speed Ability?"

Hearing this, Mayumi, Suzune, and Azusa all began reflecting on the match.

At the moment the start signal was given, Tatsuya had moved in front of Hattori.

At the next instant, he was several meters behind Hattori's right flank.

Anyone would mistake that speed for Flash Step.

A normal human body is incapable of that sort of motion.



"The fact that that is impossible...I think Senpai is more aware of that than anyone."

It was just as Tatsuya said. As the judge, Mari was closely observing whether CADs were being activated. Not just the obvious CADs, but even for hidden CADs, the flow of psions would have been obvious to her.

"But, that?"

"That wasn't magic, that was a bona fide physical technique."

"I can testify to that as well. That is Onii-sama's physical technique. Onii-sama was mentored by Kokonoe Yakumo-sensei."

Mari held her breath. For someone as versed in combat as she was, the name Kokonoe Yakumo was quite familiar. Mayumi and Suzune did not know of Kokonoe like Mari, but they too could not hide their surprise that someone could accomplish such a feat that was normally written off as something that could only be accomplished through the aid of magic.

Mayumi recovered from her astonishment. From the perspective of someone who had studied magic, she also had her own question.

"Was that attack also Ninjutsu? I thought I saw the release of Psion wave motions."

That being said, her voice and word selection had both stiffened, probably because she still hadn't completely overcome her shock.

Generally, inquiring about another Magician's unreleased abilities, or even to ask how the ability works, is against the rules. But, for someone such as Mayumi who uses Psion Bullets, for Tatsuya to use Psions that had no physical manifestation as weapons, and exactly how he managed to damage Hattori... these burning questions could not be suppressed.

"You're correct. The attack was not Ninjutsu, but based on Psion wave motions. The foundation of that Psion motion wave came from Oscillation-type Basic Single System Magic."

"Given that, I still don't understand how you knocked out Hanzou."

"Causing him to faint was enough."

"Faint? How did that happen?"

As he watched Mayumi tilt her head, Tatsuya's expression did not become more troubled as he continued to explain.

"For Magicians, Psions can be discernible just like visible light and sound

waves. This is a mandatory skill for magic, but the side effect is that when Magicians are exposed to unexpected Psion wave motions, they frequently misinterpret that their bodies are swaying. This misunderstanding directly affects the physical body. The reasoning behind this is very similar to hypnotic suggestion, where people under hypnosis are induced into thinking they suffered 'burn injuries', then find out that the physical symptoms reflect their thinking. During the match, I used this illusion of 'swaying motions', causing him to feel an extreme case of seasickness."

"I can't believe it... Magicians are usually exposed to Psion wave motions, and thus become accustomed to these surges. For External Systemic Magic, both Activation Sequences and Magic Sequences are types of Psion wave motions. And yet despite this, to be able to disable a Magician through Psion surge alone, and to cause such a strong effect, exactly how..."

The one who answered Mayumi's question was Suzune.

"Compound waves."

"Rin-chan?"

Just this short sentence was not sufficient for the intelligent Mayumi to understand. Naturally, Suzune's explanation wasn't finished.

"By consecutively creating three varied vibrations, then have their intersection point at Hattori-kun's location, thus creating an equilateral surge through these powerful wave motions. To think you were capable of making such precise calculations."

"Quite the explanation, Ichihara-senpai."

Although Suzune was also quite shocked at Tatsuya's calculation abilities, *she also deserves considerable credit for comprehending the mechanics after seeing it only once*, Tatsuya thought.

However, Suzune's real question was in another area.

"Speaking of this, how were you able to consecutively invoke vibration magic 3 times? If your technical speed is so high, how come your technical score is this low?"

At such a direct reference to his low scores, Tatsuya could only force a small smile.

Ever since laying eyes on Tatsuya's CAD, Azusa could not calm down in the slightest and now tentatively offered a question.

"Tatsuya-kun, is that CAD the 'Silver Horn'?"

"Silver Horn? Silver, as in the Silver from that mysterious genius Magic Designer Taurus Silver?"

At Mayumi's question, Azusa visibly brightened.

At times described as a "Device Geek", Azusa happily explained away.

"That's him! The miraculous CAD engineer associated with Four Leaves Technology, whose name, appearance, and data all remain a mystery!"

The genius programmer who was the first in the world to make the Loop Cast System a reality.

Ah, Loop Cast System is the Activation Sequence that skips the step of restarting each Activation Sequence. If the Magic Sequence is the same, then the CAD no longer has to restart the Activation Sequence each time. This is done by adding a copying power to the Magic Calculation Area's execution mode, adding a copy of the Activation Sequence's last parts to the Activation Sequence itself, so Magicians can endlessly invoke magics within their ability. Although the theory existed in the past, but to calculate the Invocation Sequence and copy the Activation Sequence separately at the same time, no one could do it until now..."

"Stop! I know what Loop Cast is."

"In that case..."

In that case, Silver Horn is the name of the Fully Customizable Specialized CAD developed by Taurus Silver!

Naturally, it has the best adjustments for the Loop Cast System, is able to invoke magic stably using the least amount of Magic Power, is critically acclaimed, and is especially popular among the law enforcement population.

Although it's sold on the market, but that requires a special procedure and fee! And judging from the way the barrel is longer than the traditional model, yours must be a limited edition model?! Where did you get that?"

"A-chan, calm down a little."

Maybe it was because of asthma, but Azusa's chest was heaving as her eyes were glued onto the item held in Tatsuya's hand. If Mayumi, who was well aware of Azusa's interests, hadn't been on hand to stop her, she would have probably been admiring it from a very close proximity.

On the other hand, Mayumi still had another question.

"But, Rin-chan. Isn't that strange? No matter how capable the Loop Cast CAD is, Loop Cast still can't..."

After the talking stopped, Suzune nodded as she tilted her head like Mayumi.

"That is strange.

Loop Cast is designed for consecutively casting one type of magic. Even if it is the same vibration magic, if the wavelength and number of vibrations set by the Magician changes, these would cause differences to occur within the Activation Sequence. If the Loop Cast automatically copies the original Activation Sequence, then it would be impossible to account for the differences in order to achieve 'Compounding Waves'.

If you set the number of vibrations as another variable, then it may be possible to use the same Activation Sequence to achieve 'Compounding Waves' while still accounting for all the differences. But if target, strength, time of duration are all variables, and you include number of vibrations as another variable... Don't tell me you managed to calculate all of that?"

This time even Suzune was stunned to the point of speechlessness, and under her gaze Tatsuya merely shrugged.

"It doesn't matter if it's multi-variable quantitative processing speed, calculation scale, or even interference strength. None of these are subjects that are assigned a grade."

Before Mayumi and Mari's gaze, Tatsuya remained ambivalent as he said that aloud.

"...The evaluation of magic technical skills only includes Invocation Speed, the scale of the Magic Sequence, and phenomena rewriting ability. I see now, so the test is not capable of completely measuring a person's ability..."

With a groan, Hattori sat up and answered Tatsuya's ironic statement.

"Hanzou-kun, are you alright?"

"I'm fine!"

Mayumi bent at the waist and looked over Hattori. In response, Hattori quickly dodged the incoming face and hurriedly got to his feet.

"I see, so you were all worried about this from the beginning."

Hattori could not have said this if he had not overheard their earlier

conversation.

Mayumi straightened herself, then nodded with a look of understanding on her face. Hattori was directly facing her.

"No, in the beginning I really hadn't realized!"

Still flushed in the face, he hurriedly searched for an argument.

"After I lost consciousness I was still in a hazy state... I only regained movement just now!"

Put it this way... It looked as if it was very easy to understand the underlying emotions.

"Is that so...? Then you must have understood completely what we just said?"

"...Eh, yes! Even if still hazy, my ears could still hear the words..."

It seemed like Mayumi perfectly understood the feelings Hattori held towards her.

Evil woman...? Even if there was this impression, but the connotations behind those words did not adequately fit her surroundings, Tatsuya decided to stop pursuing this line of thought.

Whatever the reality was, there was also the possibility that he simply misread the situation.

Tatsuya continued the work that was interrupted by Mari's shout.

...Putting it like that would be overly pretentious, since all he was doing was returning the CAD to the case.

Tatsuya pretended not to see Azusa, who was staring at the object in his hands with an expression that clearly said "Do Want".

Tatsuya also ignored his sister's gaze that suggested she wanted to help. That was because Miyuki wasn't very adept with machines. Mechanical dunce, or high tech allergies would not be an inappropriate description, especially since Tatsuya's CAD was customized to the point that a normal high school student would not be able to handle them (on the other hand, because the school's CADs only received limited adjustments, Tatsuya could not use them to the full extent of his abilities). The truth was, if Miyuki came to help, it would only increase the workload.

He replaced the storage device and reset the safety. The sound of footsteps approached Tatsuya from behind.

Looks like the explanations were at an end.

What followed next did not concern him, so Tatsuya did not turn around.

"Shiba-san."

"Yes."

Miyuki replied in a displeased tone.

Including Tatsuya, there were only two males in the room, so even if the tone was completely different from before, there was no mistaking who the speaker was.

"Earlier, I made a rude comment concerning your favoritism."

There was also no mistake in who the speaker of the voice was talking to.

"I was the one whose judgment was clouded. Please forgive me."

"I also spoke too arrogantly. Please forgive me."

Tatsuya was also perfectly aware, despite his back facing them, about who was bowing to the other one.

Sometimes it was hard to tell who was the older and more mature sibling. Tatsuya pursed his lips and locked the CAD case.

He slowly turned around.

For a second, Hattori revealed a cowed expression, but quickly returned to a tougher stance.

During that split second of peace, was it preparation for reconciliation, or the harbinger for a rematch?

Before either possibility could occur, the moment disappeared.

In the end, Hattori only met Tatsuya's gaze briefly, before turning around.

Feeling the burning fury emanate from beside him, Tatsuya only lightly patted Miyuki on the shoulder.

They were going to work together in the same Student Council from now onwards, so leaving behind any bad blood would only hurt Miyuki.

As if Tatsuya's thoughts were telepathically transferred over, Miyuki quickly mastered herself.

"Let's head back to the Student Council Room!"

At Mayumi's words, every member began to move.

Behind Suzune, Azusa, and Hattori, Mayumi's face revealed a look that

said "It can't be helped".

Following that, Mari became aware of Tatsuya's gaze, and shrugged as if she didn't want the other four to notice.

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After placing the CAD back into the workroom, Tatsuya returned to the Student Council Room, where Mari immediately grabbed his wrist.

Miyuki, who was being tutored by Azusa near the terminal on the wall, raised an eyebrow at this, while Tatsuya could only signal through his eyes that this couldn't be helped... Although, Tatsuya harbored doubts as to whether she could understand this.

He forcibly suppressed his subconscious urge to throw the other person aside. Though come to speak of it, to be able to capture her target in such a narrow window, Mari's physical abilities must be quite impressive as well.

"While a lot of unexpected events occurred, let's go with the original plan and head to the Public Moral Committee HQ!"

As if not caring about Tatsuya's (largely confused) mental concerns, Mari dragged him away by the arm.

Miyuki finally noticed Tatsuya's confused expression, and redirected her gaze back to the terminal. Albeit, with great difficulty.

Hattori never raised his head since Tatsuya entered the Student Council Room.

It looked like he was trying to ignore everything in that direction, which was probably his greatest concession from an emotional standpoint. For this, Tatsuya was extremely thankful.

Mayumi hastily batted her hand. Exactly what that was for, or what meaning it was trying to convey...? Among the people that Tatsuya had already met, she was probably the hardest to understand.

That should probably be tabled for a later date.

After much difficulty (largely persuasion), Tatsuya was able to free his wrist, and obediently followed Mari.

In the room's farthest corner, in a spot where there would normally be a fire escape, there was instead a staircase leading to the Public Moral

Committee HQ.

*Are we ignoring fire safety standards? (!)*

Tatsuya ruminated on this, but even if the students were learning on the job, or even brand new, as long as there were excellent Magicians on hand, the lack of firefighting equipment shouldn't have been a problem. Simply using vibration or speed magics was enough to put out a fire, then the use a combination of Gather-Move Smoke Magic would be enough to expel it. In truth, large scale fires in tall skyscrapers were yet another area that Magicians could display their skills.

Given that the lack of an elevator was within the boundaries of fire safety, the rest can be forgiven, Tatsuya thought.

In regards to Tatsuya, who was right on her heels through the door into headquarters, Mari pointed towards the chairs next to the table, and said, "It's a little bit of a mess. You can rest there for a second."

