

魔法科高校の 劣等生30

奪還編

The irregular
at magic high school



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「将輝さん……？」

「……好き、なのだと思います。
将輝さんは、優しい人だから」

「待ってください！」

劉少尉はまだ十四歳の女の子ですよ。
全員と隔離する必要は無いはずです！」

一条将輝 いちはなう・まさき

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

劉麗蕾 リウ・リーリイ

大亜連合の戦略級魔法『霧
靈塔』の継承者となった十四
歳の少女。現在は日本に滞
在し一条家と接触する。

Chapter 1

Early Saturday morning, July 13th. More specifically, it is ten minutes to seven in the morning.

“Are you going to go visit Honoka right after returning home?”

Tatsuya with his usual expression, asked Miyuki with his usual voice while they were on their way to the school.

“Yes, as planned.”

Miyuki with a different appearance has bright chestnut-colored hair, light brown eyes, and a different voice than usual, due to Lina’s magic “Parade,” but she speaks with the same tone of voice.

Yesterday, July 12, Minami was taken out of the country through a sea route by the efforts of Minoru, who secured the support of the Parasites from the American army. Tatsuya’s chase ended in failure.

But neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki became discouraged.

“Tatsuya, will you come too?”

Lina asked Tatsuya, who had exactly the same face as Miyuki, but they differed in the color of their hair and eyes.... Lina took her face as the basis for changing the appearance of Miyuki, so if we exclude the difference in colors, they were indistinguishable from one another, like two peas in a pod.

Lina also knew that Tatsuya failed to return Minami.

However, Lina didn’t seem to worry about Tatsuya.

Not because she thought that Tatsuya didn’t care about yesterday’s failure.

Lina knew perfectly well that both Tatsuya and Miyuki took some damage mentally. However... neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki has given up.

Lina was also aware of this.

“Yes, I’m going. Lina, are you going to go too?”

"Of course. Honoka is my friend."

"... If Tatsuya and Miyuki behave as if nothing had happened, then I will also maintain my usual behavior," Lina thought to herself.

◊ ◊ ◊

Miyuki was forced to change her face with Lina's magic in order to avoid the attention of reporters.

On Monday, July 8, Ichijou Masaki, with the help of the new Strategic-Class magic "Ocean Blast," stopped the advance of the NSU fleet in the Sea of Japan.

By itself, this event went exactly as Tatsuya had calculated and planned. However, Kichijouji Shinkurou's speech to reporters told them the name of another hero, greatly disrupting Tatsuya's plans.

Absurdly honest Kichijouji told reporters the name of Tatsuya as the co-developer of Ocean Blast. Now "thanks" to this, not only Tatsuya, but Miyuki has also become the target of aggressive attempts by journalists to get information.

Fortunately, neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki have yet to be surrounded by reporters and photographers.

The school still doesn't know that Tatsuya and Miyuki moved to the building in Tofu. According to the records, they still live in their private home that's owned by their father, Shiba Tatsuro, in Fuchu. As a result, the media is now mainly targeting that house.

Therefore, one could easily guess that reporters who could not get anything from their home would decide to ambush them on the road from the station to the school. In fact, that's the way it was. Anticipating this, Tatsuya asked Lina to change Miyuki's appearance to another person.

Miyuki is headed to school with Lina earlier than usual, because it takes time to dispel Lina's "Parade." The magic can be undone in an instant, but in order to prevent an unspecified number of students from seeing this transformation, they must go to the student council room, not the classroom, and cancel the disguise there. For that reason, they went to school earlier than the usual time.

When Miyuki and Lina left, Tatsuya settled in the dining room. Despite the setbacks, he hasn't given up on the rescue of Minami, and he hasn't been driven away or been beaten by Minoru.

This morning, he had gone over the consequences of his actions yesterday. But no matter what he did, it was still left unfinished.

"... Minami is heading east across the Pacific Ocean. Their course remains unchanged..."

Sipping coffee brewed by a home automation system, he turned his "sight" to Minami. He could easily track her Eidos in the information dimension without any issues.

"Minoru... hasn't noticed that I'm "looking.""

Minoru was supposed to be next to Minami. Tatsuya decided to follow this "connection" and tried to read Minoru's Eidos. But, before he could focus, the "image" of Minoru disappeared from his "field of vision."

"Kimon Tonko?"

Obviously, Tatsuya's "line of sight" was disoriented with the help of Minoru's Kimon Tonko. It seems that Minoru has perfectly mastered the East Asian continental ancient magic, "inherited" from the ghost of Zhou Gongjin.

At this, Tatsuya consequently stopped his observation. Attached to Minami's Eidos, the marker he put there still remained, and he doesn't particularly want Minoru finding it.

By continuing such a careful observation, it is likely that the ship carrying Minami would be able to be stopped. However, a careless attack could hurt Minami and that would be getting his priorities mixed up. Even if he tried to destroy only the engine, the ship in the end may just sink, which is completely unacceptable, and the connection between that and his "sight" could be exposed.

"It's still too early..."

Thinking that it was time to get ready to leave, Tatsuya finished his coffee. He was going to a meeting of the Ten Master Clans. Although, no formal attire was required, at least some formal attire was required. Officially, he was still a high school student, so his school uniform was suitable for this, but he decided to change into a suit.

Having put the cup in the dishwasher (there was no need to press a button, since the

sink started automatically when a sufficient amount of dirty dishes was reached), Tatsuya went to his room while walking past the living room.

At that moment he was stopped by the sound of an incoming call on the videophone.

It was still only eight in the morning. The only reason to call at such a time could only be an urgent matter. It could also mean that this person can only call at this time? If so, then it was impossible to remain indifferent.

Tatsuya went into the living room and pressed the call respond button.

Fujibayashi Kyouko in her military uniform appeared on the wall display.

“Tatsuya-kun, good morning. Sorry to call at such a time.”

Fujibayashi spoke without hesitation from the videophone screen. Her behavior indicated that she wasn't at all concerned about the fact that it was early morning.

“Good morning. Do you have an urgent matter?”

Tatsuya suddenly asked in a cold tone. He wasn't so inhospitable because his mood had deteriorated. This was a completely normal behavior for him.

“Not that this business was urgent...”

Fujibayashi mumbled.

With a silent look at the camera, Tatsuya urged her to continue.

Fujibayashi's eyes nervously ran from side to side, and she spoke without looking Tatsuya in the eye.

“... I want to apologize for my father. Tatsuya-kun, could you give me some of your time?”

“Do you mean you want to meet and talk face to face?”

“Yes.”

At that moment, Fujibayashi finally looked Tatsuya in the eye with determination on her face.

"My father's deed was a betrayal, for which you shouldn't apologize through a camera and monitor."

Fujibayashi Kyouko's father, Fujibayashi Nagamasa fought with Tatsuya yesterday at the foot of Mount Fuji, in the Aokigahara Sea of Trees. He stood in the way of Tatsuya to thwart his pursuit, and let Kudou Minoru escape. The night before, Nagamasa promised to cooperate with Tatsuya in the capture of Minoru, so his act can no doubt be called a betrayal.

"Not necessary."

Tatsuya's response was still indifferent and cold.

"But..."

"I just now received your apology, nothing more is needed."

The tone of Tatsuya's voice seemed to say: "It is useless to object."

Fujibayashi had already opened her mouth to continue. However, Tatsuya's voice sounded before she could say anything.

"Instead, would you like to visit your father? Do you know which hospital he is in?"

Defeated by Tatsuya, Fujibayashi Nagamasa, was captured by Kuroba Mitsugu's subordinates and taken to the Yotsuba family-run hospital in Kofu. Now he is undergoing treatment there with limited freedom of movement.

"Yes. I've heard from my mother."

"He was badly wounded, but not so much you would be refused to meet with him."

This "restriction of freedom" of Nagamasa didn't mean that the Yotsuba family would interfere with his communication with the outside world. Last night, his family was told of the name, address, and telephone number of the hospital where he was being treated.

"...Okay, I understand."

"First talk to the person responsible for the problems, Nagamasa, and only then come back." Was what Fujibayashi interpreted from the words of Tatsuya.

“Once again, I sincerely apologize for what happened.”

Tatsuya somehow understood that Fujibayashi misinterpreted his words, but didn't take the time to correct her.

“Everything is fine. Take care.”

Having finished the conversation with words that can be called cynical and easily be misunderstood, Tatsuya turned off the videophone.

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Lieutenant Colonel Kazama who worked in the office of the 101 Independent Magic Equipped Battalion left his office without even being able to sit for a considerable time. It's because he received a message from the terminal device above his desk.

Currently he was standing in front of the desk of the 101 brigade commander, Lieutenant General Saeki.

“Yesterday, in the former Yamanashi Prefecture, in the vicinity of Mount Fuji and the lakes of Kawaguchi and Saiko, a person named Kudou Soushi appeared in a police investigation.”

This was the first topic that Saeki raised right after the usual exchange of greetings.

A faint surprise appeared on Kazama's face.

“That person has the same name as the second son of the Kudou family.”

“That was him.”

The surprise on Kazama's face became clearly distinguishable.

“But, what was he doing there? The funeral of His Excellency Kudou is scheduled for tomorrow, so he should not have time for any long trips.”

As Kazama said, the funeral of Kudou Retsu, who was killed by Minoru (officially died of an illness), will take place tomorrow on property belonging to the main house of the Kudou family. Undoubtedly, the ceremony will be attended by many guests in order to express their condolences. The family of the deceased should be busy with

preparations not only today, but also for several days leading up to the funeral.

"Kudou Soushi seems to have joined the battle against Shiba Tatsuya to help Kudou Minoru escape."

"Do you think the Kudou family is still connected to Kudou Minoru?"

Kazama's voice showed that he was not only surprised, but shocked.

"This is only circumstantial evidence."

Saeki wasn't particularly surprised at Kazama's shocked state, and only answered him in an indifferent tone.

"But since Kudou Soushi was interrogated by the police, this mean that Tatsuya has not erased him, right?"

"Naturally. His Mist Dispersion is classified top secret magic. To use it to eliminate interference for the return of a servant - is not permissible."

At this point, Saeki's poker face started to crack. Her words meant the direct enforcement of the point of view of the army. While this point of view didn't coincide with Tatsuya's priorities. However, Kazama didn't begin to point this out to her now.

"I think that to some extent he understands this..."

Saeki sighed.

"... The ball of fire that was observed last night in the Shonan area was caused by his "Mist Dispersion." There is no direct evidence for this, but my subordinates analyzed images from infrared cameras on a stratospheric platform, as a result of which such a conclusion was made.

"This is the first time I'm hearing about this."

This remark by Kazama expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that this information didn't reach him. Tatsuya, as "Special Lieutenant Ooguro Ryuuya," is commanded by Kazama in the Independent Magic Equipped Battalion. It is reasonable that the Information Division of Division Headquarters was responsible for the initial analysis, but Kazama believed that before making the final decision, they should naturally ask his opinions as the battalion commander.

Saeki understood Kazama's feelings, and actually expected them.

"Our battalion, won't protect Shiba Tatsuya in regard to the violations he committed yesterday."

Furthermore, she completely ignored Kazama's displeasure.

"His behavior has recently become completely unacceptable. If he thinks that he can do what he wants, because he is a Strategic-Class Magician, then we should rectify the situation."

"In my opinion, Tatsuya has no such error in his thoughts..."

So since we now have a new Strategic-Class Magician named Ichijou Masaki, that means that Tatsuya has "outlived his usefulness?" But, Kazama didn't say this out loud.

"By the way, if you say that Kudou Soushi helped Kudou Minoru escape, then that means... Kudou Minoru successfully escaped from Tatsuya's pursuit?"

"It seems that Kudou Minoru fled to the Pacific Ocean on a USNA army transport ship, taking Sakurai Minami with him."

"Does he have connections in the USNA army?"

"Obviously, the Parasites from the USNA army helped him."

The Japanese army managed to find out that the Parasites are building up their influence within the USNA army, making the Stars the center of their forces. This was information that was available only to a fraction of the Intelligence Department and a small number of people in the leadership, but Saeki was able to get the information through personal connections.

"I see."

Saeki had not yet spoken about this with Kazama, but he wasn't surprised by this. Kazama's reaction was unexpected for Saeki, but she didn't ask him if he knew about it. She had a fear that the conversation might turn into him inquiring about her source of information, which was undesirable for her, if she asked him about it.

"... Shiba Tatsuya most likely already knows how Kudou Minoru escaped. So, there's a good chance that he knows the place where he escaped too."

“Tatsuya has that “sight.” But what is the problem with that?”

“The transport ship that took Kudou Minoru aboard seems to be heading to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.”

“Northwest Hawaiian Islands... Are you worried that Tatsuya might go to Midway Island?”

“Correct.”

Saeki answered in the affirmative, not even trying to get away from the answer.

“Lieutenant Colonel. The Independent Magic Equipped Battalion should in no way help Shiba Tatsuya with an attack on Midway Island.”

“I understand. I will also bring this to the attention of my subordinates.”

Seeing that Kazama understood, Saeki breathed a sigh of relief.

From Saeki's behavior, Kazama concluded that she fears that he might want to take part in such an attack on the base of the American army. It was extremely undesirable for Kazama to be considered such a person who puts personal feelings above national interests. Kazama was dissatisfied by her assessment of him.

“Is that all you need?”

That is why his words carried a tone of resentment. At that moment, Kazama no longer hid his discomfort.

“No. There is one more thing.”

There was no concern in Saeki's voice about Kazama's dissatisfaction. But the tone of her voice seemed somehow too calm.

“A decision was made to release the Australian magicians captured in March, Jasmine Williams and James J. Johnson.”

“Will they be extradited to Australia?”

“Yes.”

Kazama didn't ask about the reasons for their release. If this was the decision of the

government, then he didn't want to invite trouble by asking unnecessary questions. According to official records, there are no Japanese soldiers held captive in Australia. However, there may be undercover agents held in custody as criminals, and not as prisoners of war. Kazama himself also had some involvement with illegal operations, but in fact he didn't want to be involved with people engaged in similar work.

"Lieutenant Colonel, I would like to assign you with a mission to escort these two."

"Me?"

But as soon as Saeki spoke about this, he immediately realized that the case of these two Australian agent magicians would concern him personally.

"This task will only take one day, and it won't interfere with the management of the battalion."

"May I know the date and place?"

"Departure from our base on July 14 at 09:00. The two of them will be transported to our base today, during the day."

"Tomorrow... And where do you need me to escort them? To Australia?"

"To the island of Iwo. Extradition will be made there."

"We are just giving them back?"

"It won't be a prisoner of war exchange. However..."

Saeki paused and pulled a sealed letter from her desk.

"Pass this on to the person in charge on the spot. Be sure to personally hand it over."

"Personally, to who, if I may ask?

No name or address was written on the envelope. Therefore, the issue Kazama had was quite obvious.

Saeki's answer turned out to be unusual.

"Lieutenant Colonel, you know this person both by name and appearance."

At the moment, only Saeki and Kazama were present in the brigade commander's office.

This meant that he was a man whose name couldn't be spoken aloud, even here.

"I understand."

Kazama didn't question any further.

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It was already ten o'clock in the morning when Tatsuya took off from his house in a small helicopter piloted by Hyougo. His flight destination was the Yokohama Bay Hills Tower. Today, at 10 a.m., the emergency convening of the Ten Master Clans Conference will start, which will be held in the online conference hall of the Kanto Magic Association. Tatsuya was called to the conference as a witness.

"Saegusa-senpai, good morning."

Tatsuya spoke to Mayumi, who was standing at the entrance to the conference room.

"Good morning, Tatsuya-kun. You are early."

Mayumi smiled broadly and went to meet Tatsuya.

"Senpai, are you here as the representative of Saegusa-dono?"

"No, not at all. I'm here as an assistant to Juumonji-kun."

"That's what it is. Indeed, even Juumonji-senpai may not be able to focus on the conference if he needs to manage the video conferencing system alone."

"Yes, assistance from outsiders is not prohibited."

For a moment, Mayumi's face seemed to darken. It seems that she knew what would be the subject of discussion at today's meeting.

However, Mayumi quickly regained a friendly smile.

"Tatsuya-kun, would you like some tea over there?"

“But the conference is supposed to begin soon, isn't it?”

“We have more than ten minutes.”

Mayumi said and dragged Tatsuya to a special place reserved for tea parties.

Tatsuya knew that she was a woman with her own special outlook on tea drinking. He was worried that it would take longer than just ten minutes to make tea of acceptable quality, but Mayumi wasn't so fanatical. She just got ice tea out of the refrigerator and set it in front of Tatsuya.

“Tatsuya-kun, I'm sorry I didn't help you last time.”

Mayumi started the conversation with an apology right after she put the glass in front of Tatsuya. She didn't put anything superfluous, like syrup, milk or lemon, on the table. The lack of frills was probably due to a lack of time.

“... Are you talking about last month? But that evening, as a result, Minoru's attack was repelled. On the contrary, I should be thanking you.”

Mayumi talked about that evening in late June, when Minoru attacked the hospital where Minami was staying. As Tatsuya said, Minoru couldn't kidnap Minami that evening.

“That time, the attack of Minoru-kun was repulsed by Juumonji-kun... But if we could have caught Minoru-kun then...”

“I couldn't catch Minoru, either.”

The atmosphere at the tea table became heavy and gloomy.

“... By the way, have you been going to school lately?”

Completely changing her tone, Mayumi asked Tatsuya, apparently in order to get rid of her gloomy mood.

“I go. Sometimes.”

Tatsuya didn't lie. Even if you look only at the current week, on Wednesday he went to introduce Lina to Director Momoyama. In addition, the school resumed work only on Thursday. Tatsuya decided that the answer “I don't go to school at all”, on the contrary,

would be a lie.

But contrary to Tatsuya's thoughts, Mayumi frowned when she heard his answer.

"But I know that Tatsuya-kun is exempted from going... I also know why it happened..."

Mayumi looked at Tatsuya with concern in her gaze.

"So the situation isn't going as Tatsuya-kun wanted...? After all, they didn't tell you that you shouldn't go to school at all? Maybe you should better go there as often as possible? You only have six months left to be a high school student..."

From Mayumi's words, Tatsuya realized that she was worried about him. But, she was obviously mistaken.

"I'm going to school as often as possible."

It wasn't an excuse; it was undoubtedly the true thoughts of Tatsuya. At the time when he first entered First High School, he probably didn't like going there, but the present Tatsuya didn't dislike going to school. Rather, on the contrary, he already experienced some attachment to First High School. In addition to his personal preferences, Tatsuya was very curious about how Miyuki and Lina spend time together at school. For Miyuki, he simply (as usual) was worried, and concern for Lina was expressed by the thought "I hope she doesn't do something crazy." But the current situation simply didn't leave him with much time to attend school.

"... That is, was it an unnecessary concern?"

It is unlikely that Mayumi understood so much from Tatsuya's short answer. She probably sensed changes in his tone of voice and expression. The anxiety that caused her to frown, although it hadn't disappeared without a trace, was significantly reduced.

Three minutes before the meeting, Katsuto appeared. This didn't cause any delay. Since the preliminary preparations were carried out by the staff of the Magic Association. An assistant was required only after the start of the conference.

Tatsuya and Mayumi entered the conference room after Katsuto.

The large display, divided into ten parts, was already attended by six people. Tatsuya with one slight bow greeted all of these people at the same time - heads of families from the Ten Master Clans. This behavior wasn't caused by the fact that he neglected

the heads of other families. Neither Katsuto nor Mayumi also greeted each of them individually, but also only made one general bow (Mayumi gave a polite low bow, bent over in her belt).

Some time after Tatsuya, Katsuto and Mayumi entered, the head of the Yatsushiro family appeared on the display.

And at exactly ten o'clock the remaining three appeared on the display: Yotuba Maya, Saegusa Koichi and Kudou Makoto.

"So, the time has come, and I now announce the emergency convening of the Ten Master Clans Conference open."

Katsuto's announcement didn't contain much formality in the welcoming words.

"I would immediately like to clarify one question."

Suddenly in a harsh tone, Ichijou Gouki, the head of the Ichijou family, spoke.

"Is it true that Kudou Soushi-dono helped Kudou Minoru escape?"

"I will answer. It's true."

Without flinching in front of such an onslaught, Tatsuya answered.

"Having impersonated the appearance of Kudou Minoru with the help of "Parade," Kudou Soushi-dono became bait, and led me away as a decoy. While I was chasing Soushi-dono, Minoru was retreating in the opposite direction."

"Kudou-dono. Are there any inaccuracies in Shiba-dono's words?"

Futatsugi Mai, the head of the Futatsugi family asked Kudou Makoto.

The Kudou family is currently not a member of the Ten Master Clans. Now they are one and the "Eighteen Replacement Families," which are designated to duplicate the roles of the Ten Master Clans. Kudou Makoto was invited to the conference not as a party to be notified of the situation, but as a party to be interrogated.

"At first glance, everything is so, but I would call the statement "impersonated" inaccurate. Soushi didn't become bait voluntarily."

Without hesitation, Makoto answered Mai's question.

“Do you mean that he manipulated him?”

“You mean that the Parasitic Minoru-kun controlled Soushi-dono as a puppet?”

Mutsuzuka Atsuko and Yatsushiro Raizou bombarded Makoto with questions one after another.

“Right. Soushi couldn't resist Minoru's mental interference magic after he had merged with a parasite.”

If Soushi was present, then he might have testified that he wasn't directly manipulated by magic. Soushi himself didn't offer to help Minoru escape, but in fear of overwhelming power, he was forced to cooperate. However, pressure on Soushi was exerted not only by Minoru. It is true that Soushi was frightened by the power of Minoru, but it was Makoto who ultimately ordered him to become bait. Minoru didn't use magic to manipulate Soushi's thoughts.

“Can Minoru-kun use the magic of manipulating consciousness? But, in the data provided about him there was no such information.”

“This is probably one of the new abilities he gained after becoming a Parasite.”

Makoto's explanation was a deliberate lie. Minoru didn't manipulate Soushi with magic, and didn't have the magic of manipulating consciousness. However, in Makoto's voice, as before, there was no noticeable excitement when answering Shippou Takumi's question.

“So you insist that Minoru-kun was manipulating Soushi-dono?”

This question was asked by Saegusa Koichi.

“Correct.”

Makoto's answer didn't change. Obviously, he was going to put all the blame on Minoru.

However, Koichi's questions didn't end there.

“Since when?”

“...What?”

Makoto showed his first signs of being worried.

“When exactly did Soushi-dono come under the influence of Minoru-kun's manipulation? I heard that the car used as bait wasn't rented or stolen, but belonged to the Kudou family. When exactly did Soushi-dono come under the influence of his magic of manipulation of consciousness, and when exactly did he take this car for use?”

“It was...”

“Kudou-dono, had you not noticed Soushi-dono's suspicious behavior?”

“... I'm ashamed to admit it, but I didn't notice.”

Makoto's tone of voice changed from painful to modest. His confident attitude cracked.

“That's pretty dangerous.”

Koichi said this not in a teasing, but rather serious tone.

“In what sense is that dangerous?”

Ichijou Gouki wedged into the dialogue between Koichi and Makoto.

Gouki, with his question, wasn't intending to help Makoto, who was in a quandary. He only heard that Koichi was talking about danger, and wanted to know what exactly he meant.

“Kudou-dono didn't notice that a member of his family was strongly influenced by a Parasite.”

Koichi spoke in a fervent tone, as if he were waiting for Gouki's question the whole time.

“Therefore, it is impossible to deny the likelihood that other than Soushi-dono, there are others who have been dominated by a parasite and are hiding in his family and among servants.”

Koichi's reasoning was rather stressed. But, it was impossible to deny them either. Unless Makoto refuses the claim that Soushi was manipulated by Minoru.

“Kudou-dono. I believe that the fears of Saegusa-dono cannot be ignored. What do you

think?"

Futatsugi Mai turned to Makoto, trying to maintain a neutral position.

"... I agree with everything that he said."

Makoto was forced to admit Koichi's words.

"I will check everyone at home immediately."

"You do not know who is under parasite control, right? Won't you be short handed by doing this alone, Kudou-dono?"

"Saegusa-dono, are you offering help?"

The one who answered Koichi's question was Gouki, not Makoto. If Gouki didn't speak just now, Makoto would have remained silent.

"I've been thinking about this issue for a long time, and over the past year my family has been looking for people who can use perception magic. I think it's time to use their skills. They would certainly be useful."

Koichi's enthusiasm for recruiting magicians with perception magic was based on observing the very first Parasite incident last year. At least there was no lie in Koichi's words regarding this point.

In addition, Koichi's proposal wasn't based on good intentions.

"Then how about our family helping too?"

"No, there's no need. We cannot ask for help from you, Yotuba-dono, when you already have problems with Minoru-kun and the USNA."

Despite her surprise, Maya's offer was immediately rejected. This clearly proved that, under the pretext of "investigation," Koichi plans to get the results of the work of the former Ninth Laboratory.

"How about Kudou-dono and Saegusa-dono discuss this issue later directly with each other?"

As if anticipating that sparks were about to fly between Koichi and Maya, Katsuto intervened in the conversation.

"That's right. It's as Juumonji-dono has said."

Gouki supported Katsuto's initiative.

"Good. Kudou-dono, give me some time after the conference?"

"I'm not against it."

When Makoto agreed to Koichi's terms, the atmosphere between those present returned to normal.

"Shiba-dono. No, or should I call you Yotuba-dono?"

Shippou Takumi decided to move on to the next question and therefore turned to Tatsuya.

"Please use Shiba"

Tatsuya answered this way not because of a rebellious sense of individuality, but in order to be able to distinguish him from Maya during this conversion.

"Then, Shiba-dono. Last night, were you the one involved in the shootout with a group of magicians who robbed the news helicopter near the eastern coast of Hiratsuka?"

"I was attacked from the helicopter you speak of, and I counterattacked with magic which destroyed them."

Tatsuya answered, correcting Shippou Takumi's wording a little.

"Yes, from the materials received it can be understood that the counterattack of Shiba-dono was self-defense."

Takumi responded to Tatsuya's objection with agreement in his voice.

"Could you understand who the opponents were?"

"Maybe these were Kudou Minoru's accomplices?"

Questions followed from Itsuwa Isami and Mutsuzuka Atsuko.

"That I could not understand. They had an East Asian appearance, but they had such distinctive features that I wouldn't call them Japanese."

Erika heard from Toyama (Tooyama) Tsukasa the assumption that the enemy is the Illegal MAP. However, Tatsuya didn't know this information at the time of the battle yesterday, so he held the position that he didn't know the identity of the attackers.

"I found out the origin of those guys."

As if rejecting Tatsuya's answer, Saegusa Koichi intervened.

"And who was it?"

Katsuto asked Koichi to continue.

"An illegal squad of killers from the USNA, unit Horsehead."

"Illegal MAP...?"

Mitsuya Gen muttered in an understanding voice, after hearing the name voiced by Saegusa Koichi.

"Saegusa-dono, Mitsuya-dono, what is Illegal MAP?"

After Ichijou Gouki's question, Saegusa Koichi and Mitsuya Gen's eyes shifted to one side. They looked at the monitor to see the facial expressions of each other.

As a result of eye contact, Mitsuya Gen was selected to answer the question.

"It's a unit strictly dedicated to illegal black ops and assassinations, which reports directly to the USNA army – Joint Chief of Staff. The unit consists of three squads, all of whose members are magicians with excellent interpersonal fighting skills. I heard that one of these units, called Horsehead, was created for tasks in the Great Asian Alliance, which is why it consists of magicians of East Asian appearance."

"So you mean that this is a certain elite unit of the American army, designed for illegal work?"

"You could say that."

Mitsuya Gen answered the question of Ichijou Gouki.

"Yotsuba-dono, why is America so intent on trying to kill your son?"

Gouki asked Maya in a caustic tone.

“Who knows? Maybe because Tatsuya flat out rejected their request?”

In Maya's blatant manner of speaking, it was obvious that she didn't even hide the fact that she could care less about all of this.

But Gouki didn't care about Maya's frivolous attitude.

“Are you talking about the request to participate in the Dion Project? I don't think that they would send a magician assassination squad just for that reason. As I thought, this must be related to the rumor about your son, so it's true?”

Maya didn't respond to Gouki's provocation, but only slightly smiled.

“What rumor?”

Shippou Takumi asked.

“The rumor that the Strategic-Class Magician who destroyed the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, the user of the Strategic-Class magic that caused the so-called "Scorched Halloween" is Shiba-dono, the son of Yotuba-dono.”

Formally, this statement by Gouki answered Takumi's question, but in fact it was meant as a subtle inquiry to Maya and Tatsuya.

Maya, as usual, only smiled impassively.

Tatsuya had to answer.

“I don't see the need to answer.”

From Tatsuya's offhanded answer, Gouki's eyes widened and his face turned red.

“This issue wasn't included in the agenda of this conference. If this meeting was planned for this, then from now on I will refrain from discussion and won't bother you.”

Tatsuya continued before Gouki managed to say something.

“Shiba-dono, you're exaggerating. Take it easy.”

“Ichijou-dono, you should also refrain from making statements to seek out the situation of other families.”

Mutsuzuka Atsuko and Yatsushiro Raizou hurried to become mediators in the dispute.

“... Really. This was an inappropriate topic.”

“I apologize.”

Gouki, though only in words, admitted that he was wrong, to which Tatsuya answered with a completely insincere apology.

The atmosphere in the conference room began to deteriorate. The heads of families displayed on the screen didn't hide their decline in motivation. Or rather just didn't want to hide it.

“If the armed forces that started the shooting were the Illegal MAP, then the riots that they organized were in no way connected with Minoru-dono or with any Japanese criminal organizations. This time they were able to penetrate the country, by taking advantage of a convenient moment during the retreat of the NSU fleet, so from that moment on, the self-defense forces, in order not to shame their honor, will have to strengthen their vigilance.”

Mitsuya Gen probably felt that they couldn't continue on like this, so he decided to continue the discussion.

“Therefore, we don't need to be involved in this matter. I believe that the issue that we should discuss now concerns the responsibility of Kudou-dono.”

“Mitsuya-dono is right. Even though it was a result from falling prey to Minoru-dono's magic, this didn't happen without the help of the Parasite, whose existence arouses public alarm.”

Saegusa Koichi spoke up, taking advantage of a convenient moment after Mitsui Gen's speech.

“Yotsuba-dono. Did Kudou Minoru abduct a maid from your house? What decision would the Yotsuba family offer in this case?”

Obviously, with this question, Koichi was trying to leave Maya with the dirty work.

“Let me think... Tatsuya, what do you think?”

Without removing the smile from her face, Maya simply threw the question of Koichi's

to Tatsuya.

“I believe that we don't need to force them to take responsibility.”

Tatsuya answered without hesitation.

“If the Kudou family was manipulated by Minoru, then they too can be considered victims of the Parasite. It is also an unbiased fact that the Kudou family is the main victim in this matter, since Minoru killed the previous head of the family. I believe that from the point of view of humanity, it would be inappropriate to condemn the grieving family for complicity, while preparing to hold the funeral of His Excellency Kudou tomorrow.”

“Well said, Shiba-dono.”

Futatsugi Mai agreed with Tatsuya in a quick manner of speech, unusual for her, praising him. Perhaps she was afraid that in this case the objections wouldn't be relevant.

“As Shiba-dono said, Kudou Minoru is the criminal who killed the previous head of the Kudou family. The Kudou family wouldn't have been willing to help such a person.”

“From the point of view of common sense, it is.”

Agreed Yatsushiro Raizou in a slightly ironic tone.

“I also support the view that there is no need to demand compensation from the Kudou family. Saegusa-dono, does this suit you?”

“Since it suits Yotsuba-dono, I won't mind.”

Glancing at Mitsuya Gen, Saegusa Koichi voiced his agreement with the humbled face.

In addition to Maya and Tatsuya, the opinion that the unity of the Ten Master Clans should not be disrupted was supported in their own words by Mai, Raizou, and Gen. Although the Kudou family wasn't one of the Ten Master Clans at the moment, it was recently among them, and it clearly stood apart from the other Eighteen Replacement Houses. If you push the Kudou family beyond measure now, the Ten Master Clans system may weaken. This is precisely what they feared.

Koichi also didn't want to violate the established order of the Japanese magical world

with the Ten Master Clans at its top. Although he sought to lower the status of the Kudou family, which retained a strong influence, despite the fact that it left the Ten Master Clans, but general devastation wasn't part of his plans.

"That's great. And also, Shiba-dono."

Mitsuya Gen didn't stop even after forcing Saegusa Koichi to compromise.

"What?"

"Yes, I agree that this place is not suitable to reveal your strength."

"Mitsuya-dono. This has already..."

Katsuto tried to stop Gen. But he didn't stop.

"However, Shiba-dono. Now it's no secret to anyone that you are the same Strategic-Class Magician. Your actions and statements have caused uncontrollably arising suspicions and rumors among many military and politicians both in Japan and abroad. You should be a little more serious about the harsh reality in which these people, fearing a threat, may show an excessive reaction."

Gen's comments were not based on malicious intent or hatred. Rather, on the contrary, it was his way of showing concern for Tatsuya's present and future.

The Mitsuya family had military ties not only in Japan, but also abroad. They probably intercepted fragmentary information regarding secret plans to neutralize the "Strategic-Class Magician, Shiba Tatsuya."

"I will take your advice into account. But even if you call it a well-known secret, I still can't speak about anything relating to myself."

Tatsuya seemed to understand that too. However, his position has not changed.

He had an agreement with self-defense forces, according to which he was forbidden to disclose that he was a user of the Matter to Energy explosion magic. In addition, he could not ignore the information received from Shiina through Miyuki.

The Mitsuya family informed the self-defense forces of Tatsuya's plan to attack Midway Prison. Obviously, the information was transmitted to Saeki, closely associated with Tatsuya, precisely in order to prevent the implementation of this plan in practice. If you

look from the appropriate point of view, Tatsuya could not help but think that this speech of Gen's also had the goal of tying to bind his hands and feet.

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Today's extraordinary meeting of the Ten Master Clans left Tatsuya with a bad aftertaste. It was fortunate that he wasn't blamed for the battle with the Illegal MAP, but the fact that he was pretty much exposed as a Strategic-Class Magician was an unacceptable result for him, despite the fact that it wasn't his fault.

However, if you continue to be in a bad mood, then this will cause undue concern for Miyuki. Forcibly suppressing these feelings in himself, he went to the hospital where Honoka is staying, which he, along with Miyuki and Lina, planned to visit after they returned from school.

"Hi, Honoka! How are you feeling?"

When they entered the hospital ward, Lina spoke first with Honoka.

Tatsuya and Miyuki stood behind her with a delicate lack of expression on their faces.

In truth, Miyuki didn't speak first because she felt that Honoka would be glad if Tatsuya spoke first. And Tatsuya, as if having read Miyuki's thoughts, was planning to ask Honoka first about her well-being.

However...

Lina destroyed this plan of action with her energy.

But she couldn't be blamed for this, because they didn't discuss who would do what in advance. The result of all this was a temporary lack of facial expression in Tatsuya and Miyuki.

Perhaps Tatsuya and Miyuki showed excessive caution.

Honoka answered Lina's question with a clear voice, without showing a single bit of disappointment.

"I'm alright. Although this is called "hospitalized," I'm just here for a routine examination."

“I see. That's good.”

Having recovered to his normal state, Tatsuya entered into the conversation.

“Tatsuya-san... I'm sorry to make you worry.”

Honoka was embarrassed, but didn't even hide her smile. Although she didn't think that Tatsuya wouldn't worry about her, but when he so openly showed his concern, she couldn't suppress the joy in herself.

“Honoka, you shouldn't apologize. Rather, I should apologize. Sorry to drag you into this. And Erika, I also created problems for you.”

In addition to Tatsuya's group, Erika and Shizuku also came to visit Honoka.

Tatsuya first bowed to Honoka, and then said an apology to Erika.

“What are you saying, Tatsuya-san! You are not to blame!”

“Right. Those villains are to blame. Fortunately, neither Honoka nor Mizuki were injured, so Tatsuya-kun doesn't need to take responsibility, right?”

Honoka was energetic, and Erika, with a barely perceptible smile, shook her head from side to side.

“I'm very glad that no one was hurt. I'm also not only talking about Honoka and Mizuki, but about Erika, Saijou-kun and Yoshida-kun too.”

Miyuki's words were from the bottom of her heart, but were also designed to prevent Tatsuya from continuing to apologize.

“Right. Mizuki also missed school today, but this is due to precautions so that yesterday doesn't happen again. As for Leo and Miki... in a sense, they are able to take care of themselves.”

As Erika said, as a precaution, Mizuki stayed home today. But Leo and Mikihiko didn't come, because they were too shy to come to a girl's personal (not shared) hospital ward.

“I also don't think that it's Tatsuya-san's fault either, but...”

The remark of Shizuku, who was silent before, sounded a little different from the

general flow of the conversation.

Shizuku stared at Tatsuya. There was no smile on her face.

“I want Tatsuya-san to protect Honoka so that this doesn't happen again.”

She had an absolutely serious tone, in which there wasn't a fraction of playfulness. Her face was absolutely serious.

“Ah!?”

Honoka screamed. Erika and Lina were also openly surprised.

For some reason, there was no surprise or anger on Miyuki's face.... But there was no smile either.

“I think you already know that I'm from the Yotuba family of the Ten Master Clans.”

Tatsuya's answer to Shizuku's question sounded more like a “question” than a “statement”.

“Yeah.”

Shizuku answered, not Honoka. Honoka herself only stared at Tatsuya, holding her breath.

“Previously, I'd been planning to separate from the Yotuba family in the future... Or even to confront them. But now I intend to live as a magician from the Yotuba family.”

When Miyuki heard Tatsuya continue to speak, her face darkened for a moment.

“For Honoka to be under my protection means, that she will become a magician working for the Yotuba family. She won't be able to live a normal life, or be a normal magician. However...”

“And yet, I do not mind.”

Gathering her strength, Honoka issued an answer confirming the acceptance of what Tatsuya had said.

There was no hesitation in her eyes aimed at Tatsuya.

But when she turned her eyes from Tatsuya to Miyuki, indecision appeared in her gaze.

“But then... Miyuki, does this not bother you?”

Hearing Honoka, Miyuki looked away.

However, she immediately turned back and looked Honoka directly in the eye.

“Honestly... I don't like this. Because Honoka is an attractive girl. But at the same time while having an objection to this, I am glad that we can together be a support for Tatsuya-sama.”

“Miyuki... Yeah, I'll try.”

Miyuki and Honoka smiled at each other. But the smiles of both were strained. Miyuki's smile was clearly feigned, and Honoka's smile lacked self-confidence. However, neither in their words, nor in their eyes was a lie.

“However...”

Miyuki said and turned to Tatsuya. Her smile, which she gave to Tatsuya, shone dazzlingly.

“It is forbidden to cheat, Tatsuya-sama.”

“There was no need to say something like that right now,” Tatsuya moaned in his thoughts, not even changing his face.

“There was no need to say something like that right now ...”

And then suddenly Lina's voice shouted out.

As expected... The atmosphere was ruined.

However, there was no one here who didn't understand that the cause of the ruined atmosphere was precisely because of the defiant act of Miyuki.

“... Of course.”

Tatsuya answered, making his face as serious as he could.

Honoka's face, meanwhile, had already begun to twitch from a constant smile.

“So greedy.”

Whispered Shizuku, standing to the side of Honoka.

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7 p.m. Lina had dinner again at the same table with Tatsuya and Miyuki. However, today she wasn't just waiting at the table, as usual, but was in the kitchen with Miyuki. Unfortunately, she still didn't have the cooking level to call it "cooking together." Rather, it was only "Miyuki's help."

“... I didn't expect Shizuku to talk about something like that...”

With great difficulty wielding chopsticks, Lina spoke to Tatsuya.... Miyuki in a rather Spartan manner didn't allow Lina to use a knife and a fork instead of chopsticks.

“It really was unexpected.”

Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki asked what exactly Lina meant by the words "something like that." To Shizuku's "request" expressed by the words "I want Tatsuya-san to protect Honoka," Tatsuya replied "I will take Honoka, Erika, and the others under my protection." And all this corresponded to Lina's impression, which she voiced last night with the words "it looks like you're going to establish a kingdom."

“But for you, Tatsuya, on the contrary, circumstances are more preferable when the other side has asked for protection, isn't it?”

“Yes.... But really, it would be better if the situation didn't go so far, that my protection would really be required.”

Lina suddenly took these words of Tatsuya's, which he was saying more likely to himself, seriously.

“... Honoka is also a magician. Therefore, for her, the probability of getting into a dangerous situation is already quite high, regardless of Onii-sama.”

“That's right. People who seek out powerful magicians, and make them work for them against their will, are in the government, and in civil organizations, and in criminal

gangs. Therefore, Honoka should be happy to be protected by Tatsuya.“

Miyuki and Lina hurriedly spoke in a distracting manner. More precisely, only Lina was nervous and hasty. Miyuki's words were more like convincing herself.

“...Yes, you're right. Plus, in this case, it doesn't mean that I have to do something right now.“

“...Right. Now it's better to give priority to Minami-chan.“

The chopsticks of all three froze. The air became heavier, as if this time there was no escaping or evading an answer.

“... I don't know if I should say this, but is it okay that you aren't busy chasing after Minami? You're not going to give up, are you?“

“Of course, I don't intend to give up.“

Without hesitation, Tatsuya answered Lina's question.

There was no indecision in his words.

The sad expression disappeared from Miyuki's face.

“I know her location. Now she is... about 1,200 kilometers east of Tokyo. Moving underwater in the Pacific Ocean at a speed of 35 knots.“

“Do you know so much!?”

Lina's eyes widened at Tatsuya's last words.

Her chopsticks even fell out of her hand.

Miyuki looked at Lina sitting across from her with a disapproving look.

