

CODE GEASS

コードギアス

反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

STAGE - 1 - SHADOW

of the Rebellion



Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI

Written by
MAMORU IWASA

BANDAI
entertainment.



 **CODE GEASS** Lelouch
コトギアス of the Rebellion
反逆のヒーロー
1: STAGE -1- SHADOW

Lelouch, a young Britannian man, obtained a special power from a mysterious girl.
Geass.

It is an absolute power that allows the user to make someone—anyone—obey his orders.
Lelouch has decided to use the power of Geass to obliterate the Holy Empire of Britannia.



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STAGE -1- SHADOW

A BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT NOVEL

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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."

I never miss drinking a cup of vegetable juice each day because I'm an Aries. The new curtains I just bought were a little too long and they're dragging on the floor... What should I do? Should I cut it myself? But I've messed up in things like this before, such as the bathtub cover.

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CODE GEASS

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反逆のルルーシュ

Lelouch 1

of the Rebellion

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MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS Reloach of the Rebellion



Lelouch vi Britannia

The eleventh prince of the Holy Empire of Britannia. He was presumed dead after the war. Currently uses the surname, "Lamperouge."



Suzaku Kururugi

The son of the last Japanese Prime Minister, Genbu Kururugi. He is a childhood friend of Lelouch and a member of the Britannian Forces.



C.C.

A girl who entered into a contract with Lelouch and gave him the power of Geass. Further details about her are unknown.

ASHFORD PRIVATE ACADEMY

ASHFORD PRIVATE ACADEMY



Milly Ashford

The daughter of the Director of the Ashford Private Academy, and the Student Council President.



Nunnally

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



**Shirley
Fenette**



**Rivalz
Cardmonde**



**Nina
Einstein**

Arthur



CODE GEASS Lelouch of the Rebellion

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS 22 Region of the Rebellion

HOLY EMPIRE OF BRITANNIA



Charles zi Britannia

The 98th Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia, one of the most powerful nations in the world. He is Lelouch and Nunnally's father.



Cornelia li Britannia

The second princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia. She is Euphy's older sister. After Clovis was assassinated, Cornelia came to Area 11 to take over as viceroy.



Lloyd Asplund

The chief of the Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. He is Suzaku's boss and loves the Lancelot more than anything else.



Euphemia li Britannia

The third princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia. She is only 16 years old, but serves as the sub-viceroy for Area 11. She is known as Euphy for short.



Jeremiah Gottwald

A soldier in the Britannian Forces. After Clovis' death, he served as an administrative ruler, but was demoted after the infamous "Orange" incident.

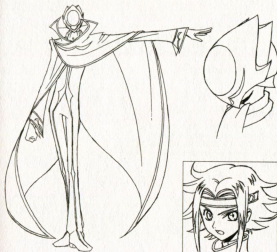


Cecile Croomy

The chief operator of the Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. Her influence over Lloyd is immeasurable.

THE BLACK KNIGHTS HOLY EMPIRE OF BRITANNIA

THE BLACK KNIGHTS



Zero

The leader of the Black Knights. His face is always hidden behind a mask, and not even the Black Knights know his identity.



Kallen Stadtfeld

Her mother is Japanese, and Kallen's Japanese name is Kallen Kozuki. She is the ace pilot of the Guren Mk-II.



Diethard Ried

A Britannian who joined the Black Knights. Ohgi is a little suspicious of his intentions.



Kaname Ohgi

Second in line in the Black Knights under Zero. His meek, amiable personality makes him popular among its members. He is a former teacher.

CODE GEASS Lelouch of the Rebellion

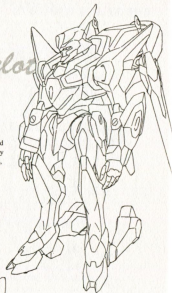
MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

Lancelot

Lancelot

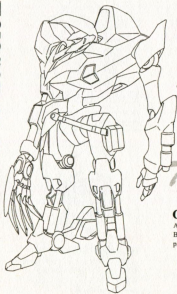
The 7th generation Knightmare Frame, developed by the Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. It is still in the testing stages, but possesses great power. The pilot is Suzaku Kururugi.



Type-02

Guren Mk-II

A pure Japanese Knightmare. The main weapon the Black Knights use to fight against Britannia. The pilot is Kallen Stadfield.

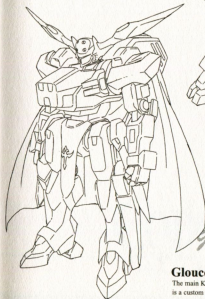
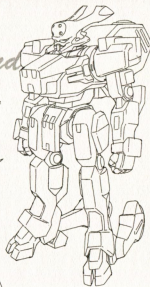


KNIGHTMARE FRAME

Sutherland

Sutherland

Fifth generation Knightmares used by the Britannian Forces.



gloucester

Gloucester Cornelia Custom

The main Knightmare of the Britannian Forces. This is a custom model made for Cornelia.

CODE GEASS: Lelouch of the Rebellion

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反逆のルージュ

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

Interval

It's not that I like to surprise people. I just like to see the surprised look on their faces.

You say it's the same thing?

Well, I guess so.

But when people are caught off guard, I think they're more likely to show their true nature. They face me with their real self. That's why I like it. I want to keep seeing that side of people. (I know it's bad taste.)

So anyway, I, Milly Ashford, am known at my beloved school, the Ashford Private Academy, as the person who loves tricks and festivities.

Well, I can't deny it. Besides, this is a huge school. There are over 2,000 students here, and when you're the Student Council President, you naturally become that way. I can't show a gloomy face in front of everyone.

But I do get blue once in a while; and I don't know if it's a backlash of my cheeriness, but when I do, I get really downhearted.

Yes, I am depressed right now.

I lost something very important.

If someone else saw it, they may think it was nothing, but it is something I value very much.

Let's see. In a case like this, whom can I rely on the most in my Student Council?

"I see. You lost something?"

The boy stared at me with a look of surprise.

The classroom was filled with light from the setting sun. No one else was in the room. Well, it's after school, so there shouldn't be. The sad, vacant space was nothing compared to what it was like during the day.

The boy was sitting all alone at his desk, writing something. He had his textbooks open, so he was probably studying ahead for tomorrow's class. He has young, big eyes and soft looking, chestnut-colored hair. Although he looks young and he seems friendly when he's at school, the face he shows when he's serious is very manly and actually...businesslike.

His toned shoulders and legs are probably pretty muscular. Of course, it's not like I looked at them myself—hee. I'm sure that he looks better in his military uniform than the school uniform he's wearing now.

Suzaku Kururugi is a soldier. Although he's a high school student, he is a warrant officer of the almighty Britannian Forces. A warrant officer at 17 years of age...I wonder what he did to achieve this? And is it really okay for a soldier to be a normal high school student? To be honest, I've never seen anyone like this, even among the aristocratic spoiled brats who abuse their special privileges.

Well, I guess that just means he is that competent, and a necessary resource.

"Remember how we checked the school facilities to prepare for the big cleaning event next month?" I decided to brief Suzaku quickly. "It seems that I dropped it then. I asked the teacher in charge of the lost and found, but I was told nothing was turned in. So I thought maybe it was brought to someone in the Student Council."

"I see." Suzaku said, looking worried. "I'm sorry, I didn't find anything of the sort."

"Okay..."

"Oh, but how about Shirley or Nina? They were walking around with you yesterday, right?"

"Yes. I already asked them this morning. And I asked Rivalz, too."

I was really hoping it would turn up with Suzaku. He's a transfer student and although he's still not accepted by many of the students, his reliable nature and amiable personality has also won over a good number of students. And really, he is reliable. No matter what Student Council work I give him, he always finishes it with no problems.

But I guess this time I had hoped for too much.

"Okay, I got it. Thanks. Sorry for bothering you while you were studying. See ya."

"Oh, Ms. President?"

I was about to walk out the door after my hurried thanks and apology, when he got up from his chair and called for me.

"Should I help you look for it?"

He had a serious look on his face, which showed that he meant it and wasn't just saying it out of sympathy.

He's such a great guy.

When he's like this, he's really my type and my playful nature starts to come out, wanting to poke fun at him, but I need to restrain myself. At least for today.

I smiled first, then shook my head.

"Thanks. But don't worry about it."

"But..."

"It's okay. I'm not in a hurry to find it. I'll look for it as I walk around."

Besides, I know he's busy. I can't imagine what it's like to be a student and a soldier, but just from looking at him I can see that it's tough. He often skips school or leaves early because of work. And it must be harder to keep up with schoolwork because he's a transfer student.

Suzaku still looked like he wanted to say something, but I left.

Then the next person to ask would be...

"Huh? You lost something?"

The girl looked at me with her mouth open in surprise.

Her hair is not completely red, but it is pretty reddish. The way she turned around on the path that leads to the school gate in the setting sun made her stand out...hold on now.

Why does everyone look so surprised when I bring up this topic?

When I asked, she—one of the members of the Student Council, Kallen Stadtfeld—put her hand to her mouth as if to say, "Shoot."

"Umm, well, that is...well..."

"What?"

"How should I put this...well, this is just in general terms, but..."

Kallen mumbled as she continued.

"Usually, you would announce something like this on the school PA system with some hip-hop music in the background, saying, 'Whoever finds it will get a date with one of the Student Council members!' or something like that."



I did my best not to lose it.

Besides, it's after school right now and there's no point if I announced it on the PA...hey, wait. So Suzaku's expression of surprise had the same meaning, too? Dang it, that Suzaku Kururugi. He tricked me with his nice-guy face. I'm definitely going to pick on him tomorrow.

But before that, I need to pick on this girl in front of me. I know that she has a pretty hot body hiding underneath her quiet personality.

"Hm. I see," I mumbled with a hint of sadness.

Kallen flinched a little and got a little rigid.

Hee hee hee.

Kallen is pretty fun to play with, too. She may look cool as a cucumber all the time, but she really is naïve as to certain topics. And plus, she's the daughter of the honorable Stadtfeld family. Of course I'm going to be interested in her.

"I didn't know you looked at me that way, too. I guess it can't be helped."

I said this despondently, and Kallen started to fidget.

"Uh, um, Ms. President?"

"Oh, I know. I understand that I'm the one who's always doing stupid things. But I think that's part of my job as Student Council President. It's necessary. It's my duty to get everyone fired up..."

"No, I mean..."

"I thought by my acting stupid, the students could enjoy their time here more. But it's tough to know that even my Student Council members think I'm an airhead..."

"..."

I sighed. "I'm so tired. Tired of this...what do you call it, a mask? I can't take it off, and eventually it starts to wear you down..."

I looked down to make my bangs fall over my face.

Kallen seemed deep in thought.

Then, suddenly, she stood in front of me with a determined face.

"I understand that I do."

She caught on!

...Of course, I have a feeling she caught on too much.

I wonder if something I said touched her more deeply than I anticipated?

Oh, well. I need to finish this off.

"I see, you understand, Kallen?"

"Yes. I think you work really hard. You do things that should get praise, not criticism, ever."

"Yes...yes! Thank you, thank you, Kallen. I'm very happy that I'm friends with someone like you..." I tearfully confessed, while I reached for Kallen's chin and tugged her face closer to mine.

"Huh?"

"I think of you dearly, too. It might not be coincidence that you joined the Student Council, but rather...destiny..."

"Huh? Huh? Um..."

"If it's for you, Kallen, I could do anything. That's why I want you to..."

"!!!!"

"...do things for me..."

"Stop it right there!" Kallen jumped away suddenly, breaking loose of my hands. She was panting with her hands on her chest. Her face was bright red.

Hee hee.

Well, I guess I'll spare her for now.

"Good. Kallen, you seem to be feeling better. I noticed that you've been frequently absent these days, so I was worried."

"Oh..." Kallen gave a look of bewilderment, and then turned red again, for a different reason. "...You tricked me."

"Hee hee. This is my way of showing affection, you know. So anyway, can I get back on topic? So nobody turned anything in to you?"

"No. And even if I knew something about it, I wouldn't want to tell you anyway."

Kallen turned away, her face still red.

Her pouting face is cute, too.

"I see... Okay, got it. Thank you, Kallen."

"I told you I didn't find anything!"

"What? You didn't like that? Then next time I'll be a little more sadistic, if that's what you want."

"No, thank you!"

Kallen stomped away toward the school gate. Most of the students who attend this school live in the dorms, but Kallen lives at home. The colorful setting sun was in the direction of the school gate, so it looked like she was heading toward the sunset.

I was going to leave too, but stopped.

"Kallen."

"What is it?"

She wouldn't even turn around, but kept stomping away.

I laughed lightly and said, "I know it's tough with your weak body, but try to come to school as much as you can."

For some reason, Kallen stopped.

"I know it's not all fun and games here. But I think that's why it's a treasure, don't you agree? The time you spend here?"

"..."

"Anyway, that's something I'm poking my nose in, as Student Council President. I'll see you tomorrow."

Then I left without waiting for Kallen's reply.

Now, the only one who's left is...

Hmm.

I don't really want to ask him.

Because...



"I see. You dropped something."

The boy glanced at me with cold eyes.

Dang, I knew he would have a different response from the others.

He had already changed out of his uniform and was wearing everyday clothes. He was sitting comfortably on an antique chair, tipping his teacup toward his mouth. The skin showing from the edge of his cuffs was as smooth as silk, and his glossy black hair and long eyelashes were artistic masterpieces. The aristocratic décor of the room contributed to the *onmii* effect that no painter could express.

Yes, he's a stud. He looks like someone who would be featured in a magazine for pretty boys.

But I know that there are horns on that head and a tail sprouting from his hip.

"I would like to ask something," the beautiful devil said to me, teacup still in hand. "Is it something important to you?"

"Huh? Well, I guess so. I don't want it to get lost or have someone else keep it." I wasn't thinking much when I answered.

The devil's eyes glistened. Shoot!

And then, the devil—Lelouch Lamperouge—smiled (only that feature is like an angel's), and said: "Well, well...then I must find it now. Before you do."

Ack.

I guess he's still mad at me about the day Arthur joined our clubhouse.

Arthur is a cat who's been staying with the Student Council. When he first came, well, we had a lot happen...

Sheesh, I can't believe Lelouch would hold a grudge. If you're a man, you shouldn't be hanging onto the past!

Hmph.

And if the world has devils, there are angels to help me get rid of them. If he thinks I came here unprepared, he's wrong.

"Lelouch, you can't be so mean to Milly."

See?

"She's really distressed about the item she lost. Please help her. I beg of you."

And so, nobly and subtly, a little girl sitting in a wheelchair counterpunched Lelouch's attacks.

Unlike Lelouch and I, she's in the junior high division. She is Lelouch's little sister, Nunnally Lamperouge.

She's in a wheelchair, and her eyes, too, are...well, she was involved in an incident, and since then she can't see. It's not like that's the reason why she's a good girl. But honestly, it's a mystery how she grew up so innocent and pure when her older brother



is like this. And actually, they don't really look similar. Even her hair...Nunnally's hair is close to ash blonde, and very different from Lelouch's.

"Besides, Milly is always taking care of both of us, right Lelouch?"

"I won't deny that, but I take care of her too. Many times multiplied."

"Really? But I always have fun when Milly is with us."

"..."

Nunnally's words were filled with kindheartedness. Even Lelouch was at a loss for words.

Take that.

That's right. Nunnally is Lelouch's—perhaps his only—weak point. That's why I didn't come here first. I told Nunnally the details before I came to Lelouch.

I'm really glad I did that.

Eventually, Lelouch slumped his shoulders as if to give up, and placed his teacup on the table.

"Fine. I'll help you, Ms. President."

"I knew you would come through for me, Lelouch. You're so reliable."

"I don't need useless flattery. Besides, I won't be much help. I didn't find anything of the sort."

"I see..."

"It's not at the lost and found. It didn't come to the Student Council. You can't find it anywhere. That means..."

Lelouch narrowed his eyes.

Honestly, when he makes expressions like this, he's really beautiful.

"...From what you've told me, it seems that the item you dropped may be important to you but others won't see it that way. So the person who picked it up might not think it's a big deal, and held on to it."

"That's..."

A slight problem. No, it's a pretty big problem.

"By the way, what is this item that you dropped?"

"Oh, uh, it's..." I stammered. "...a schedule book."

"Huh?"

"A schedule book. But it's not the student handbook. And it's not the notebook that contains the notes of my Student Council members' work habits either, so don't worry."

"No one's worried about that," Lelouch said, exasperated, and then thought again. "I see, a schedule book. That's pretty tough. Depending on who picked it up, it might have been thrown away."

That's a really big problem.

"You didn't have your name in it?"

This was Nunnally asking.

"Actually... I'd just bought it."

The two of them gave me a puzzled look at the same time. I guess their acting in unison shows that they are siblings after all.

"You'd just bought it? And it was important?"

"Was it very valuable?"

"No, that's not it..." I sighed. It's too bad, but I guess this is where I should give up.

"Thanks. You helped me a lot, both of you. I'm sorry to bother you at home."

Yes, this is their house. They are dorm students, but because of Nunnally's disabilities they live in a section of the clubhouse.

I rose from my chair. Then Nunnally bowed her head.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be of any help."

"If it's almost new, then it's more likely that someone still has it. Why don't you talk to the teachers and have them ask the students in each class?" Lelouch tried to help too, but I just smiled and shook my head.

"I can't make it that much of a big deal."

"But..."

"It's okay. I'll just give up and accept it as bad luck. Sorry for bothering you, Lelouch and Nunnally. I'll see you two tomorrow at school."



As soon as I left the clubhouse, I sighed deeply.

The sun had almost completely set, and was now behind the city skyline. The sky was turning darker. The weather was nice, but the moon wasn't visible yet.

I turned around, and saw a light come on in one of the rooms that Lelouch and Nunnally live in. The rest of the old-fashioned building was dark. The siblings and their maid, Sayoko, are probably going to eat dinner in that room. That is one thing I wish I had. The members of my family live separately and we're so busy, we never eat together.

Especially on days like these, I get envious.

"Oh, I shouldn't get so down. It's not my character," I mumbled aloud, and started walking down the path.

"Hey."

Suddenly, someone called to me from the side of the path. I jumped in surprise and quickly turned to where the voice had come from. I hugged the bag I was holding against my chest, and backed up.

I saw a silhouette of a person in the darkness.

Who was it?

Lelouch and Sayoko were in the clubhouse. I didn't think I'd get sexually assaulted on campus, but if I yelled I was sure they could hear me.

The silhouette came closer and closer.

I stiffened up, but then...slumped with a sigh of relief.

Oh.

It was just a girl.

And she looked younger than me. She had long hair that reached to her waist, and her face was proportionate like a doll's. Her expression was like a doll's, as well. Actually...

It was a face I didn't know.

I know almost all of the students who attend here. As the Student Council President, it's part of my duty. But the girl in front of me I didn't recognize. That brought back my suspicions.

"Who are you?" I asked, and the girl raised the edge of her lips a bit.

Perhaps...it was a smile.

"You're the Student Council President, right?"

"Huh?"

"Thanks for always taking care of my useless one."

Unlike her expression, her tone of voice stayed the same and confused me. Useless one? "Who would that be?"

"A student here."

"Oh...oh."

Finally, I understood.

This is a private campus, so outsiders usually can't enter the grounds. But there are many exceptions. If you're a family member or friend of a student, as long as the student verifies it and the school gives permission, you can visit.

But "useless one"...how mean. Of course, I can't criticize her about that, considering my position here.

I was thinking all this, when I finally noticed that the girl was standing in front of me.

She continued in her unfriendly, monotone voice:

"By the way, I found this. Is it yours?"

I was a little thrown off by her directness, but then my mind went blank.

Everything that was on my mind, such as...who was the useless one she was talking about; or, just because she's allowed at the school it's a little odd for her to be roaming around the dorms at this hour...were blown away.

The girl's pale hand was holding a schedule book.

"Yes, yes!" I forgot to thank her and just nodded vigorously, and accepted the book. I immediately opened it up.

There was nothing written on the white pages...I didn't care about that. I turned the pages violently—and then, I slumped my shoulders in disappointment. It was worse because my hopes that were raised were crushed.

It wasn't in there.

It wasn't that this book was important. What I was really looking for was...

"And..." The girl suddenly spoke again. "...I found this near it."

She extended her other hand. In that moment, all the power inside of me left me. I was so relieved I almost sat down.

"I found it in the ditch next to the clubhouse. Well, it was coincidence that I found it. He ate the food that I ordered, so I took a walk to work off my anger, and then..." The girl continued to talk, but I wasn't really listening. I just kept looking at what she was holding.

A picture.

Then, the girl stopped and looked down at what was in her hand. "Is this something you took with your friends?" She handed it to me as she spoke.

"Yes..."

I put down my bag and accepted the picture with both hands. "I know it's childish, but...there aren't that many pictures of us all together. My Student Council members hardly stay together because they're so independent, and once they go somewhere they don't come back and stuff, so..."

But...no. That's why it's important.

In the picture, from the side is...

Rivalz. He's a little clumsy and the class clown, but he cares for his friends dearly.

Nina. She's quiet and tends to stay alone, but she has a strong will.

Shirley. She's cheerful and full of energy and always lightens everyone's mood up.

Kallen. Her body is weak and she's absent a lot, but she's reliable when it's important.

Nunnally. She's innocent and pure.

Suzaku. He's new and he's a little too straitlaced for me, but he has a kind heart.

Lelouch. He's insulting and always skips class. And he's so cold that I worry about his future, but in the end he comes through for you.

And me, Milly Ashford.

We do have some problems, but I think we're a pretty good Student Council for the Ashford Private Academy.

"It's too early for this to become a memory, but I feel at ease when I carry this around. I know it's impossible, but it feels like this time in my life is going to last forever, you know?"

I'm sure that my words made no sense to someone who didn't know me, but the girl appeared to be listening to what I said. She mumbled, "I see."

Suddenly I heard footsteps. She was walking away.

"Oh..."

"It's a limited experience, that's why you wish it would last longer."

The girl spoke with her back turned to me.

"Huh?"

"The way you think is correct. When you receive eternal life, you find out it's something horrible."

"Um..."

"That's why you should treasure it. At least when you're experiencing the moment." And then she left, leaving me with a puzzled look.

I didn't even have time to thank her.

But her words stuck in my head.

They were warm and sad words.

Treasure it...

Of course I will. No one needs to tell me that. No matter what happens, I want to do that.

But her words grabbed me and didn't let go. It was like I was bound by a spell. The reason for it...I thought I knew, but I didn't.

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

STAGE-1:1-MASK

[Honorary Britannian]

The general term for Numbers who receive certain privileges as Britannian citizens. Ever since Area 1 was founded, this system has been used in each territory to assure the empire's development and prosperity. Among the Areas, in Japan, or Area 11 as it is now known, Honorary Britannians are allowed to join the Britannian Forces. And their achievements are such that they cannot be ignored...

May 2017, Area 11

1

The city that lay below her looked like it was calm and free of worries.

I hope that one day this will be true.

Inside the girl's heart, she had an innocent admiration for peace.

The girl's name was Euphemia li Britannia.

If you were to describe her in one word, it would be *pretty*. Her beautiful facial features had both class and innocence, and her hair swaying in the night wind shone in the moonlight. She stood on a balcony so high it practically reached the heavens, but looking down at the city, she had no air of arrogance.

Euphemia was the third princess of the super nation Britannia. She was also the sub-viceroy of this territory, Area 11.

In Britannia, the royal court stands at the top of military and political affairs. This is why Euphemia, who was only 16 years of age and should be attending school, was in such a high position—even if it was in name only. Of course, it was a different story whether it was a good thing for the girl.