So this only qualified as a little. That being said, it was not like there was no place to put one's foot down, or that all the chairs were covered with luggage. It was probably because they just came from the neat and tidy Student Council Room, so this image was especially jarring, but that was as much as could be expected.

Books, portable terminals, and even CADs, all sorts of items covered the table. Tatsuya slightly cleared out a space on one of the half-pulled out chairs beside the table.

"The Public Moral Committee Room is like a bachelor's home. Even though I've told them to pick up after themselves time and time again, there's still no one who listens..."

"It can't be helped when no one is around."

Not knowing if Tatsuya's comment was out of mockery or comfort, Mari wrinkled her brow upon hearing this.

"...Our primary objective is patrolling school grounds. The state of affairs within HQ couldn't be avoided."

Presently, there were only two people in the room. The Public Moral Committee consisted of nine people, but the space within the room could accommodate a group of people many times greater than the current roster. Within this space, the idle atmosphere and dispersed items only served to increase the sense of uncleanliness.

What drew Tatsuya's attention, aside from the obvious messiness of the room, were the cluttered objects on the table.

"Even so, Chief, would it be okay if I tidied up a bit?"

"What..."

At Tatsuya's sudden proposal, Mari raised an eyebrow in surprise. — Surprise was well within a senpai's acting repertoire. (!)

"As someone aiming to be a Magic Artificer, I can't stand it when I see CADs scattered around like this. I have the same stance towards abandoned or disabled terminals."

Because of this, Tatsuya's priorities in task management had changed.

"Aiming to be a Magic Artificer? Even with that level of anti-personnel combat capability?"

At Tatsuya's words, Mari earnestly tilted her head a bit. From the recent contest, despite the brief time that had elapsed, the level of anti-personnel combat was superb.

"No matter how hard I try, my abilities can get me to a C-Rank License at best."

But, just as if he was discussing someone else's affairs, Tatsuya mildly used a self-deprecating comment to counter Mari. Mari was too astonished to find any words to rebut that.

In most countries, Magicians operated under the licensing system. The system was based on international standards, from which this country was not an exception. It doesn't matter if you work for the corporations, the government, or even open a private practice, the difficulty and need both reflect upon the level of licensure. Magicians with higher licensing levels received a higher level of compensation; this is the rule of society.

International licenses have 5 levels between A and E.

Selection and ranking are based on Magic Sequence design and usage speeds, scale, and interference strength, which were the exact same scales used in high school technical skills testing. In other words, the educational technical skills grading scale was designed to naturally lead into international licensing standards.

There is a separate, special set of standards for law enforcement and the military, but at the end of the day, those standards are for "law enforcement" or "military types", and not designed to measure Magicians.

"...So, it's okay if I clean up this area?"

"Ah? Hm, I'll help too. We can talk while we work."

Mari hurriedly stood up, probably because she was the type that naturally looked after other people.

Or maybe it was because just sitting there watching Tatsuya toil away at the piles of books was simply rude.

While both of them worked at similar speeds, when compared to the empty space in front of Tatsuya, the pile in front of Mari did not decrease in size, and the surface of the table still wasn't visible.

Tatsuya gave it a brief glance.

And let out a small sigh.

Mari stopped her hands in a clear sign of surrender.

"Sorry, I'm really bad at this type of work."

She might bear the biggest responsibility for the state of the room, Tatsuya thought.

That only remained in his thoughts and was not verbalized, given that he was a mature adult... maybe. (!)

"Speaking of which, you're quite familiar with those."

"What are you referring to?"

"The book categories. I thought you were just going to put them somewhere else, but I didn't expect you to sort them by subject."

"...Excuse me, sitting on the table is a little..."

In a sudden change of attitude, Mari sat down on the table in the open area that Tatsuya cleared away, looking at the disorganized pile of books. Her dress was directly touching Tatsuya's wrist. The cloth subtly covered the thigh area, leading to a charming pair of slim legs. Even though the flesh was completely covered, the outline left nothing to imagination, thus rendering that position a terrible distraction to mental state.

"Ah, sorry."

Needless to say, Mari's voice did not show a trace of apologetic tone. — Any intentional response would only bring about the reverse effect, thus proving the idiom, silence is golden.

He dug out the bookcase from the pile of books, and placed them properly

on the shelves. In this day and age, both paper-based books and bookshelves are considered rarities.

Not to mention that they were magical texts.

"In terms of why we scouted you — on this matter, we went over this earlier. It is to properly adjudicate cases of improper magic usage, and to improve the perception of Course 2 students."

"I remember, but I think that this tactic may cause considerable backlash... May I take a look at this book?"

After sorting the books, the terminals still needed work. After asking Mari for permission to examine the data, to which Mari had nodded in agreement, Tatsuya restored the terminal to working order, cut the power, shifted the terminal to storage mode, and gathered the parts in one area.

"Why do you think that way?"

"Even though we never mentioned this aloud, if an underclassman were apprehended by someone of equal standing, this would naturally lead to negative reactions."

He left the seat, and began searching the cabinets by the wall.

After placing the terminal within an empty cabinet, he heard a completely irresponsible comment of "That's true" coming from behind him.

"But at the same time, 1st Year students would welcome this change. Haven't your fellow students talked about this?"

"Yes..."

After sorting the terminals, he looked towards other cabinets.

"I think that if a Course 1 student took over, the negative reaction would outnumber the welcoming reaction."

After locating the target, Tatsuya straightened himself, rotating his shoulders before taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves.

"Resentment is likely inevitable. But in regard to newly enrolled Course 1 students, they might not have been exposed to the discriminating thinking long enough to become prejudiced, right?"

"Who knows?"

The object that Tatsuya carefully removed from the cabinet seemed to be a CAD case.

"Just yesterday I ran into the 'I don't acknowledge you' declaration."

After wrapping the grounded protector around his sleeveless wrist, he reached his hand towards the pile of CADs.

"Thank goodness you carry even this type of equipment... Was that person Morisaki?"

"This is quite convenient... You know him too?"

"The teachers recommended him to join the committee."

"Eh?"

The hand that was examining the CAD status faltered slightly.

He hastily picked up the CAD that fell to the ground.

"So even you can be surprised."

"Of course."

In response to Mari's laughter, Tatsuya's response was colored by his sighing tone.

If only there was a way to undercut all this antagonism...

"Due to yesterday's ruckus, there are grounds for withdrawing the recommendation, which was what I planned to do, but yesterday's event had nothing to do with you."

"I was involved as well."

"Well then, if we were able to recruit you, it would be much harder to reject him."

"Why not simply take neither of us, what do you think?"

"Do you dislike it?"

Upon receiving such a direct question, Tatsuya stopped the work of his hands.

Temporarily, he put the CAD back into the box, and raised his head.

Mari was sitting on the table looking downwards at Tatsuya's face without a smile on her face.

Her slender and delicate gaze seemed to see right through Tatsuya.

"...To tell the truth, I find it very troublesome."

"Hm... And?"

"Despite thinking that it's troublesome, I don't plan on backing out at this point."

Mari's face once more revealed her delighted smirk.

Her devilish expression seemed to have increased her beauty two-fold.

"Senpai is the type of person who hates trouble too..."

"You're also the type who likes to cut corners."

Alas, Tatsuya could only admit that she won that round.

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"...This is the Public Moral Committee HQ, right?"

That was Mayumi's first question after descending the stairs.

"That was quite the unexpected greeting."

"What, this is all because of you, Mari. No matter how many times Rin-chan reminds you or how much A-chan begs you, you still haven't cleaned up the place."

"I object to your hurtful and inaccurate description of the situation, Mayumi! It's not that I don't want to clean up, but that I haven't started yet!"

"As a woman, you should pay more attention to this."

Mayumi narrowed her eyes as she squinted at Mari, who hurriedly turned around.

"It's not like I don't want to... Ah, that."

Upon seeing Tatsuya busily examining a terminal's internal condition after removing the protective cover, Mayumi displayed an understanding expression as she nodded.

"So it's because he's been put to good use already."

"Meh, just so."

Mari's back was still facing Mayumi as she replied, just as Tatsuya closed the protective cover and turned around.

"Chief, the inspections are complete. The damaged parts have already been replaced. There should be no more problems."

"Good work."

Mari nodded quickly, but maybe he was reading too much into it, because

Tatsuya thought he could see sweat beads on Mari's temple.  
Cold sweat.

"Eh... So you address Mari as Chief, which means we have successfully recruited you."

"I thought I never had the right to refuse in the first place..."

Tatsuya didn't even look at Mayumi's teasing expression, and deadpanned his response.

Mayumi looked like she disapproved of Tatsuya's attitude. She placed one hand on her hips, raised the other forefinger, directing her most displeased gaze towards him as she was about to unleash her most exaggerated attitude to voice her objection.

"Tatsuya-kun, isn't your response to your older sister simply too rude?"

...In short, the way Tatsuya framed his response was because he didn't have an older sister. If he admitted this aloud, Tatsuya felt that the situation would only grow worse, so he did not verbalize it.

No matter where it started or where it ended, it was so archetypal that no real response was possible.

If anything, Mayumi's attitude towards him was overly casual, Tatsuya thought to himself.

He had entered this type of situation with similar impressions in the past, and managed to sidestep the issue every time. This time however, Tatsuya somehow felt that he was unable to do so.

"President, just in case, I want to clarify one thing with you."

"Hm, what is it?"

"We met for the first time just before the enrollment ceremony, right?"

It goes without saying that meeting for the first time might constitute an overly familiar attitude, not to mention all the additional meanings behind those words, as Mayumi's eyes widened upon hearing them. However, they quickly reverted to their normal size and narrowed even more, to the point that her expression could only be described as "wicked".

Tatsuya finally realized what a terrible move he made.

Just before, Mari had a very similar facial expression, now that Tatsuya thought about it. So, this must be what people mean by birds of a feather flock together, Tatsuya thought as he wished he could escape reality.

"Is this how it is... Ho ho ho ho ho."

Tiny devil would be a perfectly appropriate description for that smiling face.

"Tatsuya-kun thinks that we've met before, right? And the day of the enrollment ceremony must be our fateful reunion!"

"No, wait, President?"

Exactly why were the tensions rising so quickly?.

"A long time ago we might have met once, then thrust apart by cruel fate, only to be united by destiny once more!"

If she was really reveling in those words, she would be a dangerous person. But if she was acting this entire sequence out while purposefully allowing everyone else to know she was acting, there was something terribly wrong with that kind of personality.

"...Unfortunately, that was undoubtedly our first meeting."

"...I thought so too."

"I say, I say, unless you really got those fateful meeting vibes?"

Mayumi clasped her hands in front of her chest and pressed her face closer towards Tatsuya. —She looked very excited, but in reality she was fooling around. This suited her quite well... Truly, a terrible personality.

"...Sorry, why are you so happy about this?"

Even if he used a question to answer a question, he wouldn't receive an answer.

The only thing he received was that gaze filled with expectations.

She is an "S", Tatsuya jotted down in his mental notebook.

Seizing the opportunity, Tatsuya replied.

"...If this is destiny, then it definitely isn't fate, and looks more like doom."

Tatsuya's reply caused Mayumi's face to darken as she turned around. "Is that so...?" A lonely muttering meandered to Tatsuya's ear.

Dark clouds of depression gathered behind her back.

Tatsuya also felt that he might have gone too far. Even though his response was based on his estimation that Mayumi was completely teasing him, if there was a shade of sincerity in them, then he needed to apologize.

However...

There was no way to tell if it was good luck or bad, but the sense of guilt didn't linger for too long.

That was probably due to confusion, given the circumstances.

"...Tch."

As her shoulders slumped slightly, Mayumi's lips dropped a sound that could only mean a sense of defeat.

It was Tatsuya's turn to widen his eyes.

It was only a small sound to be sure, and not graceful in any way, but could still be identified. (!)

"Um, President?"

"Hm, what is it?"

Mayumi turned around to face Tatsuya; her elegant smile would have charmed any newly enrolled male student.

"...Why do I feel like I understand you a little better now, President?"

Feeling utterly exhausted, Tatsuya thought that he glimpsed Mayumi's real face behind the mask.

And that is, a smiling face that loved to tease others.

"It's about time to stop the jokes. Tatsuya-kun, too much leisure time can be a bad thing."

Towards Mayumi, who was completely guiltless and treated the entire thing as a joke, Mari said,

"You can't use the same tricks you used on Hattori, Mayumi. Your appearance doesn't work on him."

Mari took the opportunity to throw in her two cents.

"Don't describe others in such an evil manner. It's as if I like messing with underclassmen."

