

CODE GEASS

コードギアス

反逆のルース

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

STAGE - 3 - SWORD



Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI

Written by
MAMORU IWASA

BANDAI
entertainment.



Actions are answered with consequences.
Not even Lelouch's powers can change that.

Though he has the absolute power to make anyone obey his orders, even he cannot escape from this inevitable fact.

The world hands out consequences without regard to individual wants or expectations.

If those consequences weave the fabric of the world, where does one find the sins they must bear and the punishments they must receive?



CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のロンド

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

3: STAGE -3- SWORD



CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルルーシュ

Lelouch 3

of the Rebellion

STAGE -3- SWORD



Original Concept by
Ichirou Ohkouchi / Goro Taniguchi

Written by
Mamoru Iwasa

BANDAI
entertainment®

CODE GEASS LELOUCH OF THE REBELLION
STAGE -3- SWORD

A BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT NOVEL

ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY
WRITTEN BY
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY
COLORING BY
COLOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY
COLORING BY
INSIDE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
COVER/COLOR ILLUSTRATION DESIGN BY
INSIDE DESIGN BY
TRANSLATION BY
ENGLISH ADAPTATION BY
ENGLISH BOOK DESIGN BY
ENGLISH COPY EDITOR
ENGLISH EDITOR
PUBLISHER

Ichirou Ohkouchi / Goro Taniguchi
Mamoru Iwasa
Takahiro Kimura
Reiko Iwasawa
Shuji Sakamoto
Taeko Kumagai
toB
design CREST
Masaya Hiroshige (CRESPI)
Kuro Uzo
Hope Donovan
Jose Macasocol, Jr.
Lucy Huang
Robert Place Napton
Ken Iyadomi

©Mamoru Iwasa 2008
©2006-2008 SUNRISEPROJECT GEASS, MBS
Character Design ©2006 CLAMP

Originally published in Japan in 2008 by KADOKAWA SHOTEN PUBLISHING CO., LTD., Tokyo.
English translation published by Bandai Entertainment Inc. under the license by Sunrise, Inc.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holder. Code Geass is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59409-984-7

First BANDAI ENTERTAINMENT printing:
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in Canada

PROFILE
MAMORU IWASA

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

I'm an Aries, and I cannot drink hot tea. I've been called childish, like maybe when I grow up I'll finally be able to drink hot things. That hasn't happened yet. I do have food I like now that I didn't like before. Anyway, it's been getting cold lately, but I keep asking for cold water at every restaurant I go to. No, I'm not doing it out of spite...

CODE GEASS
コードギアス
反逆のルージュ
Lelouch 3
of the Rebellion

STAGE -3- SWORD contents

Main Characters 8

Interval 15

STAGE-3:1-SYMBOL 23

Interval 69

STAGE-3:2-RUINS 81

STAGE-3:3-SWORD 129

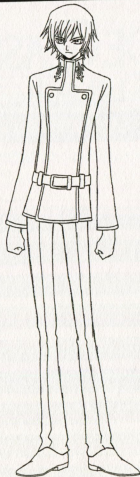
Promise 183

Afterword 193

Commentary by Takahiro Sakurai 197

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS Lelouch 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.

MAIN CHARACTERS

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.



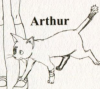
Shirley Fenette



Rivalz Cardmonde



Nina Einstein



Arthur

CODE GEASS Lelouch of the Rebellion

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS: The Lancelot of the Rebellion

HOLY EMPIRE OF BRITANNIA



Charles zi Britannia

The 98th Emperor 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.



Cornelia li Britannia

A soldier in the Britannian Forces. After Clovis was assassinated, Cornelia came to Area 11 to take over as viceroys.



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.

MAIN CHARACTERS

THE BLACK KNIGHTS



Zero

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



Kaname Ohgi

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

Kyoshiro Tohdohh

Former lieutenant in the Japanese military. He commanded the only battle that Japan won in their war with Britannia. He was recruited into the Black Knights for his supreme skills. He knew Suzaku when he was a young boy.



Kallen Stadtfeld

Her mother is Japanese, and Kallen's Japanese name is Kallen Kousuki. 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.



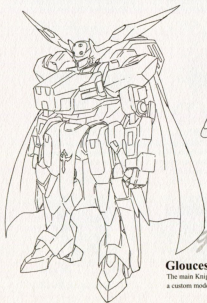
CODE GEASS: The Lancelot of the Rebellion

MAIN CHARACTERS

CODE GEASS: The Lancelots of the Rebellion

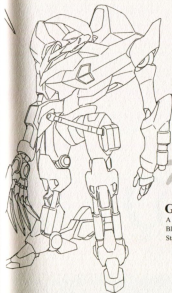
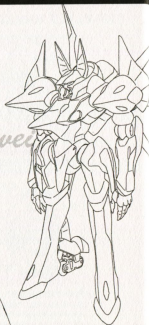
Gawain

A prototype Knightmare developed by a team led by Lloyd. It is equipped with many new abilities such as the float system, the Hadron Cannon, and an electron analysis system known as the Dread System. Because of it, the unit is much larger than other Knightmares. To ease up the control of the unit, there are seats for two pilots.



Gloucester Cornwall Custom

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



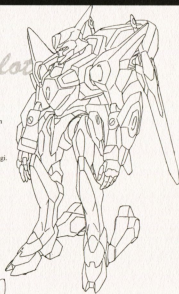
KNIGHTMARE FRAME

CODE GEASS: The Lancelots of the Rebellion

Lancelot

Lancelot

The 7th generation Knightmare Frame developed by the Britannian Forces' Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. It's 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. Kallen Stadfield is its pilot.

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

Interval

September 2017, Area 11

The expression "extraordinary leader" was often applied to Charles zi Britannia, the 98th Emperor of the Holy Empire of Britannia by his admirers. Though high praise, if any ruler of the modern era deserved it, Charles did. In fact, no sovereign to date had accomplished as much as him.

His ascendancy to the throne marked the beginning of Britannia's preeminence on the world stage. He turned merely one of several strong nations into a continent-spanning Empire that occupied one third of the entire world. Despite continual warfare, he governed the growing nation with success. Though widely lauded as a supreme ruler, he didn't let ego interfere with his goals. He continued his reforms domestically, putting an end to bureaucratic restructuring, stimulated a long stagnating economy and cleaned out internal corruption effectively. Without him and his skills, the current Britannia would not exist. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that his arms of steel and will of iron had forged a new nation. He was a giant of his own generation.

It was the era of Britannia, and of Charles the Conqueror...

That's what the people of future generations may call the current times.

For all that he was revered, Charles himself remained an troubling enigma. Though a public figure, his private life remained far from prying eyes. Typically, a despot's business is everyone's business. They can't help but be the center of attention, no matter how strictly they attempt to shield themselves. Furthermore, a cult

of personality often arises around well-known public figures, especially those of great accomplishments, happy to relate a charming array of stories which further exalt the public. This was also not the case with Charles. In other words, no one ever heard him tell of stories that would have prompted such praise as "His Highness was always such a smart boy" or "And that's why he's a brave and righteous person." Since it was odd for an autocrat to be so mysterious, many people in the EU and top executives of the Chinese Federation began to question his very existence.

Did this person, Charles zi Britannia, really exist? Maybe he was just a piece of propaganda engineered by the Britannian media...

"Your Highness." When one of the chamberlains called him, the Emperor of Britannia, Charles zi Britannia had his eyes closed, absorbing the warm light around him.

The emperor stood in an incredibly strange space. At first glance, it resembled an altar, until one realized that the columns set at four corners, stairs and platform were all floating in midair. The sky below and above was caught in a state of perpetual sunset. The place held a sinister, artificial aura. However, Charles and his chamberlain appeared quite unaffected.

"What? Schneizel?" Charles said in a low voice as the chamberlain whispered something in his ear. His eyes fluttered open and he placed a hand on the collar of his extravagant mantle, lost in thought for a moment. Though advancing in age, he was still a handsome man. One might think that is no surprise, judging from the way his sons and daughters looked. However, his face had something that none of his children's had—absolute confidence and an overwhelming power to awe.

"Yes, Majesty. Your orders?" the chamberlain asked. Charles cracked a leonine smile.

"Let him do as he pleases. If he's that sure of himself, let him challenge me." The chamberlain bowed, stepped back, and would have made his way uneventfully down the stairs had he not heard something out of place. It was a term so incongruous to the man who uttered it that the chamberlain must have misheard.

"Big brother."



Nunnally Lamperouge squirmed backwards in her wheelchair periodically to address her maid. "Ms. Sayoko, hurry. It's going to start."

"Hee hee. There's no need to be in such a rush," said Sayoko, hands demurely placed on her apron. The ash-blond blind girl was affixed to a spot right next to a small radio. "You must really be excited that Suzaku is going to become Princess Euphemia's knight."

Nunnally's wide smile brightened at Sayoko's words. She nodded, "Yes, because I love them both so dearly."

The ceremony room was as spacious as a palatial ballroom. It had, in fact, originally been used for that purpose. However, that was under former Viceroy Clovis; current Viceroy Cornelia had no interest in such soirées. As a result, parties were becoming an endangered species in Area 11. For the record, it wasn't because Cornelia couldn't dance. Rather, she really disliked occasions that called for her to prance around in a feminine dress. Rumor had it that the only one who ever succeeded in forcing her to dance in a frilly dress was her younger sister.

Cornelia was absent from this ceremony as well. Third princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia, Euphemia li Britannia, about to bestow a great honor, commanded the stage alone. Exquisite formal attire bedecked her figure. Her serene girl-like facial features were intense and serious, focused, before the room of

capitalists, aristocrats and high-class military officers, each dressed in their personal finest.

Shortly, at an officer's signal, the double doors of the ceremony room opened. Backlit by the bright sun, stood a boy. He, too, was dressed in his finest—not a military uniform or even the pilot suit in which he operated his white Knightmare, Lancelot. Instead, he was clothed in a pure white suit, attire reserved among the Britannian Forces for knights alone. The formality of it threatened to overwhelm his youthful face. Stiff and serious, he slowly strode along the brand new red carpet toward Euphemia.

At the bottom of the stairs, he halted, knelt down and bowed his head. Euphemia began to recite the ceremonial words.

"Suzaku Kururugi. Wilt thou upon this day pledge thy fealty to Britannia and stand as a knight of the crown?"

"Yes, Your Highness," the boy, Suzaku Kururugi, replied quietly, head still lowered.

"Dost thou wish to abandon thyself and be sword and shield for the sake of justice?"

"Yes, Your Highness," Suzaku replied again and drew the ritual sword from his waist scabbard. With both hands, he handed his blade to Euphemia. The princess received it with one hand, then another hand joined and she patted each of the boy's shoulders lightly with the flat of the blade.

It should be noted that there were two ways of performing the knighthood ritual. Using the sword was one of them. The other one called for the person on stage to place their hand on the neck of the person below the stage, and embrace. Considering that Euphemia was an unmarried young woman, the former method had to be chosen.

Once the short ceremony was complete, Euphemia exhaled in relief. Of course, it was so slight that only Suzaku could hear.

"I, Euphemia li Britannia take you, Suzaku Kururugi, to be my knight."

Suzaku accepted the sword that was returned to him with the solemn words of annunciation and sheathed it. Upon Euphemia's cue, he turned to enjoy a reception of resounding...silence.

Actually, one person applauded. He was a skinny tall man, wearing glasses as always, but in attire far more formal than his everyday white coat. The man was Lloyd Asplund, a Major of Area 11's Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps, as well as an Earl of the Holy Empire of Britannia. Grin on his face, he clapped steadily.

No other attendee seemed willing to follow his lead; instead, they directed cold glances and cold shoulders Lloyd's way. Euphemia's face clouded, but though his princess paled, the knight remained resolute.

It was expected from the jump in position. It was unheard of for a pedigreed princess of the Britannian Empire to welcome a Number into the position of knight, and to make matters worse, he was Japanese. Suzaku knew why the audience was livid with outrage and disapproval, yet, for Euphemia's sake, he couldn't let it stand. He was now her knight, and his duty was to defend his lord. He was both protector of her person and her honor, and this situation was causing Euphemia to loose face.

"What should I do?"

I know better than to jump up and try to address the crowd, thought Suzaku. That would only worsen the situation. Plus, that wouldn't shift the aim of their attack, and meaningless words would probably enrage them even more. If so, action is best. They'll realize that their attitudes disgrace not me, but a princess of Britannia. Even if they think my actions cowardly, I don't care if they insult me. I'm dedicating my all, my virtue, my honor and my glory to my lord. That's how a knight is supposed to be.

Suzaku reached for the blade at his side. The ceremonial blade was a precious heirloom of the Imperial family and its weight would be recognized.

I shall hold it up. I shall hold up proof that this girl behind me is nobody but a princess of Britannia, an heir to the throne.

The sound of a second pair of hands clapping gave Suzaku pause. He gasped and turned around. The sound came from a military officer, a man who looked right at home in his formal attire, unlike Suzaku. His sturdy soldier's facial features didn't clash with the countless emblems shining on his chest either.

The man was Andreas Darlton, the head officer of the military in Area 11. Besides her personal knight, Guilford, Cornelia trusted him more than anyone else under her command. Darlton carved a slight smile on his face when his eyes met Suzaku's. His clap seemed to approve what Suzaku intended to do to prove Euphemia's worth, rather than to celebrate his knighting.

No one in the audience was bold enough to ignore the applause of Viceroy Cornelia's representative, and soon the entire room ignored their earlier discontentedness to clap.

Suzaku showed his appreciation by giving Darlton a small nod.

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

STAGE-3:1-SYMBOL

Dating from the medieval times, liveries were uniforms that only knights and the subjects of local baronial families were permitted to wear. In modern Britannia, the privilege of liveries was limited to the Imperial family's private knights. As in olden times, different colors held particular meanings: the most divine were gold and red, followed by white, purple and blue. One could tell a family's power within the Empire by the color of the liveries worn by their knights. In other words, it meant that the more divine the color of one's knights' uniforms, the more power you possessed in the Empire, although the Emperor's Knights of the Round were exceptions to this rule.

Suzaku Kururugi's appointment to knight of Euphemia li Britannia, the third princess of the Holy Empire of Britannia, shocked all of Area 11.

Knights of the Imperial family were treated as aristocrats of the Empire. Though no official title had been bestowed upon Suzaku, it was only a matter of time. Some of the more bigoted Britannian civilians claimed that having a Number—a Japanese person, no less!—join Britannian nobility would be a nightmare. They hoped that the man with the greatest power in this situation, Euphemia's father Emperor, would correct the situation. Boy, were they barking up the wrong tree. According to the constitution, an Imperial family member's knight selection overrode all other laws. Even for an absolute monarch, changing national law was no easy task. In any case, it wasn't Charles' style. Instead he sent a congratulatory telegram to his daughter at Suzaku's knighthood ceremony, which made many conservative Britannians sigh in disappointment.

In the big scheme of things, this was one of the more interesting aspects of Britannia. As a nation, Britannia gave preferential treatment to people from its home country, while discriminating against those from its territories. This was so-called a "pureblood" system. Such blatant discrimination naturally led to fierce rebellion from people of other ethnicities; however, Britannia, or rather Charles himself, didn't hesitate to put talented people of foreign origin to practical use. It was clear from his public speeches Charles was bigoted, but what underpinned his

principles was an extreme meritocracy. A prominent aristocrat once said, "The emperor loves those with power and disgraces those without power." The story of the Ashfords, deprived of their rank and title after the Emperor judged them incapable, was hardly an uncommon one.

Similarly, plenty of incidents of foreign hire, say to develop Britannia's super weapons—the Knightmares—existed. Yet, it was still unheard of for an honorary Britannian soldier to gain the title of a nobleman.

That was probably another reason why the Emperor was a man of mystery. By nature, the ideology of the purebloods and that of meritocracy conflicted. Yet, Charles was able to calculate both into his tactics for the advancement of his great Empire. Only a leader as extraordinarily capable as Charles could have succeeded in reaping the benefits from supporting two complete opposite ideologies in one nation.

However, no matter how well Charles wielded his mighty powers to transform discord into progress, the distortion remained in Britannian thinking.

No two people in Britannia embodied the philosophical split more clearly than two of the Emperor's daughters, Euphemia and Cornelia.

"You haven't said anything about it yet," Euphemia said to Cornelia over a communications screen. The gallant but stern viceroy of Area 11 displayed a silent mixture of bitterness and anger.

Euphemia knew why Cornelia hadn't attended her knight's ordination ceremony. Publicly, Cornelia had cited a need to attend to terrorist eradication efforts in the Hokuriku area, but Euphemia knew that was just her big sister's excuse.

Finally, Cornelia answered, "Appointing a knight is a privilege of royalty. It's out of my hands, even as Viceroy." Her aloof tone

saddened Euphemia. Of course, the younger princess knew that she wouldn't convince Cornelia of anything in a day. Cornelia embodied the first principle of Britannia. She regarded purebloods as the best and the rest as inferior. Though Euphemia was prepared for Cornelia's anger and rejection, she also hoped that somehow, if she explained things right, maybe Cornelia would show some tolerance toward her decision. Given Cornelia's extremely cold reception, Euphemia felt rather assumptive of her sister's goodwill.

The viceroy gave no indication of sympathizing. Euphemia leaned forward in her chair. She cleared her throat to speak.

"Suzaku Kururugi is an honorary Britannian, and he's proved himself more than worthy of being a knight. Sister, even you..."

"It's Viceroy," the businesslike voice corrected Euphemia, sending the girl's heart in a downward spiral. Sadness, along with flames of indignity, began to well up in Euphemia's chest. The younger princess' tone sliced with that newfound edge. "Viceroy, even you must know he's deserving."

"Discrimination against the Numbers is our national policy."

"Then it's time I tried to change that," said Euphemia in a sharp tone, which shocked Cornelia a bit. An even severer expression appeared on the woman's face.

"Oh is it now, *sub-viceroy*? Well, when you become Empress, feel free to do so!"

Euphemia didn't answer that question, nor look away. Showing no sign of fear, Euphemia let her sister's piercing glare bounce back and changed the subject abruptly.

"By the way, there is something I wanted to ask you. I hear that you were the one who appointed Suzaku Kururugi, my knight, to be the executioner for the first level terrorist, Kyoshiro Tohdoh."

"..."

"Is this the case?" Euphemia prodded. Cornelia remained silent, then turned away and said, "It is."

"Why did you order such command?" Euphemia wanted to know.

"Why not? He's a soldier, such a command could be given any time..."

"As the sub-vice-roy, no, as the person Suzaku Kururugi pledged his loyalty to, I demand to know!"

A bristly silence filled the air. Cornelia brought back her eyes to stare sharply, and with all the dignity of a viceroy, at her sister.

"Suzaku Kururugi is an honorary Britannian, but he is also allowed to operate the latest and best Knightmare in our military, Lancelot, under a special provision." To Euphemia, Cornelia appeared small and distant. "Therefore, I had to ascertain his true intentions. Is that enough?"

Euphemia didn't blink as she said, "I understand. Well, then please make sure this will not happen again. He is now my knight."

"..."

"It is overstepping your boundaries even as viceroy to order a direct command to the knight of an Imperial family member. I will not stir up what already happened, but please keep that in mind in the future."

"Euphy..."

"...Excuse me."

Euphemia cut off the conversation with a press of the reception button, its dry, robotic tone filling the room. She didn't move her finger from the button for a while.

Then, suddenly, she crossed her arms and slumped onto the desk.

Regret seeped into her. Right before Euphemia cut the connection, Cornelia's facial expression had finally changed. The stern face of viceroy melted into the face of a reprimanded older sister. *Why did I say such a thing? I just wanted her to understand,* Euphemia thought. *Sure, the incident in Chofu left a bad aftertaste, but*

was now the time to mention what I did? It must have seemed like I was provoking a fight.

I love her. I love her and that's why I want her to understand. I still don't think appointing Suzaku as my knight was a bad idea, and it's important to me that she understands that. She's the closest person to me, the one who's always protected me. She's my beloved sister.

"Idiot..." she whispered to herself, not as sub-vice-roy or Suzaku Kururugi's princess, but as Euphy, the little sister.

If Suzaku's appointment caused a small rift between the sisters, it caused a typhoon-like wave to ripple through the general population.

The Japanese people of Area 11 were split just as the sisters were.

To the anti-Britannians, the incident was outrageous. They saw Suzaku Kururugi as a symbol of betrayal, and he deserved to be detested. The fact that Suzaku had served the occupation military as an honorary Britannian didn't help his case. Not only had he kissed up to win their favor, but he'd become a royal guard dog who'd be turned on his fellow Japanese. Some among the extreme terrorist groups insisted that assassination of the great traitor, Suzaku Kururugi, should take precedence above even resistance against Britannia. In fact, many would gladly take his life themselves if the opportunity ever arose.

On the opposite side, Britannian Loyalists perceived the event with enthusiasm. Most of them came from Japan's upper class in the pre-war era, and even after the war, they'd quickly been given honorary Britannian status. Their treatment under Britannia had been a far more pleasant experience than for the rest of the Japanese. They were the ones who were irritated by the fact that chronic terrorist activities kept Area 11 from being promoted to a Satellite area. They were even irked by Zero. The news of Suzaku Kururugi's promotion to knight renewed their hopes. Although not

the most surefooted of them yet, Euphemia was still a legitimate princess of Britannia. For a Japanese person to stand beside her was indeed a significant gesture. Most importantly, better relations with Britannia meant a more secure future for them.

