

The Irials of Chiyodaku Running the Supreme Court of Another World

with My Sister

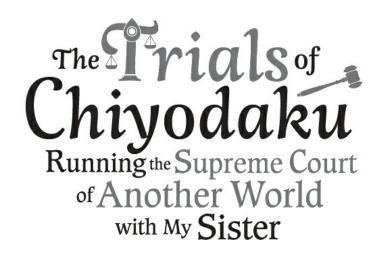


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CHIYODAKUOKOKU JUDGMENT ANE TO ORE TODE ISEKAISAIKOSAIBANSHO Vol.

2

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At the center of the kingdom, a great balance was about to be born.

At first, there were two sets of balance scales: the Scales of Judgment, brought forth by a Japanese boy, and another brought forth by a young man of this world. They drew together, clashed, and were absorbed into one...and floated in the dim sky like a newborn babe having its first bath.

"Man creates man above man itself," spoke a white-haired man. "Those who stand above others and judge humanity cannot be allowed to make mistakes. Only he who is absolutely righteous may conduct trials for this kingdom."

The man was wearing a white robe adorned with golden thread—a raiment only worn by the one and only high priest, the proxy of this otherworld's God.

He stood in a copy-pasted version of the Nippon Budokan, originally found in Tokyo's Chiyodaku. The interior had been remodeled into a religious institution. He stood in the center of the first floor of what was originally stadium seating.

His decisive words echoed throughout the building.

"The high priest's words are right and just."

Thousands of his followers, filling the surrounding stadium seating, responded in chorus. In the darkness, they were all wearing the same white robes and held lit candles in their hands. They were to be the gallery of the trial.

Among the eerie scene of the crowd agreeing as one with the high priest...

"You and Tsukasa are not the same."

...one boy spoke out against him.

"High Priest Gilvert Trinity...your righteousness is corrupt."

The Japanese boy, the court assistant for the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse, was wearing black robes with a design of the imperial mirror *Yata no Kagami* on them. He was embracing his stepsister who wore black robes of the same

design. Her body was feverish and drenched with sweat.

In the vast, packed arena, the siblings looked all alone.

They were like two lonely crows that had fallen from their nest.

"How foolish. There's no way some average young boy summoned from another world could even begin to understand the will of our God in this world. Yet you make such gross accusations."

The high priest was dripping with confidence.

"I am God's proxy. These two hands are the sacred hands of God. It is unthinkable that they could be sullied by evil deeds..."

He pretentiously spread his arms as he spoke. His two hands were glowing with bluish-white light.

"You poor, unenlightened Japanese people. Allow me to teach you the error of your ways. For to doubt me, in itself, is a sin."

Bwonnng—the golden scales floating in the air towered above their heads.

The two pans that hung on either side of the scales were each more than sixty feet in diameter.

They floated above the heads of the high priest and the boy who held his sister in his arms. The pans were stilled by a mysterious force as they settled, as if comparing the weight of the opponents' souls.

An aura of light emitted from the pans formed a line of text.

Accused: Akuto Satou, Tsukasa Wagatsuma

Charge: Blasphemy

The high priest spoke with an enraptured smile.

"I hereby sentence the brother and sister to death."

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Article I Peace in the Home, Hope for the Children

It had been about three weeks since my sister and I came to this world.

"Why don't you just confess already?"

The voice of the half-elf prosecutor, Ileana, echoed emptily in the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse.

We were in a room designated as the Juvenile Court.

Per Japanese law, people under eighteen are considered juveniles subject to juvenile law; there are special rules for minors in criminal cases. The Japanese Supreme Court building that the princess originally copied to become the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse didn't have a room specifically for juvenile cases, but this one was provided so that all kinds of cases could be handled in the Japanese fashion.

Juvenile cases handled by the Juvenile Court are different from your average trial in that, as a rule, they are not open to the public.

Basically, it was a small operation with no gallery and only the relevant parties present.

In this room, my sister, Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma, sat at a long table. I sat on her left.

To my right, I could see Prosecutor Ileana at another long table, and nobody to the left.

Juvenile cases were different from the usual style of trials where prosecutors and lawyers argue back and forth.

In front of us, the accused juvenile and his guardian were sitting on a bench.

"Gobta. Why did you enter a building with restricted entry?"

Ileana's assertive questioning was met with...

"..."

...silence.

A hush came over the room.

The only sound was the dwarf-made wall clock ticking away the passing of time.

He won't talk... He's exercising his right to remain silent. Experiencing it firsthand, this is actually pretty awkward.

I decided to review what I knew about this kid so far. I concentrated my thoughts on my hands for a moment, and—

Vwoom—a window containing text and photos appeared at my fingertips. Use of these magical multi-use windows was one of the perks of being the owner of the Shard of Judgment.

Let's pull up the info about this case.

I focused my mind, and the window's display changed like I was operating a tablet screen with my brain.

Juvenile, Gobta Boucher

Age: 12 years

Race: Goblin hybrid

Just as I was expecting, the case details came up on the window.

I never thought I'd run into a stereotypical fantasy goblin in the courthouse... but this world never fails to surprise me.

The Chiyodaku Kingdom that my sister and I had been summoned to was home to a number of different races besides humans. Walking around town, you'd find that more than half the people weren't full-blooded humans, but half-something or a hybrid of another race.

When I was just an average Japanese high school student, I was really into

isekai fantasy stories. In my favorite anime, manga, and game series, characters did things like form up a party of members of different races and go defeat the Demon King, or use their unique powers to fight battles with other ferocious tribes.

But I'm not that kind of main character.

Through my job as court assistant, I help out with the kingdom's legal trials. Even if the citizens of this kingdom are part of a fantasy world, they still deserve to be protected. It's my job to help solve their problems, together with my sister, who serves as judge. Through my years of playing versus games back in Japan, I had perfected my poker face—so I muted my excitement and made sure not to stare at the goblin in front of me like he was some form of entertainment for me.

Time to see what goblins are like in this world.

He looked pretty much like what you would expect a goblin to look like in a fantasy story. I checked the info on his guardians in the case record. His father was half-goblin, and his mother was 100% human. That meant Gobta was a quarter-goblin. Still, the goblin genetics must have been pretty strong since his skin had the goblins' signature greenish tint.

His build, at twelve years old, was a little smaller than a human's. Apparently, this small stature was the result of the goblin race's long-standing custom of living underground or in caves until recent decades—or at least that's what head maid Shiro had told me before I came here.

A voice in my head cut through the silence of the room. It was my sister.

<< Is this kid okay? He looks like he might be sick...>>

I had unlocked a telepathy skill that let me secretly speak with her. It was really convenient.

<<Are you saying that because he's green?>> I replied, concentrating my thoughts into my forehead.

<< Yeah. His guardian, too. I wonder if they're feeling unwell.>>

Oh boy. Thank God for telepathy.

While an expert judge, my sister was a little out of touch when it came to fantasy world street smarts. She still wasn't used to the common sense of this other world.

<<That color is normal for goblins. And anyway, it looks more like he's not talking because he really doesn't want to, not because he's sick.>>

Gobta Boucher was balling his fists on top of his knees and squeezing his mouth tightly closed. For a twelve-year-old, I could tell he had a strong sense of determination.

<<It's a good thing you're here to clue me in. I'll try a different approach, then.>>

Tsukasa stood up from her seat.

I assumed she meant a different approach from the other cases we'd overseen since coming here. First, we solved the Color Slime Case, then the Hero's Party Homicide Case (now just called the Hero's Case). In the three weeks after that, we had worked on the rest of the cases that had been piling up behind the Hero's Case—small disputes, traffic accidents, stuff like that. While there hadn't been anything remarkable, we had still managed to cover over three hundred cases.

It was just the two of us: my sister, who from the start always said that "a judge is as good as dead if they're not taken seriously," and me, your average guy who was trying to keep up with everything happening around us.

After getting our footing and finishing up some cases, Tsukasa had softened up in some ways.

"Prosecutor, please hold your questioning."

"Y-yes ma'am!" replied the prosecutor, Ileana.

Judge Wagatsuma walked to the young goblin. She stood before him and leaned over to meet his gaze.

"It's okay," she told him. "You can relax."

She smoothed back her long black hair and looked into the goblin boy's eyes.

Tsukasa was wearing a tight skirt and a nice blouse that gave off an "otherworld office lady" vibe. In this tribunal, neither the judge nor the assistant needed to wear the standard black court robes, and the proceedings had felt less serious than usual from the start. She was trying to loosen the tension that had built up from the prosecutor's strict questioning.

"We talked about it at the beginning, right? You have the right to remain silent. You don't have to tell us anything you don't want to. And staying silent won't have any disadvantage to you, nor will we get angry about it. I can promise that much to you."

Her tone of voice was kind and polite.

I was impressed. This was my first time observing a juvenile case, and I rarely saw my sister be so sweet to a male who wasn't her little brother.

" "

"Are you maybe a little afraid of me? If that's it, I'm sorry. You see, the court isn't always just about wanting to punish bad guys. You're only twelve, and I know you haven't done anything bad before now, okay?"

She was right.

I looked at Gobta Boucher's criminal record that was displayed in the court record window. It was totally empty.

"I know it sounds like a big deal since we're calling what happened an 'incident,'" Tsukasa continued, "but you didn't hurt anyone, and no one here is trying to pin you with some kind of severe punishment. We just want to know why you broke the law, and I want to hear it from you directly."

The reason why this boy was here in front of us today was written in the referral under the section titled *Grounds for Hearing*:

The suspect entered a building under the jurisdiction of the Royal Cabinet of the Chiyodaku Kingdom without permission...

I swiped through the record in my window. In the arrest report, it said that about one month ago a police officer had caught Gobta leaving a building that was marked NO TRESPASSING.

And it's not like he stole anything, either.

I started examining the photos of the inside of the building. It looked like it had been abandoned for years. Large items of trash had been left inside, and mud had accumulated on the floors. Maybe someone had broken in and done this, but there was no evidence proving that it had been Gobta, even after the forensic investigation for fingerprints and hair at the scene.

The police had searched Gobta's belongings, too. He had nothing but his school things on him.

The only thing that we know for sure is that he was seen leaving the building. It's an interesting case.

Just like when Japan had adopted the European legal system, the Chiyodaku Kingdom had imitated and adopted the Japanese legal system. If this boy had broken into a building, he'd probably be charged with trespassing.

But, like Tsukasa had said, no one was really pushing to punish this kid. Yet this persistent, mysterious silence continued.

"If you don't tell us something, Gobta, this incident will never get resolved and will remain in your record, hanging over your head. And if it comes up again in the future, we might not be able to protect you."

"...!"

I could sense his resolve wavering.

<< How am I doing? It's not weird, is it?>> Tsukasa asked me telepathically.

<<You're golden. Keep going.>>

Her attempt at convincing him seemed to be working.

"Can we just talk? Please?" she urged Gobta.

She leaned forward. Even watching her from behind, I could see her huge breasts sway.

"Uh..."

My sister, age twenty-eight, who upon being summoned here had been reverted to the body of her fifteen-year-old self...all except her huge boobs.

I guess it had been too much for little Gobta to process. He stared at them with his mouth hanging open.

"The foundational principle of the family court is 'Peace in the home, hope for the children.' Let's think about your hopes, together."

"Er... Uh..."

No good. He's only focused on her chest. Or I dunno, maybe that'll work?

"Hey, Gobta. Hurry up and say somethin'." Gobta's father, Goburo Boucher, who had been sitting quietly to the boy's right this whole time, started poking him. "Are you really gonna sit here and make this pretty lady say all this crap to try to get you to talk? You're no boy of mine!"

"Shut it! I got nothin' to say!"

So much for that plan.

The trust Tsukasa had been building came crashing down.

"He's been like this the whole time. To think even you couldn't crack him, Miss Judge...," Ileana said, looking concerned.

"Arrrgh, you're nothin' but trouble, you li'l brat!"

Goburo was forty-two years old. His slightly overweight body was shaking with anger.

This looks bad.

I visualized moving my magical window to the side.

"Come on, spit it out already, you little—!"

Wham!

Goburo's hand smacked the letters on the window with full force.

He cradled his left hand and moaned in pain. The hand had already turned red from the impact.

"O-ouch..."

"Please restrain yourself from any acts of violence while you are in the courtroom," Tsukasa told him.

Here we go again...

I'd started to get used to this kind of situation. We had worked on a few cases so far where one of the people in question had flown into a rage. Each time, I would block them by moving around my windows. And each time, the text's incredible sturdiness had kept the window fixed in its place right in the spot where I had positioned it.

"B-but! He can't just keep sittin' there sulkin' like that!" Goburo protested.

"The court cannot trust words which have been extracted by force." The judge switched over to a strict tone of voice. "Would you like to be tried for child abuse?"

"No, I-I'm sorry...Miss Judge, and Mr. Akuto the Window Mage..."

Goburo did a one-eighty and started apologizing instead.

Next to him, Gobta said quietly, "Th-thank you...Mr. Window Mage..."

"Window Mage"? Is that some kind of new nickname that's catching on?

I wasn't sure how I felt about that, but I was just glad that I had been able to protect Gobta.

Tsukasa changed the subject. "Mr. Goburo, was your wife not able to be present today?"

She had a good point. I had a feeling this wasn't going to go well with just the father here.

"...There's no way Lyra would come."

Goburo started to explain with a dejected look on his face.

"About a year ago, she joined up with that church and hasn't returned. At this rate, we're probably gonna get divorced."



When I returned home, my head maid, Shiro, was there waiting for me.

"Welcome back, Master."

As usual, she was perfectly poised. These three weeks, I always found her standing in the exact same place, repeating the exact same lines as if they were pre-recorded, bowing her cute head with her cute dog ears.

"Good to be back."

"Miss Judge is in the bath. Shall I prepare the usual for you?"

"Yes, please."

My sister and I had been living in an apartment within the courthouse complex. While the rest of the building was pretty imposing, our area had been renovated as the princess's villa and was surprisingly comfortable to live in.

The living room was filled with Japanese-style furniture. I sat down on the sofa and let out a sigh.

"Your royal milk tea."

Shiro had already prepared me a drink, seemingly at the speed of light.

I took a sip from the mug she handed to me. The drink was sweet and the perfect temperature.

"Delicious as always, Shiro. You really pay attention to every detail. Thank you."

I could feel myself relaxing from the inside out, and my exhaustion began to dissipate.



"As your maid, it is my duty to remember your likes and dislikes and apply them accordingly, Master."

While her response sounded cold, her face looked lovely as she said it. She was beautiful like a doll, with hair that was an ethereal shade of silver atop her head. Even her beastly fangs peeking out of her mouth gave her bonus points for cuteness. And having a tail on top of all that was plain cruel. At one year younger than me, her overwhelming cuteness was enough to make me dizzy.

She's seriously too adorable. There's just that one thing...

Her expressionless eyes that bored into me.

Shiro was staring back at me stone-faced. She had told me before that she was taught "the more emotion, the weaker the maid." But I still couldn't get used to seeing it in action like this. I had to try to break up the awkwardness.

"Oh, right. Shiro, why don't you tell me more about stuff you're into? I'd like to get you something as a token of my gratitude."

"While we did promise to 'tell each other more about ourselves,' Master, such considerations are unnecessary. I am simply doing my job as your maid."

Shot down.

In that case, I'll just change the subject.

"Oh, by the way," I added. "That stuff you told me about goblins really came in handy today."

"I am glad that my knowledge of this world was of use to you." She moved her face closer to me and sniffed. "I sense that your interaction with a male goblin has left you exhausted."

"You can tell, huh?"

I expected no less from the kingdom's top maid—she could sense a lot from smell alone. When we first met, she had sensed that I was dangerous and pinned me to the ground. I seriously thought she was going to kill me.

"Yes. From the scent. Although I am unable to surmise the contents of the conversation."

She kept staring blankly at me. She was holding back, but I could tell she was curious to know what kinds of communication a Japanese person from another world had been having with the people of this kingdom and what I thought about it.

"...It was about how he met his wife, the troubles they had since getting married, stuff like that. Tsukasa had me ask him about it in her place. But I can't really tell you any more since it's confidential."

"I see. So judges even lend their ears to family matters."

The head maid had gotten bits and pieces of information about our work and pieced it together to form a basic understanding.

This was the kind of thing that made her so reliable.

Pretty soon, she won't need me anymore.

Deep down, I started to feel this uneasiness creeping over me.

I don't think I was ever supposed to be on the judging side of things in the first place.

My sister is special. She dutifully studied for decades, undertook extensive training, and resolved thousands of actual court cases to become a pro among pros. Even though most of her abilities are based in book smarts, they're still extraordinary.

But I was different. I was just your regular second-year high school student. If you could open my stats menu like in a game, all my stats would definitely be average. I didn't have a single special ability or skill.

When I was summoned to this world, I got something called World Transfer Bonus: Acquisition that let me unlock magic and skills more easily than the average person. The thing is, all the abilities I unlocked still started at level one, so it was actually pretty weak.

And aren't the people involved in legal trials supposed to be extraordinary?

These three weeks, I had handled the magical windows and supported my

sister through telepathy.

But in the end, once my sister got used to this world and started learning to utilize brilliant resources like Shiro, she wouldn't need my support anymore.

I'm a jack of all trades and a master of none, with nothing special about me. And coming to another world only made me realize how powerless I was all over again.

Not that I'd ever let on that I'm feeling down like this.

Having her as my older sister and learning from her for as long as I could remember, I couldn't help but analyze myself objectively like this.

It was a dark feeling of introspection, like the antithesis of admiration—

"-kky! Akkyyy!"

I felt the dark skies of my mind clear at the sound of my sister's voice.

She ran up to me, still damp from the bath and wearing her bathrobe.

"Gweat job again today! Kissy kiss!"

I stopped her shoulders with my outstretched arms as she dove to hug me, her lips pursed into a kiss.

"Aww, come on, I wanted to get in some cuddle time with my cute widdle brother after a hard day of work!"

This was her "off mode" that she used to de-stress after work. And it was childish to the extreme.

"Uh-huh," I said. "Be careful, you're still wet."

Her large chest swayed before my eyes. I was close enough to see drops of water getting sucked into her cleavage and get a whiff of her flowery conditioner. This temptation would normally be enough to throw all reason to the wind.

She's your sister, she's your sister, she's your sister...

I chanted the words to myself, just like I had always done for all these years in

order to cope. But it was getting more difficult to bear these days.

In the courtroom, her brown eyes were like those of a bird of prey. But now, they seemed innocent and round as she looked in my direction. The disconnect between these two versions of her was intense. It was bad enough that a beautiful adult woman had transformed into a teenage girl but kept her huge boobs. And now, she looked young enough to be my love interest.

If Shiro's cuteness wasn't playing fair, then this should be illegal.

"Miss Judge, shall I bring you an ice-cold beer?"

"Thank you, Shiro! But I think I'll have my first beer at the usual tavern tonight. ♥"

Tsukasa suddenly moved away from me and began changing into her casual clothes.

Lately, we had been going to the tavern in the Adventurers' Guild after work almost every day.

"Okay, I'm ready. Let's go! ♪"

"Yes ma'am."

"Mhm."

Shiro and I answered, and we were off.

The main gate of the courthouse faced the royal palace, which was in the center of Chiyodaku. It was quite the spectacle: a towering, medieval European-style castle plopped right where the Japanese Imperial Palace should be.

We walked around the perimeter of the royal palace, illuminated by the light of the setting sun. Tsukasa complimented Shiro's hair as she often did and reached over to pet her tail. Nearby, copy-pasted Japanese cars and different races of people in running gear passed by. Peaceful, affluent scenery all around us...

"Oh! Mr. Akutooo! Miss Juuudge!"

Heading northeast, as we approached Akihabara, I heard a familiar voice that sounded like an anime character.

"Thank you for your hard work again today! Go, go, governance! ☆"

A small, pink figure ran toward us with one of her signature legalese greetings.

It was Princess Ecstasia, the head of the kingdom and the prodigy mage who had summoned us to this world.

The princess inhaled and let out a refreshed sigh. "Ahh! I feel like the air has somehow gotten sweeter since summoning you two here! I'm so happy!"

In her usual excited manner, the girl was wearing a pink maid outfit and a smile that was practically a sideways D.

"We couldn't have done it without you. And I'm sure solving the kingdom's garbage problem had a lot to do with it," I replied.

"And after fixing up that doozy, you've gone and started working on all the cases that had piled up behind it. I just can't thank you enough!"

The princess started patting me with gratitude.

She's got that same laid-back smile as always.

Her bubbly demeanor was infectious. Even the beast-hybrid maids accompanying her were all smiles.

"Miss Judge, you're looking beautiful and voluptuous as usual! I know, I know...I can look but I can't touch! Don't wanna be found guilty of sexual harassment. Love that!"

The princess was drawn to Tsukasa's breasts like a magnet and started waving her hand at them in a polite little wave like she was some kind of Di*ney cast member.

"That could count as sexual harassment, too, you know." Tsukasa crossed her arms.

"Shiro, Tsukasa looks like she could use a little help," I said.

"My apologies, but Princess Ecstasia's smile takes priority."

Shiro remained expressionless, but her tail was wagging. She must have been happy to see her original master.

Upon witnessing the rapport between our otherworldly selves and the kingdom's ruler, the Akihabara passersby started to comment.

"As cute as always, Princess Ecstasia!"

"Miss Judge really is beautiful."

"Mr. Akuto isn't so bad himself."

How embarrassing.

"What are you up to today, Princess?"

"I was watching a Japanese anime film with everyone: *Demon Flayer: The Movie!*"

I looked in the direction she had come from and saw a crowd dissipating.

"That courage to face one's fears, and that deep familial love...! It really lit a fire in my flat little chest!" the princess squealed.

"You were showing the movie on that huge monitor on the building over there?"

"Yep! They call it a roadshow after all! So I showed it to the road!"

"I don't think that's what 'roadshow' is supposed to mean..."

She took that one literally.

"Akky, you should quit while you're ahead."

"Are you two off to your usual watering hole? Do you mind if I accompany you?" the princess asked me.

"That's fine. But you know minors aren't allowed to drink."

"I'll just have what you're having, Mr. Akuto! Yay, compliance!"

"I will stand guard," assured Shiro.

And so our party of three became four as we headed to the tavern.

As we left the center of Chiyodaku, we saw fewer and fewer Japanese buildings that the princess had magically copy-pasted, and more buildings that were close to a medieval European style.

In the back alleys of Akihabara, I really started to feel the chaotic atmosphere of this otherworld: open-air markets selling monster leather and fruits I had never seen before, the smell of adventurers' armor covered in their enemys' blood splatters, the sharp sound of dwarf hybrids hammering away at their metalworks, the hustle and bustle of the busy streets...

This really is awesome.

I've always loved the idea of other worlds. Breathing in and filling my lungs with this world's air, I got a feeling of satisfaction like I was becoming one with something I loved. And for a little while, I forgot about all the other tedious things in my life.

"Akky, I like this world."

Tsukasa was walking beside me.

"I think I finally get why you like it here so much, too, so now I'm starting to like it," she added. "I never really cared about other worlds or fantasy stories or anything before, but at the end of the day, people are the same wherever you go."

She had a beautiful, sweet smile.

"Tsukasa..."

I felt bad for having been so uneasy about everything before. If anyone would be uneasy, it would be Tsukasa. To someone who knew nothing about it, this game-like world was full of strange environments that followed strange rules. The fact that my only family member in this world had overcome her fears and had even started to like it here, like I did, made me unbearably happy.

"Thank you," I said, looking at her bright smile. "As long as you're here in this world with me, I'm sure we can resolve any kind of trouble without a problem."

Even though I was happy, I still couldn't shake that inferiority complex, thinking that I soon wouldn't be needed anymore. I had let it slip that I knew she was the one they really needed here.

"Oh, that reminds me," she said. "I was thinking I'd let you be in charge of Gobta's case."

"Huh?"

That was an unexpected request.

"I'm really happy to hear what you just told me," she started. "But you know __"

"Meow! If it isn't Miss Judge and Mr. Akuto! We appurrrreciate your business, as always, meow!"

A part-beast barmaid with cat ears called out to us from in front of the Adventurers' Guild tavern.

"Today we've got frrresh kraken on the menu! All the best cuts! And I can rrrecommend some tempura that'll go great with a Chiyodaku Ale and a Poppy, meow!"

"That sounds great," Tsukasa and I responded in unison.

"Come in, come in! There's rrrain in the forecast, meow! Get in here before the evening rrrush!"

Just as she said so, I felt a light drizzle of raindrops.

"Then let's take shelter and have some fun!" The princess grabbed Shiro's hand and ran inside.

I'll have to ask Tsukasa more about what she wanted to talk about once we're in the tayern.

I started to follow the princess—

Crack—!

A strange sound, like a huge vibration ripping through the atmosphere, blasted around us.

"What was that?"

It was the sound of all our lives being turned upside down.

Article II The Case for State Compensation for the Collapse of a Building

"Court is now in session for the Case for State Compensation for the Collapse of a Building!"

The next day, I found myself reading out this case name and opening the court session under the gazes of over three hundred spectators.

The place: the Grand Bench of the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse. Like the name suggested, only the biggest cases were dealt with here.

"Oh-ho-ho! How I do love the ☆ Grand ☆ Bench! The acoustics are simply excellent in here. I see they still haven't replaced that poor sun tapestry that was scorched by old Laman."

With complete disregard for the heavy atmosphere of the courtroom, lawyer Tamamo Keisei chattered along to herself. While she looked like a five-year-old girl on the outside, as a half nine-tailed fox, she had inherited thousands of years of her lineage's memories. She was a wily little ruffian and had gotten the top score on the kingdom's bar exam.

"Counsel for the plaintiff, shall we proceed with your statement of the complaint?"

The question was posed by the kingdom's one and only judge, Tsukasa Wagatsuma. She had switched over into her serious "on mode."

Looking from the assistant's seat where I was sitting, Tamamo was to my right, standing on a chair on the other side of the plaintiff's table. This time, she was on the side of the prosecuting party.

"Hmmmmm. Let me seeeee. I know if I agree to that, you'll treat it as if I have stated the whole contents of the complaint already. But that's just so dull! And all our kingdom's lovely citizens won't understand a thing we're talking about!"

The little fox had an arrogant look on her face as she jeered back at the courtroom.

This girl in her golden-brown parka with its lawyer badge pinned onto it always put her own enjoyment first. She treated every trial like it was a video game and did whatever she could to make it fun for herself.

She's annoying as usual, but she's not wrong.

In a Japanese civil trial, it's called the "statement of the complaint," when a written complaint actually gets submitted to the court and opposing party in advance, and its contents are automatically treated as having been already stated in the courtroom. It's very simple in contrast to a criminal trial where the prosecutor reads aloud the entirety of the complaint during the trial itself. But it seemed like we wouldn't get off that easily today.

Behind me, I could sense that the judge was feeling the same.

"In this case, we shall comply with the main purport of the oral argument. Counsel, please state the nature of the complaint to the court."

"That's what I thought!" Tamamo excitedly sucked in a breath. "Yesterday evening, in Akihabara, a five-story building owned and maintained by the Royal Cabinet suddenly collapsed. It collapsed onto the neighboring area and destroyed the branch building of a venerable church which had stood in that space since ages past."

Tamamo boldly recounted yesterday's incident that had shaken the kingdom to its core.

"Among those who had been gathered in the building during the incident, one church member, Cumba Nols, died. Another, Alba Nols, lost consciousness and is still in critical condition. There were also a number of followers who suffered bruises and other injuries from the falling debris..."

Death. Critical condition. Injuries.

I felt the seriousness of the incident weighing upon me.

"As for proof of the incident, the cat girl from the tavern witnessed the event and will give her testimony."



"Y-yes, meow. I hearrrd a loud cracking noise, like something breaking. Then I saw the building across from ours start to tip, then fall over, meow. We hurried over to the scene, but it was already..."

We were there, too. We saw it happen right before our eyes.

"If a testimony is required, we will hear it after the defendant's pleading. Please finish your statement first."

"Certainly. Regarding the affected building, it was the property of the Royal Cabinet and was a Japanese building created using the Copy-Paste Spell by Princess Ecstasia Itou at age eight. Therefore, under Article Two of the State Redress Act, I charge the kingdom as liable for compensation based on the defect of a public structure!"

At the beginning of the trial, the Scales of Judgment had appeared and now loomed above the people in the Grand Bench.

The scales, which changed their appearance based on the time and place, were now about the size of a long table as they floated in the air.

Underneath them, lines of magical black text displayed the information about the incident's related parties for all to see.

The Case for State Compensation for the Collapse of a Building

Plaintiff: Gilvert Trinity

Representing Counsel for the Plaintiff: Tamamo Keisei

Defendant: the State

And the one being sued and held responsible was the kingdom's representative and governor herself.

"Defendant, your response."

"..." Silence.

The defendant was to my left. Princess Ecstasia was standing on the other side of a table.

Her face was pale, and compared to the large table, her body looked small and helpless.

"Does the defense not have a Minister of Justice present? Otherwise, please consider having an attorney to represent you."

The judge's voice was tinged with concern for the defendant.

Tsukasa and I knew that the princess had a habit of falling asleep when things stopped being fun for her. And in any case, it was a strange sight indeed to see a fourteen-year-old girl being held legally responsible for such a grave incident. Yet—

"...I will take this on all on my own." The princess gripped her skirt with her small hands. "I am still a descendant of royalty. And I have read all the letters that were sent to me."

"If you will respond to the facts of the case thus far, please state how you will plead. You may admit, deny, or—"

Ecstasia cut off Tsukasa's explanation before she could finish. "I admit to all of the charges."

All concern vanished with her resolute expression and statement.

"I may be stupid, but I'm not so stupid that I can't understand when my kingdom's citizens are in pain."

She firmly fixed her eyes on us as she spoke.

I can tell she still has her pride as a member of royalty... It's brave of her.

The two golden pans of the Scales of Judgment hung over the heads of the plaintiff and the defendant.

A few black orbs had appeared under the plaintiff's side. They represented the factual grounds for petition.

"It is true that the building that fell was a Japanese building that I copy-pasted five years ago. I don't remember anything that happened with the building after that. But I was nearby when it happened yesterday...and I know how much damage was caused."

In response to the princess's statements, the black orbs turned gold and floated up to rest on the plaintiff's pan.

The scales above our heads started to tip toward the plaintiff's side. The conditions necessary to win the case had been cleared.

"Well, winning isn't very fun if you just confess to everything!" I heard Tamamo say.

It seemed like the case's outcome had already been decided.

It was unprecedented—the country's ruler had lost the case completely. The three hundred or so people in the gallery, who had been silently observing the proceedings, now began to murmur. Among them, some otakus in Akihabara fashion who appeared to be the princess's fans started speaking out.

"It's not the princess's fault!"

"Didn't the building just deteriorate over time?"

"Protect the princess!"

"Isn't the trial supposed to find out the whole story?"

The courtroom grew noisier. The trial's speedy conclusion must have stirred up confusion.

"The court is carrying out this trial with due prudence. As to the recognition of the facts of the case—"

The judge had begun to regain order over the court, when she was cut off.

"Oh, how lamentable indeed!"

A bright voice echoed throughout the room with a grandiose tone, as if the speaker was reciting ancient poetry.

That must be the plaintiff, Gilvert Trinity.

His white, thin hair was like spiderwebs, and his complexion was spotless. He was smiling softly; a pure white robe adorned with gold details hung from his

slender frame. Although this otherworldly appearance might make one mistake him for an old man, he was allegedly in his late twenties.

He was seated next to Tamamo and hadn't moved a muscle since the start of the trial. But now, he stood up and began to speak. I noticed he was about a head taller than me.

"Yesterday, the kingdom was at peace. A pleasant breeze was blowing, and I headed to our church's branch building with some dozen members of our congregation."

He held the rank of high priest—the top position in the kingdom's church.

And he had wasted no time in bringing this case to court with Tamamo Keisei at his side.

"For some decades now, the Royal Cabinet's administrative policy has focused on promoting a prosperous kingdom through adopting aspects of Japanese civilization. Among the Japanese buildings springing up around it, our old church building has been in that same spot for hundreds of years as a place of worship for our citizens."

And just what exactly was this church he spoke of?

Shiro filled me in after the incident yesterday.

This church worshipped the God who created the sacred artifacts thousands of years ago. It was a monotheistic belief system, although its adherents were said to worship those artifacts themselves. The humanity of this otherworld had been constantly subject to the threat of the Demon King, but each time had been able to resist it owing to the power of the sacred artifacts. Among the past generations of heroes who had defeated the Demon King, many of them wielded these artifacts as their weapons. The priests of this religion were able to interpret the nature of the artifacts and perform maintenance on them, and they were skilled in the art of manipulating the mana inside the body to heal others. In other words, priests had been like backup for the heroes' fights against the Demon King.

Reminds me of those priestly characters you always see in Dr*gon Quest RPGs that heal the main character.

The church became the most well-known spiritual pillar for humanity in this world. It was associated with holidays and events in which people prayed to God, and wedding ceremonies were held in its houses of worship—it seemed a lot like how some Japanese people celebrated Christmas or had their weddings in a chapel. And apparently, this church had even held some level of influential power over the kingdom's politics and courts.

According to Shiro, "The previous king adopted the Japanese constitution's separation of church and state and severed the church's ties to the royal family. I have heard the religion has been in decline since then."

The previous king was Princess Ecstasia's father. He was fondly remembered as the developer of the Copy-Paste Spell that brought Japanese things to this world and as the ruler who brought prosperity to the kingdom. The very same had also invited resentment from others. But he was no longer of this world, having died of exhaustion after playing too many *eroge*...

"Evening had begun to fall as we offered up our prayers to God," the high priest said. "And as we heard the soft pattering of rain, I noticed a strange sound—a kind of creaking, like something beginning to crack. And then the church building was hit with an intense impact. The brick walls and ceilings were smashed through with that unrefined material you call 'concrete,' and a great deal of debris rained down on me and my congregation."

All present were completely absorbed in listening to his story.

"As you are all aware, I am in possession of the Holy Scourge, the oldest sacred artifact which has been handed down by successive high priests for over three thousand years. In the face of this danger, I decided to fight. And I protected my congregation from the debris that threatened to rain down upon them—isn't that correct?"

The church members sitting in the gallery answered: "The high priest's words are right and just."

They stood out in their plain, white robes. The men wore a kind of hat like a monk might wear, and the women wore a hood that resembled a nun's habit.

"What happened to Cumba was ill fortune. At the time of the incident, he happened to have gone to the restroom and was closer to the area where the

building collapsed. Once the ceiling began to collapse, an overwhelming amount of debris fell and smashed that same restroom. Cumba...was summoned by God."

Not long after the building collapsed onto the church, the roof caved in. What he described was consistent with the scene we had seen yesterday outside of the tavern.

"Alba is Cumba's older brother. Although I tried to stop him, he ran to his brother in the restroom and was himself buried alive. Using the power of the artifact, I was able to save him from the rubble, but alas, he was gravely injured. His entire body was covered in wounds, and even now he treads the boundary between life and death..."

The courtroom was silent. No one dared to speak up when such a heavy subject was being discussed.

It's like our everyday lives collapsed.

When we walked up to the tavern, everything had been going great. It pained me to think how easily hope had disappeared from our peaceful lives.

"You have yet to state your demands."

I heard my sister's firm voice. I could sense her eyes on the plaintiff, though she didn't move an inch.

"We just have to tell you what the high priest wants, correct?" said Tamamo.

Having seemingly lost interest given how simply the trial had reached a conclusion, Tamamo was now sitting down in her seat looking bored. On the other side of the plaintiff's table, I could only see the upper half of her face as she slumped back against her chair.

"I believe that isn't something I alone can state," said the high priest. He looked up to the ceiling, then frowned at the judge and the gallery in succession. "The victims of this incident are not only myself and my congregation. The entire kingdom has now become unsafe. Everyone—you feel it, do you not?"

The heavy atmosphere turned cold.

"We don't know when the next copy-pasted object will collapse. Even this courthouse, or the many skyscrapers surrounding the royal palace, or the shops crowding the streets of Akihabara, could collapse at any moment, and thousands of precious lives could be undeservingly stolen away, crushed beneath the falling rubble."

My breath caught in my throat. With his words, any and all sense of safety disappeared.

"Perhaps this is God's punishment toward the current monarchy for its preoccupation with Japanese anime and the like. Oh, how deep these sins run."

"Plaintiff, there is a logical leap in your argument," the judge warned, quick as an arrow.

"R-right! The safety of Princess Ecstasia's copy-pasting has been meticulously controlled!" Prosecutor Ileana added from the gallery. "Plus, the building in this incident was designated as off-limits, and the investigation of the cause of collapse still isn't complete!"

"Quiet in the gallery. I have not given permission for you to speak."

After rebuking Ileana for speaking out of turn, Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma continued.

"The court believes that there is still a need to formally investigate the cause of the building's collapse. It would be hasty to request compensation when no reasonable causal relationship has been found."

She was right—it was too early for a conclusion. Tsukasa's and Ileana's words began swirling in my head. There was something off about this case.