Unable to ignore the previous comment, Mayumi's answer became a little heated.

"Regarding what I just heard..."

Tatsuya deeply regretted opening his mouth with prior consideration, and began to clean up again. If he stayed too long in the miasma spread by the others, he would definitely suffer additional damage.

"The difference in Mayumi's attitude is because she's already

acknowledged you, Tatsuya-kun.

She probably considers the two of you to be quite alike in some areas.

In other words, she's playing coy. She only takes off her mask in front of the people she acknowledges."

At Mari's oddly solemn expression, Tatsuya felt a sense of unease.

"Don't believe what Mari says, Tatsuya-kun.

But, I guess I do acknowledge you?

It feels like I can't deal with you the same way I treat the others.

Maybe the one touched by fate is me."

Hearing this, and seeing Mayumi's smiling face that no sane man could hate, Tatsuya's internal pace had been completely disrupted.

Looks like challenging these two directly from the front would be an exercise in futility, Tatsuya thought.

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The reason Mayumi came to visit was actually to inform them that the Student Council Room was closing early. She was only supposed to check on Tatsuya in passing, but that had quickly become her primary objective before long. It probably wasn't a good idea to dwell too long on that subject.

Since the end of the enrollment ceremony, many different action items had also come to a head. "Then, I'm going ahead." Mayumi waved and walked towards the Student Council Room.

Tomorrow marked the first day for the competition for new club members, so the activity level of the Public Moral Committee was going to increase as well. Mayumi's conversation with Mari and Tatsuya ended at this point.

Current information systems, much like their predecessors, required very little time to operate.

Several of them needed to be shut down, but even if this step was overlooked, they would still automatically enter sleep mode.

The only thing that needed to be done at this point was set safety protocols, but at this opportune moment — or maybe unfortunate moment

- two male students entered the Public Morale Committee headquarters.

"Hi."

"Good morning!"

A vibrant greeting spread throughout the room.

"Oi, Nee-san, can we come in?"

Where the heck is this, and what year are we in? Tatsuya thought.

The subject in question was not overly tall, but possessed a sturdy build, with shortly cropped hair that was very suited for a headband. And to so casually use "Nee-san", he had to be referring to—

(Must be Watanabe-senpai...)

Tatsuya glanced briefly at Mari, who was a little embarrassed.

The fact that she still retained (at the very least) some sense of normalcy brought a ridiculous amount of relief to Tatsuya. "Chief, today's patrol is done! No arrests!"

When compared to the other guy, this one had a bland appearance and his speech pattern was quite normal, but filled with an imposing manner. The unmoving stance he took while giving his report reminded people of a soldier, or maybe a police officer, or someone part of a system that had largely remained unchanged over the years. (!)

"... You're telling me that Nee-san cleaned this room?"

At the abrupt changes in the activity room, the sturdy one could not conceal his surprise as he walked towards Tatsuya.

There shouldn't have been a major difference in weight, but amazingly, his footsteps were incredibly slow in comparison. (!)

Just as the boy passed in front of Mari, she casually stood up, looked towards him—

"A-ya!"

SPA! There was a sound that was pleasing to the ear, just as the boy crouched down and covered his head.

Mari held a notebook rolled into a rod.

When did she pull that out?.

"Don't call me Nee-san! How many times do I have to tell you for you to remember?! Koutarou, is your brain a decoration?!"

Tatsuya had not yet sorted through his confusion, but Mari had already roared her displeasure at the boy covering his head.

"Please don't hit me on the head, Nee... No, Chief. Speaking of which, who's this? The rookie?"

It probably didn't hurt that much, despite the yammering of the boy named Koutarou. However, noticing the moving rolled-up notebook, he quickly changed Nee-san to Mari's official title.

In front of Koutarou, who had gone rigid in nervousness, Mari lowered her shoulders and sighed.

"...It's just as you said, he's the rookie. 1st Year Class E Shiba Tatsuya. Recommended by the Student Council."

"Eh... There's no insignia."

Koutarou was very excited as he examined Tatsuya's coat, while at the same time checking out Tatsuya's build.

"Tatsumi-senpai, that's violating the ban on certain words! At this time, I think Course 2 student would be the proper description." (!)

The other boy, despite saying this on the outside, could not disguise his coldly analytical body language. "The two of you should be careful. That kind of thinking may lead to a world of hurt in battle? (!) I'll only say it once. He just thrashed Hattori."

However, just as Mari said this with a teasing smile on her face, the two boys' expressions became grave.

"...This guy, took out Hattori?"

"Yes, in a formal duel."

"What! The undefeated Hattori, losing to a newcomer."

"No need to shout, Sawaki. Didn't I just say that?"

Tatsuya was not pleased at being stared at for so long, but these were not just upperclassmen, but his seniors in the Public Moral Committee. He just had to bear with it for a little longer.

"This guy is quite determined."

"He's got potential, Chief."

Like musicians recovering from a disrupted rhythm, their gazes changed. Almost as if they could change appearances on cue.

"Surprised?"

"Hm?"

The question was too vague, so it was hard to tell what was being asked, but it didn't seem like Mari expected Tatsuya to answer anyways.

"This school is filled with people immersed in the idea that labeling Blooms and Weeds determines their superiority. To be honest, I hate that. So I am very pleased with the outcome of today's match.

Thankfully, Mayumi and Juumonji both understand my personality. Thus, the members recommended by the Student Council and the Club Management Group aren't people brainwashed into that sort of thinking. While I can't say that there's no sense of superiority here, we're all people that can objectively evaluate another person's skills.

Unfortunately, the three students recommended by the teachers are rather from the former category, so there's nothing we can do about it, but I think this place wouldn't be a bad fit for you."

"3rd Year Class C Tatsumi Koutarou. Welcome aboard Shiba. If you got the skills, you're fine in my book."

"2nd Year Class D Sawaki Midori. Welcome to our group, Tatsuya-kun."

Koutarou and Sawaki both reached out a hand. Just as Mari said, there wasn't a hint of insult in their expression. Their earlier evaluation was simply to see if Tatsuya had any ability, and whether he was a Course 1 or Course 2 student made no difference to them, Tatsuya finally understood this.

He had to admit he was somewhat surprised. Indeed, this wasn't a bad atmosphere.

He returned their greeting and shook Koutarou's hand. For some reason, the hand wasn't released. !)

"Juumonji is from the Club Management Group. You can refer to him as Group Leader Juumonji."

*Was it just to tell me that? You could've told me that after you released my hand. (!)*

"I'm up next. Please refer to me by my family name Sawaki."

Upon feeling pressure on his hand, Tatsuya's consciousness was pulled back to reality.

His grip strength had increased to the point where you could hear the movement, Tatsuya was surprised to find.

This school had excellent students, and not just solely in the magic department.

"Don't call me by my name."

That appeared to be the warning.

There was no need for such a roundabout warning, as Tatsuya was not in the habit of referring to upperclassmen by name, but since Sawaki took time to specifically mention this, he should respond as well.

"I'll remember that."

At the same time these words were spoken, his right hand was released.

Upon seeing Tatsuya's physical skills, Koutarou's surprise surpassed Sawaki's own.

"Ho, that's quite impressive. Sawaki's grip strength is at least in the triple digits."

"...I think that hardly qualifies as normal physical abilities, even for Magicians."

Tatsuya pretended not to know, giving only a light response.

He was probably going to get along quite well with these two -- Tatsuya thought.

## **Chapter 4**

When compared to traditional auxiliary equipment such as magic staves, tomes, or talismans, CADs possessed superior invocation speed, refinement, complexity, and were capable of executing large scale magics. They were the definitive auxiliary equipment in the modern age.

That being said, they weren't universally superior in all categories when compared to traditional auxiliary equipment.

Due to the precise nature of CADs, when compared to traditional auxiliary equipment, maintenance required additional effort.

This was especially the case when dealing with the compatibility between the user's Psion wave motions and the Receive-Release System.

CAD utilized the Psions released by Magicians as raw materials (it may be more appropriate to describe it as the ink for paintings), directed towards the Activation Sequence in the Psion Information Aide, where Magicians then use their own physical bodies as a conductor for reading the Activation Sequence before plugging the result into the magic design. Depending on the quality of CAD maintenance, this could influence the speed of magic invocation anywhere between 50-100%.

In other words, Psions are particles of thought or consciousness made concrete. Their manifestation can be extremely diverse. For every hundred people there would be a hundred different types, and a thousand users would create a thousand types. Every individual has a unique Psion wave motion, so if the CAD wasn't finely tuned to their specific use, the user would encounter difficulty managing the exchange of Psions.

Besides that, there are many essential points that lead to a custom fit CAD.

These would fall under the purview of the Magic Artificers charged with CAD maintenance, and the reason why exceptionally skilled Magic Artificers were seen as coveted treasures.

In addition, the fluctuations of Psion wave motions reflect the growth of the physical body, such as changes as a result of age, and are subsequently affected. In fact, these fluctuations could change daily.

Thus, the ideal situation would call for daily maintenance based on the user's physical status, but CAD maintenance requires equipment that is

extremely expensive.

Generally, only the military, police, central government, first class research institutes, famous schools, and well-financed major corporations possess the power and funding for CAD maintenance equipment and related trained personnel, an impossible scenario for small to mid-sized companies or personal use. Magicians in the latter categories resort to using Magic Machine Customization Stores once a month, or Mechanical Service Stores once or twice for scheduled check-ups.

First High was also considered to be one of the country's premiere schools, and thus naturally possessed special facilities for student use. It was a common sight to see students or faculty undergoing CAD maintenance on campus.

However, due to special circumstances, Tatsuya's house also contained state of the art CAD maintenance equipment.

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After dinner, in the basement that had been converted into a CAD maintenance room, Tatsuya turned around upon hearing the only other occupant in the house speak.

"It's okay, go ahead and come in. It's about time I took a break."

That statement wasn't a lie, probably because Miyuki had waited for a period of time to elapse before attempting to speak with him.

"Excuse me. Onii-sama, I was hoping you could adjust my CAD..."

She was holding a cellphone-shaped CAD.

On her approach, the soft, pleasant smell of soap buffeted the senses.

She was wearing a simple, large velvet robe, something commonly seen during medical examinations.

"Are the settings incompatible?"

That apparel was for someone intent on maintenance.

"That's impossible! Onii-sama's adjustments are always perfect."

Because her response was always superlative accolades, there was little point in telling her to change. From previous experience, Tatsuya knew that trying to do so was pointless.

However, the last time they did a full maintenance was 3 days ago. Usually, they only did a full maintenance once a week unless there was an urgent reason, thought Tatsuya.

"It's just, that..."

"Don't worry about it. Go ahead and say it like you used to."

"Sorry, I actually wanted Onii-sama to help me change a few Activation Sequences..."

"What, just that. It's nothing to worry about. I was getting worried for a bit."

He softly brushed his sister's hair and took the CAD from her hands.

Miyuki dipped her head in embarrassment.

"So, what systems do you want to add?"

General CADs were limited to 99 registered Activation Sequences. Even for Miyuki's highly customized CAD, this was an insurmountable limit.

The variability of Activation Sequences were dependent on where the Activation Sequence combination ended and where the individual's Magic Calculation Area began in terms of execution. In reality, there were unlimited combinations.

Generally speaking, targets, strength, and ending requirements were set as variables to be executed by the Magic Calculation Area; all other essentials would be incorporated into the Activation Sequence. However, it was not rare to see strength as the Activation Sequence quantity to reduce hydrochloric acid execution to increase Invocation Speed. Many Defensive-Type Magics relied on using the self as a physical marker in relation to the target, whereas Contact-Type Magic quantifies all the numbers. All these were introduced in the practical skills class. (!)

Miyuki belonged to the minority who registered a wide variety of low fixed quantity, highly flexible Activation Sequences.

For fifteen year old Miyuki, who could grasp magical skills far beyond what her age could suggest and had an incredibly varied repertoire of magic, 99 types was far below her actual ability.

"Binding-Type Activation Sequence... I want to increase the types of Anti-Personnel Combat Magics."

"Hm? You already have Speed Magics, so do you need to add Binding-Types?"

Of all the different types of magic, Miyuki specialized in Speed-Type Magics. One division of Speed-Type Magic was Freezing Magic, capable of reducing a target's temperature to near absolute zero.

"Onii-sama should know that Speed Magic is rarely directed towards individual use and very difficult to work with. Partial speed reduction or partial freezing are practically impossible, and the Invocation time is very long. I thought of this after watching today's match. I'm lacking in magics that use speed as the primary focus, with the intent on using the minimal force to subdue the opponent." (!)