“Sorry.“

Lina whispered, picked up the fallen chopsticks on the tablecloth, and laid them on the ceramic stand for chopsticks.

After ascertaining that Lina wasn't too lazy to put her chopsticks up properly, Miyuki turned to Tatsuya and asked:

“Speaking of underwater, do you mean that she's in a submarine?”

Needless to say, Miyuki herself, put her chopsticks on the stand right after she stopped eating, following the rules of proper etiquette.

“This isn't known to me. It can also be a fully submersible transport vessel.... More importantly, the food's getting cold. Let's talk while we're eating.”

“Really.”

“A fully submersible transport vessel? You know quite a lot...”

Although Miyuki and Lina reacted differently, they both continued to eat after Tatsuya.

“Moving east from Tokyo... Hawaii, maybe? Or...”

Although Lina tried to pretend that something had crossed her mind, it was obvious that she was passing off her expectations as reality. She considered it a convenient coincidence that the ship with Minami aboard was heading in the direction towards Midway Island.

Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki accused her of such recklessness. They both understood that Benjamin Canopus, a prisoner in Midway Prison, was dear to Lina, and she worried about him the same way they worried about Minami.

“Obviously, the destination is neither the main island of the Hawaiian archipelago, nor Oahu. They're either going to Midway Island or to the atoll next to it...”

Undoubtedly, this is precisely why Tatsuya led the conversation in the direction Lina desired.

“Lina, are there any USNA military bases in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands?”

Tatsuya heard from the Mitsuya family that a USNA military base is located on Pearl & Hermes Atoll. However, he decided to ask Lina this question, hinting that he might pay attention to Midway Prison.

“I heard that the Pearl & Hermes Atoll has a navy supply base.”

But unfortunately, Lina was unexpectedly serious. She didn't notice Tatsuya's hint and only answered what she was asked.

Miyuki stared at Lina with a frustrated look, trying to convey to her the thought, "No, not that!"

While Tatsuya was sitting next to her, he patiently continued to ask Lina questions.

"What did you hear about it?"

"I didn't look into every regional base that we weren't planning to use. I'm not a Navy officer."

"So it's not that big of a base?"

"Probably. I think I would remember if it were an important base."

"Should I, perhaps, say it to her myself...?"

Tatsuya was already starting to have a headache.

Miyuki was focused on eating her food, avoiding this conversation.

"So, this is a base that is far away from the mainland, and we don't know how many military personnel are stationed there? A suitable place to keep an abducted person there."

"... Tatsuya, do you think their destination is Pearl & Hermes base?"

Lina timidly asked Tatsuya.

Tatsuya no longer had the desire to keep dancing around this topic, tonight.

"I'm not going to ignore the likelihood that a kidnapped person might be imprisoned on Midway Island."

Lina breathed a sigh of relief.

Miyuki glanced briefly at Lina. This look said: "what a troublesome and demanding child that needs a lot of care" but Lina didn't even notice that Miyuki looking at her.

Chapter 2

Sunday, July 14th. 9 a.m.

As planned, Lt. Col. Kazama flew to Iwo Island.

Kazama's assistant, Senior Lieutenant Fujibayashi, went to Nara to attend the funeral of her grandfather, Kudou Retsu. Kazama's escort today was Major Yanagi and several junior officers and soldiers of a separate magically equipped battalion.

Also with him were two more "fellow travelers" - Jasmine Williams and James J. Johnson, combat magicians from Australia. In the spring of this year, they were caught red-handed for attempting to commit sabotage in Okinawa, and until yesterday were imprisoned in a military prison (not in the one for prisoners of war, but in the one containing enemy soldiers who are not considered prisoners of war). Kazama's task was to hand these two over to a representative of the Australian army, who would arrive on Iwo Island.

Jasmine Williams and James J. Johnson were informed that they were being released. They were both very surprised, but didn't even think to suspect a trick. Therefore, they behaved obediently.

"I hope that today's mission will end without incident," thought Kazama, and once again ordered his subordinates on the plane to watch over them.

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Elsewhere, approximately 30 minutes after the departure of Kazama.

Tatsuya along with Miyuki and Lina boarded a VTOL with Hyougo as the pilot.

Their goal was to provide the means to pursue and rescue Minami. In particular, they wanted to check on how the progress was going on the development of the four-seater air-car that is capable of flying to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.

Tatsuya has not yet decided whether he should fly directly to Midway Island and the Pearl & Hermes Atoll by air-car. A full round-trip flight in an air-car would be a rather extreme measure. It seemed foolish to join the battle immediately after flying more than four thousand kilometers. Even the idea of hijacking a warship of the USNA army seemed to Tatsuya more realistic.

Tatsuya flew to Miyakijima, considering a plan to which he might have to attract third parties.

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At the same time, an aircraft carrier approached the island of Iwo from the west. And this ship didn't belong to the Australian army. It was an aircraft carrier in the British Navy.

About an hour before the aircraft carrier arrived on the island of Iwo, a small hyper-sonic transport aircraft came closer to the aircraft carrier. The plane also belonged to the British army. Approaching, the plane landed on the corner deck of the aircraft carrier.

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A plane was also approaching Miyakijima from the west. However, it was a domestic aircraft - a business jet flying from Fukuoka International Airport.

This small jet plane landed at the Miyakijima airport shortly before Tatsuya arrived.

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A vertical take-off plane with Tatsuya, Miyuki, and Lina on board arrived at Miyakijima at the beginning of the eleventh hour of the morning. Their arrival took place at the scheduled time, and the visit was announced in advance, so they didn't have to wait for a car to meet them when they landed. However, the car that picked them up drove them to a different place instead of the planned one.

Instead of driving to the research buildings in the eastern part of the island, the car drove to the buildings along the west coast, which once housed the administrative staff of the magician prison.

They were brought to the former office of the head of the prison. In this room that was converted to the highest standard with a luxurious interior decoration, Yotsuba Maya, the head of the Yotsuba family, was waiting for them. She was sitting on the couch, and

behind her, as usual, stood Hayama.

Miyuki involuntarily turned around and looked at Hyougo accompanying them. But he only shook his head barely noticeable with a look on his face saying "I didn't know." Obviously, he was also not informed that Maya would be coming to Miyakijima.

In any case, surprise here won't help. First, Tatsuya decided to greet Maya. Miyuki followed suit. Lina was at a loss what to do, but in the end she chose a silent bow.

Maya invited them to sit down, and Tatsuya sat on the right end of the three-seater sofa. It was a place directly opposite Maya, who was sitting to the left on one of two single sofas, standing in a row on the opposite side across the table. Near Tatsuya, in the middle of the sofa, sat Miyuki, and after her, on the opposite end of the sofa from Tatsuya, sat Lina.

"Sorry to be so sudden. A visit to the research lab will have to wait a bit."

From these words, it was clear that Maya arrived at Miyakijima not by accident. After examining Tatsuya's schedule, she chose the right moment.

Previously, this would mean showing the highest degree of vigilance. But the present Tatsuya wasn't particularly tense in such a situation. An enemy can become an ally, and an ally an enemy. The concept of "volatile relationships" doesn't only occur in romantic relationships between a man and a woman. The enemy of yesterday, today will become a friend, and who today was a friend - tomorrow will become the enemy. Like Tatsuya had told Honoka at the hospital yesterday, the Yotsuba family, which he had previously considered his enemy, is no longer antagonistic towards him.

"No problem. So, can you tell us on what business you arrived?"

"Sure. Guests who came from far away were already waiting."

"Oh?" Tatsuya thought when he heard the answer. From her words, she suggested that these were not her guests, but guests for him. It would be unnecessary to say that Tatsuya wasn't aware of any guests in advance.

"Yesterday I could not talk about them."

From the following explanation of Maya, Tatsuya switched his attention to his thoughts. There was no point in guessing who these visitors were. In any case, he will soon meet with them. Judging in this way, Tatsuya went back to focusing on the conversation with

Maya.

“But first, I want to clarify something else.”

“What exactly?”

“Tatsuya-san, perhaps I should not ask about this, but... What do you intend to do in the near future?”

It was a rather abstract question, but Tatsuya wasn't embarrassed.

“Going to get back Minami.”

“I see... Do you know where Minami-chan is now?”

“Yes. A transport ship with the kidnapped Minami on board is currently heading towards the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.”

“And how do you intend to get to this place?”

“I am still thinking about this issue.”

“I see... Tatsuya-san.”

Maya's “passive” face has changed to that of the head of the family.

“Wait 2-3 days.”

“...Can you say why?”

Tatsuya asked about the reasons for this order from Maya.

“When there is news, no matter good or bad, I will certainly inform you of them without hiding anything.”

Maya didn't answer Tatsuya's question. But not only Tatsuya, but Miyuki and even Lina realized that she was up to something.

“I get it. I will follow your order.”

Tatsuya bowed to Maya, expressing his agreement.

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Tatsuya, along with Miyuki and Hyougo, went to a reception room located in the same building. Their guide was Tsutsumi Kotona. She was both the guard and bride of Shibata Katsushige, the heir to the title of head of the Shibata family, a side branch of the Yotuba family.

Lina stayed in the (former) director's office, as Maya told her, "we need to talk." And when the conversation with Maya ends, Lina will again unite with the rest.

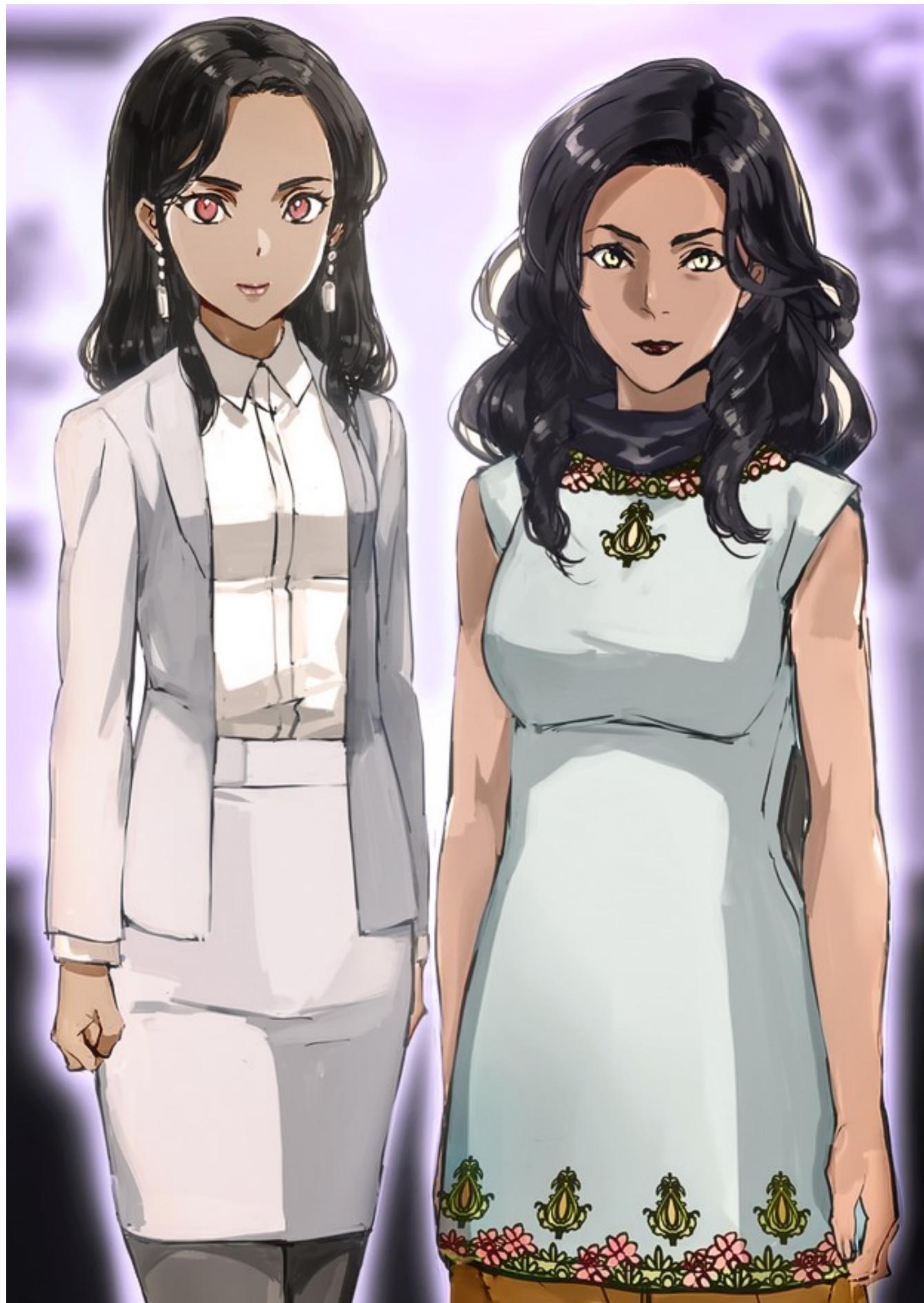
Kotona knocked on the front door. They answered from the other-side rather quickly.

"Katsushige-san. I brought Tatsuya-san and Miyuki-san."

More specifically, Hyougo was still with Tatsuya and Miyuki. But Katsushige... more precisely, the guests were waiting only for Tatsuya. Miyuki, the heiress of the title of head of the Yotuba family, could not be ignored, but the fact that Hyougo wasn't counted among those who arrived could not be called arrogance and indifference.

"Come over here."

Katsushige got up and led Tatsuya and the others to the sofa. In front of the three-seater sofa, there was a woman with dark skin and specific features, presumably 40-45 years old. And behind her stood a tall and slender beautiful woman with cocoa-colored skin that looked 20-25 years old.



The woman, who looked older, Tatsuya knew in person.

"Dr. Asha Chandrasekhar...?"

She is the leading figure in her country in the field of magical engineering, and also a professor at Hyderabad University, located in the south of former Central India, and the center for the development of magic in the Indo-Persian Union. She is the developer of the Strategic-Class magic "Agni God Downburst" (Agni Downburst).

"What is the VIP of the Indo-Persian Union doing here?"

Without showing his suspicions outwardly, Tatsuya went to Chandrasekhar. Miyuki walked up and stood next to him, and Hyougo behind Miyuki.

"Professor. This is Shiba Tatsuya, and next to him is Shiba Miyuki."

First, Katsuhige introduced Tatsuya and Miyuki to Dr. Chandrasekhar. And without any pause, looking at Tatsuya and Miyuki, he continued:

"Tatsuya-kun, Miyuki-san. This is a professor at Hyderabad University of the Indo-Persian Union, Asha Chandrasekhar."

"I am honored to meet with you. My name is Shiba Tatsuya. I've already heard your famous name."

"I am also glad to see you. My name is Asha Chandrasekhar."

Chandrasekhar held out her hand. Tatsuya squeezed it carefully.

"My name is Shiba Miyuki. Nice to meet you."

"I am pleased to meet you too. With such a beautiful heiress herself to the famous Yotuba family."

After ascertaining that Miyuki and Chandrasekhar also shook hands, Katsuhige invited the three to sit down.

The woman standing behind Chandrasekhar didn't budge. Even without explanation, it was clear that she was the guard of Chandrasekhar.

With one quick glance at her, Tatsuya could not determine who she was. But, Chandrasekhar herself revealed her identity.

Interrupting her sitting halfway, Chandrasekhar turned back. But Tatsuya and Miyuki didn't sit down, politely waiting for the elders to sit down first.

"Her name is..."

Having said this, she returned her gaze to Tatsuya.

"Arya Krishna Shastri. She is my bodyguard and an unannounced Strategic-Class Magician. Just recently she learned "Agni Downburst" in March of this year.

Miyuki widened her eyes and held her breath.

"My name is Shiba Tatsuya."

Without raising an eyebrow, Tatsuya introduced himself to Arya and bowed slightly.

Arya silently bowed to Tatsuya with the same light bow.

Grinning, Chandrasekhar sat on the sofa.

Following her, Tatsuya and Miyuki sat on the opposite sofa. Katsuhige sat on a side chair, and Kotona stood behind him.

The conversation between Tatsuya and Chandrasekhar began.

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Behind Maya stood Hayama, waiting for orders, and behind Lina there were no allies. For her it was like she was alone and without help on the battlefield.

In addition, her opponent was a sorceress, known under the pseudonyms "Demon Lady of the Far East" and "Queen of the Night." But Lina was also one of the strongest in the world, being a Strategic-Class Magician. However, Maya was rumored to be a user of magic that "surpassed Strategic-Class magic in a one-on-one battle" and from which "it is impossible to defend oneself." Lina already understood that Maya wasn't her enemy, but in this situation she simply couldn't help being nervous.

"Are you already used to living in Japan? Now you are in a position slightly different from the last winter, when you were here, aren't you?"

Maya who spoke to her first made a friendly face.

“Everything is fine. Miyuki and Tatsuya are really nice to me”

Encouraging herself with the thoughts “don't be afraid” and “don't be too alert”, Lina answered with a smile on her face.

“I'm very grateful that you undertook being the escort of Miyuki-san.”

“I'm also very grateful that you helped me with shelter.”

“I see...”

From somewhere, Hayama took out a cup and a glass of tea, and set them on a low table. A cup is set in front of Maya, and a glass of iced tea is set in front of Lina.

“Will chilled black tea suit you?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Lina immediately sucked on the straw. Without any ulterior motives. She was just thirsty from the exertion.

In fact, the ordinary black tea wasn't on Lina's list of preferred drinks, but she calmly drank the iced tea prepared by Hayama without milk or syrup. Not because it wasn't bitter, but because she didn't care right now. In such conditions, on the contrary, it seemed to taste good enough.

And the delicious drink eased the tension a little, and she relaxed.

Of course, this was Maya's psychological trick.

“I want you to continue to accompany Miyuki-san for as long as possible, but...”

Hearing Maya's words, Lina didn't spit out her tea in surprise, on the contrary, she swallowed it.

Fortunately, the tea didn't enter the respiratory tract, so she didn't start coughing. However, she did need to catch her breath before she could give an answer.

“I wonder what Shields-san is planning to do in the future? Will you return to America? Or will you stay in Japan?”

All of a sudden she was faced with a tough call. This question has been bothering her for a long time already, although only now was she put under such pressure.

"... Last February, Tatsuya said that he would help me if I wanted to leave the Stars."

Maya was showing surprise by widening her eyes slightly. It was a little bit of her acting, but also she was really surprised. She had never heard of such a thing before this conversation.

"At that time, I replied that "I don't think I want to leave the Stars." But now..."

"You wanted to leave them?"

"I don't know. More precisely, I am confused and can't make a decision."

As if in order to gather her thoughts, Lina lowered her eyes to her hands lying on her lap.

"I don't hate the States. Even now, I still have patriotic feelings towards America. But does my homeland really need me..."

Lina remembered the day when she had to escape from the headquarters of the Stars, and her voice trembled.

"Such issues are not so easily resolved. You don't have to rush to make a final decision."

Maya comforted Lina with a (outwardly) kind, love-filled face.

"...Thank you very much."

"If Shields-san wants to become a Japanese citizen in the future, I can make the arrangements quickly. Shields-san, if you become an adopted child of Japan, is there anyone who can object to it?"

"No... I've pretty much never saw my parents since joining the army."

"You didn't talk on the phone with them, either?"

"They didn't communicate with me either by phone or letters."

Lina was also a little unlucky with her family. As if considering her really high magical characteristics as something sinister, her relatives, both close and distant, preferred to

stay at a distance from her even before she was taken into the army. Also, her stunningly beautiful appearance also became one of the reasons that family ties were practically nonexistent.

But despite all this, when she was 10 years old, the army noticed her. Almost immediately after this, the army took custody of her, and from that moment on, her parents almost didn't come to meet with her, which was rather insensitive behavior from her parents. Although, perhaps, the army and the government had a hand in this without the knowledge of Lina.

... For example, for the reason that it was part of a policy of concealing the identity of a Strategic-Class Magician officially recognized by the state.

“I see, so that's what happened... Sorry to touch on such a sore subject.”

After hearing Lina's revelation, Maya understood how difficult her relationship with her parents was. Therefore, her voice was filled with sympathy.

“It's alright. On this issue, everything is already decided. Therefore, no one will oppose my adoption.”

“I see. As I said before, you can contact me about this at any time.”

“Okay.”

Lina bowed to Maya, not getting up from the couch.

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“Mister, what do you think of the current situation of magicians?”

Chandrasekhar asked Tatsuya.

In their conversation, such appearances were established: Tatsuya - “Mister,” Miyuki - “Miss,” and Chandrasekhar - “Doctor.”

“More specifically, I mean the means of control for magicians by the government of each individual country.”

Tatsuya thought for a moment and answered:

"If you look from the point of view of the government, then don't these measures work as they should?"

Precisely "as they should." However, that's with the reservation that it is "from the point of view of the government."

Chandrasekhar correctly understood Tatsuya's train of thought.

"Okay. But the government of any country, even such as the NSU and the GAA, will always consider that control of magicians is not enough."

"Probably."

Tatsuya agreed with the words of Chandrasekhar, nodding slightly.

"And from the point of view of magicians, this is something completely unacceptable."

"..."

Tatsuya refrained from commenting this time.

This didn't bother Dr. Chandrasekhar, and she continued to explain her theory.

"In modern society, the human rights and freedoms of magicians are neglected. Even basic human rights, which must be sacred and inviolable even in a democratic society, are not recognized as belonging to magicians. Or they are easily limited and violated. The use of magicians for military purposes is the sphere of their application, which most clearly reflects this situation. For example, in countries where conscription for military service as a whole has been canceled, for magicians conscription remains. Compared to non-magicians, magicians are treated with clear discrimination."

Tatsuya was surprised to hear the fiery speech of Chandrasekhar.

After all, she was a scientist who developed not only the "Agni Downburst", but also many other magics for military use, which made magicians useful for the government. Chandrasekhar herself is also a magician, but her magical power is so weak that she is unsuitable as a combatant. That is, she is not one of the magicians used by the government, but, on the contrary, she is a person from that same government that uses magicians. At least, that's how it was previously.

"On the other hand, citizens who are not magicians insist that magicians are

“dangerous creatures” that have the power to kill ordinary people even without weapons, and therefore their freedom must be further limited.“

“But only a small part of the anti-magicians behave this way, right?”

Involuntarily Miyuki interrupted her. Tatsuya was still silent.

Chandrasekhar's face faded. Moreover, it seemed that on her face reflected not only despondency, but also suppressed anger.

“In Germany and France, on the initiative of the government, collars are being developed to neutralize the wearer with electroshock if signs of activation of magic are noticed. At the end of the development, a law is likely to be passed requiring all magicians to wear these collars. Many European countries, with the exception of Britain, will follow this example, and ultimately, this idea will spread throughout the world.”

“It can't be! Isn't that like treating livestock??

In a voice that almost seemed like she was about to cry, Miyuki was simultaneously angry and trembling.

“Right. Not even slaves, but cattle. But this idea continues to spread not only among radical anti-magicians, but already among ordinary citizens.”

Chandrasekhar didn't even try to console Miyuki.

“They can't be allowed to do something like that!”

“Yes, miss, you are absolutely right. I think exactly the same.... In the past, I tried to provide magicians with a status in society, making them an indispensable fighting force for the state. But now I have changed my mind.”

“Do you have a specific plan?”

Tatsuya asked Chandrasekhar in a restrained tone.

“I believe that magicians have already reached the stage where they must independently defend their rights. And it is necessary not only to unite within the borders of their countries, but also without regard for state borders.”

"Doctor, you're not one of those who consider magicians to be a superior race, are you?"

"No. My opinion was formed solely as a result of the emotional rejection of the doctrine of the anti-magic movement. My intentions are not in enmity with citizens who are not magicians, but in organizing a moderate movement that protects the rights of magicians in a peaceful cohabitation."

"Cohabitation [併存]? Not coexistence [共存]?"

[The difference is in the first character, as you see. In general, the Japanese have a dozen different words for the word "coexistence," and all dictionaries simply write "coexistence" without giving any explanation. For the Japanese themselves, apparently, there are differences. I suppose that the first word means approximately "existence together, but contrary to something," and the second simply means "existence together."]

"Fear of civilian magicians has risen to such a level that it already causes mass hysteria among the people. Germany and France are good examples of this. And although I don't want to say this, it's the "Scorched Halloween" that happened two years ago that caused the current world situation. That was, in fact, because of your Strategic-Class magic, mister."

Tatsuya didn't deny the words of Chandrasekhar with any phrase, like "it wasn't me."

"Very few people can maintain sound judgment, believing that the possibility of falling under a nuclear strike can be caused not by a government decision, but by the whim of just one person. Of course, I am sure that Mister is not such an unreasonable person. However, there are many people who think otherwise. They not only don't want to know the character of Mister, they don't even want to know what you look like. Not wanting to know either your origin or name, they are simply afraid of Mister as a magician with catastrophic destructive power, and as the personification of death and destruction itself."

There was no doubt Chandrasekhar had hard evidence on Tatsuya being the strategic class magician. Even if she wasn't aware of "Material Burst", she definitely had information on the utilization of the magic, that surpasses strategic nuclear weapons in terms of power. There was no point in interrupting her to deny that it wasn't true.

“In such a situation it is difficult to hope for reasonable decisions. Therefore, you need to temporarily place magicians and non-magicians at a distance from each other.”

“But there are not so many magicians. Magicians themselves won't be able to maintain modern social standards at the required level.”

“Magicians, that is, those who are able to use magic at a practical level, are only 0.01% of the adult population. Although, there are those who have at least a slight compatibility with magic, and there are 10 times more than that. If you look at the 0.1% of the world's population in real numbers, you get a very small number. After the Third World War, the world population fell to three billion, but according to estimates for the last year, it has already exceeded five billion. It will be difficult to collect all people suitable for magic, but even if we could collect only one-hundredth of them, the result will be 50,000 people.”

“Even if you succeed in gathering people suitable for magic all over the world, it will be impossible to gather 50,000 people in one place.”

“An organization with 50,000 members and some economic power will have a voice that can influence governments of different countries. The plant with Mister's Stellar Furnace Energy Reactor is capable of serving as such an economic basis.”

Now the purpose of Chandrasekhar was clear. She flew to distant Japan because she wanted to use Tatsuya's Stellar Furnace Energy Plant in the fight for the human rights of magicians and magic-fit people.

However, Tatsuya did not feel any resentment. The goal of his ESCAPES project, also known as the Stellar Furnace Energy Plant Project, was precisely aimed at freeing magicians from their fate of being used as living weapons, and let them play major and essential roles as engineers and manufacturers. As such, Chandrasekhar's and Tatsuya's visions were compatible with one another.

“What exactly do you want to do? Transform the International Magic Association into a magician human rights organization?”

Chandrasekhar didn't answer in the affirmative to Tatsuya's question, which was slightly off topic.

“The International Magic Association has a very stable position as the organization needed as a deterrent against the use of nuclear weapons. To fight for the human rights of magicians, it would be better to establish a new Non-profit Organization. Also, to

designate people with aptitude for magic, in addition to words such as "magician," "engineer of magic" [magic constructor] and "creator of magic" [magicrafter], you need to enter some broader definition. For example, what about magian* as opposed to the word "civilian"?“

[I didn't figure out how to translate it. But since the characters speak the exact English variants of words, then from now on I will also have English to show this "author's style."]

“Magian... By the way, magic, have you added the suffix "an", which carries the meaning of "man"?“

“Yes, because the word magician for people is usually associated with the image of some magician-illusionist.“

“Okay. "Magian." I think this is a good name.“

“I also think that it sounds beautiful. But if you take this word into use, then what do we do with the word "magician," which is now in use? It seems to me that people who simply have a suitability for magic and people who can use magic in practice, still need to be distinguished from each other by name.“

Tatsuya and Chandrasekhar pondered the question identified by Miyuki.

“The Japanese word "magician" [魔法師] is an abbreviation for "magic technician" [魔法技能師], so I think that you can leave it, but...“

“... What about calling a “magic constructor” with the word “magist?” In the sense that it is a magian-technologist.“

“Technologist... Does this mean a person professionally working in a specialty based on knowledge in his field?“

“In this case, it is closer in meaning to the concept of “capable of magic” than to the concept of “person who builds magic” [magic constructor]. For us Japanese magicians, this is an easy-to-learn word.“

All three nodded to each other with smiles. At that moment, about the same image of the future appeared in their minds.

Chandrasekhar's face became serious, and she corrected her posture.

“Not today or tomorrow, of course, but within a few years I will be ready to create an international association of magians. And you, Mister, I would like to ask for cooperation in the establishment of this association.”

“If the situation allows, then I would like to join your association, doctor.”

“Then at the right time, I will contact you again.”

Chandrasekhar and Tatsuya held out each other's hands.

This time, Tatsuya shook her hand a little harder than when meeting.

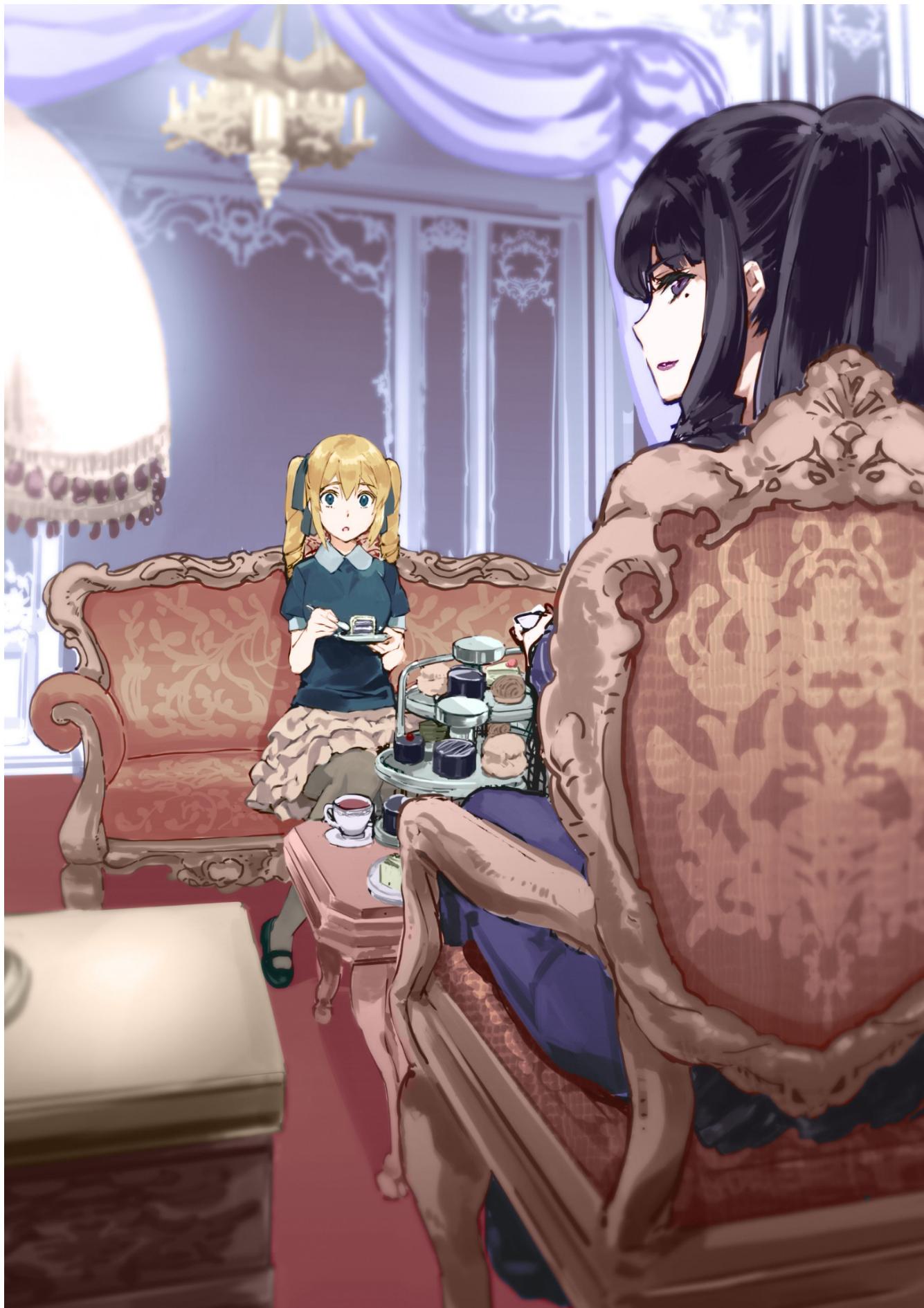
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Even when Chandrasekhar and Arya left the reception room, there was no sign of Lina's appearance, so Tatsuya and Miyuki decided to return to the director's former office.

“Ah, Miyuki. Have you finished your conversation?”

“Lina... What are you doing here?

On the table in front of Lina, many sweets were lined up. Maya, sitting opposite her, watched what was happening with a smile.



“I AM...? Yes, I’m trying delicious things.“

“Miyuki-san, do you know that there are a lot of different pleasures on this island? But since there is no longer a prison, now we need to improve this area. To begin with, I invited confectioners here.“

“...“

“I believe that the pleasure of eating is important to maintain morale.” Tatsuya replied in a neutral tone instead of Miyuki’s speechless voice.

Nodding agreement on her face, Maya got up from the couch.

“Miyuki-san, will you try?”

Maya gestured to Miyuki: “Sit here.”

Miyuki looked at Tatsuya, bewildered.

Seeing that he nodded slightly, Miyuki went to the place where Maya was sitting.

At the same time, Maya sat in a luxurious leather chair, standing at a table in the back of the room.

Leaning back and relaxing, Maya looked at Tatsuya.

As if answering this look, Tatsuya stood in front of the table.

“How was the conversation with Dr. Chandrasekhar?”

“It was pretty interesting. Oba-ue, do you know what we were talking about?”

“Of course, she previously told me.“

In other words, Maya has already agreed that Tatsuya will collaborate with Chandrasekhar’s plan.

Now it was possible to get a clearer promise from Maya to take on any obligations. But Tatsuya didn’t dare to ask for it. Because he didn’t want to pre-bind himself in the future with any activity entrusted in the form of orders.

“Understood.”

He answered only that.

Maya nodded generously and ordered Hayama to arrange a chair.

Tatsuya himself refrained from finding a place to sit, but he didn't need to go anywhere to do this. The office chair on wheels rolled itself to a place in front of the table. It wasn't as luxurious as that of Maya, but it also looked solid and had leather-covered armrests and a high back.

At the direction of Maya, Tatsuya sat on this chair when it stopped.

"Tatsuya-san, about what happened the day before yesterday. It seems like you defeated Fujibayashi Nagamasa with some new magic?"

Like waiting for Tatsuya to sit comfortably, Maya asked this with interest on her face.

"Yes, I used a new magic to break through Fujibayashi Nagamasa's magic."

"I wonder what kind of magic it was?"

This minor correction of Tatsuya didn't seem to bother Maya. All her attention was directed to the new magic of Tatsuya.

"In order for the pushion informational body to exist in this world and influence the phenomena in this world, it needs a psionic informational body, which will be an access point for it, a kind of conductor. It is like a support for existence in this world, or, to paraphrase it, it can be called a foundation supporting existence."

Tatsuya felt the gaze directed at him, not only from the front, but also from behind, and from different sides. In addition to Maya, everyone was attentively listening to Tatsuya's story: Miyuki, Lina, and even Hayama and Hyougo.

"And Tatsuya-san confirmed this theory?"

"Only indirectly, based on observations. But based on these observations, "Astral Dispersion" gave the expected effect, so we can make an unambiguous conclusion that these conclusions are not erroneous."

"And this new magic is called Astral Dispersion...? Please continue."

"When the phenomenon changes, information remains about this. Even reason is no

exception to this rule. Even when the phenomenon was caused by reason, if it had an impact on this world, then there will be a record about this in the informational dimension."

"... Do you mean that pure thoughts and emotions do not directly affect this world, therefore they leave no traces in the informational dimension, and the projections of spiritual bodies and interference in the minds of other people are recorded?"

"At least, the phenomena that can be reproduced by external systemic magic are accurately recorded in this "story"."

"... Go on."

"By reading the Eidos, the psionic informational body containing records of phenomena, we magicians recognize the very essence of these phenomena. At the time of using magic, this, although with some differences, is done by all magicians, even those who do not have an ESP like "Eye of Spirits" such as mine."

"I see... When these "some differences" become absurdly large, then this is reflected in the result. But if we talk only about recognizing the essence of the phenomenon from the Eidos, then Tatsuya-san is right."

Tatsuya bowed slightly and continued to explain.

"The East Asian continental ancient magic "Sekihei Hatidzin" turned out to be magic, for which the corpses are processed into magical containers containing the Psionic information bodies known as "ghosts". Using the power of interference in the phenomenon that these "ghosts" possess, Kimon Tonko is supported at fixed points."

"The power of interfering with the phenomenon... in ghosts?"

"The true form of the force of interference in the phenomenon is pushion waves. I discovered this during a battle with a hostile astral body over at Mount Takao. A "ghost" is, in fact, a pushion informational body, therefore it is possible to extract from it the force of interference in a phenomenon, gradually cutting pieces from it and using them as fuel."

Lina also listened, so Tatsuya only said "a hostile astral body," without giving the name Arcturus.

"This is very interesting."

Maya was only interested in Tatsuya's new discovery, and showed no interest in the enemy's personality.

"It seems that Tatsuya-san has made many important discoveries related to magic and reason over the past few days."

"Yes. Thank you."

In response to Maya's praise, Tatsuya made an even more courteous bow than the last time.

"Fujibayashi Nagamasa released these "ghosts" from their containers, and used them as a means of attack against me. After searching on the basis of information about the modification of the phenomenon caused by the external systemic magic used by him for this purpose, I discovered a psionic informational body that serves as a supporting basis for "ghosts". After reading its structure, and expanding it, I made the existence of these "ghosts" (pushion information bodies) impossible in our world. This is Astral Dispersion."

"That is... it's magic that separates spiritual bodies from our world?"

"Yes."

"So this magic doesn't destroy the spiritual body itself, but destroys the "foundation" through which the spiritual body exists in our world and intervenes in it?"

"That's correct."

"Madam. "Impossible to exist in our world" from the point of view of our world is like death."

At that moment, Hayama intervened in the conversation.

"If spiritual bodies separated from our world could come back, then our world would be filled with ghosts. I suppose Tatsuya-sama's new magic can be called magic that kills spiritual bodies."

"Kills ghosts. This is something revolutionary... Tatsuya-san. I don't want to rush too much, but could you describe the new magic in a detailed report? Your discovery and invention will be an important asset of the Yotsuba family."

The Yotuba family is not only a clan of combat magicians, but also a clan of magic researchers. Seek and explore the possibilities of magic. And as a result, answer the question "what is the mind/soul?". That was the purpose of this clan, which the other Master Clans didn't know about.

"As you command."

Tatsuya had a different goal, but he was also a researcher of magic. He didn't mind leaving his magic in a document for magic research.

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11 a.m. The plane with Kazama, his subordinates, and also the soon to be freed Australian magicians landed on Iwo Island at the appointed time.

The other side to which the captives will be issued has already arrived.

"Is the ship not Australian? Is that... Royal Navy aircraft carrier, Gibraltar?"

With suspicion Kazama muttered to himself.

"There can be no mistake, this is Gibraltar from the British Navy."

Kazama's question was answered in almost a whisper by the foreman Tateoka, who was appointed temporary assistant to Kazama instead of senior lieutenant Fujibayashi, who had left today for the funeral of Kudou Retsu.

Britain was currently considered an allied country for Japan. The call of the Royal Navy vessel to the Japanese port wasn't a problem in itself.

"Contact headquarters. Ask if the Royal Navy is the other side to which the captives must be released."

If they are the ones who need to surrender magicians captured as saboteurs, then this is another conversation. The escorted agents are Australians by nationality. Kazama didn't hear that Britain would come to pick them up.

The answer from the headquarters of the 1-0-1 brigade came quickly.

"The answer is from the brigade headquarters. They say there is no mistake, pass them

on."

"Australia asked Britain to mediate the extradition...?"

This time, Kazama really spoke to himself. He was so bewildered that he unconsciously said his thoughts aloud.

Although the number of countries of the British Commonwealth of Nations has significantly decreased, but formally it still existed. Australia remained a member of the Commonwealth, and was in close allied relations with Britain. According to one popular theory, Australian army units are trained and formed with the help of secret knowledge obtained from Britain.

But even if this is true, then the arrival of the British Navy in order to pick up the agents of the Australian army, can not be considered an ordinary event. Despite membership in the Commonwealth and allied relations, Australia is an independent state. And Australia itself is much closer to Japan than Britain. Kazama could not think of a single reason why Australia could ask Britain to take the captured agents.

"Or does Australia have no need for this at all, and is... the business of Britain itself?"

He had a vague feeling that what he really had to give was the letter entrusted to him, not the captured agents. Kazama thought about this, remembering the envelope in his inner pocket.

Kazama's confusion intensified at the time when he came face to face with a representative of the British side who arrived to pick up the prisoners. There was no room for misunderstanding in Saeki's order. Give her letter to the representative of the host captive. Nevertheless, the doubt didn't disappear from his head as to whether or not to give this person a letter, in which, probably, some important military information was written.

The British representative turned out to be William McLeod, officially recognized as his country's Strategic-Class Magician.

"What is one of the Thirteen Apostles doing here...?"

Not only Kazama, but anyone in his position would think exactly the same. However, this wasn't a completely impossible development of events. Jasmine Williams, one of

the prisoners that was going to be released, was a user of Ozone Circle, although in terms of scale her magic didn't reach the Strategic-Class. And the one who developed this magic was none other than William McLeod.