"Miss Judge, you were summoned to this world by Princess Ecstasia herself, were you not?" the high priest asked Tsukasa as he took one glance at Ileana, who was standing indignantly. "In that case, I suppose it is unavoidable that you would take her side in this trial."

The atmosphere once again took a sharp turn.

This is bad... People are going to start to doubt the legitimacy of the trial.

The gallery seating began to glow red. The spectators' bodies were emitting

small orbs of light.

"The court is impartial and neutral," Tsukasa insisted. "It is decidedly impossible to side with her."

"So you say. Then why have you stopped recording the session?" the high priest replied.

What?

I hurried to check the computer under my desk. He was right—the live feed had been cut off.

"Just the other day, during the Hero's Case, you were sure to make your judgment known to the people through your live broadcast. Is this perhaps out of consideration for the princess?"

I pressed the button on my headset. "Shiro, what's going on? The camera feed is turned off," I told her, speaking as fast as I could. There was no answer.

Maybe there's a connection issue?

In this world, the mana in the air sometimes interfered with reception, even when communicating within close range. But that wasn't the problem this time.

Crash—!

I heard a strange sound to my left. Shiro, who had been tasked with recording the session, was standing next to the princess.

Around her, the recording equipment was scattered on the floor and the cables all disconnected.

"Shiro, what—?" I started to ask, in shock.

"A falling-out of sorts? Human bonds are ever so fragile," Tamamo cut in.

That was enough to irritate me even more. I stood up and faced the head maid.

"Shiro, did you break the cameras?"

"I cannot cooperate in anything that would harm Princess Ecstasia."

The look on her face made me shudder with fear.

She wore a steely, blank expression, and her eyes, which were normally a shade of blue reminiscent of thin ice, had turned red.

"Please halt the trial."

Her words were cold. She stepped forward in her metal-soled boots, toward the judge's bench.

"Wait. Don't come any closer." I stood in between Shiro and my sister.

"Do you think you can win against me in a fight?" Shiro asked me.

Her eyes had turned a blackish red, like they had been imbued with blood. Maybe this was some kind of manifestation of one of her tribe's abilities. In those eyes, I could see the rage and murderous intent welling up inside her.

So Shiro is not our unconditional ally.

From the start, the head maid had been the princess's retainer. It made sense that she wouldn't prioritize us over the princess.

I felt a pang of sadness like I had lost a friend. My legs trembled.

"Please, don't come any closer," I urged as I moved all the magical windows I had opened in front of me.

"...Grrr."

Shiro positioned herself like a rabid dog about to lunge. Honestly, I wasn't sure if the windows would be enough to stop her.

"Shiro, stop," said the princess. "Don't make any more trouble for Mr. Akuto."

Her dog-eared retainer halted.

"I hereby revoke head maid Shiro Katou's appointment as a member of the courthouse staff. Please exit the courtroom immediately."

The judge—Tsukasa—had ordered Shiro to leave.

<<Tsukasa...>>

I turned back to look at her as I spoke to her telepathically.

My sister's body as she stood at the judge's bench was covered in reddishblack stains. The Rust of Doubt that had been emitted by the people in the gallery had already flown over to the judge. From on top of her black judge's robes, the rust encroached upon her body and let off smoke like it was burning her flesh.

<< Akky...there was no other choice. But if we lose Shiro...>>

I heard the uneasiness in my sister's voice through her telepathy, though she showed none of it on her face. She appeared to be partially in shock.

Tsukasa's order appeared in the floating window. Would this text be thrust onto Shiro like it had for Laman the Hero? I didn't think my sister had it in her to use her Power of Words on Shiro like that. I—

"Oh, what a pitiable sight!" The high priest's words jumped out once again to corner me. "So this is the judge that was summoned to our world with such great effort? Do you think you can save the kingdom while in a predicament like this?"

We had to think. Right now, we were not on the princess's side. But I didn't want to make Shiro our enemy, either.

"Won't you use the Power of Words? How truly incompetent. What shameful ignorance," said the high priest. "I suppose it was unavoidable. Only the people of this world can truly understand our world's logic."

As the gallery began to doubt Tsukasa's legitimacy, the red rust would continue to grow and take away our power. We needed to find some decision that would regain their trust.

"I understand that you yourself were witness to the building's collapse from outside of a tavern, Miss Judge. What were you doing there? Watching the spectacle at a safe distance, unable to do anything? It is said that you who have come from the other world are in possession of a world transfer bonus that gave your bodies special abilities. Yet all you have done is make your body younger? How ridiculous."

I remembered something that Ileana had said earlier that had caught my ear.

"Ah, if only I had been there myself at that time, and seen the building collapsing, I could have wielded the power of the Holy Scourge at once, supported the building from falling, and saved my congregation!"

The building that fell had been marked as "off-limits." We know that building...

<< Akky, is it possible that this pope guy is right?>>

Tsukasa's telepathic message was tinged with unease.

<<What do you mean?>> I asked back.

<<All I've done so far is hold Japanese-style court trials. Maybe there's some other way we should try to help the people of this world. Like for example, if you'd honed your magic more, maybe you would have been able to stop that building from collapsing.>>

She was right—these three weeks, we had only been prioritizing racking up our number of completed trials.

After finishing the Hero's Trial, and declaring our intention to judge God themself, we hadn't done anything to advance our knowledge of that God's power, or how magic works in this world. This might have been a mistake on our part.

<<I don't know anything about this world's culture or rules. What if there's some set of important rules that's above the law itself? Isn't it possible that this guy would be better at problem-solving than us?>>

Her apprehensions were reasonable. I might feel the same if I were a thirty-something working adult with no knowledge about other worlds.

"...Assistant, you have been standing there silently doing nothing but interfering with the argument. It seems you may have invited the wrath of God upon you."

Above our heads, the Scales of Judgment began to lower themselves toward us.

Tsukasa Wagatsuma, Akuto Satou: Violation of Oath Detected

The scales showed the line of plain text. The scales may give its owners magical powers, but they weren't our ally.

Punishment: Transform body so that it may never again stand in the

courtroom

Sharp, gold tentacles began to grow out of the Scales of Judgment. And they were heading right for us.

"Oh-ho-ho! It has detected that you violated the oath you took upon your first trial. What will you do, Akuto, my boy? Is this game over for you? Maybe if you apologize, I'll be so kind as to forgive you!"

We'd taken an oath to "administer righteous justice, based on truth and conscience, and to see through lies and falsehoods, for the sake of the kingdom." If we strayed from that promise, God would penalize us.

Apologize to Tamamo? What the hell is she talking about?

I ignored whatever she was saying and focused on reaching Tsukasa telepathically.

<<Tsukasa. This building is the same one as in the other case. It's worth investigating. Right now, we need to—>>

<< I got it.>> She quickly sensed everything I was trying to say.

"The building which collapsed is under investigation in connection with another case. Hence, the cause of collapse is still under question!"

She couldn't be specific about which case in the interest of privacy.

But we had noticed. The building that fell was the same building that the young Gobta Boucher had snuck into.

"Huh, another case, is it? What proof do you have that it has any connection to this case? The responsibility under Article Two of the State Redress Act is as a no-fault liability. This sounds like no more than a poor excuse to attempt to escape. The person responsible must be punished."

Once again, the atmosphere in the room took a turn.

"As a prosecutor, what do you think of the priority relationship between these two cases?"

"Your Honor, the matter at hand is extremely serious. If you would allow me to be involved in both prosecutions..."

"Then please make the necessary preparations. Anything you can find to prove a flaw in the Copy-Paste Spell would be desirable."

"Yes, Your Honor!" Ileana gave a perfect bow from the gallery.

I understood the reason for all of this. This would give us more time to try to save the princess.

But on the other side of my windows, Shiro was still about to explode with rage.

"Shiro, I'm going to accept their judgment," the princess began. "And, I'm going to quit doing magic. Using any kind of power that makes our kingdom's citizens uneasy goes against my goal: 'a place where we all get along and have fun.'"

She said it with an expression befitting the leader of a country.

"I will give a formal apology and reparation to the victims. Miss Judge, how much time do I have?"

"The trial will be held one week from today, at an appropriate location."

"I understand. Then, if you will excuse me..."

The princess, in her pink maid outfit, ran to the exit.

"Princess Ecstasia!"

Shiro left too, chasing after her former master.

"So the trial is temporarily halted? Fine, I suppose... Yes..."

The high priest kept monologuing to himself. The court record window in front of me picked up what he whispered next:

"Good, they've been separated from the Royal Watchdog. And it looks like it may rain. Not bad."

I had a bad, nagging feeling when I thought of one possibility.

And with that, I decided to take action.



SOFWELL S

A causal what? ...Oh, looks like we're back in this corner.



Tsukasas

That's right! I was just thinking about how I wanted to talk about causal relationships!



Princess

What a natural segue!



lleamas

It is quite a difficult concept. Though I believe it refers to the issue of cause and effect in relation to the facts of a case.



Tamamos

Elementary: If a criminal is born, it's the parents' fault. The parents are the cause.



Tsukasa:

That's one way of thinking. It's called a conditional explanation, where all causal relationships can be explained as "no A without B." With this, we can say the causal relationship lies with the parents, and even their parents before them.



Shiros

In a trial, is there a point in endlessly backtracking the facts in that way?



Akutos

Yeah, it wouldn't be normal in a court trial.



Tsokasas

Correct. After all...

The goal of considering causal relationships is to decide the extent of compensation and the responsibility of the crime.

There are many theories on how to approach it, but I look at the circumstances of the case and assume causation only where it is reasonable and appropriate. This is called legally sufficient cause.



lleama:

So this avoids condemning people who have had nothing to do with the outcome of the crime.



Tamamo:

What if someone throws a surprise party for a person with a heart condition, and they die? They were just trying to celebrate, so they're innocent, yeah?



Tsukasas

In that case, it's a question of whether the party-thrower knew about the victim's condition in advance, or if it was accidental.



lleanas

It becomes difficult when we have to consider whether those involved were aware of particular conditions.



Alkotos

Yeah, Tsukasa, you always stress over how best to write your grounds for judgment.



Tsukasas

In terms of making a convincing argument...for better or for worse, that's one place where a judge's personality comes into play. Try reading the verdicts of some different court rulings if you're curious.

Article III The Court Assistant Shall Conduct Necessary Investigations of the Juvenile, His Guardians, and Others

When the trial was halted, I ran out of the Grand Bench, thinking over all the possibilities that came to my mind.

The high priest's words—"they've been separated from the Royal Watchdog"—implied that he had other goals outside of this trial. There was something ominous about him being in one place but having other goals elsewhere. It was like diversionary tactics.

Combined with the fact that Shiro had been the one to tell me all her knowledge of the church's history in this kingdom... I shuddered to think of the horrible possibilities of what his goals could be.

One: restoration of the church's authority; two: the banishment of Japanese culture; three: revenge against the royal family.

Maybe that's why his way of speaking was so polite yet also so insistent and nasty.

If dividing us from Shiro was necessary to achieve some other hidden greater goal...what I needed to do was make sure we didn't get separated from Shiro.

This is all just guesswork, though... Hopefully it's a groundless fear. But right now, I need to chase Shiro.

"Hah... Agh... Urgh...!"

I wasn't able to catch up with her. I lost sight of Shiro and the princess outside of the courthouse gates.

I couldn't help it this time. If the high priest wanted to divide us, right now

from his point of view he would see me running after Shiro, and Tsukasa being left completely alone.

I could try putting that to use. Right now, it might be best to go out of our way to show that we're weakened.

If someone was playing a trick on you, it could be a good idea to make it look like the trick was working, to the extent that there was no risk to you. At least, that's how I felt based on my experience in social deduction games.

<< Akky... Everyone's gone now. Where are you right now?>>

It was Tsukasa.

<<Tsukasa, listen. I have an idea.>>

I told her everything that had been on my mind.

<<Yeah, let's be wary of the plaintiff's true intentions. By the way, about what I was saying earlier...>>

I sensed that she wanted to bring up the topic she had tried to talk to me about earlier.

I needed to tell her what I had been thinking, which I hadn't been able to tell her before.

<<In otherworld fantasy stories, sometimes there are rulebreakers with powers even greater than God. But there's nothing wrong with what you're doing now, either.>>

<<Do you really think it could be fair for a Japanese person to judge others in this world?>>

If the princess, the one who summoned us, were here, she would probably flat-out affirm everything Tsukasa was doing. But I wasn't like that.

<<If there was something wrong with your judgment, I would stop you. I promise.>>

If nothing else, that must have been why a normal fantasy-loving high schooler like me was summoned to this world with her.

<<So until I do, I want you to keep doing everything in your power to do what you think is right.>>

<< Akky...you really get me. Thank you. I'll do my best to keep it together.>>

And if she got stuck somewhere, I would just have to do something about it to help her.

<<So what should we do next?>>

<<Let's split up and investigate on our own for a while. I think I'll go find Gobta first.>>

While conversing with her telepathically, I had already started heading toward the area where Gobta usually hung out, based on his case record.

<<I hope he'll talk to you this time. In that case, I'll go investigate the cause of the building's collapse. While talking with you, I realized there was something about what the high priest said that caught my attention.>>

<<What part?>>

<<When he said, "that unrefined material you call 'concrete.'" The thing is, I don't think Japanese buildings with steel-framed reinforced concrete construction can collapse so easily. I want to try the calculations in a simulator.>>

It was a sharp observation. And here I was just feeling my way through this like it was a video game.

But with Tsukasa on the case, I knew she would find her way to conclusive evidence by using sound reasoning.

<<That's not something I'm able to do. It's in your hands.>>

I heard her respond <<Leave it to me!>> before I headed to my next destination.

When I arrived, I found that the case record had led me to Gobta's middle school.

School was just letting out, and uniformed students were leaving through the main gate.

Humans and other races are all attending the same school together. It's a nice sight...

Momentarily forgetting what I came here for, I couldn't help but feel a little moved.

Education up through middle school had become compulsory more than ten years ago in the Chiyodaku Kingdom. While on the outside the school building matched the rest of the medieval European—style downtown with its brick exterior, on the inside was apparently a modern institution of education. Japanese-style education was having a boom in the kingdom.

While getting distracted thinking about all this, I caught a familiar figure in the corner of my eye. It was Gobta Boucher.

"Oh, hey, Gob-"

I started to call out to him, but thought better of it.

Crap, am I gonna seem like some kind of creep if I call out to a student after sitting here staring in fascination?

I let my own thoughts get in my way. Gobta in his blazer walked past in front of me, alone.

Guess I'll just keep quiet and follow him. I'm pretty sure it's allowed for an investigator in a family court case to visit the family's house, as long as it's for the purpose of the investigation.

I started to feel nervous about doing this for the first time but tried to shake it off by remembering what my sister had told me about juvenile cases. My role was court assistant, which in the end basically meant it was my job to do everything except make the legal decisions, which was the judge's job. As for investigators in Japanese family court, according to the Courts Act and the Juveniles Act, their position permits them to investigate the juveniles' living situations. So yeah, that sounded like it fell under my "court assistant" jurisdiction.

Around me, the scenery turned into a residential area. Houses with old and new architecture mingled along the streets.

Then, in front of me, I saw Gobta's ears perk up.

"Yo, Window Mage. Why're you following me, bro?"

"Uh, no, I just... I wanted to ask you more about what happened."

"I got nothin' to say to you." The twelve-year-old goblin turned around and stared daggers at me.

"That building fell down, right? So who cares about it anymore?"

I faltered from having been noticed, but more than that, I was intimidated by his hostile look.

He's still treating me like this after I saved him from getting punched by his father. Maybe it's a lost cause.

Maybe he wanted even less to do with me after I witnessed how bad his relationship with his father was.

What should I say to him?

"So you know about the building collapse that happened yesterday. About that building, I wanted to ask—"

"I told you, who cares?! I got nothin' to do with it. Just leave."

No good approaching from the topic of the incident, either. But what's with his attitude?

"Tch. What, and you've got another lady with big boobs following you around today, too?"

"Huh? What do you mean, lady—?"

He had clicked his tongue at something behind me. I turned around to look.

"Hey, my cute little Akuto!"

Standing there was Elma, the half-succubus.

"Elma... How long have you been there?"

"What's with the face? You look like a cockatrice that got shot with a BB gun. I

came here to give you a souvenir from the Hero's Village. But when I found you, you were standin' in front of that middle school lookin' all suspicious. Anyway, eat up. Freshly roasted using Holy Flame!"

Elma, with her reddish-purple hair, demon horns, and tail, had been part of the former Hero's party. She kept up a guise that made her look like she was only in her twenties, and showed off her voluptuous body in a tight bodycon dress. She had what I'm pretty sure they used to call a "rockin' bod."

From the way she spoke to me, it sounded like she didn't know about yesterday's incident.

"A cockatrice egg omelet... Wow, it's huge. Let me pay you something for this."

"Oh, stop. Quit it with all the politeness. It's the least I can do after you saved our village. Laman's doin' good, too. Has he visited you yet?"

"I haven't seen him."

"He was supposed to have gone to see you. Maybe he caught you while you were at work and just took it upon himself to guard the perimeter or somethin'. He's got nothin' better to do. 'Specially now that there isn't as much trash in the village. That was your doin' too, wasn't it?"

"The amount of garbage that was there before wasn't normal. Come on, enough with that."

The Hero's Case—in which, after decades of Laman and his party choosing the slightly wrong paths, the overflowing garbage in the Hero's Village caused an out-of-control fire. After its resolution, Laman once again took up the job of burning the garbage with his Holy Flame magic. But we had also found better ways to divide up the responsibility of the kingdom's garbage processing.

"Little Akuto, you're so cute and sweet! Let me give you a hug! ♥"

"Wait, Elma—ah, mmm!"

Right in the middle of the street, I sank into the succubus's ample flesh. I thought I might suffocate.

I couldn't see him, but I heard Gobta let out a "Whoa..." somewhere close by.

"Hmm... Do you wanna do it with me, too, goblin boy? I can take you both at once if you like...? I'll get rusty if I don't practice my seduction techniques every so often."

"Mmph, wait, Elma!" I popped my head out from between her cleavage. "That's way too sudden, and anyway, he's way too young for you!"

"Hm, I guess you're right... A middle schooler is a bit too young for a seventy-year-old."

"What?" Gobta was shocked.

"Elma is the same age as Laman the Hero. Her appearance is just a magical illusion. Do you get it?"

Gobta's eyes bugged out of his head as he let out an "Eek!"

I don't blame him, really.

"Mmm! Good boy! Oh, Akuto, I just can't help but pet you. If I had grandkids, I wonder if they'd be like you."

She started petting my head like a dog. Her womanly scent was starting to make me feel dizzy.

"Oh, speakin' of garbage, Laman remembered somethin' about the Black Scales."

"Please, tell me."

Black Scales...

They were connected to a mysterious entity who had appeared before the Hero's party incident, who attempted to steal away the Shard of Judgment. Considering that they had tried to pass themselves off as an official of the kingdom's government, it was a mystery we were eager to solve.

"First, he told me that the Shard of Judgment he had given to Fiona was momentarily taken. But, since the shard has a special characteristic that automatically returns it to the hands of its owner, Laman was able to recover it."

"I see... That means it would be difficult to take the shard by force."

As I thought about the shard I had in my own possession, it started to respond and become warm inside my pocket. While it looked like nothing more than a fragment of a courthouse staff lapel pin, this sacred artifact that gave its holder the ability to use the Judgment Spell was being targeted by some mysterious power behind the scenes.

"Second, he said the offender made themself invulnerable to attack as they escaped. These two points were the only information he could say for sure."

"It's very important information, especially coming from the Hero himself. Thank you, Elma."

I couldn't help but feel happy, thinking that a hero from another world had sent me this information.

"All right then, I'll be headin' back. I feel like there's trouble brewin' in the air in town, so be careful. Also—"

Elma let go of my body and turned toward Gobta.

"I think it's too early for you to be choosin' the path of the lone wolf. Li'l Akuto here is always helpin' others, so let him help you. I guarantee you won't regret it."

"Elma..."

She had sensed the awkward atmosphere between us.

Her trust meant a lot to me.

"But really...you've got a long way to go, Akuto. He noticed you were followin' him, but you didn't even notice I was followin' you. If this was a real battle, you might be dead, kid."

She sounded like she was trying to scare me.

"G-got it!" I responded, flustered.

I'm definitely no match for her.

"Well, catch ya 'round! ♥ Mwah! ♥"

The half-succubus blew a kiss as she left.

"Just as I was thinkin' I might be jealous that you're always surrounded by

babes... I guess it's actually not so easy for you, Window Mage."

"I'm glad you get it now. And by the way, can you cut it out with the 'Window Mage' thing?"

The atmosphere seemed to soften up a bit after the two of us were left alone on the street together again.

"Okay...just 'Windows,' then."

"That's even worse. It's an insult to Bill G*tes. Man, you've got a weird sense of humor."

"...Heh-heh."

Gobta broke into a smile. After the front he had been putting up all this time, I felt like I had finally gotten a glimpse of the real him.

"Anyway, sorry for tailing you like that," I said.

I figured I would try to come at the investigation from another angle. But then...

"Hey. There's something I wanna ask you, bro."

The serious look Gobta got in his eye made me stop in my tracks.

"Do you like action games?"



The Royal Cabinet's head maid Shiro was born in a village that was famous for its slave trade. It was in a remote region of the continent where beast hybrids were many in number. Their bodies were strong and their senses keen. Among the beast clans, one known as the Dog-Eared Clan ranked among the most valuable. And their loyalty to their masters was unshakable.

One problem was that their prejudice toward their masters was too strong.

This also caused difficulties when choosing their masters.

Members of the Dog-Eared Clan believed that those close to them were their masters whom they should devote their loyalty to. It was common for them to devote themselves to their birth parents or the heads of their households.

Therefore, newborn members of the Dog-Eared Clan were isolated from others from a young age.

They were given food and training, and then they were tested.

They were ranked by their strict instructors, and the most outstanding out of the clan were selected.

Lastly, an incantation called Inugami was cast upon them.

Only the ones who survived this final process earned the right to work for the royal family...

"Princess Ecstasia!"

I exited the Grand Bench and ran after my master.

I never lost the scent of my beloved master. I did not stray as I found my way back to her.

"I shall accompany you, Princess!"

I said this as a matter of course. I could not be separated from her in her time of crisis.

"Shiro, I told you. You have to stay with those two. Listen to what Mr. Akuto says."

"B-but, then..." I felt an impulse to bite off my own tongue. It was unthinkable for a retainer to defy their master's orders. "You will be judged, Princess Ecstasia."

"Please, close the door."

Without looking at me, my princess got into her official vehicle. Her attendant closed the door for her.

On the other side of the tinted glass window, I sent her a telepathic message.

<< Princess Ecstasia, I will protect you!>>

<< What I must do now is apologize and provide reparations. It's not something I need your protection to do. Mr. Akuto and Miss Judge need you

more than I do right now.>>

I sensed movement inside the vehicle. It changed gears.

I jumped in front of it.

<< Please, wait... I must protect you at all costs, Princess!>>

Protect.

I repeated myself like a fool.

<<Do whatever Mr. Akuto says. If you don't listen to him, I'll never talk to you again.>>

<<Wh-what?!>>

Snap. I felt the Telepathy Spell end. She had cut me off.

My vision wavered. It was as if the earth beneath me was crumbling. I felt pain as the skin on my knees split open.

I fell to the ground as if I'd been shot in the head. My knees started to bleed onto the asphalt.

Vwoom. The vehicle began departing.

"Ah!"

Of course, I chased it.

If I remove some of my physical limitations, there's nothing I can't keep up with.

I kept chasing after my princess until night fell.

Princess...Ecstasia...

Donning her tiara on her small head, she visited people related to the incident all over the kingdom and bowed in apology.

She wouldn't let me get close to her. All I could do was watch from afar.

If only I had been a more perfect servant.

Guilt. Guilt. Guilt.

I felt myself driven forward, like my brain had become nothing but a flickering red light.

Find a way. Find a way. Find a way.

Before I knew it, I found myself standing inside the Public Prosecutor's Office.

"Eek! Shiro...your legs are covered in blood!"

It was Prosecutor Ileana. I had to stop her.

"What is the status of the preparations for Princess Ecstasia's prosecution?" I asked.

"Uh, what? Oh, of course, I'm giving it my all! I have been tasked by Miss Judge, after all. The entire staff of the Public Prosecutor's Office is working on the case!"

"...Is that so?"

Even fueled by this rage, I didn't think I could take on the entire staff of the Prosecutor's Office.

"Wait! Shiro, you don't look very well at all!"

I left her and began following Princess Ecstasia's scent once more.

But I knew that beloved face would never again look me in the eye.

And she was going to quit magic, even though she loved it so much and did it only to help others.

How has it come to this ...?

Crunch! I heard a strange sound.

"Eep! It's the Royal Watchdog!" someone screamed.

Under my feet, I saw a crushed guardrail. Apparently, I had stepped on it without noticing.

Creak! I twisted it back into place. Disrupting the public landscape would upset the princess.

"Huh...?"

Something was different than usual. There were fewer people.

The monitors on the streets that were abuzz with images until yesterday had gone blank.

Everyone was afraid. They feared that something could collapse at any moment. That building. Or that one.

In the span of one day, the Japanese buildings that had been praised so much were now being shunned.

And a single trial was threatening to bring down the entire royal administration.

"What should we do ...?"

I didn't know. I couldn't think of any way to resolve this.

Tsukasa Wagatsuma and Akuto Satou came to mind. My princess had summoned them from another world called Japan. And currently, they were designated as my new masters.

Tsukasa Wagatsuma was a judge. Her techniques of law were the highest in the kingdom, and she was an expert in resolving legal incidents. But she had declared that she must "punish" my princess. Her resolution was to judge and punish her. I wasn't going to stand idly by while that happened.

Akuto Satou was an average Japanese boy, and one year older than me. While he was skillful overall, he had no abilities that stood out. However, he quickly became accustomed to life in this world and his position as court assistant, and he exhibited a broad viewpoint and strength in a support role. The princess had been fond of him ever since his summoning.

I believe he had been working silently in the background, contributing greatly to the resolutions of their major cases thus far. Their first trial, and the Hero's Case. Even though he was from another world, our people loved him.

Akuto Satou... Perhaps he will be able to help me.

Or so I thought, for a moment. But I shook my head.

Just as I was my master's servant, he was his sister's brother. If I relied on him too easily, I might come to regret it.

This was an emergency. I needed to get my priorities in order.

Protecting the princess came first. Without question. I rejected everything else.

I rejected Master Akuto.

And I rejected the loyalty and trust that had begun to grow while serving him.

Sting. I felt a pang in my chest.

Is this...my conscience?

I remembered the concept of "conscience" I learned while following him. But...

I am accustomed to stifling my emotions.

This thing that bubbled up in my chest on its own. This pain that bore no visible wound.

The more emotion, the weaker the maid.

Emotions caused one's decisions to falter.

They were nothing but a hindrance to my work. So I stifled them. Like I always had.

Then...

"I must make Akuto Satou call off the trial."

...I reached a decision.

"Oh-ho? In that case, I shall teach you a method that will surely stop him."

I received words of counsel.

"All right, bro. What do you think this item does?"

"Looks like some kind of sparkly potion... I bet drinking it makes you temporarily invincible or something."

"Ding, ding, ding. Heh-heh."

Gobta was barraging me with questions.

We were looking at a game's settings screen.

"You're amazing, bro. You understand it all right away."

"That's because your game design makes it easy to understand right away."

And we were in Gobta's room at his family's place.

Gobta had asked me whether I liked action games, and I'd answered yes. In that instant, Gobta started acting restless and brought me back to where he lived with his father.

The Bouchers lived in a three-story apartment built of stone. The contrast created by the white walls and the black woodwork was beautiful and reminded me of medieval Europe. The third floor, meanwhile, was full of modern electric appliances. It felt like I was inside some nice Scandinavian bed and breakfast.

When we arrived, we were a little hungry, so we decided to share the cockatrice omelet that Elma had given me. Gobta made tea to go with it. I had no idea what kind of tea it was, but the blend went surprisingly well with the omelet.

After he finished eating his half of the omelet, Gobta got quiet and fidgety. But after a while, he opened the door to the attic in the living room and pulled out a laptop—an old model from years ago. We moved to his room, and he turned on the laptop. On the screen he brought up *Pixel Game Builder*—an old program that let you create your own original games.

[&]quot;Hey, Gobta. Does this thing work?"

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"Psh, of course it does."
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Gobta excitedly pushed the ENTER button.

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...Dun, da da dun, da dun! 🕽 Dun, da da dun, da dun! 🕽
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The laptop's screen turned dark before a pixel art image of a building appeared. Upbeat music began to play.

I think this is called MIDI, right? The melody sounds really retro, like something out of a game from a few decades ago.

It reminded me of the retro game shops where I had hung out in Akihabara back in Japan.

On the screen, a macho-looking character appeared in profile as his body bounced to the music.

Justice Fighter

Da da da da duuun 🎝

The game's original title floated up into view.

"This is awesome."

Chills of excitement ran down my spine. I wasn't expecting to get this hyped up.

"For another race in a fantasy world to make a game using *Game Builder*...it feels like a miracle."

This kingdom in another world is overflowing with Japanese things and imitating Japanese culture...

And it's gone so far that a twelve-year-old gamer in this world even made his own original action game. I would have never expected that this world had been raising a fellow gaming fan all this time.

"What are you mumblin' about? Miracle? You're weird, bro."

"Is this playable?"

"Obviously. Try it."

I did as I was told and placed my trembling fingers on the arrow keys and the

Z and X keys.

"What, the only playable character is a goblin?"

"Well, duh. I'm a goblin, aren't I?"

"Then who was that character that was just on the screen?"

"That's just the default human character. But his clothes and stuff look pretty old so he looks kinda off. What, you don't wanna play as a goblin?"

"No, it's good. I like all different fantasy races."

They all had something special about them, which made things interesting. I like that, because I don't have anything interesting about me.

I started clacking away at the keyboard and began Stage 1: The Street.

There are many different kinds of action games, but this one was a beat 'em up side-scroller. I started on single-player arcade mode.

"All right, bro. Time to show me your gaming skills."

"Is that a challenge? Yeah, you're on. Let's get this goblin going."

At some point, we had started bantering casually like old friends.

I had originally come here for the investigation, but I had forgotten all of that once he put a game in front of me. I got absorbed into what I wanted to be absorbed in.

A few minutes later...

"Stage cleared. That was easy."

I started acting a little cocky. It always felt good to clear a game stage.

Stage 1 was just a bunch of monk-like characters dressed in white coming at me with weak kicks and punches. I had picked up an item called a spiked club pretty early on and just beat them all to death with that. Maybe this was supposed to be like one of those games where you're just one guy against a huge crowd of weak enemies.

Last Stage: Enemy Headquarters

Without any time to catch my breath, the stage changed to what looked like a

pro wrestling ring.

"I only made two stages so far. But the final boss is tough."

A tall man with white hair swinging a whip walked out from the right side of the screen.

I had a feeling like I had seen this character somewhere before. But before I had time to think of where, the screen started flickering black. Black tentacles flew from the right side of the screen to the left.

You Lose

"Come on, that's just cheating! No way!"

"You givin' up?" Gobta was cackling.

"...No, I just need to remember his attack pattern and back him into the corner."

"Now that's cheating, bro."

Just as we were starting to really have fun with it...

"Sorry, time out for a sec."

Gobta turned toward the house's entryway.

"Huh? What's up?"

"He's back."

Gobta shut the laptop on me, so fast that he almost closed it on my fingers.

"Wha—? He's back? What are you talking about?" I hadn't heard anything.

"Sorry, I've gotta put this back. I don't wanna have to explain so just stay here."

Gobta took the computer, ran out to the living room, and put it back in the attic. I stayed sitting next to his desk, looking on dumbfounded. He came back to his room and shut the door.

Clack, clack, clack. Ka-chack!

I heard a sound coming from the entryway. After a while, a listless voice called out, "Hey, I'm home."

It was Gobta's father, Goburo Boucher.

"Gobta...what's up with your ears?" I asked.

Gobta's ears had changed shape and were moving up and down in a twitching motion.

"Oh, you've never seen this before? It's a special goblin skill, All Ears. My dad's has gotten rusty over the years, though."

His ears did look like they had taken on a shape to better pick up sounds.

That seems convenient. I wish I could do that.

I felt this without a second thought...and just as I did, I saw the words *Skill Unlocked: All Ears* light up inside me.

"Hey, Gobta. What's this omelet thing?"

"I'm studying! Go ahead and eat it!" Gobta answered him through the door. "He works as a delivery person. Sometimes he stops home during work to blow off some stress by having a snack."

I nodded in understanding and kept trying to stay as quiet as possible.

"Ahh." I heard him let out a sigh and a burp. "All right, I'm off."

The door slammed shut. Gobta's father was headed to work again.

But the excitement that had built up from playing video games was totally gone now.

While Goburo had been eating the omelet and drinking tea, my eyes had wandered around Gobta's room. And something had struck me as off. For someone who was so into game design, his room was surprisingly devoid of game-related things.

"Hey, Gobta. Are you hiding that you like video games?"

"Games are forbidden in our house. Thanks to Gilvert Trinity."

"Huh? The high priest?"

"Mom won't come back. I hate living like this. There's no point."

His wandering statements had gotten my attention.

"Those guys were the ones who messed up the inside of that building anyway. They were doing experiments with forbidden magic."

"Forbidden magic? Who?"

"...I know you won't make fun of me, bro."

After being silent for a moment, he started falteringly telling me his story.

"It's all his fault. Gilvert Trinity, and his Black Scales..."



I left the Boucher house and started piecing together Gobta's story in my head.

About one year ago, his father, Goburo, and his mother, Lyra, were having a conversation about their child's education. Goburo was apathetic and didn't make any suggestions, but Lyra suggested that they restrict the amount of time that Gobta was allowed to play video games.

One day, their conversation turned into a fight, and Lyra left the house. Goburo made light of the situation, assuming that she would come back in a few days. But she didn't. Some days later, Goburo happened to be making a delivery at the church's headquarters. Among the congregation of followers who had left behind their everyday lives to join the church, he saw his own wife.

Goburo and Gobta were shocked when they found out that Lyra had joined the church. When they tried to contact her, they were blocked by the wall between the church and the outside world. They even tried to enter the church headquarters as prospective members, but they weren't allowed to enter because they were goblins.

After all this distress, Goburo decided to ban video games in their house. He thought if God was watching them, they might see that they had stopped playing video games and return Lyra to them. Goburo started the rule like a kind of prayer. But the two soon realized that they were underestimating the

situation, thinking their wife and mother would come back to them just through exercising some self-restraint.

Living his daily life under these restrictions, Gobta's grades started to drop. One day, angry and desperate, Gobta went past one of the church's branches on his way home from school. A newlywed couple was being blessed at their wedding ceremony. When Gobta looked away from the scene, he noticed the building marked NO TRESPASSING next door. Out of curiosity, he peeked inside.

The building's first floor was filled with various articles of large refuse. Among the articles, the old retro arcade game machines drew his attention. To the people of this kingdom who loved fun, new things, maybe a Japanese retro game had been too much of a stretch. Or maybe the contents had been too violent. In any case, it had been thrown away.

Gobta was fascinated by the machines, which sat silently in the building as if they were sleeping. He liked the action games and versus games the best. *Street F*ghter*, *F*nal Fight*, *D*e Hard Arcade*... Of course, the games didn't turn on. But the names of ultimate attacks and their commands were written on the machines. Just looking at them and imagining what they did was fun. He could have stayed there for hours and hours, and he wrote down game ideas in his notebooks until he had filled three of them.

Gobta decided he wanted to make a game with a goblin as the player character. After visiting some used software shops, he discovered the old game production software called *Pixel Game Builder*. It was PC software, and he didn't have his own PC, but he figured he could secretly use his dad's old laptop that hadn't been used by him at all. And so Gobta secretly immersed himself in making his game. And he grew to love games even more. It was a secret that he couldn't tell anyone, but he was fine with that. He didn't want to tell anyone. Not about his situation at home, or about his goblin player character. He would definitely get made fun of.

One night, around the time that the Hero's Case was getting big, Gobta again snuck into the off-limits building. Like always, he used All Ears to make sure he didn't run into anyone. But that day, he heard a sound coming from inside the building. There were multiple people standing around the arcade game machines.

Gobta got scared. Maybe the machines were finally going to be thrown away as trash. He peeked inside. In the darkness, he saw a person with white hair holding a candle. It was the church's high priest. Around him were some people who looked to be other, shorter races, and the black silhouettes of yet others. He heard them talking. He overheard the words *forbidden magic* and saw the man hand something to one of the shorter races. And then a set of upsidedown, black Balance Scales appeared.

As for what happened after that, all Gobta could say was, "I can't explain it well...but it was something horrible, like lives were disappearing one after another." It was probably the work of some forbidden magic, but unable to watch the situation unfolding in front of him, Gobta had decided to return home. Having snuck into the off-limits building, he wasn't able to tell anyone about what had happened. But still, he had to know what happened to the arcade game machines. He went back into the building, this time during daylight. All nine machines that had been placed all around the building's round pillar were gone. But there was no evidence left behind of their removal. All that was left in their place was a huge amount of mud.