"Hm... But I don't think Miyuki fits that type. Attacking before the opponent is ready and using speed to disrupt the opponent is a legitimate strategy. However, striking with force born of absolute superiority, using Zone Interference to nullify the incoming magic, then using magic that is both stronger and greater in scale than the opponent's defensive capability, don't you think that orthodox style fits you better?"

Zone Interference involved using the user's own Magic Power to nullify opposing magics within the user's immediate surroundings. This occurs when a zone has been saturated with a user's magic, rendering the zone "Unable to be Changed", thus overriding the opponent's magic attempt to rewrite the surroundings.

Just as Tatsuya said, Miyuki's Zone Interference was incredibly powerful. Even in magical combat, it was unlikely she would be harmed in any way. Usually, whoever seizes the initiative has the advantage. This is a fundamental strategy in magical combat, but when up against an opponent like Miyuki, the advantage of seizing the initiative would be greatly decreased.

"...I can't do it?"

Then again, in the face of his sister's submissive question, Tatsuya didn't say "no".

"No, that's not the case. That's true... In the Student Council, if it's up against a fellow student, then this strategy would be necessary. I understand. Under the premise of not reducing the current magic, I'll readjust the systems of the Activation Sequence."

Now that his sister expressed her request, Tatsuya did not refuse. However, he did not forget his earlier suggestion.

"You're not going to consider getting another CAD?"

"Only Onii-sama can dual wield two CADs."

"If you put your mind to it, you can do it too."

Tatsuya forced a smile as he ran his hand over Miyuki's head as she stared at him. Gently rubbing her hair or head was one of Tatsuya's basic methods for improving his sister's mood.

The effect was immediate.

Miyuki closed her eyes in pleasure as her small head was completely immersed in her brother's tender care.

"Let's start with a quick examination."

Seeing that Miyuki's pleasant mood had returned, Tatsuya adopted a specialist's expression.

Reluctantly leaving her brother's touch, Miyuki stepped back and removed her robe.

What was revealed before Tatsuya's eyes was an indecently dressed body.

As she lay on the examination bed, Miyuki was only covered by her white underclothes.

Tidy and pure white, it seemed to turn the situation even more sensual.

Even though they are kin — no, against Miyuki's breathtaking beauty, no one should've been able to keep their composure. Miyuki's stance exuded enough charm to drive men mad.

His sister's eyes could not hide her sense of shame, but even under such a gaze Tatsuya remained stolid, not revealing a single emotional expression.

Right now, he was a machine. An observing, analyzing, recording machine wrapped in flesh.

Completely unaffected by emotion, objectively analyzing the situation; an ideal state Magicians strove to reach thus manifested upon Tatsuya's body.

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"Good work, it's done."

Hearing Tatsuya's words, Miyuki left the bed and stood up.

This type of examination could not be obtained anywhere.



In fact, it is extremely rare to see this sort of intensely detailed maintenance.

The maintenance facilities on campus simply involved putting on a pair of headphones and placing your hands on the touch pad for examination.

Tatsuya kept his eyes averted to the side while handing the velvet robe back to Miyuki, who wore a glum expression while gazing at Tatsuya's back.

Her elder brother sat in a chair with a backrest that only reached the upper waist and, as if nothing had happened, gazed at the terminal.

No, it was not "as if".

Actually, it was expected that nothing would happen, since this was a weekly occurring process.

This would go on without end if they were consciously aware of each individual occurrence.

Even though her embarrassment had not disappeared, and she was acutely aware that this sense of shame was something that shouldn't be lost, she didn't have any thoughts towards taking the next step.

She forced herself not to think of the next step.

If her elder brother could keep his composure, this was also something that Miyuki could be happy about.

—If only it was as usual.

"Onii-sama is quite crafty..."

"Miyuki?"

Hearing Miyuki's tender and beautiful voice, Tatsuya quickly responded.

—It was very rare to hear Onii-sama use that kind of wavering, harried voice.

—Upon hearing that, the one whose heartbeat became erratic, whose temperature rose, and whose heart fairly sang in pleasure was none other than herself.

With the velvet robe draped over her shoulders and not closed in the front, Miyuki pressed her soft chest onto Tatsuya's back, gently rubbing her face against Tatsuya's cheek, and continued to whisper softly into her elder brother's ear.

"Miyuki was so embarrassed, but Onii-sama was just like always,

completely expressionless..."

"Uh, Miyuki, I say?"

"Or, do you not see me as someone of the opposite sex?"

"If I did see you that way, then we'd be in serious trouble!"

That was true. At that moment, just as these words were about to become the topic of conversation, her subconscious formed a chain that forcibly dragged back this line of thought. (!)

"Is Onii-sama not interested in Miyuki? Is Onii-sama more interested in Saegusa-senpai's type? Or, maybe someone like Watanabe-senpai? Earlier today, your conversation seemed very affectionate..."

"You heard that?"

Seemed extremely unlikely.

Miyuki should've been in the Student Council Room being tutored by Azusa in regards to using the computer system.

On top of that, even if someone was eavesdropping, there was no way Tatsuya could not have detected them.

However, Tatsuya did not have the time right now to marshal these thoughts into arguments.

"Aha, just as expected! Both of them are beauties!"

"I say, Miyuki? Aren't you misunderstanding something?"

"Onii-sama is being pulled between two beautiful senpais on either side."  
(!)

All of a sudden, Miyuki's CAD was held in her left hand.

"This is your punishment!"

"Ah!"

Unexpectedly, it was not magic, but a Psion Surge released by Miyuki that caused Tatsuya's body to spasm and fall out of the chair.

[Self Restoration, Auto Start.]

[Core Eidos Data, Read from Backup.]

[Load Magic Sequence — Complete. Self Restoration — Complete.]

The instance of losing consciousness did not last a single second.

He had never lost consciousness longer than that instance.  
His physical body did not allow him to collapse for any duration longer than that time.

This was his personal magic, his curse.

As he opened his eyes naturally, what he saw was a beautiful visage staring down at him.

"Onii-sama, good morning."

"...Did I, do something to incur your displeasure?"

"My apologies, I went overboard with my joke."

Though her voice was apologetic, Miyuki's face was smiling once more. That smile was capable of disarming even the sternest adult's attitude, a cute smile matching her age that Miyuki rarely wore.

Watching that smiling face, not even he could do anything, Tatsuya thought.

In reality, wasn't this exactly like a pair of innocent siblings playing around?

At the end of the day, his sister was incapable of actually doing something that could cause him harm.

"Please, take it easy on me..."

Grasping his sister's hand, Tatsuya mumbled this as he too smiled.

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She awoke at the normal time.

But in comparison to usually getting out of bed, her mood was worse.

Maybe her brain was still muddled by sleep.

The house didn't have her elder brother's presence.

He had probably left for morning training.

This happened every day.

Her elder brother, who always went to sleep later than she did, but always woke before she did.

Like yesterday, it was very rare for her to get up first.

In the past, she had been worried that her elder brother was going to ruin his body.

Now she understood that such worries were meaningless.

Her elder brother...that person was special.

The people of the world call her a genius.

That was the praise that they gave to special individuals, people that were different from themselves.

—In fact, they understood nothing at all.

The truly impressive, special, bona fide genius, should be her elder brother.

That person existed in a different dimension.

They could not even comprehend that.

Those that hide their personal jealousy to flatter others...they probably couldn't understand.

True talent that towers over lesser mortals, that draws a terror that transcends jealousy.

Not awe, but terror.

The man who by all rights would be the father of these two siblings crumpled before that terror. And in the face of that terror, he belittled and abused his own son. All this she was aware of.

Her elder brother believed that she remained ignorant.

Thus, she pretended not to know.

Father — that man to this day still sought to belittle her elder brother's talent, to give him a false sense of defeatism, seeking to pinion the wings of his spirit and ambition. All this she knew.

How comical.

He originally sought to imprison her elder brother, only to find himself crushed by the fact that his son's talent far exceeded his own.

That son obtained the "resources" he needed to barter for his freedom.

Their father could only watch that one last binding, and was forced to let go.

The only thing that man could do was adopt that phony title, and collect the hollow praises of the masses.

That person was not interested in this, she probably knew this as well.

...She was unable to control her own thoughts.

It was as if she wasn't herself and were someone else instead while thinking this.

Probably not fully conscious, Miyuki thought.

Must be a lack of sleep.

The cause was extremely obvious.

It was the reason behind why she had acted the way she had yesterday.

That moment had been perfectly peaceful.

It was rare to see her elder brother so harried; the sight was both comical and cute.

Her mood had been very pleasant.

However, once separated from her elder brother and lying alone in bed, that sense of peace had disappeared.

Her chest throbbed and she couldn't sleep.

Uneasiness pervaded; sleep remained elusive.

This must be love.

But,

That can't be the passion of romantic love.

And it couldn't be the affection of romantic love.

Because that person was her elder brother. Her elder brother by blood.

From that moment 3 years ago, when she first heard of their relation. (!)

*Since being saved by that person and knowing the truth that day 3 years ago, I have worked hard towards being a worthy little sister to that person.*  
(!)

*I've always had this dream, that one day I would be able to help that person, just as he helped me. I want to become the one that that person can depend upon. This was how I rationalized it.*

*From that person, I demand nothing.*

*Because this life that should have faded away into oblivion, was saved by that person.*

*Even though right now I am only the shackles that bind that person in place.*

*But one day, I want to be the key that liberates him.*

*I want to be the person who can be of help to him.*

*—The first thing is to prepare breakfast.*

*While he could probably eat over there,*

*Onii-sama would probably obediently return home on an empty stomach.*

*To let Onii-sama eat a delicious breakfast: that is what I can do right now.*

Miyuki smoothly rose, and stretched herself out.

## **Chapter 5**

There are many special things in the High School Magic Division, but the basic system is no different from normal schools.

Here in the First High School, there are club activities.

Like normal schools, to become an official club, you need to have a minimum amount of people and have some kind of track record.

But, since this school has a close relationship with magic, there are some clubs that can only exist in a Magic High School.

Within major magical games, schools One through Nine within the Magical Academy often get together and have competitions. The outcomes of these competitions often rank these various schools. Depending on the schools, they may put more emphasis towards these games than most prestigious sports schools. If a club were able to perform highly within the "Nine Schools Competition", then the club's budget and its members receive special treatment.

Finding and getting talented new students has become the most important task every year since it affects the influence the clubs have on campus, and this task has full support from the school. That's why during this season, the clubs battle ferociously in order to gain as many new students as possible.

"...And this is why all kinds of trouble appears every year."

In the Student Council Room.

Thoroughly tasting Miyuki's hand-made bento, Tatsuya listened to Mari's explanation.

"The solicitations from the clubs are so fierce, it often affects the classes. And it doesn't help that there's only a 1 week time limit for them to get as many new students as they can,"

Mayumi, who was sitting next to Mari, explained.

Nestled close to Tatsuya was Miyuki herself, as if she belonged there.

Suzune and Azusa were not there. They only came to the room yesterday because Mayumi invited them; usually they had lunch with their classmates.

Mari, like yesterday, had her own home-made lunch. Mayumi was slightly angry because she was the only one eating the dining server's machine-made lunch, but her mood seemed to finally recover. She even exclaimed that she would start making her lunch tomorrow.

"During this time, various clubs are bringing out the tents all at once. It's like a small festival going on here. There are even secret lists that name all the students who scored high grades on the entrance exams, and I'm sure those people will be heavily targeted. Obviously, there are rules in place that penalize the clubs and its members if they break them, but it's not uncommon to see fist fights or even magic shooting about."

Tatsuya put on a surprised face after listening to Mari's explanation.

"I thought carrying around CADs is prohibited?"

It is possible to still use magic without a CAD, but something like "shooting about" magic definitely requires a CAD for most people.

Mari's answer amazed Tatsuya.

"The school gives them permission so that they can have 'demonstrations'. There is a simple screening in place, but it's more or less a free pass. Because of that, during this time, this place becomes a giant lawless zone full of chaos."

Well obviously, thought Tatsuya. Why would the school allow such a thing...? Usually they would make a screening like this more strict.

Before Tatsuya could formulate the question, Mayumi gave the answer.

"I believe it's mainly because the school wants the clubs to score highly in the Nine Schools Competition. I'm sure the school wouldn't mind a few rules being broken as long as they raise the chances of recruiting more students."

The government outlawed mandatory participation in extra-curricular activities over 10 years ago because it neglected students' rights. Because of that, the school cannot do anything openly besides letting the various clubs recruit as they want.

