



赤 の 事 件 簿

HOMRA in Las Vegas

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K - HONRA IN LAS VEGAS

**TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN
RAWS: RIDIA**

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CHAPTER 1: "HOMURA" DIES IN A SCORCHING HEAT!

California, United States. Death Valley National Park.

This place, called "Death Valley", however, despite its name, has many lives. Coyotes that roam the wild in search of food and water, bats that avoid sunlight deep in caves, kangaroo rats that need little water to live, of course all creatures can adapt to this harsh desert that has evolved over thousands of years. For creatures that are not prepared for anything, like Homo sapiens who came from Japan, a country full of forests and water, this is literally a "valley of death".

And now, there are five figures walking down State Highway 190, swaying in the heat.

They are all dressed as stubborn. One took off his knit cap, a sweaty giant trembles, the sunglasses have a broken lens, the brown hair sticks to the skin, and the hoodie has several holes. They walk under the scorching sun, like a beggar or someone who came out of a crazy party.

The main members of "Homura", Misaki Yata, Rikio Kamamoto, Saburota Bando, Yo Chitose and Eric Surt are in a sorry state.

"Yata-san... Las Vegas... Is there still a long way to go...?"

Bando asked, as if out of breath.

"You're stupid... a little more... we should be able to get there in a while..."

Yata responded the same way.

"Water... anything... even muddy water... water..."

Chitose lost his vacant gaze in the dry desert.

"Oh!"

Kamamoto suddenly yelled.

"Yata-san, please look! There's a watermelon!"

They all had no energy to react, and only vaguely saw Kamamoto's back running towards the "watermelon" as if he were rolling. Kamamoto jumped on the "watermelon", but the next moment it hit him with intense pain.

"What?! What kind of watermelon is this?! The thorns grew densely?!"

"Kamamoto... it's not a watermelon, it's a cactus..."

Yata pointed out with a pitiful voice. Kamamoto returned their gaze as if he had woken up from his dream, he looked back at the cactus and turned his gaze towards Yata and his friends.

There was a limit to Eric.

He collapsed to his knees and fell to the ground. As expected, everyone responded dramatically to that. Chitose picked Eric up and Bando quickly punched him in the cheek.

"Hey! Eric! Be firm!"

"Don't sleep! You will die if you sleep!"

"No... that's... water..."

Eric's face, moving his dry lips and burying his face firmly in the ground, showed a clear phase of death. Chitose and Bando looked at Yata as if the same thing was happening to them.

"No, Yata-san! What are we going to do?!"

"At this rate, Eric will be...!"

"Well...!"

Yata clenched his fist and looked up at the sky.

Until now, he had passed through many dead zones. He thought that he could defeat any enemy with that power and the red bond.

But now, they weren't fighting something they could swing their fists at and beat them to death. Dry land and bright sunlight, the environment itself, are his enemies. No matter what kind of talent they use, they won't be able to escape from this dead land.

Yata could only crouch down next to Eric and scream desperately.

"Remember, Eric! Didn't you show it to Kusanagi-san and Totsuka-san, who betrayed us?"

Chitose and Bando took a breath. Eric also rolled his dry eye and stared at Yata. Kamamoto kept looking at the cactus and wondering if he could separate it somehow.

"That's right...! If those people hadn't done that, we wouldn't be about to...!"

Yata remembered what had happened and hit the ground with a clenched fist.

Yes. The whole betrayal started a month ago. It was an event at "Bar HOMRA".

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"I'm back."

"Oh, Anna. Welcome back."

It was a white-haired girl and a red-haired young man who rang the doorbell and entered.

Anna Kushina and Mikoto Suoh. Kusanagi sometimes asks them to buy the daily necessities of those who live in "Bar HOMRA". It is up to Anna to choose the items exclusively, and Suoh's role is to accompany Anna and carry the luggage. Suoh was still holding a cigarette and hanging a grocery bag with green onions in one hand.

Suoh put a grocery bag on the table and sat on the couch. Anna carried the bag to the counter. Kusanagi, who smiled "big", suddenly noticed that Anna's appearance was different from usual.

Totsuka, who was helping with the preparation, came out from behind the counter and pointed at that.

"That? Anna, is your face red?"

As Totsuka said, usually the white-wrinkled expressionless expression seemed to blush a bit. Anna shook her head to anticipate Kusanagi's concerns that she had caught a cold.

"I understand."

"Eh?"

"Ticket. Tour."

The shredded words seemed to indicate Anna's emotion. She looked cool and calm, but she was just a teenager. Whenever something happy happened, the tension rose, and Kusanagi and Totsuka had spent too much time with her to understand.

The two looked at each other, turning their necks at the same time.

"What kind of tour?"

"Anna, do you have a favorite place?"

"No. It's this!"

It was frustrating to talk; Anna took her hand out of her pocket in front of them. The wrinkled envelope, which had been held for a long time, had the following letters on it.

"... "Invitational ticket for a 10-day trip to Las Vegas, USA"?!"

"What?! What's wrong with this?!"

"That's why! I understand!"

Anna shook her hands and appealed with a look as to why he didn't understand. When Kusanagi and Totsuka were about to be confused, Suoh, who was smoking a cigarette on the couch, spoke up.

"Fukubiki. Anna figured it out."

Finally, understanding had caught up.

It is a regional promotion event held by a nearby business district. If you collect 10 stamps that you can get for every 100 yen you buy, you can try it once. Since it's a shopping street, the prizes are just tissue boxes, salad oil, and daily necessities, but for some reason the special prize was the Las Vegas tour.

Anna picked it up, the moment she realized that, Totsuka smiled at her and praised her.

"That's amazing! You're lucky to have a special prize! Anna, you can be a great player in the future!"

"Hahaha."

"No, it's strange how a praise... Anna, can I open this?"

Anna nodded in response, Kusanagi opened the envelope with a letter opener and began examining the contents.

At that moment, the doorbell rang and several members entered. Yata, who was at the beginning, bowed to Suoh, who was lying on the couch.

"Oh, Mikoto-san! Good afternoon!"

"Good afternoon!" said the others.

The people behind him, Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose, and Dewa, also greeted him. Suoh abruptly waved his hand to respond, then smoked again.

"Hey, Yata, listen. Anna is amazing!"

"Well, what did you do?"

As he listened to Totsuka's explanation that had a smiling face, Yata and his colleagues were also excited. Yata gave Anna a thumbs up.

"That's amazing, Anna! I wonder if there's a once-in-a-lifetime tour of Las Vegas!"

"Yes, thanks."

Anna smiled and answered that, suddenly shaking her head.

"By the way, where is Las Vegas?"

"No, I was happy without knowing it!"

"Las Vegas is a tourist city in Nevada, USA. There are casinos everywhere in the city, and anyone can play at any time. If you look at it, it seems that you can enjoy not only gambling, but also various shows and attractions."

Dewa got the information about Las Vegas from his PDA and showed it to Anna. Anna was engrossed in the PDA, looking at her innocent expectations.

Adults, on the other hand...

"Big money in the casino, overflowing money... It's spreading, the American dream!"

"This is a tourist town, so there is likely to be a lot of good food. How nice!"

"America... Girls Show... One night stands with a beautiful blonde...!"

"They should calm down a bit..."

Dewa muttered to the three people, Bando, Kamamoto, and Chitose, who talked about their naked desires without shame. Yata hit his back happily.

"Well, it's a little better! After all, it's 'Homura's' overseas debut, right? Let's decide here!"

"Hmm, that's impossible, Yata-chan."

Kusanagi, who was reading the brochure on the counter, unfortunately muttered that. Yata looked at Kusanagi with a question mark.

"Why, Kusanagi-san? It's impossible..."

"This tour seems to be for families. Only 4 people can go."

At that moment, something similar to an electric current ran through everyone.

"Four people?"

"That means..."

A suspicious look went back and forth between Bando, Chitose, Kamamoto and Yata. It was only natural that Anna, who won the award at the Fukubiki, would fall into that frame. There were only three spots left available, and there were seven adults there. With the addition of other key members, the opportunity will be even tighter.

Now, they had to confirm it. Who would outsmart his friends and kick them out, using any dirty hand to get the remaining three tickets to Las Vegas!

"Well, thinking normally, King and Kusanagi-san will come in, right?"

Totsuka had a delicate tone, and the remaining two seats filled up quickly.

"No, please wait a moment, Totsuka-san! Why is it like this?!"

"Huh? You can't let Anna go alone, right? Anna's guardians are those two, so it's a natural choice, right?"

"Uh... no, yes, that might be the case..."

Yata glanced sideways to see Kusanagi and Suoh. Kusanagi examined the brochure, and Suoh curiously lit a second cigarette.

"Hey! Kusanagi-san runs a bar, right? Can't you rest for 10 days?!"

"Then I'll leave the interpreter to you, Yata-chan."

"Eh?"

Yata rolled his eyes and looked at Kusanagi, and Kusanagi smiled and shook the brochure.

"If you go there, you'll need an interpreter. Well, Mikoto can speak a single word and Totsuka isn't enough to communicate."

"But there are various troublesome things, like passports and exit procedures, right? Including such things, I think it's better to be accompanied by a bean, Kusanagi-san."

"Well, that's right. It would be like burnt miso, but I think it's fine."

"Gah...!"

Yata was startled by the too honest opinion and backed down. And from behind, a trio of desires pushed at his back.

"No, Yata-san! Don't lose!"

"That's right! Our frame will shrink!"

"Please do your best, Vanguard Captain!"

A bond was a bond, even if it was lugubrious interest. Yata then nodded slightly and encouraged his voice.

"So what about Mikoto-san? I don't think he's interested in abroad."

"Mikoto."

Anna tugged on Suoh's sleeve and asked an innocent question.

"Mikoto, aren't you interested in Las Vegas?"

"....."

The cigarette in Suoh's mouth turned red, exhaled smoke, and he responded.

"What happened, Las Vegas?"

Anna blinked several times as if suddenly caught. It just preceded the exotic sound of "Las Vegas," and she probably had no expectation of what would happen. Still, she looked at Bando, Kamamoto, and Chitose in turn, and then back at Suoh.

"Money, food and the blonde beauty?"

Kusanagi looked at the three with slight annoyance, and they shrugged. But surprisingly, Suoh suddenly laughed.

"Do you want to go?"

"Yes."

After nodding her head, Anna added as she remembered.

"I want to go with Mikoto."

"....."

Suoh inhaled purple smoke again, then muttered.

"If so, shall we go?"

That way, the remaining two boxes were completely filled.

Yata bit his back teeth. He couldn't help but admit defeat. He was ashamed that he backed down when he lost, and he couldn't give up. Yata also wanted to go to Las Vegas. Or rather, he wanted to go abroad. Anna wasn't the only one with a childish longing abroad.

Of the four places, three slots were filled. There was only one place left. Everything slipped into it. Yata hardened his fist with that determination.

"So, there's only one more! Let's decide! Because we're not convinced at this rate!"

"Oh, it's true!"

"It's just like Yata-san says!"

"You guys..."

Kusanagi said as he weakened, but Totsuka still had a smile on his face.

"That's right. We have to decide fairly, right?"

"That's right! We're friends! It must be the same between friends!"

"If so, then rock-paper-scissors is fine, right?"

"Huh?! No, that's..."

"Come on. If it doesn't come out, you'll lose, Rock, Paper..."

"Uoooooooooooooooooh!"

Scissors.

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And Yata, Kamamoto, Bando and Chitose were walking along the path to get home.

The sunset illuminated their faces. His facial expressions, full of sadness and regret, were like those of a lost dog. Some looked up to the sky, and some looked down, and no one tried to look at each other. If they looked at each other's faces, they couldn't help but feel their own defeat.

Eventually, Bando muttered.

"Well, isn't that a suitable place? Anna will go with Mikoto-san, Kusanagi-san, and Totsuka-san."

Chitose smiled to follow him.

"That's right. Since they're our top three, it's natural for them to go, right?"

Kamamoto nodded.

"Oh, yes. Rather, I think it would have been awkward if we went. You can't go abroad with Kusanagi-san and others!"

"That's right! Hahahaha..."

A dry voice rang out on the way home, further emphasizing his misery.

However, there was only one person who did not try to blend into the conversation.

It was Yata.

The careless footsteps gradually slowed down and finally stopped completely. Kamamoto looked back and patted his shoulder sympathetically.

"Yata-san. Let's give up and hope that Mikoto-san brings back souvenirs of Las Vegas."

"Shut up!"

Yata squeezed his hand. Bando and Chitose jerked their bodies startlingly at the volume of his voice.

"You guys, isn't it pitiful?! We must have been friends! And yet, why should we be forced into such injustice?!"

"No, it's unfair, I lost at rock-paper-scissors, so it can't be helped."

"Don't say that! I'm talking about feelings! I can't forgive my feelings of waiting for them and burning in Japan!"

Bando gritted his teeth at Yata, who raised the flames.

"Then, what are you going to do?"

"It's decided; we're going to Las Vegas too!"

The words took a breath.

Go to Las Vegas. They assumed that it would not be possible without Anna's ticket. The losers had to go home and "wait" until the winners came back.

But it is different. Las Vegas is certainly real. That place was not a dream land that could not be reached without a dream ticket, but in the United States on the sea. They remembered it in Yata's words.

Flame lit up in Yata's eyes. The flame of "Homura" was determined to burn without leaving blood, bones or ashes. Against that amount of heat, the Pacific Ocean, which is 10,000 km away, was just a puddle. He pointed to each and every one and gave precise instructions.

"Bando! You're good at detailed calculations! It's usually fine, so pay the travel expenses!"

"Well, oh, you, got it!"

"Chitose! Find out what we need and get it all! Send the money to Bando! We'll split it later!"

"Oh, I get it!"

"Kamamoto! Prepare passports for everyone! I'll find a good part-time job!"

"I was disappointed!"

As if Yata's enthusiasm flared, the other three began showing motivation before he knew it. They could go to Las Vegas, no. The firm will to "go" brought them back to one clan: "Homura".

"We're going to Las Vegas too! Travel expenses aren't a big deal, if you win a lot of money at the casino, it's such a big flatulence! I'll double it, no, I'll pay it back, 100 times! Come on guys!"

"Oh, yes!", replied the others.

"Oh! He's putting on a good face! So, that's the usual, finally!"

A red aura lit up from the hardened fist and Yata thrust out his right arm. Similarly, the other members put their glowing red arms over Yata's and yelled all at once.

"No Bone! No Blood! No Ash!"

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After that, the difficulties they experienced became a story in itself, but they took action on it.

By having a number of jobs that bridged the gap between black and illegal, they were able to earn as much travel expenses as they needed in two weeks. Much of their motivation was to "prove it to Kusanagi and his friends", so they kept it a secret from the other members, even Dewa, who was with them. Akagi, Dewa, and Fujishima didn't show their intention to go to Las Vegas, so they weren't invited.

However, there was only one member they needed.

Namely...

"What? Vegas? I'm not interested."

It was Eric Surt.

Born abroad, he was the only bilingual in "Homura". When traveling abroad, where you don't know right or left, you need someone who can understand the language. Eric wasn't much interested in gambling, food, or blonde beauty, but was caught on the condition that "half of the travel expenses would be borne by the members" and he would eventually tag along.

And they successfully completed the exit procedure, and triumphantly left Japan.

Currently, they suffer from dry death in the "Valley of Death".

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"Damn, what is this?!"

Yata endured the tears that swelled with regret. There was no such thing as a drop of water that they could obtain. To survive, they shouldn't even shed tears.

And, when Eric fell down, he pointed his trembling finger at Yata,

"No, it's all your fault...! How could you confuse "Las Vegas" and "Los Cabos"?!"

"Oh."

The cold gazes of the other members turned to Yata.

That was the case. Yata arranged the ticket, but it was not destined for Las Vegas, California, USA. It was Los Cabos, South Lower California, Mexico.

He notices it only after leaving the airport, but it was already too late.

They stepped on Mexican soil, not the United States.

Yata quickly apologized.

"Well, can't I help it?! I can't read English!"

"Then don't make arrangements from the beginning! Usually, there were two immigration procedures, didn't you find it strange?!"

"I don't know because it's my first time traveling abroad! If so, Bando would be responsible too!"

This time Bando shivered. His sunglasses had broken lenses, and the eyes behind them swam. Chitose murmured, looking at him.

"So is. I have found a Mexican who can enter the United States cheaply saying: "Travel expenses are wasteful"..."

"He was a smuggler, right? Thanks to that, we were chased by the border guards!"

"Well, everyone was happy to say, "Cheaper, better!" Isn't it strange that I'm the only one to blame?!"

"We've become illegal immigrants because of you! If they find us, will we be deported?!"

"Now that you mention it, Yata-san, you had to fight the driver of the car that stopped after that!"

Under the brightly shining sun, "Homura's" friends began to fight with each other. With death imminent from dryness, the time and calories they spent surviving should be limited, but they didn't realize they had blood on their heads. Only Kamamoto, holding a cactus, directed his vague gaze across the road.

Kamamoto muttered.

"It's a shadow."

No one in "Homura" noticed that comment. They decided that it was not worth listening to the gossip of those who were beaten by the heat.

But, the comment had a more important meaning than any words that had flown out there.

"The shadow of a car."

Chitose, who heard it for the first time, stopped arguing and looked at Kamamoto. The others also lowered their fists and looked at Kamamoto, then turned in the direction Kamamoto was looking.

There was a car approaching from beyond the horizon, beyond the bright haze of heat.

"It's a car."

"It's a car!"

"Help has arrived!"

Shit fights vanished in an instant and returned to a fateful community to sustain life. Everyone took off their jackets and shook them to appeal to their existence. Yata and Bando stood in the path with their arms outstretched to stop it.

"Hey! Hey! Help me!"

"Please help!"

"Water, water! Help!"

They were desperate. Literally, if they missed this opportunity, it was only death that would be waiting for them. The boxy white vehicle slowly slowed down and stopped in front of them, perhaps because of the heat, or because they had no intention of running until they met a fool.

They all took a breath. Bando and others were crying. They could finally get out of that hell, that thought relaxed their hearts.

Between them, Yata stepped forward and looked at the driver's seat with a tired smile.

"No, I was saved. Well, I'm sorry, but we're headed to... Las Vegas..."

The voice suddenly became smaller.

The face in the driver's seat was a familiar face.

The blue uniform that was worn. Black framed glasses. Beyond that, the dull eyes were stagnant, but now there was a light of joy. After taking a closer look at Yata's awkward appearance, shirtless and even without his knitted hat, he said with a teasing tone.

"Are you asking me? If so, is there a certain way to say it, Misaki?"

Saying that, Saruhiko Fushimi laughed happily.

CHAPTER 2: NIGHTLESS CASTLE IN THE DESERT

Two men were looking at each other in the dry desert.

One was stripped to the waist, and though his woolen hat had fallen off, his eyes still held uncontrollable anger.

One person was leaning against the seat of the white truck, wearing an annoyed smile that seemed to enjoy his anger rather than anything else.

Misaki Yata and Saruhiko Fushimi. The two men looked at each other in the brilliant heat.

"Yata-san! I'm glad I finally found you!"

Suddenly, a voice echoed from behind the vehicle.

Yata opened his eyes and looked over there. There was a familiar face in the back seat of the boxcar. Akagi, Dewa, Fujishima, the people who were supposed to be in Japan leaned forward with joy.

Bando muttered in astonishment.

"Shohei? Why are you here...?"

"Ah, San-chan! No, actually there are several things."

"Hey."

Fushimi coldly interrupted the conversation. With a knife look at the backseat, as if he was throwing it.

"This story comes first. Don't get in the way, San-chan."

Akagi was full of words, and Yata felt anger rise from his temples.

"There's no reason for me to tell the traitor. Bastard. What did you come for, Saru?"

A teasing smile appeared on Fushimi's mouth.

"It's a job. Unlike you, who have free time, I'm a civil servant here. I have to go on a business trip abroad."

"Because you are a dog in blue, will you come to America if a bone is thrown at you? It is not like a monkey. There is no such possibility that you pass through here, what is the purpose?"

Fushimi's smile deepened. With his elbows on the window, he brought his face closer to Yata's.

"Is it a situation where you can say that? Think about your position with me now and say it properly."

"....."

Yata clenched his fist tightly.

The California sun was burning his neck. The dry wind evaporated the sweat in the blink of an eye and mercilessly deprived the body of water. In fact, Eric was dehydrated and fell. If he was left as he was, there was no doubt that he would fall into a serious situation.

"I'll say it again, Misaki. If you ask someone for something, there's a way to say it, right?"

Yata is the captain of "Homura". It was definitely himself who intervened in this situation. So he had to be the one to take responsibility.

Yata bowed his head as he bit his lip.

"...Saru. Ask. I'm begging you. At this rate, Eric will die if you don't help him."

"....."

Fushimi's facial expression had changed to something that looked bored.

5 seconds or 10 seconds. Fushimi lightly squeezed his chin after a choked silence.

"Get him in the back. There's water in the car."

Yata looked back and nodded. Bando and Chitose carried Eric, and Kamamoto, who had come to his senses, hurriedly opened the back seat door. Fujishima, who was inside, laid Eric down in the car and doused his lips with water from a plastic bottle.

After seeing Kamamoto board, Yata returned to Fushimi. Fushimi looked at him suspiciously.

"What are you doing? Get in quick."

"I won't go up."

A voice hard as steel bounced off the words.

"The reason I bowed down was for you to help them. I won't go up. I'll stay here."

Surprised, Kamamoto and the others stuck their faces out the window and shouted.

"What are you talking about, Yata-san?!"

"You're going to stay here; do you really want to die?!"

Yata didn't reply to that, but looked at Fushimi. He held the "Homura" mark that was on his left collarbone as if he was scratching it.

"I still can't forgive you for desecrating this pride, Saruhiko. It's better to hang out here than lay my head on a traitor and survive."

Fushimi narrowed his eyes and muttered coldly.

"...So is."

He turns forward and lift the window. The engine roared and the vehicle began to move slowly. A member in the car yelled to stop Fushimi, but he silently continued to press the accelerator. In the blink of an eye, the vehicle sped up and sped off, finally disappearing beyond the horizon.

Yata wiped away the sweat and started walking again.

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How much time had passed since then?

The bright sunlight did not weaken, and the heat and dryness gradually drained Yata of his physical strength. As Yata walked down the road, he turned his grudge against the sky. The sky in California was as blue as black, and no clouds could be found anywhere.

At that time, he was about to lose the strength of his body and wanted to lie down on the road. Each time, Yata shook his head and berated himself. He couldn't die in a place like that. Anyway, he had to join the "Homura" members and play hard in Las Vegas. Good rice. Overflowing money. By the way, he would punch Fushimi in the face...

Yata stabbed his knee on the spot.

"Damn."

Consciousness was stunned. The field of vision was blurred. Desperately shaking off the thoughts that seemed to arise so far, Yata looked past the road that swayed in the heat.

Something was shining on the road.

At first, Yata paid no attention to him. He thought the bumpers and empty cans that had slipped were just reflecting light. Instead, he had to move to survive.

As he got closer, it became clear what was glowing.

It was a PET bottle.

Yata opened his eyes and approached with an unbelievable expression. When he picked up the PET bottle, he could feel the heavy weight in his hand.

As he held his breath, he opened the lid, placed it to his lips, and tilted.

Viscous water flowed into the dry mouth.

Even if he became slimy, it seemed to Yata like the finest sweet dew. He stopped thinking and swallowed hard, snorting. As the water level dropped by half, Yata suddenly returned to sanity. He couldn't drink it all. He didn't know when he could rehydrate next time. He had to save it in order to survive.

Yata hit his cheek with both hands.

"Ok!"

The relief of surviving restored vitality to the withered legs. Yata started walking down the road again as he carefully grabbed the plastic bottle with both hands.

Suddenly, he turned his gaze forward.

The road was flooded with strong sunlight. The water in the plastic bottle he bathed in was lukewarm but not rotten. That means it hadn't been long since it hit the ground.

Until now, there hadn't been any cars that had passed on that road other than that white van.

That's what he believed.

So who dropped that plastic bottle?

As the color of the sky changed from purple to ultramarine and the stars began to flutter in the sky, Yata heard the sound.

Sound of an engine. A car was running.

With the expression that he was finally saved, Yata raised his hands and tried to stop the car with his whole body. It was not necessary. The truck slowed down and stopped well in front of Yata. The driver jumped.

Not that he didn't expect this situation. Still, his English did not come out. Yata desperately spoke, moving his tangled tongue and his head forcefully.

"Ah, uh...hell! Help, too! Aim...um...um, come on, Las Vegas!"

"Las Vegas?"

"Oh, yeah! Las Vegas! Las Vegas!"

The driver blinked. He had a deeply carved face and dark skin. He shook his head and asked questions.

"Chinese? Japanese?"

The word Japanese was barely audible. Yata nodded many times,

"Ah, yes! So, Japanese!"

"Oh!"

The driver smiled and gave a thumbs up with his right hand out.

"Japanese! Nostalgic! Well, get on!"

Yata stared in astonishment at his right hand wrapped in black gloves. However, he immediately grasped the situation and quickly made his way to the passenger seat. As he sat down on the seat, he was thankful for his unexpected luck.

"Ah, thanks! Thanks, man! You really saved me!"

"Hahaha! No problem! It's a bit tight in here though!"

With a cheerful smile, the driver hit the steering wheel and immediately started the car. Yata hurriedly closed the door and fastened his seat belt. The driver looked at Yata out of the corner of his eye and smiled.

"Boy, what's your name?"

The usual Yata would have been angry at being treated like a child, but of course that kind of anger had not increased now. He answers honestly.

"It's Yata. Misaki Yata. What about you?"

"Edward! Call me Ed!"

"Well, Ed. No, thank you very much. If I had stayed like this, I would have been really dry or frozen."

Shaking himself off, Yata turned his gaze out the window. That heat was like a lie, and it was cold at night. Even if he managed to escape dry death, he might have frozen to death if Ed hadn't passed by.

"You walked through Death Valley, the Japanese have guts."

Yata smiled bitterly at the familiar word "guts" coming from foreigners.

"Ed is incredibly good at Japanese. Have you been there?"

"Yes! I lived there! It's nostalgic, my young days, it was more than 10 years ago."

"Hey... is it work?"

"Hmm, well, that kind of kanji? What about Misaki? Why are you going to Las Vegas?"

"That's a long story! Listen!"

Yata began to speak as if he had cut a dam. He desperately works part-time to save money and try to travel abroad for the first time with all his friends, but the destination was Los Cabos, and the van they got in to cross the border cheaply was actually from an illegal immigrant. That's it, and Yata suddenly stopped talking.

"Really?"

Ed's eyes widened as if he was surprised. Yata believed that he was in trouble. He talks too much, maybe they'll take him to the police, he wondered if he should cheat, but when he thought so much, Ed burst out laughing.

"Hahahahaha! Misaki, you! The Japanese have guts, I love them!"

"Well... really?"

"Yes! And I'm a friend too! Because I'm a foreigner too, it's okay!"

He said something out of the ordinary. Ed shrugged happily at Yata, who was scared.

"I was not born in the United States in the first place. Mexico! From Mexico to Nihon to Fuhonukoku, then from Nihon to the United States to Fuhonukoku. Ok! You rarely see a Japanese! Ordinary Japanese is not that crazy!"

Apparently, this guy named Ed seemed to be pretty tough. Perhaps he noticed Yata's confusion when he replied, "Uh, oh...". Ed casually got back on topic.

"And then, did you go to Las Vegas? You're not having such a bad time; can you go home on your way?"

"Well, that is..."

Then Yata suddenly stopped talking.

"Why did you want to go to Las Vegas?"

Anna won the ticket for the tour and everyone decided to go. Aside from Anna and Suoh, Kusanagi and Totsuka weren't dissatisfied with the fact that they were going. Since there were only four tickets, it was only natural that there were only four people in the end.

What he was really unsatisfied with was that they couldn't go together.

Therefore, Yata was burned. He tried to go to Las Vegas with all the instructions so that everyone could go. Those who didn't want to go couldn't be helped, but at least Kamamoto, Bando and Chitose agreed with Yata's philosophy. Doing a black part-time job, suffering all kinds of problems, the passion to go beyond the desert was born there.

Where he got stuck.

"I think because I have friends."

That was it.

Ed looked at Yata. Embarrassed, Yata scratched his cheek. But Ed didn't make fun of him or make a fool of him. With a bitter smile on his mouth, he nodded deeply.

"I see. Friends are important. I get it."

Yata was a bit surprised and looked at Ed. Ed smiled, but his gaze seemed to be somewhere far away. Yata stopped talking, thinking that he might be remembering his "friends". Everyone has memories they want to treasure.

Looking out the window again, Yata noted the change.

Before he knew it, the desolate desert was over. The two-lane highway had changed to four lanes, and beyond that, it was even wider. The volume of traffic was also different from before, and SUVs and sports cars were beginning to be seen here and there, mixed with large trucks and wagons.

In the distance, the night sky lit up brilliantly.

Ed walked over laughing to Yata, who opened his mouth halfway and looked at him.

"About time to arrive. The proud jewels of America's Nevada. Welcome to Las Vegas!"

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This city is full of colors and light.

No matter where you look, neon lights and lightning will be reflected in your field of vision. Bright reds, poisonous purples, luxurious whites, and golds shimmer throughout, and it's a bit of a flicker for the eyes after a long plane ride.

If you look into the distance, the sky lights up brightly. Perhaps looking down from space, the city must appear to be a dome of light that drives out the darkness. Simply "City without night". Kusanagi and his friends have landed in Las Vegas, a city without night.

"Anna. Isn't it cold?"

Kusanagi called out to Anna's back as she walked out of the airport and stopped. Anna didn't react. She opened her mouth and looked at the city that was still shining.

For a moment, Kusanagi felt sorry for Anna.

What they see is different from what Anna sees. Due to a congenital disease, her eyes can only see red. The avalanche of colors that was spreading at that moment seemed vague to him.

Still, Anna seemed amused.

The life she has led until now is very different from that of a normal child. As a Strain, under the patronage of the Red Clan, she doesn't even go to school. To her, who has lived in the warm, cramped world of Bar HOMRA, the colors of Las Vegas may seem magnificent, if at all.

"Yes, Anna. Take this."

Totsuka handed Anna a steaming paper cup. It was hot chocolate. Anna grabbed it and took a sip as she looked at the sight in front of her. Her face was smiling.

"Delicious."

"Yes? Good! It's a souvenir of my first victory, so feel free to drink!"

Kusanagi was surprised at the word "first victory".

"Well, Totsuka. Have you already done that?"

"Because there are already slots at the airport? If so, I have no choice but to do it!"

Totsuka made a peace sign and Kusanagi showed a bitter smile on his face.

Surely, as Totsuka says, there are a lot of slot machines installed in the airport baggage claim. Tourists are sucked in like bugs jumping into a moth lantern by a cluster of machines that emit fluffy blue and purple light. It was a suitable setting for the entrance of the casino city.

Totsuka said with a smile as he waved the withdrawal coupon.

"I bet \$100 and win \$110. Well, the first game goes like this."

"Was it moderate? No, how did you feel?"

"Looks like I was finally able to quit smoking on the plane, so I said I'd smoke somewhere. Uh..."

Totsuka looked around and solidified. His smile was just as stiff. Seeing that, Kusanagi was caught in an unpleasant premonition.

It quickly came true.

"Kusanagi-san, maybe it's bad."

Kusanagi followed Totsuka's line of sight and also stiffened in the same way.

Suoh was surrounded by security guards.

Even in such a situation, he was truly a personality to calmly smoke cigarettes. However, in a foreign country where words cannot be understood, Suoh's personality only had the opposite effect. He could see from a distance that the guards were frustrated by that attitude. If Suoh was touched, Suoh would not hesitate: Kusanagi knew too much about the character of the Red King.

"Wait, wait, wait! Mikoto, hold still!"

As he yelled, Kusanagi ran towards them. Anna mysteriously watched his back as she tilted the cup of chocolate.

+++++

The truck stopped and Yata landed on the ground from the passenger seat.

"Uh, oh...this is Las Vegas!"

What he saw was a scene that he had only seen in movies and photographs. Heavy stones that make you feel history pile up endlessly towards the sky. Yes, this was the world-famous quadrangular pyramid, the Great Pyramid of Giza, which contained the sublime pharaoh's coffin.

Why is it in Las Vegas, it shouldn't be in Egypt of course? Why is the Sphinx sitting instead of the front door? He had many doubts and Yata was amazed. It was decided that

this pyramid-shaped hotel would be the inn for Yata and his group during their stay in Las Vegas.

"Over there. It's famous, the pyramid! I know it too!"

As Ed said, the "pyramid" only seems to reach the locals. If so, this way can be quite useful on its own.

Yata looked back at the truck and gave a thumbs up with a big grin.

"Seriously, thanks, Ed! Thanks to you, I think I can finally join my friends!"

"Hahaha! No problem, Misaki! Say hello to your friends!"

Ed laughed happily too and gave a thumbs up and started the truck. Yata took off his beanie to a friend he met during the trip, he was shaking it until he couldn't see the truck.

A sudden call came from behind him.

"Yata-san! You're safe!"

Looking back, Akagi and Bando were about to jump out of the hotel like they were rolling. Yata smiled and opened his arms.

"Oh! Have you guys arrived yet?"

"I arrived at night and then I ran to help Yata-san! Kamamoto-san, Chitose and Dewa are now looking for a rental car or a taxi."

"Then, it's alright for you to come back, please contact them! My PDA can't be used here yet."

"I understand!"

Bando took out his PDA and began to make a phone call. As he glanced sideways, Yata asked Akagi.

"How's Eric?"