Shocked and dumbfounded, Gobta exited the building. It was then that he was discovered by a police officer on patrol and treated as a juvenile delinquent. He was asked to give a statement about his trespassing, and about the mud. He didn't want his parents to find out that he had sneaked into the building because of the game machines. He didn't know how the mud had gotten there, and even though he felt that it had something to do with forbidden magic, he wasn't able to put what he had seen into words. On top of everything, talking about it might get him targeted by whoever was using that forbidden magic. He didn't think the police or the prosecution were on his side. He only thought they were there to scold him. So he decided to just stay quiet.

<< And that's everything. What do you think?>>

That evening, walking toward the courthouse, I told Tsukasa everything over telepathy—what happened after I met up with Gobta, and everything he had told me.

<<...This is all very valuable information. I doubt he would have shared all this with anyone else but you.>>

<<I wonder.>>

I felt like that was an overstatement. I hadn't been looking for a compliment, so it just made me feel awkward.

<< I wasn't able to get through to him at all. But your investigative skills were excellent!>>

<< All I did was play video games with him.>>

<<p><<There's something called "play therapy." One famous kind is called sandplay therapy. First and foremost, the investigator must respect the child and accept them as they are. The process aims to create a friendly relationship of trust in which the child can express their feelings freely through play. And when that happens, the investigator can read things like anxiety or fear from their unconscious expression...>>

By "investigator," I guess she meant a family court investigator.

Having been around her talking about her work so much, I knew something about the occupation. In family court, they work together with the judge as a team. Where the judge is the pro regarding the law, the investigator is an expert on behavioral sciences such as psychology, sociology, social welfare, and pedagogy. They use various techniques to carry out their actual investigations.

<< Huh, that's interesting. But I've never heard of it.>>

I never considered that there were psychological techniques that involved games. That's not the reason I was playing games with him. He's the one who influenced me with his passion for games.

<<I think it was even better that you weren't conscious of it. I think you're really good at getting up close to other people's emotions. Without even knowing it, you managed to get the facts by using behavioral science. Actually, it's not really about what you could do or did. It's your natural ability to earn the trust of the people in this world.>>

<< I was just doing what I wanted to do—something I like.>>

<king something and getting immersed in it means you have a natural ability. I can't do that. And I could never like any other man in this world that isn't you.>>

<<You're joking, right?>>

<<Well then, now that we've collected some of the facts, it's time for analysis and evaluation.>>

I struggled to keep up with the topic shifts from doting to case analysis.

<< In the game, the people wearing white must be the church's followers, and the boss must be the high priest. Gobta is harboring a grudge over the enemy who stole his mother away from him—a dangerous situation.>>

I hadn't realized it until she put it into words. To me, it had just been your standard brutal action game made by a gaming fan. But looking at it from the perspective of a seasoned judge was totally different.

<<I see... If it gets worse, that could become reality in the future.>>

I recalled the Hero's Case. One wrong decision could greatly change the course of the future.

I was glad that I'd been able to talk to her about this.

<< I don't want to make my mind up on that just yet. But creative works can often be associated with a person's emotional trauma.>>

I felt a chill.

My field of vision suddenly narrowed before me. I felt like the world suddenly shifted from horizontal to vertical.

This other person's story was resonating with me.

Why did I start liking fantasy stories in the first place?

I flashed back to a memory that had been sleeping within me. I was three. My dad got remarried, and I met my new stepsister, Tsukasa. She had a sad, lonely air about her at that time. One day, I innocently asked about the remarriage. And when I did, my dad scolded me sharply, "You must never, ever mention Tsukasa's father." His words stayed in my heart like a cold lump. Maybe it

wouldn't have bothered most people. But a kind of resignation toward adult society started to grow inside me after that. I constantly felt this awkward situation where I wasn't allowed to talk about it, and couldn't help but sense it. Maybe that's why I liked escaping to unrelated fantasy worlds.

But...what I'm feeling right here and now is different.

What I was facing now, after being summoned to this world, were the victims of a collapsed building. A family torn apart. The stark realities of the people of this world.

I had gone silent in thought.

<<...Then there's the mother, Lyra.>>

Tsukasa called me back to the conversation.

At the sound of her voice, I thought about her past for a moment.

And I considered that maybe the reason she became so obsessed with court trials had something to do with her father.

But now wasn't the time to reflect on our pasts.

I cut off my thoughts from those old memories, and I told my sister what I had just decided.

<<Yeah. About Lyra...>>

<<You're going to go look for her, aren't you?>>

<<You saw right through me, huh?>>

There was one thing I hadn't been able to tell my ever-impartial sister.

I had promised Gobta that I would find Lyra and bring her back.

Gobta had told a regular old human like me all sorts of difficult things. I wanted to do something to pay him back.

<< I think I'll be able to hear a lot about what's going on in the church headquarters. And the church is probably the most important thing we need to investigate right now.>>

I didn't want her to think that I was just acting impulsively based on my

feelings. I tried to show her I was being rational.

A few weeks ago, the high priest had used the Black Scales and some kind of magic in that building. A few weeks later, the building collapsed. And now, paired up with Tamamo Keisei, the high priest had rushed to go to court as a victim...

The high priest holds at least a part of the truth about this major incident. He knows the inside of the collapsed building. And yet, he didn't mention anything about it at the trial. That means he's hiding something. I was starting to think that the horrible possibilities I had sensed as I left the Grand Bench were very real. Still...

<<I don't think the high priest would give you any answers if you summoned him and directly asked him what happened in the building the night Gobta saw him. Plus, if we make any mistakes based on our preconceived assumptions about what the church is really like, we'll get punished by the scales.>>

I told Tsukasa my train of thought.

<<p><<That's right... The plaintiff wasn't surprised at the sight of the scales' punishment. He already knew about that function. I think he was intentionally trying to evoke doubt in the gallery through his argument.>>

Yes. This was the conclusion we needed to draw from this.

While it was the newest of the sacred artifacts and still had many unknowns surrounding it, the Shard of Judgment was just another sacred artifact.

<<p><<The high priest inherited a sacred artifact that was passed down over thousands of years. He may be knowledgeable about the Shard of Judgment's punishment. But if he knew about it and made that argument anyway, that means he's trying to take you down, Tsukasa.>>

<<Well, thanks to your help in the courtroom...we were able to escape that danger for now.>>

<<He really is dangerous. We need to carry out our investigation without being noticed by him.>>

<< Yeah, agreed. But what exactly is forbidden magic anyway?>> Her voice

was tinged with worry.

<<Unfortunately, I don't know, either. I'm guessing it's magic that was banned because it's dangerous. But I think since there were other people with him when he was using it, it must mean he can't use it when he's alone.>>

<<...I wonder if Shiro knows about it?>>

Shiro. She had supported us so much ever since we were summoned here.

She got dragged into the trial at the Slime Store, but in the end, she helped us save the slimes. And I had been able to see her smile as she looked at the slimes she loved so much.

Riding the pegasus carriage with her on the way to the Hero's Village, we had talked about "the Japanese conscience." Even if just a little bit, I had felt like we had started to understand each other that time.

But Shiro had served the princess for about ten years. She was originally the princess's maid, and she only supported us because she had been ordered to do so by the princess.

I remembered what she looked like when I last saw her. In opposition to the princess's potential punishment, she had treated us like enemies and nearly attacked Tsukasa. I couldn't forget her eyes, turned red with the intensity of her anger.

Tamamo had called it our "falling-out"...but I refused to believe that this was the end for us.

<<I'm going to find Shiro and try to convince her to come back to us. And I think I should go alone.>>

Tsukasa nodded. << Okay.>>

If there was some fault with the princess's magic, then Tsukasa might still need to punish her.

Can't have the judge herself going to meet with Shiro. I have to figure this one out on my own.

We needed Shiro's abilities and knowledge of this world for what we wanted

to accomplish going forward.

In this world, we were weak. We were just humans with the power to hold trials. In contrast, the depth of the church we were trying to search and investigate was unfathomable.

I returned to the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse, mulling all this over as I walked.

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"Oh, Shir-"
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I saw Shiro and started to call out to her. On the other side of the glass of the front entryway, I saw her silver hair standing out against the darkness. But...

What? Don't tell me...

Past her, I saw a man with white hair in a white robe... A figure who looked like the high priest appeared to be in the building with her.

Why would the two of them be sneaking into the courthouse right now?

In shock, I blinked hard before I saw them disappear into the building.

<<Tsukasa, where are you right now?>>

<<Hm? I'm on the fourth floor of the trial building. I finally found something I was looking for.>>

The place she was in was separated from the court building where the main entrance and the Grand Bench were.

<<Can you escape out of there, but use an exit besides the main entrance?

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<<It's possible. But why—?>>
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<<I'm going to talk to Shiro. I'll contact you when I'm done. I just don't want you to get captured.>>

Sensing the situation, she responded <<...Got it. Be careful.>> and cut off the telepathic connection.

Thinking of the worst possible thing that could happen, I chased after the shadows of Shiro and the high priest.

Article IV Attendants Shall Not Make Lewd Advances Toward Their Masters

The Supreme Court building, which had been turned into this world's courthouse, looked imposing as usual.

The structure's outer wall, said to be constructed with ten thousand tons of granite, was like a medieval fort.

At its front entrance, the glass doors had been left open. Not a single light was lit, and passing through the dark entrance, I felt a chill as if I had just entered into the mouth of a huge monster. The possibility that my own residence had fallen into the hands of the enemy only added to the chill.

To shake off my fear, I whispered, "Holy Flame," and created a small fireball the size of a marble. This spell that I had learned from Laman the Hero was the same flame magic that had defeated the Demon King.

After the Hero's Case was closed, I had been practicing the spell by myself every night. As someone who had always loved the idea of having fantasy powers, Holy Flame was the only thing I had unlocked so far that had that fantasy feel to it. But still, the spell was difficult to use, and I couldn't create bigger flames or more than one at a time. My fireball was still at level one.

But with this, at least I wouldn't get surprise-attacked in the darkness while fumbling around looking for a light switch.

With this light, I've got my eyes. Next...

I decided to try out my new skill All Ears. In my mind, I visualized my ears changing shape like Gobta's had.

Wiggle...wiggle...flap!

I felt my ears make a gross flapping motion. It was suddenly easier to pick up all the sounds that caught my attention.

That's kind of anticlimactic. But I guess it's still pretty great to be able to use a new power.

Feeling satisfied with myself, I let out a creepy chuckle.

Wait, I hear something.

There were footsteps coming up the stairs. And there was something that sounded metallic.

It must be Shiro.

She was wearing her metallic-soled boots that doubled as weapons.

I went up the stairs and arrived at the large hall in front of the Grand Bench.

"I've been waiting for you...Akuto Satou."

There, the Royal Watchdog had been lying in wait.

"I guess this is the end of the Master roleplay. That's too bad."

That was my attempt to lighten the mood.

No matter if I had known this was in the realm of possibility, the pressure I felt now having to face Shiro like this was too much.

The natural light of the stars, streaming in through the window in front of the Grand Bench, faintly illuminated her silver-white hair. In the darkness, her snow-white skin made her look like a doll. And that doll would stop at nothing to protect the royal family.

"Please stop the trial against Princess Ecstasia."

Her voice was emotionless. My attempt to lighten the mood had had no effect on her whatsoever.

"If the request comes from you, Tsukasa Wagatsuma will surely stop the

trial."

Considering what I knew about Shiro, I wasn't surprised that she had sniffed out the fact that Tsukasa would stop if I asked her to.

"What if I say no?"

"I will take you as hostage and use you to stop Tsukasa Wagatsuma."

"That won't work. I already told her not to stop the trial for any reason."

In reality, I wasn't sure what Tsukasa would do if my life was on the line.

"In that case, why don't we decide this through a game—something you are familiar with?"

"What is this, all of a sudden?"

"The loser will do whatever the winner says."

"Sorry, but I don't think this is really the time for games."

I mean, except for all that gaming I just did with Gobta.

"Please suggest a game you are good at."

"Shiro, don't tell me you allied with the high priest in order to protect the princess. Did you?"

Shiro kept her eyes fixed on the center of my body, and for a few seconds simply waited.

"In that case, please allow me to choose."

She put her finger to her lips and pondered for a moment.

"... Tag. I have heard it is a popular game in otherworld Japan."

She had no intention of answering me. All I could do was go along with it.

"I have played it with Princess Ecstasia before. It is a game where one must touch another player with their hand."

"Yeah, I know. But a game of tag with only two people will be pretty damn boring."

"I will take into account the disparity between our abilities. You win if you are

able to touch my body even one time. I will win if I am able to touch you a hundred times and then restrain you."

"That's quite a handicap you're giving me."

The difference between our physical abilities was massive.

But I figured I must be able to tag her at least once out of her hundred.

"Let us begin." I saw her eyes flash red. "Akuto Satou. I will ensnare you."

She disappeared.

"Wha-? Wait..."

Where is she?

I looked to my left.

"Wrong. On your right," she said.

"Urgh!"

I felt an impact against my behind, and staggered from her strong slap. I swung my right hand, but hit nothing. Next, I felt her palm slap against my back. She grabbed me by my staggering legs and threw me headfirst into a brown sofa. Against my rear, I felt— *Smack! Smack!*

The sound of her slapping my sorry ass back and forth echoed throughout the room.

Ow, ouch! This is bad... She's superhuman. I-I'm scared...

""

"I see you are feigning loss of consciousness. Ineffective."

She came close again. I drew in the fireball I had left floating in the hall...

"Grah!"

...and pulled myself out of the sofa cushions to fly at her.

"I can sense the movement of the air with my tail."

She sent me flying with something like an aikido technique, and I almost got burnt by my own fireball I was trying to attack her with. I ducked out of the way and crawled on the ground in an awkward limbo position.

"Ninety-three tags remaining."

"Ow, ow, ow! Time out! Stop! There's no way I can win this!"

This is nothing but a miserable, one-sided beat-down.

"The difference in our physical abilities is too brutal! I'm no match against a beast hybrid! And the tail thing is just unfair!"

"So you still feel it is unfair. In that case..."

Shiro walked steadily toward me across the marble floor of the large hall. When she passed the statue of Lady Justice, she snapped off its bronze sword with an axe kick.

"I will recognize this sword as an extension of your hand."

Clang—the sword, a cold tan color, came clattering toward me with a metallic sound.

"Now things are getting exciting."

I was getting fired up. I had chosen kendo as my elective in PE class. I picked up the sword and got into a basic stance.

"Graaagh!"

Shiro dove at me like an animal. Trying to avoid hurting her, I held back as I swiftly swung the sword.

Clang, clang—the sound of metal on metal.

"Eighty-five tags remaining."

She knocked me down over and over.

Clash, clang—my hands were shaking.

"Fifty-nine tags remaining."

The bronze sword got shorter and shorter. Shiro flew through the air while kicking her metallic boots against the sword, breaking it off bit by bit.

"Guh... Arrrgh!"

"You are weak. Thirty tags remaining."

No matter how I swung the sword, or how I came at her, I couldn't touch her.

This is the true power of the Royal Watchdog...

In desperation, I threw what remained of my sword at her. But she had already disappeared from the spot where I last saw her.

"I will make you understand. Five tags remaining."

My whole body felt hot. My flesh was engorged with blood and stinging all over.

"Ugh!"

I fell over, face down. I felt a fragment of copper prick me, and the cold marble of the floor against my face.

"Please face this way."

Shiro kicked me and turned me over to my back. In an instant, her metallic boots stepped on both my arms. The heels functioned just like shackles over my wrists as she pinned me to the floor. I looked up at the ceiling and at Shiro. She wasn't even breaking a sweat.

"This is the last tag. You lose."

She reached out her hand. I heard the fabric of her maid outfit sliding against me. Her beautiful hand, white like porcelain, stretched out toward my cheek. Then— "Hyou hlet hyour grrrd dnn!"

You let your guard down—I said, as I touched her.

"This is...a piece of the sword? You...?!"

I had been holding a broken piece of the sword in my mouth. I had feigned pathetically falling over onto the ground and put it into my mouth. And now, I used it to touch her hand.

"Bleh." I spat out the sword fragment. "How's that, Shiro? You did say the sword was an extension of my hand, right?"

Shiro was frozen.

"I win. You have to listen to what I say."

"Heh...don't be absurd. I've already broken your spirit enough. Game time is over."

"Wh-whaaat?"

You're kidding me, right?

"Akuto Satou. You understand now, right? You are no match for this."

"Huh?" The fire that had built up inside me suddenly went cold.

"You have felt it. You are weak. What if Tsukasa Wagatsuma is attacked? What if you are attacked? You can't do anything to protect yourselves, can you?"

Shiro spoke to me as she straddled my trunk. Her two eyes returned to the color of their calm state.

"Therefore...I will give you one more chance. Please stop Princess Ecstasia's trial."

The moonlight streaming in from the ceiling illuminated Shiro's body.

Her thin waist. Her dainty head, and the two small mounds hidden under her maid's uniform.

Her ethereal silver-white hair. Her completely emotionless expression.

And her ice-blue eyes, silently staring back at me.

"If you refuse, I'll make you bleed half to death. What will your sister think when she sees you so weak and defeated?"

I looked up at her stiffly upright body.

I could faintly see her canine teeth peeking out from her mouth. I couldn't move my arms. She could bite into my carotid artery by simply stooping down. She held my life in the palm of her hand.

She's driven me into a corner. No doubt about it.

I was scared.

"If you stop the trial, I will protect you and your sister. We can assign a large number of maids to your service as guests of the royal family. I can promise you a luxurious life as an eternal, honored guest."

"Shiro, are you being serious?"

"Yes. And if you so desire...you may also do as you like with me."

As she said this, she picked up her skirt with her fingers.

Inch by inch, she gradually pulled up her skirt. I caught a soft, faint whiff of her flowery scent.

The sight in front of me started changing from black to white. Her snow-white skin...her tightly toned legs...past the edge of her thigh-high stockings...and a gap the shape of an inverted triangle that led up to her rear...

"Ah..." I let out a sigh.

"Sit up and show your reverence. If you do, I will pet you, like a good boy. Like a baby. You do not have to think about anything else."

If I sat up now, like she said...I might have been able to bury my face into her lower abdomen.

"Shiro..."

But I decided to tell her the truth instead.

"...you're not very good at the whole seduction thing."

Her hands that had been raising her skirt suddenly stopped.

"...What do you mean?"

"And your legs are torn to pieces."

Both of her legs were wounded. Her stockings were so ripped and full of holes that I couldn't tell how they were even staying on. Her skin was covered in scrapes and dried blood...



"I'm not kinky enough to get excited by this kind of roleplay."

"...B-because of this?"

Noticing the mistake she had made, she started to lose her composure. I went on.

"That's not the only thing. Shiro...you're crying."

The head maid blinked her eyes. Her eyelashes, like delicate pieces of silverwork, were wet.

"No, I am not."

"Maybe I haven't known you as long as the princess has, but I consider you a friend. I can notice when something's off about your expression. And look, your tail is trembling."

While her eyes weren't shedding actual tears, her dog tail, which wagged happily when she was having a good time, was now drooping and shaking slightly.

"M-my tail...? You're wrong, that's—"

"Shiro, you have a conscience. I know you don't actually want to do this. You can't hide it completely. If the princess is important to you, you'll remember how she tried so hard to summon us here."

"But this is the only way to protect Princess Ecstasia!"

"We're trying to protect Princess Ecstasia right now, too."

"..."

I sensed Shiro holding her breath. Her dog ears were twitching and starting to turn toward my direction like she wanted to hear more.

"It looks like you'll finally listen to what I have to say."

I felt a sense of relief wash over me. Though I still couldn't move my arms.

"...But before that... Hey, I know you're over there."

Still lying down, I used my powers to draw back the fireball I had made, which was about to go out.

I visualized my mana pouring forth and used it to move the fireball over in front of the Grand Bench.

Just earlier, I had seen something move in my view from between Shiro's legs and used All Ears to check it out.

"Ah, so I have been discovered! Your ears are keen, my boy."

"You didn't do a great job of hiding your giggles, you little fox."

A small, fox-colored figure began to emerge.

"Fine, fine, that is enough. Pfft...heh-heh! Oh, how delightful! A masterpiece! Even just remembering it makes me roll with laughter!"

And out of the shadows popped Tamamo Keisei, attorney at law.



"I—I do not require first aid. Tell me, what did you mean by protecting Princess Ecstasia?"

"Just sit still. Wow...this looks terrible. How did this happen? And there are all these little pebbles in the scrapes... You're covered in wounds... Did you jump into a pit of razors or something?"

"No cause for concern, it's already healing. And it doesn't hurt at all, so—ah, ouch!"

"Sounds like it hurts."

"The disinfectant is stinging..."

For the moment, I decided to ignore Tamamo as she rolled around in laughter.

I turned on the lights in the building, went back to our room, and grabbed a first aid kit.

I moved Shiro, who was lying exhausted on the floor, to a sofa. While she resisted, I tried treating some of the injuries on her legs.

"...Your hands will be dirtied by my blood."

"Your blood isn't dirty, Shiro."

"If I receive assistance from you, Master, I will lose my right to call myself a maid."

"I'm happy... You'll still call me Master."

"Uh... I mean... But after I did such a thing..."

"Since I won that game earlier and you have to do whatever I ask, I think I'll ask to go back to being Master."

"Unh... Ah, ouch..."

"How are the bandages? Too tight?"

"...U-unh..."

I wasn't sure if she was frustrated or embarrassed, but her face had turned red, and she was hanging her head.

Having finished bandaging the raw wounds on her legs, I put back her skirt that I had moved up and out of the way.

Oh...was I doing something so risqué this whole time?

After a couple seconds, I felt my face get hot.

That was a pretty amazing view. Why didn't I burn that more into my memory?! Ahh...argh...!

"Oh-ho, treating your enemy after defeat? How chivalrous! Is this what you Japanese people call bushido?"

The baby-faced fox-girl—actually thousands of years old—came bounding toward us.

"Oh, but I truly enjoyed when you told her she's 'not very good at the whole seduction thing'! That will make today's highlight reel! I suppose your resistance to seduction must be high after being so used to Miss Judge's big \Leftrightarrow bouncy \Leftrightarrow things!"

"So that was the reason, Master."

All the redness quickly disappeared from Shiro's face.

"Cut it out, you guys," I begged.

I was starting to get a little annoyed.

"Tamamo, you put that whole seduction idea into Shiro's head, didn't you?"

"Oh-ho? What would ever make you think such a thing? What will you do if you've just made a false charge against me? Perhaps I could sue you for such slander!"

"So it wasn't you, waiting for me to come back to the courthouse, disguised as the high priest to freak me out?"

Tamamo, a half-fox-spirit, was able to use many different fox-spirit magic techniques.

"I should have known you would see through such a simple trick, my boy!"

She puffed out her flat, five-year-old chest.

"I simply told her that, as a noble head maid stuck in a conundrum like this, 'the only way to stop Miss Judge from judging Ecstasia is through ensnaring Akuto.' And in order to ensnare a human, there are certain steps to follow. First, lure them in. Then, break their spirit using something they are skillful at against them. After that, use sweet, sultry words to make them putty in your hands! That was just a small taste of my genius technique!"

Sure am lucky I was somehow able to escape that.

"Okay. But why would you do all that in the first place?"

I had heard her side of the story, but I still didn't understand her motivation.

"Well, what do you think? Hm? Why is it, do you suppose? Please, consider it well and give me your best hypothesis!"

...She's more annoying than usual today. Did I do something to get on her bad side?

I thought back to what the little fox was interested in: video games...her own pleasure...deep-fried tofu...

As I mulled it over, Shiro whispered so that only I could hear, "Miss Tamamo

was saying that you broke a promise to her."

Promise...? Oh, right.

When negotiating with her in the courtyard of the Shrine of the Hero, she had told me that she wanted to challenge me on Super N*ntendo. So I had promised her to "play video games in the princess's room while drinking real Japanese miso soup at a real Japanese table."

I got so busy that I totally forgot.

But I couldn't just tell her that I had been busy. That wouldn't be convincing to her, especially since Tsukasa and I had been going to the tavern after work almost every day. But she also wasn't the type to forgive after just a simple apology.

In that case, I needed to act like I had been working on setting up the perfect experience for her.

"Oh yeah, about that promise we made. Sorry the preparations have been taking so long."

Tamamo's restless fidgeting stopped dead.

"Preparations, you say?"

"That's right. I figured since we're going through all this trouble to get everyone together to play video games, it wouldn't be fun to just play any old game, right?"

"Oh-ho?"

Good. She took the bait. Let's go with this.

"I didn't want you to be bored, so I've been using my free time between work to look for an interesting new release for us to play."

"...Hmph. I suppose you are right. It wouldn't be fair to challenge each other to a game we both already know well."

Tamamo spoke with a mysterious look on her face, her five fox tails wagging slowly.

"Yes, exactly! But you know...it's really too bad..."

"What is?! Hurry up and let's do it!"

"Like the plaintiff said, there might be a flaw in the Copy-Paste Spell, right? And I'm pretty sure that the game console in the princess's room is copypasted."

"Then no need to worry. If it is operational now, then there must not have been any issue at the time of its copy-pasting."

"Does that ever happen—issues at the time of copy-pasting?"

"I do not feel like explaining. Tell me when we will hold our event. Now!"

I was curious to know, but I didn't think I could push the matter right now.

"Hmm... Well, you see, I had secured use of the princess's room, but we can't really use it now, under these circumstances. That would be trespassing, wouldn't it?"

"Then let us trespass!"

"Are you really a lawyer?!"

I had to call her out on that one.

"...Fine! I shall double-cross the high priest!"

"Huh?"

Shiro and I simultaneously gasped in surprise.

"I had been running low on my daily dose of pleasure, so I thought I might as well try overthrowing the royal family with the high priest. But if I do that, we won't be able to hold our fun event, correct? And if Ecstasia quits using the Copy-Paste Spell, then the kingdom's amusements will soon run dry. And I do quite enjoy this kingdom of imitated goods."

"Oh, so you're suddenly a patriot?" I was baffled at how easily she chose to betray the high priest. "But what position does that put you in as a lawyer?"

"Hm? Oh. Well, I've only accepted the state compensation lawsuit so far. And besides, seeing as he's the son of the previous high priest, I'm certain that he is looking down on a Japanese *yokai* like myself."

"Uh...Gilvert's father was also a high priest?"

"Yes. What, you weren't aware?"

Tamamo spat out her words, looking disinterested.

"That damned Gilvert. He's so desperate to surpass his father's number of followers. Truly absurd."

In her thousands of years of inherited memories, Tamamo must've known some things about Gilvert's father as well. But even if I wanted to, it wasn't something I could use my acquisition skill on.

"You truly are knowledgeable, Miss Tamamo. Then you must know something about the truth of the building collapse as well."

"Don't try to flatter me, it won't work. Besides, I couldn't tell you."

"Pfft. So you decided to be the case's lawyer even though you don't know what happened?"

"Just so. As a lawyer, it is better not to ask clients about things that would be better \nleq left \nleq unsaid! You should read the Attorneys Act and the Basic Rules on the Duties of Practicing Attorneys. You've heard of an attorney's obligation to the truth, yes? Well, there's no obligation to the truth if you don't know it!"

"Isn't that fundamentally wrong?"

"It's a skill, my boy. But I wouldn't expect you to understand—you're essentially just a normal, average, high school boy with that weak flame spell of yours."

"I already have a complex about that. You don't have to rub it in. I'll call off our event."



"Okay, okay, calm down. I said I'd betray him, and I'm not going back on it."

Yeah, says the betrayer herself.

"After speaking with you, I am sure that it will be more fun to double-cross the high priest anyway."

"Okay. Then I guess it was all worth it to get my ass beat up."

Behind me, Shiro dejectedly whispered, "I'm sorry..."

"I shall bring you a piece of conclusive evidence before daybreak!"

Tamamo Keisei, attorney at law, pointed dramatically toward the north...

...before bounding through the main gate.

...

Silence.

"I guess I'll wait here."

Exhausted, I sat down on a sofa in the large hall.

"Yes, Master," Shiro responded next to me.

"...Um...could you please tell me what you meant when you said you would 'protect Princess Ecstasia'?"

She faced me with an innocent twinkle in her eye.

I had a feeling it was going to be a long night.

Article V Freedom of Religion Shall Be Guaranteed Even to Infiltrators

Shiro and I waited for Tamamo to come back with her "conclusive evidence" about the building collapse.

While we waited, I told Shiro what I had found out on my way here.

"I see... So the Black Scales that attacked Laman the Hero are somehow connected to Gilvert Trinity. And if it's true that he was using forbidden magic inside the building...this is darker than I expected."

"You know what forbidden magic is, Shiro?"

"It is a general term for magic which God has forbidden the beings of this world to use. For example, magic such as reviving the dead, material transfiguration, time manipulation, life alteration, and mental tampering."

"Oh... The spells themselves sound like they must be super rare."

In one sense, they sounded impressive.

"Rarity aside, the fact is that research regarding them is still incomplete."

"That reminds me. This sounds a lot like when the Scales of Judgment talked about transforming the body."

"That's because they are a sacred artifact. In short, it is acceptable for forbidden magic to be used by the power of an artifact forged by God themself. But any earthly being who uses the magic will indiscriminately receive a heavy penalty. And it wouldn't end at the person's magic simply being sucked away. They could lose their body, or it could cause a natural disaster..."

"Whoa. That's intense."

I was pretty sure I got it now. To be designated as forbidden by God meant

that there were rules against the very forces of this world. And those rules were different from the rules that humans decided among themselves. For now, it didn't seem like God's rules would go against Tsukasa's trials.

"I guess if those kinds of spells were allowed in this world, Tsukasa and I wouldn't have been summoned in the first place. You could just ask a dead person who killed them, or turn back time so that an incident never happened."

"And how would you feel, Master, if you were to become that kind of judge?"

"You're joking, right? That'd basically be cheating." It was so funny that it wasn't even funny.

"To return back to the topic at hand, if such a dark existence was behind the building's collapse...then doesn't that mean that Princess Ecstasia is innocent?"

"Hold up, we definitely don't know enough yet to be able to say that for sure."

"You did say you would protect Princess Ecstasia."

Shiro stared at me unwaveringly as she sat on the sofa.

"Uh... Can you cut it out with that look...?" Trying not to be too intimidated, I spoke my thoughts out loud. "Anyway, this case is pretty huge. I think it's important that we make it black and white. Being the highest court in the kingdom, Tsukasa won't be able to make a ruling if there are any doubts surrounding it, and if the trial is halted without knowing the truth, everyone will be stuck in this state of uncertainty. And the princess will quit using magic. Our ordinary lives will never come back that way."

"So you're saying that going ahead with the trial is in itself a way of protecting Princess Ecstasia."

"If she didn't do anything wrong, it will become clear in time. We need to find out what forbidden magic was used within the kingdom. And as for the search for Lyra...let's think about it after Tamamo comes back with her evidence."

"I am worried about Ms. Lyra. And I am eager to see Tamamo's decisive evidence."

"I agree. Oh yeah, what were you doing up until you met up with me,

anyway?"

"You mean after I left the Grand Bench."

Shiro told me what she had seen from her point of view.

"So that's what happened with the princess...and Ileana..."

The princess had confessed to the crimes, but Tsukasa would surely be able to find some way around that.

Ileana had been a chief vassal to the previous king and the princess, and helped promote their administration. If anyone could find detailed evidence of a flaw in the Copy-Paste Spell, it would be her.

"Okay," I said. "Now all we have to do is wait until dawn for Tamamo's 'conclusive evidence.'"

Shiro nodded.

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Morning came.

But Tamamo didn't return.



Around noon, Shiro and I whispered to each other in the shadows of a deserted building.

"The crowd of people in front of the congregational hall are people hoping to join the church. What about on your side?"

"It turned out all the doors to the cathedral were locked. I wasn't able to find out anything about the inside of the building."

We had waited all night in vain, expecting Tamamo to come back with her "conclusive evidence."

We weren't sure if Tamamo had double-crossed us, or just failed, but we couldn't keep waiting any longer.

After taking a rest, Shiro and I had split up as we left the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse.

We set off to investigate the church's headquarters. It was the same northern direction that Tamamo had pointed toward and within walking distance.

After a quick survey of the vast grounds and the buildings that it comprised, Shiro and I met up away from prying eyes.

"We can't tell anything from the outside."

"The church seems to have a policy of secretive organizational management in the name of their tradition. The important buildings such as the cathedral are locked off, and the congregational hall is apparently where the congregation members are conferred miraculous blessings."

I drew close to Shiro as we talked. Her support was a huge help as always.

"That reminds me. I wonder if Gilvert is really trying to gather more followers than in the era of the previous high priest like Tamamo mentioned."

"The era of the previous high priest? That would be just after Laman the Hero defeated the Demon King. With the rise in population, the number of the church's followers also rose, and at its peak it was said to comprise some tens of thousands of followers. However, I have learned that the number began to fall starting around forty-five years ago when the debate over the separation of church and state began."

I understood the gist of it. But I got the feeling that there was no point in asking Shiro any more about the history of the church right now. There was only one thing left to do—

"All right. I'll go in alone and sneak in among the prospective members."

I needed to do an undercover investigation of the church's headquarters.

I wasn't sure if it was really okay for a member of the court to do that, but I had to do it to find out the truth.

"It's too dangerous. Won't you allow me to accompany you, Master?"

Her beautiful, ice-blue eyes gazed at me with concern.

"One of the high priest's goals was to split us up. I think he's afraid of your abilities. And I think it's fair to think that's why he sent Tamamo to go meet with you. We should keep acting like we've had a falling-out. If from his point of view it looks like I threw away Tsukasa to run after you, but wasn't able to gain back your cooperation in the end, I think he won't be as wary of us."

"I see... So we must prioritize avoiding the suspicion of the subject of our investigation."

She seemed to be convinced by that.

"Let's split up again. The only problem is that we can't make any communications from the inside."

"In that case... It seems that new members are given their own rooms. After you have joined the Church, please leave behind something that will allow me to track your scent. I will meet up with you there, Master."

"Let's do that. I knew I could count on you. And I'm happy that you've gone back to calling me Master."

"At present, you are the one who has presented the most broad-minded plan with regard to protecting Princess Ecstasia. Therefore, I have resumed calling you Master."

"Again with the roleplaying, I see."

"You used that word last night as well. What is the meaning of this 'roleplay'?" She stared up at me with her innocent, expressionless eyes. "I am not playing. I am serious."

"O-okay..."

Our gazes met again. I couldn't help but be flustered at her cuteness.

What does a virgin like me know about roleplay anyway?

"M-maybe I can explain it to you later. We don't have time to dawdle. Let's go."

We needed to stay on our toes to find more clues for this major case.



Once again we headed toward the church's headquarters.

It was located at the center of the Chiyodaku Kingdom, within the moat that surrounded the royal palace.

"I never expected to see the Nippon Budokan looking like this."

I mumbled this to myself without thinking.

The Nippon Budokan was a famous facility in Tokyo's Chiyodaku. It was about twenty or thirty minutes away from the Supreme Court on foot and faced the northern side of the Imperial Palace. It hosted concerts of famous artists and major sporting events, so I bet the number of people who had been there was overwhelmingly higher than those who had ever been to the Supreme Court.

But the Nippon Budokan that I knew had been drastically changed.

"Around the time of the reign of the king two generations prior, the king succeeded in a large-scale copy-paste of the Nippon Budokan and its surroundings," Shiro explained. "At the time, the royal family and the church were still intimately involved, so rather than repair the existing church complex that was falling into disrepair, the king assigned the entire Nippon Budokan area as property of the church. Since then, the church has remained there while extending and renovating the buildings."

I looked at it as we approached. The distinctive octagonal shape of the Budokan's roof was still intact. But the windows around the outside had changed into medieval European—style stained glass, and the roof had been covered in an old-fashioned-looking stone. At the peak of the roof, where there had been a decoration that looked like a golden onion on the original Budokan, in this world there was a unique-looking decoration sparkling atop the roof—it was a kind of golden cross symbol like an X, and it almost looked like the kanji

for father.

This majestic building, located at the Chiyodaku church headquarters, was called the cathedral.

Here we go. If they're trying to increase their numbers, then they shouldn't be too strict about letting me join...

The asphalt underfoot ended and turned into cobblestone. There were plants that looked like olive trees planted all around. Paired with the royal palace towering in the background, the scene around me looked like something out of medieval Europe.

"Prospective members, please proceed to the congregational hall."

A congregation member wearing a white robe called out to the crowd. There were some members stationed as guides here and there, with the men wearing monk-like robes and white hats on their heads, and the women dressed in white hoods like nuns.

"Yes," I replied, and headed in the direction I was told.

The congregational hall was to the southeast of the cathedral. Its architecture had no Japanese influence, and from the outside looked like a brick monastery. While it was smaller than the cathedral, it was still about the size of a gymnasium.

