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RETURN OF KINGS
SUZUKI SUZU / GoRA

K - RETURN OF KINGS

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN
RAWS: RIDIA

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PROLOGUE: THE BOY LOOKING DOWN

As soon as the light turned green, people started walking at once.

Shizume City, a scrambled crossroads. The crowds of people coming and going through this place never stop. Like the black waves that break the dam and overflow its banks, crowds of people cross this path today too, slowly and for their own reasons.

A choking crowd of people, people, people.

Gojou Sukuna was watching that show while he sang.

"Rainy day, rainy day, I like..." (Rain Song.)

He sat on the electronic bulletin board on the rooftop of the building and let his legs wander. It was a dangerous act that could cost him his life if he made a mistake, but Sukuna didn't seem to care and he just calmly manipulated his PDA.

"My mother will come here with my umbrella..."

Every time he swiped the PDA's screen, the image changed. They were the images from the surveillance cameras installed in Shizume City. Some were established legally to prevent crime, while others were created by members of the "Jungle" clan for criminal purposes.

"Pitch pitch, chap chap..."

Clansmen lurk among the people who come and go below. Those who are not told the reason, do not know the purpose and just follow the "mission". What they want is not the big invisible things like trust and bond.

The points of "Jungle". It is a numerical value that embodies power.

The more points you accumulate, the higher you can go. Above, there is a vast and powerful world that is incomparably larger than before. Clan members know this.

That's why they belong to "Jungle" by themselves.

To open up his own world with his own power.

"Run, run, run!"

Before long, Sukuna's fingers stopped.

A young man with black hair and a girl with pale pink hair appeared on the PDA. Sukuna's goal is the other half. The young man.

Yatogami Kuro. The member of the "Silver" clan, known as the "Black Dog".

Sukuna's mouth turned into a smile like a carnivore baring his fangs.

"High scoring character, Mikke."

He started the application and called a previously created mission. After reconfirming the details of the mission, Sukuna smiled.

Those were the fireworks that signaled the start of the game. He lit the fuse, but in the end there will be no stopping it.

Sukuna declared as he imagined what would happen from now on.

"Ordered by the authority of Rank J. Mission 2086, activated."

In an instant, the character of a deformed parrot appeared on the PDA.

"Clear voiceprint authentication. Mission 2086 with Rank J authority, activated."

The official mascot of "Jungle" parrot character Janpy spread his wings and repeated that. Several green rays shot out from its wings and were absorbed by the people coming and going below.

Crowds of people flowed in unchanged. But some of them suddenly stopped and started walking in different directions. The PDA they were holding had the same green glow as Sukuna's.

Sukuna licked his tongue as he watched the flow of people slowly change.

"Come on, let's start the game."

To change this world where the "King" rules and people are dragged aimlessly.

They will start with the hunt for the dog.

CHAPTER 1: DDoS ATTACK

The E-Rank player, with the username "Roadman", was operating his PDA from the driver's seat of the truck.

He installed an app called "Jungle" just three days ago. He has installed and disabled various gaming apps to kill the time waiting for delivery, but this one is quite funny. It is an application that combines SNS and games.

"Oh, here we go."

"Roadman" smiled when he heard the mission start report.

The large-scale mission that had been announced a long time ago, the full details, of course, "Roadman" did not know. He was only instructed to deliver the package. He can get an exceptional reward just for that, so there's no reason not to.

And, "Roadman" noticed a shadow reflected in the side mirror. He emerged from the side door of a building and hit the bed of the truck a predetermined number of times.

From the location information of the PDA, after confirming that the other party was the person to whom the luggage would be delivered, he opened the cargo platform.

The other party quietly opened the truck bed. Far from exchanging words, he didn't even check the other's appearance. This was also common in "Jungle". It does not care about the identity of the other party or the content of the package. They are only connected by missions.

"Mission Accomplished! 100 "Jungle" Points Added!"

At the same time Jan notified, the PDA's screen turned green and a success fee was added. The figure that had taken the luggage had disappeared through the side door of the same building, but "Roadman's" interest was already turned on what to use those points for.

A ranked player, username "Non-chan" returned to the cafe from the side entrance with a baggage.

She works as a reception staff at this cafe. From ordering and registering to cleaning and serving food, she was quite busy with a wide range of tasks, and the only thing she could do to relax was the occasional game of the app.

The fact that she received a package from an unknown truck was part of that game. At first, she was worried that she might get involved in a crime, but recently she has come to think that it is exciting and interesting.

A little spice in a boring life: that's "Jungle" for her.

"Non-chan" returned to her work in the living room and vaguely observed her surroundings.

She soon found a partner. Judging from the appearance information of "a man in a brown suit" in the quest content, she called him.

"Customer, are you okay here?"

After saying that and handing over the luggage, the man accepted it with a very natural gesture.

"Oh, thanks."

Of course, there is no relationship between "Non-chan" and the man. This is the first time they have had a conversation. Even so, she acted like she was the employee who received the request because she was told to do so.

"Excuse me, then."

"We hope to see you again."

"Non-chan" bowed deeply as she exchanged empty greetings. At the same time, the PDA that was in her uniform pocket vibrated. Successful mission report. Sensing it, she smiled.

A G-Rank player with the username "Sky Goldfish" was walking towards the scrambled junction in Shizume City.

The reason why he is so aware of the baggage he carries under his arm is because he knows its contents. The higher your rank, the more you can understand the full scope of the mission. In other words, the responsibility of being exposed will grow.

"Sky Goldfish" usually works in the legal field. He knew very well what kind of punishment he would expect if the contents of that package were exposed to daylight.

The more he thought about it, the more nervous he became and he purred.

Even if he risks so much, he doesn't dare to give it up because he finds "Jungle" very attractive. This is more than a game. It is a tool that allows you to change your boring and mundane daily life as you wish and realize your ideals.

He couldn't stop there now. By using that power, he can go higher. That desire drove "Sky Goldfish".

Besides, he wasn't the one doing it. The other party does not know his identity or his name. The secret of "Jungle" is amazing, and he doesn't think it's searched for unless there's a very good reason.

After taking a deep breath, "Sky Goldfish" appeared at the scrambled intersection.

Almost at the same time, a bicycle approached him.

A young blond man with a quizzical expression, aware that the eyes behind the sunglasses were staring at him, "Sky Goldfish" swallowed again.

An N-Rank player by the name of "Emerald" skillfully caught the thrown luggage and made the bike work as it was.

Everything was going according to plan. He has spent a lot of points preparing that package, but if he succeeds, he will get more than enough points to make up for it. The rewards for completing large-scale quests that have been announced for a long time were delicious.

The heavy users of "Jungle" are probably all participating. With that many points, you can use your psychic powers to fulfill your wishes, or even rise to a higher rank. Everyone was desperate and looking for that opportunity.

And he would be the first to seize that opportunity.

"Emerald" whispered as mounted his bike.

"Activate "Disguise"."

In an instant, a mask covered the face of "Emerald". The dark green flickering mechanical mask is used primarily by "Jungle" users for criminal purposes. You can hide your face and voice from it, and as a head-mounted display, you can instantly retrieve the information you need.

The screen was now focused on the mission objective.

Yatogami Kuro. Commonly known as "Black Dog".

One of the main objectives of this large-scale mission.

"Kuh, hihhi!"

Inside the mask, "Emerald" laughed. He is not going to settle for killing the Black Dog. He will use those points to become even stronger. And if all other large-scale missions are successful, even high ranks will be within reach.

Like "Beauty☆Angel" and "Five". Everyone will mention the name "Emerald", yearn for it and want to be like that.

While dreaming of a bright future, "Emerald" threw the luggage in his hand towards the Black Dog.

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It was Neko who caught the stuffed animal.

The two of them suddenly stopped and looked at him. It was a stuffed animal that looked like a misshapen parrot. There was no reason for him to receive such a thing. That's why Kuro thought that the stuffed animal was just a lost item.

"Hey!"

He stopped it, but the person who threw it just raised his hand and ran away.

Feeling a slight sense of incongruity, Kuro frowned.

That man's face wore something resembling a mask. Sure, that...

"Hmm? You can't eat this, right?"

Neko, who had been complaining of hunger for a long time, bit and sniffed the stuffed animal. Looking at the situation, Kuro realized that his feeling of discomfort was turning into a sense of danger with a shock.

"Yes. That mask, if I'm not mistaken, is from "Jungle"!"

"Unya?"

Neko nodded in agreement. In her hand, the stuffed animal swelled up suddenly.

"Neko! Let go it!"

Kuro's combat experience and Neko's instincts made them instantly take evasive action. Neko dropped the stuffed animal, and as Kuro held Neko with his left arm, he extended his right arm towards the wall of the building. When the "colorless" skill was activated, an invisible force field entangled the building's ducts like a rope, binding the two bodies together.

Ten seconds after Kuro and Neko jumped into the sky, the stuffed animal exploded with a roar.

"Roadman" did not hear it. He was enjoying rock on the radio while he was driving his truck down the Metropolitan Freeway.

"Non-chan" noticed the sound and looked up, but immediately turned around to hear the customer's voice calling out to her and began to politely take orders.

"Sky Goldfish" involuntarily shrugged. Although he knew they wouldn't catch him, he couldn't stop the cold sweat from running down his back.

"Emerald" turned around. He laughed out loud as the flames and black smoke receded into the distance.

Kuro and Neko were clinging to the building's duct, looking out at the devastation.

The explosion itself didn't seem to be that big. It appears that some people were injured by the scattered fragments, but no one was fatally injured.

Even so, people were confused, scared, screaming and running away from the explosion that took place in the middle of the city.

"...Kurosuke. That's all."

Neko's voice was unusually tense. Even the unassuming girl knew without thinking what the current situation meant.

"Oh. They targeted us."

If the action had been delayed, even for a moment, they would not have survived unscathed. They could have lost one of their limbs, or in the worst case, they could have lost their lives.

But, what Kuro felt at that moment was not fear or impatience that his life was being attacked.

It was an unmistakable anger.

"This is how you do it, "Green King" ...!"

Without showing himself, he manipulates the clan members using the means of the Internet, trying to achieve his goals even involving unrelated people. That is the most stupid, cowardly and unforgivable act.

"They will continue to target us. To prevent that, we must hide for a while, where they can't see us."

Neko nodded slightly, but immediately asked with a worried look.

"Yes, but where?"

Kuro laughed softly. To ease the anxiety of the only companion who was now at his side.

"What are you talking about? Hiding is your specialty, isn't it?"

Neko's face suddenly lit up. She realized that she could overcome that situation.

"I understand! Leave it to me!"

When she said that, Neko raised her head and squealed in a high-pitched voice.

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The rest area of "Scepter 4" had a stagnant atmosphere.

The source of that atmosphere was the members of the Special Forces who were resting here and there. Some were drinking tea, others slumped over their desks, and others making calls to the office. What they all had in common was that they clung to a dark color of fatigue.

Then the door to the rest area opened and other members of the Special Forces ran in.

"I'm exhausted. I'm finally back at the garrison!"

"Thank you for your hard work, Domyoji-san."

"Oh, I'm tired, Hidaka."

Hidaka, who had fallen asleep, raised his head and thanked Domyoji. Domyoji responded with a smile, but he still couldn't hide his fatigue.

Akiyama turned his gaze to Enomoto who returned and asked.

"Enomoto, Fuse. Did you find out what happened to Yatogami Kuro, who was involved in the bombing incident?"

"It's refreshing. Fuse was pretty tenacious in dealing with that informant."

"After the incident, it seems that he has completely hidden with his partner."

The bombing incident that occurred in Shizume City was widely covered in the news and various programs. The acts of terrorism that have taken place in the heart of the city have aroused the interest and fear of many people, weighing heavily on those who respond, in this case, "Scepter 4".

Akiyama muttered thoughtfully.

"Isn't that unreasonable? It seems the Green Clan is specifically targeting them."

Originally, the victim, Yatogami Kuro, and his partner, Neko, should be protected by "Scepter 4". To guarantee their security and prevent further acts of terrorism.

However, they still haven't been able to follow in the footsteps of the two. That also resulted in the exhaustion of the "Scepter 4" resource.

Domyoji muttered as if he was fed up.

"Anyway, various incidents are happening here and there at the same time, and I can't do it."

"Goto. What the hell is the Green Clan thinking?"

Goto answered Hidaka's question in his usual relaxed tone.

"I don't know."

At this time, the person who was quietly looking at the laptop opened his mouth.

"Are you stupid? Regardless of the executives, the people below don't think of anything."

The eyes of everyone present were drawn to that person.

Fushimi Saruhiko. Executive number 3 in "Scepter 4".

He prefers to act alone and is a troublemaker who often ignores orders. His personality is also twisted, and he's not the type to be liked by others, even if he's not wrong. In fact, many members of the Special Forces were initially hostile towards Fushimi.

Still, Fushimi was gradually accepted as number 3, due to his exceptional ability.

"What do you mean, Fushimi-san?"

When Hidaka asked, Fushimi clicked his tongue and turned on the computer he was looking at. The carefree Hidaka looked at the screen with a grateful smile.

"Thanks. That's... "Hooray. Now I'm up to Rank-N. I will get more points and get more power."..."

"Mission. Intimidate the Black Dog. Shake the blue clothes more and more."

Goto took over after that and read aloud. The other members of the Special Forces also gathered around the PC before he knew it.

Fushimi muttered as if he vomited.

"It's an underground site created by users of the Green Clan, "Jungle". Well, I guess it's all fun for them."

"A game, huh?"

Akiyama raised his eyebrows and said that. For him, who has a serious personality, it would be amazing if he got involved in crime for fun.

"..."Jungle" is a clan that is united by interests. There is no point in trapping subordinates. There are plenty of substitutes for them."

The members of the Special Forces nodded as they listened to Fushimi's nonchalant explanation. His analytical ability was second only to that of the "Blue King" Reisi Munakata, and that was the common understanding of the Special Forces.

"It's a man wave tactic because it's easy to replace staff..."

"However, no matter how lowly the opponent is, as long as they commit crimes, they cannot be overlooked."

Fushimi snorted at Akiyama and Benzai's words.

"That's what they're aiming for. This is a government office, so we have to treat even the most trivial incidents seriously. We inspect the scene, collect testimony, locate suspects and make a report, that's all. If a large number of cases are solved one by one according to the rules, how much effort would it take us?"

Domyoji and the others nodded deeply at Fushimi's frivolous comments.

"That's right. There was a robbery the other day, there was a bombing the day before yesterday, and yet today I was chasing guys who started dancing in the streets. I think I'll catch a cold from the temperature difference."

"There were also nuisances like randomly dropping lemons around town. The problem is that the lemon-shaped bomb was mixed up."

"Some seemingly insignificant acts hide serious crimes, and vice versa. And we have no way of knowing..."

The more they talked, the darker their faces became. No matter how many they caught, there was no end to what they were doing, and it seemed to be completely useless. That fact weighed heavily on the Special Forces.

Enomoto timidly raised his hand.

"If there's no point in catching the subordinates, then you have no choice but to catch the upper echelons, right?"

However, Fushimi dismissed it.

"If you can do that, you won't have any difficulties. A clansman with Rank-N or higher will have a good amount of information, but those guys are usually the ones giving instructions. That's right, you can't grab his tail."

"What's with that girl? The ninja we captured during the Mihashira Tower Incident, she's a high-ranking clan member."

Akiyama answered the question.

"U-Rank, Hirasaka Dohan. Certainly, she should have a considerable amount of information, but no matter what, she won't speak at all. It will be almost impossible to extract information."

"There's nothing like claiming you're a pro behind the scenes. A high-ranking player who went out of their way to catch you is out of luck with that deal."

Kamo sighed, but Benzai suddenly thought of something.

"But isn't it true that not all high-ranked players are as quiet as Hirasaka? If you're a clansman who just became an N-Rank like the guy who posted this, there might be a gap."

"...That's how it is."

(Currently, "Jungle" is running a series of large-scale quests. The success rate is exceptional, and a large number of points are distributed to users. A thoughtless Clansman who would never have been able to rise through the ranks could end up in an important position by chance. The question is, what kind of actions will those idiots take next?), Fushimi thought.

"Fushimi-san! The site has been updated!"

Fuse's voice suddenly rang out, snapping Fushimi out of his thoughts.

The next mission was displayed on the laptop. Fuse caught his breath when he saw the image flowing along with the words.

"This is because "Homura" is not silent."

Hearing those words, Fushimi let out a wry smile.

(Idiots trying to attract idiots? I can't laugh.), Fushimi thought.

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"We are being influenced by many members of the Green Clan, right?"

Office of "Scepter 4". His boss, the "Blue King", Reisi Munakata, said so with his usual calm expression on his face.

It was Munakata himself who was more energetic than anyone who dealt with the incidents of supernatural powers caused by "Jungle" recently. Awashima Seri was once again struck by the relaxed appearance of her respected superior, who showed no signs of fatigue.

Straightening her back, Awashima made a report.

"Yes, unpleasantly. The other party uses high-anonymity tools on the Internet to cause chaos in a fun and criminal way. For that reason, it is extremely difficult to identify the culprit, and last night during the investigation, we came across the Red Clan in Shizume and we ended up in a showdown."

Munakata put his hand to his chin and seemed to be thinking about something. Suspicious, Awashima asked.

"Captain, what's going on?"

"I see. They still had that hand."

"Eh?"

"It's a way to harass us. Awashima-kun, contact the Red Clan as soon as possible."

"Yes..."

Munakata explained to Awashima that he seemed to miss the point, logically as a boss.

"It means that the Green Clan doesn't have to move to disturb us. If there are pieces that can be moved, they will actively move them."

"Does that mean that "Homura" will be that piece?"

"They're by no means a bunch of idiots, but they do have a line of non-negotiables. "Jungle" will easily trample them. For example..."

Hearing Munakata's prediction, Awashima's face paled. Certainly, if such a thing happened, the Red Clan would not remain silent. Collision and chaos between "Homura" and "Jungle", that would put an additional burden on the already exhausted "Scepter 4".

"I'll get in touch with them as soon as possible!"

Awashima said that as she took her PDA. However, Awashima, and perhaps Munakata as well, knew that the act would end in vain.

No matter how long he stops, "Homura", whose precious things have been desecrated, will never stop. Just like they did a year ago.

At that moment, the office door was opened without knocking. When she turned around while listening to the sound of the doorbell, Fushimi Saruhiko was standing there with an irritated expression.

"Captain. It's going to be troublesome."

Munakata stood up and quietly gave the order.

"Everyone, prepare for dispatch."

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A girl was sleeping on the couch.

Pure white hair and white skin that is beyond compare. The expression on her face as she snorted silently was innocent.

Of course, she is not an ordinary girl.

The Red Clan, "Homura". Anna Kushina, the Third King who should lead it. That is her name. Among all supernatural beings, the "Red King" has the most severe "violence" attribute. The fact that such power resided in such a young girl showed the cruelty of fate, and at the same time strengthened the unity of those who encouraged her.

Kamamoto looked at the sleeping Anna and whispered softly so as not to wake her up.

"Yata-san. Anna, does she seem to have fallen asleep completely?"

Yata Misaki, the vanguard leader of "Homura", replied with the same low voice.

"I guess she didn't get much sleep last night because she was so busy all night. Shizume was noisy all over."

"Hey, you two. Don't get distracted and give the lady a blanket."

Chitose prepared a burgundy blanket from somewhere and gently covered Anna. It's almost mid-December, and the cold weather is only getting stronger. If you sleep in such a place, you might catch a cold.

Yata looked away from the sleeping Anna to the outside of the HOMRA bar. The people walking on the road were all dressed in warm clothes, and their breath was cloudy with white.

(It will soon be a year old.)

Suddenly, such a thought crept into his mind. The hint of winter reminded him that it was so long ago that Yata, no "Homura", had lost many important things.

Yata shook his head and pushed that thought out of his head. Before they start crying over the past, they should think about the threats that lie ahead.

"Chitose. You and Dewa had a dispute with "Scepter 4" last night, right?"

When Yata asked, the two nodded.

"Well, a bit with the beautiful underboss."

"It seems there was a face out there, but it was our territory. It couldn't be helped. In the end, Kusanagi-san came out and the situation calmed down."

"I see..."

And Fujishima and Eric also spoke.

"Eric and I also had a near miss with the blues. It wasn't a big deal, but..."

"Recently, the blues have been circling here and there on alert."

"Fujishima and the others too."

It wasn't about his companions or "Scepter 4" that clicked his tongue. It was out of frustration towards "Jungle" which has been causing a stir lately.

"Jungle", which hid in the shadows of the network and was never shown, has been causing a lot of trouble recently. The territory of "Homura", Shizume, is no exception, and the other day Yata and Kamamoto dueled with the members of "Jungle".

Even so, they still spring from anywhere. It looks like a real bug.

Yata slowly clenched his fist and opened it again.

Yata understood that his frustration was not just because his territory was being invaded. Yata and "Jungle" have more than a one-sided fate. That was the event in the distant past that inspired him to join "Homura".

He couldn't help but think of the person next to him at the time, so it irritated him.

As he took a deep breath and tried to calm down, Bando let out a maddened voice.

"What is this...?"

Bando stood still, looking at his computer. Akagi, who was also looking at the screen from behind, was also trembling. Sensing that this was not a trivial matter, Yata called out to him.

"What's up, Shohei?"

"Please watch."

They all gathered at the computer that Bando opened. Then, when they saw the images on the screen, they froze in the same way as Bando...

A few seconds later, they were all on fire in the same way.

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It was a video made by combining raw pixel art with 8-bit sound.

Probably imitating retro games. Illuminated with eye-catching effects and colors, the title appeared in the center of the screen.

"The end of "Homura"."

A scene in which a blond-haired youth is shot dead by a person wearing a fox mask was screened as a game.

"The weakest executive... really was the weakest!"

A scene in which a red-haired man with a huge sword looming over his head is stabbed to death by a man in blue was screened as a game.

"The stupid king died stupidly. (laughs)"

A blond-haired youth and a red-haired man collapse into the spotlight. As if to emphasize that, the dot characters were written in huge letters.

"KING IS DEAD. HOMRA IS END."

"..."Homura" is finished!"

To someone who didn't know anything about it, it might have looked like an ad for a game.

However, if someone who knew a little about the situation saw it, they would have noticed the tremendous malice that lurked behind that image.

Both the blond and red-haired youth were humans who once lived in this world. They lived, breathed, ate, slept and woke up, talked with friends, laughing and sometimes fighting.

That video was a mockery of life or death. By laughing at their deaths and caricaturing them as games, they almost spit out their lives.

The names of those who stomped on the two were clearly indicated on the title screen. Those who treasured them had to engrave their names in their memories.

The Green Clan, "Jungle".

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Kusanagi Izumo listened intently to Awashima's voice, echoing on the PDA.

"This is an absolute provocation. Izumo Kusanagi, never act prematurely. Your words can stop the Clansman. That is why..."

Awashima's voice was like sweet music, and he always wanted to listen to it for as long as possible. But now, just this once, for Kusanagi, it's just a noise.

Kusanagi spoke in a clipped tone.

"Be patient, Seri-chan."

Awashima gasped on the other side of the PDA. Or maybe she noticed the seething fury hidden in Kusanagi's voice.

"We're not human enough to just ignore something like this."

"Wait, Kusanagi..."

After that, Kusanagi hung up the call.

He called Yata immediately. He answered in a second. The voice that echoed from the PDA had the same kind of burning anger that Kusanagi carried.

"Kusanagi-san..."

"Yata. Did you see the video?"

"Yes. Bando found it, so... everyone saw it. Anna too."

Kusanagi frowned. If possible, he didn't want Anna to see something so ugly. He didn't want her to feel like they were trampling on the precious memories she kept in the back of her mind.

But things had already started. They only had one option.

That was endangering those who imitated that.

"Send me the video data. If we've been being provoked so blatantly, I'm sure we'll have some leads. Talk to Bando and those familiar with the Internet and discuss it."

"What should I do?"

"You're the captain of the vanguard. Once you find out where they are, I'll let you in first. So now it's time to wait a bit."

"...Yes."

"You're not the only one who's angry."

"I know, I already understood."

After hanging up the phone, Kusanagi smiled slightly. Yata has also grown. If the previous guy had been shown something like that, he would have run off without knowing where he was going, and he would have gone to hit the "Jungle" clansmen at random.

However, that doesn't necessarily mean that Yata's enthusiasm has waned. It means that he learned the art of swallowing passion as it is. When he finds someone to hit, his anger will explode even more fatally.

Kusanagi muttered under his breath as he analyzed the data sent.

"At least, as long as you don't regret it, "Green King"..."

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"Yes. The goal is to make the "Blue King" who wields the "Slate" look exhausted, intimidate the Silver Clan, and bring out the hidden "King", right?"

At a coffee shop overlooking the crosswalk in Shizume, Gojou Sukuna happily reported.

"In that case, let's get the Red Clan to participate in this event and make it even more exciting. Yes, I have already given orders, Nagare."

The name of the large-scale mission, "Harass Homura", was proceeding smoothly. As a large-scale mission alongside "Provoke the Black Dog" and "Make the Blues Work", the clansmen were highly motivated. If you complete it at the same time as the reward quest, you can accumulate enough points to reach J-Rank. The fact was spreading, and more people were joining.

"Of course, I'll be there too, behind the scenes. I want to see what it looks like up close."

As he said that, Sukuna narrowed his eyes happily.

"Still, do these guys really think they can become J-Rank? 100.000JP is a point you can't reach unless you defeat the "King" class."

To Sukuna, the low-ranking clansmen were not allies, they were just pieces. The only people he calls companions are those who are in the same rank as him.

"Well, either way, it's fine with us. If Awashima's or Kusanagi's class can get a scratch, that'll be great. Even if that's not the case, they'll be more tired from this commotion."

And the computer that was open in front of him showed a new situation.

"Are you monitoring there too? Yes. Yata of the Red Clan has started to move. Maybe he cracked the code. It's too early for an idiot."

He couldn't help but laugh. When the movements are so easy to understand, he felt like he was watching a comedy. Everything was going according to the scenario they wrote. The funny thing was that the actors themselves did not know.

"Well, why don't we go see him up close? Nagare, come see him if you'd like."

Sukuna's computer received information one after another. Combined with the surveillance network that spans the city and reports of clansmen being sent here and there as spies, it's easy to tell where someone is.

Around the same time as Yata's departure, the blues were dispatched. That includes the "Blue King". The leader is Fushimi Saruhiko, number 3 of the blues. If he launches an attack while he is isolated, it is possible that he can harvest the red and blue executives in one go.

"It's okay to go your own way. You can't do it that easily."

Sukuna grabbed the long staff and stood up, saying that they were making a fool of themselves.

"A weak boss character doesn't even count as an opponent."

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Ran.

The skateboard made noise and ran. The passers-by let out shouts and yells. Yata accelerated even more, leaving all that behind. To get to the nest of those who did that as soon as possible, even if it was just for a minute or a second.

(Shit! That's it! They shouldn't have done that! I'll never forgive them!)

Yata gritted his teeth as he crossed the park and jumped down the stairs along with the railing.

Memories of days gone by were the first thing that came to his mind. Suoh Mikoto. Totsuka Tatara. They were irreplaceable companions and people he admired and respected. Because the days he spent with them will never come back, Yata's... no, the memories of "Homura" remain as bright memories.

(That time was a treasure to me! That's...!)

"Jungle" stained them. They made fun of them.

At that moment, Yata only wanted one thing from the bottom of her heart from him.

Retaliation.

Those who defiled the precious things of Suoh, Totsuka, and Yata would be beaten, trampled, and writhed in fear, pain, and regret. That's all he wanted.

Therefore, Yata ran. In a straight line towards the destination, nothing else was reflected in his eyes. With a burning fury and steely determination in his heart, he was running.

The place he arrived at was a family building.

He rode his skateboard inside, he made a tight turn and stopped. As he did so, Yata quickly turned his gaze.

There was no one there. The clean first-floor room, which was a reasonable size, was completely empty. Yata muttered with vigilance and tension in the unnatural situation.

"Is this where you were...?"

He once visited that building when he was looking for the perpetrator of Totsuka's murder. Was it a base for some foreign mafia? It was not an enemy of "Homura" who possessed supernatural powers, but he hardened himself to make the culprit vomit the route of the weapon obtained.

Of course, Yata doesn't know who owns this building now. He doesn't need to know.

The important thing is that there was someone here who desecrated Suoh and the others.

"Uh!"

Suddenly, footsteps echoed through the empty building.

He held reflexively. If it was the base of "Jungle", then there was definitely his enemy there, that thought became embarrassing.

"...Tch, you?"

Fushimi Saruhiko, the owner of the steps, said it like he was throwing up.

"Saruhiko. Why...?"

"You've identified the source of the images, haven't you? That's because the address of this building was written into the text in some flashy cipher. How stupid. It's a trap, you know?"

Fushimi shrugged in amazement.

"I wonder if Kusanagi-san has figured it out anyway. That's why you asked about the location and rushed in by yourself, huh, Misaki?"

Fushimi's eyes looked provocative, but Yata returned his gaze.

"Tch. I'm following Kusanagi-san's instructions correctly. The other "Homura" guys will come later."

Fushimi, who once belonged to "Homura", but now belongs to "Scepter 4", is considered by Yata as a traitor. Whenever they come face to face, they always start a fight.

However, he did not dare to fight Fushimi now. Because there was something he had to do first.

"I know this is blatant cheating, but a clue is a clue! That's why you're here, right?"

"...Tsk."

Fushimi clicked his tongue again and turned his back on Yata.

Yata lowered his gaze a bit.

Fushimi wondered why he went there alone.

Fushimi, sent by "Scepter 4", came to investigate the situation first. It was natural to think so, and considering his personality, which has always tended to be dogmatic, it was not surprising that he was alone in enemy territory.

But... maybe there was another reason.

In the past, Fushimi was also a member of "Homura". Although he is no longer around, Suoh and Totsuka were still friends.

Fushimi, like Yata, probably went there because he felt that something important had been desecrated.

What came to his mind was the situation that happened half a year ago, when Anna woke up as the "Red King". Fushimi told Yata about the whereabouts of Anna, who was kidnapped by "Jungle". Despite his feud with Yata and "Homura", Fushimi was not the type to abandon a little girl.

"Hey, Saruhiko. I, last time, thanks to you..."

Just as she was about to say thank you, which he couldn't say at the time, Fushimi muttered in a cold voice.

"That silly video is making a fuss."

Yata widened his eyes and let out a high-pitched voice.

"Hey, Saru. What are you saying?"

Fushimi looked at Yata and responded with a bored look.

"Oh? Did I say something wrong? Trash is trash, right?"

Yata knew that his expectations were misplaced.

"It's silly, you say?"

If you are ridiculed for the death of your comrades and feel the slightest bit of anger, those words will never come out. Saruhiko Fushimi was a member of "Scepter 4", and that image was nothing more than a seed to cause confusion.

Yata muttered in a low voice.

"You, retract."

Fushimi said with a mocking voice.

"Forever you act like an idiot."

"You, retract!"

"Suoh Mikoto is already dead!"

"You, retract!"

When he kicked the ground with all his might, the wheels of his skateboard were engulfed in flames. Yata rushed towards Fushimi at the speed of a bullet, leaving fiery trails on the floor of the building.

"Haha!"

Fushimi blocked the approaching skateboard's attack with a high speed saber. As he swung his saber with all his might, Yata jumped without resisting the impulse. Spinning in the air, he drew his staff and attacked Fushimi again.

The flame-covered staff collided with the glowing blue saber, creating sparks.

"This time..."

"Hahaha!"

Fushimi had a dark smile on the other side of the fight. Yata's anger increased even more. He knew he didn't go there to do that, but he still felt compelled to shoot him in the face.

He felt strength in his arms. It was the same on the other side. At that moment, the force of pushing each other increased to the limit, and the balance was about to collapse.

"Yata, that's it!"

"Fushimi, stand down!"

Two different voices sounded at the same time.

Maintaining the balance of power, Fushimi said in a shrill voice.

"Tch. An unnecessary obstacle."

"Saru. They saved your life!"

He pushed the stick and it bounced back. Fushimi withdrew in the same manner, and behind him was a long line of "Scepter 4" blues.

As if paired with them, the "Homura" members were standing behind Yata. When Yata looked at him, Kusanagi, and the Red Queen standing next to him, Anna nodded slightly. She was also burning with anger because they insulted her comrades.

"Oya, oya. Everyone in "Homura" is really angry."

A man came out of the line of blues. The face with a cold smile that did not suit the place was familiar.

Reisi Munakata. The boss of "Scepter 4", the "Blue King".

Yata waved his arms and shouted.

"Of course! They have desecrated Mikoto-san and Totsuka-san! We will punish them accordingly!"

Munakata didn't break his smile, but his subordinates were shocked. Although he is from another clan, it is probably not the attitude towards the "King", but that is not what Yata knew. He doesn't like what he doesn't like.

Deputy Commander Seri Awashima stepped forward and suppressed the tumult with her eyes alone.

"Izumo Kusanagi. I want you to stop here. We will deal with the Green Clan."

"Deputy Commander Awashima. I'm sorry. Just like Yata said, let's punish this guy who did such a stupid thing with our bare hands."

While he maintained a calm expression, Kusanagi lit the lighter in his hand and muttered.

"Literally. If we don't, "Homura" won't work."

Despite the lynching statement, Munakata said without changing his complexion.

"Well, in that sense, we're also being quite ridiculed. It's no coincidence that they chose this place."

At that moment, Anna looked up.

Looking up with a catlike gesture sniffing the air, softly.

"...They are there."

With a smile on his face, Munakata again raised his voice to the upper floor.

"Stop looking from above and get out."

As if responding to that voice, a group of figures appeared.

It was a creepy bunch. Their clothes, genders, and physiques were all different, and yet they all wore mechanical masks from the neck down. Around 20 of them were parked in the corridor leading to the entrance hall and looked at them as if they were prey.

One of them leaned forward and shouted frivolously.

"We really caught them with that kind of bait! "Blue King" Reisi Munakata, 100.000 "Jungle" points. Anna Kushina, 100.000 "Jungle" points. Awesome! If we do it, we'll go up about 3 ranks at a time. Heh!"

"Oh, that woman with the big tits is Awashima, right? 6000 points. The guy with the sunglasses, Kusanagi, is also worth 6000. Fushimi is worth 4000, Yata is 3000!"

Applause and laughter. Yata coldly stared at the heated figure of each of them arguing about things they didn't quite understand, while each of them struggled to come up with numbers.

What should they do with them?

As they trample on people's deaths, they feel no remorse. It was extremely ugly and silly to think that they were allowed to do anything, as if everything was happening in a game.

The anger did not subside. There was only contempt mixed into it. Exterminate pests, not kill enemies. Yata understood that this was one of those cases.

"So, we don't hold any hard feelings towards you, but this is also for points."

While saying that, the masks took out the stuffed animals from their pockets.

"They are dead."

They threw them all at once.

Twenty stuffed animals fell to the floor, bouncing, rolling, and rapidly puffing up. The next moment, explosive flames and thunderous sounds engulfed the entrance hall.

The masks looked at them, laughing happily. They did not feel the slightest guilt for taking someone's life. They were only chasing short-term points, wanting to move up the ranks.

That laugh, however, was frozen.

The blue-glowing barrier repelled the explosive flames swirling in the entrance hall. Inside the hemispherical barrier, the unharmed "Homura" and "Scepter 4" turned their angry eyes upwards.

"Why...?!"

"Aren't they dead?!"

Yata is shocked from the bottom of his heart by the disorder of the masks. With a "King" class ability, you can hold 10 or 20 bombs in one hand; that's something a Clansman should know.

Munakata closed his eyes silently and sighed.

"It's really vulgar and silly agitation. Our detention center is far from comfortable. Please prepare yourselves."

"You said that "Homura" is finished? Don't you know? Now we have a new "King". A "King" who is as strong as Mikoto."

In response to Kusanagi's words, Anna took a few steps forward. There was an unmistakable anger on her innocent face.

"They laughed at the life that Mikoto and Tatara lived."

In an instant, Anna's small body burst into flames.

The flaming crimson aura of the Sanctum displayed by the Red Queen. Influenced by that aura, Yata felt a surge of power within him.

"It's unforgivable."

The quiet phrase represented the heart of "Homura". Yes, unforgivable. Who would forgive them? No one who ridicules Suoh Mikoto, Totsuka Tatara, or his irreplaceable companions will get away with it. They had to squash them completely so that no one would come up with such a silly imitation again.

Burning passion gushed from his throat as was.

"No blood! No bone! No ash!!"

No blood, no bones, no ashes. With an aura of hellfire burning everything, the members of "Homura" rushed out like wild beasts unleashed.

Munakata, who was observing the situation, muttered in a low voice.

"Then let's go. Our cause is clear."

"Everyone, draw your swords!"

Under Awashima's orders, the members of "Scepter 4" unleashed their sabers. Finally, when Munakata drew his sword, a crystal blue aura radiated from his sword. Responding to the blue "Sanctum", the clansmen began to advance with a single, unruffled step. It's perfectly controlled movements reminded him of a giant machine.

"Uh, shoot, shoot! Do it!"

The masks panicked as they saw the two-color red and blue clansmen rushing over. They have no "King", nor protection from Sanctum. They only have one thing to rely on, the firearm in their hand. But...

"No, no! I can't communicate at all!"

"What's going on?!"

All the bullets fired at Munakata were blocked by his super power. The moment he touched the glowing blue barrier, the bullet scattered into the air like flakes of snow. Munakata advanced with a cold expression through the hail of bullets.

A majestic march, the masks trembled in fear at the sight of the "King's" march.

"Ah, he's a monster...!"

"She's a girl! Aim at the girl!"

Someone yelled. Her character was less than that of a beast, but no one noticed it. Impatience, fear and desire led them to point their weapons at Anna.

Anna stared helplessly at the death cannon that was pointed at her. Like a child looking at a balloon, there was no emotion on her face.

But if you've seen it before, you'll know it's the opposite. Beneath the weak and expressionless expression, a silent anger can be seen.

Her anger manifested as wings.

A pair of wings of flame that burned crimson. The wings that grew on the girl's back fluttered gracefully.

With just that move, a wave of deadly heat hit the members of "Jungle". Those who were aiming at Anna screamed, dropping their weapons and rolling on the ground in agony from the heat.

The Kings were not doing anything. They only showed a small glimpse of their power, the power worthy of the name of the "King".

At that time, the members of "Jungle" were falling apart.

"Hey, this is a different story! Is there no way we can win like this?!"

"Let's run away! If it's now, it's still... Gah...!"

One of the receding masks screamed and collapsed.

"Where are you guys going?"

Yata glared at them as he stepped on their necks.

"I won't let you get away. I'll make sure each of you learns properly."

"Hey, hey!"

A mask panicked and pointed the barrel of its rifle at Yata. Yata readied his staff and prepared to attack, but the mask turned and dropped the rifle.

"I'm burning! What is this?!"

The mask let out a scream as he dyed his shoulders blood red. When Yata looked back, a blue outfit appeared from the stairs on the opposite side. Playing with a throwing knife in hand, Saruhiko Fushimi opened his mouth nonchalantly.

"Are you prepared with guns, knives, and even bombs? Sounds like a fun toy, doesn't it? Tell me where you got it."

Yata and Fushimi looked at each other for a moment. However, no words were exchanged. Before that, there was something to do.

Yata and Fushimi kicked the ground and attacked the trembling "Jungle" clansmen while their staffs were clad in red and their knives ran blue.

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"Hey, hey, hey, hey!"

"Emerald" ran down the back alley.

As he forgot to remove his mask and gasped, he looked back over and over again. He desperately kept running, trying to get away from the scene, even a little.

All the companions who tried to carry out the mission together abandoned him. No, they're not friends in the first place. It's just another person with the same interests. From the beginning, "Emerald" had no intention of helping when they were in trouble.

Even so...

"What are they talking about? They're monsters!"

"Red Queen" and "Blue King". The two kings were literally displaying power in different dimensions.

The "Red Queen", who looked like a normal girl, waved her fiery wings and shot down all the members of the "Jungle".

The "Blue King", who was deploying a blue barrier, knocked them down with a single blow without even being able to touch him with a single finger, let alone a bullet.

Despite exhausting almost all points and connections, and being well prepared and well-armed, the mission was a complete failure.

The glory that he should have almost attained disappeared like a mist. "Emerald" was now a devastated loser. No one in "Jungle" will listen to him anymore. In "Jungle" where the strong eat the weak, the value of the loser is infinitely close to zero. Realizing that he had fallen into the position of those who had looked down on him up until now, "Emerald" tasted despair as if his eyes were pitch black.

But that was not the only misfortune that awaited him.

Two figures got in his way as he ran down the back alley. Seeing that, "Emerald" stopped involuntarily.

"Oh, you!"

He got goosebumps on his neck. It seemed familiar, not a story. A few days ago, "Emerald" himself went on a mission and tried to take a person's life to earn a reward. Yatogami Kuro, known as "Black Dog", and his partner.

"Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Nihihi! I won't let you through here~!"

The Black Dog said that coldly, and the girl seemed to enjoy it.

The humiliation of defeat, the impatience of being persecuted, turned to anger. If he killed them, he could gain something. He may have had that plan.

"Don't underestimate me! I'm an N-Rank from "Jungle"!"

As if to convince himself, "Emerald" yelled and tried to stick out his tongue.

"I can use not only bombs, but also supernatural powers!"

He activated a special app and launched an attack. That was all he could think straight.

Before he knew it, the Black Dog appeared in front of him.

"Eh?"

At the same time, that question mark appeared in his mind, the body of "Emerald" spun in the air. Unable to take a passive form, he was slammed into the ground from behind. His breathing stopped, a sharp pain went through his body and "Emerald" writhed on the cold asphalt.

"Gah, ugh..."

"Ok. Will you listen in order?"

The Black Dog nonchalantly asked "Emerald" as he groaned.

"It was your 'King' who ordered this attack, right? Or was it the executive class guy named Mishakuji Yukari? What is your 'King' thinking? And do you know anything about a man named Isana Yashiro?"

"Emerald" was not in such a mood not to reply. Pain, impatience, humiliation and fear dominated him. Turning his back on the Black Dog and crawling away, no matter who was watching, he was an unmistakably defeated loser.

The footsteps of the Black Dog approached from behind. Little by little, impatience burned his neck. "Emerald" gritted his teeth and crouched on the ground as he looked at the Black Dog.

"Damn! Eat this!"

It wasn't because he wanted to fight back that he bit his tongue. The difference in combat power was obvious. It was just a desperate plan to gain time and escape.

However, the electrical discharge of extraordinary power was not released.

"Eh? That's it!"

Instead, a lone parrot emerged from the PDA. A hologram of "Jungle's" mascot "Jumpy" floated into the air and declared no mercy.

"Mission failed. Mission failed. All "Jungle" points are gone. All abilities will be looted."

"No..."

The blood drained from his body. He finally remembered the rule that if he lost all his "Jungle" points, the rank he had accumulated up to that point would also disappear.

"What an idiot! The points I finally saved by doing my best just because of that!"

"Emerald" yelled as if he was vomiting blood.

No. It wasn't "Emerald" anymore. The "disguise" mask that had appeared due to his supernatural power disappeared, and behind him was the face of an ordinary man.

"Damn... I'm an N-Rank... I was an N-Rank who would soon be able to talk to the King... How did it end up like this?"

The twisted pain of the man who had lost "Emerald", N-Rank or even a clansman, without getting anywhere, was sucked into the air.

Faced with that figure, Yatogami Kuro looked down coldly.

He turned on his heel and began to walk. As she was lined up next to him, Neko asked strangely.

"Kurosuke, are you alright?"

"After all, he's a small object that can be cut right away. He probably doesn't know anything."

"Jungle" is clearly a different clan than "Homura" and "Scepter 4". Mutual camaraderie is almost non-existent, and most Clan members are nothing more than puppets from higher levels. He felt sorry for someone whose tail would be docked if he got in his way, but he doesn't think he needs sympathy for people blowing up bombs all over town.

"Scepter 4" should take care of the rest. In the process, he may get closer to "Jungle," but that's not his job.

"Shiro's whereabouts, after all, no one knows."

With a sigh, Neko started walking. she asked Kuro as they walked side by side.

"You are worried?"

"No."

Neko laughed and shook her head.

"Because he's the Shiro of Wagahai. We'll definitely meet again! All we have to do is work harder and harder to find him!"

"That's right."

Kuro softened his expression and nodded.

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Sukuna looked up at the sky while he was standing on the rooftop of the building.

Two giant swords floated there. Red and blue, the sword that shines in each color is the "Sword of Damocles", the proof of being the "King".

Sukuna's smile only deepened as he looked up realizing the great power with which any psychic should be in awe.

Because the stronger the boss, the more interesting the game, he knows it.

"It got quite interesting when I guessed all the little characters, Nagare. Unfortunately, I couldn't get the "Silver King" out."

This large-scale mission had multiple implications.

One of them is to explore the trends of the "Silver King". Unfortunately, the plan to meddle with the Silver Clansman Kuro, which would result in the appearance of the "Silver King" (possibly) ended in vain.

That does not mean that the mission has failed. Rather, it can be said that the results were better than expected.

At this time, Sukuna was silently smiling as he looked at the blue "Sword of Damocles". The joy that came from finding a strategy for a difficult enemy welled up within him.

The biggest obstacle for "Jungle", the sword of "Blue King" Reisi Munakata, was cracking and splintering.

"The "Blue King", it's just a matter of time, huh."

CHAPTER 2: SILVER CHOICE

He swept every corner of every room.

He didn't leave a single hair behind, which was impossible given the nature of that house. Still, with that kind of feeling, Kuro cleaned up carefully. He cleaned everything from the kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom to the toilet.

A safe house that would hide them, even for a short time. He wanted to return the favor.

The ten or so cats that were the original owners of the house gathered in a corner of the room and looked at Kuro with sleepy eyes.

The reason they didn't bother with him cleaning up was probably because they wanted to sleep, not because they understood Kuro's feelings.

After finishing all the preparations, Kuro called to the corner of the room. "Neko. It's time to go."

"Hmmm~..."

Neko who was dozing with the cats slowly raised her neck. The resentful look hadn't changed since he decided to leave there.

He knew how she felt. It turned out to be an unexpectedly comfortable hiding place. The cats seemed to have become good friends, and Kuro had no trouble taking care of them.

Still, there was a division in things.

"We have to go."

Kuro's repeated words contained a soft resonance. Neko blinked many times. Each time, Kuro saw the resentment turn to sadness.

"...See you."

Her friends responded by purring as she silently stroked the cat's hand. Standing up, the two of them opened the front door of the safe house together.

And, the man who was standing there, his eyes sparkled unexpectedly when he saw Kuro.

"Oh, are you leaving yet?"

Kuro didn't know the strangely dressed man's name. He only recognized him as an "informant". He was the one who prepared a safe house for the two who had to hide after being attacked by "Jungle".

"Oh. It was for a short time, but they took care of us."

"It doesn't matter. It's not just for you."

It was that informant who told him that the bounty that had been placed on Kuro in "Jungle" had been withdrawn due to a failed mission. For him, who originally buys and sells information, "Jungle" seems to be a kind of business rival. The fact that he helped Kuro and his friend was also based on the principle that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

"Even if the reward was withdrawn, it was yesterday. It's still not certain. I think it's safer to stay here for a while longer, but..."

The concerned look wasn't just for show. It was only a couple of days, but Kuro had guessed that this informant was so kind-hearted that you wouldn't believe he was from the underworld.

That's why he shouldn't depend on him forever.

"I appreciate the offer, but it's already been decided by me and Neko."

"Oh, yes! It's not bad here, but wagahai is going home after all!"

Neko who was clinging to Kuro's back said that as if she was covering fire. The informant shrugged in astonishment and ushered the two in.

"Oh. If you go that far, I won't stop you anymore. Chasing people who leave is not my hobby."

"Sorry. Someday I will definitely return the favor."

"Don't do that. I didn't mean to help you with that intent."

Kuro bowed deeply to the informant, who stuck his tongue out at him and started walking. Judging from the fact that Neko also bowed, it seemed that she also felt indebted to the informant.

The moment they passed each other, the informant let out a single word.

"...Now that I think about it, I forgot there was a message."

Kuro stopped and looked at the informant curiously.

"Message? From who?"

"The "Blue King". He asks you to visit him."

"....."

Kuro's eyes were wide. Neko didn't seem to quite understand the meaning, and she compared Kuro and the informant with a dumbfounded expression.

The informant said, taking the initiative.

"I didn't tell you. They figured it out on their own. Be careful where you are; if you have even a little skill with information, you'll figure it out in no time."

"...Mmm."

At those words, Kuro let out a growl from deep in his throat.

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Kuro stopped and looked towards the building.

It was a solid brick building. The surrounding area was surrounded by iron fences, giving the atmosphere of a prison or a fortress.

Family Registration Division, Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau, Fourth Division, "Scepter 4", headquarters. This is the base of operations of the Blue Clan who governs the "order".

Kuro took a deep breath.

It seems that the pretext under which Munakata called Kuro and Neko to his base of operations was only for the purpose of questioning the situation. That informant commented that the fact that it was a "request" rather than an "order" showed that "Scepter" 4 was not hostile.

Still, he can't let his guard down. He will not drink or eat, but this is the dependent territory of another clan. He needed a certain amount of spirit to get on board alone.

(Shiro.)

While thinking, Kuro tied up his own hair.

(Until you return, I will do what I can. As a member of the Silver Clan, Yatogami Kuro.)

He closed his eyes in silence and offered his vows to the man who is his teacher and friend.

After that, Kuro slowly took a step forward.

He approached a soldier in blue who was waiting inside the gate. It was a familiar face. If he wasn't mistaken, it was Benzai. A member of the "Special Forces", the elite force of "Scepter 4".

"Captain Munakata is waiting for you in the office."

After saying that, Benzai moved his gaze from him to explore.

"Hmm? Hey, where did the other one go?"

"It seems Neko didn't want to come. That's because, as the name suggests, she's a selfish alley cat."

"Oh..."

He worried whether or not that argument would be accepted by the person who governed the law somehow, but Benzai didn't seem to care much. After muttering in astonishment, he turned on his heel and entered the garrison. Kuro looked back at the building and then started walking with Benzai.

For some reason, there was a tea room attached to the office.

"Welcome. Kuro Yatogami-kun."

The "Blue King", Reisi Munakata, sat on the seat of the guest of honor and greeted Kuro with a smile. The posture of sitting upright with a straight back was like a model for a precision machine. A steaming teapot was placed in front of him.

After standing still for a while, Kuro finally asked a question.

"What is this?"

"It's the tea ceremony. Do you know it?"

Kuro responded sullenly.

"I know. Am I asking why is this thing here?"

"Since a strange Clan member is visiting us, we have to show some courtesy. It also means apologizing for being rude a year ago."

At those words, Kuro's face clouded slightly.

Exactly one year ago, Kuro, Neko, and Shiro were surrounded by "Scepter 4". To let the other two escape, he challenged Munakata on his own and was utterly defeated.

Of course, the opponent was the "King". He didn't challenge him thinking he could win. However, the humiliation of being treated like twisting a baby's hand and being stepped on with overwhelming force was still deeply etched in Kuro's heart.

"Are you saying that was 'disrespectful'?"

Hearing Kuro's dry voice, Munakata's eyes widened and he said, "Oh!"

"Should I demonstrate it in action? I don't mind rubbing my forehead on the mat here..."

"Is different."

Saying that, Kuro entered the tea room.

"I challenged you for what I believed in. You also defeated me for your fairness. That's all. It wasn't impolite."

He removed the scabbard from his waist and placed it on his left side. A position where you can always attack your opponent. Showing that he does not trust that person.

Seeing that, Munakata smiled slightly.

"I see. It was a slip of my tongue. Allow me to apologize for that rudeness."

Kuro looked at Munakata's smile without breaking his rigid expression.

"Then will you accept my tea again?"

"Yes."

Then the tea party started.

As a disciple of the former "Colorless King", Ichigen Miwa, Kuro knows all about the customs of literary and military arts. Even from Kuro's point of view, Munakata's tea ceremony was nothing short of splendid. He received the tea that was offered to him according to etiquette and slowly savored it.

As Munakata looked at that figure with a thoughtful look, he cut to the main topic.

"First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for helping to arrest the criminal. The other day you were involved in a bombing raid caused by "Jungle" and you disappeared..."

"Yes. We managed to escape just in time, but apparently we were attacked by the Green Clan. We hid for a while."

"It's a smart move."

Munakata said that with a half-smile. Kuro closed his eyes silently and asked.

"The reason why we are being watched is because we are members of the Silver Clan, right?"

Munakata smiled deeper and answered the question.

"It is true that the Green Clan is looking for the "Silver King". The only foothold for that is the Clansman who finally created the "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann, who had been alone for more than half a century."

Munakata pushed a ladle at Kuro and said.

"Kuro Yatogami-kun. You and that Strain girl. You'll inevitably get marked."

Kuro looked down and muttered.

"What exactly is the Green Clan?"

Munakata narrowed his eyes in response to that question.

"It's a strange clan. Even among the clansmen, almost none of them have met the "Green King"."

"I heard that it is a special clan connected through the Internet, but it is too strange that a clan member has never met their "King"..."

"I agree. Calling them clan members may be the first mistake."

Munakata slowly got up and walked over to his desk. Running his finger over the desktop, he performed some operation, and a hologram appeared in the air.

"The "Green King", Hisui Nagare uses a social networking service called "Jungle" to secure his pawns."

Kuro stood next to Munakata and looked at the image.

A geometric pattern slowly unfolded against the background of the earth's rotation. The pattern eventually formed a large tree. A gigantic network that covers the stars, that is...

"Is that the "Jungle" site?"

"Yes. Users who have no knowledge of the existence of clans or supernatural powers and who simply log into "Jungle" as an SNS are referred to as "E-Rank", taking the last letter of "Jungle". They are the lowest rank, and by participating and completing quests, they accumulate points and increase their rank."

"In other words, the psychic crimes that are causing trouble in the city right now..."

Munakata nodded and continued as if he was giving a lecture.

"The mission of earning those points is like making an online game come true. Using the points, you have accumulated in this way, you can increase your rank, and if you go up a rank, then follow the G-Rank, and you will be granted temporary supernatural power."

"Tentative start..."

"If you fail a mission, the points you've accumulated up to that point will be deducted, and in some cases, you'll lose your ability. There's nothing we can do about the suspects who have been cut off from "Jungle" and turned into people common, and we have no choice but to hand them over to the police."

Kuro muttered into his mouth that the lizard's tail was being cut off.

The clansman he defeated in the alley must have been one of them. A pitiful man who regrets losing all of his supernatural powers and becoming a mere human. The appearance of being thrown down the upper steps of "Jungle" was a far cry from the appearance of the clansman Kuro knew. There must be a strong sense of camaraderie not only in "Homura", but even in "Scepter 4", which is based on vertical division, but he didn't feel such a bond in "Jungle".

Kuro narrowed his eyes and asked Munakata.

"But... is there any member of the clan who is officially empowered?"

In Kuro's mind, Munakata said as if he could see through the image of a man.

"The highest ranking Ranker. A handful of executives must have met the "Green King" Nagaru Hisui and received power directly. One of them is the person you are currently imagining. It is Mishakuji Yukari."

Mishakuji Yukari. It is the name of a traitor who was once Kuro's older brother and who turned his sword against his master, Ichigen Miwa.

Now that man belongs to "Jungle". He seems that he is in a position that can be said to be the right hand of the "Green King". He doesn't know the details, nor does he want to know. All he knows is that Mishakuji Yukari is Yatogami's enemy, and that his swordsmanship is far superior to Yatogami's.

"Have you had any contact with Mishakuji Yukari since then?"

"No."

Kuro clenched his fists. Will he be able to defeat him the next time they meet? Giving an answer to that question. He felt a helpless frustration with himself.

Munakata asked again.

"What about the "Silver King"?"

"I haven't seen him in a long time...!"

The reason he raised his voice was because he didn't want to hear the obvious. After all, it was Kuro and Neko who were looking forward to the return of the "Silver King" more than anyone.

However, Munakata's attitude did not have the color of mockery. With a serious expression, he asked another question.

"Did the "Silver King" say something about the "Slate"?"

Kuro's eyes widened in surprise and then answered.

"No. Ever since he regained his memories as the "Silver King", we've only been together for a short time. I didn't have time to talk about it."

"...Is that so."

"What happened to the "Slate"?"

At Kuro's question, Munakata suddenly looked away.

"No. However, now that the "Golden King" is gone, I am in charge of managing the "Slate". I just wanted to know if there was any information left behind by the leading person, the 'Silver King' regarding the "Slate".

Kuro looked at Munakata.

He was hiding something. The current "Blue King" is the kind of man who always hides his motives, hides his hand, and builds detailed plans and behind-the-scenes calculations that no one knows about. Ever since their meeting a year ago, Kuro had always had that perception.

However, Munakata was somewhat different.

He didn't think to confirm the identity of the discomfort. Munakata has circumstances of Munakata. There's no reason anyone other than "Scepter 4" should intervene.

"Sorry I couldn't provide any useful information, but if that's all then I'm sorry."

Kuro bowed deeply and began to head towards the exit.

"Kuro Yatogami-kun."

Behind him, Munakata yelled.

"The Silver Clan had no dependent territories."

"And with that?"

"In this situation, it would be a shame not to have a base of operations as a clan. If you don't mind..."

Saying so, Munakata, the "Blue King" extended his hand towards Kuro.

"The members of "Scepter 4" will protect you. I give you the authority to stay in the camp and I promise to protect you in case of an emergency."

"....."

It would probably be a good option.

The current Silver Clan is not established as a clan. It has no dependent territory that should have been a safe zone for clan members, it only has two members, and the most

important "King" is missing. Kuro and Neko would be in a refugee-like situation from the perspective of other clans. Protecting them may be the responsibility of "Scepter 4", who claims to be "order".

If he accepts this proposal, he will not be targeted by "Jungle". There will be no more hiding and being forced to flee.

But...

"Thank you for your offer, but I reject it."

At that answer, Munakata gave a slight smile.

"Oh, how boring."

He only took a step forward.

"I don't think you and I have a bad relationship."

Two steps, three steps, four steps, five steps, six steps. Munakata was slowly approaching, and Kuro stepped back as if he was being drawn in by some unusually intimidating feeling. His back touched the door, and Kuro unconsciously felt "cornered".

Averting his eyes from Munakata's gaze as if he was looking at himself, Kuro said:

"Ah, it's not a compatibility issue..."

After saying that, Munakata took a deep breath and took a step back.

"Are you saying you don't want to owe other clans?"

"....."

His previous me probably would have.

When he was working to fulfill Ichigen Miwa's will, he wouldn't have even responded to calls from other clans. At that time, he was fine, because the "Black Dog", which was only true to the words of his late master, was nothing more than a device that lived alone and accomplished the mission by himself.

But now...

"No. It's not just me."

Munakata widened his eyes slightly surprised by Kuro, who responded with a smile.

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Fushimi Saruhiko stopped his work as he heard footsteps behind him.

Due to the mass arrest of more than 20 members of the "Jungle" clan the other day, "Scepter 4" suddenly perked up. Among them were mid-level N-Rank users, and it was a great harvest to be able to requisition all of their PDAs.

PDA analysis and Clansman questioning. The information obtained from both sides can be a stepping stone to the upper echelons of "Jungle", which has been shrouded in mystery until now. Not only for the intelligence department of "Scepter 4", but also for Fushimi himself, it's a job worth immersing himself in.

That was why he wanted to ignore the footsteps behind him.

The heavy footsteps stopped right next to Fushimi.

"Fushimi-kun, do you have a minute?"

Fushimi looked at Munakata while inwardly clicking his tongue.

"Has the interview with Yatogami Kuro finished?"

"Yes. He's probably going through exit procedures at the gate right now."

After a pause, Munakata, as if nothing had happened...

"Fushimi-kun, please follow him."

"Eh?"

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. (Are you asking me to follow him right now? Are you kidding?)

As if he heard that voice, Munakata looked at Fushimi and smiled softly.

"The Green Clan may contact him again. Stay tuned."

It was an unmistakable "order." As a member of "Scepter 4", the King's orders cannot be ignored. At least, this time, Fushimi responded by clicking his tongue in reality.

"I understand."

Instant job change. Benzai and Enomoto are the people from the Special Task Force who are capable of handling such important information. Facing Fushimi, who started writing an email requesting them to take over, Munakata spoke in a serious tone.

"Please inform Awashima-kun as necessary."

Saying that, he turned on his heel and tried to leave the briefing room.

Pausing to compose an email, Fushimi glanced over his shoulder at Munakata. He shot a bored look and a voice behind him.

"Where will you be, Captain?"

Munakata's response was direct.

"In the Mihashira Tower."

(Forcing people to work and pilgrimage to the Golden Clan.), Fushimi thought sarcastically.

"Again? Lately, you've been spending a lot more time with the 'Slate' than in the headquarters."

Munakata did not look back. He didn't even bother to reply. Fushimi clicked his tongue again at the sound of footsteps.

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Kuro was found at the main gate of the garrison.

Originally, he is a cat who seems to have run free. He's sure he'll come back when he's hungry, and normally he would have left him alone, but for some reason he worried that he wasn't even at lunch. Before he boiled the soba noodles, he walked around the place, thinking that if he didn't find it, he would eat it first.

A young man was kneeling down and caressing Kuro. Zenjo called out to Kuro, who comfortably rubbed his head against the youth's palm.

"Kuro."

The young man turned around. As he looked at Zenjo in bewilderment.

"What?"

"Oh, no, I called the cat..."

"Oh."

The young man nodded approvingly.

"Is he called Kuro because he's a black cat? Excuse me."

He picked up Kuro's body and handed it over to Zenjo.

Zenjo accepted it with one hand. Most people who see the one-armed giant Zenjo for the first time express surprise at him, but the young man didn't show even the slightest hint of that. After bowing politely, he turned on his heel and left.

His demeanor and the sword at his waist couldn't be that of an ordinary person. As he guessed that it was probably a famous clan member, he heard a voice behind him.

"Zenjo-san."

When he turned around, there was a woman standing there. Seri Awashima. A talented woman who serves as the deputy commander of "Scepter 4".

"Do you have some time?"

Her dignified voice had a strength that made it impossible to tell if she had or not. Zenjo blinked a few times and apologized to Kuro, who was purring into his palm.

"I'm sorry, but please have lunch first."

Lunch consisted of a heaping bowl of red bean paste.

After being ushered into the reception room, when Awashima asked, "Did you finish your food?"

One by one in front of Zenjo and Awashima, a mountain of black bean paste was piled up. It seemed like a joke, but Awashima's expression was serious and there was no sign that it was a joke.

She reached out her hand, took the red bean paste directly and brought it to her mouth. After that, Zenjo asked Awashima.

"Subcommander, what kind of business brings you here?"

Looking directly at Zenjo, Awashima opened her mouth.

"Today, I would like to hear from you as an individual, not as a deputy commander. For the previous "Blue King", Habari Jin's right-hand man, Gouki Zenjo."

Once again, the hand that was reaching out for the anko stopped in midair. Zenjo slowly shook his head with a half-hearted smile.

"I don't think he can say anything useful."

"You are the only person Captain Munakata wanted to bring back from the previous "Blue King" Habari Jin clan."

"I'm just an employee who works in the reference room."

He did not want to be humble. The past is the past. No matter what Munakata plans, no matter what Awashima sees, he was no longer a demon.

Despite Zenjo's casual attitude, Awashima's expression did not change and she opened her mouth.

"The Kagutsu incident occurred 14 years ago, when the Sword of Damocles of the former "Red King" fell. Zenjo-san, your left arm was also lost at that time."

Zenjo's eyebrows twitched.

The Kagutsu incident.

Caused by the "Kings", it was a form of end. It was the name of the detestable ending that engulfed and devoured several "Kings", a city, hundreds of thousands of lives, and Zenjo's left arm.

The past is the past. That's how it is.

However, there is certainly a past that should not be inadvertently entered.

"I heard that without you, the change in Japan's topography would have been more fatal. If things had turned out worse, the Japanese archipelago might have split..."

And Awashima was about to step into the past with some intention.

"Affected by the turbulence of Genji Kagutsu's Weismann deviation, the "Red King" at that time, your "King", Jin Habari, was also in danger of dropping his Sword of Damocles. But the worst was averted. Because..."

For a moment, Awashima hesitantly lowered her gaze.

However, the words that followed were inevitable to fulfill her purpose. Looking at Zenjo again as if she had made up her mind, Awashima spoke clearly.

"Because before that, Zenjo-san, you brought down your own "King"."

The previous "Blue King" Habari Jin.

Even now, 14 years later, just thinking of that name still made his missing left arm tremble. His own master. His own righteousness. His own "King". The fact that he cut him with his own sword will never go away.

Zenjo only responded briefly.

"Yes."

"...I know it's an insensitive question. But please tell me. What was the old "Blue King" like before the Sword of Damocles fell?"

Awashima's expression was tinged with despair. Maybe that was the point, what she really wanted to hear.

Looking at her calmly, Zenjo opened his mouth.

"You're worried about the Captain, aren't you?"

Awashima took a deep breath. Zenjo continued.

"The Captain's "Sword of Damocles" has a scratch on it. It seems there are other members who have noticed it as well. How is the Captain?"

"Usually, there are no changes. However, ever since he was put in charge of Mihashira Tower, he has spent more and more time with the "Slate". Every time, I feel that something is slowly changing..."

"Is that so."

Awashima clenched her fist tightly on her knees and said thoughtfully.

"I'm terrified. I was wondering if the reason the Captain called Zenjo-san to "Scepter 4" was for him to do the same job as before one day..."

"That's my job?"

"Eh?"

Unable to comprehend the meaning, Awashima raised her voice and looked at Zenjo. Zenjo didn't care and he got up from his chair.

"Reisi Munakata's right hand is you, not me."

".....!"

Awashima's eyes widened.

"Thank you for the food. I had sweets for the first time in a long time. It was delicious."

Pulling back his tied sleeves, Zenjo brushed past Awashima and left the reception room. After closing the door, suddenly, there were words that crossed his mind.

"Fate, huh?"

Everything has a role. A great providence that transcends the will of a small human being. Munakata said that this was what caused Zenjo's 'arm' to move and cut his 'King' at that moment.

Maybe that's right. Because none other than Habari had said the same thing. What he trusted is not Zenjo's head or his words, but his "arms". The "Blue King" who was looking at things from a great height might have seen the same thing.

That's what Zenjo thought.

He wondered if he and Seri Awashima had a destiny.

Is the same fate awaiting that man named Reisi Munakata?

There is no other answer than the "King". The past is the past, and the present is the present. Those who live in the current "Scepter 4" will have their own future.

While he was thinking about such things, Zenjo slowly walked towards the reference room.

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"Hmm...!"

Poking the red marble into her blue eye, Neko was looking for "him".

However, what she could see through it all was the red-stained bar of the HOMRA bar and the red clansmen staring at her in amazement. Neko raised her arms in an explosion of frustration and irritation.

"Not good after all! I can't see Shiro!"

"Did you really see the figure of the "Silver King"?"

Kusanagi, standing on the other side of the bar counter, called out to her. Neko barked as if she bought a fight that had been sold.

"I saw Shiro! When I looked at the marble, Shiro was there and he was fine!"

"Because I put my strength into that marble so you can connect with the person you want to find the most."

Anna, who was sitting next to Neko, said that in a soft voice.

This fall, Neko and Anna had a strange connection. It all started when Kuro and Neko, who were passing by, rescued Anna and Kamamoto from being attacked by the Green Clan. After that, even after Anna woke up as the "Red King", "Homura" did not forget her kindness and was kind to her.

Of course, she did not forget that "Homura" chased them in the past, but Anna was different. She's cute, kind, and gives her tasty things. Neko and Anna had become good friends.

"Well, if Anna says so, I will."

Kusanagi shrugged slightly. Neko looked back at the marble and muttered sadly.

"But I saw Shiro, and that was the only time... Hey, Anna, show me one more time!"

Anna smiled at Neko who snuggled up to her, but shook her head.

"You won't always be able to see him. But I'm sure he's connected. Your loved ones may be watching you."

"Oh, really?!"

Encouraged by those words, Neko looked back at the marble.

"Shiro! Shiro! Are you looking?"

"By the way, why are you standing here like it's natural? You're from another clan!"

Yata angered his shoulders and made such an accusation. Neko pouted and walked away from her,

"Because the glasses boss said he wanted us to go with him."

"So, you ran away and made this place your haven. Well, if you're in our dependent territory, even the blues won't be able to get their hands on you."

Kamamoto's words irritated Yata even more. He held out his arms intimidatingly,

"Don't be using HOMRA conveniently!"

Neko shook her head like a baby.

"I hate the glasses boss! I hate the other glasses guy too! I don't want to go to the blue hide!"

"Hey, you!"

"What happened to the Black Dog?"

Kamamoto changed the subject. Neko blinked and shrugged.

"I don't know..."

"You do not know?"

"I'm not worried about Kurosuke! Even if we get separated, we can meet again and again!"

When she put her head in Anna's lap, she stroked her head silently. If Neko was a real cat, she would have been purring. Anna's knees were so warm and soft and comfortable.

"An interrogation, huh? Looks like the blue guys are falling behind the green guys' moves."

"It's a good feeling, isn't it? There are many people who have green breath among the common people, and I don't know where the clansmen are."

"Those who live a normal life while playing with PDAs are connected to the vegetation. It's hard to do."

Kusanagi and the others were having some difficult conversations, while Neko absently sat on Anna's lap and listened.

Countermeasures and strategies, Neko didn't have such troublesome thoughts. However, those people with green masks were only perceived as "disgusting guys" who chased after Neko and Kuro. There was only one thing she could do with the "bad guys": ignore them and run. At least that's what Neko has always done.

But, now that she thought about it, those people don't seem to do that.

"They're not targeting Anna again, right?"

Kusanagi responded with a wry smile to Yata's words.

"Anna is now the "Red Queen", they won't want to mess with her."

"Even if they come, I'll be fine."

Looking at the hand that was caressing Neko, Anna muttered under her breath.

"The red inherited from Mikoto. With my red, I can fight. I won't lose."

Resting her head on Anna's lap, Neko stared at the gesture.

These people, "Homura", are trying to fight. They are trying to stand up. to protect your precious things.

"...Anna, are you okay?"

When she said that, Anna's kind eyes looked at Neko. Neko half sat down and communicated her feelings with gestures.

"Kurosuke said that the power of red was destined for destruction, but... Anna, won't you explode with the power of the king?"

Neko doesn't know much about the former "Red King". Still, she could feel his terrifying presence on her skin even from a distance. She recalled that she had the impression that he was so scary that she wanted to run away from a distance, but that it was somehow sad.

Neko doesn't think Anna is scary. But somewhere there was the sadness of the previous king. Neko doesn't know what will happen to Anna, who is trying to face the battle as a "King". Not knowing, she couldn't help but worry about it.

A person who has become "King" may suddenly disappear one day.

Just like the previous "Red King" did.

Like Shiro.

Suddenly, Anna got up from the couch. With just a smile in response to the restless Neko, she headed towards the wall.

There were many photographs there. They were all happy, cheerful, shoulder to shoulder and laughing. A fragment of memories now long gone, with little familiarity to Neko.

However, the figure of Anna gazing at them eloquently told her how precious those memories were.

"I'm not as strong as Mikoto. But I have a feeling that I'll be fine."

Saying that, Anna slowly turned around.

"I got this power to protect myself. There's Izumo, Misaki, Rikio, and everyone else."

Some important people. Also the people next to her, and...

"Tatara and Mikoto are here too."

Those who have already disappeared are still alive in Anna's heart.

"That's why I'm fine. This beautiful red is my friend."

Holding her chest, Anna said that.

Seeing Anna like this, "Homura" responded in the manner of them.

Some tried to hide their pain from her by looking away from her, while others nodded feverishly.

Among them, Yata was the only one who stepped forward and declared.

"I'm going to protect Anna too! No, I know that Anna is stronger than me currently, but..."

Yata scratched his head impatiently.

"Until now, I've always thought that Mikoto-san was amazing and didn't understand anything... I may not understand much even now, but I'm still the kind of person Anna can rely on. I'll be the kind of man Anna can lean on!"

"Yata-san...!"

Kamamoto looked at Yata with a hint of emotion as he sobbed.

Kusanagi and Anna had small smiles on their lips.

Neko got a little happy and jumped on her feet.

"Anna, you're going to be fine! That's good!"

The anxiety she had felt before disappeared. She is sure that Anna will be fine. Because there are so many people who care about her and who she cares about them. Even if they have to fight the green ones, they will surely be able to work together and beat them.

"When Shiro returns, I'll bring him! Shiro has been king for a long time, so he is the king's senpai!"

"Yes. I want to talk to him."

Saying that, Neko and Anna laughed together, and then Yata intervened.

"Hey, it's not easy to get along with other "Kings"."

Puzzled, Neko asked Yata.

"Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why can't we just get along?"

"...No, I don't know why... but that's how it was..."

To Yata, who was muttering, Neko seemed to be saying something obvious.

"It's better to get along!"

"Neko is right."

At Anna's sudden comment, Yata blurted out the words "Oh, oh..." and scratched his cheek awkwardly. Neko puffed out her chest in triumph.

At that moment, Kusanagi came over with a tray.

"Ok. If you don't fight, you can still eat this."

Neko's eyes sparkled. What Kusanagi brought were hot pancakes with brightly colored fruits, sweet and fragrant vanilla ice cream, lattice-shaped chocolate and raspberry sauce.

"Wow! It's a snack! It's a snack~!"

Neko's eyes sparkled as she jumped onto the plate on the table. But...

"Kusanagi-san, me too!"

"Me too!"

"Nyaa?!"

Similarly, Yata and Kamamoto rushed to the plate. Neko cringed and cornered the plate to protect herself and Anna's party.

"You can take it yourselves."

"Ahhh!"

When Kusanagi said that with a shocked face, the two of them turned around and ran to the kitchen. Neko released her guard and turned to the pancake with a big smile.

"Hm~! Delicious!"

As she munched on the fluffy pancake, Neko suddenly remembered something that happened once. She said to Anna as gesticulated.

"You know, Kurosuke made this for me the other day too! While I'm talking, I'd like to put black honey on the pancakes. Kurosuke's story is long, so it's annoying, but what Kurosuke does is delicious!"

"That's a big deal. Black honey, huh. I might be able to do it. But still..."

Kusanagi gave Neko a smirk.

"Neko-chan also likes "Kurosuke"."

Neko's eyes widened as if the tip of her nose had been turned upside down.

If they ask if she likes him or hates him, well, he likes him. Kuro is fussy, annoying, and sometimes grumpy, but he's a nice guy nonetheless. He seriously thinks about Shiro and Neko, and he tries to protect them with his own body. Those days that the three of them went through were undoubtedly precious memories for Neko.

So Neko replied:

"I like Shiro better, and I like Kurosuke as much as I like fish?"

"Neko."

"Nyah?"

"You can come here with Kuro."

"Meow?"

Neko repeatedly blinked her round eyes. Today is a day when people say things she didn't expect, though Neko never lived to anticipate anything.

"You can stay here until Yashiro returns. It's safer here."

Neko looked around her.

As if to confirm Anna's words, both Kusanagi and Yata, who had returned from the kitchen, nodded slightly. Neko who had been chased by them and fought alongside them knows how strong they are. With "Homura" protecting her, even if the greens attack her again, she will be able to sleep peacefully.

But...

"Is there any dependent territory that you guys have? Ah, after becoming a member of the clan, the "Silver King" disappeared."

At Yata's casual words, Neko lowered her shoulders. She really didn't understand what "dependent territory" meant, but it was true that Shiro was not there. That's why they were being targeted by the greens.

"...Misaki."

Anna looked at Yata with sharp eyes. Perhaps finally realizing his own slip of the tongue, Yata hastened to explain.

"Ah... well, sorry..."

Neko kept her face down and shook her head.

"Alright."

"Ah, sorry! It's ok, as Anna says, if you stay here..."

"That's wrong!"

Neko looked up and smiled. Anna gave her a curious look.

Certainly, just as Yata said, Shiro was not there. There is nothing that can guarantee the safety of Kuro and Neko, and it is true that if they were chased by the Green Clan like the other day, they would have no choice but to run away.

Still, Neko was not alone.

Right next to her, was Kuro. He's not there right now, but she's sure that Shiro will come back. It is different from the days when she was alone, shivering with cold and loneliness.

Instead of giving up, Neko made a clear statement with hope burning in her heart.

"Because Wagahai has...!"

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"Kurosuke!"

As he was crossing the bridge towards Gakuenjima, someone called out to him from behind.

When he turned around, Neko was jumping up and running towards him. Kuro asked Neko that she had reached him with an exasperated face.

"Where have you been?"

"I didn't want to go to the glasses boss, so I hid in Anna's place!"

It was really forceful. It seems that she doesn't feel sorry for pushing the troubles onto Kuro and quickly hides. However, that kind of thing about Neko is nothing new, so he didn't even feel like complaining now.

"Geez..."

"Hehe!"

Neko hugged Kuro who was sighing. A big smile appeared on Neko's face, as if something good had happened.

"What?"

Neko extended a red marble in front of Kuro. They gave it to her when she helped Anna Kushina that time.

It seems that it was endowed with the ability to perceive, and mirrored Shiro and Kuro, whom Neko cherishes the most.

How much the two were saved by that appearance. They didn't know where he was, no, they didn't even know if he was alive.

"This marble doesn't always reflect Shiro, but it's definitely connected to Shiro. Shiro might as well be watching you."

Looking at the happy Neko, Kuro also laughed.

"Oh, really?"

"Ok. So let's go home!"

Neko laughed as if she was convinced of something.

Seeing that, there was a scene that appeared in Kuro's mind.

Those were the words that Reisi Munakata said to him in the "Scepter 4" headquarters at that time.

"I offer you the protection of "Scepter 4"."

He thought that Munakata's offer was to their advantage. At least they wouldn't be attacked by the Green Clans. They could walk without worrying about their backs, and there would be no need to stay awake.

"Thank you for your offer, but I reject it."

Still, what Kuro said was...

"Even if I don't have any territory, I have a place to return to."

There was a reason for that.

Neko also remembered in the same way. At the HOMRA bar, Anna invited her to stay there.

"You should stay here until Yashiro returns."

Anna's words were kind, soft and full of warmth. If she had nodded her head, she surely would have lived a peaceful life. Surrounded by kind people, she should have been able to live in peace without being afraid of anything.

The Neko from a while ago would have done it without hesitation. Because it was everything Neko wanted.

However, Neko shook her head.

"Alright."

Anna's warm knees felt so good.

Those green guys are pretty scary though.

But still...

"Because Wagahai has a home to return to!"

Kuro and Neko were unaware of each other's situation. There was no way of knowing what kind of conversation each of them had with the "King" they met.

Still, the two of them crossed the bridge as if it were a matter of course. Because they know that it is the place to which they must return. As they squinted at the blurry sunset, they believed that somewhere, surely, their "King" was also looking towards that sunset.

Kuro and Neko walked away to go back to their own home.

CHAPTER 3: RETURN

The first thing that caught his eye when he opened the fusuma was Mishakuji lounging on the couch and relaxing.

"Oh, Sukuna-chan. Welcome back."

"Kuwa! Welcome! Welcome!"

Gracefully filing his nails, Mishakuji glanced at Sukuna out of the corner of his eye. Sitting on the back of the couch, Kotosaka spread his wings and rejoiced at his return. Beyond that, Iwafune was vacuuming with a beer in hand, and in the kitchen, in the back, was steaming a hot pot.

Sukuna let out a small sigh when he saw the scene just before dinner at some house. Even if he said that this is the hideout of "Jungle", a supernatural group that is causing a stir in the world, few people would believe it. Sukuna himself once suspected that it was some kind of camouflage due to over-familiarity.

However, it is an undeniable fact that this "secret base" is their base of operations. Sukuna sat on the tatami and turned his gaze to Mishakuji who was lying on the couch.

"Even though people have been working, you are calm."

Mishakuji just snorted and didn't reply. Well, it's true that the mission Sukuna was involved in until now was only for Sukuna. Mishakuji had nothing to do with it, so whether he brushed his nails or took a bath, he was up to Mishakuji.

