

New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 21

Aleister has finally reached the cemetery of Westminster Abbey, the key to defeating Great Demon Coronzon. What she witnessed there was—

Mathers. The head of the world's greatest magic cabal, the Golden. A man who should have been cut in half at the fated ground of Blythe Road, one hundred years ago.

Mathers isn't the only one. The powerful Golden magicians that he was leading simultaneously bare their fangs at the head of science. Mathers cannot be defeated with a magician's abilities. Aleister is at a loss for what to do but by making the land of science, the one hundred years accumulated there was not a waste.

Kamijou Touma and Accelerator. The two who are the fruits of the accumulated efforts of the headquarters of science, Academy City, finally face off against the greatest and strongest Mathers—!



か-12-88



新約とある魔術の禁書目録 21

鎌池和馬



電撃文庫



Kamachi Kazuma

なんか……何にもない場所で決戦って、思い返してみればこのシリーズではあんまりやってこなかったような。新約9とかもそうですが、キャラで盛り上がると場所を使った底上げを必要としなくなるからかもしれません。



Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I am slowly drawing in the back country of Hiroshima.

Novel Illustrations

新約

とある魔術の 禁書目録

鎌池和馬

イラスト/
はいむらきよたか

21

THE NATION OF BRITAIN

The proper name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The nation is composed of the four nations of England, Wales, and Scotland on the island of Britain, as well as northern Ireland.

Since olden times, British culture has been one of the pinnacles of governance, culture, and the natural sciences, but Britain has another face.

As a great magical nation.

Originally, the reason why the Anglican Church is so proficient at anti-magical warfare is due to the myriad of magical threats close to home. Because of this, the countryside has held powerful (and at times, dangerous) magicians regardless of character or organization.

Among those organizations is the Golden, the most powerful magic cabal that earned great fame across the globe in only a few years.

Even after the Battle of Blythe Road, they remain. In their blaze of glory, the Golden strikes at Aleister.

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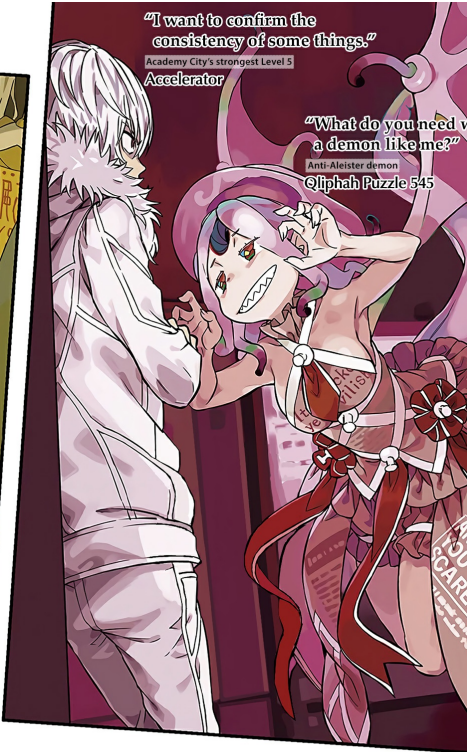


“Here I go, Crowley!!!!!!”

Golden magician who uses unpredictable magi

Dion Fortune





An RV was parked near an unnamed oasis in Egypt.

A gentle knock came at the door even though no one should have known the RV was even there.

“ ... ”

Needless to say, Mina Mathers, the black cat witch looking after the RV, had to be cautious. She softly lowered baby Lilith into the crib and produced a palette knife in her hand. She had used her art to introduce simple graphics to the formal magical symbols. It was similar to the revolution caused by adding icons and a mouse cursor to personal computers instead of just a black screen covered in alphanumeric text that looked like more like an alien language than anything.

Her cat ears moved like directional microphones to focus on the sounds beyond the steel door. She would have to use that to decide whether to burst through the door and fight or grab the steering wheel and flee. At the very least, doing nothing would not improve her situation.

...Or so she thought.

However.

“Oh?”

Tingling tension surrounded her, but her face clouded over behind the veil of her mourning clothes. It was a cloud of doubt. This was odd. They definitely had a visitor. The sounds from beyond the door were enough to know that. But she also sensed a distinct lack of caution. There was just the one person and they did not appear to be holding a weapon at the ready or refining magic power from their life force using meditation or a special breathing method.

She thought for a bit.

And then she spun the palette knife around in her hand and threw it at the closed door.

With a dull sound, the dull palette knife stabbed dead center into the door. It did not sink deep enough to break through to the other side. It really was just

the tip sticking into the metal, but it was what it was. The killer intent would have reached whoever was on the other side.

But even that produced no change in the presence beyond the door. She sensed some slight movement, but it was only surprise at the sound from the door. In fact, the calico cat curled up at her feet reacted more when it jumped up in surprise. Whether or not the attack hit was not all that important when the force of her will and its killer intent would have passed right through the flat steel door.

(They aren't an expert?)

Then who were they?

The RV was parked in the middle of the desert, so she doubted a door-to-door salesman or an official seeking payment for public utilities would be paying it a visit.

This visitor was a complete mystery.

Mina Mathers approached the door, pulled out the palette knife, and pushed up the chain lock with the blade portion. She flipped the knife around and hid it up her sleeve before opening the thin metal door. The chill of the desert night snuck in through the gap.

"Hello."

It was a casual greeting.

She had never directly met this person, but she had seen him on documents listed as an important individual. That showed just how valuable he was to Board Chairman Aleister.

"I received a message asking me to run out here if it became necessary."

He spoke Japanese with an odd rising tone at the end of his sentences.

His white coat looked out of place in the sandy desert.

And his large face looked somewhat froglike.

This doctor had become something of a legend in Academy City.

"Oh, it was you, Heaven Cancellor."

“Sorry, it took me a while to heal this good boy here. Animals just aren’t my specialty, you see.”

Once he mentioned it, Mina Mathers looked down and saw a golden retriever wrapped in bandages and obediently lying at the man’s feet.

It did not matter to this man if a wound was “lethal” or if a patient’s condition was “hopeless”.

He would overturn those assumptions.

If he said he would save someone’s life, he would do it.

He carried a different sort of legend from Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, Aleister Crowley, or any of the Golden magicians.

In that case, there was only one reason why he would have been called here.

“This is about Lilith, isn’t it?”

Lilith looked like a healthy baby now, but she was literally the product of a miracle and a specialist would probably want to scream if they examined her. After all, she lacked the physical body and the cells which were fundamental to the standard definitions of life. She was an exposed soul without original sin. The high quality of her spirit had caused a number of miracles and allowed her to temporarily remain in this world, but a child without a vessel of flesh was far too fragile. If nothing was done, her soul itself could dissipate at any time.

The soul was described using a number of different media: fire, water, electricity, incense, *etc.* But that meant a definition of what it *actually was* had yet to be found. Refining one’s life force into magical power was the foundation of magic, but that did not necessarily mean they had actual definitions for everything involved in that process. It may have been similar to how people could leave behind offspring without fully understanding their own DNA.

But the various theories that did exist came from the need for a physical vessel to stabilize that energy in the real world. Even angels and demons usually sought out a vessel or spiritual medium. And if they could not get that, they were only summoned to the extremely limited space of an artificially-created magic circle or an accidentally-created spiritual location. While it was not entirely unheard of, it was extremely rare for such a being to walk around freely

while in that exposed state.

So even if a soul lacked original sin, it was too much to ask them to constantly maintain a level of paranormal power greater than an angel or demon. If it was really so easy, Fuse Kazakiri and Aiwass would not have needed to use the entirety of Academy City to make an appearance.

The frog-faced doctor spoke up while stepping inside the RV.

“Now, I would like to confirm some essential information here. I was given a message, but the writing was a tad too poetic, which just confused me. Maybe I’m getting old, but I’m not sure if I should take it at face value or view it as an indirect reference to something else. So I would like to ask some questions before I get started.”

“Yes, magicians do tend to be like that.”

“And now another poetic term has been introduced. I would like to get to work saving my patient, but I feel like I was given some ancient text instead of a medical chart. Perhaps this is what the Edo period translator of the *Tafel Anatomie* felt like.”

The golden retriever shook before entering the RV. He(?) seemed to be shaking off the sand that had gotten into his fur. He may have known now was not the time to interfere because he stayed away from the crib and instead jumped onto the sofa bed and lay down.

“Lilith is in a dangerous state with nothing to contain her. She needs a new vessel.” Mina Mathers worked to translate the situation into sensible terms. “I will try to use science side language. For now, let us set aside how to define life. As a pure technique, do you know of a way to restore or transplant lost experiences or memories? Or you can think of it as someone’s entire personality if you would prefer.”

“Perhaps the hormone balance produced by the brain, nerves, and organs? There are a number of things I could use, but it really depends on the specific situation. And when it comes to memories, *there is a boy who even I failed to save.*”

“You are referring to methods not listed in the Bank, aren’t you? For now,

please list out everything you know. The truth is, just the memories and personality would not be enough. Heaven Cancellor, Lilith must be placed within a complete vessel of flesh. Now, I will attempt to provide a simple explanation of life force and magic power.”

“Oh, about that. You needn’t bother.”

He readily cut her off.

This puzzled the black cat witch.

“I don’t know about the actual Mina Mathers, but you at least are Aleister’s friend, aren’t you?

“I am not sure if I would use the word friend, but it is true I support his actions.”

“What word you use is of little importance. It’s an issue of definitions, isn’t it? So I assume you would not mind if I provided the name I once used as one of Aleister’s few friends, if we use your position to define that term.”

The black cat witch’s ears twitched slightly.

She remembered hearing someone describe themselves as one of Aleister’s few friends. But those words had not been spoken to Academy City’s Board Chairman. They had been spoken during the legend of a much older era when London had still been wrapped in fog and steam.

“That man was the only teacher Aleister ever accepted and his greatest friend. That man was a victim of the opium addiction he developed from his inexperienced medical techniques. That man was the first to face defeat and have his path distorted during the Battle of Blythe Road. That man left the struggle for power in the West, learned yoga in Ceylon to treat his addiction, and ironically regained a healthy body thanks to being ostracized from the Golden cabal and failing in life.”

The crawling feeling felt like an even greater taboo than touching a coffin of the dead.

That strange tremor started at Mina Mathers’s fingertips and crawled up her spine. This might be exactly what she would feel as her palm rubbed softly

against a door she must never open.

Kihara Noukan supposedly had the absolute advantage here, yet this man had easily gotten that dog to follow him using nothing but brutal scientific ability (although wielded to save rather than to fight as the dark side was wont to do). And that man gave the exact same smile as he continued his explanation.

He clasped his hands in front of his chest.

And he winked.

“My name is Golden Magician Allan Bennett. Although I took the name Swami Maitrananda as a Buddhist monk. I escaped the toxins permeating me from the West and now I work to save everyone I can in the East. Is that enough of an introduction for you?”

Prologue: The Golden and Its Past – True_Wizards.

There was once a magic cabal known as the Golden cabal.

It was only active for a short period of time between the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Nevertheless, that cabal is still known as the “world’s greatest”. Some had public-facing identities as a pharmacist, a stage actress, a coroner, or a genius author, others barely survived off of translating old texts or suggesting speculative financial deals, and others simply remained unemployed and reclusive. The cabal was like a sample set or encyclopedia of every sort of person.

The Golden cabal had a kaleidoscope of different faces depending on which aspect of it you were looking at: everything from a salon or club for those with odd hobbies to a legitimate magical research group or warmongers armed with curses. However, there were two prominent figures who had to be discussed no matter which view you took.

One was Aleister Crowley.

The other was Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

The Golden cabal was a convenient container for those eternal rivals who normal society could never understand. They learned together, spoke together, and laughed together, but they also loathed each other, opposed each other, and tried to kill each other. Like two beasts living in the same cage. Later on, many magical researchers attempted to analyze the depths of the strange relationship between the two geniuses based on how the surviving texts described it, but most likely not even those two knew the truth.

They were teacher and student, yet they saw each other as heretics.

They were good friends, yet they saw each other as nemeses.

Crowley and Mathers existed alongside each other in the framework of the Golden cabal, but they had a habit of arguing over their differing theories. Take the Great Demon known as Coronzon. Mathers defined it as an unwavering and absolute evil, but Crowley rejected that and said it was a relative evil.

That may have been why.

Those two walked the same path yet could never get along, so in April of 1900, a critical armed conflict developed between them, beginning in Hammersmith.

That conflict became known as the Battle of Blythe Road.

It was a battle between Mathers, who thought sacrifice was an unavoidable part of magic, and Crowley, who refused to accept that. The details of that need not be described here. But as a result of that battle, the Golden cabal no longer exists in its pure form. At the end of that conflict *which was intense enough to be recorded in non-magical history*, a certain human had either killed or robbed the possibility of success from every last magician belonging to the Golden cabal. The Dawn-Colored Sunlight, New Light, and other self-proclaimed “official” successors would later arise, meaning it was not entirely snuffed out, but those were no more than the futile struggles of a dwindling line.

Yes, it was a thing of the past.

“This isn’t Mathers...? That can’t be. But wait...”

“What’s going on? Can you really tell just by looking at the bones!?”

Then what was this?

What had happened in that Westminster Abbey graveyard in the center of the political and religious city of London?

They had wanted the remains of someone who had died long ago.

By making a command through that contractor’s body, they had hoped to stop Coronzon who was sure to break free of her seal and create innumerable victims around the globe.

However.

“Math...ers...???”

“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!?”

There was no mistaking that masculine figure wearing a bright Scottish military uniform with a witch-like hat and cloak. That man had called himself a descendant of the highlanders and sown the seeds of magic across all of Europe by translating many grimoires. With his knowledge, his diverse vocabulary, and the help of his artist wife, Mina Mathers, he had provided simple graphics to help understand various magical systems – yes, much like personal computers had spread so explosively after the introduction of icons and the mouse cursor instead of just strings of alien language. He was the one who had mentored Crowley as a teacher but also opposed him in debate. If history had turned out even a little differently, he may very well have succeeded in his dark aspiration to become the founder of modern Western magic.

If only he had not succumbed to paranoia.

If only he had not summoned Coronzon and ordered her to attack the person who held enough power to take the Golden cabal’s throne from him.

Then neither Lilith nor Crowley’s second daughter would have been sacrificed.

“And do not think of this as unfair.”

“Now, let us redo the Battle of Blythe Road. Crowley, you once stole everything from me!!”

What, ultimately, was happening here?

Was it not Coronzon who stood at that malicious peak?

That human was supposedly at the center of it all, yet she felt several steps

behind.

Everything she believed in had been shattered. The taste of victory that had supported her had been shaken. Her breathing was heavy, her legs were shaking, and tears threatened to wet her eyes.

But. Even so.

"Oh, I see."

"Aleister, your daughter should not have been saved."

That alone, she could never accept.

No matter what, she had to stay strong and fight back against it.

Her enemy was the world's greatest cabal: the Golden cabal. Mathers was accompanied by Westcott, Fortune, Regardie, Felkin, and more of those original magicians who each had their own legends.

But that human had not spent the peace of the last century twiddling her thumbs. Science and magic. She had needlessly split the world apart to create an age in which it fought against itself. And in the chaos following the war, she had established a giant academic institution in the Far East on the pretext of restoring the capital city there. Its name was Academy City and it was the Abbey of Thelema itself, created by gathering the shards of the dream that had failed in Sicily and repackaging them in the form of science.

"Mathers..."

"You said we need to go all out to celebrate your reunion, right?"

It was all a mirage created from lies.

Nevertheless, many people had gathered in Academy City.

And they had grown far beyond what its founder had ever imagined.

“Then you do the same, Aleister! The magic doesn’t even matter!! Bring out everything you have as the Board Chairman of Academy City!!”

“Aleister is not alone. The fruits of her labors are right here!!”

Now, the time of reckoning has come.

There is but one win condition: survival. Which will it be: science or magic?

Chapter 1: Frenzy – Welcome_to_GD_Paradise!!

Part 1

It was a December night, but the Westminster Abbey graveyard was not wrapped in a melancholy chill.

There was an explosion and flash of light.

The leader of the Golden cabal wore a witch hat and cloak over a brightly-colored old Scottish military uniform. Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers's scarf flapped in the night wind and his fire wand, water cup, wind dagger, and earth disc Symbolic Weapons floated around him...but he had *not* used them to produce some special paranormal phenomenon.

"Hmph."

There was a dull sound.

Aleister Crowley, who was now a girl with long silver hair, stabbed a broken piece of a fence into the ground at her feet, broke a buried gas pipe (likely used for the gas lamps which were growing common again because the natural gas was seen as ecological), and allowed the flammable gas to leak out.

The result was *a completely ordinary explosion with the definite ability to maim and kill.*

The intense heat, light, and shockwave shot toward Mathers and the others like a flash flood. It was too late to realize the wind was being used to accurately manipulate the flow and density of the gas. Their entire silhouettes

were enveloped by the explosive flames.

However.

The result was hardly a surprise at this point.

“Is that all?”

He did not sound remotely shocked. The dense wall of flames was blown apart like tearing through wet paper. And Mathers stood at the center of the vortex without a single scorch mark on him.

They had originally wanted to use Mathers’s body to stop Coronzon.

Use it?

That was no longer an option. In fact, it was entirely possible he was even more powerful than Coronzon and was the true mastermind here.

“What else did you expect from the leader of the Golden?”

“Before I learned of magic, I was a boy with a lot of scientific curiosity,” said Aleister with a laugh.

She did not care if she was being arrogant or insolent. Nor did she care if she had been trembling like a scared child a moment before. Even if it was a bluff or a trick, all that mattered was that she could gather strength in her legs and stand up to face her unforgivable nemesis once more.

She would use her defeat and failure.

So that human would speak down to her opponent. Whether or not she had the power to back it up was irrelevant.

“I simply was not satisfied until I had actually proven the superstitions I ran across. Yes, I do sometimes see it in my dreams to remind me I did some awful things. I mean, there was no real reason to kill the same cat in several different ways at once to see whether or not cats really did have nine lives.”

“ ... ”

“This is the same, Mathers, who married a creepy cat. If I see something I cannot explain, then I must experiment and observe. That is how I built up the entire science side and Academy City. Whether or not this one attack works is

not the real issue. Both success and failure are gathered into the single pile known as 'big data'. By the time you notice it, it will be too late. You will be trapped and defenseless."

Her lovely lips continued with the word "and".

She would make a comeback. Unlike those magical elites, that human would never be broken no matter how many times she was beaten down.

"What I need is numbers. Keep chatting and the next one will hit you, Mathers."

A fist flew straight toward the man.

In the brief moment that the contrast between the dark night and the bright flames had confused Mathers's vision, the spiky-haired high school boy named Kamijou Touma ran straight toward him and aimed his right fist dead center on Mathers's face.

"Cold and wet. Water, reveal thy nature before me."

Mathers actively used magic against Imagine Breaker as it approached.

The sound was like shattering glass.

But the magic in the way diverted the fist slightly off path. Much like firing a bullet through a water tank.

Was this thanks to the man's experience losing his life to a different form of Imagine Breaker in the past?

"Wha-?"

"Next: hot and dry."

Kamijou could not make up for the slight delay. Mathers spun to the side and easily dodged the fist as if slipping through the gaps in a crowd. But it did not look like the movement of feet in leather shoes. Kamijou noticed the fire wand frozen in the air behind Mathers. It looked much like a fencing sabre.

"Fire, reveal thy nature before me."

With the sound of a match being struck, the bottom of the wand flashed orange while pointing toward Kamijou. The boy had yet to finish throwing his

fist. Even if it was just a solid wand, he was in trouble if it jabbed into his defenseless throat or eye, so what would it do if it carried magical flames?

He did not have time to imagine the answer.

Academy City's #1, Accelerator, sent his fist right into Mathers's cheekbone from the side.

This was their first clean hit.

Many gravestones shattered as Mathers tumbled across the graveyard with his Scottish military uniform, scarf, and cloak trailing after him. The result looked like a small airplane had crashed there. A cloud of dust rose into the air, but Accelerator clicked his tongue before even checking on the result.

The air carried no hint of worried emotion.

Extraordinary magicians were gathered on the roofs and steeples like a murder of crows, but not one of them attempted to intervene.

"What the hell is going on?"

Those words were far removed from scientific or logical.

He sounded like he had run across a strange jinx.

"I tried using my reflection to shred all his blood vessels and nerves. So did I screw it up, or does the human anatomy in my head not apply to him?"



“Now, now.”

A figure slowly stood up.

He was entirely unscathed. In fact, he did not even crack his neck. Accelerator’s reflection could kill any life form with blood and electricity flowing through it, but Mathers was just fine after taking a direct hit without even trying to dodge. It almost felt like he had let himself be thrown so violently across the ground to play along with their game. Like a sumo wrestler who obediently tumbled over when a small child pressed against them. It had suddenly grown less clear which side was really sounding out the other’s strength.

Whichever side ran out of cards first would be consumed.

Mathers tugged the scarf down from his mouth and smiled as if enjoying that game.

“I’m the son of a bitch who spread Kabbalah across Europe, divided magic between East and West, and used Belzébut to purge my own people. Science? Academy City? I have no interest in anything so indirect. Novice, have you forgotten the taste of Coronzon? Shall I summon her here again? Fear can never be destroyed. So tremble, quake, and above all, offer me your thanks. The world will literally change when you lay eyes on this fear.”

“Ignore him.” Aleister snapped her fingers. “This is the guy who baselessly claimed to be the Count of Glenstrae, descendant of the highlanders. You needn’t pay any attention to his meaningless dramatics. ...And have you forgotten what I said, Mathers? Each individual success and failure is not what matters. It is the big data built from it all that will trap you and leave you defenseless.”

And as if in response to the quiet snap, a sticky noise covered the night sky. No, there was a single word to describe that fat lump of flesh, creature with an unnatural number of arms and legs, giant metal insect, doll made just realistic enough to fall squarely in the uncanny valley, and more.

“The Crowley’s Hazards!?”

“I know I was the one to guide them here, but the thing is, I can’t control

them. Keep up the fight, Mathers.”

Kamijou shouted the name, but Mathers did not even remove his gaze from Aleister. He breathed an exasperated sigh and tapped the ground with the bottom of his fire wand.

And the magicians waiting on the roofs and steeples responded swiftly.

Was this...

Was this really the “swarm” that had pushed the magical United Kingdom to the limit?

The Crowley’s Hazards.

Even that name felt wrong now.

There was no sign of what they had once been.

This was not even a battle. It was unilateral destruction, like weeds being mowed down. The grim reaper wielded a scythe, not a sword or spear. That weapon was used to reap lives without giving them a chance to resist. The overwhelming difference in strength here was reminiscent of that.

Countless tarot cards...through the air to guide the lightning...the tower...tumbling down.

Ksh.

Massive flames...like mad...handheld oil lamp.

Kssh.

A white and black club...to boost the magic of the surrounding...

Kssshh.

Tap shoes struck the ground...the sound of...formed a cross from the countless sparks.

Kssshhhh!!

A quasi-immortal body was used to...a fistfight where...

Kssssshhhh!!

A black box opened and closed...random magic that not even...could calculate

the...

Kssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

“ ... ”

Kamijou Touma watched it with his own eyes.

He compared it to his memories and tried to make sense of it over and over.

But none of it was any use.

He could not keep up with the scene before him as it pressed in toward him like pure violence.

There was only one thing he could just barely tell: no individual magician stood out in this chaos. Altogether, they created a performance with a strange harmony to it.

This was the world’s greatest magic cabal.

The Golden cabal.

There was no point in arguing who was the most powerful. The general idea of synergy came to mind. Blood, flesh, guts, entrails, and things the identity of which Kamijou preferred not to speculate fell to the ground with the sound of heavy raindrops. He nearly forgot to breathe at the sight of it all, but then Aleister, who should have been the primary target, grabbed his hoodie and tugged him back. She was clearly incredibly confident if she could continue to embody the love of moe she had developed in Japan.

A beam of light very nearly grazed Kamijou and then the tip of a Westminster Abbey steeple was torn away and vaporized. The Crowley’s Hazards’ flesh and guts poured down and a portion of the roof began to collapse.

Hadn’t the Golden cabal been sent here to protect England?

Were they uncontrollable once released?

Or were they the ones who secretly ruled this country from the shadows?

“(This only functions as a smokescreen. We need to make ourselves scarce.)”

“Eh? Huh?”

“(I never expected those things to win here. Didn’t I explain more than once that I am only gathering data at this stage? Smartphones are fantastic inventions. Thanks to those fools having their fun, I have recorded all of the spells the Golden magicians are so proud of. Safely securing Mathers’s remains is no longer an option, so to be honest, we have no more reason to stay here in this musty old graveyard.)”

“Do you really think I will let you escape?”

A deep voice pierced accurately through all the noise.

A short distance away, Mathers repeated himself just to be sure they had heard.

“Do you really think I will let you escape?”

Aleister responded by snapping her fingers and pointing in a certain direction.

When Kamijou turned in that direction and saw who was there, he shouted to them.

“Accelerator, we’re counting on you!!”

“Tch.”

After a single tongue click, an explosive boom erupted. Academy City’s #1 used his vector control to kick off the graveyard ground and that white shadow snatched up Kamijou in his right arm and Aleister in his left.

“Hot and dry.”

Mathers sent an attack soon thereafter.

Just as the fire wand spun around, the surrounding Crowley’s Hazards were burned away and a great serpent of flame swept across the spot Kamijou and the others had stood in a moment before. The stone wall, metal fence, and everything else in the way was blown away. Just like the others, Mathers showed no concern for British property and structures. The Golden leader’s cloak whipped violently in the blast. Still, it was impossible to tell how seriously he was taking this. And after just barely avoiding the attack, Aleister took advantage of the small opening by snapping her fingers in the #1’s arm. More Crowley’s Hazards filled the space between them and Mathers like a thick wall.

Simply leaving Westminster Abbey's grounds required risking their lives.

"This should be far enough. Preserve your battery as much as possible."

"Is that any way to talk to him after he saved you?"

It was Kamijou and not Accelerator who snapped back at her. The white monster himself did not bother arguing. He simply asked the most relevant question.

"Was that all of them?"

After tossing the other two onto the silver sand filling a London street, Accelerator leaned on his modern design cane and gestured toward Westminster Abbey with his slender chin.

"If so, they won't last fifteen minutes."

"No, I would think not. No matter how hard you try, attempting to use magic to kill those magicians from the Golden cabal's heyday is a mistake. With each Crowley's Hazard killed, more of my power should be rising to the surface as the defrag continues, but...that is not enough to deal with Mathers. He can denote any aspect of the world with his complete control of the four most basic elements. Challenging that with the supernatural is as useless as aiming a flashlight at the sun."

"Is the difference in power really that great?"

"Yes, but there is no need to panic."

They were being pursued by the full force of the Golden cabal. The silver girl herself had to understand that threat greater than anyone, but she relaxed her shoulders and gave the other two an exasperated look.

When you were accustomed to failure, you knew how to get back on your feet quickly.

It was hard to believe this was the same magician whose entire body, even the eyeballs, had had been trembling in the Westminster Abbey graveyard. That self-control was a strength *similar yet different* to Kamijou Touma's.

"You were the ones to suggest I resist magic with science. Since you pushed me forward and encouraged me, I would appreciate it if you stuck with me now."

...And you were exactly right. I split apart science and magic and let the world heat up for a century. Now it is time to crush the Golden cabal with Board Chairman Aleister's unique system."

Small Othinus lightly kicked Kamijou's cheek while standing on his shoulder. She was warning him not to let his emotions influence him here.

"(Didn't Aleister say you didn't have to stick with her to the end and you could jump off whenever you thought it was time? She's already changing what she expects of you.)"

Their plans were unknown. And extra caution was required when *the* infamous Crowley was involved, but did that not really get through to the spiky-haired boy?

Meanwhile, the silver girl gave a wicked smile.

"But whatever we will do, I would like to prepare first. And we are not far from a location much more conducive for science projects and DIY work than a moldy graveyard."

"?"

Kamijou frowned, so Aleister explained with the smile of a mischievous child.

"Travel a bit north of here and we will find the famous Piccadilly Circus. In other words, a largescale shopping center☆"

"..."

"..."

"Well, you two?" asked Aleister. "Doesn't that sound like the perfect place to fight back against a swarm of zombies?"

Part 2

“Cold and dry.”

With the sound of something soft bursting, the earth disc held over Mathers's head swelled out. No, a porcelain-like material gathered around it like an umbrella.

A moment later, a dark red shower stained every part of the Westminster Abbey graveyard. Needless to say, that was what remained of the Crowley's Hazards. No matter how many there were, Crowley was still Crowley: no more than a novice within the Golden cabal. They never stood a chance against the group actions of those ultimate magicians who possessed such varied traits and legends.

Not a drop of blood reached the decorative checked cloth which was the pride of Scottish nobility.

“Hot and dry then hot and wet.”

When Mathers pressed his wand against the ground and whispered toward the dark red filth spreading out before him like a deadly marsh, flames rapidly spread out from him and across the entire defiled graveyard. Once the floating dagger spun around him to construct a protective circle, even the ashes were swept away and scattered by a gust of wind. Nothing remained, but that was not worthy of surprise. This was no different than brushing some dust off of his coat.

The many magicians jumped down to the ground.

They were all powerful enough to have defeated the Crowley's Hazards which had ruled the night earlier, but none of them even cared how many each of them had defeated.

Several of them had participated in a magical ceremony much like a stage play

in which they each wore clothing and carried Symbolic Weapons appropriate for their role and used curses and took actions in a specified order.

That was the foundation and the essence of the Golden cabal.

All their results were to be offered up to their leader.

“How was that?”

The man who asked that while kneeling and bowing his head was Edward Berridge. He wore a moss-green military uniform with no camouflage markings and small bags of bandages and disinfectant were attached here and there, so he appeared to be dressed as a medic. Even among the eccentrics of the Golden cabal, he was one of the few faithful servants that Mathers could place his full trust in.

In other words, their leader was not the Great Demon who had been pathetically sealed in a foreign land by that novice. There had only ever been one person to whom they owed their loyalty.

“I never hold back.”

He said little.

There was no need to explain everything here. The others within the Golden cabal would know what he meant. Or rather, the only people who had remained in the cabal were those who could keep up with Westcott, whose excessive caution tended toward paranoia, and Mathers, who had a temper.

In other words, no matter how skilled Aleister Crowley was, he had been unable to stand that group. Not when they claimed sacrifices from the general public were necessary for the development of magic.

“Let us end this quickly, my hounds. You drive them out and I will hunt them down.”

Once they had permission, several figures entirely ignored gravity to jump from rooftop to rooftop. These were not the actions of people who hoped for a fair fight among equals. They moved more like large dogs finally given some food after being denied for far too long.

Still kneeled at his master’s feet, Berridge spoke calmly.

“They may not be the best hounds. They may kill the prey before driving them out before you. Either way, this will be over in less than five minutes.”

He was not bluffing or currying his master’s favor. He truly believed this.

But for some reason, Mathers responded with a slight upward bend of the lips mostly hidden behind his scarf.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

Part 3

The Golden magicians in the Westminster Abbey graveyard were not the only ones affected by that bloody rain.

“What is even happening?”

Those words came from a large man in a baggy shirt and jeans whose shiny black hair was spiky like a stag beetle. His clothes looked like a street-style outfit at first glance, but cross symbols were hidden on it here and there.

His name was Tatemiya Saiji and he served as the vicar of the Amakusa Church.

The Amakusas had initially been deployed to intercept the Crowley’s Hazards at the Dover coast, but when that battle line fell, they had withdrawn to London. They had regrouped there and begun a counterattack with no idea how successful it might actually be.

However.

“Did the Crowley’s Hazards just...disappear?”

Itsuwa tried to make sense of the scene before her while she cautiously raised her collapsible spear and viewed the bizarre mixture of London and Egypt.

It was like that great swarm of monsters had been sucked into a black hole.

Just how many tricks did the Anglican Church have up its sleeve?

“Anyway, we need to check on the situation.”

“The Crowley’s Hazards were concentrated on a point five kilometers north of here. That would put them in the vicinity of St. James’s Park and Westminster Abbey.”

There were too many unknowns to say the threat had passed.

This was no different from knowing some unexploded ordnance was buried

underfoot.

Also, St. James's Park was adjacent to Buckingham Palace.

They did not know what had happened, but that was exactly why they had to go and check. If the Crowley's Hazards *or something even more dangerous* were lurking there, it was possible they would be slaughtered without a chance to fight back, but if something dangerous had begun within the capital city of London, they could not just ignore it.

Wars escalated.

When one side did something, the other side had to as well. That was one truth of the world.

When exposed to the fury of the Crowley's Hazards, it was entirely possible that the Anglican Church had decided it was time to release something truly shocking. After all, the entire country was on the verge of collapse. They were in no position to only choose the weapons they could safely control.

This was abnormal.

Tatemiya and rest of the Amakusas knew all too well how tough the Crowley's Hazards were after fighting on the front line. Those things would not simply be defeated in some miracle. *Not even using the remnants of the unnatural Egyptian symbols scattered around.* They needed more than some extraordinary secret weapon. They needed the kind of experience that a normal person could never achieve.

Then what was this situation?

The Crowley's Hazards had relentlessly poured into the capital, but now it was like had been sucked into a black hole. They could not just have vanished like that. Not even a miracle could explain it. Only something truly brutal could have produced this result so quickly.

"Let's go." Tatemiya Saiji adjusted his grip on his flamberge, a rippling sword that had to measure around two meters long. "We're going, right? This might mean staring into the abyss, but we can't just ignore this. We need to understand the situation and then take control if it needs to be stopped. Odds are good the Anglicans are overwhelmed, so we also need to figure out how

many normal citizens are still here and make sure not to get them involved in-
..."

"Oh? I see no reason to throw out your lives so soon after they were saved."

A soft voice interrupted from so close he could feel the sweet breath on his ear.

"!?"

The speaker was already right behind him.

Tatemiya spun around and used the centrifugal force for a horizontal swing of his two-meter-long sword.

He felt a dull sensation.

But he had not hit the woman who had spoken to him. She had taken a step back just as someone else stepped forward. He had not hesitated to take the blade to his neck and protect the woman in a strange form of chivalry.

The level of coordination between the pair was bizarre.

It was creepy enough for Tatemiya to grimace.

"Wha-?"

"Well, Westcott?"

Just as Tatemiya heard a dull sound burst out, he saw a flash of light and he was sent flying backwards. Ushibuka and Isahaya somehow managed to support him.

That had been a seal pressed in wax.

Was it a method of conveying one's willpower derived from letters?

As seen in the seven candles, the dolls of folklore, and many other examples, wax was an extremely common material used in magic.

The woman wore a long dress designed not to stand out much and a monocle with a practical design. She looked a lot like a tutor in an old picture book. The strangest part about her would be the long white and black clubs resting over her shoulders. She looked twenty at the oldest and she spoke to the elderly man who appeared to have lived three times her age.

“These are modern Western magicians. So is this what Crowley produced?”

“Hm, so this is what that heretic wrought.”

But more shocking than any of that was the wet sound coming from the old man.

He was dressed like a doctor in a thick coat. The attack would not normally have traveled all the way from the side of his neck to his face. There should have been a wound on his hand from when he reflexively raised it to protect himself, but even that basic instinct was missing from him. He had to have taken serious damage to his carotid artery and his neck bone, but that old man in a suit held the weapon to his wound with a smile on his face.

“Yes, yes. Not bad at all. That young one built an extremely kind system.”

“Westcott, that really should have killed you.”

“Not at all, Annie. If he had seriously been trying to kill me, I would have been beheaded. Swing a blade this heavy at this speed and my neck bone really shouldn’t have stopped it. He likely reduced the force to make sure he did not kill me. He uses a double-edged sword, so I assume one of the sides has been filed down smooth. Although in this case, it only cruelly lengthened the pain.”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Coroner. Glad to see you would be able to determine your own cause of death.”

Westcott. A coroner. Quasi-immortality.

And Annie.

The name of a certain magic cabal immediately entered Tatemiya’s mind.

Whether that was true or not, these two alone were more than enough of a threat. And if they were part of an organization, how many more were waiting behind them?

“Well, it is true we could ditch these odd jobs if Mathers would just take complete control of that demon already.”

“Are you kidding? If that paranoid man takes control of Coronzon, it would only add to our troubles.”

The more Tatemiya heard from them, the more sweat poured from his body. Of course, the more famous someone was, the easier it was for others to take on their name, but would they put themselves in this kind of danger for it?

“Wh-what do we do, Tatemiya-san!?”

Itsuwa began to raise her collapsible spear, but then she unnaturally stopped.

The monocle woman dressed like an old-fashioned tutor narrowed her eyes somewhat.

She tapped her shoulders with the white and black clubs and commended the girl’s decision.

“Yes, that was a wise choice.” She laughed. “If you had aimed that at me, I might have killed you just now.”

“!!”

When she heard that, Itsuwa forcibly removed her limiters.

She shattered the chains of fear and stepped in front of Tatemiya. And she jabbed the sharp blade of her spear toward the monocle woman.

Meanwhile, this person claiming to be Annie Horniman did not suddenly punch or kick the girl. Nor did she recite a strange incantation. She simply pressed the tip of the long white and black clubs against the ground and stood them upright.

And she whispered.

“Boost Target: Westcott.”

Everything burst into motion.

Not just Itsuwa’s spear. Many other Amakusas stood around them, so their swords, spears, axes, hammers, staffs, chains, and other weapons rushed in from both sides to protect the girl.

But it only took the one attack.

The object shining at Westcott’s fingertips was some wax kneaded until it was soft.

Was it the wax used to seal secrets within a letter, or was it the wax used to

create a cursed doll?

Either way, a flash of light became a physical blow and struck Itsuwa in the center of the gut.

“!?”

All of their weapons broke and the girl could not even react with her spear.

Itsuwa flew backwards after taking the elderly man’s attack to her gut, but she still managed to see something. The white and black clubs were the pillars of a gate. For just an instant, she saw something wavering behind Annie. It was like a soap bubble taller than she was. And what was that displayed in that ridiculous snow globe? If those clubs were meant to be Jachin and Boaz, then was it Solomon’s Temple?

Unable to get up and with her fingertips convulsing unnaturally, Itsuwa desperately tried to share the inspiration that had struck her. So that as many of them as possible might live.

“An...altar.”

“Oh, dear.”

“It all comes from the Golden ceremonial ground. Those are the white and black pillars – the flags of the east and the west – and the ancient temple based on those symbols. So your magic must be the most magnificent ceremonial ground for an offering. You are the costar and you aren’t interested in individual accomplishments. You amplify someone else’s power.”

“Yes, very well done. The foundation and essence of the Golden cabal is group magic modeled after stage plays. Hee hee. I don’t even care about Mathers’s orders now.”

Annie Horniman was not the only threat.

There was also William Wynn Westcott.

That elderly man was free to move.

After pulling the blade from his neck in a way that would only widen the wound, he tossed the flamberge aside.

The wound was already healing

“Pick it up.”

He pointed down at his feet.

The kind words were belied by an arrogance that seemed to be asking Tatemiya to lick his shoes.

“You would hate to be torn down while unarmed, wouldn’t you? Then pick up the weapon you have entrusted your life to, young one. There is no better medicine for putting your soul to rest.”

“What should we do, Westcott?”

“You can decide that, Annie. I have no interest in putting on a solo performance and I was never any good at it anyway. I doubt I could kill them very well without you tuning me as my costar.”

He made it sound as unremarkable as asking for her help because he had trouble cooking fish.

He was only thinking of the odds. How many people did he face and how many could he get to run away? And how should he take Tatemiya Saiji’s life in order to convince the greatest number of the other Amakusas to run away?

However.

That grim determination was shattered when the magician named Annie covered her mouth and laughed. Strength visibly left her shoulders like air escaping an overinflated balloon.

“You know what? Let’s not bother, Westcott. They’re close, but not quite strong enough. If they had been a little better, they would have been enough of a threat to remove from the main story thread out of self-defense.”

There was no way Tatemiya, Itsuwa, and the others could find solace in those words.

These two were only adlibbing and this was not what they had said just a minute ago.

And that meant these words could be contradicted a minute from now.

“Are you sure? They are using magic with the stench of Aleister Crowley on it.”

“I’ll admit it’s confusing, but most magicians are like that these days. Most of them are complete strangers to that failure of a man, so would attacking them really resonate with him in any way? These clearly aren’t our targets. They’re so boringly obedient. *At this level, you can hardly call them experts.* So the Boogieman meant for the general public should be enough. If we’re looking for his influence, science and Academy City come first.”

Tatemiya Saiji’s life had been placed on a platter while a conversation was held about his fate.

But there was nothing he could do.

His joints were too messed up for that.

He could not understand this situation, he could not ensure anyone’s safety, and he had had no control over what happened. He doubted anyone had control over these monsters named Annie and Westcott.

“Go.”

Annie spoke a direct but coldly vague word.

It did not matter who was protecting what. The situation seemed to teeter on a seesaw from one minute to the next, so what happened next was in no way guaranteed. It was like carefully digging up landmines using a mine detector only to be told those mines could move around all they wanted below the surface. Everything was riding on the whims of those two, so it felt like getting on their nerves would get you blown away instantly.

“Your skills were disappointing, but I can’t fault you since it was rooted in kindness. And as we are both defenders of England, fighting and taking your lives would be a waste. Stay on the outskirts and let the others know that the threat of the Crowley’s Hazards has passed. That and that alone is the symbol of happiness that you can present to everyone. Hee hee. Yes, just like a four-leafed clover or a goddess of victory.”

“Who...”

His voice was scratchy.

But it still may have taken every last ounce of courage Tatemiya Saiji had to get the words out.

“Who are you?”

“Are you seriously asking that?”

The look on her face made it clear she thought that question was as stupid as asking why the sun rose every single morning.

“He is William Wynn Westcott and I am Annie Elizabeth Fredericka Horniman. If you claim to be part of this field yet don’t know those names, people might start to suspect you are a mole.”

They had given their warning.

So they did not particularly care what happened next.

“Sometimes you really are the worst, you know that?” asked Westcott.

“That still makes me better than you,” replied Annie. “You’re always the worst.”

A quiet tapping sound followed.

Annie Horniman tapped the white and black clubs – Jachin and Boaz – against her shoulders.

It was late at night in London. Despite the mixture of England and Egypt making the city look like another world altogether, they were enjoying an evening stroll together with Westcott in a thick coat and Annie dressed like an old-fashioned tutor.

Their role was to play the Boogieman.

That was a monster or fairy that mothers had invented to warn their children. If a mother found a child carelessly approaching a forbidden area, they would frighten them and warn them away just like those two had. Running across the Boogieman was bad news, but they were useful since they kept the children

from attempting dangerous things.

Stay away from rivers and swamps. Be careful around the fireplace or kitchen. Be home before it gets dark. Do not go with strangers.

The warnings would be extremely simple and there was no need to specify what would happen to those who did not heed them.

Monocled Annie held the white club between her cheek and shoulder.

“Curse that Scotland-obsessed man. Is he focused on their fairy culture now? I just know Mathers was the one that decided to have us do this.”

“I think you’re jumping to conclusions this time. The Golden cabal also has that famous poet, remember?

“But we could do this so much more easily with a people clearing field.”

“The entire country is already on edge. Everyone feels the same pressure no matter where they are, so a people clearing field would only send them wandering around forever, Annie. And if we could not predict where they would go, there would always be a risk of them being where we do not want them.”

“I wonder what Coronzon is doing right now. If we could control her, I bet we could knock Mathers down a peg or two.”

“Why needlessly snatch the chestnut from the fire? We can leave that tricky work to someone who specializes in it. Namely, Mathers.”

“...”

“One of your few flaws, Annie, is that everything you’re thinking is written right there on your face.”

Historically, there was a reason Annie Horniman applied so much pressure to Westcott and the other Golden members. While she was interested in the occult, the main reason she had chosen to join the newly-established Golden cabal was her friend Mina Mathers. Annie had been wealthy, so she had been a valuable source of funding for the cabal in its early years. That was also why she did not get along with Mathers. Her intention had been to support her friend’s lifestyle, so she loathed that man who ended up spending all the money on

magical research and translating grimoires. After all, he had been unemployed and had no connections in “ordinary” society, leaving him unable to support his wife, but for some reason, he had always come to her for money while acting like he was better than her. It was said that love was blind, but why her best friend had married a man like that had been the theme of Annie Horniman’s greatest lifelong research project.

That was why Annie was with Westcott now.

No matter what the circumstances, she could not bring herself to work with Mathers. She preferred being with someone else who saw Mathers as an enemy.

As long as they were less of an eccentric than Mathers, at least.

“When you get down to it, Mathers holds all the cards. Oppose him too strongly and you could easily be ‘eliminated’.”

“I wasn’t suggesting that... I just think it’s unfair that only Mathers and Aleister are allowed the title of ‘uncontrollable monster’. Having a functioning brain is downright exhausting around here. The Golden cabal wouldn’t be what it is without all of us, right? So can’t he share with the rest of us?”

“...”

“And how long are you going to resign yourself to the #2 spot, Westcott? He might have more forces, but the opposition party is still the opposition party. Sigh, has nothing changed even after an entire century has passed?”

Arthur Edward Waite was sensible enough but was lacking in skill. Crowley had interesting skill but was even crazier than Mathers.

“Mathers really is treating us like outsiders. I can’t believe he’s using magicians of our level as a Phylakissa to keep people away. That’s 0=0 work!”

“I don’t recall you complaining when we were assigned the job, young lady.”

“Don’t be dumb. Nothing good would come of having a sane person butt heads with that indiscriminate magic freak. I know just how crazy Mathers is, so someone has to keep things in order. *Scotland might be a different story, but I doubt he would go easy on anyone here in England.*”

“Well, it is true London must remind him of some rather unpleasant memories of life.”

“I can’t stand a man who can’t find a place for himself outside of magic. He’s practically a natural disaster. It’s like if an undertaker went around killing people to ensure he could make a living.”

The nervous people were sure to relax somewhat now that the Crowley’s Hazards were gone.

So the temptation might fall upon them.

Like a fool hoping for some secret knowledge, people were sure to peek out through a gap in the curtains or hesitantly crack open the door to feel the outside air.

That meant this pair’s work was only going to grow.

Warning people one at a time would be far too much effort.

“Hey, Westcott, as a coroner, you know how to *open people up*, don’t you?”

“I do not appreciate that phrasing.”

“You don’t get to complain when, outside of your job, you cut open bizarre corpses to examine the bodies of those who had signed certain contracts on parchment,” said Annie. “Anyway, this time I’ll be the victim and you can be the villain. You can use a razorblade or a kitchen knife, but isn’t there a perfect killer for an eerie night like tonight?”

“Ha ha. So Jack the Ripper was part of the police, was he!? That explains why he was never identified no matter how many bodies turned up!! ...That theory is hardly funny, young lady.”

Part 4

The silver girl held her smartphone on its side.

She seemed to be reviewing what she had filmed earlier.

“John William Brodie-Innes. The Calvary cross, the equal-armed cross, the pyramid cross, the Maltese cross, and more. They all refer to the joints in a battle formation. So the primary effect must be the gathering, directing, and scattering of power. The more time he is given, the greater the formation he can weave together.”

She muttered under her breath and showed no intention of explaining to Kamijou and Accelerator.

“Robert William Felkin. Those aren’t tarot cards flying around him. Are they a mind immersion spiritual item using tattva? But instead of increasing his own mental state, they may be meant to drag other people’s minds into the bog. And I bet the entire group works together to attack the defenseless physical body once the astral body has been removed. Although if anyone was using an Eastern method, I expected it to be Brodie-Innes.”

These were Golden magicians just like her.

So instead of discovering anything new, Aleister may have been searching for anything that differed from her own understanding.

“Edward Berridge. A magical medicine specialist. I bet they wouldn’t have been so eager to take on the Crowley’s Hazards if they didn’t have him as ‘insurance’. He’s using a reflective tablet which ‘redirects’ the impurities to heal. That does sound like the kind of system he would use.”

At that point, Aleister paused for a moment.

And was that a cynical smile on her face?

“Annie Horniman. Are those white and black clubs supposed to be Jachin and

Boaz? She's using spells to tune and optimize a third party instead of directly attacking. I would like to know how much of Solomon's Temple she is reproducing with those two pillars. But regardless, I never imagined Annie would follow *Mathers's* instructions."

William Wynn Westcott, Israel Regardie, Netta Fornario. She chopped the long video into small chunks, divided them into multiple folders, and added tags to signify importance. Kamijou could not tell what made her add some to the favorites list and not others, but he kind of felt sorry for the ones who were snubbed. But there had been more than one hundred magicians in all, so this work could not be completed overnight.

Each individual was important, but they were a group.

They were the world's greatest magic cabal.

Was she perhaps focusing on the ones who were the key to that group movement? That was only possible because she was familiar with the group from her time with it, but she had to be careful lest she end up stabbed in the side by someone she had ignored or by a dark horse. Failing due to some overlooked detail would be a very Aleister thing to do.

Meanwhile, they heard the dull sound of breaking metal.

Piccadilly Circus was lined with famous shops and one of those was a shopping center with a focus on hardware supplies.

The back entrance used a solid metal door, but the remnants of the Egyptification came in handy. There were plenty of stones and blunt objects lying around. They threw a rope over the top of a streetlight, attached it to the front and back of a golden sarcophagus containing who-knows-who, and tied a shorter rope to the center so it could dangle down as a handle.

Then they just had to ring the bell.

It was a lot like a Shinto temple bell.

By holding the rope in both hands and leaning backwards, the sarcophagus swung back like a swing. And just like revolting peasants lifting up a log to break through a castle's gate, the feet of the sarcophagus broke through the thick metal door with a powerful dropkick.

Kamijou Touma the Burglar was very troubled that this had worked.

“Okay, I’m getting more and more worried about my future!”

“You’re just barely safe as long as you don’t start to think of these things as a special talent. Try to return to normal society, human.”

Since Othinus was a god of war and deception, she did not seem to think much of the destruction occurring before her eyes. But if she accepted anything and everything, he felt like he would gradually drift in the wrong direction, so his teenage heart actually wanted her to scold him a little. Who would have thought the day would come when he longed for Index’s behavior that had done such severe damage to his adolescent scalp.

When the door was mercilessly smashed through, an alarm began to sound, but none of them seemed to care. It was obviously just an automatic thing and no human guards would be showing up in this situation. Still, it was distracting, so silver-haired Aleis-tan grabbed a metal ruler bent at a right angle and smashed the alarm console on the wall to silence it.

“We should knock over some shelves to create a barricade, but as you can see, you shouldn’t expect it to accomplish much. If they wanted to, they could blow through the walls or ceiling to get in.”

“Then what’s the point of fortifying ourselves here!? You stupid dick!!”

“The shock seems to have temporarily dragged your vocabulary back to the early elementary level, but not to worry. We are not here for defense.”

Crude names did not seem to have much of an effect on this lover of dirty jokes. Some kind of specialized tactics would be necessary for her rotten heart, like how casting healing magic would do damage to rotten zombies.

“I will not rely on magic.”

She knew their opponents well.

Yet the bloodthirsty board chairman spoke with a gruesome smile on her face.

“I am here to prepare what I need to hunt down old-fashioned Mathers.”

“What a joke,” spat out Accelerator. “What can you do with some junk at a

hardware store? A chainsaw and nail gun aren't gonna do much against them."

The #1 reached toward his skinny neck and touched the choker. He had stuck with them just because, but now he was implying it would be a lot faster if he *dealt with* the enemy on his own.

Aleister responded with an exasperated sigh at her short-tempered student.

"Preserve your battery."

"..."