"Well, that's the situation we're in. Starting today, the Disciplinary Committee is going all out. Whew, I'm glad we were able to cover all of our empty seats."

As she said that, she sent a sarcastic look to her side.

"I'm glad you were able to find someone so talented, Mari."

Seeing how she ignored the look with a smile, it looked like they do this sort of thing often.

After eating the last bite and putting the chopsticks down, his cup was being filled with hot tea from beside him.

After taking a few sips, Tatsuya attempted to put up a small resistance.

"Well, the clubs are targeting the students with the highest grades, meaning the First Course students correct? I don't think I would be of any use in that case."

Only Course 2 students should police Course 2 students. He was using Mari's argument from yesterday against her.

"Who cares about that. I'm counting on you."

She completely blew it off.

There was no way Tatsuya was able to respond to this.

"...\*Sigh\*, understood. I assume we are starting after school?"

"Right after you're done with class, just come to HQ."

"Understood."

Tatsuya quietly accepted Mari's words. It was hard to tell if his actions were manly or he just plainly gave up.

Sitting beside him, Miyuki asked, "President, are we going to join in the patrol as well?"

Miyuki referred to "we" as in the Student Council members. Tatsuya smiled, seeing how his beloved sister was able to fit in so quickly even though she could be difficult around people.

"I will be assigning A-chan as support. Hanzo-kun and I have to standby in HQ, so you and Rin-chan will have to stay here."

"Understood."

Miyuki nodded her head meekly, but Tatsuya could see that she was slightly upset. She may not have been combative but her skills were high. She probably just wanted to test out the new restraint-type magics that were added in her activation sequence.

But, when he told her that she yelled "No, that's not it!" and quietly added "Stupid Onii-sama", which may sound like a curse depending on how you listen to it. Then Tatsuya wondered,

"Nakajou-senpai is on support?"

It was a subtle claim that suggested that Azusa may be unreliable for the job.

Only a "subtle" one though.

"I know you're uneasy about her based on her appearance, but you should know Tatsuya, appearances can be deceiving."

"I understand that, but..."

Tatsuya was mainly pointing out to her timid attitude.

Mayumi understood what Tatsuya was trying to say and laughed.

"Well, the timidity CAN be a little bad at times, but don't worry. A-chan's magic will come in handy in these situations."

She let out a smirk similar to Mari's.

"You see. At times like these when you may have large crowds going wild, her magic — Azusayumi[5] — can really be effective."

Modern magic is a technology where most of the magic is formulated and shared. Of course, there are some private magics that are not known to the public, but most are registered in a database. Most of the magics are only categorized by "type" and "effect", but some magics that have high originality are often given inherent names.

"Azusayumi? I don't believe there is an official inherent name such as that. Is it an External Systematic Magic?

Tatsuya thought about it, but then concluded that there is no registered magic that goes by the name of "Azusayumi". He only asked about External Systematic Magic because most unregistered magic was usually External Systematic Magic.

"...Don't tell me you memorized every single inherent name."

Rather than answering his question, Mari let out an amazed voice.

"...Tatsuya-kun, you must have like a satellite connection that constantly links you to a massive database or something,"

Mayumi answered while widening her eyes.

Miyuki was about to burst out with laughter, but this wasn't the first time that people asked this kind of question, so she was able to maintain her humble composure.

Modern Magic was based on studies on super natural powers. Rather than categorizing magic by its visual aspects, like "the flame is burning" or "the wind is blowing", they categorize them by its effects.

"Speed, Weight", "Movement, Vibration", "Converge, Dissipate", and "Absorb, Disperse" are known as the 4 System/8 Type magic. Granted, there are some exemptions to this category. Magic that is not a part of the 4 System/8 Type magic is broken down into 3 categories. One is perception-type magic known as "ESP" (Extra Sensory Perception, not Extra Special Power). Another is a magic that does not aim to alter phenomena by temporarily rewriting the body of information associated with phenomena, "Eidos", but aims to control the Psion itself. This is known as Non-Systematic Magic.

Mayumi's specialized Particle Release Magic is a typical Non-Systematic Magic. The magic Tatsuya used to KO Hattori is also more along the lines of Non-Systematic Magic (rather than Vibration Magic), but since Psion manipulation is technically a part of the 4 System/8 Type, the difference between the two is trivial.

And the third type isn't something that manipulates physical objects, but the spirits themselves. These types of magic are just referred to as the External Systematic Magic since they don't belong to any type of system. Some examples of magic in these characters include magic that manipulate spiritual beings, mind reading, spirit separations, and even mind control.

"As Tatsuya may have figured out, A-chan's 'Azusayumi' is an Informational Manipulative External Systematic Magic. In any given area, she can put multiple people under a trance-like state and guide them however she wants."

After being surprised multiple times, Mayumi finally gave the answer to what "Azusayumi" is.

The "Informational Manipulative External Systematic Magic" is a type of mental interference magic that controls not only your thoughts, but your feelings as well.

"Azusayumi isn't something that robs or overtakes your consciousness, so it doesn't make the opponent completely helpless. Instead, rather than only affecting an individual, it affects a group of people. So it's the perfect type of magic to calm down a wild crowd should they go out of hand."

After hearing Mari's additional explanation, Tatsuya put on a serious

expression.

"...Aren't there first-class restrictions tied to that kind of magic though?"

The External Systematic Magics have many specialized effects, so there are strict limits imposed on them, more so than the typical 4 System/8 Type magic. Out of them, the restrictions are harshest on the Mental Interference Magics. As explained, this type of magic can become a fearsome brain-washing tool. People in a hypnotic state are extremely vulnerable to commands. If this type of magic's existence were known, tyrannical governments, terrorists, cults, and the like would surely do anything to get their hands on it. But when Tatsuya pointed that out, Mayumi answered "There's nothing to worry about" as she chuckled.

"Do you think A-chan is the type to cooperate with some dictator?"

"Well, there are cases where she could be forced to cooperate."

"No way. She gets teary-eyed just by finding a small amount of money on the ground. I don't think she'll be able to concentrate on the magic with all that sense of guilt crushing her."

It's common knowledge that your mental state affects your magic. If she was that kind-hearted, then the mere thought of an awful crime like mass brain-washing could make her unable to use any magic. Well, another way to look at it is, if she was that weak-hearted, then someone could just make her dependent on them and manipulate her that way, but there was no reason to go down that route at the moment. Right now, there was an even more basic problem.

"I'm sure that the laws concerning the restriction of Mental Interference Magic are valid no matter what kind of person Nakajou-senpai is..."

After Miyuki pointed that out, Mayumi seemed to be at a loss of words.

"...Um, don't worry Miyuki-san. It's not like she uses it outside of school."

The uneasy answer that she gave out was absurd. She didn't seem like the type who showed their weakness when they were cornered, but if it weren't for Mari's help she would've just dug herself into a deeper hole.

"Mayumi... saying it like that would make people misunderstand. Nakajou was granted permission to use her External Systematic Magic only within the school grounds. Well, we did use a backdoor method that's often used by the Research Institutions by giving the reason for the exception as, 'scientifically researching the easement of usage restrictions'."

"I see."

"I didn't know you could do it like that."

"Yes, you can..."

The Shiba siblings nodded with understanding at Mari's explanations while Mayumi let out a nervous laugh.

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As Tatsuya was heading towards the Disciplinary Committee HQ after class, a high pitched voice called to him.

When he turned around, a skinny girl with short cut hair greeted him.

"I'm surprised Erika... are you by yourself?"

"Is that something to be surprised about? I don't see myself keeping appointments with other people and going around with them."

Now that she mentioned it, there were several instances Tatsuya could think of.

"Anyways Tatsuya-kun, what are you gonna do about clubs? Mizuki said she was going to join the Art Club. She invited me to join with her, but I'm not exactly the artistic type, so I am just walking around to see if there's anything more fun to do."

"Didn't Leo also say that he chose something?"

"The Mountain Club right? That really suits him."

"Well... it does seem to suit him."

"The Mountain club at our school focuses more on survival than just climbing. Seriously, it's almost like the club's just made for him."

The way she was subtly cursing about almost made her seem like she was bored.

"Hey Tatsuya, if you haven't joined a club yet, do you wanna look around with me?"

Tatsuya wasn't able to blatantly reject her because she seemed to have a lonely face, but if he pointed that out to her then she was sure to get angry at him.

"To tell you the truth, it seems like the Disciplinary Committee's already

using me as they please. It's possible for me to walk around with you, but I have to do it as a patrol. If that's okay with you then I can do it."

"Hmmmmm... ah, well. Let's just meet up in front of the classroom then."

Erika seemed to think hard before letting out a shrug like she was reluctant to go along with it, but the smile on her face gave away her fake gestures.

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"Why are you here?!"

That was how the reunion started.

"Aren't you acting a bit rude?"

Tatsuya sighed and said that with a tired voice, but this caused only more agitation.

"What!!"

He seemed like he was about to lunge forward, but,

"Shut up you newcomer."

A quick roar from Mari made Morisaki Shun stand upright and close his mouth.

"This is an official meeting for the Disciplinary Members, so every person here is a member of the Disciplinary Committee. At least get that through your head before you shout out like that."

"I apologize!"

How pitiful; Morisaki's face showed tension and fear. He was brought in only two days ago by Mari. Not only that, he was still feeling heat from being reprimanded from the Student President, a heavy burden for a serious new student such as him.

"Oh well, take a seat."

Mari let out a nervous expression as she ordered the blood-drained faced first year to sit down. Judging from her demeanor, she did not seem like the type of person who would feel pleasure from oppressing those that were weaker than her.

Morisaki sat in the chair facing Tatsuya. It was an unwanted seating arrangement for the two, but they couldn't help it because they were the

newest members. Being an underling meant they had to sit at the edge of the table, glaring at each other.

"Everyone here?"

After 9 people entered the room, Mari stood up.

"Okay, listen up. The beginning of that crazy week is here again. For the Disciplinary Committee, this will be the first big hurdle we have to overcome in the beginning of the year. Last year, there were certain people in here who had joined and caused an uproar during this period, and there were others who tried to stop it but ended up making it worse. Please be sure to brace yourselves this year. I don't want to give any reprimands to anyone. I repeat, Disciplinary members will not be the ones causing trouble this year."

Multiple members just sat there and shrugged. Tatsuya, on the other hand, seemed to always get into some kind of trouble, so he swore to himself to be extra careful during this time.

"Thankfully, we were able to find replacements in time to cover the ones who graduated. I'll introduce you. Stand up."

Even though there weren't any rehearsals or anything, the two were able to stand up quickly without being muddled. But, the two had completely opposite facial expressions.

Morisaki was unable to or didn't even bother to hide his nervous facial expression, but the way he stood upright showed his enthusiasm. On the contrast, Tatsuya just stood up acting calm and composed.

"Morisaki Shun from 1A and Shiba Tatsuya from 1E. These two will be incorporated in the patrols from now on."

There were murmurs in the room after hearing Tatsuya's class number. But since it was the headquarters where they reprimanded any student using the offensive word, he didn't hear anybody using the word "Weed".

"Who is he being paired up with?"

Instead, there were some people who asked questions about him. One of the people who raised his hand was a 2nd Year named Okada. He was one of the people elected by the teachers.

"As I explained previously, during the club recruitment week, everybody will patrol the grounds on their own accord. The newcomers are not an exception to this."

"Are they even useful?"

Formally, that question was pointed to both Tatsuya and Morisaki, but by the way his eyes looked at Tatsuya's left chest showed that it was directed only towards him.

Something like this was expected to Tatsuya, so he just let Mari handle everything. But Mari, on the other hand, already had a fed up look on her face when she was looking at Okada.

"Don't worry, they're useful. I've seen Shiba's skills with my own eyes and Morisaki is also pretty competent with his device manipulation. He just had bad luck with his opponent. If you're still anxious, then why don't you pair up with Morisaki?"

Mari let out a negligent answer like she had enough of it, but Okada hid his smirk and, while holding his composure, let out a sarcastic "It's fine".

"Anybody else want to say anything?"

Tatsuya was surprised at Mari's belligerent composure because it made her seem like she was picking a fight with everyone. But besides Tatsuya and Morisaki, no one paid much attention to it. The other members treated this like it was a daily routine. There seemed to be some deep-rooted conflicts within the committee, but the leader here seemed to be the one stirring up these conflicts.

"We will be concluding this meeting. The patrols will be done according to plan. Does anyone have any objection with this?"

There were some who seemed like they wanted to say something, but they weren't people who were actively opposed to the notion.