But apart from that, he was annoyed by Mishakuji's aristocratic attitude.

With a childish competitive spirit, though he didn't realize it himself, Sukuna puffed out his chest and appealed to his achievements.

"While Mishakuji was taking it easy, I did a great job! The "Homura" guys danced exactly as I expected, and I was able to bring out the guys in blue. After all, the more clans that participate in the game, more colorful it will be."

However, Mishakuji paid Sukuna no mind and smiled at the finish on his fingernails.

"Yes, it's beautiful."

"Hey! Are you listening, Mishakuji?"

As Sukuna threw a tantrum, Mishakuji finally smiled at him.

"I'm listening. If "Homura" goes into a rage, the number of people "Scepter 4" can devote to suppressing the incident will increase dramatically. Involving "Homura" was an interesting choice, wasn't it? The method of using the dead as reserve is not very beautiful."

Sukuna turned around at the stinging last word.

"I don't care about aesthetics like you do. Thanks to that, I also saw the blue and red swords of Damocles. On the blue sword, the wound is wider than when I saw it before."

A broken sword of Damocles. What it shows is the fact that the charge of regicide haunts the Blue King Reisi Munakata.

After all, this game is a fight for the King. Just like shogi and chess. No matter how much other pieces are sacrificed, in the end the team that defeats the "King" wins. The fall of Munakata, who had taken over the previous "Red King", was close, and Sukuna's current goal was to hasten it further.

Mishakuji nodded and narrowed his eyes.

"It's going well. By the way, how was Kuro-chan?"

Kuro? Sukuna finally remembered after tilting his head.

"Ah, Yatogami Kuro. He didn't seem as strong as you said. Is he really your brother?"

Mishakuji Yukari is one of the few strong people that Sukuna recognizes as superior to him. Since he was the younger brother, he was planning to find out how much strength

he possessed, but he was mostly just running around and not doing much. If all he could do is defeat a small item like "Emerald", it was a good place to be disappointed.

Mishakuji shrugged at Sukuna's exasperated face.

"He's not my real little brother, you know? It's just that we were under the same master, Ichigen Miwa."

"Yukari, training brother!"

"That's right. Kotosaka-chan is better at remembering things."

Pointing his manicured fingernails at him, Kotosaka rubbed his head comfortably against the tips of his fingers. Sukuna looked at him with a confused face.

"That boy is growing interestingly. That was enough to stick a sword into me. Even if it's Sukuna-chan, how would you feel if you dealt with that boy?"

Sukuna stuck out his tongue at the provocative way of saying it.

"It doesn't matter. I don't have time to hunt down guys who don't even give me points, and if he comes up against me, I'll just crush him."

Before Sukuna, Yatogami Kuro had a low priority. Despite his rarity as a member of the Silver Clan, removing him is not currently in the cards. What was necessary was to "torture" him, and it was fine to leave such trivial matters to the lesser members of the clan.

Besides...

Iwafune stopped vacuuming and gave Sukuna a reproachful look.

"Anyway, did you buy the detergent I asked for earlier?"

Sukuna was exhausted, but still he pushed the store bag he had bought towards Iwafune.

"I'm busy too, so it's boring, don't ask me to run an errand! I bought it!"

"Okay, I can't go out right now. Guess I'll have to get someone outside to buy it for me."

Iwafune looked into the plastic bag as he said something that sounded like a scolding, frowning.

"Oh, you have to buy the one with fabric softener!"

"Softener! Softener!"

Kotosaka roared as he flew through the air. Sukuna tried to hit Kotosaka with a clenched fist, even though he knew he couldn't reach him.

"Don't worry, dammit! It doesn't matter, Iwa-san, you're always piling up clothes, but are you so picky about detergent?"

"I'm not hoarding it; I'm just waiting for the right time to wash it. The proof is that you wash your pants relatively often."

Iwafune took a sip of his beer as he shrugged. Sukuna became more and more annoyed seeing him as a useless househusband or elderly pimp. With a big sigh, Sukuna picked up the portable game machine that was sitting on the dining room table.

"More than that, I want to do something new soon. I'm tired of just giving missions to people under me."

Mishakuji agreed and applied a base coat to his manicured nails.

"Well, it certainly lacks glamour. It's frustrating that the "Silver King" is still missing."

"The "Silver King", is he really alive? I mean, even if he was alive, he would have escaped to heaven for about 70 years. He's good at running away."

At that moment, a voice echoed from the back of the room.

"But he came down to earth a year ago. He came down."

The wheels turned silently, pulling the owner of the voice out of the darkness.

He is strapped in a straitjacket and can't even move without using a state-of-the-art wheelchair. His appearance is reminiscent of a sick man on the verge of death, or a delinquent trapped in the dark underworld.

But Sukuna said no. Everyone recognizes the "Jungle" clansman on the spot.

Even on the verge of death, his thoughts are freer than any human being.

Even if he was pushed into the dark underworld, he knew that his thoughts were bigger than any "King".

The Fifth King, the "Green King" Hisui Nagare, slowly looked at everyone.

"I want to meet the "Silver King". He, the first "King" who discovered the mystery of the "Slate".

Sukuna noticed the warmth hidden deep within those eyes. Nagare possesses a machine-like logical way of thinking, but at the same time, he has a passion that is stronger than anyone else. Otherwise, the dream of creating a new world would be a joke.

Nagare's will is now directed at the "Silver King". There was something about it that made him think about it. Sukuna is the highest ranker in "Jungle". If Nagare so wished, he intended to fulfill that wish with all his might.

As he lay on the couch, Mishakuji said in amazement.

"The opponent is an unchanging "King". Although he has the worst compatibility with Nagare-chan, the "King" of Alteration. He might be our biggest obstacle, you know?"

"It's useless to say it. You know if this guy says it, he won't listen."

Iwafune's voice was mixed with the sound of a wry smile towards a boy who had no sense of hearing. Mishakuji got up from the couch and gently shook his head.

"Well, Nagare-chan should do whatever he wants. I just want to see if the new world Nagare-chan creates will be beautiful."

That's right, Sukuna thought.

"Jungle" is, after all, a gathering of such people. A clan of those who seek new worlds and possibilities. If there is a horizon they want, they will open any obstacle. If you don't have that kind of value, you don't have the right to belong to "Jungle".

"If it's a game that Nagare plays, of course I'll play it. Because we, the green clan "Jungle", are the players of the game created by Nagare!"

Sukuna declared that with a smile, and Nagare nodded slightly. Suddenly, several windows appeared in the air of the "secret base".

"This is...?"

What was projected there was a group of people that even Sukuna knew well. Reisi Munakata, Anna Kushina, Seri Awashima, and Izumo Kusanagi are the main figures of the clan against which "Jungle" is hostile.

Nagare slowly moved in front of two of them, the images of Yatogami Kuro and Neko.

Iwafune asked as he drank beer.

"They are the vassals of the "Silver King" that you are obsessed with. Are you curious?"

"Yes. I'm curious about them."

When Nagare blinked, the holographic image changed in response. The scene where Reisi Munakata and Anna Kushina were having a conversation. It was probably a video from the final phase of Mission 2086, when the "Jungle" clansmen were destroyed by "Homura" and "Scepter 4".

"Silver Clan members entered and exited the headquarters of "Blue King" Reisi Munakata and "Red Queen" Anna Kushina. This is a situation we need to be a bit concerned about."

"Are these guys going in and out of the red and blue because the "Silver King" is pulling the strings behind the scenes?"

Nagare narrowed his eyes as if he were sinking into silent thought.

"It is unlikely that the "Silver King" is contacting them while evading our surveillance. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out. Since we do not know the whereabouts of the "Silver King", we must consider that he has a means of communication that we do not recognize."

"Aren't you thinking too much?"

"Yes. Maybe I'm overthinking it. But I have to do what I can."

Nagare's gaze unintentionally turned to Mishakuji. Mishakuji smiled charmingly and spread his arms wide like a stage actor.

"Flower buds are beautiful. But buds that drop before opening are even more beautiful."

Pulling the sword from his waist along with the scabbard, Mishakuji let out a sonorous voice.

"Is that so? Iwa-san, Nagare-chan?"

"What are you saying?"

In contrast to the stunned Iwafune, Nagare nodded in agreement.

"That's right. No matter what the possibility is, if you pluck the cocoon, it will still be a possibility."

After a pause, Nagare uttered those words.

"Mishakuji. It's a mission. Please remove them from the game board."

For a short time, the "secret base" was filled with silence.

The elimination of Yatogami Kuro and Neko. The removal of two people who could lead to the absent King, Adolf K. Weismann, who "Jungle" mistrusts the most at this time. It means that the game will go to a different stage than what they were doing.

Faced with that fact, the J-Ranks showed their respective reactions. Gojou Sukuna was seething with excitement and Iwafune Tenkei was a bit worried.

And Mishakuji Yukari was...

"I can't believe I can continue from that moment so quickly."

There was a contradictory echo in his voice. A slight sadness and much more joy and anticipation. He put the hilt of the sword on his shoulder and muttered a bit.

"I wonder if this is also fate."

Of course, Sukuna didn't know about Mishakuji's sentimentality. He didn't know if he was a junior brother or a junior disciple, but if it was a mission, there was no need to stop anywhere.

"If you're going to get rid of Yatogami Kuro, so am I. Mishakuji and I have different opinions on whether he's strong or weak. I'll make it clear in black and white here!"

At Sukuna's triumphant declaration, Iwafune replied, "Oh!".

"Are you going to put it in black and white?! You're a brat, but you say cute things, Sukuna!"

Sukuna didn't even try to hide his disgusted face from him and spat it out.

"I hate Iwa-san to death."

"What the hell, I'm praising you so don't be embarrassed. Just be honest and say you're happy!"

Iwafune took a sip of his beer again, laughing out loud. Sukuna stood up with a cane in hand as he no longer had a problem dealing with him.

"So, let's go pick the sprouts, Sukuna-chan?"

"Ah!"

Then, when Mishakuji put his hand on the fusuma, Nagare suddenly muttered.

"I forgot to say. Mishakuji. You can kill Yatogami Kuro, but please bring Ameno Miyabi back alive."

Sukuna tilted his head at the unfamiliar name, but immediately remembered it.

Ameno Miyabi. If he remembered correctly, it must have been the real name of the girl called Neko.

"I don't care, but may I ask why?"

Mishakuji asked over his shoulder, and Nagare spoke matter-of-factly.

"Because she is my compatriot."

It was also an unknown word.

No, he never heard the word "compatriot" come out of Nagare's mouth. Those words, which were neither comrades nor friends, seemed to represent a side of Nagare that Sukuna didn't know.

But Mishakuji seemed to have a clue.

"Compatriot, I see. Understood, My Lord."

After responding lightly, Mishakuji left the "secret base". Sukuna walked out as if he was chasing him.

Cool, humid air caressed Sukuna's cheeks.

The "secret base" exists in an abandoned underground water storage facility. The spectacle of huge pillars lined up in the dark is like an underground temple.

Sukuna asked as he walked between the pillars.

"Hey, what did you mean earlier?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't be silly. Ameno Miyabi is that Neko person, right? Why is she a compatriot of Nagare's?"

Mishakuji looked at Sukuna with sidelong glances.

"Come on? Why do you think?"

Just from that look, Sukuna understood that Mishakuji had no intention of answering directly.

"That's enough."

With his lips pouting in frustration, Sukuna pondered.

Ameno Miyabi. The girl named Neko.

Originally, she was supposed to be a Strain girl. She is good at hallucinating, blinding, faking memories, etc. She's quite a troublesome ability, but he didn't perceive her as a threat because the person in question was stupid.

Why was she a compatriot of Nagare?

She is not a "King". She's not like she has a history of being in "Jungle" before. In the first place, he didn't think that any of them were the existence that Nagare called "compatriots". Killing the "King" and cutting down the Clansman, he could do without hesitation.

Does it mean that Ameno Miyabi is a special existence for Nagare?

More than a "King", more than "Jungle", more than themselves?

"...It's stupid. Stop it."

Muttering so, Sukuna gave up on the idea.

There was no way he could come up with an answer just thinking through everything himself. Although Mishakuji and Iwa-san knew the true identity, it was annoying to ask

them for an answer. Sukuna decided to focus on the mission, assuming that if anything happened, he would tell her.

While fiddling with his PDA, Sukuna said quietly.

"Yukari. Can I decide the mission outline?"

"At your discretion."

Mishakuji's answer was simple. Despite being a J-Rank, Mishakuji doesn't really want to do things like create and launch quests. He prefers to take things into his own hands.

It was in contrast to Sukuna's method. Sukuna uses everything that is available and often entrusts the complicated but important functions of reconnaissance and finding enemies to the lower ranks. He also knows how to manipulate them at will.

"Ordered by the J-Rank authority. Mission 3921, activate."

"Voiceprint authentication confirmed. Mission 3921 with J-Rank authority, activated."

Jumpy's wings glowed green. The electronic information that Sukuna had just created turned into innumerable lights and was sucked into the darkness above him.

"Jungle" extends its roots from underground to the ground. They will soon discover that the kingdom they must defend is already entrenched in its roots.

The mission setting is Ashinaka Academy. It is the home of the Silver Clan.

+++++

There was pure white rice in front of her.

There a red marble was placed on a small cushion. It's a marble that reflects Shiro, and it's highly prized (that's what Neko thinks for herself), so it would be perfect as an offering.

Neko said kindly as she clasped her hands together.

"Shiro. Wagahai is fine. Don't worry."

Then, as if to finish the meal, she made a sound with her chopsticks and a cup of tea.

With that, she was sure that she wouldn't have to worry about making Shiro, who was somewhere far away in the sky, hungry. She was happy until Kuro, who was sitting at the same table as her, let out an angry voice.

"Stop! It's not even auspicious!"

Neko flinched, but she still objected disapprovingly.

"Because I want to feed Shiro too!"

"I don't mind that, but you should finish your food first."

"Uh..."

"Come on, put it away right away. I won't be able to put another plate on."

Reluctantly, Neko put away the cushion and the marble that she had prepared. Kuro quickly put the plates there. White rice, miso soup and grilled horse mackerel were served with grated daikon radish. Seeing that, Neko's stomach groaned "Kyurururu...". Of course she was worried about Shiro being somewhere, but other than that, she was hungry and the fish looked delicious.

"Itadakimasu."

At the same time, they put their hands together and began to eat.

"Now that I think about it, this room also has a lot more stuff."

As he loosened the horse mackerel with the tips of his chopsticks, Kuro suddenly said such a thing. Neko raised her head and looked around the room.

It was certainly as Kuro said. Maneki-neko, Japanese umbrellas, temari balls, even tanuki figurines and totem poles, the room is cluttered with clutter. At first, Kuro was diligently tidying up, but when the large number of things that came up exceeded the storage limit, he gave up everything.

"While he was looking for Shiro here and there, he somehow brought it back."

"This room is used as a base to search for Shiro. But where the hell is he wandering...?"

To Kuro who was muttering, Neko picked up the fish bone and said:

"I don't know, but I think he's unexpectedly close."

"Why do you think that?"

"Somehow I know!"

He said that innocently and she bit into the bones of the fish.

Kuro looked at her in astonishment, but before long he closed his eyes in silence and, as if he was impressed, he said...

"You don't need reasons, do you? I think that's what it means to believe."

Neko stared at Kuro.

Why did he take it for granted? Motives and bases, that kind of thing doesn't make sense. That's what she thinks. Neko has always lived like this.

Because...

Because?

".....?"

"Neko? What happened?"

Kuro called out to Neko who was staring at the sky. Raising her voice, "Uh...", Neko looked at Kuro in surprise.

"What?"

"No, it looks like you were thinking about something. Is there something bothering you?"

"....."

Neko's blue and gold eyes pointed at Kuro.

But she hadn't seen Kuro. The worried expression on his face, the messy room full of things, and the favorite fish on the table were not reflected in Neko's eyes.

At that moment, she almost remembered something.

She didn't know what memory it was.

However, only a vague feeling of dread remained within Neko. It was like looking into a deep, bottomless hole. It was as if she suddenly heard a voice calling her name from inside the hole. That's how it felt.

"Neko?"

Kuro's expression took on a serious look, and his hand reached out and grabbed Neko's shoulder. With a soft shake, Neko blinked as if she had just woken up.

"Hey. Are you sure you're okay?"

"...Yes, hey! It's nothing!"

Especially brightly, Neko said that.

She didn't think to tell Kuro about the sensations she had just learned. It wasn't because she thought Kuro couldn't understand. It was because Neko wanted to get away from that fact.

All her life, Neko has lived according to how she feels. She has been running away from things that she doesn't like or that she fears. If she can't escape, she pretends not to see him. If she does that, one day it might disappear, even if it's something inside of her.

So Neko did.

"Kurosuke, another serving! Wagahai wants to eat more rice!"

"...Oh, yes. I understand."

Although he was confused, Kuro accepted Neko's bowl. As he served the food, Neko smiled more than necessary.

+++++

Send 01: "Report target position", is activated.

Shipment 01: "Target Position Report", completed. Adds 5 "Jungle" points.

Send 02: "Report target position", is activated.

Shipment 02: "Target Position Report", completed. Adds 5 "Jungle" points.

Notification: Guys, too many reports! The EX1 send "Report target position" will be triggered every 5 minutes from now, but it is first come first served.

Send 03: "Issuing a guest pass for Ashinaka Academy", is activated.

Shipment 03: "Issuing a guest pass for Ashinaka Academy", completed. Adds 5 "Jungle" points.

Warning: We are almost at Gakuenjima. We have prepared a lot of missions, so you can earn as many points as you want. Stay tuned!

+++++

"Geez..."

Yata let out a tired voice as he entered the HOMRA bar.

He went directly to the stool at the counter and sat down. Kusanagi, who was behind the counter, only looked at Yata and then quickly looked back at the PDA in his hand. The behavior bothered him a bit, but he had to report it anyway.

"I kicked out all the green guys that got into Shizume. They look like cockroaches."

When he said that with a sigh, Kusanagi gave a small laugh.

"Even if it's Yata-chan, it's impossible for everyone. One of the characteristics of green guys is that you don't know where they hide."

"I know! That's what makes me mad!"

"Well, thanks for your hard work. You should rest for a while."

Even as he said that, Kusanagi didn't let go of his PDA control. As expected, he suspected and scream.

"What are you doing?"

Kusanagi smiled and showed Yata a PDA. The bright green rear screen and the characters that floated in the center are from "Jungle".

Suddenly, blood boiled through his entire body. Suoh and Totsuka, the memory of when his two dear friends were desecrated, suddenly revived, and Yata involuntarily raised his head.

"Kusanagi-san, that's all!"

"Calm down. I know what you mean."

Kusanagi's voice was calm, but his eyes weren't smiling. Yata took a deep breath, exhaled, and sat back down on the stool.

Kusanagi is like him, no, Kusanagi has been with those two the longest. That anger might even surpass Yata's. Kusanagi is probably looking for a way to defeat "Jungle" with his head, just like Yata hits the "Jungle" members hard.

While manipulating the PDA, Kusanagi spoke in his usual tone.

"If you know him and you know yourself, you won't be able to fight a hundred battles, okay? I was curious about how "Jungle" works, so I explored with a disposable PDA. Then I came across this."

A familiar face was projected into the air from the PDA. That is to say...

"What is this?! My picture!"

Yata felt an uneasy feeling when he saw the photo of his face and the letters "Yata Misaki 3000JP" flickering below him, as if he had been secretly photographed somewhere.

"In short, that's the bounty on your head. If I can kill you, I get bonus points. So if you accumulate those points, your rank in the clan will go up."

"I see."

Yata was satisfied with Kusanagi's explanation.

Now that he thought about it, he remembered that the guys who were ambushing them in that building also dropped strange numbers. It must have been a strategy to get a large amount of prize money by bringing "Homura" and "Scepter 4" together. However, it was the other side that was everywhere.

"So it's a reward? Well, that's why they're afraid of this Yatagarasu-sama, isn't it?"

On second thought, it wasn't bad either. He didn't know how many points 3000JP was, but being the target with a photo of his face was probably a big threat to them. If his existence becomes a nuisance to "Jungle", it would be better than that.

Then, Kusanagi turned the PDA around again.

"Yata-chan, Yata-chan."

"Eh?"

"Look here."

What was projected there was a familiar face and the letters "Fushimi Saruhiko 4000JP" blinking below.

The blood boiled again and Yata hit the counter with his fist and stood up.

"Eh? What a joke! Why do they give more reward for the monkey?!"

"We'll be evenly matched in strength, but Fushimi can also process information. If I change it to green, won't it be a bigger threat?"

"Damn, I can't believe it!"

Kusanagi's careful explanation only added fuel to Yata's anger. If it was something like that, he should have made a more violent rampage in that building. He should have carved into theirs hearts that he was even more terrifying than Fushimi.

Seeing Yata like this, Kusanagi smiled and put the PDA on the counter.

"Yata. Are you in contact with Fushimi?"

Yata's eyes widened as if struck by the void, and then he immediately turned around.

"Why are you asking all of a sudden? You're not going to ask him for help, are you?"

"No, I wonder what happened to "Scepter 4" after the incident the other day. I also try to sound out Seri-chan in various ways, but this is quite a strict guard."

"So you mean contact the bastard monkey and ask him about this or that?"

There were some thorns in his voice. Despite Yata's piercing gaze, Kusanagi still kept his calm expression.

"You still can't forgive Fushimi?"

"I won't do such a thing."

He believed it was natural. Fushimi Saruhiko is a traitor. "Homura", Suoh, Kusanagi, Totsuka... And then, the man who betrayed him and fled to "Scepter 4".

However, his anger was not as intense as before. It was still hot, but it had turned to a dull, smoky fire, like coals buried in ash.

Kusanagi looked directly at Yata and said:

"If that's the case, then Fushimi or "Jungle", which one can you forgive?"

Yata pursed his lips.

Seeing that expression, Kusanagi let out a small sigh.

"Reconcile with Fushimi, is what I say. We and "Scepter 4" are not allies or anything. However, we are not enemies either. The only enemy is "Jungle"."

"....."

"Don't mess with the wrong person."

Yata seemed to understand what Kusanagi meant.

It wasn't like it used to be. That's what he said.

When Suoh and Totsuka were close, Yata didn't have to think about anything. Yata was the kamikaze commander who pounced on "Homura"'s enemies without hesitation, and he thought of the role of Kusanagi and Totsuka.

However, after Totsuka's death, Suoh also lost his life. There was no one to unite "Homura", and at one point it was even in danger of disbanding.

All members of the clan trust Anna, who has become the "King". But Anna is still a child. To unite "Homura" as an organization, Kusanagi alone is not enough. Someone has to take the place of what's gone.

He was vaguely aware that this was his role.

However, he probably won't be able to become like Suoh or Totsuka. He was sure that he could not possess the great power to attract people, or the kindness that makes even a raised sword come down. Yata Misaki is just Yata Misaki after all. He didn't think he would be able to take their places.

"I know. That's all."

When he said that bluntly, Kusanagi relaxed his expression.

"Well, if that's the case. Sorry for saying unnecessary things, Yata-chan."

"....."

Kusanagi's kind tone was even more pitiful, and Yata clenched his fist tightly.

At that moment, he heard the footsteps of someone coming down from the second floor. When he turned his eyes there, the white-haired girl, Anna, suddenly peeked into his face.

"Oh, Anna. What's wrong?"

When Yata called out to her, Anna blinked slowly. Her expression was as expressionless as ever, but there was a sign that she was somewhat confused.

"A lost item."

"Eh?"

"When Neko came yesterday, she seemed to have forgotten something."

Neko. A girl who belongs to the Silver Clan. It's true that she came to the HOMRA bar yesterday to hang out and then left, but Yata said in amazement.

"Did she forget something? What a careless woman."

"I have to deliver it. I'm sure she'll have trouble without it."

Yata suddenly stopped Anna, who was about to head for the exit of the bar.

"Give it to me. I'll take it."

Anna stopped and looked at Yata in surprise.

"But..."

"A king shouldn't go out lightly, right?"

"Misaki...?"

Reading something from Yata's expression, Anna tilted her head and looked at Yata. That look was embarrassing, and Yata said as he turned to the side with a slightly reddened face.

"Anna is now the "Red Queen", but you are different from Mikoto-san. Didn't I tell you that I will be someone you can trust?"

He couldn't take the place of Suoh or Totsuka.

Yata can only be like Yata. He will become someone that Anna, Kusanagi and everyone in "Homura" can trust. Yata's determination was to become a man who would make people think they would be okay with him.

"Yes."

Yata held out his hand and Anna smiled gently.

"Thank you. So, give this to her at Gakuenjima."

Yata felt his determination waver when he saw what Anna had given him.

In Yata's palm was a small piece of frilly white cloth, women's underwear.

Kusanagi, who was looking at him from afar, said in a plaintive and amused tone.

"Yata-chan, are you going out with that?"

"That woman..."

In shame and anger, Yata yelled as loud as he could, grabbing the underwear in his shaking fists.

"What should I do to forget these kinds of things?"

+++++

The path to Ashinaka Academy was prepared by "Jungle".

After leaving the "secret base" and walking for about 30 seconds, a taxi was already parked in the alley. There are tens of thousands of taxis everywhere in Tokyo, but the driver is a member of the "Jungle" clan. An N-Rank, "Transporter." As his name suggests, he possesses specialized skills as a transporter.

The best thing about him as a messenger is that he shows no interest in the "cargo". Without even looking back at Sukuna and Mishakuji, who had quietly boarded, without even asking where they were going, the "Transporter" slowly started the car.

All surveillance cameras on the route are controlled by the supernatural app "Glass Route Ver. 3.0", and Sukuna and Mishakuji were transformed into electronic invisible humans. Sukuna verified the location information of the targets Kuro Yatogami and Miyabi Ameno as he watched the scenery of the bay flowing through the vehicle's window.

"Neither of those two are moving. I mean, they don't seem to even notice our movements."

"Yes."

"It's a bit disappointing. I wish I could spy on their movements like the "Homura" guys. Then I could tease them and set a trap for them."

When he complained, Mishakuji chuckled.

"There's no way Kuro-chan could pull such a trick. Neko-chan wouldn't even dream of such a thing."

"Well, that's correct."

Sukuna muttered. After all, a clan without a "King" is something like that. Sukuna let out a sigh, thinking that this would be a boring and uninteresting mission.

It was only after getting out of the taxi that he had a disagreement with Mishakuji.

Heading to the front gate of the school, Mishakuji, as if nothing had happened...

"By the way, I will defeat Kuro-chan by myself. You can take care of Neko-chan."

He hadn't heard of it. Sukuna rolled his eyes and protested loudly.

"Hey, why?! Let me fight him too!"

"I told you. Kuro-chan is my apprentice. It's my job to kill him. My destiny.", Mishakuji looked at Sukuna,

"If you get in the way of that, even if it's Sukuna-chan, I'll have no mercy."

A chill ran down Sukuna's neck.

There was a serious light in Mishakuji's eyes. It was the same light as when Sukuna had once faced him as an enemy. If Sukuna still had to defend himself after that, he would actually draw his sword out.

But that light soon gave way to a slight smile.

"If you want points, I'll give you as many as you want later. So stay out of the way."

Sukuna pouted. He complained about being swallowed by Mishakuji's spirit.

"It's boring getting free points. That's not a game."

At that moment, Sukuna's PDA made a ringtone.

Sukuna responded to that. After exchanging a few words, Sukuna's communication and all previous anger disappeared.

"Ok, Yukari. I'll leave that to you."

"What happened?"

"I have a little urgent matter. Please take care of Yatogami Kuro! See you later!"

Waving his hands excitedly, Sukuna trotted towards the front door. One of the students who was nearby noticed him and handed him a PDA.

"J-Rank, thank you for your hard work!"

"Yes, yes, Gokuro-san."

Tossing the PDA to the student, Sukuna hurried towards the school. Yatogami's name had already disappeared from his mind. He would leave that to Mishakuji. He had found better prey than that.

"Homura" executive, Misaki Yata.

"Scepter 4" executive, Saruhiko Fushimi.

The information that the two were going to Gakuenjima was picked up by Sukuna's network, though it was only a appropriation of the one Nagare had built. In any case, most of the important people in the clans that were hostile to "Jungle" were being caught.

If Yata and Fushimi were to clash, the strength of both clans would be greatly reduced. It would bring a favorable future to the "Jungle" battle. More than the point itself, that fact made Sukuna's pace even faster.

+++++

Gakuenjima at noon was filled with many students.

After a long morning of classes, students who took a breath of relief flooded the school all at once. There are plenty of places to eat in the school cafeteria, the terrace of the cafe for shopping, and there are students who fill their bellies early and start playing. Lunch time is the busiest time of the day.

Among them, the figure of Yata stood out a lot.

He was not wearing a uniform, he was riding a skateboard and holding a stick that looked like a lethal weapon. It was a strange object that anyone could see.

Yata shook his head and muttered at the strange look that pierced him from here and there.

"Where the hell is that Neko...? If I'm caught walking around with this kind of thing, shame will make me a suicidal man."

Inside the paper bag he held under his arm were women's underwear. He surely would feel more comfortable with a bomb in hand. Furthermore, Yata is one of the criminal group that occupied this school exactly one year ago. He would like to finish his errands quickly before security finds him.

Suddenly, Yata stopped skateboarding.

It was because he saw a familiar figure in his path.

"Saru..."

That person, Fushimi Saruhiko, also noticed Yata around the same time. He narrowed his eyes behind his glasses and clicked his tongue.

"Misaki. What is Homura doing in a place like this? Do you plan to occupy it again?"

He said that to ridicule him, and his blood rushed to his head momentarily.

"Ah? It has nothing to do with you!"

When he turned around, what Kusanagi had said came back to his mind.

(Don't mess with the wrong person.)

That's right, he shouldn't do that.

The enemy of "Homura" is "Jungle", not "Scepter 4", and even if he is wrong, he is not the same Fushimi Saruhiko. Yata's personal feeling is that he can't forgive him, and that shouldn't lead to unnecessary quarrels.

Besides feeling unforgivable, he owed Fushimi one thing.

"I didn't say thank you correctly at the time."

"Ah?"

What came to his mind was the incident that triggered Anna's awakening as the "Red King".

"It was when Anna was kidnapped by the green clan before she awakened to the King's power. If you hadn't told me, I wouldn't have been able to help her, let alone find her whereabouts."

"So...?"

Fushimi's seemingly bored tone irritated Yata. Still, it was a sacrifice. He had to talk to the end.

"For that! I don't care about you, and I still can't forgive you, but I am grateful for that time. Thank you."

At that moment, a silver light flashed in Fushimi's hand.

"Oops?!"

Yata jumped to the side and narrowly avoided it. Throwing knives that appear out of nowhere are special items that Fushimi, who is a dark weapon user, often uses for surprise attacks. Yata instantly prepared for battle, yelling as he grabbed the staff.

"No way! What are you doing?!"

However, Fushimi did not see Yata. He had a wary look on someone behind him.

"Cheez. Did the attack from behind miss?"

Hearing a voice behind him, Yata turned around in a panic.

A boy was standing there.

A boy with a cheeky face who was about to enter Gakuenjima. If it was just that, he wouldn't have paid attention to it, but having a scythe with a glowing green blade in hand, it was a different story.

"Hey, what? Who are you?!"

"If you have time to talk, be a little careful with your surroundings."

In contrast to Yata's upset, Fushimi was calm. He slowly put his hand on the saber.

"You are Sukuna Gojou, the highest ranked of "Jungle"."

Yata held his breath at those words, and the Sukuna boy laughed merrily.

"Hey. You know me. Well, that's why you got more points than the guy in the beanie."

"What did you say, brat?!"

Even as he cursed, Yata raised his staff without letting his guard down and turned to Sukuna.

Rank-J, he murmured into his mouth. Among the many members of the "Jungle" clan, he must have been the highest ranking existence. He was disappointed that he was a boy, but he should never let his guard down.

Age is irrelevant to those who struggle with supernatural powers. Anna, their "Queen", is about the same age as the boy in front of them. Yata carved into his heart that this guy was stronger than any member of the "Jungle" clan he had ever fought.

"If I can kill them both and get 7k, that's a pretty tasty quest, right? So..."

Sukuna smiled brightly. The smile of a predator. Then, brandishing his green scythe, he leaped high.

"Become my points!"

+++++

Leaving Shiro's room in the student dormitory and walking with Neko, Kuro looked at her again.

"Neko. Are you sure you're okay?"

Neko gave a surprised look and then chuckled.

"Hmm, Kurosuke, what's wrong? There's nothing special wrong with Wagahai!"

"Oh, really...?"

"Yes! I ate rice and I'm full of energy!"

Once she laughed at him with a gutsy pose, he couldn't say anything more. With a vague nod, Kuro glanced vaguely at Neko's profile as she walked down the hall.

The smile from before was gone, and there was a vaguely depressed expression.

He groaned inside.

It was still weird. It wasn't good at all. Yet somehow Neko didn't want to tell people, or didn't seem to realize it herself.

There is no point in forcing people to answer about their concerns, which they do not want to say or of which they are not aware. There might be a way to get rid of it and find out, but to be honest, Kuro wasn't good at such tricks. Or, if Shiro were here, he would magically solve Neko's problems.

It was then that he sighed at his immaturity.

"Kuro-kun, I've been looking for you!"

There was a figure running from the other side of the hall. A student belonging to Gakuenjima, who is especially close to Kuro and Neko, Yukizome Kukuri.

"Kukuri. What's wrong?"

"Well, it's none of my business, but there's a girl who wants to talk to Kuro-kun. Come on, come out!"

As Kukuri called out to her from behind, a female student ran towards Kuro from the shadows. A student he didn't recognize. As she tilted her head down, she handed him a pink envelope with flushed cheeks.

"Umm, Yatogami Kuro-san! Please take this!"

"For me?"

"E-excuse me!"

When he received the girl's letter without understanding, she bowed her head and ran away. As she left, Kuro's ears picked up a familiar electronic voice.

No way.

An ominous sign hung like a dark cloud. However, it seemed that only Kuro had such a concern. Neko and Kukuri were curious and looked from both sides.

"Hey, what's written there? Let's open it up."

"Uh..."

Opening the envelope and unfolding the letter, Kuro's eyes widened.

There it was written:

"I'll wait for you at the connecting bridge, Yukari."

"The girl from before, her name is Yukari-chan, right?"

Kukuri was playing innocently. However, Kuro was in no mood to be cheerful.

He thought it would come someday. The green clan cannot sit still forever. He had half guessed who would be sent at that time. Therefore, it was inevitable that this letter would reach Kuro.

An old companion of his, but a sworn enemy that he turned his sword against his master.

(Are you finally here? Mishakuji Yukari...!)

Muttering so to himself, Kuro put the letter in his pocket.

Kukuri gave a big thumb up as she smiled.

"Good luck! I support you!"

Of course, she did not know the fate of Kuro and Mishakuji. She's just a normal, good girl who isn't even tinged with supernatural powers.

Still, he was grateful for Kukuri's prayers. Even though she doesn't understand the circumstances, she supports them. That fact alone is why Kuro wields the sword.

"Oh. Pray for my safety, Kukuri."

Saying that, Kuro started to walk.

A bit later, Neke followed him. There was no trace of melancholy in his expression, only the color of determination, but with an irrepressible fear.

After thinking for a moment, Kuro said to Neko.

"Neko. If you're scared, stay here."

"I will go."

Neko's answer was simple. When he looked at Neko with a bit of surprise, she clung to Kuro's arm with an angry expression.

"I told you. This is my house! That's why I'll protect it!"

He took a small breath, and then Kuro chuckled softly.

"...That's right. I'm sorry."

Gakuenjima was the place Kuro, Neko and Shiro had to return to. If someone tries to invade that place, they will face it with all their might. If Kuro thinks that, naturally Neko will think so too. Because they are comrades who share the same destiny.

"Come on, Neko."

"Yes!"

The two then walked away, to protect their home on Gakuenjima.

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He was looking down from that figure in the sky.

For nearly half a century his time has passed drifting through the skies. It's a place where he has been wandering with regret and a little hope, comforting himself with occasional guests with whom he had no connection whatsoever.

It's been a while since he's been back there. After a long time, "home" was comfortable and it reminded him of the reason for wandering. He should not be in contact with the earth. Even the reasons that led him to think that way were vivid.

But now...

Anticipating what was about to happen, he was in a state of intense impatience.

He could understand the intentions of the "opponent". He thought they wanted to drag him out of there. Or did they wish that he never descend to earth?

If he abandoned his companions, even for a short time, he would lose the right and reason to go down to earth.

Behind the impatience, he was impressed that the calm thinking part of him was "a good move." From what he heard, the "opponent" seems to be familiar with the game. Royal Fork, or Rookie Checkmate. He had to choose one and discard the other.

He had already decided which one to choose.

He orders a turn. The old "home" turned slowly and swam as if scratching the sky.

The place he should return to was Gakuenjima.

+++++

On the connecting bridge pillar, Mishakuji Yukari was blown away by the wind.

A slight smile appeared on his lips, as if he enjoyed the breeze that caressed his cheeks. His expression was so calm that it was hard to believe that he was about to fight a life and death battle.

It's not because he will take the upcoming battle lightly.

He expected it from the bottom of his heart.

For Mishakuji Yukari, fighting was both a means and an end. Fight to fight. It is pure, transparent, beautiful and strong because it is lean.

Probably more than Yatogami Kuro.

Looking at that person, Kuro clenched his teeth.

He had already put the thought of whether he could win out of his head. He would just do his best to protect this place, Gakuenjima.

With just that determination in their hearts, Kuro and Neko stopped.

Mishakuji's eyes looked at the two of them. The smile on his lips changed color slightly.

"Long time no see. Nice to see you again, Kuro-chan."

"Mishakuji Yukari. What did you come here for?"

Mishakuji shrugged and answered Kuro's hostile question.

"I already told you to call me Onii-sama, didn't I? Besides, I can't say that it's nice to ask everything you don't have to ask."

Saying so, he took out the sword from behind him. Half of the two swords delivered in the Miwa Meishin style, "Ayamachi". The blade shone mysteriously in the sunlight.

"Neko. I'll stop him. Please support me from behind."

"Yes!"

Neko hurriedly nodded and moved away from Kuro and ran behind the pillar. The red Japanese umbrella she is holding is the one she brought from Shiro's room. Because that will protect them instead of the one who is no longer there.

After confirming that, Kuro put his hand on the sword at his waist, "Kotowari".

"So you came here to fix things?"

"It's not okay to answer every single thing you don't have to answer either."

Mishakuji's right arm moved as if he was dancing.

"That's not beautiful!"

The next moment, a flying slash split the air.

Kuro quickly jumped to avoid it. The cut shattered the asphalt and smoke blocked Kuro's vision.

From the smoke, Mishakuji jumped out along with the tip of the sword.

Mishakuji didn't slow down his attack on Kuro, who barely blocked the thrust. The swing of the sword and the "pass" that swung down from the side cut into Kuro's sleeve.

An opportunity!

With his sweaty hands gripping the handle of "Kotowari", Kuro attacked without warning. However, a blow strong enough to create a vacuum only emptied the air.

Mishakuji had disappeared from his sight.

The survival instinct screamed. An enemy was lurking somewhere in his blind spot. In a second the sword could run through him. Knowing this, Kuro was still stiff and unable to move.

"Up! Kurosuke! It's dangerous!"

Neko's scream saved Kuro.

The blade rose before his eyes. "Kotowari" and "Ayamachi" intertwined and sparked. Mishakuji landed light as a feather and pushed his sword further. An unimaginably heavy pressure from that slender body tried to crush Kuro's entire body.

As he did so, Mishakuji showed a charming smile.

"As expected, your skills are still immature. But I will commend you for not running away!"

"This school island is the place where my king, Shiro, will return! I will not allow you to take a single step towards that place."

Mishakuji laughed sarcastically and knocked out Kuro's body.

"It's a shame. Just now, a friend of mine came in."

"What...?!"

Mishakuji did not let the confusion go unnoticed. The pressure was suddenly released and the sword hilt slammed into his upper body as he lost his balance and staggered. Kuro's body was bent like a dog, and his defenseless neck was exposed. The blade of "Ayamachi" was getting closer.

"Don't bully Kuro!"

At the same time as that cry, a huge beckoning cat appeared on the bridge.

"Oh."

Smiling happily, Mishakuji lightly swung his sword. The slash that was unleashed easily cut through the illusion created by Neko's supernatural ability and made the beckoning cat disappear. The reconnaissance operation was forcibly cancelled, and Neko was blown off the bridge, and the red Japanese umbrella she was holding flew into the air.

"Kyaa!"

"Neko!"

Neko who collided with a parapet stretched out and didn't move. Suppressing Kuro who was trying to rush at him with his sword, Mishakuji spoke casually.

"Don't worry. My king wants me to take you back alive, Neko-chan, no. Ameno Miyabi-chan."

Neko leaned against the parapet and shot a startled look at Mishakuji.

"Ameno...? Who...?"

"You don't remember. That's fine."

Shrugging, Mishakuji walked over to Neko. Keeping the sword in his hand.

Kuro's chest was full of passion.

"Mishakuji Yukari! Don't mess with my friend!"

He kicked the ground with a roar and unleashed a slashing attack. Mishakuji danced away from him. He jumped onto a pillar using his supernatural power and ran vertically just as he was. As he held on to it, Kuro boldly attacked him.

"Ooooooooooooooh!"

Top, middle, bottom, from all angles, at all speeds, and with all possible techniques, Kuro attempted to overthrow Mishakuji.

On the other hand, Mishakuji's sword was ghostly. If he thinks he's looking for him, he'll hit him, and if he thinks he's right, he'll shake him and his core will never waver. Despite being users of the same Miwa Meishin style, Kuro and Mishakuji's swordsmanship was as different as heaven and earth.

It's probably because Mishakuji fully owns the Miwa Meishin style and then added his own enhancements. He has already reached a height that can be called Mishakuji Shiryu.

Mishakuji said as he mocked Kuro's despair.

"You're as straightforward as ever, Kuro-chan. It's beautiful and upright, but there's a limit to that."

"What are you saying...?!"

"For example, it was the students themselves who allowed Sukuna-chan to enter this academy. That student knows nothing. Not knowing your thoughts, anger, or sense of mission, he invited Sukuna-chan to enter. The place you are dealing with! to protect is already ours!"

The image of that student flickered in Kuro's mind for a moment.

She is about the student who became Mishakuji's henchman and delivered the letter. She was definitely a student at this school. But, at the same time, she is probably also a member of the "Jungle" clan.

If so, how much meaning does his fight to protect this school from "Jungle" have?

"You see, "Jungle" takes root anywhere and absorbs nutrients from anywhere. Our great green tree will eventually reach for the stars with its branches and leaves, swallowing up the golden sun and silver moon alike. And this world will be covered with a beautiful greenery and it will be reborn. I want to see that!"

Shouting like a song, Mishakuji wove a series of feints to corner Kuro. The hilt of the sword struck his forehead and his vision darkened for a moment. The blade approaching the nape of his neck was bounced back with a blind "Kotowari" move, but by this time, Mishakuji's attack had plunged into Kuro's belly.

"Gah!"

Kuro was thrown off the top of the pillar and pulled down by gravity. As he writhed in the air, he activated his supernatural ability to hold off the chasing Mishakuji and, at the same time, tried to absorb the impact of the crash as much as possible.

Even so, he couldn't kill him. Hitting from behind, Kuro tried to regain his balance as he rolled on the ground over and over.

Sticking his sword into the ground, trying to get up.

The tip of Mishakuji's sword pointed at his throat.

"But you will never see that world. You will fall here like a cocoon."

Kuro gritted his teeth as he looked at Mishakuji, who spoke heartlessly.

(Couldn't I win? I'm not this guy...!), Kuro thought.

He felt that he has always been like this.

Since he was swinging his sword under Miwa's tutelage, he was never able to defeat Mishakuji Yukari.

Even when he asked him to practice swordsmanship.

Even when he pointed his sword at Miwa and left.

Even when he appeared as a vanguard of "Jungle".

The result was always like this. Mishakuji remained on his feet until the end, and Kuro finally fell to his knees.

Compared to Kuro, who faithfully executes the techniques taught by his teacher, Mishakuji Yukari's talent is brilliant. In terms of skill and genius, Kuro ranks far below Mishakuji. No matter how much time and effort he puts into it, he may never be able to beat Mishakuji.

Kuro knew that. He understood, but still...

"I won't give in to you...!"

Hearing that, Mishakuji narrowed his eyes.

"Yes. You are ready. Your face is beautiful now."

What dwelt in those eyes was the light of pure intent. Cut Kuro without malice or hostility, just for his own good. Kuro knows better than anyone that Mishakuji Yukari is a man who can do that.

He would be lying if he said he didn't regret it. What will happen to Neko, Kukuri and Gakuenjima after he take his life? Is it possible to stop the tyranny of "Jungle"?

And above all...

Isn't it possible to finally find the man whom he admired as his teacher and who was his friend?

"Yatogami Kuro. Your life is mine!"

Mishakuji raised "Ayamachi". As he looked at the shining white blade from the front, Kuro on his chest, called out his name.

"Shiro!"

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He heard a voice.

A voice calling his name.

For half a century he wandered the skies. Even then he heard voices.

A voice calling for help. A voice pleading for salvation. A voice that revealed anguish.

Those were the voices of people who had some kind of illusion towards the airship that was drifting aimlessly through the sky. That heavenly airship was inhabited by paranormal beings that would bring them out of their afflictions. There were quite a few people who took those fantasies seriously, even if they weren't sure where they came from.

But the voice never said his name.

Because whoever it was had nothing to do with them. Gods, angels, aliens, etc. He who brings salvation does not need a name. They fantasize about salvation itself, not about existence as a person.

But now...

"Shiro, Shiro. At this rate, Kuro will be killed."

She was calling his name.

Isana Yashiro, abbreviated as Shiro. The name of a man who did not exist anywhere on this earth. It would also be an illusion.

But she called it by herself.

Even if it was an illusion, even if it was temporary. It was definitely his name. It is proof that he, who had lost all contact with the earth and only wandered alone in the sky, spent time with them, even if it was for a short time.

Just like Kuro and Neko are already part of him.

Isana Yashiro is definitely his name.

Because of that, Shiro thought, "This time, I'll take a step forward."

"Shiro, please help me! Shiroom!"

Shiro took a step forward as if drawn by Neko's voice.

The "Schattenreich" was anchored 300 meters above Gakuenjima. Without hesitation, he threw his body off the ramp into the void. In an instant, gravity caught Shiro's body, and his body began to fall in a straight line towards the ground.

Almost at the same time, the aura of his shrine as the "Silver King", was emitted from Shiro's entire body. A powerful force capable of distorting normal space appeared in a single form above his head, far above him.

The Sword of Damocles.

As proof of being the "King" of "Kings", it is the embodiment of that power.

While deploying a wide area shrine that engulfed the island, Shiro used gravity to superimpose his own super powers and accelerate further. Along the way, a red color crossed the edge of his vision and Shiro smiled quietly. With an invisible force, he pulled the red Japanese umbrella that had been caught in the wire and held it in his hand.

Then Shiro landed on the ground.

He opened the Japanese umbrella and slung it over his shoulder. With just that gesture, all the dust that had been raised was blown away, revealing the figure of Mishakuji, whose eyes were wide with astonishment.

"You are...!"

"Shiro..."

"Shiro!"

With the cheers of Kuro and Neko behind him, Shiro turned the Japanese umbrella around with a cold gaze.

"Isn't it too arrogant to walk into someone's house with your shoes on and try to take and kill someone's family?"

The destination of that line of sight was not Mishakuji.

A bird perched on the pillar of the connecting bridge. The man who watched them through the bird was Shiro's true enemy.

"... "Green King", Hisui Nagare."

+++++

The declaration of war received through the screen made his straitjacketed body crack.

Not out of anger or remorse. Clearly, that was jubilation. Nagare's expression, which usually never reveals his emotions, distorted with joy.

"Finally, finally, finally, you are back. You are back, first king, "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann. You returned to this world, to our game board."

Eliminate the "Silver King". Alternatively, clarifying his whereabouts while making plans for it, Nagare gave little consideration to the first possibility. Judging from his relationship with Yatogami Kuro and Ameno Miyabi, there's no doubt that Weismann would show up. He expected that, and it turned out to be a perfect fit.

Of all the countless plans he has made thus far, there has never been a more exciting moment than this. The "Silver King" is a special existence for Nagare. The forerunner who discovered the "Dresden Slate" and the oldest "King". Being able to see him was one of Nagare's long-hidden wishes.

If his arms could move, he would have extended them. If he had a heart, it would have beat. Nagare, who was not allowed to do any of those things, simply expressed his joy in words. That is to say...

"Welcome."

CHAPTER 4: CHABUDAI ALLIANCE

"Haha!"

Sukuna jumped as he let out a light laugh.

A sickle wrapped in green electricity tore through the air and intersected with Yata's skateboard. The green and red auras collided violently and annihilated each other. Sukuna used that as a reference point to do somersaults and then launched a heel over Yata's head.

"Gah!"

Yata looked for him in a dangerous place, accelerated the skateboard and left. Just as he was about to chase after him, Fushimi cut him down as if to replace him.

"This time you? Ok, let's play!"

"Tsk...!"

As he violently fought Fushimi, Sukuna flicked his tongue in.

Yata is a skater who repeatedly approaches and backs up quickly as he lands powerful punches, while Fushimi possesses a method of attack with little chance to open up at both short and long range. No matter how many N-Ranks gather, it will be hard to stop these two.

But... Gojou Sukuna was a J-Rank, a top-peak player in "Jungle".

The extraordinary application "Grassroot Ver. 3.0" even controls the security cameras of the school. Even behind him, which was originally supposed to be a blind spot, he was in full view of Sukuna. Information is the weapon of "Jungle". And not having it is the weakness of these two.

Sukuna matched Fushimi's saber with his sickle blade. Almost at the same time, Yata ran in with his skateboard. Not knowing that he was a hole that Sukuna created on purpose.

"Sweet!"

Shouting, Sukuna swung his scythe around and jabbed the blade into the ground.

At the same time, he started the extraordinary application "Thunder Wave". Fushimi, who noticed a moment before, withdrew, but Yata, who started a sudden approach, couldn't stop himself. A "wave of thunder" that came from Sukuna passed through Yata's entire body.

"What?!"

"Thunder Wave" doesn't have much attack power, but it does cause considerable pain and paralysis. Sukuna slashed at Yata, who had stopped moving. Staff in hand, Yata barely parried the attack.

"Bastard!"

"Ahaha, your attacks are very weak!"

He easily blocked Yata's counterattack, and just as he was about to corner him, Fushimi's knife reflected into his electronically shielded field of view.

"These guys who have been secretly hiding up until now, they are not in high spirits!"

Roaring, Fushimi threw several throwing knives at him. Sukuna laughed out loud as he dodged and jumped to evade the attack that was precisely aimed at his vital points.

"Huh, you guys are red and blue number three, right? Is this all you have? It's not my hobby to score points with null games!"

As soon as he landed, Sukuna approached Fushimi in a single leap and raised his scythe.

"What?!"

"First of all, I'll go for the 4000 points!"

"Saru!"

However, the blade that was supposed to pierce through his heart was blocked by a skateboard that he sliced from the side.

A slight surprise ran through Sukuna's heart. Fushimi and Yata jumped back to keep their distance, while Sukuna also renewed his vigilance and readied his weapon.

Right now it was a blow that was sure to be caught. Yata, who should have taken damage from "Thunder Wave", should never have been able to support him at that distance and time.

Does that mean they have "something" to fill it? Sukuna noticed a smile on his lips as he studied it.

(It's cute. A game has to be like that.), Sukuna thought.

Sukuna takes no pleasure in oppressing weaker enemies. There is meaning and joy in overcoming strong and growing enemies.

Sukuna again took an offensive stance. To fully enjoy the pleasure, he lowered himself and put his strength into his legs.

".....?!"

He realized something.

He raised his face as if repelled by him and widened his eyes.

"That, no way..."

Fushimi and Yata were also looking up at the eastern sky with surprised expressions just like Sukuna. A giant sword of the "King" hanging in the distant sky.

"I know this sword... a year ago, at that time..."

"Silver... No, it's the "Silver King"."

The "Silver Damocles Sword". What his appearance means is that...

"He's the last boss, come on."

Mumbling a bit, Sukuna laughed again.

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Kuro was dumbfounded and looked up at the red Japanese umbrella spread out in front of him.

(Is this a dream, an illusion?), Kuro thought.

It was a spectacle that he had seen in his dreams. One day, the man they have been looking for will return. How long have they waited for the day when they would greet each other with the same attitude, the same smile and return home together?

At that moment, Kuro couldn't accept the fact that that figure was right in front of him.

The back of Isana Yashiro, the man Kuro and Neko have been waiting for, is close at hand.

However, Shiro had a different appearance than before. Instead of a soft smile, with a determined look in his eyes, he surely is looking at the enemy.

At such a shrine, Mishakuji Yukari smiled charmingly and bowed respectfully.

"Nice to meet you. The first king, the "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann. I am a J-Rank of the Green Clan "Jungle", Mishakuji Yukari."

A parrot flew from the connecting bridge pillar and landed on Mishakuji's shoulder. He spread his wings and let out a cry of affirmation.

Mishakuji's smile deepened as he stroked the parrot's chin.

"Please excuse my rudeness as a clansman. This here is my lord."

In an instant, his mood changed.

The parrot emitted a strong pressure that could be clearly seen even from a distance. Kuro crouched down clearing his throat.

He remembered that feeling.

Reisi Munakata. Suoh Mikoto. The same kind of aura they gave off.

That means...

"Nice to meet you, "Silver King". I am Nagare Hisui, the fifth king, the "Green King".

The parrot's beak opened, and graceful human speech flowed from it.

Shiro narrowed his eyes and replied in a low voice.

"I guess you did this just to attract me, "Green King".

"Yes. Now I can confirm that you are not a bystander like you used to be. It is a great strategic victory."

Mishakuji shrugged and looked at the parrot in wonder.

"So my little brother was used as bait? What a cruel king."

"That is also affirmative. It is a ruthless change of order. Please withdraw immediately."

"Oh, you should get rid of that big fish you caught, right?"

Mishakuji's smile was mixed with something cold.

He was still holding the drawn "Ayamachi" in his hand. If he felt like it, Mishakuji would probably attack Shiro right then and there. Fighting against the strong is his joy. Whether he is a "King" or not, Mishakuji does not hesitate to enjoy that joy.

(Let me...!), Kuro thought.

Gritting his teeth, Kuro grabbed the "Kotowari" handle again. He mainly he wouldn't use his sword. That is Kuro's pride and reason for existing.

However, the parrot's voice interrupted that determination.

"Withdraw immediately."

Kuro was distracted for only a moment. Meanwhile, however, Mishakuji was resheathing his sword. After looking at the sky with a theatrical gesture, he bowed deeply.

"Unfortunate. It is a pity, but if it is an order from my lord, there is nothing I can do about it. I apologize for this, "Silver King".

Then, Mishakuji turned his eyes towards Kuro.

"Kurou-chan, I will entrust your life to the beautiful "Silver King" who ran for you, but next time, please entertain me more."

Narrowing his eyes, he said quietly.

"Otherwise, I'll cut you down like a dead branch."

"Guh..."

The next moment, his face was distorted with humiliation.

The parrot flapped its wings and rose into the air.

By the time the feather landed on the bridge, Mishakuji was nowhere to be seen.

"Phew..."

Power fell from Shiro's shoulders. Almost at the same time, the silver "Sword of Damocles" that he hung above his head vanished like smoke. With the removal of the Sanctum created by supernatural power, the "Sword of Damocles", the embodiment of that power, also disappeared.

The battle was over.

He couldn't do anything in front of him. He couldn't beat Mishakuji or protect his friends. Far from protecting his master from him, he was a loser who could only be protected by his master, so was Kuro now.

As he bitterly held that thought, Kuro looked down.

"Can you get up, Kuro?"

Shiro softly called out to Kuro.

A soft and warm gaze that was completely different from the one he was looking at the enemy before. It was exactly the same as Shiro's face in Kuro's memory.

The humiliation and remorse were gone in a moment. How long have you longed for a reunion with his teacher and friend? With that joy, Kuro squeezed his face as he tried to smile.

He is, after all, a member of the Silver Clan. There was a courtesy that had to be practiced before a friendly smile.

Kuro raised his head and dropped to one knee on the ground. He deeply bows his head at Shiro who is approaching him.

"Welcome home, my... Guwah?!"

Neko stepped on his back with all her might.

"Shiro!"

Involuntarily leaning forward, Neko stepped on the back of the neck and charged towards Shiro. It was a hard force to describe. Just as she was, Neko clung to Shiro's neck and rubbed his head.

"Shiro, Shiro, Shiro, Shiro! I missed you! Where have you been? What have you been doing? Why didn't you come back?"

Kuro heard Neko's words in rapid succession as he knelt on the ground. He jerked to his feet and clenched his fist in anger.

"Idiot, that's what I'm going to ask you now."

Still, Neko didn't stop talking. As if the feelings she had been suppressing until now had broken the dam and spilled over, Neko held Shiro's face in her hands and continued speaking.

"I've been looking for you, Shiro! I've been looking for you for a long time! We went to many places, and then the green ones came after us and defeated Kurosuke, they even kidnapped Anna and it was all on fire..."

"Yes."

"Even after that, I've been looking for you for a long time, so..."

Kuro's hands lost their strength.

Neko was also waiting impatiently for Shiro. No, just because Neko is purer, that feeling must have been stronger than Kuro's. They would meet one day, she was sure they would. Never before had Neko lost hope.

So Neko had the right to do it.

"Am at home."

"Welcome back."

As if relieved by Shiro's soft embrace, Neko buried her face in his chest and murmured.

Then, as she calmed Neko down, Shiro's eyes turned to Kuro. Feeling embarrassed by his sweet gaze, Kuro turned his face away from him.

"That's how it is."

"You're not being honest. This is a scene where it's okay to cry like you're hugging me like Neko. I missed you, Shiro!"

"Who would do that!"

The reason why he involuntarily retorted out loud was because he felt that he was being mocked for his anguish and conflict. Just as he was about to tell him how he felt while he waited, he suddenly put on a serious expression and bowed his head.

"I'm sorry."

"No..."

If he apologizes honestly like that, it would somehow become a bad atmosphere. Neko was looking at Kuro with a downcast look. Kuro cleared his throat.

"No, I'm glad you're alive."

Saying that, Shiro smiled again.

"I say the same."

"What about the current situation?"

"I know most of it. Otherwise, I couldn't come at such a good time, right?"

Kuro's eyebrows twitched. In fact, it was the perfect timing. Too good, he would even say. That means...

"Did you mean it was all intentional?"

"Well, what do you think?"

Shiro said that as a nonsense, but maybe it was true. From somewhere, Shiro was watching them, and he inadvertently jumped into danger.

Kuro relaxed his shoulders and smiled.

"You have not changed anything."

"Hahaha... I was wondering if I could do something on my own without involving everyone, but the Green Clan was moving faster than I expected. They pushed me and brought me out into the open. In the end, I guess I gave them all a bad experience..."

"That's right, idiot."

To put it bluntly, Shiro unexpectedly widened his eyebrows.

"If you only witnessed and shared both joy and pain with us, we wouldn't be having this conversation. We, Adolf K. Weismann, no, Isana Yashiro... are members of your clan, don't forget that."

"Shiro, you are our king!"

With a big nod, Neko placed both hands on Shiro's chest. Seeing Neko's genuinely happy smile and Kuro's smile mixed with wonder and relief, Shiro's expression gradually collapsed.

"Neko, Kuro..."

It wasn't just Kuro's imagination that made his eyes look wet. But he didn't want to follow him. Patting Shiro and Neko on the shoulder, Kuro said in a low but clear voice.

"Now we're back to normal."

"Yes."

Shiro nodded with a smile in his moist eyes. Seeing that face, Kuro finally felt a sense of reality. He really felt that Isana Yashiro had returned to them again.

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"Huh?! What the hell are we going to do in this place from now on?!"

Fushimi Saruhiko clicked his tongue as he saw Sukuna suddenly take out his PDA and start talking on the phone during the battle.

The same thing happened with Yata next door. Being disrespected until now, he couldn't just finish. They split from left to right, with Fushimi grabbing a throwing knife and Yata grabbing a staff.

At that moment, Sukuna took his sickle out.

".....!"

Yata and Fushimi stopped moving at the same time. But Sukuna didn't even look at them. While holding his glowing green scythe, he said terribly bored.

"Hey, I'm tired of withdrawing from null games."

Saying that, tucking the PDA into his chest, Sukuna turned his back on the two of them.

"This...!"

Fushimi grabbed Yata's arm when he was furious and tried to chase after him.

"It's useless. Don't do it."

When Sukuna found out that Fushimi and Yata were visiting Gakuenjima, he launched a surprise attack. Naturally, he had secured multiple routes to retreat. There was no way they could catch up with him, even if they chased after him with blood rushing to their heads, and if they did it wrong, they might end up isolated and get hit.

At that time, they had no chance of winning from the start.

However, it seems that such a thing was beyond Yata's understanding. Yata violently shook Fushimi's hand and looked at him from the front.

"Saru, damn, are you scared?! Isn't it frustrating that a kid like that has bothered you?"

Tsu, he heard a sound around his temple. His anger turned colder, and Fushimi spat it out.

"Don't let that fool roar in front of you. That's why the greens make you dance like that."

"Yes, damn it!"

This time, Yata's face distorted with anger. Yata's wrist that was trying to grab his collar flap was grabbed in an instant, Fushimi looked at Yata coldly.

"Sorry, you're busy. Can I have a moment?"

Hearing that calm voice, the two of them turned around at the same time.

Standing there were Yatogami Kuro and Neko. And also, the "Silver King", Adolf K. Weismann... Isana Yashiro.

"You..."

"May I ask you to take a message to your kings?"

At that request, Fushimi and Yata looked at each other for a moment. They then moved away from each other and turned towards Shiro.

"What do you want to tell Anna?"

Yata's expression had the same amount of embarrassment mixed with wariness. A year ago, the person seeking his life was right in front of him, so it was only natural.

However, Shiro simply replied with a smile that didn't seem to matter at all.

"Hey, there's something I'd like to suggest. I thought there might be something we could do together with the "Red King" and the "Blue King"."

"What I can do?"

Almost at the same time that Yata bowed his head, Fushimi's PDA sounded a ringtone.

He pulled it out and saw the name of the person that was calling. Shiro guessed the name.

"Is it Munakata-san?"

Fushimi directed his gaze towards Shiro, who was smiling. Before Fushimi's eyes, it looked like Munakata's mysterious smile.

He received the call without answering, and when he put the PDA to his ear, he heard Munakata's smiling voice.

"Please connect me to the "Silver King"."

He clicked his tongue instead of answering. As it was, he tossed his PDA towards Shiro.

The sudden release of the PDA made him panic, and he received it after several juggling. Shiro greeted Fushimi with a big smile.

"Thank you!"

Fushimi felt even more irritated by his innocent attitude.

In the macroscopic worldview of the "Kings", he was nothing more than a piece. He should have known, but it wasn't nice to see someone so above him.

With both hands in his pockets, Fushimi muttered as if he was vomiting.

"That is why he is called the "King"."

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Three "Kings" were gathered in that room.

"Third King, "Red Queen", Anna Kushina."

The girl closed her eyes quietly and sat quietly on the tatami.

"Fourth King, "Blue King", Reisi Munakata."

The young man observed the situation with a cold smile.

"And I, the First King, "Silver King", Adolf K. Weismann, Isana Yashiro."

The boy looked at the two of them alternately and nodded calmly.

"A group of prominent people gather around the same table... it's like a round-table conference."

And at that moment, Yata, who was right behind Anna, stomped down as if he couldn't take it anymore.

"A round table is a chabudai! This one is square!"

Receiving a reasonable remark, Shiro scratched his head and laughed.

"Sorry. But this was the only table we had."

"That's not the problem! We can't gather so many people, so there must be a better place! Why is the room so small!"

Yata's point was also valid, and it was stifling to have a total of 9 people, 3 people from each faction, in one room. The reason why Kuro suddenly stood up and opened the window was probably to change the air, even a little. It would be no laughing matter if the "King" collapsed from lack of oxygen.

Fushimi, who was standing behind Munakata, let out a sigh.

"It's like stuffed sushi. Don't make a fuss, it's hot."

"This is the formality, sloppy blue clothes!"

"I guess it's the same for you guys. Just like last year, it would be a nuisance if the thugs came in disorderly, so I purposely came to fix it."

"What?!"

Yata leaned forward in a fight, and Kusanagi grabbed his arm.

"Yata-chan, it's a place for VIP attendance. Can you hold it back for a bit?"

Almost at the same time, Awashima looked at Fushimi.

"Fushimi, please refrain from pointless provocations."

"I'm sorry."

Fushimi's apology lacked sincerity, but Yata remained silent. They weren't there to fight. At least, that was the common understanding of all.

At that moment, a timid voice entered from outside the room.

"Um... I'm sorry..."

A girl appeared who is a friend of Kuro and Neko, and a former friend of Shiro, Kukuri Yukizome. She was holding a large tray filled with tea for the number of people. Shiro smiled and thanked her.

"Thank you very much, Kukuri. I'm sorry you're doing all the work."

Originally, Shiro as the host should have entertained them. Kukuri, who appeared there by chance, said, "Is there anything I can do for you?", so Shiro could focus on the meeting.

Kukuri laughed happily and started arranging the tea on the table.

"Okay. Kuro-kun and Wagahai-chan finally got to see Shiro. It seems they don't want to leave."

Kuro cleared his throat awkwardly.

"This isn't that kind of thing, it's like a three-on-three form of conversation..."

"That's right, I can't leave you anymore!"

Without hesitation, Neko hugged Shiro and rubbed his cheek. Shiro and Kukuri let out a wry smile.

At that moment, Munakata moved.

He slowly raised his glasses and silently looked at Shiro. With just that gesture, the air in the place that was about to be released tightened with a crack.

"It's about time for the round table... no, shall we start the "Chabudai Conference", "Silver King", Adolf K. Weismann?"

Perhaps reading the atmosphere, Kukuri slowly slipped out of the room. Shiro turned to Munakata with a smile on his face as Kukuri gave a small wave and left.

"As for me, just call me Isana Yashiro, "Blue King" Reisi Munakata. "Red Queen" Anna Kushina, thank you very much for answering my sudden call."

Anna opened her eyes and smiled softly.

"I don't care. I wanted to repay your clan for their help."

"Nyahaha, Anna, thank you!"

Neko waved at Anna who also waved back. However, Munakata cut off the communication between the pretty girls.

"In that line of reasoning, I think we are forced to deal with the consequences... Well, let's put that aside for now."

Munakata turned her thoughtful gaze towards Shiro and asked a question.

"What is the purpose of setting up this meeting?"

On the other hand, Shiro simply smiled.

"I can't believe someone like you wouldn't have expected that."

"....."

Munakata's eyes narrowed. However, the one who answered his question was another "King".

"Countermeasures against the Green Clan. Nothing more."

Shiro nodded his head at the words that Anna leaked out.

"Good answer. It's an item on the agenda, but we have a reason to discuss it again here now."

Saying "reason" was discouraging in every sense of the word.

But Shiro had to say that. Unless everyone clearly recognizes that they are in a different setting, such a meeting would be pointless.

Saying that, Shiro breathed in and breathed out calmly.

"The second king, the "Golden King", Daikaku Kokujoji, is dead."

Shiro watched intently as the weight of those words slowly permeated the room.

Of course, the "Kings", Awashima, Fushimi, Kusanagi and Kuro seemed to have a clear understanding of the meaning and consequences of that fact. The only ones who didn't understand well were Neko and Yata, but they didn't say anything.

What Shiro paid attention to the most was Munakata's reaction.

"I see."

Looking slightly down, Munakata muttered a bit.

"Japan... no, the "Dresden Slate", which has hidden influence throughout the world, and the loss of the strongest "King" who is the pillar of the ruling system."

Munakata currently manages the "Dresden Slate". That means that all the responsibilities of the society fall on his shoulders.

The current social system was created by none other than the "Golden King", and the only way to act as his representative is by exercising royal authority. The "Blue King", the symbol of order, would be suitable for that, but Shiro could only imagine how strong the pressure would be.

Awashima muttered with a strong sense of concern.

"After all, the recent activation of the Green Clan..."

"Lieutenant... without the "Golden King", the "Green King" has nothing to fear. Ambitions and power no longer need to be suppressed."

Kusanagi raised his hand slightly and asked a question.

"But they were looking for you, did you hear that? Isn't that different from being afraid of you too?"

"I'm not a direct threat like the "Golden King", I guess. It's probably because I have the power to influence the "Slate" which is the core of its ambition, and the power of "immutability" which contradicts its "change"."

"We don't know when, where, or how it will be used, so are you saying you're a wild card?"

"Yes. The "Golden King" knew about it, so he hid me until he passed away..."

The "Golden King" Daikaku Kokujoji. For half a century, he was the only man he could call a friend.

Kokujoji tried to use the power awakened by Shiro for good to save that country. To save many people from suffering. He was carrying a load too great for one person to carry.

At the end of his life, he also tried to save Shiro. He truly cared for the man who had shunned his responsibility and placed it on him.

Daikaku Kokujoji was a strong, big and kind man.

With a slight shake of her head, Shiro dismissed the momentary feeling towards his friend.

"And now they have brought me out. From now on, the Green Clan will not hesitate to play while calculating how the joker will be used."

"To counter that, will the remaining three kings go against the Green Clan?"

"Yes."

Munakata muttered with a thoughtful face.

"Because there is no longer an absolutely strong "Golden King"... is that so?"

"What are you saying?"

Fushimi and Awashima, standing behind him, looked at Munakata with questioning eyes. Munakata answered clearly without looking back.

"Ok. Protecting order is the cause of our Blue Clan, "Scepter 4"."

"Captain! But are you sure?"

It was Awashima who quickly raised her voice.

The reaction is natural. "Homura", including Anna, were the opponents of "Scepter 4" in a large-scale conflict. At that moment, Munakata had the former "Red King" Suoh Mikoto in his hand. The "Homura" side couldn't understand how they were taking it.

Still, there was no hesitation in Munakata's expression.

"Awashima-kun, we were also busy dealing with the Green Clan. If we can get powerful reinforcements, then let's dare to accept some friction."

"Reisi."

The one who called out to him was Anna, sitting right in front of Munakata.

"I told you, I don't want to say thank you."

"....."

"But I also said that it was what Mikoto wanted, so I don't hate you. The Red Clan will fight alongside the Silver Clan and the Blue Clan. In the name of the Red King."

"I understand."

Faced with Anna's gaze filled with sincere determination, Munakata only replied that.

In response to that, the two Red Clan executives raised their voices in agreement.

"Three clans fighting together. Well, under the current circumstances, there is no reason to object."

"So let's beat all the green guys! We'll make it!"

Kusanagi muttered calmly and Yata raised his fist. Seeing that, Shiro breathed a sigh of relief.

If there is no resentment on "Homura's" side, the three-clan alliance will work out well. If the clan of "Scepter 4", "Homura" and as yet unnamed Shiro move under the same control, they should be able to keep up with the unseen "Jungle" clan.

However, Shiro had another concern.

He silently observed the state of Reisi Munakata, the "Blue King".

He could only guess what kind of thoughts were lurking behind that intelligent expression. Still, considering what had happened so far, he was definitely the key person in that alliance.

Reisi Munakata is the "king" of regicide.

Shiro knows all too well what triggers a regicide charge. In addition, Munakata also manages the "Dresden Slate". Being exposed to "Jungle" attacks, all clues of the events so far have been concentrated on Reisi Munakata.

What is he thinking and how is he trying to handle the situation? Shiro had to confirm that.

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He never thought that would happen.

Kusanagi couldn't contain those thoughts as he slowly walked down the stairs of the bedroom with Anna.

Fighting together with "Scepter 4". A year ago it would have been unimaginable, and after that it would have been abominable to even imagine. If "Jungle" hadn't made such a provocation, he doesn't think it would have been an option even now.

After all, the "King" who rules the Blue Clan is the man who killed Suoh Mikoto.

He understands that it was inevitable fate. But understanding and feeling are often separate creatures. The "Homura" guys are more or less unhappy about being associated with the blues. The reason he didn't reveal it was because Anna was the one who made the decision and Kusanagi was the one who complied.

If Kusanagi agrees, no one can object. Because Kusanagi is the last of the top three.

Suddenly, a feeling of nostalgia rose in Kusanagi's chest.

(Me, Mikoto and Totsuka. "Homura" was a clan of only those three.), Kusanagi thought.

People gradually gathered in the small place they created. Some were drawn to Suoh Mikoto's overwhelming strength, others were touched by Totsuka Tatara's warm kindness and decided that "Homura" was their place. In doing so, "Homura" took shape.

Then Totsuka Tatara died.

As if he was chasing after him, Suoh Mikoto also passed away.

People disappeared from "Homura", like a comb with a missing tooth. He can't blame them. The clansmen swear allegiance to the King. But if there is no "King", there will be no meaning or reason to belong to the clan.

The "Homura" of today is not the "Homura" of the past. Kusanagi was the only one left from the start. He would be lying if he said he didn't feel sad about it.

But...

"Counterattack! I'll make those green bugs fly!"

"No Blood! No Bone! No Ash!"

Outside the dormitory, Yata and the clansmen were raising their spirits with their fists. Kusanagi let out a wry smile at the sight that hadn't changed since the old days.

He wondered what Suoh and Totsuka would say if they saw them now.

Mikoto could just smile slightly and not say anything.

Totsuka could happily blend in with them and raise their fists together.

Both are nothing more than Kusanagi's imagination. But even if they were there, they wouldn't deny the current "Homura". That's all he could say for sure.

What they did is still there.

While he was thinking about such things, Kusanagi separated from his companions and slowly walked away.

"As soon as the special mission returns to the garrison, check the alert posture."

"By the time the person in charge of the Red Clan arrives, prepare a reception system on this side."

"Yes!"

Under the command, the members of "Scepter 4" began preparations for withdrawal with rapid movements.

It is a well-controlled movement. Now that he thought about it, it was the first time he had watched their movements so closely. "Homura", who solves all problems with their spirit and drive, is unmatched in terms of control.

(And so on...), Kusanagi thought as he puffed on purple smoke.

"Well, I'm the only person in charge, but well, Seri-chan."

Kusanagi called out to Seri Awashima, the person in charge of "Scepter 4", who was next to him. Awashima responded to Kusanagi with a thoughtful look, as she was nicknamed "Woman of the Tundra".

"I look forward to your work. More importantly, what are you going to do with those documents?"

He immediately had an idea of what Awashima was referring to.

"Ah, I was on the fence about that, but I decided to give it to the "Silver King"."

Awashima's eyes shifted to Kusanagi.

"Yes."

After saying that, Awashima kept her mouth shut.

(Hm...), Kusanagi thought.

He was sure that he would listen to even a single complaint. Those documents, the research materials for the "Dresden Slate", would not have been possible without Awashima's cooperation. It was not an exaggeration to say that half of the property belongs to Awashima and by extension "Scepter 4". He did not think that the puritanical Awashima would consent to give it to a third party.

Kusanagi stared at Awashima's profile.

Hard and cold, but somewhere inside, hesitation lurked. Her silent and unspoken gaze seemed to be fixed on Munakata, who had yet to appear at the entrance to Gakuenjima's dormitory.

Kusanagi also directed his attention to the bedroom.

Reisi Munakata. The man who killed Suoh Mikoto.

Every time he sees that man, his heart trembles, not for reason, but for emotion. However, Munakata is also a "King", and there are many who worship him. Awashima's gaze, looking at Munakata now, was probably the same one he had towards Suoh a year ago.

That's why Kusanagi muttered as he looked ahead.

The "Silver King" is the first "King". If you leave it to me, it won't look bad."

Awashima also muttered without meeting Kusanagi's eyes.

"I hope so."

Kusanagi inhaled the cigarette smoke and exhaled again.

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"Munakata-san."

Shiro prevented Munakata from leaving the entrance where the setting sun was shining.

He looked back. There was no expression on his face. Narrowing his eyes behind his glasses, Munakata opened his mouth nonchalantly.

"Do you still need something, Isana Yashiro?"

"Are you now managing the "Slate" instead of the "Golden King"?"

It was more of a confirmation than a question. The information that "Scepter 4" was going in and out of Mihashira Tower, where the "Dresden Slate" was kept, was also heard by Shiro through the rabbit.

Munakata naturally affirmed that.

"What about that? Since there are no other suitable candidates, I think it's a natural role."

"How far did you go with the "Slate"...?"

"Not as far as you, the "King" of the Beginning, but that's something."

Shiro didn't know how far that "something" was.

Even Shiro hadn't caught the full picture of Reisi Munakata, the "Blue King". It was clear to him that just because someone was a "King" didn't necessarily mean they were good, even without recalling the examples of the "Fox Mask" and Kagutsu Genji.

The "Slate", the source of supernatural powers, is accompanied by great power.

The problem is how those who manage the "Slate" will handle it.

"Are you going to be the second... Daikaku Kokujoji?"

"....."

Munakata remained expressionless and did not reply.

It seemed to Shiro that it was both affirmation and denial.

Shiro who found it knows the weight of "Slate" better. How painful it would be to bear it alone. If so, he might be able to help.

Shiro stepped forward and withdrew.

"If you don't mind, I'll help run the "Slate" as well."

"You who ran away once, do you want me to count on you?"

Without even hearing the ending, Munakata said that to him to push him away.

".....!"

Shiro held his breath.

There are innumerable mistakes he has made, and two things weigh heavily on his mind.

Waking up the "Slate".

And then, he irresponsibly left the "Slate" that he had awakened.

He still wanted to right the irreparable mistake. That is why Shiro has once again returned to this land.

But... Munakata didn't seem to allow even that.

"If it is a countermeasure against the Green Clan, I would greatly appreciate your cooperation. Well then, excuse me."

Munakata looked ahead and left. His back was stiff and cold, and it seemed he would never speak to him again.

A while after Munakata disappeared, Shiro asked with a big sigh.

"I wonder if this is also cause and effect... isn't it, Kuro?"

He looked behind him. From behind the wall, he could see the worried faces of Kuro and Neko.

"You realized?"

"Shiro!"

Neko hugged Shiro and looked up with wet eyes.

"Were you bullied by that bespectacled boss?"

Shiro smiled and answered.

"I'm fine, it's nothing."

"Really? Hey, is it really nothing?"

Shiro gently stroked Neko's hair who persistently asked him. After that, he turned to Kuro and reluctantly shook his head.

"In fact, I ran away. Even at that time, I didn't do what I could have done, and I was drifting in the sky the whole time."

"....."

Kuro couldn't answer that question. All he knows is Isana Yashiro, not Adolf K. Weismann.

"That's why I decided not to run away this time, but to face him."

Shiro's decision is known only to Shiro. Hearing those words that sounded like he was talking to himself, Kuro hardened his expression and placed his hand on his chest.

What he took out of there was a tape recorder.

Both Shiro and Neko had a blank expression on their faces. He had a bad feeling about it. In the affirmative, Kuro nodded once and pressed the switch on the recorder.

"One step at a time, jumping towards the path you chose, that's all you need."

What is recorded there is a series of haikus composed by Ichigen Miwa, who was Kuro's teacher and the previous "Colorless King". Kuro closed his eyes as if he gritted his teeth and spoke with a serious tone.

"Every time I hear it, it's a wonderful phrase...! Listen, Shiro. In other words, people have no choice but to follow the path they believe in, one step at a time, but never forget the fun and the fantasy of skipping at any time."

"Spooky!"

"What?!"

In response to Shiro's sincere reaction, Kuro's eyes widened in anger, but he breathed out his anger and pointed to the bedroom stairs.

"Go back to your room. There's horse mackerel and miso soup today."

"Hurrah!"

Neko raised her hands in joy and jumped down the stairs. Shiro said in a low voice as he walked with Kuro.

"...Thank you, Kuro."

"Hm."

"Both of us, let's go quickly! I'm hungry!"

"Yes."

With a wry smile, Shiro caught up with Neko.

"Oh, now that I think about it, my old room, did they even make repairs and a transfer contract to you guys?"

"I have to thank them for creating a place for you to return to."