While Suzaku's new status had meaningful consequences for Eleven and Britannian alike, the only people who sincerely celebrated Suzaku's knighthood were the people closest to him.

The usually cool and collected Lieutenant Cecile Croomy of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps jumped with joy when she first heard the good news from her boss, Major Lloyd Asplund.

Nunnally Lamperouge, now in the eighth grade of Ashford Private Academy Junior High, suggested throwing a student council sponsored celebration party. Student council president, Milly Ashford, gave her approval and along with student council members Rivalz Cardemonde and Shirley Fenette, they invited all the students in the school to join in the festivities.

To them, political tactics and friction were irrelevant. It was about celebrating the achievements of a boy who was alternately a childhood friend, a classmate and co-worker. Nothing else mattered.

However, there was one essential name missing from the list of celebrants. The missing person was a childhood friend, a classmate, a fellow student council member and the person who knew Suzaku Kururugi best. It was Lelouch Lamperouge—more accurately, it was Lelouch vi Britannia. That was the missing name.

"What's so complicated?" asked C.C. in her usual dry tone, as she flopped down on the sofa. "Just use your geass on Suzaku Kururugi. Order him to either join your side or to resign his post." Although C.C. had a point about geass being the most reliable to solve the problem facing him, Lelouch did not agree with its use.

"I can't."

"So stubborn. Why not? Because he's your friend? Or is it pride?"

Lelouch removed his gaze from the window to meet C.C.'s volley of questions head-on. Annoyed and bitter, he answered in a clipped tone.

"All of it."

C.C. shrugged at the somewhat predictable answer, muttering to herself, "Well, I understand if he's in a hurry."

Strangely, the situation was beginning to resemble the time when Zero first showed up in Area 11.

At first, Zero and the Black Knights gained popular support from the claim that they were protecting the weak from all evil powers that sought to prey on them. The first group of people to overwhelmingly approve of the group was not the anti-Britannians or the Britannia Loyalists, but the ones in between. The Black Knights supporters were people who didn't like being controlled by Britannia, but also felt negatively about fighting with force. This middle group outnumbered both of the extremes in Area 11.

For most people, who governed them was of less concern than how they lived their lives. As long as the government helped rather than hindered them in day-to-day tasks like providing for their families or making a living, that government was acceptable. In their view, the current Britannian government didn't deserve support, because it suppressed the lives of the Japanese people. But at the same time, terrorists were just as much to blame for compromising the lives of everyday folks.

Nationalism alone didn't put bread on the table. Hence the Black Knights, with their goal of fairness, were widely accepted by moderates.

Of course, Lelouch had come to these conclusions on his own, without any help from C.C. He most likely chose the Black Knights' mission of "protecting the weak" rather than "defeating

Britannia" with this demographic information in mind. But with the ordination of Suzaku Kururugi, a threat to the Black Knights' monopoly on the middle ground had surfaced. The Black Knights' greatest rivals were now Suzaku Kururugi and Euphemia li Britannia.

C.C. didn't know her personally, but was very much aware of the girl's past achievements. True, they were trivial in comparison to Zero's deeds or her sister Cornelia's military victories. The girl was basically a figurehead sub-vicey.

On the other hand, she was an accomplished figurehead. Cornelia rarely appeared in front of civilians as their vicey; instead, she sent her little sister as the walking billboard. Especially for functions related to cultural development and charity ventures—including many press conferences, visits to cultural and welfare facilities, opening of athletic meetings and so forth—Euphemia attended instead of her sister. The third princess was even the sponsor and representative at a funeral held for the civilians who died in the battle at Narita.

The more civilian affairs she handled, the more firmly her reputation spread into the minds of the Japanese living in Area 11. People began to realize that she didn't hold any political power... but neither did she discriminate against the Japanese.

Perhaps, in the beginning, her actions merely contrasted the vicey's. Cornelia was a hardliner who upheld the national policy of discrimination. But Euphemia, seen through the lens of public functions, built a reputation of diplomacy and tolerance. The battlefield on which her actions were judged was the press conference.

And in her arena of battle, she never insulted the Japanese. Her intentions were so clear that even a disinterested party like C.C. could sense it. C.C. had been surprised to discover this

Britannian princess whose ideals agreed with those of Lelouch and Nunnally. It was terribly ironic though. Someone who held the same ideals as Lelouch had become the greatest obstacle to his retaliation against Britannia.

The balance of favor awarded by the moderates of Area 11 currently tipped toward Euphemia and Suzaku Kururugi, instead of the Black Knights. Although it had yet to blossom into total loyalty, buds of hope for the relationship that Euphemia and Suzaku shared began to grow. In addition, Britannia went public about the Black Knights' involvement at Narita, where many civilians died. That incident had helped the Black Knights show their capabilities to the masses, however, their long-held policy of "protecting the weak" now showed cracks. For those disappointed by the news, the story of Suzaku and Euphemia provided a breath of fresh air.

Euphemia couldn't have capitalized on a better moment to take the air out of the Black Knights' sails if she tried. But she wasn't any sort of schemer, C.C. could tell that. Judging from her behavior on TV and according to Lelouch, who'd known her for a long time, she didn't seem the type to have a hidden agenda. She probably just happened to want to acknowledge Suzaku at the time.

"If you're not going to use your geass," C.C. began, breaking the silence, "then you've got three options left. What needs to happen is for the Japanese people to lose their trust in the princess and Suzaku Kururugi. The one who holds the key to that is your childhood friend. If he leaves the princess's side, whether through dismissal or any other reason, she'll no longer be the people's 'Britannian Princess, the Savior of the Japanese.' You can either make Suzaku Kururugi leave the post of knight for his love of Japan or physically remove him from the princess' side."

"Well, the first option is out of the question," whispered C.C. The guy belonged to the Britannian Forces and went to a

Britannian school. He likely didn't have an ounce of patriotism, least not in any sense that the anti-Britannians could see. "That means the latter option is the way to go."

"The Black Knights have discussed it. Diethard advised assassination and Ohgi suggested capturing him with a regular frontal attack, but I..." said Lelouch, looked as if he realized something before he finished what he was saying. He turned to look at C.C. doubtfully, who was still lying on the sofa.

"You said three options. What's the last one?"

C.C.'s expression became more impassive. "Are you playing dumb, Lelouch? The last option is for you to capitalize on your personal relationship with him and to convince him to abandon her." Lelouch frowned and knitted his delicate eyebrows at how she said it on top of what she said. C.C. continued, pretending not to notice. "You already considered it once yourself. You have nothing to lose, why don't you try it? Even though, in my opinion, you would probably fail in persuading him and end up having to use your geass to cover up who Zero is."

Lelouch scowled. After some time, he asked softly, "What makes you think that I would fail?"

"That's for you to find out," C.C. in her usual high-toned manner. "Sorry, but I'm not your counselor. And secondly, the guy is your friend and the relationship between the two of you is none of my business. You should handle him yourself instead of running to an outsider." Lelouch groaned at her grating words though he admitted she had a point. The questioning ended.

The black-haired boy returned his gaze to the window, losing himself in thought and completely oblivious to C.C.'s gaze at the back of his head.

Suzaku Kururugi found that it was no calmer in the eye of the storm his appointment had caused.

One of the things bothering him was the definition of a knight. Suzaku hadn't been employed by Britannia very long. He became a Knightmare and Warrant Officer only half a year ago. Before he'd become fully trained in the position of Warrant Officer, he'd become a full-fledged knight for an Imperial princess and promoted to Major.

So not only was he an outsider by blood, but an outsider by training.

A knight protects his lord. He knew that much. That was obvious even from the incident at his knighthood ceremony; however, when it came to matters of how to conduct himself daily, he was full of questions. He didn't know who to ask either. The only other Imperial knight stationed in Area 11 was Guilford. Not only was Guilford stationed outside the Tokyo Settlement at the moment, Suzaku found him unapproachable. The two weren't friends, and so he didn't feel right asking.

Another person of royalty he could think of was Lloyd, but the man was eccentric. He probably wasn't the most suitable role model for Suzaku, especially when it came to tough situations. Suzaku wouldn't dare behave as Lloyd would, coming from the young knight it would be a major affront. The only other nobles he could think of were Margrave Jeremiah, who fell out of favor after the Orange Incident, or Margrave Villetta. Unfortunately, he knew neither one to be accepting of him as an honorary Britannian. Furthermore, both had been missing since Narita.

There was one question Suzaku knew the answer to. The question of Ashford Academy. No matter how flexible they had been with his job as a test pilot for the prototype Knightmare, Lancelot, there was no way Euphemia's knight would be attending school there. A knight who couldn't be by his master's side at all times would be a laughingstock. Suzaku knew it would be hard

to leave his friends on the student council, but he was prepared to endure the hardship.

When he told Euphemia, she would have none of it. "How would that make me sound, Suzaku? Am I not the one who advised you to go to school?"

"Yes..." Suzaku found himself defenseless to her bubbly remonstration. "Yes, it was you, Your Highness Euphemia. I'm grateful, but..."

"Suzaku," Euphemia stopped him jokingly again. "There's more to being a knight than just being a guard! Of course, being a bodyguard is part of it, but...that's not what being a knight is all about. Look at Guilford. He's not always with my sister, is he?"

"Um...he isn't?"

"No, he isn't. I think that what my sister wants from Guilford is not mere 'protection.' She needs meaningful advice and support more than a busybody. As do I."

This shut Suzaku up. Then he began...

"...How do you know I can do that? I'm just a soldier. I'm not even Britannian-born. I don't what I could even advise you about..."

"That's exactly why!" Euphemia exclaimed warmly. "Major Suzaku Kururugi, it has not been a year since I was appointed sub-viceroy of Area 11. There is much I don't know and that I am not aware of. That's why I need your eyes. I need your point of view on Area 11, as a Japanese person."

"..."

"Is that so hard to understand? Then, let me put it this way. Unlike Viceroy Cornelia, I am still learning and, therefore, knowledge is what I seek. Especially knowledge of things I would not be able to learn myself. That's why I need you outside, with your eyes and ears open, so that you can learn and tell me what you think. I expect that would be much needed for me in the future," said Euphemia, her explanation punctuated with a smile. "At least, that can be our official statement. Maybe I just want you

to continue going to school. Besides, you're my first knight...I'm still in shock."

"Yes, I feel the same way."

"Anyway, now you know where I'm coming from," Euphemia said playfully. "Okay, then it's settled. And if you still refuse, your lord will order you to go to school!"

Suzaku had no choice but to agree. Unless Euphemia felt like opening up the discussion again, he'd have to abide by her wishes. *I'm sure a chance to rectify the situation will arise.* Still, he was touched by her concern for him.

Just like Euphemia, I have so much to learn, Suzaku thought. *I'll figure things out bit by bit—how to act, how to deal with school. I'll do it because Euphemia chose me as her knight.* However, Suzaku's mind wasn't totally at ease yet. He was thinking about two people who he'd recently happily reconnected with. They were Lelouch vi Britannia and Nunnally vi Britannia, a brother and a sister who he spent his childhood with, when Area 11 was still called Japan.

Since he'd been knighted, Suzaku had begun thinking of them more frequently.



The battleship cut a swath of white through the broad ocean as it powered southwest from Tokyo Bay. It was headed for Shikine Island. Though small and remote, the island was populated with jungle life, as well as minor Britannian facilities.

Per the order of the sub-viceroy of Area 11, Euphemia li Britannia, Suzaku Kururugi was headed there.

Euphemia intended to welcome a person of nobility, the chancellor of the Empire, Schneizel el Britannia. He was one of Euphemia's stepbrothers and was paying a visit from the homeland. She intended to greet him at Shikine Island.

"But why is he coming to Shikine Island? Wouldn't it be safer for him to come directly to the Tokyo Settlement?" Suzaku asked Lloyd and Cecile in the second control room on the ship. Despite being promoted to Major, a rank higher than Cecil's and the same as Lloyd's, Suzaku's attitude towards the pair was the same as ever. They would always be his superiors. Perhaps he had the luxury of feeling that way since the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps ran independently from the rank and order military. Actually, Suzaku's promotion had prompted discussion with the higher-ups about a possible promotion for Lloyd and Cecile, but the information had not been disclosed to the two in question.

As there wasn't much to do in running the ship, Cecile was standing around, somewhat bored. She smiled politely at Suzaku's words and looked at Lloyd. "Yes, I'm curious about that myself."

"Oh... You're saying you don't know either, Cecile?" Suzaku gasped.

Lloyd said something even more surprising. "Ditto."

"What?!"

Lloyd now regarded Suzaku with the sternness of a professor calling in a student for an oral examination.

"I was counting on you Suzaku. Didn't Princess Euphemia say anything?"

"No... nothing in particular, except for the fact that it was to accommodate the chancellor's request."

"Oh well, then I should have been the one with prying eyes. Unfortunately, I haven't the slightest. I haven't even heard directly from His Highness Schneizel," said Lloyd.

"Maybe he really doesn't like me," he muttered cheerily.

"You still shouldn't have said anything. Your loose lips got our plans leaked onto the net," Cecile said glumly.

"That girl was so charming though, I couldn't resist," Lloyd said when he figured Cecile wasn't paying attention.

Suzaku didn't understand what he meant.

Just then, the door to the control room opened, and a soldier from another department walked in. "Major Kururugi. Princess Euphemia is calling you."

"Understood..." Suzaku started to answer, then looked to Lloyd for permission. He wondered if he'd get the answer of a technophile, the genius and crank combined, or...

The Major waved his hands, gesturing for Suzaku to go. "Lancelot won't be launched over the ocean... and we're in the ocean after all. Don't waste your chance. Go ahead and leave us old folks here. You young people should—" Cecile's firm hand around his neck shut him up. A smile lit up Suzaku's face.

"I'll see you later Suzaku."

"Oh, yes, thank you. Excuse me."

Suzaku left the control room to the banter of his colleagues.

"What do you mean, us, old folks?"

"Now now, I wasn't talking about *you*."

Euphemia was in the observatory, a room located above the battleship's bridge.

A guard opened the door, and Suzaku walked in to see Euphemia gazing pleasantly out at the ocean.

"I just got word from headquarters at the island," said Euphemia in a charming voice, as Suzaku politely bowed. "My brother Schneizel... I mean, the chancellor's arrival may be a little delayed." Suzaku reflexively tensed.

"Is something wrong?"

"No," Euphemia shook her head. "Well, I mean, they had some trouble, but its nothing you should be concerned about. It was simply an adjustment of the ship's controls. Avalon's still being tested."

Avalon? I've never heard of that name. I thought Schneizel's flagship was called the Leelen.

"Then, we'll wait for them when we arrive?" Suzaku confirmed.

"We may have to do so," said Euphy. "Could you relay that message to the members of the Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps? You've brought Lancelot with you, correct?"

"Yes, with General Darlton's permission."

"It may be inconvenient but I know that my brother Schneizel cares about his little baby. If possible, let's have Lancelot ready to welcome the chancellor with us."

ASEEC had been founded under Schneizel's name in the first place so the request was understandable; however, it was odd to hear somebody refer to a Knightmare as a baby. Lloyd would be delighted to hear that.

After relaying a few more business notes, Euphemia turned her eyes back to the window. Having not been excused, Suzaku stayed. Though the way the princess looked from behind wasn't notable in any fashion, Suzaku felt she was a tad down. Just the other day, she'd seemed in high spirits about seeing her dear brother soon, too...

As Suzaku was thinking about her, Euphemia said, "I had a fight with my sister."

"Excuse me?"

"With my big sister..."

Suzaku began to say something, but thought better of it. He knew what the problem was. There was only one person Euphemia referred to as her sister in public...and only one problem she could possibly have with that person.

He could tell from her bitter smile when she turned away from the window that she didn't blame anything on Suzaku. "I'm so useless. I guess I don't know anything."

"..."

"I want to make up, but I don't know how. I've never had a fight before. Could it be that I'm scared...of my sister?" Suzaku

knew a rhetorical question when he heard one. He knew they'd fought about him. He knew she wouldn't ask him for guidance.

From time to time, people get the urge to ask a question that they already know the answer to. The one who was asked the question then provides comforting words, even if they're not practical.

In the silence, Suzaku gave a quick glance to the ocean outside of the observatory. Clear blue seas as far as the eye could see. Their destination of Shikine Island was not yet visible. Sparkles of sunlight filled his vision.

Suzaku sighed and focused on the room again as he carefully chose his words. "It's not my intention to step into your disagreement, but there is one thing I would like to say, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind," said Euphemia.

"I'm sort of...um, envious."

"Envious?" Euphemia blinked her pretty eyelashes in astonishment and peered at Suzaku.

"Yes," Suzaku nodded. "There are many kinds of fights. Some people fight because they don't like each other and some people fight because they care about each other. What happened between you two is obviously the latter."

"Yes, but..."

"You two care greatly for each other and you don't hide it. That's why you're fighting right now and that's why I'm envious. I mean..." Suzaku said with a deprecating smile, "I haven't had a fight like that for a long time..."

Suzaku's subdued expression concerned Euphemia. As he saw her face get serious, he realized too late he'd said something he hadn't meant to. Euphemia asked Suzaku gently, "You don't have anybody to have a fight with...?"

"It's been a while," Suzaku tried to sound cheerful. "I used to have a friend who I fought a lot with, but I don't think we can do that anymore."

"May I ask why?"

"That's because..." *Most likely not because of him...It's because of me.*

Should I tell Euphemia about Lelouch and Nunnally? That was the issue that'd been distressing Suzaku lately. Lelouch vi Britannia and Nunnally vi Britannia were siblings sent to Japan basically as hostages eight years ago. They were reported dead in the war against Britannia that followed.

However, in reality, Suzaku's childhood friends still lived quietly in Area 11, hiding the fact that they were of the Imperial family.

If his new position was his priority, there was only one thing to do. That was, of course, to tell her. After all, Suzaku was now Euphemia's knight. Furthermore, Lelouch and Nunnally were Euphemia's stepsiblings. For a knight to withhold information about beloved family members seemed disloyal. Euphemia wasn't the type of person to begrudge them for being alive. If anything, she'd probably try to have a better treatment arranged for them.

At the same time, Suzaku knew that his friend Lelouch felt deserted by the royalty of Britannia. He felt hatred, animosity and fear, to the point where he changed his name and discarded his identity.

Now that he thought about it, Suzaku never heard anything judgmental toward Euphemia come out of Lelouch's mouth, nor Nunnally's. Nunnally even mentioned that Euphemia was a kind, wonderful person at the celebration party they held for Suzaku. She cupped her hands and lowered her voice so people around her wouldn't hear and said, "She used to play with us a lot too. I admire her and I am so happy that she likes you."

Although he knew it was pointless, he couldn't help wondering how things could have been different.

If Euphemia had been old enough to take on the position of sub-viceroy in Area 11 right after the war of seven years ago, how it would have been? How would it have affected Lelouch and Nunnally's situation? For starters, he was sure Euphemia would never have allowed them to be abandoned.

Suzaku started to see ways this hypothetical was applicable to the current situation. It was already a known fact that Euphemia didn't possess much authority in Area 11. The one with authority was her older sister, Cornelia; however, wouldn't it be something big for Euphemia to know the existence of Lelouch and Nunnally? It's not that Suzaku wanted them accepted in the Britannian Imperial family again. He couldn't imagine that Lelouch would even want that, regardless of how Nunnally felt. But how could it be a bad thing for Area 11's sub-viceroy to know the truth about her siblings?

Suzaku felt that it could be more significant for Nunnally. Lelouch would always be fine. He was smart, ambitious and capable. He'd thrive on his own without Euphemia's support, but not Nunnally—not with who she was and especially not with her handicap.

"But..." Suzaku hit a bump in his reasoning. He felt he could trust Euphemia completely. He knew that she would never take away the peaceful lives of Lelouch and Nunnally. But he couldn't overlook the fact that all three were royalty, not civilians.

The nexus of authority—Suzaku was well aware of how evil the place could be. He was also brought up in the miasma surrounding an authority figure because his father was the last Prime Minister of Japan, Genbu Kururugi. He knew now what he couldn't comprehend as a child. It was a world of demons. Evil swords named greed and conspiracy slashed people indiscriminately, cutting up their individual personalities and good will.

Suzaku reckoned the reason why Lelouch didn't ask Euphemia for help, despite his positive feelings toward her, wasn't due to pride, but awareness of that demonic world. Euphemia might not intend

to hurt Lelouch or Nunnally, but there was no telling when her knowledge might put a gun in someone's hands, a gun that would end up shooting Lelouch or Nunnally in the chest.

Either way, Suzaku didn't feel right telling Euphemia about Lelouch and Nunnally without Lelouch's permission. Still, he needed to somehow get the matter off his chest. If he tried to be loyal to his friend, he'd be disloyal to his lord. If he was loyal to his lord, he'd be disloyal to his friend. Back and forth it went. Seven years ago, he would have placed priority on the friend, but things were different now. *I mean, they have to be different. They're supposed to be.*

A glimpse of a green crested the horizon. It was tiny Shikine Island, the size of half of one twentieth of the Tokyo Settlement. It's only occupants were a scattering of stationed soldiers, including their relatives and affiliates.

