

Prologue—

Reverberating with the violent sound of rain, a cold night
Within a forest where countless trees were crowded in, a luxurious mansion had been built.
Standing in a prudently maintained, beautiful grand garden was a Western building that had a Middle Ages-like architecture.
It was a night sky covered in dull weather, where not a single star could be seen.
The mansion, being exposed to the violent downpour from up there, was enveloped in flames.
I should have been able to make the whole family happy.
Standing at a spacious balcony made of marble, a man in a tuxedo muttered. While his wet fringe stuck onto his forehead and his desolated shoulders were soaked, he was just overlooking the blazing garden below.
Even while the building and flowers were exposed to the raindrops, they were violently blazing. From there, the smell of oil was mixed in and drifting over. That was probably of the flammable material that was released out from the enemys flamethrower. Even when the mans estate that was set on fire was almost burned up, it did not seem like that hand of fire loosened up.
Directly behind the man standing at the balcony, his wifeexposed to the rain like the manwas standing.
His wife in a dress lovingly pressed her forehead onto the mans desolated back, and opened her lips.
Its not like youre at fault.
His wife forgave the man and gently patted his back drown in despair.
Everything waswith no other way of putting it a disaster.
Burdened with the important destiny of the life-and-death of his family, the man worked recklessly hard. And the result he gotthe thing he madeturned out driving his family to ruins like this.
His good-will of his greatest intention turned out to be the worst kind of ill-will.
While bearing that mortification, the mans eyes distorted and he said.
Did our daughter manage to escape successfully?
Its alright.
The wife desolately smiled and muttered behind the man.
Our companion Crowney will surely get that girl away successfully. We just have to buy some time here like this for that girls sake.
We no longer have anything we can do for that girl other than that, do we What useless adults, we are.
We probably were not able to be good parents, were we?
I couldnt even do anything father-like. I feel that Ive done things that Im sorry for to that girl.
The two cuddling together expressed a sad smile together. They were thinking about the days they spent loving and accompanying each other till this moment, and those blissful memories made a smile appear on their faces.
When the two had nothing left to say, the world was soon engulfed in the sound of rain.
Then, the wall very near to them was destroyed, and a large silhouette flew out from inside.
The crimson flames blazing at the garden illuminated its huge body in the cold rainy night.
Its height was 3 meter. That silhouette was a praying mantis possessing a body of steel.
At the same time it broke through the concrete wall from inside the building and flew onto the balcony, it probably discovered the two of them. It thrust out its sharp giant sickles, and entered into a battle stance.
A monster-metal intelligent being-, huh?
While looking up at the steel praying mantis, the man concluded without an expression.
From the hole in the wall that that praying mantis broke through, a human figure walked out a little later.
-A scientific technique advanced enough is indistinguishable from magic.-
The human figure gave off the voice of a woman and appeared.
Walking out to the balcony, that human figure was also, like the praying mantis, illuminated by the flames.
The human figure was covered by thick metal armor all over her body. She had bulky gauntlets and shoulder guards. Pale-colored guards like armors of Western knights were put onto her limbs. There wasnt even a tiny part where her skin was exposed, and that figure covered in armor almost could be seen as a machine taking on the appearance of a human.
In that right hand of hersshe was carrying a giant sickle like the one carried by a Grim Reaper.
The women covered in armor continued her speech.
-Certainly, thats one of the Clarks 3 laws. This metal armor that your family made might certainly be suitable to be called magic. For our idea to be enhanced to this extent it is really an amazing technological power.-
Listening to the armored womans words, the wife said with a menacing look.
Our family had accomplished our task. You promised if we succeeded in making that power, our family would be able to return to your community. And yet, why are you giving us this treatment?...
The armored woman shrugged her shoulders.
-I recognize your familys achievements. However, its unfortunate, but we are unable to accept you as our compatriots again. Thats the absolute blood law. It is impossible to welcome you, who have impure blood.-
The wife couldnt help gritting her teeth at the calm attitude of the woman saying that.

You didnt plan on keep your promise from the start, did you what cruel humans!

-We are no longer humans. Were Aion a long time ago.-

While lightly warding off the glaring gaze from the front, the armored woman sighed.

-On top of being unable to accept you as Pleroma, we probably have no choice but to let you continue staying on this land. However, the circulation of your technological power amongst humans was deemed as dangerous. In that case, everything was that we had no choice your family would have to perish.-

How selfish!

-Thats true.-

On top of admitting that honestly, the armored woman continued.

-Your familys research data had all been seized by us. We had obtained everything we need. Therefore, we had already killed all the chamberlains, staffs and people we used that were in underground research establishment. Well be taking over after that. Thanks to your research, were able to undertake on more efficient tactics on the extinction of the human species. At the least, well hand down a lengthy story of your familys achievementsas the ones who made the human world end.-

At the same time as the womans words ended, the praying mantis monster, which was quiet till now, started to move. It was a timing almost like it was waiting for the woman to finish her words.

Youre controlling the monster with 'Blood Hack', arent you?

The man muttered with a loathsome look.

-Thats right. For beings with recessive heredity like you, its a power you dont possess, right?-

During the time that the armored woman was speaking, the steel praying mantis had hop to the man and wife.

The praying mantis standing right in front of their eyes raised its giant sickle-shaped arm high up.

While looking at that sickle of despair, the two resigned to their deaths.

That sharp arm would go through their cranium like their brain, and should easily snatch away their lives.

Without looking at the attack that would terminate their lives, the two just calmly hugged together.

In the end, it looks like I couldnt bring your happiness.

Thats not true.

Denying the mans words, the wife quietly shed tears.

If I could be born again, I would choose you no matter what. I want to be your wife, and to grow old together with you. Thinking like thatIve always had happy days even up to today.

Embracing his teary wife, the man too shed a trickle of tears.