"It was all thanks to the Lieutenant."

"Thank you, Lieutenant!"

Such a casual conversation made Shiro very happy. It was because he felt that he had finally returned to the place where he should return.

CHAPTER 5: CONNECTIONS

XX slowly raised her head.

It was a family room. There was a table, a dresser, and a TV. The aluminum sheet next to her was open, and soft sunlight streamed in from the porch.

It was the house of XX.

After blinking several times, XX looked around. Neither mother nor father. Did they go shopping or work? Even when she called out to them, the only response was silence, which only increased XX's loneliness.

At that moment, a voice shouted.

She looked to the side. Before she knew it, a cat was sitting on the sunny porch.

What was that cat called? Of course, yes.

"Tamagoro!"

A hoarse voice came from nearby.

XX turned to the direction of the voice in surprise, and then.

She got goosebumps all over her body.

There was a small altar in front of her.

It shouldn't have happened until now.

The altar looked like it hadn't been maintained in a long time. The flowers in the vase had dried up and not even the ashes were left in the incense holder. The dark and gloomy door closed tightly, but slowly, it was about to open.

She didn't want to see.

She shouldn't look.

Although she knew that, her body did not move. The door would open by itself. XX remained rigid, imprinting that movement on her dry eyeballs.

Two portraits of the deceased were enshrined on the altar.

One showed a white-haired boy smiling kindly.

One showed a grumpy, dark-haired boy.

Her heart began to pound.

Help.

XX just wanted that. She needed help. At that time, she just wanted to escape from that place.

XX twisted her neck with all her strength and turned to the side. To ask for help from the only existence that was not her, Tamagoro lying on the porch. Then she turned her eyes.

Tamagoro was not there.

A parrot with green feathers was perched.

XX widened her eyes, the parrot opened its mouth and clearly called out her name.

"Ameno Miyabi."

And Neko jumped.

She opened her eyes as wide as she could. Her body was wet with a cold sweat. She held tight to her heart that was beating like a bell from the top of her nightwear.

Neko tried to forget the dream, but she couldn't.

That name, that scene. She was stuck in her head and wouldn't let go. The dream seemed to merge with reality and spread right next to the bed. It took tremendous courage to confirm it.

When she looked to the side, Shiro was sleeping peacefully.

A relief that made her want to cry spread through Neko.

With that feeling, Neko buried her face in Shiro's chest. She could hear Shiro's sleepy voice.

"Neko...? What's wrong...?"

Neko didn't respond to that sleepy voice, instead she just shook her head. She was afraid to even tell him that she had a scary dream. As soon as she uttered it, it would come true that she couldn't help but feel like she was being attacked.

Unable to sleep or close her eyes, Neko clung to Shiro, trembling until morning.

+++++

Seeing the "Jungle" Clansman jump out of the alley on the right, Andy Domyoji smiled and grabbed the hilt of his saber.

"Domyoji, ready!"

The lock was released by voice recognition and the saber was drawn at the same time he began to run. Noticing the approaching white blade, the green masked clansman flinched. However, as expected of a mid-range, he immediately turned his PDA towards them and displayed an interception stance.

Domyoji's smile turned fierce, and a voice of fighting spirit spilled from his throat.

"Oyaaaaaaaaa!"

Leaping to dodge the electrical discharge emitted from the PDA, he quickly approached the shaken clansman and struck him on the side of the head with the hilt of his saber.

After tying up the unconscious clansman, Domyoji let out a triumphant cry over the radio.

"Ok, one step up."

But what he returned was a warning.

"Domyoji! Behind you!"

"Huh? Gah!"

A group of green masks that seem to be friends were emerging from the alley. With murderous intent clearly visible through their masks, they pointed their weapons at Domyoji.

"Grrrrroooaaahh!"

Furthermore, they were all knocked down at once by the giant that broke through.

Rikio Kamamoto, the leader of "Homura". With a massive body of over 100 kilograms and a red aura, he looks like an advancing heavy tank. After being run over by Kamamoto, the green masks flew through the air and rolled on the ground before being captured by the "Homura" clansmen who had been waiting for them.

"Ok, we caught the shit!"

"Give me the rope!"

Raising an animated voice, they skillfully placed the power suppression tools on the green masks. Taking a deep breath, Domyoji looked around.

The number of green masks in the report was six. They all seemed to have been caught.

Domyoji put down his saber and saluted Kamamoto.

"Thanks for your help!"

Kamamoto turned around and gave a thumbs up with a pleasant smile.

"Oh! You are welcome!"

Domyoji laughed and thought, "What the hell are these good guys?"

He had never collaborated with one of the "Homura" clansmen, but when he put together a united front like that, he got along well with Domyoji. Well, Domyoji is in the free-spirited category of "Scepter 4", so it's only natural that he would have a strong affinity with "Homura".

Then, Benzai and Kamo rushed up from behind.

"Domyoji, you stand out too much on your own!"

Domyoji waved his hand to the side of his face.

"Yes, the red guys were blocking the front. They're resourceful, so if you play with the green ones and spread them around, they'll take care of the rest."

"Not bad tactically, but relying too much on other clans..."

Domyoji chuckled slightly at Benzai, who was still scolding him.

"Benzai is not feeling well."

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"No, don't worry about it, we are talking about this."

Domyoji thought that Benzai, along with Akiyama, is a "Scepter 4" duo type. At best he is honest, at worst he is stubborn. This joint front is also following the rules, but they can't seem to move well because they lack flexibility.

"Akiyama, turn the transport vehicle around. Oh, we've secured them all."

Kamo, who finished contacting the escort team, joined the conversation.

"His illegal networks follow secondary routes that we often overlook. We were able to control this matter on the first try. Even if you thank him, you will be punished."

"Kamo is right. He is realistic."

"So what are you talking about...?"

Kamo had a questioning expression on his face and Benzai accepted the words, albeit bitterly.

"It is true that our security shifts have improved significantly."

"If you try it, it'll work surprisingly well. I'm thankful I had more hands. Thanks to that, I can take a shower."

"Well, that is..."

Benzai smiled wryly at Domyoji, who crossed his arms and nodded.

At that moment, a transport vehicle turned the corner of the street.

Akiyama's subordinates are driving.

And sitting in the passenger seat is Saruhiko Fushimi.

"Oh...", Domyoji thought and pretended not to see it. Just imagining how Fushimi, who originally belonged to "Homura", thinks about the current situation, makes him cringe. Domyoji tried to leave the place to avoid getting involved as much as possible.

And, he threw a juice at him, and Domyoji reflexively received it. The one who gave it to him was the "Homura" member, Kamamoto. He smiled and lifted his own juice.

"Good job. That's a gift."

"Oh, thanks."

As he said thank you, Domyoji couldn't help but worry about the passenger seat of the transport vehicle. As he tried not to look in that direction, Kamamoto and Akiyama got out of the car and started a meeting.

"Can I get in that car?"

"Oh, please."

The "Homura" members began to load the restrained "Jungle" clansmen in the back seat. He thought he heard the click of his tongue, but Domyoji drank the juice and pretended not to hear it.

+++++

It was Usagi who asked him to clean Kokujoji's belongings.

He is an old rabbit that Shiro knows well. He doesn't know exactly what kind of chain of command "Tokijikuin" has, but from the fact that he served Kokujoji until the last moment, he was probably the "King's" closest vassal.

At first, Shiro was confused by his offer.

He certainly was an ally of Kokujoji. But that was nearly 70 years ago, and he hadn't even heard his voice since he fled into the sky. If Kokujoji's memory is accepted, there must be someone more suitable than him.

"There was no such person before you."

The answer weighed heavily on Shiro's back.

Has the lieutenant lived his entire life without making family, friends, or close friends?

After a moment, Shiro nodded.

The old rabbit didn't say anything, just bowed deeply.

It was a well-appointed room.

Tatami mats and shoji screens, Japanese sliding doors and chests of drawers, hanging scrolls and Japanese swords in the alcove. It's been a long time since people lived here, but not a single piece of dust has fallen on the tatami mats. This is probably proof of how much the owner of this room has been revered.

"This is the first time I've come to the lieutenant's room."

There was no longer anyone to respond to the fallen words.

Still, Shiro could feel his presence in the room. It was as if he could imagine how Kokujoji had lived in that place.

"You've been here alone..."

The room was too plain for a man of power who had led that country out of the quagmire of defeat. Perhaps Kokujoji wasn't allowed the luxury of private time. Control others, discipline yourself and continue to support a nation. To accomplish such a feat, he must have given up the worldly happiness of him as a human being.

But among them, there is only one. There was something that showed Kokujoji's humanity.

A photograph leaning against a Japanese chest of drawers.

There are three people in the image. Daikaku Kokujoji and Adolf K. Weismann straightened up. And...

"Lieutenant. My sister prepared something amazing like this."

The papers in Shiro's hands were as old as the photographs. The last person in the photo made it. Claudia Weismann, co-investigator of the "Dresden Slate" and his older sister.

"Many years after we parted ways, it was exhumed from a bunker next to the lab. Kusanagi-san found it when it was donated to the library in a box and left there for a long time without knowing what it was. Look, that Library Officer Red General Staff."

Stroking the surface of the document, Shiro narrowed his eyes. Handwriting, the habit of writing, scribbling here and there brought Isana Yashiro back to when he was Adolf K. Weismann.

The smell of the wind blowing through the majestic streets of Dresden. Voices of people talking and laughing in a familiar language. A strange-tasting homemade dish brought in between studies. Memories of the bright days that had passed half a century ago floated in Adolf's mind, and then disappeared.

"It seems my sister was able to see through it all. The lieutenant went straight to make his dreams come true, and I was lost in front of my inflated dreams, all..."

While he was flipping through the documents and saying that, something slipped across the space. He bent down and picked it up.

It was also a photograph.

It's the same composition as the photo hanging on the Japanese dresser, but it was taken right after. Even though more than half a century has passed, he still remembers that time vividly.

It was Claudia who suggested taking another photo. This time, she put the mouse used in the experiment on Kokujoji's head, saying that that boy should be with them. Kokujoji was taken aback by his sister's jokes, and Adolf saw this and laughed.

A time that will never return, but that certainly existed.

Shiro read the scribbles written in the corner of the photo.

"Irren ist menschlich." (To err is human.)

Mistakes are human nature. Forgiveness is the work of God.

With a pop, he felt a light pat on his back.

He looked back without wanting to. There was no one there, of course. There was only Adolf K. Weismann Isana Yashiro, and his sister or his friend was not there.

Shiro closed his eyes silently.

God is in heaven. The only thing he could do when he went down to the ground is face his mistakes. Because even if he doesn't get forgiveness, he can't move on without it.

He opened his eyes. He took the photo frame and attached it to a small box.

The memory of the mistake was also an irreplaceable memory. He was sure that it would be a light to go on.

When he left the room, Neko jumped towards him as if to say that she was waiting for him.

"Shiro!"

With a wry smile, he hugged and caressed her with one hand. Shiro thought lightly that the reason why Neko had become so spoiled these days was probably the effect of his long absence.

Kuro, who was taking care of him outside, asked him with a mysterious expression.

"You're done?"

"Yes. Even though it was called organizing belongings, there were hardly any personal belongings."

Kokujoji's relics were gathered in a box that he could carry under his arm. That was all Kokujoji had. Grasping that meaning, Kuro lowered his eyes with a mournful expression.

And suddenly Kuro put his hand on the hilt of his sword and Neko stiffened.

Before he knew it, almost 10 rabbits had appeared in the courtyard in front of the private room of Kokujoji.

All of them wore rabbit masks and black clothes. The figure that was destroyed seemed to embody Kokujoji's ideals.

With a look on his face, Shiro let go of Kuro and Neko's guard and spoke to the old rabbit that appeared in the hallway.

"The lieutenant's order was to cooperate with me until I came back down to the ground, but I asked you to extend it longer."

"Useless words. You are my king's friend."

Old rabbits wore their sleeves pushed together in front. After that, all the rabbits in the yard bowed at once.

"According to my king's will, the Golden Clan 'Tokijikuin' will only be involved in the preservation of the current system from now on. We will stop actively getting involved in the situation. With your permission."

As "Silver King", Shiro said:

"Forgive me."

And as Kokujoji's friend, Shiro said:

"About Daikaku Kokujoji... Thank you for everything."

"...Ha."

Both sleeves trembled slightly. Looking at him, Shiro felt a little relieved.

Daikaku Kokujoji may not have had anyone close to him. His family, his friends, but certainly there were those who cared for him.

"Still, it's 'Tokijikuin'. As rumored, it's a formidable clan."

After leaving Mihashira Tower and walking down the street, Kuro said something like that.

"Is that so? Well, it's hard to get along at first sight, but if you talk to them, they're good-natured people, aren't they?"

"It's not about looks or personality. It's about skill."

Kuro said embarrassed.

"Mihashira Tower is a dependent territory of "Tokijikuin". I should have known they were there, but they appeared without any sign, so I inadvertently became wary. Now that I think about it, it was disrespectful."

"Yes, yes! I was surprised too!"

Neko nodded and Shiro smiled wryly.

"The "Tokijikuin" clan has been running this country for a long time. The number of people and the thickness of the ranks are incomparable with other clans. Those people are also stationed in the Mihashira Tower, so I think they must be quite influential."

However, it is said that even these people were unable to stop Mishakuji Yukari alone in the Mihashira Tower Attack Incident. Partly it was because the "Golden King" was weak, but more than that, it was because Mishakuji was that powerful.

As he walked, Kuro crossed his arms in annoyance.

"It's a bit harsh that we can't rely on the Golden Clan as a fighting force even though the battle against "Jungle" is about to intensify..."

"They are not a simple combat unit. They are the control system of the 'Slate' that controls the key points of this country. We cannot afford to lose them by running carelessly. The lieutenant knew that too, so he put the condition of to wait until I got down to the ground."

On the side of the street, "Scepter 4" personnel are stationed to guard Mihashira Tower. Kuro looked at them sideways and said with a frown.

"Hm, so... Is that the "Blue King" who is running the "Slate" now?"

That sentence clicked with a nuance. Shiro scoffed.

"What, are you still holding on to the fact that you were bullied before?"

"No!"

"Nyahahahaha! Kurosuke was criticized!"

"Well, it's not that kind of private feeling, it's more..."

"You got hit by that guy who almost killed you, so isn't Kurosuke really weak?"

"Neko! You!"

Enraged, Kuro approached Neko, who jumped and dodged. When the two started chasing each other around Shiro, the "Scepter 4" clansmen looked at them wondering what was going on. Shiro entered the arbitration, greeting them with a friendly smile.

"Well. Munakata-san can't help it, because he is a "King". Rather, I admire the courage you had to challenge him."

"Hmm..."

Hearing Shiro's words of praise lightly, Kuro made an expression that wasn't bad.

"As for Mishakuji Yukari, I want you to work a little harder."

"Guh..."

Hearing Shiro's reproachful words, Kuro closed his eyes in frustration and lowered his head.

"I know... I'm not as good as him... But still, in order to beat him, I will train every day with the spirit of devotion and diligence."

"No, Kuro? You're kidding, aren't you? Don't worry too much about it. You weren't doing your best back then."

"Idiot! How can you beat him with such a spoiled idea! Mishakuji Yukari is a traitor who pointed his sword at Ichigen-sama, and my mission as a servant is to defeat him."

"Oh, that's too much trouble. Say something to him, Neko."

Shiro made that comment to Neko and noticed that she was terribly quiet.

"Neko? What's up?"

A while ago, Neko should have been rolling with laughter, but she had a completely different expression. A look of fear, anxiety, and impatience that he had never seen before. As she clung to Shiro's arm, Neko was staring at one point.

"...Over there. Just now, someone was watching."

"Over there?"

In front of Neko's gaze, there was nothing but a nondescript street tree. Shiro patted Neko on her back, trying to reassure her.

"There's no one there. It's okay."

"Yes. He was looking. Absolutely, about Wagahai..."

Saying that in a low voice, Neko buried her face in Shiro's arm. Seeing that unusual situation, Shiro and Kuro exchanged glances and bowed their heads.

+++++

Prime Minister Samukawa Kanichi.

That's his title. As a representative of the Cabinet, which is the executive branch, he is the most important civilian. He is the top of Japan, and the direction of this country depends only on his will.

At least, that is what it seems.

That is not really so, it was just a "presumption" among those who held a certain position. There are other supreme powers. Those who have even greater power than the chief elected by the people. Political tasks that they use conveniently, that was the reality of the Prime Minister.

Samukawa never felt dissatisfied with it. Originally, he was a self-protective person, and the position of Prime Minister became the result of sticking to the "shadow of the big tree". This is Samukawa's true nature, and this is why he became a politician.

But even so, the current situation was frustrating for Samukawa.

Official residence of the prime minister, office. Originally, it could be called the most important place in this country. Everyone but Samukawa must be nervous, considerate, and humble in this place.

Despite that, the man puffed out his chest arrogantly and acted as if he owned the room.

Reisi Munakata, Head of the Fourth Branch of the Family Registration Division, Tokyo Legal Affairs Office.

Officially, he is just an official. As the Prime Minister, it is incomparable to him, and it is an existence that can be blown up.

All that changes when you put the premise. Munakata will become an entity called "King", and Samukawa will become nothing more than a political institution.

"As explained above, we, "Scepter 4", have officially assumed the authority to manage Mihashira Tower and "Dresden Slate". A notice will come from the Golden Clan soon."

"With Gozen gone, are you literally pretending to be a king?"

The sarcastic way of speaking is a far cry from Samukawa's usual. Putting emotions behind a smile is the basis of politicians. He hasn't been able to do that. Even Samukawa took offense as he gave a sly smile at a youth who was much younger than him.

However, Munakata seemed to pay no attention to Samukawa's irritation.

"I'm not pretentious. I'm the "King" defined by the "Slate"."

Samukawa's temples twitched. He thought about how to teach the rude youth about his position, but in the meantime, Munakata dropped a bombshell.

"Therefore, we will also transfer the priority of the orders to each national institution held by the Golden Clan."

Samukawa's eyes widened and his hips began to float.

"No, impossible! Just when..."

"Just when you took the weight off of yourself?"

After noting the point, Samukawa fell silent.

The "Golden King", Kokujoji Daikaku, is a distinguished man who has rebuilt this country. No one in the world of politics or business can match him in terms of status, honor, or power. He is truly a political giant, and it is precisely his intention that an existence like the "King" can do as it pleases.

It was about two months ago that rumors began to circulate that Kokujoji was dead.

Of course, rumors are just rumors. No one had confirmation. However, in reality, Kokujoji no longer appears on the surface, and the rabbits' contact is nothing more than maintaining the system. It was clear that Kokujoji was in a situation where he couldn't give orders.

"King" is a high-ranking existence of politicians. That is the premise.

And finally the time had come to tear down that "premise" that had been hanging over their heads for a long time after the war. It was time for them, who were elected by the people, to recover their legitimate rights.

Even though he had such expectations.

Seeing Samukawa's agitation, Munakata smiled. It wasn't a smirk. It's a warm smile that tells a child, "You don't have to be ambitious if you don't know where you are."

"Don't worry, Prime Minister. We have no intention of influencing the fortunes of the nation with our own selfish desires."

Samukawa stopped breathing and Munakata continued calmly.

"At the moment, we are only asking for smooth cooperation from all quarters towards the confrontation with the Green Clan that threatens the peace of the world."

"You assume the right to give orders, please."

"The way a base has is what is called order. I kindly ask for your cooperation as the Prime Minister."

Samukawa clenched his teeth to keep from making noise.

Evidenced form, that is, system.

The current Samukawa couldn't reverse that.

The system continues to function even after the death of the founder. "Tokijikuin", properly operated by those pesky rabbits, is still in effect. If the youth in front of them demand the transfer of power according to the system, they have no choice but to respond.

"In short, are you telling me to follow you?"

"If you put it that way, yes."

Samukawa closed his eyes for a moment at Munakata's simple answer.

The next time he opened his eyes, there was a smile on his face.

"I see! If that's the case, I'll give you my full cooperation, Munakata-kun!"

Munakata's expression didn't change, but the attendant behind him was startled. Samukawa's sudden change was so splendid.

"I will notify every ministry and agency through the Chief Cabinet Secretary. Let's do our best to ensure that your "Scepter 4" can operate without delay. That must be the testament that Gozen left behind!"

"Then so shall it be."

When Munakata spoke, he felt his eyes shake again, but this time he was able to contain himself. He had experienced that kind of humiliation and bitterness countless times in his life as a politician. Survival was far more important than that pride.

He did not nullify the premise.

Not now.

The change is already happening. If "Scepter 4" really has the same power as "Tokijikuin"... Is it long term? When looking while taking a co-op system, there will be something that can be seen.

It is precisely when we determine that, that it is time to act.

"Anyway, I was wondering what would happen if Gozen disappeared, but if Munakata-kun puts it all together, I'm relieved! Well, the future of this country is bright! Hahahahahaha..."

As he gently turned his tongue, Samukawa also turned his thoughts around.

The Green Clan. An organization that appears to be hostile to "Scepter 4". First, he would start investigating from there.

+++++

The war is waged within 10.2 inches.

Multiple green light points move on a wireframe map. A blue dot suddenly appears there, blocking the green path. The greens scatter and try to escape the blue by taking their own routes, but this time a red dot of light appears in front of them, a giant X mark was carved on top of the green dot of light sandwiched between the red and blue.

Kusanagi placed the tablet on the bar counter after confirming that the large letters "TARGET NEUTRALIZED" appeared in the center of the screen.

"It seems that the joint fight with the Blue Clan is unexpectedly going well."

"Yes."

The one who answered was Anna, who was drinking juice on the seat at the counter. She didn't need to look at the tablet or anything like that, instead she was the source of the location information that was displayed on the tablet.

Anna's original ability to respond increased dramatically after she became the "King". The marbles with her supernatural powers function as "terminals" for her sentient abilities. As long as you have the marble, they can communicate with each other without any electronic network. By distributing marbles to not only "Homura", but also "Scepter 4", they have built an information network that could be called the "Supernatural Power Network".

That is one of the new advantages gained by the "Three Kings Alliance". Jungle's superiority so far has been its control over the electronic network. If you blindfold him, "Jungle" will never beat the alliance.

"Ah, they are very lucky."

Yata, who was sitting on the couch, muttered so and dropped the tablet.

"Hey, Kusanagi-san, why am I on standby here? Even if you're going to blow those green guys away, without this Yatagarasu, you'll have to deal with "Homura"."

Kusanagi looked at Yata in astonishment,

"Idiot. If you see green, you'll run in without looking back. I heard various things, what kind of recklessness Yata-chan did during the cooperation operation with the blue ones."

"Gak..."

Yata shuddered. Seeing that, Kusanagi sighed quietly.

He thought that he had calmed down a bit, but Yata was still Yata. In the operation with "Jungle", he ignored cooperation and rushed over, rampaging without thinking about the damage to the surroundings, and even ended up fighting with "Scepter 4" who tried to stop him. In response, Kusanagi would have a headache.

With that said, Yata was also right.

"I can't help it. I can't keep my cool when I'm in front of those green guys. It's about Mikoto-san and Totsuka-san..."

Saying that, Yata cut off his words. Like he hates talking about it.

Until now, Yata has suppressed his anger towards "Jungle". The explosive power when released would not be suitable for cooperation. No doubt it was Kusanagi himself who told him not to deflect anger away from them, and it might be a bit unreasonable to ask him to adjust the output as well.

Kusanagi knows. The strength of Yata's feelings and the frustration that comes with it. That's why he spoke in a soft tone.

"Well, people like us are important too. Reserve forces, you say. In preparation for accidents, you always need to have some leeway."

"Is that being a substitute?"

Kusanagi smiled wryly at the Yata-style way of saying it.

"Yes, don't be silly. Yata-chan is the one saying that he's going to protect Anna."

"That's right."

Yata awkwardly looked away and looked at Anna. Anna was calmly drinking juice. Her calm demeanor oozes the dignity of a "King".

Hitting the tablet with his finger, Kusanagi said as if to persuade him.

"Yata-chan, you have to learn to look at things from a distance. This is a good opportunity."

"Hey..."

Yata took the tablet again while letting out a careless voice. Even as he curled his lips, he rubbed awkwardly with his fingertips, trying to grasp the battle situation.

Kusanagi returned his gaze to his tablet and opened the information screen.

"The "Green King" hasn't shown any conspicuous movement since the turmoil in Gakuenjima. It's only the clansmen in the end who are still rampaging."

"As long as you're being watched from blue front and red rear, you can't make any perceptible movement. But..."

Looking at the marbles placed on the counter, Anna said quietly.

"He's not holding back, he's gathering strength."

"It's like sharpening your fangs to make the next big thing happen... It's a spooky story."

Yata, who was on the couch, laughed heartily.

"No matter what, there are three "Kings" here, with Anna leading the way. Even if those green bugs bring their boss, we'll crush them easily!"

Yata stated so confidently, but Kusanagi's expression did not clear.

"Three "Kings", even if you say that..."

As he muttered, the exchanges at Gakuenjima revived in Kusanagi's mind.

"Could you tell the "Red Queen" to keep an eye on the status of the "Blue King"?"

The "Silver King" Isana Yashiro told Kusanagi that when he handed over the documents related to the "Dresden Slate".

"What do you mean status?"

"I can't say exactly what it is, but it's very dangerous. It's like..."

Shiro kept his mouth shut, as if he was hesitating to say anything else. Therefore, Kusanagi was able to accurately understand what he was saying.

It's like Suoh Mikoto.

Kusanagi groaned.

"The regicide charge, huh?"

It was directly Munakata who took Suoh's life. But... Even if Munakata hadn't wielded the sword from him, the "Sword of Damocles" would have fallen and Suoh would have lost his life.

A "King" can only be killed by a "King". It's a taboo. Appropriate punishment will be given to those who violate the taboo. That was the "regicide charge" destabilization of the royal authority due to the rapid increase in Weismann deviation, and the end result was the riot.

Suoh killed the "Colorless King". As a result, it went out of control and caused enormous damage to the entire Kanto region. It was Munakata's sword that prevented it from happening, but because of this, Munakata also had to bear the burden of regicide.

"You've noticed the signs, right?"

"The "Sword of Damocles"..."

It is now an open secret that the gigantic sword that towered in the blue sky had some flaws in its majesty. Every time Munakata wielded his royal power, the fault seemed to grow. He doesn't want to imagine what's to come, but he had to. If things get worse, the entire Kanto region could turn into a huge crater.

"It's not like it's going to happen right now, but the situation is the situation. It's better to be very careful."

Remembering those words, Kusanagi frowned.

"I don't know how much we can trust them anymore, and I want you to be honest about what happens to anyone. I wish it wasn't like that."

At this time, Anna put the cup on the counter and said quietly.

"I was able to meet Mikoto and the people of "Homura" thanks to the "Slate"."

There is a certain determination in Anna's eyes.

"But if someone becomes like Mikoto because of the "Slate", then I..."

"Anna, what are you saying...?"

Yata looked puzzled at Anna and then at Kusanagi.

However, Kusanagi couldn't take his eyes off Anna. The worst possible imaginable. That's what the "King" imagines, who has the ability to resonate louder than anyone else. That raised Kusanagi's sense of crisis on several levels.

"That's why the "Blue King" is in such bad shape."

Anna didn't answer. She was looking at the counter with a penetrating gaze.

The marble touched her elbow and rolled off the counter to the floor, making a loud noise.

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She flipped the futon over and checked the inside.

"Shiro?"

It wasn't there. Next up was the closet. She opened it on both sides and stuck her head inside.

"Eh? Shiro? Ah?"

Shiro was not there. She carefully opened each shelf of the dresser and said his name.

"Shiro, answer me. Shiro!"

No matter which shelf she opened, she couldn't see Shiro.

With each confirmation, Neko's anxiety grew by one. Shiro was nowhere to be found. Where had he gone? Did he go somewhere far away?

"Hey, Shiro, where are you?"

"If it's Shiro, he just left."

Kuro, who was cooking in the kitchen, said that casually.

"Where did he go? I'm going too!"

"Leave him alone for a while. I'm sure he has a lot to think about."

She spun on her heel, jumped, and when she landed on the bed, she had already taken the form of a cat. When she buried the tip of her nose in the futon, she was filled with Shiro's scent.

And, Kuro poked his head out of the kitchen. With an exasperated expression, he tried to scold Neko.

"I know you're happy to have Shiro back, but it's a bit complicated. He's not going anywhere, so calm down."

"Why!"

"...Why, you?"

"Why does Kurosuke know that?!"

As if she yelled, Neko said that.

From inside the futon, she looked at Kuro with bright blue and gold eyes. Kuro's calm demeanor annoyed her. Why didn't he care more? Where is the guarantee that Shiro will not go anywhere?

"He Might disappear again! Shutting people up is being selfish!"

"Neko..."

Kuro's expression changed to something like that.

As he wiped his hands on the edge of his apron, Kuro walked over to Neko and sat down next to her. He reached out his hand and gently stroked her forehead.

"Are you worried, Neko?"

Neko turned around and put her head inside the futon. However, Kuro never stopped stroking Neko. He placed his palm on the fur on her back and stroked her.

"Ok. Shiro isn't going anywhere. You said so."

"...Such thing."

"Can't you believe in Shiro?"

"No, it's not like that, but Shiro..."

A muffled voice echoed from the depths of the futon. She did not doubt Shiro. Kuro wouldn't tell a lie either. After searching for Shiro for a long time, she finally found it. He would never go anywhere again. She wanted to believe that, and she should have.

Still, she couldn't control the anxiety welling up inside her.

"It's strange."

As he slowly stroked Neko's back, Kuro said that longingly.

"When you were looking for Shiro, you never doubted that you would see him again. You couldn't be more optimistic. Still, you were the one who was really right."

That's how it is. Without Shiro, she never experienced such anxiety. She never felt the fear of not seeing him again.

And yet...

"Why are you so worried even though you were able to find Shiro?"

She didn't know.

Neko didn't know why. She doesn't care about Nagare or the Slate or anything like that. It is so because it is so.

Because...

Because she knows that people suddenly disappear for no reason and never come back.

"Oh!"

In the depths of the futon, in the darkness, Neko's body writhed.

With green feathers dancing in the air.

A name that was confined deep within, and she prayed that it would never revive again.

"Ameno Miyabi."

A young man's voice called out to Neko.

"No way!"

Shouting, Neko jumped. When she turned around and returned to her human form again, she hugged Kuro in surprise and buried her face into his shoulder.

Then she began to cry silently.

"Neko?"

Kuro, dismayed, raised a confused voice. But Neko couldn't handle it. Overwhelmed by inexplicable anxiety and fear, she trembled all the time.

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It was the first time in a long time that he had looked at the sky from the ground.

The sky was infinitely wide, blue and lonely. There was no one but Shiro. Therefore, it was quiet and lonely. It was the perfect place to break all ties and walk away.

The ground contrasted with the sky. It is teeming with people, and the speculations they create never cease, intricately intertwining and spreading. Thinking about it, Shiro was astonished as if it was the first time coming into contact with it.

The place where he is now, is the nostalgic Gakuenjima, the rooftop of the school building.

It's a place he used to hang out at when he was just Isana Yashiro. He would skip classes and take a nap there, and Kukuri would scold him for it. With nothing but white rice in hand, he would beg everyone for a side dish and turn it into a boxed lunch.

Looking back now, it seems like a memory from a previous life. Hard to believe it was only a year ago.

"If we delay, this country will end..."

After suddenly muttering, Shiro smiled quietly.

Was the voice he heard at that moment Kokujoji's scream? Or was it an unconscious warning from himself who felt it? At some point, he must have foreseen the path that would lead to the end of this country.

Where did it all start?

Hisui Nagare's secret move. The death of Daikaku Kokujoji. The attack on Mihashira Tower. Suoh Mikoto and the death of Totsuka Tatara. The accident of Adolf K. Weismann and the rampage of the anonymous "Colorless King".

Or is it the conflict between Kagutsu Genji and Habari Jin?

Or did it all start when he discovered the "Dresden Slate" in the first place?

While he was immersed in such thoughts, he suddenly heard a sound of wings.

A soft voice called out to Shiro who was still looking at the blue sky.

"You did your best to warn the "Blue King", but it seems to have been in vain. I feel sorry for you."

Shiro replied without looking back.

"Peeping is not impressive, "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

"My eyes are everywhere. It's my only freedom."

That's true. The "Green King" rules the network. In today's information society, he has tremendous power. Due to that power, he was able to evade the eyes of the "Golden King" and continue to plot against him to this day.

"Dragging you as soon as the lieutenant died, you are also quite cunning."

He thought the parrot that was perched on the rooftop rail smiled.

"To think that someone who finally decided to move after his friend's death would teach me a lesson. I find it ironic."

Shiro also smiled gently.

"I see, when you say that, I have no words to answer. So?"

"Yes. Now that the nice introduction is over, let's get down to business."

The parrot is the "Green King". Hisui Nagare's messenger spread his wings. As if he would open his arms when one entertains another.

"I have been waiting for your return. I wanted to bring you this proposal."

He had an idea of what the proposal was. However, Shiro said nothing and just waited for Nagare's words.

As expected, Nagare offered one of the wings to Shiro.

"First King, "Silver King" Adolf K. Weismann, would you like to join me?"

Shiro didn't laugh. Instead, he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Let's join the "Chabudai Alliance" and let's all four work together to protect world peace! I don't think that will be your proposal."

"The "Chabudai Alliance"... It's a fancy and respected name, but of course it's different. It's a new one-on-one alliance between you and me to further the evolution of humanity."

"....."

"You must have pointed to that once. In Dresden, 70 years ago."

A breeze blowing through Dresden. The voices of people laughing and chatting. In an instant, the strange-flavored dishes brought in between experiments appeared in Adolf's mind and then disappeared.

"That "Slate" is the "Evolution Acceleration Device" displayed on the "King" and the Clansman. Suppressed by the strongest existence, the "Golden King", the appearance of tension was slight, and even the appearance of the "King" was limited to the entire Kanto region."

With a dry voice, Shiro asked.

"Is that your purpose? For what?"

"It's just like I said. It's "just" to further the evolution of mankind."

Slowly, he broke out in a cold sweat.

As for the ultimate goal of the "Green King", he had a few possibilities in mind, perhaps the worst.

Hisui Nagare has come up with all kinds of plans for "just" the evolution of humanity. It doesn't matter what the motivation is. The problem is that Nagare is infinitely pure and therefore never gives up.

Equal parts fear and vigilance, Shiro said:

"You seem to be more dangerous than I thought."

"I am honored to receive such a compliment. However, that is my dream."

"Dream..."

As if an old wound from the past had reopened, Shiro's chest slowly ached.

"That dream..."

"Did it break? So why don't we rebuild it together? The situation is different now than it was 70 years ago. Nothing can stop us anymore. We just have to."

Nagare's dream had an irresistible charm.

Because it's a dream he once had. In that nostalgic Dresden, he would make the dream he pursued with Kokujoji and Claudia come true. It would not fail this time. He wouldn't let anyone get in his way. Unravel the mystery of the "Slate" and lead humanity to a new stage!

Breathing easily, Shiro replied.

"I will politely decline."

Nagare tilted his head in wonder.

"Why?"

"Everything is different from 70 years ago."

Kokujoji and Claudia are no longer anywhere.

His dream disappeared from the earth with them. What Nagare sees is nothing more than a dream similar to the one he once had. It's up to him to decide what to do with it, but even if he makes a mistake, it's not something he can do on his own.

This is because Shiro knows too much about the many things that have been lost as a result.

"Hmm... I didn't think it was a bad proposal, but it seems I was naive."

Nagare said without a hint of regret, and then continued like this.

"There is no specification, let's do our best to get the "Slate"."

Shiro was not surprised. He assumed that would happen, of course. Analyzing his actions thus far, it was clear that he was trying to make the "Dresden Slate" his own, the source of the mystery.

"Originally, he was going to imitate the "Golden King" and wait for the rookie "Blue King", who was desperately suppressing the power of the "Slate", to run out. It's a change of plans."

"Since I came back, I won't let you do what you want."

"Is that so? I wanted to go hand in hand with you, but if you're going to compete, that's what I want. I'm looking forward to it."

Nagare's voice was filled with calm fighting spirit and confidence.

With the "Chabudai Alliance", the situation of the war changed drastically. Due to the cooperation of the three clans, "Jungle" was now cornered.

But where does this confidence come from?

If he asks that question, he won't get an answer. Because that was Hisui Nagare's trump card. Like Shiro, he must have a secret "something" that will show his power only when he puts it on the field.

So Shiro asked another question.

"I'd like to confirm one thing, but it's okay to say that you were the one who dragged me onto this game board in the incident a year ago, right?"

On the other side of the parrot, he felt Nagare let out a small laugh.

"Oh, did you notice?"

"This body..."

Shiro placed his hand on his chest and looked at Nagare.

"Even if the Blue Clan used the Yuishiki system, they wouldn't be able to determine his identity. There's no way anyone but you could prepare such a person. In that case, you were the one who set the stage for the "Colorless King". take action on that incident, and you instigated me."

The escape of the "Colorless King" seemed chaotic and calculated. Using Shiro as bait, the "Red King" and the "Blue King" collided, and in the midst of the chaos, he was trying to gain the power of various Kings. If he had bought into that ambition, he would certainly have been a vessel for the "King", but there was a limit to what he could do on his own. There must have been an organization to support him somewhere.

And the only clan that is benefiting from the current situation is "Jungle".

"I see. Was it counterproductive by erasing the traces of existence, disguising an accidental death to those around you, and providing the necessary information? It's a bad habit of mine to be too picky."

For the first time, Shiro was angry with Nagare.

Totsuka Tatara. Suoh Mikoto. Many others lost their lives in the rampage of the "Colorless King". If this was all part of Hisui Nagare's plan, then he couldn't forgive this man.

"Go so far, why me?"

Nagare answered easily.

"You should be a player, not a watcher. You started it all."

He felt as if he were being showered with cold water.

He thought that was true. It all started him. He found the "Slate", analyzed it, and became "King" through mystery; that's how it all started, and all the tragedies up to this point have started there.

Many people lost their lives due to the rampage of the "Colorless King". The "Green King" planned it. So what happened before that? Who is responsible for the hundreds of thousands of lives lost in the battle between Kagutsu Genji and Habari Jin? Whether it's him, Kokujoji, or Claudia, there's no such thing as lack of responsibility.

That's why Shiro thought.

What has been started must be finished.

"Manage the "Slate"... no, do you want to release it?"

"So it will be. Please, don't worry and trust us with your dreams."

Shiro stared at Nagare who said that with indifference and determination.

"What if I say you can't?"

"Fight if you want."

Leaving that behind, the parrot that housed it flapped its wings and flew away. Shiro waited until the figure turned into a black dot in the blue sky and finally disappeared from sight.

"I don't want any of this."

He doesn't like to fight. If dialogue and understanding solve the problem, then it's better. But then Nagare would never give up. The purity of his ideals makes him uncompromising. He knows this because Shiro used to be like this.

When Hisui Nagare stops, that's when his heart stops.

As he clenched his fist, Shiro determinedly lied a bit.

"But I won't run away anymore."

CHAPTER 6: OPEN WAR

When was the first time he had that dream?

When facing the "Golden King"?

When did he find out about the "Silver King"?

Or when he was picked up by Iwafune?

Hisui Nagare could not remember that moment clearly.

Before he knew it, the dream was inside Nagare. Like a replacement for his lost heart, it throbbed in Nagare's chest, driving him into action. Or, in order to force Nagare to do so, the "Slate" may have stolen his heart.

Free the "Dresden Slate" and evolve all of humanity to the next stage.

Nagare believes that this is why he became the "Green King".

Hundreds of thousands of lives caught up in Genji Kagutsu's rampage were necessary sacrifices for that.

It is his dream, his reason for being. Nagare has used everything to achieve that. The "Colorless King", the "Red King", "Jungle", Iwafune, Kotosaka, Mishakuji, Sukuna and even himself were nothing more than tools to make his dreams come true.

And now...

He is in the place where he can touch that dream.

"The execution date is the 24th, Christmas Eve."

While looking at the many information screens floating in the twilight of the "secret base", Nagare spoke with a passionate tone.

"We will use all the power we have to seize the last sacrament, the "Dresden Slate". This is the purpose of us "Jungle"..."

But...

None of the Rankers, the highest ranking clan members of "Jungle" who are Nagare's tools and limbs, saw their "King".

Iwafune was happily drinking beer.

Kotosaka stayed on the couch and got ready.

Mishakuji looked at himself in the mirror and worked on his mask.

As for Sukuna, he was lying down and engrossed in the game, not in a position to listen to people.

He didn't want to say it, but he had to. This is a very important strategy meeting. Nagare looked around and said in a monotone.

"Are you listening?"

"I'm listening, Nagare-chan. No, I have wrinkles."

Mishakuji replied as he carefully examined the condition of his face.

Nagare felt a relief. It's okay if he's listening.

"Yes, Yukari. Let's continue. Currently, the "Slate" is stored in Mihashira Tower. Originally, in my plan, after the death of the "Golden King", the "Slate", which would no longer have humans to seal it, was supposed to evolve into the entire human race, demonstrating its original function. Leaving aside the old Daikaku Kokujoji, I thought that the young and immature "Blue King" would not be able to control it, so I decided to leave it in the building..."

But...

The highest ranked Clansman and Rankers of "Jungle", who share the same dream as Nagare, were not seeing their "King".

"Are you listening? Are you?"

"I'm listening, Nagare. Wow! My level's up!"

While he was lying on his back, Sukuna clenched his fists in cheers.

Nagare agreed. If you're listening, that's fine, and it's a good thing if your level goes up.

"I see, Sukuna. Congratulations. Anyway, the "Blue King" worked harder than expected. Excellent. On top of that, the most troublesome "Silver King" came back and joined the new "Red King" to solidify the defense of Mihashira Tower. With this, we have no choice but to take the method of directly controlling the "Slate".

Having said that, Nagare sighed quietly and reluctantly said:

"Besides, you guys haven't heard me."

"Hey. Guys, listen carefully, ok? Even with this, he's our king, right? Some respect needs to be shown."

Iwafune deftly shook the 350 ml can as he made a complaint. Opening the lid of the next beer, Nagare looked at Iwafune with moist eyes.

"You are the one who shows the least respect, Iwa-san."

"Don't get me wrong, Iwa-san."

Mishakuji smiled brightly through the mirror.

"Right now, I am refining myself so that I can dance with the greatest splendor and grace on the battlefield. My heart is already high. I am always ready to draw my beloved sword, "Ayamachi".

"Me too."

Sukuna also smiled as he focused his gaze on the game screen.

"I do it because I can't help but feel uneasy when I'm not playing. To be honest, I know enough about what Nagare says."

"I see."

This time, Nagare understood.

They are no longer the members of it. It is his flesh and blood. Nagare thinks and expects the same.

He wants to see a new world, a beautiful world. That's why they move. Therefore, no sacrifice or obstacle is cause for concern. Iwafune, Kotosaka, Mishakuji, and Sukuna understood.

"Are you both ready? I'm impressed. So, let's have a fancy Christmas party after we safely collect the "Slate".

"Chicken! Chicken! Juicy, delicious!"

On the couch, Kotosaka spread her wings and was happy. Nagare smiled at that first friend.

"Kotosaka, I want you to do your best too."

"Oh, then, we'll decorate the "Slate" that you'll get instead of the tree."

Mishakuji said that jokingly. Nagare doesn't really understand jokes, but even so, he felt a slight slack in his shoulders.

With that, Sukuna closed the game console with a snap and looked at Iwafune.

"For one thing, we're all in high spirits."

"Yes?"

"What about Iwa-san? Will he function properly this time?"

No wonder Sukuna wasn't satisfied. The J-Rank of "Jungle" Iwafune Tenkei had almost never done anything that felt like work. In the first place, the existence of himself was unknown to most of the clansmen.

The one who kept Iwafune a secret was none other than Nagare himself, and so Sukuna was convinced.

The next mission will be total war. He is not a lukewarm opponent who can win while he retains power.

You must put all the cards in your hand, including the "trump card", into play to reveal which one is stronger.

Faced with such a big event, Iwafune still smiled like he was crazy.

"Well, it's me. I'm slowly drinking beer like this."

"...Damn. I beg you, Iwa-san."

Sukuna said in amazement, but he didn't seem to have any intention of continuing. He also knows Iwafune's true identity, the extent of his strength. If he plays his role correctly, it will have a great effect.

Mishakuji chuckled and pointed at Nagare.

"More importantly, Nagare-chan. It's rare for you to have a proper meeting beforehand. Perhaps you think it's painful to deal with three "Kings"?"

"Haha. Well, isn't it? Hey, Nagare."

Iwafune laughed and Nagare nodded silently.

"That's right. It is true that the allied army of the "Silver, Red and Blue King" is a formidable enemy. But..."

Their union has serious flaws.

He wondered if Isana Yashiro and Reisi Munakata were aware of this.

Even if they were aware of it, they wouldn't be able to fix it. The flaw is too fundamental. If they can hit their trump card there, even if there is an overwhelming difference in strength, they would have a good chance of winning.

Nagare looked down into the gap, toward the floating hologram.

A swarm of inorganic data simply reflects reality. Nagare, whose limbs were sealed, had his first weapon, "Information". Nagare knew that deciphering it and accumulating it would lead to a dream.

And now...

His dream is within reach.

As he stared at him, Nagare silently took the last step.

"Ordered by the "Green King" authority. Mission 1224, activated."

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As expected of "Tokijikuin", what they prepared in the basement of the Mihashira Tower was a very spacious conference room.

Being there reminds him of the "Chabudai Conference". He remembers being crammed into a room in a student dormitory until he was suffocating. Well, he was the one who suggested that, but it was still nice to have a wide space.

Coff-coff, clearing her throat, Shiro let out a cheerful voice.

"Hey. Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for joining us. How are you?"

Now, in front of Shiro, are the two clans.

One is the Red Clan, "Homura". They are sitting on the right side of the conference room, looking at him with dark eyes.

The other is the Blue Clan, "Scepter 4". They are sitting on the left side of the conference room, looking at him with cold eyes.

At them, who seemed to be slightly dissatisfied, Shiro smiled,

"It doesn't look very good. Considering my position as the "Silver King", I don't think you'll openly object, but I wonder, are you a little dissatisfied with the fact that I'm calling you over and over again?"

"Something like that."

Misaki Yata, the executive of "Homura", said so with bitterness.

"If you get it, why don't you help out a bit? We're the only ones fighting the green guys, right?!"

Yata's words are also valid, and the Silver Clan has not contributed at all to the current cleanup operation against the "Jungle" of the "Chabudai Alliance". Shiro was worried about deciphering the materials they received, and neither Kuro nor Neko would leave Shiro.

Shiro scratched his head and said, "No."

"I don't have the words to answer when you say that, but thanks to that I got some information, so I wonder if you'll forgive me."

Then Kusanagi raised his hand.

"Uh, "Silver King". May I speak?"

"Of course, Kusanagi-san."

"First of all, the main premise is that the Green Clan will come to this Mihashira Tower to take the "Slate". There's no doubt about that, right?"

Shiro narrowed his eyes and nodded gravely.

"That's right. The "Green King", Nagaru Hisui, said so himself. That's not a hoax or a trick. It's a declaration of war against us, the "Chabudai Alliance".

After that, he turned his gaze towards "Scepter 4".

"And if the Green Clan gets the "Slate", which the Lieutenant... no... The order in this world that the "Gold King" and the "Blue King" have worked so hard to maintain will likely collapse. At best, it would cease to be the world we know. Because..."

After taking a deep breath, Shiro announced.

"They, the Green Clan, want to give all of humanity the power of the "Slate".

For a moment, the place was noisy.

Grant the power of the "Slate" to all of humanity. That is, all human beings will possess supernatural powers. Much destruction will be wrought by those who cannot control their supernatural powers. There are likely a myriad of people who abuse their supernatural powers. The tense expression of "Scepter 4" vividly expressed that threat. If that happens, your business will collapse in an instant.

Kusanagi looked at "Scepter 4" with compassionate eyes, then looked back at Shiro.

"Both us, the Red Clan and the Blue Clan members who are waiting, there shouldn't be a single person who doubts your status as "King". However, whether or not you have the

ability and ability to wield this kind of strategy is a different matter. To be honest, I think people are worried about it."

Neko behind Shiro got irritated.

"Hmm! Shiro is amazing!"

Kuro, who was also waiting, stopped her.

"Enough, Neko. Kusanagi Izumo, it may sound like I'm being biased, but this man has the ability to do just that. He's smart, he has the ability to lead and make decisions."

"Kuro, thank you."

Shiro smiled at the trust he received from the two of them, and then turned to Kusanagi.

"And Kusanagi-san as well. I'm sure you dared to represent everyone's feelings, right? Well, the reason why I'm in command of this interception operation is simple. Because I know all about the specifications of the "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

Yata stood up as if he couldn't take it,

"Hey, you! What does that mean? I heard that the "Green King" is a guy who rarely appears? Maybe you don't even have a connection to them!"

Kuro's eyebrows rose at Yata's almost abusive words, but Shiro suppressed it with his hands.

"That's right. You're right, he keeps his own information very secret. As expected of a "King" who rules the network. His origins, appearance, abilities, age, and even gender are unknown. But there is only one person who met Hisui Nagare in person."

"What's that?"

Nodding to Awashima's soft murmur, Shiro operated a PDA.

Behind him, projected on the widescreen, was a gigantic, muscular old man with bare copper-colored skin, and a young man in a straitjacket stood before him.

Awashima let out a surprised voice.

"His Excellency?! No way, who is that person?"

"Yes. Simply put, the "Green King" Hisui Nagaru once challenged the "Golden King" Daikaku Kokujoji. And all by himself."

Once again the place was in an uproar.

Shiro operated the PDA without caring and played the video. As the "Golden King" and the never-before-seen "Green King" began to move on the screen, the shock turned into awe-inspiring silence. They all stared at the image.

Shiro continued to speak nonchalantly.

"I have all the recorded images from that time. I received the data from the Lieutenant and heard the story from the Lieutenant himself."

Awashima raised her hand as she focused her gaze on the video.

"May I speak, "Silver King"?"

"Of course, Awashima-san. And for me, Shiro, please."

"Ok, Shiro-san. Frankly, I can't believe it. Why did the "Green King" fight such a reckless battle?"

Shiro looked at the screen again.

Nagare kicked at the gravel and jumped. Shaking his claws of glowing green energy, he leaped at Kokujoji.

"Maybe he wasn't reckless. Because even though he was defeated in the end, for a while he turned the strongest "King" against him and had a close fight."

Kokujoji's fist smashed into Nagare's chest.

Nagare's body went flying like a bullet. He bounced as he drew a green trajectory, was sucked into the distant darkness and disappeared.

The video stopped there.

In the middle of the silence, someone muttered.

"Is this... the "Green King"?"

It was the first appearance of the "enemy" they saw. He is not some random clansman who gets cut if he gets caught. The culprit of all the incidents that are happening now, the figure of the enemy "King" that they must eventually face and defeat.

"Hisui Nagare's reason for launching that abnormal attack is also very strong. It's a throwaway line after losing, but he said, "I tried to challenge the big boss"."

"He is a child!"

"What a dumb guy."

Hearing Yata and Fushimi mutter, Shiro smiled.

"That's right. Hisui Nagare is different. He plans things so carefully and meticulously that no one notices, but he also puts his childish ideas into practice. But that's why his actions are unpredictable."

Shiro went back to fiddling with the PDA. What was projected on the screen was the result of his efforts to trace Nagare's traces, a follow-up investigation of "Tokijikuin".

"Tokijikuin" is a system that is in the center of this country, and its tracking ability is as good as "Scepter 4". However, even with them, they were unable to capture Hisui Nagare's existence.

"Barely escaping from the "Golden King", the "Green King" disappeared from the main stage. The reason they haven't moved until now is because the Lieutenant was there. But the Lieutenant is gone now."

Shiro shook his head and chased away the thoughts that were about to spring from his mind.

"That's why I want to be in command of the operation this time. I also know how to defeat Hisui Nagare. The "Green King" is very strong, but he is not an opponent you can never defeat. But that requires the cooperation of all of you."

He looked around with a sincere look.

The two clans looked at each other in confusion. They can understand the importance of the information that Shiro brought, but they don't know if he is okay to hand over the command.

"But, even if you say so..."

"I will."

Anna cut him off.

"Eh?"

"Anna...?"

Kusanagi and Yata looked at Anna questioningly.

But their "Queen" did not look back at her subjects. Indifferent, and therefore with sheer determination, she spoke clearly.

"I will. I can't leave them alone."

With that alone, "Homura"'s mind seemed to have made up its mind.

Kusanagi, Yata, Kamamoto and the rest of the members, there was no one who disagreed with that determination. No one has forgotten what the Green Clan did to them.

"I see. Then you don't have to say anything else. "Silver King"... no, Shiro-san, the Red Clan will cooperate with you."

"Thank you."

At Kusanagi's words, Shiro returned a smile and turned his gaze to "Scepter 4".

"What about the Blue Clan?"

Munakata crossed his arms and was deep in thought.

Since he entered that room, he hadn't said a word. Since he has been the one who has led the fight against "Jungle" up to now, his silent attitude was even creepy.

When Munakata suddenly opened his eyes, he said in a low voice.

"It depends on the content of the strategy."

Shiro smiled. It doesn't seem to be a case of rejection. If so, there is still a chance to get cooperation.

"Makes sense. Then I'll explain it to you now, Kuro."

"I understand."

Kuro nodded, and when he operated the PDA, the image on the screen behind him changed again. What appeared there were the figures of two people.

Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna.

The rankers who are considered to be the most powerful force in "Jungle".

"In fact, it is not Hisui Nagare himself who becomes the heart of the Green Clan's battle. These two are Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna. I want you to remember their faces well. Our first goal is to prevent these two from working. Ok? For that..."

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"Well, lately, I haven't been able to."

"Kerun" murmured as he moved the straw in his mouth.

"Jema", who was playing with his PDA, just looked up and said nothing. He continued to operate enthusiastically as if to say that there is something more important than that, and then made a small gesture with his fist.

"Ok, sure."

"Uh, what? What mission?"

Throwing away his apathetic attitude, "Kerun" leaned forward.

"No, I don't know. The mission is to send a lot of emails."

"What is that? How much are the points?"

"Five."

"Trash!"

Looking up at the sky, he exclaimed loudly and "Kerun" leaned back on the couch.

"Jema" is gloomy, but nothing to complain about. He agreed that this mission was rubbish. He tossed the PDA onto the table and leaned back against the couch.

Both are "Jungle" users.

They're both G-Rank, and they're probably around the age of college students. The reason why he went "gloomy" is that neither of them has revealed his actual age. He doesn't even know his real name. They get along well and have the same ability, so they always hang out, but their connection is only in "Jungle", and their actual status has no meaning.

Using that restaurant as a place to hang out, they have lived a satisfying "Jungle" life, chatting about irrelevant things and going on delicious quests.

"...The other day, it failed."

"Jema" is who was talking about. "Kerun" nodded as he chewed on the straw.

"That's right. There are many users who say they lost a lot of money because of "Five"."

"The other day"... that's the full-scale mission, "Mission 2086".

"Jungle" got excited about the quest issued by the Highest Ranker, "Five". Not only was it a large-scale quest straight from a Ranker, but the points distributed were huge. They were inundated like bugs in sweet juice with quests that rewarded 100 or 200 points for just a few tasks.

Both "Jema" and "Kerun" fell into the category of those missions that made them feel good. They did something a bit illegal, but the rewards you get from this game are full of charm, regardless of the existing rules.

And yet, the reason "Mission 2086" is a bitter memory for them is because, in the end, that mission failed in the final stages.

"That's right. There was an idiot who tried to hunt the "Red King" and the "Blue King" together."

"Oh, yes, I thought it was the name of a jewel, but... because you messed it up so much, both the Reds and Blues got really angry."

"Seriously, don't be silly. And in the end, aren't we the ones who pay for it?"

The straw that he spat out rolled across the table and touched

"Jema's" PDA. "Jema" made a disgusted face and took his PDA and wiped it with a wet towel.

"Since then, most of the larger missions have failed. "Kazimun" and "Four" were also arrested."

"Really? Those guys are U-Rank dealers, right? The Blues have no mercy."

"It's better than getting caught by the red guys. Rumor has it they'll be half dead."

"Hah, not good anymore. What's that ending? Isn't it game over for "Jungle"?"

"Kerun" shrugged and said that cynically.

"Jungle" is a clan with thin ties. In a world where it is natural to use others and kick others, the sense of belonging to the clan itself is low. In the current situation where there are no delicious quests and you can get caught if you do something wrong, the worst part of the dissatisfaction goes to the official higher levels of "Jungle".

"Well, let's wait and see. Let's find another interesting game."

"Ok. Can I make a report too?"

"I've never seen you do that."

"No way, I'm doing it at home! This is probably a secret base for "Jungle". I keep my work and play separate."

At that time, the two PDAs issued a notification at the same time.

"Eh?"

"What...?"

The two looked at the PDA at the same time and stiffened.

The popup shows:

"1224 Mission Activation Emitter: H.N."

H.N.

If there is a middle or upper rank who doesn't know his name, he is definitely a fool. The abbreviation for "command name" is the name indicating the pinnacle of "Jungle", the "Green King".

"The "Green King", directly, a mission?"

"It's been years, how is that...?!"

"Kerun" and "Jema" quickly opened the application screen and began to devour the details of the mission. As the story progressed, the faces of the two became more and more red.

"What is this, aren't reward points weird?!"

"500 points for just one transport mission! He must have made a mistake!"

"No, but it's real because it has an official electronic seal! Even if something goes wrong, I'm sure the points will be paid!"

"Hey, is there something like 1000-3000 here?! Seriously, I don't know what this means, huh?!"

A little further, there was an explosion. The waitress who brought the water had dropped the tray. "Oh, sorry!" The waitress said, tilting her head, and she quickly began to pick up the broken glass, which, of course, they did not notice. There's no way you can afford to notice a petty accident when gold is scattered in front of you.

"For now, let's go! Whoever can do it in pairs will request acceptance of the mission!"

"Ok! I'll apply for the next mission now! First come, first served!"

Grabbing the slip, the two of them hastily left their seats. The bright eyes in their eyes had already removed the sense of stagnation they had felt before.

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In the empty conference room, Shiro breathed out silently.

The strategy meeting ended successfully. Both "Homura" and "Scepter 4" agreed to follow Shiro's instructions, and most of the clansmen have now come out to take positions. The only people left in the conference room are the "Red and Blue Kings" and the business class members, such as Kusanagi, Fushimi, and Awashima.

First, the first stage.

He managed to gain the trust of his "friends". They will act according to Shiro's strategy.

However, there are still many things to worry about.

Kusanagi and Anna then approached Shiro.

"Hey, Shiro-san. I think the strategy makes sense. Let's do our best together."

Izumo Kusanagi. Shiro considers him the balancer of the makeshift "Chabudai Alliance" as an executive of "Homura". In the previous question and answer session, he took the initiative to raise questions that other members might have. Thanks to that, the exchange after that was pretty smooth.

"Thank you, Kusanagi-san."

"But are you sure? The members of the "Jungle" clan are just two people who are getting on board, what's going on?"

That question, too, was probably something that came from "Homura" instead of him. Shiro nodded.

"Yes. As I explained earlier, those two are the only people Hisui Nagare really trusts. Other members of the clan are probably used for diversionary operations to save manpower against "Scepter 4". A mission has already been launched for that purpose."

"Mission 1224" has multiple meanings. Disruption of "Scepter 4", improvement of lower clan members by dispersing a large number of points, and above all a declaration of war against the "Chabudai Alliance".

With a snort, Kusanagi looked into his PDA.

"Huh, "Mission 1224". How nice of you to let us know when you're going to hit the road to attack us."

"I thought of a line called a hook, but it probably isn't. Hisui Nagare probably won't do such tricks at this stage. On this day, he must come from the front. "Homura", together with "Scepter 4", should form a blocking line. Please, Anna."

"Leave it to me."

The little "Queen" nodded silently. Although she is a girl, the willpower that dwells in her eyes is comparable to that of any "King". The current "Red King" will surely become a good "Queen".

That's what Shiro thought, and even though it was before the battle, he felt a relief.

"...By the way, what do you think of him?"

Kusanagi suddenly said that.

Following his line of sight, Munakata was standing on the other side of the conference room.

Next to him is Fushimi Saruhiko, an executive. He looks like he was giving an order for something, but he couldn't hear it from there. However, just the cold expression in his profile left a terrible impression on him.

"He never spoke his mind. I wonder if we can trust him."

"I don't know. But it's the only way to win. That's how powerful the opponent is."

For Shiro, the "Chabudai Alliance" is a friend. Probably for Anna too.

But for Reisi Munakata, it's different. The "Chabudai Alliance" is a partner in the fight, and more importantly, it is nothing more than an "enemy of the enemy."

After completing the request, Munakata left the conference room. Looking at that back, Anna muttered.

"Reisi..."

"Furthermore, that person has been holding the "Slate" only since the Lieutenant passed away. Therefore, the load is heavy and the consumption is heavy. No wonder he is being cautious."

As he said that, Shiro also narrowed his eyes at Munakata's back.

"The "Slate" will allow humans to evolve without limit unless it is controlled by the power of the "King". Munakata-san took over the job previously done by the Lieutenant. We, especially me, must thank him."

How much weight is on his back? Despite being injured and overwhelmed, Munakata tries to carry the "Slate" alone, without anyone helping him. It is not an exaggeration to say that now that the "Golden King" is dead, the order of the world depends only on him.

That's why Shiro hopes someone will stay by his side. It would be great if there was someone he could take on, even a small part of that great responsibility. He couldn't do that himself, but even so, the "King" needed such an existence.

The "King" is also a human being.

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"Well then, I'll give you the rest."

Munakata said that as he entered the elevator leading to the "Slate Room".

Fushimi remained silent and did not reply. Until the moment the elevator door closed, he continued to look at Munakata. Munakata said nothing more either and looked at him with a cold expression.

As the elevator began to move, Fushimi finally let out a click of his tongue.

Turning on his heel and walking down the corridor, Fushimi pondered on the order he had just received.

Since he joined "Scepter 4" until now, he has received numerous requests. There were many orders that were out of common sense, and Fushimi was able to carry them out despite his complaints. Because he could predict the importance of that order and the extent of its effect.

However, this time the order was canceled once.

Fushimi had no idea what would happen if he followed him. But Munakata must have seen it. A vision of how things will play out after that.

Because he is the "King".

They were chosen by the "Slate" and move the world itself with their superhuman macroscopic vision and abilities. Fushimi and other members of the clan are nothing more than pieces. There is no need for the cogs connecting the gigantic mechanism of the "King" and the world to understand the whole, that makes Fushimi irritated.

"If it's you, you won't hesitate."

Munakata didn't even change his expression and said it clearly. He knew he looked that way, but he was quite refreshing to be told so boldly. He even made him think that he might have gotten into "Scepter 4" in anticipation of that order.

Traitor.

Fushimi's mouth formed a smile that seemed to rise.

Excellent. Such a role is suitable for him. Not because he sees himself as such, but because it's the most effective. Fushimi decided to carry out the order.

"Fushimi."

He stopped when his name was called.

Before he knew it, Vice Commander Seri Awashima was in front of him.

"What are you doing? Hurry up and go to your post."

"I know. I'm about to go now."

The function assigned to the Fushimi post, by Isana Yashiro, was to manage the battlefield from the outer command vehicle. Analyze the information, divide the enemy and lead the battle trend as desired. Although they are not on the front line, there is no doubt that they play a very important role.

Fushimi believes that he will always be watching.

Fushimi's ability doesn't shine in a group. Fushimi's strength lies in observing, analyzing, and remotely controlling the crowd.

He can't deny what the "King" does. No, but it is also true that he is irritating.

He let out a small huff and was about to walk past Awashima.

"Wait."

Awashima stopped him again.

He wondered what it was, and when he turned his eyes, he was greeted with a questioning look.

Awashima remained silent for a moment, as if she chose her words, but when she finally opened her mouth...

"The Captain did he seem okay?"

She asked that.

"Eh?"

When he involuntarily raised his eyebrows and asked back, Awashima's cheeks were unusually red. As she muttered nonsense words like "no" and "it", her gaze wandered in the air.

"This is the decisive battle between "Jungle" and us. The Captain's condition is directly related to the success or failure of the strategy. From your point of view, is the Captain alright?"

Fushimi was stunned. He only knew one thing.

"Aside from being fine, he wouldn't do something like this if he didn't have a chance to win, right?"

"I see. You're right."

As he said that, Awashima looked down anxiously. Seeing that, Fushimi felt a pain in the side of his stomach. "King" is the same as the sky or the sea. It is beyond human control. Even if he was worried that the sky would fall, it was literally a baseless worry, but it seems that even a person as smart as Awashima couldn't understand it.

Although, the sky can fall and the sea can dry up.

There are also times when the "King" falls apart.

Still, Fushimi's conclusion remained unchanged. "King" is "King" and man is man. If the time came for him to break down, there was nothing they could do. It was just a waste of time to fight.

Even if he said that, Awashima's trembling expression would not change. Fushimi thought it was a bother, so he casually said...

"And if something happens, the Vice commander should do something about it. He seems to only trust you."

".....!"

Awashima's eyes widened and then she clenched her fists as if she was ready for something.

"Oh, it's true!"

(It's easy, this person.)

So he thought, but of course he didn't say it.

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The sun went down and the night grew.

"Outside" is, oddly enough, Christmas Eve. The eve of the savior's birth.

Gorgeous illuminations, lively crowds, and laughing voices. That kind of happy scenery is nowhere to be found in this building. All the windows and doors are covered with steel barricades, and the interior is packed with countless barriers and traps. In contrast to the celebrations in the outside world, this place has a pre-war silence.

However, the silence gradually began to fade.

One by one, like a flash of light in the darkness of the night, those reports were sent to the Mihashira Tower.

A mysterious group is holding a mask parade in Yodomiya.

It is said that a threatening letter was sent stating that a bomb had been planted in the Tsubakimon government office building.

According to legend, a robbery by a masked group occurred in Shizume.

All these are psychic crimes that "Scepter 4" should deal with. According to the protocol that Munakata had promulgated beforehand, those crimes should be solved by the ordinary members. He doesn't know how it turned out in reality. The Special Forces, who can quickly respond to unforeseen circumstances, cannot move from that location now.

If this place is controlled, this country, no, the order of this world will collapse.

And then the vanguard appeared without being too flabbergasted.

"In front of the main gate, the members of the Green Clan, Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna, have been seen!"

A surveillance camera attached to the front door showed their appearance. One is a small child and the other is a tall young man. Both steps are light, and not the slightest tension can be seen to go to the decisive battle now. As if enjoying a night walk, the two of them slowly approached each other.

A green blade flashed in Sukuna's hand.

"I'm going to hurry up!"

Like a wolf unleashed, Sukuna began to run. The close-up of Mishakuji and Kotosaka, they noticed the camera and smiled and waved their hands, and then the surveillance camera footage stopped.

"It seems that all 4 surveillance cameras have been destroyed!"

A rippling wave of agitation swept through the "Scepter 4", which surrounded the invaders inside the main gate. The "Silver King" had already predicted this situation, but even they had doubts as to whether it would come true.

"From the front... How reckless."

"That's why we have confidence in our power."

Hearing voices whispering one after the other, Awashima stepped forward and raised her voice.

"They're coming... All members, draw your swords!"

"Yes!"

On command, the members of the Special Forces unleashed their sabers. The experts who have dealt with numerous crimes with supernatural powers stared at the front door with a tense expression.

Suddenly, the front door exploded.

Two shadows rushed forward, easily breaking through the fire shutters reinforced with military barricades. Gojou Sukuna and Mishakuji Yukari. They are the two best ranked rankers that "Jungle" has.

Mishakuji walked with magnificent steps as if he had just appeared at a party.

"Merry Christmas! I have come to receive the "Slate"."

"So number 2, Seri Awashima, is the only one who seems to be able to score points!"

Saying that with a horrible smile, Sukuna rushed straight towards Awashima. Of course, Awashima has nothing to fear. Gojou Sukuna, who emphasized "points", was already expected to target her. She didn't mean to come up with a silly game, but if she limits the other person's actions, she'll use it.

"All Members! The Match Begins!"

"Yes!"

Special Forces are deployed to the left and right of Awashima. Surrounding Sukuna from three directions and defeating him. Seeing the absolutely unfavorable situation, Sukuna smiled like a warrior beast.

"Scepter 4" misjudged Gojou Sukuna's characteristics. He wasn't just a battle junkie who liked to fight. Unfavorable battles and boss battles with a high degree of difficulty are the most exciting. Sukuna was that kind of player.

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A loud sound coming from below marked the beginning of the battle.

Explosive sounds, crushing sounds and cutting sounds The sounds are so diverse that it is hard to believe that there are only two enemies. The situation below can be monitored from where Shiro is, but so far the damage is progressing within the expected range.

Standing next to Shiro and looking at the monitor, Kuro said in a low voice.

"Looks like it's started."

The images on the monitor clearly conveyed the inferiority of "Scepter 4". Unable to withstand Sukuna's attack and Mishakuji's sharpened offensive, it seems they were falling behind.

"Shiro. I have absolute confidence in your strategy, but is it alright? Leave the first floor alone to the Blue Clan."

Shiro silently shook his head at Kuro's concerned question.

"As I explained in the strategy meeting, the first thing we should do is interfere as much as we can with those two... the envoys of the "Green King". Their goal is to reduce our strength. We'll do the opposite. I told Awashima-san to fall back at an appropriate point. It's okay."

As if she heard Shiro's words, Awashima started issuing retreat orders on the monitor. Withdraw in an orderly manner while maintaining formation. This is a feat that would not be possible if it weren't for "Scepter 4", which focuses on control tactics.

"The real thing is when the "Green King" comes out. Conversely, does that limit the amount of time the "Green King" can move?"

"That's right. That "King" is certainly close to being the strongest. I don't know if I, the "Blue King", and the "Red King" could win even if we try our best. No, on the contrary, I think it can even overwhelm the people in this building by itself. However, it doesn't take long for it to exert its power. In a nutshell..."

Shiro raised a finger.

"If we exhaust everyone and let the "Green King" run out of time, we win. If they reach the "Slate" before time runs out and steal it, we lose."

"I see."

Kuro nodded silently, and then Neko appeared.

"Hey, Shiro. It's kind of funny."

Kuro lowered his head in amazement.

"What are you talking about?"

"Because there's Shiro and Kurosuke. All together. They're all working so hard together. Wagahai, my heart feels tight."

Then, Neko opened her arms and hugged Shiro and Kuro together.

"I think it's alright. Nyahahaha."

"My gosh, you're such an airhead as always."

Kuro laughed helplessly, and Shiro also hugged Neko's body and laughed.

"Yes. That's right. We're all good together. Let's celebrate Christmas in a big way."

"Yes!"

Neko's energetic response echoed with the sounds of the battle below.

(Yes. It's okay. It should be okay.)

With a smile on her face, Neko desperately tried not to listen to the voice that echoed from within.

From below, the sounds of the battle can be heard endlessly. The blues are fighting the greens. They're going for them, she believed. As for the blue ones, frankly speaking, Neko didn't like them very much, but now she wants them to do their best. She wishes them good luck, and she wants them to win.

She wants the greens to get out of there.

The sound of battle was getting closer. To Neko's ears, they sounded like footsteps. The sound of "it" approaching. An "it" with an eye that never loses even the slightest hole, far away.

She heard it from inside her. It is the sound of knocking on the door. Inside her, a door that shouldn't exist was being knocked on. Someone was trapped there. She walked out of here, screaming to remember, knocking on the door.

Neko pretended not to hear it.

She put more strength into her arms that hugged them both. Otherwise, she wouldn't be able to keep smiling. Like a child huddled in her house waiting for the thunder to stop, she went still and rigid.

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At some point, the excitement of the battle began to turn to frustration.

As Sukuna advanced, the enemy fell back the same distance, maintaining their formation. At first, Sukuna realized that was just a ruse.

As proof of this, no one has yet beaten the other player. The damage is dealt steadily, but just as they are about to finish, an exquisite obstacle appears.

Even now, as he was about to stab the collapsing blues with a sickle, another one rushed in from the side.

"Scepter 4". Vice Commander, Awashima Seri, is the most troublesome, Sukuna clucked. She carefully observed the overall situation of the battle and made accurate and quick decisions. If it weren't for Awashima, the enemy camp would have collapsed long ago.

In that case, he would just finish that first.

"Yukari! It's Awashima!"

When he gave an order to attack from the left, Mishakuji turned from the right with the same breath. Sukuna cornered Awashima with explosive acceleration using the extraordinary "Burst Dash" application. Sukuna bared his teeth and smiled as he brandished his scythe.

"I'll get those points!"

At that moment, Awashima screamed.

"Now, Fushimi!"

Along with multiple ejection sounds, his vision was dark and blocked. The acceleration of "Burst Dash" couldn't be stopped right away, and Sukuna lost his balance from being caught by it and rolled awkwardly on the ground.

"Dammit, what is this?!"

He swung his scythe blindly and tried to cut it, but couldn't even move his limbs. Just when he realized it was a catching net, he heard Mishakuji's voice from outside.

"Don't move if you don't want to hurt yourself, Sukuna-chan."

Almost at the same time that he cringed, several sword flashes ran and his vision opened up brightly.

The net that was cut to pieces by Mishakuji's sword danced around Sukuna, who was on his buttocks. Mishakuji snorted at Sukuna, who was frozen with wide eyes.

"Are you okay? Shall I give you a hand?"

"No!"

Red-faced, Sukuna stood up and readied the scythe again.

While Sukuna was being restrained, the opponent was setting up their formation. Retreating further into the hallway from the front door, Awashima yelled.

"Come on!"

The reason why the blood rushed to his head was because he was aware that she had once exposed him to something unpleasant.

"You make me sick! You're a small-time character though!"

Mishakuji's high-pitched voice stopped Sukuna, who was about to use the extraordinary app again.

"Sukuna! Don't chase her!"

"But!"

"You know where we should be heading right?!"

Mishakuji pointed a finger above his head, and Kotosaka also flapped his wings in agreement.

"Up, up!"

"Our job this time is to pave the way for Nagare-chan, who can only fight for a limited time."

He clicked his tongue. He was maddening, but it was just as Mishakuji said.

"It's certainly not the time to use resources in a place like this."

He took a deep breath and regain his composure. It was none other than his own mistake that he got caught up in the opponent's plan. Mistakes are mistakes, and repeating them without understanding them is hopelessly clumsy. Thinking so, Sukuna once again directed his attention to "Scepter 4".

They all held up their sabers and turned their eyes full of fighting spirit towards them. But they never tried to attack them themselves.

With just that, it seemed that the intentions of the other side could be seen. Don't attack aggressively and set up a trap while blocking that attack. It's a perfect delay tactic. Sukuna clicked his tongue again at that impatience.

Mishakuji smiled slightly and took a step forward.

"Fufu. You seem to be making a lot of plans, but it's no use. After all, you are the bright green of "Jungle" and the beautiful flowers that bloom there are my food."

Mishakuji struck a strange pose as he moved his body like a stage actor.

"It's only a foil!"

He exclaimed very happily.

Feeling embarrassed to see his partner's embarrassment, Sukuna turned his gaze to "Scepter 4", but there was no one there. Even though Mishakuji is in his own world, they will probably go ahead with his own tactics.

"Oh, yes. Let's move on."

After saying that and starting to walk, Mishakuji stopped his pose as if nothing had happened and followed Sukuna. Sukuna started heading towards the stairs as he thought about how he could do something like that, even though he had full confidence in his abilities.

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"Seriously, you have a useful power, the new "Red King". With this, you can communicate without worrying about the intervention of the green ones."

Putting a red marble in his palm, Shiro muttered so.

The red marble pulsates slightly and emits a slight heat. This marble, which all members of the "Chabudai Alliance" have, is the medium for Anna's network of supernatural powers.

Not only images and sounds, but also thoughts can be transmitted instantly. This power, which was like an expansion of Anna's sentience when she was Strain, was the cornerstone of this operation.

If the other side is winning with individual strength, it is a good plan to suppress it with numbers and cooperation.

With his eyes closed, Shiro spoke to the marble with his mind.

"Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna have launched an invasion. Everyone, please follow the plan, ok?"

That voice reached Anna's consciousness and spread throughout the "Chabudai Alliance". The members of "Homura" lift their spirits. Although out of print, "Scepter 4" still has a strong fighting spirit. And...

Munakata, who was motionless in the "Slate Room", looked at Shiro through the net.

"Now. If possible, I would like things to go according to Isana Yashiro's plan."

Shiro smiled wryly. There was no anger. When the line is drawn so clearly, it's quite refreshing.

Also, apart from Munakata, Shiro had a firm trust in him. Maintain order in this world and strive for its functioning. Reisi Munakata, who tries to do it out of a sense of responsibility rather than selfishness, is similar to Daikaku Kokujoji.

The fact that Munakata is standing on the last line is a great relief for Shiro. As he said, if things go according to Shiro's expectations, then it's fine. Even if something unexpected happens, it will definitely happen. As long as Hisui Nagare isn't stupid, Munakata will do something about it. Somewhat irresponsibly, Shiro decided to think so.

And now...

The image of a "Jungle" member breaking through a blocking net that was placed ten and twenty times in a straight line appeared in Shiro's mind.

"Mishakuji, Gojou, both, captured by the security camera on the 10th floor!"

"I understand. Manually activate the defensive equipment inside Mihashira Tower as planned."

At the same time, in the command car of "Scepter 4" that was waiting outside, the scene of two members dealing with them fiercely was also sent.

Fushimi Saruhiko and Enomoto Tatsuya. He is an information warfare expert on "Scepter 4". Of course, he is no match for Hisui Nagare, who controls the electronic network, but even so, within this limited local network, he can carry out operations without interference from him.

"Entrapment 10-E +3, +4, F -4."

"Normal Entrapment Deployment Confirmation!"

"It's a whole course in suspended ceilings, traps, and electric shock. Please dance at least."

After taking control of Mihashira Tower, the numerous barriers and traps created were activated one after another by Fushimi and Enomoto. Enomoto glanced sideways at Fushimi's smiling face.

But...

"Everything is broken!"

Those obstacles didn't seem to stop him. As he brandished his sword while humming, Mishakuji easily broke through the barricades that stood in his way and the traps that attacked him. It was like navigating an uninhabited field.

The smile disappeared from Fushimi's face and he clicked his tongue.

"Tsk. After all, this level won't stop you. So..."

Again, Fushimi began to write at breakneck speed. He was trying to catch Mishakuji and Sukuna jumping on the hierarchical map like tops with his fingertips.

"Entrapment 11-D -3, -4, -5, 2-S +4, +5, 9-Z full yards."

In the video, traps that are a bit more radical than before (flash grenades, rubber bullets, high-pressure water cannons, and tear gas bombs) appear one after another and attack the two of them. Mishakuji and Sukuna turned left and right and began destroying the traps while repelling and dodging those attacks.

But that's what they're there for.

As Fushimi pressed the last key, a huge blind came down, dividing the room in two. In the video, Sukuna and Mishakuji stopped their feet and turned to the shutter in surprise. Multi-alloy reinforced shutters block even tank shells. Not even they can break it.

"Entrapment Deployment Confirmed! Mishakuji, Gojou, both have been successfully separated! However, the damage seems to be extremely small for both of them."

"Monsters."

Fushimi spat that out. According to the plan, he was supposed to wear them down a bit more, but it didn't seem to be going so well. Fushimi began selecting the traps to activate next as he called out their predicted routes that had started moving again.

Those shows were fully shared with "Homura" who was waiting upstairs.

Anna's heightened sense makes it, like different parts of a single body, tied to a vast consciousness. If "Homura" is the right hand, "Scepter 4" is the left hand, one of Fushimi's fingers.

Lighting a cigarette and exhaling purple smoke, Kusanagi said in admiration.

"A plan to divide and guide two powerful individuals individually, surrounding and exhausting Gojou Sukuna with our Red Clan and Mishakuji Yukari with our Silver Clan. It would not have been possible without Fushimi's ability to master and perfectly operate the security equipment of this building. Right, Yata-chan?"

The dialogue pointed towards him and Yata turned irritated.