"He's sleeping in the room right now. I've seen a doctor, but it seems his life isn't in danger since it's mild heat stroke, and if he gets a night's rest, he'll recover soon. Fujishima is taking care of him, so I think he'll be fine."

"Oh! I'm glad..."

Yata exhaled deeply. If you get injured or sick due to your own poor driving, you can't really enjoy traveling. After deciding to check on the situation later, Yata looked up at the top of the pyramid.

For a while, after looking at this, Yata opened his mouth.

"What happened to that guy?"

It seems that he just came up with it. Akagi shook his head, looking up.

"When he brought us here, he left early. He had a job to do."

"I work...? Well, why did you come to this place in the first place? Also, with you?"

At that question, Akagi scratched his head as if he was weakened.

"I don't really get that either. When he was out, he suddenly came over and asked me where King was."

"Mikoto-san...?"

Yata's facial expression turned steep. "Scepter 4", where Fushimi belongs, is an organization that has a skirmish with "Homura". If such a person was looking for a "King" at work, he could not have been calm.

Akagi continued to explain in a traceable manner.

"When I said he was going to Las Vegas, he started contacting somewhere. So, we were on the sidelines too, so he told me to follow him and they put me in the car, and by the time I knew it, I was on a plane."

"Huh?! Guys, the Blues are our enemies! They told those guys where Mikoto-san is, and that's why you guys got trapped?!"

When Yata got angry, Akagi shrugged and Bando, who had ended the call, said something.

"It's different, Yata-san. Fushimi said that Mikoto-san is in danger. If he tells them that, Shohei and his friends can't just hold his fingers and look at him, right?"

Agitation spread in his chest.

Mikoto Suoh is in danger. If he had heard it, he would have laughed with his nose. He does not believe that there are so many things in the world that can harm the Red King.

However, on the other hand, Yata trusted Fushimi in a way. He is a traitor, dark, cunning, sarcastic, disgusting, and extremely capable. If such a man says "dangerous", it is definitely "yes".

"What is that danger?"

"Yata-san, do you remember Mizuchi?"

Mizuchi's name didn't immediately stick in his head. He tilted his head, he thought for a moment and said, "Oh.".

"Mizuchi, I'm sure he was the bad guy who kidnapped Anna and locked her up in a place called "downtown", and Mikoto-san finally beat him up. What happened to that guy?"

Bando's cheeks tightened with tension and he answered the question.

"He looks like he broke out of prison a while ago. He flew overseas, so he's here in Las Vegas now."

CHAPTER 3: SNAKE HUNTER

He woke up to a regular screeching sound.

The man lifted his sweat-soaked upper body. He felt that he had a terrible nightmare, but he did not remember it well. He was thirsty. While trying to find the water, he noticed something unusual.

The room was completely dark. He couldn't even see a bit ahead. He thought about the light and soon realized that it was a misunderstanding.

The room was not dark, but his eyes did not see.

"What is this?"

The sweat that broke out was mixed with cold things. It was astonishing. The sound of metal screeching echoed and his body trembled.

"Where I am?"

The man put his hand on his head and tried to remember why he was there.

At that moment, he heard the sound of the door opening from somewhere, and then, someone spoke.

"Hello, Mr. Mizuchi. Are you awake?"

She was a woman and she spoke English. As he made some guesses, Mizuchi asked in a firm voice.

"Who are you?"

"Me? Yes, call me Jane."

Mizuchi laughed with his nose.

"Anonymous woman, Jane? Do you mean you are not going to reveal your identity?"

"I don't care what the name is. The question is what the contents are."

So it was. Mizuchi fell silent and waited for the next action from the woman, Jane.

In the dark, there was the sound of a chair being dragged. He believed that she sat down. The sound of screeching metal echoed again, and his body trembled. Jane began to speak.

"Koushi Mizuchi. Former "Seven Kamado Chemotherapy Research Center Director" and Former "Gold Clan Member, Tokijikuin". I read your dissertation on the study of different abilities. It is a very original point of view. However, there is one slight lack of ethics."

Mizuchi remained silent and listened to the words.

"Your defeat was, after all, due to that lack of ethics. An incompetent person who doesn't belong to the clan who collects Strains and repeats human experimentation, creating things that were close to human weapons. It was not good that you were caught by the "Golden King". That adult is the type to swallow everything along with the voice, but he is angry enough not to forgive such outrages."

"It is scandalous?"

Mizuchi bit down hard on his back teeth and scratched his temple. The memory evoked by the words turned into a stabbing pain that grated at the back of his brain.

"My experiment was to artificially create a "King". If that happened, humanity would have made great strides! Before that innovation, is it scandalous and inhumane? The history of human beings has shown that there is no progress without sacrifice."

As if to beat the pain, Mizuchi slammed his fist into the sleeper. Over and over, as the sleeper shrieked and thrashed, Mizuchi's eyes began to heat up and water.

"That! That man! Mikoto Suoh! The violent "King" who can only rampage! Why did the 'Slate' empower such a primitive man?! Is that also the power of the "King"?" There's a lot of stupidity!"

If he could see, he should have known that they were not tears, but blood vomited from emotion. However, Mizuchi didn't realize that. He continued to spew anger and curses, hitting the sleeper.

Jane, who was watching him, leaked out a voice saying "Hmm."

"As reported. There seems to be a slight change in personality."

"What?!"

"Mr. Mizuchi. Do you remember why you are here?"

Saying that, Mizuchi tried to trace his memory.

After being arrested as a criminal involved in a different skill, Mizuchi was imprisoned in a detention center owned by "Tokijikuin". After being deprived of the investigation

site and spending days in disappointment, he was finally sent to the trial site. He was pushed into the transfer vehicle while immobilized, and the engine started.

He did not remember from that moment.

"We were the ones who rescued you from "Tokijikuin". However, the security there was considerable and we had to use some violent means. There were no deaths, but there were some injuries. One of them is you."

"....."

"The doctor told me that the shock of the "rescue" caused a slight damage to your brain. It was said that it was that effect that made you blind, and that it might have affected your personality as well. What do you think of yourself?"

It was a messy story. He didn't know who they were, but he understood that they were causing him a terrible experience.

Still, for some reason it was crazy.

"Fufufufufufu... Yes. Did you help me? I have to thank you. Thank you very much, Anonymous."

It was difficult to control the emotions that suddenly arose. Mizuchi calmly analyzed his state. Was it the effect of the "brain damage" that Jane said? Either one was fine. The situation was more important than the condition.

At that time, Mizuchi analyzed that situation as follows.

"So? Is it because of the idea of retiring to the United States that you helped me?"

Jane seemed a bit shocked, and Mizuchi laughed again.

"What surprises you? It is a well-known fact that each country targets different talented technologies. If you assure me even using hard means, it is overwhelming to think that it is the work of intelligence agencies in other countries."

"Why is United States?"

"Your English, it's a beautiful English accent. If you're a first class intelligence agent, you probably have both. There are many intelligence agencies in the world, but the number is limited when it comes to "first class". Among them, The United States is particularly excited about research on different skills."

Mizuchi smiled and leaned forward.

"In the last World War, the United States led the war against Germany and won a spectacular victory. However, the miraculous relic that was supposed to be obtained there, the "Dresden Slate", was kidnapped by Kokujoji Daikaku at the tip of our noses. If the research on the different abilities obtained from the "Slate" brought unprecedented

prosperity to Japan, which should have been a defeated country, it would be a disappointment for the United States not to have that."

"....."

"Of course, the United States also started to research different abilities in a hurry, but unfortunately, both "King" and Strain basically occur only around the "Slate". Research cannot proceed in such an environment. All they can do is to kidnap a talented investigator and give them a small Slate."

Mizuchi lowered his unseen eyes. Metal screeched and his body trembled. He was slowly beginning to understand where he was.

"For now, is this place on a ship you own? Is it still in Japan's territorial waters or has it already gone out to sea? In any case, you are in control of my death. If I don't accept your "suggestion", will I be a food for fish?"

Mizuchi doesn't know what Jane is like. However, there was a small laugh.

"We don't do such savagery to our precious investigators. Fortunately, we are long-suffering. Let's have a good discussion."

Mizuchi laughed.

"In short, I'm not letting go until you nod."

"It costs a fair amount of money too. First, you probably didn't want it. What if you could go back to Japan? You'd be connected to the detention center again, and that's it."

That fact could not be denied by Mizuchi.

Mizuchi was an unmistakable criminal. A villain who had abused the power of "Tokijikuin" and repeated human experimentation. "Tokijikuin" will be following his whereabouts. That is, the very nation of Japan was persecuting him.

Japan was definitely Mizuchi's homeland. There was a certain amount of attachment. But if he didn't have a place to study, it was just a barren desert for Mizuchi.

Jane said, as if she had seen through the idea.

"Let's stop the confusing negotiations. We will provide you with a new place for investigation, and you will provide us with the results of your investigation. Is that enough?"

That was exactly correct. This was Mizuchi's "second life" that was about to end. His knowledge, technique and "talent" were once again in the open, which was more important than anything else.

The joy that welled up could not be suppressed. Mizuchi shook his shoulders and started laughing. He could continue with his investigation. He could look beyond other

possibilities. It was the best gospel for Mizuchi. If that were the case, it wouldn't be a problem if the brain was slightly damaged, the personality was transformed, or the sight was lost.

And, in fact, they were not lost.

Mizuchi spread her arms in the direction Jane would be facing and yelled.

"Okay. I accept your transaction. First of all, let's give him a lecture on what the different skills are! Fufufufufufufufufu!"

Of course, he didn't realize that Jane looked creepy to Mizuchi's uncontrollable laughter.

+++++

"Something like that happened half a year ago."

Fushimi gave a stagnant look to the man who said it with a smile.

Hairstyle parted seventy-three, silver-rimmed glasses, masked smile, and navy blue three-piece suit. He was a man who looked like an elite office worker or a bank clerk somewhere, and of course he wasn't the kind of person who would come to the "Scepter 4" camp.

The only one apart from the golden seal of "Tokijikuin".

This man who showed up without an appointment arrived at Munakata's office without any hindrance because he was wearing the seal. There is no doubt that the "Tokijikuin" Golden Clan is the most influential organization in Japan today. Even in front of Reisi Munakata, the "Blue King", the man did not try to break the attitude worthy of him, albeit in a humorous manner.

"It was our fault that Mizuchi was kidnapped. There are various kinds of interference from other countries, but I didn't expect to take such direct action. There is a "Usagi" in the escort. Not having it was one of the reasons for the failure."

"That's it."

Munakata looked at the business card placed on the office desk and read the characters written on it.

"Tanaka Hitoshi, a special diplomat from the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs"...?"

"Of course, it's a pseudonym."

With a smile, Tanaka simply said that.

"We have no name. We are "Usagis", just terminals to become your limbs and fulfill your wishes. But when it comes to working abroad, that look is too flashy. I decided to dress up a bit."

Munakata heard him and laughed.

"As expected, "Tokijikuin", do you mean that you can create or delete humans who don't care? It's a word that we who belong to the family registry section can't easily ignore."

"Covert operations are common sense in this world. We recognize that the people of the Blue clan may understand that they contribute to the national interest just as we do."

The roundabout interchange seemed to let the tongue slip. Barely holding himself back, Fushimi urged the story first.

"So? What is the Golden clan to us?"

Tanaka looked at Fushimi. A smile like a mask gave off a strange feeling that he would never know what he was thinking.

"That's right, let's explain step by step."

As Tanaka operated the PDA, a window emerged into thin air. A map of Tokyo and a close-up photo of part of it. A convoy and a suspected car overturned and debris was scattered.

"The means by which the thief secured Mizuchi was nonviolent. He pushed a large truck from the side into a convoy car that was stopped at a traffic light, and when it overturned, it burned out the rear seat lock and packed Mizuchi's body in the truck. Well, it was smart to take such a step."

"It's bold, but it's effective."

Tanaka nodded at Munakata's impression.

"In fact, although it was violent, their performance was perfect. The personnel in charge of the escort could not do anything and shot them down, and no one noticed the thief. Further investigation found traces of someone's work in the surrounding surveillance cameras and traffic lights that stopped the convoy. It is definitely a professional job. "

"How about tracking down the truck that secured Mizuchi?"

Tanaka operated his PDA. The red dotted line, which appeared to have moved the truck, extended from the point of the accident to the western part of Tokyo.

"Since the truck itself wasn't visible, it took a while to narrow it down, but we managed to figure out the route of travel. However, where they headed was..."

Munakata narrowed his eyes at the place where the dotted line stopped.

"Is it Zoshuku Kurayado Station? I see."

"The number of daily users at Zoshuku station is 3.5 million. It is the largest number of people in the world, which is also listed in the Guinness Book of Records. They got lost

there and disappeared. The truck was found in the parking lot on the sixth floor of the basement connected to this station, but of course it was a hollow shell."

"What is the identity of the truck?"

"A shipping company in Tokyo was robbed the day before the incident. The driver was also found in the toilet at Zoshuku station. He was blindfolded and had earplugs and testified that he did not remember anything."

Fushimi sighed and summarized the story.

"In short, you have been frank. That is not the answer to this question at all. What does that have to do with us?"

"It is from here that we can have a relationship."

Tanaka smiled and operated his PDA. The map of Tokyo immediately disappeared and became a world map. Among them, Japan was marked with a large red cross.

"An organization that is so audacious and capable of committing such detailed crimes cannot be considered a national one. Public institutions are under our control, and private organizations are unlikely to make an enemy of "Tokijikuin". If so, they are organizations abroad."

A number of red circles appeared on the world map in the window. United States, United Kingdom, China, Russia. Munakata muttered as looked it.

"Koushi Mizuchi was indeed a talented investigator."

"That's right. Until now, Japan, which has the "Slate", is at the forefront of research on different skills. Excellent researchers are what every country wants more than anything else."

"A foreign intelligence agency stole Mizuchi?"

Tanaka nodded and said the names one by one.

"Central Intelligence Agency CIA, Confidential Information Department SIS, Federal Security Service FSB, Ministry of State Security, after investigating various foreign intelligence departments, we finally got a "hit". That's it..."

One of the dots on the world map was highlighted. A huge entertainment city that shines like a resplendent jewel while surrounded by deserts in the navel of the North American continent.

"Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. Mizuchi's appearance was confirmed here."

More photos appeared on the Las Vegas map. The man was holding a cup and laughing in front of a table with red carpets, gold chandeliers, luxurious dishes and numerous sakes.

Although his eyes were covered with something like goggles, Fushimi was still familiar with that man's face. Sledding and mumbling.

"Mizuchi."

"This is a photo taken three days ago. Koushi Mizuchi is in Las Vegas. Perhaps he is backed by a powerful intelligence agency. And even more troublesome: now the "Red King" is also heading to Las Vegas."

Munakata's eyebrows twitched.

"His departure was recently confirmed. It is true that the "King" is not prohibited from going abroad, but fate is a problem. The "Red King" is also heading to Las Vegas. In Las Vegas, where Koushi Mizuchi is waiting for them, who has many ties to them."

The flow of history came into view. Munakata's words made that clear.

"It can't be a coincidence."

"Yes. We believe that Mikoto Suoh's trip to Las Vegas was due to Mizuchi's work. The purpose is unknown, but I don't think I invited him to warm up the old relationship."

Munakata leaned back in the chair and put his finger to his lips.

"Revenge or experiment? Either way, Mizuchi will interfere with Mikoto Suoh. What will happen then? I wish we could have a skirmish."

"Assuming the worst case scenario, there is a possibility of a royal blowup happening in Las Vegas. If that happens, it's not a diplomatic issue. It will look like the start of a war between Japan and the United States."

"Would it be World War III? It's definitely a world crisis."

As he smiled coldly, Munakata looked at Fushimi.

"Fushimi-kun. When you were in the Red Clan, did you ever interact with Mizuchi's camp? I remember seeing a race like that."

Tanaka nodded with a smile like a mask.

"Yes. I came here because there are qualified personnel. A person who knows Mizuchi, has a connection to the Red Clan, and belongs to "Scepter 4". We, before going to Las Vegas, definitely want to borrow Saruhiko Fushimi."

Fushimi didn't answer and just stared at his toes. It was as if he could make his existence transparent.

Of course, that didn't happen. Once manifested, Fushimi's body was tightly entwined and he was about to be dragged to Las Vegas, far beyond the sea.

"Then Fushimi-kun, it's a business order. Go save the world."

Munakata said that lightly, Fushimi clicked his tongue at least in resistance.

+++++++

"I see. You are too harsh, there are several things."

Shaking the cocktail glass, Kusanagi laughed. Fushimi didn't try to hide his grumpy expression, instead he stood up with his hand in his pocket.

Maroon Hotel, 1st Floor, Casino Floor. This place, which is directly connected to the reception hall, was packed with many tourists. Most hotels in Las Vegas have a casino, which is open to non-guests. The minimum bet was also a welcome casino floor for the light class, starting at \$1.

In such a place, the appearance of Fushimi standing instead of sitting on his seat was unpleasantly noticeable. The poker dealer where Kusanagi sat also looked suspicious. Kusanagi pointed to the seat next to him with his chin and said.

"Well, sit down."

Fushimi thought for a bit and then sat down on the stool. Kusanagi stops the bunny-shaped waitress and picks up the gimlet from the tray. The drink they serve is a service drink, but as a courtesy, the waitress smiled dazzlingly as he put the dollar bills on the tray.

"Thank you, Mister."

"My Pleasure, Lady."

With a giggle, the waitress pats Kusanagi's chest, a card with contact information in his pocket. Kusanagi lowered his gaze and then looked at the back of the departing waitress.

Fushimi called out in a sulky tone.

"Have you heard of those people?"

"Hmm? Well..."

Kusanagi put the gimlet in front of Fushimi as if to blur.

"It's Mizuchi. It's a name I haven't heard. Sake tastes bad."

"....."

Fushimi pursed his lips awkwardly. When Kusanagi visually showed him the gimlet, he reluctantly picked it up. Kusanagi met him there with his cocktail glass.

"Cheers."

Fushimi apologized for wetting his lips with alcohol and then complained.

"I mean, please tell the answering machine the name of the hotel you're staying at."

"Haha, sorry. Sorry... No, did you bring them? I will, travel expenses weren't cheap either."

"The cost is financed by "Tokijikuin". It seems that there is a crisis in the world, so it is better to have more manpower."

"Suddenly it became important."

Kusanagi laughed, there was a call from the vendor as if he couldn't cash it.

"Mister?"

"Oh, sorry."

After apologizing lightly, Kusanagi paid a tip for the entry fee and the first round began. He tipped Fushimi in the same way, and he looked at Kusanagi annoyed. However, Kusanagi calmly dismissed his gaze and confirmed the cards dealt.

"Well? Won't you tell me?"

"Mikoto-san... Talk to Mikoto Suoh, please return to Japan immediately. Now I have a backup of "Tokijikuin"."

Kusanagi laughed with his nose. Of the three participants, one got off and two stayed. He looks at Fushimi and ask.

"Why don't you go? Leave or retire?"

"Kusanagi-san..."

"Tell me about the betting player at the table."

Fushimi clicked his tongue at him and spoke.

The dealer collected all the chips in play in front of him and the second round began. Of the five community cards lined up in the center, three had been revealed. 4 of spades, 7 of clubs, 9 of diamonds. Kusanagi gasped as he looked at the cards laid out.

"You can tell from the fact that you were in "Homura". It's dangerous, so pack your bags and run away. Is that so? Do you think we'll obey?"

"I do not believe that."

Fushimi bet \$5 of his chips. One of the participants withdrew and the other called. Kusanagi laughed and proceeded in the same way.

"Well, that's the correct answer for me. If it's about Mikoto, please ask me. I wonder if she remembers Mizuchi?"

"....."

"But, Fushimi. I also belong to "Homura"."

Third round. The fourth community card was revealed. Three of Diamond. Fushimi looked at him and said a bit.

"That's fine with you, but what about Anna?"

Kusanagi turned his gaze from the card to Fushimi.

"Mizuchi targets "Homura". It should include Anna. What if he tries to use Anna again as experimental material? There is also a backup of the intelligence agencies there. Can you protect her in a foreign country where you don't understand the language and culture?"

Another customer wagered a \$5 chip. Kusanagi glared at him and raised a \$10 chip.

"Don't get me wrong. Fushimi."

Silent anger was hidden in the murmuring voice. Fushimi was impressed at that voice.

"Did you forget what Mizuchi did? He killed Anna's parents. Thanks to him, Anna couldn't live a normal life."

"....."

Fushimi called without saying anything. The other guest withdrew, leaving only two people, Kusanagi and Fushimi, on the field.

The final round. The last card revealed: The King of Diamonds.

"Why should we run away from Mizuchi? Is the one who ran away from us out there? When Mizuchi ran away for a bit, I only regretted that he was locked in a cage from the bottom of my heart."

Kusanagi took a sip of the cocktail and laid out all the cards he had.

Fushimi sighed deeply. It was a reaction that said a job that was known to fail from the start had failed.

"Well then, at least..."

While meeting Kusanagi's eyes, Fushimi also slid all the tiles on the table forward.

"If I win this, promise me you won't stand out. I won't tell you to run away. Listen seriously to me and the "Tokijikuin" council."

Huh, Kusanagi laughed. He expected Fushimi to go down there, but why was he so tenacious? As a former senior, he couldn't run away.

"Yes. I'll take it."

Confrontation.

Fushimi revealed his hand. 5 of spades and 6 of hearts. 34567 straight.

And Kusanagi also turned his hand to the front.

"I'm sorry, Fushimi."

Ace of Diamonds and Q of Diamonds. It is a role higher than a ladder.

"The "Red King" is like my ally."

Saying that, Kusanagi hit Fushimi's gimlet with his cocktail glass.

CHAPTER 4: TROUBLE IN LAS VEGAS

Danny Buckman, a contract merchant at the Maroon Hotel, didn't really understand the relationship between the two at first.

In front of Danny was a red-haired young man and a white-haired girl. The young man looked at the spinning roulette boringly, and the girl waits for the moment when the ball falls with shining eyes. They looked like a father with his daughter, a brother and a sister, but it was rare to see that the children were excited about that.

"Mikoto."

When the girl raised her voice at him, the young man named Mikoto looked at her politely.

"Do you want to do it, Anna?"

Anna nodded and Mikoto casually handed the chips to Anna. Danny was surprised at the exchange of Japanese.

"Start gambling."

With Danny's phrase, customers began to bet as they wanted. Anna took the chips she received and looked seriously at the betting area.

"Turning."

When Danny spoke again, the roulette wheel began to spin.

Strictly speaking, it is illegal for children to gamble, even in Las Vegas. However, entertainment wouldn't be possible if he cared about that kind of game. Danny tolerated

it, tossing the ball into the roulette wheel, smiling at Anna, who had a black chip before he spun the roulette wheel.

In front of Anna, who joined her hands in prayer, the ball swirled around the board.

When Danny took aim, it landed on the black box.

".....!"

With a bright expression on her face, Anna stretched out and looked at the roulette wheel. She then turned her gaze from it to Mikoto who was next to her.

"Mikoto. Got it!"

"Hmm... Oh, that's right."

Anna showed no offensive pretense at Mikoto's response, which seemed uncomfortable. Assuming this was the relationship between the two, Danny handed the increased tokens back to Anna and winked at her.

"Congratulations, young lady."

Speaking in English, Anna blinked amazingly. Then, like a child, she smiled.

"Thank you."

Danny smiled.

However, the service went as far as that. As a contract dealer, he would work properly from now on. The dealer's job is to put the ball into the selected pocket, and the real joy of roulette is guessing which pocket the dealer intends to put it into. It will be a long time before the Japanese lady gets there.

"Start gambling."

Danny stated again with a smile on his face.

Thirty minutes later, Danny's expression froze and his complexion began to pale.

The chips were stacked in front of Anna, and he couldn't even recognize their appearance. She has bet six times since then, and Anna has hit everything. She started with twice the colors red and black, then three times the dozen, then six times the line, seven times the first five, and nine times the corner.

At that point, she had already made over \$2000.

He didn't know what was going on.

It couldn't have been possible.

Anna didn't seem to understand even the rules of roulette. A girl this good beat astronomical odds and punched his pockets, as if she could see Danny's heart.

Sweat oozed from the hand holding the ball, and the aim was about to be shaken. Danny stated again, being careful not to shake his voice.

"Well, start betting."

However, the surrounding guests were not moving, they were observing Anna's behavior. It was just about riding a girl's horse. They wanted to shout that they were not proud as players, but when you win, you win, that was also the rule of the game.

Everyone at the table was looking at Anna. The exception would be Mikoto, the young man sitting next to her. He continued to smoke, his expression not changing at the increasing number of chips. It didn't seem like it was an unexpected victory. It was creepy, unlike the deadpan Japanese who heard the story.

Anna's hands moved silently on the table where no one moved.

She bet all the chips on black.

"Turning."

The roulette wheel began to spin. Customers began to mill around and place tokens in black spots or the like. Danny was looking at him, feeling a cold sweat on his back.

"The bet is off."

The rotation of the ball began to slow down. They all watched him with a sigh.

No. At that time, there were still exceptions.

Mikoto and Anna. Mikoto silently stared at the black area where Anna placed the bet. And Anna wasn't looking at the ball, but at Danny.

When Danny realized that, the ball fell into a locker.

Red 16.

The place was filled with mourning. Only the young man and the girl in front of him did not speak. Despite losing all the chips, the girl silently smiled, looked at Danny and tilted her head.

"Come on, Mikoto."

"Yes."

The two of them stood together and left the table as they were, showing no regret or displeasure. Looking at her back in a daze, Danny suddenly had an idea.

Until now, Anna was hitting his pocket. As if she knew in advance.

So it's not possible that she lost on purpose?

The girl in the end was compassionate. He didn't think that was mysteriously humiliating. Until the next bet began, Danny stared at the strange Japanese duo.

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"It was good?"

As she walked through the bustle of the casino floor, Anna looked at Suoh who said that out of the blue.

Maybe Anna thought so. Mikoto was aware that Anna would intentionally lose at that point.

"Yes."

Anna nodded and began to talk about her thoughts and feelings.

"It was fun at first, but then I started knowing which box to put in. I could see where that person was pointing."

Probably, she activated the sentient ability like Strain. Even if she couldn't see the future, she could still see where the person in front of her was paying attention.

If you win in a fair game, no problem. But that trafficker is a normal person, albeit with skill. In Anna's sense, using different abilities against such opponents is cheating.

"Because he is cunning."

That was the case.

Suoh laughed and stroked Anna's hair. For some reason, she was happy and proud of the feel of his warm palm. Anna also loosened her mouth.

A stinging sensation stabbed at her skin.

Anna stopped and looked around her.

The casino floor was filled with light and sound. The sound of the ball spinning around the roulette wheel, the lightning of the slot machine shooting out of the hit, the cheers and shouts of the tourists who were delighted with them, in the midst of the hustle and bustle, Anna felt a rough touch. She felt as if the grainy black paper was gently caressing her cheeks. She remembered it.

Malice and hostility.

"Mikoto."

Suoh was moving before the warning. He gently nudged Anna's body, moving between her and the poker table.

At that time, the men in black had already surrounded Suoh.

"Client. Excuse me?"

Anna did not understand the meaning of English. However, the feelings they had were passed on. The harsh hostility was growing stronger.

Before them, Suoh...

"Thanks."

While he laughed a little, he said it in Japanese.

The men in black looked at each other's faces for a moment. Then, with the precision of a machine, they took one step at a time. The tourists around him sensed signs of trouble and began to move away.

"In this way..."

One of the men in black grabbed Suoh's arm. Anna looked at Suoh anxiously. Of course, she wasn't worried about Suoh. She was worried about the safety of the other party.

Suoh looked at Anna,

"I can't cheat."

The next moment, Suoh's fist sank into the face of the man in black.

"You!"

Another man in black changed his blood phase and grabbed Suoh. Suoh laughed lightly, took his arm and kicked his epigastrium. He jumped onto the back of a man in agony and slammed his heel into the last remaining brain.

"Shit!"

From between the slot machines, from the back of the poker table, more men in black appeared, and in the blink of an eye, Suoh was surrounded. Suoh laughed invincibly in front of a swarm of enemies.

"Go with Totsuka."

That was all he said to Anna, and he jumped into the herd.

The big fight had begun.

Slot machines collapsed, the table flipped, chips, blood splatters, and the bodies of the men in black flew through the air. The tourists screamed, disturbed the calculation and fled. Suoh was in the thick of the fight, but he happily shook his fist at him or received a fist. Anna leaned over, snuck into Blackjack's pedestal, climbed out the other side, and sighed.

She heard a familiar voice.

"Ah. Hey, you're flashy, King."

Anna looked at the owner of the voice and her expression suddenly relaxed.

"Tatara. Can you stop Mikoto?"

Totsuka made a flap with his hand and, while watching Suoh madly, he shook his head with a "Hmm."

"Isn't it impossible? It feels like the other side is poking around. Did you notice it even with a grudge?"

"No."

"That's right. Who are those people in the first place? They don't feel like security guards, maybe they're yakuza."

Anna didn't know why those men in black had called them or where they were going to take them. Yet only the gritty black hostility told Anna of the danger. Not because they did anything, but from the beginning they had intended to attack Suoh.

And even now...

"Tatara!"

The tone became louder than before because the surrounding hostility gradually reduced the siege. Looking around, there were several people approaching them, mixed in with the fleeing tourists.

They were not men in black. Anna intuitively understood that they were their favorites. The sword-eating light that inhabited their eyes looked only at Anna. From the beginning, they were their target!

The enemy had already escaped from the human wave and started to go straight towards Anna and the others. Totsuka smiled softly at Anna, who clung to herself.

"It's okay, Anna."

At the same time, Anna remembered various familiar signs around her.

"Because everyone is there."

"Oh!"

Kicking a fallen slot machine and jumping up, several red glows flashed.

The group of enemies was suddenly hit and kicked without being able to react properly. Meanwhile, the red glow grew even stronger. One of them, a young man in a woolen hat, knocked over several enemies with a mop and smiled at Totsuka.

"Hey, Totsuka-san! You're doing something that looks like fun! Isn't the bee that left us injured?"

Totsuka shook his head with a bitter smile.

"It's the result of rock, paper, scissors, so God is not free enough to hit each other."

"It's not that, it's a matter of feeling!"

Yata held a mop as he struck an enemy sneaking up from behind with his rear fist. Around that, Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose, and Eric, the "Homura" members who should have gone to Japan, gathered one after another.

Anna rolled her eyes and asked.

"Why is everyone here?"

They all responded with fearless laughter.

"I've been working part time! I had a lot of problems!"

"I went to Mexico, I walked in the desert, it was very hard..."

"I almost dried up... because of Yata...!"

In the second half, he was close to a grudge clause, but looking back, Yata screamed.

"Shut up! You're supposed to know the language more than anything else! We came all the way to America, they don't seem ruthless!"

"Aaaah!"

Yata pushed his fist up. Glowing chandeliers, red carpets, roulette wheels, poker stalls and slot machines rolling over them, in a strange landscape, the fist with a red aura was terrifyingly familiar.

"No Blood! No Bone! No Ash!!!"

Yata raised his voice at the same time. A group of fists that jutted out in response turned into an even larger aura. Surrounded by them, Anna smiled a little.

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A couple of men and women were in the VIP lounge overlooking the casino floor of the Maroon Hotel.

Standing in front of tempered glass, watching the hustle and bustle going on in the world below. The man, who stroked his white suit, his red shirt and his hair back, pierced the glass and stuck it to his forehead, looking at the scene.

The man's name is Koushi Mizuchi.

There were three eyes on his face.

"Uh, oh, Jane? Is something wrong?"

A blonde woman with her arms crossed beside him, Jane, turned her suspicious gaze on him.

"What are you talking about?"

"It's not decided? It's "Homura". We invited the "Red King" to the party, right? I didn't want to invite everyone."

The three eyes were constantly moving, looking at each of the "Homura" members.

"Misaki Yata. Rikio Kamamoto. Saburota Bando. After all, there are those I don't remember calling. This is strange, Jane. Whose fault is it?"

Jane turned her heels unpleasantly back. Sitting on a Venetian couch, she poured wine into a glass.

"There's nothing wrong with that area, Mizuchi. When they got to Japan, they tried to get caught in the net."

One of Mizuchi's eyes twitched and turned to Jane.

"Oh, after all, isn't it strange? Then why are they here? Why didn't they get caught in the net?"

"From what I see, they immigrated illegally."

"Hmm..."

Mizuchi's pupil grew as made a mechanical noise. Jane pursed her lips and pointed at Mizuchi.

"Stop doing that."

"What's that?"

"Don't look at me with those eyes. It's disturbing."

Mizuchi's eyes moved and turned forward again. Keeping the conflict under his eyes in full view.

"That's rude. I was making sure you weren't lying. Your pulse and temperature will tell me if you're lying."

Jane gave a creepy look at Mizuchi who shook his shoulders.

Mizuchi's eyes and part of his brain were replaced by machines.

The connection between the optic nerve and the eye of the camera was Mizuchi's ability to enable technology that was not feasible even with cutting-edge cybernetics. His "talent" drawn by Daikaku Kokujoji, the "Golden King", was specialized in healing and regeneration. With a power that Jane and her colleagues couldn't understand, Mizuchi replaced his eyes with a machine, allowing him to "see" light of all wavelengths.

At first glance, Mizuchi's head was covered with glasses. But, in fact, it was Mizuchi's new "skin", which had been replaced by fiber-reinforced plastic. Three rails ran over the skin, and each rail was equipped with a freely moving camera eye. Mizuchi besides being a talented scientist, was the third monster to have undergone a transformation by using that technique on himself.