Also, through interrogation, it was found that Jasmine is the so-called "improved magician", that is, her genetic code was modified. It is highly likely that Britain provided the improvement technology. Australia's science and engineering industries were not backward, but since the Third World War, a policy of actual isolation was chosen as a protective measure, which caused stagnation of the development of magic-related technologies that can be used for military purposes.

Therefore, even before coming here there were already speculations that there might be some kind of connection between William McLeod and Jasmine Williams. However, it was hard to believe that such an important person as one of the "Thirteen Apostles" would appear at the military base of another country with such a minimal escort.

Yes, McLeod arrived, accompanied by an entire aircraft carrier. More precisely, he arrived on an aircraft carrier. But based on the name "aircraft carrier", it is only a mobile air base with airplanes. An aircraft carrier moored in the port doesn't possess any military strength. The ship itself has no means of attack, and airborne fighters will be shot down before takeoff.

McLeod himself, as a Strategic-Class Magician, although has tremendous combat power, but his magic is Ozone Circle. It turns oxygen in the specified area into ozone gas. If he uses Ozone Circle in the current situation, it will affect his allies too.

Is there really something so valuable in Saeki's letter that Britain is prepared to take the risk of "losing their Strategic-Class Magician" if something happens...? Struggling to break the seal and look at the letter, Kazama first handed over the captives to McLeod, after which he handed him the envelope entrusted to him by Saeki.

McLeod immediately, on the spot, without much enthusiasm opened the letter (he didn't tear it off, but cut off the seal with a paper knife taken from his assistant), and while standing, he read the message written to him.

"Understood."

McLeod said and handed the envelope and letter to Kazama.

"... Are you sure I can read this?"

“Yes. In order for us to have no misunderstandings.”

Kazama ordered his subordinates to move away. In response, McLeod ordered his guard and assistant to leave the premises altogether. Surprised by such a reaction, Kazama also ordered his subordinates to leave the room. When they stayed in the room only together, Kazama invited McLeod to sit on the sofa, after which he also sat down and unfolded the folded letter.

The English text, written by Saeki's familiar handwriting, wasn't so long.

McLeod spoke after Kazama finished reading and looked up.

“Sending the NSU fleet south across the Sea of Japan was an unexpected military decision, in my opinion.”

His first phrase at first glance seemed unrelated to the contents of the letter.

“I collaborated with the Dion Project to prevent the possibility of a Matter to Energy Explosion targeting the United Kingdom. I don't need anything else. I wasn't going to take away the freedom and future of promising young people.”

From the context it was clear that by “promising young people,” McLeod meant Tatsuya.

“I also evaluate his project of the Stellar Furnace plant as extremely significant. Attempts to prevent him may result in significant missed opportunities for a civilized society. Moreover, for us magicians, this can also lead to negative consequences.”

From such an unexpectedly high assessment of McLeod, Kazama could not find the right words to even maintain a conversation.

“Assessment of the Stellar Furnace plant is nothing more than my personal impressions. However, regarding the dispatch of the NSU fleet south, I have the opposite opinion. Yes, I had a secret connection with Dr. Bezobrazov through the Dion Project, but a military invasion of Japan is unacceptable, even if it was only a simulation.”

“... Do you speak on behalf of the United Kingdom?”

“Yes. And from the Kingdom, and from the Commonwealth too.”

In response to a question from Kazama, McLeod openly admitted that the royal family's

intentions were behind his actions.

"As I said earlier, if we get guarantees that the Matter to Energy explosion magic won't be used against the United Kingdom, then we will have no reason for enmity towards Japan."

Kazama remembered the sentence written in the letter he had just read.

Saeki invited McLeod to work together to implement the "Strategic-Class Magician Control Agreement."

According to her draft of such an agreement, the revealed Strategic-Class Magicians must be registered with the International Magic Association, and their country must take responsibility for controlling them.

By control obligations here is meant taking responsibility for their actions. However, they won't take responsibility for the consequences caused by the used Strategic-Class magic (especially the Matter to Energy explosion magic). If so, it will keep the Strategic-Class Magicians in such a position that they won't be able to freely use magic.

Even if this agreement is concluded and enters into force in the form that Saeki intended, then for those magicians who have political power and privileges, or are representatives of the government or the leader of their country (such as McLeod, Bezobrazov, the Strategic-Class Magicians of the USNA Eliot Miller and Roland Bart, Leonid Kondratenko from the NSU) - nothing will change for them. But for magicians like Carla Schmidt, who are far from politics, a catastrophic restriction of freedom is inevitable.

"... No, everything is clear. The true goal is Tatsuya."

Kazama quickly realized that the goal of his boss was to take Tatsuya from the Yotsuba family and make him her subordinate. Anyone in his place would also have come to that conclusion.

"Her Excellency won't be satisfied with the separation of Tatsuya from the Yotsuba family. She is going to take all freedom from Tatsuya."

Saeki is a scorched military man. For her, national interests are always in the first place.

"This magic is too strong to respect personal rights."

If we take that as the basis, only the logic of the military, then Kazama thought the same way. He had to admit this and that bitter feeling of hostility that came from the depths of his heart. He had this acute hostility towards himself, who had allowed such a train of thought.

"It will take some time, but I will do my best to have a conference to discuss the draft agreement."

In the letter, Saeki asked McLeod to engage his personal as well as British international influence.

"Pass it on to Her Excellency Saeki."

"I understand."

Kazama in his position could only bow in gratitude to McLeod's promise to cooperate.

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1:55 p.m. Five minutes later, the funeral ceremony of the elder of the magical world of Japan, Kudou Retsu, will begin in the large ceremonial hall of the city of Nara. The preparation was already completed, and all members of the family of the deceased were already seated in their places. The guest seats were already almost all occupied.

A noise was heard from the entrance to the hall. The participants thought that the monk had arrived earlier than scheduled, and turned around... and so froze in that position.

Three people entered the room. They came literally at the last minutes, but the uproar wasn't accusatory voices. It was only senseless sighs of admiration that rang out from different angles.

There were two women and one man. Both women were incomparable beauties. The lady, who was older, looked to be in her early 30's, maximum. Those who immediately recognized her also knew her real age, and knew that she looked 15 years younger than her actual age. She shone with her charming, young, gorgeous, and vivacious look.

The younger one was in her late teens and looked exactly her age. Although she could

be called a girl by age, the attractiveness of an adult woman has already begun to manifest in her. The surrounding people tried to find words in their thoughts to describe her ethereal beauty. But, couldn't find anything suitable. Elegance, grace, neatness, purity, splendor, extraterrestrial charm. Yet, none of those terms could really describe her. As a result, they were able to express their thoughts about her only as "she is so beautiful."

Behind these two women was a young man... or even a teenager. Compared to the woman and girl, he looked completely ordinary. At the very least he was not someone who was able to incite awe from other people. Nevertheless, his existence wasn't lost against the background of the woman's charm and the girl's beauty. Also, the people around didn't see anything unnatural in this.

These three sat down in their seats. Thus, the spell that riveted the eyes of those around them was dispelled. Sighs turned into whispers.

"... Who is this beautiful girl? Is she really a living person...?"

"... Don't you know? That is Shiba Miyuki-jou from the magic high school, First High."

"... And the guy with her is Shiba Tatsuya. There can be no mistake."

"... You mean that Taurus Silver?"

"... Yeah. So that lady with them is the mistress of the Yotsuba family...?"

"What?... It's true. That is Yotsuba Maya-dono in person."

"To show herself in such a crowded place... How many years ago was the last time this has happened?"

The gossip continued until the host announced the entry of the monk responsible for the ceremony.

Four hours later, the monk left and the host announced the closing ceremony. There were a great many visitors who came to burn incense. Two weeks have passed since his death, so the funeral ceremony was different from usual. The coffin was taken out in the presence of only the closest relatives, and the organization of the commemoration after the ceremony was undertaken by the family of Makoto's wife, whose surname is

Fujibayashi*. Incidentally, Kyouko's family with the surname Fujibayashi, and the family of Makoto's wife with the surname Fujibayashi* are very distant relatives. They have no direct relatives, even if tracked by the family tree at least until the last century.

[In fact, these two surnames are pronounced the same, but are spelled differently. For Kyouko's family, "faji" is a word meaning a wisteria flower, and for Makoto's wife, "faji" is written in the same way as for Mount Fuji. I'll write a "new" surname with an asterisk to distinguish it from the usual one.]

However, as could be seen at today's funeral, the Fujibayashi* family clearly shunned the Fujibayashi family. When the Fujibayashi family offered any help, they politely refused. Perhaps the circumstances surrounding the birth of Minoru (Minoru's genetic mother is the younger sister of Makoto, who married a person from the Fujibayashi family), which cannot be disclosed, influenced the relationship between the two families.

If the events of the day before had not happened, then they might have helped today at least at the front desk.

But in the end, the Fujibayashi family had no responsibilities at this event. Fujibayashi Nagamasa, the head of the Fujibayashi family, helped with the escape of Minoru, the killer of Kudou Retsu. Therefore, today everyone tried to completely avoid contact with representatives of this family.

Senior Lieutenant Fujibayashi Kyouko stood in full prostration in the corner of the hall used for the funeral dinner.

She had no errands.

She could not occupy herself with anything.

Her heart was hurt harder than expected.

She felt the same pain yesterday, when she couldn't apologize.

... So Kyouko thought.

"... And yet, it's good that we managed to get here in time."

"Really. I was also a little worried."

“Actually, I didn't plan to talk for so long. But Tatsuya-san's story was very interesting.”

“... I'm sorry.”

Perhaps the reason for this was her psychological state.

“Excuse me!”

Kyouko unwittingly intervened in the conversation between the aunt, nephew, and niece.

“Ara? This is the daughter of the Fujibayashi family, isn't it?”

Yotuba Maya responded with a smile to such an unbridled call from Kyouko.

“Yes, my name is Fujibayashi Kyouko. Thank you so much for coming so far to mourn grandfather.”

“I studied with Sensei. I would come to say goodbye, even if it was on the other side of the globe.”

“Grandpa would be glad to hear that.”

After Kyouko answered with a standard phrase, she finally overcame her indecision and asked Maya:

“... May I take a little of your time?”

“Sure.”

Kyouko made a slightly surprised face because she didn't expect Maya to agree so easily.

“Let's change the location. You also don't want to attract excessive attention, right?”

“...Yes.”

There were also various people who were somehow connected with the army and the Magic Association. Also, in addition to the head of the Yotuba family, the heads of the Ichijou, Futatsugi and Saegusa families also came here. Other Master Clans also sent their representatives on behalf of the heads of families. From the Eighteen Replacement Families, there were either heads of families or their representatives

here. Both Kyouko and Maya didn't want other people to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"Hayama-san."

"Yes, Milady."

Hayama replied with a respectful tone, who suddenly appeared behind Maya.

Surprise appeared on Kyouko's face. She didn't understand when and where Hayama came from.

"I would like to calmly and without haste talk with this young lady. Can you tell me where I could speak with her?"

"I will call a car. Please follow me."

"Good. Fujibayashi-san, will this suit you?"

"... Yes, I don't mind."

Kyouko showed some hesitation for a moment, but she didn't really want to stay here. Therefore, in the end, she agreed with Maya's proposal.

"Tatsuya-san and Miyuki-san, you can return to Tokyo."

"As you order."

Tatsuya answered Maya.

Her word "may" sounded like permission, but it was actually an order. Maya didn't want Tatsuya and Miyuki to attend her conversation with Kyouko. They both understood this perfectly.

"Tatsuya-sama, Miyuki-sama."

Hyougo stood behind Tatsuya unnoticed and called Tatsuya and Miyuki.

"Preparations for take-off are completed."

Coming from Miyakijima, they eventually got on two different vertical take-off planes and rushed to the funeral ceremony. One of these aircrafts was the one on which

Hyougo originally took them from the building in Töfu. That is, Maya had her own plane to return home, so Tatsuya and Miyuki didn't need to wait modestly for her.

"Got it."

answered Tatsuya.

"Haha-ue. In that case, goodbye."

Realizing that they were heard from all sides, he said goodbye to Maya with the "right" words.

"Oba-sama, goodbye."

"Yes, take care of yourself."

After Maya said that the two of them left.

Hayama's words about calling a car didn't have the standard meaning "rent a car" for this idiom. His words meant that "a personal car will be served." Maya's visit to Kudou Retsu's funeral has been planned for a long time. It was routine for the Yotsuba family to prepare a suitable vehicle in advance in case the head of the family needed to move somewhere.

Hayama sat in the front passenger seat, after which the driver, who was also a security guard, pulled the control lever. Behind them was followed by a car with four additional guards.

Instead of preparing a separate room, Hayama brought them to a small restaurant that Kyouko liked to visit. Without any particular wariness, Maya sat down at the table. Hayama stood behind Maya, and four guards stood in the corners of the room. Kyouko could not hide her tension from such a picture.

Nevertheless, while standing, she also could not conduct a conversation, and given that it was she who asked for this conversation, it was impolite to continue to stand. Kyouko was very nervous about the fact that she would have to turn her back on the fighters of the Yotsuba family, but still sat down at the table in a place opposite Maya.

After which she held her breath and bowed low to Maya.

“First, I would like to apologize. The day before yesterday, my father did something completely unforgivable.”

Kyouko froze in that position.

“You mean that Fujibayashi Nagamasa-dono helped Kudou Minoru escape?”

“I’m talking about my father helping in the kidnap of Sakurai Minami-san.”

Without raising her head, Kyouko answered Maya’s question.

“If you are talking about that, then you do not need to apologize. Nagamasa-dono probably had his own reasons for doing so. But as a result, your father was seriously injured and was hospitalized. Therefore, I believe that he has already received a sufficient amount of punishment.”

“But...”

But shouldn’t a loser suffer? Shouldn’t the criminal take the blame? Kyouko wanted to say that, but...

“Besides, our Minami was eventually taken away through no fault of your father.”

“Huh?”

Because of this unexpected statement by Maya, Kyouko completely forgot the words prepared for her answer, after which she unconsciously raised her head.

Maya’s face frowned in frustration.

Kyouko didn’t expect the head of the Yotuba family to make such a face, so she completely forgot about the apology, and involuntarily asked:

“What do you...?”

Maya didn’t answer Kyouko’s unsaid question.

“Although your father was unable to prevent Tatsuya, the day before yesterday’s chase ended in failure anyways. Therefore, you no longer need to torment yourself with guilt.”

Maya regained her smile in the blink of an eye and reassured Kyouko in a friendly tone.

The interference of Yakumo wasn't noticed by either the army or the police. Neither sensor networks stretched across the streets, nor reconnaissance satellites, nor surveillance devices installed on the stratospheric platform recorded the battle between Yakumo and Tatsuya.

The skills of Yakumo, hiding not only himself, but also the enemy with whom he fought, were far beyond Kyouko's imagination. Therefore, she didn't even suspect that there were some other obstacles besides her father.

Therefore, Kyouko didn't understand the meaning of Maya's words. But when the injured party in the form of Maya says that "you are not to blame", it will be strange if Kyouko continues to insist that "it is my father's fault".

"...Thanks for your consideration."

So Kyouko took Maya's words.

Finished with her apology, Kyouko didn't want to detain Maya any longer. Having gulped down the chilled black tea remaining in her cup, she tried to get up from her seat. Of course, she didn't forget to pay the bill.

But before she could say goodbye, Maya called the waiter and ordered some more tea and snacks.

"Fujibayashi Kyouko-san."

Kyouko could not get up when her name was called in a completely different tone than before.

"Yes?"

The strength seemed to leave her legs, and she again sat back down on the chair.

"I believe there's a better use for such a valuable asset, in comparison with the current situation"

Maya said in a low voice, sitting in a completely relaxed and laid-back pose.

Kyouko could tell by Maya's voice that she was talking about her.

“What are you talking about?”

But out loud she asked about the meaning of her words.

“Fujibayashi-san. Would you retire from the military and come to our house?”

Instead of answering Kyouko's question, Maya answered with an invitation.

“... You mean... I should become a Yotuba magician?”

Kyouko answered in a stiff formal tone.

“No, this is not coercion. We have no desire to quarrel with the self-defense forces.”

Maya smiled.

This smile was so charming that Kyouko involuntarily fell under her influence.

“Speaking about leaving the army, I do not mean that I demand that you leave there with a scandal. I say that if you yourself want to peacefully resign, we will gladly accept you as an employee in one of our companies, for example, in FLT.”

Maya's suggestion was more reasonable than what Kyouko first thought.

Her tension eased slightly.

And in this relaxed mind, as if through the opening of a gap, Maya's voice crept in.

“Changing your profession to a civilian magician is neither treason, nor a betrayal of the government. In a suitable environment that allows you to reach your full potential, you, on the contrary, will be able to contribute to the development of society, using your abilities to the fullest.”

“I... have not yet revealed my full potential?”

“I believe that Fujibayashi-san's magic and mind are able to cover a wider field of application. Here... for example, have you ever thought about why you can interfere with magic in electronic information networks?”

“... Electrical signals and electron flows are also physical phenomena, so it's not strange that they can be affected by the magic of the release system, right?”

“Are you talking about exposure to electromagnetic waves or to electric current and voltage? But how can magic recognize the simple motion of electrons as meaningful information?”

“That's...”

“Are you translating electron movements into machine language right in your head, and machine language into human? And all this during the use of magic?”

“... That would be hard to do.”

“But you can use magic to influence electronic information networks. You can search for the necessary information with a speed and accuracy higher than that of the well-known Echelon III system. And you do this by using not the power of supercomputers for hacking, but only magic and a regular home information terminal. How do you do this?”

Fujibayashi could not answer Maya's question. It was natural for her that she could manage electronic information networks as she wished, but she never wondered why and how she could do something like that.

“Therefore, I believe that you underestimate yourself. You have a talent that can expand the capabilities of the whole world of magic, and you use your abilities only to collect and operate military information.”

Maya's words shocked Kyouko greatly. Initially, she planned to become a researcher of magic. She joined the military only because of the death of her fiancé. Kyouko, a former military groom, died in Okinawa - at his very first place of service, where he was appointed immediately after joining the army. Kyouko decided to go to military service just after that.

Now even she herself doesn't know what kind of mental state prompted her to do this.

But after hearing Maya's words Kyouko noticed.

That she lacks motivation to continue in military service.

“I can ensure you that in the future you will be able to freely use your magic.”

“...”

“Of course, I'm not demanding an immediate response.”

“... Please let me think about it a little.”

“Of course. Please take your time. Fujibayashi-san, some more tea?”

“No. Sorry, it's getting late. I think I should go.”

“Really? In that case, I will wait for a positive response.”

Until the very end of the conversation, Kyouko didn't say a single word that could be mistaken for refusing the invite to Maya.

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Soon after Kyouko left, Maya also left the restaurant. After all, she came there only for a conversation with Kyouko. And since she left, there is nothing more for her to do there. Maya and her escort team got into two cars and drove to the airfield, where their vertical takeoff plane was parked.

“Madam. As far as I know, you had no plans for recruiting Fujibayashi-sama.”

Hayama asked Maya shortly after the car started. His words were not just a question, but more like a rebuke for an unplanned act.

“I couldn't miss such a rare opportunity.”

Maya realized that this was a rebuke, but she wasn't at all embarrassed.

“With all due respect, but were you serious with your invitation?”

Asked Hayama, slightly surprised.

“Of course, I was serious.”

Hayama sat in front and looked forward, so he could not see that the face of the responding Maya was completely serious. However, in her voice, Hayama still caught some bad intentions.

“It is dangerous to give the enemy the ability to collect and process information from

Senior Lieutenant Fujibayashi. Especially recently, when Her Excellency Saeki began her various activities.“

“Based on the recent conversation, do you expect her to become a researcher of “information networks”?“

“Yes, I hope so too. Everything on earth has its own Eidos, and it is located on a platform called the Idea... If you shed light on the principles of the information network connecting the various Eidos within the Idea, this can become an important key to understanding the very essence of magic.“

“I totally agree with you.“

“This is a rather complicated topic. If you take it seriously, you won’t have time for anything else, right?“

“And this is an exclusively secondary goal?“

“Right.“

Not only Hayama, but anyone would have guessed that the main and secondary goals were mixed up in Maya’s story. Yes, and Maya herself should have understood this.

Therefore, Hayama didn’t question further. If the mistress is lying deliberately, and if it is beneficial, then the servant should not intervene

Chapter 3

Today: July 15, 6 a.m.

The transport ship “Coral” with Minoru and Minami on board arrived at the USNA base at Pearl and Hermes Atoll.

“Raymond. Why can’t we get off the ship? What does all this mean?“

Minoru addressed Raymond in an apparently accusatory tone.

“Don’t blame me. We can’t go ashore either. They just said, “Don’t get out of the ship. Supplies are being replenished.” And that’s it. The reasons were not explained.“

The responding voice of Raymond was kind of frail. It seems that this situation was also unexpected for him.

“What does Lieutenant Spica say?”

First Lieutenant Zoe Spica is also a parasite. Minoru could mentally communicate with fellow parasites at any time, simply opening a "communication channel". So there was no need to ask Raymond, who was standing before him.

“The lieutenant doesn't know either. She's just as confused, or rather annoyed.”

Raymond didn't point this out to him, but simply answered. Both Raymond and Minoru seemed to be much more alarmed than could be seen in their faces and behavior.

“The Lieutenant has requested a conference call with Stars headquarters. According to Lieutenant Spica, if all goes well, the situation should improve within a couple of days, a week at most.”

“Weeks? It's quite a long time... Well, okay. Raymond, did you come to tell me about this so that I don't start acting up?”

“I don't think Minoru would do something so stupid. But this is just my opinion. Most of the local soldiers know nothing about you at all...”

“Okay. I will be careful that my behavior is not misunderstood.”

“Yeah... I'm sorry that it turned out so uncomfortable.”

Raymond stepped out and closed the door outside.

With a small gesture, Minoru locked the closed door. There was no gesture recognition system. The handle of the lock was shifted by the simplest of movement magic.

In the cabin, in addition to Minoru, there was also Minami. She didn't say a word, but she also heard what Raymond said.

“Sorry. That's how it all turned out.”

Minoru bowed and apologized to Minami, who had a clearly worried face.

“No.”

Minoru raised his head and saw Minami shake her head slightly.

"After all, this wasn't the fault of Minoru-sama."

Minami said with a restrained smile.

If she added anything else, Minoru would have taken it as criticism. Therefore, Minami said nothing more.

Minoru understood the significance of this smile by Minami and bit his lip in frustration.

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Tuesday, July 16, in the morning at the dinner table at the Shiba family's house.

"The ship with Minami arrived at the base at Pearl & Hermes Atoll."

Tatsuya informed Miyuki and Lina while listening to the news on TV.

"I see..."

Miyuki answered in a low voice. Time and place coincided with the expected, so there was nothing to be surprised about.

"So, what are you going to do now?"

But Lina seemed to be far from calm. Still, she was worried about Canopus, a prisoner in Midway Prison.

Lina's tone of voice was as if she wanted to rush Tatsuya. In some other case, Miyuki would likely blame Lina. But Miyuki knew why Lina was so depressed, so in a low, reproaching voice, Miyuki only said:

"Lina..."

Lina realized that her behavior was close to unacceptable.

"... I'm sorry."

She immediately apologized to Tatsuya.

“Don't worry about it.”

Tatsuya answered Lina's apology. Then he also answered her question:

“At the moment, I'm waiting for Oba-ue to get in touch about a vehicle that can deliver me to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.”

“That's it...”

“My promise to go and rescue Minami has not changed. The same goes for Lina's request.”

Lina looked away, embarrassed.

“... Thanks.”

She said in a very quiet voice.

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The next day, July 17, during lunch break.

During the afternoon chatter in the dining room, Miyuki suddenly became distracted and with an intrigued face pulled out a mobile terminal from her inner pocket.

In the first half of the century, in the so-called era of the heyday of mobile messenger applications, schoolchildren could not live without constant text communication. But now the picture of schoolchildren constantly chatting anywhere and anytime is a thing of the past. That is why the likelihood the message that arrived was meaningless and useless was very low.

“Miyuki-oneesama?”

However, there are even fewer messages that cause you to freeze from surprise. Suspiciously, Izumi turned to Miyuki, staring at the terminal screen.

Miyuki looked away from the terminal, looked at Izumi, and without any problems regained her natural expression.

“I apologize. Nothing happened.”

“... Listen, have you already decided on your summer vacation plans?”

Erika, who was sitting with them, suddenly changed the subject.

Her energetic & cheerful voice seemed to let all her friends and kohai know "to stay out of it."

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Miyuki and Lina also left home early today. This has continued unchanged from last Thursday. The school also insisted that they leave school as early as possible. But specifically today, their early departure wasn't associated with the fact that "they should not stay late," but rather with the fact that they "should not be late."

The message Miyuki received today on her lunch break read "be sure to return home today by 6:00 p.m." And they sent it from the main house of the Yotsuba family. The message also contained: an order to arrive for a joint dinner at a hotel in downtown Tokyo, a warning to be ready for departure at 18:30, an order to take Lina with them, and a notification that Tatsuya has already been contacted.

“Welcome back.”

Tatsuya, who met them at home, was still in his everyday clothes. Miyuki saw nothing strange in this. It is women changing clothes that usually takes a lot of time. Miyuki and Tatsuya were no exception to this “rule.”

There was still an hour left before the scheduled meeting time.

“I'll go get ready.”

Miyuki told Tatsuya who met them at the entrance.

“Lina, you hurry too.”

“Hey, wait a minute! I don't have a dress and all that!”

“No problem, I'll lend you one of mine. Our size is about the same.”

More precisely, Lina was 1 centimeter taller, and Miyuki had a slightly larger chest circumference. But these differences were easily leveled by heels and liners.

“Oh, that's right! I understand!”

Lina was more concerned about the design problem, not the size, but she realized that it was no use trying to resist.

She humbly followed Miyuki.

Miyuki and Lina helped each other change and left Miyuki's room at 18:25.

“Both of you look very nice.”

Dressed in a regular, not too strict black suit, Tatsuya gave a compliment to the two girls.

“Thank you very much. Among my dresses there are not so many that suit Lina's “color”... Or did I go a little too far with openness?”

Blushing a little, Miyuki gracefully swirled in place.

“No, nothing like that. I think it was a good choice, suitable for both black-haired Miyuki and blonde Lina.”

Miyuki and Lina chose short black dresses.

True, they were a little different in design. The hem of Lina's dress was a little shorter, but Miyuki had a slightly deeper neckline.

But against the background of the beauty of these two, these differences were not noticeable. In the most modest words, it was a pair of incomparable beauties.

Miyuki smiled broadly, and Lina blushed slightly and shyly looked away from Tatsuya.

At that moment the doorbell rang.

The hands of the analog wall clock showed 6:29.

The large sedan, driven by Hyougo, drove Tatsuya, Miyuki, and Lina to an underground car parking lot in a mid-rise building in the city center. Both Tatsuya, Miyuki, and Lina looked like themselves, since Maya instructed that "no disguise is needed."

Which, in fact, was confirmed when they got out of the car - there were no signs of media employees within sight. As Hyougo explained, the parking lot was designed so that the entrance gates wouldn't open without a special invitation, in which the electronic key is integrated. In other words, the venue for today's meeting was a club with a closed membership, which doesn't allow outsiders.

Hyougo presented an invitation at the reception. The clerk, a middle-aged man in a three-piece suit, stepped out from the counter and led Tatsuya and the others into a separate room.

At first glance, this room might have seemed to have a window leading out, but it turned out to be a large high-resolution display that displayed a view of the city. Judging by the air circulation, air conditioning worked in the room. It seems that an entire air conditioning system was built in over the ceiling. Apparently, this room was completely isolated from the rest of the building.

They waited less than five minutes. The clerk brought Hayama, as well as two people of European appearance - an elderly man and a woman in a business suit. The woman also had Japanese facial features, so maybe she was of Japanese descent.

Before Hayama had time to introduce the elderly man, Lina said "Ah!" From the look on her face one could understand that this person is quite famous in the USNA.

"Tatsuya-sama, Miyuki-sama."

Hayama turned to Tatsuya and Miyuki, calling their names not in the usual, but in the reverse order.

"This gentleman is the USNA Senator from Virginia, His Excellency Wyatt Curtis."

"My name is Wyatt Curtis."

Curtis didn't wait until Hayama introduced Tatsuya and Miyuki, but took a step forward and extended his hand to Tatsuya.

"My name is Shiba Tatsuya. Pleased to meet you."

Without waiting for the reaction of Hayama or Miyuki, Tatsuya shook his hand extended to him.

"And this is my fiancee, Shiba Miyuki."

"My name is Shiba Miyuki. I am honored to meet you."

"Mutually."

Curtis answered the bowed Miyuki and also bowed back. Judging by the greeting, his Japanese was pretty good, and he seemed to have some respect for the Japanese rules of conduct.

"Your Excellency, Senator, my name is Angelina Kudou Shields. I am honored to meet you."

"Major Angie Sirius from the Stars, then? Wyatt Curtis. Pleased to meet you."

However, he answered Lina, even in English, but somehow arrogantly and haughtily.

Lina wasn't surprised that he guessed her personality. And the secret of how he knew this, Curtis himself told them, after they all sat down.

"I'm - uh... the younger brother of Major Benjamin Canopus' grandmother from Stars. His real name is Loews. In Japanese it would be grandmother's brother?"

He spoke the last sentence in a low voice to a woman of European appearance standing behind him.

She leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Exactly, I'm his "great-uncle.""

"Sorry, senator."

Lina turned to Curtis in Japanese.

"What is it?"

This time, Curtis also answered in Japanese.

"With all due respect, but if you are just a relative of Ben... Major Canopus, then you

should not know that I am Sirius. So rumors that you have close ties in Langley - is that true?"

Mentioned by Lina, "Langley" is the popular name of the Central Intelligence Agency of the USNA. In the first half of the century, the CIA lost a significant part of its influence, however, during the Third World War, it again became the strongest intelligence organization in America.

"Hm... And you're a pretty straightforward person, Major. This is usually considered a good character trait, but in some cases it can be harmful."

Lina shuddered all over.

"I'm sorry if I offended you, senator."

"No, nothing like that."

Curtis said and looked from Lina to Tatsuya.

"As the major said, I have some influence in the CIA."

"I already understood that your Excellency has more power than a normal senator."

Curtis smiled contentedly as he heard Tatsuya's answer.

"In that case, I think you will believe what I tell you now."

He said as an introduction, after which he continued:

"Shiba-dono. I can provide you with a convenient means to reach the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. In other words, a ship."

Miyuki and Lina simultaneously rounded their eyes and covered their mouth with a hand.

"This is a rather generous offer."

In contrast to them, Tatsuya answered in a dry tone and with an indifferent face. His attitude seemed to say: "this is what I expected."

"Your Excellency. If it doesn't bother you, could you tell me what are your goals and motives?"

"I would like to ask for the release of Benjamin Loews, the Midway prison inmate. Organize an escape, to be more precise. Shiba-dono, if you fulfill this request, then I am ready to take on the settlement of the consequences of all that you end up doing in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands."

"Such conditions seem somehow too convenient for me..."

Having said this in a doubtful voice, Tatsuya showed Curtis that he wanted an explanation. By the way, he used the universal pronoun "I" [watashi] instead of the formal "I" [jibun], firstly, taking into account the fact that Curtis had little experience in Japanese. But it was also a reflection of the fact that the psychological distance between him and the forces of self-defense was gradually increasing.

"Do you think so?"

Tatsuya expressed his true feelings out loud, but Senator Curtis seemed to have a different opinion.

"Although I said that I will organize a ship that will deliver you to the place, but our ship won't be able to participate in the attack against the military facility of our country."

"Of course."

"Of course, I promise full support in terms of supplies... However, I completely leave the capture of Midway Prison and Pearl & Hermes Base to you, Shiba-dono, and to people from the Yotsuba family."

These words of Curtis confused Tatsuya. He spoke as if it was natural that the Yotsuba family would support Tatsuya. Yes, formally Tatsuya was made the son of the head of the Yotsuba family. If you know only superficial facts, then it will naturally be thought that the Yotsuba family will send reinforcements for him.

But Wyatt Curtis, in his own words and in the words of Lina, is a politician who has a strong influence on the foreign intelligence community of the USNA. Does he really not know that until recently, Tatsuya was treated coldly within the Yotsuba family?

"In a sense, I take all the risks of going to war with the States."

But now we must concentrate all our attention on this conversation. Hearing Curtis's words continue, Tatsuya pushed all the doubts in his head to the back of his mind.

“The most important part is assigned to you, so it will be natural for me to undertake the preparation and elimination of the consequences.”

“I understood your train of thought, Excellency. But why do you need to go this far and arrange for Major Canopus to escape from prison? I heard from Miss Shields that Midway Prison is a place where nothing threatens prisoners. If this is the case, then instead of escaping from prison, which in the future may leave a stain on the reputation, would it not be better to strive for release by political means, although it will take more time?”

“Midway Prison is really a place where no one is harmed by the prisoners. On the contrary, we can say that the health of prisoners there is monitored at a level not comparable to regular prisons. What you said, Shiba-dono, is the logical and wise choice.”

“Do you mean that it is not a matter of logic?”

Curtis smiled broadly at Tatsuya's comment.

“Exactly. You are pretty understanding for your young age. This is not a matter of logic. There is a problem in honor. You might think that this is some kind of nonsense, but when a tarnished honor silences you - this is tantamount to political defeat. Sending a relative to prison in itself is already a humiliation. And if at the same time the convict is also not guilty, then this is already like an insulting provocation, as if saying "we are not afraid of you." Politicians should not ignore insults. We must not allow ourselves to be looked down upon.”

“Does this mean that in connection with your political life, you need Major Canopus to be released as soon as possible, and not in such a way, where he is released by the party that imprisoned him?”

Hearing Tatsuya's comment, Curtis whispered, “Excellent!”.

“That's right. As a politician, I cannot wait for him to be released at the end of the sentence. But this is not the only reason.”

Curtis paused and held out his hand to the glass on the table. But not because it was difficult for him to continue talking, but simply because he wanted to drink.

“Currently, the military circles of my country are contaminated with parasites.”

It seemed that the impression in Curtis's voice became more serious.

"The distribution that began with the Stars... the reproduction of parasites has stopped so far, but their influence continues to grow day after day."

Tatsuya wasn't surprised. Without the significant presence of the Parasites, the attack on Miyakijima wouldn't have taken place, and Minoru wouldn't have help with his escape from the country.

"The states are a democracy. Both the army and the government are doing everything for the people. All evil spirits should not monopolize their places there. We can't let them run it. This needs to be stopped."

"I understood you."

Curtis talked in a fervent manner typical of older people, to which Tatsuya answered him with a soothing tone of agreement.

"In addition to rescuing Major Canopus, you also want to destroy the Parasites who helped with the escape of Kudou Minoru."

"Will you be able to do it?"

Curtis asked with hope in his voice.

"I think this will inevitably happen in the course of achieving my goal."

Such an answer by Tatsuya didn't mean any boasting of force. He just expressed his indirect consent.

"If we both achieve the results we want, then I would like to ask for a good relationship in the future."

At first, Curtis said somehow vaguely,

"If this case ends as we both wish, then I promise that my faction will side with Shibadono's fiancee when she becomes the head of the Yotuba family."

But immediately after that he announced specific conditions.

Tatsuya could not help but be surprised at this proposal. This meant that the USNA Senator, and a powerful politician with a strong influence on the CIA, would become

the patron of Miyuki.

“... Hayama-san.”

Tatsuya wanted to ask Hayama if Maya agreed to this.

“Madam is in the know.”

But Hayama was ahead of him, answering earlier.

“... Your Excellency. I am ready to take on the task of saving Major Canopus.”

Tatsuya said in plain text, without introducing any ambiguity.

It also meant a complete rejection of the option “not to help Canopus,” but Tatsuya could not answer “no” to a proposal that would strengthen Miyuki’s position.

“Thank you very much.”

Curtis stood up and held out his right hand.

Tatsuya also stood up and shook Curtis's hand.

“The ship is already prepared. Three days from now, the destroyer will approach Miyakijima. I'll send a detailed schedule later.”

Curtis promised Tatsuya during their handshake.

◊ ◊ ◊

Thursday, July 18th.

Upon arrival at the service, Kazama was first called into the office of the brigade commander.

“Lieutenant Colonel, do you know the USNA Senator Wyatt Curtis?”

Having received such a question immediately after the greeting, Kazama thought for a few seconds.

“As far as I know, he's an influential politician, member of the conservative hawk

faction, and according to rumors, is the "backroom director of the CIA." And what's going on with that Senator Curtis?"

"Yesterday he visited Japan on an unofficial visit."

"Unofficial? Did he come to discuss how to respond to the actions of the NSU?"

Kazama's proposed course of events was also quite possible, but Saeki didn't take it seriously. She continued to speak, ignoring Kazama's words.

"It seems that the Intelligence Department wasn't able to track all the activities of Senator Curtis, however, last night he presumably made contact with the Yotsuba family."

"With Yotsuba?"

"A person allegedly from the immediate circle of the head of the Yotsuba family was spotted talking to a secretary-translator of Senator Curtis."

"Presumably? That means, it is not confirmed?"

"It seems that some illegal jamming device was used, as it wasn't possible to take photographs."

Although she said about the "illegal device," covert photography is also illegal. The photographs obtained in this way cannot be used in an investigation against foreign political figures.

"However, according to the report of the monitoring agent of the Intelligence Department, it was almost certainly one Hayama Tadanori, confidant of Yotsuba Maya."

"The Hayama who runs the servants in the main house of Yotsuba...? Major figure."

"Just a servant of one of the Ten Master Clans. There is no need to exercise excessive vigilance."

Saeki cut off in a cold tone. But a small amount of bluff was also visible in her tone.

Hayama at one time secretly helped in the very war that led to the collapse of Dahan and which led to the fact that Yotsuba became known as the "Untouchables." He could be called a kind of "rear officer" who helped the then head of the Yotsuba family,

Genzou, by preparing means for penetration and choosing effective targets for attack. Nicknamed the "Silver Fox" and being known as a skilled strategist, Saeki should not have been so dismissive of this man.

But Kazama didn't say it out loud. He still had a sense of restraint in relation to a superior officer.

"If at such a time, Senator Curtis made contact with the Yotsuba family..."

Instead, Kazama outlined his findings from the information he had just heard.

"... then maybe he asked the Yotsuba family to destroy the Parasites that had invaded the American army? In exchange, he agreed to an attack on the Midway Prison and provided funds to chase Kudou Minoru."

"... But why would Wyatt Curtis make such a deal?"

"They say that the senator is not only politically conservative, but also religiously conservative. For a person with such beliefs, the very existence of Parasites is unacceptable."

By his reasoning, Kazama guessed only part of Curtis's motivation, but he guessed the content of the deal almost completely.

"Having arranged cleaning from Parasites with the help of internal troops, you will inevitably get the stigma of the instigator of internal strife. So he decided to entrust the "cleaning" to the Yotsuba family?"

"That too, but in my opinion, this is simply the result of the calculation of military force. As you said, Your Excellency, if we try to destroy the Parasites on our own, then friendly fire cannot be avoided. You can't just send a large number of troops, as this will entail a deterioration in reputation. And Tatsuya alone has power comparable to an entire army. If he doesn't need to worry about the round trip, then he alone will easily destroy one or two military bases in one go."

"So, the goal of Wyatt Curtis is to destroy the parasites gathered at the base in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands with the hands of Shiba Tatsuya?"

"I think something like that."

"You cannot let Shiba Tatsuya do something like that."

Saeki's tone of voice was annoyed and a little pushy.

"... I am afraid that the interference of the Japanese magician in the internal struggle for power in America may be mistakenly perceived by the USNA government as a message. And this is undesirable."

It seems that Saeki herself felt that because of this understatement, she looks a little hysterical, so she added a little explanation.

But her true intention was a reluctance to allow the Yotsuba family - civilians - to get strong ties in the American political world.

At least that's what Kazama thought when he heard Saeki's words.

Saeki didn't know how Kazama took her words. At that moment, her mind was immersed deep in her thoughts.

"... Shiba Tatsuya..."

Without looking up, as if talking to herself, she named Tatsuya.

And at that moment when Kazama looked at her, she continued:

"... Summon him as special officer Ooguro Ryuuya."

In ordinary peacetime, in areas outside of hostilities, the army has no right to call on civilians. However, so that Tatsuya could be a participant in the hostilities, he was given special officer status. If you use this as an excuse, then you can call Tatsuya to a military court. Or you can just call on him, as a superior officer calls a subordinate.

"However, at the moment the situation doesn't correspond to the conditions provided for in the regulations on special duties. You need a reason to call. What should I tell him?"

Kazama doubted that it was worth abusing the status of "special officer" in the current situation, when the specific threat from the NSU had already passed.

"Tell him that this will be an interrogation, necessary to remove suspicions of secret contacts with foreign forces."

"... Okay."

"Complete nonsense," thought Kazama. But he didn't object.

Chapter 4

July 18, 15:00 Japanese time and July 17 19:00 local time. The port of the Pearl & Hermes military base, located in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, included a USNA Navy transport ship.

This event in itself wasn't something special and deserving of special mention. There was nothing strange about the fact that a crowd of armed soldiers came ashore from this ship. Here, after all, there was a supply base for the Navy of the USNA. Of course, when landing on shore for rest, soldiers took personal weapons with them.

Unusual in this situation was that the faces of these soldiers were very tense, as if they were landing on enemy territory. Hiding their steps and breathing, they headed not to the main building of the base, but to another ship in the port.

Their goal was the fully submersible transport vessel, "Coral," moored in the port. That same ship Minoru and Minami embarked from Yokosuka port. And remained there until now.

There were no windows in the "Coral's" cabins. Unlike civilian passenger ships, the design of warships usually involves a small number of windows, because they are a weak point. The "Coral" can actually be considered a submarine, and its interior is completely isolated from the external environment. Therefore, Minami, sitting in the cabin allotted to her, didn't even know that sunset would soon be outside.