Thank you.

The raised sickle of despair swung downwards.

I wanted to at least see that girl all grown up for even just a day.

Please live strongly happily

The sharp sickle went through their flesh and even thrust in deeply into the marble floor.

Gushing blood soiled the top of the marble and flowed away together with the rainwater.

Looking down at the death two, the armored woman leaked a small sigh.

-Theres still the daughter, huh? Geez, searching for her is probably going to take some time.-

The violent rain grew even stronger.

Burdened with death on her shoulders, that woman began to walk with the appearance of an apathetic cold armor.

In that destination of hers, she was awaiting the unimaginable future of atrocities.

Sector 1 Bose Nova 2015–

Exiting from a Tokyo tollgate was a sightseeing bus with a party of people, as it entered the Tokyo Expressway.

The scenery of the clear sky under the expressway covered their windows.

As they looked up at the tall buildings that pointed up towards the sky on both sides of the road, the students let out gasps of admiration.

Left, right, all I see are large buildings!

So this is Tokyo!

The students clamored in unison, and the inside of the tourist bus gradually bustled with activity.

Skyscrapers, enormous advertising billboards and more. The complex dimensional network of roads flowed through the window.

For these traveling students belonging to a high school in a provincial town, the unfamiliar sights of Kanto was thoroughly exhilarating.

But amongst those in the class excited by the outside scenery was also a group of boys absorbed in a game of cards. And within the group of boys hard at work on old maid, one boy muttered.

..All in all, Id say Nanagi is a lucky boy.

Across from the boy who spoke, left puzzled as to what kind of card he drew Nanagi Ryouga was staring fixedly at the card with an uneasy expression. He finally pulled out the selected card, and having seen its design, Nanagi was left speechless.

It was a joker.

And he, who had drawn the winning old maid, was the so called lucky boy.

Why am I the lucky boy?

The circle of school friends playing old maid pointed out to the clueless Nanagi in what may have been their vexed feelings.

No kidding! Todays social science field trip! That girl that is a transfer student is in your group!

Transfer student you mean Kisaragi?

Thats right! Its obvious Im talking about that young, girlish, attractive transfer student!

As he gave his angry classmate an incredulous look, he listened to another complaint.

I never heard that after the groups had been decided, such a cute girl would suddenly make her appearance! No matter what you think, this is on the performer level! Even with all the girls in our school, shes the top rank!

And whats more, she joined the group short exactly one person, Nanagis group. How fearsome your good fortune that is!

You keep saying Nanagi is a lucky boy. What the hell is this lucky boy you keep calling me?

Having said so, Nanagi gave a sideways glance at the schoolgirl sitting a few seats in front.

In the front of the bus elegantly resting her chins against the window, was the mentioned transfer student Kisaragi Mana.

Long, black hair and a slender body with porcelain white skin.

It was a hurriedly put on uniform, but on Kisaragi, it seemed fashionably worn.

Hanging below her chest was a thin chain necklace, with an embedded cross.

And together with the accessory, a graceful scent and cleansing atmosphere wafted, from which rumors spread of how she was originally from a religious school.

Certainly, in Nanagis eyes she was a fairly beautiful woman.

It couldnt be helped that his classmates were fascinated by her cleanly beauty.

But isnt that girl a little cold?

She had introduced herself on the first day of her transfer, spent time talking to the girls of the class, and Kisaragi often smiled.

She was smiling on the outside but it there was no helping that Nanagi found it to be a fake smile stemming from a shallow pretense. That was the impression that naturally came to him.

Even now, Nanagi could see the look of extreme boredom in her gaze.

Suddenly, Nanagis smartphone was notified of an unexpected short message.

It was from Nanagis sister.

Nanagi temporarily laid the card in his hand aside.

Its rainy in Shizuoka. I hope its sunny in Tokyo. Im looking forward to onii-chans present.

The contents were that simple.

But even such a trivial mail was heartwarming, and Nanagi broke into a full smile.

Its bright and clear in Tokyo. Ill work hard on the present, so you and dad look forward to it.

Nanagi wrote the reply and quickly sent it.

And as they indulged themselves in games of old maid without end, the bus traveling through the maze of what was the Tokyo Expressway had at long last, arrived at Rainbow Bridge.

Also could be seen at their destination, was a structure characteristic of a giant.

Oooohhhh! I can see it! Isnt that the Tokyo Big Sight?!

The hands of the members playing old maid stopped, and Nanagi and the others excitedly gazed out the window. Four titanium gold colored roofs in the shape of inverted triangles could be seen.

Tokyo Big Sight

The modernly modeled building was famous enough that the students recognized it in a single glance, despite it being their first time seeing it.

I've never seen it on TV or the internet so that's the real thing! Ahh, looking at it like this, it gives off the impression of a deeply moving silhouette!

.Ahem

Facing his awestruck friends, the girlish looking Nanagi proudly explains.

Those inverted triangular structures are 8-story buildings known as the Conference Tower. We will be listening to a keynote speech in the 7th floor of the conference tower, in a room used for international conferences capable of housing a thousand people. By the way, it seems the exhibition area well be touring throughout the morning is the eastern exhibition hall!

Before Nanagi, who had announced his extensively informed knowledge, some of his friends faces twitched.

NaNanagi, you sure know your stuff.

Well, Nanagi has been eagerly planning the order in which we visit the booths for some time now after all. You've really been looking forward to it, haven't you? Today's social science field trip.

Wow..I just lost interest!

Why did you go from admiring to losing interest?! W-What?!?! Is it so bad to be interested in it?!

Nanagi's face reddened, as he perked his shoulders up in protest at the friends who laughed and made fun of him.

Future Science Expo 2015.

Open to the public on an early autumn day, the event taking place in Odaiba's Tokyo Big Sight was managed under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

According to the pamphlet, the purpose of the event was The Assembly of Technology, as the headlines stated.