Mizuchi muttered with his face pressed against the tempered glass.

"Well, it can't be helped. Besides, I thought they'd be here soon."

"What?"

Jane was disappointed, and one of Mizuchi's eyes turned to her again.

"I'm a criminal who belonged to "Tokijikuin", right? Kokujoji Daikaku shouldn't have thrown me away. I thought it would take some time to chase him down. It was unexpected that they came so early."

"Uh, "Tokijikuin" was the one who brought them to this country?"

"With a cover of diplomatic immunity, he could bring several people while hiding his identity. In other words, we are already being chased by "Tokijikuin". Huhhhhhhh!"

That sounded funny to him, Mizuchi shrugged his shoulders and laughed. Jane looked at him and took a sip of wine.

"Oops. Looks like they're going to run away."

Jane stood up and walked to the edge of the tempered glass as she held the glass.

On the casino floor, "Homura" was bonded and trying to cut through the attacking men in black. On the other side of the main entrance, they were all running towards the entrance side at once. The men in black were trying to chase them down, but it was clearly depressing from there. In fact, they were just gangsters hired for money, not the intelligence department. It was part of the calculation to run if they were hit.

"I'm going to move the inn. They noticed that this hotel is under our control."

"What are you going to do?"

"Yes and no. "Tokijikuin" will be looking for me. They could enter this room right now."

Jane looked out of the room with stern eyes. The fighters were stationed outside. He was a member who had military service experience and it could be said that he was a veteran, but it was doubtful how much he could fight against a talented person.

Mizuchi and Jane turned their heels almost at the same time and started heading towards the exit. As they walk side by side, Mizuchi said happily.

"In other words, it's okay to run away while being chased. Let's escape via the rooftop helipad. There's also a date with "him"."

"What about "Homura"? Will you leave them alone?"

"I have enough data, but I can't let it go. The clansmen have arrived, so let's welcome them. That's right."

Mizuchi declared this happily, as he pushed the door open and held out his arms to welcome them.

"Alright, let's do the "Glass Hopper II" output! It's a memorable battle royale of the beloved child we created! I'm sure you can get a lot of valuable data!"

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They ran across the casino floor, kicked the "STAFF ONLY" sign, and "Homura" proceeded as one.

No staff member tried to stop the group of Asians running in the backyard of the hotel. They leaned against the wall with scared faces and looked at them in a holdup position. As expected, Totsuka had to put his hands together and say the words "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." every time he passed a staff member.

As the back door opened, the warm spirit of the night caressed Totsuka's cheeks. Two trucks of the exact same type were parked nearby. Totsuka was familiar to one of the drivers.

"No, Fushimi. Thanks for your hard work!"

Fushimi sent a "get on fast" gesture with a face that seemed to have bitten a bitter worm. Totsuka climbed into the backseat of the truck with Anna's hand pulling. Yata, Kamamoto, and Bando followed them, and the other members boarded the other car.

Two vans started to run at the same time.

"What about Mikoto? Didn't he come?"

Anna looked around her and posed a question. Totsuka shrugged and replied.

"He's King, don't worry. Just in case, Kusanagi-san is there too. I'll contact them later and they'll join us."

"Damn it, I don't like it. Did we win? Why do we have to run, Totsuka-san!"

Yata sitting next to Anna got angry. His combative eyes were on the Maroon Hotel, which he was driving away from. Totsuka calms him down with an "Okay."

"You can't bother other customers, right? And there's no point in defeating them. Maybe he's a thug who knows nothing about "him"."

"Exactly."

And, an unknown face suddenly protruded from the passenger seat. A mask-like smile was pasted on the seventy-three-parted hairstyle. Yata suddenly withdrew.

"What?! Who is this guy?!"

"Oh, sorry. You were late, here you go."

Yata eerily received the business card with both hands and read it out loud.

"Special diplomat, Hitoshi Tanaka...? Are you an official? Why are you in such a place?"

"It's a job. Actually, it was our request to cooperate with Saruhiko Fushimi. I'd like to ask everyone to cooperate in capturing Koushi Mizuchi."

The air inside the car suddenly became tense.

Koushi Mizuchi. It was the first time Anna had heard that name.

Anna held her breath and widened her eyes, looking at Tanaka seriously. Mizuchi's name was nothing but an abominable past for her. She should never have wanted to hear the name of a man who stole from her parents and tried to harm her aunt.

"Anna..."

Totsuka took Anna's hand and tried to say something so as not to worry her. However, Anna stared at Tanaka's face and collapsed.

"It's okay."

She just said that.

Tanaka's smile changed slightly at that situation. An inhuman smile like a mask seemed to have a faint warmth.

"I told Kusanagi-san and Totsuka-san, but I haven't told you yet. I'll explain it to you in detail, so it will take some time."

Tanaka then started talking about the story so far. Mizuchi's escape. The involvement of foreign intelligence agencies. As "Tokijikuin" and "Scepter 4" are working together to capture Mizuchi, and "Homura" is involved in it.

It was Yata who got angry when he heard the story to the end.

"Well, it's the fault of those idiots and the others! They shouldn't let such a bad guy get away so easily!"

Tanaka bowed deeply with a smile on his face.

"You're right. I'm sorry. Regarding this situation, all faults are from "Tokijikuin".

"Oh..."

Yata is weak when they apologize head-on. He couldn't continue any longer, and even turned around, muttering something. Fushimi in the driver's seat clicked his tongue in irritation.

"It's no use saying that now. The question is, what should we do from now on?"

"Uh, it's loud! I know, that's all!"

"So? What kind of plan do you have, Tanaka-san?"

Totsuka asked in a clear voice, not breaking his soft demeanor. If the responsibility was beyond, they would probably think about what to do, and whether or not they would deal with it was another question.

Tanaka nodded and looked around "Homura" in the car.

"The most effective plan is to make everyone leave the country immediately. With a special machine of "Tokijikuin", it is possible to return to Japan undetected by the intelligence agency there."

Yata, Kamamoto, Bando, Totsuka and Anna. The facial expressions of all the members signaled "no".

Perhaps he already knew. Tanaka looked at Fushimi in the driver's seat and continued his words.

"If they're not going to leave this city, they'll have to move somewhere else first, because the Maroon Hotel is probably breathing in the enemy. My colleagues are currently looking for a hotel. Mizuchi is unlikely to get caught in the net."

"Well then, what about our hotel?"

It was Bando who raised his hand and said that. Kamamoto nodded.

"It's a pyramid, but there are quite a few customers, it's close to here, isn't it good for hiding?"

"Pyramid. Oh, there? I see."

Tanaka put his hand to his chin and started to think of something.

"I was thinking of a different location for the base, but that hotel may be suitable. There are many tourists and there are various access methods. There is no harm in hiding or escaping. Hmm."

Tanaka looked at Fushimi. Before being told anything, Fushimi had started inputting the destination into the navigation system installed in the van. Tanaka turned his gaze to the passenger side door and gave some instructions to the parallel truck.

At that moment, Anna raised her face.

She kneeling on the seat, looking at the road that flowed past the window beyond the backseat. Totsuka asked about the situation.

"Anna? What's wrong?"

"I can hear footsteps."

"Steps...?"

You couldn't hear that sound in a speeding car. Totsuka looked back, as did Anna. The night view of Las Vegas blended into the darkness behind it as flowed by.

Zushin.

He hears such a sound from somewhere.

"What's that?!"

Bando was the first to discover it. He looked at it, pressing his head against the rear window. The people in the car all looked at him at once.

The sound of screaming was heard again.

The appearance of "it" was reflected in the rear glass for a moment. In Totsuka's eyes, it looked like a steel ostrich with a terrifyingly short neck. An armored box-shaped torso with armor and two elongated legs extending from it. The knee joint bent the other way flexed with a mechanical sound, and the next moment it jumped out of sight.

"Step on the gas, Fushimi!"

Totsuka cried out due to an almost instinctive sense of crisis. Fushimi stepped on the accelerator with all his might without saying anything. The sudden increase in speed pushed everyone's body against the seat.

A steel ostrich passed through the place where the van was until a moment ago.

Totsuka confirmed with horror that there was a huge crack in the asphalt. If they were trampled on, that van would be scrapped in an instant.

A red scanning light illuminated the ostrich's steel body. The ostrich began to sprint down the road at high speed, turning it towards them in the blink of an eye. At last, Totsuka learned the identity of the short neck that grew from his torso.

A long cannon mounted on the fuselage: the laser pointer stopped and was placed on Totsuka's forehead through the glass.

CHAPTER 5: EDWARD, THE RED

The purple smoke was inhaled deep into the lungs.

Compared to last time, the surroundings were silent as a lie. All he could hear was the moaning of the black clothes that had been shaken. Suoh, leaning against the roulette wheel, slowly blew smoke towards the glittering chandelier.

Suddenly, he felt a signal behind him.

Looking back, the face he knew had a bitter smile on his face.

"That's a lot of flashy work against Shiroto-san."

"Hmm." Huffing, Suoh received a glass of whiskey from Kusanagi.

"It's self-defense."

Actually, it was the other side that was poking at. Until he bought a fight that was sold to him, Kusanagi didn't believe it. Arguably there should be a better way to do it. But, well, he understood.

He understood it, but he didn't mean to.

After picking up the whiskey, Suoh suddenly remembered:

"What happened to Anna?"

"She ran away with Totsuka and Yata. We're the only ones left here."

Suoh had a suspicious look on his face. Totsuka was fine, but why did Yata's name come up?

He maybe he read the question, Kusanagi had a hard time looking at him, took a sip of cocktail, and said:

"It's going to be complicated. Fushimi went on a business trip with a 'Rabbit'. Well, Yata is another matter."

"You don't know why."

"I don't know. But there is one important thing."

Suddenly Kusanagi's eyes were serious.

"Mizuchi is here. Looks like he called us."

"....."

Suoh blinked several times and stared at Kusanagi's face.

Kusanagi put his hand to his forehead and exhaled deeply.

"Ah, sorry. He's the director of the center that kidnapped Anna."

After being told so much, he finally understood.

"I see."

Suoh only had the acknowledgment that he was a scientist who had captured Anna and was conducting various experiments. He was the power of the "King", he was shouting in various ways, but he could barely remember that part. However, he remembered that he was a member of the Golden Clan and was taken to the "Rabbits" because he violated the internal rules.

If Mizuchi was the one who called them there, then the black clothes lying on the ground could be seen as Mizuchi's henchmen.

Suoh muttered.

"So, I'm glad I was able to beat them."

"That's right. I don't know who these over there are. Still, beating up such an ordinary person, no matter how I think about it, I'll either save time or stop."

Shrugging at Kusanagi, Suoh swallowed the whiskey. He put the empty glass down on the roulette table and left.

Kusanagi also drank the cocktail in the same way and started walking with Suoh. That hotel was part of the tour program. If so, he could think of it as the root castle of the enemy. In a place like this, he couldn't sleep.

As he walked beside him, Kusanagi suddenly muttered.

"I don't understand Mizuchi's purpose. To get revenge on you, or is he still trying to make Anna a king? If so, those black clothes are a strategy to separate you from Anna. Maybe it was."

Suoh looked at Kusanagi and said casually.

"It's okay."

Kusanagi looked at Suoh. On that basis, his eyes said it all.

Suoh laughed at Kusanagi's pessimism with his nose.

"There's Totsuka and Yata. If so, that's fine."

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"Saru! The road is cut to the right, right!"

"I'm doing it right now, don't mess it up!"

Annoyed screams echoed through the vehicle. Every time the laser sight of the "ostrich" was aimed at the van, Fushimi would turn the steering wheel from left to right and somehow try to avoid it. He maybe he noticed that something was wrong with the other truck that was running next to him, slowed down and crashed into the "ostrich".

Sparks scattered across the road in the dark night and the red pointer moved. Almost at the same time, the Gatling gun attached to the body of the "ostrich" began to fire.

Along with the roar of the window glass shaking, the railing on the immediate side turned into a hive, growled, shattered, and disappeared back.

".....!"

Every person in the van was terrified and convinced at the same time. If they were shot at something like that, no matter how talented they were, they couldn't get away unscathed.

"Damn it! I'm sorry!"

Kamamoto barked, opened the back seat window and leaned forward. A Moorish red genie in his fist hardened, and he shot out like a ball of fire. Fireball is Kusanagi's ability, but it's not like the other clan members can't use it either. They just prefer human bullet battle.

The burning red fireball, however, did not catch the "ostrich". Just before landing, the "ostrich" flexed its legs a lot and jumped into the air. He jumped more than 5 meters, again, falling towards the truck.

"Hey, is it falling?!"

"Shit, gaak!"

Fushimi turned the wheel with tremendous force as he gritted his teeth. Kamamoto and Bando in the rear seats toppled like dominoes in a sharp turn that almost caused the rear wheels to skid. The claws of the "ostrich" attacking from above pierced through the driver's door and window together. Shattered glass shards glinted in the road lights.

The red light was absorbed by the "ostrich's" legs in a straight line to tear the brilliance from it.

A throwing knife thrown by Fushimi while he was driving pierced the "ostrich's" ankle joint and burned a red aura.

The "ostrich", which was running on both legs, lost its balance and slowed down. Still, the "ostrich" hadn't given up yet. The laser pointer shone like a beast looking for prey.

Fushimi stepped on the accelerator as much as he could and pushed the "ostrich" out of the way in one go.

The "ostrich" disappeared into the darkness behind, and the people in the car finally exhaled all at once.

"What is that? Robotic weapons...?!"

"But you're stupid, there's no such thing! It's not a movie."

"No. He's probably right."

The gentleman with the calm voice was Tanaka, sitting in the passenger seat. Keeping an eye on his back, he put his hand on his chin as if he was thinking.

"It has been more than half a year since the CIA captured Mizuchi. No wonder such a weapon was born if the military science of the US Army and the unique technology that Mizuchi knows are combined..."

"Huh?! We're being attacked by the CIA?!"

"Maybe it's the National Security Agency NSA, because it has a stronger connection to the military."

Fushimi clicked his tongue at Tanaka, who smiled.

"Don't be afraid, they won't ask the army to be your opponent...!"

"To be precise, it's more like one or two non-regular platoons belonging to the intelligence department, rather than the army. I don't think a decent civilian employee would have a shootout in the city."

"Soldiers of 100 people will attack with such weapons. It's not something amateurs can do. No matter what they say, it's better to return to Japan quickly."

"Hm..."

As Tanaka put his hand to his chin and tried to think about it, again, the footsteps echoed. Bando pressed against the glass of the rear window, he screams.

"Hey! It's already caught up with us!"

Fushimi looked in the rearview mirror and muttered in annoyance.

"What should I do?! The speed is higher there...!"

"That's right. So..."

Tanaka unbuckled his seat belt and slid out of the fully open passenger seat window. The terrified Yata, screamed.

"Hey, Ossan! What are you doing?!"

"It's my job to protect you."

Tanaka narrowed his eyes and looked back as he clung to the roof of the truck and was buffeted by the strong wind rushing down the road. The "ostrich" approached moving both feet at imperceptible speed. The laser pointer was aimed at Tanaka's inorganic features.

"Osan!"

Yata's screams echoed from inside the vehicle. As he listened, Tanaka swung an arm towards the "ostrich".

The Gatling gun began to fire.

Tanaka would be pierced by countless ammunition and his corpse would be thrown on the road; everyone in the vehicle anticipated that sight, and shrugged.

But that didn't happen.

The ammunition stopped just before it reached Tanaka, as if he had slammed into an invisible wall.

The "ostrich" kept firing. However, the bullets never reached Tanaka. All the bullets were locked in midair and lined up in a strange curve. It was like an avant-garde art.

Tanaka smiled silently and waved an arm that lit up the golden glow.

"I am a senior agent of the 'Rabbits' and 'Tokijikuin'. Don't expect this level of attack to do anything to me."

Amazed, Yata turned his soulful gaze to the ceiling.

"Impressive, Ossan, I understand! It's okay!"

Yata opened the truck door, slapping his cheeks with both hands. A strong wind blew across the road and Fushimi cried out in anger.

"What are you doing, Misaki?!"

"Ossan stopped me before, but I'm going to kill him now!"

Yelling back, Yata jumped out of the van.

Sparks were scattered by the wheels of the skateboard at a relative speed of 80 km/h. The sparks got bigger and eventually turned into a flame that engulfed the wheels. As he carved the fiery grooves into the asphalt, Yata began to spin the handle of the mop that he held in both hands at high speed.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Along with the screaming spirit, a red genie dwelled in the mop and exploded like a spinning flame. The skateboard's orbit jerked out once and Yata slammed the flame into the "ostrich", which was still firing, mixing acceleration and centrifugal force.

The steel fuselage fluttered and the spark flashed in the darkness of the night.

"Wow! What kind of things!"

Facing the victorious Yata, the "ostrich" began to wander. The rotation of both legs slowed down, the speed visibly decreased, and it fell as it was.

The laser pointer pointed at Yata before doing so.

"Shit!"

Yata hurriedly manipulated the skateboard and tried to get away from the "ostrich". But the pointer pursued him relentlessly. The cannon began to rotate at high speed while aiming at Yata's forehead.

A red butterfly was sucked into his snout.

An extraordinary butterfly with very little firepower, but it was enough to shut his mouth. The butterflies that touched the bullet exploded, shattering the barrel and igniting thousands of ammunition packed in the ammunition mechanism.

The body of the "ostrich" exploded from the inside.

The "ostrich", which became a moving ball of fire, lurched to the right, tilted to the left, and, on a drunken wobbly foot, detonated repeatedly. Like an ostrich that has lost its head, he kept running aimlessly, eventually going over the railing and falling far below the path.

"Hmm... I was scared..."

Manipulating the skateboard with the power of a different skill, Yata returned to the van. He smiled at Totsuka, who walked out the door.

"Thank you, Totsuka-san. You saved me!"

Totsuka returned a wink.

"Well, I'm still an executive of "Homura"."

The two looked at each other and laughed loudly, then Yata turned to the passenger seat.

Tanaka was already sitting there when he returned. Seat belts were also fastened, and wind-disturbed hairstyles were patted down by hand. Yata laughed and pointed his fist at him.

"Ossan was nice too! If you weren't here, I'd be a hive right now."

Tanaka smiled like a mask, stared at the fist and gently punched his fist there.

"No, this is also a job, but is it okay to call me that?"

"Huh?"

"I'm still 28. How's that for Ossan?"

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One of Mizuchi's eyes made a noise and moved, deciding the wrong direction.

"Hmmm~?"

Jane had a look of disgust on her face. From experience, she knew that when Mizuchi responded like that, that was when something was wrong.

"What is this time?"

"Uh, 'Glass Hopper II' was done. As expected, 'Homura', is it hard to kill with that kind of weapon?"

As he mumbled and mumbled, Mizuchi opened the door and got out of the car. Jane and her escorts also came out into the street.

"Well, I was able to record the W deviation from him, so let's do it. I really can't trust the average person's courage. Unless he's a threat, they won't take him seriously either."

"Why do you understand? Have you not received such a report?"

One of the eyes twitched at Jane's suspicious words.

"Oh, that's easy. I've set the feedback to come here when a cyber-weapon is destroyed. It's natural for parents to always want to know the condition of their beloved child, right?"

"I have received no such report."

"Is that so? Well, it would be better if we could always monitor the planes that could be used. There are still more than 30 'Glass Hopper II'. If you get everything up and running, 'Homura' will be a hive in no time."

As he shrugged and laughed, Mizuchi walked into the street. Jane followed him, looking at Mizuchi's rear.

Fremont Street was still packed with tourists. Unfortunately, it seemed to overlap with the time of the Viva Vision Show, and the semi-circular arcade that covered the ceiling began to display psychedelic images. All kinds of colors melted and tangled and distorted like liquids, Jane thought. The guy who made that video must have felt pretty comforted.

Looking at the casino shops to the left and right, Mizuchi greeted the children on the way with a smile. The boy also laughed and turned to Mizuchi. Fremont Street was also a mecca for artists, although it didn't seem like an attitude towards a monster. Perhaps he was recognized as one of them.

As he watched the boy walk away, Mizuchi only nodded.

"Children are good, because they are full of talent and future. Don't you think so, Jane?"

"When you talk about children, it gives me goosebumps for some reason, Mizuchi."

When she returned that answer, Mizuchi laughed out loud again.

During such exchanges, they reached the target store.

On the street of the bright neon and light show, that place was only dark as if darkness was in the air. It was originally a bar inspired by the Western era, but the appearance of many large motorcycles parked in front of the store and tattoo-covered bikers drinking around it was clearly decent, showing that it was not a good bar.

The motorcyclists were looking at them and the escort personnel were nervous. Before them, Mizuchi didn't seem to feel any pressure. He looked at the store sign and laughed happily.

"Blood and Flame. Hahahaha. To think it's the same as "Homura"."

"Hey. It's not a night show, Asians."

The cyclists stood up and surrounded Mizuchi. The thick arm wrapped in a leather jacket could snap like a dead tree if it came to Mizuchi's neck.

Still, Mizuchi didn't show any signs of hesitation. He rolled all three eyes and said with a smile.

"When Mizuchi comes, Mr. Edward will take over."

The bikers looked at each other and separated from Mizuchi.

"Excuse me. Please go there."

The bikers reverently pushed the door of the bar with a polite attitude that did not resemble a strong physique. Mizuchi entered the bar, followed by Jane and her companions.

Harsh air was trapped inside the bar.

A neon signs with a jukebox that looked like a figurine and a spider web. At the counter, which seemed to have been uncleaned for several years, the hollow-eyed men sat vaguely. Placed on the counter was a box that was probably flour. Jane followed Mizuchi, avoiding looking at them.

"Client. Boss."

When the motorcyclist who opened the door called out in a low voice, a bright voice in contrast to that came back from the back of the store.

"Oh! I have been waiting for you, Mr. Mizuchi! You have often come here and there!"

VIP room at the back of the store. With multiple escorts behind him, the man was lounging on a leather couch.

Edward The Red. He was the boss of "Blood and Flame", a gangster who ruled downtown Las Vegas.

Blue eyes, long limbs, muscular and slender body. His dark skin indicated that he was a South American Hispanic. No shadow could be found on his smiling face. Jane knew it was a friendly attitude that didn't resemble the head of a violent group, but of course, it was a farce.

When he was asked who was the most dangerous man in the Las Vegas underworld, any thug would name Edward.

The Mexican mob, whose sphere of influence is Southern California, controls almost all of the Hispanic mobsters. They value order and discipline, and do not allow even the slightest deviation. Asylum if you submit, death if you refuse: this is how they have grown in power.

Under such circumstances, "Blood and Flame" did not try to obey any organization.

Of course, Chief Edward was ordered to kill several people. Many mobsters targeted Edward for money and honor, but none of them could take his life. Edward has always been at the forefront of the conflict, having even destroyed dozens of enemy hideouts on his account.

The appearance of Edward, who killed all the hostile organizations, burned them and laughed with blood, was called in amazement: "Edward, The Red".

Of course, if you think about it normally, that's just a junkie's wishful thinking.

However, that was the case. The proof of the fact was shown by Edward's right hand.

There was only a thumb on his right hand.

The other four fingers of his had become burned scars. Edward showed the sofa in front of him, waving his impressive hands like a normal human being.

"Come on, sit down! Hey, by the number of drinks!"

Edward raised his voice. Mizuchi sat face to face with Edward without hesitation, and one of his eyes caught Jane out of the corner of his eye. Jane reluctantly sat down next to Mizuchi.

Edward rounded his eyes and stared at Mizuchi.

"No, I heard about it, but there is actually a third one! Is it really visible? How many of these are there?"

Mizuchi's three eyes looked at Edward, who opened his right hand.

"It's a philosophical question, Mr. Edward. One in metamorphosis, but five in metaphysics. His deficiency seems to make him quite complete."

"Oh...? Hahahahaha, I don't know what the scholars say!"

Edward laughed, and the mechanical blankness of the escort behind them barely smiled. The distorted cheeks had crushed burn marks.

They brought the tequila shot.

"In Las Vegas!"

Edward drank it all at once in one gulp. Mizuchi did the same. Jane was lost, but she still shoved it down her throat. The taste of burnt sake spread in the stomach.

Edward dropped the shot glass and leaned toward the table. The eyebrows furrowed as if he was in trouble.

"By the way, Mr. Mizuchi. I'm sad. I'm a member of the group I lent you, but it seems you made a mistake. I don't know who you were dealing with, but it was sad that we were so weak. How much did the treatment cost for everyone?"

"It's \$50,000, Chief."

"\$100,000?! That much?! Wow, what a wheel of fire! That's right, we're going broke!"

Edward looked up at the sky, holding his head on purpose. Jane barely held her tongue. He really didn't understand the meaning of the wheel of fire, but, in short, he was trying to get money out of it.

And when Mizuchi started laughing,

"The wheel of fire, huh, do you remember it from Japan, Mr. Edward?"

Edward looked back at Mizuchi and shrugged.

"That's right. My youth was when I was in Japan."

"When were you in "Purgatory"?"

Edward blinked slowly.

The air in the room visibly changed.

The biggest change occurred in Edward's subordinates. The blood rushing out of their faces, they stiffened their bodies to see what Edward looked like. The impatience and fear of the time bomb just before the time limit appeared evenly on their faces.

Edward laid his back on a leather couch and said,

"Did you know?"

"Of course. I am a member of the clan. Like you, I am a former member."

"I..."

Edward's voice was cold and mechanically resonant, as if the joy up to that moment was a lie.

"I'm still from "Purgatory"."

His blue eyes were devilish. As the escort staff tried to prepare themselves, Jane had to keep an eye on them. They shouldn't stimulate Edward there. If he exploded, every one of them would turn to coal.

"Purgatory", the predecessor "Red King", a clan led by Kagutsu Genji, the man who brought about the unprecedented catastrophe that killed 700,000 people in Japan in 1999. His habit was a fierce word, a group of extremely troublesome terrorists who they captured the lives of human beings, whether themselves or others, only on paper.

Edward once belonged to that group. They did not know what his position was. He may have been the bottom end. However, no matter who the members are, it's best to think of them as dangerous while in "Purgatory". Edward's career is a clear testimony of that.

It was not really known if he understood the danger, Mizuchi laughed happily and rotated all three eyeballs.

"I see, are you still from "Purgatory"? The clansmen have died and Kagutsu Genji has disappeared. Still, "Purgatory" still continues?"

"I am alive."

"I see, maybe it's true. You are alive. Even if everyone else dies or you lose the King, "Purgatory" will continue as long as you are alive. Mr. Edward, do you know the new red clan?"

Edward's eyebrows moved sharply. Mizuchi continued talking happily.

"Of course you don't know. You escaped from Japan and came to the United States after the Clan Incident. You then used your abilities to grow up in the underworld of Las Vegas. There is no way you would have known the current situation of the clan in Japan."

Mizuchi looked at Jane. Jane took some documents out of her briefcase and put them on the table. There was a photo and information of Mikoto Suoh and other members of the "Homura" clan.

Edward picked it up with his right hand and began to read.

Eventually, he leaked a tweet that appeared to have been deleted.

"Who is this "Red King"?"

"To tell the truth, I got help from you to beat them up. To the newborn red clan, "Homura"."

Edward looked at the documents with a look that seemed to bite at any moment.

"Unfortunately, all of your members have been sent to the hospital. Well, that's not surprising. After all, the opponent is the 'Red King'. For you who know the former Kagutsu Genji, it's quite profitable as long as you have one life."

The flame burst.

The roaring, burning, distorted, snarling arm of fire was released from Edward's right hand. A fiery hand that reached out to lick the ceiling made a fist in the shape of grabbing Suoh's information documents and slammed into the table. The smell of burning bangs gave Jane a premonition of death.

Edward had a low voice, with his dazzling and murderous blue eyes.

"There is only one "Red King"."

The table turned to ash and shattered, and the store's sprinkler went off. The water mixed with the digestive agent spilled out, and the flame of the extraordinary skill did not go out. Edward's killing intent also burned endlessly. As if it represented the buried fire in his heart.

As he soaked himself, Mizuchi didn't break his smiling demeanor.

"Oh, of course. That's true for you. There is only one "Red King" in the world, the only one in the world: Kagutsu Genji. It doesn't matter if his sword falls and the land of Japan disappears. That's why he can be precious. Kagutsu, who was ruined with hundreds of thousands of lives and laughed out loud, can be called a hero."

Mizuchi leaned forward. The smile disappeared from his lips.

"So, Mr. Edward. Kill Suoh Mikoto."

"Eh?"

Edward's killing intent was about to go towards Mizuchi. Taking it head on, Mizuchi said.

"Perhaps there is only one 'Red King'. So Mikoto Suoh, the existence of the current generation 'Red King' is blasphemy for Kagutsu Genji. In order for him to remain 'King', Mikoto Suoh must be eliminated, right?"

"....."

Edward's flame stopped.

Along with that, the sprinkler too. Edward's eyes, which gathered up his drenched hair and stared at Mizuchi, showed strong discomfort.

"Are you trying to use me?"

Mizuchi smiled.

"Of course. I'm trying to use you, so you should use me too."

He touched his finger. One of the escorts took out the briefcase and placed it in front of Edward.

"It's \$500.000. I'd like you to receive it as an advance payment. If you have any other information or strength you need, I'll always provide it."

Edward looked at the briefcase under his feet as if he was looking at dirty things.

"Why do you want to kill Suoh?"

Mizuchi suddenly laughed.

"I have a personal grudge against Mikoto Suoh, but I'm not trying to get rid of it. I just want to know. How can I kill the King?"

"....."

"Regicide. I'm intellectually curious. It's because of your 'King'. Let's join hands."

Mizuchi extended his right hand.

Edward blinked. The blue eyes alternated between the passion of the beast and the intellect of the person.

After a long patrol, the monster from "Purgatory" took the hand of the third monster.

CHAPTER 6: NO DIED

A funeral procession was marching through the desert.

It was an unknown wasteland, wide, whitish. A group of people dressed in black suits walked in a long line. Everyone's head was lowered and not a single voice could be heard. Silently, solemnly, they walked on.

Ed stared at the show.

—— Wait, me too...!

Ed called them. He should have called them, but no voice came out. Even if he tried to chase after them, his legs didn't move. As if only his awareness was floating there, Ed was numb and just watched the show.

A man with his right ear burned was walking.

A giant with a burned back was walking away.

A man with only the tip of his little finger missing was walking.

And the one who marked the way was...

—— Boss! King!

Frustration and loneliness burned Ed, who was only bound by conscience. He desperately stretched out his non-existent arm, tears overflowing from his non-existent eyes.

—— I refuse! Do not leave me! Me! I also!

Ed was screaming. In a voiceless voice, so voiceless that it would rip his throat out.

Still, the funeral procession did not stop. They walked away. Towards the end of the desert under the scorching sun.

Before long, the funeral procession was sucked past the wavering horizon and disappeared.

Ed was left alone in the place. He no longer spoke, but he was conscious, he crouched in place and began to let out a silent sob.

He looked like a child who had been abandoned by his parents.

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When he woke up, the first thing that jumped into his field of vision was his charred right hand.

"....."

It seems that he was still stretching out his right arm while he slept. A ceiling fan stirred warm air behind the four missing fingers.

With a pop, his right hand fell onto the bed.

"Ed, are you okay?"

He heard a voice right next to him. When he tilted his head, Maria looked at Ed's face with concern. She was a brunette with wavy black hair, her teary eyes looking at Ed.

Maria was Ed's lover. She and Ed were from the same place, so they decided to go out together. He liked the fragrant black hair and the modesty that did not intervene more than necessary.

Still, this time, he was annoyed by the sticky look.

"Noisy."

With a murmur, Ed sat up. Maria leaned over his bare shoulders.

"But, Ed, you were crying."

"....."

When he caressed his cheek with his right thumb, he could definitely feel the dry tears.

"Haha..."

Ed laughed only with his lips and his voice.

"Blood and Flame." - The strongest gang in Las Vegas. The leader of the outlaws who ruled the center of the city with violence, giving a bloodbath to all the Mexican gang killers. A Clansman from "Purgatory", crying over an old dream?

"I'm here. If Takao finds out, he'll laugh at me."

"Eh?"

"Any way at all."

There was no way Maria could understand what he was muttering in Japanese. Ed got out of bed, pulled on jeans and boots, and a biker jacket over his bare upper body.

Maria's restless voice was heard from behind him.

"How about today? Are you coming home?"

"It's work. I won't be home for a while. Do it properly."

The voice that returned without turning around was so harsh that even he could tell. It was an effect of the dream. He hadn't had that dream in a long time, it was clearly the aftermath of yesterday's events.

He was irritated. If he stayed there, he would take out his frustration on Maria. So Ed quickly opened the door and walked out. The Nevada summer sun shone down on Ed as he walked down the stairs of his apartment with a frown on his face.

As he did, he was thinking about yesterday.

—— Mizuchi. That bastard.

Just remembering it made him angry. A bastard snake who investigates people's pasts and tries to use them as he pleases. If it was up to Ed, he would have killed him the second he thought about it. He should have turned that fake scientist to ashes with his supernatural arm on fire.

What kept him from doing it was the word he spoke.

"...\"King Red\"..."

Just by muttering that, an irresistible sense of nostalgia hit Ed.

Kagutsu took Ed to "Purgatory" when he came to Japan at the age of 20 and desperately spent his days as a gunslinger in the underworld. The memories of those days with them still shone brightly inside Ed.

"It was fun, really."

A quiet smile suddenly appeared on Ed's lips.