Light and sound were blocked, but there was something that was still transmitted through this isolation. She felt by a sixth sense that she was approaching a kind of "foul smelling atmosphere."

She convinced herself that the "smell of gunpowder" at a military base is normal. But she still had a bad feeling.

The doorbell rang faintly in the cabin. Minami walked quickly to the airtight door and unlocked it.

They pulled the door out in to the corridor.

"May I come in?"

As expected, Minoru came.

"Yes, please."

Minami took a step back and invited Minoru in to the cabin.

Minoru squeezed into Minami's cabin through a slightly ajar door and locked it behind him.

"Something strange is happening outside. A detachment of several dozen soldiers is coming towards this ship."

Minami nodded back. Minoru's words reminded her of what she was just thinking, and her thoughts switched from "this can't be" to "as I thought."

"Raymond and Lieutenant Spica also don't understand the situation. I don't think that the American military will fire weapons at each other, but I think that it's better for you and I to stick together."

Minami nodded once more, now with a much more intense face than before.

She didn't think that it was wrong. On the contrary, she agreed with the idea that "it is better to stick together."

During the attack on Miyakojima, on the transport ship, "Midway," there was an attack squad consisting of more than 20 Parasites, and on the "Coral," there were only three Parasites among the crew and passengers: Minoru, Raymond and Spica. The crew was selected by order from the Pentagon's Anti-Japan hardliner faction. They were ordered to support only one group of Parasites, showing a hostile attitude towards Japan.

But for military bureaucrats who have a physiological and religious hatred of the Parasites, there is no difference between the terms "cooperate with the Parasites" and "obey the Parasites." The Coral crew in this case were not crew members who were "fellow American soldiers", but referred to as, "minions of the demons devouring our Motherland".

It's impossible to even direct weapons at "compatriots", but they won't hesitate when it comes to shooting at "demon minions." Especially, if this was an order coming from their commander. These were the psychological states and such thoughts now among the soldiers who were ordered to attack the Coral.

The Coral was designed for underwater movement, but during mooring at a port, about a quarter of its hull protrudes above sea level. However, unlike conventional submarines, it has a large hatch for loading or unloading cargo. That meant, there was no such inconvenience where only one person could enter or leave inherent in other submarines.

More than 60 soldiers approached the cargo hatch, silently made a huge hole in it, and then surged into the ship.

The Coral's crew was shocked by this outrage.

The crew numbers about 120 people. This is almost double that of the soldiers coming on board. Although they had a numerical superiority, the attacking and defending sides were very different in terms of readiness. The Coral's crew were helpless in the face of a surprise attack, and were killed one by one.

The principle for reproduction of parasites was unknown. Last winter, the Parasites were unable to increase the number of their counterparts, neither in America nor in Japan. However, this year, according to currently available data, more than 50 people became Parasites not as a result of the experiment with a micro black hole, but as a result of the so-called secondary infection - by coming into contact with existing Parasites.

The Coral's crew spent about three days in a closed environment with the Parasites. They were shot only because there were suspicions that they were "infected." Since the principle of "infection" is unknown, it is likely that all crew members were converted to Parasites. The parasites can't be "cured," therefore, in order to prevent the spread of "infection," "patients" should be "disposed of".... Such were the arguments of one radical conservative faction from the Ministry of Defense of the USNA.

However, in the case when it is necessary to "get rid of" the entire crew completely, the option with the least risk will be if the ship is sunk by explosives from the outside, and not board it with soldiers. The crew is not unarmed, so possible losses in the assault squad as a result of a counterattack, can't be ignored.

Such an opinion was expressed shortly before the start of this surprise attack. If it was possible to execute "divine justice" without any sacrifice, then you wouldn't have to come up with something like that, and you wouldn't have to choose the method of this "divine justice".

The option to destroy the ship was rejected, as there was no certainty that this would kill the Parasites. Even if we talk about ordinary magicians, it isn't known whether the sinking of the ship on which they are on will kill them. And in the case of Parasites - demons - they may not be destroyed, even if they die.

Therefore, the assault squad was ordered to shoot everyone with "silver-crystal bullets."

The name "silver-crystal bullets" didn't mean that they were made of "silver crystal." These bullets were made of a sharpened crystal core coated with pure .999 silver with the addition of a tiny fraction of nickel. It was an anti-demonic weapon used mainly by Protestant exorcists, who were active in the former USA.

Unlike Catholics, Protestants traditionally didn't have magical combat organizations. However, the need for exorcists existed all over the world even before the era when the existence of magic was revealed. In the former United States, one Protestant organization took advantage of the lack of traditions of local exorcists and created a anti-demonic weapon from the culture-optimized firearm.

Unfortunately, the attitude of the exorcists towards the Stars is not very friendly, because the Stars often take for themselves promising young magicians, with whom the organizations of exorcists have already laid their eyes on. The Stars were unable to get these bullets for Lina during the first Parasite incident. However, this time, for the sake of eradicating the Parasites that are eating away at the Stars from within, the exorcist organizations agreed to cooperate with the conservative faction.

However, it wasn't yet known whether silver-crystal bullets were effective against Parasites.

The entire detachment defended three men in black robes walking in the back. One of them was middle-aged, and the other two were young. Palatines hung on their neck with crosses embroidered on them, and in their left hands each of them held a large cross 60 centimeters high. These were the same "exorcists" - magicians of ancient magic, regular army priests and pastors.

They were not high-level exorcists and didn't possess high magical attack power. But their task wasn't to kill the Parasites with magic. To fulfill the task entrusted to them, these three exorcists began to pray, raising the crosses in front of them.

Vibrations from the explosion that blew a hole in the cargo hatch reached Minami's cabin.

Minoru's eyes rounded at first, but then immediately slightly closed them. Then he frowned, still remaining with his eyes half closed.

"Blocked...?"

Opening his eyes, Minoru saw Minami watching him with a restless look.

Minoru was puzzled for a moment whether he should explain to Minami the current unusual situation they were in, and came to the conclusion that if he didn't say anything, it would cause more concern.

"... The mental connection with Raymond and Lieutenant Spica doesn't work."

"Blocked?"

Minoru has not yet explained to Minami the details of the Parasite's abilities. She didn't know about the difference between telepathy and the mental connection of the Parasites, therefore, she wasn't particularly surprised that something interfered with the "common thoughts" of the Parasites. Her train of thought was that if the activation of magic could be impeded by "Hindrances," then mental communication could also be interrupted by something.

However, the divided thoughts of Parasites and telepathy differ fundamentally. Each Parasite has an individual consciousness, but at the same time they all share one common consciousness. The mental communication of Parasites is like a dialogue with oneself, if you look at it from the point of view that all this happens inside one single consciousness. Even if somewhere between separate consciousnesses some kind of blocking mental waves are emitted, this should not interfere with communication between fellow parasites. This would be possible only if it is possible to intervene immediately in the entire consciousness shared by all Parasites. In a single consciousness, covering all representatives of the species "Parasite".

If it turns out that it is still possible to do this, it will mean that it is also quite possible to interfere with the magical abilities of the Parasites themselves and reduce their strength.

"Minami-san, don't leave me."

Minoru stood in front of the door, with his back towards Minami.

Seeing that Minoru was unusually tense, Minami responded with a short "okay." The strong tension was also visible on her face.

No sound was heard from the other side through the completely soundproofed walls. Outside, only a depressing atmosphere was transmitted inside, from which the tension gradually increased.

Minoru wasn't only guarding the door. He also tried to get in touch with Raymond and Spica, and at the same time he tried to use "Elemental Sight" to find out what was going on. However, using the Eyes of the Spirits, he could only read vague information.

"A certain spell is being used here that impedes the mental processes of the Parasites... and indeed any non-human creatures...?"

This was probably the work of magicians of ancient magic, specializing in the expulsion of all non-human beings hostile to people, such as evil spirits and ghosts. In the current situation, when their mental connection isn't working, only such an option came to his mind.

His magic and "Elemental Sight" were not completely sealed. He was able to understand that there were executions outside, and was able to read information that three magicians prevented his magic.

"... Do you need to deal with them first?"

Minoru asked himself. Even if they simply block magic, it means that they interfere with Minoru's consciousness, in other words, with himself. This is an obvious act of aggression.

"You won't take my life. But don't worry, I won't take yours either,"

Minoru mentally told himself to Minoru and decided to strike back.

In a blurred field of vision, he aimed his "sight" at the magicians of ancient magic preventing him from using magic.

It didn't turn out as smoothly as he wanted. To overcome the anti-demonic blocking spell, Minoru had to concentrate his mind as much as he had never done before. Because of this, his attention deviated from his surroundings. Distracted by a counterattack at a long distance, he didn't notice what was happening very close by.

To attack, Minoru chose the magic, "Spark." It was the simplest spell from the magic of the release system, which he knew best. Usually a small amount of air is ionized using this magic, however, Minoru forcibly displaced electrons not from the air, but from the clothes of the enemy magicians.

Created at zero distance, an electrical discharge spread across the skin of the enemy magicians.

The success of neutralizing enemies with electric discharge was confirmed by Minoru by the disappearance of interference in his mind.

Having regained clarity of consciousness, Minoru looked around with "Elemental Sight" to find out what was happening around him.

"...!"

"Minoru-sama!"

He realized this at about the same moment that Minami's warning reached his ears.

The door of the cabin, which, in theory, was locked, swung open. It had a simple non-magnetic lock with a metal deadbolt. That is why this hermetically sealed door was almost impossible to open from the outside. The assumption that the bolt was shifted by psychokinesis came to mind only later, when the situation was resolved.

But now, six gun barrels were pointed at Minoru and Minami. Minoru activated "Spark" with the power of thought. But this didn't happen at the same time that Minoru recognized the soldiers. Even Parasites must follow a system called "magic" and cannot use it unknowingly. Constructing a sequence of magic is a process that occurs in the field of the subconscious, but the user must be aware of the magic that he is using. Parasites don't only need CAD's, but also activation sequences, but even they from the time from recognition of the enemy to activation of magic is not zero.

After Minoru recognized the soldiers with weapons, it took him half a second to decide to use the magic, "Spark."

During this time, the soldiers have already managed to pull the trigger.

Bullets flew through ionized air.

Six soldiers fell to the floor, struck by electric shock.

And the bullets fired from six barrels...

They were stopped by an anti-object shield deployed by Minami.

There is an opinion that there is nothing easier and faster than thought, but a person's reaction can sometimes be even faster than thinking. Exactly at the very moment when the enemies tried to enter the cabin, hardened by the rigorous training of a combat magician, Minami reflexively pressed the desired combination of buttons on her CAD and activated the barrier magic.

The bullets lost their kinetic energy and fell to the floor.

Minami collapsed exhaustively to her knees.

"Minami-san! Are you okay!?"

Instead of Minami's barrier, which lost its effectiveness, Minoru built a powerful anti-object, heat-resistant and electromagnetic-resistant shield. Even light didn't penetrate inside this shield, so Minoru created a light source in the form of a weak plasma, which shone, but didn't burn. Minoru dropped to one knee next to Minami and held her shoulder with his hand for support.

At first he reached out to shake her shoulder, but at the last moment he thought better of it.

Minami's smile appeared on her face, distorted by pain.

"I'm fine."

Minami's intermittent voice said that she, on the contrary, was far from okay.

"Everything... happened... too... suddenly. I... just... didn't... manage... to adjust... the... power."

"Enough! Say nothing more!"

Minoru unconsciously hugged Minami with both hands.

His face was as pale as Minami's.

Minoru once again remembered that using magic shortens Minami's lifespan.

He abducted her precisely for this reason.

He didn't want Minami to die, so he abandoned his humanity himself and suggested that Minami do the same.

And despite all this...

Due to his carelessness...

He admitted that Minami had to use magic.

Now he wasn't interested in the attacks of the newly arrived enemies, nor in Raymond's mental connection. He rejected all this and hugged Minami tightly.

The battle ended after 20 minutes.

After Minoru neutralized the exorcists, this allowed Zoe Spica to demonstrate her true fighting abilities. And she, after all, belonged to the class of the First stellar magnitude - the highest in "Stars," the strongest division of magicians in the USNA. She alone neutralized almost half of the assault squad.

When the fanatical commander was killed, the remaining half of the enemies lost their desire to continue the battle. The Coral's crew also didn't begin to avenge their dead comrades, and accepted the surrender of the enemy, so in the end the battle didn't end with the total destruction of one of the parties.

However.

Minoru and Minami received help only an hour after the end of the battle.

“... Minoru. How is your girlfriend?”

“The pain has passed, and she is sleeping peacefully. The medicine she was given seems to be working.”

Immediately after the battle was over, the ban on disembarking for the Coral's crew on shore was lifted. Minoru was also allowed to get off the ship, and Minami was transferred to the medical center of the base. Minoru spent some time near Minami, and now sat on the pier and looked at the evening sea.

“I see...”

Raymond said only that, and could not pick up the following words.

“... It's my fault.”

Minoru sat with his arms around his knees and his head bowed.

“I should not have allowed her to use magic...”

“No... it's not your fault. Who would have thought that at an American base, American soldiers would attack each other... that is impossible to predict.”

“Lieutenant Spica has already apologized for this.”

“We will do everything in our power to cure Minami-san, who suffered from the internal conflict of our country,” she said.

Minoru's face showed a faint, self-deprecating smile.

“But, to my knowledge, I only know that there is only one way to cure her..”

“So...!”

Raymond raised his voice.

“In such a situation, it's time to stop being so indecisive! Minoru, you can do it!”

Minoru raised his head and looked into the eyes of Raymond standing next to him.

Raymond involuntarily tensed, and his breath caught.

In Minoru's eyes, he saw a feeling of helplessness bordering on despair.

"I won't force her. Until she herself desires, she won't be the same as us."

"But after all... just you..."

"I promised. That I won't force her."

Minoru mumbled in a voice like that of an old man who had lost the desire to continue living.

Raymond could only stand silently, not knowing how to answer.

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July 18, 20:55.

Leaving Miyuki at home, and Lina with her as a guard, Tatsuya alone visited the Kyuuchouji Temple.

But, he didn't suddenly rush in there without an invitation. Tatsuya had already been there today at 10 a.m. and asked Yakumo to arrange a meeting with Toudou Aoba. The two fought against one another seriously almost a week ago, but in the end they parted as if nothing had happened. At about noon, Yakumo called Tatsuya at home and said that the meeting was scheduled for 9 pm today.

Yakumo's apprentice led Tatsuya to the far side room. He waited there for about five minutes. Exactly at 9 pm Yakumo brought Toudou Aoba, and he took the main place*.

[They say "at the head of the table", but the Japanese are sitting on the floor, and the "main place" is about the same, only without a table...]

"I sincerely apologize for inviting you today."

"Forget the greetings."

"Yotuba Tatsuya, raise your head."

Tatsuya obediently raised his bowed head. Despite the middle of summer, Toudou wore a high-quality suit similar to the one he had in their previous meeting.

“It seems like today you want to ask me for something. Don't be shy, speak.”

“Thank you, I will take advantage of your proposal and immediately get down to business. My question is also related to your Excellency's obligation to be a deterrent. Could you arrange for me the possibility of using military force legally, even if I leave the 101 Independent Magic Equipped Battalion and lose the status of Special Officer?”

Truly unashamed, Tatsuya immediately voiced his request to Toudou.

Toudou didn't get angry, but, on the contrary, grinned with interest.

“And I thought the question would be about Wyatt Curtis's request.”

“It seems to me that it would be better if the head of the family talks to you on this issue, and not me.”

“Hmm...”

Toudou was still looking at Tatsuya with a grin.

“Yes, she did consult me. And with regards to the matter of requesting cooperation from Asha Chandrasekhar, too.”

“So you are already in the know?”

Tatsuya countered Toudou's provocation with an indifferent face.

“Good.”

Toudou again didn't consider Tatsuya's behavior a problem.

“If your power can't be used freely, then this will weaken our country's defense.”

Toudou nodded and crossed his arms over his chest.

“My authority in the modern world doesn't manifest itself so openly. It will be difficult for me to officially grant such special privileges to one person. However...”

Toudou removed his hands from his chest.

“... I can arrange that after something has actually happened, you won't be accused of a crime.”

“May I ask you this?”

“You can.”

Tatsuya bowed low, his forehead touching the tatami.

“But why are you at odds with Saeki?”

Toudou asked in a teasing tone, looking down at Tatsuya's back.

“Her Excellency Saeki doesn't seem to like the fact that our family is sheltering Angelina Kudou Shields.”

Rising, Tatsuya answered.

“You're sheltering Angie Sirius, not the Yotsuba family.”

“I am...”

At that moment, Tatsuya again used the universal self instead of the formal one.

“... I think she will no longer be Angie Sirius.”

“Wow.”

“Huh.”

Not only Toudou, but even Yakumo, who was silent before that, gave a voice.

“Not “I hope,” but “I think”...?”

Grinning, Yakumo asked Tatsuya.

“Yes. It will be so regardless of my intentions.”

“Ha ha. I hope it will be so.”

Yakumo was still laughing, but Toudou had regained his serious face.

“After Kudou’s death, Saeki was left with an unpleasant emotional aftertaste. This probably has also affected her.”

An expression flashed across Tatsuya's face, showing that this was a surprise to him. He suggested that Saeki was only calculating in terms of diplomatic gain, but it seemed like digging a lot deeper in this case.

"However, breaking the relationship between you and Saeki will be beneficial for our country. Your power should not be placed under the control of just one military officer."

Tatsuya didn't know how to react to this, so he decided to just make a polite, light bow.

"I understand the situation."

It seems that Toudou didn't care about the reaction.

"As I said earlier, you can leave a question for me about your right to be a participant in the hostilities. And you will protect our country in the right way at the moment when you decide that you are the one who needs to."

"As you order."

Tatsuya bowed his forehead to the floor again.

From above, Toudou's words were heard again.

"You can accept Wyatt Curtis's offer. Politicians and bureaucrats won't like this, but the release of Benjamin Loews from prison is well suited to demonstrate your strength to everyone. However, the complete destruction of Midway Prison is ruled out. Exceeding the dose of a drug turns it into a poison."

Obviously, Toudou kept in mind the need for military containment of the USNA army. Almost certainly, he was very unhappy with the attack on Miyakijima.

Thinking about this, Tatsuya, who continued to sit forehead on the floor, replied:

"I understand you."

"During the rescue of Sakurai Minami, you don't have to think about the damage that you will inflict on the American army until it is very big. The complete erasure of the Pearl & Hermes base from the face of the earth, nevertheless, will be unnecessary, but I do not mind the damage caused by the sinking of one or two aircraft carriers."

"I would like to finish everything as quietly and peacefully as possible."

"That will do too. But I have one condition.... you can raise your head."

"What?"

Tatsuya said and straightened up slowly.

Toudou wasn't impatient, but immediately voiced his condition.

"Don't bring Kudou Minoru back to the country."

"Do you mean that I should not kill him?"

That evening, Tatsuya heard from Yakumo that Toudou and his "colleagues" are prone to allergic reactions to all inhuman evil spirits. Hearing about that "condition," he expected that he would be required to destroy the Parasites.

"That is unnecessary. What is happening in America must be settled by the Americans."

"I understand you."

Tatsuya realized that for Toudou it was enough that demonic creatures simply didn't exist in Japan.

Minoru's abilities were also very valuable, but for Tatsuya, returning Minami was a higher priority. And he couldn't go against the conditions set by Toudou.

"I will also arrange for you to leave the country. You don't want to worry about any tedious accusations of secretly leaving the country?"

"... Thank you."

Tatsuya didn't expect Toudou to show such zeal for cooperation.

If he leaves the self-defense forces, then there really is a chance that he will be much more severely blamed for illegal actions that had previously been turned a blind eye. And his current business is primarily a secret exit from the country. But Tatsuya was ready for such an inevitable risk.

"Yakumo."

Toudou called out to Yakumo and turned to him.

“Tatsuya-kun, here you go.”

Yakumo moved closer to Tatsuya and took a flat dark blue bundle from his pocket.

Having received this bundle in his hands, Tatsuya with a glance asked Yakumo whether it could be opened.

“You can open and see.”

said Toudou.

“Okay.”

Inside the bundle of dark blue silk was an official passport with a seal authorizing exit from the country.

The reason for leaving indicated in the passport was cooperation with the USNA in the field of technology. That is, Tatsuya allegedly temporarily went to the USNA as a technical specialist in magical engineering.

Tatsuya could not hide his surprise. Seeing his face, Toudou and Yakumo smiled with satisfaction.

“That was suggested by Yakumo. You can take this as an apology for the fact that he recently interfered with you.”

“Although I disturbed you not at my discretion... Well, that was, what it was.”

Regardless of the interference and apology for him, regardless of the details of this act and its reasons, for Tatsuya it was definitely a useful thing.

Tatsuya politely bowed in gratitude for the help.

Chapter 5

Japanese time: July 19, noon. Local time: July 18, 4:00 p.m.

A small transport aircraft arrived at the Pearl & Hermes base. This base was built outside the atoll, on an artificial base and a floating pontoon mega platform, so the

base itself didn't have an airstrip. The role of the runway was performed by the aircraft carrier assigned to this base. Therefore, when the aircraft carrier was absent (was on a mission), the base could only accept aircraft capable of landing on water. This aircraft was also supposed to arrive yesterday, but due to the lack of an aircraft carrier, the schedule was shifted by one day.

This small transport aircraft flew here from New Mexico, from the base of Stars. Three days ago, First Lieutenant Spica asked the Stars base to resolve the unusual situation that arose, namely, the Coral's crew was forbidden to go ashore immediately after entering the port. Yesterday, while this request was still under consideration, a surprise attack occurred, committed by their own allies, USNA soldiers, like themselves. After receiving a request for help from First Lieutenant Spica, the commander of the base Walker immediately decided to send Major Kevin Antares and First Lieutenant Eliya* Sargas (both Parasites) from the eleventh detachment. However, the plane that was supposed to deliver these two could not leave, because the "runway" was absent at the base.

[Japanese transliteration is very harsh. This name has quite a few varieties (Ilya, Elia, (I) Elijah, Eliya), I just chose one of them, since it is completely impossible to understand which one the author intended.]

"Lieutenant Spica. Sorry, we're late."

The first person Antares spoke to was Spica, who came to meet him on the deck of the aircraft carrier. At the same time, the base soldiers bypassed them at a great distance.

"No, I'm glad you arrived, sir."

Spica understood that Antares also had unexpected obstacles, and didn't blame him.

In addition, Spica herself wasn't one of the victims.

"By the way, regarding Commander Vega and Lieutenant Deneb..."

"The commander and lieutenant fell in battle."

"... I see. Sorry."

Antares wasn't particularly familiar with them, but the death of his colleagues was always shocking news. Even for parasites.

He spoke again only after about five seconds.

“So what is the situation?”

“Almost half of Coral’s team has been lost, but the remaining half have become better treated. Care for the wounded is also up to standards.”

The face of Spica hardly changed the moment when she talked about the fact that almost 60 people were victims of this incident. Did she have such a character initially, or did she lose her humanity after becoming a Parasite?

“Understood.”

Antares also didn't show any emotions on his face about the killed members of the Coral crew.

“Lieutenant Spica. I understand that the problems at this base have been resolved?”

At this moment, First Lieutenant Sargas joined the conversation.

“No, there are still unsolved problems.”

“Are you talking about the punishment for the surrendered assault squad?”

“That issue will be resolved in accordance with military legislation.”

“Then what are we talking about?”

Antares returned to the conversation, forcing Spike to give an answer.

“We have a relative here who is not connected to our network.”

“Do you mean that this relative refuses to share consciousness with us?”

Sargas didn't hide his surprise.... Of course, by "relative" they meant Parasites. And no misunderstanding between them arose.

“Is something like that possible?”

Sargas was also a Parasite, so he could not believe it right away that this "relative" could deliberately disconnect from the network of shared consciousness.

“...It is a fact. I don’t know why this behavior is possible.“

However, no matter how hard it is to believe it, it turned out to be true.

“And who is he?”

Antares asked Spica with a stern expression.

“He is our relative of Japanese descent named Kudou Minoru. Raymond Clark brought him aboard the Coral. Now he is at this base.”

Spica's voice was a little tense.

All Parasites are separate individuals. Possessing individual consciousnesses, they are also connected at a deep level of consciousness, meaning that they share one whole consciousness. This is a feature of the species of living creatures called Parasites.

It wasn't known what damage could entail the existence of an individual separated from this common connection. Parasites have only recently recognized themselves as a “species” and have a very short history. You could even say that they "have no history." Before that, they had not encountered a Parasite capable of isolating itself from their "network", so they simply could not ignore the study of this danger.

Spica felt this intuitively. After having listened to her, Antares and Sargas also intuitively understood. That an individual who refuses to be included in their network of consciousness threatens their existence.

“... And where is he now?”

“His companion is unwell and he is now with her in the medical center.”

Spica answered the question of Antares. Although she had not communicated with Minoru since yesterday, she continuously monitored his activities.

“This companion is also a relative?”

“No. The girl is human.”

“One of our relatives fled the country with a human girl...? He seems to have some kind of complicated situation of his own.”

“Raymond Clark must know the situation of Kudou Minoru.”

“I see... no, this can't be put off. One of us must get in touch with this Kudou Minoru.”

Hearing Antares, Spica frowned.

“Kudou Minoru is able to isolate itself from our network at will. Convincing him will be a daunting task.”

“I understand. There is nothing to be done, we will have to use relatively crude methods. You knew this and patiently watched him while you were waiting for us.”

“Yes, major.”

When Antares and Sargas were still human, they specialized in the magic of mental interference. Having become Parasites, they have not lost their skills. On the contrary, their power of influence only increased.

Spica thought that these two would be able to overcome the mental barrier of Minoru with their magic of mental interference.

Antares and Sargas, who were silently nodding, made up their mind to do so.

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July 19, 13:00. Tatsuya arrived at the headquarters of the 101 brigade, located at the base of Kasumigaura. He was asked to come there by phone.

At 9 a.m., he received a phone call from Fujibayashi Kyouko. They only talked about business, but Tatsuya wasn't overly cold in talking to her. He wasn't aware of the details behind Maya's conversation with Kyouko yet, but he knew that they had a private conversation somewhere else after Kudou Retsu's funeral. Tatsuya speculated that some kind of agreement has been reached regarding the interference in his pursuit by Fujibayashi Nagamasa.

However, the reason Tatsuya responded to Saeki's call was different. He went to the brigade headquarters, believing that it was worth clarifying his position.

“Special Officer, thank you for coming.”

Tatsuya greeted Saeki, who had clearly shown only the semblance of a smile, not with a salute, but with a slight bow and nod. He was in ordinary casual clothes and without a

hat, so from the point of view of manners everything was in order. According to some (erroneous) tradition, earlier Tatsuya used the standard salute of honor for greetings. Seeing Tatsuya's current greeting, Kazama, standing next to Saeki, felt the awkwardness of the situation.

Saeki may also have noticed that Tatsuya's behavior is different from what it used to be.

However, she wanted to immediately begin the interrogation she had planned.

"Your Excellency Saeki. I'm giving up my status as Special Officer effective immediately."

However, Tatsuya spoke first.

"...In what sense?"

In response to Saeki's question, Tatsuya took an oblong envelope from the inside pocket of his summer jacket and laid it on the desk.

There was a "notice of resignation" labeled on the envelope.

"I'm..."

Kazama experienced an even stronger sense of awkwardness and inappropriateness from what was used by Tatsuya's universal "I" than before. But he understood that this wasn't the time to worry about that.

"... not a real soldier, so notice may not be required. However, this is my decision."

Saeki removed all expression from her face, looked at the envelope and said:

"I can't accept that."

"Your Excellency. This is not a "letter of resignation," but a "notice of resignation." Moreover, at the time I was awarded the rank of Special Officer, no agreement was reached on the duration of my service. I must be free to leave at any time."

"So you think that society will accept your excuse of "I don't like my job, so I'm leaving!?""

"If you are referring to public opinion..."

Tatsuya made a completely serious face while responding to Saeki who was unable to

hide her annoyance.

“... then isn't compelling a minor to military service contrary to this very public opinion?”

“...”

The clever reasoning in Tatsuya's argument definitely had an effect on Saeki.

“... Have you forgotten who you are? You are a Strategic-Class Magician. We cannot let you leave the army arbitrarily.”

“Why?”

“Why... Because the state should not leave unattended a destructive force comparable to strategic weapons. You should be smart enough to figure it out without additional explanation.”

Saeki no longer hid her annoyance.

Tatsuya, in turn, stopped hiding his cold and indifferent face.

“It is not the state that doesn't want to leave Strategic-Class magic unattended, but the government.”

“...What's the difference?”

“The government is persistently striving to assert control over weapons in its hands. While the state attaches great importance to the use of weapons for their benefit.”

“But it is the government that decides how weapons will be used in the interests of the state.”

“Usually it is.”

Tatsuya calmly agreed with Saeki's argument.... However, he continued immediately.

“Decisions on the use of strategic weapons are made at least by politicians, not by the military.”

Saeki's face turned slightly red. And the reason for this was anger, not shame.

“You mean that I am a military dictator who disregards the opinions of civilians?”

“These were general considerations. Speaking generally, military force should not belong to just one person. Strategic-Class Magicians, possessing a military force comparable to strategic weapons, are special people who don't fit within the conventional framework.”

“... Do you mean that you are a person requiring special treatment?”

Saeki asked in a mocking tone.

“Not special. But specific.”

Tatsuya didn't succumb to her provocation. Yes, and could not - because his emotions were clearly limited. In this case, Tatsuya's “curse” worked as his weapon.

“Guided by general criteria, you can't follow in the right or wrong direction. General rules aren't applicable to such unique people, such as Strategic-Class Magicians. Even if I don't have masters, then my magic can still serve for the good of national defense. Conversely, if they restrict me, I won't always be able to use magic for the sake of the country.... Remember, for example, the fact that brainwashing impairs magical abilities.”

Tatsuya spoke out the last sentence in an ironic tone.

“... When a Strategic-Class Magician uses his power, no one but the government will be responsible for the consequences. Shiba Tatsuya, you already struck out with your Strategic-Class magic on the territory of another state. Breaking relations with self-defense forces, will you take sole responsibility for such massive destruction?”

“At the time of October 31, 2095, I was considered a Special Officer and attacked the GAA fleet on the orders of the self-defense forces. I think I shouldn't have to be telling your wise Excellency Lieutenant General Saeki that ignoring the chronology is sophistry.”

Even without Tatsuya's statement, Saeki understood that this was a stupid excuse.

“I'm not talking about the past, but about the future!”

The meaning of her words wasn't completely clear.

Saeki quickly realized that she hadn't said enough to understand her thoughts. Before

Tatsuya pointed this out to her, she continued her refutation attempt, pronouncing the words with a tongue twister.

"You just said that you will use Strategic-Class magic for the sake of the state, even if you do not work for the government? I mean, will you take sole responsibility for this?"

"Your Excellency, this is the reverse order. When it is required to use Strategic-Class magic for the sake of the state, it should be used only after the state... the government will make a firm promise to assume this responsibility. I am not good natured enough to take responsibility instead of the state."

Saeki pierced Tatsuya with her gaze for a while.

She simply looked at him, and didn't try to refute his words.

If this dispute had a judge, then at that moment he must have declared Tatsuya's victory.

"Our cooperation lasted almost five years. Thank you for watching over me, all the best."

But Tatsuya didn't come here to argue with Saeki. Honestly, this argument was just a waste of time for him. If Saeki humbly accepted the notice of resignation, then he wouldn't have to deal with it.

Of course, Tatsuya didn't think that Saeki would agree with a smile to his departure from the army.

"... Lieutenant Colonel Kazama, detain Special Officer Ooguro."

Saeki gave Kazama exactly the order that Tatsuya was expecting.

In general, Tatsuya thought Saeki would do this from the very beginning.

"Commander."

But it wasn't Kazama who was the first to respond to Saeki's order.

Major Yanagi requested an order from his immediate commander, who had not yet undertaken anything.

"... Yanagi, go ahead."

By order of Kazama, Major Yanagi and his subordinates (soldiers and junior officers) began to move.

This room was pretty small. It was impossible to use large-scale magic.

No, Tatsuya, of course, had the option to destroy this room and escape. But Yanagi and his subordinates, as members of the independent magically equipped battalion, could not ignore the possibility that the office of the commander-in-chief of the brigade in which their battalion was listed would suffer, and that the hostess of this cabinet, Lieutenant General Saeki, would be involved in the take-down. They were forced to attack Tatsuya only with the help of magic that controlled their bodies, and magic that caused damage upon contact.

There were four attackers, including Yanagi. Kazama still has not budged.

The first blow was delivered by Yanagi.

Taking a step forward with his right foot, he lunged forward with his right hand.

It seems that this wasn't an ordinary fighting style, but the first attack from a series of strikes. This blow was aimed at the solar plexus. Tatsuya didn't shy away from this and took the attack with the palm of his left hand.

But Yanagi's right fist continued to press Tatsuya's left arm.

His power was aimed precisely at Tatsuya's center of gravity, and it couldn't be turned aside.

Tatsuya had to put much more effort into his left hand so that this blow wouldn't reach his body.

During this fight between the right fist and the left palm, Tatsuya and Yanagi didn't move.

Yanagi's subordinates took advantage of this and attacked from the left and right.

Tatsuya stepped back with the help of movement magic, maintaining a fighting stance.

Yanagi this time stepped forward with his left foot and lunged forward with his left hand.

This time it was a strike with the base of the palm. Tatsuya didn't shy away from him either.

However, he didn't block it, but accepted it with his torso.

Yanagi's left palm entered Tatsuya's right side. Yanagi frowned at the sensation conveyed to him from his palm.

It was a sensation of a broken rib.

This lunge with Yanagi's palm ended in a fracture in Tatsuya.

Yanagi absolutely didn't expect that everything would turn out so simple.

That is why the reaction of Yanagi was late.

The delay was negligible, just one instant. However, during this time interval of less than half a second, Tatsuya's right hand reached Yanagi's face.

It was a blow with the base of the palm, but with the movement of only the arm, without working the lower back.

Such a blow should not have sufficient strength and was usually used only to distract attention. However, Yanagi lost his balance away from him and fell to one knee.

The reason for this was the movement magic activated by using "Flash Cast."

Tatsuya's magic set in motion his right hand, causing it to strike Yanagi.

It was a partial imitation of the magic of "Self-Marionette", which Tomitsuka Hagane specialized in. Tatsuya couldn't imitate the Self-Marionette completely, but could reproduce it within the limits of one right hand.

At the very moment that Yanagi was thrown back, Tatsuya no longer had any broken bones. Self-healing through the use of his magic, "Regrowth."

Eliminating his damage, Tatsuya took a step forward to finish off Yanagi.

However, he was forced to interrupt the "pursuit."

Three of Yanagi's subordinates from three different sides simultaneously attacked Tatsuya.

These were fighters from a platoon that had undergone special training in melee skills under the leadership of Major Yanagi. Even Tatsuya had poor prospects in a battle of three against one. Before he was completely surrounded, he took a big jump and landed in front of the door.

Now he stood at the front door of the commander's office, albeit with his back to it.

"Do not let him run away!"

Yanagi shouted to his subordinates, recovering from the damage, after which he got up and also rushed forward.

Saeki pressed something on the desktop console. Remotely locking the door.

The door looked like ordinary wood, but it was only the outward appearance. In fact, it was made of special steel plates glued with decorative wooden panels.

But Tatsuya didn't even reach for the doorknob.

Instead, he moved toward the approaching Yanagi.

Yanagi's right arm moved into Tatsuya's chest.

Tatsuya's right arm moved into Yanagi's chest.

It wasn't like a mirror image, but as if a three-dimensional image was projected in a rotated form. From exactly the same position, they simultaneously carried out exactly the same blows.

A wave of vibration was released from the palm to the heart of the enemy. It was a melee technique using the magic of the oscillation system.

Yanagi won in power.

But there was no significant difference between the results of their strikes.

Both legs cringed.

Yanagi fell to his knees.

But Tatsuya only staggered and stood up straight again. The damage was nullified by his magic, "Regrowth."

In order for him to not fall completely, Yanagi leaned on the floor with his left hand, and grabbed his chest with his right. His forehead covered with sweat. Tatsuya went right past him and his subordinates, frozen in place. He headed deep into the room.

To the table of Saeki.

But here Tatsuya's review was blocked.

Kazama stood before him.

Tatsuya didn't even understand when Kazama had time to move.

But Tatsuya didn't stop, but continued to move forward.

And the moment Tatsuya approached Kazama...

Tatsuya's body soared into the air.

And hit Saeki's desk. Hitting the table not from above, but from the side, Tatsuya fell to the floor.

Kazama didn't turn around.

Tatsuya turned to Kazama and stood as if nothing had happened.



BY TINYTIGER
MAHOUKAVI

“... To substitute himself in order to inflict damage to the enemy and win?”

In response to Kazama's words...

“No, that could be called a draw. However, I do have a tool that erases damage. The only difference is this.”

Tatsuya spoke in a tone that sets out well-known facts.

If you look closely, you could see that Kazama's legs were trembling slightly. He struggled to keep his body upright, which should have fallen long ago.

At the time of the throw, Tatsuya sent a vibrational wave through the point of capture of his hand.

This vibrational magic was much more powerful than the one sent to Yanagi. Even the so-called “Flash Cast” doesn't complete activation instantly. When you spend extra time on this, it means that you don't have time to prepare yourself to fall safely. But, you can afford to do such things thanks to the ability of automatic self-healing.

Tatsuya turned and held out his hand toward Saeki.

Saeki instantly grabbed her hand on the handle of the drawer in which the gun lay.

Tatsuya's hand reached the desktop console.

Saeki froze in surprise.

Unlocking the door lock, Tatsuya turned around.

“So, your victory over the master wasn't an accident?”

Kazama spoke with Tatsuya heading for the door when he passed him.

“That was my loss. I'm still not able to defeat master.”

Answered Tatsuya as he passed Yanagi.

Yanagi didn't move. More precisely, he could not move.

Tatsuya left the commander's office.

As soon as he closed the door behind him, Kazama collapsed on one knee, and two subordinates rushed to him. The remaining subordinate hurried to Yanagi.

It took about two minutes after Tatsuya left.

Restoring his breath, Kazama rose.

"Take Major Yanagi to the clinic."

"Understood."

Yanagi obediently leaned on the shoulders of two subordinates, and they left the commander's office.

"You are free too."

"Understood."

Kazama also released the remaining junior officer. Only two remained in the commander's office - Saeki and Kazama.

"... Lieutenant Colonel, have you taken the matter lightly?"

Saeki rebuked Kazama in the form of a question.

"I didn't give in."

Kazama didn't deny that he was frivolous. Do not kill the enemy, do not destroy the building and interior items. Under such conditions, one cannot become "serious." The same went for Yanagi, and Tatsuya too.

Kazama tried to capture Tatsuya, using all his powers within the limits of what is permitted by the same conditions as the enemy. And as a result, was defeated. For Kazama, to say aloud the excuse "I wasn't serious" was a shameful act. But the same can be said about the fact that he could not fulfill the order. Therefore, he no longer wanted to argue with a superior officer.

"... There is nothing to be done about the fact that he managed to leave. We have no reason to get an arrest warrant. So from now on, it is necessary to strengthen our monitoring of him in order to prevent at least a secret exit from the country."

Saeki already realized that trying to blame Kazama was nothing more than her personal nagging. She left this question unattended, and spoke of a more pressing matter.

"Thank you. By the way, Your Excellency, what will you do with this?"

Kazama picked up and laid on the table the "resignation notice" that fell to the floor as a result of Tatsuya's collision with the table.

Saeki took this envelope in her hand and silently threw it into the shredder standing next to the table.

"Are you sure?"

"As he himself said, he is not a real officer. From the very beginning, he wasn't properly registered with the self-defense forces, so the notice of resignation in itself is something meaningless."

"That is, you will ignore Tatsuya's refusal from the title?"

"No. Records created on a special basis about "Special Officer Ooguro Ryuuya" will be deleted today."

Saeki's decision was unexpected for Kazama. He again asked, "Are you sure?" This time in order to confirm the intentions of the boss.

"Disloyal soldiers are bad for the army. If he says that he doesn't need the support of the army, then let him do what he wants."

Saeki's words were not out of sympathy for Tatsuya. On the contrary, her voice, it seemed, at any moment would start to tremble with anger.

◊ ◊ ◊

American military base Pearl and Hermes, Northwest Hawaiian Islands. Local time: July 18, 8 p.m.

Minoru came to Minami's medical room. The sun was already completely hidden behind the horizon, but the lighting in the room was turned off. In order to not interfere with Minami's sleep.

She had not slept at all since yesterday, but the time she spent without sleep was very short. Overheating of the magic calculation area exhausts the mind more than the body. She could not normally maintain a state of wakefulness due to a lack of "vitality of consciousness."

At this base was a military doctor. But Minoru didn't even hope for treatment from this doctor. Medicine won't help here. He knew that Minami's condition could not be cured by modern medicine.

The magic calculation area, located in the subconscious area, this "function" of the mind, responsible for the construction of magic, like other human abilities, has certain limitations within which it can work. Continuous processing of requests that go beyond these restrictions will harm not only this function of the mind called the magic calculation area. This disorder of the mind will also be transmitted to the physical body, which in the end can even lead to death. To prevent this, there is a "safety valve" in the magic calculation area that stops processing beyond the limits of possibilities.

But sometimes the body has a need to demonstrate power that exceeds these strength limits. In such cases, the magic calculation area can momentarily allow processing exceeding the limits. If at this moment the safety valve is so damaged that it becomes impossible to restore it, you can guess that if there is no limiter in the magic calculation zone, processing overload, or the so-called overheating, can easily happen. That was the true nature of the condition effecting Minami.