Prospective cutting-edge technologies of future key industries are introduced to the general public, the next generation of engineers sought out, and appeals to foreign countries of Japan's technological powers made.

The event was, in short an exhibition of leading edge technology.

The machinery and equipment of research institutes and specialized experimental facilities of large corporations kept from prying eyes under conditions, could be seen by their group at the venue.

Scholars and engineers would announce their nerve-wracking research. By doing so, the presenter might be able to find an investor willing to fund his/her research.

This was a place of such encounters.

Be that as it may, Nanagi and the others had nothing to do with the adults plans; they were no more than the usual attendee.

If there were to be one point that differed them from the general attendee, it would be that they had to later write a report on the presented speeches, and submit it to their teacher.

As part of their morning group activities, they would visit arranged places discussed beforehand. Things he saw, things he heard. Both came as nothing but new findings.

One such example was the dolphin-type lifeguard robot that swam around like a fish in the small pool specially installed in the venue.

There were also conversational receptionist robots that offered responses indistinguishable from that of a humans on display.

There weren't only robots; he heard explanations, such as one on using the energy generated by the satellite solar panels in the form of microwave frequencies to send transmissions into space, and was left completely in awe.

Over here is the AR, come over and experience the world of Augmented Reality.

Nanagi and the others suddenly stopped by a booth, where they were distributed digital cameras from a receptionist.

And like this, they entered a place that seemed to reproduce the general-styled living room in a home.

Please turn on the camera, and see the living room through the camera.

Following what the female aid told him, Nanagi turned on his camera.

And he looked through the camera at the center of the living room.

!

Nanagi peered through the camera in what should have been an empty space, and on the LCD, could see a large TV.

As he tried to look at the surroundings, in what should have been an empty screen, a refrigerator and gaming console were reproduced.

Cooooo!!!!!!

It was no common three-dimensional image.

Holding the camera in place, he moved towards the TV that should not have existed as if it were real, and as he approached closer, it drew farther. From the very same position Nanagi was standing in at a visible angle, the manifested images were changing.

The female aid spoke to the speechless Nanagi.

This uses AR technology, and is called the AR catalog service.

AR catalog service?

The female aid picked up a piece of A4 sized paper in the living room.

This caused the reflections through the camera to change, and the TV sprung forth from the paper the female aid had lifted up.

Drawn from this paper is a marker, a special design the camera detects, and matches its position to the CG three-dimensional image, creating an image construct. If, for example, you were to buy a replacement for a large home appliance such as a TV and install this marker in your own home, the location in which you choose to arrange the TV can be conveniently identified. This marker recognition software can be used on your smartphone free of charge.

I get it now. This is the so called virtual reality?

Its often confused, but AR and VR are two separate terms.

The aid made a wry smile, as she gently replied.

VR, short for virtual reality, is a computer generated technology that simulates the five senses as an illusion. Compared to that, AR is a technology that augments the contents of human cognizance.

Hmmm. I kind of get it, but I kind of dont.

The digicam in your hand carries an annotation display feature in the originally empty space. The annotation will make the CG be displayed again. Was that explanation satisfactory?

To the female aid who kindly explained this to him, Nanagi made a poker face smile.

Of course, he didnt really get it.

After he said his thanks to the aid, Nanagi joined up with the friends in his group.

At the time when he finished carefully looking at the display items, Nanagi noticed the time on his watch.

Crap! Its already this late!

Hm? Did something happen, Nanagi?

One of the boys in the same group as him asked.

Nanagi opened his pamphlet and showed it to the members in his group, as he said

This over here. This. Soon in East Hall 3, the Future Electronic World performance is going to start. In about 4 minutes.

The name may have been showy for an event, but they took place in hour intervals.

And standing center-stage, some demonstrator would display their products.

A seemingly fainthearted girl with glasses answered Nanagi.

Wh-wh-whaaaaath-then we better hurry!

The girl in the same group as Nanagi was the class president, Fujino Inori

With Fujino taking the lead, Nanagis group hurried began to move.

Hm?

Nanagi noticed Kisaragi Managa was making a long face as she walked beside him.

It wasnt as if there was nothing to talk about today.

During group activities, when everyone should have been acting together, she seldom smiled.

Somewhat worried, he subtly questioned her.

Kisaragi-san, do you find this event uninteresting?

Not having expected Nanagi to start a conversation with her, she made a slightly started face.

But she immediately returned to an unsociable face void of expression, and exited from his line of sight.

Without ignoring Nanagi, her lips opened.

If I remember correctly, your name is Nanagi-kun?

She asked in a questioning tone.

Having only just transferred schools, it wasnt expected for her to match the names and faces of her classmates yet.

But she had correctly guessed Nanagis name.

Im sorry if I got your name wrong. But my family is constantly on the move, so I dont know when they will relocate again. The thought of meaninglessly remembering your names hasnt really crossed my mind.

What are you saying?

Im saying I dont have any intention of getting along with you guys.

Huh?!

Her clear, distinct declaration left Nanagi at a loss for words.

Kisaragi faced the taken aback Nanagi, and brushed through her own beautiful hair.

Is this event not fun, you say? Isnt it obvious?

No longer wearing a forced smile, she thrust her merciless words at Nanagi.

What could be so interesting about the likes of a future of expectations?

At first, the group had inspected the set displayed items from start to end.

With lunchtime approaching, Nanagi and the rest were in the middle of moving to the class rendezvous point.

A boy in the group asked the seething with rage Nanagi,

Why are you in such a bad mood, Nanagi? Werent you the one looking the most forward to this social science field

trip?

Yea.some things happened.

As he scratched his head, Nanagi cursed out in a low voice.

Whats up with her. All insensitive. Here I was thinking she might be bored because shes a transfer student and doesnt have anyone shes close to then she says shes not interested in being friends with us?! If shes like that, Ill never be friends with her!

