

New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 20

Aleister, who left behind his stronghold, Academy City, without hesitation, started a general offensive on the magical metropolis of England. In this seemingly unjust operation, for some reason, Kamijou, Index, Accelerator, Hamazura, and Takitsubo can be seen...

The seal that was used against Great Demon Coronzon, whose power surpasses that of Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass, is soon to be unraveled. Before this could happen, they must obtain the Great Demon's weakness within London. However, since Lola, who is being possessed by Coronzon, leads the Anglican Church, it is inevitable that this would be seen as an invasion from the science side.

Kamijou threw the gauntlet on a decisive battle desired by no one. Beneath this fierce situation, the one who saved him from this predicament is the gentle manager-type airhead young woman, Orsola???



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鎌池和馬



電撃文庫



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Kamachi Kazuma

エアコンの室外機ですよ。普段当たり前に見ているものでもロンドンとかヴェネチアとか歴史のある街だと取りつけるのすごく大変なんだろうなあ、と。

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Toaru Majutsu no Virtual-On

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I am slowly drawing in the back country of Hiroshima.

新約

とある魔術の 禁書目録 20

鎌池和馬

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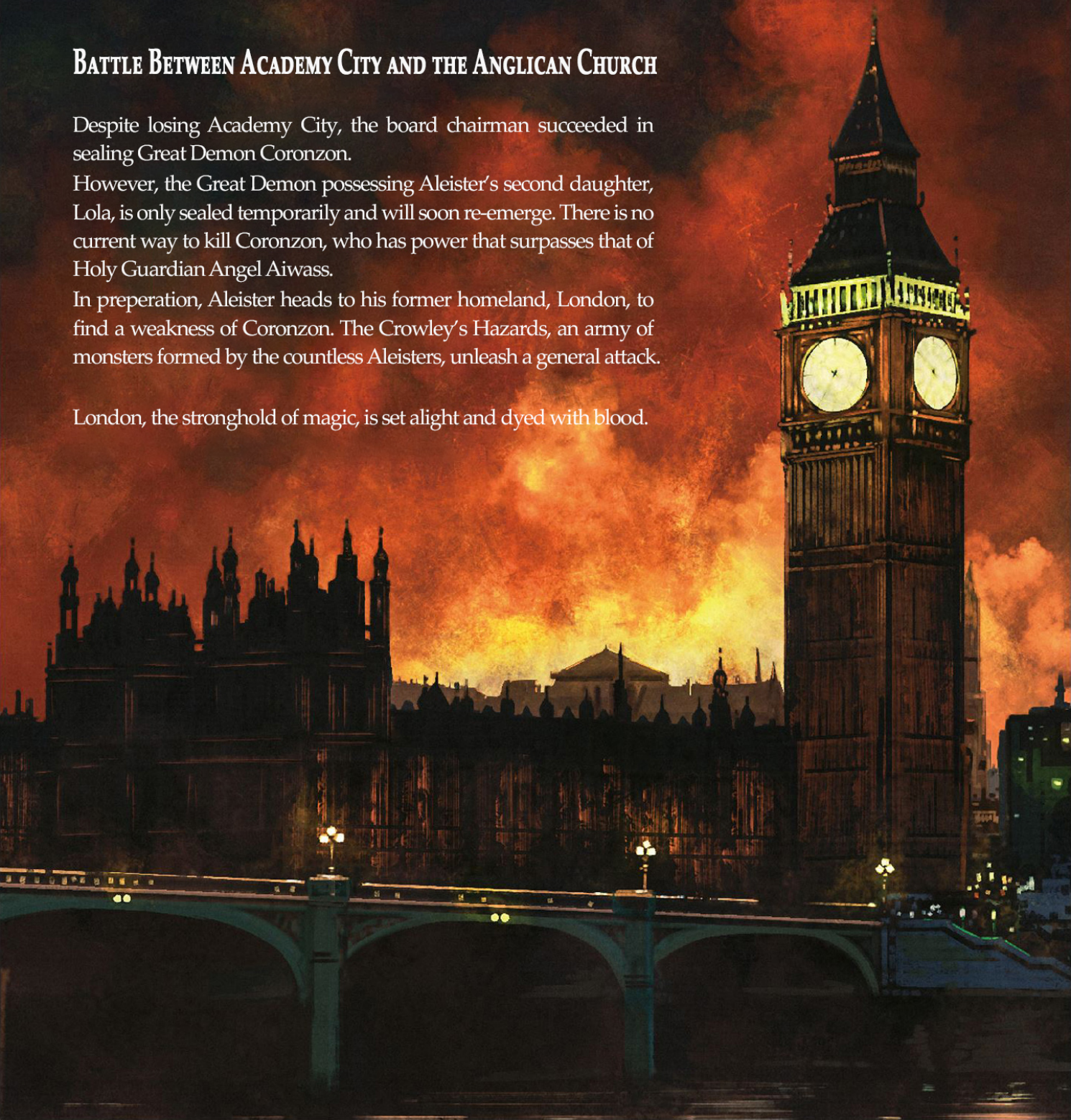
BATTLE BETWEEN ACADEMY CITY AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

Despite losing Academy City, the board chairman succeeded in sealing Great Demon Coronzon.

However, the Great Demon possessing Aleister's second daughter, Lola, is only sealed temporarily and will soon re-emerge. There is no current way to kill Coronzon, who has power that surpasses that of Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass.

In preperation, Aleister heads to his former homeland, London, to find a weakness of Coronzon. The Crowley's Hazards, an army of monsters formed by the countless Aleisters, unleash a general attack.

London, the stronghold of magic, is set alight and dyed with blood.



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“Hee hee, hee.”

Anti-Aleister demon

Qliphah Puzzle 545



"Hey, don't start snuggling up against me here."

Former underling of Item
Hamazura Shiage

"...Then where do you want me to do it, Hamazura?"

Member of the new Item and Level 4 AIM Stalker
Takitsubo Rikou



"Don't worry. I'll be back."

Academy City's strongest Level 5
Accelerator

"You aren't going to fight again, are you?" asks Misaka as Misaka makes sure."

Serial number 20001 of the Sisters
Last Order



"Oryaaaahh!!"

Nun who memorized 103,000 grimoires
Index

"Bfhh!?"

Boy who has Imagine Breaker in his right hand, which dispels any form of supernatural
Kamijou Touma



"...I apologize, but I must drive you from this city immediately."

Member of the Anglican Church's Necessarius
Kanzaki Kaori

"Are you shorthanded?"

Academy City's board chairman and beautiful girl
Aleister Crowley

"If I work with a Saint,
I can push you back!!"

Leader of one of the three main factions in Britain, the Knights
Knight Leader

TOARU MAJUTSU NO INDEX NEW TESTAMENT

新約

とある魔術の 禁書目録 インデックス

20

KAMACHI KAZUMA
鎌池和馬

イラスト・はいむらきよたか

HAIMURA KIYOTAKA
デザイン・渡邊宏一 (2725 Inc.)

PROLOGUE

Overturning Science and Magic.

Become_to_War.

Oh, Lola, you poor, entirely innocent girl.

The children of man cannot choose their parents no matter how hard they try. If you had never been involved with that magician, none of this would have happened.



“Bwah! Pant, ah, bwah!!”

Late that December night, darkness filled Academy City in the cold rain.

The hospital where that doctor worked would normally have been a symbol of rescue, but right in front of it, a woman with extremely long blonde hair lay on the wet asphalt, opening and closing her mouth and seeking air while sounding like she was drowning.

And that was not a figurative expression.

That archbishop would normally wear a beige habit and it looked like she had collapsed face down. But in truth, half her body had sank into the parking lot. Just like she was sinking into the pitch-black ocean late at night.

And there was one other person there.

No sign of that magician’s original form remained because he had transformed into a lovely girl with long silver hair, a blue blazer, a witch’s hat, and a cape. He smiled thinly as she whispered to the woman.

In order to kill Aleister’s baby girl Lilith, Mathers had indiscriminately sent modern Western magic into the world. That greedy man had summoned Coronzon and that great demon had possessed Aleister’s other daughter: Lola.

“The world of magic emphasizes symbolism.”

Magician Aleister Crowley.

He—or in this case, she—provided a lecture, perhaps because she had sat in the seat of Academy City's board chairman for so long. Or perhaps this was her fatherly side showing through since she was in the presence of her daughter.

“And that does not just apply to special individuals, silver weapons protected by a tribe, and marble ruins. Wrapping a waist band, thrusting a spear, and other perfectly ordinary actions are given an extra value. And at this point, I am not going to explain what each individual thing means. What matters is that all phenomena have meaning, Coronzon. It was not there in the first place, but just as people used up all the available internet addresses, fools like us have left almost no empty space.”

She pressed down.

Lola Stuart tried desperately to climb out of the dark and wet asphalt, but Aleister pressed down on her white forehead adorned with beautiful blonde bangs.

“Now, let us follow the story of St. Margaret who worshiped the cross. Because I know you loathe those morality plays as much as I do.”

The father pressed her leather shoe's heel against the daughter's forehead.

"I will step on you."

“...ister.”

“That is a symbol of stripping away a demon, stealing its power, removing the disaster, and retrieving peace, Great Demon Coronzon.”

[illegible]

Golden hair that symbolized devilishness wriggled after spending a very long time gathering power from the moonlight. It emitted a somewhat off-kilter fear that was different from that of a witch from the ancient past or an alien from the future. This was something outside the realm of imagination. If you faced this Great Demon while unprepared, your soul could be damaged and you could be forced to succumb no matter what your physical specs were.

But the magician who had created all of modern Western magic was different.

The silver crushed the gold.

The pressure from Aleister's foot grew as if to bury Lola's lovely face in the black asphalt. No, that was not just the silver witch's power. Academy City was that magician's holy ground. It was a reproduction of the Abbey of Thelema that had once stood on a small Italian island. She used all of that to apply a "seal" that resembled extreme gravity.

“How does it feel to be humiliatingly defeated by what is just? Now, let us move on from St. Margaret and discuss a clever little technique.”

It came directly from Aleister Crowley.

“The Banner of the West. Those dual symbols and color layout will reject evil. I cannot eliminate all doubt from thy nature, so I shall protect thee by severing all ties. Furthermore, I am blameless and need not leave this location, so the evil one must remove herself in accordance with her sin!!”

Aleister Crowley had not designed Academy City for this purpose.

If she had known Lola Stuart was Great Demon Coronzon borrowing her daughter’s flesh, her plan would not have taken this form from the very beginning.

But that was not what mattered.

That magician had defined what qualified as magic and controlled all that fell under that label. Even if it was a loathsome and cursed thing now, she would not allow that to hamper her skill. As much as she might hate and resent it, Aleister was still a true magician. And from that human’s perspective, everything visible in the world was magic. Inhaling and exhaling, standing and sitting, walking and stopping, weeds growing from the cracks—it was all linked to the mystical.

“So you cannot escape the contract unless you complete your agreement with Mathers by killing me? I pity even you, Great Demon.”

“...Kh...”

“Still, that is no reason to hold back.”

Nothing special was needed.

Modern Western magic was a system of techniques set up to give everyone equal access to the mystical, no special talent required. And that was exactly what had torn apart a certain magician’s family.

Aleister made an announcement to the Great Demon that could only continue following Mathers’s orders even after his death.

“I will use everything I have built up to stop you, Coronzon.”

She would not even let her opponent speak.

Even if she had been possessed for so long, what was in that father’s heart as she stomped on her daughter’s face?

“Even all this *is no more than buying time*. I cannot kill you the way things are. But how much can I do in the time this buys me? Give it some thought inside the seal. Just as every country and region in the world has used the exact same punishment since BCE times, having our time wasted is a burden for us all. Oh, but we know each other well enough that I am sure you will understand. And that is why this will fill you with more fear and suffering than anything else.”

There was a sticky, muddy sound.

The pressure felt like an asteroid at this point. Aleister Crowley used her heel to shove the Great Demon into the dark wet asphalt.

Then, with an odd sound reminiscent of a punishing lightning strike from heaven, an unnatural light flashed through several of the roads that acted as Academy City’s arteries.

That light drew a giant equilateral triangle with a cross carved into the center.

Anyone who knew anything about modern Western magic would immediately recognize it as the Banner of the West. That symbol of exorcism was one of the most convenient symbolic weapons that protected the spell user by monitoring and rejecting the approach of evil power on the ceremonial grounds—for example, something resembling Telesma that was out to get humans. The banner was so useful because good and useful powers would remain unmolested while only the evil and useless powers were affected.

It only took an instant.

Once the light vanished, nothing remained.

Not even the golden demon sinking into the asphalt.

Aleister spoke as if spitting a curse down at the wet road surface.

“...It all begins here. I will use this time to its fullest.”

Yes, this was only the preliminary round. It only treated the symptoms. That silver girl was a skilled enough magician to fully know this was no time to be optimistic. A seal that used an entire city and measured dozens of kilometers across might sound nice, but the city had not been designed for use against Coronzon. She had only connected the spider web of roads in a meaningful way. It was a makeshift method that took inspiration from the giant circle Karasuma Fran had used in her attempt to summon Kamisato Kakeru.

That great demon would tear through something on this level.

After all, if Aleister’s predictions were correct, Coronzon had enough direct firepower to push back Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass.

Currently, the human race had no real method of fighting back.

If she learned how to fight this makeshift delaying tactic, it was all over. The next time Lola Stuart made an appearance, no one would be able to stop her.

“...Kh.”

The silver girl could be heard coughing up blood.

This was not the conflict between scientific esper powers and occult magic. Before even getting to that, magic was a dangerous thing in and of itself. So much so that the person using it could take someone's life without even realizing it.

She could not allow the negative effects of her magic to be released into the wide world.

She ensured the recoil of her magic was sent back to her own body. The girl held a hand to her mouth but still smiled thinly. As if to say this was the proper form of a magician. Even as the midwinter rain struck her, that human looked down at the empty ground and spoke.

“...I will take it all back, Coronzon. Along with my second daughter.”



Academy City had entirely ceased to function as a city.

Of course, the 2.3 million people who lived in the city had no way of knowing about Great Demon Coronzon. They had only seen a flash of light resembling lightning. When a blackout had followed, most of them would have assumed some largescale power distribution problem.

But they could not check social media or trending terms to see some simple statistics.

Nor was there an official announcement to prevent confusion.

...This was unavoidable because the communications infrastructure had gone out along with so much else. There were some who criticized the internet and mobile devices as a hotbed for misinformation, but it was also dangerous to have it entirely cut off and thus isolating people.

An invisible monster quickly spread by word of mouth.

Was it only an accident, or had there been some kind of attack?

Would this be an extended blackout and were there any goods they wanted to grab while they could?

And.

Whether it was an external attack or an internal coup...were they safe where they were?

Everyone immediately chose to take action, but that may have been because they had learned how harsh infrastructure failures could be during the heat wave which had never been explained (at least not officially).

They could not just wait around.

Throwing a tantrum would accomplish nothing. Even if there was no obvious enemy, losing the necessities of life was still a threat.

In fact, it might be worse if there was no enemy to defeat and thus bring it to an end.

After experiencing the fear of the city infrastructure failing during the heat wave caused by a microwave attack, those 2.3 million people acted swiftly. They did not lament the sudden confusion and they did not swarm a convenient authority figure to vent their anger. *If they did not adapt to this change, they really would die.* That was the way of things in the natural world, but that harsh logic had returned to the surface here. It did not sound at all like something a city of science would do, but once they sensed that strange atmosphere, they really were quick to act.

“Don’t push! There’s no reason to panic! You don’t need to rush the buses! We are opening up the trucks and dump trucks!”

An Anti-Skill officer in a green track suit guided some children who were carrying as much luggage as they could. But even the adults shouting with their physical voices did not actually know what had happened. What had that flash of light been? Had all of the city’s countless wind turbines been taken out? Had there been a problem with the rushed recovery work, or was this a malicious attack? Their minds were full of questions, but they could not let it show. If they did, it could trigger an explosive panic among the students who made up eighty percent of the population. And given their esper powers, that had to be avoided.

For now, they knew Academy City had been reduced to an environment as dangerous as during the heat wave. Most of the children could not stay here. Everything had stopped, so they could not even inject them with tracking nanodevices.

How much would times change after this?

The toothbrushes and piggy banks they carried like normal were collections of bizarre technology to the outside world. More importantly, the children themselves had gone through the esper development program that allowed them to bring microscopic quantum theory to the level of macroscopic physical phenomena.

And there were some who could not follow the normal evacuation instructions.

For example, there were military mass-produced clone girls who all shared the same face.

“You aren’t coming with us? asks Misaka as Misaka tugs on your coat sleeve.”

A small girl of about ten wore an overprotectively thick coat.

The person resting his weight on a modern design cane was Academy City’s strongest Level 5.

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

“...I’ve got stuff to take care of.”

“Shouldn’t Misaka go with you?”

“Don’t be stupid. You’d only get in the way.”

They were approached by a small, round car that did not fit the #1’s tastes at all. Yoshikawa Kikyou sat in the driver’s seat. She was a specialist in that clone technology.

A girl wearing something resembling an ao dai waved from the passenger seat with a cruel look in her eyes. She was Misaka Worst. She was a living weapon designed for use against Accelerator by outputting only the malicious parts of the Misaka Network.

The researcher in a lab coat, Yoshikawa Kikyou, opened the driver’s side door as she spoke.

“Have you finished your goodbyes?”

“You got this completely wrong, you straight-laced woman. We should’ve watched through binoculars for twenty or thirty minutes. Bya hya!! Ah ha ah ha ha!! And after Misaka hoped to intercept the #1’s lovey-dovey face through the Misaka Network☆”

The #1 clicked his tongue again, but with more malice behind it this time.

He sounded fully exasperated.

“What’s being done with the other clones?”

“That has already been arranged. We can’t gather a bunch of identical girls on a bus, so they’re being transported as cargo. But if you ask me, a sealed container is more comfortable than your average one-room apartment.”

“What happens after they leave?”

“Even with so many satellites circling the planet, there are still a surprising number of secret gardens left here and there. There may have been a better way for me to spend my time unemployed. What, did you think the outside media could actually catch wind of this?”

Accelerator lightly tapped his modern design cane against the wet asphalt.

And he spoke.

“That’s fine then.”

“Ni shi shi. You’ve changed, #1.”

“Is there something wrong with that?”

“...Oh, dear. You really have moved to a higher stage, haven’t you? As someone soaked in the evil side, Misaka feels a little lonely.”

Misaka Worst pouted her lips like a child in the passenger seat of the small, round car, but Accelerator did not care. Thinking of himself as the strongest was the same as giving up on any further growth. And could you really call that “strong”? He could actually ask that question now.

“This won’t be a long trip. I’ll deal with it and get back right away.”

“Oh? Don’t you want to use this chance to tear apart your collar and fly free?”

“Are you serious?”

Academy City was a crucible of malice.

But without this city and the external organizations that cooperated with it, the Sisters would have had no place in the world. The outside world was not prepared for those clones, both from a medical equipment standpoint and a legal standpoint. No matter who stood at the top, Academy City was necessary as the framework that protected them.

“...There’s nothing...really nothing to worry about, right?” asked the small girl.

She grabbed Accelerator’s coat and looked up at him.

“You aren’t going to fight again, are you? asks Misaka as Misaka makes sure.”

“ ... ”

Now, what would the correct answer be for a normal human? As someone who held the strongest rank, the #1 had no way of knowing.

During World War III, he had brought Last Order to Russia because it had been an emergency. More importantly, he had still been mentally immature at the time. He now had the “strength” needed to accept that. Back then, he had probably been unable to bear the fear of having something important to him so far out of reach. Just like in a stormy

sea or on a snowy mountain, he had feared the wind would carry her forever out of reach if he let go for even a moment.

But that was wrong.

He no longer thought true trust looked like that.

Accelerator would now be looking to a different world centered on an axis entirely different from the rank he had built up so far. He could not predict what would happen. But there was one thing he had to say regardless of that. There were multiple types of strength and the #1 felt he was realizing the strength that would allow him to say this.

So he said it.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be back.”

“Right.”

Now, it was time to get to work.

As if shaking free of his reluctance, Accelerator turned his back on the warm world he had created while being saved by a few different miracles.

A never-before-seen battlefield awaited him beyond the darkness.

“Do you have any idea what time it is, Index!? That’s simply not an option! This pork ramen stick is just uncooked cup ramen shaped into a stick! It’ll kill you! You should only eat a mass of sodium and calories like that when you’re trapped on a snowy mountain!!”

“Leering!? I really don’t think you should be judging other people’s thoughts based on your own, Takitsubo-san! And what is this about a pale mini-China dress and a silver-haired, brown-skinned, and bandaged Egyptian woman!? Besides, you can’t use psychometry! Ehh? You have no proof there’s a signal coming from south-southwest and why was your description of the brown-skinned woman so much more detailed!? Someone, help me!!”

Accelerator sighed and stared off into the distance for once.

...Keeping one’s distance from others could be very important.



The time and place shifts to the Egyptian coast of the Mediterranean.

The sky was a clear blue and the air was dry.

This was a point on the way to their destination.

It was the kind of desert oasis seen on a postcard. A hideout had been prepared there. Instead of a villa, it took the form of a boxy RV.

With the stage in Egypt, it seemed like the time for a bandaged brown beauty to shine, but the Magic Gods like Nephthys and Niang-Niang were nowhere to be found. For one thing, where they went could not be influenced by the interests of the human world. However, a pure berserker would appear in the center of conflict regardless. That was the way the silver girl saw it.

This was no more than the sinful human world.

“I’ve repaid my final debt, Aleister,” said the blond sunglasses boy named Tsuchimikado Motoharu. “This is a safe hideout for now, but don’t forget that the situation is changing by the second.”

The silver girl, who wore a blue blazer uniform, a witch’s hat, and a cape, glanced over at someone.

Karasuma Fran, a bob cut girl in a hoodie bikini, nodded.

The rabbit-ear antennae on her head and the ball-shaped Doppler radar on her butt wiggled a bit as she spoke.

“...Nothing contradicts that. There are no EM or IR transmissions and I am detecting no faint magnetic readings from electronic circuits. We do not have to fear a locator beaming our position back to England or radio-triggered plastic explosives on the bottom of the RV.”

Those malicious hypotheticals might sound ridiculous, but they were not completely out of the question. Rather than questioning Tsuchimikado’s humanity, there were simply too many reasons to hold a grudge against Aleister.

That said, Fran was a former member of the Kamisato Faction, but she was also a magician who had blended into that extraordinary group to send reports back to Lola Stuart. She looked as absentminded as Takitsubo Rikou, but she lived in the same world as Tsuchimikado Motoharu who had infiltrated Academy City. She was better suited for detecting malice than Kamijou Touma or Accelerator.

“But do we really have to attack England head-on? I doubt they are all Coronzon’s pawns...”

“Well, they will not all be under her direct control like you were. But the good justice of a British gentleman will be in our way here. If we spend time explaining everything, we will lose the time I bought us. The British will not know what they are protecting, so even if it means a direct fight, we must grasp at Coronzon’s Achilles’ heel as quickly as possible.”

“ ... ”

“There is no need for you to come along. There was nothing you could have done to avoid the A. O. Francisca incident, so you need not feel responsible.”

“Hmph,” snorted the sunglasses boy. “Also, there are still German landmines in the Egyptian desert. Don’t blame me if you drive over one and blow yourself up.”

“Sure.”

“You won’t get anything else out of me. I’ll be infiltrating things behind the scenes in my own way. If you care about your family, then keep that in mind. Put my little sister in danger and I will kill you.”

Finally, Tsuchimikado Motoharu gave another look toward Fran rather than Aleister. He seemed to be asking her what she would do. The hoodie bikini girl shook her head. Just like when she had shaken free of her love, that small girl would not run away and hide. She would challenge things head-on and secure a place for herself. She did not want “the ends of the earth” like Tsuchimikado.

Fran had been directly controlled by Lola (i.e. Coronzon) using three red jewels, so she may have sensed a different sort of danger. Did she want to thoroughly eliminate the possibility of being controlled again, or did she want to repay the others for saving her? That was unclear.

“...Understood. It’s your life, so I’ll trust your instincts.”

That was all.

Almost like a Villager A, who existed only to guide the protagonist, Tsuchimikado Motoharu vanished into the middle of the desert as if fading into the sand.

“Now, then.”

Long silver hair, a blue blazer uniform, a witch’s hat, and a cape. The root cause who had transformed into a girl took a breath, opened the stainless-steel door, and stepped inside the RV with the hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl. The space was larger than a van. The sofa and table folded up and the bath was a shower room smaller than a phone booth, but they could not be picky.

The spiky-haired high school boy named Kamijou Touma had already entered to inspect the temporary home, but now he frowned.

“So you brought us here, but why Egypt?”

“For European magicians, it is a nearby holy land much like Tibet and the Dark Continent of Africa is a crucible of the mystical. This place is also closely related to the experiments

for summoning Aiwass and Coronzon. ...Although it turns out Mathers summoned Coronzon before I did. They *have a fundamentally different axis* to the humans who ascended to Magic Godhood, so I doubt we can stand up to them through force alone. If I am going to be extending myself, I wanted to start at an advantageous location. I do not know how effective it will be, but no place on earth would be better for jamming that Great Demon.”

That would be why they had chosen a mobile RV instead of a fixed villa. She did not think this would remain a safe place to the very end. In fact, continually moving to hide their tracks would be better.

“Mina Mathers.”

“Yes?”

A cat-ears widow(!?) in mourning clothes hid behind a corner of the RV. She tilted her head a little and awaited her orders.

At her feet, a calico cat chased after her tail which moved around like an independent creature.

Girl Aleister’s expression did not change.

“Take care of Lilith while I am away. She is a baby and the historical Lilith died of typhoid fever. Be extra careful with milk, toys, and anything else she might put in her mouth. This baby was reborn by twisting destiny, so be careful of anything related to the original cause of death.”

“Understood. According to my parameters, I am a wife, so there is nothing to worry about.”

Now. ...Who was it that had tearfully curled up in front of a convenience store with a power cable in her mouth because she did not understand the concept of food? If that store manager had seen this, he might have screamed, but the silver girl was not too bothered about things that could be learned with a simple search.

Blatant hostility and mechanical politeness.

From beginning to end, everything that surrounded Aleister fell into those two categories.

She may have realized that because that former board chairman gave a faint smile. The one exception may have been Kamijou Touma.

A small life wrapped in baby clothes uttered a quiet voice. When working with Hamazura Shiage, she had used a number of mystical items in the form of a three-dimensional puzzle and fluently spoken human language through a wooden doll, but her natural form was a perfectly normal baby. It may have only been in combat mode that she did anything so extreme.

This may have been the final anchor for Aleister Crowley. That existence was the lifeline that held him or her in a kind world. The human shook free of that and made an announcement.

“I will rescue my other daughter as well.”

Index, Othinus, Accelerator, Hamazura Shiage, Takitsubo Rikou, Karasuma Fran, and Kamijou Touma.

She looked across those faces.

“To be honest, the British people, who innocently believe in the justice they were given, have done nothing wrong, but no one can kill Great Demon Coronzon who has been temporarily sealed in Academy City. Even after all that, she will crawl back out before long. Once Coronzon is free once more, there will be no taking back my daughter and a dark shadow will be eternally cast on humanity’s history. If the great magic nation of England is unwittingly protecting her Achilles’ heel, time only permits us to forcibly break our way through. There is simply too much we would have to explain: that Crowley still lives, that the top of the science side is a magician, that there is no wall between magic and science, and so on. I do not want to waste the time I bought us by destroying Academy City, so we will break through.”

“This is sounding dangerous already...”

It was of course the spiky-haired high school boy who interrupted with a troubled look.

The human humanly smiled with viciousness separate from the standard emotions.

“Lola Stuart controls England from within and spreads her desired destruction both inside and outside of that country. After seeing what was done to the grimoire library and Karasuma Fran, you should be familiar with her cruelty. I promise you that leaving this be will benefit no one.”

“Honestly, are we balancing evil on both sides of the scale here?” asked Accelerator.

“This seems far better than something as dangerous as pure good, if you ask me. Currently, there is no way to kill Great Demon Coronzon who is possessing my second daughter. Not even with Imagine Breaker. This is due to the way she has sewn herself to all 53 nations and regions in the British Commonwealth. I am taking measures in the other regions, so we will directly attack England itself.”

They had not just stopped by Egypt in order to follow Aleister Crowley’s past footsteps. The world map spread out on the fold-up table had a line crudely drawn in red permanent marker. It looked like the path of someone moving around the world in an old fighting game. It began in Tokyo, Japan, continued along Southeast Asia, arrived in Egypt where they were now, crossed the Mediterranean to reach Greece, traveled to France, and then crossed the Strait of Dover from Calais to reach southeast England.

“Calais has already fallen,” coldly stated Aleister Crowley. “Academy City has ceased functioning and no one can do anything to change that, so the cutting-edge scientific weapons will all be in disarray. Because even military satellite communications are shared these days. We only need to focus on their magical forces. We are about to do the reverse of the Normandy landing. No matter what kind of defenses we find waiting, we will force our way across the sea to reach England. Everyone who has come this far has their own objective here and most of those are the results of disasters, the seeds of which I sowed. I am not kind, so I will tell you this: I will not spend any time on you. This is an express train with no stops along the way. So once you find the station you want, you will have to jump off the train and fulfill your objective on your own. It is no concern of mine if you miss your stop or screw up your landing and break your leg.”

“...”

“Similarly, my objective is my own. You are not obligated to stay with me to the last stop. If things look too dangerous, abandon me and jump off. Academy City no longer exists. The adults will not protect you. So take responsibility for yourself. That is the final lesson from your former board chairman.”

No one told her she had no right to say that.

He or she had toyed with so many people, taken so much from them, and sent their lives off track.

But she said to take responsibility for yourself.

She was an extraordinary villain. Aleister Crowley could have used all the science side’s information technology to cover up her evil reputation, but she had not. This magician had abandoned her apparent age and even gender, but it was clear she was not lying about this.

“Now, let us begin.”

Was the indistinct aroma of death the result of her resolve?

Carrying the smell of death because she did not fear death was very much like that human.

“Magic and science. I suppose it’s time to destroy every part of the world I divided.”



All of that.

The spiky-haired high school boy named Kamijou Touma vaguely thought back to all of that.

Why was his mind so hazy? The answer was extremely simple.



“I think we’re screwed...”

Pressure weighed on his stomach. His vision harshly shook up and down. But Kamijou Touma did not even have time for ordinary seasickness. A more direct threat squeezed at his heart and sent extreme signals sparking through his brain.

“I really think we’re screwed! We’re gonna die! This time, we really are gonna die!!”

With the sound of tearing metal, his vision opened up.

It had originally been a cruiser. But this was one of those deadly things seen in stupid American videos where they forcibly strapped a jet engine to a boat to send it racing between the waves at 150km/h. However, the roof was entirely missing, transforming it into a convertible. And the dark ocean before his eyes was far too different from the usual image of the Strait of Dover.

It was a moonlit night.

But the explosions, flashes of light, and roaring flames hid both the stars in the sky and the full moon.

It was less than forty kilometers from Calais, France, but nasty beams of light shot from the distant horizon and tore through the icy sea breeze. Aleister was at the helm, but Kamijou had no idea what she was basing her lateral evasive actions on. The boat was being gradually torn apart and the roof had just been blown off. If the line of fire had been just a few dozen centimeters lower, it would have torn off and vaporized his head before he could even raise his right hand.

Index clung to his arm and looked pale as the cruiser used the waves like ramps.

“That’s England...? How should I put it? It seems entirely different.”

“Index?”

Kamijou looked puzzled. She was from the Anglican Church, but she was also somewhat distanced from England due to having her memories erased each year. It may have been like seeing your homeland on TV. Index seemed to be wrinkling her brow.

“I think they have a bunch of unique emblems set up on the beach to fire the divine punishments and curses of patron saints. But that’s the same as rejecting everything yourself. It’s like they’re holing up in their shell and pushing away what they don’t want to see.”

Aleister gave a snort of laughter at that.

If everything Kamijou had seen in the Windowless Building was true, then he(?) did not have many good memories of his(?) homeland of England.

“So they can fire about 800,000 shots a minute over the entire Strait of Dover. Based on that, they’re trying to crush everything with a barrage even if they aren’t guided.”

Palm-sized Othinus sat on Kamijou's shoulder. Perhaps because she was a god of war, she did not seem surprised by this.

It was like a fireworks festival using live artillery, but this was not a childish show put on by the magic gunners controlling the extra-large spiritual items lined up on the coast.

In fact, they were the desperate ones.

[illegible]

This did not come from beyond the horizon.

Kamijou ducked down when he heard the roar of carnivorous dinosaur erupt nearby.

There was a bloody monster of a man with countless swords and spears piercing his body.

There was an old woman riding a wooden broom with several holes that looked like human faces.

There was a beautiful winged young man with a lovely face and a rainbow halo.

There was a giant grotesque dragon made of organs with several giant maws that resembled carnivorous plants.

There were hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, and maybe even more of them. That bizarre army spread out with enough force to fill the dark sea and they pushed in from the French side to the English side. The Anglican Church's most secret of techniques gave them 800,000 shots per minute, but not even that could push them back. As the monsters in the front were crushed by the beams of light, more monsters pushed past them and continued ever closer to the United Kingdom.

Most of them did not even have human form.

There was a swollen mass of octopus-like tentacles. There was a carnivorous dinosaur with its muscles forcibly contained by rusted metal armor. There was something that comically emulated a human form with pieces of concrete patched together. There was even one that looked like it could swallow a large truck or tanker whole.

Hoodie Bikini Karasuma Fran kept herself warm with an insulating gel on her belly and she held her small hands on the top of her hood as the wind blew violently at it.

“...Aleister Crowley,” she groaned.

Of course, she was not referring to the girl steering their boat.

And this was not limited to the Strait of Dover.

This war was underway in all 53 regions of the British Commonwealth.

“Call them the Crowley's Hazards. They are a disaster that bears my name.”

With the low laugh of a storybook witch, Aleister gave a simple explanation while steering and humming.

“Because Coronzon used Lola’s body to kill me in the Windowless Building, my many overlapping possibilities flowed out. And there are more than a billion of them. Keeping track of the exact number would be too much of a pain. Some of those Crowleys have mastered magic, but some of them gave up on it altogether. But, well, none of them are what you could call a normal possibility. They are still me, after all.”

Thick beams of light continued to tear through the group of Aleisters known as Crowley's Hazards, but they pushed back with even greater force. That should have been a good thing for Kamijou and the others who were hiding among those monsters as they crossed the dark ocean to reach England, but the sight was enough to send a chill down their spines. The vast sea was soaked red as if by a red teabag and flesh and bones could be seen floating here and there.

Viewed from space, the Earth may have looked like a bloody planet.

And it had already been explained that this was not limited to the Strait of Dover. The Crowley's Hazards were wielding their power everywhere. They did so directly in 53 countries. And if the surrounding countries were dragged into the chaos, no country or region would not play a role in the battle.

Aleister Crowley was not concerned with the fate of his own lives.

It was possible that was also true of the silver girl steering their boat.

An ear-splittingly raw sound rang out.

The dragon made from countless organs and mouths had split open its maws. And it released a thick deluge of what may have been stomach acid. With the force of an industrial water jet, the counterattack split the battlefield along a straight line and erupted beyond the horizon. Something like a cumulonimbus cloud explosively grew on the surface, but that may have been chemical smoke with the properties of sulfuric acid.

The bombardment of light from the Strait of Dover faded somewhat and the monsters rushed in.

They were close.

They could see the coast made of white lime. Kamijou Touma gulped while viewing their goal in the moonlight. No, that may have been the starting line. By this point, the flow of time was too confusing.

Just then, a beam of light shot by too close for comfort.

It struck the giant mass of organs that had been racing along next to them. Everything scattered around and a squishy mass the size of a light truck flew toward them.

“W-w-waaahhh!?”

There was nothing they could do.

When the heavy mass hit the cruiser, it was bent like a candy box someone had stepped on, it was torn apart, and Kamijou’s group was thrown into the red-dyed coastal area.

CHAPTER 1

The Unwavering Magic Kingdom and the Pervert.

Welcome_Home, A.C!!.

Part 1

The situation was very different from normal.

The Strait of Dover was the entrance to the Eurasian continent. The coast was a beautiful pure white not found anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The land had originally been made of soft limestone. Immediately past the fine white beach were nearly-vertical cliffs that resembled white walls. When the moon was out, the entire land seemed to shine in the moonlight, which should have created a wonderful contrast with the dark ocean.

That was nowhere to be seen.

Everything there was a collection of impurities. Like a beach covered in garbage washed in from a foreign country or like the aftermath of a cargo ship accident, the silhouettes of artificial objects were visible all across the long stretch of coast.

The December sea breeze reached the cheeks of a female knight in charge of protecting that coast. It was cold, but not so cold that the ocean froze over. This place was not as snowy as Santa Claus's home. The winter wind smelled strongly of the ocean and retained a hint of warmth, but on this night, that gave the disconcerting impression that you were bathing in blood.

The corners of concrete blocks jutted out from the dark ocean.

Several large shields were stabbed into the beach like barricades.

The white beach had been crudely leveled, but was that to hastily bury landmine-like magic circles in the sand?

Several steel beams stuck out from the vertical cliff wall and rose vines were wrapped around those like the barbed wire on the outer wall of a prison.

No, it went beyond ways of obstructing a direct landing.

There were wooden boxes and tanks of supplies, or traps made to look that way. There were rescue tents. There were trenches to hide in when attacks arrived from beyond the horizon. The entire panoramic view was sullied by a massive defensive formation that used both direct and indirect methods.

That beautiful coast was a mere one hundred kilometers away from the capital city of London. In the most basic and essential way, if they allowed the coast here to fall, the United Kingdom was as good as defeated.

The fine sand of the beach looked like the desert at night in a picture book, but immediately past that, the limestone rose vertically to form the walls of a natural fortress. Some things taller than humans were sticking out of that cliff face.

They were gigantic disks carved with lions' faces and hunters' clothing.

Those were swiveling and changing direction much like parabolic antennae. The female knight in silver armor and a surcoat raised her voice.

"Group 3, begin your rest phase! Groups 1 and 2, move to the front!! On my signal, begin simultaneous prayer and charge the emblems ASAP!!"

Each group was made up of more than a hundred people and the many nuns lined up in a rectangular formation. Young girls kneeled, folded their hands, and wholeheartedly offered up prayers.

But that was not the source of the power.

Praying to god was fine. But was it right to pray that only you will be saved when faced with a battle and other people needing help? Also, there were saints like Saint Vitus or Saint Julian whose miracles were more or less divine punishment or a curse. You could intentionally trigger that divine punishment and then divert it to a different target in order to attack someone. It could be seen as irreverent, but it was a very human method of systemizing the ability to manipulate the anger of holy ones.

Of course, they had more than one kind of attack.

First of all, the different attack emblems sticking out of the earth were distributed to provide mutual covering fire no matter where an attack arrived. And to fill the slight lag between attacks, completely different forms of magical cannons were prepared: magic mirrors that used Maria Kannon, the wind instruments from Revelation, etc.

The horizontal downpour of attacks was not allowed any gaps as it was released toward the dark sea.

Instead of sniper shots against a point or sweeping attacks along a line, they suppressed the horizon by covering an entire surface.

(I thought we only had to wait until Archbishop Lola could be contacted, but now all I'm hearing is that a search of her residence at Lambeth Palace found instructions describing the hiding places of some trump cards that can turn this around. I know Hologres Mirates is in charge of the investigation, so what is he even doing?)

"...They won't make it in time."

However.

Even after all that, those were the only words in the female knight's heart.

They could defeat the enemy. They could stop them. But the number of enemies pushing back at them was overwhelmingly greater than the amount they could slay. These beasts were large enough to sink a large truck or cargo ship with a tackle and they filled the ocean with enough force to push back against the hail of magical attacks.

The female knight held a single gold coin in her hand.

It was a Beheading Coin. The spiritual item had a horrific name, but it had its origins with a bribe a criminal's family would pay the executioner back when criminals were beheaded with an axe.

It was a request to give them a quick and painless death.

This spiritual item was a last resort. It would raise one's concentration and cut off their pain and fear for just a few seconds. It was a "gift of mercy" that allowed its user to choose death without hesitation. It may have been more like portable anesthetic than the final dagger used to put an unsaveable fellow soldier out of their misery.

(These large spiritual items put together by the former Roman Catholics and the Amakusa are pretty impressive, but it's another sign that this war requires quantity over quality...)

A disconcerting sound that resembled chewing spread throughout her surroundings.

There were concrete blocks and steel beams sticking up from the ocean bottom like a sunken forest. Those were another method of preventing a landing. Your average giant fish or ship would tear a hole in its belly, but that did not work here. This enemy's belly actually broke, smashed, and crushed the underwater obstacles.

Crowley's Hazard.

No one had officially named them that, but it had naturally occurred to everyone in the 53 attacked countries.

It was not at all an even fight. Their opponents pushed back against the hail of cannon fire, blew away the ocean turrets and unmanned observation ships, and even cleared away the underwater obstacles in the shallows. They had already arrived that close.

What would happen if those things arrived on land?

Buildings, homes, and reinforced concrete shelters would be meaningless.

They were like a great gluttonous maw.

Their mere presence would destroy everything in England.

While faced with those monsters pushing in from the dark ocean, the female knight drew the sword she wore at her hip. That heroic woman spun around the moonlit blade and did not hesitate to raise her voice.

“Main Knights unit, forward!! Our target is the Crowley’s Hazards. Groups B through D. Engage them as soon as they arrive on land. The noncombat prayer unit borrowed from the Anglicans should fall back immediately!!”

Several thundering footsteps reached that limestone land.

The knights’ chances were irrelevant. Whether they wielded swords, spears, axes, clubs, or metal balls, they found magical meaning in their weapons and combined extreme physical training with miracles and the mystical as they faced their enemy.

“Now this is a battle worth fighting.”

“Everyone, how about we see who can slay the most?”

The female knight in the lead answered that brave suggestion with a fierce smile.

A moment later, those warfighters jumped down the limestone cliff to the beach like a bursting silver flash.



“This ain’t good.”

That carefree voice could be heard at about five hundred meters up.

A unit of Anglican witches rode their brooms lower than the clouds so they would have a clear view.

“The cannon fire is stopping. What’s this, what’s this? Are they hoping to buy time however they can while falling back to regroup? I’ll admit they do have several lines of defense set up like a baumkuchen, but still.”

“The enemy is definitely reaching land now. Our recon isn’t really needed anymore, is it?”

“We’re up against an army of *the* eccentric Crowley, right? It looks like they can just do whatever they want, so I really want to avoid having one shoot its tongue out at me like a chameleon. How about we get out of here???”

They were more selfish than the girls in plain nun habits acting as the prayer unit on the coast, but that may have been why they had settled on being witches.

However, not everything was peaceful for those witches in the wind.

They saw a bright light beyond the darkness.

“This ain’t good.” The broom-riding witch did not sound particularly worried. “Curse Greater London. They’ve activated the triple-quadruple final barrier. Oh, honestly. And we’re still outside the castle gate. Are they cutting off our escape route as a way to demand we fight to the death for our country? Flying over the ocean is reckless enough, but we’re done for if we have our power of flight taken while over land!”

“That guy in charge of defense back there must be the premature type. And it apparently doesn’t matter if you’re from the Knights or the Anglicans. We’re all being used as sacrificial pawns.”

“You mean Holegres Mirates from the Knights? I just hope whoever’s in charge isn’t getting their ass kicked by everyone there. So what do we do? Give up on everything and start rooting for the Crowleys?”



“Emergency, emergency.”

Despite his words, the young boy’s footsteps were as accurate as clockwork. The hem of his baggy habit dragged on the floor behind him. No honorable poverty, piety, or purity could be found in him. The scent of someone who made a living through killing was too strong for any other concepts to apply. More than the various forms of magic he wore, it seemed like a disturbing ritual that his very existence was allowed within the church’s teachings. Or perhaps if he made a single mistake, the spell would be broken and that young boy would be the one burned at the stake.

He belonged to Necessarius, the 0th Parish of the Anglican Church.

His name was Nics Everblind.

His first name was taken from words like bionics and electronics, so it was clear that he was a magician who specialized in some kind of technological or academic field.

Arms and legs were roughly tossed into umbrella stands. Organs dangled from the ceiling by chains like some kind of meat being smoked. But the young boy ignored all of that as

he approached a closet made of black oak. When he threw open the double doors, dozens and maybe hundreds of solid sparkles stared back at his juvenile face.

And “stared” was not a figurative expression.

The shelves lined with soft velvet were covered with glass eyes.

“They said ‘unrestricted’, so I can use whatever I want. I can even go with that one I normally hold back on. This is incredible. It really is an emergency. #49, #51...oh, but I hate to miss a chance to use #65.”

For an instant—just an instant—he was tempted to grab as many as he could carry and bring them all with him, but that would be meaningless. These were cutting-edge products processed with paints that would destroy a biological eye. No matter how powerful and unparalleled a spiritual item was, a tool was still a tool. They were useless if he could not properly *attach* them.

Attach them to his own body, that is.

He was a magician who focused on signs. And in his case, it was the magical symbols that could be represented with a single body. But what was he to do when he reached the limit of what he could express with his own arms and legs? The answer was obvious to him, but if his method’s usefulness became widely accepted, it would lead to an age where magicians severed their own arms and legs and dragged out their own organs.

The young boy’s one eye moved back and forth like the ticking of a clock, but he finally moved his baggy sleeves and grabbed one item from his collection. And he held it up like the medallions or cards a child his age would normally collect.

“#77: Shiva Imitation. Yes, this is the best option.”

Eye powers came in a variety of forms—petrifying the body, filling a heart with wickedness, reducing luck, etc.—but what the young boy had chosen was not excessively powerful.

Shiva’s eye could see through to the evil of the world and learn if it was the proper time to destroy it.

“Emergency, emergency.”

In other words, it was simply the appropriate time.

Even a child could tell just by looking out the window. And despite how he looked, he was not that pure.

“Honestly, the world truly is doomed if people start glorifying destruction at the hand of god.”

He stuck the necessary prosthetic eye in his eye socket, opened the door, and ran out into the polished marble hallway. Several suitcases cut by in front of him. The curves carved into the surface may have been a sigilized name. They were following around a blonde maid like baby ducks, but those suitcases were not products of the science side full of semiconductors and sensors. Tea-serving dolls that carried a specific item had been perfectly normal even in Edo-period Japan. The fly in the ointment was that they may have been given insufficient teaching because the small bags would fall out of line and get lost and the large bags would loudly bang into each other when they got too close or competed over the best route.

“Hey, stop that! Don’t fight over me!”

The woman tried shouting at them, but she must not have expected much from it. Eventually, the surprisingly muscular maid knocked the suitcases onto their sides, stacked them up, and carried them herself. As the maid began to leave like a busy pizza deliverer or a librarian returning books to the shelves, the prosthetic eye magician called out to her.

“Hello, Ms. Catacombs.”

“Yes, do you need something?”

Since she would use that arm strength of hers on him if he carelessly called her “miss”, the maid was approaching the precipice in a number of ways. At her age, she wanted to meet some normal people, not the freaks you found in the magic industry.

“I have an apocalyptic eye in right now, so try not to look at my face too much. Even if it is fake.”

“Oh, do you need to make some adjustments? If a single is good enough, I have a few individual soundproofed rooms open, so I could place you into immediate meditation.”

In other words, all of those things that looked like suitcases were actually “coffins” meant to stuff people inside. There was enough padding between to make them into ultra-compact soundproofed environments. Soundproofed environments the size of phone booths were advertised for people to practice the violin in their apartment, but this was an even more advanced version of that.

“No, not that,” cut in the boy. “And how are the coffins ever supposed to learn if you carry them yourself?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. It is because they can’t live up to my expectations that I have no choice but to do this.”

“You’re overprotective.”

Their conversation was interrupted by a loud noise that sounded like the building's materials being cut or even torn away. They looked over to see a smiling young wife in glasses who held a thick leash. However, the thing struggling on the polished marble floor (which was reflective enough to put the women's panties in a dangerous position!) was not a quadruped. It was a red and rusty circular blade similar but different to a carpenter's circular saw. British history was a history of decapitations. It was obvious what would happen if that irregularly-struggling blade reached you.

Just as it had been believed that the mandrake grew from a criminal's bodily fluids, impurities could gain special powers when transformed. You could think of this as a collection of sword rust. Thanks to their troubled history, this prized product was packed full of the grudges of the royal and privileged.

The young wife(?) in glasses only had affection in her eyes.

"Hee hee hee. Sorry about that. My adorable little Alps is so naughty she won't listen to anything I say."

"...Oh, no. Now I'm really scared," said the young boy.

"If you want to curl up, I could lend you a coffin."

While the three of them chatted, they each held a Beheading Coin in their hand and made their way toward the exit.

Westminster Abbey was used for official ceremonies by the royal family. At the moment, the carriage stopped next to it was shaped like a ridiculously-large pumpkin. And one step outside that door brought them to the center of London, making it the most important location for enemy and ally alike.

"Welcome back, Crowley. Welcome to London, the city of fog, magic, and battle. Do not underestimate the depths of this great magic kingdom. Now, let's do this, you pervert! You monsters who have even cast aside your human forms!!"

Welcome to the end times.

A second national crisis had arrived to follow the British Halloween.

Part 2

It's hopeless.

We're so dead.

“Pant, pant...”

It was December in England and he was soaking wet on the beach in the middle of the night. Kamijou Touma was all alone and he could not find anything to do besides hide behind a small rock like a crab.

(We got separated almost immediately, Aleister!! I have no idea what to do without you around and where did Index and Othinus end up!?)

There was also the fact that he had crossed who-knows-how-many national borders without a passport, but he had already been corrupted when it came to that. After traveling around the world fighting powerful men like something from a fighting game, that spiky-haired boy saw far too much of the world as his own backyard.

He was not surprised at all to find his cellphone had no signal.

And he doubted that was simply due to being in a foreign country. Since they were fighting a war, information was probably being blocked for civilians. He was in a warzone. He only wanted to live a peaceful life, but that fact finally caught up to him here.

“Eh heh heh. I want to eat sprouts. Yes, just dump a bunch of sprouts in a frying pan, add some salt and pepper for flavor, cook them to a nice sizzle, and then fill my stomach with sprouts. Eh heh heh heh heh...”

When people were faced with a situation they could not handle, they would try to escape into their past. Although the fact that this made him fantasize about a pile of sprouts said something about his lifestyle.

He had made it this far on momentum, but what was he supposed to do now? What would he eat? Where would he sleep? Would he have to walk the entire way? Without riding a train? When the reality of the situation suddenly hit him, Kamijou grew pale and patted his pockets, but his wallet only had 72 yen inside. He could not imagine how he would get that mere pocket change converted into British currency.

(Dammit, wait. I have to stay calm. Not many people will have realized that Lola is Coronzon. Someone needs to do something. Argh, I just want to do something about that demon and save Aleister’s daughter, so why do I have to fight against these decent British people!?)

A heavy straining sound reached him from beyond the small boulder.

It was surprisingly close by.

Not even ten meters away, a dignified female knight in a surcoat and silver armor was swinging around a double-edged sword while a monk in a black tailcoat fought back using the various staffs he held in his many arms. He would have originally been a Westerner, but the bald man looked something like a many-armed Buddhist statue. He pressed two

hands together in front of his chest, jabbed the bottom of the staffs in from multiple angles like bullets, and fought on seemingly even footing with the British knight.

“Hh!!”

The knight’s blade flipped around and chopped off one of the bald man’s arms.

The battle continued in her favor from there. She pushed in like an avalanche.

But that was not enough.

She could not spend so much time on each individual battle. England’s defense unit had been losing from the moment they failed to push back the Crowley’s Hazards covering the ocean. If they could not swiftly slice through each individual monster like it was no more than a weed, they would be surrounded and swallowed up by the never-ending stream of enemy reinforcements.

With the sound of something soft being torn apart, the many-armed tailcoat man swelled out from within and burst. The Crowley transformed into an octopus large enough to pick up a semi-truck and the silver-armored female knight gave another flash of her sword. One of the tentacles was immediately sliced to pieces, a strange sticky liquid stained the white beach, and the course of attack shifted somewhat. After failing to defeat the female knight, the octopus mercilessly smashed the small boulder Kamijou was hiding behind.

“Eek!?”

“?”

A suspicious aura arrived from the female knight.

This was no time to just silently shiver in the British December weather. His one and only chance to escape was while the dust of fine sand and broken limestone filled the air. He did not even bother getting up as he crawled behind another rock nearby. He felt just like a bug running in fear from some bug spray.

He heard more of that straining sound and found it did indeed come from that Crowley’s Hazard. Each tentacle was thicker than his torso and they were covered with elliptical suckers. Except no. Those were eyes, noses, and mouths. They were gnashing their teeth in search of flesh and blood to bite, tear, and swallow.