"You look starved for an explanation, child. I apologize if I ruined the illusion that adults can do anything, but we unfortunately are too short on time to hold a special lesson to clear up some brat's questions. We are busy, so your bottle can wait. Although I will explain what I can while we work."

Despite not actually having permission, the silver girl threw open the door to the main shopping area and grabbed the handle of a shopping cart. That much looked a lot like a young wife out shopping for dinner ingredients, but all the lights were out and the humming girl was headed toward a section full of dangerous-looking tools.

"To answer your question, normal weapons would indeed be useless. But that just means we have to scale up. Airplanes, tanks, barbed wire, mortars, *etc.* Quite a few tools of death reached the limelight during World War I and so many people died that even the winners wanted to kill themselves out of guilt. And I saw it firsthand to make sure my prophecy had been accurate, so you can trust me on that. But do you know what weapons the soldiers feared most and were quickly banned by war treaties because of the gruesome way in which they killed?"

Othinus and Accelerator gave a "hmp" of acknowledgement.

Kamijou was apparently the only one who did not know the answer to this quiz. Although it was unclear whether it was healthier to know the answer or to not know.

Whatever the case, Aleister readily gave the answer while selecting a welding torch and a thick gas tank.

“It was the poison gas weapons. The most well-known is mustard gas, but if we don’t aim that high, we can easily produce a certain gas right here. For example, the first one used in World War I was chlorine gas and it can be made by mixing together some ordinary detergents. And it too is a true weapon of war.”

“ ... ”

“Now, the weapon known as the demon of World War II was the napalm used for carpet bombing, but that too can be easily created by mixing some additives into gasoline. Also, the self-forging warheads used in modern tank warfare are destructive enough to break through composite armor, but that was really just taking something accidentally discovered when a housewife was caught in an oven accident and putting it to military use. It has long been said that it is not the technology that kills people, but that is all the more evident when you see how thin the line between military and civilian is. Do I need to go on and explain the connection between soccer balls and radomes or between stealth fighter canopies and a microwave oven’s protective door?”

“Enough talk. You’re giving endless examples because you feel the need to sound more convincing. In other words, you’re worried this isn’t enough.”

That quick rebuttal came from the #1.

He was not the type to sugarcoat things.

“Did they really look like people who would die from ordinary weapons found in military history? I seriously doubt running them over with a tank would be the end of the story.”

“Hah hah hah. Oh, don’t worry about that. You can count on me when it comes to handmade weapons. Just so you know, I was once an agent for the British intelligence agency MI5. Blam, blam☆”

“Wait, what!?” shouted Kamijou.

He could not quite remember if the number was 5 or 6, but he was reminded of that handsome spy who traveled the world in a black tuxedo.

“I was constantly disappearing and appearing elsewhere thanks to my lifestyle, so some magical researchers take that idea pretty seriously. They say I

did so many bizarre things and shocked all the newspapers to either manipulate information or send a sign to my enemies or allies. Now, I'll leave the truth of the matter to your imagination." The silver girl giggled. "Anyway, the impact of new weapons can vary. These might be legendary magicians, but they aren't the residents of some convenient alternate world. Showing them a borrowed gun or bomb isn't going to freak them out."

Aleister winked as she threw more and more "materials" into her shopping cart: thick metal pipes, the rubber tubes used to connect a gas stove to the gas line, a drill, a circular saw, an air compressor, *etc.* She seemed to have regained her confidence by now.

"But that just means we have to show them *something beyond modern warfare*. And SF weapons are my specialty. Have you forgotten? I'm the board chairman in control of the very Academy City that created espers like you. Even without the Bank, I can build some *next-generation weapons even more brutal than magic*."

Part 5

Think of an athletic festival or cultural festival.

When people were moving about to prepare for something, it created a lot of hustle and bustle.

And that of course meant people could not keep their eyes on every little thing. There would be blind spots.

“Come out, Qliphah Puzzle 545.”

While Aleister and Kamijou Touma were slicing apart pipes with a saw and drilling holes in them, Accelerator hid himself in the vending machine corner of the dark shopping center. And something rose up in front of him.

It was a collection of snack wrappers, empty cans, paper packages, and other trash that should have been divided into the different trash cans lined up by the vending machines. When it all gathered together like nails to a magnet, it ultimately had the same volume as a short girl.

And with a quiet popping sound, a translucent silhouette appeared from within.

“Nee hee hee. Nee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee.”

Looking just at the shape, she appeared to be a girl.

But her overall proportions were out of balance. She had too many curves for her short height. Her eyes were naturally quite large and her nose looked artificially well-formed, but most of all, her rainbow-colored hair spread out like a jellyfish, axolotl-colored wings grew from her back, and a thick tentaclish tail covered in suckers extended from the back of her hips.

She was a demon artificially created by Lola (i.e. Coronzon).

Accelerator had taken her in when she was near death after defeat at Aleister

Crowley's hands and she was currently secretly working with the #1.

Qliphah Puzzle 545 wore a "poverty dress" made from faded English newspapers decorated with duct tape and thick pins. Countless English words danced across their surface and lined up to create shocking articles.

The fear of Academy City's human experiments. Should clone tech be internationally banned? The #1. Manufacturing people from human cells. Ignoring their human rights. The possibility of a new threat. Using them as a new commodity for safe and cheap labor.

"Now, now. What do you need with a demon like me?"

"First, why even bother with that meaningless performance?"

"I'm the type of demon that possesses people. Or rather, incubi and succubi are pretty much the only demons with their own bodies. Anyway, existing without that is really exhausting. So when I appear, I like to have a door to use. Or maybe you would call it something to symbolize the birthing process."

He had asked, but the #1 clearly did not care about the answer.

"Okay, my first command is to clean up this mess."

"Ugh. That's like telling someone to clean up the confetti they threw around for you. Was I born under a star ensuring I would only meet ultra super Ss?"

However, Qliphah Puzzle 545 seemed to be enjoying herself as she got down on all fours to clean up. She also needlessly stuck her little butt out toward him and wagged her tentaclish tail. She was, after all, a being meant to draw out people's malice and desire. Poses that stimulated people's sadism may have been her specialty.

Yes.

The text covering those crinkling newspapers was likely completely different from what Aleister Crowley had seen. It might change depending on who was looking at it.

Materialism, anxiety, greed, lust, ugliness, cruelty, viciousness, rejection, foolishness, and godlessness.

It was all a metaphor for the Qliphoth that pointed to all this world's vices.

Accelerator could only quietly click his tongue.

...Which meant he still felt somewhat *uneasy* even after this attempt to reduce the tension.

That demon would speak with a voice as sweet as candy but laugh with the grating voice of an old witch. It may have been a part of her demonic devilishness that set people on edge, like listening to a scratchy record that occasionally let the needle skip.

“Nee hee hee. I would really prefer you didn’t speak my demonic name out loud all that often.”

“Then what do you suggest I do?”

“Do you really have to take that threatening stance? Honestly, I don’t care what you call me as long as it’s obvious you mean me: familiar, agathion, imp, or even partner or honey if you like☆”

“...”

“Okay, okay. I forgot you were the type who can’t take a joke. Now, why have you summoned me here? Since you’re so powerful and very nearly unmatched, I doubt you want help fighting.”

“I want to confirm the consistency of some things.”

“I see, I see. Nee hee hee.”

The rainbow girl laughed like an old witch and placed an index finger on her slender chin.

And that symbol of dangerous knowledge spoke.

“I did some research regarding the Golden cabal, so I can tell you Aleister Crowley is not bluffing here. But you already knew that, didn’t you? Instead of focusing on what Crowley said, you compared the reactions of Othinus, who understands magic, and Kamijou Touma, who does not. You looked to see if either of them noticed something off about what was said.”

Accelerator decided she was not an idiot after all.

Aleister had spent many long years plotting inside the Windowless Building,

so would he be able to determine the truth of what that human said by looking at her face? The answer was no. She was the one standing in the spotlight, but that was not where he had to focus.

Although as the one holding the demon's reins, perhaps this display of intelligence was not to be celebrated.

"Mathers and Coronzon, was it? So which one is the big boss here?"

"*At the moment* I would say Mathers. Looking at the influence they have, anyway."

"You said Aleister wasn't bluffing. Even about MI5?"

"Peh heh heh ☆ What do you think?"

The demon covered her mouth and laughed.

She too was leaving that to his imagination.

"There are a few things I don't understand," said Accelerator.

"Are you asking me to teach you the basics of magic like how to convert and refine your life force into magic power? I'm pretty sure Crowley or Kamijou would notice your absence and come looking before we were done."

"Not that. Why isn't she bluffing? Just because we came running when she was in a bind? If that was enough to dull her mind, there's no way she could've kept Academy City running for so long. There must be more to it."

"Nee hee hee. At the very least, I don't think it's for your sake."

"..."

The #1 thought for a moment while leaning against a drink vending machine.

"Does she still have a job for *that right hand*?"

"Focusing on the efficiency and utility is exactly what I would expect from someone who made a contract with a demon, but it might be simpler than that. You're thinking of her as the board chairman, but this Aleister has left that position and is free to act."

Of course, he could not trust what he heard here.

There was no evidence to back up the theory and it was all coming from a demon.

“Come to think of it, with the board chairman stuff and everything, you seem awfully knowledgeable about the science side. How much do you know about Aleister?”

“Only what data was given to me to define my enemy. I, Qliphah Puzzle 545, was set to autonomously activate as a Crowley Killer if Lola Coronzon was no longer in control of the world. Simply put, killing Crowley is the entire reason I exist.”

“...”

That reminded him of something.

A military clone known as Misaka Worst had been created to kill him. Or if she failed in that mission, she was to take her own life to induce a mental breakdown in him.

“Pathetic,” he muttered. “Does everyone think alike?”

“I don’t know what you’re thinking of when you say that, but is it that surprising they’re so similar? Crowley, Coronzon, and Mathers originally lived in the same world. It was only later that they scattered into different groups.”

“Then there is more to this,” spat out the #1 monster. “I don’t know if it’s Coronzon or Mathers, but anyone with those same cruel thought patterns wouldn’t be satisfied with a simple attack on the building. Something far more dirty awaits us.”

Part 6

The Golden cabal was released into the London night.

A girl in a frilly white dress with pink accents flew through the darkness. Her short red hair, white skin, and small build appeared even fluffier than normal thanks to the white flower, veil-like hair decoration, and ballerina-style dress. Without the thick soles of her shoes, she would have been less than 150 centimeters. It was reminiscent of how most animals would try to look threatening by bristling their fur or feathers when faced with danger.

Her name was Dion Fortune and she too was one of the Golden magicians.

She moved legs in bright stocking to dangerously jump from rooftop to rooftop and some others ran alongside her at the same speed. Arthur Edward Waite wore a vest and slacks and looked like a tailor thanks to the slide rule in his belt and measuring tape around his neck. John William Brodie-Innes wore the black robes of a judge. Waite in particular was more skilled than anyone with tarot, so he could not be thrown off the trail no matter where their prey tried to hide.

The specific process was of little importance.

They just had to know that what Waite told them was true.

“Naked Shopping Center at Piccadilly Circus. Would you like someone to watch your back, young lady?”

“And how about I move out ahead of you so you’re protected on both sides? Nothing motivates a British gentleman like a small hand holding onto the hem of his clothes. Hah hah!”

“No thank you,” spat out the small girl without even glancing over at her companions. “The science side? Don’t make me laugh. Only my mistress is allowed to kill me.”

She jumped down from the roof of a five-story building.

The shopping center in question was right there. And while in midair, Fortune reached for the box that always stayed by her side. The black box was made of a smooth material and was about big enough to hold a soccer ball. Normally, the group would work together to construct a single piece of magic, but she added in a pinch of adlibbing.

As her skirt caught the wind and gave a glimpse of her drawers, she tossed in a well-used rose cross medal and closed the lid as if to chew it up.

“Translate, simplify, and create anew!!”

The truth was, Dion Fortune *did not know what kind of magic would come out*. She claimed to use up old and inefficient traditions to rebuild them as a smarter new spell, but the grimoires she compiled were beyond what the Golden’s defenses could handle and some magicians in the cabal speculated their teachings moved beyond what the original ones had covered. So the magical phenomena that Fortune introduced to the battlefield would bring great chaos to enemy and ally alike.

Only one thing was known for sure: Dion Fortune had consistently found victory using this method.

Since not even Fortune could predict what her magic would do, it had a way of ruining any calculations and plans made in advance. It was much like triggering a volcanic eruption or sudden downpour while two armies were staring each other down. No matter what kind of plans a novice like Crowley built up in that building, they would all be torn down by something shockingly unexpected.

Even now as she jumped down from a building rooftop with her ballerina-like skirt inflated by the wind, she had no guarantee the magic she used would assist her in that.

“Hey, you need some help!? That’s a five-story drop!!”

“I said no thank you.”

Fortune spoke casually while she dropped through the air of that December night.

Ultra-hot flames burst from within the black box. Her short red hair and decorative veil were tossed about. And like a booster, the explosion transformed into thrust and forcibly altered the dress girl's falling trajectory. She gave a hop, floated for a moment, and then descended safely to the ground along an unstable trajectory.

She had not planned this at all. Any plans would have been meaningless.

It all came down to her *luck of the draw*.

That was Dion Fortune's greatest weapon. That was why she created the invisible monster of unpredictability and used it to help her fight. It was just as unfair as someone winning through pure dumb luck against a supercomputer AI taught to play mahjong through repetitive learning that included the traits of individual players. It was such nonsense that not even Arthur Edward Waite's cards could fully predict what would happen.

The stage play ceremonies were secondary for her. She used adlibbed oddities. So while raising a giant mass of flames like a hammer, she took aim at a window on the shopping center's second floor.

Did this enemy require working with the others or not?

"Here I go, Crowley!!!!!!"

If this meteor of an attack landed, it might just raze the shopping center and the rest of Piccadilly Circus to the ground.

Yes, if it landed.

What came next was not an artillery shell or a laser beam.

With the explosive sound of space itself being distorted, something slammed into her while she was still airborne.

Part 7

“Hit confirmed. Charging second shot. Don’t underestimate the illusion known as science I have created.”

Inside the dark shopping center, Aleister aimed something forward while keeping his distance from the window. It looked something like a spiky shield, but each of the spikes was a modified thick pipe. A look on the back of the shield showed thick tubes and hoses packed in tight.

Aleister laughed while surrounded by an air compressor and an acetylene gas tank normally used for welding.

Accelerator breathed an exasperated sigh while leaning on his modern design cane. Only Kamijou Touma responded with the surprise and asked the question that Aleister wanted.

“What? I turned the knobs and kept the hoses from tangling like you asked, but she suddenly fell from the sky!”

“This merely sends flammable gas through the pipes to create a mass of sound.”

Teachers appreciated students who asked lots of questions, so the silver girl answered while using a grip similar to a bicycle’s brakes to open and close the shield-like collection of pipes.

“That said, it’s really just detonating a mixture of acetylene, oxygen, and hydrogen and using the pipes to aim it all in one direction. The speed is probably Mach 9.8. ...Now, this is no time to be staring with your mouth agape. The speed of sound is the speed at which it propagates, so what do you think will happen if you force it to go beyond that and reach nearly ten times the usual speed?”

Sound would become a brutally lethal weapon.

The rest was the same as an industrial cutter that sliced through thick steel with water. And mixing artificial diamond dust or other solid impurities would increase its cutting power. Air could produce a similar sort of power.

The cute girl god(!?) insolently crossing her legs on Kamijou's shoulder spoke up.

"That explains why you were mechanically grinding down those titanium alloy screws. You are a cruel one. You filled the barrels with a special abrasive to increase the damage from the shockwave, didn't you?"

"I call it the Super Sonic Striker. Tighten it together and it forms a spear."

Aleister fired the second shot. The dress girl must have realized it was some kind of projectile even if she did not know what exactly it was. She held a hand to her face like she had run nose-first into an invisible wall and she used her flame-spewing box to leap to the side. However...

"Spread it out and the S.S.S. forms a wall."

The third shot struck the short girl's entire body. The invisible wall sent her flying in the opposite direction where she slammed back-first into a building's wall. She was partially embedded in the wall, so the thick wall itself must have taken damage from the blast. And it of course did not end there. The flames vanished from the black box and the frilly dress girl lost her support. With the wind whipping at her skirt and drawers, she helplessly fell more than three stories down to the ground.

"Ah!!" shouted Kamijou.

"You idiot. This isn't the time for compassion."

The #1 was unfazed. The one who blatantly clicked their tongue was Aleister who had supposedly just scored the clean hit she had wanted.

"Just like with Mathers. I still need more data."

That redheaded girl had fallen from quite a height, but she slowly pressed her hands against the ground and lifted herself up on legs wearing bright stockings. There was only asphalt below her, so nothing would have cushioned the fall. And what about the Mach 9.8 mass of sound that had hit her!?

Then came the fourth shot.

When the shockwave spear hit her, the frilly dress girl was slammed into the opposite wall once more. By the time the fifth shot was fired, she held up the black box and something like a translucent umbrella deflected the shockwave spear.

Was she *adapting to it*?

“Are they preparing to work together? The Golden cabal’s true attack is coming.”

Meanwhile, the high-pitched sound of shattering glass came from overhead. The enemy was the world’s greatest magic cabal and there was no guarantee that one girl was the only one approaching them. There was another attacker. But even if he knew it was a diversion, Kamijou would not be satisfied until he had commented on the strange scene playing out outside the window.

“Hey, she only successfully blocked that last one. Shouldn’t she have taken a lot more damage than this!? O-or is that *thanks to her black box* too!?”

“I see. The outlines of the problem are gradually coming into view. This odd feeling may be the key to reaching the heart of the issue. The key to learning how exactly Mathers and the others managed to escape that battle alive.”

Aleister must have decided continuing to attack that nightmarish girl would only allow another magician to get behind them because she tossed the entire unit out the window.

And that included the acetylene tank which was extremely useful for metalwork like welding, but could cause an explosion if handled improperly.

Accelerator did not bother relying on his power. He held a hand over just one ear while still leaning on his cane.

A moment later, flames and light on a level never seen in a normal school life reached Kamijou even though he was indoors. But this was not enough to relax. That frilly dress girl with that floating black box was enough of a monster to hop back to her feet after taking repeated hits from a mysterious superweapon, so it seemed doubtful an irregular explosion would be enough to take her out.

Kamijou's only option was to desperately stay right behind Aleister.

"All magic follows some kind of system. It only appears otherwise because you do not understand all of the formulas hidden behind it."

"What's your point?" asked Accelerator.

"It isn't like her. Dion Fortune only ever uses what she happens to draw from her box, so it is odd for her to rely on a single spell like this. Using quasi-immorality to frighten people was more Westcott's style."

She answered, but she had no intention of actually explaining. Not to mention that only Kamijou, who had seen the past in the Windowless Building, would recognize those names.

"Dion."

Without properly answering Accelerator's question, Aleister laughed in her throat. Even though she had to understand they were the ones on the run here.

"So it's Dion Fortune, is it!? Ha ha. At this rate, I wouldn't be surprised to have Regardie coming for us next!"

It was a broken sort of laughter, but then Aleister shoved a hand in her skirt pocket. She had set up next-generation weapons around the shopping center, but to get her from position to position, she had put together a few brutal grenades that used the gel form of gasoline known as napalm or that combined iron oxide and aluminum for high-temperature incendiary rounds. The crazy scale of the Golden cabal was obvious from the fact that these were only meant to act like smoke bombs.

A moment later, Aleister's head *rotated vertically*.

No, it had been severed by some kind of sharp blade.

It looked a lot like she had been beheaded by an executioner's axe.

So who would have believed it had been done with the edge of a single card?

The card depicted a tower being destroyed by lightning from heaven.

It symbolized destruction and shock.

"Excuse me."

The person who stepped up alongside the decapitated girl was a middle-aged man with a tailor's long measuring tape around his neck and a slide rule in his belt.

"That was much too easy, so I did not have a chance to introduce myself. I am Arthur Edward Wai--"

"It was tricking you that was much too easy, you fool."

He was not given a chance for small talk or to gasp in surprise.

A small feminine hand slammed into Arthur Edward Waite's face. No, the blow was not the point. The hand held a thick plastic bag like those used for IVs. And needless to say, it was shoved right into the man's mouth.

And that deadly hand belonged to Aleister Crowley.

When the focus of Waite's eyes shifted slightly, he saw the true silver girl standing before him.

"It's the same as a Rorschach test. When people are shown an unclear pattern like an uncountable number of stars or grains of sand, they will imagine the outlines they hope to see. Just as people see faces in the milky way or the desert dunes. There is even a theory that people manage to resolve their troubles by staring at a crystal ball because they are actually peering into their own mind by looking at the faint scratches and cloudiness on and in the crystal. That is why fortunetellers leave their mark on the tools of their trade after many long years of use. In other words, the trick to this form of guidance is not to shut off all information; you must provide just a hint of information. Are you even listening?"

Did that magician really have the time to break it all down to understand it?

There was a whitish explosion not quite like a magnesium one.

Once iron oxide and aluminum began to react, they would heat up to a maximum of three thousand degrees Celsius. The simple firepower rivaled Stihl Magnus's Innocentius, but it was less continuous and provided less control. Regardless, it could not be fun having such a dramatic chemical reaction occurring inside your own body.

Ultra-hot flames burst from the man's eyes, mouth, nose, and every other hole. And when Kamijou saw the man transformed into a pillar of fire, he began freaking out.

“Wah! Waahhh!!

Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???”

“Quit scrambling around for a fire extinguisher. We need to get to the next attack point. This is no more than a smokescreen.”

“Wh-wha-?”

“I will obediently accept even the most unpleasant fact if it is true. Have you forgotten what happened with Mathers and Fortune? If this was enough to kill them, we wouldn't be in this jam.”

Extraordinary did not even begin to cover it.

While it was difficult to harm Accelerator, the #1 esper, and Aleister, who had mastered magic, they would still suffer like a normal person if they were cut or stabbed. The only other person Kamijou could think of who would not bat an eye at having their entire body destroyed was Othinus as a full Magic God when she had worked to take his life with her crossbow.

And this was not limited to Mathers at the top or Fortune with her black box. It was nothing special for them.

Could they all do this?

Just how monstrous was the Golden cabal?

“Kh.”

When they heard the sound of footsteps on metal, the shoulder fairy whispered in the boy's ear.

“(Above, human.)”

“So more trash has arrived, huh? How long do I have to keep preserving my battery, you piece of shit?”

Accelerator made it clear he wanted to kill whoever it was before they were killed.

The sound came from the third or fourth floor. That was where lights were hanging down at even intervals to illuminate the entire shopping center. Think of it like a large warehouse or school gym. This sound came from the complexly intersecting metal framework up there.

Step, step step, step, thud.

Was it some kind of sparks?

Perhaps they had something hard on the soles of their shoes, like with tap shoes.

With each step, a small orange light floated about overhead. They formed crosses. Some had arms of even length, some were twisted, and some were like a combination of four arrowheads. Many different cross symbols filled the night sky like a planetarium.

This was not a hunter who silently pursued his prey. These were the steps of the hound that used his footsteps and breathing to apply pressure and lure the prey out into the line of fire.

There was no real light on him and they could only see a figure dancing in the darkness, but Aleister practically groaned a certain name.

“John William Brodie-Innes.”

He too was a proper Golden magician. So was he one of the truly formidable foes who could single-handedly overturn the modern Western magic that Aleister had spent a century spreading through the world?

But the silver girl saw through it a moment later.

“No, he rushed out here to take over for Waite. He’s only stalling for time. The foundation and essence of the Golden cabal has always been ceremonial magic modeled after a stage play. And the results here are not even being offered up to Mathers. The Lady of the Masquerade Ball. So even after all this, you still devote yourself to her? You certainly are a loyal hound!!”

Part 8

Hyde Park was located about three kilometers west-southwest of the Naked Shopping Center at Piccadilly Circus.

There was a small island in the Serpentine Lake within the park.

At just two kilometers away, few places were so close to Buckingham Palace.

A woman and two men were there.

Each and every one of the Golden magicians had walked a legendary or mythical path. And with a coroner, a genius author, and others, many of them had been famous outside of the cabal as well. However, a few of them had been famous for their more scandalous side.

For example, William Wynn Westcott and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers whose strong wills had forced them to split the cabal between the two of them. There was also Aleister Crowley who had widened those cracks until the entire cabal shattered.

And.

When thinking of the most influential member who had helped spread word of the organization, you could not forget about *her*.

The Lady of the Masquerade Ball.

She was known to have so little sense she boldly attended a non-magical ball while wearing a Symbolic Weapon that was still being developed and should never have been taken out in public. In a way, her wild antics outdid even Crowley's.

"A distance of 3000 is still dangerous."

One of the men kneeling at her feet softly spoke to her.

The Lady of the Masquerade Ball reigned supreme in a fancy red party dress

that showed off her bodylines and with her beautiful face covered by a smooth mask without eyes or a mouth. The two men knew their place, so they remained kneeling behind her with their heads bowed even as they expressed their concern.

“This is still in the danger zone, so the unexpected could still harm your precious body. I do not know how powerful this science of Crowley’s is, but I do not think the risk is worth taking.”

The masked woman’s only response was to exhale from her nose.

She was not Aleister Crowley. The side effects of magic did not concern her. Even if it fell upon some ignorant person or blew a faithful servant’s body to bits, she would still prioritize her own goals as a magician.

She was served only by those who were not bothered by that stance.

If Mathers and Westcott were the leaders of the main faction, then she was the empress of the secondary faction. That was why she had created *a secondary cabal known as The Sphere to which only the chosen of the chosen were invited*. It may have been like the elites of a giant empire gathering in one place and putting together a unique set of ideals. Their territory might be small, but their influence could not be taken lightly.

One of the men wore the thick, long-sleeved shirt and comfortable pants of old-fashioned tennis apparel. He held an oil lamp in one hand.

His name was Frederick Leigh Gardner.

“I have a report from our brothers. They say to fire.”

“I see.”

That was all she said.

As soon as she snapped her fingers, their formation moved. The formation was made by the Lady of the Masquerade Ball and her two magician servants, but it was not a triangle.

There was one more spot. A horn was embedded in the small island to form the fourth corner to take the place of a man who wielded a twisted silver rod.

“So Allan never made it, did he? Where did he get off to, anyway?”

Those words held great meaning.

The Lady of the Masquerade Ball.

Charles Rosher, Frederick Leigh Gardner, and Allan Bennett.

Surely you have not forgotten.

Allan Bennett was the only teacher Aleister Crowley ever accepted and his greatest friend. Yet the Lady of the Masquerade Ball only saw him as one of her servants.

He was useful, but not worth growing sentimental over. A pawn was no more than a pawn.

“Let us begin the silly wordplay. We shall toy with numbers and letters, add straight lines and curves, and combine it all into signs and symbols.”

This was somehow different from the Golden incantations that resembled complex formulas.

What left the Lady of the Masquerade Ball’s mouth sounded more like a children’s song. The simple lyrics were a series of sticky terms that seemed to carry gloomy traditions and other aspects of the past.

Just look back at history and you would find what the Lady of the Masquerade Ball had accomplished with her beauty and wide knowledge.

She read the classics and concentrated it down to the level that a certain being was visible to the naked eye.

(This really is no fun without you here, Allan. Everything goes exactly the way I want. These non-rebellious servants provide no variety. They do nothing more than extend the reach of my own individuality.)

“It is time to shake Kochab, the planet protected by Raphael. But do not forget. Though the names may differ, the entire celestial sphere points to a single tree. All elements fall within my grasp and no element found on the surface of the four worlds or to the very ends of this earth can be fully separated. Therefore, only the appropriate knowledge allows one to reach their pure form.”

Simply put, she had fully summoned the spirit of Mercury with a method

entirely different to the Golden cabal's.

“Planetary Spirit Taphthartharath. Leave thy natural revolution and seize upon my planet.”

It had no physical form.

Nothing more than a great power collapsed in upon itself while falling straight toward the shopping center at Piccadilly Circus.

Part 9

It was all blown to smithereens.

And yet someone somewhere said the following:

“Nee hee hee. *Mission accomplished*☆”

Part 10

When it erupted, Kamijou had no idea what he was screaming.

In the instant of the lightning-like strike, a single strange image was burned into his retinas: Accelerator reaching for his choker and Aleister grabbing the #1's wrist and pulling him to the ground.

"Get down!!!!!!"

As soon as that voice stabbed into his ears from close by, the flow of time suddenly reverted to normal.

Aleister had known Kamijou would do what he was told, so she had instead prioritized the #1 who would take a moment longer to grasp the situation.

Everything exploded and was tossed around. The shelves, the walls, and the ceiling fell apart and were blasted skyward. It was less an explosion and more a frightening vortex of destruction, like a giant tornado had been compressed into a point before unleashing its power all at once.

But.

In that case, the boy did not understand.

Neither Imagine Breaker nor Accelerator had done anything. They were simply lying down and clenching their teeth, but for some strange reason, their flesh and blood was not torn to pieces and they had not died.

"That is the symbol of Mercury. The Planetary Spirit Taphthartharath."

While lying on top of the #1, the silver girl brushed off some small pieces of the building and provided that name.

"How about explaining in a way that actually explains something?" asked Accelerator.

"But in this case, it is the same as the relationship between salt, sulfur, and

mercury in alchemy. Instead of pulling in the actual planet revolving around the sun, certain symbols and signs are given energy in order to control them. You should understand what I mean, Kamijou Touma.”

“?”

This was a problem.

Why was it so hard for geniuses to understand that passing the conversation to someone else would only get a blank stare in response?

“It is the same as astrology. Where the stars are actually located in the vast universe is of little importance. We only find meaning in how they line up when viewed from earth. Well, due to your extensive experience with modern Western magic, you may be more familiar with the four elements. But the basic idea remains the same. It can get complicated when you include Enoch, but it would be the element of wind in this case. When you convert from decimal to hexadecimal, the number of stones does not actually change. You are merely viewing the problem from a different angle. Every man and every woman is a star.”

“???”

Oh, no, thought Kamijou.

The board chairman assumed he understood, Othinus was not providing an explanation, and the #1 was giving him a look that said, “If you get all this, then I’ll leave it in your hands.”

He got the feeling they would kill him if he said he did not understand.

Aleis-tan was apparently the type who would die of loneliness if left all alone, so she seemed to view him as a formidable enemy and as a good friend who had shared her experiences in the Windowless Building. But when it came to this topic, Kamijou could not play the Showa-era wife who knew what her husband meant when he said “y’know, that thing”.

He had never felt so left behind.

“Simply put, the power being used is the normal energy circulating through the earth. I am sure you have heard of ley lines before. The attack appeared to

fall from the sky, but it was actually the opposite. It erupted from the earth and rose toward heaven. Just like a car's wheel, when the human eye views it at a certain speed, it appears to move in the opposite direction. Or to dumb it down to the point that a kindergartner could understand, they placed a fictional Mercury on the screen of the night sky, removed one element from the energy building up in the earth to destabilize that energy, and launched it toward that fictional point. See how it is all related to the way we see things from earth? Try fighting back normally with Imagine Breaker or Accelerator when you are still affected by that viewpoint issue and it will have the opposite effect. No matter how strongly you view them as an enemy, you will only increase their accuracy and power. It would be as foolish as reaching out to touch the high-voltage line powering a train."

"R-right, right, right. Yes, exactly. I know just what you mean. That's exactly what I was about to say!!"

Kamijou Touma was on the verge of tears, but he forced a full-face smile while trembling and spoke with his voice cracking. After all, Accelerator did not seem like the type to take a joke. How was he supposed to say he was clueless when that boy was giving off such shark-like killer intent!?

He had to push through it.

But that was fine! He probably would not die just because he did not bother figuring out what it all meant!!

But the small understander on his shoulder saw right through him and gave some exasperated advice.

She was, after all, the god of deception in addition to magic and war.

"Human, it seems you need a quick overview of why people come to hate math or cooking. When the class is progressing too quickly for them, they will pretend to understand and skip past one page in the thick textbook. And once they do that, they have no hope of understanding anything after that. The only option is to return to where they got stuck. So if you do not confess you are an idiot who understands none of this, your pain will only continue to grow. It is best to bite the bullet while the wound is still shallow."

"Kh."

“Japan has an interesting folk belief: a liar grows into a thief. ...Do as you wish, but I suggest following your ancestors’ advice. I’ll even apologize with you, okay?”

The spiky-haired high school boy decided to return to the basics.

Pretending to be smart had always been a fool’s errand for him.

And he grew teary-eyed when she offered to apologize with him. Anyone who did not cry there could not be human.

“I’m an idiot. I’m sorry, but I’m an idiot. So please tell me!! I doubt this magical knowledge will be useful in any other context, but everything here is so crazy I feel like I’ll be killed in an instant if I don’t learn this, so please teach me! Wait. Oh, no. Am I in serious danger of being held back a year because I’ve been using up all of my brain space for stuff like this!? Goddammit!!”

“Tch. So it’s not about knowledge or skill,” said Accelerator. “Are the real idiots the ones who can’t even absorb information properly? I can’t believe this.”

“Is there a permanent marker lying around here?” asked Aleister. “In honor of this moment, I need to write ‘idiot’ on your forehead.”

Despite what she said, Aleister had the look of an abandoned child...although the boy soon to be permanently branded as an idiot was too preoccupied to notice.

At any rate.

“As long as we behave normally, the energy will only descend from high places to low places. If they have removed the Mercury symbols from the ten components to create a lightning rod to guide that power, then we just have to follow the same rules. And what do you do if you don’t want to be hit by the lightning strike hitting the lightning rod? You stay away from it. Doing nothing is a perfectly valid choice.”

“You, the pervert who’s still a pervert as a girl,” said Othinus. “Don’t get carried away. I gave him a push in the right direction to help get things moving again, but normally, I am the only one allowed to insult him.”

“...”

“And you, the androgynous one. Why do you look so displeased?”

There was no difference between science and magic here.

It was the same as reaching out toward a high-voltage line. Attempting any kind of special defense would only harm them.

But if they stayed put, they would be safe.

Aleister’s answer was correct, but how had he known that?

His thoughts turned to a certain staff.

It was a twisted silver rod.

If Allan Bennett had not been one of the Lady of the Masquerade Ball’s servants, it was unlikely Aleister Crowley would have been able to dodge this so easily. For one thing, the planetary spirit summoning used by the Lady of the Masquerade Ball was based on some of the oldest texts in the Golden cabal’s possession. Specifically, some texts that had not been optimized with Mathers’s unique methods. Since Aleister and Mathers were always focused on creating something new, Aleister would likely have been confused by this. If she had not heard about it from that old man one hundred years ago, the odds were good she would have failed to respond appropriately and been blown to pieces.

It was thanks to the one teacher and friend a certain human had ever accepted.

The silver girl smiled ever so slightly.

(Old enemies never seem to go away, but the old friends are much the same.)

“Curse that Lady of the Masquerade Ball. This kind of *inconsistency* crops up because she relies on such inaccurate bombings. Well, she has always had a bad habit of doing everything in the most extravagant and over-the-top way she can yet losing interest in any one thing quite rapidly.”

Aleister finally got up off of the #1.

Kamijou reacted by looking around the area.

He found a frightening scene. Where had that giant shopping center gone? It

was worse than the aftermath of a child violently tearing open a present. It was more like someone had taken a utility knife and sliced it open into a polyhedral net. The ceiling and walls were gone and nothing but rubble and wreckage was spread out around them like the dunes of a desert.

Kamijou gulped.

“What in the world happened? What about that Waite guy and...whatever the other one was. I feel like there were an awful lot of Williams, but regardless, there were Golden magicians here, right?”

“Arthur Edward Waite and John William Brodie-Innes. There is also poor Dion Fortune who you forgot entirely even though she is a girl. And there might have been more we never saw. The Lady of the Masquerade Ball can be merciless when it comes to sacrificing personnel, so their survival is an unknown quantity.”

None of those names made Kamijou want to say “Oh, yeah! That guy!!”

He had trouble when all these Western names were listed off at once, so it felt like playing on hard mode.

“Tch.”

“Accelerator-san? Would you mind explaining why you clicked your tongue!? And you’re not playing fair here. You’re sitting there acting like you can see through everything, but do you really understand any of this? I mean, you’ve just been silently nodding over there!!”

Had he learned nothing from the lightning rod example? Silence was one way of expressing yourself. Choosing not to say anything careless before you understood the situation was an excellent choice, but Kamijou had never been good at that. Kamijou Touma had the soul of an old lady on a foreign vacation who only knew Japanese, so he generally felt like he would die if he stopped talking. Plus, he had a terrible sense of humor. When someone like him gained any authority at all, they would end up droning on and on like a school principal giving a speech.

When Kamijou looked further out from their location, he realized the damage was not contained to the shopping center.

Only that one building had taken any direct damage, but the indirect damage was a different story. Rubble and glass shards had been scattered in every direction. All around them, windows were shattered, shutters were dented, and even some stone or concrete walls had collapsed. He was glad it was late at night and that the city was on high alert. The scene would have been truly horrific had the streets been teeming with tourists like when London was shown on variety shows.

Meanwhile, a vicious smile reached the lips of someone whose life was becoming something of an unfunny joke.

“But our survival will be an unknown quantity for them as well. In fact, they will likely assume we were killed in the Lady of the Masquerade Ball’s over-the-top Taphthartharath attack.”

“How does that help us, you dirty joke lover!? That just means we drove them back enough that we can’t see them anymore. There’s nothing we can do now, is there!?”

“Yes, and that is fine. You need to learn how to use adversity to your advantage. With this much destruction, the Golden group will need a short time to check for bodies. So now is our chance to act. And there just so happens to be a location I was hoping to check out.”

“And where is that?”

“We can talk on the way there. You wouldn’t want to waste this brief respite we acquired, would you? Welcome, Kamijou Touma-kun, to London, city of fog, magic, and the Golden.”

Fog.

Magic.

And the Golden.

Something clicked in Kamijou Touma’s mind when he heard that. Because he had seen the end of the Battle of Blythe Road in the Windowless Building.

“Oh, that’s right. Blythe Road! That wasn’t some strange fantasy world. It happened for real in the real London. *So that place must still be here.* You said it

was a ceremonial ground and armory for the Golden cabal, right? If we could rummage through that place, we could find some powerful-..."

"Sorry, but no."

The silver girl smiled and rejected that idea.

Was the hint of sadness on her face a touch of nostalgia?

"Isis-Urania. That temple given the number 3 was the first one established by the Golden cabal...although it was more of an annex than anything. It was the kind of moldy stone apartment you can find anywhere. Instead of overwhelming them with power, I would like to understand our enemy. And you cannot learn from a textbook if you start in the middle. So how about we rewind the clock and head back to where it all began?"

Part 11

Now, why was it given the number 3 if it was the cabal's first headquarters?

"That was Westcott's doing," explained Aleister while walking through the London night.

The city was still on high alert, so metal shutters were down all over the place. Some of those shutters had been dented in by something. There may have been no real need for any of it now that Isis-Demeter – the last of the Divine Mixtures – had been destroyed, so the Egyptian stones were gradually fading into the foggy city's air.

The brief silence was almost deafening.

Did this also mean the threat of the Crowley's Hazards had passed? That should have been a good thing, but it also illustrated the strength of the Golden magicians who had torn them apart in the blink of an eye. Even with the Divine Mixtures, the standard(?) Anglican Church had failed to fully accomplish that, yet the cabal had done it so easily.

The era had changed once more.

Instead of that fusion of Egyptian mythology and Greek mythology, everything had been repainted in Golden colors.

"He apparently wanted to claim the Golden magic cabal was not something new but actually the official continuation of the ancient Rosicrucian line. In other words, it was *a new branch*. Thus, he faked a letter sent to a German cabal and also faked a response authorizing the creation of a British branch. That exchange of letters is known as the Sprengel Letters. And because there were already two temples in Germany at the time – or so that old man claimed for his invented backstory – the first one in London was said to be the third."

"..."

“Anna Sprengel. No one ever actually met that legendary individual who only appeared in letters. It sounds utterly ridiculous, but that is the world we live in. I mean, wouldn’t it be exciting if there was actually a mysterious #0 Level 5? A missing superior rank has such a strange draw and persuasive ability. Even if you have no proof of its existence, you assume that is due to your lack of experience. So let me put it as simply as possible. The proper meaning of the word does not really apply in this case, but...the affliction you refer to as ‘chuunibyou’ was just as common a century ago as it is now. Back then, they loved the slightly mysterious ring of the German language they so rarely heard. And there you have it.”

Aleister really was harsh and merciless at times like this. Although she had failed in her own life for the exact same reason, so she could not just innocently laugh about it. Your words had a way of coming back to bite you.

Kamijou looked back toward Academy City’s #1.

The idiot on the verge of being held back decided to rebel against the smartest kid in class.

“Well? Can’t understand a word she’s saying, can you?”

“Why do you look so proud of that?”

“Mwa ha ha! Because I had a head start on all of this stuff and even I’m having trouble believing what I’m hearing!! You didn’t know anything about this before now, so there’s no way you understand when she starts babbling about Isis-Urania!! I bet there are nothing but question marks in the brain behind that handsome face of yours!!”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“Eh? Wait. What? You can’t just admit it! Now I sound like the bad guy here!”

“Isis-Urania, huh? That’s different from Isis-Demeter, so it sounds like I need to fill in some missing information. And it’s supposed to come from some German secret society? But the ‘Golden’ name doesn’t sound German to me. Now, setting aside whether or not that society actually existed, they just wanted the prestige that name brought, right? Sounds like they weren’t interested in actually being loyal.”

“.....

“(Don’t worry, human. No matter how much inner ugliness you reveal, I will always remain your understander. You piece of garbage.)”

She said it oh-so-gently.

At this point, Kamijou Touma could only bite his lip and shake.

You were not an idiot if filling in some missing information was all you needed. That just meant you were missing the proper foundation. On the other hand, what did you call someone who absorbed information worse than reinforced concrete absorbed water? What did you call someone who did not have a clue even after having everything explained? Even the idiot was beginning to figure that out.

“(Also, when idiots try to feel better by seeking out another idiot, it is because they are idiots being idiots. Why don’t you consider bettering yourself instead, you idiot?)”

“You’re saying all of that out loud, Othinus!! Hghh! You’ve already broken my spirit, so is this that thing where you’ve decided it’s faster to tear me down and then build me back up!?”

His cries of “hghh” continued.

And while he fearfully covered his ears to escape reality, Othinus breathed a soft sigh.

“(How smart you are honestly doesn’t matter. Test scores aren’t going to save anyone’s heart. What makes you a real idiot is that you don’t understand that I will always be by your side to explain anything you don’t understand. Honestly, why don’t you use the resources available to you? That’s like struggling to do math in your head in this age where every phone has a calculator. Really, just really. Have you forgotten that wisdom lies at the foundation of magic, war, and deception? Grumble, grumble.)”

With his hands over his ears Kamijou Touma did not at all notice the way his tiny understander was childishly pouting her lips on his shoulder, thus confirming he was an unfortunate sort of idiot.

“This is the place.”

The silver girl came to a stop and looked up at something.

But even after his experience in the Windowless Building, Kamijou Touma would have walked right past it if she had not said anything. It was an ordinary apartment on an ordinary street. Yet there it was. Kamijou’s mouth hung open. This was his first visit after a century had passed. The time scale of European buildings was completely different since they were made of stone and did not have to worry about earthquakes. The only buildings from a century ago in Japan were shrines and temples. There were some thatch roof homes that appeared to be preserved, but their roofs and earthen walls were replaced quite frequently.

It was the same as how famous paintings were touched up with the appropriate paints, meaning you could never truly see the brand-new completed product exactly as the painter had intended it. So when you really did have an original structure right in front of you, it was quite impressive.

“The Isis-Urania Temple.”

Aleister had to be feeling something in her chest.

Even Kamijou felt an odd sense of time passing like he had just returned from Ryugu-jo.

“Mathers, Westcott, and the others would never give this place up.”

“Ah, hey!”

When Aleister stepped in the front door with no hesitation whatsoever, Kamijou belatedly ran after her. Yes. This was the starting point of the Golden cabal. It was a special holy ground for them. So was it really safe to just strut on in? Kamijou thought of those figures he had seen in the darkness at Westminster Abbey. The visual was enough to send a shiver down his spine. To be blunt, they had not seen Kamijou and the others as worthy enemies.

Part 12

And.

When Aleister Crowley and Kamijou Touma rushed into the stone apartment, some scraps of paper and fallen leaves gathered next to Accelerator and rose up as if to insert themselves into this brief period of time.

With a forceful popping sound, a translucent demon appeared from within.

“You have some guts. Nee hee hee.”

“Clean that up.”

“And you learn way too fast. I thought you didn’t know the first thing about comedy, but you’ve already picked up how to respond with perfect timing!!”

She laughed while immediately getting down on all fours. And while she got all muddy and showed off her pitiful state at her master’s feet, the #1 monster breathed a sigh of exasperation.

“Don’t pop up like this when I haven’t called for you. I don’t want them seeing you.”

“Oh, dear. Well, I’m glad you do know I’m your trump card.”

Qliphah Puzzle 545 flipped vertically in complete violation of gravity and her taped-together newspaper dress trailed after her like a crescent moon.

She floated upside down.

Was this pose also meant to extract something from Accelerator’s heart?

“I did as you said, but can you really call that a success?” she asked.

“We survived, didn’t we?”

“Still, though.”

She was originally meant to bring about the madness of war.

She was the very atmosphere that drove people crazy.

So Accelerator's command to Qliphah Puzzle 545 had been a very simple one.

"Y'know, while I do like the idea of encouraging the enemy to attack because you don't want to deal with a brutal surprise attack at their full power, no normal person would be able to give that command. Nee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee ☆"

Doing that was theoretically possible if you had the power to amplify hostile urges in anyone participating in the battle.

No matter how powerful the enemy was.

From the moment their group had joined the battle, they could not escape Qliphah Puzzle 545's power. In fact, the stronger they were and the closer they were to the center of the fighting, the greater their desire to spread death would be. It was the same as the pressure at the earth's core creating such incredible heat. Unless they could choose to stop fighting despite knowing how powerful they were, like Orsola Aquinas had done with Isis-Demeter, they could never shake free of the negative passion.

Accelerator had not tried to dodge it altogether.

Nor had he asked her to do the impossible.

If he knew it would not be fatal, he was fine with hastening the timetable of the bomb being dropped on their heads.

Perhaps this was a logic unique to Accelerator who would use his reflection to stop any attack.

And what would have happened without Qliphah Puzzle 545 pushing the Golden magicians onwards?

If the attack by Planetary Spirit Taphthartharath had been calmly carried out at full power as initially planned, could Aleister have dodged it so easily? Kamijou Touma seemed to be putting his life in that silver girl's hands, but the #1 still had some fundamental doubts there.

He could not forget that the board chairman had never followed a single path of success.

Confidently intercepting the attack only to be blown to smithereens was a perfectly realistic possibility for her.

“Tch. How naïve.”

“So what now?”

“What Aleister is telling us is fundamentally accurate. She is not bluffing. If that’s your view, then there’s no point in you sticking around here.”

“True enough. Plus, they might just detect me in that cramped indoor space. I mean, a formless presence fills up a lot more of an indoor room than the wide outdoors.”

“You’re free to work now, right? Plus, you’re pissing me off, so I’m sending you on another job.”

“I see. Yes, that does make me feel more like a familiar. So where will you be sending your lowly gofer?”

“Hm? You aren’t gonna complain?”

“Well, I am interested in doing some things outside the contract, but I’m still a demon, so you could say I live to work. I’m actually quite diligent. I work hard and corrupt people real good. That’s just what I do. So what do you want???”

“While that board chairman was working on her godawful plan, there was someone she tried to have killed because he was a dangerous and unpredictable element. I know he came to England, but I want you to figure out if he ever made it to London. You can do that since all sorts of information finds its way to the capital, right? Now that I’ve experienced it for myself, I can tell. It’s a kind of stealth. His presence just disappeared. ...So why does he exist? He barely has any presence at all, but at times like this, you never know when he’ll introduce a glitch onto the game board and make it all freeze up. He’s completely hidden. It’s the same uneasy feeling as noticing a mistake in the source code only to never find it again when you scroll back up. It shouldn’t matter, but if you ignore it, it could develop into a critical error.”

“?”

It was unusual for Accelerator to remember someone’s name.

Especially when that someone was only a Level 0.

“Hamazura Shiage. I want you to go figure out where he is and what he’s doing.”

Part 13

After climbing a few flights of stairs, Aleister finally entered the hallway of a certain floor. The straight, narrow hallway left nowhere to run or hide and it was lined with identical doors. She stopped in front of one of those doors and did not hesitate to fling it open.

She seemed to be saying that she too had the right to say “I’m back”.

And.

And.

And.

“What the hell?” muttered Kamijou Touma when he peeked inside from behind that short girl.

It was a horribly dark room with no artificial lightning.

He was pretty sure the overall layout was unchanged from when he had seen it in the Windowless Building. He recognized the position of the table and shelves and even the pattern on the curtains was the same. This was the starting point for Westcott, Mathers, and Aleister. They had killed time by gathering here and having serious discussions about something as ridiculous as magic. It was a simple place, but it had to be mentioned when discussing the Golden cabal.

However.

Something like particles of light were faintly dancing about that otherwise dark room. Was it the reflection of the moonlight coming from the window? It was not just some hallucination. Aleister quietly clicked her tongue and pulled out her phone. She activated the backlight and shined it inside the room.

She illuminated a room trapped in the past.

Specifically, everything was coated with dust. That was also the identity of the light particles reflecting the moonlight. It might be easier to think of it like the dust floating in a film projector's beam.

It was obvious no one had been living here.

There were plastic sheets over the shelves and table to keep the dust off, but that was the only human intervention. All of the light fixtures had been removed, presumably to avoid an electrical fire from a short. There were no footprints on the dusty floor. The place remained as a holy ground, but that was all. There was no sign of Westcott, Mathers, or the others having visited.

“...”

“Are they more focused on Blythe Road? Or did they build a new base elsewhere?”

Kamijou tilted his head. If what Mathers and the others had said was true, they had been hiding in the shadows of history for more than a century after the Battle of Blythe Road. They had hidden from the watchful eyes of the Anglican Church and Academy City. They would have had plenty of time to build up funding and construct a new base as a third group not part of the science side or magic side (which had been split apart by Aleister). Even if they called this a holy ground, it was hardly surprising they would have found other things and places they cared about even more in the intervening century. Even shrines and temples would be moved to new locations during the development of a city.

But Aleister was not ready to nod or shake her head.

She acted as carefully as someone presented with a strange contract to sign. The silver girl's eyes flitted between each piece of information before her and she finally muttered a few words.

“Wait. Could it be?”

Part 14

It was late at night in London.

“Is this the place? Yes, this is it.”

“Really?”

Index wore a nun’s habit with white and gold teacup coloring and Karasuma Fran wore a hoodie, a bikini, and rabbit-ear antennae. The two girls had entered the strictly guarded capital city during the chaos caused by the Crowley’s Hazards and Divine Mixtures, but they had lost sight of their goal there. They were searching for the spiky-haired high school boy named Kamijou Touma, but even after finding him again after he ran off on his own, they had lost track of him yet again.

But they could not just stay still.

The situation was accelerating in a negative direction. That was all too obvious to Index even though she was a bit removed from the center of the issue. The traces she did see were extremely ominous. There were sticky clumps all over the walls and ground around here, but she could tell it was *not* Orsola Aquinas with the Isis-Demeter Divine Mixture that had done this. There was little to no sign of any resistance from the Crowley’s Hazards. Isis-Demeter was certainly a threat, but not enough to explain this. If it had clashed head-on with an army of Crowley’s Hazards, it would not have had such a decisive victory. It may have been able to repel the army, but the entire area would have become a rotten sea of trees. If anything, there may have been more friendly fire than anything.