"Kusanagi-san. I even admit that he has his skills in this."

Fushimi was removed from the combatant list this time because his information processing ability was outstanding even among the "Chabudai Alliance". Although he has Anna's support, he has so far been able to guide those two non-standard people. It's "Homura's" job, to do the "finish off" after leading them.

"More importantly, was it about time? Is the child in charge of us coming?"

"Really. That's all thanks to Shiro. That brat owes me a lot."

With a fighting spirit on his face, Yata slammed his fist into his palm. Fushimi support is annoying but useful. If he failed to defeat the cornered enemy, he doesn't know what kind

of disapproval he would do. With that thought, Yata turned his gaze towards the direction the enemy was supposed to come from.

At that moment, the barricade was cut into a cross.

"Here we go!"

With a warning voice echoing, Yata charged the staff in his hand with red supernatural power.

A tall shadow appeared from behind the clouds of smoke.

"Eh?"

To all appearances, he was not a child. For some reason, the man whose entire body was drenched with water brushed his hair as if to remove the dripping water droplets and looked at them.

"Oh? Are you my partner?"

Saying so, Mishakuji Yukari pointed his sword at him.

"Hey! This is not the brat, Saru!"

When he involuntarily yelled, the counter argument returned without delay.

"Each of these guys is strong against nonsense. I was able to lead him somehow, but it's a mistake to the extent that the opponent is different! If you have any complaints, go ahead and do it yourself!"

"Well, that's correct."

Shortly, Kusanagi found himself next to Yata. With a lighter in hand, his lips smiled, but his eyes didn't. He was ready for battle.

"Nothing will change if you "suppress one". Or else, Yata-chan, why don't you try your best if you're not dealing with children?"

"Tsk! Shit, I get it!"

Gritting his teeth in frustration, Yata was still holding his staff. As Kusanagi said, he can't choose who is his opponent. His role is to defeat the enemy in front of them.

"Get ready, you green bastard! We won't let you through here!"

"Yes. I'm looking forward to it!"

With a happy smile, Mishakuji ran straight ahead and Yata gripped the staff tightly.

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The noise began to enter Anna's otherworldly web.

Perhaps because the Red Clan has begun to fight in earnest, they are worried about her support. Shiro's spirit is sensitive to how turmoil is transmitted as waves. Not surprisingly, he believed her. Even though she is a "Red King" and she is determined to fight, this was the first time she had fought an enemy equal to or better than him.

"Well, our turn is almost here."

When Shiro said in a low voice, Kuro nodded.

"Mishakuji and Gojou will be held by the entire clan, including the "King". And when the "Green King" arrives, the three "Kings"... "Silver", "Red" and "Blue" will fight against him. Surely there is no other way than this. But..."

A slight shadow fell over his expression. Shiro tilted his head and asked.

"Kuro, what's wrong?"

"Don't think I'm being foolish. If I were stronger, at least if I could fight Mishakuji Yukari on equal footing, you'd be able to fight more easily."

"Kuro."

Shiro touched Kuro on the shoulder.

"I've only heard the story, but I don't think you're inferior to Mishakuji Yukari."

"But you also said that back then."

Kuro asked back with a doubtful face. At that time, Shiro had just returned to Gakuenjima. In fact, Shiro said something to the effect that it would be easier if Kuro could compete with Mishakuji. Astonished, Shiro pondered on whether he had been worried about it for a long time.

"That was a joke. And I also said that you weren't doing your best."

Kuro was upset.

"What do you mean? I certainly did my best to deal with it. I didn't mean to cut corners."

"Yes. At that time, you still couldn't use your true power as a member of the Silver Clan."

"Silver...?"

"I certainly made you a member of the clan. But that's it. It didn't get to the point where we could use the Silver power, our supernatural ability. But now..."

Shiro put extraordinary powers into his own hands. A shimmering silver aura was transmitted from that hand to Kuro's shoulder, and Kuro's eyes widened in surprise.

"This is...?!"

"Kuro. The only thing you could use was the colorless ability. There's no way you can win against Mishakuji Yukari who uses two colors. With my power, you'll be able to fight him on equal terms for the first time."

It was as if the Silver power had turned into Kuro's self-confidence. As he confirmed the supernatural power that filled him, Kuro looked back at Shiro and nodded forcefully.

Shiro smiled quietly and added.

"Besides, I'm sure you'll really show your power more."

At that moment, Neko who had taken the form of a cat at his feet suddenly raised her head. She returned to her human form and let out a voice full of vigilance.

"Shiro! Something's getting closer!"

At last the time has come. He was ready and he had nothing to fear. Even if the opponent is the strongest Clansman.

"Is it Mishakuji Yukari? Neko. If the parrot is with him, I'll leave him to you."

"Yes! Leave it to me! I'll eat him like Christmas chicken!"

The moment the Neko bravely said that, the shutter at the entrance of the room was destroyed with a crash.

Through the hole, a small figure slowly entered. A child. Bracing a scythe with a glowing green blade on his shoulder, he looked around vigilantly.

Shiro frowned and said in a low voice.

"It's not Mishakuji Yukari. Is it Gojou Sukuna?"

In response to that voice, Sukuna looked at him. A belligerent smile appeared on his lips.

"Oh! He's the "Silver King"! I didn't expect the last boss encounter here. He was irritated with so many traps, but I'm lucky!"

"Shiro, let's do it!"

Neko, who was ready for battle, yelled and Kuro drew his sword silently. Seeing that, Sukuna's smile deepened even more. Even though it was three against one, and one of them was the "King", there was not a trace of fear in his expression, as if he was enjoying the difficulty.

"I'll make Nagare have one less thing to do. It's time to earn a lot of extra points, "Silver King"!"

"Don't believe it!"

Kuro yelled and ran off. Sukuna waved the scythe at him in response. As he looked at the two clansmen who began to fight violently, Shiro's thoughts were spinning at high speed.

However, Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna, the two members of the clan, do not have the same abilities. Mishakuji is clearly stronger. That's why the plan was to have the silver team, including a skilled "King", against him.

It collapsed. Although war is always accompanied by unforeseen circumstances, now they must anticipate the consequences of that situation.

What about the Red Clan?

Though aware of the marbles in his hand, Shiro thought of the other clan, "Homura", that he had to deal with the powerful enemy that he was supposed to be in charge of.

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A few minutes after the battle began, "Homura" began to fall apart.

Mishakuji's attack was like lightning. By the time he seemed to arrive, he had already made up his mind. Several clansmen had already passed out and were lying on the ground. They weren't dead, but getting back into combat would be difficult.

"Bastard!"

Yata's skateboard sped up, transforming anger at his friend's defeat into speed. Rotating the flames wrapped around the staff, Yata attacked Mishakuji with the same momentum.

With a smile on his face, Mishakuji took it smoothly.

"Tsu...!"

"It's a good hit. But momentum alone won't do anything."

Swaying, Mishakuji's sword swayed as if carrying a mist. The pressure on the rod instantly disappeared and Yata felt as if all his hair stood on end. His intuition as a fighter who had been through many a rough patch told him exactly what would happen next.

Be killed.

It was Kamamoto who saved Yata from that prediction.

"Get away from Yata-san!"

With an aura pouring out from his entire body, Kamamoto launched himself into a desperate stance. The sight of a red-hot giant crashing into him is like a volcanic bomb.

Mishakuji narrowed his eyes and instantly stepped back. Kamamoto's gigantic body passed through an empty space and buried itself in the wall, creating radial cracks.

Kamamoto said out loud as he looked at Mishakuji.

"Are you alright, Yata-san?"

"Oh. You saved me, Kamamoto!"

"Hmm, I see."

Swinging his sword, Mishakuji slowly looked around the room.

While Yata and Kamamoto dealt with Mishakuji, other clansmen surrounded him. All of them were looking at Mishakuji with angry eyes.

Facing a look of anger and hostility, Mishakuji opened his arms quite happily.

"It's obvious, but it's very different from the blue boys. Even if you get hurt or fall, you'll never break and your life will shine even brighter... Fufu."

With a heartbreaking smile on his lips...

"You are beautiful!"

"Go away! Guys!"

Almost at the same time as Kusanagi's order, Mishakuji kicked the ground.

If he hadn't pushed the skateboard behind him, he probably would have been knocked over. Yata barely managed to parry Mishakuji's attack, which shot out as he spun, then turned his back on him and began to run. Kamamoto shook off his giant body and followed.

"Yata-san, it's dangerous, it's dangerous, it's dangerous!"

"Shut up and run!"

"My God, didn't you let me in?"

From behind, Mishakuji, still smiling, chases after him. Yata ground his teeth as goosebumps rose on his neck. It is completely true what the enemy said, and it is too uncomfortable to run away with a tail between your legs, even though you have fought so hard. But...

"Hurry up, Saru!"

Several blinds fell behind Yata and Kamamoto, as if they had heard the words shot into his head. Kamamoto looked back with a relieved expression.

"Hey, good! With this, for a while..."

The shutter broke and Mishakuji ran inside. Carrying a mysteriously shining sword and running while smiling charmingly, he has a terrifying beauty that is far from human.

The two fled again with all their might.

Behind Yata and Kamamoto, multiple layers of shutters blocked him. These obstacles last less than a few seconds. Mishakuji's sword pierces shutters 1, 2, and 3.

The fire bullets fell like shotguns that attacked Mishakuji.

"You failed."

Although he was taken by surprise, Mishakuji's reaction speed was still amazing. He quickly swung the sword to knock down all the bullets. Then, alert, he lowered the point of his sword and looked at the man who shot the flame.

Correcting the misalignment of his sunglasses, Kusanagi said in a relaxed tone.

"My young man, will you be with me?"

With a laugh, Mishakuji pointed his sword at Kusanagi.

"So, will you be my partner?"

"No... sorry about that."

Kusanagi turned around. The shutter came down again as if to cut into his back.

In a room surrounded by shutters on all sides, Mishakuji shrugged as he still held his sword.

"It's really endless... It's not beautiful to blatantly waste time."

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"Shit! This guy!"

Sukuna jumped again as he echoed evil.

In terms of speed alone, Sukuna could surpass Mishakuji Yukari. Irregular feints. Kuro's body reacted precisely to him approaching while preparing irregular feints. Sukuna's scythe attacked from the right, but Kuro's sword "Kotowari" stopped it and repelled it.

(My body is light... Is it because Shiro is next to me?)

Kuro's eyes widened as he saw the sword glowing silvery white. The power that springs from the depths of the body resides in the sword inherited from his master. As if to congratulate Kuro who became a member of the Silver Clan.

He thought so. This is what he wanted. He can fight for his own master. He is now standing in a place that the powerless young Kuro could never reach.

Instinctively, Kuro looked at the sword with a silver aura.

(Ichigen-sama, I am...!)

"Don't look away!"

Seeing that as an opportunity, Sukuna continued to attack. But...

"Neko!"

"Yes!"

As Neko activated his supernatural power, silvery-white bubbles began to bubble around Sukuna. Sukuna tried to shake off the waves of foam rising from under his feet and tried to get rid of it with his sickle.

"What is this?!"

That is exactly the gap. Kuro quickly approached and roughly pushed Sukuna's body with the scabbard he was holding in one hand. Sukuna twisted his body to avoid it, but all he could do was change the angle. He was shocked as he was, he rolled backwards on the ground, but immediately got to his feet.

Sukuna yelled in anger and fatigue.

"Dammit! You coward!"

"Hmph. Say what you want."

"Ah, Shiro looks bad."

Shiro and Neko lashed out with light banter, and Kuro pointed the tip of "Kotowari" directly at Sukuna. The three members of the Silver Clan are organically cooperating and supporting each other. Sukuna was his only opponent and he didn't feel like losing at all.

Suddenly, the smile disappeared from Shiro's face. Turning his Japanese umbrella around, he turned his cool gaze on Sukuna.

"Well, your activities have ended. As a fighting force, you will surely be crushed here."

Sukuna was overwhelmed by the intimidating feeling of a "King" that was unimaginable from his usual gentle demeanor.

He yelled out loud to cheer himself up.

"Do not be silly!"

In a fit of rage, Sukuna attacked Shiro with even more violent movements than before. The blow was blocked by Kuro, who immediately stepped forward. He wasn't going to let his fingertips touch Shiro. It became the sword of the "King", and it moves like a shield. At that, Kuro felt joy well up from the depths of his body.

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The wheels of the wheelchair creaked as they rolled across the marble floor.

Hisui Nagare, who had advanced to the center of the hall, looked up silently. Various sounds can be heard from the upper floor, which has been converted into an atrium. The sounds of crashing, breaking and running. Combat sounds.

Iwafune, standing next to him, spoke as if he were someone else's problem.

"Oh, you're also surprisingly good at it."

Nagare closed his eyes and tried to activate his supernatural power. Most of the electronic networks have been removed from that building, but some are still alive. He tried to control it and check the situation of the battle.

But he changed my mind.

Now he's there.

He's not the person he was when he could only look out from his underground hideout. If he feels like it, he can go anywhere. He can see the world with his own eyes, not an image as a collection of light particles.

That made him so happy that he trembled.

"Right now, the status is around 70% clear. You're a little early, Nagare."

Nagare denied those words in a calm voice.

"No, it's not too soon. I'm here to fight."

"Eh?"

Iwafune, who questioned him curiously, guessed everything just by looking at Nagare's profile.

The appearance is nothing more than the usual deadpan. However, inside, the excitement and enthusiasm of a child impatiently waiting for an excursion is about to overflow. For a long time, Iwafune, who had been with Nagare as father and son, understood that very clearly.

Iwafune said with a sigh.

"Hey, there are three "Kings" waiting for you upstairs, you know? Wait a bit longer until Yukari-chan and the others make a route."

"I'm not going to wait."

Iwafune laughed as if he had given up at Nagare's stubborn insistence.

"At this rate, you can't even hear Iwa-san, who is a surrogate father?"

"Affirmative. I will act selfishly."

"Fufu, it's time to rebel. Alright, let's go."

Nagare looked at Iwafune and smiled.

"Thank you, Iwa-san. I am grateful to you."

And so, Nagare stood up and looked up again.

There is an enemy ahead. His enemy. Enemy of "Jungle".

Hisui Nagare never had ill will towards them. He recognized the power of their as a "King", and even respected one of them.

But still...

"It is true that the combined forces of the "Silver King", "Blue King", and "Red King" are powerful. But if it is me..."

There was no wavering in the confidence that he was the strongest.

"It's an easy win!"

Then, Hisui Nagare opened his arms.

He easily broke through the straitjacket that wrapped around his body and unleashed all the supernatural powers that were sealed.

Picking up his wheelchair, Nagare began to run. Due to the "alteration" power that overflows from his body, his body transforms into lightning. With a trail of green glow, Nagare disappeared up the stairs, bounding up and down like an unleashed beast, or like a happy child.

"Well, you can enjoy it as much as you want."

The expression on Iwafune's face as he watched with narrowed eyes was just like his father's.

CHAPTER 7: STILLE NACHT (SILENT NIGHT)

Inside the command car, there was a heavy and superheated atmosphere.

"Entrapment 16-F, -4, -3, +6, +7, simultaneous development."

"Deployment successful, destroyed!"

"You don't have to report the destruction one by one. Send the intended route."

"Yes!"

If the combat units deployed inside Mihashira Tower were fighting using their bodies, they were fighting using their brains. Furthermore, due to the company's policy of not being able to reduce the number of combat personnel, only a small number of members remain. It wasn't a joke. Without Fushimi's support, they would have overcome the siege long ago, allowing them to invade the "Slate".

But, no matter how few resources they have, they cannot give up.

Not for justice or cause, but for their own pride.

"Forecasted routes are out! Route 1-G and Route 6-S."

"Are you already on Route S?! Leave this floor! Deploy all traps simultaneously!"

"Got it! Simultaneous deployment of all traps!"

While typing quickly, Fushimi shifted his gaze to the side. That is the floor plan of Mihashira Tower displayed on the monitor using 3D modeling. The top 30% of them are blue and the bottom 70% are green.

"The enemy's invasion rate is 70%. This delay strategy is about to reach its limit."

"It's progressing much faster than planned..."

"Yes. Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna. Their actions are simple and based on brute force; that's how confident they are in their individual abilities. Tsk, they're just playing with us."

Two points of light move on the 3D map of Mihashira Tower while being interrupted. To avoid interference or eavesdropping from "Jungle", the electronic network was limited to use inside the command car. It was based on the judgment that information leaks could be minimized by using it in conjunction with the power grid, but there was never any interference from "Jungle".

Fushimi seems to be the only one trying to control this battlefield. The enemy side has no strategy or anything. They just show's up and messes it up. Fushimi's job is to prevent it, delay it and, if possible, eliminate it. It's like using a piece called a combatant to deal with a rising tsunami.

Sweat ran down Fushimi's cheeks.

"...In other words, it's all my job."

It was cold sweat. The pressure that the victory or defeat of this battle rests entirely on his shoulders. What forces should be distributed where, whether or not predetermined operational objectives can be achieved, and how compensation will be provided if they cannot be achieved.

If it fails, then...

"Route S has been violated!"

Hearing Enomoto's voice, Fushimi thought for a while, and then in a solemn voice said:

"Go to Phase 2."

"Eh?!"

Enomoto takes a deep breath. He explained to her what the sign meant. Enomoto, who has the second highest information processing ability after Fushimi, should be asked to act as an assistant, but unfortunately, he doesn't have the psychological ability to oversee the entire operation.

"But, is it 30 minutes earlier than expected?!"

"It's already unexpected! If we don't deal with Mishakuji now, we won't be able to deal with it in the future. It's a waste of time to talk like that, so hurry up and wave your hands!"

"Yes!"

Straightening his back, Enomoto began to operate. Fushimi, for his part, gives instructions to the entire organization through an electronic network.

"Jungle repulsion plan, second phase. Concentrate your forces in the Cloud Hall on the 75th floor and defeat the Green Clan members one by one."

Without waiting for an answer, Fushimi hung up. As long as he was aware of the situation, there was no need to wait for the report from others. Fushimi muttered as he looked at the map of Mihashira Tower.

"The Silver Clan is at war with Gojou Sukuna. "Scepter 4" and "Homura" will attack Mishakuji Yukari from both sides. We have misunderstood our opponents, but so far it's almost as planned..."

At this time, the car's electronic equipment issued a warning sound.

Fushimi turned towards him, and Enomoto, who was measuring the data, let out a shouting voice.

"Large-scale Weismann anomalies confirmed near ground floor! It's moving!"

"Here you come, "Green King"."

"Well, we've just moved into the second phase! What should we do?!"

Fushimi clicked his tongue again. The originally assumed time no longer made sense. (If they don't respond flexibly and adapt to the situation, why would I have to do the foolish thing that they'll line up?!) As he suppressed the feeling of wanting to yell, Fushimi quickly gave instructions.

"Notify everyone in the hall that the "Green King" has appeared, and then proceed to the third phase."

"Eh, then, but the second phase is still..."

Watched by Fushimi intently, Enomoto quickly turned back to his screen. Hearing the voice of Enomoto, who began to contact each member, Fushimi began to prepare for the activation of Phase 3, the "Lockdown Protocol".

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Mishakuji Yukari was starting to get bored.

No matter how fast he runs, what awaits him is a blind, a trap, and then another blind. It does very little as a barrier. That's because the slash attack that runs at the same time goes through them.

Despite that, the other side is repeating that tactic like an idiot. It sounds good when you say it's a strategy to clutter up the amount of material, but ultimately, it's probably because there's nothing else to do. After breaking through the dozens of shutters, Mishakuji muttered in amazement.

"Oh, are you buying time again? As expected, I'm getting a little bored."

So far both are as expected. It is the joseki in shogi and chess. They want to exhaust Mishakuji and Sukuna while leaving traps to interfere with Nagare who comes later. He wants to reduce the number of opponents while they wait for Hisui Nagare. The outcome of the intertwined speculation is 50/50 at the moment, and neither has taken a decisive step.

He was fed up with the situation.

"For the sake of our king, we must smash the traps as much as possible. I know it's part of my job, but..."

"Kwah! Boring! Boring!"

Looking at Kotosaka, who raised his voice in agreement, Mishakuji began to run.

"That's how it is!"

A blunt charge that completely destroys attacking traps. A fierce charge far removed from his previous elegance, anticipating the presence of the enemy's main force. In the tug of war up to that point, he was able to comprehend the location of most of the enemies. If he plunges into the center of it, some kind of change should happen.

Repeating the same thing over and over again is not Mishakuji Yukari's way of life.

"I want to fight with more style!"

"Let's do what you want!"

A reply came from the space that had been shattered, and Mishakuji inadvertently stopped his feet.

A spacious hall that is clearly different from the past. The group in the center waited for Mishakuji with a fighting spirit on his face.

"Here, let's spread flowers!"

The young man in the knit cap who had turned his back on him earlier, the executive of "Homura" Misaki Yata, now headed straight for him. The skateboard, accelerated by the red supernatural ability, approached at such speed that even Mishakuji's eyes were blinded. He sliced through the passing staves with his sword, and just as he was about to counterattack, a shower of flames began to fall.

".....!"

He immediately kicked the ground to avoid it, and there was an explosion where the rain of fire hit. After that heat wave passed, he turned his attention to "Homura".

The man who caused the explosion was smoking purple smoke while he was standing.

"Customer-san. Just like Yata-chan said, this is the end point. I can't let you go anywhere anymore."

Contrary to his calm voice, the eyes behind the sunglasses weren't smiling. Mishakuji, on the other hand, pointed his sword at them with a charming smile.

"I think so. But I'm not going anywhere either."

Mishakuji's gaze was fixed on one of them, a girl.

The "Red Queen", Anna Kushina.

With strained red eyes, she stared at Mishukaji.

"Long time no see, "Red Queen"."

When Mishakuji casually called out to Anna, her shoulders contracted.

"At that time, you were just a helpless child. I haven't seen you for a long time, and you've grown into a splendid king. I misunderstood you."

"Bastard! Why are you talking to Anna without permission? I'm going to kill you!"

Mishakuji bowed respectfully, ignoring Yata, who was shouting from the side.

"Right now, you are undeniably the "King". You may be the youngest in this place, but you are undoubtedly the strongest. Therefore, Anna Kushina... I will take your life."

And then, Mishakuji unleashed a surprise punch.

A slash that glowed green split the air and flew. At almost the same time, Kusanagi released a barrage of flames that rained down like hail. The barrage and the slashes annihilated each other, and this time Mishakuji himself charged into the void that was created. The mysteriously bright tip of "Ayamachi" pointed directly at Anna.

Wings of flame blocked Mishakuji's vision.

".....!"

Mishakuji reflexively rolled to dodge. A few millimeters above his head, a hot, deadly wind swept through. Facing Mishakuji, who kept his distance from her, Anna spread her flame wings and said resolutely.

"Yes. It's different from that time."

A crimson aura rose from her entire body. That's the look of the one ahead of his class, chosen by the "Dresden Slate."

"I'm the "Red Queen". I will not hesitate to use this power to protect everyone!"

That figure reminded Mishakaji of the men he once saw.

The "King", like the infinitely clear blue sky.

The "King," like a red, swirling purgatory.

They were fierce, short-lived, and beautiful as they scattered violently, involving many lives.

Now, an existence with the same power as them, stands in front of him.

Enough opponents to make life glow and burn!

As Mishakuji smiled slightly, multiple footsteps were heard behind him.

"Hey, "Homura", are you alright?!"

"You're late, Blues!"

The members of "Scepter 4" appeared from below. All of them were exhausted, but they still had enthusiasm. They all took out their sabers and began to surround Mishakuji from afar.

Holding the staff, Yata laughed belligerently.

"Heh, there's finally no place to escape. Get ready this time, you bastard!"

"I see."

Two clans and the "Red Queen". The difference in strength is too much to deal with alone.

But Mishakuji did not despair.

An indescribable emotion welled up from the depths of his chest. He couldn't help but hope how much brighter his life could make in that utter dead end. Going into the battle to the death with euphoria instead of fear. After all, Mishakuji is probably just a swordsman.

He sincerely apologized to his two former teachers for that, but the next moment, he was gone.

"On guard."

Declaring war lowly, Mishakuji sank.

At that moment, he felt "it".

"....."

He widened his eyes and looked down at his feet.

Similarly, the only one who noticed "it" seemed to be the enemy, Anna. With her red eyes trembling and her small fist clenched, she whispered:

"...He already came."

The moment he heard that voice, a momentary hesitation was born in Mishukaji.

His exaltation, his desire to know how much he can shine in this dead land. The temptation to launch into a life-and-death battle with the King had an irresistible appeal. Yes. "Jungle" is irrelevant. This moment is the reason he is alive.

Right now. Here... kill the King.

Those whispers tickled his ears, but with just one deep breath, he could no longer hear them. Only the gaze of Hisui Nagare remained, who conveyed his passion for the ideal of the "New World".

Surrender everything to your boiling blood and let your life shine to the limit. That's fine too.

But in the end, Mishakuji didn't choose that option.

Because breaking a promise is not beautiful.

"I cannot do anything about it."

Mishakuji shrugged his regrets aside and gave a small smile.

At that moment, a roar shook the hall.

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Hisui Nagare jumped up and down. Like a puppy running through the garden. Like a kid after school.

Nagare climbed up the building while he jumped around the uninhabited Mihashira Tower. He broke traps, he broke blinds, he turned into green lightning and moved forward with nothing to block him.

His appearance was beautiful, wild and joyful.

Freed from everything that bound him and breathing the air of the earth with "freedom". How long has it taken so many people to get that right that is taken for granted.

Iwafune, standing at the entrance of the first floor, couldn't have seen that scene. Still, in Iwafune's mind, the scene certainly appeared.

The "Green King" was unleashed and devastated at his whim.

"Haha... quite well, good health!"

Looking at him, Iwafune drank from a bottle that held whiskey.

"It's been 9 years since he fought the "Golden King" Kokujoji Daikaku, and if you count the case of Kagutsu, it's been 10 years... If you think about it, it's been a long time in the shadows, right? I hope he lives a long time."

Nagare, who was defeated by Kokujoji, had to hide underground to escape the "Tokijikuin" pursuers. He secretly formed his own hands and feet, "Jungle", and slowly spread the branches of conspiracy and espionage.

"However, the elder Kokujoji is no longer in this world. In other words, there is no one on this earth who can stop you with all your might, Nagare."

Nagare's straitjacket not only seals his supernatural powers and his freedom, but also serves as a maintenance device that prolongs his life. That straitjacket is a device through which an enormous amount of supernatural power circulates that is consumed to continue "modifying" death itself.

Now that he has been unleashed, Hisui Nagare will continue to unleash his full power as the "Green King". As the price of freedom, the countdown to death has already begun.

Even so, Iwafune cast an unwavering gaze upwards. With a smile on his lips.

"Ok, Nagare! Run as hard as you can! This Iwa-san is watching, so let go ahead and play with all your might! Haha!"

Iwafune raised the bottle as if he were toasting the floor above, which was shaking with destruction and shock.

A large piece of debris fell right next to it, and he flinched and cringed.

"Wow! What the hell is this?"

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The repeated blows jarred his feet and Yata accidentally nearly fell off his skateboard. With one foot on the ground, a new impact hit all of "Homura". Mishakuji Yukari still held his sword and did not waver in the slightest.

Yata clicked his tongue and looked at the ground.

"Is this sound new...? Hey, Blues, hurry up and go to their location!"

"Scepter 4" responded to the voice and blocked Mishakuji's escape route. Seeing him, he chuckled.

"Oh, he left early."

The one who reacted to those words was Awashima Seri.

"Go out? No way."

"Yes, he's coming."

Even Yata could understand who he was pointing at.

The "Green King", Hisui Nagare from "Jungle", who has the greatest strength. Even Mishakuji Yukari, who wields the power of two clans, is but a billboard compared to Nagare.

Mishakuji released his stance and shrugged as he still held his sword.

"Oh, sorry. It's too bad. It's starting to get fun, but it's over."

"It's over! It's over!"

The parrot perched on his shoulder let out an ominous cry. Kusanagi looked at him with a shudder.

"It's over..."

"The "Green King"! It's faster than I expected, but..."

Awashima and Kusanagi, the agitation of the two executives spread like ripples between both clans. Yata was not good at understanding the details of the situation and the strategy of the war, but he was able to clearly understand the spread. He felt resentment and trembling for the arrival of the enemy "King".

Unable to allow it, he raised his voice.

"Oh, don't be scared, everyone! Whether it's the king or a servant, it doesn't matter who comes. It's okay to just blow them up one after another! Cheer up!"

Now it doesn't matter who the opponent is. Whether it's Sukuna Gojou, Mishakuji Yukari, or even the "Green King", all they have to do is face them and fight until they run out of strength. That was Misaki Yata's creed.

Faced with such a Yata, Mishakuji looked at him mockingly.

"Oh, that's great, Opponent-kun. But the reason I'm saying "sorry" is..."

Mishakuji's sword flashed with a speed that even the eye could not catch.

As Yata reflexively raised his staff, Mishakuji shook his sword.

"Huh?! You!"

"My turn is over."

As he gracefully waved his hand at him, Mishakuji fell down the stairs along with the severed floor.

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The shock and roar were also transmitted to Sukuna.

Of course he knows what that means. The arrival of the "Green King". Hisui Nagare has finally started to move. At the same time that he felt excited about it, impatience was also born.

He still hadn't done anything. If he doesn't catch even a single Silver Clan in front of him, he won't be able to follow Nagare...

"Shiro!"

"Yes, it looks like they've gotten into the game too. It's faster than I thought."

"What are you going to do, Shiro?"

The three met and whispered something. nobody paid attention to him. That fueled the fire of anger.

"What are they talking about so casually?!"

With an angry voice, Sukuna waved the scythe at him. He activated the extraordinary application "Great Raiha" and a powerful wave of thunder contained in the tip of the sickle captured the three people of the Silver Clan at once.

The figure disappeared like a bubble.

"Tsu...!"

Each one of the bubbles that broke into a thousand pieces swelled up and closed in on Sukuna. Sukuna clucked and jumped back.

At that moment, Yatogami jumped from the other side of the bubble and hit Sukuna with a strong kick.

Sukuna barely blocked the kick with the handle of his scythe. However, he couldn't kill the pressure. Little Sukuna immediately flew out, crashed to the ground from his back and immediately rolled backwards and readied his scythe.

The chase he had been wary of did not come. Isana, Yatogami, and Neko were watching from a distance. More than anything, that made Sukuna yell in anger.

"Dammit! Since a while ago, I started a serious match with you guys!"

Yatogami frowned and in a persuasive tone said:

"Gojou Sukuna. This battle is not to determine an individual's ability."

"Oh? There's nothing more important than winning or losing a game!"

Sukuna understands his mission better than anyone. Eliminate all those who stand in the way of Nagare. He understands that winning that game means winning Nagare's game. That is why he is seriously trying to kill them. If he can get one of the "Kings", his plans will be that much closer to success.

Despite that, he doesn't feel that much resolve from the opponent. They're just trying to buy time. In his head, he understands that this is the purpose of their strategy, but he felt that they were trampling on his pride as a player when they were doing everything they could to go easy on him.

"Bet your life! I'm betting my life!"

Sukuna activated the extraordinary application "Raijin Korin". Sukuna's hand transmits extraordinary supernatural power to the hilt and blade of the scythe. It is a large-scale ranged attack that is second only in power to the "Raiko no Jutsu". If true, he wanted to use it in a way that would involve more enemies, but it can't be helped. At this point, Sukuna decided that annihilating these guys would lead to victory.

The expressions of Shiro and the others tightened as expected due to the enormous power. Yatogami stood in front as he held his sword, and Shiro stood behind him as he twirled his umbrella.

"So you're trying to sell your life... then there's no way around it!"

"Big Move Coming! Counterattack on Swing Time!"

"I understand!"

Isana Yashiro is a "King" in every way. It is doubtful that this psychic ability can pass through the Sanctum. However, taking shortcuts even if there is no match goes against Gojou Sukuna's human creed.

This is because high difficulty bosses are the only opponents worth defeating.

"I'll crush them all together!"

As he roared, Sukuna kicked the ground. He swung the scythe with all his soul. Yatogami looked at him and held his sword on his hips.

At that moment, something fell from above.

"The sun is setting..."

That guy easily deflected Sukuna's scythe, letting <Raijin Korin>'s attack escape up the stairs.

"...those who chose to leave their home..."

As he was, he swiped his sword and caught Yatogami's surprise strike.

"...and those who returned."

He gracefully landed on the spot.

The looks that Sukuna and Yatogami gave him were strangely of the same type.

"Mishakuji Yukari!"

"Yukari! What are you doing interrupting?!"

Mishakuji, who appeared from above cutting through the floor, shrugged off the insults thrown at him with a cold face. Kotosaka took off from his shoulder and began to fly noisily.

"Interrupt! Interrupt!"

"Fufu, Kuro-chan. After meeting the "Silver King" again, you look even better. After all, the selfless sword you wield for your master is what makes you who you are."

Standing on a circular concrete slab, Mishakuji turned like an idol under the spotlight and pointed his sword at Yatogami. Yatogami also raised his sword without lowering his guard, and with a tight voice, he said:

"Did you come to help your partner, Mishakuji Yukari?"

"That's foul play!", Neko yelled.

That line reignited Sukuna's anger. It's the most frustrating when you get stuck in a battle with a formidable enemy. Sukuna let out an angry voice as he stabbed into the ground with the handle of his scythe.

"I don't need help! Get out!"

But Mishakuji shrugged in amazement.

"Help? Save? There's no way I'd do something like that. I just came to find our boy. It's time to go, Sukuna-chan."

"Kwah! Go! Go!"

"I won't! I'm still fighting!"

At Sukuna's throat, which he insisted on, he shot a cold spike at him.

He couldn't see it or react. When he came to, Mishukaji was touching Sukuna's throat with his inverted sword. The hand that held the scythe was full of strength. When Mishakuji did something, he really did it, that fact made Sukuna nervous.

Mishakuji said with a voice as cold as that sword.

"Listen to me, Sukuna. It's not pretty to see a child not following orders. Also, Kuro-chan, I have decided that when the time is right, I will eat you deliciously."

Sukuna's teeth gnashed. Anger and frustration still swirled in his chest.

But at the same time, a calm calculation that surpassed that was beginning to spin in his head.

Mishakuji is there. That means "Homura" and "Scepter 4" are free. If Sukuna continues to fight there without hesitation, he will only become a liability.

Retiring with a loss is frustrating, but letting your team lose to your own record is an unforgivable war crime.

"Gezz. You're much more selfish, aren't you?"

Sukuna changed. If so, the sooner he acts, the better. When he carelessly wielded a scythe imbued with supernatural powers, the side windows shattered and the night wind blew into the building.

"Wait, Mishakuji Yukari!"

Perhaps understanding what the two were thinking, Yatogami hurried over. Sukuna stuck out his tongue in response, while Mishukaji waved his hand gently and muttered happily.

"Kuro-chan, it seems I wasn't meant to fight you tonight. But I'm sure we'll meet again soon. On the fateful day that will bring us to a conclusion."

And so, the two danced in the night breeze.

As he ran through the walls of the building, Sukuna snarled at Mishakuji who was next to him.

"Damn. You got in a good place."

"I've put up with it, so don't complain. Besides..."

Mishakuji looked down and smiled sweetly.

"Today's protagonist is that girl."

Looking beyond Mishakuji's line of sight, he saw green thunder rushing toward the building, spreading thunder, shock, and destruction. His "King", the figure of Hisui Nagare running.

"Well, that's correct."

Sukuna chuckled softly. He finally got to play outside with his friends who have been cooped up for so long. When he thought about it, it seemed that he would be able to forget the momentary defeat in the blink of an eye.

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"Fushimi, the third phase has started. Are you ready?"

"It's done. From now on, we will shut down the entire Mihashira Tower along with the information and power systems, and isolate the "Green King". Please note that further communication will be limited through the detection ability of the "King Red"."

"I understand."

Mihashira Tower, in the "Slate Room".

Reisi Munakata listened to Fushimi and Awashima's communication with his eyes closed.

This strategy is divided into three phases. It was conceived, discussed and concluded mainly by Shiro and Munakata. They spent all their resources to crush the minority with the majority.

First phase. Attract the members of "Jungle", divide them and exhaust them.

Second stage. The three clans... Red, Blue and Silver will destroy or exhaust the "Jungle" members who will be divided.

And then the third phase. Activate the "Lockdown Protocol" when the appearance of the "Green King" is confirmed. All combat personnel except the "King" will come to their support.

The "Blocking Protocol" is literally the main purpose of the blocking. All the traps in the building are activated without hesitation, and the communication network is physically and electronically isolated by physically destroying the communication network with explosives placed in various locations.

With slightly wide eyes, Munakata muttered to himself.

"There are no lights to illuminate the path, no voices to reach your ears, and many thick walls block your way. This entire Mihashira Tower is a prison for you."

Now, in Munakata's mind, the figure of Nagare running inside the building was vividly projected.

All kinds of barriers stand in front of Nagare, who has the will and runs like thunder. Anti-personnel traps, including reinforced shutters, anti-psychic barricades, mines, turrets, and traps, for that purpose. Various weapons requisitioned from the army by maximizing the authority of "Scepter 4" bared their fangs against the "King".

"Of course, there's no way we can hold off a king with a trick like this, but every trick will definitely take away your limited time and physical strength."

And those traps are not the biggest barriers for Nagare.

The "Silver King" and the "Red Queen". They are on the same level as Nagare, and it is the highest class of strength.

"Can you get here after clearing 100 walls and two kings? "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

The moment he muttered that, he felt something twist under his feet.

It wasn't the impact of the destruction that Nagare was spreading. It was faint, but someone's heartbeat, as if resonating with the very soul.

Looking down, the "Dresden Slate" embedded in the glass floor pulsed with a faint glow.

"Four kings meet in one place. You seem to understand what that means."

The biggest "sin" a king can commit. The "Damocles Down".

When Weismann's maximum deviation from the "King" reaches a critical point, the "Sword of Damocles" hanging over his head falls. The impact of the fall of the "King" would burn a radius of tens of kilometers and take the lives of hundreds of thousands of humans.

And above all, the most terrifying fact is that the power of the "Damocles Down" increases multiplicatively.

If both swords were to fall, the nation of Japan, or perhaps the land itself, would be wiped out. And if there are three? When it reaches four, it may bring a fate to the surface that threatens human civilization.

If a "Sword of Damocles" falls, other swords will fall in a chain reaction. It is not an exaggeration to say that the four kings who meet in this small building have the fate of humanity on their shoulders.

"But it won't happen."

Munakata muttered towards the "Slate" as if he was talking to a person with a will.

"I won't let you do that."

As the "Blue King" who is in charge of "order", he must never bring about its downfall. Preparations have already been made to prevent that from happening.

Just like the old "Blue King", Habari Jin.

The "Slate Room" where Munakata was was the final line. He seals the "Slate" that encourages human innovation and prevents the sword that causes humanity's destruction. Reisi Munakata's pride was to bear the fate of the human race, never to be confused, never waver, and never falter.

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The remnants of the melted round shutter continued endlessly.

The "Green King" is like a ray of light that runs freely. The powerful electrical heat that it radiates itself burns and melts everything from velvet rugs and marble floors to steel barriers. Even without using Anna's web of supernatural power, it was easy to track Nagare by following the "footprints".

Kuro growled as he stared at the edge of the melted shutter.

"Is this how it all looked after Hisui Nagare passed through here?"

Shiro nodded his head.

"Yes. He's using his power like crazy. He's also much faster than expected. But there's no way he can stand up to this."

"Isn't that what you expected?"

"No, it's more than he expected, or rather, it doesn't seem like it's going to work. What is he thinking? Something doesn't feel right."

Or, Shiro believes that "it" is the normal functioning of Nagare. It's been 9 years since he took it seriously, and from the measurement records of that time, Shiro had predicted Nagare's activity limit time. Also keeping in mind that Nagare will grow and accumulate strength.

But the current situation goes far beyond those expectations.

With that much power, no matter how you look at it, Nagare's active time is less than 30 minutes. It's already been ten minutes since he broke in. Shiro, Anna, and Munakata should hold out for the remaining 20 minutes. If he was alone, he wouldn't know what to do, but if the three "Kings" worked together to deal with it, he could easily buy that amount of time.

There's no way Nagare didn't know. Despite that, he heads straight for the "Slate". It's like he thinks he'll be fine even if he's exhausted.

"Shiro! Shiro! Hurry up!"

Neko's voice suddenly brought Shiro back to his senses.

"Hisui Nagare has removed the limiter. I will use my power without thinking of limits."

"So you mean..."

"Anna is in danger!"

At the same time as he yelled, Shiro and Kuro began to run next to each other. Leaping over the rows of melted blinds and heading towards the battlefield with Anna, below was Hisui Nagare still advancing. Neko, who was left alone, also ran after them.

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"Vice Commander. Everyone is ready."

Awashima nodded to Akiyama, who whispered softly.

The members of the Special Forces behind her did not escape unscathed. They played an important role in luring and separating the two "Jungle" members who rushed in at the beginning of the operation. Serious injuries such as sword wounds, burns, abrasions, and even broken bones were ordered to stay in the rear, but they all refused.

Because they know that this battle will determine their future destiny.

A little further away, Kusanagi also sent a notice to the "Homura" members.

"Well, the main character is Anna. Even if small things wander into the battle between the "Kings", they will only be an obstacle. Soon, Isana Yashiro, the "Silver King" will join us. Shiro-san will be defending, Anna attack, and we'll all be acting as a distraction and support."

"Oh, got it?!"

"Yes!"

Just like "Scepter 4", "Homura" was in a good mood even after taking a hit. They do not know the details or the depth of the situation. Still, the passion to devote himself to his "King" with his companions is exactly the same as "Scepter 4".

Kusanagi teased Yata.

"Yata-chan, you don't know what you're doing, right?"

"It's all about setting up a diversion and not going too far!"

"If you rush like the other day, you'll get burned. Be careful."

"Hey, what happened the other day has nothing to do with it! I got it!"

In the exchange between Yata and Kusanagi, a small laugh leaked out between "Homura". Awashima muttered in amazement.

"Even at a time like this, "Homura" has a lot of energy..."

She felt a look on her cheek. When she looked over there, Anna was looking at her.

Although she is a girl, she is a respected "King". Awashima turned to Anna and bowed her head respectfully.

"Excuse me, "Red Queen"."

"Because we are connected."

"Eh?"

"We are all deeply connected. That is why."

Saying so, she rolled a red marble in her palm.

"Our fire will never go out."

The red glow that illuminates the marbles is the eldritch web node that is the cornerstone of this operation. However, the "connection" Anna is talking about is probably not referring to that. They share something bigger without even going through the network.

Maybe it's the time they spent together.

It can be the place where they live together.

It may be someone's memory.

They are strongly connected by such things. Awashima is dazzled by that. She doesn't think "Scepter 4" is inferior to "Homura", but is it really as deep a bond as theirs?

"Still, the one that doesn't convince me is the "Blue King"."

Awashima gasped at the sudden voice.

"He's making Anna, the queen of "Homura" risk his life, while he retires to rest. What the hell is that bastard doing? Does he think he's superior?"

Yata crossed his arms with a disgusted expression and complained to Kusanagi. The reason they were speaking loud enough to make it to "Scepter 4" was not to make themselves heard. Awashima also acknowledges that Yata is not that kind of person. He is just sincere.

Kusanagi looked at Awashima. His face said "be tolerant." So, as if he admonished Yata...

"Yata, that was decided at the meeting. We can't let the "Green King" get to the "Slate Room", and if we all get in here and break through, it will be even worse. From now on,

Anna and Shiro-san will reduce the enemy's strength, and even if they happen to reach that place, the "Blue King" behind them will surely stop them. That's how it should be."

"No, I'm not talking about strategy or anything like that. What I'm talking about is more of a feeling, an attitude."

Yata lowered his eyes a bit and muttered to himself.

"Kuh, I don't get why anyone would want to follow him."

Awashima felt anger rise among her subordinates behind her.

At the same time, Kusanagi patted Yata on the head.

"Idiot, you're talking too much about something else. I'm sorry, Seri-chan."

With those words, Yata seemed to finally realize that his voice was reaching "Scepter 4". He awkwardly looked at Awashima and said impatiently.

"Ah, it's not about you..."

"...No."

Awashima gently shook her head.

She knew who Yata was talking about. Fushimi Saruhiko. A man who once left "Homura" and later joined "Scepter 4". Yata and Fushimi had a relationship that could be called friends, but Fushimi broke off that relationship.

Their enmity still exists. Most of Yata's anger and frustration towards "Scepter 4" probably stems from Fushimi's affiliation with them. Therefore, Awashima did not take Yata's mistake at face value.

And in a sense, Yata's words are correct.

Everyone in "Scepter 4" would agree that their "King", Reisi Munakata, was a bottomless man. Like Anna Kushina, he is not a "King" who lives with Clansman. This was Munakata's way of being as the "King" who could see everything from a high place and order the clansmen around as he wished.

What is Munakata thinking about in the final line of the "Alliance of the Three Kings", the "Slate Room"? What is he looking at? What is he feeling? Even Awashima, who is his confidante, isn't sure.

At that moment, Anna turned her head and muttered.

"Everyone, back off."

"What?"

Almost at the same time Kusanagi asked, an impact unlike anything before that, shook his feet.

"...He's coming."

Before Anna's gaze, the last of the many layers of shutters suddenly changed shape.

The shutter, which is strong enough to withstand a single hit from a tank gun, crushed and spun inward. As if a wild giant was smashing with all its might, various dents were born on the surface, and it finally became unbearable and exploded.

"Kuh?!"

Mixed with the dust and debris, an extraordinary amount of energy overflowed. A big storm breaking out in the green. The man standing in the center of it all, the "Green King" Hisui Nagare, bared his fangs and laughed.

He waved his right hand carelessly.

The lightning formed the claws of a beast and attacked Awashima and the others. In the blink of an eye, they were unable to react at all.

Flame wings engulfed "Scepter 4" and "Homura".

The "Red Queen". Anna Kushina's supernatural ability. Her supernatural ability, manifested as a flame with will, acted as a shield and repelled the fatal blow. The lightning claws flew in various directions, carving long claw marks on the walls and ceiling of the hall.

Nagare laughed even deeper on the other side of the flickering flames.

"Special Forces. Defensive formation."

Before she could say it out loud, Nagare had disappeared.

All Awashima could perceive was the diffusely reflected green glow and the intense pain that tore through her body. Her awareness flickered with pain as if struck by lightning, and when she came to, she was sprawled on the ground. The reason why she barely fainted was probably thanks to the supernatural field she had developed.

Yata, who had fallen nearby, staggered back, showing his resistance.

"Tch... Damn, I let my guard down!"

When she looked around, most of "Scepter 4" and "Homura" were knocked out. In less than a split second, Nagare had nearly destroyed the two clans.

"That's the "Green King"..."

The vaguely filtered murmur contained a sound close to despair.

It's a different level from the "Kings" they've seen so far. At least, so it seemed to Awashima. Without a "Golden King", there is no doubt that Nagare is the strongest "King". Clansman etc. are not a problem for him at all.

Awashima probably wasn't the only one who felt helpless. There were a few clansmen who didn't faint, but they were visibly demoralized. Awashima bit her lip and tried to scold them.

But before that, a girl stood up and walked forward.

"Anna! Are you hurt?!"

"I'm fine."

Among the clansmen standing side by side, only the "Red Queen" was unharmed. There is no shyness in her eyes, there is only determination and a sense of mission.

"Here I go. I must stop him."

Wings of flame spread and flutter. Kusanagi yelled as he covered his face from the hot wind.

"Anna!"

Anna didn't hear him. As that small body floated to the surface, she flew towards the hallway, chasing after Nagare as she scattered her otherworldly red feathers.

"Vice Commander..."

A moan came from nearby. When she turned around, the members of the Special Forces, who had injuries all over their body's, were looking at her anxiously.

Their hearts are not broken. At least not yet.

However, their body's, which had been damaged in battles with Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna, had already reached their limit. Awashima couldn't lead them to chase the "Green King".

"...Akiyama. Sort the injured into levels and transfer them to the rear. Take the severely injured to the hospital."

Akiyama gasped at the de facto retreat order. Without looking back, Awashima turned on her heel and started walking.

"Ah, where are you going, Vice Commander?!"

"To the "Slate Room". The Captain is in danger."

The power of the "Green King" far exceeded Awashima's expectations. Isana Yashiro predicted that the energy consumed by Hisui Nagare is inversely proportional to the hours

of operation. What if the current Munakata was directly hit by a kamikaze-like destruction that he didn't even think of what would come next?

The worst damage was found to be a stiff neck. That alone should be avoided at all costs. Her own life would be nothing more than a paper against the total power of the "King", but still, it is better than doing nothing.

"It's unreasonable! Dealing with a monster like that alone...!"

"Please take us with you!"

Voices were raised one after another among the Special Forces. But Awashima stared at them and shook her head. Some squad members are already injured to the point of not being able to fight.

Letting them accompany her there is the same as ordering them to die. Even Awashima was not prepared to go that far.

At that moment, a voice came from another direction.

"You're not alone. We're going too."

Awashima's eyes widened and she turned her attention to him.

It was "Homura". They are the same ones who received the damage. There are also some clan members who can't stand up.

Even so, Yata and Kusanagi had yet to see despair in their eyes.

When Kusanagi's eyes met, he smiled.

"If you have to protect the "King", we are with you."

Awashima didn't answer, just nodded.

"Homura" and "Scepter 4" used to go head to head and collided many times. But now they share a purpose.

It is to support their "King".

They began to run, with Awashima leading the way. To the "Slate Room". To the battlefield of the "Kings".

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A bolt of lightning tore through the interior of the building.

At first glance, it might have seemed like a natural phenomenon. A magnificent spectacle of the gods created by the difference in voltage between the atmosphere and the earth. It is a harbinger of calamity that runs carelessly and haphazardly, destroying everything it touches. The thunder, however, had a certain intention.

The path where the thunder rushed was not random, but was repelled by precise calculation. Before the blockade of Mihashira Tower, he accurately traced the route sent by Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna. If Fushimi Saruhiko had watched him, he would have clucked and cursed. Ultimately, until the third phase, the "Alliance of Three Kings" had been unable to capture "Jungle".

But even that is trivial on the battlefield of the "Kings".

There was a bird chasing the rushing thunder. A young bird that flies with flaming wings and spreading fiery feathers. Each of the fluttering feathers in the air changed direction according to their will, and was shot by lightning like a missile chasing an enemy aircraft.

The lightning spun around and dodged its wings, turned around, laughed, and slowed down.

Flying in parallel, the thunder greeted the bird.

"Hello, "Red Queen" Anna Kushina. I was in a rush earlier, I'm sorry. I apologize."

Nagare's tone did not sound like she was in combat. He is as calm as if he is talking to an acquaintance. Anna clenched her back teeth and let out a tense voice.

"Listen, "Green King" Hisui Nagare. Stop it. I can't give you that. That "Slate" is not your toy."

Nagare easily stated that.

"Of course, that's not my toy. I agree. Players who have awakened powers that surpass humans compete to rise to the top. The "Dresden Slate" is a system for that purpose. In other words, no It's just me, it's everyone's toy."

Anna's expression turned serious. Clenching her small fist, she said:

"Stop."

Nagare laughed again, rose, fell, and rose. While he did it, he danced. He spread his hands in the air, turned and said as if he were singing.

"I won't stop, I can't stop. Anna Kushina, I will fulfill my purpose."

"Stop!"

The attack was not intentional. If possible, she wanted to end it with dialogues.

But Anna knew. As Isana Yashiro once pointed out. She knew that through intuition rather than reason.

They can't stop Hisui Nagare with words.

In response to her will, another pair of flames erupted from Anna's back. They are not wings. It was her sword that took the form of a blade to stop the heart of a group of supernatural energy, Nagare.

Nagare looked at Anna and smiled even deeper. Thunder's body stopped suddenly and he turned to Anna. Anna gritted her teeth and fired her own sword.

A pair of flaming swords flew up in a double helix, landed, and exploded.

"....."

Anna also stopped flying and landed. Looking across the flickering explosion, Nagare was unscathed.

"Hmm. Even though you just woke up, you are quite mastering the power of the King. I am impressed."

Conscious of the cold sweat running down her back, Anna returned the words.

"You do not understand the meaning of this power."

"Power itself has no meaning. Every holder of power gives it meaning."

"That's not all...!"

Anna clenched her fists. There, she gathered a crimson aura.

Seeing that, Nagare said as if he was warning.

"I see. In other words, you want to find meaning in it. Suoh Mikoto. Does the will of the previous "Red King" reside there?"

"....."

"I'm sorry, but that's an assumption. Suoh Mikoto and his will no longer exist anywhere in this world. He disappeared with his body. You're free to assume you've inherited it, but it's gone."

"No!"

Screaming, Anna kicked the ground.

The flame wings produced an explosive acceleration. Without hesitation, Anna hurled at Nagare the destructive supernatural energy that she had put into her small fist.

The fist was easily caught by Nagare's palm.

"No doubt."

Nagare laughed even more as he gently wrapped around Anna's fist.

"Because I am the same. I follow their ideas. The wishes of 700.000 people sleeping in that crater. Correct this world where the "King" randomly takes lives. I think they are still screaming from the bottom of the sea."

Using the fist that Nagare clenched as a pivot, Anna turned her body around and kicked him in the stomach with all her strength. Her small body flew back, and Nagare also took a few steps.

"Good."

Facing Anna, who landed and raised her fists, Nagare calmly spread his arms.

"We have confirmed our disagreements. Now let the game begin."

He unleashed his talent.

The supernatural energy that had been radiated indiscriminately began to take on a certain pattern. A mane of thunder wrapped around his head and claws of sparks covered his limbs. In the center of it is his heart, already lost in the hole in Nagare's chest. The mass of supernatural energy pulsing in the depths of his open chest continues to alter his "death".

Nagare is now trying to channel that energy into battle. He is trying to cut the "life" from her and fight according to his own will.

The situation reminded Anna of a word. That is to say...

"The... Thunder beast!"

Anna once again generated multiple flame swords and fired them in quick succession.

However, she did not hit Nagare. Leaning forward like a beast, he rushed forward and zigzagged through the rain. Glowing green claws thrust out to pull out Anna's heart.

"Ah...!"

Anna closed her wings of fire, barely blocking the attack. "Red" and "Green", two supernatural energies collided and annihilated each other creating a shock wave. In the wave of deadly energy that would have killed an ordinary person instantly, the two "Kings" cut and knotted, and flew while knotting.

It is not the life or death of each one that decides this party. The whereabouts of the "Dresden Slate", that relic that decides the fate of mankind, is what leads to victory or defeat. The "Kings" understood that accurately.

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Isana Yashiro's Sanctum floated in the air with its umbrella open in the cold air of the December night.

The interior of Mihashira Tower has been turned into a half-labyrinth due to the invasion of two "Jungle" members and the physical blockade of the "Chabudai Alliance". Unlike Nagare and Anna, Shiro who doesn't have an explosive exit was chasing them from the outer wall of the building.

The battle had already begun. Flashes of fire and lightning were reflected in the windows of the building.

"Anna and Hisui Nagare are fighting..."

"Shiro, look!"

It was Kuro who pointed above his head. He clung to the wall of a building with his Colorless ability, and Neko clung to his neck. At the point where he was pointing, in the sky above Mihashira Tower, two swords appeared as if they were fighting each other.

A red sword that looks like a burning flame and a cool green sword that looks like a roaring forest.

The two "Swords of Damocles" meant that the "Kings" collided with each other with all their might.

"Shiro! Let's hurry up and save Anna!"

Neko let out a hasty voice and Kuro nodded loudly. Nagare, who claims to be the strongest, is too heavy a burden for Anna. As soon as possible, Shiro must also participate in the war.

But...

"Wait a minute."

The reason why he muttered under his breath was because no matter how he looked at it, the calculation didn't add up.

Shiro understands better than anyone the conditions in which the "Sword of Damocles" appears. After all, he was the one who brought that formula into the world.

The nostalgic Konig plan. Sword-shaped Kouki that appears when an EX- α individual's W Deflection exceeds the threshold. Therefore, it is also a barometer that shows how serious the "King" is.

The point is that the "Sword of Damocles" appears only when the Weismann deviation from the "King" exceeds a certain percentage.

Nagare is fighting seriously. In fact, he possessed powers beyond Shiro's imagination, and the possibility that he was fighting while he suppressed energy from him disappeared with that.

By best estimate, Nagare's battery drains in less than five minutes. The inside of his head made a noise.

He doesn't know what Nagare is aiming for. After expending so much unrestrained energy, he hasn't been able to defeat even one of the "Kings". If Shiro was Nagare, they would have withdrawn by now. At this rate, it was obvious that he would be surrounded by three "Kings" and stopped.

Or is this also part of the plan?

Even if he runs out of energy and collapses, is there still "something" that leads him to victory?

"Shiro! Anna!"

Neko's voice crying brought Shiro out of the sea of thoughts.

The expressions of the countless people who once lost their lives in front of him flashed through his mind for a moment and disappeared. He wouldn't add Anna to one of them. He has the power to protect someone. This time, he decided to handle it completely.

"Come on!"

Shouting, Shiro kicked into the air. Kuro and Neko did the same.

It's good to think. It's okay to get lost. But don't just run away. Regardless of Hisui Nagare's intentions, Shiro decided so. So he just followed his heart.

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It's strict.

Nagare definitely thought so as he ran through the halls of Mihashira Tower like a meteor.

Of course, he was happy until now. For the first time in a long time, Nagare, who had been straitjacketed underground, was able to enjoy freedom. Just jumping and jumping and fully breathing was pretty fun.

But now he had a "playmate."

Anna Kushina, the flaming bird, the "Red Queen" was chasing Nagare who was running.

Despite her young age, her determination and disposition were exactly the vessel of a "King". With only a thought to protect her comrades, she challenged Nagare, who is far more powerful than her. You might laugh at her for being reckless due to her youth, but Nagare was familiar with that figure.

That night. It was like him, who challenged the "Golden King" even though he knew he couldn't win.

He was happy. So it was fun. The reason was that even though he knew that obtaining the "Dresden Slate" was a priority, he couldn't leave Anna alone.

As he ran, Nagare kicked the ground and danced in the air. With a movement that ignores the laws of physics, he twisted his body in the air and swing his arms at Anna.

The sparks emitted from both claws attacked Anna like a slash.

".....!"

Anna flapped her fiery wings and turned her body to dodge the attack. At the same time, she created a flaming sword and fire it. A direct hit would definitely result in a fatal injury. That was definitely "nice" for Nagare.

If he doesn't risk his life, he won't get true innovation.

Before long, at the end of the long corridor, the door of the "Slate Room" came into view.

Nagare narrowed his eyes. It's a hopeful, unlucky, mixed feeling. There is no doubt that therein lies his most sincere longing. Still, it was a shame that "moment" ended.

Looking back at Anna, who had caught up with him, Nagare confessed honestly.

"Sorry, Kushina Anna. Looks like my game with you ends here."

Anna's expression turned tense as if she sensed something with her sensitive ability.

The supernatural lightning energy that covered Nagare's entire body began to emit an abnormal glow. The pounding pulse abruptly increased his pace, and the electrical charge in the air created an unpleasant sizzle. Anna spread her flame wings and slammed to a halt, taking a great distance from Nagare.

And then, Nagare released his power.

Thunder several times more powerful than the "Raiko no Jutsu" exploded around Nagare. A storm of coffers that burns and destroys everything it touches. Driven back by a torrent of power that resembled the wrath of a god, Nagare opened the door with his own body.

And Nagare saw it.

The circular "Slate" embedded in the thick floor glass. The last hidden treasure that brings innovation to humanity.

The "Dresden Slate".

Nagare smiled involuntarily as he climbed to the top of his dream.

"I have finally arrived. It is the goal."

"No, there is no target."

A voice reached his ears.

When he looked at him, their eyes met. Eyes as if rationality and reason were condensed and hardened. While he is bathed in destructive energy, his expression is calm as if blown by a gentle breeze.

The "Blue King" Reisi Munakata.

His saber was stopping Nagare's body. Blue and green, two energies that push and cancel each other. Even with all of Nagare's power, he still couldn't defeat Munakata's saber.

No. It's different.

It was no longer "full power." His energy, his life, is rapidly losing his luster. Nagare knew that through his senses.

In an instant, the energy membrane that had covered Nagare's entire body was broken. Like light snow melting in the sunlight, he crumbled, and vanished from the surface at the contact of Munakata's blade.

The weight of "death" weighs on both shoulders.

Nagare suddenly changed the direction of his energy. He tried to direct all the energy that had gone haywire out, in, and expend all of his strength to survive.

Munakata did not miss that opportunity.

The saber gave off an intense glow, and the power formed by the blue supernatural ability acted as a "thrust force" instead of a "cutting force". Munakata then tossed Nagare's body, which had become defenseless, over his head like a baseball player hitting a home run ball.

Breaking through the multiple layers of the ceiling, Nagare's body rose up into the night sky.

Looking up at the brilliant pure white moon, Nagare smiled quietly.

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Isana Yashiro was the first to notice.

Above the Mihashira Tower, where multiple "Swords of Damocles"... "Red" and "Green" floating in the night sky were fighting each other, a new sword "Blue" appeared. Directly receiving that glow, the "Green" sword distorted, wavered, and finally disappeared.

"Finally... your battery is dead!"

Shiro kicked into the air and rose up. Running along the wall of the building, Kuro and Neko also followed.

Hisui Nagare's power has been exhausted. So far it was predictable.

No, he supposed that could be said to be too predictable. It was too self-explanatory, like throwing an object and it will fall over.

That's why Shiro couldn't stop the excitement.

If all of that is according to Hisui Nagare's plot.

Even if he desperately thinks, he can't read the plot. Maybe they were misinterpreting something in some ridiculous way. He couldn't control his anxiety.

Shiro thought so. He thought as he ran through the air. Through the gaping hole in the top floor of Mihashira Tower, they broke into the "Slate Room".

"Anna! Munakata-san!"

In the "Slate Room", things were already changing.

From the entrance, he could see Anna walking slowly inside. Her body seemed to be damaged and exhausted, but she still hadn't run out of energy. She looked up at Shiro, nodded slightly, and returned her eyes to the center of the room.

There were two "Kings" there.

"Blue King" and "Green King". Reisi Munakata and Hisui Nagare.

It was already resolved. Nagare had his exhausted body stretched out, and Munakata plunged a saber into his neck.

Looking towards Nagare, Munakata asked quietly.

"How was it, Hisui Nagare? Did you have as much fun as you wanted? You were like a beast, without intelligence or order."

While looking at Munakata, Nagare responded with a bright voice.

"Yes, it was a lot of fun, Reisi Munakata. And all humans are beasts. We are just individual creatures that are different from each other."

Then, Nagare shook his head and fixed his gaze on her.

"I'm sure you are too, Ameno Miyabi."

Everyone present saw Neko.

Neko shrugged. Gold and blue, two eyes wide open and blood pouring from her face. The expression on her face only expressed a feeling.

That means, fear.

"Wa-Wagahai is a cat!"

Saying that to cut him off, Neko hid on Kuro's back. As if by doing so she could cease to exist.

"Neko...?"

Even when Kuro asked worriedly, Neko just shook her head. Shiro observed the situation from within the Japanese umbrella.

On the other hand, Munakata looked back at Nagare.

"Ameno Miyabi, is that the real name of the girl that I couldn't find even with the investigation of "Scepter 4"? But isn't she too special to be an example for humans in general?"

"I think so because you're stupid. She's my compatriot. We redefine ourselves without being bound by our preconceived humanity. The way free spirit should be is the potential of being human. And now, me, who's closest to that ideal, I have come to receive the "Slate"."

A sarcastic smile appeared on Munakata's lips.

"Are you going to say that you are the one who deserves to be the administrator of the "Slate"? That is really arrogant."

Nagare also gave Munakata a quizzical look.

"That is a misunderstanding, Munakata Reisi. There can be no such thing as a "proper manager" for the "Dresden Slate". Arbitrarily trying to handle "it", the source of possibility, itself shows a lack of understanding of its essence. It's absurd."

"I see. Are you saying that the raison d'être of the "Slate" is not to administer power, but to invite chaos that simply unleashes it?"

"There is no such thing as "meaning". Only powerful people wield that power at will."

"Like Kagutsu Genji?"

That question stopped time in the "Slate Room".

Genji Kagutsu. The treacherous "King" who caused the worst burst of royal power in history.

Like Kagutsu, Hisui Nagare's origin is shrouded in mystery. No one knows how he came to be "King" before he suddenly appeared before the "Golden King" nine years ago.

However, due to his abnormal build, the hole in his chest, and the powerful energy he constantly radiates, Shiro speculated that Nagare was a victim of the Kagutsu Incident. During the great destruction caused by Kagutsu, wasn't Nagare chosen as the "King"?

If so, Munakata's question is too cruel.

And then, Nagare answered that question head on.

"Affirmative. I will give all humans the power to protect themselves from a "King" like Kagutsu Genji. Therefore, I don't care if I become Kagutsu himself."

His commanding and unwavering response showed that this was his true intention.

There is no change in the fact that Nagare is the "King" of the conspiracy that lurks in the depths of the Web. Many lives were lost by getting caught in the web.

But at its core, perhaps, it was an ideal that was as pure as a child.

For the first time, Munakata felt the true feelings of the hostile "King", but, even so, Munakata did not hesitate.

"But you're running out of power now. How do you view this situation?"

A brilliant blue blade touched Hisui Nagare's throat. If Munakata wanted to, he would be able to take Nagare's life right now.

"Hisui Nagare, you are already dead. According to the information from the "Silver King", your physical vitality is barely maintained thanks to the Green Clan's special ability. This is probably the reason why they can freely adjust their own athletic abilities."

Even so, Nagare did not show the slightest agitation. As if everything was going according to plan.

"However, if you run out of power, it's like this, a toy with a dead battery... No, it's supposed to be like a corpse. I don't think you're qualified to compete with me for ownership of the "Slate"."

Nagare looked at Munakata and smiled gently.

"That's right. But I'm not the one to fight you."

Saying that, Nagare added.

"Now... "He" will come the way that I made. He's my trump card."

"He?"

No one could understand who he was referring to. Hisui Nagare's trump card. It's neither Mishakuji Yukari, Gojou Sukuna, or Kotosaka. The final piece, probably known only to Nagare.

Isana Yashiro was the closest to an answer. The response to Nagare's plan was moving forward so they wouldn't get distracted. However, even if they knew there was "something", they didn't know what it was.

However, the footsteps of "him" had already begun to be heard.

Drifting, turning into a "gray" mist.

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"Come on! Anna's in danger! Show your guts on her!"

"Yes!"

Yata raised his fist and cheered them on as he raced down the hall on his skateboard. In response, the members of "Homura" let out a voice. The figure of them rushing towards the "Slate Room" together, towards the battlefield of the "Kings", was like a meteor shower of fireballs.

Slightly behind them, Kusanagi, Awashima, and the members of "Scepter 4" were running as well. Awashima muttered in amazement as he stared at "Homura" and the others.

"I'm really fine, even in this situation..."

Kusanagi responded with a smile.

"Since this is the situation, let's do it. At times like this, it's good to have Yata-chan."

"Vice Commander."

Akiyama, who was catching up, briefed Awashima.

"It seems that a problem has occurred in the supernatural network of the "Red King". We are having trouble communicating with the command vehicle."

Kusanagi's expression hardened and exchanged glances with Awashima. He didn't want to think that something happened to Anna.

(I can't imagine what kind of situation she will be in in the battle with Hisui Nagare. As soon as possible, we must arrive on the battlefield and support them.)

As soon as he thought that, Yata yelled and stopped.

"Gah!"

Kusanagi also stopped and looked at him.

A cloud of gray smoke.

No, that was...

"What is this... fog...? Watch out everyone!"

As he shouted a warning, Kusanagi turned his gaze to Awashima. If it can't be natural, then they have to think of it as interference from the enemy's supernatural powers. They had to work on corrective action immediately.

However, Awashima was not there.

Kusanagi widened his eyes and looked around. Yata, Kamamoto, and the "Homura" members, who had been in a good mood until a while ago, were nowhere to be seen.

"Yata! Kamamoto! Seri-chan!"

In the vague world of mist, Kusanagi raised his voice alone. But what returned was silence.

No.

There was only one thing that rang in his ears.

Katsun, katsun, the sound of someone's footsteps.

Behind the misty veil, the figures flickered. Someone was walking. He took a leisurely step, as if he were taking a walk, and he didn't seem to mind Kusanagi.

"Who the hell are you?!"

Kusanagi made a quick decision. He saw the figure as the source of the situation, the enemy. He created countless fireballs with his lighter and shot them out like a shotgun.

All those fireballs hit the figure.

And everything slipped.

"What?!"

He felt a figure laugh from beyond the mist.

But that was it. "It" did not stop, it went into the misty world and went back.

"What the hell is that guy?! Damn it, Anna!"

Kusanagi began to run in the direction where the shadow had disappeared. At the same time, he took out a marble from his pocket and looked at it.

The red glow, flickering faintly, was still on. Kusanagi spoke to him.

"Fushimi! Can you hear me?! What's going on now?!"

The marble flickered and Enomoto's voice echoed in his mind. It was imperfect, like a noisy radio transmission.

"There's an unknown Sanctum inside the tower...! It's a "King"!"

Only those words were clearly audible.

"What?!"

"Vertical Over... The "Sword of Damocles"!"

"Impossible! A fifth "King"!"

Kusanagi ground her teeth. All kinds of questions were resolved immediately. But he didn't have time to analyze it. Through the misty hallway he ran forward.

If Kusanagi had had time to look at the sky at that moment, he would have been in awe of its majesty.

Like when Fushimi jumped out of the command vehicle on the ground floor and looked up at the sky.

There was a "Sword of Damocles" floating in the "gray".

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The mist enveloped Shiro as if it had a will. As if to isolate each individual, entering the gaps between humans and trying to separate their existence.

"Shiro!"

With a weak voice, Neko came closer. Kuro also drew his sword and stood in front of Shiro. So that no matter what kind of person attacks, he will be cut down immediately.

"Ok. I'll be by your side."

Whispering softly, Shiro grabbed Neko's hand. Her cold, trembling hands meant that she was completely scared.

Regret stabbed into his chest. He wishes he had taken better care of her. Neko has always been afraid. She acts stubborn so they wouldn't understand her. He was distracted by Hisui Nagare's mysterious behavior and didn't see the signal.

He had to listen to Neko's story.

But before that, the situation itself must be dealt with.

"Munakata-san."

He called him as a warning. From that mist he could feel the signs of "blocking" and "rejection". But, the "Kings" are too big to hide. Just as no wall can hide mountains, Munakata's presence was firmly there.

Munakata spoke in a calm tone.

"I see, so you were behind Hisui Nagare's reckless actions and inexplicable self-confidence..."

At that moment, Munakata swung his saber to the side with imperceptible speed.

The blue phosphorescence dispersed, and his glow pierced through the mist itself.

A bored middle-aged man in a cassock appeared from the other side.

Shiro, however, recognized that face. He looks very tired and unshaven, but he's seen him.

That is to say...

"The Sixth King, the "Grey King", who is said to have died during the Kagutsu Incident..."

"Ah, wait a minute, Munakata. Human relations come first. I have something to tell you."

As if to interrupt Munakata, who was about to speak, he raised a hand.

"If it's about me, call me "Iwa-san"."

Saying that, he smiled.

CHAPTER 8: FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN THE DESPAIR

Once upon a time there was a clan called "Cathedral".

The total number of clan members was actually several thousand. With an entire city in southern Kanto as its territory, the clan, which idealized mutual benefit and mutual aid, functioned as a semi-independent country under the reign of the "Golden King" Kokujoji Daikaku.

The ruler of that kingdom was Otori Seigo. The "Grey King" responsible for "Protection".

Otori, who was an anonymous official, took the fact that he was chosen as "King" as some sort of revelation. God gave him that power to reach out to the less fortunate and protect the persecuted.

That's how he interpreted it.

Nobody gets hurt, nobody suffers. A cathedral guarded by the "King" chosen by God.

The sanctuary collapsed in a single day.

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Looking towards the dark hole, Otori muttered in a hollow voice.

"Kagutsu... what the hell did you do...?"

There is no answer for that anymore. In that hypocenter, the place where the center of "Cathedral" once stood, that man lost his life, and more than that, he dropped something even more sinister.

The "Sword of Damocles".

As if following Kagutsu's bottomless destructive impulse, the sword pierced through the heart of "Cathedral". The largest recorded "Kingdom Burst" burned and killed everything within, turning it into a deep, dark pit.

Until just a day ago, there were countless people there. There were countless families. There were countless smiles, happiness, the warmth of snuggling and holding hands.

Now there is nothing.

Cold sea water began to flow into the huge hole. Someday this place will become a bay. Swallowing countless corpses and whole souls, sinking their pain of death and regret to the bottom.

Otori could only stare dumbfounded at the remains of his ideal.

He finally got to his feet and turned around.

The cities that stretched out at the foot of the Kanto plain had turned into piles of rubble.

When the "Sword of Damocles" fell, the hypocenter turned into a huge hole. However, the destruction caused by Kagutsu's death did not stop there. A deadly shock wave spread out and swept through the city on the edge. Very few civilians would have survived the furious explosion.

There must be some still alive, even if only a few.

Believing that, Otori began to walk.

There were many things that were people.

There was a girl who had her limbs torn off. There was a boy who lost his mind. There was a mother and baby who had miraculously retained their original form, but had died.

Otori could only walk through seemingly endless time, seemingly endless hell.

"If someone is alive, please answer! Is there anyone...? Is there no one here...?"

Otori's voice echoed in vain. He really knew.

What he wanted to save was not "someone", but himself.

"Please... someone answer...!"

Otori didn't notice that his desperate face was wet with tears. The "King", whose salvation was once sought by hundreds of thousands of people, is now seeking those who seek salvation. Because he knew that saving someone would be his own salvation.

At that time, if he could save even one person from now on, surely, his power would have meaning.

He suddenly came into view.

A lonely child lying in the cracks under the collapsed building.

"Hey, stay strong! Are you alive?"

Shouting, Otori ran down from the pile of rubble and clung to the building. As a "King" with supernatural powers, he put all of his strength into it and raised a building that seemed to weigh tens of tons. Above Otori's head, a shining "Sword of Damocles" appeared.

"Guh...!"

Gritting his teeth, Otori shook the rubble of the building with such force that his feet sank into the ground.

A boy appeared below.

A sharp piece of rock pierced his small back.

Otori knelt down on the spot.

"Not good... Even a child like this... Is this the ideal ending I was looking for? What is the meaning of the power of the "King" who can't save even a child?"

With trembling fingers, Otori touched the necklace. The symbol of the God he once prayed to.

But that feeling was not accompanied by any emotion. Faith, reverence, nothing. What he felt at his fingertips was nothing more than inorganic metal.

Otori realized that his faith had disappeared from within him. There is no God. Even if they are not interested in themselves. Neither God-given power nor God himself could save anyone.

Biting his lip, Otori looked down at the boy's tragic corpse.

The corpse suddenly began to glow.

".....?!"

Otori widened his eyes. The glow from him was green. So this boy is a survivor of the Green Clan?

That was what he thought, but he soon realized that this was not the case.

"Coronation". This is the phenomenon when a person becomes a "King".

He thoughtfully looked up. It was exactly what Otori expected.

"The green "Sword of Damocles"...?!"

Otori looked back at the boy. In the green glow, the dead boy was slowly opening his eyes.

He had no doubt. This boy is neither a member of the Green Clan nor a corpse.

A new "Green King" was about to be born.

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Five swords floated in the night sky.

Their presence, which seemed to press down on the white moon, was beyond majestic to the point of being comical. If all those swords fall, the world will probably end. Fushimi never imagined that he would witness something like a Hollywood movie called "World in Crisis".

Enomoto leaned out from the command car and muttered anxiously.

"What's wrong, Fushimi-san? A fifth "Sword of Damocles"... wasn't that four kings?"

It wasn't Enomoto he clucked at. This situation, by itself...

"This is not good. What is the result of the observation?"

"Compared to the beginning, it is more stable. However, there is still interference on the top floor..."

He looked inside the vehicle. Observations made by Anna's supernatural network were displayed as they were on the screen. The green glow that had dominated most of the building now seemed to give way to a gray mist.

Enomoto asked as he pointed to the last one to show up.

"What color is that...?"

"It's not gold or colorless, so there's only one left. I didn't expect it."

Silver. Golden. Red. Blue. Green. Colorless. The rest of the color is "Gray", as is the fog that surrounds the observation point.

"Oh, the green disappears!"

"Weismann's deviation from the Fifth King is rapidly declining!"

At the same time as Enomoto, the vehicle staff gave a report. A noise ran through the green Damocles, and disappeared like lightning that ran and disappeared for a moment. Looking at him, Fushimi asked a question inside the vehicle.

"What is the Weismann deviation of the new King?"

"He still maintains a high number! This... perhaps it can exceed the Captain's Weismann deviation...!"

Thinking of what he saw, Fushimi leaned over the command vehicle and took a deep breath.

The "newcomer" is full of energy, but the "Red Queen" has been exhausted from fighting Hisui Nagare, and the "Blue King" is cracked. Everything will depend on how long the last one, the "Silver King", can hold out.

"Damn. It's troublesome..."

Muttering, Fushimi began to simulate the future in his head.

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At first glance, he was a middle-aged man who was unkempt.

His hair was disheveled and stubbled, and his worn cassock was wrinkled, as if it hadn't been ironed. With a loose, sloppy mouth and carefree gaze, it's hard to imagine that he was ruling a single kingdom.

But still...

Munakata had accurately measured the strength of the man in front of him.

"The biggest and worst case of the overthrow of royal power that occurred at the end of the last century, the Kagutsu Incident. The Sixth King, the "Grey King", who was believed to have died as collateral damage..."

As he muttered, Munakata put strength into the hand that held the saber.

The ability of the "Grey King", which has been silent for many years, could possibly surpass itself.

"I have to say that I was very surprised that this man survived and became the mastermind behind the Green Clan."

Iwafune shrugged and smiled, as if he could see Munakata's heart.

"No, Munakata. The man named Otori Seigo certainly died at that time."

Even so, his eyes weren't smiling.

"What's in front of you now is Iwafune Tenkei, a flightless chicken who lives in "Jungle" and acts as the father of the "Green King" Hisui Nagare. It doesn't seem like much of a mastermind, I'm just an old man."

This time it was Munakata's turn to laugh.

Munakata certainly sensed this as he fixed his gaze on Iwafune.

"A misty Sanctum that possesses the attribute of "absolute protection"... while displaying your power like this, it's easy to tell that you're a simple man."

Mist rolled from under his feet.

Slowly, but at a certain speed, the mist thickened. Enveloping Hisui Nagare, who was lying on the ground, his figure gradually faded away. It would be useless to swing the saber. Fog cannot be cut or traversed.

When he muttered to himself that this was the "Green King's" trump card, he heard a laugh coming from somewhere.

"I win. Reisi Munakata."

Hisui Nagare, who should have been at Munakata's feet, suddenly found himself on Iwafune's shoulders.

Munakata's eyes narrowed. As he did so, the mist continued to thicken. The mysterious voices of Neko and Kuro echoed from somewhere.

"Nya? This feels a little weird!"

"This is...!"

Their voices were coming from different places, not from the direction they should have been.

Information about the "Grey King" was sparse even in the database. Munakata doesn't even know the details and principle of his "absolute protection" ability.

However, he was able to predict to some extent from Hisui Nagare's recovery move just now and the gap between the two's voices.

That is to say...

"Not good! Don't stop!"

Anna created wings of fire again. The flames that turned into spinning swords were shot towards Iwafune in quick succession.

All of that was blocked by a wall of mist.

".....!"

From the other side of the dense mist, a muzzle with a dull glow appeared. He is standing upright, facing Anna. Anna took a deep breath, stiffened.

"Anna!"

Shiro jumped in front of her.

He placed a special field on the closed Japanese umbrella, and the fired bullets were repelled one by one. The ricocheting bullet flew in another direction, brushing past Kuro and Neko. The bullet must have been imbued with supernatural power, and a huge hole was blown in the wall where the bullet landed, and he was able to see the night sky beyond.