"Okay, very well then, carry on. Don't forget your recorders. I will explain things to Shiba and Morisaki. Everyone else, mobilize!"

Everyone stood upright, put their heels together, and used their right fist to hit their left chest. Tatsuya wondered what was going on, but he learned later that this was the traditional salute that the Disciplinary Committee used. There were other rules like saying "Good morning", no matter what the time was, and such.

The other six members started leaving the room one by one. Koutarou and Sawaki, the last ones to leave, said "Don't try too hard" and "If you have any questions don't hesitate to ask me" as they left (it was obvious which one said what). As Tatsuya was being courteous (at least formally) to the two, Morisaki glared at him with annoyance. Mari saw this and held in a

sigh while feeling a headache coming around.

"First, I'll give you guys these."

Mari gave the two an armband and a small video recorder.

"Put the recorder in your chest pocket. It's customized where the lens would pop right out of the pocket. All you have to do is push the recording button on the right."

When they put the recorders in their pockets as told, the lens stuck out, ready to record.

"Be sure to keep that recorder on you at all times. When you see someone committing a violation, be sure to press the switch. You don't really have to worry about getting a good picture because testimony from a Disciplinary Member is considered as adequate evidence. Just think of it as a precautionary measure."

As she waited for the two to reply, Mari ordered them to bring out their mobile terminals.

"I'm going to send you the communication frequencies now... confirm that you received it."

The two confirmed the receipt of the communication frequency.

"Always report your findings using this frequency. We will also be giving out instructions through this frequency as well. Lastly, CADs. Disciplinary Members are permitted to carry their CADs and you don't have to wait for permission from someone to use them. But, if we find any unauthorized usage, you will be kicked out of the committee and receive a penalty more severe than the normal students. Last year, we had a student expelled because of that, so be careful."

"Question."

"Go ahead."

"May I use the CADs that I found in the Committee room?"

Tatsuya's question caught her off-guard so it took a moment for an answer to come.

"...I don't mind, but why? Those are pretty old models."

Mari figured, by watching Tatsuya during his match yesterday and such, that he was skilled with handling and maintaining CADs. Not to mention that Azusa was enthusiastically talking about the high spec CAD that he

used.

And here he was asking to use an older model. Mari couldn't hide her curiosity.

"They may be older models, but those CADs are high-class items mainly used by professionals."

He gave an unexpected answer with a bitter smile.

"...Is that right?"

"Yes, that series has a low popularity because it's such a hassle to maintain, but despite that, you are able to customize it however you want, and the switch while using the NCT is very sensitive. Thanks to that, although limited, it has passionate support from enthusiasts. The person who bought these was probably a fan of the series. The battery life is a little limited, but it's been overclocked to boost processing power. If you sell these, you can probably get a hefty sum of money from those enthusiasts."

"...And we've been treating those things as trash all this time. I see, now I know why you were so particular about cleaning up the place."

"I'm sure if you brought Nakajou-senpai over she would have explained about the series..."

"Nakajou is too afraid to even step foot in this room."

"Oh... I see."

The two let out nervous laughs. But Mari soon noticed Morisaki was thrown out of the loop.

"\*Cough\* Well, in that case use it however you want. It's just collecting dust in the room anyway."

"Understood. In that case, I'll borrow two of them."

"Two? You really are an interesting person."

Tatsuya took the two that he had secretly customized for himself and attached them to both of his arms. Seeing that, Mari let out a smile, and Morisaki twisted his lips sarcastically.

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"Hey."

While leaving the HQ, Tatsuya was called out by Morisaki.

He could tell by his voice that it wasn't something friendly.

Tatsuya thought about ignoring him, but that would just make things more complicated, so he unwillingly turned around.

"What?"

A resenting voice and an arrogant answer. There was no way a friendly atmosphere would come out of this.

"You seem to be good at bluffing. Is that how you got to the president and the other members' good side?"

"Are you jealous?"

"Wha..."

If you're going to get angry over a small counter like this then stop making sarcastic remarks, thought Tatsuya.

But at the same time, he felt a little jealous of Morisaki's straightforward attitude.

"...Either way, you really crossed the line this time. There's no way you Course 2 guys can use multiple CADs at once."

By not saying "Weeds", he's probably putting his awareness in the Disciplinary Member's role, thought Tatsuya cynically. But Morisaki didn't notice Tatsuya's bored stares and continued with his lecturing like he was drunk with his own words.

"If you attach CADs on both your arms, then the Psion interference would make both of them unusable. You didn't even know that did you? All you were thinking about was looking cool. Since you can't use any decent spells, I guess you have to do these sneaky little things to get by just so you don't look stupid."

"Is that supposed to be advice? You seem pretty confident, Morisaki."

"Ha! I'm different from you people. I was caught off guard the other day, but that won't happen next time. I'll show you the difference in our levels."

How naïve of him to assume that there will always be a "next time"...

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Even though he had a meeting with Erika, she wasn't in front of the classroom when Tatsuya came.

Oh well...

Tatsuya let out a sigh, a habit he acquired since the beginning of school, and brought up the LPS in his mobile terminal.

There was a red dot slowly moving on the school map. At least she was kind enough to not turn off her mobile device. She didn't seem that far away.

It was only supposed to be a precautionary measure though...

She was completely relying on him to seek her out. He zoomed in on her location and started walking towards it.

Tents covered one school ground to another; it almost made this place look like a fair with street vendors.

"Seems like there's a festival going on here..."

Erika said to herself. But when she realized that, she started laughing at herself.

She had a habit of talking to herself, but from the beginning of this school year, she hid that habit.

Unusual that I'm by myself, huh... It looks like you really don't understand me that well Tatsuya-kun.

She was silently talking to him — the boy whom she broke her promise with.

During middle school, actually even in elementary school, she spent most of her time alone. It's not like she hated people or anything like that. She had a pleasant attitude and she could easily get along with anyone. She just becomes negligent towards relationships quickly.

She just couldn't be with anyone 24 hours a day. Her good friends called her cold and said that she acted like a whimsical cat. Others said that she acted high and mighty. There were many boys who wanted to have a relationship with her, but none ever lasted. She went around freely, not being tied down by any promises.

That was her motto.

*...Well, it WAS my motto... but lately I've been acting a bit weird.*

Looking at it from a 3rd person's perspective, it almost seemed like she was stalking him, Erika thought to herself. *This is the first time that I promised to meet up and go around with someone. It has only been a week so I could get bored of this like always, but at the same time, I was thinking that this might be different.*

"Erika~"

10 minutes after the promised time. From just past the school entrance within school grounds, Tatsuya was calling out Erika's name.

He found me quicker than I expected, she thought.

"...Sorry."

He showed a painful expression on his face for a moment, but then he bowed his head down.

"...So you're going to apologize."

Erika wasn't expecting this, so she was stupefied.

"I'm sorry for being 10 minutes late for our meeting time. But, being late and not being at the promised location are two different things."

"Ack... sorry."

It was a strange expression, but Erika was unable to counter the smile on his serious face.

"...Say Tatsuya, don't people say that you have a bad personality?"

"No, that's unthinkable. No one has ever complained about my personality. They have said that I am a bad person though."

"That's the same thing! Wait, that's even worse!"

"Oh wait, that's wrong. Not a bad person but an evil person."

"That's even worse!"

"I was even called a demon by some people."

"Ok, I've had enough!"

As Erika was panting, Tatsuya started acting like a pondering philosopher.

"You seem tired. Are you okay?"

"...Tatsuya. People mentioned that you have a bad personality, didn't they?"

"Well as a matter of fact they did."

"...So you're just going to ignore the entire conversation we just had?"

Erika just drooped her head from fatigue.

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It took a little effort recovering her mood, but Tatsuya was able to continue his patrol before people around them started ridiculing them.

But 5 minutes into it, Tatsuya wanted to go home.

He had underestimated things. Even though he heard that things were a bit "rowdy", he still thought it would be within the bounds of a normal high school club recruitment fair. But in reality, it was nowhere near that.

Hm, I see why they need people to police this place, but I don't think even 10 people are going to be enough.

The mass of tents covering the grounds were filled with people. Across the wall of people, Erika was captured and letting out some kind of scream. Even though she had high agility, she still wasn't able to push her way through the crowd. Well, it didn't sound too convincing coming from Tatsuya who decided to look on from a distance.

It did not necessarily mean that Tatsuya had more agility; it was just that people targeted her rather than him. Tatsuya had an average height and looks, and at first glance he seemed a bit plain. On top of that, he was also a Weed so people paid no attention to him.

In Erika's case, she was beautiful. Miyuki is the type of fragile beauty that made people hesitate reaching their hand out to, but Erika is the type of beauty that, even though people know they would be burned somewhat, they would still try to grasp her.

Basically, what happened was that the club solicitations bombarded her. The fact that she was a Course 2 student didn't help her at all (or as Erika put it, it was useless). They were probably trying to make her join as a mascot figure, something that didn't require the use of magic. So everything around her turned into chaos.

Tatsuya couldn't see what was going on through the line of people (he guessed that they were probably, at worst, only grabbing her arm, holding on to her, or even groping her). The atmosphere quickly turned murderous

as this went on to a point where Tatsuya could no longer ignore it.

Tatsuya only went ahead of her because he assumed that she would be able to fight her way through. A person would need a lot of training to restrain someone like Erika. He remembered how she was able to quickly flick the CAD out of Morisaki's hands, and that move was not something that could be obtained in a year or so. Because of that, Tatsuya had confidence in her abilities.

The ones who actually surrounded Erika were all female upperclassmen. It seemed like the males were not insolent enough to go around touching a girl's body. He assumed that she would be able to break past girls who were only a year older than her, but that seemed to put her at a disadvantage. Erika was hesitant in using any violence.

Just when Tatsuya thought about saving her, it occurred.

"Hey, wait, where are you touching me? S... Stop...!"

He started hearing cries of help from Erika. It looked like playtime was over.

Tatsuya quickly engaged the CAD on his left arm. When the magic formulated, he kicked the ground and made it shake slightly. Physically, the vibrations he made from the shock weren't visible, but he used magic to manipulate the vibrations he made and directed them towards the crowd.

The vibrations weren't enough to make a person unconscious. Tatsuya didn't have the physical strength or the magic capability to make a vibration that large. But the vibrations did make everyone lose their sense of balance.

As he pushed forward in the crowd everyone who was touched by Tatsuya fell over. After pushing a number of people over, both boys and girls, he was able to get to the center and break through the upperclassmen. Tatsuya then grabbed Erika's hand and said "Run". He pulled her hand and made his way out of the crowd.

After slipping through the crowd like a magician, Tatsuya was able to run to a remote location between the buildings. After letting go of her hand and turning around, he finally realized the mess she was in. Her hair was messed up, her new uniform was wrinkled, her top was undone, and her necktie was in her hand since it had fallen off.

Tatsuya, by pure coincidence, was able to see the skin underneath her uniform as she frantically tried to fix herself.

"Don't look!"

Even though she was looking down, she was able to tell by the way Tatsuya's feet were turning towards her. When she got back up to yell at him, his face was already turned the other direction.

"...Did you see?"

He could easily imagine her red face.

"..."

But Tatsuya was unable to give her an answer.

He should say that he didn't see. That would be the smart thing to do.

But the slightly sunburned skin, her white breast, and her slim body. Even the beige-colored undergarments were all etched in his memory.

"Did. You. See?!"

It seemed like she was done dressing since he could no longer hear any rustling of clothes. At the same time, he understood that he didn't have any more time to think based on the tone of her voice.

Well, in that case I should be punched in the face then, he thought. Even though it wasn't his fault, he should at least show some sincerity being the guy and all.

—And so, after briefly escaping from reality, he turned around (now that he thought about it, he was not completely innocent since he left her in the crowd in the first place).

Thankfully she was actually done dressing up. If she wasn't, then it would've probably made things much worse.

Tatsuya was relieved in seeing her fully buttoned up with the neck tie woven tightly. But then Tatsuya thought, if she hadn't loosened her neck tie and unbuttoned the top button in the first place, it wouldn't have gotten so bad.

"Sorry, I saw."

But he did not dare say that. After seeing her red face and lines of tears that were left on her eyes, he couldn't say anything.

Erika glared at Tatsuya from below. She started becoming red again and clenched her fists, probably from remembering the shame she just suffered.

"...Idiot!"

She didn't use her hands, but instead kicked him in the shin. But then, after she did that, she quickly turned around and walked away.

Tatsuya silently followed her.

Tatsuya couldn't see her face, but he could tell it was filled with tears.