“Something else is happening.”

Index looked so nervous she might start biting her nails if she was not careful.

Why had this war started?

Where was the center and who was in control?

Index knew it had started with Aleister and she had managed to follow along up to the Divine Mixtures, but now she was confused.

She felt a need to calm down and view the big picture once more.

She had to make up for falling behind and get ahead of the issue.

“Instead of wasting time searching blindly for Touma, we should find something we know we can do. I wasn’t much help when I saw him before and who knows how far behind I’ll be next time. So *I need to be ready to give him some actual useful advice each time I see him.*”

Was this another form of growth?

She was done with chasing blindly after the boy and then getting mad at him once it was all over. If she could not find him, then what could she do without finding him? Instead of lamenting that nothing went her way, what could she do in this less-than-preferable situation? That was where Index set her sights now.

Meanwhile, the rabbit-ear antennae girl adjusted the large backpack on her back and looked up at the impressive building in front of them.

“And that’s why we’re here?”

“Yes. This is the British Museum.”

Books were kept in the British Library instead, but there were actually a few exceptions. And there was none of the creepiness of sneaking into a school or hospital at night. There were a lot of people inside already. And they were full of energy. When they peeked inside, they saw lots of former Roman Catholic nuns gathered.

“Oh, if it isn’t the grimoire library. Should I say ‘welcome’ or ‘welcome home’?”

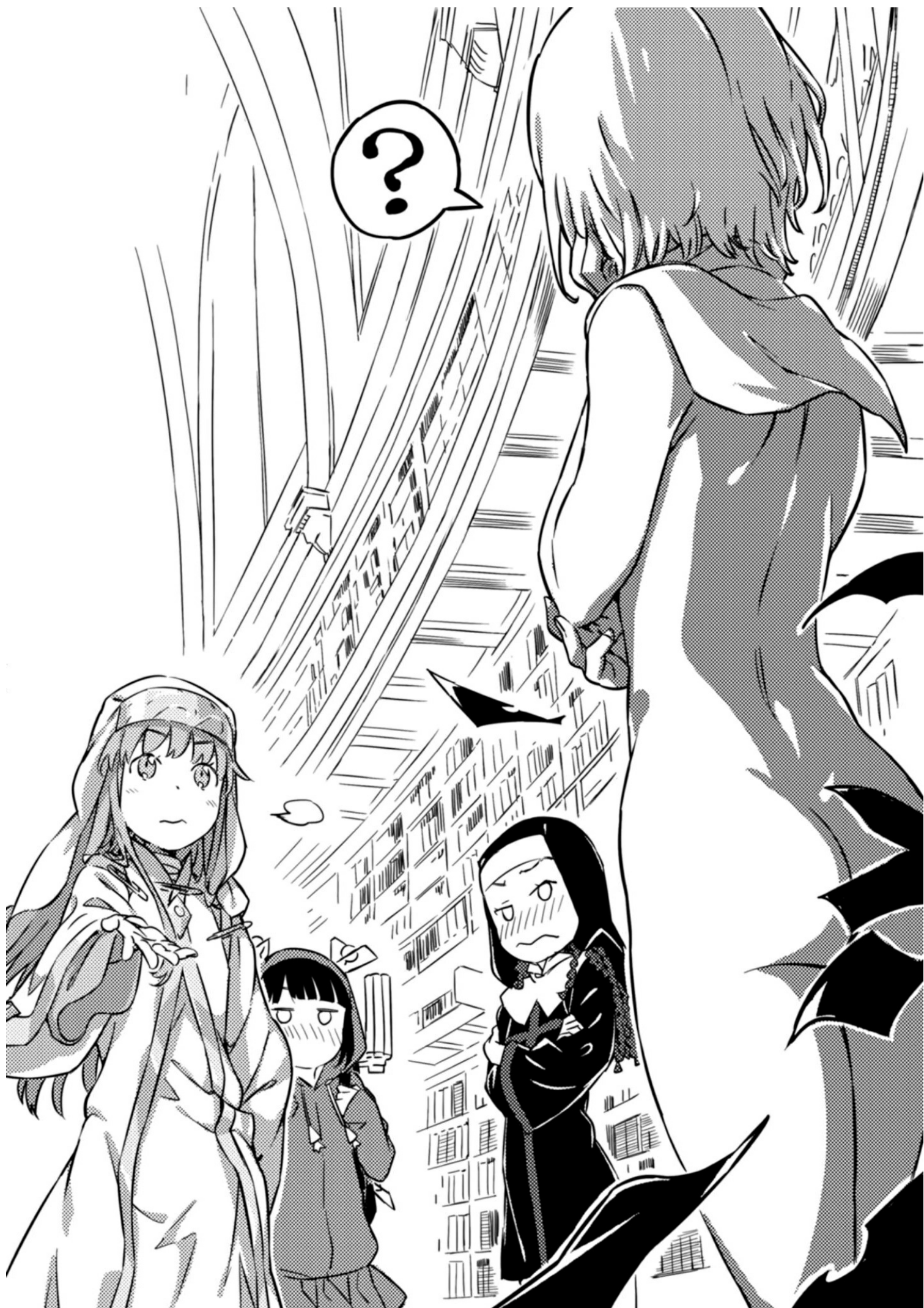
Agnese Sanctis, a short nun with lots of pencil-thick braids, spoke up in surprise when she noticed Index.

“What are you all doing here?”

“Outsiders like us haven’t been given any direct orders. They might think we’re already dead. So we’re checking on the damage to London and redoing some calculations.”

Agnese’s expression was quite soft for what she was saying. Perhaps the damage was a lot less than they had feared.

That was good, but...



“Oh, my, my. What to do? I already served everyone the food I had made.”

“Don’t move, Sister Orsola! Your basted-together habit is coming apart!!”

The pieces of a habit fluttered away like flower petals as the utterly carefree (and super sexy) woman approached. With the moonlight shining on her, the visual would probably have inspired Botticelli to paint a sequel to the Birth of Venus.

She was so perfect it looked more like art than a pinup model, but she placed a hand on her cheek and tilted her head.

“What brings you here tonight?”

“Give me the key to the repair room in the back.”

Index spoke like a child demanding her allowance so she could visit the candy store, so (naked) Orsola only tilted her head further.

“Umm, Index? You have a perfect memory, so don’t you already have all of those documents memorized? I apologize if I am being rude, but I don’t see why you would need to view them now.”

Index nodded.

“If I was only interested in the text, yes.”

“?”

“This has all gotten really complicated, so I want to gather as much information as possible. I need to untangle all the threads and line them up in order. I need to know what’s happening in London...no, across the entire world. If I don’t know that, I can’t give Touma any advice.”

Part 15

The report never came.

No matter how long he waited, it never came.

“That’s enough waiting.”

A short comment was uttered in the ruined graveyard of Westminster Abbey.

It was the voice of someone ending something in disappointment.

And Mathers’s simple comment made Edward Berridge’s shoulders jump. That faithful medic was still kneeling in his moss green uniform equipped with bandages, disinfectant, and other medical supplies.

He had failed to live up to his master’s expectations. That fact felt like an invisible flame burning his entire body.

“No, that can’t be. It is just taking them longer than expected to find the bodies. Again, that can’t be!!”

“That’s enough waiting.”

Mathers repeated himself.

Berridge could viscerally sense what that meant, so he fell silent instead of digging in his heels any further. This man had reached for the name Belzébut to purge internal traitors and not just battle external enemies, so he was toying with Berridge to see if the other man would obey.

And Mathers himself continued speaking even as he gave off that crushing pressure.

“Aleister Crowley is alive. We are talking about someone who survived even after I sicced Coronzon on him.”

“Kh.”

That was the conclusion.

And who was it that had been so confident Aleister would not last five minutes?

Just how shameful and humiliating was it to have his master reach this conclusion before the bodies could be found in the remains of the shopping center?

But the Golden leader did not care.

Perhaps it was his ability to excise those human emotions that allowed him to proclaim himself as the organization's leader. It was not necessarily just Westcott and Mathers who sought that position after all.

While Berridge burned with shame, Mathers simply thought of some numbers.

(Well, this happened because the Lady of the Masquerade Ball carelessly attacked ahead of everyone else, so fine. Curse that gaudy woman and her Sphere. If she hadn't chopped up my Golden cabal to create her own little playground, we would not be unraveling like this.) He had made sense of the result, so he would not question it. But no one could say what would have happened to Berridge if he had not been able to.

"Aleister would not die so easily."

Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers bent over to look the other man in the eye. He lifted his witch's hat a bit and whispered in Berridge's ear as if revealing the answer to the fool who could not accept his mistake.

And those words may have been an even more painful blow than declaring he would kill the man.

"(Because Aleister was always my #1 student who I taught everything I knew.)"

Mathers did not console his subordinates at times like this.

He would not hesitate to punish them even if they were already dead. And if they were a magician who showed promise of further growth, he would throw them off the cliff and accept only those who managed to crawl back up. That

was why he was the most feared among his fellow Golden magicians and was sometimes referred to as a tyrant or dictator. The people he silently allowed to go about their way were the ordinary people with no promise whatsoever.

And.

To his knowledge, there was only one person on the planet who had ever lived up to his fierce expectations.

Even if that had inspired such intense rage and hatred within him.

Between the Lines 1

So what kind of person was Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers really?

Looking back in history would show an impressive list of accomplishments. The greatest of those were helping to found the world's greatest cabal and translating original grimoires such as *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, and *The Greater Key of Solomon*. The originals were not just incomprehensible but also shattered the reader's soul with their toxic knowledge, so he converted them into a simpler form that anyone could read. That was the trigger which led to a Kabbalah-centric magical culture spreading across all of Europe. Even the grimoire library of Index Librorum Prohibitorum rated his writings at the same level as *The Golden Bough* or *The Book of the Law*.

However.

It was less well known that Mathers translated more than just important grimoires.

"Oh, you've made such a mess again."

The graceful woman could not be blamed for letting some exasperation color her voice. French newspapers littered the floor and blue and purple paint was splattered on top of that. The main dish was the corkboard larger than a tray. The cork had been cut up with a knife and pasted together in layers to create rippling hills and valleys.

It may have been meant as a type of diorama.

This man's talents really were as a writer and a translator. To a talented artist like Mina, his attempts here looked like a child making a tiny garden for art class.

"I never did like that game of chess."

“You mean Enochian chess?”

“Mina, I mean the basic game itself. Everyone claims it’s some intellectual game that simplifies war, but in what battle do both sides have identical forces and supplies? And don’t get me started on the terrain! Half of war is decided by the terrain!!”

“That’s great and all, but are you never going to stop living like this even when we have a shocking nine pounds to get us to the end of the month? Do you mind if I ask how you think it is acceptable to live on a tattva diet where you have to use your mind’s eye to see anything at all between the bread in your sandwiches?”

“Give up, Mina. Working will not put any more money in our wallet. How fulfilling your life is relies on your outlook. And there are surprisingly few people willing to learn in this age of excess.”

“Oh, I see. This explains why you actually called me by my name for once, instead of just ‘hey’ or ‘you’. While I appreciate that, I would like to remind you that there are still fifteen days left in this month.”

“Mina, if it comes to it, I can release myself from these physical bonds and go on an astral journey. Can I count on you to keep my physical body safe?”

“It is not astral projection if you collapse from hunger with your soul hanging out of your mouth. Wouldn’t it be more efficient to learn some practical yoga to suppress the activity of your organs?”

“I hate all that Eastern nonsense. I couldn’t tell you if it works or not, but just look at those youngsters who have confused a magic cabal for a sex salon. They’ll accept anything if you just add ‘Indian’ or ‘Tibetan’ to the front! They try to excuse their opium use and orgies by calling them secret ceremonies passed down in the East. It’s ridiculous. Those self-styled magicians must think India and Tibet are some strange fantasy world. And I bet they couldn’t even tell you what language the true sutras are written in!!”

The eccentric genius named Mathers was satisfied as long as he could let his heart of justice burn over things like this. And he completely missed that his wife was much more concerned about them starving to death in poverty.

When you got down to it, a magician was a magician. Mathers did not have a public face like Westcott did as a coroner, so he was not going to have a rich lifestyle. Yet there were things he could not stop himself from doing like a bad habit.

“India sounds nice to me. They have plenty of teas we could never hope to drink.”

“Stop thinking about what we can’t have, Mina.”

Of course, there were no public texts saying Mathers had a hobby of making dioramas or inventing his own rules for chess.

Those were nothing more than ways of distracting him from his boredom.

“Before getting to labyrinthine trench warfare, you need water. The concept of water must be there. Chess unfortunately lacks the concept of projectile weapons, but this will still greatly change the soldiers’ movement. Coal stole the sails from ships and petroleum is changing automobiles into tools of war. This is no longer the age of wind. Whoever controls the water controls the war. Especially in England and France. Listen, Mina. What must we control if we are to stay on the forefront of magic in the coming age? This is where you will learn what truly matters. The ocean has long been opened for the chosen ones.”

“Oh, my. So my self-proclaimed highlander husband wants to be a Viking now?”

He cleared his throat.

This was about military matters.

Even before translating *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, Mathers had translated a French military manual.

“Do you find this childish?”

“While literary types like you hoard knowledge, artistic types like me focus more on intuition. Learning the details of perspective, texture, and lighting can come later, but you need to start by finding your core. Those with no defined axis for themselves can never even pick up the brush.”

The woman who always stood by his side was one of his few understanders

and also a partner who provided powerful support by absorbing his techniques and knowledge and providing the artistic talent he had not been blessed with. She was much more than a student. While Mathers sought to bring back lost knowledge in the form of text, she supported that with intuitive graphics.

If personal computers had never developed past alphanumeric text on a black screen in the name of history or tradition, they never would have become so ubiquitous. Needless to say, it was the icons and the mouse cursor that had made them simple enough for anyone to use intuitively.

The exact same approach had been attempted a century earlier. Aleister had ultimately put a stop to it, but if they had successfully incorporated those visual and graphical explanations, another form of magic may have filled every corner of the world like computers and smartphones had done.

“I...”

The woman walked back and forth through the shelves lined with strange books and finally pulled one out.

It was the translation of a French military manual that pointed to a surprising side of a magician like Mathers.

“I liked your writing back when you wrote this. It was rough around the edges, but there was real warmth in the phrasing you used.”

“You do know that is a manual for efficiently killing people, don’t you?”

“It is all in how you use it.”

She was his understander.

She was not like Westcott who had competed with him for power and influence within the cabal or like Crowley who had developed a rival theory of magic. Just like that small god was for Kamijou Touma, even if he pushed her away or seemed to insult her *on the surface*, she would never mistake the true meaning behind his twisted temper (that Mathers knew was a problem but could not change).

“If it was really meant only for experts in the field of killing, there would be no need to break it down so anyone could understand. It is a way of being ever

prepared and knowing the tactics of the neighboring country just in case times change. Look at it like that and then who would you say it is for?”

“Your one and only flaw is your bad habit of interpreting everything as a virtue.”

“Annie warned me about that too. Yes, I believe it was back when I told her I was marrying you.”

She was the type to just come out and say things at times like this.

But he was not to be underestimated.

Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers did have a childish side that wanted to wear a Scottish military uniform, that would stare at old maps and fantasize about battles occurring there, that deeply approved of bayonets for keeping some form of sword on the battlefield even in an age of bullets and gunpowder, and that made his eyes sparkle when he saw a giant cannon. But more than that, there was a part of him that *could not stop* once he had made up his mind about something. It was the same tunnel vision seen in a certain type of genius when they were focused on something. When it came to his magic research, that man was highly unapproachable and feared by those in other cabals or even in his own cabal. And that bomb had gone off in the worst way during the Battle of Blythe Road.

He was more than just an eccentric.

And there were some hobbies you could follow much further specifically because they were entirely disconnected from profit.

So what if he had the military skill to command a group and overwhelm all opposition in addition to his excellent magical skill?

How much of a threat would he be then? If you would like to see the answer, just look to the Golden cabal.

If you dare.

Because armies look very different when they are directed at your enemy or directed at you.

Chapter 2: That Which Human Wisdom Compiled – Grimoire_Nova.

Part 1

By the way, the thug named Hamazura Shiage was still alive.

If a bug stood out in the open, it would be squished immediately, but it was invincible if it hid in the forest or field.

The city of London was still mostly in one piece. He had parked the stolen four-wheel-drive vehicle in front of the British Museum, he leaned against the side with his arm around his girlfriend Takitsubo Rikou's shoulders (and she looked even cuter than normal with the knit jacket worn over her pink track suit), a bunch of nuns were gathered around, and the strong-willed exhibitionist gods named Nephthys and Niang-Niang were in the back seat. So what was missing? A life of peace and calm???

Explosive blasts and flashes of light were still erupting in the night. At times, the stone and concrete city itself rumbled unnervingly.

But the nuns running busily to and fro outside the British Museum seemed to have relaxed somewhat. He did not understand a lick of English, but they seemed to have received word of something. *Maybe they had learned one of their own was safe.* The oppressive tension from before had entirely vanished.

Except...

"Hm?"

"Mhh..."

A knock came from inside the back window.

And he could hear some muffled voices.

When he looked inside the vehicle surrounded by a thick animal bumper, he saw the brown-skinned, silver-haired young woman and sickly pale mini-China dress girl tremble a bit and then look elsewhere.

Even an idiot could tell what this meant.

Something very unpleasant was about to happen!!

“Boyyy☆”

“No.”

“Drive to the west and you’ll see something neat. Now’s your chance to capture it!!”

“Definitely not, you stupid gods!! This is the same as an NPC saying ‘there is a cave up ahead’. If I go there, I’m only going to find a crazy brutal dungeon with an insta-kill freak of a boss at the end!!”

For some reason, the mini-China dress girl used her hot breath to fog up the window before pressing her lips and (flat) chest against the window while speaking through the thick glass.

This had the effect of essentially whispering into Hamazura’s ear while he leaned against the side of the vehicle.

“(Stay here and the ‘neat thing’ will probably come to us, but are you sure you want that? Get those nuns involved and they won’t last long.)”

“I can’t believe you!!”

“Protecting your girlfriend is important, but you don’t want too many ugly travel memories, do you?”

Hamazura did not actually know all that much about Nephthys or Niang-Niang, but without the advice they had given just for fun, he never would have made it from Dover to London.

They were ridiculously inappropriate and they did not act on anything remotely resembling human morality or ethics.

But their power was real.

If they said something was going to attack, then that was what would happen.

“ ~! Get in, Takitsubo!!”

“Wah.”

Hamazura grabbed his girlfriend’s slender wrist and opened the driver’s side door. After tossing the small girl (with surprisingly large breasts) past the shift lever, he slipped into the driver’s seat, reached for the wires hanging down from the forced-open ignition, and operated the clutch and handbrake to get the vehicle running.

“Ah, wait! What are you doing!? I overlooked it because it was an emergency, but that’s a stolen vehicle, isn’t it!?”

He just about ran into that straitlaced glasses nun because she happened to step outside just then. She shouted something at him, but he had bigger issues. It pained him, but he simply tapped the brakes a few times to say bye with the brake lights and then sped away.

After being thrown into the passenger seat, Takitsubo Rikou was flipped upside down with her small butt pressed against the headrest and she was as expressionless as ever.

“Hamazura, what is going on?”

“Ask those dangerous people in the back!!”

Despite his obvious malice, the gods reflected in the rearview mirror simply laughed. One wore only bandages and the other a mini-China dress. Both their outfits were revealing enough to get them kicked out of a Halloween party, but they were currently pressing their cheeks together to fit their faces in the mirror for him.

“I understand the desire to gaze upon a fearsome god, but you should really keep your eyes on the road. I mean, five kilometers goes by in no time while driving.”

“Five kilometers!? And what am I supposed to be looking for anyway!?”

“Hamazura, that sign says this is Piccadilly Circus.”

“Oh, you’re such a cute couple☆”

“Shut up, bandage exhibitionist! Can you maybe explain what I’m looking for!?”

“You’re about to run them over.”

When sickly pale Niang-Niang made her nonchalant statement, Hamazura slammed his full weight down on the brake pedal. The tires screeched against the ground. Takitsubo Rikou had already been creating a full-body silhouette of Mt. Fuji while upside down, so this sent her bouncing forward.

Hamazura had forgotten his own seatbelt, so his nose slammed into the steering wheel. The airbag did not activate, but was that due to a malfunction or had he cut a cord he should not have while messing with the ignition?

(What the hell?)

The bright headlights were shining on a girl.

She was curled up like a kitten trying to protect herself in the middle of the asphalt coated with a thin layer of silver sand.

He immediately threw open the door and ran over to her, but was that driven by the guilt of nearly hitting her or just the fact that she was a slender redheaded girl?

“Damn, that was close! What’s wrong!? Are you hurt!?”

Only after running out did he realize how dangerous this all felt. That was mostly due to the smell. It was a burning smell not quite like gunpowder.

(Hurt.)

He finally gave serious thought to the word he himself had used.

Yes, there were no absolutes and nothing could be taken for granted in London today. The absurdity and unfairness of this city rivaled the darkness of Academy City. Anything could happen and it tended to take things a step or two beyond what he feared. If he was not cautious, he would be chewed up and spit out by some kind of surprise attack.

A vehicle alone was not enough anymore.

His fingers trembled as if from withdrawal symptoms. He really wished he had a gun.

Even though he had worked so hard to escape from that mess and make his way to England.

(Did someone attack her? But wait. Could that someone still be around here somewhere!?)

“Can you stand? Dammit, just get in the car so we can get away from here! Oh, right. Do you even know Japanese? Just come here!!”

“Ugh...”

Groans were apparently a universal language.

The redheaded girl slowly looked up while curled up to protect her gut. Only now did she notice the bright headlights and narrow her eyes, so she may have barely been conscious. And when he took a better look, he realized she had taken quite a beating. If he had known this in advance, he would have considered having Takitsubo Rikou come out to help despite the danger.

She wore a frilly white dress with pink accents. The ballerina-like lace and frills made her overall silhouette look quite fluffy, but her exposed upper arms were slender enough to guess she was actually very skinny.

However, her short red hair and dress had scorch marks in places.

It looked a lot like she had crawled out of a burning building and then run out of strength in the middle of the road.

He heard a quiet metallic sound blowing in the light breeze.

A bell on a string fell from the white veil girl's hand and onto the filthy ground. He was reminded of how it was preferable for people in disaster areas to carry whistles or bells because shouting wore you out so quickly.

What had she been thinking when she reached for that?

And had no one answered her call for help even as she lay collapsed here on the road?

What was that she was curled up to protect?

Hamazura was unsure what purpose it had, but a black box just big enough to hold a soccer ball was sandwiched between the girl's stomach and the ground. It must have been smooth and polished to begin with, but now it was dented and covered with silver sand.

(You've gotta be kidding me.)

To repeat, Hamazura Shiage did not understand much of anything that was happening in London today. He only knew the monsters known as Crowley's Hazards had attacked London and the mysterious ruins(?) set up around the city had repelled those monsters. He had seen Orsola Aquinas fused with Isis-Demeter after she left the British Museum, but his knowledge was not enough to explain what exactly that was. And he was entirely unaware of the return of the Golden cabal at Westminster Abbey.

That was why he came up with a faulty theory here.

(I don't know if it was the Crowley's Hazards or London's protectors who did this, but I can't just leave her here!!)

"We need to get away from here. ...You didn't hit your head, did you? Okay, I'm going to pick you up. Um, one, two, three!!"

He rolled her onto her back and moved the box. Then he moved his arms below the girl's knees and back and lifted her up. In other words, he used the princess carry. Skill Out often had to deal with injuries when calling an ambulance was not an option and this was actually a unique method they had developed for retreating while taking their injured companions with them, but Takitsubo Rikou's mouth formed a small triangle because she had no way of knowing that. Of course, that happened behind the bright headlights, so Hamazura could not see it as his fear drove him to help this stranger.

The dress girl placed the dented box on her stomach and held it like an otter and she desperately tried to look up at Hamazura's face with one eye unable to fully open.

"Ah, ugh."

"Shut up. Don't talk. Damn, how do British hospitals work? What number do you call and how late are they open? Do you need an insurance card or some

kind of ID? And are they even running properly with this war going on!?”

Most likely, that girl did not understand much Japanese. So when he spoke that foreign language in such quick succession with the obvious interrogative intonation, she mistook what he was asking.

What is your name?

She assumed he was asking that very basic question.

“...io...tu...”

The redheaded girl giving off a faint scorched smell moved her throat to half groan an answer.

Most people would think nothing of it, but anyone in the know would feel their heart freeze over when they heard that name:

“Dion...Fortune.”

Part 2

He had missed his chance.

It was just like when you started to raise your hand to get the bartender's attention but someone else called out to them first.

That was nothing to be embarrassed about. Everything was fine.

The good-looking middle-aged man named Misaka Tabigake trembled a bit while hiding behind cover.

"This isn't good. They're really just going to leave me here. But I can't exactly shove that injured girl out of his arms and demand he save me instead."

He had not had a good night what with the giant monsters wandering around and the huge stone blocks raining from the sky, but he was just about at his limit. He had no idea who this new group wandering around London was, but they were bad news. They were too much for an amateur to beat in a game of hide-and-seek. Misaka Tabigake honestly felt that figuring that out was pretty good for an amateur.

And.

As seen from the way he was speaking to himself, the loneliness was eating away at him. Enough so that he was seriously considering buying an AI speaker just to have someone to talk with. Although that would probably eventually end up much like taping the ultimate comfort product to the top of a plate-shaped cleaning robot.

However.

God had not abandoned that middle-aged man.

The four-wheel-drive vehicle started to drive away, but it must have had some trouble and stalled because it shook and then came to a stop. Based on how it moved, it appeared to be a manual, so the driver may have been in a

rush and screwed up with the clutch.

Also, Misaka Tabigake heard some dangerous-sounding footsteps from the dark alley behind him.

Those came from a young woman and an elderly man.

“Oh, another ‘lost child’. Hello, backpacker. It’s too late in the year to be trick-or-treating, but the Boogieman is here.”

“Wait, Annie. Our top priority here is Dion Fortune. It was someone else who placed her in that vehicle. ...And while they appear to be suppressing their power, I can see *two powerful distortions* there.”

“Do you need the temple?”

“This will be a major performance.”

Misaka Tabigake lived more on the science side than the magic side, but that only meant he had taken a half step outside the realm of a normal modern person. He knew next to nothing about next-generation weapons or esper power development. He only had the knowledge of someone who was well-traveled outside of Academy City.

You could think of him as a businessman who could get advance notice of new products in development. He was helping steer the future, but not in any significant way.

To be clear, he was not the type of man who could choose to fight courageously after coming in contact with the unknown.

But there was one thing he could tell here.

(This is bad.)

It was like visiting a war torn area and finding a fallen sign warning of a minefield only after walking a good distance into it. Or like feeling pain in your appendix while overseas, but when the locals brought you to the only hospital in the village, you found yourself in a cave with a half-naked old man calling himself a shaman who pulled a knife from a bucket and started halfheartedly sharpening it in preparation.

Moving past this point would cost him his life.

He could sense that invisible wire drawn taut.

This was his experience talking, not anything he had read in a school textbook. The tingling sensation he felt was enough for even an amateur to make a clear prediction about the future. And there was more than one invisible wire. Those two people gave off a solid wall of pressure that violently and complexly filled every last gap.

It was not a question of overcoming this or not.

He could not even consider trying to duck past them.

This was the kind of death that would blow you away if you so much as touched it.

(Not good, not good, not good!!)

It had not captured him yet.

This was a single surface, not a deep forest or a spider web.

Allowing it this close was suicidal, but it was possible he could still avoid touching the wires. He slowly took a breath. If he could back away so cautiously that he did not even disturb the bugs crawling on the road and if he could clear the way for them, perhaps they would overlook him. Just maybe.

Misaka Tabigake smiled weakly.

He considered a number of things and then made the mature decision.

He reached for the construction materials he was hiding behind and applied his full body weight.

With a loud crash, the rebar and triangular cones covered in a blue tarp scattered across the alleyway entrance.

(What in the world is wrong with me!?)

“Start driving, you damn kids! Just get out of here!!”

He cursed himself in his mind, but there was no hesitation in the words he spoke out loud. He wanted to be saved too, but he had already decided he would not push that injured girl out of the way. Letting that four-wheel-drive vehicle escape was good enough. Because what he had seen was too much.

That Asian boy and that injured middle-school-aged girl reminded him of something. Even if there was no direct connection, that combination brought a certain face to mind.

He pictured his own daughter who had to be caught in trouble of her own since Academy City had shut down.

When a problem broke out on the streets, a grown adult would not think about beating the troublemaker until they could no longer move. Escaping the danger unharmed was good enough. And projectile weapons were everything in this world. He glanced over at the nearby fire hydrant and considered using the pressurized water to knock over his opponents when they tried to cross the barricade.

“This is in the way.”

That quick statement was followed by an explosive flash of light.

The light came from the kind of wax used for old letters.

“I hold a coded text. When read using the methods of Trithemius’s five books, these fragments reveal text of great power. Now experience the knowledge of the Golden’s beginning.”

The old man’s words became physical destruction.

The makeshift barricade of construction materials was blasted outwards. Misaka Tabigake was reminded of how primitive landmines had been made by covering explosives with rubble. Not that this provided him with a solution. The materials hit him and he was thrown to the other side of the major road.

“Hm. So this is all I can manage without Annie’s tuning. I never was any good at violence. Sorry I’m not as good at inspiring fear as Mathers is.”

“Aga ~!!!”

Misaka Tabigake swallowed his scream as soon as it started to escape.

But this was fine. It was not the first time he had dislocated his shoulder.

This was nothing new, so he could bear it.

But then he saw the red brake lights of the vehicle that had finally gotten

moving.

(You idiots!! Stop here and everything I did will be for nothing!!)

His eyes widened, but if he actually shouted at them, he might direct that fearsome duo's attention toward the vehicle.

Unable to get up, he crawled along the ground with one arm hanging limp like a doll's arm, but then he heard an exasperated voice.

That old-fashioned tutor with a monocle and that doctor in a suit and coat looked like they had stepped out of a picture book.

"Westcott, he's a normal person. Although he doesn't seem to be a local."

"And we are the Boogieman, aren't we? Since you have given up on tuning me, I have to go at it like I am trying to kill him or it will not work."

"I am a sensible magician. I just don't want to be the target of Mathers's temper."

"And? Are you suggesting you too would use Coronzon if necessary?"

"..."

"Your face. It's showing on your face."

Misaka Tabigake heard a quiet sound.

It was the tutor woman tapping her long white and black clubs against the ground.

And something like a giant soap bubble appeared behind the two pillars.

Their conversation and actions made no sense, but Misaka Tabigake could tell they had gone easy on him. Yes, he had yet to touch those illusory wires. And the solid wall of wires had silently changed its layout. They now surrounded him like he was deep in the forest or caught in a giant spider web. They were packed around him densely enough that moving a single finger would touch those deadly strings.

This was bad.

It was enough for the dull pain in his body to fade away.

He could no longer hope to escape just by hitting them with a fire hydrant's water from a safe distance. Even turning tail and running would be risky. The sense of death was so thick that something as ordinary as breathing felt like a gamble. This was his punishment for trying to be someone he was not.

(This is very bad!!!!!!)

And then the invisible wires of death were mercilessly severed.

It came from directly overhead. Fearsome shells crashed into the ground like a giant sewing machine.

Something was flying overhead. A roar reminiscent of a fighter jet hit his eardrums after a short delay. When his mind struggled to find a description for the silhouette he saw, it settled on a demon with wings spread.

That was not the British air force.

A weapon that ridiculous could not exist in the normal world.

(What *is* that!? Is it from Academy City!?)

The hard asphalt was torn up like if a bomb went off below the sandy beach and a horribly unhealthy-looking cloud of gray dust filled the air.

"Tch!!"

"Westcott, you idiot! You put yourself in harm's way too much!!"

It sounded like they had not expected this attack. But if that was the only reaction they gave despite being in the direct line of fire, it only proved just how monstrous they were. Even enough firepower to tear apart the city was only a smokescreen to them. Misaka Tabigake knew that fear and despair would stop his heart if he saw what was beyond that dust. But he did not waste the time given to him. He forced his body up despite the dislocated shoulder, waved his left hand, and shouted to the four-wheel-drive vehicle at the top of his lungs.

"Get going, you damn kids!!"

They seemed to be questioning whether or not they should bring this strange middle-aged man with them, but he forced their hand by running down a different alley. He heard the screeching of tires as they drove off.

Yes, he could move now.

The tension had dissipated with the arrival of the powerful cavalry. Those imaginary wires of death had been cut, the pressure was gone, and the world seemed to have opened up once more. It felt like being stranded on a hellish snowy mountain and then seeing a rescue helicopter descending through the white blizzard. This was a baseless jinx just like the wires of death, but he decided he was going to be okay now.

“Nhh, gahh!!”

He held a rolled-up handkerchief in his mouth and slammed his shoulder into a nearby wall to pop it back into place.

“Pant, pant. Oh, hell. I guess this at least gives me another story to tell at a bar. I could really go for some scotch right about now.”

While more or less rubbing up against the wall, he left the short alley to reach another road.

Then another shockwave erupted overhead. The mysterious aerial weapon from before had circled around to take aim at those two monsters.

And then he saw it.

He got a good view this time.

That silhouette formed from several rocket boosters and powerful weapons had a distinctive name written in English.

A.A.A.

Anti Art Attachment.

“Wha-?”

However.

What shocked Misaka Tabigake was not the strange collection of weapons or that code name that was a bigger secret than any national classification level.

It was the girl in the center.

The girl seemingly made a part of the weapon.

Could he really say he recognized her? Could it really be her on the other side of the world and while operating what had to be an illegal military weapon!?

“What the hell???”

The rational part of his mind tried to convince him he was seeing things, but the father inside him firmly rejected that idea. How could he call himself human if he would mistake someone else for her? The debate in his head devolved into a brawl. His mind went blank.

He forgot all about hiding himself and watched the flying object while leaning against the machine for one of the bike rental services that were filling the streets in place of phone booths lately.

But.

Once more, he became a witness of the current age.

Part 3

To understand the situation, we need to move back in time a bit.

The thing was, Misaka Mikoto and Shokuhou Misaki had taken the A.A.A. with them to Bali.

As long as a weapon did not look like a weapon, no one would question it.

They had thoroughly dismantled it, reassembled it in a way that gave no hint of its proper usage, and packed it in a container as an incomprehensible piece of avant-garde art.

“Okay, I’ll admit I agreed with your plan so we had some response ability in case of an emergency, but what is this!?”

“Shut up, Shokuhou. It’s too late to complain now.”

Also, the A.A.A. had changed form yet again.

It no longer held just one person. It now held two: Mikoto in the front and Shokuhou in the back. The layout had a fighter jet motif. Mikoto could pilot it herself, but she could reduce the burden on herself by letting Shokuhou handle the enemy location, targeting, and hit confirmation.

“(Although I can’t trust that unathletic girl’s kinetic vision or reflexes enough to give her control of the weapons.)”

“Misaka-saaan, is that any way to talk about someone after dragging them halfway around the world in a swimsuit? And we’re moving at Mach 6!! How am I even alive right now!?”

“Ah ha ha. That’s twice as fast as my Railgun, isn’t it? That’s a little depressing. It feels weird living at speeds like this. In another hundred years, will people be able to break themselves down at the quantum level and travel through fiber optic cables?”

“Misaka-shwaaaaan! Please take this seriouslyyy!”

Shirai Kuroko and the rest of the Tokiwadai girls were still back at Bali. The A.A.A. did not have the power to carry around two hundred people and Mikoto did not want to bring those girls on an illegal trip when they had such promising futures. Mikoto would smile stiffly when she heard someone mention Shokuhou’s clique, which was the strongest faction in Tokiwadai Middle School, but make no mistake. They were generally good girls. It was just Shokuhou at the top who was rotten. Mikoto would only bring along someone awful enough that she would feel no guilt about ruining their future.

“(Please tell me this position isn’t a permanent thing. For one thing, I think that twintail girl is going to find some way to curse me before long.)”

“Hm, did you say something!?”

“How are we talking while moving so fast, how has the friction ability not torn our skin away, and how has my double bikini not been stripped off of me!? None of it makes sense! Have the laws of physics learned how to be a gentleman to ladies like me!?”

“Academy City’s heatwave was a largescale microwave attack, remember? So preserving our heat isn’t an issue. And the air can be broken down with electricity to change the oxygen level. Also, fluids will flow from more dense areas to less dense ones, Shokuhou-kun. So when I open a ‘hole’ in the atmosphere (which also gives us the oxygen we need), the air will naturally be redirected there. That prevents us from being roasted by friction even without any armor panels to protect us. Using both methods at once is pretty exhausting so I can’t do it for long periods of time, but I can manage for a short flight like this.”

“Eh? So if you run out of strength, I’ll be fried and suffocate at the same ti-...”

“I’m piloting the A.A.A. too, so if I blackout, we’ll just crash. You’re only the backup gunner, so you can’t fly it on your own.”

“I can’t believe you! Now I really want to make you into my puppet. Oh, but don’t worry. I know just how to ruin your life because I happen to know several perverted dances that would make any normal girl faint just from seeing an example of the choreography!!”

“Now I’m worried about you. Have you been practicing those hellish dances in front of the mirror just so your unathletic ass knows how to give people accurate instructions? Are you really that dumb???”

Flying to the other side of the planet would take about half a day on a normal passenger plane, but the A.A.A.’s rocket engines were a different story.

When they entered British territorial waters, Mikoto made sure to speak up just because.

“The purpose of our visit is sightseeing and we will only be staying the one day.”

“There’s something wrong with scheduling a day trip to the other side of the planet!!”

The distance from the coast to London was about one hundred kilometers, but that was nothing to the A.A.A.

Even Mikoto had to groan when she saw the occasional red flames or the crushed body of a giant beast. It was hard to believe she was seeing the modern world where fiber optic cables covered the earth and you could search any location using a GPS map app.

“So what is all this anyway? Some bizarre technology ability from the Kiharas?”

But for Shokuhou Misaki who knew nothing at all about magic, that was how she viewed *the world of magic* before her eyes. This was her first time seeing it, so she naturally took this as the average. It was Mikoto who knew how strange this was because she had caught glimpses of it in the past.

(Wow... This is different again from Russia during World War III. It seems less planned and more like someone just dumped out their toy box.)

“Misaka-san, space out like that and we’ll fly right past London.”

“Oops.”

She refocused and slowed down enough to observe the surface.

She looked down on the heart of London which was covered in darkness because almost all the lights were out.

“Found him.”

“Really?”

“I’m using his phone’s signal, so it has to be him. Tch. I don’t know who that is, but they’ll regret laying a hand on my family.”

What would have happened had Kamijou Touma not followed Karasuma Fran’s advice and shut off his phone to prevent anyone from tracing the signal? Or what if he had forgotten to turn it back off after using it for light in the subway tunnels?

It was a silly hypothetical and there was no turning back time now.

“Explosives loaded. Surface targeting speed: Mach 2.5!!”

“Misaka-san, you’re pure deep down, but you can do some dangerous things. Mach 2.5 is for taking careful aim!? And crossing national borders to fight in a war for a family member sounds more like a job for a half-naked Hollywood macho man swinging around a machinegun with ammo belts wrapped around him!!” She did not care.

She aligned the guide grid along a straight main street to avoid damaging the buildings as much as possible and then she connected those points with a line. The line of fire was set and she did not even need to squeeze a trigger.

As she flew along the preset course, tons of shells were launched toward the ground.

“Hit! But only a shallow one, so let’s circle back around and try again!!”

“You’re firing 120mm shells at the same rate as a Gatling gun and you can call it ‘shallow’? Wait, don’t those have the firepower ability to blow the turret off of a tank with just one direct hit???”

“Don’t blame me. Go ask them why they’re so tough. I think that held them back long enough for papa to escape, but I want to be sure!!”

These two girls were Level 5s created by Academy City.

So they did not let their guard down even when they felt in control. They could not predict what kind of supernatural powers they would encounter outside of Academy City, so it was always a possibility unless they actually saw

those monsters' corpses. After all, there were a small number of espers known as Gemstones who were born with their ability.

So they were cautious of return fire from the ground.

Their targets were walking through London like they owned the place and they seemed to have shrugged off the shells, so they had to have some kind of attack they could use.

But even without that, the A.A.A. was a bizarre weapon. That was obvious enough from the fact that Mikoto and Shokuhou were left exposed. If just one attack hit them, they were done for. The A.A.A. had likely been born of a completely different *tree* than the weapons development that dated back to World War I. Yes, it was like it had been designed based on the logic of fighting some unknown sort of enemy.

However.

“Eh?”

They were flying at an altitude of three hundred meters.

With the exception of a lightning rod at the top of an exceptionally tall building, there should not have been anything near them.

“Oh?”

And yet Misaka Mikoto heard a girl's voice coming from that same altitude.

And soon thereafter, they arrived at the moment Misaka Tabigake had witnessed.

They crashed into something in midair.

Mikoto's vision spun wildly around and she lost her balance.

The A.A.A. stalled and she lost control.

“What in the-...!? Did I hit a bird!? No, that was no bird!”

“Wait, what, Misaka-saaaan!? Does this thing have any kind of safe ejection ability!?”

Mikoto was too preoccupied to answer that question from the lumps of excess fat. The A.A.A. was not shaped like a proper airplane, so it was fragile

once it lost its balance. It may have been designed to provide one-hit kills and thus no thought was given to what happened if it was hit. Even as they were swallowed up by the darkness of London, Misaka Mikoto still could not believe what she had just seen.

The question in her mind may have been an ironic one for a girl who had transformed herself into a demon with steel wings by donning this bizarre weapon, but she could not help but ask it.

What had that been?

It had looked a lot like the fusion of a human girl, a toxic jellyfish, bat wings, and newspaper.

Yes, it had looked a lot like a demon.

“Oh, hell.”

Meanwhile.

The translucent demon, Qliphah Puzzle 545, had been sent flying by one of the A.A.A.’s barrels after colliding with it at supersonic speeds. She had entered a tailspin and crashed onto the roof of a nearby apartment. This was one of the problems with the occult’s complete lack of control towers and IFF signals.

She had been ordered to run around London and find Hamazura Shiage. He made it sound simple, but she did not know where that boy was and she did not want to be spotted by the Golden magicians or the ignorant British people. So now that England’s anti-air defenses were in tatters, she had thought it would be best to search from the air since it gave her a good view and let her keep a safe distance.

She had never expected someone else to have the same idea.

Freedom of movement and events outside of the contract were the greatest luxuries for a contracted demon. It may have been like sneaking out of your room at night while taking a trip with a group. When something bound you, you wanted to escape it. When you were told it was off limits, you wanted to do it. That devilish way of thinking was not hard to imagine, but this was not at all the

exciting accident she had wanted.

She was left dizzy and sprawled out on the roof.

“I just want to scream.”

On the other hand, the minimal damage this had done to her was proof she was a true demon. The word demon had been getting a lot of use lately, but she was basically a downgraded version of the beings that were the opposite of Fuse Kazakiri or Gabriel. Magic Gods, Coronzon, the Golden magicians, and now the A.A.A. It could be hard to tell with all those extraordinary figures wandering around, but Qliphah Puzzle 545 was very much a monster too. She was a resident of the very depths of the world who could drive entire countries to madness if she put her mind to it.

You did not need a giant robot to kill your enemy. Wearing a camouflaging sheet and hiding in the forest to take aim with your handheld laser gun was more than enough.

The value of a tool was not fully defined by its power. No pizza deliverer would be foolish enough to drive a giant semi-trailer truck around the intricate city streets. Supernatural power as stable and convenient as hers was actually quite rare.

And the demon pouted her lips to sulk about being knocked from the sky.

“I can’t believe this. I really should’ve put in some insurance.”

(Anyway, that was the rumored anti-magic weapon, wasn’t it? It didn’t look like those kids knew *how to use it properly*, but it’s still pretty scary.)

Qliphah Puzzle 545 was an artificial demon created by Lola Stuart (i.e. Coronzon). Plus, Lola had used Karasuma Fran to send Kamisato Kakeru into Academy City when so many Magic Gods had gathered there. When Kihara Yuiitsu had gone on her rampage at the end of all that, the appearance of that weapon had been shared in a report.

It was the anti-Magic God trump card that Aleister Crowley had built.

Now that Qliphah Puzzle 545 had seen it, she felt confident it could hold its own against the Golden magicians. Although it might not be able to actually

deliver a finishing blow.

And the four-wheel-drive vehicle driven by Hamazura Shiage had driven off somewhere while she was caught in the collision. Not many vehicles would be out on the streets given the state of London, but that did not mean she would be able to find it again. There was no guarantee. Finding someone going for a leisurely drive around the city was much easier than finding someone who knew they were being pursued.

(Dion Fortune, that mystery man, two Golden magicians, and now the A.A.A.. Also there were those Magic Gods, I guess. I was only supposed to chase after one boy, but now there are all sorts of strange game pieces on the board. I see. So this is the irregular element, unpredictable witness, and unseen tumor that can shred a criminal plan to pieces. This Hamazura Shiage may indeed be an error hidden in the source code that only produces further errors.)

Should she continue pursuing Hamazura Shiage, or should she return to report on the unexpected intruder who had arrived on the A.A.A. which had crashed off in a different direction?

“Hmm, that’s the real question, isn’t it?”

All or nothing.

The contracted demon named Qliphah Puzzle 545 was about to determine whether she was rewarded or punished.

Part 4

A variety of equipment was lined up in that RV parked by an unnamed oasis in Egypt.

That said, there was only so much the frog-faced doctor – no, that name was no longer necessary here – could carry with him. Surprisingly, most of what he carried in his bag was not medical equipment. Surgery equipment did include hand-cranked drills and saws in order to cut through and drill holes in bone, but those were just construction tools given greater precision than normal.

He was the magician named Allan Bennett.

As a Buddhist monk, he was known as Swami Maitrananda.

According to the official history, he had grown to be a frail old man due to his opium addiction, but after recovering while learning yoga in Ceylon, he had gained a body *so healthy you would swear he was a different person altogether*. That explained why he was nearly unrecognizable to anyone who had seen him at the Battle of Blythe Road.

Now.

How much had Aleister Crowley known when he pulled the trigger on that illusion?

That human was clever, but he was not blessed with success. That was why the black cat witch had speculated he had truly intended to kill the man.

“I will be borrowing that coffeemaker.”

“What?”

“Is there an ice tray in the freezer? If you fill a bowl and pass it through a glass tube, you can distill and freeze all you want. And I will use this juicer as a centrifuge. I can modify the steam oven into a sterilizer. Because the one for the bottle is too small. A black light? Good, I can mess with the power supply to

add in some UV sterilization. Is there any kind of water tank? Yes, if I fill this storage case's gaps with glue, I can use it as an isolation workbench. The TV is LCD? Yes, I guess I can't expect CRT in this day and age. ...Hm, a home theater projector? Now that's a nice bit of hardware. If I take it apart and mess with its components, I can make an oscillograph."

It was one thing after another.

The magician in a white coat quickly manipulated each tool to transform the ordinary household items and appliances into precision medical equipment. And they were all items that could not be bought outside Academy City and would cost tens of millions of yen even inside the city.

This man, Allan Bennett, could save people even if he was trapped on a desert island.

"This is fairly mindless work, so I would like to use this time to confirm a few things."

"S-sure. Basically, Lilith needs a new vessel of flesh. She is in a very unstable state and she will likely lose her life before long. So to prevent that..."

"You need a vessel of flesh?"

"It should be possible with Academy City's cloning technology."

"You mean creating a life that would not normally have been born and then taking that life to use its body as a component? *Are you kidding me?*"

An odd intensity filled these words.

But Mina Mathers found that those words filled her with relief. It was possible the Heaven Cancellor identity had simply been camouflage to hide his true identity, but his inability to ignore any life approaching death had not been a lie.

"Let us discuss ethics, shall we?"

He spoke like an old professor repeating a lesson for a student who refused to listen.

Aleister Crowley viewed Mina Mathers as an inorganic advisor, so not even that human would be able to speak to her like this.

“There are different ways of duplicating or multiplying cells. For example, you can use up an embryo or you can start from the cells extracted from someone. You can use human cells, or you can use cells from a pig or another animal with a similar structure. There are a wide variety of options.”

“ ... ”

“Now, just having the same cells multiply is simple enough. Have you heard of that DIY bio stuff recently? If you fill a sterilized glass container with a culture medium made from bananas or potatoes, add some mincemeat from the supermarket, and then just keep it heated, the cells will multiply on their own. The most difficult part of that experiment is eliminating all the unwanted mold and bacteria. The actual cell multiplication isn’t all that hard.”

“But doesn’t that only give you a microscopic clump of flesh that multiplies as indiscriminately as cancer cells?”

“Exactly right.”

He readily admitted it.

This magician laid out a technique that was impossible for modern humankind.

“That is why you control the telomeres to prevent that cancerization process. To do that, you only need to cultivate a type of enzyme that reacts to the repeated sequence TTAGGG and, once you have enough of it, inject it into sample cells you want to multiply. ...Was that too complicated? To put it more simply, you just have to return the abnormal cells to normal. Using that method, you can produce any part of the body inside a glass tube. And then there is no need to dirty your hands by killing another baby to save this one.”

There was a precedent for this in Academy City. And Mina Mathers would have come into contact with it while managing data in the Windowless Building.

Kumokawa Seria.

She worked as the brain of Kaizumi, an old man on the Academy City Board of Directors. She had lost an eye during Tsuchimikado Motoharu’s quest for revenge, but she had repaired the body part using one of the spare parts she had preserved elsewhere.

“This isn’t worthy of so much surprise. Telomerase enzyme injection experiments have reached the point that they can suppress aging to a certain extent. *Even with the normal technology outside the city.* So should it really surprise you that an Academy City doctor can accomplish a bit more than that?”

“I have a tendency to make pessimistic predictions instead of leaping toward easy hope. That may be because I was built as a simulator, but this is ridiculous either way.”

“You can alter that opinion once you see the results. More importantly, you look after this centrifuge, will you? I would like to make two or three sensors for monitoring purposes just in case.”

That was all Allan Bennett said before moving from the RV’s spacious living area and entering the driver’s cabin up front. He could not remove the vehicle’s ability to drive, but that was still a treasure trove of spare parts.

Also, the golden retriever got up from the sofa bed and followed him.

As Mina Mathers’s cat-like ears suggested, she was sensitive to noises and voices.

So instead of using his artificial voice or leaving behind any written words, the dog projected glowing words directly on the doctor’s white coat.

“Hey, how long are you going to continue deceiving her? There is no romance in toying with a pure heart like that.”

A thin smile appeared on the frog-faced doctor’s lips and he started to say something, but he decided to do this Kihara Noukan’s way. In his case, he used sign language.

“Miss Mina Mathers is being extremely cautious. And I am nothing more than a doctor, so I’m not cut out for a fight. I was told to follow the instructions I was given in advance the instant she showed any kind of weapon.”

“And so you said the magic words?”

“Don’t give me that look. I only did what Aleister’s message told me to do. I mean, *I have no idea who this Allan Bennett person even is.*”

The golden retriever breathed an exasperated sigh.

“You have no romance at all.”

“That sort of emotion is unnecessary on the path of medicine. All it does is glorify death.”

There was definite pressure behind those words.

And that pressure had nothing to do with volume or tone.

“While deceiving her did get us in the door, I don’t see how we can get a detailed explanation out of her. After all, when she sees your know-it-all face, she innocently believes you already understand it all.”

“Is that thorniness part of what you call romance? Or was it love at first sight between the dog and the cat?”