The bridge bustled with activity in preparation of arrival. A crew member contacted each control department through the intercom; the steersman and his assistant diligently checked over the machines. Once Euphemia showed up with Suzaku in tow, the crew all stopped what they were doing and bowed to the Princess.

"There is no change in the estimated time of arrival, Your Highness, Princess Euphemia."

"That's good."

"We would like to have the escort ships patrol nearby water without getting into the bay. May I have your authorization?"

"I'm leaving orders regarding troop movement up to you, captain. Do as you will."

"Yes."

The battleship wasn't Euphemia's private ship, but its commander's seat on top of the bridge was reserved for her. A Britannian national flag hung behind it.

Euphemia took her seat; Suzaku took up his station standing next to her. Seemingly uncomfortable that he remained standing while she sat, Euphemia began surveying the area for a chair. Suzaku didn't mention that if even if she'd found one, he couldn't accept her offer.

Therefore he echoed her small sigh of disappointment with a sigh a relief. Depending on the circumstances, her compassionate side could get him in trouble. It wasn't uncommon for a subordinate on a battleship to remain standing next to their superior. If he was to sit down next to her, he surely would have been greeted with looks of disgust.

The concrete port of the harbor grew large outside the reinforced front window. Euphemia observed the scenery silently for a while, then said softly, "Suzaku."

"Yes, Miss Euphemia?"

"May I ask a question?"

"Whatever you'd like."

"How do you feel about, um..." Euphemia stopped. Then she lowered her voice even more and said, "...about Zero?"

Taken aback by the unexpected question, Suzaku felt his cheek muscle twitch for a split second. After thinking a moment, he asked, "You mean, what's my perspective on that man?"

"Well..." Euphemia tilted her head a little to one side. "Can I say, including that?"

"I see," Suzaku nodded slightly. "Then here is what I think. I think the way he's going about things is wrong."

Euphemia looked up to see Suzaku's face and asked, "Why?"

"He only relies on force. He handles every problem with force and thinks he can change things that way. That's nonsense. Any results gained through the wrong means aren't worth anything."

Suzaku had explicated own beliefs rather than describe his thoughts on Zero. Euphemia, however, hung her head and said,

"That means what my motherland, Britannia, is doing is just as meaningless. It's a nation that rules by force alone too."

Suzaku gasped. He had to look around to see who might have been listening. Fortunately, Euphemia's voice was soft and low as usual, and there seemed to be no one among the hardworking crew who could have heard.

"Princess Euphemia, that's..."

"Is it funny to hear that from a princess of Britannia?" she said with a smile this time. "But I've felt this way for a long time. Actually, it's the reason people thought I was weird back home. I was often scolded by my mother and my sister for it too."

For those in a position to scold her, her attitude would have been manageable. But for those who weren't, it must have caused dismay. Ten years previous, when she was in the early years of elementary school, Euphemia wrote an article that stunned her teacher. The first lines read, "I wish the world would become one. I wish Britannia, the Chinese Federation, the EU and everything would be gone and we could get along peacefully as one..."

The first statement wasn't so bad. Britannia had no problem uniting the world, so long as it was done justly under their flag. The problem was the second. If it hadn't been written by a child, one would assume the writer harbored treasonous intentions.

On her paper, the teacher wrote, "Princess Euphemia is a kind child who wishes for national peace." He must have sweated over that evaluation. It was strange, though. Her sister, Cornelia, believed strongly in military power and had no mercy for those who did not fall in line with the Empire's regulations. Although Euphemia admired her big sister, she apparently rejected some of her sister's core principles. Clearly, political views were not inherited through blood. However, did Euphemia have some sort of reason for breaking ideologically with her sister?

"You said you only believed in power..." Looking back at the bridge, Euphemia spoke again. "I think the true nature of Zero is more than what he shows us."

"But..."

"Did you know that I talked to him in person once?"

Suzaku had heard about that before. It was about a half year ago, during the hotel jacking incident at Lake Kawaguchi. Euphemia just happened to be at the hotel during a hostage situation with the Japan Liberation Front and was taken prisoner. Before rescue by the Black Knights, she she'd been face-to-face with Zero in the hotel.

"Zero aimed his gun at me back then."

Euphemia's voice was flat, but that made Suzaku not want to take his eyes off of her. "But unexpectedly, I didn't feel scared. I felt certain that he wouldn't shoot me."

A pause.

Suzaku hesitantly asked her "...Did he give you some kind of indication that he wouldn't?"

Euphemia shook her head again and looked up at Suzaku. She smiled, but seemed puzzled. "I'm sorry. It was just a feeling. I still have the same feeling. Unless I were to become a different person, I don't think he'd shoot. I think..." Euphemia grew serious "...Zero feels hostility towards Britannia. But that's not all I felt in him."

"You felt something else?"

"Sadness..." Euphemia replied in one word.

"He feels both hatred and sadness toward Britannia. That's why he wants to change things. Change Area 11...and Britannia. Yes, I'm sure of it."

Wordlessly, Suzaku focused on the floor. A moment later, he straightened his back and said, "I still don't agree with his methods."

"Neither do I. I agree with you. It's the heart of the problem."

"What do you mean?"

"In order to put an end to his methods, shouldn't we show him a better way? That's the right thing to do, but..." Euphemia

looked downcast. "I don't have the power to do so right now. Nor do I know what the right methods are, either."

Two eavesdroppers loitered in the hallway leading up to the bridge, overhearing the conversation between the princess and her knight. Lloyd leaned against the wall, speaking to Cecile in his usual playful tone. "I'm not sure what to say."

"Pardon me?"

"It's a scene both natural and somewhat strange."

Cecile was confused. She snuck a peek at the princess and the young man. "You can't ask too much of him. He just became her knight."

"That's not what I meant," Lloyd ruffled his hair in a gesture of confusion.

"Well...let me put it in a hypothetical. For example, Cecile, let's say you were employed by the military office of another country, say the EU or Chinese Federation. If you were told to die for your superior, how would you react?"

"That's..."

"That's what it means to be a knight." Behind his glasses, Lloyd's face became inscrutable, giving Cecile pause.

"...What do you mean?"

"Ha, nothing really." Lloyd tried to laugh it off but Cecile kept her eyes on him. Her superior officer shrugged his shoulders.

"It's strange for me to say, but a normal person wouldn't react as a knight does. It's easy to understand the motives of the one who gives the order. He or she desires for their will to be carried out. But what about the will of the subordinate? People who put themselves in a position where they're unable to refuse orders."

"..."

"They follow them because they are orders. If they didn't accept orders, they could never have become knights. They serve their lords loyally because they have been ordered to do so. I'd understand if he chafed under orders from time to time, or showed a bit of hesitance. But he doesn't. Never."

"... But, that's..."

"Because he's earnest and loyal? Because his boss's nice? No, Cecile. That's not it..." Lloyd was no longer smiling.

"I think it's because he's missing something as a human."

"All the better for one of Lancelot's components..." Lloyd muttered.

Cecile couldn't respond to his words.



A group of soldiers dispatched from the island's headquarters met an envoy from the battleship at the port. According to the soldiers, contrary to information they'd received aboard the ship, Schneizel was on time.

"Is it safe to assume that their ship will arrive here?"

Upon Euphemia's inquiry, the officer saluted and answered her. Yes. They'll arrive as scheduled."

"I see. Then, it would be more practical to wait here instead of at headquarters."
In the moment that Euphemia turned to grin at Suzaku and Lloyd, the island's headquarters suddenly let off a great plume of black smoke.

3

"First Troop, proceed straight ahead! Zero Troop, cover the flanks of the First Troop!"

Kyoshiro Tohdoh gave commands from the cockpit of his Knightmare, a Gekka.

An enemy Sutherland leapt into his view. Before it could even get a blow in with its tonfa, the Gekka slashed the Sutherland in two with its sword. The enemy unit exploded. In the blink of

an eye, Tohdoh had annihilated his enemy. The Knightmare's speed made such an action possible, but the fact that Tohdoh continued to issue orders while fighting spoke to his superb technique.

"Second Troop, temporarily retreat toward eight o'clock! Wait until you can confirm the target. After confirmation, wait at your assigned post!"

His ability to make calm, accurate judgments while executing bold movements in the heat of a battle even made Lelouch jealous.

Tohdoh mentally distanced himself enough from the mission to be an effective commander. His mission this time...

Zero, leader of Black Knights, had formulated the mission upon learning that Euphemia, a Britannian Princess, and her knight, Suzaku Kururugi, would be meeting Schneizel el Britannia, Britannian Chancellor, on Shikine Island. Away from the heavily protected settlements or military bases, on that remote island, they were to capture Suzaku Kururugi and his white Knightmare. That suited Tohdoh fine. It was a decent plan, and rather straightforward. It was certainly a plan of action he preferred over Diethard's ruthless suggestion of assassination.

What did Tohdoh think of the strategy?

After joining Zero during the Chofu incident, Tohdoh had become something like a military advisor to the Black Knights. It was not because he necessarily agreed with the principles of the Black Knights or was drawn to Zero's personality. He merely determined that following Zero was the most effective method to rebel against Britannia. Unlike certain members of the Black Knights, who trusted Zero beyond a shadow of a doubt, Tohdoh kept his distance and observed. He had experience following the orders of a powerful leader who made decisions of national importance, which made it easier for him to remain slightly disinterested. Tohdoh's will was stubborn, but also more flexible than one might expect of a military officer.

Honestly, Tohdoh harbored some doubts about capturing Suzaku and Euphemia. The two weren't military threats to Zero or the Black Knights. Tohdoh was aware that the popularity of the two young people, and the positive expectations they were raising amongst the Japanese people was a political issue. It was the worst idea to respond to politics with force. If it was a battle of ideologies, then the battle should be fought in the arena of public opinion. Zero and the Black Knights had greatly advanced their cause of protecting the oppressed, and many Japanese people's lives had been improved. Surely that mattered.

What should I do...? Tohdoh's thoughts continued to bug him throughout the battle.

I'll observe the situation for a little bit longer. Euphemia didn't have much power over Area 11. Suzaku lacked organized support, and without grassroots support, their idealism was doomed to failure. Especially since Euphemia's big sister, Viceroy Cornelia, held all the real power. Cornelia possessed very Britannian ideas, to the point that not even her sister could sway her away from them. That was why neither Euphemia nor Suzaku could satisfy the Japanese people. They end up betraying their trust, and when that happened, Zero could finish them off.

It didn't occur to Tohdoh to place any value on the fact that he had once been Suzaku's teacher. Their paths parted at Chofu. Tohdoh was too logical to be sentimental. He showed no mercy to his enemies, and never had.

"Third Troop, proceed north along the coastline! If Euphemia and Suzaku's troop tries to leave the island, cooperate with the submarine to stop them! Fourth Troop, cover Rakshata!"

Whatever his feelings, it was too late to question the mission now. And again, Tohdoh wasn't opposed to it. He was fine with capturing Suzaku Kururugi, except for one nagging concern.

After Suzaku was captured, which could be done, how did they intend to treat him? Frankly, the Black Knights couldn't kill him as a betrayer of Japan. That would turn the act into a terrorist

one, and the Black Knights would lose support. Some of the Japanese people were inspired by the boy. If his blood stained the Black Knights' hands, they would become merciless murderers. But Kururugi himself would become a martyr to Britannian sympathizers. The Black Knights would find themselves under attack by Britannia and its supporters alike. Alive, Kururugi was a symbol of hope, yes, but dead he would be a powerful symbol as well. In fact, for the Britannians and their supporters, the best outcome they could hope for was the boy's martyrdom. Unlike the living, who could talk and act of their own will, the dead were vulnerable to being shaped into anybody's ideals.

Of course, Zero had a plan, he always did. *If not, whether or not this mission succeeds, you'll lose*, Tohdoh uttered these words of caution to Zero to himself.

Unlike Tohdoh, many of the other Black Knights wholeheartedly believed in Zero's version of justice.

"Tamaki! Cover my back!"

"You got it!"

Inside the Guren Mk-II's cockpit, Kallen Kozuki concentrated on the strategy panel beside the main monitor. Her eyes were full of conviction. A few days previous, the Black Knights had been reorganized, and Kallen had been assigned the position of captain of the Zero troop. In other words, the leader of the Black Knights and personal guard of Zero.

Right after the Black Knights had formulated the current mission, Kallen had a chance to talk to Zero.

"We won't kill Suzaku Kururugi. We won't gain anything from it," Zero confidently proclaimed through his mask. "Kallen, our purpose this time is to destroy the idealistic dream that Britannia and their followers are trying shove down people's throats. We'll put a stop to their evil intention of lulling Japan into

a false peace and serenity. We don't need to kill Suzaku to achieve that. Rather, we need him to live so that he can reject Princess Euphemia...I mean, Britannia itself, on his own. Through his actions, people will realize that Britannia isn't worth their trust or expectations."

"But, that's..."

"After capturing Suzaku Kururugi, I'll make him choose—the Black Knights over Euphemia. He'll end up fighting against Britannia. Trust me."

Trust me... Of course, his words were enough for Kallen. *He's always said that before making miracles happen for us and Japan. It's going to be the same this time.*

Unlike during the Chofu incident, Kallen resolved not to show any mercy to Suzaku, despite the fact that they were classmates and fellow student council members. Suzaku was her enemy and she would fight him. She'd made up her mind on that, but still...Zero's order to capture Suzaku alive relieved her. If Suzaku joined their side, that would even better.

If Zero can make a miracle happen, then it's my place to...

It's my place to be his shield and protect him.

The enemy Sutherland in front of her got a brief taste of the Guren Mk-II's clawed hand before exploding under its radiation surge. The Guren surpassed Tohdoh's Gekka in terms of firepower. Kallen and the Guren Mk-II were a deadly combination, the best the Black Knights had. And thanks to Rakshata, a technical genius who joined them recently, they no longer were experiencing technical problems with their units.

"Now! Come on, Suzaku...!" Kallen whispered in her cockpit. Suddenly, something crashed into the Black Knight's formation.



The slash harkens shot from the white Nightmare cut off both arms of its enemy's Nightmare. Inside it's cockpit, pilot Suzaku Kururugi's attention was already directed at another figure, this one red.

... *That's the red Nightmare.*

He didn't think it was impossible to defeat it, but knew it would be a tough fight. Especially, like in the Chofu incident, if he allowed it to be guarded by its allies, the machine's mobility and fighting performance would be maximized against him. If he could keep his distance, the VARIS rifle would take it down.

Before he could actually implement his plan to keep his distance, his opponent made an unexpected move. Although it didn't show its back to Suzaku, the red Nightmare suddenly jumped backward and sped away. Suzaku couldn't make heads or tails of why it would abandon a winning battle. But then, Lancelot's main sensor caught something. It appeared in telephoto mode. It was a black Burai, and a figure was leaning out of the cockpit to greet him. The man wore a black cape and a mask.

"Zero?"

Because the red Nightmare had retreated, there was nothing between them now. Suzaku reflexively hefted the VARIS but stopped. The black Burai was too far, even for the VARIS. He had to be closer... However, as if reading Suzaku's mind, Zero's Burai disappeared from Suzaku's monitor. The land spinners in its legs kicked up a cloud of dust as Zero sped off.

He wants me to follow.

Suzaku knew it, but that didn't stop him from pursuing Zero in the Lancelot.

"Please go help out at headquarters."

That had been Euphemia's response to Suzaku's insistence that he remain by her side to protect her.

"Don't worry about me. There's security here. So, Suzaku, you must show your valor as a knight. So that we may finally silence all these naysayers."

As it was his lord's order, he couldn't disobey. Nor could he return empty-handed. He needed to capture Zero, who had come to lead the anti-government movement. Such a deed would be a military honor none could fail to recognize. He didn't have the option to let Zero go, even if his only other option was to fall into a trap. Of course, Suzaku was desperate to show results. But at the same time, he was making a grave miscalculation of his own value. It never occurred to him that the Black Knights' target was not Euphemia or Schneizel—but Suzaku himself.

The back of Zero's Burai grew closer and closer. The Burai were remodeled units based off an older generation machine than Suzaku's Lancelot, and they were no match for the white Nightmare's mobility. Suzaku readied his VARIS. But suddenly, the Burai's back disappeared from Suzaku's monitor. It was below him! The two units had entered a sand pit that looked to have been excavated by a mortar explosion. Suzaku's opponent skated into the middle of it. There was nowhere to hide. Had Zero brought Suzaku down there to have him shot at from all directions? No, that didn't make sense as long as Zero was down there too. Furthermore, even if that was the plan, Lancelot wasn't so slow as to be unable to avoid a barrage of fire. Whatever their motives, Suzaku wasn't about to let Zero get away from him. He twisted his control stick to make Lancelot jump. At the same time, he shot his slash harkens. Their rapid fire struck the Burai's shoulder before spitting across the sand. By then, the Lancelot easily leaped over its enemy's body, bringing Suzaku face-to-face with Zero's unit. He aimed the VARIS at the Burai.

"Zero! This is it..."

In the cockpit of the Burai, Zero—no, Lelouch—emitted a low, cunning laugh. The next moment, abnormal vibrations shot through Lancelot's body.

"What...!?"

"What's going on!?" demand Euphemia. She'd been trying to follow the unfolding battle but now turned to look at Cecile in surprise. The woman was standing in front of a control console, eyes wide and trained on the keyboard in front of her. She didn't respond to Euphemia's question.

A scratchy voice came from the communication device attached to the console. It was directly connected to the cockpit of Lancelot. But the voice heard was not from Suzaku Kururugi, the Lancelot's pilot.

"We need to talk, Kururugi."

Euphemia gulped. That voice...belonged to Zero. He was talking to Suzaku from somewhere outside.

He addressed the immobile Lancelot, frozen in the middle of the sand pit.

"I suggest you come out. You'll be treated as a prisoner under international law. Of course, if you don't want to negotiate, we could just gun you down."

At his words, Euphemia felt a chill along her spine. Leaving the strategy board, Euphemia ran to Cecile.

"I don't care! Tell Suzaku to abandon the unit. But what's wrong with the Lancelot? Why can't it move?"

Right when it had been about to shoot, Lancelot's functions had stalled out, right in front of the enemy. However, it wasn't so much an internal malfunction, as...

"Nightmares are powered by sakuradite. There must be some interference in the part that makes an organic connection with Yggdrasil Drive...." Cecile could hardly believe what she was saying. Another person added in an unusually sober voice behind her.

"A Gefjun Disturber..." It was Lloyd. Cecile spun around.

"You mean...!"

"But they're partially using it as a jamming mechanism." Lloyd started to sound like he was talking to himself. "I thought

it only theoretical. What a fool I am. It really is you, Rakshata..." Darkened eyes narrowed behind glasses.

"Hmm..." Standing above the sand pit, Rakshata Chawla smoked her pipe and casually observed. "It looks like the range and endurance still need a little work."

Below her, the white Nightmare remained frozen. In fact, Zero's Burai was also caught in the interference field and couldn't move either. Not that it was an issue. Twelve Pile Pods were stationed under the ground surrounding the sand pit. Outside the field, a whole troop of Black Knights had trained their assault rifle targets on the white Nightmare.

"At the very least, I could extend the range of this little toy to an area the size of this island. How groundbreaking." Even with improvements, the practical applications would be limited. The current situation was a textbook example. It was notable that the technology behind the disruptor came not from the military, but from a specific medical field. Rakshata shrugged the thought off, frowning slightly. There was no point in thinking about that. "What's done is done."

Rakshata removed the pipe from her lips and turned her back on the scene.

"Take care of the rest, Zero."

Zero emerged from the Burai, gun in hand.

Suzaku exited the Lancelot and stood before the gun, fearless.

4

The faint call of seagulls echoed in the air.

The sky above them was high and blue. *How ironic*, Suzaku thought. *Surrounded by a peaceful sky and beautiful sea, humans keep fighting. Well, after all, if everyone wants to fight... Otherwise it would be laughable. Maybe there's a supreme being watching from above and laughing...*

"Suzaku Kururugi," said the masked Zero. "I'll get straight to the point. I want you to join me."

The irony was just rich today! *Is this man teasing me? He points a gun at me, surrounds me with Nightmares, then asks if I want join him?*

"Is that a threat? Well you can forget it. There's no value in results obtained by the wrong methods," Suzaku delivered his message clearly, holding himself straight, but inwardly marking this as the point where he ought to give up on returning home alive. From the beginning, Suzaku hadn't intended on even getting out of his Lancelot. He only did so because his lord, Euphemia, ordered him to. Of course, Euphemia must have been concerned for Suzaku's safety and so told him to comply with Zero's instructions. He was thankful for that but he didn't think it very worthwhile. He and the Lancelot had thwarted the Black Knights' activities many times. Though the Lancelot's value as a weapon was high, they had no reason to keep its pilot, Suzaku, alive.

No, it was false to say that Suzaku had no value. While Zero and Black Knights wasted their time on him, it gave the headquarters of this island time to reestablish order and allow Euphemia, Lloyd, and the others to escape safely...

"Ha!" Zero's sudden laugh interrupted Suzaku's train of thought.

"You say results gained the wrong way are worthless..."

Suzaku raised his eyebrows.

"So, you would say the peace we have now has no value?"

