

CODE GEASS

コードギアス

反逆のルージュ

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE -0- ENTRANCE



Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI

Written by
MAMORU IWASA

BANDAI
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CODE GEASS Lelouch
of the Rebellion
ゴッドギアス
反逆のルージュ
1: STAGE -0- ENTRANCE

Lelouch plans to crush the Holy Empire of Britannia for the sake of his sister Nunnally. Meanwhile, his best friend Suzaku Kururugi was building a foothold within the Empire. Perhaps their destinies were already set by then.



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Lelouch 1
of the Rebellion

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PROFILE
MAMORU IWASA

Born in 1973. Received the 4th Sneaker Award for Most Outstanding Book with his "Dancing in the Wind - Legend of the Flying Dragon."

Lately, I've been having a hard time pulling an all-nighter. No energy drink can help me. No, seriously...

CODE GEASS

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反逆のルージュ

Lelouch 1

of the Rebellion

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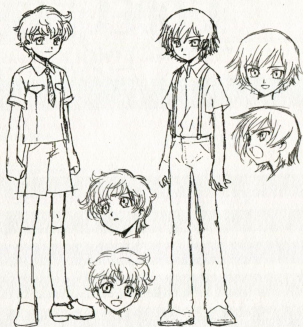
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MAIN CHARACTERS

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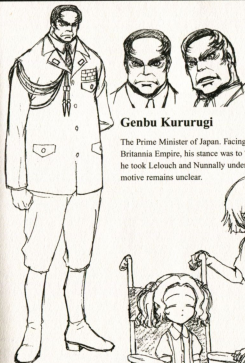


Suzaku Kururugi

Prime Minister Kururugi's son. He has a strong fighting instinct, and repeatedly clashes with Lelouch. But eventually he and Lelouch become friends. He is intimidated by his father.

Lelouch vi Britannia

A prince of the Britannia Empire. His mother Queen Marianne was assassinated, and Lelouch was sent to Japan to live with the Japanese Prime Minister, Genbu Kururugi.



Genbu Kururugi

The Prime Minister of Japan. Facing pressure from the Britannia Empire, his stance was to "fight or die." Officially he took Lelouch and Nunnally under his wing, but his real motive remains unclear.

Nunnally

Lelouch's little sister. Her legs were injured in the incident that took their mother's life, and the trauma took away her sight as well.

CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

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反逆のルージュ

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Interval

August 2017, Area 11

There are many strange rooms in the Ashford Private Academy clubhouse.

"This academy's pretty new to begin with," Lelouch Lamperouge, the Student Council Vice President, said.

He had straight black hair and was good-looking, with a hint of sadness in his eyes. His slender frame was a little too thin, but proportionate. He was one of the two most popular boys among the girl students.

"When the academy was built, they wanted it to be active. This resulted in strange clubs popping up left and right."

"I see." The other young man with light hair nodded.

His height wasn't that different from Lelouch's. His eyes were lit up like a child's, and his face looked younger than his age. This was Suzaku Kururugi, who was also a member of the Student Council.

"But Lelouch, I think the clubs in the main building are pretty normal."

"That's why this annex building has all the odd ones."

"Oh. I see."

"This place is chaos."

Lelouch looked down the hall that lay in front of him with a gloomy expression on his face. The mystical color of his eyes darkened.

The hallway had no windows, just inorganic steel doors lined up on both sides. The place was dim. Actually, the end of

the hall was pure darkness. There was no light coming in. The atmosphere was that of a cheap horror house.

Or the entrance to Hell, Lelouch thought as he rolled his eyes.

He was in a bad mood, which could be explained by the items in his hands. In his right hand was a large bucket. In his left hand, a new mop.

Suzaku also carried the same items, except that he had an apron on over his school uniform and was wearing rubber gloves.

Lelouch clicked his tongue and turned back to Suzaku.

"So why do we have to clean the old club rooms?"

Suzaku smiled with a worried look on his face.

"The academy anniversary is coming up, and it's the President's orders."

"And where is she?"

"Um, I think she said she had another 'marriage meeting.'"

"Again? I don't see the point anyway. She always breaks it off by kicking the guy in the groin. How about Nina?"

"She has some research to do."

"I think she's going to blow up the lab again. If she does, she's going to get expelled. Shirley?"

"Swim team."

"Right. Her tournament is coming up or something. Kallen?"

"She's absent."

"She's probably going to some costume party. Who else is there?"

"Rivalz."

"Probably hemorrhoids."

"Yeah, it is. I want to ride with him on that sidecar one day."

"If you don't mind shortening your life, be my guest. Then..."

"Nunnally can't help, Lelouch."

"Of course not. Then I guess that leaves just us."

Lelouch sighed deeply. On the other hand, Suzaku looked excited.

"It's fine. It looks fun. I'm looking forward to it."

"Really. I'm in great fear."

You never know what could happen. That was Lelouch's thought.



"Suzaku, what's our first room?"

"Hold on. Let me see...oh, here it is. The Fall-Down-Seven-Times-and-Topple-Eight-Times Club."

"That makes no sense. And it has no members anymore, right?"

"Yeah. The club closed down two years ago in July. But the introduction to the club is still here. Let's see. 'We are a negative club that believes in falling seven times and toppling eight times. Our activities will have no victories. The philosophy of losers is our policy, and we will always be looking down as we walk. Our values—'"

"That's enough. My head is starting to hurt. So we need to throw out everything in this room, right? That should be easy. I'd prefer it if I could just burn this entire room."

"The President wanted us to keep the documents for the academy archives."

"And keep a record of this shameful taint on our academy? No way," Lelouch mumbled as he opened the door. He literally opened it with his hands; this annex didn't have automatic sliding doors. The door creaked heavily and opened outward.

Inside...there was nothing. White walls, windows with white blinds shut. That was it.

The room wasn't small. But there were no furnishings or anything else in the ten square meter room.

It was just empty space.

"Oh." Lelouch sighed in relief. He tapped his shoulder with the mop handle and stepped in. "But I guess it was to be expected. Besides, it's already been two years..."

"Lelouch! Watch out!"

"Huh? Whoa!"

Suzaku suddenly tackled Lelouch from behind and both fell to the floor.

What are you... Lelouch was about to yell, when something flew above his head. Immediately after, he heard an explosion. Water drops scattered.

Then silence.

"They're not real bullets. They're high-pressure water guns. But they're pretty destructive."

Suzaku was calmly analyzing the situation, in contrast to the speechless Lelouch.

And while still on the floor, he took a coin from his pocket and threw it in the air.

Whoosh!

"!!"

"I knew it."

The coin was shot in the center.

"So a sensor triggers the guns if something walks in over a certain height. I see, that's why they really have to 'look down' while they walk."

"How can you be so calm!?" Lelouch was finally able to raise his voice. "What is this room? How could this be a club?"

"Hee hee. Don't worry, Lelouch. I'm professionally trained so these traps are nothing."

"That's not the point! It's not normal to have military traps in a school clubhouse!"

"But maybe that was the philosophy of this club."

"I want to crack open the head of the guy who thought of this and look inside to see what made him go psycho. Anyway, let's get out of here."

"Huh? But we have to clean the room."

"You seriously think we can clean?"

"Well, I guess it would be easier if we turned off the system from the outside."

"That's not the point!"

Lelouch and Suzaku crawled back to the door. Suzaku was first, and then Lelouch followed. As soon as both were outside, Lelouch jumped to his feet and slammed the door. The sound echoed through the dark hallway.

"We'll take care of this later. Suzaku, what's the next room?"

"Let's see...Oh, it's this one."

"What is it?"

"Landmine Club."

An uncomfortable silence overtook the two of them.

Eventually, Lelouch spoke up, resisting his instinct to yell in frustration.

"Hey, Suzaku."

"What?"

"Is it just me who wants to blow up this whole building and close it off to the public forever?"

"What a coincidence. I was thinking the same thing."



Even after that, the perils continued.

"Why do we have to go through this?" Lelouch mumbled. He was holding a broken mop and a hole-filled bucket in his hands.

"It's because we're cleaning." Suzaku answered in a slapdash manner. His apron was burnt up.

"Cleaning? Suzaku. How many rooms have we cleaned so far?"

"Zero."

"In fact, how many rooms did we make worse?"

"Thirteen."

"That's a good number. How are we still alive?"

"I'm not sure."

They dragged their feet to the next room and looked at the white plate hanging on the door.

"Japan Culture Research Club. Oh, this sounds normal."

"Hold it, Suzaku. Did you forget that the Frog Lover's Club was just a factory to make toad grease?"

"I didn't understand the Pipe Club. Why were there so many microphones there?"

They opened the door.

They didn't walk in. They'd figured out already that wasn't the best idea.

They peeked into the room.

"Oh."

It was Suzaku who spoke up first, cheerfully.

"Wait, Suzaku." Lelouch tried to grab Suzaku's arm, but it was too late. Suzaku was already in the room, looking around. Lelouch gave up and followed him.

"This place is normal, Lelouch."

"You think? This is surreal in its own way."

The two had reasons to think so. The room was dim. It was cluttered like how it was left, when the club died.

It was a wonder how they'd got it in there, but there was a red mail drop box next to the window. Lined up next to that, like a twin, was a large statue of the Laughing Buddha. The wall was covered with signs saying things like, "Festival!" or "Tenchi Muyo," and although there was no running water there was a *shishi odoshi* hanging from the ceiling. An old tatami was laid out for half of the room, and in the center of it was a hibachi and *zabuton*. There were countless *prajna* masks, wind-bells and bamboo sticks.

It was indeed culture, but...it could also be called junk, or a garbage dump.

"Look, Lelouch. It's a *kendama*."

"Listen, Suzaku..."

"It's been so long since I touched one of these. Whoa." Suzaku pulled it out from the pile of junk and twisted his wrist

to fling the ball into the air. The ball made a clean loop and went onto the spike.

But he didn't stop there. Suzaku continued to manipulate the ball expertly and smoothly.

"You're as dexterous as always."

"And you were always bad at these things since we were kids. I think Nunnally was better."

"Hmph." Lelouch snorted, and took off his shoes to get on the tatami.

He stood in front of the Laughing Buddha and looked at a picture of Mount Fuji on the wall. Then...he noticed something.

"Oh..." It was between the statue and the wall. It was rough to the touch and smelled like mold. The paper had turned yellow from age.

"What is it, Lelouch?" Suzaku stopped playing with the *kendama* and came closer. Then his expression darkened. His eyes narrowed like he was a different person.

Lelouch was holding a newspaper. The date was August 10, 2010.

An extra edition.

The caption read:

"Britannian Forces Invade Japan."

Silence fell upon the room.

Before they realized it, it had begun to rain outside.

Bits of water dropped onto the window and dripped down slantedly.

Lelouch started to put the newspaper back, when one sheet fell to the floor.

"Father..."

A picture was staring back at them.

It was a man with dark eyes, receding hair, and a strong jawline. He was wearing a dark green military uniform.

The page was filled with the word, "recuperating."
Lelouch picked the page up from the tatami and put it back
into the stack, leaving the newspaper where he'd found it.
Suzaku remained silent.

"It was raining."

"Huh?"

"That day...it was raining, too."

"Lelouch."

"That's why I hate the rain."

"I see."



But.

It had all started from that day.



--Eight years ago--

CODE GEASS
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反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE-0:1-Previous Night

[Holy Empire of Britannia]

A nation that began a territorial war of expansion of large dimensions, in various parts of the world at the beginning of the 20th century. Rare at the time, the nation was a monarchy ruled by an emperor. Blessed with fertile land and backed with military might, they dominated the rest of the world. At one point their expansion covered most of the world map, but then...

September 2009, Britannia

***T**here is no one on my side.
Not anywhere.*

The two were alone in the lobby with the high ceiling. Neither was over ten years old.

The girl was sitting in a wheelchair looking down, and next to her was a boy with black hair and a stern face, looking contemptuously at his surroundings.

A businessman in a suit, a young tourist couple, an elderly couple holding hands with their grandchild all passed by. The area was bustling with activity, full of people, with speakers announcing departure and arrival times which made the people rush even more. On the other side of the thick glass there were many airplanes taking off, one after another. And inside there were waves and waves of people. The large amount of activity proved that this country was developed and affluent.

Yet the two were on their own.

Speakers announced the next arrival and departure times.

And finally, the tall person who was standing near them moved. It was a man in a black suit, with a slight scar that looked like a burn on his neck. He walked over to the girl and boy and gave a token bow to them.

"Prince Lelouch, Princess Nunnally. It is time."

The girl continued to look down. The boy just glared at the man.

"I will accompany you two until Narita. If you need

something while on the plane, please let me know." As he said this, the man, who wore dark sunglasses, reached for the girl's wheelchair.

"Don't touch her!"

The people who were rushing to the boarding gate stopped and turned around. They stared at the boy who yelled.

The expression of the man wavered slightly.

He looked around hesitantly, and then back at the boy. The dark lenses didn't reveal his exact emotion. But disapproval emanated from him.

The boy deliberately ignored him.

"I'll take Nunnally."

Then the boy pushed the man aside, lowered the casters and slowly began to push the wheelchair, leaving the man where he stood.

The man in the sunglasses shrugged to himself.

He caressed the scar on his neck and started walking a few steps behind the boy.

There is no one on my side.

Not anywhere.

Here, or in the country called Japan where I'm headed

Nowhere in the world.

We siblings have no one on our side.

Lelouch was sure of it at the time.



September 2009 in the Imperial Calendar was a time of unrest and turmoil in the island country in the Far East.

Only a few months before, the Holy Empire of Britannia that ruled the entire Asian subcontinent spread their greedy hands to the Indochina peninsula, and in a matter of time defeated their

military. Claiming it as their dependent territory, they enlarged their area of influence and announced the formation of Area 10.

As a result, both the European Ultra-Union and the Chinese Federation reacted immediately.

They sought an alliance with Japan, which had previously held a neutral stance—and which boasted incredible amounts of sakuradite underground—and together the three imposed an economic sanction against Britannia. Further, they allied with developing countries to shut Britannian vessels out from various marine waters. Britannia reacted *in extremis* and both camps glared at each other across their borders. Both sides were engaged in expanding their militaries and obtaining information.

It was that kind of era.

The eleventh prince and seventeenth in line of succession to the throne of the Britannia Empire, Lelouch vi Britannia, was going to Japan to study abroad with his little sister, Nunnally vi Britannia.

People were puzzled when they heard the rumor. It would be understandable if it were during peacetime. Or if the country were one they had decent foreign relations with.

But that wasn't the case.

The Indochina incident had resulted in Japan giving up their neutral stance to join the EU and the Chinese Federation, and thereby entering a state of hostility toward Britannia.

To send a jewel to the enemy...

It was no surprise that people couldn't understand what Britannia, or its emperor Charles zi Britannia, intended.

To complicate matters further, not only were they royalty, but Lelouch vi Britannia was nine years old, and Nunnally vi Britannia was only seven. Both were too young to be studying abroad.

Of course, there was the consideration that royal personages should broaden their life experiences. But there

was a time for everything. The two should have stayed in their home country for at least five years. That was the conventional practice in Britannia.

Besides...Japan's intentions were as incomprehensible as Britannia's. Even though they had recently sided with the EU and the Chinese Federation, they had long held a neutral standing between the conflicting factions. Perhaps they wanted to avoid damaging relations with the superpower Britannia nation. But still, there were other ways to improve the relationship. Taking in children who were not even ten years old seemed to have no point. In fact, it might even provoke further opposition in the country, already gaining momentum due to the EU's activities.

Maybe there were some behind-the-scenes negotiations that couldn't be made public. You couldn't blame anyone for such rumors going around.

But either way, the young prince and princess were in Japan now.

Six months had passed since they arrived.

The season wasn't autumn anymore, but late spring.

They have been staying at the home of the Japanese Prime Minister Genbu Kururugi, the Kururugi Shrine. And they will be staying there until...

May 12, 2010, Japan

2

The mansion was near the ocean.

The pine trees looked like they had grown naturally in random spots, but actually they had been placed around the mansion with precise calculation. Bluish-black roof tiles and Japanese cypress pillars. At first glance one might think that it was a fancy Japanese inn. The north side of the mansion faced a cliff, below which lay a white sand beach. On the other side of the mansion was a pine forest; and beyond that, a few scattered private residences.

Describing the mansion as "remote" wouldn't exactly apply. Private citizens lived nearby. But you couldn't feel their existence much.

The tranquil atmosphere was perfect to live in seclusion in, and even more perfect to relax and enjoy a time-off. At the same time, it wouldn't suit someone who wanted a rowdy, active life.

That was the kind of mansion the Kururugi vacation home was.

I want to go to the beach.

It was little sister Nunnally who made this unusual request.

"There is a pretty beach nearby, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

The two had just finished eating lunch, and Lelouch was in the middle of cleaning up. He stopped what he was doing and looked puzzled.

Straight black hair, a handsome face with a hint of innocence left. But his eyes were mature like those of an adult, as was his expression.

"But it's too early to swim, Nunnally. In Japan you have to wait at least one more month to even get into the water."

"I know."

Nunnally was sitting in her wheelchair, as always, while accepting the small plate Lelouch had finished washing.

Her eyes were shut tight. They never opened.
She was blind.

Nunnally began wiping the plate with the towel she was holding in her small hands. Even though she couldn't see, she could do at least this much.

Lelouch felt that she didn't have to do such things, but Nunnally preferred to do as much as she could. She felt that when she helped, she could still be useful to her brother.

Nunnally finished wiping the plate and carefully placed it on the table. And smiled when she turned toward Lelouch.

"Lelouch, I can't swim, anyway."

"That's right. I'm sorry."

"But I like the sound and smell of the ocean. If you have time, can you please take me?"

"Sure..." Lelouch thought about it for a moment. Honestly, he didn't want to take Nunnally outside that much.

It hadn't always been this way.

When they were still in their home country of Britannia, they used to go out and play. This may have been due to the influence of their vivacious mother. Nunnally had been a quiet girl to begin with, and Lelouch was never a rambunctious boy, but their mother used to take them outside of the palace. And the two didn't mind that. Compared to the constraints of the palace, outside they were able to run about freely. They were especially happy with the time they got to spend with their kind mother.

But now, their mother was no longer with them.

Besides, it would make more sense if they were at home, but they were in a foreign land. And Lelouch knew how the people of this foreign country thought about their home country. He knew what names he and Nunnally were called.

Invaders.

Hostages.

But this mansion was a second home to the Kururugi family, and different from the main house they were living in until a month before.

There weren't that many houses nearby. Rarely did they see someone when they went outside. And they were only going to walk down a private path from the backyard to the beach underneath the cliffs. The chances of bumping into someone other than the people who lived here were very slim.

So, Lelouch thought it would be all right.

And Nunnally never asked for anything.

"Okay, I got it. Let's go right now."

"Thank you."

"Do we need to take anything? It's not like it's far, but..."

"Oh, about that..."

For some reason Nunnally looked down a little.

But then she raised her head quickly and said, "Lelouch. Can we invite Suzaku to come along too?"