From beyond the mist, Iwafune's voice echoed out.

"Haha, that's right, "Silver King". You must take care of the princess!"

Shiro didn't care. He looked up and yelled.

"Kuro! Take care of Neko! Get away from there!"

"Huh?! No, Shiro! Wagahai will be with you!"

Kuro held the body of Neko who was about to reach him. Despite his anguished expression, he remained loyal to his master's orders. He held onto Neko and flew away from the mist.

The fog thickened even more.

Neither Kuro nor Neko nor Munakata nor Iwafune could be seen. Shiro deployed his supernatural field and protected Anna from the mist.

"Anna. Are you okay?"

Anna nodded helplessly. However, her face had lost all blood and her breathing was shallow. It was too much force. It was only natural, since she single-handedly waged the battle with Hisui Nagare.

"More than me, Reisi..."

Shiro gritted his teeth and deployed the supernatural field at maximum output.

There was an answer. With all the power of the "Silver King" that governs "immutability", it seemed that that mist could be partially nullified.

However, if he did, the "Grey King" could target Anna.

Anna seemed like she could no longer move. If he hits him with his attack, he won't be able to stay still. He didn't want to think that Otori Seigo, who once professed compassion, would target the children, but is now Iwafune Tenkei. He had no idea what to do.

Besides, someone could die in front of him.

That alone was unacceptable.

"Yashiro...!"

Anna let out a guilty voice. However, Shiro slowly shook his head and began to deploy his supernatural field for defense.

"...Munakata-san."

Shiro couldn't do anything but whisper "I'm sorry" and pray for their safety.

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"Heavenly Wolf" absorbed the blue supernatural power and glowed brightly. Raising his saber, which glowed brightly even in the gray mist, Munakata swung his sword on top and slashed straight at Iwafune's head.

However, what was ahead was the steel Iwafune was holding, the barrel of a revolver. That itself must be a supernatural power control mechanism, the barrel glowed dully and stopped the blue blade.

Two lights, blue and gray, scattered like small sparks. Munakata frowned and Iwafune smiled and aimed his revolver without releasing the pressure.

The barrel was positioned perfectly against Munakata's forehead.

If he had slowed down for a second, there would be a hole in Munakata's forehead. Still in a low stance, Munakata had his saber at his side. Furthermore, if it had been a moment earlier, Iwafune's stomach would have been cut open.

At this time, Iwafune had already jumped into the distance.

A thick mist soon enveloped his body. Munakata fired a slashing attack with the supernatural power he put into his saber. The flying blue sword arrived where Iwafune should have been and was deflected.

As expected, Iwafune's voice rang out at the same time.

"Hey, where are you aiming?"

A shot rang out along with a mocking voice. Annoyingly, they came from different directions. Although the place he emitted from should be the same.

As he fired bullets, Munakata did not try to find Iwafune's location. He knew that it would be useless to do so.

Iwafune's "absolute protection" ability is shrouded in mystery.

It's probably a spatial warp ability.

In the gray mist, Iwafune twists the world itself. By distorting space, light, sound and all kinds of energy are transferred from where they should be to another.

Shiro, Anna, Kuro, Neko and Hisui Nagare. The person who should have been there is not there and the person who should not have been there is. Munakata's slash attack was deflected instead of being blocked. If they were doing it right, they would never make it to Iwafune.

It is possible to break through with such "absolute protection" and "order"!

As he pondered, Munakata opened his mouth to fire a sighting shot.

"Are you attacking by hiding in the mist? It's a petty way of fighting, befitting a man who lost his clan, changed his name, and survived only by hiding in the ground."

"I don't care what you say. I've already given up pride. It doesn't hurt or sting."

A voice came directly from above.

A voice resounding from a blatantly abnormal place, either because he knew his hands were exposed or because he didn't care that he knew.

"The Gray Clan "Cathedral", at its peak, was a powerful clan that wielded power second only to the Gold Clan "Tokijikuin". The one who led "Cathedral" was the "Grey King" Seigo Otori. Possessed of strength and virtue, it is said to be a masterpiece that was widely admired not only by clansmen, but also by the general public."

"Haha. That's why it's not such a splendid thing."

The voice came from right behind Munakata.

When he reflexively turned around, he could see a shadowy figure walking away. Despite that, the sound of footsteps could still be heard from behind.

Obviously, he was making fun of him.

Munakata raised his voice.

"Fourteen years ago, I led the clansmen in an attempt to prevent Genji Kagutsu's Sword of Damocles from falling, but I was unable to stop it and the clan was wiped out. It was an unprecedented catastrophe with 700,000 dead, including civilians."

The footsteps stopped.

Around the same time, Munakata fully expanded his supernatural field. In an instant, the randomly twisted world was reconfigured under "order", and Iwafune peered through the mist.

"So you left your old self back then with the people you couldn't save then!"

Missing no chance, Munakata fired a blue slash from his saber.

The straight cut, however, was distorted and deflected by the dense fog that had gathered in front of Iwafune. Leaving only a smile on his face, Iwafune hid behind the wall of mist again.

"Well, let's see. After all, it's an old story."

"Why did you decide to join Hisui Nagare and appear on stage at this time?"

A shot rang out instead of an answer. One shot from directly above, one from behind, and one from the side. Munakata blocked them all with his saber.

He didn't feel any hostility or killing intent. Everything lay beyond a vague mist.

It seems that only words can be delivered to each other.

"If the world proposed by Hisui Nagare were to come true, society would fall into chaos and there would undoubtedly be many victims. I don't think it's your idea to go along with such a barbaric act to save humanity and create an ideal paradise. Did the Kagutsu incident make you so depressed?"

"Ideal paradise, huh."

Iwafune's voice was mocking.

"The "King" does not have the power to create such a thing. Both you and I are being rolled on this stubborn "Slate". Except for "that guy" who is trying to "roll" the "Slate"."

Iwafune was laughing beyond the thick gray mist.

Recklessly empty. As if to say that the gray world where nothing can arrive is the place where the "King" arrives.

As if he denied it, Munakata swung his saber again.

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Anna let out a shaky breath.

The battle between the two "Kings" airs like an earth-shaking clash. She was too weak to bear it. Shiro stretched out his arms to support the unsteady Anna.

"Anna, are you okay? Are you cold?"

Anna nodded slightly and closed her eyes.

"What a cold mist... is this the depth of this person's despair...?"

The responsiveness of her, the power to see through, which she further enhanced by becoming a "King", she could clearly see through him.

A man in a cassock grins hollowly beyond the mist. He has a hole in his chest. A big, wide, dark hole that swallows everything.

Unlike Hisui Nagare, there was nothing in the hole. He can't feel any pulse of energy, any longing for the future. However, he is filled with cold despair.

Hugging Anna's shoulders to keep her warm, Shiro muttered pitifully.

"The "Grey King", Seigo Otori. I heard from the lieutenant that he was a pacifist who hated conflict, but when it came time to fight, his force stood shoulder to shoulder with the "Blue King" Habari Jin and the "Red King" Genji Kagutsu. Munakata-san..."

"Yashiro. From now on, take care of Reisi..."

Anna pleaded. She didn't want to be a nuisance. She herself is a "King". She is no longer just an existence that leans on someone.

Suddenly, a stray bullet flew out from beyond the mist. Shattered debris fell on the two who avoided it at a dangerous point. Shiro quickly opened his umbrella to protect Anna from the pouring rain.

Shiro said in a reluctant but firm tone.

"No. I can't leave you alone now."

Anna clenched her fists in frustration. She hated her helplessness.

That person would surely rise up and face any situation. Seeing Munakata struggling, she must have laughed a bit and punched the mist with her fist.

After all, she couldn't be like Mikoto.

That was so frustrating and lonely.

And, beyond the mist, he saw something that glowed. It wasn't a supernatural power, it was an ultimate brilliance of matter. The heavy hanging cables gleamed in the light.

At the same time, a strange sound echoed in Shiro and Anna's ears. They soon realized it was the sound of approaching helicopter rotors, tearing through the air.

Shiro looked up and yelled.

"Damn! The rooftop!"

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Iwafune walked through the mist.

He fired a gun as he walked. The revolver's barrel, which has a long, hollow frame, was broken to expose the barrel, into which the bullets are loaded one by one.

Iwafune didn't even see Munakata's slashing attack. The mist that gathered semi-automatically distorted the supernatural energy and deflected it upwards. The "absolute protection" mist deflects almost all attacks and nothing can reach Iwafune.

After loading the bullets and folding the barrel, Iwafune smiled wryly.

Almost everything was ready.

Iwafune casually held his gun and pulled the trigger. Roar and shock. Munakata, who was beyond the mist, repelled the bullet. Before he could confirm that, Iwafune opened his mouth.

"Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, unable to do anything, were shocked and died. If each of us has power, we can't just face death without resistance. You can resist with your own responsibility. That's the kind of world that Nagare It's about to explode."

The objection came back with a cutting attack.

"What nonsense! Humans who have suddenly acquired power beyond their control will simply show their power and kill each other, a foolish and chaotic world will come. Society needs order and someone to run it. A world of order and intelligence is a beautiful ideal world."

Sweet precision. Not even covered by mist. Iwafune dodged it by tilting his face.

"Haha. It smells blue, absolutely. Wow, just the "Blue King"?"

Iwafune pulled the trigger while he smiled.

"Hey, Munakata. You've never seen hell, right?"

Another chance. Munakata took it.

"You've never walked through hell, right?"

One more shot. Munakata dodged.

"The reason you can't do that is because you have power. That's because you're a "King". If you were just a human being, and it fell on you or someone you care about, you'd think, "Why me?", "I want power"."

Iwafune walked as he fired his gun. A misty world with dark eyes.

The former Iwafune would have agreed with what Munakata said. That's because Iwafune was the "King". Because he believed himself to be omnipotent.

But no, the "King" is not omnipotent.

Iwafune, or rather, the "kings" who lived at that time, realized this. A monster named Kagutsu Genji taught them that they were nothing more than super-humans.

You cannot make wishes come true, you cannot protect anything, you cannot save anyone.

"The reason why you really believe that you can create an ideal world with your own power is because you are a young man, Munakata, and you haven't experienced any setbacks yet."

So, Iwafune walked slowly and appeared in front of Munakata.

Munakata's eyes widened in surprise, but before he could flash his saber, the hilt of the revolver he held in his inverted hand sank into his belly.

"Only for the "Blue King"?"

"What...?!"

Groaning, Munakata staggered back a few steps. It would have been easy to take him down by stabbing more, but Iwafune didn't do that and raised his hand.

"Ah, it's a bit crazy."

He folded the revolver up again and began to load the bullets.

Munakata was looking at that relaxed state of mind with frustration.

"Don't try too hard, young man. This is the advice of an old man. If you set your ideals too high, you'll also get frustrated, right?"

"I have no intention of engaging in useless talk!", Munakata shouted.

A full blow with a saber, but he was still blocked by a gray wall. Iwafune walked away from Munakata,

"Resuming hide and seek, I won't let you use that move so easily!"

He could feel Munakata's superpower swell.

He was surprised. The gray mist was neutralized by the supernatural field focused on Munakata. Correcting the twisted world to what it should be, it was as if "order" was glowing, but...

Iwafune prepared a revolver loaded with bullets.

"Don't overdo it. Are you feeling better?"

He was no longer going to hide in the mist. because there was no need for it.

"It's useless to use all your strength against a weak opponent. It's high tide here too."

The gray mist accumulated in the muzzle of the revolver. All the skills that were used only for defense until now were converted to attacks. Contradictions like attacking with

"absolute protection" are nice, but if a shield is hit with full force, it can become a deadly weapon to beat people to death.

The exhausted Munakata did not have the strength to withstand all of Iwafune's might.

It was something they both knew. Both Iwafune and Munakata are a kind of "King". They could imagine what would happen from here on out.

Despite that, there was no despair in Munakata's eyes.

He looked calmly and intellectually at his impending defeat, his frustration, and Iwafune.

As if to say it would never break.

Iwafune smiled and pulled the trigger.

A bullet with a high output supernatural ability was fired in a straight line.

Munakata reacted to that. The saber, which also glowed with extraordinary power, turned around and caught it with his blade. But no bullets were fired. As he distorted the physical phenomena around him, he continued to advance until all of his supernatural energy was used up.

Munakata's saber broke at the same time that supernatural power was exhausted.

Half of the saber and the spent bullet fell to the ground at the same time.

"....."

Iwafune shrugged and met Munakata's eyes.

What was floating in the night sky looking up from the hole was exactly what Hisui Nagare had planned. And beyond that, the shining blue "Sword of Damocles" loomed.

The sword of the "King", which was defeated in tatters and looked like it could break at any moment.

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He thought he was asleep for a while.

Beneath his closed eyelids, Nagare sensed several things. The sound of helicopter rotors hitting the air. The smell of gunpowder and dust that tickled his nose. The night wind blew through his hair and he felt the presence he had been yearning for all this time.

Source of eccentricity. An original miracle. God's pedestal that allows people to evolve to the next stage.

"The Dresden Slate."

A familiar voice sounded in his ear.

"Ok, Munakata! The fact that I went out with you and acted like a little chanbara was just to buy time to get this guy out."

Nagare slightly opened his eyes and looked to the side of him.

The familiar stubble looked down with a beaming smile.

It was thanks to him that he was able to sleep. Nagare thought so. Nagare's "trump card", the "Grey King", but also a member of the "Jungle" clan, the human Iwafune Tenkei, who is also like a father.

Nagare trusted Iwafune so much that he could leave everything else to him and go to sleep.

"...Iwa-san."

When he called out to Iwafune in a weak voice, he met Nagare's eyes. With a smile, he laid him down and lay back cross-legged.

"Oh, Nagare. You did it."

"Yes. I understand. Thank you."

As he felt the coldness of the "Dresden Slate" on his cheeks, Nagare certainly laughed as well.

They finally achieved "Jungle's" cherished wish to seize the "Dresden Slate" which had been kept secret by the "Golden King".

Beneath the helicopter's rotor in the sky, swaying on a "Slate" suspended from cables, Iwafune gazed out at the bright lights of the city. Taking a can of beer from his pocket in his cassock, he opened the lid and held it lightly.

"Merry Christmas. This is a present from Iwa-san to you who have been a good boy for nine years. It's too big to put in a sock."

As he said that happily, Iwafune took a sip of his beer.

Nagare, who was looking at him, said to Iwa.

"Iwa-san. I want to drink too. Give me a sip."

"Eh?"

Iwafune frowned curiously, but quickly smiled.

"Well, it's good that you remember the taste of sake, Nagare. Here you go."

He put beer on Nagare's lips and tilted him. The bursting carbonic acid touched Nagare's tongue.

"How is it? What do you think?"

"...Bitter and bad. It's incomprehensible."

Iwafune laughed again at Nagare's scowl.

"It's a boring impression if you use it as a reason for victory."

"Yes. After all, this one suits me better."

Nagare looked down at the "Dresden Slate". It could be seen that the energy consumed was quickly recovered. That was probably due to direct contact with the "Dresden Slate". If they manage to deepen their analysis and fully connect with the "Slate", there will be nothing on earth that can stop them.

The glorious future that he had glimpsed was instantly erased by Nagare.

"Besides, we haven't won yet. They will try to get it back. Now it's our turn to defend."

"Ha. Then leave it to me, it's my job to protect you."

Suddenly, Iwafune frowned as if he had bitten into something sour.

He raised the beer to his mouth to wash it down and smiled distantly.

"If it's about you, I can protect you."

Iwafune looked down. As if he was afraid that Nagare would see his eyes.

Nagare nodded. Iwafune is similar to Nagare, but he is actually a bit different. Nagare lost everything, but Iwafune lost something to protect.

But this is not a fight to recover what was lost.

It's a battle to grab a new dream.

Iwafune looked at Nagare. The light that shone in those eyes. Laughing, he raised the beer can again and looked at the helicopter hovering overhead.

"...By the way, how should I scale this?"

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"Communications restored! No fog effect in sight!"

"The Weismann deviation is rapidly decreasing! It's vertical below!"

Fushimi narrowed his eyes as he listened to the reports from the command car.

"...That kind of thing you can tell just by looking at it."

He muttered in a voice only he can hear and breathed out softly.

There was no sword in heaven anymore.

When the tide receded, the five "Swords of Damocles" disappeared one after another. First green, then blue, then gray, silver, and red, they all disappeared as if they were holding their spears.

The battle of the "Kings" was over.

He didn't even need to hear about the outcome of victory or loss. The helicopter that flew away was undoubtedly the "Dresden Slate". The sound of the receding helicopter rotor was like the triumphant voice of a conqueror.

They had lost.

Then Fushimi thought: "I have to find out how much we lost."

"Isn't the monitor recovered yet?! Make sure the Captain is safe!"

As he gave the order to the command vehicle, Enomoto's panicked voice returned.

"Yes! I will send staff to the "Slate Room" immediately!"

"The ban on electronic communication has been lifted! Contact the air traffic control room in Suzugaya and request that that helicopter, which flew away from Mihashira Tower, be tracked down!"

"I understand!"

At that time, a report from another member surfaced.

"We received a call from Vice Commander Awashima!"

"Contact me with her."

After telling him briefly, Awashima's voice echoed over the radio near his ear.

"This is Awashima speaking. We have now reached the "Slate Room", and have confirmed the safety of the Captain and the other "Kings". There is wear, but there is no threat to life."

"...Is that so."

It seems that the other side is also sweeter than he expected. If that was his intention, they could have taken Munakata's life. The reason why he didn't do that was to avoid the charge of Munakata's second dance, by killing the "King". Is it because he decided that he shouldn't take on that burden, even if it left him worrying about his future?

Or does it mean that now that they have obtained the "Slate", they don't even have to worry about it?

With a click of his tongue, Fushimi reported the situation to Awashima.

"I've done everything I can to fix it. I've restored electronic communication, so I'll leave the rest to the Vice Commander. I'll be in charge of tracking the helicopter."

"...Ah. I understand."

After saying that, Awashima hung up.

Awashima's voice was filled with equal parts relief and regret. She was relieved that Munakata was safe, but she had nothing to do with it. She regretted that.

He almost laughed. But he shouldn't have laughed. This is what a clansman should be, an ideal subject. Thinking of the "King", wishing for his safety and trying to grant that sentence.

He wondered if that was so.

He doesn't know. What he was about to do from now on was undoubtedly Munakata's orders, but he was not thinking of Munakata.

Because he worked. He will do it because it is worth doing.

"You should get insurance."

Fushimi snorted.

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Then dawn came.

Awashima returned to the ground floor and squinted into the dazzling morning sun. She was exhausted from running all night, but she didn't allow herself the luxury of sleep. She still she had to lead "Scepter 4".

"Prioritize getting the wounded out! Are there any wounded still inside the tower?"

"There are some people we can't get in touch with! Rescue teams are currently searching!"

"There is a risk of internal collapse. The rescue team must work with caution!"

There was a lot to do. It doesn't matter if it's a war or not, someone has to deal with the consequences, win or lose.

Awashima ordered herself to do it.

Busy on her feet and working, however, Awashima refused to look at that corner.

A man sat in a transport vehicle.

Reisi Munakata.

The "Blue King", the Boss of "Scepter 4". Originally, he should be the one standing in the front. Under his orders, Awashima rushed through the post-processing. This is how it should have been.

However, after the battle was over, Munakata didn't even try to say a single word.

Since he was able to stand on his own two feet and go down there, there shouldn't be any abnormalities in his body. First of all, she should feel relieved.

But what about his heart?

Doesn't that tattered blue sword mean Munakata's ideals have been shattered?

"Vice Commander. A report from Suzugaya."

Suddenly, Akiyama's voice rang out and Awashima snapped back to reality.

"What happened to that helicopter?"

"That said, the fog seems to interfere not only with visual observation but also with radar, making it impossible to track."

"I see... Anyway, continue the search with all your might."

"Yes."

With a wave, he left the scene. As expected, Akiyama and Benzai didn't show any problem even in that situation. Accepting the fact of defeat as it is, they began to move towards the next thing.

Awashima bit her lip and caught herself. She thought that she should do that too. Like a tireless precision machine, she has to do what she has to do.

"Information team, hurry up and analyze the footage! Consolidate the reports with Fushimi! The squad that suppressed the "Jungle" riots will continue to interrogate and investigate."

Awashima gave instructions one after another as she chided the withering feelings.

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Standing in the hallway, a sense of defeat filled Shiro's heart.

There is a huge hole in the center of the floor. What has been there for a long time no longer exists. A miraculous relic that he himself discovered and was protected by Kokujoji, the "Dresden Slate".

That was stolen.

(Sorry. Lieutenant.), Shiro thought.

He closed his eyes in silence and apologized in his heart to his old friend who was no longer in this world. He knew that no matter how much he apologized, he would not be forgiven, but he felt that if he didn't, he would shrink away from his apology.

Suddenly, he heard two voices behind him.

"Shiro... are you alright?"

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

Kuro and Neko, the only two members of Shiro's clan.

Shiro helplessly turned around and laughed. Or he pretended to laugh.

"Haha... I don't know what to do. Actually, I'm lost too. I didn't think I had a joker like that. It was my mistake."

The "Grey King" Iwafune Tenkei.

He even hoped that Nagare had a trump card. However, it was beyond Shiro and Munakata's imagination that the true identity was the "King" himself. Iwafune, who is believed to have been killed in the Kagutsu incident, was on Hisui Nagare's side. No, judging from the relationship between the two, Iwafune himself may have been the one who raised Nagare.

With a soft smile, Shiro shrugged.

"I suppose one of Hisui Nagare's mysterious backgrounds has been revealed. The price was quite high, but..."

"Don't say unreliable things, Shiro."

Kuro encouraged him and stepped forward.

"There's no time to be depressed. Of course, you're going to get the "Slate" back, right?"

"Get it back, huh?"

Shiro's voice in response resembled a sigh.

"The Lieutenant risked his life for more than half a century to keep it under control, and after his death, Munakata took over and controlled the power of the "Slate". But now, it's only a matter of time before that power is released to the world."

"What will happen if he does? Will they all be naked?"

At Neko's simple question, Shiro involuntarily broke out. Kuro made his eyes triangular and he grabbed Neko's head.

"Idiot. We're serious."

"Boo. I was trying to cheer Shiro up."

Neko puffed out her cheeks and tried to resist. With a kind look, he watched the two of them playing like cat and dog.

Kusanagi and Anna approached Shiro.

"Shiro-san. Let's go out now. There are wounded here too."

"Ah... yes. Thanks for your hard work."

Somewhat awkwardly, Shiro bowed to Kusanagi. Kusanagi doesn't blame Shiro for his attitude, but he is the one who planned this strategy and led them. He was definitely responsible for them.

Then he realized that Anna was staring at him. The "King's" gaze, which possessed great reaction ability, seemed to see through the hesitation within him.

"It's not over yet. There must be more we can do. We're not giving up."

Facing Anna, who said that in a low voice, Shiro also gave her a small reply.

"Yes, that's right. There is still a way..."

Anna nodded and then turned on her heel. Kusanagi also lightly waved her hand and left the "Slate Room" with her.

After dismissing him, Shiro turned around and looked at Neko.

".....? What's wrong, Shiro?"

Neko blinked curiously. Her innocent expression felt painful at that moment. He thought about how to start it and how to avoid scaring Neko, but still he couldn't help but mention her name.

"Hey, Neko. That thing Hisui Nagare said about..."

Neko was surprised.

Neko's shoulders trembled. Fear appeared in her wide-open eyes, and her gaze gave Shiro pain.

But it was a pain he had to face. Until now, Shiro has never had the purpose of facing Neko. Regardless of her identity or her origins, he thought that Neko should just be Neko.

But he won't do that anymore.

If he doesn't face her properly, he probably can't face Hisui Nagare.

"He said your name, right? If I remember correctly..."

"No!!!"

With a bursting voice, Neko cried.

Kuro looked at Neko in surprise. Neko also flinched at her own loud voice.

Then Neko smiled awkwardly.

"W-Wagahai is a cat! I don't have a name!"

Perhaps those words are not true.

But she wasn't acting either. Shiro sensed in Neko's behavior something akin to an obsession, like, "It must be like this".

It's as if they've been imbued with the words, "It doesn't matter who it is."

"Neko."

As Shiro gently approached, Neko jumped back like a wounded animal and kept her distance from him.

It was unprecedented. For Neko, the place next to Shiro was supposed to be the safest place. But now she looks at him with fear as if she is looking at a monster.

"...No."

"Neko, tell me..."

"No way!!"

With a high pitched voice, Neko disappeared.

Ability to manipulate recognition. It would have been easy for Shiro, the "King", to nullify Neko's supernatural powers, but he didn't. It won't work if she doesn't come out of her own free will, instead of ripping off the lid.

"Neko. I'm on your side, so tell me what you're afraid of."

Unanswered. Or maybe she wasn't there anymore. Even so, Shiro continued to raise his voice.

"I'll never give up on you! So please let me talk! Anytime, I want to face it with you!"

Again, there was no response.

He breathed out silently and lowered his head, then Kuro called out to him.

"What's up, Shiro?"

Shiro looked up and shook his head weakly.

"Neko has always acted strangely. She was scared about something and she woke up in the middle of the night."

"...Oh."

"Maybe Neko is afraid of Hisui Nagare. To be more exact, "something", he knows who Neko really is, I guess."

"Oh, really...?"

Kuro frowned curiously.

Perhaps that feeling was beyond Kuro's understanding. Yatogami Kuro is Yatogami Kuro and has never been anything else. He wonders if she remembers exactly where she was born and how she spent her time.

But Neko is not like that.

"To us, Neko has always just been Neko. She's a mysterious girl who claims to be a cat. But that's not true. Neko must have a common name. She must have a proper first and last name. There must have been people who called her that way, and a home that was built for them."

"That's right."

"Do you think she remembers that?"

Shiro looked directly at Kuro and asked.

Kuro spent more time with Neko than with Shiro. For a year, Kuro and Neko had been looking for Shiro. During that time, Kuro should have been watching Neko in her way. Shiro wanted to know the results.

"...I don't understand."

Finally, Kuro shook his head.

"I never heard from her about her home or her family. I've heard about what she used to do, but only when she roamed around like a real wild cat."

"Yes. I thought the reason she didn't talk about her house was that she just didn't want to. But maybe Neko doesn't really remember who she is."

Kuro's doubts seemed to deepen.

"But that is..."

"Yes. Of course, if that's the case, Neko's attitude is strange. Normally, people who don't know about their past want to know about it. Just like me."

What came back vividly in his mind was that rainy day when he returned home with Kuro and Neko.

The family home that should have been, the family that should have been, no longer existed. There was a public facility, a dome-shaped playground.

Shiro still remembers the feeling of losing his feet at that time. The fear of being confronted with the fact that a person named Isana Yashiro does not exist anywhere.

That's why Shiro knows about Neko's abnormalities. There's no way someone who knows nothing about himself could behave so innocently.

"It's impossible if it's true, but we know the solution."

As if he realized something, Kuro took a deep breath.

"No way, is it the ability to manipulate recognition?"

"That's right. For some reason, Neko wanted to seal her past even from herself. She then applied her recognition manipulation ability to herself. She believes that she is a cat, and her past as a human doesn't exist."

"What a stupid thing..."

Shiro nodded without objection to Kuro's reluctant words.

"Of course, it's just speculation. I don't have any evidence to back it up, and I don't think I'll ever find anything like that. But that would explain why Neko freaked out at the name "Ameno Miyabi"."

Kuro pondered with a difficult expression and then looked at Shiro hesitantly.

"Shiro. Since this is about you, you're probably seriously thinking of Neko when you say that. But if that's the case, is it alright if we carelessly intervene?"

"....."

"If Neko sealed her past, there must be a reason for doing so. But would touching and exposing that past of hers really do her any good?"

He didn't know that.

But one thing was sure.

"Hisui Nagare will surely do that."

Why the "Green King" who is obsessed with Neko is also hiding in the darkness of lack of information. But sooner or later he will come into contact with Neko. This is how he would try to dig her up as "Ameno Miyabi".

He never doubts his purpose. Why did Neko want to seal her past?

"We also have a difficult decision to make. Either we face Neko's past, or if she's like this, I can't go with her in a fight with Hisui Nagare."

Kuro clenched his fist in frustration. Neko is Kuro's partner, no, Shiro's. That will never change.

But is it really right to take a wounded comrade to the battlefield? The decision had not yet been made.

"Anyway, I have to talk to Neko. And then everything will start."

Kuro also nodded slightly at Shiro, who spoke gravely.

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The voices of "Scepter 4" could be heard from far away.

Even under those circumstances, they were active. Or should it be said that it is precisely because of that situation? "Scepter 4" is a so-called "government office", and there is work to be done no matter what. Post-processing, contact with various places and the work to be done are varied.

Yata was a bit envious.

Yata cast a bored look towards his "Homura" comrades.

At the entrance to Mihashira Tower, some leaned against the wall, others sat on the ground, simply maintaining an oppressive silence without making eye contact.

It was exactly the atmosphere of the team when they lost in a fight.

Bando broke the silence with a careless voice.

"Ah. After being heavily used by the "Silver King", and in the end the strategy failed."

Akagi responded with a wry smile.

"If you say that, you'll lose your mind, San-chan."

"That's right. We are also responsible for not being able to stop the "Green King"."

"I wonder what will happen from now on..."

"Well, for now, aren't you glad you weren't badly hurt?"

Yata listened with a touch of irritation as each of them said what he wanted. However, it was not enough to stop them. Until now, they have been fighting "Jungle". However, if results were not forthcoming, one would be tempted to complain.

Kamamoto uttered a single question.

"If the green guys get their hands on the "Slate," what do you think will happen? Yata-san..."

Yata scratched his head and spoke in a dismissive tone.

"...Come on. Something terrible is going to happen."

The "Silver King". Isana Yashiro's explanation was not fully understood by Yata and the other members of "Homura". The Kusanagi area would be different, but in any case, all he knew was that an "evil thing" would happen.

All humans would become psychic. He could not imagine such a world. He has exchanged silly jokes about whether the lady who works at the fish shop he goes to will also become a supernatural being, or whether she will be able to keep the fish fresh by blowing cold air from her hands, but...

Of course, he knew that it wasn't that carefree. The whole world will fall into chaos. The number of psychic criminals will increase explosively and many people will die in unnecessary conflicts. He knew it in his head, but he couldn't imagine it.

Yata suddenly looked up.

In the morning glow, someone approached him.

Looking at that person's face, Yata noticed that his eyebrows were wrinkling.

"...Saru."

Fushimi Saruhiko looked at the crouching "Homura" members and his face did not show any emotion. It would have been a lie if he said that he didn't take offense at the stone look at the side of the road, but now Fushimi was in a joint fight. After hesitating over what to say, what came out of his mouth were boring words.

"Good job."

Fushimi laughed. It was his kind of smirk.

"If you make a big deal about an alliance and play a ridiculous matchup and then lose, you can't even look at it."

He was blown away by the way he said it. Yata looked at Fushimi,

"Don't put it that way. We all fight with all our might, right?"

"I'm going to do my best, huh? It's a loser's idea to be satisfied even if you don't get results if you work hard."

"That is...!"

The members of "Homura" became irritated and turned their eyes towards Fushimi with a thirst for blood. Yata also shook his fist and raised an angry voice.

"Don't say that, since you were only typing on your computer in the vehicle! By the way, wouldn't it be better if your "King" had won against the "Grey King"?"

Fushimi looked at Yata coldly.

He couldn't help but keep his mouth shut because he remembered Awashima's pained expression. It is true that he does not like the "Blue King", but what would the clansman think about it? If it was him, if Anna or Suoh were to be torn apart, he would beat them up without hesitation.

Such consideration for Yata, but Fushimi...

"Exactly. I'm disappointed too."

He politely ignored it.

Passing by Yata, who was surprised, Fushimi walked away. Yata unintentionally turned around and yelled at his back.

"Hey, it's your "King" we're talking about! Aren't you going to fight for him?!"

Fushimi ignored him and walked quickly, suddenly stopping.

"Hey."

From a distance, Fushimi turned his head and looked at Yata.

"Finally, it could get interesting. Come after me, okay?"

His slight smile seemed different from the nihilistic ones he used to have.

Yata recognized that face. A long time ago. when they were just kids.

It was the look on his face when he spoke of his ambition to turn the world upside down like no one had ever done before.

"Saruhiko...?"

Confused, he called out to him, but Fushimi doesn't answer. He looked ahead and kept going. As if to say that this is the correct path.

Turning his back, Yata felt a strange noise in his chest.

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A painful bandage was wrapped around Munakata's back.

It was a scar from the battle with the "Grey King". Hidaka Akira had never seen Munakata so hurt before or after. He thought that the "King" was invincible. Never bad, never hurt, never shaken... that's what Hidaka saw from Munakata, and also from the other members of the Special Forces.

But not.

The "King" is never invincible. If he fights another "King", he may get hurt or lose. Just like Munakata today.

Still, Munakata remained calm. At least that's how he appeared from the outside. He pulled the uniform over the bandages and muttered to himself.

"To think that the "Grey King" was still alive... Furthermore, it was unexpected that he was attached to Hisui Nagare."

Hidaka felt a sense of relief at his calm tone. It seemed as if the usual attitude or defeat had no effect on Munakata. Despite having the "Slate" stolen, he wondered if he would be able to return to his daily work without incident.

"Unexpected? Yes, I agree. It's a mistake that could have been avoided."

There was something that cut through Hidaka's naive expectations.

Fushimi.

With his back against the rear door of the transport vehicle, he nodded.

"It's clearly the fault of you and Isana Yashiro, the "Kings", who didn't suspect the shadow of the "Grey King". I can't believe that the "King" is completely oblivious to the existence of another "King" because he is simply obsessed with the struggles for the "Slate"."

Hidaka looked at Fushimi with a frozen face. In a situation like that, what would he do? He wondered, but Fushimi Saruhiko was originally that kind of person. Exceptionally good, but nothing to wear you down. It seems that it does not change even if the "King" is the opponent.

"If you're only here to criticize something that can't be helped by saying it now, take a step back. I'm tired."

There was obvious irritation in his voice.

Hidaka was in shock inside. Because he was far from the Munakata that he knew. Always calm and motivated, no matter what difficulties come his way, he can blow them away without hesitation as much as a gentle breeze. That was Hidaka, no, it was the appearance of the "Blue King" that everyone imagined in "Scepter 4".

He collapsed.

Fushimi cast a disdainful look at Munakata.

"Aren't you going to give me any instructions from now on?"

"Isana Yashiro will think ahead. Follow his instructions. I'm a loser, so I'll refrain from doing it for a while."

It was a flirtatious comment. Fushimi pushed away from the back door, glared at Munakata with obvious anger, and said abusively.

"Why are you in a bad mood, why did you get beaten in a one-on-one fight? The "Golden King" is dead, all the bulges over your eyes are now out of sight, and the world is about to get away with it yours, but the troublesome old man is still alive. I'm sure you'll hate him too."

Munakata slowly turned to look at Fushimi.

There was a silent anger in his eyes.

Hidaka swallowed. Although the gaze was not directed at him, he couldn't help but want to prostrate himself and beg for forgiveness. What's more, the "King's" anger had a cold pressure.

"Do you feel better with this result? You must have been dissatisfied with this alliance in the first place. Were you going to wait and see if the strategy failed?"

But Saruhiko Fushimi was not an ordinary clansman like Akira Hidaka. Looking back at his anger, he slammed his hands against the rear bumper.

"By the way, I was thinking you were going to lose!"

Unable to remain silent, Hidaka raised a voice to stop him.

"Fushimi-san, you're saying too much...!"

Fushimi looked at Hidaka. Immediately, Hidaka was speechless and withdrew. Without even laughing at him, Fushimi turned to the inside of the vehicle and said in a rather calm voice.

"...If you say you'll leave me here, I'll quit."

"Then resign. If you have any complaints about me, just leave. You were originally a traitor, right?"

".....!"

Fushimi's expression froze. Munakata continued, as if to laugh at that reaction.

"If you don't like it, resign immediately. You've always been that kind of person. This is how you can't follow any "King" from the bottom of your heart, but you can't get out of the gears of the "Slate", and you're wandering in a narrow range. You're just a small object."

Fushimi drew his saber.

There was no chance of anyone stopping him. Fushimi slammed his saber against the back door in one smooth motion and ripped off his "Scepter 4" uniform jacket. Fushimi

had already turned on his heel and started walking when the saber struck his fluttering jacket.

"Fushimi-san!"

Hidaka called out to him. But Fushimi's back spoke louder than his face. No one's words or intentions reached him, he only felt a firm rejection.

Giving up on trying to stop Fushimi from escaping, Hidaka insisted on Munakata instead.

"Captain, shouldn't we stop him?!"

"Leave him alone."

Hidaka felt an indescribable unease at Munakata's spitting tone.

Fushimi is certainly a person who converted from "Homura". He was also dissatisfied with the alliance this time, and his rhetoric to the defeated Munakata would never have been reasonable.

But still, was Munakata the type of person he would call others "traitors"?

Even Hidaka could have guessed that if he said that to Fushimi now, he would be furious. He didn't think Munakata didn't understand that. That could be because Munakata thinks that Fushimi should leave, or...

Was the wound Munakata received so deep that he couldn't even think of such a thing?

It was an irreverent idea. Hidaka shook his head and dismissed it. Still, he couldn't shake off the anxiety that rose like a black cloud.

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There was a languid atmosphere in the HOMRA bar.

The members of "Homura" who had returned to their base were speaking less than usual, and the voices of those they were arguing with were also low pitched. It could be that they were exhausted from fighting all night, but more than anything, the reality of defeat weighed heavily on them.

Yata, lying on the couch, felt bitterness in the environment.

But, at the same time, he was certainly there to accept it. In the past, Yata wouldn't have been able to bear the fact that he had "lost" and would have gone out and attacked something, but now he feels that it can't be helped.

Of course, he hadn't given up. The "Chabudai Alliance" lost to "Jungle". But that doesn't mean it's all over. There is always a "next". Even if he fell down once, he still had the strength to get up. Yata was convinced of that.

He thinks he's changed a bit.

Before, he did not think about the "next". Yata only had "now", and he was glad not to think about the future. He just ran and hit everything he could get his hands on. Or get hit. He will win or lose, in the end someone would have done something for him. Kusanagi, Totsuka or Suoh Mikoto.

There is no substitute for him now. Yata knows. Anna is the "Red King", but she is not the type to lead people. Similarly, Kusanagi can organize well, but he's not good at inspiring people.

It's his job to do that. Run ahead of others, and have everyone follow. That is the form of the current "Homura".

Yata's role has changed.

What has changed the most is that Yata himself understands that.

"...I wonder if it's always like this."

No one heard the leaked words. They were chatting quietly about the events of the day and the appearance of the "Grey King".

Like Yata, Fushimi was now an executive of "Scepter 4".

Yata knew exactly what role Fushimi had played in that operation. He ended up saying things like "You were just typing on your computer", but if it wasn't for that guy's support, the "Jungle" Clansman would have killed them in no time. Mishakuji Yukari and Gojou Sukuna are stronger than them.

Fushimi has established a strong position in "Scepter 4" to the extent that he can be entrusted with such an important role. Probably to the point that no other person can replace him.

The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't understand it.

What Fushimi said when he walked past him, just before leaving Mihashira Tower.

(Finally, it could get interesting. Come after me, okay?)

It was incomprehensible. they lost. Whatever happens from now on, he doesn't think it's going to be fun. Also, what does that "come after me" mean? So it's like...

At that moment, he heard an incoming call from behind the counter.

"Hi, Seri-chan. What's up? Are you calling to discuss our next moves?"

Kusanagi, who had answered the PDA, let out a calm voice. He was talking about cooperation with "Scepter 4"? Yata gave Kusanagi a vague look.

"Hmm? Fushimi? No, he's not here, but... what about Fushimi?"

The name that came up took his breath away.

Holding down the earpiece of the PDA, Kusanagi looked at Yata.

"Yata, you are not in contact with Fushimi, are you?"

Confused, Yata shook his head.

"Are you fucking with me? What did he do?"

"I don't like it... It seems they lost contact with him after he left after arguing with "Scepter 4"."

He stood up without thinking.

Kusanagi resumed their conversation on the PDA with a worried look on his face. Yata left the HOMRA bar without hesitation. Kamamoto was yelling Yata's name behind him, but he didn't hear it either. Feeling the winter chill on his cheeks, he frantically pulled his PDA and called Fushimi's contact number.

No matter how many times he called, there was no sign of Fushimi picking up.

"Saruhiko...!"

As he called out his name, Yata couldn't comprehend the emotions welling up inside him. A tingling fever that is neither impatience nor anxiety nor anger. He tried to get rid of his doubts, but it doesn't work. Fushimi's words held him back.

Come after me.

Is he not about to leave the place where he is now? So he's not trying to go somewhere deadlier? What if Fushimi, who was disappointed in his "King", Munakata, was able to escape from "Scepter 4"? So where will he go next?

"You cannot do that!"

Yata yelled at his own thoughts.

Fushimi left "Homura" because it was the right thing for him. Yata doesn't approve of this, but he doesn't doubt that Fushimi holds his own convictions. He believes that he is not the type of person who would switch affiliations over and over again just because he lost or was at a disadvantage.

Believe in him, he should have.

"It is not like this."

His soliloquy that fell on the asphalt while he lowered his gaze rang in Yata's ears.

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Fushimi walks the streets at night.

The breath exhaled from him is white, and there are a lot of people. Now that he thinks about it, today is December 25, Christmas day. Fushimi snorted sarcastically as he walked past lovers snuggling together and families laughing as they held hands with their children.

No one here knows that until recently a deadly battle for the fate of humanity was being waged. Or maybe it was just an illusion. The fate of more than 7 billion people was being contested by only a few dozen supernatural beings.

But it is true.

Before long, all 7 billion human beings will become psychic.

The greatest upheaval in human history will occur. Many people will die. Laughing here and now, children, fathers, mothers, lovers and friends, how many will survive?

Fushimi stopped thinking like that.

He couldn't help but think about it. Even at that very moment, somewhere in the world there is a war and people are dying in vain. The happiness of the "here and now" only exists in the "here and now". Even if it eventually breaks, it is what it is.

Fushimi turned his back on that happiness and headed to a deserted park.

At that moment he rang a bell in his chest.

He clucked asking if he was still there and pulled it out. Awashima and other members of "Scepter 4", blocking all incoming calls, but it seems something was missing.

Fushimi narrowed his eyes when he saw the person that was calling on the screen.

Yata Misaki.

Contorting a cheek, Fushimi cut the call short.

He would add him to his block list as well. As he did so, Fushimi started walking again. He left the hustle and bustle and wandered into a deserted park.

Munakata's voice echoed in his mind.

(You were originally a traitor, right?)

Fushimi laughed, thinking that it was normal to say such a thing.

Traitor. That must be true. He discarded "Homura" and ran to "Scepter 4". There are many within and without the clan who call him a traitor. However, he never thought that "King" himself would say that.

He didn't know if those words were Munakata's true feelings. Or he could say that he was just telling the truth. What if Munakata said that after properly understanding what it meant?

Fushimi stared at the PDA screen with stagnant eyes.

"Then I will become a traitor..."

A green glow reflected off his glasses. Fushimi logged into his account for the first time in several years by touching the "Jungle" mark on the PDA screen.

CHAPTER 9: NEKO'S DREAM

Awashima Seri let out a deep breath as she leaned back on the couch in the living room.

Ever since they were defeated in the decisive battle of Mihashira Tower, Awashima barely took a break. There was a lot to do. Pick up the injured, transport them to the hospital, rearrange shifts to fill in the gaps, contact and inform relevant parties, track down the missing "Dresden Slate" and gather information, while conducting normal activities such as crime patrol, in order to minimize the members' agitation due to defeat. She couldn't show even the slightest hesitation.

"Phew."

Awashima let out another sigh and rubbed her eyes.

"Please rest for a while." If Akiyama hadn't negotiated with a serious expression, Awashima would have kept working. And then she should have collapsed. Not to mention the physical exhaustion, the mental exhaustion was reaching its limit. Awashima still suffered from losing, and there was one thing that worried her more than anything else.

This is the case of Munakata and Fushimi.

It seems that there was an argument between Munakata and Fushimi in the early morning of the 25th. Even if she regretted not being there at that time, now it wasn't a big deal.

The most shocking thing was the fact that Munakata had an argument with someone. What that "King" made was a theory or a statement, even if there was, it would have been an argument, and it was unimaginable that he would fight violently with someone.

No, thinking so, Awashima smiled while she still covered her eyes.

She has only seen Munakata get angry once. How many years ago was that? When Suoh had just become the "Red King". Munakata tried to persuade Suoh and for some reason it turned into a battle.

At that time, Awashima could do almost nothing. When she became a member of the "Scepter 4" clan, she learned the entire history of supernatural powers. Among them, the clash between the predecessor "Blue King" and the "Red King", which is said to be the worst, and the "Kagutsu Incident" at the end. The clash between Munakata and Suoh seemed like a repeat of that.

Even Suoh couldn't have ignored that story. Despite that, that man easily kicked Munakata away. What made Munakata angry was Suoh's irresponsibility.

However, Fushimi is not a "King".

Even as capable as he is, he is just a member of the clan. He is in no way equal to Munakata. It was unthinkable that Munakata would have a fight with him and finally drive him out.

Could that also be because of the injuries he received?

Then...

"What I can do?"

Her gaze moved slowly, and settled into a gothic-style coffee table near the couch.

Awashima's saber was leaning there.

(Reisi Munakata's right-hand man is you, not me.)

The man who once said that to Awashima cut to his own "King". As a result, he saved this country. Habari Jin expected that? A clan member who is most loyal to himself brings death upon himself. Was that the right path for her?

What about Munakata?

Wait, who will be by his side when she drops his "Sword of Damocles"? Could it really be her?

Is it possible for her to kill the Captain...?

".....!"

The doubts that had been suppressed until now spilled over, and Awashima frowned as if she was enduring the pain.

Despite being defeated, Munakata is still alive and well. The Clansman are also desperately searching for the whereabouts of the "Green King". There is still a chance to get the "Slate" back. They did not lose completely.

Still, the second hand of doom is definitely advancing.

When "that moment" comes, she must draw that saber. That was the role of Seri Awashima, the Vice-Captain of "Scepter 4", which she couldn't cede to anyone else.

Lying back on the sofa she tried to catch her breath.

She didn't want to think about it anymore. She remembered that Akiyama took it from her when she tried to remove her PDA from her chest. Because if she does, she'll have to work.

From there, her thoughts turned elsewhere.

No one was able to contact Fushimi. All incoming calls from "Scepter 4" were blocked and in the case of "Homura" it was no different. Contact lost and gone. They have no idea where and what he is doing these days.

One of the reasons she wants him to come back is that Fushimi's disappearance is the cause of half of that hustle. He is a capable man. When it comes to information processing, there's no one better than Fushimi, and there are mountains of jobs that can't be done without Fushimi.

And she on the other hand is just worried about Fushimi.

Fushimi is not a nice person, even by flattery. Rather, to put it bluntly, he has a bad personality. He's the type of person people hate, and Awashima didn't like him either.

Still, there is something about Fushimi that cannot be left alone.

He is sharp as a knife, but has a brittle side like glass. Despite being extremely talented, he is fatally bad at trusting others. Where and what is he doing now that he has jumped from "Scepter 4"? Thinking about it makes her feel uncomfortable. Hopefully he doesn't get desperate and get involved in weird things.

Just as she was thinking about it, there was a knock on the break room door.

"Fu, Vice-Captain! It's hard!"

Awashima sat down heavily. A lot of hard things have happened in the last few days. Just adding one more thing now won't change anything, the voice from the other side of the door pushed away a careless thought.

"The "Jungle" clansman, Douhan Hirasaka has escaped from prison! It is believed that the missing Saruhiko Fushimi guided her!"

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Blade proof suit, tactical vest, heeled boots and combat gloves. Even when she got dressed and moved her body, there was nothing unnatural about it. The grenades, flashbangs, and shurikens that Fushimi always kept on hand were nowhere to be found in the cardboard box that Fushimi brought, but it couldn't be helped. Those clothes were just "trial items",

and the ones in there were "dangerous goods". In any case, if she went back to the hideout, she could replace it.

Fushimi looked coldly into the rearview mirror as Hirasaka adjusted her equipment in the back seat. There was no light inside the van parked in the dark alley, and the only light was the unreliable interior lights.

While he pretended to manipulate a PDA, Hirasaka also watched Fushimi without letting her guard down.

In a way, that place was dead.

If one of them wanted to, a battle would break out in no time. Other than Fushimi, Hirasaka has no reason to keep him alive. If the freedom that was fortunately obtained was solidified, it would have been better to shut Fushimi's mouth there.

She wondered if she could.

She answered herself that she could do it. Dangerous goods have been seized across the board, but she's got a switchblade in her combat gloves. Make a hole and pick his throat. That would be enough.

"Do not think too much."

Leaning down from the driver's seat, Fushimi stabbed into the nail.

"I took the knife out of your glove. Right now you don't have anything you can stab or cut with."

Hirasaka tried to operate the glove. Shukon, a stupid sound resonated and the knife did not come out. Hirasaka shrugged as she gave him a cool look.

"You have quite a hobby going through women's clothing."

"I never thought of you as a woman, wall-breaker. I tell you, there's no use trying to escape. Next time, I'll sew your whole body to the back seat."

Before she knew it, a knife appeared in Fushimi's palm. When she thought about it, she remembered that this man was also a concealed weapon user.

"Alright."

Hirasaka raised both hands as if she was giving up.

"Cancel the plan to kill the enemy. It's impossible. So what do you want from me?"

Fushimi snorted and waved his hand, and the knife disappeared like a magic trick. Then, he said...

"I'm going to be a ranker. Help me with that."

As expected, she was surprised.

But once she got past the initial shock, a thought came to her: "That must be so.". Fushimi's actions were clearly a rebellion against "Scepter 4". In that case, Fushimi should have given up on the Blue Clan, so it was only natural for him to run to "Jungle".

Hirasaka said...

"If it's the second time, is betrayal something you're good at? Even I frown."

"Don't lie, you say it's wrong because it's against morality. Your parents seem to have seen through your true nature."

Of course, Douhan was not a name given to her by her parents.

But that didn't matter. Hirasaka asked.

"What are my benefits?"

"I got you out of jail."

"Do you want me to return the favor? Unfortunately, I don't remember turning into a crane."

"I know, you can't follow me without millet dumplings."

Saying that, Fushimi blurted out something.

She received it reflexively. Of course, it was not a millet dumpling. It was a wad of rubber-bound bills. 500,000, guessed by touch.

"Is it a deposit?"

"If the mission is successful, I will give you the same reward. In return, all the points earned are mine."

Hirasaka thought fast.

Exchanging points for cash violates the "Jungle" rules. However, there are loopholes in any rule, and even though two people completed the quest, there are often situations where only one person gets points. You can help one without accepting the quest. So if the other checks it with cash, he is effectively buying points with money.

A million per mission, not a bad amount. However, drinking only in "not bad" conditions would not be a business.

"A million, regardless of the difficulty of the mission. That's not worth it."

Fushimi responded flatly.

"I will generate incentives based on the difficulty level. When I rank up, it will come with a bonus."

1,000,000 is the minimum guaranteed amount and the incentive is negotiable. It was perfect, or rather, it was definitely a delightful piece of work. Hirasaka thought for a few seconds and decided that there was no point in throwing it any further. Instead of sticking around and getting concessions, it will be more profitable to stay in a short and long relationship.

"Alright."

Facing Hirasaka, who briefly agreed, Fushimi nodded and started the engine.

Hirasaka asked while she was a bit surprised.

"No way, from now on?"

"What do you think of that 500,000? I already sent you the mission details. It's an easy job, so there's no incentive."

Saying that, Fushimi started the van.

Inside the trembling car, Hirasaka pressed the switch on her neck. A full-face tactical mask covered her head. A glowing green HUD appeared in front of her and various information was projected onto her retina.

"Work.", she murmured into her mask.

Hirasaka is a professional. There is a precise calculation formula behind the action, and it is not moved by emotions.

Still, this situation brought a kind of excitement to Hirasaka. She could work. It was the only thing in her empty life that gave Hirasaka a feeling similar to joy.

Feeling the electricity of "Jungle" running through her body, Hirasaka slowly began to read the details of the mission.

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Neko was gone.

After the "Decisive Battle at Mihashira Tower" ended that day, and after she disappeared due to recognition tampering, she never appeared again. It was the same when he returned to School Island, and no matter how many times he called her, never got a single answer.

"Where did she go? No way..."

Shiro smiled and shook his head at Kuro who frowned in concern.

"No. Neko is close, because this island is her home."

Although there was no wind, he felt the rustling of the leaves and the branches of the trees. Neko was close. She was probably close enough to hear their voices.

"Then why doesn't she appear in front of us?"

At Kuro's question, Shiro made a slightly sad face.

"...I wonder if she is afraid of us."

Emotions are everything to her. Anger, sadness, joy and fear. Get closer to comfort and move away from fear. That's how she lived her whole life.

Not long ago, her peace was with Shiro.

It was different now.

Shiro has become an object of fear for her. That's because Shiro has realized the root of Neko's fear.

What Neko fears the most is "Ameno Miyabi".

Her real name. The real me of her. She is terrified of who she really is.

Not that Neko understands why she's afraid of him. Of course, Shiro doesn't know either. If Neko herself doesn't understand how she ended up in that state, no one can.

But at that moment, the image of a scared, trembling and cowering Neko broke his heart.

Shiro looked away from Kuro and slowly looked around him. Somewhere in that field of vision, Neko could be. Maybe not. Using the power of the "King", it is easy to remove the disguise from her. But doing so would not solve anything.

Instead, Shiro raised his voice.

"You should go to Kukuri. She's not scary, right? So, when you've calmed down, can you come back? I want to talk to you, Neko."

There was no answer. The trees were quiet. Kuro lowered his eyes pitifully.

Still, Shiro muttered under his breath.

"...I'll be waiting."

Then he walked away. To the student dormitory, to the place where Shiro was, to the place where Kuro and Neko should return.

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"Eehh?!"

The reason she unintentionally let out a voice was because there was someone in her room, which should have been empty. A student dormitory where the students of

Gakuenjima live. After classes were over for the day, Yukizome Kukuri found that "lump" when she returned home humming.

The lump was in her bed. She was using a futon. She knows that she is a person, but she doesn't know who she is. As far as Kukuri knows, however, there is only one person who would likely do such a thing.

That is to say...

"...Wagahai-chan? What are you doing?"

The "lump" collapsed. From the mouth of the futon, from the dark shadow, only a glimpse of blue eyes peeked out.

"...Alright."

"Eh?"

"I'm Neko."

Her voice was tinged with tears.

With a small sigh, Kukuri put her school bag on the ground. As she sat on the bed, the "lump" began to move. Kukuri asked kindly.

"Did you fight with Kuro-kun?"

The "lump" moved again. She shook her head. Kukuri continued, placing her palm along the back of the futon.

"So, Shiro-kun?"

She moved a little more this time. She denied it even more than before. Knowing it wasn't a fight between the two of them, Kukuri let her gaze wander through the air.

"Well, then..."

Saying that, Kukuri remembered that she didn't know anything else about Neko.

Both Kuro and Neko live in a different world than Kukuri. The two are not students at the school, but for some reason they are mysterious beings who have settled on that island. Recently, a boy named Isana Yashiro joined them. She knew they weren't ordinary people, but Kukuri didn't quite understand who they were.

When she was searching for the words, the "lump" came to her.

"It's frightening."

"Eh?"

Wide-eyed, Kukuri asked the futon.

"What are you afraid of?"

"....."

The futon moved. as if trembling After a brief silence, she heard a muffled voice.

"Ameno Miyabi."

She had no idea what she was talking about.

"Hmm, I see..."

Kukuri crossed her arms and thought deeply. It's like asking a baby. She didn't understand what Neko meant. She has no way of expressing what she wants to say. Or maybe she doesn't want to say it in the first place. The only way to fill in the missing information is by marking each one.

"Why are you afraid of that?"

After a while, Kukuri asked.

"There is a door."

A door. Is it some kind of metaphor? Kukuri blinked and waited patiently for the word of the "lump".

"I hear a voice coming from the door. It's calling me. Her name is Ameno Miyabi..."

Kukuri took a deep breath.

She calling her. Does that mean "Ameno Miyabi" is Neko?

As if she read Kukuri's thoughts, the "lump" moved violently.

"No! Wagahai is a cat! It's not like that!"

Neko is an emotional girl. Jumping, crying and laughing, she has seen that kind of thing many times.

However, it was the first time she had seen Neko deny something so desperately.

A conflict was born within Kukuri. She doesn't know much about Neko. She might be safe to say that she doesn't know anything. And yet, is it okay to say something to Neko now? Surely Neko is afraid of a fundamental "something". Also, is she okay if she carelessly touches her?

No.

It is neither good nor bad.

She wanted to do it.

This innocent girl is scared to the point of death. She wrapped in a futon and snuggled up. If so, she would love to help her. Those were Kukuri's true feelings.

"Well, the door is..."

As if groping, Kukuri twisted the words.

"Isn't it possible to throw it somewhere? How about we throw it in the sea or in the mountains?"

Neko shook her head at the trivial idea.

"Impossible..."

"Well, what about opening it? If you try to open it unexpectedly, you might wonder what it is."

Once again, Neko denied.

"No..."

Laughing softly, Kukuri patted Neko's back.

"I see. That's true. You can't open scary things by yourself. Fine, then..."

Kukuri said what came to her mind.

"What if you're with someone?"

"....."

"Kuro-kun or Shiro-kun. If it's those two, can you open it together? That way, it's much less scary than opening it yourself."

The "lump" didn't even move.

Just when she was wondering if she said something wrong, Neko whispered.

"You can stay?"

"Eh?"

"Even if I'm not a cat, will Shiro and Kuro still be together?"

She wished could tell her that it's normal.

But saying that, Kukuri was not irresponsible, nor was she familiar with those two. She doesn't know what kind of people Yatogami Kuro and Isana Yashiro really are.

That's why Kukuri said...

"What do you think, Wagahai-chan? So, do you think those two will break up?"

After a short pause, the "lump" began to move.

Seeing that, Kukuri smiled.

"I see. Good for you."

"....."

The mouth of the futon, from the shadow inside, peered out blue and gold eyes. When she blinked once and opened her eyelids, the tears had already disappeared.

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She heard a voice.

From inside the closet. through the door. The voice kept calling her name.

"Ameno Miyabi."

The owner of that voice was not alone.

An old man's voice yelled as if he was crazy.

The voices of a man and a woman cursing the monster and asking it to return the child.

The voice of a young man, intelligent and cold.

But they were all different. She knew it wasn't true.

"Ameno Miyabi."

Actually, it's her voice.

Wagahai's voice. Her voice.

She was the one who made the door and pushed everything through it. She forgot about it. After all, Wagahai is a cat. Cats do not think about anything, do not remember, do not worry, they just need to sleep comfortably in a safe place. Because that's all she wanted, she turned into a cat.

Even though that was all she wanted.

"Ameno Miyabi."

She heard a voice on the other side of the door. She heard her own voice. "Ameno Miyabi" is called "Ameno Miyabi". She was calling Wagahai.

Maybe she could open the door, because she was the one who closed it. Cancel recognition manipulation ability. It's easy because she's done it before with Shiro.

But then she doesn't know what will happen.

What would those two say if she was selfish? Will they accept her as she is?

Or like those people, will they fear her and turn away from her?

If that happens, she is certain that she will never be able to find peace again.

That's the only thing Neko was afraid of.

"Oh."

Her heart jumped a lot, and Neko reflexively jumped high.

With wide blue and gold eyes, she Neko saw him.

On the bedroom ceiling. A green parrot perched on a windswept water tower.

The entire body is covered with hair. A real cat would have curled her fat tail. Fear and chill numbed Neko's judgment.

Suddenly, the parrot spread its wings and screamed.

"Whoa! Stupid cat, scared, scared!"

Her face turned red. Anger overcame fear and Neko threatened Kotosaka with her entire body.

"There's no such thing as scary! Stupid!"

"Whoah, whoah, whoah, whoah!"

Kotosaka laughed triumphantly, and Neko shifted into a battle stance. Just when she thought she was going to catch him, rip off his wings, and dunk him in the sauce, Kotosaka's demeanor changed in an instant.

"Please stop, Kotosaka. I came looking for her today. Don't make her angry."

"Whoah!"

After a sharp cry, Kotosaka fell silent. Sensing a touch of intelligence behind his camera gaze, Neko braced herself.

"Eh?"

Of course, Neko knows the names of the others. Even so, the reason she asked was to delay the main topic, even if it was a bit.

The parrot nodded and answered.

"Right. It's my first time speaking like this, so let me introduce myself again. My name is Hisui Nagare. I am the "Green King". What is your name?"

A name. It's nothing, it was accompanied by the pain of spitting fire.

"Wagahai... I'm Neko..."

"Oh, really?"

Neko froze at the question which he immediately returned to.

"Is your name really Neko? No, that's not the right question. Do you really think your name is Neko?"

"....."

"In that case, I'll teach you. Your name is Ameno Miyabi. The only daughter of Ameno Taichi and Ameno Hinako, who lived on 1-3-21 Higashi Naebara, Naebara City, Kanagawa Prefecture."

Neko certainly remembered the feeling of something entwined under her feet.

"14 years ago. You were 2 years old at the time and miraculously survived the Kagutsu Incident in southern Kanto. Perhaps your super power was awakened at that time."

That grabbed a leg like it was mud, crawled like an ivy and tried to bind Neko's body. She was afraid and wanted to run away, but she couldn't move her body.

Neko knew what that was. The true nature of what she herself had confined and bound.

It's called "past".

"You lost your parents and used your cognitive manipulation to survive. Even so, you were still young, so maybe it was instinctive. You manipulated the perceptions of a couple, and underneath them..."

"Stop."

Neko said that to Nagare, who was talking about her own "past" with a machine voice that spoke clearly of the record nonchalantly.

Surprisingly, Nagare suddenly stopped speaking. Kotosaka tilted his head curiously.

"You really don't remember. I get it. Apparently, you can even manipulate your own perception."

"I don't know, Wagahai is like that..."

"Of course. You've even sealed the memory of sealing your memory. It's natural that you don't know. I also didn't come here to talk about the past. My origin is in the past, but I always look to the future."

Then Kotosaka spread his wings.

As if he extended.

"I came looking for you. Ameno Miyabi, or simply Neko. We are compatriots."

Neko blinked slowly, looked at Nagare and asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Let's put it another way. We are comrades."

At those words, Neko violently shook her head. She looked up with her blue and gold eyes like a kitten cowering in fear and threatening her enemies.

"No. I'm not your friend. You bully Kuro and Shiro! I hate those kind of people!"

"You don't like people bullying those two. Is it because they're your friends?"

"That's right! Shiro and Kuro are Wagahai's friends!"

"Even if they know your true identity, will those two still be your friends?"

Like an awl, Nagare's voice accurately pierced Neko's weak and soft parts.

"Ameno Miyabi. Or Neko. That's what you fear the most. Fearing your true identity would be known, you kept your true identity away from yourself. It must have been painful to be called a monster by those you believed in. I feel sorry for you."

Her chest ached as if she had been stabbed. Breathing became rapid and shallow. Not knowing why that happened, Neko's face twisted in pain and fear.

"Is there any guarantee that those two won't do that? Any guarantee that they won't run away from you after finding out who you really are?"

Yes. That was terrifying.

She was sure that she would be fine. That's what she wanted to believe. It was easy and logical to think so. Shiro forgave Neko. She gave him a fake personality and memories, manipulated him conveniently, even so, Shiro told her that she could stay by his side.

But, now, if that didn't happen...

Just thinking about it made her body shudder. Even if she knows it's impossible, it's like there's a physical obstacle and her thoughts stop moving forward.

As if he huddled against Neko's fear, Nagare whispered softly.

"I would not do that."

Neko looked at Nagare.

"Because I already know your true identity. How did you do that? Why did you do that? Because I know more than you do."

"....."

"Neko. Or Ameno Miyabi. We are compatriots. We are friends. If you are a monster, I am a ghost. I died because of that incident, and then I was reborn because of that incident."

Monster. The words that once drove her to loneliness strangely no longer scared Neko.

That's probably because Nagare is telling the truth. It's not because he's blaming himself or cursing, but because he believes he's a true partner.

"But I deny my own words. I am not a ghost, I am a human. You are not a monster either, you are a human. To survive, to pave the way, we will use all the power we have. If that is not human, then all the humans in this world would be inhuman."

With his intellectual tone intact, Nagare's words took on a tinge of warmth. It's as if he was silently revealing his hidden feelings that he had been thinking about for a long time.

Neko muttered in a weak voice.

"I am a cat..."

"Yes. You can also be a cat. That's what it means to be human. It doesn't matter if there is someone who will become the "King". It's okay to have humans turn into cats. It's okay to have a parrot to be your friend. That's the kind of world I'm aiming for."

At those words, Neko's eyes widened.

The first thing that came to her mind was a warm world. No one would harass Neko there. They would not throw stones at her or call her a monster. Because there is a world where everyone has turned into a monster. Manipulate people's memories, spit flames, and fly freely. In a world where everyone is like this, Wagahai, she could still be a cat.

She was sure she wouldn't feel alone.

Nobody would leave.

It was a lovely world that made her reel.

A parrot spread its wings to her. Hisui Nagare extended his hand.

"Ameno Miyabi. Or Neko. Please come with me. Be the key to open the door to a new world. I welcome you."

Before she could think of anything, Neko's paw stepped forward.

Neko doesn't know what awaits them in that world. But at least that guy on the other side of the parrot sees himself as an ally. He would never leave Neko alone. If the world he talks about comes true, no one will ever abandon Neko.

Like those people.

Like mom and dad.

Feeling a sharp pain deep in her chest, Neko slowly reached out.

"Neko."

His voice echoing from behind her made her jump and cringe.

Hesitantly, she looked back.

There were two boys.

One was a dark haired boy with a grumpy expression on his face.

The other is a white-haired boy with a soft atmosphere.

But now they both look the same.

They had a sad look.

"Neko. What are you doing?"

Kuro's voice did not blame Neko. It's that kind of voice that you can't say something he's afraid of, because if you say it, it's likely to come true.

"Are you going, Neko?"

Shiro's voice was filled with deep sadness. It was the sadness that Neko knows so well. A close friend suddenly leaves, disappears. The sadness at that moment was like a huge hole.

She felt as if the ground under her feet was distorted.

She felt that she was about to make a big mistake.

Neko was sad when Shiro disappeared. Shiro went somewhere even though he said he wasn't going anywhere. She was sad, she couldn't forgive him and couldn't give up, so she searched here and there with Kuro.

Shiro returned after all, but otherwise she believes that she would still be looking for him. To spend the rest of her life looking for him and to fit back into his pocket.

She now she would be causing the same pain.

"...Wagahai is a cat."

Muttering to herself, Neko looked at the ground. She suddenly became distorted. Neko didn't know from the dripping tears. It was hiding behind the door.

"But maybe I'm a monster."

"There is no such thing!"

Kuro yelled that out loud which surprised her. Looking straight into her round gold and blue eyes, Kuro raised his voice even higher.

"You're our friend! You're definitely not a monster!"

Shiro said otherwise. Despite his sad face, his smile was as warm as the sun.

"Even if Neko is a monster... Neko is my Neko."

"....."

That's all.

That's what she said. Shiro also recognized it. That day, at that time, a child fell from the sky. She's been there ever since she jumped onto his chest.

The warmth that gently enveloped Neko, that she was alone in the cold room.

The world doesn't have to be warm. She doesn't need you to be nice to her. If these two people are there, if Shiro and Kuro are there, Neko will be happy.

Neko blinked as if she had woken from a dream and turned to the parrot.

Snuggling into Shiro's warm arms, Neko said clearly:

"Because I'm Shiro's cat. I can't be your friend."

Saying that, Neko separated from Nagare.

"...Is that so."

Hisui Nagare didn't say much. He slightly tilted his head, he closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry."

After saying that, the parrot spread its wings and flew away.

Neko, Shiro and Kuro watched him carefully. After the green shadow got smaller and finally disappeared into the sky, Neko crouched on the spot.

"Neko? What's up?"

Kuro yelled in panic. Neko covered her face and shook her head. She couldn't stop crying. Neko muttered like an idiot along with heat running down her cheeks.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry."

Even Neko wasn't sure who she was apologizing to.

With Hisui Nagare?

With Shiro and Kuro?

With her mom and dad?

Was with the photo of that child that was at the back of the Buddhist altar?

She didn't understand. Shiro and Kuro gently hugged Neko's shoulders that she did not know. Wrapped in that warmth, Neko kept apologizing for something.

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That night she also had a dream.

XX was in the room. It was night. The porch shutters were closed, the kitchen and living room were deserted, and only icy cold filled the room.

Alone in a cold room. XX was sitting holding her knees.

Despite that, XX was not cold. Somewhere in her heart there was warmth. That was already a part of her. As long as she has it she won't be cold. That is now clearly understood by XX.

There was a Buddhist altar in front of her. She from time to time she could hear voices calling her.

"Ameno Miyabi."

She was no longer afraid. She just thought it was cute. Because of her, because of her cowardice, she was trapped inside her.

When she reached out and knocked on the door, she could feel the coolness.

(I'm sorry.)

XX apologized again. Even so, she couldn't open the door. She didn't have the courage to find Ameno Miyabi there.

At least not for now.

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Having broken the link with Kotosaka, Hisui Nagare leaned his body back and took a deep breath.

Various thoughts passed through his mind. With the addition of Ameno Miyabi, many plans that were scheduled to go live now fell through. Of course he had alternatives, but they wouldn't have as much impact as he thought at first. If it could have been incorporated, the "Chabudai Alliance" would probably have been almost destroyed, but...

"Don't get carried away, Nagare."

Iwafune, who was sitting cross-legged and drinking beer, said with a smile.

Nagare's eyes were half open and he stared at Iwafune.

"Iwa-san. Since when have you been there?"

"You've been there from the start, right? Well, you can't do that anyway. If she's a girl, you should have a little more ways to do it."

With a beer in hand, Iwafune shrugged. Nagare was silent for a moment and then said:

"I figured it was the best way to go, but it seems I was wrong."

"Well, I didn't get that kind of opportunity. I couldn't tell you either."

At that moment, Iwafune asked, "Hmm?"

"So does that mean it's my responsibility? This guy was careless. And to think that what I did didn't teach you a trick or two for hooking up a girl. That's too bad, Nagare."

He wanted to say that he didn't need to be taught such things, but it was an undeniable fact that he had just failed. Nagare listened silently.

"Listen, Nagare. A girl wants to be needed. You have to make her think you're useless without her. You don't understand that sort of thing, right?"

"It is necessary?"

"That's right. Reasoning and interests are second and third. Make that person think you need them!"

"But I need her."

"So! Don't say that!"

With a thump, Iwafune slammed the beer can down on the table. With that momentum, Nagare stepped back a bit.

"If you don't put it right in words, you won't be able to convey it! You're smart, calm, and trustworthy, but you lack humanity. So girls won't follow you! Even if you're a little silly, women are creatures who choose to be kind and they want to be with you."

"Uh..."

"Look at me. It looks like this and it's pretty popular. Why? Because I'm lazy!"

Saying that, Iwafune groaned into the beer and wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his cassock.

"You are an apprentice to me too, Nagare! What is important is the "feeling of being left out". If you are square and rigid, not even the waiter will follow you."

Nagare stared at Iwafune's loose cassock with inorganic eyes.

Of course, Nagare respects Iwafune. As "Grey King", as his adoptive father, he doesn't think he would be where he is today without him, but other than that, he despises his neglect of his private life.

However, Nagare found a grain of truth in Iwafune's words. That is to say...

"People are drawn not only to what they need, but also to those who need them, right?"

"Uh, well, I didn't even talk about such a difficult topic."

"So the startup plan should include that element as well."

"What? Starter plan?"

With a thoughtful face, Iwafune pondered.

"Ah, umm, that's it. How about a receiver of the existing social system?"

"Yes. If I could add Ameno Miyabi to my companions, I could use her cognitive manipulation ability to speed up the boot, but now that's not possible either. It's a shame."

Saying that, Nagare moved forward silently.

The clothes that held him and kept him alive had already served their purpose. His arms, legs and his body, which were previously confined to sustaining his life, are now free to move.

And it's all thanks to that relic.

The "Dresden Slate" pulsed silently under Nagare's eyes.

Nagare, who was linked with the "Slate", felt the pulsation from it directly. As if in sync with lost heart, he squirmed a little. Each time he felt an enormous surge of power.

"Right now, the "Slate" is still asleep. However, this power will be greater than any power mankind has ever possessed."

Nagare crouched down on the spot and gently patted the "Slate".

"When the "Slate" really wakes up, unprecedented chaos will ensue. Assuming that time comes, we need to change the existing social infrastructure from the current stage. At the very least, we need to have an organization that can handle the disruption."

"Hm."

Iwafune raised the beer to his mouth with a difficult expression on his face, completely different from before.

"That is the minimum responsibility of those of us who try to awaken the "Slate". "Jungle" must not be underground anymore. We must rise."

Take humanity to the next level.

It is Nagare's dream. Ever since the Kagutsu Incident took his life, his family's, and everything else, he's been thinking about it. Why did that happen? What did that mean? Why did those who died at that time die? This is the answer.

It was a necessary sacrifice for the next age, a new step. This is how Hisui Nagare sees them.

And when the next age began, it was already visible that great confusion and misfortune would occur.

It is impossible for Nagare to anticipate and not take countermeasures. What he wants is human innovation, not unhappiness. If there are people spilling, you need a saucer to catch them.

"Iwa-san, thank you for your advice. The shape of the new "Jungle" has once again become clear. In the "next" age, not only those who need us, but those who "we" need, we will take everything."

Nagare activated a special ability and made several windows float in the air. Ranker Limited Quest.

An important order as a mission only for Mishakuji and Sukuna. When he stroked it, the window turned into a paper airplane and flew off into the darkness.

"Activate mission 5538. Let's raise a new "Jungle" with our own hands."

With a small murmur, Nagare slowly rose to his own feet.

+++++

Cutting through the darkness of the night, the sound of the 750cc exhaust carried through the metropolitan highway.

As he made his way through the gaps between the trailers, the big motorcycle of "Kerun" ran like an arrow. With his full-face helmet he didn't feel the wind, but the landscape he saw melted at great speed and didn't hold a constant shape. If he made the slightest mistake steering the wheel, he would be thrown high and far and melt into one of the blobs of that landscape.

Inside the rider's gloves, his palms were soaked. Gripping the steering wheel over and over again, "Kerun" yelled.

"Hey, "Jema"! Persecution, what's going on?!"

He was sure that he had already gotten rid of them, it was okay to slow down. Disappear and reappear as if it had been blown away by the wind. As the lights streamed in from the edge of his vision, "Kerun" wished for him from the bottom of his heart.

"No! They're still chasing us! "Scepter 4" even sent a helicopter?!"

Thinking it was a joke, he felt a chill in his stomach. Thoughts and memories rushed through his mind as fast as the landscape passed.

It was supposed to be just a game. If you win, you get points, and if you use the points, you get super powers, it's a wonderful game. "Kerun" and "Jema" advanced by leaps and bounds. They weren't strong, but they were quick and wise. They only dabbled in safe, delicious missions, and they won handily. The power they gained there helped them change their lives. A lot of money, delicious food, fun trips, cute girlfriends, all of which are things that cannot be obtained as a student, all of which are obtained through "Jungle".

And now all of that was about to be removed.

The HUD that was displayed within the full face summoned even more despair. A map that reflected his location information, the destination was blocked with a red X mark. "Scepter 4" was shutting down traffic. The only way to escape was to go down the lower path. If so, it's the end of the series. "Kerun" was not so good at motorcycle technique that he could run freely on narrow roads.

University, family, girlfriend, finding a job, life. Several words came to his mind. There is a lot written on the "Jungle" forum about what happens to psychics trapped in "Scepter 4". Day after day, unspeakable torture would await him. According to one person, they were thrown into a special prison and never returned to society. According to another person, electrodes were implanted in their brains and they were forced to work permanently as a slave to "Scepter 4".

Even if those comments contained exaggerations, he would undoubtedly be branded as "criminal". He would drop out and live a long, dark life as a straggler.

He didn't like that. Why did he look like that? There are many guys doing worse things.

At the moment when his face distorted as if he was about to cry, a voice suddenly echoed in his ear.

"Do you want me to help you?"

Jiggle, the rider outfit trembled. He didn't know where he was hearing it from. When he entered the HUD, an unknown account was connected to the voice chat. "Kerun" he shouted agitated.

"Who are you?! Jema, what's going on?!"

"I-I don't know! Although it's supposed to prevent unauthorized accounts from entering."

"With that level of security? Are you serious? Well, it doesn't matter. Whether you want help or not, decide in 10 seconds."

The blocking net was closing on the map every moment. He didn't have time to hesitate. "Kerun" he begged someone he didn't know.

"Help me! I'll pay you!"

"Ok. Go down to the lower path."

Before thinking about it, "Kerun" slammed on the brakes, turned the steering wheel, and left the metropolitan highway. As he crossed at excessive speed, more voices echoed.

"Turn right at the first light. Go straight and stop at a convenience store. Just wait for instructions."

"Oh, hey! If I do something like that, I'll get caught by "Scepter 4"."

"If you want to be safe, listen to what I tell you in a low voice."

Gritting his teeth, he still did as he told him. At the same time, he activated "Whisper Command" and ask "Jema", who should be watching from afar.

"W-What's going on? Who is he?"

"Uh, I don't know! But he's quite an advanced hacker. Our conversation just now could have been overheard..."

Of the two, "Kerun" is mainly in charge of practical work and "Jema" is mainly in charge of information processing. Since "Jema" said so, it would be better to think that the network was under control.

While he was thinking about such things, "Kerun" stopped in front of a convenience store.

His vision was shrouded in darkness.

".....?!"

He panicked and looked left and right. He was pitch black for only a moment, and what jumped out at him were the exposed concrete and inorganic guide lights. Somewhere in the underground escape passage a thought came to him...

A voice came from the side this time.

"Let's hide here for a while."

A figure suddenly appeared in a space that should have been empty. The entire body was wrapped in black clothing, and the face was covered with a full face mask. It was a bit different from the camouflage mask they wore, but it was definitely a member of "Jungle".

"...Ah, are you the guy who contacted me?"

When he cautiously asked, the black clad shrugged slightly.

"I'm under no obligation to respond. My job is to get the target to safety."

Saying that, the black clothed one put his hand to his ear and began to communicate somehow.

He didn't know what it was.

But at least "Scepter 4" didn't seem to get there. When he looked at the map on the HUD, he could see blue emblems representing PCs with "Scepter 4" and follow-on helicopters moving back and forth around them. "Kerun" felt a cold sensation that they must be looking around.

"Eh?"

"Kerun" couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The map started to move, but he hadn't moved. However, the marker meaning "myself" on the map was moving at considerable speed. An old marker began to move in pursuit of him.

Like a hyena chasing wounded prey. "Kerun" looked at him in a daze and uttered words that weren't even a question.

"What's happening...? Am I here? Why is the map moving?"

The answer came out of his ear.

"What's moving is a discarded PDA I set up here. I hacked into your account and made you log in twice there. It'll take a while before they notice the clothes."

"Huh?! Hey, what are you doing?! Taking someone's account without permission!"

"Well then, shall we bring them back? The blue clothes will gladly come to pick you up."

He had no words. He didn't like it, but he had to listen. That guy certainly seemed to be an ally, but an ally in "Jungle" means nothing more than "an opponent who has the same interests". Depending on the situation, he could always become an enemy.

Before long, the mark of "Scepter 4" disappeared from the map, and "Kerun" patted his chest in relief.

"...Apparently, it seems to be fine. Thank you for your help."

"The reward is 10,000 JP."

The blood of "Kerun" was frozen at the ready-to-use request.

"What? 10,000 JP?"

"Ah. I won't lose a single point."

"Fu, don't be silly! Didn't you hear that story?!"

"You're the one who received the reward without checking. I've already done my job. Now it's your turn to pay."