Euphemia stepped forward on the balcony, enchanted by the quiet night. She was gazing at the Tokyo Settlement, a city exclusively for Britannians. But it was the "exclusive" part that bothered Euphemia's heart. It was Britannia's policy to distinguish between the people who were from Britannia and the people who were from the territories—known as Numbers—but Euphemia wondered if it was that self-centered way of thinking that didn't

allow the city to sleep in peace. She was always thinking about things like this.

She heard footsteps behind her. "It's a beautiful moon. But don't stay out here too long. If you catch a cold, it would be troublesome."

There was only one person in the government bureau who could speak to Euphemia that way.

"Dear sister..." Euphemia turned around and began to speak, but stopped herself. She straightened and curtsied respectfully. "In excellent spirits, Viceroy?"

The other one laughed. She came out to the balcony, walking in her dynamic way and said, "We're not working right now. Don't be so formal, Euphy."

Her name was Cornelia li Britannia. Their same middle name indicated that they weren't half sisters, but shared the same father and mother. Her face was more mature than that of Euphemia's, but there were similarities.

Euphemia smiled at her sister. "Yes, sister."

"It's an awfully quiet night. It reminds me of our palace back in Britannia."

"You liked it there a lot."

"I haven't seen Mother lately, either. She's probably worried about you." Cornelia said this as she reached for Euphemia's hair. The pale, slender fingers combed through the soft hair.

Euphemia closed her eyes.

"You're tired from all the events that have happened, aren't you? If it's too tough, you can go back home to Mother for a while."

"No..." The cold night air brushed Euphemia's cheeks. "I decided to do this on my own. I wanted to help you."

"You're so stubborn."

"I get it from you."

Cornelia laughed quietly and let go of Euphemia's hair. Euphemia opened her eyes.

"It's true that I'm thankful you're here. I'm good at shooting enemies, but taking care of civilians is not my strong suit. Once this Area calms down, I will need you."

"I hope so..."

A respectful knock interrupted the sisters' conversation. It was the office door, which was connected to the balcony.

"Your Highness, I am very sorry to bother you."

"Guilford?"

Instantly, Cornelia's face turned stern. She moved away from her younger sister and turned toward the office.

"What is it?"

"There's something I wanted to tell you immediately. I was hoping I could have a little bit of your time."

"Fine. Let's go to my office. Is Darlton here as well?"

"Yes, he's waiting."

"Then I'll be right there."

Cornelia nodded gravely, then turned to look at Euphemia, who was still standing on the balcony. She smiled once again, but not as brightly as before.

But her tone of voice was gentle. "Sorry, Euphy. It seems that our private time is over."

"You don't need to worry about me, sister."

"You should get some rest. I know you've not been sleeping much lately. Staying up late is bad for your skin." Cornelia jokingly warned her, and then left the balcony.

Cornelia was an object of adoration for Euphemia.

She was strong, kind, and beautiful.

She always protected her.

But there was a hint of complicated emotion in Euphemia's eyes, as she watched her sister leave.



Area 11 was founded in a similar vein as the other territories.



At the time, this country was known as Japan. It went to war with the Holy Empire of Britannia and lost. It became a territory of Britannia like the other nations, just as Britannia had already achieved 18 times previously. Britannia didn't consider it evil to rule other countries with its power. It was, in fact, the nation's goal, regardless of how they were viewed around the world.

But because of that, Britannia was resented by many who held different values.

"Crush imperialism!"

"Death to the Brittanian invaders!"

"Banzai Japan!"

The terrorists in Area 11 were very active, and showed no signs of being contained.

In fact, only a few months ago the former viceroy, the third prince of the Britannia Empire, Clovis la Britannia was shot and killed by a terrorist. A strong resistance against the empire hadn't been seen in any territories other than Area 11. It showed how much this land was opposed to Britannia even before the war, and how hard it was to rule.

Cornelia li Britannia was sent in to this difficult territory as a trump card.

Among some of the soldiers, Cornelia was known as the war goddess. She was a highly skilled soldier, and right after being appointed as viceroy, she crushed several terrorist organizations. Investigating in secret, she led her troops in as soon as she found their headquarters and destroyed them in one stroke. This could've only been done by Cornelia. The reason why Area 11, which had been thrown into a state of turmoil and confusion with the death of former viceroy Clovis, had calmed down a bit recently was due no doubt to Cornelia's achievements.

However, this competent princess was not only looking at the battle against the terrorists: but at one of the most difficult fights to tackle as viceroy.

The battle against internal corruption. Cornelia returned to her office and her face darkened as she went through the documents handed to her.

Yet, the words that came out of her mouth were calm.

"I don't want to insult the deceased, but it seems that my dear half-brother was not a competent commander."

In this case, the half-brother Cornelia was talking about was former viceroy Clovis.

To be honest, Cornelia had yet to learn everything about military affairs in Area 11. The Royal Guards she brought with her when she was appointed were the exception; the soldiers who were stationed in this Area were not her personal soldiers, but former Viceroy Clovis'. In addition, Britannia provided each viceroy with a certain amount of discretion, and the military troops deployed in each territory were fairly independent. In other words, the Britannian Forces of the territory would come under the influence of that territory's viceroy.

"Are you unhappy with the generals appointed to each military precinct?"

The grim voice belonged to a military man named Darlton. He had an athletic build to match his husky voice, and he was a middle-aged man with the look of a genuine soldier. Yet he wasn't a simple-minded soldier who just charged into war; and the trust Cornelia had in him was huge.

Cornelia shook her head to her older aide's words. "It's not a problem with the individual generals, but the power they have. They have too much."

Area 11 was divided into a total of five military precincts, and ruled respectively. There was the East A Precinct, Middle B Precinct, West C Precinct, Hokkaido D Precinct, and North East E Precinct. Each precinct had a regular military force allocated, to maintain local order.

That was fine, but to Cornelia's eyes as a new viceroy, it disturbed her that the direction of the precincts was scattered.

It was almost irritating. And it was all because the general, the highest position in each precinct, had too much power. In short, the independence of each precinct was too strong. It was fine that the generals had supreme command of the military troops in an emergency, but to leave the promotions and personnel matters to them was unheard of. A military was stronger with more centralized power, was Cornelia's belief. But the situation of Area 11 went against this.

"And that is why something as idiotic as this occurs," Cornelia said in disgust, throwing the documents she had in her hand onto the desk.

It was a report compiling unjust personnel movements that Cornelia had assigned someone to investigate in secret, when she knew she would become the viceroy of Area 11. The report showed various patterns of irregular promotions, including those involved with connections or personal preference, but what annoyed Cornelia the most was how many there were. Honestly, it would be too much to hold an individual hearing for each and every one of them.

"I predicted there would be some...but I didn't think this many. If useless soldiers were gaining power due to money and blood relations, it's no wonder that terrorists were taking advantage of them left and right."

"What should we do? It is a given that we will punish each head of personnel affairs, but if we are to correct this many positions I can imagine a large state of confusion."

"But if we don't, the bureau will lose face. And one incompetent superior can ruin the motivation of a hundred soldiers. But it's true that it's too many."

"How about if you decide based on actual ability?"

It was not Darlton, but the other man who made the suggestion: Guilford, who had come to get Cornelia earlier. He was still young; probably close to Cornelia in age. His hair was slicked back and the glasses he wore made him look intelligent. His

looks were those of a scholar, but he was a true soldier. However, his position was a little different from Darlton's.

Guilford was Cornelia's knight.

The knight system was distinct to Britannia, and there were two meanings to the term, "knight."

The first was the name given to the pilots of the Nightmare Frames, the main military weapon of various countries, the human-shaped machine.

And the other was the title given to the one who pledged his loyalty and his life to a Britannian royal personage.

The original meaning of the term was, of course, the latter. However, Britannia was the first nation that used Nightmare Frames in battles, and all those who were knights were obligated to train on the Nightmare Frames, so the two terms were used interchangeably. There was no official description of the Nightmare pilots, so in a true sense, Guilford was the best model of a knight. He rode a Nightmare Frame and he pledged his loyalty to Cornelia. Unlike Darlton, who might become separated from Cornelia depending on the situation, Guilford would never leave Cornelia's side.

Cornelia cocked her head slightly to Guilford's words.

"Ability?"

"Yes."

Guilford, standing by the wall, nodded once.

"Even though they reached their position unjustly, it doesn't mean that everyone who was promoted does not have the appropriate skills. No matter what their route to the position, there should be some who serve their post humbly and have adequate ability. So I suggest you leave in those who have the power and performance, and demote those who don't quite reach the bar."

"I see..."

"Of course, if we do that, the fairness of the dispensation will be in question. So we should investigate the past performance

of the suspicious ones, and balance the achievements with the crime."

"That's pretty interesting, but the moral question would still remain. Besides, if we take that route, we ourselves would be considered as playing personal preference in deciding the positions, when that is what we are criticizing."

"Yes, so the demotions would apply to everyone. After that, we can look at abilities and those whom we want to keep would receive new letters of appointment from the bureau. It would just be a formality, but it would hold water. Either way, I think it's necessary to keep the competent ones in the military. And as long as our first investigation is accurate, by acting upon it we would reaffirm our authority in the eyes of the precincts."

"And afterward, even if we stripped away power from various high figures, they would obey without question, eh?"

"Yes."

This suggestion was far beyond that allowed from a mere soldier, and the method was fairly dishonest, but Cornelia didn't seem to mind. She was, after all, the second princess of the super nation Britannia Empire, and Viceroy of Area 11. A policymaker couldn't do his or her job by being clean. It was necessary to lie to society, as long as in the end it would benefit the public. Cornelia understood that.

Darlton, who had been quiet, opened his mouth again.

"I agree with the suggestion. I believe we need to strengthen the military immediately to contain the anti-government forces that are active in various areas. To do that, we need to give all power to Your Highness."

"Don't call me that. I am currently working as Viceroy." Cornelia laughed. She then thought for a moment.

Cornelia understood what her two subjects wanted to say. Unfortunately for them and for herself, it hadn't been very long since they were appointed to Area 11. And what triggered the appointment was the assassination of the former. She did crush

several terrorist groups with lightning speed, but she knew that wouldn't be enough to calm Area 11 down. So basically, there was a necessity for Area 11 to come under Cornelia's influence, and the first step to achieve that was to restructure the military system. That's what Darlton and Guilford were saying. And Cornelia agreed with them. It was still too early to leave the politics of this Area to the scholars.

Besides, if that were the case, she wouldn't have been appointed here. Right now, what was sought of them was to raise power. It was important to show immense power so their enemies would lose the motivation to rebel.

Clovis failed to achieve this.

Cornelia considered her half-brother.

Cornelia li Britannia might come off as a cold-hearted woman, but her affection toward blood relatives ran deep. Her affection toward Euphemia was over the top, but she loved even her half-siblings as well. There were many princes and princesses fighting for the throne, so Cornelia's attitude was in the minority in that sense.

So even if she saw Clovis as having been an unreliable military man and ruler, he was one of the siblings she had loved. And Cornelia believed that stabilizing Area 11 would be a tribute to her brutally murdered brother.

No.

Come to think of it, Clovis was not the only relative who died on this soil.

There were two others...

"Viceroy?"

Cornelia came to with Darlton's voice. Her mind had wandered off to personal issues during an important conversation.

"I'm sorry. Anyway, I think I will go with Guilford's suggestion in regards to this. Do you agree, Darlton?"

"You seem tired. I should've been more considerate at this hour. I cannot apologize enough."

"No, it's fine. By the way, was that the only issue for tonight?"

"Yes..." And Guilford cut off his words. His posture was still straight, but his facial expression showed a hint of hesitation.

Cornelia lowered her brows.

"What's wrong, Guilford? Don't worry about me. If there is something else, then tell me."

"Yes... Then I would like to mention..."

Guilford spoke carefully.

"...It is about the terrorist who is said to have killed Prince Clovis—Zero."

In a moment...

Cornelia's eyes turned sharp like a hawk that found its prey.

2

Statistically, a school without natural surroundings tends to be more prone to having violence erupt.

Of course, it doesn't mean that it is bound to happen; it's just a matter of the odds. Humans seem to get blue when they're surrounded by steel and concrete. And it wasn't just limited to the students; the teachers were affected as well.

To that view, the Ashford Private Academy, located in the center of the Tokyo Settlements in Area 11 was ideal. There were many trees on the large site, of different varieties. Some areas looked like a forest. And if you excluded the hallways and school buildings, the ground was mostly covered with grass. Perhaps this atmosphere contributed to the cheerfulness of the students and teachers, regardless of the brutal state of society.

But it was a problem when they were too cheerful and carefree, thought the Vice President of the Student Council, Lelouch Lamperouge. He sighed as he flipped the postcard.

It wasn't something he wrote. Today, it was his job to read a postcard written by someone else.

Lelouch faced the microphone in the broadcasting room and curtly announced the words he'd prepared to read beforehand. Of course, Lelouch himself thought that he was sounding as friendly as could be.

"Okay, this is today's first request. It's 'Innocent Days,' by Pupil. It's a good song. I like it, too."

Suzaku Kururugi, who was sitting next to Lelouch, received the signal from Lelouch and started playing the song. At the same time, Lelouch dropped the volume of the microphone. This made it so that the school grounds would only hear the song for the next few minutes.

After looking at the amp and confirming that everything was working smoothly and properly, Lelouch stretched his back.

Suzaku, who was nervously operating the equipment, looked at Lelouch and smiled. "You're used to this, aren't you, Lelouch? I'm still scared I'm going to mess up."

"I've been doing this for over a year." Lelouch's voice sounded lazy, completely different from when he spoke into the microphone. "If you do it a couple of times...*yuuu...*...you'll get used to it, too."

"You didn't sleep well last night?"

"I'm just bored. Besides, there's no reason to do this just for the lunch program. It's too much trouble."

"But this is popular, isn't it? I think I heard my classmates talk about it."

"It's only popular when Ms. President is the deejay. Although she talks the whole time, and even after lunch is over sometimes."

But the program was popular when Lelouch was deejay, too. Of course, unlike Milly, whose funny comments and stories were a hit, Lelouch's popularity simply came from the fact that the girls could hear his voice.

"I think it's fine to just play the music. Our school goes overboard with these festive activities."

"I guess the President's cheeriness is affecting the whole school."

"It's more a bad influence than good."

As they were talking, the song came to a close.

"Lelouch."

"I know..." Lelouch yawned once more, then sat up in his chair.

He raised the volume of the microphone, and his face became more serious. It was funny to Suzaku because he was trying to do his job right, even after complaining.

Eventually the song faded out, and Lelouch spoke into the microphone.

"Okay, that was 'Innocent Days' by Pupil. Now I would like to move on to a postcard received in our box. We've been asking for suggestions for the main event of our school festival to be held next month. Let me introduce our first postcard. It's from a student who calls herself, 'Pizza Lover.'"

Huh?

"Hello, this is my first time writing. I know this is sudden, but I love pizza. I love it so much I don't know what to do. I like all kinds of toppings, and I don't mind if I eat pizza three times a day. Actually, I do eat pizza three times...a day?"

...

"And here is my suggestion. How about trying to create the biggest pizza at the school festival? I bring this up because the guy I live with is nagging me about my pizza eating habits. He says that my diet is unbalanced, or that it's my fault that others think that he loves pizza, too. He also thinks I should show more restraint since I'm staying at his place for free. Sheesh, I can't believe he would say this, because if I wasn't around...he wouldn't, um, even know how to treat a lady..."

...

Lelouch grew paler as he continued reading. His face turned rigid.

"Lelouch?" Suzaku whispered to him.

"So please try to create the world's largest pizza to show this idiot how great it is. Thank you."

Of course, this was where Lelouch was supposed to make a comment.

But Lelouch couldn't move. He couldn't speak. He had completely frozen, holding the postcard in his hand.

Something was seriously wrong—Suzaku knew that. But there was something more important to do than to kick his friend sitting next to him.

Suzaku reached out quickly and turned the microphone to face him.

"Okay, then let's go to the second song of the day. It's by the same group as the last song, Pupil. The song is called 'Alone.' Enjoy."

He worked the audio system and lowered the volume on the microphone. He'd had to choose the same group because he didn't have time to change discs.

Eventually, a slow ballad started playing through-out the school.

Suzaku sighed in relief, and looked at Lelouch with a puzzled face. Lelouch was still frozen.

"Lelouch? What happened?"

"Suzaku."

Suddenly, Lelouch got up from his chair.

"I have a stomachache for the rest of the day."

"Huh?"

"I have a stomachache, so I'm leaving school early. Can you tell the teachers?"

"Tell the teachers... Hey, wait, Lelouch..."

But Lelouch had already run out of the broadcasting room and out the door.

Suzaku was left alone, trying to figure out what had happened.

It took a few minutes for him to turn pale when he realized that, with Lelouch gone, he was going to have to do today's broadcast.



That idiot! That idiot! That idiot!

The school grounds were filled with students eating lunch under the bright, blue sky, playing badminton or lying on the grass reading a book—in short, spending their lunchtime normally. Lelouch ignored them all and headed straight to the clubhouse, where he and his sister Nunnally lived.

Inside there was no sign of Sayoko, who took care of Nunnally. Nunnally was in school at this hour, so perhaps Sayoko had gone shopping.

Lelouch went straight to his bedroom. He tried to unlock the door by punching in the secret code, but messed it up twice. When he finally got the door open...

There she was, sleeping soundly on Lelouch's bed.

Lelouch could hear her light, rhythmic breathing.

She only woke up when she wanted to, and slept when she wanted to. Last time, she woke up in the middle of the night and told Lelouch that she was hungry and wanted him to go buy pizza.

Looking at her sleeping in his bed without worry or consideration made Lelouch want to rip the blankets off of her, but he decided not to. It wasn't because he was being nice. It was because he saw her bare shoulders peeking from the edge of the blanket. She wasn't wearing any clothes. Not only was she self-conscious, but she had no modesty!

Instead, Lelouch violently poked her small head.

"Hey, wake up. C.C.!"

No response.

"If you don't wake up, I'm going to throw you out of the bed. Wake up!"

No response.

Lelouch thought to himself, irritated.

"...Thank you for waiting. Here is your large seafood pizza."

"...Huh? I thought I ordered the seasonal special, the extra spicy salami today..." She finally responded. "And...I thought I asked for a delivery at 3 o'clock. Even I don't eat lunch twice before my snack."

And she said troubling things, too. That meant she ate four meals a day!

The girl in the bed opened her eyes and looked up at Lelouch sleepily. Then she slowly began to stir. Her eyes brightened slightly, and she sat up.

At least she had the front of her body covered. She had a little bit of decency, it seemed.

"Oh, it's you. What kind of a joke was that? Did you start a new part-time job to make money? Fine, I'll cooperate if you're willing to do that. Of course, I get a discount, right?"

She had long, silky hair and a face that looked like a porcelain doll's. Her body was small and fragile, and if she sat quietly she would pass as a mysterious beautiful girl.

But Lelouch knew.

Inside, she was worse than Ms. President.

The anger and irritation left Lelouch, and he said heavily, "Just put on your clothes. I'll continue our conversation after that."

"Oh...yeah, I guess so."

She nodded and started to dress, not minding that Lelouch was right there.

Lelouch clicked his tongue and faced the other way, walking away from the bed.

And then...

"Lelouch."

"What?"



"My underwear is at your feet. Get it for me."
 "Get it yourself!"
 In the end, Lelouch yelled.



They'd met a few months ago, in the city on the brink of collapse.

The poor district where the former Japanese—now called Elevens by the Britannian people—lived after being conquered by the super nation of Britannia.

The Shinjuku Ghetto.

Of course, Lelouch wasn't there because he lived there. He was—unfortunately—a pure Britannian, with a legal Britannian citizenship, and his looks were different from the Japanese. He was there out of pure coincidence, and to clarify, he accidentally got involved in this situation.

But whether it was coincidence or not, Lelouch met this girl.

Even now, Lelouch could clearly remember her words. How they sounded, and the tone of her voice as well.

This is a contract.

The girl spoke with a voice that didn't just stir the body; but if there were such a thing, she spoke to the soul.

In exchange for this power you must make my one wish come true.

If you accept this contract, while living with humans you will live unlike any other.

The power of the king will isolate you.

Are you prepared for that?

Of course, at the time there was no choice other than to accept.

But didn't he enter the contract because he was awed by her mysteriousness? At least at the time, her presence overwhelmed him.

Her power, her capacity, her absoluteness. It was like his genes were breaking down one by one, and his existence was being recreated from nothing.

People would call that awesome.

Yes, at that time, he was in awe of the girl before him.

He saw a goddess.

That was why he took her hand, and nodded yes to her words.

That was why.

That was why, *but!*

"Why are you so irritated, Lelouch?" The girl asked, sincerely puzzled by Lelouch's behavior. By this time she was already dressed, in Lelouch's shirt and pants.

Her name was C.C. Was it even her real name? Lelouch didn't care.

She came to this house a few months ago, and matter-of-factly stayed. To be honest, Lelouch didn't want a strange girl living with him, or even coming into the home where he lived with his sister Nunnally. But there was nothing he could do.

C.C. looked around and glanced at the clock hanging on the wall.

"Hey, you skipped school again? It's too early for you to be home."

And she dared to criticize others!

"...I didn't skip school because I wanted to. It was because of you...ah, forget it. That's right. There was nothing in that postcard that was too specific. It was my fault for not dealing with it calmly. It means I still need work. But what kind of idiot, someone who is even *wanted by the military*, would post to our suggestion box? That shows no tactics, no strategy, no self-control or cooperation. It's like you're not even aware of the danger. You're that kind of a person. You're always! *Always!* ALWAYS doing this! You mess with my everyday life and you act on your own just because you have eternal life! You never listen to what I say."

Lelouch drew a breath to continue his rant, while C.C. merely blinked at him.

"Fine, do as you wish. Go do your own thing and get into trouble. The only thing I hate other than Britannia is you. They say you can't have it both ways, and it seems to be true. But sometimes I think if I didn't have to see your face anymore, my plan to crush Britannia could go hang. There's something wrong with me if I would even consider that. Was this what you were talking about when you asked me if I was prepared? Fine. Interesting. Then one day I'll crush you. Are you happy now?"

After Lelouch finished, he glared at C.C.

Then C.C. responded, as cool as ever: "I still don't understand why you're so irritated."

"..."

I'm tired.

Lelouch wobbled for a few steps before falling onto the couch nearby. He put his hand to his temple and lay down. "...I'm going to sleep. Wake me up in the evening."

"Huh? I'm not your alarm clock."

"Why don't you be useful for a change? How much do you think I spend on your food?" *I could buy at least 50 cheap alarm clocks a month.*

C.C. was mumbling something on the bed, but Lelouch didn't bother to listen and closed his eyes.

Sheesh.

There was no point in arguing about it now, but Lelouch wondered if meeting her was good fortune or bad. Of course, he knew the merits. He had an objective.

And to reach that objective, the power he received from her was very handy.

Of course, if he hadn't received it, he would've searched for other methods; but it would be foolish not to utilize useful cutlery that was laid out before you. They had a relationship of using, and being used. It was fine. It was perfect for the two of them.

But on the other hand, when Lelouch thought of the drawbacks of having this girl around, he got a headache.

Because of her, his values had crumbled.

Because of her, his once easygoing school life was filled with stress.

And his savings account was decreasing.

The worst was that Nunnally suspected he had a girlfriend!

(That was the pits.)

Lelouch was mumbling in his head with his eyes closed.

He hoped that one day the whole world would crumble and C.C. would get swallowed up into the earth—but it was hopeless. This was a girl who didn't die even when her forehead was shot through with a bullet.

Suddenly, Lelouch heard an annoying 'blip' noise.

It was the sound of C.C. turning on the television. As usual, she had no consideration for the napping master of this room.

Lelouch heard people's voices; then they cut off and he heard a news anchor reading the news. Surprisingly, C.C. loved watching the news. She was almost always watching it when she watched television.

Lelouch was just drowsily listening to the sound of the television when one of the news items caught his attention.