"Oh. Uh, yeah."

Lelouch had good reason to be hesitant.

Originally, Lelouch vi Britannia was never the type to show an interest in others.

It may be that he was born that way. It may be because of his status as the eleventh prince of the only superpower in the world, Britannia. It may be because he lost his mother at such a young age. Or it may be related to the fact that he was sent practically as a hostage to a foreign country.

Even if you asked him, he would probably answer that he didn't know.

But don't misunderstand. Lelouch didn't show interest in others. But it wasn't because he was not interested.

Actually, he was interested, but Lelouch was cautious of everyone around him.

Ever since he lost his mother...rather, ever since his mother was assassinated, he'd viewed others with suspicion.

He had to, or he couldn't have survived. It was too dangerous.

The Britannian royal family was constantly in conflict.

Lelouch realized that when his mother, the fifth queen of the Britannia Empire, was killed. Specifically, it was two months later when he was finally able to see his father, the Britannia Emperor, Charles zi Britannia.

"I have no use for the weak. That is what it means to be royalty."

Lelouch showed his disapproval of his father for not protecting his mother, but that is what his father—that man—answered.

But it didn't end there.

That man didn't even show up for his wife's funeral.

He didn't come to visit Nunnally, whose legs were severely damaged and who had lost her sight in the incident.

And to finish it off were those cold words.

When Lelouch heard them his eyes burned.

His view of the beautiful royal chamber became distorted.

That man continued:

"You sought an audience with the emperor of Britannia simply to inform me of that? Such stupidity, from a child born from me."

Lelouch understood everything from the way he had said those words in disgust.

To this man, the ninety-eighth emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia, Charles zi Britannia, he and his mother and his sister were merely pawns.

If broken, pawns can be easily replaced.

And once broken—a pawn is useless.

A pawn that cannot protect him or herself was a piece of trash.

No emotion.

No feeling.

He had nothing comforting to say. He wouldn't even stop to look at him.

He only sought a brilliant pawn that could help him and have the potential to take his place.

Only an unbreakable pawn.

From that day, the world became Lelouch's enemy.

That man, those who surrounded him, and the half-siblings and stepmothers who were in the same position and thought of Lelouch as a nuisance, all became Lelouch's enemies.

Fighting alone, stepping on others to climb up. That is what Lelouch thought the world was. There were no people. Other than his sister Nunnally, no one else existed in the world.

But...



Even though it was a vacation home, it belonged to Kururugi, one of Japan's wealthiest men.

It was a large residence. Lelouch had to pass by many rooms to reach his destination. The room he was looking for was at the far end.

Including the servants, there weren't many people who lived here. Of course, Lelouch preferred it that way.

Lelouch walked down the hallway and stood in front of the door.

It was hard to knock on it properly. The door didn't look like a door, but rather like a partition to Lelouch. You opened it by sliding it to the side, and it was made of white paper attached to frames made of wood.

The door was slightly open. After a moment's hesitation, Lelouch peeked inside through the space. It was an almost empty room with tatami flooring. And he was sitting in the center of it.

He had his eyes shut tight and his legs tucked under him.

He was wearing a white *dōgi* and a navy blue *hakama*. For a pure Japanese, his hair was lighter than most.

Right beside him was a stick. No, not a stick—it was something called a *bokuto*. It was different from the *shinai* he used to carry around.

The young master of the Kururugi household, the son of Genbu Kururugi, the Prime Minister of Japan—Suzaku Kururugi was sitting on the tatami with his eyes closed. The new wooden sword was next to him.

He sat like a figurine, in the tranquil atmosphere. For some reason, Lelouch felt like someone was grasping his heart.

Suddenly, Suzaku's eyes opened.

"Who is it?"

His strong-willed eyes looked at Lelouch. And at the same time, they softened. "Oh, it's you."

His tone of voice didn't change. Nothing changed.

Except for one thing.

"A prince is snooping? That's not appropriate, Lelouch."

"You're the one who left the door open." Lelouch's attitude didn't change, either.

He snorted. "You're napping at a time like this? You're slacking off a bit too much, Suzaku."

"This is called meditation. Meditation."

"You mean, a nap?"

"Sometimes I think you're an expert at starting arguments."

Suzaku laughed and got up. "So, what is it? You didn't come here to pick a fight with me, right?"

"Oh..."

Lelouch paused for a moment.

"Nunnally wanted to know if you would like to join us and go to the beach."

"I see...how rare."

"I don't necessarily need you to come with us."

"That's how you get the opposite result, Lelouch."

"That's because you have a twisted personality."

"I'm not as bad as you."

Suzaku pondered for a bit before answering.

"Well...I was pretty bored, so...okay, I'll come along. You should be thankful, Lelouch."

"Yeah, right."

Suzaku grabbed the *bokuto* that was next to him.

Nothing had changed since that night; except for the *bokuto* he took with him everywhere.



It was raining.

"Lelouch, I..."

It was a dark, cold rain that seemed to envelop the night.

"I..."

His hands clenched his chest. Trembling, frozen hands.

"I..."

His words were cold as ice, and it ripped ones heart out. And yet it was seeking salvation it would never achieve.

"I will never use my power for the sake of myself..."

It was raining.

It was a dark, cold rain that seemed to envelop the night.

It was a rain that seemed to envelop the boy.

"Never again, Lelouch..."

And probably, a part of him died that day.



Outside the mansion the sky was clear, as if it were a painting.

Although summer was still on its way, the sun shining down on the children was hot.

An ocean breeze caressed them from beyond the blue sea. White seagulls were lost in the sky.

There was no one on the beach.

Of course there wasn't; because this was private property of the Kururugi house. It was a private beach.

It was hard work to move Nunnally's wheelchair on the sand, so midway through Suzaku put Nunnally on his back, carried her near the water and sat her on a small chair that Lelouch had brought. Who did which duty was decided by who had more strength, which the two boys argued over. In the end, Lelouch gave up when Nunnally reminded him that he'd injured himself previously because of her.

And even now, for some reason Suzaku was by Nunnally's side, taking care of her.

"That's right, Nunnally. I'll support the rod, so reel in the line slowly."

"Like this?"

"Yeah, you're doing good. But you can't reel it in too fast, because the hook will come flying at you and it'll be dangerous. When I tell you, stop. Then I'll throw the hook back."

"This is my first time fishing."

"Really? But you're doing really well."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. The way you hold the rod is perfect. But Lelouch on the other hand... well, I guess I really shouldn't say anything."

Suzaku looked over at Lelouch, who was lying face down in the sand.

He wasn't doing that because he wanted to.

He was struggling to remove the hook that got caught in his clothes when the line got tangled, and his foot caught the soft sand and fell. He couldn't move because of the hook and line, and laying on the sand face down he looked like the dried squid that hung in fishing villages.

"Lelouch, you should never get stranded on a desert island. You'd never be able to survive."

"That's not true," Lelouch argued, after he finally got one section of the line untangled.

"Damn, what's with this rod? I can't throw the weight straight."

"That's because you're not throwing it properly."

"It's broken. Go call the makers of this rod. You should ask for a refund."

"Um, you know..."

"I quit. Besides, going for prey with such a thin line is not my style. It's much more efficient to catch them with a net."

"Then there's no fun in fishing," Suzaku said, rolling his eyes.

"Oh? Suzaku, the reel is heavy."

"Ah, you got one, Nunnally. Reel it in."

"Oh! Oh! It's moving."

"Don't worry. Slowly..."

"Um, uh..."

"That's good. A little more...almost...got it!"

"Did we catch one?"

"Yeah. You caught a fish!"

"Wow. What kind of a fish is it?"

"It's called Gilthead. It's good when you broil it."

"Oh...are we going to eat it?"

"It's a little small. What do you want to do? Should we let it go?"

"Yes. Please let it go."

"Okay."

Suzaku pulled the line in, and unhooked the small fish and threw it back in. There was a tiny splash and the fish disappeared into the ocean.



Then Suzaku took the rod from Nunnally's hands. "Let's try to catch a bigger one this time!"

"Y-yes."

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you, but our dinner depends on our fishing skills."

"Oh. Really? I didn't know."

"Yes. It's true."

Suzaku tried to sound stern but his face was still smiling. He took the rod and flung the hook and weight far into the ocean.

"Okay, Nunnally. One more time."

"Yes. I'll do my best."

"That's right. We'll try to catch a...red snapper!"

"Okay!"

"No, I'm just kidding. We can't catch that."

"Huh?"

Nunnally looked confused. Suzaku was smiling at Nunnally.

Lelouch had finally managed to untie the line and stand up, and he silently watched the two interact. It was a comforting sight.

If he were the Lelouch from before, he wouldn't have allowed a stranger to interact with Nunnally that way.

But now it was different. Actually, it was only different with Suzaku. Just watching them together comforted him.

It put his heart at ease.

If only things could remain that way, how happy they would be. *If only.*

In the end, they stayed at the beach until late afternoon.

Suzaku and Nunnally caught eight fish, and as predicted, Lelouch had caught none.

It wasn't a season with short days, but it did get chilly when the sun started to go down. Nunnally had a jacket that Lelouch had brought. Suzaku looked at it and was impressed.

"You're prepared."

"Nunnally's not used to being outside. Of course I am."

"You'll become a good 'maid' one day."

"I don't know if you're insulting me or praising me."

The sloping path back to the mansion went around the pine trees in the rear before it curved back around. The path was sand-laden, but it wasn't as soft as the beach and didn't require as much strength to push the wheelchair.

Suzaku walked ahead to pick up tree branches and throw them to the side. Nunnally and Lelouch, pushing the wheelchair, followed. There was still daylight left, but the thick forest was dim and it was hard to see.

"Anyway, I understand the theory to fishing now. Suzaku, next time I'm going to beat you."

"You hate losing, don't you."

"Hee hee. That is my brother."

"But Nunnally, Lelouch is the only one ever to catch no fish there."

"Oh, my..."

The slope wasn't long. Soon after, the path turned flat.

All they had to do was get through the grove and they would reach the back entrance of the mansion. The end of the grove came into sight in front of them.

That's when Suzaku stopped in his tracks, in the middle of the path.

"Suzaku?"

"Sorry, Lelouch," Suzaku responded, with his eyes turned toward the grove they had just come through. "Can you go ahead? I forgot something."

"You realize it now?" Lelouch rolled his eyes.

"Hee hee, I know, right?" Suzaku laughed, but was already running back. He quickly disappeared into the grove.

"I can't believe he has that much energy left," Lelouch mumbled.

They'd been fishing for half a day and Lelouch was pretty

tired. Even if Suzaku was used to fishing, his energy was abnormal. He moved as if the day had just started. And his legs...Lelouch didn't know adults who were able to run that fast.

"Let's go, Nunnally."

Suzaku had told them to go ahead. They had no reason not to.

Lelouch started to push the wheelchair again when he noticed Nunnally's face was turned around. Her eyes were shut tight as always, but she was facing the direction where they had come from.

"Nunnally?"

"Oh...yes." Nunnally finally faced forward when Lelouch spoke up, looking down slightly.

Lelouch was puzzled, but continued to push the wheelchair anyway.

As they exited the grove, the path widened. The Japanese-style mansion with the blue roof tiles was getting closer. When they were almost there, Nunnally piped up.

"Lelouch?"

"What is it?"

"I wonder if Suzaku is okay by now."

For a moment, Lelouch almost stopped pushing. Nunnally's brown hair was swaying in the wind. Her hair was getting longer. Perhaps he should cut it soon. Nunnally was trying to grow her hair out, so it would really be just a trim.

"Lelouch?"

"Oh, yeah. Sorry."

Lelouch knew what she had meant.

Nunnally wasn't asking about Suzaku's physical state. Besides, by what he'd demonstrated earlier it was apparent that he was fine.

She had been asking about Suzaku's mental well-being.

She had realized that Suzaku was different from before. He wasn't currently attending school and about a month before had arrived at the vacation home, right after Lelouch and Nunnally had settled there.

No matter how much Lelouch asked him for an explanation, Suzaku only answered that he was staying there, too.

Something was different. Something was a little off.

And Nunnally was good at sensing changes in other people. Perhaps she wasn't distracted by appearances, as she wasn't able to see.

"Nunnally, what do you think?"

"Huh?"

"Do you think he's changed?"

Nunnally probably wasn't expecting that question. She looked down and inclined her head. After much thinking, she finally answered.

"I think...Suzaku is nicer than when we first met."

Lelouch nodded. "Yeah...that's true. He's not violent like before."

Never again.

"And he notices things a lot more now."

"You're right. He's not as callous."

I'll never use it again.

"I think he's more cheerful, too."

"Yeah, he's friendlier."

I'll never use my power for myself.

"But..."

"Huh?"

Never.

"I'm scared."

"Scared?"

I can't use it, ever.

"I'm scared that one day Suzaku is going to leave."

The wind grew stronger and the pine trees in the grove shook in unison. The smell of the ocean was still strong there and it tickled the nose.

"Lelouch...that day, did Suzaku..."

"Let's not talk about this, Nunnally." Lelouch cut her off.

He hadn't talked about that incident since the day it happened.

To Nunnally, or even Suzaku.

Perhaps...he wouldn't be able to talk about it ever again.

For some reason, Lelouch suddenly had a feeling, but he didn't know why.



The thick trunk belonged to the biggest pine tree in the grove. Even when the wind got stronger, it wouldn't budge. It completely blocked the flow of air.

Suzaku stood with his back leaning against the trunk and stared at the dimly-lit grove. With his left hand on the wooden sword at his waist, he continued to look straight ahead.

Even when dusk turned into complete darkness, the boy stayed there.

May 2010, Japan

3

The state of affairs was in an uproar.

Everyone was incensed about one thing or another.

"At dawn on the 9th, the Britannian Empire Viceroy Government officially proposed a reform on the technological agreement concerning the bioelectronics field. This is clearly a move to sanction our country, and Prime Minister Kururugi, who is currently recuperating, immediately released a statement of opposition. The Prime Minister is also considering presenting it to the international court and..."

"Please note this. This is the scar on the landscape the Britannian Forces left from their air strike on Hanoi. By viewing this, one can see that their official position of limiting their attacks to guerilla military bases is false. The cold and evil Britannian Forces caused collateral damage against ordinary citizens..."

"The international human rights group NAR has issued a statement condemning the policies the Britannia Empire imposes on the Numbers. The Britannia Empire has completely ignored the NAR's statement and many people all over the world are criticizing..."

"The Britannia Empire Foreign Ministry has claimed that Japan is supporting terrorist activities such as the recent Manila terrorist bomber incident. This is a complete fabrication, and the cold and heartless Britanniains who support imperialism are..."

"In response to the military exercise by the Britannian Forces, Prime Minister Genbu Kururugi, still recuperating, released this statement: 'Our country will not succumb to threats. If Britannia is going to show their blood-stained fangs to my beloved country of Japan, they will learn a lesson the hard way.'"

"The Britannian invaders had crossed the line and showed their presence at the distribution meeting of *sakunadite*, a resource our country has the official rights to conserving..."

There is only one thing that is certain.

Both sides have reached a point of no return.

It was unclear if the room was Western or Japanese-style.

The antique scroll picture on the wall was Japanese-style, but the round table in the center of the room was clearly of Western design, as were the ten or so antique chairs surrounding it.

There was quite an age range among the people sitting at the table. But in general they were mostly over forty. No one in the room was in his twenties. And the oldest...there was no limit. There were probably some men over seventy years of age.

There was one young man standing behind the old man who was dressed in a kimono. He was tall and his toned physique showed the power that lay within him. He was probably in his early thirties.

The expressions of those sitting at the table were clearly displeased.

Actually, they were grim.

On top of the table was a large piece of paper, illuminated by a dim fluorescent light. There were vertical and horizontal lines, with brown lands and blue oceans depicted on it.

It was a map.

The room was so silent that one might have expected the quiet to last until dawn, but one of the men finally spoke up.

"That wolf of Britannia. He's doing whatever he wants."

That broke the silence in the room. All of the men began talking at once.

"It seems a little belated to get angry now, after all the blatant provoking he's done."

"I would suggest that you drop your casual attitude. The enemy fleet even passed through the territorial limit of Ishigaki Island."

"He's taking advantage of Prime Minister Kururugi's condition..."

"We should make the first move before they attack. That's our only option."

"But in this situation, the EU won't act. To them, it's nothing but affairs going on in an Asian country far away. Even if we dangle the rights to *sakuradite*, I wonder."

"Besides, there are rumors that they're in collusion with Britannia."

"In fact, I think we can count on the Chinese Federation more. They won't just sit around and watch Japan fall."

"You can't be serious. We can't rely on communists. They would come and scavenge if they saw us at a disadvantage."

"Our national defense won't work if we're relying on other countries."

"But Britannia is too powerful. Did you hear that the Glasgow is already fully deployed?"

"Hmph. What can a science fiction toy do?"

"We'll hit them at sea. Then we'll focus on defense and wait for the right time. I'm sure the EU and the Chinese Federation don't want us to become a territory of Britannia. They should act one way or another."

"Relying on other countries and entities is a losing mindset."

"There is a limit to how much we can control information. Regarding the military exercise, we constrained the media, so there haven't been any rallies within the country so far."

"But it's only a matter of time. Hmph, sooner or later there may be destroyer fleets in Tokyo Bay carrying the Britannian flag."

"That's why we need to make the first move! We have no other option."

"No, it's dangerous to fight alone. We need to pull in at least the Chinese Federation."

"We don't have the leeway for that. There are constraints with time and the developing situation."

"But..."

The dispute continued. But actually, you couldn't call it a dispute. A dispute without substance or answer cannot be called a dispute.

Instead, it's what's known as "complaining."

There was one old man who remained silent, listening to the men surrounding him. He shifted a little and the entire table shut up.

The old man was sitting in the center and had his eyes closed. He wore a greenish-brown kimono and his face had countless wrinkles. He was small-framed, but his demeanor was intimidating. He looked like he had the power to crush the others by uttering a single word.

The old man heard that the men had stopped talking. He slowly opened his eyes and matter-of-factly looked at the men around him. And finally spoke.

"I think you all have gravely misunderstood the situation."

His voice was also matter-of-fact. But his stern rebuke was clear.

Many of the men flinched.

The old man continued. "I did not have you all come here to talk about this country's future. Besides, you military government officials do not have the power to decide anything. The last decision will be made by Prime Minister Genbu Kururugi."

"But Mr. Kiri하라..." A man in military uniform started to object, but a cold glimpse from the old man suppressed him completely.

"Therefore, I will speak for him and make this declaration."

The old man paused for a moment. He closed his eyes again.

"Do-or-die resistance."

The atmosphere of the room got tense.

The old man didn't miss the opportunity.

"We won't rely on the EU or the Chinese Federation. The Japanese who live here will protect the Japanese homeland. That is the will of Prime Minister Kururugi. So I need you all to start the discussion from there."

Such amazing presence; and it was an equally amazing narrative power that he held.

In the room there were only two men left.