There was a line of about a hundred or two hundred people in front. There were some different races mixed in with the crowd, but the majority were humans. An examiner wearing robes asked me for my citizen identification cards, and I went along with the document review. Even outside, there was a quiet, religious atmosphere about the place.

"We ask that you undertake one week of monastic life at the headquarters. Do you agree to this?"

"I do," I answered.

I told Tsukasa over telepathy that I was working with Shiro to infiltrate the headquarters. Apparently, she had been staying somewhere away from our home at the courthouse, focusing on investigating the cause of the building

collapse. << I trust your judgment,>> she said, leaving it to me. I would focus on things on my end.

"Mr. Akuto Satou. Please sign here."

I signed my name on something that looked like a contract. When I saw that none of the congregation reacted to seeing my face or hearing my name, I thought they either must be living totally cut off from information from the outside world, or they just didn't care...or maybe I just blended in to the crowd that well.

There was a level of risk in making my real name known, but I also had reason to want to see how others reacted to it. If I was rejected from joining, I would just have to think of another way to approach the investigation.

"Preparations for the first induction ceremony of the afternoon are underway. Please wait in this room."

After being let through, I entered the congregational hall. On the first floor, there was a multi-purpose hall, a restroom, a waiting room, and so on.

There were about a hundred wooden chairs lined up in the waiting room. I sat down in a seat in the corner.

There was a screen hanging at the front of the room, and an introductory video was playing through a projector.

"The God of Creation created the heavens and the earth, and next created Man in their own image. Then God granted upon Man the sacred artifacts which would drive away evil..."

It seemed to be a video about this world's creation myth.

It sounded an awful lot like the creation myth of another religion I had heard before. Everything else I had heard from Shiro. The high priest had inherited the oldest sacred artifact, which had existed for around three thousand years. The high priest was a proxy of God. The high priest could use the art of miracles. The high priest had supported the kingdom as a representative of the church...

I don't think I'm going to learn anything new from this high priest PR. I guess I'll look around.

The other people in the waiting room looked normal. All European-looking types. It seemed that most of the beast-hybrid types had been stopped at the entrance by the examiner.

Though my Japanese face might have stood out, I didn't seem to draw much attention thanks to my completely average aura. It made me a little sad, but I decided to take it as a good thing for now.

I overheard a couple having a conversation and listened in via the All Ears skill.

"Hey, do you really think we'll be safe after becoming members of the congregation?"

"If we don't end up liking it, we can leave. If I can just get my back pain cured, I'm out of this gloomy place."

"Right, that curative magic everyone is talking about... Then, if it doesn't live up to the hype, let's go home..."

So they came here for such a simple reason and aren't interested in the religion's doctrine...

But I understood the demand. The high priest's argument had shaken the citizens' sense of safety. There must also be an increase in people who got interested in receiving God's divine protection through word of mouth. And it seemed like this curative magic was another incentive. This must have been what Shiro had called the "art of manipulating the mana inside the body to heal others."

"It is time. Please follow me to the sermon hall in the basement."

A church member in a white robe spoke robotically to the room.

Some hundred people got up and left the waiting room. All were silent as we were led down the stone stairs.

You can't tell from the outside, but this place goes pretty deep...

The structure, carved out by the technology of generations past, was damp and smelled of mold. The scent of the dirt floor made me feel like I was in an underground dungeon.

Basement level three...basement level four... Down we went, until we stood in

front of a carpeted space. It was about the size of a school gymnasium but was only dimly lit with candles situated on the walls and floor. The basement's cold air had a pungent smell like someone had been burning resin or herbs.

"Please sit in a numbered seat. And may God protect you."

Saying this, the guide made a small gesture to the left and right in front of his chest using two fingers. Similar to the Christian sign of the cross, it seemed the worshippers of the sacred artifacts made a sign of an X.

We sat down in the designated seats. At each of our feet, there was a small container and one candle, and numbers were displayed at our seats. My number was 786.

Does this mean that this many people have come through here just today?

If so, that meant the number of followers was rising at a pretty good pace.

What's this container?

There was a ceramic container placed next to the candle. It was hard to see in the dark, but it looked like there was some kind of liquid in it. Though I was curious to check it out, I heard one of the guides warn us not to touch it until the high priest said so.

I just need to try not to stand out. Just blend in.

I waited, doing my best to keep a straight face.

It looked like all the numbered seats had been filled in. Then after some time...

Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap.

...the church members surrounding us began applauding.

High priest Gilvert Trinity had appeared with a tranquil look on his face.

"Today is a blessed day...because you have all graced me with your presence in our church."

Over the rows of people's heads, I could see him standing at an altar at the front of the sermon hall.

He wore a white robe with golden adornments. Unlike his followers, he did

not wear anything on his head but his ample white hair. While he looked like he should be an old man, his taut skin, free of wrinkles, made him look more like he was in his late twenties.

"The kingdom has become prosperous. But there is something we must not forget among that prosperity: our faith. These days, even when people gather, their hearts are scattered. The people have lost their true sense of connection and are now mere shadows of their former selves."

He spoke eloquently with a polite tone of voice and a warm expression.

The man's definitely a gifted speaker.

It felt like a different kind of skill than the courtroom pros like Ileana and Tamamo had.

"No matter how blessed we are with material wealth, we must not forget spiritual wealth. Our irreplaceable tradition of faith has been sullied because of these foreign things, and this foreign culture..."

He didn't mention Japan by name, but it was clear that was what he was speaking against.

I can't deny that Japanese culture has invaded this world.

I had keenly felt this during my work on the Hero's Case. But...

"This kingdom is a sin. The people who live in it, live in sin. And sin is deserving of God's punishment."

...this was getting a little carried away. What did the kingdom's citizens think about this obvious leap in his logic?

I checked the others' reactions in my peripheral vision. The couple that I had heard talking before was obviously not buying it, sighing and gagging sarcastically.

Reminds me of modern Japanese people, the way they don't go along with weird religious talk.

It definitely wouldn't be the first time a society rejected the foreign things of a different civilization.

Japan limited foreign trade and banned Christianity in the Edo Period. They even referred to European traders as barbarians.

But I thought there was usually a stage where the two civilizations eventually became accustomed to one another. And right now, I felt that there couldn't be that many citizens of the kingdom who hated Japanese things just because they were Japanese.

"Now, let us return to the beginning. All of you who have come here today have been chosen by the church. That is the same as being chosen by God. Let us live lives that follow God's law. If you do, you will surely be saved."

Thinking about it, I started to feel like this was nothing more than the usual spiel for trying to convince someone to join a cult.

So this is the gist of it? In that case...

"...But simple words such as these are insufficient. Allow me to show you all the miracle of our faith."

Clatter—somebody came out pushing a cart from behind. There was a person lying on it, covered in bandages.

I know that face... It's Alba Nols.

I had seen photos of him in association with the building collapse case. This was the person they had said was in "critical condition."

"This individual is the older brother of the man who died yesterday in the building collapse. He tried to save his younger brother, was buried in rubble, and has since been on the verge of death. Oh, what a terrible sight to behold."

The high priest sat the man up and started removing his bandages, starting from his neck and working downward.

His left side, now exposed, was in an unspeakably wretched condition.

People around began to gasp in shock.

All of his visible skin was torn to shreds, his broken arm lay shattered and limp at his side, and his swollen body was caked with dried blood.

The extent of his injuries made it clear how immense the incident's damage

had been. The case's information had mentioned he was undergoing treatment, but this was the first time I was hearing he was not at a hospital, but at the church headquarters.

"While I was able to save him from the rubble with my power, he was already in this terrible condition. But now I shall save him through the power of miracle."

The high priest placed both hands on top of Alba Nols's body. Then...

"God's Panacea."

He recited the name of the spell, and a divine light began to emit from him.

So this is the high priest's magic...

In the dim sermon hall, the light given off by his hands looked warm and holy. The people surrounding him looked on with bated breath.

Then before our eyes, Alba's wounds began to close. His skin was restored, and his clotted blood began to flow once again. It was like God themself was bestowing mercy unto humanity.

"Ah... Guh..."

Alba Nols opened his eyes and spoke as tears flowed from his eyes.

"I feel...the power...of God..."

Clap, clap, clap, clap.

The surrounding congregation members began to applaud, as did the prospective members. I did, too, so as to not stand out.

A high-level healing spell...

I had no idea how it worked, but it was pretty impressive to witness all of Alba's wounds disappear before my eyes.

"Yes, I am the proxy of God. My hands are God's hands. These hands will cure sickness, cleanse sins, and offer a feeling of blessing to all our devout followers. This is God's beatitude and God's miracle."

His somber words were steeped in persuasiveness.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the couple from before now nodding with their eyes wide open.

"All of your sickness, your unease, your fear...all the evil lurking within your body. I shall release you from it. Now, please take the vessel before you into your hands."

The atmosphere felt spiritual, filled with candlelight and the scent of incense.

Surrounded by the pungent air, I did as I was told and took the container into my hands.

"Now please drink this holy water in one swift gulp and become one with God's body."

I heard the high priest's instruction, and I was just about to follow.

But just then, one of the church members came rushing in, and whispered into the high priest's ear, "In the penance chamber...!"

"Please wait a moment." The high priest addressed us before leaving the sermon hall.

It seemed like there was some kind of trouble going on, I thought to myself, regaining my bearings.

Then something caught my attention behind me, outside of the room.

I turned on the All Ears skill that I was finally getting the hang of.

From some ways away, I heard shouting.

"...Nooo! Release me from this wretched place...!!"

It was Tamamo.

Her voice was echoing up from the deep basement and through the stairwell. Once the door to the sermon hall was closed, I couldn't hear it anymore.

Maybe this is more serious than I thought...

I got a bad feeling. A chill down my spine cooled my head and brought me back to my senses. The liquid in the ceramic container in my hands had a strange, volatile smell like vinegar. I couldn't see what color it was in the darkness, but I could tell it was muddled and cloudy.

Did you really almost drink this weird crap? I scolded myself. I need to get rid of this somehow.

Someone would probably notice if I just tossed it. I needed to move as little as possible. I whispered, "Holy Flame." Covering the opening of the container with my hand, I used the flame to try to evaporate the liquid inside...

The high priest was gone for about two minutes—just long enough to make a cup of instant ramen, al dente. I almost burned my own hand, but I had been able to make all the liquid disappear.

"My apologies. I had to deliver God's Panacea to another disciple in need. But they are all right now."

Time to get back to business.

Once again, he instructed us to drink, and the new members began to drink down the liquid. I pretended to drink.

"Give yourself up to the euphoria. Close your eyes. And let us pray."

The high priest continued in a solemn voice.

"The word of God is the only law of absolute justice."

It echoed throughout the sermon hall.

"The high priest is the proxy of God."

I heard the people around me repeating after him.

"We believe in God's judgment."

I cracked open my eyes.

Gonnng...

A golden figure floated before us, shining in the light of the candles.

The Scales of Judgment had appeared.

What are they doing here...?

Suspicion flashed through my mind.

"Cleansing Prayer."

Then a golden flash of light.

And an impact to the back of my head.

I lost consciousness.

Article VI Peeping into the Showers Is Prohibited (Excluding the High Priest)

"Please rest until you have absorbed the Word of God."

A mechanical voice spoke to me. Who was it?

"Proceed to the exit and take a copy of the scriptures, compiled by the high priest."

A disciple. The guide. I took a copy of the thick tome.

"In addition, please take a set of robes according to your size and gender."

I accepted a set of male robes, in the medium size.

"Men, please put on your caps, and women, your hoods, immediately."

I put on the small, light hat.

"The high priest has decreed that 'one must never remove their cap or hood, except when alone."

I must never remove my cap, except when I'm alone.

If the high priest had decreed it, then that was "the only law of absolute justice."

"I will now bring you to your rooms that the high priest has prepared for you."

The high priest did? In that case, I should follow.

I walked through the basement with the others. There were lots of numbered rooms.

"Tonight, please spend some time reading the scriptures. The lights will be turned off at bedtime."

Scriptures. The word of God. I hugged the book to my body.

"Number 784, please enter your room. Number 785, please enter your room..."

The new recruits went into their rooms one after another. The number of people in the hall dwindled.

"Number 786, please enter your room."

My head was pounding.

"Number 786, are you feeling unwell?"

Oh, that's me.

I shook my head. It was wrong to feel unwell. After all, that would be God's judgment.

"Understood. Number 787, please enter your room. Number 788..."

I noticed I was standing in my room—a room for one. I changed into my robes.

I saw the book of scriptures. I had to read it.

I turned a page.

A stabbing pain in my head followed.

Is this me?

"I must not doubt the word of God."

No, wait. Wait, wait, wait.

Where did these thoughts come from?

I started to feel confused.

My own thoughts, and thoughts that weren't mine.

They resisted each other, unable to mix, like water and oil.

"The word of God is the only law of absolute justice."

What about this one?

"The high priest is the proxy of God."

"We believe in God's judgment."

And these?

These three phrases were circling endlessly in my head.

The words overrode my own thoughts.

Just as the three phrases hooked me into a loop—"I must not doubt the word of God"—words from the scriptures popped into my head over and over.

I'm scared.

I don't want to turn the page.

If I read any more, my head would become even more full of these words.

"Urgh, agh!"

I clawed at my head. My cap fell off.

But the rule was "never remove your cap or hood, except when alone," so I didn't have to pick it up. More importantly...

"The word of God is the only law of absolute justice."

...I wanted to read the scriptures. If I followed their teachings, then I would do no wrong.

I want to be good.

The high priest is the proxy of God.

All on earth, under God, all hearts as one.

"W-water..."

I wanted to cool my head. I wanted to wash it off.

I ran into the wall. A sound echoed off the stones. My brain hurt.

There was a shower in the corner of the room. Good.

I opened the metal door and grabbed the handle.

Quick, I need water—

I want to read the scriptures.

"No, argh!!"

I fell onto all fours and groaned.

My thoughts were not my own; I cowered in fear.

But this was another world. When in Rome, or whatever. I had to follow this world's laws.

Did that mean that all of Japan's rules were wrong, because they weren't the rules of this world?

"Tsukasa..."

I imagined my sister's face. I tried to speak with her telepathically, but my head wasn't working right.

"Urk, bleh..."

I spat out the Shard of Judgment. I had stuck it to one of my back teeth for safekeeping. I had been prepared to swallow it if they searched my body.

"Case record window," I whispered, and the window appeared. The Hero's Case verdict was displayed.

If these scriptures were the only law of absolute justice, did that mean that this case that we judged without any concern for the scriptures had been unjust?

"Tsukasa... My..."

The case that I had run all over the kingdom for, including the Hero's Village. I perused the text.

The accused did not intend to kill the victims, and hence the charge of murder is invalid.

Verdict: The accused is not guilty.

...I couldn't believe that this was wrong. But was it?

"Master!"

I heard Shiro's voice. Where was she?

The scriptures said that "the rule of the Royal Family has been righteously

guided by the high priests for successive generations." Didn't that mean that Shiro must also be righteously guided by the high priest?

"No, that's wrong...!"

All I could do was curl up in a ball and mutter to myself.

A beast hybrid with silver-white hair came down from the ceiling air vent and spoke to me.

"You were taking too long, so I followed your scent after finding where the new recruits had gathered." Her pale hands touched my body. "Is something happening inside your body? I sense that your mana is exhausted."

The dog-eared maid approached me and sniffed.

"This scent... It's a drug that lowers the intelligence of magical beasts. Don't tell me they made you drink it?"

"Oh, please put my hat back on my head."

I have to wear it. I'm not alone anymore. An absolute rule.

"Your hat? ... Master, let me take a look."

She pushed me down from behind. I was immobilized on the dirt floor.

"There are words imprinted onto the back of your head. About twenty of them."

At Shiro's calm words, I felt my brain start to work again. Of course...

"P-Power of Words."

The high priest had summoned the Scales of Judgment back there.

"He's using the Judgment Spell. He cast something called Cleansing Prayer on us."

"I see. He's secretly in possession of one of the Shards of Judgment. And the Power of Words skill he acquired imbeds words directly onto the brain and controls thoughts. It's brainwashing."

"Ugh... I don't feel good..."

"I believe this falls under the forbidden magic category of mental tampering.

He must have been able to wield it by using the power of the Shard of Judgment. But to use the Power of Words, he's required to spend trust... Oh. That's why he's closed off the church headquarters and is working behind closed doors to..."

"Shiro... Shiro..."

"Master, if this is part of the Judgment Spell, you may be able to reverse it."

Oh yeah. I remembered I had brought up one of the windows.

"Reverse... Cleansing Prayer!"

I spoke the words and felt the shard begin to vibrate as another window appeared.

Please specify the text you would like to cancel.

I repeated the phrases.

"'The word of God is the only law of absolute justice.' 'The high priest is the proxy of God.' 'We believe in God's judgment.'"

Twenty-four words in total.

Cancellation Complete

"Ah. They moved. Master, the words have disappeared from your head."

"...Ahhh."

I felt my thoughts go back to normal, now relieved of confusion.

The cause must have been the Power of Words, like Shiro had said.

The Power of Words... In the courtroom, Tsukasa had been given a special skill called Law Gravity, which let her attribute various levels of weight to the words

she used in her trials. And the high priest, behind the closed doors of the church headquarters, had been given a special skill that allowed him to brainwash his followers through his judgments.

I pulled the window at my fingertips closer to me. The trust information window was displayed in front of me. I had used 48 trust in canceling the spell.

I guess reversing the spell takes double the amount of trust for the number of words.

Trust was a value we could earn through measuring the trust level of people watching our trials. Through the Hero's Case, Tsukasa and I had earned some 1,500,000 trust, and it had been steadily increasing as we continued our court duties. The more trust we had, the more we could use our special abilities. However...

"Master, you don't look well. Your mana is dangerously low."

I had no strength left in me, maybe because I had been resisting the high priest's magic.

"...I'm exhausted... I need to sleep..."

My vision started to blur. About all I could tell was that I was lying on my back now.

"We have no choice. I will transfuse my mana to you as an emergency measure. I've practiced on a training dummy since last time, so I won't make any mistakes this time."

Shiro said this with confidence.

Mana transfusion? What does she mean...?

I didn't have the energy to talk.

Just let me sleep.

"I will begin. Excuse me..."

I felt something soft and fleshy on the back of my head.

"Ngh!"

She plugged my nose.

Unable to breathe, I opened my mouth to take a breath— Om—

But something soft and moist covered it.

Soft threads like silk fell down into my face. Delicate hands grasped my jaw and lifted it up. A mellow, refined scent filled my nostrils.

Before I was able to comprehend what was going on...

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"Haaah..."
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...she started blowing her breath into me.

"Nnnnh?!"

With nowhere else to go, her breath flowed into my mouth, into my trachea, and into my lungs.

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"Again." She inhaled.
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"Wait. Shiro—"

Om.

"Haaah..."

"Nnnnhh!!"

The air forcibly entering my lungs was body-temperature and damp. The fully concentrated breath that came directly into me made it feel like our bodies had merged.

She was doing artificial respiration on me.

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"Again." She sucked in.
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"Bleh, pweh, p-please stop—"

Om.

"Mmmmph!!"

She blew air into my lungs. Her breath, filled with the fleshy smell of her body, filled up my alveoli. My vision sparkled, and the world suddenly became bright like my pupils had dilated. The sensation was like someone had injected an energy drink straight into my veins.

"Okay. I believe that may be sufficient."

Shiro released her mouth from mine and peered down at me.

"Ugh..."

"Allow me to wipe your tears. Was it painful?"

She lifted me to sitting and wiped the salty tears from my eyes with her delicate fingers.

I opened my eyes to see...

...a silver-haired nun.

"Uh...Shiro, what's with the outfit?"

"Oh, this? After infiltrating the premises, I put on these robes so that I could walk around freely."

Shiro never played fair, but a head maid wearing a nun's habit was just too much. God-tier cuteness.

I feel a nosebleed coming on. Honestly, I'd probably feel better if I just let it rip.

"Master, someone is coming."

What? Damn it. Anyone coming to take this slice of heaven away from me is an enemy. Wait—we're already in enemy territory.

As I struggled to grasp the situation around me, Sister Shiro replaced the cover to the air vent she had come through. Then...

"This way, we won't get caught."

"How did we end up like this?"

Shiro threw me across her shoulder and started carrying me somewhere.

Before I knew it, she had me standing between her legs in the shower unit.

"This is the only place we can hide. Since there is a gap at the bottom, I cannot let my feet touch the ground."

Shiro answered like it was logically obvious. Well, she was right. The shower walls were metallic and opaque, but there was a gap at the bottom like in a toilet stall. The shower occupant's legs were visible.

"But is this pose really necessary?!"

Shiro had suddenly become barefoot and was pressing her feet against the insides of the walls. The bottoms of her feet were against the pillars of the door side of the stall, and her back against the wall side. And somehow, that meant I ended up standing between her open thighs.

The nun's small chest was right in front of my face. My nose was brushing against her. I smelled something flowery...

"How strange. I thought you did not find my body attractive, Master."

"...What?"

That's obviously not true.

"Yesterday you told me, 'You're not very good at the whole seduction thing."

Oh, right. I had said that after our game of tag.

"...That was after getting all banged up by your tagging, and your legs were covered in blood. Obviously, it wasn't a very sexy situation."

Those bloodied legs, the ones I'd bandaged, were now wrapped around me.

I'd call this situation pretty abnormal.

The strangeness of the situation now hitting me, I felt my heartbeat start to go crazy.

Her ice-blue eyes lined with silver lashes stared at me.

"Master, did your heart rate just increase?"

"Uh, yeah, can you blame me?"

I felt annoyed with myself for getting so flustered by her blank expression.

"B-besides, it was kinda my first time doing that...with my mouth..."

I was talking about her artificial respiration. Or mana transfusion. I wasn't sure if I should count it as a kiss.

"It was not the first time."

"Well, sure, maybe you do mana transfusions all the time for your work, but..."

Just saying it made me depressed. That really was my first time.

And on top of it all, I had been half-unconscious. I only remembered what it felt like, nothing else.

"That was the second time. I am sorry about what happened the first time."

"Huh?"

What did she mean?

"The first time was when we fought the magical beasts outside the Hero's Village, and you collapsed."

I had a flashback. We had fought a flock of cockatrices, and I lost consciousness when I lost control trying to cast the fire magic I wasn't used to yet. When I woke, I was laid up with Elma taking care of me...



"Huh?"

So that was the first time?

"Practice is very different from the real thing," Shiro explained. "When I did it for the first time...I, uh, faltered at the rawness of the sensation and the procedure went awry... Hence why I then practiced on a dummy meant for learning artificial respiration."

"Now I remember... Elma said when she found us, you had been unconscious."

"As your maid, such a careless mistake on my part is unforgivable. I am truly sorry."

Shiro's flat expression wavered as her cheeks started turning red in embarrassment.

"That's the part you're embarrassed about?"

"Is that so strange?"

Having been raised to suppress her emotions, her way of feeling things was a little different than mine.

Her beautiful, ice-blue eyes stared at me innocently.

Her graceful facial features. Her tidy-looking nun outfit.

This is bad... Really bad... Cuteness overload...

Her God-tier cuteness was about to make my heart literally explode and kill me.

"Master, please be quiet. This scent... It's the high priest."

Scuff, scuff, scuff... The sounds of footsteps stopped in front of the room.

"Number 786, are you feeling all right?"

Did someone report me to the high priest? Damn it, and this is the worst

possible timing...

He knocked on the wooden door.

"Master, please act like you are taking a shower."

Stuck close to me, her sweet voice whispering into my ear made me shiver. Somehow I managed to reach the shower handle and turn it.

Shhhhaaaa—water started pouring from the shower head onto the floor. At the same moment— "I must check on you just in case something has happened. I'm coming in."

—the high priest entered the room.

"Pardon me. I didn't realize you were in the shower." I heard the sound of pages turning. "I just couldn't believe that we had the Japanese Akuto Satou himself among our new recruits."

I guessed he was looking at some kind of name registry. So he had noticed me.

"...Hmm... How interesting..." I sensed that he was looking for something in the room. "It seems you have been reading the scriptures."

"Yeah, I read it," I answered.

"And how are you feeling?"

He asked me in a soft tone of voice, but I could feel his sharp gaze through the shower door.

"Uh...the word of God is echoing in my head...and it makes me feel really dizzy..."

What a stupid answer.

But it was like Shiro said—I was supposed to have taken drugs that lowered my intelligence.

"I see. Situation normal." I could tell that the high priest was relieved. "After all, there are always a few new members who become overwhelmed from experiencing the rapture of God's judgment."

I needed to make sure the high priest thought his Power of Words was still

working.

"I wonder. Is a person from another world like you really able to understand the scriptures?"

"Yes... I want to obey the judgment of the God of this world."

On the other side of the shower door, the high priest broke into a smile.

"Ha-ha-ha! How magnificent. You parted with your sister, only to choose the church rather than the princess. I'm sure God's blessing will suit you well."

Good, that seemed to convince him. I think I'm safe for now.

Or so I thought.

Yank, yank. I felt Shiro tugging at my clothes.

What is it?

I looked at her face. She was trying to tell me something, but she was so expressionless I couldn't tell what it was.

"Oh?" The high priest's tone of voice changed. "Do you have your robes in the shower with you?"

My heart jumped into my throat.

"How strange... Do you usually shower with your clothes on?"

This is bad... He's gonna find us!

How didn't I notice that I was fully clothed?

Shiro was noiselessly mouthing something in front of me. But I still had no idea what she was trying to say.

"I intended to be considerate of your privacy, but this is too suspicious. I apologize, but I would like to check inside the shower..."

What do I do? If I can use telepathy with Shiro— I focused my concentration into my forehead and felt a line connect between us.

<<Master!>> <<Shiro!>> Good, I reached her.

<< Please put both arms over your head and relax your body!>> I did as I was told.

Shhhwwwip!

She was so fast I didn't even see her move. In a split second, I had been stripped stark naked.

"Oh, I see." The high priest stopped moving. "You removed your clothes in the shower."

With super speed, Shiro had folded all my clothes and placed them outside the shower.

I went with it. "...Yes, I have a habit of getting undressed in the shower room."

With that we managed to keep him at bay. I turned to face Shiro again...

...and saw she was now on the verge of losing her balance.

<<Ah...>> <<Wai—!>> Our positioning was getting extremely precarious.

I bent forward in a hurry to hide my lower half. Now I was basically hugging Shiro.

<<Master.>> A message from Shiro. <<Your heartbeat...is extremely loud.>> <<S-sorry.>> My poor virgin heart already felt like it had exploded multiple times.

<< He will find it suspicious. Can't you stop it?>> So basically, "please die"?

Splash! Shiro's tail hit the shower handle and turned it to cold water.

"Arf!"

"Was that you just now, Akuto Satou?" the high priest asked.

"...Yes! The water suddenly turned cold! Arf, arf!"

What else could I say? I was desperate.

"It seems that the hot water isn't as reliable since we expanded our facilities. I will be sure to let the maintenance team know."

That convinced him, somehow...

Just as I was on the verge of a mental and physical breakdown, I heard a voice calling from the hallway.

"High priest, sir. It is almost time for the next ceremony."

"I must take my leave. There are yet many more souls in need of saving. While you may feel some confusion, please do your best to accept the law of God."

"S-sure."

With cold water pouring over my head, I used the last of my energy to focus on what was being said outside.

"Let us head to the sermon hall..."

The high priest shut the door to room 786.

"Hmph. He's nothing but an average human brat after all. Perhaps Tsukasa Wagatsuma is the one in possession of the Shard of Judgment. But that is of little importance."

He spat out the words as he walked away.

After hearing it through to the end...

"...Master?"

I passed out cold. Again.

Principal Offender



Shiros

Perhaps this is a simple question, but...

What happens when someone commits a crime under the influence of another person?



Tsokasas

That's a very good question. It comes down to who is determined to be the "principal offender"...



lleama:

From the Latin *principalis*, meaning "first, original." The principal is the actor primarily responsible for the crime. Wait, Tamamo—are you asleep?!



Tamamos

Zzz... You there, boy... Won't you go shoplift some deep-fried tofu...for a cute little girl like me...? Zzz...



SOSONA S

She's quite the sleeptalker.



Tsukasa:

But it's a perfect example. Let's consider shoplifting—that is, theft. What would you think of a person who steals something to give to the girl they like? Just give me your first impression.



Shiros

I daresay anyone who commits theft is guilty.



Tsukasa:

That's correct in this case. The person who stole the item would be the principal offender. Okay then, what if Tamamo was the one who did the stealing, and she had another person acting as a lookout to help her get away with it?



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...I believe Tamamo would be the principal offender, and the person helping would be at fault, too. But the helper didn't get to eat the deep-fried tofu, correct?



Tsokasas

You're sharp, Shiro! That's right. The person assisting Tamamo only abetted her crime. This is called being an accomplice, or an accessory.



Neamas

An accomplice... According to the Penal Code, Articles Sixty-Two and Sixty-Three, the accomplice receives a lighter punishment than the principal offender.



Tamamos

Mumble, mumble... Hurry up and steal 'em...else I'll cast a hex upon you! ...Zzz...



Princess:

What if someone was forced to do something bad under the influence of a magic spell?



Troubaras

If the spell was strong enough to affect the person's thoughts and hinder judgment, they would only be an accomplice. It's the same as being used as a tool. The person who cast the spell—in this case, Tamamo—would be the principal offender.



Shiros

Interesting. I understand now.



Princessi

I get it!



Illeamas

Only Tamamo is the principal offender here... I'll be sure to inform her once she wakes up.



Tamamos

Zzz... Mmm... Crime never tasted so good... Zzz...

Article VII Only Living Persons May Testify

For a few days after that, Shiro and I conducted our investigation while living at the church headquarters.

The day started early for the congregation. We were woken up by the sun and gathered in the cathedral.

We listened to readings from the scriptures by senior members of the church, prayed, then ate breakfast.

The meals were plain. Hard bread, vegetables, and fruit. Fermented milk.

Then each of the new recruits were put into various "teams" and did their rounds helping around the grounds.

The church was apparently composed of these teams with the high priest at the top. There was the missionary team, the maintenance team, the accounting team, and so on.

Apparently, they put you in certain teams based on your disposition, but I often got sent to the cleaning team. The headquarters, having been recast from the Nippon Budokan, was so huge that there were never too many people on cleaning duty.

We devoted ourselves to our chores during the day, had our meals, and returned to the cathedral at sunset for more readings of the scriptures.

The same thing, day after day. I followed along faithfully.

Trying not to do anything suspicious, I put on a normal, harmless face and acted like the high priest's words were still controlling me from the back of my head.

At first, I sometimes sensed the high priest coming to check on me. But after a short while, he stopped coming.

It seemed he was too busy every day working on increasing his ranks as much as possible.

On the side, we were steadily working on our own investigation.

<<Shiro. The high priest just went to the penance chamber. Stay on your toes.>> <<Okay. I've already finished searching this floor. I'm coming back now.>>

Shiro and I communicated the high priest's location and other points of interest through telepathy.

Our coordination was super smooth, and in just three days of our investigation, we were able to conclude some new facts.

I made sure to thoroughly communicate these to Tsukasa and get her opinion on them.

<<Those words he wrote on the back of your head...I think they're supposed to be a syllogism.>>

<<Basically, it logically means that the high priest's judgment is equal to God's judgment, and therefore is the only absolute justice. It justifies all the high priest's decisions as correct.>>

<< What is written in the scriptures? "It is a sin to question the scriptures;" the "origin of the world" according to the high priests... I see. He's made it so everything he says is judged as correct.>>

<<I think the way it works is that he makes you drink that medicine to lower your intelligence, then imprints the words on your head, which then makes you want to read those scriptures compiled by the high priest himself. The more you read it, the more you're indoctrinated into his way of thinking.>>

<<Obviously, we can't let him get away with brainwashing these people and controlling their minds. No matter how much you try to excuse it by calling it religion, it infringes upon personal rights and the right to freedom of thought. Brainwashing is an illegal act, and it's even possible to sue him for compensation if the brainwashing forced the victims to buy something or tricked them into performing labor.>>

<<p><<The high priest must have made it a rule to keep your cap or hood on around others so that you can't see the words on the back of each other's heads. That must also be why you have individual showers in your rooms; people would see the words if you used a public bath.>>

<<I'd guess he's earning trust to use the Power of Words in the penance chamber. He must be cautiously using the Scales of Judgment in a closed-off space. I bet members who have been fully brainwashed are the only ones allowed in there.>>

<< What details do you have about this "penance"? So those who commit the sin of questioning the high priest are subjected to confinement and lashing... How antiquated. It's not befitting of this kingdom. That must be why he's hiding it. It's barbaric.>>

<<And the little fox... I feel bad, but I don't think we'll be able to save her any time soon. I hope she's not being subjected to some kind of strange mind control.>>

<< You don't need to worry about me, Akky. I'm always somewhere conspicuous. And I'm making progress on my investigation of the building collapse. I'm more worried about you two staying safe.>>

<<So did you find Lyra yet?>>

My sister's words supported me in ways that the high priest's never could.

After talking to her, I started to think: How could anyone become the "only law of absolute justice"? It was too convenient.

The feeling of uncertainty in my chest disappeared and was replaced with a budding sense of strong determination.

I continued to put on an obedient face toward the high priest but worked harder than ever behind his back to find a way to bring him down.

On the fourth day, amid the crowd of faces in the cathedral, I found Lyra Boucher.

On the fifth day, Shiro trailed Lyra all the way to the deepest level of the basement.

That night, me and Shiro were in my room after lights-out.

"Specifically," she said, "I am a member of a race called the Inugami."

"That's pretty crazy that you finished training at age six and worked for the royal family ever since."

"It is fine. Beast hybrids can walk just a few days after they are born. If not, they wouldn't be permitted to live."

Having spent the last few days together in this small room, we had started talking about our backstories.

"Master, you said your parents remarried when you were age three. That is even younger than when I completed my training."

"It's not a big deal. I hardly even remember it."

"Hmph."

While she was still expressionless, Shiro's fluffy tail was wagging restlessly back and forth.

It looks like you can tell a lot about Shiro's mood from the way her tail moves.

I had been too concerned with facial expressions and almost forgot about body language.

"Tell me more about you, Shiro."

I genuinely wanted to hear more of her stories. The way she told them was easy to understand. And the more I heard, the more I understood exactly how

amazing Shiro was, and the more I came to love this world.

"But my stories are boring."

She was lying face down in her white religious habit. Her dog ears didn't fit inside the hood, so they were poking out.

"That's not true. They're super interesting. After all, to me, you're the person I'm closest to in this other world, and the most important."

"Oh? The most important?" Shiro stared at me. "What about Miss Tsukasa?"

"Well of course she's important to me, and I respect her so much. She's my sister."

"Then isn't Miss Tsukasa number one?"

"Huh? You're number one, too, Shiro."

We were silent for a moment.

"...My number one is Princess Ecstasia," Shiro told me.

"I know."

"There is something unusual about you, Master. Please stay away from me for a while."

"What?! That's so mean!"

I must have said something wrong. Shiro was scratching her forehead with a blank expression on her face.

"In that case, why don't we change the subject? Will you tell me more about your life after you started working for the princess?"

Maybe she would talk about her favorite topic.

"...After I left my village, I was told that I would belong completely to the royal family. I had heard rumors that, in the past, some became sex slaves or were experimented on with the power of the sacred artifacts."

"..." I listened in silence.

I didn't know if it was true, but I guessed it was only natural that such a cruel history existed.

"But Princess Ecstasia was always Princess Ecstasia, from the moment I met her."

"What do you mean?"

"She loves things that are fun. And she loves to share fun things with others."

Shiro still faced down as she spoke. Her tail began to stand up straight.

"When I first met her, Princess Ecstasia was holding a viewing party for a Japanese anime. I decided to watch her from afar. But Princess Ecstasia noticed me and took me by the hand. She said, 'Let's have fun together.'"

Yeah, that sounded like something the princess would do.

I had heard that Shiro was assigned to the princess from age six. That meant that the princess had been five.

Imagining the princess at that age, I was sure that she had that same sideways D of a smile.

"Having undertaken training as a royal retainer, it was unthinkable to go alongside my master in such a way. But I couldn't just let go of her hand, either. I sat down next to her, and we watched the anime together."

"What anime was it?"

"Cra*on Shin-chan the Movie."

Sounded perfect for a five-year-old.

"After the movie was over, Princess Ecstasia was looking over at me. I had been completely overwhelmed at the experience of watching my first animation. Since I was taught that 'the more emotion, the weaker the maid,' I acted like I had felt nothing. But..."

As Shiro looked back on these memories, her tail had begun to wag.

"Princess Ecstasia smiled at me and said, 'I'm so happy. I can tell that you had fun.' Seeing that smile, I thought how glad I was that this person had become my master."

The princess had been able to read Shiro's mood faster than anyone else.

Maybe she had some kind of special intuition, or maybe she had just noticed

Shiro's tail.