"Now, for the next story. There was a terrorist bomb attack in the Tokyo Settlements D218 District on the 7th. The targeted house was the residence of Rick Bogart, and today the bodies that were found in the burn site were finally identified. The victims were Mr. Bogart, his wife Eva, and their three-year old daughter Amy. The police and public safety officials are still looking into possible reasons for why Mr. Bogart was targeted, and declare that they will devote all their manpower to finding the culprits. This case, that took the life of an innocent, young girl..."

Lelouch opened his eyes and sat up on the couch.

Eventually, the news program ended.

C.C. changed the channel and a different news program started. It seemed to be a time slot when all the channels were showing the news.

Suddenly, C.C. was standing behind the couch Lelouch was sitting on, with her hands on the backrest. The rectangular screen was showing the same news item that they had just heard, with a different news anchor.

Lelouch noticed that she was peering into his face from the side.

And she bluntly said: "Was that something you ordered?"

For a moment, Lelouch lowered his eyebrows in disgust. But it was only for a moment, and then his expression changed.

He answered coldly. "Unfortunately, I don't have that much bad taste."

He smiled; a smile that was almost too cruel for a student as young as him to have.

3

There was a resistance group that was creating a buzz in the public.

No, the term "resistance" was used by Japan. For Britannia, the group was nothing but a terrorist organization. Anyway, there was no doubt that this one group was different from the rest.

The group's name was the "Black Knights."

What made this group different from the rest?

It was solely because of the beliefs and principles they advocated.

"We don't deny war. But we won't forgive those with power mercilessly killing those without! Only those who are prepared to

be shot, can shoot. We will appear when the powerful attack the weak. No matter how powerful that entity may be!"

If one were to interpret this in the Black Knights' favor, it meant that the Black Knights did not agree with people taking the lives of innocent civilians, whether they were Britannians or terrorists.

And actually, they proved that with their actions.

There was an incident known as the Shinjuku Incident.

The Britannian Forces were indiscriminately demolishing the Japanese ghetto, the Black Knights fought against them, and for a moment thought that they would wipe out the Britannian troops.

There was something called the Orange Incident.

An innocent suspect was held for the assassination of the former viceroy Prince Clovis, and they risked their lives to save him.

There was also the Kawaguchi Lake Incident.

One of the largest anti-Britannia organizations in Area 11, the Japan Liberation Front, took some Britannian civilians as hostages and it was the Black Knights, although they were also against Britannia, who saved the hostages.

They stood against Britannia; but it didn't mean they would point their spear only at Britannia.

Just like they declared: their true enemy was the "tyrannical and powerful."

That was why this group was receiving a lot of attention in Area 11. At the least, they were popular with the Japanese who hated Britannian rule, but who couldn't agree with terrorism and just stay quiet. Of course, if one looked at it from a different point of view—for example, that of the members of the Japan Liberation Front who lost their lives at Kawaguchi Lake—they would say that they were traitors who would betray allies in a second. And Area 11 Viceroy Cornelia li Britannia would say that they were acting only

to gain popularity and that they were an outrageous, self-righteous group who were stirring up the civilians.

The Black Knights' final principle was this:

"Those with power, fear us! Those without power, seek us! The world will be judged by the Black Knights!"

These words contradicted what they stood for, as in, why would they have the right to judge the world; or in fact, wasn't judgment itself the foundation of the relationship between the strong and weak? But all of that was forgotten with what they achieved.

The easiest way to describe the Black Knights was as "heroes."

They didn't yield to the super nation Britannia, yet they didn't involve innocent people; and they continued to fight for the Japanese people who lived in Area 11.

At least, among the Japanese who hated Britannia, they were heroes who appeared out of nowhere. The craze was all directed toward them, and the praise was going to the leader of the group.

Zero.

A mysterious man who always hid behind a black mask.

There was no one who knew who he was.

But actually, that wasn't the entire truth.

There was at least one person who knew who Zero was.

C.C. Of course, that didn't mean that C.C. was Zero.

Zero's identity was...Lelouch Lamperouge...no, his real name was Lelouch vi Britannia, the eleventh prince of the Holy Empire of Britannia.

He was brought to Japan eight years before, practically as a hostage, and was thought to have been killed when Japan went to war with Britannia.

At the present moment, he was using a fake name to overthrow the Britannia Empire his father ruled. And he continued to live his life behind a mask.

Lelouch was Zero.



Just as he had said, Lelouch took a nap until early evening, and woke up before his sister Nunnally came home. He then started making a lot of phone calls.

"Ohgi? It's me, Zero. Yes, it's about yesterday's incident. Can you gather some people for tonight? ...No, I don't need that many people. But all the board members. Of course. Kallen, too. Well, I wouldn't say Tamaki is necessary..."

C.C. watched with an emotionless face, sitting on top of his bed.

After Lelouch was done, she said bluntly, "I always think this. You keep saying that I have no sense of danger, but your nerve is quite something, too."

"Are you saying not to make calls as Zero while on school grounds?" Lelouch snorted lightly, and threw the cell phone on the bed. "Don't worry, it's camouflaged. And this cell phone is a special order from the world's number one in information warfare, the Britannian Forces."

"Where did you get that?"

"Let me just say that the wolf knows what the ill beast thinks." Lelouch evaded the question and started taking off his school uniform, which he was still wearing.

Of course, C.C. didn't cover her eyes or look the other way. And Lelouch didn't even ask her to. Once Lelouch started taking off his shirt, C.C. asked, "So, what are you planning to start?"

"Huh?"

"Don't play dumb. It's about the news earlier. Come to think of it, you've been going out a lot since that incident."

"I have?"

"You're not going to say that you can't forgive terrorists who sacrifice civilians, so you're going to go crush the culprits...are you?"

When Lelouch heard this, his expression grew colder. He turned around to the girl on the bed, still shirtless, and said, "Are you going to say that too, C.C.?"

"..."

"Don't get confused here. I don't want to become a hero. I am just pretending to be one. Especially toward the people here in Area 11. What I said at Kawaguchi Lake is half true, but I don't plan on being tied down by ideals."

"So, you're just doing this to increase the number of your allies."

"Exactly."

"You're a con artist. Just like that courageous viceroy said," C.C. mumbled, and Lelouch laughed.

"Indeed. I'm self-righteous and stirring up the civilians. But if I can destroy Britannia in the end, anything goes."

Was it because of his experiences as a young boy; or was it something he had from birth?

This boy, Lelouch vi Britannia, had a twisted personality. For one thing, he was rebelling against his own country of Britannia not for Japan or for the Japanese.

It was all for personal revenge.

I want to show the Britannia Emperor who abandoned us siblings and just watched our mother die.

I want to provide a kind world for Nunnally, who is hurt in both body and heart.

These two reasons were the source of Lelouch's actions.

Well, not that I am in a position to criticize him, C.C. thought to herself, as she watched Lelouch, who had gone back to changing.

Judging that it was evil to try to overthrow a country while involving many others, based on personal feelings, was fine. But what about governing a country while disrupting many people's lives for personal gain? Did one call that good, something necessary? How stupid. It wasn't about which was right or wrong; it was about criticizing both ways, or not criticizing both ways.

Whether you died for other people or for yourself, death was death. That was the same for everyone. At least that was what C.C. thought. So, she wouldn't criticize him.

Because she is—his partner in crime.

He just needs to be useful...that's all I need.

Just when she was thinking that, Lelouch finished changing.

He was wearing clothes that didn't stand out. He had just been talking to the Black Knights, so he was probably meeting with them. Obviously, he wasn't wearing the mask. He hadn't revealed Zero's identity to the Black Knights—actually, he couldn't, because Lelouch was Britannian and therefore the enemy of the Japanese—so he would need the mask when he met with them. But he couldn't walk out of this clubhouse wearing it.

In addition, C.C. really didn't know what Lelouch was up to. She knew for sure it was related to the news they saw earlier, but Lelouch wouldn't say anything beyond that.

It was annoying.

She didn't care what kind of a personality he had, or what he was thinking. But it did matter if he were to die or get captured.

Then, Lelouch began to speak as if he had read C.C.'s mind. "I'll tell you one thing about what I'm going to do. It seems that the viceroy of Area 11, Princess Cornelia li Britannia, is restructuring the military at a fast pace."

"I know that already. Lately, every time that face shows up on television it's about that. It seems to annoy you."

"Exactly. But I wonder if it's just annoying to me?"

"..."

"What do you mean?"

"It means that there are snakes in anyone's bosom." Lelouch said nonsensically. Then he stopped laughing and wore a serious expression. "One more thing. You stay put in this room. Honestly, every time you act on your own, my plans get foiled."

"I remember saving you a few times because I acted on my own."

"Ergh...Anyway, I don't need you in regards to this plan. If you get in the way and ruin it, I'll have a few ideas too."

"Yeah, yeah. I got it." C.C. answered in a slapdash manner. "Besides, it's almost dinnertime. So I'll just observe you in this matter."

Lelouch glared at C.C. with suspicious eyes, not believing her. But he probably thought that warning her any further wouldn't make a difference.

He left the room with a grumpy face.

C.C. stayed on the bed for a while, engaged in her thoughts.

The sun was setting outside the window.

In general, reflecting its master's personality, there wasn't much furniture in the room. Whether it was his high birth or his personal taste, the couches and tables were high-end goods. But because of that, there was no lived-in feeling. Actually, that probably more accurately reflected Lelouch. This room was only a temporary residence for him, after all.

"Just pretending to be a hero, eh?"

Somewhere far away, she heard a sound. Perhaps the little sister had come home.

But C.C. continued to think aloud.

"Lelouch, can you follow through with that?"

Probably not, C.C. responded to her own question in her mind.

Night was falling.

If Lelouch vi Britannia was wearing a mask, then this boy was also wearing one.

But his mask wasn't visible to others. No one knew about it, and no one would understand it. Perhaps even the boy himself didn't understand it.

Furthermore, if Lelouch was a Britannian who was planning the destruction of Britannia, Suzaku was a foreigner—of a race conquered by Britannia—he was Japanese, but he was acting in a position to protect Britannia.

Suzaku Kururugi, Honorary Britannian.

He was a Warrant Officer, belonging to the Area 11 unit Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps.

It was ironic.

Specifically, the two didn't meet at the Ashford Private Academy. They were childhood friends. They had spent some of their days as young boys together.

It was a short period of time, not even a year; but the amount of time spent does not determine how close one person can become to another.

They got to know each other and understand each other then.

That fact is something both of them have that is very important, and which cannot be replaced by anything else.

But the more important it is, the shock, anger, and sadness when it is crushed cannot be measured.

It is a known fact that military food wasn't good.

But there was an exception to everything; and the food they served at the cafeteria on the base was pretty good, Suzaku thought.

...Well, but only by comparison. Since he was transferred to this unit, at times he was fed food that made him feel the world was ending, so maybe his taste buds weren't working anymore.

The hangar was dark and silent. He was poking at some noodles the cafeteria had prepared for him—he'd been asked to take it out of the cafeteria because it was late—while reading the book he was holding.

He was studying. But this wasn't for school.

"Let's see. When you separate the liquid and solid sakuradite using the reaction of a set pressure, a super high-speed convulsion wave is created. By linking this to the slow wave Yggdrasil system, the energy conversion rate elevates. After that, you use the feedback from the man-machine interface and the parasite cables of each joint...ummm."

Suzaku stopped the hand that was bringing the chopsticks to his mouth. He sighed and put down his chopsticks, and looked up at "him," who was covered up. He shrugged and mumbled as he smiled wryly.

"Your mechanism is really complicated."

He spoke as if someone were there to listen, but obviously what he was talking to was not human. Besides, there was no human who was taller than four meters.

But still, it was a part of him.

The machine that wore armor and reminded one of a knight was covered and could not be seen. But the shape was distinguishable. Once life was breathed into it and the final part, Suzaku, rode it, it would roam the earth with intimidating speed and mobility. If equipped with its main weapons, the MVS and VARIS, no other Knightmare would equal the power it had. In fact, when Suzaku first rode it, he was surprised.

Developed by the Britannian Forces Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps, a prototype weapon: the seventh generation Knightmare Frame.

Also known as the Lancelot.

"Studying, Suzaku?"

Suzaku suddenly heard a voice, and he turned around to face the entrance of the spacious hangar.

There was a slender shadow standing beneath the glowing fluorescent light.

She wore a military uniform. It was late, but she must've been working too; she was holding a small folder in her right hand. She wore little makeup, which made her look smarter, and it was refreshing.

"Miss Cecile?"

When Suzaku called her name, the woman—Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps Lieutenant Cecile Croomy—smiled and walked over to where Suzaku was.

"It's fine that you're working hard, but you don't have to go this far. You're not a developer or an operator. You're just a pilot."

"I know, but..."

Suzaku smiled back. She was his superior, but he didn't salute. And he called her, "Miss." In this unit, the director had abolished all of those formalities, probably just due to his personal preference. When Suzaku was new here, he felt uneasy about it, but he'd gotten used to it since then.

Suzaku gazed up at the Lancelot again.

"But I didn't receive the proper pilot curriculum."

"Oh? But you have experience doing the simulation program, right? Before you came here?"

"Yes. But that was just the military collecting experimental data using the Honorary Britannian troops, so there wasn't much theoretical training."

"Are you worried that you're riding just with your senses?"

"A little. Although at the end I feel like that's what I'm going to be doing."

But as long as a machine was placed into his hands, Suzaku wanted to do the things that he thought he should do. Ninety-nine percent of it might go to waste, but the remaining one percent may come in handy one day. And Suzaku believed that it was the duty of the pilot to know the limits of the machine. What it can endure, the limits of its movements.

On a battlefield, the situation was always changing, so depending on the circumstance a pilot might need to do something crazy; but doing so without knowing the limits would just be going out of control. It wouldn't be adapting to the situation. And if that caused the machine to break, Suzaku wouldn't be able to

face the development team, including Cecile, who was standing in front of him.

Cecile just laughed, "I see," and didn't say anything more on the matter. "How's school? Are you able to keep up with classes?"

"Actually, that's been harder for me. I don't have the foundation to learn."

"Well, that academy is one of the best in Area 11. And in your case, you're a transfer student. You joined the Britannian Forces when?"

"When I was 14."

And ever since, he'd been in the military. He didn't think he could ever go back to school, and he wasn't hoping for it either.

But he was told emphatically that that was wrong.

By a noble person.

And thanks to her, he was able to attend school while serving in the military—in fact, he was able to attend the Ashford Private Academy, a special treatment unimaginable for an Honorary Britannian.

"I'm sorry that because of my schooling I'm causing you and Lloyd a lot of trouble. I'm really sorry."

"Please, don't be." Cecile smiled and shook her head. "In fact, I agree. You should attend school like a normal teenager. Of course, I didn't think you'd be attending the Ashford Private Academy...Oh!"

"Yes?"

Suzaku was about to ask what was wrong, then he turned pale.

Cecile was glaring at the Styrofoam cup filled with noodles that was in front of him.

"You're eating junk like that again..."

Suzaku heard a scary mumble.

"Oh. No, this is...no, it's not what you...it's just a snack! Yes, a snack."

"Even so, it's not good for you. You're still growing. Fine, I was just about to finish what I was doing, so I could go to the kitchen and..."

"No, but..."

It happened then.

A savior came from an unexpected place.

The area surrounding them turned red. There were twirling red lights and an ear-ringing siren.

"Huh?"

Suzaku looked around, on alert. It was Cecile who was holding her temples as if she was experiencing a migraine.

It seemed that she knew what was going on.

And then, a high voice came through the speakers.

"Uh, emergency, emergency. Hello all, thanks for working. Are you enjoying your break?"

Of course, Suzaku knew who it was.

It was unmistakably the voice of Lloyd Asplund, the director of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps.

"But...too bad! Your break is over. Prepare to sortie. Don't forget to pack your hiking gear."

"Sortie..."

Suzaku repeated what Lloyd had said, and Cecile sighed deeply next to him.

4

You couldn't really call it a village.

It was a wasteland, surrounded by a dense forest. It probably wasn't the war that did it: it had probably been that way from the beginning. The roads hadn't been built this far, and the only way to get out of the forest was probably animal trails. But water and electricity were available. Of course, without any approval and

therefore illegally. Judging from the sensor feedback, there was an open space underground. Not a natural one, but manmade. That meant it was a true hideout.

The bright and shiny moon shone down, casting the area in a cold and heartless light.

"I don't like it."

Cornelia, dressed in military uniform, stood on a hill and looked down at the village that couldn't be called a village.

Her knight, Guilford, stood by her like a shadow.

"Is there a concern?"

Cornelia didn't answer Guilford's question directly. She continued to look down at the area in disapproval and said, "According to our information, there are many boys under the age of 15 in that settlement."

"Yes. But, that is..."

"Don't get me wrong, Guilford. If they come at me with weapons, no matter how young they are, I will not have mercy. I will show them respect as an equal enemy and destroy them. But..."

Cornelia's eyes narrowed.

"...knowing that they are using young children for their selfish claims—for that, I can show no respect."

I'll let them know that personally, Cornelia thought to herself in disgust.



"The Great Japan Soten Party?"

When Suzaku asked, Cecile nodded as she looked at the portable laptop she'd brought into the cantonment area.

"Numbers-wise they're not a big group, but they are pretty famous in the Chubu region. You know..."

"I know. They're an extreme organization that calls for the complete removal of Britannians, soldiers or civilians."

And their methods were pretty bad, too. Their terrorist claims were ridiculous to begin with, and they didn't discriminate in their targets. Even if they were civilians, as long as they were Britannian, they would kill them.

There was no hope—that was how Suzaku felt. Not about this specific terrorist group, but about terrorism in general.

Suzaku wondered if the terrorists wanted a return to seven years ago.

A war-torn era when human lives weren't worth even a piece of paper.

And war didn't end when one side won or lost. Especially for the people in the losing country, the most dreadful experience comes afterward, right after the war ends. No matter how contained battle is, the turbulence of war spreads evil energy. Then the entities known as humans show the ugliest side they would never have shown in a peaceful era. It wasn't just about the strong oppressing the weak. Even the losers would fight and steal from each other to survive. Suzaku saw this in the last seven years. He didn't want to see that ever again. He never wanted anyone to have to see it again.

It took seven years, but finally the extremely chaotic times had ended and Area 11 was becoming more stable. But now this.

Of course, Suzaku didn't agree with everything that went on in Area 11.

Especially the way that the Britannians discriminated against the Numbers with their political measures. But what good would it do to oppose Britannia with violence? That would be just a repeat of seven years ago. Suzaku thought that they misunderstood the meaning of the word "patriotism." It was really foolish.

You cannot save much by the use of force...

"Suzaku?"

Suzaku snapped out of his musings. He usually acted without thinking, but when he did think, he tended to get lost in thought. It was a bad habit of his.

He pulled the zipper of the pilot suit up to his neck, and pushed the air out using the button on the back of his wrist. He then turned to Cecile, who was standing next to him.

"I'm sorry. So, the headquarters of the Great Japan Soten Party is there?"

"Yes," Cecile nodded. "Do you know about the incident that happened four days ago? You know, the bombing terrorist attack that killed a three-year old girl."

"...Yes."

"It's not been announced to the mass media yet, but it seems that incident was their work, too. But that ended up giving their headquarters away. One of the members who was arrested gave up this place, I hear."

"I see," Suzaku nodded, but then a third voice interrupted their conversation.

"But that is only the official announcement."

In the front of the head trailer, the large vehicle that carried Lancelot, a man was sitting in the passenger seat with the door open, looking up at the night sky. Honestly speaking, he didn't look like he was in the military. He wasn't wearing a uniform, but rather a white lab coat a researcher would wear, and his legs were thin. He was tall, but not muscular. Furthermore, his skin tone was pale and he wore rimless glasses. Even if Guilford also wore glasses, he didn't look as sharp. This man looked like a scholar who loved to research.

But he was a man of the military with a rank as well.

His name was Lloyd Asplund. He was the director of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps, and Suzaku and Cecile served under him.

"What do you mean?" Cecile asked.

"Umm. Just like I said," Lloyd answered, for some reason still looking happily up at the sky.

Even though they'd been ordered to be ready, and a mission was already underway, his voice held no sense of urgency. And of course, no sense of pessimism either. He was that kind of person.

"Well, it's just a suspicion I have. Besides, the Great Japan Soten Party is famous for their propaganda, right? The young ones willingly do suicide bombings."

"That's..."

"I'm sure they don't go as far as brainwashing. But just because a member got caught, I don't think they would easily give up their headquarters. And in such a short period of time, too."

Cecile realized before Suzaku what he was saying.

She turned a little pale.

"Wait a minute. So you're saying that the higher-ups knew about this place from the beginning?"

"Or, they got the information from a different source."

And then, Lloyd's expression changed to being a little disturbed.

"Don't you think it's weird? We finally got here, and even though we know where the terrorists are, we're still standing by. And the frontline is a formation that is prepared for a Nightmare battle. The enemies are underground, so all we have to do is drop bunker busters from the sky, and it'd be done."

"But maybe they want to capture the ringleader and put him on trial."

"I don't think Princess Cornelia, who's been destroying organizations left and right ever since she came to this area would do that. No way."

He shook his head, and then jumped off the trailer's passenger seat. He looked weak, but he was actually pretty agile.

He walked toward where Cecile and Suzaku were, looking at the trailer with childlike devious eyes.

"Of course, I don't care as long as I get a chance to use the Lancelot."

Cecile's expression turned wry.

"Actually, about that..."

"Yes?"

Cecile sighed.

"This is just an assumption, but...we weren't really called in to help, were we?"

"Hee hee. You found out?"

"Of course. Viceroy Cornelia is a typical Britannian, for better or worse."

She meant that Cornelia was an embodiment of the country of Britannia.

Then why wouldn't Cornelia order the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps to join in on the mission?

It was obvious.

It was because of Suzaku.

Britannia, as a country, did not treat Britannians and those from the territories—the Numbers—equally. Of course, there were people like Cecile and Lloyd who did not hold a prejudice against Suzaku or other citizens of the territories. But as a nation, that was their stance. Actually, in the Britannian Forces there was a group known as the Purists, who were proud of their blood and disliked the fact that there were Numbers in the military. Perhaps since the nation favored discrimination, the military would obviously follow suit.

But the second princess of the Britannia Empire, Cornelia li Britannia, was to a certain extent a high-minded person. For example, citizens of the territories were beneath Britannians, so it would make sense to use them as tools and sacrifice them on the battlefield. But she wasn't the type to think this way. Cornelia believed that protecting the nation and its people was a noble duty, and that that duty must be carried out by the Britannians who were the rulers. It was the responsibility of the high and noble—a *noblesse oblige* way of thinking. For her, the citizens of the territories, who had accepted Britannia's control, were the ones to be protected and not the protectors.

Then why did Suzaku hold a revered position as a Knightmare pilot in the Britannian Forces, under Cornelia's rule? This was due to the special position of the Advanced

Special Envoy Engineering Corps. ASEEC for short, this unit was technically part of the Area 11 military force; but actually, as the term "Special Envoy" indicated, it was really under the authority of the home country of Britannia. It meant that there was someone more powerful than Cornelia in the home country, and as long as that person recognized the ASEEC and Suzaku, Cornelia could not reverse that at will. And Cornelia was not happy about that.

So Cornelia did not show a genial countenance toward the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps.

She didn't directly give them the cold shoulder or oppress them, but she didn't rely on the unit as "her troops." If they were to join in, they were welcome to, but she didn't aggressively make use of them.

"Unless we are attacked directly by the enemy, we won't get to fight. I'm sure you pushed your way into here because you wanted battle data for the Lancelot, but...honestly speaking, it's pointless."

"We don't know if it's going to be pointless. And just like you said, we might be attacked by the enemy. It's better than doing simulations at the base."