The old man was still sitting at the center of the table, with the young man standing behind him.

The old man reached for the water pitcher on the table and poured himself a cup of water. "It's really tiring to put yourself out there. Don't you agree, Tohdoh?"

The young man didn't answer.

"I do prefer being behind the scenes. And considering that, the incident with Kururugi hurts even more. At least he was good at these kinds of things." The wrinkled throat of the old man swallowed the chilled water.

The young man—Kyoshiro Tohdoh—waited until the old man had placed the cup back on the table before he spoke.

"Do-or-die, is it?"

"I had a hard time keeping a straight face." The old man's voice was as calm as ever, yet it was strong-willed. "But it's better to go to that extreme with that group. They don't want to take responsibility, so they simply ride on someone else's back. They are foolish. Simply foolish. They won't move unless we cut off their path of retreat. And there are some who were close with Kururugi. It's a good opportunity to weed them out."

Tohdoh again kept his silence.

He had no need to follow this man's orders. He was a ranked soldier in the military. The only person who could order him was his superior officer. And this old man was not

Tohdoh's superior officer. In fact, he wasn't even in the military, or in government service.

But Tohdoh...knew.

To the public, he was recuperating.

But actually, the Prime Minister of Japan, Genbu Kururugi, had been dead for quite a while.

Tohdoh knew why his death was kept a secret. He knew who kept it a secret. And why Britannia and Japan were not at war yet.

Tohdoh knew everything.

This old man, the former head of the Kiriwara Conglomerate, the largest conglomerate in Japan, Taizo Kiriwara...on a certain level, was the head of the country of Japan.

After a pause, Tohdoh spoke with care.

"So...the war cannot be avoided?"

"No." The old man's voice remained calm and unemotional.

"Even in Britannia's financial community, there are those who oppose war. They don't want to invest in a territory that has frequent occurrences of resistance and opposition. They do want the *sakuradite*, but if they only want to develop resources and obtain concessions, they would rather improve the relationship with our country than conquer it by force. It's more efficient and there's less risk. And furthermore, the one who was in the way, Kururugi, is now out of the picture."

"Then..."

"However, when a country moves, I know that rational thinking doesn't always take priority. Actually, since the beginning of time, humans have never gotten into conflicts based on logic. It is all about self-respect. Because they have pride and believe in themselves, human beings fight and hurt one another. Humans are made to follow what they want to believe. In that sense, Kururugi's got me. If his only motivation were based on gain and calculation, I would still have options left. But rock-hard belief, I can do nothing about."

His belief that enemies should be crushed, the old man thought to himself.

"The sword is already drawn. Unless that sword sees a conclusion—blood—neither side will back down. We can buy some time, but it's not easy to change a result that is sought by over a hundred million people. But even if we lose, we can choose how we lose."

The old man's words were murmured, yet Tohdoh's eyebrows shot up in response.

The clock on the wall was already past midnight.

The old man lifted the cup of water again and took a sip. He sighed.

"In the end, we're forced to fight a war we cannot win. Then all we can do is to choose the best way to lose. Don't you agree?"

"I don't think it's a certainty that we cannot win."

"Hm. No, I think it's all right that you feel that way. It wouldn't be interesting if all of Japan bowed its head. There should be at least one person who makes Britannia's blood freeze. I think the only one who can achieve that is you. Do you understand? That is why you're here; and that is why I'm prepared to lose. The reason why I fired up the men earlier was not to subject the country to a 'scorched earth' policy and continue to kick against Britannia. It's the opposite. We need to surrender while we still have strength. Japan will lose to Britannia at war. But we cannot remove our fangs. We cannot lose our pride and grace. That will lead to the turn of events later."

"Would it go so smoothly?" Tohdoh asked, almost mumbling.

He knew what the old man was intending.

The way Britannia had been provoking Japan had been excessive lately.

They violated territorial waters and airspace as if the border didn't exist. Just recently a Britannian patrolling craft fired warning shots at a Japanese fishing boat near Alaska and forced a search. The official reason was a suspicion of drug smuggling, but no one believed that. The fact of the matter was that Britannia

was trying to pick a fight with Japan, and it was just a matter of whether they wanted to accept it or not. Actually, Japan didn't have a choice. Whether a "trigger" incident occurred or not, Britannia would soon send their military forces into Japan. They had the power to do so. And they weren't afraid of being ostracized by the global community.

On the contrary, Japan's situation was anything but stable. The EU and the Chinese Federation supported strengthening Japan's defenses, but once Britannia invaded Japan, it was unknown if they would stick around or not. Britannia was a country that already had territories from Areas 1 through 10, and they controlled one-third of the world map. It wasn't a nation the two factions wanted to fight. If possible, they wanted to stay on Britannia's good side. If offering Japan as a sacrifice would appease Britannia and make the great nation cease their incursions, they would gladly do so. Of course, Britannia wasn't that easy to read; and the two organizations weren't optimistic. But in reality Japan couldn't rely on them as allies.

Tohdoh looked outside the window, and then spoke again.

"Various facilities including Naha, Iwakuni, Itzushima, and Ogasawara are tightening their security. Of course, I'm sure Britannia is aware of our movements."

"The movements were scheduled. Now it's just a matter of when to start the war. Of course, in order to avoid criticism later we'll have Britannia initiate it."

"Sir, I understand your logic. We should just fight Britannia once, and at the point where we still have strength we should go into negotiations, and once we achieve some sort of autonomy we surrender. Furthermore, later on we wait for an opportunity and launch a rebellion—the best way to lose is this method, correct?"

The old man smiled slightly for the first time.

"As expected from you, Tohdoh. You're correct. But you're not the type to obey on the outside while still rebelling on the inside, are you?"

"If it's necessary, I will do that. But I think we're taking our enemy lightly. What if they see through our intentions and come to crush us completely?"

"Then they could do so. If they were an enemy who would ignore reason that much, it would make it easier later on. But of course it won't be that easy. That man—Charles zi Britannia—is not that stupid. Even though many of the people in both nations are emotional over it, there is no reason for Britannia to suppress Japan. It's true for us too, but they don't want Japan to be scorched, because then it would take longer to rebuild and govern. It's Britannia's style to exploit the resources of the country they conquer and indirectly govern it as a territory. If they crush the *sakuradite* mining facilities they would do more harm than good, and Japan wouldn't be useful then as a military base against the Chinese Federation."

"What about the men who were just in this room? They will probably go against Britannia unwaveringly. If that happens, we may not be able to surrender."

"That is when Kururugi's death would become useful. He would decide to surrender after thinking over what was best for his people. And then he would commit suicide to suppress the holdout military units. The script is cheap, but it's convincing. It should go well. Anyway, by name the leader of this country is still Kururugi. Even if his body is in a chilled morgue."

The old man's words flowed easily and without doubt. His tone was still dry, but that made him seem even more unwavering.

But still, Tohdoh couldn't obey just like that. He didn't agree with the old man's opinions.

What this old man was trying to do, was to make Japan surrender once to Britannia, and then one day find the chance to strike back. Then wouldn't that be the same as Prime Minister Kururugi's view?

It wasn't a method to be proud of.

Besides, submitting to the control of Britannia even temporarily would cause the Japanese military organization to be dismantled. Developing power from scratch to fight off Britannia would be very difficult. How much could they achieve using guerilla activities? Besides...even if the battle were just an act, many lives would be sacrificed and that would be for real.

War is evil and cruel. There would be many casualties. And it wouldn't only be military personnel; civilians would die, too. It wouldn't be bad if Japan were to continue obeying Britannia. But to continue resisting would result in more deaths.

If we're not serious from the beginning, we shouldn't go to war.

But if we're going to fight, we should do all that we can. That is how Tohdoh thought. The best way was to fight Britannia to expose what they were capable of, and then afterward go into negotiations while looking for a way to peacefully end the war. There was no need to go to war with surrender in the agenda. Even if it was Britannia, they should have a weakness. If Japan could attack that, even if we don't win we can't lose, either. These idealistic theories—no, optimistic theories—were what Tohdoh was considering.

But the old man looked like he had read Tohdoh's mind.

"It's fine to have hopeful dreams about the future, Tohdoh. But in reality, we can hear Britannia's footsteps outside our door. We should use whatever we can. Even if it's the late Kururugi—or even you, and myself as well. So my priority will be to give the citizens of this country pride, grace, and then humiliation. We will be defeated once. But the next time we'll get them...if these feelings develop and come together, one day we may be able to destroy the footing of the giant known as Britannia. Of course, this is a hopeful dream too."

Then the old man shook his head. And for the first time, he turned around to look at Tohdoh.

"But if we can't have dreams, then this country has no future. Even if it's not a spectacular or gracious dream. Am I wrong, Tohdoh?"

Tohdoh looked into the old man's eyes. Then...he let out a deep sigh. He straightened his shoulders and took a moment before speaking.

"I understand. Then what should I do?"

"Just as I said before, do all you can to oppose Britannia. I'll give you Itsukushima. Our group will do everything to provide you with supplies. You don't have to go for the big win. You just have to win locally. Is that possible?"

"If that is your order."

"If you need people, I'll provide that too. But, before that..."

"Yes?"

"I need you to take care of something. It's about the goods from Britannia."

Tohdoh caught his breath in his throat.

Whether the old man noticed Tohdoh's reaction or not was unclear, but he continued matter-of-factly.

"They seemed to be negotiation material for Kururugi, but to me they are useless. Besides, a simple plan such as taking hostages wouldn't work against Britannia. And it's too late for that now anyway. Actually...they are like a time bomb. I don't know what Kururugi was thinking, but it's dangerous to leave them alone. He's really sly, that wolf of Britannia. He would use even the succession conflict to his advantage to achieve his ambitions. He is truly vicious and strong. Compared to him, my struggles are nothing."

Tohdoh remained silent.

"Anyway, for us to take the do-or-die stance yet to keep those two—we would lose credibility, both in front of the enemy and our allies. But we've lost the opportunity and timing to send them back."

"So you want me to get rid of them?"

"Well..." The old man didn't answer.

Instead, he gazed at the furnishings in the room. There was a vase across the room filled with red roses in full bloom. But not all

the flowers were blooming. There was one rose among the others that was wilting.

As the old man continued to gaze, one petal from the wilted rose fell to the floor.

Then the old man smiled.

It was a cruel smile.

Tohdoh felt shivers go down his spine.

May 14, 2010 Japan

4

Nunnally had a fever.

It was two days after they had played at the beach. Suzaku was apologetic because he felt responsible, but Lelouch reassured him.

"She exercised, so her body got tired. That's a good thing."

"Why is it good?"

"It means that before, Nunnally didn't get much exercise."

Nunnally was in a wheelchair, so of course she didn't have much energy. That was why she got a fever when she did something out of the ordinary. But Lelouch actually thought that was a good thing.

What Lelouch worried about more was her heart, not her body. Nunnally had never been an outgoing girl, but ever since their mother's death she had clammed up even more. It was true that she couldn't walk on her own anymore. But with her legs, and more so with her eyes, the doctor had said that her psychological trauma was greater. She had an emotional disorder, and if that negatively affected her lifestyle, it would affect her body as well.

So playing outside and getting sick was a good thing because it was forward-looking. When she got better, she might be healthier than before.

That was what Lelouch hoped for. And he didn't show it, but he appreciated Suzaku for it. He believed that Nunnally had become more positive because of Suzaku.

When they were practically thrown out of Britannia by their father and had come to Japan, Lelouch was prepared to protect Nunnally all by himself. There were many in Britannia who held bad feelings toward them. And the Japanese didn't have a good view of Britannia as a whole. So who else was there to protect his sister?

But as he spent his days at the Kururugi mansion, he realized something.

To protect means to bring someone up.

When he lost his mother Marianne, Lelouch grieved. But he immediately thought of Nunnally and pulled himself together. Well, maybe he wasn't completely together yet, but he chose to believe he was. He was older. He was the big brother. As long as they didn't have a mother, he was the only one who could take care of her.

But Lelouch immediately ran into an obstacle: he was still only a child. He hadn't yet reached the age of ten. There were more things he couldn't do than he could do.

He was financially secure. He had lost his guardian and was sent to a foreign land, but he was a prince of the superpower Britannia. It wasn't like he'd lost his name and status. The people of Japan treated him indifferently, but they were not cruel. They provided him with what he needed to survive.

On the other hand, Lelouch tried to keep people at a distance from Nunnally. He knew that Nunnally wanted it that way, and more importantly he couldn't trust the people around him. But as soon as he began to do that, he realized something.

If this continued, Nunnally would get weaker.

Not physically, but mentally.

Before in Britannia, and now in Japan, Nunnally relied on Lelouch and Lelouch only. She was attached only to Lelouch and only looked to Lelouch. It was to be expected, to a degree. She was a young girl who had witnessed her mother's murder right in front of her eyes.

But then her dependence on Lelouch closed her world. In a closed world, a human being cannot grow. A human being cannot thrive.

For a child to grow and become an adult means that the child's world must spread out. The big, wide world may be scary. There may be anxiety. But unless a child faces it, he will

never become an adult. In fact, the child will just break down mentally.

Lelouch realized that clearly on the fifth night they were in Japan. He had stayed out a little later than usual because of errands, and when he came home to see Nunnally's room he was speechless.

The room was a mess.

Pieces of teacups, glasses, vases and other items were scattered throughout the floor. Before he left, the room had been clean. In fact, they had cleaned the room together that morning.

For a moment, Lelouch thought it was someone else's wrongdoing. Perhaps a Japanese person didn't like the fact that there was Britannian royalty living here.

But it wasn't.

The door and windows were all locked, and most importantly, Nunnally was sitting calmly in the middle of the room like nothing was wrong.

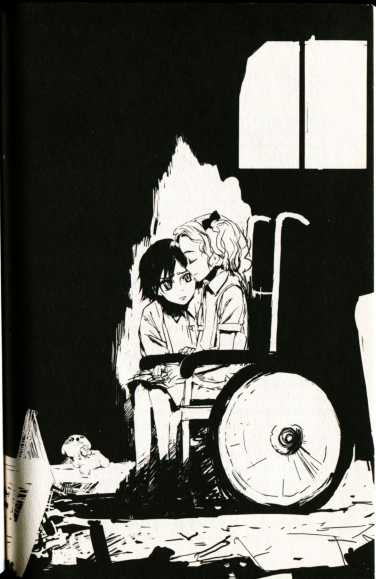
It was Nunnally who had ruined her room.

She had broken the cups, glasses and vases.

Of course, Lelouch scolded her like he never had before. But what appalled Lelouch the most was that Nunnally didn't seem to realize what she had done. She didn't understand why Lelouch was yelling. She wasn't acting. She wore an expression of genuine confusion. She looked like she didn't know what she did.

So, after the incident, Lelouch tried to keep fragile and potentially dangerous objects away from Nunnally. But that didn't solve anything. Of course, Nunnally didn't act up when Lelouch was around. The problem arose when Lelouch was not around. When she was separated from her brother, her mentality broke down.

One time when Lelouch came home, all the clothes had been pulled out from the drawers. Another time, Nunnally had bruises on her hands and arms from hitting them against the wall.



She also had an incident where she tore up her bed sheets with her nails.

Once it was so bad that she was lying next to her wheelchair, which was tipped over, with her head bleeding.

Lelouch was at a loss.

He couldn't understand why these things were happening. Then he understood. It was a signal from Nunnally, to ask him to stay with her.

But realistically speaking, that was impossible. Actually, it would make matters worse. If Lelouch stayed with Nunnally, she wouldn't break things around her. But then she would become even more dependent on Lelouch.

Lelouch probably wouldn't have been able to resolve this on his own. It was a vicious cycle in which the more Lelouch protected Nunnally, the more attached and dependent she became. Then that led to Nunnally becoming even more anxious and destructive whenever Lelouch was gone. The more Lelouch cared for Nunnally, the worse her condition got.

That was when Suzaku Kururugi came into their lives.

Bluntly speaking, Lelouch didn't like Suzaku at first. He was a violent boy with no class. It was hard to believe that he was the son of the Prime Minister of Japan. Lelouch thought that all Japanese children were the worst. Suzaku may have helped him at times, but Lelouch never thought that he would thank him from the bottom of his heart.

But once Suzaku started visiting Lelouch and Nunnally at the place they were at until a month before, Nunnally's acts stopped.

Maybe she was nervous that there was another person around. Maybe she was embarrassed to show her other side to a stranger.

Whatever the reason, she stopped. And once Suzaku, with his sociable ways and healthy disregard for Lelouch's and Nunnally's royal status and situation, came into their lives, Nunnally opened up. Honestly, Lelouch was surprised and

even frustrated that Suzaku was able to resolve something that he couldn't. But it was also the first time Lelouch saw the true Suzaku. Not as a savage Japanese child, but Suzaku Kururugi as a person.

In the end, Lelouch was able to open up to Suzaku and become friends with him because Nunnally had done so first. It was because Suzaku had shed light upon Nunnally's closed world.

And that hasn't change even today.

The past few days have been fair-weathered.

The air coming in from the windows felt good. The sound of the ocean waves was pleasant to the ears.

Since Nunnally had asked for it, Lelouch left her bedroom windows open. He thought it would be fine because it wasn't like she had a cold. And the temperature was pretty high, so airing out the room was actually for the better.

A moment after he opened the windows, Nunnally fell asleep. Lelouch heard her even breathing. He hadn't given her any medication. But his young sister was sleeping peacefully.

Lelouch looked at her and smiled. Then he looked outside the window and saw something. He tiptoed out of Nunnally's room and headed for the front entrance of the mansion.

"Suzaku."

Suzaku was about to leave the main entrance. In his right hand was an empty shopping basket.

"Are you going out?"

Suzaku nodded. "I was going to go get strawberries." He knew that Nunnally loved all kinds of fruit.

But Lelouch didn't understand why Suzaku wasn't asking a servant to go get it. When he asked, Suzaku answered with a smile.

"I'm not buying it from a store."

"It's not a store?"

"No. But he's an expert with fruit."

According to Suzaku, there was a farm nearby, one the Kururugi family had known for years. It was run by an old couple, and their strawberries and tomatoes were some of the best. They did it more as a hobby than a business, according to Suzaku.

"They'll have enough for me. I'm close with the old man."

"I see..." Lelouch mumbled vaguely. He glanced at Suzaku.

Suzaku was wearing navy shorts and a t-shirt. He wasn't wearing his *dogi*, but he still had his *bokuto* with him. It was an amusing mismatch. After he finished looking, Lelouch told Suzaku that he wanted to go, too.

Suzaku was surprised.

"You don't have to come. You should stay with Nunnally."

"She's sleeping. And if you're going to go see someone for the sake of Nunnally, then I should pay my respects as well."

"That's not the point."

"Would I get in the way?"

"No."

"Then let's go."

And so it was decided.

The sun was blazing.

Once they'd gotten through the grove and reached the main road, the strong sunlight blinded them. It was a hot day, hot enough to sweat just standing still.

They were walking a path between rice fields when Suzaku pointed to a small house with a red roof in the distance. He said they were heading there.