The magic calculation area, located in the area of the subconscious mind, was still a "black box" for both magicians and Parasites. At this stage in the development of knowledge of magic, it is impossible to restore this mechanism. The only way to prevent the magician from shortening their life from overheating the magic calculation area with a damaged limiter is to refuse to use magic.

But Minami eventually used magic. In addition, a powerful magic that caused a strong load. Right in front of Minoru.

"If the human mind and body cannot stand the use of magic, then there is no choice but to become a non-human being, more suitable for magic..."

Minoru thought this was the only right choice. With all his intelligence, he could not come up with another solution.

"If it goes on like this, then Minami-san..."

"You have no choice but to turn Minami into a Parasite," the voice whispered in Minoru's head. And that wasn't the voice of the divided consciousness of the Parasites. It was the inner voice of Minoru himself, not wanting Minami to die.

But at the same time, another self was also sitting inside him, reproaching him for trying to break the promise he made with Minami. And there was also Minoru inside him, tormenting himself with the question of whether there really were any other ways.

He already had an answer. Any treatment is only a temporary measure. Now, even if the magic is sealed, it won't lead to an improvement in current symptoms.

There is no other lasting solution than to become a Parasite.

"She used magic through my fault."

"If I were more attentive to what was happening around me, then Minami-san wouldn't have had to use magic."

Minoru sat with his head hanging by the bed on which Minami was sleeping, and mentally lamented.

"What shall I do..."

Minoru pleaded desperately, peering into the emptiness of the darkness.

Minoru suddenly raised his head.

"This answer didn't come from within me."

The magician's perception informed him of such a unfamiliarity.

"Something Dark... This is not ordinary darkness."

This darkness had some kind of altered nature.

It wasn't just a lack of light.

Despite the fact that the lighting in the room was turned off, a few seconds ago it wasn't completely dark here, as it is now.

The light coming in from the corridor, penetrating through the partially open door, as

well as the bed and Minami lying on it, were all slightly distinguishable.

And now nothing was visible at all.

Everything around Minoru was drowned in darkness.

No. He himself was engulfed in darkness.

"... Perception blocking magic!?"

Minoru intuitively sensed that this darkness was a magical attack directed against him.

He tried to determine the identity of the enemy using "Elemental Sight".

But could not "see." Not only could he not see the identity of the enemy, but he couldn't see anything. Even his magical vision was blocked by this darkness.

"It even reaches the mind... No, on the contrary. Does this magic block the enemy's senses directly from the mind?"

Minoru wasn't at a loss. He had a lot of knowledge. Knowledge of the Kudou family, and the knowledge of Zhou Gongjin. Minoru knew of both magic that blocked the five senses, and magic that prevented perception beyond the five senses. For example, his "Parade" was magic that deceived both of them.

"It only obscures the "eyes." And it doesn't do any other harm anymore."

If the ability to search for the enemy is blocked, then it's not the end. Minoru decided to erect a barrier against the magic of mental interference and wait for the enemy to make their next move.

I didn't have to wait long.

A voice came from the darkness. It wasn't a simple loud physical voice tearing at his eardrums, but a fierce voice forcibly penetrating directly into his consciousness.

This voice didn't consist of clearly distinguishable words. It had neither Japanese nor English words, nor words from other languages.

It was just a "sound" conveying meaning directly.

"Hear...!"

And this voice conveyed such an appeal.

“Do not reject...!”

And such a call was still present in this voice.

But what should I hear? What should I not reject?

Minoru didn't feel a magical compulsion from this voice, but a banal sense of curiosity.

When he voluntarily directed his consciousness towards this voice, the meaning it conveyed... more precisely, the "intentions" became more specific.

“Hear my voice! Hear our voice!”

My, ours. This voice belonged to one and several speakers at the same time.

This alone allowed Minoru to understand that the hosts of the voice were Parasites.

“Do not reject my consciousness! Do not reject our consciousness!”

Minoru "rejected" the assimilation of the shared consciousness of the Parasites using a magic barrier. Applying the magic developed by the Kudou family to subjugate parasite dolls, Minoru ordered the Parasite who lived inside him to “not enter” the collective consciousness.

This voice was trying to get Minoru to undo this magic.

"There are two magicians."

In addition to the fact that they are trying to drag him into a collective consciousness, he determined from magical waves that more than one magician is attacking with mental interference magic. The enemies worked in pairs. Although "Sight" wasn't available, he was still able to read the properties of the magic used by "touch".

"This magic... it manipulates the mind like powerful hypnosis."

Minoru made this conclusion by analyzing the magic trying to manipulate his mind.

"One of them obscures the "eyes", and the other inspires thoughts."

Continuing to follow this touch, you can even counterattack.

"First, neutralize this "darkness"!"

However, to prevent future confrontations, he decided to teach the opponents a lesson by completely breaking their magic, and, thereby, showing them the difference in strength.

The magic chosen by Minoru was Parade. The original purpose of this magic was to not allow the enemy to catch you, but even when he was already caught in the "Darkness" trap created by the enemy, he didn't hesitate to choose.

"If the enemy is not Tatsuya-san...!"

Minoru was sure that if the enemy wasn't Tatsuya, then with the help of Parade he would easily be able to hide from them, even if he had already fallen into the hands of the enemy.

And in his thoughts there wasn't a bit of complacency.

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"hmm?"

"Is he moving?"

In one of the rooms at the Pearl & Hermes base, the voices of two men sounded simultaneously.

The first voice belonged to Major Kevin Antares, and the second to First Lieutenant Eliya Sargas.

Major Antares is the commander of the eleventh detachment of the Stars, and First Lieutenant Sargas is a member of the same detachment, having the rank of the First stellar magnitude class. They were both magicians specializing in magic of mental interference, and both were converted to Parasites as a result of "secondary infection."

When they became Parasites, the magic they knew about best didn't change. On the contrary, they showed a tendency to go even deeper into their specialization.

Antares was good at magic affecting many minds simultaneously, and Sargas was strong at magic that focuses on one target and makes a powerful attack on their mind.

The magic that plunged Minoru's mind into "darkness" was created by Antares, and it was called "Nyx*". This magic could be called the trump card of Antares. It intervenes in the ability to perceive the mind, creating an area of hallucinations that blocks visual and auditory information.

[The goddess of the night from Greek mythology. She is Nikta or Nyukta in other translation options. In Japanese transliteration and English spelling - "Nyx".]

Opponents who fall into this area fall into a state where they "do not see, even when they are watching" and "do not hear, even when they are listening." And its effect is not limited to the vision and hearing of the physical body. It covers all information recognized by the mind as visual and auditory. As a result, the magician also becomes unable to recognize information about Eidos, perceived visually, and information about psionic waves, perceived audibly. In other words, not only the five senses, but also the sixth sense is "shrouded in darkness."

Antares used this magic to seal Minoru's remote aiming and prevent a counterattack from magic. This provided Sargas with a safe environment to destroy the mental barrier of Minoru. That was their strategy.

As they planned, no counterattack came from Minoru.

Minoru had come so far with this girl and should not have left her so easily. Now, however, he stepped out of the corridor and walked briskly away. At least that was what the magical perceptions of Antares and Sargas told them.

It was hard to think that Minoru would abandon his companion.

The magic "Nyx" of Antares didn't aim at one specific person. It was intended to affect many people at once, by targeting a specific area of physical space. Minoru realized this and planned to counterattack the enemy magicians, leaving this area and thereby regaining the ability of remote magic aiming.... Which was Antares interpretation of the current behavior of Minoru.

"Following the target."

In order not to subject his subordinates to danger, Antares began to move the hallucination zone created by his magic Nyx after Minoru.

"Yes, commander."

Sargas also began his pursuit after the moving Minoru as a target for magic.

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After Minoru activated Parade, the magical darkness disappeared, and the darkness of the night returned.

The magic that created the darkness wasn't interrupted. The area of effect magic, depriving perception from the mind, shifted away from Minoru. Minoru didn't leave this place, but only moved information about his location. After all, the enemy pursued Minoru informationally, and therefore moved the coordinates of the aiming of magic.

The speed of this reaction indicated a high level of magical skill by his enemies.

But, this high level skill, on the contrary, made them immediately fall for Minoru's trick. As he expected.

Minoru subsequently activated mental interference magic with psionic light moving through physical space as an intermediary.

The magic was called Phobos. This is a magic that sends psionic light into the enemy's magical field of vision, painted in colors that evoke the image of fear itself. There is also a magic called Deimos, which doesn't require an intermediary and sends fear directly, but it wasn't in Minoru's repertoire yet.

The effect of Phobos is not lethal. However, people affected by it, regardless of their mental stamina, will be subject to indescribable horror, and their mind will noticeably weaken. Even those who have trained to resist fear cannot escape the fear brought by Phobos. And no matter how hard you try to suppress this fear, it will continue to keep coming from the depths of your mind.

After activating Phobos, Minoru realized that the magic of the "voice" that attacked his mental barrier before activating "Parade" was interrupted. The "darkness" that had previously swallowed Minoru also disappeared. Both magics no longer had any effect on Minoru. But for him, now it only meant that the operators could no longer maintain the magic aimed at the substitute created by his Parade.

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“Major Antares!? What happened!? Lieutenant Sargas, let me know what happened!?”

First Lieutenant Spica screamed in a panicky voice, looking at the two men writhing in agony, who fell to the floor with the chairs they were sitting on. It seemed to her that an attack of convulsions suddenly seized the two.

“Was that just now... Phobos?”

Moaned Antares, waking up first.

“... I agree with you, commander.”

Sargas agreed with Antares, clutching his sore head with his hand.

“It was a mental interference attack by Kudou Minoru!”

Spica's cry implied the question "how is this possible!?" In order to apply magic to an adversary that you cannot see physically, it is necessary to fix the “image” of the target in the information dimension. And “Phobos”, in particular, is magic that achieves the result by directly irradiating the enemy with psion light. And we aren't even talking about "Deimos", directly sending images. For a remote attack by Phobos, it is necessary to accurately determine the coordinates of the target through the information dimension. This was impossible to do while in a state of difficulty obscured by the magic of Nyx.

“Major Antares, Lieutenant Sargas... well, and Lieutenant Spica at the same time.”

At that moment, a mental voice so powerful (not loud) sounded in the minds of these three that it seemed as though their head would crack from it.

“Mr. Kudou. Did you want something?”

With a grimace, Spica answered him. She decided that it would be better if she answered Minoru, instead of Antares or Sargas who had just attacked him.

“I think Raymond hears us too, so I won’t repeat it. I do not intend to take control of you.”

Spica's heart nearly jumped out of her chest. It happened exactly as she and Antares was afraid of. They could not gain access to Minoru consciousness. No access - so you can not intervene. However, Minoru had access to their

consciousness. If Minoru wants to, he will be able to correct her consciousness, and so that she won't even notice it.

This was "only possible theoretically," but in fact it wasn't known whether in practice one Parasite could take control of other Parasites. However, Spica and other soldiers of the USNA army could not ignore the likelihood that they could fall under the control of the Japanese Minoru.

"So never try to get into my head again. I do not want to control anyone. And I don't want anyone to control me."

"... Got it. We won't do that again. We apologize for our deed."

Antares answered him.

"Apologies are accepted. For my part, I also apologize for my rude behavior."

At this Minoru interrupted his mental connection.

"Rude behavior...?"

Groaned Antares.

The bitterness of defeat was present in his voice, as well as on the face of Sargas who heard him.

Chapter 6

Saturday, July 20th. It was the last day of the first semester, but Tatsuya wasn't going to go to school today. However, this didn't mean that he was going to indulge in laziness all morning.

6:30 a.m. Tatsuya had breakfast with the already familiar company of Miyuki, as well as Lina, who had recently begun her normal everyday life.

"Onii-sama, here you are."

Despite the fact that Miyuki soon needed to go to school, she managed to make sure that Tatsuya finished breakfast with her own brewed coffee.

“Thanks.”

Tatsuya said, took the cup and immediately brought it to his lips.

“Pleasant taste. It’s sad that for some time I won’t be able to enjoy coffee made by Miyuki.”

Hearing Tatsuya's words, Miyuki, who had returned to her seat, drooped sadly.

Lina, on the contrary, in anticipation of Tatsuya's next words straightened up unconsciously.

“Today, as planned, I will go to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands from Miyakijima.”

Senator Wyatt Curtis promised that the destroyer would approach Miyakijima this afternoon. Since then, Tatsuya no longer communicated with Curtis, but if the schedule he sent was valid, then tonight he will head towards Midway Island and Pearl and Hermes Atoll.

“...Yes.”

There was a hint of bitterness in Miyuki's voice. But it wasn't the sadness of their separation that was responsible for it, but concern for Tatsuya.

“Lina. I entrust Miyuki to you during my absence.”

If we talk about anxiety, then Tatsuya could say the same thing.

“Yeah, you can rely on me. And in return, take care of Ben.”

Tatsuya entrusted Lina with Miyuki's guard, and Lina asked Tatsuya to save Canopus. They have exchanged these promises many times. Now they have confirmed them one more time, because Tatsuya will leave for Miyakijima in the first half of the day, which will be before they return from school.

“I'll take care. And about Major Canopus, and about Minami.”

“Yes... Thanks, Onii-sama.”

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Miyakijima, 2 p.m.

Tatsuya stood on a pier in the port, recently built on the northeast coast of the island, and looked at the sea. The USS destroyer "Matthew C. Perry," although not visible beyond the horizon, was supposed to anchor in adjacent waters in the direction Tatsuya was looking. Tatsuya heard about this from the members of the island's defense detachment (and they, in turn, learned about it from the captain of the destroyer by radio), and therefore went to the pier.

The Matthew C. Perry is the destroyer promised three days ago to Tatsuya by Wyatt Curtis. Who knows if there was any secret intention that the ship sent was named after the admiral who headed the so-called Black Ships, which made Japan open to international relations in the mid-19th century.

Tatsuya didn't stand on the pier to try to see a ship that could not be seen from here. To his right, a small ship was preparing to be dispatched. On it, he was going to go out to the destroyer.

"Shiba-san, the preparation is complete."

The captain of this ship said to Tatsuya after a little more than five minutes of waiting under the rays of the summer sun. The small ship wasn't a pleasure boat 10-20 meters long, but a ship with a total length of 50 meters and a crew of 20 people, originally built as a patrol ship. The fact that in the presence of 20 crew members, the captain personally came up to report, reflected the status of Tatsuya on this island.

And the reason wasn't only that he was from the direct line of the Yotsuba family and was the bridegroom of the next head of the family. It was that he was a key figure in the construction of the plant under construction on this island with a Stellar Furnace. In addition, people who were on the island during the attack of the Parasite squad at the beginning of the month also knew about his real abilities, which allowed him to easily deal with the main enemy forces. Not everyone respected him yet, but no one else could ignore him.

"It will be a dangerous journey, thank you in advance."

Tatsuya turned to the captain and bowed with a nod.

"I agree. All crew members are instructed to remain vigilant as we approach."

The captain saluted Tatsuya. However, he probably didn't fully understand what Tatsuya

called "a dangerous journey." Most likely, he considered this a common danger arising from the approach of an unarmed ship with a warship of another country.

Tatsuya didn't explain his thoughts in detail, but simply bowed again and boarded the Rakuyoumaru*.

[Literally "The Setting Sun."]

With the help Toudou prepared and official passport received from Yakumo, Tatsuya went through all the necessary procedures for leaving the country. More specifically, all legal procedures were completed at the time of receiving this passport. The reason for leaving was "sending Taurus Silver (aka Shiba Tatsuya) to the USNA for cooperation in the field of magic technology." If Tatsuya was to participate in the Dion Project, then perhaps he would follow the same formalities. Of course, his current trip was completely unrelated to the Dion Project. Therefore, it was understood that his trip was allegedly connected with the need to provide the USNA as a allied state with technologies related to the thermonuclear reactor he's developing.

And the destroyer "Matthew C. Perry" was allegedly sent to guard an engineer delivering valuable technology. According to the directional plan, the small ship Tatsuya was aboard and the USNA destroyer will sail in parallel courses to the east, and upon reaching the Japanese Depression Tatsuya will transfer to the Matthew C. Perry.

Thanks to Toudou Aoba's help, there were no problems with the documents when Tatsuya left the country. From a legal point of view, the content of these documents was a big problem, since both the purpose and destination were a lie, but this issue could be dealt with even after it was discovered. And at the moment, there is no evidence of an attempt to deceive.

By the way, within the powers of the coast guard patrol ships there is a right to conduct inspections in territorial waters. At first glance, there was nothing strange in the fact that from the patrol ship "Aguni" to "Rakuyoumaru" an order was issued to stop for inspection.

The destroyer "Matthew C. Perry" was anchored just outside the territorial waters off the coast of Miyakijima. The coast guard ordered the Rakuyoumaru to stop when it was already approaching the border of territorial waters. The Aguni patrol ship set off from the west to intercept the Rakuyoumaru, heading for the Matthew C. Perry.

Tatsuya watched the Aguni approach from the Rakuyoumaru deck.

"Shiba-san, staying on deck is dangerous. You better get back to the cabin..."

The captain who approached from behind spoke to Tatsuya. His concern wasn't only in his words, but also in his voice.

The waves at sea were really high. It seems like it was because of a typhoon moving from north to west of the Ogasawara Islands. It wasn't so strong that it was hard to stand on your feet, but from the captain's point of view, Tatsuya was a newcomer to the sea. So it was natural for the captain to worry about the possibility of any incident.

"Okay, I understand you."

There was no need to increase the psychological burden on the captain. Therefore, Tatsuya obediently followed his advice.

The cabin provided to Tatsuya was on the port side. A guard ship was sailing from the west across the Rakuyoumaru's path heading north. In other words, approaching from the port side. Therefore, from the window of the cabin one could observe the situation.

However, Tatsuya wouldn't have had trouble observing, even if his cabin was on the starboard side. He continuously monitored the Aguni's information with his "sight" from the moment he discovered it while standing on deck.

Both with ordinary eyesight and with his "Elemental Sight", Tatsuya saw that the patrol ship was about to ram them, not intending to stop.

"... Too much for a simple coincidence. Was there a leak from the main house about the location of my cabin?"

Without any fuss, Tatsuya thought.

The Aguni patrol ship was sent to crash exactly into Tatsuya's cabin.

And he looked at it and did nothing.

The nose of the patrol ship stuck right into the left-side area of the Rakuyoumaru where Tatsuya's cabin was located.

With the development of anti-ship missiles and high-speed torpedoes, there was no longer any sense in installing heavy armor on warships. Warships of this century are equipped with the necessary minimum of armor, and rely more on anti-aircraft artillery, torpedo interception, stealth and mobility.

However, coast guard ships are not designed to confront anti-ship warplanes, submarines or unmanned torpedo bombers, but fleets of illegal immigrants, spy ships and pirates armed with small arms. They do not run much of a risk in running into a strong rebuff, but instead run the risk of being criticized by international human rights organizations if they sink a ship with a preemptive strike.

In cases where it turns out that the adversary was disguised as a refugee spy vessel of a military organization, such criticism is in itself a reputational risk. And often it also brings damage that cannot be ignored diplomatically. After all, you can't start an attack until you get evidence that the opponents are not refugees.

Therefore, at some point, the coast guard ships went the opposite way from the warships - they began to be equipped with armor capable of withstanding both a preventive attack from machine guns or anti-personnel missile launchers, and a desperate blow from the hull of the pursued suspicious vessel. In other words, they were equipped with a hull capable of sinking other ships with its impact. Of course, they were not equipped with such an archaic thing as a ram on the nose. Yes, and the style of work of modern border ships was to block the escape route of a suspicious ship, getting in his way and not allowing him to move on.

However, the "Rakuyoumaru" had already stopped. The guard ship shouldn't have rammed the stopped vessel instead of blocking its escape path.

The "Rakuyoumaru" initially also started to be built as a patrol ship, but at some stage of construction it was decided to reassign it to a civilian vessel, so the amount of installed armor was noticeably reduced. Its hull wasn't able to withstand the collision with the sturdy armor of the patrol ship.

On the port side, starting from the place where the Aguni's nose hit, a crack began to spread. The original site of damage was above the waterline, but now the crack has spread below it. It immediately became clear to everyone that the "Rakuyoumaru" would inevitably sink. And not just sink, but it seemed that it was only a matter of time, until the ship's hull would break in half.

The USNA destroyer, waiting about 500-600 meters ahead, lifted their anchor. It was about to come in to save the team on the Rakuyoumaru. The ships of the maritime police also left Miyakijima one by one.

The “Aguni”, which caused fatal damage to the “Rakuyoumaru”, also backed up to move away from the “Rakuyoumaru”. The eighty-meter “Aguni” wasn't only an armored vessel, but it was superior in size to the fifty-meter “Rakuyoumaru”. Its internal structures were also made of thicker and stronger components. On a surface inspection on the Aguni, no visible damage was visible.

From the point of view of common sense, having gained some distance, the “Aguni” also had to join the rescue of the crew.

But only if the collision was indeed an accident.

However, being the closest to people floating in life jackets, the Aguni didn't even try to save them. It didn't start braking even when the distance to the “Rakuyoumaru” exceeded 50 meters. On the contrary, the Aguni's small-caliber ship's gun was aimed at the “Rakuyoumaru”.

But this gun, although it was called small-caliber, but its caliber was somewhat larger than, for example, on fighter jets. Its destructive power was excessive for such a small civilian ship as the Rakuyoumaru. For those who have not yet managed to escape from the sinking ship, this action was like a control finishing shot.

Flames erupted.... Not only from the gun's barrel, but from its foundation too.

At the same time the loaded ammunition exploded.

A young man leaned out of an approaching helicopter.

His clothes and hairstyle were disheveled in the wind. In order to not fall out, he held on to the top of the doorway with his left hand. He held out his right hand with what looked like a pistol.



This young man was called Tsutsumi Kanata. He was a representative of the second generation of improved Bard series magicians, as well as a guardian of Shibata Katsuhige, the next head of the Shibata family, a side branch of the Yotuba family.

Kanata pulled the trigger of the pistol-shaped CAD in his right hand. From a point which was thirty centimeters from the tip of the gun (where the pistols had their muzzles), a beam of quantized ultrasound stretched toward the patrol ship.

The magic was from the oscillation system, "Phonon Maser." It was this magic that, using a shot of heating ultrasound, led to the ignition and explosion of ammunition.

The just released second Phonon Maser, from the helicopter flying up from the other side, destroyed the second gun.

The patrol ship began to turn around. It refused to inflict the finishing blow on the "Rakuyoumaru" and decided to run away.

Of course, the Yotuba magicians flying up from Miyakijima should not be able to miss them.

A twin-screw transport helicopter approached the Aguni from the west and fighters began landing on it. Stepping on to the Aguni deck, the magicians of the Shibata family, a side branch of the Yotuba family, began the assault on the ship's interior.

However, this didn't stop the flooding of Rakuyoumaru.

Rescue operations around the sinking ship were carried out by the efforts of the approaching ships of the maritime police and boats launched from the destroyer "Matthew C. Perry".

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Tatsuya has recently become widely known as a magic engineer. The news that he was the victim of maritime terrorists was covered by many media outlets.

An investigation by the maritime police, conducted in collaboration with the Miyakijima defense squad, found that the Aguni patrol ship which attacked the Rakuyoumaru was captured by radical anti-magic movement soldiers and officers of the Japanese Navy Self-Defense Forces. The news reported that the anti-magicians from the Aguni patrol

ship confessed to trying to kill Tatsuya along with the entire Rakuyoumaru crew.

Tatsuya was pulled out of the water five minutes after the flooding of the Rakuyoumaru. All his clothes were covered in blood. He was immediately taken to the resuscitation and intensive care unit (ICU) of the Miyakijima hospital.

After learning of Tatsuya's injury, Miyuki arrived at the hospital within an hour of the incident. Tears welled up in people's eyes as they watched the video shot through the ICU window, which showed Miyuki collapsing to her knees in tears after seeing Tatsuya lying in a medical capsule.

It also caused a wave of criticism and outrage aimed at the media for filming such a dramatic moment on a hidden camera and shamelessly showing it on the news.

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July 20, 9 p.m.

There was a secret facility in the ground underneath Miyakijima, which could be called an "underground port", through which you could go to sea, unnoticed by reconnaissance satellites and surveillance systems on a stratospheric platform.

Now at the water's edge of this port stood Tatsuya, dressed in a "Freed Suit", without a single wound.

For those who knew the true abilities of Tatsuya, there was nothing surprising about it. "Restoration," one of two magics he was gifted with at birth, can undo all damage. For both himself and others. Both living beings and inanimate objects. It doesn't heal wounds. It literally rolls back time to the state before being injured and implements a state in which time from that moment passed without being injured.

This magic doesn't just create an "injury free" state. It implements the "current image" of the object with a reference point at any time within the last 24 hours. For example, you can do such a trick as returning to a condition that was in the middle of a long-term serious injury, and thereby get only a small part of the original injury.

Tatsuya was really seriously injured during the collision with the patrol ship. First, he rewrote his injuries to such an extent that they were non-fatal, and went into the water along with the ship. And then he completely rolled back all his injuries after receiving

help at the hospital.

“Onii-sama.”

“Tatsuya.”

Two girls, Miyuki and Lina, approached Tatsuya and simultaneously called out to him. For today, Lina has changed the color of her skin to light brown, and the color of her hair and eyes to black, but now she's already returned to her actual appearance.

“Miyuki, that was a great performance. Thanks to you, all suspicions will become unfounded, and no one will bother me.”

In the hospital lay a doll, which is an exact copy of Tatsuya. If you look at it from the outside of the ICU capsule, it will be impossible to distinguish it from the original. People who know about Tatsuya's “Restoration” will doubt this truth, that he's supposedly still in the hospital, but there are hardly any daredevils who want to invade the ICU ward, where they showed Miyuki sobbing.

“It wasn't a performance.”

In response to Tatsuya's praise, Miyuki pouted and turned away. On the contrary, Lina was surprised at her unusual behavior, not Tatsuya.

“I really was in shock. Although all this was planned, it was a big mistake to think that I could remain calm when I saw your bloody figure.”

By the time Miyuki arrived at the hospital, Tatsuya had already taken off his bloodied clothes, replacing them with a hospital gown and bandages. Miyuki wasn't supposed to see a “bloodied figure.”

However, Tatsuya wasn't so stupid as to point out this inaccuracy now.

“... I'm sorry.”

“I understand that this was an effective way to show injuries. And I realize that lying in a hospital is in many respects a convenient state of affairs for you. But still...”

“I understood. I will never use this method again.”

Seeing the tears appearing in Miyuki's eyes, Tatsuya hastened to make such a promise.

Miyuki clung to Tatsuya, burying her face in his chest. Tatsuya didn't resist, but instead put his arm around Miyuki.

Lina shyly turned away, while after some time, as if she lost her patience and without turning her head, she asked:

“... hey. Are you okay?”

“Do not worry.”

Tatsuya answered, and Miyuki pulled away from his chest at the same time.

Miyuki's face looked refreshing.

While Lina's face, on the other hand, looked as if she couldn't bear to look at them. Lina knew that both Tatsuya and Miyuki were completely honest with each other, but she still felt the falsehood of the planned harmony performance she had seen.

“... So you're going?”

Therefore, her manner of speaking seemed a little unfriendly. However, she came here to see Tatsuya off not just to accompany Miyuki.

“Yes, as planned.”

“I see... I don't think you have to worry, but be careful anyway.”

In contrast to Lina's words, her voice was filled with undisguised uneasiness.

“Onii-sama. I will look forward to your safe return.”

Following her, Miyuki spoke, putting all her feelings into her words.

“I promise that I will be back safe and sound, so that you can meet me with a smile.”

Tatsuya swore an oath in response to Miyuki's plea.

“...What about me?”

Complained Lina who felt like she was ignored.

“But you yourself just said that you don't have to worry about me?”

“But I'm not... worried!”

Lina objected, with her face flushed, as Tatsuya grinned.

Tatsuya and Miyuki giggled at the same time.

Lina hardly had deliberately created this situation, but she managed to get rid of the bitterness of a temporary separation precisely thanks to them.

“Okay, I'm leaving.”

Tatsuya got into a large air-car, the construction of which was completed just the other day. It was a car in the form of an “SUV” (SUV), which differed from the previous version, not only did this one increase to four seats, but also the presence of a large number of military equipment was installed.

Sitting in the driver's seat, Tatsuya took off in this large car that looks like a low SUV. Accompanied by the views of Miyuki and Lina, the air-car sailed about ten meters along the surface of the water, after which it began to slowly dive into the water.

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After passing under water about 50 kilometers to the east, the air-car driven by Tatsuya surfaced. Then Tatsuya switched it to flying at low altitude.

A distinctive feature of this new type of air-car wasn't its increased capacity and load capacity, but improved stealth efficiency. Thanks to the artificial Relic (also used in the Stellar Furnace), and more precisely, its function of storing magic sequences, this low-power but highly effective magic of hiding electromagnetic waves and isolating sound waves can be continuously activated for up to 12 hours in a row, regardless of the abilities of the magicians who are on board.

It has a low output power because the required result was achieved even with a weak interference power in the phenomenon. And it also meant that such magic was harder to detect. The new air-car had characteristics that made it difficult to detect by not only sound, light, heat, radio and magnetic waves, but also psionic sensors.

However, even this air-car wasn't all-powerful. The possibility of space flight and underwater diving were only additional functions, and remained the same as in the first

model. Even with the stealth of the air-car, the risk of being detected under water was lower than when flying through the air. But Tatsuya still switched the mode to flying at low altitude, because it wasn't clearly known what negative consequences a long stay under water would have on the air-car.

After about five minutes of flight, he arrived at the meeting point. There he saw this giant emerge from under the water. The secret pride of the USNA Navy, the nuclear-powered submarine carrier, Virginia. The reason for it being "secret" was because this submarine warship was equipped with a nuclear reactor prohibited by international agreements.

The upper part of the outer shell of the Virginia moved apart, exposing the flight deck. Tatsuya landed the air-car on it.

The destroyer, "Matthew C. Perry" was a distraction.

And Wyatt Curtis's promised means of reaching the Northwest Hawaiian Islands was this nuclear-powered submarine aircraft carrier.

The sliding doors of the outer shell closed. Following the instructions from the deck crew, Tatsuya led the air-car into the hangar. When the crew showed Tatsuya the OK sign, he stepped out of the air-car. Two people approached him.

"Tatsuya-kun, it looks like you managed to slip away without a problem."

The person who spoke to Tatsuya was Shibata Katsushige, and his companion was Tsutsumi Kanata. After catching the terrorists who captured the Aguni patrol ship, they mingled with the crew of the USNA destroyer, which joined the rescue operation, and thus boarded the Matthew C. Perry. From there, they were transported to the Virginia by a destroyer helicopter.

"Katsushige-san. With you here I feel calmer."

"We couldn't let you go alone on a foreign warship. And it is not a matter of whether we trust our allies or not, but that you are a valuable fighting force of the Yotuba family."

"I understand."

The fact that Katsushige together with the combat magicians of the Shibata family will be aboard the USNA warship delivering Tatsuya to the Northwest Hawaiian Islands was

originally planned. As Katsushige said, their presence here was to ensure that, in the worst-case scenario, Tatsuya didn't fall into anyone's hands except the Yotsuba. The list of what should be prevented included even his voluntary escape abroad.

Tatsuya wouldn't flee to another country while Miyuki remained in Japan, but there were still people in the family who didn't understand this. Katsushige was sent not to defend Tatsuya, but simply to silence those who were against this operation.

However, this didn't mean that he could not be "reinforcements". The task of Katsushige and his people was "to prevent Tatsuya from falling into the hands of someone outside the Yotsuba." If it suddenly happens that on the island of Midway or the Pearl & Hermes atoll, Tatsuya falls into the hands of the USNA army, then a detachment of magicians of the Shibata family led by Katsushige will go to his rescue.

Here, the fact that he was "not isolated" was of great importance.

"I will be glad to work with you during this operation."

"Mutually."

In response to Tatsuya's bow, Katsushige also made a slight nod.

◊ ◊ ◊

A little later than 10 pm, Yotsuba's main house.

Throwing a bathrobe over her nightwear, Maya listened to Hayama's report in her private room.

"Tatsuya-sama safely met with Katsushige-sama."

Hayama, even in mid-summer, dressed in an impeccably seated three-piece suit, informed Maya of information obtained through mental telepathic communication.

"I see. I wonder if we managed to fool the self-defense forces with this trick."

"I suppose this should at least prevent open interference."

"If so, then the performance was worth it."

Having taken a sip of black tea with an aroma of brandy, muttered Maya, the organizer of today's incident.

Planting anti-magicians on the Aguni, ramming them into the Rakuyoumaru - all this was ordered by Maya to the Yotuba magicians specializing in manipulating consciousness. Both Tatsuya's hospitalization, and reporters with a hidden camera filming the sobbing Miyuki - the whole "plot" of this farce was written by Maya.

"By the way, what did they do with the anti-magician soldiers from the Aguni?"

"Self-defense forces demanded their extradition. The police are resisting as best they can, but after a few days the transfer will take place."

"And then the soldiers who committed the attack, before they fall into the hands of military investigators, commit suicide in order to show everyone their determination."

"That's exactly what is planned."

"I wonder if Her Excellency Saeki will intervene?"

"This scandal occurred in the Navy. And Her Excellency is in the army. So, even if she tries to get involved in this matter, the necessary bureaucratic procedures should take some time."

"And yet, let's speed up the schedule. So... to begin with, let the criminals quickly "part" with the police."

"As you order. I will organize it."

"Yes, thank you."

Smiling gracefully, Maya nodded to the courteous Hayama who bowed.

Chapter 7

Sunday, July 21st. Starting today, summer holidays begin at First High and the other magic high schools of the National University of Magic.

Usually at this time, the student council president was very busy preparing for the Nine

Schools Competition, but this year the competition was canceled, so a gap appeared in Miyuki's schedule.

However, this wasn't the reason that Miyuki remained on Miyakijima since yesterday on the pretext of caring for Tatsuya.... After all, Miyuki would have done exactly the same, even if the competition had not been canceled.

Including now, when the allegedly hospitalized Tatsuya was actually not in the hospital.

◊ ◊ ◊

8 am. Miyuki who had already finished breakfast and arrived at the hospital where Tatsuya allegedly lies injured, received an incoming call on her mobile terminal.

Miyuki was now in the ICU observation room. It was forbidden to enter the ICU itself by everyone except doctors and nurses. Visitors can either watch what is happening in the ICU through the window leading to the corridor, or observe the patient through the monitor installed in the observation room. Miyuki's mobile terminal was able to receive an incoming call because a wireless repeater was installed in this surveillance room. The walls of the hospital were made of materials blocking electromagnetic waves, so if Miyuki were in the corridor where you can look into the ICU through the window, the call wouldn't have come through. The electromagnetic isolation wouldn't allow incoming and outgoing communication on the terminal to work.

“Yes, this is Shiba.”

“Miyuki...”

A woeful voice was heard from the speaker, which was painful to hear.

“Honoka? Are you calling about Tatsuya-sama?”

Worried about having to deceive Honoka and the rest of her friends, Miyuki consciously answered in a calm voice.

“Actually, I wanted to call yesterday, but... Miyuki, that would be inappropriate, right?”

“Did Shizuku say that?”

“Yeah...”

Miyuki nearly burst into tears, and it wasn't a public game.

“...Thanks. For your concern.”

“Yeah.... So, how is Tatsuya-san...?”

“I don't know if it would be appropriate to say “fortunately”, but nothing threatens his life. He still cannot leave the ICU, but if everything goes smoothly, then he will be discharged in about a week.”

Miyuki answered Honoka's question with a prepared phrase reflecting the “official version”.

“I see. Thank God...”

Contrary to Honoka's words, her voice remained worried.

“If you're worried, then maybe you should come?”

Miyuki's question wasn't the result of deep thought.

“Can I?”

“Sure.”

However, when Miyuki responded with consent to Honoka's question, the thoughts in her head took on a complete form.

In general, even letting someone in to the hospital was undesirable. Tatsuya's hospitalization was fictitious, and he himself was no longer in the country. In the hospital a doll which is an exact copy of Tatsuya, laid in a hospital bed in his place. If you permit "visiting the patient", which only allows visitors to get so close to the bed with the doll. That is why the option with ICU was chosen. However, the more visitors there are, the higher the risk of revealing this secret.

However, if none of his close school friends comes to visit him, it will look unnatural. In addition, Honoka, Shizuku, Erika and the rest are unlikely to do anything that puts Tatsuya in an unfavorable position. In this, Miyuki completely trusted them.

“I'm glad someone is worried about Tatsuya-sama. Honoka, are you coming alone? There is no hotel on this island in the usual sense of the word, so I will prepare you a

place where you can spend the night."

"Um, can I call you back a little later?"

"Sure."

"Then, around noon."

"Okay, I will wait."

Honoka completed the call.

Immediately after this, Miyuki called the Yotsuba main house, not from a mobile terminal, but from a landline equipped with an encryption device.

Fortunately, she was quickly connected to Maya.

Without any thought, Maya immediately allowed Honoka and their other friends to be accepted.

◊ ◊ ◊

The news that Tatsuya was hospitalized after meeting with sea terrorists has become a hot topic of discussion in the Master Clans as well. Not to such an extent, of course, in order to convene an extraordinary emergency Conference of the Master Clans again, but a rather decent number of telephone conversations between the heads of different families took place.

But among them there were also those who had enough of their own affairs.

For example, the Ichijou family.

"Rei-chan*, let's go have breakfast."

[For those of you who didn't know or forgot: the Japanese have no "L" sound, and all these Liu Li Lei and others they pronounce Riu Ri Rei, etc. I used to write Lei-chan, but since the author came up with such a long explanation (here in text), let the "nicknames" be through "R," and the real name through "L."]

"Thanks, Akane. I'm coming."

Liu Li Lei, a Strategic-Class Magician who escaped from the GAA, said after completing her morning routine in the restroom in response to a proposal from Ichijou Akane, the eldest daughter of the Ichijou family. Yesterday, she moved from the Komatsu base to the Ichijou family mansion.

This decision was made at a meeting with the head of the Ichijou family, Ichijou Gouki, with representatives of the army command. This meeting took place the previous Sunday during a memorial dinner held after the funeral of Kudou Retsu. The meeting was also attended by the head of the Futatsugi family, Futatsugi Mai.

This measure was mainly designed to reduce the burden on Ichijou Akane, who was sent together with her older brother to Komatsu base for permanent stay there as Liu Li Lei's guard. The situation at the base wasn't so bad, but in the end it was decided that keeping a high school student literally locked up at a military base wasn't the best solution.

The move took place yesterday afternoon, because Masaki had closing ceremonies in high school yesterday. At the private secondary school Akane attended, summer holidays began 10 days earlier due to the unstable military situation, but in all high schools of magic, including Third High, the holidays began only today. Masaki had been absent from his school for a long time, so nothing had changed for him because of the start of the summer vacation. However, for adults who love formalities, this seemed like a "very convenient moment."

The Ichijou family mansion was divided into two sections: one in the western style for the family, and the other in the Japanese style in the spirit of ancient samurai houses for the reception of guests. The room in which Liu Li Lei was settled in was in the Japanese section. They, along with Akane, walked down the long corridor surrounding the house and came to the family dining room.

"Good morning everyone."

"Good morning, Reira-chan."

Liu Li Lei, who welcomed everyone according to etiquette, was answered by Ichijou Midori, the wife of the head of the family.

"Morning, Reira-san."

Following her, Masaki answered. Gouki wasn't at home this morning.

Incidentally, this nickname "Reira" was an abbreviation from the Japanese reading of the hieroglyphs of the name "Li Lei", which sounded like "Ri Rei." When used in names, such a abbreviation is quite acceptable by generally accepted norms. Akane's "Rei-chan" used was an abbreviation for the real name "Li Lei," but the version of "Reira" was proposed by Liu Li Lei herself, who said: "It's hard to pronounce my real name, right?"

No one laughed at her explanation that "it was one of the pseudonyms for penetration missions," but Masaki and the others were indeed at a loss what to call her. In the end, Midori and Masaki decided to call her "Reira." Gouki, by the way, used the appeal of "Liu-dono", and Ruri, the second daughter of the family, simply reduced "Reira" and used the same nickname as her older sister: "Rei-chan."

So Liu Li Lei safely began to live with the Ichijou family.

However, society wasn't so kind to magicians that this peaceful life could last a long time. This is especially true for those who have the strength of the Strategic-Class.

The brunch at Ichijou's family began at 8:30. While the head of the family, Gouki, was currently summoned to the Kanazawa base of the National Self-Defense Forces.

The base commander, Colonel Asano, personally met Gouki in a grateful manner. For the Kanazawa base, cooperation with the Ichijou family was very important, and the base commander had no desire to do something like challenge this in a strict demanding manner.

"Thank you for arriving so early in the morning."

"No, I arrived earlier than planned. Excuse me."

Gouki answered Asano's words while also bowing. He was a tough man, but not rude. In addition, this cooperation was not only important for Colonel Asano's side.

Asano led Gouki to the reception room, which was decorated quite luxuriously for a military base. As soon as they sat down, the conversation was immediately started with the phrase "let's get down to business."

"Is the General Staff dissatisfied with the move of Liu Li Lei to my house, or what?"

Until yesterday morning, the place where Liu Li Lei was under protection was the Komatsu air base. A week ago, Gouki met with senior officials of the General Staff,

which manages all the individual military departments: land, sea and air. And today he was called here by the General Staff of the ground forces.

Liu Li Lei was a foreign soldier seeking asylum, so the interference of the Ministry of Justice or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could still be understood. The army had no need to touch on this issue. More precisely, the army wasn't in a position to have the right to intervene in this matter.

"I sincerely apologize. They didn't tell us anything either, except that the topic would be to resolve the issues concerning Strategic-Class Magicians."

