

魔法科高校の 劣等生 24

*The irregular
at magic high school*

エスケープ編〈上〉

佐島 勤

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illustration / 石田可奈

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illustrator assistant / ジミー・ストーン 末永康子

design / BEE-PEE





『ESCAPES計画ね。
意味は……まあ、良いや』

『ESCAPES計画だ』

北山 平

きたやま-しずく

8年A組。深雪のク
ラウティド。運動・
知能系魔法が得意。
感情の起伏をあまり表に出さない。

レイモンド・クラーク

Reymond Clark

平が留学していたUSNAバークレーにある高校での同級生。その正体は『七賢人』の一人、エドワード・クラークの義妹。

司波深雪

しば-みゆき

達也の妹。第一高校3年A組所属。生徒会会長を務める優等生。冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する『重宝のグランコン』。

司波達也

しば-たけや

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



『任せてくれ』

『そうですね。
わたしが頼れるのは、
お兄様だけです』

Chapter 1

"Taurus Silver is a student at the National Magic University Affiliated High School, Mr. Shiba Tatsuya. People of Japan. I want you to convince Mr. Shiba Tatsuya."

The appearance of the mysterious personality in the video, calling himself one of the "Seven sages", caused a wide public outcry not only in Japan, but also in America.

In the field of Magic Science, Taurus Silver is given as much attention as the pioneer of the "Cardinal code", Kichijoji Shinkuro. But unlike Kichijoji, who had no new achievements since the discovery of the Cardinal Code for Weight-Type Magic, Taurus Silver, implemented a practical version for Flight-Type Magic, which was celebrated.

"Cardinal George" in the theoretical field and "Taurus Silver" in the technical field. This was the common view of Japan by the American Magic Association.

And now, hidden for all this time, the identity of Taurus Silver was revealed. Furthermore, it turned out that he was also a high school student like Kichijoji Shinkuro. This news, that became a sensation, attracted attention from those who ordinarily aren't interested in magic.

Raymond laughed when he saw the reaction of ordinary people on the Internet, which he expected would be quite turbulent. He realized what he was doing was dark and therefore couldn't enjoy it together with his friends from school.

His work in the role of "Seven sages" was a secret that was only known by himself and his father, Edward Clark. He couldn't boast about this in front of his simple friends.

The moment Raymond got up from the table and thought it was time for dinner, the home security system alerted him that his father returned home. At the same time, Raymond came to the realization that it is unusual for his father to appear in the daytime.

His father Edward comes home once or twice a week. When he needs his father, he usually goes to his office... And his mother divorced his father and left when Raymond was 10 years old.

The day of the week on which Edward usually came home hadn't arrived yet.

Naturally Raymond realized that it was his "prank" that caused Edward's unusual actions.

"Dad, welcome back."

Of course he'll be angry. In anticipation of this, Raymond came out of his room and greeted his father with a smile.

"Raymond, that was a stupid thing to do!"

"Sorry."

Edward's voice was more rigorous than Raymond expected. However, Raymond's apology was only in words. Neither his thoughts nor the expression on his face hinted at any fear.

He understood that his father must be seriously angry.

"...But the result was convenient. If the privacy of the minor was violated the public opinion, media and human rights organizations would raise unnecessary fuss. I would have suffered greatly if I had taken this next step in the pursuit of Shiba Tatsuya."

"I'm glad I helped my dad."

Raymond only made a submissive face for a few seconds. Edward's reprimand and his true intentions that followed were within Raymond's expectations.

The USNA government, a democratic state, cannot openly violate the rights of magicians. Especially the rights of a minor. That is why Edward could not use the real name of Taurus Silver to control the public opinion of the Japanese. Despite this, he expected that for the USNA, it was most advantageous if the name "Shiba Tatsuya" would come under pressure of the public opinion.

But if this information was leaked from sources other than government officials, the government of the USNA will not be attacked by the media and human rights organizations. The disclosure of the identity of Taurus Silver by Raymond, who plays the role of one of the "Seven Sages", meets these requirements.

But if this information was leaked from sources other than government officials, the government of the USNA will not be attacked by the media and human rights organizations. The disclosure of the identity of Taurus Silver by Raymond, who plays the role of one of the "Seven Sages", meets these requirements.

Raymond guessed this.

"Can I do anything else for dad?"

Raymond's question was not the desire to fulfill his duty as a son, but the desire to play further.

Edward squinted a little. Of course, he also realized what his son expected from his actions. He did not scold him because he came to the conclusion that "The Seven Sages" are quite useful.

"I plan to visit Japan in the near future."

"You, personally?" Edward nodded to Raymond's question.

"You want to go too?"

"Can I? I'll go!"

Raymond immediately accepted his father's proposal.

When Tatsuya watched the video addressed by the Seven Sages, it was 7 o'clock in the morning. It took three hours before he came out of deep reflection and started acting.

At 10 o'clock in the morning. Tatsuya called the main house of the Yotsuba.

"Sorry about the wait. Terrible things have happened, haven't they?"

Unlike the previous times, when he wanted to talk to Maya, this time she didn't pretend she wasn't there. However, instead of a dumbfounded expression, Maya's greeting, which appeared on the screen, contained not a drop of concern.

"Yes. I believe that we will no longer be able to confront this passively." Tatsuya answered directly to the tantalizing words of Maya.

"...I wonder how we can respond well?"

Maya slightly knitted her eyebrows, showing that it would be unpleasant if expectations were not met.

"I called to talk about this."

Even when Maya showed that she was in a bad mood, the expression on Tatsuya's face did not change. Not showing even a polite smile, he finished the entry and moved to the main issue.

"Do you have any ideas?"

"Yes..."

The light smile vanished from Maya's face, and she pondered. Tatsuya silently waiting for the answer, watching her image on the screen.

"I'll send a man to pick you up. It's a little early, but let's talk at lunch."

The second hand of the clock managed to make half a turn before Maya gave this order.

"Understood."

Tatsuya thought it wouldn't be a problem if they discussed it on the phone. But he didn't mind a personal meeting to talk about it. Tatsuya respectfully bowed to the image of Maya on the screen.

Tatsuya arrived at the main house of Yotsuba at 11:30. Hanabishi Hyougo, who was sent to pick up Tatsuya, immediately led him inside the main building.

In the canteen, where the name of the successor was announced on New Year's Eve, everything was prepared for a joint dinner, but Maya was not there yet. Now Tatsuya no longer feared the authority of Maya. But he was pleased with the fact that he did not have to wait long for the person at the highest level of power in the family.

Maya appeared five minutes after Tatsuya took his place.

"I'm sorry I made you wait."

"No, nothing like that."

Tatsuya got up from the chair, and bowed to Maya in the dining room.

"Clear."

Having received permission from the nod of the displeased Maya, Tatsuya sat back on his chair.

Their places were opposite of each other. To make it easier to speak, the table was replaced by a smaller one compared to one from New Year's Eve.

Behind Maya stood Hayama, and behind Tatsuya stood Hyougo.



On the signal of Hayama, the female maids entered the dining room and put down the food.

It was not a full dinner, but only soup and some garnish, as to not disturb the conversation.

"Eat, don't be shy."

"With your permission."

As directed by Maya, Tatsuya picked up his chopsticks. Still, all his attention was directed to Maya.

"This time it was unexpected even for me."

"For me, too."

So he wasn't embarrassed when she suddenly spoke to him.

"Tatsuya-san knew about him, didn't he?"

"Raymond Clark? Yes, but as I previously reported, we never communicated directly."

After the parasite incident was resolved, Tatsuya gave Maya the details of the case in a written report. The report also contained a complete rehash of the case where Raymond Clark offered his assistance in supplying information.

"I wonder if you could find out if there was a connection between Raymond Clark and Edward Clark."

"It's hard to say exactly. Although he offered to help with information on a permanent basis, I have since then not had any contact with him."

In that video message, Raymond said to Tatsuya, "I'll try and continue to give you information that you can count as important." But he never fulfilled that promise.

"I mean, did you forget about him?"

"In the sense that I didn't remember him, that's right. I only left the existence of Hliðskjálf in the depths of my memory, but I had to study the matter more seriously. I think Taurus Silver's identity was already known to Raymond Clark at the time of contact, but I'm sorry I couldn't catch him by surprise to reveal details about the tool he was using."

"...Well, this is the last thing, there's nothing to be done."

Maya's response sounded like some obscure hitch. Tatsuya thought, (Come on.)

"As you say."

As a result, he just bowed, pretending to agree.

"There's one more question, Tatsuya-san."

But Maya, during this momentary confusion, seems to have realized something important. She suddenly decided to change the subject.

"What did you do with your seal? I see it's been released."

"It was destroyed to increase my chances of victory against Juumonji-dono."

Tatsuya did not panic and was not afraid, so he immediately gave a direct answer to Maya's question. Besides, her question didn't sound like a charge.

"Destroyed? Not released?"

Maya with doubt inquiringly bowed her head. Her face showed that she doubted whether she had correctly heard.

"Yes. The vow itself was annulled." Tatsuya again answered Maya's question without fear and hesitation.

"This was very reckless..." Maya said.

"He was not an opponent that could be defeated without recklessness."

"Couldn't you win even in a sealed state?"

There were signs of accusations in Maya's voice. But it was concern about the recklessness of Tatsuya. For some reason, it was not a charge of unwittingly withdrawing the vow.

"But since you really won, it wasn't a mistake."

"I'm sorry to bother you."

Tatsuya could not understand Maya's real intentions, so he just briefly answered and bowed.

"So... It's time to move on to the main issue."

Was she satisfied with the answers, or was it just time? Maya urged Tatsuya to explain the plan for "retaliation".

Tatsuya had not finished eating, but he temporarily put his chopsticks down.

"I would like to get permission to hold a press conference in the main office of FLT."

"Are you saying you're going to take it personally?"

Maya slightly rounded her eyes.

"Yes."

"And what, I wonder, are you going to say to the journalists?" Maya asked, giving Tatsuya a curious look.

"I am going to announce a project of a plant for the processing of oceanic water using the 'Stellar Furnace'."

"'Stellar Furnace'? You mean the thermonuclear reactor you developed a sequence of magic of constant gravitational control for? What is this project?"

"The Extraction of both useful and harmful Substances from the Coastal Area of the Pacific Ocean using the Energy produced by the Stellar Furnace (extract both useful and harmful Substances from the Coastal area of the Pacific using Electricity generated by Stellar-Generator). The first letters of the basic words were taken from this phrase, and the abbreviation "project ESCAPES" was made."

Now, for the first time Tatsuya first revealed his true goal to Maya.

"...This is quite interesting. Tatsuya-san plans to achieve the creation of an independent State for magicians with this 'project ESCAPES'?"

"I did not plan to separate from the country. To cover all necessary necessities of life is unrealistic to be done by magicians alone."

"You won't even require autonomy status?"

"I think that this will be of little use, even if the government is too stimulating."

"You don't have a childish way of thinking."

Maya hid her mouth with her hand and narrowed eyes. But the expression on her face made it clear that she was silently laughing, but to Tatsuya, it was clear that it was not from a bad impression.

"It will be sufficient for me that the rights of magicians, guaranteed by public foundations, will indeed be protected."

"To get the government to implement this. That is Tatsuya-san's purpose for this, isn't it?"

"Yes. Although I do not deny the possibility of obtaining real autonomy as a means to implement this."

Unable to tolerate any more, Maya laughed out loud.

"...Right. But I am sure that the general public will be against such a regime of governance as autonomy."

Maya laughed more, and then looked Tatsuya straight in the eye.

"I understand Tatsuya-san's plan. I see that you have thought this through enough to succeed."

Tatsuya understood the meaning of Maya's words when she only marked herself by saying, "I see."

"Does that mean that the opinions of Aunt alone will not be enough to allow this?"

"Yes, it does. But not in the sense that we need approval from all the side branches."

Tatsuya silently stared at Maya's eyes, waiting for her to continue.

"It concerns sponsors, especially close to our Yotsuba family."

"Is it about His Excellency Toudou? Although I only know his name..."

"Ara, you're right."

Maya was a little surprised, but immediately nodded with an emotional smile on her face.

"Then the conversation will be short."

Maya wet her throat with green tea. When she returned the cup to the table, Hayama immediately replaced a new one for her.

"The conditions are that Tatsuya-san has to explain to His Excellency Toudou what we have just discussed, and to get his permission to do so. I'll arrange a meeting with His Excellency."

"Understood. I'm sorry to bother you."

Without showing any apprehension, Tatsuya bowed in a sign of consent.

"But since we need to make some preparations at FLT, let's define an action plan. How about Friday, in four days, at 10 o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't have any plans, so I don't mind."

After all these events, Tatsuya's schedule, as a student, a developer, and as a special officer, was empty. He therefore accepted in an instant to Maya's proposal.

"The press conference will be postponed if His Excellency will not be able to meet in the near future. And if you can't get His Excellency's consent, it will be canceled."

"This is inevitable, I understand."

"Yes."

Maya nodded with a smile, looking at the demonstration of submission by Tatsuya.

As soon as the meeting with Maya was over, Tatsuya went back to the villa in Izu. He originally did not plan to stay there, but no one was going to hold him.

Since the new year the attitude of the servants to Tatsuya has changed a lot. However, due to the fact that he was seldomly in the main house, respect was extremely scant.

"...Tatsuya-san does not seem to care at all."

Sitting in her office, which was her "personal space", Maya unwittingly said part of her thoughts aloud.

The nearby Hayama heard her words.

But he didn't comment on the muttering Maya, and just put a cup of tea in front of her.

"Hayama-san..."

"Yes, Madam?"

Although by Maya's voice it was possible to think that she was talking to herself, but Hayama answered her calling voice without panic or confusion.

"What do you think about it... About what Tatsuya-san told us?"

"Speaking of the story of Tatsuya, do you mean the question of the vow? Or is it about the press conference?"

"I speak about both questions... Right, first I'd like to hear Hayama-san's opinion about the abolishment of the Vow."

"Yes, indeed... In my humble opinion, this will not cause any particular problems."

"The vow itself was removed, but there will be no problems?"

Maya asked Hayama with unconcealed surprise in her voice.

"With all due respect, but was not the role of the Vow completed when Tatsuya became the groom of the next Head-sama?"

"But wasn't his seal intended to insure obedience to the Yotsuba family?"

"I know. But madam. I dare say it rudely, but you seriously think that it is necessary to fear the current Tatsuya's magic going out of control?"

"A complete vow withdrawal. This means that Tatsuya can now at any given time, 24 hours a day show all 100% of his magical abilities. This means that he can freely use Material Burst."

"Initially Tatsuya's power was sealed out of fear of uncontrollable activation of Material Burst."

Anger, sadness, hatred, if only one of these arises and the boy could in turn instantly attack any point of the world with magic, the destructive power of which surpasses any strategic nuclear missile. Even if the Earth itself is not destroyed, all sentient beings on it will be easily destroyed. And people are no exception.

To prevent such a situation, the Yotsuba family sealed the force of Tatsuya.

But the seal was not complete. The Yotsuba family did not renounce the power with which only one person can confront the whole world.

They valued this power.

By conducting a pre-determined procedure, Tatsuya could temporarily gain the ability to use the Material Burst at his own discretion.

The seal of the vow was needed to prevent the impulsive use of destructive magic by Tatsuya, regardless of his intentions. It was installed in case he could not control his magic.

But the vow connected not only Tatsuya's magic abilities.

The binding spell on Tatsuya was designed to use the magic power of Miyuki. To keep the power of Tatsuya sealed, so the vow consumed a large amount of Miyuki's power.

The vow is not needed when Tatsuya can hold his magic under the control of his will.

"We can say that the vow was not 'not necessary', but rather a harmful thing that reduced the fighting power of the Yotsuba family, suppressing the forces of two powerful magicians, Tatsuya and Miyuki."

Maya received from Hayama a rather unexpected opinion, and could not immediately answer it.

"The ability of Tatsuya in the management of magic is such that it competes for first or second place in the entire Yotsuba. We can say that it is the highest level in the whole world."

"...Right. At least he's taller than me."

Hayama neither confirmed nor refuted Maya's assessment.

"As long as no misfortune comes to Miyuki-sama, the magic of Tatsuya-sama will not get out of control."

"And if something happens to Miyuki-san, the vow will not stop the riot of magic... that is what Hayama-san is trying to say?"

"You're right. Therefore, I believe that the Yotsuba family should protect Miyuki-sama by any means. I apologize for my cheeky words."

"I understand, this is clearly a fact."

Maya reached for a cup of tea, but halfway removed her hand and sighed deeply.

"To have so much force, indeed, troublesome. If we want to use it, after all, it will be abusive of us. And if we want to isolate it, we won't be able to ignore it anyway."

"We cannot say that there is no threat. To compromise, to betray oblivion, or surrender? If we do not use the force that is the source of the threat, then surrendering to the enemy is only a temporary solution."

"You're right, Hayama-san. As long as the enemy is not devoid of strength, surrender is not a solution. But if this force is inseparable from the enemy's essence, there is no other choice but to destroy it."

"But this is only in case you can't compromise, right?"

"It is the common opinion that the search for a compromise is one of the options for postponing problems... But in our case it will be quite difficult, wouldn't it? Because the threat of this magic is exposed to all countries of the world."

"Do you think that there will be people planning to kill Tatsuya-sama?"

While Hayama asked, he replaced the contents of the tea cup.

"I think that there are already some forces that have reached the phase of practical execution."

Taking the cup in hand, Maya said this before touching her lips.

"This is a pretty big deal."

Maya lateral vision caught the expression on Hayama's face. Contrary to Maya's expectations, Hayama was not smiling. Maya felt that she should somehow change the subject.

"But Tatsuya-san can't be killed, can he?"

"I think so. Tatsuya is almost immortal. However, Miyuki is not."

Maya put the tea cup on the table so abruptly that there was a loud ringing.

"...What happens if Miyuki-san falls from an assassination attempt aimed at Tatsuya-san?"

"I believe that the people of the Yotsuba family should try to avoid this possibility by any means."

After answering Hayama, Maya plunged into silence.

"Miyuki is protected by Tatsuya like no other. Even now when they are in different places, this is not a hindrance to Tatsuya. Tatsuya's protection is effective from any distance."

Magical ability that can dissipate the very essence of magic, that is his sequence of magic.

And another ability that can cancel fatal injuries until the person has died.

Maya felt relieved when she reminded herself that Miyuki was safe because she was protected by Tatsuya.

But it is obvious that Tatsuya is not all-powerful.

The victory against Juumonji Katsuto was not easy.

Tatsuya was unable to neutralize the protective version of the Phalanx.

He is able to dispel any sequence of magic, but that does not mean that he can neutralize any potential magic.

To defeat Katsuto, Tatsuya had to use a physical attack in the form of a neutron beam.

It is impossible to stop that neutron beam, because simultaneously with irradiation, the use of a neutron barrier is impossible. But you can evade it. In addition, "Baryon Lance" is a magic that puts a lot of strain on Tatsuya's magic calculation area, so if it is dodged, it creates a serious gap in his defense.

Tatsuya himself will never die, no matter how he is attacked. However, it is not accurate to say that there will be no cases of such an attack, from which he won't be able to protect Miyuki, because this will cause fatal trauma against him. Perhaps a magician capable of making such an attack exists somewhere in this world.

No, not "perhaps." Tatsuya received heavy damage, losing one hand from the cannon of charged particles from Angie Sirius... Although with modern regenerative medicine, he would eventually recover even without his superpower "Regrowth".

In addition, Tatsuya was unable to neutralize "Tuman Bomba" in the Soya Strait. And the reason was not because he was remotely kneeling from the base of Kasumigaura. Also, he would have been defeated by Katsuto if he hadn't prepared Baryon Lance in advance.

"...Hayama-san wants to say that the protection of Tatsuya-san leads to the protection of Miyuki-san, and that, in addition leads to the fact that the magic of Tatsuya-san will not get out of control?"

"I think that even in a sealed state, Tatsuya will never be defeated.

However, does the limitation of Tatsuya-sama's power, limiting his ability to protect Miyuki-sama not contradict the original goal to prevent the rampage of Material Burst?"

"True... You may be right, Hayama-san."

Maya relaxed her shoulders and leaned back in the chair.

"If you consider the ability of Tatsuya-san, who does not allow his magic to go out of control, the limitation of force can be said to give a reverse effect."

Hayama respectfully bowed to Maya.

"Well. I give my permission to destroy the Vow."

Not "Ignore", but "Allow".

Hayama slightly raised his eyebrows with surprise.

"Mitsugu-san and Touka-san may raise some noise on this, but if that goes too far, I'll talk to them myself to convince them."

"As you will. I will try not to bother Madame with this question as much as possible."

"Yes, thank you."

Thus, Maya and Hayama finished with the topic of allowing the removal of Tatsuya's seal.

"By the way, what do you think about 'Project ESCAPES'?"

"It's amazing."

After hearing Hayama's voice filled with unexpected emotions, Maya turned to him in surprise. The person standing next to Maya, Hayama, looked the same as his words indicated.

"You really appreciate it, don't you?"

"Project Dione by Edward Clark was an idealistic project that the responsible magician has difficulty resisting."

"...Indeed, it is difficult to go against what is positioned as the dream of all mankind."

If humankind adheres to the current growth rate, it will sooner or later be faced with problems such as limited space on earth and a lack of resources. A plan to address this issue has been presented.

It was stated that this requires the power of magic, and it is impossible to refuse cooperation. Even if it is necessary to sacrifice the lives of magicians, if they renounce it, they will be called traitors of humanity.

Regardless of the success or failure of the project.

"However, Tatsuya's project itself demonstrates another solution. Let it be fair, it directly opposes the plan of Edward Clark."

"As for its grandiosity, the plan of Tatsuya-san is a couple of steps inferior to 'Project Dione'."

Maya seemed to think Hayama overestimated the proposed plan by Tatsuya. So she ironically objected to the words of Hayama.

"I mean, it's more realistic."

But Hayama did not praise the plan of Tatsuya in a burst of feelings.

"It seems that capital owners prefer to invest in cases that show more realistic prospects."

It seems that he first of all assessed the effectiveness of the plan as a means of retaliation.

"...Theoretically, this is the case..."

With a slight sense of unwillingness to admit her defeat, Maya agreed with the opinion of Hayama.

"As Madam said, the chance of success of a fairy tale, which is a pipe dream, is rather low. But it benefits from the power of persuasion from the assistance provided by other countries."

"It would be good if His Excellency decides the same."

"Can Tatsuya persuade Toudou Aoba? It all depends on whether Tatsuya can overcome this deadlock."

"By the way, Madam."

This time Hayama changed the subject, not answering the muttering Maya.

"What is it?"

"As I mentioned before, I do not think that a compromise is impossible."

"...For the question of the Tatsuya-san's magic threatening the whole world?"

"Yes. Tatsuya-sama earlier said that he did not deny the possibility of getting magicians themselves. If Tatsuya-sama will act not individually, but on an equal basis with representatives of the State, there will be no need for compromise."

On the same day, when a mysterious man revealed the identity of Taurus Silver.

From that very morning the media stormed the entrance of First high.

Classes started earlier than usual, so there would be no pupils caught on the way to school, who would be surrounded and have microphones waved before them. But by the beginning of the second lesson, both the main and service gates were completely crammed with the employees of various mass media companies.

The reporters requested materials on Tatsuya, but the school rejected all requests.

Given the importance of protecting the privacy of the minor, as he did not commit anything illegal, this is normal even though he did not attend school.

Despite the refusal to issue information, the media did not give up. No, that seems to have been unimportant from the start, whether the school will allow it or not. Even when the morning half of the classes ended, and a lunch break came, a crowd of journalists still captivated the whole neighborhood around the school.

"They're still here..."

"It seems even more of them have shown up."

On the words of Izumi, who was watching the main gate of the school from the window of the school board, an exhausted voice from Kasumi answered her, also observing the situation on the street.

"The back gate is full of reporters..." added Honoka with a timid voice.

She could see the situation outside, sitting in her place, because she directed the light rays to her field of view. In fact, it was a violation of school rules for using unauthorized magic, but here and now no one was going to complain.

"It's going to be a problem when everyone goes home from school." A frowning Miyuki murmured.

"Should we call the police?"

Miyuki slightly shook her head at the offer of Shizuku.

"Let the teachers think about it. We cannot make such decisions ourselves."

"Understood."

It was just a fleeting idea, and Shizuku didn't cling to it.

"But President, I think we will not be able to reach our house safely only by our efforts..." with a helpless expression on her face, Shiina turned to Miyuki.

If Saburou was here, he wouldn't have any qualms to say something like, "I will protect you," to cheer Shiina up, but it looks like he was having trouble communicating with the school board, so he stayed away from the room.

When Shiina said, "only by her own efforts," she naturally hinted that they would not use magic. Theoretically, magic can be used for self-defense. But the definition of the legality of using magic for self-defense was greatly hampered. If press freedom is used as a shield, even though they are minors, the likelihood that the use of magic is legitimate will be rather low. For so-called "experts" there was still a deep rooted evil, which sees "journalism" as something sacred.

Miyuki, apparently, also feared this situation.

"We need to think about some countermeasures." She answered with a serious expression of her face.

Needless to say, the First High School was not the only place where the media was. Many reporters also crowded near the work place of Taurus Silver, the office of Four Leaves Technology. There were a lot of reporters, openly recording everything on camera, because there was no need to pay attention to the privacy of minors. If they were not involved in the media, they could be suspected of interfering in official business.

However, after noon a break came to this frantic activity to gather information.

But it happened not because common sense woke up in the journalists and reporters.

Two o'clock in the afternoon. The media received a response from FLT with the consent to provide information.

"...In four days we will hold a press conference by Taurus Silver. It will be held on Friday at 10 o'clock in the morning in this building on the first floor, so today we ask you to leave. Those who do not leave this place will be refused to visit the press conference.

In addition, if there are complaints about the collection of information not only from the staff of our firm, but also from students of the First Magic High School, the attendant will also be refused to visit."

After a young office worker in charge of public relations appeared, a loud voice announced the decision, immediately among the press there were those who objected to it. In general, they only, in varying degrees, expressed frustration, but the reason behind the shouting was roughly the same.

"This is a violation of press freedom!"

It was a boilerplate phrase. However unexpected it was, the journalists stopped their onslaught.

They probably thought about what would happen if the press conference was canceled if they were going to have a riot.

Most reporters realized that instead of trying to set up other companies, it would be better to secure their share at the same time.

The journalists gathered in the main office of FLT, exchanging informal phrases with each other, eventually dispersing, without causing any disturbance.

The office of the Development manager at FLT headquarters. This room was the personal office of Tatsuya and Miyuki's Father, Shiba Tatsurou.

Nominally, Tatsurou was the largest shareholder and had a luxury office, which was even bigger than the director of the company.

In this room Tatsurou now received a representative of the true owners of FLT, sent from the main house of the Yotsuba.

"Good work in counteracting the media."

A young man who was about 25 years old, though thanking Tatsurou with a polite tone, seemed to be looking down on him.

"No, I just gave a couple of instructions to public relations."

Tatsurou could not fail to feel disgusted by the fact that he must obey some guy, who is 20 years younger than him. But he didn't show this in any way.

Regardless of who the representative is, Tatsurou did not have the courage to show disobedience to the main family here.

"How humble. But it was a pretty fine solution to the issue. Please continue in the same vein and make the necessary preparations so that there are no extra problems on Friday."

"You can rely on me."

"Excellent. Good day, then."

Nodding, Hanabishi Hyougo wanted to leave the office.

"...I'd like to ask you something."

When he had already turned around to go to the exit, Tatsurou hesitated to call him.

"What is it?" Hyougo asked, turning with a slight smile on his face.

Tatsurou averted his eyes from Hyougo's face. He did not ask Tatsurou to hurry up and waited silently. When the second hand of the clock managed to make half a turn, Tatsurou finally overcame his hesitation and spoke.

"What is the main family planning to do with this child?"

"This child?' Maybe you're talking about Tatsuya."

Tatsurou's lips trembled, and he could not answer the question of Hyougo. It was as if his throat and tongue were unable to work adequately now.

"So it is about him? Sorry, but since I'm a young and an inexperienced beginner, I can't figure out what thoughts our head has on him."

In this polite tone, there was a contempt that said "you're even lower than this rookie." Tatsurou figured it out and started to get out of it.

"In addition, Tatsuya-sama is the groom of the next Head-sama. Tatsurou-dono, with your role, it's not something that you should care about."

"B-but I am his father!"

Tatsurou raised his voice maybe because he neglected the feelings of the parent to the child, or because he could not endure humiliation.

"I know that. What's the matter?"

But whatever he answered, Hyougo did not give meaning to the words of Tatsurou.

"When it was decided that Miyuki-sama will be the next head, and Tatsuya-sama will become her fiancé, the role of Tatsurou-dono was fulfilled. Isn't that good?"

"W-what..."

"I thought Tatsurou-dono didn't like Tatsuya-sama? But now you don't have to behave like a parent or a child anymore?"

Tatsurou could not object to Hyougo.

"Then, I will give one piece of advice. Miyuki is your daughter, but Tatsuya is not your son. The real mother of Tatsuya-sama is our head-sama. And the real father of Tatsuya--is not you, Tatsurou-dono."

This was the story that Maya invented to marry Tatsuya and Miyuki. But now everything went to the fact that this lie will become the truth.

"If Tatsurou-dono showed his love as the parent of Tatsuya-san, the main family would respect that bonds. But you rejected Tatsuya. The current relationship should be what Tatsurou-dono wanted."

Tatsurou had no arguments. He could not object to what Hyougo said.

The number of people surrounding First High school was significantly reduced by the end of the afternoon half of the lessons. But about half of them still remained at that time.

This does not mean that they have abandoned their collection of information.

This was due to the fact that the employee of FLT voiced the threat "Those who cause problems for First High School will not be permitted to attend the press conference."

In other words, almost half of journalists and reporters did not succumb to these threats. Perhaps most of them just didn't get the instructions associated with it.

Despite the fact that their number was halved, it was still enough to scare the students.

This time there were no magicians among the crowd of journalists around of First High. For students of First High, capable of using magic, it was strange to fear "ordinary people", unable to use magic. Or at least the most "ordinary people" thought so.

Indeed, if the Students of First High use all their power, if they "commit an act of violence", they could easily throw away all these journalists.

But as a result, they will be declared criminals and expelled from society. But even if it is so successful that they are not blamed now, it is easy to imagine a future in which they are afraid, hated and suspended from society.

The school students understood that they had no other choice but to live in human society. It was a fear of 'pen violence' that could take away their future, where they live peacefully as members of society.

"We can't just break through with force, right?"

"Kasumi-chan, don't say such dangerous phrases."

"That's why I asked if we can't."

Answering Izumi, Kasumi again looked at the open space in front of the school gates. They stood at the beginning of a straight road leading from the school yard to the school gate. They hid from the journalists behind a tree and looked at the situation outside.

"Is... Ah, Miyuki-sempai."

Noticing Miyuki coming out of the school building, Izumi interrupted the conversation with Kasumi. Kasumi continued to watch the media, and Shiina, hidden behind these two, timidly looked at the situation outside, but after the words of Izumi they looked towards the school building.

"Miyuki-Sempai, how are you doing?" Izumi asked when Miyuki, who was accompanied by Minami, approached a distance close enough for dialogue.

"Unfortunately, the director wants to avoid police intervention."

In the voice of Miyuki, responding to Izumi, there was no pity, but a confession that everything turned out as everyone thought. The point was that the school did not plan to deal with the media.