The house stood alone at the base of the mountain, and it was clear that it wasn't as "nearby" as Suzaku had said earlier.

"That's not close at all," Lelouch complained.

"That's why I told you to stay home."

"I forgot that your energy level is not that of an ordinary human."

"I've changed my mind. I'm going to take you along no matter what. And I'm not going to slow down for you."

And that's what Suzaku did.

Of course, they weren't hiking a path in the mountains, but Lelouch became overwhelmed from the heat and the endless road.

They finally arrived at their destination an hour after they had left.

An old couple dressed in work clothes came out to greet them at the simple home. Once they saw Suzaku, they both smiled widely and welcomed the two boys. So Suzaku was right about being close to them. But Lelouch was surprised at how much they welcomed him as well.

"You're Suzaku's friend?"

"Uh, yes."

"You boys must be tired from walking so much. Come in and rest."

The two took them up on the offer and received drinks and snacks.

Maybe they don't realize that I'm Britannian? Lelouch wondered, and he asked Suzaku the same question when they were walking home.

Suzaku responded, sounding a little perturbed.

"You think all Japanese hate Britannia, don't you?"

"Not all, but..."

"Yeah, you do. I've been thinking about this for a while. I don't like how you think everyone is your enemy."

Lelouch then got a little annoyed, too. "But you said something like that before."

It had been Suzaku who kept saying how he hated Britannia when they first met.

When Lelouch pointed this out, Suzaku didn't deny it and mumbled that it was true.

In Suzaku's hand was a shopping basket full of strawberries for Nunnally. They didn't even have to buy it. When Suzaku told the old couple about Nunnally, they had given them the strawberries for free.

Suzaku glanced at the juicy, red strawberries and continued. "But...there are really only a few people who really hate Britannia."

"What are you talking about?"

"Everyone thinks they hate Britannia because everyone else is saying so." Suzaku sounded like he was recalling memories.

Lelouch fell silent. He understood what Suzaku was really saying. Suzaku was trying to say that that's how he was before, too.

But now he was different. He had changed after meeting Lelouch and Nunnally.

The sun was setting slowly. The path between the rice fields ended and they entered the grove. They continued to walk silently in the shadow of the trees. It wasn't evening yet, but the path leading to the main entrance of the mansion was dim.

Suddenly, Suzaku stopped walking.

Lelouch turned back to look at his friend. "What's wrong?"

Suzaku handed the shopping basket to Lelouch. Lelouch didn't understand. But before Lelouch could question him, Suzaku spoke up.

"Go back without me."

It was a quiet voice.

Lelouch looked at him curiously. He had an experience of *déjà vu*. He remembered something like this happening before. "You're not saying you forgot something again, are you?"

If that was the case, the old couple's house was too far away now. If Suzaku wanted to go back, it'd be best to go another day. If he went now, Suzaku wouldn't return home until nighttime.

Lelouch was going to say this, when Suzaku spoke again.

"Hurry and go."

This time, he sounded impatient.

Lelouch looked puzzled.

"What's going on?"

"Just go. Hurry."

"But..."

That was when Lelouch shut up.

There were many men, looking like ghosts, who came out from behind the pine trees that surrounded them.



All of the men were dressed in black.

They were wearing rubber suits that clung to their bodies. Their faces were covered with masks. Just looking at them, it seemed like a big joke.

But it was clear that they weren't here for fun and games from the looks in their eyes.

Altogether there were seven men. They began to inch closer to the two boys, surrounding them.

Before Lelouch was able to ask who they were, Suzaku spoke in a low voice.

"You're the guys who've been wandering around here for a while."

"Huh?" Lelouch turned back to look at Suzaku.

That was when it happened.

A gust of wind went by Lelouch's side.

A small shadow running.

But the speed wasn't ordinary. It was as fast as a bullet, precise as an arrow shot from a bow.

"What!?"

By the time Lelouch was able to yell out, the shadow was closing in on one of the men. Suzaku pulled out his new *bokuto* and made an arc. A ragged moan was heard. And then the masked man fell to the ground.

There was silence.

The atmosphere was one of shock.

It was as if they couldn't believe what had happened right in front of their eyes.

And it was the same with Lelouch, who stared at Suzaku. He was surprised that Suzaku had acted without confirming who the men were. But he was more surprised at Suzaku's movements.

Honestly, Lelouch couldn't even see what Suzaku did.

Suzaku was athletically capable. And he was strong in fights. Lelouch knew that from experience. They'd fought the first day they met.

But that was only in comparison to children of the same age. The men in front of them were adults. They should have the advantage in power and in other respects.

Yet, even though it was a surprise attack, one of them was defeated by a single stroke of the *bokuto*.

What did he do? Lelouch wondered. He couldn't believe his eyes. But the situation didn't allow for Lelouch to think it over.

Suzaku, still standing near the fallen man, yelled out.

"Idiot! What are you doing? Run!"

"Huh?"

"These men are after you and Nunnally!"

Lelouch came to with those words.

All hesitation vanished.

Lelouch ran away from the scene as quickly as possible, running through the thick grove.

The men came to as well, and started to chase after Lelouch. But Suzaku ran ahead and stood before them.

"I won't let you go."

And he raised his *bokuto* to ready position.



There weren't any tree roots sticking out, but the path was sandy. Trying to run at full speed made Lelouch almost fall once or twice.

Still, Lelouch ran.

There was only one thing on his mind.

Nunnally.

A month ago, they were relocated from the Kururugi family's main house to this place. And since living here Lelouch had been off guard.

One reason had to do with the tranquil atmosphere of the mansion.

But the bigger reason was that there were so few people here. The main Kururugi home was in a city, with more people around—people who expressed their disdain toward Britannia. But here, there had been no one like that.

For the first time since coming to Japan, Lelouch had been able to spend each day peacefully.

And the fact that Nunnally was more stable than before, also had made Lelouch drop his guard.

Big mistake.

Damn.

Who are those men? Are they Japanese or Britannian? But Lelouch knew that these questions were meaningless.

It didn't matter where the men were from. What was important was whose orders were they following, and for what purpose.

Lelouch always knew that it wouldn't be a surprise if something dangerous happened to himself or Nunnally.

That wasn't just because they were in a position of being "hostages" in this country.

Actually, they weren't "hostages." They didn't have that much worth. "Sacrifices" would be more accurate.

That man, their father—Britannia Empire's emperor Charles zi Britannia.

Think about it. Who gained the most if he or Nunnally died at this moment?

It wouldn't be Japan.

It wouldn't be the other royals who resided in their home country.

It would be *that man*.

The prince and princess who went to Japan as exchange students get killed there. That man would clap his hands in delight. Now they would have a good excuse to invade Japan!

It may be Japanese extremists who actually were putting them in harm. Or possibly the people who killed their mother.

But it was that man who had sent them to Japan, fully knowing the dangers of doing so. Actually, that was what he was hoping for when he cut them off.

Lelouch didn't realize it at the beginning. But he realized it when he saw how the Japanese were hateful toward Britannia.

A useless pawn.

But if the pawn is going to break, why not have it broken in another country?

That's why they were sent to Japan alone—a prince and a princess of Britannia—without a bodyguard. The ill intent was impossible to ignore.

Our father is wishing for our deaths.

Even if he didn't deliberately cause it, he was ready to have it suit his plans if it happened.

Shivers went down Lelouch's spine. How inhuman that man was! But immediately Lelouch regained his cool. This was not the time to get angry.

Before, Suzaku said after observing Lelouch's attitude that Lelouch was too cautious of the people around him. But he had to be that way. He couldn't trust anyone—Japanese or Britannian.

That's right, even that incident one month ago...

At that moment, Lelouch stopped.

He was already out of the grove. The entrance to the mansion was in front of him. The Japanese-style house showed nothing out of the ordinary. There was no clamor.

The mansion might look sleepy and without activity, but it was secure. It would be odd if it weren't, as occasionally the Prime Minister stayed here.

So when Lelouch saw that no alarms had gone off, this proved that the mansion was safe.

Nunnally should be inside, too. Of course, Lelouch should've gone into the mansion immediately. But before he did, he stopped.

He turned around.

He looked at the thick grove—the dark shadows of the trees.

And thought of the boy who'd stayed behind to save him.

Lelouch bit his lip.



The man was bewildered.

The shadow was only but a small one standing in the middle of the road.

Yet, there were two victims fallen beside the shadow.

Of course, one could say it was a surprise attack. The two men had thought that they were dealing with a child, and came closer to try and catch him. But they were both defeated by the *bokuto*. As soon as they'd reached down to grab the boy's neck, their throats were jabbed. They couldn't even groan as they fell to the ground.

The boy was holding his *bokuto* up again, ignoring the fallen men.

The man clicked his tongue in frustration.

He was the leader of this group. He was annoyed at the failures of his men, but did not lose his cool.

He signaled to his men with his eyes.

Go without me.

After all, they were only dealing with one child. He understood now that this was no ordinary child, but there was nothing to fear. And besides, their objective was not this child.

One of his men began to move, trying to follow after the other boy who ran away into the grove.

But...

This time, the man couldn't believe his eyes.

The boy had disappeared.

In reality, he hadn't, but he moved so fast it appeared that way.

The boy turned and ran toward the man who'd gone after the other kid. And although the *bokuto* must've been a burden on his thin arms, he carried it using proper form, jabbing the man in the stomach with it. It wasn't a real sword, so it didn't break the skin, but the momentum and speed were extraordinary.

"Urgh!" The man groaned under his mask and toppled to the ground.

Then the boy—Suzaku—glanced at the fallen man.

"I told you I won't let you go." His tone was lacking emotion.

And once again, the boy held up his *bokuto*.

Finally, the man's mindset changed. This boy wasn't someone he should treat as a kid. He regretted for a moment that he didn't bring an expert in this sort of thing. But it was too late to complain now.

Instead, he became serious.

He decided to forget that he was dealing with a boy.

And that...

...sealed Suzaku's fate.

The man ran toward Suzaku. Suzaku lowered his sword slightly. At that moment, the man kicked up the sand at his feet.

"!!!"

Blinded by the surprise attack, Suzaku's lost his positioning. The man threw his knee up into Suzaku's stomach.

"Gah!"

The boy's small frame flew back and hit the pine tree behind him.

He didn't lose consciousness. Even with the extreme pain and shortness of breath, Suzaku still tried to move. He'd dropped his *bokuto* when he was hit. He tried to pick it up, but the man reached him first. He twisted Suzaku's right arm behind him and shoved the boy to the ground.

"You..."

When Suzaku tried to talk, the man pushed him down harder.

That was when it happened.

"Suzaku!"

Suzaku's eyes opened wide under the man's arm.



In the end, times of crisis and despair leads to early maturation in a child.

Some may think that it is one way to grow; but in another sense it is highly dangerous.

The eleventh prince of the Holy Empire of Britannia, Lelouch vi Britannia, was a precocious boy.

The world viewed from Lelouch's eyes was cold.

I don't have any allies anywhere.

How could a world be warm to a child who thinks that way?

Just like his mentally unstable sister, Lelouch also had a disorder in his heart. In fact, because the symptoms didn't show, it might be something even worse.

But Lelouch had met someone.

The boy was not an enemy or an ally, but just "human" to Lelouch.

Sometimes, Lelouch wondered why Suzaku stayed with him and Nunnally. He could've left them alone. He didn't have to hang out with someone as cynical as Lelouch. Because staying with Lelouch didn't hold any merit for Suzaku. Suzaku really had no reason to.

Lelouch hadn't recognized it before. But actually, that was the exact thing he'd been seeking. When he'd lost his mother and saw how his father truly was, that was what his hardened heart had wanted.

Lelouch was frustrated.

I can't lose him.

That was the only thought in his mind.

That's why, for the first time since he came to Japan, Lelouch did something really stupid.



"Suzaku!"

When Lelouch got there, he saw Suzaku restrained on the ground by a man. His *bokuto* taken away, his hair caught in the man's hands, and his face held down on the sandy path.

But still Suzaku shouted from under the man's arm.

"Idiot! Why did you come back?"

For a moment Lelouch couldn't answer. Honestly, Lelouch himself didn't know the answer. He agreed with Suzaku. Why was he here? There was no reason to be here. All he had to do was worry about Nunnally. That's the kind of person Lelouch of Britannia was.

Suzaku shouted again.

"Hurry and run! A weakling like you can't win!"

This annoyed Lelouch.

"Weakling? What about you? You're being completely held down by that man."

Suzaku's eyes widened in disbelief. "What are you saying at a time like this?"

"And besides, in this case, your actions are far more reckless. If I'm stupid, then you're stupider. Anyway," Lelouch looked around him. "How dare you hurt my friend."

The man holding Suzaku down was watching in disbelief. But Lelouch's words brought him back. He remained quiet and cocked his head to signal his men. There were three more men left standing. They came to surround Lelouch.

But Lelouch didn't move. He wasn't afraid. Instead, he said nonchalantly, "I'm not asking who you guys are. Besides, you wouldn't answer anyway."

"Lelouch?"

"But I'll say this. You guys are...foolish." Lelouch laughed. The men inched closer. Their arms reached to grab Lelouch's head.

But at that moment, a siren echoed.

The men gasped and looked around them.

"Did someone smoke near a fire alarm?"

Lelouch glanced at the man who was still restraining Suzaku.

"Hmph. This happened because you didn't settle it in one blow. Now, what do you want to do? Did you want to get rid of us here? That's fine, but then you and your men won't be able to run away. Judging from the way you're dressed, you don't want people to know who you are, right? But if you leave now, then we'll just say it was a false alarm."

It was clearly a negotiation.

A calculated one.

Let us go, and we'll let you go too.

It was not something a ten-year-old should be able to pull off.

The eyes peeking through the mask expressed surprise. But the hesitation only lasted a second.

The man let go of Suzaku, his eyes still on Lelouch, and signaled his men.

They took off, carrying the fallen ones and running into the thick grove. In seconds they were nowhere to be seen.

The siren continued to run.
 Lelouch waited tensely.
 Eventually the sound of the siren died, and Lelouch finally
 breathed a sigh of relief.
 He glanced at Suzaku, who was still on the ground, looking
 up at him in awe.
 And Lelouch smiled.
 It was a smile of satisfaction.
 "It looks like I'm better at things like this."



It was a huge blunder.

The man cursed himself many times as he ran through
 the grove.

He'd taken the situation lightly because they were children.
 But they weren't ordinary children. Either of them.

They had to regroup. As he ran, he told his men, "Next time,
 a blunder like this will not be allowed." All of the men nodded
 in silence.

"There is no next time."

As soon as the men heard the voice, the atmosphere got tense.

A gun appeared from the shadows of the trees.

The men stopped.

The gun was held by a tall shadowy figure, a man dressed in
 a dark green military uniform.

The soldier—Kyoshiro Tohdoh—stood in front of the leader
 and said quietly, "Or there may be a next time...depending on the
 terms you agree to."

The man slowly raised both of his arms.



"Here, lean on me, Suzaku."

"Yeah, thanks."

It was almost completely dark. The two boys walked along
 the dim grove path. Both were silent. They approached the
 mansion quietly, and the air hitting their skin was chilly.

It was Lelouch who was now holding the shopping basket
 full of strawberries. Strawberries for Nunnally—who would learn
 nothing of this incident—and the two of them to eat when they
 got home.

Eventually, the mansion was within their view.

Suzaku opened his mouth. "Lelouch, I..."

But Lelouch cut him off.

"When did you first notice the men?"

"Oh. Uh..." Suzaku hesitated. "Two days ago at the beach."

"I knew it." Lelouch's voice was dry. "Did you fight them
 then, too?"

"No, they were just roaming around that day."

"I see. And today you wanted to protect me?"

"Yeah."

"How annoying."

Suzaku started, and looked at Lelouch.

There was silence again.

And then Suzaku looked down.

"I guess...in the end, I wasn't of any use."

Lelouch shook his head.

"What I find annoying is that you didn't tell me about them
 beforehand. If I knew, maybe something like today wouldn't have
 happened."

"But..."

"Did you think I'd get scared?"

"That's not it."

"Don't take me lightly, Suzaku. I am a prince of Britannia.
 I'm used to these kind of things. And...you don't have any reason
 to put yourself in danger for me or Nunnally." Lelouch didn't
 mean to say this with any special emotion. He just wanted to

casually warn Suzaku. But suddenly, he felt the weight on his shoulders lift.

With puzzled eyes, Lelouch turned around.

Suzaku was standing still in the middle of the road, looking down.

"Suzaku?"

Suzaku didn't raise his head.

He only mumbled, inaudible if it hadn't been silent in the grove.

"Reason..."

"Huh?"

"I can't do it if I have no reason?"

Suzaku's shoulders were trembling slightly. His fists were clenched.

Lelouch cocked his head to one side, thinking. Then he bluntly answered. "Yeah, you can't."

Suzaku shot a look at Lelouch.

"Lelouch..."

"As you know, Suzaku, I'm pretty twisted."

"Lelouch..."

"You said earlier that you don't like my attitude. But I can't help it. And besides, I can't really believe in good intentions without a reason."

"Lelouch..."

"I guess I can only blame my birth for this. Princes and princesses are all like this. The people around us are either enemies or subjects."

"Lelouch..."

"That's why I can't believe good will that has no reason behind it. The only thing I can believe is good will with reason; only if the other person is going to gain something. Or else, it doesn't make sense."

"Lelouch!"

Suzaku's voice changed into a shout.

Still, Lelouch's calm attitude didn't change.

"That's why, if you really want to help us...I'll make a reason for you."

"Huh?"

Suzaku looked dumbfounded.

Lelouch looked Suzaku straight in the eye. He then walked over toward him. "Suzaku. I don't know what burdened you that night."

"!"

"I'm sure it had something to do with me and Nunnally. But that's why I'm not going to pry it out of you. Unless you want to tell me, I won't even speculate. But...you said that you would never use your power for yourself. I think that's really dangerous. Actually, it's stupid. You'll never be able to live. That's my reasoning. But..." Lelouch smiled. "...I actually like how you don't reason."

Suzaku was still dumbfounded.

"That's why I'll say this," Lelouch continued. "You won't use your own power for yourself. If that's what you're going to do...then I...I'll use my power for you."

He looked at Suzaku. "Give and take. Mutual assistance. How's that for your reason?"

Again, there was a long silence.

The breeze coming in from the ocean rustled the tops of the pine trees.

And then...Suzaku smiled, too.

"Deal."

And here, we will return to the present.

Of course, the pilgrimage to their past is not over yet.

There was a time when the two didn't know each other.

A time when they could not accept one another.

But still.

It was inevitable for them to meet, and to develop a bond.

I can assert that.

I declare this as the one who is known as *the witch*.

CODE GEASS
コードギアス
反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Interval

August 2017, Area 11

Suzaku Kururugi, Ashford Private Academy High School Division student.

Warrant Officer Suzaku Kururugi, Holy Empire of Britannia, Area 11, Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps soldier.

Both are true.

It's not something that is a secret. If someone has connections to the military, people know.