“Don’t you dare.”

“Sorry.”

That was when they heard a meow from the frog-faced doctor’s feet. A calico cat looked up from its food dish with a look that said “What? I’m not giving you my food.”

“I heard that you absolutely loathe that...magic, was it called?”

“All magic should be eradicated. Otherwise it will leave a slight vulnerability in the field of science.”

This Kihara had fought alongside Board Chairman Aleister.

He was one of the few who had supported that human and he had done it from a different direction than the frog-faced doctor.

“But having a goal does not mean anything is acceptable in pursuit of it. Yuiitsu-kun was extremely skilled and you could say it was me who drove her in that direction, but it seems she forgot that lesson. But as you can see from my detached view of this, I too am a Kihara. I am part of that family of madness and destruction that saviors like you should look down upon in disgust. But even then, there is one thing I refuse to compromise on.”

“This might be off topic, but have you ever considered taking up the path of medicine?”

From what position was the frog-faced doctor asking that question?

But the golden retriever had an answer ready.

“What a ridiculous idea. If a Kihara reaches for the field of medicine, they will end up like Byouri-kun. I can never be like you. No matter what scientific field it is, I will make a complete mess of it. Even if I start out hoping to use it for salvation. Yuiitsu-kun started with concern for me, but look at what she actually did. That is what a Kihara is.”

“Hm,” muttered the frog-faced doctor in thought.

And since that was the first actual noise he had made, Mina Mathers’s cat ears twitched while she looked after the handmade centrifuge. The tail behind her also lifted up in interest.

The golden retriever’s tail moved differently, but his nose and ears also moved cautiously.

“So what will you do?”

“Well, I have no idea what to think when she keeps using words like ‘original sin’, ‘life force’, and ‘magician’, but I just have to convert that into words I do understand, right? I just need a technique for transferring a human’s entire ‘self’ – memories, personality, subconscious reflex and reaction patterns, *etc.* – into another body. If I keep it simple like that, then it might just be possible.”

The golden retriever’s tail fell limply to the floor.

“That’s the thing about you.”

“What is?”

“I know it simply isn’t possible, but sometimes I can’t help but wonder *if the man in front of me really is Allan Bennett after all.*”

“It might just be to deceive an enemy, but this is a skill all doctors need.”

“ ... ”

“You can’t underestimate the placebo effect and you don’t want the medicine you’ve prescribed your patient to not work, so removing the patient’s worries is part of a doctor’s job.”

If that was enough to convince the golden retriever who stood near the top of the Kiharas, then that doctor really was an extraordinary person.

Part 5

“They noticed us.”

The silver girl suddenly spoke within the dusty old London apartment.

It had sounded like she had found some kind of hint, but this new comment interrupted that.

Something was approaching.

No, they had already entered the next stage.

“Netta Fornario and Israel Regardie, hm? In terms of a stage performance, they would be the opening act. I had caught glimpses of a few scouts, but an actual attack will only reveal their abilities to me. Either way, this is a major performance overall. Let’s move elsewhere and respond to the very center of their act.”

“W-wait. What are you saying we do?”

“Isn’t it obvious? We ruin Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers’s fun.”

Board Chairman Aleister did not even bother looking out the window.

She snapped her fingers.

“Accelerator, try reading the air currents using the dust floating in here. That calculation should be easier than starting with the vectors on your skin.”

Suddenly, an invisible attack passed through that indoor space, shattered the window, hit a woman with two black braids who was clinging to the outside like a lizard or newt, and sent her flying away from the building. A blackened silver accessory shattered.

He was to preserve as much as possible.

So once he switched the choker back off, the #1 gave a skeptical look.

“Why are you giving me more cards to play?”

“What does that matter to you if all you’re concerned about is killing me?”

The one most surprised by all this was Kamijou Touma who had failed to react until it was all over.

“Didn’t you say it didn’t really matter if they attacked us!?”

“Sorry. Did I forget to explain this to you? I am the kind of human who forgets the promises I made just one second before. That’s just how broken my ethics are.”

“You shitty old man!!”

“The route I took might have been different, but I believe I would be classified as a loli hag. And I don’t say that as a joke. I am the genuine article since I really have lived more than a century.”

But no matter what she said, the situation was underway.

They had encountered and clashed with the Golden cabal once more.

That meant Kamijou and Accelerator of the science side had no choice but to follow Aleister from the room to the hallway. And if that led them to a cliff, the sulking spiky-haired boy was seriously considering kicking the silver girl off of it.

(But anyway.)

Kamijou was beginning to figure out how to interact with Aleister, but it was hard to get her to stop when you honestly praised her. You had to be more careful with compliments than with insults.

At any rate, he had a hard time imagining that attack would have been fatal, but Aleister no longer seemed to fear them like she had during the clash with Mathers in Westminster Abbey’s graveyard. He hoped he and Accelerator were helping support the lonely magician to some extent.

“That was surprisingly easy. I suppose there are something things you could not fix even by ruling them with fear, Mathers.”

But they were not given enough time to run down the stairs and out the back door or to hold their breath and hide in a good ambushing spot.

Before they could do much of anything, they heard the heavy footstep of leather shoes coming from the stairs.

It was clearly meant to inform them of this individual's presence.

That fluttering cloak.

That unwavering and imposing build.

Those facial features.

Aleister boiled over the instant she saw that.

[illegible]

“Cold and dry then cold and wet.”

He did not hesitate to wield the supernatural.

The silver girl pushed past even Accelerator to stand out front.

The #1 was the strongest, but his firepower was too direct. Had Aleister decided this called for something more underhanded and tricky?

Or had she not wanted the Golden leader to take away the person standing by her side?

The silver girl was overflowing with emotion, but Mathers walked up to the front line while ignoring all his subordinates. The blue cup and green disc were dancing around him.

The chain reaction of small noises sounded an awful lot like waves crashing and receding.

“The blessing of the earth becomes decay. Come forth and spread, lord of demons born from the decay of all that is.”

The objects scattered at his feet were nothing out of the ordinary.

They were small, hard peas.

Come to think of it, wasn't there a traditional sound effect for stage plays in which a basket full of adzuki beans was shaken side to side?

But.

These peas scattered at Mathers's feet quickly grew dark and discolored. They

wriggled, spat out sticky strings, and connected together.

This was not magic performed as a group. If it was a stage play, then it was Mathers's solo performance.

And he spoke words of power.

"Thy name is Belzébuth. Purge the insolent ones who stand before me."

When Aleister tried to run forward, a bunch of those black strings burst from her left chest.

That was her name.

The many peas scattered on the floor linked together to form a sticky black rotting object and then they linked together the name of a great wicked power and the name of a sacrifice.

"Gah."

It looked like a woman's long black hair after thoroughly soaking in a slimy drain. It was as unclean as could be. And they covered Aleister's heart, arteries, veins, and everything on the inside of her ribs. At this point, science was irrelevant. Mathers's magic ruled over everything.

This was not meant to kill someone instantly.

Because that would be *meaningless*.

"Huh?"

This was the very fear that had remotely hunted down and crushed the Golden magicians who had split away from oppressive Mathers in the midst of the Battle of Blythe Road. Mathers had not simply been caught in a conflict Aleister started. This was the legendary attack said to have shattered the cabal because the magicians feared it more than the enemy before them and had started blaming each other for having started the fight.

"How does it feel after so long, novice?"

"...!?"

"Doesn't fear taste so sweet once you give in and accept it? Just like every religion and mythology has its god turn military might against the human race

at some point.”

It broke the target's spirit before their body.

In the middle of her run, Aleister came to a stop and just about collapsed to her knees, but Mathers grabbed her neck and he lifted her up with just the one arm.

This was no time to watch on in shock.

Aleister and Mathers killed far too quickly.

It was a little late to act now, so Kamijou could only shout.

Mathers had appeared so tough in the Westminster Abbey graveyard, so Kamijou knew his fist might not work. And Aleister did not have much time with her throat in the man's grasp. She could die to perfectly ordinary asphyxiation.

“Accelerator, the floor!!”

“Hot and dry.”

"Shut up! Just do it!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

The floor fell away not below Mathers but below Kamijou and Accelerator.

An area with a radius of about a meter collapsed below them.

Just like a shark sinking below the surface, the two boys dropped to the next floor down.

They just barely avoided being hit by the deluge of flames that filled the entire straight hallway. While still holding the silver girl up with an arm and with his scarf flapping, Mathers spoke with a hint of amusement in his voice.

“I see.”

Meanwhile, the four Symbolic Weapons flew around him and clanged together like musical instruments.

The arrangement instantly changed.

“Hot and wet.”

His cloak and scarf danced in a gust of wind. In a single slice, an invisible blade of compressed air chopped the apartment in two all the way down to the

foundation.

However, there was one thing in its way.

The floor between him and the boys altered its trajectory just a bit and that affected its accuracy. The scenery shifted and the cracks spread, but they had successfully dodged certain death by just a few centimeters in the identical hallway one floor down. Afterwards, Kamijou Touma pointed back up at Mathers.

“Get him!!”

It was finally time to attack.

Accelerator broke through the obstacles overhead and attacked Mathers from below. They had no idea how effective this would be, but destroying the floor would drop the man down within Imagine Breaker’s range. Kamijou did not know how Imagine Breaker was classified on the science side, but he knew the Golden cabal had kept it as the ultimate exorcism spiritual item which had supposedly killed Mathers once before. It now resided in the boy’s right arm and had been incorporated into some kind of plan in Academy City. Mathers could never ignore it since it had directly caused his death before.

But.

Nevertheless.

“Hmph.”

Mathers stomped the heel of his leather shoe on the floor just before it burst from Accelerator’s attack.

It was like a hopeless game of whack-a-mole. By fully controlling the four elements, could Mathers really use just his foot to strike down Academy City’s #1?

But just then, when Mathers glanced down for a brief moment...

“Hh!!”

Aleister let out a quick breath and swung her right knee up while still held up by the man’s arm. The sharp and heavy knee strike had to have hit the jaw hidden below the scarf, but Mathers did not react. No training could protect

you from a hit like that, but he simply glared at her.

“I came to deal with you personally, so please do not assume you can end this so easily.”

“Ha ha.”

The silver girl actually laughed.

Yes. That human did not fear failure.

“I see, I see. So that’s how it works. It looks like killing the cat as many times as it takes is worthwhile after all. I was already curious after what happened in the Westminster graveyard, but it all makes sense now.”

“...”

“You can thank Dion Fortune.”

She gave the answer while facing her death.

Like she was leaving behind a dying message.

“Israel Regardie or Netta Fornario would have worked just as well, but it was Fortune that clued me in. I will reveal your secret. Westcott is the only quasi-immortal that cabal needs.”

“Your hackneyed sensibilities stole the Golden from me once, so I will not be satisfied until I have killed you by corrupting you from the heart so that only contaminates and pathogens flow through your veins. Now, it is time you decided what to do in the meantime. Spiritual Tripping? The Blasting Rod? Or will you use Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass again? No matter what you try, you can never escape from me. Because you are you and I am me.”

“You fool. I will entrust my life to the century I built. In other words, to science. That said, what I could scrounge up at a shopping center was not quite enough.”

She had not broken.

The silver girl was completely different from when she had trembled all alone in the Westminster Abbey graveyard.

Mathers narrowed one eye in displeasure as she continued.

“Really, this is kind of cheating. And you could say I am only handing the earth and its people to Coronzon sooner. But no complaints, okay? If you truly understand what kind of human I am, then don’t let this anger you, Mathers.”

That was when the dam broke. Mathers’s cloak and scarf fluttered as he spun around and slammed Aleister’s back into a nearby wall.

The loud bang was followed by the unpleasantly long sound of the air directly forced from her lungs finding it could not leave through her constricted throat.

“You still haven’t broken?”

“Enjoy this while you can, Mr. Short Temper. I won’t ask the impossible of you. I already know you aren’t capable of anything as complex and intellectual as patience.”

Mathers raised his arm once more. He likely planned to use his height to slam the silver girl against the hard floor. This was not a martial arts ring, so in the worst case, her spine and ribs could shatter and pierce her organs.

But.

Of all things.

While suspended by an arm and short on air, Aleister pulled out a card-sized electronic device. It was a perfectly ordinary smartphone.

Disappointment filled Mathers’s eyes, but it was unlikely he knew what this really meant.

So Aleister explained for him.

“Unlock. *Now Academy City is fully functional once more.*”

They were indoors, yet Mathers still sensed an intense beam of light dropping toward him from overhead. The light pierced and destroyed everything in its path, but...

“Is that all you’ve got, novice? You really thought an orbital bombing was enough to fry *me!*?”

The powerful beam practically grazed Aleister’s nose as it scored a direct hit on Mathers. Yet his voice and that strange pressure were not weakened in the

slightest. The Symbolic Weapons of fire, water, wind, and earth were ordinary items any modern magician could carry with them, but this was what they were capable of in the right hands.

And then...

“You fool.”

The silver girl readily responded.

“The result is practically staring you in the face. Who said I was satisfied with a mere satellite weapon?”

It was too late now.

The optical attack had already been launched straight down from satellite orbit. And where was Academy City’s #1, Accelerator, who Mathers himself had intercepted with a stomp earlier?

“Reflection and focusing. It is high time you experienced just what Academy City can do, you philistine.”

An even greater attack shot back up from below as if to rebel against heaven. The #1 had taken the satellite weapon head-on and then sent it right back with double the power.

And that achieved a certain saturation, pushing something past a threshold.

Of the four weapons frozen in midair, the wind dagger was deflected away.

This was a first.

A change came over Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers’s face. The expression glimpsed below his witch’s hat was a negative one, but it was not one of displeasure. It was slight – ever so slight – but his face was twisted as if in pain.

Something burned away in the light. The witch’s hat and cloak, the scarf, and the Scottish military uniform he so loved were all scorched and his previously untouched skin grew discolored. It collapsed. What did? The outline of that immovable obstacle named Mathers.

And.

And.

And.

Just then, something fluttered in the corner of Aleister Crowley's vision.

Part 6

The Golden magician named Dion Fortune came to.

“My, my. It looks like she’s woken up, Niang-Niang. If she had waited until after we were done treating her wounds – heh heh heh – she could have at least avoided the sting of the disinfectant.”

“There’s not enough room, Nephthys. And who keeps shoving their ass right in my face? Do I need to bite it!?”

An ear-splitting scream erupted within the four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The bandages, disinfectant, tweezers, and other items inside a mini first aid kit flew through the air. That kit had been found in the trunk of the stolen vehicle along with a wrench and a hammer for breaking the window if the car fell into some water.

Even with the full backseat to work with, it was still cramped with three monsters crammed in there together.

In a habit picked up from living in Academy City where satellites were watching 24/7, Hamazura tended to hide below bridges, in parking garages, or anywhere with a roof when he was on the run. In this case, they were below one of the trees next to the road. However, the very fact that he had a habit of what to do while on the run showed he had made some major mistakes in planning his life.

At any rate.

(Are they 8=3 level? No, even higher!? I thought those ranks didn’t really exist and were just for show!!)

“Nwa ha ha ha! Show some fear and respect! You people used the names of Isis and Osiris assuming there would be no repercussions, but I am one of their fellow gods and am oftentimes seen as one and the same. So good evening. I

am Nephthys.”

“Gyaaaaaahh!!”

Hamazura was starting to feel worried.

That delinquent boy began to recall some old trivia on the level of an urban legend that he had heard in the past. Something about screaming at the top of your lungs being bad for the blood vessels in your head.

He turned around in the driver’s seat to look back.

“Hey, she’s injured, isn’t she? Try not to get her so worked up!”

“Oh? But weren’t you the one that asked us to treat Dion Fortune’s wounds? Although it looks like she could heal herself on her own.”

“Fortune? Well, anyway, I don’t know how to treat someone that badly hurt, but a bandage woman like you probably knows a thing or two about that. Plus she’s a girl, so it would be a bad idea for me to remove her clothes.”

“Oh, dear. You say that, boy, but haven’t you been glancing back in the rearview mirror. And quite frequently too.”

The mini-China dress girl’s unwanted oracle sent a fist flying toward him from the passenger seat. Yes, while Takitsubo Rikou looked like the cute and expressionless bunny type, she would take action just as expressionlessly when necessary. Our hero(?) kept talking while looking quite ugly with his face squished against the drivers’ side window.

“Bgweh. N-no, you misunderstand. Your tits will always be #1 to me. Wait, wait, wait! The glass is creaking from all this pressure! Are you just embarrassed or are you legit mad!? And can someone please explain what’s going on!?”

“You’re not really supposed to rank people for that kind of thing,” said bandaged Nephthys with a wink.

The gods could quickly switch between English and Japanese, but they used Japanese when speaking to Hamazura. That meant the girl named...Dion? did not know what they were saying but could tell she was caught in the middle of it. She trembled with some tears in her eyes.

The brown beauty continued regardless.

“Magic Gods are those who pursued magic to the point of no longer being human. But these Golden people have remained human while using spells that incorporate even the power of Magic Gods. But it isn’t a case of one side walking all over the other. It’s a complex mess of mutual deception and betrayal. You could say whoever lets their guard down just a little will be consumed.”

“Well, normally thinking, a Magic God who has mastered magic would never be outdone by the knowledge of a magician who is still working to master magic,” said Niang-Niang. “But these Golden people aren’t exactly the average case. Do you mind if I use a poker analogy? A 2 might be the weakest card, but if you gather all four of them, you have a four-of-a-kind. It’s the group effect. It’s synergy. Of course, it’s still like threading a needle, but if used correctly, it could probably bring them pretty close to being the strongest out there. It’s not just the kings and aces that determine who wins and who loses.”

“Even Aleister figured out for himself how to eliminate Magic Gods Zombie and High Priest. If these people want to claim they’re the original Golden magicians like him, they’ll have to show us something that makes even us panic.”

“Right?”

“Niang-Niang.”

“Um, I was really trying to brush that off with a smile, so why’d you have to repeat yourself to drive your point home? You’re so mean, Nephthys. So thanks for digging back up that embarrassment from my past. Didn’t I say I was going to destroy Academy City and shout ‘all okay’ nice and loud?”

“Who would have thought the Kamisato Fever would bring a quick end to that? Right?”

“Hghh!?”

That loud groan caused redheaded Dion Fortune to jump in shock. The sickly pale mini-China dress girl should have been more considerate.

“A-are you trying to get me to commit harakiri, Nephthys???”

“Eh? Why would you do it the Japanese way? Their cruel traditions are more

High Priest's thing. And that method is no fun at all. It's like being forced to wear non-matching underwear. Wearing a matching set feels so much better, so I'd rather see some amazing Chinese culture like Lingchi or Paolao☆”

“Are you secretly a demon!? Hey, you innocent babies looking clueless in the front seats, don't even think about searching those terms!! No matter how curious those Chinese words make you, you will seriously regret it if you hit that search button. So promise your big sis Niang-Niang you won't do that!”

“Specifically, Lingchi is a form of public execution where a living criminal is slowly chopped up over a long and truly agonizing period of time. Don't search for it, okay?”

“The Nihon Daruma story about travelers having their arms and legs cut off and then put out on display is a completely baseless urban legend, but it might have taken inspiration from that. Tremble tremble.”

Fortune was trembling even more than Niang-Niang and she looked dizzy too. Perhaps the words Lingchi and Paolao were known all around the world much like pachinko and keirin. Hopefully she did not assume she was going to be punished in such horrific ways.

“Oh, but Niang-Niang, no part of the world is bloodless. You already tried to appropriate harakiri from Japan, but they also had a punishment known as the Six-Location Cut. And while everyone seems to look up to the West as the gold standard, they had a device known as the rack which pulled on the limbs until the body was torn apart. Everyone comes up with these ideas. The humans covering this earth are so cruel, aren't they?”

“Gyaaaahh!? I thought something was off about you, Nephthys, but you've started on some weird new obsession, haven't you!?”

“Quiet! You shouted so loud Fortune fainted again!”

“Oh, how seductive of her. Being a natural at trances can't be fun. Heyyy, wake up!”

Fortune convulsed in the back seat after sliding down so much her butt nearly slipped off the seat, but then Niang-Niang did something to her. With her bright stockings and frilly dress, not much of her skin was exposed, but Niang-Niang

still seemed to be wrapping wet tissues around her forehead and neck. She was apparently cooling the larger blood vessels to stimulate the girl. It seemed oddly old-fashioned, like a sort of folk medicine.

And after the mini-China dress girl used exaggerated movements to catch Hamazura's eye...

"This isn't enough. Boy, bring me a green onion! I'll shove it up her ass. This is gonna be a major operation."

"Habwah!? What!? What is this sense of impending doom!?"

Dion Fortune had passed out and did not understand Japanese, but some kind of sixth sense kicked in and she hopped back up as if to avoid some kind of trap. The hop was a little too vigorous, so her skirt fluttered up, revealing a glimpse of her drawers, and her face plowed right into Nephthys's large chest.

The bandaged woman did not seem to mind and she rubbed the back of Fortune's head as if comforting a small child.

"These things took root in civilization before the spread of forensics that use fingerprints or DNA, so you can find an odd accumulation of torture and execution techniques in the areas of the world where the majority of the people wished to avoid death. In other words, pretty much the entire world. Ancient Egypt is no laughing matter either. After all, the desert is an unforgiving place and we had such high-level toolmaking and stone construction skills. Some theorize it was the first civilization to use ropes and bondage for torture."

"Gabgbgbh."

"Nephthys, Fortune is convulsing again. If you don't release her from that endlessly soft bog, she'll suffocate."

"Oh, dear."

Explaining that made Niang-Niang start to blush, which just meant she was a little less pale than normal, and they had gotten extremely sidetracked with their World Cruelty Theatre, but Hamazura Shiage did not understand the first thing about magic anyway. Talking about gods and goldens in front of him would accomplish nothing. He did recall receiving some kind of special lecture (and a slap) from something-or-other Birdway, but the true idiots were the ones

who forget everything even when they did study. It was also Birdway's fault for not being a perfect blonde teacher with tight skirt, black stockings, a white blouse (with two buttons undone) that showed off her bra lines, and the lovely face and giant breasts to match. How was he supposed to remember the lesson without that?

So there was only one thing to say for that member of the spoiler generation(?) that would just look up the answer to everything.

"Keep it simple."

The brown beauty responded while pulling Dion Fortune's small face out from her ample cleavage.

"Dion Fortune might be able to get a bite in on us, but we might be able to chew Dion Fortune to pieces. And while the two of us are together and desperate for some excitement, Dion Fortune is all alone, trapped between us, and injured. So a question: who has the upper hand?"

"Oh, I get it now," said Hamazura for the time being.

But he had to be careful. That view came from a pro-Magic God position. If that other group called the Golden cabal was asked the same question, they might see things differently.

And on top of that, this new girl had fainted when they shouted too loud, she had narrowly escaped the spring onion, and she had suffocated in the endlessly soft bog, so Hamazura spoke up in sympathy for the woozy-looking frilly dress girl.

"I don't get any of this, but quit talking about biting people and chewing them to pieces when she's injured! I was trying to rescue that Fortune girl, but now I feel like I threw a fawn into a cage with two wolves! So stop that! Look how scared the poor girl is!!"

"Don't..."

He had taken her side.

However, that seemed to have hurt her pride.

She shouted back at him in English.

“Don’t you dare mock the great Dion Fortune!!”

The black box floated up as the frilly dress girl bared her teeth and roared at him.

Niang-Niang widened her eyes like dinner plates to observe the Golden magician from close up. And she spoke with a blank expression.

“Fine, if you wanna try it.”

“Wha-?”

“You got this far with the luck of the draw, right? The spells you shove inside that box are transformed and corrupted like a game of telephone, so not even you know what it will end up as. That luck-based randomness is meant to bring down the enemy’s strategies and tactics. So you could say it’s a lot like an archetype processor that forces them to fight with nothing more than their base strength. But do you think you can defeat a god with nothing more than luck? When you’re no more than a hairless ape?”

Sweat poured down Dion Fortune’s forehead below her white veil.

She may have only now realized this.

It could have been Israel Regardie or Netta Fornario. If these Magic Gods had run into any of the other Golden magicians, no one could have predicted the result. But Dion Fortune would be forced to fight with probability instead of with ingenuity or a fistfight. Once that game of Russian roulette began, it would become an extremely boring fight to the death in which she was guaranteed to blow her brains out in the first round.

Meanwhile, Nephthys calmly interrupted.

“Now, now, Niang-Niang. What are you even saying? You can’t call her a hairless ape when you can see that red hair on her head. And by her age, she’ll have some hair down below too.”

“Eh? Down...below?”

“Eh? Why do you look like someone who just saw the real murderer???”

An awkward silence fell between the two higher beings.

This introduced some unnecessary suspicions about Magic God Niang-Niang who had lived for at least a thousand years.

But the woman who had all her hair got back on topic.

“Now, the Golden cabal used Kabbalah as a foundation, added in Egyptian Mythology, Greek Mythology, tarot, Enoch, and plenty of other things, extracted the common symbols of god and light, and put it all together into a system of spells that approaches the essence of it all. And within that, Nephthys is the Imperator, one of the three positions in the 0=0 ceremony. ...Now, surely you aren’t naïve enough to think you could use that box of yours against a legit Egyptian deity like me. This is beyond what luck can do for you, unless you set things up to the extent Aleister Crowley did when he brought out that being he calls Aiwass and claimed to have complete the Last Judgment in 1904.”

“Umm.”

She received a troubled voice in response.

With the stage play ritual magic that used a large group of people, the arrangement of people could be altered to cover up a weak point, but recovering from a mistake was much more difficult with a solo performance.

Meanwhile, Nephthys smiled and clasped her hands in front of her large chest. She looked like she was begging for something.

Mathers had fought with the coded text that had led to the initial Golden cabal before Crowley had joined, so he may have been able to immediately create a new stage play that omitted the divine crying woman. Quasi-immortal Westcott had also been involved with that coded message, so he may have been able to ignore the apparent damage and work out the flaws in his spells from the horrific wounds torn into his body.

But what about Dion Fortune?

It could have been any other magician or Magic God, but this bandaged woman was just a bad fit for her.

And then the brown woman spoke with the kind voice of a kindergarten teacher.

She kept it short.

And simple.

But she was the female deity associated with Osiris, god of the underworld, and who was directly linked to death, tears, and sorrow.

“Do you want to die?”

“.....

The floating black box fell back down into Dion Fortune’s hand.

Hamazura did not understand, but he could tell the confrontation was over.

Not only did he not understand magic, but the last bit had played out in English. An idiot like him could never hope to keep up.

“So what does all this mean? Who’s the victim and who’s in the wrong? Where am I supposed to take that girl???”

“Oh, what a gentleman. But I don’t think it’s too late to get some more information out of her as a reward for taking her in. ...Really, she’s probably the only Golden magician who would back down so easily. Especially in their current state where *they would probably calmly challenge a god even after having half their body blown away.*”

Then Niang-Niang summed it up with something she really should not have said.

She touched on a taboo.

“Heh. Compared to Westcott and Mathers, she’s a complete newbie to the Golden cabal. So don’t worry! Losing a mere Fighter A isn’t going to affect the cabal much!!”

“You seem really intent on setting her up as the one in the wrong, but I don’t want to see a girl crying in humiliation, so stop it!!”

For some reason, it was Hamazura she glared at with tears in her eyes.

It was possible Dion Fortune was the kind of person who took more damage from pity than malice.

Takitsubo breathed an exasperated sigh from the passenger seat.

And she spoke in English.

“I don’t really care what you think about all this, but you should at least be polite.”

“?”

“Hamazura risked his life to help you when you were collapsed on the road, so shouldn’t you thank him?”

...

...

...

“Squeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...bubble, bubble, bubble☆”

This time, the frilly dress girl collapsed backwards and passed out.

“Wait, hold on!! It bothers you that much that I picked you up!?”

“I bet this is because we forgot the spring onion,” added Niang-Niang.

Part 7

He burned away.

He was burned to a crisp and blown away.

Or he should have been.

The smell of death and burning filled the old apartment hallway.

“Hmph.”

In her silver girl form, Aleister ripped away the man’s hand still holding her neck. The wrist end was carbonized and torn from its arm.

“That damaged his body. But did it work? No, not yet.”

Even after all that.

“...”

Mathers had been forced to let go of his target, but he silently glared at her from a short distance away from the scorched area.

There was a simple reason for his survival.

Before he was heated to the point of death, someone else had tackled him out of the way.

The Golden leader spoke that person’s name.

“Edward Berridge. My bright and shining brother.”

“Brother? You seem to have quite a faithful servant, Mathers.”

Aleister’s voice was brimming with sarcasm and mockery.

That was why this magician was the very same Aleister Crowley who had once followed the Battle of Blythe Road through to the end. Once she got started, she would not let her conscience stop her until it was over and done with.

“Besides, that wouldn’t have been enough to kill you off whether you received help or not.”

Embers danced through the air.

But they did not come from burning pieces of the apartment.

The edges of the giant hole allowed the wind in from more than one direction and that blew something into the air between the two magicians.

They were *tarot cards*.

Simply put, it was the same as the black cat witch named Mina Mathers. She had been both a powerful simulator and the Thoth Tarot, but then Aiwass had set her free by remaking her as a grimoire to virtually construct a body for her. Qliphah Puzzle 545 was another example. Coronzon had power equal to or greater than Aiwass, so she had successfully created an autonomous artificial angel based on the Qliphoth.

Unlike humans, such beings could not refine magic power using their own life force, but they accomplished something similar by absorbing power from the ley lines running through the earth.

In other words, even a fake could use magic.

“It was not that you acquired a quasi-immortality spell like Westcott’s.”

Aleister’s lips definitely twisted upwards.

She had discovered that Cinderella’s dress was made by the fairy godmother, but there was another way of looking at that. She seemed to be mocking the filthy identity hidden below the dress.

“Original grimoires have always been considered indestructible. Isn’t that right, Mathers?”

Thinking back, why had Mathers bothered to create a wall of water to redirect Kamjiou Touma’s fist back in the Westminster Abbey graveyard? Even though he had made a point of taking Accelerator’s deadly reflection straight to the face immediately afterwards?

And on that note, why had Academy City’s #1’s special attack – the one that destroyed all the blood vessels and nerves in the target’s body – failed to work

on him?

The answer was simple. An original grimoire would never want to come in contact with Imagine Breaker. And since he was technically not human, it was no surprise his circulation of blood and bioelectricity differed from a normal person. So even if Accelerator was the best the science side had to offer, it was only natural his calculations had not fit.

“I notice you don’t have a drop of blood on you even after slaughtering so many other versions of me. Did you not want to blot out the card patterns? Come to think of it, I can see some of that black cat’s influence there.”

However.

Those had been small questions, but it was something else that had really stood out to Aleister.

“It was Dion Fortune,” said the silver girl. “She is technically a Golden magician, but she only joined in 1919. *That is well after the Battle of Blythe Road in April of 1900*, Mathers! And what about Israel Regardie or Netta Fornario!? Those untimely magicians arrived after the battle was already over and futilely worked to forcibly restore the Golden cabal to its former glory. You could say they were from a different generation. Whatever their skill level, they are complete newcomers from my perspective. If you had been secretly selecting your favorites from the later iterations of the cabal such as the Dawn-Colored Sunlight or New Light, someone would have detected you long ago. So what is this? You were all one group from the beginning? Newcomers like them would never be standing side by side with the founders like you and Westcott!!”

It was true Fortune’s name had been mentioned in the Windowless Building.

But you must not forget.

Aleister had reproduced that based on his own point of view and its main purpose had been to inspire and motivate him by digging up his old traumas.

As long as the powerful symbol of the Golden cabal was there, there had been no need for the details to be exactly right. In fact, some exaggeration would only help with the intended goal. And when the events had been shown to

Kamijou Touma, Mina had provided some additional explanations and rearranged the chronological order to help convey what the boy needed to know.

It was possible to create beings that thought for themselves.

And for higher beings on the level of Aiwass and Coronzon, it was possible to create things like the baby Lilith and Qliphah Puzzle 545.

With so many previous examples, there was no reason to not do it again.

So they had to reach for that answer here.

It was much more convincing than attempting to claim every last Golden magician had somehow survived the Battle of Blythe Road and remained undetected for a century afterwards.

The hand Aleister held like a piece of fried chicken crumbled like a knot had come undone and it transformed into several cards. The wind carried them over to Mathers and his lost hand regenerated.

A true grimoire could not be destroyed by any method.

That was why the Anglican Church had created the grimoire library known as Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

“What a silly farce, Mathers. Even with all these familiar faces around, am I still all alone in the end?”

“Is that how you see it?”

However.

Even with the truth revealed, Mathers whispered to the silver girl.

“If you truly have *stopped thinking there*, then no target could be easier to finish off, Aleister.”

The air crackled as killer intents clashed.

If either one moved a finger, some unstoppable attack would be unleashed and one or the other would be destroyed.

But just before that could happen, Mathers grimaced a bit.

“Do not interfere.”

It sounded a lot like a high-voltage line exploding, but it did not come from the hallway. It either came from one of the rooms or from outside the building.

“I thought I had sensed a slight intoxication, but it seems something had slipped into my mind. Is this the madness of war? Protégé of Coronzon, do you know who it is you are targeting here?”

The silver girl’s eyebrows rose slightly.

Hadn’t she already killed the artificial demon this reminded her of?

“You had an excuse ready to go for when you lost? You are thorough if nothing else, Mathers.”

“Say what you wish. Punishing this ungrateful demon comes first, but do not think this has saved you. I am always working towards killing you. I will fill in these irregular gaps that keep extending your life. No matter how small they are, I will fill them in. So come at me with science or magic. The number of possibilities you have left are the countdown to your doom. You must know what kind of person I am and surely you do not think the likes of Coronzon could change me.”

The words “cold and dry” soon followed.

As soon as Aleister tackled a nearby door and dived into the room beyond it, an all-destroying sandstorm filled the straight hallway.

The silver girl did not bother checking the hallway.

She quietly clicked her tongue while collapsed on the floor.

“So he’s gone.”

She finally heard a few sets of additional footsteps, but she doubted they belonged to the Golden magicians or Mathers. They were in such a rush she wondered if that god of war was scolding them. And just as she started getting worried, Kamijou Touma and Accelerator peered in through the broken door.

“S-so what happened?”

“I destroyed one and mostly revealed the mystery behind the Golden

members. Bread and wine, 22 and 56, and some wax as a secret ingredient. I will explain and in detail.”

Aleister sat up on the floor, sighed, and added something else.

“(But if that battle had continued, *it would have been me that was killed*. Just as discovering the blueprint for a tank doesn’t make its armor any less solid, revealing Mathers’s identity does not reduce his magical skill.)”

“What? Did you just mutter some ominous stuff under your breath?”

“No, it was nothing.” The silver girl shook her head while seated. “Anyway, since Mathers left, he must have found something more important than killing me. And it would be something more than eliminating someone interfering from the shadows.”

“Hold on. You mean *Mathers* of all people had a more pressing issue to deal with?”

Aleister had to smile at that phrasing.

In this short time, Kamijou had seen what drove that man.

“Yes. *Mathers* of all people prioritized something other than what he wanted. He tried to hide it with a silly act even after faithful Berridge was destroyed before his eyes. That means whatever is happening could not wait until after he had killed me. There must be something, but I have no idea what. So I would like to know if you have any ideas. ...This would be so much easier if I had Mina Mathers here as the Thoth Tarot, but you will have to take her place for now, my students.”

Part 8

Dion Fortune, the girl wearing a frilly white dress with pink accents, heard a quiet metallic jingling.

Hamazura Shiage leaned the driver's seat back to get some rest and accidentally hit Nephthys with the headrest, but then he seemed to realize something.

"Oh, right. I still have this. You can have it back."

"..."

She could not understand what he said, but the expression half-hidden by her white veil looked quite complex. It could not be measured with any one emotion.

This was the SOS signal that had not reached anyone.

She seemed to be a prideful girl, so she may have gathered what courage she had left and rung that bell while something broke inside her and she burned with humiliation. And since it had ultimately accomplished nothing, this reminder must have been a doubly or triply painful.

Or perhaps it was the same for any teenage boy or girl.

Asking for help was perfectly normal for adults, but it required a painful amount of effort for a child to utter those words.

One's pride was more valuable than their life. His pride's value had not risen to the point that he would be unable to ask to use the bathroom at school, but Hamazura was at that same age. The results of his powers development and the scores on his tests had cost him almost all of the currency known as pride and that debt had continued to pile up until he found himself wandering the back alleys of Academy City. But he had been given a chance to recover by Takitsubo Rikou, Kinuhata Saiai, Mugino Shizuri, and the late Frenda Seivelun. If those girls

had not taken him in and given him a loan in the currency of pride, he would have still been there in the back alleys.

“It’s okay.”

So despite the language barrier, he found himself speaking to this girl.

“No one heard it, but that’s fine. If none of your companions heard you asking for help, then that protects some of your pride. So it’s okay. It’s all in how you look at it. You can redo it as many times as it takes. It still hasn’t fallen to zero and you’re still not in debt.”

Takitsubo seemed unsure whether or not she should translate this.

So Hamazura held out a hand to stop her.

It did not matter if the girl could not understand him. It only mattered that he said it.

A failure was not a complete waste of time. Sometimes it was necessary to come to a stop. So he hoped he could show that through his actions instead of his words.

Part 9

A staticky sound continued intermittently just outside the run-down apartment.

“Kah, ah.”

The translucent demon named Qlipah Puzzle 545 was there.

Perhaps due to a direct counterattack from Mathers, her outline was irregularly blurring. She had fallen to the ground, she could not breathe properly, and an unpleasant sweat poured from her entire body. The text on the English newspapers complexly rearranged itself, but it never formed actual words and sentences. It looked more like a corrupted text file.

This was no time to dream of the sweetness she found in freedom of movement and in events outside the contract. This external pressure could only be described as extraordinary. A monster lurked outside the rules. Leaving those rules introduced a lot of risk. She was reminded just how valuable the boring safety of those rules was.

(This is bad. This is bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad bad.)

She could not gather her thoughts.

She had quickly given up on pursuing Hamazura Shiage and intended to tell Accelerator what she had seen.

(Even in this form, he's still Mathers. Did he really rearrange the numbers of the Major Arcana using his own interpretation? He's leaving Coronzon's control!!)

But once she returned, she had found Mathers and the other Golden magicians attacking the Isis-Urania Temple.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 had learned that no good deed goes unpunished. She had tried to actually protect her contractor for once and this was how she was

rewarded. Her policy was to only answer the questions she was asked, so she had kept the identity of these Golden magicians to herself.

But no matter what form he took, Mathers was still Mathers. She had tried getting him to act carelessly by using the madness of war on him like she had with the Lady of the Masquerade Ball, but using the exact same tactics against such an intelligent group had been a mistake. Every action taken by the cabal personnel and the reason behind it would have been reported back to their leader. And they were not naïve enough to be repeatedly outdone by a downsized artificial being.

A normal person would have been killed instantly by that attack.

Qliphah Puzzle 545 had only survived because she was a demon.

“Kh. I can’t believe this.”

She was surprised she was calm enough to speak in complete sentences like that. It was like floundering in the water and thinking you would drown, but then realizing your feet could reach the bottom of the pool.

She somehow managed to stand up, used a hand to prop herself up against the wall, and took a deep breath. Then she hesitantly tried spreading her wings like someone checking on a half-healed scab. She once more left the bonds of gravity and floated up.

(Well, I’ll just have to check on everything one at a time. Nee hee hee. And I guess I’ve shaken free of Coronzon’s control too.)

She made a loop-the-loop in the moonlight such that anyone on the ground would have seen her make a loop around the moon.

It looked like her body was not going to fall apart after all.

And then.

“Oh?”

She saw something on the ground.

A four-horse carriage was weaving through the gaps in the miniature city below her. And it was not alone. Similar carriages gathered from all over to form a single caravan.

They seemed to be on their way to pick someone up.

Qliphah Puzzle 545 looked to see where the carriages were headed and saw Buckingham Palace.

Which meant...

“So is that for the Royal Family? Nee hee hee.”

Part 10

The standard tourist route through the British Museum did not visit the back area. Index and Fran threw open the thick double doors and stepped into a darkness so thick it felt like swimming through stagnant air.

Overall, it was like a giant stone dome.

“Here, use this light.”

They must have decided her basted-together clothes would never stop falling apart, so Orsola now wore a Japanese-style school uniform coat over her bare skin. But Index was a discerning girl thanks to her perfect memory. She knew this was the very same coat a certain boy had used to cover Orsola’s nudity while taking her from the subway!!

“...”

“There are a lot of historical documents stored in here, so try to restrain yourself.”

Fran cautioned her before anything happened.

Incidentally, Orsola carried a silver tray containing what looked like an oil lamp, but it was actually an electric light. And the light was covered by a glass shade that blocked UV wavelengths just like sunglasses did. Needless to say, that too was to protect the old paper.

But why was it on a tray?

“It pains me that sandwiches were the only finger food I could prepare for you.”

“Food! And are those the wicked kind that seduce the maiden heart!?”

Fran gave her a look that said “What did I just say about historical documents?”, but it was no use. The sandwiches Orsola had brought were only

canned meat and vegetables held between bread, but the care taken in preparing them was evident from how she had boiled the contents to remove excess fat and salt and how she had cut off the bread crust.

“Sandwiches are not very messy, but it would still help if you held them between these napkins.”

“I just hope eating this late doesn’t make us too drowsy.”

Despite what the hoodie bikini girl said, she did not try to stop them. Index and Karasuma Fran were promoted into the group that had managed to eat a meal since landing in England. The mayonnaise was homemade and had a few drops of olive oil for flavor. Thanks to that and other tricks by the capable young woman named Orsola, the sandwiches seemed much more complete despite using canned ingredients. Meanwhile, poor Kamijou Touma and Hamazura Shiage were still going hungry.

But that was not why they were here.

Reading desks were lined up in the center and tall bookcases formed a circle around them, but the hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl’s gaze moved right past that cascade of books and looked further in. The historical documents were only used as reference for the work done here. The real exception of the British Museum was further in: the archive and workroom for repairing damaged covers or torn pages. The old texts needing specialized repairs were sent there.

Which raised a certain question.

Fran frowned and looked back at Index as the girl approached that area.

“You have more than 103,000 grimoires memories, don’t you? And original grimoires can repair themselves, so why would they need human help?”

“I have the text memorized. But not the tiny creases, fingerprints, and other marks left on a physical text. And a lot of original grimoires should be gathered here as external reference material. Keeping their locations uncertain helps ensure their safety.”

Grimoires were not mere data.

Whether it was papyrus, parchment, or paper, they were physical objects. Which meant there would be important traces left beyond the actual text itself.

“Bibliomancy,” bluntly stated Index. “You pull out a grimoire, picture your worries in your head, and flip through it. Then you place your finger on a specific passage and read what it says to find the answer to your worries.”

“That method is used with the Book of the Law, isn’t it?”

Index obediently nodded at Orsola Aquinas’s elegant question.

“But it isn’t actually entirely random.”

“...”

“A brand new book would be one thing, but when you’ve read through a book countless times, you will leave some mark on it. Given enough time, it will gain a habit of opening on its own to your favorite page. So even if you think you are flipping randomly through it, it will be biased toward certain pages. So you could say bibliomancy isn’t so much random as it is a way of reminding yourself of a favorite passage.”

“Well, fortunetelling is often just guiding the customer toward the answer that already exists inside them. They just want the objectivity and self-acknowledgment of having someone else say it.”

People left their mark on the tools they used.

That was not at all limited to books. Tarot, other forms of cards, and crystal balls would gain fingerprints, smudges, and small scratches when touched on a daily basis. That was what transformed them into devices to confirm the thoughts inside you. And their accuracy grew the more they were used.

“In other words.” Orsola placed a slender index finger on her chin. “The truly original Book of the Law would have the small marks and scratches needed to peer into the mind of its author, Aleister Crowley? Like data recorded with magnetism?”

“Or.”

The hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl audibly gulped.

Perhaps the thought occurred to her because she wore so many kinds of

antennae while also being a magician.

“If you could fully control what small marks and scratches you made on a book, could you transfer that ‘invisible data’ to a brand new book?”

Index looked around, pulled out several books, and checked them, but then she tilted her head.

This was the British Museum’s repair room, but that alone must not have been enough data.

“There is a lot of confusion around the country right now, but we could probably gather more from the British Library and other places in England,” said Orsola.

“So it would be difficult to gather something stored further away?” asked Index.

“Especially Scotland, I’m guessing.” The hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl tilted her head, and operated something in her backpack. “The phones and internet of the science side and communication magic of the magic side are all having trouble. Even though the threat of the Crowley’s Hazards should have been eliminated.”

“Is there nothing we could do?”

“Hm.”

Fran pulled an antenna from her backpack.

No, that was not an antenna.

“I’ll head over to Scotland and stab this palm rod into a ley line. I should be able to use it as a temporary base station for a communication magic data network.”

“Then let me do that,” hesitantly offered Orsola Aquinas. “There is not much I can do here, so you two stay here in the British Museum to continue your investigation.”

“I don’t know the situation out there, so danger could be lurking behind any corner.”

“That is all the more reason not to have our precious grimoire library wandering around.”

Orsola’s voice contained an odd intensity.

She may have seen this as atonement for causing so much chaos in her attempt to help London by using the Divine Mixture.

Everyone found their own way to recover, so Index sighed and spoke.

“Don’t do anything reckless, okay?”

“There is nothing to worry about. If I use that helicopter thingy, I can travel at three or four hundred kilometers per hour. It will be a quick trip.”

“Your use of the word ‘thingy’ isn’t exactly inspiring confidence.”

Part 11

“It’s Mathers,” said the silver girl.

Kamijou Touma shouted back at her within the old apartment.

“What? Hold on. You’re not making any sense. You said we’re supposed to figure out why Mathers left, but now you’re saying it was because of him!?”

“What was my original plan here? To stop Coronzon using the contract she has with Mathers. I could use his remains as a relay point to indirectly send Coronzon a stop signal. But we did not find those remains at Westminster Abbey and the Golden magicians are ganging up on us. Is that because the enemy was a step ahead of us? No, it’s more than that. We have to rethink all of our assumptions.”

“What does that mat-...wait just a second. You aren’t suggesting there are two different Matherses, are you?”

“Yes, you can’t let the impact of Mathers’s return lead you astray. My methodology was not wrong.” Aleister waved her fingers a little. “Why was Coronzon protecting the United Kingdom with so many Crowley Killers: Qliphah Puzzle 545, the Divine Mixtures, and even the Golden magicians? To put it another way, what was that demon so afraid of? If Mathers’s remains did not exist, there would be nothing worth going to such lengths to protect. Because Coronzon would not have a weak point.”

“But Coronzon did use several different methods of preventing us from messing with England. As if she was afraid of something.”

“Oh, and just to be clear, the idea that Coronzon herself is acting out of love for her homeland isn’t even worth considering. We are talking about a demon who would laugh as the entire world burned down around her.”

That meant it was not an emotional reason.

There had to be a logical explanation.

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

“So you’re saying they’d be in trouble if the real Mathers’s corpse was discovered?”

“Now that is an answer worth a perfect 100. To be honest, it never sat right with me that Mathers’s bones were buried in London. While he was born and raised in this city, not all of his memories here were pleasant ones. If he was going to insist on anywhere, it would have to be Scotland.”

Aleister tried to sound like she had known all along, but do not be deceived. She was the one who had said they had business at Westminster Abbey. This was the same awful trick that famous detectives used when a corpse showed up and they said “Just as I thought! I knew something smelled fishy around here.”

But Kamijou Touma was an honest and gullible boy, so he looked quite impressed.

“Come to think of it, didn’t you say something about the name Lola Stuart being chosen for him?”

“He claimed to be the Scottish Count of Glenstrae. That had about as much legitimacy as Westcott’s Sprengel Letters, but it is more than enough of a personal motivation. Humans will kill their neighbors over delusions, after all. Heh heh.”

“Hey. If you keep teasing my understander, I’ll kill you, Aleister.”

The tiny understander seated on Kamijou’s shoulder cut in without hiding her irritation.

She crossed her legs and got back on topic.

“But I am curious why Mathers and the others would start to act like soldiers now. The focal point of the fighting was London and I haven’t heard of anything happening in Scotland. Plus all the Crowley’s Hazards in the UK have already been dealt with.”

“Not to mention that the Golden magicians easily dispatched the Crowley’s

Hazards,” said Aleister. “I can’t imagine Mathers of all people would put on an act and withdraw because of them. He does not view the different Crowleys any differently, so he should have no trouble crushing as many of those parallel beings as necessary. ...In other words, he could have killed me before moving on to the others.”

What the silver girl was saying sounded crazy, but it must have been accurate.

But what other possibilities were there?

Kamijou Touma honestly did not know British geography very well, so just saying “Scotland” did not mean much to him.

But he still tried to figure something out.

“Huh? Was it Orsola or was it that female knight whose name I don’t know? No, maybe it was Lessar or Birdway. Whoever it was, when they told me about some guy called Holegres’s plan for the Divine Mixtures, I think they said something about Scotland.”

“?”

“Holegres? And Scotland?” asked Accelerator. “Oh, yeah. I met that piece of shit noble called Holegres Mirates.”

It could be easy to forget with the Golden cabal showing up, but these were not two separate incidents.

Everything happening in the United Kingdom was connected, so they might find a hint in an unexpected place.

So what had been happening before the Golden cabal, back when Qliphah Puzzle 545 and the Divine Mixtures had clashed with the Crowley’s Hazards? Why had Orsola, Agnese, and the others been so unreasonably ordered to buy time?

“Oh, right. I remember.”

Kamijou Touma and Accelerator gave the answer at the exact same time.

“The Royal Family was being taken from London to Scotland.”

Part 12

Meanwhile.

“Oh? What’s this, what’s this?”

Hamazura Shiage asked that inside the parked four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The radio, which had been silent due to the emergency restrictions on the press, began talking on and on about something in English. He did not understand English at all, but he could still sense the intensity in the male announcer’s voice.

“Hamazura, they’re talking about a road closure. No one is allowed to enter the highway heading north.”

“I can imagine a lot of people want to escape London right now, but would anyone really want to draw attention to themselves by driving around with the engine roaring? Hell, they’d probably crash into part of a pyramid before running across one of those monsters.”

That was when Nephthys gave an amused comment from the back seat.

“Oh, my. So the Royal Family has finally decided get up off their asses. Are they avoiding the airport because they’re afraid of being shot down? And if they’re securing the route north, they’re probably withdrawing to Scotland.”

That comment caused more than just surprise.

Dion Fortune almost jumped out of her skin. And she must have developed some weird sort of habit because the frilly dress girl nearly fainted again.

“S-S-S-Scotland!?”

“Oh, man. I’m guessing this is bad for you. It is, isn’t it?” The sickly-pale mini-China dress girl spoke in a teasing way. “Mathers was all about Scotland, so it makes more sense for him to be buried at Edinburgh Castle than Westminster

Abbey. The place looks like a tourist attraction, but there's still tons of underground tunnels centered on St. Margaret's Chapel. So was Westminster a trap and Edinburgh the real deal? Buuuut what happens if a magical symbol as powerful as the Royal Family visits Scotland because they have their hands full with the Crowley's Hazards and everything else? And you can't exactly reject a visit from the queen, so that's probably where they'll end up staying. By the time they arrive at Edinburgh Castle, the *anonymization barrier placed on the graveyard might just shatter from the pressure.*"

“Exactly right. So, Fortune, we need to get on the highway and give chase. Quit goofing off and rejoin us.”

It was a woman's voice.

But where did it come from? And was it speaking Japanese or English? Hamazura could not tell, so it scared him that the meaning entered his mind and would not leave.