"Then do we have to be obedient to the hands of the reporters...?"

Shiina, who had such a face as if she was now crying, was anxiously asking Miyuki.

"I think that people from the media will not do anything wrong..."

The voice of Miyuki lacked confidence. Honest reporters will not use force. But among these reporters could well be present fanatical supporters of the anti-magic movement.

"Miyuki."

Honoka, who was going to them through the school yard, called Miyuki. Followed by Shizuku and Mikihiko.

"Honoka, how's the back gate?"

"Bad. The crowd is such that you cannot slip through."

"There are even people among them who feel clearly evil. In my opinion, it would be better to not use the rear gate." Mikihiko added after Honoka's answer. Shizuku nodded in support of the words of Mikihiko.

"President."

The Chairman of the club management group Igarashi, as well as Tomitsuka, Takuma and Saburou, who was not supposed to have a connection with the club management group, approached from the opposite side of Honoka.

"Chairman Igarashi."

Miyuki turned around, hearing the voice of Igarashi. Despite the fact that they are already been familiar enough, Igarashi froze.

Tomitsuka, who was more resistant to the beauty of Miyuki than Igarashi, spoke instead of him. But the one worried most of all here was not Tomitsuka and Takuma, but Saburo. He did not even look towards Miyuki, but immediately rushed to Shiina, asking, "Are you alright?".

"We have notified all clubs about the termination of activity. Everyone should now be ready to go home at any time."

"Thank you for your work." Miyuki responded with gratitude to Tomitsuka's report.

"But what do we do, President? Even if we go home with the whole crowd, students will still be caught... Maybe we should mobilize the guys from the sports clubs to build walls."

"You can't make living shields out of fellow students. That is gender discrimination, Shippou-kun." Miyuki politely rejected the kind guys idea of Takuma.

Shizuku considered Takuma's offer "A good idea", so showed a dissatisfied look at the words of Miyuki. But among those who did not support the idea of Takuma, there were no other ideas, and all sent their views to Miyuki in the hope of receiving further guidance.

Miyuki deeply sighed, seeing that she was being given the views of her classmates standing in the school yard, hiding behind the alley trees so that they could not be seen from the school gates.

But instead of complaining about them, she resigned herself to the idea of "nothing can be done."

"... I'll talk to them."

"You, Miyuki-Sempai!" Izumi shouted with surprise.

"Yes. I'll ask the media people to go home."

"That's dangerous!"

"I'm against this idea, too."

After Izumi, Shizuku also tried to stop Miyuki. Since Shizuku was not as overexcited as Izumi, she was more convincing for Miyuki.

"I don't want to do it myself, but can I just stand here and do nothing? I'm the President of the school board."

"But Miyuki and Tatsuya-san have a special relationship."

"Right. That's why I should."

"It's the opposite."

"The opposite?"

"They have certainly studied the available data and know that Miyuki is the former sister and now bride of Tatsuya-san. It would not be difficult for the media to find out."

Shizuku gave an unusually long speech for her in talkativeness. She probably felt the impending danger that Miyuki would come out to the reporters.

"Do you realize that's not normal? If it aggravates the situation, it will not only be your problem, Miyuki."

"... Are you saying this could lead to a worsening of the reputation of all magicians in general?"

"I do not want to admit it, but the probability of this is not equal to zero." Miyuki's mood worsened. In a sense, she was guilty of her engagement to Tatsuya.

Although Shizuku noticed this, she was not going to retreat. But Honoka and Mikihiko, standing nearby, were very nervous.

"Your sense of responsibility Miyuki can be understood. But this time it is better to stop."

Kitayama Ushio, father of Shizuku, is the owner of a large group of companies. When it came to Ushio, even the media hampered, and calls for open attacks became rare. But he was always cautious in counteracting the media.

Perhaps it was because of her father's image that she could not consider it. It seems that Shizuku assessed the power of the media so high that she was the most afraid out of anyone present here.

"Even if you say so..."

Now it is a situation where nothing can be done. Of course, Miyuki was going to continue with her initial idea. But she suddenly sent her gaze behind the backs of the reporters, and froze in that position.

"...Miyuki-Sempai?"

Ignoring the voice of Izumi, Miyuki continued to look in that direction, with round eyes. The voice of Izumi simply did not reach her consciousness.

Feeling amiss, everyone looked where Miyuki looked. Carefully coming closer, the rest also realized that a car is approaching.

"Is that really...?" Honoka muttered. She's not the only one who knew who was approaching in this car.

Suddenly Miyuki tried to run to the school gate. But Minami stopped her, grabbing her arm from behind.

Miyuki was surprised. She regained her self-control, and she realized that she had forgotten her sensibilities. Miyuki smiled at Minami, and she let go of her hand and bowed.

Miyuki went calmly and Minami followed her.

Honoka and Shizuku, Kasumi and Izumi, Shiina and Saburou, each pair exchanged views, and they all went after Miyuki and Minami.

The last ones left were Mikihiko, Tomitsuka and Takuma, who remained in the school yard without going out to the gate.

The journalists, reporters and operators gathered at the school gates noticed the approach of the electric vehicle and freed the road.

Recently, the police liked to arrest people for obstructing road traffic. Although this is a minor violation, it clearly is an illegal act, so it will be difficult for the media to file a complaint.

If they are lucky, they can get inside when the electric car enters.

They had such assumptions.

The electric car stopped in front of the school gates.

With a little delay after that, from the other side of the gate came Miyuki and the rest. Few of the reporters and journalists noticed them. The man who came out of the electric vehicle caused a lot of noise among the mass media representatives.

"...Why...?"

Swallowing the phrase "Onii-sama", Miyuki said only that. The one who came out of the electric vehicle's driver's seat was Tatsuya.

"You are Shiba Tatsuya-san, aren't you?"

For media representatives, the appearance of Tatsuya now was quite unexpected. Tatsuya was dressed in the uniform of First High and did not use any means of disguise or concealment of his face. If it was a reporter who had already studied data on Tatsuya, he would have unerringly recognized him by his appearance. But by the tone of the reporter, who first spoke to Tatsuya, it was evident that he doubted himself.

"Yes, it is."

Tatsuya answered in a calm voice. He had a natural tone of voice, and he had no impression that he was pretending not to understand what was going on.

"...Is it true that you are Taurus silver?"

The reporter for a moment was discouraged by this imperturbability, which showed that most likely, an interview will not work, but he quickly pulled himself together and demonstrated his excellent ability to be arrogant.

"I thought we had already talked to the press?"

Tatsuya's response was neither "Yes" nor "no".

"On Friday in the main office of FLT, a press conference will be held by Taurus Silver. If in doubt, go ask yourself."

The voice of Tatsuya was loud enough to be heard not only by reporters, surrounded with microphones, but also by everyone else. Including from the farthest ranges. Including even those who stood on the other side of the closed school gates.

"A press conference? They decided to do it..."

The mumbling that came from Mikihiko was half admiring and half shocked.

Miyuki stood motionless with wide open eyes, and covered her mouth with her hand.

Tatsuya looked at Miyuki. Even if he hadn't heard the voice of Mikihiko, he already knew that Miyuki and the rest were behind the gate.

"Please clear the way."

Tatsuya appealed to a group of journalists huddled around the gates of the school. He did not shout and did not even speak with an elevated voice. This voice has absolutely no pressure.

But despite this, the surrounding journalists and reporters retreated back, standing unsolidly on their feet.

But some of them still remained standing before Tatsuya, blushing with shame for their weakness.

"So you're Taurus Silver!"

"Excuse me, who are you?"

Tatsuya responded with an indifferent voice to this allegation.

"What?"

It seems that his question for the Bonin journalist was something unexpected. However, he looked foolish only for a few seconds, then he came to himself, and he proudly announced the name of one of the major newspaper on which he works.

"Clear. But if you're not a single journalist, you should have heard from your company."

"What was there to hear!?"

The journalist was about 30 years old. Of course, he did not like that a young guy who is younger than him by more than 10 years, behaving so unsuitable. He asked Tatsuya in an aggressive manner.

In the eyes of Tatsuya, looking at this journalist, there was no irritation, no anger, no contempt, no pity. In other words, it was a sight equivalent to looking at someone on the side of the road.

Seeing this view, the journalist did not fall into the frenzy, but trembled.

The journalist looked at Tatsuya like he was a creepy creature belonging to another species. If someone had met a harmless man, but then found out that the man was actually different from him, he would have had a similar view, as the journalist now.

"Those organizations that receive complaints about interrogating students from First High will be denied admission to the Taurus Silver press conference. FLT should have alerted them."

A wave of confusion spread to the press officers gathered here.

Apparently, half of those present didn't even hear what Tatsuya said.

"It's only four days. I think waiting so long will not be considered a violation of the freedom of the press."

The words of Tatsuya did not convince the journalists. But stubborn objections did not follow.

Because before they started swearing, they heard a loud clap.

This clap was the sound of a shot. A scream from one of the female reporters followed.

The reporter that interrogated Tatsuya fell, landing on his ass. Tatsuya noticed that someone was going to shoot, so he pushed the reporter out of the trajectory of the bullet.

Tatsuya stood with his back to the journalist. As if in slow motion, he instantly turned around and caught the bullet with his hand.

After that he pried his left hand open. A pistol bullet fell out of it.

Reporters standing next to Tatsuya froze, looking at this scene. Some of the reporters noticed that Tatsuya was wearing black gloves, but it still didn't explain anything. Even if you wear high-performance bulletproof gloves, they won't catch a bullet.

The crowd of journalists, reporters and operators turned chaotic.

People with panicking cries tried to escape from the killer with a pistol, resulting in them crushing each other. Some stumbled and fell, but the rest, whether they were comrades or rivals, were fleeing and just trampled and kicked the fallen.

The killer didn't even look at the runaway reporters. His bloodshot eyes looked only at Tatsuya.

Clutching a pistol in his hand, he kept shooting at Tatsuya. There were sounds of several shots in a row. Tatsuya caught all the flying bullets.

Needless to say, this was not a simple trick.

Releasing the magic of Decomposition in all directions, Tatsuya did not destroy the bullets themselves, rather he dispelled their momentum (vector) moving it forward.

By the way, if you try to Decompose too much, then at the point of exposure, an reverse-acting force occurs. This will not reduce the damage caused by the bullet and would not lessen its momentum.

But from the beginning, it is necessary to mention, that decomposition of the impulse of a flying bullet without application of external influence is not a physical "phenomenon". The

"Information" that the "bullet pulse dissipates" existed not only at the point of impact, but also in the entire surrounding space. As a result, the bullets that flew toward the palm of Tatsuya had already practically stopped.

But the essence of this could only be felt by magicians. Hid amongst the journalists, the terrorist from the anti-magic movement panicked, seeing with his own eyes such a physically impossible phenomenon as a man "Catching bullets".

Even after the shutter stopped moving back (that is, the rounds ended), he still kept Tatsuya in sight and continued to pull the trigger convulsively.



Tatsuya did not try to grab the terrorist, though he clearly lost his mind and had plenty of open places to attack. This was because he wanted to show the journalists and reporters that he was being attacked, not the other way around.

Tatsuya's eyes looked at the clown senselessly pulling the trigger, but his consciousness was vigilant against possible accomplices. But at this point there were no signs of the appearance of other attackers.

Looks like it was a single criminal. Coming to this conclusion, Tatsuya went to this terrorist.

The man released bizarre cry. It is not known whether it was possible to call it a cry, because the people who did not see this man, would confuse it with howling stray dog. or the "Howling of an injured person" *.

["Loser, Loser, loser, loser" such words were used. But literally it translates to "Losing dog". In English, there is also an analogue with a similar value: "Underdog ".]

Tatsuya made the second step, walking with the usual walking gait.

The man threw the gun at Tatsuya, when the magazine was empty.

Tatsuya did not even shirk, and the gun just flew past him.

Already shouting something more similar to the human language, the terrorist put his right hand in his pocket and took out a short knife.

It was the so-called Bonder Knife, where the grip of the blade was in the hand while the blade protrudes forward out of the fist. Wearing this was completely illegal, but after using a gun it was silly to think about this.

Although he had a short blade, the length was enough to kill a man.

Nevertheless, Tatsuya made the third step, completely ignoring this blade.

Taking another step, they would have been at arm's length between them.

But this last step was made by this man, a terrorist. He poised a stab at Tatsuya's belly.

Although it was a surprise for him that it was not to his face, he dodged the blow, going to the right. At the same time he grabbed the left hand of the man behind the wrist with his right hand and pulled it, returning his body back.

The man lost his balance and fell.

At this point, finally, a guard working for First High appeared. He slightly opened the gate and climbed into the resulting gap. Naturally, there were no crazy journalists, who decided to take advantage of such a chance to get in to the territory of the school.

The guard rushed into place. Prior to the arrival of the guard Tatsuya stood there, stepping on the compressive bonder knife in the right hand of the man.

Among the concerned media staff, there was a noise of voices trying to understand what had happened.

"Was that magic just now?"

"There is no way."

Talk about this thought was heard from different directions. Everyone was surprised by the fact that Tatsuya caught a criminal without magic.

In fact, he used magic when catching the bullets, but the sensors available to those people were unable to detect the magic of Tatsuya.

This magician was catching bullets, not using magic, and defused a man with a knife without getting any wounds. Reporters, operators and journalists were all frozen and stood there, unable to understand.

Tatsuya took advantage of this hitch, going into the school gates and brought Miyuki and Minami to the car. He seated them on the rear seats, sat down on the driver's seat, and drove away. The reporters reflexively disembarked from the road, letting them pass.

"...Onii-sama, when did you get the right?"

Miyuki had a lot of things to ask, but the first thing she asked was a relatively unimportant question.

There are also other conditions for obtaining driving rights in addition to reaching the age of 18. But unlike in past times, there is now an opportunity to circumvent these limitations. If there is a need to perform work duties, and there is a guarantee from the employer, then, as in the case of the rights to a motorcycle, the right to control a car can be obtained after the completion of compulsory education.

For example, Katsuto got the right to manage a conventional car immediately after admission to First High, under the pretext of the need to work in a construction company managed by the Juumonji family. These rights are only necessary for driving, for passenger they are not needed. However, the certification exam is much more difficult than usual.

Tatsuya did not use this exception. His work as Taurus Silver is a secret (now we can already say "was a secret"), so he could not fulfill the condition of "Employer's guarantee".

He got it right after he moved to Izu. After all, the machine is much more convenient in most cases.

"I didn't even know... You could have told me. Onii-sama is so secretive."

"Ha-ha, I'm sorry."

Tatsuya turned to the cute, resentful Miyuki, and apologized. Of course, he could afford to do this because the car was driving on autopilot. After such a minded response, Miyuki finally felt relieved.

"...But why did you come to pick me up? Why take the risk and appear before the media?"

"Because I thought that Miyuki, as the President of the School Council, would not be able to resist any action. I couldn't afford to burden you with such tedious things."

"Onii-sama..."

Miyuki, as usual, made an enthusiastic face, and on Minami's face was a completely disappointed expression.

"So, what was your real goal?"

When Miyuki asked about the real intentions of Tatsuya, her voice was still slightly intoxicated with delight. Minami's eyes opened wide and blinked because she was frightened by the loud sound of a dove.

She did not expect that Miyuki would doubt the words of Tatsuya.

"That hurt. I didn't lie."

Unlike the contents of the phrase, the voice of Tatsuya was cheerful.

"But it's not just that, is it?"

Miyuki also spoke with a smile, but she did not feel deceived at all.

"I had a goal to warn the media. To tell them, that if they will continue to be unceremoniously here and sniff around, then in the future they will not be able to receive important information. Another goal was also to show that I am not afraid of the media. But the main thing was getting rid of the troubles that bothered First High, and thus to reduce the load on the Miyuki."

"...I got it. Now I understand."

Implying in the answer that she "did not understand anything ", Miyuki just gave up.

As expected by Tatsuya, the reporters surrounding First High disappeared. It can't be said that it was "fast", but 30 minutes after Tatsuya's electric car left, all reporters and journalists had already dispersed.

There were no reporters who pretended to be gone, and hid themselves to catch the passing pupils to pry for information. Therefore, pupils of First High (and working staff) were able to return home safely from school.

After all, the threat of losing the invitation to Taurus Silver's press conference proved to be effective.

Taking Miyuki to her new home in Chofu, and having received this information from an observer at First High, Tatsuya returned to Izu.

Those who watched First High was not Tatsuya himself. But he had connections with those who orchestrated the surveillance.

Returning to Izu, Tatsuya met with his information provider, who returned before him and waited for him in the villa's living room.

"Hyougo-san, today you have taken good care of various affairs."

"Tatsuya, you have also worked well today."

Hyougo stood opposite of the chair Tatsuya sat on. Naturally, Tatsuya was not going to get up, and Hyougo stubbornly was not going to sit down. In addition, Tatsuya called him "Hyougo-san" Not because they befriended, but to distinguish him from his father, who, like Hyogo, is the butler of the Yotsuba family.

"No, I just took Miyuki. Thanks for the info on the attacker."

By the information about the attacker, he meant the case where the terrorist shot at Tatsuya. To be honest, Tatsuya was informed in advance by Hyougo that among the crowd of the First High reporters, murderers could hide.

"Everything went well?"

"Yes. Although it was unexpected that he was the only one."

"To make sure Miyuki did not get wounded by stray bullets, we had taken care of them in advance to reduce their number... Were these actions unnecessary?"

"Reduce the number? Got it... No, I think it was reasonable."

"Thank you for your praise."

Hyogo bowed, putting his hand on his chest.

"It seems that because of the shooting on Tatsuya, the media staff has gotten excited. There were reports that they have begun to see hints that there could be a connection between that armed terrorist and the anti-magic movement."

"It seems that it was expedient to give him a shot."

"For people who do not deal with weapons, the scene in which they see a man shooting is quite shocking, even if the victim is their sworn enemy. And this time, because of the fact that Tatsuya-sama was catching bullets and leaving them in the same form, the impression was even stronger. I suspect that the effect of this will begin to spread gradually."

"Would it have been better if I was injured?"

"Probably, yes. However, Miyuki-sama would be saddened if Tatsuya-sama shed blood, so stopping the bullets was the best solution."

"Really. There would be a reverse effect if Miyuki lost her head and her magic got out of control."

Tatsuya sarcastically chuckled, saying this, but Hyougo bowed, pretending not to notice it. Like these two said, Tatsuya deliberately gave the terrorist a shot at him. Although the terrorist was not a fake in itself, but before the plan of attack was known, two people were preparing to play that role.

"The original plan was to let them know that if they were close to magicians, they could be attacked by supporters of the anti-magic movement."

"I think this warning was received. I am also thinking of preparing a few reports that Anti-magic is a hateful terrorist for all."

"I'll leave it to you."

"As you wish."

Hyougo bowed again, putting his hand on his chest, and his face looked happy perhaps from the fact that he enjoyed this backstage work.

In addition to the villa where Tatsuya lived, the Yotsuba family had another property in Izu. It was a small separate house from which it was possible for Miya to rest and not disturb her.

Among the Yotsuba, Miya was the only owner of magic with unique properties. Even if she was overloaded with the use of magic and could not fully work as a magician, it was still expected that all sorts of vile hunters would try to kidnap her for this unique skill.

In fact, there were as many as three attacks to kidnap Miya, and all of them were repulsed, so the construction of the house was not an unnecessary concern. However, after Mia's death, the house was abandoned and only occasionally visited to maintain order.

Although all this time Tatsuya resided only in the villa, the possibility of using that house after a long time was also considered.

Yuuka did not find any problems with the furniture, appliances and other accessories.

"Thank you for your work."

Tsukuba Yuuka, the eldest daughter of the Tsukuba family, one of the side branches of the Yotsuba family, nodded generously.

"If the luggage is transported, can you take the case?"

It was the evening of the day when Tatsuya dined with Maya, discussing how to react to the information War announced by the two Clarks, Edward and Raymond. It goes without saying that Yuuka visited this little house not for entertainment, but to complete the task entrusted to her by the head of the family Yotsuba.

The work entrusted by Maya to the Tsukuba family was to erect a "cleansing from people" barrier, which should keep the media from approaching the villa where Tatsuya resides. Such spells are a specialty of ancient magic, and modern magic was not initially focused on such activities. But among all families with a familial relationship with the Yotsuba, the Tsukuba family was best specialized in Mental Interference Magic. Using such conditions to activate the magic where duration is increased by decreasing the power, you can build barriers no worse than those of the users of ancient magic.

They arrived at the observation house in the evening, so when the installation of the barrier was completed, it was already dark. If you can use magic, it doesn't mean that you can see in the dark. Night vision is a magical ability.

"Madam, a suspicious person has been found."

"Uh, where?"

That's why Yuuka didn't notice that man.

"...Oh, I see. Looks like he's watching the villa where Tatsuya-san is located."

A suspicious man was dressed in a dark blue jacket and trousers, which was poorly distinguishable in the dark, and had binoculars hanging on his neck. Even at the place where he stood, one could come to the conclusion that he, as Yuuka said, came to watch the activity of Tatsuya.

Yuuka's subordinates spotted this man with the newly created barrier. This barrier, created under the guidance of Yuuka, interferes with the idea that people can recognize the existence of the villa where Tatsuya is staying in. The principle is the same as that of

"Ghost Walker" used by Zhou Gongjin and Chen Xianshan. The eyes see something, but the consciousness thinks it doesn't see it.

And how does that affect the person who was watching the villa right before the barrier was erected? He'd think the villa was suddenly gone.

No wonder he may accidentally stop hiding his presence.

Conversely, if this person did not even flinch, it would mean that he has the skills to hide his presence from Yuuka and her subordinates.

"Grab him. Not to kill. No serious injuries."

"Understood."

The magicians accompanying Yuuka, dissolved in the darkness, leaving one of them as her guard.

"In any case, Tatsuya-san certainly noticed him..."

Yuuka looked at the villa where Tatsuya was located. The bright light from the windows made the villa noticeable in the dark.

Tatsuya hardly did not notice that someone was peeping. It seems that he left that man because he came to the conclusion that there would be no real harm from him. Or he thought that even if he catches him, then the follow-up action on the issue can be a troublesome affair.

This man hid on the land belonging to the villa. All surrounding areas were the property of the Yotsuba family (more precisely the real estate company, which was secretly managed by the Yotsuba family). But there were no fences there. Even if the offender is apprehended under the pretext of an unlawful invasion, he can pretend that he has not noticed and in retaliation accuse the apprehenders of unnecessary measures.

"... Looks like he's decided to throw those difficulties at us."

Tatsuya should have noticed not only a suspicious person, but also Yuuka's group. He thought he didn't have to get his hands dirty.

Yuuka deeply sighed, remembering the face of her not-so-sweet distant relative.

"Head-sama, the construction of the barrier has been completed without delay."

"Good work."

After completing the interrogation of the suspicious person, Yuuka returned to the small house and called Maya with a report.

"After that, we discovered a suspicious type, watching Tatsuya-sama. We caught him and interrogated him."

"And?"

Maya slightly rounded her eyes, and the corners of her lips slightly raised, forming a smile.

"Did you determine his affiliation?"

"He is an agent of the Tomita family."

"Tomita of the hundred families... I think they are on a special account with the Magic Association, aren't they?"

"Yes. The observation of Tatsuya-sama was conducted on the request of the Magic Association."

"Clear..."

Maya nodded with a charming smile on her face. Yuuka felt a chill on her back, but she somehow managed to keep her face calm.

"According to the agent of the Tomita family, he had no intention to cause harm. Apparently, the Magic Association thought that Tatsuya-san would try to hide somewhere."

"Clear."

"We still have the agent. What do we do with him?"

"Let him go. No need to erase memory."

"...Will that be okay?"

"Yes. The Yotsuba family never abandons their people. It is necessary to remind the Magic Association about this."

...Too impertinently, Yuuka unwittingly thought. At least she didn't say it out loud.

If we remember the circumstances of Tatsuya until last year, it is quite a good impression.

No, it's not just the past. Yuuka believed that the duel with the head of the Juumonji family was a battle that he had to go to alone as the one who would become the husband of the next head of the Yotsuba family. But at the same time she felt that not taking any measures against the Military Intelligence Department was quite brutal on the Yotsuba's part.

"You wanted to say something else?"

"Yes, but it does not apply to the task."

Yuuka answered Maya's question immediately, as if she were not thinking of anything superfluous. Because of such abilities, Yuuka was in the first place among the four candidates for the right to be the next head of the family.

"I don't mind."

"My mother is worried that the seal on Tatsuya-san has disappeared."

"'Worried' is a rather discreet description, isn't it?"

Even if Maya was joking, Yuuka couldn't refute it.

Touka, Yuuka's mother, is proud of her magical powers. Of course, this kind of pride is present in every magician, but Touka is a special case. Knowing this, not only Maya, but anyone could guess that the destruction of Pledge made Touka hysterical.

"Does the head think that this is not a problem?"

Instead of arguing, Yuuka directly asked about Maya's intentions.

"That Pledge was annulled? Hmm, I don't think there's going to be a problem, but... There's nothing to be done about it, right?"

"Nothing to be done?"

Maya's response surprised Yuuka.

"I knew it could be dissipated in theory. But who would have thought that Tatsuya-san would be able to do something that could be dangerous for Miyuki-san?"

"Yes. Really."

According to the system of Pledge itself, it was expected that, when destroying the magic itself, the spell supporting Miyuki would receive seriously damage. Therefore, it was really unexpected that Tatsuya went to that much risk.

"In addition, we will not be able to re-impose Pledge on Tatsuya-san."

Yuuka had nothing but to admit to what Maya said.

Pledge places a heavy burden not only on those who use it, but the person who maintains the Magic Sequence. Not just in a case where there is a recoil from Pledge being dispelled; in a situation where Pledge acts, it keeps the magician from losing control of their magical skills on a daily basis.

The current Tatsuya can now use magic that would have before reduced the magical skills of Miyuki.

"When we cannot do anything, can we only run away from reality?"

This comment by Maya was an acute criticism, hidden under the guise of reproach to Yuuka and her mother, who had gone beside herself because of the destruction of Pledge.

"True... I think you're right." Yuuka answered, realizing this. She answered not because she had no choice because she was submissive, but because she understood the meaning of the expression "escape from reality."

Chapter 2

The profession of Shibata Katsushige, the next head of the Shibata family, one of the side branches of the Yotsuba, officially meant that he worked as the Secretary for the Ministry of Defense.

Katsushige's Magic combat power was extremely high, but instead of using magic in battle himself, his work was to reflect on how to use magic in battle.

In South America, Africa and Central Asia there were still many battles, but East Asia and the western part of the Pacific region have been in a state of calm since autumn of the 19th year. Thanks to this, many employees of the Ministry of Defense did not work overtime and left early.

The day after the media raised a big hype (ordinary citizens who had no relation to magic, did not even know about the topic) around the disclosure of the identity of Taurus Silver.

After leaving the office at 19 o'clock, Katsushige didn't go home, but to a hotel in the center of the city. Although it was not a first class hotel, whose name was known even abroad, it was popular among businessmen for delicious food and an acceptable level of safety.

In the restaurant of the aforementioned hotel, he quickly found the person with whom he had a scheduled meeting. Naturally, he found him quickly, because here, everything was arranged in the form of separate rooms, and he knew which room to go to.

"Hi. I'm sorry I called."

He was dressed in a regular suit of a man of the same age as Katsushige's father.

Even to Katsushige, who knows his occupation, he looked like an ordinary businessman.

"No. It's all because my dad couldn't come. Forgive us for the impolite change of the contact person."

"No, no, no. Asking for a meeting so suddenly is a thoughtless act from me. Here I have to apologize."

"If you say so, then I am grateful, Kuroba-san."

Like Katsushige said, the partner he met was Kuroba Mitsugu, head of the Kuroba family, one of the side branches of the same Yotsuba family.

At the invitation of Mitsugu, Katsushige sat down. Mitsugu also sat down at the same time. The waiter, who entered the room with Katsushige, came to the table. Mitsugu and Katsushige only ordered sake and light snacks and let the waiter go.

"So."

Mitsugu straightened out, and then slightly bent over the table.

"Today I called for an important reason. We need to talk about him."

"Are you talking about Tatsuya-kun?"

Mitsugu said "about him" unclearly, but Katsushige easily guessed the person he meant was Tatsuya. But Mitsugu did not make a mistake, and did not make a gloomy face.

"Right. Yesterday the identity of Taurus Silver, in the end, became well-known. What do you think, Katsushige-kun?"

"Was it not inevitable when Edward Clark made it clear that he knew the name of Taurus Silver? Although it is unfavorable for the Yotsuba family, but I do not think that Tatsuya-kun is to blame."

The answer Katsushige gave was not what Mitsugu expected.

"But don't you think that this situation could have been avoided if he hadn't entered First High and obediently sat at home? Because it is obvious that

'project Dione' takes into account not only the achievements of Taurus Silver, but also the experiment 'Stellar Furnace', which he did last spring."

Katsushige shook his head at the words of Mitsugu.

"Admission to First High was not Tatsuya-kun's intention. It was inevitable because of the Yotsuba family's sentinel system."

"Katsushige-kun may not know, but after the incident Yokohama the head-sama ordered him to drop out of school and sit under house arrest.

But he did not obey and continued to attend First High. If he were to disappear from the stage at that moment, he would never have been noticed."

"No. After using Material Burst, it was only a matter of time before Tatsuya-kun would be discovered behind the scenes by international politics, only this would have happened in another form. Besides, at that moment it was impossible not to use Material Burst. Without this magic, Japan would have suffered immense damage."

"Is that so? There is the Yatsushiro family in Kyushu. If there is a battle at sea, the Itsuwa family will depart. In naval battles, the Itsuwa family has a great battle force even without the use of 'Abyss' by Mio-Jo. The Great Asian Alliance is a strong enemy, but I don't think we'd lose to them if we hadn't used the Material Burst."

"Even so. At that stage there was no other choice but to use Material Burst. In war, Victory is not always the best way out, but it does not mean that you have to lose. After the invasion of the country, the forces for the next battle would remain less. Not only time, but also economic power is needed to replenish the combat force. If you look at the Great Asian Alliance, suffering from the consequences of the monstrous attack of Material Burst, you will understand."

Mitsugu had nothing to object to. He knew and understood it even without these words.

"... I understand your thoughts that his magic is irreplaceable for National Defense. Then it is even more impossible to let him go to America."

Mitsugu changed his approach.

"Yes."

Katsushige only briefly expressed his consent.

"In that case, should he be protected by the Yotsuba family? And the USNA government can surrender if, for example, he dies suddenly."

Mitsugu, who received the approval from his words, gathered his strength and said what he wanted.

"And if he, moreover, will be killed by 'Humanists', it should reduce the worsening public opinion about magicians."

"Really."

"In this case... Kuroba-san."

Using as a pretext the will of one of the side branches, Mitsugu was going to ask Maya for Tatsuya to be caught and locked away. But Katsushige abruptly interrupted Mitsugu's speech, in which he wanted to ask for cooperation.

"I couldn't understand why all the heads of the side branches look at Tatsuya-kun with such hostility."

Katsushige said "couldn't" in the past tense: So Mitsugu already understood the meaning of this sentence.

"So the other day I checked it out, and I asked my dad. He did not want to confess for a long time, but in the end he told everything."

"... I see."

The people of Mitsugu's generation promised to keep this story secret.