What are you muttering on about, Nanagi-kun?

N-nothing much.

Nanagi having avoided the question, forced a smile towards a girl in the group.

The class president Fujino glanced at him from the side as she spoke to the group members.

Umm, ummthe performance is over and its about time for the assembly butfor other places you want to quickly visit, does anyone have one?

Fujino awaited the group members response.

No one felt like expressing their thoughts to such a meek appeal.

Each and everyone one of the members in the group wore an expression of fatigue, conveying such feelings as this much is good enough. Were spent, to her.

They had lasted 2 3 hours, though having walked through the venue the entire time since morning, the members were in a worn out state. Nanagi too, having been able to visit all the places he wanted, was satisfied.

huh?

At Nanagis sudden murmur, Fujino timidly asked.

W-whats wrong, Nanagi-kun?

He spoke aloud what he had realized.

umm, this is strange. Kisaragi-san isnt here.

At Nanagis mention, the other members also came to be aware of the situation.

Three boys, two girls. The six member group was short one girl.

The only one nowhere in sight was Kisaragi Mana.

The members searched the surrounding crowd, and said in unison.

Huh, shes not here!

I wonder if she got lost. Kisaragi-san, where did you end up going to?

Are you kidding me? Assembly time is right around the corner. Wont it be bad if we dont find her soon?

Wh-wh-what should we do, Nanagi-kun?

Why are you asking me that?

Nanagi cast a troubled look back at Fujino, her eyes watering as she pleaded for his opinion.

And then he had a flash of inspiration.

Does anyone know the number on her smart phone?

Before the group activity commenced, Nanagi and the others had informed each other of their contacts.

Nanagi did not have her number, but the other members might have learned of it.

Do you guys know it?

I dont.

Me neither.

...I also dont know her number. Even if I asked her, she would always give me the slip.

Who would have thought even the class pres didnt know!?

Nanagi went from slightly troubled to completely shocked.

Nanagi himself couldnt exactly blame the others butKisaragi had not given the other members her number. To not even give it to the class president, it would seem that her words of not being interested in playing friends with the classmates would genuine.

With mixed grief, he looked around his surroundings.

The surrounding crowd was considerably large.

Fed up with these feelings, Nanagi made a reluctantly made a proposal.

Anyway, we have to hurry and find Kisaragi. She shouldnt have gotten far. Lets come back here in 10 minutes, and if we havent found her, well consult with the teachers.

Nanagi and the rest split off in all directions and began their search for Kisaragi.

As he moved within the crowd, Nanagi murmured successively in a fit of impatience.

Seriously! Shes not only rude, but also makes trouble for everyone.she pisses me off.

Should he find her, he would not be satisfied if he did not at least give her a piece of his mind.

Shrugging his shoulders, he began his search for Kisaragi in the venue.

Kisarai Mana.

A girl who transferred one month ago, and whom Nanagi had yet to become acquainted with.

What he did know about her was based on rumours he had heard from the boys in the class, and whose credibility were questionable.

Like how she had lived abroad and was fluent in foreign languages such as english and chinese.
Or how she won the chess championship and excelled in academics even in foreign schools.
All he only heard about her were seemingly unbelievable rumors.
Even if those frequented rumours were false, it wasnt uncommon for people to take it for true upon seeing the graceful air emanating before Kisaragi; it was such foul play.
Kisaragi Mana. With a horrible attitude to boot.
Nanagi was searching high and low for such a girl.
Where the hell did you go Kisaragi-san?!?!
He spouted out his irritated emotions.
Thinking how she couldnt have gone too far, he believed she would quickly be found.
But reality proved contrary to his expectations.
With Kisaragi nowhere to be found in East Hall 3, Nanagi had wandered into the area of East Hall 1 before he knew it. If he still couldnt find her, it was possible that she may have gone to East Hall 6 by crossing the center passage that connected to the other side.
In his search for Kisaragi, Nanagi looked restlessly within the grounds as he walked.
In such a completely inattentive state, Nanagi bumped shoulders with a passerby in front of him. He hurriedly apologized to the person he bumped into.
S-sorry!.....wait, what?
Nanagi lowered his head in front, but the person was already gone.
The man he bumped into wore a hooded shirt and baggy jeans and certainly wore the air of one of those bad-type characters.
The man took no interest in Nanagi, nor did he stop to pick a fight, and walked off.
Nanagi stared at the back in amazement as he walked into the distance.
.I wonder if he was in a hurry.
He never turned back towards Nanagi. He was busy looking around, appearing to have been searching for something.
He found his friends before long, and after a few other men joined them, began talking in place.
Nanagi couldnt hear what they were saying buttheyre attitude was deadly serious.
Suddenly, Nanagis eyes were attracted to the wristbands the men wore.
A symbol of an inverted V superimposed on an upright V in the shape of an eye.
The wristbands on the men all bore the same symbol.
Is it a mark of their team or something?
After a long discussion while standing in place, the men split off into the venue.
Nanagi watched them for some time, but he couldnt afford to dawdle around forever.
He also had an objective to promptly find Kisaragi.
As he pulled himself together, Nanagi once more began his search for her around his surroundings.
Though as it was..he had already lost the drive to search for her.
Over here might also be no good. Maybe the others found her. Would it be better if I went back?.....
Having not found her, he was left only with feelings of distress. Nanagi returned to the predetermined spot he had decided with the group members in East Hall 3.
And as he was about to leave the place, his feet suddenly stopped.
Experimental model for a quantum computer?
Near the central region of East Hall 1, he came across the huge signboard panel.
Over there where the spectators gathered, enclosed in surrounding chains rose an enormous clock tower.
It was a complex mechanical tower whose height was three times that of a human.
Nanagi was able to immediately come to the understanding that it was a clock tower due to a large electronic bulletin board installed on the center of the machine. In large numbers, the time was displayed. The red numbered lights continually indicated the current time above the bulletin board in silence.
The time was clearly indicated in hours, minutes, seconds, each a column following their respective order. And in the column successively following seconds, contained a number changing within a moments notice, that the exact number was imperceivable.
Nanagi read aloud the life-sized, explanatory panel placed in front of the tower.
A model on the principles of quantum computers, huh. The worlds top contender for most accurate time displaywhat a pointless thing to compete for. Isnt it just a normal computer with high calculative performance?
The huge machine before him appeared to have been an experimental model for a quantum computer.
As for what exactly a quantum computer was, Nanagi did not have the slightest clue.
Just that the purpose of the computer was to tell time.
To use such a big device, that was only capable of doing things a watch could, was pushing it.
Not particularly feeling any rise in excitement, Nanagi vacantly looked up at the clock tower in front of him.
The time continued to count up, and soon hit noon.
In the exact instant the clock display turned the 12th hour.
?