But the burden he carries, no one knows.



"Okay, Suzaku."

The 360-degree virtual simulation screens that surrounded him turned to black, and instead, a woman's face appeared.

She had shoulder-length hair and an intellectual look. Her eyes were soft and enveloped those around her warmly. She was smiling.

Her name was Cecile Croomy, and she was the chief operator of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps.

"You're doing well. Your production ratio, Yggdrasil resonance—both show high numbers."

"Thank you, Ms. Cecile." Suzaku smiled in the capsule simulation pod. He wiped the sweat on his forehead with his hands. And how were my training numbers?"

"Those were also fine, I want to say, but...can I ask something?"

"Yes."

"When you entered Block 14, you let two markers in the abandoned factory go, on purpose. Why was this?"

"The identification signal read UNKNOWN. I did recognize the automatic pistol nearby, but they weren't acting hostile so I decided that they might be civilians."

"What if they'd acted hostile?"

"I would've captured them using paralyzers."

"And if you had orders to shoot them?"

Suzaku hesitated.

"Of course...I would've shot them."

Cecile lowered her eyebrows slightly. But it was only for a split second.

"Okay. Training is over. I don't think we need to improve on anything. System freeze."

"Yes, my lord. System freeze."

"Good job. I have tea prepared, so come down."

"Oh...sure. Thank you."

The screen turned off.

For a while, Suzaku stayed in the pod.

He stared at the blank monitor.

Then, he sighed deeply.

The hangar was crowded with people.

There were numerous researchers in white running all over the place. There were countless gauges lined up. And among the people and the machines, the giant stood.

A machine painted in white and gold.

Both shoulders were thrown out to the sides. The two legs that supported the huge frame were elegant. If it were wearing a cape, you could truly call it a "knight." The fifth generation Knightmare Frame, the Sutherland, used in all the Britannian Forces also resembled a human being; but this giant was much more advanced. It would be tasteless to call this a mere machine.

Seventh generation Knightmare Frame: Lancelot.

Suzaku exited his pod and was staring at the dignified frame when Cecile appeared, carrying a tea set.

"Here you go."

"Oh, thank you." Suzaku picked up a cup from the tray and took a sip. The aroma of the tea was relaxing.

"I'm sorry I don't have snacks to go with it."

"Please—I'm fine. Where is Mr. Lloyd?"

"Over there." Cecile looked toward the Lancelot's legs.

Major Lloyd Asplund, the head of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps, was wearing a long white coat and glasses and was typing at a keyboard furiously.

"What is he doing?"

"He wants to attach a flight unit to the Lancelot. Well, most of what he does is for fun, so you don't have to worry about it."

"I see." Suzaku nodded vaguely. Cecile giggled, holding the other teacup in her hand. "Or did you want to fly using the Lancelot?"

"I'm not sure."

"It would broaden your range in battle. Besides, our unit often receives assignments like a reserve unit would. So placing emphasis on mobility does make sense, and it is in sync with the requests of the higher-ups."

"Is it because of the Narita incident?"

"Yes. It means that they're finally approving our activities." Cecile put her cup back on the tray. "But I don't want him using unit funds for his hobby. I should go stop him soon."

"Be nice."

"Yes. I'm always nice. Oh, and we have a meeting regarding the training data in 20 minutes, so you should go change."

"Yes. Thank you."

Cecile left Suzaku's side and trotted over to where Lloyd was. She then grabbed his collar. Suzaku couldn't hear what they were

saying, but he saw Cecile make a disapproving face and Lloyd turn pale. Like any other day.

Suzaku laughed. Then he turned back to the giant standing behind him.

The white and gold machine was turned off. The Yggdrasil Drive was not running. The FACTSPHERES weren't lit up.

It was looking down at the humans with a blank expression.

Suzaku glanced at the giant's eyes, then at the swords at its waist, and shook his head slightly.

He placed the teacup on the tray and was going to put the tray away.

Then...

Once you unsheathe a sword, you need to be prepared.

"Huh?"

He turned around.

He thought he heard something.

But there was no one in the hangar who looked like they'd said anything.

The researchers were running around looking busy, and Lloyd was being dragged away like a cat who'd been bad by Cecile. They were heading toward the meeting room.

And the giant's eyes, looking down. Blank, emotionless...

Suzaku stared back at those eyes. Quietly.

And he did that until the time came for his meeting.

--Eight years ago--

CODE GEASS
コードギアス
反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE-0:2-Entrance

[Knightmare]

Originally, the Knightmare was developed with the ability to replicate human movements. Not just movements in battle, but in every situation imagined by humans. It could aid and amplify human activity as well. The Knightmares were just "dolls" that had restricted movements; but the fourth generation Knightmares had joints similar to that of humans, and surprised researchers all over the world. However...

September 2009, Japan

The boy was running.

His age was around ten.

His *dogi* was flapping in the wind. His light-colored hair was flowing. He ran and ran.

He was fast for his age. He was so fast that the word *fast* couldn't catch up with him. He was probably the best in any sport at school. Even some adults would find it hard to keep up with him.

His name was Suzaku Kururugi.

Coming up before him was a shrine surrounded by trees.

There was a tiny running stream.

There was a stone bridge over the stream.

Across the bridge was a *torii*.

The red pillars were more scarlet than usual because of the sunset.

Once the pillar was within reach, Suzaku stopped running. He was out of breath, and his forehead was damp with sweat. He stared at the *torii* for a while, then clicked his tongue.

"How stupid."

His rough words didn't match his innocent-looking face.

"I should go home."

He turned around.

This time, instead of running, he walked.

The boy's face was pressed against the ground.

Even when his white shirt got footprints on it, or his black hair got covered with dirt, he stayed hunched over.

But the battery wouldn't stop.

The boy's side, back, face and head were attacked by kicks and punches.

"Britannians should leave!"

"That's right, you hostage!"

"You invader!"

The words didn't hurt.

He didn't care about the boys saying them, either. He wasn't afraid of the pain reverberating through his body.

But he was frustrated about the crushed shopping basket on the ground. He could see it from the corner of his teary eyes. He was finally able to buy pears for his sister Nunnally. He didn't want to bow to the store clerk with the cold eyes, but he did so, thinking about Nunnally.

The pears fell out of the basket and were smashed. They weren't edible anymore. He couldn't give them to Nunnally now. He cried not because of the pain, but the frustration.

His name is Lelouch vi Britannia.

"Look, he's crying."

"Heh. The Britannians are weak."

"Daddy said that Britannia is scared of Japan."

"That's why you're a *hostage*."

He couldn't hear the words.

He could only see his sister's smile as the world got blurry.

And then...

The two meet again.

The wheels of destiny start turning from here.



"That's enough."



The voice that came out of nowhere echoed through the grounds of the shrine.

One of the boys turned around, and his face froze.

"Su-Suzaku..."

"I can't believe you're all ganging up on one person. If Tohdoh-sensei finds out about this, you guys will be in big trouble."

Suzaku looked at the boy on the ground. Among the dark shadows of the trees, on the stone pavement, he was hunched over. The luxurious shirt was dirty and wrinkled.

What an idiot, Suzaku thought to himself. He gets into situations like this because he wears those snobby clothes. And the look in his eye. He should at least change the way he looks at people. His facial expression should be apologetic.

No, I guess he can't.

When he'd met the boy for the first time he was like that, and he will never change.

"What, Suzaku?"

The boys started to argue, but they weren't coming on strong, out of fear.

"Are you on the side of Britannians?"

"Of course not, idiot," Suzaku responded quickly. "I hate Britannia."

"Then, why..."

"But I hate guys who pick on the weak even more."

Suzaku answered bluntly.

The boys looked at each other.

They thought it was cowardly to back down, but they were also scared of Suzaku.

Suzaku knew this, and said in a low voice:

"I'm going to get seriously mad."

Everyone flinched. And Suzaku thought that they would hate him even more now. He was from a prestigious family, but was violent—that's how he was known among his peers. He knew that.

The first one to say it was probably a parent of some kid he beat up, but now all the kids were saying it. And he hated to be in groups with others, so at school and everywhere else he was alone. But he didn't mind. The only ones who need help from others are the weak. He wasn't weak.

"Just go. I won't tell."

The biggest boy in the group glared at Suzaku. "Even the teachers say that they hate Britannia."

"Don't change their words. They just said that Britannia's methods aren't good."

"It's the same thing."

"Who knows?" Honestly, Suzaku didn't know the difference either. "Either way, it's not the teachers who are here now. It's me."

That was the last warning.

The boys probably thought if they stayed any longer, Suzaku would turn violent. They looked at each other and ran away.

One day, I'll get back at him—he's a spy—who does he think he is?

Suzaku didn't hear what they were saying, but he could guess. Either way, it didn't matter. They couldn't do anything on their own.

Suzaku thought maybe the idiot in front of him now was a little better than them. At least this idiot wasn't a loser. He didn't give in. His eyes said so.

The idiot looked up at Suzaku and wobbled up without asking for help. He mumbled. "Why..."

Suzaku didn't even want to hear the word, "help," so he cut him off. "I didn't do anything. It's just that your sister asked me to, so I came to see what was going on."

"Nunnally asked you?"

His face changed only when Suzaku mentioned that girl.

"That's right." An ill-tempered Suzaku nodded, and Lelouch's expression got even more cross. "You're lying."

Suzaku was annoyed. "I'm not."

"You're lying."

"I'm not."

"You're lying!"

"I'm not!"

"You're lying!"

And that continued until they got home.



It was closer to a shack than an annex.

It was two stories tall, and to have a structure like this separate from the main home was quite impressive financially, but still. The pillars supporting the four corners had been battered by rain and wind. The frosted glass windows seemed to reject the outside air and closed off the building gloomily. There were assorted trees on the mountain behind the house. And in front of the main entrance was a grove with more trees. The white walls were taken care of, but instead of being tasteful, it looked rather creepy.

It looked like a building that could be mistaken for a haunted house.

And the fact that the two siblings lived there showed the situation they were in.



To Nunnally vi Britannia, the world is small.

Of course, Nunnally has physical limitations.

Nunnally cannot see. And her legs won't move. This happened as a result of a certain incident.

But to Nunnally, it wasn't just because of her physical disabilities.

Purely, her world is small.

But that is what she wants. Because the big world is full of scary things.

The beautiful Britannia Palace was indeed a typical representation of it. When she was able to see, the palace was beautiful and cheery. But at the same time, it was full of jealousy and hatred.

It's not that all the people there were like that, but there were many. The cold glares of the stepsiblings, the step mothers' contemptuous words and the indifferent servants who took care of her.

Everyone was scary.

Even in Japan, it was no different.

People are scary. Everyone. She's so scared she wants to run away. That's why the world is fine when it's small.

A small world, where no one can come in... then I can live Alone, with my kind brother. Just the two of us...

Nunnally heard stomping footsteps.

Lelouch?

Nunnally can't see, so her other senses are stronger now, especially her hearing. That is why she can tell who the footsteps belong to, as long as she knows the person.

But this time, she could hear two different footsteps.

Soon, she heard voices too.

"Why are you following me?"

"Are you an idiot? I told you in the beginning that this annex was originally mine."

"But now it's our room!"

"Don't give me attitude, you hostage."

"We're not hostages. I told you that we're foreign exchange students. How many times do I have to tell you?"

"How many times do I have to tell you that I used to spend time here? What's wrong with coming to retrieve something I forgot?"

"You're suffering from amnesia at your age? The Japanese Prime Minister must be sad to have such a loser for a son."

"Sometimes you say weird things. Amnesia?"

"It describes idiots like you."

"What did you say!?"

The footsteps were running. And they were arguing while running.

Nunnally knew the voices. One was her brother, Lelouch. And the other was the boy named Suzaku. The son of the family they were staying with.

To Nunnally, that boy was scary. He got into an argument the first time he met the siblings.

"...I still don't forgive you for what you did."

"You started it."

"It's because you tried to touch Nunnally!"

"I just thought it was pretty. What's wrong with touching her hair?"

"Idiot. Savage. Japanese. Try it again and I'll hang you upside down and sink you in Tokyo Bay."

"Do you want me to beat you up again?"

...So that is what happened.

"Anyway, I can prove you're lying if I ask Nunnally."

"Yeah, go ahead and ask. You'll know I'm not lying."

And that's when the door opened violently.

"Nunnally!"

The footsteps that burst in belonged to her brother, Lelouch.

"Are you okay? Did he do anything weird to you?"

A little behind Lelouch, Nunnally heard mumbling, *what do you mean, weird?* And that was Nunnally's question too.

"Welcome home, Lelouch. What do you mean, weird?"

"Huh? Oh...um..." Lelouch started to mumble. "Well, I mean..."

Nunnally didn't understand the situation, but she could tell that her brother was probably wearing an embarrassed expression. Her beautiful face with kind eyes was probably showing hesitation.

Suddenly, Lelouch yelled out. "What I mean is, did this guy come see you?"

"Yes. Just earlier, he said he forgot something." *See, I told you,* Nunnally heard in the background again. She tilted her head to one side.

"And I just told him that you were late coming home..."

As soon as she said that, the rowdiness started again.

"See! You lied!"

"It's not a lie! She did ask me."

"No, did not. She just said that I was running late. She didn't ask you to go look for me!"

"But anyone would assume so if she said it with that face!"

"What face?"

"That face!"

Huh? Lelouch turned around. "Oh, sorry, Nunnally. We're not fighting or anything..."

"Of course not. I don't pick on the weak."

"Would you stop interrupting me!? Besides, who are you calling weak?"

"You, Prince Weakling."

"What are you..." But Lelouch probably remembered Nunnally's worried look, and stopped.

The room fell silent.

And finally Suzaku decided it was enough. "Ah, whatever. I'm leaving. Sheesh, because of you guys, my practice today is ruined. Well, I guess it's okay because Tohdoh-sensei isn't here anyway."

"I didn't ask you for anything!"

"Whatever. And by the way, little sister..."

Nunnally flinched at the name she was never called.

"Yes?"

"Your big brother is fine. But he's awfully clumsy."

"Clumsy?"

"He fell on the road on the way home. I think you can get mad at him for causing you to worry." And the footsteps left.

The door was shut.

Then silence.

Lelouch mumbled, "He..."

"Yes?"

"Sorry, Nunnally, for being rowdy."

"Lelouch, were you hurt?"

"Huh? Uh, yeah. But it's not a big deal." Lelouch's hand touched hers. His hand was the only thing that reassured her. But there was something on her mind.

"Lelouch?"

"Yes?"

"Are you...laughing?"

"Huh?"

Nunnally could feel her brother's dumbfounded expression.

But it didn't last long. Lelouch's voice hardened.

"I'm not laughing, I'm mad. Sheesh, these Japanese are really callous."

"I see..."

But Nunnally knew that Lelouch wasn't serious.

Because just now, he seemed like he was enjoying himself for the first time since coming to Japan.

Sheesh. He's so stuck up.

Suzaku was complaining inside his head as he walked down the path to the main house.

It was already getting dark. He'd wasted a lot of time.

There was still a long way to go on the path before reaching the main house. And even this path was private property of the Kururugi family. For most Japanese who only made an average income, the amount of space they had was unbelievable. But it was the main house, the Kururugi Shrine, and they had 240 shrines all across Japan. Even in this city alone there were five related shrines. And all of that property

belonged to Kururugi. Even the shrine where Suzaku saved Lelouch belonged to Kururugi.

"Besides..."

Suzaku kicked a stone at his foot. He talked out loud to himself.

"...why did he come to our house?"

He's weak, but doesn't talk like a weakling.

And he kept saying things that annoyed Suzaku. Were all Britannians like that? If that was true, then they really were an annoying bunch. No wonder the adults kept badmouthing them.

Suzaku chased the stone and kicked it again.

And again.

This time, the stone fell into the grass on the side. That made Suzaku stop walking.

He turned around to look at the annex. There was one room that was lit. It was probably the bedroom they slept in. The soft, glowing light in the darkness looked weak. Suzaku heard a dog howl somewhere.

But...

This time, Suzaku didn't say it out loud.

If he wasn't Britannian, he'd be pretty interesting.

Honestly, Suzaku had never met someone his age like Lelouch. Most kids, after fighting with Suzaku once, would never speak to him again. They would either be scared and stay away, or take a subservient attitude toward him. But Lelouch was different. He didn't run away, and he didn't become subservient. Instead, he fought back. He was weird. And that little sister—Suzaku was curious about her, too. That girl was really weak. Someone needed to protect her. That's why Suzaku had lied to help her earlier.

Suzaku stopped his train of thought and clicked his tongue.

What an idiot.

They're Britannians.

And Britannia is a horrible country.

They instigated wars for what they needed. They invaded other countries for the sake of their own greed.

They were a horrible country.

Everyone said so.

The main house came into sight. It was so large it was intimidating.

Once Suzaku looked up at the house, he recomposed his expression. The entrance was lit and clean, and there was one pair of leather shoes there.

Suzaku walked into the house and, instead of going to his room on the second floor, he walked down the hallway on the first floor. At the end of the hallway there were double doors that didn't match the Japanese-style house.

Suzaku stood in front of the doorknob and stopped. He took a deep breath before knocking.

"Who is it?"

A deep voice could be heard from the inside.

"It's Suzaku."

"Come in."

Suzaku turned the doorknob carefully and walked in.

"I didn't know you were here, Father. Welcome home. Sorry for not coming home earlier."

His attitude and choice of words would surprise anyone who knew the violent Suzaku outside of this house. And he was only 9 years old, too.

But another face Suzaku had was being a "son of a prestigious family."

He was brought up well.

If asked which was the true Suzaku, this disciplined one was the fake...

Suzaku bowed deeply when he entered. In front of him was a middle-aged man sitting in a luxurious chair, resting his arm on the armrest while gazing at the stack of papers he was holding.

Some sort of work-related documents, probably. The man was slightly plump. His hairline was receding. Gloomy eyes.

His name was Genbu Kururugi.

He was Suzaku's father, the master of this Kururugi house, and the Prime Minister of Japan.

He didn't seem to care much about the son who came all the way to his study to greet him. He didn't even look up from his documents.

"Did you need something?"

"Not really." Suzaku's response lacked in emotion, too. It wasn't the attitude a child would have toward a father he hasn't seen in over a month.

Kururugi sighed, a sound that was more like a snort.

"Then go to your room and rest. You have school tomorrow, don't you?"

"Yes."

"There'd better not be a drop in your grades."

"I'm fine."

And that was the end of the conversation for the parent and child.

Kururugi still didn't look toward Suzaku. His eyes were glued to the paperwork in his hands.

Suzaku bowed again and was about to leave when his father spoke again.

"How are the two from Britannia doing?"

Suzaku stopped, opening the door. "Doing? What do you mean?"

Then, Kururugi finally looked up.

Suzaku thought that his father smiled.

He looked... sinister, almost.

"Never mind. They are important guests. Treat them well. Good night, Suzaku."

"Good night, Father."

Suzaku felt chills.



The phone rang.