Aleister seemed capable of controlling the bizarre Crowleys to a certain extent, but this boy did not have that same control. In fact, this looked like a cross between a bloated corpse and a giant octopus and it did not even have the appropriate number of tentacles, so did it even understand human language? Kamijou had no idea which of the many chattering faces to speak to. He felt like a circus member finding himself surrounded by the lions and tigers backstage while the animal tamer was away. And for the British people trying to preserve peace, Kamijou Touma would be seen as a bastard who showed up with

Aleister, so even if he said he wanted to drive out Great Demon Coronzon and rescue Lola, would any of those diligent British people believe him right away?

Kamijou Touma was like the bat who could not be a bird or a beast, so he was already on the verge of tears.

Think. He had to think.

(No matter what anyone says, England is England. Isn't there anyone I know around here!?)

His weak heart could only search for friends.

His cellphone still had no signal, so he did his best to look around from behind the small boulder. He caught a glimpse of some people on top of the white cliff. They seemed to be girls in black habits. He focused his eyes as if praying and tried to find a familiar face.

(Those habits...yes, the zippers make them look like the Roman Catholic ones. No, wait. Could it be...? Yes, it is! That's the former Agnese Force! ...Okay, found them!! There's Lucia and Angelene!! Wow, how can I be so lucky!?)

Kamijou Touma was a hopeless bastard since he was on the villain's side, he had entered the country illegally, and he was sneaking behind cover like a bug, but things were sure to take a turn for the better if he could speak with someone he knew instead of a complete stranger. As he focused on those lateral connections, the spiky-haired boy transformed into a filthy hand-rubbing and bowing boy as he prepared to call out to the top of the cliff. But the exact moment before he did so, the chilly December wind carried a voice down to him.

"I'll kill them!!!! Damn that god-forsaken pervert army! I will never let them set foot in our second home. Oh, god, they're so sticky and gross. I'm going to sterilize everything and everyone related to them!!"

"P-please calm down, Sister Lucia. If we fall back and set up a proper defensive line, we should be much more successful here. So a strategic withdrawal is the best way to kill as many of those perverts as efficiently as possible."

"....."

Kamijou Touma froze with his lips forming the "h" of "hey".

After shrinking back down, the spiky-haired boy gave up on joining them. He did not know English, but the tone had been impossible to misinterpret. With the way those girls were shouting, he was certain anyone they deemed on the enemy's side would be sliced to pieces right away. That reminded him that Lucia was something of an extreme clean freak, so she would never forgive someone she saw as the friend of a pervert. Kamijou Touma should have been more suspicious from the moment he thought he might be lucky.

“Kyaaahh!!”

Then a surprisingly shrill scream rang from the beach.

It was the female knight in the silver armor and surcoat. She must have rushed things and pushed too far ahead. The giant octopus could probably crush a dump truck with its tentacles and one of those gave a horizontal swing that hit the female knight's lower body. She was thrown tumbling through the air and her back slammed into the fine sand of the ground. Kamijou did not know what kind of magical effects her armor provided, but he doubted she would be getting back up anytime soon. It was a miracle that hit hadn't snapped her spine like a game of *daruma otoshi*.

He could not afford to be found.

He could not stand before them.

“Gah!?”

The female knight swung her sword one-handed while lying on her back, but the giant tentacle swung down from above as if to crush her. The sword slammed back down on her breastplate with twice the force of her own swing and the blade snapped. Her arms and legs convulsed like a giant stake had been driven into her heart, but yet another attack came her way. Dry sounds of destruction continued as the aforementioned “suckers” chewed through the armor and surcoat. The cracked metal armor broke and the cloth placed within the joints to protect her skin was torn. It no longer mattered how well-equipped she had been. All that remained was perfectly-normal underclothes and the feminine skin below that thin material.

With a sound much deeper and violent than swinging a metal bat, a tentacle thicker than Kamijou's torso was raised once more.

No. No. I can't.

Kamijou held a hand over his mouth and struggled with himself behind the small boulder, but then something occurred to him.

Even if they had branched out across so many “what ifs”, that Crowley was still Crowley, right? He recalled what he had seen during the pursuit of A. O. Francisca. That eccentric had thrown him into a love hotel just because they needed a quiet place to work.

Even the silver girl had been like that and this Crowley was a seafood festival covered in tentacles and suckers.

Its opponent was a girl. So what would happen to the loser?

Now, are you excited yet?

“Show some self-restraint, you morooon!!”

Kamijou raised his voice.

He ran out and used the element of surprise to punch that tentacle, but then he realized something.

The Crowley's Hazards had branched out from so many “what if” possibilities, but they apparently did actually exist. So unlike normal magic, they could not be negated with a punch from Imagine Breaker. He felt a squishy feeling like he had punched a water bed. He suddenly recalled that nothing had happened to the silver girl Aleister when she sat on his lap.

“...”

But the female knight was in full hostile mode as she pulled away the staff holding her head down, covered her bared chest, and glared tearfully at him.

He could not be a bird or a beast.

Kamijou Touma the Bat had reached the limits of his precarious situation.

With a wet explosive sound, a red liquid sprayed out.

But the spiky-haired boy had not had an arm or a leg blown off.

It was the monster that looked like a cross between a bloated corpse and a giant octopus. Most of it had been entirely blown away. The Crowley's Hazard may not have noticed it had lost its organs because it stood still while hemorrhaging a strange sticky liquid like a fountain. Meanwhile, a white figure landed next to it.

It was Academy City's #1.

Accelerator sounded irritated.

“...What are you playing around for you, goddammit?”

“You...huh?”

“Don't lose your nerve over me killing these things. I don't know if they're really him or not, but why the hell should I stop myself from killing the board chairman?”

He spat out the words in utter annoyance and did not hesitate to kick away the corpse that had lost its organs. Kamijou Touma was an atheist, but he still would not want to take the flowers placed at someone's grave. This act bothered some vague idea lodged somewhere in his heart.

The white remained unsullied.

The fountain-like spray was repelled from the monster like a waterproof coat.

And Kamijou was not the only one surprised by the turn of events. While sitting on the beach and holding an arm over her broken silver breastplate, the female knight stared wide-eyed at them and shouted something in English.

“Who the hell are you? You don’t look like normal people, but surely you aren’t with the Crowley’s Haz—!”

“Sleep.”

There was a quiet sound.

Accelerator flicked something with his thumb and it hit the female knight in the forehead. It seemed to be a flat front tooth taken from one of the octopus’s crushed faces. The female knight’s head wobbled a bit and then she collapsed motionless onto the fine sand.

“Swinging around a broken sword and refusing to listen? Just how badly did the apocalypse hit this country? ...Since it’s wartime, it looks like they aren’t going to treat outsiders like human beings. They’ve let that Lola Stuart person blind them. It does indeed look like we’ll have to defeat them as we go.”

Their doubts were not entirely off base, but the strongest did not bother worrying about it.

Kamijou Touma looked incredibly sad as he grabbed a plastic tarp and placed it over the knight’s chest.

“...Do I really not look like a normal person needing help...?”

“No one’s gonna call you normal if you can remain so calm during this apocalypse.”

Several more liquid explosions blossomed elsewhere.

The scary part was that not all them were colored red.

Blood sprayed again and again. A beetle, some gas, a humanoid form made from thick chains and round metal balls, and a carnivorous dinosaur covered in rusty armor panels all sank into the beach while a silver girl stood at the center of those bizarre forms.

That person wore a wide-brimmed hat and cape over a blue blazer uniform.

She was Magician Aleister Crowley.

“I’m back in England, home of Bunny Gray. Yay!”

And since they both wanted to defeat Coronzon, she (he?) was accompanied by Karasuma Fran as if the hoodie bikini girl was a bodyguard.

“Hold on. Why are you sending cellphone signals all over the place? Either turn it off or remove the battery.”

“Eh?” said Kamijou. “It doesn’t have a signal, so what does it matter?”

“The civilian phones are being restricted, but the official calls for the police and firefighters work just fine. And they can work out your location even with the restrictions in place. You must be suicidal to scatter signals like that when you’re trying to infiltrate the country.”

He doubted he could win an argument against the antenna-covered former UFO girl. Setting aside his pride and obediently obeying was one of Kamijou Touma’s few good points.

Accelerator brought a hand to his choker. He seemed to be checking on it, but Kamijou did not have the guts to ask for details.

Girl Aleister gave a wicked smile.

“So I’ve collected Kamijou Touma as well. That is good news.”

“Wait, those monsters are your fellow Crowleys, aren’t they!? But you’ll still kill them!?”

“After all the trouble I’ve caused others in my life, do you really think I’m going to go easy on myself? Besides, if I was smart enough to pull my hand back from the fire for fear of burning myself, I wouldn’t have started this offensive war.”

Despite what she said, Aleister showed no mercy on others either. When some silver-armored knights noticed the oddity, she held her hand out toward them and unilaterally beat them down with the illusionary swords, guns, or whatever else of Spiritual Tripping. ...Since only the target could see those weapons, was she actually cautious of Kamijou and the others despite what she said?

In a way, this was a completely different direction from the illusion-breaking boy’s right hand.

It was a completed method that gave physical form to illusions and sent them out into the world.

“I will contain the recoil of my own magic. That is my way of taking responsibility, but, well, that makes this awfully convenient. Sharing the battlefield with so many versions of myself allows me to send that recoil all over the place without having to harm anyone else.”

Two people stood next to wickedly-smiling Aleister: Index in her white and gold teacup habit and Magic God Othinus sitting on the nun's shoulder.

"...I've never heard of this recoil. Are you really, really sure it's real?"

"I do approve of facing the world of magic with constant skepticism, but do not let your doubts lead you astray. You carry 103,000 grimoires...plus one more from Mina Mathers. But even the perfect database is useless if you do not know how to use the search engine. Even after gathering all that information, you have not covered all the blind spots."

Kamijou blinked in confusion and asked a question.

"Hey, we're missing some people. What happened to Hamazura and that girl called, um, Takitsubo?"

"I sent up a balloon covered in cameras, but I haven't located them yet. The cliff is made of fragile limestone, so they might have escaped into a cave eroded by the waves."

"You were complaining about my phone earlier, but what about his phone?"

"...You're the only one careless enough to keep your phone on in a warzone."

Fran sounded both apologetic and exasperated. If you converted her words into saying she had sent out a drone to do a search of the surface, you could sense more of that Tsuchimikado-style darkness and less of the eccentric former UFO girl. The way she did things was like using curry powder or mayonnaise to hide the bitterness of a poison.

Meanwhile, Aleister was entirely carefree.

"Not even I am perfect. In the worst case, they were crushed by the Crowley's Hazards that are only focused on killing, but in the next worst case, they could have been captured by the Knights. I suppose the best case is that they are hiding somewhere like you were."

"...And why aren't you suggesting we search for them, you utter failure?"

"Do you not remember what I said a mere thirty seconds ago, you poor student? I am not perfect and I have my stamina to worry about. Plus, that #1 has his choker battery. If we continually wear ourselves down on the front line, this beach will be our graveyard. And if that happens, we will have no way to search for your missing friends."

"..."

"He will have learned the bare minimum of 'etiquette' from his life in the back alleys of Academy City, so I suspect they are already in infiltration mode. I suggest we hide ourselves and preserve our energy for another time. If we are going to search for someone, we should choose the more likely method."

Kamijou turned toward Accelerator and Karasuma Fran, but the #1 did not seem interested and the hoodie bikini girl only nodded. She seemed to support Aleister's idea that they should avoid having the search team wiped out by secondary damages.

The human giggled.

"And as dry as it may seem, the more likely method would be to make our way to London. Everything in this country is gathered there. If they were captured, they will be taken there. And even if they are left here on the Dover beaches, we can search more easily by gathering information in London where all information inevitably ends up. ...We could even intentionally have the Knights capture Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou while we lie in wait to rescue them in London."

"...How likely is that to succeed?"

"Unknown," answered Aleister while sticking out her tongue.

That board chairman had incorporated failure and defeat into her plan. That human had lived a life entirely devoid of guaranteed successes.

"I believe I already told you that I am not kind. I also said I will not spend any time on you. Thus, this marks the end of your childhood where you can simply follow the rails laid out for you. If you have an objective, figure out how to get off the train yourself. Take responsibility for your own life and figure out the most efficient spot to jump off."

Part 3

Crack open the hard plastic.

Connect the colorful cables that pop out like a tuft of hair and you're done.

"Good, it's running, it's running. ...England's car security sure is crap. Anyway, Takitsubo, fasten your seatbelt."

"Right."

It was a large four-wheel drive vehicle that was abandoned on the beach. In addition to an attachment on the roof for skies or a canoe, it had bulky metal bars attached to all four sides, making it look something like a birdcage.

"What is this?" asked Takitsubo.

"It's a lot like what they use in Australia in case they crash into a kangaroo. In England, I'm guessing they're more afraid of sheep or something running out onto the road..."

“Even though it’s a developed nation and a holy land of soccer?”

“Away from the big cities like London, it should be pretty tranquil.”

While they conversed, Hamazura Shiage turned the large steering wheel and drove the big four-wheel drive vehicle across the white sandy beach. They had actually been dropped right into a safe area that felt a lot like the eye of the storm. Their phones sat on the dashboard with the SIM cards removed. His general plan was to assist Aleister in exchange for a guarantee of their safety, but that had fallen apart now that they were separated from Aleister. That said, he didn’t have the courage to run through the explosion-filled coastal battlefield while shouting that name.

In other words...

“Time to retreat. I don’t care where, but let’s get somewhere that’s safe. We can search for Aleister once things have calmed down some.”

He might sound awfully dismissive of Aleister, but when he had to weigh the board chairman against his girlfriend, it was obvious which one he would choose. His top priority was making sure no stray bullets hit that zoned-out bob-cut girl in a pink track suit and sweater. It all came down to that.

“Actually, what are we even doing here?” asked Hamazura.

“I think we were fighting for love and peace or something, but we lost our guide.”

They did know how to contact the others, so it was all the more frustrating that they could not use their phones. Of course, assuming those others were not complete morons, they would have shut off their phones too, so using a payphone was not an option either.

Yes, these two had been partially clever.

Had it been fortunate or unfortunate that they had quickly hid below this four-wheel drive vehicle’s roof?

They showed no sign of knowing Fran had sent out a balloon to search for them from the air.

The vehicle had a manual transmission, which was growing rare in modern times. If the owner had wanted to make full use of the four-wheel drive when climbing steep slopes, they may not have wanted an automatic that would change gears on its own. Just like with a computer’s enter key, Hamazura thought he looked kind of cool operating the shift lever himself. ...Of course, he would have just found it annoying if his girlfriend was not sitting right next to him.

“Hamazura. Where exactly will we go?”

“To be honest, I don’t know anything about England. Does this car not have a GPS? There’s a holder, but nothing in it. Did the owner use a smartphone app? Takitsubo, check the dashboard just to be sure. There might be a paper map.”

“Reading a paper map would make me carsick.”

“Then are you asking me to spread the map out in front of me while I drive?”

“Nn.”

“Hey, don’t start snuggling up against me here.”

“...Then where do you want me to do it, Hamazura?”

(I’d love to let this get me excited, but I’m more curious where she learned to say things like that! If she says she’s been practicing in front of the mirror, I think something inside me is gonna explode!!)

This was not Japan’s Academy City. This was the truly free land of England where Devil Mugino and Imp Kinuhata’s watchful eyes were nowhere to be found. They were entirely alone. And inside a stolen car on the beach at night! Not even Hamazura himself knew how far things would go between these two lovers now that no one was around to stop them!!

However.

They were supposedly alone here, but he sensed an ominous presence within their safe territory.

“Oh? In that case, I recommend going to the capital city of London.”

The four-wheel drive vehicle swerved unnaturally along the beach and just about crashed into a rock sticking up from the sand. It was not as bad as an icy road, but slamming on the brakes was still a bad idea on sand.

The rearview mirror reflected the face of a woman with silver hair and brown skin.

A pale girl in a mini-China dress pressed her cheek against the woman’s, making the scene in the mirror look like a crazy costume party.

“Ugh, there’s way too much moisture. I can’t stand the sea breeze. Can you dry out the air with the air conditioner?”

“For a damp crying woman, you really do have trouble with moisture, Nephthys.”

The two cackled in the back seat and their presence was enough to make Hamazura feel like he had stumbled into another world.

“You only have to think about it from his perspective. Instead of running around randomly hoping to find him, you’ll have more luck figuring out where he’s likely to go and getting there ahead of him.”

“And London is definitely the center of this entire conflict☆ Given your relationship value with Aleister, there’s no way he’ll stay on the beach forever just because he got separated from you two.”

“Wha-wha-wha—?” stammered Hamazura as he failed to operate the clutch, stalled out the vehicle, and could not get it started again. “Who even are you two!? Your aura is enough to know you’re bad news!!”

“I am Magic God Nephthys and she is Magic God Niang-Niang.”

“To be clear, we’re in a position even deeper than the Lost Continent of Mu or whatever. You should rejoice that you get to be a witness of this age. Wa ha ha ha!!”

Niang-Niang’s mini-China dress left her flat chest and bright thighs in a dangerous position, but she actually raised her hands and stretched her back as if showing off her slender body. He did not know how rare these people were, but he seriously hoped someone would do something about the silent eruption of killer intent coming from Takitsubo in the passenger seat.

“Why are you tagging along with us?” he asked. “Don’t you realize I just found myself in the dream-like situation of taking a vacation with my girlfriend where no one can interfere!? Plus, we’re in Europe! *Europe!* Just look at that gloomy aura coming from the passenger seat. Why do I have to make up for something some complete strangers have done!?”

“Oh, sorry about that.” The silver-haired beauty had her curvy brown body wrapped in nothing but bandages (did that even count as clothing?) and she held Niang-Niang to her large chest. “We were just selecting the best person for our needs. I mean, World Rejecter had taken us to the perfect playground of endless battle, but then we were dragged back here again.”

“Then again, it looks like that’s going to let us come in contact with something interesting, so we were hoping to find some way of killing time until then☆”

...This was starting to sound dangerous. It was like hearing Mugino talk when something began quietly boiling in the depths of her heart.

“Hey. Let me ask this again: why us?”

“Because you had the weakest motivation,” nonchalantly replied bandaged brown Nephthys. “Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and the people around them have too clear a goal in mind, so they wouldn’t be very interesting for observers like us. And Aleister is

completely out of the question, of course. Follow him around and his viewpoint would bring too great a bias to monitor things properly. You might not think it, but I am quick to tears. Although I do feel somewhat bad since he is putting so much effort into it.”

“And we don’t really want to follow around the Anglicans when they’re being actualized by Coronzon.”

“Yes, Aleister and Coronzon would both see Magic Gods like us in a hostile light.”

“Right? They probably hate how indifferent we are about fortune and misfortune in the world.”

Human body pillow Niang-Niang sounded carefree, but a bad feeling only continued to grow inside Hamazura. It was unusual for him to feel more and more worried the more something was explained to him.

“Observer? Monitor? ...Does that mean there’s something else you’ll be watching?”

“Yes, a number of things.” Nephthys giggled, rubbed her cheek against Niang-Niang’s face, and spoke in an alluring way. “One of those things is Great Demon Coronzon thanks to that secret agreement with Mathers, but the acts of humanity are much more interesting. Take the magic kingdom of England for example. They seem to be hiding something *quite fascinating* even from the perspective of gods like us. At the very least, this cocktail is far nastier than the Maria Kannon.”

Part 4

It was like the world of a picture book.

Balloons larger than balance balls were gathered like a bunch of grapes above Kamijou Touma’s head. The wires hanging down from each one were combined to support a basket made of surprisingly sturdy paper.

They were leisurely floating through the air on a hot-air balloon journey. Their speed was much less noticeable than when traveling on the surface, but it probably worked out to 30 or 40 km/h. However, they may have decided this had better odds of taking them to London than if they made a risky and exciting car chase.

“It is about a hundred kilometers from Dover to London.”

It had taken more than just Karasuma Fran to set this up.

“I mentioned I had set foot in Kamakura Japan before, didn’t I?” The wicked girl who had done most of the work sounded carefree. “Japan’s origami has as many diverse uses as

their furoshiki. With a bit of cleverness, the shape and strength can be altered to your needs and it can even be used to contain a satellite's solar panels in a limited space. I do have to wonder if that country derives pleasure from throwing out all of their strong points. As someone who was treated so poorly in England, France, Italy, and America, I can't help but laugh whenever I hear someone bragging that what they've done is 'normal in the West'."

The rocking handmade hot-air balloon contained Kamijou Touma and the others from their England invasion party. Even from that elevated vantage point, they saw no sign of Hamazura and Takitsubo.

"An RV, a cruiser, and now a hot-air balloon... It's anything goes with you, isn't it?"

"Whether I was rich or poor, my life was always controlled by money. But more recently, I was Academy City's board chairman. I have hidden assets stashed all around the world. Yes, if I gathered them all together, I could probably buy up the entire EU now that it has declined from the back-to-back conflicts of British Halloween, World War III, and the Magic God Siege in Denmark."

"Can't we get some help from those Crowley's Hazards? A lot of them had wings."

"Setting aside issues of control, a lot of those are evil dragons covered in deadly poison or aircraft filled with deadly mold. They generally carry nothing more than a desire to kill and harm, so even if we can use them, we should never try to tame them."

They traveled through England's night at such a leisurely pace it was hard to believe a war was raging.

"..."

Index remained silent as she stared into the darkness below. What was on her mind as she viewed that land covered in the fires of war?

Meanwhile, Aleister barely seemed to care.

"Let's avoid Canterbury. Ensuring we arrive in London takes precedence, even if it means taking a bit of a detour on the way."

"What's in Canterbury?"

Kamijou tilted his head and Othinus breathed a sigh of exasperation from her spot on his shoulder.

"...Do you know nothing of the opponent you're about to fight? The Anglican Church's official headquarters, Canterbury Cathedral, is there."

"Vweh!?"

“If you travel straight to the capital city London from the ocean entrance of Dover, you will pass through there,” explained Index. “It is obvious why they chose that location.”

A moment later, a red line shot from a steeple on the surface and swept across the night sky. Kamijou jumped a bit, as if lightning had struck a nearby tree, but Aleister only scoffed.

The magician identified the attack while viewing that frightening blast of highly pressurized water.

“The miracle of Thomas Becket’s blood, hm? Do not worry. They have not located us.” That human wagged her finger and winked. “I went out of my way to mobilize Karasuma Fran so we could fly in a non-magical fashion. Aleister Crowley is a magician, so they will expect me to rely on magic. ...All the supplies in the world are useless if the people operating them do not know how to think.”

Aleister spoke as if humming a strange lullaby while she looked into the darkness past the basket’s edge.

“You never change, England. You may have entered the new millennium, but the dawn is still a long way off. Nothing has changed since those days you believed those philistine newspaper reporters who failed to see the essence of things and made a fuss about how I was a ‘pervert’ and a ‘ghoul’. If you act the intellectual while failing to look at things with your own eyes and failing to do the work with your own hands, you will never sweep away the darkness before your eyes.”

“Th-then what was that?”

“England is a magic kingdom. So much so that the Anglican Church has grown endlessly bloated as the group that cracks down on such things. If no one but the Anglicans used magic, they would have no reason to exist. The Daybreak, the Noon, the Blazing Sun, the Sunset, the Dusk, the Pole Star, the Eclipse, the Sunspot, and the Dawn-Colored. So many magic cabals have split from my much-maligned Golden cabal like so much spray, so one of them was likely sending out a familiar to gather information. And it was mistaken for us and shot down. ...Flight is a fragile thing, but why do those on the side of justice not realize that the more they punish it, the more people will do it just to spite them?”

Every once in a while, that sinister red light would slice through the night sky, but Aleister did not seem worried as they slipped through that air-defense network.

“But where in England is this weakness of Coronzon who you say is sealed in Academy City? London does sound likely since it’s the capital city, but should we really skip past this city? The Anglican headquarters are there, right?”

“Are you asking if I have a reason to skip the meaningful-sounding Canterbury and immediately attack London, the most populated part of the country?”

There would apparently be no stopping Great Demon Coronzon once they reappeared, but Kamijou did not want to fight an all-out war with England either. He wanted to hurry up and resolve the Lola and Coronzon problem so they could end all the chaos. For that reason, he wanted to avoid skipping somewhere and delaying the discovery of something important.

But Aleister seemed to have an idea.

“It is true that Canterbury’s security is quite strict. But if you have some insurance in case of trouble, would you really leave it at your headquarters? That would be like sticking your usual wallet and your emergency funds in the same bag before heading out into the city at night while traveling overseas. Would you really leave everything in one place, where it could all be lost at once if something happened?”

The hot-air balloon looked like something out of a picture book and it slowly circled around the city which looked like a mass of dark shadows with all of its lights off. Based on that, the people there may have been using terms like “martial law” and “blackout” as if they were normal.

“...”

Kamijou narrowed his eyes a bit while looking at Canterbury which looked like a dark hole in the ground thanks to the large-scale blackout. Back at Tokyo, Academy City may have looked similar while shut down with Lola Stuart trapped inside.

The area directly below them was apparently made up of pastures.

He saw something like twisted barricades set up at irregular intervals.

“That is the England-Londinium Fortress. ...The outer edge of it, that is.”

Kamijou was not quite sure where that name came from.

The occasional flickering lights he saw seemed to be from torches rather than any kind of electric lights. They saw more and more layers of the same as they continued. If it had all been visible at once, it might have looked like tree rings or a baumkuchen with London in the center.

“They’re crop circles,” said the hoodie bikini girl. “Like the ones Bunny Gray makes!”

“What? Why? Are the Anglican’s researching UFOs?”

“Of course not.” Aleister sounded exasperated. “You refer to unnatural flattened grass found in the middle of fields, but that level of mystery has been spoken of since the days when heads were removed by guillotine. Although at the time, it was believed they were the aftermath of fairies dancing and they were only a few meters wide at the largest. These days, they are lifted up alongside Nessie as unexplainable phenomena and they have

grown much larger in order to compete with the Nazca Lines that most people have only ever seen in pictures online. Most of them are just local kids having fun knocking down wheat and ruining the farmer's hard work."

"What's your point?"

Aleister had given up on explaining and seemed satisfied just complaining, so it was Othinus who answered from the boy's shoulder. She clung to Kamijou's ear with both hands and softly spoke into it.

"The mysterious sign of flattened grass has been spoken of throughout history, but the theorized cause changes from era to era. Most photographed crop circles are only children wanting attention, just like the Cottingley Fairies, but there are some that are not so easily explained. The group on the ground has artificially recreated that so they can control these grasslands with a single command and create a long wall made of dried grass."

The idea of a dried grass wall did not really make sense to Kamijou. It was true England would not have had time to build their own Great Wall of China one stone at a time from the moment the army of Crowleys crossed the ocean to attack, so they would have needed an easier method. But would that really be strong enough? It only made him think of the first bastard to have his house taken out in *The Three Little Pigs*. Unlike Aleister, Kamijou did not want a direct clash between England and the Crowley's Hazards. He would love it if a wall could keep that monster army out, so he would prefer they had made one out of a harder and thicker material like brick or steel.

But Accelerator spoke up in annoyance.

"...The people who made that wall must be insane. They've set it up so they can dump oil or something on the people trying to climb the thick wall and then toss a torch down to take them out."

"Fire has long been a surefire method of destroying a corpse and stripping the dead of their honor. It is the best way of killing a criminal. After all, the Christian Last Judgment supposedly requires a physical body. Burn their body and God can't save them. Preparing a wall of flames shows just how seriously they are taking this."

Kamijou's entire body shrank down a bit when he heard how this was far more hostile than he had imagined.

"But there is no real reason to worry." Aleister sounded like she was speaking to a child who had had a bad dream. "This is the best line to take. If we had tried to sneak across the surface, we would have run into a checkpoint. If we had used some kind of special magic to fly, their air defense network would have shot us down. But it seems the professionals of the Knights and Anglicans have completely forgotten that humans *can fly normally*. Preconceptions truly are poison to the mind. Hot-air balloons and airships were common even before the Wright Brothers."

While holding the reins, hoodie bikini Fran leaned out from the balloon's basket and shook the round Doppler radar tail she seemed to be sticking out toward Kamijou.

"We have passed the England-Londinium Fortress's third wall. We should have about sixty kilometers to go. If we think of Buckingham Palace as the throne, then we've crossed the wall and entered the rose garden out front."

"There is no need to rush. The way things are now, the outer wall and that open-air garden are as far as we can go. We cannot break through the solid inner gate to enter the castle."

"Wow."

Kamijou Touma sounded somewhat impressed as he stared into the distance.

He might have looked like someone with a fear of heights trying to distract themselves by staring out at the horizon instead of looking down.

"That's incredible. The aurora is out. I guess that's what you get in Europe during December. It was snowing while I was in Russia for World War III and when I was escaping with Othinus."

"You are...something else. The fact that I feel so frustrated may be a sign that my identity as an educator has settled in more strongly than I expected. And I only thought of it as a way to camouflage Thelema..."

"?"

No one explained the exact conditions for viewing the aurora, such as the latitude and solar winds, so Kamijou did not notice his fundamental misunderstanding.

With the look of someone fighting a headache, girl Aleister wagged her index finger.

"That is likely the final barrier covering London."

"This is sounding dangerous."

"Indeed it is. The United Kingdom is a unique territory because it is a complex combination of three factions and four regions. Magical barriers are generally like walls that keep people away, but by placing triple barriers of four different types at the exact same coordinates, Barrier A's gaps will be plugged by Barrier B and so on, creating something of a labyrinth."

"Hey, can't you explain this in a way I can understand?"

"There are several gigantic walls moving back and forth. If you happen to touch one of them, you will be drawn into the gap between them and crushed to death. And they are complexly tangled together like a mess of cables, so not even your Imagine Breaker could

easily break through. ...In fact, shattering just the surface layer would only drag you inside all the quicker.”

She actually did as asked for once. And thanks to that, Kamijou Touma felt like his heart was shrinking.

“What are we supposed to do about that?”

“Well.” Aleister nodded. “No matter how complex and bizarre this final barrier is, the British people must have a way to pass through. Perhaps not the lowly soldiers, but the—heh—chosen ones.”

“What? Please don’t tell me we’re supposed to tail a British person to learn the secret route through.”

“They would not be foolish enough to allow that, but we can hitch a ride with them. For example, if an important person was captured by the Knights, they would be taken back to London for questioning instead of being killed on the spot. After all, the infamous Tower of London is there and it is known around the world for its specialization in torture and executions.”

“What are you trying to say?”

This was no time to just ignore what she said.

But asking her to clarify may have been careless as well.

At any rate, Magician Girl Aleister answered with a wicked smile.

“I am saying we can get in if you are captured.”

He did not have time to question it.

A dull sound burst out and Kamijou’s body went limp. Since Imagine Breaker did not help, she may have used *a perfectly normal* high-voltage stun gun. His body wobbled and then toppled over the edge of the basket made from several layers of thick paper. He knew this was the worst possible path, but he could not stop the flow of time.

A stun gun was bad news here.

With a high-voltage current, it did not matter whether or not they were directly touching him. Index had been standing right next to him and palm-sized Othinus had been sitting on his shoulder, so what had happened to them?

Unable to cry out in protest or find an answer to his questions, Kamijou Touma dropped like an artillery shell onto a roll of dried grass left on the grasslands.

Between the Lines 1

The size was extraordinary, but how comfortable was it to ride?

Last Order, a girl who appeared to be around ten, leaned on the side deck railing of a cargo ship loaded with containers.

“Rocking...rocking on the boat...”

She tried to humming an improvised song, but...

“...Ugh, now Misaka is feeling kind of sick, says Misaka as Misaka provides a self-report.”

She then began muttering “beep beep beep beep” to herself.

She had begun a form of non-verbal communication that only she could understand.

“Misaka #15151 is relaxing in Rio, reports Misaka. Yay, churrasco is the best.”

“Misaka #18000 is riding a motorcycle around Vietnam, chats Misaka while she delivers some pho for a personal online delivery service.”

“Misaka #10782 is cooking rice cakes at the Antarctic base, says Misaka while she checks if it is ready. The penguins are so cute.”

They all seemed to be having fun.

Last Order began absurdly wondering if she alone had been cursed in some way, but then...

“Hey! Staring out at the winter ocean is only going to give you a chill. Come on inside.”

The researcher named Yoshikawa Kikyou called out to her from a distance, but Last Order only waved her small hand weakly back while still leaning on the railing. Her experience in this short time had taught her that the rocking of the boat in a small area was much worse than in a wide-open area.

“Ugh...” she groaned as if cursing something and she looked up into the blue sky while wrapped in a thick coat. Since she hoped staring into the distance would help, she was mostly relying on unscientific good luck charms. To be more charitable, you could say she was hoping for the placebo effect to kick in.

“Why? Why does it have to turn every which way? asks Misaka as Misaka complains. The ocean is so big, so it could always go in a straight line.”

“Because we would crash if we didn’t steer out of the way of everything in the ocean!” shouted Yoshikawa while forming a megaphone with her hands.

They were at the exit of the already cramped Tokyo Bay. They could see the giant Ferris wheel that was a symbol of Yokohama. They had a long way to go before they reached Alaska and the beautiful aurora there.

Yoshikawa looked out at the winter sea which was so rough it could have appeared in the world of enka.

What was that floating on its side there?

It was a mysterious corpse that looked like a giant fish with several human-like arms extending from its sides.

In addition to Academy City, the JSDF and the US military had facilities around Tokyo and Kanagawa, but this did not seem to be from them. Yoshikawa held a handheld wireless radio that looked somewhat like a cellphone, but since she was relying on that device that linked back to the ship’s large radio, it was clear that the lines for public broadcasts, the police, the firefighters, and even amateur transmissions were in a state of chaos, chaos, and more chaos.

...A born scientist like Yoshikawa Kikyou would never be able to imagine the life of an Onmyoudou expert like Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

And the situation here was not unique.

With 53 countries and the surrounding countries affected, you would have hard time finding any part of the globe without something going on.

Misaka Worst, a cruel-eyed girl in an ao dai, whistled next to Yoshikawa.

“Misaka was expecting the world to be torn to shreds by the leaked technology, but it’s surprisingly peaceful. How boring.”

“Well, it’s like this all around the world. Even if Academy City’s secrets cross people’s paths, there’s also the real-time news about even more sensational wars. A normal person isn’t going to know how much of it is real. They’d just end up falling for some fake news mixed in with everything else.”

Of course, that would be different for someone who could tell the real information from the fake, but the only people who could do that were the experts who had been inside Academy City. For the people outside the city, Academy City was wrapped in a veil of mystery that was only partially removed during the Daihaseisai. Even if some technological information had been leaked during this chaos, they would have no way to search it out.

“Still, Academy City’s technology was the lifeblood of the world economy. And yet there are some who are encouraging this. When the economy grows unstable, it is the powerful nations that will try to make up for their losses through war. The enemies are unidentified monsters, so you can kill as many as you want without having to take any moral responsibility or worry about influencing the political power balance. ...We’re going to see more countries attempting an economic recovery by using war like public works.”

“They’re free to go overboard and mass-produce deadly weapons if they want,” said Misaka Worst. “But is this war really going to last that long?”

“If they made all those preparations and the war ended right away, they would be deep in the red. Even though we don’t know why this started, so there’s always a possibility it will end just as suddenly.”

Yoshikawa raised both her hands and stretched her back.

It was the same uncomfortable feeling as calling an ambulance because your stomach hurt really, really bad only to have the pain fade away completely by the time it arrived. You did not really want to be sick, but you still prayed they would find something at the hospital. ...In the same way, she did not really want this to end before she could arrive at the unobserved ends of the earth and see the aurora in Alaska. Those were her thoughts as a complex adult woman.

CHAPTER 2

The Tower of London Awaits with Maw Agape.

the_Abyss_of_London.

Part 1

Notice to Capital Defense Unit.

Close the England-Londinium Fortress's final gate barrier. This is an order from Hologres Mirates, grand representative of the Knights.

The situation is as follows.

The coastal defense unit has failed to repel the Crowley's Hazards pushing in across the Strait of Dover. Now that they have set foot on the English mainland, our top priority is defending London and preserving the safety of the glorious Royal Family.

There is no need to recover the former Agnese Force, the Amakusa Church, or other outside combat units. Do not wait for their arrival. Close the barrier immediately. It was their failure that allowed the enemy on our land. We cannot allow them to hinder our country any further.

I am a proud English noble.

I absolutely refuse to have England treated as a buffer zone to protect the other three countries just because of the geographic conditions. If I am to do this, I demand a good reason.

Since Archbishop Lola Stuart has abandoned her duties and gone missing, the Anglicans have lost their justification to tell us what to do.

I am currently searching her residence at Lambeth Palace. I just hope I can find *that* in a timely fashion.

Also, prepare the necessary personnel.

The barrier is perfect, but always prepare for the worst-case scenario.

“Just in case” is an extremely important phrase during wartime. We are talking about the defense of London here. Stay even more focused than normal and get to work immediately.

There is no need to report to Knight Leader.

I have the favor of the Royal Family, so any who doubt my words will be summarily punished for their betrayal of Queen Elizard and the rest of the Royal Family’s trust.

Part 2

Kamijou Touma was shaken at a steady frequency.

But he did not feel even a hint of the sleepiness brought by sitting on a train. He was inside a prisoner transport carriage, the door was padlocked shut, and the small window was double-locked with chain-link and metal bars. The gloomy atmosphere refused to go away.

“Ahh...”

He had forgotten.

He felt like he had come to understand something.

He should not have let the Mina Mathers and baby Lilith incidents influence him so much. While Aleister was a father and a magician, he was also the board chairman who had done all that scheming in Academy City. To achieve his goal, he had split the world between science and magic, pitted the two sides against each other, and even used the 2.3 million people in that city as his pawns. Why had Kamijou not considered the possibility that he too would be thrown on the table as a card in Aleister’s deck? These questions continued rolling around in his mind.

“Hmph, you scoundrel. Just wait and see what fate awaits you once we arrive at the Tower of London.”

A dignified female voice filled the same enclosed carriage as him. But that came from the person escorting him, not a fellow prisoner.

It was the same female knight he had seen at the beach of...Dover, was it?

She was even speaking Japanese for his benefit. ...Or so the spiky-haired boy saw it. In truth, she had spoken to him in English several times and grown slightly depressed when he completely ignored her incomprehensible words and continued muttering to himself.

“That Asian unit...the Amakusa. I hear they were wiped out by the Crowley’s Hazards.”

“Eh!?”

“And it is all your fault. It seems the entire city of Canterbury has fallen. That is what happens when those Crowley’s Hazards arrive. They eat people, tear them apart, toy with them for fun, and crush them. This is the greatest disaster in British history...”

“?”

Kamijou briefly thought his heart would stop, but more and more doubt rose in his mind as he kept listening.

“Wasn’t Canterbury sitting there entirely untouched?”

“Do not be ridiculous! Everyone is saying it! And who would lie at a time like this!?”

“...In other words, you haven’t seen it for yourself?”

“I hear they dangle people upside down and drain their blood before eating them. The blood pours out of the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and every other hole. That must be unimaginably painful and I hear that is what happened to those Amakusa Asians...”

Based on that, Kamijou felt like he did not need to worry too much about the Amakusa. All sorts of disinformation had to be spreading during the chaos.

He sighed and changed the subject.

“I see you got a new breastplate. That’s good. Really good. Thank goodness your boobs remain undefiled...”

“D-do not dig back up that humiliation, you fool!! I demand you forget that at once!!”

The female knight blushed and backed away while holding her body protectively in her arms. He was reminded of when he was tricked by Tsuchimikado and forced to flee from all the battle girls in the School Garden. She may have had a pure upbringing which left her unaccustomed to speaking with non-knight men.

Then he heard a quiet metallic sound.

Something had spilled from the female knight’s hand. She quickly snatched back up a somewhat large gold coin. Kamijou Touma’s ears were finely attuned to the sound of dropped change.

“Foreign money always seems so weird. It looks like a toy or something.”

“You fool. This is a Beheading Coin. It is a type of spiritual item.”

...For a moment, he thought this tea country woman had gotten her Japanese wrong, but it seemed she really had said “beheading”. And that was such a dangerous word that he had not heard anything beyond it.

Nevertheless, she continued the explanation on her own.

“It assists suicide attacks by removing your pain and fear for a few seconds. You can think of it as a portable anesthetic developed by the magic side. The fact that we need something like this is proof that our training is insufficient.”

“What!?”

“Do not try to take it from me. Everyone participating in this battle was issued one.”

Kamijou finally felt himself surrounded by the wartime atmosphere.

The city of London visible through the small and oppressive window did not seem much different from inside the carriage.

There was no one there.

And not just because it was late at night. He did not see any drunks, or even stray cats. All of the storm shutters were closed, but it seemed less like they were afraid of a specific enemy and more like they wanted to shut out the light from the aurora-like veil overhead. According to Aleister, that was protective magic, but that defensive weapon seemed like a symbol of war. It was an extremely strange sight to see nuns in habits and knights in silver armor rushing around while sinister martial law was being enforced. The entire city was ruled by a stirring that felt like the harbinger of a great disaster. Everything was being remade such that yesterday’s normal would no longer apply tomorrow. The formless “age” itself may have been crying out.

This was not his first time in England.

He recalled the somber look on Index’s face in the Strait of Dover and in the hot-air balloon.

And that was why he said what he did.

“...London sure has changed.”

“Hmph.”

The local knight woman must not have liked that suggestive comment from an outsider. She gave a snort (while still huddled back in a corner of the carriage) and spoke to him.

“A truly tragic fate awaits you.”

“?”

“The Tower of London is not as kind a place as you think.”

“Hm? Hmm???”

He had a vague recollection of hearing about that place.

“I think they talked about that on a travel quiz show... Didn’t they say it isn’t as much of a tower as you would think and it’s used to store jewels?”

“I will admit it is more of a large box than anything, but you are referring to the Jewel House located on the same grounds. The actual White Tower is hell on earth.”

Before Kamijou could ask what she meant by that, their carriage passed through a stone castle gate. There were a few buildings inside the large area surrounded by the tall castle walls. As far as he could see, it looked like a giant hospital made from oppressive stone. But this was an ominous hospital with no exit that only existed to gather the sick without healing them.

The carriage entered one of those buildings.

The already oppressive view of London was entirely snuffed out. All that remained were stone walls in every direction. He felt a great pressure, like he had been buried alive below the thick bedrock. Were those ravens surrounding them with cawing? Even though there had not been a single cat visible in the city? This may have been a safe home for them.

“Get out,” said the female knight in silver armor and a surcoat. “We have arrived at the depths of the earth.”

Kamijou recalled that Lola Stuart, top of the Anglican Church, apparently had some kind of secret, but he doubted this female knight would know that much. Still, he regretted not even trying to get any information out of her while they were alone together.

It was too late now that the double doors at the back of the carriage had opened.

If the others learned that he knew of their secret, it could cause a lot of trouble for the female knight too. If he could not stay with her and protect her, it was best to not to do anything that would rouse people’s suspicions.

This situation was not simple enough to solve just by telling the truth.

The ignorant female knight called out to a middle-aged man she seemed to know.

“Beefeater! This is your next guest. You have an open room, don’t you? I know this is sudden, but please get him checked in.”

“It’s always so hard to tell how old Asians are, but he appears to still be in his teens. What is the world coming to? ...Welcome to Hotel White Tower. Although when you check out, it will be in a complimentary body bag.”

...Kamijou had no idea what he was saying in his fluent English, but the somewhat pitying looks were far more frightening than the obvious hostility in his tone.

Once he was handed over to what seemed to be one of the Tower of London’s jailers, Kamijou was led down an oppressive stone corridor at the point of a long oak staff that was not quite a spear. They took turn after turn and climbed and descended stairs along the way. Without any windows, he could feel his sense of direction and height gradually fading away. It was just like a labyrinth. He felt like he was exploring a creepy old castle. He could not tell if they were climbing a tall tower or descending to the depths of the earth.

After passing through a few metal bar doors that blocked the corridor, they found a prison lined with metal doors.

“#087 has arrived.”

“Repeat, #087 has arrived.”

Kamijou did not understand English, but he could make out the numbers. Being stripped of his name and referred to with a number was a unique feeling. He should have been able to write it off as a mere nickname, but he found himself unable to accept it so easily. It felt like having his humanity denied.

A metal door bearing that same number was unlocked and he was thrown inside. The room had a small window. It was positioned high on the wall, but it allowed the moonlight in through the bars. The enclosed space was less than six square meters and it contained a tattered and discolored mattress and what had once been a blanket. The only other thing was a toilet he was skeptical could even flush, so it truly was a nightmare. It was so dreary that it would even break the spirits of the people who had chosen to throw out all of their possessions and move into a one-room apartment.

“What am I supposed to do now...?”

He held his head in his hands.

He could see no possibility here. Although perhaps he should have expected that in a professional(?) prison.

He did not have the courage to sit on the toilet or the mattress which had grown brown for reasons he feared to speculate. The stains, cracks, and rust all looked vaguely like human faces. The only option left was to lean against the heavy, cold stone wall and scream at the top of his lungs.

“Aleister, I’m sure you were using the commotion to sneak into London, but you are going to come save me afterwards, aren’t you!?”

Simply put, Kamijou was not supporting England or the Crowley’s Hazards. He wanted to solve the Lola/Coronzon problem and bring an end to the chaos as quickly as possible. He and that board chairman were in a delicate position of mutual understanding while still being enemies. And since Aleister wanted to pick a fight England, Kamijou had his doubts she would feel any obligation to rescue a pacifist. In fact, Aleister was about as far from human morals as you could get, so Kamijou had trouble imagining her taking any kind of moral responsibility.

Aleister herself had said to take responsibility for themselves and disembark, so if they continued obeying her and dropped out, they only had themselves to blame for letting her trick them.

So what was he to do?

“...”

This was a prison run by Necessarius. He did not know what exactly the oft-mentioned witch hunt entailed, but he could guess it was nothing good. He was imagining a bunch of strange torture tools made from metal rings and thick chains combined into something like a puzzle ring! If he stayed here, he really would be subjected to a cruel show straight out of a gruesome Western fairy tale!!

He heard footsteps.

He jumped and turned toward the metal door. The sounds in the hallway reached him quite well for how thick the door was, but then he noticed the long and skinny window, like the newspaper slot in a cheap apartment. That may have been for giving the prisoner water and food. But he was not at all inclined to approach that small window and peer out. After all, his mind was filled with those gruesome Western fairy tales. It was entirely possible that the instant he tried to peer out, an awl would stab him right in the eyeball.

(What is this? You’ve gotta be kidding me. What’s going to happen to me!? Ehh? Why...why now? They aren’t coming to my cell, are they? They have business with some other prisoner, right? They aren’t going to strap me to a dentist-like chair and run the tip of some sewing scissors down the center of my balls, are they!?)

The footsteps continued.

There were identical metal doors all along that corridor, but he could not help but feel each step was approaching him specifically. He was reminded of a ghost story where someone ran across a bloody station attendant, hid inside a coin locker, heard someone knocking on each locker in turn, and finally heard the click of theirs unlocking. Since he could not find any knowledge that might actually be useful here, his panicked brain may have been dredging up any memory it could find.



Kamijou Touma backed into a corner of the cell and curled up while the gentle young woman placed an elegant hand over her mouth as she watched him through the door's small window. Instead of disappointment or embarrassment, she responded with a pleasant smile. And that mature tolerance pained him more than anything at the moment.

"Wh-why are you here? Are you trying to sneak me out?"

"Oh. Um, I currently belong to the Anglican Church, so I am helping with the work here. And you need to be questioned. Um, which one was the right key again?"

Kamijou thought he would cry when he heard the jangling of a keyring. This meant she was in charge of beating him in this strange torture and execution tower. He had no allies here. He felt like there was a gaping hole in his chest, but just as his mind began to burn itself out by spinning its wheels too much, his thoughts took an odd turn:

Wait.

This was only gentle Orsola. ...If she was the one doing it, wouldn't he be spared anything too cruel? For one thing, would she even know how to use the torture tools straight out of a cruel Western fairy tale? He suddenly pictured her cutely tilting her head while holding a whip and candle. He had a feeling this would turn out all right. Yes, it surely would. *Ha ha ha. No, Orsola, you use that like this.* As long as he did not become a foolish gentleman who placed himself on the chopping block to lecture her on the proper usage like that, he was fairly certain she would run out of time before figuring out what to do. And didn't that sexy young woman have a bad habit of jumping from topic to topic? It was possible she would forget the very basics of questioning someone and not let him what she wanted to know or what he was supposed to do. Yes, this would work. Kamijou Touma wiped away his tears. It was sure to work. He just had to put on his pants. It could all start from there. His heart was pounding in his chest, but this was no time to let an odd suspension bridge effect get him somewhat excited. Just zip them up and fasten your belt. If things go well, there could even be a slightly sexual turn of events.

(Slightly sexual... No, this tight leather atmosphere feels like it would go beyond "slightly". No, no. I need to ride this wave! I'm not going to let this turn into real torture and end up dying in this prison!! My name is Kamijou Touma! I look forward to working with you here! Pant, pant. M-man, this is scary. My favorite word is "dorm manager". Ohhhh, I look forward to working with you here! I really do!!)

Kamijou Touma boiled over a bit as he poured his passions onto the idea of a dorm manager.

And while he stood there blankly, without putting his pants back on, he had a thought: *I can die later.*

"Okay, got it open. Now, please come this way."

Meanwhile, Orsola Aquinas opened the thick metal door with a bright smile that suggested she did not have a clue what was going through his head. As the cross around her neck suggested, she was a pacifist. Despite being a sexy young woman, she was full of openings and just extremely careless.

“Come on, Kamijou. Please put your pants on.”

“I’ve never had a woman tell me that before! I feel like I earned a ton of experience points from that one!!”

“Yes, yes. Look, I’ve spread your pants out for you. You can place your hands on my shoulders for support. Start by lifting your right leg and putting it through here, okay?”

She was the same as always. And this time, that meant her face was right at waist-height.

Right leg and then left leg.

Kamijou trembled as he moved like a small child getting help dressing himself. This scene felt so wonderfully nostalgic after the craziness he had seen throughout England. He felt like everything would be okay if he just followed along. This was peace. There was still hope!

“Oh, ohh, ohhhhhh...”

“My, my. What is the matter? Please don’t cry. There, there.”

Orsola softly wiped away the boy’s tears with an elegant handkerchief, realized he was not going to stop, and wrapped her slender arms around his head. She held his head like a young wife holding a giant watermelon to her chest.

“It’ll be okay. The scary part is over.”

“Orzola-byan, Orsola-saaaaan!!”

“As long as you answer the questions, nothing bad will happen to you.”

“Wait, you’re on their side?”

Kamijou Touma pulled his head from the bottomless swamp of those large boobs and suddenly sharpened his focus.

This was no time to succumb to the suspension bridge effect or Stockholm syndrome.

He considered slipping past her and making a run for it like a disobedient pet cat, but even if he left the cell, he did not know the layout of the Tower of London and there had been barred doors along the way. He desperately told himself to wait. He needed certainty. Waiting for certainty would be better than making a gamble with no realistic hope of

success. He would leave the cell, spend some time with Orsola, and check to see if he could spot any emergency exits.

“You really shouldn’t enter England without permission at a time like this.”

“I suppose.”

“I’m sure this is all a big misunderstanding, but make sure you tell the truth once we arrive at the room. That is the best way of ensuring this goes smoothly. Lord, please protect this poor lamb...”

“Is that so?”

Kamijou was so focused on memorizing the layout that his responses were fairly absentminded. He recalled that Orsola had specialized in spreading the church’s teachings around the world when she was with the Catholics. Seeing how carefree she was made him feel silly getting so cautious and ready to fight.

“From what I have heard, Canterbury has fallen, which is a real problem. The people who are captured by the Crowley’s Hazards are eaten, rolled up into a ball, or crushed. It is so sad that we have reached an age where everyone must rely on these Beheading Coins.”

“I heard something similar in the carriage. But is it really true? Canterbury looked fine when I saw it. In fact, it was making anti-air attacks with frightening high-pressure water blasts.”

“We also can’t contact the Amakusa, so I’m so very worried. Rumor has it the captured people are gutted and dried...”

“Wasn’t it that they were hung upside down and had their blood drained? And it’s probably just that you can’t reach the Amakusas’ phones.”

“My, my. I am here to help with the work, so we need to get you started on that questioning.”

“And with how you jump from topic to topic, I’m not sure you could contact them even if the phones were working. C’mon, granny, you already ate!! Come back to your senses!!”

Despite his hopes, there were no obvious escape points.

That was when someone kicked on one of the metal doors from the inside.

“Hyah!”

The blonde young woman shrieked in an unexpectedly cute way and clung to Kamijou's arm from the side. He sensed a soft feeling and a faint sweet aroma. Oblivious Orsola was just like a small child tearfully trembling in a haunted house, but with the way her volume was touching him, Kamijou Touma's adolescence was about ready to explode.