"But Suzaku has school, you know?"

"Hee hee. Oh, so that's the main reason. Hey, Cecile. Did anyone ever tell you that you should be on a nursery staff instead of serving in the military?"

"...Can I get mad now?"

"Oh, no, please don't."

There was a disruptive atmosphere brewing between his two superiors, but Suzaku didn't intervene. Instead, he looked to the west of the cantonment tent.

He could see a dense thicket under the moonlight. The black shadows of the trees blocked half of his view. Because of that, he couldn't see the settlement that was the terrorist headquarters.

Actually, where Suzaku was at wasn't the battlefield. They were way to the back. The main Britannian Forces' Knightmares led by Cornelia were deployed on the other side of the trees.

Cecile said it too: unless something out of the ordinary happened, they wouldn't be ordered to fight.

But that was fine with Suzaku.

It wasn't that he was thankful he wouldn't have to fight fellow Japanese. Unfortunately, he had lost that kind of sentiment long ago, when he applied to be a soldier in the Britannian Forces. That was why even if they were Japanese, if they were causing pain to people living in peace, if they were causing disruption by not following the world's rules, then they were Suzaku's enemies.

But Suzaku thought about what Lloyd had said.

Now that he thought about it, there was something baffling about this strategy.

And he had a bad feeling about it. It wasn't logic; it was instinct.

What could this hunch mean?

Until he figured it out, it was probably best to stay put.



There was another man in the Britannian Forces who had a bad feeling about the whole thing.

His name was Andreas Darlton, and in the Area 11 military, effectively the number two man after Viceroy Cornelia.

Of course, Darlton knew more about the mission than Suzaku.

And the goal of this mission was not just to crush the terrorist headquarters. Besides, if that were the case, just as Lloyd had said, they would only need to launch a missile into the settlement.

They didn't do that because they had another objective.

"...Viceroy. The Gloucester troops have arrived at the specified location. We can go anytime."

The Gloucester was the fifth generation Knightmare Frame that was an improvement over the current main force of the Britannian Forces, the Sutherland. It was developed to focus on Knightmare-to-Knightmare combat, and was equipped with the SHOT LANCER. Cornelia's Royal Guards mostly piloted the Gloucester, and the purple-colored mark signified that they were directly under Princess Cornelia.

"Confirmed. Then stay there until we go in. I'll give the signal when ready."

Cornelia's voice responded to Darlton's report through the Gloucester communication device.

"If the information is accurate, they will use Knightmares. I think you know, but destroy those completely. After we penetrate the basement, I'll leave you in command."

"Yes, Your Highness."

And the communication was supposed to end there; but they were, after all, a master and a subject who had fought on many battlefields together.

Darlton was about to turn the communication panel off in his Gloucester, when he heard laughter echo in the cockpit.

"I sense you want to say something to me, Darlton."

For a moment Darlton was surprised, and then he smiled slightly.

"Princess. Reading too much into your subordinates is not a sterling quality. Those who do not give their subjects mental fatigue are rulers of virtue."

"I have many subordinates who do not say it in words but with their actions, so I cannot help it. Anyway, what is on your mind?"

"Yes."

Darlton's expression sobered. "Viceroy, I know this is a little late, but do you really believe the group is connected to Zero? Their ideas and principles are too different."

"I know. They are more of the type Zero would go after, to gain more popularity. But, a connection doesn't always mean they're on the same side."

"So, you are saying they are in opposition?"

"That's more likely. According to the information Guilford obtained, this group is frantically searching for Zero. And among the terrorists Zero killed at the Kawaguchi Lake incident, were members of this group too. They don't want to shake hands with Zero; they want to point a gun at him."

"If that's the case, then they don't know where Zero is, either."

"If Zero is still alive. But although we're both seeking him, the information we have and the information they have might not be the same. Furthermore, their stance is the same as Zero's, anti-Britannia. The possibility of them having information we don't is high."

"Do you think they would give it to us easily?"

"In order to do that, I want as many main members captured alive. Of course, I have no intention of negotiating. I do not like these men. If we were to get information, I'd get it through a confession, whether by drugs or torture."

Cornelia's voice lowered, and even Darlton got chills down his spine. This was one of the reasons why her enemies called her a witch. When she set out to destroy her enemies, she did not settle. If she said she would do something, she would do it. Of course, this was also why she had achieved so much in battle.

But sometimes, depending on the situation, it becomes her weak point.

As Darlton was thinking that, as the more experienced soldier, Cornelia had already moved on to the next topic.

"Anyway, that goes for Zero as well, but I cannot let them run around any longer. It is a hassle, but we're going to decide this in one sweep, Darlton."

"Please leave it to me."

But she will not understand that yet, Darlton concluded his

thought. He could not get rid of the bad feeling in his heart.

And in the end, Darlton's and Suzaku's premonition came true.



"Are we really doing this, Zero?"

"Don't worry, Ohgi. Cornelia's troops are gone now. Hee hee, it's her weakness that she can't leave it to troops other than her Royal Guards to do something. If you want to crush a headquarters completely, you don't order a general of a precinct to do it. You have to move yourself."

"But to use the Soten Party as bait..."

"I can't agree with their ways. Besides, they were the first to be hostile toward us, acting as if they were going to raid us. In this case, we're just borrowing the power of the Britannian Forces."

"..."

"Don't misunderstand the gravity of the issue, Ohgi. We cannot achieve our goals without sacrifice. There is no need to feel sorry for them."

"...Fine. We're ready. Give us the signal anytime."

"Okay. Then..."

The clouds covered a bit of the moon, obscuring some of its light.

In that moment...

"Let's go."

At about the same time, in a completely different area, Cornelia was also ordering the attack from her Gloucester.

"Go!"

A booming roar echoed through the island formerly known as Japan in two locations, changing the quiet night into a whirl of screams.

As soon as the sound of the explosion shook the building, the man jumped from his chair.

"What the...!?"

Yet, he didn't panic. He went to the window to look around, as expected from a military man. But his self-control ended there.

Under the window he looked out of, at the end of the straight corridor, was a fire. The main entrance, which was closed securely, had a huge hole in it, and crumbled concrete was scattered all around.

"Wha...what..."

The phone in his room rang frantically. Out of reflex, the man grabbed it.

"Chief! We have a terrorist attack! A group of terrorists have attacked this base!!"

Of course, standard operating procedure would be to give concise orders to deal with the situation. This man was the head of the facility. It was his responsibility to carry this out. Actually, if he had, perhaps this mission would not have been completely successful.

But in the end, the man couldn't do it; and as he panicked, confusion spread throughout the entire facility.

Gun shots and explosions echoed everywhere.

Angry bellows and screams resounded throughout the building. The attack was not only from the front. The back gate was also on fire.

The man's confusion turned into fear.

If I stay here, I will be killed.

And the moment he thought this—he was not the chief of the facility anymore.

He told his subordinates to take cover in a high voice, and then he took off for the basement. There was an emergency evacuation shelter there. As long as he stayed there, it wouldn't be broken into that easily. And if he waited, perhaps the other facilities would send help.

He entered the secret code into the touch panel and the heavy door to the shelter opened slowly. The man jumped inside. He hid himself in the small room with the somewhat low ceiling. And finally, the man sighed in relief.

However...

Immediately after, he experienced true horror.

"Well, well. To run away so quickly, leaving your men behind.

What a great general."

The man's eyes widened.

There, in the darkness where no one else should have been, was a shadow.

A black cape, black gloves, black shoes, and...a black mask.

All of the components swirled in the man's mind, and pointed to one name.

In the next moment, it came out of his mouth.

"You...you...are Zero!?"

Inside the mask, Zero—no, Lelouch Lamperouge—smiled coldly.

"Yes. I believe this is the first time we've spoken? But I understand your character very well. And it was easy to predict your movements. That's why I was able to wait here at ease." The voice was amplified with an internal microphone.

The man took two, then three steps back.

"Wait! I..."

"I told you that I know. Chief of Central Troops in the Holy Empire of Britannia Area 11 Military Headquarters, Gigelf Muller. Previously under Viceroy Clovis, you were in effect the number three man in the military, the head honcho of staff headquarters. But ever since Cornelia arrived you've been getting the cold shoulder."

"I...!"

"Actually, if it were up to me, a cold shoulder would be a reward compared to what I would do with you. Because you..." And then, Lelouch laughed. "...No. There is no point in my

speaking further. I would have you walk to the guillotine with your own legs."

"What?"

"Don't get me wrong. I won't kill you. I'm just—going to order you."

As he said this, Lelouch reached toward the left eye on his mask with his hand. He pushed a button. The shutter opened, and revealed his eye.

A weird mark glowed.

It was inside the eye.

It looked like a phoenix that rose from the ashes and was flying to heaven.

The mark glowed red in his left eye.

And then, Lelouch quietly ordered.

"Then...speak."

In a moment, the world inverted.

All reason in the present world disappeared like puzzle pieces that didn't fit anywhere; and to resolve it, the eternal world on the other side of the mirror recreated an ideal world that was lost with unbreakable doctrine.

Here, heaven was not above. The earth was not below. The sea was harder than a diamond, and the stars were darker than black. Right and wrong were reversed; interacting with each other, and someone greater than anyone wept. It was an eternal cosmos where chaos reigned quietly.

Yes.

This was the power given to Lelouch by C.C.

No matter who it was, just once, he had the power to make them submit to orders.

The power of Geass.

The phoenix fluttered from Lelouch's eye to Muller's eyes.

Lelouch continued.

"Speak of everything you know about Rick Bogart."

And Muller spoke.





"So, what was going on?"

C.C. was sitting on Lelouch's bed as if it were her place. And she asked without sounding interested.

Lelouch had just gotten out of the shower, and he was drying his wet hair violently with a towel. Once he was done, he hooked the towel around his neck.

"It wasn't a big deal. Gigelf Muller was involved in a part-time operation that was separate from his mission, even though he was a big player in the Britannian Forces."

"Part-time operation?"

"I guess you can't go so far as to call him a traitor. He was just interested in fattening his wallet."

Lelouch threw his flushed body down onto the couch. He reached for the ginger ale he brought from the kitchen and quenched his thirst. He stretched his back, finally with a little time to breathe. And then he turned his head to look at C.C. on the bed.

"That man was dealing with anti-Britannia organizations in Area 11 on the side, making a ton of money out of it. He would leak information he obtained from his position, or put soon-to-be-disposed-of weapons on the black market."

"I see. He's a pretty rotten one."

"Only a small one. He couldn't do anything that would shake up the entire Area. All he could do was get a little cash allowance. Well, but he bought his position with that money, so we don't know what would've happened in the future. Greed is something that grows larger as your rank goes up."

"But you stopped it—is this your plan to gain more popularity?"

"Yes. I just need to send the confession footage of Muller and the evidence to the mass media under the Black Knights' name. I'll put it up on the Internet as well. Of course, the footage won't be good as official evidence because it will be assumed that I threatened him: but those who believe will believe. 'The Black Knights reveal the rotten Britannian Forces'—that's good enough."

"I see."

C.C. hugged the huge cushion that was on the bed, and cocked her head. "But how did you know about the man?"

Lelouch smiled a sinister smile. And said something outrageous, in a nonchalant tone.

"Easy. The Black Knights had a deal with him, too. Kallen's Glasgow was originally from him. Well, I was never involved with those deals personally, so tonight was the first time we met."

Even C.C.'s mouth dropped open in surprise.

"You sold your accomplice? To gain public support?"

"I was going to cut off ties with him anyway."

Lelouch smiled coldly again.

"Besides, I found a different route for obtaining my weapons. And that type of man would betray us easily, depending on the situation. I didn't want us to get false information from him and have my organization fall in one swoop for his promotion. An ounce of prevention for a pound of cure."

Lelouch's straightforward tone and words betrayed no feelings of guilt. His beautiful face was still smiling.

C.C. stared at Lelouch, surprised.

I thought he was twisted, but I didn't know it was to this level.

But perhaps that was why he was fit to be in contract with her.

Then, C.C. had another question.

"By the way, what was the Rick Bogart incident about?"

Lelouch's face turned rigid.

His smile faded, and he looked away from C.C., sinking his body lower into the couch.

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

STAGE-1:2-SHADE

[Far East Incident]

The war between the Holy Empire of Britannia and Japan occurred in a.t.b. 2010. Japan had large amounts of underground sakuradite, and when they implemented an arbitrary system to distribute it, war erupted. The Britannian Forces were overwhelming, and the Prime Minister at the time, Genbu Kururugi, decided on unconditional surrender. He silenced those who advocated a do-or-die stance by taking his own life, and the war ended. (However, there was a theory that Prime Minister Kururugi's death was a coup d'etat from within the government.) The end of the war marked the taking of Japan as Area 11 as part of Britannia's territory. It was completely under Britannia's control for a while, but...

June 2017 Area 11

I learned that death is not a beautiful thing.
That was the thing I was most unhappy about. I didn't want
to know.

I loved her so much. She loved me so much.

But when I saw the corpse full of holes, I thought...

How dirty.

I vomited.

*It wasn't because of the smell of blood, or intestines, but the ugliness
of my own heart.*

I vomited and vomited, and I took it out on everyone around me.

*Perhaps because I was violent, they made me take something and I
was put to sleep.*

*When I woke up, my sister had closed her eyes and rejected the
world, too.*

I won't forgive him.

*More than the people who did that to my mother, I couldn't forgive
him. I couldn't forgive him for making us experience this.*

*Why didn't he protect us? Why didn't he help us? Why did he
abandon us?*

And then I started to think...

One day, I'll make you feel the pain I felt.

I'll take away what's important to you. I'll take away what you cherish as an individual. I'll snatch your heart and pound it to the ground.

I won't leave you anything. I won't even give you death. That will not be an escape route for you. As long as your geriatric life continues, suffer. Scream.

I don't care if it's right or wrong.

I decided that this is going to happen.

And then, Lelouch started his rebellion.
Against the man known as his father.



In June, Cornelia went home to Britannia.

She reported to her father, the Emperor of Britannia, Charles zi Britannia, that she dismissed nine executives stationed in Area 11. She also requested and was granted more soldiers from the home country. Of course, this was all to strengthen the Area 11 military.

Beforehand, she'd had a meeting with someone.

His name was Schneizel el Britannia, the second prince of the Holy Empire of Britannia. He was Cornelia's half-brother.

Schneizel was also Chancellor of the Empire, and after he agreed to put in a word to their father for her, he laughed. "You've got quite a burden there, Cor. That Area is talked about here in the home country, too."

"I cannot apologize enough that I haven't been able to meet your expectations."

"No, if you're having a lot of trouble, the situation would've been out of control under anyone else. We can talk to Rachelle in

Area 10 about helping you out. Let me know if there's anything else I can help with."

"Yes. Thank you, my brother."

After her business was concluded, Cornelia made preparations to go back to Area 11, without even taking the time to see her mother who lived in the palace. Her time spent in the home country was only a day and a half. Cornelia was incredibly busy during this time, having just been appointed viceroy to Area 11, which was full of unrest and turmoil.

Once she returned to the government bureau in the Tokyo Settlement, she called her sister Euphemia to her office.

"Going forward, for everything excluding viceroy-hosted events, I want you to attend all formal and official events for me. Do you understand, Sub-Viceroy Euphemia?"

"I understand, Your Highness."

"Sorry that I'm going to cause you trouble. But the civilians would rather see your lovely face than my stern face."

Euphemia gave a look of surprise, and then smiled charmingly.

"You're a kind person, my sister."

"As long as you're the only one who thinks that, Euphy."

"No. Eventually the people of Area 11 will come to understand it, too."

After Euphemia left, Cornelia then called her aide, Guilford, to her office.

"Don't take your eyes off the NAC."

"NAC—Do you mean the Six Houses of Kyoto?"

"That's right. If they show any suspicious movements, let me know immediately."

This was a Japanese group that had wielded a great amount of power in Area 11, both before and after the war. Before the war they were more of a heavyweight in the financial world, and Cornelia figured that she couldn't take them lightly.

"The civilian personnel said that they were cooperating with our governance, but that makes me more suspicious. Before, they were a major player in this country, one of the foremost economic powers, doing as they pleased. Do you think they liked it that we took that power away from them?"

"Indeed."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they were pretending to comply with us, while secretly funding anti-government organizations. If I get a chance, I would like to poke at them a bit. And if I let money mongers move freely, it will affect Britannia's dignity."

This was Cornelia's biased view as a soldier, a person who was more of a military supremacist than a financial supremacist. But her view of the situation was correct. Her judgment was not off-base.

After she dismissed Guilford, Cornelia was set to deal with the next order of business, but then she received a notice from one of her secretaries.

"Sir Jeremiah has arrived and requests to see Your Highness."

"Jeremiah?"

Cornelia repeated the name with a puzzled look, then immediately muttered, "Oh." Her voice held a tinge of contempt.

Jeremiah was a soldier formerly under Viceroy Clovis, and after the viceroy's death he had served as a substitute administrative ruler for Area 11. However, in Cornelia's mind, he was obviously not a competent man. She had heard that he was so-so as a Nightmare pilot, but it was his other qualities that were the worst. Basically, a substitute administrative ruler doesn't even exist officially as a position, and it was just an emergency stopgap measure, but there was no one other than this man who had failed so miserably at the job. It was his duty to keep the confusion minimized until the next viceroy was appointed, but he'd been dragged about by terrorists and instead of calming the confusion, he spread it. In a sense

Cornelia had had so much trouble governing Area 11 because of this man, and so she couldn't possibly have a good impression of him.

"Did he come to complain about losing rank?" Cornelia sounded obviously irritated. "He indeed is a worthless man. Send him away."

"Yes, but..."

"Tell him that there is a procedural requirement to fulfill before he can see the viceroy."

It was because he couldn't even think through that much, that he made a blunder.

But Cornelia didn't say that, out of consideration toward her subordinate.

After the secretary left, Cornelia took care of the documents that piled up while she was gone. When she was finished, she called for Darlton.

"Are we ready yet?"

That was the first thing Cornelia asked when her most trusted man came into her office.

Darlton cocked his head in confusion at the question for a moment. Then, he understood what she was asking, and smiled.

"Yes. The defensive preparations around the settlements are getting solid. Even if Your Highness left this area, the incident that occurred before will not happen again. However, I suggest we use Nightmares instead of aerial bombardment this time."

"That is the big headquarters, after all."

"Yes. We would like to capture the head, Katase, and his aide Tohdoh alive."

"Tohdoh of Miracles, eh? How interesting. It seems that I can fight someone tough for a change."

Cornelia smiled audaciously.

She would have a chance to exercise her skills to the fullest.

"Good. I'll leave assembling the troops to you. Dispatch the spies again. After we receive their report, we will crush the Japan Liberation Front hiding in Narita!"

"Yes!"

The Britannian Forces in the settlements moved secretly, yet concurrently.



The organization known as the Japan Liberation Front was based on Japan's military before the war.

After the war, Britannia, as expected, dismantled the military organization of Japan, but among them were some officers and soldiers who didn't follow orders and escaped. They evaded the hunt Britannia launched, secretly gathered, and created an organization for the liberation of Japan. That was the starting point of the Japan Liberation Front. And this proved that the Japan Liberation Front was not a group of amateurs. They did lose to the overwhelming Britannian Forces, but they had a good amount of training and experience in battle. They were in a different class from the resistance groups that were basically a bunch of juvenile delinquents.

Actually, the abilities of this organization were quite high; and even now, under Britannia's rule, there were several regions where they had influence and were resisting Britannia's authority. Among the Japanese who dreamt of independence, there were some who saw the Japan Liberation Front as their only hope. But there were other opinions as well.

"They have no choice but to die out."

Lelouch Lamperouge said this bluntly. He was in his room in the clubhouse.

"Historically, there are only a few cases where those kinds of men reclaimed the government. Do you know why, C.C.?"

"No."

C.C. sounded like she didn't care. She probably wasn't interested, because in her hand was a jar of hot sauce, and in front of her was a pizza that had just been delivered.

"They can't switch their way of thinking. They have some military power, but the mentality is old."

Lelouch continued, with his eyes fixed on the television.

"Even in the past, they fought with this mentality and lost. They are a group of artifacts from an old era. It's true that this government reform was brought on by an outside enemy invasion rather than something from the inside, but a vase that broke once will not return to its original form. This group is trying to do that, and it's foolish. They are just going to fade out slowly. They can't become flag bearers for the future."

"And you're saying that you could be one? A flag bearer?"

For someone who insisted she loved pizza to death, C.C. was eating the pizza with no expression. When she asked, Lelouch didn't even turn around. He just smiled as if he were ridiculing the question.

Did his smile mean that it was obvious he was? Or did it mean it was nothing that concerned him?

Either way, Lelouch didn't answer. He lay down on the couch and continued.

"Well, the organization as a whole is like that, but individually they are probably a little different. Actually, because they're a military organization, there may be people in it who are worth preserving."

"So, this time you're going to support the Japan Liberation Front to help those people?"

"Of course not."

Lelouch shrugged.

"I'm not hoping for anything of the sort. In this case, it's just that the situation is convenient for me."

Currently, there were a tremendous number of people wanting to join Lelouch's Black Knights.

It wasn't surprising, since the Black Knights had been the talk of the town since the Shinjuku incident, and had been successful many times since then. The number of people making donations had been increasing as well. There is some personnel issues that need to be worked out, but overall the organization was growing.

However...

"But Cornelia is restructuring Area 11 much faster than I predicted. If I don't do something, I won't have a chance."

"So that viceroy is a stronger player than you, eh?"

"It was a difference of when we started, that's all," Lelouch emphasized, and C.C. gave a chilling smile.

"Didn't I tell you before? You call that being a sore loser."

"Hmph." Lelouch snorted crankily, and combed his hair up with his fingers. "Anyway, I need to hit Cornelia here and now. I need the new members to gain some experience, too. And..."

Lelouch cut himself off.

He couldn't say the rest, because this was his personal motivation.

He reached out from the couch, grabbed some French fries and threw them in his mouth. They were intolerable when cold, but fresh ones were delicious. He had already eaten lunch, but it was perfect for a snack. Incidentally, Lelouch never worried about gaining weight. He had no experience with it. It was probably his body type.

He ate the fries at a good pace while watching the television. Then, his brows lowered.

A girl appeared on the screen.

It was a sports competition, or something similar. The girl was dressed in elegant formal wear, standing on a stage, speaking into the microphone.

Even through the television, Lelouch saw that her pretty face was rigid with nervousness. It wasn't annoying; but rather, adorable.

Her effort in trying to do her duty was coming through. It put a smile on one's face.

"...And, in my name, Euphemia li Britannia, I announce the beginning of this competition. To all the athletes, today..."

Her speech wasn't delivered smoothly either. But still, she had a soothing presence.

Suddenly, C.C. spoke up.

"She's the viceroy's younger sister? They don't look like they're related."

"If you say that, Nunnally and I are half related to them too. Well, I guess no one will doubt that she is Nunnally's sister."

Lelouch's tone of voice showed no emotion.

C.C. glanced at Lelouch.

And then, she asked quietly. "Is she also someone you need to defeat?"

"No..."

Lelouch closed his eyes slowly. He spoke as if seeing into a far past. "She won't become either poison or medicine. Not like Cornelia. But that's why..."

"That's why?"

"...I want her to leave this Area soon. In no time...this place is going to turn into a world she shouldn't see."

Once she got off the stage and hid behind the partition, the girl—Euphemia li Britannia—breathed out heavily.

Her heart was still racing. Her hands were shaking a little.

That was why she couldn't keep quiet. She knew that it was pointless, but she asked someone nearby anyway.

"Um, was that okay?"

The female secret service agent, who was keeping an eye out vigilantly, looked at her attentively and smiled.

"It was wonderful, Your Highness."

"You think so? Thank you."