"Will the self-defense forces command me to give them my son?"

"They didn't say anything to me. But to be honest, I would like your son to become an officer in the self-defense forces. And this is not only my opinion. However, this should never be forced. I think, besides me, many understand this."

"Okay..."

Gouki, although he could not hide his gloom, but it was clearly not very serious. He arrived at Kanazawa's base an hour earlier than scheduled to find out in advance why he had been called today. But now, at best, he will know everything only at the last moment and won't be able figure out the desired topic in advance. However, he didn't expect that he could prepare sufficiently effective answers, so his disappointment wasn't so strong.

The topic of conversation between Gouki and the commander of the base Asano changed to Asano's hobby - fishing.

9:35 a.m. Arriving at the Kanazawa base wasn't an officer from the General Staff, but the commander of the 1-0-1 brigade, Lieutenant General Saeki.

Not only Gouki seemed suspicious. The Kanazawa base belonged to the 10th division. Many of the base soldiers, including Commander Asano, bowed their heads inquisitively, wondering "why the 1-0-1 brigade commander?" But the base commander was a Colonel by rank, and Saeki was a Lieutenant General. No one would say a word if Saeki would say that she came as a representative of headquarters. Colonel Asano returned to his office, and opposite Gouki, Saeki sat instead.

Behind Saeki stood a female officer of about 30 years old. It was the escort of Saeki from Kasumigaura base, Captain Kido Otoha. Saeki didn't bring Kazama with her today.

“Thank you very much for making this journey for the sake of our meeting.”

Saeki bowed. Gouki didn't even nod in response.

“Because it's better than if you suddenly broke into my house. So, in what case did you call me so urgently?”

“Such circumstances arose that I needed to personally meet with you.”

As they both said, Saeki first asked permission to visit the Ichijou family mansion. To which Gouki replied with a categorical refusal, and as a result, the meeting was scheduled at Kanazawa base.

Saeki wasn't offended that Gouki didn't even try to hide his bad mood. In fact, this wasn't a serious manifestation of emotions, but an attempt to impose a sense of duty through complaints of coercion to something excessive. But Saeki understood this and knew how to use it.

“So, what is your business?”

But Gouki was only thinking about it, if only everything went fine. He no longer complained, and instead asked Saeki his last question again.

“I was told that the topic of discussion will be about a solution to the question regarding the issues concerning Strategic-Class Magicians.”

“Yes. To get started, take a look at this.”

Saeki said, and at the same time, Captain Kido handed Gouki a paper folder with documents.

“... The Strategic-Class Magicians Control Agreement? Could you explain?”

“Sure.”

Saeki immediately answered Gouki's question, asked with doubt in her eyes.

“Since the beginning of this year, Strategic-Class and other large-scale magic has been used everywhere, as if breaking through some kind of dam.”

Saeki listed the names of the magic and the places where they were used:
Synchronized-Linear Fusion, Thunderclap Tower, Active Air Mine, Tuman Bomba.

“The concern of people over large-scale magic is growing all over the world. This can turn into mass hysteria and unrest.”

“And to stop this concern, you want to place Strategic-Class Magicians under the control of the International Magic Association?”

“No, each country will be controlled exclusively. And the Magic Association will be given the right to conduct inspections over the control of Strategic-Class Magicians.”

“... But isn't this actually the same as it has been so far?”

“If you now ask a state to part with its Strategic-Class Magician , then you won't receive consent. Therefore, you can't leave everything as it is now. I believe that the anxiety of the masses will be significantly reduced if, instead of the current conditions, when only the state has control, a system will be introduced that gives international guarantees for state control.”

“I see... But why should Japan take the lead by proposing all this?”

Gouki asked Saeki this question, clearly pronouncing every word with a serious face and gaze.

“To avoid suspicion of Japan.”

“What other suspicions?”

“Suspicious of territorial ambitions.”

Saeki's answer was unclear. Gouki's face showed that he didn't understand the point.

“In our country at the moment there are two foreign Strategic-Class Magicians : Angie Sirius and Liu Li Lei.”

“Angie Sirius?”

From the behavior of the surprised Gouki, Saeki realized that he wasn't pretending. She came to the conclusion that the Master Clans didn't share with each other information about the escape of Angie Sirius.

“Angie Sirius is being harbored by the Yotsuba family.”

“Hmm...”

Gouki showed deep wrinkles on his forehead. It seems that this willful behavior of the Yotsuba family caused Gouki at the same time feelings of discontent and danger. That was exactly the reaction Saeki needed.

“In addition to these two, the other day your son was approved as a official Strategic-Class Magician. In addition, in October the year before last, it was our country for the first time in the world used Strategic-Class magic in war.”

“... “Scorched Halloween”?”

“Although, at the time, it was a necessary measure for the sake of national defense, it is also impossible to deny that as a result, it was we who were the first to remove the seal from using Strategic-Class magic. That is why our country should take the initiative in resolving the issue of control over Strategic-Class magic.”

“Okay.”

Gouki nodded exaggeratedly.

“So, then what do you want from my family?”

He asked this, looking directly into Saeki's eyes.

“I would like your son, Ichijou Masaki-dono, as well as Liu Li Lei, who is under the protection of the Ichijou family, to agree to obey the government’s decisions to use Strategic-Class magic.”

“The question is only in the use of Strategic-Class magic? Without joining the ranks of self-defense forces?”

“To enter the service or not, they must decide for themselves.”

“And that is true.”

Gouki nodded again.

“So all that we have just discussed will depend on the personal opinions of Masaki and Lui-dono.”

“Ah... no... but after all...”

Saeki thought that Gouki thus wanted to abruptly end their conversation.

But she was mistaken.

“Let's call them here, and let them decide.”

“Right now?”

“Yes. You don't mind waiting a bit?

“...Good. I agree.”

Saeki had no choice but to agree to this proposal imposed by Gouki.

The conversation continued after about 30 minutes.

Now, in front of Saeki, Masaki sat in his school uniform and Liu Li Lei in a summer dress. Liu Li Lei wasn't in the form of the army of the Great Asian Alliance at her own request. And she borrowed the summer dress, of course, from Akane.

Akane wasn't with them. If there was even a tiny chance that Liu Li Lei would commit sabotage based on Kanazawa, then Akane, as a user of Nervous Disorder, would still be sent as an escort. But at least in the Ichijou family everyone (including Gouki, Masaki, and Midori) thought there was nothing to worry about.

In addition, if Liu Li Lei acts at least a little suspiciously, then Saeki's bodyguard Captain Kido will without hesitation get and use a gun.

Saeki had to try and tell the same thing she had recently told Gouki, a second time for Masaki and Liu Li Lei.

“... I understand what you are trying to say, Your Excellency.”

After hearing Saeki's story, Masaki responded to her silent appeal to express their views.

“I agree with your opinion that we should take some measures to reduce people's anxiety about magicians. In addition, I didn't intend to use Ocean Blast on my own, so I do not think that my freedom will be somehow limited if the permission of the government is required to use this magic.”

“So Masaki-san, do you agree with the control of Strategic-Class Magicians?”

“Yes. However, as far as my career is concerned, at the moment I am going to enter the

University of Magic, so I would like to ask you to postpone the question whether I should enter the military service or not."

"That is enough for me."

Saeki nodded in satisfaction when she heard Masaki answer.

"What about you, Lieutenant Liu?"

With Masaki's consent, Saeki's current goal has been achieved. Saeki believed that Liu Li Lei would eventually return to the GAA, so there was no point in asking her opinion right now. Saeki asked Liu Li Lei this question "casually."

"I agree with what Masaki-san said."

"... Do you mean in response to maintaining control of Strategic-Class Magicians?"

Saeki asked again, because Liu Li Lei's answer was rather unexpected.

"If Masaki-san says it's necessary, then I'm also okay with it."

Liu Li Lei's response was again a complete surprise for Saeki.

Saeki involuntarily looked away from her companion and stared at Masaki.

Masaki was at a loss for words. His cheeks twitched, and his eyes darted from side to side.

"... Just for reference, Lieutenant Liu, what will you do if Masaki-san advises you to obtain Japanese citizenship and enlist in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces?"

"I will do as Masaki-san says."

There was a sudden loud laugh.

Having patiently endured before this with a forced smile, Gouki finally, could no longer restrain himself.

"Gee, I didn't expect that my stupid son is capable of this."

"Father!"

Masaki, in a panic, tried to rein in Gouki with a stare.

Perhaps this helped, since the next words of Gouki were already said in a serious tone.

“As they themselves said, let's wait with the issue of cooperation with the self-defense forces before graduating from the University of Magic. The right to inherit family leadership, if necessary, I will transfer to one of my daughters.”

Gouki got up.

“So, I think we answered all the questions that need to be answered.”

“Yes. Thank you for your positive answers.”

Said Saeki and also rose from her seat.

Masaki and Liu Li Lei also hastily stood up to keep up with the situation.

◊ ◊ ◊

... This conversation took place on the evening of July 19, the day before Liu Li Lei moved to the Ichijou family home.

Venue: Liu Li Lei's room at Komatsu base.

In fact, it all started as common girl talk between Liu Li Lei and Ichijou Akane. But then...

“Rei-chan, are you in love with Nii-san?”

“... This is a rather sudden question. Why are you even asking about something like that?”

“Well, probably because it bothers me as a little sister.”

“Akane, do you have a brother complex?”

“Nah, nothing like that. After all, I have plans for Shinkuro-kun.”

“Is Shinkuro-kun the same Kichijouji Shinkuro-kun known as Cardinal George? I thought

that he would be a colder person, like all these scientists, but it turned out that he was pretty kind."

"Yes!... No, no, stop, this isn't about me. Rei-chan, so you fell in love with Nii-san?"

"... Do I have to answer?"

"I want to know!"

"... I think I like him. Masaki-san is a kind person."

"Kind? Rei-chan, you have a different view of things. Most of the women who fell in love with Nii-san explain it by saying that "he is handsome" or "he is strong.""

"I saw a lot of strong people. But Masaki-san is the first man who really was kind to me. Other men had only feigned smiles, behind which they hid the desire to use me for their own purposes."

"Oh... Well, good or bad, Nii-san is not a liar."

"On the day when my country sent a sweeping squad, I was very glad about the sensitivity of Masaki-san, who said kind words about Lin-tze... that is, about Lieutenant Lin."

"I see, that's where it started. But you know, Rei-chan. Nii-san is rather stupid in such matters, so if you seriously intend to get him, then nothing will come of it if you do not go on the offensive yourself."

"Get him... Do you mean to become lovers? But isn't that too... vulgar for a girl?"

"No! I'm completely different, Rei-chan! Your explanation would be suitable for the 20th century! But now it's the end of the 21st!"

"Okay..."

"To crave something too much is also not good. Because men like "shyness" and "femininity." They are dreamers."

"Um... Do you mean dreamers*?"

[The author constantly inserts English words into the speech of the characters. In this case, Akane said "dreamers" in English, and Liu Li Lei asked again in Japanese for clarification.]

"Yes, they mostly are. In particular, Nii-san seems to prefer the obedient and fragile women of the typical Japanese type, "Yamato-Nadeshiko." "I will follow you in everything" - approximately this approach should give you results."

"... I get it. I'll try. But Akane, does that really suit you?"

"What suits you?"

"I heard that Japanese girls do not like when someone falls in love with their older brothers, and that they try in every possible way to interfere with this."

"Where did you get such information from!? Yes, and I already said! I have no brother complex!"

"Sorry."

"Well, there are girls like that too. But personally, I will support you, Rei-chan. I don't want to see Nii-san kicking a horse*.

[Some old Japanese phraseological phrase. I didn't find the exact meaning, but it roughly means an unlucky person (it all started with some kind of samurai who died from the fact that he was kicked by a horse).]

"A horse? Kicking?"

"But it's an impregnable height. An almost impossible effort will be required."

"??"

"Therefore, Rei-chan, try your best!"

"Yes... No, that is, thank you, Akane. I will try to."

Thus, behind this sudden "attack", which took Masaki by surprise today, lurked this conversation between the two girls, which took place two days before...

◊ ◊ ◊

Saying goodbye to Ichijou Gouki, Masaki, and Liu Li Lei, Lieutenant General Saeki, accompanied by Captain Kido, left Kanazawa base. They boarded a helicopter, waiting for them at the helipad, and flew to Kasumigaura base.

When the base from which they flew out of disappeared over the horizon, Saeki leaned back in her seat and took a deep breath.

“... Your Excellency, are you unhappy with something about the answers of the Ichijou family?”

Captain Kido spoke with an indecisive tone to Saeki.

“No, I got even more than I expected.”

In contrast to this answer, Saeki's face didn't look pleased.

Seeing Captain Kido's face filled with doubt, Saeki sighed again.

“... Both from the Ten Master Clans, the same age... I thought they wouldn't be much different.”

“Are you talking about the differences between Ichijou Masaki-kun and Shiba Tatsuya-kun? Indeed, compared to Shiba-kun, Ichijou-kun is more like a typical teenager and seems more immature.”

“Captain, you're a little wrong.”

Saeki, in a strict tone, rejected the impressions expressed by Kido.

“... No, at first glance, it looks like that, but...”

It seemed to Saeki that her tone was stricter than she wanted, so she lowered her voice to soften it.

“Ichijou-kun is much more aware of what should be a priority for the country. Ichijou-kun is more mature in that he understands his responsibilities.”

“This is also reflected in the differences between the positions of the Ichijou and Yotsuba families, right?”

“I agree. Instead of looking at the Ten Master Clans as one group, we should evaluate them separately... No, maybe it would be better to say that we must crush each of them

separately?"

"These are the basics of tactics."

Seeing Kido's serious face giving her joke, Saeki smiled slightly.

But there was absolutely no smile in her eyes.

◊ ◊ ◊

Fujibayashi Nagamasa, defeated by Tatsuya and captured by Kuroba Mitsugu's subordinates, was admitted to a hospital in Kofu. This hospital was under the control of the Yotsuba family. Although his injuries were treated here, it could be said that he was actually imprisoned here.

His daughter Fujibayashi Kyouko visited his ward on July 21 at 11 a.m.

"Welcome, Lieutenant Fujibayashi."

"... Tsukuba Yuuka-san, as far as I remember?"

Nagamasa had a separate personal room, but it turned out that at the moment he wasn't alone there. Yuuka knew that Kyouko would be arriving today, so she came to meet her in the room.

"I am honored that you know me. I would like to discuss something with you and your father... Do you mind?"

It was the usual polite request for permission, but the situation didn't allow the option to refuse.

"Yeah, I don't mind."

Feeling forced, Kyouko announced that she agreed.

This room was quite spacious, and on both sides of the bed were simple chairs for visitors, so two people could easily sit opposite each other for a conversation. Kyouko sat in the chair farthest from the entrance, and Yuuka sat in the chair closest to the entrance.

"So. It would be rude of me, as an outsider, to disturb the conversation between father and daughter for a long time, so I will immediately inform you of the Yotsuba family's demand."

Kyouko tightened her whole body. In contrast to her, Nagamasa lay relaxed in a semi-sitting position in his raised-back bed.

"The Yotsuba family decided not to disclose the crimes of Kudou Makoto and his accomplices."

Kyouko, stiff with tension, flinched sharply. It was obvious that one of Yuuka's mentioned "accomplices" was Fujibayashi Nagamasa.

"But in return..."

Ignoring Kyouko's reaction, Yuuka continued to voice the demand.

"... we would like Lieutenant Fujibayashi to testify as a witness to the activities of Lieutenant General Saeki to help enemies."

"Helping enemies... what are you talking about?"

Kyouko with a pale face asked Yuuka.

The look on her face was tantamount to admitting that she "knew something."

"Well. For example, the case when, knowing about the penetration of Lu Ganghu into the country, Saeki ignored it."

Kyouko caught her breath.

"You know about other cases, right?"

Perhaps Yuuka was bluffing. The Yotsuba family might not have been aware of the "other cases," and in the Lu Ganghu case, they probably didn't have evidence.

But Yuuka was so agile from the very beginning seized the initiative in the conversation that Kyouko couldn't say it with confidence.

"... I would like to discuss this with my family."

Kyouko planned to buy some time to gather her thoughts.

"We have already received consent from the head of the family, Nagamasa-sama, and the eldest son Choutaro-sama."

But Yuuka anticipated even that.

"... Please allow me to speak with my father for a moment."

"Understood. I'll be waiting in the hallway. Call me when you are done."

Yuuka left the room, but her last words exerted such pressure, as if she said "don't take too long."

Exactly the same moment the door closed, Kyouko exhaled deeply.

"Otoou-sama."

Kyouko stood up and turned to Nagamasa.

"Is it true that you agreed to a deal with the Yotsuba family?"

She stood and waited for the answer from her father.

"...It's true."

Nagamasa answered only after three seconds. There was no hesitation or guilt in his voice.

"..."

Kyouko didn't know what to say for a while, choosing between complaints and reproaches.

"I understand that in a situation like this where you are a prisoner, you simply had no choice. However..."

The Yotsuba family demanded that Kyouko become a traitor. In a sense, disclosing the dishonesty of a superior officer may not be considered a betrayal of the state. But justice can be applied not only in the right way. Kyouko didn't think that the Yotsuba family would use her "testimony" to achieve righteous goals.

"I would have agreed to the demands of the Yotsuba family, even if I weren't a prisoner. The loser obeys the winner. That is our rule."

"But then I will become a traitor!"

Kyouko's words seemed pretty insensitive. She took it as if he didn't care what position she was in.

"You are not only a soldier, but also a person from the Fujibayashi family."

"You want to say that I have to leave the army!?"

"I will ask in response. Is Lieutenant General Saeki worthy of such complete fidelity that you are ready to become an accomplice to her fraud?"

"That..."

At this moment, it wasn't the faces of her superiors or colleagues that arose in Kyouko's head. But the words of Yotuba Maya, about the fact that she "wastes herself and is worthy of a better cause."

She first felt (more precisely, realized) doubts about the fact that she should be a soldier at the moment when, in February this year, she heard a message about the death of Chiba Toshikazu, with whom she had a friendly relationship with after a couple of conversations. Like a chain reaction, this led her to a memory of how death parted her from her fiancé, and how she could not understand the reason why she entered military service.

However, at the same time, she had a feeling that she had doubts about her work much earlier.

"It all started to seem strange... last August."

It all started with the fact that the plans to conduct an experiment with Parasite Dolls at the Nine Schools Tournament were revealed, which forced Kudou Retsu to truly resign this time.

Her grandfather, Kudou Retsu, and Saeki were longtime rivals.

"After Oji-sama's plans were revealed, Her Excellency Saeki seemed to have broken the chain..."

Was her self-control weakened by a victory over a long-standing rival? Kyouko knew from personal experience that since then there have been many more orders for her,

clearly beyond the responsibilities of the commander of one brigade. Many of Kyouko's assignments were clearly illegal in the past, but over the past year she has experienced many times the feeling that now these assignments have begun to go beyond the bounds of illegality.

"Kyouko. Does Lieutenant General Saeki deserve your loyalty as boss? Is the 1-0-1 brigade a higher priority organization than the Fujibayashi family?"

"... Everything wrong should be corrected."

Kyouko made such a compromise with her feelings.

"There are only two cases that I can testify to. But one of them is not helping enemies."

This was the answer given by Kyouko to Yuuka.

Yuuka, seated in the same chair as before, nodded in satisfaction.

"The first case is Saeki's silence about the penetration of Lu Ganghu."

"Yes. Kyouko nodded in response to Yuuka's reminder."

"And what is the second?"

Kyouko no longer wondered if Yuuka knew of other cases, or not.

"The materials and funds for the development of parasite dolls were provided to the Kudou family... Uncle Makoto... Her Excellency Saeki."

"Are you talking about some other parasite dolls besides those stored frozen in the former Ninth Laboratory?"

Yuuka didn't show a single bit of surprise at hearing Kyouko's confession.

Kyouko was never able to determine if Yuuka knew about this beforehand or not.... But she already didn't care.

"I'm talking about blank bodies for the parasite dolls, released since September last year. Her Excellency was considering replacing infantry units with units of parasite dolls."

“But the Ministry of Defense didn't approve the development cost?”

“The army command also didn't approve.”

“In other words, bribery is obvious.”

“Right. I didn't think about finding out the money trails, but if you study them in more detail, the names of military-related enterprises with which Her Excellency has close ties will come up.”

“Thank you for such details. We will study the sources of the bribes.”

Kyouko nodded silently and expressionlessly at Yuuka's words.

◊ ◊ ◊

“... So Shizuku, Erika, and Saijou-kun will come too?”

“Yeah.... or not?”

“No problem. Total of four people from tomorrow morning for a day, right?”

“Yes, please.”

“Alright. I will prepare everything.”

“Thanks. Well, see you tomorrow then.”

“Yes, I'll be waiting.”

It was now past one o'clock in the afternoon. Immediately after completing her conversation with Honoka, Miyuki opened her address book and reached out to press the button on the administration office communication device to ask them to prepare sleeping accommodations for four people.

However, a moment before she touched the touch panel, the melody of an incoming voice call began to play.

The message “incoming call from Saegusa Mayumi-sama” appeared on the screen .

“Yes, this is Shiba.”

“Miyuki-san? This is Saegusa Mayumi.”

“We haven’t talked for a long time, senpai.”

“Yeah, a long time.... This time something absolutely terrible happened. Miyuki-san, are you okay?”

“Thank you very much for your concern. But, as they say, there is a silver lining. Tatsuya-sama’s life is not in danger, and after his recovery there should be no complications or side effects.”

Mayumi was very careful choosing her words. While Miyuki’s answer seemed very strong-willed to her. Their dialogue up to this point was a normal conversation between a kohai, whose fiancé had an accident, and a senpai, who was worried about the two.

“What about Tatsuya-kun’s Restoration...? Did it not work this time?”

“The power of Tatsuya-sama is also magic, so he cannot use it without being conscious... I don’t think Tatsuya-sama could have imagined that he was being attacked by a self-defense patrol ship.”

“That’s it. Unlike “superpowers,” “magic” can’t be used unconsciously. You can’t build magic unless you make your subconscious mind work with your consciousness...”

“Yeah.”

“And one more thing... Umm... Miyuki-san, if you will allow me, can I visit Tatsuya-kun?”

“But Tatsuya-sama is still not able to receive visitors...”

“Well, if you can’t, then so be it.”

“No... well, I get it. Do you mind if I consult with the family and call you back?”

Mayumi, without further explanation, understood that when Miyuki mentioned “family” she meant the Yotsuba.

A girl from the Saegusa family requested a visit to the groom of the next head of the Yotsuba family. Mayumi considered it natural that they should be asked for permission

from the head of the family.

“Yes of course. I will wait.”

“I’ll try to call back as soon as possible.”

They both ended the conversation in a completely natural manner, without showing any awkwardness to each other's words and tone.

Miyuki headed to the hospital telephone room, leaving Lina in the ICU observation room. The telephone room was divided into six separate sub-rooms - “telephone booths.” Using her ID card, she entered one of these booths, equipped with a direct video link to Yotuba's main house.

This completely soundproofed little cubicle didn't have chairs. There was a console near the entrance, and a 40-inch panel was hung on the opposite wall.

Miyuki entered three different ten-digit numbers on the console.

Maya herself appeared on the wall monitor immediately.

“Oba-sama, I apologize for the frequent calls.”

“Don't worry about it. Is someone asking for a visit again?”

“Yes, I just got a call from Saegusa Mayumi-san.”

Miyuki wasn't at all surprised at such an accurate guess. At present, the “visiting Tatsuya” was the first thing that came to mind when Miyuki called the main house, and even if the phone was tapped, there was nothing wrong with that.

“The Saegusa family, then?”

But Maya, on the contrary, showed signs of surprise.

“This is hardly a personal visit... I wonder what their purpose is?”

Miyuki agreed with Maya that Mayumi's request was most likely the intention of the head of the Saegusa family. But it was clear that Maya didn't require Miyuki to answer this question.

“... Okay, fine.”

As usual, Maya herself came to some sort of decision.

“Miyuki-san, you can agree to her request.”

“Are you sure you should invite Saegusa-senpai?”

“Yes. Miyuki-san, I'm giving you the job of dealing with Mayumi-san.”

Maya didn't set any conditions for the eldest daughter of the Saegusa family to enter the stage of this performance.

“I understand.”

For some reason, Miyuki wasn't surprised.

“How did everything go?”

Lina asked Miyuki, who returned to the observation room.

“I got consent. And without any special conditions.”

Lina was very surprised at Miyuki's answer.

“Uh? But Mayumi, the Saegusa family are Yotuba's rivals?”

“We are not hostile to each other, but neither are we friendly.”

It seems that Lina's concern only grew when she saw Miyuki's unbiased attitude towards this matter.

“Is that okay? After all, it would be bad if, due to this leak, everyone finds out that Tatsuya's hospitalization is a fake.”

“Everything will be OK.”

Miyuki said and smiled at Lina.

“Miyuki... You have some kind of creepy, evil smile.”

“How rude.”

Lina's face froze, but the voice of Miyuki's reply wasn't particularly angry.

"Leaking information about fictitious hospitalization would really be a problem... But if it is senpai, then everything will be okay. If you politely ask, she will be silent."

"... Yeah, right. I'm sure it will be."

Lina muttered in a unconvincing tone, seeing that Miyuki's smile had become even more piercing. Lina was clearly afraid to continue discussing this topic any further.

Ignoring Lina's unnatural behavior, Miyuki called the administration office to ask for guest rooms for five people.

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After stopping by the General Staff Headquarters, Saeki eventually returned to Kasumigaura base at the beginning of the fifth hour of the day.

Entering the commander's office, Saeki immediately summoned Kazama. Despite the fact that today was Sunday, Kazama appeared quite quickly.

"Lieutenant Colonel, do you know about the news of Shiba Tatsuya 's hospitalization?"

Saeki asked Kazama, who stood in front of the table.

"Of course, I know of it."

"And what do you think?"

Although the question was quite abstract, Kazama knew exactly what Saeki was asking.

"It is hard to believe that he is really seriously injured. Tatsuya has that self-healing ability."

Saeki made a stern face and asked Kazama the following question.

"If the hospitalization is false, then for what purpose was this done?"

"Perhaps the most likely cover is for an attack on Midway Prison. And perhaps he has already left the country."

“The Intelligence Department also has doubts about this incident.”

“Did you go to the Intelligence Department?”

The buildings of the General Staff Headquarters and the army Intelligence Department were within walking distance of each other. Kazama decided that Saeki didn't get this information by telephone, but by going straight there.

And at that moment, Kazama felt a certain uneasiness.

“Your Excellency. Of course, I doubt it, but have you really told the Intelligence Department about Tatsuya's “Restoration”?”

Tatsuya's “Restoration” is a far greater secret than his “Decomposition”. This was agreed upon in a contract with Yotsuba.

This agreement was terminated at the very moment when Tatsuya relinquished his special officer status. However, the obligation to maintain confidentiality remained even after the termination of the contract. Although these were not legal obligations, and there were no documents left, but precisely because it was the wrong side of the world living outside the law, trust was of great importance.

“... The Intelligence Department launched an investigation yesterday.”

Saeki didn't answer Kazama's question.

Kazama realized that it was useless to ask again, so he didn't bother with further questions on this subject.

“Was it successfully infiltrated?”

Kazama asked instead.

“I heard that they sent a scout disguised as a reporter... But to be honest, the security there seems completely impregnable.”

“It is shameful, of course, that the army Intelligence Department can not surpass the civilian. But such is their opponent. Nothing to do about.”

Kazama criticized his colleagues as if it was none of his business.

Saeki's face showed irritation.

"Lieutenant Colonel, we must not 'do nothing.'"

"But the real problem is that a forced investigation is impossible. If you look at the situation with an open mind, Tatsuya is a victim."

"Does this incident itself seem to you unnatural? How could it be so coincidental that the entire crew of the patrol ship would turn out to be anti-magicians?"

"And what if it wasn't an accident, but a planned attack by a faction of the fleet that supports the anti-magic movement? Or, for example, some kind of "faction against the Ten Master Clans"?"

Saeki fell silent.

Not only Kazama, but anyone would know, this didn't convince her.

"Your Excellency... Sorry for being rude, but are you not being too hostile against Tatsuya?"

"I'm not being hostile against him."

Saeki's denial was so harsh that it seemed like one of those natural, reflex reactions.

Kazama decided not to argue any further.

"...I apologize."

"... If you find out anything about Shiba Tatsuya's activity, then report it immediately."

Saeki didn't say "forgive" in response to Kazama's apology. And there was no reaction to that statement by Kazama, other than denial. It was clear that her last sentence was said solely in order to get rid of an uncomfortable topic.

"I understand you."

"That's all I wanted to talk about. You are free to go, Lieutenant Colonel."

Hearing Kazama's response, Saeki ordered him to leave as permitted.

Chapter 8

July 22, 10:00.

One after another, at Miyakijima Airport landed two VTOL's rotors with thrust.

Their simultaneous arrival was only an accident, and wasn't planned in advance.

The first plane was the property of the Kitayama family, and it included Shizuku, Honoka, Erika, and Leo aboard.

The second belonged to the Saegusa family, and delivered Mayumi.

All five got into a nine-seater van, and were taken to a hospital located in the eastern part of the island. To the hospital where Tatsuya was supposed to be.

By the way, when the four from the first plane met Mayumi in the airport terminal building, not only Honoka, Shizuku and Leo, but even Erika greeted her. When Mayumi was still in First High School, Erika didn't even try to hide her estrangement from her, but it seems that something has changed in her head over the past two years.... Perhaps this was due to the misfortune that overtook her older brother Toshikazu.

However, there was no denying that between these five... there was an awkward atmosphere between the four kohai and one senpai. But it was only an age wall between people from one year of study and an older person. Among these four kohai's, Honoka had the most contact with Mayumi. However, even she became a member of the school Student Council only after Mayumi resigned as president. Although, Erika and Leo, fought with Mayumi during the Yokohama incident, but they didn't contact her as much as their other classmates.

However, all their awkwardness disappeared without a trace as soon as they arrived at the hospital.

Miyuki and Lina met their five guests in the ICU observation room. Making sure the door was locked, Miyuki suddenly "dropped the bomb."

"Thank you very much for coming to visit Tatsuya-sama. However, Tatsuya-sama is not at this hospital."

"Uhh!?"

Honoka had the most over-emotional reaction. The others also showed surprise by issuing various variations of "Eh?", "What?" etc.

“... Miyuki-san, what do you mean?”

Leo asked in a low voice, one of the first to recover from the shock.

“Tatsuya-sama was indeed involved in this incident, and was seriously injured. However, he fully recovered when he was brought to the hospital.”

“...That's it!”

Erika shouted in a whisper, hitting her hand in hand.

“It's that healing magic, Restoration, huh? Which Tatsuya-kun possesses.”

On the day of the Yokohama incident, Miyuki revealed to Mayumi, Honoka, Erika, and Leo the secret of “Restoration.” Shizuku wasn't with them then, but later, with the permission of Tatsuya himself, Honoka told her about everything.

It seems that initially none of them, except Mayumi, even thought about the possibility that “Tatsuya healed his wounds,” but now everyone seemed convinced.

“... Miyuki fooled us all with her crying display.”

Erika's tease was most likely intended to hide her own embarrassment. But her words definitely reflected the emotions of everyone present. The appearance on the TV of Miyuki, sobbing, leaning against the window and wall separating the corridor and the ICU, had an effect on everyone, forcing them to abandon any doubt.

“Please don't say such shameful things as if I were a liar.”

Miyuki protested by looking rather embarrassed rather than gloomy.

“Ah, yes, exactly.”

At this moment, Lina, who was also present, spoke with her changed appearance. Her voice sounded like she was remembering something.

“There were no fake tears. It was very difficult to calm Miyuki down, even though she knew that the wounds would be healed.”

Miyuki confusedly averted her eyes from the five staring at her.

“... Tatsuya-sama was lying on the ICU bed, completely bandaged. How can you keep

calm by looking at this?"

"...I understand."

Unexpectedly, the first to accept Miyuki's excuse was Leo.

"Sometimes it happens that the head knows that everything is alright, but the heart is still restless. This alone shows how deep Miyuki-san's feelings are for Tatsuya."

"... Wow, even Leo could see all that."

"Even me" is already too much!"

Erika inserted her tease as usual, and Leo snapped as usual.

Thus, the tense atmosphere disappeared.

"... So then where is Tatsuya-san now?"

"He left to do some secret work."

Miyuki didn't give a specific answer to Honoka's question.

But Honoka didn't elaborate. She didn't lose interest, but simply restrained herself from poking her nose into his secret business.

Mayumi turned out to be the one who "stuck her nose" in this place the deepest of all.

"So, such a large-scale performance was needed to cover up the absence of Tatsuya-kun? But are you sure you should have told me this? The eldest daughter of the Saegusa family?"

The families of Saegusa and Yotuba are disputing clans. This is no longer a secret not only for the Ten Master Clans, but also for anybody who is at least a little familiar with the circumstances. Of course, Miyuki knew that too. She was chosen as the next head of the Yotuba family.

"I don't want to continue the conflict with the Saegusa family."

Miyuki's response was based on her position as the next head of the family.

"Besides, I'm not going to be hostile towards you just because you are from the

Saegusa family. But in response I ask: Senpai, will you tell about the absence of Tatsuya-sama to someone from your family or even to someone outside the family?"

"I'm not going to do something like that."

Mayumi answered with a tone as if she was coaxing herself.

She lowered her eyes and paused.

"...Yes. I have no intention or motive to do anything unfavorable to Tatsuya-kun or Miyuki-san."

After these words, Mayumi very quietly whispered:

"I didn't know that my cunning father had planned something like that."

"Okay, Miyuki-san. Tatsuya-kun is now being treated inside the ICU. He is not yet able to talk, but nothing threatens his life. He just sleeps, and there is no fear that he won't wake up. It'll do?"

"Thank you for understanding."

Miyuki bowed to Mayumi.

Looking up, Miyuki turned to Erika, standing next to Mayumi.

"... We will do exactly the same."

Answering Miyuki, Erika turned around and looked at the others, "won't we?"

Under her gaze, the other three — Honoka, Shizuku, and Leo — nodded at the same time.

"But why?"

"Do you mean why I revealed the truth to you?"

Miyuki asked Shizuku about the missing part of the question.

"The less people that know the secret, the more secure it is."

Shizuku expressed the meaning of her question with such a phrase.

“It is not always so.”

“In what sense?”

Miyuki shook her head in the negative, which Shizuku bowed her head inquiringly.

“When people are only refused, it strengthens their doubts and fuels the desire to get to the bottom of the truth. If it were possible to completely isolate the secret from the public, then no one would even know about it. I'm not saying that it is impossible to keep secrets for a long time, but I think that it is rather difficult.”

“So you think a little leak is normal?”

“By no means. I won't allow Tatsuya-sama to interfere with either the government, the army, or the media.”

Miyuki didn't raise her voice, but from her strong-willed tone, Shizuku blinked her eyes.

“It's easier to make people believe a lie than keep secrets. That is my opinion.”

“Why do you think so?”

Not only Shizuku wanted to hear Miyuki's explanation.

Mayumi, Honoka, Erika, Leo, and even Lina all looked at Miyuki with interest in their eyes.

“With Lina, I kind of discussed it yesterday,” Miyuki thought, but didn't laugh at that.

“Well, in order to continue to keep a secret, you need to make all people believe that “something like that doesn't exist.” And if you get several people, or even several tens of people, to believe in a lie, then it will begin to spread further on its own.”

“Miyuki... I thought so yesterday ... but you are an evil women.”

“Really? I don't think that anywhere in the world there are people who do not resort to lies.”

Miyuki with a calm face protested to the surprised Lina.

Six people, including Lina, muttered in their minds: “That is not the point!”

“... In other words, Miyuki-san, do you want us to become these very “people who believe in the lie?””

With an understanding face, Leo voiced the "right answer."

“I'm not going to ask you to actively spread the "lie." But if they ask you, I would like you to answer that Tatsuya-sama is in the hospital.”

Miyuki's answer was intended not only for Leo, but for everyone else.

“Of course, I agree.”

Honoka was the first to respond. The others following one after another, consenting responses from Erika, Leo, Shizuku and Mayumi followed.

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Due to the hype caused by yesterday's reporting with a hidden camera, the entrance to the hospital where Tatsuya allegedly lies was closed to everyone except those who had anything to do with him. Any visits from this moment were organized only after prior authorization.

The media, as usual, tried to refer to "freedom of the press," but this time the public opinion was on the side of the hospital.

It seems that the influence of the "crying beauty" was too strong. Regardless of the truth (the report was organized by the Yotsuba family), everything looked like the television crew had done it to themselves.

But reporters are unlikely to give up so easily. For them, “freedom of the press” should be above all. Perhaps this will sound like an exaggeration, but the more they were restricted, the more their spirit of struggle flared up...

In other words, neither the newspaper or television people gave up. Also, several spies from various intelligence agencies integrated themselves into this crowd of reporters and photographers.

A medium-sized cruise boat drifted off the coast of Miyakijima . It belonged to one of

the nationwide television networks, but had on board agents of the army Intelligence Department. But, it wasn't the army capturing the television network crew's boat. The Intelligence Department was one of the subcontractors of the country's largest television network. And it goes without saying that the representatives of the television network didn't even know about it.

"How is it going?"

The team leader, who was silent until they moved away from the island, asked about the results from the other members of the team who were also silent.

"Useless. I have to admit that infiltration will be extremely difficult."

"Hackers haven't achieved anything yet, either."

"It's difficult to get in touch with the hospital staff, so the search for those who want to cooperate will take much longer."

With each adverse report, the team leader's frown on his face became even deeper.

"This hospital has an extraordinary level of security. It seems that other organizations haven't found any clues either."

"Well, at least there's some consolation."

The team leader muttered in response to a report by a team member who oversees the activities of other intelligence agencies.

The team leader looked out the window. The evening sun was covered by clouds covering the entire western sky. There was still some time before sunset, but it was almost dark. The typhoon's path deviated westward, that is, since yesterday it only moved away, but the waves only intensified.

"It's only the second day. It's too early to raise the white flag."

The team leader said in a confident tone, staring at the faces of all the assembled team members.

"For now, let's go back to the hotel on Miyakijima. But if the weather improves at night, then be prepared to depart at night. Until then, everyone is free."

“Understood.”

The members of the team answered the leader in unison.

Everyone stood up and went to their posts.

The cruise boat headed for Miyakijima, located 50 kilometers west.

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Later on in the evening, Mayumi, Honoka and the others moved into guest rooms prepared for them in the eastern part of the island.

At the moment, only two remained in the hospital: Miyuki and Lina.

“A cruise boat of the army Intelligence Department is moving towards Miyakijima.”

A report was sent to Miyuki’s mobile terminal from the Miyakijima Naval Police.... The police on this island were technically civil servants, but absolutely everyone in this police station were magicians working for the Yotsuba family.

“Okay. There is no need to touch them.”

“I understand. We continue to observe.”

The call was ended so abruptly that it could be considered rude. Miyuki understood that this wasn't due to the fact that she was treated scornfully, but to prevent wiretapping, so she wasn't particularly offended.

“Miyuki, what did they say?”

Lina asked Miyuki, who is with her for the company in the ICU observation room. Lina didn't seem to question the situation when adults ask for instructions from a girl of her age.

“It looks like the ground forces ship has sailed to a neighboring island.”

“The ground forces ship...? The Japanese military is scary.”

“In Japan, there is also the Marine Corps. Only for some reason it belongs to the army.”

"So the Marines are on this ship?"

"No, hardly. This is the work of people from the Intelligence Department, so I don't think it is a ship of the Marine Corps."

"Ara, the detrimental influence of sectionalism in Japan is exactly the same as in the States."

"Agreed."

Miyuki smiled at the amazed Lina.... But it was a bitter smile.

"I wonder if all the agents are now gone?"

Lina asked, changing her tone.

No. Miyuki shook her head, making a serious face.

"It seems that agents of the NSU are still working hard at sea."

"Wow! What courageous guys. After all, soon a hurricane will come here."

Miyuki involuntarily smiled at such a reaction of Lina, not seen from her earlier in Japan.

"Not a hurricane, but a typhoon. In addition, according to the weather forecast, another two days are left before the typhoon approaches."

Wiping the smile from her face, Miyuki Corrected Lina.

"The day after tomorrow is coming soon."

Objected Lina, also making a serious face.

Miyuki meant that "the typhoon won't come tonight," but the fact that the typhoon will come the day after tomorrow really was "very soon."

"...Yeah."

Miyuki agreed with a bitter smile on her face. Lina responded with a very proud face.

Chapter 9

The clock on the nuclear-powered submarine carrier, Virginia, was changed to the local time of the destination.

And now this clock showed the time: exactly 17:00. Tatsuya left the cabin and headed for the bridge, accompanied by the guard/surveillance soldier assigned to him.

Nobody forbade him to enter the bridge.

“Tatsuya.”

On the contrary, the captain of the ship, Colonel Michael Curtis, turned to him and addressed him extremely friendly.

He was the nephew of Wyatt Curtis and Tatsuya's most influential assistant during this mission. But Captain Curtis liked Tatsuya even without all that.

“We reach Midway Island in about an hour.”

“I see. Everything is on schedule.”

Tatsuya came to the bridge to confirm the start time of the operation, but the captain answered him before he even managed to ask.

“Preparation won't take much time. How about a conversation over a cup of coffee?”

As Captain Curtis said, preparing for a sortie should not take more than thirty minutes.

“Yes, with pleasure.”

Tatsuya had no reason to refuse.

The captain broke into a smile, called his senior assistant, and informed him that he would leave the bridge for a short while.

As a result, Captain Curtis led Tatsuya to the captain's cabin.