It was just after the small boy disappeared behind the doors. Kururugi picked up the phone on his desk, his eyes still on the documents.

"It's me."

For a moment, the hands flipping through the papers stopped. "...Connect." The documents were thrown to the desk. Night was advancing on the other side of the window. "...It's me. Kururugi. Hm."

A dog howled somewhere.

"...I see. So, I can do whatever I want with them, eh?

Hmph. Just as the rumors say, he's a heartless father. But that's better for us anyway...I know. It's not that they don't have value as hostages. Even though they were stripped of their rights to the throne, there are people who support them...I see, that's the first I heard of that..."

It became slightly lighter outside the window.

It seemed that the clouds covering the moon went away.

"...Fine. Leave it as is. Either way, we can buy time...yes, for both of us. But...yes. It's about Kiriha. I'm sure he's suspicious... yes, he's still coming. But don't worry about him...Of course. When the time comes, I'll take care of it. My son? Idiot. They betrayed me first...anyway, don't cut communications with the other side...I know. I'm not that foolish...Yes. That's right. The disclosure of information should take place as scheduled..."

Eventually, he hung up.

The full moon was shining outside of the window.

Kururugi looked up at it and this time, for sure, he laughed, as if laughing at something. As if he were insulting something.

And as if he were expecting something.

He continued to laugh. Sinisterly.



Honestly, he couldn't get along with his father.

He didn't know why.

And most likely, he didn't want to know why.

It was a few days later. It was a Sunday.

"Sensei!"

It was a fair day, fitting for autumn. Suzaku changed into his *dogi* and *hakama* as always, and was waving his arms in front of his house gate. A thin, tall shadow was approaching from the hill.

As he got closer, one could see that he was tall but not thin. He just looked that way because his body was proportionate. The fit shoulders were broad and he had a thick muscular chest.

When he recognized Suzaku standing at the gate, he raised his arm too. He then ran over to Suzaku as if he couldn't wait to see him.

"Hey, Suzaku."

When Suzaku stood in front of him, the sharp face that reminded one of a knife softened into a smile. He was probably just over 30 years old. He was wearing a dark green military uniform decorated with badges.

His name was Kyoshiro Tohdoh.

"How are you?"

"Good!" Suzaku answered cheerfully. "But I was bored at practice because you didn't come for a long time."

"Ha ha. I'm sorry." The man laughed. "But I do have a separate job."

"You were busy with work?"

"Yeah. Something like that."

Suzaku opened the large gate and allowed the man onto the property.

When they walked side by side, Suzaku's head didn't even reach the man's shoulders. It wasn't that Suzaku was short; the man was simply tall.

"Then do you have work today, too?"

"Yeah. Your father called for me."

"I see..." Suzaku looked despondent when he heard that.

The man noticed and patted Suzaku's head with his big hand. "Don't worry, it won't take long. As soon as I finish talking to your father, I'll meet you at the training hall."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I promise."

"Yay!"

This Tohdoh was Suzaku's kendo teacher.

"Is your father doing okay?"

"I think so. But he's not home that often."

"I see. He is a busy man, after all."

"Where did you go for work?"

"Itsukushima. For training."

"Huh? Itsuku..."

"It's in the western region. There's a base there. By the way, you grew again."

"I'm still not tall enough. But I'm the sixth tallest in my class!"

"That's enough, isn't it?"

"I want to be as tall as you."

"But there are inconveniences too, you know. First off, it costs money."

"Why?"

"Because I can't buy clothes in normal stores. And I have to buy larger seats for trains and planes or I'd be squished. And I'm so big, when I do something bad it shows easily."

"Then I want to be a little shorter than you."

"Ha ha ha."

If someone who didn't know them saw the two, he might think they were brothers.

Or perhaps...father and son.

The Kururugi property was vast. Even the path from the gate to the entrance made for a good walk. It was a while before they reached the Japanese-style front entrance. And that's when Suzaku noticed the shadow.

At the end of the path that forked, past the stone pavement that led into the grove, a boy wobbled on his feet with a shopping basket in his hand.

Straight black hair, a handsome profile. But his white shirt was dirty again. And he had bruises on his face. But his lips were drawn in a straight line.

"He..." Suzaku stopped and made a face.

Then Tohdoh mumbled, more to himself. "It's that boy." That was when Suzaku left Tohdoh's side. "Suzaku?"

"Sorry, sensei. I'll catch you later!" And with that, Suzaku ran. He jumped over the clean-cut grass and caught up with Lelouch quickly. He grabbed Lelouch's arm.

"Huh?"

"Hey, come here."

"What the...let go of me!"

"Shut up."

Suzaku dragged Lelouch, who was protesting, and they both disappeared into the shadows of the building.

Tohdoh looked on with an expressionless face.

"You're such an idiot." Suzaku turned over the first aid kit and said what he thought out loud. Various things from the box fell to the floor: a bottle of antiseptic, bandages, tweezers, etc.

Lelouch was facing to the side, seated on the floor, quiet, looking cross.

Come to think of it, I've never seen him smile, Suzaku thought.

Lelouch didn't look like he was going to run away. But his mouth was clammed up. And there were bruises all over his face. Suzaku couldn't really tell because Lelouch was

wearing clothes, but he was sure it was a similar situation on his body, too.

He knew what had happened. Or he could guess.

Probably something similar to the other day. Although the boys who injured Lelouch this time were likely different ones from the last time.

There was no kid around here who could stand up to Suzaku after he'd been warned.

"Okay, face me."

But Lelouch didn't listen.

So Suzaku took the antiseptic, splashed it on a cotton ball and pressed it hard against the reddest part of Lelouch.

Lelouch screamed something unrecognizable.

"I can do it without your cooperation, you know. It'll just hurt more."

And finally Lelouch obeyed. He reluctantly faced Suzaku.

Suzaku took care of Lelouch's wounds with an expert hand. When he realized this, Lelouch looked at him curiously. Suzaku was able to see his reflection in Lelouch's eyes.

What an interesting eye color.

Suzaku felt like he needed to say something, so he did. "I'm good at this kind of thing. I need it during training."

Lelouch remained quiet. The room was silent. Sunlight streamed in through the opened doors.

Finally, for the first time since he entered the room, Lelouch opened his mouth. "Where is this?"

"Training hall. For kendo."

"Kendo?"

"Um...well, we fight each other using bamboo sticks."

Lelouch probably didn't understand. He was sitting on the polished floor. He raised his arm and pointed to a frame hanging from the wall. It was a piece of paper with snake-like writing on it. He was pointing to the letters.

"What does that say?"

"Don't ask difficult questions."

"It's your training hall."

"It's my family's training hall," Suzaku finished treating Lelouch's wounds. "Okay, I guess that should do it. You should keep holding the towel against your arm."

"Oh, okay."

Suzaku snorted. "Hmph. Don't get me wrong. I'm not doing it for you. If you went home like that, your little sister would get worried again. That's why."

"Yeah. That's true."

"Besides, it's your fault." Suzaku looked at the shopping basket a few feet away. It was something Lelouch was holding earlier. It looked like there was some fruit inside.

"If you want something, you should ask the servants to get it. Everyone who lives around here hates Britannia."

That's why it was ridiculous for Lelouch to walk around alone. Lelouch's black hair was similar to that of the Japanese, but one look at his face revealed that he was a foreigner. And the whole city knew that the Britannian prince and princess were living here.

Lelouch scowled. "You hate Britannia too."

"Of course."

"Then why do you do this?"

"I told you before. I hate it when the strong pick on the weak."

Suzaku couldn't bear the sister getting hurt. Even if she was a princess of Britannia, the weak were the weak.

"Anyway, from now on, don't go out outside alone. One day you're not going to come home. If that happens, your father in Britannia will be..." Sad, is what Suzaku meant to say. But he couldn't.

Lelouch threw the towel he was holding against his arm to the floor and stood up.

"That man is not a father!"

His voice was so fierce, Suzaku felt that the entire training hall must have shook. Suzaku gulped. He was shocked. He

looked up at Lelouch, dumbfounded. And Lelouch realized what he had said.

He gasped and a stern look came over his face. He looked away, to the side.

A gentle breeze wafted into the training hall.

Then Lelouch picked up the towel on the floor. "I'm going home," he mumbled, and began to leave. But after a few steps, he stopped. "Um...Thanks. For caring for my wounds."

Suzaku couldn't answer. He was still in shock from all of Lelouch's yelling.

Lelouch started to leave again. But when he reached the entrance to the training hall, Suzaku finally found his voice.

"Hey."

Lelouch turned around.

His strangely-colored eyes were looking at Suzaku.

"Um...if you want to go out from now on, let me know."

"Huh?"

"If I'm bored, I'll go with you."

Lelouch looked surprised.

And then he responded. "I'll think about it."

He closed the door behind him. Suzaku heard the light footsteps recede into the distance.

Why did I say something so stupid?

He's a Britannian. I hate them.

But.

He smiled a little bit for the first time. It was a beautiful smile. Suzaku couldn't believe it himself, but... He was happy.

2

After that, they spent a lot of time together.

"You're a foreign exchange student, right? Don't you have to go to school?"

"It's not necessary. I can study at home too."

"You say that, but you're really dumb, aren't you?"

"I'm sorry, but my academic ability is far higher than yours. I can tutor you if you want."

"No thanks, idiot."

"I'm trying to be nice."

"It's the way you say it that ticks me off!"

They interacted with the same words, but either way, the time they spent together increased.

They lived on the same property. Even if they didn't want to, they could see each other everyday. As promised, when they went out they went together. As long as Suzaku was with him, the bullies in the neighborhood couldn't touch Lelouch.

"You're good at sports, right, Suzaku?"

"Oh, yeah...I guess so."

"He's just full of energy, that's all."

"What! You weakling with a big head!"

"Don't talk like that in front of Nunnally. What if she starts talking like you, idiot?"

"Please, stop it!"

Suzaku was getting along with the sister, too.

At first, she was clearly scared of Suzaku; but she heard her brother talking with him so easily, and eventually she was reassured.

After that, the three played together often.

Suzaku would visit the annex and they would spend a lot of time together. Sometimes they would watch TV or listen to the radio, both brought in from the main house. Nunnally didn't want to go out often, but they would bring her out and take a stroll in the grove.

Seasons passed.

Autumn went by, the new year came and went, and even winter passed.

"In the summer we should go to Izu, Nunnally. My family has a vacation home there."

"Hey. You can't just take her without telling me."

"The ocean is pretty, too."

"The ocean? But I can't swim..."

"Don't worry. The water is shallow. And I'll stay by your side."

"Hold it! Don't plan things without me. I'm going to be with Nunnally."

"Shut up. If you don't want to come, you don't have to. You can stay here and mope like you always do."

"Who said I'm not going! Fine, I'll go. I'll protect Nunnally even if my life depends on it!"

"That's a little embarrassing."

"Hee hee. Lelouch."

Suzaku was having a fun time. He wasn't thinking about Japan or Britannia. He forgot those things and was enjoying himself.

He didn't know if he could call them friends. He never felt like he had a friend before.

But it was fun.

That was the only feeling he had. And that was fine.

But, just one thing.

No, two, that were not to be forgotten.

The first were the dark eyes of his father who watched the three of them playing. And the word "Britannia" heard from the television and the adults around him, turning into something said with hatred.



April 2010, Japan

Tohdoh was holding his *shinai* in silence. He held it up in position in the serene training hall. He was like a well-made statue. But he was not a statue. If you touched him, you could feel the warmth.

Tohdoh had a tranquil look on his face, but he was not taking the boy in front of him lightly. The boy who stood against him had a small frame. He was ten years old. From the tall Tohdoh's perspective, the young boy was nothing. But Tohdoh had his full guard up.

The boy was a genius. Tohdoh was probably the first one to notice that. And he was not only a genius in kendo. Actually, the sword was only a part of the boy. His body and the nerves that ran through it...that was genius.

If he decided to pursue the path of the sword, he would become first class. And if he decided to pursue the path of martial arts, he would become first class in that aspect, as well. It was an unfair scenario, for the ordinary mortal who could only give effort. Yet, sometimes there are humans like these. Geniuses.

If the boy decided to go into the military, just like himself...

He could become a hero.

Of course, that is, if he was prepared to dirty himself with the blood of another.

The boy was also holding his *shinai* in position, circling Tohdoh inch by inch. His innocent face was damp with sweat.

He was probably looking for a chance to attack. But there was none. His potential was higher than anyone Tohdoh knew. For now, the boy lacked experience and size. But the fact that he recognized that, and took care in choosing his attack moves was already smart.

Tohdoh changed the direction of his body and faced the boy.

The boy moved again.

Tohdoh changed direction accordingly.

This went on for quite some time.

I guess it's enough, Tohdoh thought to himself, and lowered his arms slightly.

"Yah!"

At that moment, the boy charged in.

He thought that Tohdoh was out of position and went in to attack. But he didn't know that it was something Tohdoh did on purpose.

The charge was accurate and fast like an arrow. It was a move no other ten-year-old could do. Tohdoh had to do all he could, even though he expected the attack, to dodge it. He twisted his body out of the way and struck the boy's *shinai* with his own. The boy was out of position completely. So Tohdoh finished it off with a swing on the boy's wrist.

A loud snapping sound echoed, the sound of Tohdoh's *shinai* against the boy's arm guards.

The two of them stopped.

It was the boy who spoke first.

"My loss!"

Suzaku bowed, looking happy.

The door to the training hall was open. A gentle breeze blew inside.

Even though it was spring, the air was still chilly. But it was perfect for Suzaku, who was dripping with sweat from practice.

He wiped his face with a towel as he praised his teacher.

"You did that on purpose. You invited me to attack, and then got me by dodging it."

Tohdoh laughed. "Just knowing that is amazing enough, Suzaku. You've gotten better."

"Not yet." Suzaku shook his head. "Even if it was on purpose, I still had a chance. But I couldn't even touch you."

"If I invited the attack, I couldn't let you. But if your attack was a little smoother, it wouldn't have been dangerous. You were thinking about your next move, right?"

"Yes."

"That wasn't good. If you had only thought about that first attack, I wouldn't have been able to dodge it completely."

"I see..." Suzaku nodded.

Tohdoh continued. "Once you unsheathe your sword, you have to be prepared. In reality, if you use real swords, you may not get a next move. So you have to put everything you have in every shot you make. Or else, you'll be defeated first."

"Yes."

"An unsheathed sword won't be satisfied unless it sees blood. And to be prepared to see that blood, is the path of the sword. That doesn't change even if we use *shinai*. That's what I think."

"Yes."

Suzaku had a serious face. He was sitting on the clean floor with his legs tucked under him.

Tohdoh noticed that, and softened his words.

"Well, although I say all this, if people ask me if I'm prepared, I'm not. I just got a complaint from my men, too. That lately I've been too out of it. That maybe I should become a city training hall teacher and quit the military."

Suzaku laughed.

It was true that Tohdoh had been visiting the Kururugi house a lot. It was good news for Suzaku, but he guessed that it was a problem for Tohdoh's work. He did indeed have another job in the outside world.

Just as their conversation took a pause, someone called for Tohdoh. "It was a servant of the house. The master is calling for you, sir."

Tohdoh's expression hardened slightly. But he immediately softened it. "I see. Then I shall go." He glanced at Suzaku. Suzaku nodded.

"I'll be practicing a little bit more."

"No, you should call it a day. If you work too hard, you might get hurt."

"But..."

"You should listen to those older than you, Suzaku." With that, Tohdoh left the training hall.

The tall shadow disappeared behind the frosted glass and became smaller.

Suzaku slumped to the floor. He was indeed tired from the long hours of facing Tohdoh.

Someone was calling.

Suzaku.

Hey, Suzaku.

It was nostalgic.

It was like a close brother was calling for him.

How stupid.

He had no such thing.

But the clear voice felt so good...

"Suzaku!"

"Ow!"

Suzaku felt pain in his head. And his dreamy feeling was gone. He opened his eyes and sat up. Lelouch was standing in front of him.

"Where am I?"

"Huh?"

Suzaku saw the reflection of himself in Lelouch's strangely-colored eyes. He looked around and sighed in relief. He was in the training hall. It seemed that he was tired after his bout with Tohdoh and fell asleep.

The sunlight coming in through the doors was reddish. Suzaku sighed again and yawned. "Oh, it's you."

"What do you mean, 'it's me'?" Lelouch pouted. "You really don't have manners, do you? I was worried you would catch a cold, so I woke you up."

"I won't catch a cold. I'm trained, unlike you." Suzaku rubbed his head. Then he realized what had happened. "You kicked me in the head, didn't you?"

Lelouch didn't look sorry at all. "It's your fault for not waking up."

"So violent."

"You're one to talk."

As always, Lelouch had a comeback for every remark.

But that was how he felt.

It was proof that Lelouch trusted Suzaku. When Lelouch vi Britannia didn't trust someone, he became awfully quiet. He would lay defenses in order to keep weaknesses hidden away from enemies.

So his light attitude was proof that he considered Suzaku his friend. Suzaku understood that.

"Anyway..." Lelouch was closing the windows as he spoke. The air coming in was chilly, more so than before. "...it's too early to sleep. Besides, doesn't this place get locked up at night?"

"I'm surprised you know that."

"So did that military guy beat you up again?"

"He wasn't beating me up. He was training me."

Suzaku had invited Lelouch to try training, too. Although Lelouch lacked stamina, his reflexes weren't bad. Of course, he was nothing compared to Suzaku.

But Lelouch rejected the idea.

His reason was that he didn't want Nunnally to worry.

At the time, Suzaku accepted the reason, but now he doubted it. He wasn't doubting Lelouch's words.

He was doubting Lelouch's heart.

Honestly, in Suzaku's eyes, Lelouch still didn't trust the people in this mansion. Just as he was with Suzaku before, if it wasn't absolutely necessary, he tried not to get involved with others. He talked normally to Suzaku now, but he wasn't like that with anybody else. He still tried to go out shopping when he needed something. And every time, Suzaku went with him.

He supposed that, looking from Lelouch's eyes, everyone around him was a foreigner.

Foreigners who were not on good terms with his home country.

Suzaku understood, but he still thought Lelouch was too cautious. It was a different story with the people who lived in the city, but Suzaku thought that he could relax a bit more in this house.

I think Tohdoh-sensei should be okay.

Kyoshiro Tohdoh, Suzaku's kendo teacher, wasn't exactly welcoming toward Britannia. But he wouldn't act childishly toward a kid. At least that's what Suzaku believed.

Well, it's not up to me.

It was up to Lelouch who he wanted to trust and who he didn't. Suzaku himself was not the cheeriest of boys when he stepped out of this mansion.

"What's this?"

Lelouch was asking a question. He was standing next to a package in the corner of the training hall floor.

"It's sensei's." Suzaku answered, finally getting up. "I think he meant to come get it later."

"I see." Lelouch was staring at the package. "There's a sword here, too. Is it real?"

"Well, he is a soldier after all."

When Suzaku answered, Lelouch laughed. It was a cold smile that didn't suit a child his age.

"What a birdbrain. A soldier leaving his sword lying around."