In the days spent with "Purgatory", Ed lived as he wished. He killed, drank, ate, sang and danced. The number of times he was attacked by "Scepter 4" was countless, and the number of people who died in fights between his friends was endless. Still, those days were definitely fun. People die someday. In that case, do what you want with the people you like and then die. Above all, he was happy that he had the power to do so.

Together with his friends from "Purgatory", he burned his heart, burned his body, raised his fists and turned to ashes as he sang triumphantly. That's all Ed believed.

And in the end, Ed didn't die.

July 11, 1999.

That day the sword of the "King" fell, and the topography of Japan changed. Ed couldn't be on that final battlefield.

Finally running late, Ed ran frantically around the rim of the crater that had nothing on it. Calling out the name of the "King", he called out the names of his allies as far as he knew. If he could do it, he wouldn't mind having faced "Scepter 4" at that time. He was sure they wouldn't mind if he was a little late. Whoever he was, he wanted to fight. Fight, burn his heart and die!

And, as expected, he found no one.

Only death and ruin existed on the rim of the crater. "Scepter 4" seemed to have retired a long time ago, and the Self-Defense Forces and the police were on a business trip to rescue civilians. They mistook Ed as a victim and called him out, so he didn't feel like lighting the flames on them. He knew that such death meant nothing. Still dazed, he turned his back on the crater and began to walk.

More than 10 years have passed since then.

Japan used to be Ed's second hometown, but at the time it was difficult. Leaving Japan, entering the United States illegally, and wandering the country, Ed dabbled in all kinds of wild things. Killing local gangsters and stealing money, he eventually settled in Las Vegas.

No matter how ruthless the gang was, it didn't bring death to Ed. His supernatural abilities solved most of the problems and elevated Ed to a certain position in the underworld.

Still, Ed's heart is still burning.

Ed knew that he didn't survive. He missed out on death.

A miserable man who doesn't die when he should, makes false friends and lovers, and continues to live lazily. Edward The Red, feared throughout Las Vegas, was his true identity.

But...

Ed found out about the existence of Mikoto Suoh.

A new "Red King". Kagutsu's successor.

When Ed found out, he felt a fire running through his burning heart.

There was only one "Red King". Kagutsu Genji was the only "King", and an existence worthy of the name. It was an unforgivable pretense and an insult to call someone else that. At least that's how it was for Ed.

That's why he wanted to kill him. Delete his existence.

The smile that floated on his lips took on a sinister color.

Thinking of that made his heart burn. "Assassinate the King". He couldn't think about that. He didn't know how strong Suoh was, but he knew that the "King" was above the clansmen. Kagutsu Genji, Habari Jin.

—— If Suoh is like them, I would probably be evaporated without even being able to touch him.

It's okay. There is no such thing as attachment to life. The only thing that matters is how you die, and if it's against a "King", you will be able to burn your body and mind to fight him.

A dazzling brilliance for a life that is only burning and waning.

"Haha!"

Ed clapped his hands, laughed, and looked up at the sky. For the first time in 10 years, it was a genuine laugh. His bright blue eyes looked up at the sun and he ran off with a big smile like a child.

"The sun is already high in the sky. It looks like it will be hot again today."

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"Hm, can you start?"

VIP room of the "Pyramid Hotel", Kusanagi's voice had a tense tone that was not suitable for a comfortable room.

To be precise, this company-rented room was so luxurious that it couldn't be compared to the room at the Maroon Hotel where Totsuka and the others had stayed. It is about 50 square meters, has 3 bedrooms and a large LDK, and is fully equipped with a wall to wall screen TV, pool table, slots and even roulette.

Still, no one was excited or grateful. They were all directing a stern look at the person in charge, Tanaka.

"Yes. Now, let me explain."

Tanaka began to speak without hesitation. Totsuka and Kusanagi knew most of the information, but they didn't necessarily share it with everyone.

In particular, their "King" who had just joined them, Suoh Mikoto, should have known almost nothing.

The foreign intelligence department involved in Mizuchi's prison break that happened half a year ago. A trip to Las Vegas was the bait that lured Suoh and the others, and in order to stop him, "Tokijikuin" and "Scepter 4" work together to pick up the "Homura" members left behind in Japan and join them.

Suoh's expression did not change as Tanaka spoke. It was a cold look, like listening to the weather forecast.

"That's the story so far. From now on, I will explain Mizuchi's purpose, which I have analyzed and deduced from his actions so far."

"He's going to kill me."

Suoh's muttered words increased the tension in the room.

Totsuka sighed silently.

Putting the others aside, Anna's body had hardened to the point of pity. It must have been because of Mizuchi, and maybe there was a sense of responsibility that it was a trip she made. Totsuka thought there was no need to feel such a thing, but Anna was not Totsuka.

For the time being, Totsuka shrugged and complained to Suoh.

"King, no matter how many words you say, it's too short. Why do you think that?"

"That's right, so it can't be helped."

Suoh said that bluntly, Tanaka raised a hand.

"Yes. That is consistent with our speculation. The goal of Koushi Mizuchi and the US Intelligence Service is to kill Mikoto Suoh."

"Kill him...?!"

Yata's eyes took on a dangerous tint. Knowing that the other clansmen were also being targeted for their own "King's" life, there was no way they could keep their cool. Totsuka and Kusanagi were no different.

But at least Kusanagi had the responsibility of coordinating the event.

Kusanagi asked, hiding his cold gaze with his sunglasses.

"What is the base?"

"It's his actions. Mizuchi attacked us when we were escaping on the road, with Suoh-san's clansmen. If Mizuchi's purpose was the same as before, to make Anna Kushina "King", he would have done no such thing. The introduction of new weapons and the indiscriminate firing of machine guns, it would not have been surprising if Anna-san lost her life."

Anna's shoulder twitched. Totsuka placed his hand there.

"Why does that mean he's targeting Mikoto?"

"First of all, it is practically impossible to kill the "King" without using supernatural powers. In addition to Weissmann's powerful deviation, he is protected by the clansmen. Still, if we were to plan a "Royal Assassination", we would have to start for eliminating clan members. Reducing the enemy's strength is the basis of good tactics."

The clansmen exchanged glances. As expected, there was no one who was not uneasy. Anger and animosity, they displayed typical "Homura" brutality, showing no mercy towards those who would harm them.

Fujishima raised his hand and asked.

"Are we still being attacked?"

"It's not clear. Although the enemy is the intelligence department, its size and capabilities are unclear. It's not like they can monitor all of Las Vegas. At this stage, this place hasn't been caught, though, it's also a matter of time."

Tanaka then looked at everyone and then looked directly at Suoh.

"Now. With that in mind, I'd like to make another suggestion."

"You mean run away?"

Suoh was ahead of the game again.

The masked smile on Tanaka's face changed slightly. Totsuka didn't know what kind of emotional change it represented.

"Simply put, that is what it means. Even the US Intelligence Service would not be so reckless as to attack you who have returned to Japan. We will remain in this country and do our best to capture Mizuchi. I would like the "Red King" to make a wise decision."

"...Don't be kidding me."

Yata muttered under his breath. He glared at Tanaka with a look of anger and stamped his foot on the ground.

"It's the other side that attacked us. Why do we have to turn around and run after they ruined our trip? It doesn't make sense!"

Kusanagi smiled gently.

"I see. Fushimi-san said the same thing."

"That's right! Hey, listen, Tanaka! We "Homura" have never turned our backs on the enemy! It doesn't matter who the opponent is or where the venue is!"

Tanaka calmly determined Yata's temper. He looked around the room and saw that the other members, including Anna, had the same opinion.

He then fixed his gaze on Suoh.

"Are you sure you're okay with that, "Red King"?"

Suoh had a blank expression on his face. He was looking at Tanaka with the kind of sleepy look he usually gets when he's lying on the couch at the HOMRA bar.

Before long, he said quietly,

"If he comes at me, I'll just crush him."

That's all he replied.

"Ugh," Tanaka let out a sigh. The reason why he can't see the slightest hint of disappointment is probably because he expected that answer from the start.

"Understood. Furthermore, this incident is entirely our fault. We have a duty to ensure your safety. I am arrogant in front of the "King", but please allow us to protect you."

Suoh shrugged and stood up.

"Do what you want. We'll like it too."

After saying that, he headed for the exit of the room. Totsuka asked without thinking.

"King, where are you going?"

"Sake. There was a bar on the top floor."

Without stopping his footsteps, Suoh said that and walked quickly. Totsuka exchanged glances with Kusanagi, who shook his head slightly and followed Suoh.

Thus began the "hidden life" of "Homura".

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"Now for the next news."

The TV was playing a series of images. She had already seen so many images of the road that she was sick of it. Shattered guardrails, bullet holes in the road and "Glass Hopper II" in flames and black smoke.

"Police have confirmed that the shooting on the Great Basin Highway last night was the result of a dispute between local mob groups. According to the Las Vegas Metro Police, the conflict between the local mob and the Mexican mob has escalated in the past few years, and this incident is the result of that."

Jane let out a deep breath and flung herself onto the bed.

It was the first time since the shooting that she could take it easy. Covering up the incident itself, explaining the progress to upper management, appeasing the local police... Cleaning up what happened was Jane's main job at the time.

"Damn that crazy man!"

In helpless rage, Jane slammed a clenched fist on the bed. The bed screeched and Jane took another deep breath.

What was more irritating being the fact that the upper management placed some trust in Mizuchi.

To Jane, who was watching closely, she couldn't believe that he was crazy. Mizuchi is clearly insane. He does not hesitate to provoke firefights in the city, anticipating the

consequences that he would bring, and still calmly tries to kill "Homura". If she had the right to do so, she would have held back or eliminated Mizuchi right then and there.

Nevertheless...

It was also true that Mizuchi's purpose was in line with what the higher-ups saw.

Currently, Japan is an ally of the United States. If the espionage activity is about "technology theft", even if it is exposed, it will be "a debt". Jane thought so, and even when she secured custody of Mizuchi half a year ago, she never imagined that it would become so big.

"So that's the "King Killer"?"

If the matter is exposed, it will undoubtedly become a serious international problem. Jane could never understand top management's idea of taking the risk and still giving the go-ahead. Maybe there was something she didn't know. She had thought that way more than once, but she didn't have the courage to go deeper into the upper steps. Spies are information eaters, but Jane knew very well that certain types of information are poisonous.

No.

If that's the case, wouldn't it spit out information if it was closed?

Just as she was thinking about that, she heard that "guy's" voice from above.

"Hello, Jane! Great news! "Fireworks Master II" has finally been released!"

"Kyaah?!"

With a scream, Jane rolled off the bed. When she directed her confused gaze towards the ceiling of the room, there was a disc floating there. It was an extraordinary new weapon with two rapidly spinning rotors and an eye chamber that blinked red.

"Pyrotechnician II". Mizuchi, who was there, happily began to speak as he met Jane's gaze as silently descended to the ground.

"It took longer than expected to mass-produce alloy purified steel. Although it's an alloy with a different philosophy than 'Glass Hopper II', the engineers here are quite stubborn. Well, basically it's not reasonable to ask people who don't even know what supernatural powers are, that they understand."

"Mizuchi! Don't enter someone's room without permission!"

As Jane yelled with her face flushed with anger, Mizuchi let out a voice as if he had noticed, "Oh!"

"This is rude! It is unacceptable for a gentleman to enter a lady's room without her permission. No, I am so happy that I want to share it with you. Well then, here I am."

"Wait. Sit down, no, stop."

Jane pointed to the desk and sat back on the edge of the bed. Mizuchi said, "Hmm?" As she expressed doubts, he landed "Fireworks Master II" on the desk.

After inhaling and exhaling silently, Jane began.

"You. Are you seriously going to kill Suoh Mikoto?"

She had a feeling that she could see Mizuchi tilting his head in a strange way on the other side of "Fireworks Master II".

"What are you talking about, Jane? Isn't that what was decided as the purpose of the operation from the beginning? A simulation of the "King Killer" and the experiments on it, that's why I called them here in the first place."

"Until stealing supernatural technology, that's fine. It has long been the desire of the military to create supernatural weapons and set up tactics that can be used by those with the probability deviation field of clansmen."

Mizuchi chuckled.

"Fufufufu, that man must be very happy to know that they are so feared by the United States. Fruit of the occultism he devoted himself to in his later years, the superhuman army has become a real threat. They couldn't taste its fruit."

According to the calculations of a group of experts, if a military action against "Tokijikuin" were to take place, it would not be enough to attack a division. Even if there are only a few hundred psychics, more than 10,000 armed soldiers, combat vehicles, and air guns are needed.

"But is it really necessary to go that far? Japan isn't even an imaginary enemy country, it's a friendly country. Summoning an important person in that country to assassinate him, and if it leads to the worst possible outcome... There's even the possibility of a "sovereignty outburst"! For that reason, the entire city may be destroyed! You're trying to repeat the Kagutsu Incident here in Las Vegas!"

At Jane, who yelled pointing her finger, Mizuchi shrugged his shoulders.

"No, Jane. You explained that too. That's why... Las Vegas, the shining jewel of Nevada! Gleaming neon lights, numerous casinos, delicious food and fun attractions. The most amazing thing is that it is surrounded by a desert. Even if the worst outcome you mentioned happens, it will end with minimal damage."

"Still, there will be 10,000 deaths!"

"It would be much better than falling in Los Angeles or Chicago or New York. If you ask me, Kagutsu Genji's mistake was not making Tokyo or Osaka the hypocenter. If you

wanted maximum destruction, you could do that... well, I don't want to know what a madman thinks."

A madman said that and laughed. A cold sweat ran down Jane's back.

That guy was serious.

He was really trying to kill Suoh, trying to bring down his sword. The death of the "King" does not amount to an "outburst of royal authority", but there is a high possibility that it is.

So, what she still didn't understand was the top management's thinking. Why were they trying to carry out a plan equivalent to dropping a hydrogen bomb on their own country? She really didn't understand that.

Mizuchi suddenly said.

"Sure, it's an exaggeration. I don't know what you guys are thinking. After all, that sort of thing happened shortly after the war. Even after half a century, it seems that the memory of pouring cold water on my head, which raised in battle, it has not disappeared yet."

".....?"

"What do you mean by that kind of thing?"

Shortly after the war, that would mean that GHQ was still in control of Japan. At that time, she wondered if there was a history of "pouring cold water on him".

Even after mobilizing all the knowledge that she had cultivated in the intelligence department, she still couldn't think of anything. What was Mizuchi talking about?

Faced with that doubt that was conveyed, Mizuchi said with a smile.

"If that's the case, did you know about Yokohama?"

"....."

"Fufufu. I see. Don't you know, you too? Well, there's nothing you can do about it. Isn't that a stain on the history of the Japanese occupation, a shameful part of the United States that no one wants to touch? No matter how many people there are in the organization, it's natural that there are people who don't know about it."

Jane had never hated Mizuchi as much as she did at that moment.

Information staff are creatures that eat information. Being singled out for ignorance is the same as doubting one's own abilities. With a look of anger, Jane stared at "Fireworks Master II", but what came out of her mouth was the exact opposite of what she thought.

"Ah. If you don't mind, please tell me."

Ignorance is a shame, but letting ignorance go beyond shame is self-denial. Jane should have known. Even if it was poison, if she didn't understand the higher-ups' intentions, she wouldn't be able to protect herself.

"Hmm... The fact that you haven't been informed of that must be because the higher-ups have ulterior motives. Is it okay for me to show you that?"

Unusually, Mizuchi was crisp. It was a matter of routine. Teaching "information you don't need to know" leads to a security clearance violation.

Still, Jane leaned forward and raised a pleading voice.

"Hey, please, Mizuchi. I swore to dedicate myself to my country. But if you don't know what you're really fighting for, you can't risk your life, right?"

It was a line that made her teeth float on their own, but she didn't mean to lie. You get into the dirty work of espionage and all that because you know someone has to. In a world where conspiracies and betrayals run rampant, but what is required of a spy is a loyalty stronger than anyone else.

Does her own justice and the justice of the organization really coincide? Jane had to make sure of that.

"Actually, it's fine. Well then, let me show you. The hidden history of us and your country."

Saying that, Mizuchi began to speak in a low voice.

Finally, even after Mizuchi finished speaking, the room fell into a heavy silence.

"Now you get it, right? Why is "killing the King" so important? Why is top management looking for a way to do it?"

"I see."

The words that came from Jane's lips sounded like someone else's, not hers. He could see that her face was stiff. The fact that she had just been told didn't seem to be true at all, but even so, there was no reason for Mizuchi to lie.

"Fireworks Master II" emerged. He walked past Jane who was sitting on the bed and headed for the exit. Mizumi's cheerful voice resounded from there.

"Fufufufu. I'm glad you were convinced as well. The threat of his "royal authority" is difficult to explain in words. I have no choice but to do so with facts."

Jane called out to the "Fireworks Master II" who was about to leave the room.

"Wait. Mizuchi."

"Hmm? What, are you still asking questions? You need to think for yourself a bit..."

"I understand the thoughts of the upper echelons. The following are your thoughts."

Jane's blue eyes glared sharply. In response, Mizuchi hovered and looked at her with his eye camera.

"You said intellectual curiosity. You didn't hold a grudge against Suoh, you just wanted to know. Is that true?"

"....."

Mizuchi didn't say anything for a while.

From the moment they met until now, it must have been the longest silence. Mizuchi, who had undergone a manic transformation of his personality due to brain damage, never kept quiet.

That's why she was able to put her trust in what he said next.

"Oh, it's true."

Short and heavy, Mizuchi muttered.

"Once upon a time, I tried to create a "King" with my own hands. To advance human evolution, but that proved impossible. Only "Slate" can produce a "King". It is not something that can be wielded by hands human."

The tone sounded like he was talking to someone far away. "Fireworks Master II" couldn't tell her what Mizuchi was looking at the moment.

"Then we must get a countermeasure. If the "King" shows his fangs against a man, the power to crush him. I think it's worth it, no matter the cost."

Mizuchi said that with a smile.

"Leaving those monsters unattended is dangerous and scary, and I can't sleep at night."

And then "Fireworks Master II" suddenly disappeared.

A stealth weapon that uses supernatural power, as she remembered what Mizuchi once said, Jane looked out the window with a gloomy expression.

The night view of Las Vegas stretches on forever and hundreds of thousands of people go about their business under the twinkling lights. They go through their lives with mixed feelings of joy and sadness.

For people to gain the power to resist the "King", is it really permissible to blow up the lives of hundreds of thousands of them?

Jane clenched her fists, she could never find an answer to that question.

CHAPTER 7: RED ENCOUNTER

Fushimi Saruhiko threw himself on the couch by the window.

The night view of Las Vegas extends outside the window. The myriad of flickering neon lights of the casinos, the night shows of the luxurious first class hotels and the bright twinkling stars woven by them were truly a sight worth a million dollars.

However, the beautiful scenery did not heal Fushimi's stagnant eyes.

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

As he rubbed his eyes, Tanaka brought him a cup of coffee. Did he want him to work more? Looking at Tanaka's masked smile, Fushimi took the coffee and started to sip it.

"What is your progress?"

"Thanks to Fushimi-san, things are going well. We have completed the installation of W Vessensors at 17 emergency entrances and exits of the hotel. With this, if a person with supernatural powers or a supernatural weapon breaks into the hotel, we will be able to catch it quickly."

Fushimi snorted. Extraordinary weapon. It sounded ridiculous, but as someone who was actually attacked, he could never make a fool of himself. Considering that those ostrich-shaped robotic weapons could attack en masse, it couldn't be helped to make some preparations.

Fushimi looked around the room over his shoulder.

The interior of the room had been remodeled over the last few days, and it was finished in such a way that the briefing room of "Scepter 4" looked like this. More than 10 monitors are installed on the wall of the room, showing (illegally, of course) images from surveillance cameras located throughout the hotel. While stepping over wires that are so thick that there is no room to step on, the "Tokijikuin" agents wearing the same suits as Tanaka are busy going back and forth, contacting here and there, like a command room in the field of battle.

After taking a sip of coffee, Fushimi asked Tanaka next to him.

"Do you think they found us?"

"It's best to think so. It's been a while since then. Since they're based in Las Vegas, they know what we're doing."

Fushimi narrowed his eyes and began to analyze the force.

The enemy is the US Intelligence Department, the CIA, or the NSA's 100-person non-regular force, plus ridiculous robots. On the other hand, there are more than a dozen

supernatural beings centered around the "Red King". Their personal impressions aside, Kusanagi and Yata have top-notch psychic abilities. Even against a fully armed soldier, it would do nothing.

"The problem is the amount of extraordinary weapons."

Tanaka immediately nodded at Fushimi's murmur.

"[Ostrich]: It's troublesome that we don't know the total number of those bipedal walking weapons. It would be safer to assume there are 10 of them, even if it's a low estimate."

"....."

Fushimi frowned.

At that moment, when the "Ostrich" attacked, almost everyone inside the van was deploying their supernatural fields.

Conventional weapons are ineffective against fields deployed by supernatural beings. The so-called probabilistic deflection field, a force acting on the probabilities of phenomena, deflects bullets from conventional weapons. No matter how much you fire, those bullets just fly in another direction and never hit the psyker's body.

However, the bullets from the "Ostrich" did hit them.

The one who bore witness to that was none other than Tanaka.

"What I was implementing at that time wasn't the probability deviation field. It was my unique ability, the "Coordinate Fixing Zero Point". Fixing the coordinates of a specific object and moving it freely. If I hadn't used that ability, the bullet would have hit me."

That testimony had great meaning.

In other words, the "enemy" possesses weapons that can be used by psychics. He is equipped with a "probability correction bullet" that penetrates the probability deviation field.

"In that case, the logic of the numbers speaks for itself. If all "enemies" were equipped with "probability-modifying bullets" and fired them, even a psyker would quickly turn into a corpse."

"....."

Fushimi's eyebrows deepened at a dangerous angle.

If a single member of "Homura" dies, everything will be over. Suoh Mikoto will never allow it. Even if Las Vegas burns to the ground, even if all US forces turn against him, he will hunt down those who killed his comrades and take revenge.

At that point, Fushimi's mission to "protect world peace" will fail.

"In the end, I guess I have to protect everyone."

When Fushimi said that, Tanaka smiled and nodded.

"It's hard, but that's the way it is. I owe you, Fushimi-san."

Fushimi wanted to throw the coffee at Tanaka. It was originally this guy who brought him to this place. When he opened his mouth trying to say a sarcasm, an alert echoed in the room.

".....!!"

Everyone in the room focused their eyes on the wall monitor.

Sensor W, a device that measures the Weissmann deviation value, reacted to the device that notified when someone passed by. The location is the seventh exit, the northeast exit on the first floor of the casino. Fushimi stared at the monitor, wondering if the enemy had invaded from there, and inadvertently let out a roar of anger.

"What are you doing, Misaki?!"

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Anna's energy was fading with each passing day.

It is possible that the Las Vegas tour that she had done was a trap to attract "Homura". The unanimous opinion was that "that sort of thing has nothing to do with us", and Anna probably understood that too. But often understanding and feeling are different creatures.

Another reason for her lack of energy could be that she was physically isolated from Suoh. Currently, the enemy's target is presumed to be "Suoh Mikoto's assassination", and the area around him is said to be the most dangerous place in Las Vegas. Clansmen with combat power aside, Anna and Totsuka were forbidden to get close to Suoh and had to sleep on another floor with an escort.

It seemed that Anna could take it. She was allowed to move freely within the hotel, but she rarely left her room, and she continued to stare dejectedly out the window.

Yata, of course, was the one who displayed his chivalrous spirit.

"Hi, Anna! Since you're here, why don't you take a walk?"

Anna looked at Yata, who said that with wide eyes. Looking out the window, then looking at Yata again, she murmured.

"But that's it."

"Okay! We're here for sightseeing, right? I don't know if it's Mizuchi or Kizuchi, but it's ridiculous to be worried about someone like that!"

Saying that he would blow him up, Yata lifted the book in his hand. It was an information magazine about Las Vegas that she brought from Japan, and there were sticky notes here and there. Anna's face turned bright red.

"That's mine."

"Anna, you wanted to see a lot of different places, didn't you? You put sticky notes on it and wrote various things. So why don't you go where you want to go?"

Anna frowned with concern. She blinked and looked at the information magazine. "I want to go" and "Is it okay to go?" they floated alternately in her mind.

Yata looked around the room and beckoned to everyone who met his eyes. Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose, and Eric, oddly enough, these are the members who traveled to Las Vegas together with Yata.

Yata rested the handle of the mop that he stole the other day on his shoulder and grinned.

"If you're worried, we'll be your escorts! No matter how many hundreds of robots like that come, we'll turn them all to scrap!"

A faint smile finally appeared on Anna's lips when she saw Yata, who reassured her by patting his chest.

Anna reached out and took Yata's information magazine. She must have memorized it by heart, and when she flip through the pages to show it to everyone, there was an article about a gorgeous hotel and fountain show.

"Every day from 18:00 there is a fountain show at Hotel Varangia. I've always wanted to see that."

Yata looked at his watch. 4:47 p.m. The Varangia Hotel was not far away. If they left now, they would be in time for the show.

Yata smiled sheepishly and gave Anna a thumbs up.

"Alright! Then let's go right now!"

Anna held the information magazine close to her chest and nodded slightly but clearly.

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Las Vegas and Mikoto Suoh are a very incompatible combination.

Suoh had no interest in money or in casinos. It seemed that he had missed most of the meaning of being in Las Vegas, but on top of that, he paid no attention to the attractions and shows. After visiting Las Vegas, it was just to accompany Anna that he looked around him, not of his own volition.

Therefore, although paradoxical, staying at the "Pyramid" hotel was strangely suitable for Suoh. If he asked for alcohol or cigarettes, they would bring them to him. He would take as many naps as he wanted. Suoh probably didn't pay attention to Tanaka's request not to go out, and Kusanagi and Totsuka painfully realized that he was just staying there because he didn't have to.

If Suoh wanted, he would quickly leave the hotel and spend his time however he wanted.

And if an enemy attacked him, he would easily retaliate.

That was becoming the common opinion of everyone, probably including Tanaka and Fushimi. No one can stop the action of the "Red King". When the time comes, he will go quickly.

And that moment came without warning.

The room where Suoh and the others sleep is a VIP room rented by "Tokijikuin". Luxurious furniture forms a line and of course there is also a bar counter with equipment in the room.

Suoh drank at the rooftop bar only on the first day, other than that, he mainly drank at the bar in his room. Suoh, who was enjoying sake and cigarettes with Kusanagi as the bartender, suddenly looked away from the window, maybe because he was familiar with the taste of HOMRA, or maybe because he got tired of going all the way to the top floor.

"Do you want to hang out?"

He said it in a low voice.

Before Kusanagi could say anything, Suoh grabbed a box of cigarettes and a lighter and stood up. He quickly emptied half of the whiskey that was left in his glass and walked out of the room. Kusanagi panicked and called out to him.

"Wait, Mikoto! Where are you going?"

"A walk."

Suoh's words were short and to the point. Kusanagi exhaled silently, at which point his thoughts had already formed. He shrugged lightly and followed Suoh.

When he came out into the hotel corridor, Fushimi was about to come running.

As soon as he saw Suoh, he flinched and stopped walking. Kusanagi suppressed his laughter at the danger. Did he feel a bit sorry for the change from "Homura" to "Scepter 4"? Suoh didn't mind at all, but his gaze seemed to linger on Fushimi.

Kusanagi gently called out to the tense Fushimi.

"What's wrong, Fushimi? Did something happen?"

"That guy... Yata came out by himself. I'm going to stop him."

"Ah, I don't know what to say, but let's go for a walk too. It's okay."

"Huh?! What are you talking about, Kusanagi-san?"

He ignored Suoh and walk towards the elevator hall. Kusanagi waved his hand lightly on his back and followed him. It wasn't that he didn't feel sorry for Fushimi, but it wasn't something Kusanagi should care about.

After going down to the first floor, the two crossed the lobby with the casino floor on their sides and walked out. The indigo color was beginning to blend into the twilight sky and it would be completely dark in another hour. Suoh and Kusanagi walked through the crowd of tourists with different skin tones.

Suoh's footsteps were in no hurry, and the expression that he was just strolling was perfect. He entered the park and walk while stepping on the shade of the green trees. He stopped at a hot dog cart on the way and bought one with sauce. Kusanagi also bought one.

Before long, Suoh sat down on a bench in the shade of a tree and started eating his hot dog.

Kusanagi did not ask where he was going. He just kept pace with Suoh. If it was just a ride, it was fine. If he had another purpose, he would stick with it. That was it.

As the two of them ate their hot dogs, the darkness of night began to fall.

Suoh, who was licking the sauce off his fingers, suddenly looked up.

At that moment, Kusanagi finally realized it.

There was something there.

After dark, the park was sparsely populated. A jogger passing while listening to music, a family walking home from a casino, a street performer running downtown, but they weren't. There was no one in sight to pay attention to two Asian men lounging on a park bench.

That's what it looked like.

Suoh stood up as people stopped coming and going.

He took a few steps forward with one hand in his pocket. He put his other hand on his neck and punched.

An explosive aura was emitted from Suoh's body.

A storm-like aura that appeared locally blew around Suoh in a radius of about 5 meters. Leaves flew from the trees, trash cans tipped over, and some crashed to the ground with a shorting sound.

Due to the aura that had been displayed in advance, Kusanagi passed through Suoh's "bullying" and left the bench to approach the fallen object.

"What is this?"

He raised his eyebrows and crouched down beside it.

It looked like a disk. It was a shiny silver machine, about 50 cm wide, top mounted.

Judging by the attached propeller, it was probably something like a drone, but...

The strange thing was that the "disk" sometimes became transparent.

Repeatedly turning transparent and non-transparent like a flickering light bulb. Because it broke down due to "Intimidation", it was probably originally floating around them while it was transparent.

Kusanagi stood up and looked at Suoh.

"Is this the guy you were wondering about?"

"Yes. I've been looking at it since yesterday. It's just an eyesore."

Kusanagi was amazed, but at the same time convinced. Even before becoming "King", Suoh possessed the feeling of a wild beast. It would not be strange if he was sensitive to the gaze of an invisible "something".

But other than that,

"You know. Say that beforehand and then move on."

"Even if you say so, it can't be helped. The quickest way is to destroy it."

"Are you a barbarian?"

When he picked up the broken "disc", it was much lighter than it appeared. It was probably a companion to the "supernatural weapon" that Totsuka and others were talking about. They said they were attacked by an ostrich-like bipedal robot, but because this "disc" has a camera in its eye, it could be a reconnaissance weapon equipped with stealth capabilities.

When...

The "disk" stopped becoming transparent.

At the same time, the eye chamber lit up red. Chi-chi-chi-chi--, while blinking at short intervals, it gradually became faster, like when a creature's heartbeat speeds up when it dies.

A bad feeling ran down his spine.

At this time, Suoh's toes were already lifting the "disc".

The "disc" jumped almost at a right angle to the ground, spinning in the air, it spread flashy flames and exploded grandly.

"Uh...!"

Kusanagi quickly covered his face with his arms to block the blast. Burnt electronics and screws rained down over their heads, falling into the fountains and creating small columns of water.

After letting it go, Kusanagi cursed.

"It even has a self-destruct function! What a dangerous thing...!"

"You are too careless."

He glared at Suoh who said that rudely, but there was no room for objection. The enemy was trying to kill them. Even if it was a reconnaissance weapon, it should have been expected to be loaded with weapons.

That said, Kusanagi also had something to say.

"No way, I thought of giving it to the "Tokijikuin" people. I thought if those people could analyze it, it would be a bit more advantageous."

Since it self-destructed, there was nothing that could be done to give it to them. Kusanagi sighed, Suoh smiled only at the corner of his mouth.

"Then don't be busy from now on."

"What?"

Right after Kusanagi asked again...

Three pieces of iron fell from the sky.

With an earth-shattering roar, the hunk of iron landed and aimed its red-eyed camera at Suoh and Kusanagi. It was a special weapon with the same shape as the one that chased Totsuka and the others, with bipods and a machine gun: "Ostrich".

They formed a triangle centered on Suoh and Kusanagi, stepping at exactly the same time with their feet of steel.

The machine gun began to rotate slowly. While all three guns were pointed at him, Suoh muttered in his usual tone.

"There's no shortage of things to do with analysis, right?"

Suoh's smile turned into a fierce one, like a lion facing prey from him.

+++++

The restaurant "Fontaine" was full of people.

The Varangia Hotel's fountain show has become one of the specialties of Las Vegas for its magnificent and beautiful performance. The show itself is free, but if you want to take your time and enjoy the food, you'll have to go to a restaurant affiliated with the hotel, like Fontaine, and order incredibly expensive dishes.

Right now, Yata and the others are in danger. Even if you ignore the fact that it's tourist area pricing, the amount of money Yata can live on for three days is tiered on the menu. Kamamoto, Chitose, Bando, and Eric craned their necks and looked at the menu, frowning.

Anna, who was sitting in front of them, said anxiously.

"Misaki? I'm not hungry..."

At the same time, Yata and the others turned their faces away from the menu and smiled widely.

"No, what are you talking about Anna? Order whatever you want, I'm sure everything is delicious!"

"No..."

Receiving the menu in confusion, Anna began to read it. Meanwhile, Yata and the others put their foreheads together.

"Hey. How much do you have now?"

"About \$50. I didn't expect it to be this expensive..."

"Ok. Let's go ask Anna what she likes and we'll stick with the cheapest soup."

"Hey! Does the ribeye here look that good?!"

"Kamamoto, you are noisy. There is no money to buy something like that. Drink water from the fountain and bear it."

Fortunately, Anna did not find out about the unfortunate conversation they exchanged in secret. She lowered the menu and pointed to a large photo with glowing eyes.