"...How should I put this? This really isn't the place for you."

"Uuh. U-um, I was hoping I could act as the prison chaplain and help guide everyone back onto the proper path..."

She was truly admirable. He seriously wished Aleister would start following in her footsteps. Although that pervert would probably take that advice literally and use it as an excuse to stalk her.

In the end, they arrived at their destination door with Kamijou having learned nothing of value.

"This is the place," said Orsola as she knocked on the door.

(No, it's not over yet. Don't give up. There has to be an opening somewhere. I didn't find anything on the way here, but if I check on the way back, I'm sure to—wait, am I really going to be interrogated by Orsola? Am I going to see that clueless young woman tilting her head in black leather bondage gear!? Then there's still hope! Oh, I can't wait!!)

Kamijou's thoughts took a worldly turn and began to run wild, but then a question occurred to him.

Orsola Aquinas had just knocked on the door. She had a keyring at her waist, so she could open the door even if it was locked. That left only one possibility: there was someone on the other side of the door. Orsola was not the one in charge of the interrogation...no, let's be more straightforward: the torture. There was someone else there!?

The door opened far too easily.

And *he* stood there in the center of a scene from a cruel Western fairy tale.

Stiyl Magnus.

A nearly-two-meter boy who grimaced while biting into a cigarette filter.

"Hello, you piece of shit."

Kamijou had actually been looking forward to this thanks to the presence of Orsola Aquinas whose curves were clearly visible through her plain habit and who was defenselessly clinging to him like a tearful child in a haunted house. In terms of sugoroku, this tragedy was like landing on an "advance six places" spot only to end up sent back to the beginning immediately afterwards.

The person in front of him spoke with no emotion in his words.

“What are you doing here when you should be looking after that girl? I really feel like roasting you a bit, but this is a job. I will leave out my personal feelings and solemnly complete each step in turn.”

“O-ohh...”

Kamijou Touma’s vision started to grow dark like he was lightly anemic.

He wanted to curse his ignorant self for trying to escape reality with the hint of eroticism coming from Orsola’s boobs through her thick habit.

My favorite word is “dorm manager”.

This was not the time for that.

“You can’t do this, you idiot. I know there are a lot of different ways to hurt people, but please not a fire expert! Anything but thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat!!”

He received no compassion or mercy.

Kamijou Touma was swiftly strapped to the chair.

Part 3

“...”

“Don’t glare at me.”

They were near the first wall of the England-Londinium Fortress.

A small gas station and attached diner were built about twenty kilometers from London. Aleister Crowley gave that exasperated comment from a table by the window.

Accelerator, the #1 Level 5, sat across from him.

The diner seemed to have expanded its services using products from the farms that managed the surrounding grasslands. It served lamb instead of beef or pork. The souvenir section sold knit gloves and hats made from what appeared to be wool. ...The batteries and the toy radios, which had a range of less than a hundred meters, were sold out, so there may have been some misinformation going around that they could be used to contact your family during the cellphone restrictions.

They had taken the paper hot-air balloon to the ground where it waited on standby.

Since they were close to the barricade set up by the Anglicans, this seemed to be an important supply station for the nuns. They occasionally saw a girl leaving with an armful of food or entering the motel to use the shower.

Accelerator gave a skeptical look out the window.

“...Is it just me or are they saying something about the entire Dover coast sinking into the sea? What are you doing with that creepy army of yours?”

“Now, now. Not everything is under my control. They are fighting a war and communications are being restricted. Do you really think accurate information is going to reach those virginal girls? This country no longer exists in the age where you can search anything for a low monthly fee.”

A small war would break out here if they were discovered, but the girl in a blue blazer uniform, a witch’s hat, and a cape was entirely relaxed. But not because she was confident they would not be noticed. She had simply learned every little failure was not worth getting worked up over.

Accelerator took a bite of the burger that had come with the standard meal and then returned it to the tray with a very troubled look. After that, he did not even bother trying anything but the fries.

Aleister chuckled since this was her homeland.

“Well, this country has a lot of things, but good food is not one of them. Still, you are not following the proper etiquette. British food is meant to be eaten with alcohol and the sweets are meant to be eaten with tea. Attempting them on their own is not recommended.”

“This isn’t the time to brag about your home country.” The #1 clicked his tongue and continued speaking with his eyes still directed out the window. “The others all ditched you. This is what happens as soon as that weakest guy is gone. You sure are unpopular.”

Accelerator’s tone seemed to hint that he wished he had gone with them.

Index, Othinus, and Karasuma Fran.

All of those girls had vanished. They were probably searching for Kamijou Touma in their own ways.

“Either way, struggling wildly will accomplish nothing. The path to London will not open until something is done about the triple-quadruple final barrier.”

“ ... ”

“I wouldn’t if I were you. Not even vector control will accomplish much. As you are now, you could probably get the toes of one foot inside at most. You are still a long way off from having what I would call a good grasp of magic.”

Aleister wiggled the tip of her silver spoon around while weaving some sarcasm and scorn into her words. Regardless of her individual likes and dislikes, this was the only way the girl magician knew how to communicate with people.

“Well, that Magic God might be able to get through. Regardless, I never wanted popularity. Besides, if I had someone who was willing to risk their life to stop me, do you really think I would have spent more than a century straying from the so-called proper path?”

“...You’re only outside that Windowless Building now because someone did exactly that.”

“Now that was a cruel thing to say. Does that make us birds of a feather?”

Aleister did not seem at all bothered as she scooped up some Western lamb curry with the same spoon as before. As someone who had been born in England and come to hate it, that human knew what she was doing. Instead of hoping for the food to be decently seasoned, she had chosen a curry that had dozens of different spices dumped into it.

Perhaps because that wicked human had grown up in a country of harsh hard water, she did not trust the tap water and drank from an expensive water bottle.

“I supposed I should get to the main issue.”

“Hm?”

“London is a large place. If you include Greater London, it is a metropolis with 33 districts that covers approximately 1,600 square kilometers. It would not hurt to let you know our destination.”

Accelerator had no real reason to assist Aleister. In fact, this was the person who had cast a dark shadow on his life. Since she did not fear failure, defeat, or death, he could not exact revenge. This journey was a way of finding a way to do that.

He was not interested in either side of this conflict. He was only observing.

If Aleister told him what her goal was, the #1 might very well take it from her and destroy it...but she almost certainly knew that.

She was accustomed to loss.

The grim reaper had been a constant companion during that human's life, so she would not struggle over something as small as this.

"Westminster Abbey."

She did not hesitate to play that card.

The game was already underway on the table and that included the risk this created.

"It is closely related to the royal family's official ceremonies and it is tied to the religion and politics of the great magic kingdom of England."

"Hm? I thought this was about your family?"

"Oh, that does come first for me, but this is not limited to the personal issues of Lilith and Lola. Before long, Coronzon will crawl out of the seal in Academy City. The next time she shows up, humanity will have no way of stopping her. What do you think will happen if that cruel demon takes control of both the magical Anglican Church and scientific Academy City? That Great Demon targeted my daughter's body just to deliver a blow to me, but this would allow her to play her games on a global level."

"..."

"As far as I can tell, we cannot kill that thing the way things are. Not even with your help. Thus, I have business with a secret sleeping in England."

Part 4

"I'll talk, I'll talk, I'll talk!! I mean, I have no reason to stick with Crowley to this extent! I'll tell you everything, so no fire! Don't make me wear a metal mask heated to the same orange glow you'd see at a swordsmith!!!!!"

The Tower of London torture room was filled with strange torture goods. And in the center of it all, Kamijou Touma tearfully shouted while struggling at the belts strapping him to the chair. In all seriousness, if he did not say something to keep himself focused, he was afraid he would piss himself.

Stiyl Magnus.

It did not matter that they were acquaintances. He would not bat an eye while he slowly burned away Kamijou's fingers one at a time.

“Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart’s sudden disappearance and the Crowley’s Hazards?”

“No, wait! Don’t just flood me with questions like that! Let’s handle them one at a time! I said I’ll tell you everything, didn’t I!?”

“Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart’s sudden disappearance and the Crowley’s Hazards?”

“Is that all you can say!? Goddammit!!”

Stiyl’s emotionless voice made it sound like he was mechanically reading off a message.

The saving goddess Orsola Aquinas was no longer here. That faint aroma of sweet eroticism was nowhere to be found. All that remained was a life-or-death battle with a devil who reeked of cigarettes. Even now, that nearly-two-meter boy held a cigarette in the corner of his mouth while making a bored comment.

“You sure do talk a lot. I haven’t even done anything yet.”

“Because it’s fire! Your very first move could cripple me for life!!”

“...The people who do that are only making a show of being forthcoming in order to hide their real secrets. They make it look like they have nothing more to hide so they can trick the questioner into not searching deeper.”

“...”

“Yes, that silence sounds much more promising. Thank you for letting me guide you there. And now it is time to drag the information out of you.”

It was true he could not tell Stiyl about the RV in Egypt where Mina Mathers and Lilith were hiding. Even if he and Aleister were enemies with a mutual understanding and even if he would gladly betray Aleister and get her thrown into the Tower of London in his place, that was something he could not reveal no matter what.

“The thing about fire is,” began Stiyl while blowing cigarette smoke in Kamijou’s face, “it’s an extremely useful means of destruction, but it is very difficult to use when you want information out of someone. Go in too strong and they will die of shock. And if the necrosis spreads too far, there is no saving them. It is possible to extract residual information from a corpse’s brain, but you only have one shot at it. And even when compared to cutting or crushing, the *fear of losing part of your body* is simply too great. Just like you said, a single move could cripple them for life, so there is a risk of them psychologically giving up on life. Once that happens, they will not talk no matter what you do to them. And that is a major problem for someone trying to get the necessary information out of them.”

“So...you won’t use fire?”

Stiyl had mentioned a few terms like cutting and crushing that Kamijou seriously wanted to steer clear of, but he also wanted to make sure of this no matter what.

Stiyl continued with no real change of expression.

“I could answer yes and I could answer no.”

“?”

“We use this for the modern witch hunt.”

He held a scrap of paper in front of Kamijou's face. It was a largish paper doll that really did look like it had been cut out of a piece of copy paper with scissors. It had a simple head and limbs, but the overall balance was off. It apparently only had to look vaguely humanoid.

“What is that...?”

“Keep your mouth shut. I don’t want you biting your tongue.”

With that cold comment, Stiyl Magnus shoved his lit cigarette into the paper doll's right leg.

“Welcome, Kamijou Touma, to London, the city of fog, magic, and torture.”

It immediately came off.

The boy's right leg burned and carbonized until the bone was visible and it fell off at the knee.

“Ah, bah!?”

He was reminded of the delicious part of fried chicken.

The end of the chicken leg bone. This was like a much larger version of that round bit of bone covered in cartilage that quivered like thick, translucent gelatin.

"Owwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!!???"

“Oh, you can actually scream? I thought for sure your eyes would roll back in your head and you would pass out with the very first move, but you must have a fair amount of experience with this sort of thing. Well, that will only make this all the more hellish for you.”

Kamijou screamed and struggled, but Stiyl only observed him with the look of a child tearing the legs off of a bug. Then he pressed the cigarette against the paper doll's lower stomach.

It was like watching plastic melt. With a strange odor, the skin blistered and burst, the muscles snapped, and an internal pressure caused more and more of a thick substance to spill out. His vision flashed in and out and his view of the room grew blurry for a reason other than tears.

The only thing he could hear anymore was the mechanically emotionless voice repeating itself.

"Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart's sudden disappearance and the Crowley's Hazards?"

But at this point, Kamijou finally realized something.

One of his legs had fallen off, but he could not escape the chair's belts no matter how much he struggled. That meant the restraints on all his limbs were still in place. Even though one of those limbs should not have been there anymore.

"Ah, ahh...?"

"Yes?"

"You aren't actually...burning me with fire. You're using that doll...yes, using it to send just the sensation to me."

"Knowing that does not allow you to escape the pain and suffering," explained Stiyl while holding the end of the cigarette right in front of the paper doll's face.

It was the same as the urban legend of the purple mirror that said something bad would happen if you did not forget about it before you turned twenty. It did not matter whether or not you understood how it worked. The more you tried to reject it, the more you would focus on it and the more you would fall into its trap.

"This is a professional tool. There is no escape. Just like hypnotism and red-hot tongs, it does not actually influence your physical body. Thus, it cannot rapidly raise your blood pressure and cause you to die of shock. Taking extreme levels of damage but being unable to die is hell itself. This is a hell designed by human hands to hunt witches."

His vision continued to flash in and out.

"And your prized Imagine Breaker is useless here because your right hand is bound to the chair by a perfectly normal belt. When the source is right there in your head, it must be so very painful that you cannot simply reach up and touch it."

Kamijou could tell. He felt an ill omen like someone was shoving a red-hot sheet of metal in front of his face. He forgot to even clench his teeth and drool flowed from the corner of his mouth as he gathered his consciousness which threatened to completely shatter.

Aleister did not matter. He did not care about Lola Stuart.

But Mina Mathers and Lilith were different.

Giving up on them for his own convenience would violate the boy's rules.

Stiyl Magnus felt no real emotion. He knew exactly what he had to do and he would simply repeat the same actions he had made the day before. There was nothing on his face, like he was losing sight of himself while repeatedly assembling the boxes running by on a conveyer belt.

The same questions were repeated yet again.

"Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart's sudden disappearance and the Crowley's Hazards?"

"..."

"The face is especially bad."

Despite those words, he shoved the cigarette into the paper doll as casually as someone stamping a form.

Part 5

They were floating.

"Nn."

Index and Karasuma Fran were holding onto the wire dangling from one of the hoodie bikini girl's UFO balloons. They were practically embracing each other as they got as close to London as they could manage.

"Riding a hot-air balloon with so many people is just wrong. Riding Bunny Gray like this is best."

If they touched it, they were dead.

Once they were caught, they would be pushed into the gap between barriers and ultimately crushed beyond recognition by the giant press that covered the entire city.

Yes, they were near the triple-quadruple final barrier that irregularly emitted unnatural red or green lights.

“It looks like England really is completely transformed.”

“They have no choice given the situation. The people here are only trying to protect their country, so you can’t blame them.”

“Right...I need to look at this differently...”

“You can’t just lament what’s happening. If Great Demon Coronzon breaks free of the Banner of the West in Academy City and crawls back out, there is no way of stopping her.”

Much like Tsuchimikado Motoharu, the hoodie bikini girl was good at this sort of thing thanks to her experience infiltrating an enemy group to achieve her objective. She did not simply alter a single long rail. She always had multiple rails so she could switch to another parallel rail at any time during the chaos. That was the unique logic of someone who could never appear shaken.

“This goes beyond a simple conflict in the Crowley family. This is a battle to free England—and the world as a whole—from Great Demon Coronzon’s influence.”

“I know that.”

From a distance, it looked like an ominous aurora in the night sky, but from this close, it was obviously a dome covering the entire city.

“I’ve taken in something other than that too.”

And after that unnecessary correction...

“It generally seems to have given a physical repulsive force to the rules permeating the land and space. It uses the aspects of national and regional character that work to distance outsiders. I’d like to compare it to the Eastern idea of Dosojin...but this probably has its origin in the guild membership rules that force members to protect the group’s secrets.”

“So can you get through or not? If you can’t refine your own magic power, I can help you out.”

“Forcibly pulling on it won’t do any good. It’s like a bunch of those power cable things tangled together. It isn’t an issue of the strength at any single point. Untangle one part and it will get tangled with another part. That multi-layered structure is what makes it such a pain. I doubt even Touma’s right hand could fully destroy it if he just went straight at it.”



“And what about with your knowledge as the Index Librorum Prohibitorum?”

“Not a chance. I doubt even the person who set up this final barrier knows how to untangle it. They’ve intentionally randomized it. That way you can’t make a fixed correspondence table using Gematria or something.”

“Well, rushing it isn’t going to help. I guess we’ll have to deal with one thing at a time.”

Some people might find Index and Karasuma Fran to be an unusual pairing, but they actually had a few things in common.

“Mh. I finally come back to England and I can’t even get into London, which is Bunny Gray’s second home...”

“I prefer Japan’s Kanamin, so I don’t really know what you’re talking about.”

“Are you feeling a throbbing in your head?”

“Only a periodic twinge.”

Yes, Index and Fran had both had something done to their bodies so that Lola could directly control them. The control method had been destroyed for both of them, but they could sense some traces of it remaining.

Was that throbbing a reaction to Great Demon Coronzon’s thoughts?

If only they could use that to stage some kind of counterattack...

“I have to repay her for what she did to me in that A. O. Francisca incident.”

“None of that matters if you get crushed by the final barrier before you can do anything.”

They could not open it, so there was nothing they could do.

While keeping a short distance from the final barrier that could crush them if they even touched it, hoodie bikini Karasuma Fran asked a question.

“What happened to that little Magic God?”

“I’m not sure. I think a bird might have gotten her.”

Part 6

“...”

Kamijou Touma's eyes would not focus properly.

A rusty flavor filled his mouth. His mouth was all sticky after his back teeth bit through his own flesh. He did not think it was his tongue. It was probably the flesh of his cheek. He wanted to rinse out his mouth, but he was not given that kind of freedom.

"Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart's sudden disappearance and the Crowley's Hazards?"

"Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart's sudden disappearance and the Crowley's Hazards?"

"Why did you set foot in this country? Whose idea was it? How much does it have to do with Lola Stuart's sudden disappearance and the Crowley's Hazards?"

Stiyl was no longer here, but the questions continued ringing in his eardrums.

He forcibly peeled apart his stuck-together lips and spoke while his eyes refused to focus and his body sat limply in the chair he was strapped to.

"...Aleister. I really am going to kill that bastard..."

Stiyl Magnus was not here.

Had he gone to get an even nastier tool, or was he getting a first-aid kit to treat Kamijou's mouth and extend his suffering? Was there any chance at all of a clueless Orsola miracle?

At any rate.

"Oh, you're tougher than I thought. I expected to find you had at least pissed yourself. You must have built up some resistance from confronting this god of war for such a depressingly long time."

"Eh?"

At first, he thought his brain was pumping out too many endorphins to distract him from the harshness of reality.

But when he raised his head while strapped to the chair, he did indeed see her.

"Othi—eh? Othinus...???"

"Why the surprise? The bars over the window were built to puny human standards, so they could never stop a god in her tracks. Their precious security was flawed at the most fundamental level."

In other words, she had used her small size to slip between the bars. It was the same reason mice had no trouble wandering around an impregnable prison. But while Kamijou did not know how many floors up this was, wouldn't it have been difficult for Othinus to climb up to the small window?

He heard a sound like sheets beating against the air. He looked to the window again and his eyes widened in shock. There was a giant bird standing there. If he was being honest, he was a little afraid of animals larger than cats and birds larger than crows.

"The head Norse god has an affinity for birds. I would use two raven familiars to gather information around the world and I would transform myself into a hawk to inspect the lower world."

"You captured it and rode it around? I've never seen a real hawk up close before..."

"Now that is sad to hear. Has basic education changed that much?"

Othinus was constantly defeated by their kitten, so how had she managed to tame that dangerous thing? As she spat out her last comment, Othinus climbed up Kamijou's shin and took up a position on his lap. And she removed something from her shoulder that was like a golf bag to her small body.

"Did you talk?"

"...About what...?"

"...Hmph. As always, you are far too kind. You did well for someone who was betrayed by a supposed ally and exposed to the tortures of the world's greatest witch hunting organization."

She sounded utterly exasperated but her voice also had a somehow gentle roundness to it.

Othinus's golf bag turned out to be something wrapped in black leather. She unwrapped it on his thigh and revealed a few different tools she had acquired somehow or another.

"What are Index and the others doing...?"

"How should I know? You need to start worrying about yourself for once. The humans are still stuck at the triple-quadruple final barrier covering all of London. As long as they don't attempt a random attack on it, they won't die. And since they clearly couldn't do anything, I decided to set off on my own."

"?"

"It is the same as the bars on the window. A barrier built for humans cannot stop a god like me. And it is a flaw in the basic design, so there is nothing anyone can do about it at this stage."

Othinus first pulled out a tool with a sharp blade at the end of a pencil-length metal rod. Given her height, it looked a lot like a spear or naginata.

Fear returned to Kamijou's worn-down heart.

What had happened to the peaceful world of a few seconds ago?

"Hey, what is that!? A scalpel or something!? You sure are a dangerous fairy!!"

"You moron. This is a knife used for working with pure gold. We can't get started unless I do something about these belts, right? But these are nothing compared to chains or a metal ring, so wait just a moment."

"You idiot! Hey, don't crawl across me with an exposed blade! You're kidding, right!? That's right by my wrist! You're really going to cut there!? I'm afraid you're going to slice right through me!!"

"...Understander, when did you lose so much trust in me?"

"You Western gods are always so careless about things! You're always destroying and remaking the entire world! Can you really cook and sew and do other precise dorm manager work!?"

"How rude. I'm skilled enough to get my friend's severed head talking again. Cook? As a sign of peace, I once created a human from the spit gathered in a spittoon. And the blood flowing from their corpse was used to create the world's finest mead. Has that cleared up the misunderstanding?"

"I trust that our bonds are strong enough to survive this, but you're honestly creeping me out!!"

"Shut up. Okay...all done. Your right hand is free."

It did not take long once one hand was free. The restraint belts used the same structure as the belt on his pants. While making sure he did not knock Othinus off of his lap, he undid the remaining three buckles.

Tiny Othinus gave a haughty snort before speaking again.

"You look exhausted. Curse those damn Anglicans. Maybe I should drop a divine spear on their heads."

"This is their job. Not that I want them to keep doing it."

Orsola and the others seemed to have fallen for some self-made disinformation about the Amakusa being destroyed and Canterbury falling. They were also carrying those Beheading Coins, dangerous-sounding suicide-attack spiritual items that worked

something like a portable anesthetic, so he could not let his guard down for a variety of reasons.

Once he was free, Kamijou checked each of the tools Othinus had brought. In addition to the knife, the palm-sized god had a metal-cutting saw thinner than a pen, a screwdriver handle and a few interchangeable tips, a small hammer used to break a sunken car's window from the inside, a free-size wrench that's width could be adjusted with a dial, and more. It looked like she had grabbed everything she could because she did not know what would come in handy.

"It is ridiculously out of the question for a god like me to worry about the interests of a mere human...but I am a criminal. And the environment I rely on is established by the treaty between Lola and Aleister. And yet one of them has been revealed to be possessed, cratering any trust anyone had in her, and the other has cast aside their own title as board chairman. I don't care who, I just want someone who can guarantee my position. And that includes my position by your side."

Kamijou naturally approached the small window Othinus had used to get in.

But once he reached the wall, he was confronted with reality.

"This...is really tall! I can't reach it!"

"Honestly, there are plenty of unproductive torture devices in here. How about using one of them as a stepstool?"

"I don't know how any of them are used. I'm afraid one will snap shut like a bear trap the instant I step on it."

Kamijou hopped up and down until he managed to grab the window's bars and forcibly climb up. ...When he looked out, he found they were much higher than he had expected. They were at least on the third floor. And he had no idea if there was anything to cushion him below. The outer wall was almost entirely vertical and had nothing sticking out for him to grab. Also, this building was only the White Tower, so even if he escaped it, he would still find the thick castle walls surrounding him. If he jumped down and broke his leg, only a cruel fate awaited him.

He let go to end his modified pull-up and he breathed a heavy sigh.

"...That's not going to work. Even if I could break the bars, jumping out from here would be suicide."

"In that case, the only remaining option is the main door."

Guided by Othinus's voice, Kamijou grabbed the tool set and dragged his exhausted body toward the metal door. Since this was not a normal room, there was no keyhole on the inside. The hinges were also attached on the outside, so he could not find anything to

remove with the tools. Nor was it fragile enough to break a hole in with the hammer or saw. This door did not even have the long, skinny window he had seen on the cell door.

“There’s nothing here. What am I supposed to do!?”

Kamijou shouted and kicked the door in desperation, but that only left him holding his aching toes and groaning. There really was nothing he could do. He even lost his balance while standing on one foot, so he placed his right hand on the door to balance himself.

Immediately, the thick metal door collapsed outwards with an almost silly sound.

“Wah!?”

With that support taken away without warning, Kamijou Touma fell over and rolled out into the Tower of London corridor. He very nearly committed seppuku with the tools he was holding. He had no idea what had happened and looked around in confusion. He doubted that metal door had broken just because he kicked it. Which meant...

“Did they magically reinforce it to provide the strength they wanted?” asked the Norse god who was skillfully standing on his head. “If so, you should touch everything you can: doors, stone walls, locks – it doesn’t matter. There was no reaction from that window, but Imagine Breaker might work in some places.”

“...Should I really do that? Isn’t the Tower of London a historical building!? I don’t know how England handles national treasures and important cultural properties, but wouldn’t this be a big deal!?”

“Not to worry. You would only be bothering the Royal Family.”

“Royal!? So it is a big deal!”

“How can you be so bothered by this after spending so much time clashing with a god like me? ...Also, what made you think you could settle all of this without upsetting anyone? Have you forgotten what they did to you as soon as they brought you to the Tower of London, human? Whether you escaped your bonds or not, being taken here is like earning a red card in life.”

“...”

“That smile has frozen on your face, hasn’t it? Create a path out if you want to live. If you do not destroy every wall and door you can in order to create an escape route the authorities did not expect, you have no hope of survival.”

There was no turning back now that he had destroyed the door. Even if he returned to the room and sat in the chair, they would notice something was wrong. And they would surely see that as intent to resist and torture him further. In fact, they would have continued the

torture like normal even if nothing had changed. Nothing good would come of staying in that room. He could not keep dreaming in vain of an Orsola miracle.

When he scrambled to his feet with his face pale, Othinus climbed down to her spot on his shoulder and lost herself in thought.

(Hmm. In that case, I can make a good guess why Aleister suddenly sent this human to the Tower of London: the greatest treasure which they cannot even keep in the Jewel House.)

“Fine! I don’t even care anymore!! To hell with Stiyl and Orsola! They can get yelled at for allowing me to escape. Curse that warm and gentle woman. I hope she’s brought to tears by a slightly lewd punishment!!”

“What’s gotten into you? Has the threat of death finally broken the switch meant to preserve your bloodline?”

Part 7

Things were surprisingly easygoing.

The grasslands continued to the horizon, which felt terribly empty to Hamazura and Takitsubo who lived in cramped Academy City. Several railroads intersected at the center of that landscape. There was something like a roofless unmanned station, but there were no ticket gates or ticket machines. It may have been exclusively for loading and unloading cargo such as sheep and machine-rolled hay.

“Hamazura, can we really not get through? If we wait around, those monsters are going to catch up.”

“Hmm. I think this is as far as we can get like this. They’ll probably notice us if we move any closer.”

Hamazura Shiage switched off the headlights and come to a stop in response to his girlfriend in a pink track suit and sweater.

It looked like a perfectly ordinary cargo station, but it was surrounded by an abnormal amount of chain-link fencing. There was a transformer room for the trains, but it was still overkill.

“Are they arguing about something?”

“They’re saying Loch Ness has dried up. ...Do they mean *the* Loch Ness?”

He did not really get what Takitsubo meant. Hamazura was not sure if “Loch Ness” was the name of a coffee brand, some historical ruins, or a soccer club team.

Regardless, he could guess this was more misinformation.

(They’re fighting a war, so do they have food or fuel stored here? They could have built a big underground tank like under a gas station...)

Hiding it in an obvious vault or underground area made it easier to target, but they could not hide it in civilian homes just because that was harder to find. Thus, they tended to use national forests, prisons, and parks. A transformer room surrounded by fences and high-voltage warnings fit the conditions.

But before getting to that, Hamazura did not understand all the complicated details about magic and the Anglican Church. He was simply worried about this obvious checkpoint when they had illegally entered the country without a passport and then stole a car. Stealing cars was forbidden in pretty much every country, but he was especially afraid of ending up in handcuffs in a foreign country with an unfamiliar legal system.

“What should we do? Choose a different route?”

“It looks like this same barricade continues forever.”

The vehicle’s four-wheel drive power would allow them to leave the asphalt and directly drive across the grassland, but that did not seem to be the issue here.

Hamazura glanced at the rearview mirror to check on the monsters in the back seat.

“Hey, you say you’re Magic Gods, right? I don’t really know what that means, but can’t you use your over-the-top god powers to blast through this checkpoint?”

“Oh? Are you sure you want us to do that?”

“We can do that, but I apologize in advance if it ends up altering the earth’s crust here. If you think of it as creating a new wonder of the world, then it’s actually a plus for the local humans who are bound by worldly interests☆”

...Hamazura was not sure how serious the brown bandage woman and mini-China dress girl were. He did not really get how incredible Magic Gods were, so they just seemed like a relative insisting they would start taking things seriously tomorrow.

However.

“Oh, I think you have other things to worry about.”

As soon as Nephthys said that with a smile, someone tapped lightly on the driver's side window. The sound alone was enough to make Hamazura groan. It was identical to an Anti-Skill officer arrogantly using their position of authority to question him. He glanced over, but did not find a uniformed police officer carrying a gun or baton. It was a glasses nun in a black habit. Instead of a flashlight, she held a lantern that used reflective panels to direct the light of an oil lamp in a single direction.

It was a strange visual for someone who had lived by LED lights for so long, but nothing good would come of stomping on the gas pedal and trying to flee. These people who truly believed they were in the right would not hesitate to grab onto the car at times like that. And if they were subsequently thrown off, he would now be responsible for a death or injury. If he wanted to avoid danger and not place any additional crimes on his own head, he needed to focus on the "etiquette" of these situations.

He opened the window rather than the door.

(The grassland starts right over there, so she wouldn't hit her head on the asphalt if she's sent rolling away. If I catch her off guard and knock her away before gassing it, I should be able to ensure her safety.)

It might seem surprising, but even if a possibly hostile person was within arm's reach, people would relax if there was any kind of "wall" between them. This was based on the concept of personal space, where another person would begin to feel threatening if they moved within a certain radius of you. Every prison and juvenile hall made sure to warn the guards to remain cautious when approaching prisoners through the bars. When questioning someone in a car, pretty much everyone would bend over and try to peer inside, so Hamazura planned on making his move when she moved her face in close. ...The fact that all this came to him so readily was proof that he could not rid himself of his old lifestyle so easily.

Judging the age of foreigners was difficult, but this glasses nun looked even younger than him. And she spoke with the lantern in hand.

"What are civilians doing wandering around here!? You need to evacuate! Just get away from here as fast as you can!!"

The idiot could not speak English and did not even know how to open a conversational English app on his phone. All he could do was clasp his hands together and repeat the magic word: sorry.

It was only after Takitsubo gave him a brief translation that he noticed something was out of place. This glasses nun had not approached them because she thought the car was suspicious.

A moment later, the ground shook.

No, that was not it.

“Get in!!”

“Ah? Eh?”

“Carrying that fuel will only get you killed!! Just hurry! Do you want to die!?”

When he gestured with his arm, she finally seemed to get it. Before he could open the door, she dropped the containers and dove in the open window. Thanks to that, her hips caught on the window frame and her upper body fell in Hamazura’s lap. He was thankful for the glasses nun’s softness, but he regretted this turn of events once he realized how hard it was to operate the accelerator, brake, and clutch with someone’s body weight squishing their boobs against his lap. Regardless, he sent the four-wheel drive vehicle racing forward.

Something roared right past them.

He had no idea what form it had originally taken, but a giant object seemingly made of red shadows barely missed the nun’s legs sticking out the window. They could not let their guard down. Something larger than a bus was tearing into the grass at its feet to make a sharp turn and take aim at them again.

In the back seat, Nephtys said something while holding Niang-Niang like a body pillow.

“She says her name is Sister Agata and she wants to thank you.”

“Yes, and her boobs are touching me!! I want to thank her too!!”

“.....”

“Try to keep your jealousy under control, Takitsubo. We’re rescuing someone and taking evasive action here. Ow!? Okay, okay. I apologize, so if you’re gonna hit me with tissues, use the paper box!! That bottle of wet tissues is really hard, so it hurts!!”

“She also says they need to buy time for Archbishop Lola to return. ...How admirable.”

Nephtys added her own exasperated comment at the end. Given the nun’s puzzled look, she must not have been able to see past Hamazura and into the back seat.

Fear clenched his heart when a large shadow arrived overhead, but this seemed to be something other than a Crowley’s Hazard. It resembled a boomerang-shaped stealth bomber, but it seemed to be made of a thin cloth, making it something like a bat’s wings.

Flying through the air would help avoid the risk of the Crowley’s Hazards on the ground, but this thing made no attempt to collect the nuns on the grasslands.

Instead, it dropped plastic containers like the ones the nun had been holding and even larger metal drums.

(Damn them!! Is fuel more important than human life!?)

He did not shout at the top of the lungs because of the glasses nun whose butt was still sticking out of the vehicle.

Hamazura had a connection to Lilith, but he was not at the center of the issue. Still, the mention of Lola Stuart seemed ominous to him and he was worried this Agata might know who he was.

He could not just pick up the one nun. Bus and truck headlights started to light up and he heard horses neighing in the darkness, but it did not look like there was room for everyone on those things. Each time he saw some nuns abandoned on the green grassland, he came to a stop, honked the horn, and yelled to them.

“Grab onto the roof, the door, or wherever! Just get on!!”

The words may have been unnecessary. The girls immediately hopped on. The roof had an attachment for skis or a snowboard and the four sides had metal bars for keeping sheep away, so that “bird cage” had plenty to hold onto. Hamazura suppressed his raging heart, controlled the impatient urge to stomp on the gas pedal, and waited. He had never known the simple act of waiting could feel like it was shortening your lifespan.

The glasses nun sticking halfway in through the window pounded on his thigh.

“Hamazura, she says everyone is holding on.”

“Finally!!”

The tremor was approaching.

Aleister would always be Aleister. Those monsters may not have known how to distinguish between enemy and ally. The horizon was barely distinguishable from the darkness and it seemed to swell up irregularly.

That was an illusion.

As far as the eye could see, the various Crowley’s Hazards, both large and small, were approaching and none of them had a human form any longer. The army was so massive it looked like a moving mountain range.

There was a clown larger than a broadcast tower with super deformed proportions. There was a humanoid form made of round clock faces and innumerable gears. There was a giant with tiny Crowleys spilling from the tears in its thick, sewn-together skin.

It was a nightmarish scene.

Hamazura did not even want to think about what would happen if they were swallowed up by that.

Enemy and ally would meet the same fate.

“What the hell, what the hell, what the hell, what the hell!? The scale here is so messed up!!”

“My, my. This car is covered in girls on the outside and inside. I never thought I would find a secret garden here.”

“That black habit is from the Roman Catholic Church, right? And that bus was full of Asians, so it was probably the Amakusa. In that case...yes, I can sense the cruelty of this situation☆”

The Magic Gods acted like they were outside the flow of time, but he could not bother with their sightseeing talk.

The off-road engine roared as Hamazura crashed the four-wheel drive vehicle through the barricade and drove off into nature. He did not have time to check where the asphalt ended and the grassland began. His only option was to get as far away as possible from the deluge of flesh and destruction approaching from behind.

“————!!”

“Someone translate what that Agata girl is saying into Japanese!!”

“She’s saying to watch out for the English gardens, boy☆”

“?”

He frowned at the mini-China dress girl’s words. She had not translated the term “English garden” at all.

“The English like to enjoy the scenery, so they put special effort into the fencing for the sheep. They don’t grab some wood stakes and boards for some crude carpentry like on American ranches. The ground might look level at first glance, but they’ve actually built drop-offs of more than a meter to keep the flower-eating sheep out. And of course, the trick is to make sure the drop-offs aren’t apparent when looking out to the horizon from the higher second house, so looking harder isn’t going to help.”

“Then what am I supposed to do...!?”

Gravity seemed to disappear while he was shouting.

The four-wheel drive vehicle had driven right off of one of the one-meter drop-offs. His vision wobbled up and down when they landed, but he was more worried about the nuns holding onto the roof. Fortunately, the sheep bars kept them from falling off.

“Also watch out for waterways, stone steps, and brick flowerbeds. While the French love to keep the land level and build living rose mazes, the English prefer to dig into or build up the ground itself. Let your guard down and you’ll fall in a hole or blow a tire.”

“That advice is about as helpful as ‘watch out for the mines buried around here’. All it does is inspire fear without giving me any actual way of knowing what is safe or not!”

It sounded like he should return to the asphalt instead of relying on the power of four-wheel drive. Even if the English liked to mess with the ground, he was pretty sure they would leave the public roads alone.

Before long, he had crashed through a second and third checkpoint.

There were no guards of any kind there.

They must have decided retreat was the best option. The powerful light of flames scattered across the grasslands which had no streetlights. This was clearly not fuel igniting. It was an unnaturally sticky sort of fire. A seemingly endless hay wall had ignited. And it would not just catch the Crowley’s Hazards pushing in from behind. This was the checkpoint Hamazura and the others had intended to break through next.

“Hey, there’s a ton of nuns hanging on outside, right? So what do we do!?”

“According to the glasses girl, they will take care of themselves so drive right on through.”

He could only scream.

Thinking of it like passing one’s hand through a candle’s flame, he used their speed to send the large bumper crashing through the wall of fire.

There was a deafening roar as the fire consumed oxygen, but he did not feel much heat even with the driver’s side window wide open. He saw a pale blue light surrounding the four-wheel drive vehicle.

Takitsubo frowned in her pink track suit and sweater.

“Um, a magical barrier? I think that might be a slang term I’m unfamiliar with...”

“I don’t care what it is, but don’t keep it to yourself!! Give it all to me in Japanese!! All of it!!”

“Hmm... We are the students of Saint Peter who gaze upon the Son of God. We shall be protected by the secret ceremony of the saint symbolized by the unicorn’s horn and breasts on a plate and who stopped the lava of Mt. Etna.”

“Eh? What? Is this some scary fairy tale stuff???”

Nephthys placed a hand over her mouth and giggled in the back seat.

“No, you two. That translation is correct. This is based on the legend of the saint known in this country as Saint Agatha. After all, Christian holy women are generally considered inviolable.”

The vehicle was safe and none of the nuns clinging to the roof and doors seemed to have major injuries. But Hamazura did not look happy as he held the steering wheel.

“...That doesn’t really help. Getting through there wasn’t enough to escape those monsters!!”

As if to confirm his amateur thoughts, the nun in his lap began shouting again.

“...!!”

“Shit, whatever she’s saying, it sounds serious. I know I’ll regret this, but someone please translate for me!!”

“Come to think of it, stop touching my boobs, you asshole.”

“This silent killer intent... Takitsubo’s gonna kill me before the Crowley’s Hazards can, isn’t she? Anyway, is she saying anything else!?”

“She says escaping to London won’t do us any good.”

At first, he did not know what the glasses nun was saying via Niang-Niang.

The mini-China dress girl explained further while having fun rolling around in the back seat and grappling with bandaged Nephthys.

“She calls it the triple-quadruple final barrier. The castle gate is locked tight, so driving full speed into it will only smash the car to pieces.”

“...Then what do we do? The way forward is blocked and we have who-knows-how-many unstoppable monsters approaching from behind! Seriously, what are we supposed to do!?”

“I guess everyone here was used as sacrificial pawns. That’s why the Roman Catholics, Amakusa, and other external groups were placed on the front line.”

Nephthys barely seemed to care, but her words gave him no hints whatsoever. Racing toward a cliff in a game of chicken was risky enough, but this was like having a giant steamroller approaching from behind while you did so. Whether he stepped on the gas or the brakes, he could not avoid being torn to mincemeat.

But just then...

“Hamazura, something feels weird. One of the pressures has disappeared.”

“Ah?”

Hamazura shouted wildly while sweatily holding the steering wheel and gladly accepting the label of “creep” from the nun pressing down on his thighs.

“Ahhh!? Wh-wh-what the hell is that!?”

Part 8

It happened in an instant.

To the people not in the know, it must have seemed sudden.

The veil of light covering London vanished like a major blackout.

“Okay, let’s get moving.”

After seeing impregnable London’s defensive wall vanish, the girl in a blue blazer uniform, witch’s hat, and cape calmly spoke.

“I would expect nothing less of Imagine Breaker, the ultimate joker spoken of since the Golden days. It seems Kamijou Touma successfully destroyed the core stored in the Tower of London. That spiritual item was necessary to maintain the triple-quadruple final barrier.”

“You...”

“Don’t get so mad, Accelerator. Would you prefer to stick him in a jewelry box for safekeeping?”

Their destination was Westminster Abbey.

It was probably London’s largest cathedral and it had a deep connection to the Royal Family.

“They do not have the guts to place it in an obvious castle, but they are also afraid to place it in a normal home. So what location is sturdy but in a blind spot? Without even referencing the giant Star of Africa diamond, the infamous Tower of London is well known for storing the Royal Family’s greatest treasures. ...So where in London would the defenders want to place the core of their triple-quadruple final barrier? Nothing could have been more obvious.”

If it could not be destroyed from the outside, they only had to destroy it from the inside.

The human named Aleister Crowley had once destroyed the world’s largest magic cabal via internal conflict. If she was willing to admit defeat after a direct attack failed, she would not have continued down a path of suffering and setbacks for more than a century.

“There is no escaping now, London.”

She spoke in a singsong voice and each of her steps seemed to be crossing a definitive line.

What that meant was likely only understood by that magician who had a century-long connection to this land.

“I’m back, city of fog, magic, and gold. Fortress of Great Demon Coronzon, Crowley has returned to settle things once and for all.”

They arrived in south London.

It was part of the outskirts that had chaotically spread outwards over the years.

There was stone, brick, concrete, and asphalt. The street’s mixture of old and new was covered by a cold December fog.

As soon as she set foot there, she heard the dull metallic rattling of shutters and doors. They knew they were already locked, but they could not relax until they double-checked. It was a sign of that sort of rejection. It seemed meant to drive out a great criminal who would curse you if you so much as laid eyes on her.

There was also the solid scraping of cowboy boots walking across the rough ground.

And the scraping of an extremely long katana scabbard.

“...I apologize, but I must drive you from this city immediately.”

One leg of her jeans was cut to the base, her coat had one arm missing, and her T-shirt was tied at the bottom. The long glossy black hair of an Asian was tied in a ponytail and the belt at her waist carried the long Shichiten Shichitou.

“I do not have a second to spare if I am to save everyone who is risking their lives fighting.”

She was Kanzaki Kaori, a Saint.

There were fewer than twenty of those obvious cornerstones of a fighting force.

Meanwhile, Aleister Crowley was more like a stage actor. She used exaggerated gestures and a loud voice, but the more ostentatious she behaved, the more her presence and reality seemed to fade away like a dream or illusion.

It was like a formless tanuki or fairy showing off money made from leaves or sawdust.

“Are you shorthanded, giant of the United Kingdom?”

A roar echoed through the darkness directly behind the silver girl.

The multiple defensive lines laid out like tree rings or a baumkuchen were no longer functioning. The triple-quadruple final barrier had been lost. Nothing remained to keep out the army of Crowley’s Hazards. The capital city of London was being trampled.

But.

However.

Some new footsteps blocked the way.

A line of silver light flashed as swiftly as lightning but with a violent slicing power.

Red, green, brown, and gray. It was unclear how they had gained bodily fluids like that, but flowers of blood blossomed in a variety of colors.

Aleister and Accelerator by her side showed no sign of surprise. They must have already detected the assassin’s presence.

It was Knight Leader who softly landed behind them after swinging his double-edged sword to clear off the blood. The man in a suit had a few dozen fully-equipped knights waiting behind him.

Aleister was surrounded now, but she only scoffed.

The magician faced the Saint rather than Knight Leader.

“Those were all Aleister Crowley as much as I am. Does a loving Saint like you not feel anything when you think of the magic name you carved into your heart?”

“The Beheading Coin.”

But it was not Kanzaki who responded.

Of the two assassins, it was the head of the Knights who took a step forward.

“At the request of Holegres Mirates, I gave the final approval to issue these spiritual items in case a swift suicide attack was necessary. I spread them around the country.”

He squeezed something in his hand and clenched his teeth while burning with justice.

And he did not hesitate to unleash a shout.

“But I will not let anyone use these. Not even one of them. I am not alone here. If I work with a Saint, I can push you back. I will push through you!!”

“...Damn you, Lola. When did you cleverly shift the axis of their justice? Did you convince them that *killing your enemy is a form of salvation?*”

Let us make one thing clear.

Kanzaki Kaori and Knight Leader made no more attempt at conversation.

The fog and darkness were split as the monsters attacked Aleister from the front and back simultaneously.

They shattered the sound barrier.

Their extraordinary attack transformed their very bodies into deadly weapons. Kanzaki Kaori used Nanasen, seven wires blended into the exaggerated motion of drawing her sword. Knight Leader simply used his double-edged sword. They combined trickery and a straightforward attack so their enemy could only respond to one of them. It was complete overkill that would smash a criminal's body to pieces instead of just take off their head.

But Aleister only breathed an exasperated sigh.

Meaningful numbers scattered from her right and left fingertips like orange sparks.

Immediately, silence fell. At first, it seemed like time had come to a halt in some kind of mistake. She had blocked both Kanzaki Kaori's wires and Knight Leader's sword.

One with a golden staff with a spherical head. The other with a large silver scythe.

The two weapons symbolized the sun and the moon.

Aleister remained between the two monsters and fended them off with a hand each.

“Is it that strange?”

She giggled.

And Aleister whispered like a demon with the strange weapons in hand.

“Is it that strange that I can easily stop your supersonic attacks when I could not even dodge Kamijou Touma’s fist? There is an answer to your question. If you have any thought left in your heads, then enjoy figuring it out. That is the greatest luxury of human life.”

They were in the midst of a battle and a war.

So Kanzaki Kaori and Knight Leader did not respond to her words.

It truly happened in an instant.

In less than the blink of an eye, a spear shredded the darkness on its way toward the national traitor’s chest.

Knight Leader had caught a spear tossed to him by another knight and made a further attack with it.

Wars were fought with the sword, but executions were a different matter. An axe could remove the head or a spear could pierce the heart. In the capital city of London, there were plenty of things that had taken more lives than the average war.

This symbolized a tragedy of the wealthy, not a war of the starving.

Knight Leader had fought on equal footing with Acqua of the Back, aka William Orwell, who held a unique position even among the Saints. Meanwhile, the silver girl already had both hands full. She should have had no way of blocking the spear aimed at her heart. This spear had its weight magically increased, so it would break her body to pieces.

“Again,” whispered Magician Aleister Crowley in a singsong voice. “I was asking if you are shorthanded.”

With a heavy clang, the spear tip was forcibly repelled. It happened at just a few dozen centimeters from the silver-haired girl’s back. After missing its mark, the spear struck a nearby steel streetlight. The streetlight broke.

Accelerator stood nearby, but he had not interfered with his control of vectors.

At some point, the unrealistically large scythe had vanished and Aleister had touched the spear with her perfectly normal right hand.

Kanzaki Kaori took a cautious step back.

Or perhaps she was creating the distance needed to launch her next attack.

“What’s wrong, frontline fighters?”

Aleister gave a cruel smile, but at what was it directed? At the proud fighting force of the homeland she so loathed, or at herself for having to once more rely on magic after coming so far?

“Surely you have not mistaken something as simple as this for Imagine Breaker. If you are that devoid of knowledge, I won’t even bother with you. I will trample you down and continue on.”

“Modern Western magic.”

Something spilled from Kanzaki Kaori’s lips.

She spat it out in an *unnaturally* hateful voice no one had heard from her before.

“Are you the magician who created it all?”

No matter how many Crowley’s Hazards she had fought as they arrived from the ocean, none of it would help with this battle here.

The different Crowleys had entirely different forms after walking entirely different possible paths. Some of the Crowleys had wholly abandoned magic and others had wholly mastered it.

“I’m shocked you would see me that way. Nothing I did was all that impressive. I simply took what was already there, chopped it up, and rearranged it in a more understandable form. Just like the colors of the rainbow or the do-re-mi scale used to teach children. ...Of course, the fools who thought *that is all there is* were successfully convinced that the world is divided between science and magic. Even though there is actually a nearly infinite gradation in between those two poles.”

Knight Leader made another heavy spear jab, but he mostly meant it as a test to confirm what he already suspected. Aleister used her right hand to swat it away like a bug and the deadly spear tip was deflected out into the empty air.

“Therefore.”

She did not need a weapon or spiritual item.

Her most reliable partner was inside her head.

“I don’t care how many billions of people live on this planet. Even if every last one of them hates me, only a small fraction will be able to use magic at a practical level. And no one can harm me if they follow the theory of modern Western magic which I constructed and redistributed. Freedom vanished from the world with the introduction of the Book of the Law in 1904. No matter how hard you try, the shadow of Aleister Crowley will continue to stalk you at the foundation of your spells. I can interfere as much as I like. As the developer, I am familiar with the backdoors and zero-day exploits in the technical system known as modern Western magic. Right now, I am merely *refusing you service*. Perhaps I should have it blow up in your hands next.”

It did not particularly matter if the magical materials they relied on dated to a time before Aiwass’s summoning—or to put it in Crowley’s terms, the time of the Last Judgment when the Aeon was advanced. Even if you listened to Japanese noh or kyogen, it would be ruined if you attempted to understand it using the do-re-mi scale brought over from the West.

“Why is it I can fly on a broom without fear of being brought down? Because you cannot do it.”

In other words, the only people who could hope to outdo Aleister in the field of magic were the extraordinary Magic Gods or a magician with an independent streak on the level of Westcott and Mathers who had competed with Aleister to develop a universal format for the foundation of magic while in the Golden cabal.

Imagine Breaker was not needed if you *only* needed to negate magic.

That was clear from the fact that a grimoire library held a central position in anti-magician combat. And Mathers had so badly wanted to be the editor of modern Western magic because he had wanted to establish rules that worked to his advantage. Just as a specific search engine and a specific online store had covered the planet, he had wanted to stand at the foundation of the infrastructure.

Aleister had something that let her keep up with their supersonic movements.

And she could reject all of their modern Western magic.

“Why you—!!”

The fully-equipped knights began to move. They must not have wanted to trip up Kanzaki or Knight Leader who were moving at supersonic speeds, so they rushed Accelerator instead.

It only took an instant.

The #1 grabbed one of the knights by the face and lifted them from the ground.

“I’m not on that piece of shit’s side. I won’t get in your way.”

There was no obvious fire in his voice.

But it was that very iciness that squeezed their hearts with frozen vines.

“So leave me the hell alone. ...Do you want me to kill you?”

“Stop it.”

Surprisingly, it was Aleister who snapped her fingers.

“Your enemy is right here, so worry not. Lashing out at outsiders will only bring you back to your old ways. Do you want to return to being the battle-crazed berserker you once were?”

“Tch.”

Accelerator clicked his tongue and let go of the knight’s face.

He had not used his vector control to mess with the inside of their body, but the fully-equipped knight did not move after collapsing to the ground.

Aleister narrowed her eyes, but not at the knight whose will to fight had been so pathetically broken. She was focused on the other knights who made no attempt to save them.

Knight Leader tossed aside the spear and spoke in a cold voice.

“Move. You are in my attack range.”

That was all he said to his fellow knights who were in trouble.

If they had a reason, then they could accept it.

It would be worse to make them think it was their fault.

“We will make a recovery here, so do not worry and please withdraw.”

Kanzaki Kaori’s somewhat exasperated voice seemed helpful, but it was actually quite the opposite.

Something was not right.

Aleister viewed everything from a cynical viewpoint, so she had seen through it. The tendency to lift up irreproachable experts might seem like a virtue, but that also meant driving out anyone who had even the slightest flaw.

“...Is that all?”

She (he?) had never trusted God. Nor did she trust those who trusted God or those who loudly insisted they were obeying God by preserving order.

“While you have gone through these routine tasks and repeated these tear-jerking stories of emotional subjugation, has some innocent person been harmed by the magical recoil being scattered everywhere? And because you use others for your own grand achievements? If so, you are beyond saving. Did you think I sounded full of myself talking about redistributing all of this? It is more than that. The fact that you did not question the very system of magic and choose to stop using it is proof that you are truly beyond saving.”

Once she knew that, there was no need to hold back.

If Aleister Crowley announced she would trample them down and continue on, that is exactly what she would do. She would crush them underfoot and keep moving like they were no more than a bug.

But just then, something changed.

It was unclear what sort of emotion it contained, but Knight Leader smiled a little.

“We already knew.”

A heavy noise followed.

It was a block of stone larger than a harbor container. The stone had been neatly cut and dropped into London from the open air. And this abnormal phenomenon did not occur just the once. It was only here-and-there at first, but it gradually picked up steam until it was a complete downpour. It was a lot like the strange phenomenon of small fish or frogs suddenly pouring from the sky, but it was fundamentally different. If anything, it may have been more like a puzzle game with more and more blocks falling.

“I see.”