But Mitsugu did not feel that he should criticize the head of the Shibata family, understanding his motives. No, it is right to say that he had no right to criticize. Because Mitsugu himself was the first to reveal the secret. Despite the fact that the one he disclosed it to was Tatsuya himself.

"Kuroba-san. I can't agree with you and my father. To be hostile towards Tatsuya-kun is wrong."

The voice of the waiter was heard from outside the room.

They briefly interrupted the conversation, waited for the waiter to put glasses on the table with chilled sake and left the room, and then continued.

"... But he's dangerous."

"One person possesses the power to destroy the whole world. One influential person has access to a 'button' that can destroy the whole world. One government possesses a military force capable of destroying the entire world. Of these three concepts, the first two seem to differ in nature from the latter, but in their essence they are all the same thing.

As far as how 'democratic' the country is, its military force is always ready for use. Otherwise there would be no point. There is no point in maintaining military capabilities if the country itself is destroyed while democratic procedures are in place. Civilian control is what deters influential people from willful use of the army in fear of losing office, and stops the use of already applied force. In the presence of a system capable of completely discontinuing the use of military force, in any case it will be impossible to properly defend from, even when preparing in advance."

"However, instead of the complete absence of brakes, it is better to have at least some. Even if it is only a partial limitation."

"You're right. Therefore, dictators should not be allowed to possess weapons of mass destruction. Military power must be under civilian control. But Kuroba-san. Influential people elected by Democratic vote can also turn the key to launch strategic nuclear missiles. Even if the startup key is divided between several people, it is necessary to understand that the owners of these keys are chosen by influential people themselves, without the participation of voters."

"...This is an extreme argument."

"The fact that Tatsuya-kun will destroy the world is also an extreme argument."

"If you think so, the use of weapons of mass destruction by dictators is also an extreme argument."

"No. A dictator is called a dictator because the structure of his power is arranged so that no one can stop him. It's different with a normal person. You can't interfere with a person's thoughts. What a man thinks, what he decides, cannot be stopped by other people. But if it is an ordinary person, not a dictator, then they can be influenced to be stopped. You can limit them to change their mind. He can be persuaded."

"...Are you saying that ordinary people are closer to influential people from the democratic government than to dictators?"

"People living alone... No, people who think they live alone will be closer to dictators. However, those who wish to live with someone, people who feel that they cannot live alone, cannot become dictators."

"..."

"Kuroba-san. It is not necessary to consider Tatsuya-kun a dictator. If you really care about the future of the world, then he should not remain alone. Sorry for the rudeness, but what you want to do will only backfire. This will not only harm the fighting power of our country. As a result, it will harm the future of the world."

"...Is that your opinion?"

"I came here instead of my father. You might have guessed from this fact."

Katsushige got up.

"Kuroba-san. Be realistic."

Finally having said this, Mitsugu continued to sit, while Katsushige went home, where he was waiting for Kotona and he cooked her dinner.

At the same time, when Mitsugu and Katsushige parted in a tense atmosphere.

At the headquarters of the Magic Association in Kyoto, the Chairman of the Association, Tomitsuka Hitsui sat at the desk in her office, clutching her head.

Before her eyes on the table lay a document containing an urgent request from the USNA. It said that Edward Clark plans to visit Japan and asks to organize a meeting with Taurus Silver, that is with Shiba Tatsuya.

"Ah-ah, that's it! What do you think I should do?"

Hitsui hysterically shouted, looking at the document lying on the table.

"No, I know what to do! We need to arrange a meeting with Shiba Tatsuya!"

Still holding on to her head, she chided herself. Hitsui's head was boiling. "Yes, it is understandable..."

As a result, an exhausted Hitsui's face fell on the table.

"But I have no such power..."

Still with her face lying on the table, Hitsui sighed deeply.

"I give up... I can't..."

Hitsui slowly lifted the upper half of her body from the table.

"This Saturday... It's too urgent, and it feels like the situation will only get worse..."

She looked at a small display standing on the side table on the side of her desk. An overview of the latest news was displayed there.

"Taurus Silver will hold a press conference the day before that?"

Why of all the days exactly the day before? Yes, and what does he want to talk about?"

Reflection over it, Hitsui decided it wasn't that bad.

"Why does all this happens when I am the Chairman..."

Her head collapsed on the table again.

It was late evening, after 21 o'clock, when Maya called Tatsuya.

"I'm sorry about the time."

"No, I've been waiting for this call. Many thanks."

"Don't worry. It's about my promise."

Indeed, when they spoke last time, Maya said she was arranging a meeting with Toudou Aobo. But Tatsuya didn't expect Maya to call in person to report it.

"Did you get a meeting time from His Excellency Toudou?" Tatsuya asked, hiding his surprise, having made a face expressing nothing.

"Yes, that's right. Looks like he's ready to meet you tomorrow at 7:00 p.m."

Maya had a smile, showing that she noticed the excitement of Tatsuya, but she did nothing so hostile, like reproach him for it.

"Where will the meeting take place?"

"In the Temple of Kyuuchouji *. I heard that Kokonoe Yakumo-san will be present at the meeting."

[The name of the temple is written in the same characters as "Kokonoe", but it is read differently]

This time Tatsuya could not hide his surprise. Maya giggled, as if saying, "I caught you."

"...Sorry. But I was also surprised to learn about it, and Tatsuya-san, I see, is also surprised. Now I feel a little calmer."

"I'm surprised. Is the master somehow involved in this?"

"His Excellency and Yakumo-san seem to have been well acquainted for quite some time. But the connection between them is a mystery."

"I thought so too."

Tatsuya responded quickly, but in reality, together with a strong surprise, had tormenting doubts.

The one who introduced Tatsuya to Yakumo was Kazama. Officially, they do not have any connection to the Yotsuba. He communicated directly with Kazama and with Yakumo. He thought that their words could be trusted, considering that the 101 Independent Magic Equipped Battalion secretly quarreled with the Ten Master Clans.

However, everything changed with this additional information about the friendly (how close this "Friendship" is, is unclear) relationship between Yakumo and Toudou Aoba.

Tatsuya and Yakumo's relationship isn't one of disciple and teacher.

This was decided at their first meeting.

They were only sparring partners for magic martial arts training, Yakumo has taught Tatsuya nothing. He was taking questions, but he could not answer them. Such was the agreement about his visits to Yakumo.

However, Tatsuya learned a lot from Yakumo. For example, without the help of Yakumo, he would have hardly been able to complete the development of "Far Strike" needed to confront the parasites.

Also, although Yakumo's position about "answers to questions" has not changed, Tatsuya has received a lot of knowledge from Yakumo, even in cases where this knowledge corresponded to "A question that he cannot answer."

Tatsuya thought it was just some kind of fad for Yakumo. He felt that Yakumo, whom he had not known at the time, had done it for some purpose.

He also suspected that it might have been a plan to separate him from the Yotsuba family so that he fell under the control of the self-defense forces. However, the more he communicated with Yakumo, the more scattered these suspicions became.

But doesn't that mean he should have thought that?

Yakumo was not easy. No, according to Tatsuya's judgment, he was an uncontrollable suspicious man. However, Tatsuya for some reason trusted Yakumo...

"Well, then tomorrow at 7 o'clock in the evening I will visit the temple of Kyuuchouji. Thank you very much for the information."

Answering Maya, Tatsuya tried to remain vigilant in order not to show his anxiety.

Chapter 3

On Monday, when Raymond Clark in the form of "the first Sage" performed on TV, the population's interest in Taurus Silver rose sharply. But the next day the interest began to fade away, and today, on Wednesday, it has ceased to be a topic of discussion among ordinary people.

There are no people in the world of magic who do not know the famous Taurus Silver. However, those who can use magic make up only one thousandth of the adult population. But this does not mean that 99.99% of people live without magic, because some people are related to magic in the role of engineers, managers, politicians, soldiers and other civil servants, even without the ability to use magic in practice.

In recent years, even people who are engaged in magic began to appear, while speaking of the Anti-magician movement.

Quite a few citizens indirectly benefit from the use of magic for public order, national defense and disaster response. However, most people still live without a direct relationship to magic.

Magic is not a necessary factor for the life of modern society. At least in a social environment where you can live peacefully. Thus, even if the innocent magicians (better to say whose guilt is unknown) are harassed, they treat it indifferently. Being indifferent, you will not feel guilty.

Even if one high school student, known as Taurus Silver, tries to impose a future contrary to their will, for ordinary people it was no more than one third of the articles in the newspapers.

In the evening, when Tatsuya arrived at the temple of Kyuuchouji, this situation still remained unchanged.

18:45. Tatsuya left the train booth at a stop in front of the steps leading to the gates of the Kyuuchouji temple.

Nobody was with him. To come alone was one of the conditions for Tatsuya from Toudou Aoba.

Tatsuya, from the booth, looked slowly at the sides. Although he consciously acted so conspicuously to check... I mean, to show that he's checking that there's some kind of security around here, and that he's on the lookout, but he really couldn't find any signs of the observers.

There were signs of persecution, they just disappeared before he arrived at the foot of this hill, so it seems he was not mistaken.

It wasn't a coincidence. Perhaps the disciples of Yakumo (or even Yakumo himself) took care of it. As Yakumo does not trust the reception of guests (even if they are not invited guests) to inexperienced people making mistakes, Tatsuya decided that he did not need to worry about it. Whom he should worry about--is about himself. Even Yakumo should not interfere with a personal conversation with the famous Toudou Aoba, a secret player in the backstage arena of the political and business world. But you can't be completely sure of that. Perhaps this place was chosen to check Tatsuya out.

Given this opportunity, he arrived 15 minutes early just in case. But if Yakumo is serious, it is extremely doubtful that so much time is enough. Keeping this in mind, no matter how overzealous, Tatsuya went up the stone steps.

Unfortunately, Tatsuya fears came true.

Roughly in the middle of the path along the stone steps, the space around suddenly contorted. He was shown the illusion that the ladder began to increase...

No, that he himself began to shrink.

He realized that his consciousness was affected by magic. This characteristic continuous effect was the peculiarity of ancient magic.

Modern magic, on the contrary, gave importance to speed, and it did not have such features as a long action to maintain the effect.

With his sight, Tatsuya could see that reality and the illusion were overlapping. This was because Tatsuya was pushing out the interrupting spells that were trying to penetrate his mind with a Magic Sequence, reading the contents of these sequences of magic.

Even with magic acting on the Mind (Pushion information body), the sequence of magic was in the form of a Psion information body.

Although Tatsuya was not able to use Mental Interference Magic, if the Magic Sequence is in a state where the activation is not yet complete, he could defend against the magic of the enemy or even intervene with the spell.

This magic caused him to take some time to activate magic with his hand. If this wasn't Tatsuya, he would have already become a prisoner to the illusion.

But he did not fall for the magic of illusions. Knowing Yakumo, he wouldn't have expected this magic to stop Tatsuya. Kokonoe Yakumo was not a naïve adversary, continuing to use those methods that he has already shown that do not work. Once Genjutsu* does not work then move on to the next...

[The same magic of illusions, just apparently a term from ancient magic.]

"...Physical attack" It happened at the same time as Tatsuya said it to himself.

From two sides he was attacked by cutting vortices.

These were not vacuum blades. It was magic, which, with the support of the air, crushed stone to powder, condensed in the form of ultra plates and sent them into flight with high speed.

On the edges of the stone steps there were no hedges, only a grove.

Tatsuya instantly decomposed these four flying blades, flying from the darkness, which used to be nothing.

Of course, Yakumo's attack should not have ended with this. A man named Kokonoe Yakumo was not so kind as to (even when he is not serious) to finish a case with two types of attack, Genjutsu and cutting vortices

The stone steps Tatsuya was standing on, were not long. This evening was cloudless and the moon shone. He was unable to see the temple gate even at night, but now everything in front of him was filled with impenetrable darkness.

And from this darkness flew arrows.

Close sounds were not heard. He could not feel any signs of magic, dampening sound, or signs of magic sending the arrows. Was it a magic trick to let out arrows without a sound, or a bow made to not make a sound when shooting?

Sending this thought to the far corner of the mind, Tatsuya sent the bulk of his consciousness to the rain of the arrows.

He laid out all the arrows as one aggregate. Applying magic, Tatsuya finally noticed that the arrows were intangible.

"Magic of false information bodies!?" It was not a simple illusion. It was Genjutsu, influencing the information dimension and deceiving vision, "seeing Information". This is a magic of the same type as "Parade" which Lina specializes at.

It was a trick to expect that the attack would be something tangible.

Tatsuya aggravated all five senses and ran up the stone steps. There were no signs of any presence in front of him.

Tatsuya did not stop and slow down and cautiously moved forward, but at the same time he could not suppress a sense of surprise in himself, that was directly carried out.

In this battle, for the first time Tatsuya discovered the location of the enemy. Sharpened hearing caught the sounds of rustling clothes.

Heightened smell of incense, which impregnated the clothing.

Heightened sight noticed the contour of the figure, which came out of the darkness. The figure was above him on the ladder.

Being below, Tatsuya was in a clearly disadvantaged position.

Tatsuya jumped.

When he was at the same height as the enemy, he pulled his leg forward for a blow, without fear that the situation would become uncomfortable.

The enemy curved the upper part of the body and dodged the jumping kick by Tatsuya. Flying past the remaining enemy, Tatsuya landed on a stone stage.

Now Tatsuya was higher. But now Tatsuya was in an insecure position, rotating back to the enemy.

Heightened touch caught the airflow. The enemy's attack was aimed at his back. Using Flash Casting, Tatsuya activated Move-Type Magic.

The magic activated with Flash Cast had a small scale and a low power.

The speed could be called the only advantage. But if you need to move only 60 centimeters, then with flash casting, it was not a problem. And to evade the enemy's fist, a distance of 60 centimeters was enough.

When the enemy's direct punch overcame a distance of 30 centimeters, Tatsuya was already twice as far away. The enemy's attack ended in a blunder. Tatsuya turned around and prepared to attack at the same time as the enemy began to move forward.



The edge of Tatsuya's palm was at the enemy's neck. The enemy's Fist (Yakumo) was at Tatsuya's armpit. Both of them stopped their hands on the verge of delivering a blow.

"Master. This was a pretty rude greeting."

"It's almost time. Come along. His Excellency is waiting."

Tatsuya looked at the watch. It showed 18:50. It's only been five minutes since he started climbing the stone steps. Tatsuya didn't think he could fight Yakumo in such a short time. It seems that Yakumo himself had chosen how long the fight would take.

Although Tatsuya limited himself as not to cause damage to the environment, he was serious in this battle. However, Yakumo was able to act so as to take the schedule into account. With a little regret, Tatsuya realized that he was still far from Yakumo.

When Tatsuya entered the main hall of the temple, there was no dust on his suit.

All of the consequences by Yakumo's "prank" had been removed using "Regrowth".

Yakumo led him into the inner room. Toudou Aoba expected him in the side room, which led him through a passage to the right of the main premises of the temple (where an altar of a deity stands, which is prayed to in the temple).

He had a suitably shaven head for a Buddhist temple. However, he was wearing a high-class business suit, clearly sewn to order. He easily held his back straight, his shoulders were wide, and the lower part of the body also had a dense physique. Signs of old age were already noticeable, but when he was young, he was undoubtedly a strong guy.

But at the same time, on his head, below his would-be hair is his most distinctive feature.

Bulging eyes under thick gray eyebrows. His face is not beautiful, it could be called Majestic. However, his turbid-white left eye caused a strange feeling of oppression of the interlocutor. This left eye created an impression of heterogeneity.

Tatsuya also paid attention to this left eye. He realized that he had already met this old man in this temple in January of this year, on the 4th, to be more precise. But they did not quite meet, he only saw Toudou by his back when he was leaving the temple. Toudou then turned and looked at Tatsuya with his murky white eye, but said nothing and left.

"Can I start introducing myself?" Tatsuya asked after sitting down on his knees and bowed.

At first he thought it would be better to sit quietly until Yakumo presents him, but then he felt that in this case he would be captured in the blink of an eye by the opponent's pace.

"Permitted."

The answer Toudou gave would sound like an anachronism if it were to be said by another person, but not by him. The voice of Toudou perfectly fit his manner of speech.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Shiba Tatsuya. It is a great honor for me to meet you."

"I am Toudou Aoba. Yotsuba Tatsuya, I've been looking forward to seeing you."

Toudou called Tatsuya "Yotsuba Tatsuya" instead of "Shiba Tatsuya".

Tatsuya, who was still in his bow, did not react to these words.

"You can raise your head. I permit you to talk directly."

Tatsuya straightened out like he was told. He did not look away, but looked Toudou straight in the eye. This was his interpretation of the meaning of

"permit you to talk". But neither Toudou himself nor Yakumo reproached him for that.

"I heard from Maya. That you want to explain something to me."

"Yes."

Tatsuya didn't use such standard phrases, like, "Could you give me your time?" or "Could you listen to me?". He intuitively understood that Toudou did not need such formalities.

"I'm listening to you." And Toudou, indeed, immediately asked to go to the main topic.

"In short, I have a plan to build a plant that produces energy resources using magic."

Tatsuya said this as a preface, and began explaining the details of "project ESCAPES". Toudou did not interrupt Tatsuya and listened to his whole story to the end.

"Clear." Toudou said after Tatsuya finished the story, saying he wanted to have a press conference as a means of retaliation in an information war that was announced by the two Clarks, Edward and Raymond.

"Then, can you allow me to go out in front of the media?"

"I give my permission. You can also use my connections to ask others for cooperation."

"Thank you very much."

Although Tatsuya said so, he did not feel joy, but vigilance. He concluded that everything went too well. Consent was not to be unconditional. There must have been some conditions. He was afraid he would be put in some impossible conditions.

"By the way, I want to ask you something."

"What's that?"

Tatsuya answered, without changing the expression on his face, but he could not get rid of the feeling that he was trying to evade the question.

Toudou may have noticed the alarmed Tatsuya, but did not take advantage of him.

"In your explanation, you mentioned that you are not looking for political power."

"Yes."

More precisely, he said that he is not going to ask for more power, if it does not interfere with the work of the plant, but he was not required to demand political power, so he did not dare to correct what Toudou said.

"I'm not just talking about the power plant. The power you possess is incomparable to anything. It's not just that it exceeds the limits expendable for one person. In fact, this is not something that may be allowed to any organizations other than the state."

Tatsuya didn't mind that. He himself seriously considered this the same as Toudou said. But despite this, Tatsuya was not going to give up his power or trust it to anyone.

"Why do you use this power? What do you want to achieve with this force?"

"A happy life."

Tatsuya responded immediately without showing any hesitation.

Hearing this answer, Toudou clearly frowned his eyebrows.

"Are you saying that this undeserved power of one man should only be used for one's own sake? Are you not interested in the welfare of society and the preservation of the state?"

"A happy life is impossible without the well-being of society. Also, I believe that at the current stage of human development, the existence of States is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of public order."

"I mean, do you mind giving your power to the state for your own well-being?"

"I would not use such arrogant phrases as 'giving power'... But if you look from the standpoint of public order and National Defense, you, Your Excellency, are correct."

"That's good. Yotsuba Tatsuya."

Toudou again called Tatsuya "Yotsuba Tatsuya". They sat opposite to each other and looked into each other's eyes. Seeing the expression on the face of Toudou, Tatsuya realized that he was not mistaken, and said so intentionally.

"I want you to do what I used to do. Be the deterrent force of this country."

The words of Toudou puzzled Tatsuya.

(What does he mean by deterrent force? Does he want me to officially announce that I am the user of Material burst? But then it cannot be called "the same as before...")

"...You want me to declare myself a magician of strategic class?"

Tatsuya decided not to waste time, rewinding his thoughts that were deadlock, and directly asked Toudou about his intentions.

"Now it is not necessary. But if you need to, do it."

"Does that mean that in case of a military threat, I have to confront it? Like in the fall of two years ago?"

At the end of October 19th, Tatsuya destroyed the fleet of the Great Asian alliance with Strategic Class Magic. (Does it mean that he will have me play this role again in the future?)

"Deterrent power is the ability to stop a threat from becoming a reality. The ability to confront a military threat that has become a reality is a conventional military force, not a deterrent force. The power of deterrence is something that is desirable, but should not be used."

But this probably wasn't what Toudou wanted.

"You don't understand?"

"It's a shame to admit, but I don't."

In fact, he didn't fully understand what Toudou said. But Tatsuya decided not to speculate, but just to ask the right answer.

"This is nothing complicated for you. It is enough to deter other countries by instilling fear in them."

Understandable, mentally agreed Tatsuya. This was roughly the same conclusion he came to.

Apparently Toudou wants Tatsuya to play the role of the Demon King. But not as the king of demons, as in an RPG, which must be destroyed by a hero. It's more like a transcendental being who can cause disasters by simply reaching out.

"Your Excellency has previously said that it is desirable that a deterrent force should not be used. But to scare the enemy, don't you need to show them your strength?"

"If there is a need to demonstrate, usage can't be avoided. I'll leave that decision to the people behind you."

And it seems that he will not have to choose this remedy. Tatsuya recently wondered whether a deterrent force was a necessary evil.

Changing the activity of magicians from the military sphere to a civil one. As a result, the power of the military, which relies on the shoulders of magicians, will be reduced.

Magic is a force that is somewhat unrelated to the amount of material resources. The magicians that provide combat power are the aspect with which even small countries can confront large countries with many resources.

If the magicians' fighting power is not grasped, small countries will likely not be able to confront large countries. Unfortunately, it is easy to predict a future in which the world will plunge into the era of war if the four major world powers notice this and begin to absorb the world.

And if the world is again enveloped in the fire of war, magicians will start to be used as weapons again. Trying to improve the lives of magicians is a vicious cycle.

Perhaps to avoid such a future, he will inevitably have to become a deterrent force, replacing the lost fighting power of magicians who have gone into the civil sphere. Tatsuya thought so before he heard Toudou's demand.

If Tatsuya becomes a deterrent force, then "Project ESCAPES" — the first step to releasing magicians from their fate as weapons — will receive not only the tacit approval of Toudou, but also his support.

Tatsuya had no reason to refuse.

"As Your Excellency wishes."

Tatsuya expressed his intention to accept the Toudou's proposal with an indirect expression.

"Are you sure?" For the first time, Yakumo spoke, who until now only silently listened to the conversation between Tatsuya and Toudou. "In that case, you will be lonely."

"I don't mind."

Tatsuya really needs only one person. If this person is near, he will never feel lonely. The feelings of Tatsuya were arranged in such a way. And he knew that this person, Miyuki, would never leave him. Even death will not be able to separate Tatsuya and Miyuki. Because he won't let that happen.

Being separated from other people was not a cause of concern for Tatsuya.

Yakumo's warning did not frighten Tatsuya.

"This conversation is over."

It seemed that Yakumo still had something to say. However, Toudou decided to wrap things up. (for Toudou it was an intervention).

"Your Excellency. What should I do?"

Tatsuya was not going to talk to Yakumo. As he realized that Yakumo was worried about him, he decided to avoid quarrels that could ruin the relationship in the future.

"I'm not going to give you any specific instructions. Do what you think you need to do."

The words of Toudou did not mean the granting of unlimited powers.

It was the opposite. This meant that Toudou would not be responsible, no matter what happened. Responsibility for any problems would fall on Tatsuya.

"I accept your offer." Considering this fair, Tatsuya answered Toudou.

Behind-the-scenes leaders never take responsibility in case of any problems. The burden of guilt has always been on the direct performers. Toudou didn't need to mention this.

"Well. In that case, I'll also talk to my friends. It was a useful time."

Thus Toudou notified that the meeting is over.

"In that case, can I leave you?"

"You can go."

Tatsuya deeply bowed, touching his forehead to the floor, and then stood up. He sat on the bare floor (tatami) from the beginning, the seat cushion (BUD) was not provided. Holding his face down, to not look at the interlocutor, Tatsuya turned his back to Toudou and went out.

After seeing Tatsuya to the gate of the temple, Yakumo returned back. Toudou waited for him to be in same posture with which he talked to Tatsuya. Yakumo replaced Toudou's cooled tea. While Toudou drinks tea, Yakumo sat in front of him, waiting.

"And what do you really think about this conversation?"

As a sponsor of the Yotsuba family, Toudou Aoba had access to detailed information about Tatsuya. It's impossible for Toudou not to see this information. He also exhaustively studied information about Tatsuya from external sources. Yakumo asked about the impression of their real meeting.

"He's more broken than I expected."

Yakumo counted Toudou's answer as "interesting".

"Have you been disappointed?"

"Even if it is broken, it does not mean that it cannot be used. For example, even if the weapon has a broken fuse, the bullet will still fly out if you pull the trigger."

"It depends on how you use it?"

"Although there is a danger."

Toudou looked into Yakumo's eyes. His murky white left eye looked directly into Yakumo's soul.

"It seems that Your Excellency's power of Sight did not act on him."

"...Forgive me. It was unconscious."

"No, I don't mind."

Toudou Aoba hails from a Charmers family. If the data about his pedigree was true, this was one of the oldest families of supernatural power users in Japan.

But Yakumo knew that Toudou Aoba was not able to make full use of his "eye", because instead of honing his skills as a caster, he chose the way of fulfilling his family's responsibility to control the casters. If he said it was unconscious, it is true, not an excuse. Yakumo easily accepted Toudou's apology.

"Like you said, I couldn't look deep into the heart of Yotsuba Tatsuya. The Yotsuba, were able to create something interesting."

"Although it happened accidentally, but he is the final 'Product'."

Yakumo's response paraphrased the expression Toudou used.

"Right." Toudou couldn't resist a stretched smile. However, he immediately returned a serious face. "Kokonoe Yakumo. I want to ask you something."

"Yes, what is it?"

There was still a light smile on Yakumo's face.

"In an emergency, will you be able to kill Yotsuba Tatsuya by your own power?"

However, having heard the question Toudou, Yakumo, as expected, could not continue to smile.

"Hmm... Based on the experience of the previous test, I would say that the odds of winning are about 60%. If we include the outcome where we knock out each other at the same time *, we will get 70%"

[The author uses the term from Kendo, which means a draw at simultaneous strikes. As I understand it, Yakumo means that an additional 10% will be found if he is trying to beat Tatsuya at the cost of his own life.]

Under the previous test, he meant the battle on the stone steps.

This wicked joke seems to have had such a hidden meaning.

"Even with all your skills is there only a 30% chance to leave with nothing?" Toudou was genuinely surprised. But Yakumo's answer had not yet finished.

"No, the remaining 30% means my own defeat. The battle between this inept monk and him cannot end with escape."

"...Are you saying that even you, known as the reincarnation of Casin Koji, cannot escape?"

"Six months ago I would be able to escape... Yes, and now the odds are just the same 60%. If it is a year later, this inept monk will not be able to do it at all."

"Even so...?"

Such a kind of visage Toudou, probably, has not shown to anybody, except Yakumo. Although the fact that Toudou gave Yakumo some slack was also due to the fact that he was really shocked.

"Judging by his abilities surpassing those of this inept monk, there is nothing to be surprised about. Among the young people with whom this inept monk is familiar, there is only one person who can resist him.

And if you look around the world, these people will not get more than the fingers on two hands."

"...Terrible times have come."

"And that's true... Your Excellency, another cup?"

"Fine."

Yakumo took the cup from Toudou and went to the stove. With skillful movements he quickly brewed the tea, and then carelessly put the cup back.

The old man Toudou carelessly, ignored the rules of decency, brought the cup to his mouth and slowly drank.

"Thank you for the treat."

"Don't be grateful."

"Oh, yes. For some reason, only your skills of brewing tea do not improve."

Due to the arrogant words of Toudou, Yakumo answered only with the curve of a smile.

"I'll go."

Toudou stood up.

"I'll take you." Yakumo said, not getting up.

"You don't have to." Without turning around, the old man Toudou said this, and opened the sliding door.

When Tatsuya returned to the villa in Izu from the temple of Kyuuchouji, it was already around 10 o'clock in the evening. As soon as he returned, he went to the TV screen, but he wasn't going to call Maya. Time was already late. He only wanted to convey a short message that "Consent was received", through Hayama or his assistant.

"...Tatsuya-san, did you want something?"

However, for some reason Maya suddenly immediately appeared on the screen. Like she was waiting for a phone call.

"Sorry about the time. I just got back from Kyuuchouji temple."

He reflexively responded with an uninteresting formal phrase, but Maya did not expect a witty answer from him.

"Clear. Good work. Did you meet His Excellency?"

"Yes. I got a project permit."

"Clearly..." Maya slightly screwed her eyes and looked at Tatsuya.

"...and what was demanded in return?"

Apparently, Maya also thought from the very beginning that in order to get support from Toudou, he needed to give something in return.

The fact that she did not tell him in advance meant that she believed that Tatsuya would do it anyway, so there would be no real harm, and so he would not have to worry much.

"I was asked to act as a deterrent force against other countries."

"...in such a sense, does that mean that Tatsuya-san finally has to reveal himself as a Strategic Class Magician?"

Maya's delusion was the same as that of Tatsuya. That's why it didn't arouse a smile. Tatsuya thought she really believed that.

"No. There is no need to officially announce it now. His Excellency said that he left all decisions to me."

"Everything to you? Oh, my... It's a serious responsibility."

Maya's thoughts were on the same path as Tatsuya. Was it because it was the rational process of thinking, or because Tatsuya in general is very similar to Maya...? These were the thoughts that now occurred in the far corners of Tatsuya's consciousness.

"...In any case, the main thing is that His Excellency's consent has been received. You can hold a press conference without changing the schedule."

"Thank you very much."

Maya felt relieved after Toudou's consent was received. Tatsuya also felt relieved when he received that response from Maya. The experiences that will be used by someone seem to be the same at the top and bottom, when there is, in reality, someone else.

"By the way, Tatsuya-san, do you remember our conversation about Miyakijima?"

In order to catch the suddenly replaced topic of conversation, Tatsuya threw away all his superfluous thoughts and concentrated his consciousness.

"Is this a conversation that was in the middle of April? When you said that a new research center would be built on Miyakijima?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. I was thinking of partially changing this plan to attract attention to the plant from Tatsuya-san's project."

Tatsuya couldn't answer quickly.

"I also discussed it with Hayama-san. I think this is the best place for Tatsuya-san's project. How would you like that?"

"...Using the word 'attract', you mean as in third-party business partners?"

His face did not show the feeling of alertness because all of this seems too convenient for him, Tatsuya first of all asked a question that seemed harmless. Upon hearing the question, the Maya smiled with a happy expression on her face, as if she were saying, "Well, I guess he noticed."

"With the current scale of the project, only our own subsidiaries will suffice to implement it, but I believe that with the prospect of the future it is better to attract third-party assistants from the very beginning."

In this matter Tatsuya had the same opinion. If you run the factory only with companies associated with the Yotsuba, it is highly probable that the magicians involved there will also be only those who are under the patronage of the Yotsuba. Then it will not be a "release of magicians", but only "a new project for the Yotsuba".

"The area of the island is small, so, even if it becomes a virtual autonomous region, not many will raise complaints about this."

With this opinion Tatsuya also agreed. Although it's an area of 8 square kilometers, in fact, this was comparable to a small town, but those who raise the noise of a "Mutant rebellion" or "the Kingdom of Magicians" will only be a few.

"Well, how would you like that?"

"I think I should be grateful."

"In that case, can we begin with construction?"

"Yes. I'm counting on you."

Tatsuya had a vague sense of concern that his plan could be used for some other purpose. But he convinced himself that it is necessary to give priority to promoting the project.