But as Euphemia thanked her, she knew that the agent could give no answer but that. Actually, there wasn't anyone who would say, "That was bad." In the end, she could only evaluate herself.

Euphemia didn't stay to watch the competition. And even as she was escorted to her limousine, her heart was still beating rapidly.

Honestly, she was a little depressed.

If she were Cornelia, she would make a speech as easily as if she were sipping a glass of wine. But she wasn't used to it yet. A difference in experience...was what she would like to believe, but she knew deep inside that that wasn't the only factor. When she thought about it, when her sister was her age, she was already giving speeches nobly. She had a decently high position as well, and she was working efficiently. Just as she was now. And lately, everyone in the royal family was obligated to learn how to pilot a Knightmare Frame. Cornelia should've only had the same amount of training as her, but she easily overpowered the top pilots in the military.

Perhaps people have a certain amount of dignity that they are born with.

Euphemia thought to herself as she sat in the limousine that rode along quietly. *I probably can't be like Cornelia.*

"...After this, we would have you return to the bureau. At 2 o'clock, there is the scheduled press conference. At 3:30, there is an anniversary event for the national museum, and at 6 o'clock there is a dinner hosted by the House of Lords."

The woman sitting in the seat across from Euphemia was going over her schedule for today. She was not in the secret service, but a secretary who served Euphemia.

"Is something the matter? Do you not feel well?"

"Oh, no...I am fine. I understand the schedule for today."

"Very well. I am glad."

Euphemia felt uncomfortable, and looked outside the window.

This was an upscale residential area. There were no high buildings; the skyline consisted of the smooth roofs of the houses. There weren't that many people walking along the pavement lined with trees. The early summer sun was shining radiantly.

After the limousine turned right at the intersection, the road turned onto an uphill slope.

There, Euphemia saw a building at the end of the road that was different from the residential houses.

Oh...

Inside the walls that surrounded the establishment, there was a bell tower that looked like it was floating in the sky. There were many coniferous and deciduous trees, surrounding a horizontally long building of about five floors. There wasn't just one, but several of these buildings on the grounds.

It was a school. She knew the name of it, too.

The Ashford Private Academy.

She would be lying if she said she wasn't attracted to it. Besides, Euphemia used to attend a regular school in the home country before she was appointed sub-viceroy. Since she was the third princess of the empire, she wasn't treated exactly the same as her classmates, but even so, she had friends who didn't see their differences in position as a barrier. When they learned that she had to quit school, they were really sad. It was too soon to call it "nostalgic." School indeed had been a part of her calm and peaceful everyday life. Although this was a different school from the one she'd attended, the similarity made looking at it a little painful.

In addition, currently at this academy...

Because she was thinking about him, when she saw his back her heart jumped.

She thought it was a mistake at first, but then realized that it might be possible. It was indeed a time when students were still in class, but in his case, things were a little different. He might have instances where he would have to leave at this hour.

His hair was light brown, more so because it was in the sun. His body looked lean in his school uniform. His long legs were walking swiftly. And she couldn't see them from this angle, but those eyes... When she first met him, she couldn't help but look into them deeply. They were soft, kind, but a little strict. And a little sad—that was why she thought he should attend school. If he was only seventeen, he should—that was what she said, and she didn't think what she said was wrong. When she spoke with him that day, she thought that he might hate himself. That was why he was kind to others, but strict toward himself. That was why she thought he should be where he could feel the kindness of others. It was good to have somewhere you could go to for that.

He probably wouldn't feel free to call her "Euphy" anymore.

When she met him, she purposely hid that she was a princess. She wanted to, on a whim. But now he knew who she was.

The limousine passed him by.

Of course, Euphemia didn't ask to stop the car so that she could say hello. If she did that, it would cause him trouble. He wouldn't like it, either.

That was why she turned around once and looked at him. He couldn't see her because the windows were tinted.

But...

Just like that, her depressed feelings lifted.

"Is something the matter?" Her secretary asked again.

Euphemia simply answered, "No," and smiled. "It is nothing."

Her voice was stronger now.

She couldn't fall into self-pity. It was true that she couldn't be like her sister. But there must be something that she could do.

I should just learn these things, one by one.

I'm sure he is, too.

One by one...

Suzaku felt someone looking at him, and glanced up.

He saw a fancy car driving in front of him.

There was nothing to take note of, so he resumed walking again.

He turned the corner and hurried to his location. Actually, it wasn't really a location but a place to meet. It was right in front of the back gate of the university next to his school.

"Hey, Suzaku. Thanks for coming out."

Lloyd was wearing his white lab coat and smiled as he waved his hand. His smile wore the usual expression of someone who had something up his sleeve. Behind Lloyd was the head trailer with Lancelot in it. The trailer belonged to the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps and currently it served as their headquarters. They did have a base to replenish or store their equipment in, but that belonged to the Area 11 military and to the ASEEC, who were under the home country's military, they were merely borrowing them. In the future, things might change if the ASEEC achieved great things, but it would still be pretty hard.

"Did you let your school know?"

Cecile poked her head out of the passenger's seat, and Suzaku answered yes to her question.

"I got approval to be absent until the end of next week."

"Good, good. Then..." Lloyd's glasses sparkled. "...From today, you'll be doing preliminary drills for the next three days. The virtual simulation program will be mainly C-13 and E-49, so it's going to be tough."

"I can handle it."

"But in the end, this won't be useful if Princess Cornelia crushes the enemy. Sigh. I wish she would just completely lose for once. So that we can deploy the Lancelot and make use of all the simulation we did."

Suzaku didn't know how to answer that.

One, eight, seventeen, twenty-five, fourteen, six, thirteen, fifty-two.

Seven, forty-eight, fifteen, twenty-seven, three, nine, sixty-five, five, five, eleven, two.

The target appeared randomly. The girl moved the machine with highly accurate control, and crushed each of them.

Her hair was deep red. The sweat rolling down her cheek was more due to nervousness than exertion. She wore a red and indigo bandana on her forehead. Her grip was strong on the control stick, but was marvelously fast and quick.

Her blue eyes had the fierceness of a female panther running through a dense jungle.

If any of her schoolteachers saw her like this, they would be surprised. And even more so with her classmates who knew her.

Her name was Kallen Stadtfeld, also known as Kallen Kouzuki.

She was a student at Ashford Private Academy, and a member of the Student Council. Her image was that of being the sickly daughter of the noble Stadtfeld family, Britannian aristocrats. But her true face belonged to the Black Knights, the anti-Britannian organization. There, she was the top pilot.

She was another one who wore a mask. But hers was easily recognizable. She was born to a Britannian father and a Japanese mother, and by her will she chose to be on the Japanese side.

"...Seventeen, twenty-one, seventy-three, forty-two, six, three, fourteen, nine...eight!"

In an instant, Kallen's movement stopped.

She looked down and let out a deep breath. Her heart was still racing, and her shapely breasts were still jiggling.

And then, a different woman's voice echoed from the radio.

"Good job, Kallen."

Kallen raised her head and asked immediately. "How was it?"

The woman fell silent, and then said, "Perfect. You got all of them."

"All right!"

Kallen's face beamed and she gripped both of her fists in front of her chest in a triumphant gesture. Again, if her friends from school saw her, they wouldn't believe their eyes.

Kallen turned off the power in the circular cockpit in a good mood. She wasn't in the main unit, but a simulation pod that was connected to the main unit. What Kallen had just finished was training.

She opened the ceiling from the touch panel, and Kallen jumped out of the pod. A different voice spoke up.

"Excellent work, Kallen."

"Oh..."

Next to the woman, Inoue, was... a shadow. He was dressed in black. The surface of the mask he wore glowed dimly, reflecting the light in the hangar.

"Zero!"

Kallen responded enthusiastically and ran toward him.

"You were watching?"

"Yeah." The masked man, the leader of the Black Knights—Zero—nodded. "Inoue kept squealing that something was amazing, so I came to take a look."

"I'm honored."

Kallen was gazing up at the mask. Her eyes weren't sharp like during training, but held a look of admiration.

Of course, Kallen didn't know what kind of face lay behind the mask. Nor did she know who he really was.

When she found out, what would happen?

Nobody knew at this point.

In any event, to Kallen, this man was a genius who had shown her many miracles. He was a brilliant leader, and that was it.

No other information was necessary.

"So what did you think, Zero?"

Inoue was laughing next to him as she asked this. Zero shrugged and said in his microphone-altered voice: "Let's see...if I met you on the battlefield, I would run away immediately."

Kallen's face lit up.

"It was really amazing. The design concept is different from the Glasgows you used to ride. You mastered this in such a short time..."

"Thank you. But most of the credit goes to the machine. If I use this, I can take on that white Nightmare..."

"And win?"

As he said this, Zero glanced up at the Nightmare before him and Kallen and Inoue followed suit.

The crimson red unit looked like it was tailored to its pilot.

Its form was different from the main units of the Britannian Forces, the Sutherland and the Gloucester. It was human-shaped, but in contrast to the Britannian Forces' units that were clearly designed on the concept of a knight, this one was hardly as elegant. Instead, it looked like a vicious murderer. Even when it stood straight, it was slightly hunched forward. The arms were disproportionately long compared to the height, and the legs were short, making one think of stability and strength. And the most prominent feature were the silver claws at the end of its right arm.

It wasn't an old model from Britannia. It wasn't a mass-produced unit that they stole, either. This was a pure Japanese-made Nightmare, one that Japan was finally able to create after being defeated seven years ago.

The official name was the Guren Mk-II.

It would indeed come in handy.

Zero mumbled this to himself after he returned to his private room.

He still had his mask on. This was not his home, but the headquarters of the Black Knights in Shinjuku Ghetto. This room was prepared not for Lelouch but for Zero. As long as he was here, Lelouch couldn't take off his mask.

In regards to the Guren Mk-II, although it was also due to Kallen's high ability as a pilot, even the basic specifications exceeded the current Nightmare Frames they had. He read the manual, and its kinematic performance and its "trump card" would be dominating in combat. If he left it with Kallen, just that one unit would be a tremendous military strength. So Lelouch had no intentions of piloting the Guren Mk-II. He could certainly maneuver it, but only at an average Britannian knight level. But Kallen was different. She had abilities that were second nature to her. She also had the will to fight in the battlefield. To not use a pilot who could bring out the machine's highest potential, was the stupidest move a commander could make.

Of course, he also needed to think about how to handle the Six Houses of Kyoto that had so generously provided the unit. But on this mission, he didn't have to worry about that yet. He could put the Nightmare to use as much as he pleased.

Then, the next step was to plan out the strategy to apply their military power.

Lelouch brought up the data on his computer.

It was a map. But not a two-dimensional one; it was a three-dimensional one. It displayed geological data, as well as vegetation. Any necessary information was almost completely available on this map.

There was a small caption that read, "NARITA," on the raised ground.

This was the mountain range known as the Narita Mountains. The altitude easily surpassed 2,000 kilometers. It was

the headquarters of the Japan Liberation Front, and in an extremely precarious position now that the Britannian Forces were about to invade.

Actually, Lelouch had been using this map to plan out numerous strategies for the past several days. This time he was not going to attack outside of Cornelia's presence. He was going to face the Britannian Forces, led by Cornelia, head on. There was no loss in too much planning.

He had come up with about twenty-four different strategies, but had decided to go back to square one. This was because Kallen's adaptation to the Guren Mk-II was remarkably fast, and he was able to put her in his calculations.

Let's see...

First, he went back to the basics and compared the enemy-ally ratio.

Currently, there were roughly 650,000 Britannian soldiers stationed in Area 11.

In comparison, the Black Knights had about 700 soldiers, not counting the nonmilitant members such as informers.

650,000 versus just 700.

To look only at the numbers, it was tragic.

However, these numbers were slightly off. To look at it from a different viewpoint...

Even though the Britannian Forces had 650,000 men, this obviously included all of the soldiers spread out over Area 11. The battlefield for this mission, the Narita Mountains, was in the Touba A District. This district contained the center of Area 11, the Tokyo Settlement and the Britannian Government Bureau, and there would be many more soldiers stationed here than in other locations. The estimate was around 200,000. But all of these soldiers were probably not going to participate in this mission.

Thinking about the Muller incident a few days earlier, Cornelia should be taking precautions this time.

She would probably leave soldiers at each base for defense purposes, and therefore would only be left with, at most, 50,000 soldiers.

Actually, Lelouch thought that there would be even fewer soldiers than that; but that way of thinking was dangerous. It was foolish to underestimate the enemy. He should keep in mind that Cornelia, if she needed to, could mobilize that many soldiers.

50,000 versus 700.

It was still tragic.

But Lelouch was smiling ironically inside Zero's mask as he looked at the map.

If I can win this, it would indeed be a miracle.

But that wasn't actually what Lelouch was thinking. That would be something others would think, when they saw the figures.

Lelouch didn't think for a moment that he would lose.

Even the Messiah had to create miracles in order to be believed.

So in a sense, if Lelouch and the Black Knights were truly to be seen as the "Saviors" of Area 11, they would have to pull off this miracle.

Now, for the next step.

In order to make the miracle happen, the key was the Japan Liberation Front, which would be opposing Cornelia's Britannian Forces. According to the information he obtained, they had a maximum of 7,000 soldiers. But Lelouch wouldn't rely on them for military power. Ever since the Kawaguchi Lake incident, the relationship between the Black Knights and the Japan Liberation Front had deteriorated. Even if Lelouch asked them to join forces, they would decline, and Lelouch had no intention of joining with them either way.

Bait and foil...that's what they would be.

In the first place, even if they were the current number one anti-Britannia organization, if they faced Cornelia squarely they would be crushed by a probability of 100 percent. Cornelia would

probably use over 300 Knightmare Frames for this mission. The Japan Liberation Front had, estimating on the high side, about fifty to sixty Knightmare Frames. The number of Knightmare Frames was an important factor that would decide this battle, and with this overwhelming difference there was no way the Britannian Forces would not win.

And there was also the difference in commanders.

Second Princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia, and Area 11 Viceroy, Cornelia li Britannia.

For now, the biggest obstacle to his rebellion against Britannia. Lelouch did not have a low opinion of her. For one thing, in the past Lelouch challenged an army that Cornelia led and was beaten severely. That was even with using his Geass and planning the strategy well.

From that painful experience, Lelouch carried out an investigation and analysis of Cornelia. From what he found out, he could say the following.

First. The soldiers that Cornelia led had an abnormally high morale.

Cornelia was a warrior who had triumphed in battles around the world before she was appointed as viceroy for this Area. The soldiers looked up to her as a goddess of battle. It wasn't easy to destroy that point of view. Especially among the Royal Guards. No matter how chaotic the battle, they would never abandon the battlefield and run away. Of course, here she would not only have the Royal Guards, but also the soldiers that were originally stationed in Area 11, the ones who were under former Viceroy Clovis. So if Lelouch were to target something it would be them; but he couldn't count on that either. That was because he couldn't imagine Cornelia placing such soldiers in important locations.

Second. Cornelia tended to choose fair battle strategies, but those tactics were never rigid, but rather, flexible. Depending on the situation, she would use tricky moves.

This was something Lelouch had experienced personally. In the past, Lelouch had used his Geass, seizing an enemy Knightmare and tried to raid Cornelia's main formation as he did in the Shinjuku Incident. But Cornelia swiftly changed her formation and used bait to throw Lelouch into confusion, and had him in the jaws of death. That time Lelouch managed to escape; but if he were to be in the same situation again, he didn't think he'd be so lucky. That princess wasn't the type to rush in recklessly.

Third. She had many brilliant men under her.

That was easily understood if one looked at Cornelia's wartime career. From what Lelouch researched, her aide Darlton was a courageous soldier even before he served Cornelia. And her knight, Guilford, was known as one of the best Knightmare pilots even at his young age. Other than those two, there were Alex, Clift, Endover, Flandre, and others. For Knightmare battles one couldn't find a better unit than them, in all of the Britannian Forces or the world. Cornelia herself was a very good Knightmare pilot—actually, within her unit she was one of the best—but it wasn't as if she was fighting battles alone.

And finally... She knew when to retreat.

Her noble birth as a Britannian princess was probably responsible for that. Cornelia had a lot of pride, and not the sort of personality that would endure a pathetic loss. But she had a lot of compassion toward her men. She would do anything to avoid letting them die in vain. If necessary, she wouldn't hesitate to retreat under those circumstances.

Honestly, she has no weaknesses, Lelouch thought, as he counted off the qualities of his great enemy.

He couldn't make fun of the Japan Liberation Front. Even for the Black Knights, it was like ants going against a beast. It wasn't just the difference in number of soldiers or weapons. The morale and skills of the soldiers were issues, too. The Black Knights had a lot of new members, and they couldn't stand against Cornelia's

troops. If they fought normally, they would be blown to pieces in a second and it would be over.

Yes—if we fight normally, that is.

Then we shouldn't fight normally. Lelouch looked at the map displayed on his computer.

Cornelia would most likely choose an encirclement strategy against the Japan Liberation Front hiding in the Narita mountain range. She would divide her troops, and surround them from all sides. There was that much difference in military power. She would create a formation that would not let even one soldier escape, and then in one blow she would attack the mountain. To counter this, the Japan Liberation Front's only choice was to break through at a single point and escape. There would be too many enemy Knightmares to use the mountain to launch a guerilla battle, and it would be stupid to barricade themselves in the mountain when they didn't have reinforcements coming to help.

No, but it would be dangerous to conclude that.

Lelouch thought again.

That was a plan they would undertake if they thought like Lelouch. It may be different with Cornelia, but he didn't think the Japan Liberation Front would act the same way. If the commander of the Japan Liberation Front was a real fool, he might have them take refuge in their headquarters for no reason at all.

They might easily surrender after seeing how many they were up against, too.

Lelouch gave a scornful laugh. He then decided that the people of the Japan Liberation Front would not be useful.

The problem is the organization of the Britannian Forces. Cornelia is unlike Clovis, and she will not be commanding the troops from the back, so...

She would probably lead the main troops and attack with her Knightmare.

That location would be, in an 8 out of 10 probability...here. And she would place Darlton's troops around here, with a reserve force in

between. Guilford won't leave Cornelia's side, so the troops that would climb the other side of the slope would be Endover's troops. The ones who would be sent to the back would be Clovis' former troops...

Each time Lelouch moved his mouse, spots of light appeared on the display map, and virtual battlefields were created.

Then if I cut off the communications between Cornelia and Darlton and the reserve force, Cornelia's troop will be isolated by a big probability. And it would take time to regroup, too...If I could pull it off, it would be a pretty good fight.

But even if it seemed simple, it would be a lot of work and definitely not easy to do. They weren't the type to fall for a diversion, and there weren't enough soldiers on this side.

The Black Knights Knightmare troops, including Kallen's Guren Mk-II, would all have to be there when battling Cornelia's troops. That means I would have to save them up to then. Although, even if I could do that, it would be very difficult to defeat Cornelia...But then who would hold off the rest of the troops? Wait a minute. Who?

Lelouch leaned forward and looked at the map.

He stared at it for a while, and then...

He grinned inside his mask.

I see. The idea of holding them off is too passive. In this case, we're the ones who are launching the surprise attack, not them. It's a little classic, but...maybe I'll try it.

Just as Lelouch was thinking that, there was a knock on the door.

"Zero, are you in there?"

It was a man's voice. Lelouch quickly turned off the map on his screen. It wasn't a man he distrusted, but he didn't like showing plans that were still being created.

Then, Lelouch answered. "Ohgi?"

"Yeah. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

The door opened and the young man came inside. He was well-built, and wore a ripped-up leather jacket and jeans. He looked like a student, but his actual age was older. And he was

second in line for command of the Black Knights, right under Zero. His honest personality was a slight fault of his, but his mellow nature made him popular among the members.

His name was Kaname Ohgi.

"I got more information from that guy," Ohgi sat down in the chair in front of Lelouch, and started talking immediately. "It's that guy named Diethard. You know, Zero, I don't really trust him."

"I told you to leave that up to me," Lelouch answered dryly. "And, what was the information?"

"Oh, uh..."

Ohgi hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"It seems that the Britannian Forces are going to delay their mission. Our previous information indicated that they were going to deploy this weekend, but they're going to move it to the beginning of next week."

Lelouch lowered his brows.

"Did something happen?"

"I don't know. The guy said he didn't know the details. He just said the change in schedule is set."

"Hm..."

This bothered him a bit.

Cornelia had been preparing this Japan Liberation Front repression plan for quite a while. Once she decided she was going to execute it, it would've been because she was prepared and ready. But to change the schedule at this point didn't make any sense.

"Well, I guess they have their reasons..."

"What should we do? Should we wait to see what happens?"

"No..." Lelouch straightened his face that was cocked to the side, and answered clearly. "...It does sound odd, but for us it's good news. We now have more time to prepare. I think we can even thank them for the extra time."

"So..."

"There are no changes in the plan, Ohgi."

Ohgi made a slight face when Lelouch said that.

In fact, Ohgi didn't agree with this mission. He didn't straightforwardly oppose it, but it was obvious that he thought it was crazy.

I guess that's a normal reaction.

But that is exactly why Lelouch had to accomplish it.

"Anyway, I need the report on the situation around Narita. Gather the information and give it to me as soon as possible."

"The situation?"

Ohgi frowned.

"There's no need to report. There are Britannian inspection points on the streets, and the forests are filled with Britannian surveillance soldiers. I'm sure they're going to completely close the roads after the troops deploy."

"I know that. What I want to know, is where they are located. Where are they inspecting, and where are the soldiers positioned."

"What are you going to do with that information? Are you planning to attack the Britannian Forces from the back after they start fighting the Japan Liberation Front? That's crazy."

"Hee hee...a pincer operation is impossible. You know that already, Ohgi. We can only do that if both sides cooperate with each other and if we have enough men. The Black Knights and the Japan Liberation Front do not have that kind of potential. The Britannian Forces would easily destroy both of our organizations."

"Then..."

"I have no intentions of that. What I have in mind is actually the opposite of a pincer operation. Let's see..."

And then, Lelouch spread his arms out, over-exaggerating his movements slightly.

He laughed inside the mask and said, "In this case the meaning is a little different, but I'm thinking of a 'purler.' That is

why we need to sneak through Britannia's surveillance. And the Japan Liberation Front's surveillance as well."

By using the Geass.

Of course, Lelouch only said that in his mind, so Ohgi didn't hear it.



The atmosphere of the research laboratory was frenetic.

"We need to hurry. In a few days, this area is going to be a battlefield."

The man in a suit who wore glasses was sweating as he gave orders to his men. In front of him, many research workers were running around. One operated a forklift, stacking up boxes, while another was copying data on a computer. And another was running around with a cardboard box in his arms.

Then, one of the younger men stopped, and said with a hint of exasperation, "Sir, it's impossible. We can't move a facility this large in just a few days."

"I know." The man in the glasses made a pensive face. "But the chief even asked 'the higher-ups' to at least delay the mission a few days. We need to do the best we can."

"But..."

"By being in the sphere of influence of terrorists, we could more easily avoid the inspectors—we knew that it was a double-edged sword to do our research at this location, but I didn't think the time would come so fast... Anyway, if our research is found out by the military, it'd be over for all of us here."

The young man was silent.

After looking at him with calm eyes, the man in the glasses continued. "After most of the labor is over, you should all evacuate. The rest will be taken care of by the chief and I."

"Please stop kidding. This is our work. We can't let you take the blame."

"I see... I'm sorry."

And the man in glasses bowed deeply.

The young man grinned and was about to walk away, when he noticed something and stopped.

"Oh? Is that..."

"Huh? Oh."

The man in the glasses picked up the item the young man was looking at.

It was a framed picture.

The man in the glasses was in it, along with a teenage girl and a middle-aged lady who resembled her.

"Is this your family?"

"Yes. I thought I wouldn't have time to gather my personal items, but at least I wanted to take this."