"Can I order this Las Vegas Raspberry Night Parfait?"

The majestic parfait, like an imposing tower, has an incredible price of \$45.

If this was a tourist spot in Japan, and if Anna wasn't in front of them, he would have called the store clerk, he would have grabbed him by the lapels, cursed at him, and left the store. Yata desperately resisted the urge and smiled.

"Oh! Is that enough? Don't stop!"

Anna gently shook her head.

"Maybe I can't eat it alone. Shall we eat together?"

"Anna..."

Kamamoto was the only one who was touched by her kindness, and Yata and the others looked down embarrassed that the girl had seen through their financial situation, well apart from that the fountain show started as soon as they brought all dishes.

"Wow...!"

Even Yata, who had been complaining in his heart about it, couldn't help but look at it with wide eyes.

Water and light emerged from the center of a large fountain that looked like a small baseball field. The start was smooth, and with the magnificent classical music, the thread-thin water began to spin in a spiral.

Under the indigo sky, the lights buried under the surface of the water gracefully illuminated the splendidly dancing column of water. White, blue, and red, the lights that shone in various colors were like water fairies dancing in lustrous dresses.

Anna, who was watching the show, muttered.

"Beautiful red."

Yata looked at Anna for a moment, then smiled and nodded. Anna wasn't looking at him, but seeing her reassuring profile made him very happy to be there.

Classical music gradually rose. At the same time, the water column was thick and large, changing the atmosphere from elegant to majestic. A mist of water rose up for a moment, and as if blowing on it, a gigantic column of water came out of the water. A water fairy that danced gracefully and sweetly suddenly turned into a majestic and spectacular water giant, that was the impression he got.

The surrounding tourists also let out sighs and cheers as they admired the magnificent view.

Among them, Yata noticed a man approaching.

Dark skin and deeply chiseled features. A black biker jacket worn directly on bare skin and black gloves. Seeing that cheerful smile on his lips, Yata involuntarily raised his voice.

"You are Ed! What a coincidence, to find yourself in a place like this!"

"Oh, Misaki! Long time no see! Looks like you've been doing well!"

Anna, Kamamoto and the others seemed to have noticed Ed's presence, smiling and opening their arms. Seeing the tall Latin American man, Kamamoto and the others bowed their heads, and Anna's face suddenly stiffened.

Yata did not notice that. Laughing, he introduced Ed.

"This boy is Ed! He picked me up in the desert. He saved my life!"

"Hahahaha! Misaki, you're exaggerating! When you're in trouble, you can ask for help even in Japan, right? I just did the obvious!"

"Well, I don't really know, but... well, sit down."

"Oh, thank you! Then don't hesitate!"

Ed sat down in a chair and crossed his legs. Yata noticed that Anna had subtly distanced herself from him.

"By the way, what's up, Ed? Are you a tourist too?"

"Hmm, no, you're wrong. I'm not saying it's a job, but, I'm looking for someone. I thought Misaki would know."

"Huh? Why me?"

Ed said with a smile on his face.

"Mikoto Suoh. Where is he?"

Everyone was speechless as they looked at Ed.

Ed put his arms on the table and poked his face out. With an innocent tone like a child begging for something.

"The same hotel as Misaki and the others? So can you tell me where you're staying? In exchange, I'll let Misaki and the others go."

"You..."

The show reached its climax. The column of water erupted with even greater magnificence, and the light shone in various ways to color it. Catching the kaleidoscope of water and light out of the corner of his eye, however, what came out of Yata's mouth was a dry voice.

"A servant of Mizuchi?"

He could feel Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose and Eric getting nervous. Ed made a rather surprised face and waved his hands exaggeratedly.

"No, no! I don't care about that guy! The only person I want to see is Mikoto Suoh!"

"What are you going to do when you meet Mikoto-san?"

Ed gave a short answer with a fierce smile that was probably his true nature.

"I will kill him."

Anna's body trembled. As he looked at her with rather affectionate eyes, Ed said:

"There is only one "Red King". I can't do anything more than that. So I will kill him. Get rid of this world. If I don't do that, I won't be able to fight everyone either."

They had no idea what he was talking about.

But there was no need to understand. There was only one thing to understand.

In other words, this guy is an enemy.

"I have nothing to teach you."

Ed showed no disappointment at his hostile words. "Hmm," he murmured, leaning his long back against the seatback and looking up at the ceiling.

"So if I kill them, will Mikoto Suoh show up too?"

(Try it!)

Just as he was about to say that, an angry voice resounded.

"Misaki! What are you doing?!"

Confused, he inadvertently looked away from Ed.

Fushimi was standing at the entrance of the store. With an angry expression on his face, he approached them with long strides while several "Tokijikuin" agents followed him. Ed looked at that too.

His blue eyes widened.

Fushimi didn't care about that, he walked over to the table and slapped him. He muttered under his breath while throwing an angry look at Yata.

"Don't leave the hotel, I've told you over and over again...! Has your brain degenerated to the point where you can't protect yourself? When idiots get along with each other, isn't it just that idiots move and become more and more idiotic?"

"...Saru. Now..."

"Hurry up and get out. Let's go back to the hotel. Even if it's Miko-..., Suoh Mikoto went and ruined it. I don't have time to take care of you."

Yata started and looked back at Fushimi. Just as he was about to ask him what it was that had messed up...

"Puff."

Suddenly, such a voice resounded.

"Hahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

It was Ed.

Leaning down, holding his stomach, he laughed as if he couldn't stand it. He slammed the table with his black-gloved right hand, and the parfait fell on impact and spilled onto the floor.

The surrounding tourists shifted their gaze from the show to Ed, wondering what was going on. But he didn't care about those things, and he was spreading laughter.

"Hahahahahahahahahahaha! What is this? Why do the blue and red clans get along so well? Huh?! What kind of joke is this?!"

Yata did not understand the cries in English. But there was something he could understand.

This man was not laughing, only his unbearable hatred and anger burst into laughter.

Dazzling eyes with murderous intent pierced Yata head-on.

"How stupid! These bastards are from the Red Clan?! What else? Taking a girl and eating a parfait, there's no way I can accept the bastards who are good friends with the blue clothes!"

Flames erupted from Ed's right hand.

An oddly long arm-shaped flame that rose high enough to lick the ceiling shattered the table with its force, scattering shards and sparks throughout the restaurant.

CHAPTER 8: LAS VEGAS IS BURNING

Mizuchi was lying on the reclining chair and was in an extremely relaxed state of mind.

He put his hands on his dirty lab coat and used his fingers to tap out the rhythm. From the old gramophone, "The Arlesian Woman" Suite 2, No. 4, Georges Bizet's "Farandole", or "The King's March".

Mizuchi stared at him as he indulged in clever classical music.

The battle scene was projected directly into his brain through the eye camera, the image of the "Red King" destroying the "Grasshopper II" and the others.

"Fufufu, fufufufufufufufufu~"

With trembling shoulders, Mizuchi laughed, letting out a giggly voice. But he wasn't actually laughing. An uncontrollable torrent of emotions was causing such a physical reaction.

Suoh was beautiful.

Like a flexible carnivore, he ran, jumped, swung, and knocked down. With just that, the masterpiece created by Mizuchi quickly turned to scrap. That is why he is the "King" of "Kings". The overwhelming combat power was beyond the reach of extraordinary weapons.

Mizuchi looked "up".

There was nothing there. Not even a fragment of the "Sword of Damocles", the supernatural sword that appears when the "King" draws all his power.

Mizuchi once again tried to let out a laugh-like voice.

"Units 15 and 16 have stopped working! Unit 17's right leg actuator is not receiving signals."

"Doctor! Permission to withdraw!"

He was brought back to reality by the rude scream.

He slowly got up from the recliner and looked around. The three eyeballs captured the figures of the operators who gulped and skipped eye contact.

Mizuchi let out a yawn. One of the operators looked at him,

"Ah, Doctor..."

"What time is it?"

"Eh?"

"The time from the beginning of the battle until now. How long has it been?"

As expected, the American military operator didn't repeat useless questions. He took a quick look at the screen and announcement.

"It's 5 minutes and 47 seconds."

"Hmm. It took five minutes. I see."

Suoh's image was still reflected in Mizuchi's brain. He tore off Unit 16's right leg and used it as a makeshift club to attack Unit 17. Unit 17 fired machine guns as they retreated, but all of them were repelled by the rising aura and the chamber was filled with chunks of iron.

"Unit 17 has stopped working."

Silence descended on the control room at the same time that the operator murmured.

In the midst of that, Mizuchi approached the console with light steps and began to operate it over the operator's shoulder. He downloaded the battle log of how the situation was on his own HUD. He knew very well that scientific progress cannot be achieved without the accumulation of countless failures.

A harsh voice was released from behind them.

"How can you be so cheerful while wasting millions of tax dollars, Mizuchi?"

"Kyuin", the eye camera rotated backwards. It was Jane. Her blue eyes were filled with anger. Mizuchi raised both his hands quite happily.

"Are you in a bad mood, Jane? Did you hear anything from upstairs?"

"It's the other way around. I don't like the fact that the top doesn't say anything about this strategy."

Mizuchi's second eye camera was pointed at Jane. It was due to Mizuchi's intention to record the beautiful spy's anger and frustration in as much detail as possible.

"I will use three "Grasshopper II" to stop Suoh, and in the meantime I'll attack the enemy base. Is something wrong? Defeating each one is the beginning of the tactic, isn't it?"

"This one has been individually destroyed. The "Pyramid" raid has just started, but Suoh already destroyed three of our planes. I'll get them back soon."

"In that case, we have to move forward with the attack. Unfortunately, the AW Anti-Weismann bullet didn't work against the "King". However, against a Clansman, it will be effective enough."

Emotions other than anger and frustration surfaced in Jane's eyes.

With the corners of his mouth turned up, Mizuchi laughed.

"Oh, wow... I wonder if you, who are a CIA agent, are scared? It's not a big deal, is it? Didn't you guys play "March to the Sea" once, too?"

Jane responded with a groan.

"Are you going to start the Civil War again...?! It's insane to sacrifice 2 million people who live in the greater Las Vegas area!"

"That's why it's effective, isn't it? Oh, you can see, Suoh has a certain humanity. People who aren't relatives can be stressful for him... Fufufu."

Mizuchi shook his shoulders and then, with unsteady steps, headed for the exit of the control room.

"Continue to stop Suoh. I should be able to earn a decent amount of time by doing the battle model of "Fireworks Master II". In that gap, if someone kills even a "Homura" clan member, that will complete the first stage of the operation."

Jane's beautiful face distorted with pain. Mizuchi walked out of the control room as he recorded it with two eye cameras.

What they are trying to do is a scorched earth strategy.

A lavish scorched-earth strategy set in the entertainment city of Las Vegas. The goal is to exhaust the "Red King" Suoh Mikoto as much as possible. To do that, the first thing he needed was to target the red Clansman. After the Clansman was killed, he would chase after them without thinking of the damage to his surroundings. While running away from him, Mizuchi and the others would use defense nets and traps to intercept Suoh.

It is unknown how many civilians would be affected. Mizuchi rather hopes that the damage will deal damage to Suoh Mikoto's heart.

That man isn't Genji Kagutsu, he is a monster that has not fully become a monster.

"Otherwise, our purpose will not be fulfilled. Hey, right?"

Speaking into the void, Mizuchi nodded in satisfaction and activated the communication function of the HUD.

"It's me. What's going on with that one?"

"The final functional test is complete, Doctor. You can leave at any time."

"Very well. I'll go there from now on. Prepare for departure."

Walking briskly down the corridor, Mizuchi laughed softly again, then suddenly realized it and opened the strategy map.

A map unfolding around the "Pyramid" was born in the corner of his vision. At a point about 2 km north of the "Pyramid", a marker appeared that meant "Engagement with enemies". Reading the meaning engraved there, Mizuchi cried out with deep emotion.

"Oh, Mr. Edward! What a splendid moment! Will it be wild intuition or Genji Kagutsu's guidance? Fufufufufu, alright, let your life shine to your heart's content!"

"Eh?"

The operator, whose call was still connected, raised a suspicious voice. Without answering that, Mizuchi let out a laugh and increased the speed of his walk.

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One of the reasons Tanaka chose the "Pyramid" as his base was the lack of a helipad.

Although "Tokijikuin" has a world-class organizational strength, there are a number of restrictions on its overseas activities. Interference with the sky was one of them, and it was impossible to align the legs of the helicopters in such a short time.

Therefore, Tanaka truncated the sky. No helipad means no enemies in the air. If it's just a ground battle, it can be dealt with only by a person with special abilities. He had those thoughts, but...

It seems that the enemy's intentions were beyond Tanaka's.

"3 helicopters confirmed in the sky! Judging from the shape, the model number appears to be CH49!"

"Six confirmed supernatural weapons at the bottom of the helicopter! They're closing in here!"

Hearing the reports one after another, Tanaka took a deep breath.

Tanaka's expectations were off. They easily jumped over what they had predicted "wouldn't get that far".

This is a clear "military action". If such an action were to take place in the United States, and in Las Vegas, which is a world-famous tourist destination, it would certainly cause a commotion like hitting a honeycomb. Did US government officials foresee this? After going this far, why did he have to plan to "kill the King"?

Tanaka let out a flurry of questions as soon as he exhaled.

"Prepare to escape. Prioritize the protection of the "Homura" members. I will accompany you."

"Understood!"

As the "Tokijikuin" agents began to move at a breakneck pace, Tanaka loosened his tie and tossed it aside as he walked. For the rest of the time, no formalities were required.

When he came out of the corridor, the first thing he saw was the "Homura" member. Totsuka Tatara. Despite being an executive of "Homura", he is a rare existence that is almost the weakest. When he met Tanaka, he smiled.

"Could it be that we are being attacked?"

Tanaka narrowed his eyes and bowed deeply.

"Yes. The enemy seems to have used much bolder methods than he had supposed. Currently, three military helicopters and six "ostriches" have been confirmed in the sky. Urgently, we must escape from this hideout."

Blamed and abused for his own mistakes, Tanaka made a decision.

"Ok. Then I'll tell everyone."

Totsuka said that lightly and went back to his room.

Slightly surprised, Tanaka followed him. Akagi, Dewa, and Fujishima stayed in the suite. Other members were reported to have gone out without permission. Totsuka quickly explained to them.

"That's why we have to escape immediately. Ah, Tanaka-san, do we have time to carry our luggage?"

"No. I want you to evacuate as soon as possible."

When he said that, Dewa let out a sigh.

"Really? I should have done it after buying souvenirs..."

"That's why I told you. Take your luggage."

"Would you like to go fast?"

Fujishima and Akagi also began to rush out of the room. At that quick action, Tanaka blinked.

"How should I put it... everyone, are you used to this kind of situation?"

"Ahaha.", Totsuka laughed.

"It's not like I'm used to it, but we are "Homura"."

Seeing his back leave, Tanaka slightly changed his perception of "Homura".

In an instant, the window exploded.

".....?!"

The "Pyramid" is, as its name suggests, a strange hotel in the shape of a square pyramid. All rooms are located outside and the entire exterior wall is made of tilted glass.

Multiple "ostriches" broke the window glass on one side and invaded.

It took less than a few seconds for the machine gun to lock onto Tanaka and begin firing.

"Eh?!"

Tanaka's arms, which were clad in a golden aura, activated a special ability. "Fixed Zero Point Coordinate". By designating a specific space, all existing kinetic energy in that space is fixed. Tanaka unfolded it in front of him like an absolute shield, trapping all the machine gun bullets, which would hit hundreds of times per second.

In response to that, one of the "ostriches" began to circle to the right.

"Kuh...!"

Tanaka distorted his face and watched his behavior with sideways glances. Tanaka cannot move while "Coordinate Lock" is active. If he gets shot around a specific space, he can't avoid it.

Meanwhile, the "ostrich" stomped on the couch and kicked over the pool table. A machine gun aimed at Tanaka's side.

"Oh, shit!"

Akagi jumped with a determined voice.

A bright red fist hit the "ostrich's" barrel. The blow rocked the turret, and at the same time the machine gun began to fire. Another "ostrich" that was pierced by the bullet jumped onto his knees as he short-circuited and collapsed on the spot.

"Tanaka-san, keep it up!"

Dewa and Fujishima began to run, brushing past Tanaka's flanks. They lowered their bodies until they barely touched the ground and slipped under the "ostrich's" feet.

The "ostrich" conveyed the pilot's confusion in the remote area. Machine guns protruding forward naturally had a limited angle of depression. That gun couldn't shoot straight down.

"Uh... oooooooooohhh!"

Dewa and Fujishima simultaneously grabbed one leg of the "ostrich" and began to lift it up. The glow of supernatural power that covered their entire bodies became dazzlingly strong. As they were, they turned the "ostrich" on its side. A huge steel leg fluttered through the air and the machine gun fired randomly.

"Wow, amazing!"

"Get down, get down!"

Totsuka slipped past the arguing "Homura" members and took a step forward. A phosphorescent red light flew out of both of his hands. Flaming butterflies created with his supernatural powers. They passed through the incredibly random bullets and were sucked into the barrel of the machine gun.

There was a momentary pause.

Then, the three "ostriches" burst out with a roar.

By this time, everyone, including Tanaka, had already left the suite. He endured the impact and the roar that shook his eardrums as he lay down on the ground.

Finally, after everyone calmed down, they got up.

"For now, is this safe?"

Wiping the soot from his cheeks with the back of his hand, Totsuka said that calmly. Akagi nodded, while Dewa and Fujishima looked around.

"Tanaka-san, are there other people attacking us still?"

"I'm worried about Yata-san and the others. I think they'll be fine, but..."

"Can we join them too? Dewa, can you contact them?"

"Ok, I will try."

This time, Tanaka let out a sigh of admiration at the customary exchange.

Clan members aren't necessarily used to rough stuff. Even if they have a power that far exceeds that of ordinary people, it is common for psychics to be unable to do anything due to confusion.

However, that doesn't seem to be the case with "Homura". Either because they have overcome many crises, or because of their strong convictions, they seem able to move with precision even in danger, just like veteran soldiers.

When he tried to praise them out loud, he heard a voice yelling through the headphones in his ear.

"Captain! Enemy reinforcements! Eight more supernatural weapons confirmed! We're surrounded! Order us to stand down!"

Tanaka let out a sigh.

They aren't "rabbits", they are just "Tokijikuin" agents, and their special abilities are not suitable for battle. Besides, it would be better to think that being so upset is useless.

"Bad news for everyone. The enemy has sent more reinforcements. We are surrounded by 11 "ostriches" in total. We must leave here now."

Just as he was about to say that, the door to the suite across the street turned into a honeycomb and flew. Two "ostriches" peeked out from inside, and Tanaka and the others ran back to his room before they could say anything.

A second later, a hail of bullets ripped through the hallway. Tanaka closed the door and fixed it... or at least prevented anyone from coming through the door.

But, if things continue like this, they will eventually be surrounded and annihilated.

The exit had already been blocked. Would it be possible for him to launch a desperate suicide attack and destroy those two bodies? There are 11 newly confirmed "ostriches". To protect "Homura" from them, strength is absolutely insufficient.

"Tanaka-san, Tanaka-san."

Totsuka pushed Tanaka's shoulder. Tanaka frowned and looked at Totsuka.

"What are you doing? Let's run away quickly."

"Eh?"

Tanaka was confused for a moment. Along with Izumo Kusanagi, Totsuka is seen as the brains of "Homura". He shouldn't have known the current situation, but...

However, Totsuka pointed behind himself with a soft smile on his face.

"If it's an exit, it's right there."

Tanaka remained silent and stared at him.

Surely. Speaking of a way out, it's a way out.

A 130-meter-high windblown window that was destroyed by an "ostrich" attack... it was possible for a psychic to escape from there.

+++++

Inside the Fontaine store, screams and confusion erupted.

The shattered pieces of the table burst into flames and spread in all directions. The tourists, who were watching the show in peace, were caught in the shrapnel like bullets and collapsed in pain.

However, Yata had no time to worry about such things, because he could feel the immeasurable threat of the man in front of him, who had suddenly changed.

"Protect Anna!"

Screaming, Yata jumped. The mop handle in his hand was wrapped in a red supernatural ability, and he waved it at Ed with all his might.

A blow that would have easily destroyed the skull of an ordinary human was blocked only by Ed's left hand.

".....!"

"Hahaha... Are you going to attack right now?"

Baring his fangs at him, Ed laughed. As he firmly held the mop in his left hand, he swung the long arm of flame.

(Eating this guy is bad!)

An intuition flashed through Yata's mind. He quickly dropped the mop and crossed his arms in front of his face.

A glowing fist of fire struck the center of him.

Yata's body flew out with a jet-like flame.

Yata was thrown into the sky on top of a large fountain, shattering the window glass, along with a piece of glass that sparkled and reflected the light. The ever-changing night sky of Las Vegas, the glitter of the hotel, the column of water that still spouted and the arms of fire.

"Hahahahahahahahaha!!"

While he was laughing like crazy, Ed launched a follow-up attack on Yata. Yata spun his body in the air, narrowly avoiding the arm trying to wrap around him as he whipped around.

He fell backwards onto the center stage of the fountain.

"Hahaha...!"

Ed landed a few feet away. With his long arms of billowing flame, his face no longer held a smile as he rose to his feet.

"Haaah... You're weak, Misaki. Are you from the Red Clan? Really?"

Yata stood up as he caught his breath. He looked at Ed, who wasn't even trying to hide his disappointment from him, and yelled.

"What's wrong with you?! What the hell is that power?! Pressure?!"

"Misaki, are you not only weak, but also foolish? You've been saying that for a while. I'm Edward the Red, a member of the Red Clan "Purgatory"."

".....?!"

As far as Yata knows, there is only one red clan. "Homura", to which he belongs, is the only Red Clan.

However, Yata also knew that "Homura" was not the first Red Clan.

The "kings" appeared about half a century ago. The clans have existed ever since, and those clans continued as long as the "King" lived, and most of them disappeared with the "King's" death.

In other words, Ed was...

"Are you the survivor of the previous Red Clan...?"

"Previous, huh?"

Ed's dark expression was filled with killing intent that stung the air.

"We, "Purgatory", are the only red clan in the world. This is proof."

Lifting the scar on his right hand, Ed muttered. The flames that erupted from the burned wounds turned into arms and hit the stage.

"So, Misaki. I can't let you and Mikoto Suoh live. If I left a fake monster like you alone, I would be crushed by the boss in the other world!"

A long arm of fire closed in on Yata at the speed of a snake aiming for prey from him.

"Tsk...!"

With a click of his tongue, Yata managed to dodge it. Even though he was on the fountain stage, it was annoying being submerged up to his shins. Since his mobility had been reduced, the other side with reach had more of an advantage.

Just as he was thinking of a countermeasure, water gushed out from directly below.

As if to divide Yata and Ed, the column of water rose one after another, and the color of the spotlight illuminated it beautifully. The fountain show at the Varangia hotel continued. A column of water that gushed high in the sky obscured the view and Ed was no longer visible. Yata put his fists in a red aura and remained vigilant.

An arm of flame reached out, piercing the column of water.

"Kuh!"

Pounding his fists at him, Yata ward off the blow. It was a heavy blow that could have broken his body if he let his guard down. Arm long as he was, he returned to the other side of the water column while kicking up thick steam.

Yata gritted his teeth as he grew warier of the unseen Ed.

(This guy is strong...!)

As the vanguard of "Homura", Yata has overcome many difficult times. Among them, Ed would definitely be a first class skill. Along with his raging passion, he possesses a veteran combat mentality that cannot be underestimated.

(Or maybe he is stronger than me.)

But... he couldn't afford to lose.

Just as Ed is proud of "Purgatory", Yata is also proud to be a member of "Homura". No matter what the survivors of the past say, he cannot give in. "Homura" is the only Red Clan, and Yata is a member of the clan, defeat would dirty the Clan's billboard.

"That's why I'm going to win...!"

He took a deep breath and let it out. The red supernatural power that inhabited in both of his hands began to shine brighter.

The next blow would be victory. A long-range attack has a big hole in the chest. Yata imagined that scene, slipping under his long arm and throwing his fist at Ed.

At that moment, the flames spread towards Yata's face again.

"Eh?!"

With a momentary sigh, Yata slipped through the blow. He had an ache from the heat in his temples, but not enough to stop him. Yata jumped onto the pillar of the spouting fountain.

A flaming hand grabbed Yata's neck.

"Gah...!"

As he slowly burned his neck, his long arm of fire grabbed Yata's neck and lifted him into the air. Ed smiled as he looked at Yata, who was kicking his legs.

"You're really dumb, Misaki. If you think about it, you can predict the feint of the fireball, right? Well, it might be impossible for a sweetie like you."

The pressure on his neck was getting stronger. It was as if he was about to break his cervical vertebrae along with the guard that was barely stretched by his supernatural power.

"Well. Don't worry, I'll send you to your friends later...!"

Yata heard the sound of his bones crunching from within. Yata gritted his teeth and tried to close his eyes.

The long arm of flames was severed from the wrist.

"Ah...?"

The superpower vanished into thin air and disappeared, and Yata, who had lost support, fell. A figure walked past Yata, who was coughing violently.

The human figure was Fushimi Saruhiko, who rested his saber on his shoulder and let out a deep breath.

"Exactly. You're right. This damn idiot's stupidity is guaranteed."

A growl escaped the back of Ed's throat.

"Scepter 4..."

"Well, I'm as unlucky as this guy's head. On the orders of my unreasonable boss, I traveled to Las Vegas to find a silly charm. Really, I don't like all this at all, but..."

He then pointed the tip of his saber at Ed and said in a disgusted voice.

"This is also a job."

CHAPTER 9: DELIRIUM

Maria Reyes sat on the bed and looked at the PDA.

She tapped on the "Edward" entry in the contact list and tried to make a call. Maria had been repeating that action over and over for a while now. The reason she always gives up is because Ed told her not to contact him during work.

Maria has never broken that ban. She knew that it was her submission that allowed her to remain the lover of Edward the Red, the infamous Las Vegas gang member. Unprecedented and cheerful, cruel and childish. Maria understood Ed's characteristics and she loved him too.

That's why she Maria knew that Ed's cheerful behavior was nothing more than a pretext. In its depths lay a dark void that no one could touch.

Before waking up, during the meal, after the adventure, Maria watched Ed's dark face carefully, from time to time, as the void appeared. Maria didn't do the foolish thing to ask what it was. Only then would she be able to continue living that way.

But...

Maria looked at the PDA one more time.

Just before Ed left this morning, the void appeared. Although there is nothing in the dark, it seems to have an irresistible scorching heat, the kind of thing that is hard to name.

"I don't think Ed will ever come back here again.", Maria had such an intuition.

At that moment, she heard a sound in the distance.

A muffled sound, like something exploding.

Unable to resist, Maria got up and ran out of the room.

The members of "Blood and Fire", who were supposed to always be below as Maria's guards, were nowhere to be seen now.

This also made Maria feel frustrated. Many of the members are thugs who follow Ed by force, and among them are many remnants of the mob that he crushed. There are few people who have good feelings for Ed, and Maria's guards should have been those people.

The fact that even that was being pushed meant that the "work" this time was on a grand scale.

Maria got into the car and started the engine. She knew that she was acting reckless. Nothing yet. Stepping on the accelerator, Maria drove towards the direction of the explosion.

+++++

It wasn't bad at all.

Suoh had such an impression as he was walking leisurely at night in Las Vegas.

Two robots descended from above, blocking Suoh's path with a roar. This time they came with an extra flying saucer. There were several, but he stopped counting.

They would soon become scrap metal anyway.

Suoh dispersed his aura. Receiving an aura like a heat wave storm, the robot tilted and the saucer escaped into the sky at a dangerous point. In that space, Suoh took a big step forward and slammed his fist into the robot's knee.

Steel legs creaked and shards of wires and electronics flew.

A rotating machine gun was aimed at Suoh from a short distance. Suoh carelessly stuck his arm into it. If you stick your arm into a steel shaft that spins hundreds of times a second, it will usually turn to minced meat in an instant, but the "King's" arm was unusual, and it was the barrel of the gun that broke. An annoying noise rang out and the motor that detected an abnormal load stopped immediately.

Suoh grabbed the barrel of the gun and dragged the giant robot body down with all his might.

He stepped on the body of the robot, which was spinning on its legs like a dying insect. Clad in a red aura, he stomped on a military armor crushing it like an eggshell. He destroyed the other robot in the same way.

He exhaled and thought.

He didn't feel bad after all.

There were people who jumped on him. He didn't have to take it easy. That was indescribably comforting.

If this were Japan, it would be different. The hostile yakuza, or the Clansman of Scepter 4. Suoh always held back when he punched, kicked and threw them. He didn't know what would happen to his opponent, but he didn't even think about taking their life. That's why he had to gently slap those who pointed their weapons or sabers at him.

It was a stressful job.

However, this was different. So Suoh thought as he created a fireball and threw it at the puck, it was pure fighting. Destroy his opponent. Apart from that, he didn't think about anything else, so he felt good.

The disk spat fire as it crashed, making a loud crack. Suoh stepped on it and proceeded. Even with a slight smile on his lips.

However, that smile disappeared the next moment.

Several discs appeared in front of Suoh after canceling his transparency. Attached to the bottom of the eye chamber was no weapon. It was a flash that seemed to be attached to an SLR.

The three flashes hit Suoh with intense light like a strobe light.

"....."

Suoh reflexively closed his eyes. He let out a small click of his tongue.

The flash blinked erratically and relentlessly pursued him no matter how hard he tried to get away. A nasty, damaging and effective attack.

If you can't destroy the "King's" body, you can destroy his senses. Visual, auditory and olfactory stimuli will certainly become an attack if they accumulate.

But it didn't make sense.

Suoh raised a hand in front of him and focused his aura there. An indiscriminate attack with some degree of directionality, so to speak, a shotgun with an aura. If you randomly shoot "where enemies are likely to be", the unpleasant stimulant will soon wear off.

Suoh was just trying to give off an aura.

He stopped, because he heard a scream.

A boy or a girl, he didn't know from the flood of light. A little boy, probably 10 years old or younger, was crying for his mother, in the direction from which Suoh was trying to emit an aura.

Suoh twisted his lips.

He knew exactly what his opponent was aiming at.

They were trying to wear Suoh down. They wanted him to use his physical strength and thus reduce his energy. It was no accident that the boy was in the direction of the puck. He can destroy weapons, but he couldn't kill children, that's how they see Suoh. That is why the "Human Shield" can be used effectively. That must be the enemy's strategy.

That was the truth.

The aura was still stored in his palm.

However, there was no need to think of other measures. The sound of an explosion suddenly resounded and the light stopped.

He lowered his hands and opened his eyes. The puck became a ball of fire and lay on the ground.

When he looked around, Kusanagi was about to put away his Zippo lighter. Seeing him smile, Suoh snorted.

"Sunglasses came in handy for the first time."

Kusanagi shrugged and ignored Suoh's words.

"It helped me focus my attacks on you. It caused unnecessary damage to the surrounding area."

As he spoke, Kusanagi slipped past the broken disk and approached the boy crouched at the base of a plant. He spoke to him in soft English and lead him to safety by pulling his hand.

Suoh looked at him with his hand still in his pocket.

Kusanagi returned shortly and Suoh fell silent.

"Go back to the hotel."

Kusanagi's eyes widened in surprise. As if reading Suoh's thoughts, he looked at his face.

Finally, Kusanagi gave up and sighed.

"Okay. What are you going to do?"

"A little more fuss."

However, it was difficult to become violent there. The intrepid tourists watched Suoh and the robot he crushed from afar. There were also those who recorded with their PDAs pointing at them, as if they thought they were shooting a movie. Suoh's fighting style was not designed to protect them.

Kusanagi must have been aware of that. Checking on his PDA, he pointed to the right,

"So, there's a city golf course there. No one will be there at this hour."

"Yes."

Suoh nodded and started running.

The race of the "King". The concrete he passed through broke and Suoh's body jumped due to his power. He grabbed onto a traffic light, broke it, jumped back, landed on the roof of a building, and ran again.

Several helicopters were flying in the night sky, which was closer than before. Seeing Suoh move, they hurriedly followed him.

Suoh looked at them. Helicopters will presumably have a pilot on board, unlike robotic weapons. If they really wanted to kill him, it shouldn't matter if he killed them. Now that he sold a fight, he wouldn't complain no matter what the price.

However, there may be another child directly below the crashed helicopter. He can be someone's father, or mother, or all of them.

Thinking of that, Suoh clicked his tongue again.

Las Vegas had too much going on for him to mess with.

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The second floor of "Fontaine" had become a battlefield.

Yata called that foreigner Ed. The flames spread to the curtains, and from the sprinklers that detected it rained down a large amount of water. Customers were eating bubbles and running away, the store staff desperately trying to calm them down so they wouldn't panic.

Then another source of confusion erupted.

A shot.

A scream followed by another scream and an angry roar. The passengers rushing towards the exit turned around one after another, lowered their posture, and threw themselves on the ground.

Like Moses parting the sea, the ones who appeared from among the guests were the boys in black.

Kamamoto muttered in amazement.

"It's them again. They don't get tired of being hit?"

Chitose replied calmly.

"This time they have a toy, so they are optimistic."

As he said, those in black were carrying something they didn't have last time, a gun. All of them were holding submachine guns in their hands with murderous and excited eyes, pointing at them and shouting something.

A few men in black rushed forward and pointed their muzzles at them.

"Hehe." Laughing, Kamamoto also took a step forward.

Kamamoto's aura unfolded almost at the same time as the wild firefight began.