CEO of the "Hokuzan groups", Kitayama Ushio ("Business name" — Kitakata Ushio), has a great influence not only in business circles, but also in politics.

It was not uncommon for him to hold meetings with the Government, but in most cases, his schedule is adjusted according to his circumstances, even if the schedule is planned in advance.

But on that day, on the last Thursday of May, Kitayama Ushio was quite unexpectedly invited to a luxurious Japanese-style restaurant.

He cancelled all other plans and went to this restaurant because the inviting partner was someone he could not refuse.

Toudou Aoba. The circle of people who knew the name of this shadowy, influential man was limited. Unlike the famous "Traders of influence", Toudou Aoba never openly went on stage. But those who benefited from his name were aware that his abilities were undeniable.

Fortunately, Ushio was never threatened by the shadow activity of Toudou.

However, the founder of a rapidly growing company, which competed with Ushio, lost all his property as a result of underestimated the influence of Toudou. He received a long prison term for an ordinary crime, which in normal cases could not cause such problems, and was deprived of the right to start a new business. Ushio considered it an obvious demonstration to the rest.

"It is a great honor for me to be invited by you."

"I'm sorry I called you so suddenly."

Toudou Aoba was already 60, and Kitayama Ushio was in his early fifties. Toudou's tone was a little rough, but given the age of both, it did not sound unnatural. But the difference in their attitude reflected not the difference in their age, but the difference in the type of influence (political influence and economic power) that they owned.

First, Toudou and Ushio killed a little time with the usual secular conversation. But Toudou Aoba, it seems, was not so tactless as to suddenly call one of the country's largest businessmen to just chat.

He was just worried about the eyes and ears of the waiter serving them.

The institutions used by such people as Toudou, are not only expensive, but besides providing tasty food and drinks, their employees also perfectly observe "the rule of the three monkeys" ("do not look", "do not listen", "do not say").

Perhaps the man who survived in the world of wiles and intrigues, simply could not give up this superfluous vigilance.

"I called you today because..." After some time, Toudou began to speak when the time for delicacies and sake were over. "...I want you to support the business of a young man."

"Do you mean for me to invest in this novice business of this young man?"

Such inquiries were not uncommon for Ushio. But he was interested in it, because such a request was made personally Toudou himself.

"And who is this amazing man who has earned the attention of your holiness?"

"You already know this guy. His official name from the family register is Shiba Tatsuya."

"...Shiba-kun?" After a long pause, Ushio was able to speak only that.

To hear this name from the mouth of Toudou was quite unexpected for him. "...Then this new business is something related to his inventions as Taurus Silver? Or something related to a thermonuclear reactor?"

"The second. Shiba Tatsuya tries to release magician from the role of weapons, giving them work to produce energy."

"I understand. I accept your proposal."

This time the answer was immediate. So much so that even Toudou was a little confused.

"Don't you need time to think about it?"

Even after this offer, there was no doubt for Ushio.

"Your Excellency must know that my wife and daughter are also magicians. My wife has been forced to live as a 'weapon' for a long time, even though she has now retired."

Of course, Toudou knew about Benio, the wife of Ushio, and his daughter Shizuku.

He looked forward to continuing the story.

"But if the war begins, not only my wife, but my daughter will be sent to the battlefield. If it comes to a full-blown war, magicians, useless in the workplace, can be forced to become a combat force. I'm afraid of that."

"...But if we talk about the benefits, besides the war, there is still a project, announced by the nearing States."

Naturally, Toudou did not really want to cooperate with "Project Dione". These words were intended to show how serious Ushio is in his statement.

"I don't want to sacrifice my wife and daughter. That is worse than forced military use."

"Hou. Why do you think that?"

This question was no longer a test for Ushio, it proceeded from real curiosity.

"... The essence of the 'project Dione', the expulsion of magicians in to space. I do not know whether it is the will of America, the intrigue of Edward Clark, or if it is done for some other reason, but it seems they want to expel Shiba-kun from the earth. But the damage is not the only thing. If the project is launched, the involved magicians will no longer be able to live on Earth. The earth will cease to be their home. This is the project."

The answer Ushio coincided with the conclusion that Tatsuya made.

And most likely, Ushio and Tatsuya were not exceptions. There are probably many people who came to such conclusions about this project.

"Right."

Frankly speaking, Toudou also noticed the hidden target of the Dione project.

"On the other hand, according to the project by Shiba Tatsuya, the area where magicians will feel at home will only expand. Energy production is necessary even during wartime. On the contrary, its importance is growing."

When Shiba Tatsuya's plant will be included in the state system of power supply, they will not be so careless, as to throw magicians on the front, causing a lack of energy. It's well thought out."

And Toudou most valued "project ESCAPES" and Tatsuya for creating a compromising relationship between the supply of combat power and the supply of energy, which will create a situation where it becomes impossible for magicians to be used as weapons.

In terms of National Defence, this is an unacceptable situation. But if this was everything to the project, Toudou would have destroyed Tatsuya's project.

But Tatsuya agreed to become a deterrent force.

If the system of energy production with the nucleus in the form of a star reactor spreads to the whole world, other countries will lose their fighting power of magicians, and the relative military power of Japan with a trump card in the form of Material Burst will only increase.

Although it was not clear yet whether someone comparable to Tatsuya who could be a deterrent force would be born in the next generation, but he will let the rulers of that time take care of it. Since Toudou lived in the present, he took responsibility for the present. He has not overestimated himself enough to be responsible for the future.

"I Agree."

Ushio was not particularly worried about the lack of combat power of magicians. He wasn't a politician. He believed that if there is no magical combat force, it can be compensated by a conventional combat force.

His company was not engaged in weapons, but if there was such a need to protect his family, he would without any doubt begin to fully support the military industry with his company.

"Could you tell me more about the Shiba-kun's project?"

Tatsuya's project corresponded to his interests. Ushio decided to meet him. Usually whenever his family is concerned, his thinking lapsed suspiciously. However, in such matters, Toudou was not going to deceive him, and this should not be a problem.

"You'll ask him for details."

But now he could not deny that he doubted him too much.

"Really. Sorry for the rudeness."

Realizing this, Ushio sincerely bowed. Cooling his head, he sent his consciousness to what he really had to check out here.

"Your Excellency. I wanted to ask you something."

"What's that?"

"What is the position of the Government regarding the project?"

Now, the whole world welcomes "project Dione". There is no country that has officially taken an early position. He was afraid that the launch of a plan, opposing "project Dione", can be regarded as a diplomatically negative phenomenon. Toudou Aoba also understood this well.

"The Japanese government will not intervene."

He made his position clear by saying this.

Chapter 4

Friday, May 31, 2097.

Since the morning, numerous media representatives have rushed to the main office of Four Leaves Technology.

Needless to say, their goal was a press conference held by "Taurus Silver". The meeting was to begin at 10 o'clock, but as the crowd of reporters and operators met in front of the building could interfere with traffic and other people's work, the venue was opened earlier, at about 9 o'clock.

Even traditional large newspapers, usually without any interest in the magic industry, organized several groups in the very first rows.

Although many of their colleagues had a conceited relationship, but for a third-party observer, these colleagues were no different from the usual.

Their indiscriminate conversations died down when the staff responsible for communication with the media came to the podium. The reporters, holding their breath, watched the FLT employees perform last checkups of the microphone and lighting.

The digital clock in the conference room showed 10 o'clock. The front door of the conference hall opened, and Tatsuya and Ushiyama came to the podium.

Under the clicks of the shutters Tatsuya stood in front of the microphone. The chairs on the podium were not used.

Behind Tatsuya hung a big screen. On it appeared the description "Stellar Furnace Energy Plant Project".

The conference room was filled with noise. These were voices expressing doubt as to why the presentation of a new business project is taking place. Not paying attention to the confusion of the assembled, the responsible employee announced the beginning of the press conference.

"I am Shiba Tatsuya, and I am responsible for the development of software for Taurus Silver projects."

"I am Ushiyama Kinji, and I am responsible for the development of hardware for Taurus Silver projects."

The noise immediately increased. Media representatives gathered here firmly believing that that this young man (although he was still a schoolboy, the appearance of Tatsuya can be expressed by the word "young man", and not "boy") in the suit was the real identity behind Taurus Silver. But this man in the working jumpsuit also called himself Taurus Silver. In the media camp, chaos began.

"...Uh, Taurus Silver is not the name of one developer."

As the reporters did not follow with questions, Ushiyama continued to speak.

"It's the name of the development team, consisting of him and me.

We have already updated the personal information about the applicants, and you can confirm it at the patent office."

"...Why did you deceive the people so much?" When at last a hand was picked, one of the female reporters asked this. In fact, they were insensible words, which lacked respect for the interlocutor.

"We weren't going to cheat. Often applications for patents are filed under the name of the firm, and even now it is common practice to keep confidentiality of personal information about the individual members of the group."

"B-but Taurus Silver is regarded as a brilliant engineer, who in just 1 year has advanced the development of CAD software by 10 years, and your company did not deny it, right?"

"We have never confirmed excessive statements like 'brilliant engineer' and other things like that."

The reporters had nothing to say to this irrefutable answer by Tatsuya.

"The reason for the confidentiality of personal information was that the Youn-*... That Shiba is a minor. For that same reason, we refused to hold an interview."

Ushiyama continued nervously.

[He almost misspoke, beginning to say, "Young master.]

The privacy of minors in the present period was a stable social principle. The media couldn't go straight against it.

"Does this mean that what the mysterious man named 'The First Sage' said in that message, was only half true?" Another reporter delicately changed the subject, asking another question.

"Because Taurus Silver is the name of the team consisting of me and Ushiyama, the message that Taurus Silver is me, Shiba Tatsuya, is misinformation."

Tatsuya changed his first-person address to "Watashi" to seem impolite to this media representative. After all, the content of the answer was a direct attempt to quarrel with him.

"Misinformation on TV?"

"The news showed information different from the truth. That's called misinformation, isn't it?"

"But the fact that you are Taurus Silver is true!"

There was a piercing hysterical scream from another part of the conference room.

"...it was mentioned earlier that Taurus Silver is not the name of one person."

Tatsuya turned to this reporter and answered him with a calm but seemingly brazen voice. Objecting voices stopped.

"However, it is also true that we have caused confusion among people around the world."

Here Ushiyama took advantage of the moment, and his awkward voice wedged in to the conversation.

"Therefore, here and now, we are announcing the correct information regarding Taurus Silver."

The conference room was noisy again.

"...What do you mean?"

"It means that we are terminating our activity as Taurus Silver." In this sense, Tatsuya returned the obvious answer to the brave question.

"Does that mean you're stopping CAD development?" The question came from a reporter from a single publication firm familiar with the magic industry.

"Ushiyama will continue to develop CADs, and I'll do another thing."

Tatsuya said this and pointed his hand at the screen behind him.

"This is a new project for the organization and supply of Energy for industrial and domestic needs, using a Stellar Furnace, or in other words a thermonuclear reactor, which works with Gravity Control-Type Magic."

Journalists began to talk indiscriminately within their groups. Tatsuya silently stared at them until the noise died down.

"The design of the installation is not new." Tatsuya said this, so order could return to the conference hall. Representatives of the press did not interrupt his explanation.

"...the installation is planned to be built on a remote island or on the sea surface. With the help of the power generated by the Stellar Furnace reactor, hydrogen will be produced from the sea water, which will be further sent to land.

We hope that together with the process of hydrogen production, we will contribute to the purification of the marine environment by removing harmful substances from sea water."

A simple animation appeared on the big screen showing the mechanism of the installation. Comments on the animation were not told by Tatsuya, but by an FLT employee.

After the animation was finished, the conference room filled up with loud noise. A correspondent from an industry magazine raised his hand as an interested person.

"...Are you not going to send electricity directly from the thermonuclear reactor?"



"I think that many will be concerned about the stability of the Stellar Furnace reactor, so first we decided to build a plant at a sufficient distance from the urban area. Therefore, taking into account the loss in the transmission of electricity at the far distance, I designed the scheme of converting it into hydrogen fuel."

"I think that a significant number of magicians will be needed for the operation of a thermonuclear reactor."

It was said by a reporter from a publication directly related to magic.

"You're right. Magicians participating in this project will be transferred to the island or floating base, on which the plant with the presented installation will be located."

"...Are you going to create an independent State of magicians!?"

This question was asked by a reporter from a newspaper that was usually set up to be negative towards magic.

"Because of its peculiarities, the plant will not be able to function with only one magician. The staff will include many non-magician engineers."

"...In other words, do you mean that a minority of magicians will rule the majority of ordinary personnel?"

"...The plant will be operated in compliance with all laws and regulations."

Tatsuya could not restrain his habit of fighting for magicians. However, he now gave a textbook answer, and at the present stage, when there was no specific data, no one could continue to make false accusations.

"How do you respond to the request for participation in 'Project Dione'?"

This was a "cover fire", the question was asked in a provocative voice by a reporter from the same company as the previous one.

"The request from the National Scientific Agency from the USNA was about the participation of a schoolboy, calling himself Taurus Silver. But a little earlier, 'Taurus Silver' ceased to exist, so I can no longer respond to this request.'"

"These are empty excuses!" The reporter reflexively shouted in response to the brazen words of Tatsuya.

Tatsuya himself considered it an empty excuse, so he was not embarrassed by this exclamation.

"Did Mr. Edward Clark from the National Science Agency require me to participate?"

This objection was also prepared in advance. It was a counterattack that the reporter would not be able to answer with "Yes."

"But it's obvious that Mr. Clark meant you when he was talking about Taurus Silver."

However, the reporter still persisted.

"Is that so?"

Tatsuya knew what the reporter said was true, but for the rest it was not so obvious. Tatsuya did not answer with "Yes" or "no", he just answered with a question. The reporter was just speculating. So when he was asked, "Is that so?", he had nothing to say.

"Even if another invitation comes from the Dione project, I won't be able to accept it. The project of a plant with the Stellar Furnace reactor has already moved to the stage of choosing the place for construction. I don't have time to participate in other major projects." Tatsuya summed it up.

Tatsuya's press conference was broadcasted live on TV.

Speaking of TV, it was meant not to be covered by many large radio channels. Rather than a small cable news channel. The target audience of this channel were magicians and people interested in magic. It broadcast various news related to magic, and was also known as the channel, broadcasting absolutely all Nine School Competitions.

Kudou Minoru, who missed school because of his poor health, watched this broadcast, sitting on his bed in his room.

"Tatsuya-san is so amazing..." said Minoru while sighing when the broadcast was over. He turned the TV off and went to bed. There was a whirlpool of admiration for Tatsuya in Minoru's thoughts.

He also admired the plan for the energy plant with the nucleus in the form of the "Stellar Furnace" (at the press conference, Tatsuya did not use the name "Project ESCAPES").

He admired the power with which Tatsuya was able to overcome the pressure of what made him an enemy to the world, and used the heightened attention for his own purposes.

Minoru envied Tatsuya to the depths of his soul.

Tatsuya did not give up and, freely and unrestrictedly, use his wisdom and power to fight society and the world.

And he, in comparison with this, only lies on this cramped bed, watching other people's affairs. Which is unfortunate.

Minoru was thinking. That if he only had a healthy body...

Minoru was sure that he was not inferior to Tatsuya in mind or magic.

This was in no way overconfidence by Minoru.

Minoru assessed his abilities after he saw Tatsuya's abilities. His ability was recognized not only by himself. "His grandfather, Kudou Retsu, also cherished his talent.

He successfully avoided feeling poorly at the Thesis Competition of last year (although Tatsuya was in it but did not present), Minoru won there, beating Isori Kei from First High and Kichijouji Shinkurou from Third High.

When he remembered the Thesis Competition, he went through his memories, one after another. The memories of the events that took place less than a month before the contest came back to him.

About how they first fought together the next day, October 7th.

The next time they met was two weeks later, October 20th.

The day afterwards, he was bedridden from the heat and made it uncomfortable for them.

On October 27th. Having closed Zhou Gongjin's escape route, he believed that he managed to repay the debt that he owed from when he got ill.

Minoru remembered that entire day. After all, this was the first time since his birth that he was useful to someone. So Minoru remembered this day...

With these memories in his thoughts, Minoru did not notice how he fell asleep.

In his dream he returned back to that day, October 27, 2096.

There was a guy in on the other side of Uji Bridge. In the dream, Minoru observed himself from a stranger's view.

From the car on which he stood, sparks and fire poured out.

Right before the engine exploded, he jumped out of the car and looked intently at Minoru.

Minoru realized that he was Zhou Gongjin. This is what the dream looked like from his view. He escaped along the Uji river, going in a downward direction.

Then he was attacked by a "Girl" that suddenly appeared with a bob hairstyle.

Despite the fact that this was a dream, he could clearly feel strong pain.

These memories, they should have not been known by Minoru. This experience he should not have experienced.

Before him, Ichijou Masaki appeared, and behind him, Tatsuya.

Maybe he's rebuilding this scene in his imagination based on reports from the incident? Minoru was covered in cold blood, despite the fact that he was in a dream.

Masaki's attack tore the inside of his shins of both legs. This time there was no pain.

"I will not perish. Even if I die, my existence will continue!"

He thought he said this with his voice. Undoubtedly, one who dies like this, holding such a thought, usually will wander in the world of the living as a ghost. Minoru felt sympathy, having personally experienced the last moments of Zhou Gongjin's life.

But the dream was not over. Zhou Gongjin's consciousness continued.

Zhou Gongjin sailed up the Uji River.

Suddenly the dream came from Minoru's point of view. Zhou Gongjin's ghost was approaching him.

"Become one with me!" Zhou Gongjin shouted and flew at Minoru, who was standing on the Uji bridge.

The surrounding landscape had disappeared. The bridge also vanished from under his feet. Minoru hung in the air over the river.

Minoru realized that this was no longer a dream about the events that occurred 7 months ago, but an event that is actually happening in the present time.

Memories of the events of that time somehow brought him here.

More than six months later, Minoru realized that Zhou Gongjin's ghost drew his attention.

"Become mine!"

The fingers from both of Zhou Gongjin's hands pierced his chest.

Although it is better to say "plunged". Something invaded him.

Although Minoru was aware of this, he was surprisingly calm.

Even for himself, it was unexpected that he was not afraid of this

"evil spirit" trying to capture him. He didn't have to be afraid because he knew what to do.

Minoru quickly understood this. The thing that was trying to swallow him was of the same essence and nature as the parasites.

He was an undisputed genius and the strongest user of magic in the Kudou family. His brothers and sisters did not realize it. And his father apparently would not admit it. But his grandfather certainly understood it.

By the age of 16, Minoru had already mastered all the magic of the Kudou family.

"Go away, Ghost."

Minoru used Mental Interference Magic. In this dream, magic is not used on something physical, that's why his magic was still going to work.

Coming out of Minoru's "body", like the wind, a stream of luminous particles burst out, and with this force, which was like a hurricane, blew Zhou Gongjin's "body" away.

In the world of Minoru's dreams, he and Zhou Gongjin were both in ghost bodies. Their minds existed in the form of ghosts.

He cannot be blown away using psions, like with "Zone Interference", but Mental Interference Magic makes it possible to both attack and defend.

Zhou Gongjin's hands were separated from his "body". They were immersed in Minoru's body to the wrist and were submerged to the part from where they were torn off.

"Give me your body."

Not frightened, Zhou Gongjin again flew to Minoru.

"Although it's not usable and a naughty body, I can't give it away."

Minoru activated the following magic. From the darkness, lightning of all colors of the rainbow appeared and surrounded Zhou Gongjin's ghost body. In this world, magic was called, which was worth thinking about. Minoru felt more freedom compared to the real world.

"Give it to me..."

The Phantom body of Zhou Gongjin was now dark in several places, his once graceful appearance was now covered with black spots, and the body was lacking some parts.

"...I'm sorry, Zhou Gongjin. But it's time to finish this."

Minoru owned all the magic of the Kudou family. And together with this magic, came the methodology to create a Parasite Doll. Including the binding parasite Loyalty spell.

"Obey Me, Ghost. Become my food."

Minoru held Zhou Gongjin in his hands and he activated the magic for enslaving Parasites.

The usual loyalty spell is arranged in such a way that if you comply with certain conditions, compensation is provided. The compensation used in the production of Parasites is to supply the Parasites with Psions which are necessary to them.

The condition for this is absolute obedience. In case of disobedience, the parasite is deprived of already absorbed Psions and needs to submit again.

The compensation offered by Minoru is an existence within him. And the condition is to be preoccupied. In other words, using the loyalty spell, Minoru "ate" Ghost Zhou Gongjin.

"...Good work. Thank you for your knowledge."

Minoru felt like the "secret knowledge" associated with "Demons" accumulated by Zhou Gongjin became his own.

Minoru in his sleep showed an "Angelic" smile. This smile undoubtedly belonged to a messenger looking from heaven to earth, filled with beauty, haughty and devoid of humanity.

Tatsuya expressed his gratitude to Ushiyama, who accompanied him during the press conference, he thanked the staff that drafted the venue, and was going to leave the main office.

He didn't want to run into his father. He had no desire to meet him, and his father obviously did not want to either. This assumption of his father's feelings was not a mistake.

Because it was not a subordinate of his father that stopped Tatsuya, who changed his clothes in the locker room and went to the underground parking, trying to avoid the reporters at the main entrance, but by a woman calling herself a member of the Magic Association.

"Is this going to be a long conversation?"

Tatsuya has no particular bad feeling towards the Magic Association, but he asked because he wanted to leave this place as soon as possible.

And he did not underestimate the ability of the press to sniff around.

"It won't take long. I just need to get your answer..." The employee timidly answered Tatsuya's question. The Magic Association sent not a man but a young woman to give Tatsuya a better impression.

But it clearly had the opposite effect. She was frightened by the sight of Tatsuya, as if she had very meager experience's with men (meaning no sexual experience). When a person has no special tendencies, this is only used to offend.

But Tatsuya also became awkward, because he had no hobbies like scaring women for fun.

"In that case, get in the car."

But when he offered the employee of the Magic Association this, it was impossible to fully say that this act was not a manifestation of revenge.

"Tomorrow afternoon...?"

The request of the Magic Association was that they wanted him to meet Edward Clark at the Magic Association, who is going to arrive in Japan tomorrow.

"Yes! In the afternoon, at any time that is convenient for Shiba-san!"

The employee begged Tatsuya in a desperate voice. Looking at her condition, it was not possible to say, that she is not accustomed to men, but it is possible to say that it is difficult to talk to men, or she could even have androphobia [fear of men].

What was the Magic Association's purpose for choosing such a woman? This was an obvious mistake in choosing roles.

"It's a pretty sudden invitation."

"I'm sorry, please!"

The car was on autopilot, but Tatsuya was sitting in the driver's seat, according to the rules. And the employee of the Association was holding the door of the front passenger seat.

Tatsuya decided to finish this conversation quickly, but not out of compassion, but because of her irritating behavior.

"There's nothing to be done. Then I'll be there tomorrow at 14:00, at the Kanto branch."

"Is that fine?"

"I can't afford to refuse, can I?"

These words were not an attempt to bargain, but Tatsuya's true feelings.

Though not officially, Edward Clark asked for a meeting as a representative of the USNA government. He decided in advance, that at the end of the meeting, refusing to meet could have negative consequences in diplomatic relations. Tatsuya was not so arrogant or childish as to ignore it.

"T-T-thank you very much!"

The employee exaggerated her emotions too much. Tatsuya was no longer able to tolerate this irritation. He stopped the car on the side of the road and he kicked her out.

Tatsuya went to First High. Initially, he planned to go there immediately from the main office of FLT. Although he did take a long route, he still had the feeling that it took too much time.

He changed everything but his jacket into his school uniform in the locker room at FLT. After changing the jacket from a business suit to the long jacket of the school uniform, Tatsuya went not to the classroom, but to the principal's office. There he told the school staff that he wanted to meet with the principal.

It was almost noon, the lunch break was about to start. Usually, if student asked to meet with the director at such a time, they will only be reprimanded and kicked out of the office. But, as expected, the staff of First High knew about the Tatsuya's situation. In the current situation, not knowing his circumstances would be strange.

Was the director's schedule accidentally free at that moment, or did he send someone away when he heard about the visit? Tatsuya got into the director's office very quickly.

"Thank you very much for taking the time for me, even though I came so suddenly."

First of all, Tatsuya politely thanked him.

"I was watching the broadcast." Director Momoyama suddenly changed the topic. "Did you refuse to participate in project Dione because you had something on your mind when you told me?"

But once Momoyama asked this, it was easier for Tatsuya to answer.

"Right."

"...The project of a power plant with the Stellar Furnace reactor... Don't you have a shorter version of the name?"

"...Given the planned location of the plant, it is unofficially called the 'Project for the extraction of marine resources and the elimination of harmful substances from the coastal zone of the Pacific', or abbreviated 'Project Escapes' from the first letters of the words from the phrase in English: 'Extract both useful and harmful Substances from the Coastal Area of the Pacific using Electricity generated by the Stellar furnace.'."

"ESCAPES? This name cannot be used officially."

Momoyama quickly realized that this name contains the hidden meaning of "Escape for magicians from military use."

"Yes. That is why at the press conference I called it a 'project for a power plant based on a stationary Stellar Furnace'."

"Hmm... So how far have you gotten in this project?" Momoyama asked, looking at Tatsuya standing in front of his desk. Standing there, most of the students would respond with a trembling voice.

"...We have already started the actual implementation. It's not a sham to escape from the Dione project."

Momoyama really suspected that this was a pretext for not participating in the Dion project.

"...I believe you."

In itself, the word 'believe' was not proof of what he really believes with all his heart, but Momoyama still said this to Tatsuya.

"Thank you very much."

Although you're not involved in Project Dione he did not express this directly.

"Now on to the condition of exemption from classes..."

"Release from classes is not canceled."

Momoyama interrupted Tatsuya's speech.

"I can guarantee your graduation. And a recommendation to the University of Magic too. So you should focus on Project ESCAPES."

"...Are you sure?"

The words of Momoyama sounded too suspicious to Tatsuya. The exemption from the classes originally provided by Tatsuya was done under the pressure of the USNA to make him participate in the Dione Project. Now that Tatsuya has officially refused, Momoyama no longer had to treat him in any special way.

"I think that Project Dione has a deeper meaning, giving an honorable way of life to magicians. That's why I asked you to participate in it."

Momoyama implied that his special attitude towards Tatsuya was not only because of the pressure of USNA. Tatsuya could not understand whether this was true, or if it was to pretend that he succumbed to the pressure of the government.

"But now I feel that your 'Project ESCAPES' also has a deeper meaning, giving the magicians a peaceful way of life. According to my estimation, its social significance is not inferior to Project Dione. So I don't think it's necessary to change my attitude."

"...Thank you very much."

Even after these explanations, Tatsuya did not understand the true motives of Momoyama, but, above all, he thanked him for the praise and bowed.

"Good luck."

Bowing again in response to the words of Momoyama, Tatsuya left the principal's office.

When Tatsuya left the director's office, it was still about 10 minutes before the lunch break began . He initially planned to return to Izu, but after a short hesitation, he went to the school council room.

He passed up to the highest room of the fourth floor, with such a route that he would not to be seen from the classrooms in which classes were now being held.

His ID card opened the door without any problems.

He was not absent for too long. Tatsuya did not feel particularly nostalgic, he just took his usual place and turned on the terminal.

He checked the status of current events, since Miyuki and others had promoted him to the School Board without much delay.

Working on cases that had nothing to do with his work, he didn't notice that the lunch break had begun.

Miyuki and the rest should come soon because they're having lunch.

Therefore Tatsuya thought this, but contrary to his expectations, Miyuki arrived even sooner than expected.

"Onii--, no, Tatsuya."

"Tatsuya-san?"

Miyuki was not alone. Both Honoka and Shizuku, who was not in the Student Council, and second years Izumi, Kasumi and Minami came to the school council room almost simultaneously.

"You can't say we haven't seen each other in a while, right?"

Today is Friday. Last time they met was near the gate of First High on Monday. He's doubtful that the greeting "Not seen for a long time" came to this occasion.

And for Miyuki this "long time not seen" was all the more unsuitable, because he communicates with her every evening.

"...You came to tell the school about today's press conference?"

Miyuki quickly recovered from the shock and gave an unexpectedly correct guess.

"Right. How did you guess?"

"Given the press conference, I thought it might be related to it..."

As Miyuki said, she was informed in advance about what will be told at today's press conference.

"Yes. I just talked to the principal. Although I declined to participate in the Dione project, the release from classes still remains in effect."

"That means... What were you going to do here?"

Not only Miyuki, but Honoka was also somewhat nervous. It seemed that they felt uncomfortable with his presence. Tatsuya had such an impression. The ones gathered in the school council room were Miyuki, Honoka, Shizuku, Izumi, Kasumi and Minami. All but Tatsuya, were girls. Maybe they were going to talk about something girly?

"No, this is... We were going to see the press conference here, Tatsuya."

"...Got it."

When Tatsuya held the press conference, classes were still going on.

Conscientious students could not watch it live.

Miyuki probably recorded the broadcast on the school board's server.

The channel associated with Magic news definitely had a contract to broadcast to the Magic Schools.

"Then I'll go to the library, call me when you go home."

Even Tatsuya was ashamed to watch his press conference on TV. As if running away from it, he hurried out of the school council room.

After school, Tatsuya met with his friends in the school cafeteria.

Not only with Miyuki and others whom he met in the school board room, but also with the rest of their regular company. Since he got here by car today, it was impossible to go to the habitual café, located on the way to school.

The students' views, directed at them from all sides, were annoying. But today they could make an exception.

The recording of the press conference was shown not only in the school board room. At lunchtime, the recording was also shown on the big screen in the dining room. Many students watched the recording on their personal information terminals. So everyone was interested.

"Tatsuya, I saw the conference."

Naturally, his friends also watched.

"Good job."

"Tatsuya-san, only you could think of that."

"I think it's really amazing. I'd have never thought of that before."

After Leo, this was said by Erika, Mizuki and Mikihiko. The reaction was more open among his former classmates than among the school board group.

Perhaps it was because they had no extra emotion.

"...Construction of a plant that generates energy using a Stellar Furnace? Tatsuya. Doesn't this have a simpler name, like an abbreviation?"

Leo asked something similar as Principal Momoyama. Perhaps many have thought about this.

"There is an unofficial abbreviation, 'Project ESCAPES'."

"Who's to escape? Where does the abbreviation come from?"

"Extract both useful and harmful Substances from the Coastal Area of the Pacific using Electricity generated by Stellar furnace. E from 'Extract', S from 'Substances', C and A from 'Coastal Area', P from 'Pacific', E from 'Electricity' and S from 'Stellar'. Altogether, ESCAPES. This translates to: 'Extraction of both useful and harmful substances from the coastal zone of the Pacific Ocean using the electricity produced by the Stellar Furnace.' "

"Ha-ha... I'm guessing you matched that word."

"Correct."

Leo, as usual, decided to show his uncharacteristic wit.

"Escape from what?"

"From military use."

Having heard the words of Tatsuya, before him the cheerfully smiling Leo made a serious face.

"...Really?"

Leo is a magician developed as a weapon with an improved body. He clearly realized that "escape from military use" is an "Escape from the fate of magicians compelled to be a weapon."

Not just Leo. Minami, who is also such a magician, of course, also understood this. The other members of the group also wore different expressions. In particular, the faces of Honoka, Kasumi and Izumi froze. These three were highly likely to have genes that had been modified in the generation of their fathers and grandfathers.