"Hey, I don't approve of you insulting him."

Of course, Tohdoh himself had said earlier that he was too relaxed these days.

But this was different.

Suzaku put away his *shinai* and other equipment, and shooed Lelouch out. He followed Lelouch out, stepping outside.

He closed the door and locked it.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" Lelouch asked.

"What?"

"His stuff is still inside."

"Oh, that's right."

Tohdoh would be at a loss when he came back. But it had been a few hours since he'd left. How long could they be talking?

Lelouch laughed. "You're a birdbrain too."

"Shut up. It'll be okay if I give sensei the keys."

Suzaku assumed that Tohdoh was in his father's study.



There was a long silence.

The ashtray on the desk was filled with at least three cigarette butts. They weren't Tohdoh's; he neither smoked nor drank. They were from the middle-aged man, the owner of this room.

The room was dark because the blinds were closed.

The interior was luxurious, fitting for the Kururugi house. There were heavy bookshelves full of books on both sides of the room. The carpet under their feet was thick, and it was a genuine leather sofa that Tohdoh was sitting on. The Western-style interior was probably Kururugi's choice. Unlike the family he was born to, Kururugi had foreign tastes; he had studied abroad in many countries. He was chosen as the Prime Minister not because of the power his family held, but for his international experience.

Tohdoh was reading the materials that had been handed to him. Eventually he finished.

He sighed.

"Are these facts?"

Tohdoh worked hard to suppress the emotions he was feeling inside.

The man sitting in front of him nodded nonchalantly. "If it's not true, then I should fire all of our intelligence members." Genbu Kururugi smiled unpleasantly.

It was a smile that said he knew what Tohdoh was thinking.

"Why are you surprised, Tohdoh? We're dealing with a tyrant, a one-of-a-kind that we don't often see in history. He is a bloodthirsty beast. Britannia Emperor Charles zi Britannia—if you know that man even a little, it's not something to be surprised about. He is not someone we can continue to appease. I knew this would happen as soon as we took the side of the EU and the Chinese Federation, even though it was for a short period of time."

"I see. And what do we do now?"

"For now, they're publicly saying that it is military training in the East China Sea. So we'll pretend that we buy that. I've already told Okinawa Headquarters to increase their troops and hold emergency simulation trainings."

"That's not good. It will give the enemy an excuse." Tohdoh had clearly called Britannia the enemy. "If we show a heavy-handed display, it might start a war."

"Actually, it would definitely start a war. Don't misunderstand, Tohdoh. They are already picking a fight with us. Even before we've indicated if we want to fight. It would be pointless to act submissive now."

Then Kururugi laughed.

"Of course, it is my intention that they are doing so."

Tohdoh looked at Kururugi silently.

Then the Prime Minister stopped laughing.

Dark, sinister eyes looked back at Tohdoh.

"Are you serious? That's what your eyes are saying, Tohdoh. But no, I'm not crazy. Or perhaps I'm not fully myself. Yes. Once we go to war, Japan cannot win against Britannia. Never. It is like ants going against a giant with swords made of leaves."

Tohdoh said nothing.

"Although Sawazaki took my words seriously and is strengthening the defense line. But it's true. Britannia can invade Japan any day, and our nation will lose in a matter of a short period of time."

That was when Tohdoh raised his arm toward his chest. He touched a button on his uniform. It was a casual move. After that, Tohdoh opened his mouth.

"You knew we were going to lose..." He was choosing his words carefully. "...then why did you make matters worse?"

"Hm. I don't know what you're talking about." Kururugi shrugged. The wrinkled face was wearing a sinister smile again.

"Actually, I don't know *which* act you're talking about, Tohdoh. Are you talking about the fact that I used the media to raise anti-Britannian sentiments in Japan? Or that we sided with the EU and the Chinese Federation? Or manipulating the *sakuradite* distribution to anger Britannia purposely?"

"All of what you did, including those."

Tohdoh's eyes were not just sharp, but had the intention to kill. His whole body was giving off a murderous intent. This was a side of himself he would never show to Suzaku.

Kururugi looked away as if he didn't appreciate Tohdoh's reaction. But he was still smiling. He spoke, looking off to one side.

"You have no right to criticize me, Tohdoh. You pretended to be a servant and took in my son. But yet you were willing to strip me of my position if necessary."

"What are you..."

"You're here on Kirihara's behalf, aren't you?"

Tohdoh's broad shoulders twitched.

Kururugi saw that from the corner of his eyes and snorted.

"As always, whatever that old man does is underhanded and yet obvious. Or did he really think I wouldn't know? Anyway, you're the watchdog assigned to me. That's why you approached me and kept coming in and out of my house. No, it's not just you. A long line of Prime Ministers have had something similar."

And for the first time, Kururugi's tone changed to one of disgust.

"Even though we say we're free, or we're democratic, it means nothing. In reality, this country hasn't changed since losing

that huge war 65 years ago. Only the few demonic, selfish ones have power. That formula hasn't changed."

Kururugi picked up the cigarette pack on his desk. He took one out and lit it.

A smoke that reminded one of a snake rose in the room.

Kururugi laughed again. He then looked at Tohdoh straight in the eye. "Then...it doesn't have to be Kirihara who holds power. Don't you agree, Tohdoh?"

In that moment, Tohdoh felt chills go down his spine.

Like lightning, a thought came into his mind.

"Are you..." Tohdoh got up from the sofa. "...planning to sell off this country just for that? To increase your power, you're going to start an unnecessary war and become a dog of a foreign country?"

Kururugi didn't answer.

Instead, he just laughed.

"Are you going to kill me, Tohdoh? You can't. You weren't given that much power from Kirihara. But even Kirihara can't stop what has come so far."

Tohdoh clenched his fist. His expression turned hard as a stone, sharp enough to kill someone with his eyes. Kururugi looked at his fist and snorted again. And then suddenly changed the subject.

"By the way, the Britannian children we're keeping at our house. We need to get rid of them here in Japan. I had a request from them."

"...What?"

"Not from the father. I guess he's not that coldhearted. But the factional struggle within the family is a bit scary, eh? There are people in Britannia who do not want those two alive."

Inside Tohdoh's mind, another puzzle piece fit into place. "So that is who you're dealing with? You're going to obtain the power of viceroy of this country when it becomes a territory, in exchange for the lives of the two children?"

"Of course not. No one is that generous. They were just convenient, that's all. But they would be good promissory notes." Kururugi smiled. "They die in the war. It's a cheap, but easy to understand, script. Of course I'm not that obliging. I'll let one survive. That would keep them in check. In order to make them keep the promise, the child would come in handy. I'm going to get rid of the daughter."

As Kururugi smiled, his tongue, yellow from nicotine, licked his upper lip. He looked like a lizard with a prey right in front of it.

Tohdoh finally realized it then.

The man who sat in front of him...was full of greed, more than anyone could imagine.

Kururugi's smile turned positively sinister. "Honestly, I would like to sell her off to a brothel or something. But I'll be compassionate. I'll kill her myself."

"You...you are..."

Tohdoh was at a loss for words.

"...such a..."

"And I'll give you a choice, too. Thank you for taking care of my lowly son, even if it was just for a short time. But from now on, you only have two choices. You can obey me—or sleep eternally in the soil of this Kururugi house."

The Prime Minister snapped his fingers.

Men dressed in black appeared from the shadows of the bookshelves.

Tohdoh didn't even have time to brace himself.

A gun was pointing in his direction.



The boy was running.

Suzaku was pale. But he continued to run on the stone pavement.

He wasn't enjoying the run as he usually did. He was running as if he were running away from something.

He was trying not to think about it.

But what he was afraid of had become reality.

Actually, Suzaku didn't hear all of what Tohdoh and his father had said. Even if he had, he would have understood only half of it.

The only thing Suzaku found out was that war with Britannia was going to start.

His country and his two friends' home country were going to fight.

Then what would happen to all of them? More importantly, what would happen to the two siblings?

The adults around Suzaku called the two "hostages." They sometimes would warn Suzaku.

Suzaku, you shouldn't be so friendly with the Britannian children.

Of course, he ignored them all. He thought it had nothing to do with him, that it was business among adults. Countries, wars, all of those things didn't have anything to do with him. He didn't want to be involved.

That was what he believed.

It was what he had wanted to believe.

But in fact, that wasn't the case.

He was involved.

Hostage, hostage, hostage—the children Britannia sent to make friends with Japan—but now Britannia is going to war with Japan. Britannia is going to invade.

Why?

Why would they, when the prince and princess were here? Why would they desert them? They are the emperor's children. They have high status. The emperor should be protecting them. They aren't strong—they are weak. They are even weaker here. Why? Death. Betrayal meant death for the hostages. Death. Why? Why?!

Everything was spinning inside of Suzaku's head. He felt nauseated. He was angry. He was confused.

Suzaku kept running. He knew that running wouldn't do anything, but still he ran.

He reached the old building surrounded by trees. It was the annex where the two lived.

He didn't bother to knock. He didn't even have time to consider it.

Suzaku kicked open the door and ran in.

"Lelouch! Nunnally!" He yelled.

If there'd been someone to hear him, that person might call it screaming.

"Where are you? Answer me!"

Silence.

It was already getting dark outside, but the lights weren't turned on. The dim annex was quiet, and it made Suzaku anxious. He had a bad feeling and was trembling.

"Lelouch! It's me!"

He called for his friend with all his might.

Then...

He heard a voice that wasn't his.

He thought it was his imagination for a moment.

No, it wasn't his imagination. He did hear a voice. From above.

The second floor!

He ran up the stairs.

As soon as Suzaku reached the hallway on the second floor, the groaning was more audible.

"Lelouch!"

He threw the door open.

And next to the bed, the black-haired boy was lying face down.

"Lelouch!? Hey, wake up!" Suzaku ran toward Lelouch and tried to sit him up. But at that moment, Lelouch fought back.

"!"

Lelouch had bitten Suzaku's arm.

"Ow...idiot! Lelouch! It's me, Suzaku!"

But Lelouch still didn't stop. He kicked Suzaku's stomach, grabbed his hair, and tried to get away.

It was like they were back to when they'd first met.

"Damn it, what's with you?" Suzaku yelled and tried to hold Lelouch down.

He shivered suddenly. Lelouch had turned around and Suzaku saw his eyes. They weren't normal. The usually clear eyes were muddled and wavering.

Suddenly, Lelouch weakened. Suzaku was scared that the worst had happened, but it wasn't the case. Lelouch grabbed Suzaku at his chest.

"Father..."

Suzaku thought that Lelouch was asking for help.

But he wasn't.

Lelouch's face was filled with hatred. His eyes were looking somewhere far away. He was overcome with anger.

"Father...I knew it...you knew this would happen...and you...abandoned us! Father!"

And then Suzaku realized everything.

Everything he didn't want to see or hear.

Why was Lelouch so cautious of those around him? The people in the mansion?

Lelouch didn't want to get involved with anyone other than Suzaku.

It's because he knew. He understood that everyone other than himself were his enemies. Enemies who posed a threat to his life. And in the midst of that, he tried to protect Nunnally.

But then...

Why did Lelouch allow Suzaku into his heart?

Why did they become friends?

"Nunnally..." Lelouch muttered again.

"Lelouch! Where's Nunnally?"

"Damn it...the drugs..."

"Hey, don't close your eyes. You're going to protect Nunnally, aren't you?"

"Sorry...I misunderstood you...sorry...so can you...at least...at least...save...Nunnally..."

Lelouch's words cut off. He had lost consciousness.

Lelouch's breathing evened out. Suzaku realized that Lelouch must've been drugged to fall asleep.

He looked around and saw that the room was a mess. He knew what had happened from that.

Lelouch probably fought the people who tried to take Nunnally away. And then in the struggle, he was drugged.

Suzaku looked down at Lelouch, who was in his arms. He lifted the boy up and laid him on the bed.

Lelouch's eyes were shut tight.

Lelouch probably didn't realize who he was talking to when he asked that Nunnally be saved.

He may not have realized that it was Suzaku who came into the room.

But still, he had asked him to protect Nunnally. To save her. And those words shut out everything else for Suzaku.

Suzaku gazed down at Lelouch for a moment before turning to leave.

"Don't worry. Wait here, Lelouch."

And then he ran out of the room.



Power.

I need power.

But I don't have power.

I need power to fulfill the promise with my friend.

Where can I get power?

Where?

That's right.

I can get it there.



Nunnally vi Britannia was in darkness, as always.

Ever since the day she lost her mother, she's been in darkness.

Even with her sharp senses, Nunnally didn't know where she was. She was brought here when she was taken away from her brother.

But she knew this room didn't have a good feeling.

The room was warm, but the atmosphere felt slimy, like it was oozing over her skin.

Lelouch!

Nunnally's body grew rigid in the dark.

She kept calling her brother's name.

Everything had gone well.

In the study with the blinds closed, smoking, Prime Minister Kururugi was satisfied.

Tohdoh wasn't there anymore. He was being confined in one of the rooms.

Kururugi sat down on the sofa and exhaled smoke. He still wore a sinister smile on his face.

It was a darkly satisfied smile.

Suddenly, the phone rang. The call was from within the mansion.

Kururugi picked up the phone. "It's me." A muffled voice on the other end of the line said something. In that moment, he stopped smiling.

He pushed his cigarette into the ashtray and stood up, the phone still in his hand. He walked to the window and pushed the blind up slightly. "How many?"

The muffled voice answered his question.

For a moment, there was silence.

Then..."Hmph. So Tohdoh isn't that stupid after all. Fine. Leave them alone. It's just a matter of the master answering to the yelp of his dog. That Kirihara. I guess he was more suspicious of me than I imagined."

Kururugi's fingers left the blinds.

"...Yes. They probably had a bug on him. If this is the case, maybe I should let him leave. That's right, there's no reason to give them an excuse."

He began to walk toward the door of the study.

"The schedule change? Heh, you fool. Once they step into this mansion, they are doomed. That demon is not that stupid...Ashford? I see, that's the connection. But once I let the dog go home, they can't do anything. Besides...heh heh, right. If I accomplish the fact right now, I won't be the one to fall. It's been a long time for that demon. As soon as that girl dies, his power is gone..."

Before Kururugi reached the door, it suddenly opened. He gasped and grasped the phone tighter. He stared at the space the door made. And at the end of his sharp sight was...

A small shadow.

Wearing a white *dogi* and navy *hakama*.

Kururugi sighed in relief. Then he became angry. He was being interrupted at the most important time by the last person he'd expect. "What do you want, Suzaku?"

The boy just stared at his father. His eyes were surprisingly emotionless.

"I'm asking you what you want. Your father is busy," He asked again, but there was no response.

Kururugi clicked his tongue in annoyance, and turned back to the phone. "It's me. No, it's nothing. I'll call back. Just keep quiet until then." He hung up. And then he looked at his son, annoyed.

For some reason, his son's left arm was hidden behind him.

"Suzaku..."

"Father..."

They both spoke at the same time.

"Please, Father." Suzaku walked into the study as he spoke. His voice was emotionless, like his eyes. "Please don't start a war."

For a moment, Kururugi was dumbfounded. He looked at the boy curiously. "What?"

"Please," Suzaku said again. "Don't harm those two."

Kururugi's expression changed instantly. His eyes turned sharp, as if looking at an enemy. But it was only for a moment. He regained his composure. "What are you talking about? Are you foolish?" Kururugi said in disgust.

He tried to pass Suzaku, but something held his arm. "Hm."

"Please, father."

His father tried to pull his arm away. But for some reason, Suzaku didn't let go. "Please."

He lost his temper then for the first time. "Stop bothering me!" He flung his arm and finally, his son let go. But at the same time, he heard a heavy *clunk*. It seemed that Suzaku had been hiding something behind him.

Kururugi didn't bother to confirm what it was. And he didn't bother to ask Suzaku, who was on his knees on the floor, if he was all right. He began to leave the room.

Maybe it was a little bit of guilt showing.

Guilt over taking away his son's only friend.

But that...took away Genbu Kururugi's future.

He felt Suzaku stand up behind him. He ignored it and took a step. In that moment, Suzaku mumbled.

"Then...you can't leave here, father."

"What..."

Kururugi turned around. And heard the dull sound of something piercing his body.

There was a sudden sharp pain in his stomach.

"Gah! Guh...gah...Suzaku...you..."

"You can't leave..."

The final words of the last Prime Minister of Japan, the governing man of this nation, were those incomprehensible groans.

The silence continued.

The only sound she heard was the ticking of the second hand of the clock located somewhere in the room.

She could only feel herself breathing.

But suddenly, she heard the creak of the door opening.

Nunnally raised her head. Footsteps were coming closer. "...

Who is it?" But there was no answer. The room was still silent.

Her anxiety was about to turn into fear. She was about to scream. But at that moment: "Nunnally, are you okay?"

"Huh? Suzaku?"

It was like a ray of light to Nunnally.

She didn't notice that his voice sounded different than usual.

"I'm sorry someone put you here. Father...I think he was a little drunk." Suzaku came behind Nunnally and put his hand on her wheelchair.

Nunnally heard a dripping sound. She also smelled something, something that smelled like metal. "Um, Suzaku?"

"Don't worry. He's sleeping already. I'm sorry to surprise you."

"Um..."

"Let's go home, Nunnally. Lelouch is waiting."

Suzaku lowered the casters, and started to push the wheelchair out of the room. But as soon as they got into the hallway...

"Ugh! Urgh..."

"Suzaku? Suzaku? Are you okay?"

"Yeah...I'm just...Sorry, I guess I can't. Nunnally, please ask a servant to take you back..."

"Suzaku?"

"I'm—sorry."

And then Suzaku ran.

"Suzaku, what happened? Suzaku?"

Nunnally started to turn her wheels herself to try to chase after Suzaku. Of course, there was no way she could catch up. And then there was nothing Nunnally could do after that.

Somewhere, she heard a door slam shut.



By the time Tohdoh stepped into the room, everything was over with.

The thick carpet soaked up the dark blood. Yet it couldn't soak up all of it, and the blood reflected the fluorescent light on the edges.

At the center of the blood was a dead man.

The man who had been the Prime Minister of Japan until a moment ago, Genbu Kururugi, was now just a piece of flesh.

And in the corner of the room, the boy was sitting on the floor.

He was holding his knees, sitting like he was scared of something, with his head buried.

His white *dogi* and navy *hakama* were red with blood.

The blood of his late father.

And near the boy, Tohdoh's sword was on the floor, unsheathed. The sword he had left in the training hall was here.

The boy slowly raised his head.

"Sensei..."

The desperate eyes were looking straight at Tohdoh.

"Sensei..."

But Tohdoh couldn't answer.

He couldn't say anything. A pure military soldier who had seen many deaths in his past—was shocked at the sight in front of him. He was speechless. Even though he knew that the boy wanted consolation.

It was someone else who spoke.

"You unsheathed."

That person came in from behind Tohdoh.

It was a tiny old man wearing a kimono.

He was a small man, but he had presence. His movements possessed energy. Even the sound of his cane hitting the floor had power.