"Kerun" was again stuck in the voice. He couldn't help but admit that there was a reason for what he said to the other party. No matter how impatient he was, he should have confirmed the reward and negotiated.

He didn't think so. At that time, he didn't have that kind of time. "Kerun" is just a college student. There was no way he could make a decent judgment or bargain in the ten seconds that would ruin his life.

In other words, this guy knew and extended a helping hand.

"I don't have that many points."

Feeling bitter, "Kerun" had no choice but to defend himself. He now he had about 4,000 points. He couldn't shake the sleeves.

"Is that so? If you combine it with your partner, you can prepare around 10,000."

By partner, he meant "Jema." First of all, that communication should be a private chat with that guy. Although he was listening to that conversation, he hadn't said a single word since before.

"Hey, Jema..."

He called out to his "partner" with a grasping sensation, but again there was no response. He was still connected. However, the fact that there was no reaction...

"You were abandoned."

The one in front of him, dressed in black, was the one who muttered. There was no tone of mockery in his words. It was a way of saying that he was only confirming the reality in front of him.

This time his blood boiled. The fact that he was the only one trying to save himself from it aroused his helpless rage. He raised his fists and shouted.

"Don't be kidding! Oh, I'm not paying, because it's just me!"

The angry voice that echoed inside his mask suddenly stopped.

A blade was plunged into "Kerun's" throat. It was the point of a sword drawn by the guy in the black armor. It was so fast that he didn't even know when he pulled it out. Anger withered and fear arose in its place.

"Is that so? Then let me take your life."

"Oh, hey..."

"Killing the target won't give you a penny, but if you throw it away, you won't be able to show anything else. Even "Jema" will pay what he owes if he finds out about the target's fate. Then, it will be completed."

"Wait, wait! I understand!"

Still rigid, "Kerun" let out a miserable voice. Tears clouded the HUD vision, out of fear and regret. The black robed guy's words were not threats. He really he would do what he said he would do. That is what "Kerun" knew intuitively.

"I will pay... all the points I have..."

Muttering, "Kerun" opened the account of "Jungle". The recipient politely accepted the mission issued by "Kerun" as a form, when all points were paid... 4000JP, Janpy appeared as a matter of course and announced that the account would be deprived of all points.

With that ceremony "Kerun" ended as a member of the "Jungle" clan. The career he had built disappeared and he went back to being an ordinary person.

The black robe held his swords and bowed their heads slightly.

"6000 points left. How will you pay?"

"Kerun" shuddered. Unfortunately, he is already insolvent.

And the person he called muttered cruelly in his ear.

"Bring me that motorcycle."

"I understand."

The black robe involuntarily poked at the throat of "Kerun" with the tip of the knife. He got off his motorcycle and backed up. Thus, in a very natural movement, the black robe straddled the motorcycle.

"If I sell it, it will be worth a lot. After that, I'll take it from your friend. So I'll let it go this time."

The black robe started the engine and the motorcycle began to work. "Kerun" was silently watching his back.

+++++

"Rank up! Saruhiko Fushimi has been promoted to U-Rank of "Jungle". Congratulations."

Fushimi countered the spectacular statement of the parrot-like mascot, Janpy. He put the PDA down on the couch he was sitting on and muttered to himself.

"It's no game."

Hirasaka, leaning her back against the wall in the corner of the room, snorted.

"I can't say enough about cheating and being naughty."

"It's not a foul, it's a feat. If there's a hole, it's natural to use it, right?"

Hirasaka just shrugged and said nothing to Fushimi, who was listless. There is no objection to that, and Hirasaka has been supporting Fushimi in the first place. She had no intention of complaining from the beginning.

The two are in the hideout prepared by Fushimi.

A couch table, a laptop, a mattress and a blanket are randomly placed in a bare concrete room. It is really a room just to come home and sleep.

Only they and Hisui Nagare know that they are there. That "King" watches over everything. However, it is impossible for even Nagare to take a look at the contents of this room. Both visual and auditory, it is designed to be completely isolated from the outside world. It is the first time that the PC is also disconnected from the network and the camera and microphone are physically crushed.

Therefore, this room was the perfect place for secret conversations.

"How much did the motorcycle sell for?"

Fushimi asked unexpectedly. It seems that he entered into negotiations to obtain compensation. Hirasaka handed Fushimi a small folded bill.

"Shibata NR750. It was sold at a good price because it was new. However, since they will be treated as stolen goods, the fee was deducted."

After taking a quick look, Fushimi took out a wad of rolled up bills and tossed it to Hirasaka. Before receiving it, she knew that it was smaller than what she normally receives. She assumed that means that if you sell a motorcycle, you should keep it as a reward. There were no objections. Dealing with Fushimi is always fair. She likes that he doesn't waste time.

After accumulating the bounty, Hirasaka walked away.

"What are you going to do with that mission?"

Fushimi's eyebrows rose. His stagnant eyes turned to Hirasaka.

"5538, huh?"

"The forum is full of repeated large-scale quests. Mission 5538, "Plan Startup". It's different from the quests I've done so far."

Hirasaka took out a PDA. In that electronically locked room, the PDA is just a record board, but you can still check mission details.

"We will attract VIPs from all walks of life to "Jungle", including entertainment, media, legal, political and financial sources and diplomacy. That seems to be the essence of the "starter plan". If this is accomplished, "Jungle" can become an organization that leads this country, both in name and in reality."

"So you got the treasure and finally set out to conquer the world? It's nonsense."

Fushimi muttered as if he vomited.

Hirasaka stared at that expression. In order to survive in the underworld, it is essential to have the ability to guess to some extent the feelings of others. Anger, frustration, fear, bewilderment. What the person is thinking, how he will act next, can be dimly seen when superimposed on the situation.

"This will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Now that you've been promoted to U-Rank, you'll be able to take on more difficult missions. Isn't it possible to reach Ranker during this large-scale mission?"

Cynical and grumpy. Yet exceptionally capable. This is the human image of Fushimi Saruhiko, which she obtained from observing him over a short period of time. It seems a bit out of place with the current situation of a traitor who gave up "Scepter 4" after being defeated at Mihashira Tower and jumped into "Jungle".

Hirasaka only wants to know one thing.

"However, this quest can also be a final blow to your old nest."

Did Fushimi Saruhiko really betray "Scepter 4"?

"There are many voices from all walks of life who question the *raison d'être* of "Scepter 4", whose "Slate" has been stolen. In other words, "Slate" is like a brocade flag. Whoever owns it can claim sovereignty. Faced with what was stolen, you can become a traitor."

To find out, you have to delve into the emotions of this man. Why is he angry and what is he interested in? For Hirasaka, his "partner", the opportunities are endless.

And the observation shot from a moment ago...

"The reward is enough. There is no reason not to travel."

Looks like it's already out.

"Hirasaka. On this list, I listed the weaknesses of those who are likely to be interested in the proposal, who are likely to lose money even if they are not, and those who are. Compensation will be calculated separately."

"I understand."

Hirasaka nodded and immediately used "Wall Break" to escape from the room. She grabbed the edge of the window or gutter, land softly, and operate the HUD with her line of sight.

(As a result of the observation, Fushimi Saruhiko has no attachment to his former home. I will continue to monitor future trends.)

Attaching the collected video and audio recordings from the eye camera and microphone, Hirasaka sent the email to "H.N.".

The secret investigation on Fushimi was a requested mission from a fairly early stage. In order to faithfully fulfill the mission received from Fushimi, Hirasaka also faithfully fulfilled that mission.

In fact, Hirasaka doesn't care if Fushimi is a traitor or not. Truth is money. That was it for Hirasaka.

And one more thing. Hirasaka has a way to monetize that information.

Hirasaka straddled the parked motorcycle. The destination is Tsubakimon. She started the engine while she figured out the plan to invade there.

+++++

Kuro was walking through the winter city.

A green onion head popped out of the shopping bag on his chest, and at first glance, he looked like a student on his way home from an errand. Nobody pays attention to him. At least, that is what it seems if the circumstances are not known. But he was wrong.

Kuro knew more than anyone that it was a mistake. The senses that had been forged through years of training felt the piercing gazes from here and there.

(Hey, it's him.)

(He's worth 10,000 points!)

"What are you going to do?"

Actually, no such voice was heard.

However, the gazes that were directed from everywhere said so. Curiosity, animosity. The reason why they were so obvious was not because Kuro's senses were particularly good, but because the people looking at him didn't know how to hide their feelings.

"You can't be stupid!"

"Photos, photos. Even information alone will earn you points!"

He took a deep breath.

It wasn't even a problem and he didn't attack. He could have thrown it away, but he didn't like to take advantage of a reluctant enemy. "Jungle" is definitely his enemy. He doesn't know what to do with the photos, but he can't let them serve as a "mission."

His body submerged for a moment and Kuro jumped high.

From railings to streetlights, kicking over traffic lights and signs, moving in a zigzag trajectory. It was a very slight distraction that a normal psychic could detect, but there was a scream from behind.

"Ah, he ran away!"

"Damn, I couldn't take a photo!"

After all, "Jungle" is that kind of group of people.

Humans who can't even be called psychic to the extent that ordinary people have grown hair. He can't even fight a decent battle, and if he ever gets into that kind of situation, he'll run away as fast as he can. Originally, they were not Kuro's enemies.

He thinks that's why it's so troublesome.

They are not combatants. These are the countless eyes and ears of "Jungle". There's no point in destroying it, but if you leave it alone, it will deal damage. Kuro couldn't even imagine how Hisui Nagare, the core and brain of "Jungle", would handle the information he received from his eyes and ears.

This is happening more and more every day. Neither "Scepter 4" nor "Homura" were able to capture "Jungle". It's only natural that there hasn't been any movement since the decisive battle a month ago...

At that moment, an explosion sounded nearby.

Kuro took a deep breath and immediately went into a fighting stance. While he was holding a shopping bag, he placed his hand on the sword at his waist. In front of his gaze was a man with an unearthly light that seemed to have caused the explosion.

But...

"Oh, it's not me!"

The man was completely confused. Pushed by the surrounding gazes, he took a few steps back and put his hand on the fire hydrant. Then, the red light shining on his hand moved towards the fire hydrant, and in the next instant, the fire hydrant exploded, spraying a large amount of water.

"Kyaaaa!"

A passing woman reached out her hand to block the fall of water. And this time, a blue light inhabited her hand, creating a distorted shield. The shield barely repelled the water, but its distorted shape spread the water over a wider area, drenching even more people.

"Wow?! What the hell is this?!"

"Ah, that guy! He's a psychic!"

Anxiety and fear created chaos that spread like an epidemic. It was as if he could see it in Kuro's eyes.

"What?!"

With the shopping bags still in hand, Kuro ran outside to clear up the confusion. There is no way that they, who until just now were ordinary people, knew how to calm down and control their supernatural powers.

Cursing Hisui Nagare in his heart, wondering if that was his purpose to unnecessarily sow confusion, Kuro extended his hand towards the people who had become makeshift Strains.

Overhead, the announcer from the street television was announcing with a serious expression.

"Next is the news about the incidents involving supernatural powers that are rapidly increasing across the country!"

+++++

"Since the beginning of the year, the Cabinet has introduced a special emergency bill for countermeasures at the national administrative level in response to incidents involving singular abilities that have been occurring frequently throughout the Kanto region."

Underground temple, "Secret Base".

Hisui Nagare continued his work while listening to the voices of the news echoing through the six mat room.

In the same room, the executives of "Jungle" met. Sukuna was enjoying the game as always and Mishakuji was doing strange poses one after another on the yoga mat. And Iwafune was slowly drinking beer while he was watching the news on TV.

"Oh, the "Slate" test is going well, isn't it? Old Kokujoji's information control doesn't work anymore."

"Yes, everything is going well!"

Nagare stopped working and looked at Iwafune.

"Yes, the number of people receiving special powers from the "Dresden Slate" is increasing. It's working well."

Mishakuji muttered in ecstasy as he moved into the "pigeon pose" on the mat.

"Fufufu. A new age is coming where everyone will shine with their own individuality. A chaotic jungle age full of life. A paradise for the fittest."

"Paradise. Isn't that what people call "hell"?"

Iwafune laughed as he said that, but Nagare didn't let it slip that there was a cold, hollow feeling in his voice.

Iwafune is his ally. There is no doubt about that. However, if he were to ask if Iwafune affirmed everything Nagare wanted in the world, it would not.

Sukuna, who was still lying down, shot teasing words at him.

"Hm, what's wrong? Are you scared old man?"

"Old man, old man! You coward!"

Iwafune didn't resist and shrugged slightly.

"Not that I have any complaints. The hell I can see is a little better than the hell I can't see. That's my choice."

Iwafune lied and started drinking beer again, while Nagare operated the device in his wheelchair. A window appeared in the air behind him and a real-time image of the "Slate" was displayed.

"Currently, about 40% of the unlocking of the "Slate" has progressed. As a result, the people who become Strains are constantly increasing. There are probably some who have managed to control their powers and are cleverly hiding their supernatural powers, so that the actual number is much higher than the data. It doesn't seem to be directly proportional to the progress of the opening and the awakening of the supernatural powers."

Added various screens to the "Slate" of the video. Display of seals, mostly gold and some blue.

"The special protection that the "Golden King" had over the "Slate" was about to be released naturally. The "Blue King" reinforced that. As expected, he governs the "order" and precisely separates the supernatural powers surrounding the "Slate". But that will soon be fixed."

"If that happens, all 7 billion humans will become kings."

Nagare nodded to Mishakuji, who smiled in "bow stance".

"Affirmative. In order to make the arrival of the next era faster and safer, we have also issued a series of special missions for "Jungle" players."

The image in the window changed and an electronic map of Tokyo was displayed. The "Jungle" seal, which indicates the mission in progress, continues to move slowly.

After hearing about the mission, Sukuna stood up. He looked at the map skeptically and muttered to himself.

"Is that the "starter plan"?"

"Capture and scout newborn Strains, monitor and restrain other clans, and lay the groundwork for our future movements."

"Hmph, don't bother."

The reason why Sukuna pouted was probably because he wasn't involved in the "Boot Plan". Maybe he didn't like the fact that he didn't have the opportunity to participate in a mission that seemed interesting.

Mishakuji scolded Sukuna as he took the "Hero Pose".

"Delicious food requires preparation, Sukuna-chan."

"A moment ago you said: "Survival of the fittest". Winner takes all, right? Eat or be eaten?"

Sukuna manipulated the PDA into calling a certain news site. The person reflected there is none other than Mishakuji Yukari. Wearing an elegant suit, he smiled as if he were spinning on a potter's wheel.

"What the hell is this?! Why are you interviewing me without permission?!"

Sukuna looked at him and expressed his own impressions of him.

"It says here: "Beautiful CEO, Mishakuji Yukari. Member of "Jungle", which stretches into the future." Hey, you said something big."

"Oh, it's a cheap camera, but it looks pretty good. Let's spread it later."

"Hey, Nagare! Are you alright?"

Sukuna seemed to realize that he couldn't understand it and pointed at Nagare in a fit of anger. Nagare responded with an inorganic expression.

"Since the "boot plan" is a plan for us to make public, there is no problem in being exposed to the media. The method of exposure is entirely up to Yukari."

Mishakuji said confidently as he moved into the "Standing Tree Pose".

"In a group, something called a "flower" is necessary. That's right, the "flower" is me. With that, they will unite like bees attracted to honey."

"Don't say the same as the interview written here! Damn, the King of "Jungle" is Nagare! You're just a decoration!"

"I can't go to the "front" yet. If I make my whereabouts clear, it might invite other clans to intervene."

"Boot Plan" is a great mission to advance "Jungle" to the front. Since it was a plan to advance to the "table", a person was needed to be the representative. Nagare for the right reasons, Iwafune because of his personal beliefs and Sukuna because he is a boy, the white arrow was Mishakuji. That could be the reason why Sukuna was irritated.

However, Sukuna was right. In other words, it is a standing position, like a panda attracting customers, a clown. He was a little worried that it would go against Mishakuji's aesthetics.

"The decoration is not good. If it is a role that draws people's attention by beautifully decorating the whole body, I would appreciate it."

Surprisingly, Mishakuji was quite enthusiastic. Even if he is a clown, it might be a treat for him if he gets a lot of attention.

"I also really like the CEO position. There are many unique people among the VIPs in various fields, and various seeds are sprouting among the clan members."

As Mishakuji murmured in delight, the marker on the electronic map made a sound in response. A mission accomplished report. A great mission of 3000JP. What is shown there is a picture of a suspicious person wearing a black mask.

Iwafune reacted while he drank beer.

"Oh? Is this the ninja girl you mentioned?"

"That's right, Douhan Hirasaka. During the first attack on Mihashira Tower in October, she was captured by "Scepter 4" and lost a lot of points, but in the last month she regained points and returned to U-Rank."

"As expected of Douhan-chan. But she seems like she has recently become a good person."

It was a glamorous way of speaking that seemed to be typical of Mishakuji, but it was somewhat deceptive. Nagare tampered with the device and summoned a new person.

Iwafune put down the beer can and widened his eyes in surprise.

"Oh, this guy is..."

"It is rumored that he is a new face."

"Wow! News, new face!"

Everyone was staring at the person. He has a listless look and for some reason holds a knife in his mouth. It can be said that he is the person who is currently attracting the most attention within "Jungle". After all, his predecessor is his predecessor.

"Fushimi Saruhiko. Former number 3 of "Scepter 4". He has also rapidly increased his points since a month ago and has risen to U-Rank immediately."

"I know. This guy is a bounty boss."

Sukuna crossed her arms with a dangerous smile. Nagare, who understood what he was thinking, immediately stabbed him.

"Right now, the bounty on Fushimi Saruhiko has been suspended. I won't stop you if you want to fight, but I wouldn't recommend it. He is a promising player."

"Hmm."

Sukuna snorted and turned to the side. Iwafune asked as he stroked his beard.

"I for one am curious about the old "Scepter 4". If you think about it normally, he might be a secret agent, right?"

"Of course, we have the highest level of surveillance on him. However, no evidence of his contact with "Scepter 4" was found on any network. For now, we can only consider him as a target."

"Hmm, isn't it that kind of thing?"

The Fushimi icon made a sound signaling that the mission was accomplished. Seeing that point, Iwafune raised his voice.

"Hey, he has over 90,000 points!"

"It's not a point that can be earned in about a month. There's a chance some kind of trick will be used. It's fun."

"Hey, is that a trap?"

Sukuna clucked and Nagare quoted from the data Hirasaka sent the other day.

"According to him, it's not a trap, it's a glitch. If there's a hole, use "Jungle". I agree."

"....."

Sukuna's disgust grew stronger. But unfortunately, there was no adult there to calm him down. Mishakuji said happily as he gradually turned his body into "Hero Pose 2".

"If he completes the next big mission, he might even go up to J-Rank."

"Very likely. I have high hopes."

"Wow. This room is getting a bit lively."

The elders said what they wanted and Sukuna stood up as if he had been frustrated.

"Hmph, this is always not a big deal."

"Oh? Where are you going, Sukuna?"

"I'll catch some small fish."

Saying that, Sukuna headed towards the exit. Mishakuji cast a mocking voice behind him.

"OMG, a newcomer caught me and I got nervous~♪"

"Hey!"

Is it a sign from the stars that they looked at it? Sukuna, who must have realized that, didn't say anything else and left the room with wild steps.

Nagare bowed his head.

"I have a question. Why is Sukuna angry? An increase in our combat strength should be a joyous thing for us."

Iwafune laughed out loud, but did not answer the question. Instead, he fixed his gaze on Mishakuji.

"Yukari-chan, don't have fun and provoke the child. You are mean."

"Even if it's bad, it's love."

Smiling charmingly, Mishakuji made a heart symbol with his hand and, seeing that, Nagare bowed his head again.

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"I am at home now."

When he opened the door to his room in the student dormitory, two voices greeted him at the same time.

"Welcome home~"

"Sorry to bother you."

One voice belongs to Isana Yashiro, who is a roommate. And then, the owner of the other voice left the room. Kukuri Yukizome. A common friend of Kuro, Shiro, and Neko. The smile she had on her face turned into a surprised face when she saw Kuro drenched.

"What? Is it raining outside? Towel, towel..."

Saying that, she retreated to the bathroom and threw down the bath towel. With a wry smile, Kuro accepted it gratefully.

"No... today I also had some problems with supernatural beings in the city."

Saying that, as he dried his hair, Kukuri frowned painfully.

"Oh, yes, there's a big ruckus here and there. I know, it's pretty scary when you first see it."

Kukuri crossed her arms and nodded. A year ago, she too experienced a similar situation when the school was occupied by "Homura". It was there that Kukuri first touched a supernatural power the world did not know.

Kukuri quickly waved her hand away.

"Ah! Sorry, I wasn't talking about Kuro-kun, okay? Kuro-kun and Wagahai-chan aren't scary at all!"

"I understand. Thank you, Kukuri."

"Hahaha... Ah, I have to go to the student council. Kuro-kun, I'll leave you some cookies, so please eat them."

In response, Neko's voice echoed from the living room.

"Wagahai is eating! It's delicious!"

"Well then Shiro-kun too. Good luck with your studies~"

"Yes, thanks."

And so, leaving only a bright smile, Kukuri lightly left.

Kuro put the used bath towel in the laundry basket and entered the living room. There, Shiro and Neko were sitting next to each other. A small table was placed on the raised tatami and a large amount of materials was spread out on it. With chimaki wrapped around his head, he looks like a student in the middle of a race.

"Thank you for shopping, Kuro. How is it outside?"

"The security situation is getting worse and worse. A month ago, the "Slate" that fell into the hands of the "Green King" surpassed the clan's boundaries and began to grant special abilities to common people."

After encountering a supernatural incident along the way, Kuro calmed down the panicked new Strains and then handed them over to "Scepter 4". Of course, they didn't cause it on purpose, so it shouldn't be a crime, but the confusion and fear that flashed in their eyes were vividly etched in his mind.

"Fortunately no one appears to have been injured, but that is within visible range. I've heard there's damage elsewhere."

For a moment, Shiro's movement stopped. He slightly tilted his face.

And Neko next to him took a cookie.

"Shiro!"

Out of reflex, Shiro opened his mouth. Neko tossed a cookie there and Shiro nodded slightly as he munched on the cookie.

"Yes. Take immediate action. We have to complete this investigation as soon as possible."

"No, I don't blame you, but you have a very auspicious attitude."

Shiro looked at Kuro and smiled with concern.

"Ahaha... I completely failed in the Christmas matter. But I can't give up. This time we have to properly stop the "Dresden Slate" and the "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

A month ago, the "Decisive Battle of Mihashira Tower" ended in complete defeat.

Although no one was killed, the "Dresden Slate" was captured and its subsequent whereabouts are unknown. "Scepter 4" continues to search with all its might for it, but due to the frequent incidents of supernatural powers, it seems that he is not going smoothly. It was only natural for Munakata to reject Shiro and Kuro's offer of help. Dogs are fond of "tracking."

However, it seems that Shiro didn't take the news of the force knocked out seriously.

There are things that only Shiro can do. How to deal with the "Dresden Slate" stolen by Hisui Nagare. Only Adolf K. Weismann, who discovered the "Slate", can come up with it.

"When I was a child, my sister scolded me a lot. "If you make a mess, clean it up yourself", she said."

Suddenly, Shiro looked into the distance and stared at the photo frame on the dining table.

There are sepia-toned photographs of three people, two men and a woman. Adolf K. Weismann, Shiro's predecessor, his sister Claudia Weismann, and a young Daikaku Kokujoji.

"I'm the only one who can clean it up. If I don't finish it properly, they'd both get mad."

Kuro has no way of knowing how Shiro feels about his late sister and best friend. He just looked down at the ground and speak with a vague thought.

"You've been doing great for the past month. I can't do anything, so I'm not worthy."

Right now, the only thing Kuro can do is calm down the commotion caused by "Jungle" and Hisui Nagare. It's not even a symptomatic treatment, it's just a cleaning. Even while he was doing that, the thought of Nagare constantly breaking the seal made him feel more and more impatient.

And while Neko nodded to that Kuro.

"That's right, Shiro is fine! Kurosuke is the useless one!"

"I don't want you to tell me that...!"

Kuro was a bit upset by her cheerful words, but he still felt relieved somewhere in his heart.

Because Neko had fully recovered.

Even after learning her true identity and choosing to stay with Shiro and Kuro, Neko still showed signs of depression from time to time. Neither Kuro nor Shiro clearly know the cause, because Neko didn't want to talk.

Maybe it's due to Neko's past. Shiro speculated that she had sealed her own memories due to some kind of trauma. She was very scared because it was about to be resolved.

She couldn't face the past that was so painful that she had to abandon it and be reborn as a different existence. Therefore, the only thing Kuro can do is be by her side. Together with Shiro, he snuggles up to Neko. That's all he can do.

A series of thoughts arose again, but...

"Kuro cooks for us every day."

Suddenly, Shiro said that. Kuro shook his head with a bitter face.

"Don't mix things up. It's serious."

Shiro smiled.

"It's a serious story. If Kuro doesn't cook for us, we'll die. If I don't do something with the "Slate", humanity will be in trouble. That's why I have to complete the countermeasures against the "Slate", and Kuro has to cook for us."

"That's right!"

Kuro smiled wryly at Neko to which she nodded. Just when he was wondering if she really understood, Neko nodded and said happily.

"Kurosuke works hard on his food! Shiro works hard on his studio! Wagahai works hard on supporting them! It's fine!"

Neko then took Kukuri's cookie and threw it at Kuro. As he looked at the cookie that he received, he thought that it was correct.

Do what you can. Step by step, move on. Ultimately, that's it. There is no point in rushing and if you try to find a way out, you may fall into a trap. She seemed like she was saying something irrelevant, but what Neko said was definitely the truth.

"That's right. I think so too."

Shiro reluctantly agreed and turned to the mass of material.

"I think I'll go with the "Sounding Hammer" plan for the "Slate". The Sanctum, which is deployed in a special state, causes an irreversible transition into the Weismann phase of the "Dresden Slate". This is an application of my sister Dr. Claudia Weismann's "Schwert Second Control Methodology", and it looks like this."

Shiro showed him a notepad with a diagram of arrows and spirals. No matter how you look at it, it's a child's doodle, but it's probably imbued with immeasurable meaning.

"Fufu, yes, that's good."

After all, Neko nodded. Looking at him, Kuro said.

"I see. For dinner, it's curry."

"Hurrah!"

"Curry! Yes!"

Neko and Shiro jumped for joy and clapped their hands. With a quick smile, Kuro headed to the kitchen to put on his apron.

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Fujinouchi, Tokyo. Millennium Hotel.

New Year's Day is over, and the neighborhood, back to normal, was tremendously lively that day. Luxury limousines and stylish sports cars arrive one after another, spitting out beautifully dressed people. The relaxed and dignified appearance was exactly that of the upper class, and they entered the hotel one after another while chatting in groups.

Among the crowd were a couple of familiar people. A man and a woman.

As for the man, he is quite handsome with a soft gaze and a sweet mask. The elegant figure standing in a suit looks like a model somewhere.

The woman is a beauty with her glamorous limbs draped in an evening gown. Her chest, daringly open, is adorned with a pearl necklace.

It is about Izumo Kusanagi and Seri Awashima, number 2 of "Homura" and "Scepter 4".

They talked in secret.

"Still, I didn't expect to receive a date invitation from Seri-chan. And at a celebrity party like this."

"We are currently understaffed. In the first place, it was you who brought the information about this party."

The way they link arms and whisper in each other's ears is like a perfect lover. However, the sharp glances that Awashima occasionally displays as she watches the guests cannot be attributed to those of the upper class.

With a smile, Kusanagi brought his lips to Awashima's ear and pointed it out.

"Seri-chan, Smile, smile. Here, the daughter of the president of R&B Corporation, "Kusakabe Lise", I want you to behave appropriately."

"...I know."

After answering briefly, Awashima gave an awkward smile. The dress that makes movement difficult and the smile that hides her true face are far from the usual Awashima. She's not used to it, but work is work.

It was none other than Kusanagi who got the information that "Jungle" was planning a large-scale party.

The party, dubbed "Jungle Bootup Reception", was to be hosted by a new company "Jungle", which operates an advanced SNS, and invited celebrities from various fields. Many celebrities accepted the invitation, although they were not that famous, because they were starting to get the hang of it.

Concepts like clans and supernatural powers were hidden by "Tokijikuin". But that's just on a general level. It was an open fact for people who extended their antennae, even a little. And the recognition of "Jungle" was proof that the story of the capture of the "Dresden Slate" was widespread.

When she told him that information, Kusanagi said something reluctant.

"Those big boys have light footwork. Riding the winning horse, he's too cheeky. I wonder if that's the case."

That comment resonated with Awashima, from "Scepter 4," with a sense of coldness.

After they were defeated in the "Decisive Battle of Mihashira Tower", the loss of "Scepter 4" was clearly visible. The information provided by other public institutions stagnated and some began to blatantly ignore their requests. Even when she informed Munakata, all she could hear was a single word: "Are you sure?" That weakness was going to produce the result of being despised again.

Hearing such insults being openly uttered by some people about youths trying to seize hegemony in a country without knowing where they stood and were left on their knees after clumsily failing, Awashima felt her blood rise again.

However, Awashima said nothing. She is the deputy commander of "Scepter 4" and is in charge of all practical matters. Undercover investigation into this match was the "practice's" top priority. "Jungle, who hadn't been caught by his tail until now, dared to appear on the surface... No matter what, it was necessary to capture the information there.

Awashima said with a sigh.

"If Fushimi was here, I wouldn't have bothered you."

Fushimi Saruhiko left "Scepter 4" after the "Battle of Mihashira Tower", and his whereabouts were unknown.

The last time Fushimi was seen was in the "Scepter 4" detention center, when he escaped with Hirasaka Douhan.

She kept it inside "Scepter 4" and didn't tell other clans about it. Even Kusanagi shouldn't have known either.

"I see. Fushimi hasn't been found yet. What about Munakata-san?"

"I don't know. The chief's thoughts, Fushimi's feelings."

Awashima frowned as if to bear the pain. Kusanagi gently hugged Awashima's shoulder.

"Well, that's a disappointing face. It's a fun party, Seri-chan."

"Don't be silly."

Reflexively she tried to push his hand away from her, but she stopped. Actions that inadvertently attract attention should be avoided. Awashima looked at Kusanagi with an angry smile, and Kusanagi, with an unfamiliar attitude, continued to escort Awashima.

The receptionist at the "Jungle Bootup Reception" place was wearing a mechanical mask.

Awashima frowned. She has seen that mask many times. For Awashima, it was a symbol of a coward who wants to hide his true identity while he commits crimes. Awashima is frustrated and righteously outraged that such a coward would openly work as a receptionist at a luxury hotel.

Kusanagi gave Awashima a light pat on the back and stepped forward.

"Please sign in on the spot."

Kusanagi brought his face closer to the PDA that was outstretched. The PDA made an electronic beep and scanned Kusanagi's retina, displaying his ID. The receptionist smiled; although he couldn't see his face, he reached out and pointed to the door of the place.

"Kusakabe Izuru-sama and his wife. Welcome. Please head to the entrance there."

"Ok."

Awashima looked at Kusanagi as she walked arm in arm.

"So, I'm your "wife"?"

"Yes, my love."

Kusanagi doesn't feel uncomfortable at all. Awashima sighed softly, put on the domino mask she was given, and entered the venue.

The party venue was quite big. It is probably the most prestigious place in this hotel and you can see the night view of Tokyo from the windows that stretch along the wall. Under the luxuriously shimmering chandelier, celebrities in domino masks converse and are entertained by tuxedo-clad members of the "Jungle" clan. The only strange thing was that they were wearing a mask that covered their entire face.

"Hmm, this is a celebrity party that's better than you've heard."

In response to Kusanagi's admiration, Awashima quickly determined the customer's physiognomy.

"Senior government officials, businessmen, movie actors, writers, even the current prime minister."

The anger rose again. It is a well-known fact that it is none other than the current Prime Minister Kanichi Samukawa who is spearheading the condemnation of Munakata. First of all, "Jungle" is a terrorist, and it could be said that the Prime Minister's attendance at a party organized by that terrorist was a serious problem.

"Seri-chan, smile, smile."

"I know."

When she answered in a tone that he didn't understand at all, a voice suddenly blared from the ceiling speaker.

"I would like to thank everyone here for coming to the "Jungle Bootup Reception". On behalf of the organizers, "Jungle" Corporation CEO Mishakuji Yukari would like to greet everyone."

The lighting dimmed and a spotlight shone on the person who appeared on the stage. Both Kusanagi and Awashima are well acquainted with the man, with his hair slicked back and dressed in a smart suit.

"Everyone, welcome to the new era!"

The dignified behavior of him is almost the same as when he faced Kusanagi and Awashima in the "Decisive Battle of Mihashira Tower". Kusanagi muttered bitterly.

"Mishakuji Yukari from "Jungle", both his face and name are exposed. How bold."

"So he doesn't even feel the need to hide anymore."

As Mishakuji extended his arms, the screen behind him projected a huge "Jungle" logo. A confident speech echoed throughout the room.

"Everyone here is very lucky, because we can be the pioneers of a new era! Our information network "Jungle" will go beyond mere communication tools to redefine human beings as a next generation social infrastructure. The possibilities that before us are, yes, infinite..."

For Awashima, it was excruciating nonsense. No, her job is to make a fool out of it. Awashima winked softly at Kusanagi, leaving him and slipping into the crowd of people hanging out here and there. The voices of them gossiping whispered in Awashima's ear.

"The supernatural incidents that have been going on for a while have become a tailwind, haven't they?"

"It seems that the "Jungle" system will also be introduced to related ministries and agencies."

"There are rumors that that power will be ours."

With the power of her will, she hardened the expression that was about to turn hard. She knows there will be a headwind. She came all the way here to do something about it.

Then, she saw a middle-aged man waving his wine glass and laughing out loud.

"Well, it's a very happy day! Now that disgusting young man can't play any role! Is this the first year of "Jungle"? Hahaha!"

After stepping on the foot of the current Prime Minister with all her might with her heel, Awashima proceeded smoothly. It would be a lie to say that she couldn't stop drinking when she heard the screaming behind him, but Awashima quickly forgot. Because the target appeared right in front of her.

She pretended to trip in front of an attendant wearing a mechanical mask and then fell. The attendant immediately held Awashima up with one arm, and Awashima dared to press her chest against her arm.

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

From the other side of the mask, she could clearly feel the turmoil within. Awashima frowned in annoyance and looked at the staff with moist eyes.

"Excuse me, I'm a little dizzy."

"Oh, customer? Are you okay?"

"I wonder if I had too much to drink. I want to go somewhere quiet."

The attendant's throat rose and fell at the charming whisper.

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And the officer collapsed on the ground.

He went down unconscious with a blow to a vital point, but it shouldn't be a lasting injury. Kusanagi turned to Awashima, who was next to him, after apologizing with a single bow.

"Seems more like foul play, Seri-chan."

"I'll do whatever it takes to get the job done."

Awashima knelt down and touched the staff member's body. She quickly found the PDA on his chest and tossed it at Kusanagi. Kusanagi activated it, used a connector hacking tool to breach the security, and started viewing the data on it.

When he searched the history, he found what he was looking for in one go.

"There is a list of participants in the party. If we take this..."

"We will be able to identify influential people who have been touched by 'Jungle'."

Once again, Awashima's gaze returned to the sharpness of a bird of prey. Who is leading the various acts of sabotage that "Scepter 4" is currently suffering in public and the plans to introduce "Jungle" into ministries and agencies? In the end, they are probably just Hisui Nagare's limbs, but if they are raised, their movements will slow down. The disqualification of "Scepter 4" may be stopped.

Seeing Awashima look at the PDA, Kusanagi shrugged and laughed.

"Hey, let's go. If we stay too long..."

At that moment, he heard someone's voice under his feet.

"D4, answer me. The retinal response disappeared. What happened?"

Awashima and Kusanagi saw it at the same time. Communication voices leak from the mask of the lying down staff member. The retina response means that the skin has the function of notifying the user when something goes wrong.

"Come on."

"Yes."

He turned quickly on his heel and opened the door. Almost at the same time, a loud voice echoed from the end of the hall.

"They are there!"

Three clan members with mechanical masks. It is not a number that he cannot win in a direct fight, but it is troublesome to draw a pistol. With a click of his tongue, Kusanagi turned and ran. Awashima did the same.

"I don't care, shoot!"

Along with the incredible words, gunshots and live bullets were fired. Kusanagi lowered his head and rounded the corner, turning around and cursing.

"Are they crazy?! There are some VIPs though!"

"Even if you delete one or two, you should be able to get rid of them...just leave them there!"

"I understand!"

The elevator was about to reach the end of the hall. He pressed the button as if to slam it shut, look back. Almost at the same time the doorbell rang and the elevator doors opened.

From inside, a burly man wearing a mask stretched out his arms.

"Kyaa?!"

"Seri-chan!"

With his log-shaped arm choking Awashima's throat, the giant man drew a gun with his other hand and fired at Kusanagi. A bullet grazed Kusanagi's hair, but he jumped undeterred, daring to jump into the narrow elevator shaft.

"No!"

The big man raised an annoyed voice and his muzzle twitched. He pulled the trigger two and three times, but Kusanagi bounced inside the box with a masira-like movement, preventing him from aiming. Using the springs in his body, he jumped near the floor display panel and delivered a strong kick to the big man's head.

"Uh...!"

The giant staggered, but perhaps it was because of the protective mechanism of the mask, or because of the resistance of his physique, that he stopped in a moment. A hail of bullets rained down on Kusanagi, who was crawling in a crouch. Kusanagi dodged it with a breakdancing move and raised her voice.

"Seri-chan!"

"Eh!"

Awashima wriggled free of the kick-loosened restraint and jabbed her elbow into the pit of the giant man's stomach. Awashima grabbed his arm, which had gone limp in pain, and twisted with all her might. By the principle of leverage, the giant man's body leaned forward, Awashima's palm sank into his neck, and Kusanagi's kick that slipped on the ground swept across his foot almost at the same time.

Kusanagi let out a huge sigh after delivering the final blow to the face and crotch of the giant man who had fallen on his back.

"Don't throw him at me in such a small space. If he bounces, he'll hit you."

"There's no way this kind of idiot would think of such a thing, right?"

Saying to spit it out, Awashima reached for the gun, pulled out the magazine, and fired the last shot remaining in the chamber at his feet. With the quickness of a soldier, Kusanagi whistled. At that moment, the elevator reached the underground parking lot. While he was wary of an ambush, he immediately jumped.

The underground car park, where many luxury cars were parked, was not popular. Awashima warned him as they ran.

"The exit is closed."

"Let's do it. But with this...!"

Kusanagi quickly searched for the stolen PDA. In a hotel where "Jungle" is alive, the security system should be able to work through an electronic network. Sure enough, security-related applications were quickly found. Continuing the operation, the blind at the rear of the parking lot was finally opened and light from the electric light came in.

"Ugh, looks like we managed to escape."

It was then that he took a deep breath and felt relieved.

A green flash appeared, brushing against Kusanagi's hand.

"Kusanagi-kun!"

Awashima let out a surprised voice. Kusanagi couldn't even do that and stared at his empty hand. The valuable evidence that could identify the collaborators stolen from the "Jungle" PDA was pierced by the thrown knife, destroyed without a trace, and fell to the ground.

"Damn...!"

With a bitter groan, Kusanagi turned his hostile gaze into the darkness at the rear of the parking lot.

"Emergency mission accomplished! You get 3000 "Jungle" points!"

An electronic voice sounded like a reward for completing a game that doesn't fit the scene. A flash of green lightning pierced the darkness, revealing someone standing there.

Awashima took a deep breath.

"Who is...?!"

In contrast to the annoying Awashima, the person only had a mechanical, expressionless expression. He pulled out two knives from his chest and wrapped them in green supernatural powers. That glow, this time clearly, began to illuminate the man's face.

"Rank up! Saruhiko Fushimi has been promoted to J-Rank of "Jungle". Congratulations!"

"Fushimi!"

The moment he called out his name, Fushimi threw a glowing green knife at him. Kusanagi stepped forward and crushed the knife with the flames from his lighter.

He wasn't allowed to say the many "whys" that were going through his head. Kusanagi said in a suppressed voice, the red eldritch wrapped around his lighter arm.

"Fushimi. I will listen to your story at the hospital."

The next moment, Kusanagi created multiple fireballs. A direct hit would inevitably cause severe burns, but he unleashed it at Fushimi without hesitation. Fushimi looked at him with an expressionless face.

Suddenly, a man emerged from the ground behind him.

The person emerged from the ground and grabbed Fushimi's shoulder. Fushimi was sucked into the ground as if he was repeating the moment when he appeared upside down. The fireball went through an empty space, hit the rear wall of the parking lot and exploded.

Kusanagi clicked his tongue and muttered.

"Green clan member...!"

"Fushimi! Why, Fushimi?!"

Awashima's agitation was no match for Kusanagi's. With grief more than anger, she called out the name of her former subordinate who had already disappeared. Her feelings were too difficult to guess. Because he showed her his betrayal in the cruelest way possible.

That's why Kusanagi couldn't afford to be carried away by his emotions. He put his hand on the shoulder of Awashima who was standing up and urged her on.

"Seri-chan, that's all for today."

Awashima bit her lip, but nodded clearly. From somewhere far away, the roar of the enemy guards approached them. Kusanagi and Awashima fled from the voice and headed towards the exit of the parking lot.

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"Congratulations!"

An unexpectedly bright voice greeted Fushimi as he entered the room.

Hotel Milenio, VIP room. Sitting on a long couch in the center of a room so large it could be mistaken for a hallway, the man slowly clapped his hands. The easy smile that floated on his lips seemed welcoming and ridiculous at the same time, at least to Fushimi's eyes.

The CEO of "Jungle" Corporation, Mishakuji Yukari. Until just a month ago, this man was his adversary. Mishakuji knows this too.

Even so, he calmly pointed to the couch opposite.

"Please make yourself comfortable. Saruhiko-chan. You have the right to."

Fushimi obeyed his words and pursed his lips in a bow.

Mishakuji reached out and took the champagne from the wine cellar. He poured the two glasses of wine onto Fushimi's side and then poured. Raising his glass slightly, Mishakuji winked at him.

"To the birth of a new classifier. And to your free soul. Let's make a little toast."

"Freedom?"

Fushimi didn't even reach for the glass. He doesn't know what's in it and drunkenness slows his judgment.

Mishakuji didn't seem to mind that, and he calmly raised the wineglass to his lips and tilted it.

"Isn't that so? Izumo Kusanagi and Seri Awashima, whom you defeated, were your acquaintances. The reason why you can throw knives in front of your former comrades without hesitation is because you are free."

"In short, are you saying that I am a traitor?"

"It's up to you how you take it. But I don't mean to disrespect you. I mean it, I don't hate it. The determination of people to do what they want without being bound by rules or ethics is beautiful."

Mishakuji narrowed his eyes and stared at Fushimi. Like to see through his thoughts.

Fushimi clicked his tongue sharply in response.

"I don't care about your assessment. Instead, would you let me meet the "Green King" quickly?"

Mishakuji raised the champagne to his mouth again and chuckled.

"Oh, you're pretty impatient, aren't you? You've become the classified you've always wanted, so why don't you soak in the glow a little more?"

"It's not my wish and it's not like I'm immersed in the afterglow. I just did what I could."

"That's not cute. If Sukuna-chan heard that, he'd be mad."

As he said that, Mishakuji put down his glass and got up from the couch. With slow steps, he walked towards the cabinet placed in the corner of the room. When he touched the elegant wooden door with his palm, a scanning light swept up and down, and an electronic voice resounded.

"J-Rank confirmed, Mishakuji Yukari. I'll open the door."

The cabinet was lifted without a sound and opened to the left and right. Beyond is a stout freight elevator. Mishakuji entered and called out to Fushimi.

Fushimi sighed and got up.

"Is it a spy movie or something?"

At that irony, Mishakuji smiled brightly.

"Because it's our "secret base". Without that trick, it would be boring."

Fushimi entered the elevator and looked inside. There were no floor numbers or buttons like in a normal elevator, just a palm-shaped interface on the side of the door. As Mishakuji put his hand on it, the door closed and the elevator began to move silently.

From the acceleration applied to his body, he knew that he was descending at considerable speed. After several tens of seconds, the elevator slowly came to a stop, and the doors opened to the left and right.

The place he entered was a dimly lit corridor. A motion sensor was activated, the lights came on, and a blind appeared, blocking the way.

While Mishakuji was in front of him, a scanning light was directed at his face. Retina authentication. After that, the shutter began to open vertically.

He did not know that such an underground passage existed in the middle of the city. The locks are tight and it's pretty deep.

Behind the shutter was a vast underground space. Stone pillars that look like temples stand side by side, and the light falling from far above illuminates the two in front of them in white. As he walked by, Mishakuji chatted casually.

"It is a secret passageway to our hideout. There are more than 100 exits in Tokyo alone. In the main subways and underground floors of skyscrapers. It is one of the most important secrets that no one knows except the top of our "Jungle".

Fushimi raised an eyebrow. As a member of "Scepter 4", he knows better than anyone how important current information is. By exhaustively searching the main subway stations and skyscrapers with underground floors, and discovering them from the entrances leading to their hideouts, it is possible to invade the "Jungle" headquarters, which has been hidden until now.

"Is it okay for you to tell me that?"

"Of course. You're already a classified. A companion who shares secrets with us."

Or, Fushimi thought. Maybe they think it's okay to be located. Will they believe "Scepter 4" is lost and no longer has the power to defeat "Jungle" head on?

As if he ignored Fushimi's thoughts, Mishakuji continued with a light tone.

"This time it was a great achievement, Saruhiko-chan. Against "Homura" and "Scepter 4", the number 2 of both clans, fighting alone. Fufu, you should have called for reinforcements, don't exaggerate."

"I don't like cooperative play or anything like that."

"You're lying."

Saying that lightly, Mishakuji looked at Fushimi. The color of his smile and his purple eyes, which had a bit of a piercing light, stared at Fushimi.

"You personally recruited U-Rank Hirasaka Douhan, monopolized the "Jungle" points for two people, and thought of achieving a quick rank rise. You cheating child."

Fushimi didn't bother even though he was caught off guard. That's because he expected the title to have been fulfilled. Faithless whispers.

"It was possible in the system, but couldn't it be done?"

"No way. It's selfish and wonderful. Besides, my Nagare-chan doesn't care about fouls."

Fushimi's eyebrows twitched at the name.

"The "Green King" Hisui Nagare."

"Our King I think likes people who think like that."

The words rang in Fushimi's ears as if they had various meanings.

Fushimi doesn't know anything about Hisui Nagare. But still he knew very well what he was thinking.

Did Saruhiko Fushimi really betray "Scepter 4"?

If so, "Jungle" deliberately invited internal disease. The information that Fushimi, who became a J-Rank, can obtain at his base of operations is immensely important. If that information can be brought to "Scepter 4", the situation can be reversed.

If Fushimi were in Hisui Nagare's position, he would be the first to be suspicious. He would not be promoted to J-Rank. Even if he made a mistake, he couldn't invite it to his base.

But Hisui Nagare does.

Fushimi doesn't like that. Because he makes him feel like a monkey dancing in the palm of Hisui Nagare's hand.

He sometimes he feels that he is swimming.

But the really important things only exist in the tiger's den.

"Come here."

Mishakuji stopped in front of a huge wall.

A thick old door was attached, resembling a shelter, which blocks the underground space. Facing that door, Mishakuji calmly spread his arms.

"Welcome, Saruhiko Fushimi. The "secret base" of "Jungle" welcomes you."

It was unlocked. The door opened slowly with a heavy sound.

Once he set foot there, there will be no going back. Will he fulfill his purpose or leave as a corpse? One of two. He had been prepared for that for a long time, so he did not hesitate to take the plunge.

Still, the moment he stepped forward, the face of a man flashed across his mind.

(Will he get here?)

He may not come. Anyway, he's crazy. He is an idiot who shoots 0 points in a row. It's possible that he doesn't understand what he was saying and it's all over while he's going back and forth.

However, there are times when he gets 100 points.

Fushimi's lips twitched slightly, but when he took the next step, he was gone. With a bored expression on his face, he advanced into the darkness of the tiger's den.

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The glass fell to the floor and shattered with a screeching sound.

But Yata didn't notice that. The fist that hit the counter table trembled. His blood seemed to drain and he squeezed his voice through the cracks in his teeth.

"What the hell is he thinking?!"

Kamamoto and Anna looked at Yata as if holding their breath. Kusanagi, standing behind the counter, called out to him in a low voice.

"Calm down, Yata."

However, those words did not reach the current Yata. Yata yelled his anger at that man, Saruhiko Fushimi, who is somewhere.

"You betrayed us, and this time you betrayed even the blue ones, so what are you going to do? What the hell is going on beyond that?"

There is no response to the words that he spits out with passion. Nobody should have known. What Fushimi is thinking and what he is trying to do, the answer can only be found in Fushimi.

He is a traitor.

Those words came to mind and Yata carelessly scratched the mark on his chest.

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It's been a long time since she finished her report.

Every time the second hand ticks, a drop of anxiety runs through Awashima's heart. Beyond the office desk, Munakata's expression seemed to be the same as always, but Awashima wasn't sure if that was really the case. After being defeated in the "Battle of Mihashira Tower", something in Munakata decisively changed. That fact has turned into a stagnation of anxiety, and there is always pain within Awashima.

"I see."

Suddenly, Munakata opened his mouth.

"With this, Fushimi Saruhiko's secession became decisive. It's like having your dog bite your hand."

There was also no change in tone from him. Quiet and young, everything is in the palm of his hand, and his eyes say that even if someone like Fushimi leaves him, it will have no effect.

(Is it really so?)

Awashima lowered her head to suppress the voice that seemed to come from within.

"Sorry. It's my responsibility to supervise."

Munakata narrowed his eyes as if he was considering whether he was listening to the apology or not.

"Anyway, we have to fill the void he left as soon as possible. To reinforce the front line, we will transfer several personnel to the Special Forces. 2 people from the Mobile Division general platoon, 3 people from the Information Division and 1 person from the Reference Room of the General Affairs Division."

General affairs section.

She thought she heard it wrong. General affairs departments are often staffed with non-combat fit personnel. There are no adequate personnel for the most elite "Special Forces Corps" in battle.

No. It's also different.

Awashima knows that there is only one suitable person.

"Excuse me."

At that voice, Awashima trembled and turned around.

With a slimy movement, the demon entered the office.

"You...!"

Like flowing water, demons never stop moving. With very natural steps, he advanced to the center of the room.

At that moment, the demon exploded.

Awashima's eyes could not capture the moment when the stillness turned to action, just as the murmur turned into a torrent in an instant. Within a few meters of a single step, the saber running from Zenjo's waist was perfectly positioned on Munakata's neck, beyond the office desk.

"....."

Awashima not only acts as the vice commander of "Scepter 4". Her swordsmanship is the best of the Special Forces and she has never been behind most of the members.

Even she, far from stopping Zenjo's outrage, couldn't even react. It was the demon who had his hand on the hilt of his saber.

Munakata did not lose his composure. A white blade approached the nape of his neck, literally a piece of skin. From there she saw something fall.

It was a mistake. It was cut in half and twitching nervously.

With one arm, he swung the long sword around and Zenjo returned it to his sheath.

"I'm sorry."

"Amazing."

Now that he had picked a fly out of his clothes, it seems that was it. Thinking of that, Awashima cleared her throat.

"Gouki Zenjo, the "Zenjo Demon" who killed the predecessor "Blue King" Habari Jin. From now on, I will have you behind me."

The "King Killer" would be behind.

Awashima understood exactly what that meant.

When Weismann's deviation from the "King" reaches a critical point, the "Sword of Damocles" that was looming over his head falls, bringing ruin to the land. However, if the "King's" life disappears before it drops completely, that is not the case. Yes, if someone can kill the "King" before that happens...

Just like Zenjo did with Habari Jin.

Just like Munakata did with Suoh Mikoto.

Placing that sword behind his back meant that he had his own destruction in sight. To drop his own head before the sword above his head falls. As a sword for that purpose, Munakata chose Zenjo.

Awashima bit her lip and lifted trembling fingers from her saber.

Various emotions swirled and she couldn't contain a single shock.

And she, smart, knew it. That tremor, that fluctuation, was the main reason why she was not chosen.

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Pan-pan-pan, a somewhat silly sound resounded.

Ribbons and confetti fluttered and piled above Fushimi's head as he stood in the doorway. Fushimi didn't even pay, he just stood under the board that said "Welcome Fushimi-kun" with an inorganic expression on his face.

"Hey, nice to meet you Saruhiko-kun! Welcome!"

"Thank you for coming, Saruhiko. Welcome."

"Kwah! Welcome!"

Iwafune, Nagare, and Kotosaka greeted him. Even so, Fushimi did not lose his iron expression and answered in a low voice.

"...Thank you."

His line of sight moved slowly, scanning the room.

It was a room like a cheap apartment. The kitchen is full of soot and a rickety fridge has a note telling you when it's your turn to take out the trash. If you look all over Japan, there are probably tens of thousands of one-room apartments with six mats that you can find anywhere.

No one would believe that this is the home of the "Jungle" Green Clan.

But Fushimi knows it's true. This show, which seemed like a practical joke, would be "like" if you know "Jungle" well. The one in the middle, a man in a wheelchair, has that hobby.

The "Green King" Hisui Nagare.

He was younger than he had imagined and more disturbing than he had thought. Even now, he looked at Fushimi with a mysterious smile.

"Okay, let's not just stand up talking. First of all, sit down."

The cheerful middle-aged man is Iwafune Tenkei. His other name is Otori Seigo, the "Grey King". It was the trump card of the Green Clan that won the last battle of Mihashira Tower.

The trump card put a plate of sushi on the table with a happy-go-lucky smile.

"This lazy Iwa-san went all the way to town and bought it. Real sushi! Not one of those food stalls. Look, what would you like? Tuna? Sea urchin? Salmon roe or shrimp?"

Despite the familiar welcome, Fushimi insisted on not placing orders.

"Okay, eggs."

"Heh, are you a boy?"

The only one who whispered was Sukuna Gojou, a boy who had his back to Fushimi. Sukuna's disgusted attitude from the moment Fushimi entered was, on the contrary, easy to understand and comfortable for Fushimi.

Iwafune rebuked Sukuna.

"Hey, you're the kid, aren't you? Oh, yes, there's more than just sushi! Eat chicken! Fried chicken!"

"Eat chicken! Eat chicken!"

"Don't say that, you silly bird!"

Sukuna punched Kotosaka, who spread his wings and made a racket. Seeing that, Iwafune frowned in embarrassment.

"What's up, Sukuna? You've been acting weird for a while now. Are you shy? Huh?"

Sukuna snorted and turned around. Iwafune looked at Fushimi and shrugged slightly.

There, Nagare intervened.

"Saruhiko, you've risen five ranks in just one month. This speed surpasses Sukuna's previous speed. It's really amazing. It's a new record."

Immediately, Sukuna's disgust turned visibly darker. Fushimi observed the situation emotionlessly.

"Nagare... let's talk about that another time."

"Eh, why do you say that, Iwa-san? I'm confused."

"Why? Sukuna, it's okay, so put yourself in a good mood. The beginning of a relationship is important and a smile is essential. You can't do well if you keep getting angry like this. Isn't that right, Saruhiko-kun?"

Through his observations up to this point, images of each person and their relationships have emerged, albeit vaguely.

Hisui Nagare, despite all the brilliance of him, seems to have a simple childishness. It seems that the blunt way of saying that something is awesome honestly doesn't fit with the intricately twisted conspiracy of "Jungle". Or maybe that distortion is the reason why he is called the "Green King".

Sukuna, on the other hand, was unmistakably just a child. His desire to be recognized by Hisui Nagare is transparent. That's probably why he's hostile towards Fushimi. Fushimi can be seen as a rival that threatens his position.

On the other hand, Iwafune is an adult. It must be said that he is suitable for his age, he is trying to mediate in the place of the pure and somewhat unsympathetic Nagare. Including his ability, he can be the base of this "secret base".

While he was thinking about those things, Fushimi responded with a single answer.

"No, it's fine. It doesn't matter."

"Oh, really?"

Iwafune relaxed and sat down on the couch. He raised a beer and made a toast.

"Ok, if you want to act cool, that's fine by me."

"I didn't come here to make friends."

"Then why are you here?"

Mishakuji Yukari, who had been silent until then, whispered.

He could feel the air in the room warm for a moment. Fushimi Saruhiko. Former number 3 of "Scepter 4". Why did a man who used to be his enemy get promoted to Ranker? Even if he didn't put it into words, everyone including Fushimi was probably thinking about it.

Fushimi said it nonchalantly.

"No reason. It's a game, right? I'm just trying to see what happens when I push my score to the limit and if I see something new. I don't think a "sushi party" is the goal, right?"

Nagare narrowed her eyes and answered that question.

"Of course. Our plan starts here."

"Ready, go ahead!"

"I have high hopes for your work. Saruhiko Fushimi, Rank-J, the elite of our "Jungle".

Everyone present looked at Fushimi.

Expectations, irritations, doubts, curiosity, and various other emotions, Fushimi took for granted. From the moment he took off his blue clothes, he was prepared to be seen with those eyes. Deserter. Traitor. There is no point in trying to remove the labels that have been placed on him. If so, he would make the most of it.

That's why Fushimi smiled fearlessly and said calmly.

"Please, just tell me what to do. I'll show you how to complete any mission. It's much easier than interpersonal relationships."

CHAPTER 10: THE WORLD REVOLVING

Sukuna Gojou hates Fushimi Saruhiko.

He hates his face and attitude. He doesn't like his background. He hates his abilities. Everything Fushimi does makes him angry. He didn't even want to breathe the same air, but as a Ranker, he was there and was allowed to be next to Nagare.

However, Iwafune...

"This is your first junior, right? Please be nice."

With that, he pushed Sukuna's back.

Sukuna pouted, but he still followed Iwafune's words. He didn't mean to be nice to him, but since he was breathing in the same place, he had to confirm the other person's "standing position". For what purpose did that man come to "this place"? It is Sukuna's responsibility as a J-Ranker to know that.

Fushimi stood motionless outside the "secret base". In front of him is consecrated the "Dresden Slate", a relic that is a source of supernatural powers and signifies the victory of "Jungle".

Sukuna shouted a provocative voice behind him.

"What do you think? It's the "Slate" that your former king lost and we took."

Fushimi looked at Sukuna for a moment, then immediately looked back at the "Slate". He responded vaguely.

"Not at all. He has nothing to do with me."

He was irritated by the nonchalant response. Sukuna stood next to Fushimi and looked him straight in the face.

"It doesn't matter. Now that you've become a Ranker, you're also a player and one of the operators of this game. Ah, but don't get carried away, okay? Just because you beat my record for fastest rank promotion and you rose to the ranking in a short period of time..."

Fushimi snorted. When he looked back at Sukuna, there was a hint of contempt for the boy.

"Oh, what? Are you upset because your score has been changed? You're a very troublesome child."

Blood rushed to Sukuna's head.

"What...?! What do you mean?!"

He must have been a figurehead. However, Sukuna's shyness refused to acknowledge that with all his might. He gritted his teeth so hard that he made noise and looked at Fushimi.

"You were able to get this far quickly because you used Hirasaka! I don't like playing games that depend on people like that!"

U-Rank Douhan Hirasaka and Sukuna had some kind of connection. Sukuna was able to promote to Ranker thanks to her help. He did not trust Hirasaka, who often betrayed him, but even so, Sukuna did not dislike her.

He did not like the fact that Hirasaka had fully supported Fushimi's promotion in rank.

Whether he knew Sukuna's subtleties or not, Fushimi maintained his natural tone.

"Who trusts people? But if it's a "tool", then I'll use it. I used to use dark weapons."

Sukuna realized that strength was gathering around his temples.

When he woke up, he was in front of Fushimi with a long staff. Sukuna said with a smile on his face.

"Hey, why don't you play against me once? Let's bet 10,000 points. I'll give you a big handicap."

"Huh? It's troublesome..."

The surprised words were cut in half.

Sukuna's long staff produced an electric blade. Anyone can see the battle posture. Nagare and Iwafune are behind them, but there is no sign of stopping them. It is still within the expected range. Or did he anticipate what would happen and try to persuade him to talk to Fushimi?

"I won't kill you. We're mates, right?"

In the end, the reason why Sukuna was not convinced was because he doubted Fushimi's strength.

"Jungle" is a world of the law of the fittest. Strong players rise, weak ones crawl to the bottom. That's clear.

Fushimi Saruhiko is probably a "good" player. He scored points efficiently and reached the top of the leaderboard as the fastest. But if he wants to stand shoulder to shoulder with Sukuna and the others, he will need more proof than that.

A test of strength.

Tension ran through Fushimi's body. Seeing that, Sukuna smiled. A frail but well-behaved boy is beaten and falls to the ground. Nothing is more pleasant than that. To see that, Sukuna put strength into the hand holding the scythe.

"Hey! What are you idiots doing?!"

At the same time as his sharp voice, a severe pain rained down on his brain.

Sparks spread in the depths of his eyes and he barely stopped his faltering consciousness. When he turned his tear-filled vision forward, Fushimi was also crouching with his head in the same way.

The man who hit the two of them, Mishakuji Yukari, put his hands on his hips and spoke in a tone like that of an older brother scolding his younger siblings for being messy.

"Stop fighting among yourselves. Internal disputes are not beautiful."

"Why... did you even hit me?"

"You and your damn brute force, Yukari..."

Fushimi and Sukuna complained, but Mishakuji responded with a wink.

"It's not that fights between friends are prohibited, but now is an important time, so I want you to be a little more aware."

Sukuna looked at Mishakuji resentfully, but said nothing more. He knew in his head that what he said was true.

Mishakuji looked at the "Slate". Silently, but surely, the relic pulsed. Just as the heart pumps blood, the "Slate" creates, sends and circulates unknown energy. Mishukaji said as he looked at the situation charmingly.

"Soon the slate will bloom. At this rate, it should be close."

"The new stage created by Nagare is about to begin. I am ready."

"So be careful, Sukuna-chan. Besides, wouldn't it be more spectacular to fight in the next scenario?"

"Hmm." Sukuna snorted, still, he was convinced. It was just as Mishakuji said. It's okay to let Fushimi understand after moving to the next stage. When the time comes he will clarify the matter.

"You saved my life."

Muttering softly, Fushimi looked at Sukuna with irritated eyes. Still he didn't say anything. His sullen silence is proof that he understands the power difference between him and Sukuna. Feeling somewhat satisfied with that, Sukuna turned on his heel and walked towards Nagare, who was silently watching over them.

As he looked at that, Fushimi let out a silent sigh.

"Sukuna-chan is a boy after all."

Mishakuji said that while he laughed.

"But he is strong, you know? He is still far from being a sophisticated beauty, but in terms of power, he is on par with me, or even stronger. Even if he asks you to fight him again, refuse."

Fushimi looked at Mishakuji with dull eyes.

"...Don't worry. I don't have any hobbies that make me sweat in vain."

He then directed his attention to Sukuna, who was talking to Nagare.

While he is having a friendly conversation, Sukuna nudges Nagare on the shoulder. Kotosaka spreads his wings and shouts something, while Iwafune watches with a wry

smile. Fushimi has belonged to several clans, but this is a sight he has never been able to see in any of them.

"Two kings, two clansmen, and a bird. However, they interact with each other equally, even with the two "Kings". It's a strange place."

The "King" is special. Although there are differences of degree, everyone respects them and that is why they keep their distance. To Fushimi, that was what a "King" meant.

That's different with "Jungle". The "King" is powerful, but he is just one of your allies. Sukuna and Mishukaji treat them as equals and the "Kings" naturally accept it. The J-Ranks were strangely friendly to the top of the green clan, who struggled for profit and sometimes got into trouble.

"Really? From now on, that kind of era will come. It's time for each and every one of us to have our own power and live from our own strengths and responsibilities without being controlled by anyone."

Saying that, Mishakuji smiled as if he could see Fushimi's heart.

"I think that suits you, right?"

Fushimi then looked away. Mishakuji is much more troublesome than Sukuna, who wants a showdown. Hiding that thought, he also turned on his heel and began walking in a different direction than where the "Kings" were.

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And then the "King" finished his calculations.

Scattered around the room are all kinds of blank papers, notebooks, copybooks, and straw paper. No, it would be more accurate to say it was a blank slate. The pieces of paper were filled with countless symbols, formulas, and memos, reminiscent of a paranoid madman's hospital room.

The "Silver King", Isana Yashiro or Adolf K. Weismann, tapped the last mathematical expression with the tip of his pen several times and then threw the pen away.

Resonant hammer effect according to the second law of the basic theory of research in physics W. Research continued privately by Claudia Weismann, a researcher who was once touted as a "two-headed genius" along with Adolf in the Third Empire. Shiro interpreted it, arranged it, and came to a conclusion.

"...This is the only option, eh?"

He meditated, no one heard the murmur. Kuro and Neko were gone. That's why Shiro could talk to himself without hesitation, looking at the sepia photo on the dining room table.

"Lieutenant, sister... I'm sorry."

Shiro... Adolf's firm decision is to put an end to a dream.

70 years ago. Dreams they shared together.

The dream that Adolf, Claudia and Kokujoji started together, and that they had together, will end with their own hands.

Shiro closed his eyes and endured the pain in his chest that little by little came out. That pain will probably never go away. He will continue to live with that pain. That resolution was already set within Shiro.

The method of happiness they once found.

Therefore, he will destroy it.

Just as he was thinking that, the intercom rang.

".....?"

Shiro stood up and headed towards the door. Kuro and Neko wouldn't have called the intercom, and Kukuri should be in class right now. He opened the door wondering who had come.

The girl standing there looked at Shiro with red eyes and muttered.

"Hello."

Shiro rolled his eyes and asked the girl, Anna Kushina.

"Anna? Why are you here?"

Eyes that seemed to see through everything darted to Shiro's face, then to the back of the room.

"Because I felt like I should come."

Just from that, Shiro understood why she had come here.

"...Thank you."

"No."

Shiro then invited Anna into the room.

There was nowhere to step in the room, which was full of documents, but without changing her expression, Anna bent down and picked up one of them. Anna probably couldn't understand the notes, which were a mix of Japanese, German, and mathematical formulas.

Still, she stroked the paper and muttered to herself.

"Destroy it."

Shiro nodded silently.

"Yes. I thought about it a lot, but it seems like that's the only option."

"Yes."

Anna said nothing and stared at the paper that described how to destroy the "Slate".

Seeing Anna makes Shiro feel suffocated.

The "Slate" has disrupted many lives. The "King" would be the best example of this. Reisi Munakata. Suoh Mikoto. And if Anna Kushina had not existed in this world, her lives would have been completely different. He doesn't believe she could have lived a normal life, but at least she could have lived as a human being.

If the "Slate" had not existed, Anna would never have awakened to her supernatural powers. A man who tried to wake up the "King" took her family. She should have been able to live an honest and modest life.

What changed that definitely was the "Slate", and it was Shiro who discovered it.

Shiro tried to open his mouth. He felt that he had to apologize to Anna. Nothing will come back like this. But, at least if he didn't do that, he wouldn't be satisfied.

At this moment, Anna murmured.

"There were good things and bad things..."

The look on Anna's face as she silently stared at the paper seemed nostalgic for something.

"...Thanks to the "Slate"."

"....."

Shiro held his breath for a while, then made up his mind and asked.

"Isn't it because of the "Slate"?"

"There is that too."

Anna recognized it easily, but she still gave a slight smile.

"But I'm sure that a lot of things happened even without the "Slate". That's why I don't want to blame anything or anyone. I think we should think for ourselves and live our lives to the fullest. That's why I came."

With that, Anna straightened her back and lowered her head towards Shiro.

"Thank you for finding the "Slate". I'm sorry it had to be destroyed."

Looking into Anna's sincere red eyes, he felt the pain in his chest suddenly ease.

He thought his dreams were sins.

He was convinced that he had committed a great sin that twisted the lives of many people.

It was still true. The past cannot be changed with a girl's impressions. What he has done is before his eyes and Shiro must take responsibility for it.

Still, Shiro was certainly saved by Anna's words.

Adolf, Claudia and Kokujoji aspired to people's happiness. He could think that the days the three of them spent together in Dresden were not a mistake at all.

"...Thank you."

Saying that with a hoarse voice, Shiro also bowed his head. Anna nodded and then silently looked back at the note he had written about his dream and how to destroy it.

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"What do you mean?! I can't believe you're going to fire the Captain!"

Slapping the desk, Awashima raised an angry voice.

Prime Minister's Office. Normally, the moment a voice like this was raised, the SP would intervene and restrain the owner of the voice.

Awashima also fully understood that the other party was the leader of a country and that such an attitude was not appropriate for her.

Although she understood, Prime Minister Samukawa's weak smile irritated Awashima to the point that she made her lose her sense of reason.

"Hmm." Exhaling deliberately through his nose, Prime Minister Samukawa folded his hands on his desk.

"It literally means that. Munakata-kun took responsibility for the incident that occurred at Mihashira Tower on Christmas Day and I made him resign from his position as head of the department. In other words... he is fired!"

The proud expression on his face is characteristic of politicians who have defeated his political opponents.

"Guh.", Awashima gritted her teeth. Although she knew that it was useless to say it now, she couldn't help but say it.

"Prime Minister, what authority do you have to do such a thing...?!"

"I have authority. The enforcement authority that "Scepter 4" has was granted to the "Fourth Branch of the Family Records Division", a division of the Office of Legal Affairs.

After all, you are all public servants. We have the obligation to obey the orders of the State."

"But...!"

Prime Minister Samukawa looked pitifully at Awashima, who was still trying to reason with him.

"The reason why he has been able to look so proud until now is because of the great power of Kokujoji Daikaku's "Tokijikuin" clan. It seems that Munakata-kun had intended to take His Excellency's place without realizing it, but what was the result? The secret treasure that "Tokijikuin" had been guarding for almost 70 years was stolen in just two months after being placed under Munakata-kun's control. I would have to say that he is not qualified."

Awashima remained silent.

The loss of "Scepter 4" was a foreseeable future. With the passing of the "Golden King" Kokujoji Daikaku, who created the "System of Seven Kings", the privileges of supernatural beings were slowly being usurped by most others. It's going to be bad. Munakata's defeat will only accelerate this trend.

His place is gradually being erased. Feeling as if her feet were collapsing, Awashima clenched her fists.

"Munakata-kun has already accepted his dismissal as boss."

Prime Minister Samukawa's next words left her breathless.

"That's all..."

"He also seemed to know exactly when to retreat. In that sense, he is truly a "King". If you are a confidant, why don't you sacrifice yourself for the "King"?"

Prime Minister Samukawa's smile clearly contained mockery, but Awashima didn't see it.

If Munakata had wanted to resist, he could have done so. Although he has lost his power, the "System of the Seven Kings" lives on. There is no doubt that "Tokijikuin" is responsible for maintaining the system. If he had wanted to avoid the humiliation of being fired from the boss's position, he could have done so.

Munakata did not. Awashima still didn't know what that meant.

"The other members will wait until further notice. This is your order."

Prime Minister Samukawa held out a piece of paper with a proud expression on his face. Awashima accepted the paper with trembling hands, it was clearly written as "Standby Order".

"This piece of paper..."

"This paper is important because I value formality."

After saying that, Prime Minister Samukawa laughed out loud.

At the same time, inside the Scepter 4" camp.

"Damn, what do you mean they fired the Captain?"

Domyoji shouted as he kicked a chair in the bathroom.

Just five minutes ago an email arrived from the capital's upper echelons announcing Munakata's dismissal and the order to stay away. "Scepter 4" was definitely a state-owned organization, but was actually allowed to operate as a semi-independent unit. Although he worked closely with the capital and the country, he never gave up taking orders. Furthermore, the dismissal of the head of the department was an unexpected event.

"The Captain hasn't shown up... Can you forgive me for something like this?"

Akiyama admonished Domyoji, who was still in bad shape.

"Calm down, Domyoji."

Benzai analyzed that calmly as he crossed his arms.

"So far, the government has never interfered with "Scepter 4" in such a forceful manner... but does it have anything to do with the fact that the top government seems to be in contact with the Greens? Now that Fushimi-san is has allied itself with the Greens, things I don't want to believe are happening one after another..."

"What are the Captain and Fushimi-san thinking?!"

Undirected anger is probably the flip side of anxiety. This was a feeling shared not only by Domyoji but by all the members present there.

Since their defeat at the Battle of Mihashira Tower, opposition to "Scepter 4" had become visibly stronger. In contrast, the Green Clan has expanded to the surface world and is now showing strength to reach the upper levels of government. Simply put, "Scepter 4 is becoming a "loser".

However, amidst all that, there was one feeling that the members shared.

"I don't think the Captain will get rid of his responsibility. Maybe he has his own reasons for doing so?"

It was Kamo who muttered to himself. Enomoto, who was next to him, nodded his head.

"Oh, that's right. Until now, the Captain has always solved problems in ways we never imagined. I'm sure this time too..."

"Yes, but... what kind of method is that?"

There is no one who can answer Domyoji's counter question.

It is thanks to Munakata's leadership that "Scepter 4" has been able to overcome so many difficulties. His transcendental perspective, however, is so transcendent that his subordinates often do not understand him. Munakata's move was beyond the comprehension of those who were not kings.

Still, even though it was difficult to understand, Reisi Munakata was the "King" of them.

Akiyama looked at the other members and said clearly.

"I don't know what the Captain is thinking, but "Scepter 4" and Reisi Munakata will not end like this. The time to act will definitely come. So let's wait until then. I think that is the meaning of the Captain's silence."

There were no words, but the members of "Scepter 4" nodded silently.

They have their cause, even if it is humiliated and repressed by the State. Only they knew that there was nothing shady about it.

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Anna looked up at the blue sky and let out a quiet sigh.

The winter air is cold and her breath is white. However, Anna's eyes cannot capture that color. The blue sky and white breath blend with the monochrome background, making it impossible to see anything but a vast ocean of color.

Anna's color blindness is something she was born with. She can't recognize colors other than red. Her family was distraught about it, but Anna was fine with it. Precisely because she couldn't recognize other colors, the red color reflected in her eyes was particularly vivid and beautiful.

If it weren't for those eyes, wouldn't she have been chosen by the "Slate"?

If it weren't for the "Slate", she wondered if she would have been able to see the most beautiful red in her eyes.

With that in mind, Anna opened the door to enter HOMRA.

"Ah, Anna. I'm glad you're home."

Kusanagi, who was on the other side of the counter, let out a relieved voice, and Yata, who was sitting on the couch, asked.

"Anna, where have you been?"

"I went to see Yashiro and the others."

"I would have accompanied you if you had told me. There is a lot going on right now!"

Anna felt a little surprised by Yata's dissatisfied words. She is now the "Red Queen". "Jungle" won't mess with her unless there's something really wrong.

Maybe in his mind, even though she is the "Red Queen", she is still a helpless girl who lost her parents, left her aunt and came to this place. Anna is part of his family, the youngest child they must protect.

Then Anna smiled slightly and said.

"I'm sorry."

"Mmm... oh."

Yata was probably aware of that too. He scratched his cheek in embarrassment and turned to the side. Then, Kusanagi said.

"By the way, Anna... Munakata-san, it seems that something terrible has happened."

"Yes."

She heard the news from Shiro that Reisi Munakata had been fired as head of "Scepter 4". She doesn't know much about politics, but she could intuitively understand that things were not going well. The weakening of the social power of "Scepter 4" means that "Jungle" is on the offensive.

"I never thought that a "King" could be fired by his country. This sudden incident seems to have caused quite a stir within "Scepter 4". The members have also been told to wait and it is unlikely that they will be able to leave their base. It seems that the most important person, the boss, has not shown up. I hope Seri-chan is okay."

Kusanagi sighed softly. The current brain behind "Homura" is definitely Kusanagi. His eyes probably see a more detailed perspective.

"At the party Seri and I attended, hosted by "Jungle", there were quite a few people who looked like they were government officials. I guess the government chose green over blue. If this continues, the world will turn green."

"I guess that's why."

It was Yata who muttered to himself. His expression was depressed, as if he was thinking about something. However, Anna could feel dark red anger swirling deep in his chest.

"Yata-chan?"

"So Saruhiko abandoned the sinking ship and betrayed it again, this time turning to the greens."

He clenched his fists tightly and the words he spat out were tinged with deep anguish. Yata and Fushimi knew each other before joining "Homura", and their relationship was off limits to other people. Not even Anna knew how Yata felt about Fushimi, who had betrayed him repeatedly.

"Misaki..."

Yata looked back at Anna, who looked worried. He then slowly got up and walked towards the exit of the bar.

"...I'll go look around again."

After watching Yata leave, Kusanagi sighed and changed the subject.

"Anna, what happened to Shiro-san?"

Isana Yashiro's investigation to counter the "Slate" stolen by "Jungle". Now that "Scepter 4" is out of power, his research could be said to be the only trump card against "Jungle".

Anna hesitated for a moment before telling him the result.

"Anna?"

Kusanagi murmured in disbelief, and Anna took the step and opened her mouth.

"...Yashiro's investigation has been completed."

"Well, then..."

Anna nodded resolutely in Kusanagi's eyes.

"He will destroy the "Slate"."

Those words were serious and little by little they permeated the silence of Bar HOMRA.

The destruction of the "Slate". They knew this was his trump card. It is also said that only Shiro who is the researcher who discovered the "Slate" can do that.

However, both Anna and Kusanagi were unsure if it would really be possible. For them, as supernatural beings, the "Slate" is something that "exists" there unwaveringly, just like heaven and earth. Is it possible to destroy heaven and earth? What will happen? It is still difficult to predict.

But it has to be done. Otherwise, the world will be plunged into chaos that will resemble destruction.

Kusanagi murmured slowly, as if he was fully aware of the weight of his words.

"...I see. Shiro-san finally found a way to do that."

"Yashiro has decided to destroy the "Slate" which was the shape of Yashiro's dream."

Kusanagi looked at Anna in silence.

"Anna, are you okay with that?"

Anna put her hand on her chest and mumbled a little.

"This red is important to me."

Anna's eyes can no longer capture the red that lives inside her.

It was something that once resided in a certain man. A red flame that burns silently while containing the power to destroy everything. The red color reflected in her eyes was so beautiful she could stare at it forever, and the warmth she felt when she touched him was surprisingly soft.

Kusanagi is also one of the people who was attracted by that warmth. She lowered her eyes and nodded.

"...Yes."

"The "Slate" took a lot from me, but I still love this red. This red saved me."

There is nothing false in the words she conveyed to Shiro at that moment. The "Slate" took her family from her and then gave it to her. If it was thanks to the "Slate" that she was able to meet "Homura", then it must have been a blessing.

"Anna..."

Looking at Kusanagi who looked worried, Anna said resolutely.

"But it's okay to lose that."

Images of the members of "Homura" appeared in her mind.

Some of them were people she would never see again. Every day she spends with them is a treasure for Anna. Memories never fade and remain beautiful forever. However, what will happen if the world is exposed to unprecedented chaos due to the "Slate"?

Those who are present will also be caught in the confusion. And the memories are only in the past. Whatever future she has with them will disappear.

"For a long time, the only thing I could do was "see" my destiny. But now it's different. If the destiny of the "Red King" is destruction, then I will destroy the destiny that will harm the people I care about."

Anna believes that is her mission after awakening as the "Red King". Anna Kushina's role was discovered by herself, not because anyone told her.

Seeing Anna's determination, Kusanagi also nodded silently.

"...I see. I guess I've been waiting for this moment ever since I found those documents in Germany."

"Yes. All that's left is..."

Just as she was about to say that, the doorbell rang.

When she turned around, she saw a young man standing at the entrance of the bar. His casual clothing, a simple shirt and pants style, was something she had never seen before. Is this a sign that he has gone from being a public figure to a private person? Anna spoke the young man's name.

"...Reisi."

Reisi Munakata, the man who had broken away from "Scepter 4" and had come to be known as the "King of the City" gave Anna a slight nod in return.

"Hello."

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It was a scene too strange to be considered a dialogue between two "Kings".