If a single one hit her, she would be killed instantly, but Aleister looked unfazed. Yes, that human could tell she was not going to die here.

The blocks were falling in an orderly arrangement.

The stone blocks stacked up to quickly form giant structures. The nightscape of London was rapidly blotted out as a wholly different culture blossomed.

A king's tomb took the shape of a square pyramid that incorporated both largescale stone architecture and high-level astronomy.

A stone pillar rose sharply into the sky to praise a sun god.

Countless pieces of wall art included both diagrams and writing while ignoring the perspective seen in Western paintings.

The historical kings displayed as giant statues were all pharaohs with no connection to the Royal Family that ruled England. London was known as the city of fog, but its atmosphere had entirely changed. The girl magician felt the piercing chill of the dry desert at night. It would have seemed perfectly natural for the ground to burst open and a corpse wrapped in bandages to crawl out.

Northern Africa had come to London.

Eventually, Aleister narrowed her eyes in admiration at that mismatched scenery.

For someone who had come to hate Christianity after a lifetime of abuse, false accusations, and persecution from the “pious believers”, this may have actually been more comfortable even if it was a trap sprung by the enemy.

“Egyptian mythology, hm? *Although this is the Egyptian scenery as a European would imagine it.* Did you use the Rosetta Stone as a source? I imagine you dug through the British Museum until you found it. But I believe I already explained that even magical resources from before 1904 are meaningless if you attempt to understand them through the filter of modern Western magic.”

“That is why we will make no attempt to understand them.”

Aleister and Kanzaki Kaori both already knew the answer.

So their statements were no more than curses meant to strike their opponent with harmful emotion.

“We take what is there and release it as is. That is all.”

“And you call that managing the battlefield? I believe most people refer to that as a runaway weapon.”

“We do not care.”

Knight Leader remained unfazed.

He did not bat an eye.

“When fighting aboard a ship, the presence of a storm can influence a knight’s battle.”

The lovely girl felt a tug on her right cheek and then a slight scratch appeared there. A piece of the falling and piling-up stone blocks had broken off and a tiny fragment had cut through her skin. It produced only a single drop of blood, but that drop held great meaning.

Her untouchable status had been shattered.

Aleister could not be killed by the magic she had developed.

But Aleister could be killed by the mystical when it was not viewed through the filter she had constructed.

These were ancient methods from before the modern era. Whether they were runaway weapons or disasters, an unexpected strike in the storm could shatter the soul of this person who had taken a girl's form.

...Knight Leader and Kanzaki Kaori were supposed to be protectors, but they had searched for, constructed, and were rejoicing at the success of a method meant to kill a human who had supposedly been born and then died in England.

(Almost like a repeat of 1947...)

“So what?”

However.

Aleister Crowley continued to scoff even with her advantage taken.

Hers was the look of a human who had never feared failure in the first place.

“Surely you did not think I of all people expected to end this without a single scratch on me. The magician named Aleister Crowley does not fear bloodshed. I am the bastard who decided my great work would require dyeing the entire planet with blood and who foresaw the outbreak of World War I but focused on my magical research instead of making any attempt to stop it.”

The fight was only just beginning.

There was no need to even count this as a second round. This was the true beginning when both sides were finally wearing down each other's lives.

“Now, it is time I taught you something.”

She grinned.

In her lovely girl form, Aleister used a thumb to wipe the blood drop from her cheek and then spoke in the exaggerated way of a stage actor.

“I shall teach you the true nature of the blood sacrifice used to kill every last member of the Golden cabal. Or if you like, you could call it my Blood Sign.”

Between the Lines 2

The Tower of London was in a panic as well.

So many places had been cleanly broken through: the thick metal door, the bars blocking the corridor, and even the outer stone wall thought to be eternally indestructible.

Needless to say, they had all been destroyed by Imagine Breaker.

The disappearance of a single prisoner had left the entire place buzzing with the energy of a beehive.

“The White Tower takes top priority! Hurry up and lock it down and perform a headcount on the permanent prisoners. If you deem it necessary, you may eliminate any who take even a step outside their cell!!”

“The walls around the entire facility are more important. Even if they make it to the garden, no one can escape if we fortify the final gate!”

“Check the keys. Do not let any of them be duplicated!!”

While the specialized jailers known as beefeaters ran around in a frenzy, a gentle nun tried to stay out of their way by leaning against the wall of a newly-ventilated corridor.

She held a hand elegantly to her cheek and spoke in a troubled voice.

“My, my, my, my...”

“There you are, Sister Orsola. Are you hurt?”

The tall boy with red-dyed hair who walked up was Stiyl Magnus. The religion did not actually ban it, but standing next to a priest with a cigarette in his mouth reminded her how much variety there was in the Christian Church.

“N-no,” said Orsola. “I am perfectly fine. Um...”

“He ran off. Kamijou Touma, that is.” Stiyl gave his hateful reply with enough force he nearly bit through his cigarette’s filter. “I intentionally used a normal chair with normal restraints that had all magical elements removed...but knowing his misfortune, I doubt the latch broke by pure coincidence. And the belt was clearly cut. Damn, does that mean he had help?”

...Stiyl was actually pretending to be on her side and observing Orsola’s reaction, but he did not find what he was looking for.

But not because she was good at hiding things. Orsola held the cross at her chest and spoke as if praying for the boy's safety.

"This has developed into a major incident, but do you think Kamijou will be okay? I just hope he doesn't resist and get hit by a curse..."

Stiyl could only click his tongue at that.

If she was this bad at lying, he seriously doubted she could have helped Kamijou Touma escape. In fact, if she had helped, she would probably have gone to report what she had done.

In her Roman Catholic days, this woman had stayed true to her nonviolence even with the Agnese Force targeting her life and she had decided that being beaten was better than raising her own hand to beat someone else. And by a twist of fate, she had ended up living in the same Anglican dorm as the former Agnese Force, but she was virtuous enough to live in harmony with them. She was the last person to mask the truth out of fear of pain.

He actually felt guilty for having doubted her, but she also reminded him of someone.

She was much like the grimoire library girl that he had once guarded.

(I'm still much too soft...)

"Stiyl, are you going to go search for him?"

"We all have our own duties. I will wait here and work to get the usual interrogations back up and running. And when I have some spare time, I will help fix these holes in the Tower of London."

"In that case, um, is there anything I could do?"

"Make no mistake. The Anglican Church did not give you that cross so we could place you on the front line as our pawn."

"..."

"Find happiness and reach for it yourself. Do not waste the chance that girl risked her life to give you, Sister Orsola. We don't even need to look at John's rebuke of the philosopher. Wealth is powerless, but throwing it in the ditch is not the same as honorable poverty."

He must have known this was not the role for him because Stiyl awkwardly brushed a hand through his long, red-dyed hair.

"We still haven't finished checking how many prisoners escaped their cells. The Tower of London is a deadly place right now, so you should withdraw outside the walls for now. ...I would prefer to think it hasn't crossed that final line, but the risk is still there. Be careful."

“Um, but...”

“It would be best if you let the beefeaters guide you, but be cautious of them as well. A permanent prisoner might have stolen one of their uniforms. Make sure their sleeves, hems, and shoes are all the right size. Got that?”

He did not let her get a word in edgewise. After his rapid-fire instructions, Stiyl Magnus turned away from that kind oasis and disappeared into the darkness of the Tower of London.

Meanwhile, Orsola Aquinas was left behind.

“Isn’t there something?”

She paced back and forth.

Her tempo was much slower than the frenzied movement around her. Her desperate persistence may have looked painful.

“Isn’t there something I can do to help? I don’t care what...”

“Hey.”

A voice called out to her from the side.

It came from the long, skinny food slot on one of the nondescript metal doors. Saying you did not recognize that female voice may have been tantamount to lese majeste in this kingdom.

This was England’s second princess, but at the same time, it was the culprit behind the attempted coup d’etat known as British Halloween.

“Princess...Carissa?”

“It sure is noisy out there. Did some idiot make a run for it?”

The Tower of London was generally permeated with the negative side of history, but there were some who stayed in a cell of their own free will. To restrain herself, to prevent the magic cabals from banding together to take her life, to be freed from the obligations of life...and to punish herself even if it meant rejecting a pardon.

Second Princess Carissa was officially known as a militaristic tyrant, but Orsola knew it was all rooted in a desire to protect her kingdom. Carissa’s plan for her coup d’etat had been to preserve England’s unique traits, enrich it by any means necessary, and then break Curtana to return the kingdom to its people.

“If you need help, then open this door. I can hunt them down as your hound.”

“I-I see.”

“Then again, it would probably be best if I stayed put for now.”

Orsola felt like tilting her head at that passive statement. Carissa was a militaristic patriot who might as well have been a powder box in a dress, so Orsola had assumed she would want to burst free of her cell with the Crowley’s Hazards rampaging across England.

A self-deprecating laugh came from beyond the slot.

“People like me and that mercenary bastard keeping his silence in the next cell over are a type of symbol. You could call us heroes or champions. It’s easy to set foot on the battlefield when using heroic words like that, but that can also place a great pressure on the atmosphere as a whole.”

“A pressure?”

“That’s right.” The born warrior explained the rules of war to the pacifist. “An external enemy isn’t the most frightening thing in war. In fact, you need to be more worried about the people pushing on the soldiers’ backs from within the defensive line. If they pick up too much momentum, *you’ll never be able to stop*. ...When living in an age of war, always think of the internal pressure, sister. In every age, speakers who inspire madness will rise within your own borders.”

Orsola recalled that Second Princess Carissa had only relied on professional warfighters like the Knights and the modern military during her coup d’etat. British Halloween had ended in failure when the masses had sided with the queen, but Carissa may have drawn a line in the sand and made sure that she did not allow the civilians to be infected by the madness of war.

“Maintain self-control. War requires more than just an army. It is all for naught if everything falls into an age of madness no matter how much you demand everyone preserve their morals. People like you are also necessary.”

“Um, what do you mean...by that?”

Just as Orsola Aquinas asked that, several footsteps approached.

“There you are, sister. It is dangerous here. Please withdraw outside the grounds until the headcount of the permanent prisoners is complete and safety has been ensured!”

She did not have time to insist on an answer.

Carissa quietly closed the food slot she had been holding open and she made one last remark.

“...Look at that one standing inconspicuously in the back. His shoes are the wrong size.”

The other beefeaters approached the suspicious one and restrained him. In order to keep her clear of the chaos, an emptyhanded jailer led Orsola away while she held the cross at her chest. All of a sudden, she had left the White Tower and was taken outside the thick walls surrounding the entire facility.

“This is Orsola Aquinas, a temporary worker. Please get her checked out!”

“The curse scan of her hair sample is complete. Identity confirmed. Hurry outside!”

The jailer who had escorted her out removed a large sheathed knife from his hip and pushed it into the nun’s arms.

“As that cross indicates, you are already as English as any of us. I wish I could escort you all the way back to the safe dorm, but this is an emergency and we must complete the lockdown as quickly as possible. Sorry!!”

She did not have time to say anything.

Left alone, Orsola used both hands to hold the knife to her chest and looked nervously around.

“...What do I do now?”

She had wanted to help out at the Tower of London, but that was no longer an option. But if she was caught in some trouble in the dangerous London night, she would cause further problems for the others during an emergency.

She recalled the beefeater mentioning the dorm.

“I guess that is what I will do.”

People would change once they had even a temporary goal. Just like a child who did not want to go to school but gradually made their way there by kicking a pebble along the way.

Orsola trudged through the London streets.

Silver sand hung in the air like fog and giant pyramids and statues rose up in defiance of history. England’s capital city was being eroded away. But this was necessary if they were to protect it. The scene had the unpleasant impact of seeing the age itself transforming or finding yourself no longer able to think of peace as the status quo.

“Sigh.”

Orsola Aquinas breathed a heavy sigh, but she eventually made it back to the women’s dorm.

That was a warm symbol of a peaceful life.

But there were no lights on now. Nor was there any sound of life or warmth. Even after opening the front door and stepping inside, she only found a dreary atmosphere no different from the outside. It was like a dead, abandoned building.

She placed the borrowed knife on a nearby table and walked to the kitchen. Everyone relied on her cooking skills, so that was her greatest power spot.

But even after returning home, the wilted flower would not bloom again.

The kitchen was exactly as they had left it. There were several bags of flour on the countertop. Opening the refrigerator would have revealed a paper package of cream and a wrapped turkey. Needless to say, it was already December. Making an order at the last second would not be enough to serve so many people, so the plan had been for this to be the day everyone worked together to ensure they had all the necessary ingredients.

Merry Christmas.

The banner bearing those words and the tree decorations were all sitting out waiting to be hung up. Orsola would not look, but she knew there would be brightly-wrapped bags and boxes below the beds in each of the rooms.

It had all been abandoned while half-finished and all the warmth had faded away.

Was this really the end?

Would the madness of war take that gentle time from them?

Could she only watch as it happened?

“Okay.”

Orsola Aquinas clenched her fists in front of her large chest and breathed out through her nose.

“I’ll do what I can. Even if it’s just the one thing.”

Always think of the internal pressure.

Had the words of Second Princess Carissa, war expert, reached that pious sister or not?

CHAPTER 3

The Blood Choice, A Certain Pious Weapon.

SISTER(xN.A._Weapon).

Part 1

“I want to eat sprouts, sprouts, sprouts. I want to dump them in a frying pan, season them with some salt and pepper, and fry them up. Eh heh heh. That guy cooking would be good enough for me, but then a dorm manager shows up, tells me to eat something more nutritious, and invites me to eat some meat and potato stew since she made too much. Heh heh heh heh heh...”

“Hey, human. I’ll admit being able to enjoy VR with nothing but your brain must be convenient, but it’s time you came back to reality.”

This was no time to be escaping reality on the London streets.

The sounds of hooves thundered through that developed country’s capital city like something from a Western.

“Where are you, runaway!? Fleeing will not end well for you. I do understand that pain, so if you surrender now, I will do you a favor and kill you painlessly here rather than take you back to the Tower of London. Listen, this is your last chance!!”

“Eek!”

Kamijou shrank down while hiding from the female knight in silver armor and a surcoat who rode a horse down the main road. That offer was no help whatsoever. And he could not take the mounted soldier lightly just because it seemed so outdated. He was on foot, without even a bicycle to ride. He could never hope to outrun a true thoroughbred.

That aside, what had happened?

“Wait, wait, wait...”

Kamijou Touma, the spiky-haired high school boy with a palm-sized fairy on his shoulder, looked around while leaning against a nearby wall.

He had been to London before, but that did not mean he knew his way around. To him, London was an unfamiliar foreign city. But even then, he could tell the scene before his eyes was abnormal.

Stone pavement, bricks, concrete, and asphalt.

The cold, hard materials forming the London streets were a mixture of old and new, but all of that was blotted out by the structures of old Egypt seen in pictures books. There were piles of giant rectangular blocks, strange observatories, stone pillars that stood as tall as broadcast towers to praise some god, and flat, perspectiveless wall art. Faint clouds of silver sand floated in the air instead of fog.

“What? What happened? This just all fell down like a puzzle game.”

“The aurora-like light of the triple-quadruple barrier is gone. They may be panicking.”

Othinus said that while looking up into the night sky from her position seated on the boy’s shoulder.

Kamijou touched a piece of wall art with his right hand, but it was not destroyed and did not disappear.

“...I hope Aleister and the others have made it into London. I don’t want all this searching to be for nothing.”

“Hey, if that had collapsed, we would have been buried alive. And Aleister had to know sending you to the Tower of London would get you tortured by a professional, but she did so to have you destroy the triple-quadruple barrier’s core along with whatever else. If some mistake kept her from reaching London after that, a blast of divine punishment may be in order...”

“Knowing Aleister, I could totally see that happening.”

“Which is why we need to prepare for that possibility.”

The main problem was that Kamijou did not know what to do without Aleister. He wanted to save Lola from Coronzon who was sealed in Academy City and he knew the key to that was in London, but he did not know what exactly that meant.

He could not support the Crowley’s Hazards who would destroy England as a whole if necessary, but he also could not support England which was attempting to eliminate Aleister without asking what any of this was about. He wanted to settle the Lola and Coronzon issue as quickly as possible. That was all, so why did it have to be so complicated?

He could hear more of the stone blocks falling like rain on a large road a short distance away. He could see them quickly building pharaoh's tombs and observatories to blot out the usual London scenery.

A quadrupedal form cut across the deserted road.

Kamijou stared in shock and found it was not a dog, cat, deer, or horse. There was a stereotypical hump on a back that stood taller than Kamijou was tall.

"Wh-what? A camel!? I've never seen one of those before..."

He felt a squeezing at his heart when he realized there were no fences or bars to separate him from an animal larger than he was. In picture books, they were always depicted slowly walking through the desert, but he had also heard they were used in races. If he stood in front of it, he might be trampled like it was a horse or bull. He did his best not to provoke it, but he was also somewhat skeptical. He was pretty sure the ones he had seen on TV had looked different. ...Had they really twisted their face to form a human expression like that?

Othinus crossed her arms while sitting on his shoulder.

"I see. So that's it."

"Um, have you figured something out?"

"Watch out above you. There is a scorpion on the wall you are leaning against."

"Whoa!? Wait, it's huge!"

This was far more than the slight fear of the camel. When he saw a venomous bug the size of a young wife's yoga mat, he frantically jumped back from the building wall. Despite its size, it must have been a cowardly thing because it responded to the boy's movement and shout by fleeing further up the wall.

This was no time to try to act cool by saying the key to defeating Coronzon was in London. A bug bigger than a slipper was way too scary.

"I think my heart skipped a beat... Eh? What was that? A new species?"

"Or something even nastier."

The Magic God breathed a sigh of exasperation with her tiny butt on his shoulder. The breath tickled his ear a bit.

“What you see before you is not actually Egypt. It might be easier to understand if I called it the Dark Continent as imagined by Europeans.”

“That’s supposed to be easy to understand?”

“You only have your own ignorance to blame, human. ...But, fine. I will dumb it down even further for you. Hey, what comes to mind when you hear the word ‘Sphinx’?”

“Index’s pet cat.”

“ ... ”

“Ow! Okay, I’ll take it seriously! Wait, h-hey, don’t cry! I’m sorry, okay!!”

“...I am not crying...”

“I’ll make you some fries from scratch when we get back to Japan! You really liked those, right? Right!?”

“I will take those. But I am not crying.”

Othinus replied flatly, but she was hanging her head and trembling. It was time for Kamijou Touma to be a man and enter serious mode.

“...Anyway, I’ve seen it in old stories and pictures books, but I don’t know that much about it. Isn’t it, um...what was it again? A creature that asks people riddles and eats them if they can’t answer them?”

“Yes. What has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening? The answer being humans.”

Othinus seemed to have recovered and she replied like she was reciting a fairy tale.

“But in fact, no such legend exists in Egyptian Mythology.”

“Eh?”

“That story was created when a Greek crossed the Mediterranean, saw the Sphinx statue, and incorporated it into their mythology. The ancient Egyptians who made the statue were thinking nothing of the sort.”

Her exasperated nuance may have come from viewing history from the perspective of a god.

“Egyptian Mythology is full of such things. They did not get it as bad as what the film industry has done to Haitian zombies, but it is covered in European biases and preconceptions. Mummies were originally meant to contain the dead person’s soul once

more. As a mere container, the mummy alone would never have moved around, but we now think of them as bandaged men wandering around to protect ancient treasure, right? The coffin of a proud pharaoh is treated as the source of a curse.”

“What’s your point? There’s nothing to this and it’s all a giant bluff?”

“...That would certainly be nice. Hey, human. Do you want to try letting that scorpion sting you?”

“ ... ”

“Exactly. Whether or not it is based in the proper mythology may not influence the actual deadliness very much. Oh, and watch out for cobras and crocodiles too.” Othinus crossed her slender legs while seated on Kamijou’s shoulder. “Do not forget that London’s final defensive line was breached. It would be one thing if they had done this earlier, but would they really entrust everything to an ineffective illusion? Whether or not it would be physically possible, I just don’t think they could have psychologically played a useless card at this stage.”

“You mean...?”

“It might be best to assume this has transformed into something more dangerous than pure Egyptian or pure Greek.”

“Wait, wait. You’re saying this looks dangerous even from a god’s perspective?”

“Make no mistake, human. New magic is not necessarily superior to old magic. If we are simply looking at ease of use, the modern Western magic spread by Crowley may be superior, but right now the focus will be on whether or not is effective against Aleister Crowley. That is the only difference that matters.”

...With more than a billion Crowley’s Hazards around the globe, that did sound like it would be a valuable thing. It could even be viewed as the Anglican Church’s trump card or secret weapon.

His tiny understander snorted.

“Also, the Crowley’s Hazards and *that* Aleister are parallel beings. If something is found affective against one Crowley, it may be possible to slaughter all of them at once.”

“ ... ”

“What a pain. When did you make up with Aleister?”

“Don’t be silly. This is an entirely different issue.”

They heard tires tearing into the silver sand.

A large four-wheel drive vehicle shot out from a side street, swung its back end around in a wide curve, and then drove right past Kamijou and Othinus.

“What the hell? There are still people here. And there sure were a lot of nuns hanging onto that thing!”

“More importantly, human, make sure you are not hit.”

He did not have time to ask what she meant.

There was a roar.

And some creatures burst out as if in pursuit of the fleeing vehicle. There was a humanoid shape made from twisted and bent tree roots, an alien with an oversized head, and a concrete cube with definite body-shaped stains on it. It was like a parade of nightmares. It was like cutting into a giant, squishy monster and having its guts explode out.

These were the many Crowley's Hazards.

They had finally entered the capital city of London.

[illegible]

Even one of them would have been too much.

If he was swallowed up by an entire group, he would meet an even more tragic fate than being chomped by a dinosaur's jaws.

But just then, a point in the night sky flashed several times.

A beam of light shot out.

The destructive light tore straight through the Crowley's Hazards.

They were more or less vaporized.

Several dozen of those extremely-grotesque Crowley's Hazards were erased like someone blowing on a detailed piece of sand art. Scorching wind struck Kamijou's cheek as he watched. The heat was so great that the air explosively expanded and approached like a solid wall.

The attack had come from an elevated position.

The beam of light had seemed like a giant tree but also had the viscosity of molten steel. It scattered randomly around at first, but then the unneeded branches vanished and it pierced only the target. If there was no safety device, it might have destroyed all of London with that.

But while Kamijou panicked, Othinus calmly observed it from his shoulder.

“That did not come from the stars in the sky. It was an obelisk...a stone pillar used to worship the sun god.”

“You’re kidding, right!? That one shot wiped them all out! What the hell is England doing inside their own country!?”

“They have used their trump card, clearly. With London under attack, they cannot continue acting the British gentleman. Are they going to repel the enemy with this? If so, the scale of destruction in this war will be out of their control.”

Kamijou thought for a bit and then shook his head. He could not stand up to that. If a stray shot came his way, he would have no way of knowing which of the many branches was the real one and it would be too fast for him to raise his right hand in time.

“Didn’t I tell you?” said Othinus. “What you see here is not from the real Egyptian Mythology. It is only a twisted form of Egypt being forcibly processed by the minds of Europeans...in this case, probably the ancient Greeks. Although that may make it easier for them to control.”

She was not like Kamijou Touma.

Magic God Othinus had a belligerent tone to her voice, like she was somehow impressed.

“I suppose this one would be Ra-Zeus. Quite well done for a fake.”

Part 2

The pacifist nun named Orsola Aquinas held a large blade in her hand.

But it was not the knife she had borrowed from the beefeater who protected the Tower of London. Her usual kitchen knife felt much more at home there.

If used incorrectly, it could still kill someone.

But after Orsola held it below the water flowing from the tap, she placed it on the cutting board like always.

“Now, then.”

She grabbed her favorite apron from a nearby chair and placed the shoulder straps over her shoulders. She crossed the straps behind her back and tied them to the waist strap with a tight bow. That completed her preparations. Her habit had a hood, so she did not need to wear anything over her hair. The cross at her chest was important to her. It was the hope so many people had risked their lives to give her in distant Japan. She tucked it below the apron so as not to get it dirty.

(It’s too bad we can’t have our party, but I can’t let the ingredients go to waste. I need to make a late-night snack to help the others out as best I can.)

A few memos were attached to the refrigerator with magnets. One of them contained a hastily-written message telling the others to gather at the British Museum, so that would be where Agnese, Lucia, and the others were.

Orsola could not directly fight, but there was more to her than that.

Human beings needed to take breaks to eat and sleep. If she assisted them there, she might be able to support their overall performance.

(Right now, all I can do is cook for them, but I should also think about drawing a bath and making their beds. If I take care of all the odd jobs, they can focus on England’s crisis.)

“Hm, hmm, hm, hm, hmm.”

She hummed a timeless classic.

She spun the kitchen timer and lit a few of the burners. There were a few things she had to keep in mind. She could not bake a pie or a pizza because the dough had to sit. Since she had to feed so many, she could not make fried eggs which required nursing a frying pan for so long. They would not be eating it here, so food that could survive being shaken around a bit would be best. She also wanted to avoid noodles that would quickly *go soggy* even if they were easy to make. As an Italian, it pained her to rule out pasta and pizza right away, but there was no real reason to insist on Italian food. It meant a lot that they had plenty of potatoes due to Sister Angelene’s insistence on having fries (even though it made Lucia angry with her). This was meant as a late-night snack, but they would not be crawling into bed immediately afterwards, so they would want something filling.

“Good, good, good. Hm, hm, hm. This should work.”

She flipped through the recipe book hanging from a fridge magnet by a string, planned out the short time available to her like a timetable mystery, and nodded several times.

She knew how to cook everything already, but she wanted to check through where she had written down everyone’s likes and dislikes.

She chose a safe meal that did not include anything anyone outright hated.

She boiled whole potatoes in a pressure cooker and she scooped out a turkey and filled it with vegetables. Adding lots of cheese in place of cinnamon was her own personal touch. She then stuck it in the oven. She cooked what turkey meat she had removed and added it to a warm vegetable salad. She did not have time to season and cook some roast beef, so it unfortunately had to be a salad.

“Hmm, it’s hard to tell if these are meat dishes or vegetable dishes.”

After placing some on a small plate and sprinkling some salt, she tried a taste. It passed her check, so she continued as is. Instead of mixing some dressing, she prepared a few different bottles based on the nuns’ preferences.

She knew it would take a bit of time, but she decided to make a macaroni gratin as well. While she had to give up on some long and skinny spaghetti, she simply was not satisfied until she had some kind of pasta in there. She did not have quite enough ingredients, so she used a few of the cooked potatoes to expand it as a potato gratin.

She had a variety of things ready now, but it did not seem like enough if the nuns were going to munch bit by bit on what they liked. Although she saw it more like a kid’s meal of several small entrees on a single plate instead of a luxurious buffet.

It would never end if she made the dishes one at a time, so this capable young woman cooked several dishes at a time. There was an odd research report stating that a housewife simultaneously cooking four or more dishes had equal or greater parallel processing power to a top-level drummer, but it came so naturally to Orsola that she did not realize how rare her ability was.

After preparing a few more dishes, she lifted the large pots themselves instead of transferring them to proper containers. Then she made her way to the dorm’s garage. There was a one-person car there. It was a very thin car that seemed more like a sturdier version of a pizza delivery motorcycle than anything. The back door swung upwards, but it had no trunk, so she placed the pots in the luggage space behind the lone seat and latched the lids shut.

(It pains me that I couldn’t prepare any dessert...)

She would be able to boil water at the British Museum. It would be difficult with so many people, but it would be better than nothing. With that in mind, she collected a tea set and a rectangular can of tea leaves. She had not taken an espresso machine despite being Italian, so she was clearly picking up the local British culture. The kind, young woman’s ability to prepare meals for the multicultural women’s dorm was growing without limit.

After loading in everything necessary, she opened the garage door. The silver sand bothered her, so she swept the area with a broom even though it was sure to accumulate again before long.

“There. And we’re off.”

After grabbing the steering wheel and leaving the garage, she realized she was still wearing her apron. She could not afford any further delays, so she kept it on as she drove into the London streets filled with silver sand. The hybrid car was in its electric mode, so it was nearly silent. She seemed to have been warped to a nightmare world where the capital city was swallowed up by Egyptian ruins.

The closed-up shops all had similar notices on their metal shutters: *No stockpiling. Let's share our canned and bagged foods.* There also seemed to be rumors spreading that the mysterious monsters were weak to preservatives.

Orsola’s destination was the British Museum where the familiar nuns had gathered.

Despite the emergency, she obeyed all of the stop signs and rolled down the window to rub the nose of a camel drawn to her by the smell of food. Her beginner’s luck gave her a relatively smooth trip through London.

Finally, her destination came into view.

“There we go. Will they mind if I just drive in?”

She tilted her head as she used the one-person car’s thin shape to drive through the gate and park alongside the British Museum’s back entrance. She felt an urge to clean up the silver sand here too, but the food came first.

Everyone was waiting here.

She had found something she could do.

If she shared her strength with theirs, they were sure to rid the city of this oppressive atmosphere.

“Tah dah! Everyone, I’ve brought a late-night snack. How about we all eat together after saying grace?”

Orsola entered through the back entrance with a smile on her face and the apron still over her habit.

Immediately, she was hit by a “flood”.

“Damage report!” “The Crowley’s Hazards have been detected within the city!!” “What is Sir Hologres Mirates doing? He is in charge of the overall defense, isn’t he!?” “The civilians are still not fully evacuated! The official data does not come close to matching what we are seeing!!” “What are those things towering up from the city?” “Did they seriously demand we protect the city without telling us the entire plan!?” “We may have been nothing more than sacrificial pawns, Sister Agnese.” “If Archbishop Lola was here, the

power balance between the Anglicans and Knights would never have collapsed like this...” “I’m worried about what happened to the other external units like the Amakusa.” “Were they prioritizing an escape to Scotland over protecting the capital?” “That doesn’t matter! Is there anything we can do!?” “Can we only wait here for further orders!?” “Let us fight.” “Let us put up a fight that matters!” “Please order us to make a direct attack, Sister Agnese!!!!!!”

It was like a giant grater pressed against the heart.

That torrent would scrape away all the kindness there.

Overwhelmed by the vibration of her soul, Orsola could not move and no one noticed her there for a while.

Not even the proper employees of the British Museum would know this was happening.

Agnese Sanctis, the small girl at the center of the storm known as reality, finally gasped and looked over at Orsola standing outside the group of nuns.

“What is it, Sister Orsola? I thought you went to the Tower of London?”

“Well, um, uh. They had some trouble there and could not ensure my safety, so they asked me to temporarily evacuate. Umm, so I made everyone a late-night snack.”

“That’s great. Hey, everyone!! Sister Orsola has brought us some much-needed refreshments. Christianity might forbid meaningless gluttony, so make this a meaningful meal. Work harder for each bite you take!!”

They must have been exhausted because they replied with a fairly impolite cheer and gathered around. Angelene, who had a bent back and two blonde braids, did a little dance each time one of the big pots was opened, but tall Lucia scolded her each time.

They had accepted her help.

No, they had *done her the favor* of accepting it.

She should not have read too deeply into this situation, but Orsola Aquinas could not just accept this at face value. She felt something like a draft. Why had they told her to go to the Tower of London instead of using her here? The answer was gradually dawning on her.

They thought she could not bear to be here.

They thought it would be best if she did not see this.

Agnese and the others had experience with violence and they had made that decision out of kindness.

“I...”

Orsola spoke up like a child who had lost her mother in the crowd.

“I am not getting in your way, am I?”

“Don’t worry.”

Agnese immediately answered her with a smile.

She was undoubtedly speaking these words out of kindness.

“You’ve helped us plenty already. This is more than enough.”

But how would those words be interpreted by someone who felt inadequate?

The nuns with the power to directly fight and protect their country failed to consider that.

Part 3

When you got down to it, that was what entertained Nephthys and Niang-Niang so much.

“What, what, what!? What’s trying to kill us now!?”

While operating the four-wheel drive vehicle’s steering wheel, Hamazura shouted more to provide an outlet for his fear than in search of an answer.

Driving into London was all well and good, but the geography grew even more unfamiliar within the confusing layout of streets. It was practically a miracle that he even knew which side of the road to drive on. He had his hands full simply turning the wheel to follow the instructions from Sister Agata, the glasses nun with her stomach caught in the window frame and her boobs on his lap. Except her instructions were often last second and he needed Takitsubo’s translation before he could comply, so he tended to run a little late. He would drive right past the intersection about once every three times.

“————!!”

“Ow, don’t hit me! I’ve already passed the road by the time I get the instruction!!”

“Hamazura, I found a map.”

“There are a ton of weird pyramids and statues everywhere, so we’d just crash if we followed the original roads!!”

A beam of light resembling molten steel or a giant tree surged from the top of a stone pillar as tall as a broadcast tower.

Was that a crane sticking up above the buildings, or was it a ridiculously-huge catapult?

A crocodile rivalling a small warship at more than three hundred meters long was slowly swimming through the city’s giant winding river.

“Wow! I can see it, I can see it!”

Niang-Niang looked straight back and shouted happily while kicking her legs around with no concern for the short length of her mini-China dress. She was acting just like a small child overwhelmed by the view out a bullet train’s window after leaving a tunnel.

Except for the fact that her eyes were directed toward something far more wicked.

“That projectile has got to be Tefnut-Artemis and that giant crocodile below us is probably Osiris-Hades. Hah ha hah!! Humans always have the craziest ideas!! I never thought they would swap out gods like this!!”

“They seem to be making some localized comebacks...but they’re using these things completely wrong. Are they just not looking at the big picture? I wonder if they can really control them like this. Let’s hope they don’t get carried away and become the new Mu or Atlantis.”

The stone and metal bridge began to collapse from the end the four-wheel drive vehicle drove across. The Crowley’s Hazards would be a true nightmare if they caught up, but they were thrown into the dark, muddy Thames where the beast bearing the name of two underworld gods opened its great maw. No, that may have been an artificially-created hell that did not require the involvement of a god or ruler. Or so one would suspect upon seeing its wicked form.

Even when a Crowley’s Hazard tried to jump overhead, they would be shot down by a sphere of stone that resembled a small moon. Hamazura preferred not to think about what would happen where it landed.

Although he was too preoccupied to think about it regardless.

Because an African elephant larger than their vehicle charged toward them from the side.

“!? Ohhh!!”

When he remembered all the nuns clinging to the roof and doors, he frantically turned the wheel. He could not rely on the sheep bars to hold this animal back. He just barely dodged it, but he also crashed into a pile of soft sand.

The seatbelt dug into his upper body.

He was lucky the airbag had not activated. Given her position, it might have hit the glasses nun in the side of the face.

He lowered the gear, stepped on the clutch, and restarted the engine. It started up, but the vehicle would not move when he shifted it into reverse. He only heard a disconcerting slipping sound.

When he checked the rearview mirror, he saw the African elephant shaking its head in agitation a short distance away. This animal was very different from the ones calmly extending their noses and eating apples at the zoo.

“This takes me back.” Nephthys sounded like she was somehow enjoying this situation. “You shouldn’t take them lightly just because they’re herbivores. Long ago, those ferocious beasts were feared more than crocodiles. It can probably turn over this vehicle.”

“Is this as far as we get? Get out, everyone! We need to get away from here!!”

If that mass of muscles locked onto a flesh-and-blood human, there would be no escaping it. That meant Hamazura had to stay here with the vehicle, dangerous though it was.

“The horn, the tail lights...oh, and there’s a smoke bomb by my feet. Hey, Takitsubo, I don’t know English, so tell them to get away from the car! I’ll draw its attention!!”

But something odd happened.

The nuns had been knocked from the vehicle by the crash, but they approached it again and began pushing on the heavy mass of metal like they were rescuing a car from a swamp.

“You idiots!!”

“Hamazura, they won’t listen. I think they’re trying to repay you for saving them in the fields.”

“...”

“I can’t leave this all on you either. If we’re going to do this, I want to bet on the possibility of everyone surviving.”

“Ah, hey!!”

With that, the girl in a pink jump suit and sweater opened the passenger side door and hopped out. Glasses Sister Agata also extracted herself from the window to assist the recovery.

Hamazura clicked his tongue.

The ferocious African elephant was clearly looking at them. And a trumpet of excitement erupted from it. They did not have a second to spare. And if none of them could escape, they would have to get the vehicle moving again.

Hamazura floored the gas pedal with the gear still in reverse.

All those hands gradually moved the mass of metal.

And soon...

They escaped the pile of sand!!

“Okay! Get in, Takitsubo! You nuns too!!”

The squealing of the tires must have provoked the African elephant because it finally began charging. Hamazura’s heart pounded in his chest, but he could not leave even one of them behind after all this. Takitsubo returned to the passenger seat, the glasses nun dove in through the driver’s side door like that was her spot now, and the other nuns grabbed onto the roof attachment and sheep bars. They were all focused on Hamazura in the driver’s seat. It was almost comical how none of them looked to the very conspicuous pair in the back seat.

He saw the last one climb on.

He turned the wheel to change the vehicle’s direction, changed the gear, and stomped on the gas pedal. The four-wheel drive vehicle seemed to jump as it shot forward.

The giant elephant just barely missed them and crashed into a brick wall.

They did not have time to check on it. He kept changing gears so they could pick up speed.

“Ha ha. They’re all such idiots!!”

That was when a beam of light shot through the night sky overhead.

Whatever it was aimed at, it tore through London’s buildings and steeples and sent pieces of buildings crashing down toward the vehicle. Hamazura knew it was crazy, but his only choice was to swerve back and forth to dodge them.

“Dammit, watch out!! What is with all this crap!?”

“The Greeks did not understand Egyptian Mythology.”

Niang-Niang was from Asia, but what did Nephthys think of it?

On the surface, the bandaged brown beauty only giggled as she added her own explanation.

“So when they crossed the Mediterranean and saw the many ruins and statues in that mystical desert, they did not know what it all meant. No, it may have been a matter of pride in their own intelligence and culture. They decided these must be the same gods they believed in and the locals had simply given them different names. ...When they came across a great culture with stone architecture and astronomy at a higher level than their own, they may have only been able to accept it by assuming they were the world standard and these others were inferior to them.”

“The Moai statues at Easter Island got it pretty bad too☆”

“Not to mention the theory that aliens built all the ancient civilizations. I mean, all the islanders did was place logs on the ground to carry the heavy stone.”

Hamazura Shiage could not help but yell at them.

“Can you just tell me what those things are!? And are you going to help out!?”

“Hmm, we really don’t fit on either side of this conflict.”

No matter what, an outsider like him would not receive more allies.

Could he only hope for the different enemies to destroy each other? The previous warm feeling was gone and Hamazura only felt brutality in his heart, but then Nephthys said something interesting.

“Come to think of it, you said you found a map in the dashboard, didn’t you?”

“What about it!? Ah, that was close!!”

“Where exactly is your final goal? Since you’re still driving, I’m guessing it wasn’t just London in general.”

That brought a frown to Hamazura’s face as he turned the wheel whichever way meant not crashing. But then Sister Agata, the glasses nun with her boobs in his lap, forcibly pressed on the brake pedal with her hand.

“Wait!? Don’t shove your face in my crotch, Miss Nun! That’s my—”

“.....Hamazura, you seem to be enjoying yourself.”

The four-wheel drive vehicle screeched to a stop and a few of the nuns on the roof and doors were peeled away and fell off.

No, that was not it.

“Ugh. They let go themselves? What, is this your destination!?”

Did they not understand his Japanese, or did they simply not intend to answer him? Sister Agata once more extracted herself from the driver’s side window and tumbled out onto the road. All of the nuns were moving toward the same place.

It was not a castle.

It did not seem like a mansion either.

It was a wide white building on a vast area of land. Perhaps because of the mention of the Greeks, Hamazura was reminded of the Parthenon he had seen on TV. To him, every white stone building with pillars lined up at the entrance was the Parthenon.

“That’s the British Museum,” said the pale, self-proclaimed god who sounded just like a tourist. “If you want something stored, there’s no place better than a museum in a developed nation☆. Dynasties are destroyed pretty easily, so you can’t rely on their palaces. And royal graves and treasure vaults all get wiped out by moisture, mice, and thieves.”

“That’s right, Niang-Niang. But if you use a secret hiding place on one can ever find, no one will realize its importance and it will be covered up by the asphalt and concrete of construction. Compromise is important. ...The one problem is when a weird bird is added or an ominous black cat is covered up in the name of art restoration.”

...These gods acted like it was a train station coin locker or hotel cloakroom, but how serious were they about that?

“By the way.” Bandaged Nephthys hugged mini-China dress Niang-Niang like she was restless. “About those twisted weapons bearing the names of gods. You got distracted by that impressive African elephant...but what did you feel when you saw them? Hope or disgust?”

“What?”

“This is a fork in the road. Depending on your answer, you may regret it.”

Part 4

In truth, Agnese Sanctis was grateful.

At first glance, it may have looked like clueless and careless Orsola Aquinas had rushed in without reading the atmosphere.

But what even was the wartime atmosphere?

Was it really right to cleverly read it and adapt to it?

“Munch, munch. This is the Asian miracle of a buttered potato, isn’t it!? It’s a lot like the baked potato served as a side to a meat dish, but the potato is upgraded to the star! I’ve always wanted to try one.”

“It’s more or less the same thing, Sister Angelene. Although this is my first time seeing a culture that eats it with squid shiokara on top. Anyway, stop talking with your mouth full. You need to swallow first.”

Lucia and Angelene were like that now, but the atmosphere just a bit earlier had been the tense and oppressive one of wartime organization. If that had continued, the constant pressure on Agnese’s back may have led them into a reckless attack.

This was an age that criticized those without courage.

But was this really a situation that required forcing a show of courage? They had been given a chance to reconsider that question.

Orsola was a valuable part of the group.

That faint light stood out all the more as the entire country was swallowed up.

Orsola herself did not realize what she had done and looked somehow apologetic.

She placed a hand on the center of her apron’s chest.

“...We went to all that effort to prepare for the Christmas party, but I used up all the ingredients.”

“At least you found a good use for them. I mean—”

Agnese started to say something but swallowed the words with a smile still on her face.

I mean, I doubt we’ll make it to Christmas. What would she accomplish by saying that to a support role like Orsola?

Instead, the small girl shifted focus.

“There’s no one way to celebrate Christmas. It doesn’t have to be about eating and drinking, right?”

“That’s...right. A silent night might be nice.”

Orsola was smart.

She may have noticed the forced change of focus.

And Agnese Sanctis had learned something while keeping her silence. Orsola Aquinas was a symbol that must remain pure. She was a definite ray of hope that still remained in this age. It was not an issue of winning or losing. If she was stained by the madness of war, one of England’s crucial pillars would break.

They could not just buy time for the important personnel and treasures to be evacuated north to Scotland.

They could not just stubbornly make a sacrificial last stand.

Agnese was truly thankful.

She had seen it with her own eyes and felt it with her own hands. This person had given her something concrete to protect and given her a real reason to fight.

“Um, is something the matter?” asked Orsola.

“No, nothing.”

There was no way they would survive until Christmas.

That was Agnese Sanctis’s blunt assessment, but she still smiled and responded.

There was a thin chain around Orsola’s neck. Agnese could easily imagine what was hidden below that apron: a small cross. It was a symbol of everything that protected Orsola Aquinas, but also a symbol of Agnese Sanctis’s sin.

She would not let that happen again.

She would be the shield this time.

“Let’s fight and take back our days of peace and calm.”

Part 5

An incredible “explosion” always occurred in the chaotic period between eras.

It was an invisible thing that still shook the world to its core.

In recent times, if the Great King of Angolmois really had appeared in July 1999 as prophesied, it would have descended from heaven like a giant meteor and obliterated the normally necessary two-thousand-year period, forcibly ending an era. No matter who had survived as a result, the world would surely have been ruled by a completely different format of the mystical.

In Aleister Crowley’s case, the symbol of the chaotic period he had witnessed was the destruction of the Golden cabal.

And after the small world he believed in was drowned in blood, what was it that magician had grasped in the instant of the 1904 “explosion”: a holy guardian angel or an extraterrestrial lifeform?

With that, the old Osiris had completed its role and the new Horus was born.

Modern Western magic was the result of him building up magic in a form that everyone could use equally and of a certain man completing the compilation. He had spread it throughout the world in the guise of documents “leaking out” upon the Golden’s destruction. And that extremely irresponsible act had killed an innocent child. He had to have been aware of magic’s danger, but he had still spread that information while shedding tears of blood so that he could control that global risk himself.

Was anyone more knowledgeable of the magic used by human hands?

Could that human really allow anyone to boast such a thing?

“Ha ha.”

Two gusts of wind blew through.

Kanzaki Kaori and Knight Leader’s extraordinary athletic abilities made them the trump cards of the Anglicans and the Knights, but Aleister Crowley did not falter while between them.

In fact, she seemed to be inviting them to dance.

She was a silver girl with a blue blazer uniform, a witch’s hat, and a cape.

She should have been killed instantly, but that magician instead seemed to be in control of everything. She twirled with her long silver hair fanning out around her, as if to revel in the contradictory situation.

“Ha ha, ha ha, ha ha, ha ha!! What’s wrong, England!? What’s wrong, London, city of fog, magic, and gold! Are you out of tricks!? Then I’ll be on my way to Westminster Abbey!! I will set foot in that holy ground where Lola Stuart...no, Great Demon Coronzon’s Achilles’ heel is hidden!!”

Neck and hips.

Two silver flashes attempted to slice through her body, but loudly-laughing Aleister was no longer there.

She had jumped up onto the large stone blocks that continued to rain down from the heavens.

“You fools. How can you expect to catch me when all you’ve done is cram in as much power as possible without considering the original capacity? Did you want to show off your powerful alkaline batteries that much? I’ll admit Saints are difficult to reproduce and they have an obvious charisma, but their great power is so inconsistent and unstable that they are mostly just hiding the actual losses in how flashy their actions are. As for that armored tax collector making up for his insufficient power by siphoning it from the entire country, you aren’t even worth discussing.”

Knight Leader moved even higher.

He clung to the bottom of an airborne block like a bat.

And a line of silver light dropped toward the silver girl’s head.

“Kh.”

There was a slight gasp.

But unlike before, the falling blocks did not allow them to come to a stop. Instead of blocking the attack, Aleister twisted her body to avoid it and jumped to a different piece of stone.

The bizarre aerial battle continued.

The silver girl must not have cared too much if her voice was reaching them or not.

That was how it had always been for Aleister Crowley.

“What matters is optimization. You can think of it like superconductivity of magic power. A blood sacrifice that stains the entire planet is a product of intelligence. You are stuck in an age where you shove a bunch of coal into the furnace to move a mass of metal with the steam, so did you really think you could keep up with me as I am now?”

Kanzaki Kaori’s body transformed into a sonic boom.

She mercilessly broke through the base of a pyramid being constructed, so Aleister was forced to alter her footwork.

The silver girl landed on a stable apartment roof for the time being.

She formed a gun with her right hand, aimed it at the elite knight pursuing her, and blew him away with Spiritual Tripping. It did not matter whether or not that attack actually existed. The attack was established by convincing your opponent it did.

But it was not over so easily. If they placed their target on the route they wanted, England could launch a surefire attack.

The top of a stone pillar flashed irregularly as if aiming at the silver girl who easily escaped the lethal range of the blades wielded by fierce warriors moving at supersonic speed.

Ra-Zeus.

A mythological attack burned the London shadows. The light was like molten metal, it spread out like a giant tree, the unneeded branches were removed, and it accurately attacked only the scoundrel of a magician.

Aleister Crowley held her right palm out toward empty space.

She was not using Spiritual Tripping this time. Nor was she taking advantage of a vulnerability in modern Western magic.

A magic circle colored a sinister blood red appeared and blocked the divine attack like a shield.

After being concentrated down, the red lost its shape and faded into nothingness once more. But once they knew it was there, the others’ eyes could not be fooled. A faint red haze seemed to surround Aleister as if oozing out from the lovely silver girl’s outline.

It responded to supersonic actions and deflected attacks bearing divine names.

It was important to note that nothing of the sort had been seen when Aleister fought Kamijou Touma in the Windowless Building.

“I mentioned the optimization of power, didn’t I? Instead of just trying to stop an attack, you scatter it. When that power has only been absorbed from the earth and concentrated,

returning it to the earth is not difficult. ...At the very least, a battle must be fought between people. No matter how large the scale, a soulless unmanned spiritual item can never bend my will."

Had she never expected to keep this hidden?

Or did this not qualify as a trump card needing to be hidden?

"Have you forgotten the situation here? I have split into more than a billion Aleister Crowleys who are simultaneously attacking all 53 countries and regions of the British Commonwealth. Thus, the conditions have been met. This worldwide conflict is defragging me. I will not allow a single needless sacrifice. Did you think the mere defense of a single European island nation could hold back the chaos currently swallowing up an entire planet!?"

At that very moment, a drop of red appeared on the silver girl's index finger. It may have been Human Aleister Crowley herself who had done it.

And the silver girl could only smile bitterly at what that small wound meant.

Knight Leader was not smiling.

"Even a 'mere' European island nation will be effective."

"Heh heh heh. Ah ha ha ha ha!! Yes! Yes, yes, yes! I'm just never satisfied until I've shown off, am I?"

"..."

"Did you expect me to be all upset? If only you had just let yourself be overwhelmed, but now I've lost my chance to stop, you noble, noble elite."

With an explosion of dull sounds, the fierce warriors' bodies disappeared.

The stage had shifted again.

Several tall, skinny objects rose up from the stone and steel city like they had broken through the ground. They were a row of thirty-meter stone statues of historical pharaohs. The silver girl leaped to the head of one in a single bound and Kanzaki pursued her. They jumped from statue to statue while watching for opportunities to attack each other.

She must have realized that any magic she used would only be negated by a vulnerability, so Kanzaki Kaori made "normal" attacks with her steel blade. Aleister slipped right past those and took aim at Knight Leader who attempted to make an attack with slightly shifted timing. Spark-like numbers danced from her fingertips and her fingers formed a simple gun.

“Blasting Rod. The power will grow to ten times what you imagine.”

With an explosive roar that only the victim could hear, the man in a suit was blown to the side.

He was mercilessly knocked straight into the ground from atop the pharaoh statue’s head.

Aleister used the slight lag this created in order to jump to a newly-formed pyramid. No, her target was not a modern apartment or an ancient tomb. She ran along the new and old buildings like a skipping stone to make her way to the base of a stone pillar that stood as tall as a broadcast tower.

What about the divine-class firepower released as beams of light?

She charged straight toward it while dodging the first and second beams and she did not allow a third.

She no longer used magic.

The girl’s slender leg swung around and an extraordinary attack mercilessly broke down the obelisk.

“That’s Ra-Zeus down.”

The roof of a normal apartment was not enough to bear its weight.

As the stone pillar twirled like a giant’s baton, Aleister jumped to an ancient pyramid and forcibly grabbed that pillar in her small hand.

She now held a javelin measuring more than a hundred meters long.

The silver girl whispered from atop the pyramid.

“Now, then.”

She responded casually to the warship-sized crocodile that leaped straight up from the distant Thames. She used just her arm strength to throw the pointed stone pillar like it was a dart. She did not hesitate to skewer it. The giant crocodile had carelessly shown its head as if responding to a mayday from Ra-Zeus, but it was swiftly eradicated before it could do anything.

“And that’s Osiris-Hades.”

Of course, it did not end there.

Neither Kanzaki Kaori nor Knight Leader had been fully defeated. And destroying just a weapon or two of London's defensive firepower was not enough to turn the tide.

But the silver girl actually gave a fierce smile.

"Send in as many as you want, watch as they are all destroyed, and fall into greater despair each time. To be blunt, no Aleister Crowley will go easy on England. Recall what you did to us. That is all I have to say."

A dull sound rang out.

The magician looked back from the roof and saw Saint Kanzaki Kaori running up the levels of the pyramid to reach her. The levels were stepped, but those steps were the size of storage containers. It was a superhuman feat.

Aleister breathed an exasperated sigh and muttered something under her breath.

"I expect everyone has noticed the oddity by now, but I suppose it's time to reveal the trick."

All sound vanished.

No, they had moved past the world of sound. The pyramid they were standing on collapsed as the base was blown away. Someone planted their feet on the tops, sides, and even bottoms of the airborne rubble to bounce around like a pinball. The Amakusa Church priestess with a black ponytail charged straight toward Aleister with a sonic boom surrounding her as she compressed the air in front of her. Shichiten Shichitou no longer mattered as it hung from her belt. A mere tackle would smash the silver girl's body to smithereens.

However.

The girl in a blue blazer uniform, witch's hat, and cape only snorted on an airborne block while making sure she was not crushed by the stone raining down around her.

A roar soon followed.

Nothing in the world changed.

"...They are those who were blessed from the moment of their birth. They are the fools who were satisfied with that and ceased to think. Have you ever wondered why the various sects of the Christian Church place such an emphasis on Saints?"