"Huh?"

What is this man talking about? Suzaku got a bad feeling but Zero was just getting started.

"This is a hypothesis. Seven years ago, the former Japan unconditionally surrendered to Britannia after only one month of war. But if Japan hadn't surrendered at that point, and had continued resisting, what do you think things would be like now?"

"..."

"Japan had reached a point where it could no longer fight against Britannia on her own. There were only two super powers in the world with equivalent power to Britannia—the EU and the Chinese Federation. These countries were no better than Britannia. Even if they'd accepted Japan's requests to aid their war efforts, their true purposes wouldn't have been to defend Japan, but to jointly control Japan's abundant sakuradite resources."

"...That's..."

"In other words, if Japan hadn't chosen surrender at that point, this place would have become a pawn in the power play between major nations like Britannia and the Chinese Federation. Continuous warfare between those nations might have been played out over Japanese soil. However, that was prevented. Yes...with his own death, your father, Genbu Kururugi, curbed the military's desire for continued conflict."

His words touched Suzaku's heart deeply. His conviction to reject Zero's arguments slightly weakened. A bead of sweat slid down his forehead. Something that wasn't logic or emotion, but more like instinct set off alarms in his brain. *No. No. If I let this man keep talking, something bad is going to happen. He'll lead me down a road I do not want to travel.*

But against his will, Suzaku could only respond with, "... That's right. And I've been fighting to preserve my father's peace. Even if we had to sacrifice Japan as a nation...it was preferable to people dying because of meaningless wars..."

Zero scoffed.

"And humanitarianism is laudable. But considering the situation that the Japanese people live under in Area 11 and Britannia's discriminatory policies, you really should be setting higher standards. In any case, I'm not concerned so much with your vision of humanity so much as your vision of justice."

"What...?"

"It's as you said, Suzaku Kururugi. There's no value in results obtained by the wrong methods. Then, let me ask you this. Seven

years ago, Japan chose to surrender. Was that the result obtained by the right method?"

"I venture to claim that it wasn't. Prime Minister Kururugi, elected by the people, didn't choose surrender. That decision was selfishly made for him by his killer!"

Suzaku felt like the sky was falling on him, grinding him into powder. Zero kept talking.

"I don't know the true intentions of Prime Minister Genbu Kururugi at that time. However, there's one thing for sure. Regardless of what he was thinking, he was not able to execute it under a legitimate right. Someone else prevented his will by taking his life. Do you understand...? The Prime Minister, the man who was supposed to represent the nation and its citizens, was murdered and someone else determined the future of the nation and its citizens. The will of the people was stolen from them, by a lone criminal pursuing their own selfish agenda!"

Suzaku stumbled, shocked as if he had been hit by lightning.

"Um... That... That's..."

This man...

He knows everything. He knows about what happened seven years ago. And he knows what role I played—I mean, happened to play. But why? How does he know? That's been hidden away in the darkness...

"How... How do you know about that...?" Suzaku's trembling voice echoed mercilessly off the cold mask.

He didn't know how much time had passed.

When he came to his senses, Suzaku realized Zero was right next to him. Looking away from Suzaku, he lowered his gun.

Then, Zero said quietly to Suzaku, "There's only one way for you to atone now."

"..."

"You can give the Japanese people the choice that was taken away from them seven years ago. The option to fight Britannia."

His words pulled Suzaku back to reality.

"...Fighting? That again..."

"It's an option worth exploring. Or would you rather drive the masses towards a future dictated by your own egotism? Isn't that completely against your sense of justice?"

Suzaku fell silent. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Join me Suzaku. As long as you're on Britannia's side, you won't be able to resolve your internal struggle. I can help you resolve that conflict."

Zero's confident words were suddenly interrupted by an screeching electronic noise squealing forth from the communication device mounted on Suzaku's ear. It was from headquarters, requesting his reply. Suzaku glanced at Zero. He asked in a low voice, "...May I take this?"

"As you wish. But don't forget your position right now."

Zero must have meant Suzaku wouldn't be getting the luxury of confidential communication. Suzaku received call in open audio mode.

"...Yes?"

"Major Suzaku Kururugi, this...is Lieutenant Colonel Fayer... of the Shikine Island...base command."

His speech was rather garbled due to the jamming effect in the immediate vicinity.

"This is...Major Suzaku Kururugi. Lieutenant Colonel Fayer."

"Major Suzaku Kururugi, as of now...I'm assigning you a very important mission. We are now...launching surface-to-surface missiles towards the terrorists! Major Kururugi, you are ordered to keep Zero there!"

"What...?"

It was not Suzaku, but Zero who expressed his dismay and anger.

"Nonsense! They're giving up their subordinate to die!"

Suzaku regained his full consciousness with that. No, it wasn't exactly regained. He just had an order to follow. An order that even Zero could recognize.

"... Yes, my lord..."

No sooner had Suzaku quietly affirmed his orders than he pounced on Zero. As the other boy was obviously not expecting the assault, it was easy for Suzaku to steal Zero's gun and twist his arm. He pointed the gun at the side of Zero's mask.

"Nngh!? Suzaku, you..."

"I'm sorry...I don't agree with your views!"

"Why, you little...!"

Kallen, who had been watching the situation unfold, screamed with anger in the cockpit of her Guren-Mk II. As she reached for her control stick, field commander Tohdoh sharply reprimanded her.

"Don't move! The field will affect you too!"

"But..." Kallen had to do something or Zero would...

The turning of the tables was apparent not only to the Black Knights, but their enemy as well.

Euphemia faced a group of uniformed military officers. They were officers of the island's national guards, who had been assigned to protect her. But as they explained the situation to her, Euphemia momentarily got very pale and flushed red with anger.

"Who gave that order? Suzaku Kururugi is my knight! At the very least, it is my right to command him and his Nightmare!"

No one flinched at her rebuke. An especially big captain calmly responded to her.

"It was a para-level one order. I'm sure Your Highness knows this, but if such an order is given in the colonies, it can only be countermanded by the three high class officials' consent or the viceroy herself."

"Weren't you listening?!" Euphemia's voice raised one octave. "Who issued this order? I demand to speak with them at once!"

"A para-level one order, sub-viceyroy Euphemia."

Euphemia bit her lip. But it wasn't in her nature to give up so easily. If she was the type of girl who'd be calmed with an excuse like that, she wouldn't have decided upon a knight against her sister's will.

"Out of my way!"

Not giving anyone time to stop her, Euphemia lifted her long skirt and dashed away. She ran past the captain of the royal guard towards a single Nightmare. It had been prepared to protect Euphemia and a pilot was about to board. Euphemia ran to it, and pushing the pilot away, she grabbed its automatic ladder.

"What...? Princess Euphemia!?"

"What are you trying to do?"

"Contact the base!" Euphemia yelled out as she was lifted up. "Tell them there's a chance I'll be caught in the attack. See if they'll launch then!"

"Please stop this! Think about what you're doing!" The captain of the royal guard yelled as he barreled towards the Nightmare. But before he could stop her, Euphemia roared the machine to life.

Gun held in his right hand, Suzaku used his left to throw Zero into the cockpit of the Lancelot.

"Ngh! You're gonna die here as well. You don't have a problem with that?"

Suzaku didn't say a word. The communicator burst forth more static.

"...Major Kururugi. Your sacrifice will not be in vain."

The voice caused Suzaku's shoulder to flinch slightly.

"We're about to put an end to the most dangerous criminal our homeland has ever known. They'll speak of your bravery for generations to come!"

"Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up!!!"

As if the unreasonable order was meant for him, Zero banged his black-gloved fist onto the panel in rage, trying to injure the poisonous voice.

Zero's reaction threw Suzaku for a second. But immediately he shook his head and steadied the gun at Zero. "Be quiet, Zero."

"You..." The words slipped like oil off Suzaku. "...fool!"

The echoing words carried up to the sky, which bore a flying dark shadow.

"Missile approach confirmed!"

To his subordinate's nervous report, Tohdoh violently clicked his tongue.

"All Knightmares! Target on those missiles and throw up a barrage. Empty your guns if you have to!" Tohdoh knew his order was impossible to follow. A long-range attack was one of the most effective ways to wipe out an enemy's Knightmares.

A Knightmare's assault rifle or anti-air cannons could shoot down one or two missiles. Unfortunately for Tohdoh, the number of missiles indicated on his screen exceeded that limit. If he wanted to accurately intercept the supersonic missiles, he'd need a weapon he didn't have.

"All machines, scatter and continue firing! Don't get too close to each other. You could be destroyed with one shot!"

They were no longer able to concentrate on Suzaku and Lancelot, still in the middle of the sand pit. Their leader, Zero, was stranded there. Should he have Rakshata turn off the Gefjun Disturber and rescue him with their Knightmares...? No, Tohdoh immediately retracted the thought, knowing it impossible. If

the device was turned off, the white Knightmare would also be revived. Besides, Zero was the prisoner now. If he tried to rescue Zero...

"!?"

On his main monitor, Tohdoh saw a girl jump out of the cockpit of the red Knightmare and dash towards the white Knightmare in the middle of the sand pit.

"Suzaku! Release Zero! It's Kallen Stadtfeld from the student council!!!" Tossing aside the visor that obscured her face, Kallen screamed, "Look this way!"

What's going on...? wondered Tohdoh. But before he could stop her, a blip on one of his monitors gave him pause. The missiles headed towards them suddenly changed course, many of them in random directions. Tohdoh immediately knew the cause. It must be the submarine. The Black Knights' submarine had stealth capabilities thanks to Rakshata's jammer technology, and it was being directed at the missiles.

"Okay! We can do it now..."

Tohdoh's direct subordinate, Asahina, chirped through the radio, but Tohdoh didn't agree with him. His instincts, not logic, told him to pay attention to the bad feeling growing in his gut. Suddenly, Tohdoh realized the enemy's intentions.

"Every machine, watch your back!"

"What...?"

"The missiles coming at you are decoys! The real attack is still coming!"

As if to prove Tohdoh's words, a huge dark shape blotted out the sky above them.

Euphemia hurried along the coast in the royal guard's Knightmare.

The Knightmare she'd stolen was amphibious, a Portman. It was not meant for battles. Neither was Euphemia battle-ready. Although she'd been trained to operate a Knightmare, even being near a battle was dangerous for her. Fortunately, the general chaos in this particular sortie was working to her advantage. The Black Knights were too busy and her allies couldn't shoot at her to stop her. Slowly but surely, she was making an unfettered approach on her knight, Suzaku Kururugi.

Suzaku...

You can't die yet...

At his knighting ceremony, he had pledged to protect her. But, she pledged at the same time. She would never have said it out loud, but she pledged to protect him.

Following the lights indicated in the screen, Euphemia landed her Portman on a forest road adjacent to the beach, an incredible vibration shaking her body. She realized how difficult it must be to pilot a Knightmare in a real battle. But for Euphemia, she had greater concerns than piloting on her mind. Who ordered Suzaku to be put in a situation where he would be fighting for the sake of his allies? She had. Would Suzaku be sacrificed for the sake of those allies? No. She could never accept that.

Through the trees, she caught a glimpse of her final destination—a large sandy pit.

I see him!

She also saw enemies. However, Euphemia had no intention of stopping. All she wanted to do was reach Suzaku, and use her power as a princess to stop the Britannian army from making indiscriminate attacks against him...

When she inclined her control stick to increase the speed of the Portman, she noticed something. At first she thought her main monitor was having an electrical failure, until she realized that something was darkening the sky outside. Euphemia

directed the focal point of the Factsphere, the Knightmare's sensor, upward.

... For a second, it looked like a castle in the sky.

Of course, it wasn't a castle floating in midair, but a ship. Not a battleship that cruised the sea, or the occupation army's G1 base running on the ground, but a flying vessel. Plated in thick armor and protected with special shields, its form was that of an intimidating fortress.

"That's..." Euphemia knew who it was. "That's my big brother's Avalon!"

"Wh-What's...that?"

"A battleship!? A flying battleship!" Tohdoh exclaimed at the fearful and confused crew member through the communicator panel. Then to his soldiers, he barked, "You'll be shot at! Shield yourself with trees and don't give the enemy a line of sight. Fire under cover only!"

Tohdoh's level-headed orders didn't stand a chance against the chaotic situation. Trained resistance organization they might be, but disciplined military force the Black Knights were not. Rather, even though they were disciplined to a degree, the arrival of the incomprehensible flying ship threw everything out of whack.

The airship aimed machine gun turrets attached to its sides at the ground, firing a hail of shots. Two Burai that couldn't comply with Tohdoh's orders were completely destroyed. Furthermore, the Gefjun Disturbers blipped out of existence when additional shots blew up the underground field-generating pods.

"Ugh..."

Tohdoh was about to fire his Gekka's slash harkens at the enemy's machine guns when the airship's bottom hatch slowly opened.

"What is that...?"

Inside of the dark hatch, two huge sinister eyes gleamed.

"A soldier must follow his orders!" Suzaku yelled inside Lancelot's cockpit. Zero retorted, just as loudly, "Ha! Certainly easier than following your heart!"

"Ngh!"

"How do you feel about this?"

"You're wrong! I have rules that I made and I need to live by!"

The two continued arguing, not oblivious to the darkening ground outside the cockpit, but more interested in yelling at each other.

"Dammit, Suzaku! You're going to die!"

"It's better than breaking the rules!"

"You stubborn fool...!"

Zero placed his left hand on the side of his mask, opening the shutter that exposed his left eye.

...What?

The eye bore a strange red mark, like a bird soaring toward the sky.

"Live!!" Zero commanded.

The whole milieu had transpired over just dozens of seconds.

On the bridge of the floating battleship, a melancholy man tapped his baton to the floor.

Immediately following, the hatch of the battleship swung open, and the powerful shots fired from within blanketed the earth.

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

Interval

May 2009, Britannia

Let's go back in time for a moment.

In order to understand their value, let's return to a time when they were children, and knew nothing, when everything was peaceful and tranquil.



The aroma of marsh rosemary filled the air. Little birds gathered and sipped water from a cooling fountain. Pink flowers swayed in the calming spring breeze. Underneath a roofed passageway connecting two buildings, two small figures walked across alabaster flagstones.

"Look at this, Lelouch! Our sister Cornelia gave this to me."

"Yeah, its very nice, Nunnally."

The raven-haired prince and his sister, a princess, babbled to each other joyfully. Neither was over ten years old. The princess held a pretty doll in her arms, also a princess, one with big eyes and a blue dress.

The prince's name was Lelouch vi Britannia and the princess' name was Nunnally vi Britannia.

"But I saw the same doll in Euphy's room before..."

"Hee hee! I got the same one as Sister Euphy's because we are so close."

"Then, you have to show it to Euphy next time."

"Yeah!"

The happy conversation between the young brother and sister was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a group of figures. The groups approached them from the far side of the corridor. The shadows did not belong to children, rather, to a lady in an especially glamorous outfit and her entourage of well-dressed ladies.

The smiles vanished from the prince and princess' faces.

Before the group reached them, Lelouch pushed Nunnally toward the edge of the pathway. The pair stood side by side to bow their heads as the group passed by. Suddenly, the woman leading the procession stopped walking.

"What's that ladies?"

Her face was caked in makeup. Her slitted eyes stared straight ahead, as if Lelouch and Nunnally weren't there. Of course, she was only behaving as such because the children were there.

"Don't you smell something mechanical?"

Standing next to Lelouch, Nunnally's shoulders trembled. As if protecting her, Lelouch made one step forward. He casually looked up at the lady's profile.

"How are you, Empress Gabriella?"

The lady ignored his greeting.

"Or, is this the smell of blood?"

Holding her doll, Nunnally stepped closer to Lelouch, seeking his shelter. Lelouch frowned.

"Would you like to say something to us?"

To the boy's apparently hostile inquiry, the lady in question looked at Lelouch and Nunnally for the first time. With her hand covering her mouth, she said, "Oh!" with a sarcastic tone.

"Well, well. I was wondering who you were. Aren't you the

eleventh prince who's becoming known as a smart little boy? The son of a bloody queen."

The lady kept insulting him. "What an attitude you have! You're just like your mother!"

Suddenly, she stretched her arm over Lelouch's head. She wasn't trying to touch him, instead, she reached out to Nunnally. The lady's skinny arm snatched away Nunnally's doll.

"Give it back!"

Looking at Nunnally's anguished pleading face, the lady grinned.

"What's this? A doll? It can't be. No child of that woman would play with dolls. Playing with dead bodies is more suitable for you, don't you think?"

The women behind the lady giggled.

"Empress Gabriella! She's probably using that doll as a dead body."

"She must be thinking that she killed that doll on a battlefield."

"How awful! Yet so fitting."

"Ha ha! How true."

The lady whom the other women called Gabriella nodded to their comments with satisfaction and laughed spitefully.

"But this doll is too clean to be a dead body. At least, well... one or both of her arms should be broken."

The lady yanked the doll's arm, trying to break it with all her might. Nunnally's tearful eyes widened.

"No, don't!"

"Stop! Stop it! Don't you know who gave it to her...?"

Angered, Lelouch forgot who the lady was and reached to stop her. Then, all of a sudden, something happened. A violent wind blew Gabriella off balance and she dropped the doll.

"What in the world...?"

Surrounded by her entourage, the lady looked to the source of the wind. In a split second, Lelouch took advantage of the

distraction to quickly retrieve Nunnally's doll and then hide with Nunnally behind one of the columns supporting the archway.

"Hello! Lelouch and Nunnally. I'm back!"

The children perked up. Nunnally yelled with excitement, "Mother!"

The powerful wind still funneled through the garden, coming from an intimidating giant. The giant held a rifle in its right hand. It was the third generation Knightmare Frame, a Ganymede prototype. The person in the cockpit was a beautiful lady with black hair, someone seemingly unfit for the threatening Knightmare.

"Sorry I'm so late!"

Her name was Marianne. She was known as Marianne vi Britannia, Empress of the Holy Empire of Britannia. Lelouch and Nunnally jumped out from their hiding place behind the column to run toward her. The lady from earlier screeched at their mother.

"M-Marianne! How unseemly of you to go in and out of the palace with such a thing!"

Marianne responded to her by raising her rifle. Accompanied by a mechanical operational sound, Ganymede leveled the rifle at the lady.

"Agh...!"

"Oh, excuse me. This is just a prototype. It doesn't operate as precisely as I would like." Marianne smiled at her from the cockpit like an angel. "Unfortunately, I can't guarantee your safety. I suggest you hide deep inside the palace or somewhere else as soon as possible. You think you can do that, Queen Gabriella?"

The rifle in Ganymede's hand shook back and forth. The lady's face turned white.

"Y...you savage! I won't forget about this."

With much ado, the lady ran off toward the building. Her entourage quickly followed her.

"Thank you for your cooperation... But, it seems I've already forgotten all about it." Marianne manipulated her Ganymede into

a kneeling position and smoothly disembarked. Empress she might be, but no lady's dress adorned her. Instead, she wore a more knightly officer's uniform. Nunnally ran toward her and jumped into her arms.

"Mother, you were cool!"

"Oh dear, Nunnally. You thought that violent behavior was cool? You make me very happy."

Lifting up her daughter with one arm, Marianne stroked the child's hair lovingly. Then, she looked past her little girl to the boy with black hair standing some distance away. He didn't display his sister's exuberance, but it wasn't that he had anything against his mother. He was starting to become a little embarrassed about expressing his childish love for her. He also felt it unfair to take his mother's attention away from Nunnally, especially at his age and with being a boy. Of course, Marianne understood what he was thinking.

With Nunnally still in her arms, Marianne quietly walked toward Lelouch.

"You've been good, Lelouch! You tried to protect Nunnally. You're a good big brother."

"Y...yeah."

Lelouch looked down with embarrassment. "I'll protect Nunnally. So don't worry about us."

Marianne looked blissful.

"You're right. You have to protect what's really important to you by yourself. Soooo," As she was saying it, she knelt on the ground to gather both Nunnally and Lelouch in an embrace, "you'll protect Nunnally and I'll protect you!"

"Huh!? S-stop it, Mother. I'm embarrassed!"

"You two are my treasures. We'll be together forever..."

A blushing Lelouch struggled to get away, but to no avail. He was forced to accept the warm, loving embrace. Soon both brother and sister closed their eyes in joy and squeezed their mother.

Before she left her room, the second princess of the Britannian Empire, Cornelia, checked her clothes for any untidiness.

It was a rare instance of preening. Of course, as a princess, Cornelia paid attention to maintaining a standard in her presentation, but it was true that she didn't care about what others thought of her. At least, she was interested in internal qualities more than external ones, at least more than most girls of almost twenty. In reality, she'd always looked a bit like a handsome, noble young knight, a look that made her rather popular among the princesses of her age group.

But even Cornelia got nervous when she visited this room. Perhaps it was because there wasn't any other from which she more desired respect.

After confirming her clothes and hair to be in immaculate condition, and taking a deep breath, Cornelia rapped on the door. Immediately, someone responded to her.

"Come in, Cornelia?"

"Yes, Your Highness. Since I heard you were back, I came to say hello, Empress Marianne," cheerfully responded Cornelia. "I brought something from my father. May I come in?"

"My door is always open to you. Please come in."