He trained his shin so it could withstand a full-blown attack from a wooden sword.

Her flexible shoes with no protection to the toes probably felt much more pain than he did. But, if he tried to say anything regarding that, she would probably just lash out again.

All he could do was pretend not to notice the unnatural way she walked.

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Even though tents were popped up all over school, it was only on the school grounds outside. Inside the buildings, there were demonstrations going on within the various club rooms.

And also here in the gymnasium.

The two made their way into the 2nd gymnasium, also known as the "Arena", where the Kendo club was performing.

—By the way, at this point Erika had long cooled her head. She already knew that she was blaming him for something that he didn't do. It also helped that he didn't make any excuses toward her. Yet, she already started unbuttoning her top button and loosened her neck tie because "it was getting hot". She seemed to already be forgetting what she had gone through.

The two looked down on the arena by the corridor at the Kendo club's demonstrations.

"Oh... even though it's a Magic school, there's a Kendo club."

Erika nonchalantly said.

"Isn't it common to have a Kendo club at a school?"

Tatsuya nonchalantly answered. But then Erika started staring at his face.

"...Is there something wrong?"

"...That's unexpected."

"What is?"

"I didn't know that there was something Tatsuya-kun didn't know. Anybody who's had martial arts training already knows about this."

Tatsuya started to worry after listening to her.

"Do I look like a person who acts like he knows everything?"

"Ah, no, that's not it. It's just that you have that aura that you know everything."

"Aura you say... I'm the same year as you remember? Oh well, putting that aside, why is having a Kendo club so special?"

"Oh, right, you're the same year as me... when you put it that way it's kind of strange... ahhhh, anyway, Kendo right? If you're aiming to become a Magician, Kendo isn't something you do at a high school level. What Magicians typically use are magical sword skills based off from "Kenjutsu" and not "Kendo". You probably take Kendo up to elementary school to get the fundamentals of Kenjutsu, but during middle school, those who want to become Magicians already go to Kenjutsu instead.

"Is that right... I thought Kendo and Kenjutsu were the same thing."

"Wow, that's really unexpected."

After hearing Tatsuya say that, she really was surprised.

"Even though you seem like you have so much martial arts experience... ah, I know!"

"What?"

Tatsuya was surprised by Erika's sudden outburst.

Well, he wasn't the only one who was surprised, but Erika just ignored all that and just kept on making faces like "I got it" and "Everything makes sense now".

"Hey Tatsuya, you're assuming that all martial arts are combined with magic right? Not only martial arts but fighting spirits and things like that. You assume that magic is used to supplement the body when it moves around right?"

"Isn't it obvious? Muscle isn't the only thing that makes the body move."

From Tatsuya's point of view, what Erika said was obvious to him, but Erika only seemed to nod with some kind of understanding.

"Well, for Tatsuya it may be obvious. But in normal competitions that's not

the case."

"I see."

It was a roundabout way of saying it, but Tatsuya was now aware how his common sense was slightly off from hers.

"Putting that aside, why don't we just quietly watch the performance now?"

This time it was Tatsuya's turn to make Erika aware. When she followed his subtle glances, she saw that everybody was looking towards her. After letting out a nervous laugh, she became a quiet spectator.

The practice rounds shown by the regulars were in full force. What caught everyone's eyes especially was the performance by a female 2nd Year student.

She wasn't large or anything; she had around the same body structure as Erika, but she was fighting on par with a man twice her size.

It wasn't just strength, but she was using graceful skills to parry her opponent's attacks. She looked like she had some leeway.

She had a certain beauty in the way she fought the practice rounds. All the spectators had their eyes on her.

But there was an exception right here. Right after she defeated her opponent theatrically and bowed her head, Tatsuya heard a snort from beside him.

"It seems like you didn't enjoy it."

"Huh? Well, yeah..."

She didn't realize that the statement was directed towards her so there was a slight pause in the answer.

"...It's so boring watching this though. She's fighting with an opponent that has a much lower skill level than her, so she's able to show off like that. Instead of a fight, it seems more like a rehearsal."

"Well, you are right regarding that, but..."

Tatsuya's face let out a natural smile.

"It's a performance to promote their club remember? There are always pro martial artists who do showy moves to demonstrate live combat, but you can't really show live combat to normal people. Live combat in martial arts is basically trying to kill one another."

"...You're so cool-headed, aren't you."

"It's just a difference of opinion."

Erika looked away with an irritated face.

But this is the facial expression she uses when she acts like she's angry. She's probably more angry towards the people who use martial arts as a flashy show than what it's really supposed to be and finds those people dishonest.

Even if Tatsuya puts those feelings into words, it would probably irritate her even further.

He doubted that she would just jump into the fight, but he knew that she would do something similar to that. As Tatsuya was about to lead Erika away, something caught his attention.

Just as the two were leaving the spectator corridor and about to exit the building, he started hearing a commotion. It seemed like someone was arguing.

When he looked to his side, Erika was looking up at him. Her eyes were brimming with curiosity.

The first one to dart off towards the commotion was Erika, while she grabbed Tatsuya's sleeve.

Tatsuya was essentially being dragged to the middle of the commotion.

As the two pushed past the crowd (the only reason no one really got angry was because Erika smiled at them as she pushed on by), they saw a swordsman and a swordswoman confronting each other.

The girl was the same girl who just participated in the practice round (or rehearsal as Erika puts it). Her chest plate was still on, but her helmet was off. She was a beautiful girl with semi-long black hair. She seemed perfect as an advertisement for the new student recruits with her looks and her skill.

"Tatsuya, do you like those types of girls?"

"No, you're much prettier Erika."

"...I'm not going to fall for that monotone voice of yours."

Even though she was glaring at him, her face was subtly red.

"Sorry, I'm not used to it."

"...Aahhh! Why are you always..."

She started mumbling something but thankfully, she stopped harassing Tatsuya, so he was able to focus his attention on the swordsman.

He was about the same size as Tatsuya, but he seemed to have a spring-loaded body. He had a [shinai](#) in his hand but no armor on. He was going to ask people around him what was going on, but it didn't seem like he needed to.

"The Kenjutsu club is scheduled to perform an hour later Kirihsara! Why can't you wait?!"

"Wow, how can you say that Mibu? I was just trying to help you guys out since these weaklings you got here don't seem to be advertising your Kendo club effectively."

"By forcing him to have a practice round with you?! I can't believe you're saying things like that! If the Disciplinary Committee finds out that you used violence on an upperclassman, you're not the only one who's going to be in trouble!"

"Violence you say? Hey, hey Mibu, don't be exaggerating things here. I just used my shinai to hit his helmet. If that guy's part of the Kendo club, he shouldn't be going unconscious over something like this. Besides, he was the one who started it anyway."

"It's because you provoked him!"

*There isn't much meaning to have a dispute when their weapons are pointed at each other,* thought Tatsuya. But since it made clear what was going on, it was convenient for him.

"Seems like fun."

Erika mumbled on the side, Tatsuya wasn't sure if she was talking to herself or not. But he could tell from her tone that she was excited.

"This is much more interesting than that little rehearsal that we just saw."

"Do you know those two?"

"Well, I don't personally know them."

Seeing how she responded to his question, it didn't seem like she was talking to herself.

"I just remembered about the girl. Her name is Mibu Sayaka. The year before last, in the National Middle School Kendo Tournament, she placed second in the entire country. She was cheered by the media as the Beautiful Swordswomen for awhile."

"...But she placed second, right?"

"Well... the champion's looks were... you know."

"I see."

That's the media for you.

"The guy's name is Kirihara Takeaki. The year before last he placed 1st place in the Kanto Middle School Kenjutsu Tournament. A real champion."

"He didn't participate in the Nationals?"

"The Nationals for the Kenjutsu tournament only start from High school since there are much fewer competitors for that one."

Well that's right, nodded Tatsuya in agreement.

Kenjutsu is a sport that combined sword techniques with magic, so the basic prerequisite to do Kenjutsu is to be able to use magic. Even though technology has come a long way in assisting people in using magic, probably only 1 in 1000 middle schoolers are able to use it in a practical setting. Even in adulthood, only 1 in 10 are able to maintain that level of magic.

Even though some of them are Course 2 students within the schools, outside of school, they're basically elites.

"Oh, looks like it's starting."

Tatsuya was able to feel the atmosphere reaching its breaking point.

Just as a precautionary measure, he took out his armband and attached it to his left arm. The student next to him was surprised, but he glared at him after seeing there wasn't anything on his left chest. But Tatsuya's attention was focused on the two.

The female swordswoman was hesitant in attacking an opponent with no armor on. But, as long as they faced their swords at each other and had no intent on backing down, there was no choice but to fight.

It seemed like Kirihara was going to make the first move.

"Don't worry Mibu, it's only a demonstration for the Kendo club. I won't use any magic on you."

"Do you think you can beat me with technique alone? You, Kirihara from the Kenjutsu club who heavily relies on magic, and me, from the Kendo club who relies on nothing but technique?"

"You talk pretty big Mibu. I'll show you. The Kenjutsu technique is used

to fight past the body limitations!"

That was the signal of the fight.

Kirihara lunged forward and swung his shinai towards her head.

The sounds of shinais beating each other echoed in the room, followed by screams that came seconds later. The spectators couldn't tell what was going on. They could only listen as bamboo and bamboo hit one another, sounds so violent that they almost sounded metallic. Most were only able to imagine the intense fighting taking place.

—Excluding a small number of people.

"Impressive. The female Kendo students are at a pretty high level. If this is how good the second place is, then how strong was the champion?"

Tatsuya let out a breadth of admiration towards Sayaka's skill.

"No, she's completely different from when I last saw her. I can't believe how much she's improved in only 2 years..."

Even though she let out a surprised look, Erika hid her face as she licked her lips while she let out a combative aura.

The two were momentarily locked in place, but they quickly pushed each other and jumped back to make space between one another.

Some took a breath while others gasped for it. The spectator's reactions were split in two.

"I wonder who will win..."

Erika asked in a quiet voice.

"Mibu-senpai seems like she has the upper hand."

Tatsuya answered in a whisper.

"The reason?"

"Kirihara-senpai is avoiding the head when he attacks. That first move he made was a bluff because he knew that she was easily going to take it. Besides, he's limited by not being able to use his magic. In terms of technique alone, Mibu-senpai is much better."

"Agreed. But, the question is, can Kirihara-senpai hold himself in until the end?"

"Ooooooooooooooo!"



First time during the match, Kirihsara let out a roar while lunging forward and attacks from both opponents struck head on.

"Is it a draw?"

"No, it's not."

Kirihsara's shinai skimmed Sayaka's left arm while Sayaka's shinai was stuck in his right shoulder.

"Ugh."

Kirihsara used his left hand to push away her shinai and dove back.

"He lost because he tried to change his aim in the middle of the attack."

"I see, so that's why he seemed to waver in his attack. It was the perfect timing to make it a draw... but I guess he couldn't cut off his feelings."

Tatsuya and the others weren't the only ones who knew the match was over.

Seated towards the front of the crowd were members of the Kendo club and the Kenjutsu club. The Kendo members let out a sigh of relief while the Kenjutsu members clenched their teeth in anger.

"If this were a real fight, then this would have been a mortal wound. The attack you made on me didn't even reach my bones. Just admit your loss."

Sayaka let out a declaration of victory in a graceful pose.

But Kirihsara distorted his face while listening. Was his swordsman side admitting his loss despite what he was feeling otherwise?

"He...heheheheh."

He suddenly started letting out a hollow laugh. Did he admit his defeat? It didn't seem that way.

Tatsuya's sense of danger shot up within him. The only person who sensed this more than Tatsuya was the one who was standing in front of Kirihsara — Sayaka.

He recovered his stance, pointed his weapon at her, and looked sharply at her.

"A real fight, you say? If this was a real fight, you wouldn't even be able to cut me. Mibu, do you really want to have a real fight? Then... I'll show you what a 'real fight' is!"

As Kirihsara activated his CAD using his right hand, screams came from

the crowd of spectators.

There was a screeching sound that echoed the room, like someone was scratching a panel of glass. There were some who even kneeled down with pale faces.

Kirihara jumped forward and swung his shinai down.

He had the same speed, but he wasn't using as much strength as before. Regardless, Sayaka jumped back.

The attack didn't even hit; it barely grazed her. But her chestplate was cut open, just by getting grazed by a shinai.

The thing that increased its cutting power is a close combat Vibration Magic, "Sonic Blade".

"How's that Mibu?! This is a 'real' fight!"