A red-hot aura swirled around, blocking and deflecting all bullets. Kamamoto did not know the name of the probability change field, nor was he aware of it. However, they only know from experience that guns and bullets are useless against them.

"Chitose, Bando!"

When Kamamoto raised his voice in the middle, Bando rushed towards the black ones as if he was crawling on the ground and Chitose rushed into the sky. They panicked and fired wildly, but they weren't as good as the clansman who developed the aura. A fist sank into the face of one of the leaders and a fight began.

Kamamoto looked back. Using the overturned table as a shield, Anna crouched down. Her expression was tinged with fear, but she bravely looked at Kamamoto and nodded.

Eric knelt beside her and looked at Kamamoto in the same way.

"Kamamoto-san, I will protect Anna."

"I understand!"

Beating his chest, Kamamoto ran towards the line of men in black like a human bullet train.

He punched, kicked, stomped while he was holding a headlock. In the midst of that, Kamamoto looked outside. The beautifully decorated window panes of "Fontaine" mercilessly shattered, revealing a still-going fountain show.

Flames and blades danced as the column of water rose.

He let out a snort. No matter how he thought about it, it was annoying to leave it to "that guy". However, it was Yata's own order to protect Anna. They couldn't get out of there.

"Shut your mouth!"

Kamamoto decided to direct his dissatisfaction and frustration at the attackers. He threw the two of them out the window together, and Kamamoto looked at the black clad men who were still fighting and began to walk quickly.

+++++

That was what it meant.

The area was already surrounded by the supernatural weapon "Ostrich". If you are attacked by their machine guns that penetrate the probabilistic deviation field, even if you are a supernatural person, it is not free. If you don't want to be a pile of corpses, you have no choice but to escape from the siege. And the exit to the siege was in the window they broke, maybe a jump from there and a fall of more than 100 meters would save them.

That's what Totsuka wanted to say.

Tanaka reflexively opened his mouth.

"You're crazy?"

It was a very rude comment, but Totsuka didn't seem offended and just laughed.

"Easy. I can handle it."

Saying that, he jumped on the remains of the "Ostrich" and looked out the window.

"Look, this hotel is shaped like a pyramid, isn't it? That's why the outside isn't a "wall", it's a "slope". If you slide down instead of falling, you can handle it, right?"

"No... What do you think?"

It was Akagi who said that without confidence. He also stuck his head out the window in fear.

"Even if it's tilted, isn't the angle too narrow? If you lose your balance in the middle, it's the end of the series."

"But isn't there another way?"

"Well, it is. I wish there was another way."

Dewa scratched his cheek as he looked out of the room. The door had been attacked by multiple "ostriches", and almost all of them were broken into pieces and floating in the air. Even so, the "Ostrich" still couldn't enter because Tanaka was blocking it with the "fixed coordinate zero point".

But they didn't have much time left.

The sound of gunshots began to be heard from the wall a little way from the door. They were trying to get through the wall to get in. Tanaka's ability couldn't fix two points at the same time. If they got out of there, he couldn't do anything this time.

Fujishima muttered calmly.

"You are ready?"

Then, everyone in "Homura" looked at Tanaka.

It was just as Fujishima said. He had no choice but to make up his mind.

Even a supernatural person would die if he fell normally from a height of 100 meters. The probability deflector field doesn't even deflect the impact of a fall. Probability is "chance that it is possible", not the magic that makes the law of inertia not exist. After jumping, each person's decision will be the difference between life and death.

Tanaka inhaled and exhaled at the same time.

"Okay. Come on. I just have one thing to tell you."

Looking at "Homura", Tanaka spoke gravely,

"I'm afraid of heights. Please understand that there is a possibility that I can make an error in judgment."

+++++

Ed looked his own "arm".

A long arm of flame, the stigmata that once bestowed upon the baptism of "Purgatory". It was cut from his wrist and scattered.

He then saw the cut human.

Of course Ed didn't know anything about him. He didn't need to know. There were only two things that mattered: a scruffy blue uniform and a loose saber. In response to that dull look in his eyes, Ed smiled.

He thought he was back.

At that time, during the height of "Purgatory". In the age of red and blue killing each other.

"Blue clothes, wow!!"

At the same time that he shouted, Ed flexed his long fiery arm like a whip and let out a horizontal calm. The blue clothes jumped to dodge the blow, then slashed at it with a flash of the saber. Ed stuck out his tongue, laughed, and swung around to regenerate his arm. He could create as many flame arms as he wanted.

However, he couldn't follow up. Yata took advantage of that gap and hurried inside.

"Ohyaaaaaaa!!!"

An enthusiastically unleashed fist slammed into Ed's stomach. Severe pain and nausea erupted at the same time, and his body broke into a dogleg shape. Yata head-butted sharply into the face of Ed, who had swum in front of him.

This time, Ed's body leaned back, swaying from side to side.

His left hand suddenly reached out and grabbed the back of Yata's head.

"Hahahahahahahahaha!!!"

With a mad laugh, Ed pushed himself up and head-butted Yata back. Yata, who is short in stature, flew out with nosebleeds everywhere and was thrown onto the stage from behind. In order to crush his skull, he hit the palm of the flame directly from above.

A blue barrier blocked the chase.

It was the blue clothes. Yata's body was wrapped in a shield created by the saber. The sparks of the aura scattered wildly, and in that space, Yata turned as if he was breakdancing and kicked out the palm of his hand. He wiped away the bloody nose with his fist and jumped to his feet.

Yata was on the left, and Blue was on the right. Seeing the two of them slowly approaching each other, Ed's expression took on a demonic rage.

"Red and Blue, why are you fighting together?"

In response, Yata yelled at him and spat on the blue clothes.

"Gak! I don't do that!"

"I told you it's just work."

Ed narrowed his eyes. Slowly, killing intent and madness rose up his throat. Faced with the combination that was absolutely impossible at "that time", the depths of Ed's soul were screaming, denying those guys. He wanted to kill them, crush them, and pretend it never happened.

Yes. That was all that mattered to Ed.

For those who had already left, all he could do was kill them.

So, someday...

Ed raised his right arm. The long arm of flames shone even more violently and rushed towards the heavens like an ascending dragon.

Even higher than the rising column of water, it remained in the air, and in the next moment, it turned into countless flames and rained down on the stage.

"Tsk!"

The blue clothes swung his saber precisely and cut down all the fireballs raining down on him. Still, the flames rained down endlessly. The blue clothes was stuck in place, unable to take a single step.

But Yata was different.

Amid the rain of fire, he charged at Ed.

Evasion was minimal and no defense was considered. Yata was unfazed, despite the fact that he was hit by several fireballs. His eyes were filled with the same fiery fighting spirit as Ed.

A red symbol. It was the color of violence and madness.

"Haha!"

Along with Ed's laughter, a torrential rain of fire focused on Yata.

"Ooooooooooooooh!!"

Yata, with his spirit, filled his crossed fists with a red aura.

The two reds collided.

"Well...!"

As expected, Yata's legs stopped. He barely blocked the torrent of flames like a waterfall with his fists, but couldn't move forward due to the pressure. Ed smiled with the confidence of victory. He wanted to turn him into a handful of ashes.

At that moment, Yata let out a low growl between his teeth.

"Hey, Saruhiko...!"

When Ed realized it was the name of that blue clothes, it was already too late.

The blue clothes turned to the side kicked the water and came closer. A cold, expressionless face and gray eyes with murderous intent. The tip of the saber hit Ed directly.

"Haha.", Ed laughed.

A scene he had seen over and over again. The guys dressed in black being slashed, ripped apart, and poked with the blues' sabers. Dripping blood, dying as they screamed, never moving again.

The time had come, he waked.

Thinking of that, Ed stared at the approaching sword tip.

The saber went through Ed's right shoulder.

A blue aura unfolded and forcibly cut off the flames rising from inside Ed. The right arm that had been outstretched disappeared in the bud, and the fountain spilled out and doused the flames that had engulfed Yata.

Eyes wide and teeth clenched, Ed grabbed the collar of the blue clothes with his left hand.

"Guh...?!"

"What are you doing, bastard?"

He curled his fingers like claws and bit down on the blue cloth's throat.

Looking into the eyes behind the glasses of the blue clothes that were distorted in agony, Ed let out a murky fury.

"You should have killed me now! Why are you doing such a sweet thing? Still, are you a member of "Scepter 4"?!"

The blue clothes frowned as he suffered. Either he didn't understand English or he didn't understand Ed's words. Either one would do. He could break a human neck with one hand. Ed squeezed his hand even tighter, trying to make him pay for the sweetness.

At that moment, Yata hurried back inside.

"Let him go, come on!"

The aura covered fist pierced Ed's face.

His awareness wavered and the strength left his hands. The blue clothes took advantage of that gap and moved instantly. He kicked up the tip of the saber embedded in his shoulder, tearing at the flesh of the shoulder and springing up.

Mixed with the gushing water, the blood danced.

Ed knelt down and shook his head. He tried to put out his long arm of flame, but he couldn't. When he looked up, his right arm was almost removed from his shoulder. If he concentrated, the stigmata would react, but the amount of flame that came out was so small that it seemed like it wouldn't grow to his arm.

Ed looked up as he was hit by the falling water.

Yata was looking at Ed. He breathed on his shoulders and wore an aura on his fists. If he felt like it, he could smash his head or break his neck.

But he wouldn't.

Finally, Ed's back teeth clicked. A crisp voice escaped.

"You can't even kill people? A kid like you being a member of the Red Clan? I won't admit it...!"

"I don't know what you're talking about.", Yata whispered.

"What do you want to do and who are you really? I don't know. But, I also have something I can't give up."

"....."

Facing Ed's fierce gaze from the front, Yata scratched his chest.

"I'm a member of the Red Clan, "Homura"! No matter who you are, if you deny it, there's only one thing I can do. I'll hit you. That's all."

He heard a tongue click. It was the blue clothes. Ed didn't understand what that meant. He just had a grimace on his wet face.

"Then give it a try. Misaki."

Yata swallowed hard. He hesitated for just a second. He raised his bright red fist.

After...

Everyone present felt it.

Forgetting all the circumstances, Ed, Yata and the blue clothes, looked up at the sky. Beyond the city where the neon lights and the lights intersect, the gap between the high-rise hotels that line up.

A red "Sword of Damocles" floated in the night sky over Las Vegas.

CHAPTER 10: CLASH

The night breeze caressed Suoh's cheek.

There were no people on the golf course and not even one of the lights was on. With only the bright moonlight for light, Suoh walked. Through the forest, passing the fairway to reach the green place surrounded by bunkers.

A quiet space where the hustle and bustle of before seemed like a lie.

But Suoh knew that it would not last long.

From far away, multiple continuous rotor sounds rang out. Several armed helicopters belonging to the "enemy" were heading towards the golf course.

Suoh narrowed his eyes and slightly clenched his fists.

A red aura pooled there and created a ball of light. There, even if the helicopter crashed, there would be no unrelated human casualties.

Projected searchlights lit up the street and closed in on Suoh at the speed of a snake. Suoh watched the spectacle with cold eyes.

However, no attack occurred.

The searchlight illuminated the area around Suoh. No shooting or shelling.

".....?"

Suoh, who had been looking up doubtfully, noticed "it".

A huge gun was hung at the bottom of the helicopter.

The shape was clearly different from the bipedal robots that had been discarded until now. With a height of about 4 meters, a huge torso covered in thick armor, with thick arms and legs that were comparable to that. Compared to Totsuka's "Ostrich", this one would be called "Gorilla".

The cable that suspended the "gorilla" was removed and it began to fall freely.

With a heavy sound, the "gorilla" landed on the street. The impact of the fall caused the grass to rise and the earth to erupt. Behind the clouds of dust, the eye camera was looking at Suoh with a flickering red light.

"Fu, fufufufu, fufufufufufufufufufufu!"

The "gorilla" approached Suoh with heavy footsteps as he laughed out loud.

"Hey, hey, hey! It's been a long time, Suoh, the "Red King"! Do you remember me?!"

Suoh tilted his head. He didn't remember the voice. But the other side seemed to know him. Using logic instead of memory, Suoh replied.

"Are you Mizuchi?"

"Oh, my god! It's an honor to have been remembered by the "King"! I see... So, do you remember "him"?"

As he said that, the 'gorilla' made a gesture of opening his arms. It was an action like introducing himself, but Suoh responded with amazement.

"I don't know."

"Ay, ay! How ruthless! The "King" doesn't remember anything about the lower class! I don't think so, Suoh Mikoto, after all, he is..."

Then Mizuchi cut off his words and muttered.

"Because he is the man whose life you took with your own hands."

"....."

Suoh blinked and dug up the memory of him.

He certainly remembered the people he killed with his bare hands. In regards to the Mizuchi incident, there was only one person.

Suoh said that name.

"Senkouki, huh?"

The "gorilla" dropped his arms and landed on the ground like a real ape. He stretched out his wild neck as hard as he could and brought his face closer to Suoh.

The "gorilla" face made a mechanical noise and slowly opened to the left and right.

"Yes. The man you killed. My friend, Senkouki. He is the "Mark II"."

A lone man was enshrined behind his face covered in armor and electronics. He burrowed into a narrow seat and gripped the control stick with both hands.

The man also had half of his face turned into a machine. The cameras of the three eyes looked at Suoh at once with a chirp.

"This is a battle for revenge, Suoh Mikoto. At the same time, it is also a battle for humanity's innovation. If the supernatural weapons I have developed, the most powerful of them, the "Perforator Mark II", can defeat you, we will be freed from the yoke of the "King", and we will finally be able to face the threat of the "Slate"!"

"....."

The "gorilla" face shield closed again. While standing, "Perforator Mark II" folded both arms to show the strength of it.

"So, let me kill you, Suoh Mikoto! For humanity! My friend, "Perforator Mark II"!"

Suoh casually hit his stomach with his fist.

"Uoooooooooh?!"

With Mizuchi's scream resounding, the giant 10-ton body flipped backwards, rolled over, and fell to its knees. Pushing the manipulators of both hands towards the street, Mizuchi loudly condemned.

"What are you doing?! I was still in the middle of speaking though!"

"You're crazy."

Muttering in amazement, Suoh began to walk. He slowly moved closer to him while engulfing both his fists in a red aura.

Mizuchi was crazy. In just a few words of conversation, he got it right. If so, he didn't want to hear any more. Get rid of that big bastard and quickly join his friends. That was the basic route.

On the other hand, the "Perforator Mark II" emitted a red light from the eye chamber on him and he laughed fearlessly.

"Fufufu, that's fine! A surprise attack is also a way to fight! Then... let's go too!"

The thick armor that covered both shoulders immediately came loose. Missile pods arranged in a honeycomb pattern were exposed, and he fired countless missiles at Suoh without even taking a moment to breathe.

"Uh...!"

As expected, Suoh took a deep breath and avoided it by jumping sideways. However, the swarm of missiles that had cleared the empty space turned sharply as he raised jet flames, chasing Suoh everywhere.

Suoh shot the aura that covered his fists like a double shotgun. The missiles collided with the aura shots, turning into countless fireballs and lighting up the darkness of the night. Being exposed to the heat and shock wave, Suoh instinctively raised his hand.

"Perforator Mark II" was waiting there.

"Suoh Mikoto!"

A powerful punch was fired from the fist held at his waist.

Suoh defended himself with folded arms against the pressure equal to the full power of the heavy machinery. A normal person would have been stung in an instant, and his heels dug into the grass.

At the same time, the fist of "Perforator Mark II" slid from left to right.

"Did you forget... the origin of the name "Perforator Machine"?!"

Behind the sliding fist, a "stake" flew out at explosive speed from the open cylinder.

He couldn't take it. Suoh's body flew out like a cannonball, jumping horizontally across the green, crashing into a tree, and finally coming to a stop.

Beneath the violently swaying branches and leaves, Suoh lowered his arms.

The blood that dripped from his arm fell onto the grass.

Both handlers hit the ground violently and the "Perforator Mark II" let out a whoop of joy.

"I see! This is good news! The extraordinary alloy created with the "Gold" power seems to work for the "King" as well! Well, this will be excellent data! We can take another step forward!"

Whether he heard that voice or not, Suoh also stepped forward.

"...Interesting."

A fierce smile appeared on Suoh's lips.

When he finds a suitable prey for himself, when he learns that it's okay to go on a rampage without holding back, he grins like a beast. Grasping his bloody hand, Suoh balled his fists in front of his chest.

Above, the red "Sword of Damocles" appeared in the Las Vegas night sky.

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The VIP room of the "Pyramid Hotel" is about 200 meters high and about 300 meters long. According to the Pythagorean theorem, the hypotenuse is given by the square root of the sum of the height squared and the length squared, so the length of the slope they will slide down is...

"Hyaho...!"

Interrupted by Akagi's shrill laughter, Tanaka tried to look at him in frustration. However, Tanaka found it difficult to imagine a human gliding at high speed, so he clung tightly to the mattress his body rested on, barely suppressing his screams of fear.

Currently, Tanaka and the "Homura" members are sliding down the "Pyramid" wall at high speed.

For Tanaka, who was afraid of heights, it was nothing more than torture. Even so, it was the only way to escape the siege of supernatural weapons. They smashed everything in the room and used it as a makeshift sled. Akagi with the remains of the "Ostrich", Dewa with the closet door, Fujishima with the bathroom bathtub, Totsuka and Tanaka climbed on the mattresses and embarked on that terrifying journey.

The strong wind, the landscape that seemed to disappear, the feeling that even the soul was being pulled by gravity. All those things were about to shake something in the center of Tanaka. While biting his lip and desperately suppressing the erupting screams, Totsuka, who was sitting in front of him, suddenly turned around.

"Tanaka-san, are you alright?!"

Being able to care for others in that situation was a big problem. Tanaka parted his trembling lips and tried to reply.

"There!"

Multiple "discs" appeared as if they were clinging to everyone who was sliding down. It was an "attack type" equipped with guns on the bottom. He was aiming at Totsuka's head.

Totsuka immediately kicked the wall.

The mattress changed its trajectory while spinning, and 0.5 seconds later the "disc" fired a volley. Countless bullet holes were carved into the walls of the hotel, and in an instant they were receding far behind.

"Gah...!"

Tanaka pointed his shining golden arm at the "disc" that was trying to follow them and used the "fixed coordinate zero point". The "disc" stopped for a moment, during which the mattress slid down at high speed. If Tanaka doesn't stay on the same coordinates, "coordinate lock" won't work, but if he wants to escape, it is enough to just stop for a moment.

An "ostrich" fell in front of Tanaka and the others.

"Uoooooooooooooh?!"

While shouting involuntarily, Tanaka tried to change direction like Totsuka did. They were screwed. The "ostrich" landed on a slope less than 10 meters away, and the mattress crashed into the "ostrich" without time to take countermeasures.

Totsuka and Tanaka's bodies flew into the air.

Tanaka barely looked down into his swirling field of vision. The city lights were spreading. The altitude was still over 50 meters. The fact that he was in such a place without any help would make him lose his soul, but something inside Tanaka held his soul together.

Responsibility and pride.

In order to protect the peace and prosperity of this world, he turned into a "rabbit".

Tanaka waved his arms. Dwelling there was the golden aura of "Tokijikuin". He fixed his body and Totsuka's body in the air by "fixing coordinates"... As long as the coordinates themselves are fixed, the "fixing coordinates" will remain effective.

Tanaka slowly lowered Totsuka's body which was left in the air.

Totsuka looked at Tanaka with a surprised expression, then yelled.

"Tanaka-san! Up!"

Of course, it goes without saying that Tanaka took notice.

An almost silent rotor sound was spinning over his head. Without even looking at it, the mouth of the "disc" was pointing at him.

But Tanaka didn't do anything, he couldn't do anything. "Coordinate lock" uses both arms. He used one for Totsuka and the other for himself. If any of them break free, Tanaka's purpose could not be achieved at that time. The purpose is not to let the "Red King" go crazy.

Even if he dies, Suoh won't lose control. Because Tanaka is not his comrade. Tanaka's goal was to protect the "Homura" members, including Totsuka, and the survival of him and the "Tokijikuin" agents was not included from the start.

Tanaka covered his head with his golden arm. Even if he penetrated the probabilistic deflection field, it didn't matter as long as he didn't die instantly. There were 10 seconds left for Totsuka to hit the ground. As long as he held him for that moment, he would be fine.

There was a faint hammering mixed with the sound of the rotor. Bracing himself for the impact, Tanaka held his breath and tensed every muscle in him.

A shot rang out.

The "disc" went flying as if struck by an invisible hammer.

".....?!"

Unexpectedly, Tanaka looked at the falling "disc" while holding his breath. Furthermore, the shooting continued, and several "discs" floating around were blown up while scattering fragments.

Support for "Homura"... no. They would have already reached the surface by sliding down the slopes of the "Pyramid". It wasn't even a backup of "Tokijikuin". This was clearly a long-range sniper. There are no such firearms in the American branch of "Tokijikuin".

Then who...?

Totsuka landed on the ground. Tanaka then lowered his own body as well. Meanwhile, he was toying with the question.

+++++

Seeing the glowing red "Sword of Damocles", Yata's eyes widened.

"Mikoto-san?"

The "Sword of Damocles". A supernatural sword that appears when the "King" uses all of his power. There are only a handful of instances where Suoh the "Red King" has gone all out, so even Yata, a veteran "Homura" member, has only seen it a few times.

It was showing up.

That meant that the person Suoh had to do his best with had appeared.

"Shit!"

Yata tried to run in the direction where the "Sword of Damocles" was floating. If there was a powerful enemy in front of Suoh, Yata's role was to charge him.

However, his run was blocked by the rising flames.

"Ha."

It was Ed.

Flames shot out from the tip of the torn arm. Stronger and longer than ever, the flames engulfed the dying arm and began to cover everything.

"Hahahahahahahahahahaha!"

His arms on fire writhing, Ed laughed. Just like Yata, his dazzling gaze turned to the "Sword of Damocles" that was floating in the distant sky.

"What the hell is that...? Are you saying that he is a "King"? Are you saying that he is the "successor" of Genji Kagutsu?! I won't admit it! I won't forgive him!"

Mixing seething anger with laughter, Ed casually stepped forward.

Yata had an intuition.

What he should do is not go towards Suoh. He must not let this dangerous clansman guy get to Suoh.

"Ed!"

Screaming, Yata ran at Ed's back. A blow from behind to the defenseless neck. He was supposed to be able to suppress it.

Yata took a heavy hit to his side and was blown sideways.

"Gah...?!"

Going on stage, Yata endured the pain. It was an unexpected blow. Not from Ed. And besides him and Ed, there was only one person in that place.

Fushimi Saruhiko.

"You... Monkey, what are you doing...?!"

Fushimi did not reply. With the leg that kicked Yata, he coldly looked at Ed.

With one flaming arm dangling, Ed slowly descended from the stage into the fountain. His palm touched the water and steam rose as he made a loud noise. A billowing column of smoke was trying to hide his back from him.

Yata stood up as if he was rejected by him. When he tried to chase Ed, he was clearly blocked by a saber.

"That is all."

Yata looked at Fushimi as if there was no such thing as a saber pressed against his throat.

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean? Didn't you hear what I said? From start to finish, I'm going to do my job."

Fushimi said that coldly and let cold steel bite into Yata's throat.

"My job is to protect you, I'm sick of that."

"What...?"

"What we're worried about is that all of you die and Suoh Mikoto gets out of control. If that happens, there will be international problems, and in the worst case, Las Vegas will turn into one big hole. We just have to avoid that."

Yata hit the stage with his fist and cried out desperately.

"That's why I'm going to stop him! To protect Mikoto-san, you were also helping, weren't you, Saruhiko?!"

"Hey, are you serious?"

Fushimi sneered and Yata gritted his teeth.

"The clansman protects the "King"? There is no way you can do that. In the first place, no matter how dangerous he is, he is not an enemy to Suoh Mikoto. There is nothing a clansman can do for a "King"... Misaki."

What Yata had been chewing on was his own stupidity.

That kind. He was an idiot for believing Fushimi Saruhiko even a little. Yata knew better than anyone who that guy was.

Fushimi was the worst traitor.

He was definitely not on his side.

"...I understand, Monkey."

Yata grabbed the saber from his throat. A red aura spread across the steel as if it were on fire. Fushimi had drawn his saber before he could hear it.

"You are my enemy!"

A fiery fist cut through the place where Fushimi should have been just now. Fushimi, who landed, smiled as he saw the tail of the flame disappear into thin air.

"Oh, yes. Did you notice now, Misaki?"

Yata did not reply. That guy was another enemy of "Homura". He didn't have a word to speak to a guy like that.

Defeat that guy and go after Ed. That was his new purpose.

With that in mind, Yata swung his fist at him. He smashed into the saber, sending up red and blue sparks.

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A funeral procession was advancing through the desert.

Slowly. A group in black suits were walking towards the horizon. Past the mist of flickering heat, toward the black figure that seemed to disappear at any moment, Ed gasped.

"Wait, me too...!"

Without voice. It was the same, but now Ed could move.

Tears welled up in both eyes, but a smile appeared on his lips. Joy filled Ed.

Finally, he could reach them. He arrived quite late, but he could get killed for that. Even so, he could go back to "Purgatory".

Ed ran into the crowd of departing men in black. With one arm missing and his entire body covered in blood, Ed didn't stop. He had survived until now only to catch up with them.

"I'll be there soon, so don't leave me!"

With tears, blood, and a voiceless scream, Ed just ran.

After a penetrating impact, gravity disappeared.

Ed's body flew 10 feet into the air and crashed to the asphalt.

Blinking several times, Ed craned his neck and looked up at the night sky. The giant sword that was floating in Las Vegas didn't get any closer. Vegas is big. It was impossible to walk.

Then Ed raised his upper body.

"Are you okay?! You?!"

An old man got out of the car and ran towards Ed. The bumper was slightly dented. So, apparently he was run over by him.

Ed smiled a little. There was no anger at being run over. It was his fault for being careless.

"Hahaha... it's okay, it's okay. It doesn't hurt at all."

Ed slowly got to his feet. The man had a puzzled look on his face, but still he didn't try to escape. Normally you wouldn't want to get involved with someone who's covered in blood and missing an arm. However, out of a sense of responsibility for running over him, he couldn't turn his back on him.

He thought that he was a good person. He couldn't bear to kill him.

But now he needed his legs.

"I am sorry."

Ed's left arm snaked out and grabbed the man's neck. Ed squinted at the drowning man and manifested his right arm of fire. He raised a clenched fist.

"Ed!"

He spun around at the cry.

Maria was there. She got out of her truck and ran towards him. With a beautiful face mixed with concern and joy at the reunion, there were even tears in her black eyes.

Ed looked at the man.

The man was also crying. That was out of pain and fear. Over and over, she looked at the flaming fist and Ed's face.

He didn't need two legs.

"Haha, that's good, man."

Ed caught his breath and laughed, releasing the man. The man shoved his butt into place, gasped several times, and crawled away from him.

With her running momentum, Maria hugged Ed. Hot tears wet Ed's chest.

"I'm glad...! There's no one here, and I can't contact Diego or Alan, so I thought something might have happened to you, so...!"

"Maria. Drive."

"Eh...?"

Ed began to walk, dragging his body. He opened the passenger seat of the truck and got in. While she was puzzled, Maria got into the driver's seat as he told her to. Then, as if she finally noticed it, she took a deep breath.

"Ed, that arm...?!"

"Ah. This is fine. Further on. Please drive in that direction."

With his left arm, Ed pointed to the side where the "Red King's" Sword of Damocles was floating. Maria wrapped his finger in a trembling hand.

"You're not fine, right?! Besides, you have to go to the hospital."

Ed grabbed Maria's head and slammed it against the driver's side window glass.

"I'll say it just one more time. Drive there. Or I'll kill you and drive. It's hard to do it with one arm, but you can't help it, right?"

Speaking in a soft voice, Maria nodded repeatedly as she continued to be pressed against the window glass.

Satisfied, Ed nodded and leaned back in the passenger seat. Maria is a good girl. Good and obedient. She didn't want to die if it was possible.

The truck began to run at a smooth speed. Ed dreamily gazed at the "Sword of Damocles" floating in the distance for a while, but before long he closed his eyes and began to rest momentarily.

CHAPTER 11: CLASH II

Kusanagi took out his zippo and lit a cigarette.

The purple smoke that he exhaled slipped into the darkness of the night. Kusanagi was in an alley where the bright lights of the hotel did not reach. Speaking of the light in that place, the flickering emergency light, the light leaking from the main street outside, the cigarette Kusanagi held in his mouth...

Sparks scattered from the bare base, and the embers of superpower that still burned.

Kusanagi killed 5 "ostriches" and 12 "discs". From the moment he parted ways with Suoh, countless supernatural weapons attacked Kusanagi. Kusanagi continued to fight, turning the guns towards the less popular side so that the common people would not come to harm; and that was the result.

"Well, I think that's alright."

Kusanagi muttered to himself as he operated his PDA. He exchanged minimal contact with the other members with the PDA provided by "Tokijikuin", but he hadn't received a reply in the last ten minutes. They were probably under attack, just like him.

Arriving at the Pyramid Hotel, Kusanagi discovered that his guess was correct.

Near the top floor, where the VIP room was supposed to be, it exploded and black smoke billowed up. The hotel entrance was so packed with evacuees that it was hard to even get close. Kusanagi went to "back" and destroyed several supernatural weapons there...

Once again, Kusanagi inhaled the purple smoke.

So, he looked beyond the night sky.

The sword was still floating there. A bright red "Sword of Damocles". Even Kusanagi had only seen her a few times.

It meant that there was an opponent worthy of Suoh's seriousness.

Kusanagi suppressed his urge to go there immediately. His role was to control "Homura". Get them together and create a system where they can protect each other. Suoh was fine alone, no, it was better for him to be alone. That way, he could sweep through without hesitation.

Kusanagi, who was saying that to himself, he suddenly noticed that a vehicle was approaching.

He reflexively took a fighting stance. However, that did not seem to be an enemy. The minivan was slowly approaching and he could clearly see the driver. A beautiful woman in a suit with short blonde hair.

Finally, the minivan stopped in front of Kusanagi. A beautiful woman came down and gave Kusanagi a sharp look. Her face was stained with exhaustion and anguish.

"Izumo Kusanagi. Do you speak English?"

Kusanagi shrugged and answered.

"I studied overnight. If I didn't, I couldn't persuade a good woman like you."

The beautiful woman's expression did not move or twitch. When he regretted making a mistake, she jerked her chin toward the minivan.

"Follow me. I am protecting your comrades."

Kusanagi inhaled the smoke, exhaled it, and then said:

"I haven't heard your name yet?"

After some hesitation, the beautiful woman took out her identification card from her pocket. White lettering encircled the blue-tinged eagle crest: Central Intelligence Agency.

"Erin O'Connell. I'm a CIA agent. Back in the day, but..."

"....."

Kusanagi slowly took a cigarette and put it in the portable ashtray. Seeing the cold hostility in his eyes behind the sunglasses, Erin raised her arms.

"I know how you feel, but I'm on your side now. I've decided to resign from the CIA for personal reasons."

"What happened?"

Erin bit her lower lip and looked down at the ground.

"I can't keep up. To that madman, and to the top management who let it go unchecked...! I dedicated myself to protecting this country. No matter what the motives are above us, we can't follow a strategy that sacrifices people."

He found no lie in her anguished expression or in her spat words.

Of course, the other party was an intelligence agent. There should be many ways to trick Kusanagi's eyes. Still, if his comrades were with her, there was no reason not to follow her.

"Well, I'm asking for guidance."

Erin nodded and got into the driver's seat. Going to the passenger seat, Kusanagi barked.

"Don't try to imitate weird things. Sorry about the burns."

"Don't worry, I'm unarmed. If you can't trust me, I don't mind if you check my body."

Kusanagi smiled softly.

"Those kinds of things, I'll ask when it's private."

Seeing Erin's mouth relax a bit, Kusanagi was satisfied.

The minivan started slowly. Kusanagi once again looked up at the top floor of the burning hotel.

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"Ah, Kusanagi-san said that he will be able to join us."

When Totsuka, who was checking the PDA, said that, an air of relief filled the room.

Totsuka and the other "Homura" members were in a garage near the Pyramid Hotel. After slipping down from the "Pyramid", the robots' attacks visibly stopped and they took refuge there.

However, they did not find that place on their own. They had a guide.

Dewa muttered as he carefully watched the entrance.

"Is it okay to trust that woman?"

"Hmm. What do you think?"

Totsuka bowed his head and said that.

It seems that the former CIA agent who calls herself Erin came to "protect" Totsuka and the others. Erin said that with a serious expression, perhaps sensing the atmosphere from Totsuka and the others.

"I want this operation to end. For that reason, I want you to cooperate."

If they asked him if he could trust her, he wasn't sure. There was also a good chance that it was a trap. Since he had Fujishima and Akagi on guard, he should have been able to spot the "ostrich", which couldn't act stealthily, as soon as that will get close.

"But Tanaka-san said that it's fine, right?"

Saying so, Totsuka looked around the corner of the room.

An old couch was brought in and turned into a simple bed, where Tanaka lay.

The experience of sneaking out of the hotel seems to have done him a lot of damage. If you are afraid of heights, you can't help it. The reason why Totsuka and the others wanted a safe place was so that Tanaka could rest, since he had become groggy.

According to Tanaka, Erin could be trusted. When they escaped from the hotel, someone supported them. Judging from the circumstances, he couldn't think of anyone other than Erin who took down the "disc" with a long-range sniper.

Why did the CIA agent decide to betray her own organization? Totsuka and the others had not heard the details. It was going to be a big thing...

"Totsuka-san. Here we go."