Following the sound of Marianne's laughter, Cornelia stepped into the room. The faint scent of static greeted her. There were cut flowers in a vase on the table, probably clipped fresh from the garden. On the other side of the table, a tall figure cut a stately silhouette from the bright, shining sun. Empress Marianne's brilliant black hair contrasted the sparkling light.

"Welcome back to the Aries Villa."

"I wasn't away long enough to deserve such a formal welcome. Under the Emperor's orders, I just went to oversee the development plant of a new Knightmare model, which will be tested in battle soon."

To Cornelia's solemn salute, Marianne gave a wry smile. Her own sharp uniform had already been changed out of in favor of a regal dress.

"But I'm so glad you came. Please sit down, Cornelia. I'll get you some tea."

"Oh! No thank you." Cornelia looked surprised and shook her head. "I just came to see how you were. You must be tired. I won't stay long."

"Are you sure? I don't mind at all."

"No. Please rest today with Lelouch and Nunnally."

At Cornelia's words, Marianne narrowed her eyes and nodded.

"Did you mention you had brought something from the Emperor?"

"Yes, this is it."

From her pocket, Cornelia produced a small box. She opened it and let Marianne confirm the contents. Inside was a magnetic optical data disk. The label bore a small signature of King Charles zi Britannia, who also happened to be Cornelia's father.

"Father was staying here, but before he left he gave this to me directly. He asked me to keep it safe until you returned. He instructed me not to let the chamberlain or civil service officer handle it. So, I came to deliver this to you by myself..."

While she was speaking, Cornelia noticed the smile fade from Marianne's lips. The empress stared quietly at the disk.

"Empress Marianne?"

"Um... Oh, I'm sorry. Well, the Emperor wasn't being very considerate, was he? Making his proud daughter act like his chamberlain!" Marianne joked. "When I see him next time, I'll tell him."

"Oh, no. I don't mind."

As she handed the disk and the box to Marianne, Cornelia felt a reservation about doing so. Cornelia didn't know the disk's contents. Her father hadn't told her anything about it. She hadn't questioned it when he'd given it to her, but seeing Marianne's reaction, she felt something was off, especially about the part that

Cornelia had to be the one to safeguard it. Marianne seemed to have some idea what was inside...

What did it contain?

Before Cornelia could inquire about it, Marianne spoke cheerfully. "Oh, I heard you completed a special training program for Knightsmares, Cornelia."

"Ah, yes. Just the other day."

"I heard about it. You didn't lose a single battle against knights in a real troop. The commander seemed puzzled. He said it was hard for him to decide whether he should praise the princess or scold the knights."

Cornelia blushed.

"No... I'm sure my opponents were going easy on me. I have a long way to go before I can even come close to being like you, 'Marianne the Flash.'"

"Oh, you'll get me in trouble! I'll be scolded by your mother again for filling her daughter's head with silly stuff." Marianne winked playfully. Even Cornelia smiled at this. Unlike Marianne, Cornelia's mother acted like a lady, and expected the same from her children.

"I've given up trying to live up to her expectations a long time ago. I'm relying on Euphy for that. I know I'm not good enough to tell you this, but my goal is to be like you."

"You're really going to get me in trouble now, saying something like that!" Marianne smiled as she said it.

"How's Euphy, Cornelia?"

"She's fine, thank you. She's acting up because Lelouch and Nunnally haven't been to see her lately."

"She's a nice girl. Very kind."

"And yet I can't take my eyes off her because she'll go off and do whatever she feels like."

"That's her personality. You should nurture that independent spirit."

"I try to understand that..."

They made mindless chatter after that. As Cornelia promised, it wasn't a long visit. As Cornelia was leaving the room, she said, "When you have time, please stop by my mother's palace."

"To be scolded?"

"Of course not!" Cornelia laughed. "Please bring Lelouch and Nunnally with you. It would really delight Euphy."

"I'm so thankful that she likes them."

"We're thankful too. She does like them."

"Then, I might ask her to be Lelouch's bride some day."

Cornelia couldn't hold back and burst out laughing. "You must be joking. They're half brother and sister. Or, are you talking about another Lelouch?" Cornelia enjoyed an out-of-character moment of light heartedness, but Marianne seemed momentarily dazed.

"Oh, yes..." Slightly looking down, the queen whispered,

"Certainly that can't be allowed. For a brother and sister to marry..."

"Excuse me?"

Cornelia couldn't hear Marianne and asked her again. Eventually, Marianne looked up. The whole exchange unnerved Cornelia.

"Second princess of the Holy Britannian Empire, Cornelia li Britannia..." As she spoke Cornelia's full title, Marianne appeared in a different state of mind than she had been up until that point. Her eyes looked dangerous and Cornelia felt like stepping back. Normally, Marianne was friendly, and one couldn't see where the name "Marianne the Flash" came from. She didn't act like an unapproachable empress either, and that was one of the reasons Cornelia respected her. But the woman certainly was full of passion and integrity, noble as her rank. Even Cornelia, who was becoming a skilled Knightmare pilot, felt intimidated. Years later, Cornelia would still remember what Marianne said, word for word.

Marianne opened her mouth again and Cornelia felt an irrational shortness of breath.

"I want to ask you something. Would you listen to me,
Cornelia li Britannia?"

"Y...Yes."

The past is behind them.

What's done is done. No one could change what happened,
nor could anyone deny it either. Even a witch like me can't alter
anything.

It would come to pass that the sun of the young siblings,
and the revered empress loved and respected by a young princess,
would tragically pass from their lives.

Something went disastrously wrong.

What was to happen next?

Either way, let's go back to the present, and fast forward to
where we left off.

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

Stage-3:2-RUINS

September 2017. ???????

1

When Lelouch opened his eyes, he saw shrubs, and from between them, a small squirrel looking back at him. It was wild, for it was suspicious and did not try to come near.

"Ugh..."

Lelouch slowly got up. As he did, the squirrel darted into the bushes and disappeared. I guess I scared it, Lelouch thought, still in a daze.

Then, suddenly, his mind was turned on, as if someone had turned on a switch. He looked around with watchful eyes.

"Suzaku!"

However, the only things he saw through his mask were trees and grass. There was a dense grove.

After staring at the scenery that lay out in front of him, Lelouch shakily stood up. He wasn't hurt. He felt a little groggy as if the circulation in his body was bad, but he didn't see any injuries. Even if he was hurt, it was not a priority in Lelouch's mind as of now.

"What is this place?"

There was an opening at the end of the grove. There was a bright light shining in from there.

Lelouch wobbled toward the light unconsciously. There was one thick branch that blocked the exit. He moved it with his hand and walked into the light. Lelouch couldn't believe his eyes.

"What the..."

There was nothing past the grove. It was a cliff.

Down below, the clear blue ocean waves were hitting the ledges.

Euphemia was looking at the ocean that spread across her with absent eyes.

Her hair and clothes were drenched with saltwater. When she came to, she was lying on the beach. The rising tide was hitting her face and woke her up. Confusion swept inside of her.

"Where is this?"

Euphemia mumbled aloud. Of course, there was no one nearby to answer. Actually, she wasn't even sure what had happened before she was lying on the beach. She had tried to go where Suzaku was, to save him. She thought she had made it just in time, but that was when her brother Schneizel's Avalon came and...no, she couldn't remember what happened after that. Why was she sleeping in such a place? What happened to the battle? Where did Zero and the Black Knights go?

I wonder if this is not Shikine Island?

If it were, there should be more activity nearby. However, the area was tranquil and peaceful. There were no sounds of open fire, and no sounds of Knightmares running. The only sounds she heard were the gentle crashing of the waves and the seagulls crying as they flew above the ocean. She noticed that the sun's position hasn't changed much. That must mean that not much time has passed. Unless, the sun had completely gone down and came up to the same position...

Euphemia raised her hands and hit her cheeks.

It cleared her mind a little.

She needed to pull herself together. She should see if someone else is nearby. Perhaps Suzaku or the Britannian Forces are in the area. She can think about what happened after that.

She dragged her wet skirt and started to walk along the beach. She looked horrible. Even her undergarments were wet. The drenched cloth also had sand on them, so it felt gross against her skin. However, she had no time to worry about that.

Euphemia walked along the beach for a while when she saw a large rock further ahead.

I wonder if I can climb on it and try to look farther out. Or perhaps I can climb on the cliff it is connected to.

Euphemia hurried toward the rock. As she got closer, she saw that it looked easy to climb.

But just as she tried to get closer to the rock, she heard footsteps. Footsteps that were different from her own. It was coming from top of the rock. Euphemia almost screamed. However, she was able to swallow it in.

The owner of the footsteps came out of the shadow of the rock.

He was wearing a dark, black mask.



"For heaven's sake!" C.C. mumbled in a bored voice in a gloomy and dark corridor. "Thanks to your little prank, I had to talk to that dull little man."

C.C. was currently in the Black Knight's submarine. Since the incident on Shikine Island two days prior, it had escaped pursuit by the Britannian Forces and was using its stealth capabilities to hide deep under the sea.

"Then, how many of them were there? Okay, so Lelouch and that princess, as well as Suzaku Kururugi." Although she was alone in the corridor, C.C. was apparently talking to someone else. She



wasn't speaking into a com device or cell phone, she didn't even carry anything like that.

"You sent Kallen to the island too? You have very bad taste for one who acts like an aloof observer."

But the headcount matches now; C.C. said to herself.

Meanwhile, like the drifting submarine, Lelouch's Black Knights were feeling without direction. The current situation wasn't their fault. Their chief commander, Zero, and their ace pilot, Kallen, were missing in action. They'd last been seen on Shikine Island during the operation. When Britannia's aerial battleship suddenly appeared, it had released a hail of fire that had catastrophically damaged the Black Knights' forces. A total of fifteen Knightmares were destroyed. Although emergency ejection seats saved the lives of many, a good number of survivors were badly hurt. Most of the parts for the Gefjun Disturbers had been collected, but the Pile Pods were reduced to rubble.

They'd suffered a resounding defeat. It was probably Tohdoh's clever leadership on the battlefield that kept them from being completely overwhelmed. Tohdoh had barely managed to rally the remaining forces, about half, and used every possible method to escape—including the blocking of radio waves by ECM, diversion by remote control mine explosions, and using the terrain to cloak their movements while the enemy strengthened their forces. On top of all that, he even completed the incredible feat of collecting the Guren Mk-II, sans pilot and part of its body. Without his efforts, the resistance group known as the Black Knights might have been destroyed that day.

However, even Tohdoh couldn't find Zero and Kallen. It seemed impossible. He'd lost sight of them right after the first barrage hit the ground. At first, their survival seemed hopeless, but an image caught on their monitors gave them some cause for optimism. Neither Zero, Kallen nor that white Knightmare had been at the epicenter of the attacks. Their remains and the remains of their machines were nowhere to be found either.

Another mystery was the Britannian Forces' reluctance to chase after the Black Knights, an attitude that had contributed to Tohdoh's successful retrieval of his forces. It didn't make any sense for the Britannian Forces to act as they did. Why weren't they giving chase? They seemed to be desperately searching for something. The Black Knights assumed it had to be the white Knightmare, not because of its value as a weapon, but because Suzaku Kururugi and Zero had been in the cockpit together. Since it had disappeared without a trace, Britannia might have prioritized the search for the Lancelot and its cargo over pursuit of the Black Knights.

Of course, they were slightly off. The Britannian Forces were indeed searching, not for Suzaku and Zero, but for Third Princess Euphemia. Their search had nothing to do with Zero. C.C. was the only one among the Black Knights aware of that fact, but she didn't share the information with the others. They didn't ask her. Moreover, she didn't think it important to share. Even if she'd explained what had happened, no one would believe her. Plus, the crew was already in the right state of mind, biding its time until a break in Britannia's search net opened up, and they could search for Zero and Kallen. It was better for C.C. not to interrupt and dash their hopes.

"But, you know," C.C. said, crossing her arms in discontent, "your actions were no help, at least not for me. I don't care about the other three or the Black Knights. If that man...if Lelouch doesn't come back, it would be senseless. And, I had a way to save him. Why did he have to do that? He just had to bring along Suzaku Kururugi...No, I don't care about your reasons."

She heard someone approaching from the far end of the corridor, probably a Black Knight. C.C. lowered her voice.

"...What I meant was because of you that man and I are still in danger. It will cost you a lot. I don't know...I'm not interested in that island. I've never even been there. If you want to play, go ahead. Don't drag me in."

What a pain... C.C. thought. Damage control would be difficult. Though C.C. herself wouldn't bat an eyelash at people disappearing one place and reappearing in another, most other people witnessing the same event wouldn't be so nonchalant about a clearly supernatural phenomenon. *How would Lelouch react? C.C. wondered. He's perceptive. He'd immediately know I was involved, and that's troublesome.*

She resolved not to tell him any details when he eventually asked.

At least I don't have to worry about that until he safely returns, C.C. thought.

"Wonder what happened to him? I want to believe he's talented enough..." However, if necessary, she'd have to do something about the situation. *This time he messed up pretty bad,* C.C. mused as she leaned against the corridor wall.



It was almost second nature for Lelouch to draw his gun.

The Britannian princess on the beach under the rocky outcropping looked up at him in surprise. Who noticed the other's presence first? It might have been Euphemia, but Lelouch was the first to react to their meeting.

As he pointed the gun muzzle precisely at Euphemia's chest, Lelouch rapidly scanned the area. No one was around. She was alone. He was alone, too, but her being alone meant that he could do as he pleased, such as hold her hostage. Since his communication device had been lost, he could use hers if she had one. As he processed various outcomes and how to deal with them, Lelouch looked at Euphemia, and noticed something strange.

Nothing remarkable. It was just strange that Euphemia was standing there and looking at him. Though a gun was pointed directly at her, the princess didn't seem afraid. He didn't sense

any anger or hostility from her. Instead, she was staring at Zero, a terrorist whom she must hate, with very calm eyes.

She closed those eyes and made one step forward. Before Lelouch could yell at her to not move an inch...

"Lelouch..."

Her word blew away all of the calculations whirling around Lelouch's head with the force of a typhoon. This was one possibility that had never crossed his mind.

"Lelouch, it's you, isn't it?"

He was speechless, the mask hiding his stunned face.

How...

"I haven't told anyone. I swear!"

Her words nudged him out of his momentary trance. It was pointless to play games. She really knew who he was. Someone with convictions as strong as hers wouldn't be deterred by any lame explanation.

Lelouch lowered his gun and pressed a switch on the back of his mask. It slid open, releasing Lelouch's silky black hair, just like his mother's, into the salty sea breeze.

"Lelouch...you are really alive..." Euphemia smiled tearfully.

2

Suzaku Kururugi pondered a small object.

It was a switchblade shaped like a cute coin purse. The object was more dangerous than a gun, in a way, but it didn't belong to Suzaku. It belonged to the scowling girl whose hands were tied up by a belt. Suzaku already knew personally how deadly the small knife could be, because the girl had attacked him with it. Her fast movements and skill were impressive, but in Suzaku she had found the wrong person to tangle with. Suzaku was far more skilled at

hand-to-hand combat than the average terrorist or Britannian soldier. Given equal conditions, he was easily as skilled as anyone in the special forces.

"I see..."

After sheathing the switchblade, and sighing lightly, Suzaku spoke. "You don't know what happened either."

"Hmph!" The girl, who Suzaku had always known as Kallen Stadtfeld, responded defiantly. "So, you're shipwrecked too? Serves you right!"

He didn't know she could be like this; her attitude in school was quite different, but Suzaku didn't feel like bringing that up.

"You're right about me missing in action, but the situation isn't that bad. We're not too far from Shikine Island."

"How do you know that?"

"The vegetation here is pretty similar to Shikine Island. The position of the sun and the temperature is about the same too. When I can measure the positions of the stars later, I'll have a pretty good idea where we are."

Kallen looked up at Suzaku's face as if she were being taken advantage of for not being as well prepared as him. "You don't seem worried at all. You're..."

"I've learned how to confront my enemies. I'm a military man, even though you don't recognize me as such."

Kallen thought the real issue at hand here wasn't that Suzaku was part of the military, but rather that she was a member of a terrorist group. She couldn't help being overwhelmed with hostility toward him. "If my people get here, you're the one who'll be the prisoner."

Suzaku didn't answer. He didn't need to, he knew she was right. Neither of them had communication devices, much less their Knightmares. Though he doubted the rescue parties would arrive anytime soon, Suzaku figured Kallen would only get more aggravated if he told her that. Inwardly, Suzaku wasn't as calm as he looked.

In any case, he was still processing the fact that Kallen, a sickly classmate of his, was a member of the terrorist group, the Black Knights. "Kallen, do you know...who Zero is?"

After a moment of silence, Kallen glared at him with piercing eyes.

"Why not find out for yourself?"

Suzaku realized from her defensive attitude that she didn't know.

"I see. You don't know either..."

"How did you...?"

"He's hiding from everybody, even from his colleagues..."

Their confrontation on Shikine Island flashed through Suzaku's mind. A lot of things bothered him about what had happened. What troubled him most was what Zero told him.

How did Zero know? How did he know about my father? Did Tohdoh tell him? Tohdoh's with the Black Knights now. He's one of the few people who knows what happened between me and my father. Did Tohdoh tell Zero about it? Suzaku couldn't imagine that. Tohdoh didn't seem like the type of person to reveal information like that easily, even if Suzaku was his enemy. Then, how did Zero know? No one but Tohdoh and the old man Kirihara knew the details of that incident seven years ago.

...Wait, there's one more...

Suzaku shook his head violently.

"Wh-what?" Kallen yelled in surprise at Suzaku's sudden jerking, but he wasn't listening.

...Don't even think about that.

He shouldn't even consider the thought. Suddenly, Suzaku remembered the words of Darlton.

"...Unless you try, you can't see what's there."

He knew that, but this was really something he didn't want to think about. The consequences for people he cared about would be too severe. His theory was baseless anyway. He didn't have any proof. It was abnormal of him to jump to such a conclusion. It was strange. Wrong. In any case...

I'm going to concentrate on what's in front of me now.

There were more pressing matters. He could think more about it some other time. Right now there were problems to handle, problems that if left alone, would prevent him from having the luxury of sitting around, dwelling in his thoughts. As he finally managed to rechannel his thoughts, he sighed deeply. He reached for the neck of the pilot suit he was still wearing and unzipped the collar to let air in.

"Wh-whoa there!"

Why was someone screaming at him?

"What do you think you're doing?"

It was Kallen's voice. Face red as a beet, she seemed scared of him. It only took a moment for Suzaku to process what she was reacting to. The situation was a bit suspect, after all. There she was, a captive girl lying on the ground before him, and here he was, trying to take his clothes off...

At the sight of Kallen's flushed face, Suzaku forgot their positions momentarily and burst out laughing.

"You've got the wrong idea. I'm just getting in the river. I have to find food and water before dark. Regardless of whose colleagues are coming for us first, there's no sense in us dying of hunger before they can get to us."

"Well...um..."

"Besides, I'd kind of like to wash. Oh, and I recall you charging me naked when you noticed me by the river earlier. As far as vulgarity is concerned, you're not one to talk."

No sooner had Kallen's face begun to display relief than it was bright red again. "You're horrible!"

Suzaku didn't have a retort.



The vast ocean before him lapped the beach calmly.

...What am I doing?

Confusion flickered through his mind, as he leaned back on his elbows, sitting on a rocky outcropping. Behind him, a cheerful voice asked, "Are you sure I can borrow this cape?"

"Yeah, you should wear that until your clothes are dry. I don't want you to catch cold. Especially in this situation."

A sick prisoner would be troublesome, Lelouch reasoned, but logic had little to do with his current feelings. He was hardly even playing the role of kidnapper anymore, letting his prisoner go off by herself to change in the forest. If the Britannian army showed up or something like that, it would be a different story.

"This is very...big," Euphemia muttered, rustling the fabric.

Lelouch didn't know what to say, but offered, "That's because it's a cape."

"That's not what I meant. I was trying to say you're not like you used to be anymore. Your shoulders are too big for me Lelouch. You used to be smaller than me."

He didn't know what to say again, but this time he decided to say nothing. He remembered that although he had been born earlier, she'd always been taller than him as children. His mind started wandering into distinct memories.

Euphemia must have finished changing, because Lelouch heard her sit down on the sand behind the rocks. Of course, Lelouch didn't turn around, as Euphemia was naked under the cape. Although they were brother and sister, there was common courtesy to maintain.

"Thank you. I felt disgusting, but I feel much better now!"

"Is that so..."

Euphemia's voice was still cheerful, but she seemed confused as to whether or not she should thank him more politely. Lelouch just nodded awkwardly. Then, he spoke to her in a more serious tone.

"How did you figure it out?"

"What?"

"I mean, how long have you known I was Zero?"

She paused for a few seconds before answering, "I wasn't convinced until just now."

Lelouch almost sneered at himself. "Oh, boy! I thought I was disguising myself really well. I even wore high-heeled boots to make me look taller, although I knew it would be hard to walk."

"That's probably why."

Her answer surprised him.

"What do you mean?"

"Because you were trying to disguise who you are now, right? I don't know that part of you. I just remember how you used to be. It's obvious that you'd be taller and have changed in other ways as well."

He was shocked. Euphemia was absolutely right. Lelouch's disguise as Zero was to distinguish himself from who he was now and to deceive the people around him. It didn't mean anything to Euphemia, who only knew him from childhood. But it wasn't just that—Euphemia's great instincts, or potent memories, had allowed her to break through Zero's mask when someone like Cornelia remained in the dark.