The dull pain in the delinquent boy's skull felt like having his head split open and directly filled with alcohol. He had no idea what he was shouting. Plus, this did not seem to be an attack. Those words had simply been sent to him and this was only a side effect.

No.

Those words had clearly been directed toward Dion Fortune.

“Fortune.”

“Ahhhhh.”

“Hurry it up. Also, there appear to be two *distortions* in there, but what are they? If you will not answer, we will have to go there and see for ourselves.”

"Gogagelbagboharfaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh|

Hamazura felt nauseated, but not like he had been punched in the gut.

This was a dangerous nausea, like he had been punched in the back of the head.

Yet he was not the target here.

This was directed at Fortune. Hamazura felt like the core of his mind was being grabbed and shaken, but whoever this was may not have even noticed he was there.

(Dah, bwah!? What...the hell? Is this some kind of unavoidable pseudo-sonic weapon using telepathy!?) “Is that astral projection?”

“Ow. I think it’s a little more primitive than that. Instead of dragging something from the physical body, it’s more like causing something to grow. Their magic power or some equivalent power is vibrated at a set frequency to make contact. So it isn’t the most precise thing in the world.”

Nephthys paused while holding a hand to her head.

And she had no trouble making her next comment.

“But in this case, I’d say *she* is in the most trouble.”

That was what Hamazura Shiage heard.

So he naturally thought of redheaded Dion Fortune. The speaker was clearly trying to bring that girl back. The shock to Hamazura and the Magic Gods was only a side effect, so it could not compare to what Fortune was feeling from a direct hit.

And yet.

It was someone else who looked like she was going to cough up blood and whose face was covered with sweat.

It was Takitsubo Rikou in the passenger seat.

“What?”

It all faded in an instant. The pain, the mysterious heat, and the dangerous sense of having been punched in the back of the head all went away. And an even greater anxiety and fear squeezed at his heart.

“What’s wrong? Do you feel sick!?”

“From the...northwest.”

Were those really his girlfriend’s words coming from his girlfriend’s mouth?

It felt more like a giant invisible hand was squeezing them out of her.

It may have been related to her ability to accurately locate and track other people's AIM Diffusion Fields. Even without the highly toxic Body Crystal, she occasionally seemed capable of receiving special signals.

Had that manifested in the worst possible way here?

Her mouth flapped as if in search of air and horrifyingly weak words left her.

"The signal is from...two sources. Hamazura...this is bad. You must not... contact them."

Hamazura wanted to know why this was happening.

It had not been like this a moment before. He had already been in over his head here, but this seemed even worse. It may have meant a lot that the Magic Gods had allowed him to take a step back and simply observe things. That way his girlfriend's life had not been at risk.

But now...

(It's this bad for me and I'm a powerless Level 0.)

He had to bite his lip.

Now was not the time to wallow in his helplessness.

(So how bad is it for a Level 4 like Takitsubo? Her brain has to feel more than shaken! It's gotta be more like taking a blast from an invisible shotgun!!) "Annie and Westcott," said the white veil girl.

Dion Fortune was speaking English, but Hamazura could tell she had spoken two names. These were the companions who had not shown up even when she rang her SOS bell. And here they were to pick her up again.

"Do you know them?"

"..."

"Then tell us everything you know! Hurry!! I don't know who they are, but we need to silence them. I can't force any more pain onto her!!"

Shouting at her in Japanese only confused her, so Nephthys softly whispered to the girl.

But she did not just translate what he said.

That bandaged brown beauty added the following:

“He says he wants to fight for his girlfriend. No matter how mysterious the enemy. So hurry.”

“Y-you can’t win. You just can’t. We’re talking about Westcott and Annie from the founding period! And when two or more Golden members work together, they’re greater than the sum of their parts!!”

“Oh? Did I forget to say he was willing to risk his life?”

He did not have time to agonize over it.

Hamazura Shiage ran out of patience and reached for the driver’s side door.

He threw it open and took a step outside.

A moment later, the delinquent boy’s vision bent to the side.

Was he even aware the world was spinning around him?

“Annie, don’t be so hasty. That was not one of the distortions.”

“For real? He ran out so quickly I hit him with Jachin on reflex. Whoops.”

“Hm. Hitting him with the pillar of mercy was very considerate of you, Annie.”

They said something in English, but those suspicious people were not what mattered. His nearby girlfriend was.

She had sensed a signal from the northwest.

She had said it came from two sources and that he must not contact them.

Takitsubo Rikou’s groaned words belatedly returned to him, but he had already been knocked to the ground. Some kind of blow had hit him in the head and he could not even move his fingers.

The intruders were an old-fashioned tutor with a white and black club and an old man who looked like a doctor in a thick coat and suit.

They spoke in English while looking down at Hamazura like fishermen whose net had caught a bizarre surprise.

“Then are the distortions inside?”

“I wonder what Fortune is doing in there. Let’s drag her out already.”

Sweat poured from Hamazura's body.

He did not know what they were saying, but he could imagine where they were focused.

If they checked inside the vehicle, they would encounter the two Magic Gods. He had no idea what those self-proclaimed gods could actually do, but what would happen to weakened Takitsubo Rikou in the passenger seat if a battle broke out here? A single stray shot could be fatal.

So before that happened...

(I have to keep them out here!!)

“Gaaahhhhh!!”

He forced out a roar, gathered strength in his fingers, and grabbed a fist-sized stone lying nearby. He did not have to aim for the head or heart. There were plenty of locations that would hurt no matter how much you had trained. Without getting up, Hamazura swung the rock down on the doctor's little toe.

The man made no attempt to dodge.

Hamazura heard something being crushed within the leather shoe, but the man did not bat an eye.

And while the old man looked down at the boy, something like wax danced in his fingers.

Hamazura could not hope to imagine what that would do.

But his instincts told him one thing:

(I'm screwed.)

A fearsome roar burst out.

His heart stopped beating.

Or so he thought, but time continued to pass and he remained conscious.

“What?”

He held his chest which ached from fear and tension and he tried to see what happened from the ground. There were signs of an explosion, but the asphalt

was torn up right in front of him...where those two monsters had stood.

“What the hell happened???”

He also saw a black box floating in defiance of gravity.

And.

He saw a girl in a frilly white dress with pink accents.

The redheaded girl was clearly looking past Hamazura. The delinquent boy slowly looked in the same direction and saw the old-fashioned tutor and coat-wearing doctor extracting themselves from the bushes and broken trees and then standing back up.

What had happened and how had they survived it?

He had no idea.

Annie and Westcott looked puzzled. They appeared to be testing their throats and their voice rang in Hamazura’s head again: “Fortu-...”

“Don’t make a fuss,” said Fortune.

It happened again.

Hamazura cowered down from that voice, but just as the black box spun in Fortune’s hand, something burst in front of him. No, invisible waves burst out like an approaching flood.

“Leave here, Annie, Westcott. I assure you these are not targets Master Mathers would insist on eliminating. You are supposed to be the Boogieman, so when you run across civilians who cannot directly influence the battle, shouldn’t you only be driving them away?”

“C’mon, what’s come over you, Fortune?”

The old man sounded exasperated and he had returned to speaking normal English.

He spoke like he was calming a child, but there was no smile in his eyes.

“You shouldn’t be doing this. I heard what happened at the Naked Shopping Center in Piccadilly Circus. It pained me to hear it. So return to us and help us out with that power of yours.”

“You can’t trick me. You only used me to buy time for Taphthartharath and you didn’t even bother searching for me at the blast site afterwards. And I doubt you’re here because you were following my signal.”

“Direct any complaints toward Mathers.”

The old-fashioned tutor sounded somewhat irritated.

When she referred to Mathers, it was usually to dump a problem on him.

Those were their roles. They were only fakes created by Lola Stuart, but having them roleplay according to a set process was the most efficient way of keeping their thoughts going.

The Golden magical system had spread all across the world (albeit in a form altered by Aleister), but something else was needed to recreate the original magicians: the rules, processes, and incentives to efficiently use their group magic.

For example, a certain boy had lost his memories. He believed he knew what Imagine Breaker’s power was, but was he correct about that?

“It’s true we were following a different reading, but we really were glad we found you. Not that I can blame you for not believing us.” The old man in a coat shrugged. “So to eliminate any misunderstanding between us, we will tell you everything. That Asian lying there is irrelevant. The distortions we seek are in the back seat. We have detected something requiring caution even for our Golden cabal, so we would like to open the door and check inside. And if necessary, we must eliminate these distortions.”

“I won’t let you.”

“I apologize if I was unclear, but what you want changes nothing.”

“Westcott, *you had better listen.*”

The old man’s eyebrows bent in displeasure.

How much of a taboo was it among them for such a young girl to demand anything of him?

Soon thereafter, light clashed with light.

But the look of surprise was not from Dion Fortune whose frilly skirt fluttered up, giving a glimpse of her drawers. It came from the magicians of the founding period, William Wynn Westcott and Annie Horniman. The quasi-immortal man's magic was amplified by the white and black clubs, yet his wax seal had failed to knock down the frilly dress girl.

The beam of light had hopped straight up and passed above the four-wheel-drive vehicle's roof.

He had missed.

No, it had been deflected.

That wax spell was derived from letters, so it sealed power and sent it to someone. The beam of light hit a water tank on a nearby building, causing the tank to burst like a balloon and send water raining down.

But that was not the only destruction.

Something spiraled around the center of Westcott's chest. That attack had been launched from Dion Fortune's floating black box. Of course, stabbing a knife into that old man's chest and turning it like a doorknob would not kill him.

However...

"Didn't I tell you to listen? Interrupting someone while they're talking is rude. And you call yourself an English gentleman?"

Sweat dripped from the old man's brow and down his nose.

That founder magician was worried.

"My spiritual item fully breaks down any spell and transforms it into something else entirely. Not even I know what it is in the box. So, Westcott, it is all random. Premade plans, the pre established harmony, and any secret preparations are no match for a complete and utter accident. I will tear down your stability. Do you know what that means?"

"..."

"So leave."

It was Dion Fortune in her ballerina-like dress and white veil who took a step

forward as if to hold the black box out as a threat. Mathers, Waite, Gardner, and Brodie-Innes could not have done anything, but her next words acted as a critical hit against this old man.

“If you don’t, my accidents will tear down your stability – your quasi-immortality.”

The monocle tutor clicked her tongue and started to move, but wax shined in the darkness.

The old man grabbed Annie by the nape of the neck and leaped away.

He made a leap that seemed like it must have shattered his own legs and reached a nearby rooftop in a single bound.

It was all over.

The thread of tension loosened just a bit.

The outline of Dion Fortune’s fingertips blurred somewhat. She clenched her small fists to suppress it.

Of course she was terrified.

She had defied two magicians from the founding period. Westcott had folded, but what had Annie tried to do? The Golden cabal was all about teamwork, so could Fortune have dodged it while on her own?

She let out an annoyed breath and kicked the vehicle’s tire.

“What is wrong with me!? Why am I picking a fight with them!? Now I’ll never have another chance to rejoin them. And the entire Golden cabal from Westcott to Master Mathers will be out to get me!!”

Hamazura had no way of knowing what she was shouting in English.

He only knew he no longer felt the ringing in his mind that had tormented Takitsubo.

“You did it.”

He said something she could not understand.

And...

“Hyah!?”

Dion Fortune cried out as her white veil fluttered in surprise.

Hamazura Shiage could barely stand, but he forgot all about the pain and suddenly hugged Dion Fortune.

“Ah ha ha!! Wow! You kick ass, Fortune! How’d you get those monsters to leave? You saved Takitsubo’s life. Thank you, thank you so much!! I couldn’t have done anything on my own!!”

“Tch. Stop that...”

She could not understand his words.

But she could understand the tearful smile on his face. The magician named Dion Fortune had learned there was a way of earning the currency of pride without clinging to the Golden cabal. And this had to be how you did so.

He kept hugging her and did not let go. So to preserve her pride, the frilly dress girl opened her mouth to speak.

And since he could not understand her, there was no need to worry about saving face.

“Well, what else was I supposed to do? They never came to save me when I rang my bell, but I hear you risked your lives to take me in.”

“That’s what she said, boy☆ Ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

She had forgotten all about the translation gods in the back seat.

So she covered her face with her hands and released an unintelligible scream.

Part 13

The situation was converging.

A new development had come into view.

Mathers had a reason worthy of acting out of self-defense.

What did he need in order to protect that secret?

If the Royal Family arrived in Scotland, they would unintentionally destroy the anonymization barrier. And the Golden cabal would do anything to keep that from happening.

Between the Lines 2

“Let’s name our sixth temple Amen-Ra. We’re finally going to Scotland!”

Those words were spoken in the distant past.

Specifically, about a century ago.

The cheap apartment was old even then. And the man who looked annoyed in the Isis-Urania Temple was William Wynn Westcott.

“Is your usual sickness flaring up again, Mathers? You need to separate your personal interests from your magical research.”

“Don’t be silly. The north is a mystical land. I would love to investigate Edinburgh Castle and research the Loch Ness area. Going on picnics from England to Scotland is not easy, so we need a base in the north!”

Everyone in the Golden cabal knew Mathers was both a genius and an eccentric and he likely caused trouble for the neighborhood housewives who knew nothing about him. If not for Mina Mathers maintaining a public face and speaking with the neighbors with a smile, he may have been driven out of the area long ago.

And one of the strongest eccentricities was his obsession with Scotland.

He claimed to be a descendant of the highlanders.

He claimed to be Scottish nobility: the Count of Glenstrae.

None of his claims had anything to back them up, but unfortunately, his skill was very real. Westcott was certain that man would be capable of counterfeiting a family tree or altering the ley lines to link his bloodline to Scottish land (although Westcott was hardly one to talk when he had counterfeited the Sprengel Letters).

The Golden cabal had gathered the greatest talent in the world.

But that did not mean they wanted to stand out. Those who studied magic were generally outcasts.

“That is no reason to be shouting about bringing back the House of Stuart while wandering around Main Street in broad daylight, Mathers! It is 11 AM. Normal people are at the office or factory working at this time of day. Even the Lady of the Masquerade Ball waits until the pubs are open to cut loose. Because then if she causes any major problems, people just assume she is drunk!!”

“You public officials are so hardheaded. You have a stable income, don’t you? You have plenty of savings, so why in the world wouldn’t you spend it?”

“Shut up, you jobless bum. Why are you out enjoying yourself every day when you have no income? And when you get into trouble, it draws attention to me! It’s hard enough juggling two identities without my superiors breathing down my neck!”

“Life is so much easier once you lose your job. Every day, I calmly meditate on why you people are so obsessed with the public world.’

“Annie is glaring at you.”

“I couldn’t bear that museum manager job she got me, so I quit in less than a year. And now she’s just paying my expenses directly.”

“Annie just pulled out a cursing doll!! Someone restrain her before she uses it!!”

“And now Mina’s soul is tied to Paris. Traveling from there to London isn’t easy. I mean, I can’t take a ship or hopper car without any money.”

A struggle broke out between the Golden magicians (using their top-class powers), but the unemployed yet powerful founding member (who had a beautiful young wife) sighed another comment.

“Scotland is so wonderful.”

He seemed to be fantasizing about a distant land.

And there was confidence in his voice.

“Everything I desire is there.”

Chapter 3: Highway Lock On – Speed_Freaks.

Part 1

“Bwah!!”

It was December in Academy City. All the lights were out, so darkness ruled. When viewed from satellite, it would look like a gaping black hole in that capital city of ten million.

And in those sticky shadows was something possibly even more unnatural.

“Argh. Grrrrrr!!!!!!”

It was like a tar pit splitting open.

The giant seal used the entirety of Academy City.

A single slender arm burst from the solid asphalt of the paved road. It wandered through the air in search of a handhold and eventually found a broken piece of plastic. Just like the survivor of a shipwreck clinging to a wooden board.

The rest did not take long.

A woman’s face, torso, and legs crawled out from the black earth. She had extremely long blonde hair and a modest beige habit. That person known as Lola Stuart crawled back to the world of the living.

At the same time, there was a deep noise. And several more followed. Power traveled from the generators to the transformers, power transmitters, and spider web of power cables to breathe life back into the dead city. Bright artificial lights blinked on inside the skyscraper windows, traffic lights, and every

other corner of the city.

This had been an absolute necessity for Aleister Crowley.

She had needed to outdo Mathers and use a single powerful counterattack to escape a bind.

But that was summoning another threat.

“Aleister.”

Lola spoke deeply while curled up in the fetal position and surrounded by sticky colors. At the same time, she sensed something with her sensory organs as a higher being. That Great Demon clenched her teeth and waited for her avatar’s pulse to calm.

She heard something rattling in her sleeve.

She pulled it out and clicked her tongue.

It looked like a long and narrow wooden card, but the panel actually functioned as an extremely special easel. It was a handheld underlay on which she would draw lines and fill in colors.

She would draw rough sketches on it with special charcoal made from red wine and iron oxide while using bread crumbs in place of a kneaded eraser. Needless to say, those materials had been chosen to apply symbols of flesh and blood to the card. By coloring it with pigments chosen based on personal traits found in things like bibliomancy and reinforcing it with a thin layer of the wax used for cursed dolls, she could create a member of the Golden cabal.

As seen with the artist Mina Mathers, magical items like tarot cards could be newly created from just about anything.

So why had this one broken?

The demon thought about that small wooden panel’s combination of sketch, colors, and wax coating.

It may have been a similar data transmission method to heating a turtle shell in the fire and reading the future in the cracks.

(Mathers and a few of the others have taken damage and Berridge was

destroyed. Damn, this couldn't have been by chance. I guess they've figured out the trick by now.)

Looking just at their specs, Mathers was superior to Aleister no matter what the latter tried. And with the Golden army at his command, they could easily slaughter a swarm of Crowley's possibilities.

However.

Because Coronzon was Coronzon, she was not relieved by that and she did not simply accept it.

Dispersion. 333.

She interrupted the bonds between people and the world and she tore them apart.

The world was embedded with that obvious symbol of natural decomposition. In other words, people should naturally fall into conflict and destroy each other. Yet that was not happening. It was highly *unnatural*, but humanity still existed. As tiny, puny, insignificant, and obscene as they were. Coronzon saw no value in the bonds between people, but even she had realized something. If there was a reason for everything that happened, then as much as she hated it, *those bonds did have power*.

Humanity was like microplastics.

It did not matter how harmful or powerful they were on their own.

If they would not be broken apart, they could still distort the entire world.

(They were only ever meant for use against Crowley, so I can't expect them to work perfectly in any other situation.)

She left the fetal position and slowly stretched out her arms and legs. Her body had calmed down. She consciously breathed in and out and then got up from the cold road.

(There is no real reason to stay here. Even the Windowless Building has left. I lost my chance to *have some fun* controlling Academy City with the board chairman's corpse, so I'll have to rethink how to use this toy box.)

At that point, she grimaced slightly.

Using the leader's corpse as a relay point to manipulate the giant gears was the exact method Lola had suggested using on the dying Aleister back in the Windowless Building. And now Aleister was attacking England to reach Mathers's corpse. She had unwittingly given that human a hint.

"What a pain. I really need to fix my bad habit of talking too much when I call checkmate."

It did not take long once she got moving.

Academy City had to contain enough power to annihilate the human race ten thousand times over, but figuring out what it all was and how to unlock it would not be easy. Losing the Windowless Building and Aleister's corpse was a major blow. It was like having a giant supercomputer but not knowing where the mouse and keyboard were.

However.

Even if she could not control Academy City as a whole, some smaller parts of it were a different matter.

This was like opening up the supercomputer, removing one of the blade servers lined up like mille-feuille, attaching a clip to the circuit board, and sending it a signal from your mobile device.

In this case, her long blonde hair wriggled like an independent creature and acted as her hacking tool.

An old tradition said demons resided in a woman's hair.

That was very true here.

"Hmph."

She sliced up the shutter to a random warehouse and viewed the collection of steel and composite armor within. Academy City had been Aleister's territory and that human had apparently been in the habit of leaving backup supplies around the city. Although that only applied to the items that could be duplicated.

With a hand on her hip, Lola named the device before her eyes.

"The A.A.A."

This was not a complete set. It was only a collection of repair parts. Those parts were not assembled into its proper form, but that was not an issue for Coronzon. She sent out the hair that was more than 2.5 times her height. Once the hair slipped into the cracks in the armor like nematodes, she read the inner structure in the blink of an eye.

She could not control science, but the magical symbols hidden in the steel and concrete city were a different matter.

“This isn’t even a flash tablet or planetary magic circle. It just uses ordinary sigils.”

She pulled her hair out with a sticky sound.

No, her hair did more than that. Like a ribbon in rhythmic gymnastics or like the cursive writing on a parchment contract, the dancing golden light formed meaningful characters in the air. Then bat-like glowing wings burst from the sides of her beige habit.

These sinister wings were formed from the “contents” of the A.A.A., not its mechanical structure.

(I should take a ballistic route instead of normal flight. Heading ‘outside’ and reentering should be faster.)

That Great Demon did not care about her avatar’s convenience.



With Coronzon filling the avatar, that soft flesh would not burn up in the atmosphere.

Even though she was using the same thing, those wings did not possess over-the-top rocket boosters like Aleister's toy did. The wings remained wings, so she only had to flap them.

Those excess functions were a sign of fear.

Facades, justifications, theoretical arguments, and ideals. Humans grew fat on all that extraneous nonsense. To the point that they lost sight of what lay at the center of it all.

333. Dispersion.

Coronzon encouraged the world to naturally break apart and she did not hide her evil deeds.

"Now, then."

She looked straight up.

The thick ceiling overhead did not even enter her thoughts.

"The Great Demon is coming for you, Aleister. And you only have yourself to blame."

A single line of light broke through the giant warehouse's ceiling as it launched itself outside the atmosphere.

Part 2

Finally wearing a Roman Catholic habit once more, Orsola Aquinas looked out a transport helicopter window. She was on her way to Scotland. The helicopter could travel at three to four hundred kilometers per hour and it could ignore the roads and traffic, so it would not take long to arrive.

Even so.

It may have been late at night, but the surface was awfully dark.

That reminded her that the country was experiencing a crisis. She was just glad that she did not see a giant sea of flames below.

Although the fact that the possibility even came to mind may have proven how abnormal a situation this was.

“Thank you very much.” Orsola looked away from the window and spoke to the woman riding with her. “I can’t protect myself and I couldn’t ask for a better bodyguard than a Saint like you.”

“...”

It was Kanzaki Kaori.

She was the Priestess of the Amakusa Church and one of the fewer than twenty Saints in the world, but she showed little confidence or brightness at the moment.

She had likely experienced her own troubles during this national crisis.

She covered her face with a hand and groaned.

“To be honest, I am not confident I have it in me to continue fighting.”

“Oh, my.”

“I killed someone. Whatever form they might have taken, the Crowley’s Hazards were still people. I violated my magic name. So I am not sure how I

should wield magic now.”

Orsola did not simply comfort her.

She placed a hand on her cheek and then spoke.

“Then I will protect you until you are back to your usual self.”

“ ...”

“Do not worry. I too am part of the Anglican Church. I am not entirely ignorant of magic.”

This contradicted what Orsola had said earlier.

Kanzaki Kaori of course noticed that, which was why she said what she did.

“Why are you so certain this is a temporary thing? Why do you think I will recover with time?”

“Because you are much, much stronger than I could ever imagine.”

“I’m really not.”

“And I too made a serious mistake. It might be something I can never make up for. But even if I cannot, I must not give up and look the other way. Isn’t that what it means to be human?”

Kanzaki could not answer.

Even Saints were flawed humans. And after the mistake Kanzaki had made, she could not act like she was better than someone else.

She could come up with an answer once she had a better grasp of her own life.

Everyone lived their lives with the same doubts.

So Kanzaki Kaori spoke once more.

“I pray that I can one day live my life correctly once more.”

“Yes, so do I.”

Part 3

That room was supposed to be for mending the covers and pages of books.

Grimoires had only been gathered there because it was off limits to normal people.

Which meant...

"I knew it," said Index as she looked around the work tables lined with different colors of paint, glue, and cutters for neatly slicing the ends off of paper.

Was it wine or iron sand? Some kind of red pigment had been worked into a charcoal-based drawing tool and kneaded erasers had been made from bread crumbs. There was also some soft wax.

"This isn't for repairs. It looks like they were creating something new. But it looks smaller than a book. Maybe a notepad? No, it could even be a set of cards."

"Like tattva or tarot? There are a few scraps of thick paper in the trash. It's only as wide as the end of a fork, so I bet it came from some cards. The scraps are all lined up like after someone cuts the crust off of bread."

The individual marks and scratches left on books or scrolls could be extracted and copied as a data medium. And that meant the data could be transferred to a brand new book with nothing written in it.

That said...

"Is there nothing else we can figure out here? I just wish we knew *what* was being made here."

"Could we figure out *who* was making it?"

"?"

“Normal people aren’t allowed in here. This is the repair room for the British Museum’s important documents, so only a limited number of people would be allowed to apply paint and glue or cut them with a blade.”

“So it was an inside job? And by an Anglican with a lot of authority?”

“Like the Anglican leader, Lola Stuart?”

Index and Fran had both been directly or indirectly controlled by Lola (i.e. Coronzon), so it was natural for their suspicions to fall there.

Index had a perfect memory, so she would not forget something even if the topic was shifted elsewhere. She wrote out a list of the books she wanted from the British Library while she made a suggestion.

“While we’re at it, let’s investigate Lola.”

“What do you mean?”

“No one knows how old she is and no one knows when she took her position as archbishop at the top of the Anglicans. What is her real history? She claims to be Aleister Crowley’s second daughter, but how did she work her way up to the top of the church?”

Luckily, they had plenty of reference material here.

So they could make better use of their time than running around blindly.

Part 4

A solid yet light clanking sound rang through London late at night.

Needless to say, it was Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. That peerless magician wore a witch's hat and cloak over a bright Scottish military uniform that predated the use of camouflage and his four Symbolic Weapons were bumping together as they danced around him.

"Cold and wet, then hot and wet."

When the Golden leader spoke those words, blue and yellow lights spiraled around him and attached themselves to his leather shoes. Instead of running, he slid and leaped. He sometimes slid across the road surface and sometimes kicked off of walls or signs to speed through the night faster than a police car equipped for highway patrols. His witch's cloak and his scarf trailed behind him like a shooting star.

And he was not alone.

Arthur Edward Waite, John William Brodie-Innes, Robert William Felkin, and other magicians with their own unique legends accompanied him at that speed. They jumped over abandoned cars and took detours around the haphazardly placed ancient Egyptian stone. Any who saw that group would have felt the same fear as seeing a pack of wolves chasing down their prey.

But someone was missing.

Edward Berridge was not bowing his head by the short-tempered Mathers's side.

"The Praemonstrator is Felkin and the records and backup will be done by Waite. Westcott, you can be Imperator. You choose the Hiereus and Sentinel."

"Oh? Unusual for you to give up command. I expected you to take the Imperator job."

“Don’t let him distract you by giving you a 6=5 level role, Westcott. He doesn’t seem interested in the 7=4 position, so he’s really just leaving the performance to us while he can sit back and relax in the audience seating. I can’t stand it.”

Even if they had all studied in the same cabal, they had their distinct areas of expertise. The possibility might be there, but not everyone’s magic could reach Mathers’s level.

On the other hand, they were a cabal.

When an individual’s power was not enough, they just had to work together.

Movement was a symbol of the wide area one controlled and of the amount of knowledge they could obtain. The most obvious example was flight, but there were plenty of others. For example, the legends of parting the sea, the legends of passing through a jail cell’s bars or door, and the astral projection achieved by staring at a tattva card.

They used a white and black pillar, tarot, the Banner of the West and the Banner of the East, a rose cross medal, a planetary magical circle, tattva, a magic sword, a seven-branched candleholder, a censer, and the four types of Symbolic Weapons.

They were all symbols with their own important meaning, but they were also props which established a major ceremony when used as a set. Words and sentences differed, but it would be strange to try to rank them against each other.

The Golden magicians passed each other, their speed rose and fell, they changed lanes, and they were constantly swapping positions. Their movements changed the location of their ceremonial tools which also changed their meaning. This was the Golden method of performing a ceremony much like a stage play.

They constructed a single large current that moved like a dragon or serpent and they picked up speed like a car shifting gear.

They had originally been created to protect England, so why were they targeting the British Royal Family?

The Anglican archbishop would never give such an order.

But what about Great Demon Coronzon?

To that sinister higher being, England was no more than one of her toys. She had used it when it would protect her, but if it lost its usefulness, she was more than willing to destroy the entire nation. That was the thought process of a demon with no fear of god.

“It doesn’t really matter where the target is since we have Waite’s tarot. It won’t be hard to work out which route they’re using,” said Annie Horniman, the monocle and dress woman who looked like an old-fashioned tutor. *“How does it feel to be ordered to protect your own corpse, Mathers?”*

“Enough nonsense.”

The Golden leader did not even glance her way while his Scottish military uniform and thick cloak flapped behind him.

Yes.

It did not matter where he had come from or that he was created from a tarot card. He was the leader of the world’s greatest magic cabal.

If Coronzon had fully copied Mathers to the card, then he would be the same Mathers who had held Coronzon below his foot and had her do his bidding.

“I will remove these bonds. There is no such thing as perfection or absolutes in this world. 333. Dispersion. That absolute evil prevents the bonds of this world for no real reason. She is an incarnation of the natural breakdown of human civilization, so she should know that.”

And for that reason, Mathers could not afford to let anything interfere with Coronzon now. That would ruin everything he had prepared. So he would protect it. He would not let anyone touch the corpse in Edinburgh Castle which could be used to relay commands. If anyone threatened to do so, he would defeat them.

Even if that meant *attacking the head of the United Kingdom even though he had been created to protect that nation.*

“Let us follow our country’s traditions.”

He showed no hesitation whatsoever.

“Let the foxhunt begin.”

Part 5

A great number of carriages left Buckingham Palace and traveled north.

They each had four horses, but the rain roof stuck out further than the coachman's seat, making it look like a long line of connected cars from a distance.

Queen Elizard spoke slowly and deeply inside one of the carriages.

"Hand me a sword. I am not picky. A mass-produced steel one is fine. The Crowley's Hazards? An unidentified magic cabal? What do I care? I will fight alongside everyone else in London."

"Discard restraints #05 through #60! Set up more! Rebind her entire body with the common divisors 3 and 4!! Hurry!! Before she breaks free of them all and goes on a rampage!!"

This did not seem at all the way to treat an elderly woman. She was like a ferocious beast. It was the aides wrapping wide silk bands around her arms and legs who were nearly dragged and swung around.

Meanwhile, black-haired and monocled First Princess Riméa breathed an exasperated sigh while sitting across from her mother. She was a fundamentally distrusting person.

"Do not be silly, mother. Whatever the reason, this country will never break free of the fighting if you are taken out. Why don't you understand that? You might as well be sending the entire population to their deaths in order to save just one person."

"But," said Third Princess Villian as she glanced somberly out the window. "I think I understand. Ordering the normal citizens to evacuate would only cause massive congestion to the roads. I get that, but I still don't like leaving the capital on our own."

“Oh? Did you catch Carissa’s love of war?”

“Kh.”

Second Princess Carissa specialized in this sort of thing, but she was still imprisoned in the Tower of London. She played the same role as the political hostages of an older era. The Royal Family had left one member in London. That would put the people’s minds at ease because surely they would not leave a royal in danger, right? That was the intended message.

“The Crowley’s Hazards, Egyptian Mythology, and now an unidentified magic cabal. This has fully left our understanding. Win or lose, if we force our way through this without the proper information, we will almost certainly create a great number of victims among those around us.”

1st Princess Riméa was not naïve enough to immediately praise the Egyptian symbols and magic cabal just because those things had defeated the external threat of the Crowley’s Hazards. Any fighting force unknown to the Royal Family had to be a rogue unit within England and a magic cabal was a criminal group needing elimination. Even if a gang protected the people of a city during a zombie outbreak, Riméa would not hail them as national heroes.

Unregistered fighters had to be viewed as enemies.

And the more powerful they were, the more their uncontrollable firepower threatened the common people.

“Also, the Royal Family leaving London will protect the people who cannot escape the city. We are aware of several different threats in the United Kingdom, but whether we intend to attack them or defend against them, we should assume they will view us as the center of the nation. If we move, their indiscriminate attacks will move with us. Surely you understand that.”

If they fought in London, it would cause damage in London.

No matter whether that battle was meant to destroy or save the city.

However, that did not make it okay to bring that same damage to Scotland.

“This is a race.”

With a heavy metallic clunk, First Princess Riméa rested something on her

shoulder. Its structure was far too complex to call it a staff.

“That means the scoundrels cannot remain bunched together. We dangle some bait in front of them, lure them across a long enough distance to spread them apart by their varying specs, and then we defeat them one at a time. Scotland is our destination, but it would be best to eradicate them before we arrive. We have four hundred kilometers until the border. And Edinburgh Castle is another one hundred kilometers from there. On the way there, we will keep our distance and fire on them. And all the while, we will be spreading out their group to pick them off one at a time.”

They had given this thought.

The Royal Family would not simply flee in the face of a national crisis.

(But.)

Third Princess Villian had another somber thought.

(If that isn't enough to defeat them all, we'll be spreading the flames of war to Scotland.)

Part 6

After leaving the ordinary London apartment which was actually the Isis-Urania Temple, Aleister Crowley took a very simple action.

Her cape fluttered unnaturally and then four objects the size of 500mL bottles emerged. They were micro rocket engines.

“Huh?”

Kamijou Touma could only stare.

She was floating in the night sky. Only after a few moments of staring at the magician’s white panties (which he did not particularly want to see), the spiky-haired boy asked a question.

“Wait, are you chasing after Mathers? What are we supposed to do!?”

“I can’t afford to lose track of him. And now that I have unlocked the tech, there is no reason to continue hiding the cards up my sleeve. Scotland is about four hundred kilometers away. That might sound like a lot, but it only takes a few hours in a car. You two find your own transportation and follow after me.”

The silver girl was no help at all.

She used her micro rocket engines to fly off into the night sky while Kamijou remained helplessly on the ground. It sounded like a bad joke, but he had been left behind all the same.

“Hey, Accelerator, what should we do?”

“Don’t ask me. You figure it out yourself.”

“You’re headed the other way!? U-um, where are you even going!?”

Kamijou shouted after him, but the #1 waved back at him and messed with his choker. With a dull sound, he jumped up to a nearby rooftop and disappeared from view. He clearly had no intention of chasing after Mathers or

Aleister.

Was it so wrong that the spiky-haired boy could not fly?

Left all alone, Kamijou Touma trembled and muttered to himself.

He felt so very forlorn in the foreign night.

“Why? Why am I surrounded by selfish morons who refuse to cooperate no matter what!?”

“Whatever the result, I really don’t think you have any room to talk when it comes to being self-centered, human.”

“...”

“?”

“I was wrong. I’m not alone. I still have you, Othinus-shwaaan!!”

“Wait! Stop that, understander! I know you’re feeling lonely, but don’t grab at me like that when we’re outside and anyone could be watching!!!”

Part 7

“Wow,” groaned Hamazura Shiage.

They moved elsewhere after the previous encounter. He had driven the four-wheel-drive vehicle below a bridge due to his habit of avoiding satellites.

However.

Five people was a lot for that vehicle. It was feeling cramped, so he had hopped out and tried climbing up on top of the bridge.

But he had spotted something odd in the London night: four-horse carriages. And they did not appear to be for show like the ones tourists could ride around. There were ten rows of two, for a total of twenty. And the rain roofs stuck out well past the coachman’s seat, so it all looked like a single luxurious sleeper train from a distance. There was also a cavalry unit protecting it all.

However, that did not mean much for him on the narrow sidewalk.

Only after watching them drive past did he wish he had snapped a photo with his phone. Although he had the phone turned off to keep anyone from tracking it, so he could not have opened the camera app fast enough anyway.

But then he heard a quiet electronic jingling from his pants pocket.

He could have sworn he had turned it off.

(Are you kidding me!? Why did it restart!? That’s really not good!! It might’ve been broadcasting my location this whole time!!)

He snatched his phone from his pocket and saw a familiar display on the screen.

“What? It’s you, Aneri?”

The device vibrated a little.

He took that to be the same as a nod.

“You weren’t the one to turn my phone back on, were you?”

Silence this time.

But that did not seem to be meant as a denial.

It was impressive that the program could express awkwardness.

Aneri had originally been the support AI for the Dragon Rider supersonic motorcycle and its special protective suit. The machine had been destroyed rescuing Fremea Seivelun, but the program remained. The AI had also helped a lot with the Processor Suit – which was the Bank itself in the form of a humanoid suit – during the fight against A. O. Francisca.

That said, he had thought Aneri had ceased functioning when the board chairman had shut down all of Academy City’s technology.

(If she’s up and running again, does that mean the entire city was unlocked???)

But hadn’t the city been shut down to stop the villain named Lola or Coronzon or whatever? Hamazura did not fully trust Aleister and he had no way of seeing into the board chairman’s mind, but he still had to wonder what she was thinking.

“Well, I’ll set that question aside for now. Anyway, this should help a lot. Did you only now get inside my phone? How much do you know about the mess around here? I need as much support as you can give me because, honestly, I’m in way over my head here.”

The device vibrated again in response.

Aneri had always been oddly sociable.

With phone in hand, he returned to the vehicle below the bridge and found Dion Fortune trapped between the two Magic Gods in the back seat.

“Mwa ha ha. Spill it. Spill the beans. This will be much easier on you if you do!”

“The great Dion Fortune, elite of the Golden cabal, will never fall for such underhanded tactics! Hee!”

“Sure, sure. Okay, the tickling just passed the thirty second mark.”

“Bwa ha, wa ha ha!! I-I will nyever syuccumb to-ah nya ha ha!!”

Hamazura was pretty sure it was best not to ask what was going on. He had noticed the vehicle rocking as he approached it, but this was what he had found inside. He could only say it was crazy for the windows to be fogged up just from those girls’ sweet breaths. He felt like he had lost a lot of points as a human being for leaving his girlfriend alone in a place like that.

“What are you doing?”

“Ah, Takitsubo, you idiot!”

“But Hamazura. That person saved you, so we can’t just abandon her.”

The delinquent boy had interpreted it as Fortune saving Takitsubo, but which interpretation was the correct one?

Niang-Niang took a break from supplying the tickle hell and faithfully answered Takitsubo’s question just to kill some time.

“Hm. Dion Fortune seems to be an obsessive note-taker, so we’re having fun asking her what she wanted to write down so bad she started running her fingertip along her palm.”

“Just leave her alone!!”

Hamazura spun around in the driver’s seat to look back, but that proved to be a bad idea.

There were some moments when people did not want someone looking them in the eye.

The laughing redheaded girl seemed to get excited when she was the center of attention because she held her head high.

“Ah ha nya ha nya ha! Pant, pant. Do not underestimate the great Dion Fortune. I write grimoires, contribute to an occult magazine, work on correspondence education, and even give lectures! I am the cute spiritual medium who reveals her charm on multiple fronts instead of letting the old ways hold her back! Hwa ha ha ha ha ha!!”

Why did he feel so disappointed once he got a translation of that? He did not feel particularly jealous and was not entirely sure any of that was something to brag about. He wished she could find pride in something else. Perhaps it all sounded so old and musty because it was so far removed from the modern digital world of video sharing sites and social media.

“Heh. Bowled you over with my charisma, didn’t I? The great Dion Fortune is a modern young magician who is always on the lookout for the next hot thing. Oh, whoops. I need to suppress my charm a bit for this sensitive teenage boy. But I can’t blame you for recognizing talent when you see it! Kneel before me now and I will give you the privilege of being my chair! Hwa ha ha!!”

“She says she is very interested in bathing in a guy’s used bathwater, boy☆”

“Are you sure that’s what she said? It sounded like she said a lot more than that! Am I wrong!?”

Then something odd happened. The frilly dress girl’s spiel came to a complete stop and she stared wide-eyed at Hamazura.

“Mi-...”

No, she was technically staring at the delinquent boy’s phone.

And the frilly dress magician spoke a certain title in a daze.

“Mis...tress???”

It was a bombshell of a statement.

Hamazura had no way of knowing, but Aneri was a downgraded version of Reading Thoth 78, aka Mina Mathers.

And why was Mina Mathers Mina Mathers?

Why was she known as a black cat witch?

“Wh-what are you doing in such a tiny box!? Was there some kind of mistake during the setup to establish your physical form? No, something isn’t right. Is that an entirely different system than us!?”

Dion Fortune began panicking and talking endlessly without stopping to listen.

And Aneri remained entirely silent.

There was no response.

It was the same awkward atmosphere as an elevator. That was enough for the frilly dress magician to jump so much her head and the white flower decoration bumped against the ceiling.

“Wait! Please wait! Anything but more scratches!! I’ll do anything, so please work with me, mistress! We know each other well enough for that, don’t we!? All those cat scratches on my back were no laughing matter! And what kind of black cat is the size of a tiger!? Was that really a cat or was it some other member of the cat family!?”

“???”

As question marks filled Hamazura’s mind, Niang-Niang explained while rolling around in laughter.

“Dion Fortune originally joined the cabal under the *courteous* protection of Mina Mathers, but due to some turf wars within the cabal, she fell victim to a harsh magical attack from Mina. Her house was surrounded by black cats, her back was sliced open by the carnivores’ claws, and she even saw phantom black cats the size of tigers.”

That explanation did not mean much to Hamazura Shiage who did not really know who Mina Mathers was. He only knew her as the one with the big boobs and mourning clothes who was looking after Lilith. And he had no idea what any of that had to do with Aneri.

Regardless, he could tell this had unearthed some kind of trauma, so Hamazura the Gentleman decided to put the phone back in his pocket.

But just then, a great din thundered down from overhead. It was even more heavy and continuous than a focused downpour of rain. At first, he had ducked down because he did not know what it was, but then he remembered they were hiding below a bridge.

“Wh-what the hell!? What is going on up there!?”

A semi-truck or a tanker truck would not make that much noise driving by overhead. This tremor was like all the guests in a club or the audience in a stadium stomping their feet at once. The sound soon left them, but a strange

uneasiness stuck with him. Something strange had happened, but no one was telling him whether he should be afraid or not.

And if whatever-it-was had crossed the bridge, should he assume it was chasing after those carriages?

The two Magic Gods giggled and redheaded Dion Fortune looked up at the ceiling with her pale face between theirs.

“That was Master Mathers and the others.”

Everyone focused on the frilly dress girl and she gasped when she noticed. She frantically covered her mouth with both hands and shook her head.

She had saved them.

So Hamazura knew he could not treat her badly. It simply was not an option.

“I won’t talk! I won’t!! Even if we’ve parted ways, I’m still a member of the Golden cabal, so I can’t betray the others!”

Once Nephthys pinned the girl down, Hamazura called Aneri up on his phone and rubbed it against the struggling girl’s cheek.

Part 8

Misaka Mikoto and Shokuhou Misaki had crash landed in London.

They ended up a good distance away because they had used a shallower angle to reduce the damage as much as possible instead of just plowing into the ground like a meteor. The English signs said they were even further north than Primrose Hill. They were just about in Outer London.

And Academy City's #5, Mental Out, was in trouble.

"C-c-c-c-c-cold, it's so cold. What is going on? I can see my breath. Oh, right. It's December, isn't it? What kind of idiot wears a swimsuit in London during the winter? I'm going to die. Why do I keep having to fight for my life ability against things that aren't even my own fault, Misaka-saaan!?"

"Hmm, looks like it's more the movable joints than the rocket boosters themselves. It's the bearings. I wonder if I could fix it using the parts in the swiveling portion of the other weapons. But I'd be nervous using it without testing it first."

"Miiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiisaka-saaaaaaaaaaaaaaan!?"

They were living in entirely different worlds.

The queen could not believe her eyes while she held her shoulders, pressed her legs together, and shivered.

"I-is her tunnel vision ability breaking the limits of the human body now?"

"..."

"No, this might just be an extension of the law that prevents idiots from catching col-..."

"I can hear you, Shokuhou."

And unless Mikoto opened up her mind, Shokuhou Misaki's Mental Out could

not control the #3.

She should have caught on sooner. In this post-apocalypse, it was the physically strong who reigned supreme.

“No, wait, Misaka-san!! Why are you grabbing me around the hips and lifting me over your shoulder? Wait, don’t tell me. Is this the legendary-...ahhh!! My butt!? What kind of person starts spanking someone in the freezing December weather!?”

“I have a feeling your hopeless personality is a result of a spoiled upbringing, so I need to reeducate you from the ground up.”

“How did you reach that silly conclusion? And how am I supposed to respond when you act like a middle-aged mother with a full-on broccoli-style perm?”

“Act now and you get twenty percent more at no extra cost.”

“Ahhh!!”

Loud slapping sounds echoed through the London streets for a while. The young lady of the prestigious Tokiwadai Middle School could not escape her punishment. She could only cover her bright red face with her hands.

Finally, she was freed.

Swimsuit Queen Shokuhou Misaki was feeling a bit warmer from the embarrassment, but her heart would die if she had to continue keeping warm that way.



Also, why wasn't Misaka Mikoto bothered by the December London weather?

Even if her one piece covered more skin, it was still a swimsuit.

"No, don't stop thinking, Shokuhou Misaki. There has to be some kind of trick. Yes, that's right. Didn't Misaka-san say something about being able to stay warm using microwaves!?"

"Tch, you remembered."

"Fully-Electric Hot Water Bottle Girl Misaka-san, could you please share some of that happiness with a girl in need?"

"Get off of me!!!! You have no restraint at all when you're desperate, do you? If you found yourself stranded on a desert island, I bet you'd immediately strip and start sending smoke signals in the nude."

"The best queens increase their charisma by giving off just a hint of defenselessness☆ Like the pinch of salt to bring out the flavor of a watermelon."

"I'm going to hit you if you don't let go. Besides, don't you have that juicy power that lets you control people's mental state by manipulating the fluids in their body? Can't you keep yourself warm with that?"

"Call me juicy again and it's a sexy dance festival for you. And don't think your #3 brain defenses can stop me! All your craziness today has seriously put my life at risk, so I'm on the verge of releasing all my limits and awakening to new powers, Misaka-saaaan!!"

Whatever the case, they could not do anything hasty when they had doubts about the A.A.A.'s ability to fly. They needed to spend a lot more time carefully working with the machinery, so the necessities like food, clothing, and shelter became much more important.

"Well, that last attack was only for good measure, so papa should have been able to escape without it."

"Your love for your family is great and all, but I don't see how that helps me and my blue lips. By the way, how much money do you have on you?"

"Why?"

Shokuhou Misaki pointed a shaking finger toward a line of vending machines. In addition to the hot drink and sandwich machines, there was a machine with rain gear like umbrellas and raincoats.

“Ohh, I guess London is known for its rain. This is perfect.”

“Well, it’s better than nothing. The food might be full of artificial colors and preservatives, but I must have one of those raincoats! However, there is a problem there. I happen to be a classy cashless girl who only carries a card, but these local vendors do not appear to accept electronic money. So please, Misaka-san! Can I borrow just one crumpled bill!?”

Shokuhou Misaki had finally completed her transformation into a begging girl tearfully clinging to a schoolmate (in the filthy late-night streets while wearing nothing but a swimsuit).

And that signaled the start of a noble game.

“Oh, poor Shokuhou Misaki. She can’t warm herself with microwaves and she can’t even buy a raincoat. Is this what you call karma?”

“Wait, no! I’m only #5, so I don’t even get a spot on the winners’ podium, but you are the glorious #3!”

“Hm, you can do better than that.”

“Woof, woof. Wait, a photo!?”

When the phone’s flash went off in front of her, Swimsuit Girl Shokuhou Misaki immediately held her right hand horizontally to at least cover her eyes. But Mikoto was not cruel enough to wait until the girl froze solid. The #5 attended the prestigious Tokiwadai Middle School and her intellect was the real deal. Even if Mikoto could not stand her, she would still come in handy for repairing the A.A.A., so it would be best if she was not knocked out by the cold.

However.

“(I have a feeling she’ll turn on me the instant I buy her a raincoat, so maybe I should have her fend off the cold with the cardboard boxes and newspapers lying around here and only buy it for her once she’s truly desperate. She needs to properly appreciate what I’ve done for her.)”

“I hope you aren’t really considering that, Misaka-san! I-I-I really am at my limit here! The shivering ability is reaching the core of my body! I’ll do anything! I’ll give you a shoulder massage and shine your shoes, so please, Great God Misaka!!”

This girl did not even have any matches (and was wearing a swimsuit), so she had her hands full in a number of ways. She was willing to go this far over what was little more than a thick plastic sheet.

“Hm? A horse???”

Which was why the shivering blonde girl initially thought she was hallucinating.

With all the chaos in London, it would not have been too surprising for some animals to have escaped the zoo, but that did not seem to be the case here. A muscular horse was fully outfitted with reins and armor and it was ridden by a female knight decked out in silver armor and a surcoat. The queen’s discerning eye could tell she was not just a troublesome performer hoping to earn some money from tourists wanting to snap a photo with her. She may have been an actual knight who guarded Buckingham Palace.

But that was not the real problem.

There was someone else on the horse: a spiky-haired boy sat right behind her.

“Heh heh heh. It must be destiny that we ran into each other again, so let’s have a lovely journey together, Miss Knight!!”

“You must be joking!! How dare you take advantage of my compromising position to boss me around!? Have you no shame!? And you call yourself a man!?”

The leisurely clip-clopping of hooves passed by from right to left.

They did not seem to notice the two girls.

But those girls were very curious about what they had overheard.

“Taking advantage of her?”

“Compromising position???”

The female knight had spoken in proper Japanese. That was unusual for a blonde-haired, blue-eyed resident of London. That seemed to sum up who was in charge between her and the spiky-haired idiot.

There were some issues with the A.A.A.'s flight capability.

It could be fixed by substituting other parts, but the work would take a while to complete.

Mikoto and Shokuhou both recalled their situation here. And they arrived at the same conclusion:

“Who cares about that!? What is he doing after traveling all the way to London!?”

The roar of rocket engines shook the English night.

After the disconcerting sound of metal fitting together in complicated ways, the winged devil silhouette shifted all of its rocket boosters to the back. The flying device transformed into a monstrously large motorcycle. Even with the hovering support legs holding it up, its shape was far too brutal.

Occasionally, variety shows or documentaries would focus on the vehicles for a unique kind of race in foreign countries. Existing cars or motorcycles would have jet fighter or rocket engines forcibly attached to the back to blast those drag racers down a straight road.

Right now, they did not need to fly.

They only needed to give chase.

They had nothing as nice as helmets. Mikoto tossed a translucent vending machine raincoat to Shokuhou, put one on herself, and then jumped onto the monster bike.

“Hop on, juicy powers!! We need to go punch that idiot!!”

“Okay, Misaka-san. Now that I have a coat, the perfect queen is back!! ...And don't think I didn't hear that.”

The bike gave a violent roar.

Mikoto frowned while holding the handlebars.

The unathletic girl had climbed onto the extra-large motorcycle just fine, but now she was fidgeting oddly. Mikoto gave her a puzzled look through the side mirror, but she could not see the other girl's expression because she stuck her face into the raincoat hood and rubbed her forehead against Mikoto's nape.

"What is it now!? That's really distracting!!"

"It's just, ah, I wasn't expecting it be so-...oh, this vibration is a bit much..."

".....I know you always have a member of your clique call a car for you, but that isn't because you're too sensitive for a bike seat, is it?"

No response.

The blushing girl used her silence to forever bury the truth.

Mikoto cleared her throat.

"Yeah, I guess it couldn't be that."

"Um, wait, Misaka-san. Could you please drive safel-..."