"Yes, that's right."

Tatsuya did not conceal this intention. Friends would understand it, so there was no reason to hide it.

"You have to succeed, no matter what it takes." Mikihiko said in a serious voice.

"It's going to be all right, it's Tatsuya-kun."

Erika tried to blow away the tense atmosphere, and cheer everyone up. Their expression softened when they heard her.

"Right. If it's Tatsuya-san, it's going to be all right."

"You said you had to choose a place. And when will the construction actually begin?"

After Honoka, whose speech not only expressed confidence, but was closer to religious belief, Mizuki asked about a specific schedule.

"The project has already started."

"Huh? Then what about school...?"

"Although my exemption has not changed, I plan to go back to school, when the situation will calm down a bit." With a slight smile Tatsuya answered the wide eyes of Mizuki.

"Is that so? Thank God..."

Honoka exaggerated her relief. This behavior caused all of them to smile.

"Tatsuya-san."

Tatsuya turned to Shizuku, sitting next to Honoka.

"What's that?"

"My father wants to meet you."

Kasumi rounded her eyes from Shizuku's words. It was easy to guess what she had mistakenly thought, but the real meaning was, of course, different.

"I think it's about the project."

"I got it. When can I come?"

Tatsuya immediately guessed that this was the work of Toudou.

But he did not show this, asking Shizuku with a serious expression on his face.

"He said he'd be happy to meet on Sunday."

"At what time specifically?"

"The exact time has not been assigned."

"In that case, how about I bother you around the afternoon, say, 1 o'clock?"

"I think that's going to be all right. I'll call you if the circumstances change."

"Yes, that's fine."

Thus, this simple coffee break accidentally became a significant event for Tatsuya.

As a result, Tatsuya didn't go to the villa in Izu, rather he went to the new house in Chofu.

Tomorrow he was to meet Edward Clark at the Kanto branch of the Magic Association, and the day after tomorrow he was going to visit Shizuku's house. So returning to Izu was ineffective.

This will be the first time Tatsuya stays overnight in the building in Chofu.

Miyuki was more excited about this fact than Tatsuya. No, to be more precise, Tatsuya did not worry at all. Miyuki was the one that worried.

"Tatsuya-sama, Miyuki-sama, sleep well."

"Yes, good night."

"Good night, Minami-chan."

The upper floor of the building was fully occupied by the residence of Tatsuya and Miyuki. Its structure was the same as that of an ordinary mansion, and it had several different rooms with separate entrances.

There were separate entrances to the rooms of Tatsuya and Miyuki, and a separate entrance to the room where Minami lived. ...In other words, Minami "changed her work" from "maid who lives in the employer's home" to "Maid on Demand".

In other words, it meant that Tatsuya and Miyuki would spend the night alone in their residence. For Miyuki this was a situation where she could not help but be excited.

"Onii-sama."

Miyuki changed Tatsuya to "Onii-sama" Ever since they got into the car, and only "they" were around.

But that didn't start today. Even in phone calls, she called him that.

She acted the same way she acted on the Saturday night at the villa in Izu.

For her, it was not something she was consciously aware of. As Miyuki said, it is more natural for her to call him "Onii-sama". Since that day, 5 years ago, in the summer, in Okinawa.

"Go to the bathroom first."

"Alright."

Miyuki advised him to go to the bathroom after Minami left, not because they were arguing with each other, but because she should be doing housework.

The bath was fully automated, from cleaning to filling it with hot water.

There was a similar bath in their old house. But in the new house, the automation was a step higher. You could take a bath without doing anything with your own hands. Tatsuya figured this out when he entered the bathroom.

For a moment Tatsuya seriously thought about whether or not it is necessary to just use the "human washing machine" (Fully automated shower cabin), because this bathroom corresponded to the luxurious layout of these apartments and was equipped with not only a huge bathroom, but also with an ample place to wash. As a result, he decided to wash in the traditional way.

But even if "Traditional" was said, everything around him was also automated.

"Shower."

After washing his hair it was not necessary to spend time looking at the shower head to touch it. After the voice command, the shower poured hot water.

When Tatsuya washed away the shampoo and stretched his hand behind the washcloth to wash his body, he felt something from behind, on the other side of the door to the bathroom, it was a sign of human presence.

He didn't feel any stress. Although his back was to the door, it was clear to him that it was Miyuki, as clearly as if he had seen her right in front of him.

"Onii-sama."

The one that was tense was Miyuki. Her voice was indecisive.

"What happened?"

He had absolutely no idea why she was here. No, he didn't understand the reason she talked to him while he was washing.

"...Let me wash your back."

(What?)

He had no difficulty in hearing what Miyuki said. But he couldn't understand. And he still didn't understand.

(Wash your back? Who? by whom?) It was very unusual that Tatsuya got confused by such superfluous thoughts.

"I'll wash your back."

Whether she lost her patience because no answer came, or she saw a chance in the absence of a refusal. Miyuki opened the door to the bathroom. Tatsuya strongly regretted not having locked the door.

But it was too late. Miyuki's steps were heard. Tatsuya couldn't look back. Luckily, he was able to quickly grab the towel hanging next to him. With the help of this he managed to hide the part below the waist.

It felt like Miyuki was very close. He did not know what she was doing now.

After thinking 'what if there was a mirror', Tatsuya hastily threw away that thought. There was one there, a mirror. Right in front of Tatsuya.

However, its surface was covered up by condensation. Tatsuya thought he was lucky for not having the habit of bathing in front of a mirror.

"Onii-sama, I beg your pardon..."

Miyuki's white hand stretched forward to the side of Tatsuya's head and grabbed a sponge. For an instant Miyuki's breasts touched his back. Thought Tatsuya was nervous, eventually he was relieved, when he realized that the touch was not bare skin, but from a towel.

A soaped sponge clung to his back. Not only the sponge though, the thin fingers of Miyuki also touched his back.



"Miyuki, why are you so suddenly...?" Tatsuya could no longer keep silent and asked without turning.

"Am I making you uncomfortable...?"

"No, there is no inconvenience."

In fact, he was very uncomfortable. But Tatsuya knew he didn't have to say that here.

"Thank God..."

Miyuki's voice, which sounded like she was concealing tears of joy, confirmed that there would be a great amount of trouble if he said something else.

"...But that's probably enough."

The fingers touching his back trembled a little.

"...Even if it's a little, but I want to be there for you."

Her voice also trembled with shame.

"We haven't been together lately... Is that a bad thing?" Miyuki whispered with a sweet voice. She whispered these affectionate words.

"...No." Tatsuya muttered, as he was wondered if she was being manipulated. Maybe it was someone's hobby, but the bath in the new house was 2 times longer than the usual bathrooms.

In this bathroom, Tatsuya and Miyuki now sat together. ...Back to back. Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki had the courage to turn their face.

But even if the bath was long, there was not enough space for two people to be in there at the same time. At the moment, Tatsuya is taller at 180 centimeters, while Miyuki is taller than the average women.

Moreover, Miyuki had long legs uncharacteristic for Japanese people.

When they entered the bath, they both took their towels off.

Even Tatsuya could not remain calm when the bare skin of their backs touched. And Miyuki's face was red not just because of the hot water.

"...Onii-sama. How long are you going to stay here?" Miyuki asked, attempting to make her voice sound the same as usual.

"I'm going back to Izu on Sunday night."

The voice of Tatsuya, on the contrary, was solid.

"You can still return to First High... Can't you?"

"I don't know how the USNA and the New Soviet Union will behave. I think we need to observe the current situation a little bit more first."

"That's true..." murmured Miyuki with unconcealed disappointment in her voice.

But she didn't say something selfish, like, "Come back soon."

"Can I... come visit you again in Izu?"

"Of course. I'll be happy to see you at any time, unless of course it hurts your studies."

"Well, Onii-sama. You sound like a parental guardian?"

"Isn't it natural for me as brother to be a guardian? Being a fiancée doesn't change that."

Miyuki unwittingly giggled from this inept joke by Tatsuya.

"Well, Onii-sama is the only one I can rely on."

"Leave it to me."

Miyuki's words contained an unpleasant undertone that she "cannot rely on her father", but Tatsuya pretended not to notice. Such care will only be painful for Miyuki.

"Sunday... Can I go with you to Shizuku's house?"

"Well... It would be better if you were was there."

Miyuki was a little surprised, because Tatsuya suddenly spoke in a serious voice.

"You mean... that I need to attend during your personal conversation with Shizuku's father?"

"...I am welcoming the first sponsor of my project, which can become the work of our entire life. I think it will be better if you come too."

The work of our whole life. Miyuki could not misunderstand the meaning of these words.

"All right, Onii-sama..."

Miyuki enthusiastically nodded and plunged under the water.

"Miyuki? Are you okay?"

Tatsuya timidly asked this, because the sensation of Miyuki's back, which previously had barely touched him, suddenly became a snug fit.

Miyuki tightly leaned her back against Tatsuya.

If this was intentional, it is already a little bit beyond what can be stopped with a simple smile.

But what if it wasn't intentional?

"...What do you mean with 'OK'...?"

The voice of Miyuki, answering the question of Tatsuya was softer.

...That's not good, Tatsuya thought, did Miyuki overheat in the hot water?

"Miyuki, you better get out of the water now."

"...That's true..."

In response to his warning, Miyuki only nodded and said this with a helpless voice. There was no sign of movement.

...What to do? Carry the naked Miyuki with his hands was really the last resort.

If he calls for help from Minami, then he must first get out of the bath.

In the current situation it will be quite difficult to get out of the bath without touching Miyuki's body. In addition, he feared that Miyuki could simply go under the water, if he were to remove his support.

Tatsuya, you might say, was confused.

As a result, it took him more than a minute before his mind came to the idea of pulling the water out of the bath.

...Fortunately, on this day neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki caught a cold from sitting in the hot water for too long.

Chapter 5

Edward Clark came to Japan and was met with a lot of reporters. The fuss was not like a diplomatic visit, but more similar to a private visit of a famous actor.

The reason for this was that Edward and Raymond did not even try to hide from the public. Rather, they, on the contrary, tried to raise the hype in the media.

But they did not give news organizations and such services a press conference or an interview, and as a result, under the protection of the police, they left the airport.

They went to the Embassy of the USNA. This could not be called strange, because Edward Clark is a member of the State institution.

Reporters and journalists knew about this, and most of them were standing behind them, looking at the shadow of the Government of the USNA in the back of Clark.

At 13:30 they flew from the embassy by helicopter, and at 13:50 arrived on the roof of the Bay Hills tower in Yokohama, where the Kanto branch of the Magic Association is located.

Tatsuya arrived at the Kanto branch of the Magic Association 5 minutes before the scheduled meeting time. Despite the fact that he was told that Edward Clark was waiting in the waiting room, he showed no haste.

Because he was forced to suddenly change his plans just a day ago. Initially, Tatsuya intended to let Clark wait about an hour.

But he still arrived on time... Perhaps he was much more attached to the notion of 'common sense' than he thought himself.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Shiba Tatsuya."

Tatsuya, who was brought to the meeting place by a branch employee (but not the one he met yesterday), spoke with Edward in Japanese.

Maybe it was childish behavior and to put up some form of resistance.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Edward Clark."

Unexpectedly, Edward greeted him in fluent Japanese.

"It is a great honor for me to meet you."

But Tatsuya did not lose the ability to speak and continued in what is to be considered in this case, an insolent conversation in Japanese.

By the way, using his peculiar memory, Tatsuya did "remember anything that he at least saw or heard once", he almost perfectly mastered not only the English language, but also the languages of most major countries.

"The same goes for me."

Edward, who answered without removing his smile, looked like a perfect liar, which did not fit his mediocre appearance.

His appearance in a neat suit and beautifully slicked blond hair, together with a standard figure that is not considered thick or thin standing 180 centimeters tall, created the impression that he is not a scientist or engineer, but a senior manager of a sales department. No, not even a private company salesman, but one for a government agency?

Undoubtedly, his appearance was not the only thing. Although Edward Clark was originally considered an engineer, the role he is now playing is exactly that.

Although Tatsuya was offered a chair, he sat on the couch without any hesitation. For the employees of the branch, this was of noticeable concern because of the presumptuous behavior of Tatsuya, but Edward, and for some reason, Raymond did not show a drop of anxiety and sat in front of him.

"I watched the press conference yesterday. Mr. Shiba, your energy plant project surprised me."

Edward was the first to speak.

"Thanks. But it is far below 'Project Dione' in terms of space and time. I think that this is a great project that I cannot complete in my entire lifetime."

"How humble."

Tatsuya's words were hard to understand, because they were filled with sarcasm.

He implicitly pointed out that magicians would be cut off from the human community both in time and in space for Project Dione. By the expression on Edward's face it was impossible to determine whether he understood this hint.

At least, the staff of the Magic Association, present as observers, looked as if they could not understand. If Edward was able to maintain his "Poker Face" after realizing this, then he is undoubtedly a villain.

"So the Stellar Furnace is a fusion reactor using Gravity Control Type magic? So you designed it for the use at the power plant?"

"Yes. The completed form will have a design that uses the sea water directly."

The expression on Edward's face moved slightly. It proved that he understood the hint of Tatsuya that "Therefore it cannot be used in outer space".

"...The construction of a power plant using the Stellar Furnace is certainly a significant project for Japan. But the terraforming of Venus is a hope for all mankind. I would like Mr. Shiba, having achieved numerous technological breakthroughs as Taurus Silver, to join the Dione project."

Whether Edward had lost his patience, or he had planned so from the beginning, but he suddenly voiced the main requirement.

"I think, after looking at the yesterday's press conference, you realized that I'm not Taurus Silver. But I don't have to tell you what you know already."

The last sentence of Tatsuya contained the sarcasm "You have studied the question with the help of Hliðskjálf, so you should know." The existence of this backdoor to Echelon III Tatsuya had heard of from Raymond. This fact must also be known by Edward.

"The glory of Taurus Silver comes from phenomenal achievements in the field of software. In other words, Mr. Shiba is the essence of Taurus Silver."

"Whatever the software is, without its hardware, it is just plain text. In the relationship between 'soft' and 'hard', there is no specific claim which is the main part and which is the secondary."

"That's not true. Hardware without a program is just an empty shell."

"However, the actual work is done by equipment."

Raymond poked his father in the side with his elbow, and Edward coughed unnaturally. Noticing that, Tatsuya took the conversation in a different direction, he tried to start from the beginning.

"...The team, called 'Taurus Silver', broke up yesterday, so I will refuse the request of their participation. Instead, I would like to ask you here again. Mr. Shiba, would you take part in the Dione project?"

"I'm sorry, but yesterday I already took responsibility for the project of the energy plant using the Stellar Furnace. If you hadn't asked for Taurus Silver's participation from the very beginning, and had you went to me at once, I had an option to leave the project of the plant to other people... I can only say that this is bad luck. I'm sorry, but you'd better retreat."

Tatsuya responded with a clear rejection of Edward Clark's demand right before the staff of the Magic Association.

After that, a series of similar questions and answers happened between Edward and Tatsuya, but eventually Edward could not convince Tatsuya. Edward knew that Tatsuya would not agree. But he miscalculated that he could not even put Tatsuya in a disadvantaged position, and take any advantage of him.

"I knew that the usual methods would not help... But I did not expect such a stubborn stance."

"Dad, what are you going to do now?"

Now these two were in the hotel room provided by the Embassy of the USNA. The two rooms next door had bodyguards. This could be called an unprecedented case where the staff of the organization associated with the government were treated as VIPs. It proved once again that Edward Clark is not a simple engineer.

"Perhaps this goal cannot be achieved peacefully."

Edward was not going to ask what his son thought.

"I think killing is the last resort."

Raymond showed no attempt to morally evade the possibility of his father dirtying his hands with evil deeds.

The lack of secrets between them may have been due to good relations between son and father, but from a side of human upbringing, their relations differed greatly from the social standards. Perhaps Edward believed that, in general, that moral aspect could be ignored the moment he gave Raymond Hliðskjálf.

"But we have to consider this option if we cannot neutralize him with the help of the Dione project."

For Edward, the purpose of the Dione project was not to develop Venus and make resettlement there a possibility, which is possible if Venus is to be terraformed. The real goal was to completely neutralize Shiba Tatsuya. And therefore neutralizing the Strategic Class Magic

"Material Burst".

"But, like you said, it's a last resort. Tomorrow I'll give an interview on TV. The public opinion of the Japanese should be ignited."

"And looking at the result of this, we can come up with our next move?"

"That's right, Raymond."

"Dad?"

Raymond saw Edward frown after he nodded, so he turned to him.

"The New Soviet Union may decide on the power approach, without waiting for the plan regarding public opinion to be triggered..."

Edward was concerned about what step the New Soviet Union would make, and, more precisely, what Igor would do.

"If their 'power approach' ends halfway, then Shiba Tatsuya can get the data for a counterattack. So I want you to be careful for a while..."

"Would you like to study this question using Hliðskjálf?"

Edward shook his head after hearing the suggestion of Raymond.

"Rumors say that the New Soviet Union built a system of reverse detection in opposition to Echelon III. I do not think that they will be able to catch on to Hliðskjálf, but... We must not risk ruining the current cooperating relationship with Igor."

"I got it, dad."

Raymond seemed disappointed, but still agreed with Edward's protest.

"So I'm free tomorrow?"

"Don't go too far. Right, just in case, tell me, what are you going to do?"

"I think I'm going to visit Tear."

"Tear? Ah, the daughter of the Kitayama family?"

Edward briefly paused, counting the advantages and disadvantages of deepening ties with the relatives of the owner of the "Hokuzan group", known even in the USNA.

"...Why not? You can go."

"Yes, I got it."

Raymond went into his bedroom with a brisk step. He was probably going to call Shizuku. Edward gave his son a glance with a smile.

On Sunday, a meeting between Tatsuya and Shizuku's father, Kitayama Ushio, ended in a short time and in a peaceful atmosphere.

Help from Ushio for "Project ESCAPES" confirmed the words of Toudou Aoba about his connections. And Toudou did not force him to do it. Providing magicians with non-military jobs corresponded with the wishes of Ushio.

At the current stage it was still early to talk about the costs of construction and operation, so today Tatsuya finished with explaining the details of the project to Ushio, which he did not tell at the press conference.

"I heard a lot of interesting things. This has been a useful time."

Ushio in an elevated mood helped Tatsuya and Miyuki to the exit from the living room.

"If the energy of the Stellar Furnace will serve not only for the production of hydrogen, but also for the extraction of lithium, cobalt and uranium, it would be quite profitable. There are companies in our group that are looking for resource collection from sea water, so I'm thinking of letting you look at their research material."

"Thank you."

Although the knowledge and reasoning of Tatsuya in Magic Engineering were at the highest level, his knowledge of the industry, after all, was at the level of a regular student. The production secrets that will make a profit from the extraction of resources are what Tatsuya wanted to learn the most. The firm promise of comprehensive cooperation with Ushio was a huge step forward for Tatsuya.

"Oji*, can we see Shizuku?"

[Polite appeal to a middle-aged man. Something like "Uncle " (not the one that's a relative).]

The fact that friends of his daughter came to ask for help together greatly softened the attitude of Ushio. As expected by Tatsuya, (or it would be better to say "as he planned"), the presence of Miyuki proved useful.

"My daughter will be happy if you do."

Ushio smiled widely, responding to the request of Miyuki to meet with Shizuku.

"Mr."

At this point in their conversation, a kind maid wedged in.

"What is it?"

"Shizuku-Oujosama currently has a guest."

"A guest...? Yes, now that I think about it, I've heard something like that."

"That's not a problem. Then maybe another time."

"That's not a problem."

After hearing about the visitor, Miyuki tried to abstain modestly, but Ushio stopped this.

"...This guest is a student whom Shizuku met while studying abroad...

Yesterday he suddenly said he wanted to meet. It sounded absurd, and I already wanted to give up, but I couldn't do it because he said he was going back to his country soon. He is relevant to you, this guy. So I thought you'd be aware of the situation."

"...A person who is relevant to me?" After hearing the words of Ushio, Tatsuya asked instead of Miyuki.

"This guy's name is Raymond Clark."

With the information network of the owner of a large group of companies, he should know the meaning of the surname "Clark".

Tatsuya finally understood what Ushio meant

"All right, Oji. We'll meet them." Bowing down, Miyuki answered.

"Understood. You, take them to my daughter's room." Ushio immediately commanded the maid.

Everything went as smoothly as if it was a pre-made scenario.

Shizuku met Raymond not in her room, but in the tearoom.

The door of the tea room was open. Although there was a servant nearby, Ushio would not allow her daughter to stay alone in a closed room with a guy around the same age. Although it could be an order from Shizuku's mother.

"Shizuku, I'm sorry for the intrusion."

"Ah, Miyuki..."

Hearing the voice from the hallway, Shizuku turned to the door. Was it just their imagination that she looked relieved?

"Raymond Clark. Sorry about the intrusion."

"Shiba Tatsuya... Yes, come in."

Raymond was stunned by the invasion of Miyuki and Tatsuya, but after Tatsuya called him, he answered with a smile.

"Yesterday we could not communicate easily. It's a good thing we met."

Raymond switched his attention to Tatsuya.

"You wanted to talk to me?"

Isn't he here for the courtship of Shizuku? Tatsuya thought, but he was also interested in what Raymond would say, so he sat in front of him. Shizuku, sitting opposite to Raymond, moved to a place on the side of the table before Tatsuya answered Raymond.

Miyuki sat between Tatsuya and Shizuku.

"I wanted to hear your opinion."

Ignoring Miyuki, Raymond answered Tatsuya.

"Listen, Tatsuya."

Raymond easily called Tatsuya as if they were friends. Well, at least it was better than using embarrassing names like "God of Destruction" (The Destroyer), so Tatsuya decided to keep quiet.

"...The project of the energy plant with the Stellar Furnace... Uh, does it have a simpler name?"

"You would already know if you did your research."

"You've already researched this with Hliðskjálf," there was a hint of sarcasm in Tatsuya's answer to Raymond's question.

"Even if I understood, I did not have time to watch the press conference."

Raymond sulked and looked. Tatsuya was not amused to look at the inflated face of a guy, and he easily told him about the name of project ESCAPES.

"Project ESCAPES? I mean... Okay."

Raymond stopped his question because he intuitively realized that instead of "escapes", Tatsuya gives more meaning to the word "escape".

"Are you seriously planning on working on Project ESCAPES?"

"Everyone's asking me that." Tatsuya declared, looking tired.

"Project ESCAPES is not a simple excuse to avoid Project Dione.

The first thing to consider is that this project was invented before you wanted to terraform Venus." He answered Raymond with a voice in which there was not a single drop of friendliness.

"It is cruel to call it... an invention."

"So you really want to terraform Venus?"

Raymond, who tried to object to Tatsuya, was cornered with this new question.

"Real resettlement will be possible not after just 10 or 20 years. The elapsed time will be measured in centuries. It will be necessary to invest money and efforts for many generations. I don't think the USNA has any motives to take this huge project seriously. No, not just the USNA. I do not think there is single country with enough motivation on this planet. If anyone can take on such a grandiose project, then only the world government could, right? I think that's the way it is."

"...The plan of settling on Mars is also advancing as an age-old project."

"It is only planned. The methods of movement are not even defined yet."

"Don't you think that such a grandiose project is just to force the creation of a world government?"

After seeing the situation worsen, Raymond changed his selection of arguments.

"If we forcibly unite the world, the usual wars will only turn into a civil war."

But even this ended with another argument from Tatsuya.

"...Doesn't Tatsuya have a dream?"

"I only prefer dreams that can be realized."

Even after this pretext, Raymond's heart remained steadfast.

"But then there will no longer be any romance."

But Raymond did not have the spirit for this. It seems that the words of Tatsuya will only be something "holy" to him, something that Raymond cannot yield to.

"When it can be done, it ceases to be a dream. But when you do not know whether it will be realized or not, it can be called a dream."

"You're a romantic. Does this mean that Project Dione is only a romance for you that neglects the possibility of failure?"

"A man of magic, with the power of thought, will fly into space. Isn't that romantic?"

"Why should I be responsible for that?"

"...Huh?"

Raymond froze with surprise on his face.

"To go into space by using magic. I'm not against this dream. But this is your dream? There's no reason for me to help."

"This is..."

"The reason you want to tie me to Project Dione is not for chasing that dream. This is based on more realistic calculations."

"... I got it. Then let's talk about realistic things."

It seemed that Raymond had already lost the dispute, but he showed an unexpected persistence.

"Thanks to the development of the ocean, we can sustain the current capacity of the Earth for some time. But the limits of the earth are finite. Even if they will be expanded, but one day the final limits will be reached, which cannot withstand the growth of the population of mankind."

"I do not deny such a future."

"In this case, space exploration is a reality that we should not turn away from just because it is difficult! For humanity to continue its prosperity, we must go into space as long as we still have the strength to do so."

"Why will space exploration be the solution to population growth?"

"Huh...?"

Raymond now had an expression on his face, indicating that he did not understand completely.

"...But isn't that a solution? The land has a limitation of capacity, so you need to go beyond that land..."

Raymond was perplexed to argue with a confused voice.

"Space also has a limited space."

"Is... Maybe it is. But..."

"And space suited for human life is even more limited."

" ..."

"Even the exploration of space cannot escape these limits. Humankind can only delay the time before we hit these limits."

"...These are empty excuses."

"If we only extend the time to reach these limits, we must work on what we can already do."

"...This is sophistry with extreme arguments! Space has no real limits! With Magic, humanity will endlessly conquer new frontiers!"

"However, the goal of the ESCAPES project is not to respond to population growth."

" ..."

"I'll complete the Stellar Furnace and implement the plant to reach my goal. You strive into space to reach your goal. If that's your real goal."

Without finding the words to refute this, Raymond slowly stood up with the face of the defeat.

"Tear, I'm sorry. I'm going to go."

"Okay."

"...Tatsuya. We'll never let you escape."

"I'm not going to let you catch me."

"I would like to see the day when you regret these words. ...All right, Tear. I'll see you again."

Raymond, while leaving, only looked towards Shizuku.

"... Yes. Ray, I'll see you later."

Sadly smiling after he answered Shizuku, he went out through the door that was left open.

In the tea room, though there was no oppressive mood, an unpleasant residue remained. To change the atmosphere together with the air, Shizuku asked the maid to open the window.

Using the remote control, she turned on the TV. It was also to change the mood, but the transmission, which was shown by TV, could give the reverse effect.

"Shizuku, leave it, please." Tatsuya stopped Shizuku, who wanted to switch the channel.

Edward Clark's interview on the screen continued.

"...Thus, if we talk about the true significance of the use of magic for the future of people, it should be used for the exploration of space."

Edward on TV spoke English, but his speech was synchronously duplicated with subtitles.

"I believe that the Magic thermonuclear reactor is a wonderful invention. But it should be used in places where it is difficult to replenish fuel reserves, and sunlight is unstable. For example, on the moons of Jupiter. It will be able to produce electricity steadily even when the satellite is going into the shadow of Jupiter because of its circulation around it."

"The period between the Ganymede circulation is only 7 days.

Even the Callisto one is a little less than 17 days." Tatsuya muttered in an ironic tone. Of course, his voice did not reach the place that was on the other side of the TV screen.

"The development of the ocean can be carried out by other technologies, not using magic. The necessary power for industry can be achieved by using the electricity generated by oceanic solar power plants and geothermal sources. A rare talent, called magic, should be used for more meaningful purposes."

"He almost says the same things we just heard, isn't it?"

In the voice of Miyuki with which she asked Tatsuya, there was no irony or aversion, but only naïve simplicity.

"Maybe it's because they're father and son?"

"Father and son?"

Shikoku looked a little amazed.

"I have not confirmed it through third-party official agencies, but there are no mistakes."

"That means how..."

"Shizuku, did you not know? Didn't you have a welcoming party at their home or something like that when you were an exchange student?"

The Tatsuya's question was based on the prejudice that in America, compared to Japan, they arranged parties at home a lot more often.

"Ray didn't have a party at his home."

Truthfully, Shizuku was often called for parties during her exchange studies. But America does not seem to be different from Japan in that it all depends on the particular family and the particular person, how much the parent will interfere in the relationship of their child with his friends.

"I would like Shiba Tatsuya-san to take part in our project in order to open the future for mankind. I hope so."

Speaking on TV, Edward emphasized public principles. Tatsuya, who knew his true motives, grinned at hearing these words.

Chapter 6

As of 2097, from the ten research institutes that were used for the development of magicians' abilities, located at different locations across the country, that were open in the 2030s, half are still working and the other half are closed. However, three of the five officially closed laboratories continue to work, having changed their name and their superiors.

Built in Nara, the former Ninth laboratory (the former Ninth Institute for the Development of Magicians' abilities) also continued the study of magic as the "Ninth Laboratory for the development of magic", a private research institute co-financed by the families Kudou, Kuki and Kuzumi.

Officially the ninth laboratory explores Perception-Type Magic, which is slower in comparison to magic that changes phenomena.

The study of magic related to Perception-Type is not a lie. But the research is not limited to this.

One of the products of their research, created by the present ninth laboratory, are the parasitic dolls, that troubled Tatsuya last summer.

This humanoid weapon in the form of an automatic doll-gynoid, which has magical power by sealing the parasite in an independent information body that has a human mind.

Despite the fact that the parasites were frozen prior to the actual commissioning due to inept use during the tests, their effectiveness is assessed as sufficient to be used in real combat. That's why they are dormant, and not disposed of. The parasites in the dormant state are still kept in the ninth laboratory.

Sunday evening, June 2, 2097.

A man's silhouette approached the warehouse of the ninth laboratory in which the parasite dolls were stored. In the dim light of the emergency lights was an enchanting, divinely, diabolical beauty, who at first sight did not completely belong in this world, appeared.

Although Kudou Minoru was a guy of inhuman beauty from the very beginning, in the darkness of the night, human nature filled mystery, and it manifested in the essence that belonged to the "Man" category.

Minoru opened the warehouse door. He didn't use magic or hack into the system. Why do something like that when you have a key? He borrowed this key in advance from the Development management department.

Minoru entered the vault. Inside the room there was air conditioning, but it was cold and dry.

There wasn't any atmosphere of mystery. Minoru, who belongs to the magicians of Nine, whose magic is a hybrid of ancient and modern mages, was also able to use Mental Interference Magic and could feel Pushion waves. He could not see the pushions themselves by having special eyes like Mizuki, but could recognize the waves created by Pushions.

If he put this feeling together with his real feelings, it could be called that "he could distinguish them as a rumor."

And Minoru could not feel the activity of pushion waves at the moment. This was proof that the parasites, that is, the Phantom Monsters, which are the basis of the Parasite Dolls, have now been recorded in an idle, dormant state.

(Can I be healthy if I eat them?)

("Swallowing' one will suffice. Part of the body will inevitably be changed by the parasite, but in 'my' * case the person should not be damaged.")

[Zhou uses "I" in the third person when talking to Minoru.]

The knowledge of Zhou Gongjin responded to a question in his mind.

Minoru swallowed the ghost of Zhou Gongjin using a loyalty spell intended to enslave parasites. The loyalty spell is "subordination", not "unification". Because of its nature, the Phantom of Zhou Gongjin was added to the consciousness of Minoru in the form of a second consciousness.

Minoru felt a feeling that such a consciousness was added, more precisely he felt his consciousness was connected with a personal adviser or a disembodied AI helper.

(... Part of the body?)

("According to the American army, a body for communication was added to the brain.")