"After that, I began to feel that Princess Ecstasia's happiness was my happiness. Being together with her all the time...and being able to take on a popular Japanese-style last name so similar to hers, was a great honor."

"Your names are pretty similar."

We've got Itou, Katou, and Saitou.

"Princess Ecstasia gives to everyone equally, without discrimination. And it's not only limited to the otherworldly Japanese things she brings here with magic. All are drawn to her personality—adults, children, horses, slimes. They love her. She brings fun to all of us."

Shiro was really revealing the extent of her feelings for her master.

"I love Princess Ecstasia. She is very precious to me. I was truly happy to be able to serve at her side... Ugh..."

Her dog ears drooped dejectedly, and she covered her face.

"Wh-what's up? Shiro?"

"Ugh... How did this happen...?"

She began to whine and sob pitifully.

S-so much for suppressing her emotions...

So she could become overwhelmed by emotion when talking about her first master. I heard her continue weeping. Her wet, silver eyelashes sparkled in the dim candlelight. Her tail banging on the floor reminded me of a sad drunk banging on a table.

Whiiine... whiiine...

Though she was supposed to be emotionless, right now it looked like her whole body was expressing her overflowing emotions.

"Shiro, why don't you drink some water?"

"...Okay."

I passed her an extra cup I had brought back to the room with me. I poured

her some water from a pitcher I had filled up at the drinking fountain.

Gulp, gulp... "I'm hungry."

After drinking the water expressionlessly, she took out some kind of black sphere the shape of a ping-pong ball. When it came to eating here, while I was subsisting on the food provided by the church, Shiro was eating emergency rations that she had brought with her.

Chomp, chomp...gulp, gulp...crunch, crunch...gulp, gulp...

She took one bite and then a drink, mechanically repeating these two actions over and over. According to her, the black ball was a nutritional supplement mixed with the fat of magical beasts. It smelled funny and looked like there was no way it tasted any good.

"So, um, I did swipe some extra food from the cafeteria. Do you want some?" I asked her.

From my robes, I took out a piece of paper that I had folded up and hidden some raisins in.

"I am fine. Aren't you hungry, Master?"

"Not really. But let's eat this together."

I unwrapped the paper in front of her. We drank water and munched on the raisins. They were sweet and sour.

...Munch, munch. "They're delicious." Munch, munch...

She started eating them pretty quickly. Her cute tail stood up and started to wag.

...Gulp, gulp...ahh. "Princess Ecstasia has always done her best to protect the people's smiles. She would never use the Copy-Paste Spell if it had a flaw."

"Yeah. I agree."

She was starting to cheer up little by little. That was a relief.

"Let's try to meet Lyra tomorrow."

"Okay!"

Together in the basement of the church headquarters, Shiro still in her nun outfit, the evening deepened into night.

She had started snoring softly, curled up like a dog and fast asleep.

I could stay up and stare at that cute sleeping face all night, but instead, I forced my eyes closed and slept.



On the afternoon of our sixth day inside the headquarters, Shiro and I descended to the deepest basement level of the headquarters.

There, we found an off-limits room with heavy security. But with the help of Shiro and the use of the air ducts, we were able to dig our way inside.

The space was called the Compost Room.

"Lyra, we're here to help. We came here looking for you on Gobta's behalf."

We learned that Lyra was the person in charge of that room.

While the room had heavy security on the outside, once we were in, we outnumbered the limited staff allowed access.

Lyra was in there, working alone. When we approached her to try to talk, she looked like she was going to try to run, so Shiro restrained her from behind. I quickly removed her hood and canceled the three lines of text imprinted on her head via Cleansing Prayer. But...

"..."

Something was still off.

I had heard about Lyra Boucher from her husband, Goburo. Aside from the fact that they had argued about Gobta's games, she seemed like your average mild-mannered woman in her forties. Apparently, since Gobta had gotten older, she had started helping out part-time at a flower shop.

u n

She didn't say a word. Actually, it was more like she couldn't hear what we were saying.

Shiro's restraints were flawless. She didn't hurt Lyra physically, nor did she need to cover her ears or mouth.

"Shiro, what exactly is wrong with her...?"

Shiro checked the back of Lyra's head. "There are still some words here."

I rushed over to see up close. We faced each other as we took it all in...

I hear nothing except the high priest's words.

I speak nothing without the high priest's permission.

I smell nothing.

Reading that sent a chill down my back.

"Cancel!"

I made the words disappear right on the spot.

The high priest was even using his Power of Words to control people's senses.

"How disgusting." Shiro was at a loss.

"This is so wrong..."

I wondered what crime someone would be guilty of for stealing away a person's senses. I had no idea.

I started to think that this was even more evil than simple brainwashing.

"Lyra, can you hear us now?"

"...Ah... Uh..."

The woman in Shiro's arms was bewildered. Based on her reaction, she may not have spoken with another person in quite a long time.

I used the Shard of Judgment to bring up Gobta's case record window. I then showed Lyra his juvenile case and his photo.

"We came looking for you. For Gobta."

"...G-Gob... Gob...ta...?"

Lyra stared intently at Gobta's photo and case record. Shiro kept her hands on her. Then the mother in her forties cowered into a crouch.

It was going to take a while for her to regain her composure and be ready to talk.

"Master, isn't this conclusive evidence? Though we already erased the words on Lyra's head..."

"You're right." Shiro's composed voice brought me back to my senses. "We need to save the evidence."

Using the shard, I pulled up the evidence window. With this, I could take photos of our surroundings.

I looked around from where I was standing. This floor, called the Compost Room, was built differently than the rest of the basement levels I had seen so far.

Once through the heavily guarded front door, there were lockers and a disinfectant shower. Past that, there were multiple smaller rooms.

Inside the smaller rooms, the four walls were finished with some kind of coating. The floor was smooth and looked like it had good drainage.

"Please be careful. The floor is slippery. It has been made water-repellent using a spell circle."

"Thanks, Shiro." I appreciated her excellent observation. "What do you think this smell is?"

The air of the room was filled with a pungent smell like rotting garbage.

"...I believe it's coming from that box."

Shiro hesitated to say it, despite her signature clear communication style. I looked where she indicated.

There was a huge, dirty box, about the size of a car.

I approached it silently.

The box was metal and shaped like an ark. There were some tools hanging off its side.

"A saw, a hatchet, scissors, a hammer, a chisel, a carving knife, a brush..."

I had a bad feeling.

"Master, I will open it."

"No, Shiro. Why don't you look after Lyra?"

She didn't show it on her face, but I could tell that she was exhausted from the work of bringing me here. Besides, I was worried about Lyra's condition, too. I had to do it myself. I stepped onto the metal steps.

Clank, clank... I rose up to a position where I could look over the entire ark.

There was a plastic lid on top of the rectangular box. It felt warm.

Just on the other side of this plastic...

I already knew what I would find.

I knew why it was called the Compost Room.

And I knew why it was kept under such tight security, and why only an extremely limited number of church members were allowed in.

Now all I had to do was confirm it.

Just confirm it.

At least that's how I tried to convince myself.

I felt my breathing grow irregular, and an uncomfortable sweat started to roll down my skin.

This was definitely going to haunt me for a while.

But still, I needed to confirm it.

Confirm the truth...

I opened the lid.

Human body parts.

Intestines, hair, eyeballs, skin, testicles, tongues...

They were all mixed together like garbage.

"Urgh!" A wave of nausea came over me.

The smell was a direct hit to my nerves. I felt a sour liquid come up from my stomach into my mouth.

I held my hand over my mouth and swallowed it back down. Then I pulled off the lid, and almost fell off the steps.

"Master!"

"Photograph...the evidence!"

I spoke as if giving an order to the magical window and clung to the side of the box.

If I don't see it myself, the evidence window won't save it.

I remembered my sense of duty. I had to find the truth and solve this case, together with my sister.

"I'm sorry."

The next thing I knew, I was apologizing.

"I got summoned here and treated this world like it was a game. But I couldn't save you."

I was naive.

I had thought I was doing a pretty good job helping my sister and helping the people of this kingdom.

But this was the reality: defiling the dead at the very heart of the kingdom—and covering it up.

These pieces of flesh couldn't tell us anything about who they were or how

long they had been here.

Was it self-important of me to feel responsible for my helplessness? The sight of the dead bodies was sending my thoughts and emotions whirling. Someone from another world, sent here where people can't be saved from this kind of fate. Holding trials couldn't bring these people back. What was it all for? It was useless.

"Ack!"

I heard something. It was coming from inside the compost.

"S-sobeone's sdill...alibe in dere!" Lyra said from behind me, plugging up her nose.

I jumped into the ark.

The flesh that had turned into black compost felt warm. The gas produced in the fermentation process puffed up from below and blew into my face. I gritted my teeth and dug with both hands.

"Agh... Urgh...! Hah...!"

A person's face appeared.

Alba Nols was still alive.

P

That night, back in my room, I reread what had been recorded in the magical window.

Record of Statement

Lyra Boucher

Age: 40

Race: Human

I began going to the church headquarters last year. I wanted to consult about some worries I was having in my home life. That's when I met the counselor in charge, Cumba Nols. He was about 60 years old, and a veteran priest. He kindly listened to me, much like a father...

Cumba Nols. He was the victim who was said to have died in the building collapse.

One day, I noticed that Cumba wasn't looking well. He said he was having trouble swallowing. I had heard of someone developing a tumor in their esophagus before, so I suggested he go see a doctor, but then he told me he was already under treatment by the high priest. That was the last time I saw him alive.

Cumba must have been receiving treatment by God's Panacea, the high priest's spell that was said to cure anything.

Once I had been visiting the church for a while, I was brought to the sermon hall. It seemed they had abolished the priest position, along with the counseling service by the priests. I was to speak directly with the high priest himself. Soon after I met with him, he had me drink holy water...and everything got foggy after that. Wanting to read the scriptures more, I started living here as a disciple. It must have been the work of that Cleansing Prayer you told me about.

It might have been almost a year since she was brainwashed.

On the day of the building's collapse, we were brought by the high priest to that church branch building. He said that the couple dozen disciples there that day were "especially devout." But Cumba and Alba weren't among us. The high priest left the building for a while, then came back, then went into the restroom. We were in the middle of praying when the building next door collapsed.

Her testimony differed from what the high priest had said about Cumba and Alba being there that day.

The high priest took out the Holy Scourge and sent the falling rubble flying. Next I knew, he was carrying Cumba and Alba out of a cloud of dust. After that, I believe Cumba's body...was handed off to the compost team.

It seemed the compost team was composed of a small number of members, chosen out of those deemed "especially devout."

And those few people receive a special blessing before they start their work. That's how they were able to enter the Compost Room.

In general, it was used as a place to collect the compound's garbage. Sometimes, it was where they brought inconvenient dead bodies to disappear.

A few days ago, I was chosen as a member of the compost team. I was told it was a great honor. I was made to drink holy water again. I did notice I had lost my sense of smell, but I didn't think much of it at the time. Then I was given a Purgatorial List. Cumba's name was on it, but it was already crossed off.

I had saved the list in my record window.

In the Compost Room, at the back of the huge box, there had been a sink for washing up. The list was posted there.

The last name listed was...

Yesterday, a new person was brought in for purgation. I saw the name Alba Nols added to the list and noticed that their faces looked similar... I thought he must be Cumba's one and only family member that he sometimes mentioned. I noticed it was his older brother.

After being saved from the building collapse, Alba Nols was supposed to be receiving treatment for his injuries.

The superficial injuries covering his body had been healed using God's Panacea.

He had been used to show new recruits the high priest's power. Once he had been healed, there was no use for him anymore, and he was thrown away. Now that the growth of the congregation was on the right track, there was no longer any need to show off the high priest's healing powers.

It was my first time doing this job, and after seeing Alba and remembering Cumba...I couldn't bring myself to dissect him. So I put him into the box just as he was... I wonder if I will be punished for my sins. And what would my husband and Gobta think of me if they knew?

Starting to feel nauseous again, I closed the record window.

"Master, you are looking very pale."

Shiro peered at me, looking concerned. She was sitting next to my bed in her nun outfit.

"I'm okay," I told her. "More importantly, I need to relay all this to Tsukasa."

After discovering Alba, I had transferred some of my mana to him to bring him back from the brink of death before reversing his Cleansing Prayer. Then I barfed my guts out and washed my mouth out in the sink behind the large box.

Lyra had been watching me, and now she seemed to be calming down. Soon, she was ready to give me that testimony.

I asked Lyra to keep acting like she was brainwashed. We couldn't do anything flashy like break her out of here. And on top of everything, Alba's condition was still poor. I asked her to take care of him and to keep acting brainwashed until tomorrow.

What exactly should I do next?

We had discovered something so, so terrible.

I needed to get the whole truth of what I had seen. This would affect the entire kingdom.

As I thought this over, I felt my values begin to shift within me.

I'd always loved the idea of being a special person with special powers. But what about now?

Special powers with malicious intent could turn into cunning evil. An evil that trampled and defiled anyone without the power to oppose it.

How many people had been driven mad by his special power?

But what was the true nature of this evil? We still didn't know.

Was it the high priest himself? Were the Black Scales involved, too? Was it forbidden magic?

And if we judged the wrong party, weren't we the ones who would have to face the consequences?

What else did we need to figure out?

One thing that was still unclear was the power of the Holy Scourge.

And the cause of the building's collapse. And the high priest's true motives...

A brain like mine wasn't going to be able to parse all this information by itself. And the trial's recommencement was coming right up. I wanted to talk with Tsukasa.

<<Tsukasa... Tsukasa?>> No answer.

I got anxious.

What if...?

"Shiro, once everyone's asleep, we're getting out of here."

"Yes, Master."

Article VIII The Court May Destroy Objects or Carry Out Other Necessary Means of Disposal to Discover the Truth

It was the sixth night since we infiltrated the church headquarters. It might have been past midnight. If that was the case, it would be the day of the trial.

Shiro and I slipped out of the headquarters and returned to the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse.

Tsukasa wasn't there.

Shiro, suspecting the possibility of kidnapping, brought out some kind of magical tool that looked like what people in forensics used to search for fingerprints. With it, she searched for traces of magic usage, but nothing came up.

I recalled what happened six days ago. Tsukasa had left the complex through a different building and had been staying overnight somewhere else ever since. I told this to Shiro, who started tracking Tsukasa's scent from her escape route.

We went outside and headed toward Akihabara, But...

"I'm sorry. I've lost her scent."

"Of course it would start raining at a time like this."

We were unlucky. Now all the scent left behind would be washed away with the rain.

I was wearing my usual clothes, and Shiro was back in her maid outfit. We looked up at the sky, standing in the shadows of the abandoned buildings.

If I were Tsukasa, where would I be?

She'd told me she was "always somewhere conspicuous" and had been

making progress on her investigation of the building collapse. In that case...

"Let's try the scene of the incident."

Pelted by the rain, we ran past the deserted city buildings until we reached the site of the building collapse.

After the collapse, since the section above the second floor had been demolished to prevent any secondary incidents, the building's original structure was gone. But the wreckage from the demolishing had been left around as small hills of rubble. The entrance side of the church branch building that had taken the brunt of the collapse was half exposed, and half turned to rubble.

And there in the rubble...

...was Tsukasa, crouched down.

"We've been looking all over for you, Tsuka—"

But when I called out and ran up to her, she let out an "Eek!"

She stood up. Her disheveled clothes and messy black hair made her look like a ghost.

And from within that silhouette, her two red-brown eyes stared back in our direction with a ghastly look.

"Oh...I thought someone had come to attack me." She slumped back down to the ground. "It's just you, Akky..."

"What's going on?" I demanded.

There was something strange about her surroundings. There were huge fragments of eggshells scattered all over. And the top of the concrete rubble was covered in rotten raw egg.

"The evidence is under here."

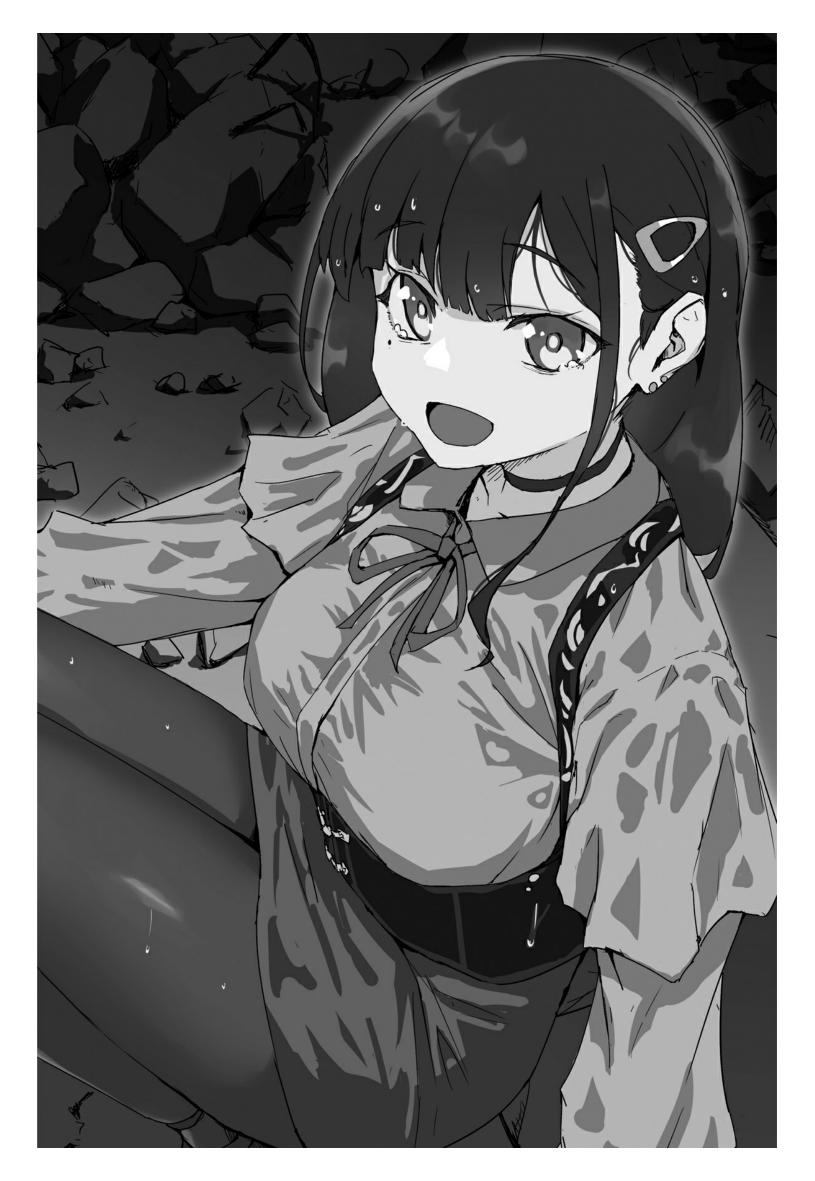
"Huh?"

"So...I was...searching the rubble, and..."

She got that far before collapsing, as if she had fallen unconscious.

"Tsukasa!" I ran to catch her.

Her fifteen-year-old body, now smaller than me, was running a fever and trembling. Her hair and clothes were sticky. This wasn't just rain; it was egg and sweat...



Next to where she had been standing was a folding shovel and a large hammer.

Then I understood what those small hills of concrete rubble had been doing around her.

"You were digging into the rubble all by yourself."

I was speechless.

She had been trying to dig up some kind of evidence as to the cause of the building's collapse. But since she had invited the hostility of the head maid by continuing the princess's trial, she had no one to help her. So she went ahead alone...

"Master, there is a tent over here."

Next to the mountains of rubble a small camping tent was set up.

I carried Tsukasa on my back and moved her into the tent.

"I never thought by 'a conspicuous place' she meant she'd been camping out at the scene of the incident..."

Inside the tent, there were empty cans and food wrappers of what looked like had been her sustenance for these past few days.

I dried her long hair with a towel that was next to her sleeping bag.

"Heh...I thought I could kill two birds with one stone by staying out here and also working on the investigation. But I might need to concede defeat when people start throwing cockatrice eggs at me."

"You've got dark circles under your eyes. Have you been sleeping at all?"

There were broken, rotten eggs even inside the tent. I started feeling indignant at their sticky, smelly presence. Of course she wouldn't have been able to get any rest with this stuff around her.

Tsukasa's abilities are special, but physically, she's just a helpless young girl.

I'd overlooked something so simple. If I had been here, I would've been able to protect her.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left you alone. Did you notice anything about the people who threw this stuff at you? How many were there? Shiro and I will find them and—"

"Stop. I just got a little dirty, that's all. Can you imagine how ridiculous it would be for a judge to sue someone for getting them dirty? It'll wash away with the rain, anyway."

Tsukasa smiled at me.

"Hey, more importantly, the fact that someone is subtly trying to impede my investigation suggests that there's a real culprit. Heh...heh-heh-heh. I'm getting kind of excited..."

I gulped and looked at her face. The judge's brown eyes inside of that small girl's body glowed with a penetrating gaze.

"I'll never let them take this evidence from me."

I knew she was serious.

If she said there was evidence under this rubble, then I was positive there was.

And the second we took our eyes off it, there was a chance someone could steal it or tamper with it.

While she hadn't found it yet, she had spent the last six days protecting that evidence.

And I loved her for having that tenacious determination toward her trials.

"Thank you, Tsukasa. You were trying not to worry us, weren't you?"

"If we're going to work separately, this is the least I can do."

With Tsukasa on the case, I knew she would be able to find the culprit.

"Akky...you're not looking so hot yourself." She lovingly stroked my face. "But that look in your eye. You found something, didn't you?"

I wanted to be as competent as she believed I was.

"Yeah. We were able to meet up with Lyra. And we found some evidence that may be painful to see."

"Show me. I want to see it all."

The fire in her eyes was beautiful.

"I need to see it, even if it's painful. More than anyone else."

I felt lucky to be here with her, with that fire.

"We want to make the right judgment, for the sake of the people of this world."

She didn't need to brainwash me for those words to stick.

""I'll expose the evil lurking in this kingdom...and make them pay.""

In the tent, the sound of the rain echoing around us...

I told Tsukasa everything.

Shiro kept watch for suspicious persons outside.

Meanwhile, Tsukasa buried her face in my body and breathed. She told me this helped her stay calm. I let her do whatever she wanted.

We discussed our hypotheses about the case, and eventually, we figured out what was left for us to clarify.

As the rain let up, and as the night sky began to brighten...

...we started preparing for what was to come.

Article IX The Church Member Brainwashing and Homicide Case

"Approximately five years ago, the accused used the Copy-Paste Spell to produce the affected building in this case. While being aware of the possibility of a fatal flaw, the accused disregarded the possibility that a collapse could kill an unspecified amount of people and failed to properly maintain the building, hence causing its collapse. This as a result killed Cumba Nols, aged fifty-nine, and Alba Nols, aged sixty, who were in the church branch building adjacent to the property and were buried under the rubble. Charge: homicide. Applicable penal statute: Penal Code Article One-Hundred and Ninety-Nine."

Prosecutor Ileana read aloud her indictment in the Grand Bench of the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse.

Shiro and I weren't in the courtroom. We were watching via a wired monitor in another room.

This was to show that the judge who was judging the princess was working alone.

The judge, Tsukasa; the prosecutor, Ileana; and the accused, the princess, were in the courtroom. The gallery was a full house, and the high priest and three of his followers were sitting in the front row, waiting to testify as witnesses. All this was being filmed by the Royal Cabinet's maids and broadcast to Shiro and me in the other room.

While it looked like Judge Wagatsuma was operating the various court record windows on her own, I was actually controlling them from a distance. We had made it look like the windows opened automatically when the Shard of Judgment commenced the trial. Within the Grand Bench...

Building Collapse Homicide Case

Accused: Ecstasia Itou

...the case details were floating in the air above.

"But Master, Alba is still alive."

"Yeah. Apparently, church headquarters notified the prosecution that he died vesterday."

But just a short while ago, I had confirmed that Alba was safe.

Last night, I returned to the church headquarters under the cover of night. With Shiro's help, we got back into the dormitories. During the morning prayers, we snuck over to make sure Lyra and Alba still hadn't been found out.

Maybe he had been preoccupied due to the sudden increase in the church's members, or because of the trial today, but the high priest hadn't noticed us. We had slipped back out of headquarters just as he ordered the entire congregation to gather in the cathedral before heading to the courthouse.

"Let's just do the trial the way we decided."

"Master. What should we do about the facts I discovered this morning?"

She was talking about the people who had thrown eggs at Tsukasa. She had tracked them down using her sense of smell. While it had been rough going because of the rain, she discovered that multiple people had gone back and forth between the scene of the incident and the church headquarters over a span of days. Only problem was, there was no evidence.

"Let's keep it to ourselves for now. First we have to get the high priest to let down his guard."

"Understood."

We had a plan for how we were going to reveal the truth.

But still, we didn't know how things were going to unfold. We needed to watch the progression of the trial carefully.

"The court will provide some explanation as we conduct this criminal case. This is because while the accused has not committed the act of murder, she is still being indicted for the crime of murder. The crime in question in this case is murder by omission..."

Tsukasa's voice echoed throughout the Grand Bench.

"Per the Penal Code, 'a person who kills another person is punished by the death penalty or imprisonment for life or for a definite term of not less than five years' for homicide. A literal interpretation establishes punishment for a person who proactively took some action that killed another person. This is called a crime of commission."

The judge's words were being broadcast to the entire kingdom over wired cable.

"However, does that mean that a person who does not proactively carry out a murderous action should not be punished? In that case, it could be contrary to the intent of the law that defines the crime of murder. Take for example the case that a doctor bears murderous intent toward a critically ill hospitalized patient, does nothing to help them, and the patient dies. In such a case, depending on the circumstances, the crime of murder may be established by the doctor's failure to act. This is called a crime of omission."

I felt the example she gave would be easily understood, even in another world.

But listening to this made me wonder. There was no way that the princess had murderous intent.

The logic of the indictment felt forced. Any sensible citizen of this kingdom must feel that way, too.

Did Ileana make her indictment based on a crime of omission intentionally?

Maybe she was trying to exonerate the princess by accusing her of an extreme crime only for it to fail.

"The accused may make her statement."

In the courtroom, among the various conflicting motives...

"I'll go ahead and plead guilty. I did create the building, after all."

...the princess was still prepared to accept the crime in its entirety.

"Where is your counsel?"

"I don't need any."

Maybe it was because she felt responsible, but she had left herself almost tactlessly defenseless.

"…"

There was a momentary pause in the trial.

Tsukasa and I had discussed the princess's attitude. We figured that she would probably come without a lawyer. Normally, criminal trials required the presence of legal counsel for the accused, so the state would appoint one for them. But we couldn't do that this time.

A number of church members were sitting in the gallery.

Because of the nature of the case, we couldn't have the judge act in any way that caused suspicion that she was looking out for the princess.

"Let us proceed. Prosecutor..."

Tsukasa decided to keep going with the trial. No one voiced any objections.

"Master, at this rate, Princess Ecstasia will be found guilty."

Shiro was staring at me, obviously becoming nervous.

"Relax. She won't make any ruling that goes against the truth."

I tried to calm her down, then returned my attention to the proceedings.

"...That is to say, before copy-pasting a Japanese building in its entirety, we first check the ground used as foundation. Furthermore, after the land is prepared so that there is no slope, we copy-paste structures that are determined to be on the same topology. This is how it has been conducted since the reign of the previous king, and the evidence as such has already been submitted."

Prosecutor Ileana was explaining the workings of the Copy-Paste Spell.

"A question from the court: Have you discovered any flaws in the objects that are created via the Copy-Paste Spell?"

"At the time of copy-pasting the Japanese objects, there are no changes to the objects caused by the spell itself. Unlike forbidden magic, the Copy-Paste Spell doesn't afford such discretionary freedom. As one possibility..."

On the desk in front of the prosecutor stood a collection of figurines laid out on a cloth: Hatsu*e Miku, *Pok*mon*, *One P*ece...*

"They all have imprints in the shape of fingers in them," observed the judge.

"Correct. If the object being created by the Copy-Paste Spell is touched before the luminescent phase is complete, it will become imprinted by whatever touches it. However!" Ileana went on with determination. "All floors of the building in question were thoroughly inspected after its completion and were confirmed to be safe!"

"Then were there any flaws in the building created by the princess?"

"The only possibility...is that there was already a flaw in the original Japanese building!"

Now I see where they're going. So through her indictment, Ileana is trying to show that the princess's crimes are actually the fault of the Japanese people.

If she could pin the incident on the Japanese architects, who aren't even in this world, this would all be an unfortunate accident.

But still, the populace's anxiety would remain. That wasn't going to be enough.

"Miss Judge, I would like permission to speak."

Gilvert Trinity had raised his hand.

"I'll allow it," the judge curtly replied.

"Think of the two souls that have been called up to Heaven. And the feelings of the other injured victims. They cannot be healed by placing the blame on some party not even present in this world. If there was a possibility of a defect in the building, and it was ignored, then doesn't the responsibility lie with the kingdom after all?"

His voice was calm yet firm. I could tell he had the attention of the people in the gallery.

In response...

"Um. For these six days, this whole time I've been trying to meet with the victims."

The princess spoke.

"I wanted to apologize and offer them monetary compensation. But there's something strange going on."

"What do you mean, strange?" asked the judge.

"They wouldn't let me meet with the victims themselves. Apparently, they are all inside the church headquarters, which I visited, but I was always stopped at the gate and told I wasn't allowed to meet with them. I wanted to apologize to Cumba's body in person... And that's why I then went searching for their families. But all of the victims' family members outside of the church said that after they joined, they haven't been able to contact them at all. Also, you said that Alba has died—I looked for him, but I hadn't been able to find him at any of the kingdom's hospitals."

The princess's thoughts were all over the place. She looked exhausted, like she must not have been able to relax for this whole week. She was only a fourteen-year-old girl, after all.

But still, she had been able to slow the high priest's roll with this.

The judge raised some of her own doubts. "It is true that the only information we've heard about the victims has been through the high priest's stories."

"What can I say? These last few days have been busy, so we haven't been able to speak with Princess Ecstasia. As for the Nols brothers, they are war orphans and have no surviving family. And the rest of the victims are 'especially devout' disciples. They all believe in me and have trusted me as their proxy for this case. As such, I ask that all apologies and compensation go through me."

The white-haired man spoke with a gentle smile.

"I don't want to do that. I want to apologize directly to the victims themselves."

"Oh dear. Well, perhaps you can write them letters from your jail cell. I'll

make sure to deliver them personally."

Each of them was refusing to meet the other halfway. I could sense the people in the gallery getting confused.

<<Akky, what should we do?>> <<Start by praising the high priest. Treat him like a hero. Let's follow our plan.>> <<Understood.>>

"The court recognizes the high priest Gilvert Trinity as the representative for his church members."

Tsukasa turned toward the high priest and continued.

"After all, we've all heard how the high priest is a hero who saved his people's lives from a collapsing building. And we are very thankful that you are joining us today as a witness."

Her tone had become markedly more polite.

Considering what she now knew had been happening in the basement of the church headquarters, and that the church had tried to impede her investigation of the scene, Tsukasa must have been harboring anger within her. But still, she was playing her part just as we had planned.

"Through the help of our witnesses, we should be able to solve the remaining mysteries for this case. Thank you in advance for your generous cooperation."

First, we had to try to get the high priest to talk as much as possible.

"Miss Judge, you are acting rather differently than when we last met. Did you have a change of heart?"

"Actually, my brother who had been acting as court assistant said to me that 'other worlds have their own sense of righteousness.' It made me think: If you are proven to be right, perhaps I will retire as a judge."

"...Is that so? You would be all right with that?"

"Of course. And on that occasion, my brother and I would be honored to live a life of prayer together in the church."

"Pfft!" The high priest cracked a smile. "You Japanese people are admirable indeed!"

So far, so good, Tsukasa. She had done a fine job acknowledging that I had joined the church.

The high priest probably thought I was still at church headquarters offering up prayers at that very moment.

"Now, please take the oath before the witness stand. The accused may return to her seat."

The head of the church, wearing his gold and white robe, switched places with the princess at the center of the Grand Bench.

Watching the monitor, I opened the witness oath in front of the witness stand.

The high priest glanced at the text and read it aloud.

"'I solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'"

"Thank you. Please proceed with your testimony. Since not all present are aware of the testimony you gave last week, please include everything from the beginning."

"Certainly. On that fateful day, I..."

The high priest repeated the exact same story as he had told it last week.

As they were praying in the church branch building, through the rain they began to hear a creaking sound. Then the unrefined concrete crashed down on the walls and ceilings... He protected his congregation from the falling debris with the Holy Scourge... But the unfortunate Cumba was in the wrong place at the wrong time and died from his injuries.

"And yesterday, Alba died as well. While I did rescue him from the rubble, and temporarily brought him back from the brink of death with my treatments...I believe the wounds in his heart ran too deep. He...took his own life."

Tears sprang to his eyes as he emphasized those last words.

But we knew the truth. Alba was still alive. And he had almost been made into compost.

He's a good liar.

I was overcome by an urge to barge in there and confront him with the evidence that debunked his lies. But not yet.

"By 'treatments,' do you mean the famous God's Panacea?" Tsukasa asked the high priest, pressing him for further explanation.

She hated the man and must have been exhausted from sleeping outdoors for a week straight, but you'd never know it. She kept her face measured and calm, as if she had on some kind of special makeup that could hide her expression.

If we rushed this part, we could mess everything up. I checked my impulses.

"That is correct. It is able to cure any kind of illness...as long as one has faith."

The high priest exaggerated his gestures, like he was playing it up for the camera.

"But oh, what a tragedy that such a horrific incident occurred! It can only be God's punishment. But it is also an opportunity for us all to repent!"

The three church members sitting in the gallery chanted...

"""The high priest's words are right and just."""

...and nodded in unison.

Looks like they're still brainwashed.

The two men's caps, and the one woman's hood, were fastened tightly.

Lyra wasn't with them. She must have still been hiding at headquarters.

"The court would like to confirm the two enigmas that still remain in this case. The first is the Holy Scourge."

Tsukasa cut to the chase.

The true nature of the Holy Scourge, this world's oldest sacred artifact, was among the mysteries at the crux of this case. We needed to hear everything we could about it from the high priest himself.

"As you are aware, I have come from the otherworld Japan, and am thus a newcomer here. I know little about the special power of magic and sacred artifacts of this world."

"Yes, precisely why I wondered how you could speak so boldly of your intention to judge the God of this world."

He was talking about her declaration after the Hero's case that she would "judge God themself." How did he feel about that, as a high priest? This other remaining mystery was of the utmost importance to the case: the high priest's motive.

First we need objective truths over anything subjective.

This was something I had learned from Tsukasa.

In criminal law theory, there are two major approaches: a subjectivist approach that emphasizes the offender's intent and character, and an objectivist approach that emphasizes the criminal act and its result.

But it's difficult to establish proof of a crime only through subjectivity. If someone tried to kill a person by cursing them and hammering a nail into a voodoo doll, it would be dubbed an "impossibility defense." Objectively speaking, this would be considered attempted murder.

What needed to be clarified first throughout the trial's investigation were the objective facts. Clarify the objective truth and solidify it. Give the true culprit nowhere to run.

That was what Tsukasa believed to be a fair trial.

"For the sake of my own ignorance, I ask you to please show us this Holy Scourge."

"Oh my. I suppose I can oblige." The high priest held out his right hand. "Come forth, Holy Scourge."

In the blink of an eye, a whip had appeared soundlessly in his palm.

The whip's form was primitive. The handle was large enough to stick slightly out of his hand where he grasped it. It was about as long as a horse whip and a reddish brown, emitting a divine glow.

"It appears you summoned it by some kind of magic," said the judge.

"It is not magic. It is a sacred artifact. As its possessor, it is always wrapped around my body."

That's creepy. Great, I just imagined him naked with the whip wrapped around him.

"That way, I can defend myself even in the event of an unexpected attack."

"I see." The judge's response was swift. "In that case..."

Tsukasa violently grabbed her hefty copy of the Six Codes with one hand...

"Allow me to verify that!"

...and chucked it at the high priest!

"Hmph. Awfully rude as verifications go."

But high priest Gilvert Trinity was unperturbed.

The Six Codes, probably weighing around nine pounds, cut through the air. It was heavy enough to kill someone with.

"Holy Scourge." The high priest stood in place and extended his right hand. "Counter."

The sound of something bursting open echoed throughout the courtroom.

The high priest hadn't moved a muscle, but the body of the whip had extended in his place.

The tome's six thousand pages fluttered and scattered in the air like the book had been cut in half by a master swordsman.

"I understand its power. Now, witness. Can it handle this amount as well?"

Barely taking a breath in between, the judge pushed forward. The high priest immediately understood what she was asking.

"With ease." He smiled. "Strike Down."

The courtroom was filled with a flash of golden light.

This is like what I saw at the church induction ceremony.

The bad frame rate of the monitor was actually good for observing the situation. This must have been what happened in the sermon hall after the new

members had drunk the holy water. He had taken out this whip at that time.