In fact, time seemed to have stopped there.

Only Aleister Crowley's voice hung in the air.

“It is not because you are closer to the Son of God than normal people. Nor because they see value in your rarity or are overwhelmed by your miraculous power. What matters most of all is that unlike the immortal God or angels, the Son of God and the patron saints that followed have their methods of execution and death clearly laid out in historical documents. In other words...if your individual beliefs are deemed to have strayed from what the organization wants, they can swiftly throw the breaker and remove you from the fight. Saints like you were no more than *a convenient form of miracle!*!”

The red haze wavered like an aurora.

It extended from Aleister Crowley’s palm and pierced Kanzaki Kaori’s side like a single sharp spear.

The silver girl shoved it in and twisted it.

She kicked off the midair block and dropped to a nearby apartment roof with her target still in her grasp.

She pushed her hand in to strike skewered Kanzaki Kaori.

An unbelievable impact shook the city of London.

However.

It did not end there.

One of the fewer than twenty Saints rolled to the side and something burst from her back. Whatever it was, it was translucent. It was a barefoot girl with a small frame yet with sexy curves. Each of the individual parts was beautifully alluring, but the overall proportions were imbalanced.

It happened instantaneously.

Whatever this was, it had been embedded in the battle without anyone noticing.

Time seemed to resume moving and the pyramid blocks rained down around Aleister.

The translucent girl had thin wings and a wicked, tentacle-like tail displayed almost too prominently on her back and the back of her hips. Her straight hair was a rainbow color never seen in humans and it spread outwards before the ends curled inward, making it look something like a large umbrella.

Her clothing initially looked like a shoulderless dress with a long skirt full of slits because it was shaped like upside-down flower petals, but it was actually a collection of trash. English newspapers—their gray color turned yellow or brown with age—were sewn together to create the overall shape, what looked like glittering jewels were actually shards of glass, and silver duct tape was wrapped tightly around her large chest and hips.



“This is the natural result.”

The silver girl stared at the demon who had a sinister hole in her forehead.

She spat out the words while the limp Saint remained lying on the roof.

“Saints generally prefer quick showdowns, so it did seem odd you would go along with my nonsense for so long.”

Something scattered at the bare feet of that fool princess. They were Beheading Coins, the spiritual items that rid you of pain and fear for the few seconds needed for a suicide attack. Those coins were only useful during a hopeless war.

As the countless sparkles fell to the apartment roof, they transformed into beer bottle caps.

She was likely a symbol.

A symbol of hopeless war. A symbol of formless disinformation that inspired unnecessary grief.

This demon was the very atmosphere *that drove people mad*.

“Even I will research my likely enemies. And knowing Kanzaki Kaori’s personality, she would never work at fortifying London’s defenses on her own while the rest of the Amakusa are sent to the dangerous front line at Dover. And no matter how she was distorted and even if she is willing to accept necessary evils, I seriously doubt she would accept the deaths of others so readily. That was the most obvious one, but...what a pain. I imagine there were discrepancies, large or small, in the others as well.”

“Hee hee.”

The translucent demon only laughed after being found out.

That temptress’s body was imbalanced after pursuing beauty too far and she wore a dress of English newspapers, duct tape, and thumbtacks. She did not appear to be bound by gravity. Her feet never touched any surface, she ignored the concepts of up and down, and she twirled upside down. The movement could not be explained by the presence of her wings and tail.

That demon’s mere presence destroyed order.

The newspaper articles writhed as they covered her feminine curves.

“Wicked”, “pervert”, “ghoul”—the dancing text was driven directly into people’s minds instead of via their vision and it was all irresponsibly criticizing a certain human. Of course, she had not just so happened to pick up these malicious articles which had grown yellow or brown like autumn leaves. The battle had already begun.

Aleister Crowley had taken the form of a lovely girl.

So she was not foolish enough to judge someone by their outward appearance.

“Ee hee hee. Hee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

“Honestly.”

With a light sound, a new figure landed on the apartment roof.

Another demon had arrived.

The person standing atop a rectangular chimney was Accelerator.

“...Are we really doing this again? Is this the same as with that A. O. Francisca kid?”

“Higher lifeforms like Coronzon and Aiwass are not that common. For one thing, there are no truly pure elements in the surface of the Four Worlds. Accelerator, you bear the name of a particle accelerator, but not even your power can fully separate them.”

“...”

“That is no more than an artificial demon with a much simpler structure. It just needed to control someone. It is essentially more of a tool than a lifeform.”

“Not what I meant.”

“?”

“You’re the piece of shit who sat at the top of Academy City and laughed at all your ‘successes’ while filling one half of the world with tragedy and misfortune, so why do you go easy on someone just because they’re being controlled? First A. O. Francisca and now this. You aren’t seeing your own situation in them, are you?”

“...That’s your problem?” The peak of a certain category gave a self-deprecating smile. “Aleister Crowley has always been the one who tears down the old order. I am the complete and utter piece of shit who directly rebelled against the world’s largest religion, did not hesitate to trigger internal conflict within my magic cabal once I deemed it no longer useful, and carried the entire world to the next Aeon with the completion of the Book of the Law. My plan is full of holes, but all that matters is that the many branches eventually regroup somewhere. Did you really think I had a goal that followed any proper logic?”

“Tch.”

“I do not expect a proper death for myself or the world and my soul will descend to hell after I die. But that is not the convenient penal colony, where the victors send the losers, that my predecessors thought it was while they smugly believed *they alone would never end up there*.

A quiet sound came from girl Aleister’s shoulder. Whether it actually existed or not, she supported a twisted silver staff there. But this also meant that arrogant magician had drawn her best weapon from its sheath or holster.

Her actions belied her words and said this being required radiating killer intent in every direction.

While observing the temptress girl who floated like a balloon and spun right-side up once more, Aleister traced her empty hand’s fingers across the brim of her witch’s hat.

She had quickly seen through the collection of allure who sent her newspaper skirt dancing in a crescent moon shape.

“Quite the stereotype.”

“Ee hee hee. Nee hee. Hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

“...And you got the interpretation wrong. The Qliphoth is often interpreted as an evil tree and it does use demons’ names for the guardians of the spheres, but that does not mean its essence is an absolute evil. Even if you were to misuse tarot, it is not simple enough for the upside-down Death card to mean life or resurrection.”

“Qliphoth?” asked Accelerator.

“Yes, this is a chance for you too. You might not know what the words mean, but keep this in the back of your mind. This is knowledge that is freed of the division between science and magic.”

Materialism, anxiety, greed, lust, ugliness, cruelty, viciousness, rejection, foolishness, and godlessness.

Those were the things seen behind the toxic words of the newspapers’ sensationalist articles.

The newspapers adorning that demon’s “merely” beautiful body were very different from modern ones. They were the bible of an age in which environmental destruction was mistaken for conquering nature and people reached for the power of capitalism and money as they searched for a source of stability to replace faith. Provocativeness over truth, immediate sales over intelligence. And this had been propped up by the overwhelming influence of mass media. To Aleister, who had constantly been attacked by their biases and prejudices, those hopeless, century-old newspaper articles really were the evil tree that indicated the immoral world with its 10 spheres and 22 paths.

Of course, that magician would not let something like this break her concentration.

The silver girl gave a flowing lecture to this newcomer.

“That is the inverted tree that stands in the opposite position of the tree of life protected by the angels. If the just have gone through the appropriate training, it can assist them in acquiring the dangerous knowledge found in that hidden world, but if you view it with insufficient resolve, you will be bewildered by a fog of confusion, find something other than the truth, and come to believe that a perverted underground ceremony is the one and only way to acquire knowledge, or some such nonsense.”

As represented by the baseless misinformation and the Beheading Coins, the translucent girl was the strange atmosphere of a hopeless war.

Kanzaki Kaori, Knight Leader, and possibly London or England as a whole may have been influenced by that.

Just like someone reaching for a strange magic sword or ancient parchment and peering into it without the knowledge needed to properly understand it.

“Even if you do open the path through a misuse of the cards, nothing good will come of using the reverse meaning before learning the standard meaning. However, that is not the crux of the problem. ...The tree of life is also a diagram explaining how to handle the soul. Thus, using the inverse tree properly will likely assist in the creation of *something much like a life*.”

One must not forget about Mina Mathers here.

She was an AI meant to support Aleister’s thoughts and an original grimoire, but what was that book’s name? The Thoth Tarot, which Aleister had sent out into the world. And each tarot card gained power corresponding to the tree of life.

Aleister had called this artificial demon more of a tool than a lifeform.

Aleister was the board chairman who had mass-produced more than twenty thousand military clones, disposed of them in an experiment, and used that as camouflage to spread the Misaka Network, so she did not hold back on this subject.

This was a tree anthropomorphized by human knowledge. She was a partial demon created exclusively as a possession specialist. Her structure was similar yet different to the humans who corresponded to the tree of life. She was a thought being who was the inverse of Mina Mathers, the embodiment of the Thoth Tarot.

With all that spelled out, the accumulation of history could give the illusion of stability, but Aleister understood the meaning contained there and breathed an exasperated sigh.

Do not be led astray by the words. A definite get-rich-quick scheme introduced by a demonic temptress would be even emptier than a pyramid scheme.

Look to the essence.

That demon with a disconcerting hole in her forehead was *horribly flimsy*.

“Is this meant as revenge? That does sound like something Coronzon would do. What is your name and number? Refuse to tell me and I will drag it out of you with Neuburg’s method. That Great Demon could not refuse, so do you really think a mere creation like you could do so?”

“Hee heee hee hee. That part is quite simple.”

Those ten fingers swayed like they were adrift in the dark sea at night. Was that thread or thin poison needles that glowed with a rainbow light? Like a deadly jellyfish, the countless needles stabbed all across nearby Knight Leader’s body.

He became unrecognizable.

His limbs bent, his body moved stiffly, he spun around...and with a swing of a slender arm, he was discarded to the side. He was not worth holding onto. This seemed to say the true battle had yet to begin.

The girl demon spoke.

“Qliphah Puzzle 545. A pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“...And one more thing. Yes, I see now. The John’s Pen structure embedded in the grimoire library was inputted by Coronzon via Lola.”

Think back an era at a time and it was a simple matter.

Coronzon had not changed in the slightest.

England as it collapsed, A. O. Francisca, Index, and Lola Stuart.

333. Dispersion.

As that number and essence indicated, that Great Demon obstructed the world’s bonds and that preference had remained consistent. But instead of acting as an external threat, the demon derived joy from tearing things apart by dripping poison into the group and having them ruin it all themselves.

“What are you going to do?”

“Whatever I wish.”

The silver girl whispered a singsong reply to the artificial demon who disturbed the world’s harmony with the threat of stereotypes. Aleister focused once more on the staff weighing solidly on her shoulder whether it physically existed or not.

Chaos was wild nature itself. Unlimited freedom gave birth to all things, but it was not kind enough to protect the fangless and furless humans.

But the order brought by castle walls was simply oppressive and would kill even more people. The rules of hopeless wartime would preserve order by driving out all doubters as an evil, and those rules were a far greater intentional evil than the capricious ferocity of nature.

Thus.

This magician reached for the contradiction of riding the wave of chaos rather than suppressing it, but also acquiring *the true order of unrestricted freedom* that restrained no one.

And she spoke the fundamental essence of the book she had released to resist a world of collapsing bonds.

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.”

Part 6

“Sorry I’m late! Sister Agata has arrived!!”

The glasses nun named Sister Agata shouted as she entered the British Museum that felt like a school or hospital at night since the lights were off.

The situation really was different from normal.

Although that should have been obvious from the fact that everyone there was holding a Beheading Coin in their hand.

For one thing, Agata and the others had been kept in the dark about so much.

Why had contact with Lola Stuart been lost without warning?

Why had the Crowley’s Hazards suddenly started attacking the British Commonwealth?

They knew nothing, they had no set goal, and they had simply been ordered to fight.

They were to protect London indefinitely.

Looking back, they may have been a unit of sacrificial pawns meant to buy time.

Museums were normally busier at night because they only had the limited time while it was closed to bring in or take out the antiques and artworks, polish the glass, replace the lights, and inspect the air conditioning that managed the room temperature and humidity. But that was not enough to explain this. In the donut-shaped hall known as the Great Court, wooden boxes, cardboard boxes, and various types of packaging material were piled up and some of the glass cases had their contents missing.

The fires of war had directly reached London, so preparations were underway to either evacuate north to Scotland or participate in the magical war.

The Egyptian section's Rosetta Stone was one of the main draws of the museum and archaeologists would probably feel faint if they knew its spot was already empty.

When Agata arrived, a great quantity of eyes turned her way.

They all belonged to people in black habits like hers. The skirt and sleeves had zippers that allowed adjustments to personal taste, so they were clearly all the Roman Catholic style.

There were around 250 of them in all. Joining the former Agnese Force and their identical habits helped put Agata at ease. But she could not indulge in that and come to a stop. Everyone knew they had no time. The glasses nun spotted their short leader and got straight to the point. Almost like she was driven by the strange wartime atmosphere itself.

She spoke to a short girl. The girl's red hair formed several braids about as thick as pencils. She kept her habit's skirt intentionally short to prioritize mobility.

"Sister Agnese, what is the situation?"

"I only arrived a bit ago, so I don't know the whole picture...but to get right to the point, the Royal Family and the Knights are arguing over what to do at Buckingham Palace. With the triple-quadruple final barrier broken, a direct defense of London is unavoidable. The knights charged with protecting the royals are suggesting a Plan B of evacuating just the Royal Family to Edinburgh Castle in Scotland, but Hologres Mirates, who is acting as an intermediary, insists the royals will not accept a Plan B and demand a happy ending."

During British Halloween, the current queen and the second princess had directly clashed on the front line over the future of Britain and the people who lived there, so the Royal Family was clearly a combative group. Once they learned they were under attack by a ghost they thought they had banished long ago, they would never even consider abandoning the capital and shamelessly fleeing.

They could not use the people as a shield so they could survive.

That sounded virtuous enough...but Agata wished those immature leaders would think about how much it would shake the kingdom as a whole if they were to die in battle.

(Or is *someone putting those words in their*—no, I'm overthinking this. But it is true we haven't heard anything directly from the Royal Family...)

The force took its name from her, so when Agnese began to speak, the other nuns gathered around. First, tall Lucia asked a question as if to confirm what she already knew.

"I had thought our plan was to fortify the city's defenses by regrouping the remaining forces that were called back from the collapsed front line, but what is our objective then? Are we to eliminate the Crowleys flooding the streets, or are we to buy time for the VIPs to escape to safety?"

Whatever their plan was, they still had a large army approaching them. If it took too long for the Royal Family and the Knights to come to an agreement, they could end up starting a marathon without knowing where the goal was. It might finally be time to use their Beheading Coins.

Agnese made sure Orsola was not nearby and then sighed.

"...First of all, do you think we can win this?"

"..."

"We're only hearing about the shortest route across the Strait of Dover, but the routes from Spain and Scandinavia are apparently approaching their boiling points as well. Once those cups run over and the Crowley's Hazards cross the ocean from there, there really will be no stopping them. And if they come from the North Sea, evacuating the Royal Family to Scotland's Edinburgh Castle might be meaningless. I just don't see how risking out lives buying time is going to improve the situation."

With just one route of entry, they had failed to push back the enemy and allowed those monsters to reach London.

And a second and third route would soon be established, so they did not even want to run the numbers on how outnumbered they would be. It was enough to feel faint. The higher ups might be choosing a strategic withdrawal, but that was looking like delaying the inevitable, like escaping to the roof when your high-rise building was on fire. No matter what calculations they ran, there was no hope to be found.

“Even if someone charges the enemy with a rousing battle cry, they aren’t going to turn this around. How can we buy time and who can we help escape? ...That would be the bare minimum of an *optimistic view* and we can only reach it by throwing away our own lives.”

Yes. Even after shifting their goal that low, it still counted as optimistic.

If they staged a last stand, the odds were much better they would be killed without accomplishing anything at all. Not much was worse than being ordered to simply “defend” without given a clear goal. It turned a group of human beings into a barrier of expendables.

It was such a straightforward way of putting it that Agata and Lucia both fell silent. It may have been Agnese’s ability to keep this kind of meeting going that had made her the leader of these 250 girls.

Then another nun whispered in her ear.

“(Sister Agnese. The list will be complete soon. We have categorized them using three different systems.)”

“I see...”

“(Each of the orderings is based on a complex series of logical calculations. If you simply choose from the top of the list, you will not be held responsible.)”

“...”

This list ordered the 250 nuns in the British Museum based on their “usability” and it would be used to select the members of a suicide squad.

However, Agnese Sanctis breathed a quiet sigh so that no one would notice.

If the time came for that, she intended to toss that list aside. As their leader, she would have to take responsibility and throw her own life away.

“(That is merely running away.)” whispered the nun who stayed in the shadows with her eyes closed. “(You must make a decision and throw out the lives of others. You are only trying to escape that pressure.)”

“...Maybe so.”

She slowly let out a breath.

Whether she would use it or not, they were probably hurrying the completion of the list. The other nun left to go elsewhere, eyes still closed.

Agnese focused on Lucia, Angelene, and the others in front of her.

“Whether or not we will defend the city with our lives, the battle has arrived in London. This is a battle within London instead of a battle on the way to London, so we cannot avoid damage to the city. ...That means this is no longer a battle to defend. It is a showdown in the capital city. We cannot hope to put up a fight if we are not prepared to destroy the city ourselves.”

It was abnormal enough simply to have an external enemy directly entering a country's capital.

From here on out, nice-sounding ideals would not be enough.

Just because the stage had shifted to London did not mean they could go on a rampage, knocking over buildings willy-nilly. They had to allow the Royal Family and the important materials to be evacuated north to Scotland, they had to keep the civilian casualties to a minimum, and they had to prevent any repercussions related to the Tower of London's prisoners or the hidden magic cabals. Before, they had been able to line up barriers on a plain, aim their weapons from there, and focus on fighting, but now they had to fight in an entirely different way. They of course had an overwhelming disadvantage as the ones being invaded, so they would have to forcibly make up for that somehow.

And that would require using one life to protect another.

The existence of the list flashed through Agnese's mind again.

“I used a back channel to acquire a map showing the distribution of independent indoor evacuation within London. We can start by using that to decide which buildings we can bring down to form barriers and which areas we need to keep the enemy out of.”

Of course, they did not have time for preparations here either. The enemy had already crossed the final line and entered London. Someone would have to stop the Crowley's Hazards while they remade the city into a labyrinth.

Even if they did complete the preparations for that labyrinth, they would only be buying time based on time already recklessly bought by others, so there was no guarantee of victory. And what would happen to the unsupported humans who stood in the way of the Crowley's Hazards?

They had no exceptional joker, so normally thinking...

(We need to use a suicide squad here.)

They would be committing suicide. They would be killing themselves with their attack.

Meanwhile, whether she had realized what this meant or not, Lucia frowned and spoke.

“Well, we need to prepare ourselves for what’s to come.”

Agnese gave a thin and somehow troubled smile.

She scratched her cheek which had the softness of a teenage girl.

“Since they are duty-bound to protect the kingdom, the Royal Family and the Knights can’t choose to destroy London themselves. Meanwhile, former Catholics like us are outsiders. We have the advantage of choosing options that will make people question our patriotism.”

At 250, their numbers rivalled a small school. That might sound like a large army, but Agnese and the others had been reduced to the level of dirt in their fight against Biagio Busoni who had contaminated the Roman Catholic Church and God’s Right Seat who had lurked even deeper in the church. They had been forced to make an enemy of two billion people around the world, which was literally several orders of magnitude higher. It was practically a miracle that England had accepted them as a temporary home. They had not been given time to really plant their roots here, but they had been taught how to hold kindness in their hearts.

They could not let that go to waste.

They would save as many English people as they could, so she wanted to accept as many nuns as she could.

And to that end, Agnese Sanctis was willing to use her own life as a pawn.

“...”

She did not know what kind of treatment the magician named Aleister Crowley had received from this country. Agnese and the others had been accepted for now, but they might eventually end up on the receiving end of those thrown stones. But this was not the time to worry about that. There was something they could try and people they might be able to protect.

She did not care if they were accused of being ungrateful.

Did they want to be saved, or would they go to die? Would they move forward, or would they fall back? Agnese did not know what exactly was in Lucia, Agata, and the others’ hearts. Then Angelene, the small braid girl clinging to Lucia’s back, opened her mouth.

“Didn’t...Holegres Mirates, was it? Didn’t that knight summon us to the British Museum because some powerful spiritual items were being stored here? Didn’t he say they were hidden in a puzzle of stacked boxes so not even the normal personnel were aware of them?”

“Yes, he apparently found some documents that Archbishop Lola kept in Lambeth Palace. It seems they have already been removed, though.”

Agnese acted confused in a different way from before.

A low tremor rose through the floor of the British Museum which stored so many antiques and artworks. The museum was built to prevent a single crack or chip to its contents, so the fact that the outside shaking was reaching them inside was proof of a serious emergency.

An obelisk could easily shoot down a mobile fortress. A warship-sized crocodile swam through the winding Thames. A catapult flung stones with enough force that they cracked the ground upon impact.

They were all exceptional jokers.

Their impact on the overall battle was unclear, but they were a hope to Agnese who might have to order some of these familiar people to make a suicide attack.

Glasses Agata hesitantly looked up at the ceiling.

“I did see some extraordinary things during my wild first experience with hitchhiking, but it was not clear how much those things could do against a full swarm of the Crowley’s Hazards.”

“There is a reason for that. From what I hear, those things are *being used wrong*. Um, I think they called them Divine Mixtures. You are apparently supposed to do more than just connect them to the ley lines, making them reliant on the ground. That method can apparently only draw out less than one percent of their true power. I apologize that this is all hearsay.”

Agnese breathed a heavy sigh.

Those things were their last hope, but they would be meaningless if they were wasted.

“It’s a stereotypical miscommunication. We successfully found a few capital defense spiritual items in the depths of the British Museum based on the documents Sir Holegres found in Lambeth Palace. But the enemy army was already here, so everyone dragged them out there without checking how they should be used... And even if we do receive an official order to retrieve them, that would not be easy given the chaos out there.”

The shifted power balance was obvious from the fact that the knights were rummaging through the Anglican archbishop's residence. Lola's absence was painful. That had given the Knights a lot more sway and outsiders like Agnese's group or the Amakusa had lost the guarantee of their safety.

"S-so we have usable capital defense spiritual items, but they can't use their full power and we can only sit and watch as they're destroyed one by one!?"

Would they jump straight to a suicide attack, or would they have time to attempt a less hopeless fight first?

It was gradually dawning on them that that decision was being decided by people other than them. Lucia looked furious, but Agnese raised her index finger.

"So at Sir Holegres's request, they are being hurriedly retrieved by freelance couriers that exist outside the chain of command. For now, we need to gather as many surviving fighters as we can while keeping damages to a minimum. We will have to hear the details from the courier, but as long as we know *how to use it properly*, we should be able to annihilate the Crowleys in London, even if it means systematically destroying the city and turning it into a labyrinth."

With a carefree comment of "I have more food ready", something unbelievable approached. Even if the British Museum's Great Court was part of the tourist area and had plenty of glass cases to protect everything, it was still strange to see gentle and carefree Orsola Aquinas wearing an apron over her habit and pushing a food cart toward them. Any antiques maintenance and repair specialist would have foamed at the mouth and fainted if they had seen it.

But just then, a monotone buzzer rang.

It was likely from the main entrance. Normally, that would not be audible in the donut-shaped hall, but even if it was full of frantic energy, the museum had not eliminated the darkness of a school or hospital at night. The rude blast of noise at the guard station made its way all the way here.

Everyone turned toward it. Even Orsola.

This signaled the arrival of the supplies needed for a comeback, but was that a fortunate or unfortunate thing?

Holding a means of resistance meant they could no longer choose an easy death. They had no choice but to enter hellish London once more.

There were around 250 of them.

And Agnese Sanctis, the small leader who gave the force its name, spoke all of their thoughts aloud.

“...So it’s here.”

Part 7

An obelisk broke.

It took flight.

It skewered a giant crocodile.

“What are we supposed to do about this...?”

Kamijou Touma, the petty bourgeois who could not participate in that mythological-level battle and was honestly more afraid of the scorpions and cobras, muttered blankly to himself.

The Egyptification of the city of fog must have been accelerating. The silver sand had been no more than a thin fog before, but now it fell like volcanic ash and started covering up the asphalt roads. It sort of reminded Kamijou of Academy City littered with Element remains after the heat wave.

Meanwhile, Othinus sighed while recrossing her slender legs with her tiny butt on the boy’s shoulder.

The pyramids and giant statues kept appearing and disappearing on their own, so he avoided touching them with Imagine Breaker while relying on the normal asphalt that was being erased by the silver sand. He had touched some wall art before, but that was too small a sample. If something did collapse at his touch, they could easily be buried alive.

“...From the look of things, I’m guessing Aleister is causing all that destruction up there. Is this the war she was talking about? If so, *she’s a lot softer than I expected*. And I doubt just seeing a baby’s face would have triggered it at this stage.”

A god of war saw things on a different scale entirely.

Kamijou was starting to feel dizzy from these other-dimensional visuals, so what did she find lacking?

“Once you had destroyed the triple-quadruple barrier from within, you may have had no strategic value to Aleister. Or to put it another way, why do you assume you need to risk your life and fight here?”

“?”

“Wait, you need to ask these questions, human. You’re not some wage slave that has mistaken the runner’s high of overwork for actual value!”

When she shouted in his ear, Kamijou came to his senses at least a little.

Yes, that was right.

“I don’t need to force myself to run right into the most dangerous area, do I?”

“That’s what I’m saying. They might be in a state of high alert, but the people of this country are not as diligent as the Germans. Not all of the shops will be closed and England is a country of pubs that serve plenty of craft beer and scotch whisky.”

“Wait, Othinus. We can’t go to an actual bar.”

“I don’t want to hear anything from Mr. Soft Drinks who can’t even bring himself to drink the tap water, much less alcohol. Anyway, unlike France or Spain, England’s cities do not go to sleep early. We can ignore that magical battle between those idiots busy giving their minds a work out, find someplace to kill some time, and eat some fish and chips while creating a nice vacation memory between just the two of us...or whatever...”

“Either way, what do you want me to do when I only have 72 yen in my wallet?”

“...”

“...Are you serious? Is that really so bad it makes a god fall silent? ...No, wait. Wait! I have something else here in my wallet. Go to a drug store or convenience store with this Tatsuya Tea point card and...oh, I guess it wouldn’t work in England. It’s looking like I really will need to brave the foreign tap water.”

No matter what he did, Kamijou could not escape these more boring threats to his life. With service charges and table charges, modern places would take money just for sitting at a table without ordering anything, so it did not look like they could flee into a sturdy building.

In that case, they would have to find safety while outside.

“As big as it is, this is still just one city, right? Is there anyone I know around here? I don’t care about the war between England and the Crowley’s Hazards. If I can just convince someone that this...Coronzon is controlling that Lola person, we wouldn’t need to fight like this, right?”

“Whatever Lola’s nature, I seriously doubt reconciliation is an option now that the Crowley’s Hazards have unilaterally invaded their homeland... But fine. That is the board chairman’s problem. So who do you hope to find?”

“Anyone, really. It could be Agnese, Sherry, Birdway, Oriana, Lessar, or hell, even Princess Villian or Queen Elizard! I’m a little afraid of Orsola who was wandering around the Tower of London, though... And weren’t there even more people with those British-sounding Western names!? With that many, surely I can run across *one* of them, right!?”

“.....
.....Hey, human. Is it just me, or were all of those female names?”

“Ow, my earlobe!! Did you pick up Index’s biting habit!? And I can’t help it that all of the British guys are terrifying people who tend to rush to the other side of the moral debate! Like Stiyl! Or Aqua!! They can’t take a joke and not one of them has a temperament that’s ‘just right’!!!!!!”

“(Has he completely forgotten that a god of war got fed up during a battle against him and threw in the towel? If your atmosphere or temperament are too much for him, you probably barely qualify as human anymore...)”

Just as they were discussing that, they heard the old-fashioned clip-clop of horse hooves through the thin curtain of silver sand.

It was Kamijou’s new acquaintance in full-body armor and a surcoat.

“I finally found you, runaway!!”

“Hgiiii!?”

“My offer of mercy has expired. I will lasso you around the neck and drag you back to the Tower of London!!”

“Wait, are you a knight or a cowgirl!?”

“Are you unaware America broke away from England, human?” his little neighbor unhelpfully explained.

He would be in trouble if he was caught by this knight who was not very nice to her horse by making it gallop over the asphalt to reach him. The Tower of London was irrelevant here. Dragging him around by the neck could easily be a death sentence.

“S-s-s-stairs! Where are some stairs!? Horses can’t handle height differences, can they!?”

“Sigh. I can tell you’ve never watched those horse-riding competitions, human. A properly-trained horse can easily handle heights up to their chest and a horse trained for security around Buckingham Palace will have no trouble with stairs.”

“Wahhhhn!?”

He had no choice but to eat his words. He made a frantic change of course, reached both hands up to the edge of a pyramid block on the main road, and somehow managed to climb up on top of it.

“Where are you, runaway!? Running and hiding at this stage is craven!!”

“(Craven? She’s really going all-in on this old-fashioned knight thing, isn’t she? And how am I the craven one when she’s using a full set of weapon, armor, and horse against a defenseless and unarmed person!?)”

He was apparently in a blind spot when viewed from the ground. Instead of risking a peek down, craven Kamijou Touma curled up like a roly-poly and held his breath.

Then that giant roly-poly was sent flying when a scooter suddenly ran into it.

...It took him a second to realize it given how sudden it was, but this was a proper(?) traffic accident. The ear-splitting screech of brakes echoed from the ancient ruins taking over London.

“Huh? That didn’t sound good. I really wish everyone had obeyed the evacuation order. And this sand in the air is such a pain since it reflects the headlight back at me if I turn it on.”

“We are far too busy to mess with this. And who was it that said we could avoid all the people and wreckage if we drove along the ruins themselves? Honestly.”

Someone shouted from the ground below. The female knight in silver armor and a surcoat dismounted her horse and climbed up after hearing the loud crash, but she must have been dutiful through and through because she grew pale and ran over to assist the spiky-haired boy even though he was an enemy and a runaway prisoner. She may have felt like a police officer who had pursued a runaway criminal a little too far with their police car.

Meanwhile, the culprits looked down at Kamijou Touma who was trembling (in the straitlaced young woman’s ample chest).

“Geh!? One of those goody-goody knights is here! And while we’re on a covert operation!!”

“Lend me a hand here. If we leave them like this, we can’t correct our mistake until that stuffy knight (who will probably take her virginity to her grave) completes the recovery magic on her own. You provide the consumable candles and incense. ...And who is that

kid anyway? A drunk who ran out of alcohol and couldn't stay put, or a foolish young priest out on patrol???"

While lightly convulsing (in the arms and chest of the female knight) atop the neatly-aligned giant stones, Kamijou heard what those true pieces of shit were saying.

And their voices sounded familiar.

When he matched faces to those voices in his head, the Kamijou Touma lightning struck.

"Lessar and Birdway!? Have you two formed a magical crime duo!? Are you running around out here to take advantage of the chaos!? And don't put multiple people on a scooter! Do you even have a license!?"

"Magical crime?"

The female knight's eyebrows twitched as she held the boy close (with her defenses lowered in a variety of ways).

The guilty pair panicked.

"Crap, that guy's a goody-goody too. Run away, run away!"

"Oh, he's tough enough to walk this off. And given his right hand, trying to heal him would be a waste of time. Let's get to the British Museum already."

One was an imp from a wannabe magic cabal and the other was the boss of one of the modern world's largest magic cabals. Both of them were small girls and they tried to sneak back onto their scooter.

But then someone else fell from the night sky.

"Oryaaahh!! What do you think you're doing, Touma!?"

"Bfhh!?"

It came from above the proud blonde girl's head. Index the silver-haired nun rained down upon the pyramid eating away the London cityscape. It was a lot like the mysterious phenomenon of frogs or small fish falling from the sky. Even that arrogant cabal boss was caught off guard by this, so she was easily crushed between the falling nun and the lower level of stone material. She ended up sprawled out while face down.

The sudden occurrence shocked the female knight into squeezing the spiky-haired boy's head, but Lessar in her lacrosse uniform and devil's tail panicked even more.

“C-crap! Did someone sniff out our transport route!? As a courier, I can’t let anyone take that thing from us...”

Another mysterious phenomenon provided a finishing blow.

The night sky was split apart by a spotlight that shined directly down on Lessar’s head. She protected her eyes with a hand and frantically looked up to see the saucer-like silhouette of an unidentified flying object.

“Waaaaahh!! Wha—, eh, wait, a-aliens!? W-were they summoned here by this ancient civilization’s pyramid? Am I gonna be abducted and cattle mutilated? This is not how I expected my night to go. How far forward has the world’s doomsday clock advanced when I wasn’t paying attention!?”

“...Bunny Grey is unstoppable. Vee.”

While Lessar slumped down and screamed, a hoodie bikini girl descended while hanging from a large balloon. She was making a peace sign with a smug look on her face.

“Awa, awawa.”

Meanwhile, an armored person was acting like a little girl squeezing her stuffed animal after a bad dream. It was the female knight and she was holding the spiky-haired boy, but...

“Ah!? When did you sneak up so close, invader!?”

“Ow!!”

The fully-equipped female knight mistook Kamijou Touma for an alien and shoved him away with both hands. He held his back and unsteadily rose to his feet, but his suspicions were already as high as they could go.

Or rather, most anything Lessar was involved in was bad news.

He asked some blunt questions in an extremely low voice.

“That thing? Courier?? Transport route???”

“...Uuh...”

“If you don’t explain, I’ll tie you to Fran’s balloon and set it loose. Like a flower’s seeds. If you’re lucky, they’ll collect you in France so you can blossom into a beautiful flower.”

“.....Ahh.”

That might sound dreamlike and romantic, but it must not have sounded realistically survivable to her. While sitting on the stone with no escape, Lessar looked around in search of help and heard an intake of breath from Leivinia Birdway who was crushed below Index like a frog on the road.

She always had a noble scent to her despite leading an underground group.

“Yes, it might be time to come clean. How should I put it? Seeing your face broke some things inside me. Who cares if this was a job from the honorable Sir Mirates? Besides, we didn’t want to do this in the first place, so maybe I should be thankful someone has shown up to put a stop to it.”

“?”

Next to Kamijou Touma, the female knight tilted her head right along with him. She may have recognized the name “Sir Mirates”.

“It was a forbidden power.”

Birdway had all the information and the look on her face suggested it had been a mistake to not take the ignorant boy’s side in the first place.

“I should have thought about whether I would be able to look you in the eye. Am I losing my touch? What good is defending your country if you have to destroy it from within to do so?”

Leivinia seemed sick of the silver sand in her fine blonde hair.

“I will explain. Because just calling it a Divine Mixture probably wouldn’t mean much to you.”

Part 8

On the roof of an old apartment, a translucent demon floated like a jellyfish with a dress made of discolored English newspapers, silver duct tape wrapped tightly around her alluring chest and hips, and long, rainbow-shining hair spread out like an umbrella.

She was the atmosphere of hopeless war that drove people mad.

The girl had a hole in her forehead and when her total of ten fingers wriggled on either side of her, long skinny threads burst out like tentacles adorned with countless poison needles.

Were the fools entirely under her control?

With a series of dull sounds, Knight Leader and the other fully-equipped knights jumped up to roofs of equal height. In fact, Aleister Crowley could not even ignore Kanzaki Kaori who lay collapsed at her feet. She could fall back under the demon's control at any time.

"Nee hee."

Qliphah Puzzle 545.

She was such a blasphemously evil girl that she actually looked like a stereotype.

A wicked smile spread across the demon's face as Beheading Coins—which were actually just shiny beer bottle caps—fell around her soft-looking bare feet.

"Nee hee hee, ee hee hee hee hee hee, hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee."

But her true essence was not one of common combat strength.

This created demon could control people with wicked temptation.

So how could Aleister be certain she would not target Aleister herself with that?

The demon, with her alluring body contained in a shoulderless dress of discolored English newspapers and silver duct tape, brought her spread arms together right in front of her. When she did, the entire scenery grew distorted, like it was caught in a vortex. An unbelievable number of threads—no, hundreds of millions of miniscule needles—were rotating as they approached. It was like a giant worm bursting from the desert sand to devour a poor human. They enveloped the silver girl in order to forcibly attach to her with countless points.

Evasion and defense were both impossible.

The essence of this demon with rainbow hair was dangerous knowledge. Peering into it without the proper preparation would confuse the human mind and send you down the path to ruin.

"Hee hee, hee."

The silver girl could not even blink. She could not correct her leaning body and clear drool dripped from the corner of her mouth.

And while she stood there, motionless, the barefoot demon walked toward her in such an obvious way it almost felt unrealistic. The English newspapers forming her slit-covered shoulderless dress produced an unpleasant sound. Would she shatter the silver girl's mind, or would she use her other pawns to skewer the silver girl's motionless body over

and over? She was a symbol of lies. She was more beautiful than anyone yet she wore a collection of trash. She tilted her head as she slowly approached and chose the silver girl's fate.

“Ee hee ee hee hee. Hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

However.

Far too suddenly, Aleister's right hand grabbed the demon's neck.

This was not just a reflexive action.

The silver girl's eyes were staring straight at the hole in the forehead of the demon who dangled from her hand.

The demon was not controlling her.

The impossible situation confused the artificial demon, she kicked her translucent legs enough for the thumbtacks to pop off and her dress to tear apart, but Aleister did not bat an eye.

“The evil tree will trip up any amateurs who attempt to use it. At the very least, you should not reach for it before learning the fundamentals of the tree of life. As a surprise attack against those who never intended to view it, the sight alone can provide a powerful shock. Just like a flasher in a trench coat on the streets at night.”

The harshness mixed into the speech may have just been Crowley's Crowley-ness.

“But if you have sufficient training and experience, the evil tree can assist you in acquiring dangerous knowledge. And all that really means is to learn the standard Sephiroth before peering into the inverse Qliphoth.”

“Hee.”

“I am the human who understands all of modern Western magic. Did you really think a mere inverse interpretation would cause me to err and destroy myself?”

[illegible]

A dry sound exploded out.

It was a lot like an inflated balloon popping.

She displayed no hesitation.

The knights collapsed limply to the flat rooftops like marionettes with their strings cut. The Beheading Coins they held so preciously in their hands fell to the ground and transformed into filthy beer bottle caps.

While showing no concern for the demon girl who had been blown away without a trace, Accelerator spat out a comment from atop a rectangular chimney.

“You sure like using your right hand for things.”

“A mere sign of longing. What about you?”

It threw the #1 off balance when she admitted it so readily.

Aleister laughed.

“Humans are such contradictory creatures, aren’t we? The more we belong to the side of evil, the more we long for that right hand. But Imagine Breaker would never choose someone like that.”

“Is that why?”

“Yes. *I do not care if you think I’ve gone soft.* This is my war.”

Those did not sound like the words of the person behind a simultaneous attack on 53 countries and regions using an army of more than a billion. Your average person would likely give up trying to understand what it meant.

At any rate, this was another line of defense after the triple-quadruple final barrier.

There was no guarantee that Lola (i.e. Coronzon) had only prepared the one artificial demon, but this had definitely weakened their wicked influence.

Just then, the #1 with his modern design cane heard a whispering voice. He looked over and saw the door to an apartment cracked open and a gray-haired old man hesitantly gesturing him inside.

The man was telling him in English to hurry inside because it was dangerous outside, but Accelerator gestured for the man to leave him alone.

Aleister and the #1 easily jumped to the neighboring building’s roof.

“You could have accepted the offer,” said the rare magician. “Have you forgotten? It is true that in Academy City you are the feared #1 and my actions have made yours a bloody life. ...But that is only in the artificial boundaries of Academy City. The outside world functions on the natural laws, so no one knows who you are. They will have no problem speaking to you and you should be able to speak to them just as easily.”

“ ... ”

“This is not an artificial city. You can create your own identity here. If you reject them, they will reject you, but if you accept them, they will accept you. You seem to think those military clones require Academy City, but is that really true? Setting aside the necessary equipment, wouldn't it be faster to construct a personal environment outside Academy City where you can do so from the ground up?”

“So what about you?” spat back Accelerator. “They hate Aleister Crowley and will never forgive the invader who is laying waste to England, but they only know the name. Ignoring those crazy people and their magic or whatever, most of the amateurs would never think you could transform into a brat like that. That old man wasn't just telling me to take shelter. He couldn't have been more misguided, *but he was trying to save you along with me*. ...Couldn't you just vanish into the crowd with your baby?”

“...I wouldn't be able to, no.” The silver girl slowly replied with a plain voice and a smile containing a lethal dose of venom. “Hatred is a spiral. No matter what England is like now, I can never forget how they mistreated me in the past. No matter how perfect my smile, a thorn would remain somewhere. And as that thorn continually pricked them, modern England would eventually grow to hate me. Once the spiral begins, there is no escaping it. The poison has already been poured into the drink, so there is no way of removing it.”

“Is that so?”

“The situation is not that bad for you yet. If you ignore me and the others at the top level of Academy City, that is. You need not stick to Academy City's ways while in the outside world. It is probably about time you began to consider how you will disembark.”

“ ... ”

“Will you continue to hide in the shadows out here, or will you gather your resolve and walk out into the sun? As someone who has been down that path, I have one piece of advice: do not base your decision on what you think best suits you. It is much easier to find happiness if you look to what you want to be and choose the unfamiliar path.”

Part 9

“This is a secure line. What was it you wanted to discuss?”

“Oh, dear. Is anything truly secure, Sir Mirates?”

“Are you saying you want to speak with me in person? Just so you know, you will not find me even if you search every cathedral in the City.”

“But...”

“I, Hologres Mirates, am deeply trusted by Queen Elizard and the rest of the Royal Family. If anyone attempts to listen in, we only need to remove their heads as punishment for their betrayal of both the Knights and the Royal Family. Our secrets will not get out.”

“...You haven’t said anything about the Anglicans who specialize in that sort of thing.”

“They are done for. They were doomed from the moment Lola Stuart ‘disappeared’.”

“Are you suggesting you did that?”

“I will leave that to your imagination. The power balance should be clear from the fact that knights are searching the archbishop’s residence at Lambeth Palace. It is high time you decided whose side you will take.”

“So by crushing the pesky Anglicans and gaining the Royal Family’s trust, the Knights can effectively hold all the power?”

“The Knights of England can. Do not forget about the other three countries. And to deal with them, I must leave the queen feeling a little more indebted to us.”

“...Yes, Queen Elizard only knows of the Mirates family and I doubt she even knows what you look like. Her view of your family is still stuck two hundred years in the past.”

“You speak too much.”

“I am very sorry.”

“And I made it that way on purpose. Now, what personnel are available?”

“If they obey your request, some of the former Agnese Force remains in London, so we can use them. They are being gathered at the British Museum.”

“Good.”

“A lot of the Divine Mixtures were destroyed, but we just barely managed to recover two of them. They are being transported by freelance couriers.”

“I do not expect a flawless victory. From the moment Dover fell, we knew the southern land would be devastated. Escaping this unscathed is no longer an option, so we must focus on resurrecting ourselves from the ashes. If England is sacrificed to allow the Royal Family to safely escape to Scotland, the lead-up to that event does not matter. The Royal Family will surely feel deeply indebted to England and its nobles after that.”

“...Are you sure we should do this?”

“Go over Knight Leader’s head, you mean? What happened to the England-Londinium Fortress? We cannot afford to continue losing land thanks to a stuffy man who simply obeys the Royal Family’s orders. I will work myself to the bone as a Knight of England. We will be very busy once I have built up my camp. I will rid us of all unnecessary personnel and he will be the very first one I dismiss.”

“No, not that. Are you sure we should do this to those nuns?”

“Hmph, of course. I am acting with the intent of throwing England into the fires of war and using that very furnace to resurrect it, so they at least need to make themselves useful. You understand, don’t you? I am reorganizing the personnel.”

“So you are indirectly executing those nuns by sending unnecessary personnel into an unwinnable battle?”

“Outsiders who devour our tax money and fill up our land are nothing but dead weight to the United Kingdom. This is the perfect opportunity. This might be a fruitless war, but we can make the best of it by cutting away the fat to optimize ourselves.”

“ ... ”

“But I will give them some hope. Even if it is only a way to ensure those girls dive into the furnace all on their own.”

Part 10

“...Perhaps you could call it karma that no one showed up to stop me.”

That courier was well aware that everything she did tended to backfire. Once, that had even led her to work with Lidvia Lorenzetti to revolutionize the world.

Oriana Thomson.

She had long curly blonde hair and she wore a thick coat. Covering her bodylines with artificial mink (the price of which was skyrocketing after Academy City's sudden shutdown) was not enough to suppress that alluring woman's sex appeal.

(But there really are still people here. The leaders have already decided to evacuate to Scotland, but London's normal houses are still full of people. What do they think those shutters will protect them from?)

She did not remove her coat even after entering the building, so she may have changed her mind after actually facing the nuns. The already silent museum was filled with around 250 stern nuns. It would be a certain kind of impressive if someone could run around that solemn art gallery in nothing but body paint. Those nuns might snap at her if they saw the extremely skimpy clothing she wore below her coat. That sense of taboo was palpable. Oriana walked right past the cloakroom while holding a silver duralumin case lined with papyrus.

The ability to intentionally shift people's gazes was a valuable tool for an underground courier like her, but that was not always a good thing.

Agnese Sanctis opened her mouth while focused more on the case than Oriana herself.

"Is that it?"

"Yes, just as that Hologres knight requested. This is one of the Divine Mixtures. I believe it is Isis-Demeter. This trump card was mistakenly removed from the British Museum, so I had to retrieve and return it. Shall I provide the details of its use right here and now?"

"No. We're short on time and I want to avoid having to repeat any of it. Come to the Great Court where you can explain it to everyone at once."

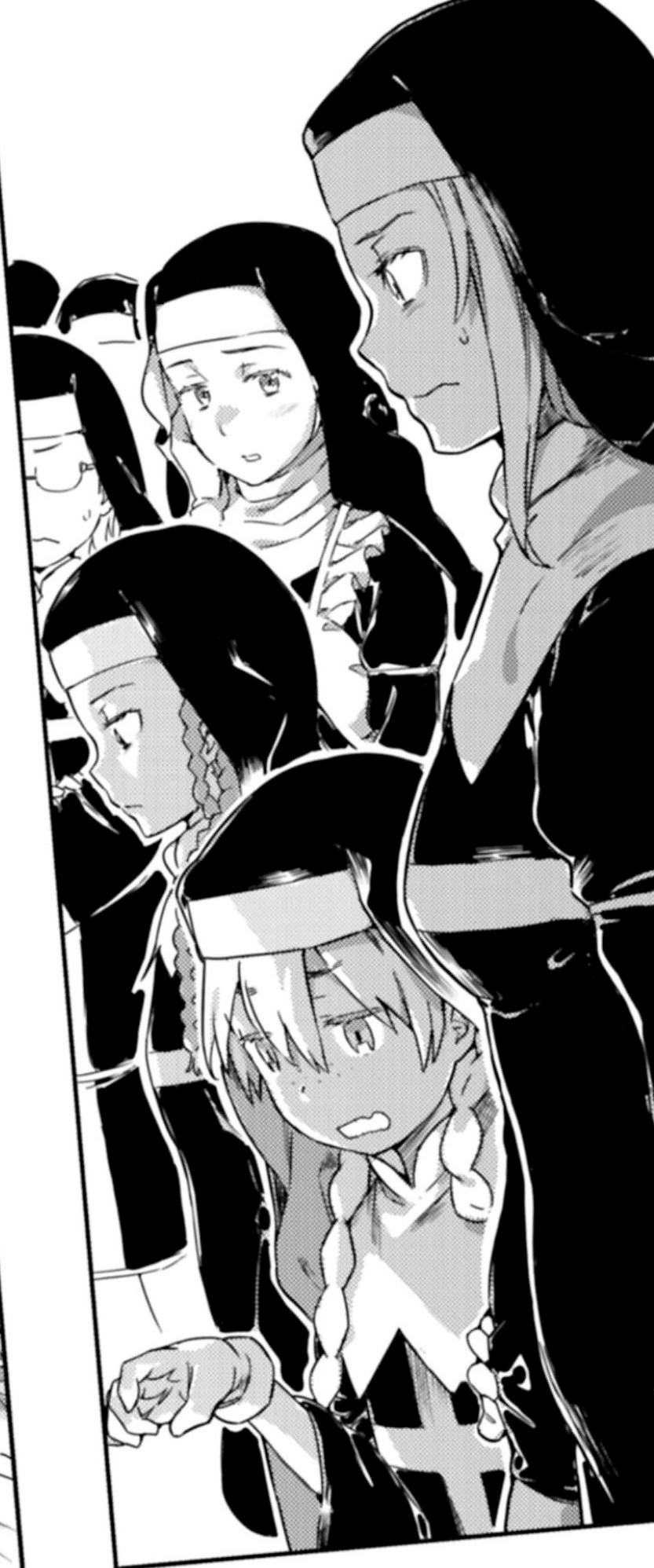
"True." Oriana breathed a heavy sigh while carrying the duralumin case wrapped in the same linen used for mummies. "It might be cruel to have you explain this to your own companions."

The Great Court felt crowded and cramped due to the stacks of wooden and cardboard boxes and the nearly 250 nuns gathered there.

When they all focused on Oriana and her artificial mink coat, she softly placed the papyrus-lined duralumin case at her feet. She unwrapped the linen, unlocked it with a key made from a gold and silver alloy, and revealed the delicate artwork within that seemed entirely unrelated to a deadly weapon.

It was made of pure gold and diamond.

Those materials were combined to create a single, life-size rose.



It seemed to draw in the soul of all who viewed it and it looked different from different angles. It was like a Rorschach test with a mysterious allure. Oriana had transported it here, but not even she could quite tell whether it looked more like a rose or a narrowed eye.

“Th-this is it?” Dual-braided Angelene leaned forward while clinging to Lucia’s habit. “This is the capital defense weapon? Since we got it back, um, uh, w-we won’t have to lose anyone, right? Right!?”

“Sister Angelene.”

Not even Lucia’s chiding could stop the small stooped nun. She was clinging to far more hope than the previous explanation warranted. She was implicitly saying she did not want to die. And Oriana did not think that was a bad thing. No one wanted to start a fight when your fate was known from the beginning. If there was some hope, they would want to grab at it.

But a glasses nun frowned.

“Um, I know Sister Angelene just asked this, but...is this really the trump card Hologres mentioned? Is this really one of the capital defense spiritual items that Archbishop Lola had in reserve???”

“It is pretty to look at, isn’t it?”

Courier Oriana Thomson had decided to take the role no one else wanted.

She considered how she should go about explaining this.

“And you might be able to win. If you use this Divine Mixture properly.”

She started with the conclusion.

Angelene was not the only one who gulped.

“I’m not just talking about buying time in a slightly better way than the worst-case scenario. I mean actually fighting and actually winning. You can settle things with the Crowley’s Hazards pushing into London. This would provide you the power to do so.”

They would be grabbing a powerful weapon in order to match an absurd enemy.

From there, it would escalate.

Oriana did not touch on whether or not that would really be a good thing. That sort of argument would be far too empty and heartless for these cornered girls.

“This might seem unthinkable to the pious nuns of a monotheistic faith, but just look at it as something people in a distant world think. ...While it is best to understand all truths through the pursuit of a single mythology and faith, that is not always possible. To get an idea of how difficult a path that is, just think of how great a magician has to be before they reach the level we call a Magic God.”

“...When it comes to that, we have no intention of using the tricks and shortcuts known as magic.”

As the 250's leader, Agnese made a bitter amendment as if to correct a past mistake. Oriana did not bother arguing the point.

“You can understand it to an extent, but you never know what you are missing along the way. When faced with such a gap, people will try to forcibly apply what knowledge they do have. This is especially common when attempting to translate another culture or religion from across the sea or desert.”

The nuns had a variety of reactions.

One listened intently in order to grasp at this hope, one refused to listen because she had already hardened her heart and did not want her heart to be shaken anew, and one was afraid her hand would be brushed aside if she reached for it. They all had their own unique reaction.

Oriana thought for a moment and lightly embraced her alluring body while toying with the artificial mink of her coat.

“For example...yes, the Eastern island nation of Japan has a god known as Dakini-ten. She rides through the world on a fox, is linked to Inari worship, and responds to all people's prayers. However, she has her origins in India where Dakini is a god with no connection to foxes. There, she is a death god that rides around on a jackal. But because jackals do not exist in Japan, they attempted to understand her by forcibly applying a similar four-legged animal to her. That established a link to the foxes of Inari worship and gave her a unique interpretation as a god who answers prayers rather than predicting death.”