"If you do something like that, wouldn't that hurt?"

("I cannot guarantee that it is absolutely safe. But 'I' often suffer from physical deterioration because I cannot control psions, keeping them within the permissible range of the body. Parasites are able to control Psions better, so parasitism can completely eliminate body problems.")

(In that case, should I study the Psion control technique better?)

("In theory this is possible. But your body may not be able to withstand this training.")

Minoru bit his lip. This was not the first time the last part of this discussion was had.

The added consciousness (perhaps more appropriately called this "advanced intellect") only responds to questions posed by him, so it will not say something like "You are talking about that again?". Without the concept of repetition, when he unwittingly repeated the same questions, he received the same answers.

After all, with only the usual effort, Minoru still could not play an active role in the important events taking place. And his body does not allow for him to be sufficient enough, so some "unusual" effort can be used to overcome these shortcomings. Minoru realized that his shortcomings cannot be overcome by effort alone.

That's why he came here tonight. Here, there was a way to free him from the shortcomings of his body. It was not difficult to wake up the sleeping parasite, and let him take possession of it. He had no experience, but he knew that it was possible without problems. The knowledge accumulated by the ninth laboratory, and the

"advanced intellect" told Minoru that it is possible.

Now it was only to make a decision. Minoru only had to decide. To decide to stop being human or retain his humanity.

How long has he been standing here motionless? Minoru, who had turned in to a sculpture of a handsome guy, slightly migrated, and once again became a man.



Minoru turned around. He left the room and closed the door.

After this decision to turn away, the ghost said nothing. The Advanced intelligence only answers what he's asked.

Minoru did not ask the ghost whether his choice was right to turn around and leave.

After Edward Clark spoke on TV, he went home, formally thanking the Magic Association, together with his son.

They arrived at the Los Angeles International Airport at 6 a.m. local time. Edward returned to his office for the first time since his absence at 14 o'clock.

Edward had no superiors at the California branch of the National Science Agency. Even the director of the branch didn't know what Edward was doing. He had a separate personal cabinet and full freedom to act on his own.

Initially, these were measures to ensure that the secret of Echelon III did not leak to the rest of the staff. But now everything has changed so that these privileges are given to advance the countermeasures against the Japanese intercontinental Strategic Class magic.

"Is it 7 am there...?"

Edward's muttering was an unconscious monologue. The work alone in this office must have had a detrimental effect, but he himself did not realize it. Perhaps it was a habit, tied to this office, because in other places it was not noticed.

"Should I wait a little longer? No..."

Perhaps it was kind of ritual for him to order his thoughts.

Edward threw away his indecision and headed for the communication device. It looked like a regular videophone, but it was a phone with a limited number of communication points, and a built-in interception prevention system using the capabilities of the Echelon III system.

The selected communication route sent a call to the New Soviet Union.

One of the rooms in the far branch of the Academy of Sciences of the New Soviet Union in Vladivostok. It is not necessary to say that the interlocutor was Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazzoff.

"Good morning, doctor."

"Good morning. No, it's daytime for you, isn't it?"

As far as the videophone could show, the drowsiness on the face of the image was not visible.

"I'm sorry about this early hour."

"If you choose a suitable time for me, then you will have a late night. So I don't mind. You have an urgent case, don't you?"

"It's not a very urgent matter, I just thought I should talk to you quickly."

"I'm listening to you."

The soft and good face of the sociable man, who at the beginning of the conversation was made by Igor, now became firm.

"You should already know."

The expression on Edward's face was also firm, but not just serious, but expressing a deeper meaning.

"The Japanese magician of Strategic Class, Shiba Tatsuya, refused to participate in Project Dione and responded to it with his project."

"Yes, I know. I watched the press conference live."

Damn it, this thought surfaced in Edward's head. There was no problem that he was interested in the press conference of Shiba Tatsuya. It's amazing that he watched it live. He should have taken into account that the content of yesterday's press conference was already known to him.

Igor may have already begun to prepare his own countermeasures.

Thinking that perhaps it was too late, Edward took off his mask of calm on his face and was going to continue the conversation.

"A power plant using the Stellar Furnace, a thermonuclear reactor that uses a sequence of gravitational control. Quite an attractive plan. So much so that I even want to offer a joint research."

But Edward was a little late. He received a heavy blow from this comment.

"Oh, please don't make that face. It was a joke."

"Doctor, you are an evil man..."

Edward could not conceal his traces of alarm, though he knew that it was only a ploy of Igor to seize the initiative.

"I beg your pardon. However, the fact that the energy plant project is attractive is an undeniable reality. Now it will be even harder to expel Shiba Tatsuya into the orbit of Jupiter, right?"

"I don't think the Dione project will be stopped. I favor the pressure of our government to ensure that the Japanese government does not approve the construction of the power plant. Or you can make an accident happen at the built plant. In any case, I would like you, doctor, to continue cooperation with us on Project Dione."

"Hmm..." Igor made a pensive face. "Actually, I was going to neutralize the Strategic Class Magic 'Material burst' in a more, so to say, direct way..."

"Doctor!"

"But if Mr. Clark insists, I'll observe for a while."

"...Many thanks."

As expected, Edward thought, feeling relieved. He was afraid that Igor would make a mistake by taking such rash measurements. If his attack is successful, there will be no problems. If Igor destroys Shiba Tatsuya, the USNA will be very grateful.

However, if it fails.

Perhaps Igor was sure that he will not leave traces of his involvement, but he is a Strategic Class Magician, known to the world. Clark himself would also be suspected if Shiba Tatsuya claimed that he had discovered that he had been cooperating in the attack.

Not only the New Soviet Union will be suspected. People all over the world know that Igor was the first to support Project Dione. Charges of attempted murder may follow, and the project will collapse.

Edward put off all his affairs and called to avoid this.

"But, Mister."

But the speech of Igor is not over yet.

"If it becomes impossible to drag Shiba Tatsuya into Project Dione, our country will choose its course of solving this problem. Alternatives cannot be excluded to eliminate the threat of the conversion of mass to energy."

It was obvious, and without any further clarification, that the "alternate option", which was spoken of by Igor, was the use of the Strategic Class Magic "Tuman Bomba".

A bout of stiff coughing attacked Edward because he had a parched throat. He hastened to drink the mineral water from the bottle.

"... Sorry. In order for something to happen, I will give the necessary orders immediately."

"I hope so too."

The face of Igor disappeared from the monitor. The link was interrupted from the other side. With a strong impatience, Edward extended his hand to another telephone.

On Tuesday, when chairman Tomitsuka Hitsui returned from lunch to her office in the Kyoto branch of the Magic Association, she was visited by an MFA employee.

"...Are you asking the Magic Association to exert pressure on the Yotsuba family!?"

"You can understand that."

"That's impossible!"

Hitsui screamed, forgetting the rules of decency.

"The Magic Association has no authority to give magicians orders to 'Do that' or 'don't do that'!"

The words of Hitsui were not a lie to avoid the responsibility. The Magic Association is a magicians-assisted organization, not an organization that controls magicians.

"But it has a strong authority among the magicians. The International Magic Association can even form disciplinary units acting above the law."

"This is only possible for the limited purpose of preventing the use of nuclear weapons! The Japanese Magic Association has no such influence to discourage the financial activity of a magician as a private person!"

"Is that so?" the MFA employee asked in a serious tone.

"Yes, it is!"

Apparently, this man was not familiar with magicians, so Hitsui firmly emphasized her opinion to persuade him.

"In addition, Magicians of the Ten Master Clans are stronger than the Magic Association. Even if the association organizes a disciplinary unit, it will not be able to force the Yotsuba family to obey."

"But the Ten Master Clans are not a monolithic structure?"

This was an erroneous argument, so the stress of Hitsui only doubled from these words of the man from the MFA.

"Do you propose to provoke an internal conflict in the Ten Master Clans!?"

"'Provoke' is an inappropriate expression. We don't want something like personal quarrels between friendly magicians. I just wondered if the true meaning of autonomy as an organization was not to constrain its members from the inside but to restrain them from getting out of control?"

"The Magic Association does not manage the Ten Master Clans!"

Hitsui felt a dull pain at the top of her stomach, but tolerated it and zealously objected.

"We think otherwise. From an objective point of view, the one with greatest influence on the community of magicians, aren't those calling themselves the 'Ten Master Clans', but the Magic Association."

But the interlocutor did not want to listen to her.

"So, I sincerely count on you."

Having said these words in the end, the MFA employee stood up.

Hitsui, the remaining one in the office of the Chairman, was covered with cold sweat and felt nausea, and could not tolerate the increasing pain, and grabbed her stomach.

It is not necessary to say that the Japanese government began to obstruct Project ESCAPES because it was asked by the Government of the USNA. To date, the Japanese government has seen no benefit from the extraction of marine resources.

In the past, similar projects ended in complete failure, so they were skeptical about it in terms of feasibility and cost-effectiveness. They emphasized that there should be no such weakness in diplomacy and the economy.

However, the response of the business community was different.

"Kitakata-san, it seems that you have decided to participate in this Business project without hesitation."

Kitakata was a commercial alias for Kitayama Ushio. These were the kind of good manners in business circles, when even at informal meetings they would call each other by their aliases, if they have one.

But there were many exceptions when only real names could be used at official events of the government and the municipality.

"As expected from Muromachi-san. You learned quickly."

"Muromachi", to whom Ushio replied, was not his real name either.

Although the business of his interlocutor was inferior to the "Hokuzan group" of Ushio in scale, this man was the actual owner of a group of companies, coming from a family business with a long tradition. In the financial world he was a big brother to Ushio .

"Have you already invested in this project? What can it be connected to?" Another businessman familiar with him spoke to him from the other side of the table.

"You already know so much. Iwata-san, who did you hear that from?"

"Yes so... from different people."

On both of Ushio and Iwata's faces, at the same time, wide smiles surfaced. Iwata, unlike Muromachi, is the owner of company that rivals Ushio's competing group, and their recent relationship was to fight for major foreign transactions. But there were no signs of enmity between them.

"It's not that I'm hiding it. Shiba-kun is my daughter's classmate."

"Yes, if you think about it, your daughter goes to the National Magic University Affiliated First High School."

"So you're in a friendly relationship with him?"

This was asked not by Muromachi or Iwata, but by another person on the opposite side. Although Ushio met with Tatsuya on the issue of the project only the day before yesterday, the news about it has spread everywhere.

Looks like Toudou Aoba deliberately spread rumors. Ushio thought when he politely answered the question.

Even if you hear about a new business that is seemingly profitable, it is difficult to make a decision to invest money in it alone. However, when the business already has a major sponsor, you will want to participate in it. For the major players of the financial world present here, the cost of the construction of one plant is at the level of "Well let's try and see what happens."

"If it's not difficult for you, Kitakata-san, could you introduce him to me?"

When one person raised this issue, with a slight lag from the rest to the side, Ushio got the same request.

It was not bad for Ushio that the number of investors would increase.

Risks can be divided as more and more people participate in the business, because it is possible to divide it so that each participant is dependent on something of their own. And as a result, the weight of the voice of each project participant increases.

"I'll tell Tatsuya-kun about your requests."

Ushio answered all with a smile, when the meeting was coming to an end.

Having received an order to appear in the office of the Commander after a day training, Lina was gloomy mentally. Yes, only mentally.

She almost made a face that showed that she hated orders.

When she was last summoned to the commander's office, the order was to accompany Edward Clark, as a result she learned the secret of the dark side of the USNA's army, which she should not know about.

Lina was disheartened by the fact that she could again receive a mission with a similar disappointing end.

But she could not say that she wanted to stop taking orders. Neither betrayal nor desertion was an option for Lina.

"Ben! You've been summoned by the Commander?"

"You too, Commander-in-chief?"

Lina began to get a bad feeling. Summoning both Lina and Canopus at the same time was not uncommon, although when she was given the order to accompany Clark, Lina, on the contrary, was alone. In the case of Jiedo Heigu (Gu Jie) Lina was ordered to stay and give the work of Canopus.

Even if she was expecting a mission in which she would not be able to show a decent result, but provided Canopus is there, it is likely that he will help her if a difficult moment arises.

So the fact that she was called together with Canopus was a good circumstance for Lina.

But, for some reason, this time she was not able to suppress a sinister premonition. Isn't it because the mission is expected to be heavy if both she and Canopus were to be sent together? She could not get rid of such thoughts.

"Major Angelina Sirius has arrived."

"Major Benjamin Canopus arrived."

"Enter." The voice of the base Commander, Colonel Walker, was heard from behind the door.

Lina beat Canopus, and she opened the door. The next moment Lina froze when she saw a superior officer, who was not supposed to be here.

"Colonel Balance...?" A stunned Lina muttered, but she quickly regained composure, and entered the Commander's office and vigorously saluted. Canopus entered immediately after Lina and stood beside her. Colonel Walker went up and saluted them in return.

"At ease." Walker said this to these two and sat back on the chair.

Balance, in the meantime, stood motionless on the side of the table.

"Major Sirius, Major Canopus, this is a special case, and I want to hear the opinion of both of you."

"Opinion?"

"Yes. Having heard the opinion of each of you, I want to decide whether it is worth to entrust the Stars with this mission."

Having heard the words of Walker, Lina and Canopus unwittingly looked at each other. As Walker said, this was a special occasion. It is normal to ask the opinion of subordinates during strategy preparation.

But when the goal is already known, the means of achieving this goal are asked. And the question of whether or not to carry out the mission at all is usually solved at a higher level, and there should be no exceptions to this rule.

"I think you already know that the magician who, on October 31, 2095, used Japan's Strategic Class Magic, the day we call 'Scorched Halloween', is a young man named Shiba Tatsuya."

Lina and Canopus at the same time returned to Walker a positive response.

"Did you know that Shiba Tatsuya rejected the proposal of the National Scientific Agency and launched a new project?"

"I know." Canopus answered. Lina also knew that Tatsuya refused to participate in the Dione project, but did not know the details.

"It's an energetic plant with a Stellar Furnace based on a Gravity Control-Type Magic Sequence. If this plan is implemented, the resource industry of our country will again receive a strong blow."

Oil, coal and nuclear plants were greatly damaged when energy sources switched from fossil fuels to solar, wind, geothermal, and biofuels. But by going into the sphere of biofuels, which requires a vast amount of land, as well as by developing small reactors for areas with low solar activity, they managed to restore their positions and live to the present time.

"...In addition, with the development of magic controlling nuclear fission and blocking radiation, the people's rejection of nuclear energy has decreased compared to the last century. For the most part, the decline in nuclear power was due to rising uranium prices and the high cost of the magicians needed to counter accidents. Nuclear weapons were sealed and the withdrawal of plutonium for civilian use was carried out."

"...Even if you do not pay attention to the circumstances in the industrial area, it will be inconvenient for our country if we cannot neutralize Shiba Tatsuya with the help of Project Dione."

This cannot be? , Lina thought.

"In this regard, the general staff thought that it is necessary to arrange a diversion at Shiba Tatsuya's plant. The view was also expressed that the threat of a presumably intercontinental range of the Strategic Class Magic 'Material Burst' would be eliminated if Shiba Tatsuya could be eliminated at this stage."

Worst case scenario, Lina thought.

She did not know the details, but as far as she had heard, Tatsuya's project was to build a commercial plant.

And to help their entrepreneurs, they want to destroy his plant.

Although this would be very difficult, but the true goal seems to be the assassination of Shiba Tatsuya. Since when did the Stars become a group of killers like the mafia?

"Major Sirius, Major Canopus, what do you think?"

"Colonel, let me express my opinion!"

Instead of answering Walker's question, Lina asked for permission to answer. It wasn't because she kept calm. Just the opposite. As she had the feeling that her head was about to boil, she tried to restore the lost self-control, deliberately observing military discipline.

"Authorized." Walker made no remark about this and just gave Lina permission.

"I'm against it. Although the magic of converting mass into energy is certainly a threat, but Shiba Tatsuya is a man from a union country and is not hostile to our country. To kill him only because he poses a potential threat are like the methods of the Mafia. I believe that the army should not dirty their hands with murders of this nature."

"I'm against it, Colonel."

"Major Canopus, you too?"

Walker listened to Lina's opinion with a stone face, but when Canopus also objected, Walker's face flashed astonishment.

"Yes. I do not think that even the diversion at the plant itself is a good idea, let alone the pros and cons of murder. Yes, the energy industry can be temporarily hit. However, the supply of cheap hydrogen fuel, extracted from sea water, can improve the lives of the citizens of our country. Actions against Tatsuya should not be murder or interference of his activities. Wouldn't it be better instead to ask him to provide our country with the know-how of a thermonuclear reactor?"

"...Do you think that we should not hinder him, but ask him?"

"Confirmed. Since the military will be used in certain areas for commercial purposes, the energy industry would be affected badly because the army would prevent it. I do not deny the aspects of the interdependence of the army and the economy, but a certain 'brake' is still needed."

"Colonel Walker, may I offer my opinion too?" said Balance, standing on the side of Commander Walker's desk.

"Please." Walker willingly allowed her. At least it looked like that.

"Thanks. I do not know what to say about the principal views of Major Sirius, but I believe that the opinion of Major Canopus is worth considering."

Lina was shocked by these words and though Balance noticed this, she ignored it.

Turning to Walker, she continued to express her opinion.

"There is one delicate side to the evaluation of Stars by people who are not magicians. If the Stars act in the interests of a specific company, or a particular industry, even if people would only think we are doing so, there is a fear that there will be intense opposition from other industries and consumer organizations."

"But can't we just sabotage it in strict secrecy?"

"The enemy is also quite capable. It would be unrealistic to conduct a diversion at the plant without leaving any clues."

Walker had to recognize what Balance said. It is almost impossible to carry out a large-scale sabotage on the plant so that it does not attract public attention.

When it is possible to investigate the traces of the caused damage, there is always a limit to what makes it look like an accident. The main prerequisite for preparing a crime against someone else's military force is to ensure that they will not be able to examine the evidence in detail.

You can, of course, escape from the punishment, pretending that you do not know anything, but the spreading of rumors cannot be avoided. In terms of the fact that there will be a minimum amount of clues, killing one person, Tatsuya, was much simpler.

"...So your opinion, as well as the opinion of both Majors, is that there are more shortcomings? ...Got you. I'll ask the General staff to cancel the operation."

The one who felt most relieved from Walker's decision was Lina.

After leaving the office of the Commander, Balance led Lina to another room.

"Major Sirius, how have you been doing lately?"

"Yes, there are no problems."

They sat at the same table from different angles. Standing up to talk would be tedious, so Balance insisted that they sit down.

Before Lina was not a cup of honey milk, but a whole mug of American coffee. After she came back from Japan last year, she probably thought it was a weakness to show others that she was drinking milk, and from then on, outside of her room, pretends to prefer coffee. But recently her stomach, apparently, could not withstand hard brewed coffee, so cream and sugar became irreplaceable.

"Understood."

Before Balance also stood American coffee. Only hers was black. It was originally pretty hard boiled, but if you add cream and sugar to it, the taste would be lost.

"Returning to the recent conversation..."

"Yes."

Lina straightened out, sitting on a chair. Although they were the only two in the room, she didn't know what the conversation was about.

She was also worried about being able to talk about it in a place like this.

"Although Colonel Walker said he would ask to cancel the operation, we don't know what the General Staff's decision would be. Maybe you'll be nominated for the order."

"Then I'll fulfill my responsibilities."

The reaction of Lina was too fast, because it apparently implied the presence of other "views" here.

"Hmm."

Although Balance noticed this, she did not pay attention to it. It could be said that it was a demonstration of her position that it would not be a problem.

"The Defense Ministry also has one more opinion."

"Do you mean that there is another policy towards Tatsuya?"

The Balance's voice was like a monologue, but Lina was forced to ask, as if she heard.

"The opinion is that it is necessary not to conflict with him, but to use him. This is very close to the earlier voiced opinion of Major Canopus."

"You mean Ben's opinion... What does it take to secure the right to know-how of a thermonuclear reactor?"

"Yes. To use the know-how of a magical thermonuclear reactor for the economy. And for military purposes to be used as a distributed deterrent force."

"Distributed deterrent force...?"

Having seen the puzzled Lina, Balance involuntarily smiled.

"This distribution concerns you too, Major Sirius."

"That? How does it relate to me?"

"Don't you understand?"

With a smile Balance was trying to nuance between "You can't do anything", and not "You're stupid."

"From the 'Scorched Halloween' situation, it seems that they can also use a satellite aiming system. Perhaps its accuracy is even better than ours. If we can capture this know-how too, then with the Major's Heavy Metal burst and Material Burst of Shiba Tatsuya, we will dominate the military forces of the world. This should lead to the rejection of at least large-scale military action."

"Me and Tatsuya working together...?"

"Initially, our army did not plan to use your Strategic Class Magic just for defense. Like 'Leviathan', that depends highly on the defense/seizure position, the place of use for Heavy Metal Burst cannot be chosen."

To be more precise, Heavy Metal Burst cannot provide sufficient power if a certain amount of heavy metal is not available in the area, and its effect will be severely limited in geographical conditions with very rough, hilly surfaces.

But compared to "Leviathan", which can only show its true value only on terrain with an abundance of water, for example, on the sea, a large lake or a wide river, Heavy Metal Burst has more freedom of use.

Although it is inferior to "Ozone Circle" and "Agni-Downburst" In terms of a lack of influence of geographical conditions, but if you add other conditions, such as power and speed of activation, we can say that Heavy Metal Burst is a suitable replacement for strategic ballistic missiles for the role as a deterrent force.

"What's the surprise? The New Soviet Union and Japan. If this alliance is formed, then Japan is an ally that will be easier to control. So if this happens, don't be too weird."

At first glance it was caution to the fact that the one who was still an enemy, cannot be forced to be an ally. However, Balance said the word "weird" which could include a secret meaning that Lina may experience certain feelings for Tatsuya.

Apparently, Balance called Lina here, because it seemed necessary to warn her that she did not show such behavior, which would lead to distrust of her, because she had previously personally met with Tatsuya.

"...Okay. Roger that."

"Yes, well, think about it."

It's a good thing we talked about this, Balance thought, seeing the confused face of the unreliable Lina.

After Balance, Lina and Canopus came out of the Commander's office.

After a while Colonel Walker summoned the commanders of the Third and Fourth Corps of Stars, Arcturus and Vega.

"Captain Alexander Arcturus arrived."

"Captain Charlotte Vega has arrived."

"Enter."

Walker invited the two unit commanders to the Office of the base Commander.

Like they said, they were both captains. Their ranks were lower than Lina and Canopus, but in the current form of the organization of Stars it was strange that there were six people of the same rank as Lina, who was considered the Commander-in-Chief.

So in a sense it was normal that the commanders of Arcturus and Vega to be lower in rank than the Commander-in-Chief Lina.

However, Vega, who was older than Lina by more than 10 years, was extremely unhappy with the fact that she was below her in rank. That's why Vega and Lina got along badly. More precisely, Vega was unilaterally hostile to Lina, who was younger than her.

Arcturus did not manifest hostility and disobedience to Lina. But they could not be called friends.

First Lieutenant Fomalhaut, executed... Killed by Lina the day before Christmas Eve last year, and was a member of the Third Corps, which is led by Captain Arcturus.

Arcturus understood that Fomalhaut, who had committed mass murders, using his "superpower", pyrokinesis, deserved punishment.

However, it was also true that he did not have the opportunity to defend himself in a military court.

For Arcturus it was unpleasant to think that Lina had no other choice but to shoot Fomalhaut on the spot, though he resisted.

There was no doubt that Walker chose these two, because there was a psychological distance between them and Lina.

"It is absolutely forbidden to tell anyone about the mission you are about to receive. Commander, also do not report this to Major Sirius."

"You got it, sir."

When they simultaneously responded to the order of the Commander, Arcturus with doubt frowned his eyebrows, and the eyes of Vega shone. She was delighted to be able to circumvent Lina. It was possible to call this behavior unworthy of her age, in fact magicians usually are not inclined to be envious on such an occasion.

Walker knew about the personal feelings of Vega, but did not rebuke her, moving on to the story of the mission.

"Create a stir at the construction of the energy plant, designed by the Japanese Strategic Class Magician, Shiba Tatsuya. One of the means of obstruction can be considered the murder of Shiba Tatsuya."

Arcturus opened his eyes wide with unconcealed surprise.

"Is this an order for me and Captain Vega to kill Shiba Tatsuya?"

"The main task is to hinder his project. If this goal can be achieved, then killing will not be necessary."

"Is it possible to resort to murder if obstruction is difficult?" Vega asked immediately. ...With a smile on her face."

"...From the moment of receiving the temporary name 'The Great Bomber', the initial plan concerning this magic of conversion of mass into energy consisted in complete neutralization if it could not be seized. Nothing has changed here. Now the priority is given to neutralization through Project Dione, and if this does not work, we will return to the original plan."

"You got it."

Arcturus was still in a state of reluctance, but he persuaded himself to accept the task.

Vega, on the contrary, was full of enthusiasm.

Through the Women's Information network for soldiers and officers, she found out that Lina seems to be friends with Tatsuya. Although it is still "potential", but he is still "the greatest threat". Those who are close friends with the "greatest enemy" should not be a soldier of the USNA army.

She, as a sempai, will wake Sirius up, bringing her the head of Shiba Tatsuya.

With such thoughts, Vega was burning with enthusiasm.

The execution of the first Lieutenant Alfred Fomalhaut left a mark in the hearts of every member of the Stars. Especially in the same Third Corps as Fomalhaut and his close friend, the First Lieutenant, Jacob Regulus, who is still searching for the truth about the incident.

At the moment, the official but absolutely secret opinion is that the murders Fomalhaut committed while under the control of a parasite.

Psychological resistance to the supernatural was lost with the practical use of magic, and at the autopsy of Fomalhaut in his brain, they found a body that should not be in a human.

Any who calls themselves realists, will find it difficult to deny the existence of parasites.

He was captured by the parasite and created disorder, using his unique ability of pyrokinesis. This was explained by his multiple murders of civilians in that incident.

But it wasn't enough to convince Regulus.

How was Fomalhaut captured by a parasite?

Shortly before the incident, Fomalhaut was sent on a solitary mission.

Until the moment they last saw him, there was no strangeness in him. So he were undoubtedly captured during that solitary mission.

The question is when, where and who did it.

If it is an accident, it is necessary to find out the conditions of occurrence of parasites and to prevent recurrence of it.

Many scientists are actively working in this direction.

Although this theory was deadlocked because of the inability to test it to confirm it, but most believed that the reason is the Micro Black Hole experiment. Disputes about the mechanism of this process are still going on.

Therefore, Regulus conducted an investigation to prove that the emergence of parasites was not an accident.

Who called the parasite that got to Fomalhaut?

If it was a deliberate incident, it was a brutal terrorist attack that could lead to large-scale losses that terrorized the USNA. Because the magician, who alone carries a fighting power comparable to a battalion, can itself be regarded as an instrument of terrorism.

His friend was used as a terrorist or a saboteur, and as a result he was executed by the hands of his own friends.

Regulus could not close his eyes to the possibility of this. Despite the fact that further investigation after the execution of the offender was not the work of the Stars, Regulus continued to investigate, and spent his free time and days off.

However, one and a half years after the incident, Regulus was more and more inclined to the conclusion that "There were no criminals". It happened by accident.

And now, when he was almost convinced, he was delivered this information.

"What does it mean..."

The fact that Regulus unconsciously muttered this aloud, had a reason.

This anonymous email had passed through the highest level of security, which is used even in the general staff, and has reached his terminal in a state without any censorship.

According to the Charter, Regulus had to isolate the message in the system and notify the security personnel. But he did not, and opened the letter.

The intuition of Regulus whispered to him that he should read it and not give it to others to read.

The letter was not encrypted. It seems to have been protected from peeping by other means than encryption.

And something absolutely amazing was written in it.

"The experiment of the Micro Black Hole is the work of a Japanese agent...!?"

In this letter it says following:

- The Micro Black Hole Experiment was started by a Japanese Private magician organization.

- The aforementioned organization knew that this experiment could cause "something" spiritual to happen.

- The organization was looking for a country to conduct the experiment that could not be implemented in Japan.

- At that time, scientists from the USNA army, who actively sought hints on the magic of converting mass into energy, engaged in similar research.

- The aforementioned organization wished to receive even more experimental data. They asked for another micro black hole experiment that would be monitored by an organization agent.

-Fomalhaut was captured by a parasite because he was suddenly attacked. If a magician has a solid consciousness and a strong goal, the parasite will never be able to possess them.

Regulus didn't believe the contents of this letter. To be honest, it seemed too "suspicious" to him.

In particular, he thought that is too convenient that it is possible to avoid the parasite from taking over by only having a strong consciousness.

But the fact that the experiment was conducted on the advice of a foreign agent, unconsciously touched him to the bottom of the soul.

The details of the experiment seemed unnatural. Not only among scientists, but also among politicians there are many who adhere to the rule of caution. The results were doubtful from the very beginning.

Among the scholars, only the minority believed that the magic of mass conversion to energy could be explained by Hawking's radiation.

Regulus also wanted to see if there was any chance that these events were too much for him to understand, like some sort of conspiracy theory.

But if we consider that the Micro Black Hole experiment could be intervened by an external force, it looks like a reasonable explanation for why the experiment was conducted at that time.

Regulus could not decide whether this external force was the Japanese civil organization of magicians, the "Ten Master Clans". Regulus warned himself that he should not be influenced by a message whose sender wished to remain unknown. But now that his investigation was stalled, and if there is an opportunity to learn the truth, he began to think that it would be a good idea to try.

If they try the experiment again, you can check whether the source of parasites is really the Micro Black Hole. Then it will also become clear if what is written in this letter is true. If this is true, there will be a chance to grab the tail of a criminal group.

However, there was a risk that new victims could appear, and be captured by parasites. But if they are the same as they are, magicians of the Star Class, then they may be able to capture the parasites or destroy them.

There was no reason not to try.

This was the conclusion that Regulus came to. At this point, he did not even think that he could capture a parasite.

Regulus approached his immediate commander, Captain Arcturus, with an offer to experiment with the Micro Black Hole, the moment after Arcturus returned from his visit to Colonel Walker.

Regulus told him the contents of the letter truthfully and eloquently proved the necessity of the experiment.

If it were any other day, it would have ended only by the fact that Arcturus would simply rebuke that Regulus was being reckless.

But Arcturus was mentally unstable after receiving Walker's assignment. He was attracted by the idea of being able to grasp the Japanese agent's tail.

If they receive important material for negotiations with Japan, it may be possible to neutralize the Strategic Class Magic "Material Burst" without such dirty methods as murder. Such a naïve calculation arose in Arcturus' mind.

Arcturus turned back in the direction of the base Commander's office and led Regulus there.

And somehow, Regulus was able to persuade Colonel Walker.

Perhaps the Colonel just wanted to sabotage the mission entrusted to him by the chief of staff.

He immediately contacted the General Staff, and in the course of the conversation, they came to the decision that for the repetition of the Micro Black Hole experiment, he will be contacted later.

Chapter 7

On Wednesday after school, Tomitsuka Hagane visited the School Council Room. Even Igarashi Yousuke, Chairman of the Club Management Group, rarely came to the School Council Room, and Tomitsuka's appearance here in general was an exceptional case.

"...When is Tatsuya planning to start attending school?"

"Unfortunately, he didn't tell me about that." With reluctance on her face, Miyuki answered the question of Tomitsuka, the meaning of which was something like: "When is the next time Tatsuya is to come?"