The captain's cabin on the Virginia was so spacious that you wouldn't even think that you were inside a submarine. Before the war, the Virginia itself was an ordinary giant

nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. The internal space was of appropriate dimensions.

They sat at a table opposite each other, and the captain personally made coffee for himself and Tatsuya. Although the coffee was brewed automatically, its taste was excellent. It was an automatic coffee processor with an AI. The opinion that automatically brewed coffee loses in taste to brewed by hand is probably a prejudice.

“Tatsuya, the time is almost here.”

“Yes. I don’t even know how to thank you and the senator.”

“I understand that you wanted to give priority to Pearl and Hermes, but...”

The tone of Captain Curtis was a little apologetic. He was clearly a sincere and kind person.

“... We have already agreed on everything at the very beginning.”

“Don’t worry about anything,” Tatsuya meant.

“Really. That was the deal. Therefore, you do not need to belittle your abilities.”

Said the captain and smiled broadly.

From this sincere smile, even Tatsuya slightly raised the corners of his lips.

“In addition, I can see at close range the combat abilities of the developer of flight magic. I’m so excited.”

The captain's eyes were filled with passion bordering on lust.

“Flying infantry and flying military equipment is a revolution in military technology. With the presence of flight magic, even the methods of warfare themselves began to change. The presence of magicians in war will only grow. At the same time, the thinking of commanding officers is also fundamentally changing. And I have the honor to be on the scene of these changes. For me, as a military man, this is an endless grace.”

“What I’m trying to do is my own personal battle. I didn’t think that it would be useful to someone from a tactical point of view.”

"No, we are here to change our awareness of what is happening. "Battle" is a group affair. The strength of an individual cannot be compared with the strength of a group of people. This principle has not changed, even when magic was used in battle. "Warriors, worth thousands of men" existed only in fiction. Even the most prominent soldiers had limited mobility."

Captain Curtis realized that he was overexcited, and broke off to take a sip of coffee.

"Even the cavalry could not instantly move from one edge of the battlefield to another. Using motorcycles doesn't help much either. Although many other devices have been developed that increase the maneuverability of the infantry, but being bound by the restriction of movement on the ground, in the end, all these tools were only a substitute for horses. The magic of flight has broken through this limitation."

"But even with flight magic, you won't be able to move instantly."

"In comparison with conventional means of transportation, this can be called one instant."

This was Tatsuya's real opinion, not his modesty. However, Curtis insisted that it was a "fallacy."

"Everything in the world is relative. Nothing ends in an instant. The mobility of flying infantry is "instantaneous" in the sense that it exceeds the response speed of ground units. A powerful unit suddenly appears right in front of you and turns the situation on the battlefield. For front-line commanders, there is no more terrible nightmare. And if this, moreover, is a single soldier, then ordinary common sense cannot be applied to him at all. Because it's like a war against Superman. In this case, all prepared measures become useless and you need to come up with new ones from scratch."

Captain Curtis grinned, this time with an insidious grin.

"Therefore, I look forward to your battle. After all, it will serve as a model for developing response tactics."

◊ ◊ ◊

Even after the nuclear-powered submarine aircraft carrier arrived at the designated point and stood in standby mode, Tatsuya didn't advance for some time. But it was

conceived.

Tatsuya started July 22 at 19:30 local time. An air-car driven by Tatsuya flew into the dark post-sunset sky.

Midway Island is not one island, but a formation from Sand Island, Eastern Island and many very small islands. So perhaps it's better to call it the Midway Archipelago.

Midway Prison is a large facility on the Eastern half of Sand Island. Tatsuya saw this object with the naked eye 10 minutes after departure.

There was no anti-aircraft fire.

"The stealth system seems to be demonstrating its designed effectiveness."

The main improvement of the new air-car was the stealth function. It was implemented on the basis of an artificial Relic, also used in the Stellar Furnace. The relic retained a magic sequence that prevented detection/recognition, and allowed it to deploy advanced stealth magic around the air-car's body, regardless of the driver's magic skills.

The continuous operation time at this stage of development is about half a day. When the total operating time is 12 hours, for further use it will take 12 hours of downtime. However, the time limit is reset if there is a pause of 12 hours or more whether or not the time limit is reached. For this mission, that was enough.

Tatsuya landed the air-car on the Northwest coast of Sand Island. From there, he headed towards the prison buildings in the "Freed Suit." The "Freed Suit" was also equipped with a stealth function, but not as good as in the new model of air-car, where the artificial Relic was used. When Tatsuya tried to fly over the high fence encircling the prison grounds, a piercing alarm suddenly sounded.

The turret mounted on the roof of the prison began to turn.

Tatsuya had heard from the Mitsuya family that the only weapons in Midway Prison were Fleming launchers and the soldiers' personal weapons. But now something else was turning, aiming directly at Tatsuya...

"Pulse Laser Cannon!"

It was an anti-aircraft laser cannon, going far beyond the use of anti-infantry.

Tatsuya didn't have time to think that he might've been deceived.

He activated his magic exactly at the same moment when he recognized the type of weapon.

A moment before the pulsed laser cannon was able to lock its aim on Tatsuya, the outline of the turret disappeared, scattering in flashes of lightning.

Tatsuya's decomposition magic, "Mist Dispersion" decomposed the barrel of the cannon and the pedestal on which it was mounted down to the level of chemical elements.

The lightning flashes were caused by the fact that the electric current supplied to the cannon for charging the laser lost the conductor through which it moved and chaotically scattered throughout the gas cloud from the metal elements that were decomposed.

"That was dangerous..."

The bulletproof function of the Freed Suit is only resistant to physical bullets, and doesn't have heat resistance sufficient to withstand a high-energy laser. Depending on the aiming speed and rapid-fire of the laser cannon, there was also a risk of falling into an endless cycle of getting shot through the body at the same time as "Regrowth" is activated.

The endless cycle of damage and self-healing for Tatsuya, able to repair any damage, is a situation he should be most wary of. If he was to continue using "Regrowth" without stopping, then sooner or later his magic calculation area will no longer be able to withstand the continuous activation, and will ultimately overheat. Or rather he won't be able to activate "Regrowth" at all. He will probably be able to withstand activating dozens of times, but if he does it hundreds of times in a short period of time, then the probability of activation failure immediately rises. This was one of the few ways to overcome Tatsuya's invulnerability.

The sense of danger made Tatsuya's perception sharpen even more.

The information about all anti-aircraft and anti-personnel weapons mounted on the roof and walls of the entire complex was instantly and simultaneously displayed in his "field of vision".

"Mist Dispersion - Activation."

He activated the previous "Mist Dispersion" reflexively, only with his own invocation power.

This time, he relied on the help of the built-in CAD in his suit to "decompose" 12 gun platforms at the same time. They also included anti-aircraft installations, for which Tatsuya was now in their blind spot, as well as automatic gun turrets installed underneath the ground in the complex.

All interception weapons installed at Midway Prison, including Fleming anti-ship launchers, disappeared without a trace in five consecutive activation's of Tatsuya's decomposition magic.

Hovering in the sky above Midway Prison, which had been deprived of its weapons, Tatsuya began to use "Elemental Sight" to search for the building containing Canopus.

Tatsuya got "information" on Benjamin Canopus in February this year, after he prevented him from grabbing Gu Jie. As expected, while there was half of the Pacific Ocean between them, Tatsuya couldn't determine the location of a person he had contact with only once. But now, knowing what to look for on this island, on a specific territory, Tatsuya easily discovered him.

On this territory, about 1x1 km in size, there were ten strong-looking (from an unassuming point of view) buildings.

"Five buildings among them are prison blocks. One building is the administration office, two buildings are living quarters for personnel and soldiers, one building is the armory, and another is a training center."

Information about the person sought-after - Canopus - was found in the very center of the entire complex. The right place was on the third floor of a three-story building, at its southern end.

Tatsuya once again looked at the information about the internal structure of the aforementioned building.

At a short distance away from Canopus there were ten armed soldiers. These were prison guards. It wasn't clear whether they had gathered in one place to protect

Canopus, or to prevent his escape?

Canopus was the only prisoner on this floor. On the first and second floors there were eight prisoners. Of course, the prisoners were all male magicians.

"It goes without saying that my invasion is already known. If I enter from the roof, they will probably come to meet me."

There was also an option to outwit them by breaking in from the first floor. But now every second counted. Also this here wasn't his only mission. His real goal, in general, was the Pearl & Hermes base.

Tatsuya decided to attack from above, according to the expectations of the guards.

The muzzle of weapons pointed at Tatsuya coming down from the heavens. These short-barreled weapons resembled a PDW (Personal Self-Defense Weapon).

For soldiers guarding the building, preferring ease of use instead of power was a smart choice. In addition, when the enemy is Tatsuya, even if they were high powered, there would be no point.

The weapons fell to pieces on the roof of the building, even before one of them had time to shoot.

Caught in an unexpected situation, the two soldiers froze for a moment, but soon quickly reached for a waist holster.

But faster than they could do it, Tatsuya pulled a pistol-shaped CAD from his belt and aimed at them.

The custom modified Silver Horn "Trident".

At the same time as Tatsuya pulled the trigger, tiny holes appeared in the joints of the arms and legs of the two soldiers.

The soldiers made muffled screams, and fell in different directions - one on his back, and the other face down.

He used Trident instead of the built-in CAD in his suit because he knew about the surveillance cameras.

The wounds that neutralized the soldiers looked like the traces of invisible bullets passing through them.

In order to create the impression that the invader with a hidden face and dressed in a completely black suit is using such a magic, Tatsuya decided to use his CAD in the form of a pistol, which can be easily connected with these "invisible bullets."

Taking one of the pistols from an unconscious soldier, Tatsuya went through the door leading down the stairs.

There was no ambush on the way from the roof to the third floor.

But he didn't even have time to take one step down from the roof, as a certain sixth sense (not "Elemental Sight") - an intuitive sense of danger - made him get down and put his left hand in front of his face.

The field for modifying phenomenon, spread out from around his palm to decompose the bullet that flew at him from the wall opposite of him.

It looked as if the bullet ricocheted off that wall, but there was no bounce sound.

But Tatsuya wasn't surprised or puzzled. Along with the decomposition of the bullet, he read and analyzed what the magic properties activated by the enemy were.

The bullet was wrapped in a reflective force field the size of the bullet. It was magic, endowing the properties of bouncing, like a rubber ball, but it reacted only to certain substances. In this case, the installed condition for the rebound was assigned to the drywall, which covered the walls and ceiling.

A bullet flew right towards the side of Tatsuya, who was crouching on one knee, which made a sharp sound. Next, without any pause, the next bullet landed one step from where he stood. Apparently, when aiming, they relied on chance to some extent. So, was the first shot, which hit right on target, also an accident?

The fourth bullet didn't come.

Tatsuya didn't let them shoot.

From below, one could hear surprised screams and the sounds of PDW's falling apart all over the floor.

Of course, this happened because of Tatsuya's handiwork.

Confirming audibly the temporary neutralization of the enemies, Tatsuya ran down the stairs.

The enemy soldiers during this time managed to snatch pistols. Obviously, the local soldiers were quite well trained, as they didn't remain stunned or stand in a stupor after an unforeseen situation. However, at the current moment, they still didn't have time to aim.

Tatsuya pulled the trigger on Trident.

Holes appeared in the limbs of three soldiers who were in the first-row trying to shoot. Modern medicine can heal such wounds (cut nerves), but for this it is necessary to undergo treatment in a hospital. Simple first aid won't help restore mobility to their limbs. Moreover, from the dreadful pain caused by the decomposition of nerves, the victims of this attack lose consciousness. Even if someone manages to avoid the loss of consciousness, then usually no one is able to maintain the clarity in their thinking.

As if not paying attention to the comrades who had lost their combat readiness, two soldiers from the second row sent cylinders at Tatsuya, reminiscent of large flashlights.

Tatsuya recognized the psionic wave noise (cast jamming) which he was bombarded with coming from these "flashlights."

"Psionic wave noise (cast jamming) that obstructs the reading of activation sequence output from a CAD?"

Tatsuya not only felt, but understood this.

"An anti-magician device that mimics the nature of Antinite. But the effectiveness is lower than that of real Antinite"

Tatsuya erased the psionic wave noise by activating his decomposition magic without using his CAD.

Almost immediately after that, he pulled the trigger on Trident.

Blood spurted out from the extremities of not only the two soldiers who aimed, the "Sorcery Disrupters" at Tatsuya, but also from the extremities of the remaining three soldiers of the defense detachment.

Before Tatsuya, no one else was left standing. As a precaution, he scanned the bodies of all the soldiers of the defense detachment with his "sight," and using decomposition magic, he made all their weapons and explosives unusable.

After that, Tatsuya used magic to destroy the lock on the door of Canopus's cell.

The Trident, which was in his right hand, was put back in its holster. In his left hand, he continued to hold a pistol that he took from one of the previous soldiers he encountered.

Tatsuya opened the door to the cell, but didn't go inside, and remained standing still.

After about ten seconds had passed.

From the far corner, located in a blind spot when viewing from the entrance, a tall figure emerged and stood in front of Tatsuya.

The man's chin was smoothly shaved, and his brown hair was neatly combed. There were no signs of exhaustion in his light brown eyes. There wasn't any noticeable "shabbiness," which is usually associated with people who are labeled with the word "prisoner".

"Major Benjamin Canopus, I presume?"

Tatsuya knew who this man was. It was necessary to ask to somehow start a conversation.

"Right. And you are?"

"I came at the request of Senator Wyatt Curtis."

"From Grand?"

Tatsuya was momentarily confused by the incomprehensible reply of Canopus, but in the end he decided to interpret this word as an abbreviation for granduncle (cousin). This may have been respectful treatment used by the family, but Tatsuya had enough understanding to know that he was referring to Wyatt Curtis.

"I was asked to give you this."

Tatsuya handed Canopus the ring handed over to him by the captain of the Virginia.



Canopus looked for a few seconds at the emblem engraved on the signet of the ring, after which he put it on the little finger of his left hand.

“Certainly this is...”

Canopus nodded slightly. The ring seemed to be enough to prove whose messenger Tatsuya was.

“The request that I received was to help in your jailbreak.”

“Understood.”

Canopus didn't ask about the reasons and the identity of Tatsuya. Tatsuya decided that Canopus apparently could not go against Wyatt Curtis's directions.

Although Canopus didn't refuse, he remained in place and asked:

“If you don't mind, then could we also take, with us, my subordinates who were captured with me?”

“Accepted. Do you know where they are imprisoned?”

“I know. I'll guide you.”

“Good. Here, take this.”

Nodding in response to Canopus' offer, Tatsuya handed him the pistol he picked up from the soldier on the roof.

“... Are you sure?”

“It can't be a replacement for a weaponized armed device, but just in case, it's for self-protection.”

Canopus preferred a weaponized armed device which combines a CAD and sword in the form of a Japanese katana. After Tatsuya's words, he frowned slightly because of the sense of caution that came from Tatsuya who might know of his fighting style.

“Thanks, this will help.”

But in the end, Canopus answered only this, and headed to the stairs.

Canopus led Tatsuya to another prison building, located 200 meters from the previous one.

They weren't attacked along the way. Canopus made an extremely surprised face when he saw that the pinpointed stationary gun turrets were wiped out, but Tatsuya who was walking behind him didn't see this.

The building was about the same size as the one in which Canopus was imprisoned, but there were many more cameras. Apparently, the previous building was intended for senior officers, and this building - for prisoners with a lower status.

Canopus moved along the corridor, from time to time looking for signs of someone's presence. Then they got to the stairs and went up to the second floor. In the end, they stopped in front of a door located approximately in the middle of the corridor on the second floor.

"Right here."

Silently nodding back at Canopus' words, Tatsuya pulled out a combat knife with knuckle guard.

While swinging the knife down, a force field of decomposition magic was formed on the cutting edge of the knife.

The knife cut through the lock on the door without any resistance.

"Molecular divider? No..."

Without responding to Canopus' murmur, Tatsuya threw open the door to a room more like a guardhouse than a prison.

Walking past Tatsuya who was holding the door, Canopus cautiously entered the cell.

"Commander!"

"Ralph."

But Canopus' tension eased when he heard a voice coming from the back of the room.

A slender young man with shortly-cut red hair hurriedly ran to Canopus. It was Ralph

Algol, the second lieutenant from the first detachment of the Stars, who was directly subordinate to Canopus.

Canopus slowly followed toward the young man.

When there was only one step between them, Canopus stopped and held out his hand for a handshake.

But the young man suddenly pushed off the floor and rushed past Canopus.

He tried to attack Tatsuya with a knife in his hand.

However, immediately after the figure, looking like Ralph Algol, began its rapid advance, a psionic stream rushed into him.

The face of the young man changed.

The physique and hair color remained the same, but he now had the face of another person.

"Gram Demolition!?"

Canopus' voice was too loud for a whisper.

The effect of "Gram Demolition," released by Tatsuya, wasn't only limited to removing the masking magic from a person who turned out to be not a young man, but a middle-aged man. The gait and posture of this man also became somewhat insecure.

Tatsuya lunged with his knife in the direction of the man who had lost the ability to control his body normally due to the psionic flow.

He struck the man in the body, not with the knife blade, but with the titanium alloy knuckle guard embedded in the handle. Having received a blow into the solar plexus, the man's eyes rolled back and collapsed to the floor.

"This looks like a member of the Coalsack squad..."

Canopus turned the collapsed man over and frowned, recognizing him.

Tatsuya heard him, but didn't ask for an explanation of what "Coalsack" was.

The situation didn't allow this.

Through the remaining open door, something the size of a fist flew into the chamber.

"Grenade!?"

The cry of Canopus described in a word what Tatsuya saw.

Canopus knocked over the table and lay down behind it.

While Tatsuya threw the grenade away with magic. The lack of magic power activated by the artificial magic calculation area using Flash Cast, in this situation was more than compensated for by the excessive activation speed.

But the enemy was also strong. The grenade thrown away by Tatsuya, flying through the doorway, bounced back inside the cell. And it didn't bounce off the door, because it was open. The fact was that in the doorway an anti-object barrier was deployed.

Tatsuya activated gravity controlled flight magic.

Explosion power is inversely proportional to the cube of distance. Before the explosion, they usually lie on the floor to avoid direct contact with fragments, but if we take into account the distance to the epicenter of the explosion in the current situation, then the distance from the grenade falling to the floor to the ceiling was greater than the distance that would be if they lay on the floor.

In addition, the process of forming an air cocoon, reducing air resistance during flight, was built into the flight magic spell. This cocoon was strong enough to withstand a headwind relative wind at a speed of several hundred kilometers per hour. Therefore, one could expect that it would serve as a shield against the relatively weak explosion of a hand grenade.

However, Tatsuya's quick wits in this case were not particularly useful.

The grenade exploded. The blast wave wasn't so strong.

Instead of exploding into fragments, thick black smoke began to disperse in all directions.

"Smoke grenade."

Tatsuya abruptly canceled the flying magic and jumped to the floor. If the enemy's goal was to block his field of vision, then remaining near the ceiling, he would be an easy

target.

The results of the smoke analysis were displayed on the screen integrated in the visor of the helmet.

... non-lethal...

... There are no paralytic components...

... There are no tear components...

... there is little damage to the respiratory system and the cornea...

"In other words, it's just a smoke screen to block the view."

Tatsuya felt the disappearance of the anti-object shield that blocked the doorway.

The field of view displayed on the visor of the helmet automatically switched to infrared mode. However, the silhouettes of people trying to get into the room were not visible.

But Tatsuya's "sight" at the same time caught the "image" of a person approaching quickly and soundlessly.

The silhouette, represented according to the information data, wore a stealth suit, equalizing the emitted infrared rays with the temperature of the outside air. To ensure visibility, ultrasound was also used. The man seemed to be a particularly advanced master, since he didn't wear special glasses for visualizing ultrasound. Just like a bat-man.

But in any case, since this person sent a weapon at us, you just need to counterattack. Tatsuya repelled the enemy fist with his right hand that was holding a knife, after which he grabbed the enemy by the forehead with his left hand. And he activated vibrational magic, which sent a wave of vibrations through the palm of his left hand.

This wave of vibrations was produced by his artificial magic calculation area, unable to deliver high power. In other words, the injury won't be fatal.

But there was enough strength to cause a concussion.

The "bat-man" had his legs buckled, and he collapsed to the floor. Given that he

received a blow to the head, such a drop looked strange, but Tatsuya didn't even pay attention to it.

First of all, because he didn't have the time for it.

Following the fallen man, the next enemy was approaching. More precisely, not even one or two. There were eight of them in total.

"Is that already above my limit?"

Until now, Tatsuya fought so as not to kill the soldiers of the defense detachment. The work entrusted to him was the rescue of Canopus and the destruction of the Parasites. He wasn't asked to kill the American soldiers who were not infected with Parasites. Although there was no ban on killing, Tatsuya didn't want to produce unnecessary discontent.

However, this wasn't a priority over accomplishing the mission.

From outside, a cannonball flew into the room. It was an iron core, similar to a shot put competition. However, it flew at Tatsuya in a direct trajectory, and not in an arc, as in competitions. Its speed exceeded 200 km/h. There were no signs of magic working during its flight. It seems that the shell was accelerated by magic only at the time of the shot.

Something flat, reminiscent of a card, was also approaching with a curved trajectory. At first glance, it was just a piece of plastic, but the edges of this card were covered with high-strength resin, sharpened to perfect sharpness. There was no signs of magic visible here too. Probably, at the moment of throwing the card, its speed, angle and rotation were set by magic so that the trajectory of free movement intersected with the given target.

Both of these attacks were designed to make it difficult to detect with magic.

Tatsuya "decomposed" the ball and the card, and shot the hearts of all eight attackers.

Sensing the intent of murder that came from the floor in front of him, he threw a knife in that direction .

It was the "bat-man" who, despite having a concussion, tried to shoot Tatsuya with a spring-loaded dart. The knife cut through his throat, causing a mortal wound.

The first man he defeated - the red-haired man - didn't move. It seems that the battle has come to an end.

Causing a faint airflow, Tatsuya blew out the smoke screen into the corridor, which by that moment was still in the cell.

"Coalsack was completely destroyed, without being able to attack normally..."

With undisguised surprise in his voice Canopus murmured, who stood up on the other side of the toppled over table.

"Coalsack is the name of the team of these guys?"

Tatsuya asked Canopus, just to keep the conversation going.

"Yes. Coalsack Squad from Illegal MAP. One of the best squads for illegal assassinations in the States..."

Canopus looked at Tatsuya not with admiration, but with wariness in his eyes.

"Assassins shouldn't attack head on, right?"

Tatsuya meant that you should not be afraid of assassins attacking directly head on. But this wasn't a manifestation of modesty or, conversely, complacency. This again was only an attempt to keep the conversation going.

"Better tell me, does the Coalsack squad have only ten people?"

This is the only thing that Tatsuya asked. Simply put, he wondered if there were still enemies left.

"Yes. There is also another Illegal MAP unit called the Cone Nebula, but their specialization is seduction. It is unlikely that they will be sent in the current situation."

"Understood."

Tatsuya scanned the room with "Elemental Sight." He did this to make sure there were no other traps or ambushes, but he discovered something else.

"Major. Under the bed there is someone bound. This, incidentally, is it not your ally?"

Canopus rushed to the bed and peered under it.

“Ralph!”

He pulled a red-haired youth from under the bed - Ralph Algol. But he showed no signs of awakening, even when Canopus tried to shake him. Perhaps he was pumped full of some kind of drug.

Canopus untied Algol and put him on his left shoulder so that the upper half of his body hung down from behind, and he clasped the legs hanging in front of him with his left hand.

“It seems that there is nothing that threatens his life, but wouldn’t it be better to leave him here?”

“No, we’ll take him with us.”

Canopus didn’t listen to Tatsuya’s advice.

But Tatsuya didn’t particularly insist on his words. He didn’t try to convince Canopus.

“Was the subordinate you wanted to pick up, only this one?”

Tatsuya asked instead.

“Sorry. There is one more.”

“Okay. Let’s hurry.”

Canopus nodded in response to Tatsuya and ran with Algol on his shoulder.

Second Lieutenant, Ariana Lee Shaula, stationed in the female sector of the prison, was saved without any noticeable resistance. Unlike with Second Lieutenant Algol, Second Lieutenant Shaula wasn’t bound or unconscious.

Tatsuya suspected it was a trap. But was there a trap or not, in which case his actions would be the same.

“Let’s steal a car. Do you have anything in mind?”

It was necessary to somehow get to the place where the air-car was parked. It was possible to take off with a “load” of three passengers, but mobility was greatly reduced.

It was unclear whether Canopus and Shaula would be able to protect themselves from shelling without CAD, and Algol still hasn't woken up. Therefore, I would like to avoid the departure using the flight function of the Freed Suit.

"In front of the armory there is a general purpose vehicle."

Shaula answered the question of Tatsuya.

"I saw it from my room window. Here."

Anticipating the question of "how do you know this," Shaula tried to lead Tatsuya and Canopus behind her.

"Wait. Point out the direction from behind me."

But Tatsuya stopped her, overtook, and turned his back to her.

Shaula's face showed that she was confused. She could not understand why, at their first meeting, he had been completely open before her, turning his back.

She looked puzzled at Canopus. But Canopus only shook his head and didn't answer.

Canopus guessed the true identity of Tatsuya. Information about Tatsuya was imprinted in his memory in the form of a person who constantly showed vigilance of the highest category. Therefore, he was even worse than Shaula, and didn't understand why Tatsuya now showed such a lack of vigilance.... However, in the case of Tatsuya, this only meant that he could "see" including behind him.

As expected, there were soldiers in front of the armory.

About fifty people. Amount equivalent to one platoon. Too much for ordinary security. Obviously, they were waiting for Tatsuya and those whom he led. Judging by what he "saw," among them were even some quite powerful magicians.

They were on the other side of the building and were not visible with physical vision. However, not only Tatsuya saw them, but they also noticed Tatsuya's group. The entire platoon of soldiers simultaneously aimed their gun barrels forward.

The weapon of each of them wasn't just a simple rifle, but a weaponized-armed device. The unfolding activation sequence belonged to the magic of the movement system called "Bend Trajectory." This magic bends the trajectory of a flying object once. In

other words, it's bending magic. The main scope of application is shooting at enemies hiding behind obstacles.

Tatsuya pulled out Trident and pulled the trigger.

Bullets fired from the weaponized-armed devices simultaneously with the activation of Tatsuya's magic.

Bullets flew straight without bending the arc. This was the result of Tatsuya activating "Gram Dispersion" by targeting the magic sequence of "Bend Trajectory" which activated in an area that lies within 100 meters in front of them.

These weaponized-armed devices didn't allow for automatic firing. Even if the CAD provided a certain level of automation, the processing speed of the magicians using it didn't allow for them to keep up with this pace. In other words, all of the fired bullets flew straight, and fell into the void. The soldiers began to withdraw the following activation sequence.

But Tatsuya's next magic activated faster.

Blood spurted from the joints of the right foot of half of the fifty soldiers, and with a slight time lag the same thing happened with the remaining half. The resulting damage caused everyone to lose their balance. And a moment later the same thing happened with their left feet, and as a result, everyone simultaneously fell to the ground.

After that, in addition to everything, he made holes in their hands, which completely deprived the entire platoon of the defense detachment from combat readiness.

Previously, Tatsuya was already forced to abandon non-fatal attacks once, but now he didn't do the same, because he thought again about the fact that the destruction of a whole platoon could have undesirable consequences.

Since the opponents were magicians, there remained the risk of a counterattack, even if they could not move their limbs. But if this happens, then Tatsuya was ready to become serious again. Not in the sense that he was ready to take a hit to himself, but in the sense that he was ready to kill if they ended up counterattacking.

After making sure that the guards were temporarily neutralized, Tatsuya ran around the corner of the building.

Canopus and Shaula followed him with tense faces. For the two officers from the Stars elite, Tatsuya's fighting power seemed unimaginable.

"Molecular Divider... Javelin?"

Shaula muttered. Obviously, she confused the magic of Tatsuya's partial decomposition with the magic, "Molecular Divider Javelin" used by First Lieutenant Zoe Spica from the fourth unit of the Stars. The effects of these two magics were indeed quite similar.

Under the dark evening sky, when even in the west there were no signs of the sun, Tatsuya and his three companions ran to the general purpose car. Canopus sat in the driver's seat. Behind him, sat Shaula, and still not awake Algol, was seated next to her.

Tatsuya took weapons from several nearby soldiers and stood next to the front passenger seat door.

Canopus looked at Tatsuya with suspicion, trying to look at him to urgently take his place, but he took out Trident and went to the armory.

"... The absence of people is confirmed."

There was no one inside the warehouse.

"... Getting information about the material of the object."

In the case of disassembling weapons or military equipment into parts, first you need to identify the information about the mechanical structure of the target object. The more complex and larger the object, the more information data is there.

When using "Regrowth," in addition to the information about the structure of an object, information about the materials that make up the object is also needed.

However, in the case of "Mist Dispersion," decomposing an object to the level of chemical elements, processing is possible even with the presence of only information about the materials that make up the object. Regardless of the size and mechanical complexity of the object. In the case of the "decomposition" of a large-scale object, Tatsuya will have less load when decomposing an object into chemical elements than when disassembling it into spare parts.

Tatsuya activated Mist Dispersion, choosing as a single target the entire armory depot and all the weapons stored in it.

The contours of the three-story building without windows floated...

And the next moment the building disappeared, as if it were an illusion.

The remains of the armory depot dispersed in the form of dust swirling in the wind.

Seeing an approaching cloud of dust, Shaula hastily closed the window next to where she was sitting in the car.

Tatsuya quickly got into the passenger seat and said to Canopus, who was staring at him with round eyes from being astonished at what he just did.

“Drive.”

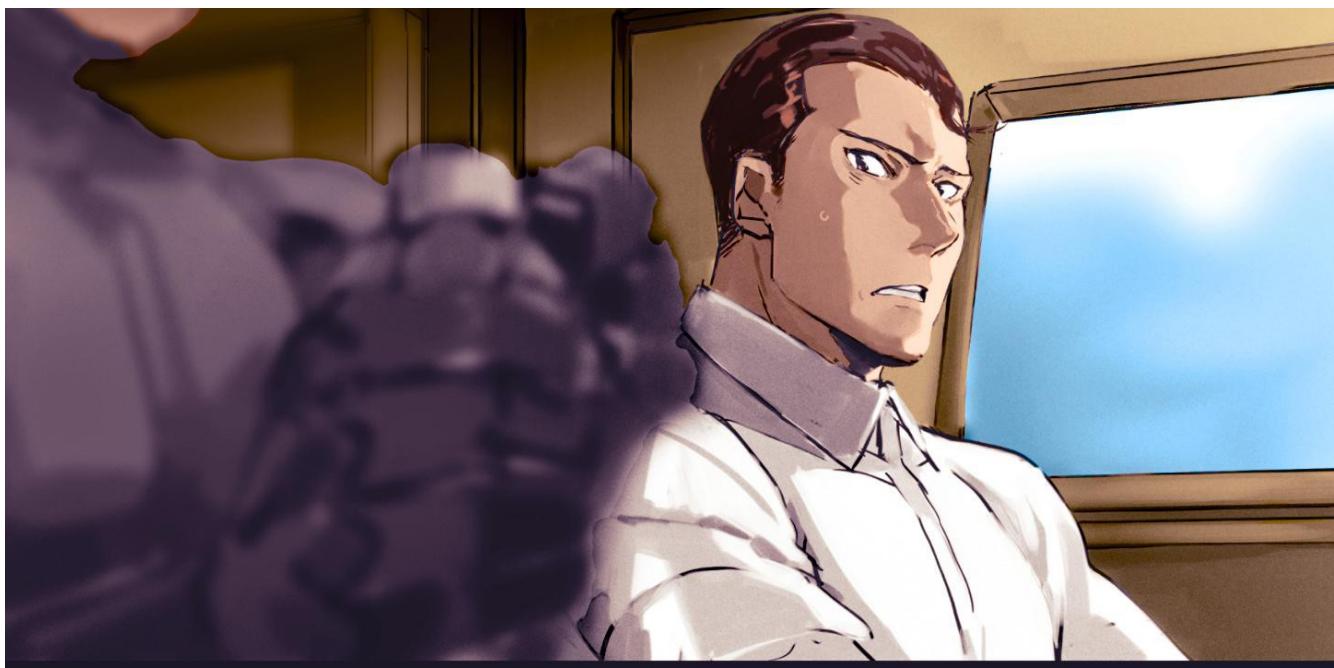
In front of the gate leading out of the prison complex, they were waiting for about the same number of soldiers as there was in front of the armory depot.

But Tatsuya's reaction this time was different.

He slowly pulled out a grenade he "confiscated" from the soldiers in front of the armory depot.

“Hey, what are you doing?!“

Ignoring the nervous Canopus, Tatsuya opened the window and pulled the clip out of the grenade. The handling of this type of weapon was exactly the same as 100 years ago.



The grenade was thrown with his right hand, and was accelerated by magic and flew straight towards the line of soldiers who stood in their way.

The enemy magician tried to influence the trajectory of the grenade, but Tatsuya easily "decomposed" the magic sequence of their magic, "Vector Reversal", which they used to try and stop the grenade.

An important principle when using magic is the rule that one and the same object or phenomenon cannot be simultaneously affected by several different magics. If you violate this rule, then in most cases the required force of interference in the phenomenon will increase, which ends up increasing the load on the magician. In addition to this, only one type of magic will work successfully. In the worst case scenario, all attempts to apply magic to the object will fail.

This principle is strictly respected in organized combat groups such as the regular army. Therefore, in this case, only one magician tried to stop the approach of the grenade with magic.

And his magic was neutralized. Although such an unexpected development of events caused confusion, but he was prepared enough to try again to stop the grenade with the same magic.

But this one extra time was the last.

The second "Vector Reversal" was neutralized by Tatsuya, and the grenade reached the area above the heads of the soldiers.

But the problem didn't end with one grenade.

Tatsuya picked up four grenades when he was in front of the armory depot. And he threw all four grenades one after another at the soldiers who stood in a line opposite the gate to block their escape path.

The grenades successfully exploded three meters above the heads of the guards.

Shrapnel rained down on the soldiers from above.

To protect themselves from the shrapnel, they crouched, raising their hands above their heads.

The field of view of the soldiers shifted from the car carrying Tatsuya and the others.

When they looked up at the sound of the horn, the car that had just seemed small due to range was already right in front of them.

The guards, who were lined up in a row, reflexively jumped out of the way of the fleeing car.

The line was built from about a quarter of the soldiers gathered at the gates.

The remaining three quarters rained down a hail of bullets on to the car.

However, this stolen car, although it was a general purpose vehicle, was actually an armored military vehicle. In addition, to the fired bullets, only about 10% of them reached the targeted vehicle. In other words, the shooting from the guards didn't cause significant enough damage that could stop the vehicle.

The car with Canopus behind the wheel passed through the gates (which were the same gates where Tatsuya decomposed a pass-through iron door), thus escaping the prison complex.

After escaping from the Midway Prison complex, they were not pursued by either ground equipment or helicopters. Of course, the American army didn't overlook the invasion and jailbreak. It's just that at the moment they were recovering from their losses and were regrouping.

"Stop here."

Seeing the air-car, Tatsuya asked Canopus to stop the car.

Taking the place of the driver of the air-car, he left the door open and shouted to Canopus and Shaula:

"Get in."

These two weren't frozen in confusion. Canopus pulled Algol from the back seat, putting him on his shoulder and ran to the air-car.

Shaula climbed into the back seat of the air-car and helped put Algol inside.

"It's okay if you don't close the doors."

Nodding in response to Tatsuya's advice, Canopus darted around the SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle)-like vehicle and sat in the front passenger seat.

Tatsuya pressed a button and all four doors closed simultaneously.

"What is this? An amphibious vehicle?"

Canopus asked instinctively, examining the interior of the car. Its windows were affixed and unopened, and in the place where ordinary cars had a trunk, equipment of unknown purpose was installed.

"No."

Tatsuya answered and activated the flight magic.

"This is a flying car."

Canopus swallowed, and Shaula screamed softly. With such background noise, Tatsuya sharply raised the air-car into the air.

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"A notification about their return came from Mr. Shiba's air-car."

After the words of the signalman on the bridge, there was a noise of whispering.

"Thirty minutes after departure... that is, it took 20 minutes directly to work? Do we know what damage was done to Midway Prison?"

Colonel Michael Curtis, captain of the nuclear submarine carrier Virginia, asked the intelligence officer.

"Anti-ship, anti-aircraft and anti-personnel gun crews completely destroyed. The weapons warehouse also completely disappeared..."

The scouts reacted so quickly because Captain Curtis had previously ordered information to be collected at Midway Prison.

"Are the prison buildings themselves intact?"

The captain asked the intelligence officer in a slightly surprised tone.

"No serious damage was noticed."

"This is a surprisingly good result..."

Captain Curtis thought so at first, but quickly changed his mind.

"Such limited damage can be interpreted as proof that the attacker could afford it."

"Midway is not only a military prison, but also a supply base, going as an addition to Pearl and Hermes."

"In just 20 minutes, and given that he restrained himself - this is a complete defeat..."

"... Tatsuya. If you weren't a guest of Uncle, and we would have to fight with you, then all the power of Virginia wouldn't overcome you, and we would eventually go to the bottom."

"I would prefer to continue to have a good relationship with you."

"Prepare for a quick ascent. Prepare the take-off deck for the arrival of the air-car. And report this to Mr. Shibata."

Captain Curtis hid his concern in the depths of his heart, and gave crew members orders to play a part in this mission.

About seven minutes have passed since the return signal was sent. In the sky above the sea around the surfaced Virginia, an air-car silhouette appeared.

Out of the dark night sea floated the gigantic hull of the Virginia. The air-car didn't circle around, but simply hovered in the sky during a flight over this nuclear aircraft carrier.

The outer shell of the Virginia parted, exposing the flight deck.

The air-car descended vertically and landed silently on the flight deck.

Crew members ran over to them.

Canopus was the first to leave the aircraft through the door of the front passenger seat,

and after him, Shaula through the rear right door.

Canopus pulled the unconscious Algol out of the car. The running crew members helped him and laid Algol on a stretcher.

Only after that did Tatsuya leave the air-car.

“For starters, congratulations on the successful completion of the first phase of the mission.”

Katsuhige turned to Tatsuya, who came out from behind the back of the team members who had already started refueling (charging ultra-high capacitors) of the air-car.

“Thank you.”

Raising the visor of his helmet, Tatsuya answered Katsuhige's congratulations.

“You're going to leave again soon, right? Leave the report to the main house to me.”

“Thanks.”

Tatsuya bowed slightly in response to Katsuhige's suggestion.

“If possible, could you please convey a message about the rescue of Major Canopus to Miyakijima?”

Raising his head, Tatsuya asked Katsuhige.

“Unfortunately that isn't possible. There is currently no person on Miyakijima capable of receiving telepathic messages.”

During this operation, all communication with the main house was carried out using the special abilities of telepaths. There were only a few subordinates in the Yotsuba family with telepathic abilities that allowed them to communicate at such a great distance, and all of them were directly subordinate to the head of the family. In this case, one of such valuable employees was temporarily handed over to Katsuhige by the main house.

“Okay.”

“In the message that will be sent to the main house, I will add a request to relay the

message to Miyakijima."

Tatsuya's request wasn't feasible, but in return Katsushige promised to remind the main house to let Miyuki and Lina know the news.

Charging the air-car was pretty fast. Less than ten minutes after the landing, Tatsuya again lifted the car into the air.

A telepathic communication session with the main house took place immediately after his departure.

The news of the rescue of Canopus was immediately transmitted by the main house to Miyakijima.

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Immediately after receiving reports of the attack on Midway, a bustle began at Pearl & Hermes Base in preparation for sending soldiers.

The original target was a counter-offensive against the enemies who attacked Midway Prison Base.

However, in a subsequent report it was said that the attackers had abducted Major Canopus and Second Lieutenants Algol and Shaula, after which they fled in a small-sized aircraft. Therefore, the goal of sending fighters and destroyers with anti-aircraft and anti-submarine weapons changed to a pursuit of the offenders.

While all the soldiers of the base (both sent and remaining) were very busy with preparations, Raymond (civilian) visited Minoru, who is in a separate room of the medical center allocated for Minami.

"Was it Tatsuya who attacked Midway?"

Although this topic (preparation for the operation) wasn't very suitable for a friendly conversation, Raymond clearly showed unhealthy interest in this.

"Most likely."

Minoru answered him.

“Only Tatsuya-san knows how to hide traces of magic perfectly.”

“You mean, besides you?”

“My abilities are just the art of deception. I can't hide as skillfully as Tatsuya-san does.”

Minoru with a serious face shook his head in response to Raymond's joke.

“I see.”

With a distressed face, Raymond answered.

“Come on do not talk about it.”

However, he quickly regained his usual cheerful face. The current situation was rather chaotic, but it developed clearly as the "Seven Sages" — Raymond S. Clark liked.

“It appears that major Antares and Lieutenant Sargas were also sent to intercept on the destroyer Chevalier.” ...Or what's its name? “Shaurma”?

Minoru, it seemed, wasn't at all interested in which name was correct, but Raymond could not leave this question open, so he took out a mobile terminal and sent a search request.

“Yeah, all the same, the “Chevalier.” And along with it, the “Shangri-La” will leave the port. It seems that they are going to send more than ten fighter class aircrafts “Horned Owls” [Eagle Owls].”

“Really!?”

The Shangri-La is an aircraft carrier assigned to the port of Pearl & Hermes Base. It is the "runway" of this base. The Horned Owls, code-named F-141, is the main strike force of the Shangri-La aircraft carrier. These are multi-purpose combat aircrafts with superior stealth system effectiveness.

In total, there were 60 “Horned Owls” on the Shangri-La. This means that more than one-sixth of them will be sent. Therefore, Minoru's surprise was natural.