"Why didn't you discuss it with Cornelia?"

It took a while for her to answer him again. "My sister never listens to me."

Lelouch didn't know why Euphemia's voice suddenly grew despondent. Before he could consider reasons for that, Euphemia continued talking. "Besides, things are sad enough as they are."

"..."

"How is Nunnally?"

"She's living with me, but she's still crippled."

"...She must hate us for not being able to do anything about it."

He was sure she was talking about what happened to Lelouch's mother and how Lelouch and Nunnally suffered after

that. Lelouch bit his lip, then asked his sister, "Just tell me one thing. Do you know anything about the incident in which my mother was killed?"

"I'm sorry. But it seems like my sister has been investigating all sorts of things. Cornelia really looked up to Lady Marianne."

"I see..." He didn't believe her entirely, but at least the Euphemia he knew couldn't lie in a situation like this.

In the clear sky above them, a seagull soared away. Lelouch tracked the gull as it shrank into the distance.

"May I ask you something now?" Euphemia spoke. He was pretty sure he knew what she was going to ask.

"Are you Zero? Or are you...?"

Lelouch closed his eyes. He wasn't trying to delay his answer. He just wanted to be absolutely sure. Once he answered her, he wouldn't be able to betray her in this place. If he betrayed her, he would also be betraying Nunnally. They were two people that he never wanted to harm. That's why he hadn't given up his name, although another part of him had become so evil.

"I'm Lelouch," he said, opening his eyes. "Yeah... Here and now, I'm the Lelouch you know, Euphy."

For her, it meant the world to be called by her nickname. He heard a sharp swallow of breath, followed by, "Lelouch..." Her teary voice sounded warm and sad to Lelouch at the same time.

Matters of identity aside, they were lost. Lelouch could tell that they were on an uninhabited island and told Euphemia that. The news didn't seem to have much of an impact on the princess.

"Well, we'll be okay."

"...You're brave. Aren't you worried about not being rescued?"

"Why? We'll be rescued, probably."

"..."

She'd always been naturally optimistic. While her clothes dried, Lelouch and Euphemia discussed a plan of action.

"Whatever happened to us...well, we won't know what till later. What's more pressing right now is a plan of survival. First, we need to secure water. Then secure food, fuel and shelter. Those are our priorities, I think."

"What about building something to get the attention of a search party? Like, making a smoke signal that can be seen from the ocean or something?"

"I recognize the necessity to consider that, but Euphy, don't you understand? Even if we could attract rescuers, you and I can't be rescued at the same time."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because..." Because whichever side found them, one of them would end up as a prisoner.

"...That's true, but still..."

"I'm right. It doesn't make sense for us to cooperate. In any case, I'll think more about that after we've taken care of survival. So, we're lost. That first. Together, we can help each other out of this labyrinth."

"Y...yes!" Euphemia responded to him happily for some reason, and added, "This reminds me of when we were children. Do you remember the forest near my mother's palace? We snuck out there to explore with Nunnally."

"Euphy, I don't think we have time to be talking about the past."

"Oh, I'm sorry." But Euphemia still sounded happy, as if their current situation wasn't very serious. "If I remember it correctly, I think it was I who found the path to get back."

"You just dragged us around wherever you wanted to go. You even ignored the marks I left to find our way back."

"But we were able to get back to the castle, weren't we?" Euphy sweetly prodded. Lelouch didn't really have a response; she was right, after all.

"Anyway, we'll think about those rescue signals later. We need to find water and food first. I found a river earlier. I think there were lots of plants that looked edible. If we're going to be here for a while though, we should secure protein..."

"We have the ocean."

"But we can't catch fish with our bare hands."

"Can we make something like a fishing rod? There's lots of trees."

"Fishing, huh? No, that won't work. Neither one of us knows how to fish. Besides, the blood of Britannians is the blood of hunters. We should throw our lot in with the land."

"I think our ancient ancestors were Vikings..."

"All the better. Let's go back to where I was earlier in the woods. We might find something there."

The ecosystem of the island closely resembled the semi-tropical island of Okinawa, the site of an old Japanese military base in the south of Area 11. If the resemblance carried, there should be game, some kind of game. Whether or not they could catch any was another matter entirely.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

Euphemia, now back in her dry clothes, looked more puzzled than worried. Lelouch held a large tree branch in his arms and grinned audaciously.

"From the footprints and droppings, I can tell that wild animals use this path. I have a chance to set up a trap that dates from medieval times!"

Lelouch started digging a hole with the branch. Immediately, he met with resistance. This wasn't like digging a hole in a sand box at the park. The island's soil was thick and challenging to dig up without a proper tool like a shovel. Lelouch's tussle with the packed earth caused him to drip with sweat.

"I'll help you..."

"Manual labor...is not for...a royal princess..." Lelouch got out of breath just trying to get the words out. "Don't worry. The system...is perfect." He was just being stubborn at that point.

"Well, then..." Euphemia said, as she made herself scarce,

"Why don't I look for some fruit or something?"

Lelouch fought his erratic breathing to get out the words, "Be careful!"

He was completely stubborn and prideful, even acting chivalrous when he had no aptitude for the task at hand. Because it was just like Lelouch to be so pathetically headstrong, she giggled a little before obediently answering with a nod.

"Right!"

As Euphemia left, Lelouch started working with the ground again. He couldn't seem to get a good grip on the large branch that served as his shovel. Euphemia glanced back one more time, then walked off giggling. He'd probably be at it all day. Even if he did complete it, she wondered if any prey would fall into it. However, she didn't feel like making fun of what Lelouch was trying to accomplish. He was working hard for her.

...He hasn't changed. Lelouch hasn't changed at all.

Like always, he was smart, knowledgeable, confident, kind, and...a little helpless. Euphemia treasured all of him. She admired him for always thinking about his little sister Nunnally and for never forgetting his mother Marianne's love, even after she had passed away.

That's why her heart felt so heavy. The playful smile sparked by their interaction faded from her face.

...That's right. I shouldn't forget. I can't forget.

He...did kill my brother.

Clovis la Britannia, the former viceroy of Area 11, had been a big brother to both Lelouch and Euphemia. Lelouch, in the

guise of Zero, had killed him. Euphemia wasn't a saint. She wasn't as close to Clovis as to Cornelia, Lelouch, and Nunnally, but she'd still loved her brother Clovis. When she'd heard he'd been slaughtered, she felt angry. She hated the murderer. It was natural for a human being to feel that way. But when she'd realized that her other brother, Lelouch, might have been the perpetrator, she no longer knew who to blame and hate. Gradually, her feelings changed and softened, leaving her with only sadness. *Why did that have to happen? Can we ever reclaim what we had—the warm memories and loving familial ties?*

"If you want people to stop doing things the wrong way, you should show them the right way." Suddenly, Euphemia remembered what she said before. Right in the middle of the woods, she stopped walking. Sunlight poured down on her through the foliage, and she addressed the warm rays as if they were a certain distant boy.

...Suzaku.

What would you think?

What should I do? What can I do?

What should I try to accomplish?

Will I find the answers someday?

Where are you, Suzaku, and what are you doing right now....?



Nightfall came rather quickly. Flames from the bonfire licked the canopy of stars.

Fish on skewers sizzled around the perimeter of the campfire. Suzaku had caught a number of fish in the river and ocean earlier. Instead of cooking the whole fish, he'd gutted them and washed them in sea water to add some flavor. Kallen's knife had proven useful as a cooking implement. But for catching the fish, he needed just his hands or the occasional wooden stake. His survival skills were top-notch. However, his captive, who was still restrained, took it upon herself to nitpick the situation.

"Don't you have soy sauce or something?"

Suzaku was rather stunned to hear complaints from Kallen, who'd been released to eat, and handed a baked fish.

"I'll try to pretend that you're not really complaining. Soy sauce is a pretty Japanese thing to ask for though. I'm surprised."

"Hmph, so sorry to disappoint you. I'm half Britannian, but I was born and raised in Japan. I need graded radish, soy sauce and lemon on my fish and shellfish."

"Didn't you use a lot of olive oil on that kind of thing in the school cafeteria?"

"Didn't have a choice."

Regardless, she was asking for something Suzaku couldn't provide. In a manner completely opposite from her polite school persona, Kallen opened and tore at the fish voraciously. She liked what she tasted, and her face lit up, blue eyes wide with joy for the few seconds before she realized Suzaku was staring at her. Her features turned down into a frown.

"They have too many bones. If you took out the guts, you should have taken all the bones out."

Suzaku sighed, "Kallen, you don't like to cook, do you? Something like that isn't that easy. I guess you don't cook."

"Leave me alone. Besides, why don't we have anything but fish and shellfish? Too much animal protein and no nutritional balance."

"I think it's better than the other way around. We can't get enough energy from vegetables and fruits."

Unbeknownst to them, on the other side of the island, Lelouch had gained nothing but massive muscle pain as a reward for his efforts with the trap, and his and Euphemia's dinner was the fruit Euphemia had gathered.

"Well, there wasn't time for it today, but tomorrow we can explore deeper into the island and find some other kind of food besides fish."

"Hey, tomorrow you might be the prisoner."

"Right now, you're the prisoner."

"Argh, you make me so mad! You were pretending at school, weren't you? I didn't know you were such a jerk."

"You're one to talk. It's shocking how different you are at school." All the while she complained, Kallen didn't stop eating. Neither did Suzaku. Pretty soon, they'd consumed the entire feast. Their healthy appetites under such circumstances might have proven their toughness, but it just as easily could have been the work of a pair of healthy adolescent stomachs.

Suzaku retied Kallen's wrists with the belt and sat facing her across the bonfire. Kallen sighed heavily.

"Ooh, I'm stuffed! I couldn't eat another bite!"

For some reason, that struck Suzaku as funny. "Is this what you're really like?"

"Yeah. Wanna make something of it?" Kallen glared at Suzaku.

He shook his head. "No, I just think it's charming to see you so much livelier than you are at school."

Kallen pursed her lips, then she looked away immediately and complained again. "...I take back what I said about you earlier. You're not a jerk, you're naïve. Just like Madam President said. That makes it even worse."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. I mean, nothing you ever need to know." Kallen fell silent after that and stared off into the night. Suzaku watched her suspiciously at first, but then seemed to undergo a mood change. Giving a look at the flickered flame, he then addressed Kallen squarely. "Kallen."

"What? Do you want me to thank you for the meal...?"

"Leave the Black Knights. You still have a chance."

Kallen's face darkened until her eyes glared with predatory flame. She directed her animosity back at Suzaku. "Just when I think you're not so bad, you show your real intentions. Too bad,

but I'm the captain of Zero's personal guard. I've fought you in my Nightmare."

"That red one?!"

"Yeah, and while we may have held each other off, I'm going to beat that white helmet of yours some day."

Suzaku closed his eyes. He shook his head slightly and told her quietly, "There's no future using his methods."

"And what about your future? Just living on as the conqueror's lapdog?! An honorary Britannian? Knight of the third princess? Ha! The name of Genbu Kururugi, the last samurai, weeps."

The late Genbu Kururugi, Prime Minister of Japan. For seven years after the war, he'd been received with ambivalence by the public, seen as either the last samurai or the betrayer. Kallen clearly meant the former.

"I'm not like you! This world's wrong and I'm trying to change it! If I don't, my brother will never rest in peace! That's why I fight! I'll do whatever it takes to win!"

Of course, Suzaku understood where she was coming from, and what she was fighting for. He could imagine her fighting for her family. But the realization dumped a cold thought in his lap.

Fighting for someone dear to you...

Suzaku opened his eyes and looked at his hands. Lit up by the flames, they looked red, as if covered in blood. Though it was an optical illusion, those blood-red hands told the tale of who he really was. They were the hands that had stabbed a family member, his father, for someone he cared for, a brother and sister. No, it wasn't for their sake. It was unfair to blame them for his crime. His feelings had been his alone. Mercy. He killed his father so he could keep feeling merciful about them...

Suzaku looked up slowly.

"Kallen, the truth is... I killed my father. I killed him ... with my own hand..."

"Huh!?"

As such, he had no right to do anything in his father's name. He didn't have that privilege...

"I'm not telling you to just give up!" Suzaku continued to a speechless Kallen. "But I do know one thing. What do results gained the wrong way leave you in the end? Just regret and an emptiness that has nowhere to go."

Emptiness and regret that your heart can never contain. He saw himself screaming to chose a different path as his father's face was covered in blood. That carnage was his reward for drawing his sword to defend his feelings. A sword requires the one who uses it to have a justification for doing so. If someone used a sword without any justification, that sword would be doubled-edged, and cut back at their heart as surely as it sliced its target. Unless there was some reason or justice in the killer's actions, they wouldn't be able to endure the sword that swung back like a pendulum at their heart.

But if one had to keep swinging the sword they drew by mistake, what can they do...?

"I don't mean to criticize your opinions. I don't have that right. I'm aware that people are suffering because of what Britannia is doing now." He knew Euphemia felt that way too. "But that's why I can't agree with you guys...with Zero's way of doing things. Zero is a lot like my father. He'll use any means necessary to achieve what he wants. Not only that...it's no better than how I used to be. He's too focused on his goals to realize what he will lose in the process."

As soon as Suzaku mentioned Zero's name, Kallen came to life. She looked at Suzaku from the other side of the bonfire with a harsher glare. "That's how you can accept how things are now?! You call that peace?! There are things that are more important than your life, you know!"

"There may be, but that's why I'm telling you. It's not only your lives that will be lost by doing this. You will lose something else along with it. I don't think that's the right thing to do."

Kallen showed that she'd heard him with a nod. Hands tied in her back, Kallen lay down on the ground, looked away, and asked in a quiet voice, "Then, tell me. What was the point of my brother's life?"

Her question was a familiar one.

"Who gets to decide whether it was right or wrong?"

Her whispering hurt Suzaku's heart. He was unable to reply.

They weren't the only ones sitting out under the stars.

On the beach, lulled by a calming crash of waves, Lelouch gazed up at the starry night. Next to him, Euphemia slept using his cape as a makeshift blanket.

The stars haven't changed, have they? From back then.

Right before she closed her eyes, Euphemia had said that.

Can't we go back?

Lelouch knew that she was asking him and wanted him to feel as she did. To go back...

Perhaps, Euphemia's memories of the old days when he and Nunnally lived in Britannia were still pure. He couldn't deny that some of the memories he had of those days were also pure. Not to say that there weren't parts that he certainly didn't want to remember. However, there was certain brightness to those days. Nunnally was well and they had Euphemia. Above all, there were in the thrall of a seemingly inextinguishable and irreplaceable light, his mother.

Unlike Euphemia, Lelouch knew how black the night after the light goes away. He didn't allow himself to cry or scream. Lelouch would have done so if that would have gotten rid of the darkness and reclaimed the brightness. Even if it made him look pathetic and ugly.

"Euphy!" Lelouch whispered fiercely into the gleaming night. "Even for me to survive...!"

The night swallowed up the rest of his words.



Soon it was the next morning.

"Are you sure you really saw that light?" Kallen asked Suzaku as she followed him through the underbrush. She struggled to release her hands from the belt that bound them.

"Yeah," Suzaku nodded without turning his head.

On the other side of the island, Lelouch and Euphemia were also walking through the woods.

"It must be a search party. Once we know who it is, we'll decide how to deal with them."

"Deal with them?"

"We both have certain things that we can't back down on."

"...You're right," Euphemia understood what Lelouch meant and gently lowered her eyes.

3

The submarine slowly thrummed through the dark sea.

"Are you sure we should be in this position? This is in the opposite direction from Shikine Island..."

When C.C., wearing clothing that resembled a straightjacket, addressed the Black Knights' deputy commander, Kaname Ohgi's question, she also shrugged her shoulders. "I was just talking about one possibility. It's up to you whether or not you accept it. After all, you're the man in charge right now, with him gone."

"Wait, then..."

"But investigating this possibility has a greater potential for success than just waiting around at the bottom of the sea. I'm sure of that. If he and Kallen try to escape, nothing will come of their efforts unless you guys are nearby to support them."

"..."

"Wow! What's this!?" Major Lloyd Asplund of ASEEC exclaimed.

He was inspecting rocks. It would be more accurate to say that he was inspecting a rock, more specifically, a huge door cut into the rock. Considering that they were underground, constructing the thing must have been a feat. Under the searchlight, the door revealed a strange geometric mark engraved upon it.

"I'd rather not have seen something that's genuinely occult," Lloyd said as politely as he could. A tall man standing nearby smiled. "Don't worry. If Euphy and Kururugi are alive, they must be around here, somewhere in the vicinity of the island that contains these ruins. My men are already searching."

"I see. Then you mean..." Lloyd teased, his glasses shining.

"You mean Your Highness expected them to be here and ordered an attack. Aren't you relying a tad too much on coincidence? Lancelot disappeared along with them, but at least we found him on the edge of Shikine Island."

"You insolent...!"

A military man on the other side of the prince barked at Lloyd. Though not as tall as the man standing next to him, his barrel chest and wide belly gave him the appearance of a large man. His shaved head was more reminiscent of a middle-aged clergyman, but he bore the badge of general on his collar.

"You don't know how difficult it was for His Highness to give that order..."

"Bartley," shushed the prince. A pained look crossed his sculpted features. "I have no excuse for that. You're right that I gambled with lives. I'm very sorry for Kururugi."

"Y... Your Highness..." stuttered Bartley.

"I don't think Major Kururugi is the sort to complain about a little something like this," Lloyd said unaffected, while the prince's words made Bartley weepy. "The problem is what the other party thinks."

"Yeah. I have to apologize to Euphy again. At least, I hope she's alive so that I can apologize to her. We must find them."

"We might find out something interesting too," Lloyd said. *He hasn't changed at all. He cried when he hurt someone, even though the person would be in pain regardless of his crying or apologizing.*

Schneizel el Britannia.

That was the man's name. He was the second prince and the chancellor of the Holy Empire of Britannia. Although the authorities of chancellor were limited under Britannia's political system, which invested all its real power in the emperor, Schneizel had proven himself a capable assistant to Charles, even surpassing the first prince, Odysseus, whose personality was rumored to be rather mediocre. It was widely assumed Schneizel would be the next emperor.

Following the incident on Shikine Island, Lloyd hitched a ride with Schneizel in his floating airship Avalon to reach their present location. According to military documentation, their present location was Kamine Island. Lloyd had never heard of it, but no one had, really. The island was originally unsettled, lacking even a name. Only recently had the ruins buried underground there captured the interest of the military.

Lloyd looked around the spacious underground cavern and scratched his head. "By any chance, did Your Highness choose to stop by Shikine Island instead of the Tokyo Settlement in order to investigate these ruins?"

"That's right," Schneizel nodded. "My father is infatuated with these as well."

"Well, I'm not sure if I can help you. This is way outside my field. Ancient civilizations, especially prehistoric ones, are more of Cecile's thing."

"Well, don't give up. You don't have to do anything with what you see today, other than..."

Schneizel stopped there and glanced to his right. The ceiling seemed too high to be underground and, yet, the silhouette of a humanoid figure stood almost as tall as the impressive ceiling itself. It had to be a Nightmare, but so large it was at least double the size of a normal one. The surface of the machine was black and a huge gun port was mounted on either shoulder.

"Can you adjust that system?"

"Do you mean the Druid System? But it isn't complete."

"I just want data from it... Though need I remind you that you were involved in the situation that led to the Hadron Cannon being fired before it was completely tested?"

"Please don't remind me."

The cannon that had decimated the Black Knights on Shikine Island had been fired from the shoulders of the Nightmare before them.



The island rose to a point in the middle, a small mountain. Halfway up the mountain, Lelouch stopped. "The light I saw at dawn... came from approximately here," Lelouch said as he surveyed the area. Euphemia, who'd been quiet all morning, finally spoke.

"Lelouch."

"What?"

"Lelouch, if it is a search party, will our time here be over?"

As he looked at Euphemia, his face reflected in her troubled eyes. Lelouch tried to shrug it off.

"It can't be helped."

"But..."

"Why would you want to spend more time with an unworthy knight like me? I couldn't even get you some food!" Lelouch laughed, making light of his incompetence, and Euphemia almost smiled. "Besides, that's a job for your real knight, Suzaku Kururugi."

Euphemia suddenly remembered. Her knight...

"Lelouch. Do you know Suzaku?"

Lelouch was surprised that she had to ask. "What are you talking about, Euphy? When Nunnally and I were sent to Japan, don't you know where we stayed?"

"I do..."

Silly as it was, Euphemia had never put two and two together. One of the reasons was that her knight, Suzaku, had never mentioned it to her. But Lelouch was right.

"I see... He... Suzaku knows you two. He probably knows what's happened to you since, right?"

Lelouch frowned a little.

"...Yeah."

"Oh, I see..." *Why didn't Suzaku tell me?* As Euphemia pondered the troubling question, Lelouch stumbled through an explanation for her.

"Don't blame him Euphy. I was the one who told him not to tell anyone. He's not responsible. Besides, he doesn't know that I'm Zero even though he knows that Nunnally and I are alive."

Euphemia looked at Lelouch's face with a blank stare. Lelouch looked away awkwardly.