"Your daughter is very pretty. Is she available?"

"Hey, hey." The man smiled wryly and chided him, but he was happy with the compliment. He beamed for the first time today. "She's pretty cheeky. When she was young, she used to say she wanted to be my bride."

"That's what happens."

"She probably has some boy she likes at school."

"That's also what happens, sir. What's her name?"

The man in glasses smiled even more.

And in a gentle voice, he said, "Shirley. Shirley Fenette. Isn't that a lovely name?"

The girl in the wheelchair tilted her head to the side, deep in thought.

"Um...Arthur was asked for the time, and he came back with the letter 'A' in his mouth? Now, what time is it?"

Her closed eyes looked serious.

They were inside the recreation room at the Ashford Private Academy, located near the main entrance.

The spacious room had a large television, with music playing from it. But no one was watching it.

Then, someone next to the girl yelled out.

"I get it! One o'clock! Because 'A' is the first letter in the alphabet."

It was Rivalz Cardemonte, who wore a proud look on his face. He was one of the Student Council members. As Milly said, he was a little too easygoing, or possibly airheaded. His hobbies included fiddling with his motorcycle.

And across him was a different girl.

She was more charming than beautiful, and her large eyes made her look a little young. But her shoulders were wider than most girls, and she had a nice body. This was to be expected, because she was on the swim team, as well as the Student Council.

Her name was Shirley Fenette.

She grinned and crossed her arms in front of her chest to make an "X."

"Wrong."

"Whaat?" Rivalz gave a frustrated look. Next to him was the girl in the wheelchair, Nunnally, who was still thinking about the answer.

But in the end, she said, "I give up, Shirley. What's the answer?"

Hearing that, Shirley squatted in front of Nunnally and took her hand. She wrote something on Nunnally's hand with her finger.

"Huh? D, A, Y—day. Day?"

Shirley nodded and said, "Where is the letter 'A' in that?"

"In the middle. Middle of DAY...Oh, midday! Twelve o'clock!"

"Correct!"

Nunnally sighed in admiration, while Rivalz pouted, saying, "What the heck?"

Then, the Student Council President, Milly, peeked in at the door. She was also a girl with a nice body, though in a different way from Shirley. If she said she was older than a high school student, people would believe her.

"Shirley, can you help me a bit?"

"Sure," Shirley answered cheerfully, and stood back up. "Did something happen?"

"Sort of an emergency. I need your loud voice and athletic ability."

"...Urgh. That doesn't sound too amusing."

"Then I'll go too."

Rivalz started to get up, but Milly made a face.

"You can't come, Rivalz."

"Huh?"

"We're going to let out a sparrow that wandered into the girls' locker room. You don't want to get slapped by the girls who are changing in there, right?"

If that was the case, indeed Rivalz was not needed.

But that might be worth it, Rivalz mumbled to himself.

"Sorry, Nunnally. That's going to be it for our riddles."

"No, it's okay. Thank you for entertaining me, Shirley." Nunnally smiled, and Shirley smiled back.

Shirley left the recreation room. It was lunch break. Milly was waiting in the hallway, and was grinning widely at her.

Shirley was puzzled. "Why do you have that look on your face?"

"Well..." Milly started to walk with Shirley, still grinning. "...I just thought you acted like a really kind older sister back there."

"Huh?"

"Yeah. I guess it's good to practice for the future."

For a moment, Shirley didn't understand what Milly was saying.

But then she realized what Milly was getting at, and her face turned bright red. "Wh-what are you saying? I was just, that was because, Nunnally looked bored, so I..."

"Hee hee. But I think that's a good idea. You should have more people on your side if you want the man, especially relatives."

"That's not what I was trying to do! Sheesh."

And in fact, that was true. Shirley wasn't the type to strategize like that. Milly knew that, but liked to tease her anyway.

Yes—Shirley was in love with the black-haired boy who was also a member of the Student Council.

Milly laughed again, and asked, "So, where is the husband today anyway? I haven't seen him since this morning."

"Hus...hus...husband!?"

"Okay, don't overreact, I just made a mistake. I meant Lelouch. Is he out gambling again? What a delinquent, leaving his dear sister bored like that."

Milly didn't sound that worried though; and next to her, Shirley looked up at the sky. It had been clear until yesterday, but the weather wasn't so great today. Gray clouds hovered low in the sky.

Really, Shirley said to herself. *I wonder where he is, and what he's up to?*

A cold gust of wind passed by them.



The air in the mountains was cold.

It wasn't winter yet, but there was snow on some of the rocky stretches. And above was a cloudy sky. It looked like it would snow again. The cold, white snow that froze not only the world but in people's hearts.

C.C. slowly climbed the mountain path under the gloomy sky. Her hair that fell to her waist swayed in the wind behind her.

It's not that I felt something.

She just thought she should go.

It wasn't precognition. She often received hunches that came from within her. She didn't have the power to know the future. But she had the resolve to follow destiny.

It couldn't be helped.

Because I'm a witch.



In the end, it was a very handy power.

But it was a little annoying that the power was given to him and he didn't earn it. Every time he used the power he felt like he owed her something, and this made him unhappy.

But...

"Zero!"

The men jumped up as soon as the door opened, and braced themselves. But Lelouch simply took off his mask and said—no, he ordered.

"Calm down. I just came to talk. You two just have to ignore all the abnormalities that are about to take place."

And then, the men became useless as guards.

Geass—as long as he looked the person in the eye, he had the power to make them obey.

It was quite handy. Yes.

The men returned to their seats like nothing happened, and resumed the board game they were playing. Lelouch was invisible in their eyes. As long as they were told to ignore abnormalities, these men weren't going to detect anything abnormal, even if they died.

Incidentally, these men were not Britannian soldiers. In fact, they were the opposite: soldiers of the Japan Liberation Front. This location was at the middle of the mountain. It was within their sphere of influence. Of course, they kept surveillance on outside enemies. But to Lelouch, it was nothing. No matter who it was, as long as the situation allowed him to talk face to face, it wasn't a problem for Lelouch. Of course, the limitation was that he must look them in the eye; and there were other disadvantages, for example, if he had to face a group of people. At the upper limit, it would probably work on about ten people.

"Well, then."

Lelouch ignored the men who chatted as they continued their game, and sent signals to the base of the mountain using a mirror's reflections. This gave the go ahead to Ohgi, Kallen, and the rest of the Black Knights to come up. They were to use a different route from the one Lelouch took. That was the path Lelouch created with his Geass, clearing it of all surveillance.

"All conditions are set. Cornelia, finally the day is here."

But as he mumbled that, he flinched.

There was someone outside the lodge. For a moment, he thought that there was one more guard wandering around. But he was wrong.

Lelouch hid behind the curtain and looked outside. His jaw dropped in surprise.

The girl with long hair was casually strolling along, as if taking a leisurely walk, looking toward the base. She was so carefree, one

half-expected her to yell, "Yoo hoo" toward the mountains to hear her voice echo.

Lelouch quickly ran outside. "C.C.! What are you doing here?"

Even when he called out to her, she didn't turn around. But that didn't mean that she didn't hear him, or didn't notice him either.

She continued to gaze at the mountain scenery, and nonchalantly said, "I just used the 'path' you created, that's all. But this area is really spacious."

Lelouch clicked his tongue. "Hey. I don't think I recall giving you permission to be here..."

"I'm not in a position to receive orders from you. Did you forget?"

Lelouch was at a loss for words. She was right. This girl was someone Lelouch could not control. Even the Geass didn't work on her.

Lelouch breathed deeply to calm himself. "Anyway, I'm asking what you're doing here. You didn't come here just to pass the time, did you?"

And the girl chose not to answer again.

She acted as if he'd said nothing, and kicked a stone at her feet.

Lelouch finally lost it and was about to yell at her when C.C. finally opened her mouth. But what she said was not an answer to Lelouch's inquiry. In fact, it was a question that didn't make sense.

"Lelouch. Why are you 'Lelouch'?"

Huh? The moment of suspicion immediately turned into annoyance. "Are you going to start a discussion about philosophy? Right now? Listen, I'm..."

"You changed your family name to Lamperouge. But you kept your given name, Lelouch. That means that you kept yourself as an individual."

"Hey..."

"You couldn't let go of your past."

Lelouch fell silent. And then, he snorted. "I think you went too far with your name. C.C. isn't even a name."

In that moment, C.C. turned around for the first time and gazed at Lelouch. When he saw that, Lelouch gasped.

She looked really sad and lonely.

It had started to snow. The gray sky scattered white snow to the ground.

"Lelouch." C.C. looked up at the sky that was dropping white crystals and said quietly, "Do you know why snow is white?"

"..."

"It's because it forgot what color it was."

After that, only silence dominated the cold mountain air.

The clouds moved by. The gloomy sky changed color and changed shapes, and loomed over the entire mountain.

Eventually, Lelouch cleared his throat. "Anyway..." He took care not to put emotion in his words. "...Don't follow me after this. The Black Knights don't know about you. I don't know what to tell them if they see you."

"So I am not your comrade, right?"

For a moment, Lelouch didn't know what to say. Then he said calmly, "I don't have any comrades."

"That's true. You have no one you can call a comrade. As long as you wear that mask, even the Black Knights are mere pawns to you. That is why I say you are naïve."

Lelouch had turned around and was about to leave, but he stopped in his tracks.

What was wrong with her? She was picking a fight. And at an important moment, too. "Hey..."

"The fact that you can't throw away your name, means that you can't throw away the meaning in that name. Especially not its meaning for yourself, but also the meaning when someone else calls you that name. Is it that dear sister of yours? Your mother? Or..." C.C. laughed. "...That boy named Suzaku Kururugi? He was your childhood friend, right?"

For the first time, Lelouch's face turned rigid. He didn't want to hear that name right now. Especially now that he was about to battle against Britannia.

"How foolish. Your sister, mother, and that boy would never agree with what you're trying to do. They wouldn't approve of it. No, actually, the boy is already in the position that doesn't approve. As your enemy."

Silence again.

The snow wouldn't stop falling.

And then Lelouch said painfully, "...I won't fight him. I won't harm him. He's in their research department. There is no way I'll face him on the battlefield." That's right. He said so before. He was transferred, so he wasn't in that much danger.

C.C. laughed again. "So that's your excuse? How stupid. Essentially, nothing is resolved."

"You'd better stop now, C.C. Even if it's you, if you say anything more..."

"You can't throw away your name. No, you can't throw away the people who call you that name. You can't throw away the emotions that arise when they say the name, 'Lelouch.' You can't throw away the past that wasn't all just painful. You can't throw away the present, the future. You're naïve. Too naïve. One day, that will crush you, Lelouch."

Lelouch was seriously angry now. But still, he couldn't say anything. It was her eyes.

Contrary to her taunting words, her eyes had that sad and lonely look again. They were reaching out to him.

Lelouch turned around and began walking to where he was to meet Ohgi and the others.

C.C. didn't follow him.

Lelouch felt her gaze on his back, and thought to himself.

That was...maybe her way of warning him.

One day it's going to be true, so think carefully about it.

Maybe that was what she wanted to say.

Or...

Maybe, from someone who threw away her name, it was her only...

4

The simplified strategy panel in the cockpit showed the positions of the allied troops like stars at night.

The invading forces surrounded the mountain.

And a single orange dot remained in back of the allies.

It was their trailer.

He wasn't unhappy. It was already decided that it would be this way.

So he talked about something else. "They're not going to ask for a surrender?" Suzaku mumbled, as he sat in the pilot seat of the Lancelot.

Beyond the open cockpit switching aperture, Lloyd answered, "Huh?" He must have heard his mumble. "Of course they won't." Lloyd answered Suzaku's question in his usual carefree tone. "There's no point."

"No point?"

"Try to see it from their point of view. Even if the leaders surrender, information would be squeezed out of them, and to serve as a warning to others, they would be executed in public. If they're lucky, they'll get a lifetime in prison. They don't want to die, so they won't surrender. That is why we won't ask them to surrender, either."

"But..." Suzaku bit his lip, still looking at the strategy panel.

No.

He knew.

He knew that it was like this. It was in his bones. He was taught to understand it.

But still, he thinks. *Even so, isn't there a way to avoid the deaths and pain of the people who get involved?*

"Well, it is a sad story. Oh, is Cecile not back? Is she in the bathroom? Well, she is a girl. It must be tough to be consti..."

"...I'm here. I can consider that sexual harassment, right?"

"Eek? Oh, um, I meant..."

Suzaku listened to the lighthearted conversation as he quietly stared at the strategy panel.

This strategy panel was much bigger than the one Suzaku was looking at.

Of course, it would be. This was the main headquarters for this mission, the G-1 Base of the Britannian Forces.

As a whole, it reminded one of the bridge of a large aircraft carrier. "Reminded one" may be the wrong word choices, because this was indeed a carrier. But it wasn't a vessel that glided over the ocean, but rather one that ran over land. From the outside, it looked like a giant spider wriggling on the ground. The number of Knightmares it could carry was around twenty. It was the symbol of the Britannian Forces. It was a moving fortress, and the keystone of the battle.

But it wasn't commander-in-chief Cornelia who headed the bridge. Cornelia was already in her own Nightmare and on the battlefield with her troops. So in that sense, this G-1 Base was not the main headquarters, but the base that supported the battlefield.

The girl who stood in front of the panel was young, only in her teens. But position-wise, she was next in line after the commander-in-chief. She was Euphemia li Britannia, the third princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia and Sub-Viceroy of Area 11.

Her young face was rigid with nervousness. One couldn't

blame her. She wasn't a complete amateur who had never received any training, but this was her first time on an actual battlefield. Of course, she knew that she was just a puppet. Those responsible for taking action, after receiving instructions from her sister, would be the staff around her.

"Are we not asking for a surrender?"

When Euphemia asked this of one of the staff, he bowed his head dutifully.

"Unfortunately, it is unnecessary."

"But, there is so much difference in military power... wouldn't they understand the situation by now? Don't they know that they won't win?"

"They do, but they still won't yield to us. Whatever we say now won't matter."

Euphemia became quiet. It wasn't a stern look, but a pained one, when she looked back at the panel.

Then...she noticed something.

In the back of the troops, there was one orange dot that was far apart from everything else.

Euphemia cocked her head. "What is that unit?"

The staff member who was standing next to her followed her line of sight, and then his face expressed disgust.

"It's the reserve unit that has the Eleven pilot."

"Huh?" For a moment, Euphemia held her breath. "Is it...the Lancelot?"

"It's ridiculous for a Number to pilot a Knightmare, but..."

His tone was polite, but his voice could not hide his distaste. Then another staff member chimed in.

"That unit is under the sponsorship of second Prince Schneizel. We do not have authority over personnel issues. Even Princess Cornelia doesn't know how to treat them..."

The staff kept complaining, but Euphemia wasn't really listening. She kept staring at the lighted dot.

That boy was here.

He was looking at the scene before him.

Thinking about what was going to happen.

Suzaku.

How do you feel?

About how the citizens from your country are still fighting against the citizens of my country, shedding blood...



Of course, she had no sentiment at all.

Once she was on the battlefield, her heart turned into a war god's. She had no compassion, no pity. She simply killed any enemy that came toward her. The difference didn't come from the fact that she was the older sister and Euphemia was the younger sister. It wasn't their age or experience that made them so, but their qualities. Perhaps, as Euphemia thought, it was a difference in their dignity.

But on the other hand, in certain situations, the younger sister's qualities might bring ease and happiness to the world around her.

Or if the sisters joined hands in a true way, perhaps this confusion in Area 11 would easily be ended.

"Japan Liberation Front. They are left behind by the times..."

Cornelia was mumbling to herself in the Gloucester.

The battlefield was right in front of her.

The abyss of death, fear, and chaos that whipped up her war sentiment countless times was right in front of her.

"...Now is the time when you shall disappear along with the dream of a restored, glorified Japan!"

And in an instant, the energy of battle rocked the serene mountain range.



A dance.

That was the best way to describe a Knightmare battle between masterful pilots.

A Knightmare ran across the earth faster than any land-based weapon, and no matter what the geography was, it had spectacular mobile abilities and the SLASH-HARKENS to trek it. Like an ancient knight it wielded a sword or a lance; and to shoot enemies from a distance it had ASSAULT RIFLES equipped on both hands.

Of course, this weapon was not completely versatile. There was nothing it could do about a missile attack from long distance. In reality, the battlefields where you could use the Knightmares were restricted.

But that was why when a capable battlefield was presented, this weapon became a mighty, unmatched demon. It was specialized, which was why it had absolute power. It was a human-shaped machine that ruled death, but it sprinted through the battlefields and danced as though it had life running through it. The Britannian Forces had the newest, strongest, and largest Knightmare troops, which was one of the reasons why it had won against so many countries.

And the same scheme was about to be replicated here.

Cornelia didn't prepare any tricky moves in her Japan Liberation Front repression mission.

In fact, it was as simple as surrounding their headquarters, and thrashing them down from upfront. But this simple strategy was the best option. Once she had the firepower to crush the enemy, there was no need to complicate matters. All she needed to do was to strike at the enemy's strength with her troops' tremendous power, and destroy them.

The Knightmare troops going up the mountains burst through the enemy defense lines one after another. Of course,

behind them followed heavily-equipped mobile foot soldiers. Their role, protected by the Knightmares, was to overrun and destroy the enemy's armory. This was the basic formation of a center of resistance repression mission.

"Hmph."

Cornelia swung her SHOT LANCER in hand and swept at the enemy Knightmare that stood before her. The enemy Knightmare—a Knightmare based on the old Britannia Knightmare Glasgow—took a heavy and sharp blow in its abdomen area and crashed into a rocky stretch. Then, Cornelia's Gloucester thrust its lancer into the center.

The enemy exploded without launching the ejection seat.

"I was expecting more from them, but I guess this is all they have."

Cornelia straightened her Gloucester's position and smiled with the face of a warrior.

The situation was just as she predicted.

The only tiny flaw was that the path her troops were taking was slightly off-track from the main enemy headquarters.

It was her error, but it wasn't a mistake that would affect the mission.

The troops she led continued to move forward toward victory.



Around the same time, on a different slope, the Knightmare troops led by Darlton were successful in breaking through the last defense line on the surface of the mountain.

"Tell the foot soldiers behind us that the entrance to the enemy hole is behind that lodge."

"Yes, my Lord."

"As soon as we crush the Glasgows outside, they should go in."

"Are we not joining up with the Viceroy's troops?"

Darlton heard this and smiled audaciously as he rapid-fired his ASSAULT RIFLE. "It seems that she is giving us the credit

of first to go in. Doesn't it feel good to serve such a generous master?"

"Indeed. Then, I will report again later." The man on the other side of the communication line laughed as he responded. In short, they had that much leeway.

As a whole, the battle went as predicted, and the absolute advantage was with the Britannian Forces.

That was why, even though it was a little early, one couldn't blame Darlton and Cornelia for talking to themselves as follows...

"And this marks the end..." Darlton mumbled to himself, as he moved his Gloucester forward.

"...Of the anti-government organizations in Area 11." Cornelia laughed on the slope when she had no one else to fight.

That was when someone way above them sent a signal of a counterattack.



One idea was to fight with ones back to the wall.

Instead of attacking the Britannian Forces that surrounded the Japan Liberation Front from the back, the idea was to sneak through the formation and put yourself in the middle of the encirclement, at the center of the approaching Britannian Forces on the mountain peak.

There was nowhere to run or hide. The situation wasn't only disadvantageous, but you were on the chopping block. If you wanted to survive, your only option was to get rid of the enemy in front of you.

Of course, there were many dangers in using this method. Actually, this strategy was a wrong one. Soldiers who became suicidal and then couldn't carry through on orders were worthless as soldiers. If they completely lost the will to fight, ignored instructions and surrendered without permission...

essentially, it was suicide. As a strategy, it was the worst of the worst.

So this kind of strategy couldn't succeed. There were some cases where it was successful, but only one in a million. That was why it was particularly noted in the history books.

But just because there were successful cases, that didn't mean that they succeeded by chance.

There was always a reason for success. There was planning. There was a precise rationality.

The mentality of every person was one step away from hysteria. There was fear and despair toward death, and the anxiety toward life was hanging by a thread, and about to fall off.

Then, you just needed to tip the balance over with a different component.

At the edge of despair, paint a colorful hope, and change fear to courage and preparedness. Although limited, it creates morale at its height. That was how the backlash worked. People become more active when they find out something that they thought was impossible is now possible. They work harder.

Then, what would be necessary to make them think that way?

Two things.

The first is, trust toward the commander.

If they believed in the leader, that he would do something, that he would show them something...at times that could lead to overconfidence, but that was also absolutely necessary in the battlefield.

And one more thing...

To give rise to the hope. You needed results.



"Good! All of the preparations are set! Black Knights, all members dispatch!"

Inside the cockpit of the machine, the reformed Glasgow—known as Burai—Lelouch started the battle.

The members whooped in joy. Some were roaring in anger to respond.

"The Black Knights will launch a sneak attack on the Britannian Forces from the top of the mountain. Follow my instructions and run down toward Point 3 at once. The objective of the mission is to capture the second princess of Britannia, Cornelia! The one to open up the assault will be the Guren Mk-III!"

On the main monitor of the Burai, the red machine of Guren Mk-II was standing in the point position.

There was an apparatus set on the head and face that resembled sunglasses. They were to protect the Knightmare's "eyes," the FACTSPHERES, from the act it was about to undertake. And there was a pile bunker piercing the ground.

"Kallen, we'll use number three for the electrode. You can do it in one blow, right?"

"Yes!"

Kallen's nervous voice came back over the radio. At the same time, the Guren Mk-II moved. The right arm—the silver claws that looked like an imaginary killer's hand—was placed on the bunker in front.

"Energy output verified..." Kallen's voice resounded on the open channel. "...Radiant Wave Surge System is normal."

Suddenly, light flashed.

It was the arm of Guren Mk-II. The arm was beginning to shine.

Just once, the sound of Kallen breathing deeply could be heard. And then...

"Transferring energy..."

In one moment, the light burst as a spark.

No matter what kind of enemy appeared, the Britannian Forces led by Cornelia would have remained calm.

Whether it was the Japan Liberation Front, the Black Knights, or even if they were the Knightmare troops of the Chinese Federation, who had been after Area 11 from across the ocean, they would've been able to handle it according to protocol. The charisma of the commander, her leadership abilities, the dauntless soldiers who followed her and their calmness and morale. Taking all of this into consideration, there was no unit in all of the Britannian Forces that could've topped this group. (The only flaw was that the former administrative ruler, Jeremiah Gottwald, was part of the group, but Cornelia had solved this by placing him far behind the frontlines.)

However, that only applied to events that occurred within the limits of common sense.

Then what would you call an event that was outside of common sense?

People would call that, a "miracle."

And therefore, what appeared in front of them was not an enemy—but an event.



The first one to notice the shaking was Darlton.

It was a trembling that seemed to come from the depths of the earth.

"What...an earthquake?"

At this point, the highest intensity level was around 2 or 3. Honestly, it wasn't much. It was common enough on this island. But if one imagined that it was caused by man, then it was a horrendous thing. Even if it was an earthquake a person wouldn't think much of, it was a power that shook the entire ground—the power unleashed at the center of it was god-like. (Actually, as research revealed later, a similar, weak earthquake was observed in the area.)

And the danger comes right after.

Beep.

The sound was an alarm set off by the Knightmare's auto balance system.

And then, at once the trembling turned violent. But it wasn't an earthquake anymore. The thing that started the earthquake—the something that occurred near the surface of the ground—caused this result.

"What!?"

The Knightmare slipped.

No, it wasn't the Knightmare slipping.

It was the ground itself.

"A landslide!?"

As soon as Darlton yelled out, the speed of the destruction accelerated.



"This is..."

Euphemia stood in front of the G1 Base's strategy panel, dismayed. The staff around her were yelling and screaming.