Take the algebra problem of $1 + X = Y$ and solve for Y. 6 and 9 might look similar, but the answer changes entirely depending on which one you fill in for X.

Monotheistic Agnese sounded dumbfounded.

“I-is that really okay to do...?”

“Not normally, but it can be useful at times. Think of it like activating a light bulb by stabbing electrodes into a fruit in place of a battery.”

The courier in an artificial mink coat continued her explanation while glancing over at aproned Orsola who was jumping up and down like a child to see Isis-Demeter over the crowd (and oblivious to how this made her large chest jiggle).

“Egyptian Mythology has been twisted quite a lot. For example, the Sphinx’s riddles were an invention of Greek biases and preconceptions after crossing the Mediterranean. And when we decipher Egyptian myths today, one important piece of information is the Rosetta Stone which is written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, standard Egyptian writing, and Greek. So all of the Egyptian culture deciphered using that as a starting point is no more than an interpretation seen through Greek eyes.”

Oriana slowly restated the name of the trump card: Isis-Demeter.

No, that was not all.

“Ra-Zeus, Osiris-Hades, Tefnut-Artemis, Wadjet-Leto... Just hearing the names was not enough to understand what does what, so they gave the Egyptian gods the names of Greek gods with similar roles—king of the gods, ruler of the underworld, etc.—to try to understand them that way. Of course, once the sightseeing Greeks returned home and explained everything, it all transformed into monsters nothing like the original stories. That tendency may have stuck around, because when Pliny released his Natural History during the Roman era, things like the phoenix are introduced as real animals and plants.”

For Agnese, Agata, and the others, that kind of twist was not what they cared about. They just wanted an option other than simply buying time. They just wanted to repel the Crowley’s Hazards from England...no, from London. Their top priority was acquiring the power to fight, even if it was like swapping out a newspaper delivery scooter’s engine for a rocket engine.

Small Angelene spoke up while hiding behind tall Lucia.

“We heard they were only being overpowered because they were not being used properly...”

“Exactly. That Hologres knight must have been in a hurry. Or maybe it was done by others who were too afraid of him to report their mistake. It seems these things are not all that powerful when merely connected to a ley line. Simply put, all the other ones were more or less wasted.”

Courier Oriana breathed a heavy sigh and paused for a moment.

She was a part of the underworld, but even she was hesitant to state this.

“However, there is risk involved.”

She knew all too well that explaining this would not stop them.

If they did nothing, the best they could hope for was to throw away their lives simply to buy some time. And the odds were good they would fail to accomplish even that. They would seek the power to fight no matter what kind of risk it brought.

“The most obvious one would be the Ra-Zeus combo. In Egyptian culture, the gods and the pharaoh were strongly linked. The human pharaoh was a child of Ra, so all the people were required to obey. Of course, that also meant the pharaoh was expected to solve things like crop failures and droughts.”

In her artificial mink, Oriana seemed to be putting off saying something.

“So based on Hologres’s recalculations, even though these are powerful spiritual items, they are not meant to be connected to a city or the land in order to absorb vast amounts of power. To repeat, the gods and the pharaoh were linked. Before worrying about energy, these Divine Mixtures desire people.”

Was it dawning on them what she meant?

This risk was a complete change in the rules. They were no longer talking about their lives.

Aleister Crowley likely would not have cared if he were in their place. In fact, the magic at the foundation of the Golden cabal had been something like a stage play and the various priests had held ceremonies based on Egyptian Mythology. Furthermore, Leivinia Birdway, Kihara Kagun, and Marian Slingeneuer would not have minded either. It might have bothered Magic God Othinus somewhat, but it would not have been an absolute deal breaker.

But these people were different.

The Roman Catholic nuns gathered here were not just any magicians.

“Simply put, the Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture cannot display its true power unless someone offers up their body and fuses with the Egyptian or Greek god. Now, can you do that? When you have already dedicated yourselves to the absolute Christian God?”

That was it.

For Agnese, Lucia, and the others, hearing that condition felt like having a rusty stake driven through their heart.

The Beheading Coin could disperse their pain and fear for a few seconds, but not even squeezing that could distract them from this.

This was even greater than the fear of death.

“From here on...I will leave the interpretation up to you.” Oriana Thomson let out a gentle breath. “But if I was to give you advice from a freelance position, I would say that a few exceptions have been seen in the past. For example, the word Maria Kannon was created when the people in the Amakusa region of Japan hid holy images within the many Buddhist images to escape the shogunate’s harsh persecution. The stories of Saint Vitus are theorized to have incorporated stories of an old Slavic god. The world you know is not necessarily all there is to Christianity. Incorporating different cultures and civilizations does not always decrease its purity.”

If they drew a line in the sand.

If they did not lose their core.

But it was still not a choice everyone could view that easily. Because what if it did not work? What if it turned out they had abandoned the faith they had followed their entire life? It was not someone else’s criticism they feared. Could they accept *themselves* if that happened? Forcibly-developed arguments were the same as a handmade hazmat suit. Could you really trust something you had made by cutting apart a thick plastic sheet with scissors and then taped together? It would be patched-together and falling apart and who could say when the invisible germs or poison gas would get in.

Why had it been the former Catholics who were summoned to the British Museum?

Would outsiders like the former Agnese Force really be made the cornerstone of the capital’s defense?

If anyone could not imagine why Hologres Mirates, the knight in charge of defending London, had made that choice, they were either very pure or very stupid. It was the same reason the Amakusa and former Catholics had been sent to the most dangerous battlefield at Dover. It was unclear where in the chain of command the decision had been made, but these girls had been chosen as convenient sacrificial pawns.

But after being cornered here, they had nowhere else to go.

And knowing that...

(If someone reaches for this, it will break their psychological pillar and their group will fall apart.)

Oriana very nearly clicked her tongue.

She had been suspicious of the meaning to this job, but now she was certain of it.

(But if none of them reaches for it, they will be accused of refusing to cooperate during a national crisis. Either way, they cannot stay here. No one knows why this war happened, but I suppose someone thought they could use it. You’re an awfully small person,

Holegres. You're no more than a stereotypical racist who wants to build up a nation of your own kind while excluding others.)

A low tremor reached them. Was it the Crowley's Hazards, or had the England side done something to fight back? Either way, it only applied more pressure to the nuns' hearts.

The conditions had not changed. Whether they would fall for Holegres's trap or try to escape it, the time for war with the Crowley's Hazards was approaching.

Everything would be lost at this rate.

Both the people and the things that the nuns had worked so hard to gather here.

Kanzaki Kaori and Sherry Cromwell lived in the same dorm as them, but those two had been given different orders for some reason and were not here. These nuns may have questioned that somewhere in their minds, but they must not have been certain enough to just reject everything.

(Once again, everything I do backfires, damn it.)

Even when Oriana succeeded, she ended up hurting people she did not want to hurt. Her job and her life felt so worthless, so she cursed in her heart like usual.

The silence was painful.

It was only broken by the words of Oriana Thomson in her luxurious artificial mink coat.

"Of course, there is another option: *leave it be*. Give up on the Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture and rely on some other method. Although if I'm being honest, that isn't very realistic and you might earn a lot of criticism if you reject a weapon capable of defeating the enemy. But you do have the option of turning away and fleeing this country. Wasn't England no more than a temporary home? So you don't need to defend it with your lives."

However.

Courier Oriana had placed the weights on the scale and given them the freedom to choose the other option, but she already knew the answer. She did not know their individual situations, but those 250 nuns would not flee. They took their lives far too seriously for that. What would Oriana have done if she had been abandoned by the Roman Catholic Church and seen as an enemy by their two billion followers? Giving up one's position as a nun and blending into the background as a freelance worker—a complete nobody—would be much safer. But these girls had not done that. Even with one-third of the world's population as an enemy, they had not abandoned their positions as "Roman Catholic nuns".

Agnese, Lucia, Angelene, Orsola, Agata, and all the others.

They would not give up on their lives as nuns or on England which had accepted them as a second home.

One of those 250 would reach for it.

They would do so whether or not they had noticed Hologres Mirates's trap.

With the straightforward lives they had lived, they could not run away from the debt they felt to England.

The spiky-haired high school boy who had saved them may not have intended to bind them like this, but they had become entangled nonetheless.

And they were caught so tightly that an unseen knight had decided to take advantage of it.

Oriana herself had once pursued a justice seen only from one side so she could use it as an absolute measuring stick. She had made an enemy of Academy City in that pursuit. As long as she drew a clear line between good and evil, she had thought she could avoid the tragedies brought by differences of interpretation.

But how well did that actually work?

Justice forced upon someone by another left no room for complaint. If all who protested were declared evil and forced to sacrifice themselves, was there any good left in that system?

What about Kamijou Touma?

That boy existed on a different level of the same predefined good and evil yet he appeared to be following some kind of straight line. It may have been that former part of Oriana that he had attacked.

(...What a pain.)

Oriana Thomson sighed so the others would not notice.

There was actually a third option here.

The Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture sought a human. But that human did not have to be one of the Catholic nuns.

It could just as easily be a freelance magician. If that underground courier reached for it herself, none of those girls would have to worry about tainting their soul or losing their faith.

However...

(I had a feeling this would end badly once I noticed the true meaning of the job, but...sigh. It always backfires. This goes well beyond a courier's job. If you're up against a railway gun, sending in a flimsy spy plane armed with a peashooter is nothing more than a category error. I need to make sure I don't go too far and lose sight of when to pull back. Otherwise, I could easily lose my life.)

It was about time to step forward.

It was time to change her destiny and her role.

And they had their answer.

A slender feminine arm slowly reached toward the golden rose of Isis-Demeter.

Part 11

A bursting sound echoed through the London night.

Wadjet-Leto.

As soon as that Divine Mixture was dragged out from below the scooter's seat, Kamijou Touma used his right hand to destroy the detailed vulture decoration made of pure gold and diamond.

"Wah!?" screamed the straitlaced and stuffy female knight.

Leivinia Birdway rubbed her temple with her index finger.

"That was a British treasure."

"Shut up. I don't care about that Sir Mirates bastard."

He gave no excuse.

But the issue was complicated by the exasperated but happy look in Leivinia's eyes even though she had supposedly agreed with Hologres's reasoning and retrieved the Divine Mixture so it could protect England by sacrificing someone. Of course, pointing it out would end badly, so he had to be careful.

"I can't believe what I did," said Leivinia. "I was just so frustrated that those Crowley's Hazards were dragging down the image of the Golden cabal. But now I feel like I'm back to my usual self."

“A-are you sure this is a good thing? I will admit that Sir Mirates’s capital defense plan is lacking in compassion, but still...”

“Hmph. What’s done is done, so quit complaining about it, Miss Knight.”

“Yes, but why do you look so happy about it?”

“.....”

Leivinia silently grabbed the female knight’s collar and dragged her around back. An odd scream of “Wait, no! Not through the gaps in my armor! Use leverage there and it will break! Gwaaahhh!!!???” rang through London’s Egyptian night. I would point out what exactly she was doing, but there is no explaining that. Saying it would end badly means it would end badly. You just had to be careful.

The female knight returned with a dejected slump of her shoulders (and with her silver armor and surcoat somewhat out of place). Lessar grew a bit pale upon seeing her, but she still spoke up.

“...I’m impressed you can do that to an elite knight. She probably draws out all sorts of power by writing out an angel’s name with stars or numbers and she probably includes the traces of some nasty ritual in everything she does, down to the way she says good morning.”

“No, I’m just a standard Type 25 Commander.”

“Heh. Eh heh heh. So you’ve already broken down the essence of such things and systemized it???”

Kamijou was curious about a lot of what they were saying, but something else took precedence.

He stared into the distance.

“You said you weren’t the only couriers, right? Then we have to get to the British Museum... I don’t care about England vs. the Crowley’s Hazards. I can’t believe those people! I didn’t leave them with the Anglican Church so they could be used as parts for some horrific human body weapon!!”

“W-w-w-wait just a second.” Lessar grew flustered and tearful because she felt like he was criticizing her when all she had done was transport the thing she was hired to transport. “Wh-what Sir Mirates is *saying* isn’t wrong and just because one of the Divine Mixtures reaches the former Agnese Force doesn’t mean any of them will really use it, right? I mean, think of the costs and risks. Plus, it can fuse with anyone. It isn’t over just because the nuns refuse. Some mean-looking magic cabal boss with no faith whatsoever just has to do it instead.”

“...That’s not an option either,” spat out Kamijou.

He patted angry Birdway’s head and apparently failed to notice Othinus puffing out her cheeks on his shoulder.

“So there’s a way to protect everyone you care for. And you can choose to use it or not. ...You call that freedom? Are you really free to choose!? Of course not!! It would actually be easier to refuse if you were being bluntly ordered to do it. Yes, yes! There’s no real reason for them to feel so cornered, but the more seriously they take everything, the harder it is to escape these things!! Right!?”

“Touma...” said Index.

“When you’re shown a chance at salvation, it doesn’t end there. *It was the same when I challenged Othinus.* For example, what if you’re buried alive in a tunnel or cave collapse and someone shares their food with a small child? That settles it, doesn’t it? Then everyone *has no choice* but to surround that child with food like some kind of offering. You’ll feel bad if you don’t do it. Those are more or less forced acts of good, right? Once things are set in motion, there’s no freedom there. No one will be able to make a logical counterargument. Even if the one child can’t possibly eat that much and even if it just dooms the adults to starve, everyone’s hearts will be swallowed up by the ‘moving story’! Could a single person really carry the weight of being the one person who says they aren’t sharing their food because it doesn’t add up? Of course not! Are you kidding me!?”

That boy had run toward almost certain death countless times.

It had sometimes been based on the schemes of Academy City or the Anglican Church.

But even then, Kamijou Touma had thought for himself and made his own decisions. No matter who was plotting behind the scenes, he had seen someone he wanted to save or an incident he wanted to stop, so he had no regrets about that.

“What is this nonsense about a hopeless wartime atmosphere!? Screw that! I’m not some yes-man who agrees with anything Aleister tells me to do. I don’t care whether England or the Crowley’s Hazards win. The fundamental problem is Lola and Coronzon, so those overly serious nuns don’t have to force themselves to fight! Yet Agnese and the others are being forced into it with no chance to complain! Those Beheading Coins diminish the value of human life, so they were bad enough, but these Divine Mixture things are going to screw with their minds!! How can I let that happen? Hologres Mirates? A systematic capital defense? That bastard won’t even show his face on the battlefield, so I’m definitely not letting him sacrifice the people left in his care!!”

It seemed similar, but it was completely different.

Agnese’s group was essentially surrounded by a thick invisible wall that was gradually crushing them. There was no room for freedom of choice there.

“Argh, what’s with this thing? The engine won’t start. I’ve never ridden a moped before, but I want to get to the British Museum ASAP!!”

“Huh? It was running just fine before,” said Lessar. “Maybe it’s the silver sand. It might’ve gotten inside and fried something.”

“Also, visibility is poor, the accumulated sand will make the roads slippery, and there are a lot of obstacles with the Egyptification and rubble from the battle,” said Birdway. “You would probably crash even in a bicycle.”

“Oh, honestly!!”

“Human, how about reading the signs instead of running off randomly? The British Museum is the other way.”

Kamijou Touma groaned as he listened to Othinus’s warning and obediently made a U-turn.

“This is not going to end well...”

It was like a prophecy.

“Showing them that blinding form of salvation will only fill them with guilt even if you tell them it doesn’t have to be them. There is no way this will end well!”

Part 12

Aleister Crowley stood on the roof of an old apartment.

After blowing away the demon girl named Qliphah Puzzle 545, she shifted gears by raising her hands and stretching her back.

“Now, onto Westminster Abbey. Pretending to be an educator is fine, but I have been talking far too much. My throat is a bit sore.”

“Are you sure this’ll be that easy?” Accelerator interrupted while continuing to “observe”. “You say you’ve gotten rid of the evil guidance by that hopeless wartime atmosphere and those Beheading Coins. You claim that will cause a lull in the battle. But I’m not so sure. You talk big for the person who spread the chaos in the first place. And the contrary way you talk makes it sound more like what you hate is the oppression of goodness and justice.”

“ ... ”

“The evil was destroyed, but is that cause for celebration? You’ve had your head held down by goodness and justice for so long, so surely you know those things are strongest *when the pendulum swings back.*”

Part 13

And.

And.

And.

A slender feminine hand grabbed the Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture.

Oriana Thomson, the freelance courier, gulped.

She was surprised, but not because she had grabbed it herself. No, another hand had reached out just before she did.

“Oh.”

Agnese Sanctis was the leader of the nuns gathered in the British Museum, but she too had her eyes widened in shock. No, that was not quite accurate. She only led the 250 nuns of the former Agnese Force. There was one nun who was from the Roman Catholic Church but had not been part of the Agnese Force.

“Orsola Aquinas!?”

Why was this happening?

Why had she chosen to push herself to the very limit where one wrong step would mean abandoning the faith she had kept for so long?

She looked no different from normal.

She gave a graceful smile as she explained her choice.

“Because unlike all of you, I don’t have the power to fight directly.”

There was no hint of a shadow on her face.

She was probably facing her true desires more than anyone else.

And that was why Orsola Aquinas did not hesitate.

“I’m not even given a spot on your list, but this way I can do something for all of you. I’m normally no use at all, but now I can protect you and your lives.”

Something was being distorted. Distorted, distorted, distorted.

Something that should have been untouchable.

“This is a good deed, so why would I need to think twice?”

Only here, by seeing this decision from an outside perspective, did Agnese, Agata, and the others face the fundamental distortion. No one had said that. There was nothing forcing them to do this. And yet it ensnared people, starting with the most earnest. They would come face to face with a sin no one had criticized them for, be crushed by their weakness, and drift toward a more obvious but mistaken form of justice and self-sacrifice.

Everyone wanted to live a cool life.

Everyone wanted to be on the side that produced moving and emotional stories.

Even if that was not like them, even if they did not fit in there, and even if they were not up to the task.

“—Tah dah! Everyone, I’ve brought a late-night snack.”

How much had that kind young woman suppressed her own feelings to preserve her usual smile and tone of voice? When faced with that tense stench of death, Agnese had been unable to bring in food with a smile. Orsola had been able to, but that did not mean it had been easy.

It may have been a great shock to her.

Something may have begun to stain her soul.

The majority rule did not matter.

The era and atmosphere were not the point.

Agnese saw killing as inevitable and Orsola wanted to protect their peaceful life. If asked which one was right, the answer should obviously have been Orsola Aquinas who argued for peace and tranquility.

“—That’s...right. A silent night might be nice.”

But Orsola Aquinas was a smart person.

It was insulting to suggest she had not noticed something off about Agnese's unnatural smile while discussing the future.

And that kind young woman did so much to look after the dorm residents' health, so how could she not have felt something upon seeing Agnese and the others approaching death and destruction?

Could she do nothing and stay silent as it happened?

Would that kind, kind person have never once bit her lip while watching those nuns heading to their deaths while smiling at her and telling her alone to escape and survive? How much had she worried, agonized, and writhed about while Agnese and the others were out front? Wouldn't she have thought about it at least a little!?

(...Ah...)

For humans to intentionally hurt or kill another human—or any form of life—they required a certain amount of “strength”. There were a lot of people who would not crush a roach below their slipper even if they found it in their room. The same applied to the Crowley's Hazards, no matter how repulsive those invaders were. To get people to overcome the fear of death and take someone else's life, the most important thing was to remove that mental barrier via hostility education and repetitive training.

Orsola Aquinas would never be able to do it.

At the very least, not in a battle in which she went on the attack to destroy the enemy.

That nun had already disliked fighting. She had preferred to let others punch or kick her if the alternative was hitting them. But couldn't people be swept away like this? When people she cared for were being hurt and her second home was being destroyed, wouldn't she direct some thorny feelings at herself for being unable to pick up a weapon?

And what if it was a fight to protect?

What if she had to grab a weapon and stand up to the enemy or else she would lose her home and everyone she cared for?

The big picture was irrelevant to Orsola Aquinas. It did not matter why Lola Stuart had suddenly gone missing. It did not matter why the Crowley's Hazards had attacked as if in response to that. It did not matter that they finally had a concrete counterattack plan after the higher ups chose to withdraw to Scotland.

She simply wanted to protect her everyday life.

She wanted to save that women's dorm and everyone who lived there.

That was really and truly all it was.

(Ahh.)

This reality made Agnese want to cover her eyes.

It had all backfired.

(Ahh! Ahhhh!! Her? Sister Orsola? This has to be a joke. And to save us...!?)

No.

Wait.

Then, something inside Agnese Sanctis told her to slam on the brakes. This did not come from the majority of her mind that was filled with regret. No, this was a warning signal from the part of her that was a cold fighting machine. It told her not to let this happen. It told her not to be dragged along with it, start crying, and say “me too, me too”. Do that and she could not hold onto anything.

She had to set her emotions aside.

She had to face the truth.

Something was not right.

The warning bell only grew louder in Agnese’s mind. She clenched her hand and felt something bending there. She held the Beheading Coin there. But no. It was now only a completely ordinary beer bottle cap.

Orsola Aquinas had made her decision. She had grabbed a deadly weapon, as if the water tension of an overfilled cup had burst and the water had spilled out.

But, but, but.

Where had this wobble come from?

What had caused the scales of good and evil to tilt ever so slightly?

“No...” said Agnese Sanctis.

This was not her decision.

Orsola Aquinas would squeeze the cross at her chest before doing anything and she would always say a prayer before eating, so would she really seek this easy power?

There had to be more to it. She would not throw it away this easily!!

Everyone else who had fit in the category of Item had gone. It was now only Kinuhata Saiai and Mugino Shizuri.

“This is how it is once it’s over. Even Fremea has left.”

“Well, at least there isn’t much risk of Level 0s being targeted by industrial spies. And I doubt word of Yakumi Hisako’s Agitate Halation Project made it outside the city. Really, she might be super safer than when she was in Academy City.”

In fact, Kinuhata and Mugino had earned enough personal grudges that Fremea would have a greater risk of being hit by a stray bullet if she stayed with them.

“Where should we go tonight? A karaoke box?”

“No, the soundproofing at those places is actually pretty bad.”

“Super how about a manga café or internet café?”

“You just want to eat junk food, don’t you?”

“If I leave it to you and your refined tastes, we’ll probably end up at the top floor of a resort hotel. I get super sick of those places almost immediately. Think about why burgers and gyudon are perennial standards. Humans prefer something on the cheaper side.”

“I see.”

“Also, will you be okay with your body maintenance?”

Kinuhata was not talking about beauty treatments and skincare. She meant the artificial things like Mugino’s prosthetic eye, prosthetic hand, and the foundation covering her burn scars.

Mugino Shizuri lightly moved fingertips that were indistinguishable from biological ones.

“These will probably last longer than a normal body.”

“Is that so?”

Kinuhata and Mugino were not really considering an escape from the country. Japan was an island nation. Whether by ship or plane, leaving the country required riding some kind of vehicle. They knew they were the target of grudges, so they wanted to avoid carelessly using such things and ending up among some wreckage in the ocean. It would be one thing if they absolutely had to escape the country, but they did not see any reason warranting that kind of risk.

Pretending to flee far away while actually staying close by was a tried-and-true tactic for fugitives.

“Oh, yeah. Super what was this place again?”

Kinuhata Saiai asked that question when she saw a large empty lot.

Mugino did not sound very interested.

“I’m not sure. Weren’t they planning to build some kind of church here?”

“Hmm?”

Kinuhata placed her index finger on her slender chin, opened and closed the drawers of her memory, and finally found the answer.

“Oh, right, right. Orsola. It was the Church of Orsola. Weren’t they naming it after some nun who spread God’s word to a bunch of different regions?”

CHAPTER 4

That Which Crowley Hates Most.

Justice.

Part 1

By the way, Hamazura Shiage was in serious trouble.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!???”

He had dropped off the glasses nun and the others at the British Museum, but sitting around in the parked four-wheel drive vehicle afterwards had been a mistake. He had partially been waiting around in case they needed another ride, but he had never expected a blinding light to erupt from the pure white temple of a museum and shatter every last window. He honestly thought it had exploded, so he grabbed Takitsubo Rikou, his girlfriend in the passenger seat, and pushed her over.

What was that?

What the hell was happening?

“Hamazura.”

“Uuh.”

“Hamazura. I can’t breathe.”

At the very least, their bones had not been scattered everywhere within the scorched wreckage of the vehicle. Hamazura finally pulled his face from her surprisingly large chest and hesitantly looked outside the vehicle while still clinging to her.

He wanted to put himself at ease by gathering as much information as possible, but *once his eyes met with something*, he grabbed her bob cut head and forced her down.

The stolen vehicle’s passenger seat must have been broken because it leaned back on its own without him having to mess with the reclining lever.

The mini-China dress girl and bandaged woman poked their heads forward from the back seat.

“Hey, if you’re gonna let your hormones take over, could you at least let us leave first? Just say the word and we’ll kill some time elsewhere. 45 minutes should be enough for a round, right? But make sure to disinfect the vehicle afterwards. And get rid of the smell too!!”

“Don’t be so rude, Niang-Niang. If they want us to watch, we need to do that for them. And doesn’t that sound exciting?”

Nephthys elegantly placed a hand over her mouth and smiled, but what she said was just as bad. Plus, Hamazura was too preoccupied to worry about what those pieces of shit were saying.

His focus was outside.

This was bad.

Whatever that was, it was bad.

It may have been too late already. He could hear the footsteps, perhaps because they were walking barefoot through the silver sand blowing around outside. No, even then he should not have been able to hear it through the glass at this distance. He had parked the four-wheel drive vehicle alongside the museum, so while hiding, he opened the passenger side door and got out with Takitsubo so the vehicle itself acted as a shield. He did not care how it made him look and he honestly doubted he could help the Magic Gods out as well.

This was different from Mugino Shizuri.

This fear was...invisible.

It was different from having a venomous spider or carnivorous dinosaur approaching you head-on. It was like being told to stick your hand in a box and that something bad would happen once you did. It was a hopeless fear that bore down on you like a thick wall because you could not see its form or give it a name.

“You’re kidding, right? You’re kidding, right!? I try helping people for once and this is how I’m rewarded? What the hell are those nuns doing?”

“Hamazura. Weren’t there people in the back seat?”

“That bandaged woman and mini-China dress girl? Oh, goddammit.”

He had decided to abandon them, but he could not follow through on it. He was well aware this action was born from weakness, not heroism. While still crouched down behind the vehicle, he knocked on its door. That alone was enough for his heart to pound wildly in

his chest, but the back door was opened in an almost carefree way. Nephthys and Niang-Niang must have been as senseless as their clothing choices because they showed no sign of keeping their heads down. They did not bother using the vehicle as cover, so they stood out like a sore thumb.

“(You idiots! They’ll see you through the window. Keep your heads down!! Wow, those outfits were not made to be seen from below, were they!?)”

Thanks to the idiot’s unnecessary final comment, Takitsubo pinched his cheek and Nephthys and Niang-Niang looked somewhat amused while stepping on his face.

The Magic Gods remained entirely carefree. They were fully in sightseeing mode. They sounded like they were waiting for the night parade at a resort.

“It’s started, Nephthys.”

“Yes, it has, Niang-Niang.”

Hamazura’s head was full of question marks at this point.

He recalled that those two had also been excited when they saw the stone pillar and giant crocodile wreaking havoc on London.

“Bwah, pwah! Wh-what? Are you Magic Gods going to fight that and drive it away?”

“...*Are you sure you want that?*”

“Stop it, Niang-Niang. He obviously doesn’t have the appropriate knowledge. Dragging the words out of him wouldn’t count.”

For a brief moment, he sensed an ominous atmosphere like someone had thrown a hunk of red meat in front of the king of the jungle.

However.

It did not last long.

When Nostradamus’s prophecy had not come true at the end of the previous century, this may have been the feeling in the hearts of the people who had missed out on that major event. They did not actually want that destruction, but it still felt anticlimactic. That was what he sensed from bandaged Nephthys’s sigh.

“It’s no use. That girl doesn’t seem interested in us.”

“That girl...?”

He was not sure what she meant.

It was true his eyes had met with *something* that walked out of the destroyed main entrance, but what had it been? Had it really been ordinary enough to call “that girl”? No matter how much Hamazura searched through his memories, he could not find any details. All that remained was the fear of their eyes meeting.

“I feel sick.” Normally expressionless Takitsubo groaned in his arms. “The noise is really bad. It’s supposedly so close by, but there’s something wrong with the signal. I can’t tell which direction it’s coming from...”

“Oh. You didn’t seem very interested in your surroundings, but are you the connective type? If so, I recommend not channeling that. You can’t call that normal even for a god, so your average trance won’t cut it. It could harm you like damaging the hardware by reading a corrupted file.”

Mini-China dress Niang-Niang sounded carefree, but Hamazura had no idea what she was talking about.

He felt some kind of twisting feeling in his brow. It was like an icepick had been brought right up to his head but was now gradually turning elsewhere.

...Something was leaving.

He did not understand anything about this. He could not let his guard down. If he did not stay focused, he thought he would pass out from the avalanching sense of relief. Only now did he realize how tense he had been. He could never go through that again. Just as a wasp’s sting was worse the second time, he could not imagine attempting that again after the fear had permeated his very core. Simply considering the possibility felt like it was triggering a severe allergic reaction.

Meanwhile.

Nephthys had exposed her alluring body as bait, but she had been entirely ignored. She pouted her lips in a childish way that felt out of place given her bandage clothing and brown skin.

“She must only be interested in annihilating the United Kingdom’s enemy: Aleister Crowley.”

Part 2

The initial flash of light was visible no matter where you were.

Even with his limited magical knowledge, Kamijou Touma understood something when he saw it.

This was overwhelmingly different from the stone pillar or giant crocodile he had seen before. The word “real” came to mind. He was running full speed, but he had yet to reach the British Museum. He had not arrived in time. He clenched his teeth. He knew how dangerous it was, but he could not stop.

The bright light had frightened an African elephant which ran head-first into a wall.

Brick rubble poured down from overhead.

One piece of rubble larger than a motorcycle was smashed from directly above by someone else who was freely flying on a broom.

“Don’t die on me. Keep in mind how valuable your right hand is.”

“Go to hell, Aleister!! How much psychological pressure do you need to place on these people!? I don’t know what Agnese’s group has used, but why are you pushing those defenders toward killing!? Once this is over, I am giving you such a spanking!!!!!!”

“I am aware I have taken this too far, but do not underestimate a pervert. That sounds more like a reward to me.”

Once the silver girl lightly placed her feet on the ground, the female knight on horseback stared in shock.

“Did you say Aleister!? This is, um...uh? Wait, I thought Aleister was...?”

“Finally, a proper reaction. I appreciate it, lady. Although I believe I already rescued you once back at the Dover beach.”

Kamijou and Othinus both stared into the distance. Their looks asked how Aleister could say that when she was the one who had sent in the Crowley’s Hazards in the first place.

“That’s the originator of the Golden-style stuff, right? Then you do something about it!”

“I am unfamiliar with that pervert. And I will be leaving now.”

While the civil servant was busy questioning a new target, the true criminals of Lessar and Birdway made a quick getaway. The next thing anyone knew, they were gone.

“(The Dawn-Colored Sunlight, hm? That magic cabal has also dipped its toes into cutting-edge science, so you could say they have most strongly inherited what I left behind.)”

“What? Hey, where’d Birdway and Lessar go!? Aleister, you help me stop them!”

“Here’s hoping they develop into a good, perverted cabal.”

“Saying things like that is not helping!”

It had looked like someone else was accompanying Aleister on the apartment rooftop earlier, but whoever it was must have decided to stay up there. And the silver girl did not seem bothered that they were separated.

“I have already destroyed a few of the Divine Mixtures. The ones I know for sure I destroyed are Ra-Zeus, Osiris-Hades, and Tefnut-Artemis.”

“I destroyed one called Wadjet-Leto.”

“No hesitation? Excellent as usual. Although you will have to decide for yourself if a compliment from me is a good thing.”

“Touma,” said Index. “When mixing Greek with Egyptian, not all of the gods are going to fit together so neatly. This was just the Greeks matching the major gods so they felt like they understood them. There might only be a limited supply of them.”

“...Hm,” said Aleister. “My guess is the only other dangerous one is Isis-Demeter.”

“I don’t care what it is,” spat out Kamijou. “But be honest with me. Who do you think *became it*?”

“That I can’t say,” said Aleister. “Everyone’s heart has a different limit. I would have to take a look at them.”

“Fran, help me out. We’ll hurry there, but can you go ahead of us and take a look from above? I want to know who of the former Agnese Force was made a part of this.”

“Sure. ...That direction is a bit removed from the political center. The British Museum is there. Yes, those people who were planning to place Bunny Grey in formaldehyde. Tremble, tremble...”

After the rabbit-ear antennae girl floated up into the night sky with her balloon, Kamijou and the others ran toward the site of the blast. The female knight in silver armor and a surcoat panicked because Kamijou, Fran, and Lessar’s group had all split up and she was unsure who to pursue. And to be honest, she would be safer if she did not follow any of them.

They did not make it all the way to the British Museum.

The oddity showed itself before they arrived.

Several bridges of varying sizes crossed the Thames as it meandered across London. Either due to the battle or as some kind of trap, a lot of them had collapsed. One of the surviving ones was an iron bridge.

It had a characteristic Ferris wheel next to it. It connected the Waterloo Station area, which was a business and residential area, with the political center that included the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey.

There was something in the center.

At first, it looked like a star had come loose from the night sky and fallen onto the bridge.

Kamijou muttered to himself with a look of utter disbelief in his eyes.

“...Orsola Aquinas...?”

If he was being honest.

If he was being completely honest.

He had been biased when guessing which one of the Roman Catholic nuns would have used that spiritual item. For example, he had expected Agnese, Lucia, or another of the fierce and combat-oriented nuns. He still would have felt faint upon seeing it, but he would have understood.

But this was different.

So very different.

Something had gone horribly wrong. She had lost sight of her core. It was like looking to a non-profit organization that visited impoverished regions around the world in the name of charity and finding it was actually war profiteering and participating in arms and human trafficking. It was that shock of a painful truth that hit him in the center of the chest.

He had trouble breathing, but he still tried desperately to force it down.

He could not keep going otherwise.

He could not save the captured nun.

This was one of the Divine Mixtures: Isis-Demeter.

“Isis from Egyptian Mythology is the goddess of life and resurrection. She is best known for bringing back Osiris after he was killed by Set and for giving birth to Horus who would later attack Set.”

As a god herself, the Magic God whispered in his ear while sitting on his shoulder.

That god had sacrificed an eye for knowledge and prided herself in her almost coldhearted observational skills.

“On the other hand, Demeter from Greek Mythology is the goddess of spring. She is Persephone’s mother and a ruler of agriculture who must give permission for any plant to bud. Setting aside how those two goddesses will be transformed into an attack, I have one piece of advice for you since the Japanese have such excellent but terribly biased imaginations: Just because this is based on Egyptian Mythology, do not simplistically assume this is a goddess who rules over a dry land of scorching sand. Do so at your own peril.”

Orsola’s Roman Catholic nun habit was nowhere to be seen. Her fine white skin was directly exposed to the air of the London night. That black habit had symbolized asceticism and its absence revealed the sexy body that had been hidden below. She only wore some broad white silk and pure gold decorations. She had a gold bracelet on her right wrist. While it did look Egyptian-ish, was it actually genuine? It may have been what the Greeks had imagined an Egyptian priestess would look like. Similarly, his outsider’s perspective as a Japanese meant he could not tell whether it was accurate or not.

Regardless, it looked twisted and out of place.

It was like having someone introduced as Cleopatra and then seeing a blonde woman step up onto the stage.

In addition to the pure gold decorations and the white silk that just barely covered her nudity, there was a giant circle behind her. It was a gorgeous flower made from a complex arrangement of gold and diamond, but it looked like the halos depicted behind holy figures in religious art.

The one trace of her former self was the cross hanging at her chest.

That symbol glittered in the moonlight, but it looked so flimsy and unreliable now.

“Why...?”

He might have understood if she had been corrupted by evil.

But did it really look so repulsive to see someone corrupted by a different system of justice?

“Why did you of all people use it, Orsolaaaaaa!!!???”

And.

And in response.

There was a disturbing pause, like she was a beat behind. And before any motion from that woman dressed as what looked like a combination of a priestess and a dancer, the giant halo behind her wriggled creepily. Then she clasped her hands in front of her large chest, slightly tilted her head, and smiled.

And Orsola Aquinas spoke.

“My, my. So we meet again, Kamijou.”

For the opening line of a battle, it was far too twisted and unexpected.

But in reality, the entire London scenery grew distorted. On either side of the giant iron bridge, the dark water of the Thames split apart and multiple colorful objects burst out. They were strange tropical vines thicker around than Orsola's torso. The rainbow-colored masses wrapped around each other to form something like a plesiosaur. And there was more than just the one. More and more and more of them burst out on both sides of the iron bridge.

Technically, they were not actually plesiosaurs.

They were only collections of colorful, tropical-looking plants. But it would be very wrong to assume mere plants would be harmless and nonthreatening.

There were great maws.

Elliptical shapes hung down from all over the plesiosaur-like silhouettes. They opened like iron maidens and revealed sinister thorns and spikes within.

These fearsome things could swallow a large truck whole.

“Ah.”

They were Venus flytraps.

The colorful masses were kneaded together like sugar sculptures to form gigantic carnivorous plants as tall as buildings and broadcast towers.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!?"

This was no time to leisurely think about hitting them with *Imagine Breaker*.

As soon as the rainbow-colored carnivorous plants poured down at him from either side as if throwing their bodies at him, he was enveloped by a sweet aroma and the iron bridge was smashed to pieces by their weight.

Modern architecture and trustworthy reinforced concrete felt flimsier than a sugar sculpture now.

“Toh!”

If hoodie bikini Fran had not grabbed him with a silly voice while dangling from her large balloon, he would have fallen right into the dark Thames. Into that river which had transformed into an underworld that could be crawling with anything.

“Wah, wahh!?”

“Ghh...”

While Kamijou shouted, Othinus groaned like she had a headache.

“What is this image? It was imprinted into my mind from somewhere. A spiral wrapping around a streamlined core. Two loops on the right...???”

Whether that tool had actually existed or not, Aleister casually called over to them from a broom like a picture book witch.

“It is grapes and olives. I am having trouble grasping the details, but the symbolism is very Greek-oriented. ...I am not so sure grapes had made it across the Mediterranean during the ancient Greek era, but, well, it may be like the fox and the jackal. All that mattered was that the Greeks would understand and accept it.”

“?”

“More importantly, did you notice?”

“Notice what!? All I know is that the situation could hardly be worse!!”

“That understanding is good enough. It is true this Divine Mixture is a much greater threat than before. I imagine they established a proper connection this time. However.” The silver girl made a dramatic pause. “That is not the point. Do not be distracted by the flashy blessings of spring or the colorful carnivorous plants. The crux of the problem and the core we must understand lies elsewhere.”

“?”

This was not the time to desperately cling to the balloon string and stare doubtfully at Aleister.

What would happen if he carelessly looked away from Orsola Aquinas now?

She floated.

After easily destroying the very bridge she stood on, the sexy priestess brought her feet together in empty air and floated there. She was light as a feather but also fixed solidly in place. And that created goddess was surrounded by the large rainbow-colored vines rising from the water and some things that looked like toothbrushes with small spheres at the ends of the bristles. They were probably something like sundew which captured bugs with its sticky fluid, but she was not capturing herself with those.

Assuming no tricks with wires, she was defying earth's gravity all on her own.

Flight.

The separation between the physical and the paranormal made that the most obvious kind of miracle. It was a showy advertisement for the glory of the gods in heaven.

"Her fingertips. ...Three loops around the left index finger and eight loops around the right middle finger."

Guided by Othinus's groaning voice, Kamijou did indeed see some kind of pure gold thread wrapped around floating Orsola's fingertips.

"When you look at all of her decorations, that nun herself is the olive tree while the gold thread around her fingertips is the grapevine. Yes, that's it. But what do the specific signs mean? Blessings or madness? The meanings of peace and blood are too new. I have heard the olive branch has long been used, though."

"It's like a game of concentration," said Aleister. "Put off figuring it out right away and focus on committing it to memory. Right-2, Left-3, Right-8. Those correspond to the Venus flytraps, the sundew, and the flight. Remember that. You will regret it if you let it slip past you now."

"Hmph," said Othinus. "You had better hope there isn't a further trick to it. Like maybe it matters which specific finger she used or which way she bent the fingers. Or maybe the fingers are a distraction while she actually chants something under her breath."

The mention of grapes and olives had only reminded the spiky-haired boy of Orsola's cooking skills, so he could not keep up with this conversation.

"There are several spells for bringing down magical flight," pointed out Fran.

"Even though this is their Crowley killer? No, there will be an extra step in there to guard against it."

Kamijou gave up on understanding the higher-level discussion between Aleister and the others and he focused on observing Orsola while clinging to the balloon.

She seemed to have plant powers and she was flying, so did that halo behind her back gather the air like dandelion fluff? Pure gold could be stretched out until its thickness was measured in microns, so was there some trick to the halo or the decorations on her body? ...No, that sensible reasoning may have been a sign he was trapped by ground-oriented preconceptions.

This was flight. Even after millennia, humans had not changed.

Even in the modern age, people trembled in fear when viewing grainy photos and videos of UFOs.

(This is bad...)

He had spent enough time with Imagine Breaker to notice his disadvantage already. His right hand's greatest enemy was distance. There was nothing he could do if his opponent fled outside of his arm's reach. So his legs mattered before his right fist. Valleys, moats, and other height differences were off limits because they prevented him from approaching within brawling range. If Orsola could fly through the air while controlled by Isis-Demeter, then she was just about the worst opponent for him.

Orsola Aquinas herself continued to smile brightly as if having a chat over tea.

That mismatch scared him.

She displayed no hostility whatsoever, and that made her impossible to read. He could not even prepare himself in advance for any pain that was coming.

"My, my. London is very dangerous at night."

"Here she comes, human."

"Now, now. Don't run away. Come here and take my hand, Kamijou. Boys generally aren't allowed, but you are an exception. Hee hee hee. I will secretly introduce you to our dorm. Come see our cozy dorm where everyone lives with a smile on their face and there is nothing at all to worry about."

"Eight loops on the right! Dodge this with everything you've got!!"

Fran wanted to stick with her balloon, but Kamijou lightly kicked her away and used the force to jump in the opposite direction.

A fearsome, guillotine-like attack scraped through the midpoint between them.

When a tightrope wire snapped and released all of its tension, it could apparently fly around as wildly as a rubber band and sever a human arm or leg. That piece of trivia flashed through Kamijou's mind. When the colorful sundew sliced through the air like a whip, it was no longer a passive trap that captured you with its sticky fluid. It became a

simple deadly weapon with increased resistance. That head would now scrape across the target like a whip made with the roughness of a file. And that single strike had enough force to tear through a giant warship like papier-mache.

To imagine the level of pain, picture dumping a bucket of instant glue over your head and then tearing off the T-shirt solidified to the skin and flesh below. This was thousands of times nastier than just a knife to the gut.

“Another one.”

Kamijou very nearly fell into the danger-filled Thames without thinking of the consequences, so Magical Girl Aleis-tan rocketed into to him with her broom. This was his second traffic accident of the day. With a powerful impact, Kamijou’s trajectory through the air was greatly altered and he fell into a tree alongside the river. The many branches cushioned his fall.

“Cough, ugh...”

“Get up, human. There is no time to sleep. You need to fight. Right-8 is the sundew. So is Left-3 the flight and the initial Right-2 the Venus flytraps? ...Grapevines wrapped around an olive tree. I can predict the next motif, so I won’t let you waste this advantage.”

A god of war could be quite harsh at times like this.

And that understander knew how to motivate him.

“It no longer matters whether you are obeying Aleister or not. Don’t you want to save that girl who is about to fall before your eyes?”

“...”

He groaned but gave no further complaint.

The spiky-haired boy sat up with just the strength of his abs.

But the next thing he saw obliterated the serious atmosphere. Kamijou shouted while looking up at Broom Girl Aleister’s panties.

“...Hey, you idiot! What the hell is that? Explain it all to me. Is this just like with A. O. Francisca?”

“You two are polar opposites, but you reach such similar conclusions. Higher beings on the level of Aiwass and Coronzon are not that common.”

“Is that Orsola? Or isn’t it!?”

“I still have not figured out what the grape and olive symbolism means. I do not know what the world looks like to her, but based on her eye motion, she can perceive external stimuli. But after that, there is some kind of nonsense reconnection being made between her thoughts and actions. If you order someone to punch someone else, they might not like the idea, but if you distort some preset actions like ‘knocking before entering someone’s room’ or ‘breaking an egg on the edge of the countertop’ and use that, they will be much less reluctant. That would explain the extreme discrepancy between what she is saying and what she is doing.”

While listening to Aleister-sensei’s lecture, Kamijou scooted off of the flower bed at the bottom of the tree he had landed in. And he got straight to the point.

“So is it hypnotism?”

“Let’s not oversimplify. You’re reminding me of those foolish newspaper reporters who sum up the life of Aleister Crowley as nothing more than ‘wicked’... More seriously, I have seen no signs of a trance or strengthened suggestion, so it would be hard to call this a hypnotic state.”

Her identity as Academy City’s board chairman seemed to show through here.

“This is tricky because, while she is receiving external stimuli, a lot is unclear about how she sees the world, so I have no idea what would happen if I attempted to use Spiritual Tripping on her. That technique uses pantomime and astrological suggestion to bind me to my target, but it also takes advantage of the way the brain fills in the gaps when it receives limited information.”

“Wait, are you serious!? Now I feel like an idiot for facing that head-on in the Windowless Building!! ...Ohhh, I should’ve just hypnotized myself using Mina’s kitty tail instead of a five-yen coin...”

“If that level of self-aware action was enough to overcome it, I never would have singlehandedly destroyed all the monsters in that Golden cabal. I know giving silly names to your enemy’s weapons and operations is an old military trick, but I really will cry if you keep simplifying this down to mere hypnotism.”

There was a deep roar as if the entire atmosphere was being torn away. That was enough for Kamijou to duck down, but Orsola was looking elsewhere while floating in the night sky. Tropical colors were tangled around the pure gold halo behind her back. She reached out an arm that shined an alluring white in the moonlight. The halo unleashed a rainbow-colored torrent that could be seen as plant vines or bizarre internal organs. She seemed to be bombing an entirely different area a few kilometers away.

She launched several shots in quick succession.

Across the winding river a giant clock tower rose from the Houses of Parliament. Kamijou thought it was called Big Ben, but he vaguely recalled hearing it had been renamed. Regardless, Orsola floated with her back to that tower, so the halo behind her back looked like the clock face.

“What is she doing...?”

“Ghhh.” Othinus held her small head. “Left-3, Right-2, Left-5, Left-6...there’s still more!? Damn, she’s looping it around every finger on both hands and it’s mixing the symbols together. There’s so much noise...!”

“That is what happens when you try to view it all at once in order to act the wise god. From the look of things, I imagine she is making ten simultaneous commands using all ten fingers. And instead of commanding ten different people, she is commanding ten different disasters. You must remain calm enough to temporarily throw this in a box labeled ‘mixed’.” The genius known as a fool maintained a composed expression. “Isis-Demeter’s top priority must be Aleister Crowley. That means every last one invading London: the many Crowley’s Hazards and me as I exist in parallel here. Assume that each shot is destroying an average of fifty to one hundred of me. Of course, that blood sacrifice will defrag and optimize ‘this me’, so it is not a real problem.”

Someone sat by the riverside.

It was the female knight in silver armor and a surcoat.

“...Ah, ahh...”

Her horse was trained for patrols around Buckingham Palace, but she was more clinging to its thick neck than holding its reins.

Was she shocked by this overwhelming force?

Or was she being crushed by the weight of the guilt she felt upon seeing the wartime madness created by a fellow knight like Sir Mirates?

The silver girl gave an interested smile from her broom.

“I have seen that lady a few times now, but...I see. So is she the black spot of a large army?”

“?”

“That is a piece of battlefield theory, human,” explained the military god on his shoulder. “When a certain number of soldiers take group action, there will inevitably be those who disobey orders out of benevolence or to follow their conscience. When a group of soldiers forms a firing line, some will only pretend to fire and others will fire warning shots that are clearly intended to miss. Even for professional knights and warriors, killing is as difficult as swimming against a powerful current.”

“And yet during uprisings of angry civilians or witch hunts driven by fear, even women, children, and the elderly will reach for weapons and readily kill. That is humans for you. Following your Thelema—your true will—is no easy task. Anyway, you could say that this knight has retained her senses even in the hopeless wartime atmosphere intentionally spread across England. During pressing situations, when the country or the current age have a way of changing people, people with a strong sense of themselves stand out.”

If someone were to think of an enemy soldier’s family while facing them on the battlefield, it might mean they are an incredibly good-natured person. Someone like that could be seen as a hope for all humankind, but at the same time, they almost never changed history through their actions in a war.

Standing still on a fierce battlefield would only get you killed.

“Is there any way to get her to withdraw?” asked Kamijou. “A single stray shot and she’s done for!!”

“Hm. She is fortunate she is on horseback. She might be in a daze, but spook the horse and it will flee to safety on its own. The common ideas of good and evil mean nothing to animals and they do not restrain themselves with self-discipline, so we can trust it to do as it should.”

The silver girl snapped her fingers. No, she rubbed some kind of dried powder between her fingers and let the wind carry it away. The horse gave a start and raised its front legs like that painting of Napoleon. It ran off somewhere with the female knight on its back.

“Oil, candle, stick, powder, mist. Simplified incense is the standard for constructing a ceremonial ground. That said, we can only trust in the animals’ wild instincts now. But what are we humans to do, seeing as we lack that?”

“We don’t have time to sit around, you pervert. If Orsola flies away from here, we’ll lose her. We’re in trouble if we have to chase after her. She can wear us down just by keeping her distance and firing projectile attacks at us.”

“Which is why I asked what I did: what are we to do?”

Kamijou answered the silver girl’s question by pointing to one corner of the London streets while still sitting on the ground.

When she saw the sign there, Aleister nodded in understanding.

“...I see. Is this what it is like to have a superb student?”

“We can’t leave Orsola like this. And you just saved that knight, didn’t you? I have no obligation to do what you want, but this is different. Still, let me make one thing clear: *I* will deliver the finishing blow,” spat out Kamijou. “However, she won’t necessarily come

to me if I call to her. Fortunately, you already said you would make the perfect bait. Can you do that for me?"

"If you insist. I do not know if it is intentional or not, but I cannot advance with Isis-Demeter blocking the way. I cannot approach my final destination of Westminster Abbey on the other side of the Thames."

The nature of Aleister's smile changed a bit there.

She spoke like she was trying to push someone away.

"Also, this is something I already told the #1."

"?"

"You do not need to stay with me to the very end. Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. In other words, do not consider unnecessary obligations, do not restrict yourself for no good reason, do not become trapped by search results and the amount of agreement found on social media, and simply do what it is you truly think is right. Worried boy, do not rely on others. Believe in yourself. In every age, that is the best answer of all. Although it is a thorny path."

"Then I'll clean up all of this mess and get you and Lola back to Lilith and Mina. And the first step is Orsola. If I abandon her, it's all over. I won't let there be an answer other than that. Not one!!"

Part 3

There was another form there.

It was a white form that was neither British nor Egyptian and overwhelmed the scenery all on its own.

Near Piccadilly Circus, which was famous for its theatres and shopping centers, Nelson's Column rose more than fifty meters from Trafalgar Square. Academy City's #1 Level 5, Accelerator, stood alongside the statue at the top. Once Aleister had left to do her own thing, this monster had also started doing his own thing.

"..."

A pathetically shrieking voice disturbed the tranquil desert night.

Accelerator held a fat middle-aged man by the ankle and dangled him off the column.

“So.”

He had done it himself, but the #1's displeased voice made it sound like he was holding a piece of filth.

“This atmosphere really takes me back. I'm assuming you're the damn old man named Hologres Mirates. And that means you're the shittiest of the shit who designed this goddamn mess.”

He had picked up this idiot at St. James's Palace.

The city of London was of course quite large, but if you paid attention, you could pick out the important locations. One: For some reason, the important Britons liked to stay in historical buildings. Two: This illusory London was full of scorpions, cobras, camels, African elephants, and other pests and beasts, but they unnaturally kept their distance from the locations held by the aforementioned important people.

Accelerator did not care if they wanted to indulge in the superiority complex commonly found in big cities, but if you lit bug repellent smoke in the jungle, you would give away the location of your secret camp.

Hologres Mirates.

Noble knights would apparently show off their flag and coat of arms during war, letting everyone know exactly where they were. Accelerator had not studied heraldry, but by looking around and gathering some sample data, he could quickly work out the pattern. It was not enough to call a code. In the end, it was only a combination of limited colors and symbols. And once he knew that, the rest was easy. The carriage stopped outside the building had the symbol prominently displayed, so there was no mistaking where to attack.