The tip of the whip nimbly danced in the air and struck down each of the pieces of paper at high speed. If he had used this whip, surely he would have been able to apply the Power of Words to every head in the room.

"What amazing skill... I underestimated it."

After the blizzard of paper ended, I could see that the huge amount of paper bits had piled up against the walls, owing to the high priest's power. This power looked like it could feasibly protect him and his followers from falling rubble, too.

"There is almost nothing that is physically impossible for the Holy Scourge. Though the Demon King isn't able to be completely defeated only through physical power, which is why the Hero and magic become necessary."

The high priest had a boastful air. In his hand, he still grasped the silent, now shortened whip.

<<Akky. What else was I supposed to check?>> <<The symbol and the number.>> "Ahem. As you possess an artifact of such power...assuming that is a real sacred artifact, does that act as proof that you are the real high priest?" Tsukasa asked the high priest.

"What do you mean?"

"The symbol displayed outside the church is a symbol much like two whips crossing each other. Furthermore, after purchasing and reading the scriptures, I noticed it was written that the Holy Scourge was a weapon held in both hands."

Like Tsukasa said, the church's symbol was a mark like an X, almost like the kanji for *father*. This was our next point to focus on.

"I'm not surprised you've done your research—the judicial profession is diligent indeed. Allow me to explain."

The high priest extended his left arm. Another Holy Scourge appeared.

"In a serious fight, I would use both hands. And while there are two, only one owner is allowed. That is precisely why the holder of the Holy Scourge is called the high priest."

The high priest shrugged his shoulders as he spoke.

"Have we had enough with this nitpicking? What is your last enigma to ask about?"

<<Akky, is there anything else we need to do here?>> <<I think it's time. Let's move on to the last phase.>> "I am thankful for your cooperation. The last issue lies in the cause of the building's collapse. Now..."

The judge sternly addressed the courtroom.

"...the court will complete its investigation at the scene of the incident!"



"This is where I saved the two of them."

We were at the site of the building collapse.

The high priest stood in the ruins of the crumbling church branch building as he spoke.

The Scales of Judgment floated directly above us. All those in the courtroom, including the prosecutor, the accused, the maids, and all the people in the gallery, had come with us and were also present at the scene.

I hid among the crowd of gallery spectators to look in on the investigation.

"According to the map of the church branch building, that location was a restroom. Is that correct?"

The judge stood next to him and corroborated the accuracy of his statement based on the documentation.

After Tsukasa spoke, I noticed some broken, scattered pieces of something that resembled a toilet. This looked like the right place.

"Correct. Alba, who had chased after Cumba, also was buried in rubble here."

"And was an autopsy performed on Cumba's body after it was brought to the church headquarters?"

"Autopsy? Oh, you mean defilement of the dead? We don't perform such disgraceful acts in our church. He was put to rest, returned to the soil."

All eyes were on the judge and the high priest. The maids were filming their back and forth.

<<Akky, what else?>> Tsukasa asked me.

<<Can you check that one other thing, too?>> As we were walking here, the different points I understood about this case had started to come together in my head. And I had already asked Tsukasa to confirm one last thing while we were here.

"Coming here, I remembered something. You said that 'if you had been there and seen the building collapsing,' you 'could have wielded the power of the Holy Scourge' and 'supported the building from falling.'"

"Yes. You saw the awesome power of the sacred artifact, did you not?"

"I have not yet confirmed that it has the power to stop a building from collapsing."

"Good grief. O ye of little faith... Fine. Watch carefully."

The high priest approached the rubble near him and turned the Holy Scourge toward it as he spoke.

"Support."

Crack, crack, crack...

The end of the whip grew and split off like tree branches. It lifted what must have been hundreds of pounds of rubble into the air and silently held them in position.

"My mana flows into the Scourge and imitates the shape of my capillaries. It can flexibly adapt to hold any object."

"Impressive. For the purposes of our investigation, would you permit me to hold it?" Tsukasa said, approaching the high priest.

<<Tsukasa, it's too dangerous,>> I told her, without thinking.

<< But Akky, didn't you wonder what happens when someone other than the

owner holds it?>> She was right, but I wasn't curious enough to expose her to that kind of danger. I hesitated.

<<I'll be fine. I just want to check what this super whip is all about with my own hands!>> If she was so determined, there wasn't much I could do to stop her.

"Hmph... As you wish."

The high priest held out the handle of the whip with surprisingly no resistance.

"Go ahead and feel the true power of the sacred artifact with your own hands."

"Looking at it up close, it has a kind of gloss like an antique art piece. And it feels..."

The moment the whip was in Tsukasa's grasp...

"...slightly waaaAAAAAAAAAH!"

<<Tsukasa!>>

She suddenly started convulsing, her eyes rolling back in her head and her mouth foaming. There was no response to my telepathy.

"Pffft—ha-ha-ha-ha! How unsightly! A fitting consequence for an otherworlder who dares to disrespect our God."

The tip of the whip, which had split off into branches like a tree, lost its power. There was a loud *crack* as it began to break.

This is the same noise I heard outside the tavern that day, I recalled.

I made a mental note of it.

The more pressing matter right now was Tsukasa quickly losing her life energy before me. Her skin was becoming covered in wrinkles.

"Miss Judge!" the princess screamed. The surrounding maids looked on in worry.

"My, my, it seems that you have very little mana within your body. Very

meager indeed. You've been depleted awfully quickly!"

The high priest seemed pleased. He had known this was going to happen.

"Hold on, witness!" Prosecutor Ileana spoke up from the crowd of onlookers. "If a sacred artifact is touched by anyone other than its owner while the artifact's power is in use, the person will have their mana sucked dry and die! If you did this knowingly to try to kill Miss Judge, you'll be charged with the crime!"

"I was only cooperating with the trial's investigation." The high priest smiled calmly. "Worry not. Even if she is sucked completely dry, I can heal her with God's Panacea."

<<Master!>> Shiro cried telepathically, her voice frantic.

The Holy Scourge was losing its ability to hold up the rubble.

Crack—! The mass of concrete began to waver.

"Damn it, Tsukasa!"

I ran over to my sister, scooped her up, and leaped out of the way.

Thud!

The mass of concrete fell behind me. I broke out in a cold sweat. But somehow, we were safe.

In my arms, Tsukasa was shaking violently. "Aghghghgh! I can sti-i-i-ill-ll-!"

I could still see that passion of hers in her eyes. In her hand she still held the Holy Scourge, its tip shriveled and shrunken like a dried branch.

"Throw it!"

She did as I told her. With a "Hyah!" she tossed the piece of the Holy Scourge far away from us.

"Return."

Immediately, I heard his voice. In an instant, the sacred artifact turned around midair and returned to the high priest's right hand as if drawn by a magnet.

So this is what Laman meant by a "special characteristic that automatically

returns it to the hands of its owner."

I remembered Mjölnir from Norse mythology. It was also called Thor's Hammer, since it was a weapon wielded by the thunder god Thor. Thor would throw the hammer at his enemies to pulverize them, and then use the hammer's special ability that made it always return to its owner. It seemed like the sacred artifacts in this world had a similar ability.

We've seen enough.

"My. What are you doing here, Number 786?" the high priest asked warily when he noticed me.

"I'm the court assistant. I show up when there's a trial; that's my job," I replied, standing below the Scales of Judgment.

"Don't tell me... I'm sure I used *that* on you. Have you reversed it?" the high priest said, baffled.

"Please enlighten us: What do you mean by 'that'?" I spat as I walked toward him. "Do you want to check the place where you put it?"

"...I haven't a clue what you're referring to. But an ordinary boy with nothing more than some special world transfer bonus ability should be more cautious when he's trying to act brave—you're liable to get hurt."

He wouldn't be taking the bait so easily.

But it sounded like he was trying to guess what kind of special ability had allowed me to break his brainwashing spell.

Having raised the high priest's suspicions, it was going to be hard to get any further testimony out of him now.

Tsukasa was looking up at me, worried.

"Akky."

Her face was haggard. Maybe it was from having all her energy sucked out of her, but she was sweating, her makeup had smeared, and dark circles had appeared under her eyes. But we had to keep going.

"Let's move on to the last piece of evidence," I said, and started heading

toward the back of the pile of rubble. "Shiro, please begin!"

"Yes, Master!"

Head maid Shiro began ordering the rest of the maids around her.

"Dig up the area Miss Judge has indicated!"

"Yes ma'am!"

The beast hybrid maids, over thirty of them in total, gathered.

"Wait. Just what do you think you're doing?" the high priest demanded.

"Examination of evidence. To see through lies and falsehoods, for the sake of the world."

"Lies and falsehoods? To what do you refer, exactly?"

"Will you confess to what you were doing in the building before the collapse?"

"...Whatever are you talking about?" The high priest's eyes scanned the scene nervously and landed on Shiro, who was giving commands. "Ah, if it isn't the Royal Watchdog. Didn't you get fired from your court duty?"

"Regarding the head maid's status..." Tsukasa staggered to her feet. "I've reinstated her as of yesterday."

"Tsukasa, you should rest—"

"I don't want to be the kind of judge who sleeps during the examination of evidence. I'm okay. I drank this."

She was holding a bottle labeled ENERGY POTION.

"What the heck is that?"

"I drank these to stay awake for those seven days. One more day won't kill me."

"This has got to be taking years off your life."

"I've already gotten to go back to age fifteen, so what's a little time off my lifespan? It's no big deal."

Yeah, it is.

"Oh. I understand now."

The high priest spoke again, watching closely as Shiro worked.

"So you're digging up the site of the building collapse in hopes of finding some trace of evidence that could exonerate Princess Ecstasia. I see the bitch is very devoted to her master."

His last-ditch effort to obstruct our investigation verged on verbal abuse. Shiro remained expressionless.

<<Shiro, hang in there just a little longer.>> <<I am fine, Master. I feel nothing but scorn toward a man like that.>> Her telepathic message was tinged with emotion as she continued digging through the rubble.

"Japan is at a constant risk of earthquakes due to its geography."

Tsukasa stood up and began speaking to the surrounding onlookers.

"An earthquake occurs when our planet's crust suddenly shifts. Japanese buildings are built under strict safety regulations, of course, and we have developed technology to withstand the shaking..."

She explained in a way that even citizens of another world could understand. Her imposing tone of voice was befitting of a judge.

"Furthermore, the people of our world also developed a method of investigating the true reason for building collapses. Using a high-precision building collapse simulator, the court was able to identify an abnormal area in relation to the collapse."

Apparently, she had used computing software developed by a certain research institute.

"That part is what we have now unearthed: the building's round pillar which faced the church branch!"

Shiro and her maids had finished. Within the small hill of rubble of the collapsed building, there was a space with a radius of about fifteen feet that was the same height as the ground.

I walked away from the high priest and entered the hollow. Within it...

...mud, mud, and more mud. There was nothing in it but mud.

I heard the people of the gallery start to speak up.

"What? There's nothing there..."

"It's all muddy from yesterday's rain."

"So there wasn't any evidence after all?"

And among that chatter, Shiro sent me a telepathic message with a certain piece of information in it.

"...Hmph. Where exactly is this evidence of yours?" the high priest said mockingly. He looked relieved. "There's nothing here. All I see is mud, stirred up by the rain!"

"You seem happy, Gilvert." I turned around and stared back at him. "That's exactly the face I wanted to see."

"Huh? What are you—?"

"There used to be a three-foot round pillar here."

Tsukasa continued her explanation, and I backed her up by opening the relevant windows.

"This is..."

Everyone was now looking up at photos from the inside of the building, taken at the time of Gobta's case.

The floor looked the same as the one I stood on now. And standing there, surrounded by mud, was a thick, gray pillar.

"This photo was taken approximately three weeks before the collapse. You can clearly see the building's round pillar there. It's made of steel-framed reinforced concrete. Around it, you can see mud that's the same color as the pillar..."

The info Gobta told me was being put to good use.

"We were in the process of investigating this mud in relation to another case. Owing to a certain juvenile's testimony, we learned that there were originally nine arcade game machines in this spot. And that a certain group of people had trespassed onto this property and used a forbidden material transfiguration spell which turned the machines into mud."

The mention of forbidden magic shocked everyone into silence.

"According to the simulation's calculations, the building's collapse was caused when this round pillar suddenly disappeared. If we weigh the amount of mud piled here, it will become clear that it corresponds to the volume of the round pillar plus the volume of the nine arcade game machines."

Tsukasa had done the calculations in her tent and checked the actual measurements over and over at the scene.

"Well then. I suppose you will have to look for a mage who uses forbidden magic as the real culprit," the high priest said with an icy expression.

Now it was my turn to try cornering him.

"Many people witnessed the building's collapse. Magic wasn't used at that instant."

"Then perhaps it's simply an unsolvable mystery. Perhaps the culprit used both material transfiguration and time manipulation magic together. No one will be able to figure it out in that case."

"That's not true." I approached from a different angle. "Our Shiro was able to figure it out. And you, you sent your followers to try to obstruct our investigation, didn't you? Until the rain came."

"...I don't know what you're talking about. Perhaps they were simply angry at Miss Judge for making a mess of their beloved church. Please don't blame me for what my disciples do out of their own free will."

"Your disciples' 'free will'? Now that's a bad joke if I ever heard one, Gilvert."

I opened up a certain window, copied it, expanded it, and lifted it so everyone in the area could read it.

Record of Statement

Lyra Boucher...

It was like a huge electric billboard, illuminating the scene of the collapse below the Scales of Judgment.

"When did you...?" The high priest was dumbfounded as he read the window's contents.

The gallery started to whisper as they finished reading through it themselves.

"The two victims weren't at the branch building?"

"So it was a lie that the high priest saved them?"

"Brainwashing?"

"Scary..."

"Compost? So that means..."

"They were getting rid of dead bodies."

"That's horrifying..."

The weight of Lyra's statement spread across the crowd like a wave. I went on.

"I have photographic evidence of the dead bodies and their disposal. Those who don't want to look, I want you to at least hear about it from others."

I brought up another window.

Admin: Photographic Evidence.

The photos floated in the air:

Compost Room

Contents of Large Box

Dissection Tools

Purgatorial List...

Their grotesqueness assaulted the eyes of all who could see.

"The high priest has been making compost of his followers' dead bodies in the basement of the church headquarters."

"This case...is extremely serious!" said Prosecutor Ileana. "That such a terrible thing could go unnoticed right next to the royal palace... It's immoral!"

"Immoral, you say?" the high priest replied. "Watch your mouth."

"No prosecutor needs to watch their mouth in the face of crime," I said.

"Mr. Akuto! Yes, this is a chargeable offense! Now that I think about it, the fact that Cumba's body was brought to the church headquarters immediately after the incident means that they were trying to cover up his cause of death! There's also cause to believe that he attempted to cover up the fact that those who inconveniently died within the church were dissected and made into compost!"

"The treatment of God's Panacea does not fail. It was God's will. Those men and women were called by God and fulfilled their destinies. And so God's children return to the earth."

The high priest's smile did not falter.

"This is how it has been, since time immemorial, and how it shall be. We feast upon the fruit of the earth and return to the earth. Upon which flowers will bloom, and olives will ripen. This is the truth as it is written in the scriptures."

The three church members in the crowd each responded in a whisper: "The high priest's words are right and just."

The bizarre sight made me feel like they were in a different world, where this kingdom's law and common sense meant nothing.

"Now I understand why my father was right to separate the church and state."

The head of the kingdom clutched at her pink skirt with tears in her eyes.

I could see she felt that the high priest had deviated from what he should have been protecting.

"Court assistant, prosecutor, Princess Ecstasia. God will punish you for your ideologies which insult the scriptures without believing in them. Brainwashing? What an unpleasant suggestion. Besides—"

He took one look at Ileana and the princess before turning his face to the

heavens.

"O Scales of Judgment! I cast doubt on this trial! This investigation was supposed to be about the responsibility for the building's collapse. Yet now all of a sudden they are trying to expose the privacy of our church! It is unrelated!"

"From the start, you've been aiming to find fault with our trial and have us punished by the scales."

"Don't be so self-conscious. It is only proper that a person conducting a trial incorrectly would face God's punishment."

"We're not doing anything wrong. This is your case," I responded to Gilvert, then spoke to Shiro. "It's time. Use those chemicals you brought."

"Yes, Master!"

Shiro and the other maids split up and started spraying some kind of liquid around us.

The sun was beginning to set, and the rubble was casting long shadows on the ground.

"What is that strange magical tool you're using?" the high priest asked.

The mud on the ground where the round pillar used to be started glowing a bluish white.

"It's a luminol reaction," I replied as I turned to face him. "It's not magic. It's forensic science."

"Forensic...?"

"You're not familiar? This is the stuff often used by crime lab investigators in detective anime. You know, like *Detective Co*an*. Too bad you never watched any anime with the princess."

"..." Silence. The high priest was staring at the light, bewildered.

"Even if blood gets washed away by rain and you can't see it anymore, it leaves behind traces that can still be detected. This chemical shows us where the traces are by making them glow like this. We can see there was a large amount of blood spilled here."

"Even if that's true, it has nothing to do with me."

"Don't move a muscle."

Shiro continued spraying the chemical. She moved from where the round pillar had been...over to the high priest.

"Wh-what is this?!" Ileana gasped.

Everyone—the princess, the gallery—opened their eyes wide.

Between the collapsed building and where the high priest was standing, there was a trail of mud. And on that trail was a line of blue-white light between the large traces of blood and the high priest.

"High priest Gilvert Trinity," I began. "You set up a very elaborate scheme. And it all started one year ago when you failed to completely heal Cumba, didn't it?"

I walked toward the head of the church.

"With your healing spell, God's Panacea, you accidentally activated a malignant tumor. But if you allowed it to be examined by a hospital outside the church and word got out, you thought that your population of church members that was already dropping would decline even further. So you muzzled the Nols brothers and decided to use them even further."

I was only speculating about his goal. But at this stage, I needed to keep exposing more evidence to make him falter.

"Originally, you wanted to wipe out the royal family and the Japanese culture that didn't fit with your own ideological beliefs. And you wanted to take the place of the judge that had been summoned. You thought you could accomplish this if you caused an incident that made the church and its followers into victims. That's when you decided to borrow the power of the Black Scales' forbidden magic."

Everything I had seen and heard up until now was starting to line up nicely.

"You set your sights on the old church branch building, because there was a restricted building right next to it. All you had to do was make it fall toward the church. But first, because you are cautious after all, you wanted to see for

yourself if the material transfiguration spell really worked. Those nine arcade machines around the round pillar were in the way anyway, and they were trash that no one would miss, or so you thought. But it turned out they were actually a key item in another case."

Even if they had been largely forgotten by most, there was still someone who loved them.

"All that was left to figure out was the timing. You aimed to collapse the building at a time when the princess and the judge were at the nearby tavern. You changed the round pillar into mud, and in its place used one of your Holy Scourges to hold up the building. Like you said, 'There is almost nothing that is physically impossible for the Holy Scourge.' So it was easy."

Using those capillaries, he probably could have even held the mud in place and camouflaged it so that it didn't lose its shape.

"The high priest is highly proficient at controlling the mana within the body. He made sure that Cumba and Alba had enough mana to maintain the power of the Holy Scourge for a specific amount of time, wrapped it around them, then had them grasp it. He planned it so that the Scourge would break exactly when we arrived at the tavern—they were basically used as human timers."

I heard the people in the gallery react.

"Th-that's terrible!"

"It's inhumane."

"That's rrright, meow! That sound just now when Miss Judge grabbed it and it started breaking was the same crrracking noise I heard right before the building collapsed, meow!"

The barmaid who had acted as the first witness was among the crowd and backed up my statement.

"I bet the sound was louder than you were expecting. You deliberately failed to mention it in your testimony. But you really let your guard down coming here. It all became clear by the judge's own hands."

We had been able to come this far all thanks to Tsukasa's guidance of the trial

and inspection of the evidence.

"It's possible that Cumba was unconscious at the time you used him. As for Alba, maybe you tricked him, or maybe you overwrote his thoughts with your Power of Words. It's also possible you made him drink a large amount of holy water. Which was it?"

The high priest was silent. His eyes darted back and forth like he was trying to think of a good rebuttal, but his mouth stayed closed.

"Using your right to silence, I see. In that case, I'll finish my explanation and you can just stay quiet and listen."

I went on.

"At the time of the collapse, you were in the bathroom, as you had planned. There, you used the second Scourge you had been hiding to protect yourself while recalling the first. You used the sacred artifact's power to return to its owner and took back the first Holy Scourge and Cumba and Alba's bodies along with it. Of course, the two of them were wounded and lost a large amount of blood while being dragged back to you. The evidence of that lies in the trail of mud leading to where you stand, and the luminol reaction. If we investigate further, I'm sure we'd find some traces of their skin here, too."

The people gathered now understood the significance of the trail of mud leading from the collapsed building up to the high priest and the bluish-white light.

"After dragging them out of the mud, you made it look like you saved the two of them. That way, you could look like a hero. And you wouldn't get found out because only your brainwashed and 'especially devout disciples' were with you that day. After that, you destroyed the evidence by making Cumba and Alba into compost. Really, quite the elaborate scheme."

"This is nonsense. The bitches must have planted the blue light in the rubble as they were digging through it."

"You looked like you were thinking up that one for a while. Is that really the best explanation you could come up with?"

I faced off against the high priest. Then I pointed to the two Holy Scourges in

his hands.

"Shiro. Spray it on him."

"Yes, Master," she replied, and pointed the spraying device at his body. But suddenly— "Stop!" The high priest brandished his whips. "How dare you suspect me! What is this? Isn't this supposed to be Princess Ecstasia's trial?!"

"Verdict: The accused, Ecstasia Itou, is not guilty."

I heard a solemn voice. Tsukasa had declared her verdict, and the Scales of Judgment responded with the following: *Building Collapse Homicide Case*

Not Guilty

The princess started to speak. "Miss Judge, I—"

"Before us right now we have a criminal who used human bodies as timers and then destroyed them. Naturally, this isn't the place to be bickering over the princess's guilt."

"I object!"

The high priest, alone, turned toward the sky and shouted.

"Gilvert Trinity's objection is overruled," Tsukasa replied coldly. "Let us immediately begin the trial regarding the new facts that have come to light during today's hearing."

"New facts? You mean lies and falsehoods!" the high priest protested. "Who exactly were these eyewitnesses in the first place? It could be a hoax!"

As he continued piling on his excuses...

"It was me."

...a small silhouette standing in the crowd of the gallery spectators spoke up.

"Gobta," I said. "I didn't know you were watching."

"Hey, Window Mage. Thanks for finding my mom, bro."

"I promised, didn't I? Lyra is doing okay, and I reversed her brainwashing. You'll be able to see her later."

"Thanks. If we waited any longer, she might have been killed by this dude,

huh?"

There was anger behind young Gobta's gaze.

"High priest Gilvert. That day, I saw a person use forbidden magic with the Black Scales. For all the pain and suffering you caused my mom and all the others—"

"Silence!!"

In that instant, the wind violently shifted. No—it was the whip. It had swept across our surroundings at lightning speed.

There was a crack. And a sound like a machine breaking. When I opened my eyes, all the recording equipment the maids had been carrying were broken and scattered on the ground.

"I...couldn't help but lose my temper." The air around the high priest was trembling with anger. "I simply cannot allow any record of me being insulted by a lower race to be preserved."

Gilvert attacked again, and the spectators began to scream and back away amid the resulting cloud of dust.

Among them, I heard Goburo Boucher: "You idiot! Gobta, keep your nose out of it!"

"Dad, aren't you angry? He hurt Mom...," Gobta replied, but Goburo was already dragging him away.

The high priest had gotten some distance from everyone else. In his hand, the long, writhing body of the Holy Scourge looked like it had been sprayed with Shiro's chemicals. It was glowing bluish-white. A sacred artifact bathed in blood.

I never expected him to turn violent with so many people watching.

Anger was welling up inside me.

I wanted to stop the trial, catch this guy, and burn him at the stake.

"Assistant, get the prosecutor on her feet."

Just as I was being overcome by these reprehensible thoughts, my sister's dignified voice brought me back to myself.

"...Right," I replied, and ran over to Ileana. "Are you hurt?"

The half-elf prosecutor had collapsed. I lent her my shoulder.

"My apologies, Mr. Akuto. My glasses were blown off..."

I picked her delicate body off the ground and supported her. Then I returned her glasses and her copy of the Six Codes that she had dropped.

"Regarding these new truths that have come to light...," came Tsukasa's voice. "I would now like to list all criminal charges against Gilvert Trinity!"

Yes. This is the right way to go about it.

Hearing the judge's words made me regain my composure.

I almost lost my head. But Tsukasa's calm decision-making saved me.

If I got angry and acted outside my role as the court assistant, that might turn into a violation of the oath I made at our first trial.

That would be just the kind of thing those against Japanese culture and the Japanese court would be hoping for: our own self-destruction.

"Then please allow me to list all the charges that come to mind..."

In the ruins of the building, swirling with dust, the prosecutor began to list the charges.

The judge nodded and announced the next step:

"We will commence a new trial."

Above our heads, the Scales of Judgment wavered in response.

Church Member Brainwashing and Homicide Case

Accused: Gilvert Trinity

The new court case's title was displayed, and under that...

...the scales began generating further lines of text.

Charges:

- Instigation of Foreign Aggression: Penal Code Article Eighty-One Obstruction of Public Duty: Penal Code Article Ninety-Five
- **3** Breaking and Entering: Penal Code Article One Hundred and Thirty **4** Perjury: Penal Code Article One Hundred and Sixty-Nine
- **⑤** Destruction of a Corpse: Penal Code Article One Hundred and Ninety **⑥** Secret Burial of Persons Dying from an Unnatural Death: Penal Code Article One Hundred and Ninety-Two **⑥** Homicide: Penal Code Article One Hundred and Ninety-Nine
- **3** Attempted Homicide: Penal Code Articles One Hundred and Ninety-Nine, Two Hundred and Three **9** Injury: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Four
- **©** Unlawful Confinement: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Twenty **©** Intimidation: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Twenty-Two **©** Compulsion: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Twenty-Three **©** Defamation: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Thirty
 - Fraud: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Forty-Six
- ⑤ Damage to Buildings: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Sixty ⑥ Damage to Property: Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Sixty-One ⑥ Medical Practice Without a License: Medical Practitioners' Act Article Thirty-One, Paragraph One, Article Seventeen ⑥ Possession of Poisonous or Deleterious Substances: Poisonous and Deleterious Substances Control Act Articles Three and Twenty-Four

"What a spectacle."

Whose voice was that?

The unfamiliar, heavy timbre made me doubt my ears.

I had no idea she had that voice in her.

I turned around and saw my sister standing sternly in the cloud of dust.

"The head of a religious organization, piling up evil after evil, and corruption upon corruption..."

Under the radiant golden shine of the Scales of Judgment...

Those eyes, filled with the most anger of any other present, burned like flames.

Maybe Tsukasa wasn't so calm and composed after all.

If anything, she looked downright demonic.

The judge was overflowing with indignation.

"You call yourself God's proxy. Before we begin, how about you bring God themself before us?" she asked.

And beneath the list of charges, which floated there like a school of fish...

"Your crimes, lined up like this, make a fine parade."

...the judge spoke as if she was about to usher us through the gates of Hell.

Sh-she's scary...

Sure, the judge was my sister, but I couldn't help but be a little freaked out by her intensity.

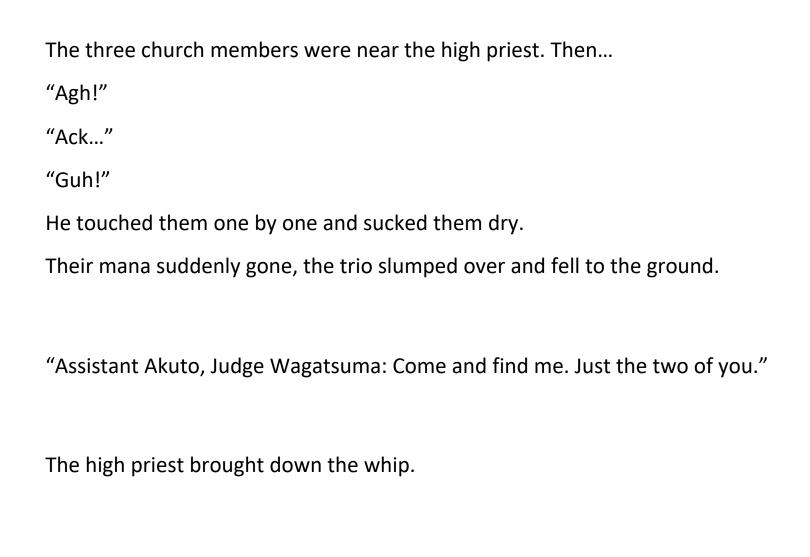
I heard the spectators in the gallery letting out whimpers of fear. It was almost as if they had seen the Demon King himself.

However...

"Do you really think that I..."

...the high priest's—no, the accused's—attitude did not waver.

"...will simply submit to this judgment, here and now?"



Article X Under God, We Must Not Allow Equality Among Men

I had a thought as I swung God's whip.

I'd set several traps.

I'd been sure not to dirty my own hands, and I made it look like I had even saved lives.

If someone had exposed me, it must have been the Royal Watchdog. Precisely why I had her removed from the trial.

I had even succeeded in breaking the judge's spirit...or so I thought.

The goblin boy and his mother were but a small fray in my plan. What I hadn't properly accounted for was the court assistant, Akuto Satou.

That he would come so close to the truth...

That child was who I really should have been watching out for. That average kid from otherworld Japan turned out to be able to wield the power of the Judgment Spell and even reverse the effects of my Cleansing Prayer...

How unpleasant.

Generations of high priests have claimed that beings from other worlds receive a special quirk. This boy must have been given some kind of magical resistance, or the ability to wield the Judgment Spell.

It's unfair.

I felt my old wounds ache. How much training did I have to go through before I was able to wield the Holy Scourge?

How much pain and suffering did I have to endure under my father's tutelage

and under the beatings of the lash?

My hair had faded from the burden of controlling the body's mana, and every single strand had become white.

That otherworld Japanese boy... He didn't know the first thing about suffering, or a sense of one's mission.

The God we worshipped would not allow this boy to possess special Godgiven powers.

No—I would not allow it.

I am God's proxy. My words are the sole law of absolute justice...

I am the only one in this world who has been chosen by God.

As the heir of the storied Trinity line of high priests, this was my birthright.

We are the ones who have judged and guided the people. This truth must govern our reality.

"Pulverize."

The whip did not strike any humans. It lashed the church building, now turned to rubble, and the chunks of concrete.

"Fek!"

"Tsukasa!"

"Miss Judge!"

"Get down!"

I heard screaming.

How unfortunate that I cannot finish it here.

I was overcome with the desire to wipe all those who did not believe in our creed off the face of the planet, but it was too dangerous to directly antagonize the Shard of Judgment's wielder.

Now that my plans had been exposed, I was left with just one choice.

I whispered to myself in the thick cloud of dust, my vision obscured: "Expand and Contract."

I set my sights on a faraway building and extended the Holy Scourge. I wrapped the whip around the building and then retracted it.

Vwoom. The whip pulled me forward through the air.

I had rid myself of this place faster than any sentencing or Rust of Doubt could reach me.

Just as I had calculated from the start.

Looking back from the wall of the building, I saw in the distance people wandering in confusion in the dust.

And I saw the Scales of Judgment, now controlled by that damn Japanese boy, floating aimlessly in the air, having lost me from its sight.

None of them were worthy opponents.

I calmly repeated the extension and retraction of the Holy Scourge, moving from building to building.

...Oh?

Suddenly, I noticed the shadow of something following me at high speed.

"Graaagh!" She came close enough to bite me.

"The damned Royal Watchdog!"

I used Counter with my other whip against the head maid and sent her flying. The beast took the fall and rushed at me once again.

I should expect as much from an Inugami. Their physical abilities are the strongest in the kingdom.

Deep down, I was impressed. There weren't many who could take an attack from the Holy Scourge without also being in possession of a sacred artifact themselves.

I watched the Royal Watchdog from atop a building. I needed to neutralize her.

"Strike Down... Strike Down... Strike Down..."

I knocked her down over and over as she attacked me. Then came the sound

of something splitting. Her maid uniform was tearing.

She is awfully persistent even when there's no immediate danger to Princess Ecstasia.

Strange—this wasn't the movement pattern I would have predicted from the Royal Watchdog.

"You're beginning to irritate me," I said.

After a dozen or so attacks, I started to feel lethargic. Then...

"Karmic Flare."

I sensed a high-powered spell being cast.

"Counter."

The incoming fireball made an earsplitting explosion before dissipating.

My legendary robe, reserved only for high priests, was marred with burn marks.

How very unpleasant.

I saw Laman, the Hero of the Holy Flame, below me.

That faithless, feebleminded old man. The fool who refused to pledge allegiance to my father.

Everything had been lined up for him to be found guilty and sent to his death, but...

Why was he here in the kingdom? And why was he helping the otherworlders?

His pattern was also different from what I predicted.

I was irritated beyond measure. The face of that court assistant came to mind.

I have to put an end to that Japanese boy. That indeed will be the highest accomplishment to offer the Black Scales.

But enough thinking.

I brought down my whip.

The Royal Watchdog's momentum began to wane. The power of the old man's flames was tapering off after that first attack.

Ah... How beautiful.

The Holy Scourge, the oldest of the sacred artifacts, was truly the strongest of them all.

This was God's power to exorcize evil.

And its holder, the pinnacle of humanity.

A beautiful power to maintain beautiful order.

This foreign culture and these otherworldly things were simply deceptions, an attempt to destroy our world's order.

The people have lived under this order for thousands of years. As they shall for thousands more. And that brings about absolute peace of mind.

My heart grew calm.

I was right.

At the same time, I felt the mana within my body running dry.

Time to return to headquarters.

My beloved church. There, my cup would be refilled by the power of my disciples.

In preparation for this day, I'd been earning trust and using the Power of Words in secret. And now I would face it along with over ten thousand devout disciples.

By the power of God, I shall judge the outsiders: the court assistant and the judge.

It will be remembered as the day we drove out otherworld Japan.

Let us sing hymns of praise to God. Sing to the beat of the divine whip.

Headquarters—where my devout disciples gathered.

Here, there was no way God's chosen could lose.

No way in Hell.

Article XI Under the Great Scales, He Who Judges Shall Also Be Judged

We stood beneath the eighteen charges, their text swimming in the air like a school of fish.

The accused, Gilvert Trinity, swung his arms.

The ends of the sacred artifact whipped at an almost imperceptible speed.

Instantly, I knew I needed to protect the people around me first and foremost. I copied a window and used it as defense against the cutting tip of the whip. But he was aiming for something else.

The whip pulverized the rubble, kicking up a cloud of dust and obscuring everyone's vision.

Once the dust cleared, I saw the high priest using his whip to deftly navigate from building to building.

He looked like Sp*der-Man or something out of *Attack on T*tan...* It was surreal to watch.

The only one who tried chasing him was Shiro.

While checking on everyone at the site of the collapse, I telepathically reached out to Shiro.

<<Master! The high priest...has entered the church...!>> Shiro sounded out of breath and tinged with pain.

<<Shiro! Where are you right now?>> << Please give me some time...to recover. Go ahead without me...to Lyra and Alba...>> Click. Our connection was

cut.

"Mr. Akuto. I see you learned to use telepathy with Shiro," the princess said. She was eyeing me with concern.

"Shiro will be all right," I told her. "She loves you, and she's been helping us find the truth all so she can bring things back to the way they were before. For you. I wouldn't be here if not for her."

"I...want to make up with her," she said, her face downcast. "I can't believe such evil was lurking right next to the royal palace. I have to take responsibility somehow..."

Tears came to the fourteen-year-old girl's face as she stared at my feet.

There, the three church members whom the high priest had sucked dry of their mana were still lying on the ground.

As expected, they had had the Cleansing Prayer imprinted onto the backs of their heads.

I had only just taken off their caps and hoods to reverse the spell. They were still weak.

In the daylight, these three members were proof of the high priest's evil nature to all gathered here for the trial.

"How...can I ever apologize—?"

"There's nothing for you to apologize for, Princess. The high priest will be punished for his own crimes."

As I said this, I felt my determination solidify within me. We absolutely could not let him get away with this.

"I can't believe we let him escape during the trial." Next to me, Tsukasa was burning with anger. "Akky. I can't rest until we catch him."

Just then I heard approaching horse hooves.

"Neeeeigh!"

"Oh, it's you! You came here for us?"

The pegasus that had previously brought us back and forth from the Hero's

Village had stopped before us.

I was sure Shiro had prepared this for us. It was pulling a carriage behind it.

"Well, I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth! Let's go, Akky! Princess, you wait here with the others."

Tsukasa jumped into the carriage. The pegasus, which only let those who were pure ride it—aka virgins—was whinnying happily.

So far so good, I guess?

"All right, let's head to the church headquarters!" I said as I got into the carriage. This wasn't the time to be concerned about stuff like that anyway.

I grabbed the reins. Time to put that Horse Riding skill to use.