"So enough messing around. Let's do this!!!!!!"

Shokuhou could not even form proper words after that.

They were chasing someone with no clear destination in mind, so the monster bike roared through the London night in a next-generation rodeo.

Part 9

There was actually a good explanation for why Kamijou Touma was seated right behind a female knight whose name he did not know.

Let us move back in time just a bit.

He of course had to stop Mathers's group from attacking the Royal Family's carriages, but he was a simple high school boy without even a bicycle. Aleister had flown off with her cute little jet engines and Accelerator had gone off somewhere under his own power. Left behind, Kamijou needed to find something that could travel at more than 100km/h.

That left just one option.

"Okay, it's mooching time. Where can I find someone to drive me around!?"

"It might sound nice when you call it the power of your bonds, but you really are the worst sometimes, human."

That was just how a high schooler without a license viewed cars and motorcycles. Whether it was their parents or public transportation, it was always someone else doing the driving.

Plus, he already knew there were several familiar faces in London. Lessar and Birdway had been riding a scooter together and he bet he could get a ride from Orsola, Agnese, or one of the other nuns. Add Sherry and Oriana into the mix and surely at least someone had a car.

And.

When Kamijou Touma peered around a corner, he spotted an innocent little fawn in the concrete jungle.

"Isn't that the knight we helped evacuate near the Thames???" he asked.

"She's already recovered?" added Othinus. "That was quick."

“She’s staring at a map on her horse. And wait. Is she tilting her head and flipping the map around trying to figure it out? Isn’t this her hometown???”

“She isn’t following her usual patrol route and the Royal Family is apparently headed to Scotland. She was probably ordered to join them as a guard.”

“Looks to me like she’s about to cry.”

“Well, in the confusion of battle and with communications out, a certain percentage of soldiers will get lost on the way, but unfortunately, I think she’s just not very smart.”

Whatever the case, it looked like they could come up with a mutually beneficial arrangement. Kamijou had business with Mathers’s group which was trying to attack the Royal Family. If he gave the female knight directions, she might just give him a ride on her horse. And since Kamijou could not hide his stupidity on the knowledge front, he was more than willing to rely on Othinus for those directions.

All the spiky-haired boy could do was attempt a hellish negotiation by channeling the spirit of an old lady who traveled the world knowing only Japanese.

“Yahoo!! Having trouble there, miss? If you like, Kamijou Touma here could escort you on a much less irritating journ-...!!”

Before he could finish, his tiny understander and the female knight gave the exact same warning:

“You fool! Don’t sneak up on a horse from behind and then shout!! Those herbivores are easily spooked!!”

The idiot was kicked away by the horse’s back legs. It was such an impressive kick that the scene was a little comical.

And that was the reason.

“I was careless, but I still feel taken advantage of. Is this what it feels like after an insurance scammer runs in front of your car?”

The clip-clop of hooves continued.

But despite that peaceful cadence, the wind blew by and the scenery flowed by like they were driving down the highway in a convertible.

The female knight did not throw Kamijou Touma off of the horse despite her complaints because she felt bad about what had happened. Leaving him there had been an option, but she was a good person through and through.

A horse might sound primitive, but when equipped with special rubber horseshoes for urban terrain, their mobility rivaled that of a motorcycle. Also, this was the magical kingdom of England. Several different spells were used when raising a horse for official duties. Running around a two-thousand-meter lawn would not be enough to exhaust them.

Kamijou Touma was still woozy, so he leaned on the female knight from behind and spoke with a smile.

“It’s, ugh, it’s okay, Miss Knight. Pant, pant. It was all necessary.”

“Why is he so full of life? That kick could have easily killed him.”

“I’m a god and I couldn’t tell you that.”

“More importantly, tell this fool to match his breathing to the horse’s movements!! He keeps throwing me off my pace and Alex is getting sick of it!!”

His right hand had touched all over her armor, but her clothes still had not exploded. Any magical reinforcements must have been applied inside the armor.

And Kamijou was interested in what the female knight had just shouted.

“Ho ho? So this horse’s name is Alex, is it?”

“He is not mine. I am borrowing him from Second Princess Carissa. She ordered me to take care of him while she is imprisoned. He normally only gets to walk around the Tower of London’s courtyard, you see. I cannot let anything happen to this royal horse, so breathe with the horse’s movements, you fool!!”

It sounded a bit like she cared more about the horse’s wellbeing than Kamijou’s. And the mention of Carissa brought a light squeezing to the spiky-haired boy’s heart. Angering her would indeed be a bad idea. He might just find himself on the receiving end of that overbearing princess’s high heels.

But this also meant he had recovered enough to consider such things.

They had to be moving faster than your average motorcycle, but he did not feel his mind going blank like when he rode a roller coaster. Similar to a bus or taxi, it may have been comforting to have someone holding the reins. Nevertheless, accidents still happened and he would share her fate even though he had done nothing wrong himself.

“Yo, oh. Breathe rhythmically? Like this? Does it really make that much of a difference???”

“Stop that, scum! Quit rubbing your crotch against my hips just because I can’t stop you right now!”

Apparently unfamiliar breathing methods could lead to unfortunate misunderstandings. The female knight blushed bright red and shouted resentfully back at him.

“Ahem. While it does not go as far as the unicorn legend, Alex is known for only growing attached to pure maidens.”

“(Jump!!)”

“Why did your heart just leap in your chest? What is it now?”

“Well, um, you see...I had heard people in the west tended to, uh, hit those milestones at a younger age, but if this horse is fond of you...my, oh, my. Does this mean you are, um, pure? Or how should I put this?”

“?”

The spiky-haired boy was too embarrassed to ask any more clearly than that.

But that topic was the only thing in his classy mind. It no longer mattered to him that they were traveling faster than 100km/h.

Then Othinus gently whispered in his ear.

“(That settles it. She’s a virgin.)”

“Blush!!!!!!”

An odd noise came from the adolescent Kamijou Touma.

Also, Alex began struggling, so the female knight had to force him back on

track with the reins. And she was too busy dealing with the horse to check on the situation behind her.

“What is this? What is awakening inside him? Explain this to me!!”

“Don’t worry. It’s just a sickness,” said Othinus. “Innocent young boys have a great weakness for a certain word. No matter how much they try to guard themselves against it, they cannot help but react to it.”

“That explains nothing. And small one, why do you sound so relieved by the boy’s disturbing react-...”

“And another thing, human. Did you realize this raises a certain question about Princess Carissa?”

“(Shake!!!!!!)”

“Gwah!? What is this aura behind me!? Really, what is awakening inside you to spook Alex this badly!?”

The female knight trembled with biological revulsion, but she still overlooked something thanks to the god’s forceful change of subject.

Then she got back on topic to help shake off the fear.

“So the central focus has shifted from the Crowley’s Hazards to the Golden magic cabal, has it? I find it hard to believe they really are *the* Golden cabal, but I have received some suspicious information in official reports. Wars do tend to escalate because you have to strike back when attacked, but I can’t believe they would release something so uncontrollable in our country.”

“What do you think about Lola Stuart at the center of it all?”

“I refuse to believe it. For one thing, that Great Demon simply does not exist.”

It was a blunt answer, but it was a sensible one when no material evidence had been provided.

And...

“More importantly, you’re sure this is the right direction? Putting up with your behavior has been a trying experience, so if we fail to regroup with the Royal Family, not even I know what I will do to you.”

“Come to think of it, why didn’t the queen use an airplane?” asked Kamijou. “Wouldn’t she have a really fancy private jet or something?”

“There are signs of an internal threat in addition to the external one. We cannot rely on the air routes when we might have someone leaking information. Secrecy is a government plane’s greatest defense.”

Kamijou Touma looked impressed with her knowledge, but Othinus snorted from his shoulder.

“Try to sound smart all you like, but care to explain how you ended up running around in circles? The Royal Family is taking the land route north to Scotland, right? I don’t care how complex the roads are in London, there are only so many highways between cities.”

“Gh.”

“The many branches converge into a single trunk. If you head to Scotland, you will naturally rejoin them. What, were you hoping to stop for a picnic?”

Of course, Mathers and the other pursuers would come up with the same idea. That was why the Royal Family had predicted an attack and gathered as many defenses as they could.

“There it is. That’s the entrance to the highway.”

“Looks like it isn’t blocked off. A normal car could wander onto there, not to mention Mathers.”

The experts had that to say, but the lower middle class Kamijou was surprised to find no tollbooth at the highway entrance. The armored horse ran up the onramp and entered an elevated road as wide as a runway.

Just then, Kamijou’s shoulders jumped at the loud roar coming from behind them. *It sounded a lot like a rocket engine*, but it had apparently missed the onramp and entered the road below. He had no idea who that was, but it may have been a lost out-of-towner.

Meanwhile, the female knight clicked her tongue.

But not because Kamijou had wrapped his arms around her even tighter when the previous noise caught him by surprise.

“Ignore whatever that was behind us. The Royal Family really is up ahead. We’ve fallen behind, so we need to hurry it up! We can’t regroup with them by waiting here!!”

“How can you tell?”

“There are horse droppings here and there. More than twenty four-horse carriages must have passed through here.”

“...”

“D-don’t give me that disappointed silence!! It’s an unavoidable part of using living creatures!”

Her shouting just about led to disaster.

She was slow to notice an obstacle lying on the highway, so the horse nearly trampled it.

It was a human.

Someone had been thrown to the asphalt and they were still collapsed there.

“Wah!?”

The female knight gave a shout and quickly pulled on the reins. She just barely dodged the person. It was a boy who looked middle school aged. No, maybe even elementary school aged. His baggy habit allowed even the spiky-haired amateur to know he was connected to all this, so Kamijou looked back and shouted.

“Who was that!? Do you know him!?”

“I do not!! He wasn’t a Knight. He looked more like an Anglican to me.”

The female knight shouted back at him while lighting a flare so colored flames spewed from it like a firework. She threw it behind them either as an SOS signal for the medics to retrieve the boy or as a hazard light so no one else would hit or trample him.

However.

Her explanation placed a cloud over Kamijou’s face. He did not exactly want harm to come to the enemy, but this meant the boy was not a Golden magician

who had gotten himself defeated while attacking the Royal Family. It was the Royal Family and their protectors who were being defeated.

“It’s started,” muttered Kamijou. “The fight has already started up ahead.”

Part 10

Hamazura Shiage gave a puzzled look inside the four-wheel-drive vehicle parked below the bridge.

“Eh? Tarot cards???”

“Yesss...”

Dion Fortune was so afraid of Aneri(?) that she finally confessed with tears and snot staining her face, but Hamazura was not sure what it meant or why it mattered. Would a detective look so foolish if they confidently explained the trick to a locked room murder only to find everyone was too dumb to understand?

“T-Taki-Takitsubo-shan?”

“It’s okay, Hamazura. I don’t understand it either. It might be a metaphor or codename for something.”

Not being the only one was such a wonderful feeling. It didn’t solve shit, though.

However, the bandage woman and mini-China dress girl had shown no mercy to Fortune.

Being too powerful may have come with its own issues.

Fortune was speaking English, but he could still tell there was no ill will behind her words.

“She isn’t saying anything too tricky. She just hasn’t explained everything you need to know.”

“Yeah. I can see why she’d be so confused when you keep pressing her for an answer.”

“Higii!?” was apparently universally understood.

Even without a translation from Takitsubo, Hamazura could tell how cornered Dion Fortune felt.

“Stop that. Fortune saved us, remember? And I feel like you two are giving everything a skewed viewpoint and Fortune is actually a pretty amazing person.”

Those ruinous words should never have been translated into English.

The frilly dress girl brushed back her white veil as she started getting a big head again.

“Heh. Eh heh heh. Yes, I am the great Dion Fortune. Pitting me against Magic Gods is cheating, that Egyptian one is enough to bring me to tears, and finishing me off with my mistress is not playing fair at all, but that is not what matters here. Yes, I am amazing. I might be surrounded by insanity right now, but if you understand my value and show me the proper respect, I will give you the privilege of shining my shoes, massaging my shoulders, carrying my bags, and otherwise doing my bidding! Ah ha ha ha ha ha!!”

“Boy, you deal with this one.”

“Hold on! Don’t you carry some of the responsibility for translating all that!?”

At any rate, the frilly dress girl gave more of an explanation from the back seat.

“When you get down to it, we are just one of the defenses prepared by Great Demon Coronzon. Master Mathers seems to be working toward some way of breaking free of that so we can do whatever we want. He always was good at translating grimoires.”

“Mathers?”

“He is the leader of our Golden cabal...although that description makes me feel bad for Westcott who claims to be the second leader.”

Keep in mind that Hamazura Shiage was not present for the events at the Westminster Abbey graveyard. Thanks to that, he could not even imagine what kind of person Mathers was or what kind of organization the Golden cabal was.

That was why he arrived at a certain thought in the driver’s seat.

(Hm. I don't get any of this, but Coronzon is the villain who was chasing after Lilith, right? *Then could we work with this Mathers person to fight her?*)

Nothing could have been more presumptuous.

If things had been different, it might have been a possibility, but that option had been eliminated a century ago.

"So if we go to...Scotland was it? We can meet this Mathers person?"

"Hamazura, isn't Scotland pretty far away?" asked Takitsubo.

"I don't know the geography here."

"Scotland is to the north," explained Nephthys. "And the UK is about half the length of the Japanese archipelago."

"It's that long? Then we can't just sit around here. After filling up with gas somewhere, we can go talk with this Mathers guy."

That shocked Dion Fortune as she sat between the Magic Gods in the back seat. The exhibitionists were giggling and whispering into her ears, so they seemed to be acting as a luxurious two-person translator. Hamazura had a feeling they were taking some liberties in their translation, though.

Either way, Dion Fortune tearfully thrashed her arms and legs around and raised her voice.

"Wait!! This is all moving way too fast!! And why are you acting so tough!? Have you already forgotten how quickly Annie and Westcott took you out!? And you think you can deal with Master Mathers of all people!?"

"Wa ha ha ha!! I'm pretty sure this boy's brain is throwing a party 24/7. ...But I see. This is the bystander's perspective. You get a lot of interesting ideas when cheap emotion isn't clouding everyone's minds☆"

"Yeah, Kamijou Touma and Accelerator wouldn't have worked this time. Like we said at the beginning, they're way too close to the action."

Niang-Niang and Nephthys shared a meaningful smile in the back seat.

Due to how weak he was, Hamazura was sensitive to changes in the mood and he could tell something was changing now. He felt like it had started with

seeing those carriages. The threat of imminent death seemed to be fading and the usual stillness of late night was returning to London. The city was entering a world of peaceful sleep where that abnormal excitement was unneeded.

“How do the convenience stores and fast food chains work in England? I’ve heard they close early overseas, but the self-serve gas stations are open 24 hours a day, right???”

“Hamazura, we’ll know when we get there.”

“Y-you’re going to visit Master Mathers with these two spirits? For real!? There’s something wrong with the world when saving people only puts me in even more danger. Wh-wh-wh-what do I do? I might die today...”

Hamazura drove the vehicle out from under the bridge and into the London night. Before long, he spotted a sign he recognized, so it must have been an international brand. The lights were off, but since there were no barriers or chains keeping them out, he tried pulling up to the self-service gas station.

“Oh, the digital display is on. The pump should be working.”

“Hamazura, if there are vending machines, go buy some snacks and drinks. This might be our last chance for a while.”

After they discussed what to do while viewing the gas pump through the window, Hamazura opened the door and got out. Self-service stations would have at least one employee inside, so they may have been asleep. Or they had abandoned their job and fled due to the emergency.

And while he thought about that, he noticed something.

Two very small girls were doing something in the darkness. One was a lacrosse-style girl with long black hair braided at the end and the other was an elegant young lady with shoulder-length fluffy blonde hair, a white blouse, a black miniskirt, and black tights. Neither one was the type he expected to find at a gas station.

They were standing restlessly around a scooter.

“Ugeh. This gas is expensive. When did a liter pass 1.3 pounds!? Nwah! War really is a crime!! So we’re definitely splitting this bill, right? You’ve gotta be

loaded with your big-ass cabal.”

“Don’t try to scam me, small-fry. This is your scooter, right? So this is your responsibility.”

“Does driving you around earn me nothing!? A taxi would’ve taken ten pounds in just two kilometers. And isn’t the Dawn-Colored Sunlight the proper successor of the Golden cabal? This is like a giant defense contractor driving a small local factory out of business to get the patent to a single tiny bearing! Stop picking on the little guy!!”

“If you were a driver from my cabal, I would have fired you for speaking to me like that. New Light, was it? Besides, it’s obvious you’re only staying so small to hide your actual skill and keep your operations lightweight. You have no right to say anything to me.”

They were arguing over something in English, but there was no way in hell those two were old enough to be using a car or motorcycle. Unfortunately, Hamazura Shiage was driving around in a stolen vehicle, so he was in no position to scold them here.

Instead, he stuck some wrinkled money (that he had found in the stolen vehicle’s dashboard) into the pump.

Afterwards, there was nothing much to do except listen to the heavy liquid running through the hose.

But then those two girls noticed him.

The one with shoulder-length blonde hair gave him a quizzical look and then spoke in fluent Japanese.

“Hm? I thought I recognized you. You were one of the guys hanging around Kamijou Touma.”

“Who are you again? My precious memory space is reserved for people with big boobs.”

A merciless slap sent Hamazura Shiage rolling around the area.

“I recognize this pain. Bard...no, Bird-Something, right!?”

“Almost there. Do you need another hit to jog your memory, you hunk of

junk?”

“Ow, wait, ow, ow! When you step on someone, you’re supposed to let each blow linger for a bit! This isn’t a reward; it’s just violence! Please stop, you little dominatrix! What is even happening!?”

“Oops, I hit him too much and he rolled away. Guess I went overboard.”

This was odd. Hamazura Shiage was the delinquent with a heart of gold who would rescue little kids and abandoned kittens in the rain. His time with Fremea Seivelun, who was always nyah-nyah-ing, had taught him how to deal with kids, but none of the usual logic seemed to apply here. Why not? Yes, it was a lot like this blonde girl looked like a kid but was more like an old lady on the inside!!

“Oh, so it isn’t that you haven’t developed a chest yet. You had one, but it shriveled away. You’ve made yourself look young enough, but you’re a wrinkled old hag on the ins-brbwobergh!?”

“Next time I’m jabbing the toe of my shoe up your ass, you fool. More importantly, what are you carrying in that thing?”

“Bwah!!”

Someone rolled out of four-wheel-drive vehicle as if they could not bear to stay inside a moment longer. Since the Magic Gods were stationed in front of the side doors, she had apparently opened the door at the very back. The frilly dress girl forgot to stand up and frantically clung to Hamazura.

“Wait, wait, wait! Please don’t barge in on Master Mathers uninvited! You seriously need to rethink this! He really does have a short temper and no sense of humor! What will you do if he uses his Belzébutth meant for punishing his own people!? You’ll die!!”

He could not make heads or tails of her English. His grasp of the language was so poor he had considered asking Takitsubo if he was right about which label meant gasoline and which one meant diesel. He felt like his only option was turning toward the blonde girl who knew Japanese.

“That’s right! You can always count on Bird-Something! Hey, sorry about the trouble, but could you tell me what Fortune is saying?”

“.....

For some reason the little blonde dominatrix and devilish lacrosse(?) girl froze when they saw the frilly dress girl. They stopped moving with their eyes wide.

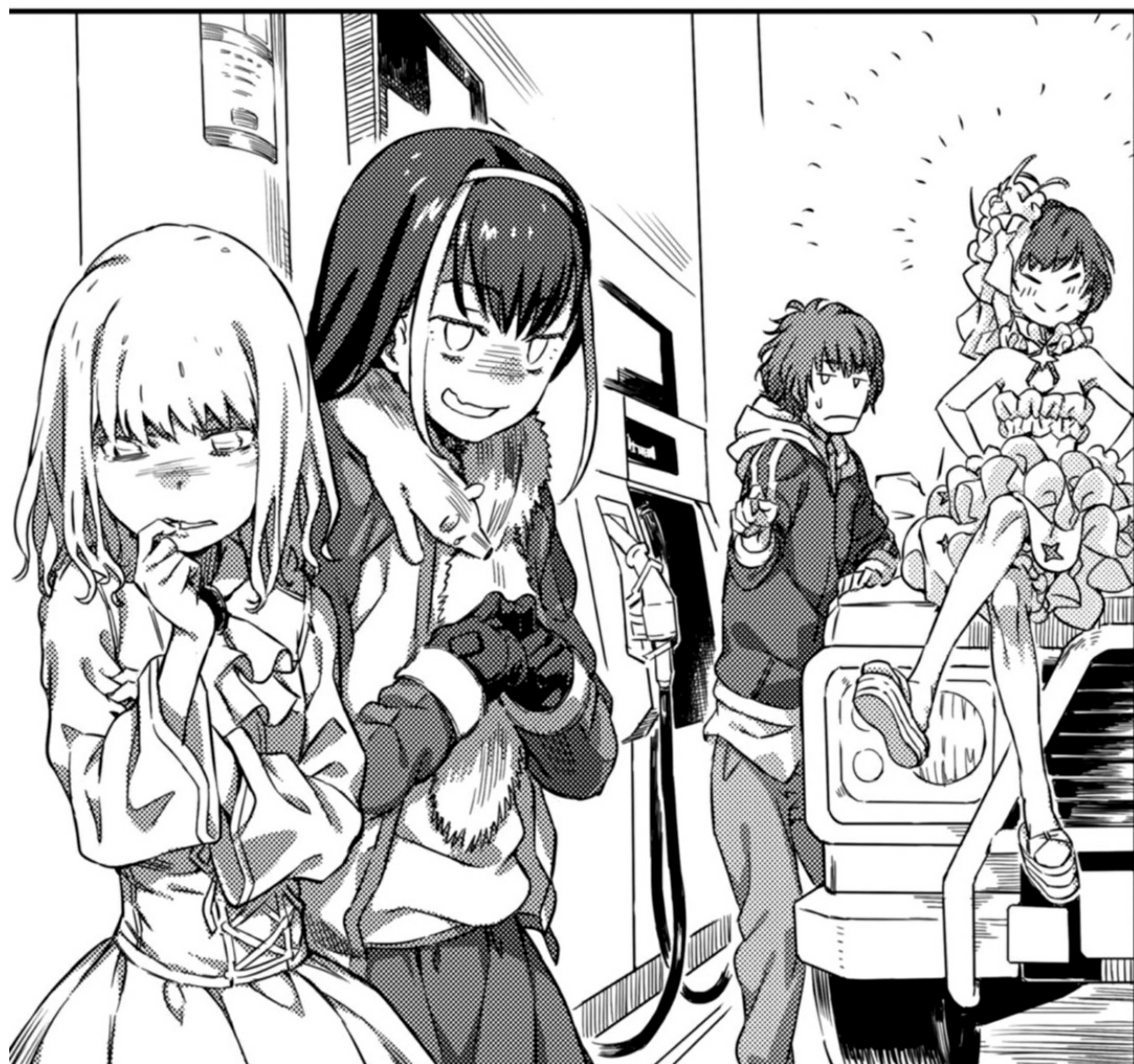
“Hm? What’s with you two?”

They did not answer his question.

Instead, the little blonde girl’s entire body trembled and she somehow managed to force out a voice so unsteady it nearly cracked.

“D-Dion...Fortune???”

That tear-and-snot-covered face was gone in a flash. Dion Fortune sat on the hood of the vehicle, elegantly crossed her bright stockinged legs, and held her head high.



“I see, I see. So these are the descendants of the Golden cabal. How cute. Hee hee. How does it feel to see one of the originals? Quite an honor, isn’t it? Your heart is pounding with excitement, isn’t it? Hwa ha ha! Well, soak it all in because this will be a memory of a lifetime! Yes, there’s more than tears for me today! This is just another lovely day in the life of Dion Fortune, magician of love and glory!!”

Was this something like an entertainer surrounded by fans on a street corner?

Yet when Hamazura glanced over, he saw the blonde girl and lacrosse girl hanging their heads with shadows over their faces. And a closer look showed they were biting their lips. There were even tears in the corners of their eyes.

“(This is...this is a member of the original Golden cabal? You’re telling me *this* is what I’ve dedicated so much time to studying!? No, no! I don’t want to write it all off as a waste of time! Ah ha ha ha ha ha!!)”

“(S-surely this is some kind of mistake, right? Right!? I know you’re supposed to view a technique or technology in isolation from the thoughts and personality of its inventor, but this is still something of a shock!!)”

This seemed different.

Those two looked more like mixed martial arts fans who had gone to see a match in person and found it was much less exciting than on TV and the fighters were a lot smaller than they expected.

The blonde girl intentionally took a few deep breaths to calm herself before speaking.

“Anyway, you mentioned Mathers just now, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, but I haven’t actually seen the guy,” said Hamazura. “Most of what I know comes from her.”

“Hey, Fortune!! A founder like Mathers isn’t, uh, *like this* too, is he!? Just nod or shake your head! This is important! Depending on your answer, I might just crawl into bed and not get out for like a month!!”

“Eh? What’s this? Are you hoping to write him a letter, or do you think you can make some corrections to the grimoire? Uwehhh, don’t grab, ugh, my

decorative collar, urgh, and shake me like that. Bleh, I feel sick.”

She was a surprisingly powerful little dominatrix.

But she was inexperienced and showed room for improvement. Her British training had clearly not taught her how to provide punishments and rewards in equal measures. In fact, the frilly dress girl started to look pale, so Hamazura quickly intervened. He did not want to see a girl foaming at the mouth.

“Hey, stop that, Little Miss No Boobs! I can’t just watch you do that to Dion Fortune!!”

“Shut up, I do too have boobs!! And what are you to Dion Fortune anyway!?”

“What am I to her?”

Come to think of it, why had she stayed with his group after saving them?

Everyone around him was such an irregularity (including Takitsubo and Aneri) that he was actually glad to have someone more on Fortune’s level, but he did not want to make her feel like she had to stay.

“Um, that’s actually a good question. Why am I traveling with her?”

“Hgh!?”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t say that if I were you,” cut in the lacrosse girl. “She might not understand your words, but your facial expression and the general mood say a lot. Do you want to make Class Rep Fortune cry? ...And that size of yours is generally referred to as a margin of error, Decimal Point Girl. Bwa ha ha!!”

If this was enough to make Dion Fortune teary eyed, she must have opened herself up to Hamazura and Takitsubo more than he thought. Maybe the Magic Gods had effectively played the bad cop role.

Thanks to the reference to her chest, the blonde girl held the lacrosse girl’s head between her small fists and rubbed at her temples while speaking in a low voice.

“Hey, let’s go see Mathers for ourselves. I don’t really care about the fate of the world, but my identity as a Golden magician is at stake here.”

“Ummm, unlike a certain idiot who does everything out of pure self-interest,

I'm a legit patriot, so I'd like to put the safety of the UK first and foremost."

"Do I need to use my heel?"

"Ha ha. I'm well known for my wide range of defenses, so if I were you, I wouldn't underestimate-..."

"I'll use it on your family. I'll turn every last one of your relatives into an M."

"Wait just a second! Targeting someone's family is the absolute worst and scummiest thing a criminal organization can do! I-I couldn't bear to see my parents with that kind of fetish!!"

The lacrosse girl bristled at the thought.

That was when Hamazura interrupted.

"Hey, she said the guy's headed for Scotland. And I heard the UK is half as long as the Japanese archipelago. How long would that take on a scooter? Wouldn't you end up with your asses all red and raw?"

"..."

"..."

The blonde girl and lacrosse girl exchanged a glance.

It was a worried one.

"If Mathers went to Scotland...oh, I get it. It's that obsession of his. He really is claiming to be the Count of Glenstrae, isn't he?"

"Let's just pray he isn't wearing white tights and a crown in full-on prince mode. And if we know where he's going, couldn't we get there ahead of him? Instead of burning out the scooter's engine on the highway, I bet it would be faster to hop onto a freight train running through the night."

"Don't be silly. I am the Dawn-Colored Sunlight's leader, so I can get us a private jet to use. I'm a little worried the airport won't be running during this crisis, though."

"Then why was this domineering girl weighing me down on the back of my scooter this whole time? I really want to give you a punch now."

The sound of the liquid running through the hose and the digital display both

stopped, so the fueling was complete.

The same was true with the lacrosse girl's scooter.

"Wow, the price feels even more outrageous when you see the total. Gas is way too expensive. Electric has got to be the way of the future. Y'know, living a cheap and ecological life on solar power."

"?"

Hamazura heard an odd warning tone. The money he had shoved into the pump must not have been enough. He had no sense of how much this British money was worth and just shoved another wrinkled bill inside, so the lacrosse girl whispered the answer to him.

"1.3 pounds a liter is more than 180 Japanese yen."

He thought he was going to throw up.

Part 11

“I don’t see Nics anywhere!”

“He fell off a while back. He might even be dead.”

Those words came from above the twenty horse-drawn carriages.

The roofs stuck out past the coachman’s seat and the carriages were in perfect synchronization, so there was plenty of space to stand on, much like the top of a train.

(This trip was ill-advised for a number of reasons, so we should count ourselves lucky we even made it to Manchester. But this is only the halfway point to Scotland and Edinburgh Castle is even further than that! I can’t believe they’ve already caught up to us here!!)

The blonde woman in a classic maid outfit was named Ange Catacombs.

The young wife holding a leash attached to a large rusted circular saw instead of a pet dog was named Cutia Virginroad.

Needless to say, both were part of the Anglican unit known as Necessarius. The chaos in the chain of command was obvious from the fact that Anglicans and not the Knights were directly guarding the Royal Family. Also, both Ange and Cutia had earned enough of a negative reputation for their particular skills that they could not be deployed to other countries, but this was no time to worry about that.

“These aren’t the Crowley’s Hazards.”

What were they?

What were they!?

“Then is this some allied group gone rogue, or is it a dangerous domestic group like a magic cabal!? Argh, why does the archbishop have to be

incommunicado now of all times!?”

“My, my. But whatever the case, we have to view any unauthorized magical force as an enemy, don’t we?”

They were approaching a large English city, so the highway changed from a strip of asphalt through a grassy field to a modern elevated roadway. They could see variously-sized buildings beyond the soundproofing panels covering the left and right side.

And at the same time...

“Maintain the movement formation based on the three vertices. This relative speed is good enough.”

“How about you trust your cabal-mates’ skill a little more than that? Try passing them, Mathers.”

The people targeting the Royal Family were not clinging to the roofs and sides of the carriages. Nor were they using their own carriages or vehicles. They were using their own feet to run along the asphalt, the median, and sometimes even the signs or streetlights. Instead of running, it looked like they were sliding along a thin layer of water to match the 180km/h speed of the carriages.

The Necessarius women heard a sound like dry wood or glass clanking together.

“Cold and dry, then cold and wet.”

And.

It came from the roadway rushing by so quickly. A witch’s cloak and a scarf flapped as a threat in human form opened its mouth.

“Belzébuth.”

The magician known as Mathers would not hold back at times like this. He did not scale up one stage at a time when facing beginners. He used his ultimate technique right off the bat. He completely ignored any gap in skill level and used his special attack to crush anyone he was up against.

The Royal Family’s plan was to lure in the enemy group and lead them around in order to split them up and pick them off one at a time, but that was only a

theoretical concept. It was looking more like the Royal Family would be devoured instead.

A rapidly-rotating blade could be heard tearing into a carriage roof. The rusted circular saw at Cutia's feet was trying to forcefully snag and tear apart the filthy black hairs targeting its master's heart. That curse used two names: the powerful demon lord's and the target's. So the sticky black threads had to be destroyed along with their illusionary foothold before the two names could be connected.

"Surely you did not think you could stop my magic all on your own."

"Kh."

"I would have ignored you had you remained an irrelevant distraction. But be it the Crowley's Hazards or the United Kingdom, I will tear down all that stands in my way. Tremble with joy as you are defeated at the hands of the Golden cabal."

(Still.)

The classic maid clenched her teeth.

(Still, this is better than letting them topple the carriages themselves by interfering with the magic boosting them.)

But that was not the two Necessarius women's accomplishment.

The first princess in a blue dress was seated in the window of one carriage and leaning outside. She held a long object that looked a lot like a spear, but it was not actually a spear. Curtana was the royal sword without a tip. That flat sword was a symbol of peace, but its dangerous tip had been retrieved and attached at the end of this spear to create a true weapon of war and slaughter.

The heavyweight weapon was thoroughly reinforced with steel pipes and armor panels in order to control a sword fragment measuring only a few centimeters long.

"Curtana Lost. Oh, blade fragment symbolizing the fearsome side of the monarchy, lend me your power."

"..."

“You claim to be the Scottish Count of Glenstrae? Well, I am 1st Princess of the entire United Kingdom. If you really are a noble, then bow your head to the royal bloodline, Mathers!!”

A quiet tongue click came from the scarf.

If he was simply the leader of the Golden magicians, he might have managed to wipe out the carriages in three seconds flat. But the other side of Mathers showed itself here. His claim of being a descendant of the highlanders was short on actual proof, but he could not ignore the background he insisted on. Crushing this princess would be admitting it was a lie.

But this was a stalemate for Riméa as well.

The plan had been to lure the enemy into a chase while picking them off one at a time, but the Royal Family had its hands full simply keeping the carriages upright. At this rate, they would be inviting the enemy – she did not hesitate to think of them that way at this point – into Scotland.

Thus, the first princess had to rely on someone else.

“Do it, Anglicans! Don’t disappoint me any further!!”

The command of one with royal blood struck them in the back.

It was no longer time to be speaking in a drawn-out, carefree way.

The young wife revealed her true face.

“Oh, pure saints whose thoughts remain even after your unsullied flesh and blood were scattered in death. Raise your voices, entangle yourselves with the approaching attacks, and redirect them from within to prevent disaster!!”

This attempt proved too much for her.

She never should have tried to match Mathers’s strength. With a loud sound of breaking metal, it was the circular saw that shattered. When the shards struck the asphalt, they produced orange sparks and were quickly left behind.

“My, my. That is not good!!”

But even with her partner lost, Cutia only placed a hand on her cheek. She had not lost the will to fight. In fact, she did have a partner after all. With the

sound of something swishing through the air, the thick leash thrashed about like a great serpent. It was a thick rope with a large loop at the end. There was no need to explain what that symbolized.

“Hanging is a merciless execution. The rope which tortured so many sinners at the will of the gathered crowds is a tool of bondage and release. Watch from the depths of your slumber, foolish descendants who have forgotten the meaning of those many deaths. Bind your souls and do not allow your leaders to succumb!!”

But Mathers did not even give a command to the four Symbolic Weapons floating around him.

He simply breathed an exasperated sigh.

How smoothly they switched places was a sign of just how high-level their coordination was.

A moment later, someone landed on a carriage roof after jumping off of a plastic bucket full of water used for shock absorption at the start of an off ramp. The man in the black robes of a judge was John William Brodie-Innes. His shoes must have had metal built in because they produced a dry sound much like tap shoes.

And that tapping caused something like orange sparks to scatter around.

No...

“The knowledge of the cross is hidden in the intersections of all symbols. The modified pyramid cross signifies the gathering of power, so send this danger right back at them!!”

John William Brodie-Innes’s sparks acted as intersections – that is, crosses – of the lines and curves in all magical circles, writing, and symbols. The Calvary cross, the Maltese cross, the Greek cross, and the pyramid cross. The magical power flowing toward him from the Necessarius woman was taken into the magical circle and sent down different branches of each intersection like a train switching rails.

And what did that mean?

“Eh?”

The young wife heard a loud roar by her ear.

Those crosses used the enemy’s magical symbols to John William Brodie-Innes’s advantage.

The leash in Cutia’s hand should have been her trusty companion, but it was now attached to a growling four-legged beast crudely constructed from nothing but blood-red cubes. But she did not know this beast. She did not even have time to brace herself. It charged right toward her as she held the leash. It bit into her right side and threw her toward the asphalt rushing by with such frightening speed.

“Kyaaaaah!?”

“Cutia!!”

The maid with a long skirt jumped toward her companion’s scream and reached out her hand. When Ange snapped the fingers of her other hand, various sizes of autonomous suitcases slid toward the road surface as temporary footing for their master.

“Close, seven-cornered wall. The catacombs will not yet allow you to awaken!!”

When the maid shouted that with the young wife in her arms, a suitcase she was not standing on hopped up irregularly like it had stepped on a pebble. No, it opened up like a crocodile attacking a small bird on the water’s surface.

It swallowed the red cube beast and snapped shut once more.

That alone demonstrated inhuman skill.

But even then...

“Did you think you could defeat your enemy by *playing with* your own magic? It is the macro universe you should be responding to now.”

Mathers did not bat an eye.

His four Symbolic Weapons continued to dance around him.

“Hot and dry. I will now show you what happens when you take your eyes off

your true enemy for even a moment.”

The fire wand made a full rotation in front of the man as he ran at 180km/h in leather shoes.

That was enough to create a flaming circle which spewed flames across the entire roadway with the intensity of a flash flood.

There were no shouts or screams.

He had not given them the time, but there was another reason.

The maid and young wife saw that powerful magic blown away before their eyes.

Blown away by the right fist of an Asian sitting behind a female knight on a military horse.

One of Mathers's eyebrows twitched slightly while he moved at 180km/h.

“Hey, Mathers.” Kamijou Touma shouted at him in Japanese. “What, are you only interested in your target? Well, I can keep you busy in the meantime, you living fossil of a coelacanth!!”

Ange Catacombs and Cutia Virginroad gasped atop the autonomous suitcases, but that was a reaction to Mathers's change of expression, not the fact that their lives had been saved. That boy had worked his way under Mathers's seemingly impervious skin, even if just a little.

Mathers's eyes clearly moved below the witch's hat.

He set his sights on just that one boy.

“I see. I suppose I did just say I would show them what happens when you ignore an enemy. So I will not allow this. I will not, my inexperienced enemy. It is time you felt the appropriate fear and regret for hastening your death by making an appearance here.”

Kamijou could not understand his Scottish English response.

Othinus gave an inaccurate translation with a straight face.

And that god stuck out her tongue afterwards.

“He says he is as much a pervert as Aleister and wants you to ‘reward’ him

good and hard. Human, do not hold back. Smash that arrogant nose of his!!”

Part 12

His girlfriend, Takitsubo Rikou, was asleep in the passenger seat.

They were traveling north to Scotland after leaving London in the stolen four-wheel-drive vehicle, but since it was stolen, using the highway would be too risky. He had decided to stay on the normal roads running alongside the highway and keep an eye out for checkpoints and police while staying below the speed limit. The supernatural was not the only thing to fear since Hamazura Shiage did not have anything that let him skip right past those more ordinary concerns.

The digital clock told him the time was better described as early morning than late night. The only radio stations he could find were playing soft jazz with no talk at all. He was a little worried this would cause British truck drivers to doze off and crash, but the music choice may just have been part of the local color.

The bandage woman and mini-China dress girl had been causing such a ruckus earlier, but when he checked in the rearview mirror now, he saw them leaning together (Dion Fortune between them) with their eyelids gently shut.

His eyes met those of the frilly dress girl.

She looked melancholic.

She had her feet up on the seat and her arms around her knees.

“(Are we seriously going there? But I only just fought back against Westcott and Annie. The rest of the cabal will have heard, so they’ll probably all be against me. And Mathers has such a short temper he’ll probably just kill me! Why did I have to run across the kind of person who rushes out to see the hurricane or tornado!?)”

“Fortune.”

With one hand on the wheel and his eyes on the road, he held some

caffeinated gum back toward her with his other hand. Her small hand hesitantly reached for it. It was not always clear whether sleeping or just staying up was better at this time of night, but Fortune must have given up on sleeping.

“What kind of person is Mathers?”

“?”

She did not understand his Japanese question. She had to be quite intelligent, but she just tilted her head. Her white veil shook. All of the girls who could translate for her were in their separate dream worlds.

But then they heard a quiet electronic jingling.

When Dion Fortune realized it had come from the phone in the holder, her shoulders jumped. The Magic Gods leaning on her groaned a bit at the movement. Hamazura was not quite sure why, but Fortune seemed to have trouble with Aneri.

“Don’t worry. Aneri won’t bite. Okay, Aneri, can you translate for me? I don’t want to wake the others, so it would help if you used text instead of speech.”

“It’s true my mistress doesn’t bite, but she does scratch.”

“Hey, Aneri, are you sure this translation is right???”

He still had his doubts, but this was apparently accurate.

The bandage and mini-China dress Magic Gods were leaning on Fortune with their soft-looking cheeks resting on her shoulders. If you only focused on the visual, it looked...cute?

“Nnn, mutter, mutter. No, I couldn’t possibly eat any more Fortune. I’m stuffed.”

“What!?”

You could not blame someone for their dreams, but was Niang-Niang really asleep? The frilly dress girl’s shoulder was wet with the drool dripping from the corner of the Magic God’s mouth.

This reminded Hamazura of something.

“You slept pretty peacefully, Fortune.”

“Ugh, you were watching me sleep?”

“Although you did convulse weirdly from time to time. It was honestly kind of hot.”

“Being an excellent spiritual medium has its downsides!! Dammit, why do trances have to be like that!?”

Now he was even more certain the translation was bugging out on him, but apparently not. He desperately wanted to find some common language with Fortune.

He tried to think of something while blowing a bubble with his gum.

And then he heard an odd sound.

He checked in the mirror and saw Dion Fortune puckering her lips and straining until her face turned red. He was confused at first, but then it hit him.

“Ha ha. What, can you not blow a bubble?”

“Why do you look so pleased with yourself?”

“There’s no real trick to it. Just chew the gum up nice and soft, make an indentation in the middle with your tongue, and then blow into it. I think that’s all it is. It comes so naturally to me now that it’s hard to think about how I do it.”

How long did it take to find this side of someone?

What about with Mugino, Kinuhata, and Takitsubo?

Or what about Westcott and Annie? Would things have been different had they met under different circumstances? And was it too late to change that now?

And Mathers.

Hamazura Shiage only had a name for that person.

He chewed completely ordinary gum as he continued speaking words that might not reach the girl.

“I’ll teach you how to do it later. If you’re fine with that.”

“Hmph.”

Dion Fortune puffed out the cheeks behind her white veil. He may have hurt her pride a little. And he was impressed with Aneri for actually translating the “hmph” into Japanese for him. How did that AI recognize things that were not really words?

“Why are you and my mistress such good friends?”

“Personally, I’m not quite sure why you’re treating a program like it’s female.”

“Or am I just an exception? Aleister and Mathers were so eccentric and narrow-minded, but even they could hold a proper conversation with the black cat witch. The only magician that ever truly angered her was me, the great Dion Fortune.”

“Aneri, did you do something to her? Now’s your chance to apologize.”

His phone vibrated as if to shake its head at the accusation.

“Hmm.” Hamazura thought for a moment. “Fortune, do you have a phone?”

“I was ringing a bell to call for help. What do you think?”

“Don’t sulk. Why not buy one if you get the chance? They have cheap prepaid ones here, don’t they?”

“Not a chance. If you want to friend me, then at least build a temple for me first.”

“You know how to use ‘friend’ as a verb? Then you’re definitely interested in this stuff! Aneri, once she gets a phone, stay on there for a while.”

“Why would you want me to be on edge 24/7!? What did I ever do to you!?”

“That’s not the point. There seems to be some kind of misunderstanding between you two, but I bet you can get over it if you’re together for a while.”

“Hmph.”

“Please. I don’t know what your problem with Aneri is, but this is a chance for you too.”

Dion Fortune said nothing for a while.

But when he glanced back at her through the mirror, she finally let out a sigh.

And she answered even if it cost her some of the currency known as pride.

“Okay, fine. I promise.”

Part 13

The transport helicopter arrived in Scotland.

There was no heliport, but any flat area of land was enough.

The first order of business was to take the palm rod that Karasuma Fran had given her and stab it into the ley line to establish a temporary magical communications network.

“We should take readings across the whole area. Miss Kanzaki, you do the other side of the lake!”

“Understood.”

There was no difference between Saints and normal people here. The power flowing through the earth was determined by the terrain, so you only had to view the arrangement of mountains, valleys, and such. That said, it only gave you a general idea. The plumbing, gas pipes, and other artificial objects buried in the ground would change things, so maps and satellite photos were not enough. It was always best to do a local survey.

There was no one around, but there was fortunately a church nearby.

Orsola set that up as their base, left a few pieces of equipment there, and then stepped back outside with a basic spiritual item that matched her height.

It was really just a glass weight on the end of the sort of thin chain used for necklaces. She slowly walked along the field with it. It was one of those things where the weight’s swaying and rotating would supposedly change in response to water or metal in the ground.

Using the Divine Mixture had been a terrible mistake.

But she did want to do something for this country which had accepted her and let her in.

So wasn't there something she could do other than wielding a weapon and fighting?

Orsola Aquinas could not find a definitive answer.

But everyone was filled with doubt in their life.

(I need to hurry.)

She marked her map at every point where the thin chain responded. Once she had a few marks, she compared them to the predicted ley line location and drew some curving corrections to its path.

(I need to get this done as soon as possible!!)

She found the point at which she could stab in the rod to bring back communications.

It looked like a completely ordinary field.

Orsola lifted the palm rod that the hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae girl had given her.

"There!!"

She heard a muffled sound.

It did not matter if it was only a small thing or if she could wield no direct firepower.

Orsola Aquinas was once more doing something for the people living in this country.

Part 14

The Royal Family carriages left the Manchester area. The highway descended from the elevated roadway and returned to being a thick stripe down a grassy field. The frequency and brightness of the lights reduced to something more befitting the late night, but there were now some normal vehicles here and there. While London had been exposed to such constant tension, the atmosphere and mood here may have been different.

Even though the threat known as Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers was here with the entire Golden cabal in tow.

Kamijou could tell these would not be easy opponents.

And not just because of the strength of their magic. While he had to remain on the horse, Mathers and the others could run around at 180km/h just fine. He could not even stand on the same stage as them to fight.

So what was it he needed to do?

He shouted to the female knight holding the reins.

“The others don’t matter, so chase after their big boss: Mathers!!”

“Wh-what!? Do you even know how his magic works!? You make that sound so easy.”

“No matter how powerful he is, history has proven that *Imagine Breaker works on Mathers’s attacks*! So don’t think about it too much and just ride the horse toward him!! I’ll deflect any attacks with my right hand!!”

“!!”

They did not have time for further argument.

But instead of the female knight making up her mind, Mathers forced her hand by using the wand, cup, dagger, and disc floating around him.

“Hot and wet.”

“Alex!!”

She was a warrior by trade, so she moved to crush the enemy before he could attack.

But instead of charging straight into him, she rode up alongside him to reduce the lateral distance between them. Mathers was nearly pinned between the military horse and a Royal Family carriage – although he mostly seemed worried about Kamijou’s right hand grabbing one of his floating Symbolic Weapons – so he kicked off the side of the carriage and onto its roof, his witch’s cloak and scarf flapping behind him.

Kamijou also gathered his strength.

“Stay like this.”

“Wait, are you insane!?”

“My legs are already shaking, so please don’t say anything to make me rethink this!!”

“Human, allow me to encourage you. The city of Manchester is said to get its name from a term meaning ‘breast-shaped hill’.”

He jumped from the female knight’s horse to the top of a Royal Family carriage. The airtime was minimal, but he still thought his heart would stop. He was not a magician who could react to any situation. If he made one wrong step and fell to the road, his whole body would be shredded as if by a giant grater.

“Argh, I can’t stand this! I can’t turn my weapon against carriages bearing the mark of the Royal Family!!”

“You collect the two on the suitcases!!”

The magicians riding the variously-sized suitcases waved to say they did not need the female knight’s help. The suitcases gradually slowed down, so the two women vanished into the distance behind them. But Kamijou did not have time to watch it all and faced forward once he was certain they were safe.

He was standing atop one of the carriage roofs that seemed linked together in a long row.

And he was directly facing the Golden leader.

“It would seem you think this puts us on equal footing,” said Mathers.

He had not noticed himself, but it meant a lot that he was speaking to an ordinary high school boy just as he had to the legendary Aleister Crowley.

He grabbed the fire wand and tapped the carriage roof.

“The science side? Academy City? I can deal with you by crushing just one carriage...no, just one horse. You will share the fate of the collapsed carriage while I can run along the asphalt just fine.”

“Is that so?”

“Your Imagine Breaker cannot protect you from everything. Try it if you like, but I can destroy the roof below your feet long before you can cover the short distance between us and swing your fist. You will not make it.”

“Is that all you’ve got, Mathers?” spat out Kamijou. He did not hesitate to respond. “I can tell there’s nothing to you. Settling the score with Aleister? A battle a century in the making? Don’t make me laugh. You can look at the world around you and see how far we’ve come since the Battle of Blythe Road and yet that’s all you can talk about!? It doesn’t matter that you’re not the real Mathers. Black Cat Witch Mina Mathers was a richer person than you. She could accept the present world and enjoy herself!!”

“ ... ”

Mathers may not have understood everything the boy said in Japanese.

But the Golden leader’s eyes narrowed slightly at the names he mentioned: Aleister and Mina.

That had to have been a decisive fork in the path forward, but Kamijou could not quite tell how.

Mathers’s response was short.

“If you wish to lecture me, wait until you have won.”

Kamijou had more to say once Othinus whispered a translation from his shoulder.

“Is that how you see it? Well, I’m not fighting for the #1 spot on the winners’ podium. This doesn’t have to be a competition between science and magic and I don’t have to compare my strength to yours.”

But Kamijou pointed his right hand in a different direction altogether.

He put his other hand on his hip and finished his thought.

“I’m not fighting alone.”

It was unclear if the Golden leader really understood his Japanese, but the boy’s gestures and expressions must have been enough to get the gist of it.

For the first time, Mathers grabbed the brim of his witch’s hat and let his attention shift to something other than his target. Arthur Edward Waite, the Lady of the Masquerade Ball, and the other Golden magicians likely thought of that silver girl.

But there was no one there.

Only the grassy field flying by at 180km/h. The night breeze smelled saltier now, so they may have been near the ocean.

“Ah!?”

John William Brodie-Innes, who wore a black judge’s robe, and Robert William Felkin, who wore a black cloak and a pure white suit, crashed into each other while looking to the side.

And after they lost their balance and fell, Alex mercilessly trampled them.

That magic cabal performed large ceremonies like a stage play, but their coordination had been broken.

The female knight seemed as surprised as anyone.

Her eyes were wide and her mouth formed a small triangle after unintentionally crushing two Golden magicians.

“Okay, Felkin is out! Someone else take over as Praemonstrator! You, the weakling with nothing to do! Yes, you, the one who looked over when I said weakling! No, you can’t get out of it by looking away now!! Don’t let the 7=4 position scare you! We’ll only treat you like a temple chief, so just do it!!”

“Show a little concern for Brodie-Innes too, Annie.”

The Golden magicians were clearly out of sync as they slid along the road like it was ice. And as they weaved back and forth and traded positions, they finally stabilized themselves once more.

Of course, just because something would kill a normal human did not mean it could fully destroy an original grimoire. Still, a couple of them had been successfully removed from the battle for the time being.

And Kamijou’s real target was Mathers.

The man only had to be distracted by his subordinates’ screw up.

If the boy could run up to the man, Imagine Breaker could reach him!!

“You might not care since you can *pull it off* so easily, Mathers, but you need to keep in mind just how abnormal a place 180km/h is!!”

There was an opening.

Kamijou was unlikely to get a better one.

But Mathers immediately spoke without even turning the boy’s way.

“Hot and dry.”

Part 15

Meanwhile.

“Hmm?”

After the translucent demon named Qlipah Puzzle 545 passed through the temporary birth canal created by gathering the surrounding cushioning, packaging, and cardboard boxes, she tilted her head.