"Yeah, I understand how uncomfortable you feel. I also understand that he didn't make the right choice as your knight. But we have so many reasons to..."

"Huh?" Euphemia gave Lelouch a look, then said, "No, I don't feel uncomfortable or want to blame him. Lelouch...?"

"Wh-What?"

"Well, I really shouldn't be asking you this, but weren't you trying to catch him on Shikine Island?"

"I was."

"I couldn't hear all of the conversation between you two because the radio communications were pretty jammed..." *...but I heard some of it.*

"You want him to be on your side right? By abandoning his duties as my knight."

"Yeah...that's pretty much it." At that moment, Lelouch's face appeared even more confused than Euphemia's. He understood what the princess was trying to say. It was in Lelouch's best interests for a rift to arise between Suzaku and Euphemia. It was the first step toward Suzaku leaving his duties as a knight. Then Lelouch frowned and sighed.

"What am I doing...? I'm completely turning back into Lelouch..."

Euphemia smiled ear to ear. "Lelouch, you're Suzaku's friend aren't you?"

But Lelouch didn't give her unconditional agreement to that question. "I could say that in the past tense. I'm not so sure anymore."

"What?"

"N-nothing. Yeah. You're right. We used to fight a lot when I first came to Japan."

It was then that Euphemia felt some distant corner of her mind illuminated. A light pierced through the inscrutable mists and distinguished a pathway that she hadn't been able to see before. That was the mental image she produced.

Lelouch and Suzaku were friends. They built their friendship seven years ago under trying circumstances. In the midst of a delicate situation between Britannia and Japan, they had forged a friendship, not out of obligation, but because they willed it to happen.

Could she gain any clues from that? Was there a clue in the past that could change the present, where Britannia and Japan once again fought as enemies? Was there a clue that would allow the boy standing in front of her to return to her?

They pushed on through the bushes, unable to locate anyone they were expecting to find.

"Strange. I don't think we're in the wrong spot."

"Could it have come from the slope on the other side of the island?"

Lelouch shook his head. He couldn't have made a mistake like that. There was no question; the light had to have originated around the spot they were at. But there was nothing to be found. Suddenly, the unexpected noise of footsteps startled Lelouch. He heard voices as well.

"Someone's coming!"

Pushing Euphemia ahead, Lelouch adorned his face with the familiar mask and hid in the bushes. First, he needed to ascertain the newcomers' identities. Were they from the Britannian Forces, the Black Knights or were they unrelated? Whatever the case, Lelouch's plan of action was clear to him. He was going to protect Euphemia from being hurt.

Then it all went wrong.

Somehow, Lelouch didn't seem to get along well with this island. The people who he saw enter the clearing were the last people on earth he expected to see, much less see together. At the same time, he noticed the ground they were standing on was uncommonly smooth, almost artificial. But he didn't have time to ponder the mystery of the large slab of rock, as Kallen and Suzaku were suddenly in hearing range.

"You must be tired Kallen. We can take a break."

"Who said I need a break?"

The curly-haired boy walking in front was Suzaku Kururugi; the redhead behind him was Kallen Stadtfeld. Lelouch's jaw dropped open. *Why are they here?* His mind raced through a thousand possibilities, coming to no conclusion. While Lelouch over analyzed the new development, the person standing beside him didn't waste any time moving the scenario along.

"Suzaku!"

Ignoring all the plans...or rather, not having made any plans, Euphemia cheerfully jumped out of the bushes.

"Princess Euphemia!?" Suzaku yelled with surprise. Lelouch checked his astonishment and jumped to action himself. He grabbed the princess' hand, drew his gun from his chest pocket and placed it against her neck.

"Don't move! This girl is my prisoner!"

"What...?"

"Zero!"

Lelouch whispered in a voice only Euphemia could hear. "Just play along with me."

"..."

Euphemia began to say something but thought better of it. After making sure she remained silent, Lelouch told Suzaku. "I'll take back my subordinate you have there! We'll exchange prisoners!"

"Zero! Again you...!" Suzaku yelled and moved towards his captive princess.

"Don't move!" Zero warned.

"Nngh!"

"Eliminate terrorists, no matter what the sacrifice. Are you going to follow that rule and let your mistress die?" After teasing Suzaku with the question, Lelouch snidely quipped, "Even though your integrity has already been broken?"

Suspicion tinged Suzaku's firm expression. Kallen, who during their argument had taken to freeing herself, suddenly ran up and tackled her captor.

"Ouch! Kallen!!"

"Zero! Now...!"

Actually, the situation had just turned sour for Lelouch. Things being what they were, Lelouch had only pretended to take Euphemia prisoner. He wanted Kallen back and had full intentions of exchanging prisoners. He knew that Suzaku wouldn't have agreed but Lelouch knew there was someone's orders the knight couldn't disobey.

Lelouch planned to have Euphemia order Suzaku to execute the exchange. Suzaku couldn't say no to her orders. That was the

rule he lived by. What happened next was key. Having Suzaku release Kallen, Lelouch would release Euphemia as promised. He didn't want to try anything there. If Lelouch did something to deceive Suzaku, he wasn't sure how Suzaku would react. So Lelouch would just return Euphemia as promised. Then he'd propose a further truce. Not to Suzaku, of course, but to Euphemia. He'd propose that each group go their own way and not attack the other...basically, a cease-fire agreement. Since Euphemia knew who Zero was, she'd accept the proposal. Lelouch knew she would. Having such an agreement in place, he'd avoid a meaningless fight on the island, which was something he certainly wanted to forgo. Suzaku might not be convinced but he wouldn't reject Euphemia's orders. Then Lelouch and Kallen would find some means of escape.

Based on the circumstances, it was an excellent plan. It kept the situation from escalating. However, before he could even make the first move of his plan, Kallen had gone and made her own move.

Her decision provoked an unexpected result from Euphemia.

"Stop it!" the princess exclaimed.

Kallen shouted right back, "Shut up, you little puppet princess! You can't do anything on your own!"

"What...?!" Euphemia hissed. "I'm not afraid of you! I don't care what happens to me. Suzaku, I command you to fight!"

"Your Highness!"

Lelouch quickly tried to calm her down but it was too late. Kallen yelled at Euphemia from across the clearing.

"Huh, I didn't know you could yell. That's a real gun. If I were you, I'd think about being careful instead of acting all pompous!"

Euphemia wouldn't back down. "What an insult! Do you think a princess of Britannia would put her knight in a dangerous position? Don't confuse me with those terrorists who care little for the lives of others!"

"What...!? You Britanni-ans are the ones who don't care about the lives of others! Who do you think you are? You colonialist pigs!"

"At least I care more about their lives more than you do! You ought to reconsider what you're doing!"

"Shut up! I can't believe you're acting snobbish even when we've got your knight captive!"

"You're the one who's being snobbish!"

Suddenly, Lelouch's overactive mind was distracted by a hypothetical. *Why were Suzaku and Kallen together while Euphemia and I were together? Of course the best case scenario would have been if Kallen and I had ended up together, while Suzaku was with Euphemia. But still, what a coincidence...* He explored the line of thought further. At least, either one of those scenarios was preferable to if the men and women had met their same-sex counterparts on the island. If that happened, Lelouch and Suzaku's meeting would be messy, but a meeting between the other two would have resulted in a horrible disaster. It was pretty clear, that the two girls were natural enemies. Neither of them were bad people, but they didn't know how to back down and settle an argument. Given the current state of affairs, Lelouch wasn't sure what to do. Not that he had much time to contemplate.

"Stop shouting! It hurts my ears!"

"You're the one who's shouting!"

While they screamed at each other, Suzaku dipped out of Kallen's hold.

"What the...!?"

Having released himself, Suzaku dashed toward Zero and Euphemia.

"Zero!"

"Damn it!"

Lelouch immediately refocused his attention on the rapidly approaching Suzaku. He knew it was too late. Lelouch was aware how fast Suzaku could move more than anybody. Furthermore,

Lelouch didn't have any intention to shoot Euphemia. So once Suzaku started coming toward him, Lelouch had already lost his battle.

"You hardheaded...!"

As he said that to Suzaku, Lelouch released Euphemia's hand and jumped away from her. After all, Suzaku's primary concern was securing Euphemia's safety. Only once Suzaku was using his body as a shield to protect Euphemia did he turn back to face Lelouch. Lelouch maintained his distance, even as Kallen ran up. The pairings had returned to normal but nothing had been resolved. Lelouch still held his gun and Suzaku wouldn't leave Euphemia's side. Retreating from the scene was going to be harder than usual. Typical of Lelouch, various strategies played out in his mind.

Suddenly, the ground underneath them shook violently.

"Oh!" someone shouted. At that moment, Lelouch experienced an abnormal pressure in his left eye.

"What's...argh!"

Geass appeared without him having called it forth. No, it wasn't his, rather, the symbol of an ethereal phoenix taking flight was emblazoned on the ground in flaming red light.

"Wh-What's going on?!" Lelouch shouted as the slab of rock beneath his feet sunk into the mountain.

"That's not good!"

Lloyd couldn't help it; he was actually rather distraught. Although he hadn't felt like doing it, Lloyd had been connecting some equipment to the imposing black Knightmare, Gawain. The equipment had been prepared in order for the machine to analyze some substances on the surface of the remains. The display on his monitor had suddenly gone haywire, blinking and displaying a line rapidly sliding up and down a graph.

"It's not my fault!" As if to prove his words, the entire cavern started shaking. In front of the ancient door, a huge slab of rock fell towards the floor and the stone struts supporting it collapsed. On top of the slab were four figures.

"Major Kururugi? And...Zero!" Not to mention the third princess of Britannia and a strange girl!

Some astute soldiers noticed Zero's mask and drew their guns. Bartley stopped them from firing. "You fools!" he shouted. "There's Princess Euphemia. Don't shoot! Capture them! Capture them!"

Following Bartley's orders, the soldiers put away their weapons but still advanced on the rock.

"Tch!" Lelouch grunted at the ensuing chaos.

"Zero! Look!" shouted Kallen. She pointed at a huge black body, which was down on one knee. *Is that a Knightmare? But it's huge...I can figure out what it is later, the important thing now is that not only is it activated, it looks unmanned as well!*

"Cover me Kallen!"

"Yes sir!"

Britannian soldiers clambered up on the great rock to capture them. Kallen whipped around and kicked him flat to the ground. Without a pause, she began firing at the soldiers coming toward her.

"Owww!"

In a flash, Kallen elbowed a soldier in the gut, stole the gun from his shoulder holster and kicked him flat to the ground. Without a pause, she began firing at the soldiers coming toward her.

"You fools!! Form the wall in front of Princess Euphemia!" While Bartley's call echoed below, Lelouch leaped into the cockpit of the black Knightmare. He was amazed at what he saw.

"What kind of Knightmare is this? Is it Gawain?"

He could tell from the cockpit that it was no ordinary Knightmare. It differed completely from the mass-produced

Sutherlands that composed the Britannian army's main forces, or even the older generation Glasgows. Lelouch wasn't a genius when it came to Knightmares but even he could tell one thing about the machine he was sitting in.

This is the newest model. This Knightmare must be Britannia's best and latest. He could tell just by looking at the displays. Lelouch operated the touch panel to call up a simulation program. It displayed manual data meant for training, basic information that most Knightmares used in their development stage. *Where's the navigation mode...there. Start.* The operational protocols were pretty different from the Knightmares he was used to. *I think I've got it.* He selected automatic mode, so that the computer would be in charge of complicated operations such as the foot balancer, etc. The Knightmare could only recreate the movements it had learned before in this mode, so its response would be slow and no complicated movements could be done, but he couldn't ask for more. Even with that handicap, the scope of the weapons and functions now at his disposal...

Lelouch laughed. This was his lucky day. He'd found something a lot better that he could have hoped. Maybe the island liked him after all.

After yanking off a cable that dangled from the cockpit to the outside, Lelouch closed himself in and grabbed the control stick to follow the navigation indicated on the monitor. Instead of immediately standing up, he opened the Knightmare's palm.

"Jump on, Kallen!"

"Y-you got it!"

While the two rebels executed a stunning heist, the other two who also spent night on the island were practically standing still. It couldn't be helped that Euphemia wasn't doing anything, she wasn't meant to fight. The problem lay with Suzaku.

"Suzaku, what's wrong?"

Suzaku Kururugi didn't even respond to Euphemia's urgent voice. He was blankly staring at something, distraught. The object that caught his attention was beyond the rock slab, in the cavern itself. A huge double door had been carved into the cavern walls. A strange pattern had been carved into it.

"...Why?" Euphemia thought she heard him mouth.

The situation remained in flux around him. Lelouch in the Knightmare, and Kallen clinging to the neck of said Knightmare, neared the cavern exit.

"Sutherlands are blocking our exit!"

Of course, Lelouch saw them on his monitors. There were three Britannian Knightmares.

"Don't fall down Kallen. And watch out when I fire."

As he warned her through the external speaker, Lelouch put his finger on the switch on the control stick.

"What— Ahhhhhh!"

The black Knightmare fired red lights from both shoulders. They were heat rays, powerful enough to pierce thick Knightmare armor, but erratic in their aim. They missed their targets completely and spattered randomly across the walls of the cavernous space.

"Damn! The weapons are incomplete!?"

Chunks of rock began falling from the broken ceiling. Kallen, still outside the Knightmare, cowered against it to avoid being hit. Fortunately, the unsuccessful attack at least intimidated the enemy. The Sutherlands stationed at the exit broke formation, leaving an opening for the black Knightmare to speed through.

"Zero! Reinforcements!"

"Relax! Another system is operational."

Outside of the underground hollow space, a line of Sutherlands prepared their assault rifles. At that moment, Lelouch pulled back on the controller with all his might. The black Knightmare's heavy body lifted off into the air! It defied gravity, flying over the enemy rifles' line of fire.

"We're flying! This Knightmare can fly!"

"Ha ha ha...Aha ha ha ha ha!"

Kallen's worries trailed into the distance along with Lelouch's high pitched laughter as the black Knightmare disappeared into the sky.



"The Gawain! Our Gawain....!" Bartley shouted after the vanishing Knightmare. Someone calmly stopped him from behind.

"That's alright. They say sorrow follows on the heels of joy. It's not your fault, Bartley."

"B...but, Your Highness..."

"Nobody could have done anything. But I can't believe that was Zero... I can't believe I finally met him, in a place like this."

As he said that, Schneizel el Britannia, Chancellor of the Empire, followed Bartley outside the cavern. He too looked up at the sky Zero had disappeared into. Moments later, he was distracted by something else, and turned around.

"Thank heaven you're both all right."

Schneizel looked gently toward Euphemia and Suzaku. Euphemia left Suzaku's side and ran toward her half-brother.

"Big brother Schneizel!"

"Euphy, I'm sorry I took so long."

The siblings beamed at each other.

"I'm sorry for making you worry."

"No, I'm partially responsible for this matter. I can't apologize enough to you."

"Oh please, brother..."

A military officer behind Schneizel interrupted Euphemia. "Your Highness, shall we keep to the schedule?"

"Hm? Oh right," Schneizel replied. For some reason, the request had thrown him, and that made Euphemia suspicious. The military officer passed by to confront someone.

It was Suzaku.

"Major Suzaku Kururugi, you are under arrest for a grade two violation of military regulations."

"...!"

"What...?" Euphemia spun around in dismay, happiness at seeing her brother taking a backseat to her indignation.

"Wait! That man is my knight! You can't do that!"

Schneizel gently pulled back Euphemia's arm. He whispered to her, "We'll do something about this later. For now, let them be."

"Um...Did something happen?"

Euphemia looked at Lloyd, who was standing nearby. The white-clad major of the Engineering Department just shrugged his shoulders.

October 2017, Area 11

The black stain on the wall defined the room.

Iron bars clad the windows. The unpleasant concrete floor served as a reminder to its tenants that no one was meant to stay there for long. These not so subtle signs instilled a sense of desperation and frustration in anyone inside, meant to intimidate anyone inside. The stain was unmistakably blood. What had happened in this room? What would happen to him in there? Nightmares keep coming. Criminals unlucky enough to stay in this room must have felt like confessing, even to crimes they didn't commit, just looking at that wall.

In the center of the isolation chamber, the young man sat, his eyes wide open. His youthful face didn't betray any emotions. His eyes were cold, his limbs as stiff as if they were being confined by a straightjacket. In the darkness, Suzaku Kururugi kept staring at the stain on the wall and trying to keep long interred memories from rising up.

After being arrested on Kamine Island, Suzaku was taken to Shikine Island headquarters. He realized that since Zero and the

Black Knights had commenced their attack so soon after he and Euphemia reached the island, this was the first time he'd stepped foot into headquarters.

Lieutenant Colonel Fayer had asked Suzaku to listen to an audio recording of communications between the Lancelot and headquarters that had taken place during the battle after the time that Suzaku lost consciousness. Captured Zero had been pushed into the cockpit of the Lancelot. The trial Gawain was preparing to fire from the floating airship Avalon. But suddenly, Lancelot revived from its suspended operation mode and started running.

"Major Kururugi, what are you doing? Follow my orders...!"

"Shut up! Who cares about them?! I have to live!"

"You..."

The communication cut off. The recording was over. Lieutenant Colonel Fayer reprimanded a bewildered Suzaku. "I don't know how you got out of the Lancelot, but you blew a golden opportunity to kill Zero in order to save your own life. Are you going to protest?"

"Was that ... really me...?" Suzaku asked in a cracked voice. His confusion was met with anger and accusation.

"This is nothing less than insubordination!"

"!"

Suzaku was rendered speechless. His body started shaking violently. He lost the strength to hold himself up and collapsed. He really had no idea that he'd said something like that. He had no memory of the event.

Had he said that? Had he ignored an order?

"LIVE!!"

He'd followed an order alright, even though he had no memory of it. He'd followed Lelouch's order, a command that had the power to override any personality, for it was the power of geass.

Unexpectedly, Suzaku's jail cell became bright with the blinking of fluorescent lights. The dry clack of the lock followed and his cell door opened with a fearsome squealing of iron. Rimless glasses flashes in the crack of the doorway.

"It is my regret to inform you," as Lloyd Asplund of ASEEC began in his usual goofy voice, "you've missed your chance to go to heaven again Suzaku. You've been released."

Suzaku didn't budge for a few moments, seemingly enraptured by the wall. Slowly he stood up and asked Lloyd with empty eyes, "Is that... an order?"

Lloyd furrowed his brow. "You could say that. An order of mercy. Considering the extenuating circumstances, you won't be charged for violating orders. Prince Schneizel's orders."

"I see..."

Suzaku let his eyelids close. When he opened them again, he brushed dust off his uniform and adjusted his tie. He stiffly faced Lloyd, who stood in the middle of the cell.

"Upon my release, I'm expected to immediately return to ASEEC?"

"Yes, I have something I want to ask you to do."

"Before returning, may I be allowed to stop by somewhere?" The moldering air thickened.

"That's fine."

"Thank you very much."

Suzaku started walking toward the door, straight as an arrow. For some reason, Lloyd didn't lead Suzaku out of the cell, but stepped aside to open a path for him. As Suzaku passed, Lloyd casually questioned, "Are you resigning as Princess Euphemia's knight?"

Suzaku stopped.

"If you are, it's none of my business. I don't think she'd hold it against you. She'd have been mad if you died with Zero by following the order." Lloyd's statement wasn't an assumption, but the truth. Although Suzaku realized that, and maybe because he'd

always known that, he hung his head and whispered, "...I'm not worthy of being her knight."

"That's not for you to decide," Lloyd tilted weighty words. "People around you will decide if you are worthy or not. Neither you nor Princess Euphemia have any say in the matter. Being a human can be sooo inconvenient," Lloyd chuckled. Suzaku didn't laugh.

"I'm not just saying that because of this incident."

Lloyd nodded as if he had guessed. "I knew that you were someone who had lost something already."

I don't know if that's intentional or unconscious...

...Lost something.

Suzaku clenched his shaking fists and hung his head even impossibly lower. "I know that I shouldn't say this and this will be a horrible betrayal..."

"...."

"...but I've always thought it would be better if she were a much colder person. That's right, I wish she was someone who could treat me as a mere tool or machine." It would be so much easier that way. His role as her knight would be free from confusion or doubt, and all-encompassing.

Tools don't move by their own will.

Machines don't ignore orders.

Tools don't fear destruction or death.

Machines...do not use their power for themselves.

He'd already drawn his sword, and if that sword was going to cut his guilty heart into pieces, then he'd rather have no heart at all. Then he wouldn't have to get hurt; he wouldn't have to endure this suffering.

"Of course that would be easier," Lloyd muttered. "You'd have someone else to be responsible for all your actions." That's what it meant to follow orders blindly, and Suzaku couldn't deny it.

"That's why I'm not worthy of being her knight."

Unfortunately, Euphemia li Britannia wanted nothing of the sort from Suzaku. She didn't want or need a mindless knight who had no will of his own. He'd assumed something different and accepted her request to become her knight under false pretenses... What a betrayal! Knowing her expectations of him now, he felt like he'd thrown her trust away. Suzaku finally understood, as best as he could without thinking too deeply about it, what he had done. Actually, he might have still been in the dark about a lot of things, and there were still truths he didn't want to stumble upon. He'd gone so far as to pretend to be other than he was, to ignore the dark side of him that he tried to even forget existed. For seven years, it had been that way. If he'd drawn his sword in error, he couldn't bear to keep living as a person. If he chose to retain his humanity, he couldn't endure his sword rebounding back at him. Instead, he desired to become a machine—no longer human, just a tool. At least becoming a machine would free him from the yoke of shame he carried for killing his father. He'd be able to close his eyes and ears to the guilt. A machine couldn't hear or see. A machine didn't have a human heart and neither did he anymore.