As he was about to make another swing towards Sayaka, Tatsuya jumped in front of him.

Before he jumped in, Tatsuya activated his CADs on both arms (using his Psion as "hands" to press the switches) and transferred his Psion within them. He used those CAD to shoot out an intricate web of Psion waves, a type of Non-Systematic magic that he used.

By now, there were many spectators who held their mouths because a symptom similar to motion sickness spread across the crowd.

Kirihara's shinai and Tatsuya's arm intersected, but there weren't any sounds of the shinai hitting meat.

The sound that came out was the sound of a body falling to the floor.

After the spectators recovered from the sound and sickness, they were able to finally see what was going on.

And what they saw was Kirihara on the ground while Tatsuya was keeping him there, by holding his left wrist and using his knee to push down on his shoulder.

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Within the gymnasium, a.k.a "Arena", what broke silence was whispers of hostility.

"Who's that?"

"I've never seen him before."

"Is he a new student?"

"Look at it, he's a Weed."

"What the hell is a Weed doing?"

"But that thing on his armband—"

"Wait, I heard a rumor that someone from the Course 2 made it into the Disciplinary Committee."

"What? Seriously? A Weed in the Disciplinary Committee?"

The whispers originated from the Kenjutsu club and spread from there (from both boys and girls). Within the crowded circle, half stared at Tatsuya with hostility, while others simply gazed while holding their breath.

In this hostile atmosphere, Tatsuya coolly (while holding Kirihsara down) took out his communication device in his mobile terminal. His cool face didn't seem like a bluff. It seemed like he was used to being the bad guy in most situations.

"This is Tatsuya within the 2nd gymnasium. I have apprehended one student. He seems to be injured so please bring a stretcher just in case."

He didn't speak in a loud voice, but his voice echoed through the crowd. After the realization of what was happening sunk in, a member of the Kenjutsu club took a step forward and started shouting at Tatsuya.

"Hey, what are you doing?!"

He must have been confused, asking meaningless questions like that. Actually, it might not have been a question, but more of a threat.

"I am apprehending Kirihsara-senpai because of improper use of magic."

Tatsuya dutifully answered the yelling individual. Well, technically, his eyes were still focused on Kirihsara below him so even if it was dutiful it wasn't exactly respectful. Depending on how you look at it, it seemed like he was looking down on his opponent.

And that's exactly how the upperclassman Kenjutsu member took it.

"Hey, you! Stop looking down at me you damn Weed!"

He started lunging forward to grab Tatsuya in the chest.

Tatsuya quickly let go of Kirihsara and stepped back. He took a look at Kirihsara and saw that his consciousness was still hazy from the fall so it looked like he wasn't going to be running away anywhere. After making that judgment, he focused his attention on the (oncoming) upperclassman in front of him.

Other Kenjutsu members were becoming angered by Tatsuya's attitude of acting coolly like his opponents weren't even a threat. The upperclassman facing him clenched his teeth to a point where you could hear it grind.

"Why is it only Kirihsara?! Mibu over there is as guilty as he is! She was the one to continue the fight!"

The statement came from the crowd. It was a criticism that was shot toward Tatsuya and it was also made to support the upperclassman. But Tatsuya didn't even budge and said,

"As I said before, I'm apprehending him for the improper use of magic."  
Again, with a calm voice he dutifully answered.

You should've just ignored them... thought Erika, and at that point, her concerns became real.

"Stop messing around!"

The upperclassman was filled with rage again and lunged toward Tatsuya. Tatsuya avoided the attacks like a bullfighter in a ring, but this just made things worse.

Now the upperclassman was throwing his fists at him, but Tatsuya was still dodging those.

No matter what the upperclassman did he wasn't able to touch Tatsuya. Not only was empty handed combat Tatsuya's specialty, but the upperclassman was also making crude movements because of his rage.

Tatsuya was taking light steps to dodge his opponent's brash punches. Just when Tatsuya stopped moving because the upperclassman stopped from fatigue, two more members from the Kenjutsu club attacked Tatsuya from behind.

Just when Erika was about to shout "Behind you!", Tatsuya spun around and tangled the two members together. The two Kenjutsu members ran into each other and rolled to the ground.

Silence filled the room again. It was completely silent in the arena.

If there were any sound effects at this moment, it would be the sound of a boiling point reaching its peak.

Because in the next moment, the entire Kenjutsu club started attacking Tatsuya.

Screams arose from the crowd and everyone who wasn't involved (including the Kendo members) started running away to avoid the brawl.

Sayaka was the only one in the crowd who stepped forward to help Tatsuya.

"Wait, Mibu."

A 3rd Year upperclassman from the same Kendo club grabbed her wrist.

"Ah, Tsukasa-senpai."

She resisted for a moment, but when she saw the person who grabbed her wrist, she let him pull her away from the scene. Her face was overcome with guilt from running away from the fight, but she couldn't let go of the 3rd Year Kendo Male Club President's hand.

As the Male Club President took Sayaka away from the brawl, Tatsuya was in the middle of it, getting ready to take the Kenjutsu members head on.

Well, not necessarily "head on" as in counter attacking; all he did was dodge and parry the attacks the "Blooms" unleashed on him.

Tatsuya's movements were not graceful; they were solid, or even certain if there is a right word for it. It's almost as if he could tell the order the upperclassmen were going to attack from all directions; all he made were the minimal necessary movements. He stayed calm during the ordeal and showed no signs of being cornered. When they cooperated to drive him in a corner, he merely did a feint and had them hit each other; when they came at him like a wall, he skillfully wove his way through it.

Even though more than 10 people were attacking him at once, they weren't even able to disrupt his breathing, let alone stop him in place.

The Blooms understood in anger that this insolent Weed wasn't attacking back not because he couldn't, but because he didn't even need to.

This caused the rest of the Kenjutsu members to activate their CADs in anger. But when they lit it up to shoot up magic towards him, nothing happened.

Whenever Tatsuya looked in their directions, they were filled with motion

sickness and their blocks of Psion dissipated into thin air.

The Kenjutsu members cursed as they couldn't understand what was going on, but they merely proceeded to attack Tatsuya with their fists.

All the while, Sayaka didn't notice that her Male President was observing the situation out of curiosity.

### **[modifier] Afterword**

Everyone, nice to meet you. Satou Tsutomu here.

Thank you very much for picking up this book.

This "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" that became my debut work in a novel-posting site since October 2008 was edited and revised in the published serialization.

This work was written entirely as a hobby, then received an offer to be published out of luck.

It was started from an email I received from the great administrator of the novel-posting site.

That email was sent by the people from ASCII Media Works, and the text transmitted was a words of invitation, "We want to discuss the terms for publication."

To be honest, I doubted my eyes.

Entertainment novel is my number one hobby.

I also love reading and writing.

Therefore, as an entertainment novel writer, I had the desire to publish my works in the stage of books since long ago.

While being a salaryman who will never get promoted, I applied this novel that I wrote in my spare time to the publisher's rookie of the year award.

However, this kind of thing was allowed precisely because "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" was freely published on the web by an amateur and

a self-evaluated work.

Dealing with a reputable publisher is an adventure isn't it~?

I remembered how I wished that this was somebody else's problem.

Actually, the aforementioned publisher's award I applied to was Dengeki Novel Prize by ASCII Media Works, but my competition entry was easily defeated.

If you allow me to make an excuse, it was because I had to tightly compress the amount of sentences of this work into half due to the application's regulation.

I even felt, "Isn't this unreasonable?"

But I accepted my defeat.

"The world is not that sweet" is one of the few useful lessons I learned in my life as a salaryman.

However, an "unexpectedly nice" event also occurs in life once in a while.

After a chat started with a usual greeting with the person from editorial department of Dengeki Bunko that I met (although probably keeping his name secret is unnecessary, I will call him M-sama in accordance to the custom(?)).

I was really surprised when asked, "Aren't you 'XXXX'-san who wrote 'XXXX'?".

The work that I applied to Dengeki Novel Prize was this work, although they shared some settings, the style of the SF was completely different, moreover the pen name was also written using kanji notation of an English-American name by the phonetic equivalent.

Please remember that it somehow happened with my rejected work, but if you read this work on the web and a "This setting, I remember seeing it somewhere before" caught in your antenna, it seems that was the reason I was called out.

It seems M-sama was also hesitating to change a free content into a paid service, he was very worried about what the web readers would think were he in their position.

I also thought about that. However, because of the long economic

recession, downturn of the company, and overtime's restriction, headwind was blowing my salaryman profession, so I thought "It'll be hard if I don't look for a side job huh. But then, I will no longer have any time to write a novel."

That being the case, this was the best thing I could ask for in order to continue writing this work.

The world is really not that sweet, but sometimes waiting for good luck = sweet event.

And of course, this good luck was the offer of publication from M-sama.

And since we were publishing a work that originated on the web, this publication also received various help from the administrators of the site "Let's Become a Novelist".

But above all, thanks to all of you who have supported this work so far.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

I also want to express my gratitude to Kawahara-sensei who gave me a great honor with his recommendation words, Ishida-sama who added substantial value to this work with his illustrations, Stone-sama who did the mechanical design, Suenaga-sama who did the color coordination, and all of the staff who were involved in the making of this book.

And more than anything, to all of you who picked up this work, this book that I am so fortunate to be able to deliver, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

This is not the end of my good luck, so I'll do my best to deliver the next volume of this story to everyone, please also support me in the future.

(Satou Tsutomu)

**[modifier] The Late Great Favourite**

Kawahara Reki

Errr, when I was asked to write the recommendation words for "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" from the editor in charge of the story, Mr. M, I immediately replied in excitement "I'll do it! I'll do it! I'll write two thousand pages!" while looking at him with a rather presumptuous or maybe a rather arrogant look... Since the container for a recommendation commentary that long is impossible to exist, I humbly ask you to please read these pages as column instead.

In this preface, I'm afraid I would suddenly start from my personal affairs. I, Kawahara Reki, got his first book published by Dengeki Bunko in 2009. At that time, there was almost no case of a novel published in the web as amateur work will be published as it is commercially (aimed at young adults). In these two years, considerable amount of «Web Adaptation» were published by all companies. I felt that web novel's existence has been completely recognized. Then this time, there is the long-awaited publication from Dengeki Bunko, "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" ("Mahouka" from now on).

If you are a reader, then I think you already know that "Mahouka" was serialized in novel-posting site «Let's Become a Novelist» from October 2008, and concluded in March 2011 as a very long work. What's more, it was leading the popularity ranking by a large margin for a long period of time and gained a remarkable 30 million page views (!).

Although I can't possibly have enough space to thoroughly write about the charm of "Mahouka" which has gathered so much support, in short, I think I can say it was an «Online Novel that has Unique Deviation» that effectively and splendidly exhibited.

For example, if "Mahouka" was written as a competition manuscript for rookie of the year award, even with its persistently constructed magic theory and many colourful characters who made an appearance one by one from the start, it didn't omit a significant portion of the story to fit the regulation. Also, online novel do not have any limitation other than the «Author's Limit». So it is possible for the author to write a massive amount of settings, lot of characters, and a gradually breathtaking developments to one's heart's content.

Certainly, it was also a large deviation from the theory of business. What can convert that deviation to charm, in my personal opinion, is only the «Amount of Material», in other words only the amount of the text written. Although earlier I said it was the author's limit, I'm having difficulty with

the two series I'm writing as its scale become larger and larger. Anyway, with online novel, what gives an author motivation is only the readers' comments (in the early stage, even that is nonexistent...). When we have passion as the energy source to create, and earnestly connect it when writing something which deviates from theory, surely that work will emit a dazzling charm.

"Mahouka" is a rare work that breaks through that very limit and rapidly ascended to the top. The total amount of text the author, Mr. Satou Tsutomu, written in two and a half years surpassed the production pace of most professional writers. For all of you dear readers who just entered the world of "Mahouka" from Dengeki Bunko, please look forward for the work to keep expanding its world from now on.

And, although so far I regrettably had been writing in formal language, the prime example of the deviation's charm in "Mahouka" is, if you want to be loved by Miyuki-san more than her Onii-sama, I believe that you have to take Tatsuya-kun's position as the strongest first! For Tatsuya-kun who got magnificent illustration from Mr. Ishida Kana and became more excellent and brilliant than ever, I think Miyuki-san will surely show us even more rampage if that ever happens and continuing publication would not be fun anymore.

"Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" is certainly the Late Great Favourite from the world of online novel.

## Notes

An azusayumi is a kind of sacred bow used in some Shinto rituals. Rather than an archery bow, it is more of a musical bow instead.