The pegasus leaped into the sky and hoisted the carriage aloft.

We flew low between Chiyodaku's buildings as we headed to the west.

There are scorch marks around this area.

Around a certain building, I saw burn marks like something explosive had scattered there.

Shiro had told me over telepathy that Laman, the Hero of the Holy Flame, had shown up for support.

"Heeey! Down here!"

There he was. Tall and slender, seventy years old. The hero who had defeated the Demon King half a century ago.

"Laman!" I lowered the pegasus carriage out of the sky. "You came all the way from the Hero's Village?"

"I sensed that you were in danger, so I hastened here in order to protect my new king."

Saying this, Laman knelt into an exaggerated bow.

"It's been a while, Laman the Hero. Allow me to remind you that there are no kings in the courtroom."

"Miss Judge, I have burned your ruling of not guilty into my heart. I shan't

forget it even for a moment."

The old man's golden irises glimmered as he twisted a corner of his mouth into a smirk.

"That young punk of a high priest. I thought he had been behaving well ever since that eccentric father of his died, but it turns out he isn't worthy to wield the power of an artifact after all."

"Uh, what? What do you mean?" said Tsukasa.

"In peaceful times such as these, it's unusual for the atmosphere's mana to be so restless. It indicates that someone is misusing one of the sacred artifacts. I had sensed his movements in advance and was fixing to burn him to a crisp, but..."

Tsukasa had a blank expression. But I thought I got the gist of what Laman was saying.

"We appreciate your backup. But hold off on the whole burning to a crisp thing for now. We still have a trial to finish."

"If you say so, Sir Akuto, then I shall abide."

"Come with us on the carriage."

The old hero nodded. "Yes, sir! I already feel my blood burning with the heat of battle—up we go!"

"Huh? He's coming with us?"

"I think our chances will be better if we have him with us, don't you think?"

The high priest had told us to come just the two of us, but we were clearly outmatched.

"I owe my life to you two. An old man like me is prepared to give up my life for your cause. You needn't show me any special consideration."

"All right. I understand. In that case, let's go."

The old man clad in worn-out leather armor got into the carriage.

I looked back from the driver's seat and asked, "Laman, you know a lot about the high priests, don't you?"

I wanted to hear more about the circumstances surrounding the man.

"Aye. At least about the previous generation."

Laman had a faraway look in his eye as he began to tell his story.

"The previous generation's high priest was a dull fellow who was always going on about how the church was right, when in the end he really was just stuck thinking that he was right. He assigned ranks to all non-human races and looked down on them. And whenever someone opposed him, he lost his temper. He would ridicule my wife and Elma. The way we defeated the Demon King without relying on the Church's power was like spitting right in his face. Gah-ha-ha!"

Laman the Hero laughed heartily.

Even though his story was a lot like trash talk, after hearing it I felt like I was beginning to understand more and more.

"But I don't know much about his son, Gilvert. I'd guess they're not too different."

We arrived.

I stopped the pegasus carriage on the north side of the royal palace, which faced the church headquarters. Our surroundings were dead silent.

The state of the cathedral that Shiro had described to me before was unchanged. The golden X symbol was glittering on top of the roof. The blood-soaked whips. We couldn't leave things like this.

"Let's go!"

And so we stormed into the cathedral.



The Nippon Budokan in Tokyo's Chiyodaku was a massive building.

Its large roof, with its octagonal shape, was reminiscent of the base of Mount Fuji.

It had to be something like a hundred feet tall.

The Chiyodaku Kingdom's cathedral had completely repurposed the building inside and out.

The three of us entered through the west entrance...

"Tsukasa, Laman, over here!"

I guided them as I ran ahead.

When I had infiltrated the church as a new member, I had come to the cathedral almost every day. I had a good sense of the geography.

But...

"What is this, an obstacle?"

In the path, a barricade of tables and chairs had been suddenly set up in our way.

And...

"Akky! Behind you!"

As soon as I turned around to my sister's voice, there was a huge rumbling sound like falling rubble.

Someone had set up the road behind us to be blocked and covered with rubble.

"He really doesn't want anyone but us showing up."

I realized that we had been isolated from the outside.

Then there was a sudden *bzzzt!* as the lights went out. Everything was pitch black.

"This seems like something the high priest's son would think up. Secretly setting up traps for us to fall into."

As he spoke, the old hero raised his hands and began generating a fireball.

"I'll burn it all. We can simply smoke him out."

His dependable figure was illuminated by the light of his flames.

But we were here to conduct a trial.

"Wait, Laman."

I took the Shard of Judgment out of my pocket as I spoke.

"We don't need to smoke him out. We'll bring the courtroom to us!" I grabbed Tsukasa's hand. "Stay close."

"Got it!" she answered as she clung to me. Her soft, warm body was pressed up against mine.

Okay, not that close...

But I didn't have time to poke fun at her right now.

"We're not letting Gilvert get away!"

Open the court session? YES / NO

Faced with the text floating in the air before me, I forcefully tapped YES.

Rrrrrrrrrrumble...

The ground began to shake and rumble. The cathedral's ground, walls, and ceiling all took on the appearance of a wriggling liquid.

This was the Judgment Spell's basic ability: the Trial Spell.

The Scales of Judgment appeared, and me and Tsukasa were suddenly wearing court robes.

A window that had popped up beside me was displaying *Courtroom Auto-Generation Mode* and a mini map of the area.

With this, we'll be able to see the high priest's location.

The mini map allowed us to know who was where in relation to the trial. But something about the current display had me dumbfounded.

"There are ten thousand people in the gallery..."

The map displayed a donut shape that was composed of people, with an open space in the middle. The number of people in the gallery was over ten thousand.

The wall before us opened up. And what we saw...

"Akky... What on earth is this?!"

Church members, more church members, and more and more...

Inside the cathedral, the arena seating on the first and second floors had over ten thousand seats.

Every single seat was filled with a church member wearing a white robe and holding a candle.

In the darkness, we were surrounded by thousands of floating faces, illuminated by the candle flames. Not a single one of them made a sound.

But something was off. More than being mystical or mysterious, the sight was eerie.

"Court of Divine Punishment—commence trial."

A voice echoed around us. I knew instantly it was the high priest.

Rrrrrumble...

The sound of another transformation began accelerating.

Damn it, so this is his strategy? This is bad...

We were on the enemy base. The smell of the tallow of the candles combined with the damp air made me feel like I was inside the belly of a beast. The Holy Scourge hadn't been the only sacred artifact in his possession...

Swoosh—the sound of something cutting through the air. Then next to me: "Graaagh!" The old hero groaned.

"Laman!"

The fireball he had been generating over us was snuffed out, and in an instant Laman was dragged away and disappeared into the darkness.

This must have been the work of the Holy Scourge. I had forgotten that Laman's defense was his weak spot.

"Arson," said the high priest. "I see you are attempting to light fire to my cathedral, reckless old man. Someone as obsolete as you has no place here today."

"Hmph, I see you take after your father, Gilvert!" said Laman. "You love looking down on people."

"Oh, what a pitiable sight. A foolish old man, who believes his wife and friends died in an accident, crawling around and howling like an animal."

The high priest's response made me do a double take.

Wait, does the high priest know the true cause of the Hero's Party Homicide Case?

The case, in which three people had died, still had some suspicious points surrounding it. If the man with Black Scales who attacked the hero right before the incident was connected to the high priest, we might be able to find out the truth through him.

"What?! Are you saying that you know the cause of the fire that killed Fiona —? Guh, urgh!"

But it sounded like the high priest had restrained the Hero without giving him an answer.

"After this is over, I'll sentence you to death for the crime of humiliating my father."

"Damn it, where are you?! You've got no right to—"

"Ah, how good it feels to judge the people!"

"Show yourself, Gilvert!"

But the one who responded to my demand was not the high priest.

The Scales of Judgment floating above our heads started moving heavily

toward the center of the sky above us.

There sat another set of scales—the one generated by the high priest.

The two scales began to combine in the air.

The floor shifted. Tsukasa staggered with a yelp; I felt her body that I was holding close to me getting hotter.

Tsukasa has already passed her limit. I need to do something about him while protecting her.

As I decided this, the floor under us moved and brought us over to the middle of the arena.

"All men are not created equal. Man creates man above man itself."

Gilvert Trinity stood in the arena and spoke as if spellbound.

"Those who stand above others and judge humanity cannot be allowed to make mistakes. Only he who is absolutely righteous may conduct trials for this kingdom."

The ten thousand people in the gallery all agreed with Gilvert in unison: "The high priest's words are right and just."

"You and Tsukasa are not the same."

The words rushed out of me, without thinking.

"High Priest Gilvert Trinity...your righteousness is corrupt."

In my arms, I held Tsukasa's feverish young body, drenched in sweat.

Even if the whole world turned against us, I would protect her.

"How foolish. There's no way some average young boy summoned from another world could even begin to understand the will of our God in this world. Yet you make such gross accusations."

The head of the church was surrounded by his followers as far as the eye could see.

"I am God's proxy. These two hands are the sacred hands of God. It is unthinkable that they could be sullied by evil deeds..."

He spoke, opening his hands, which glowed bluish-white with luminol.

"You poor, unenlightened Japanese people. Allow me to teach you the error of your ways. To doubt the proxy of God is a sin."

Bwonnng—a set of huge golden scales had appeared above our heads.

The pans were about the size of a house; each one hovered above my and the high priest's heads.

And under that, black text was displayed:

Accused: Akuto Satou, Tsukasa Wagatsuma

Charge: Blasphemy

"I hereby sentence the brother and sister to death," Gilvert announced.

Then the words *Verdict: Death Penalty* appeared.

I had never heard of blasphemy being a punishable crime. Gilvert must have made this up himself.

A crap trial following crap laws. But still...

The gallery didn't show any signs of doubt. All I could see were nods of agreement toward the high priest.

"The Shards of Judgment are fragments of what used to be whole. Since ancient times, when the holders of a divided sacred artifact were in conflict with each other, a decision would be made to determine the true holder."

The high priest, being knowledgeable about the nature of the sacred artifacts, must have deduced how the Judgment Spell would act in a situation like this.

"Based on the system of the Scales of Judgment, the one to settle the dispute would be a third party: the gallery."

In my arms, Tsukasa whispered, "What is that? It looks so gross..."

She was staring above us where black particles were swirling in the air. They

had been emitted from the gallery members' bodies.

"Ah, what a beautiful sight...a black ballot to determine the sinner," said the high priest. "Let us call this decision the Trial of the Great Scales."

Each body in the gallery produced a black particle, which moved up toward the pans of the scales.

"Now, my most devout disciples, tell us who it is that must be judged."

As if responding to his call, the black particles all flew over to our side of the scales.

C-creeeak—it sounded like the whole world was creaking as the Great Scales began to tip.

"O sinners, come from afar from otherworld Japan. You will be punished!"

In the center of the arena, the high priest folded his hands as if in prayer.

"PUNISH! PUNISH! PUNISH! PUNISH!"

The church members surrounding us began to chant together.

I thought I heard a familiar voice—but there was nothing I could do about it right now.

I hadn't expected there to be so many... This will take some time to reverse.

I wouldn't be able to quickly reverse all ten thousand people's brainwashing while standing here in front of the high priest.

As for the punishment...I guessed being deemed the "sinners" here meant that we would have our bodies transformed so that we could never again stand in the courtroom.

But that wasn't all. This was the church headquarters. The high priest would add us to the Purgatorial List and have us brought to the Compost Room and turned into soil.

What would happen to the kingdom after that? If it were up to the church, the princess, Ileana, and anyone who helped spread foreign culture could be deemed sinners as well. Or maybe he would simply brainwash them, too.

I was overwhelmed with imagining the most hopeless outcome. Just then-

"Akky, look!"

Where Tsukasa was pointing, I saw one lone red particle floating in the air.

"The Rust of Doubt."

With even just one particle of the Rust of Doubt present, the tipping of the Great Scales had started to slow.

"Whose is it?!"

The high priest raised his voice as he walked over to the red particle. In the seats surrounding us, there in the front row of the first floor of seats...



"Oh. It was you."

There sat Gobta's mother, Lyra Boucher.

Right—the high priest had gathered his followers here before he knew about Lyra's testimony.

That's how she had been able to pretend to still be brainwashed and follow the others to the cathedral.

Lyra stood there, alone. Alba must have still been hiding in the basement.

"I—I have a question. For the high priest."

After being controlled by the high priest and unable to speak for so long, her voice was stilted.

"A question? Of what sort?"

The high priest seemed to go the route of placating her as he faced her with a smile.

"Wh-why...did Cumba have to die?"

"It was God's will." His eyes and mouth curved as he grinned. "He was called to Heaven by God."

"W-was it because I s-suggested he go to a h-hospital?"

"If you feel remorse for doubting the church's treatment, then stop with these suspicions."

"Then—wh-why didn't Alba...get better? And why was he m-made into compost?!"

"I am the proxy of God. Do you doubt God?"

"Does G-God want to silence us and c-control us like this?"

"You're a bothersome one, aren't you?" The high priest's smile was beginning to fade. "The church was kind enough to listen to your silly family troubles and even gave you a job."

"Gobta and my husband are not silly. And the one who I-listened to me was Cumba. I—I already had a job, b-but you brainwashed me, so I had to quit, and

you don't even pay—"

"You fool. Stop talking."

Lyra let out a yelp as she flinched back.

"Uneducated, uncultured people with empty heads are easy to brainwash. Precisely why you were deemed an 'especially devout' disciple and given the important station in the compost team. I was kind enough to overwrite all your worldly worries."

The high priest used this tone with her even though she wasn't brainwashed any longer.

His words are so different from Tsukasa's. Just listening to him makes me want to puke.

Listening to him talk, I started opening a large number of a certain type of window.

"The special Cleansing Prayer that I imprinted on the back of your head used extra trust from the other disciples. You caused that trouble for others just to gain your own peace of mind..."

The high priest's way of speaking had a persuasive power that forced people's wills to bend to him.

A person could brainwash another person, even without using magic. And he was good at it.

I was starting to understand. The holder of a Shard of Judgment was bestowed the Judgment Spell's Power of Words based on that person's innate individual strengths. That meant it was easy for an evil person to be bestowed an evil power.

"You must believe that we, the church, are right and just. Understood?"

The power of words to forcibly overwrite someone's thoughts.

"Y-yes..."

"If you obey now, God is willing to forgive this foolish irreverence. Turn to me and bow your head, and the scales will erase your vote of doubt."

Lyra trembled as she knelt.

"Repeat after me. 'The high priest's words are right and just.' These words will bring you happiness, just as they have for the ten thousand disciples around us."

As if begging the high priest's forgiveness, Lyra folded her hands together... and asked: "Wh-what will happen to Gobta? And my husband?"

"Worry not," the high priest responded with a smile. "Lowly races such as goblins will be erased from this kingdom. You don't need to think about them anymore."

"I've caught you red-handed in an act of criminal intimidation."

Tsukasa's voice rang out.

"On top of attempting to escape from your trial, the accused is piling up charge after charge."

From the center of the arena, the high priest began to approach her.

"Pfft. You foolish otherworlder." He again began to walk toward the center of the arena. "Intimidation? What part? I'm speaking amicably, am I not?"

"Acts of intimidation include threats of harm to a family member's life or liberty which induce fear. What you are doing to Lyra right now is, by definition, intimidation."

"In that case, surely it is necessary to brainwash such a fearful person for their own good. If not, one can never truly be at peace."

"There is no such thing as true peace in this world. Humans make mistakes and cause accidents everywhere they go. That precisely is why righteous judgment becomes necessary."

"Tsukasa Wagatsuma... You're still planning to proceed with the trial, are you? How laughable. Enough. An otherworld judge is not needed in this world. I sentence you all to death. Isn't that right, my loyal disciples?"

Gilvert Trinity turned around dramatically to face the gallery.

However...

""

...no one answered.

"...Oh? Did you not hear me?" He spoke once more. "Death to these blasphemous Japanese people! Isn't that right, my disciples?!"

Silence.

The ten thousand church members sitting around us were staring down at the arena, looking wide awake.

"Now the only person here with something wrong with their head is you."

I approached my sister from behind as I called out to the high priest.

"A-assistant Akuto Satou, what have you done?!"

Tsukasa, still unsteady on her feet, turned back to me.

"You finished, didn't you, Akk—I mean, assistant."

"Yeah. All present should have had the brainwashing reversed. Though there may be some left over."

I carried a small fox girl in my arms. "The high priest's words are right and just! Right and just, I say! Right and juuust!" It was Tamamo Keisei, in a little nun outfit.

The half fox-spirit had had some additional Cleansing Prayers imprinted onto her: I ONLY SPEAK WORDS THAT AGREE WITH THE HIGH PRIEST and I HAVE NO MEMORY BEFORE TODAY. She must have been acting pretty annoying to afford these extras.

"I'll reverse them now."

I inputted the same words as were written on Tamamo into the cancellation window and made them disappear.

"How did you reverse more than ten thousand—?!"

"It's the same method I used just now. While you were going at Lyra and the Judge, I copied enough of the reversals for ten thousand people. Then I just applied it to all of the gallery members displayed on the mini map."

"To accomplish such an act...in such a short amount of time..."

"Please don't act surprised at something so simple as this. There are plenty of Japanese people who are far more skilled than me. Though with your whole thought process, I'm pretty sure you'd just want to execute them too just for being otherworlders."

It was easy to duplicate the windows by imagining it like copying a computer file.

Once I had inputted the phrases into a window, I copied it into two, then copied those two into four. Then copied those four into eight... Do that fourteen times and you make over sixteen thousand windows. I was just doing that using small windows and directing them with swiping motions so that I didn't get noticed.

I say it was easy, but it did make me feel like I popped a few blood vessels in my brain.

It seems that when using the Judgment Spell for anything more than a standard trial, it sucks power from its user. It had felt like the blood in my brain was starting to boil, and my body was totally exhausted.

"Bwaaah! That felt terrible! Why is the back of my head so itchy?!"

Tamamo seemed back to normal after having her brainwashing reversed.

"That terrible vomit smell from the penance chamber is clinging to my beautiful, noble tails! How will you compensate for this damage?! You fool!"

She bounded around and then pointed at the gallery.

"That's right! I saw from the penance chamber! That man! And that man! Every day that Gilvert boy came to give him rotten eggs and sent him to the scene of the incident! He told him to interfere with Miss Judge's investigation! You dirty trickster! I'm glad I decided to betray you!"

She rattled on for some time.

"I'm glad you seem to be feeling better," said Tsukasa.

The men Tamamo was pointing at responded in apology to Tsukasa:

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"I-I'm sorry!"
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"I was brainwashed!"

"Everyone has really had their brainwashing reversed..."

"Besides Tamamo and Lyra, almost everyone had the same words imprinted on them, so it was easy. That goes to show that you think everyone besides you are all the same, Gilvert. You just want them to obey you. And you'll get rid of anyone who doubts you. It's so simple. So simple it verges on childish."

I was starting to lose control of the overflowing contempt I felt.

"'Man creates man above man itself'? Maybe. Maybe that is how society's system works. And you created that system, too. So how do you feel now?"

Tsukasa and I stepped out to the front of the arena and faced the accused.

"You know—having fallen from 'above'?"

"C-c-cu-cu-..." Gilvert was making a sound like an angry cockatrice. "Curse yooou!"

Everything around us was suddenly bathed in gold.

"Eek!"

"Tsukasa!"

I immediately moved to guard Tsukasa and pulled us to the ground.

I heard a whip cut through the air just inches above our heads.

"Akuto Satou! You bastard! You're nothing but a little brat!"

The Holy Scourge whipped wildly. Just as we had taken cover, it smacked against the magical windows opened around us and caused a bursting sound like firecrackers— "Maybe I pushed him too far." Though I had been interested in seeing what his true nature was like.

In my arms, Tsukasa looked up at me with a haggard expression and a worried look in her eye.

"Akky, you're bleeding!" she said, touching my cheek.

Drops of my blood started to drip from my face. It must have been cut from

the wind pressure caused by the whip.

"Now I have to punish him for hurting you, too!"

"Give it a rest, Tsukasa. You yourself said it would be ridiculous for a judge to sue someone for some minor damage like this."

"But!"

"You have to stay calm, Tsukasa. Just focus on handing down the correct verdict."

As we spoke, Gilvert's attacks were getting fiercer.

I could hear his whip slashing mercilessly at the windows protecting us as I looked down at the window at my fingertips.

Our trust points were displayed there...and they were going down.

We had more than 1,500,000 before, but now it's down to less than 10,000...

The standard Cleansing Prayer was twenty-four words in total. That required 48 trust to cancel. I had canceled the Cleansing Prayer on more than ten thousand people, and now even more trust was being used to defend against the Holy Scourge's attacks...

"God shall...expunge you...from this world!"

The clergyman had completely lost himself. I peered at his face through the space between the windows.

His eyes and mouth were warped into a dark smile. The way his white hair whipped around while he swung the whip made him look like some kind of evil spirit.

"I will judge you, even if it takes every ounce of mana from every one of my disciples!"

His violence would continue even as it consumed the power of ten thousand people as its energy source.

We can't let him do that.

I tasted something metallic. The blood flowing from my head had dripped into my mouth. I was injured, and I didn't have any particularly useful attack spells.

What could I do...?

Just as the worry crossed my mind, the message I had been waiting for ran through my brain.

<<Master—I'm coming to assist you now!>>



Ka-boooom—!

A wall of the cathedral made a huge rumbling noise as it collapsed.

Bright streams of the sun's light crashed into the cathedral that had been shrouded in darkness.

And there, standing in the cloud of dust...

"Shiro!"

"Shiro, you came!"

...was our head maid, Shiro Katou.

"Impossible—the cathedral walls are supposed to be impenetrably thick!"

"Nothing can stop me from reaching my Master," Shiro replied coldly as she looked down at the recoiling high priest. "I break down all barriers to reach him, as I was taught."

Balancing on her left leg, she twirled her right, and with her special metallicheeled boots— "By my duty as a maid—I destroy anything in my way!!"

Ka-booooom—!

The whole wall appeared to blow up as Shiro smashed it with some kind of spinning kick.

"A-awesome...," whispered Tsukasa and I, totally dumbfounded.

I felt my crotch shrink back as I witnessed the overwhelming power of Shiro's

kicks.

Th-thank goodness she wasn't using her kicks during that game of tag...

Feeling relieved in more ways than one, I put aside the windows around us and stood up.

"Mister Akutooo! Miss Juuudge!" I heard the princess's lively bubbly voice calling out to us. "We're here to help, toooo!"

A pegasus carriage flew through the huge hole in the wall. There were a few people riding in it.

"I shall not allow intruders!"

The end of Gilvert's whip headed for the carriage. However—

"You're too predictable!"

—Shiro kicked it away in midair. I heard a sharp *snap!* as the whip fell to the ground like a wriggling snake.

"You dare attack Princess Ecstasia with a sacred artifact?!" Ileana growled from the carriage.

"I recommend the death sentence for the accused, Gilvert Trinity!"

"I-I've come this far... Perhaps it's time to take some hostages!"

Gilvert and his whip still moved to act.

"I won't let you do that! What's so scary about some holy whip anyway?"

Before anyone could stop her, the Judge crawled over to the whip...

"Order...," she shouted as she swung her right fist. "...in my court!"

Whump!

Gilvert let out an "eek!" One of the whips he held in his hand had been pinned to the floor by Tsukasa's fist.

It's been a while since I saw Tsukasa bang the gavel.

But I couldn't believe that she was able to anchor down a sacred artifact with her bare hands. Her risky behavior made me hold my breath. "Ha-ha! Did you forget I have one more Holy Scourge? I'll simply take you as my hostage, judge!"

As he shouted, he moved to swing the Holy Scourge he held in his left hand...

...but he couldn't move it.

"Wh-what are you doing, you dirty old man?!"

At his left—

"Goburo!"

Gobta's father, and Lyra's husband, was clinging strongly to his left arm.

"You hurt Lyra... You made her cry!"

Seeing what was going on from the pegasus carriage, Goburo had gotten down off it and made a beeline for Gilvert.

"Excuse me?!"

"Gobta and I were waiting all this time for her to come home!" Goburo was clinging to the high priest's arm with his whole body. "I was the one who got addicted to games in the first place! I'm the one who made Lyra worried! It's all my fault! I've wanted to apologize all this time!"

"You're in my way! Get off of me!"

"You use other people like tools! You should...apologize...to Lyra...!"

"Silence, goblin scum!" Gilvert swung his left arm. "Don't touch me! You'll get your filthy green color all over me!"

The whip flailed and lashed at Goburo's clothes. I could hear what sounded like Gobta shouting "Dad!" from up on the carriage.

"Apologize to Gobta! You tore apart a mother and son for this entire year!"

"Silence! I don't give a damn! Who cares about some inconsequential goblin family?!"

Gilvert Trinity: Violation of Oath Detected

Suddenly, the Scales of Judgment started to move.

Punishment: Transform body so that it may never again stand in the courtroom The high priest's behavior had defied his oath to the scales.

The body of the descending scales began to grow sharp tentacle-like needles...

...and cut through the air toward Gilvert.

"Tch! C-Counter!"

But the holder of the Holy Scourges was unable to move them with Tsukasa and Goburo still latched onto them. With an "Eek!" all he could do was raise the whip's handle in his hand as he tried to protect himself.

Clang—! A sound like metal on metal rang out.

The oldest sacred artifact and the newest clashed together, sending out sparks like blinding fireworks.

As my vision cleared, I saw that both Holy Scourges were lying on the floor of the arena.

"The oldest sacred artifact..."

I walked toward them. They had a kind of gloss like a piece of art from an ancient civilization. But they were alive.

Something was drawing me to them. I reached out my hand.

"Don't touch them, you commoner!"

I ignored Gilvert's words and knelt to take them into my hands...

And my vision went black.

Every nerve all over my body felt like it was being invaded by some foreign body. My pores were prickling.

Somewhere far away, I heard everyone's voices...

"Akky!"

"Master!"

"Mr. Akuto!"

It felt like blood was spurting from the back of my head.

But my eyesight was still completely dark. I couldn't tell what was happening to my body.

But...I'm still okay. I can take this!

I concentrated on the *something* flowing into my body through both my hands. I needed to understand this.

I sensed that if I couldn't understand this, then there was no way for me to understand this world or its people.

"Pfft, ha-ha! You fool! Were you so drawn to this power that you now attempt to become its holder?! Go ahead and have your mana sucked away and die, then! Such power is not so simple to acquire!"

I shut out the grating sound from the outside.

In its place, the origin of everything started to come into view.

I saw the mana in the atmosphere. Still young, and sparse, and not yet adapted to this world.

Everything was rust red.

The world was covered in red rust, with no signs of abundance in sight. Lonely, and empty. A world in ruin.

This world, on the cusp of withering away, was about to change.

A flicker, then life began to grow.

The cycle of destruction and rebirth, sparked from what can only be assumed to be powerful forces from another world, repeats. Among this exists the Holy Scourge.

The Holy Scourge time after time held the existence called the Demon King in check. And eventually, humans began to prosper.

As they did the Demon King, humans feared the Holy Scourge, knelt down

before it, and worshiped it. The oldest sacred artifact was passed down for three thousand years, vanquished innumerable monsters, and likewise put innumerable humans to death.

The whip was in complete control. It could humiliate every hole in the human body, or rend a mountain in two and bury a goblin village in an instant. I saw visions of all races crying out in suffering.

These scenes were from the Holy Scourges' memories. They flowed without any concept of time. The amount of data was impossible for my brain to fully hold. Within all this was the memory of exchanges between the previous king and the high priest...

I want it.

I spoke the word:

"Acquire."

The two Holy Scourges in my hands began to tremble with heat.

I felt invisible tentacles crawl through my veins and become one with me.

"Support."

I chanted the word and visualized it. The veins throughout my body pulsed, and the Scourge naturally imitated their shape.

"I understand now. This truly is God's scourge."

The whip had taken the shape of a human vascular system of the same height as me. The figure, colored a reddish black, became a sort of human chair and held me up in the air as I sat on it. It was a flexible power. In that case...

"This mud..."

I extended the tip of the whip and dug it into the earth of the arena. Within the earth, I stretched out the whip again in the shape of my veins and again returned it to the surface.

"Fix it in place," I commanded, holding the mud vertically in place.

The pillar of mud now standing in the middle of the arena didn't move an inch. It looked sturdy enough to act as a standin pillar for a building.

"Our examination of evidence is complete. Basically anything is physically possible with this whip. We can acknowledge that much."

A special power bestowed by God. With this in my possession, I felt like anything was possible.

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"Akky... Your hair...!"
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That made me realize.

I grabbed the hair at the front of my head. It had turned a beautiful white color, and it was hot, like my hair follicles were burning. I could tell my whole head of hair had turned white. I narrowed my eyes and saw my eyelashes looked white, too.

Tamamo and Goburo also gasped in surprise.

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"Akuto, my boy..."
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The back of my head was caked with blood. It must have been a strange sight along with my hair instantly turning white.

"I guess this was unavoidable in order to acquire it."

But changing my hair color was a small price to pay in exchange for possessing the strongest of the sacred artifacts.

"R-ridiculous!" Gilvert cried, his voice trembling. "You say you've 'acquired' it?!"

Still sitting on my creepy human chair made in the shape of my own veins, I looked at the man with the same white hair as me.

"I get how you feel now. This really is a special power."

In my left and right hands, I could feel my body getting used to the feel of the two Holy Scourges.

"Though I didn't get to meet God, holding these things really does make you feel like you naturally belong above all other humans. Especially since that's how you've treated it for these past three thousand years."

"S-so you really...saw it, didn't you? Those three thousand years, and the

[&]quot;Mr. Assistant..."

beginning of everything?!"

"Gilvert."

I sat there, and he stood. I moved the human chair to come to eye level with him.

"So it's okay for the holder of this thing to rule over other humans, right?"

As I spoke, I held out the handle of the whip to show him.

"Ah—so now you wish to become the proxy of God yourself?!"

The people around us began to murmur restlessly.

"In that case, allow me to reinterpret the meaning of the Holy Scourge! It has all been misunderstood up until now!"

He knelt down before me and darted his eyes back and forth as if turning the pages of the scriptures inside his head.

"Akuto, chosen by God themself! Summoned from another world, and bestowed the special power of acquisition and thus the ability to obtain all sacred artifacts! This is the will of God, and God's revenge against we who imitate the culture of that other world! Yes, it is Akuto who should rule over the people of this world! He is chosen by God and is the new, righteous, high priest!"

He raised both hands above his head, turned around, and spoke to the cathedral in a loud voice.

"My power is nothing in comparison to Akuto's. I humbly step down as high priest. But as I am also skilled in wielding the Holy Scourge, if you would see fit to sometimes bestow one on me...I would be honored to work as your right-hand man."

I could feel the concerned gazes of the people around us as he spoke.

I must have looked like I was ready to take over as leader, having just been overwhelmed by the power of God's tool.

"I see now...why you don't doubt the 'righteousness' of this power."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm not doing it." I smiled back at him. "I don't want to become a high priest."

"What?"

"Thanks to you, I understand why I was called to this world. I thank you for that."

I folded the Holy Scourge in my right hand under my arm and held the handle of the left Scourge in both hands.

In front of his eyes, I started putting force into my hands like I was cracking a glow stick.

"A sacred artifact with unlimited physical power...a godly power that makes its holder want to command the people..."

The handle of the Holy Scourge was being bent by the hands of its owner.

And the man who had been its owner until just moments ago looked on in disbelief. "Y-y-y-you wouldn't!"

"Who needs..."

Crack! Fissures started to appear.

"...a thing like this?!"

Craaack—!!

The Holy Scourge was smashed into pieces!

The body of the whip lost its power and began breaking into pieces. The pillar of mud collapsed, and the end of the whip dried up like grass and began to wither away.

"АААААААААННННН!"

The man who had just stepped down as high priest of his own accord screamed with his eyes wide in shock.

"What have you done?! The Holy Scourge... The Holy Scourge... THE HOLY SCOURGE!!"

Crawling on the ground, he gathered up the fragments of the whip's handle.

But as he touched them, the fragments turned to dust in his hands.

"For the holder of the Scourge to destroy it themself... There is no going back from this!!"

"So what? We don't need it."

I got down from the human chair made of the second Holy Scourge as I spoke.

"It's the 'physically strongest' artifact...? More like the most violent. It's not needed in a peaceful kingdom like this."

"Hah, hah—but...to simply destroy it?!" He clawed at his head.

"Actually, we were ready to destroy the Shard of Judgement, too. We only decided to hold onto it because it seemed it might come in useful to meet God. But we don't need this old thing anymore."

If it fell into the wrong hands again, it would only cause more conflict.

"Why?! With the oldest artifact in your possession, you could have become a being of ultimate righteousness!"

"What exactly do you mean by 'righteousness'?"

"It is the same as your judge! To stand above others, know everything, and rule over others!"

"You and Tsukasa are not the same!"

I spoke to Gilvert who was kneeling at my feet.

"My sister has never said that she is right over any other person. That's exactly why, if she has even a shadow of a doubt about something, she investigates. She thinks, and thinks, and thinks it over again. And she asks me to stop her if there's even the smallest chance that she might be wrong. And if we're still wrong, it's better to let the people of this world do as they please. Even if that means whipping me or burning me."

His robe was coming undone, and his white hair he had been pulling at had

fallen to the ground.

"What did you want so badly, that made you go so far? Did you just want to believe that you were right? That on its own only brought more uncertainty. How can you prove that every single thing you say is correct? In the end, the only thing left that you could do is brainwash everyone."

"B-but there was no other way...," he said, sounding sad, "to achieve absolute peace of mind!"

"There's no such thing as absolute peace of mind. Just like there is no such thing as an absolutely righteous person. That's why everyone has to learn and keep trying, so that we can try to do the right thing."

"Everyone...?"

"Everyone gathered here today. These people who were made to suffer by you, even though they did nothing wrong."

"Their suffering...caused by lack of faith...?"

I wasn't getting anywhere with this.

"I guess I'll just go ahead and break the other one."

I held the other Holy Scourge in my hands the same way I did to shatter the first one.

"I-I'll apologize! I'll apologize, so please stop! I'm sorry!"

"Saying you're sorry won't bring back Cumba. And it won't heal the pain caused to the people who were brainwashed."

I had so many regrets in the back of my mind. And the smell and the feel of the compost still clung to me.

What I could do right now to help Alba's pain...was to find out the truth.

"I need you to confess everything you did."

"Y-yes! Oh, Akuto, God's chosen..."

With tears in his eyes, he began to talk.

"I had no idea about malignant tumors. There is nothing written about them

in the scriptures. The church's treatment, God's Panacea, works by heightening the natural healing power within one's body. But using it on a tumor caused it to activate and spread throughout his entire body."

The words now coming out of his mouth had zero affectation.

"In the rare case of any inconvenient casualties, I was instructed by my father to use the Compost Room...which I inherited from him along with the Purgatorial List. That was around the same time I received my Power of Words from my Shard of Judgment. As I became more and more skilled in brainwashing people, I had a dream. A dream where I saw a beautiful scene of our cathedral packed full of devout followers of our faith..."

Gilvert's gaze wandered, tracing the air in front of him. Like he was seeing a different place and a different time.

"Before he died, my father often lashed me with a whip. Our creed was correct. Do not dare doubt it, he would say. And he told me I would never fill our cathedral with followers. That I was a mediocre boy who would never surpass him. I wanted...to see our cathedral filled..."

His dream may have been fulfilled for an instant.

But now, the gazes of the people surrounding us were not filled with faith.

It was pity.

"I decided to use Cumba Nols, since he was going to die anyway. So I had to make his brother Alba disappear, too. It would be easy to hide the deaths of two war orphans that had been picked up by my father. Since Lyra Boucher knew about his illness, I would use her to experiment with my Cleansing Prayer as well as silence her. Just as I had resolved to do so...the Black Scales came to me and lent me their power—the power of forbidden magic."

Shaking all the while, he spilled his motives to us.

The crowd looked on as he did. The gallery of spectators that had followed from the Grand Bench started to file in through the huge hole that had opened up in the cathedral.

"I thought I had come up with the perfect plan. A setup that the complacent

and peaceful people of this world would never see through. I thought...I could banish that Miss Judge who had been summoned and made her declaration of her intention to judge God. And I could get rid of this otherworld culture... I could bring the kingdom back into the church's control..."

The high priest's torn robe began to slip down over his shoulders.

All over his exposed body, I could see innumerable scars that must have been made by the lashes of a whip.

It was evidence of the abusive upbringing he had been subjected to by his father.

"After confirming in advance that I could really use the forbidden material transfiguration magic...on a rainy day that blood would be washed away...I used the Nols brothers as my timer...and collapsed the building right in front of the otherworlders' eyes... I emphasized the wrongdoing of our current monarchy... made the bodies into compost... I thought back to my father...believing I could obtain absolute peace of mind...using the Holy Scourge and the Power of Words... I could...this kingdom..."

Gilvert drooped his head like a child who had just understood that something he wanted was unattainable.