Nanagi's field of vision distorted.

The bustle from the surroundings rapidly faded, when Nanagi felt an indescribable chill.

His head spun, and his ears buzzed. The clock tower stretched out wide, as if being pulled to the left and right, and then immediately returned back to normal before his very eyes.

The sound of the faded commotion gradually returned to his ears.

The end is coming.

It was sudden. A voice from beside him took shape.

Nanagi turned around in a fluster, and there stood a young girl.

She had probably been there from the start.

She was no doubt an ordinary young girl.

Short blond hair. Blood red eyes. And no traces of Japanese descent.

A petite, beautiful girl with a lovely appearance that differed from Kisaragi.

She gazed at Nanagi, full of loving gentleness.

Nanagi realized this and was struck speechless.

She was wearing a wedding dress.

It was not the plain, simple clothing those attending the Future Science Expo wore.

Nanagi stared at her appearance in the wedding dress in mute amazement, but pulled his thoughts together and asked.

Who are you?

A pleasure to meet you. So we meet again. My name is Sophia.

A pleasure to meet you, and so we meet again.

Her impassive introduction left much to be desired, only having revealed that she was called Sophia.

With a smile, she looked Nanagi in the eye and began to talk.

In mankind's history, innumerable predictions telling their end have been made. Take for example, the writing in the sacred texts that foretell the coming of the apocalypse, and the calamity the astrologers feared would befall on them from the heavens in Renaissance France. No matter what era, there will be those that believe in the end of the world and be haunted in fear. However, it also stands that not a single one of the ends they believed in were realized. That is why we are living and continue our existence today.

What are you saying? Are you ok?

Be that as it may, the genuine prophets have yet to leave behind the remaining predictions. He who established the symbol of the swastika for the former Third Reich had said so. We destroy not out of fear, but out of faith, 2039.

Her cryptic, one-sided and seemingly aimless speech left Nanagi baffled.

As he stayed silent following the quote, she smiled in sorrow.

I am a person of the beginning, and a person of the end. I am one who shall steal your heart, one who will bestow upon you a fighting weapon. Right here at this very moment, the words I can exchange with you are severely limited.

That is why to accomplish what I should accomplish only am I here.

She told him this with a somewhat lonely expression.

There is no more time before a nova will begin here.

Nova?

Yes. The beginning of your battle.

My battle?.....

Not knowing how to respond, he mimicked her response like a parrot.

Sophia soon held out one of her hands towards Nanagi, in it was a pocketbook.

I will entrust this to you.

What is this?

This pocketbook is something you people will need.

The pocketbook she handed over was considerably aged and creased, with a black leather cover. It had the thickness of an address book. There was nothing recorded on the front cover, but the innards seemed crammed full of content.

He confirmed it when she brushed along the sides of the paper.

Sophia made no room for refusal, and Nanagi hesitantly received the pocketbook.

If you are to ever wish to return here, this pocketbook will serve your needs.

Huh? Me, return here?.....

You will surely face a great, many choices. No one decision is more correct than the other. But you must absolutely not hesitate to the very end. You alone, are our last hope. Only you alone can end it.

Like I was saying! Just what exactly have you been saying since a while bammgh!!

Nanagi's words were forcibly interrupted.

Sophia's small lips pushed against his own.

!!!!

Her sweet breath brushed across his cheeks.

An intense heat surged throughout his body, as his face burned a beet red.

As their lips separated, the strand of saliva connecting them broke off.

Sophia, having stolen his lips, wore an enraptured expression, her eyes moist and her face dyed red.