“That alone says that Tatsuya was considered dangerous. In my opinion, this is a reasonable decision.”

Minoru didn't argue with these words of Raymond. Minoru fought with Tatsuya only in one-on-one magic battles. But it was thanks to a direct encounter with him that he realized that the true value of Tatsuya manifests itself at a tactical level and higher. What just happened on Midway Island was direct evidence of this. Tatsuya was a threat that could destroy a military base without even using his Strategic-Class magic. Therefore, the reaction of the USNA army should not be considered an exaggeration.

"I don't think that this base will be able to delay Tatsuya... Oh, it seems that Chevalier and Shangri-La left the port. Major Antares and Lieutenant Sargas are moving away."

The port wasn't visible from the window of the infirmary window, so Raymond, apparently, sensed this through a channel connecting the Parasites.

"Minoru, in my opinion, now is the time."

Raymond's phrase was unsaid.

"For what?"

Although Minoru asked, he somehow understood what Raymond wanted to say.

"If Tatsuya gets here, this time you won't be able to escape. You're not going to fight him again, are you? So now is your chance. Now only Lieutenant Spica is left at this base."

Raymond was telling the truth.

On this surface base - an artificial island - he can't hide. No matter where he hides, he cannot escape from Tatsuya's "sight". Both Parade and Kimon Tonko have their limitations, and won't be particularly useful in this situation. If he was going to continue to run away, there was no choice but to go to sea.

"...It's useless."

But Minoru shook his head helplessly.

"Minami-san can't move now."

Minami is still recovering from the damage caused by the excessive use of magic that occurred the other day. The fact that she spends most of the day in a dream is the protective function of the body, which calms the violence of the, magic calculation area

by suppressing conscious activity and, thereby, reducing the stimulation of the subconscious region. If any irritating factor begins to act on it from outside, then consciousness will forcefully wake up, which is highly likely to serve as a trigger for overheating the magic calculation area.

"So you're the only who need to escape, Minoru. As long as you stay alive, you will always have a chance to get your girlfriend back."

Minoru blinked his eyes in surprise.

Raymond's behavior this time wasn't as cynical as usual when he looked at everything around him as an interesting show. It seemed to Minoru that for some reason, Raymond was sincerely worried about him and Minami.

"No... after all, it's impossible."

But Minoru didn't agree with Raymond's proposal.

He felt that if he parted with Minami now, he would never be able to even get close to her again. Both Tatsuya and Miyuki are not such irrational opponents. They will no longer give him a chance to take advantage of.

And above all, he absolutely didn't want to part with Minami.

But not because he wanted to cure her. And not because he wanted to take responsibility for the deterioration of her condition. In truth, he was simply attached to her.

"Minoru..."

Raymond no longer said anything that could pass as appeals to escape. Whether he changed himself, or it was a temporary whim, but it seems that he sincerely worried about Minoru.

"...Good. So I'll go with you."

"What!? No, that won't do!"

Raymond's words shocked Minoru.

"Raymond. By the way, it is you yourself who have to run! If Tatsuya-san catches you,

then the Dion Project will be considered a Parasite conspiracy!"

There was no direct connection between the Parasites and the Dion Project. However, Tatsuya would easily be able to distort the truth in order to destroy the conspiracies directed against him. Minoru felt a certain sense of fear from Tatsuya, confirming that he was able to do something like that.

"If something like this happens, then it will be a problem for not only you and your father. This could escalate into a question of confidence in America, which, in turn, will disrupt the world order!"

Minoru has always been driven by personal feelings. For this reason, he didn't regret that he had gone astray... that he had ceased to be a man. But he didn't want to create problems for society.

"Well, good. That will be interesting too."

Raymond had an innocent smile on his face. Such a face meant that he perfectly understood what he had said to Minoru.

"Raymond!"

"I'm not a human being either. I don't care what will happen to the human world. The truth is that the Dion project was actually a conspiracy at the national level. So, if America is subjected to international criticism, then they're right."

"But..."

"Minoru."

After breaking an objection to Minoru, Raymond grinned.

"Instead of observing the affairs of states and the world as a whole, I would rather like to see what future awaits you."

Minoru's eyes widened when he heard these unexpected words from Raymond.

"You two... how could I put it better... so romantic. You want to watch more than any pair of films. In truth, I'm even envious."

"..."

“So I want to know how your story ends. And I want this story to have a happy ending.”

Raymond smiled shyly.

“Minoru, in order to eventually arrive at a happy ending, you must escape now.”

“Raymond...”

Raymond, who organized the second coming of the Parasites into this world by skillfully manipulating false information.

And Minoru, casting aside his humanity, killing his beloved grandfather, and causing a lot of chaos.

Despite such a backstory from these two, an atmosphere of kindness and understanding has now developed between them.

... However, in this world there is not only kindness.

“That would be problematic.”

Minoru and Raymond spun around at that voice and the sound of a door swinging open.

They were so carried away with their conversation that their attention didn't notice anything but themselves.

Therefore, they had the imprudence not to notice the approach of their fellow parasite.

They turned to see Zoe Spica holding up the index finger of her right hand.

Blood spurted.

“Minoru!”

The “Molecular Divider Javelin” pierced Minoru’s chest at the very moment the door opened.

“The wound is non-fatal.”

“What are you...!?”

Spica looked coldly at Raymond, who had faltered.

“Be silent.”

“...!”

“We must not allow damage to the States. You three should leave this place immediately.”

“Why...?”

Minoru asked in a pained voice, holding onto his chest and bending over.

“Kudou Minoru. Raymond Clark. If the Japanese get evidence that our army has harbored you – who are Parasites, then this will become an unfavorable diplomatic compromising evidence against the States.”

“... Minami-san still needs a break. And this happened to her because of your battle.”

“If you had not come here, this wouldn't have happened at all.”

Spica rejected Minoru's protest. Then she signaled to the soldiers waiting behind her.

Four soldiers burst into the room of the medical room. They aimed their weapons at Minoru, Raymond, and Minami.

“We won't kill you if you obediently follow us.”

“... We will leave, but we will do it ourselves.”

Minoru straightened up. His voice was no longer painful, and there was no trace of a wound on his chest when he removed his hand.

“You...!?”

Noticing the disappearance of the wound, Spica in a hurry tried to activate magic.

However, she was unable to do anything.

She couldn't even scream.

Spica's body burst into flames.

The soldier's bodies bursting into the room also ignited.

The magic "Jintai Hakka" from the release system.

It neutralizes the magical protection of the human body, forcibly extracts electrons from the molecules of the cells of the body, and releases them from the body. It is called "Jintai Hakka," because an electric discharge passing through the skin looks like a phenomenon of spontaneous combustion of the human body. However, in fact, this is terrible magic, destroying cells at the molecular level, depriving them of the electrons used in inter-molecular bonds.

Minoru's magic activation speed was higher than Spica's activation speed and the speed at which well-trained soldiers would pull the trigger.

The fire didn't spread throughout the room. He didn't hurt either Minami's bed or Minami herself.

Minoru skillfully controlled the electrical discharge created by his "Jintai Hakka."

Spica and four soldiers disappeared from this world in just a few moments.

From the "ashes" arouse the "parasite." The true body of the "parasite" that lived in Spica.

Minoru easily caught it and placed it inside himself.

"... Raymond."

Minoru spoke to Raymond in a emotionless voice.

"Y-yes?"

"Apparently, I too can no longer stay here. Let's run away together."

"...Good."

Raymond answered with such a face, as if he had just comprehended what had happened.

"Can you wait a bit in the hallway?"

"...Okay."

Said Raymond, and left the room.

Closing the door, Raymond turned anxiously, and before the door closed, he managed to see Minoru, with a sad face standing next to Minami's bed.

This evening, at Pearl & Hermes Base, there were many fiery flashes that resembled fireworks.

The number of these outbreaks was equal to the number of human lives.

Minoru and Raymond left the Pearl & Hermes base on the Coral transport ship, fearfully subjugating the survivors from the base.

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Major Antares and First Lieutenant Sargas, who went to sea on the Chevalier destroyer, learned about the death of First Lieutenant Spica in almost real time.

"Commander..."

"Useless. Yes and pointless."

Antares answered the unsaid question of Sargas.

Sargas didn't argue with this decision. He himself knew that it was useless and pointless, and therefore didn't say the rest of the phrase "let's go back?".

The attacker on Midway also could not be ignored. And it wasn't just the honor of the army at stake. The combat magician, who alone stormed Midway by storm, even by his already demonstrated abilities, can be considered a threat that must be dealt with immediately. And if we assume that this is the same Strategic-Class Magician that caused "Scorched Halloween," then he should be dealt with all the more. In such a situation, their language didn't turn to say that you need to cancel the operation and return to the Pearl & Hermes base.

Plus, First Lieutenant Spica is already dead. The true body that dwelt in her was supposed to escape and itself would soon follow them. That is how the parasites nature. And they can't do anything now.

... If they knew that Spica wasn't the only victim, then they would immediately ask the

captain to turn around and move back. They would undoubtedly have tried to stop the catastrophe that had struck Pearl & Hermes Base.

However, neither Antares nor Sargas had the same "vision" as Tatsuya or Minoru. Perhaps they would have noticed the death-spreading magic of Minoru if they concentrated their magical perceptions in the direction behind them, but all their attention was directed west - towards Midway.

But disaster awaited them not only from behind.

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About 8 minutes after re-deploying from the Virginia.

Tatsuya encountered the enemy about 100 kilometers west of the Pearl and Hermes Atoll.

Fighters merging with darkness flew by. If these were ordinary aircraft, then the distance over which they flew would be considered abnormal approach.

They were not displayed on the air-car radar. It looks like the adversary also had an excellent stealth system.

Masking the electromagnetic waves of the air-car also worked with visible light, but it didn't provide perfect transparency. From the point of view of an outside observer, the car was visible as flying in a kind of smokescreen, depending on the weather and light. For example, in the current clear night sky it should have been seen as a kind of foggy cloud of ultramarine color. If the pilots were sufficiently big-eyed, then with such an approach, they should have noticed something.

Tatsuya turned on a radio transmitter he borrowed from the Virginia. It showed the frequencies used by the USNA Navy. Tatsuya found the frequency at which the pilots spoke to each other.

"UFO?"

From the speaker phrases with the word "UFO" were heard. Tatsuya inclined his head mentally, but then realized that it was a question of the air-car driven by him. Shrouded in fog and not emitting heat waves (more precisely, it emitted infrared rays, but their

frequency coincided with the frequency of the atmospheric air temperature), the air-car could really be called a UFO - an Unidentified Flying Object.

However, this wasn't the case when one could happily admire. If the aircraft of the American army associated the car with the expression "UFO", then this meant only one thing - it was discovered.

On the dashboard monitor, several windows with different data were displayed. One of these windows displayed the results of the reconciliation of fighters.

"F-141 Horned Owl?"

Although in terms of generalized characteristics they are inferior to the "Crowned Hawk" [Crowned Hawk Eagle], which is currently the main combat force of the Air Force of America, but as devices that combine stealth and good characteristics for operation at low speeds, they were preferred as airborne fighters on aircraft carriers .

"In that case, with a high probability there is an aircraft carrier nearby."

In his heart, he wanted to ignore the aircraft carrier and just save Minami. But considering the difference in speed between the air-car and fighter jets, he decided that he needed to get rid of this interference now. The air-car was as maneuverable as the fighter jets, but it could not accelerate above the speed of sound. Therefore, it is easy to catch up to when driving in a straight line.

"I wouldn't like to cause serious damage to the USNA army, but..."

Completely disregarding the likelihood that he could be shot down, Tatsuya turned on the onboard CAD, which is completely separate from the flight device.

He completed the capture of the target with the help of his "sight". Two "Horned Owls" approached the air-car from different directions, as if trying to "take him in their pincers."

Tatsuya abruptly steered the car down vertically.

The after image of the air-car was pierced by machine gun fire.

Tatsuya became a little easier after the fact that the opponents shot at him first.... But what he was going to do, didn't change.

In addition to the two planes flying over him now, he “saw” eight more “Horned Owls” approaching in pairs from four different sides. He, in principle, could bring them all down at the same time, but he preferred to do it consistently.

Tatsuya activated Mist Dispersion on two Owls.

The fighters (excluding the pilot and the ejection seat) turned to dust and disappeared, becoming a misty cloud.

Tatsuya feared that the ejection mechanism might not work properly and the parachutes wouldn't open, however, it seemed that his fears were in vain. He saw the pilots smoothly descend into the night sea by parachute. And at the current time of the year in this latitude, one didn't fear for their lives.

One of the recently approached “Horned Owls” launched a rocket at the air-car. The air-car wasn't supposed to be detected either by thermal, by electric, or by magnetic trails.

“Radio-controlled missile? Reckless behavior when their comrades are down in the sea,” thought Tatsuya.

He simultaneously laid out this rocket and all the remaining eight fighters.

From the radio came the devil-cursing screams. Listening to the selective swearing of downed pilots, Tatsuya set off toward the Pearl and Hermes Atoll in search of the aircraft carrier and the accompanying warships.

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Major Antares and First Lieutenant Sargas were summoned to the combat information post of the destroyer.

“It seems like... an aircraft driven by the magic of flight.”

Sargas answered in a rather confident tone to the question of the captain, the commander of the operation, not from the bridge, but from this BEEP. The monitor just finished playing a short video sent from one of the Shangri-La fighters.

“Lieutenant. Is something like that already applied in practice?”

“As far as I know, this is not yet applied by our army in practice.”

"What do you think, Major Antares?"

The captain looked from Sargas to Antares.

"I have nothing to add, captain."

"In that case, is this UFO from Japan?"

"I think so."

The magic of flight was invented by the Japanese company FLT. In this case, it is quite reasonable to consider that this unidentified aircraft using magic of flight is a kind of Japanese experimental prototype.

"But why would the Japanese army attack a USNA owned base...?"

"The enemy is not necessarily related to the Japanese army."

Antares objected, in response to the mutter of the captain.

"The inventor of flight magic is Taurus Silver... Shiba Tatsuya. He is one of the central figures of the same "Yotsuba." I think, with a high probability, this may be the apparatus of the original development of the Yotsuba."

"All sent F-141's have stopped responding."

In the oppressive silence that followed, the voice of the AI assistant was heard, responsible for observing the sky.

"The radars still don't record the enemy aircraft's position."

"Increase the sensitivity of observation in the visible light range!"

The captain in an irritated voice gave the order to the AI.

All sensors were already trying to detect UFOs with maximum sensitivity. The captain's order meant exceeding the maximum permissible load on the observation equipment in the visible light range. But the warning didn't come back, like "there is a risk of sensors burning." Still, the military AI was trained to obey orders.

"... UFO detected. Distance 2 nautical miles."

“What!?”

Distance 2 nautical miles. Approximately 3.7 kilometers. Immediately after the captain's scream, the piercing wail of a siren sounded.

The screen displays the damage status. All guns located from the bow to the center of the ship were destroyed. The automatic guns, anti-aircraft laser guns, and anti-aircraft/anti-submarine rocket launchers.

“Display the image from the forward deck!”

The cameras didn't seem to be affected, as a large window appeared on the main screen with a view from the center towards the bow of the ship.

There was no visible fire engulfing the guns and launchers.

The automatic and laser guns simply disappeared without a trace, and the rocket launchers disappeared as if they were uprooted.

“What is it...”

As if interrupting the captain, the siren sounded again.

“The ship has completely lost its ability to engage in air defense.”

The voice of the onboard AI responsible for counting the damage sounded out.

A report on the screen reported that all stationary guns mounted on the deck and sides of the ship were lost.

“Impossible... In an instant, to completely neutralize the whole ship...!?”

At the moment, they only have torpedoes left for armament. So the shout of the captain wasn't an exaggeration.

As if responding to his cry, the image of the deck disappeared from the screen.

“What happened!?”

“Signs of destruction of optical surveillance equipment are recorded.”

The onboard AI said in an unemotional voice.

The AI is just a program. The emotions of its voice are programmed so as not to undermine the psychological state of the crew. But in this situation, such a calm tone, on the contrary, only got on the nerves of the captain.

“Someone! Get on deck and report on the situation!”

Such an order made it clear that the captain was mad.

“Captain, we can go.”

Antares responded to the order.

“... May I ask you this?”

The captain asked Antares in a slightly calmed tone.

“Yes, sir.”

Antares and Sargas saluted the captain with a gesture accepted from the sailors.

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The first ship Tatsuya discovered was the Chevalier destroyer. At first he wanted to flood it with one attack.

But this ship is most likely followed by an aircraft carrier and its escort ships. If you spend time on each of them, then the likelihood that Minami will be taken away again will only increase.

Minami's information was still marked with a marker, so there was no fear of losing sight of it, even if they escaped again. However, through the information dimension, Tatsuya already knew that Minami's health condition had worsened. True, recently, when he checked her condition before re-departing from Virginia, it suddenly for some reason improved. But vigilance still shouldn't be relaxed. Because the condition can worsen if she is dragged along by force. It was necessary to hurry.

However, Tatsuya changed his plans. Instead of sinking the ship, he neutralized all the ways in which this ship could harm his air-car.

He landed the air-car on a deck which there were no guns or launchers, and left it.

Two figures approached Tatsuya standing under the night sky.

"I was waiting for you, Parasites."

The reason Tatsuya changed his plans was the Parasites "seen" by him on this destroyer. If he sank the destroyer, then their discovery would take extra time. And that was undesirable.

Tatsuya's words made his purpose clear - the destruction of the Parasites.

Antares suddenly and without warning released magic.

When a person becomes a Parasite, then he has a decrease in the variety of magic used, but this is offset by a sharp jump in the speed of activation of the magic that he has left.

The "Nyx" of Antares was activated earlier than Tatsuya's counter-magic, covering him with a thick layer of mental interference that impedes magical perception.

However, the next moment...

The darkness of Nyx silently shattered into pieces.

"...How!?"

Antares's voice complained about the absurdity of what was happening.

When magical perception is blocked, it is impossible to "see" neither the sequence of activation, nor the sequence of magic. If you cannot "discover" the magic that you need to resist, then you cannot aim with counter-magic.

"Nyx. Pretty problematic magic."

Tatsuya didn't answer Antares's question. But mentally, he acknowledged that Antares's magic was quite dangerous.

"Even if I don't see the target visually, then I can "decompose" it, if I know what I'm dealing with."

The activated Nyx really interfered with the formation of visual images. But the processes that were carried out before the activation of Nyx could be "seen." Tatsuya can get current "information" from "information" seen in the past. And he can

decompose this information with "Gram Dispersion".

If you try to seal Tatsuya's powers with Nyx, you shouldn't even let him suspect the activation of magic. In other words, "Nyx" will work on Tatsuya only if it will be a complete surprise.

The destruction of Antares's magic served as this incentive, or so it was planned, but Sargas just now launched a magical attack at Tatsuya.

And again, Sargas' magic attacked Tatsuya's mind faster than he could neutralize it.

It was a pack of wolves that looked like shadows, with no details. More precisely, these were not wolves, but coyotes.

Countless all-black coyotes turned their fangs to Tatsuya's heart.

It was the magic "Ikel," classified as the mental interference magic in which Sargas was strong.

In Greek mythology, the children of the night goddess Nyx were called "Oneiroi," the deities that control dreams. The name of this magic is "Ikel" - it was another (real) name of the so-called "Phobetor", one of such deities, which takes the images of animals in dreams. This magic damages the mind of the enemy with the help of animal illusions. An illusion in which nightmare fangs bite the victim's heart leads to a weakening of the opponent's mind.

But unfortunately for Sargas, Ikel was waiting for the same end as Nyx.

In terms of speed of completion of magic, Sargas was ahead of Tatsuya. But before Sargas' Ikel's effects could work, this magic was neutralized by Tatsuya's "Gram Dispersion" erasure.

Tatsuya pulled "Trident" out of his holster with his right hand.

Antares and Sargas, not giving up, continued to try to attack Tatsuya with magic of mental interference, but Tatsuya neutralized each of these attacks by decomposing their magic sequences.

Tatsuya continued to activate "Gram Dispersion" using the built-in CAD in his combat suit.

"It's impossible!"

"How!?"

There were lamentations and anger in the voices of the Parasites. What was happening caused a mess in their heads, and as a result a small gap formed in their ongoing magical attacks.

Tatsuya didn't miss this moment, and pulled the trigger of "Trident."

""Mist dispersion," activation."

The bodies of Antares and Sargas trembled and began to blur.

The sea breeze picked up the remnants of their bodies and scattered them across the sky and the surface of the sea.

All that remains of them is two "Parasites."

The true bodies of the "demons" that turn people into Parasites.

"Recognition of the structure supporting pushion information bodies."

The true body of the Parasite is a Pushion informational body wrapped in a psionic cocoon. Or is it better to call jelly not a cocoon?

The psionic mass itself, which protects the "core" (the Pushion informational body), is formless, and besides it there is another psionic informational body - a kind of foundational support that ensures the existence of the Pushionic informational body in this world.

This psionic informational body, which has become a supporting pillar, must first be found among all this formless mass of psions.

Having set the search condition as the "Pushion informational body existing in this world" as a search condition, Tatsuya indirectly considered the desired structure.

"The magic of decomposition of the structure supporting Psionic informational bodies, "Astral Dispersion," activation."

The destruction of the support necessary for the existence in this world the pushion information body - the Parasite.

Having lost the "foundation of existence", the Pushion informational bodies leave this world.

Expelled from this world.

Two Parasites disappeared, leaving for the "other world."

◊ ◊ ◊

After destroying the Parasites, Tatsuya no longer took any action against the destroyer, Chevalier.

Not wanting to waste extra time, he lost all interest in them.

Climbing into the air-car, he took off from the deck of the Chevalier.

On the way, he found an aircraft carrier and two escort ships, but he was going to ignore them.

But unfortunately, the enemy wasn't going to let him through just like that.

Mobile rocket launchers on the decks of the escort destroyers aimed at the air-car. The direction of their aiming was slightly shifted, as the radars were useless. Short-range laser guns were not used, probably for the same reason.

If you just fly by at full speed, you can avoid the attacks from the destroyers. Although it could not accelerate above the speed of sound, aiming in the visible light range at a high-speed flying object would still be extremely problematic.

However, new fighter aircrafts were preparing to take off from the aircraft carrier. This time, there was obviously more than the last ten. If this turns into an air battle again, then we can safely say that the probability of this fight coming to an end in a short time is extremely small.

Performing various erratic (left, right, up, down) maneuvers, Tatsuya directed his "sight" at the escort destroyer, which was going in front of the aircraft carrier. These movements, by the way, really created the impression that this is a real "alien ship," which is usually meant when they say "UFO."

"The name of the ship is Mila Davis."

"No parasites on board detected."

"ABC weapons* on board not found."

[Special abbreviation for weapons that fall under all kinds of prohibitions. A (atomic), B (biological), C (chemical).]

To begin with, he was convinced that sinking it wouldn't cause any problems.

"The goal is Mila Davis."

The target was the entire ship called Mila Davis. Instead of recognizing the destroyer as a set of separate parts, he recognized the entire ship as a whole, using the name of the ship as a key.

"Obtaining information on the materials forming "Mila Davis."

He didn't read the structure of the object associated with this name, but information about its materials, or rather information about the chemical elements that form these materials.

""Mist Dispersion"- activation."

Tatsuya activated "Mist Dispersion," aiming only at the general concept of the Mila Davis ship, that is, at the ship's hull, its internal equipment, and the fuel it uses.

The magic that breaks down substances at the level of chemical elements has been activated.

The shape of the destroyer blurred and swam.

And its majestic image disappeared, turning into dust and smoke.

Only crew members who fell into the sea remained.

Having fallen into the sea with strong splashes, they hastily surfaced one by one. There was no longer any difference in rank between them. And the senior and junior officers, and the captain, and sailors - all in desperation looked around with faces expressing a complete incomprehension on what had happened.

Tatsuya turned on the transmitter, taken from the Virginia nuclear submarine carrier.

“This is the UFO pilot.”

Tatsuya involuntarily grinned at such a “title.” However, these were serious negotiations. If the enemy thinks he’s fooling them, then he won’t be able to turn everything as smoothly as he wanted.

“We do not wish to continue military operations.”

Having made the most serious voice, Tatsuya said into the microphone of the transmitter.

“This is the USNA Navy aircraft carrier, “Shangri-La.””

They answered him. Although it was known in advance that this transmitter could provide communication, he was relieved when it was actually confirmed in practice. Even Tatsuya was embarrassed by the realization that his “solo performance” could go unanswered, unnoticed.

“UFO pilot. State your demands.”

“My aircraft is currently heading toward Pearl & Hermes Base. I am not going to cause damage to the base until I myself am attacked. My enemies are Parasites.”

“...So, what is next?”

This was probably a question from the captain of the aircraft carrier. Tatsuya decided that this man was apparently aware of the Parasites.

“Focus on saving your comrades who have fallen in the water. Pilots of aircrafts sent earlier are also now in the water. I repeat, for my part there is no longer any intention to attack. I promise not to interfere with the rescue operation.”

“Accepted.”

The captain of the aircraft carrier quickly agreed.

“Thank you for giving us the opportunity to focus on the rescue operation.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

“... If you destroy the Parasites, then I will only be glad. True, this is just my personal opinion...”

“... Was it worth saying now something like that?”

This communication channel has not been encrypted. Both the crew of the aircraft carrier and the crew of the second destroyer could easily hear this conversation.

“I don't care. The fleet won't bow to these non-human monsters.”

“I see.”

This captain, one way or another, turned out to be to Tatsuya's liking. If not for this situation, he would want to meet him face to face.

“Then, all the best.”

However, Tatsuya was now a terrorist who attacked the regular army. His voice was changed by the function built into the suit, as it was undesirable for anyone to hear his real voice.

“May God's blessing be with you.”

Tatsuya abruptly said goodbye in a slightly rude manner, and the captain answered him with words that made it difficult to understand whether he said this seriously, or with sarcasm.

◊ ◊ ◊

After avoiding a battle with the aircraft carrier, Tatsuya now secured for himself an unhindered path to the base of Pearl and Hermes.

As the Mitsuya family told him, he saw a semi-floating artificial island. Based on its shape and size, it could be concluded that a floating pontoon mega-platform, originally intended for a surface airport, was converted into this base.

“But how is this to be understood...?”

Circling in the sky above the base, Tatsuya bowed his head inquisitorily.

At first he thought that he hadn't been attacked from the base because he received a warning from the captain of the Shangri-La aircraft carrier. But when Tatsuya approached the base, a sense of the demeanor of what was happening began to arise

in him.

... There were no signs of people at the base.

Even after reaching normal viewing distance, he didn't find human figures.

"There is only one person at the base - Minami...?"

The search with "Elemental Sight" yielded a shocking result.

Of the people there was only one, Minami. There were no signs of parasites.

"Are they using some kind of advanced concealment magic...?"

Tatsuya suspected the existence of magic unknown to him, capable of completely hiding the target from his "Elemental Sight".

He thought that Minoru had created concealment magic that completely hid even traces of the use of magic, or that the Stars had a user of such magic.

However, his intuition denied this. Tatsuya could not explain what this opinion was based on, but he came to the conclusion that there was nobody using magic on this base except him. Apart from Minami, this base really was completely deserted.

"The captain of the aircraft carrier clearly didn't know that such an unusual situation was at this base."

Despite the fact that the conversation with him took place on the radio, one could find out about such an abnormal situation by a nervous or excited voice. But Tatsuya didn't feel anything like that in his voice.

"... Anyone would be baffled."

If you land and see for yourself, you may be able to understand what is happening there. Or happened there.

"And even if nothing is clear, then you can just pick up Minami and get out of there."

Tatsuya came to this decision when he was already making his third round around the base.

Landing at the Pearl & Hermes base, Tatsuya stepped out of the air-car.

Standing on the surface of the artificial island, he discovered traces of magic that he didn't notice from the air.

"About 30... no, 40 minutes ago?"

In dozens, not, probably, even in more than a hundred different places at this base were the remains of a raging powerful magic.

"These traces... there can be no mistake. This is Minoru's "Jintai Hakka" magic."

This residual "smell" of magic, drifting in the air of the base, didn't differ from the same "Jintai Hakka" of Minoru, with which he once attacked Tatsuya himself. This is deadly magic that destroys the human body at the molecular level by forcing the extraction of electrons from the cells that make up this body. The fact that this magic was used more than a hundred times meant that Minoru had committed the massacre of more than a hundred people.

"Minoru... what happened?"

He didn't think that the Parasite swallowed the mind of Minoru. But not because he "didn't want to believe it," but only because he praised Minoru for his strength. Including the power of his mind.

And given his obsession with Minami, it was very strange that he left her alone.

"Anyway... you need to get to Minami first."

When Tatsuya landed the air-car, he did it right near the building where the medical center was located. Of course, this wasn't an accident. He entered this deserted building to pick up Minami and take her back home.

Minami was found in a room on the third floor of this three-story building.

She wasn't in hospital clothes, but in a simple shirt with short sleeves and in trousers up to her ankles. Obviously, it was clothing intended for female soldiers of the USNA army.

"Minami."

Sitting on the bed and looking out the window, Minami got up and looked back at Tatsuya's voice.

"Tatsuya-sama..."

From Minami's confused face, it was clear that her consciousness was only half awake. When she saw Tatsuya, a smile and tears appeared on her face at the same time.

"I AM..."

A stream of tears flowed from her left eye.

"Minoru-sama left me."

"Did Minoru say anything?"

"No. This happened while I was sleeping..."

Minami's voice was becoming intermittent.

Tears accumulated in the right eye also "broke through the dam" and ran down the stream.

Minoru obviously had a reason. And the reason is irresistible and compelling.

There may have been some major altercation between Minoru and the USNA army. The traces of the massacre at this base may be the result of a serious conflict between Minoru and the USNA army.

But Tatsuya didn't voice this assumption.

And he didn't ask whether she wanted to follow Minoru.

"Minami, come back."

He told Minami just that.

"Tatsuya-sama...!"

Minami buried her head in Tatsuya's chest.

Clinging to him, she sobbed like a child.

Tatsuya gently stroked Minami's head and patted her on the back, as if soothing his youngest sister. It was these movements that he applied to Miyuki when they were still children.

"Ready?"

Tatsuya asked, a sidelong glance at Minami, who was hunched down in the front passenger seat.

"Yes."

Minami answered, securely fastened with a four-point seat belt. Her eyes were still downcast, and her cheeks were still reddish. It seemed that she was very ashamed of the fact that she was sobbing, clinging to Tatsuya.... In addition to her cheeks, her forehead was also slightly red, but for another reason - she knocked it on the hard breastplate of Tatsuya's Freed Suit.

Tatsuya directed his sight forward and poured his psions into the flying device for the air-car.

"Come back. In our common home."

"...Yes."

This time, Minami nodded confidently in response to Tatsuya's words.

The air-car smoothly came off the surface.

Gradually increasing speed, he moved away from the base.

Minami looked around and looked at Pearl & Hermes Base from the passenger seat window.

And when she turned forward again, a previously noticeable shade of suffering completely disappeared from her eyes.

◊ ◊ ◊

Aiming directly at Miyakijima, Tatsuya headed a little south from the route he arrived here.

Flying past the Virginia, he told them on the radio that he intended to fly straight home on his own.

Captain Curtis responded by congratulating him on the successful completion of the mission, and Shibata Katsushige said only one word: "Accepted."

About three hours have passed since the departure from the Pearl & Hermes base.

"Tatsuya-sama, um... is everything all right?"

Minami suddenly spoke to Tatsuya in an excited voice.

Tatsuya quickly realized the meaning of this question: "Is it normal to use magic continuously for so long?"

"Even after 10 hours there will be no problems. By the way, we will arrive in four hours."

Tatsuya honestly answered her. Minami was amazed rather than delighted by this answer.

"Minami, how are you feeling? Does it hurt anywhere?"

In response, Tatsuya asked about Minami's well-being.

"No, everything is okay. Sorry for disturbing you."

"But it looks like you were in the Pearl & Hermes base hospital...?"

He didn't tell Minami that he had been following her "information" for a long time. Tatsuya directly "sees" the information itself, and these are not images or sounds. In other words, he didn't "spy" on her like a voyeur, however, if Minami finds out about this, she will certainly be ashamed, regardless of any explanation. At least, that was the logic that prompted him.

So Tatsuya pretended not to know that Minami was in critical condition 5 days ago.

"...Yes. But now everything is in order."

Minami probably dodged the answer because she wanted to hide the fact that she had fainted.

However, Minami's voice lacked confidence.

Tatsuya's "sight" confirmed that her condition was stable. At least, the overheating of the magic calculation area has definitely recovered.

"Did Minoru do something? But there are no signs of parasitization..."

He, of course, was glad to see Minami improve, but something was wrong here.

Moreover, this happened immediately after separating with Minoru, so that cause-and-effect relationship was clearly traceable.

"I see. That's good."

Out loud, Tatsuya answered only that.

◊ ◊ ◊

NASA's reconnaissance satellites detected a haze-like shadow heading west across the Pacific Ocean.

At first, the NASA space forces personnel controlling the reconnaissance satellites thought that this shadow was just noise in the image from the surveillance camera. However, the movement of this object, flying from the Pearl and Hermes atoll in the direction of Japan, was clearly artificial, so it was considered an aircraft with an advanced stealth system, and this was reported to the General Staff in the form of information requiring urgent action.

An aircraft that could not be identified by reconnaissance satellites posed a serious threat to national security. There was nothing strange in the fact that the General Staff issued a decree to order the submarine carrier hiding in Japanese territorial waters to capture or bring down this aircraft.

However, at the stage when this decision had to be transferred to the headquarters of the Navy, there was a certain "delay." Departing from the principles of civilian control, the National Security Council didn't miss this decree because of the risk of a war with Japan, an allied state. As a result, this decision was returned to the General Staff.

The General Staff tried to defend its position, arguing that the goal would be missed if not to respond immediately. Their position was that the threat of national defense

should not be neglected.

Perhaps, from a military point of view, this was reasonable and correct. But in the end, they could not convince the politicians. The tragedy that happened on Midway Island and the Pearl & Hermes base has not yet been reported to the General Staff. Perhaps for this reason, they didn't have enough materials to convince others to agree with them.

No one in the entire federal army or the Department of Defense knew that Senator Wyatt Curtis was behind this interference.

◊ ◊ ◊

July 24, just after midnight.

Touching the Kii Peninsula slightly, the typhoon accelerated and at the moment headed east. This meant that it was heading straight to Miyakijima.

“Miyuki... are you going to go to bed?”

Lina asked Miyuki, who was standing by the window and looking out of the room in a residential building in the western part of the island.

Mayumi, Honoka and the rest stayed only for one night and returned yesterday to the main Japanese island. And only Miyuki with Lina remained on Miyakijima.

“No. According to the message from the main house, Onii-sama should be back soon.”

There was a beaming smile on Miyuki's face. It even seemed to Lina that Miyuki radiates joy not only with her face, but with her whole body.

“In such a storm?”

This “aura of happiness” seemed to cover Lina, as her voice read simply doubt, not amazement.

“Just because there is such a storm.”

“Ah... I got it, of course.”

Lina quickly realized what Miyuki meant.

"He will return, hiding in the typhoon clouds."

"Exactly."

Miyuki confirmed that Lina's guess is correct. By the way, Lina was able to stop saying "hurricane", but instead of "typhoon" [in Japanese] she said "typhoon". It seemed like it was incurable.

There was heavy rain outside. The main part of the typhoon has not yet reached here, however, the night sky was densely covered with rain clouds moving east. Infrared cameras on reconnaissance satellites and stratospheric platforms were useless. The air-car didn't emit any electromagnetic waves, except for visible light, so it wasn't possible to detect it.

And in this darkness, Miyuki saw a "light."

"Onii-sama!"

"Uh?"

Hearing Miyuki's scream, Lina narrowed her eyes doubtfully.

But she saw nothing but raindrops glistening from the light from the window.

Lina wanted to ask Miyuki: "Where?".

But before she could ask this, Miyuki turned around and headed for the exit.

"Hey! Wait, Miyuki!"

"Faster, Lina, keep up!"

Not listening to Lina's call to wait, Miyuki put on her shoes and left the room.

"Oh, okay!"

Lina was Miyuki's "acting bodyguard." She followed Miyuki, trying to maintain her composure.

Miyuki, of course, didn't run out in the rain.

She was waiting for Lina at the elevator.

Miyuki leaned the ID card against the reader and opened the panel, located just below the floor buttons.

Under it was hidden another button, labeled as "B".

Miyuki pressed the button without hesitation.

The elevator that smoothly went down brought them to a railed trailer, which looked a bit like a public transport electric booth.

Miyuki and Lina got into this four-seater car.

"Are we going to the airport?"

"Yes, please."

Miyuki answered Lina's question. Hearing the answer, Lina pressed one of the buttons on the dashboard.

This button was labeled "Airport".

Using this metro, designed exclusively for important people, they got right to the airport terminal building.

It was already after midnight, but unlike ordinary civilian airports, the staff of this airport still worked.

Miyuki thought it was natural that everyone was waiting for Tatsuya to return.

"Miyuki-sama. Welcome."

"Thanks for your work."

Answering a courteously bowed employee, Miyuki headed for the door leading to the runway.

Lina followed her.

The double entry doors swung open inward.

“We have returned.”

“Welcome back, Onii-sama.”

Miyuki greeted Tatsuya with a very low bow, who was holding his helmet from the Freed suit under his arm.

Lina's eyes were not directed to this ceremony, which she had already seen several times, but to the girl standing behind Tatsuya.

Lina fled to Japan after Minami was hospitalized.

And when she came to Japan last winter, Minami wasn't yet assigned to Miyuki.

So this was their first meeting.

First, Lina wanted to ask Tatsuya to introduce them.

But when she saw how Minami looked at Miyuki, Lina decided to keep silent.

Tatsuya turned to Minami.

Minami hesitantly took a step forward.

“Welcome back, Minami-chan.”

Miyuki was the first to speak.

“Miyuki-sama, I...”

“I'm not going to demand an apology. Understood, Minami-chan.”

From these words, Minami trembled with her whole body.

“So... I still have no forgiveness?”

“From the very beginning, I had nothing to forgive you for. So what is customary to say when you return?”

“Can I... can I come back?”

“I already said that. Welcome back”.

Miyuki smiled and spread her arms to the sides.

"So be it, I'll repeat myself. Minami-chan, "Welcome back.""

Minami stopped trembling.

She ran briskly towards Miyuki, fell to her knees in front of her and grabbed her legs wrapped in a skirt.

"Excuse me! Miyuki-sama, please forgive me, please, ah...!"

Crying with tears streaming down her face, Minami continued in a teary voice and continued to apologize mixed with sobs.

"Oh... I already said that there is no need to apologize?"

Looking at Minami with a smile filled with love on her face, Miyuki gently stroked her head.

Although Miyuki smiled, tears glittered in her eyes.

(End of Rescue Arc)

(Edited by /u/blakegriffin89, light edits made by englishmuffins10)

Afterword

You reading the 30th volume of the series "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei". Did you like it?

In this 30th volume, several new supporting characters appeared at once. But don't worry. Even if you don't remember their names, it won't cause you any inconvenience with reading the series to the end. It will be enough for you to remember that Tatsuya and Miyuki get strong allies in America, and that the world famous Indo-Persian scientist suggested organizing the autonomy of the "race of magicians."

I think readers will remember that at the very end of the story of the Yokohama Invasion Arc, it was mentioned that "it was the day when the story of the glory and tribulations of the magician race begins". The terms "magian" and "magist", as well as the path to becoming a global autonomy of the "magian" are nothing more than the same "story of glory and tribulations" mentioned in the Yokohama Invasion Arc. After

23 volumes (excluding SS), a return to this hidden in words hint took place. And unfortunately, in "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" you won't be able to fully unfold this hidden storyline. After all, this issue won't have time to be resolved before Tatsuya and Miyuki graduate from high school.

And now we move on to some behind-the-scenes moments in writing this story.

It goes without saying that all the names of ships and aircrafts mentioned in this volume are "completely fictitious and have nothing to do with the real ones." "Shangri-La" is another matter (it's okay, it didn't sink, right?), But I just couldn't give it another name. I apologize if any historical parallels coincided.

Horned Owl is a member of the Strigidae family. Although, people with some English skills know that. Owls (striges) are also birds of prey, so they can be used for fighter names.

F-141 is a play on words from "one for one" (1x1). This phrase carries the meaning of "one plane - one goal of destruction." This means that it won't lose in a one-on-one air battle. I hope that in the real future there won't be such a model number.

The "Crowned Hawk" is short for "Crowned Hawk-Eagle." The "Crowned Hawk-Eagle," is the largest bird of prey in Africa. Please do not pay attention to the fact that the American army uses the name of a bird that is not indigenous to the American continent.

I think many expected (hoped?) That this time the confrontation between Tatsuya and Minoru would end. However, as I once mentioned, Minoru is the "final boss." "Final" means its storyline will hold out until the final volume. As to whether attention will be paid to him in the next volume, it is yet to be decided.

... But even though I called him the "final boss," many probably have the feeling that it wasn't Minoru who got in the way of Tatsuya, but, on the contrary, Tatsuya became an obstacle for Minoru.

Further more, I plan to take a break from the main series for one volume and release the third volume of the Shiba Tatsuya Assassination Plan. Afterwards, it is planned to release the next volume of the main series, which will be called "The Future".

And as a small preview of the Future Arc: the issue with Bezobrazov will finally be resolved in this arc. Besides Bezobrazov, other Strategic-Class Magicians will also act as enemies. The world will face the crisis of the Fourth World War and the First Magical

War, which will flare up around Japan. Do not miss it.

I'll meet you again in the next, 31st volume of "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei ."

(Satou Tsutomu)