Her answer was not a lie, and her facial expression wasn't an act.

For a while, Tatsuya will not go to school, because he is observing how the situation changes after the press conference. The resumption of school attendance depends on this situation in society, and Tatsuya himself cannot in advance say, "from what moment" he will return.

And Miyuki, day after night, grew discontent that Tatsuya was not free to come to school.

"Then... Will you tell me where Shiba-kun is right now?" With unconcealed despair, Tomitsuka asked Miyuki the next question.

"Do you have something to discuss with Tatsuya?" Miyuki asked this answer with a suspicious voice. Anyone in her place felt that something was wrong with Tomitsuka.

There was no freedom of action in his behavior. Putting pressure on the interlocutor with his circumstances was not like Tomitsuka.

"Excuse me."

However, he noticed that he was making Miyuki feel unpleasant.

"Um... There's something I'd like to talk to Shiba-kun about."

"Talk? If you don't mind, I'd like to know about what?"

Tomitsuka's eyes ran from side to side. He hesitated for a while, but eventually he overcame his indecision and met Miyuki with a look.

"My mother is hospitalized."

"Your Mother!"

Miyuki opened her eyes wide and covered her mouth with her hand. Tomitsuka was fussing from such a reaction.

"Oh, no, even though I said she was hospitalized, there's no danger for her life. She has a severe stomach ulcer.. she will be discharged from the hospital after a month of rest."

"I understood... I hope she has a quick recovery."

"Thank you very much."

Thanking Miyuki for her words of sympathy, Tomitsuka looked as if he wanted to say something else. While he was looking for the words to say, Izumi spoke to him.

"Isn't Tomitsuka-sempai's mother the chairman of the Magic Association?"

"Yes, she is, Saegusa-san."

"Does your mother's illness have a psychological origin?"

This time Tomitsuka's eyes were already wide open.

"...The doctor said it was caused by stress."

"In other words, Tomitsuka-sempai wants to say that the cause of his mother's illness, is Shiba-sempai?"

"I wasn't going to say something like that!"

The face of the answering Tomitsuka blushed. This proved that Izumi's assertion was not entirely wrong. Tomitsuka, who was worried, realized, and took a deep breath.

"...Your mother has recently been severely pressured by the government. With regards to Tatsuya-sama?" Miyuki asked Tomitsuka imperturbably.

"Yes, that's right. They want her to persuade Shiba-kun to cancel the energy plant project and take part in Project Dione..."

"What does that mean!" Honoka said loud and indignant. Izumi and Shiina, also considering it absurd, sent cold gazes to Tomitsuka.

"Can you talk about something like that? Don't you have to keep it a secret?"

"...A member of my family already went to the hospital, though unofficially. And as long as it's for my family and to the extent that it will help the people involved in the case to identify the circumstances, it will not be a problem."

The open tone of Tomitsuka's voice showed his discontent with "government-related people."

"I'm not going to accuse Shiba-kun of my mother's hospitalization. Even I understand that it is ridiculous to shift the responsibility to Shiba-kun."

"Tomitsuka-Sempai. If you aren't going to complain, what are you going to talk about with Shiba-sempai?"

Miyuki's question again was voiced aloud by Izumi.

"...Regardless of the Government's opinion, I believe that Shiba-kun should take part in Project Dione. This is undoubtedly an important project for the future of mankind, and the USNA is trying to invite Shiba-kun with the most courteous attitude.

He may have had a lot of plans, but I believe that for Japan, for the sake of Japanese magicians, he must accept the invitation of the USNA. So far, I was silent because it didn't concern me, but when it affected my family, I became involved."

There was no one among the members of the School Council who would support the argument of Tomitsuka. But there also were none that interrupted his speech.

"Although I am annoyed that I have to follow unreasonable government requests, I still want to try to persuade Shiba-kun to take part in Project Dione."

Making sure that Tomitsuka finished his speech, Miyuki spoke.

"If that is your goal, then I can't tell you anything."

"Huh..?"

Tomitsuka, it seems, did not expect a refusal. He stared at Miyuki like a person expressing their complete misunderstanding of an answer.

"If you have such a goal, I can't afford to tell you the address of Tatsuya."

"Why... Can I ask why...?"

"Because I understand that you want to stop Tatsuya, and I can't help you with that."

The face of Tomitsuka distorted, as if to say "I can't believe it".

"But... The selfishness of Shiba-kun can bring problems to everyone else! If Shiba-kun shows a little patience, everyone will end up better!"

"Selfishness, you say...?"

Miyuki did not even conceal that she was unpleasantly surprised.

"Tomitsuka-kun, it looks like you're confused about your mom getting sick. Please, forget today. It will be better for everyone."

The usual Tomitsuka is completely different and would not say anything smug. Miyuki knew this and wanted to solve the problem peacefully. For her, it was an exceptional occasion when Tatsuya was offended, and she ended it all with reasonable measures.

Her magic did not get out of control because the seal was removed, and she thus regained the primordial control of her magic. However, to her opponent, feeling like he got pushed into a corner, and trapped in his thinking, it produced a reverse effect.

"...President Shiba. I'm challenging you to a duel."

"Under a duel you mean a fight for resolving the conflict of opinions?"

"Yes. If I win, please tell me where the Shiba-kun is."

Miyuki quietly listened to the willful statement of Tomitsuka. No, she was completely calm. But there was no blazing anger inside her, because those hostile and murderous intentions were frozen.

"...I accept your challenge."

"Miyuki-sama, please wait."

The phrase of the acceptance of the duel was blocked by another voice.

"Minami-chan?"

With a mixed sense of wonder and suspicion, Miyuki asked about Minami's intentions.

Minami did not say "President", but "Miyuki-sama".

The fact that Miyuki is the successor of the title the "Head of the Yotsuba family" was well-known. At the same time, everyone here understood that Minami is not really a cousin, but is in the service of the Yotsuba family. Nobody really asked about it, but everyone suspected this kind of a relationship.

Therefore, Minami called Miyuki "Miyuki-sama", without feeling any discomfort. She even said, "Miyuki-sama", in cases where Miyuki wasn't around. However, Miyuki did not like it when it happened at school, and she insisted on the greatest possible deterrence of this behavior, showing their relationship as a master and a servant.

So she had to have some reason for saying "Miyuki-sama" in this place, showing the behavior of a servant in the presence of their kohai.

"Tatsuya-sama told me to protect Miyuki-sama. Followed with Tatsuya-sama giving me his trust, I cannot allow Miyuki-sama to participate in unnecessary battles."

Miyuki had no way to object the words of Minami. When Tatsuya's intentions are mentioned, Miyuki cannot have any objections.

"But in that case, Tomitsuka-sempai maybe will not be satisfied? That instead of Miyuki-sama, I will become the opponent of Tomitsuka-sempai."

"...I got it. Tomitsuka-kun, is that fine with you? If Minami-chan loses, then like you, Tomitsuka-kun, asked, I will tell you the location of the villa, where Tatsuya-sama now lives."

"...If it results in you telling me the location of Shiba-kun, then I do not mind."

These unexpected developments puzzled Tomitsuka. Perhaps more precisely it could be said that he was not good in such matters.

But he decided not to object. He didn't have time to worry about anything but his goal.

In disputes between students the one who is right and who is wrong, is proven by force. This was the one way of solving problems that was officially included in the rules of First High.

Of course, the "mock battle" procedure was strictly defined, and it was also required to obtain permission from the President of the School Board and the Head of the Disciplinary Committee.

It was a measure to prevent the use of training fights for unilateral violence, so basically when there is a large difference in force between the participants.

"...I thought there wouldn't be a duel against the Student Council this year."

The Head of the Disciplinary Committee, Mikihiko, complained to Izumi, who came to ask for approval of the mock battle. Since the President is the related party this time, the organization of the mock fight is handled by the Vice President, Izumi.

"This is not a duel, but a match, Yoshida-sempai."

Having made a small amendment to the words of Mikihiko, Izumi gave him the approved resolution of the Student Council together with its written form.

Seeing what it says, Mikihiko rounded his eyes with surprise.

"Hand to Hand combat!? Is that okay? I mean, the fight is between Tomitsuka-kun and Sakurai-san, a guy and a girl?"

Usually, hand to hand combat for competitions was only used by guys. Because sexual harassment is a possibility in a fight between a guy and a girl.

"The 'Using a mock knife and stopping before hitting the opponent'- rule. Sakurai-san seems to be sure of herself."

The explanation of Izumi did not calm Mikihiko at all. Even if it is said that the end of match is determined by the simulation of the impact of the mock knife, it still means that punching and kicking is allowed.

"...I will serve as the referee."

He could not simply put his seal of approval on this, thinking that he could not leave a place unattended where a pupil could be injured by another pupil. With this thought in mind, Mikihiko decided to be the referee.

Tomitsuka, who changed into a club uniform and waited in the third room for practical training, looked with round eyes at the appearance of Minami, who entered the room after Miyuki.

"Are you going to participate in the match in that outfit!?"

"But it doesn't violate the rules." Minami answered with an indifferent tone to the involuntarily screaming Tomitsuka.

"That is... so, but.."

Tomitsuka was in the uniform for Magic Martial Arts.

The upper part is a long sleeve shirt without buttons with cushions on the elbow parts, then loose belt-less trousers whose cushions were on the knee parts and only the part at the ankle is tightened. On his feet, he wore soft shoes that were designed for martial arts sports.

On the other hand, Minami was in a T-shirt with short sleeves and in short thigh shorts worn by gymnasts. Although her right thigh was covered with a weapon belt with an attached mock knife, she still had the usual appearance of an athlete with exposed arms and legs.

"Aren't you worried about injuries?"

Tomitsuka was speechless towards Minami who just spoke to him.

"Of course, if you receive a blow from Tomitsuka-sempai, you can get a bump or a bruise. Maybe even a fracture."

(In that case... You need more protection.) Tomitsuka wanted to say.

"Tomitsuka-sempai. This is the essence of a mock battle."

But Minami was faster than him.

"Even with the rules, when close combat is forbidden, the danger of being traumatized does not change much."

In a rare occurrence, Minami was quite talkative today.

"If Tomitsuka-senpai doesn't mind being injured by girls, he would have already lost this match today."

Minami intentionally made a short pause.

"At your own convenience."

She struck down these condemning words on Tomitsuka. He could not object to Minami's criticism .

"...Tomitsuka-kun, do you want to cancel the match?" Mikihiko turned to the dumbfounded Tomitsuka.

"Even if you win or lose this match, you will only have a poor aftertaste left, so it's better to stop now and you will not regret it."

Mikihiko extended Tomitsuka a life line.

"...Yoshida-kun, give the signal for the beginning of the match."

But the concern of Mikihiko only reinforced the stubbornness of Tomitsuka. Now Tomitsuka definitely needed to know the address of Tatsuya.

When Mikihiko mentioned "regret", Tomitsuka thought that "I do not want to withdraw here and regret it later, even if I injure a girl and end up regretting it".

"...Got it. Both parties know the rules? The rule is to stop before making contact Please obey the judgment of the referee."

Tomitsuka and Minami simultaneously nodded. Unfortunately for Mikihiko, neither Tomitsuka nor Minami had shown that they want to retreat.

"Then... Start!"

By the signal of Mikihiko, Tomitsuka and Minami simultaneously activated magic.

To reduce the distance, oscillation magic was used to break the balance of the enemy and get victory without injuring her... This plan, invented by Tomitsuka for this fight, was stopped by an Anti-Object barrier, which appeared directly in front of him.

Although Tomitsuka already saw the ability of Minami in last year's "Stellar Furnace" experiment and at the Nine Schools Competition, he couldn't help but be surprised at the activation speed of her magic. The barrier preventing his approach was created the moment after the signal for the beginning of the match.

With surprise, but without panic, Tomitsuka flew into this transparent wall.

His disadvantage that he could not project psions at a distance from his body, has not changed. For magic that was able to attack enemies from far away, it only affects the influence of magic that was invoked nearby into the continuous space, so a magic can be set on a remote location.

But the peculiarity of wearing high-density psion armor, which can neutralize any magic touching his body, also has not changed. No, this ability to neutralize magic, which can be called "Contact-Type Gram Demolition", has become stronger because of his improved psion control.

Tomitsuka's shoulder pierced the magical barrier of Minami. Resistance was felt for less than one second. After that, Tomitsuka felt that the barrier that was unseen by the naked eye, collapsed.

Next he was going to hit Minami with his hand. However, in the time when Tomitsuka was focused on the barrier, Minami had the time to flank him from the side.

The installation location of the magic barrier can be specified in either relative or absolute coordinates.

When setting the barrier by absolute coordinates in the true sense of the word, it is necessary to take into account the huge speed of rotation of the Earth and its orbital movement, so, even when they say "absolute coordinates", in most cases it means a relative position based on the coordinates on the Earth's surface. In human perception it can be expressed as absolute coordinates. Many people know that the magic that sets a wall using the true absolute coordinates, so that the enemy at breakneck speed flew into it, is an extremely advanced type of attacking magic.

At the moment, Minami has created barriers in the usual sense of the concept of absolute coordinates. On the other hand, Tomitsuka acted with prejudice that the enemy is on the other side of the barrier. For this reason, he lost sight of Minami at the time of the destruction of the barrier.

Minami released a compressed air bullet which can be said to be a basic version of attacking magic to Tomitsuka.

The modified "Sakurai" series has a high aptitude for magic barriers, and the second generation Minami is particularly talented.

But it does mean that she, like Tatsuya or Tomitsuka, was bad at using other spells, that weren't related to her specialization.

Besides that, compressed air bullet "in a compressed state" conceptually has some compatibility with barrier magic, so it is an easy magic for Minami to use. It is synonymous with "magic" which can "give great power".

Perhaps because the degree of threat was high, this intuition of his paid off.

Driven by a strong sense of danger, Tomitsuka created a magical barrier in the form of armor.

Tomitsuka could activate magic on objects or areas in his direct physical contact.

However, at a distance of zero meters in the Contact State, the "Range Zero", he demonstrated an unparalleled force. Such a magician was Tomitsuka Hagane.

Unlike Fortification magic, this Anti-Object barrier, activated a form that overlapped his worn clothing, and was able to take the compressed air bullet from Minami. The armor Tomitsuka created protected him from both the compressed air, and from the explosion caused by the release of the compressed condition.

Tomitsuka continued by activating Movement-Type Magic.

To move his own body using magic is the basis for his favorite technique, "Self-Marionette".

Due to his possession of this skill, he was able to jump toward Minami with such speed, that she could not prepare her next attacking magic.

As soon as his feet felt contact with the floor, Tomitsuka pulled his right hand to the right. From this position he consistently took a step forward with his right foot and thrust his right palm.

But Tomitsuka's arms and legs stopped moving due to the unexpected scene that caught his eye.

On the face of the suddenly attacking Minami, excitement appeared.

From her position, she was happy that Tomitsuka suddenly appeared before her, ignoring the distance between them.

She managed to avoid the attack of Tomitsuka thanks to her reflexes, cultivated through her training at the Yotsuba main house.

At the same time as Tomitsuka, she entered the position to prepare a blow to the chest, she bent her back backwards and pushed herself away from the floor.

Because of the backflip that happened in front of his eyes, Tomitsuka's attack missed.

No, the delay in his movements wasn't caused by the surprising back flip, but because his gaze caught a piece of bodily color, that appeared after the bottom edge of the T-shirt was lifted.

At least Minami felt Tomitsuka's eyes were directed towards her because she took her distance.

Instead of feeling disgusted, Minami thought that it was the only thing that saved her.

It was an opening that could lead to the end of the mock battle, if Tomitsuka hadn't created a gap.

There is no way you can miss seeing the satisfactory belly button.

(If the enemy were Tatsuya-sama, this fight would have already been over.)

Even though she pushed her palm of the floor and thrust back by backflipping, she could not find the next attacking posture immediately after she landed.



If she had attacked Tatsuya, this situation would be hopeless. And if this was Tatsuya, he wouldn't stop his attack just because he saw the naked skin of a woman.

Minami jumped further to the side and created a new magic barrier.

Tomitsuka recovered from his rigidity and approached Minami quickly.

Destroying the barriers.

Until that moment, everything happened the same as it did the last time. However, Minami did not come from the flank this time, but instead retreated to the back.

When the shield was destroyed, she built the next shield.

If it was Tatsuya's demolition magic, or his Gram Demolition, the destruction of magic would only take a moment. Magic Sequences displayed in the information dimension cannot resist "Gram Demolition", which decomposes Psion information bodies.

But Gram Demolition [spell dismantling] is a technique to blow away Magic Sequences attached to the Eidos using psion pressure.

Depending on the force with which the Magic Sequence is stuck to the Eidos, there is a delay in time until the dismantling occurs.

Area Magic that fixes the Magic Sequence in a space without anything is usually weak against Gram Demolition. But the barrier magic of Minami was far from "ordinary". The "Sakurai" series' Anti-Object barrier, which can withstand a tremendous amounts of momentum, was extremely powerful in the concept of "holding something". Minami has also inherited these magical characteristics.

In other words, the magical barriers of Minami can withstand Gram Demolition for a short amount of time. Even if he will eventually break through, it also means that it can give you time to prepare your next magic.

Minami's Anti-Object barriers were used to stop Tomitsuka's advancements. The barrier was quickly destroyed, but it took about one second. During this time, Minami retreated back and had finished erecting her next barrier.

It could be called a pseudo Phalanx.

But it does not mean that Minami does not feel anything from the broken barriers. The fatigue caused by the activation of magic is undoubtedly accumulating.

But Minami gradually receded back, making sure that there was a small gap between each barrier, so that the Psion armor around Tomitsuka could not touch them at the same time.

Tomitsuka could quickly destroy these barriers, so he did not move out of the way, but progressed forward. Gradually moving, almost as if he were standing still, if looked at from the outside.

This was not Tomitsuka's original style. Facing his troubles directly, using his coordinated hand and foot work, was his way of fighting. But Tomitsuka could not do this when these struggles made his legs immobilized and he is required to grab or push his opponent like you would in sumo wrestling or rugby.

Minami retreated diagonally across the practical training room.

Looking at the distance left between the walls and her left and right, Minami realized she was approaching the corner of the room.

She did not miss the moment when Tomitsuka's eyes were looking behind her.

(...I drove her into the corner,) Minami could clearly read Tomitsuka's thoughts.

Two more steps, and she's into the corner. There will be no further retreat.

Simultaneously with the destruction of her barrier, Minami took one big step back instead of two ordinary ones.

Without building another barrier.

Leaning forward to destroy the next barrier, Tomitsuka's body lost stability.

A disadvantage of Contact-Type Gram Demolition is that it can't demolish magic without physically touching it. This created a convenient opportunity for Minami because Tomitsuka was careless, since he was obsessed with destroying the barriers.

Minami, taking advantage of this moment, activated the prepared magic. Downward Whirlwind.

This magic only created a downward air flow centered around the user, and had a lack of killing power. However, Tomitsuka, who had been approaching Minami the entire time, was caught in the air current and lost his positioning.

Minami wrapped herself around Tomitsuka's back, grabbed his mock knife and threw it away.

Tomitsuka's face blushed, which definitely wasn't just because he was nervous. Through the thin fabric of the gymnastic clothing a "soft feeling" was impossible not to be felt. But luckily for Tomitsuka, Minami did not notice his embarrassment.

Hooking his leg from the inside, Minami threw Tomitsuka forward.

Tomitsuka tried to use rotational movement to shake Minami off, but she, skillfully shifting her weight around, hung on to Tomitsuka's body, thus throwing him on the ground.

Tomitsuka was under her.

As a result, Minami sat on Tomitsuka's back, "like a horse", snatched the mock knife from her waist, and put it to Tomitsuka's throat.

"The match is over! Sakurai-san wins!" Mikihiko announced when the training match was completed.

If the knife were real, it would mean that Tomitsuka's throat would have been cut by Minami. The outcome of the fight was obvious to all.

When they finished with cleaning and formalities after the mock fight, it was almost time to close the school gates. Miyuki and the rest, having finished their Student Council work, merged with the group of Erika and Leo and they finally all gathered in the usual café.

"Hey, Sakurai-san, you were so strong."

"No, I was just lucky today..." Minami shyly tried to deny the words of Kasumi.

The interest of all present was focused on the past mock fight.

"I guess luck will always be involved, but without true strength, you wouldn't've been able to win against Tomitsuka-kun." Erika intervened with a face that showed that there was nothing to be surprised about.

"Erika, did you know about the Sakurai's real power?"

The one asking was Leo, because he was a member of the same mountaineering club as Minami and her physical ability was already well known to him. However, according to the idiom "don't judge a book by its cover", the impression that people got from Minami is that she is a "gentle girl" and because her muscles aren't obtrusive, her superb motor functions also cannot be seen. If anything, it's better to say that she shows the figure of a girl who doesn't regularly exercise.

Therefore for Leo, this was unexpected behavior for Erika as if she had long been aware of Minami's power.

"It's difficult to understand unless you train enough. If you look carefully, you'll notice that this is the case."

"Is that so...?"

I wonder who Leo was more impressed by, Erika or Minami? Or maybe both.

"But I heard she's not very good at physical education."

Izumi did not have much malice when she asked Minami this simple question.

"I... am not very good at ball games..."

Answering seriously about her shortcomings, Minami looked a bit embarrassed. Izumi, who is also not that good at physical education, (It's not that they can't do it, but they're just psychologically bad at it) stopped questioning Minami.

"But I think, like Sakurai-san said, the result was not only because of her abilities."

Apparently, thinking that too much praise is also bad, Mikihiko changed the direction of the conversation.

"It seems that Tomitsuka-kun was quite uncomfortable."

"Because his opponent was a girl?"

Mikihiko nodded to the question of Shizuku.

"Choosing hand to hand combat may have been a mistake."

"Do you mean that it would've been better if they only fought with magic?" Saburou, who did not know about Tomitsuka, expressed his doubts about the words of Mikihiko.

"Because of Tomitsuka's special magic, he can't do that." Shiina immediately gave him this answer.

Next, Shiina explained the meaning of Tomitsuka's nickname

"Range Zero" to Saburou, and Honoka accused Tomitsuka: "If that happened, it would've been better to stop."

"But he really liked it, didn't he?"

Even though Shizuku was making a bad joke, it sounded serious because of her voice.

"By the way, Tomitsuka-kun seems to have been fascinated by Minami-chan's belly button..."

"Honoka, details" Shizuku poured oil onto the fire before Minami could stop Honoka.

"Minami-chan was wearing gymnastic sports uniform."

"How bold."

"Well, that's it. Minami-chan made a backflip to avoid Tomitsuka-kun's attack."

"Wow."

"...At that moment, the edge of her shirt was fluttering, exposing a rather large area of her stomach. Of course, it was quickly concealed again, but Tomitsuka-kun froze for a while, motionless staring at Minami-chan's belly button."

"Guilty." Shizuku decided without hesitation, after hearing this story.

"And his face became red when Minami-chan grabbed him from behind..."

"Really!?" Minami cried out when she heard Honoka's additional testimony.

"Yes. I guess... It was because your chest was touching him."

"..."

From the shame, Minami hid her face behind her hands. Leo and Mikihiko also blushed a little and quickly turned their faces.

"Hmm... Was the gymnastic uniform for this purpose?" Erika had no mercy for her shy junior.

"Minami-chan wanted Tomitsuka-kun to cancel the mock fight." Minami was still unable to answer, and Miyuki voiced her idea instead.

"Originally, Tomitsuka-kun asked for a fight with me."

"Then it wouldn't have been much of a match." Erika cut her off.

It is not merely a matter of difference in ability. Tomitsuka, who cannot fight at a distance, and Miyuki, who can overwhelm her enemy with a magical bombardment from afar.

If the rules for a contactless battle were used, which are usually used in mock battles with the opposite sex, it would be a one-sided fight.

"Tomitsuka-kun had obviously lost the ability to make decisions calmly."

"And Minami stretched her body out so that he could cool his head." Erika nodded with an understanding face.

"By the way, I haven't heard about it, but why did Tomitsuka-kun ask for a mock fight?"

At this point, Mikihiko realized that he also did not know the cause of the mock fight.

"Tomitsuka-sempai wanted to know where Shiba-sempai is."

Izumi answered this question because she thought Miyuki wouldn't want to answer.

"Tatsuya's address?"

Not only Mikihiko had a question mark surface above his head.

"Tomitsuka-sempai's mother seems to have been hospitalized."

"The mother of Tomitsuka-kun... As far as I know, isn't she the Chairman of the Magic Association?"

"Yes. As expected, Yoshida-sempai knows it too."

Mikihiko was not embarrassed by the praise of Izumi. Because his attention was focused on the continuation of the story.

"Hitsui-sama... That's the name of Tomitsuka-sempai's mother, seems to have been severely pressured by the government, demanding her to persuade Shiba-sempai."

"To persuade him to take part in Project Dione?"

"Yes. It seems that she got an acute gastric ulcer due to the stress... and will be hospitalized for about a month."

"...It's not Tatsuya's fault, is it?" Leo wedged into the conversation.

"I don't think so."

Izumi immediately nodded. No one objected to the judgement that Leo and Izumi came to.

"Tomitsuka-sempai said the same thing. But in reality... He clearly thought Shiba-sempai was responsible. He wanted to know the address of Shiba-sempai so he could try to persuade him to participate in Project Dione."

"He wanted to do something... For his mother." Mizuki muttered with sympathy.

"Speaking of which, Tomitsuka-kun... Looked very depressed after the match." Even Honoka, who previously condemned Tomitsuka for his rude behavior, yielded to this atmosphere of sympathy.

"But to blame this on Tatsuya-kun is, I will say, a misunderstanding." Erika hacked that sympathy at the root.

"Hasn't Tatsuya already told them, what he is going to do now? And I think it's wrong to stop him or accuse him." Leo objected to the actions of Tomitsuka, looking at them from a different angle.

"However, I think that people who say the same thing as Tomitsuka-sempai are not going anywhere. I'm talking about the people who think that Shiba-sempai is wrong, and that they are right."

Kasumi was not emotionally attached to Tatsuya, and did not sympathize with him or his position. She could therefore draw conclusions from a convenient third-party position. Neither Miyuki, nor Erika, nor anyone else, could object to her prediction.

Chapter 8

There was a big change in the situation surrounding Tatsuya on Thursday.

At the Center for the Development of Magic for the Indo-Persian Union, Hyderabad University, located in the former South India, the leading figure of this university in the field of magic engineering, known as the designer of the Strategic Class Magic "Agni Downburst", the female scientist Asha Chandrasekhar was holding a press conference.

"... For these reasons, we do not support the USNA's project for the development of Venus, but we do support the Japanese fusion reactor project."

Dr. Chandrasekhar announced that they supported Tatsuya's Project ESCAPES instead of Project Dione. Until this moment, the Indo-Persian Federation had not revealed their stance on Project Dione.

Despite the fact that it was not an official message from the government, and only a press conference held by one scientist, the rejection of Project Dione was a big surprise for the rest of the country.

Moreover, the reason for this rejection was that they wanted to support the building of an energy plant, which was not a national project yet but only a simple private business project, which was announced by a young Japanese.

Tatsuya's Project ESCAPES attracted the attention of the whole world before its official name was even defined.

"...That is, you say that the Turkish Government believes that USNA should not force other countries to participate in their space exploration project?"

The day after the press conference of Dr. Asha Chandrasekhar, the TV channel opposing the USNA televised an interview to the whole world. An interview with Ali Shaheen, the Turkish "Apostle".

This interview was shown all day on the television networks of North America and western Europe.

"This is not the government's opinion. It is my personal opinion that the use of magic for peaceful purposes should be decided by the individual and not be forced upon them."

In this interview Shaheen expressed his negative opinion about Project Dione.

"For example, recently in Japan, an innovative project was announced that used the Stellar Furnace."

"Do you mean the project that Dr. Chandrasekhar from the Indo-Persian Union also mentioned yesterday?"

"Yes. I don't know if you know or not, but the fusion reactor using Gravitational Control will solve one of the Three Great Puzzles of Weight Systematic Magic. The young man named Shiba Tatsuya does not only use this project to achieve his goals, but also tries to achieve peaceful use of magic."

"This is a rather ambitious project."

"Yes, I think so too. I wonder if a trend of peaceful use of magic will spread around the world? I believe that Project Dione is a wonderful project, but I think they should refrain from behavior that can limit other potential possibilities."

Since Ali Shaheen's speech was not as intrusive as the press conference of Dr. Chandrasekhar, it was seen more by the people from America and Europe.

"I know what Shaheen is up to."

An Official State recognized Strategic Class Magician of the New Soviet Union, one of the "Thirteen apostles", Lieutenant General Leonid Kondrachenko appeared on the screen and squeezed his lips with strong aversion.

"...This boy wants to prevent further cooperation between our country and America."

Ali Shaheen is 30 years old. For Kondratenko, who is already over 70, he was undoubtedly a "boy".

"That's why Shaheen wants to stop Project Dione, by showing his negative impression of it. This is because our country has cooperated with America for this project. And this boy wants to ruin it."

"...Is it possible that Shaheen acts spurred Japan on?" Igor asked. His own investigation has not revealed any influence of Shaheen on Japan, nor any latent connection between them in this case. But Igor thought that Kondrachenko, who was in the same position as Shaheen, could know some circumstances that he did not know himself.

"No." Kondrachenko clearly defined his answer. "If someone that wasn't in Turkey came into contact with Shaheen, I would have known about it. This time, he came up with this idea himself."

"Wasn't it a convenient time to do that?"

"After you, the doctor, announced your cooperation with Project Dione, Shaheen had some time to look for things that could prevent this project. If our country and America unite efforts, it will be the worst nightmare for him."

"So, the reason that he announced this was Shiba Tatsuya's project of a plant with a Stellar Furnace?"

"Right. For Shaheen, this was like finding a well in the wilderness. And he jumped with glee."

"But he did not immediately understand whether it was possible to drink the water from this well. This explains the delay of a few days before he took action."

"The decision to use Shiba Tatsuya's project took a maximum of 2-3 days. After that he was preparing his interview, and came to an agreement with the American TV companies. That's how it really happened."

Igor did not object to the assumption made by Kondrachenko. Albeit with minor differences, he thought about the same.

"By the way, doctor. What do you intend to do? I don't think we can rely on Edward Clark anymore."

"Really..."

He also agreed with Kondrachenko. Igor came to this conclusion when Edward Clark had failed in the act of trying to use the international public opinion.

"I'm going back to Vladivostok right now. This time I'm going to take 'Player' *."

[The author uses the Russian word "Player" in the original text. Why this is, is discussed next.]

"Does that mean?"

"Yes. We can no longer overlook that Strategic Class Magic, which at any time can bear its fangs towards our country."

"Oh... I pray for your success."

When Igor said he was taking "Player". The eyes of Kondrachenko, knowing the meaning of these words, shone.

On Saturday, it started to rain around noon.

However, in Miyuki's head it was sunny. After returning home from school, her next destination was the villa in Izu, where Tatsuya lived.

She got permission from Tatsuya to come for a sleepover.

Minami was heavily strained by the blissful behavior of her mistress.

Instead of the mistress, who lacked a sense of caution, it was natural to watch the environment with caution for her sense of duty. And for some reason, from the moment they left the house, they were constantly haunted by some kind of unpleasant premonition.

Minami told herself that she was thinking about it too much. Moderate stress is good for a bodyguard, but if it exceeds a certain level, the effect will be reversed. Besides, where they're going, there's Tatsuya.