She was taking a leisurely journey in the back of a semi-truck.

The truck appeared to be loaded with electric guitars, amps, large speakers, and other musical equipment.

Academy City's #1, Accelerator, had snuck into the closed back of the truck, which had to weigh more than ten tons, and then sat with his back against the wall. This truck's driver was either good at judging the risks or just plain hasty because it had fled London as soon as the threat of the Crowley's Hazards faded, but there was no way it would catch up to the Royal Family carriages or Mathers's group.

Qlipah Puzzle 545 flipped upside down with a weightless motion and flapped her wings meaninglessly as she spoke.

“Might I be rude enough to ask if you plan to help out?”

“I don't. Why should I risk my life for that shitty board chairman?”

“Nee hee hee! Right!? Right!?”

That girl, whose short height and large breasts gave her imbalanced proportions, matched her eye level to his while upside down and she spoke with a voice as sweet as candy and laughed with the grating voice of an ill-natured old woman. Listening to her was like listening to a record when the needle kept skipping.

But.

When she flipped right side up again, her thick tail bent like an S and touched the floor and she crossed her legs like she was seated in an invisible throne. It almost looked like she was lifting the #1's skinny jaw with her toes.

“Yet here you are on a truck to Scotland, even if it won’t arrive in time. And you’re charging your battery using the fuel cells for an outdoor concert.”

“ ... ”

“Nee, nee hee hee. Should I not have mentioned that? Should I have turned a blind eye? Hee hee. I’ve – hee hee hee-learned my lesson, so – hee – please stop! Hee hee hee hee! Not the bottom of my foot! Hee hee hee! Please stop! Hee hee! Ah, if you grab – hee hee hee hee – my ankle, I can’t – nee hee hee hee hee – get away!! Hee hee hee!! I won’t, I won’t do it again! Hee hee hee hee!!!???”

She was laughing even more than usual because Accelerator started tickling the bottom of her bare foot with a blank expression. That monster was always learning, so he knew there were ways of humiliating people that did not involve pain or suffering.

He kept his hand around her slender ankle, so Qliphah Puzzle 545 futilely flailed around like a balloon in a windstorm. Eventually, Accelerator gave an annoyed sigh while still seated with his back against the wall.

“The battle has transformed into a highway car chase, so we have to stop Mathers before they reach Scotland. But so what? There’re plenty of people on our side, so not all of us need to chase after the immediate target. The Royal Family? Will protecting them really bring this to an end? Without any loose ends?”

“Nya ha! Nee hee hee hee hee hee hee!! I-I can’t breathe! My diaphragm is breaking! Hee, hee, hoo! And this positioning – nee, nee hee – lets you look right up my skirt, doesn’t it?”

“

“Eek! Okay, I’ll take this seriously! I’m a demon, but I’ll go to bed at 9, get up at 6, eat three meals a day, cut back on fat, salt, and carbs, always exercise after

meals, and crash into you with a piece of toast in my mouth every morning! I promise I will, so please not between the toes! That's getting a little kinky! Ha ha hee ha heeee, buhee, nya ha ha ha ha ha, nee hee hee, tremble, tremble, bleh!!!???"

There seemed to be some pig-like noises mixed in with her laughter and her body started bugging out and shifting toward nausea at the end, but the #1 showed no mercy.

"The others can deal with the real-time chase. I'll use this time to stay in hiding, save my strength, and charge my battery. This is all a waste of time if they win the battle but are too tired to do anything afterwards, so we can't look at this as the end. It's more like the traffic cone at the turn back point."

"The others can deal with the real-time chase. I'll use this time to stay in hiding, save my strength, and charge my battery. This is all a waste of time if they win the battle but are too tired to do anything afterwards, so we can't look at this as the end. It's more like the traffic cone at the turn back point. ...There, see!! I was listening to the whoooole thing!!"

"Tch."

"Eh? Wait, you're really going to stop? That's honestly a little disappointing. What do I do now? My body wants more."

The #1 was starting to catch on. Qliphah Puzzle 545's tentacle-like tail was swishing back and forth unhappily and her lips were pouting. That demon was more than willing to sacrifice herself if it would make a mockery of the world and create an inappropriate mood.

"We need to keep our options open." Accelerator continued calmly while still seated. "If things go the way Aleister expects, we can go with that. But if they don't, I'll have some insurance ready. I'll use what they call a time-delayed attack, so being a little late is actually perfect."

"Nee hee hee. Yeah, it's *Aleister* at the center of it all, so it would be best to assume following her instructions won't turn out well for you. I mean, imagine if there was a charismatic leader insisting they have a vision of the future in a thousand years' time so you should join their evil organization to fight for heaven on earth, but it turns out their wrists are actually covered in scars,

they're suicidal, and they actually want to hasten the apocalypse? Would you really leap at the chance to follow their grand vision?"

He nearly agreed, but then the translucent demon stopped moving.

She seemed to have realized something.

"What is it?"

"Well, um... Your plan sounds just fantastic, but doesn't that mean we're going to have a lot of time on our hands in the more immediate future?"

"Qliphah Puzzle 545, I'm going to get some rest while my battery charges, so you stand watch until that's done."

"Whoa, hold on! Surely there's something I can use to kill the time! I'm gonna be hella bored in here. Now I see why Coronzon rebelled against that old contract. At least let me watch some videos! Isn't that what the modern marvel of the smartphone is for!?"

That was not Accelerator's problem, so he rested his chin on a raised knee while still seated with his back against the truck wall.

"Wow, I knew you were like arrogance incarnate, but I didn't know you had the miraculous skill to sleep without even a chair."

The imbalanced girl grumbled for a bit longer, but then she tilted her head.

There was no response.

She blinked a few times.

"Nee hee, nee hee hee. Wait, did you really fall asleep like this? I mean, what if someone attacked? The first hit would kill you before you could wake up and hit the switch on your choker. And what makes you so sure I'm not gonna betray you?"

She tried swishing her thick tail right in front of him, but he still did not react in any way.

Now she started to feel worried.

"H-hey, you can quit pretending to sleep now."

She had to accept it.

The #1 really was unconscious. He was focusing on recovering before the upcoming battle. He may have simply chosen the lesser of two evils between the options available to him, but he really had done it instead of just saying he would.

He had left Qlipah Puzzle 545 in charge here.

“...”

She plopped down next to him, but her contractor still did not wake up. That imbalanced girl held her knees between her arms, pouted her lips, and finally rested her small head on the #1's shoulder.

And she said just one thing.

“Hmph.”

She decided against simply going to sleep.

Part 16

Flames roared across the seemingly-connected roofs of the carriages.

Mathers did not hold back.

Even when his opponent was an amateur kid who could not hope to call himself a magician.

That thick mass of light and heat formed a thick and solid wall as it pushed toward Kamijou Touma.

[illegible]

Everyone already knew what his trump card was.

His right fist, Imagine Breaker, was his only real option.

Seeing him break right through the Golden leader's magic was enough for Annie Horniman to gasp.

He took another step forward.

He had to get within punching range of Mathers.

However.

Just as he broke through and blew away the wall of fire, he heard a series of dry sounds.

“You may have broken the hot and dry, but the hot and wet and cold and wet are joined with it. There are no pure elements at the surface of the four worlds, but the isolated cold and dry will use its great influence to disturb the world’s harmony. Earth born of fire, use your great fusion to reinforce your meaning and strike the destroyer of the elements!!”

There were four elements.

In the largescale ceremonial magic used by the Golden cabal, you could not

exclude any of those four even if you only wished to use the one.

In a technical sense, there were no pure elements in this world.

For example, fire always contained some trace amounts of water, wind, and earth.

Trying to remove that margin of error would be the same as forcibly removing electrons or protons from stable atoms or molecules.

“Westcott, Lady of the Masquerade Ball, and the rest. Look after yourselves. Do not get caught in this and die.”

So destroying the magic was not the end of it.

Mathers had set his magic up under the assumption it would be destroyed.

The great destructive power that followed was an unstable element.

A horrifying white beam of light blasted forward from Mathers’s hand.

A hit from this would be fatal.

And Kamijou had already swung his right fist with all his might.

He could not dodge this attack.

He only survived because the carriage he stood on shook hard to the side. The white beam passed right by his head and left a tingling pain on his nearly-scorched cheek. This was no coincidence. The coachman holding the reins had moved the carriage at just the right time.

But that action gathered Mathers’s sadistic attention.

He tapped the heel of his leather shoe on the roof and spoke.

“I see.”

Kamijou had to take a gamble.

“Slam on the brakes!!!!!!”

When the boy shouted, Mathers grew cautious of something. Yet nothing happened. Of course it did not. None of those British people were going to understand something yelled in Japanese. And when someone shifted their body weight in anticipation of a coming shock, they would only throw

themselves off balance if nothing actually happened.

This plan would not have worked had the coachman understood Japanese.

But Kamijou's gamble had paid off.

It was only for a moment, but Mathers's center of gravity shifted slightly out of place. This method used his own body weight against him, like a form of aikido. His witch's cloak and scarf fluttered from the movement. Kamijou could not waste the time he had bought himself, so he rushed sharply toward the man.

He had to land a punch before the person who had saved his life was killed.

An odd sound reached his eardrums. It was very different from the previously smooth sounds of the runners. Yes, Mathers was not the only one here. Israel Regardie and Netta Fornario. Annie Horniman and William Wynn Westcott. The Lady of the Masquerade Ball and Frederick Gardner. The Golden magicians running alongside the carriages were finally taking aim at Kamijou Touma.

No.

Mathers spoke coldly from below his witch's hat.

"Attack the both of us. Knock over the carriage and he will die."

"How insane are you, Mathers!?"

The magicians took action on the right side of the carriages. Their magic was demonstrated through group movement, much like a stage play. They used chess pieces modeled after Egyptian deities, a silver cross discolored a pitch black, white and black clubs, a scroll of old parchment, a cloak that flapped on its own, and illusionary fire that flickered like heat haze. So many magical symbols filled with light as each and every one of them prepared to blow away the entire row of carriages.

But just then...

"Not so fast, traitors!!"

The female knight roared from horseback while moving at the same speed.

The Golden magicians were not the only ones here. That woman drew the

steel sword at her hip, and...

“Respond to my vibration, General Use Series 25. ...S T T A T L O J!! (Shatter this threat as the light of judgment!!)”

With the low buzz of a neon light powering on, the sword’s outlines transformed with the grip unchanged. It became a giant spear made of bluish-white phosphorescence. Its use could not have been more obvious. She intended to use Alex’s powerful legs to smash them with both weight and speed.

Mathers did not even bother looking in her direction.

The only one of the Golden magicians to react was Frederick Leigh Gardner who wore the thick, long-sleeved shirt and comfortable pants of old-fashioned tennis apparel. He was probably more interested in protecting the Lady of the Masquerade Ball than Mathers. He clearly altered the formation as he swung around a lamp. The illusionary fire surrounding it grew and changed shape. It formed a giant symbol made up of a crescent moon, a circle, and a cross. Kamijou had no idea what it meant, but the female knight shouted as she made her charge.

“The Cup of Stolistes!? No, not quite!”

“Thou art the entire tree except Keter. Thou art the pillar of Mercury. Aim for the head and eliminate all wicked thoughts. Offer victory unto my lady!!”

The female knight did not know exactly how it worked.

But just as there was a rule saying the magic Aleister had created would not work against Aleister, the Golden magicians who had helped create the very foundation were beyond powerful. Just as the symbol shattered and a light flashed, her eyes dilated unnaturally. At the same time, her giant blue spear shattered and disappeared into nothingness.

What would happen if you charged a ferocious beast after losing your weapon?

The female knight did not need to be told that.

“I never thought I could stand up to you. No matter what fancy words I use to

describe myself, my skill was not enough to keep up with even the Divine Mixtures.”

Yes. She had yet to lose the will to fight.

“But when the United Kingdom and the Royal Family are in danger, did you really think a knight would back down just because her blade cannot reach the enemy!?”

Beyond the shattering light and past that lost illusion, she held something in her hand.

It was a perfectly ordinary briefcase-sized crossbow made of synthetic fibers and reinforced rubber. It contained no magical symbols whatsoever.

She fired it with a sound very different from a gun using gunpowder. If anything, it was more like a daikon radish being forcefully sliced through with an icepick. Of course, this would not be enough to defeat a Golden magician. But it was enough for him to tense up slightly. The complete lack of magic power in the weapon may have made him suspect it had magical properties that were concealed in some way.

They were already close together, so the female knight used his moment of tension to kick the belly of her horse and pass by the man.

And she embraced the horse’s thick neck to whisper in its ear.

“Alex.”

The next noise sounded even more brutal than a shotgun blast.

At first, Kamijou Touma had no idea what had happened. That military horse with powerful muscles covering every part of its body had used its hind legs to kick Frederick Leigh Gardner.

“!”

“Annie, alter the formation. Gardner is out, so you take over as Stolistes!!”

“Wait, Westcott. I’m already holding Jachin and Boaz!”

“The black pillar should be enough. And if you won’t do it, the role has to go to the Lady of the Masquerade Ball who has been itching to get her hands on it

for a while now. I think she was trying to surreptitiously take it from Gardner.”

“She always has to stand in the spotlight, doesn’t she!? Okay, fine, I’ll do it! We’re all in this stage play together, so if you want to show off by rearranging the symbols and adlibbing, you’ll have to follow through on your own. Got that!?”

It did not matter if their magic was hijacked or negated.

That was the same strategy Mathers had used against Imagine Breaker. So they would not complain even if the magician in the old-fashioned tennis apparel was taken out of the fight by brute force.

“One down.”

Regardless, the female knight calmly began a count.

“I can see why Second Princess Carissa chose this horse. He follows my instructions better than I could have hoped. I am honored I could hold your reins.”

The horse whinnied happily.

These magicians had brushed off Aleister’s handmade superweapons, so this would not be enough to kill them. But by tossing them out of this 180km/h world, they would be left far behind. It would take some time for that man to catch up and rejoin the battle.

On top of the carriages, Kamijou groaned at what he had seen.

“Y-you’re kidding, right? That’s what happened to me???”

“You idiot! Stay focused on the more immediate problem, human!!”

Yes.

Mathers stood atop the seemingly-connected roofs of the carriages with his witch’s cloak and scarf flapping behind him. As long as he remained on that roof, any interference with his mobility did not matter. This was no time to get distracted by an unexpected success.

Mathers and Aleister may have been similar in how they did not place too much weight on any one victory or loss. But while Aleister always assumed loss

and failure, Mathers always assumed victory, so he was not foolish enough to lose focus over a single win. That was why he would thoroughly analyze any losses or failures to reveal what had tripped him up. And if it was something he could use, he would immediately convert it into his own power.

Thus, the Golden leader would never overlook that moment.

“Cold and dry, then hot and wet.”

When Kamijou heard those words, he held his right hand up before even turning his head.

But the initial scattershot of small stones was accelerated even further by a gust of wind behind it. That threw off the boy’s rhythm. The attack hit before he could get his right hand up. He may have been able to stop it *if it had had that speed to begin with*, but the secondary acceleration had messed with his timing.

It was not quite the same as being stabbed with a knife.

Dull pain exploded across his entire upper body as hard and dull objects were forcibly pushed into him.

“Gah.”

He lost his balance and fell from the carriage.

The deadly asphalt was rushing by at 180km/h below and the female knight could not catch him on the horse because she had charged at the Golden magicians.

And.

And.

And.

Part 17

An explosive roar rattled the cores of everyone there.

This was a rocket engine.

The powerful thrust threatened to lift the mass of steel from the ground as it shot right past the Royal Family carriages.

“I wish we hadn’t gotten lost on the way here, but we finally found you!”

It was the A.A.A.

That mass of weapons had transformed into a colossal motorcycle and Mikoto shouted while holding the handlebars.

“Yet again, I have to ask you what you’ve gotten yourself involved in!!”

Just when the carriages had come into view up ahead, she had seen a sign for Heysham. They were almost at the Lake District and Scotland was just past that. The salty scent of the sea was so strong because Heysham contained a port for reaching the Isle of Man and Ireland. They were near the Irish Sea. Since railroads and highways would generally avoid the mountains whenever possible, the roads tended to run through the fields and along the coast.

And.

Mikoto had just slid the motorcycle directly below the spiky-haired boy as he fell from one of the carriages. That required incredible power and incredibly precise control. Even accounting for the hovering support legs, it felt nothing like swinging around a five-ton mass at 180km/h. It felt as light as moving a wireless mouse in a café.

Kamijou Touma fell onto the motorcycle.

But instead of Misaka Mikoto who was focused on controlling the handlebars, he fell toward Shokuhou Misaki who was clinging to Mikoto’s back as she tried

to bear with the vibration.

The blonde girl blinked her starry eyes.

“Oh, a gift from heaven.”

“What!?”

But coincidence or not, once she had caught happiness in her arms, the Queen of Tokiwadai Middle School was not about to let go.

“Heh, heh heh heh. Ha ha ha ha ha!”

“Wait, quit taking advantage of the fact that I can’t let go of the handlebars!”

“Nwa ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! Poor Misaka-san!! Just focus on your chauffeur job while Kamijou-san and I have some fun in the back seat of our motorcycle limousine! Is this what you call karma!? You’re finally getting your comeuppance for tormenting me over this raincoat! Now, Kamijou-san, are you okay? Are you injured? If anything hurts, I can rub it nice and gently for you.”

“Oops, I hit a rock.”

“Wahyah!!!???”

Just as the girl had started to get used to the rocket engine’s vibration, it thrust sharply up from below and her spine stiffened.

As for Kamijou Touma, he had fallen between Mikoto in the front and Shokuhou in the back and his soul was trying to escape from his mouth. His back was pressed against Mikoto’s back and his front was pressed against Shokuhou’s front. He would normally have found this to be the most wonderful kind of sandwich, but he was a little preoccupied since he had assumed falling from the carriage meant death. In all seriousness, his heart had nearly stopped from the shock.

“(Ah ha ha. Eh heh heh. I’m finally being rewarded for putting up with this entire ordeal. I know he’ll forget all about me almost immediately, but that just means I have to make my move right away. Time for some flirting. Hee hee hee. Yes, time to flirt my heart out☆)”

“Pipe down, you bitch in heat. Get your hands off my understander. It’s pissing me off.”

There was a dull sound of impact followed by a shriek from Shokuhou Misaki.

When she held a hand to her nose and looked up, she saw a fifteen-centimeter girl standing proudly on the boy's shoulder.

"Eh? What's with this doll? Was she made with Academy City tech???"

"You should call me a god."

"(They made a small doll of me like this, but this one's programming certainly is interesting. Has he awoken to the enjoyment ability of being talked down to? Oh, dear. My, my. *If that's true, then what reason do I have to hold back?*)"

And finally, Kamijou Touma recovered from what had felt like a blow to the heart.

"Ah!? Where am I? What's happening? Why is there a sweet-smelling carnivorous girl licking her lips in front of me???"

"Shokuhou, what in the world are you doing behind me!? How impure are you!?"

"~☆△♂♀××⚭ * ~ Whatever you're accusing me of, it isn't true!!!!!!"

The queen's domineering side withdrew and Shokuhou Misaki instead blushed bright red, looked away from the spiky-haired boy, and had something of a coughing fit. That had been a serious error in judgment. Something had come over her. That was not at all how a pure maiden should be acting.

"Anyway, Misaka!!"

"Yes, it sounds like you're a little busy back there! I'm guessing you don't have time to fill me in the details, huh!?"

"Hey, does it not bother you that our butts are kind of rubbing and bumping together?"

The ultra-large motorcycle swerved in an S-shape and nearly flipped over above the asphalt.

With her entire face bright red, Misaka Mikoto glared back at him through the side mirror and began crackling with electricity.

"Well, aren't you observant."

“Hold on, whoa. I’m not sure how to classify this new feeling of electricity zapping me right in the ass!”

Yes, he could not stop the electric current since Imagine Breaker was trapped between him and the blonde girl. And even if it was necessary, it would not have been appropriate to grope that little butt to stop the zapping.

Anyway.

“It might be hard to tell, but there are two sides here!! One is the bodyguards for the British Royal Family and the other is a group of magicians known as the Golden cabal! I’m trying to help protect the carriages and the biggest threat is that guy on the roof: Mathers!!”

“Eh? Ehh!? How am I supposed to tell them apart when they all look like old-fashioned British people!? Are they color coded, is one side wearing IR reflective tape, or are there ID signals!?”

“The ones that are winning are the Golden cabal. The ones that are losing are the Royal Family.”

That simplified matters.

In fact, it oversimplified things to the point of that some might mistake it for disrespect or an insult on the country. Had this boy already forgotten the welcome party he had received at the Tower of London?

“I see, I see.”

Kamijou heard the disconcerting sound of metal fitting together with metal. He soon noticed that some metal tubes much too thick to be mufflers were moving like they were alive.

Yes.

Whatever form it had taken, the A.A.A. was a weapon.

“Then I’ll start by attacking that Mathers guy and judge the rest by how they react.”

“Oh, Kamijou-san, you should really cover your ears.”

They started with a single shot.

This was the Liquid Proof Railgun.

This was the fearsome attack that had torn holes in the Windowless Building which was built to withstand a direct hit from a nuclear weapon, but they unleashed it upon Mathers as their very first attack.

The shockwave burst out a moment later and the surrounding air raged about as a violent wind. The intense heat turned some of the atmospheric components to plasma, so light flashed intermittently through the air and made it briefly impossible to see. The process was entirely different, but it felt a lot like seeing stars after taking a blow to the head.

In a way, this blast was stronger than the #1.

It was unclear if it had annihilated Mathers, but Kamijou needed to get back up on the carriage roof during this “fluctuation”.

“Hyah!”

He placed his hands on the shoulders of the blonde girl who *it seemed* was named Shokuhou and carefully stood up on the motorcycle. The girl could do nothing but frantically wave her hands in front her face while he used her as a handhold.

“(Wah, wah, wah! Too close, too close, too close! Your hips, your hips, your hips!?)”

“?”

“Cough, cough! Ahem!!”

Shokuhou Misaki could only reflect on her actions.

And then...

“Do you even know what kind of person Mathers is when you only just now joined the fight? Did you shoot that thing at him without knowing what was going on!? Isn’t your trigger finger a little loose!?”

“Shut up! I know you aren’t the kind of person to lie about this stuff!” Mikoto childishly pouted her lips while using the hovering support legs to keep the motorcycle’s balance as they moving up alongside the carriage. “More importantly, if you’re gonna jump over, just do it already. And turn on your

phone. I'll use its signal to prevent any of the weapons from firing on your location."

"?"

"That attack was enough to check everyone's reactions. The Golden...cabal, was it? I don't really know who they are, but I manually tagged everyone I need to target. So once you're up there, we'll start hunting down the enemies on the road! It looks a lot like they're coordinating their movements, so reducing their numbers might accomplish something!!"

On Kamijou's shoulder, Othinus used both arms to form a large circle.

She seemed to approve of Mikoto's plan.

"This is a ton of help, but we need to have a talk once all this is over!!"

At any rate, she really was Academy City's #3. He felt as stable as if he had a lifeline around his waist. This was not just a simple issue of strength. He had not felt like this when working with Accelerator or Aleister. It kind of reminded him of how his understander, Magic God Othinus, felt a lot more reliable sitting on his shoulder than when she was a full-powered god who could destroy the entire world.

Hoodie bikini and rabbit-ear antennae Fran had told him to keep his phone off, but he was already working alongside the Royal Family. There was no point in hiding any longer.

And he had a bad feeling.

Even if he felt stable here, this was not over. Even if he did have a lifeline, the risk of death did not just disappear. He moved from the colossal motorcycle to the carriage wall and climbed up to the roof. The carriage had used its speed to shake free of the dangerous wind and plasma storm, so the view was washed clean.

He was there.

That great presence stood there.

The boy could tell the stability and lifeline he had sensed was slipping from his fingers. A single mistake would mean death. No, this tension was so great that it

felt like a miracle he was not dead already.

The smell of the sea breeze was fading.

He was not too knowledgeable of British geography, so he could not picture where they were on the map. Still, he could tell they had passed one stage on their journey and were drawing ever closer to Scotland.

And that meant his opponent could not waste any time either.

Not even the attack that had brought down Board Chairman Aleister's strongest fortress had been enough to destroy that man.

Mathers's thick cloak and scarf flapped behind him as he stood in the same spot as before. He would not be taken out like Edward Berridge had been. Seeing that, Kamijou fiercely bared his teeth and spoke his mind.

"You damn monster."

"At this point, I will take that as a compliment, you philistine."

The four Symbolic Weapons crashed together around the Golden leader.

He glanced back at the mass of weapons swerving side to side next to the carriage.

"Another fruit of Aleister's labors? So what is this? Did you hope you could affect me by disturbing the pack of wolves accompanying me? You really have inherited Crowley's arrogance as he passed down his knowledge. I can easily handle this with a solo performance. You can curse Aleister as you die. But first, I will knock you down a peg."

This man would not go easy on a frightened opponent.

The lifeline had already come loose.

So Kamijou forcibly reminded himself that staying calm was the most important part of a tightrope walk.

He looked up just a bit and spoke.

"I think you're the one who's losing his cool, Mathers. You were so immovable back when we started, so why are your eyes darting all over the place now? Found more that worries you?"

“I will *not* say it again.”

“Is getting angry at every little thing a common trait in magical geniuses? Cause you’re a lot like Aleister there.”

A blade of highly pressurized water shot out in a straight line.

The endlessly long blade swept from right to left.

Kamijou responded by forcibly swinging his upper body down. If he blocked it with Imagine Breaker, it would only be a repeat of last time. This attack was made to be destroyed. However, that also meant *Mathers expected this magic to be destroyed by Imagine Breaker*. By shaking off his fear and not using his right hand, he could catch the man off guard. He could unbalance him, just like letting go of the rope just before your opponent pulled in a game of tug-of-war!!

“!!!!!!”

Kamijou understood the logic of it, but not using the card he had to play was even worse for his heart than he imagined. When he heard something pass by overhead, he seriously felt like his heart had shrunk. Tears welled up in his eyes. The worst attack in this case was not one aimed for his head or heart. It was one aimed for his navel. That was his center of gravity. It was simplest to think of it in relation to each of the body’s joints, but unlike the face or legs, that area was the hardest to move around and thus the easiest to hit. If he jumped, the attack would hit his legs. If he ducked, it would hit his face. Targeting that general area was the most frightening thing when the attack was powerful enough to tear his body apart no matter where it hit him.

But he managed to dodge it.

He had made a change of plans as soon as he noticed this was at hip height.

Ducking was not going to cut it.

Instead, he ran forward and threw himself to the carriage roof to slide below the deadly attack. Once the blast of water had passed him by, he got up by pressing both hands and his right foot against the roof. He took a crouch start and then started running.

He had gambled his life on that choice.

But Mathers did not seem particularly bothered that Kamijou had not used Imagine Breaker. The Symbolic Weapons crashed together with more dry sounds.

And the man spoke in a steady, low voice.

“Hot and dry.”

Kamijou was right in front of him now, so he clenched his right fist tight. Using that could lead to that beam of light from before, but this was close range. Mathers’s attacks were generally projectiles. He would avoid carelessly using any spells that might hit him as well. Because he was the strongest, he could not take his own magic lightly.

And Mathers pushed up his witch’s hat and raised his head.

But he was not focused on Kamijou Touma right in front of him. His eyes were focused on the distant night sky.

“There you are, Aleister.”

Part 18

So.

If Aleister Crowley had been the first to realize what was happening and had flown off with her micro rocket engines ahead of Kamijou and Accelerator, what had she been doing all this time?

(The ultra-low temperature bondage liquid, the planetary core vibration magma cannon, or the deadly magnetosphere compression EM wave cannon? No. My hundred years of work is not enough to deliver a finishing blow against Mathers.)

Everything always backfired for her.

Even when she was certain her preparations were flawless, she would find herself in a strange dead end.

(So I need to build up my foundation from an even deeper place. Which means I need to overcome my own issues.)

She had found the answer.

A voice spoke at an altitude of one thousand meters where no one could interfere.

This time, it would take some time to prepare.

“Every man and every woman is a star.”

“The secrets erased from the later grimoires are passed down by word of mouth so their influence can still be felt in this world. Watch Babalon, holy mother of wisdom who rides Master Therion. The golden cup in her hand shall be full of the blood sacrifice. Isis and Kali. The light of the female deities is red. I shall break down the door sealed by the foolish old ways and release the laws

of the father in heaven and mother earth that should have taken root in this planet since the beginning.”

“There is no absolute good or evil in this world, all is relative, and nothing is unneeded. The forces of creation are greater than those of destruction. Thus, nothing can be stopped by sending power against power. Scarlet impact, pierce this masculinity which has forgotten even the natural life-giving act!!”

She did not throw anything down at her enemy.

The silver girl shut off the engines and she herself became a red light as she shot down toward the earth.

Part 19

Now that Aleister was no longer hiding where she was, Mathers had of course noticed her.

“Cold and wet, then hot and wet.”

He started with a wall of water and powerful wind.

Once again, he was diverting the incoming attack. Kamijou’s fist destroyed the magic, but the resistance threw off his aim. Kamijou and Mathers switched places like they were moving through the opposite sides of an invisible revolving door. And the four Symbolic Weapons continued their dance in that short time.

“Cold and wet, then cold and dry.”

A great quantity of dried peas scattered at Mathers’s feet before growing discolored and sending out black threads to connect together.

Babalon, also known as the Whore of Babylon, was an important symbol, but she was still one who stood opposite of the angels. She was far removed from the common examples like Satan or Lucifer, but that categorization left an opening for interference and intervention.

“The blessing of the earth becomes decay. Come forth and spread, lord of demons born from the decay of all that is.”

In modern times, this lord of demons was seen as holding the #2 spot, but a sixteenth century demon researcher had placed that demon derived from Baal as the ruler of hell while Satan was only seen as something like the opposition leader.

If that powerful name could be linked to the target, the contamination would reach the target no matter who they were.

“Thy name is Belzébut. Purge the insolent ones who stand before me.”

The sinister red light descended from above like a satellite weapon, but it bent unnaturally partway down. It was like breaking a sword. Unable to continue targeting the carriages on the highway, it crashed into a field.

The result was plain as day.

Science and other tricks could be used to buy time, but they were not enough to supply a decisive blow. And they had already seen what happened when Mathers and Aleister directly clashed using pure magic.

“Ale-...”

Kamijou Touma’s voice was swept away by the powerful wind.

If that was the silver girl’s final trump card, only torment and death awaited her now.

Mathers had to have thought the boy’s voice was trembling.

But it was not.

The spiky-haired high school boy had more to say.

“Argh~ Don’t worry about that and just do it!! No matter how powerful the side effects, I’ll suppress them with my right hand!!”

“?”

“Weren’t you going to settle this and go save your daughter!? Weren’t you going to take back your life!? A pervert like you doesn’t need to suddenly start worrying about everyone else now! Just do it!!!!!!”

Mathers’s eyes widened somewhat behind his witch’s hat.

Something seemed off, but it was not something in the sky. That colossal motorcycle continued to hold the Golden magicians in check while driving alongside the carriages. It was a collection of next-generation weapons.

But what was it originally meant to do? The answer was written on the rear weapon joint.

A.A.A.

Anti Art Attachment.

“I see.”

It was meant to be piloted by Kihara Noukan. While hiding in the Windowless Building, Aleister had used that device to send her own magic elsewhere in order to kill the Magic Gods.

“That really is a fruit of your labors, isn’t it!?”

Intercepting the attack from the sky had created a slight opening.

Mathers could do nothing in that time, but he still had a savage smile on his lips.

The colossal motorcycle fired an identical red light from one of its cannons and it tore into Mathers’s side.

Part 20

Of course, Aleister Crowley had not expected the A.A.A. to be there. Misaka Mikoto and Shokuhou Misaki's actions were outside her control.

But.

What was it she had done with her patched-together plan? No matter how badly she failed and no matter how much she tasted the bitter flavor of defeat, that human had made adjustment after adjustment to follow that complex network of detours back to the original path. *If it was there, why wouldn't she use it?* Aleister Crowley made use of that foundational idea she had used to sidestep all kinds of morals and approach the truth.

"Gh."

But she was in no position to gloat.

She had still been shot down by Mathers and crashed in a field. She could not ignore that damage. She had so many injuries that she could not distinguish one pain from another. Her entire body just felt generally overheated.

And it was not over yet.

That was obvious from the angle of that second shot she had forced out of the A.A.A. It had hit Mathers from the side, so he would have been blasted far into the distance. In other words, toward Aleister's location. That would not be a problem if the attack had killed him (which required filling the space around him with such immense energy that it disturbed and cut off the supply of magical power from the ley lines, causing him to crumble like Edward Berridge had), but she doubted the Golden leader would have allowed that to happen so easily.

He was here.

And if he could move under his own power, he would work to settle things

with Aleister Crowley.

Aleister vs. Mathers.

A clash between the two of them had been unavoidable from the start.

(Where am I?)

It was a perfectly normal field.

For some reason, a palm rod was stabbed into the ground at one corner of it.

That appeared to be a point on the ley line.

“So I’m in Scotland,” muttered Aleister when she saw the sign in this field off the highway.

They had long since passed the Lake District.

“This will change nothing, Mathers. Nothing you do here will prevent them from revealing your secret.”

She should only have been speaking to herself.

There should not have been anyone else here.

“Don’t be so sure. I only need to kill you and continue pursuit. The Scottish border was not the finish line. I can chase them down and end this before they reach Edinburgh Castle.”

A deep voice seemed to whisper in her ear.

And she doubted it was a hallucination born of nostalgia.

“Coronzon controls me? That only applies to the tarot. Different grimoire formats and codes can convey the same information. As a translator, I should know.”

(An astral projection? No, is this a more primitive echo? He hopes to locate me when I carelessly react.) Kamijou Touma, Accelerator, and the Golden magicians such as Arthur Edward Waite and Israel Regardie. A great many people were headed to Edinburgh Castle in the center of Scotland while most of them fought over the Royal Family carriages. The entire United Kingdom had been destabilized, but if the anonymization field erasing the true Mathers’s remains from the world was broken by the Royal Family’s arrival at that castle,

everything else would fall into place. Whether Aleister or Mathers won here, someone else would build the relay device to command Great Demon Coronzon to stop.

Or to put it another way, Aleister and Mathers were removed from the main struggle.

That meant no help was coming for either of them.

They would have to settle this one-on-one.

Their showdown would be a competitive performance.

“...”

That silver girl was constantly plagued by failure and defeat, but even she was seriously working towards victory here. Mostly because it gave her chills to even consider being helplessly tormented and killed by Mathers of all people. What did she need to win here? Relying on her century of science was not enough, so she had to truly draw on *everything* Aleister Crowley had built up. What was in Scotland? It could be the manor by Loch Ness or the national museum. Not even Babalon, who had been erased from the later grimoires, had been enough to kill that true monster. What did she need to finish him off?

While considering that and looking around, Aleister frowned just a bit.

There was a small church there.

But the feeling in the silver girl's chest was not born of the hatred of Christianity she had harbored since her youth.

History had recorded that Aleister Crowley and Rose Kelly had been married at a church in Scotland.

“Ha.”

Aleister tried to stand up by clinging to the sign pole, but she lost her balance and slid back down onto her butt.

“Ha ha...ha. I can't believe it. I come all this way...and this is what I find in front of me?”

Only now did a soft electric light come on in front of the building. The home

security system may have triggered it. It looked the same, but the details had changed over the past century.

Aleister Crowley might die here today.

That was not a problem in and of itself. Her carefully-prepared plan had failed from the moment she left the Windowless Building in Academy City.

Resurrecting the baby Lilith and defeating Coronzon to rescue Lola Stuart were all outside of anything she had expected. It had all passed the point of correction. Even if she survived this, doom would reach her before long. So she did not care. As long as she could save Lilith and Lola. She had shown the way. Even if she died, as long as someone else would acquire the real Mathers's corpse and used it to relay a control signal to Coronzon, her wish would come true. That was how she had viewed her situation.

But this was different.

This alone was different.

The danger of the situation had not reached this church. Probably because the center of the conflict had been in London. The double doors at the front of church stood wide open. Someone hesitantly peeked out and quickly ran out upon seeing the bloody silver girl. Strangely, the young woman wore a Roman Catholic nun's habit.

"Oh, my! Are you okay!?"

Aleister recognized her.

The artificial demon had manipulated this woman into reaching for a strange weapon.

She had no connection to Aleister Crowley or Rose Kelly. Everyone who had been present for that wedding would be in their graves. This woman may have simply happened across the church and had nothing to do with managing it.

"How did you get hurt so badly? And I didn't hear a car, so where did you come from?"

"It is...dangerous here."

Aleister's injuries did not matter.

She had zoned out for a different reason, so she moved her lips now.

“You should escape from here, young lady. You should not take part in the fighting any longer.”

“I don’t want to hear that from such a little girl. Now come here. Hurry! Oh, honestly. I can’t believe such a young girl is so badly injured. And this one...oh, I did that, didn’t I? Well, I need to stop the bleeding regardless!”

The nun practically forced Aleister to lean on her shoulder.

Rose had become an alcoholic after being blamed for their baby’s death. But Aleister remembered how she had been a lot like this back when she had been kind.

“I have spat on all this.”

Barely able to breath, Aleister had to put this in a way anyone could understand.

“I cannot enter the house of God. I long since lost that right. Surely you know my name. You should let go of me and disinfect your entire body.”

“No one can really and truly say what you have done, but there is no such thing as a last chance. Everyone strays as they try to live their life correctly. And even if you have given up on yourself, god has not given up on you. So hurry.”

“...”

“If you feel any pain at all in your heart, then now is the time. So hurry inside!!”

She practically dragged the silver girl inside.

Aleister could not stop herself from entering the chapel, but there was one thing she had to do first.

“Why are you turning off the light?”

“It is for your sake.”

This nun was not aware of the imminent danger.

She had Aleister sit down in a pew and practically embraced the silver girl as she began treating her wounds by moonlight with the first aid kit she brought

out.

“This will sting.”

“Is this supposed to be a piet , young lady? You seem a little young to be the Virgin Mary.”

“I see. It is your mouth that gets you into trouble, isn’t it? And I imagine it all comes from your own lack of confidence.”

“What?”

“You could call it unrecognized talent if you like. Most likely, you have considerable skill, but the people around you do not recognize it.”

The words kept coming with the speed of someone who had long listened to people’s worries and given them advice in the confessional.

This nun must have never hesitated to walk the exact opposite path of Aleister Crowley.

Stumbling once would not be enough to break her.

“So do you want to level the playing field to bring everything back to where it belongs? You cannot relax until you have compared every part of yourself to others and find yourself superior. That is where the insults and sarcasm come from. The deadly sin of pride also encompasses vanity. You struggle to be someone important and that is why you try to look the part. But if you want confidence in yourself, it would be faster if you worked to comprehend yourself and worked to convey that to others. Simply put, I recommend putting in the effort to love others.”

“I already...did that.”

The silver girl gave a self-deprecating smile while quietly watching the nun wrap bandages around the disinfected areas.

“I did it as best as I could...and *this* is where it got me.”

(The guidance of fate took the life of an innocent baby and my wife descended into alcoholism because it was too much to bear. If I hadn’t tried to love them, that never would have happened. If I had just lived alone. But I still had enough sense not to impulsively castrate myself then and there.) Mathers

would arrive soon.

And now this nun was linked with Aleister.

The logic of it no longer mattered. If Mathers ignored the corpse in Edinburgh Castle and came here instead, it meant settling things with Aleister Crowley came first and foremost. In the worst case, he would be doing it out of little more than personal amusement.

The fate of the world and the future of the United Kingdom was not riding on this battle.

It was a showdown between a teacher and a student.

“Sister.”

What could she use?

What was here?

Still seated on the pew, the bandaged silver girl looked to the lectern. During the wedding, she had been one of the stars walking down the center aisle, but the place looked different when seated here. One look at the back wall was enough to know who the real star was here.

There was a large cross there.

“This is *that* church, isn’t it?”

“Which church do you mean? The size or opulence of the house of God does not matter.”

The nun looked puzzled, so Aleister decided there was no point in asking further questions. She seemed to have researched Crowley to an extent, but she must have only been borrowing this place. It was unclear who had maintained the church, but Aleister was fortunate it still remained in this form. If the building had been preserved and thoroughly cleaned on a daily basis, a certain item would still be there.

Aleister Crowley probably knew this church better than anyone. She even remembered the location of the lost change in the gap between the wall and the pipe organ.

If she only shattered and cast aside her principles and beliefs.

If she only had the courage to reach out and grab what lay before her, she would have a weapon to fight the monster named Mathers.

Aleister spoke while viewing the moonlight colored by the stained glass and with her bandaged naked body exposed.

“I have one question.”

“Ask as many as you like. Listening to the worries of lost lambs is part of my job.”

“Do you think sins can ever be forgiven?”

“People spend their entire lives searching for the answer to that question. And you must not think you will find the answer if you seek it. Forgiveness can only be given by god and his heart is truly unfathomable. All you can do is live your daily life the best you can, be on your best behavior, and wait for the time of judgment.”

That was not some comforting ideal.

Her words contained the slight pain of an irremovable thorn.

Aleister had seen what the madness of war had driven her to do.

And it may have been because she was imperfect that the words she worked so hard to get out reached the silver girl’s heart.

“Probably so,” said the silver girl as if giving up on something.

There was no easy salvation in this world.

The more you sought it, the more it slipped from your fingers.

In the children’s story of the Three Little Pigs, the oldest brother built a house of straw, the middle brother built one of sticks, and the youngest brother built one of bricks. The youngest brother was ultimately proven correct when the big bad wolf arrived. But what if the wolf had never arrived due to some small coincidence? That would of course be a happier ending for them all, but then the youngest brother would have been mercilessly mocked by the other two. Even though the oldest and middle brother had been wrong.

The silver girl had felt like that for her entire life.

Whenever she had heard of someone else's happiness, she had rejected it and insisted there had to be a catch. That had ultimately pushed everyone else away. It was like expecting to get the day off of school because of a big storm only for it to be nice and sunny the next day. You would feel so very guilty for being disappointed that a major disaster had not occurred. That was how she had felt while crawling through the depths of the earth.

There was no salvation. It simply did not exist.

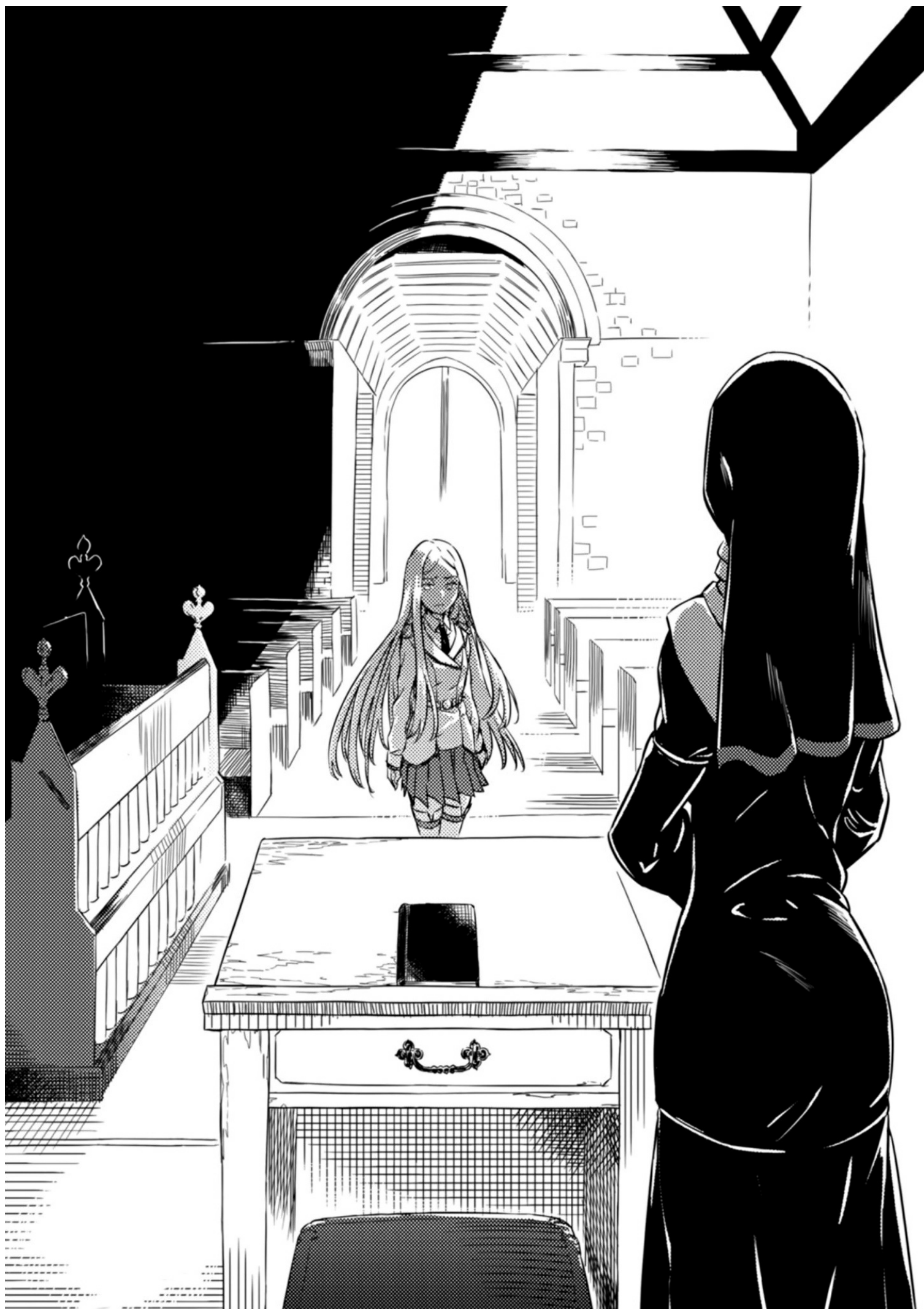
If it did, why was she having so much trouble finding it?

But.

But, but, but.

She could not help but conclude that it was right there. Aleister knew that all too well after spending so long viewing her plan as the one who created misfortune and tragedy. She had seen when her predictions unexpectedly fell apart, failed, and crumbled away. She had seen when complete coincidences had aligned in such a way to leave innocent smiles on the faces of people who should have lost their lives.

It could not be true.



It could not, yet there it was.

There was no denying it any longer.

“That’s why...”

It had never been given to her.

But that had to be the identity of the thing which had long been spoken of as a miracle.

“That’s why I hate that piece of shit you call God.”

With those words and a self-deprecating smile, the silver girl shook free of something.

She put back on her clothes, donned her cape and hat, and took a deep breath. She returned to her foundation as a magician.

If it was there, why wouldn’t she use it?

“I’ll be borrowing this.”

“Hm? That belongs to everyone. Anyone who feels a need for it may take it, so if it will help guide you.”

Aleister Crowley picked something up in order to once more...no, to *finally* settle things with the leader of the Golden cabal.

She picked up a perfectly ordinary bible.

Between the Lines 3

“Anna Sprengel.”

Once, the Golden...had nearly lost everything.

...disaster very different from the...of Blythe Road.

“Are you here...crush my cabal?”

No.

Technically, Anna Sprengel had never once... She...only a name...Westcott’s letters. And just when Mathers thought...the real one, she had slipped...his fingers.

The real one had never...yet that fictional...became the Achilles’ heel of the Golden... To Mathers, it...like a curse.

So...was not Anna Sprengel.

Mathers spoke...incredible hatred in his voice.

She was technically...

“Madame Horos. You despicable fraud of a... You puny soul not fit...the title of magician.”

Ksh.

Ksshhh.

Kssssssssssssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!

History had proven that both Belzébuth and Typhon-Set were powerless against that exceptionally greedy woman.

That unbearable rage may have been very different from the anger he had directed at William Wynn Westcott or Aleister Crowley.

Chapter 4: I'm No Messiah – Battle_of_Scotland.

Part 1

Something flapped in the wind.

It was a thick and tattered cloak. A few thick paper cards flowed out like embers or flower petals.

“Westcott, the Lady of the Masquerade Ball,” muttered a voice.

His voice vanished into the empty air and no one responded.

“Waite, Felkin, Brodie-Innes.”

Yet Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers was not defeated.

In fact, he felt fulfilled by the lack of response. No unnecessary fighters would get in his way. The others could concentrate on the carriages or whatever else. The Golden cabal used group magic ceremonies resembling stage plays, but that could weigh him down at times.

From here on, it would be one-on-one.

It would be one solo performance against another.

Nothing else was possible.

He was confident his enemy was alone as well.

“ ... ”

The Golden leader understood the meaning of this church too small to be

listed on any map.

A silver girl threw open the double doors and stepped out.

That was Aleister Crowley.

She was probably the only magician from the Golden cabal's founding period who had overcome the past century under her own power instead of relying on tarot cards.

A surprise attack was not necessary at this point.

Nor did they need to raise a loud war cry or use gigantic superweapons.

The silver girl appeared to have received some first aid, but Mathers was as familiar with military matters as magic and he could tell there was something off about how she carried her weight and positioned the trunk of her body. She was clearly covering for the pain of her wounds.

Aleister would not allow any random victims from the usage of magic, so she kept it all contained inside her own body.

She could not have relied on healing magic. She might save someone else's life, but she could not save her own life. Because if she stayed true to her principles, the healing magic would heal her body, but then the side effects and reactions would damage her body. That destructive cycle would tear her body apart like she had thrown herself into a giant blender.

Thus, all of the supernatural that the silver girl had desperately scraped together would be converted into attacks. Mathers could sense how she lived her life like a thoroughly sharpened spear. This formidable foe prioritized her principles over her own life.

The two magicians simply faced each other.

The first to speak was Aleister.

"I have one question first."

"What is it?"

"You abandoned the corpse hidden in Edinburgh Castle. Why? Why are you so intent on settling things with me? Wouldn't it be better to protect that trump

card and then change your medium just like the black cat witch did?”

The silver girl paused for a beat, but then she mercilessly tore into him.

“You’re twisted. You aren’t the original Mathers, so your connection to me doesn’t really exist.”

“To be honest, none of it really mattered. Not the fate of the world and not what happens to me.”

He readily admitted it.

The man who had gone by the name of Mathers did not try to dodge the issue.

“When you get down to it, we are no more than defenses built by Great Demon Coronzon for her purposes. But whether that is all I will ever be is my decision, not hers. I am the same as the magician who once built the Golden cabal. Tell me not to go and I want to open the door and go. Tell me to stop and I want to do it.”

It was wrong to say he loathed Aleister Crowley.

It was also not quite accurate to say he found Coronzon to be a nuisance.

If someone placed those two’s heads on the table in front of him, he would likely brush them aside without batting an eye. He had no interest in an easily-won result.

In other words...

“Once you start on something, you can’t stop. This is that hopelessly childish side of your personality, isn’t it?”

“I am working on it. And perhaps there is nothing I actually want to do here. When I translate something into another form, I may just be working to subdue that which continues to elude me. And no matter what form this resistance takes, I will be the one to decide how it ends. I too consider the remains in Scotland to be an interesting toy and your fixation on them is meaningless to me.”

“Do you remember the name of the woman you loved?”

“Mina Mathers. What of it?”

The words came too easily.

He showed no hesitation or pause when it came to love or romance. And he had never commented on the absence of his wife from the Golden magicians prepared by Coronzon.

That name was no more than a piece of data within the “background” provided to him.

With that in mind, Aleister slowly shook her head. This was her hated enemy. Her hatred had been so strong that killing him any number of times would never have been enough. Not even the Battle of Blythe Road had satisfied her.