Unfortunately, this man was more of a corrupt noble than a chivalrous knight. He had grown so fat that the armorsmiths may have thrown in the towel. Just like tiny gnats, luxurious food, and gold bars could seem overwhelming and creepy if their numbers grew too high, just looking at his outdated, jewel-covered, all-silk clothing pissed Accelerator off.

“Whabh...bh....what is this? Dobh...do you know who I am...hbh?”

The man attempted to recover from the humiliation since he had nothing but his pride to cling to, but he suddenly stopped speaking.

Face, stomach, chest, and more.

As Accelerator kicked him a few times while he dangled upside down, the man's fat body swayed like a sandbag.



“You can piss yourself if you want, but you’ll only be hurting yourself there.”

“ ... ”

“How do we stop that thing? You designed this farce, didn’t you?”

“E-EEK. Are you friends with those nuns or something? They do not have pure United Kingdom blood in their veins. Those people just barge in, steal our culture and traditions, eat off of our tax money, and occupy English land. How can we accept people who...eh heh, eh heh heh, ahhhh...”

He got carried away and ended up trailing off partway through his rant. He must have finally noticed the displeasure growing in the monster who held his life in his hands.

“So you rushed into this war so you could send people you didn’t like to their deaths? All so you can surround yourself with identical thoughts, identical tastes, and identical smiles to dye this country in a single color?”

All the fat surrounding him may have dulled his instincts.

“You know what?”

“Yes?”

“It doesn’t matter if I’m their friends, you dumbass!! Do you not know how to look at what people do and decide whether they’re good or bad!? What do you even think people’s lives are, you piece of shit!?”

After tenderizing him with another five or ten kicks, Accelerator opened his mouth again.

“Get it now? This is what a villain does. The people who don’t do this are the good guys. Figured it out? Now, since you still haven’t told me anything, should I assume not even you can stop this once it’s started?”

“Hee, ahee!”

“Hey.”

“
.....I’m sorry, I’m zowwy. I don’t know what to say. What can I say to make you stop?”

There was no more dignity left in that man. If he returned to his mansion, he would probably be greeted by a giant oil painting of himself, but he was currently acting like someone clinging to a thuggish debt collector hoping to get them to change their mind.

He may have thought he was being extremely clever.

But in the end, he was no more than another puppet influenced by the wartime atmosphere. If none of this had happened, his fantasies would have remained fantasies. He never would have even considered making them a reality.

Of course.

None of that mattered to Accelerator.

“So this was all a waste of time? I can’t afford to waste any more of my choker’s battery, so I’ve had enough of you.”

“Eh? You mean...?”

Battered Hologres smiled as brightly as a spring flower, but he was fundamentally mistaken about something.

Let’s say we polled one hundred people on the street.

...Would even a single person be willing to forgive that man with a smile? Wouldn’t far more feel certain he would just do the exact same thing again if he was set free?

“I don’t really get how it works and there’s gotta be something crazy there if even I have to give up on understanding something, but you’re doing just fine after ten or twenty direct hits from the #1. You’ve got some impressive armor there, don’t you? That luxurious thing is far better than Academy City’s powered suits.”

“Eh? Ah? Heh. Eh heh heh. I wouldn’t say I’m ‘doing just fine’...”

“You are if you can talk back like that. Incredible. You really are incredible.”

Finally.

The bad feeling finally caught up to the man.

He would have much preferred insults to these compliments that felt like being strangled by silk.

Hologres Mirates tensed his fat body more than ever before as Accelerator continued.

“I’ve been extreeeeeeeeeeeeeeemely pissed for a while now, but if I lashed out at someone, I’d just kill them. Annoying, right? Well, I’ve grown enough to actually think about those things now. I’ve learned my lesson, so make sure to tell me I’m doing a good job. So you see...”

“W-wait, please forgive—”

“I’m so very, very thankful I found someone who won’t die when I hit them and who I won’t feel even a twinge of guilt for attacking!! I’ve got nothing but thanks for you, you piece of shiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!!!!”

He threw a kick that would have broken through the front door of a nuclear shelter.

The man was like a shooting star.

Holegres Mirates’s body flew horizontally for more than a thousand meters. He grazed several steeples as he tore through the night sky and he finally crashed into one of the faces of London’s famous clock tower.

With a deafening boom, seismographs around the city registered a slight error.

Accelerator cracked his neck, reached for the switch on his choker, and spoke to himself in the most annoyed voice imaginable.

“Now, what should I do?”

Would he simply continue observing Aleister Crowley while she flew around London?

London was a city of security cameras. Could he gather security information? Or could he disturb that information?

Or...

Was there an option superior to observing Aleister? Could he really surpass Aleister by following the path she laid out for him? He could not just obediently follow the rules. But if he strayed from the path and was left behind, he would gain nothing.

He had to latch onto it. It was time for him to take the initiative.

The monster muttered the same thing once more.

“What should I do...?”

Part 4

Kamijou dragged his aching body away from the Thames.

Since he could not fly freely through the sky, he would have trouble fighting a battle with a large river between him and his opponent. Attempting to fight on Orsola’s field while she was strengthened by Isis-Demeter was unlikely to work out for him.

No, it was not the action of flight itself that caused the problem.

The problem was the distance introduced by the height difference.

“Hurry, human,” whispered Othinus on his shoulder. “She has already proven she will attack non-priority targets if they enter her field of vision.”

“I know that... Damn it, Orsola isn’t going to attack Index, Birdway, or the others, is she?”

“Worry about yourself first, you fool.”

This side of the Thames had more businesses and residences, so it had fewer landmarks than the administrative center. The only things that stood out were Lambeth Palace, which was the Archbishop’s residence, and a few small museums.

Thus the most visited landmarks were something other than tourist locations.

For example, Waterloo Station, which was one of the largest even in London.

And needless to say, this city was known to have the oldest subway system in the world.

“Run! Get inside!!”

“Shouldn’t a god have more helpful advice!?”

Kamijou Touma nearly pitched forward as he followed the subway sign and grabbed at the metal shutter over the giant station entrance. The station looked like piece of art or like a white stone temple, so the modern security seemed out of place. He of course did not have the key, so he intended to ignore any alarms and use the principle of leverage to break the lock.

He could not stop Orsola Aquinas from flying.

But that just meant he had to lure her into a field with too low a ceiling to create much of a height difference. However, the location had to be sturdier than an easily-destroyed home or business. It was still extremely risky, but by forcing her underground, his odds were at least better than zero. His right fist would reach her when their paths crossed.

A point in the night sky flashed.

“Get down, human!!” shouted Othinus.

The explosive roar arrived after a short delay. It was preceded by something flying inside the station entrance and tearing through the metal shutter like it was made of paper. There had been two “projectiles”. The first had been Aleister Crowley on a broom and the second had been Orsola Aquinas with a giant golden flower behind her back. Kamijou

pulled his head back just in time to avoid being decapitated by the jagged pieces of destroyed steel.

“Damn, this is already not going as planned. She went in ahead of us!?”

“As long as you can meet in a field with little height difference, it does not matter how you got there. Instead of trying to get ahead of her, you should follow the trail of destruction and give chase. Be prepared to use your right hand at any moment. If Isis-Demeter wants certainty and attempts to come back the way she came, you will almost certainly run into her. Don’t waste that chance.”

It was hardly surprising, but when he peered inside, he saw a modern tiled station.

When compared to the temple-like exterior, the recharge stations for ticket IC cards and the other machines looked strange.

“When she wraps the gold thread around her fingers, three loops on the left is the sign for flight. Hit that with your right hand and you might be able to keep her from flying.”

“You saw how fast she was moving. I just hope Orsola doesn’t lose her balance and fall on top of me...”

London did not have much of a nightscape and even the moonlight was valuable there, but the enclosed station went one step further and felt like a mysterious cave. Kamijou started to regret suggesting this plan. But Aleister and Orsola had already flown inside, so he could not run away. He had to rely on his cellphone’s backlight since he could not feel his way along the wall in this situation, but carrying that obvious light source in the darkness felt like asking to be killed. The more he thought about it, the more he questioned what the right answer was.

One of Kamijou Touma’s few good points was how he would simply ask when he could not figure something out on his own.

And at times like this, he was reliant on his god of war.

“To ensure you can use your right hand to attack, hold the phone in your left hand. Hold the light source as far from your body as you can. If Isis-Demeter targets the light from the darkness, you can at least avoid having one of those colorful carnivorous plants hit you in the head or torso.”

“Huh? The backlight? Why not the LED light next to the camera lens?”

“I will explain later, but you need to switch it on and off. If you have to press a button on the screen or front surface, you will end up shining the backlight on your own face. Do you want all of those carnivorous plants attacking you at once?”

“...Fine, but won’t I get my fingers taken off when they attack the backlight?”

“Also, do not keep the light on at all times. Start using it once every three seconds and then once every five seconds after you’ve gotten used to it. Experts can go ten seconds or more between flashes.”

“Why? To preserve the battery?”

“You idiot. If you don’t want those creepy carnivorous plants attacking you, don’t shine the light on your surroundings and then look around. Use it like a camera flash to burn each moment in time into your brain. Shining the light less often makes it harder to target you. But this is also a warning: even if you only flash the light for an instant, you must never stay in the same spot. Move when you make the flash and wait until the image in the back of your mind begins to fade before making another flash. And if you choose to come to a brief stop, avoid flashing the light.”

“I see. You thought this through.”

“I shouldn’t have to say this, but do not shine the light directly on glass, mirrors, or stainless steel. That is one of the most surefire ways to get yourself killed when fighting in a dark area. Light up your entire body like that and you’ll be torn to mincemeat by her colorful attacks.”

...However, all of this relied on the assumption that Orsola’s senses remained those of a normal human. If her eyes had been expanded beyond the human level or she had been given some kind of sixth sense, she would have no trouble locating him in the dark.

But once he started using the backlight flashing method (even if he did not know if he was really doing it right), he started to question whether Orsola had really conquered the darkness. He saw benches knocked over, dented-in vending machines, signs of metal scraping across the tile walls, and shattered fluorescent lights. It may have been because she was moving so quickly in an enclosed space, but there were raw scars of her bumping into all sorts of things. That made an obvious trail to follow, but it also worried him.

Based on those many scars, it seemed Aleister had successfully lured Orsola into the underground area.

“I hope Orsola’s okay... I don’t get that olive and grape stuff, but she’s dressed like a dancer, right? Will that Isis-Demeter thing really protect its host?”

“Hey, human. Can you not shut off your adolescent fantasies even now?”

“This includes you, moron. Nephthys and Niang-Niang too. Do female gods have something against wearing armor?”

The small war god tugged on his ear while he descended a stopped escalator and entered the subway area. The scrapes all over the walls led past the platform and into the tunnel.

“Be careful.”

“Hey, Othinus. Do you really think the trains are running?”

“I doubt they are running like normal, but it is possible the Knights or Anglicans are using them to transport supplies. Regardless, I was talking about the electricity. With a subway, you’ll be roasted if you step on the power supply rail, commonly known as the third rail.”

“...”

“It apparently doesn’t reach one thousand volts, but it is not a toy like the stun gun that idiot Aleister used in the balloon. This is the powerful current used to move a train, so touching it would normally kill you.”

More and more, he realized just how ignorant his suggestion had been. He could only pray he did not find Aleister and Orsola’s electrocuted bodies lying on the ground.

He had no idea how many British laws he was breaking, but he hesitantly climbed down onto the track.

A thick atmosphere of death seemed to be creeping toward him.

After walking twenty or thirty steps away from the platform, the regret was already pushing in.

“You’re kidding, right? There’s a fork already? It isn’t just one path?”

Kamijou groaned while noticing some small flowers poking out through cracks in the concrete and feeling impressed they could survive down here.

Meanwhile, Othinus spoke.

“London has the world’s oldest subway system. It has been modified so often that it spreads out all over the city like a spider web. There are apparently a lot of abandoned lines and stations that not even the subway maintenance workers know about, so I would guess the Anglicans have remade some of those into training grounds or treasure vaults.”

...His plan was to pursue Orsola and hit her with his right fist when they crossed paths. With a single narrow path, he could have done so when she made a U-turn and returned, but the difficulty of predicting her actions increased considerably if it was a labyrinth that spread out in every direction, possibly even vertically. He could try to chase her down and end up being hit by a surprise attack from behind.

“Othinus, can you track Orsola’s location and actions with those weird headaches you’re getting?”

“Don’t be dumb. This isn’t telepathy or channeling. It is only a subconscious warning when I vaguely grasp the image of grapes tangled around an olive branch from the movement of that nun’s fingers. And it is a lot like hieroglyphics that contain various meanings and scenes in a single glyph. That means I can’t sense anything without seeing her first.”

Of course, this situation had to be unexpected for Orsola as well.

This surprise attack would not work again.

It was all over if Orsola left the subway tunnel, realized the advantage provided by a height difference, and stayed put in the night sky. There would be nothing Kamijou could do.

“Right or left? Which tunnel? ...Hm, there are scars on the wall. I just hope Orsola didn’t circle around to sneak up behind me...”

“(You fool! Don’t stand there swinging the light around!)”

He had never been in control of the situation.

Something flashed deep within one of the two tunnels.

Enough colorful and intertwined vines shot down the tunnel to completely fill it.

Several Venus flytraps opened like great maws.

That manifestation of destruction approached while crushing everything in its path.

This was not the time to think about what the enemy was doing or what kind of attack it was. This was worse than a surprise attack from a train. It was like spraying an anthill with a hose. This was crushing every nook and cranny of the tunnel, so pressing up against the wall was not enough to dodge it.

“Waaaah!?”

He did not have time to think about his right hand.

If it had been a single path, he would have been reduced to mincemeat. Fortunately, he was able to run down the other tunnel. He had just barely avoided it, but the pressure to the air sent a blast of wind down his fork and it swept over him like a solid mass. He was very nearly sent flying by the compressed air.

“Argh, I screwed it up! Is Orsola down that other tunnel!?”

“Stop! What idiot would charge straight toward her!? On a straight path with nowhere to escape, you will only be unilaterally worn down with no hope of approaching her. Your right hand can only do so much. Have you forgotten you can’t afford to get hit even once, whether by a careless mistake or a nightmarish coincidence!?”

That meant he had to focus on that destination while taking a detour through the complex arrangement of subway tunnels.

However...

“Here it comes, human!!”

“What, again!?”

Whether it was still used or not, he entered a small tunnel which had the metal rails removed, jumped over a dangerous point where the tracks intersected even though this was a subway, and escaped down a Y-shaped branch line. He left each tunnel just before a torrent of carnivorous plants filled the entire thing. Running was the most he could do and he was worried he would lose his bearings as he took so many turns.

When he shined his phone’s backlight by the wall, he saw something wetly reflect it.

“Ah, what!?”

“Don’t worry. It’s only a tarp. This appears to be a relatively old section.”

Othinus sounded both exasperated and astonished. Apparently, both Japan and England chose to use blue tarps.

“I was right,” she said. “Part of the ceiling is covered. This may be makeshift rain protection while they wait for repairs.”

“The rails have been removed in some parts. If they don’t use this section anymore, would they really spend a lot of money on construction?”

“It is still connected to areas they use, right? If they leave it be, it will become a hotbed for mold and corrosion. Let the water get in and it could become an underground lake. Even reinforced concrete can break if water gets to the rebar through small cracks.”

They were fortunate the narrow tunnel prevented the carnivorous plants from swinging around like they had in the air above the Thames.

No, something did not quite make sense if they were simply being fired in one direction.

“...Hey, Othinus.”

“(Shh.)”

“Aren’t we being attacked from way too many directions!? Even if London’s subway tunnels have spread out like a spider web and even if Orsola is launching herself from place to place! It might be dark, but shouldn’t we have at least caught a glimpse of Orsola!?”

“(It is true the images haven’t entered my head since we entered the tunnel. But more than that, how is she accurately tracking our location inside this labyrinth? Since she is firing at us from beyond curves in the tunnels, it can’t just be the backlight. And with so many tunnels for things to echo through, I doubt she’s using sound either.)”

They may have had a fundamental misunderstanding.

Orsola Aquinas may have been using an even more disgusting method.

“...”

Kamijou Touma broke his promise to Othinus and shined his cellphone backlight around while standing still. Instead of just flashing it, he risked keeping it on. He tried observing his surroundings while moving the light around, but he did not see Orsola hiding anywhere in her flashy dancer outfit. He only saw the concrete ground, the rusted rails, a ceiling covered in black soot (perhaps from the steam engine days), some weeds growing from the cracks in the walls, and a few crushed cans that had gotten in here somehow.

“?”

Kamijou’s eyes stopped on something among all that.

“Hey, Othinus. Blogs sometimes post heartwarming photos of ‘gutsy dandelions’ growing out of cracks in the road, right?”

“What is it, human? This really isn’t the time.”

“...I’m not going to say things can’t grow out of the asphalt or concrete. But would weeds really grow in a subway tunnel? In parts that never get any sunlight, I mean.”

“Wait.” The tiny Magic God groaned while sitting on the boy’s shoulder. “Is that what that plant weapon is doing!?”

Part 5

“I see,” muttered Leivinia Birdway as she brushed her blonde hair off of her shoulder. She was mildly irritated by the silver sand getting in it.

She had not carelessly set foot inside Waterloo Station.

She was fine as long as the female knight did not pursue her. She was looking at a metal grate on the road. It was a vent to let out the stagnant subway air.

Sprout-like things that resembled a skinny white beard were tangled all over it.

Were they roots or vines?

It was possible you would never discover the exact species by poring through a botanical encyclopedia.

At any rate, the fact that she could see this held great meaning.

Birdway muttered under her breath with her tone more than half colored by exasperation.

“...Curse that Isis-Demeter. Has she spread the roots and vines of her carnivorous plants all across London’s subway tunnels?”

The veracity of the claim was unclear, but it was said that London’s subway structure would circumnavigate the globe two and a half times if it was all laid out end to end. A certain Egyptian goddess was said to have brought a different god back to life and a certain Greek goddess was said to have such great authority that the season of spring required her permission. And Isis-Demeter was no longer either of those. This oasis goddess decorated in silk and gold controlled all water and greenery on the planet, so she had the power to instantly control an area that covered a mere two and half times the circumference of the earth.

“Uuh!?”

“...Yeah.”

After regrouping once more, Index and Karasuma Fran groaned simultaneously.

Now, had Birdway realized that those two were both deeply connected to the Anglican Church and had both been modified by Lola Stuart so she could directly control them?

Two and a half times the circumference of the earth was nothing. No matter where Orsola Aquinas herself stood, she could place “turrets” anywhere in the tunnel network and establish a crossfire wherever she liked.

The leaves growing here and there acted as her eyes and ears. She sensed sound when the thin leaves vibrated much like an eardrum and, by using photosynthesis, she could sense light and even sense breathing from the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the air. That gave her multiple methods of searching for her target’s accurate location.

“You may have chosen the low-ceilinged subway to eliminate the height difference.”

Which side had been cornered by that decision?

Throwing a new trump card on the table had greatly changed the playing field.

“But you have found a true hell in there. You really, really have.”

Part 6

Winding paths bulged out in the thick concrete walls like a mole was digging through them.

The restrictions of a tunnel no longer seemed to apply.

Just like the roots of a roadside tree pushing up the sidewalk, the walls and ceiling were broken through, the thick tarps used to keep out rain were blown away, and vines thicker than Kamijou’s arm burst out. Something swelled out at the end of those vines. They were bags larger than a balance ball and they had a milk-pot-like lid on the top.

“Those are pitcher plants! Don’t let them dissolve you!!”

Othinus shouted from Kamijou’s shoulder immediately after he tore out the weeds growing from the wall.

The top of the heavy plant bag opened. It splattered a strange liquid around, like someone swinging around a bucket full of blood and guts. It may have been something like brutal stomach acid. As soon as some of it splashed onto the ground, a white chemical smoke burst out. It was dissolving the railroad rails and the concrete.

One hit from that and his bones would be showing.

Those weeds likely functioned as her eyes and ears. He had torn them out just before the attack, so she had missed her mark. But that method would not necessarily work forever. For one thing, he did not know how many of those leaves were hidden around each area.

“You’ve gotta be—”

“Do not relax your guard during this pause you created! Watch your feet, human!!”

Just as he prepared to flee, the god of war shouted at him again. If he had not heeded her warning and immediately altered his footwork, he would have stepped on a protrusion sharp enough to pierce the rubber sole of his shoe and the foot within. The ground was littered with fist-sized seedpods with thorns covering their hard shells.

“Your Japanese word for caltrops comes from a hard seedpod, after all. You were just about to fall victim to the trap in its proper form, human. Lose your mobility now and you are doomed.”

“I can’t let myself feel relieved at every little thing I survive. This is like a deadly forest composed of carnivorous plants. It’s a tropical rainforest labyrinth. Dammit, Orsola, where are you hiding!?”

Sweet aromas wafted in from all directions.

The air itself was being overrun.

If these roots and vines covered the entire underground area of London, it was possible Orsola could even bring down or destroy the entire British capital. It was unlikely she would actually do so since Isis-Demeter was on the defenders’ side, but it still helped sum up Orsola Aquinas’s power. She had far exceeded the power of an individual.

Fleeing the direct and visible threats was not enough to ensure safety.

Being in the network of tunnels was like being inside Orsola’s stomach.

“What is this place...?”

While running away as best he could, Kamijou eventually entered a more open area.

Originally, multiple tracks must have run in parallel there. It had to be the size of a soccer field, but it did not feel that large with the evenly-spaced stone pillars holding up the roof. Multiple tracks were lined up like in a switchyard and several hemispherical tunnels were opened on the walls. It must have been very old because the ceiling was blackened by a thick layer of soot. That had likely been caused by the smoke rising from steam engines. That made the occasional blue tarp look extremely out of place.

And.

Kamijou’s cellphone backlight illuminated a small figure sitting with their back against one of the square pillars.

“Aleister!?”

“...”

The silver girl slowly raised her head when she heard Kamijou’s shout. Her usual spirit was nowhere to be found. He did not know how badly injured she was since he had not stripped her and taken a look, but she did not seem to be doing well.

Several objects larger than basketballs were attached to her cape and blazer. They looked something like the metal balls used to restrain prisoners and slaves in an older age. Those cocklebur-like plants must have slowed her down enough for the other attacks to hit her. It was extraordinary that she was even in one piece after taking the full brunt of Orsola’s fierce attacks which had broken the iron bridge. Aleister was a monster in her own right.

The silver girl's breathing was shallow and she held one eye shut as she moved her lovely lips.

"...It wasn't..."

"What?"

"It wasn't physical. Be careful. That is more—"

"Hey, you can hear me, right? Aleister, I can barely hear you, so just nod or shake your head! Hey!!"

His voice did not seem to be reaching her.

The silver girl tilted to the side and then collapsed to the ground like a broken doll.

Her arms, legs, and short skirt were sprawled out, her hips were twisted in a way that looked painful, and she stopped moving.

It wasn't physical.

"...Honestly, this is the best she can do after having the nerve to lecture a god about olives and grapes? Is she just too clever for her own good, or is it that foolish human's curse to never have anything go the way she wants?"

What had that meant? And was it really worth saying out loud? Orsola Aquinas was possessed by Isis-Demeter. That was a magical item, so didn't they already know it was not something physical?

"It looks like she has a few lacerations, some chemical burns, and a blow to the head. Don't shake her. It's a miracle she wasn't more badly hurt. And this was a miracle she caused herself."

Othinus warned him when he grabbed Aleister's shoulder to prop her up.

Even Aleister Crowley was reduced to this.

Hiding behind the adult's back was no longer an option. From here on, Kamijou Touma really would have to do it himself.

"...Othinus. We have no guarantee from here on out. You should look for a chance and escape to the surface. There should be plenty of escape routes at your size."

"Do not be silly, human. My spot is here on this shoulder. If you want to save me, then find a way to keep yourself alive."

They heard the sharp sound of the air being torn apart.

Something lurked in the darkness.

“Right-8. But there are some we haven’t seen as well.”

He did not have time to aim the cellphone in that direction. It must have been a kind of algae with the same bioluminescent luciferase found in fireflies. The entire soccer-field-sized space was lit up by a sticky, pale green light. But Othinus whispered to him without relying on that light.

“Be careful.”

“...”

“Left-6. Keep in mind that a light provided by the enemy can be taken away at any time. If you don’t want to be suddenly thrown into darkness and pummeled from all directions, keep your own light source at the ready.”

With pale light filling the large space, they could see something walking out of one of the many tunnels. It was a flower goddess guarded by several sundew whips. The beautiful woman’s sexy body was adorned with silk and gold as if to symbolize a colorful oasis.

“My, my, my.”

With her hands clasped in front of her large chest and a giant flower behind her back, she smiled and walked closer, step by step. A quintuple gold bracelet glittered at her right wrist.

With each step, a cross shook unreliably at her chest.

She did not use the flight she had relied on before.

A vine of gold thread was tangled around her right hand’s index and middle fingers and her left hand’s middle and ring fingers.

Left-4.

She must have learned she could not make use of her greatest advantage while trapped below the tunnel’s low ceiling. Or did she no longer feel she needed it now that she controlled this entire underground area? With an odd sprouting sound, all of the parallel tunnels were blocked with giant flowers.

Othinus gave a quiet warning from his shoulder.

“...Butterworts. If the flowers alone are that big, the sticky leaves must cover the entire interior of the tunnels. Try to escape down there and you will be trapped.”

With that, she had created an inescapable underground colosseum.

“Walking around at night won’t do you any good, Kamijou. All the standard tourist locations are closed. But if you take a nice, warm bath and sleep below a fluffy blanket, it will be morning in no time. *Don’t worry. I will keep away all the scary things.*”

“...”

“Hee hee hee. How about you start by curing that jetlag? If you like, I could sing you a lullaby.”

Isis-Demeter.

Why had she directly shown herself when she could position “turrets” wherever she liked and attack from any direction? It was even possible the goddess herself could have escaped to the surface.

The answer was simple.

While Aleister lay unconscious on the ground, she held a plant in her hand. The goddess had scattered plants as her eyes and ears and this was likely one of those. Aleister had pulled out all of the sensory weeds that covered this large space. She had created a black box that forced a personal visit from Isis-Demeter herself.

She had left behind an opportunity.

Kamijou could not let that go to waste.

“(Is it camouflage, or is she making multiple simultaneous attacks? Be careful, human. Her olive fingers already have several grape vines wrapped around them.)”

Kamijou stared straight ahead while listening to Othinus’s whispered advice.

“...Orsola Aquinas...”

“Yes. Please enjoy London, the city of fog, magic, and tea.”

The smile on her face did not fit the situation.

The cross at her chest swayed slightly, like a trapped heart.

Colorful plants tangled around the halo behind her and countless vines shot out with the grotesque force of spewing entrails.

Part 7

From the beginning, Kamijou Touma may not have had much of a chance against Orsola Aquinas even in a direct battle. What did it matter that she had lost the height difference provided by flight? By tangling rainbow-colored plants around the halo behind her, she could swing around several plesiosaur-like carnivorous plant vines.

It was a horizontal strike.

The dominoes everyone had worked so hard to line up were mercilessly knocked over. Just one of the “plesiosaurs” crashed through the dozens of stone columns supporting the vast space as it swung toward Kamijou’s body.

Venus flytraps welled up like lumps or bubbles and they opened like wicked iron maidens.

“Ohhhhhhh!!!???”

He could only shout and swing his right hand around.

The colorful mass of carnivorous plants withered away, tore off, and flew away on contact, but he could not forget that twelve of them had shot out from the halo. Did it really affect the overall battle if just one or two of them withered?

“Twelve!?”

“Don’t be fooled! Look at the type and you’ll see they’re all the same attack! She can do it all with just two loops around a single right finger!!”

A dull sound burst out.

One after another, three “plesiosaurs” rushed in like a straight punch in boxing. After he dodged two and blew away the third with his right hand, another one arrived along a large arc.

He had failed to predict it.

In boxing terms, it was a hook. No, it was a body blow targeting his side. He just barely avoided being chomped by some leaves that resembled a bear trap, but he could not avoid the collision. The solid hit sent Kamijou Touma flying like a scrap of paper in the wind.

A dull scraping sound exploded from his ribs and all oxygen was forced from his lungs, so he could not even scream. He bounced and rolled along the concrete ground. Still, he was lucky there had been no whip-like “bending”. If it had gathered strength like that, his torso would have been smashed just like the stone columns.

“Ah...bhah,bwahhh...!!”

He rolled and tried desperately to breathe, but he had bigger problems to worry about.

Orsola was still not finished with her first dozen attacks.

“Oh, dear.”

With a carefree voice, the sexy woman looked him in the eye.

The cross swayed at her chest.

She did so even though the spiky-haired boy was lying face up on the ground. That blonde beauty decorated in silk and gold was standing upside down on the low ceiling. The squishing sound would be her stepping on a blue tarp meant to keep rain out.

Flight. Left-3. She had not abandoned that option.

The remaining Venus flytraps were released from the halo behind her back. It may have been like approaching to point-blank range before firing to increase the damage done by a shotgun. Of course, he could not stop all seven approaching attacks with his single right hand.

“Dodge, human!!”

“...!!!???”

He could only desperately roll to the side. One after another, the bundles of vines punched through the concrete ground in pursuit of him. This drew a dotted line of destruction, like the aftermath of a spray of Vulcan cannon gunfire.

For Orsola Aquinas, that had been a single action.

The symbol of the grapevine wrapped around the olive tree could take countless forms.

She must have felt no need to finish him off quickly. Or rather, it was unclear if she was even aware she was fighting. What did the world look like to that smiling woman who was exposing so much of that reflectively white skin?

“Orsola!!”

“Left-8? Be on your guard, human! This is a new loop number!!”

Even if he tried to attack in the moment she landed, the giant petals of the rafflesia shields kept him from moving.

Of course, it did not end there.

“Hee hee hee.”

As Orsola slowly turned toward him, the low ceiling seemed to split open and several giant objects dangled down.

The laughing nun brought her hands together in front of her chest. She kept her palms apart with just the fingertips touching as gold vines wrapped around those fingers.

(What? Right-6 and Left-7!?)

“How about I lead you elsewhere? Yes, how about we leave this gloomy place and head up to the surface?”

Pomegranate and garden balsam.

The giant fruits swelled up larger than Orsola and then burst like directional mines.

There was no room for his right hand.

Hundreds of small “bullets” covered not just a point or a line but an entire surface. They struck Kamijou Touma’s entire body like a wall.

“Human, you fool!!”

The spiky-haired boy trembled as he rolled along the ground and palm-sized Othinus clung to his clothing and shouted at him.

“Why would you protect me when I can’t even fight!? Besides, I have no hope if you’re defeated!!”

Kamijou could not even get up, so she could protest all day and it would not give him a chance to redo it. The boy desperately attempted to suppress his body’s convulsions as the blonde beauty’s feet left the concrete floor with that gentle smile still on her face.

Colorful vines tangled around the golden halo behind her. Mixed. Unable to keep up with the multiple simultaneous signs, Othinus grimaced as if from a headache.

“...Think.”

But at times like this, that god of war and magic was quick to change her train of thought.

No matter how rough the emotional noise was, her horribly rational thoughts continued all the same.

“Think, human!! What does the grape matter? What does the olive matter? You cannot create something from nothing, so there must be a secret to her strength. That girl must have had something of equal value taken from her. Can we really let that happen? Aleister cannot save his daughter, that human girl has something taken from her, you simply die

without being able to do a thing, and I am alone once more. ...I won't allow it. I will never allow all of this to go exactly as that Great Demon wants!!"

"..."

Those words shook something inside Kamijou as he lay collapsed on the ground.

The trembling of his fingertips briefly stopped.

That allowed him to rub the head of the tiny understander who was clinging to his coat and wailing.

"Human...?"

Something had bothered him.

The Divine Mixture was undeniably powerful. Isis-Demeter alone could do all this, but there had also been Ra-Zeus, Osiris-Hades, Tefnut-Artemis, and Wadjet-Leto. What would have happened if they had all been properly fused with a human host and sent out to fight? No matter how many Crowleys had invaded, they might have crushed them all literally without breaking a sweat.

But that had not happened.

According to Lessar and Birdway who had been hired as couriers, hastiness and a misunderstanding had led the Divine Mixtures to be removed from the British Museum without being used properly. They had been connected to the ley lines in the earth rather than a human and they had been wielded in an imperfect form.

So.

In that case.

"...What was...wrong...?"

Even now, more and more colorful vines were covering the giant halo behind Orsola's back. Just like watching a pie chart slowly but surely fill in. The carnivorous plants continued to be loaded, like a bowstring being drawn to the limit. No, there were a lot of gold threads tangled around her fingers. It was possible she was also attacking some people located elsewhere.

Most likely, this one would be devastating. A single hit would be game over.

Kamijou Touma would be smashed to pieces.

"Why exactly do the Divine Mixtures desire people???"

Magic was not Kamijou's area of expertise, but there was something he could sort of picture here. When comparing the power running through a human body and the power running through the earth, the latter seemed like it had to be stronger. And yet Isis-Demeter had chosen the former. Why? And unlike Agnese or Lucia, Orsola Aquinas did not specialize in combat.

That meant its goal was not the strength of the power it would gain.

It was not hoping for a special boost like it might get from Saints like Kanzaki Kaori or Acqua of the Back or Magic Gods like Othinus or Nephthys.

"Hey, Orsola."

"Yes?"

"Why are you like *that*?"

"Hm? Is there anything odd about me? A train could run through this subway tunnel at any time, so isn't it perfectly natural to want to move elsewhere and avoid that danger? So how about we head to the surface and get to the women's dorm?"

She slowly tilted her head and the motion caused the cross to sway at her chest.

Orsola did not seem to question her near-nudity or her deadly actions. The connections in her head may have been altered to create a mismatched form of consistency there.

Yes, and he had a question about that.

Kamijou Touma did not know the exact situation that led Orsola Aquinas to use Isis-Demeter. But if she had not been forced into it like a living sacrifice, then she had done so of her own free will in order to fight back against the Crowley's Hazards.

In that case...

Why was her perception skewed? This was different from A. O. Francisca who had been forcibly controlled and ordered to harm people she did not want to fight. It was also completely different from Index who had a self-defense mechanism meant to protect the grimoire library. Orsola Aquinas had supposedly had the will to fight, so why mess with her mind after that?

Plus, there were the words of some transcendent beings.

Aleister Crowley had said it was not physical.

Othinus had said you cannot create something from nothing, so something of equal value had to have been taken from her.

“ ... ”

It may have all pointed to a single answer.

And if it was all connected in a straight line with none of it wasted...

“It can’t be.”

Mixed. Orsola Aquinas unleashed twelve consecutive colorful attacks.

Part 8

Agnese Sanctis was itching to take action.

She ran out from the British Museum’s main entrance, but the disaster was nowhere to be seen.

Had it flown into the night sky or descended below the ground?

London was already unstable with the fantastical Egyptian scenery mixed in, but a further dull tremor shook the city from below. Agnese kept her balance and glanced around until she spotted a four-wheel drive vehicle parked where it should not be.

“Hey!”

“Eek!? What, what!? Foreign languages scare me!”

To Hamazura Shiage, who was pressed against the driver’s side door after leaving the vehicle, it did not matter that this was a small girl. The language barrier combined with a threatening look was enough to frighten him.

“Did you see...um, how should I explain this? Did you see a woman here!? A shining woman dressed like a pagan goddess!!”

“You’re talking way too fast!!!!!!”

When his intelligence failed him, he could only shout tearfully.

When glasses-wearing Sister Agata walked up and noticed the disastrous scene, she quickly cut in.

“Please wait, Sister Agnese! He might look very, um, unsophisticated, but he still saved our lives. Without him driving us, the Crowley’s Hazards would have gotten us. We can’t treat him so poorly!!”

“Argh, Sister Orsola is only getting farther away while we argue...!!”

“When you’re in a hurry is when you most need to be careful! Shouldn’t you make sure you get accurate information!?”

Meanwhile, Hamazura Shiage could only tremble like a small animal.

He was confident he could have wet himself on cue at the moment.

“What is this? I’m in an unfamiliar country and surrounded by foreigners while they discuss something in a foreign language. It’s so damn scary. They aren’t discussing whether to boil us or fry us, are they?”

Just then.

...If they had looked in the four-wheel drive vehicle’s back window and seen the bandaged woman and mini-China dress girl relaxing there, Agnese and Agata’s path might have changed significantly.

But for better or for worse, fate did not choose them.

First, Agata ran over to small animal Hamazura, causing pink track suit and sweater Takitsubo to silently glare at him.

Agnese quietly clicked her tongue and looked into the night sky. Given who they were looking for, simply searching the surface streets would not be enough. It was possible she was straight-up flying.

Agnese could not ignore this.

She *understood* painfully, painfully, painfully well.

When they had all faced Isis-Demeter back then, there had actually been a few different movements. Agnese had seen movement from Oriana Thomson, a courier with no real faith to speak of, and Orsola Aquinas, who felt driven to it specifically because she was part of the noncombat personnel.

And there had been Agnese herself.

...If no one else volunteered, she would have had to do it herself. Or so she had seen it. She led those 250 girls, so she could not force it onto Lucia, Angelene, or the others in that same environment. But they also could not abandon England which had accepted them. If using Isis-Demeter would have been the only way to protect what she cared for, Agnese would have used it. Even if her nun’s values made it a forbidden power.

It had only been a slight difference in timing.

If anything had been just a little different, Oriana Thomson or Agnese Sanctis might have grabbed it.

And so...

(I can't force this onto her...)

Agnese ground her teeth, but she had no hint to help her search.

(If this was an unnatural occurrence propped up by something, I can't force everything onto her alone!! *I understand*. I really do *understand*. *I understand* just how heavy and painful that pressure is, and that's why I can't let this happen!!)

"Hamazura." The dazed-looking bob cut girl said something in Japanese. "If there's nothing for us to do, we should probably run away."

Just then, a metal grate on the road was launched straight upwards. It may have been the cover to a subway vent. Frightened Hamazura fell over and glasses-wearing Agata held him in her arms to protect him. And then...something slowly rose from underground. The overall shape resembled a body with a face and four limbs, but Agnese instantly saw it as a collection of colorful entrails. The oddly sweet aroma made her feel nauseous, but an even closer look made it look like a complex tangle of carnivorous plants such as Venus flytraps and sundew.

"Eek!?"

Hamazura Shiage tried to say something in Agata's protective arms.

And then Agata gave a shout.

"Sister Agnese!! Please run away!!"

What was in Agnese Sanctis's heart at that moment? Did she think she might have found a clue that would lead her to Orsola Aquinas? Or did she think she could not let anything connected to Orsola Aquinas kill a civilian?

Not even she knew.

Several brutal Venus flytraps opened their maws wide and moved to swallow Agnese headfirst. One of those thorny mouths moved with enough force to swallow her down to her waist and chomp her in two.

A moment later, something happened.

There was a dry bursting noise.

"Eh...?"

It was Agnese who uttered that surprised sound.

Just before the giant carnivorous plant's maw touched the girl's soft skin, it was seemingly deflected by an invisible wall and knocked back. It took all the damage, just like a human attempting to bite into a concrete block.

But Agnese Sanctis had not done anything herself.

She was not Kamijou Touma. She did not have Imagine Breaker.

So what happened?

Part 9

"Kh."

A dry sound echoed down the subway tunnel.

Orsola Aquinas had launched a rush of twelve attacks from the halo behind her back.

Kamijou's right hand could never deal with all of them, but there were no new wounds on that boy who could not even get up from the ground.

"...What was...that...?"

The one who gasped was Orsola.

All of those deadly attacks were deflected by some unknown force.

"Huh? No, there is no need to think. This is fine. Just fine. Yes, I must invite him in. He came all the way from Japan, after all."

Something out of the ordinary had occurred.

Her consciousness seemed to rise and fall like a ball floating in the stormy ocean.

It was unclear how she perceived this, but Orsola Aquinas slowly tilted her head while floating a short distance away.

Something flashed into view. It may have been the result of Kamijou Touma's efforts and it may have been the honor of someone else "fighting" in a completely different location.

Either way, something was seen at her fingers for just a moment.

...Five.

“You can’t...you can’t keep going like this.”

Kamijou Touma forced his nearly broken body to move and slowly stood up. His breathing was shallow, but he was not dead yet. And if he was alive, there was something he could do.

“Human?”

“I thought it seemed unnecessarily complicated. Why would Isis-Demeter accept Orsola who has no ability to fight? And she had already decided to fight, so why mess with her perception like this? But that was the wrong way to look at this.”

Orsola’s head remained tilted as the ground split open at her feet. The thread tangled around her slender fingers had six loops on the right hand and seven loops on the left. They had seen this before. More and more giant pomegranates and garden balsams welled up like bubbles. It was this explosion that had driven Kamijou Touma so close to death.

But things were different this time.

Even when they burst right in front of him and sent their many “bullets” rushing toward him, the boy did not even need to raise his right hand while standing unsteadily on his feet. Or perhaps it was better to say he felt no fear of them.

They almost literally were peashooters.

“It wasn’t physical.”

He started by borrowing Aleister Crowley’s words.

And then...

“The Divine Mixtures could not reveal their true power while unmanned. They needed a link with someone.”

“...Wait, human. So that’s it. This, Ra-Zeus, Osiris-Hades, Tefnut-Artemis, and Wadjet-Leto were all comparisons made by the Greeks with no concern for the original Egyptian myths. They had no intention of studying and learning and no intention of accepting these new gods they had discovered. From the very, very beginning, these Divine Mixtures *were spiritual items that incorporated the rifts of bias and preconception!!*”

Something audibly sliced through the air.

Right-8. Several sundew whips made horizontal attacks around Orsola Aquinas. These attacks had “bent” to build up more than enough power to tear right through a thick tarp, a stone column, or even a skyscraper.

However.

However.

Kamijou Touma did not raise his right hand. There was no need when Orsola's attack was meaningless. The smashed fragments struck his body, but the whips themselves passed by above his head.

This was what had happened:

"A refusal to understand. Intolerance. The Divine Mixtures take the malice of two people who have given up on each other and convert it into a physical attack."

"Oh. Well, if you say we do not understand each other enough, why don't we patiently talk it out until we do?" said Orsola. "Now, what will it be? Shall we play chess or do a jigsaw puzzle to help deepen our understanding? Would it be best if we eliminated this meaningless awkwardness before heading to the women's dorm?"

"Like I was saying! We might be using the same words and claiming we understand each other, but the more the thoughts in our heads differ, the more freedom this spiritual item gains!! Just like humanity's long history of fighting over words that everyone knows: war, peace, love, calm, the future, prosperity!!"

Orsola, whose sexy body was only barely covered with silk and gold, must not have understood what he meant. She only tilted her head like a child.

"Based on that theory, it would be like a generator or capacitor...no, a transformer might be closest," said Kamijou's tiny understander from his shoulder. "And I mean the kind that handles electric currents, not the robots."

It really was different.

Between Kamijou and Orsola and between Kamijou and Othinus.

The boy may have had no proof of what he said, but that did not mean he was not worth trusting. Othinus was saying she would supply the necessary trust.

It would not have worked this way if that understander had not decided to trust him and stay by his side.

Palm-sized Othinus clung to his jacket as she continued.

"The device alters an electric current by passing it through two connected coils of different sizes, but this is doing the same with the life force circulating between two people. Think of the loops around the right and left fingers. Of course, that does not directly mean anything in electrical engineering terms, but it is included in the symbolism of the gold

grapevine and the human olive branch. That way it can adjust the energy and convert it into the attack that best fits the situation.”

If this theory was correct, Orsola was not consciously launching attacks; the attacks were being automatically launched by the discrepancy in the size of the coils. All she could do was change the number of loops and harm her opponent with malicious words or direct actions.

It was unclear if Orsola Aquinas even intended to attack.

To use her for this destructive purpose, something else was needed to have her select the attacks.

“On the other hand, lining up identical coils is meaningless outside of some special applications. Because it’s generally like changing a car’s gear ratio. ...It has the user converse with the target so that they will lose hope. They will think the other person isn’t listening. The Divine Mixtures are some very gourmet and inconvenient spiritual items if they can only absorb energy that has been adjusted to a specific ‘voltage’ by the magical transformer. I will admit its effects are well worth that selfishness, though.”

No.

This had to be getting through to Orsola Aquinas as well. Aleister had said her eye movements suggested she could perceive external stimuli. She had said this was not hypnotism.

It was getting through to Orsola, but she was throwing it out.

That was the situation the Divine Mixture wanted.

It created a giant transformer, adjusted all that energy as it saw fit, and produced a direct destructive force. It trampled on the human mind to coldly benefit itself.

“...So this is the trick the Anglicans had up their sleeve,” spat out Othinus. “I expect Coronzon understood all this and hid them as landmines. They were reserved as Crowley killers. If these had been used sooner, the British Halloween, World War III, and the conclusion of everything related to my Gremlin might have gone very differently.”

The boy could only rely on his own subjective inspiration, but his understander’s knowledge had supported his theory. It meant so much to have a third party there, to not be alone, and to be accepted by someone.

She was supporting him.

So Kamijou Touma directly accused *someone other than Orsola Aquinas*.

“In that case, the only way to keep this magical transformer intact was to prevent my words from reaching Orsola! Isis-Demeter itself is just a device with no biases and prejudices. That plain viewpoint isn’t enough. No matter how much power it can suck up from the ley lines or whatever, it all goes to waste if it can’t be adjusted to the proper value! So you did this! Isis-Demeter needed a human, so you distorted Orsola’s perception even though she had already decided to fight!! You didn’t surround her with malice. You set her up so we would naturally think there was something wrong with her when we saw her!!”

“No, there is nothing wrong with my perception. I can see everything just fine. Now, there is no need to talk about magic. Everyone is waiting at the women’s dorm, so let’s throw an early Christmas party and have some fun.”

She spoke like a kind mother confiscating a knife from a small child trying to help cook.

Under normal conditions, her view may have been fine.

An acquaintance was visiting, so there may have been nothing wrong with setting aside everything about the Anglican Church and Necessarius to instead enjoy the trip to England. But these were not normal conditions. Could Orsola not see that London had been transformed and Aleister had been badly beaten?

Had Orsola’s thoughts been twisted so much that she could see all that and ignore it?

Othinus sighed in exasperation from the boy’s shoulder.

“...Well, I can see why the arrogant Aleister Crowley was the first to fall. When newspaper reporters wrote all sorts of baseless criticism of her, that eccentric struck back by becoming exactly the wicked person they described and she even enjoyed frightening people with that identity. She never looks for understanding or tolerance from others. If the transformer supporting Isis-Demeter works better the greater the rift between two people, it would indeed be the greatest Crowley killer. Regardless of what anyone else could do, she could never accept it!”

“333...and dispersion was it? The terms related to that demon are so easy to forget.”

“Coronzon’s number and essence. Ha ha! I see, I see. This is very well made. I thought it was odd to have these foreign gods show up so suddenly, but it all converges there. The mixture of mythologies barely even matters. The important part was the magical transformer that uses human bodies as the coils and stabilizes its power the greater the discrepancy between them. The grape and olive symbolism made it look like it was all one device, but this was no more than the silly essence of that Great Demon who obstructs the world’s bonds!!”

Part 10

That may have been why.

Agnese Sanctis stood there in a daze for a while.

They had far too few samples to be sure while the London night become the stage for a defensive line and delaying tactics. It was not enough to risk one's life on. She knew that. But the young nun still spoke while facing that mass of carnivorous plants which had been torn apart and blown away all on its own.

"If we don't give up on her..."

She could not even call it a theory.

But her words were still decisive.

"If we don't see her as a monster and we don't lose sight of her usual smile...there's nothing to be afraid of?"

There were no hints.

Orsola Aquinas was not in front of them.

But oddly enough, Agnese Sanctis had found the right answer, just like immediately drawing two identical cards in a game of concentration.

Right—

Part 11

Once he had it figured out, it should have been easy.

Kamijou Touma did not need to clench his right fist here. No matter what Orsola did, there was nothing to fear. In fact, the more he opposed her, gave up on understanding her, and thought it would be easier to restrain her by force, the more power would come from the transformer that used the misunderstandings between two people. The more that power stabilized, the more she could overpower him and the less he could do. Isis-Demeter would send out power rivaling a natural disaster.

So how could he give up on speaking with Orsola just because she could not see what was happening?

So was it really right to remain silent just because anything he said would widen the wound?

To hell with that.

How would those obedient choices ever lead to the path of an understander?

“Orsola...”

He had been wrong.

He had been mistaken.

He may have been led astray by the precedent of A. O. Francisca being fully controlled, but even so. Would Kamijou Touma really *reject his opponent before even speaking with them and try to settle everything with violence? He had assumed no one would forgive Aleister Crowley even if he explained that human’s suffering. He had assumed no one would understand even if he revealed Lola Stuart’s secret.* He had raised the bridge before even trying, looked at his acquaintances stuck on the other side of the ravine, and claimed this was their fault. Wasn’t that the entirely wrong approach?

He placed his hand on a broken column to support himself.

He had no idea how long this large space would last. It could collapse at any moment.

Still, Kamijou Touma looked straight at her.

He looked at that symbol of London’s current war formed by the giant magical transformer that donned intolerance and a refusal to understand so it could shred everything people held dear.

“Orsola, that’s enough. It’s true I would be hard pressed to call Aleister a good person, but you don’t need to be so afraid. She isn’t going to take England from you. Aleister Crowley just wants to save her daughter. And to do that, she needs to find a secret hidden in London!!”

He walked toward her.

He was unsteady on his feet. He had seen an opening, but his previous wounds remained. Still, he could not betray himself at times like this. He had suffered from memory loss and he had experienced a Magic God’s hell of endless suffering where his body was pulverized so many times he lost count, but even after all that, his body would still respond when he needed to move and he gathered his strength.

He would save her.

He had to save her.

Orsola had worked so hard to remain understanding, so he could not allow that to be broken just for the differently-sized coils of the transformer.

He would not allow any further discrepancies.

If people were viewed as different coils and the difference between them was used to wield power, then he only had to approach her. Once the coils were identical, the transformer would cease to function!!

Meanwhile.

Orsola still seemed detached and her bare feet floated off the ground as she placed her index finger on her slender chin and spoke.

“Hm, I’m not sure what to say to that. I don’t know how much you know this person, but by Crowley you mean *the* Crowley, don’t you?”

Right-8 and Left-2. Several sundew whips were swung horizontally and the ceiling broke apart as acid-filled pitcher plants dropped down. Next, it was Right-7 and Left-5. Something like giant green centipedes flew through the air and twisted their bodies as they approached. They may have been a type of bladderwort or waterwheel plant. Each attack introduced a new deadly carnivorous plant to the colorful labyrinth. Kamijou took a deep breath just as one of them shot up from below to strike him in the center of the gut. The waterwheel plant had the force of a light punch, but just as his focus reflexively turned toward his right hand, a horizontal strike from a bladderwort sent the boy flying. It was pathetic. After saying all that, he had failed to eliminate his fear.

A refusal to understand. Intolerance.

Everyone knew the words peace and calm, so why did they lead to aggressive actions here? Why was she so detached from Kamijou when she was seeing the same things? This was not inexplicable or impossible to understand. He had to read what was supporting Orsola here. Her motivation was more than just anger and hatred.

The cross swayed unreliably at her chest.

It caught and reflected the light like a shed tear.

It looked like a trapped heart.

There could not have been a major change inside her. Even if she had reached for this great power, Orsola still wore that cross around her neck. She had not abandoned it yet. She had not been stained yet. Deep, deep, deep inside, she had to still carry the soul of a pious nun.

(So that's it...)

"Fear and anxiety."

"Yes, that's probably it," bluntly agreed Othinus after climbing back up to his shoulder. "If it was an ambition for world domination, she would only have to suppress her own desire, but with the fear of losing something, nothing you can do can prevent others from attacking. It can feel hopeless."

Orsola Aquinas had never cared about the big picture.

Lola Stuart's whereabouts and the invasion of Crowley's Hazards were not her main concern.

She wanted to protect.

She simply wanted to protect the women's dorm where everyone lived.

That was all.

And someone had used that feeling, abused it, and given her a push in the wrong direction.

They had led her to rely on the immediate power of Isis-Demeter!!

"To hell with that..."

"If you can reach that conclusion so quickly and face your true enemy this time, then you should be fine. Your hatred should not be directed at Orsola Aquinas. It should be targeted at something else. She can still be saved. And that salvation is named Kamijou Touma."

Orsola Aquinas's soul remained.

As long as she did not let go of that cross at her chest, it would just barely remain.

So what did he lack? He had stood back up, but how could he save her?

He had to view the fear and anxiety inside Orsola Aquinas. She was *certain* that people she cared for would be harmed and lose their home. He had to shatter that groundless fear.

She had to be told Aleister Crowley was not like that.

And the only person who could do that was the boy who had climbed the Windowless Building and experienced the secrets of the Golden cabal!!