"No way!? There is no way a landslide this big..."

"Retreat! Sound the alarm to retreat! If they stay there, the Alex troops and Darlton troops will be swallowed by the landslide!!"

But by the time one realized what was going on, it was too late to escape.

The blue dots that indicated the allies on the panel turned red at once. LOST, LOST, LOST, LOST, LOST...the words filled the large panel.

Euphemia was stunned, but then caught herself and screamed.

"Cornelia!!"



"What is the situation?"

Cornelia yelled into the radio inside her Gloucester cockpit. She was just out of the way of the landslide, not in the path of danger.

But her men to the right of her were.

"We're still confirming!"

"Your Highness! Please get out of there. It's dangerous!"

Guilford's voice broke in from a different channel. He, too, was safe.

But Cornelia yelled back at him.

"It doesn't matter! Where's Alex!? And check if Darlton is okay!"



The information about the catastrophe also reached the trailer.

"Oh no, it might actually reach the base," Lloyd mumbled, still looking at the map displayed on the console. The crumbled earth and sand had turned into a mudslide and was spreading like a folding fan from the peak to the base of the mountain.

Cecile operated the touch panel vigorously, then gasped. "The thermal reaction is abnormal! I think someone intentionally caused the moisture vapor to explode!"

"No way. I mean, I know there's groundwater under these mountains, but..."

Unlike Cecile, Lloyd's tone was nonchalant. Of course, their unit was safe like Euphemia's G1 Base and was in no danger of getting involved in the landslide. "Besides, where are they going to get that amount of instant heat?"

"But..."

"It would be like scooping magma from an active volcano and throwing it in. Or another way would be to combine a reaction stick and an electrode, and use a strong laser weapon or something and..."

Lloyd's words were cut off.

His carefree attitude dimmed slightly, and his eyes narrowed behind his glasses.

"Wait a second. Weapon?"

Cecile gasped. "Could it be..."

But by then, Lloyd's expression had returned to normal.

"Radiant Wave Surge. That's Rakshata's specialty."

"But...but, there's no way..."

"I'm just saying it's possible. She's so independent. You never know who she would work for, so..."

Lloyd folded his hands behind his head.

Then, a voice came from above.

"Did something happen?"

Suzaku was peering out from the cockpit of the Lancelot. Apparently, he didn't have his strategy panel on.

Lloyd smiled as he responded. "No, it's nothing. It doesn't involve us. So you can just stay put."

"I see."

Suzaku cocked his head with a curious look.



The landslide still wouldn't stop.

"Damn it!"

But Cornelia regained her composure. And at the same time, she thought fast.

Was it a natural disaster? No, with this timing it couldn't be. It was an intentional accident. If so, then what would the enemy do next? It was a no-brainer. With the Alex troops gone, this main unit was, if only temporarily, semi-isolated. And even a part of the main unit was harmed. There was great agitation among the remaining soldiers and knights.

Then—"A new enemy has been found from the summit! The Karius troops have headed over to intercept them!"

"Hmph. I knew they would come." A plan to attack the main troops amidst the confusion. *Their final objective is me.*

"Guilford!"

"Yes."

"We're going to retreat for now. The foot soldiers should divert to the side and have them rescue the injured. The tanks should support them."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"The Nightmare troops will maintain the battlefield, and repel the enemy's offensive. There may be more places that might crumble. Be careful with footing. By the way, we still can't get ahold of Darlton?"

"I am sorry, but not yet."

"Hurry. He's not a man who would perish just from this. No, I will not let him die."

Cornelia clenched her teeth.

And then, another communication came in.

"We have a report from the Karius troops!"

The messenger's voice was tense.

"What is it?"

"We were able to confirm the enemy. They are not the Japan Liberation Front! It seems that they are the Black Knights!"

"What! Then this surprise attack was...!"

5

In the report that was issued later, the number of Britannian soldiers who died in this battle was estimated at 5,200.

It depended on one's point of view whether one saw this as many, or as minimal. But it was premature to think that the invincible Britannian Forces had bitten the dust.

Actually, it was more accurate to say that this battle had no winner.

Why?

It was true that the out-of-the-norm surprise attack by Lelouch—Zero—dealt a staggering blow to the Britannian Forces, who had been proud of their overwhelming dominance.

But in reality, at this point the Britannian Forces still had nearly ninety percent of their military strength intact. Darlton's troops, which were directly struck by the landslide, were set back greatly, but the commanding officer—who was protected by the armor of his Nightmare—gathered the remaining soldiers, who were in good condition. It goes without saying that the troops who were not directly hit were in similar good condition. (Jeremiah Gottwald, who, swayed by personal vengeance, charged out and was easily defeated by Lelouch's Nightmare troops, was a marginal loss.)

Again, it was different for the Black Knights who participated in battle at this stage, but for the Japan Liberation Front that built their base in the Narita Mountains, they had exhausted most of their manpower in the battles they had fought with the Britannian Forces before this. In fact, after this battle the influence of the Japan Liberation Front rapidly waned, and in the end it fell apart. The damage they received was too enormous. In the end, from that point of view, the original goal of crushing the Japan Liberation Front was practically achieved at this time.

However, one couldn't say that Britannia won this battle, either. At least the commander-in-chief Cornelia would not recognize this as so, contrary to what was announced officially to the public. The Britannian Forces prepared an overwhelmingly large number of soldiers and lined up the best weapons. Yet, at the very end, they allowed a dramatic counterattack. There were too many impurities to enjoy the wine of victory.

Then how about the Black Knights, who, compared to the other factions, had the fewest number of casualties?

Actually, it was difficult to rule them as the victors either.

Lelouch's surprise attack dealt a hit to the Britannian Forces; but his and the Black Knights' objective wasn't to damage the Britannian Forces, but to capture Cornelia, their commander-in-chief.

Of course, it was just one more step until that goal—it was almost in his hands.

But that enemy stood blocking the way of Lelouch's arms.



The dry avalanche that shook the earth finally stopped moving, but the confusion in the battlefield kept amplifying.

"No! If we don't do something, the Viceroy's unit will be completely isolated!"

"Damn it, that idiot Jeremiah! Because he acted on his own, the formation is ruined!"

"Hurry and call in the troops deployed on the other side! We need to send them to rescue the Viceroy!"

"What is that Knightmare group that is all over Sir Guilford? It's not the Black Knights! Are they the Japan Liberation Front? Where did they come from?"

Amidst the yelling of the staff around her, Euphemia leaned both of her hands on the strategy panel, shoulders shaking.

I need to think.

I need to think. I need to think.

If I don't do anything, my sister will die. No, that is the one thing I cannot think about. No. What I, standing here, need to think about is something else. I am the second in command, I am the Sub-Viceroy. I have a responsibility for all of the soldiers, not just Cornelia alone. No. She is not here. I have to—I have to think about everyone, and make a decision!

"Sub-Viceroy Euphemia!" One of the staff members was almost screaming. "We should take the G1 Base to the battlefield! We need to save the Viceroy..."

"That will not be!" Euphemia rejected this with a harsh voice, as if to blow away her anxiety.

"But, Sir Guilford and General Darlton cannot move, which means the Viceroy's life is in..."

"No!" She turned down the suggestion again, shaking her head back and forth. Her long, silky hair swayed and grazed her cheeks.

"The hospital is established here. There are civilians from around this area who evacuated here! And the G1 Base is the symbol of the troops. No matter what..."

As she said this, her eyes got teary.

Think about everyone...

But her beloved sister was not part of the "everyone."

"...No matter what happens, we are not to move. Those were strict orders from the Viceroy!"

The nails of her clenched fist were clawing into her palm.

"Therefore...therefore..."

And then, the peeping of an electronic sound interrupted.

Following the sound, a window popped up in the corner of the strategy panel. On the screen was a man with glasses in a lab coat, a woman in military uniform, and a boy dressed in a pilot suit.

"What?"

Euphemia raised her voice in surprise. In front of her, the man in the lab coat wore a smile that was inappropriate, considering the situation. Behind him, the woman had a worried look, and the boy was staring at Euphemia with a serious face.

"Hello, hello. We are the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps."

The man spoke in a snide tone of voice. The staff roared in anger.

"You insolent fool!"

"You irregulars can just stay quiet!"

The woman's worried face became even more worried.

But she didn't look intimidated. "Oh, it's true that we are irregulars, but..."

"Because of that, we're in a bind," the man continued. "We're bored to death."

"Oh..."

At that moment, Euphemia understood everything.

And then, the boy confirmed it. "Sub-Viceroy Euphemia."

"..."

"I beg you, please give an order to the ASEEC!"

The staff chimed in again.

"What a lame excuse!"

"You just want credit for rescuing the Viceroy!"

"Besides, just one machine won't change the situation! And we won't accept help from a Number..."

"Why don't you let him try? There's nothing to lose. And we can't do anything anyway, right?"

"You..."

The staff were bickering amongst themselves, but none of it was sounding in Euphemia's ears.

"Hello? Are you listening?"

"Shut up already!"

She was just looking at the boy.

Actually, she was looking at his eyes.

His soft, kind, but strict—and a little sad—eyes.

Suddenly, the boy's lips moved.

But no sound came out.

They just made a shape.

Huh?

The girl read his lips.

Euphy?

I think I'm cowardly and sly.

She recalled the third morning after she arrived at Area 11. The next day, she was to be officially announced as the Sub-Viceroy.

So it was her last holiday. It was the last day to spend as just Euphy, and not Area 11 Sub-Viceroy Euphemia li Britannia.

That's why she wanted to have an adventure.

She was going to sneak out of the bureau and go to the city.

That was when she first met him.

Now that she thought back on it, it was a little embarrassing. A princess who escaped the castle, to go around the city with a boy she meets. It was like a love story in a movie.

Besides, she wasn't pure like the princess in the movie.

That time she had an objective; and furthermore, she knew who the boy was from the moment she saw his face. It wasn't a face she didn't know. He was pretty famous in this Area.

During the war between Japan and Britannia, the last Prime Minister of Japan, Genbu Kururugi, decided to surrender for the sake of the nation. To reform the people who declared a do-or-die stance, he committed suicide.

This was his son, Suzaku Kururugi.

She wondered what kind of a person he was. What he was thinking. How he saw this nation, this Area.

That was why she didn't reveal her identity, and just told him her name was "Euphy."

It wasn't that she was afraid he would take her back to the bureau. Well, there was that too, but even more, she wanted to see his true face. If he knew that she was a princess of Britannia, he would never have shown it.

I am cowardly and sly.

But, thanks to that, he showed his true self just a little, a tiny bit.

That time, he risked his life to save her.

And he spoke with his heart.



Euphemia gazed at Suzaku's eyes on the screen once again.

She was saved by those eyes that time.

He helped her move forward.

She was very uneasy back then. Area 11 Sub-Viceroy. The heavy job title was placed in front of her. She wanted to run away. Perhaps this was why she wanted to know more about this boy. It was probably different from hers, but she felt that he had a heavy burden on his back, too.

That's why he guided her. Why did she come to this Area? What should she achieve here? She felt that she understood that, after meeting him.

She hadn't thanked him yet. But she really was grateful.

So then, now...

"I understand."

Euphemia spoke, her panic over. Then, the staff that was arguing around her quieted down.

"Please rescue the Viceroy, Warrant Officer Kururugi."

I believe in you, Suzaku.

The boy's eyes lit up.

"Yes! Definitely!"

His firm face was still a little young-looking.



"Damn it!"

Guilford twisted the SHOT LANCER of his Gloucester and barely repelled the enemy's blade. The sound of metal hitting metal. Sparks flew.

He aimed for the enemy's head with the spear, but it dodged backward easily.

He's good... Actually, he didn't have time to think that. He didn't want to recognize it, but he was losing. And that machine...

The group Guilford and his troop were fighting didn't seem like the Black Knights. To say the least, the color of their machines was different. And the machines were something they hadn't seen before. It appeared to be the Burai, a Nightmare based on the Glasgow, but the shape was slightly different. And the speed and power was completely different from the Burai. If it was just about the basic performance, it was about equal to his Gloucester.

There were five machines in the enemy group, but one stood out as truly amazing. It was that Nightmare that Guilford was battling against.

I knew it.

Guilford fought back, grinding his teeth and repeating what he thought earlier in his head.

This is the man known as Tohdoh...

It was Tohdoh of Miracles. He was the Japanese samurai who was the only one, among the Japanese troops that kept losing, who was able to repel the attacks of Britannia. And he was currently the confidant of Katase, the head of the Japan Liberation Front.

But if he was *that* Tohdoh, then where was he hiding all this time? Could he have predicted the surprise attack of the Black Knights, and waited for a time to coordinate with them? No way.

"Sir Guilford!"

Suddenly, he received a communication from an ally.

It was a female knight. Her name was Villetta. She wasn't originally one of Cornelia's Royal Guards, but a soldier under the former Viceroy Clovis.

As he continued to battle, he listened to Villetta's report. His eyes widened slightly.

"Zero's troops retreated?"

"Yes. And so we came to support your unit."

Idiot!

Guilford did his best to not yell at her. There was no way Zero would retreat without motivation in this situation. And to not see through that and to come here—what an error.

"Forget the support, where is Zero!? Report it!"

"Y-Yes!"

Guilford turned pale when he saw the data that was sent.

Guilford wasn't here in this location to just play with the enemy Knightmares. He was a knight. His duty was to protect his master, Cornelia. There was a reason why, even for a moment, Guilford had left Cornelia's side.

The enemy is after me, Guilford.

The conversation they'd had a few minutes earlier replayed in his head.

If so, I'll use it against them. After you battle them for a while, retreat. Then we'll meet at Point 9.

If that had succeeded, they would've had an ideal situation where they had the enemy surrounded. A canyon with both sides surrounded by cliffs. If the enemy were to chase after Cornelia, then he would have shown up at the top of the cliff to sandwich them.

Of course, he was a little worried about this plan. It would be ideal if it worked, but it was a tricky move that used bait. And that bait was, for Guilford and for the entire Britannian Forces, the indicator of victory, Viceroy Cornelia herself. For a moment he thought of stopping her. But he couldn't. Because she had experienced, survived, and conquered on many battlefields just like that.

But now, it was different.

Zero predicted it!

Once he thought that, he was screaming at the communication panel.

"Your Highness!"



"...I can hear you, Guilford."

Cornelia's Gloucester was alone, standing in the middle of the canyon.

But at the place where she was supposed to lure the enemy, there was already someone waiting for her.

It was a Knightmare painted in red, something she had never seen before.

I guess I've gotten dull...in this case.

As she thought that, she gripped the control stick tightly.

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The energy filler, the source of energy for the Knightmare, was attached. This gave life to the white giant.

"Weapon Z-01, Lancelot, is starting up. Lancelot is starting up."

Cecile's voice echoed inside the trailer. The situation checking of the workers followed.

"Confirmed pilot entering Z-01. Individual identification information confirmed. Man-machine interface establishment confirmed."

The seat slowly started to slide toward the giant's body.

"Yggdrasil resonance confirmed. Rejection reaction, minimal. Pilot stress reaction, minimal. Everything is in the permissible range."

"Diagnosis complete. Status is all green. Backup strategy bank and status confirmed. Secondary confirmation complete."

Suzaku gripped the control stick. He entered his correlation code.

"SLASH-HARKEN, igniter operating. LAND SPINNER, idling favorable. Connection to the SAND BOARD complete. Built-in armament, system all green. Outer firearms interface is online."

And then, Cecile announced the goal of the mission.

"Weapon Z-01, Lancelot, will use the SAND BOARD and with full speed slide up the slope. Rescue the Viceroy."

"Yes, my lord," Suzaku answered quietly, and then Lloyd jumped in the communication.

"Suzaku, I have one question."

"Yes?"

"Well, it's not a big deal, but..." Lloyd's voice held no sense of urgency, as always. "You really hate people dying. But you're in the military. Why is that?"

That was a question that would shake a boy's foundation.

But Suzaku didn't even bat an eye.

"I'm in the military because I don't want people killed."

Lloyd gave a high-pitched, "I see," on the screen.

And then, for some reason he happily said, "That contradiction will one day kill you...oh, sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry—aaahh!" The last part was a scream when he was grabbed at the chest by Cecile and thrown to the ground.

And the communication cut off.

Suzaku blinked once, and then knowing it would be useless, spoke into the communication panel anyway. "Lancelot is launching now."

Honestly, he didn't understand why Cecile got so upset.

Because Lloyd's words might not be true, but they weren't all wrong, either.

The contradiction will one day kill me?

No.

Soldiers eventually die.

His life wasn't for himself. It existed to protect someone else's life.

It wasn't a contradiction. This way of life had already taken his life.

That was why he didn't understand her anger. As long as he was here, death was a given.

Suzaku decided not to think about what he didn't understand.

He had been doing that for a long time.

The Lancelot shot out of the trailer like a bullet, and went up the slope, stirring up the dirt the dry avalanche created.



Humans eventually die.

That is what Lelouch, or Zero, mumbled to himself in the Burai's cockpit.

In this battle, many Britannian soldiers died. Many members of the Japan Liberation Front died. Members of the Black Knights also died.

It was fine to mourn death. But one needed to understand that true mourning was to apply their deaths. If the blood shed created a shining result, those deaths would not be wasted. That was where the significance lay for the existence of a king, a ruler. In the end, humans lived as they pleased and died eventually. One who was truly a king would give direction to a trackless life and change it to something meaningful.

That was why Lelouch didn't hesitate to take life.

He didn't fear how much blood was shed.

Even if that was his half-sister Cornelia's blood.

But regarding Cornelia, he still needed her to live.

There was something he needed to ask her, even if he had to use Geass. It was information he obtained right before Clovis died.

Cornelia knew who killed Lelouch's mother, the Empress of the Holy Empire of Britannia—and why.

Lelouch opened his communication channel, and called out to Cornelia's Gloucester, who was facing the Guren Mk-II down below in the canyon.

"Can you hear me, Cornelia? It's checkmate."

"You must be Zero!"

Lelouch nodded. "It's been since Omiya Ghetto. Should I be happy about our reunion? But before that, I'd like you to surrender. Your rescue troops will not make it."

Then, Lelouch grinned sinisterly. "I win, Cornelia."

Inside the Gloucester, Cornelia scoffed.

"Foolish Zero."

And the princess glared at the red Knightmare that stood before her.

"That overconfidence hurt you once, yet you still haven't learned. You've taken me lightly!"

"Oh?"

"You think you have me cornered? If I defeat this one, I'll be..."

And in that moment, Cornelia's two hands that were gripping the control stick moved. The Gloucester's LAND SPINNERS responded. It flew, closing the distance between it and the enemy. The SHOT LANCER flew out.

But in that moment, the red enemy shadow blurred, and disappeared from the monitor.

It's fast!

But still, Cornelia didn't get rattled. She swiftly moved her machine and dodged the arm of the enemy that came shooting at her. She took a back step, at the same time launching her SLASH-

HARKEN from her chest. But the enemy Knightmare caught it with its left hand. It tried to pull the Gloucester by tugging on the cable attached to the harken.

"Hmph! Pretty good!"

But that was a fatal move. Cornelia didn't resist her enemy's power. Instead, she kicked the ground and thrust the Gloucester in, with the SHOT LANCER pointed toward the enemy.

Got you!

But as soon as she thought so...

Cornelia felt shivers go down her spine.

It wasn't logic.

It was from her many years of experience of negotiating battlefields, and her instincts as a warrior.

All that combined to alarm her.

"What..."

She thrust her spear, but the red Knightmare caught it with its right hand. It was gripped with silver claws that reminded one of a hungry beast.

Suddenly, a flare shrouded the monitor.

Cornelia quickly pulled the lever on her control stick, and cut the Gloucester's right arm off from the shoulder. She kicked the ground and backed away. It was the right move. The arm holding the lancer, the one she cut off with her quick decision, exploded. If it was still attached, the machine would've been blown away as well.

"What is that weapon?"

Was it a directional land mine powered up? No, but the explosion wasn't normal. The arm swelled and blew up. It was like a huge amount of heat instantaneously erupted inside the arm. Besides, the enemy's claws weren't holding anything that resembled a land mine.

Cornelia's suspicion of an unknown weapon stopped her movement for a moment.

And that was fatal to her.

The Gloucester detected a threat from behind, and sensors rang the alarm. And following that, a bullet hit. Her remaining left arm was damaged.

"Urgh!" She knew there was no point, but she yelled out anyway. "You coward! You use your ally as a shield and attack from behind!?"

"I see. So the strategy you used until now wasn't cowardly?"

Zero's annoyingly triumphant voice rang out from the communication device.

Cornelia bit her lip.

The left arm sparked with electricity, and the main computer of the machine was instructing her to force a purge.

Slowly, Cornelia pulled the lever on her control stick.



The battle situation escalated.

Under normal conditions, Guilford would've been excited about it. He wasn't the type to avoid battle. Just as his position indicated, he had the heart of a knight. The enemy's skills were honorable. He would've appreciated the fact that he met someone as good as the enemy he faced.

But the situation did not allow for that.

"Damn it, you nuisances!"

If he were to retreat, he could do that anytime.

But his esteemed master was in the middle of enemy lines. He needed to break through and progress forward, or he couldn't get to where she was.

The five Knightmares that were similar to the Burai were freely running around the area. They were good at group coordination as well. They must be highly trained. Guilford could not break through the encirclement.

"Damn it! If I cannot get through, Her Highness will...!"

It was then that his communication panel blinked red. And the voice that came through was the voice of the lady he was worried about.

"Guilford...My knight, Guilford."

"Your Highness!"



"Guilford."

Cornelia sighed inside the Gloucester that had lost both arms, and repeated his name. Her voice was matter-of-fact. "Guilford, my knight. You and Darlton protect Euphy."

"Your Highness!"

"I will not surrender."

A girl with a beautiful smile entered her mind. A person dearer than anyone else...

I don't want to see her cry.

This was the first time she'd ever thought that way on a battlefield.

She shook her head, as if to shake the thought away.

And she glared at the image of the undamaged red Knightmare on her monitor.

"As a princess, as one of the noble beings with the blood of Britannia, I will fight until the end!"

She moved the legs on her damaged Gloucester and thrust toward the red Knightmare.

She heard Guilford scream out her name in vain.



Lelouch, inside the Burai, looked down at the Gloucester that was about to engage in a desperate suicide attack and snorted.

And he said in a surly voice, "A stupid choice..."

Honestly, it wasn't a good situation.

Kallen and the Guren Mk-II, would make it possible to

capture the cockpit with the pilot still inside. But now, if Cornelia's machine stopped moving, she might shoot herself in the head with a gun.

Lelouch switched the communication to camouflage mode, and connected to the Guren Mk-II.

"Kallen, ease up a little."

"Huh? But..."

"My objective is to capture Cornelia alive. If she becomes desperate and commits suicide, that would be a problem. Can you create some leeway so she stays alive?"

"Y-Yes!"

The Guren Mk-II easily dodged the nearing Gloucester, and kept its distance.

At the least, he needed to create a situation where he could use the Geass on her.

I need to ask her about my mother.

But it was Lelouch's biggest mistake in this battle.



Suddenly, a booming roar echoed across the battlefield.

"What?"

Lelouch, Kallen, Cornelia, and even Guilford who was in a distant area, all raised their voices.

And in the next instant, a large bullet shot by the white knight pierced the side of the canyon.

The earth and sand blew away and danced in the air. The gouged earth became a path before the knight.

The shadow that was similar to a comet gripped the gun he'd just shot, and appeared on the battlefield.

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Of course, compared to the dry avalanche that the Black Knights caused earlier, it wasn't much.

But it was still effective. The method was forceful and crazy, but still it worked.

"Whoa..." Cecile mumbled, watching the battle on the panel in the ASEEC head trailer, in a mixture of amazement and admiration. "He always does these crazy moves. I can't actually believe he manage to use the VARIS to break through all the obstacles.

