



K

RETURN OF KINGS
SUZUKI SUZU / GoRA

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K – PROJECT WORLD

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..."

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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.