As if in embarrassment. As if in happiness.
And lastly, she showed a lonesome smile.
W-w-wh-wh-what did you just!?!?!
It was the first time his lips had touched that of a girls, and he was left shaking in a terrible tremor.
He could no longer think of think of her as another stranger.
Just remembering the sensation of her lips made his body quiver, and erupt in heat. His heartbeat and breathing was considerably thrown off rhythm, as he shouted within himself Calm down! in earnest. Nanagi frantically tried to cool his flushed face.
Sophia gazed at Nanagi, with reluctance to part, and then lovingly.
And then immediately after Nanagi blinked his eyes.
In the moment he shut his eyes, Sophia vanished before him.
..eh? Youre kidding, right?!?!
He had no understanding of what had happened, but he began searching within the venue for Sophia who had disappeared before his very eyes. But no matter how hard he focused his eyes, Sophias appearance was nowhere to be seen. It had been a mere instant.
In no less than a blink of an eye, a person had vanished in front of him.
Was I dreaming?
His surroundings flourished, with people coming and going no different from before.
Until just a moment ago, a showy young girl wearing a wedding dress should have been standing there. And as if to confirm that she was never there from the start, there were no signs of any changes in his surroundings.
Nanagi slowly touched his own lips.
That feeling. That warmthcouldnt have possibly been a dream or illusion.
As his cheeks flushed once more, Nanagi stood there in a daze.
Hey, you.
Someone had called him out once again.
It was not Sophias voice. A voice indistinguishable from that of a boy or girl. An androgynous voice.
He looked over to see a figure in a black trench coat standing behind him.
A boy.wait, a girl?.....
The person who had rudely addressed Nanagi was about the same age as him.
Short black hair. Studded earrings. A sharp, piercing gaze that gave off a cool impression.
As beautiful as a girl, as imposing as a boy.
The gender ambiguous pressed towards Nanagi with terrible menace.
Where did that girl just now disappear off to? What did you talk to her about? Answer me.
The figure gripped his collar.
From the cuffs of the coat, a thin key chain wound around the wrist could be seen.
Inscribed on the metal plate was the symbol of an inverted V superimposed on an upright V that resembled an eye.
It was the same mark carried by the men he bumped into some time ago. In other words, an associate of theirs.
They might have been searching the venue for Sophia.
What a rude fellow, doing this out of the blue.
Whatever, just answer my question. What did you just talk to that girl about? Who are you?
Thats what I want to ask!
As he thought so, Nanagi glared back at the figure.
His eyes were suddenly attracted to the coats breast pocket.
There, he saw a leather belt shaped like a holster. And stored in it was a handgun.
..!
Realizing where Nanagis line of sight was directed, the figure quickly covered her coat.
Letting go of Nanagi, the figure completely slipped into the crowd and disappeared.
When the figure could no longer be seen, Nanagi nervously murmured in a cold sweat.
I-I might have been seeing thingsright? What was that all about?
He had only caught a glimpse of it, and could not be sure if it was actually a gun.
Left in bewilderment, Nanagi finally noticed the weight of the object in his hands.
It was the strange pocketbook he received from Sophia.
The pocketbook was real. And there were others who had seen Sophia.
That would mean his encounter with the young girl named Sophia was no dream or illusion.
For a while, he stood there in place, having completely forgotten about searching for Kisaragi.
A phone call from the class president, Fujino, had finally brought him back to his senses.
..Kisaragi appeared to have been carefreely eating ice cream in front of a store.
On hearing news of Kisaragis discovery, he set off as if he finally remembered to do so.
The Future Science Expo was supposed to end only in excitement.
But Nanagi began to be enveloped in a strange feeling of uneasiness.

Shortly after, they were helping themselves to an all-you can-eat lunch buffet inside a restaurant found within the venue.

Nanagi's classmates had once more gathered in the entrance hall, where roll-call one by one would begin. Their destination was the side of the entrance hall. Over there would be a six-floor long escalator.

After ascending the escalator, they would climb one additional floor, where they struggled to their intended destination. There lay the Conference Tower on the 7th floor of the Tokyo Big Site.

They had arrived in what was called the International Conference Hall, whose size rivaled that of an opera house.

The entrance resembled the doors in a theater. Once he passed through it, his eyes glittered as he looked up at the tall, spacious ceiling.

It was a theater, with a vast stage that wasn't a stage.

Nanagi had searched up beforehand, and found the large conference room could accommodate 1000 people, but, seeing it firsthand, he felt it was large enough that it could accommodate far more people.

Holy! Cow! It's huge!

I wonder if you could bring yourself to act less shamefully, Nanagi-kun. I find it embarrassing as your classmate.

The one who poured cold water over his excitement was Kisaragi Mana, who sat next to him.

And for Nanagi, the same could be applied to her, who messed up the group activities because of her self-centered actions. Annoyed with her blunt attitude, he forced a stiff smile.

S-So Kisaragi-san is the one seated next to me.

That's right. Do you have a problem with that?

N-No. I don't really mind.

Beside the snappy Kisaragi, he had no choice but to keep quiet, unable to talk freely.

Nanagi took out a printout that was distributed in his school from his bag.

On it was the time schedule for today, and written information on the keynote speech they were scheduled to hear.

The future of quantum computers, huh.

Judging from the name, he had a hunch it would be a plain, difficult type of speech.

The teachers had deemed it as material at a level that even high school students could understand, but Nanagi was slightly uneasy as to whether he would be able to listen until the very end without falling asleep.

I need to write a report on this, so it would be bad if I miss the speech.

Nanagi grumbled, and then the ceiling lights began to be cast.

With the exception of the stage, the audience's seats were pitch dark.

And from inside the stage, a middle-aged man in a suit walked out.

The man gave off a slovenly appearance, bearing an exhausted expression, his white hair unkempt, with a stubbled face, standing hunched.

And along with his appearance, came a round of applause.

The man must have been the presenter for the afternoon's keynote speech.

Testing. I'd like to thank everyone for taking the time to come here today. My name is Date Keizo, and I will be presenting the speech on the future of quantum computers. I am a D.Sc. in the research of quantum engineering. I work in an office building of the National Institute of Informatics, forty minutes away from here by train.

The presenter used the microphone and introduced himself as Date.

A large, white screen was lowered on the stage.

On the white screen, the projector turned on.

In the beginning, the only thing projected on the screen was the number, 2.

How fast are the personal computers we use capable of running at? In this lecture, let us first broach the topic of how fast computers can run.

Date scratched his head and continued.

The component that determines the processing speed of our computers is the CPU, as I'm sure many of you are aware. Let us delve further into this component we call the CPU. The inner components of a CPU take on a very complex structure, crammed with micro-components naked to the visible eye, that when linked to a circuit, leaves no part unaccounted for. If we were to go to the extremes, one could say we could accelerate the CPU by accelerating the exchange of electrical signals in a circuit.

Date made a bitter smile.