Dewa, who was sitting by the garage window, suddenly uttered that voice.

The same minivan that left was approaching with a roaring engine. Totsuka took up a position on the opposite side of Dewa and held his breath. The soldiers could run out of that minivan and start shooting all at once; that kind of scene came to mind.

However, the two that came down were Kusanagi and Erin.

Dewa breathed a sigh of relief. He was also nervous. Totsuka opened the door and smiled at Kusanagi.

"Yes, Kusanagi-san. It's been a while."

"We were together until a few hours ago. Well, I know what you mean by that."

Kusanagi also had a wry smile on his lips. The other side may have been thinking the same thing. Being ambushed by a soldier after being threatened with the identities of his comrades. In that situation, it is natural to be vigilant.

Kusanagi turned to look at Erin. He spoke in fluent English.

"Thank you, Miss Erin. First of all, let me thank you."

Erin looked back at Kusanagi, then at Totsuka and the others.

"It is not worthy of respect. I helped you because it served my purpose. I want you to explain to me now."

The reason for switching to Japanese was probably to make it easier for members who didn't understand English to understand.

They still didn't know what her "purpose" was. What exactly was the "purpose" of a CIA agent who broke away from the organization itself? Erin was about to open her mouth when Kusanagi stopped her.

"Wait a minute. Looks like we're in a good place on time."

Saying that, he looked towards the alley next to the garage.

Several figures emerged from the darkness. A girl in a red dress, a giant in sunglasses, and a young man in a sweaty wool cap. Totsuka rolled his eyes.

"Anna! Why are you here?"

"I received a call from Izumo."

Anna walked over and looked at Totsuka. A relieved smile appeared on her lips.

"Tatara. Are you hurt?"

Totsuka patted his chest as he smiled.

"No. Thanks to Tanaka-san and the others, there's not a single scratch."

"Good. Tatara, I was worried because you're the weakest."

"Oh, is that so..."

With a wry smile, Totsuka looked at Yata and the others. At first glance, Kamamoto, Bando, Chitose, and Eric seemed to be safe. Only Yata was in tatters, with bruises and cuts all over his body. Kusanagi frowned and muttered.

"I didn't expect Yata-chan to go this far. Did the robots come to your house too?"

Yata awkwardly averted his gaze. Kamamoto answered instead.

"No, a gang we didn't know about appeared. They used that strange bullet, but it wasn't a big deal. What Yata-san did was..."

"Don't worry! They didn't hit me!"

"Yata-chan, it's time to stop talking. So?"

"Yes, yes. There was a guy named Ed. He looked like a Strain, but according to him, he was a survivor of the "former" red clan."

"Purgatory."

It was Erin who muttered under her breath. All of their eyes focused on her.

"Edward The Red is a survivor of the red clan of his predecessor, "Purgatory". After Genji Kagutsu passed away, he moved to the United States and settled in Las Vegas. That's what Mizuchi hired for this operation."

Kusanagi looked at Anna.

Anna nodded, pulled out a red marble, and looked at Erin. It was then that Totsuka finally understood Kusanagi's motives. He was using Anna's responsiveness to confirm the truth of Erin's words.

Knowing it or not, Erin continued to speak.

"Edward is a dangerous man. He has a strong obsession with being in the red clan. It seems that he can't even tolerate the existence of the current "Homura" and the "Red King" Suoh Mikoto."

Kusanagi narrowed his eyes and asked.

"His purpose is to kill Mikoto. Why is he so obsessed with him? We won't do anything to him."

"The purpose of the upper echelons is not to kill Suoh himself, but to kill the "King". The "King" is a powerful weapon in itself. If, by chance, an emergency occurs between Japan and the United States, the "King" and his clan could pose a great threat. It was Mizuchi who offered to develop a countermeasure to counter that."

"Those robots and those strange bullets, right?"

"Yes. It was good until "supernatural weapons" and AW bullets were developed. It makes sense to prepare countermeasures against other countries' military might. But gradually, Mizuchi began to strongly advocate "killing kings".

Anguish appeared in Erin's expression.

"I don't know how much personal grudge against Suoh was included in that. But the higher-ups accepted it. And, of course, they tried to do it within their own country. Lure the "Red King" to Las Vegas and confirm the practicality of the numerous "special weapons" developed by Mizuchi. Even if we were defeated, the data we obtained would give us a great advantage in future operations against the royal authorities, that's what I thought earlier."

Kusanagi responded with a sigh.

"Impossible. Is that why you caused such a big problem?"

Erin also shook her head wearily.

"Based on past cases, the above seems to have a strong sense of caution against the "King". However, for that reason, a strategy like forcing the people to sacrifice is putting the cart before the horse. I can't accept! such thing!"

When Erin said that, Anna put the marble down and muttered.

"This person is telling the truth."

Erin looked back at Anna.

"This girl is the Strain you are protecting? Certainly, she has a strong sense of sensitivity."

"Oh. Sorry, but I had to confirm. You're not lying when you say you'll be on our side."

"I understand, thank you."

Erin said that taking a breath and then her expression turned grim.

"And about Mizuchi. I have one thing to say about him."

Anna's eyebrows twitched. He was certain that she would never want to see the man who killed her parents and changed Anna's life forever. However, as he appeared in front of them, she couldn't ignore it.

Erin then began to speak softly about Mizuchi.

"That man is not the Mizuchi he used to be. He is..."

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Fists collided and repelled each other.

A fist was made of steel. It was an anti-royal fist, with a diameter of 1 meter and a combination of ultra-hard tungsten and different carbon disulfide steels.

The other fist was made of blood, flesh, and bone. Compared to a fist of steel, it was small, but the aura surrounding it was incomparable to anything else, the fist of a "King".

The impact created in the gap caused the "Piercer Mark II" and Suoh Mikoto to fly at the same time and land at the same time.

"Fu, fu, fufufufufufufu...!"

Inside the cramped cabin, Mizuchi let out an excruciating laugh. The eye camera, which was directly connected to the "Punching Machine Mark II", moved erratically and confirmed the damage from it. Right fist damage rate 74%, left fist damage rate 81%. On the other hand, the enemy...

Suoh Mikoto jumped up, clenched his fists, and raised them up.

In that form, Mizuchi saw a giant hammer.

Before he could think, his limbs were moving. He activated a burst of nitro and super-accelerate backwards. The seat belt dug into Mizuchi's slender body, and flesh and bone let out a scream. The explosion that happened right after that, yes it was a literal explosion, it was captured by the eye camera of the "Punching Machine Mark II". The ground rolled up, and the dirt and sand that were flying in the air rained down like rain.

"Nooo!"

If Mizuchi's eyes were naked, they would have been bloodshot. He licked all the sensors and tried to find out Suoh's whereabouts.

It was not necessary. Suoh broke through the dirt and sand and rushed forward.

"Ohhhhhh!"

Raising a roar, Mizuchi in the "Piercer Mark II" pushed his fists at him. A small hammering sound echoed through the cabin, and a bunker pile was shot at Suoh's face. If that hit him directly, even the "King" would disappear from the top of the neck.

Just before that, Suoh jumped up again.

Kicking the protruding iron stake, he sped up even more. The eye camera caught the image of Suoh swinging his fist at him.

A smile like that of a carnivore showing his fangs floated on his lips.

Mizuchi also laughed at that.

But he couldn't speak. The face of the "Piercer Mark II" was hit and fell. A traffic accident level impact struck the cab and blood oozed from the forehead which smashed into the

instrument. With his consciousness reeling, Mizuchi barely managed to carry on with the operation.

As he rolled on the ground, several flash bullets fell from the waist of the "Piercer Mark II" and exploded one after another.

Attacks on sensory organs were effective even for the "King". That was shown by the battle data until a while ago. It probably wouldn't hurt his eyesight or hearing, but it was enough to temporarily paralyze him.

In fact, Suoh's movements had temporarily stopped. That was his chance. No more flash bullets. From now on, Suoh couldn't stop him.

Mizuchi activated the "back hand".

"Ah... "Grasshopper II", "Fireworks Master II"! Do it!"

As if in response to that cry, extraordinary weapons all sprang out at once from the darkness of the night.

"Fireworks Master II" fired machine guns in quick succession as if to surround Suoh from all directions, while "Grasshopper II" tried to crush Suoh with the mass of it. Like a swarm of bees attacking a natural enemy, a steel leg trampled on Suoh and then bent over him.

Gathering all the "Grasshopper II" and "Fireworks Master II" that had been used to attack "Homura" and attack Suoh, that was the final stage of the operation.

Unfortunately, the "Grasshopper II" and "Fireworks Master II", were not able to kill the "Homura" members. It could only be said that they underestimated his fighting ability and his familiarity with battle. However, they managed to fish out Suoh Mikoto. As long as that was the case, the fundamentals of the strategy had to be changed.

In other words, an all-out attack with all supernatural weapons.

Kill the "King". To that end, Mizuchi had devoted all of his talent and time. His allies, "Grasshopper II", "Fireworks Master II" and "Piercer Mark II" were scattered by his fervent desire.

Everything to make that wish come true.

The smile of "Grasshopper II" suddenly appeared in his mind.

(Just a little longer, Sensei! Don't worry about us!)

"Fireworks Master II" shrugged and raised his thumb.

(He is weak. Now is the time to decide.)

Then, the "Piercer Mark II" slowly raised its muscular arms from him and made a punch.

(Make our powers be one.)

"Uuuuuuuuaaaaaaaahhhhhh!"

Before he knew it, Mizuchi's mechanized eyes were brimming with tears. That mixed with the blood spilled from his forehead and wet the sheet. The sight of the incarnations of the allies, willingly sacrificing themselves, stacked one after another, sealing the "King" made him feel a new evolution, made Mizuchi feel the innovation of humanity.

"Thank you... Thank you all! Your sacrifices will never be in vain!"

Then, Mizuchi raised his fist and activated the final weapon's button as he broke through the protective cover.

The abdomen of the "Piercer Mark II" was opened to the left and right, and the stored missiles were fired. Hellfire coated anti-Weissmann AWC missile. It was a lethal weapon that would penetrate the probability deflection field and hit the "King's" body directly with hellfire.

"Die! Suoh Mikoto! For our dreams!"

Aiming at the center where supernatural weapons swarmed, the missile struck without error.

Explosive flames erupted, brilliantly lighting up the night sky.

Seeing that spectacle as the dawn of humanity, Mizuchi waved as he shed tears.

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"In other words, it's all an illusion of Mizuchi's, right?"

Erin in the passenger seat nodded solemnly at Kusanagi, who asked as he turned the wheel.

"Yes. That's why he's crazy. He believes his delusions are real, and he's striving for it. And even though upper management knows it, they ignore it. It's too bad. I can only say it's unbearable."

As Erin let out a deep breath, an indescribable air entered the car.

Inside the minivan, the core members of "Homura" were huddled together. Yata, Kamamoto, Totsuka, Anna, Akagi, and Tanaka, who was still dazed. Since they couldn't take more people, the other members had to go to the site by other means.

So, Yata questioned.

"But how can someone like that build a robot like that?"

"There is a fine line between madness and genius, but for Mizuchi, it seems to be the same. The deeper his madness, the brighter his talent. By mixing multiple metals, he created an alloy with the property of "retention of supernatural powers", creating bullets that could be used even by supernatural beings. You could call it the greatest invention of the century."

"Even if..."

A police car and a fire truck appeared in the oncoming lane and went by with their sirens blaring. Kusanagi grumbled at that.

"Whatever happens, don't take it too seriously. What's all the fuss about?"

"Since it's a domestic operation, the cover is already made. It's going to be a conflict with the Mexican mafia."

"Ah. It's well prepared."

Kusanagi turned the wheel while he was amazed. The "Sword of Damocles" floating in the sky was closer than before.

Kusanagi confirmed the members through the rearview mirror. They all had the same nervous look on their faces. They didn't think Suoh would lose, but madness is madness because it's unpredictable.

At this time, Tanaka, who was looking down in the back seat, suddenly raised his head.

"Miss Erin. I have a question for you."

"What?"

"Those extraordinary weapons are the product of Mizuchi's talent. In other words, once we catch Mizuchi, no one can produce it anymore. Is that correct?"

Tanaka's face was deeply fatigued. His three-parted hair was also frayed and disheveled, and his glasses had blown off somewhere. Totsuka had told him how much hardship he had endured. Even so, the reason why he still wanted to go was probably because of his sense of responsibility for having to stop Mizuchi, which was the main cause of everything.

After a brief silence, Erin responded.

"That's right. Only Mizuchi can understand the knowledge of supernatural weapons. If he disappears, our country will once again lose its countermeasures against the supernatural."

"I understand."

The brief exchange contained multiple meanings.

However, Kusanagi pointedly ignored him. They would simply remove any falling sparks. There was no change in that perception, and it didn't matter what happened to Mizuchi.

"Hurry up."

Declaring that, Kusanagi stepped on the accelerator.

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It was about 10 seconds after the explosion that Mizuchi felt something strange.

The AWC Hellfire was supposed to be equipped with normal explosive rounds, not incendiary rounds. Even if the flames from the explosion went up first, it wouldn't last forever. After burning Suoh Mikoto, they would eventually calm down. It should be that kind of fire.

But that didn't stop.

No, on the contrary, it was burning more and more violently.

The flames swirled as they lit the night sky in red. A tornado of flames appeared in front of Mizuchi, burning the grass and trees. Mizuchi's allies, a group of extraordinary weapons, were engulfed in a vortex of flame, burned and melted.

At the center of it all, was the "Red King", Suoh Mikoto.

In a fire that would instantly turn a human to coal, Suoh looked as cool as ever. He took out a cigarette and even showed that he could afford to take a drag.

"Idiot."

The voice that he muttered was trembling unintentionally.

Suoh took a step forward. Then the tornado of fire also advanced with him. There, Mizuchi finally realized that the explosion he saw was not caused by a missile, but by Suoh himself.

Just before the missile exploded, Suoh created flames to vaporize the missile.

The hand that held the control stick was drenched in sweat.

(Is this the "King"?)

The threat that they should have known was in front of them as if it were a completely unknown threat.

(This is the "King".)

Mizuchi's clear and crazy mind understood that instantly.

The "King", a new human form. An ancient human threat. They must be killed. Otherwise, their "swords" will kill the old humans. To avoid that, he had the "golden" talent of his.

"Short."

For some reason, he could clearly hear Suoh's mutterings amidst the roaring flames.

Mizuchi widened his lost eyes.

"What?"

"You can't hurt me with such a small fire."

Muttering bored, Suoh tossed the cigarette away from him. Before that fell to the ground, that was engulfed in flames and extinguished without leaving a speck of dust.

Suoh's eyes were filled with obvious disappointment. The group of extraordinary weapons. "Grasshopper II", "Fireworks Master II", and "Piercer Mark II". None of it came close to killing him. No, maybe they couldn't even be enemies.

That fact reawakened a deep part of Mizuchi's heart, a longing he once had.

In other words, the jealousy of the "King" and the fear of seeing the limits of one's talent.

"Suoh Mikoto!"

Gripping the control stick until his bones cracked, Mizuchi in the "Piercer Mark II" began to run forward. With a height of 4 meters and a total weight of more than 30 tons, the nitro booster accelerated and closed the distance to the enemy in an instant. At the same time as the collision, the prepared stack bunkers in both fists activated.

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And then the "Gorilla" stopped moving.

A large body of steel lay face up in the bunker. The cut surface was still red hot, and the moisture in the air continued to evaporate white.

With a sigh, Suoh turned his feet towards the "Gorilla".

The "Sword of Damocles" was no longer in the sky. Looking back, he must have been overreacting. The "Gorilla", "Ostrich" and "Disc" were not worthy of Suoh's seriousness.

Feeling somewhat uncomfortable about that, Suoh looked inside the gorilla's face shield.

He wasn't damaged there, maybe it was because of that discomfort that he dared to remove it.

Suoh didn't think of that. He reached into the gaps in the face shield and squeezed.

The face shield was forced open with a scream that sounded like steel.

"Ha..."

Mizuchi was alive.

He crouched down as if crushed by the half-destroyed cabin. In that part it will be necessary to machine not only the eyes but also one of the arms.

But he was still alive.

The eye camera moved and captured Suoh.

"Will you kill me? Suoh Mikoto."

After a while, Suoh responded.

"Come on."

Fight. Defeat the enemy. He never questioned that. The fight that was sold is until it's over, and it doesn't matter what happens to the other party at the end of the fight.

But after the battle is over, did Suoh really have the will to kill the immobilized enemy?

Even Suoh himself did not understand.

"Eh."

Mizuchi laughed. He moved his blood-soaked lips and turned his words around.

"If you let me... live... I'll target you again. This time, a more powerful weapon. An even more brutal weapon...! For the honor of my scattered comrades... next time, I won't fail...!"

Suoh looked at Mizuchi and answered.

"Really..."

So, the battle would still continue.

It was Suoh's own decision to seal the deal, and according to Mizuchi's understanding, he was still "in the middle of a battle". Mizuchi intended to commit suicide. In that case, there was only one thing Suoh could do.

Suoh clenched his fists. A red aura resided there. Powerful enough to destroy a person's body. Mizuchi's mechanical eyes stared at him. Like a convict looking at the executioner's axe.

Suoh picked it up.

So, he stopped.

Suoh slowly lowered his fist with an aura still inside, then turned his gaze.

From afar, someone was approaching.

He was a tall man with royal arms and arms of fire. Looking at that and laughing. A smile with nothing but hostility and malice. It was a smile he had seen somewhere before.

"I found you, Suoh Mikoto."

Suoh turned around to look at the new enemy who muttered that with a plaintive voice and jumped onto the "Gorilla".

CHAPTER 12: MADNESS, ILLUSION, AND HIS FUTURE

Ed took a step forward, planting his feet firmly on the grass.

Suoh looked at Ed with eyes that showed no emotion. He looked at the kicking steel giant and jumped from there to face Ed. He put his hands on the back of his neck, cracked his joints and asked.

"Who are you?"

Ed responded with a flash of hate.

"I am a member of the "Purgatory" clan, Edward The Red. I have come to eliminate you."

Suoh tilted his head. It is possible that he did not understand what he said to him in English. Either one would do. Ed hadn't come to chat.

His right arm burned with a roar.

Edward's "stigmata" were supposed to be on his right hand. The four fingers torn off by the Kagutsu installation, and the flames that spewed from them, were his proof and weapon.

Flames were now engulfing Ed's right arm. Even the heat pain that was driving him crazy at the moment was numbing and he couldn't feel it. No pain, no sensation, but the burning arm moved as Ed intended. It was hot, strong and fierce, incomparable with the flames of the past.

Ed interpreted it as gospel. It was given to him by Kagutsu in Hell to punish the one he pretended to be the "Red King".

Clenching his fiery fist in front of his face, Ed muttered.

"You will die."

Then Ed swung his right arm out to the side.

The distance between them was about 10 meters. Rippled flames spread out like a snake's neck and attacked the sides of Suoh's head.

Suoh slightly widened his eyes and raised his right arm.

With a dull sound, the flame attack was blocked.

Ed smiled.

Using Suoh's arm as a fulcrum, the flame arm extended further. The same movement as a throwing weight ball that entangles the prey. The rope-like flames wrapped around Suoh's body, blocking his movement, that was supposed to be the case.

This time Suoh laughed.

He was blowing a hot wind. A hurricane of auras containing destructive power ripped away the fire rope and hit Ed from 10 meters away. Ed reflexively blocked it with his meat arm.

When he lowered his arm, he saw Suoh's face in front of him.

Something exploded around his plexus. Heaven and earth spun in his field of vision, and intense pain, fierce nausea, and acceleration attacked him at the same time. It was as if the shock of being hit by a car a while ago had been multiplied tenfold.

Before long, Ed landed on his back in the street, bounced, and landed face down. Unable to contain the gushing out of him, Ed sprayed the area with gastric juices.

"Gah, uh..."

Supporting his body with his bare arms, Ed sat up.

Suoh didn't go after him. He just looked at Ed curiously.

If he had wanted to, he could have punched a hole in Ed's stomach.

He was taking it easy. Those words made Ed's hatred boil even more.

"Damn! This must be a joke!"

With a cloudy and angry voice, Ed raised his flaming arm.

The arms of flames spread out in a parabola and rained down on Suoh. Suoh stepped back a bit to avoid it, but the fist exploded as he crashed to the ground, spreading flames all around him.

However, the exploding flames were drowned out by Suoh's overwhelming aura. Let alone the skin, even burning down downy hairs did not come true.

Suoh raised his leg and stomped on the fiery fist.

The sensation of his own aura being eroded by someone else's aura, Ed gritted his teeth at the pseudo-severe pain. As he did so, Ed forced the fire fist to regenerate. Five flaming claws tried to dig into Suoh's ankle.

Suoh took a step forward.

It wasn't even an attack. It was like putting out a cigarette that was dropped on the ground, crushing it. With just that action, the fiery fist flew out, creating a crater in the grass with a loud sound.

With sweat dripping from his face, Ed raised his eyes and looked at Suoh.

Elephants and ants. Hawks and winged insects. "King" and Clansman.

The difference in strength between them was so overwhelming that there was no place to think about it. Genji Kagutsu and Jin Habari. Ed, who had witnessed the two "Kings" before, knew this very well.

If Kagutsu was his opponent, there wouldn't even be dust left.

If Habari was his opponent, his neck would already be completely severed from his torso.

The fact that he was still alive made him angry more than anything else.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

With a roar, Ed stamped his feet. He hardened his fiery fist and punched right.

He was blocked with one hand.

Suoh's eyes were far from the strain of battle as he looked closely. Discomfort and suspicion. The look in the eyes of a lion chased by a fly seemed to disgust him.

Suoh's fist hit Ed's side.

"Guh..."

His toes kicked into his face, and he groaned and looked down. The sensation disappeared from the neck up, and Ed wasn't quite sure what was happening to him.

Before he knew it, the night sky was reflected in his field of vision.

Looking towards the distant "Sword of Damocles", not even a fragment of it floated.

Walking slowly towards him, Suoh stared at Ed's face. The disgust was gone, and only doubts appeared on his face.

Moving his bloody lips, Ed tried to curse Suoh.

"....."

He could not. Like a dying goldfish, he just bounced and no voice came out of his mouth.

Even so, it seemed that Suoh understood his intentions. He bowed his head and said...

"Do you want to die?"

Ed's bloody lips gave a slight smile.

"That's right."

Ed wanted to die.

He didn't want to survive, he just wanted to die. Not once in the last 10 years had that thought disappeared.

He traveled to the United States, fought countless mobsters, and reigned as the anonymous king of Las Vegas. The whole thing seemed meaningless to Ed. There was nothing quite like it when he went berserk as a member of the "Purgatory" clan. There were no chills like when he faced the strong men of "Scepter 4". He just lived... That was it, life was like coals.

That's why he wanted to end all of that quickly. May all life shine like them, and fall spectacularly against the false "Red King".

Ed focused all of his attention on his missing right arm. A small amount of flames escaped from his charred shoulder. A weak flame that was less than the flame of a lighter. Still, that was all Ed could do at the moment.

Suoh narrowed his eyes.

The aura gathered in that fist. A glowing red symbol of power.

Suoh finally got it. Ed would never stop. As long as he lives, he will always target Suoh and spread destruction and chaos.

Ed stared at the glowing red fist, signaling the end of himself.

A shot rang out.

Suoh widened his eyes slightly.

Of course, the bullet didn't hit Suoh. Due to the probability deflection field, normal weapons are not effective against psychics. Also, if the opponent is the "King", then a mere bullet is meaningless.

Suoh calmly turned his face away. Ed also looked at him unintentionally with only his eyes.

A woman with long black hair and brown skin trembled as she held a gun.

She was Maria.

She was shaking, tears welling up in her blue eyes. It must be terrifying. Despite being a lover of the mafia, she had never tasted chaos. She was the type of woman who was afraid to even touch a gun, even though she was given a gun to defend herself. Cowardly, obedient, just a woman. Even if she was wrong, she was not a good person to be in that place.

She pointed her swinging muzzle at the "King".

A voice filled with fear issued from Maria's mouth.

"Y-Y-Y-You... Get away!"

Contrary to that resolution, Maria's appearance was comical. Her presence made no sense here. Pointless resolution, pointless weapons, pointless threats. He wondered if Maria knew.

If he hadn't been crushed, Ed would have been huffing and puffing. Turning his gaze to Suoh, he finally made a voice that he could do.

"Keep going."

Suoh also looked at Ed again. Suoh must have been aware that his existence was meaningless. Raise your fist and lower it. With just that, all the troubles that bothered Suoh would end.

A series of shots rang out.

All the bullets flew in the same direction.

Although he was on the verge of death, Ed was stunned. Even without the deflecting probability field, Suoh would not have been hit even once. It might be unavoidable if it was shot by a woman he had never trained and was shaking with fear.

But...

The aura disappeared from Suoh's fist.

".....?!"

After that, Suoh seemed to have lost interest in both Ed and Maria. He turned around, crossed the golf course, and walked slowly toward the trees in the distance.

Ed distorted his face and put all his strength into getting up.

As he tried to stand up, his legs lost strength. With both knees and one hand on the ground, he barely supported his body. Maria ran over, but Ed didn't even look at her and yelled at Suoh's back.

"Wait!! Hey, where are you going?! Aren't you going to kill me?!"

Suoh didn't even stop walking.

He just took his hand out of his pocket and waved it around.

A dark killing intent grew inside Ed. Kill. He did what he did. Thinking so, he tried to run, but his legs didn't have enough strength. Like that dream trying to catch up with the funeral procession. There was a back in front of him that he really wanted to reach for, but his body wasn't listening to what he was saying.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

Slamming his forehead into the ground, Ed screamed as if he was vomiting blood. The night wind blew like a fool, and the scattered grass brushed his ear.

A woman's tearful voice could be heard mixed with the sound.

"Ed, stop it, Ed!"

The swollen killing intent found a place to go.

As Ed watched, Maria wore an unmistakable expression of fear. As if facing a monster, she placed her buttocks on her back and stepped back.

It was a distance that he could reach if he stretched out his arm. A woman's thin neck can be tightened without using special powers.

There was a good reason to do it. That woman got in his way. She botched the fight with Suoh and wasted the precious opportunity. That alone was worth dying for. He should have killed her and he wanted to.

Five fingers bent into hooks were about to reach for Maria's neck, but stopped halfway.

He heard a voice telling him to kill her.

Would he kill his own woman for his revenge because he was no match for the "Red King"?

Is that the meaning of not being able to die and having lived until now?

The trembling fingers finally lost their strength and fell.

"Guuuuh!"

Covering his face with his hands, Ed crouched down and let out a bloody sob.

+++++

Mizuchi was crawling in the dark.

The eye chamber was broken a long time ago, and he didn't know what was happening around him. The ground, which had been grass until a while ago, now had the feel of wet

earth. Could he escape through the trees? It would all be over if Suoh chased after him, but that was no reason not to run away.

In the darkness, Mizuchi muttered.

"Fufufu... Thank you, Mr. Edward... I appreciate it..."

He did not despair. The "golden" dream he pursued, the "king-slaying" dream, glowed brightly even in the dark. Survive by crawling or drinking muddy water. Then he would move towards his goal. Mizuchi knew that repetition was the only way to make his dreams come true.

Brilliant wisdom and talent. The only way to polish it was with his bare hands.

(That's right, master! Do your best!)

(You're almost there! Survive!)

(You do it for us too!)

In his ear, "Grasshopper II", "Fireworks Master II" and "Piercer Mark II" encouraged him.

"Oh...! Thank you, thank you all... I'm sure I will...!"

Even as he climbed up the tree roots and buried his face in the mud, Mizuchi was still smiling.

Someone would find Mizuchi, if he could just crawl to the main street. Since America is a civilized nation, an ambulance would come to help a person who is covered in blood and falls. If that were to happen, the headquarters of operations should eventually pick up Mizuchi.

He couldn't beat the "Red King". On the contrary, he couldn't even kill one of "Homura". That is the result of a study that does not lie.

However, regardless of whether top management could understand it or not, failures were inevitable in the investigation. No, the accumulation of failure data was the very meaning of the investigation. The fruit of success was on top of that accumulation. That result was just one of the many failures that are necessary if you want to kill the "King".

Mizuchi must have conveyed that. Through his own mouth, to the people above him. That is the reason why he came to this country.

At that moment, his fingers reached out in front of him and touched something.

Hard, cold and slippery: someone's shoes.

"Mizuchi."

The voice coming from above was unmistakable. Mizuchi's lover... was Jane.

"Uh... oh, Jane. Thank God it's you. I was worried."

"What?"

With his half-destroyed face raised, Mizuchi smiled.

"I received a message from headquarters that you betrayed me, but I understand. It's a ploy to trick them, right? We are comrades with the goal of "killing the king". You can't betray me."

"....."

"Come on, take me to the headquarters. Let me explain. And then, the next strategy! It might be good to do it in Japan... I'm also interested in the "Silver King". When you say "unchangeable", how much "unchangeable"? is? If I can catch him... I'm sure I can do all kinds of experiments... Fufufufu."

A metallic sound echoed above Mizuchi, who was laughing to himself.

He didn't know what it was. The next thing he heard was Jane's voice.

"I wonder if Doctor Frankenstein felt that way."

Unable to understand the meaning, Mizuchi turned his invisible eyes towards Jane.

Jane was lying.

"It is definitely us who turned you into a monster. Your superiors may not admit it, but I do. I am definitely responsible for that."

At that expression, Mizuchi smiled.

"Huh, "Monster"... I see. Maybe that's the case. I'm sure I'm a monster."

"....."

"But, Jane. As you know, the "King" is also a monster. To kill a monster, you have to become a monster yourself. Isn't that right?"

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

After sighing, Jane muttered.

"So I'll be a monster too."

And then a shot rang out.

After that, Mizuchi's consciousness, the shining "golden" dream, the most valuable battle data against the "King" that had been accumulated in the main device, all disappeared into eternal darkness.

+++++

Tanaka glanced at Erin as she returned from the golf course.

He didn't dare question the meaning of the shot that rang out earlier. He guessed that she did it because she said: "I'll draw a line.". And there was only one line that Erin had to draw.

Erin looked at Tanaka. They were tired eyes. Right next to the minivan parked across the street, she sat on the railing and breathed out deeply.

"It's over."

"Yes."

That's what Tanaka replied. He could only answer yes. Even with his shared interests, Erin was still an agent of another organization. The words that could be spoken were limited.

So Tanaka took a cigarette from his pocket, put it in his mouth, and lit it.

He offered the box to the surprised Erin. Erin smiled and took out a cigarette. She turned it on, inhaled and exhaled.

And so the two spies breathed in the purple smoke for a while.

"What's going on over there?"

Tanaka answered while he smoked a cigarette.

"A while ago, a Japanese diplomat contacted us. The United States said that they had no idea what was happening in Las Vegas, but said that they would do everything possible to calm him down."

Erin raised her eyebrows. She must know the meaning of the sign.

"Isn't that "investigation"?"

Tanaka chuckled slightly.

"Since the silence of the "Punching Machine Mark II" was confirmed, the United States has responded to our communications. Perhaps destroying it was their... apology, their breaking point."

A weapon to kill the "King" with a supernatural person. That's what America thought, Tanaka's icy side thought. Superpowers are always suspicious of being toppled from their thrones. The "superhuman body" that the Third Empire once envisioned was literally the "Sword of Damocles". It was kind of an instinct to look for ways to prevent it.

However, it ended in failure.

In the end, the supernatural weapon created by Mizuchi was useless against the "King". He did not know what conclusions the United States would draw from that failure. By holding them accountable, they might interfere a bit with that conclusion. That was the job of "Tokijikuin" and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Everything he could do there was over.

Tanaka looked up at the night sky at the sound of the rotor. A military helicopter crossed the night sky diagonally. Looking at that, Tanaka asked.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know."

Erin looked at the light at the end of her cigarette and responded with those words.

"There are not many paths for a traitorous agent to choose. If you stay like this in the country, you will be persecuted in the near future, and at best you will go to prison, at worst you will be eliminated. If you don't like that, why don't you change your face and name and fly abroad?"

"You mean me to go to "Tokijikuin"?"

Erin's blue eyes looked at Tanaka.

Placing his cigarette in the portable ashtray, Tanaka continued calmly.

"I knew that other countries viewed the existence of supernatural beings as a threat, but I never thought that they would use force to this extent. I need to review my expectations. The information you have will be of great help."

With a laugh, Erin tossed her cigarette onto the asphalt. She put on her shoes and laughed a self-deprecating laugh.

"If I can predict what the United States will do, I can also think of ways to avoid it. In terms of avoiding conflict, it is also for the benefit of my motherland, right?"

"....."

"I've also tried to recruit spies from other countries for my own camp. The trick is to make them believe they're doing the right thing. Half of it should be true. I'll make it easier to swallow to protect myself."

Erin pushed back from the railing and shrugged.

"If it's that simple, I won't betray you in the first place."

"That's all."

Tanaka had no choice but to reply.

Erin got into the minivan and started the engine. She asked Tanaka through the window.

"Speaking of which, how are the members of "Homura"?"

"After meeting with Suoh Mikoto, I took him to the hideout you prepared for me. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will move to another hotel."

"Actually. Please excuse me for causing you trouble."

Tanaka remained silent and nodded slightly. He was a miserable person. He combined benevolence and righteousness. If a person like her entered "Tokijikuin", the peace they wanted would have become more secure.

But her choice was her freedom.

The minivan took off slowly. The tail light went back. A blue patrol lantern and a siren approached from a distance as if to pass him. Tanaka stared at him and took out a second cigarette.

+++++

His body trembled and his confused awareness slowly surfaced.