And yet she had seen something different when she saw Mathers with that woman. She may have learned more from him than from any of the magic tricks he had taught her. She had wanted a marriage like that. She had wanted to build a family. She had envied him.

Aleister could feel the sadness inside herself.

It saddened her so much to see Mathers like this.

And that was why the silver girl did not hesitate.

“Those four hidden letters form a holy square which cannot be uttered by human mouths. The Y-H-V-H which indicate God himself are hopelessly inadequate and the puny human body cannot fathom his true essence.”

“Oh?” said Mathers with a slight movement of his eyebrows.

He understood Aleister in his own way.

Something opened within her black cape.

The silver girl held an old bible.

She did not look away with sour grapes, she did not engross herself in magical research as a form of protest, and she did not wail until her throat threatened to tear because *God had looked elsewhere*.

Her childhood had ended.

“But people seek salvation. They seek a salvation they can understand with

their knowledge. So let us construct a bridge by adding a Sh. The five holy letters are Y-H-Sh-V-H. That is, the Son of God. By combining the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, humanity can see salvation for themselves!!”

A white light flashed.

The silver girl was purified. White wings formed a halo above her head, a sweet aroma scattered around her like lily flowers, and she was enveloped by a purifying light.

However.

This was *the* Aleister Crowley.

The more someone knew about that human, the harder they would find this to believe. There was simply no way that *the* Aleister Crowley would hold the Christian scriptures and preach the power of the trinity. This human had worked past that. So she could overcome her own inferiority complex and mental scars and so she could protect the small building behind her. So she could prevent the destruction of the *formless things* residing within that church.

Mathers’s expression wavered slightly behind his witch’s hat.

That man had laughed.

“What did you see, Aleister?”

“The same thing I saw at the Battle of Blythe Road. Something I doubt you have ever seen.”

“Then I have no choice but to respond.”

The Golden leader could not have expected this.

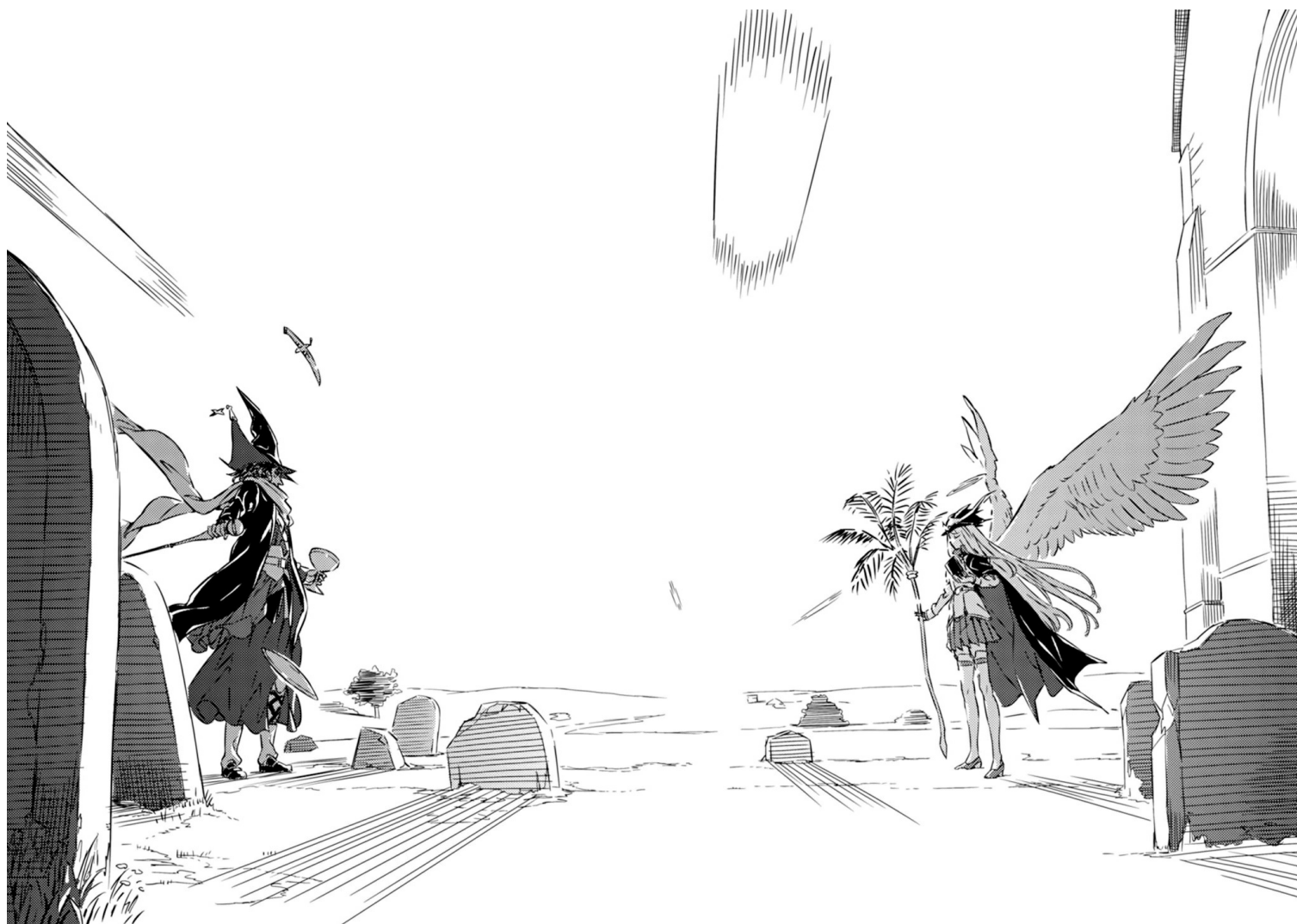
But he was quick to react once the problem facing him became clear. Mathers really was a genius. He was, after all, the man who had worked with Westcott and the others to construct the initial Golden cabal before Aleister joined.

He came up with this off the top of his head.

“INRI are the four letters carved into the original cross. Their vibration fills even the dead with life. Complete my incomplete body. Purify my flesh with those holy letters!!”

He actually chose the same system.

Mathers also used a word referring to the Christian Son of God. He gave them equal conditions as if choosing an identical weapon. He seemed to be saying he would beat his enemy down with nothing but pure skill. Mathers really was Mathers. No magician was better than him in the field of text.



The darkness was swept away.

It was white against white.

But that was not just due to Aleister and Mathers's magic.

The night would end soon.

The light of the dawn burned slowly up from the eastern horizon to wipe away the darkness in the sky.

In other words, the time had come for the world to be dyed golden.

Part 2

Everything picked up speed once it got started.

Aleister and Mathers faced each other in the dawn-colored world.

There was no cue.

They had spoken a fair amount about why they were fighting, but that may not have mattered much.

This was because Aleister was Aleister and because Mathers was Mathers.

They had learned together, spoken together, and laughed together, but they had also loathed each other, opposed each other, and tried to kill each other. They had possessed exceptional talent even for Golden magicians. Their paths of study had been incomprehensible not just to normal people but to the other Golden magicians as well, so they had been branded eccentrics. It may have been like how rounding off the corners of a diamond required striking it against another diamond of the same strength.

Thus, this had begun naturally, smoothly, and as a matter of course.

Two roaring gusts of wind spiraled around at the same time.

First, Aleister charged in at close range and Mathers struck back.

The silver girl held a twisted silver staff that became a palm tree and gained a weight far greater than its volume or density suggested. When Mathers blocked it with his fire wand and wind dagger, an unsettling crater appeared at his feet.

Aleister traced her fingers along the outside of the bible she held.

She linked herself to the many legends derived from that book.

“St. Christopher repented after serving the devil in search of the greatest master. The son weighed as much as the entire world, so that saint – when he could not bear the weight and nearly drowned – saw his true lord, the Son of

God, in the staff he carried!!”

“The son was blessed with oil.”

But Mathers was not crushed by the weight of the world.

His four Symbolic Weapons came apart.

“It is not unusual to see angels before him. Thus, the archangels of fire, water, wind, and earth will naturally descend to guard him!!”

One wielded a sword, one carried lily flowers, one protected an adventurer, and one guarded the gates of hell.

All of a sudden, there were four of those winged higher beings.

Each of them carried enough firepower to obliterate this unclean world. The pressure from Gabriel alone had caused the entire world to audibly strain to the breaking point when driven down from heaven by Angel Fall.

But Aleister simply twirled around.

The bottom of the palm staff scraped against the ground, orange sparks scattered, and it set ablaze.

This too was not found in the bible.

In fact, she called on the name of an angel who had been criticized for not being mentioned in the bible.

“Uriel is the excommunicated angel, a demon who fell to the depths of the earth. Uriel is one of the seven who was driven from their throne of light for humanity’s convenience and is not found in the stories of God. The canon is absolute. In the name of Pope Zachary, I shall smash your angel worship and thus your harmony with those four!!”

First, a protective circle appeared around the silver girl.

Then great waves of explosive flames burst out across the 180 degrees in front of her.

The fires of hell erupted from the depths of the earth and rejected the protector of their gate. Just like a red light covering up red writing. Once one collapsed, the others were dragged down with it. The four angels dissolved like

a false image and the massive flames continued on to burn Mathers.

“The son pointed his finger. The evil ones belonged in the pigs. And so the legion of evil spirits left the man’s body and entered the pigs, preserving the peace of this world.”

They were twisted.

And distorted.

All of the flames Aleister had created gathered at a single point, took the shape of a lightbulb-like incandescent bronze pig, and then charged at the silver girl who had supposedly created them.

As soon as he stabbed it from above with his wand, it burst and spewed flames in every direction.

The pure firepower may have rivaled a nuclear weapon.

But.

But.

Aleister’s words exploded out while she remained centered on the bible but felt comfortable enough to reach for support beyond that. Magicians were powerful once they had a boulder on which to anchor their lifeline.

“All is a creation of God, even the forces which have parted ways with him and lurk in the depths of the earth. My fingertips reach the Qliphoth! The appropriate knowledge drawn from there is neither good nor evil!!”

Instead of burning down the world in an instant, the flames burst and the embers transformed into sweet-smelling white flower petals.

No damage was done.

There was not a scratch on the small building behind Aleister.

Mathers smiled thinly.

He did not fall back. He did not scramble for a new solution. In fact, he took a step forward despite knowing the danger. And in response, the silver girl’s hand reached inside her black cape. She put away the bible and let go of her staff to free both her hands.

“You use that well.”

“So do you. You did well familiarizing your body with it.”

There were only a few centimeters between the two nemeses now.

The silver girl and the Golden leader glared at each other.

A moment later, their clenched fists mercilessly struck each other.

It was like a fierce rush in boxing.

This fight to the death was a contradictory mix of a short-term showdown and a test of endurance.

After coming this far, there was no need to fight in an elegant or clever way. Nor could they. They did not even consider dodging and they tried to secure their own safety and snatch at victory by being the first to knock out their opponent with a high-speed barrage. They were focused solely on wearing down their opponent like that.

Aleister caught Mathers’s fist on her forehead and her fist tore into his ribs from the side. Mathers stopped Aleister’s fist with a raised knee and swung his fist down for a harsh blow to the top of her head.

What did the heaven-razing hellfire matter?

Why should they care about the earth-cleansing deluge?

Those were no more than trivial effects. This was a true battle to tear down your opponent’s life. If anyone had witnessed this scene, the mere sight of it may have stolen their soul away.

The far-too-disturbing sound of human muscle and bone crushing human flesh and blood continued on and on.

Wearing down a diamond required dust from an equally hard diamond. Aleister and Mathers worked to punch, crush, and kill each other, but that had the effect of removing the excess their souls and exposing the cores of their beings.

“I envied you, Mathers. Not that it means much to this version of you.”

“ ... ”

“I was born into a privileged life. I had plenty of money in childhood and I lived off of my father’s inheritance to enjoy my adulthood. Yet there was not a single understander around me!! Mathers, I still find it hard to believe. What led you to create the Golden cabal? What was it I lacked!? Why was it you all those talented people gathered around!?”

“The man known as Mathers envied you as well.”

That response seemed to act as a dividing line.

Even as he accurately struck the silver girl in the temple.

There was even a look of enjoyment on that monster’s face.

“I lived in a corner of London. I was always struggling with money. I made my wife Mina suffer. Why was it always you? You effortlessly received more money than you knew what to do with, you had everything you could want, and yet you never accomplished anything with it all!!”

She did not waver.

In fact, Aleister threw her own fist straight up into the fist striking her temple. She targeted the wrist. Attacking a weak point was not the only way of preventing further attacks.

“Did you care about your family, Mathers?”

“I had no complaints with Mina.”

A dull sound rang out.

But breaking a bone or two would change nothing at this point. Technically speaking, the Mathers here was not even human.

“Cold and dry,” said a solemn voice.

A stone spike appeared out of thin air and he forced it into his wrist to take the place of his bone.

Aleister was no longer focused on cheap tricks like that.

“Then why couldn’t you abandon your obsession with Scotland? Was the home you shared with your wife not enough!?”

“What about you? You were tormented, you raged at the unfairness of it all,

and you were stricken with powerlessness, so why did you never seek some 'nonexistent place'!?"

Fist flew toward fist, passed by each other, and struck the opposite face.

The sound of impact burst out.

They had not planned this. The ground gave way before their legs did. With nothing for their feet to grip, Aleister and Mathers slid just a bit apart.

And while they continued to glare at each other, the silver girl spat out some more words.

"If you had learned the warmth of a family, understood its value, and anchored your soul there, your heart would never have wavered so much. You would have forgotten all about your fixation on Scotland and you never would have been plagued by paranoid delusions that your position in the cabal was threatened. You never would have summoned Coronzon and targeted me and my family."

"You wouldn't understand."

"Even after I struggled against fate and emerged victorious at the Battle of Blythe Road, I never did acquire something eternal. So I can never forgive you, no matter what. That life should have been beloved above all to you, so how could you trample on her and put her second, Matherrrrrrrrrrrs!?"

"Money, intelligence, looks, athletics, and magical skill. You had everything except love, so you can never understand what it is like to be so pathetically destitute." Mathers gave a wobbly wave of his forcibly-attached right hand, but he showed no sign of pain. "Mina had artistic talent. She belonged to an elite family known to the public world for producing a philosopher. Her friend Annie had money and Westcott had popularity. ...But what did I have? If I hadn't claimed to be a Scottish noble and used my magical skill as evidence, I could only have curled up in a ball like the miserable wretch I was!!"

What was it that kind nun had said?

A lack of self-confidence led to insults and hostility toward others.

"You had to compare yourself to your own wife, Mathers?"

“I wanted to create a place for myself. I had to when everyone was trying to just give me one. Mina Mathers. I wanted to become someone sturdy enough to support that woman!! ...*But that is not the real issue.*”

A wet sound followed.

It came from the silver girl’s right palm. No, it came from more than just there. Blood also sprayed from her left hand, right foot, and left foot. The bleeding kept Aleister from moving. Meanwhile, Mathers’s only injury was the one to his right wrist. Plus, he was an indestructible grimoire of tarot, so any apparent damage could be ignored.

Not even supernatural magic allowed one to ignore the limits of their physical body. Also, Aleister had excelled in the pantomime-like Spiritual Tripping. Grabbing a bible and drawing on its wisdom did not change the basic idea of contacting the supernatural. They were working to understand the great tree of magic by grafting the branch of the cross onto it.

This was a magical battle.

It could not have been more obvious what would happen if one of them lost the ability to freely wield magic.

A clear change came over the battle.

They had been wearing each other down to the limit, but they had come to a turning point.

Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

The person going by that name finished his talk in a frighteningly deep voice.

“All of that applies to the Mathers who suffered in that ordinary home a century ago. It has nothing to do with me here and now. Quit running around making a mess of things. I will be the one to kill Coronzon. She will rue the day she created a monster like me.”

He was truly an indestructible original grimoire.

But that did not mean the concept of death did not apply to him. Had he already forgotten about Edward Berridge? To transform the grimoire’s defenses such that they could behave like humans, a massive amount of energy had to be

constantly supplied from the ley lines running through the earth. By inundating space itself with just as much energy, the flow of power from the earth to the grimoire would be blocked and they would at least lose their human form and mind. In other words, Mathers would die.

However.

(Aleister does not have the time or range of movement for that.) Mathers was certain of that.

It did not matter how far the silver girl pushed herself or if she pathetically clung to him while gasping for breath.

Only those who remained focused on victory could overcome this cold choice.

(Aleister can no longer move her limbs, so she cannot use such a major technique. If I crush her here, I can continue on. I need no reason to do it. I simply must defeat her here!!) However.

The silver girl named Aleister Crowley shook her head.

She gave him a pitying look and said something that was not at all begging for her life.

"I misunderstood you."

"What?"

"There is something you cannot buy with any sum of money, something you cannot solve even with the greatest intellect, and something you cannot capture by running around the mountains or dressing up in the nicest clothes. That thing is love. That is the great treasure I so longed for. But, Mathers, I see now that you did not hold that eternal light any more than I had. I was wrong to direct such maddening envy your way."

His personality had never been easy to control.

Even in the Golden cabal, only Westcott and Mina had managed to get along with him. Westcott had invited him to help create the magic cabal, but the two had ultimately split apart and led two rival factions.

The only one who had remained with him to the very end was his wife, Mina Mathers.

The love she had shown him was undoubtedly real.

But...

“Mathers, you never accepted her love. No, you *couldn't* accept it. It's so silly, but you couldn't accept it even as she stayed by your side and filled your world with such kindness. If you had only realized that, you would have found the greatest peace.”

“...”

“And this version of you? You have nothing. The Golden? The world's greatest magic cabal? *What value does that have?* Don't make me laugh, Mathers. Power is only a means to an end. Power without a goal is no different from an old piece of furniture sitting forgotten in a corner of the attic.”

That was Aleister Crowley's answer to the Golden cabal.

It was a judgment only the one who had destroyed it could give.

And.

And.

And.

One more red wound burst open on the silver girl's side. First her limbs and now the torso that contained so many organs. That seemed to confirm the trend. There was a decisive difference in damage between Aleister and Mathers.

And yet it was Mathers who frowned below his witch's hat.

He did not know where this was leading or what result it would have. Yes, no matter how trivial it seemed, there was now something on the field *that Mathers did not understand*.

“What is that, Aleister?”

“A wound.”

“I don't recognize it. I didn't give you that wound!!”

“It is Stigmata. These marks are the proof of a Saint. When their purified body synchronizes with the Son of God, they gain the same wounds he received

when crucified two thousand years ago.”

Wind whirled around the silver girl.

The number of wounds was not driving her closer to defeat.

They were a countdown to her ascension.

The two geniuses had both used spells based on the Son of God to build their bodies up to a higher level. So what had divided the two of them? Why did Aleister have these wounds while Mathers did not?

Yes, the Son of God did not use miracles in an emotionless mechanical fashion.

As proof, the legends did not work without a certain trigger.

The bloody girl explained.

“Magic power refers to the power refined from one’s life force. Magic refers the phenomena produced by that magic power. Therefore, all magic is supported by the original power born from the depths of life.”

These were likely words written in no grimoire.

After a century of study, she had surpassed even the original Golden cabal. And now Magician Aleister Crowley was enlightened to a single truth.

It was the most fundamental of all things.

But at times, something could only be conveyed when put to words.

“So magic is a system that gives physical form to the feelings you have for those that matter most. At times it heals and at times it harms. At times it draws them close and at times it pushes them away. All spells contain the true power that contains both happiness and fear as two sides of the same coin. Begone with you, emotionless and unfeeling one. The likes of you are not fit to use magic!!!!!!”

Part 3

The countdown was complete.

The sinner had ascended.

To reiterate, the number of apparent injuries was irrelevant.

Inundating that space with energy would obstruct the transfer of power from the ley lines to the grimoire. That would cause the temporary human form and mind to scatter and erase his existence as an individual.

So to someone who had tried to judge the progress of the battle by physical damage, the ending arrived quickly, suddenly, and without warning.

But to someone who was looking at the bigger picture by focusing on the total energy in the world, this result may have been the end of a dizzyingly long journey. Just like stacking up small stones to ultimately build a giant tower, that magical battle may have required incredible effort and precise balance.

Looking back, Magician Aleister Crowley had indeed been someone who took a larger viewpoint in order to prevent the recoil of her magic from hitting a complete stranger.

“ ... ”

Aleister had transformed into a mass of pure white light and Mathers could only smolder as he had no countermeasure for this.

So in that final moment, the Golden leader only stared at the approaching white light.

The Mathers here was an original grimoire created from tarot cards. The other Golden members were the same. That was why his goal had been to outdo Coronzon to free them all.

But had that really been the only method of saving them?

The Golden? The world's greatest magic cabal?

What value does that have?

Those wise words had come so readily.

And that human could only speak them because she had lived through that era and had voiced her objection during the Battle of Blythe Road.

"I see."

In truth, he may have wanted to free his soul with those two words.

He was known as the Golden leader, but he was a different person from the man who lived a century before.

And he said more with a definite smile.

"So this is the true destroyer of order: Aleister Crowley."

Part 4

That white light burst through even the atmosphere and scorched the darkness of outer space.

Even if it could not destroy the original grimoire itself, inundating the surrounding space with energy would cut off the power supply from the earth.

So at the very least, he could no longer maintain his human form.

Part 5

“ ...”

Large cat-like ears twitched in far-off Egypt.

A lady in mourning clothes raised her head while she followed the frog-faced doctor's instructions.

She was actually a grimoire created by Aleister Crowley and set free by Aiwass.

But at this moment, she spoke one clear word.

“Honey?”

Part 6

“ ...”

It was all over, but the silver girl did not relax.

A great mass of power threatened to rear its head. Aleister knew all too well what would happen when she relied on magic, no matter what her reasons were.

The recoil.

The magic used by humans applied pressure to the world and its phases, irregularly creating something like sparks. And that distortion of the world would eventually find its way to some unsuspecting person.

She could not allow it.

Aleister Crowley had started a war to put a stop to it.

So the silver girl smiled and spread her arms to accept it.

“Come, occult. After all this time, I have finally found victory.”

There was a flash of light.

And then the sound of coughed-up blood.

Part 7

Something could be heard coming apart and floating through the air.

“Kh.”

Everyone noticed that change.

The Royal Family carriages had already entered Scotland. They would arrive at Edinburgh Castle before long. But a single attack now could tear apart the group of carriages and drive them to destruction.

Yet the attackers stopped.

The first to gasp was William Wynn Westcott.

That Golden magician had quasi-immortality.

“What...is this?”

He looked down at his hands and was left behind by that world of 180km/h. He had unintentionally come to a stop. And for each one of them that was missing, their stage play magic would fail even more.

“I’m...coming apart? Impossible. My quasi-immortality should never fail unless someone found the parchment I hid elsewhere!!”

Once it began, it progressed quickly. The carriages looked now like specks up ahead, but countless tarot cards were scattering there as well. It looked like confetti, but it had to be the Lady of the Masquerade Ball and Israel Regardie who had been trying to get their spells working again. They had already come completely undone.

“It must be our time, Westcott.”

At some point, Annie Horniman had arrived by his side.

Her outlines were slowly unraveling as well.

That attack had likely only been meant for Mathers.

But original grimoires like them were essentially indestructible. Instead of destroying the tarot cards themselves, Aleister had inundated this space with a form of energy to prevent the grimoires from absorbing power from the ley lines and that caused their human form to break apart and vanish.

In other words, that one attack had also affected the Golden magicians arriving in Scotland.

“This is all our bodies were in the first place. I had always thought it wouldn’t last.”

“It doesn’t scare you?”

But Annie smiled and only gave this response: “If it was Mina suffering here with me, I probably would have tried to stop it even if I had to destroy the world to do it.”

Hurrying to rejoin the battle after crashing on the highway ended up being a bad idea.

John William Brodie-Innes in his black judge’s robe, Robert William Felkin in his contrasting black cloak and pure white suit, and Frederick Leigh Gardner in the thick long-sleeved shirt and comfortable pants of old-fashioned tennis apparel had moved off the highway and sat in a grassy field as they watched their own end arrive.

“So Master Mathers was defeated.”

They were not happy about this.

Experts or not, everyone feared death.

And on top of that...

“Gardner, you supported the Lady of the Masquerade Ball since you were part of The Sphere, right? But we’re talking about someone who could defeat Mathers of all people. Do you really want to challenge her head on?”

“Not a chance.”

The Lady of the Masquerade Ball's worshiper smiled softly while audibly coming apart into cards.

"We weren't even your targets and this is what happens? Crowley, I don't even want to imagine what a direct hit would be like. I'll take death here over seeing a monster like that up close."

However.

There was one person who could not see it that way.

"Hey..."

They were inside an ordinary four-wheel-drive vehicle.

They had been racing down the highway after falling so far behind. They were only just now entering Scotland, but that should have put them further from the danger.

Yet Dion Fortune looked down at her hands and then at the rest of her body. It looked like she was checking the mud on her clothes.

It sounded like scattering cards.

That sound was far too unnatural, ominous, and absurd here.

"Hey!"

The frilly dress girl smiled a bit at Hamazura Shiage's voice.

It was a troubled smile.

She gave no explanation for what was happening.

And.

And.

And.

It seemed perfectly natural.

It was like the world could not return to its proper state if it did not happen.

"Hey!!!???"

The girl crumbled and blew away.

Epilogue: I Can't Let It End Like This – Go_for_Broke!!

The sun had already risen and the sky was dyed blue.

It was a winter morning.

The Royal Family carriages had safely arrived at Edinburgh Castle.

There were apparently a few museums and memorial halls on the grounds, but the people who came out to greet the carriages were obviously not the ordinary staff. It was unclear how long these officials and knights had been waiting inside the castle, but this introduced a new problem for Kamijou Touma. He had joined this fight without a passport, so would they give him a warm welcome? He concluded they would not, so he quickly jumped down from the carriage roof and began sneaking away.

“So what exactly happened? I lost sight of the Golden group a while back.”

“(Well, there’s no good reason to tell him.)” Othinus sighed while crossing her legs on his shoulder. “But more importantly, you don’t need to bother with the United Kingdom’s formalities, do you? We aren’t using their welfare or public services, so circle around to the graveyard. We can actually secure Mathers’s corpse this time, human.”

“The Royal Family is part of the government, right?” asked Mikoto. “With everything they’ve done, I’m worried they’ll arrest us and be pretty mad.”

She opened the giant motorcycle’s throttle and turned the handlebars to approach. It was apparently hard to use those monstrous rocket engines to move around slowly. She might have rolled over without the hovering support legs.

“Okay. Wait, hey, where are you going!?”

“There’s no point in hiding it now, so come with me, Misaka! And that honey person too!!”

Right in the heart.

Did that boy realize his words just about stopped Misaka Mikoto’s heart?

“ ~”

She hung her head a bit, clenched her teeth, and realized no grand and significant words would come to mind when you really wanted them.

So she let her honest self out.

“Really, why couldn’t you just say that earlier!? Like way, waaaaaaaay earlier!!”

“And have you found some weird way to categorize me since your normal memory ability doesn’t work?”

The motorcycle changed shape with some clanking sounds and attached itself to Mikoto’s back. It looked like its several tons should have crushed her, but the mechanical support legs appeared to support its own weight without applying any pressure to her.

“What’s the layout of Edinburgh Castle?” asked Kamijou.

“You started running before you knew where you were going!?” shouted Mikoto.

“Sigh. That’s just how he is,” added the other girl.

“Sticky person, why are you acting like you know everything about me!?”

“(He’s categorizing me in an even weirder way than I thought! If I wasn’t in love, I would be really mad right now!!)”

When they circled around inside the castle walls instead of the stone building itself, they found a gloomy area. The castle graveyard was cleverly hidden by the walls and trees surrounding it.

They were finally there.

And this time it was the right place.

After stepping into that abode of the dead, they found a girl already there with her long silver hair blowing in the wind. She held a shovel she had found somewhere and she was already dragging out a coffin.

How far could this girl fly with nothing more than a broom?

“You’re late.”

“Aleister, what happened!? You look like you’re an inch from death!”

Mikoto and Shokuhou responded to that in surprise.

They were unaware of the legendary human named Aleister Crowley, so they only associated the name Aleister with Academy City’s board chairman.

“Ehh!? Wait, you mean the person inside the Windowless Building was a girl like us!?”

“(No, that can’t be. The person floating upside-down in there was a-...but, wait. This rejection ability? Is the structure inside exactly the same?)”

“Be quiet, Misaka. And that lewd person too.”

“Okay, that’s it! I really am going to be mad if you’re that lazy about labeling me!”

But Kamijou had more important things to worry about than that lewd person who smelled like sticky honey. He glanced over at Aleister and the coffin.

“Can you do it?”

“Yes. It is real this time. This is Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. I will use these remains to relay a stop command to Great Demon Coronzon. The work itself is quite simple. Kamijou Touma, you stay over there. I don’t want Imagine Breaker destroying this.”

She laid out several tools on top of the coffin lid.

A wand, a cup, a dagger, and a disc.

“Wait, I recognized those.”

“My personal rule was to always create my tools myself, but if I am willing to violate my own taboo, I can also use someone else’s consecrated tools. If it is there, why wouldn’t I use it? Although this is a heresy among heresies, so I do

not recommend it.”

Not even Kamijou could tell what each of them meant. Regardless, the silver girl moved the four tools on top of the coffin lid. It was reminiscent of the game in which you placed three paper cups upside down, put a die or coin in one of them, and then shuffled them around.

"It's been so long."

Finally, Aleister spoke while kneeling in front of the coffin.

She had stopped moving her hands.

“So very long.”

There was one person who would not accept that.

They were outside the atmosphere on a ballistic trajectory at an altitude of 3,500 kilometers.

"Indeed it has been long."

That twisted being floated there with two bat-like wings. She stared down at the northern end of Great Britain.

There was still time.

If you assumed it was over with Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers.

"It has been far too long,

Aleister

Her path clearly changed.

Great Demon Coronzon dropped toward Edinburgh Castle with the force of a meteor.

She fell.

She fell and pierced the surface.

If it did not burn up in the atmosphere, a human-sized mass was more than enough of a weapon. If it crashed into the ground like that, it could erase

something the size of Edinburgh Castle from the map.

Light and noise exploded out.

The air was compressed into a solid wall that scattered in every direction like a shockwave.

It was Mikoto's A.A.A. that stepped forward, not Kamijou's Imagine Breaker. Its giant wings spread out like steel shields and protected the flesh-and-blood humans.

And.

And.

And.

"Wha-?"

"Is it really that shocking, Coronzon?"

There were two voices.

One came from Aleister as he kneeled before the coffin as if in prayer. The other came from Great Demon Coronzon who had crashed down right next to the girl. She had only made it near him. For some reason, she had not managed a direct hit.

But that was not a failing on Coronzon's part.

It was a success on Aleister's part.

"You!!"

"Stop right there, demon."

That demon's pure power should have surpassed that of Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass, yet she came to a complete stop when the silver girl spoke those words.

She was just a few centimeters away.

But she could not simply jab her right hand's gathered fingers into the face beyond those few centimeters.

Aleister smiled.

That human had been plagued by constant failure, but after all this time, she

had finally grasped the core of it all.

"As expected, your connection to Mathers still exists."

"I won't...allow this."

“Then I command you through his corpse. 333, dispersion. Leave my second daughter, Lola. There is no place for an impure demon in the surface of the four worlds, so immediately return to the abyss!!”

“Separation and scattering are the natural process of decomposition. I will not allow you to reject them! I will not allow

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.....it!!!!!"

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Once it was over, it felt almost too easy.

It was as if the demon had never really existed in the first place. The girl with extremely long blonde hair wobbled and then collapsed forward. Aleister gently reached out her hands. Her bloody and muddy hands. She looked very different now, but she still held her daughter as a father.

“Welcome back.”

She wrapped her arms around her.

And as she recalled that definite warmth, the magician whispered into her ear.

“Welcome back, Lola.”

Nothing happened.

The silence had softened and only contained kindness.

And that may have been why.

In the RV parked by an oasis in distant Egypt, the baby sleeping in the crib gently opened her eyes.

She should not have been able to speak.

But Mina Mathers's sensitive cat-like ears picked up on a definite physical voice spoken through the toy trumpet.

“No, this is not over yet.”

The sound of a blade piercing flesh rang oddly loud.

“Wha-?”

Kamijou was even more confused than the stabbing victim.

It was a perfectly ordinary knife.

It was unclear where she had hid it, but Lola Stuart’s hand was soaked with red.

“Ah?”

Why had this happened?

Kamijou was so baffled he could not even voice his question.

Great Demon Coronzon should have left. This should have been Lola, the saved daughter.

But.

But.

But.

“Fa...ther?”

Soaked with her father’s blood, the girl slowly and silently tilted her head and whispered in an oddly monotone voice.

“I always hated you.”

“Oh, no.”

And back in London – specifically, in the British Museum’s repair room – Index spoke to herself with a stack of thick tomes on the reading desk in front of her.

“Oh, no!!”

“Wh-what is it? Was it as we feared?”

The hoodie bikini rabbit-ear antennae girl named Karasuma Fran sounded

shaken next to her.

Kamijou Touma, Othinus, Accelerator, Aleister, Hamazura Shiage, Takitsubo Rikou, Nephthys, Niang-Niang, Lessar, Birdway, the female knight, and more had been acting on their own free will to solve this problem.

Index and Fran had as well.

And not all of them had gone to Scotland.

They had thought it was odd.

“Lola Stuart is supposedly Aleister Crowley’s second daughter.”

“What about it?”

“But *we only have Coronzon’s word to go on there*. That demon obstructs the world’s and people’s bonds, but you expect her to just tell the truth like that? Not a chance.”

Index had a perfect memory she had used to memorize 103,000 grimoires. But at the same time, she could only memorize the things she had seen and heard with her own eyes and ears. If she had never seen or heard of a certain document, she had to find it herself.

“Lola Stuart first appears in the documents as the Anglican archbishop on 1909. Ever since, she has appeared at important turning points in history while never seeming to age.”

“What’s wrong with that? That is the same year that Aleister *thought* he summoned Coronzon.”

“Would his second daughter, Lola, really be fully grown by that time? His first daughter, Lilith, was only born in 1904.”

“...”

Fran had no response to that.

Index and Karasuma Fran had no way of knowing, but if Aleister or Accelerator had been here, they would have recognized this as the same method Qliphah Puzzle 545 used.

For better or for worse, history provided an air of legitimacy. They had been

fooled by a plausible-sounding story.

No one had thought to equate Aleister's daughter with the archbishop before this, so no one would have compared the numbers before.

The hoodie bikini girl's mouth flapped wordlessly and Index slapped a paper document.

"Then who is this?"

And so.

An arrow covered in fresh leaves was stabbed into the ground. The rustling of its thin branches and green leaves gathered into the harmonic sound of Index's voice.

Orsola Aquinas had stabbed the palm rod into the ground.

Karasuma Fran had brought back the communications spell.

No matter how small a connection it was, it all formed a single thread leading to Kamijou Touma.

"It's okay, Aleister."

There was nothing they could have done.

There may have been no saving her.

Even so, he could not let her die still thinking her daughter had always resented her and had stabbed her.

"And that's enough, Coronzon. Cut the act. Lola Stuart was never here. Aleister's second daughter was somewhere else entirely and lived a perfectly normal life without knowing about any of this. Inside and out, you were only a created demon!! The real Lola would never have done that!!!!!"

"Hee hee."

Flames burned wildly.

She had only needed to create a brief opening. Instead of Kamijou Touma or Aleister Crowley, Coronzon had burned Mathers's coffin with a pitch black fire.

Why had she not done so before? Had her contract with Mathers ended once she made that merciless attack on Aleister?

“Hee hee hee hee hee hee hee hee!! I killed him, I killed him! I – killed – him!! Now I can finally cut all ties with Mathers. I can say goodbye to that damned contract!! Ah ha ha! I had to wait so long to burn this coffin. Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

She stepped on the head of the silver girl who had collapsed with great regret and could not get back up.

She did not hesitate to do so.

“You wanted to save your daughter? Not happening! Lola Stuart? Who’s that? Did you really think you would have a chance to make amends!? Hee ha ha! You wanna know why she must have hated you!? Because you’d mistake a complete stranger for your own daughter!!”

“...”

“Not even the Morning Star and Lord of the Flies have their own physical body. And the idea that incubuses and succubusses do is only a theory born of religious debate. ...It’s me. Only the Great Demon Coronzon has obtained a physical body under her own power!! You don’t stand a chance against that, do you? You struggled constantly trying to give a body to your Holy Guardian Angel, but even that master plan of yours came crashing down the instant you heard the name Lola!”

Everything always backfired for that human.

If she had not been shaken and had continued calmly following her plan in the Windowless Building, she might have found a way to use Aiwass to defeat Coronzon.

But this was the story of Human Aleister’s life.

“But what to do now? I am finally free. After so many years of denial, I don’t want to waste my very bite on some hard and stale bread. Ha ha! I know. Yes, that’s perfect. I think I’ll go tear Lilith to pieces!! Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

Now that the true Mathers’s remains had been burned, Aleister had no way

of stopping her.

That was a fact ruled by cold logic.

But Kamijou Touma did not think it was over yet.

Coronzon had made a big deal about Aleister being dead and how she had killed the silver girl, but Kamijou was not going to be fooled this time. That demon would not answer truthfully when asked, so there was no way she would offer up information unbidden.

The silver girl was still squirming on the ground.

Even as her nemesis stepped on her head and trampled on her heart.

Her breathing was beyond shallow.

This wound would kill her at this rate. If nothing was done, she really might die.

But this would not be the end for Aleister.

Defeat was not enough to crush her!!

“Misaka, can you take care of her wound? I’ll do something about Coronzon, so use your power or whatever else it takes to overturn this ending!!”

“I’ll try, but I can’t make any promises. Shokuhou, you help too!!”

“Kamijou-san, what are you going to do?”

“Me?”

Kamijou Touma clenched his right fist so tight he thought he would break his own bones.

He could not bear to see the silver girl with her head under the demon’s foot.

Not for a second longer.

So that boy spoke to the demon who surpassed even Holy Guardian Angel Aiwass.

“I will smash that nonsensical illusion to pieces!!!!!!”

Accelerator shook slightly while curled up with his back against the wall in the enclosed back of a large truck. He slowly opened his eyes and raised a hand to his neck. The battery was fully charged. He could not see outside since there were no windows, but if the truck's speed had remained the same, they would still be in England.

And then he realized something.

"Gh, gh."

Something else was trembling in that dimly-lit space.

It was curled up in a corner of the enclosed back of the truck. Wherever they had originally been, scraps of torn English newspaper seemed to be crawling around.

The translucent demon was curled up even tighter than the defenseless #1. She had a lovely and sexy appearance that looked like the fusion of a human, a bat, and a mollusk, but she was also extremely imbalanced for a human. Qliphah Puzzle 545 wore her cheap dress made of English newspaper held together by duct tape.

"Ghhh. Ghhhhhhghghgh!! Ah, agh, ahh, ahh, gh, gbh, this may be the end for me. I was lucky we were moving so slow. Aleister's attack didn't affect me too weirdly, but overwriting my contact wasn't as easy as I hoped."

It came from inside.

The translucent demon's soft-looking outlines were throbbing irregularly from within. This was the conflict between contracts. It may have been like trying to fly a drone with more than one remote at the same time. It would normally crash and break apart.

"But fortunately...I was able to wait...until your preparations were complete."

She had kept it inside.

So she would not crash.

So she would not harm the person here with her.

"I left scratch marks – pant, pant – all over the walls and floor. It's the same idea as a phonograph. Trace your fingers along the bumps and indentations and

convert the data into a voice. That should be easy with your vector control. Coronzon is still trying something... Nee hee hee. I'm headed for hell already, so at least get a hit in on her for me."

"..."

How long had she been like this?

He had left her in charge while he slept.

And she had kept her promise while suppressing this the entire time. With the conflicting orders bleeding together, she might not have faithfully carried out Coronzon's instructions, but if she had taken action in that confused state, she might have removed Accelerator's head while he slept without any defenses.

So she had suppressed it. She had continued attempting to do what should have been impossible.

Relief.

That was the emotion in the translucent demon's eyes when she saw the #1 opening his eyes.

It may have been a miracle she lasted this long.

"I leave the rest with you," she said.

"Yeah, you don't have to worry about that."

His battery was fully charged.

Accelerator slowly stood up, narrowed his eyes, reached for his neck, and produced a clicking sound. He had flipped the switch. Still curled up on the floor, Qliphah Puzzle 545 looked up at that monster and slowly smiled even as she trembled. But this smile was different. It had to be the true expression she had never let Coronzon or Aleister Crowley see.

And.

And.

And.

There was a dry bursting sound.

She blinked her eyes.

The translucent demon girl forgot to breath.

Her heart *had not* come to a stop.

“Eh? Ah?”

She had simply seen Accelerator forcefully stomp on the truck’s floor. That was all. But something like a shockwave radiated from that point and, when it passed through Qliphah Puzzle 545’s body, the contract with Coronzon – the thing inside her that had been driving her to act – was mercilessly shredded She was freed from her bonds.

Did this mean she was free to do as she wished?

Could she really accept that the world had opened up before her?

“Really? Why do you look so shocked?”

“Um, umm, uh, why???”

“Was it called an original grimoire? Whatever it was, you can keep them from functioning by bringing the energy in the area to the saturation point to obstruct the transfer of power, right? The basic idea is the same as electrocuting someone by screwing with the transmission of their nerve signals. I learned how it’s done when it happened to that Edward Berridge guy. So the rest is all about control. If I keep my output below what would destroy you, I can remove just the malfunctioning parts.”

“B-but, huh? Aren’t you a little confused? I might be an artificial demon that exists as a contrast to the Thoth Tarot, but I don’t actually use tarot cards. So you shouldn’t be able to save me with the same method used on grimoires.”

“Hm?”

He sounded like she had just returned without the drink he had asked for.

The #1 seemed fed up with it all as he responded.

“You hadn’t figured it out? You were created by passing energy through the Qliphoth according to a special process, so you’re made from a type of energy, right? How is that any different from the grimoires that suck energy up from the

ground or whatever?”

“Ah.”

“Hold on. Isn’t your job to fill in the gaps in my knowledge? Are you screwing with me?”

The logic checked out.

But Qliphah Puzzle 545 could not even hazard a guess at how difficult it would be to actually do it. It was as reckless as trying to use a giant chainsaw to slice just the shell of a raw egg without breaking the yolk.

And he had seen through to something not even she had realized about herself.

She had recovered after being defeated, but that was only because she was very similar in nature to an indestructible grimoire.

This was likely the ultimate technique that not even Aleister Crowley or Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers *had even considered as a possibility* whether or not they could have done it.

Yet he was supposed to be an amateur.

Even though he had only just now peered into the other side of the world.

The #1 could not even manage the fundamental act of refining life force into magic power. Here, he had only manipulated some vectors to bend and gather the thinly distributed energy that was already there.

However.

Could a true and legitimate genius absorb the information to this extent?

It was not about the amount of knowledge he had accumulated.

His inspiration was entirely different.

“Um, uh?”

“What?”

“W-well, why did you...save me???”

The contract had been for him to guarantee her life as long as she was useful,

yet this was not covered by that agreement.

It was unnecessary and inefficient.

It seemed to hint that the contract did not really matter.

“Hmph,” snorted the #1.

The owner of the ultimate brain did not overlook the scratches on Qliphah Puzzle 545’s arms from where her nails had dug into them. That was proof of just how hard she had worked to suppress the urge within her and had instead kept the promise she had made. Even though she could have just ignored that promise. Because that was how demons worked and because Coronzon was her creator. But she had not done that.

She had kept her promise.

Academy City’s #1, Accelerator, sounded uninterested.

“People controlling others and people being controlled is the most basic form of cruelty. That’s what was at the root of the century-long feud between Coronzon, Mathers, and Aleister. So I was on guard. After seeing it so many times, I could figure out how it worked and how to fight it.”

She had survived.

But did she really deserve to survive?

This second chance started to feel real.

Even though she had driven a nation mad.

Even though she had been created as a weapon.

Even though she was a demon.

“...”

“You belong to me.”

“I...”

“I don’t really get all this about a Great Demon or Coronzon or whatever, but I won’t let her interfere now. It’s up to me to decide what you do and what kind of ending you get. It’s all up to me. Listen, I won’t let anyone waste you on

some meaningless cruelty. I'll use every bit of your life for something useful. I don't care what kind of life and death is appropriately 'demonic'. Whether you end up smiling in the sunny side of the world, end up living in peace for a hundred years to come, or end up surrounded by tons of friends is all for me to decide! So don't question my decisions!! You're an artificial being? I don't care. You were born, so you should enjoy your life. Got that, Qliphah Puzzle 545!?"

"Yesh!! I will keep that in mind!!"

She sobbed for a while after that.

She had finally realized that this contract was endlessly liberating and infinitely strong.

That demon had never looked more unsightly than she did when she raised her head to reveal a face covered in tears and snot.

But Accelerator gave her points for not trying to hide it.

Not batting an eye and trying to look cool while you built up to a clever victory was not a true battle. A supposed "strongest" who would not tear themselves down was second-rate. They were the same as a soldier who could only use the by-the-book practice moves. If you could not find something you were willing to crawl through the mud to acquire, you were no more than a loser.

Qliphah Puzzle 545 was an artificial demon.

She was the same as Accelerator had once been. But now she had thrown out her grin and learned the flavor of mud.

If you might lose your life, it was okay to be scared.

And who could mock you if tears came to your eyes when you realized that threat had passed?

It all started here.

It had been the same with Amai Ao, Kihara Amata, and World War III. Accelerator remembered his silly acts of self-sacrifice when he had tried to play the villain and given up on so very much. But that was why that monster had an answer here. If you could not take care of yourself, how could you be strong

enough to find something important to you and then protect that thing?

You had to throw out the evil.

You had to create yourself anew.

She had done a lot already, but she would be judged by what she did from now on.

“Let’s start the counterattack.”

He would decide what to do about the translucent demon.

So the #1 spat out his words.

“If Coronzon has made her move, then things must not have gone the way Aleister hoped. They went to Scotland, right? That’s the next stage. So you’ll go and save the country you made a mess of.”

“Um.”

While curled up and staring up at him, the demon girl tugged at his pants leg.

The monster gave a snort of laughter.

“This outdated information on the walls and floor is meaningless. Tell me yourself. I don’t want some gloomy nonsense from someone with a death wish. I want to hear it from you now that you have the strength to survive. So tell me everything you know about Great Demon Coronzon.”

When Board Chairman Aleister was involved, there was no way it would all be smooth sailing.

“Tell me everything. Because that dumbass couldn’t end it after all.”

That was the logic of the strong.

But.

How would someone with far less power respond when faced with tragedy?

The stolen four-wheel-drive vehicle was stopped at a random point along the highway.

A slow-moving semi-truck passed it by.

Hamazura Shiage silently pressed his forehead against the steering wheel.

Yet again, he had not arrived in time.

The situation continued on its own and he felt left out.

“Hamazura.”

He did not respond to his girlfriend in the passenger seat.

There was an unnatural gap in the back seat. It should have been occupied by a girl he had only just met today. Based on what she had said, she did not seem to be a normal person. They did not know each other well enough to throw his life away for her. He could have simply labeled it as “a sad memory” and continued on his way.

But.

But.

But.

“Did you see her face?”

He groaned the words.

And his voice quickly grew into a distorted shout.

“She looked like she just accepted it as inevitable. Dion Fortune did!! Are you kidding me!? She should have cried and yelled!!”

He could not just set this aside.

He could not cleverly avert his gaze and escape to a happy life.

If he did not address this properly, he would never be able to hold a positive outlook for the rest of his life.

He did not know if what he was considering was really possible. If those magicians or Magic Gods heard it, they might find it laughable. But Hamazura decided that would be his goal. He would not be satisfied otherwise.

He recalled the flavor of the gum in his mouth.

He had promised to teach her how to blow a bubble. And that was not all. She

had promised to buy a cheap phone and let him put Aneri on it to help her overcome her issues there. They had discussed her future.

Had she known this was coming the entire time?

Had she known these long-term promises would never pan out no matter what happened in the short term?

Had she known, breathed a sulky sigh, and still agreed for his sake?

He felt a scorching heat.

Something was boiling in his chest.



Could he accept that?

Could he just let it go as a done deal?

Could he really ignore something so unfair!?

“I’ll do it.”

His motive was the weakest. That was what made him perfect as a bystander.

But who cared what those gods wanted?

“I will take back Dion Fortune. No matter what it takes!!”

With that, a certain boy undoubtedly returned to his position as a protagonist.

He would save that lonely girl who had convinced herself her life was over.

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 is Part 2 continuing after New Testament 20. The focus was on England last time, so I shifted the focus to Scotland this time. The Golden cabal included the Amen-Ra Temple, right? And that's a must(?) in a story about Mathers, right?

The idea of indestructible original grimoires has existed as far back as the very first volume, but the way they can be used has been expanded on a lot by Unabara, Xochitl, Mina Mathers, and Qliphah Puzzle 545. And the A.A.A. is convenient, but I'm a little afraid I won't be able to keep track of all its different variations!! And the strange logic of putting a scantily clad girl inside some kind of mecha suit feels like a part of Japanese culture at this point.

Unlike New Testament 18, which focused on Aleister, this was all about the battle with Mathers. He was another person with (I guess I should say weird) legends on the same level as Crowley, but this was how I summed him up in the story. Because experts always focus on the fundamentals, I steered away from having him use impressive and difficult magic and instead stuck with the more popular(?) concepts. Anyone who has been following the novels this long should see the four Symbolic Weapons and the Lord of the Flies as the basics! And I personally like that I used the French name of Belzébuth to match Mathers's base of operations. ...That local name variant is similar to what I did with Magic God Othinus. I really do think I made the right decision not using the more masculine-sounding Odin or Woden... Incidentally, a demon named Biondetta appears in my other series Blood-Sign.

New Testament 20 ended with the idea of everyone joining forces to defeat

Mathers, but no matter how much she wore herself down to pave the way to victory, I knew the final battle had to be done with his own strength if he was to overcome his trauma. They ended up fighting by throwing miracles back and forth like a snowball fight, but for experts on their level, that was the same thing as getting back to the basics.

And Mathers was not his only trauma.

If I was going to bring Christianity-hating Aleister to center stage, I really wanted to show him finding salvation by overcoming that trauma. The story shows Aleister working in the Golden cabal and Academy City, but Christianity was always at the foundation of everything he did. And I knew it had to be Orsola who gave him forgiveness. She can finally do what she was meant to do! And I made it so her words only resonated in Aleister's heart because she had made a major error in New Testament 20 and was thus not a perfectly good person. Everyone has their doubts in life. I hope everyone had their emotions steadily shaken while we followed Orsola, Kanzaki, and Aleister's journeys.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and to my editors Miki-san, Anan-san, Nakajima-san, Yamamoto-san, and Mitera-san. I also give my thanks to Kasai Shin-san who provided the A.A.A.'s motorcycle design and to Itou Tateki-san. Not only were there tons of legendary magicians, but there were also plenty of handmade invention weapons. Not to mention the occult car chase and the miracle duel. This was something like making your spicy food less spicy by dumping in tons of sugar instead of just cutting back on the spices, but I thank you for sticking with me once again.

And I give my thanks to the readers. Since I thought the scales were tilting too far in the magic side's favor with Aleister and the Golden cabal rising to the forefront, I decided to make some slight adjustments, but what do you think of the balance I set up? The clash between magic and science really is the best part of this series. I hope you all enjoyed it.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

Shokuhou Misaki always felt like she was borrowed from Railgun, but now I think she's finally made a place for herself here.

-Kamachi Kazuma