With him nearby, Miyuki's safety will be guaranteed. Minami's power will not be needed...

No matter what Minami told herself, her anxiety did not disappear. But she could not understand the cause for concern.

They reached Izu before sunset, but the surrounding area was completely dark because of the rain and fog.

It was a terrible situation when the naked eye could not see further than 10 meters, but the automated driving system and the high-precision positioning system helped even in such adverse conditions. But sitting in the driver seat was Hanabishi Hyougo, who could probably still drive well even under these circumstances.

The car with Miyuki and Minami arrived at Tatsuya's villa without almost any delay.

"Hanabishi-san, good job."

Tatsuya, who came out to meet them under an umbrella, first of all thanked Hyougo who came out of the car.

"Thanks."

On the answering Hyougo's face one could barely discern the curved smile, that appeared, perhaps, because of the feeling that someone stole some of his work. Guilty of stealing the work of Hyougo, Tatsuya did not care that he was getting wet himself, he opened the back door and positioned the umbrella so that Miyuki would not get wet. It was Minami, who got down from the front passenger seat, and ahead of Hyogo, walked around the car.

"Miyuki, you're here. Minami too, good work."

"Onii-sama, I'm sorry about the intrusion."

Oblivious to the look of Hyougo, Miyuki opened her umbrella and elegantly greeted Tatsuya. Minami silently bowed to Tatsuya and went to help Hyougo carry luggage from the car. However, out of the building soon came a self-propelled trolley with a roof, and took even the work of these two.

"Miyuki, Minami, get inside first."

Tatsuya sent two girls inside, and he spoke to Hyougo.

"Hanabishi-san, did you want to tell me something?"

"No, I'm not assigned to give you anything today. Just take care of Miyuki-sama."

"Does that mean there's no traffic anywhere?"

"It does, if we are talking about the situation inside the country."

Tatsuya slightly frowned his eyebrows from Hyougo's manner of speech, clearly having a hidden meaning.

"So there is movement in other countries?"

"I dare to assume that Tatsuya-sama has already heard about the press conference of Dr. Chandrasekhar and about Shaheen's interview."

"Yes, I know."

The conversation prolonged the time standing in the rain, but neither Tatsuya nor Hyougo was bothered about it.

"However, there was no response from the USNA or the New Soviet Union." "Do you mean that this is quite unnatural?"

"As you say."

"I got it... I will just have to be on guard and be on the lookout."

"We will try to continue to collect information."

Hanabishi Hyougo had his own information route associated with his practice in the British PMCs. At the moment, Tatsuya was not in touch with the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, so Hyougo was his most reliable acquaintance through which he could explore the activities of other countries.

"I am in your care."

"As you wish. In that case, I'm saying goodbye to you for today."

Hyougo politely bowed, dried his clothes soaked from the rain with magic, and sat down on the driver's seat.

When Tatsuya returned inside the villa, a number of cups of hot coffee were already on the table in the living room. To the deep discontent of Minami, Pixie prepared them.

Instead of changing, Miyuki and Minami quickly drank their coffee to get warm, then left to change clothes.

They went "together" because Minami expressed her intentions of taking care of Miyuki.

Returning to the living room, Miyuki was dressed in a comfortable integral dress in the form of the letter T. Along with the mysterious elegance created by Miyuki's appearance, the feeling of grace of a high-ranking priestess was also present.

Minami was in a cardigan and skirt. Although it was not her usual "dress + apron", but even so she looked like she was wearing a skirt like apron. That's how she created her image.

"Miyuki, and Minami, too, sit down. I want to hear what happened during the time I was gone."

Having said that, Tatsuya in advance wanted to prevent the start of a rivalry between Pixie and Minami for the kitchen. Minami did not become mischievous, she also wanted a little rest. Because she's not a robot that does not fatigue.

"Let me think... Maybe we should talk about Wednesday."

Minami sat, not showing any discontent on her face (in other words, in reality she was unhappy with it). Miyuki, sitting next to her and opposite to Tatsuya, mentally smiled bitterly and began the story.

"Tomitsuka-kun came to the School Council room and asked when Onii-sama plans to visit the school next time."

Miyuki called Tatsuya "Onii-sama" like the other day and spoke with no more hesitation or embarrassment.

"And you couldn't answer him."

Tatsuya did not pay attention to the use of "Onii-sama", and showed no sign of doubt in the sudden request of Tomitsuka.

"I told him that. But then he wanted to meet Onii-sama, and asked where this villa is located."

"Were there any urgent matters?"

But having heard that he did not just want to wait at school, and was even prepared to go to him, Tatsuya, as expected, showed interest.

"Yes. Tomitsuka-kun seems to want to try to convince Onii-sama."

"What does he want to convince me of? Why?"

Tatsuya asked both "what" and "why". When he heard about his conviction, he quickly guessed that it was about Project Dione. But Tatsuya could not understand why Tomitsuka decided to take such excessive actions. Maybe because of the connection between them as classmates?

Answering Tatsuya's question, Miyuki explained the development of events from the very beginning in detail. The explanation of the circumstances in which Minami was also involved, sometimes by inserting explanations, took some time.

"...So that's how it was? I even feel sorry for him."

Tatsuya indifferently expressed his impression of Tomitsuka, having finished listening to the story to the end.

"Even Minami was concerned about him."

For Minami, he, on the contrary, cared more.

"No, nothing like that, thank you for your concern."

Though Minami responded instantly, she could not conceal her embarrassment. Her behavior seems to have been that she didn't expect Tatsuya to be worried about her.

"In direct combat, Tomitsuka is a strong opponent. Although you were saved by his simplicity, but you're very lucky that it ended without injury. You shouldn't have been so reckless."

From the words "You were saved by his simplicity" Minami made a barely noticeable frown. She felt uncomfortable when she was reminded again that she had been subjected to the bad thoughts from a representative of the opposite sex. But in the end, realizing that this voice carries a real concern, Minami was again confused.

"Yes... Thank you very much."

Miyuki looked at these two with a little scary smile.

Immediately upon arrival in Vladivostok, the data on the location of Shiba Tatsuya was received from an officer of the Foreign Intelligence service.

"He is staying at a villa in Izu with his fiancée...?"

His staying away from localities was convenient. Of course, it would be better for him to be alone, but there is nothing to be done. Igor heard that the bride, who is his cousin, is also a mighty magician, but he was sure of his magic. All the more so now that this time he had brought his external terminal "Igrok" *, which amplifies his magic power.

[Previously described as "Player"]

Igor was a man born from artificial insemination, which in the old way was called a "baby from a test tube".

It was not through gene manipulation, but through the production of countless fertilized eggs, and among them was he was chosen as the most successful specimen.

And he was officially recognized by the New Soviet Union as a Strategic Class Magician Igor Andreivitch Bezobrazzoff.

Of course, there were attempts to biochemically copy his fertilized egg, and as a result clones were created, which can be called his "younger sisters" *. They were expected to become the same as Igor, Strategic Class Magicians. And in fact, seven clones mastered the Strategic Class Magic "Tuman Bomba".

[They don't seem to be exact clones for some reason, having a different gender]

However, the clones who received the middle name "Andreevna" had health problems. None of them could live normally outside of a sterile room.

And in terms of Magic power, they, unfortunately, were greatly inferior to Igor. Although they could actually activate "Tuman Bomba", but in terms of range and activation speed they were not fit for real battles.

But even if they were not used separately, they were useful as external terminals to help Igor.

They were clones, similar to the original, Igor. Therefore, it was not difficult for him to synchronize his Magic Calculation Area with them.

In order for the mind to be intact, which is the basis, and not to receive damage, Andreevna were deprived of their "ego", and were living machines, "Players", used only to activate the magic of the "conductor" Igor. He directs the way the players "Play" magic. This was the role of the clones, called "Andreevna", and how they were forced to live.

[The author conveys the meaning, using a mixture of Russian, English and Japanese words. The translation was not very explanatory, so I will explain: the word "player" means "player of an musical instrument", and "Play" magic, means how to perform it in the form of music. These are all expressions, and in fact nobody plays anything, but just conjures.]

Every time Igor uses one of them, their minds are broken down. But Igor does it without hesitation.

He could have had such a fate. But for a winner in a survival competition, acting like a loser is unnatural. Though he was created, Igor couldn't choose any other path in life than being one of the leading scientist of the New Soviet Union. Even now, things remain unchanged and he has no choice but to use Igrok.

He entrusted his assistant with the final adjustments to the large CAD that was being towed by a military train on the New Siberian Railroad.

The movement of each of the "Thirteen apostles", the magicians of Strategic Class, have a huge impact on the world's military balance, and has always been in the spotlight of other countries. Igor of the New Soviet Union, whose movement had been very difficult to trace, was now quite easy to see, so among the thirteen apostles he was given special attention. The thirteen apostles remained thirteen, because after the announcement of the death of Liu Yunde, Liu Li lei took his place.

And for Japan, in particular, Igor was a Strategic Class Magician from an unfriendly country with which they share common borders. So he was considered a direct threat.

Moreover, the attacks carried out in April in the coastal waters of Sado Island and in the Soya Strait were assumed to have been performed by the magic of Igor's "Tuman Bomba".

Monitoring his actions and his continued behavior was a crucial issue in Japan's National Defense.

Saturday evening, June 8th.

Responsible for the 1-0-1 Brigade, Lieutenant General Saeki Hiromi received important news through her private channel, and not through the official army channels.

The news said that Igor together with his personal train moved to the Far East.

"Although it says the 'Far East', the Russian seaside region is quite large... He's probably in Vladivostok. And yet, what is this personal train...?"

There was such information that to activate Tuman Bomb you need to use a huge CAD the size of a truck or train wagon. According to this unverified information, there was such a theory that Igor moves through the territory of the New Soviet Union on his personal train with an attached wagon-CAD, thus meaning that he could be using Tuman Bomba.

If this information is correct, the range of Tuman Bomb is not as large as that of Material burst which can be used from anywhere on Earth.

For magic, in fact, the physical distance does not matter.

But to overcome the real "distance", a deep understanding of magic and strong self-confidence is required. And also we can say that you need willpower to deny "erroneous common sense".

If Igor is inferior to Tatsuya in this aspect then that means it might be necessary for him to approach his target to use Tuman Bomba.

At the same time, it also means that once Igor has moved on a personal train to the Far East, it means that he could be using Tuman Bomba near Japan.

Japan itself could also be his goal.

This time it was impossible to deny direct guidance to the lands of Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu and Hokkaido.

"...In the current circumstances, there is a high probability of the target being 'him'."

Saeki thought he should be warned. However, as a result of thinking about it for a minute, she decided to leave it as it is.

More precisely, she decided to keep on observing. Saeki took the intercom device and dialed a short number.

"...Lieutenant Colonel Kazama, it's me. Sorry for the late call, but urgently come to my office."

Tension after the events in the Soya Strait have already gone, and now was a relatively peaceful time. Although it was quite late, Kazama still appeared quite quickly.

(If it is Kazama, he should be able to observe what happens while understanding "him".)

(If it goes smoothly, we can find Igor using "him".) So Saeki thought when thinking about the most profitable outcome.

With Miyuki at the villa, Tatsuya suspended his research and became her partner for this time.

Not out of a sense of duty, but because Tatsuya himself wanted to talk to Miyuki, and spend time with her.

Perhaps it was due to the mental reconfiguration, conducted by his mother Miya. If all emotions were limited to just one emotion, then the result was that it would likely heighten the remaining emotion.

However, Tatsuya believed that this was not a problem.

If his feelings were not manipulated...

If he had his own free will, he could envy his almost perfect little sister, he could shun Miyuki, he could even hate her.

When the older brother is inferior in talent, usually in most cases they are jealous of the younger sister and hate her.

Therefore Tatsuya thought that it would be better, like now, that he had no such feelings for Miyuki.

...But it also had a limit.

After they dined and took a bath (this time they took baths separately), Miyuki requested that both of them to sleep together, but Tatsuya, as expected, could not agree.

"Miyuki... Sleeping in the same bed is a bit..."

Naturally under the word sleep it was meant to sleep, without any erotic subtext.

She seems to have prepared for this in advance. Miyuki "begged" just to sleep on the same bed. It was like a little kid begging a parent to sleep together.

"We can't...?"

Tatsuya felt dizzy. He felt ashamed that he could not say "impossible" right now.

"...The other day, I slept in a Japanese-style futon. I think the best compromise would be if we lay in separate futons in the same room."

"That'll do. Thank you very much, Onii-sama!"

Miyuki joyfully waved her hands in front of her, in quite a good mood. Nothing can be done, Tatsuya sighed mentally.

Igor took the place of the operator of the big CAD "Argan", in which there were two "Igroks" placed in sterile capsules, Anna Andreevna and Veronica Andreevna.

"Argan" was just a common name. The meaning of the word was the same as the word "organ". Igor commands them like a "pipe organ".

One government official who saw this CAD that occupies an entire vehicle said it looks just like a "pipe organ" and the name stuck.

[The author may have read about the Maskovskij dialect somewhere, where the "o" is pronounced as "a". I don't know how else to explain this writing.]

They were similar only in size and shape, with pipes protruding from the sides and from behind.

"Players" are stuck inside the capsules and the "conductor" closes them in while sitting in a luxurious chair.

Igrok actually has seven capsules in total. But not all of them are necessary. To only activate Tuman Bomba, Igor alone is enough.

Igrok is a subsidiary and safety device, and for this scale of an operation two people were more than enough.

Igor ran his eyes through the information about the vicinity of the target obtained from the information network of the army of the New Soviet Union.

The weather in the targeted area is shallow rain. There's no wind. These were close to optimal conditions for the application of Tuman Bomba.

The current time is 6 o'clock in the morning. The local time in Japan is 5 o'clock in the morning, the target should still be asleep.

Igor prepared to activate the magic that will turn their usual dreams into eternal dreams.

In a Japanese-style room, where the ritual to remove the seal was held last month, two futons were now laying side by side.

Two mattresses were stacked, tightly lying next to each other, without a gap between them.

Under thin summer blankets a brother slept with his sister, Tatsuya and Miyuki. Both the young man and woman are engaged to each other.

However, the bedding of these two had no noticeable disturbance.

Naturally, both had not only their own mattress, but also their own blanket. Their futons, sheets and pajamas only had signs of bruising from moving in their sleep.

Miyuki with a happy face slept on her side, turning toward Tatsuya.

Tatsuya quietly slept on his back.

There was still some time before dawn.

Even at the earliest moment, it would still take 30 minutes until Tatsuya's alarm clock was going to go off.

Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki had shown any signs of awakening.

The supercomputer, which comes with the CAD "Argan", converts these targets' positions from the monitoring device into a format that can be used for the CAD. At the same time, the original activation sequence data required to build the magic sequence is created by the supercomputer under the control of Igor.

Rather than defining elements of the activation sequence within your mind, Igor builds an Activation Sequence based on conditions that were entered into the computer through the console. In doing so, he could build extremely complex and confusing activation sequences, impossible for ordinary magicians.

This CAD uses the same equipment-type computer that is located in the Far East Headquarters of the New Soviet Scientific Academy. The performance of the CAD at the academy is much higher, however it doesn't have a system designed to use Igrok. Igor brought Argan because he decided that the assistance of Igrok was necessary for this operation.

Igrok forces whomever is in to sleep by using electric stimuli, but he can still extract the psions from the Andreevna sisters. The naked women in their late teens are immersed in a physiological saline that adjusts to the same temperate as their current body temperatures. They wear respiratory masks since they aren't conscious.

However, the capsules did not have any transparent windows, besides, they were already loaded inside Argan, so no one could see their faces at the moment. But if you could see their faces it would reflect the sight of someone in agony, but neither Igor nor his staff would raise an eyebrow if they saw them suffering.

Immediately after the infusion of psions by Igor into the main module of Argan, the Activation Sequence starts. Igor and the Andreevna sisters read the Activation Sequence simultaneously. Igor consciously forces the two Igrok's regardless of their consciousness.

Argan adjusts the Activation speed of all three of them so that the magic output timings are matched. These three people including Igor, automatically start up the Magic Activation Sequence which will activate the Strategic Class Magic, Tuman Bomba.

Evil intent threatens me and Miyuki.

Tatsuya instantly surfaced from the depths of sleep to the waking surface.

(Decomposition of water... formation and recombination of oxyhydrogen gas*)

[oxyhydrogen gas is a combination of O_2 and H_2 that is quite flammable in a 1:2 mixture which is provided from water: H_2O]

Immediately after awakening, Tatsuya found the nature of the evil intent and the nature of the magic used.

(Tuman Bomba!?)

The rain, which went on for a long time, has already turned into a fog.

The process of dividing the rain drops into fog.

The process of the evaporation of fog into water vapor.

The process of decomposing water into oxygen and hydrogen.

And finally, the process of combining the hydrogen and oxygen, then igniting.

Tatsuya recognized the nature of the Strategic Class Magic "Tuman Bomba".

He almost unconsciously stretched out his hand to the pistol shaped CAD Silver Horn Customized modification of the "Trident" which he left near his cushion.

When he sleeps, he always keeps his favorite CAD within the reach of his hand.

Countermeasures were prepared, taking into account the experience he gained while supporting the battle in the Soya Strait.

The chosen magic was not Gram Dispersion, but Mist Dispersion.

Tatsuya targeted the modification of the phenomenon that decomposes water. Decomposition of water molecules into hydrogen and oxygen.

The purpose of the modification is that all water molecules generated by the hydrogen and oxygen fusion within a radius of 50 meters will be decomposed.

Tuman Bomba activated.

Mist Dispersion activated.

The conflicting modifications of the two magics clashed and the challenge between both mages failed.

"Not completely!"

The enemy's attack hadn't finished yet. The magic that copies the Sequence of Tuman Bomba, "Chain cast" had not finished yet.

With a slight delay, new drops of rain were falling from the sky.

"Leave it to me!"

Miyuki's magic activated at the same moment when Tatsuya heard her voice.

She activated "Freeze Flame" which is a Speed-Type and Oscillation-Type wide area magic that can freeze even fire. It is a conceptual magic that prevents anything from burning.

"Onii-sama, now!"

"Understood!"

Now, in a 100 meter radius around the villa, nothing could ignite.

Using the time Miyuki won, Tatsuya sent his "eyes" looking for the operator of "Tuman Bomba". Exploring the "link" aimed at him and Miyuki, he "searched" for the source of malice.

But he "saw" something else. The enemy attack had not yet ended.

Beyond the range of Miyuki's magic, high up in the sky, a new Tuman Bomba was prepared.

Even when the first and second blows of Tuman Bomba were prevented, Igor was not worried.

Tatsuya was not the only one who gained valuable experience in the Battle at the Soya Strait.

When Igor suggested that his enemy was the Strategic Class Magician, wielding the magic of converting mass into energy. He conducted simulations to find countermeasures in the case they were to face off again.

The data he had entered into the supercomputer Argan was the data he had obtained from that tactical simulation to create a chain of Activation Sequences.

Although he did not expect an enemy that prevented anything from burning, this magic can't stop something when the phenomenon has already occurred, so he aimed outside of the range of Freeze Flame.

In such a case, countermeasures should not be changed.

The simulation based magic attack has already been launched. Igor sat on his conductor's chair and waited for the moment when his victory would be confirmed.

Tatsuya "saw" that at an altitude of 200 meters above the villa, a rain cloud was producing a dense fog in the shape of a funnel.

This was outside of the range of Miyuki's "Freeze Flame".

The shape of the inverted funnel was obviously to achieve the Monroe effect. Tatsuya tried to destroy the structure.

However, even with his Activation Speed for decomposition, he could not prevent Tuman Bomba, which has already come to its final stage.

He did not have enough time to read the structure of the magic that formed a funnel from the misty mass.

The foggy mass is broken down into hydrogen and oxygen, but the oxyhydrogen gas is getting ready to ignite.

According to the Monroe effect, the shock wave of the ignition will be concentrated at one single point.

And the point of concentration was not in the hole of this funnel, but much lower, right at the villa.

"Victory!"

This was the final step in the sequence of the three attacks.

Igor was sure of his victory, receiving the response of a successful attack, which was the same as saying checkmate.

As a side effect of the use of magic, the rain clouds covering the sky were now gone. Igor doesn't have a low-orbiting reconnaissance satellite this time, but he is making use of another satellite that is further away.

Igor accessed the observation data of this satellite using the command function installed in the CAD Argan.

"What!?" An astonished voice bursted out.

The image that appeared on the portable monitor had a completely intact villa.

Having taken the concentrated shock wave created by Tuman Bomba, the wooden building should not remain whole.

According to an analysis conducted half a day ago by a spy satellite, the villa was a regular wooden structure.

There was a possibility that it could be equipped with a shelter in the basement, but that the ground part of the building would remain untouched was impossible. Except for just one possibility.

(The magic of a protective barrier...? Able to stop such a shock wave?) Igor has not forgotten the existence of magic protective barriers. It was estimated that even if Shiba Tatsuya or his fiancée would have installed a shield, it would still not be able to stop the shock wave. Igor was sure of the power of the concentrated shock wave.

This version of "Tuman Bomba" was the same magic that killed the previous Commander of the Stars, William Sirius, during a local armed conflict with the USNA, which occurred in the Bering Strait, and was named the "Arctic Hidden War" (the Arctic hidden War).

(Has Juumonji Katsuto been involved in the defense?) Igor was aware of the existence of Juumonji Katsuto, who possessed powerful barrier magic. Igor knew of Katsuto as the strongest threat to stop his Tuman Bomba.

(No, there was no such information.)

Thinking about it in his mind, this idea of Igor was immediately thrown away as a delusional thought. Intelligence should not have lost sight of the movement of such a dangerous magician.

(But who was it then...?)

Igor was in a predicament when he could not answer this question.

Because of this senseless confusion he missed precious time... And a chance to win.

As the shock wave came right on top. Tatsuya reflexively hugged Miyuki in an attempt to protect her.

Minami's morning began early.

As a performing maid, she was getting up earlier than anyone in the Shiba family. Away from home, in the villa, this did not change.

But since it was only 5 o'clock in the morning, she was still quite sluggish and sleepy. No, she didn't have low blood pressure, she's just not completely awake.

Her rival Pixie was the one who finally awakened the consciousness of the half-asleep Minami.

"Get up! Protect your master!"

This sound, bursting in her defenseless head, was like a blow to a gong. The realization that the scream that was made right inside the brain was the active telepathy of Pixie, came after she had activated her CAD.

In order to fulfill the purpose of the Guardian at any time, she always kept it at hand, ready for activation. She was already dressed, so it was in her apron pocket.

Sooner than she realized it, Minami grabbed her CAD in the form of a mobile terminal in her hand, and pressed the key for quick access, channeling psions through the finger.

She raised her eyes. In order to reduce the time required to activate magic as much as possible, she defined the coordinates for the Activation Sequence as "space in my view where there are no hard objects".

In Minami's head, the image of a Dome shaped Magic barrier formed, covering the roof top. Following this image, the barrier magic was activated. Immediately after that, a shock wave struck the shield.

Tatsuya's decomposition magic did not make it in time, but Minami's magic made it in time because its magic shield had already completed formed.

It was magic, stopping any physical attack.

But such a fuzzy definition loaded the Magic Calculation Zone of the operator.

Magic is easier when you limit the kind of objects you want to protect.

Moreover, the flying shock wave possessed the power to break Minami's barrier. In terms of single-layer barriers, Minami's barriers are comparable to a Katsuto's Phalanx. But the way to maintain the barrier is different from Phalanx.

In the Protective version of Phalanx of the Juumonji family, once the barrier is formed, it usually is left on its own. Only the duration of existence is decided, and if it receives an attack, and its superior in strength, it is simply destroyed. Instead, the next barrier is prepared, that uses the destruction of the existing barrier as the condition for activation. Maintaining a multi-layered shield, creating barriers one after the other with zero delay in time –that is the protective magic of the Juumonji family.

On the other hand, the barriers of Minami's "Sakurai" series, is a two-stage technique of creating barriers to take on physical attacks and she has to use continuous magic power to maintain the barriers she creates and to make duplicates if necessary.

If it is the same kind of magic, there is no harm caused by duplication.

For example, Fortification magic, which Leo specializes in, does not require a higher Interference Power for the next Fortification magic.

Minami's barrier magic was the same.

She continued to apply barrier magic to the same area. By doing this, Minami prevented the destruction of the barrier.

But it meant that it continuously activated the magic of protection against accidental attacks, which has a heavy load, even when it does not accept any attacks. Such actions strongly overloading the Magic Calculation Area.

(...I won't lose!)

(I Can't Lose!)

(I will protect Miyuki!



From an objective standpoint, Minami had no reason to be so obsessed with defending Miyuki.

She is not encouraged to do this out of kindred love, like Tatsuya.

Minami's genetic aunt, Sakurai Honami took care of Miyuki like she was family, but these were the events of the past, and not related to Minami.

They were acquired for the protection of Miyuki, or, in a certain sense, their series of improved people, "Sakurai" series, was enslaved by the Yotsuba family only to obey the orders of the young mistress.

Minami has only lived with Miyuki for a short year.

However, suffering from her Magic Calculation Area overheating, Minami still supported the barrier.

Was it out of stubbornness as a magician?

Or was it because of the distorted system of values that was used in her training?

Or was it out of fear of being thrown out after use?

There were no such frivolous motives or other negative motives.

With such motives she would not have gone to such difficulties.

Why does she protect? Even when asking herself, Minami wasn't able to answer this question.

She doesn't know the reason. She doesn't need a reason.

Having become a shield for Miyuki, Minami resisted the Strategic Class Magic "Tuman Bomba".

Created by the magic of Igor Andreivitch Bezzobrazoff that made oxyhydrogen gas ignite. The shock wave was over. In time, it was a short event, lasting only one moment. But this "moment" was long enough for Minami to reach her limit.

Having received the response from the barrier that the attack stopped, Minami canceled her barrier magic. And at the same time, she lost consciousness.

Her body lost its strength and collapsed on the floor.

Overheating of the Magic Calculation Zone due to the excessive use of magic.

Minami fell, losing consciousness, the same way the previous Sakurai Honami lost her life.

"What happened...?" A stunned Miyuki muttered, still in the arms of Tatsuya. She also felt the activation of Tuman Bomba and the attack wave.

Her "Freeze Flame" could not protect her. After switching to counterattacking, Tatsuya also did not have the time to intercept it.

She didn't think she was dying. Because any wound she would get, Tatsuya would cure her. No, "restore her" to be more precise.

Somewhere in her heart there was such a dependence on someone else's kindness, that she was not afraid of the pain that was to come soon.

However, the destruction that was definitely going to happen did not occur. The pain that comes with fatal injuries did not come. Miyuki, whose consciousness was occupied by the thoughts of "This is a miracle Tatsuya" and "You did it all for me", could not understand what happened.

"Miyuki, Deceleration Zone! Radius of 30 meters!"

"Y-yes!"

The Freeze Flame effect had already ended. Miyuki activated the magic that Tatsuya requested without any fear of the effects of the magics overlapping.

Deceleration Zone.

This is the magic that slows down the movement of physical objects in the targeted area.

In the usual case, this magic only slows down solid bodies, but Miyuki's "Deceleration Zone" was able to slow down even gas molecules.

It could also inhibit the expansion caused by an explosion, or in other words, decrease the speed of the chaotically moving air molecules.

From such deceleration, the shock wave faded and lost its destructive force.

Tatsuya and Miyuki were originally mistaken. The correct magic to confront Tuman Bomba was not "Freeze Flame", but "Deceleration Zone".

"Pixie, take care of Minami!" Tatsuya said in to the darkness, not waiting for any confirmation of Miyuki activating her magic (because he trusted Miyuki's magic skills).

"Yes, sir" Pixie answered telepathically.

He did not give more instructions.

Now the main priority was to prevent further attacks.

Tatsuya resumed the interrupted search for the target. He pulled his right hand over his head while holding a specialized CAD, "Trident", in the form of a large pistol.

With Elemental Sight, he looked for the source of Tuman Bomba. Not at the source of the explosion, but at where the magic originated from.

The magician who started the magic.

"...It's not Bezzobrazoff?"

Tatsuya read the Eidos of two young women. They were terribly distorted and fragile Eidoi, clearly, magicians with unsuccessful bodies.

Igor, who was shown at a press conference about his participation in Project Dione, was a man over 40 years old. There was no guarantee that that was really him. However, he could with full confidence say that Igor was a Russian man. He wasn't supposed to be a twenty year old woman. And Elemental Sight is not mistaken.

Traces of a disguised Eidos, done with the magic "Parade", which is used by Lina, was not observed.

"Is this another Strategic Class Magician hidden by the New Soviet Union?"

According to rumors, in addition to the thirteen official Strategic Class Magicians recognized by States, the world is hiding another thirty to forty Strategic Class Magicians.

Tatsuya himself was "a Hidden Strategic Class Magician". No matter who the two women were, he was sure they were the source of Tuman Bomba.

"If that is the case, I must erase them."

Having strongly said this, Tatsuya activated his three-stage decomposition magic "Trident", which has the same name as his favorite CAD.

First it eliminates the event interference that is covering the magicians, then it eliminates the Data Fortification that protects their bodies, and finally it decomposes the body down into its constituent elements.

This magic does not "burn" The human body, but makes it "disappear".

This magic that erases human bodies has been activated at a distance of more than a thousand kilometers.

On the console of the large CAD "Argan", a blinking signal appeared.

At the seat of the "conductor", which was occupied by Igor, the alarm sounded.

Igor was shocked when he checked the cause of the alarm.

At the same time he felt a strong relief, thinking: I am saved...

The alert message displayed on the console was similar to the following:

"Both capsules, in which the Igroks Anna Andreevna and Veronica Andreevna were held, exploded."

As if they were fairy princesses, the two Andreevna sisters disappeared in the form of bubbles inside the capsules filled with saline solution.

The increased pressure due to the vaporization of the human body exceeded the durability of the capsules, causing the excess pressure to burst and damage the Argan.

Igor urgently evacuated Argan.

The large CAD, which was damaged by the rupture of the capsules, required repair. He wouldn't be able to continue attacking even if he stayed inside.

But now that his dolls have disappeared, he was no longer hidden from the information dimension. This made Igor afraid of this ultra-long range magic attack, that made the two bodies disappear.

Igrok's were not only external terminals that helped to activate Igor's magic, at the same time they were "firewalls" protecting him. Igor released Tuman Bomba through Anna Andreevna and Veronica Andreevna.

Now this barrier is gone. Igor was relieved that he used Argan this time around, because if he hadn't, he might have been the one to be erased.

Igor was not dumb enough to just get out of the Argan's cockpit, he also popped out of the wagon shaped CAD. And, having ran away from the railway path, he stared closely at the wagon, fully occupied by the large CAD.

No more attacks. Igor did not feel humiliation. He just felt relief that he survived.

Tatsuya erased the two enemy magicians, that he saw through the information dimension and damaged the CAD they were using, which could no longer be used to fight.

"Miyuki, that's good enough"

"Yes, uh, Minami-chan..."

Miyuki already understood. That she defended them with her barrier magic from the shock wave.

"Come with me."

Tatsuya did not have the time to even look Miyuki in the eye as they left the Japanese style room that was used as a bedroom.

Ignoring Tatsuya's behavior, Miyuki hurried after him.

And screamed when she saw Minami lying on the floor in the dining room.

(Continued in the volume Escape, Part 2)

(Grammar and structure edited by englishmuffins10)