Two "Kings", a girl and a young man, are at the same counter. Blood orange juice was placed in front of Anna and champagne in front of Munakata. He didn't know what they were trying to celebrate. It's not like they were trying to congratulate him on his retirement.

After taking a sip of champagne, Munakata spoke.

"What's the point of calling me "Red Queen" out of nowhere?"

"I wanted to talk with you."

A red marble shined in Anna's hand. It was thanks to that that she was able to contact Munakata, who was active in the Battle of Mihashira Tower and whose whereabouts were unknown. The fact that Munakata also continued to possess that means that he perhaps expected something like that to happen one day. After taking a deep breath, Anna spoke clearly.

"We will destroy the "Slate"."

Even after hearing this, Munakata remained unmoved. He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and put one in his mouth.

"...I see. Without a doubt, that is an option that can be taken to overcome the current situation."

Kusanagi handed him a lighter while he searched for a light. He said with a slight smile in his voice.

"Are you a smoker?"

"I smoke very rarely."

Munakata transferred the light that Kusanagi had lit to a cigarette and slowly inhaled the purple smoke. He slowly let the ashes fall into the ashtray placed in front of him.

"For you, the "Slate" is like Suoh Mikoto's enemy."

"...I'm sorry. But it's not even that simple."

Suoh Mikoto. A former "Red King" and Kusanagi's best friend. If it weren't for the "Slate", he and Kusanagi would have lived very different lives.

But there's no point in even thinking about it. Even if he imagined a future that never came, reality won't change anything.

"The "Slate" made him live and let him die. That gave us and took away many things. I have no intention of destroying the "Slate" and giving up. However, I also think it should be destroyed."

Munakata exhaled smoke and responded.

"I agree that the "Slate" is a dangerous thing. However, the current development of this country is due to the "Golden King" and the great enlightenment of the country. In other words, the "Slate" system has profound roots in this country. We cannot afford to lose it."

"There's no point in saying something like that. Hisui Nagare is trying to unleash the power of the "Slate" and grant supernatural powers to all humans. If that happens..."

"Yes, we must stop it at all costs. However, if the "Green King" wishes for change and the "Red King" is determined to destroy it, then I, as the "Blue King", my goal is order. The power of the "Slate" must be exercised in an appropriate and orderly manner."

"In other words..."

Kusanagi looked directly into Munakata's eyes and said.

"Are you saying you want everything to go back to normal? You should back off and I'll take care of it this time."

"....."

Munakata did not respond. Kusanagi and the others cannot predict what his clear mind thinks. However, he had no choice but to make a judgment based solely on the materials he had.

That is to say...

"I don't think you can do that now."

Munakata's eyes flashed with a slight smile.

"Oh?"

Munakata, however, stopped the comment with just his voice. Does that mean that words that sound like those of a clan member are not enough to reach people? In that case, Kusanagi spoke from a different direction.

"Anna is worried about you too."

Munakata looked at Anna who was sitting next to him. The "King" girl watched Munakata attentively, without saying a word. Everyone already knows that her eyes capture more than just physical phenomena.

"...Your sword is already dangerous. If you overdo it, it will fall."

The blue "Damocles Down" means death and destruction. This also worried many people with supernatural powers. If the underlying cause is Suoh Mikoto, "Homura" cannot help but be related to Munakata's discomfort.

Suddenly, Munakata cleared his throat and laughed.

"Did you laugh?"

Munakata gently shook his head while Kusanagi narrowed his eyes and showed a hint of anger.

"No, excuse me. When I thought I was in the opposite position, it became a little funny."

"Opposite position?"

"I once scolded the "Red King" in the same way. It ended up being a waste of effort."

"....."

Reisi Munakata killed Suoh Mikoto.

If he had to say it objectively, it was probably the "right" thing to do. At this moment, Suoh's "Sword of Damocles" was also approaching his limit. Then, when Suoh himself took down the "Colorless King" who was acting behind the scenes, disaster finally struck. The only person who could stop the fall of the "Sword of Damocles" was Munakata, who was able to take Suoh's life.

If Munakata hadn't killed Suoh at that time, they would have died. Suoh would have been annihilated and Tokyo would have become a gigantic bay that would have swallowed millions of people.

Therefore, Munakata's actions were "correct."

If you can understand everything just because it is "right", there is no need to worry.

"Do you think you will be like this too?"

Kusanagi asked in a low voice. This sage seemed to be objectively contemplating even his own destruction.

A sinister premonition dominated Kusanagi's heart.

If the Sword of Munakata fell, who would have the role of stopping it?

"Reisi."

Suddenly, Anna opened her mouth. Munakata looked at the little "Queen" sitting next to him.

"What do you want?"

"You're not like Mikoto."

Munakata's eyes widened slightly as Anna spoke slowly.

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It was a windy night.

That night there were two groups of people breathing. The group on one side had uniforms painted solid blue and formed an unbroken formation. On the other hand, they were a group of beast-like people, each dressed in faded red clothes and emitting a ferocious aura.

"Scepter 4" and "Homura" are two clans that come into conflict and fight each other.

The trigger was something trivial. A Strain, who committed a robbery in Shizume, escaped and was eventually captured by "Scepter 4". "Homura" did not approve of that and demanded the handover of him, but there was no way for "Scepter 4", a security organization, to grant that request.

Until then, it could have just been a skirmish, as usual.

What was different about that night was that the "Kings" of the two clans, Reisi Munakata and Mikoto Suoh, led their respective clans.

When both sides found out about this, their tension increased. A battle between "Kings" will lead to destruction. Although they knew that, neither Munakata nor Suoh took a step back. They walked straight through the windy night.

And, naturally, it happened.

Munakata let out a cheerful voice.

"Stop, "Red King". This matter is under the jurisdiction of "Scepter 4"."

Suoh still had a cigarette in his mouth and smiled with one cheek.

"I don't know."

"Homura's" personnel officer, Izumo Kusanagi, who was attending next to him, spoke to him as if to intercede.

"I'd like to ask the Strain you captured earlier a few questions, that guy did the same thing in our territory, so I'm wondering, could you give him to me?"

He had a gentle demeanor, but the serious eyes shining behind his sunglasses told her that he had no intention of backing down either.

"Scepter 4". Vice Commander Seri Awashima looked at Munakata as if she was asking for an order.

"Captain."

"Of course, I can't just say yes. They're as annoying as ever."

Munakata said in deep annoyance as he pushed up his glasses.

Suoh smoked a cigarette, exhaled and threw the butt at his feet. He muttered casually as he put out the fire with the sole of his shoe.

"Burn them."

"Uoooh!"

The ten or so subordinates of "Homura" let out a battle cry all at once. Raising fists, stamping feet, and shouting in unison are the very voices of warriors on the battlefield.

"No Blood, No Bone, No Ash!"

Every time they scream, the red aura around them becomes stronger. It is because of this momentum that "Homura", who relies on their individual military strength and is far from being controlled, sometimes overwhelms "Scepter 4". With a fierce spirit in their bloodstream, the determination to fight until the end of their lives spreads through them like a fever.

At this moment, Munakata silently took a deep breath and muttered.

"We will advance with our sword in hand, for our cause is pure."

"Everyone, draw your swords!"

"Akiyama, ready!"

"Benzai, ready!"

Vice Commander Awashima and the soldiers standing behind Munakata drew their swords almost simultaneously. Unlike "Homura", whose power source is fierceness and drive, it was his righteousness that controlled "Scepter 4". The power known as supernatural power must be kept under strict control, and it is his responsibility to never allow it to spill over and disrupt the world. That's the power source of "Scepter 4."

"...Munakata, ready."

Munakata drew his saber a moment after his soldier and threw the tip directly at Suoh. Suoh let out a small laugh again at this act, which could be interpreted as a provocation. Keeping his eyes fixed ahead, he called to the young man next to him.

"Totsuka."

"I understand."

Tatara Totsuka responded with a soft voice that was not suitable for this tense situation and took Anna's hand. Anna turned her worried eyes towards Suoh as she evacuated to a nearby building, guided by Totsuka.

Suoh clenched his fist.

At that moment, an overwhelming magma-like aura surged from all over his body.

"Ha!"

It was an aura so dark, hot, and destructive that Awashima couldn't help but cover her face from it. If the two bright red fists hit you directly, your body will be reduced to ashes in an instant. Like the instinct of a creature that hates death, agitation ran through "Scepter 4".

Pressing down on that aura, Munakata took a step forward.

The randomly roaring red aura was stopped by Munakata's blue aura, and scattered aimlessly into the night. Munakata's appearance reminded him of a precision machine that takes everything, processes it in an orderly manner, and returns it to his ideal state.

Suoh slammed his fist into the palm of his hand.

Munakata prepared his saber.

Which one fell to the ground first?

When the people around realized it, the two "Kings" were already colliding head-on. Two colors, red and blue, collided, eclipsed each other and created a whirlpool while canceling each other out. Both clans began their own battles, centering on a transcendent battle that raged like a storm.

Totsuka and Anna watched the war between super humans from a distance.

The red marble that Anna looks at reflects what she wants to see using her sensory abilities. What is now reflected there is the image of the "Kings" engaged in a particularly fierce battle. Even though he was covered in wounds from fighting with fists and saber, Suoh was still smiling.

"Mikoto."

As Anna murmured anxiously, Totsuka next to her said in a carefree voice.

"Hey, it's okay. It's like a "hello" between kings."

Anna shot an accusatory look at Totsuka.

"Tatara, be serious."

"Ahaha, I'm sorry. But I don't think you should worry. King and Munakata-san are probably exchanging words by throwing their powers at each other like that."

"Words?"

"Yes. There's something about those people that only they can understand. They both understand things that not even me, Kusanagi-san, and Anna understand. That's the kind of relationship they have, I'm sure."

Hearing Totsuka's words, Anna looked at the marble once more.

Only a "King" understands another "King". Exchanging words and exchanging swords are the same in the sense that they clash with each other's existence. Anna was too young at the time to understand that. The young "King" egg, which had just hatched, could only observe his "conversation" through the marbles.

Fists and sabers clashed and, after a second, they separated. Landing on the roof of the building, Munakata let out a silent sigh and shook his head.

"You are a truly unpleasant man. I can't tell you how many times you have annoyed me since I became the "Blue King"."

Suoh clenched his fist and laughed.

"Ha. That's my line."

"Our power as kings cannot be used in vain as it is now."

"Who decided that?"

Munakata shrugged in response to Suoh's mocking words.

"It's not about deciding or not making a decision. It's about those who have power being responsible for that power."

"Considering that, you seem to be having a lot of fun too."

"Please don't joke."

Munakata told him to finish and raised his saber again.

"Disorderly use of force. Running without end. Destruction without regeneration. The "Fire King" certainly suits you. It burns and burns for no reason. In fact..."

"My chest is very tight."

Munakata smiled at Suoh who followed his words.

"Yes, that's it."

"Ha. That fits well!"

Screaming, Suoh kicked the ground. The saber and the fist collided again.

"The title "King of Order" suits you well. Trying to get into other people's lives with your long, boring sermons. So..."

"You make me sick."

This time, Munakata accepted Suoh's words. Suoh snorted.

"Oh, that's all."

Neither Munakata nor Suoh could remember when that started happening.

Probably from the first glance. Each denied the true identity of the other. Munakata could not accept Suoh's reckless use of the "King's" power, and Suoh did not like Munakata's attempt to impose a set standard on him. From the moment they met it was decided that the two would fight.

However, in reality, neither Munakata nor Suoh had any intention of killing the other.

No, there wasn't that. To be precise, he understood that "there is no way for this guy to die at this level". Even if the saber is swung without hesitation or the fist is thrown seriously, the opponent will not die. His opponent was a "King", a transcendent being like him. Only then could they fight with all their might without worrying at all.

Neither Munakata nor Suoh would ever admit that. However, they certainly liked the other person. Someone who wouldn't die even if he did his best.

The words they exchanged during their discussions were certainly tinged with joy.

"You always behave well, don't you feel uncomfortable?"

"Of course not. I'm not like you."

"Ha. I guess so!"

And they started again. Hit each other without the opponent dying. As they danced, scattering twin flashes of red and blue, they colored the night sky like two stars together.

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A sound was heard and the melted ice fell into the blood orange juice.

It must have only been a few seconds that Munakata looked Anna in the eyes. However, the past reflects that there is unequivocally something that once existed. Munakata certainly remembered even the few words he exchanged with that man.

Anna repeated it, as if she was tracking him.

"You are different from Mikoto."

A sarcastic smile appeared on Munakata's lips.

"I never thought I would be the one to be reprimanded. I thought his methods were very foolish."

Suoh Mikoto sacrificed herself for his way of life.

He never forgave the "Colorless King" for killing his subject and friend, and took his life. He did it even though he knew it would lead to his own destruction. This is how Suoh Mikoto lived his life. He did what he wanted. This is how that man described his actions.

And now he was trying to do the same.

Keep the "order". That's his way of life. Even if destruction awaits him in his destiny, Munakata continues his path without hesitation.

He just does what he wants.

"Reisi."

Munakata murmured as if to interrupt Anna's words.

"Either way, the "Three Kings Alliance" is no longer valid."

Kusanagi, who was on the other side of the counter, turned around and made a suspicious sound.

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday, I was fired from the position of boss due to a notice from the government. From now on, I will no longer be able to work with you as clan boss."

Kusanagi looked accusingly at Munakata.

"Even if you're no longer the boss, you're still the "Blue King". The boys in blue are at a loss right now... what are you going to do with your clansmen?"

Munakata didn't have the words to answer that.

"Scepter 4" came out of his hands. It is within the framework of law, formality and the State that both the "King" and the clan are allowed to exist. Being an organization united under that belief, it was natural that it followed the orders of the State.

Munakata, as a private citizen and as "King", must do what he must do from now on. They will too. If you are a member of the Blue Clan, you should do what you think is right.

Munakata stood up. He ended up staying a long time. It was probably because Anna's words that stopped him made him feel unnecessary feelings.

"Reisi!"

Anna also stood up and called Munakata to stop him.

However, Munakata did not turn around. The time for exchanging words is over. Munakata knew that from now on only swords and power would be exchanged.

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In front of the tea table, Kuro was sitting with his arms crossed and a worried expression on his face.

Shiro is sitting in front of him, arms crossed and a serious expression on his face. Neko next to him did the same, crossing her arms with a perplexed expression on her face. Well, in Neko's case, she was probably imitating them. There's no way she could understand what Shiro was talking about.

However, the same goes for Kuro. Schwert control, second methodology, Weismann criticality prediction, Von Dreyf's extraordinary physics, Maelström's inertial guidance... Most of the technical terms and equations written in the large number of documents scattered on the tea table are incomprehensible. Still, he realized what Shiro was trying to do.

"This method will destroy the "Slate"."

Kuro frowned. That's because he knew firsthand that the method Shiro proposed was extremely dangerous.

"Is that really possible?"

"Until now, the destruction of the "Slate" was thought to be impossible. So this is a move that not even the "Green King" would have expected, and it is a comeback."

Shiro's words can be trusted. After all, he was the one who discovered the "Dresden Slate". If Shiro could be considered a leader in research, then they could do it.

But...

"But isn't it dangerous to do something like that?"

When Kuro said something that he didn't even need to ask, Shiro laughed as if he was worried.

"I guess the only thing I can do is get them to believe in me as a researcher."

Kuro stared at his face.

He thought that didn't answer the question. Shiro never said it wasn't dangerous. If we want to understand the underlying meaning of what he is saying, he is probably saying: "It is dangerous, but we have no choice but to do it."

Kuro doubted for a moment if he should accept that as his clan member and friend.

"Yes! Yes! Wagahai believes in Shiro!"

Neko raised her hand as if she were going to jump. Shiro gently stroked her head.

"Thank you, Neko."

"Ahem!"

Kuro tried to compete with Neko who proudly puffed out her chest.

"I believe in you too!"

The two blinked and looked at Kuro.

After feeling uncomfortable and clearing his throat, Kuro straightened his back and continued.

"I believe you. You will do what you have to do and go home with us."

That last word was all Kuro really wanted to say.

Hearing that, Shiro's eyes widened slightly. Then he smiled softly.

"...Yes. It's okay. It's a plan that includes making sure I return home alive."

Kuro's expression softened. It seems that Kuro's feelings have been properly conveyed to Shiro. If he was thinking about it that much, he probably wouldn't do anything unreasonable, so Kuro nodded his head.

"Ah, that's right. There was something I wanted to give you two."

He suddenly remembered something and took something out of his jacket pocket. He placed it on the table.

They were three coins that shone silver.

"What is this?"

Neko grabbed one of them and stared at it.

"You know, we didn't have a clan name or a clan mark. I felt a little jealous of other clans."

"I see, this is the mark of our clan."

"Wow... it's so bright!"

Neko's eyes shone, holding it up to the light as if it were the most precious treasure of all. Kuro also took the coin and held it tightly. It would be hard to say that it was proof of the bond between the three of them, but considering that Shiro put a lot of thought into doing it, that felt much deeper than it seemed.

"I would like to give the clan a name, but Kuro, could you give it one?"

Kuro's eyes widened at Shiro's offer.

"Oh, me?"

"Yes, I would like something nice."

Although confused, Kuro thought carefully. He has almost never given a name to anything, but if it is his duty, he will do his best.

"It's okay. That's right... When it comes to what we deserve..."

He looked around the room. Scattered documents and memories that Kuro and Neko gathered from all over the country. As he watched them, Kuro directed his attention to the kitchen.

The first thing that caught his attention was the rice cooker.

"...White rice."

"Eh?"

Kuro muttered to himself and Shiro tilted his head. By then the name had already been decided. Kuro turned to Shiro, picked up the coin with a determined expression, and placed it on the table with a click.

"Our clan name is "Hakumaito"!" (White Rice Party)

After a moment, both Shiro and Neko trembled at the same time.

"Eh, yes!"

However, Kuro was completely satisfied with his naming sense.

"Hmm. White rice is the center of food and the foundation of a healthy body. Bright white rice has been a symbol that has existed in the center of our hearts since ancient times. It is truly unchangeable. And above all, Shiro, this is your favorite food, right?"

"Uh, well..."

Shiro seemed confused for some reason, but Neko seemed to like it. She exclaimed happily as tossed the coin.

"Hakumaito~!"

Nodding, Kuro took out a recorder filled with some words. He wanted to know what his former teacher would think of that name.

When he pressed the button, a soft and familiar voice rang.

"Happiness is wrapped in white rice."

Kuro looked at Shiro with a smug expression on his face.

Eh, Shiro laughed. He could see in his smile as if he had given up on something, but he still nodded.

"In fact, it may be perfect for us sitting around the chabudai. Very well, we, "Hakumaito", will work together and do our best!"

"Yes, I will do my best!"

Shiro looked at Neko with kind eyes as she raised her hands innocently. He put his hand on her head and said softly.

"Hisui Nagare called Neko "Ameno Miyabi"."

At that name, Kuro gasped.

Neko also widened her eyes and stared at Shiro.

She never talked about what Neko and Nagare talked about that day. Kuro and Shiro didn't dare to ask about it either. The fact that Hisui Nagare offered something to Neko and Neko rejected it was enough. Neko is her friend, a member of the Silver Clan. He didn't need to know anything more than that.

But still...

Shiro may have had some sort of responsibility. They held Neko. Therefore, it is possible that Neko has lost something.

"He must have researched and learned about Neko before she became Neko. If you ask him about it..."

At that moment, Neko tightly squeezed the hand that was placed on her own head.

"Shiro."

She called out loud and her shoulders moved. Neko's smile was as bright as the sun, in contrast to the anxious expression on her face.

"Wagahai is a cat! Shiro's cat!"

That's what she screamed.

At those words, Shiro blinked as if he had just woken up. Then he laughed lightly.

"I see. That's right, I'm sorry."

Kuro nodded as well and placed his hand on theirs.

"Neko and I are here as your friends. That's all that matters. This time, we will follow you to the end. I will not be an obstacle in your way."

"Wagahai too!"

At that moment, neither of them could follow Shiro.

A fight between "Kings". He was sure it will happen again this time. Even so, they will continue to follow Shiro. They already had a shared destiny. The three coins must never be separated again.

Shiro narrowed his eyes and almost nodded.

"Yes. Let's all go. To do that, we first need to find the location of "Jungle's" headquarters."

At that moment, something like an invisible shock ran through him.

Kuro and Neko could feel it too. However, it was Shiro who reacted the most sensitively. He instinctively held his head and fell on the table.

"Grr...!"

"Shiro?!"

"W-what happened?!"

During that time, the shocks were repeated again and again. Kuro was beginning to understand what were the waves that made the air tremble.

This is a heartbeat.

Heart beats. Blood pulse. Something is trying to send "power" while maintaining a certain rhythm.

To the "King", to the supernatural... No, probably, the objective is...

"...It's the "Slate"... it's Hisui Nagare!"

Holding his head, Shiro turned to the window and groaned softly.

"Finally, are you planning to start...?"

Kuro and Neko also looked out the window, as did Shiro, and saw him.

A gigantic column of light rose above the distant horizon.

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The pulsating waves became stronger and stronger.

The members of the "Jungle" clan watched with bated breath. Sukuna Gojou, Mishakuji Yukari, Kotosaka, Saruhiko Fushimi, and Tenkei Iwafune... all the J-Ranks were watching the scene.

The "Slate" is about to wake up.

The shackles that had kept it contained for more than half a century had been removed, and the "Slate" was screaming with joy.

Sound, light and power continued to pulse in harmony.

"So the time has finally come."

Iwafune's words seemed as if he had given up on something.

On the contrary, Hisui Nagare was trembling. It was as if his entire body was bathed in the heartbeat of the "Slate", absorbing it to his heart's content. He closed his eyes and felt the rhythm of his soul.

"Yes. It is here. The "Slate" will be released. We will be free. Finally..."

At that moment, a torrent of light erupted.

Explosive power surges from within the "Slate" and explodes as magma. Just as a seed grows into a bud, a bud into a shoot, and a shoot into a giant tree, the power it originally possessed is released and absorbed by the heavens.

The column of light rises from underground to the sky, shining brightly. It was a symbol of liberation and chaos. Yes, that's exactly what Hisui Nagare wanted.

"It's a revolution!"

Hisui Nagare exclaimed with excitement.

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Reisi Munakata watched silently.

The light emitted from the earth passes through the clouds, reaches the sky and rises even higher. It was a symbol of liberation. It was proof that the country's usual path of chaos

had been contained and that the reality Munakata had been trying to avoid had finally arrived.

"Has it started yet? It saved me the trouble of searching, though."

Munakata turned on his heel and faced the column of light.

Many enemies will be waiting for him ahead. Now that he has revealed his whereabouts, Hisui Nagare must be fully prepared to defend himself. What Munakata had to defeat was "Jungle" himself.

On the other hand, Munakata is now alone. As a lone "King" without a clan, he must face him.

It was a battle that could not be won. "Jungle" is not only made up of ordinary clan members. The clan has two "Kings" and powerful Rankers that are comparable to them. It would have been suicidal for Munakata to fight alone after suffering defeat once.

But...

"I don't know how far I'll go, but I'll try to run to the limit."

Muttering that, Munakata stepped forward.

"That doesn't seem right, Munakata."

He heard a voice he shouldn't have heard.

He opened his eyes and looked back, but there was no one there. Fiery red hair and a calm beast look, nothing. Things that weren't supposed to be there were nowhere to be found.

He let out a self-deprecating smile.

"Absolutely."

If that person had existed, or they had stood together in front of that pillar... Those meaningless thoughts came to his mind. Munakata thought that his current self was not "typical" after all, so he began to leisurely walk on his account.

CHAPTER 11: MEETING

The students were the first to react to the column of light.

At that time, it was just after school in Gakuenjima. After a long class, several students begin to stretch their wings. Some people go to club activities, others start talking about playing, and others prepare to go home. How they enjoy their freedom varies from person to person.

Among them, Sota Mishina was forced to do housework.

"Why the hell should I do something like this...?"

While he muttered to himself, he carried the many materials that the teacher had given him and headed to the warehouse. It was on the way that he noticed a column of light.

"What's that?"

The students around the glowing green light pillar were also buzzing around, some holding their tan PDAs and trying to take pictures. Mishina would have done the same if he had free time, but unfortunately he was full of luggage. He then approached the window and tried to look closer.

At that moment, the window exploded.

"Wah?!"

He couldn't help but fall on my butt and the materials were scattered throughout the hallway. As if he was fleeing from danger, Mishina began to back away with his butt pressed to the ground. As the window suddenly burst, he thought something had been thrown from outside.

But it was different. The force that broke the window came from the inside, not the outside.

Mishina realized that that power resided in his own hands. He looked in horror at his hand, which was emitting a mysterious light.

"Mishina, are you okay?!"

His classmate Inaba ran towards him. Mishina tried to ask for help.

"Kyaaaah!"

Inaba's hands also emitted red light.

"What?!"

The red light burned Mishina's bangs and spread to the nearby curtains. As the curtains burst into flames, screams could be heard from the surrounding area. No, not only that. The surrounding students also emitted light, causing confusion everywhere.

"W-what is this?!"

"Oh, I don't know either!"

Mishina was screaming against the wall and Inaba was no longer trying to get closer. Mishina's hand and Inaba's hand were each enveloped in a different color of light. If that is a source of danger, approaching someone would put them and others at risk.

"What is happen...?!"

Mishina cautiously stood up and looked out the window; His eyes widened.

He could see the school building, the club building, and the playground from the window, and he saw flashes of light and columns of smoke rising.

Unsure of his feet, Mishina put his hand against the window. His hands were shining. Mishina swallowed, seeing that as proof that the world had changed forever.

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"That is...!"

Kukuri Yukizome ran out of the school building and gasped at the sight.

Gakuenjima was in an uproar. The students were running and the teachers were trying to guide them. However, the teachers were unable to control their power, which contributed to the chaos. Exposed to the red light, wooden benches caught fire and streetlights hit by green lightning short-circuited and exploded. An unbridled power attacked the people, making them flee in terror.

Kukuri recognized that scene.

"It's like that time a year ago..."

A year ago, the school occupation incident. The school was occupied by a mysterious group and the students, including Kukuri, were trapped by them. Kukuri remembered that the group at that time had certainly used similar powers.

However, Kukuri immediately denied it.

"No, it's different. Back then, those people were using strange powers. But now, it seems that everyone in the school has been taken over by strange powers..."

Kukuri tried to remember in detail what happened a year ago. Perhaps because of the shocking experience of being held hostage, her memories of him were only hazy.

What he remembers are his eyes.

Two wet, glaring eyes looked at Kikuri from the darkness. However, she felt as if dozens of people were staring at her. Exposed to that gaze, Kukuri was too scared to move. Like a pitiful rabbit thrown before a fox, she could only stare at him, trembling, as her eyes closed in...

The next thing she knew; Kuro was holding her back.

With his help, Kukuri evacuated to a safe place without knowing why. However, the fear and anxiety did not disappear. She was afraid of not knowing. Like a child afraid of the dark, Kukuri could only tremble along with her classmates.

That fear has returned for the first time in a year. Kukuri bit her lip and placed her hand on her swaying chest.

Her hand began to glow.

Like that time a mysterious force took over her.

An instinctive fear welled up from the depths of her memory. Kukuri closed her eyes and screamed, trying to push her hand away from him.

"No!"

"Kukuri!"

Someone screamed and grabbed Kukuri's hand.

The glow on her hands gradually weakened and disappeared. Kukuri watched, blinking. Her own hand and Shiro's hand holding her.

"Hey, good. We're on time."

"Shiro-kun...? Kuro-kun and Wagahai-chan too."

The person who was smiling gently was a boy named Isana Yashiro, whom she had met just a month ago. Kuro and Neko are there too. She didn't know how it worked, but she realized that he had stopped her from losing control and lowered her head in panic.

"Thank you, Shiro-kun."

"No, it's fine. I would prefer that..."

When he was about to say that, Shiro shook his head with a smile on his face.

Seeing that smile, Kukuri felt a strange feeling.

She has not had a long relationship with Shiro. She can't even count the number of conversations they've had.

However, she felt that something like this had happened before. Kukuri was attacked by "something", but Shiro rescued her. Even though it shouldn't have happened and even though she doesn't remember it, she felt that Shiro had always helped her.

When she was about to confirm that, Kuro opened his mouth.

"Kukuri. I have a favor to ask of you."

Kukuri asked again with wide eyes.

"Huh, me?"

"Ah. It's something only you can do."

Kuro's expression was very serious and Neko nodded her head. Kukuri looked around her. Although her own power has diminished, the chaos continues and it is unclear how much damage it has caused. She didn't think that she, a mere student, could do anything in this situation.

But...

She constantly received help from Kuro, Neko and Shiro. If there is anything Kukuri can do for them, she will do it.

Kukuri nodded and said resolutely.

"...Yes. Tell me what I can do!"

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And then the light went out.

The column of light that penetrated from the underground to the heavens suddenly disappeared without warning. In the blink of an eye, the light particles dissolved into the air, leaving only silence as if nothing had happened.

"It has disappeared...?"

"No."

Hisui Nagare leaned forward and responded to someone's murmur.

"This is the true form and true brilliance of the "Dresden Slate", the treasure that creates the "King". What a joy. I am moved."

His tone was calm, but it was obvious to everyone that Nagare was excited. His cheeks are cheerful and his eyes shine. It was a natural reaction since a lifelong wish had come true. Just as Nagare had said, the "Slate" was glowing.

In contrast to when the pillars of light roared, the current "Slate" shines with a calm light, like the surface of a lake reflecting moonlight. Although the intensity of the liberation is no longer present, the brilliance of it is imbued with an intangible divinity.

Mishakuji put his hand on his cheek and murmured dreamily.

"Light that transforms the world. How beautiful..."

"Hey, Nagare, will this become a new world from now on?"

Nagare shook his head at Sukuna's question.

"It's not going to change now. It's already changed."

"Already changed?"

Iwafune crossed his arms. The way he looks at the "Slate" is filled with an unchanging sense of resignation.

"The "Dresden Slate" is a device that allows all humans to evolve into kings like us. It was originally awakened by the "Silver King", but the stubborn elder of the "Golden King" suppressed its functions. Until now, this thing has been operating in safe mode."

"However, there is no longer anything that can stop the "Slate". With the "Slate" regaining its full power, all of humanity has evolved and the possibility of becoming a "King" has opened up."

"There is a possibility for all humanity..."

Sukuna gasped as he considered the meaning of those words.

"Okay, we're outside now."

Fushimi followed him and muttered to himself.

"...It's probably a disaster."

He has run the simulation many times. When people have power that cannot be regulated, they will fear it and use it because they are afraid. To protect himself, to satisfy his own desires. Unspeakable chaos and riots ensue. It is impossible for the powers that be to suppress it.

Countless people will die.

He recognizes it as the pain of childbirth.

"Yes. When previously powerless people gain supernatural powers, the existing order will be overturned and a new world will be born. A world where they can shape their own destiny."

"...A world where you can resist unreasonable death."

Iwafune's expression was dark. Only he knows Hisui Nagare's estimation. He realized that there is a world beyond the enormous sacrifices and mountain climbs.

Then, Nagare nodded silently.

"Affirmative."

Sukuna tilted his head, but immediately smiled confidently.

"Hmm... In other words, my future opponent is a king like Nagare. Great, my arms are ringing! The stronger the enemy, the more rewarding it will be to defeat him!"

Mishakuji suddenly laughed. He shifted his gaze towards the "Slate" and opened his arms as if to welcome it.

"A new world created by kings who compete with each other. A paradise will come for the fittest. We will become the flowers that bloom in that world."

Nagare stared at the Mishakuji. Iwafune and Nagare were not the only ones who suffered an unreasonable death. Does Mishakuji remember his past, or is he not the kind of person who gets caught up in those things? Even Nagare's brain could not measure it.

One thing was for sure, he was looking forward to that world.

That's good. It doesn't matter what dreams he has, as long as his goal is the same, there is no problem. The members there were like-minded people. At least, for now.

And Fushimi turned on his heel. Walking away in the opposite direction from the hiding place.

"...What a stupid thing."

Nagare didn't miss what he muttered. Nagare continued thinking as he watched Fushimi's back retreat.

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Prime Minister's Office.

It is said to be the most important place in the country, where the Prime Minister, the leader of Japan, holds office. For more than half a century since the end of the war, numerous management operations have been carried out in that room. Although there is a knot in the eye, the Cabinet Office still has the ultimate authority and has been able to deal with various situations.

However, all Prime Minister Kanichi Samukawa could do now was listen to the news on television.

"Now, I would like to inform you about the news regarding the increase in incidents related to unique abilities. Incidents related to unique abilities have been occurring frequently since the beginning of this year, but the number of incidents has increased explosively since around noon today. Taking the situation seriously, the government asks citizens to refrain from going out. Similar phenomena are also occurring in countries around the world."

"Please change the channel."

While he was muttering, the secretary hurriedly operated the remote control. However, when she changed the channel, all the broadcast stations, even those that were broadcasting anime even during the state of emergency, were covering this incident in a big way, which only added to Samukawa's stress.

Samukawa asked, drumming his fingers on the desk impatiently.

"Have you heard from "Jungle"?"

"Not yet."

"That's strange! I never heard that such a big disaster would occur! If this continues, it will become a diplomatic matter!"

"Even if you ask me, I don't know."

The secretary frowned in confusion. She was a woman in her twenties with beautiful eyebrows, but her biggest flaw was that she couldn't respond flexibly. Samukawa regretted his mistake in choosing that person and said that he did not choose her because of her appearance.

At that moment, his feet trembled and a roar echoed from somewhere.

"What?! What's going on?!"

As Samukawa looked around in a panic, a corner of the wall surrounding his office disappeared, as if it had been cut away, and began to reflect the scenery outside.

"This...! I can see through the wall!"

"Eh?"

The secretary was increasingly confused. Of course, since the Prime Minister suddenly started mumbling something strange.

However, Samukawa himself understood what had happened to him. That's a phenomenon that has been happening frequently since "Jungle", who suddenly awakened to supernatural powers one day, stole the "Slate" for ordinary humans. That's what happened to Samukawa.

However, that is not an immediate problem. The real problem was the view beyond the transparent wall.

The Strains that were emitting an unearthly glow were arriving in droves. They are destroying the main gate, knocking down the SP, shouting angrily and raising their fists, and are about to rush towards the official residence.

"There's a disturbance at my official residence! Come on, gakk!"

Samukawa turned his bright golden eyes towards the secretary and growled involuntarily. Her clothes were transparent and the lines of the secretary's body were clearly visible.

The reason why he couldn't help but look away was not because Samukawa was a gentleman, but because he was shy. The disturbance is a much more serious problem than the female body in front of him.

"No, someone protect me! Please call Munakata-kun!"

"But Prime Minister, you fired Reisi Munakata..."

"Oh, it's true!"

At the same time, he put his head in his hands, there was a loud knock on the office door, causing him to tremble.

Samukawa crouched under the desk. Crouched and trembling, he cried out in regret.

"Munakata-kun! It was my fault! Please help me!"

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Iwafune, who was lying on the couch, asked Nagare while he was playing with his PDA.

"Somehow, we have received a request for help from the Prime Minister's Office. What are we going to do about it?"

Nagare didn't even turn around. He replied casually as he looked at the glowing "Slate".

"At this stage, the importance of the existing national power has become extremely low. There is no need for us to help. We will ignore them."

"I understand."

Iwafune turned off the PDA and threw it away. Then, he stared at Nagare's back, standing in front of the "Slate".

Hisui Nagare had already been released from the straitjacket.

By connecting to the "Slate", he was able to gain almost unlimited abilities. Even without the straitjacket that traps supernatural powers inside him, Nagare can continue to "alter" his own death.

He can live.

From Iwafune's point of view, Nagare was just doing the obvious. It is natural for a living being to fight to survive.

Iwafune took a deep breath and muttered.

"That was long."

Nagare also responded without turning around.

"Affirmative. We had to hide for a long time to escape the pursuit of the "Golden King"."

"At that time, it even gave me chills. I never thought you would fight with the golden old man. And you were beaten."

"Kokujoji Daikaku was immature to get so nervous just because a child was jumping, even though he was an old man. I thought I was going to die. I regret that."

Iwafune laughed again at Nagare's words, which seemed to hit him from the bottom of his heart. Actually, in terms of insanity, Hisui Nagare is by far the best. At that time, no King would have even imagined that he would "challenge the great enlightenment of the country".

"Well, that's over now. The "Golden King" is dead and the "Slate" is ours."

"This isn't over yet."

Nagare said, interrupting Iwafune. Iwafune frowned suspiciously and saw several holograms appear above Nagare's head. Among the images of the Red, Blue, and Silver clans, there was one image that caught his attention.

Reisi Munakata.

The "Blue King", dressed in civilian clothes, walked calmly with a single man on his back.

Nagare muttered.

"This time it's the opposite of what happened a month ago. It's our turn to defend and their turn to attack."

"Looks like that guy hasn't learned the lesson."

After laughing at the irony, Iwafune suddenly had an idea.

"Is that why they closed the connecting passages besides the Yomito Gate?"

"Yes. At the same time, we are removing the civilians from around Yomito Gate and gathering the U-Ranks into this "secret base". This is an exceptional process, but we will maintain this system until everything is finished."

The clan members probably won't be able to fight the "King" too much. Furthermore, he recognized the man Munakata brought with him. The "Zenjo Demon". It is the pocket sword of the previous "Blue King" Habari Jin, and is also the man who killed Habari. Although he is a member of a clan, he is supposed to have power comparable to that of a "King".

Iwafune opened his mouth as he thought.

"So, you're assuming they'll even infiltrate the "secret base"?"

"However, the possibility of them reaching me and the "Slate" is not zero. But..."

Before Iwafune's eyes, his power increased.

A visibly green aura overflowed from Nagare's body. With that, Nagare slowly stood up from his wheelchair. He looked at the image above his head and smiled fearlessly.

"As long as I am connected to the "Slate", there is no time limit for me. It is infinite. There is no chance they can defeat me. It is zero."

Then, Nagare looked at Iwafune again.

"Therefore, it makes no sense to place two "Kings" in this place. Iwa-san, please welcome the "Blue King".

"Huh? Is that what you expected too?"

"Possibilities always exist."

Iwafune took a deep breath and stood up.

He was thinking that he had finished everything he had to do and was just waiting to see what was left, but it seems that won't be the case. Well, if he thinks about it, although the threat still exists, there is no way Nagare will allow the "King", who has the greatest strength, to be idle. Iwafune stopped suddenly as he turned on his heel, wondering if this was his last task.

"If you have the power of that "Slate", you can release your "alteration" power to its full potential, right?"

When he said it, he wanted it to be something happy. The power of Negare that is directly connected to the "Slate" is as powerful as has never been seen before. It will probably surpass even Kokujoji Daikaku in its heyday.

Iwafune said laughing.

"So, could it be possible to change things in the past? For example, Iwa-san's losing horse racing ticket quickly turns into a winning ticket, and other things..."

It was just supposed to be a casual comment.

However, at that moment, what flashed through Iwafune's mind was a scene of ruins.

Kagutsu Genji. The "King" of violence. Hundreds of thousands of deaths were born as a result of that rampage. There are no signs of life in the completely destroyed city, and Iwafune is the only one walking in its midst. No matter who he calls, there is no voice that comes back. The people who loved him, the people he protected, disappeared from this world.

The "Slate" awakened all humanity to turn them into "Kings". They have gained the power to transcend cause and effect and distort phenomena.

If he used that power, he wondered if he could make that never happen.

That tragedy. That destruction. Even now, from this moment on, he could start again.

"I'm sorry. Iwa-san."

Nagare's words cut off Iwafune's delusions.

"Why do you apologize?"

"I can't do that. Not even I can change the past."

"....."

Seeing Nagare's apologetic expression, Iwafune felt ashamed and mocked himself.

"Well, that's true. There's no way there could be a story that good."

He shrugged. Although it was a joke, Iwafune was still ashamed of himself. He was ashamed that Nagare had seen past his selfish dreams.

They can't change what happened before. And he remembered that it was because of that tragedy that they are there today.

"I believe that working constantly and diligently is the shortest path to happiness. I'm leaving."

"Yes, take care."

Iwafune thought silently as he walked towards the exit of the "secret base".

(That's right. Changing the past and starting over isn't convenient, right?)

Nagare is looking at the "Slate". However, what he is really seeing is not a relic of the past. That is the future they are about to enter.

He will make all humans "kings" and push humanity to the next stage. For that reason Nagare died and for that reason he was revived. The new world that is about to begin is one in which he deserves to breathe.

(Your power is the power to change the present and change the future. So go ahead and remake this world, this giant toy box, however you want, Nagare.)

Smiling slightly, Iwafune left the "secret base".

"Please calm down and try calmly! You will be surprised to see that strange power suddenly appear, but it can be controlled!"

Kukuri, who was standing on the stage, issued a loud loudspeaker.

At first, the voice was so low that she was easily drowned out by the confusion caused by the supernatural powers. The students became frightened and ran away from fear because of the anxiety that an unknown power was coming from none other than themselves.

Still, Kukuri was unfazed and continued to encourage the others.

"Remember what happened a year ago. When this school was attacked. Just like that person who saved us back then!"

Meanwhile, students began to appear and responded to Kukuri's voice.

Like burned disaster victims, they began to gather around Kukuri. Their bodies emitted a supernatural light of red, blue and green.

Kukuri jumped off the stage and touched the bright red arm of the student in front. The student covered in fear, but when Kukuri emitted a silver-white supernatural light, the red light was enveloped by her and disappeared.

"Uh... this..."

"It's okay. Calm down."

Kukuri smiled at the student, as if to reassure her. She was still confused for a moment, but then nodded slightly and crouched down, cradling her arms.

The surrounding students gasped when they saw that. They were scared and confused, but they found a ray of hope in what they had just seen.

Taking advantage of that opportunity, Kukuri once again turned on the speaker and raised her voice.

"This power is not to destroy anything! It is to protect ourselves! So please...!"

"A year ago..."

"Now that I think about it, there was someone who helped me back then..."

"What resides in us now is the same power that those people had! So please do not be afraid! You can control this yourselves! Once you have calmed down, tell the others that it is okay and they can control it!"

Little by little, people began to gather around Kukuri.

Although each of them emanated supernatural powers, they desperately tried to control it. Some crouched on the ground, while others held hands to prevent their powers from getting out of control.

The light of supernatural power was weakening. In proportion to that, their confusion decreased. The fear and anxiety had not completely disappeared. The students were still scared.

Even so, she could no longer find anything that was falling into chaotic chaos or reckless behavior. Reflecting the anxiety of disaster victims, they began to discover what they could do.

With a sigh of relief, Kukuri lowered the speaker.

(This is fine, Shiro-kun. Kuro-kun. Wagahai-chan.)

Supernatural powers have not disappeared. If another agitation occurs, their fear will return. If that happens, she will simply raise her voice again. She will share with everyone what she was taught and her willingness to face chaos.

(I do what I can only do. That's why...!)

With determination in her heart, Kukuri turned her eyes towards the sky.

In the distance, she could see an airship flying away from Gakuenjima.

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There was no one left around Yomito.

There was no one on the streets, neither in the offices nor in the shops. It was certainly a big problem for "Jungle" to be able to evacuate so quickly without resorting to public authority. Or perhaps he was already linked to public authority? Munakata thought so and denied it himself.

They are not interested in power. They can use it, but they will not consume it.

With that in mind, Munakata moved forward slowly.

Several members of the "Jungle" clan had already set up a blockade at the Yomito intersection. The words "KEEP OUT" written in large letters on the yellow tape made him laugh. It's like being a police officer.

The members of the Green Clan noticed Munakata's appearance and began to secretly whisper.

"Hey, in formation."

"Ah. Yes, according to the information."

Members of the "Jungle" clan emerge from the buildings around the intersection. All of them were armed with firearms. In normal times, that would be unlikely.

In that case, Munakata thought. It must be war time now. This is a war that "Jungle" wages against humanity.

Suddenly, a voice rang from behind.

"It seems that this is definitely the base of "Jungle"."

Munakata didn't look back. A sword demon following him like a shadow, Gouki Zenjo, responded as he looked ahead.

"Yes. That bright light was there for 15 minutes and 30 seconds. It's hard to miss."

"There are many enemies. Should I take the initiative?"

Zenjo, who belonged to the Blue Clan of the previous generation and waged a war against the demonic "Purgatory", would not be able to face an armed group of that caliber. If he was thinking about the future, he should have conserved his strength as much as possible.

Still, Munakata shook his head.

"No, it's okay. It's not your job to expose yourself."

"So, the boss himself?"

Munakata smiled calmly at those words.

"I'm not the boss anymore. I'm just a king."

Then, Munakata and Zenjo touched the "KEEP OUT" tape.

With just that, the tape was cut soundlessly and fell to the ground.

At the same time, the tension between the members of the "Jungle" clan suddenly increased. The muzzle of a gun pointed at Munakata and a cry of alarm rang out.

"They have crossed the blockade line. Activate Protocol A!"

"Shoot! You'll get points just by attacking!"

The flashes from the mouths flashed all at once, dyeing Munakata's vision white. Despite the countless killing attempts directed at him and the deadly white light, Munakata's smile never disappeared.

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The battlefield was not just outside. The information processing room inside the "Scepter 4" camp had also become a kind of battlefield.

Since the "Pillar of Light" was erected, the number of emergency calls to "Scepter 4" from various parties has increased dramatically. Supernatural crimes are under the jurisdiction of "Scepter 4", and they are probably simply following the rule of leaving all problems related to the supernatural to "Scepter 4", but as a result, their lines of communication with the outside world were about to explode.

"The number of incidents caused by supernatural powers is increasing dramatically! It's as if the entire nation has become Strains!"

"It seems that some cases have turned into riots! Although it is not confirmed, there is also information that the Prime Minister's official residence was attacked."

Enomoto and Kamo, who were in charge of information processing, gave a report that sounded almost like a shout. The only devices that were connected to the outside world,

such as PDAs, received notifications as frequently as once every two seconds. Fuse, who was also in a hurry to process the report, shouted in frustration.

"Vice Commander! Does this mean we still have to wait?"

Awashima bit her lip. Fuse's words were reasonable. What is "Scepter 4" used for if they don't protect people from supernatural powers?

But...

"...We can't move now that we've been ordered to stay still."

The order was an order. "Scepter 4" is a security organization and is permitted by law to use force. If the law does not allow them to act, they cannot act.

"But! If things continue like this, there's no point in us being here!"

"Fuse. Right now, all we can do is gather information."

Benzai stopped Fuse as he clenched his fist in frustration. All members shared the regret of not being able to take necessary action when necessary.

Akiyama looked up from his computer and asked.

"You still can't contact the Captain?"

"...Yes."

Awashima frowned and shook her head.

After being removed from his position as chief, Munakata disappeared. In the absence of the boss, Awashima, the deputy boss, must take over. Similar situations have happened before, so there was no problem in itself.

The problem was that there was no "King".

Beyond the boundaries of their organization, they were a single clan. The "King" who was supposed to watch over the big picture and show them where to go is now nowhere to be found. That's the real problem.

Awashima must now decide her own actions. In the midst of this chaos, they must decide what to do or not do without depending on the King.

(Is it really possible for me to do something like that?)

When Awashima asked himself that question, Domyoji spoke.

"Vice Commander! Look at this."

"What's happen?"

"I was monitoring the area around the "pillar of light" that had risen in the direction of Yomito, and this image appeared...!"

The members, including Awashima, ran towards the PC. Everyone gasped when they saw the person reflected there.

"Captain?! And Zenjo-san too!"

Reisi Munakata and Gouki Zenjo.

They both wear unmistakable "Scepter 4" uniforms. With slow steps, they advanced forward without hesitation. In front of them was a group armed with firearms.

Enomoto said with a groan.

"These guys... they're the Green Clan! It's so unreasonable for just two of us to invade the enemy camp!"

"The Green Clan... I didn't expect Fushimi-san to be among them..."

"Call me an idiot! But why only Zenjo-san...?"

The members of "Scepter 4" began to make noise upon seeing the absent boss on the other side of the monitor. However, Awashima did not hear that. She closed her eyes tightly and muttered in a low voice.

"Captain...!"

Various emotions came and went in Awashima's chest. Most of it was painted a color called "repentance".

Munakata is probably risking his life by staying there. Waiting nearby was none other than Zenjo, a former member of "Scepter 4".

What that meant was that Awashima wasn't right for the role.

"Guh...!"

What she feels is not resentment, it is her own insufficiency.

Having lost their "King", they find themselves in a state of confusion. She doesn't know what to do and all she can do is gather information. That's why Munakata chose Zenjo. That man will not hesitate. He acts first, he decides what is needed and when it is needed.

Then...

Awashima opened her eyes. There was no longer any conflict there. She looked at the noisy members, exuding strong determination.

"I give up on "Scepter 4"."

The room fell silent as if it had been hit by water.

At that critical moment, no one could think that Awashima was upset. Awashima's eyes clearly reflected her determination.

"As long as I am a member of "Scepter 4", I cannot leave this camp. I cannot involve them in violating orders. I may be narrow-minded, but that is my limit. But..."

As she spoke calmly about her determination, Awashima took out her saber, complete with its sheath, and placed it on the desk. That's because now that she is a private citizen she can't use that saber that a public servant gave her.

"Even so, I want to be the right-hand man of the "Blue King", Reisi Munakata. Even if I am no longer a public figure, I will serve at his side and do whatever is necessary. That is my role."

"Vice Commander..."

Benzai murmured, and Awashima looked directly at Akiyama next to her.

"I'm sorry, Akiyama. From now on, you will take command of "Scepter 4". I'm leaving."

Akiyama, who is calm and collected and has military experience, is the coordinator of the "Special Task Force". If you leave it to him, he will be able to deal with any unexpected situation appropriately. It may seem irresponsible, but that was all Awashima could do at that moment.

"I understand."

Akiyama nodded silently and turned to look at the members of "Scepter 4".

"As you heard. From now on, I will be in charge of commanding "Scepter 4". As acting commander, I will give orders."

He then spoke with a cheerful voice.

"Now we will go to the headquarters of the Green "Jungle" clan, the culprit of all this, and try to calm this situation down!"

"What?!"

Looking at Awashima, who was upset, Akiyama gave orders one after another and finally looked at her.

"During operations, the protection of civilians must be given top priority and the greatest possible adaptations must be made."

"Yes!"

"I understand!"

It seems like Awashima is the only one panicking. The other members are all smiling and starting to move energetically. They contacted several locations and steadily moved forward with preparations for shipping. As if to alleviate the frustration of not being able to move, even if they wanted to.

Awashima slammed the desk and raised her voice.

"You idiots! Were you listening to me?! This is a violation of orders..."

"No, you are no longer Vice Commander... Awashima-san."

It was Benzai who interrupted her words. With a smile on his face, he took the saber that Awashima had just placed there and held it out to her.

"You are now a civilian. You are subject to our protection. Yes, that's it. In case of an emergency, we will lend you self-defense equipment under the authority of "Scepter 4". Okay, Akiyama?"

"Ah. As acting commander of "Scepter 4", I give permission."

A slight smile appeared on Akiyama's lips. When she looked around her, she saw that everyone (Kamo, Domyoji, Enomoto, Fuse, Goto and Hidaka) were laughing and looking at Awashima. Their eyes told the same story.

(We will not let you go alone. We are also members of the Blue Clan.)

"You guys..."

They murmured quietly, the same smile appearing on Awashima's lips.

The absence of the "King". The awakening of the "Slate". Despite the confusion occurring one after another, they were still able to find an answer. The "Blue King". Just like Reisi Munakata did, it is important to chart your own path and move forward without hesitation.

Even so...

They would control the sword with the sword, because their cause is pure.

"Okay, let's go."

Akiyama nodded and gave orders to his soldiers.

"Scepter 4, go ahead!"

"Yes!"

And then they started moving. To put an end to that chaos and see their King again. Grasping the saber in their hands, "Scepter 4" began to regain its meaning.

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The bullets flew like a storm.

Most of the bullets are 9mm Parabellum bullets fired from small-caliber submachine guns and their lethality is low. However, it is powerful enough to penetrate a person's skin and bite into their flesh, and if shot with dozens of muzzles, an average person would fall to the ground in seconds.

Munakata continued walking calmly under the bombardment.

Just before hitting Munakata, the bullet broke into pieces and scattered into the air. Upon touching the supernatural field developed by Munakata, it is decomposed and transmuted by the enormous Weismann deviation that the "King" possesses, and disperses into pieces of paper.

It was like confetti celebrating the royal path of Munakata.

Of course, that's already been included in "Jungle". The failure of "Emerald" has already made it clear that the "King" does not have normal firearms.

His salvo is nothing more than a blinding one. The real target was behind Munakata, on the roof of a 70-meter-high building.

"Jungle". The U-Rank "Hawk Eyes" was kneeling on the roof, patiently waiting for an opportunity. What he has is a plasma cannon that was specially lent to him by the "Green King". An electronic sight made with cutting-edge technology points at the top back of Munakata's head, distorting his "Hawk-Eyes" mouth.

"His movements are predictable...! This plasma bullet is a condensed version of the same power as "Raiko no Jutsu". If it hits directly, it will be able to take down even the "Blue King"!"

The reticles that had been shaking came together and turned green. The plasma cannon roared as it absorbed all the electricity in the building and "Hawk Eyes" pulled the trigger.

A straight line of lightning shot out from the rooftop.

Normally, even the "King" would not have been able to avoid the plasma bullets that were impossible to predict or see with the naked eye. His supernatural ability transcends physical phenomena, but he cannot see the future. You can't react to things you can't feel, that's a fact.

However, there was someone there who made it possible.

Gouki Zenjo.

The saber that was released by the super reaction waved at the same time as the plasma hit. The green arc discharge and blue aura collided, scattering sparks of ultra-high temperatures.

The plasma bullet was the first to lose energy.

With all its energy sublimated, the bullet disappeared, leaving only the smell of burning ions. Zenjo sheathed his saber and bowed as if nothing had happened.

"I did something shameful."

"I could have saved you a lot of trouble if you had done nothing."

"It's a joke."

As Munakata said, Zenjo's role was not that of a bodyguard. It is nothing more than a safety valve, an automatic device to prevent the worst from happening.

Decapitate Munakata before his "sword" falls. That is Zenjo's sole and absolute mission.

The members of the Green Clan were visibly uneasy as Munakata advanced without stopping in the slightest. Some of them began to retreat, fearful, with weapons in their hands.

"Fuck no! We can't even stop him!"

"Calm down! Anyway, the door can only be opened from the inside. No matter how big the "Blue King" is, he won't be able to break through on his own!"

Hearing that voice, Munakata smiled softly.

That's how it is. Even if Munakata knows the location, he can't open the door. There was no other option but to force a breakthrough, but if they used so much energy, they would have no energy left to fight the "Kings" who were waiting for them.

Munakata stopped at the intersection and pushed up his glasses. "Jungle" only threatened from afar, and his attacks had already ceased.

"Now, all that's left is..."

He already made his move. It only remains to be seen if it came into force. All Munakata could do now was wait.

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In the southwestern part of the outer "secret base" area, there is a bathroom for employees who once worked at that water storage facility. Only two days ago they discovered that place, which was cleverly hidden behind multiple barricades and protective sheets.

It is not known what they call that place. It doesn't seem like a necessary room for the "Green King", who controls everything electronically. However, at least that room is a control room that controls access to the "secret base", and the electronic map and surveillance camera that were called in reveal that Munakata is just around the corner.

At this moment, Fushimi Saruhiko's PDA is connected to the control panel of the control room with multiple cables. The process indicator is at 95%. He managed to evade Nagare's attention and pass through multiple layers of security to finally get there. The long work will soon be finished.

(Oh, really?)

Fushimi smiled sarcastically at the question that suddenly came to mind.

He remembered a dinosaur made of pixel art. He was also attacking a pixel art building. An animation he created himself suddenly showed behavior that should be impossible. A man made of pixel art that he didn't remember making appeared and chased away the dinosaur. He looked at him and warned him that he could see everything.

That was quite a horror. Although it wasn't exactly traumatic, he left a strong impression on Fushimi.

It's been a long time and he's grown. However, his opponent is the "Green King", who rules the network. He figured he could see that too. After knowing everything, he won't let them swim? Is he nothing more than a monkey dancing on Buddha's palm?

As he thought about those questions, "Process Completed" appeared on the screen with surprising ease.

Fushimi looked unimpressed. He simply touched confirm and that's it. All that's left now is to quickly escape from there.

"Hello, Saruhiko. As expected, you work quickly. I'm impressed."

".....!"

His eyes widened and he was surprised, but somewhere in his head he was still thinking, "I knew it." The chair creaked and he turned around.

Kotosaka stayed on the shelf. However, Fushimi knows that it is not Kotosaka. Hisui Nagare, who was on the other side, spoke to Fushimi with a voice that showed no emotion.

"I know your purpose. You intend to invite the "Blue King"."

"If you already know, kill me immediately."

Fushimi said that, but Kotosaka bowed his head.

"There's no need for that. There's no reason to do that."

"Eh...?"

"Until you complete that task, you are not a traitor. Rankers have the right to walk freely within the "secret base", and private battles between Rankers are not particularly restricted."

Nagare snorted and wrinkled one of his cheeks ironically.

"The moment I finish, I will become a traitor and they will kill me."

"It's helpful for you to understand quickly. If I may add, even if the door opens, the "Blue King" won't be able to get that far. You'll just die for no reason. It's the death of a dog."

"Are you threatening me?"

"It's an invitation. Saruhiko. I'm really inviting you right now. You've managed to sneak past me and get to the point of opening the door."

Fushimi looked at Kotosaka in silence, while Nagare spoke matter-of-factly.

"It was obvious to everyone that you were the informant of "Scepter 4". Of course, I knew it too. However, you left no evidence of that and even fought with your friends. You fought your way to Ranker."

"Using a loophole in the rules."

"That's wonderful. Congratulations, Saruhiko. I set up that loophole on purpose, but you're the first user to use it so successfully. You have the ability to see the essence of things and use them to your advantage."

"....."

Maybe he was expressing his true feelings.

Although he had many strategies, Hisui Nagare had a completely transparent personality. He doesn't lie and he always does what he says he's going to do. So what he said now is also true.

Nagare values Fushimi very much. If he changed his mind now, he would still be treated as a Ranker.

"Your nature is more compatible with "Jungle", which values free will, not with "Homura" or "Scepter 4". That's why I invite you. Please become a member of the "Jungle" clan."

Fushimi let out a long sigh.

At least he's grown since then. He had assumed they would see it, but besides that, he wouldn't let them grab his tail. No, the current situation was exactly what he meant by "being grabbed by the tail".

He threw away the knife and said in a low voice.

"It's true. If I stay here I won't have to mix with idiots or be carried away by my boss's unreasonable orders."

"Affirmative."

"The trend is towards "Jungle". Don't commit suicide by hanging on to a sinking ship."

"That's right."

Then, Fushimi said:

"Hey, "Green King". Are the clan members motivated by interests?"

Kotosaka blinked rapidly. Although Fushimi asked a question, he continued without waiting for a response.

"That's probably the case with the people who are playing hardball at the top. They go with those who are likely to win and stay away from those who are likely to lose. That's true. Nobody wants to be a loser."

With dull eyes, Fushimi looked at Kotosaka and Nagare beyond.

"But what about the people around you? Did they become members of your clan because they thought you were going to win?"

"....."

"You're smart, so you know what I'm trying to say. The answer has already been decided."

Fushimi touched the PDA and declared.

"I refuse."

The console flashed green and the four letters "OPEN" appeared. The hidden door at the Yomito intersection began to open with a loud sound.

Kotosaka, who was looking at that with an emotionless gaze, muttered to himself.

"What a pity."

With that, Kotosaka left the room, flapping his wings and shouting.

"Kuwah! You're dead! Dead!"

There was a figure entering the room, confusing Kotosaka. He is short in stature and holds a long cane. A green leaf resembling a crescent moon appeared at the tip.

With a cruel smile on his face, Sukuna brandished his sickle.

"If we're not friends anymore... then I can kill you!"

Fushimi threw the knife from his pocket at a speed that was invisible to Sukuna, who jumped and threw the crescent-shaped blade at him.

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The crossing opened with a heavy noise.

The pedestrian crossings extending in all directions began to slide diagonally and the steel doors below also opened. The members of the "Jungle" clan occupying the intersection fled in panic, and voices of confusion were heard among them, one after another.

"Who was the idiot?! The door is open! What's going on?!"

"Did something happen downstairs?! What are the executives doing?!"

"No, wait! That's it!"

One of them pointed to the corner of the open door, towards the stairs that led to the basement.

A man dressed in a cassock walked slowly towards the ground.

"Jungle". Senior J-Rank executive and "Gray King", Tenkei Iwafune.

Iwafune landed on the ground, looked around and muttered in shock.

"Wow, it really opened up. Nagare's ability to read ahead is really terrifying."

Zenjo was the first to react when Iwafune scratched his head. Munakata stopped Zenjo, who was about to take a step forward, grabbing the hilt of his saber with one hand.

"There is no need to interfere. Please concentrate on your work."

"Yes."

Iwafune then turned to the two of them. A slight smile appeared on his lips.

"Hello, Munakata. And there's a familiar face behind you. Habari Jin's right-hand man, Gouki Zenjo."

"...The "Gray King", Otori Seigo. It's been 14 years."

Gouki Zenjo and Tenkei Iwafune were old acquaintances. In the abominable "Kagutsu Incident" that occurred 14 years ago, they were from different clans, but they had the same goal. Stop the worst "King", Kagutsu Genji. To do this, both Zenjo and Iwafune risked their lives to fight.

And they failed.

Ironically, they did not lose their lives. But they lost something much more important than that.

Zenjo to his own "King".

Iwafune to his own ideals.

For a brief moment, the two exchanged glances. Were the feelings they had at that moment the same? There was probably no doubt that they could see at least a little bit of their current selves in each other's images.

Iwafune opened his mouth.

"You're getting old, man."

Zenjo responded calmly.

"You are withered."

"No difference."

Iwafune shook his shoulders and laughed, then his expression suddenly stiffened.

In an instant, the aura of a "King" was released from him.

The aura became a reality in the sky. A dull gray "Sword of Damocles." A thick fog appeared out of nowhere, enveloping the gate at the intersection and Munakata himself.

Iwafune, already obscured by fog and unable to see him clearly, declared in a low voice.

"No matter how many people come, we won't let them pass through here. This time, we won't stop, we won't take shortcuts, or we won't buy time."

Munakata narrowed his eyes and took a step forward.

A month ago, that night, Munakata was defeated by Iwafune.

Munakata's saber was shattered by Iwafune's bullets, which were fired freely from beyond the space-distorting defense created by the fog. Munakata's order could not correct the thick fog.

There is nothing different about Munakata today than back then.

In fact, you could say it has weakened. The defects of the "Sword of Damocles" have spread greatly, and "Scepter 4" who have always followed him are tied to the country and cannot move. Strategy, equipment, chances of winning. None of the items that Munakata had always possessed until now were present.

Still, he had to keep going.

The "Blue King" protects "order". He protects people from confusion and destruction caused by supernatural powers. That's why he carries a sword. No matter how things change, even if he has no allies and no chance of winning, Munakata will never waver from his current position.

Even so...

"We will fight with sword in hand, because our cause is pure."

At this moment, a roar echoed from behind.

Munakata did not look back. However, he had predicted their true identity. In a place unknown to him, it was in his imagination that they would be moving, and he had already realized that "that thing" that had been under the control of "Tokijikuin" had disappeared for several days.

"What...?!"

Iwafune's eyes widened and he braced himself. However, no matter which "King" is, he won't be able to do anything about it.

"Schattenreich".

A gigantic airship owned by Adolf K. Weismann that bears the name "Land of Shadows". It was rapidly approaching the intersection, overcoming all aviation laws and physical obstacles. Without slowing down, the "Schattenreich" landed upside down, bouncing several times. It drove over the intersection, scattering dust and chunks of asphalt, and stopped about 50 meters later.

Iwafune looked back at the gigantic airship that had just passed by him with a surprised expression, and then immediately smiled and turned to Munakata.

"...I see. If you concentrate the mist on yourself, you won't be able to avoid such a large mass. That's not fair, Munakata. Don't go out and buy a decoy yourself."

Munakata laughed and grabbed the hilt of his saber.

"It seems that you have misunderstood something. It has nothing to do with me. I am your main opponent."

"Ha, anyone is fine. My role is to greet you."

That's how it is. Either one was fine. The current Munakata is simply the "Blue King". He also didn't think about the "Alliance of the Three Kings". He exists for the sole purpose of adhering to his beliefs and defeating his enemies.

Munakata made a loud statement as he gently pulled out his saber from his waist.

"Munakata, ready."

CHAPTER 12: OPEN A PATH FOR HIM

The hand that was about to open the door suddenly stopped. A voice was heard from the HOMRA Bar and he remembered something.

The reason why Misaki Yata quickly walked away from the door was not because he was scared. It was just awkward that Reisi Munakata was the one who killed Suoh Mikoto. Although he mentally understood that this was a hopeless outcome, Yata was a man of emotions.

Thinking that if they met face to face he would say something unwanted, he hid behind the store.

The door opened and, sure enough, Munakata came out. Instead of his usual blue clothes, he was wearing a coat and casual clothes.

(What does the "Blue King" want in my house?)

The moment such a question appeared in Yata's mind, Munakata spoke.

"Yata Misaki-kun from "Homura"."

He stiffened and cringed. Yata came out from behind the store, toying with the idea that he didn't like him because he knew everything from the beginning.

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I know you were friends with Fushimi-kun before he joined "Homura"."

Yata's eyes widened at the sudden words.

He didn't want anyone to talk about Fushimi.

Especially now. He had no idea what he was thinking. Yata expressed his frustration.

"He's not my friend. He betrayed Mikoto-san and me and ended up wearing blue clothes...!"

"Maybe he has to share my fate in death. I'm sorry if that happens. I would like to apologize first."

Yata's thoughts stopped when he was interrupted by the flowing words.

"What... what do you mean? Didn't he betray you and leave the blues?! And now... this time, he changed to the green...!"

"These were my instructions."

Munakata said that as if it were nothing.

"Before the Christmas operation, I gave instructions to Fushimi-kun. In case the operation failed due to the intervention of some unknown factor and the "Slate" was stolen, he should use all possible means to infiltrate the heart from "Jungle". He had changed clans once in the past, so he was the right person for the job."

"Hmm..."

His thoughts, which had stopped, began to move clumsily like rusty gears.

Fushimi did not betray him. The reason why he pretended like this was to infiltrate "Jungle" without suspicion and secretly help "Scepter 4" in their mission.

After thinking up to that point, Yata finally found a possibility.

"Isn't that dangerous?! If they find out, the Greens might kill him, right?"

"I agree."

Yata was speechless when Munakata said that so easily.

"I sent Fushimi-kun on a mission with no guarantee that he would return alive. This was a job that could only be left in his hands. Of course, he understood everything and agreed."

"How could you order your clansman to do something like that?!"

Munakata looked over his shoulder at Yata. Yata couldn't help but feel pressured by the cold look in his eyes.

"Why? Because we can't let "Jungle" do what it wants. "Scepter 4" is a clan of order. We can't just let the world fall into chaos. And Fushimi-kun is a member of "Scepter 4"."

Yata remained silent and stared at Munakata.

He enjoys freedom to the fullest with like-minded friends. This way of life suited Yata and he was willing to risk his life for it. He was already willing to sacrifice himself for that.

Maybe that's the case for him too.

He sacrificed himself for the ideals held by his "King". In his case, it may have been "order". Maybe he didn't betray anyone from the beginning. Just because he was faithful to his way of life.

Suddenly, Munakata asked as if he had an idea.

"There is a way for Fushimi-kun to survive. He must betray me and really join "Jungle". Do you think he will do that? As a former friend, you probably know him very well, Yata Misaki-kun."

Yata didn't have an answer for that.

But Munakata didn't seem to want to wait for an answer. He turned his back on Yata again and began walking slowly. The last words he murmured echoed in Yata's ears like a prophecy.

"Whether the door opens or not... then you will know the answer he gave."

And Yata saw it.

The target point, the Yomito intersection protected by "Jungle". The asphalt split open, exposing the helpless figure.

"...Saruhiko."

As Yata watched from the bow of the airship, he bit his lip hard as he murmured the name of his former friend.

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"Homura" was flying in the sky.

In the midst of the chaos that suddenly began to occur frequently, the "Black Dog" appeared and guided them aboard the "Schattenreich" owned by the Silver Clan. The destination was the current location of the "Jungle" headquarters, the "Slate".

Nobody was afraid. Everyone knew that the time for a decisive battle would eventually come. Under the guidance of the "Silver King", Anna and the others boarded the airship and planned to enter all at once.

Currently, on the bridge of the "Shattenreich", the two clans meet face to face and have a final meeting.

"Beneath the place where the "Pillar of Light" was located, there is a water storage facility that was abandoned during construction. It seems that "Jungle" used it as a hiding place."

Kusanagi said to everyone on the lavishly decorated bridge. He taped a map of the "Jungle's" hideout's water storage facilities to a makeshift "strategy board" made by simply hanging cork boards in random locations. The enemy's expected military strength was written on the transverse diagram, which seemed to be divided vertically, and their own military strength was also assigned accordingly.

However, the only thing written there are the names of the members of "Homura". "Hakumaito" was in a situation where it could not be used as a response force.

"The "Slate" has been taken to the lowest floor of this facility. We will go there."

Kusanagi nodded at Shiro's words.

"We will act as support. We must ensure that Shiro-san and the others reach the lowest level. Do you understand, everyone? This is where you must put your guts."

"Yes!"

Although that strategy could have been considered unfair, no one objected to that. That's because everyone was informed beforehand that only "Hakumaito" and, more specifically, the "Silver King" could carry out that strategy.

Anna handed them the marbles one by one. Communication during the operation was planned to take place through Anna's supernatural network. The power of "Homura", who

operates with desperate determination and perfect coordination, will far surpass "Jungle", who has superior numbers.

Among them, Yata was alone, silent and with his head bowed.

Anna approached him. She handed a shiny marble to the sinking Yata.

"Misaki, use this too."

Yata suddenly looked up as if he had realized that and forced a smile.

"Oh... leave it to me. I'm in charge of level nine, right?!"

Kusanagi suddenly let out a wry smile as Yata looked at the map and raised his voice.

"Yata-chan. That's ok?"

Yata was visibly shocked by those words.

"K-Kusanagi-san? What do you mean?"

"Go with Fushimi. You can take your position later."

Yata lost his voice and looked at everyone present.

It is clear that it was Munakata's instructions that Fushimi pretend to betray him, that it was none other than Fushimi who opened the door, and that he was in "Jungle's" hideout and was probably considered a traitor, as already explained. No one knows what condition Fushimi is in. Whether he was able to escape safely, was killed, or was on his way, it was clear to everyone that Yata wanted to help him immediately.

When his partner is in trouble, he runs to her side before anyone else. Because Misaki Yata is that kind of man.

"B-but, if I don't arrive on time..."

Anna's voice encouraged Yata as he tried to slouch again.

"It's okay. I believe in you, Misaki."

She was smiling silently. Unwavering confidence is reflected in her eyes.

Yata tightly gripped the marble she handed him.

At this moment, the aircraft's instruments began to emit a sharp warning sound.

"Sudden altitude drop! We're diving!"

"Everyone grab hold of somewhere!"

A violent tremor hit the airship. Kusanagi held Anna in his arms and the others also began to take defensive postures.

Amidst the commotion, there was no hesitation in Yata's eyes as he looked forward.

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Munakata took a deep breath and readied his saber.

The fog is thick. The entire intersection was submerged in gray, making it impossible to see even an inch ahead. Every time he slowly moves his feet, the mist clings to Munakata. This mist is Iwafune's eyes and fingers. No matter what happens, his body is in the other person's hands.

At this moment, there was a sudden flash of gunshots.

The difference between the impact of light and bullet is less than a tenth of a second. Munakata responded admirably to a situation that exceeded the limits of human reaction. He moved his neck with minimal movements to avoid the bullet aimed at his forehead. At the same time, he pointed the tip of his saber in the direction of the shot and began running immediately.

"Oops..."

A playful voice sounded and Iwafune's body, which was barely visible through the fog, swayed again. The tip of Munakata's sword simply pierced the fog.

He's been playing that cat and mouse game over and over for a while now.

But that certainly had meaning.

Iwafune must use his ability to distort space, the fog, to dedicate himself completely to Munakata. Although there may seem to be some room for maneuver, it is still a battle between "kings." If they try to devote even the smallest amount of their energy to something else, they might suddenly collapse.

In other words, the current Iwafune did not have the strength to thwart "Homura" and "Hakumaito".

Ironically, as Iwafune said before, Munakata is supposed to play the decoy role.

Suddenly, Munakata laughed softly.

If so, he is fine. The priority above all is to recover the "Slate" and restore order to the world. If that's the case, it doesn't really matter who takes the spear first...

The problem is that Munakata's "Sword of Damocles" is approaching his limits.

If it weren't for the thick fog obscuring his vision, he would have seen two swords there. A gray sword that glimmers and a blue sword that slowly begins to crumble.

When it falls, destruction will come upon them.

Suddenly, he heard Iwafune's voice from an unexpected direction.

"Won't you help him, Zenjo?"

Iwafune called out to him calmly as he loaded his revolver. Zenjo stood behind him, hand on the hilt of his saber, and did not change his stance as a spectator.

"That's not my job."

At Zenjo's response, Iwafune jokingly said...

"Haha. Does that mean your job is to kill the king who loses control like Habari?"

Shrouded in mist, Zenjo's facial expressions could not be seen. Even if he could have seen, Munakata would not have wanted to look. Taking advantage of the momentary gap, Munakata approached Iwafune.

"You can't allow distractions!"

The saber split the mist and approached Iwafune. Iwafune's relaxed smile never fades, and that image never disappears. Iwafune avoided the cut with dance steps and then hit Munakata in the side of the head with the butt of his revolver.

Red blood danced in the gray mist.

Munakata is not afraid. Taking another step, he launched a second and third slash.

Iwafune used fog this time. The saber's trajectory was distorted by the fog and missed Iwafune, who was supposed to be there. Iwafune then slid back, firing multiple shots as he backed away.

The bullet that could not be avoided grazed Munakata's body, spreading blood.

Iwafune, blurred through the fog, sneered at Munakata.

"What are you holding on to, Munakata? You're just being stubborn. The dice are rolled. The world you were trying to protect has already been destroyed."

Although he was bleeding, Munakata responded calmly.

"Yes, I'm being stubborn. It seems I don't like losing to you more than I thought."

"Do you hate me that much?"

"I hate the way you live your life."

Beyond the glowing mist, he could see Iwafune walking. Munakata narrowed his eyes and followed the figure closely.

"If you couldn't protect what you were supposed to protect, you threw everything away and ran away, that's fine. If you can no longer bear the burden of being a King, then you should give up and spend the rest of your life."

Iwafune spoke in a mocking manner.

"Are we supposed to pick up the bones of clansmen and cry in the corners?"

"That would be much better than it is now. What I don't like the most is that even though you broke free, you try to get out again."

Munakata's sharp eyes never let Iwafune escape.

"The world that the "Green King" is trying to create is a world in which the people you once tried to protect are brought to ruin. Not only have you abandoned your ideals, but you are trampling on your former ideals. I hate that so much it makes me want to vomit."

"Kuku.", Iwafune laughed only through his throat.

"Well, if I had to say whether I like you or not, I don't like you either. When I look at you, you remind me of my old self..."

Iwafune's self-deprecating smile disappeared the next moment.

"Even if your sword breaks once, you still don't understand it. Even if you wave your naive ideals, you won't be able to change anything!"

Screaming, Iwafune pulled the trigger in quick succession. There were many flashes of gunshots and a torrent of bullets that could be called random gunshots that attacked Munakata. Under hazy visibility, Munakata dodged the bullets, which were difficult to predict and react to, with minimal movement and tried to move forward.

Iwafune appeared in front of him.

"Guh...!"

When he thought about raising his guard, Iwafune's knee had already sunk into his cheek. In intense pain, Munakata's body was sent flying several meters away. Laughing at Munakata, who fell to the ground after being punched, Iwafune loaded only one bullet into his revolver.

"It's just a difference of opinion. What we're trying to create is a world where the weak are no longer weak. A world where you and I don't have to be killed by stupid monsters."

The muzzle of the gun pointed at the forehead of the fallen Munakata. He could feel the gray supernatural powers gathering around the barrel of the gun.

"If you want to sacrifice yourself so badly for your ideals, I will help you, Munakata. It will be a much better ending than destroying the sword and killing everyone you must protect...!"

Munakata tried to lift his saber. However, he could not put strength into his knees. Gritting his back teeth, Munakata stared into the muzzle of the weapon that would kill him.

"Wait a minute!"

At that moment, he heard a voice from somewhere.

Far away, beyond the fog. A new commotion came from outside the gray world around them. Mixed with the confused voices of the members of the "Jungle" clan, a familiar voice rang out.

"I'm here to see the boss's crisis!"

Domyoji stands out and destroys the enemy formation.

"Domyoji, don't run in alone! Akiyama, Benzai, let's go!"

Kamo, the eldest, led the rest of the group as he admonished them.

"Benzai, don't let your guard down!"

"Hmph, that's it!"

"Let me go first!"

Akiyama and Benzai, the most elite, work together in exquisite cooperation to defeat enemy clan members one after another.

"What?!"

Iwafune's attention was diverted. Beyond that, a group of blue-robed people broke through the wall of mist and burst into the gray world.

Gunshots flashed, the King's shots attacked them. On the other hand, "Scepter 4" developed an almost perfect synchronized defense. By layering and synchronizing the auras developed in a regular hexagon, they exert instant, but almost absolute, defensive power. That shield received the attack of the "Gray King" from the front and managed to block it.

"Captain, please stay safe!"

Awashima said that resolutely, standing in the center of the shield and protecting her "King" with the formation of it.

He was protected by them.

Understanding that as a fact, Munakata suddenly laughed.

"What are you guys doing in a place like this?"

With that, he slowly stood up.

Akiyama, standing next to Awashima, responded in an orderly manner, as if responding to a question from his superior.

"I decided that taking control of the "Jungle" fortress as soon as possible was the mission that needed to be carried out with the highest priority, so we came to support the Captain."

"I didn't ask for anything. Besides, I'm not your Captain anymore..."

"We're not a "Scepter 4" that can't move unless told to."

Kamo said that while his back was turned, and Munakata couldn't help but keep his mouth shut.

Benzai and Domyoji said in unison.

"Isn't the title of the "Fourth Branch of the Family Registration Division of the Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau" a cover for "Scepter 4" after all?"

"That's right. It's just a formality."

"At all times, the Captain's cause is with us. We are the clansmen of the "Blue King" Reisi Munakata."

Hearing Awashima's words, the members of the "Special Task Force" nodded in unison. They keep their eyes on the enormous enemy before them, the "Gray King", but their fighting spirit does not waver in the slightest. Perfectly balanced, it seemed to be the embodiment of "order".

The title he thought he had discarded came back to him for a moment. As head of "Scepter 4", Munakata asked.

"What are the countermeasures against confusion in the city?"

"Currently, we are mobilizing the entire "Scepter 4" force to quell the unrest and rescue civilians. We are prepared to prevent further confusion from spreading."

Even if Munakata was still in the position of boss, he would probably have made the same decision. Deal with the situation and heal it at the same time, and try to end the situation as soon as possible. They are acting correctly based on their own will and intelligence.

Awashima looked over his shoulder and said with a calm smile.

"Give us your orders, Captain."

Munakata breathed in and out.

He felt as if something warm dwelt in his heart. Every time it beats, it pumps some kind of power along with blood throughout his body. It's probably a type of energy called passion. As someone who rules "order", it was an unexpected reaction.

Munakata declared loudly, hiding his passion behind a mask of calm.

"We, "Scepter 4", fulfill our duty as swordsmen. We will not allow disorder in this land, nor violence in this world. We will disperse the fog that tries to cover our boundaries. All members, draw your swords!"

"Akiyama, ready."

"Benzai, ready!"

"Kamo, ready!"

"Domyoji, ready!"

"Enomoto, ready!"

"Fuse, ready!"

"Goto, ready!"

"Hidaka, ready!"

"Awashima, ready!"