But a while back, the genius physicist known as Einstein had established his famous theory of relativity. According to this theory, there is no object that is capable of moving faster than the speed of light. That is to say, even if we were to quicken the transmission of electrical signals, the electrical signals cannot exceed the speed of light in other words, 3108m/s. If we are to only rely on the quickening the electrical signals themselves, we will be come across the obstacle known as the speed of the light.

In his notes, he wrote: Transmission of electrical signals faster than the speed of light is impossible.

But researchers, thinking they cannot increase the speed of computers, have immediately switched to an alternative method. That method is downsizing of the CPU.

Nanagi must have found Date's style of speaking interesting, because he was listening so attentively he forgot to take

notes.

In recent years, the increase in computer processing speed is namely associated with CPU downsizing. An endeavor to shorten the distance between these processing components, so to speak. The theory behind it is simple. It is obvious that compared to visiting a friends house 1 km away, you would much sooner arrive at a friends house directly neighboring your own. Every year, there is rapid progress in downsizing, and the number of components that make up a CPU increase.

Having mentioned this, Nanagi and the rest had always wondered how the laptops, tablets and other devices at their house could get smaller, and yet have a higher processing speed.

According to Dates speech, this was all thanks to downsizing.

The single founder of the American Intel Corporation, Gordon Moore, had stated that we are approaching a future of CPU downsizing. That is the well-known Moores Law. Moores Law states that the number of semiconductors in a CPU will double every two years. If this law holds true, by the end of 2017, we will see the birth of CPU components the size of atoms, or possibly electrons.

A working computer the size of an electron

Nanagi felt curious how they would make such a thing.

Now then. If we were to make computers run even faster, we would run into a big problem. The components that make up a CPU that have become miniscule in size will face a significant amount of quantum noise. That noise is something of the electron level, belonging to a micro-world, governed by laws completely different from the laws of physics we abide by. We refer to these sets of laws as quantum mechanics. From here on out, let us think about quantum mechanicthe laws of physics that apply only to the micro world.

The laws of physics that only work in the micro world

Date spoke as if several different sets of laws of physics existed.

Let us apply the laws of quantum mechanics so that we may imagine it. Say there is a wall, blocking our destination. In order to cross the wall, we do not need to climb over or take a detour around it. If we were to abide by the laws of quantum mechanics, we can phase through the wall because you and that wall can simultaneously exist together.

No way!.....

Having no reason to have heard Nanagis shocked mumble, Date unconcernedly explained on the stage.

Please think of an electron particle as a baseball. In the transmission of electrical signals, the components collectively play catchball with this ball. But because an electron follows the laws of quantum mechanics, the incoming ball will unexpectedly split into two and teleport through on contact. There is no way to catch such a miracle ball, is there? The damage sustained in electric transmission by this erratic behavior is what we call quantum noise.

Nanagi was left in bewildered amazement.

Date once more continued his explanation.

In two more years.

Date finally pointed towards the 2 projected on the screen.

If Moores Law stands true, then we will see the limits of downsizing in two years. We will no longer be able to ignore the effects of quantum noise, and any further downsizing will be extremely difficult. In other words, progression of the computer will temporarily come to a dead halt.

A computer progressional standstill.

Date had announced it would come in two years.

Does this mean they wont downsize computers anymore?....

Nanagi mumbled to himself in doubt.

It wasnt only Nanagi that was left dumbfounded; the majority of the audience were making similar faces.

And now for todays subject. I will now talk about the future shaped by quantum computers.

The number 2 on the screen behind his back disappeared, as the new text The next generations computer, the quantum computer showed up in its place.

It is exactly as stated on the screen. The next generation high speed computer that will replace the current model that will reach a deadlock in two years, that I am dedicating my work towards, the quantum computer.

Nanagi recalled the quantum computer clock he had encountered this morning in the eastern exhibition hall.

Thats the next generation high speed computer?

It was by no means an idea he could easily accept.

To grasp a better understanding of the quantum computer, we must first understand the many-worlds interpretation. This theory is still under scientific controversy, but broaches the existence of parallel worlds.

Nanagi grumbled, unable to swallow his feelings of suspicion.

Wait a second.parallel worlds? He just suddenly switched to talking about sci-fi material.

Unconcerned with Nanagis feelings of doubt, Date eloquently proceeded onwards with his explanation.

Let us assume this theory is correct. And to make things easier to understand, we will proceed with an interpretation slightly differing from the original, namely, that our future holds countless parallel worlds that branch off from ours. Chances are, the futures that we will live have been decided no matter how hard to struggle. And in actuality, until that point in time where our future has been decided, it is not the case that we may strive towards the many possibilities the future holds. The conditions in the world of quantum mechanics coincides with these conditions I have

mentioned. If you were to imagine it, parallel worlds give off the feel of an overlapping state.

Date said, lightly shrugging his shoulders.

Let us return to the previous topic at hand. The laws of quantum mechanics explains that in a functioning universe, the phenomenon where an electron particle exists simultaneously in two separate locations and instantaneously moves to another location occurs. The reasoning behind this strange electron movement is thought to be electron superpositioning. In terms of the many worlds interpretation, this would be the overlapping of parallel universes.

The overlapping of parallel worldselectrons were the underlying fundamental cause that lead to parallel dimensions. Nanagis thoughts gradually descended into chaos.

Now then, the prelude has taken quite some time. With this, we can finally begin the discussion on quantum computers.

Date said as he scratched his nose.

Present-day computers have reached their limits in downsizing. And what is it that we should do to continue production of fast computers? Physicist Deutsch at Oxford University found the solution in quantum computers. So what exactly is a quantum computer?

Having raised that question, Date grinned.

To phrase it shortly, it is a computational computer that makes use of parallel worlds.

The extraordinary proposal that came out of Dates mouth shocked Nanagi.

Using this computer in our world, it can access other computers that exist in parallel worlds and perform parallel computation. By employing these computations, we can link the parallel worlds, in a state similar to the superpositioning electron. This is we call a quantum bit.