“It all began when a magician named Mathers summoned Great Demon Coronzon. The demon was ordered to bring down and kill Aleister Crowley and that command eventually led to Aleister’s daughter Lola being possessed. Orsola, this affects you. You can never protect England if you don’t free Lola Stuart from Coronzon’s control!!”

“Really?”

It was a casual word. His words were clearly entering one ear and leaving the other.

Bright colors tangled around the halo behind her back. Kamijou told himself to not be afraid. If he felt no fear, Isis-Demeter’s attacks would have no effect.

Don’t give up. Don’t give in. Keep explaining, no matter how many times it takes.

The amount of effort he exerted was not the issue. The question was how much she understood. If he felt anger because his efforts had been wasted, Isis-Demeter would regain its destructive power.

He would be fine as long as he directly faced Orsola and approached her step by step. All of her many attacks would be smashed and destroyed upon contact.

She could perceive external stimuli.

No matter what it looked like on the surface, it was impossible that his words were not reaching her deep down. Even if it was a little at a time, he had to pull Orsola Aquinas’s soul to the surface. Once her horribly blurred vision came back into focus, his words were sure to reach her. She would understand.

Let us review something that goes without saying.

Kamijou and Orsola thought of completely different meanings when exchanging identical words like peace, calm, and defense. Orsola wanted to protect the cozy women’s dorm and she could not bear to see their home destroyed. Those feelings had been manipulated to bind her with intolerance and a refusal to understand, but she herself was not an aggressive and malicious person.

From here on, he could never lose sight of who she was, no matter what she might say!!

“Aleister Crowley *is not at fault.*”

“Why not?”

“I’ve probably suffered tens of thousands of times more, but I’ll still say it: Aleister was a hopelessly pitiable human.”

“Hm, do we really need to discuss this? I want to hurry back to the dorm to surprise everyone with some enjoyable memories. And of course, Crowley is invading England in order to harm it as we speak, right?”

“Kh, the Anglican Church dragged out this Divine Mixture and pressed you into using it! And they knew what would happen and what they would be trampling underfoot!! Do you really think this is a one time thing? The root of the problem isn't Aleister. She's just highlighting the problem. Like I said, the only way you can protect the peaceful lives of everyone you care for is to do something about the person at the top!!”

“How is this a problem? I used Isis-Demeter because I wanted to.”

“Could you have smiled like this if it was Agnese or Lucia that had used it!?”

She paused for a beat.

No, for half a beat.

The cross swayed at her chest as if to show the wavering of her heart.

“But if the Crowley's Hazards had not attacked, no one would have had to make this decision.”

“It was England that created the human known as Aleister Crowley!!”

Orsola swung around the olive and grape symbols as she came dangerously close to losing focus again, so he shook her again. He would not let her escape. He would not let her become detached so easily.

Stand your ground.

Don't fear.

If she doesn't understand, keep at it until she does. No matter how painful it is, no matter how hopeless it seems, and no matter how much of a beating you take. Continuing to talk is not a wasted action!!

“At school, she was constantly bullied and abused by pious believers, so she grew sick of the god that protected them!! And after learning magic just to spite them, she found out even that only harmed her family! She took responsibility by destroying the Golden cabal and then her baby was killed just as foreseen!! And the newspaper reporters, who controlled the great power of the mass media at the time, all pointed and laughed. They called her wicked, a pervert, and a ghoul!! And you're saying she alone is at fault? She was driven out of a country more than once when people around the world gullibly believed everything in the newspapers and started throwing stones at her. There was no safe space for her. But can you still say Aleister was 100% to blame? You can't blame both sides for that!?”

“Looking at history, Aleister Crowley did many things warranting those labels. Just go to the library and you will see. Read the newspapers stored as microfilm and you will see bits and pieces of it. And if you compare that to the Anglican records, you might learn what was going on behind the scenes.”

“That isn’t the real Aleister... Those articles might include some ‘facts’, but they don’t say a damn thing about Aleister’s feelings!!”

“I will admit newspapers at the time were not the most reliable things.”

He felt like things had suddenly come into focus.

It may have sounded like he was just arguing more forcefully, but that was not it. Isis-Demeter separated what the two of them thought of when using words like love and peace, but that “diversion” of intolerance may have been losing its effect.

Arguing directly at each other was a happy thing. That meant they had reached the point where they could lay their arguments down on the same table. It was so much better than being ignored and rejected with a smile and unable to look each other in the eye.

At some point, Orsola Aquinas had begun to hold the cross hanging from her neck.

Was it a sign of subconscious worry?

While swaying side to side a bit but viewing everything head-on, Orsola opened her mouth with her focus being adjusted to protect the transformer powered by the discrepancies between people.

“But that means you have no accurate records to prove what kind of person Crowley was. Biased personal journals? Accounts by friends and acquaintances? Reports from school or the cabal? ...None of them are definitive enough to build an argument on. In the end, wouldn’t you find the least mistakes in using the widely-accepted view of Crowley?”

“I’m not writing someone off as a rounding error!! There was no place for her with her family or at the school dorm. *The magician named Aleister Crowley didn’t have anyone like you to protect their kind home!!* Her wife Rose tried to become that, but it all fell apart when their daughter Lilith died!! How could someone not feel anything after that!? How could there be nothing more than what’s written in those reports!? Don’t give up on her. Someone as kind and strong as you must not give up on her. Please!! Is it because it happened so long ago? Is it because it has nothing to do with your life now? Isn’t it cruel to ask Aleister to accept that reasoning? Isn’t that just telling her she can’t complain even though not a damn thing has changed in over a hundred years!? Everything is built on that foundation. Her return today is directly related to all of it. This isn’t just a natural disaster or a random attack on the streets!!”

“I see. But nothing you can say will change Magician Crowley’s evil deeds.”

The understander on Kamijou’s shoulder snapped her fingers.

After a short delay, a chill ran down his spine. Orsola’s short statement was far too broad. Without Othinus’s intervention, it might have toppled everything he had built up.

The god of war sounded somewhat exasperated when she spoke.

“That was hardly fair. It was so vague you could use it to attack Nobel, the Wright Brothers, or anyone really. Sorry to make this two-against-one, but this god is going to ask a question to place a weight on the scales. To what evil deeds do you refer: the historical ones found in the records, or the ones occurring the world right this instant?”

“I am talking about the present, not the past with poor records that can be used to prove anything depending on your interpretation.”

“That is fortunate. Even as a god, I’m not confident I could defend a life that shitty.”

These had been *frightening* words as well.

And yet Othinus crossed her slender legs on Kamijou’s shoulder.

“It is true Aleister Crowley has split into more than a billion Crowley’s Hazards which are making a simultaneous attack on the 53 members of the British Commonwealth. Every part of the world has been dragged into the war, creating a hellish scene that stains the planet itself with blood.”

“Are you saying there is some special reason for that? And are you saying the sacrifices are acceptable if there is?”

“Is that supposed to be criticism? Isn’t your position that you will protect that women’s dorm no matter what? The thing is, Aleister Crowley *has not killed a single person*.”

“Wha—?”

“And that includes the Port of Calais. I believe it was all a means of maximizing the efficiency of her magical power, much like a superconductor. Her goal is the defeat of Coronzon and that only required the blood sacrifice that she mentioned herself. So she had no real reason to harm people. Summoning a billion Crowley’s Hazards and allowing them to be defeated was enough to set a world record. Even World War I pales in comparison. That is enough to secure history’s largest number of war dead, isn’t it?”

Academy City’s #1 and a god of war, magic, and deception.

When those two had viewed Aleister Crowley and the state of the world, they had said that human had gone soft. This was why.

“Is this another product of the intolerance or refusal to understand that powers your magical transformer? Accusing someone without investigating the truth of the matter is all well and good, but did you never consider the fact that you have only placed the rope around your own neck if the truth is then revealed?”

There was nothing to be afraid of.

It would all be okay.

This time, Kamijou Touma really did directly face Orsola Aquinas.

The boy told himself to match her.

They were two humans, two coils. The transformer wielded the difference between the two as power and converted it into various attacks. Right-2, Right-8, Left-3, Left-2, Right-6, Left-5, Right-7, and Left-7. Orsola had wrapped that gold thread around her fingers in a variety of ways, but there was one thing she had never used for an attack: her wrist.

She wore a bracelet at the base of her fingers.

Right-5.

That was Orsola herself. Everything was shifted from there to create the deadly power. But if he synchronized with Orsola, deepened their understanding, and matched the number of loops, the difference between the two coils would vanish. He had to swear he would not let that magical transformer continue to function. He could not leave her alone!!

“Looking at what has happened in Academy City is enough to know that Aleister Crowley has hurt a lot of people,” he said. “And Aleister abandoned her own city and released herself into the world. From an outside perspective, it might seem best to push away that ominous symbol *just to be safe*. But you can’t do that... She can only be purified if she is forgiven by this country where she was born and raised. Nothing anyone else says can save her! This isn’t like Othinus who truly had nowhere to return to. It wouldn’t truly save her even if I became her understander!!”

“Has Crowley said that? And even if so, Crowley’s words are not to be trusted.”

“Yes, you can’t trust Aleister Crowley. She’s a contrarian who hasn’t even noticed what kind of happiness she truly desires, so accepting her words at face value will only lead you to hell. That’s not the future I’m risking my life to fight for!!”

“Why should we go to any trouble for a happiness Crowley does not even want?”

“I don’t care if she wants the happiness or not! *I* want to give it to her. And like I said before, Orsola, this affects you as well!!”

“How!?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Let me be clear about one thing, Orsola. Of all the people I’ve ever met, you are the most selfish of them all. Not Fiamma of the Right, not Magic God Othinus, not Kamisato Kakeru, and not Aleister Crowley! It’s you, Orsola Aquinas!! That’s why I admired you and why I wanted to protect you even if it meant fighting the Roman Catholic Church!!”

A sundew whip forcefully struck the boy’s cheek.

Kamijou Touma did not even flinch.

His trembling had finally stopped. Fear and avoidance would only be converted into the power supporting the attack. To strip it of its deadly force and survive, he had to look her dead in the eye and accept it. Not even Right-8 was acceptable. It had to be Right-5. He would match Orsola Aquinas’s core. Do that and he could truly view her.

He stepped further forward.

He now stood right in front of that goddess of spring and resurrection who glittered with gold.

“But...”

It was a gentle action.

Kamijou Touma’s right hand touched Orsola Aquinas’s soft cheek.

“Do you have any idea how much strength is found in that selfishness!?”

Then the other one.

He held her warm face between his hands and pressed his forehead against hers. And Kamijou Touma roared at her from point-blank range. He was not interested in some created goddess. He was not seeking the power to fight. He wanted to remind her of the much stronger and nobler power that only Orsola Aquinas had.

He would not let her escape anymore.



No matter how much Isis-Demeter tried to shift the focus of their conversation with intolerance and a refusal to understand, he kept himself literally right in front of her eyes so she could not escape.

It was like reigniting a cooled engine.

The boy did not hesitate to hit her with his words.

“Abandon violence and fight with your words!! Orsola Aquinas is the person who spread Christianity around the globe even though those people did not know of or want that salvation!! And all because that’s what she wanted to do!! You dedicated yourself to that greatest and ultimate selfishness, so shouldn’t you understand this better than anyone!!!???”

Isis-Demeter used the discrepancies between people.

So what would happen if those were entirely erased?

They already had their answer.

This was something other than the Right-5.

Aleister Crowley might have looked disgusted.

But the cross hanging from Orsola Aquinas’s neck was not a symbol meant to further conflict. Orsola had tried to remain with that cross even in this state, so if she could show a power different from the people Aleister had seen throughout her life, those barriers were meaningless!!

“If you don’t understand someone, don’t push them away. Walk toward them.”

There was no dramatic flash of light or thunderous sound.

It was only a quiet sound like a crack running through a thin layer of ice.

This was not just some lofty ideal. Orsola Aquinas had accomplished exactly that. Orsola and Agnese got along in the Anglican women’s dorm despite everything that had happened, but she could have chosen a different path. Orsola had arrived first and Agnese’s group had arrived later, so she could have said something else: *I can’t bear to live a life surrounded by people who tried to kill me. I refuse to let the former Agnese Force live at this dorm. Please go elsewhere.*

But she had not.

She had accepted them. She had smiled and let bygones be bygones.

Kamijou Touma may have been the one to save the Agnese Force's lives after they were used by Biagio Busoni, but it was Orsola who had looked after them afterwards. Just how much had those girls been saved by the pure smile on her face? That was something only they could understand and that was fine. What mattered was that Orsola Aquinas did have her own power to save. And it was a much nobler power compared to Kamijou Touma who could only clench his fist, hit people, and reject people's efforts by negating their supernatural power.

"Don't screw with me, Orsola..."

How could he let someone deny this?

How could he let anyone trample on this possibility!?

"That's something that only you can do, Orsola! It's a strength only you have! Not me, not Fiamma, not Othinus, not the other Magic Gods, not Kamisato, not Aleister, and not Coronzon!! The rest of us might talk big, but we always end up fighting! Only you *really did* let go of the weapon!! You surpassed any of us in virtue and strength!! ...That had to be hard on you. You're more honorable than any of us and you did something no one else could do, so don't just throw that away!!"

He would not let her escape.

No, Kamijou and Orsola had to be in the same place now. Now that the discrepancy between them was gone, his words could reach her and she would not mistake the meaning.

It had to be hard.

It had to be painful.

Looking away from reality would have been easier. But Kamijou was confident that would not happen. Because Orsola Aquinas was far stronger than Kamijou Touma who could not stop fighting. This was not just a groundless fantasy. She really did have the strength to approach a knife-wielding person with no weapon of her own.

"Ah, ah."

The cracking sound ended.

Isis-Demeter lost its support. It was obvious what was happening.

Her trembling lips uttered words that rejected this immediate power.

The cross at her chest reflected some light.

"What have I done?"

Part 12

Had Isis-Demeter even been fused with her in the first place?

You almost had to question that with how easily and vividly it happened. All of the intolerant symbolism of the silk and gold fell away from Orsola Aquinas.

Once she accepted her mistake, she threw out that power to fight.

Now that she had lost it, she could walk forward without looking back.

That feat may still have been out of reach of the boy who only knew how to face the world by finding an excuse to rely on the power of his right fist and fight.

Part 13

After losing the temporary power of the Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture, Orsola Aquinas crumpled to the ground.

“This isn’t over yet, human. You can’t live happily ever after yet.”

The small understander spoke those piercing words from his shoulder.

All of Isis-Demeter’s power had been lost, from the giant butterworts blocking the tunnels to the algae faintly illuminating the entire space. He only had his cellphone backlight to rely on. But this was not necessarily a good thing.

Yes, an escape route had opened up.

Worse, this was an old area with blue tarps on the ceiling to keep rain out. There could be a large hole somewhere. It was a lot more fragile than it looked.

“Isis-Demeter is neither good nor evil. It is not a talent or a character trait. It is no more than a spiritual item—a tool. ...Do not allow it to escape outside. If the Divine Mixture finds a new user, the grapevines coiled around the olive branches will regain their original power.”

“Yeah.”

Kamijou Touma knew who his enemy was.

His clenched fist’s target was not Orsola Aquinas.

“I know. I’m never letting it do that to anyone again.”

Vines extended in all directions from the gold and diamond decorations stripped from Orsola’s naked body and they moved like legs to escape through the subway tunnels. It was like a giant spider or octopus. With no set joints, it tilted every which way as it crawled and it quickly became a Rorschach test that looked different to everyone who saw it.

But at its core, it was meant to be with a human being.

Even with nothing attacking it, the vines twisted, shrank like plastic exposed to fire, and deteriorated. It would soon return to being an inanimate piece of art, but he could not let his guard down. It was all over if someone grabbed it in the very end.

“Isis-Demeter.”

He could never know if it still had another trick up its sleeve.

It was said that a cornered rat would bite a cat.

So Kamijou Touma whispered the magic words.

“I will accept you. So use my body.”

The many golden legs trembled in a different way from before. It seemed to be overwhelmed by a temptation it wanted to fight. And the Divine Mixture was no more than a tool. It had no sense of good or evil and it had no instincts to keep it away from danger.

It took the shortest possible route.

It leaped forward in the span of a breath, as if ignoring the distance in between. Its leg-vines spread wide, yet again changing what it looked like. This was now a form of predation. It was like a strange maw or the infamous iron maiden.

Yes.

It entirely ignored Kamijou Touma who had an absolute counter to supernatural powers and instead leaped toward Aleister Crowley who lay collapsed next to a nearby column.

“Tch, to the very end, huh!?”

Kamijou quickly changed course, but it was just a little bit closer. He was unable to protect defenseless Aleister and Isis-Demeter would regain its power.

However.

That was only if the silver girl remained truly defenseless to the end.

“Hh!!”

The silver girl had been as motionless as death, but she suddenly rolled to the side.

After missing its target, the giant spider-like mass of gold and diamond landed hard on the empty floor.

As a reminder, the Divine Mixture could only fuse with a human if they accepted and grabbed it of their own free will. Close to death or not, that desire for power had to be there. It could not contact an unconscious person.

And Kamijou only needed an instant of time.

“Pipe down...”

This time, Kamijou Touma shoved his right palm against one of the Isis-Demeter vines which had shrunk down like plastic in a fire.

“We don’t need a montage god. We humans aren’t weak enough to need you!!”

An odd snapping sound rang out, but it was not over yet.

The tool acted as a tool by using all its strength and moving its trembling vines around to grab at the silver girl.

“It’s honestly impressive that you’re willing to go this far to fulfill your purpose! I’m about to empathize with you like with a cleaning robot!!”

A loud bang exploded from Aleister while she was pinned below the vines. Almost like she had pressed a gun against the thing’s belly.

But it was the silver girl who clicked her tongue.

It should have had the appropriate force, but it had not pierced the thing.

“I used Spiritual Tripping...but can I not establish a strong enough link when it doesn’t have a humanoid form!?”

The links between gold and diamond crumbled and cracks ran through it.

But it was not enough.

Kamijou Touma and Aleister Crowley’s combined powers were not enough to fully crush it.

They just needed one more helping hand.

Couldn't someone—anyone—lend a helping hand!?

“Take this!!!!!!”

And then, someone squeezed their eyes shut and swung down a piece of brick that must have broken off when the stone pillars collapsed.

It was Orsola Aquinas who had taken one of the blue tarps and wrapped it around herself like a bath towel.

She did not rely on anyone else.

She stood up to the nightmare of her own creation so that she could bring it to an end.

Kamijou Touma, Aleister Crowley, and now Orsola Aquinas.

The addition of the third person clinched it.

The five loops on the right wrist were no longer necessary.

She only needed the cross at her chest.

You would have thought someone had poured liquid nitrogen on it.

Cracks had already filled Isis-Demeter, but now it ceased to function and shattered.

“And here I thought you would remain a damsel in distress to the end.”

This had even caught that war god by surprise.

Although that kind young woman would not want the praise of a pagan god, especially a barbaric one that enjoyed blood and conflict.

Even so, Othinus could not help but speak with a fierce smile on her face.

“...You're pretty strong. You're my kind of woman, sister.”

Between the Lines 4

They were on the Indonesian island of Bali.

“Hm, now that we’re here, it’s not that great. Maybe we should have gone with a resort where you can actually drink the water.”

It was December, but this comment came from someone lying on a special beach chair below a parasol and sipping at mango juice through a straw. Needless to say, Queen Shokuhou Misaki was in swimsuit mode. Perhaps because she was no longer inside the School Garden, she wore a normal white bikini over a much skimpier swimsuit that was essentially nothing but strings.

Misaka Mikoto wore a one-piece swimsuit different from her school one and she responded in exasperation while bothered by how the swimsuit felt on her butt.

“How can you complain when you have the girls from your clique catering to your every need?”

When Academy City shut down, its 2.3 million residents had gone elsewhere, but the students of Tokiwadai Middle School had naturally stayed together even without their teachers telling them to. With this much chaos, they were at risk both inside and outside Japan. Academy City was no longer functioning, but to continue teaching themselves to the “Tokiwadai standard”, it was best to remain with others at the same intellectual level.

(I wish I could have gotten Uiharu-san and Saten-san to come with us too...)

Those two girls’ families had apparently come to pick them up almost immediately. And it was hard to ask them to stay with their friends when family issues were at play.

Yes.

Mikoto and Shokuhou did not think this chaos would last long. People’s optimistic assumptions of safety had crumbled away during the heat wave, so this conclusion had been reached after rationally observing the situation.

“I thought there would have been more of a panic over the leaked technology ability, so this is something of a surprise.”

“We’re talking about 53 countries. And there are fewer than two hundred in the UN, right? That shows just how big a deal this is.”

“Yes, I suppose.”

Shokuhou Misaki did not seem to care much as she spread out her long blonde hair and crossed her long legs while lying on her back.

Her shapely butt was seated on something unusual.

It was an extra-large tin doll that added a bull's head to a muscular giant's body.

Academy City's #5 Level 5, Mental Out.

The blonde girl in a swimsuit twirled a TV remote in her hand.

"It seems there are some I can control and some I can't, so I suppose some are still human and some have abandoned their humanity... I wish I could figure out the specific rules ability behind it."

"Don't look at me. Defeating those things isn't easy."

Mikoto sighed as bluish-white sparks scattered from her bangs.

"Hot, hot, hot! You're roasting my back on this tin!"

"Well, why are you lying on top of a grill? Trying to serve yourself up as some beach barbecue???"

A girl who could freely control one-billion-volt currents was far too dangerous on a field where the ocean stretched as far as the eye could see. Those things would not have been directly targeting Bali, so they may have gotten lost on the way to Singapore which was militarily connected to England. The "army" traveling over the ocean had met a devastating fate. Since they had been rendered powerless out at sea, human-faced fish larger than submarines and collections of countless tentacles were washing up on the beach where they simply convulsed.

"So what do we do now?" asked Shokuhou.

"Are we really in any position to make decisions? Strength as an individual and strength as a group are two very different things. The Tokiwadai power balance might not apply outside Academy City. ...Nn."

While they discussed that, Mikoto felt a slight vibration from the waterproof cellphone held below her one-piece swimsuit's shoulder strap. It was apparently a voice app rather than an email. When she pulled the phone out and held it to her ear, she heard a familiar voice.

"Oh, that was a lot of lag. Is this going through an exchange? I hear things aren't going well for Academy City, so have you left Japan?"

"Papa?"

"...I really wish you had stayed in Japan. Well, no use in crying over spilled milk. Run to the nearest embassy or consulate. This is bad. From here on, the world's boiling point is probably going to drop."



To be honest, Mikoto did not know much about what her father did while overseas, but was at least a hard enough worker to get her into a prestigious girl's school. He traveled the world year-round, so if he was saying this, a major wave had to be coming.

Mikoto focused herself as she listened.

“England is especially bad. Stay away from London at all costs. Wow! What’s with that blonde woman? Eh? What? She’s naked!? Man, that spiky-headed Japanese boy sure is popular. Man, I wish I was him. Wait, no! Don’t tell your mama I said that! Anyway, you need to stay away from here! It’s probably the center of the entire—ahhhh!!”

The phone call suddenly cut out.

The app displayed the long number of an international call. When she analyzed the extra numbers attached to her father’s usual number, she found that the international call code, country code, and city code all indicated a call from London, England.

“ ... ”

“Oh, what is it?” asked Shokuhou. “Did you find something interesting?”

“Don’t you dare come with me. Got that!?”

“Um, where are you going with this?”

EPILOGUE

The Golden Approaches from Beyond the Horizon.

Dawn_to_the...

At any rate, it was December.

England was said to be relatively warm compared to some other European nations and they were inside a tunnel, but midwinter was still midwinter.

“It’s so cold.”

Those words naturally left someone’s mouth.

But it was not Orsola who had been left with a tarp wrapped around her nudity after losing Isis-Demeter. It was Kamijou Touma who had been unable to sit idly by and had lent her his jacket.

A lot could get through a single hoodie.

“Ababa, abababababa!? Wha-? Am I...am I going to be okay!? I’m shivering from the very core of my body and I can’t stop!!”

“Don’t be silly, human. This is nothing compared to the blizzards of Denmark, right?”

“How in the world did you survive that snowy region in what amounts to a swimsuit? Is it cause you’re a god, or cause you’re the type to not catch cold!?”

“Did you think I wouldn’t pick up on that because it’s a Japanese proverb? I am well aware that you say idiots do not catch cold.”

“I don’t think proverb is the right word for that!!”

Kamijou protested, but no one was listening and the palm-sized fairy pulled rather strongly on his ear.

Meanwhile, the perfect sexy young woman named Orsola Aquinas looked apologetic as she wore a boy’s school uniform jacket over her bare skin and used her hands to hold the chest and bottom in place. The giant butterwort petals blocking the way were gone, as

were the luciferase-containing algae that had illuminated the darkness. She was only visible thanks to the cellphone backlight.

“U-umm, should I give this back?”

“Oh, shut up. And how are you fine, anyway!? Does that cross protect you or something!? Or have we reached the point where no one on the magic side can wear adequate clothing!?”

“But wouldn’t it be better if I did return this jacket?”

“You’re just repeating yourself!! I think your habit of jumping between topics is headed in a new direction. And why aren’t you worried about your own nudity!? Don’t look at me with that benevolent ‘my, my, hee hee hee’ expression!!”

The only reason Kamijou had yet to freeze to death was the presence of a sexy blonde young woman who was a legit dorm manager and wore only his school uniform’s jacket, but he decided it was best to keep that burning passion hidden. What’s this? These chips taste even better than before, but they didn’t even raise the price. But due to his frequent misfortune, he actually began to worry about something going majorly wrong when he saw this kind of blessing.

“...”

“Ow, ow, ow, ow!! My ear’s half-frozen, so you’re just gonna tear it off, Othinus! And see!? The deck really has been stacked against my life!”

“You’re not hiding it at all. Your worldly thoughts are near impossible to miss. (...And it’s not like I don’t have anything at all in the chest department. Hmph.)”

At any rate...

“Orsola, London is something of a mess right now, so do you know someplace you can rely on? If not, I’ll leave you with Birdway who at least has the power of an organization.”

“W-well, there is always the British Museum.”

“Then you head there. Oh, and make sure you apologize to Agnese and the others from the women’s dorm. They must have been worried sick. Also, never again touch something like that Divine Mixture. Tell the Royal Family or Knights to get lost if they try to make you. Hologres Mirates? I’ll punch him, so don’t worry about it. In fact, I’m a little concerned I’ll accidentally kill that bastard the instant I meet him.”

“...”

A slight shadow came over Orsola's face as she held the borrowed jacket around herself.

The next thing Kamijou knew, she was gently holding her cross in her hand.

She had used the wrong method, but if she would just agree to this, she never would have reached for Isis-Demeter in the first place.

She had wanted to protect something even if it meant straying from the proper path.

But everything he had done would be for naught if she started following him around in order to repay her debt or whatever. He had to draw a clear line in the sand here. As cruel as it might be.

So what words would be most effective in holding that kind nun back?

"Fine, fine. I get it, I get it! I'll protect it!!"

He winked and pointed at her with his right index finger.

He was being very rude, but Kamijou Touma definitely made the promise.

"I swear I'll protect your women's dorm. And while I'm at it, I'll protect London, England, and the whole damn world. So don't worry, Orsola."



It was night at an unnamed Egyptian oasis.

Inside an RV parked alongside it, a calico cat named Sphinx finally stood on its hind legs and spoke in an extremely cool voice.

"Hello, everyone. It would seem the time has finally come for me to take action."

A displeased groan came from the crib.

Mina Mathers, the cat ears widow(!?) in mourning clothes, remained expressionless as she held the calico cat from behind and gave it a voice via ventriloquism.

"Yes, yes, that wasn't very interesting, was it? But this RV only came equipped with the necessities, so it is short on entertainment."

After using a brush to get the cat fur out of her mourning clothes, Mina Mathers gently lifted the baby from the crib. How many times had she done this now? Baby Lilith did not seem to like the RV's TV or radio, so Mina had to pick her up whenever she awoke from her shallow sleep.

Since she was more of a cat person than a dog person, the capricious widow(!!) was easily distracted, but she did have extremely high-level calculation abilities. Even now, she was enjoying a pixel-art fighting game she had programmed in her mind. She was not just imagining she was playing a game. She truly had programmed it based on the actual hardware specs.

But when her yoga warrior with extending limbs was pummeled by slaps from the sumo wrestler she had programmed herself, she could only form a small triangle with her mouth.

“Uhh, uhhhh!!”

“Call it unfair all you want, but I do not have the equipment to output the video. I can reproduce the household game system in my head, but I cannot display it on the TV. Sucking on me will not change anything. It is not my fault you are bored. Blame the product specifications.”

And while she held the baby, the cat ears on her head twitched. With dogs, it would be the nose, but with cats, it was the ears. The two ears could move independently and they could accurately pick up sounds like a directional shotgun microphone. They were sensitive enough to tell if the footsteps outside the door belonged to their owner or not.

Yes.

Mina Mathers was focused on something outside the RV.

(This oasis is a good distance from the Nile and it shouldn't be on any maps.)

The mourning clothes and cat ears magician gently returned displeased Lilith to the crib and pulled out a palette knife.

The fact that Aleister Crowley had left Mina Mathers here hinted that she had been considering the possibility of failure. And just like in computer security, there may have been no such thing as *absolute* safety in this world.

Whoever this visitor was, the risk was much greater if they were aware of her presence here.

The question was whether or not they were at a level that Mina Mathers could repel.

Should she use the palette knife in her hand, or the RV's steering wheel?

While the lady thought, the visitor arrived in front of the stainless-steel door.

And in a perfect show of politeness, a knock came at the door.



“Nee hee.”

Silver sand floated in the air and stone materials were everywhere in London’s twisted new form, but a strange sound was mixed in. It was so simplistic that it took a moment to realize it was malicious laughter.

She had a short and slender frame imbalanced by ample sensual curves.

She had rainbow-colored hair that spread out like an umbrella and had inward-curling ends.

She wore a dress of falsehoods made from English newspapers discolored yellow and brown, silver duct tape tightly wrapped around the chest and hips, and decorations of thumbtacks and pieces of beer bottles. She could not even get up off the ground, so she lay face down with her fingers grabbing the road surface.

“Nee hee, ee hee hee, cough, hee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

She was *something similar to a life* that was created based on the tree of evil. By possessing her target and spreading destruction, she could spill poison into unified groups and inspire discord and collapse. She was an artificial demon procured by Coronzon and made to match that Great Demon’s nature: 333, dispersion.

Qliphah Puzzle 545.

The translucent demon had a disconcerting hole in her forehead and her limbs remained weak as she crawled along the dirty road like a bug. Even so, she had not been thrown out. She had not disappeared. Aleister had failed to fully kill her. Aleister must have been satisfied with destroying all ten spheres, but the 22 paths were just as important for the tree of evil. If those remained, she only had to fill in the holes. She could *recover*.

However, that work would take a very long time to complete.

And no matter how ugly and extraneous her survival was, that demon would still take the optimal action toward fulfilling her given objective: driving everyone of this country mad. Even if everyone had forgotten about her and even if she had been deemed not a threat. Just like Great Demon Coronzon had remained fixated on Aleister Crowley after making a contract in the past.

However.

A merciless voice reached the crawling demon from above.

“Oh?”

That was all it took for the demon girl to stop moving like a stake had been driven through her heart.

The Greeks had created a legend upon seeing the Sphinx. What has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening? Humans. A baby crawls on all fours and an adult walks on two legs, but what did it mean for the elderly to walk on three legs?

This visitor's footsteps contained the clack of a modern design cane.

“Y’know, everything felt so disjointed since the triple-quadruple barrier was broken. An artificial demon and Divine Mixtures, was it? Those additional defenses didn’t seem to fit together much.”

“...Nee hee...”

“But if you force them to fit together, you can see what the original idea was. I mean, those Divine Mixtures expanded the misunderstandings between people and used the intolerance that follows, so it would’ve been a whole lot worse if you had possessed the user. No matter what anyone said, you would’ve maliciously ensured that no mutual understanding could ever be found. There’d be nothing anyone could do if a demon could draw out power rivaling a god.”

“Hee, nee hee, ee hee hee hee. Hee hee, heeeeee!?”

The last part was definitely not a laugh.

While the translucent demon girl lay face down on the ground, a cane slammed down next to her head with the user’s full body weight behind it. Her strange body was not what mattered. It was like her mind and heart had been thoroughly broken and controlled. And the peak spat some words out at that symbol of immorality who lay pathetically on the ground.

“Don’t worry. I’m not a good person.”

“Hee?”

“Because Aleister divided the planet between science and magic, I only understand one half of the world. And I doubt I can study up on the other side overnight. ...Come to think of it, I think Tsuchimikado was having some trouble with this stuff, but I don’t want to try it out before I understand it. I’m sure I would regret it if I did.”

Accelerator readily spat out the words.

A tear-jerking happy ending. The two enemies had exposed their hearts to each other, opened up and spoke with each other, and created a mutual connection.

It was all very simple.

But when Accelerator saw that beauty of the world, he could not simply rejoice and he felt an uncomfortable feeling like it was all so phony. Was that a sign that his very essence belonged to the evil side?

“Aleister is acting so modest that I find her hard to believe. I’m betting she would pretend to reveal everything to me while keeping the most important parts hidden. *If I have to decide between fully trusting that board chairman or fully mistrusting her, I’ll go with the latter.* And multiple sources is always a good thing when trying to increase your literacy on a subject.”

“Hee, hee hee. So what are you telling me to do? Hee hee hee.”

“I want to keep a hands-off, wait-and-see approach with magic, so when magic is necessary, you use it in my place. And when I run into an incomprehensible problem, lend me whatever bizarre knowledge I need. Make yourself useful and I will ensure your survival.”

The unnaturally sensual demon blinked like a small child as she thought for a while. Accelerator must have been annoyed by the irregular waving of the tentacle-like tail extending from her somewhat raised butt because he grabbed the end as it moved to and fro in front of his face.

“I’m only asking the one time. There’s no real reason it has to be you, so if you say no, I’ll deliver the finishing blow and try elsewhere.”

“Um, uh.”

Finally, the demon answered with her tail in his hand.

“D-do you—hee hee hee—do you mean...?”

“Make a contract with me, demon. That’s your specialty, right?”



It was a major commotion.

Orsola Aquinas wearing nothing but the coat to a boy’s school uniform was too great a bombshell. Othinus should have been on Kamijou’s side, but she was overcome by intolerance and a refusal to understand. And after waking up, Aleister did nothing but

grin at the boy's misfortune. Once they reached the surface, they found Index and Leivinia waiting. A horrific tragedy was unavoidable.

It was a tragedy of war.

There was only one way Kamijou Touma could sum it up:

"Such misfortune..."

"Constructing an environment where you can laugh off hardships is a good thing."

Aleister was even more beaten up than Kamijou, so the boy lent her his shoulders.

With her spot on his shoulder taken, Othinus dangled from the string of his hood while looking somewhat uncomfortable.

"I could not have hoped to win there. ...When Lilith died, I took my anger out on my wife. And that ultimately led to Lola disliking me too. Not even constructing Academy City gave my heart any solace. I was stuck in a stalemate, I couldn't stop attracting hate, and I couldn't make any progress. Until you punched me, that is."

"..."

They had taken quite a detour, but they finally crossed the winding Thames and reached the political center of the city. London's Westminster Abbey was one of the largest cathedrals in England's capital and even the Royal Family used it for official ceremonies.

"But, hm. So it was a magical transformer using the differently-shaped coils created from the discrepancies between people. Coronzon put some thought into that one...but does she have no fear at all? It was certainly an excellent Crowley killer, but to think she tried to connect to your inner side."

"?"

"Have you forgotten what happened to Rensa, the esper cyborg who readily hijacked the #3 or the #5's powers when ordered to by Yakumi Hisako as part of the Agitate Halation Project? She was destroyed the instant she tried to read you. A similar self-destruction could have happened here."

"...If you're not actually going to explain, I'm just going to put this off until later, you damn intellectual."

"Ha ha. I see. You are very different from those newspaper reporters who could never rest easy unless they asked for every last detail. I kind of like being trusted enough to have my hints entirely ignored. I can see why that Magic God desired an understander."

Kamijou felt a kick to his chest. The god must have been very displeased at having her spot taken and then having the usurper pretend to know how she felt.

Westminster Abbey was known for its two towers, but just like old stone castles and cathedrals, it was a complex mixture of different construction styles because construction had taken so long to complete. Perhaps because it had been built and remodeled over decades and even centuries, the building itself swelled out like bubbles, making it look like it was actually growing.

“What of Coronzon’s is hidden here? I mean, I can tell it’s an incredible building, but still.”

“We need not enter the building itself. We are interested in the graveyard.”

“...”

“I am not making zombies, so do not give me that look.”

Kamijou had heard this was registered as a world heritage site, but there were no guards to speak of. Had the VIPs left London after the triple-quadruple final barrier and the Divine Mixtures had been destroyed, or had all personnel been gathered to protect the capital?

Whatever the reason, there was no one left here.

Since they could have run into extraordinarily cruel warriors like Stiyl or Acqua, they were most fortunate it was abandoned. Kamijou wanted to hurry up and do what they needed to do in order to strike back at Great Demon Coronzon.

“...What I need is Mathers.”

“What?”

“I do not mean that figuratively. I have business with Samuel MacGregor Mathers himself.”

The silver girl said this while staring straight ahead and borrowing his shoulder.

However...

“But...didn’t you kill him yourself? Y’know, during that Battle of Blythe Road where you destroyed the Golden cabal.”

“That is why I am looking for his remains.”

The sinister answer was finally given.

“Did you forget? That greedy genius Mathers summoned Great Demon Coronzon before I did. And he ordered the demon to trip me up and kill me. In order to fulfill that command, Coronzon eventually possessed my second daughter, Lola. ...Mathers had long since died, so the demon’s work ethic is almost admirable.”

“What does that matter? ...No, wait.”

“Exactly.” Aleister smiled in an undeniably wicked way. “333, dispersion. At the foundation, Great Demon Coronzon is supported by her connection to Mathers. Coronzon claimed killing me had severed that connection to Mathers, but is that really true? I may have been killed, but here I am moving around like normal and greatly influencing the entire world. Can you really look at this and say Crowley is dead? At the very least, I doubt this is the kind of death Mathers had in mind. If that connection really was worthless, do you think Lola would have secretly retrieved Mathers’s remains and carefully stored them at Westminster Abbey where historical kings are buried?”

“...”

“Mathers has a contract with Coronzon. And rather than being bound by that contract, it feels more like Coronzon is using the bonds to strengthen herself. ...So what if I pass power through his remains as a relay device? If I send commands through Mathers’s silent remains, I may be able to indirectly control Coronzon.”

That gave them a way of defeating that demon.

They could strip Coronzon from Lola’s flesh and bring an end to this history of constant failure.

And they arrived.

Given the overall size of Westminster Abbey, it felt quite cramped. With the walls surrounding it, it probably did not get much sun. For a foreigner like Kamijou, it was a little hard to imagine just how much of an honor it would be to be buried in that land.

“This is it.”

Aleister Crowley gently removed her arm from Kamijou’s shoulders.

The silver girl was facing a gravestone with a completely different name on it. It was entirely different from what a Japanese person would imagine. The marble nameplate was embedded in the ground above the grass. Another broad stone panel stood up next to it, but Kamijou could not tell if it was describing the deceased’s personal history or beliefs.

“Hmph.”

The scoffing magician showed no restraint here.

She stabbed a fallen tree branch into the grass and dug up the soil until the branch broke. Then she got down on all fours and dug with her hands. Digging up a grave was such a profane act that not even Kamijou could lend a hand. It was a ghastly thing. Was this a sign of how Aleister Crowley viewed those other members of the Golden cabal, or had her wounds not healed as much as she had thought?

It took a truly long time, but Aleister eventually completed it.

It had likely been oak coated with several layers of varnish. The long and narrow coffin was a little bigger than Kamijou's dorm bathtub and it was already falling apart. When he saw its size, Kamijou finally recalled that Westerners were not always cremated, so he covered his mouth with a hand. His mind was shaken by the fact that odors were sensed by tiny particles entering your body through the nose's mucous membranes. The remains would not appear "as they were" unless the entire body had turned to grave wax, but the word "corpse" still rattled his mind. The feeling of aversion was powerful.

"...I'm back, Mathers."

With her clothes, hands, and face a mess, the moonlit silver girl gave a gruesome smile.

"Your old friend and nemesis Crowley has returned."

It did not take long after that.

Like a child excitedly tearing the wrapping from a present, she tore away the coffin lid which had grown soft from moisture. While the moonlight shined on her silver girl form, the magician revealed the hidden remains.

When Kamijou saw it, it did not seem like much and that thought surprised him.

It was even lighter than the Magic God known as the High Priest. When the coffin had rotted away, small bugs, bacteria, and decomposing germs must have gotten inside. No flesh, blood, or even skin remained. It was not as white as the model skeletons found in schools, but it was a full set of bones from head to toe. The overall impression really was of it being "light". No matter how great someone's historical accomplishments, would they always end up like this after death? The visual accentuated the impermanence of worldly things.

However.

However, Aleister Crowley came to a sudden stop.

At first, Kamijou thought the memories were rushing back to the magician despite how much she claimed to hate this person.

But that was completely wrong.

“...Huh?”

“What?”

“*Who is this?*”

Those words were entirely unexpected.

It even took her a while to come to terms with what she had said. Finally, Aleister leaned over the skeleton and began examining it.

“This isn’t Mathers...? That can’t be. But wait...”

“What’s going on? Can you really tell just by looking at the bones!?”

“Do you have any idea how much I loathed him? First of all, the skull is completely wrong. You would never get Mathers’s features by fleshing this out with clay... His fingers should be skinnier and there should be some scraping on the hip joint and thighbone because he had a habit of leaning his weight to the right. Yes, that’s right. You saw the Battle of Blythe Road, didn’t you? The wound I gave him then is not here either!”

“There’s still a lot I don’t get about how Spiritual Tripping works, but does it leave actual scars behind? Both for the normal injuries I took and the illusionary ones that ended as duds!?”

“No, not that.” Aleister must have been panicking because she was speaking rapidly. “Mathers stopped the previous Imagine Breaker—that arrow—with his own arm, remember? Look at the arm bones. There aren’t any cracks or signs of repair that would correspond to that!!”

“Then...”

The person buried in this grave was not Mathers who was linked to Coronzon. What did that mean?

Kamijou looked around.

“Could you have gotten it wrong? Um, is he buried in another grave?”

“...”

Aleister said nothing.

But not because she had stopped thinking. Her face was soaked with sweat. She had already considered the worst possibility, but she could not bring herself to accept it. Her panic and tension was obvious.

And.

And.

And.

There was a quiet sound.

The silver girl's shoulders jumped like she had heard a ghost's footstep.

The Aleister Crowley was acting like a scolded child.

“ ... ”

Kamijou himself turned around as stiffly as an uncoiled doll. He had seen the demise of the Golden cabal inside the Windowless Building. And thanks to that knowledge, he immediately rejected the idea. It was not possible. It simply could not be. Even if this was a graveyard where the living thought of the dead, this level of interaction was too much. An incredible taboo pushed in from the depths of the darkness. Bright colors encroached on his vision.

The military uniform was dyed bright red and blue in a way never seen in modern camouflage. It may have been a Scottish cavalry uniform. A witch-like hat and cloak were worn over it.

In a way, the standing figure had an even greater presence than Crowley and they looked like self-confidence made flesh.

There was an extremely simple argument to be made.

The person who should have been dead had not been in the expected grave.

Then where was he?

After crawling out of the grave, the dirt-covered girl stared blankly at the imposing figure and provided the answer.

“...*Math...ers...???*”

AFTERWORD

If you've been buying one volume at a time, welcome back. If you bought them all at once, welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

This time, the great war in England has finally begun. OT17 and 18 was a dragon slaying morality play with a lot of focus on the England side, but the focus this time was on the magician who was continually attacked by England. You might discover something new if you compare the two stories. The most obvious element was the exoticism represented by Ra-Zeus, Isis-Demeter, and the others. While the stage was set in England, the magic theme was non-Christian. The British Museum is very convenient when it comes to that. Egyptian Mythology is attractive, but I was worried doing *just* that could not hold the readers' interest, so when I found some information linking it to Greek Mythology, I went with that. It was based in Egyptian Mythology, but I could also mix in a hint of Greek Mythology which has become a part of the foundation for Japanese-made Western-style RPGs. I think that worked pretty well, but now it is time to expand on that for the "rift" of intolerance and refusal to understand that leads people to mistake the meanings of words.

As the series continues, the protagonist naturally meets more people, whether they are enemies or allies. So how are you to maintain the appropriate level of tension? My answer is to use Great Demon Coronzon's dispersion. I attempted a number of approaches this time. The Index world is a very convenient miniature garden with plenty of gimmicks and gadgets thanks to the obvious line between magic and science, but what did you think this time?

What kind of power can fight against a Great Demon who obstructs the world's bonds?

Looking at it like that, you should be able to see why it is so meaningful for Kamijou Touma to be the protagonist. The path that Aleister paved and Kamijou Touma has overcome is becoming a great power that will bring everyone together and corner Coronzon. I thought we could observe a glimpse of that here.

The boss this time was Orsola Aquinas. I had London as the stage and people were being driven mad by the atmosphere of hopeless war, so who would be the most frightening one to be affected? She naturally came to mind when I asked that question. Normally, Orsola advocates nonviolence and works to deepen mutual understanding with her words, so I

thought seeing this transformation after the events of OT7 would show a side of Great Demon Coronzon's disgusting control different from Karasuma Fran or Index.

The difference between good and evil is paper thin.

I hope you can see the two sides of Orsola when you compare the dragon slaying morality play of OT17 and 18 to Aleister's point of view seen in NT20. You might see something that lies in wait for the entire series.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and to my editors Miki-san, Anan-san, Nakajima-san, Yamamoto-san, and Mitera-san. Just London would have been difficult enough, but I also mixed in Greek and Egyptian Mythology, which had to be a lot of trouble. I think illustrations have more power than text to excite the readers as they remember the old characters. Once again, thank you very much.

And I give my thanks to the readers. We are back to London, the city of fog, magic, and the Golden. ...Don't overlook how that phrase changed depending on the character using it. It has been a while since we last saw this stage, but how did you like it? If Aleister Crowley and Magic God Othinus were joining the fight, I knew I couldn't just follow standard practice and I was prepared to go in full throttle, but at this point, I hope you enjoyed the magic battles between the top players in the series.

It is time to close the pages for now...is what I would normally say here, but I actually wrote a little more after this. I hope you enjoy that as well.

I pray we can see each other again in the next story.

What's this? Have I awoken to plants as well as bugs...???

-Kamachi Kazuma

Don't let it shake you. Think.

Hadn't Aleister Crowley destroyed that world's largest magic cabal?

That phenomenon could not be overturned for no reason.

This was a story of the magic world. There was a pre-established theory behind all events.

You had to have already seen what was necessary.

So think back over everything you have seen and heard.

This was the top of the Golden, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

There had to be a reason why he was here.

It could be a trick, a loophole, or a name. Find that and everything would change.



An explosive noise burst out.

Various colors of light blossomed like countless flowers to inappropriately decorate Westminster Abbey's graveyard.

But first of all.

Even if she was weary from so many battles in quick succession, Aleister Crowley could use Spiritual Tripping and the Blasting Rod at the same time, she could use the optimization of her blood sacrifice to keep up with the supersonic battle of a Saint, and she could neutralize and hijack all modern Western magic, so it was unusual for anyone to be capable of engaging her in a purely magical battle.

It would have to be a pure Magic God like Othinus or Nephthys.

Or it would have to be an extraordinary magician like Westcott or Mathers who had their own unique control method they had used to compete for the standard of what would become modern Western magic.

"Gah!?"

"Aleister!!"

Kamijou instinctually ran over when he saw the silver girl spin through the air and slam back-first into the ground. It did not look like she could breathe properly, but was that really due to the physical damage?

Aleister Crowley had mastered magic, but her eyes were wide with terror and the pupils were wandering aimlessly. Her tear ducts would loosen if she was not careful. That silver girl no longer felt like a historical magician. Her soul seemed to have reverted to something befitting her apparent age.

Kamijou heard something similar to a baton spinning through the air.

Hat and cloak. The garish Scottish uniform that a certain magician had so loved. Some objects were dancing around that man with no strings to support them: a fire wand, a water cup, a wind dagger, and an earth disc. It was a full set of the fundamental symbolic weapons that used the four elements to play a role in all magical ceremonies.

“What’s wrong?”

He immediately spoke in English. Based on the speed of pronunciation, Kamijou could tell it was different from the American-based English he had learned in school. Was that the pronunciation found in Scotland? He was truly grateful that Othinus translated for him after returning to his shoulder.

“What’s wrong, what’s wrong, what’s wrong!? You tore apart the Golden cabal I built up and took control of all the world’s magic, but did you neglect your studies afterwards? Is this all your magic has to offer!?”

Magic and science.

That human had supposedly acquired a unified theory before cutting them apart like that. Aleister Crowley had done all that and yet...no, and *so* she was filled with fear upon finding something *she did not understand*. Seeing his student trembling like a frail girl, Mathers snapped his fingers in an uninterested fashion.

“I sense no power in you. Yet it does not seem you have simply deteriorated. Hm, what could this mean? I believe I am the killer of your daughter, am I not?”

“...”

Aleister was overwhelmed by fear of the inexplicable, but now her shoulders trembled in a different way than before.

“Oh, I see.”

What connections had that man made in his mind?

Mathers reached some kind of answer at a speed and with connections that no normal person could hope to match.

The entire world grew distorted, but Kamijou did not know how to describe it. He slowly raised his head to look above the gloomy graveyard surrounded by walls. He saw several strange figures standing on the many pointed roofs of Westminster Abbey.

Paul Foster Case.

Arthur Edward Waite.

Dion Fortune.

Israel Regardie.

Robert William Felkin.

Westcott, who had been Mathers's match in leading the Golden cabal.

And more.

And more and more.

And more and more and more.

There were dozens. No, maybe more. Kamijou Touma could only match some names to faces because of his experience in the Windowless Building where he had witnessed the demise of that world's largest cabal during the Battle of Blythe Road. No, he had technically only seen the story told by Aleister Crowley.

Aleister had been yelling with such anger it had looked like she might tear out Mathers's windpipe with her teeth, but even she faltered.

"The...Golden...?"

She was dazed.

She could not believe it because it was accurate. The silver girl spoke in her extreme confusion.

"The Golden magic cabal???"

"Newcomer, you too were officially declared dead back in 1947, were you not? And Lilith also defied precedent by returning to history. Do not forget that we have Coronzon, a higher lifeform equal to or greater than your Aiwass. ...Thinking you can do something that others cannot violates the fundamental assumption of the technical system known as magic which *anyone can freely develop*." Mathers's smile deepened as he shoved the end of his wand into the graveyard dirt. "And do not think of this as unfair. We must go all out to celebrate our reunion. And as I am the man who created the Golden cabal, isn't it

perfectly natural for me to use the fruits of that labor, including the personnel of the world's largest magic cabal?"

"..."

"Now, let us redo the Battle of Blythe Road. Crowley, you once stole everything from me!! It is time to repay you for that, and you cannot rely on a coincidental victory this time. You have lost your directional focus as an avenger and you have abandoned your growth as a magician, so let us see how much a fool holding their superfluous baby can struggle!?"

It may have been true that the current Aleister was different from the Aleister who had conquered the Battle of Blythe Road. If the silver girl resisted on her own, she might be defeated at some point because she lacked her former obsession.

But.

However.

"Hi."

One more scent of death wafted in.

Academy City's #1 Level 5 entered the graveyard with his modern design cane.

"Is this a contest to see who's the shittiest person? Pathetic. The baby is superfluous? She shouldn't have been saved? ...And here I thought I'd seen rock bottom with this board chairman, but it seems the world still isn't through disappointing me."

Once that title made an appearance, Kamijou saw the answer to the Golden magic cabal.

It may have been true Aleister had split apart magic and science.

That may have been nothing but an illusion.

However.

That illusion had created something real. No matter what her ulterior motives had been, the board chairman had still built up Academy City from the ground up. She had created the esper development program and collected cutting-edge technology there. She had also made the city an attractive enough place for a great many people to gather there.

"Mathers..." Kamijou Touma finally unleashed a roar. "You said we need to go all out to celebrate your reunion, right? Then you do the same, Aleister! The magic doesn't even matter!! Bring out everything you have as the board chairman of Academy City!!"

They stood by her side.

Kamijou Touma and the #1 stood on either side of the silver girl who had refused to accept the Golden cabal.

The strongest and the weakest spoke in unison as they declared war.

“Aleister is not alone. The fruits of her labors are right here!!”



The second act has begun.

It is finally time for the direct clash between Golden magic and Academy City science.