The clansmen drew their swords one after another, carefully pointing the tips at Iwafune while spreading their swords from side to side as if spreading their wings. They worked together so perfectly that they seemed like a single living being.

Iwafune, on the other hand, is alone. The fog is controlled by the deployed clan members, and on the contrary, the "Jungle" clan members are fleeing. It was exactly the image of a lonely "king" abandoned in the castle he was supposed to protect.

Still, Iwafune showed a mocking smile.

"This is the Blue Clan's code of honor? Ha, it's beautiful. But really, it's not supposed to be that beautiful, right?"

He slowly raised his gun and pointed it at Munakata, who was stationed in the center.

Fog gathered at the muzzle of the gun. Concentrating on one point, not for defense, but for attack. The clan members were visibly nervous. They managed to block it before, but they don't know what will happen next. That bullet could hit their King.

In the midst of that, Munakata stepped forward.

"You said the world I was trying to protect was destroyed."

"Eh...?"

"Maybe so. Extraordinary powers have been unleashed upon the world, and the world has changed decisively. No matter what we do, we will not be able to return to the world before the "Slate" awakened. But..."

Munakata said quietly and pushed up his glasses.

"Even if the world is broken, we will establish a new "order" within that broken world. That is my way of living."

Iwafune's face contorted with sadness.

"You are a person who fled from the tragedy in front of you. You are literally running back and forth, casting a fog over your vision, making what you should see vague. Hisui Nagare is already dead and you are only helping to create a paradise for the dead."

"As if I didn't know!"

Iwafune roared.

A gray mist spiraled toward the muzzle of the revolver. A dense gray aura that distorted the surrounding space gathered at one point, and the moment Iwafune pulled the trigger, it turned into a magic bullet and was released.

It was not Munakata who received the gray magic bullet that contained ideals, setbacks, despair and the regrets of hundreds of thousands of people who were left scattered without knowing the meaning.

The clan members he trusts: Akiyama Himori, Benzai Yujiro, Kamo Ryuho, Domyoji Andy, Enomoto Tatsuya, Fuse Daiki, Goto Ren, Hidaka Akira, Awashima Seri, etc. A supernatural field that developed at the same moment stopped the bullet.

The two supernatural powers came into contact, dispersing an intense spark of light. The clansmen gritted their teeth and endured the blow of the "King", which contained the ultimate power. It may have been as unreasonable and reckless as moving a mountain with human hands.

However, God's will only appear when a person's will be at its peak.

Munakata saw it. A member of the clan who fights against the "King". The strong will of people trying to face the absolute power difference with a single ray of hope and absolute confidence.

Munakata's saber flashed.

The magic bullet, which had been stopped by the supernatural shield, shattered into pieces with that single flash. With that momentum, the slash dispersed a gray mist, shattered the revolver he was holding, and sliced Iwafune's shoulder as his eyes widened in shock.

"Ah...!"

Iwafune fell on his back, his cassock soaked in blood.

The fog surrounding the intersection disappeared in an instant. It was as if the blow of the "Blue King" had opened the world. After the stagnant fog dissipated, a blue sky without a single cloud spread out.

Munakata looked at him and muttered as usual.

"We will advance with our sword in hand, for our cause is pure."

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Awashima held his breath and stared at the scene.

In front of her clear vision, the "Gray King" lay on the asphalt. Lying in a pool of dark blood, Iwafune pursed his lips ironically.

"Uh... I can't believe you won..."

His point of view was not towards Munakata, but towards the sky. He was staring at the two "King" swords floating there. The "Sword of Damocles".

"It's okay, Aonisai. Just try to stick to your will and ideals..."

Saying that, Iwafune gently closed his eyes.

At the same time, the gray "Sword of Damocles" floating in the sky disappeared. Awashima ran to Iwafune and checked to see if he was breathing.

Although weak, Iwafune was still alive. She assumed he simply passed out. Awashima looked at Munakata and said quickly.

"Captain. Let me give you some attention!"

"Forward."

Several clan members gathered around Iwafune and began to administer first aid efficiently. It's not just for humanitarian reasons. If the "Gray King" dies here, Munakata will have to bear the burden of killing the king. That was supposed to be a fatal damage to him now.

At this moment, a scream-like voice was heard from the surrounding area.

"The Ranker has been defeated! The "Blue King" is safe!"

"Oh, the guys in blue even showed up?! Shit, what are the rest of them doing?!"

"Oh, you're running away! Your precious points will be confiscated!"

The "Jungle" clan members who were blocking the intersection lost their calculations and fled. If they had started a chase, they could have captured more than a dozen people, but

none of the "Scepter 4" personnel moved. There was something more important than that at that moment.

Of the two most feared enemies, the "Gray King" has been defeated. Of course, if they eliminate the "Green King", although the Rankers are a formidable enemy, the course of the battle will probably be decided.

"Scepter 4", who was delighted with the victory, waited for the next order from him. If Munakata gives the order, everyone will run to "Jungle's" hideout.

At that moment, Awashima noticed something strange.

Munakata remains still. He has remained in the same posture since he defeated Iwafune, not moving in the slightest.

Blue sparks began to dance all over his body.

When she couldn't help but look at the sky, the "Sword of Damocles" was still floating there. The cracks on the royal sword made of blue crystals visibly spread and the separated energy chunks disappear as if melting.

"Captain! You must make your Sanctum disappear immediately!"

Munakata looked over his shoulder at Awashima and suddenly smiled.

"I already did it. But it seems that it will no longer disappear by my will..."

"....."

The "Sword of Damocles" that appears when the "King" exerts all his power consumes an enormous amount of energy just by existing.

He can't erase it. In other words, Munakata is currently in a state of overdrive. Like the "Red King" who was once defeated by the sword, he can no longer control his own power.

What awaits them next is the worst-case scenario, an "burst of royal power".

At this moment, the figure of a man appeared at the edge of Awashima's vision.

The shadow of Gouki Zenjo with only one arm, carrying a huge saber.

Before she could think of anything, a voice came from Awashima's throat.

"Everyone, stay away! You too, Zenjo-san!"

Zenjo stood still, taking only one step.

His gaze is forever transparent. Like an old wolf, Zenjo's gaze towards that question, seeing Awashima's innermost thoughts.

He wondered if she could do it.

Awashima grabbed her saber tightly.

Many "kings" are gathered there. A "Damocles Down" is a catalyst for the destruction of others. If the Sword of Munakata fell, the damage would expand exponentially, and not only Japan but also East Asia could become a gigantic hole.

It's not even hundreds of thousands. Billions of human lives depend on a single decision.

Awashima thought about this for a moment and declared decisively.

"I am this person's assistant. If necessary... I will be there."

She unsheathed her saber and readied it.

Munakata's back still didn't move in the slightest.

To prevent the tip from shaking, Awashima pressed the hilt of her saber even harder.

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Anna closed her eyes and concentrated.

The supernatural network formed by the marbles imbued with her supernatural powers forms a structure similar to a kind of neuronal synapse. Each marble was Anna's eyes and ears and served as a communication network between its owners.

At that moment, numerous scenes unfolded in Anna's obscured field of vision.

"I'm Akagi, B2 on standby, OK!"

"Here Bando, B3 on standby, OK!"

"I'm Chitose, B4 on standby, OK!"

The key points up to the fourth floor of the basement have been controlled and Akagi, Bando and Chitose are in their respective positions. Those lying at his feet were the members of the "Jungle" clan, and the members of "Homura", in addition to the main members, also seemed to be still fighting.

"I'm Dewa, B5 on standby, OK!"

"This is Eric, B6 on standby, OK!"

"This is Fujishima, B7 on standby, OK!"

Images and sounds were then transmitted from the seventh underground floor. They were still in combat, but seemed to have reached a position. The plan is progressing without problems.

When she silently opened her eyes, Kamamoto was standing next to her, muttering to himself.

"Thanks to the "Blue King" suppressing the top, it seems to be quite possible."

Anna blinked and looked up. When she saw the "Sword of Damocles" floating in the square of blue sky, her face clouded with sadness.

Anna, who is the "Red Queen" and has an extraordinary ability to sense things, she could see that clearly. The sword of the "Blue King" was cracked and damaged to the point that it seemed like it was about to break at any moment.

Soon, that sword will fall. The moment that tip hits the ground, everyone will be trapped. Munakata, Anna, and Hisui Nagare may be safe only with shrines that have the "unchangeable" attribute, but everything else will disappear like garbage.

The sooner that plan can be carried out, the sooner the destruction will be further away. Anna closed her eyes again and focused her attention deeper.

"Also, Izumo and Misaki..."

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Izumo Kusanagi was running in the dark.

It was probably his strategy that there was not a single light on in the long hallway. As far as he knew from the map beforehand, that passage led to the core of the enemy's hideout and was a key point that could be called a death line for them. Gunshots flashed from beyond the pitch darkness, aiming at Kusanagi as he ran.

"Here we go, Kusanagi!"

"I'll kill you right here!"

Thanks to the "Jungle" mask, they were able to accurately target Kusanagi even in the dark. Goggles with built-in night vision function can ensure unilateral visibility, but...

Despite the hail of bullets, Kusanagi still managed to smile.

"Sorry, I'm in a hurry. Please let me in!"

Kusanagi shot multiple fireballs from the Zippo he was holding while he dodged by jumping left and right. The fireball landed where the flash had flashed, dispersing explosive flames. Several members of the "Jungle" clan turned into balls of fire, screaming and rolling, and other members of the clan, their eyes burned by the sudden light of the flames, crouched down holding their faces.

Kusanagi's long legs knocked down the remaining clan members who had been incapacitated. After confirming that nothing was moving, Kusanagi raised his voice.

"Sorry, I'm late! Kusanagi, B8 on standby, OK!"

He then he looked back.

There are the three members of "Hakumaito" who are the key to the plan. Kusanagi was a dispatch and was responsible for transporting them there.

Kusanagi raised the marble slightly and said.

"Well, that's it for me. I can't take you any further from here, but good luck, Shiro-san."

Shiro nodded and looked at Kusanagi with serious eyes.

"Yes. Thank you very much, Kusanagi-san."

"Thank you for the cooperation of the Red Clan."

"See you later, Sunglasses! Make me more pancakes!"

Kusanagi suddenly laughed. He remembered Neko whose mouth was sticky with maple syrup and Anna carefully wiping it away.

To see that ordinary scene again.

"Yes, Neko-chan. When this is over, I will make you a tower of pancakes."

With that, Kusanagi pulled out a flame whip from his Zippo and knocked down the "Jungle" clan members who were trying to come out from below.

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There are two frustrating facts.

One is that no matter what happens, he will never be able to defeat Sukuna Gojou. "Jungle" members differ from other clans in that they concentrate their power in the executive ranks. In addition to his original sense, Sukuna possesses exceptional fighting power due to his extraordinary abilities.

Sukuna, with a dazzling smile on his face, jumped up and swung his scythe.

"Go dead!"

Fushimi quickly backed away and dodged the blow, which was aimed precisely at the back of the head. The sound of electromagnetic electricity burning the air immediately touched his ears. The fear of death momentarily crossed his mind and he began to neglect his steps. He made a mistake when landing and fell.

Sukuna carried a scythe on his shoulder and laughed at Fushimi's misfortune.

"Hahaha! That's it. You have to earn experience points before challenging the final dungeon. I can't let you return to the save point now!"

Fushimi half lifted his body and looked at Sukuna.

"Shut up, gamer boy... Pressing the off button won't save you, when it comes down to it..."

Sukuna's eyes narrowed. Contrary to his relaxed demeanor, he doesn't feel like he has the slightest chance. Fushimi exclaimed, holding his tongue.

"There is a time when we have to fight at a level where we cannot win at all!"

At the same time, he turned his body and threw the throwing knife that he had hidden in his hand at Sukuna...

The knife ricocheted and cut Fushimi's thigh.

"Gah!"

Sukuna, who wielded the scythe with ease and rested it on his shoulder again, huffed in exasperation.

"Is that it? No matter how hard you try, I don't think you can change this reality."

As he held back the intense pain, Fushimi clicked his tongue and said:

"I guess I've started lecturing the kids about reality... It's a totally annoying reality... It's not worth the salary with these dangerous living conditions, this... Really, why am I doing this kind of work? I..."

Back then, when Munakata told him about this mission, he might have refused.

This mission was very dangerous. Leave "Scepter 4" and infiltrate the enemy, and if the situation arises, work from within. No one would trust Fushimi, who was originally an enemy, and if Hisui Nagare could find a connection with "Scepter 4", he would definitely have gotten rid of him.

Carefully, but definitely. Even if you do your best, in the end, at the time of crafting, they will catch your tail. It was an almost suicidal strategy, based on self-sacrifice.

However, why did he accept it?

That's another frustrating fact.

"Then it's almost game over."

Sukuna wielded his scythe. Fushimi's face distorted as he looked at the green electromagnetic blade.

(There's no way he's coming.)

Unable to move, in his final moments, Fushimi murmured something into his mouth.

"Saruhiko!"

He heard that voice.

Fushimi looked up and searched for the owner of the voice. The voice echoed in the underground space and he didn't know where it came from. However, Fushimi knew exactly who he was.

"Misaki..."

"Where are you, Saruhiko?"

Although he couldn't see it, he could clearly imagine his face. With a mix of anger and impatience on his face, he searched everywhere while he raced on his skateboard. Fushimi let out a small laugh as he imagined that.

"Hey... that idiot... seriously... he chased me here..."

+++++

There are two frustrating facts.

One, of course, is against Saruhiko Fushimi. Although he knew that this was the place where he would definitely die, and although he knew that he would be stigmatized as a traitor, he went alone without telling anyone. That was so infuriating that he couldn't forgive him.

"Saruhiko!"

Yata was running freely underground while shouting the idiot's name. There was no way the "Jungle" clansmen defending the area would miss that, and they positioned their huge weapons towards Yata. However, Yata didn't notice either. Overcome with anger, he twisted his face and spat.

"Idiot, you're trying to be cool on your own! If you die without telling me, I won't forgive you!"

The Green Clan members fired rockets all at once. A direct hit would have been an exploding bullet that would have killed him instantly. However, Yata crouched and jumped, becoming semi-conscious. Several explosions went off behind him and the shock waves knocked Yata back, but even these were not enough to catch Yata's attention.

It is another type of anger that is directed towards oneself.

Why didn't he think more carefully about the words Fushimi threw at him that dawn? Follow me, Fushimi said. In that case, he should have pursued him with all his might.

If he can't reach Fushimi, he will be scarred for life.

Gritting his teeth so hard that he made a sound, Yata desperately looked around him.

He understood it.

On the other side of the wall that had collapsed due to the caster's attack, was Fushimi lying on the ground and Sukuna wielding a scythe.

"Saru!"

At that moment, Yata became a creature whose only goal was to move forward. The skateboard wheels roared, turning into a ring of fire and generating explosive acceleration. He swung the staff wildly and bounced off the scythe that had been lowered toward him.

As he continued passing, Yata made a U-turn and crashed into Sukuna again. Sukuna didn't seem afraid; in fact, he was even smiling as he screamed.

"So you're changing players? I don't really care about this, come on!"

The rod and the scythe intertwined again. Red and green, a two-color supernatural ability exploded, dyeing the field of vision with mottled colors.

".....!"

Yata's face was distorted and he was barely able to block Sukuna's attack with the staff he held with only one hand. His muscles swelled to the point of bursting and he felt like his wrist was about to break. Still, he couldn't use both hands because his left hand was extended on the ground.

His hand grabbed the back of Fushimi's neck.

The skateboard accelerated again, forcing the two to leave the scene. Sukuna, who was left alone, let out an angry roar.

"Damn it! You're not going to escape!"

Yata didn't even look back. Feeling a tingle of killing intent on his back, he put all of his supernatural powers into the skateboard and accelerated it repeatedly. Fushimi, who was carried on his shoulder, was as limp as a corpse. Yata shouted, feeling something cold run down his back.

"Saruhiko! Are you alive?!"

Fushimi didn't respond.

Yata's next breath was shaky. He called again and again.

"Hey...! Saru!"

"You're late..."

Although his voice was dry and weak, Fushimi responded with certainty.

"And you call yourself the vanguard of your clan? It makes me laugh..."

"Shut up...!"

Yata looked ahead, almost reacting as usual to the same hate speech.

The skateboard was sliding through the underground passage. For a while, only the sound of wheels turning echoed between them. Perhaps because he had been searching so frantically, Yata didn't even know where he was. However, he muttered...

"Why did you not tell me?"

Fushimi laughed lightly at that question.

"There's no way I'm going to tell you about a top-secret mission, idiot. You should figure it out."

"There's no way I can tell from that! Why have you always been like this? That's right, I'm an idiot. That's why I won't understand unless you talk to me properly."

"Would you have understood if I had told you?"

"Say it in a way I understand. Just say it until I understand. If you had died without me being able to hear anything... I would have always thought you were a traitor!"

After a moment of silence, Fushimi looked up.

"I am a traitor."

Yata, who was only looking forward, couldn't tell what kind of expression Fushimi was making. Still, Yata shook his head vigorously.

"That's not true! Just as I would risk my life for Mikoto-san and Anna, you did all this for the "Blue King"... That means that, for you, the "Blue King" has been your King all this time!"

"....."

Yata took a deep breath and spoke clearly.

"I... think Saruhiko Fushimi from "Scepter 4" is amazing."

Fushimi stirred slightly. He doesn't know if he laughed or was surprised. Either one was fine. Whether his words were true or not was beyond Yata's consideration.

He only said what he feels and what he thinks.

At that moment, Yata suddenly felt something strange under his feet.

He controlled the skateboard and turn using what can only be described as intuition. Almost at the same time, the ground in front of him was cut into a cross shape and a small figure jumped out from within.

"Haha!"

Sukuna turned the scythe on him while making an amused voice. Yata clicked his tongue as he placed Fushimi's still limp body on his skateboard and kicked towards Sukuna.

The rod almost blocked the tip of the scythe as it descended.

Still maintaining the momentum of the shot, Sukuna smiled as he carried the scythe and spun as if dancing.

"Saruhiko is on the verge of death. You are about to reach the yellow indicator. What should we do?"

Yata readied his staff and turned to Sukuna. He was angry at the brat in front of him who treated life and death like a game.

"If you want to play that kind of game, do it with other people besides us. Hey, do you have any friends to play with?"

Suddenly, the smile disappeared from Sukuna's mouth.

An intense light shone in his eyes as he slowly approached, twirling his scythe.

"I've always played alone. It's 100 times better to be alone than to be held down by a weaker person. I can do it alone."

Killing intent filled Sukuna's body. Yata looked at him in silence.

"The only interesting person is Nagare. So anyone who gets in his way... I'll crush him!"

Screaming, Sukuna kicked the ground.

From left to right. It was an extremely fast movement that left an afterimage in his field of vision. For a moment, Yata completely lost sight of Sukuna. A cold premonition of death ran through his neck.

"Misaki!"

The knife was thrown in a straight line and accurately hit Sukuna's body.

"Damn!"

Sukuna had to use the scythe that was supposed to decapitate Yata as a defense against the knife. He bounced, spin in the air and land. Yata, who narrowly escaped death, muttered as he pointed the tip of his staff at Sukuna again.

"So "Jungle" was your escape. You look like us in the past. But... go home."

Sukuna's face contorted in anger and irritation.

"How bossy! Even if you two get together, I'm stronger than you!"

Sukuna began to move at high speed again. A bright green electromagnetic blade left a trail like a meteor and cut its way into the underground darkness.

Yata's eyes can't catch it. He would have just stood there like a stick, waiting to be cut down.

If he was the only one, it would have happened.

"Assume that again!"

As if in response to Yata's voice, multiple knives were thrown from behind.

The knife was thrown directly, grazing his side, shoulder and ear, and he was covered in a blue glow. Without missing a beat, it passed through the green beam and stopped its movement. As Sukuna's eyes widened in shock, Yata rushed forward.

The tip of the stick pierced Sukuna's abdomen.

".....!"

In silent agony, Sukuna's small body was sent flying and fell to the ground. As he coughed violently, Sukuna looked at Yata and Fushimi with the gaze of a demon.

Yata said with a slight smile as he held the staff.

"It's like old times, fighting hand to hand with you."

Fushimi said hoarsely as he stood up.

"...It's not the same as it was back then."

"That's right... it's not the same."

Suddenly laughing, Yata held his staff elegantly and declared happily.

"Misaki Yata, member of the Red Clan, and..."

There was a pause of a few seconds after he took a firm stance. Sukuna, who was half sitting on the ground, looked at Yata as if he didn't understand what he was saying.

Yata instinctively looked at Fushimi and shouted.

"Say it! Say it!"

Fushimi clicked his tongue and said with a voice that sounded like he really hated it.

"...The member of the Blue Clan, Saruhiko Fushimi."

Still, Yata was satisfied. They shouted in unison and at the same time.

"We will be your opponents!"

"This...!"

Sukuna's frustration seemed to have reached its peak. He used only the springs of his body to rise and attack while he swung his scythe.

"Older generations can't be cool!"

Yata held his staff horizontally and blocked the blow. At the same time, Sukuna's toe flew towards him and he twisted his neck to avoid it.

"This is work. And I can't waste time playing with a child!"

As Fushimi screamed, more knives flew. Sukuna clicked his tongue and swung his scythe, knocking down all the knives. He continued to kick the ground and tried to distance himself from Yata.

Yata won't allow that. He ran out himself and began to close the distance with Sukuna. Passing by the scythe that was being wielded in confusion, the protruding staff bit into Sukuna's stomach.

"Grr...!"

"What's the problem? You're slowing down!"

Sukuna gritted his teeth and swung the sickle wildly at him. The room for maneuver he had before was nowhere to be found. Anger, impatience, humiliation, and fear of defeat enveloped Sukuna's body, making him wither. Sukuna was now forced into a defensive stance.

(We can win!)

Yata muttered that to himself as he calmly inserted the rod. The current Saruhiko and Yaka can defeat that guy. Although red and blue were different colors, they were able to recognize that they were members of a clan fighting for their "King".

With that thought in mind, just as he was about to take another step, the support from behind suddenly stopped.

"What?!"

When he turned around, he saw Fushimi crouching down. The knife he dropped lay at his feet. The damage Sukuna inflicted on him earlier was eating away at his body.

Sukuna did not waste that momentary opportunity. He crouched down and quickly walked past Yata, turning on his electromagnetic sickle and attempting to cut off Fushimi's head.

"If you're going to die, get off the stage!"

"Saruhiko!"

Yata threw his staff and tried his best to stop Sukuna. He couldn't let Fushimi fall there. If that were the case, it wouldn't make sense to throw everything away and go this far.

But...

(I can't make it on time!)

Yata's face distorted at Sukuna's demon-like speed. A shiver ran down his spine as he imagined Sukuna's sickle piercing Fushimi's throat...

Sukuna stopped moving.

"What...?!"

Fushimi's knife was stuck in his shoulder.

"...Ha. Did you let your guard down?"

Pretending that he was running out of energy... no, he was probably running out of energy. However, with the last of his strength, Fushimi sent the hidden knife flying. He hit Sukuna smoothly, imprinting his movements on the spot.

If Fushimi had been alone, it would have been nothing more than a struggle. He is not a Sukuna who will stop when a knife is stuck in him. He should have been beheaded just like that.

But every second the knife gained had infinite value.

"Uraaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Yata's fist hit Sukuna's cheekbone. A powerful punch using the red supernatural power sent Sukuna's small body flying like a piece of paper. Flying through the air as he spun, Sukuna was sucked into the hole he had made in the ground.

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He dragged his body closer to the hole.

Not only had he run out of knives, but he also ran out of strength to throw them. His physical strength and supernatural abilities are empty, and if Sukuna returns, there will be nothing Fushimi can do.

Still, Fushimi stood next to Yata and looked towards the bottom of the hole.

The darkness was so deep that he couldn't even hear Sukuna's voice, let alone see him.

Either he died or fell into an abyss of no return. Either one was fine. For now, the threat has disappeared.

Taking a deep breath, Fushimi spoke in an exhausted voice.

"...Go home, huh? You're being very bossy and lecturing a child. Are you an adult?"

Yata crouched on the spot and looked at Fushimi with a bitter expression on his face.

"You're loud. I don't know if I'm an adult or not, but I'm not a child anymore."

Fushimi laughed lightly. That's how it is. He has never heard of a child risking his life because he is too busy with work.

At this moment, a muffled voice rang out from where Yata was sitting.

"Yata-san...! Yata-san! Can you hear me? Where are you now?!"

Yata took out a red marble from his pocket and responded.

"Hey, Kamamoto. Saruhiko is safe. It's not like we're safe, though."

"I see! Anna, Fushimi is safe! Please hurry up, Yata-san, it won't be completed unless you go to your floor!"

"...Ah. I understand."

Then, Yata looked at Fushimi.

"Hmph.", he huffed. He didn't want to help or be a burden. Without making eye contact, Fushimi said:

"Go. Don't count me in on this. As expected, it's unpaid overtime."

"But you..."

Yata must be aware that Fushimi's power is running out. Those words that seemed loving, but are now unpopular. Fushimi looked at Yata.

"What is the most important?"

After a short pause, Yata answered clearly.

"...It's Anna."

"Then go quickly. You do your job. I can escape on my own."

Yata pursed his lips, turned on his heel and started walking.

Fushimi called from behind.

"Misaki."

After Yata turned around and stuttered for a moment, Fushimi muttered:

"...I'll think of a way to speak so that even idiots can understand."

As expected, Yata was an idiot and it took him several seconds to absorb the meaning of his words.

A smile slowly appeared on his face. A carefree smile like the one he used to have when he called Fushimi a friend. With that stupid look on his face, Yata clenched his fists.

"Hey! Let's talk later!"

Fushimi waved his hand as if to throw him out. Yata turned his back on him again and rode the skateboard away from him.

After his back disappeared into the depths of the hallway, Fushimi lowered his head in shock.

Even when he searched his pockets, he still couldn't find a single dark weapon.

"I used all my knives, huh..."

Just when he thought he should retrieve the knife that Sukuna had knocked down, he heard multiple footsteps.

"There he is! Here he is!"

"Don't let the intruder escape!"

The members of "Jungle". If they are defending their base of operations, they must be at least a U-Rank. It may not be the case in normal times, but now Fushimi is not an opponent who can resist. He knew that if he didn't hide quickly, they would certainly attack him.

Still, his body did not move.

Far from hiding, he couldn't move a single finger. It seems like he was more tired than he thought. Fushimi took a deep breath and whispered to himself.

"He is simple, stupid, he doesn't think, and although he doesn't understand anything... sometimes he suddenly comes up with a 100-point answer..."

He himself wondered why he accepted that job. It is a truly suicidal act to infiltrate the enemy's pockets alone, and if an emergency arises, even if it means sacrificing himself, it will benefit "Scepter 4". He didn't have that much loyalty towards Munakata or "Scepter 4". It's not like he lives in a flower garden where he would sacrifice his life for something like "order."

So why is he trying to risk his life here and now?

(That means that, for you, the "Blue King" has been your King this entire time!)

Remembering Yata's words, Fushimi looked up at the sky.

"Well, I'm risking my life, although it's not worth it..."

"Jungle". The clansmen camped in the distance. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the muzzle of a gun pointed at him. Still, Fushimi did not react and silently tried to close his eyes.

A head appeared on the ground beneath his feet.

Fushimi stiffened and widened his eyes.

It was Hirasaka. When she reached his shoulders, she reached out and grabbed Fushimi's ankles. Hirasaka gave the bare minimum of explanation to Fushimi, who blinked repeatedly.

"An escape route has been secured."

"...I don't remember asking for your help."

"The compensation has already been paid by your boss."

Fushimi suddenly let out a laugh at the simple and clear answer, and then was dragged into the darkness below.

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Kuro, Shiro and Neko run through the darkness of the depths of the earth.

The impact and sounds of battle that echoed from above were proof that "Homura" was clearing the way for them. They believed in them, "Hakumaito" and in the unwavering support of the "Silver King". To respond to that demand, they must take positions as quickly as possible.

Even if they didn't put it into words, it was a feeling that the three of them had in common. As if breaking through the darkness, their running speed increased even more.

Suddenly, their field of vision opened.

"It's here?"

Everyone stopped and looked around cautiously.

It was a space filled with white light, in contrast to the dark path they had just passed. The high ceilings are supported by glass walls and concrete reinforcements.

A cheerful voice echoed from the catwalk near the ceiling.

"White teeth are the key to illuminating the depths of the earth."

He remembered that voice and also that phrase.

The man, Mishakuji Yukari, who was sitting elegantly on the catwalk, smiled lightly at Kuro and the others, and then landed on the ground.

"You understand, right? I won't let you go any further than this. I will do everything in my power to prevent it."

Of course, Kuro knew that.

"Rururururu... Shhh!"

Neko made a threatening sound like a cat. With that in mind, Kuro stepped forward.

"Mishakuji Yukari, this match will be one on one."

"Kuro...?!"

Looking back at the confused Shiro, Kuro said in a calm tone:

"You guys keep going. I have to defeat this person by myself. I just want you to listen to my selfishness."

Yes. That's selfish.

Siblings. A man who pointed his sword towards Miwa. Through countless practices and various meetings, Kuro has never been able to defeat Mishakuji. He is the strongest swordsman, far surpassing himself, both in flower and fruit. That's Mishakuji Yukari.

He wanted to beat that man.

It is never a good cause. It could simply be Kuro's wish.

But... if he doesn't do that, Kuro won't be able to advance at all from now on.

Shiro's confusion quickly turned into a helpless smile.

"This is the first time I've heard you say something selfish."

"I'm sorry."

"Fine. But in exchange, you must win properly and return."

In response, a smile appeared on Kuro's lips.

"Yes."

"That spirit is good, but..."

As if he was going to pour some water on him, Mishakuji brought out "Ayamachi".

"Kuro-chan. If you don't defeat me, I will immediately chase after your "King", do you understand?"

Kuro faced Mishakuji and silently held "Kotowari".

Defeating Mishakuji means protecting his "King". With that firmly etched in his heart, Kuro inhaled and exhaled silently.

Two disciples of the Miwa Meishin style. They simply exchanged clear glances, mirroring each other's images on the other side of the point.

CHAPTER 13: THE END OF THE DREAM

As he ran through the dark passage, something bright opened again.

It was similar to the space where Mishakuji was located, but it was even higher in the ceiling and with countless huge cylinders. There was even a strict air, like an ancient Greek temple.

As he ran through the pillars, Shiro thought of Kuro whom he had left just now.

(Kuro. I believe in you.)

Mishakuji Yukari is a strong enemy. Perhaps his power will even reach the king. Facing the blade, Shiro did not confirm whether Kuro could win alone.

That's why he believes in him. That's the only thing Shiro can do.

At this moment, multiple members of the "Jungle" clan appeared from the front.

"There they are! Don't let them pass!"

The muzzle turned there at once. Looking at them, Neko who was running next to him, murmured.

"They won't defeat me!"

With the spirit, Neko drew a zigzag path, lowering herself like a four-legged beast. She jumped into the air and decided to drop the heel to the main Clansman.

"This is...!"

Other Clansmen quickly take the distance and aimed at Neko. However, they couldn't catch her literally jumping like a cat, and she was just thrown away.

At this moment, Neko's eyes were shining, and the sound of the bell echoed.

"Take this!"

"Jungle Attack!"

The Clansmen held their weapons and began to hit each other. Neko's reconnaissance operation skill and ability. Neko watched the Clansmen using their weapons to hit each other, and was satisfied.

"Neko!"

Shiro ran again as he called after her. There isn't much time left. They have to get to the "Slate" as soon as possible.

And...

Shiro suddenly saw that something strange was placed between the pillars.

A tatami with six mats. Kitchen with an old refrigerator. Various plaques in the Chabudai.

The appearance of a room, as if a family lived there, was left in a solemn underground space.

"....."

Hisui Nagare also has friends. The opponent has something that can be called family.

The fact that he knew sank into his chest.

But he can't stop. Hisui Nagare has a wish, and Shiro also has his own wish. That's completely understandable too. If there was something that could not be certified, there was only one thing to do.

Shiro and Neko arrived there.

A gigantic stone disk placed carelessly on the ground, the "Dresden Slate".

A relic that brings innovation and confusion to humanity.

And, as if to protect him, a solitary bird was there.

"It's here! It's here!"

The parrot made a sound. He had seen that parrot several times. He is a messenger of the "Green King" named Kotosaka.

Then, the young man with Kotosaka on his shoulder slowly stood up.

"...Hisui Nagare."

Hearing Shiro's words, the young "Green King" Hisui Nagare smiled silently. Neko nodded and snuggled into Shiro.

Nagare looked at him and silently opened his mouth.

"First King, Adolf K. Weismann, Isana Yashiro. Welcome."

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Mishakuji gently narrowed his eyes as his sword flickered slowly.

Kuro's sword in front of him doesn't seem to be as shaken as before. Unfazed by Mishukaji's brilliant move, he is trying to discern the true nature of him.

Mishakuji freely admired that state.

"Good. Although it contains great power, it is as calm as the surface of a lake. I can see your growth."

In response, Kuro replied in a low voice.

"...I've finally begun to see it too. It may seem like your sword can change shape, but there is a core running through it. The core that sustains the strength."

Mishakuji chuckled and readjusted his "Ayamachi".

"It's a strange destiny. Although we grew up under the same "king", we each received different "kings" and now our paths cross this way. It's wonderful."

Once upon a time, when they were wielding swords together under the tutelage of Miwa Ichigen, did they ever think that something like this would happen?

At the very least, it is true that the current Kuro has become an attractive enemy. There aren't many people he wants to kill from the bottom of his heart.

Mishakuji was happy about that, regardless of his morals or his feelings.

"I guess it's time we found our King. Let's get started, Kuro-chan."

Mishakuji pointed the tip at Kuro, as if he was swearing.

"My sword is to fulfill the sincerest wish of the "Green King"."

Kuro also pointed the tip of "Kotowari" towards Mishakuji and muttered to himself.

"And I, to fulfill the wish of the "Silver King"."

+++++

"Oraaaaaaaah, but what?!"

Yata was running the entire time, letting out a roar.

The map that was informed to him in advance has long since been forgotten by him. That's not to say he was running blindly. Yata already knew the coordinates he had to reach. The "warmth" he feels from Anna's supernatural network is directly beneath the presence of his friends.

But before he gets there, he will have to go through a maze.

From the darkness along the corridors, behind the barricades, from the walkways, members of the "Jungle" clan began to emerge. They really were a nuisance. Yata swung his staff to deflect the bullets they fired, smashing them, jumping over their bodies and moving forward.

"Yata-chan, have you arrived yet?"

"Yata-san, hurry up...!"

Yata's frustration increased as he received communications from Kusanagi and Kamamoto. He shouted, gritting his teeth and punching the members of the "Jungle" clan.

"I'm so excited that I keep running as fast as I can! Just wait a little longer!"

Anna's supernatural network also shares his sense of sight and hearing. Yata was well aware of the burden his late arrival placed on everyone else. Yata forced himself to take a breath, which was about to run out, and accelerated even more.

"Alright."

Suddenly, he heard that voice.

"I believe in Misaki."

He felt as if Anna's direct gaze was fixed on Yata.

Hearing that, Yata laughed. He thought to himself as he emitted flames from the tip of the staff.

(King believes in me. If I don't answer, it will be a lie!)

The staff slammed into the wall, leaving a trail of flames in the darkness. Even more clansmen wait beyond the toppled and exploded wall. Yata stood up and stared at them.

"I am Yata Misaki, captain of the "Homura" vanguard! Stay away unless you want to die!"

+++++

The unrest on the ground was already calming down.

The defeat of the "Gray King" had a great impact on the morale of the Green Clan members, and most of them retreated to their hideouts or were unable to escape and were captured by "Scepter 4". Some began to surrender voluntarily, showing no signs of resistance. Many people on the ground have probably already made up their minds. However, Awashima's expression never cleared up.

"Captain..."

Reisi Munakata was looking towards the "hideout" when she called out to him with concern.

Blue sparks scattered intermittently on his back. An uncontrollable supernatural ability causes a short circuit, which manifests as a visible anomaly.

Without turning around, Munakata said to Awashima.

"...Awashima-kun. When the time comes, don't hesitate."

Awashima bit her lip and looked up at the sky.

A broken "Sword of Damocles" hovered directly above Munakata. Like Munakata's body, it emits numerous sparks and blue aura crystals constantly break off and disappear into thin air.

It wouldn't have been strange if it fell at any moment.

Awashima looked at him and put her hand on the hilt of her own saber. Pain, sadness, despair. He kept all those emotions inside her heart and thought.

(Just do what you have to do.)

All the other members noticed Awashima's deadly expression. Before they knew it, they were watching Awashima and their "King" from afar. No matter how fate turns out, they want to see it with their own eyes.

Then only one person noticed it.

The "Gray King", Tenkei Iwafune, who was lying on the ground, suddenly disappeared.

He maybe he used some supernatural ability, or maybe he crawled with all his might. The only person who noticed that was Gouki Zenjo, who silently closed his eyes and muttered to himself.

"...At least he has a place to die."

+++++

His first impression was that he was a much younger man than he had imagined.

To awaken the "Slate" and encourage innovation in humanity. He was a delicate and gentle man who did not seem willing to commit such a scandalous act. If he had not been surrounded by a powerful aura, perhaps he would not have been able to believe in him or even now.

The "Green King", who was connected to the "Slate", silently opened his mouth.

"Honestly, I didn't expect you to go this far. As expected."

"Because I also have a will."

Hisui Nagare tilted his head slightly at Shiro's response. In a regretful tone, he said...

"I'm your fan... that is, I'm a fan of the "Silver King" that you used to be. I have great empathy with the feelings you once confided to the "Slate". Do you want to join hands with me?"

Shiro shook his head without hesitation.

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to reject you again."

"...Now that I think about it, you didn't answer me why last time either."

"That..."

Just as he was about to speak, Neko suddenly stepped forward and stuck out her tongue.

"Bleh, no! Shiro won't be your friend!"

Kotosaka, who remained on Nagare's shoulder, replied in a sharp voice.

"Shut up, you stupid cat!"

"Shut up, you idiot bird!"

Neko and Kotosaka looked at each other, growling and threatening each other.

"Ameno Miyabi."

Suddenly, Nagare called out to her.

Neko trembled. Hisui Nagare guards her true identity, the absolute secret that Neko tried to hide. Neko was afraid of that more than anything.

"Like me, you experienced the Kagutsu Incident. You are one of the few people who survived that tragedy."

Nagare easily revealed his true identity.

"Just as I woke up as a "King" when the "Red King" caused a burst of royal power, you also gained power and became Strain. And just as I lost my life, you manipulated your own memories and ended up living like a cat. We two are people from whom the "Slate" stole everything... and we got everything new."

Shiro looked at Neko.

Neko didn't exchange glances with Shiro, she just grabbed him tightly by the sleeve.

"In the course of life, people encounter many irrational situations. What matters is whether or not you can resist that irrational fate. Do you have that power? We encountered the Kagutsu Incident, but we overcame it with the power that gave us the "Slate". People

should have the power to protect themselves and pave their way. The "Slate" will give them that."

Shiro flatly denied that theory.

"No. The power of the "Slate" is too much for humans to possess."

Nagare also immediately replied.

"Why? Don't you believe in people? If so, I'm disappointed. I'm disillusioned. You used to believe in people's potential more than anyone else."

"That's not true! I..."

"I don't understand!"

Only a little.

The discussion was interrupted by Neko's words.

Biting her lip and suppressing her fear, Neko still kept her eyes fixed on Nagare. She thought slowly and, as she did, she opened her mouth.

"I don't understand what you're saying. But Wagahai doesn't need a "Slate". Shiro, Kurosuke and everyone else can do without that!"

"...Neko."

"Whoever it is, even if I'm a monster, I'll never disappear just because of that. So, I'm fine with that. That's all I need! I don't need anything else!"

"....."

"There have been bad things in the past and I think there will be more in the future. But what I want right now is not a "Slate". It's delicious food and someone who will eat it with me. That's what Wagahai wants!"

Tears welled up in Neko's eyes.

What is her "true identity"? Shiro still doesn't know.

He probably doesn't need to know. Unless Neko wants them to know, there's no need to pry. What Shiro and Kuro want is the "Neko" of now, who is innocent and full of emotion.

Taking Neko's hand, Shiro looked at Nagare and said...

"Hisui Nagare. What people need is not a "Slate". It's just it... that's right. A chabudai. That's enough. That's my conclusion. The choice of the "Silver King"."

After a while of silence, Nagare suddenly said...

"...What a pity."

"Nagare! Don't be disappointed! Nagare!"

Encouraged by Kotosaka, Nagare smiled a little. He looked at Shiro and said...

"So... let me ask you something. Why did you come here, "Silver King"?"

"I came to destroy the "Slate"."

A slight sneer emerged from Nagare's smile.

"How? You should be the most aware of the physical strength of the "Slate". I would like to add that I will not let you touch it again."

In an instant, a green light illuminated Nagare's chest. In the blink of an eye, it enveloped his entire body, manifesting as an aura so powerful that he could feel it on his skin.

"I guess so..."

When he replied in a low voice, the slight sneer that had been mixed into Nagare's expression disappeared. Along with his warning, the green shrine that Nagare uses became even more intense.

"Now I can connect with the "Slate" and absorb its power inexhaustibly. If I feel like it, "Silver King", I can use your "immutable" power and my "alterable" power. I can overwrite it and even kill you. I am invincible."

"....."

"Still, you are resisting, "Silver King"."

"If you were me, would you give up?"

Nagare narrowed his eyes and kicked the wheelchair back.

That was the end of the story. From now on, it was not the time for conversation, but for beliefs and fist bumps.

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Anna was the first to notice.

As the "Red Queen", she has a sensory capacity that far exceeds that of a Strain. Her higher perceptive powers sensed the existence of "it" before it manifested.

She turned her gaze toward the sky as if to check. In her field of vision, which only reflected red, "It" tried to take shape, not as a color, but as a figure colored by an aura.

"Silver" and "Green", the two "Swords of Damocles".

Anna understood exactly what that meant. The two kings, Isana Yashiro and Hisui Nagare, finally met.

Slowly, impatience crept up her spine.

In a head-on confrontation, the probability of Shiro defeating Nagare is zero. In theory, no one could beat Nagare, who can draw unlimited energy from the "Slate".

There is no more grace left. If they don't carry out the plan immediately...

At this moment, the marble that Kamamoto was holding emitted a red glow.

"Anna! It's here, it's the signal!"

Anna gritted her teeth. Her excellent sensory ability felt that "it was not like this yet". All the marbles are not in the correct position yet.

At that moment, Yata and Kusanagi's screams echoed through the network.

"We're almost there! Just do it!"

"Anna, do it!"

She closed her eyes, she gave a sigh and when she opened her eyelids again, her doubts had already dissipated. She broadcast the proclamation of her as "King" to the supernatural network.

"From now on, we will gather all the power of the Red Clan and open the "way"..."

A bright red aura came out from her folded arms. The aura turned into a flame, a shrine, and spread towards the clansmen like flames spreading across the plains.

Anna felt a burning sensation on her neck as the fourth "Sword of Damocles" appeared above her head.

Kamamoto, who was next to her, clenched his fist and shouted.

"No Blood!"

Kusanagi, who was deep underground, laughed in fighting spirit.

"No Bone!"

Yata, who was further down, ran with determination in his heart.

"No Ash!"

At their respective stations, the clan members (Akagi, Bando, Chitose, Dewa, Eric, and Fujishima) expressed their thoughts and threw the marbles in their hands.

Anna could see it in her eyes. Her eyes, which only recognize the color red, were able to see through "Homura's" red color through space. The red dots were connected in a straight line, forming a straight line.

She should have already abandoned her doubts. She knew she had to do it.

Still, she couldn't help but wonder if she could do it.

That flame. That red. The power of the King. Is it possible for her to control it?

(Will I be able to achieve things like that person?)

A few seconds of coma. The question that ran through Anna's mind, however, disappeared in the next moment. Someone was behind her.

It wasn't Kamamoto. Neither do the other members of the clan. His presence was clearly felt even from a distance.

Furthermore, the person behind Anna was much bigger than them. A bright, warm, soft and beautiful red.

Anna watched, unblinking, as his hand reached over her shoulder and took hers.

Anna's lips parted. Her voice overlapped with that of the man behind her, echoing her words.

"Burn them!"

The flames on both arms enveloped the marble in the air, as if it had a will. The exploding supernatural flame penetrated the ground and caused the marbles on the ground to explode, expanding further and swallowing the marbles below, increasing its power by doubling each time it was chained together. A huge column of fire engulfed everything from the first floor of the basement to the tenth floor of the basement, burning it to the ground.

Anna could see that enormous column of fire.

The flame of the King that she created with the power of all.

Anna looked back.

However, there was no one there. The shadow of his tall figure, the warmth she felt, the smile on his lips, nothing. There was no trace of his existence left there.

Instead, Munakata's face loomed near the exit from the ground.

Seeing a hint of pain in his eyes, Anna knew that Munakata had seen the same thing as her.

She met Munakata's eyes. Anna nodded slightly and lowered her eyes.

Then, remembering the man who was behind her at the end, Anna laughed a little.

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The sound of an explosion echoed in the distance, and Nagare recognized it simply as the sound of a battle.

In various parts of the "secret base", clan members "Jungle" and "Homura" fight fierce battles. Naturally, the weapons given to the clan members included bombs, so he thought that was the reason.

By the time he realized that was different, it was too late.

The sound of explosions echoed at regular intervals, getting closer and louder. When he gasped and looked up, a waterfall-like flame had already broken through the ceiling and was falling onto the "Slate".

The roaring stream of flames engulfed Nagare's body and licked the entire hall. Kotosaka jumped into the air and the others deployed a supernatural shield to block the flames.

Nagare was the only one who was directly exposed to the flames.

If he were a normal person, he wouldn't have been left with even a speck of dust. Even a normal "King" would not have been able to survive unscathed.

Of course, Nagare was none of those things.

"Is this your plan?"

Despite being exposed to the inferno that was still pouring out, Nagare did not suffer a single burn.

Nagare said with a sigh.

"I am deeply disappointed. What is the point of doing something like this?"

He thought that Isana Yashiro's intelligence was on par with his, so he didn't want to think that such a foolish plan was a trump card. If he truly believed that Nagare could be defeated with the supporting fire of the "Red Queen", then he was no longer even a person to talk to.

And Shairo did not disappoint Nagare's expectations.

"...The path is already made."

"Path?"

Nagare looked up again at the words he murmured.

He could see the blue sky.

Nagare stopped breathing. The blue sky, the white of the clouds. And floating there, swords of various colors.

He felt as if his electromagnetic heart was beating rapidly.

"Perhaps..."

"That's right."

The light of determination shone in Shiro's eyes. Determined to overcome or crush the difficulties before them by any means necessary. The formula for this already exists within Shiro.

In a lower voice, Shiro spoke of the method.

"I will destroy the "Slate" with a "Damocles Down"."

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Mishakuji Yukari had never thought that his sword was as beautiful as it was now.

A flash of "excess" released from an impossible angle, free and flexible, is truly art. Mishakuji views his swordsmanship that way, not as a boast, but as a fair evaluation. A human-like swordsman who steps forward as if he were dancing and wields his sword as if in full bloom will not be able to take a single hit.

Yes. If you do not have the proper skill in using the sword, you will never be able to bring out the beauty of the sword.

That's why Mishakuji loudly praised his opponent.

"That's amazing, Kuro-chan! You've become so strong. You're almost on par with me now!"

Yes. Yatogami Kuro also became more beautiful than he had ever seen before.

Firm and solid as a rock, no matter how unexpected the blow, "Kotowari" will absorb it and unleash a devastating counterattack. His eyes never waver, always fixed on Mishakuji.

Ah, Mishakuji thought, with a tingle.

(I wish this moment could last forever!)

However, the reality is that that is not the case. Mishakuji knew this better than anyone.

The elevated "Ayamachi" and the lower "Kotowari" crossed each other. The surrounding auras repel each other, producing sparks and a sizzle.

Mishakuji smiled charmingly as he used one hand to relieve the pressure of his spit.

"But right now, you can't just be even. If you don't surpass me, you won't be able to go to your "King"!"

"Kuh..."

Biting his lip in frustration, Kuro shifted his grip slightly. When he released the amount of pressure that had been loosened, Kuro flexibly withdrew and readied his sword again.

Mishakuji raised his voice as he made his sword dance gracefully with just one hand.

"Come, show me!"

At that moment two lights exploded.

Silver and green. He could know it without seeing it, because it is the light of his King.

"That's from Nagare-chan."

The appearance of the "Sword of Damocles" meant that Isana Yashiro and Hisui Nagare were at war.

That in itself stirred no emotion in Mishakuji. If those two fight, Nagare will definitely win. There was no way that his "Green King", who was connected to the "Slate", would be defeated, no matter how many conditions were combined.

So what surprised Mishakuji was Kuro's reaction.

He took something out of his pocket. It is a single coin that shines silver. Gripping his tightly, Kuro muttered.

"That's right. My sword is to my King, Shiro. As long as I'm with him..."

Along with the coin, Kuro grabbed the hilt of his sword and silently looked at Mishakuji.

Mishakuji was impressed by that look. His eyes are like the surface of a calm lake, without haste or hesitation, just a determination hidden deep inside.

Kuro declared happily, mirroring Mishukaji in his incredibly deep eyes.

"Mishakuji Yukari. I will surpass you!"

Mishakuji let out a sigh and laughed.

The current Kuro is the strongest Kuro to date.

Yatogami Kuro is not Mishakuji Yukari. He operates with a completely different logic than Mishakuji, who acts freely and selfishly.

Kuro demonstrates his ultimate power for the sake of the King. For his Lord. It's for someone important.

That's why Kuro was the strongest at that time. To save the "King" who is in trouble, run to his side as soon as possible and defeat the enemy in front of him. He will expend all of his life force for that purpose.

Mishakuji couldn't help but be happy about that. He considers the last-minute exchanges of life and the brilliance of will that emerges to be the most beautiful of all.

Kuro kicked the ground.

Unconsciously, Mishakuji also started running.

Rounding to "Kotowari". Preventing, in return, he pushed "Ayamachi", repelling him. Sparks fly from tip to tip and the pressure on the blade emits light. A deadly dance with two swords, a thin line between life and death as if they were playing. As if he were playing in a paradise, Mishakuji was captivated by the moment.

And then, the end came without a hitch.

Kuro intervened. Two steps, three steps, the speed far exceeded Mishakuji's expectations. As he raised the spirit of division, he turned, as if half of his body was immersed in it.

Before he knew it, the "Kotowari" sword had pierced Mishakuji's chest.

"Ayamachi" flew through the air and rolled on the concrete making a sound.

Before he could think of anything, the words came pouring out.

"That was beautiful..."

He collapsed and fell to his knees. Fever and pain from his shoulder to his chest. He could feel the blood dripping and coming out of his fingers.

His fingertips could still move, meaning he could still grasp the sword.

But he wasn't going to do that.

The decision has already been made.

This is the first time he has been defeated since he pointed his sword at Ichigen Miwa. He couldn't bear to see that great swordsman slowly lose his life to illness. He wanted to see his life burn in the midst of battle. So he doesn't regret what he did.

And now...

At this moment, his youngest disciple, who could only tremble, was about to surpass him. Mishakuji felt quiet satisfaction in the fact that no one else had cut him except the man who had inherited Miwa's technique.

His feet were shaking. Someone is fighting somewhere. Kuro looked towards the end of the hallway with an impatient expression on his face.

"Damn, it's started!"

Mishakuji muttered under his breath.

"...Kill me. And go quickly to your king."

Then, Mishakuji closed his eyes.

There was a pause.

Mishakuji opened his eyelids at the sound of the doorbell.

When he looked, he saw that Kuro had sheathed his sword.

Before Mishakuji could say anything, Kuro stared at him.

"In the fields and mountains the color may differ, but we are like noni seeds."

Yes, he recited a poem.

Mishakuji rolled his eyes. He remembers the poet Miwa's haikus without missing a single word. However, what Kuro said was...

"...I don't know that poem."

"It's my poem... Goodbye."

Without saying anything, Kuro turned his back on him and started running.

Mishakuji looked at his back in shock. The only thing he could do was record a single phrase and follow in the footsteps of his younger brother.

When he looked down silently, a slight smile appeared on his lips.

"Are you looking, Ichigen-sama? That child has finally become a full-fledged person."

He then he got up. Stumbling, he picked up "Ayamachi" and gently placed it in his holster. The time to exercise that will not come for some time. Now that all the battles are reaching their final stages, there probably isn't much he can do.

But that doesn't mean there's nothing.

"Now... the least I can do is get a new seed."

Mishakuji muttered that and started walking in the opposite direction of Kuro, looking for the stairs that led to the top.

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The great hall was engulfed in flames.

The breath of the "Red Queen" blew from above, completely burning multiple armor plates and leaving large holes. In the distance you can see a blue sky and a sparkling silver tip.

Nagare turned to Shiro and glared at him.

"Are you crazy? Damocles Down..."

Shiro accepted that look head on.

"It's the only way to destroy the "Slate". Neither me, nor the "Golden King". Another person involved in "The Beginning" told me this option."

"Are you planning to turn this into a crater?!"

No, Nagare denied his own words. If Tokyo is caught in the "burst of royal power", it will not simply become a crater. The swords of all the "kings" present there could fall together. Their power is not just a metaphor, but it would be worthy of destroying this planet.

For a moment, Nagare doubted Shiro's character, wondering if he was trying to negotiate with the world itself as a hostage. But he shook his head slowly.

"Concentrate the enormous energy of the "Damocles Down" in a single point. According to the Second Methodology of the Schwert Regulation, it will cause a Hammer Resonance Effect. After calculating the degree of resistance of the "Slate", I discovered that its limit value, was theoretically the same as "Damocles Down". When certain conditions are met, the "Slate" and the "Sword of Damocles" will only annihilate each other."

Nagare opened his eyes.

He only had a little experience with Schwert's control methodology. Weismann's deviation, the source of supernatural powers, and his crystal, the "Sword of Damocles", are normally phenomena that not even the "King" can do anything about. Although it can be observed, it is impossible to intervene, and the only way to prevent it from happening is to end the King's life. That was the conclusion of the first methodology.

However, the second method proposes another way.

Nagare punched the air. The hologram image that appeared instantly, along with dozens of data, showed that his prediction was correct.

"Impossible! He is pushing his own Weismann level to the limit!"

What the Schwert Control/Second Methodology proposes is that the "King" can voluntarily cross the critical point of the Weismann deviation. By deliberately dropping the largest energy body, the "Sword of Damocles", the power from it becomes directional. In that case, "Damocles Down" transmits energy as "penetration", rather than "diffusion".

The "Silver" Sanctuary is expanding. No reservations, no restrictions, to the point that even Nagare, who was directly connected to the "Slate", was overwhelmed. A dazzling silver glow overflowed from the hand that Shiro had placed on his chest, and in contrast, his expression began to distort in agony.

"Shiro?!"

Neko next to him huddled worried. However, Shiro forced a smile and looked at Nagare.

"What do you think, Hisui Nagare? Don't you think this is some kind of message?"

"What...?"

"The "Slate" can only be destroyed when the "King" releases the sword of his own will. I don't know who he is, but it seems to me that someone who created the "Slate" is saying that."

He closed his eyes in silence and connected the words.

"If it is too much for you, you must destroy it with your own hands."

"I will not leave you!"

Nagare released all the power of him.

A green aura enveloped his entire body and a ferocious momentum coursed through his body. Nagare roared as he tilted his body downwards.

"Looking at Suouh Mikoto's case, it takes less than 10 seconds from the start of the fall to reach the underground! If I kill you before, the sword will disappear!"

Shiro slowly opened his eyes.

"...Try it."

The value indicating the Weismann deviation in the image exceeded the critical value.

The fall began.

Before he could confirm that, Nagare had attacked Shiro. An extremely fast, lightning-like strike aimed at the throat of the "Silver King".

A red Japanese umbrella blocked his fingers.

"Grr...!"

The two auras, silver and green, collide and annihilate each other while emitting a shockwave. Shiro who rules "immutability" is dedicating all of his power to defense. Even though Nagare was directly connected to the "Slate" and gained infinite energy, it took him three seconds to break it.

The Japanese umbrella broke into thousands of pieces and the pieces flew into the air.

Shiro's body was also swept away by the shock wave like a strong wind and fell to the ground. Now that he was helpless, Nagare pounced on him like an animal.

"This is the end!"

A fist that turned into electricity pierced Shiro's abdomen. Nagare's imagination of burning his internal organs and his spinal cord and killing him along with his life did not come true.

Shiro's appearance dispersed like mist, melting into the air and disappearing.

(Ability to recognize and manipulate!)

It took him two seconds to remember those words and find Neko trembling in his arms. 5 seconds left. It was more than enough. The "Silver King" has already exhausted his power. It takes less than a second to destroy the defenseless Strain.

Lightning claws fell on the two from above.

A single swing of the sword blocked him head-on.

Yatogami Kuro. He grabbed the hilt of his sword with both hands and gritted his teeth to block Nagare's attack.

Through the space between his clenched teeth, he shouted the name of his "King" with a voice that sounded like a roar.

"Shiro...!"

Nagare frowned.

Yatogami Kuro is there. He stopped trying to think about what that meant. Now is not the time to think. That happened a long time ago. Now is the time to finish them off.

"You're in the way!"

At the same time as he shouted, the pressure of his supernatural ability increased even more. However, that prediction that only one clan member's sword would break for no reason turned out to be wrong once again.

It did not break. The sword held by Kuro, his colorless steel, still withstood the full force of the "King".

A silver aura enveloped that figure.

Taking a deep breath, Nagare looked over Kuro's shoulder.

Isana Yashiro woke up and enveloped Neko and Kuro in a silver shrine.

In that last moment of collision of destructive power, what passed through Nagare's mind was not impatience, but doubt.

"How? Why? They reject power, how can they be so strong?!"

Kuro, Neko and Shiro's eyes were staring at Nagare. The six eyes told him that if they fight, they would never lose.

At that moment, Nagare wanted to turn around.

Shiro, the reason they were there.

Why aren't the clan members who were supposed to be there to stop them?

Mishakuji Yukari, Sukuna Gojou, Kotosaka, Iwafune Tenkei.

For a moment, he could see them sitting around a tea table in their six-tatami "secret base," talking, fighting and laughing together.

At this moment, he suddenly exhaled.

A shock ran through his heart.

".....!"

He has been dreaming about that for many years. Life outside the straitjacket. Breathe freely and fly around the world.

That was the heart. If you have the heart, you can do it. The dead can return to the living and fulfill the wishes of those who also died. Extraordinary abilities for all humans. The power to resist. Be king.

The heart that had heard his prayers was pierced by a sword.

Nagare learned that not through observation but through actual experience. A silver slash pierced Nagare's stone heart. The blood of the supernatural was spilled and the life that was supposed to have been recovered returned to nothing.

His knees buckled and he fell to the ground.

Hisui Nagare looked at the sky through his falling hair. An open well and the blue sky beyond.

The "Sword of Damocles" floating there disappeared.

Nagare murmured hoarsely.

"How unfortunate..."

Then, Nagare turned his gaze towards Shiro.

The tension and caution had not yet left them. That was annoying and Nagare smiled slightly. Nagare silently closed his eyes and said:

"But I'm satisfied..."

Those were the last words that the "Green King" Hisui Nagare said.

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It was certainly visible to others.

After the silver sword fell and a shock and tremor resounded, the "Swords of Damocles" floating in the sky vanished one after another.

The test of being king, the crystal of supernatural power. It was in the heaven that he could not reach, even if he stretched out his hand, and it was about to disappear without him reaching it.

The "Red Queen" stared at that.

The sword, a symbol of the destiny that took from her family, but that also brought her something so precious, disappeared. At the same time, something inside her slowly...

"That disappeared..."

The words that Kamamoto murmured were also Anna's voice.

Disappear. The things that had bound them until now. The things that have brought them together until now. That will disappear.

Anna suddenly felt like someone was calling her and looked around her.

But she couldn't find it anywhere. That warmth and that beautiful red are no longer anywhere.

Feeling alone, Anna looked down and closed her eyes.

The "Blue King" watched the situation unfold with his usual calm.

Therefore, even when his "Sword of Damocles", a cracked symbol of power that seemed about to crumble, disappeared, he had no particular feeling about it. However, he simply said...

"It seems my life has been spared."

That's all she said.

However, Awashima, who was behind him, looked different. She dropped the saber she was holding and ran towards Munakata's back.

"Captain!"

Awashima was crying. Relief and joy are on all their faces. Munakata saw that, smiled slightly, and said casually.

"Hehe. I was a little curious to see if you could kill me, Awashima-kun. Anyway, thanks for your hard work."

At those words, something disappeared from Awashima's expression.

Before Munakata's clear mind could formulate a response, Awashima opened her mouth to ask what that was.

"Captain. I'm sorry, but gratitude is not enough."

"Eh?"

"Excuse me!"

Awashima's fist slammed into Munakata's cheek, sending his glasses flying and sending them crashing to the ground.

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"Nagare! Nagare!"

Kotosaka descended and screamed in pain next to Nagare.

However, Nagare did not move. With a satisfied smile on his face, he lay on the cold ground, not moving in the slightest. The fierce energy that had overflowed a moment ago could no longer be felt anywhere.

Kuro asked, still not letting his guard down.

"Is he dead?"

Shiro looked down in pain and responded.

"He survived thanks to the power of the "Slate". That's why..."

Those words were drowned out by the sudden sound of an explosion.

All three were hit by tremors that made it difficult for them to even stand. A low, resounding explosion sound echoed and deafened their ears. Kuro and Neko shouted in unison as they helped Shiro, who has become unstable.

"What is happening?!"

"Meow! Earthquake!"

In response to the clan member's dismay, Shiro remained calm. He looked up at the shaking ceiling and muttered to himself.

"No, someone blew it up."

"Ah. I'm sorry, but I have to fix things."

"What?!"

Kuro held his "Kotowari" in the direction of the voice. It was a familiar voice, and its owner was the one to be careful of along with Nagare.

"Gray King", Tenkei Iwafune.

He slowly walked out from behind the pillar. Blood flowed under his feet. Iwafune muttered with a self-deprecating smile on his mortal face.

"I never expected that situation to change... it was a complete defeat."

"...Kuro."

Without Shiro telling him, Kuro lowered his sword. Iwafune already lost his fighting power. No, he may already be on the verge of losing his life.

However, Iwafune showed no signs of worrying about his situation and simply said:

"I have also ordered my clansmen to flee. You should leave too."

The sounds of the explosion were getting louder. Small pieces of concrete fell from the cracked ceiling. Kotosaka flew away while he avoided them and shouted alongside Iwafune.

"Iwa-san! Iwa-san! Nagare is...! Iwa-san!"

With a weak smile on his blood-stained lips, Iwafune looked at Kotosaka with a gentle gaze.

"Haha. You too, Kotosaka. Now. Go!"

Kuro had no way of knowing what Kotosaka was thinking.

He hesitated for a moment and then flew away with a sad cry. From the hole in the ceiling to the clear blue sky. As if he was chasing him, Kuro also stretched out his colorless hand and jumped, holding Neko and Shiro in his arms.

Just before reaching the top, Kuro looked back for a moment.

Iwafune held Nagare in his arms and looked at him. His lips, with a wide smile, uttered some words.

He couldn't hear him. Kuro and his friends went up. Iwafune looked at Nagare with his eyes closed as if he were sleeping.

The explosive smoke enveloped the figures of the two "Kings", and since then nothing could be seen.

That was the scene at the end of the battle between the Kings.

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Amidst the roar of explosions and tremors, Kusanagi stood alone, staring at his feet.

"We won?"

Through Anna's supernatural network, he had already given an evacuation order. Most of the clan members in "Homura" should have been able to escape safely. Still, his role as Senior Official of the Reds was to wait until the last minute.

He still couldn't be sure what happened to the Silver Clan or the "Green King". They must be escaping alone, he thought, when he heard a voice behind him.

"Kusanagi-san! Let's run!"

It was Yata. Sliding his skateboard from the end of the hallway, he came straight toward him.

Kusanagi nodded silently and ran off with Yata. As Kusanagi headed towards the stairs leading to the upper floor, he couldn't help but ask Yata.

"What happened to Fushimi? Is everything okay?"

"Heh," Yata laughed. He looked back for a moment and then looked forward without hesitation.

"It's okay. It's okay now."

Kusanagi also laughed at his confident words. Yata-chan, who was good at running and going wild, had grown quite a bit. They ran together toward the light, feeling out of place.

Munakata's instructions were quick as tremors resonated from underground.

"All personnel, evacuate."

"Yes!"

Awashima accepted that and gave orders one after another through the intercom. It was supposed to be a normal scene from "Scepter 4", but the only difference was that Munakata's cheeks were very swollen and his glasses had gone somewhere.

The members running back and forth are surprised every time they see Munakata's face. However, Munakata's attitude was calm. After forcing themselves to accept that it was probably his fault, the members returned to their jobs.

At that moment he felt a presence behind him.

When he turned around, a man and a woman were about to appear, trying to get out from under the solid ground.

Douhan Hirasaka's "Wall Breaking Technique". Feeling satisfied that he was able to witness the ninja's skills, Munakata looked at Fushimi, who was being helped by her.

Fushimi had the same dull expression on his face as always. As expected, he felt tired, but he was not proud of having brought that operation to success. He simply said, as if nothing had happened.

"Mission accomplished."

"Thank you for your hard work."

Munakata responded as if nothing had happened and looked forward again.

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By the time they reached the ground, the noise of the impact had already subsided.

Kuro was the first to emerge from the sewer and, while helping Neko and Shiro, he quickly looked around.

It was an alley in the middle of nowhere. There were no members of the "Jungle" clan. Many people have already decided. Most likely they escaped or were captured.

Kuro breathed a sigh of relief. Just as he was about to say that they were safe, he stumbled and fell to his knees on the ground.

"Shiro?!"

"Are you okay?!"

He clutched his chest in pain and sat with his back against the wall. He looked at the worried Kuro and Neko and smiled weakly.

"It seems that I am also running out of strength..."

"What does that mean?!"

"The body I'm in is not my original body... Before the incident at Gakuenjima, the "Colorless King" changed our bodies... In other words, he was taking over the body of a strange boy."

Kuro and Neko gasped at the same time.

They knew it. Isana Yashiro is a temporary name and the current Shiro is not the original body of Adolf K. Weismann. Due to the plot of "Fox Mask", the mastermind behind the incident a year ago, he was trapped in his current body.

Shiro spoke breathlessly.

"I have been able to continue existing thanks to the immutable power of the "Silver King", but... that power has disappeared. Along with the "Slate"..."

"What? Hey!"

"What? Hey, Shiro!"

Kuro and Neko felt a horrible sense of loss at the same time.

If he was able to stay in this world thanks to the silver supernatural ability, what will happen to him now that the "Slate" is gone?

"I've been borrowing it for a long time, but I have to return it to the original owner..."

"That is...!"

"Shiro...!"

With tears streaming down her face, Neko took Shiro's hand. Shiro smiled slightly and squeezed Neko and Kuro's hands tightly.

His palm was warm.

"...It's okay. I will definitely come back. Because I am your king..."

After that, he closed his eyes as if he were sleeping.

A silver light came out of Shiro's body. He disappeared as if he melted into space, leaving nothing behind.

"Shiro!"

"Shiro, wake up! Answer me!"

As they clung to Shiro and called desperately to him, his shoulders suddenly moved.

"Ah..."

He stirred and slowly opened his eyes. Kuro opened his eyebrows and looked at Shiro's face with relief. He thought that he had regained consciousness and that he had not gone anywhere.

But it was different.

Shiro's gaze looking at Kuro was filled with fear and confusion. That is not the expression of Isana Yashiro that they know. Like a child who had never seen them before, he looked at Kuro and Neko's faces, and timidly opened his mouth.

"Who are you?"

EPILOGUE: THREE PEOPLE

Looking back, the incident that turned all humans into supernatural beings was nothing more than a fleeting dream. Although the disaster affected not only Japan but also other countries, human damage was kept to a minimum thanks to the measures taken by "Tokijikuin". Because it was all over in just a few hours, many people didn't notice anything until it was all over.

The world is still in uproar. The media is strongly demanding an investigation into truth and accountability. Now that the existence of supernatural powers has become public

knowledge, it is only a matter of time before the fact that the government has covered it up for more than 70 years after the war comes to light.

However, we will have to wait longer for that to happen.

For supernatural beings, normal life was returning. Every day was like any other: wake up, eat, shower, go to work.

However, the frequency of "work" has increased slightly.

Munakata was waiting for Fushimi when he returned to his base.

He probably didn't go to the front door to greet him. By chance they met. Still, he seemed to understand Fushimi's mission, he turned on his heel and spoke.

"Please, inform me."

Fushimi began to follow him, his lips curled.

"...After receiving a report that a Strain and "Homura" were fighting in Shizume, three members of the Special Forces rushed to the scene. They safely secured the two Strain who had already begun to escape and recently returned to base."

"Hm."

Munakata took a deep breath and shook his head.

"Although 10 days have passed since the destruction of the "Slate", it seems that people's supernatural powers have not completely disappeared. Even when the power of Hisui Nagare, who was connected to the "Slate", and Isana Yashiro, who caused the burst of royal power, quickly disappeared..."

"It is true that it is gradually weakening."

"Yes. Actually, the "Sword of Damocles" has disappeared and the "King" can no longer deploy the Sanctum. However, in that incident, people around the world have temporarily acquired supernatural abilities. Most of them have lost their power, but I'm sure there are still plenty of them. Especially here in Tokyo, where the "Slate" was located."

Fushimi grumbled in a displeased tone.

"Will our work continue for the moment?"

"It still seems so."

Fushimi stared at Munakata's back as he responded.

Not yet. This means that there will come a time when the meaning of Scepter 4's existence will be questioned.

Munakata is losing his power as "King". For him, the "Sword of Damocles" was falling apart, so that could be considered a blessing in disguise.

However, at the same time, it was a problem that would affect the survival of the clan known as "Scepter 4". Does it still make any sense to serve the "King" who has lost his power? When all supernatural beings, including themselves, lose their supernatural abilities due to the disappearance of the "Slate", is there really any point in keeping "Scepter 4"?

Fushimi is not the only one who has that doubt. He's sure many members of the clan and Special Forces think the same, even if they don't say it out loud.

However, Munakata did not respond to his subordinate's questions.

Does he still not have an answer or does he believe that every person has no choice but to find an answer to that question?

When he thought about that, his PDA sounded.

"Excuse me."

Fushimi reflexively took the PDA and pressed the call button.

It was a failure. What came out of the telephone port was a vulgar and loud voice.

"You bastard, stupid monkey! Why are you stealing from us? That Strain was "Homura's" prey..."

Fushimi hung up the call without saying a word.

Munakata stood still. His face finally turned towards him. Seeing the slight smile on his lips, Fushimi looked away and said again.

"My apologies."

Munakata said jokingly.

"Didn't you say that the Stain had been captured without "incident"?"

"Yes, it's just the extras throwing a tantrum."

Fushimi responded without hesitation, and Munakata simply laughed and looked forward.

Awashima was approaching from the other side of the hallway. When she stopped in front of Munakata and saluted, she said in a crisp tone...

"Captain. The Prime Minister has requested a meeting. He would like to discuss measures to counter the Strains abroad. Do you accept the request?"

"Okay. Let's go right away."

Nodding, Munakata quickened his pace with Awashima in tow.

Fushimi stopped and stared at his back. From now on, it's not his territory. He couldn't do politics or negotiate because he was tired.

Fushimi thought as he watched Munakata walk away into the distance.

Maybe Munakata has all the answers. What will happen to the world in which supernatural powers have been revealed? How will the clan that has lost its supernatural powers change from now on? Anticipate and then react. Because that's Reisi Munakata.

And Fushimi too.

The PDA called again. This time, he made sure to check the person before answering. Akiyama's calm voice sounded.

"Fushimi-san, I have another report. There was a robbery at the Takeido Ekimae bank. I think it was due to a Strain."

Fushimi snorted and responded.

"Here Fushimi, I understand. I'll be on my way immediately. Please prepare a transport vehicle."

Then, he too began to walk quickly.

Fushimi is also nothing more than Fushimi Saruhiko. Being a supernatural being is just one of the factors of him. Even if he loses his supernatural powers or the world changes, Fushimi will be Fushimi.

Therefore, what he has to do remains the same.

He will just do his job.

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Kusanagi finished polishing the glass.

He placed a glass in front of him and two glasses on the other side of the counter, in front of the stool. After placing them carefully, Kusanagi turned on the lamp.

It was left by someone who frequented that store a long time ago. He was a troublesome guy who engaged in various hobbies, but he left the things he collected for those purposes in the store. The reason Kusanagi knows how to use a lamp is because that person forced him to learn.

The glasses gave off a mysterious glow due to the flickering flames on the counter.

Looking at that with half-closed eyes, Kusanagi opened the bottle and poured the amber liquid into the glass.

A voice echoed in the silent bar.

"Wow, it smells good."

Totsuka was sitting on a stool, looking innocently at the glass with his usual kind expression on his face.

Next to him, Suoh lifted his glass and brought it to his mouth.

"...Not bad."

Totsuka held the glass with both hands, but didn't drink it, just enjoyed the aroma. He asked, looking at Kusanagi with a big smile.

"But is it okay, Kusanagi-san? This is an important bottle, right?"

"...Well, once in a while, why not?"

Yes. Sometimes something like that would be nice.

Suoh snorted. He put a cigarette in his mouth and tried to light it, but the lighter didn't light. Kusanagi shrugged, lit the Zippo, and handed it to him. Suoh looked at Kusanagi and then held the tip of his cigarette to the light of the Zippo.

The tip of the cigarette burned red hot and the exhaled white smoke floated in the light of the lamp.

Totsuka rested his chin on the counter and looked at him amused.

Kusanagi also slowly raised his glass, squinting behind his sunglasses. At this moment, the door of the bar opened with the loud sound of the doorbell.

"Damn...! They just stole my prey!"

"Yata-san! There will be another chance! Next time, let's make the guys in blue scream!"

Yata, Kamamoto and the rest of "Homura" entered the bar while chatting loudly among themselves.

Kusanagi blinked as if he had just woken up and looked at them. As they talked among themselves, they began to take positions at the desired locations.

There was no one sitting on the stool across the counter from Kusanagi.

Still holding the glass, Kusanagi stared at the empty stool.

"Izumo."

Kusanagi looked towards where that voice came from.

Anna was there. She was sitting on a stool, silently looking at the glass that was still there.

Her crimson eyes turned towards Kusanagi.

Kusanagi placed his cigarette in the ashtray and smiled silently.

"...Welcome."

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From the rooftop of the building, Mishakuji Yukari looked into a large hole.

The hole, which was also called Yomito Crossing or Yomito Gate, was surrounded by a yellow cordon and sparsely patrolled by police. They seemed to be quite distracted, some were holding back their yawns, others were simply staring blankly, and no one noticed the presence of the suspicious person standing on the rooftop, Mishakuji.

That marked the end of everything.

That place has little meaning to them anymore. "Jungle" was disbanded and most of the clan members gave up their power or hid in the world as people with clanless powers. The Green Clan no longer exists anywhere in the world. What's there is just a hole, a tombstone for those who once tried to bring down the world.

That's why Mishakuji holds a bouquet of flowers in his hands.

"...Iwa-san. Narare-chan. Did you have fun?"

Mishakuji muttered that and threw away the bouquet.

As the petals were scattered, the bouquet fell to the bottom of the tombstone as if it were sucked.

"Nagare... Iwa-san..."

Kotosaka on his shoulder shouted in a muffled voice. Birds cannot shed tears. Instead, he lowered his voice, perhaps as a tribute to his closest friends.

As if he was wiping away his tears, Mishakuji stroked his feathers with his fingertips.

Then he slowly turned on his heel. He called out to him as he passed the boy who was standing stunned.

"Come on?"

Sukuna didn't answer anything. He bit his lip, frowned and looked as if he was desperately suppressing something.

Mishakuji pretended not to see it.

Suddenly, he remembered something from the past. Mishakuji also lost something important in his childhood. His family, his first teacher. Everything was taken away by irresistible violence.

At least, that's not the case with the deaths of Nagare and Iwafune. They lived, fought and died for their desires. Although there may be sadness and mourning, there should be no regrets.

(I had fun. Iwa-sa, Nagare-chan.)

In place of the dead who did not give an answer, Mishakuji walked forward, giving his own answer.

Sukuna also wiped his eyes roughly with his sleeve and began to follow Mishakuji. He looked back only from time to time, looking at the hole with a trace of regret in his eyes, but then he turned forward and began to walk with difficulty.

+++++

"Wait, wait, Wagahai-chan, your skirt is riding up! It's riding up!"

"Nya?"

Kukuri quickly grabbed Neko's shoulders as she jumped as if she were dancing. She quickly pulled up her skirt, which had gotten caught in her bag and rolled up. As Neko blinked, Kukuri spoke in a tone similar to that of a mother teaching a small child.

"You know, Wagahai-chan. Your uniform skirt tends to ride up easily, so you shouldn't move too vigorously, okay?"

"Mmm... I'm very tight..."

Neko pouted in dissatisfaction, but obediently allowed Kukuri to do whatever she wanted. She was the one who said that she wanted to join the school, and if that was the case, she had to listen to her teacher, Kukuri, because Kuro had told her so.

"Yes, this is good!"

After properly adjusting her clothes, Kukuri looked at Neko seriously.

"Wow, I never expected Wagahai-chan to move here. And at a time like this!"

"Hehehe~. Nice to see you! Kukuri!"

"Likewise~. Ah, that's right. The teacher who transferred with you. I heard that he is a relative of Wagahai-chan?"

Neko laughed mischievously.

"Yes. That's what we decided to do!"

"Did they decide?"

Kukuri tilted her head in confusion at the strange way she said it. It was largely due to Neko's power that she was able to do that. However, she had no intention of telling Kukuri that, at least not until her life had completely calmed down.

"Well, anyway, he is a very nice teacher. It seems like everyone in my class already calls him by the nickname "German Sensei"."

After saying that, Kukuri suddenly looked up at the sky as if she remembered something.

"But... I feel like I've met him somewhere before."

Neko laughed again at that reaction, but she didn't say anything.

A delicious smell tickled Neko's nose as she ran towards the bedroom.

"I'm home! I'm hungry!"

A calm response came from the back of the kitchen at Neko's voice full of desire.

"It's done. Sit down."

"Hurrah!"

Raising her arms and expressing her joy, Neko jumped into the dining room.

In the chabudai there is white rice, miso soup, pickled vegetables and grilled fish. Those are some of her favorite dishes that she sees all the time.

Neko pinched the sleeves of her uniform and showed off a little at the person sitting there.

"How I look? What do you think of my uniform?"

She chuckled, Kuro walked out of the kitchen and opened his mouth in shock.

"You heard that in the morning too."

"I want to hear it over and over again! What do you think?"

He looked at Neko calmly and nodded slowly.

"Looks good."

Neko laughed as if tickled. No matter how many times she heard it, she was still happy. Even more than his praise for her uniform, the fact that he was there made her happier than anything else.

Isana Yashiro.

Or Adolf K. Weismann.

That wasn't the Shiro that Neko knew. He is a young man of exotic appearance, with silver hair and a white face. It is natural that there are no traces of the Shiro from before, and this is the "real" Shiro.

She doesn't really understand the detailed reasoning. However, either one was fine for Neko.

Even if his appearance has changed. Shiro is, after all, Neko's Shiro.

Kuro took off his apron and sat across from Shiro. Neko also sat between the two of them, waiting for a signal.

"Well..."

Kuro nodded and the three joined their hands and spoke in unison.

"Itadakimasu."

Neko laughed out loud at the steaming white rice, miso soup, and grilled fish.

It is not the pleasure of eating. Of course, that's one thing, but the fact that there were two people on each side of the chabudai she was placed on filled her with immense joy.

If she reaches out, she can touch them. If she smiles at them, they will smile back. There are two people she loves within that short distance.

That alone made her happy. Everything she needed was prepared on that small table. Happiness with a touch of warmth. It was what Neko had been looking for.

Surrounded by her family, Neko, Ameno Miyabi is happy.