The hall falls into dead silence.

It uses an infinite number of computers from existing parallel worlds to perform calculation for a single problem. Its operational output is tremendous. How so you ask? The most employed encrypted coding in present-day computers is the RSA algorithm, capable of performing prime factorization decryption. Even if say, a super computer with THz of processing power were to attempt prime factorization of a 300 digit long prime number, it would take 150,000 years. The RSA code largely determines the time spent in its decryption. Even so, a quantum computer with the same specs made to compute this process would finish decoding it in less than a second. The various codes would be cracked, and the secrets from the world would disappear.

Whoa!

It could pull off what would take a supercomputer 150,000 years in under a second.

The clock tower demonstrated in the exhibition hall left an impression far short of impressive, but having heard everything just now, Nanagi now thought it was an extraordinary piece of advanced super technology.

All of a sudden, a harsh noise resounded from the speakerphone.

The faces of the audience within the hall twisted in anguish at the unpleasant sound.

Wondering what was happening, Nanagi stared at the development on stage.

The power for the mike seemed to have been cut, as he saw Date tapping on the mike. A staff member rushed out from the back of the stage to help him. He fiddled around with the malfunctioning mike.

With Date having ceased his talk, the audience gradually became noisy.

Nanagi-kun?

W-Whats wrong, Kisaragi-san?

Is it me or..has this hall become colder?

In the seat next to him, Kisaragi was rubbing both her shoulders, as if it were freezing cold.

Now that she mentioned it, Nanagis felt his own fingertips growing cold.

It did not feel cold when he had entered the hall, but the rooms temperature seemed to have lowered little by little.

Soon, it felt like midwinter, where even their breaths could be seen.

The increasing coldness in the hall was accompanied by a growing commotion.

The speech was disrupted by a microphone failure. Whats more, the room had lowered to freezer temperature. They had been waiting since the equipment failure but.it didnt take long before complaints were thrown around.

Nanagi too, found the cold too much to bear and rubbed his shoulders while shivering.

Whats up with this freezing coldness!.....

Out with his breath, came his voiced complaint of dissatisfaction.

Five minutes had passed since the speech was disrupted.

Those who grew irritated at the staffs inadequate display of ability to quickly allow resuming of the speech also were not few.

As the cold air whirled around in the hall, a strange unrest filled the room.

At that time.

Settle down.

A voice suddenly could be heard without warning.

It was only thata girl wearing a wedding dress stood on stage.

Not a single person in the hall was aware of when she appeared there.

And it turned out Nanagi knew the name of the lovely girl.

Isn't that Sophia!?

Standing on stage was the mysterious girl who had stolen Nanagi's lips.

And just what exactly was she doing on the stage?

There was no way that Nanagi, nothing more than a bystander, would know.

It was a mystery how Nanagi, seated in the rear of the hall, could clearly hear her voice without any use of a microphone. It was something entirely beyond reason.

Date and the staff stood still in wonder, making no attempts to stop her from speaking.

They stared at her in amazement, as if they had mistaken her for a spirit.

The audience's attention all turned towards Sophia.

After looking at the quietened crowd, she soon spoke aloud.

It's a pleasure to meet everyone. And I'm sorry.

Sophia offered words of apology to them.

From this point on, you will be going out on a journey. Many will not return here a second time, and everyone can't help but feel hurt. That is why no matter how many times, you must continue to be inquisitive. One day you will find happiness.

Her red eyes faintly began to glow.

Immediately following the sound of an explosion resounded from the ceiling and the conference hall trembled.

Whaaaaa!!!

The shaking of the hall prevented everyone from freely moving.

The ceiling was enveloped in a mass of crimson flames and the torn-up steel frames rained down incessantly on the hall. The remains of the ceiling crushed many in an instant, before their very eyes.

No one would have predicted that explosives were planted in the ceiling.

For Nanagi, the situation had already escalated to a tragedy caused by nothing else than an afternoon act of terror.

Nanagi looked overhead past the blown-off ceiling and took a peek at the sun.

But the sky was dark as night.

A...total solar eclipse!!

Nanagi muttered in shock, as he looked up at the sky.

Thousands of sparks poured down from the skies. A conference hall with nothing but casualties and screams.

Surrounding the sun painted black, an ominous ring of light.

The reality that unfolded before his eyes was other-worldly, and far beyond his comprehension.

Humans are not perfect. Everyone wishes to be saved from one thing or another. That is why since distant times, and even now, people cannot help but continue to desire.

Sophia announced to the people in the hall, who were unable to do anything but stand still.

The world has always been waiting long for its savior.

And soon, black rain came falling down from the torn open ceiling.

The mysterious liquid relentlessly poured down from above.

So cold!....

The black liquid that soaked his body was surprisingly cold.

The ice-cold liquid continued to paint the hall black posthaste. With a texture resembling mud, accumulated to their feet, and submerged up to their backs before they knew it.

And then when the water level had reached Nanagi's neck, the people in his surroundings...disappeared.

His classmates. Those attending the speech. And even Sophia could no longer be seen.

In the freezing, still, sea of liquid, a single thought crossed his head.

Fight.

He fought for his life, continuing to stick his head out the surface waters.

He frantically searched for an exit, but nothing indicating an exit could be found. Submerged deep in the waters, the entrance to the conference hall had completely disappeared. He was cut off from all means of escape.

This can't be!....

Nanagi was at a loss for words, about ready to cry.

Do not fear.

He felt the voice of Sophia, nowhere beside him, enter his ears.

But the freezing waters had rapidly drained him of his stamina and Nanagi, no longer offering any resistance, began to sink into the sea bottom.

In the recesses of his distant consciousness, he embraced the despair known as death.

Translator's Notes and References—

i.e. he lost