"Father was wrong... I...was wrong..."

Tears fell from his eyes onto the ground of the arena.

Seeing him like this made me feel all sorts of conflicting things. But...

"Tell us more about the Black Scales."

We needed to push him for more information. For the truth that was lurking in the shadows of this major incident...

"Were they involved in the Hero's Case?"

Before, Gilvert had called Laman a "foolish old man, who believes his wife and friends died in an accident." It was possible that that fire was devised by the Black Scales, too. If we had pronounced Laman guilty and sentenced him to death without knowing that...I couldn't bear the thought.

"Th-that...I cannot say."

"That's too bad. Time to break this thing..."

I put my hands on the remaining Holy Scourge once again. Fissures began to appear in the handle as it cracked.

"S-stop! Please stop! I beg you!"

"Then will you tell us about the Black Scales?"

"Y-yes! The Black Scales are..."

But before he could say anything meaningful, something strange happened.

Starting from the top of his head, Gilvert's body started to become drenched in black.

And suddenly, floating in the sky above the arena, the Black Scales had appeared.

Article XII The Execution of Judgment Shall Not Harm Any Person

"Black...upside-down scales..."

I couldn't believe my eyes.

Against the Scales of Judgment's golden glow, these scales gave off a black, dark, murky glow.

They were smaller than the Great Scales, and their pans were hanging upside down. They floated nearby above Gilvert's head.

"Hey, bro! That's the thing I saw inside the building!"

It was Gobta. Having come in on the carriage with the princess and the others, he was now standing in the arena and looking up at the Black Scales.

"Master, please get back! This magic is unidentified and could be dangerous!"

Shiro ran over to me. I looked back up...

Some unknown code that resembled an ancient script was displayed in the air.

And Gilvert's body was gradually being transfigured into black text, starting from the top of his head.

In one instant—vwoom—there was a flash of green light.

Gilvert's face, converted into text, began to disappear.

"This light—it's the same as the object transference spell circle!" said Shiro.

I remembered the magic connecting the Hero's Village and the city, and the green light it gave off.

"It's trying to silence him."

The points connected in my head. Someone was trying to make his body into an object so that he could get away.

"...l..."

Just before he lost his mouth, Gilvert whispered in his last moments.

"...sold my soul to the Demon King..."

There was a clattering sound as his upper body was disassembled into text.

"Assistant! We cannot allow the accused to escape!"

"Right! We can't let him get away like this!"

It was our first time seeing something like this, but I figured the best way to resist the power of this text would be to use the Power of Words.

"Hand down your verdict!"

"...!" Tsukasa's eyes wavered slightly. I sensed what she needed.

"Tamamo! Please act as counsel to the accused!"

"What? Whaaat?! Are you mad, my boy?!"

Ever since having her brainwashing reversed, Tamamo had been watching along with the development of events.

"After he imprinted some crappy words on the back of my perfect little head?! Counsel?! I'd rather act as prosecutor and recommend all sorts of torture for that jerk's sentencing!"

The small fox girl with her five tails was practically foaming at the mouth.

"That's exactly why we need you," I countered. "If we give ourselves over to anger and hand down the verdict with that bias, we're no different than him. I don't think we can all be okay with that."

When Gilvert had been speaking, I was closely watching the expressions of the church members in the gallery.

Right after they had just been released from their brainwashing, their expressions were of anger and hatred. But after hearing about the high priest's father, and after seeing the scars carved all over his body, there were some who

changed to expressions of sympathy.

"Every criminal has some kind of circumstances. No one should be judged without counsel."

A thought came to the back of my mind. Maybe whoever was pulling the strings behind the curtain was using Gilvert to try to get us to bring down an unfair verdict, so that the people would in turn lose trust in us.

<<Akky. Thank you. I was thinking that he needed a lawyer.>> I got a message from Tsukasa. I had sensed her strong conviction just then.

Although we had broken from the usual trial procedure and were forcing our way through, when it came to the important stuff, we still couldn't lose our faith in the Japanese court. If we did, it would cast a shadow over Tsukasa's convictions.

<<I'll protect your trial, no matter what.>> That was the whole reason she had been summoned to this world. I had to protect it.

"Tamamo. Please. I can't do it myself—it's too difficult for me."

"Hmm. Well, that's true. After all, I did score number one on the kingdom's bar examination! And I do possess thousands of years of knowledge! And unlike that Yeleniana who only knows about criminal sentencing, I'm a rare genius that's well-versed in all areas!"

Ileana ran up to her. "Stop comparing yourself to me about everything!"

The judge asked, "Does the prosecution have any further charges that they would like to bring before the court before the recommended sentencing?"

"No, ma'am! My recommended sentencing is the death penalty!"

"Please, Tamamo! No one but you can do this!"

Hurry!

"Fine. Listen well, everyone! I shall present my closing argument..."

Tamamo closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Among the criminal acts of the accused that have come to light today, points regarding his involvement in the building collapse, which took place outside the

church headquarters, remain unclear. Additionally, the accused had no direct hand in either the building collapse or the destruction of corpses. Furthermore, the accused was subjected to an abusive upbringing by his father from an early age, which may have caused him to lose the ability to make rational decisions, and may have led to an unsound mind. Taking all these circumstances into consideration, may the court issue a just verdict."

"I will make my verdict now."

As soon as Tamamo had finished her argument, the judge picked up where she had left off.

"Verdict: I sentence the accused to life imprisonment!"

The text in my window moved along with Tsukasa's words.

"I will state my grounds for the decision. Based on the objective facts revealed today, each piece of evidence, and each testimony, there is no doubt that the accused entered the building in question before the collapse occurred. The crime of breaking into a building is therefore established, and the accused is subject to penalty under Article One Hundred and Thirty of the Penal Code."

As she listed out the grounds for each crime, a window with corresponding text appeared at my fingertips.

"Regarding the worsening of Cumba Nols's tumor after being treated with God's Panacea, there is scope to deem it as negligence. However, the accused knew about the medical condition and still kept him inside the church to prevent him from receiving outside treatment. Furthermore, he used Cumba as a timing device for the building collapse, which led to his death. Even if this is not a direct act of murder, and even if the exact time of his death is unclear, we recognize the causal relationship between Cumba's death and the accused's actions, therefore establishing the crime of homicide. The accused is subject to penalty under Article One Hundred and Ninety-Nine of the Penal Code!"

I thrust my hand toward the text generated by the judge and concentrated hard on an image in my mind's eye.

We needed to keep Gilvert's body here. And I needed the power to do that.

"The court recognizes that Alba Nols was also used as a timing device in the

building collapse, but since he escaped the incident with his life, the accused will be charged with the crime of attempted homicide, subject to penalty under Article One Hundred and Ninety-Nine, and Article Two Hundred and Three of the Penal Code!"

The text I grasped in my right hand became like a chain.

I swung my arm.

"Regarding Cumba Nols's body being turned into compost in the church's compost room, while the execution of the act was carried out by one of the church's followers, the affected party was under the effects of brainwashing by the accused and was used as a tool for the accused to carry out his criminal acts. Therefore, we recognize the culpability of the accused, and hence charge him with the crime of destruction of a corpse, subject to penalties under Penal Code Article One Hundred and Ninety!"

As the text of the verdict linked together, I wrapped it around the accused's body.

I hoped to myself that this chain of text would be able to fix his body to the ground.

"With regard to the false testimony given at the scene of the incident, we apply the crime of perjury, subject to penalties under Penal Code Article One Hundred and Sixty-Nine! For acts of intimidation toward Lyra Boucher, we apply the crime of intimidation, Penal Code Article Two Hundred and Twenty-Two!"

Using the text created by her verdict and grounds for the decisions, I wrapped the chain around his waist.

I struggled against his upper body, which was already being converted and broken down into its own text.

"We take into account the accused's circumstances that he suffered abuse from his late father. However, being abused by a parent does not excuse using another human as a timing device for a building collapse."

Tsukasa began to summon her Power of Words: "Law Gravity."

Creak—I felt the chain of words in my hand become heavy.

The body of the accused knelt to the ground like a captured criminal.

"The victims in this case were at no fault of their own and were only trying to have faith to better their own lives. Yet the accused trampled that faith, along with the victims' lives themselves. As the accused was well aware of his crimes, he made a concerted effort to mislead the trial. From the manner in which he rejoiced to see the citizens of this kingdom in turmoil, it is clear that the accused not only lacked the ability to make sound decisions and was of unsound mind, but also that he abused his position of responsibility as high priest for an extended amount of time. He is a wicked, intellectual criminal worthy of the utmost contempt, who brainwashed approximately ten thousand people and deprived them of their freedom in order to satisfy his selfish desire to fill this cathedral."

Our trust level we needed to use the Power of Words was declining rapidly.

But at the same time, it was increasing just as fast.

I could sense the spectators around us being convinced by the verdict as they evaluated Tsukasa's judgment.

"Based on these grounds, both the accused's maliciousness and criminal responsibility are of the extreme degree. We can only imagine the feeling of his victims, such as Alba Nols, who was trapped among the compost with his brother's corpse. In light of the nature of his crimes, his methods of killing, his persistence, his abusiveness, and the heinous nature of the social consequences of his crimes, it is arguable that the ultimate penalty of the death sentence may be appropriate."

Snap. I felt a response.

The Black Scales began to disappear.

And beneath it, only the lower half of the accused's body remained.

"However, considering the fact that we cannot conclusively say that there was no third-party influence on the motive for the crime in question, and considering the fact that the accused confessed and apologized in the end, I have decided that it is appropriate to sentence him to life imprisonment!"

The cross section of Gilvert's lower body, which had been separated from the

rest, rolled over and faced us.

There were no organs visible where his organs were supposed to be, only writhing letters like his body had been painted over in black ink. There was no blood. His legs were twitching like they were having convulsions. His upper body had been taken somewhere far away by the Black Scales. But he was still alive in this state.

Converting someone's body into text and breaking it into separate pieces... Is this the work of the Demon King?

I sensed there was an evil out there that was even more evil than the high priest.

Gonnng.

It was as if the sound rang out all over the kingdom.

Above our heads, the Great Scales had risen again and began to tilt toward where Gilvert had been standing.

I could see the black particles that had been generated by all in the gallery had stuck to his side of the balance and weighed it down.

Below the pan, there was a line of text.

Guilty

Accused: Gilvert Trinity

Charges: Breaking into a Building, Homicide, Attempted Homicide, Destruction of a Corpse, Perjury, Intimidation

He was unanimously found guilty.

A line of text appeared to signify the end of the trial.

Three Shards of Judgment descended into Tsukasa's and my hands...





lleamas

Miss Judge! I would like to ask about your recent decision against the death penalty!



Akutos

That kind of thing usually isn't discussed outside the grounds for the ruling declared at the trial.



Tsukasas

Since the ruling was rushed and cut short, and since it's such an important matter, I'll explain more. The death penalty is the ultimate punishment; it robs a person of their life. There are standards in place to ensure that this sentence is decided very carefully



Shiros

What are the standards?



Tsukasa:

Right, so...

The Supreme Court's criteria for the death penalty are...

- 1 Degree of the offense
- ② Motive
- 3 The nature of persistence or cruelty in the manner in which the victim was killed
- (4) Outcome of the crime and the number of victims
- (5) Sentiments of the bereaved family members
- 6 Impact of the crime on society
- 7 Defendant's age
- (8) Defendant's previous criminal record
- 9 Circumstances after the crime was committed

If the death penalty is deemed unavoidable from the standpoint of balance of punishment, and from the standpoint of general precautionary considerations, the death penalty is also an acceptable option.



Meanas

By "number of victims"...does that mean the death penalty isn't used if only one person was killed?



Tsukasas

No, there are plenty of capital punishment cases where there was just a single murder victim.



Shiros

So much to consider... It's all quite complex.



Tsukasa:

There are many intertwined circumstances involved in a murder. You can't simplify something that isn't simple. We have to deal with complex things in a complex way.



Akwkos

If I remember correctly, some crimes are always punishable by death.



Tsukasas

You're referring to instigation of foreign aggression. That was one of the possible charges we listed...but we weren't able to establish it with the facts that had come to light.



11eamas

I was getting really fired up. That man still has further offenses we didn't get to prove.



Tsukasa:

I had planned to pursue some of the unknowns in the case, but the appearance of the Black Scales made that too difficult.



Princess:

I wonder if there's an evil mage lurking somewhere... Our kingdom is very complicated.



Tsukasas

I don't think bringing Japanese standards into this other world is necessarily the right thing to do. I believe that we need to come up with new standards if we're going to judge the various races, or even God... Isn't that right, Akky?



Akutos

When that time comes, we'll just have to figure something out.



Princess:

I'm counting on you guys!

Article XIII The Truth Heals

The Trial of the Great Scales had ended.

As head maid of the Royal Cabinet, I assisted with various matters after the case.

First, I searched for the party responsible for removing the upper body of Gilvert Trinity, the man who brought forth the Black Scales. Unfortunately...the search remained inconclusive.

I attempted to interrogate the lower body we were able to capture, but naturally, it was unable to speak. Additionally, it continued to twitch as if having convulsions. It looked almost as if the upper body, which had been taken somewhere else in this world, was being tortured. Gilvert Trinity's lower body was going to be contained at a research facility as it carried out his life sentence.

Regarding the numerous other people who were impacted by this incident...

I discovered the Hero Laman tied up in a hidden room of the cathedral and rescued him. I rescued Alba from his hiding place in the basement of the congregational hall. Regarding the followers who were still experiencing confusion after their brainwashing, we decided to have them cared for by an expert. As for Gobta, Goburo, and Lyra...the maids escorted the Boucher family safely home.

My Master, Akuto Satou, stood at the center of the procedures after that.

Miss Judge was temporarily brought to the Royal Hospital. In addition to her severely poor physical condition, we needed to investigate the effects that holding the sacred artifact had on her body.

Still, she continued to communicate with Master over telepathy from her sickbed, as they coordinated with settling the legal side of things. It seemed they were going to take advantage of a support system for the victims of the case and proceed with the seizure of the church headquarters' property.

Along with the case's resolution, the truth spread across the kingdom.

After saving the evidence from the church headquarters, it was decided to demolish the building.

The building where such unsavory secrecy and brainwashing occurred is now gone.

In its place, may the story of Miss Judge's verdict be passed down as the history of our kingdom.

The people in the city no longer showed any signs of unease.

It appeared that our kingdom's peaceful days had returned.

Two days later, in the middle of my work, while waiting for Master outside of a park bathroom...

"Shirooo!"

Princess Ecstasia called out to me.

"Y-yes?"

It had been a while, so I was nervous. It was my first time speaking with her in about ten days.

"I'm so sorry...for pushing you away that time, Shiro."

"Please...it was no bother at all."

When she was near me, it was like being surrounded by the scent of a field of flowers. That was how lighthearted she made me feel. My body felt warm and fuzzy.

"It is all I could ask for that you are happy once again, Princess."

Truth has the power to heal people.

How did the incident occur? Who is responsible, and in what way? After solving these questions and understanding the relationship between them, our own discontent naturally resolved as well.

"Oh, Shirooo, you're too much! Let me pet youuu! ☆"

With a giggle, the princess did me the honor of petting my tail.

"Nnh..."

I couldn't help but let out a whine. I was happy.

"...Shiro. You know, I may be a happy person, but I don't have enough brains."

As she held my hand, I sensed a shadow behind her expression.

"It helped us so much that you worked hard alongside Mr. Akuto. On the other hand, I was no help at all. I had no idea what was going on."

Mr. Akuto. My designated Master.

His name carried a different weight within me than it had before.

"I believe your judgments were correct, Princess Ecstasia."

When I first met him, I thought my Princess's summoning spell had failed.

After a great amount of time and effort, what she managed to summon from the otherworld Japan was a young girl and boy. While the former was a judge by profession whose appearance had changed, the latter was just an average high school boy. At the time, I thought that there must be someone more capable that we could have summoned.

But my understanding changed.

This seemingly average boy, summoned to a world outside his own, shed tears for the people of this world, traveled all around for their sakes, and acknowledged their worth and complimented them. He even rescued a man out of a box of human compost and transfused his own mana to him, and in the end managed to reverse the brainwashing of over ten thousand people.

That was anything but average.

After this, we will hold a private conciliation.

A conciliation is a kind of discussion. I was told it was going to be a conciliation procedure used by the family court to attempt to amicably reconcile a marital relationship.



We were holding the conciliation procedure at Mr. Goburo's request to Master. Although his son Gobta's case was decided not to be taken to prosecution, he was apparently unsure of how to talk to his wife after everything that happened.

What kinds of wounds are caused when a family is torn apart by the hands of a third party? Unfortunately, as I have an owner rather than a family, I do not know.

But Master would understand.

He was able to encourage Gobta and also enlist the help of Elma as a consultant. He said he didn't want to handle the matters of a family in another world only using the common sense of the Japanese.

"Divine retribution"—I think I'm starting to understand the meaning of those words.

Master may have been given to this world by God themself.

In each case, Miss Judge handled the legal decisions.

But there was one fundamental issue—the understanding of what is important and what is unnecessary to the people of this world.

A heart that is not tempted even when in possession of awesome power and can destroy that power.

What the kingdom needed turned out to be the ability to judge powers that were not being used for good.

"Shiro?"

Those lovely, round eyes were looking up at me.

"I was not able to completely protect you all on my own."

The words naturally came out of me.

"It's all thanks to Master."

After all this, I noticed how small I really was.

While repeating over and over like an idiot that I must protect my Princess, I

wasn't able to protect her at all. Trying to handle everything with my own hands and feet, I simply got swept away by the magnitude of everything.

Master's "protection" was broader, larger.

He not only tried to protect Miss Judge from danger. He protected her convictions, which in turn protected the kingdom, which also protected Princess Ecstasia. That was how large it was.

"Princess Ecstasia, if you are unsure about anything, I believe you can rely on Mr. Akuto for help."

My original Master opened her cute, round eyes wide.

"It seems I don't need to ask you again to stay with Mr. Akuto."

She sounded happy.

"I felt it from the very beginning...that Mr. Akuto was chosen by God."

"God's chosen...assistant?"

"Yeah, something like that!"

Just then I heard water rushing. I sensed that Master had finished his business.

Then I heard a yawn followed by the sound of him washing his face at the sink.

Master must have been very exhausted.

"...I must protect Master."

Again my words slipped out of my mouth.

A Master different from the Master I had been with since I was young. I was ordered to serve him, accompanied him, and helped him. But now, after our significant amount of time spent together...some different feelings had begun to grow.

I felt calmed by his scent. I experienced kind feelings when I thought of him.

I was very interested in his feelings and thoughts. I wanted to work for him.

From now on, more—

As I felt this new sense of determination, I heard another maid speak up. "Princess Ecstasia, it is time..."

"Okay, Shiro! I'll leave it to you!"

"Yes, Princess! I will work my hardest to serve Master Akuto."

"Then I'm going to get back to my official business!"

Behind her with that dazzling smile, I could see the people waiting for my Princess.

"Everyone, thank you for waiting!"

She ran off, her cute, pink maid outfit fluttering as she went. Her maid bodyguards who had blended into the surroundings followed her.

"Oh, Shiro!"

In the middle of everyone, she turned around to face me.

"I'm looking forward to the party tonight!"

Right. We're holding an event tonight.

A party to celebrate our accomplishment together...

Epilogue: God's Chosen Shall Have All Power in Their Grasp

"Mr. Akuto looks so cute when he's sleeping. Squish, squish, squish!"

"You mustn't poke him, Princess. Akky's exhausted."

"Hey, Akky boy! Break time is over!"

"Tamamo, no it's not. It's recommended to have a fifteen-minute break for every hour of gaming."

"Shut your trap, Yeleniana! You follow that stupid rule, and you ended up a four-eyes anyway!"

"I offered up my eyesight to my love of Japanese novels, not video games! I have no regrets!"

"Miss Judge, Master's eye mask is falling off."

"Aww... He's really so cute... I could stare at him forever. ♥"

The rowdiness made me open my eyes.

I saw a pink, fancy room around me.

Outside the window, the lights from a group of buildings sparkled against the night sky.

Right...we're having our party to celebrate the end of the trial.

It was a weekend evening after I had hurried to finish all our urgent work.

We had all gathered on the top floor of the royal palace's tower, aka the princess's room, and were playing video games.

"Oh, Mr. Akuto! Wake up and smell the nulla poena sine lege!"

On my right was the princess, with her innocent, lighthearted smile.

"Sorry, I must have fallen asleep. How long was I out?"

"Exactly twelve minutes."

On my left, Shiro held an eye mask in her hand.

"All right, time to get up—oof!"

Boing—as I tried to sit my upper body up, my face smushed into something soft.

"Eek! Oh, Akky..."

A familiar, familial smell. It was my sister's magnificently huge boobs.

"Wh-what are you even doing?!"

"Letting you use my lap as a pillow, of course! We always used to do this."

I looked at her face upside down. She blushed as she smiled down at me.

"Yeah, when I was a little kid!"

I was surprised she was so okay with doing this kind of skin-to-skin in front of everyone. My head fell back down after hitting her breasts and was buried back into her soft thighs. There seemed to be no escape from this booby trap.

"Aw, after it's been so long since we got to do this kind of thing..."

"You should care more about what other people might think."

"What? It's fine! We're all like friends here, anyway!"

Friends.

Shiro, the princess, Ileana, and Tamamo.

"Well, I'm not friends with that dumb elf!"

"Hey, Tamamo. You must be pretty embarrassed with how everything went down. First you worked as the bad guy's counsel, then you went and got brainwashed. Don't you think it's about time you turned in your lawyer's pin?"

"What? Of the eighteen charges you brought to the court, how many of them were accepted, huh? A measly six! You lost two-thirds of them—twelve! You

lose! Loser! ☆ Loserrrr! ☆"

"There's something wrong with your logic—"

The two of them started bickering again.

"I didn't say we were friends. I said we were *like* friends. After all, it's not right for people related to the court to get too close to one another. The only friends you need are the Law and the Truth."

That last part sounded like some kind of weird moral out of a kids' show.

In any case, Tsukasa seemed back to her lively old self.

"I'm glad you're recovering, Tsukasa. Are you feeling all better?"

"The mana IV thing they gave me really made me feel better. I'm fine now. Sorry for pushing so much of the responsibility on you while I was in the hospital."

"It's no problem. You're just a girl, anyway. You shouldn't overdo it."

I needed to take this chance to say what was on my mind.

"Okay? No more risky stuff that's gonna shave years off your life. Promise me."

We sat on the carpet, staring at each other. As a man, there was no way I was going to let my now fifteen-year-old sister die before me. And her lack of knowledge about this world was dangerous. I had tried to remind her of this, out of worry, but...

"Akky. Do you really think you can say that to me?"

The atmosphere shifted. Her big, reddish-brown eyes had a glossiness to them.

"You're the one who's been overdoing it. If you'd made any wrong moves, you might have been made into compost yourself. And you even got your hair turned stark white... Doesn't the wound on the back of your head still hurt?"

She reached over to pet my head.

I'm the one who was making her worry.

I might've been the only person Tsukasa felt like she could rely on in this world.

"This is nothing compared to the pain that the victims are feeling."

If anything, the aching wound on the back of my head just made me feel more motivated to keep moving forward.

"We'll judge the evil forces of this world together."

There was no use anymore dwelling on whether I should be allowed to judge.

"After all, that must be why we were summoned here."

If this was your average *isekai* fantasy story, the Japanese person who came to another world would be able to use some kind of special power bestowed on them by God. But there was something different about my acquisition skill.

I had realized one way to use it when I shattered the oldest sacred artifact. If I acquire a power, I can inspect and verify it. And if I become its owner, I can destroy that power. That must go for any power, no matter how divine.

"Tsukasa...let's keep working on your plan to judge God. Before we ourselves get judged."

I had always wanted to have special powers.

Something like a cheat skill or a superpower in battle. I've always loved cool powers like that.

But that's all in the past now.

In a world where the various races are no longer fighting to survive and are just living prosperous, peaceful lives, super-strong powers might not be necessary. Conversely, someone getting seduced by such a power then trying to covet it would only plant seeds of conflict. I don't believe it's possible for everyone to only use that kind of power for their own self-preservation. And sometimes, like in Gilvert's case, a person can become ugly and warped as a result of trying to hide their transgressions.

I want to do what I can to help this world.

"Akky...you've changed," Tsukasa said, her eyes open wide. "You're so cool... I

love you... Mmm...!"

Saying it like a whisper, she pursed her lips and leaned toward me.

"Master, our Ogre Eats has been delivered."

Just then Shiro showed up holding a large amount of food and drinks.

We laid out our delivery food on the low table in the middle of the room: pizza, yakitori, sushi, fries, soups, sodas...

"All my favorites! Let us feast!" Tamamo launched herself at the spread of food.

"Thanks, Shiro," I said, moving away from Tsukasa. "Tsukasa, as long as Shiro's here, I think I'll be okay. Don't worry."

"If you trust her that much...then I believe you," she answered with a nod. "I've been wanting to tell you since before the building collapse. I think you have a much easier time getting close to the people of this world than I do. I think you should follow your own judgment."

"Tsukasa..."

"Akky, I...I trust you."

"Thanks. Well, don't you want to start drinking?"

Tsukasa's eyes had drifted over to lock onto her beers that Shiro had taken out.

"Everyone, go ahead and eat and drink whatever you want!"

Tamamo was already happily shoveling inari sushi into her mouth and washing it down with miso soup, so we didn't really get the chance to say a toast. I walked over to the low table where Tsukasa and Shiro were.

"Mr. Akutooo!"

The princess walked over with bottle and cup in hand and sat down next to me.

"Let me pour your drink for you! There you go."

With no time to politely decline, the princess poured out some dwarf-made

cola into a cup and handed it to me.

"Thank you. I do love cola. Here, let me pour yours."

Still sitting, I picked up a cup and poured her a drink.

"I'm so happy!" She started to sip.

Her drinking pace was slow. I slowed my own pace to match her tiny sips. I put Ileana and Tamamo bickering in the background out of my mind and savored the feeling of the soda bubbles fizzing in my throat...

I'm glad this world has soda, too.

I've always liked sweet, bubbly drinks. Good thing it was this world I got summoned to.

As I finished drinking and set down my cup, I noticed that the princess's expression had changed.

"Princess, is something wrong?"

Her naturally happy smile, like a capital D on its side, had turned into a normal-shaped mouth as she stared back at me.

"Huh? Does something seem wrong?"

"Hmm? No, maybe it's nothing, but, you don't look as energetic as usual..."

As I said this, I realized maybe I hadn't been very considerate in bringing it up.

The recent incident must have been hard on her.

How much pain had it caused her to have to take on and face a crime that wasn't her own?

"...Um. You know, I'm not really sure if I understand...what I'm supposed to do, from now on..."

The usually energetic fourteen-year-old sat hanging her head.

"I talked with Shiro about it. And she told me I might try asking you..."

"Princess. I know you worked really hard."

I reached out my right hand.

I patted her on her little tiara-wearing head.

"Mr. Akuto..."

"If you're ever worried about anything, you can tell me. I'll do what I can to help."

If only I had come to this world and been able to say this to her earlier.

"...Hee-hee. Okaaay! I'm counting on you, Mr. Akuto!"

The princess in her pink maid outfit happily petted my right hand with her two hands.

"Aaah, I'm stuffed! Let's get to the gaming already, my boy! Or should I say, God's Chosen Assistant?"

"The heck is that?"

"Ahem. Lately, there are many of this kingdom's citizens who have started referring to you as such... God's Chosen Assistant. The one who judged God's proxy," answered Ileana.

"Mr. Akutooo! That's so cool! ☆"

"Sounds like I've made a bad impression...but I guess it's better than Window Mage."

Thinking back, thanks to the high priest's reaction to my powers, now I probably looked like someone who could acquire anything. But in reality, the acquisition skill wasn't unlimited, and anything I acquired would always start at level one. But it might be good if I hid those weaknesses and used this as a bluff against my enemies.

"Let's go another round! This game may be old-fashioned, but it isn't bad. And I like that there is even a character that resembles me! Good find, my boy!"

Tamamo was talking about the game Chiyodaku Fighter.

"It's good, right? It was made by one of the kingdom's citizens, after all."

It was a versus fighting game that Gobta had made.

The problems surrounding the Boucher household had been solved. I had been going every day to talk with Gobta. The flow of our conversation had led

to Tamamo, and he made this game for us as a thank-you.

I don't know about God's miracles, but I think this everyday life is a miracle in itself. This game made by a fan of Japanese games in a kingdom of another world is a miracle.

Under the large monitor in the room, there was a computer, with the USB I had borrowed from Gobta plugged into it to play the game.

"Oh? I suppose it will be fair game, then. I appreciate you keeping your promise."

Tamamo picked up a game controller with her oily hands and handed it over to me.

"Well, hurry up, then! Your promise isn't completely fulfilled yet, my boy!"

"Okay, okay..."

Sitting on the cushion next to Tamamo, I turned to face the monitor.

I grasped the controller.

The air was warm and smelled of oil.

There was something nostalgic and calming about this place.



The sun had set on the Chiyodaku Kingdom.

I went out alone to the balcony of the princess's room.

The space felt open, with its medieval European—style stone construction. I rested my hands on the metal railing.

Behind me, the party was showing no sign of winding down. I heard Tamamo: "You're next, Miss Judge!"

And the princess, who sounded like she was having a blast: "Do your best! Go, go, governance!"

Tamamo, after going six wins and five losses against me, decided it was time to start switching up opponents. I was happy to let her do as she pleased.

Time to think about what's next.

I felt my flushed body being cooled by the calm evening wind.

Below, the kingdom had been covered by a blanket of night. While the princess had copy-pasted the buildings from Japan, the scene was still darker than what you would see in modern Japan.

Out there somewhere, someone was in dealings with the Black Scales.

The image of the upside-down, pitch-black scales had been burned into the back of my mind. There was something unmistakably evil about it.

Without ever showing their face, someone had set up a crime like it had been an accident. Even now, they could be planning something evil out there somewhere, using forbidden magic...

While I had been thinking over all this, someone else had appeared on the balcony beside me.

"Shiro...how long have you been standing there?"

"Master, you could be sniped from this position."

I couldn't tell if the expressionless maid was joking.

As she sidled up next to me, her maid outfit brushed against my arm and tickled me.

"What were you thinking about just now, Master?"

Her blue eyes, like the color of thin ice, stared back at me in the darkness.

"About who set up this incident...and about the Black Scales," I answered. "At this rate, even more people will end up being used by them. The Scales of Judgment's Power of Words is dangerous, and its owner can judge us using the Great Scales. Just simply having it in our possession, we might lose the ability to protect what we want to protect."

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"Yes. I understand."
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"[..."

I gulped. Then I made up my mind to say it.

"I'll acquire every power in this world."

Shiro's beautiful eyes kept staring back at me, like she was waiting for me to continue.

"It's not that I want the powers for myself. It's so we don't get overwhelmed by them. So other people can't use them in the wrong way. If we're going to run the Supreme Court in another world, it's something we can't avoid."

I felt nervous saying this aloud for the first time. It was a pretty wild ambition.

But I was trying to find a way to subvert a crisis in this world in a way that someone normal and average like me could.

"...Sorry. What I'm saying must sound crazy."

"No. It is not crazy at all," Shiro replied, undaunted. "Thinking you might come up with this very idea, I have been investigating the circumstances in which the Black Scales appeared."

"Huh?"

"Because at that place, at that time, the person responsible must have been hiding in the gallery."

I finally understood what she was getting at. She had already been thinking the same thing as me and started working on it.

"I have split the investigative work among the other maids. Once we organize the data, I plan to report back to you, Master. Let us also continue the investigation together."

"Shiro...I love you."

I was totally overwhelmed at how great she was.

"Huh? Uh, no, that's..."

It had been thanks to Shiro that we had been able to infiltrate the church headquarters in the first place.

And she had been so dependable during the trial of the Great Scales, the way she broke through the wall to get to us.

"You were really so cool back there. If you could just stay by my side forever

__"

I started to say—but then felt my blood rush to my exhausted head.

My vision started to go black. I tried to steady myself on the railing, but my hands missed.

"Master, be careful!"

Shiro quickly moved to catch me.

This girl, smaller than me, and one year younger than me. I felt her heart beating against my chest.

Still dizzy, I heard the girl with her small dog ears say something in a small voice that I couldn't quite make out.

"...I like you, too, Master. You were very cool, too."

"Huh?" I felt my balance coming back to me. "Sorry, what did you say?"

"...It is not something that is appropriate to repeat."

"Oh...okay. Thanks, Shiro. I'll be more careful."

She probably had said something like, watch your step, or hold on tight to the railing.

"Anyway, Shiro..."

"Yes? What is it?"

The maid's innocent eyes looked up at me.

I felt like I was going to get sucked into their beauty. But I had to say this one thing.

"Your stomach is sticking out."

The lower part of her stomach was poking out of her clothes like a little potbelly.

I had just noticed it when she caught me from falling.

"...I am a dog, after all. When I eat, I eat as much as I am able." She wiggled her cute dog ears. "After eating only emergency rations during our undercover investigation...tonight's food was just too delicious...and I just..."

"Pfft...ha-ha! I never expected that from you, Shiro."

I couldn't help but laugh at the potbelly sticking out of her delicate frame.

"Is it so strange?"

She stared back at me sulkily.

"It's not strange... It's great... Ha-ha-ha, it looks like you're smuggling a slime in your dress."

"I sense you are making fun of me."

Her tail wagged as she blushed.

She's so cute.

Her cute tail and belly were shining in the moonlight.

On the balcony of the royal palace, she shone more beautifully than anything I had seen.

"I will digest it shortly."

Her stomach sunk back inward little by little. It was all I could do to stifle a laugh as I watched her belly retreat back into her maid outfit.

"Master. I would like to say..."

The head maid faced me and tidily straightened her posture.

The wounds from the time she tried to "ensnare" me were no longer visible on her neatly closed legs.

"Having the honor of working under you this time, I felt a certain roughness in your use of your maids. As I am a dog, after all..."

The girl with her silver hair looked at me with upturned eyes.

Just one week ago, the way she spoke to me felt expressionless and mechanical.

"To be given orders and work hard for my Master brings me great joy. Up until now, Princess Ecstasia did not give me orders very often, and I felt my body losing its edge."

But now, I could see that she was smiling happily.

"By my honor as your attendant, it is my greatest hope that you will continue to work me harder and harder."

Her cuteness, combined with her request to be worked harder, made my heart race for a different reason.

My heartbeat was going off like an alarm bell, but I managed to control it enough to respond to her.

"Thank you, Shiro. With your hard work, we'll make the courthouse stronger than ever."

"Yes, Master!"

Under the moonlight, the strongest maid in the kingdom responded happily.

"Please, do not hesitate to order me more and more from now on, God's Chosen Master. "



Afterword

Thank you for reading this book. I am the author, Fukurou Kogyoku.

It's been about a year since the first volume, but that's because the contents of the first volume ended up so problematic that I was taken in to the Chiyoda-ku S*preme Court for judgment... Just kidding! Everything is peaceful here.

After the first volume was released, I received many comments and opinions from a wide range of people: students, novel lovers, judges working for the Supreme Court, and even elementary school girls. It made me so happy. There was some harsh criticism among it all, but thanks to that I was able to understand where I had been lacking. I read them over and over. I took it all in, processed it, and used it to power up this second volume. I believe all feedback from my readers is right.

And in this second volume, I take up that concept of "right."

It's a difficult word. What does it mean to be right?

I often hear people say that "what is right varies from person to person," in a value-relativistic kind of way. But that's not convincing to me.

A trial provides one answer in the pursuit of righteousness. But it cannot always be right, and there will be trials that make mistakes. Sometimes laws themselves are bad in the first place. That's where things get interesting.

In this volume, the main character, who was supposed to be an ordinary, normal guy, becomes the central figure in "judging all that is not right in another world." But was this change right for the protagonist? All these difficult

questions aside...I can only hope that you enjoyed the story.

For those of you who were drawn to the cover illustration and picked up this

book: It's beautiful, isn't it? Please take a look at the frontispiece as well. Isn't

head maid Shiro so cute? If you read up until the end, she just gets cuter and

cuter. Even those who picked up the book from the second volume will surely

be satisfied! Shiro and the other characters all have lots of opportunities to

shine!

Acknowledgments:

To the illustrator, jonsun. Every time I receive one of your lovely illustrations, I

feel all my exhaustion melt away. Thanks to you, I can keep working hard. To K,

my editor in charge. Looking back at the guidance you've given me over email

so far, I feel like it amounts to more than a whole novel. I'm seriously grateful

for all your help. To the designers and proofreaders: I was impressed by all your

finishing touches. Furthermore, to the printers, to the booksellers, to my family

member R who gave me their opinions, to my coworkers A and M, and all my

friends, I am very thankful.

I don't know about the next volume yet, but I'll be happy if you enjoyed the

story. I would love some f-f-fan letters (blush). I hope to write even more

interesting things in the future, so thank you for your continued patronage and

support.

Fukurou Kogyoku

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