"Where I am?"

When he blinked his blurry vision several times, he looked like he was in a car. It was the passenger seat of a pickup truck. When he looked to the side, Maria was driving with an exhausted look on her face.

"Guh..."

When he tried to move his body even a little, severe pain shot through him.

He gritted his teeth and endured it when he heard Maria gasp.

"Ed! Are you awake? Are you okay?!"

Ed looked at Maria. Seeing the anger in his eyes, Maria showed fear of being hit.

But even so, Maria lowered her eyes and whispered.

"I'm sorry. But I can't help..."

"....."

Ed didn't say anything either, gritting his teeth.

He knew what Maria was thinking. He supposed that she didn't want to die. It can be love, or it can be self-protection. He doesn't know what will happen to Maria if Ed dies. At least he got out of Las Vegas. "Blood & Fire" is not a loyal organization to the extent that the position of "previous boss's lover" is accepted.

No, or maybe even now...

"We'll be home soon. Good luck until then."

Ed frowned.

When he thought to tell her to stop, he had already reached a familiar section.

After stopping the car in front of the hideout, Maria got out of the driver's seat. Ed straightened up, got out of the passenger seat looking good at best, and wobbled. Maria lent her arm there.

It was nasty. He thought so reflectively. If they saw that...

"Boss. Are you okay?"

A low voice called from the shadow of the alley.

Leaning against Maria, Ed looked up. The organization's executive, Douglas, approached slowly.

An ugly burn ran down his cheek. Ed did. The other organization he once belonged to was crushed by Ed and the others, after which the surviving Douglas was recruited.

"Why are you here, Douglas?"

"I was worried about my boss. Looks like you did a good job."

Ed spent half of his life in the underworld.

It was much more important to read other people's thoughts there than in public society. You can't survive if you can't say what you want, what you're thinking, and what you're trying to do. That's why Ed relies on his sense of smell, which has survived until now.

And now, the scent emanating from Douglas was something he had smelled many times before.

Ed dared to speak bluntly.

"It's an extra help. What happened to Diego and Alan?"

"They left."

Two members appeared behind Douglas in the shadow of the alley.

He had a submachine gun in his hand.

Douglas's burns created an ugly smile.

"This bullet can also be used on psychics, right?"

Douglas pulled out a gun and pointed it at Ed.

Maria screamed. The passenger door was still not closed. Ed's damage was so severe that he couldn't grow his arms of fire in an instant. Something had to be sacrificed. Ed made an instant decision on what to sacrifice.

He grabbed Maria's shoulder with his left hand and turned his body at the same time. He let his body get between Maria and the gun. Ed pushed Maria into the passenger seat.

A shot rang out and a hammer-like discharge exploded from his back.

Blood gushed from Ed's mouth and splashed across Maria's face, who was writhing in fear and shock.

At that moment, the flame arm was finally ready.

The extraordinary arm that extended from his shoulder stretched out like a whip with a movement that was impossible for the human body, dragging the three people behind it.

Shouts and gunshots echoed down the back alley.

Ed looked ahead. His bloodstained lips were laughing. Shoulder, stomach, thorax. Despite the hail of bullets, Ed was still laughing.

"Hahahahahahaha!"

The two of them rolled on the ground, turned into balls of fire and writhed. Douglas, whose stomach was burned, his eyes widened in fear, but he still tried to aim the barrel between Ed's eyebrows. Ed burned the gun first. He then smashed his fiery fist into Douglas's face, sending flames down his throat at will.

When Douglas was extinguished, the other two had already stopped moving.

Ed got to his knees.

"Ed, Ed, Ed!"

Maria covered him from behind. The heat of tears fell on the flesh that had been torn by the bullet.

"Ha.", Ed chuckled.

Is that the reason why he couldn't die until now?

To save the life of his lover with his own life. Cheesy and cliché. Anyone in "Purgatory" would laugh. That's why he couldn't die.

That was true.

That is why he had lived until now.

Maria was crying, his voice was fading. He was very pleased with that. Not because he loved Maria. It was because a conviction settled in his chest.

A funeral procession crossing the white desert.

Far, far away, the march in black receded as if they were vanishing over the horizon.

Looking at them, Ed didn't feel the impatience he had before.

Because he realized that he was not qualified to do it.

Ed was no longer in "Purgatory". That day, "Purgatory" disappeared from this world together with Genji Kagutsu.

You cannot belong to what has disappeared. You can't touch it; you can't reach it. It was just something inside Ed, with bright memories.

It took him 10 years to figure that out.

Ed closed his eyes and murmured with a small smile on his lips.

"She's so sweet I hate myself."

+++++

Foolishly, there were also slot machines in the departure terminal. A few people here and there were reluctantly playing slots even though they were about to become flight attendants. They wanted to make up some of the money they had lost in Las Vegas, but most of the time they were only going to widen the wound.

Looking at him with numb eyes, Fushimi leaned back in his chair and checked the ticket again.

It was business on the way there, but first on the way home. He could see the guilt of "Tokijikuin". Thanks to his clumsiness, Fushimi ended up traveling to Las Vegas. If he hadn't done at least that much, he wouldn't have been worth it.

At that moment, his PDA received a call.

After putting the ticket in his pocket, Fushimi took out his PDA, confirmed the call, and clicked his tongue. It was a name he didn't want to see as much as possible. He could have chosen to ignore it, but Fushimi took the call with a sigh, thinking it would be a bother if he found out later.

"Good morning, Fushimi-kun, oh, excuse me. It's still noon there."

"What's up, Captain?"

The reason for his dismissive tone was because the report had already been submitted. From the arrival in Las Vegas to the present, he had been sending almost every event that happened. Now that the enemy Intelligence Service had withdrawn and the incident was circulating in the media, Fushimi had nothing to say to Munakata.

However, Munakata hit a sore spot.

"What was in Tanaka-san's report was not in your final report, so I confirm it. I heard that you injured your left arm, is that true?"

"....."

That was true. Fushimi's left arm was in a cast and bandaged and dangled from his neck.

"Fushimi-kun?"

"There was a problem trying to stop the guys from "Homura"."

To be more precise, Misaki Yata's staff broke Fushimi Saruhiko's left arm, but it was too unpleasant to put into words, so he won't report it in detail.

"That's it. Then, you must file a work-related accident claim after you return home."

"I understand. Is that all?"

"That's all there is to talk about work. From now on, it will be small talk, but your activities have been spreading across the sea."

"Eh?"

At the same time, he frowned, the television in the living room played a news video.

It was a familiar image.

"The CIA cover story says that this incident was a conflict between members of the mafia, but it seems that you were unable to cover up your activities. So it seems that it was a new show at the Varangia Hotel. Congratulations on your debut in Las Vegas."

Three men fighting as if dancing in a fountain. They rained down fire, wielded glowing wands, and slashed with glowing sabers. It certainly looked like a spectacle depending on how you looked at it.

Fushimi whispered his impressions.

"This is the worst."

Munakata laughed.

"You've been unlucky for a long time. At that rate, the casino wasn't good enough, right?"

"I don't go there except for work. I didn't come here to play."

"Oh. That's a waste. Why don't you try your luck one last time? Aren't there any slot machines at the Las Vegas airport?"

Fushimi snorted.

"I'll cut it when I'm done."

"Yes. Please let me know when you get back home the result of the slot. After..."

That was it, the call was disconnected.

Fushimi tilted his lips and looked at the slot machines in the living room once more.

He supposed it wasn't an order. It was none other than Munakata who said that it was a talk. However, he could imagine that he would be the first to be asked about it when he returned to Japan, and he could also expect to be lied to at that time, or criticized for answering "I didn't."

Just to avoid it, Fushimi got up and walked over to the slot.

He sat down at the machine and entered a dollar bill. Upon pressing the button, the reels began to spin at high speed. As it was, Fushimi randomly pressed the button three times.

The 7 was complete and "JACKPOT!" showed up.

A terrifying volume of fanfare and sickening flickering lightning were emitted from the slits in front of Fushimi. A crowd of onlookers gathered around and the staff flew away in a hurry. Fushimi looked at them with the eyes of a dead fish.

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"Hey, Yata-chan. What are you doing?"

Yata snapped out of his thoughts when he called out to him.

"Oh, no, wait a minute..."

"Do you drink alcohol? Did you?"

Yata smiled wryly at Kusanagi's joking comment. He was sitting at the bar in the room. The "Pyramid Hotel" had similar facilities, but this one seemed more sophisticated.

The place to stay that "Tokijikuin" prepared was a VIP room in a fancy old hotel.

According to Tanaka, the crisis is over and there is no need to worry about the public eye. The sun was out and it was time to return to a fun vacation. The other members seemed to have already gone out to play the casino.

But Yata still didn't feel that way.

Seeing that, Kusanagi made a very nonchalant gesture and sat down next to Yata. He picked up the bottle in the cupboard and showed exaggerated surprise from him.

"Oh, it's Ballantine's 30th. As expected of a luxury hotel, that's a ridiculous thing to put in a room."

"It is expensive?"

"Well, at the HOMRA bar, a popular bar like ours, you can't really sell it. If it's a genuine product, it's probably around 80,000."

"Eh...?!"

A strange voice came out. Yata did not know of any other bottle that cost so much.

However, Kusanagi cleverly opened the bottle. He took out two glasses, he poured just a little and slid one of them towards Yata.

Kusanagi smiled at the puzzled Yata,

"In the beginning, it's better to drink good sake."

"Haa..."

When he raised his glass, it smelled like vanilla. When he looked at Kusanagi, he was drinking as if he was licking it. When he followed suit and he dipped his tongue into the amber liquid, it spread an indescribably smooth taste, and the next moment his throat burned.

The reason why he could barely contain himself was because he heard the price. Kusanagi looked at Yata with amused eyes. He knew that was going to happen. Yata raised the glass forcefully and made a toast gesture.

"It's good."

Kusanagi laughed out loud, then brought his mouth close to the glass again. Yata also looked ahead, but he put the glass down and started looking at the sake bottles lined up on the cabinet.

Before long, Yata opened his mouth, still unable to collect his thoughts.

"I was thinking about Ed."

Kusanagi didn't know about Ed. He had heard about the former "Red Clan member" who attacked Yata and the others, but he had never actually seen him. When Yata and the others joined Suoh, Ed had already disappeared.

In fact, it turned out exactly as Fushimi said. Yata, filled with irresistible anger, had no choice but to admit it. Ed tried to kill Suoh and failed. No matter how heinous it was, there was no way a mere clansman could win against the "King".

Ed must have known.

However, he challenged Suoh. He kept wondering why he did that.

"That guy said that he belonged to a clan called "Purgatory". I'm sure that was the Red Clan from before."

"Yes. I've heard that too. It seems they were quite unreasonable."

Yata nodded vaguely. He wasn't really interested in "before". If Yata only had "Homura", that would be enough.

But...

"He lost his "King", right?"

Yata began to reflect on what Ed was shouting.

(There is only one "Red King". You cannot do anything other than that.)

"Even if we were "next", he couldn't allow it. He couldn't accept it. That's why he attacked us."

No matter how favorably he interpreted Ed's actions, it was nothing more than resentment. It wasn't like Suoh or Yata had done anything to him. That man was just spewing out the anger and hatred that had been swelling up inside of him against "Homura".

"At that time, it wasn't a joke, I already figured it out. But when I think about it now, I feel like I understand his feelings a little bit."

Losing his "King".

Yata hadn't even imagined such a thing. Suoh Mikoto is the strongest and most invincible "King". Even if something happened, even if the time came when "Homura" had to fight with everything, he couldn't even imagine that Suoh would die. First, at that time, he was supposed to have died first as the captain of the vanguard.

But what if he was in the same position as Ed?

What if the "next" Red Clan appeared in the life of losing the "King", losing the clan and continuing to smolder?

"If that happens, I could do the same. I would not allow the "following" to praise the new "Red King", and so..."

He couldn't put it into words. Yata let out a breath.

Kusanagi slowly shook his head.

"I don't know much about this Ed guy. But how is he different from you, Yata-chan?"

Yata looked at Kusanagi. The eyes behind the sunglasses were thoughtfully downcast.

"There are times when you need to think, but you don't do meaningless things. The Yata-chan I know should have been that kind of person. Even if the same situation happened, I don't think that would happen to Yata-chan."

"...Yes, it's true."

"Do you believe me?"

Kusanagi smiled. Number 2 of "Homura", his unmistakable words had considerable persuasive power.

On the other hand, Yata wanted to ask Kusanagi the same thing.

"Kusanagi-san, have you ever thought about that?"

"By chance... you mean? Haha, that happens all the time."

Yata rolled his eyes and Kusanagi shrugged.

"Mikoto is that kind of person. I wouldn't be surprised if something happened."

Yata asked as he chose his words.

"If that happens, what do you plan to do, Kusanagi-san?"

Kusanagi turned the glass in his hand. As if playing with his own thoughts, Kusanagi repeated that gesture for a while before muttering.

"I don't know what will happen then."

Then Kusanagi looked at Yata and smiled.

"I just have to do what I can. At that point, do what you can do to the best of your ability and leave the rest to me."

Yata tilted his head.

"Leave you what?"

"I don't know. Luck or heaven. Maybe something like that."

Saying that, Kusanagi tipped his glass.

It was a story he could understand and couldn't understand. Yata was not smart. He knew it very well. Moving his body was more suited to his nature than thinking, and he still wanted to.

Even so, Yata thought of Ed.

Do what you could. That's how it is. If so, did Ed have no choice but to do that? For the sake of his "King", he challenged the next "King" knowing that he couldn't win. Was that all he could do?

"....."

Yata frowned, and then, like Kusanagi, drank the glass in one go.

"Ah."

Kusanagi let out a nervous voice. The hot alcohol slid down his throat and burned his stomach. Gritting his teeth and bearing it, Yata looked at Kusanagi with slightly reddened eyes.

"Thank you, Kusanagi-san. I can't say it right, but I'll do the same. If that happens, I'll do my best."

To be honest, Kusanagi smiled wryly. He picked up the whiskey bottle again and poured it into Yata's glass. This made Yata happy, as if he had been recognized for something.

CHAPTER 6.5 (EXTRA): FUSHIMI GOURMET IN LAS VEGAS

Twenty-four hours had passed since the paranormal weapon attack and the arrival at the "Pyramid Hotel".

Leading the "Tokijikuin" agents who had appeared out of nowhere, the first thing Tanaka did was to build a "fortress". The "Pyramid Hotel" has yet to be discovered by the "enemy", but it is only a matter of time. Sooner or later, they will take some kind of action. Tanaka's plan was to establish surveillance, control, and defense postures until then.

Of course, Fushimi Saruhiko's work was also included in the plan.

Fushimi got out of bed and stretched his body.

He looked at the clock. Apparently he slept for about two hours. He thought he had a dream in which he was being chased by an ostrich, but he didn't remember exactly. He staggered to the bathroom. After washing his face, brushing his teeth, and drinking a glass of water...

He felt hungry.

Returning to his room, Fushimi opened the refrigerator and frowned.

Inside was a half-eaten sandwich. He bought some from the hotel convenience store, took a bite, and it was so disgusting that he never ate it again. It was barely food, consisting of limp lettuce and thin ham sandwiched between dry bread. If there was one good thing about coming to Vegas, it was that it made him realize how delicious Japanese convenience store food is.

Fushimi closed the refrigerator.

The hunger didn't go away. Just seeing the food, even indirectly, had only increased his curiosity. What should he do? Given the level of the convenience store, he shouldn't expect much from the restaurant either. If he had known, he would have brought some instant noodles from Japan.

At that moment, there was a knock at the door.

Fushimi cautiously leaned over and looked through the peephole.

It was Tanaka.

"Good morning, Fushimi-san."

When he opened the door, Tanaka greeted him politely. The usual side-parted hair and suit, in the style of the old Japanese office worker. Fushimi had yet to see his bright smile waver. It's surprising that it continues to do so even when they're attacked by the military.

"Thanks to your support, we've been able to establish the first phase of our defense line. We're currently planning the initial work for the second phase. We appreciate your continued cooperation."

Fushimi nodded briefly, and immediately afterward, his stomach growled.

Tanaka tilted his head slightly.

"Oh, you haven't had breakfast yet?"

"...The food at the convenience store tastes so bad that I don't feel like eating it."

Tanaka smiled at Fushimi's calm response. No, he had been smiling up until now, but this smile seemed genuine.

"It's a perfect time. I'm going to eat now, would you like to join me? It's a bit far, so we'll have to go by car."

"By car...? Are you sure you want to leave work and go?"

"I've already given my subordinates the direction to follow, so there will be time to eat. How about it?"

Fushimi thought.

He doesn't particularly like eating with other people. But, he was hungry anyway, and he didn't want to bother looking for a restaurant in Las Vegas, where he didn't know the place. If Tanaka knows a good restaurant, it might be a good idea to take his advice.

"Alright then, let's go."

Fushimi would regret his answer for the rest of the day.

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The name of the restaurant was "Heart Attack Grill".

"Heart Attack (myocardial infarction)?"

At that moment he had a bad feeling. It's a fairly well-known restaurant in Las Vegas, and he's long dreamed of going there. While Tanaka happily (and probably sincerely) talked about it, Fushimi silently investigated the restaurant next to him.

According to the reviews, it has a 4.2 stars rating. Hashtags include "hospitalization", "blood pressure", and "coronary artery bypass surgery". Not a good tag for a restaurant review.

He wondered if he could go home now.

Fushimi was already thinking that while riding in the car. Meanwhile, Tanaka parked, took his ticket, and closed one eye, saying, "I'll hide this from "Tokijikuin"." He was so frank with him that he couldn't help but say something.

A replica ambulance was parked in front of the "Heart Attack Grill". Through the glass, waitresses in nurse uniforms could be seen walking back and forth inside the store. Apparently this store is based on a hospital motif.

Next to the entrance was a scale, and a white man who looked to be about three times Fushimi's volume was standing on it and looked dejected. Fushimi thought it was too late to be depressed about his weight, but according to Tanaka, the man was depressed because he was "light". That means any customer who weighs more than 350 pounds (about 160 kg) can get a free item.

By this time, Fushimi had also begun to understand the concept of this burger joint. This is a restaurant whose purpose is to stuff one's stomach with an inordinate amount of food, known as a binge-eating establishment.

"Shall we measure ourselves too?"

"No, that doesn't make sense."

Unlike the happy Tanaka, Fushimi's goal had changed to "get back to the hotel as soon as possible". There's no way he can enjoy himself here. Fushimi had that confidence.

The two of them entered the shop.

At the reception counter, a female clerk in a nurse's uniform was listlessly playing with her blonde hair. Looking at her completely open chest, Fushimi suddenly thought of his Lieutenant.

Her darkly shadowed eyes looked at the two of them.

Tanaka spoke to her in fluent English with a bright smile on his face.

"I'm Tanaka, I made a reservation."

The receptionist looked at Fushimi and Tanaka with an appraising gaze. Looking at the two of them, who are particularly thin even among Japanese, she gave a half-smile.

"Are you okay? Do you know the rules of this shop?"

"Yes, right."

The receptionist shrugged exaggeratedly and muttered "Okay, okay." in a mocking tone, then...

"Guide for two people."

"Clap, clap!", she clapped her hands.

Two more nurses appeared from the back of the shop. For some reason, they were pushing a wheelchair. He was shocked and looked at Tanaka, who explained it to him while laughing.

"That's also a rule of this restaurant. When customers come in, they are taken to their seats in a wheelchair."

Fushimi stared at Tanaka.

However, Tanaka just tilted his head and gave a confused smile. This guy is no good. Fushimi turned to the receptionist and announced.

"I don't need it. My feet move."

The receptionist pursed her red lips and cried out in a pitiful voice.

"Oh... what a selfish boy. No, the patient has to follow instructions. If you hit your head, there's no turning back."

"It's you who need to have your brain examined...!"

Although he said that in a hoarse voice, the receptionist simply laughed and didn't take it seriously. As she poked Fushimi in the stomach with her index finger,

"Okay, can we leave the store now? Your stomach probably can't hold our burger. Oh, maybe you can finish the kids' menu?"

He was almost about to pull out his hidden weapon.

However, at the last moment, Fushimi managed to endure it. If you resort to violence, you will lose. And the one thing he absolutely did not want was to lose to them.

Fushimi sat in his wheelchair with the determination of Christ carrying his cross. Tanaka followed suit.

Then the nurses gently placed aprons on both of them. Imitating a surgical gown for a patient.

"Then have fun!"

With a signal from the receptionist, the wheelchair began to move forward. Fushimi thought that this must be how a criminal must feel after being paraded around the city and then executed.

The inside of the shop was a world of madness.

Customers wearing surgical gowns roam around the place. Each and every one of them is so large that it makes Kamamoto look small. He was surprised to see a customer receiving an IV drip, but it looked like there was a drink in the IV bag. Some people even drink milkshake-type drinks directly from syringes designed to look like real syringes. He thought that he would look better in a straitjacket than in a surgical gown.

However, Fushimi is now one of the patients in the ward.

The two of them took a seat and sat across from each other. Tanaka looked at the menu in amusement. Fushimi stared at him and muttered,

"Do you like places like this?"

"Very much."

A side-parted hairstyle, a suit, and a smile that seemed pasted on. That was the "Tanaka Hitoshi" that Fushimi knew. It's like he doesn't know anything. Everything surrounding Tanaka is a lie; he's nothing more than an icon, an agent of "Tokijikuin".

But Tanaka is different now. Now he looked like he was really enjoying it.

"Perhaps this will surprise you, but I really love these kinds of shops."

His eyes behind his glasses narrowed as if he were looking into the distance.

"As you know, our organization has a heavy responsibility. To govern the nation, ensure the safety of the people, and keep paranormal abilities a secret. If we make a single wrong move, order will be lost in an instant. Of course, that heavy responsibility also falls on us, the "rabbits". It's a tremendous amount of stress."

Tanaka lovingly strokes the menu that appears with an assortment of blasphemous burgers.

"And this is how I release it. Ramen with extra garlic oil, a five-tiered pork chop tower bowl, a super-greasy buttermilk shake... only when I eat things like this can I forget about the heavy responsibilities of everyday life."

Fushimi said with a serious face.

"You will die eventually."

"We will all die one day. What is important is how we live."

Tanaka spoke as if he had realized something and Fushimi looked at him with the gaze of a monster. It was a moment where the dark side of "Tokijikuin", the largest and most powerful clan in Japan, was glimpsed. Well, it's hard to call it a proper clan if they make its members dress up like "rabbits".

"Which one would you like, Fushimi-san?"

Tanaka turned the menu over in his hand and handed it to Fushimi. Fushimi looked with gloomy eyes at the dishes on the menu, each loaded with a nuclear warhead of calories.

"...This one."

He then pointed at a double bypass burger (in this restaurant, all burgers have the word bypass on them), the second smallest burger. Although it is ranked second from the bottom, it is several times larger than a Japanese burger. The reason he didn't choose the smallest one was because he remembered the receptionist's mockery.

"Is that so? Well then."

Tanaka raised his hand and called the waitress over. He placed Fushimi's order first, then said his own.

"I'll have this Octuple Bypass burger with the Flatliner set."

The order form slipped from the waitress's hands.

"I'm sorry, did I hear you wrong? What did you say?"

Tanaka repeated his order, a little louder than before.

The waitress nodded slightly with her eyes wide open and wrote the letters on the order form. Then she quickly walked to the center pillar of the store, grabbed a hand bell that was hanging there, and rang it to her heart's content.

"One Octuple Bypass, on its way!"

At that sound, the store fell silent for a moment... and the next moment it erupted with excitement.

"Hey, hey, hey, are you serious? What kind of crazy person is this?"

"That Asian guy?! That's ridiculous! There's no way he could eat it!"

"Hahaha, that's a bad joke. He didn't order it because he wanted to be punished, right?"

Shock, admiration, mockery. Theirs emotions were tinged with such colors. This is how people react when they see someone attempting the impossible.

Fushimi looked blandly at the menu.

The "Octuple Bypass Burger" looked less like a burger and more like a layered city built from meat and cheese.

Octuple (eight times). Four times double.

The total calories are over 20,000.

Fushimi looked at Tanaka.

"Are you crazy?"

Tanaka smiled and steepled the fingers of both hands.

"I'm looking forward to it."

There was no pretense in that voice. Tanaka was in such a good mood that it seemed like he was about to start humming. His expression says that he can't wait for the delicious food that's about to arrive.

Meanwhile, Fushimi and Tanaka were the center of attention in the shop. If anything, they were in a bad situation. No matter how you looked at it, Tanaka doesn't look like someone who could finish an Octuple Bypass burger. There's malice in their gazes, as if they were going to watch some stupid Asian choke to death on some meat.

The awkward moment didn't last long.

Their orders were carried out.

The way the waitress brought it to him looked like something out of a comedy. The meat and cheese, piled like a mille-feuille, gently swayed as it approached. When it was placed in front of Tanaka, his figure was completely hidden from view.

"....."

Fushimi stared at his double bypass burger. It's a huge thing that could feed him for three days, but compared to Tanaka's thing it's like a giant or a dwarf.

"Fushimi-san, please come over here."

Tanaka said as he handed him a pair of latex gloves. He was already adapted. Fushimi did the same. If you wipe your hands after every meal, you'll need a box of napkins.

"Well then, let's eat."

He cupped his latex-gloved hands together and made that statement with dignity.

Tanaka started eating.

First, he removed the symbolic bun from the top. Then he took the burger on top. He opened his mouth and took a bite. After repeating that a few times, the burger disappeared. He took the next burger, opened his mouth, took a bite...

He's not at all someone who eats quickly. Rather, Tanaka takes his time to savor each burger. He lovingly takes a palm-sized sheet of meat with both hands and bites into it. Every time he does that, his face lights up as if he just tasted something heavenly.

Meanwhile, the Octuple (eight times) became a sextuple (six times).

Tanaka's face didn't change color. The speed at which he ate and the things he did. Take, open, bite. He went about his routine monotonously, like an office worker completing paperwork.

The mocking laughter on the faces of the audience slowly began to fade away.

Fushimi also imitated Tanaka, removing the bun, grabbing a burger and stuffing it into his mouth.

His eyes widened.

Delicious. He thought it would be cooked dry, but contrary to his expectations, every time he put the burger into his mouth, juicy meat juices gushed out. Cheese has a slightly unusual taste, but when combined with the hot fat, it rises to an exquisite taste.

At that moment, Fushimi finally remembered that he was hungry.

Eat with pleasure. Patty. Cheese. When the fat gets too much, put the bread in your mouth and add ketchup to change the taste. Apparently, the store doesn't stock any plant-based foods, like pickles or lettuce. Apparently the French fries that Tanaka eats to cleanse his palate (although they're not that good) are all fried in lard. Hence the cardiac arrest. It's crazy.

Tanaka's burger had already quadrupled.

Tanaka's speed didn't change. Calmly and solemnly, he grabs it, opens it, and takes a bite.

The customers began to murmur. The sneer of malice slowly turned into astonishment.

Fushimi was also starting to get a new view of Tanaka. He didn't see any value in gluttony, but he still ate with pleasure. Besides, even though this place was crazy, it was definitely a hit. It was the first time he had tried something so delicious since he came to the States.

Double and then single.

When he finished the last burger, Tanaka placed it between the remaining buns. Then he started chewing it like it was a normal burger (although it was much bigger than that). There was no slowing down in that speed. As Fushimi, the other customers, and the waitresses looked on, Tanaka finished eating without slowing down at all, right down to the last bite.

Tanaka wiped his mouth with a napkin, took off his dirty gloves, and clasped his hands together again.

"Thanks for the food."

And so he finished eating.

The inside of the shop erupted with excitement.

"Hey, hey! Is that guy really Japanese? He really ate it!"

"A ninja? Hey, hey, is that guy a ninja?"

"Idiot!" He's a samurai! The last samurai of Japan!"

Despite receiving thunderous applause, Tanaka merely smiled coldly and bowed slightly. The customers became even more excited by this refined gesture and the waitress blushed and muttered, "Wow..."

Fushimi felt awkward.

Although he respected Tanaka, he was still full. Fushimi's Double Bypass Burger wasn't even a simple burger yet. It was still delicious, but since it was so greasy, he quickly got tired of it. After swallowing it and giving a small sigh, Tanaka called out to him in concern.

"Are you okay, Fushimi-san?"

"... Yes, well."

His low groan seemed like nothing more than an attempt to cope with the situation. He thought so too. He politely took a bite of the burger, but his speed noticeably slowed down.

Well, even if he can't eat it all, he can just leave it as it is. Tanaka's ability to eat a lot is admirable, but he sees no reason to join in. Unlike Kamamoto, Fushimi wasn't interested enough in food to eat until his stomach burst.

The one who blew that naive thought away was the receptionist.

"Hey, Japanese boy. How are you?"

Before he knew it, she was standing by the table. While playing with her blonde hair, she looked at Fushimi with a mocking look.

"This glasses-wearing gentleman seems like a really tough guy. But you seem to be having a hard time."

"Shut your mouth. Don't talk to me while I'm eating."

"Aha, what a strong-willed boy. But do you know what happens if you can't finish it?"

"What?"

Fushimi gave her a suspicious look. A sadistic smile appeared on the receptionist's red lips. She pointed her thumb at a large pillar. The bell that rang earlier is hanging.

Fushimi noticed that there were several whips lined up beside him.

"Apparently you didn't know? In this restaurant we have a policy of disciplining any naughty child who leaves their food lying around. Oh, speaking of rumors..."

A white man who was sitting far away from Fushimi and the others stood up at the waitress' insistence. For some reason he was slumped over. He then grabbed the pillar's railing with both hands and slightly spread his legs. The waitress took the whip from the pillar.

The waitress lifted him up and brought it down with all her might on the white man's buttocks.

"You naughty child for leaving your food behind! Reflect on your actions! Repent!"

Twice, three times. Each time the whip hit his buttocks, the white man writhed in joy and screamed. The surrounding customers laughed loudly at this.

Fushimi had a cold, expressionless face.

"What is this?"

Tanaka explained apologetically.

"Well, it's the rule of this restaurant. Like she said, if you leave your burger here, you'll be punished with a beating like that."

"Hey, I haven't heard anything about that!"

Fushimi forgot to use honorific language and lashed out. Tanaka scratched his cheek apologetically.

"Sorry, I didn't say anything. I didn't think you'd be punished so..."

That's probably true for him. Fushimi gritted his teeth and barely managed to swallow his complaint. There was no point in complaining to Tanaka now. Fushimi was already on the verge of death.

The receptionist said jokingly.

"Don't worry, there's no time limit. But in my experience, it gets harder as time goes on."

Fushimi looked at his burger.

There's still more than half left. He was fooled by Tanaka's eating style, but Fushimi's Double Bypass burger would be considered gluttony in Japan. Even halfway is quite hard.

The receptionist leaned close to Fushimi's ear and whispered.

"Give up quickly, okay? I'll train you personally. My hobby is tormenting unruly boys like you."

That voice ignited Fushimi's fighting spirit.

He reached out with his latex-covered hands, tore off a burger, and stuffed it into his mouth. He swallowed without chewing properly. His esophagus was screaming, but it didn't matter. Like the woman said, this is a race against time. He must figure it out before his satiety center sends a signal.

"....."

The receptionist frowned cautiously.

Fushimi's pace continued to get faster and faster. Grabbing, pulling, swallowing. He finished the entire burger in no time. He thought he heard a crunching sound as his stomach tightened, but he thought it was just his imagination. Fushimi continued to eat, the temples of his glasses getting wet with sweat.

"Fushimi-san, you shouldn't do anything reckless..."

"Shut up, you bother me. We're desperate right now."

Fushimi yelled at him with his eyes. At this point he didn't want to use his mouth for anything other than eating.

At this point, he was swallowing the burger without chewing much.

Before long, his consciousness began to fade. He was starting to lose track of why he was there. He didn't leave Japan and come to Las Vegas just to choke on a burger.

Several memories began to spin in his mind. The richest man in the world. Otsuchi. "Homura". Death Valley. Shit. Ostrich.

The rapidly spinning memories soon began to emerge. Sparks burned forming a flame.

That is the flame called anger.

(Why did this happen to me?)

(I wish I hadn't run away from "Tokijikuin".)

(I wish I hadn't brought that story home.)

(I wish those idiots hadn't been so stubborn and gone home.)

The man in a blue uniform with a cold smile behind his glasses said that as if it were nothing.

"Then, Fushimi-kun, this is an order. Go save the world."

(Damn it!)

The mind sometimes overtakes the body. The flames of rage engulfed Fushimi's stomach, which was about to burst, and burned the hamburger to ashes. There was no feeling anymore. Fushimi had become a machine that simply tore, spewed, swallowed, and repeated the cycle.

Clang.

Finally, that sound reached his ears.

In his blurry vision, the plate containing the hamburger wobbled and vibrated. With his outstretched fingertips there was no food to touch. The buns, the burgers, the cheese. Nothing was left

It was over.

Fushimi thought vaguely in his hazy consciousness. He felt as if his entire body had turned into a burger.

At that moment, a faint sound hit Fushimi's ears.

Clap, clap, clap.

He shifted his gaze and saw the receptionist and Tanaka in front of him, both clapping.

The receptionist smiled brightly.

"You won, Japanese. No, kamikaze boy. I was shown the Yamato Soul."

Tanaka smiled brightly as well.

"Thank you for your hard work, Fushimi-san. Ah, what would you like for dessert?"

He couldn't open his mouth. If he did, bad things would happen.

Then...

Fushimi took off his latex gloves, which were covered in ketchup, grease, and cheese, and carefully threw each of them at the receptionist and Tanaka's faces.