Lloyd, sitting next to her, was smiling with a purple bruise on his face.

A white knight kicked the ground and landed at the bottom of the valley.

The sequence of movements...

If someone who had nothing to do with battle were here watching him, that person would have called it "beautiful." The Knightmare was dancing in the air as if it had wings. The way he shielded the half-broken Gloucester like a knight protecting a lady, and the way he easily repelled the enemy's rifle shot with the shield on his right arm...

The ideal form of a Knightmare Frame was there.

It was the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps prototype weapon Z-01, the Lancelot.

"Viceroy! Are you safe? I came to rescue you!"

Cornelia, who was stunned and speechless inside the Gloucester, finally realized what was going on.

"The ASEEC? Who gave the authority?"

But there was no doubt he had saved her. No matter who it was, there was no way anyone could ignore this achievement. And

there were many Britannia knights who were watching the battle from afar who thought the same thing.

But, on the other side of the battle, the Lancelot was nothing more than a nuisance that appeared out of nowhere.

"Hey, that Knightmare..."

"Yeah, it's the same one that appeared in Shinjuku and Kawaguchi Lake."

Lelouch ground his teeth as he heard his subordinates mumble in awe.

"It's him again!"

Lelouch had to wonder just how many times that white Knightmare was going to foil his plans.

At first, it was the Shinjuku incident.

That time, Lelouch was a few seconds away from destroying the Britannian Forces, but just before he could, most of his allies were defeated by this white Knightmare.

It was the same at Kawaguchi Lake, too. Then, Lelouch was able to accomplish his goals, but because the white Knightmare made a racket in the basement, his plans had been about to go awry.

It was simply ridiculous to think that just one soldier could overturn his carefully planned strategies and tactics.

Of course, Lelouch did have the white Knightmare in mind when he planned this mission. But the weird thing was, that Knightmare didn't normally come out onto the battlefield. If he had that kind of power, he would utilize it as much as he could; but for some reason Cornelia and former Viceroy Clovis did not. That was why Lelouch hadn't considered the Knightmare as a big obstacle this time.

But he was wrong.

He didn't know who was piloting that Knightmare, but he might be stronger than Cornelia or Darlton. The abilities of the mecha were incredible, too. At least, the Burai would not be able to face it.

Then...

"Guren Mk-II, crush that white bastard!"

If the enemy brought forth their strongest weapon, you had to face it with your strongest to fight back.

"Yes!" Kallen responded, and attacked the white Knightmare.



That's the first time I've seen that red Knightmare coming toward me.

But there wasn't time to think about it. Suzaku gripped the controls in the Lancelot. In that moment, a pulse went through his body.

This was actually a characteristic of this Knightmare. Electricity ran through the body...no, it was more like, it burdened the nervous system. He heard that this never happened with the other Britannian Forces Knightmares such as the Glasgow or the Sutherland. When he asked Lloyd, the main developer, about it, he started to excitedly talk about the Yggdrasil or something, but unfortunately Suzaku didn't understand any of it.

But the capability was really amazing.

What was most impressive was that it caught up with Suzaku's own reflexes.

Before Suzaku rode the Lancelot, he wasn't a Knightmare pilot, but he'd had the chance to operate a prototype simulator when he participated in an experiment for the Britannian Forces. It was his first time, even though it was virtual, piloting a Knightmare.

His opinion was one of disappointment.

Until then, in Suzaku's mind, a Knightmare was like a human being. It was a machine that was able to completely recreate the movements of a human. But contrary to what he'd believed, the simulator hadn't moved at all the way he wanted it to.

"What do you think? This is the newest Knightmare of the Britannian Forces, the Sutherland. Of course, you Elevens wouldn't be able to move it at all."

His superior was half bragging and half sneering, but Suzaku thought that it wasn't the pilot's fault that made the machine not move well. Even if you recognized the target and aligned a sight, the reaction was slow. He was moving accurately with only a millimeters' margin of error, but the drive gears wouldn't follow. And the worst was the posture control. If it stayed that way, it would never move the way he wanted it to. In the end, he'd had to fake a slow movement to match that of the machine.

But the Lancelot was different.

Of course, it wasn't complete, but the reaction was pretty darn good. Its movement became one with Suzaku's.

The red Knightmare charged at him. Suzaku easily moved the Lancelot to the side and kicked. The surfboard-shaped SAND BOARD was still on his feet.

Of course, he didn't think it would end the fight, but he was surprised that the Knightmare caught it. Twisted silver claws—and a light shone in the middle of it.

"Huh?"

For the first time, Suzaku felt nervous. But by the time he mumbled this, he'd already released his foot from the SAND BOARD.

Then the SAND BOARD swelled up from the inside and exploded.

What is that weapon?

It was the same question that went through Cornelia's head earlier. But the difference from Cornelia was that Suzaku didn't stop moving. He jumped back and launched the Variable Ammunition Repulsion Impact Spitfire—also known as VARIS—toward the red Knightmare. But the energy level was set too low. There was no need to use a huge level of energy as he did when he broke through the canyon.

And then...

Suzaku was really surprised.

He thought he had it.

There was no way he could miss.

But the first bullet shot from the VARIS was easily dodged. The second and third shots followed, but they too passed by the red machine. He couldn't hit the enemy who swayed left and right.

"No way!" He yelled out to himself. "Is it as fast as the Lancelot?"

The red Knightmare increased its speed and approached him in a zigzagging motion.

"Wow, that new Knightmare is pretty impressive."

This from Lloyd, who was watching the footage being sent from the Lancelot.

Of course, only Lloyd could make such an inappropriate comment.

Next to him was Cecile, who was wide-eyed. She couldn't believe what she was seeing, either. "Could it be...the enemy is using the Yggdrasil drive too!?"

"No, I don't think so."

Lloyd was still composed. "Each movement is a little different. Well, I can't say for sure they're not using it. But that Radiant Wave Surge System, it must be Rakshata."

"I can't believe you're being so nonchalant about this!" Cecile glared at Lloyd. "I'm going to open up communications! You need to advise Suzaku..."

Lloyd shrugged. "I don't think he needs it."

"But..."

"It's okay. If it's that much, his and my Lancelot won't lose."

With this, Cecile stopped her hand that was about to operate

the touch panel. She looked at Lloyd, surprised. "You're awfully confident."

"You think? But I told you before. He is the best 'part' I ever put my hands on. Besides, if he weren't, I wouldn't choose him as a pilot when I hardly had any battle data on him yet."

"I see..."

"But well, honestly, he is the closest to being the best 'part.'" Then Lloyd's tone of voice changed to one of disappointment. "If only he didn't have that...I thought of upgrading and I was going to talk to him before he took off, but you interrupted me..."

"Yes?"

Cecile was dumbfounded when Lloyd threw her a resentful look.

The battle between Lancelot and Guren Mk-II wouldn't end.

"You little...! You just keep scurrying around!" Kallen slapped the SLASH-HARKEN that came at her and ran the Guren Mk-II.

"Urgh!" Suzaku's Lancelot barely dodged the Radiant Wave Surge claws.

However, even though the battle looked even, there was a decisive difference between the two pilots.

What was it?

Their attitude.

The Guren Mk-II was trying to completely demolish the Lancelot. The Lancelot, on the other hand, was a little unnatural in its movements.

Perhaps one could say there was no will behind it.

Until now, Suzaku had not been fighting to kill the other.

It wasn't as though he was unprepared for it. Suzaku was a soldier. He had experience in killing people. If it was necessary, he wouldn't hesitate.



But, if it was not necessary, he wouldn't do it.

Suzaku tended to fight like this in Knightmare battles. He didn't aggressively aim for the enemy cockpit, but instead would try to stop the enemy's movements by aiming to destroy the legs, the arms, or to crush the FACTSPHERES and take away the pilot's "vision."

It would be wrong to call it naïve. The thing was, he had high abilities as a pilot and a good machine to utilize and to win with.

But he was reaching a limit in this battle.

The red Knightmare in front of him was no ordinary enemy. If he hesitated—he would die.

Once he thought that, Suzaku's eyes lost expression.

The Guren Mk-II tried to come at him again. But at the same time, Lancelot pulled something from its hip.

The official name was MVS—Maser Vibration Sword.

Once in range, the Lancelot swung the sword sideways, aiming for the red machine. It was so accurate, it was scary. The Radiant Wave Surge flashed, and the sword swelled up from the inside. But by then, Lancelot had already let go of the sword. He had already predicted that the red Knightmare would catch the sword.

From short range, he pointed the VARIS at the Guren Mk-II.

Kallen's reaction was to protect the body with the claws. The VARIS shot many bullets. The opposing energies crashed into each other. The air grated.

"It caught it!"

Inside the cockpit of the Lancelot, Suzaku was surprised.

But it wasn't that the Guren Mk-II caught it completely.

Sparks flew. The pressurized energies were repelling each other. In that moment, an exploding sound ran through the Guren Mk-II's right arm. The joint couldn't endure the burden and went out of alignment. And then, it came to the edge of the valley where the dry avalanche had gouged the earth. The crack in the ground crumbled.

"Whoa!"

The Guren Mk-II lost its balance and fell down into the valley, along with the crumbled earth.

"Ohgi! How is the Guren!?" Lelouch yelled inside the cockpit of the Burai.

A response came immediately through the communication panel.

"Yeah, the right arm is out. It can move, but..."

Lelouch bit his lip.

Even the Guren Mk-II couldn't stand against it...

And his own situation wasn't good either.

The main monitor of the Burai showed Cornelia's Gloucester shooting SLASH-HARKENS from its chest. It came toward Lelouch's Burai as soon as the Guren and that white Knightmare began to battle. Even though it had lost both arms, it would be difficult to win against her. It was annoying to recognize it, but it was the difference between the pilots. She was one of the best Knightmare pilots in Britannia, second princess Cornelia. It would be different if it was Kallen's Guren, but the Burai with him piloting it would not match her.

Damn.

Him again!

But Lelouch vi Britannia already knew how foolish it was to let emotions control on the battlefield.

"We're retreating. Ohgi!"

"Huh?"

"We're out of time. If we continue, it'll be a war of attrition. We need to leave before the Britannian Forces regroup!"

Suzaku didn't chase the red Knightmare that fell down the valley.

He didn't come here to fight against a strong enemy. And even though it was able to stop his VARIS, that Knightmare was damaged severely, including its right arm. It wasn't a threat anymore.

Suzaku turned the Lancelot around and returned to where he'd left Cornelia.

Zero and the Burai were already gone.

As soon as he neared it, the Gloucester fell on its knees.

"Viceroy!"

But the response was a sharp voice.

"You go after Zero!"

"Yes...but..."

"My energy filler ran out, that's all. Go!"

"Y-Yes!"

Lancelot kicked the ground and easily climbed up the cliff with quick and refined movements.

When the white back completely disappeared from her monitor, Cornelia cut her communications inside the Gloucester. Once she was in a situation where no one could see her, for the first time her face showed blazing rage.

Both of her fists slammed the control bar.

This will cost you, Zero...

She should be forgiven for showing this much anger, considering the amount of humiliation she'd endured in the last few hours.

Of course, she still had the responsibility of settling her own troops' confusion after this.

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

Stage 1 >>2

This is a story from the past.

"Hey, Lelouch. Is there something you want to be when you grow up?"

"You're an idiot as always. I'm the prince of Britannia. So when I'm older, I'm going to be the prince."

"Is being a prince a job?"

"Huh? I don't know. I don't think it's really a job..."

"Oh, so you'd be unemployed."

"How rude. So, do you have any plans for the future, Suzaku?"

"Huh? Me? Hmm. I guess I could be a military man like Tohdoh-sensei, but..."

"But?"

"I thought I could be a barber too. I like playing with other people's hair."

"I'm not going to let you cut Nunnally's hair."

"But I'm better at it."

"Besides, you're using your skills all wrong. If you're going to make use of something, make use of your ridiculously large amount of energy."

"Can I get mad now?"

"Or, if you want, I can make you my knight."

"No way. It's that system where I pledge eternal loyalty or something, right? I don't want to be your subordinate."

And then...

The boy with the black hair thinks something.

And smiles.

Like he is really happy from the bottom of his heart.

"What is it?"

"Hee hee... Yeah, that's true. I won't make you my knight."

"I said I wouldn't do it even if you ask me to."

"Yeah. A knight isn't a friend. So you don't qualify."

"...Hey, I noticed that Nunnally's hair is getting really long again."

"I told you that you can't cut it."

"Just a little, please?"

This was truly a long time ago...



The white shadow was relentless in its pursuit.

"Damn it, give up already, you monster!"

Lelouch couldn't stand the pressure and turned his Burai around. He held the ASSAULT RIFLE up to shoot. But that gave a slight—and fatal—opening.

The white Knightmare launched the SLASH-HARKENS at lightning speed, and they pierced the right leg and abdomen of the Burai. The Burai lost its balance and crashed to the ground. The sensor that detected a potential fuel-based fire forced the ejection seat. But the angle of the launch was bad. Usually it would draw a half-circle away from the battlefield, but this time it bounced like a stone thrown into a river. Lelouch slammed into the strong walls of the cockpit repeatedly.

"Gah!"

After rolling up on mud, the cockpit finally stopped moving. Lelouch had no time to deal with the countless bruises all over his body. He dragged himself out of the cockpit.

But that was where his route was cut off.

"Ergh!"

A giant stood in front of him.

It was painted white and gold, as if it wanted to say that it was a hero.

Slowly, the large arm rose.

An enormous gun, much too strong for blowing away one person, pointed directly at Lelouch.

"ASEEC head trailer."

Inside the Lancelot, Suzaku spoke softly into the communication panel.

"I have found Zero. I will capture him now."

Behind the mask, Lelouch's eyes were burning with rage.



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

Afterword

Of course, as I'm writing this, I am in the same boat as everyone else and haven't seen the last episode. I want to see it really badly...

Hello again. And for those I am meeting for the first time, it is nice to meet you. I am Mamoru Iwasa, and I am in charge of writing the novel versions of Code Geass. Thank you for picking up "Code Geass Lelouch of the Rebellion STAGE 1 - SHADOW."

So anyway, it is finally Stage 1. If the previous volume, Stage 0, was about the past, this volume is about the present. But I realized something when I got to work on this volume...

Code Geass has too many appealing characters!

As a novelist, I jumped for joy. I had so many things I wanted to write about. But as it is for the anime, there is something called a text limit in novels, so I was in a bind. If I wanted to include everything that came up in my mind about every character, it would become a novel that would be over 3,000 pages. What a dilemma. In the end, I had to say to some characters, "I guess you can't stand out in the novel..." and I took away their story. For the fans of those characters, I can only apologize profoundly. I hope I can write a supplement for them somewhere. Like, a short story focusing on the characters. (By the way, there are personal favorites that I would like to write about. Like the blueberry person. Or the blueberry person).

Oh yeah, talking about the characters reminds me: when I get jobs to novelize anime series, I pick songs that match every character. Since they're not characters I created myself, the music sets me in the right mood. But since there was no soundtrack when I started writing the novel, I chose songs or music that exist already. Usually I pick something from the CDs I am listening to at the time. For some reason, I was really into wind orchestra music when I started this project, so that was the base for the music I chose.

Cornelia...Symphonia Nobilissima
Milly...Sing, Sing, Sing
Shirley...In the Mood
The Emperor...African Symphony
Euphemia...Carnival of Rose Overture
Jeremiah...El Cumbanchero

This is only part of it, but you get the idea. But now that I look at it, it's pretty fearless. The Emperor has "African Symphony?" (But that face and intimidation...) By the way, when I was working on Stage 0, I kept listening to "Is Paris Burning?" I can't tell you what music I listen to for Lelouch, Suzaku, and C.C. just yet.

So that was a long introduction. I would like to take some time to talk about Stage 1.

Because of certain circumstances, this Stage 1 doesn't start from the first episode of the anime. I'm sorry for those who had been looking forward to it. Specifically, it was decided that anime episodes 1 through 8 were to be cut from the novel, and the novel would start from Kallen's monologue in episode 9. Speaking in chronological events, it would be after the "Black Knights" were founded. The story of "how the Black Knights came to be" is currently running in the magazine "The Sneaker," called "Code Geass Lelouch of the Rebellion -The Crimson Path," so please check that out.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone from the anime staff, my editors, and of course, you readers who took this book in your hands.

I hope that I see you again for the next volume, Stage 2.

June 2007

Mamoru Iwasa

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

Commentary by Goro Taniguchi, Director

One random day near Meguro...

There's a light drizzle outside. The last train is about to leave. Tomorrow I have a meeting about the artwork. Oh yeah, and I remember Mr. Ishikawa from Victor wanted to talk to me about the lyrics for the character songs. I guess I'll have to take care of it tomorrow too...

I should go home soon. I keep thinking that, but the person in front of me, producer Kawaguchi, won't budge.

Taniguchi and Kawaguchi. It sounds like a bad comedian duo.

Yoshitaka Kawaguchi. He is a producer from Sunrise, but... really independent.

And this independent man keeps looking at his schedule book with a gin and tonic by his side.

Is it something serious? Oh well, let me get to the main topic. Unless we do something about this, it means I can't go home.

Taniguchi: "I'm telling you there's no way! Besides, I put my trust in Mr. Iwasa and the Kadokawa editorial team and am leaving it up to them, so I don't want to be arrogant and write a commentary."

Kawaguchi: "That's different. You're a director. Why don't we all be adults about this..."

Taniguchi: "Hey! You're usually so independent I can't believe you would act like you're part of an organization now!"

To tell the truth—I was in a bind.

I was ordered by producer Kawaguchi to write a commentary for the novel. Orders are annoying, don't you think?

That's why I made it Lelouch's ability, but it becomes a separate issue when I'm the one being ordered.

Am I being selfish?

Maybe. I'm that kind of a person, but is there a problem with that?

Kawaguchi: "Hey, are you listening?"

Taniguchi: "I am. Actually, can you look at me while we talk? You keep looking at your book...is there a problem?"

Kawaguchi: "Oh, this? No, I was thinking of buying a new car, but the loan calculations..."

Sheesh.

I really don't know how serious he is sometimes. Is he trying to convince me, or is he just "talking" so he could say we had a "talk"?

I did talk to the other party.

This is a handy phrase many in production companies use. He was like this in front of CLAMP and Mr. Yasuda, too. At least, it's not a side of him he shows Mr. Takeda or Mr.

Morotomi from the network. When he is selling, he tends to stick to his "I'm a reliable man" face. And on the contrary, on the net radio program he will act like a clown. If I were to use Code Geass-like expressions, he is an adult who keeps hiding his face behind a mask.

Taniguchi: "So what I was saying was..."

Kawaguchi: "You should order something."

Taniguchi: "Then I'll order a sidecar..."

I have thirty minutes until the last train leaves. I'm in a bind. A ridiculous bind.

Taniguchi: "So I was saying..."

Kawaguchi: "That you're leaving it up to Mr. Iwasa, right?"

Taniguchi: "Yes! I listened to Mr. Iwasa's interpretation, and I was okay with it. So I want to respect his work. I don't want to show myself up at the end of the novel..."

Kawaguchi: "Ah, so you're trying to look like a good guy."

Taniguchi: "That's not what I..."

Kawaguchi: "I know that. I know. We both agreed on the fact that it was going to focus more on Suzaku than the TV version."

Taniguchi: "That's right. Suzaku accepted the result of his actions and had to contain himself within specific regulations, so it's difficult to express that. Even Mr. Takahiro Sakurai, Suzaku's voice

actor, gives the effort to show and not show his dark side."

Kawaguchi: "Well, if it's Suzaku we do have the 'Suzaku of the Counterattack' manga."

Taniguchi: "Yes. And that I've left to Ms. Atsuro Yomino's interpretations. And I haven't shown up for any of its production meetings. That's the stance I want to keep with Mr. Iwasa's interpretations as well..."

And then my drink came.

This isn't good. Our conversation keeps getting interrupted. Besides, we're two men at a bar for a long time.

This is weird. This is wrong. This is corrupted. No, it's not corrupted...

Kawaguchi: "Hey, what's your occupation?"

Taniguchi: "Director."

Kawaguchi: "And for this series?"

Taniguchi: "Director."

Kawaguchi: "Yes! And I'm a producer! Depending on our positions, the way we think differs. You put those kinds of gadgets in your work, don't you? And I'm not talking about the thing with the Manhattan Project."

Taniguchi: "You don't have to include material here. No one is asking for it."

Kawaguchi: "Anyway, you have to write it. I decided. You don't have a choice. I already asked Mr. Jun Fukuyama to do the

Commentary for the first novel."

What a cheap shot!

He got Lelouch on his side first, and then brought it up to me.

Taniguchi: "You trapped me, didn't you?"

Kawaguchi: "Yeah."

Taniguchi: "Fine, I'll do it. But..."

Kawaguchi: "Hm?"

Taniguchi: "I'm just going to write down the conversation we just had. I think everyone should know what kind of a person you are."

Kawaguchi: "Hey, that's not fair. I have a face to preserve as a producer."

And then I got a call from the studio.

It seems that Ohkouchi wants to talk to me about something. Good. Great timing. Ichirou Ohkouchi is just a great guy. Even his name is great. "Goro Ichirou" sounds better than "Taniguchi Kawaguchi." Shoot, I think I'm getting a little drunk.

Taniguchi: "I have to catch the last train, so I have to go now."

Kawaguchi: "Hey, wait a minute."

Taniguchi: "A mask is something that always carries a risk of coming off. Whether it's the real you or not. I'm sure Mr. Iwasa's novel will discuss similar themes."

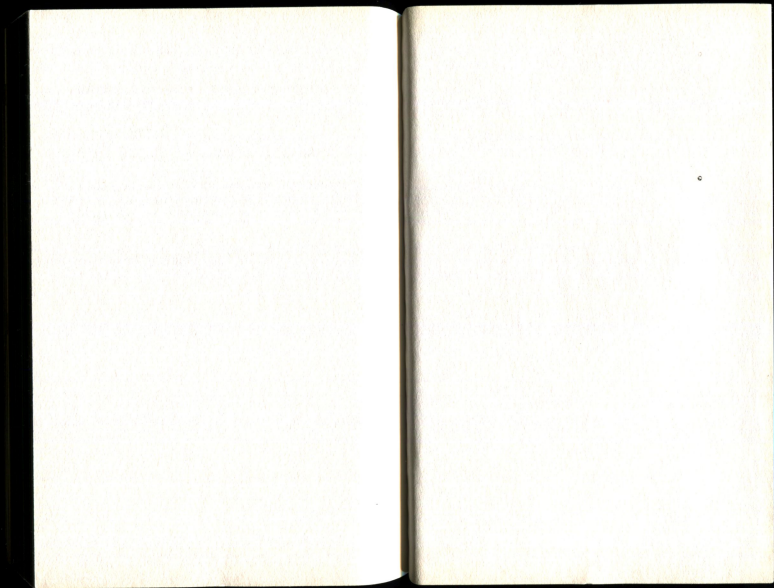
Kawaguchi: "Hey, why are you finishing the conversation and trying to take off?"

Taniguchi: "See you!"

Yukawa: "Oh, you're leaving already? But I just got here."

Producer Yukawa from Bandai Visual came. What bad timing. He is a man of bad timing. You Tamaki. I'm going to call you Orange from now on. The character is just wrong. Oh, I know. I'm confused.

It's now pouring. I guess I'll have Mr. Kawaguchi drive me home.



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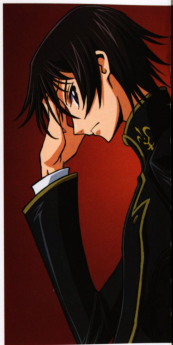


CODE GEASS
Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE - 1 -
SHADOW

Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI
Written by
MAMORU IWASA

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