"Mr. Kirihara..."

"I can't believe this is what I'm seeing, after receiving that message from you. Tohdoh, I don't know all the details, but I'm sure you're a little responsible."

"...Yes."

"Then first, fulfill your obligations. Either way, we cannot leave it at this." The old man's voice contained an authority that one could not ignore. "I'll hide Kururugi's death for a while. The situation is too unstable to reveal it now. The nation is troubled. You take command. I'll give you the necessary powers."

"Is that...possible?"

"As long as I'm around. Of course, I can't change what Kururugi did before he died."

Then the old man dispensed with Tohdoh and stepped into the room.

In this peculiar space, only the old man was calm. He walked into the room and stopped in front of Suzaku.

"Suzaku Kururugi?"

Suzaku was looking somewhere far away.

"Boy, you unsheathed your sword. That is a fact that we cannot change."

Suzaku didn't respond.

"An unsheathed sword is not satisfied until it sees blood. And your sword is still not in its sheath."

Suzaku didn't respond.

"Yes, even if you killed your father. Your eyes say so. Your body and blood say so. Then...it's up to you, where you are going

to sheathe your sword. It's up to you what you choose. How you want to take responsibility for the blood you've shed, and the blood you're going to shed in the future. But, if you cannot do that..."

Tohdoh knew what the old man was about to say. He had worked under him for so long.

But that is why Tohdoh couldn't stop him from saying it.

"...then take your own life here."

Suzaku responded with a flinch for the first time.

The old man was still talking. "And if you can't do that, you have no place in this world. You don't even deserve to live. Remember that."

Suddenly, Suzaku got up.

He was wobbling, but he still got up and started to walk.

He left the room.

Tohdoh, standing at the door, glanced at the old man.

The old man nodded.

Tohdoh bowed and followed the boy.



It was raining outside.

The raindrops were dampening Suzaku's hair, shoulders and arms.

He was no longer wearing the bloodstained *dogi*. He was wearing a normal shirt. Tohdoh had cleaned and changed him. He didn't remember it.

Suzaku looked up at the building in front of him.

There was a light on in the building, and in the dark it looked to him like salvation.

The small annex.

Suzaku was still looking. Then he turned around. He tried to walk away from the building. But...

"Suzaku!"

The small body stopped. He turned around slowly.

The black-haired boy ran out of the annex. He was out of breath, but running toward him. And then Lelouch stood in front of Suzaku.

"Suzaku, you're finally here. What happened?"

"...Lelouch. Where's Nunnally?" Suzaku interrupted, asking without emotion.

"Oh. She just came back. She's inside."

"I see...and you're awake now..."

"Just now. Anyway, what happened? Considering the situation, even you..."

"It's okay. It's over. Everything is over."

"Suzaku?" Lelouch's voice trembled slightly. He was surprised that Suzaku was holding onto him. Just as Lelouch had done hours before. But it didn't last long.

Suzaku grabbed onto Lelouch's shirt, but still couldn't support himself, and fell to his knees.

"Suzaku? Hey, let go. Actually, can you explain what happened?"

"...Lelouch. I..." For the first time, Suzaku got teary.

"I..."

"!?"

"...am never going to use my power for myself..."

"Suzaku?"

"Never again...I can't...Lelouch..."

And that was the direction of the unsheathed sword.

The rain continued to fall.

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Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Promise

June 2010, Japan

Thinking about it, the two did not have any father figures. They may have had something fake, but it was, after all, fake. It wasn't real.

One resented his father from the bottom of his heart, and eventually will plan to destroy his father and his nation.

The other was trapped by his father's death and continues to struggle, trying to escape.

What lies ahead for the two boys?

What are they going to see?

That is yet unknown.



The waves hitting the sand were high today.

There was no alert that a typhoon was nearing. It was probably just that the wind was strong. There were clouds in the sky, but the sun was shining brightly.

Suzaku sat on the soft sand, gazing at the ocean.

He was wearing his *dogi* and *hakama*. But he wasn't holding his usual *bokuto*. It was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, it got darker.

A cloud had covered the sun.

And at that moment, Suzaku became alert. He got up immediately and turned back with sharp eyes. Standing there was...

"Pretty impressive. I didn't think you would notice my presence."

The voice was young. A tall man appeared from behind the rocks. He was wearing a dark green military uniform.

"I guess you've gotten stronger. Even though I'm not your teacher anymore, I'm still happy. It's been a while, Suzaku."

"Mr. ... Tohdoh."

Suzaku relaxed.

Then he smiled.

There was a man in front of Lelouch.

He was sitting upright, legs tucked under, on the blue tatami.

But the man was not Japanese. He was wearing a black suit, dark sunglasses—and on his neck was a scar.

Lelouch was looking at him in silence, when the man bowed with his hands on the tatami. It was the Japanese style of greeting someone.

"It's been a while, Prince Lelouch. Since Narita."

It was the man who had accompanied Lelouch and Nunnally to Japan.

Lelouch was quiet for a moment, then smiled. "Not Narita."

The man's eyebrows moved up slightly.

Lelouch continued. "And 'a while' is not accurate. I think I met you about 20 days ago. Judging from the fact that you're here, you were able to run away?"

The atmosphere of the room froze. But only for a moment. The man took off his sunglasses.

"You knew?"

"No. I just guessed." Lelouch shrugged. "But I thought about it afterward, and it was odd. For an assassination it was not well planned, and you guys didn't have any weapons."

"I see." The man laughed wryly.

Lelouch thought this was the first time he was seeing the man's true face.



"I was scolded by my master regarding that incident."

"I'm sure."

This man was not trained. He might be the right-hand man of his "master," but he was not a specialist in violent acts.

But still, he was defeated by two ten-year-olds. Physically by one, and the other by his intellect.

"And what did you want today?" Lelouch's tone was a light one. "You've given up on kidnapping us?"

"Yes. Actually, there is no need for it. We settled with the people here. It looks like I can keep my job."

"I see. I get some of it, but not the rest. Why did you try to kidnap us?"

"That was to protect your life. And your sister's."

"I thought the Ashford family had cut off support for me and my sister already."

"Are you seriously saying that?"

"No." Lelouch answered. "If that were the case, we'd be dead a long time ago."

It was true.

Although the Kururugi family may not have known that.

"But I still don't get it. We were stripped of our rights to the throne. What is the point of supporting a prince with no future? What could Ashford gain from it?"

"It is our policy to seek gain from where there seems to be none."

Lelouch thought that asking further would take him nowhere. And unfortunately, the man was in a stronger position.

Lelouch sighed. "Fine. I will not ask anything more."

"Thank you very much."

"Please tell me why you are here."

"Yes. I was going to have you and your sister die."

Lelouch was surprised. But immediately he understood. He placed his forefinger against his lips in thought. "I see...that's why you wanted to kidnap us."

"It's the most absolute method. My specialty is in that area. It took a while, but I have the necessary documents now. We just need to wait for the right time to turn it in."

"If you say so, then that means me and my sister are in greater danger than before."

"Yes."

"So you want us to throw away our name and our status?"

"There is no other way to protect the two of you. If you stop being a prince, then the ones who are after your lives will have no reason to keep coming after you."

Lelouch thought again.

But not for long.

Lelouch looked at the man and nodded. "Fine."

"You'll accept?"

"Just like you said, it's the best method. But I have one condition."

"Yes?"

"I want to ask something. The people who are after our lives..." Lelouch's expression changed. His face was full of anger. But Lelouch continued in a calm voice, in contrast to his expression. "No. Who was it that killed my mother?"

The man's face hardened for the first time.

The waves were still crashing hard.

Suzaku and Tohdoh were sitting in silence, looking at the ocean.

They only spoke once. Suzaku asked, and Tohdoh responded. "The war cannot be stopped?"

"No. Even though no one is wishing for it."

That was it.

Only the sound of the waves could be heard after that.

Eventually, the sun reached the highest point in the sky. That was when Tohdoh got up. Without saying anything further to

Suzaku, who was still sitting on the sand, he started to leave. But before he was able to take ten steps, Suzaku spoke.

"Mr. Tohdoh. I'm going to quit kendo."

Tohdoh turned around.

Suzaku was still looking at the ocean.

And he spoke again.

"But...I don't think I'll stop fighting."

Tohdoh gazed at the boy.

"I see."

"Thank you, Mr. Tohdoh. One day, I'll repay you."

Tohdoh smiled.

"There's no need. You already have."

And Tohdoh left.



It may have been a small promise.

It was small, and it wasn't a certainty that it would ever be fulfilled.

For Lelouch and for Suzaku.

But it started from there.

Their paths...

"Suzaku."

Suzaku turned around. It was Lelouch. "What are you doing here?"

"Lelouch."

Suzaku didn't answer and gazed at the ocean again. He mumbled, "One day, I want to fish here again."

"We can do that any day. Even today."

Suzaku laughed.

"One day, when we're wobbly and old, I want to catch a red snapper with Nunnally."

Lelouch got quiet. Then he laughed too. "That's a good dream."

"Right?"

"I won't lose then, Suzaku."

"Yeah, Lelouch."

And on the horizon, a small cloud disappeared.



A few months later, the Holy Empire of Britannia declared war on Japan.

The Britannian Forces used their new weapon, the Knightmares, showed overwhelming power and completely conquered Japan in a mere month. They declared the formation of Area 11 shortly thereafter.

Separated in war, the two will meet again only after seven years have passed.

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Afterword

First of all, I would like to thank the director of the anime Mr. Goro Taniguchi, scriptwriter Mr. Ichirou Ohkouchi, producer Mr. Yoshitaka Kawaguchi, creative writing editor Mr. Keiji Shitamure and all of the staff at Sunrise.

Hello. I am Mamoru Iwasa, and I was asked to novelize "Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion."

As fans of the anime version, or those who did not see the anime yet but picked up this book, did you enjoy the novel? I hope you did.

This novel, as you can see from the subtitle, explains the past of the two main characters in the anime. The Stage 1 and Stage 2 that will follow this will not change facts from the anime version, so fans of the anime version shouldn't worry.

Sometimes when writers such as myself receive a job to novelize a project, there are unfortunate cases when the writers don't necessarily like the original project.

Of course, the fact that the project is expanding into other media means that it must be good; but it may or may not fit personal tastes.

"Code Geass" was the complete opposite of those cases. When I read through the materials that were sent to me, I was extremely happy.

What a great story.

It wasn't even animated when I first read the plot and settings, but it was simply amazing. How could a script be so good!?

I have never seen a project that pulled me in so much with just the script and settings. And I think that is the power of Mr. Taniguchi and Mr. Ohkouchi. (By the way, when I was talking to my editor, I suggested that they just publish the script instead of asking me to novelize it.)

I said it in the beginning, but I would like to say it again. I really appreciate the staff for allowing me to work on such a great project.

But amidst my happiness, I also felt pressure.

When the series aired, just as I predicted, it was a huge success. The more successful it was, the more pressure I felt.

I was worried that I would ruin the original, or that I would have to write something that the fans would be satisfied with, and it would have to be just as interesting as the anime.

I was intimidated at first when I was writing, but when I met with the staff of the anime, they told me that I could stop worrying about those things and write freely.

Such kind words!

And after that, I was able to write without problems.

Actually, it was only then that I was able to face "Code Geass" as myself.

I just hope that the fans will love this novel.

And as a commentary, Mr. Jun Fukuyama, the voice actor of Lelouch in the anime, has also written something. I'm really thankful for him. (Although I'm worried that some fans will skip the novel and just read what he wrote.)

The next volume will start where the anime storyline starts.

The novel will explore what the characters were experiencing when they were doing what they did.

I'm hoping that I can deliver a supplement to the world of Code Geass through these novels.

And finally, I would like to thank all of you who picked up this book.

March 2007

Mamoru Iwasa

CODE GEASS
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Commentary by Jun Fukuyama

It was amazing. Amazing is the word that best describes this novel.

Hello, and sorry for being abrupt. I am Jun Fukuyama, the voice of Lelouch in the anime, "Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion."

I think most of you who are reading this have already seen the anime on television or DVD. But I'm sure there are some people who have not seen the series yet, so I would like to say that there are some spoiler elements in what I write here.

Returning to what I said in the beginning, that's how I felt when I first read this novel. I'm involved with this project as an actor, and in the anime the story takes place seven years after this novel, in Japan—or Area 11 as it is known after Britannia conquers it. It may be obvious to those who have seen the anime, but the information about Lelouch's and Suzaku's childhood days given to me is not that different from what the viewers know from watching the anime.

I was given information about the events that had taken place, but that was it.

I didn't know the root of the bond between Lelouch, Nunnally and Suzaku. Lelouch and Nunnally's closed world as they lived in Japan. What happened behind the scenes that led to the war with Britannia. And the inside story about Suzaku killing his father.

All of the mysteries that were scattered throughout the anime are connected in this novel.

The novel made concrete for me, what I had imagined Lelouch and Suzaku's pasts were like. The puzzle pieces fit perfectly. That is because this novel brilliantly depicts Lelouch's and Suzaku's situations, environment and feelings.

Of course, the most shocking thing was the story around Genbu Kururugi.

There are still mysteries surrounding this man, but in the anime, Suzaku's father is more or less featured as "the last samurai," a hero to the nation. But it is revealed that he was the culprit who triggered the war with Britannia. Even if the Britannian Emperor was going to war anyway, Kururugi was involved in some pulling of the strings. He took away the refuge Lelouch and Nunnally had finally found for the sake of greed. And he was, in a sense, the underlying cause of Lelouch following the road of evil.

After reading this novel, I recalled the events in the anime and was overcome with a feeling of sadness.

Because of the greed of a few men, many lives are thrown off track.

Either way, Suzaku was forced to kill his own father, and struggle with that fact. He started to seal himself up, and if Lelouch noticed this change earlier, when they were together as kids, the paths they took may have been different. The only thing we know is that Lelouch's idea to keep Suzaku by Nunnally's side was decided at this point.

The two are very different, in almost every aspect. But the common ground that they were both alone pulled them together. Yet their fathers' karmas pulled them apart, and their own karmas put them in conflicting positions when they meet again.

Cause and effect, destiny, fate...the two will now go on a thorny road.

As I was reading it, I could not help but feel sorry for Suzaku. Kirihara's words when they first met must've had an effect like Lelouch's Geass. Suzaku suffered for seven years from the

trauma and the sin he committed, and this resulted in him seeking sanctuary only in death.

And Lelouch. He was young, yet so smart, and saw too much and therefore could not rely on anybody or show weakness and had to live alone. The sight of him struggling to protect his one reason to live was painful, yet I saw strong will in him.

The light shining on the children was thin and weak, but I think still they saw warmth and a future in that light. And as they struggle together after the death of Kururugi, they overcome their differences and positions and strengthen their bond.

Yet, the day comes when they must separate. This too-soon departure gives them no choice but to mature fast and make sacrifices.

I've talked too much for this to be a commentary, but I'm curious what the readers think of this wonderful novel. Did you feel the same way I did? As I was reading it, I felt more like a casual reader than one of the people on the staff that helped create this project.

I can only hope that this novel will be read by as many Code Geass fans possible.

CODE GEASS
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反逆のルージュ
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Translator's Notes

Translation Notes

Bokuto

A bokuto is a wooden Japanese sword used for training.

Dogi

A dogi is a uniform used for training in Japanese martial arts.

Hakama

Hakama are traditional Japanese trousers that tie at the waist and fall to the ankles. They are worn over a kimono called *hakamashita*. They were originally worn by samurai. Today both men and women wear them.

Kendama

A kendama is a toy that looks like a hammer with a ball connected to it. The ball has a hole in it and it rests on the spike on the top of the kendama. The two sides of the hammer are concave dishes, with one smaller than the other. The butt of the hammer is also a concave dish. The object of the game is to toss the ball and try to make it land in one of the dishes or on the spike.

Kendo

Kendo is a sport/martial art similar to fencing. People use shinai and wear protective gear.

Shinai

Shinai is a bamboo sword. It is a practice weapon used in kendo.

Shishi odoshi

Shishi odoshi literally means "deer scarer," and it refers to the devices made to scare away birds and animals from damaging agricultural crops. In this case, the shishi odoshi found in the club room is a *sozu*, a type of water fountain used in Japanese gardens.

They are made of bamboo and water pours into it. When it is heavy enough it will tip over, and strike a surface below it. Once empty, it returns to its original position until more water fills it.

Tatami

A tatami is a traditional flooring material in Japan. Rush is dried up, compressed, and sewn together. There are a lot less compared to the past, but there are still tatami sheet crafters in Japan.

Tenchi Muyo

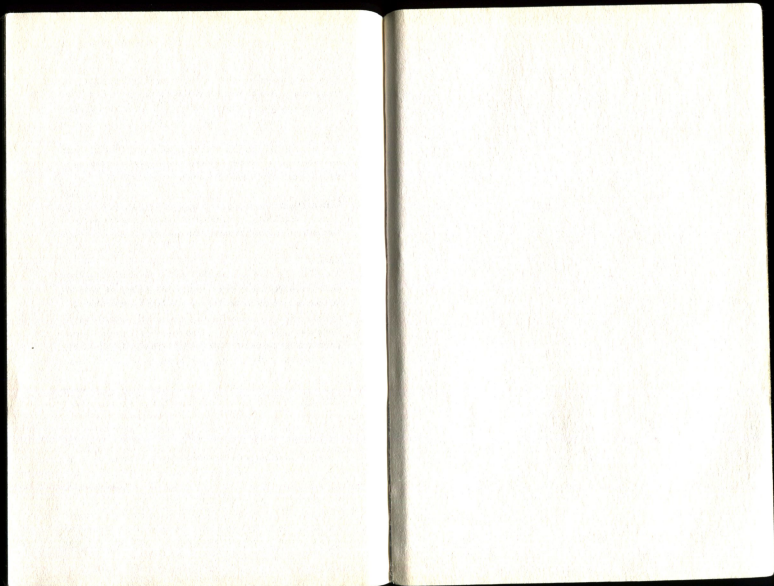
"Tenchi Muyo" literally means "you can't turn it upside down." It is often seen on boxes to mean, "this side up."

Torii

A torii is a Japanese gate, usually found at the entry to a Shinto shrine. It marks the barrier between the regions of gods and humans, and the torii is an entrance to where the gods reside.

Zabuton

Zabuton is a cushion for sitting. They are usually square, but come in round shapes too.



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Lelouch of the Rebellion

STAGE -0- ENTRANCE

There is an island in the Far East known as "Japan." This small country is being threatened by the superpower nation, the Britannia Empire.

And there are two boys living there.

One is the son of the emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia—Lelouch vi Britannia. His mother was murdered by an unknown assassin, and Lelouch was sent to Japan as a political tool. The other is the son of the Japanese Prime Minister—Suzaku Kururugi. Their meeting will be the prelude to a war involving the whole world!



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CODE GEASS
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE -0-
ENTRANCE

Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI
Written by
MAMORU IWASA

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Lelouch of the Rebellion

STAGE -0- ENTRANCE



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