"She tried to treat someone like me as a human. I don't deserve it. If I was a human, I would have been punished and put to death long ago."

Lloyd silently observed Suzaku's profile.

"And in the end...I couldn't even be a tool. I have to remember that I'm not a person and don't deserve to be."

The fact that he'd snubbed orders wasn't even the greatest of Suzaku's problems. The worst part was he'd ignored them to save his own life. A tool that shouldn't have had the ability or desire to stand up for itself had done just that. He'd gone back on a promise he'd made a long time ago.

Back seven years ago, on that rainy night, Suzaku swore to Lelouch that as long as he was alive, he'd never use his own strength for himself. He couldn't be allowed to do so. But now, Suzaku had broken that pledge and needed to atone for his long-held sins.

"...Did you say you had something you wanted to ask me, Mr. Lloyd?" Suzaku turned to address Lloyd. "Is there some kind of mission?"

Lloyd was still silent, but slowly pushed back his shortish hair. "Indeed. You should ask Cecile for details. There was another incident while you were locked up."

"Do they need Lancelot?"

"I guess. Personally, I've had enough of these odd jobs."

"I see," Suzaku nodded and smiled. Lloyd recognized the trauma skirting that smile. "Unless I have to see Princess Euphemia, I'll be at ASEEC right away."

"..."

This is probably it... Suzaku thought.

This would be the last time he'd go into battle with Lancelot. Regardless of the mission's success, he probably wouldn't return.

If that was the case, then he needed to tell Euphemia everything. At the very least, he owed an explanation to the kind soul who had accepted someone like him. And then, he'd ask her to forget about it. To not honor his memory, to put him behind her, and to continue walking on her straight path...



"We hereby declare in this place the revival of Japan...as a legitimate independent and sovereign nation!" proclaimed a skinny man with a receding hairline. His image appeared as a small inset behind the TV new anchorman.

"Atsushi Sawasaki, leader of the group which has occupied Fukuoka base, was Chief Cabinet Secretary in the old Japanese government and the number two man under Prime Minister Kururugi. He fled to the Chinese Federation after the war, but it is thought he's made this move as a result of recent civil unrest caused by Zero's actions. Furthermore, whether the Black Knights are connected with this is still under investigation..."

"We're not part of it!" Tamaki yelled at the TV monitor. He was a member of the inner circle of the Black Knights. Kallen, who was also there, glanced at the masked man beside her.

"Zero, what should we do?"

Lelouch, lost in thought, didn't answer her.

CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルージュ

Lelouch
of the Rebellion

STAGE-3:3-SWORD

[Code of Chivalry]

Chivalry is difficult to define and its meaning has changed with the times. A knight is a person who upholds the current values of an era, including what is respected and what is worth fighting for. Several core concepts, such as *to live purely and righteously, to speak the truth, to punish the wicked and to protect one's lord* have never changed and never will. In the same way, what constitutes evil may change and is never absolute. Throughout time, the most renowned of knights have also been the most reviled. To those on the other side of his blade, a knight is nothing better than a devilish murderer.

October 2017, Area 11

1

It wasn't surprising. Ever since Area 11 had been established seven years ago, something like it could have happened at any time. In fact, there'd been plenty of minor failed attempts, but this was the first large-scale one.

The problem wasn't the man who called Atsushi Sawasaki and came out of nowhere to attack the Kyushu Block. The man was nothing but a pawn, hoping for some sort of payout for allowing himself to be used. What really mattered was a particular issue that had plagued Area 11 for seven years. It was an issue that Japan faced even long before then.

The Chinese Federation.

The international giant sat right next to Area 11. Metaphorically speaking, the tiny island of Area 11 was a splinter in the side of the much larger Chinese Federation. There it sat, allowing Britannia a toehold in the region. Understandably, the Chinese Federation was uneasy about having a rival superpower in their backyard. The Federation's patience and restraint over the past seven years was praiseworthy. Since Japan had surrendered just a mere month into battle, the Chinese Federation had never managed to intervene in the war. It was once said, "The day of France's ruin is the eve of the ruin of England." Likewise, once Britannia established a stronghold in Area 11, the Chinese Federation would always be under threat of attack from Britannia. The Federation had never been involved in anti-Britannian terrorist activities in Area 11, but that's not to say they didn't have an agenda in the Area.

It was clear to everyone that Sawasaki was part of the Chinese Federation's agenda. Currently, that agenda involved occupying the Fukuoka base in the Kyushu block and declaring the establishment of an independent state, Japan. It was clear not just because the military actions required exceeded what a lone politician could pull off, but because both high-level officials in Britannia and the Chinese Federation had been expecting something like this to occur for some time. In the inevitable showdown between giants, the name Atsushi Sawasaki was only a footnote.

"Hmph! How stupid of me," said the viceroy of Area 11, Cornelia li Britannia, banging her hand against her desk in the government office in frustration. She had returned to the Tokyo Settlement temporarily, following anti-terrorist activity in Hokuriku. "The terrorists became active in Hokuriku to divert us. It was a cheap trick and we fell for it."

"They outwitted us," Guilford spoke the general sentiment. His voice was somewhat cooler than Cornelia's; however, he was far from calm inside. Most likely, his rage and remorse were more keenly felt than hers.

This whole action had begun with Cornelia quelling a terrorist group of Chinese Federation supporters. This caused Cornelia to throw her crack troops into battle, leaving her defenseless to the true enemy, Sawasaki's group. However, originally it was Guilford who brought the Hokuriku area to Cornelia's attention. It was an undeniable error for the right-hand man of the viceroy of a colony a military bias to have made.

On the other hand, their feelings aside, the incident had exposed the structural shortcomings of Area 11's forces. The forces had been gradually making organizational changes ever since Cornelia was assigned the post of viceroy half a year prior. But the old system was hard to eradicate completely, especially considering the clear difference in quality between the original security forces and the new forces under the direct control of Viceroy Cornelia.

This disparity had shrunk somewhat with the soldiers becoming more experienced and the supervisors learning more about their position. Still, the issue was too complicated to be solved in half a year or so. It took time and the right environment to foster a quality military force and that was exactly what the top executives including Cornelia, Guilford and Darlton were attempting to do. They were building a foundation.

The real results of their labor were to be expected a little further down the road. As a matter of fact, Area 11's forces were still pretty worthless, with the exception of Cornelia's forces. Knowing this weakness, Sawasaki and his backers, the Chinese Federation, had targeted the Fukuoka base in the Kyushu block. Blaming the current administration for the current flawed military was unfair, as it was the former viceroy and homeland board of administration which elected him who had done a disservice to the military of Area 11.

Guilford reported the current situation as it appeared to him on a wall monitor. "The Sawasaki faction has suppressed the Fukuoka base completely. They're preparing to advance on the Sasebo base to the west and on the Kagoshima base to the south." There was a map of Kyushu on the screen as well as a map of the opponent's progress.

"The opponent's main weapons are Gun-Ru; the Knightmare models manufactured in the Chinese Federation. They are far inferior in quality to our Sutherlands; however, their numbers are formidable. We don't have enough troops stationed at Sasebo or Kagoshima alone to deal with them. Additionally, Sawasaki has gained support of terrorist groups in the Kyushu block." Cornelia's piercing gaze threatened to split the monitor in two.

Guilford cast a glance at her, and then asked in a reserved tone, "How would you like to handle this? Fortunately... Well, I don't know if 'fortunate' is an appropriate word, but His Highness

Schneizel is visiting Area 11 right now. We could request some reinforcements from the homeland or neighboring areas."

"You've got to be kidding me!" the princess exploded with rage. "Why I should embarrass myself even further?" Suddenly as it began, the outburst ended, though her eyes still smoldered. "Well, I've already embarrassed myself. Any further humiliation won't matter as long as I can get the results I want."

"..."

"We can't request reinforcements though. It would only escalate matters and we'd have a real war on our hands. The Chinese Federation has decided to make their move with Sawasaki and they'll start fighting with their real strength if provoked. There's no reason to let this get out of control. We won't deal with them head-on."

"Then we'll handle them as if it were any other colonial insurgency?"

"We have no choice but to handle it that way. We'll consider this an internal issue, not an international tussle. If we kill Sawasaki, the Chinese Federation will have to back down. Isn't that right, Guilford?"

"Agreed," Guilford replied, his intelligent face wearing a subtle smile. He has fulfilled his duty to Cornelia tactfully. One of Cornelia li Britannia's personal shortcomings was her tendency to make hasty judgments when emotionally involved. Quick decision-making was also her great strength but she did have a tendency to jump the gun. It was his role to calm her down. He cleared the way for the speeding train of her thoughts by removing any obstacles that would have caused an explosion of pride from the fierce tempered Cornelia. After she released some of her anger, she would calm considerably and put her extraordinary perspicacity to great use.

"What's that guy's name? Sawasaki's direct supporter in the Chinese Federation?"

"Tsao. Tsao Yuan Ming. According to our intelligence department, he's fifty-one years old. He was the general of the Chinese Federation's Seventh Division until he retired from active duty last year. Now he serves as a consultant to the Liaodong Military District. It seems the rebel army that he's leading along with Sawasaki is strictly volunteer and they have no relation to the official national army. That's the latest analysis."

Cornelia smiled bitterly for the first time as she listened to Guilford's quick answers. "It's their usual tactic. I've seen it done enough times that it doesn't upset me anymore. I feel bad for the guy. He'll be thrown out of his own country if things don't go as planned."

"Either way, the Chinese Federation probably hasn't made up its mind to go to war yet. I assume they would love to launch their puppet government in Area 11 with this, but I don't think they're looking forward to going head-to-head with us Britanniens either."

"You mean there are some parties who aren't looking forward to it. I'm positive some are. Otherwise, a military action of this size wouldn't have come this far. We have precious little time to weaken the power of those who are in favor of extended action and strengthen the position of their opponents." That would be the only way to convince the Chinese Federation not to wire Area 11 up like a puppet.

We will handle the incident as terrorist activity within the Area. Our direction has been determined. Now the issue was the arrangement of subjugation armies. The opponents were calling themselves the Volunteer Forces and Liberation Forces, but they were really the Chinese Federation army in disguise. Fighting them wouldn't be as easy as crushing guerilla fighters. Cornelia could only think about using her own trusty direct forces. However, some of them were still fighting in the Hokuriku area.

"The seizing of Ishikawa is complete...but the anti-government groups might be stirred up by this incident. Couldn't we have the Endeavor's troops in Niigata retrieved?"

"The conditions in other regions besides Kyushu are also in an uproar. We have no choice but to keep General Darlton in the Tokyo Settlement, although the Black Knights seem unrelated to this event."

"You never know where this might lead. Because this is our headquarters, we mustn't let our guard down in the Tokyo Settlement. Darlton and more than half of my direct forces have to stay."

Not enough troops... Cornelia bit her lip. She was still confident that she would not be defeated. Unfortunately, given the current constraints, she needed to destroy the rebel army lead by Sawasaki and Tsao with one strike, and couldn't afford damage control.

If the disturbance is prolonged, there's a chance that the Chinese Federation, usually content to bide its time, will notice their advantage and proceed with attacks. Once that happens, it'll be a world war.

There isn't much time. Even if we were to assemble troops and leave the Tokyo Settlement immediately, some key element of victory seems lacking...

While Cornelia was deep in thought, Guilford opened the door to admit a humble-looking secretary. "Viceroy, your Excellency, I'm here to let you know that His Highness, Chancellor Schneizel, is requesting a meeting with you."

"My brother...?" Cornelia knitted her brows slightly.



They'd set up their command center in an underground storage facility. The room was big—large enough to seat an orchestra. Even though the occupants of the room wouldn't have played a very good concert.

The executive members of the Black Knights had gathered in the room. Some of the members wore the army uniforms from the former Japanese army, some wore plain suits and naturally, a few wore Black Knight uniforms. The members were of all races and

ages. They looked as though they would have nothing in common elsewhere. But here they moved toward one common goal under one operation. No, one person.

On a raised stage similar to one found in a concert hall, a black masked and mantled man surveyed the people who had gathered. "Um, so you're saying..." one of the executive members, Minami, raised his voice among those assembled, "we aren't going to collaborate with Sawasaki." The man on the stage, Zero, nodded with composure and responded through the microphone installed inside the mask. "It's nonsense. That's a puppet government, not an independent one. The Chinese Federation's."

"But they claim to be Japanese." Somebody else raised his voice.

"You'd just be changing names and masters. There's no future with them. That's not what we are looking for. Such a meaningless alliance would be toxic as well."

"Hmm...but, that means..." This time, it was a man in a Japanese army uniform. He was wearing glasses and bore a scar on his face. The man was Asahina, who joined the Black Knights along with Tohdoh. "Then are you saying we don't interfere with what the Britannians are doing? That will leave a bitter taste in my mouth. I mean, the group is headed by a Japanese person..."

Muttering was heard all over the room. Not everyone agreed with Asahina's opinion either. They were quick to point out flaws in his viewpoint.

After the general hubbub subsided, a man stepped up to Zero. He had chiseled facial features and dull brown hair, definitely not Japanese. As a matter of fact, he was the only Britannian present in this group, besides Zero himself and Kallen. The man was Diethard Ried, who'd originally reorganized the Black Knights from a small resistance group into the military force it was today. He was also the chief intelligence and strategy officer for the leader, Zero.

"Zero," Diethard spoke to Zero politely. "I think it is important to make our directions clear as a group. Why don't you tell us on this occasion? What you are aiming for."

"You're right," deputy commander Ohgi also opened his mouth for the first time. "I agree with you on that point. Even leaving the Sawasaki matter aside, what's our main objective here? What do you think Zero?"

Zero nodded to Ohgi's question. Then, Zero said evenly, "We will launch our independent nation in the Tokyo Settlement." A moment of silence—but literally, it was nothing but the silence before the storm. When everyone grasped the meaning of what he said, the air of astonishment filled the room.

"An independent nation!?"

"Launching a nation, us, alone?"

"Hey, that's jumping the gun..."

"I thought he said that we weren't going to support Sawasaki's idea of Japan..."

Ohgi suppressed the buzz, then faced Zero himself. "Hold on Zero. The Black Knights surely has grown. It has become much easier to play out our resistance activities with all the funds and weapons we have now. But a nation, so suddenly... Maybe something a little more realistic or a goal for the nearer future..."

"I agree," nodded a woman in a same uniform as the one Asahina wore. That was Chiba, who also used to work under Tohdoh. Tohdoh himself stood quietly a little further away with his eyes closed and arms crossed.

"The enemy is a nation that controls a third of the entire world. If we went straight up to them, us, the Black Knights will be swiped out easily even before the strategies are discussed. Before we talk about fairly tales, we should get a grip of the reality." Some tried to express solidarity with Chiba's statement but Zero cut them off.

"Reality?" He smirked inside the mask. Chiba frowned.

In a fierce, solid voice that no one had heard Zero speak in before, he proclaimed, "Well, then answer me this! Are you going to wait until someone else defeats Britannia? Who is going to do that for us? You think if you wait long enough, some day the

chance will come? Don't be naive! If we don't do it, that someday will never come!"

Zero's stern dignity awed everyone present. The command office grew silent again. Rakshata, head of the research and development team, was the only one bored, trying to hide her yawn. As a matter of fact, she'd been bored ever since the meeting started.

Looking over the speechless crowd, Zero dampened his tone to normal levels. "As long as you think my words as fairly tales, nothing will ever change. Not in Japan, nor in yourselves. I want each and every one of you to think about what happened today. If you don't change your mind, you don't deserve to call yourself anti-Britannia ever again. That's one thing I want you to be clear on."

You could have heard a pin drop.

Following the meeting, Lelouch headed for his room. A girl as beautiful as a doll waited for him in front of the heavy iron door. "Is your grand speech over?" Though she hadn't been in the room, she spoke as though she knew it intimately. Lelouch found her hard to read. He could never tell whether she was being sarcastic or serious.

"How about you? Are you done with your Nightmare training C.C.? Rakshata has already begun her final adjustment of Gawain."

"Don't worry," C.C. answered dryly. "I'm a natural. At least I know I'm better than you. You comes back with a broken machine every time." She was being sarcastic now. Lelouch rolled his eyes behind the mask, slid past her and went into his room. C.C. followed him as though it was her right. Her penchant to do that had instigated a rumor among the Black Knights that Zero and C.C. were lovers, although it couldn't be farther from the truth.

As soon as C.C. locked the door, Lelouch removed his heavy mask. Although he could breathe in it, it was uncomfortable to wear. It was risky to remove it while with the Black Knights but he reasoned it would be okay so long as it was just for a short while and he kept the door locked. Lelouch took his first deep breath of fresh air in hours.

C.C. glanced at him from the corner of her eye as she walked towards a bed that filled a good portion of the room. She perched on the edge, asking him a question in her usual clear, direct tone.

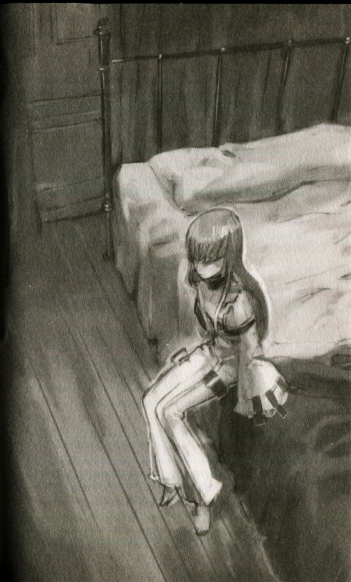
"So, did you persuade the Black Knights about Sawasaki and the Chinese Federation?" Only C.C. knew how Lelouch was going to handle that situation. Lelouch turned back to look at her and gave a little shrug.

"Before they were persuaded, I tossed a bomb. It baffled them, that's for sure. Well, it was a good opportunity. It's about time I revolutionized their minds." The way Lelouch saw it, many of the Black Knights were fervently anti-Britannian, but had given no thought to what future they might be building. They saw resistance against the system as the final objective, rather than a method. All of them didn't feel that way, particularly Todoh and Diethard, but the former soldiers like Asahina and Chiba as well as some of the other members seemed to have the wrong idea about what the Black Knights stood for.

It was necessary that he change those people's minds. The reason why Lelouch established the Black Knights in the first place hadn't been because he wanted to vent his frustrations about the way people had to live under Britannian rule. His ultimate goal was Britannia's defeat. Japan's independence from Britannia was merely a stepping stone to that end.

C.C. gave him a puzzled look. "If you say so, but I don't think it would be a great idea to reject the Chinese Federation so obviously. After all, you're going to ask them for their help later in your fight against Britannia, aren't you?"

"Of course. They'll be my allies. This incident will teach them who between us is the subordinate and who the superior."



He smiled wickedly in his desk chair. "I will destroy Britannia with my own hands. In this drama, the Chinese Federation has only been cast in a supporting role, not the lead. I won't approve of any other arrangement on my stage. Not when it comes time to achieve my ultimate goal."

That was why Lelouch didn't want somebody like Sawasaki popping out of the woodwork. Sawasaki was a dog who defected to another master when he grew tired of the first. Whatever the Black Knights' intentions might be, freeing Area 11 was just a step toward the defeat of Britannia. But any wrong step and the whole plan could begin to collapse.

"That's what you want to happen but will the Chinese Federation even help you?"

"That's what my geass is for," Lelouch laughed off C.C.'s doubt. "I recognize that this power is more useful when implemented in strategy and diplomacy, not in actual battle. I mean, whatever they think they want, we can convince them otherwise."

"I don't know if you should rely on it so much."

"I don't rely on it. I use it when necessary," Lelouch said with arrogant indifference. Then he looked as if he remembered something. "That's right..."

Lelouch tucked away his smirk in favor of a more piercing gaze. "I had forgotten to ask you something C.C."

"What is it?"

"You know what I'm talking about. The incident on Shikine Island." For a moment, a tense atmosphere filled the room, Lelouch and C.C. contributing to it equally.

Lelouch repositioned his body to directly face C.C. He addressed her in an unforgiving tone. "I'll ask you straight. What happened to Kallen and me on Shikine Island...did that have something to do with you?"

You reached that conclusion all on your own, as expected. Prepared as she was, C.C. didn't respond right away. She caught a strand of

her hair and started to play with it. She seemed lost in thought, or perhaps ignoring his question in favor of being silly.

Then, she let her hair fall and answered him indifferently, "Not directly." Lelouch didn't back down. "Then let me change the question. You know what happened, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Explain."

"I refuse."

He raised his eyebrows at the snub. His amethyst eyes gleamed.

"I thought we were accomplices."

"Some things are better unsaid, even between husband and wife, between best friends. That's even truer between accomplices."

"Are you trying to muddle your way out with reason?"

"Not really. I'm just saying that I have no intention of telling you, no matter how much you cry or scream. Not for the time being. It might be possible to tell you later."

"Do you think such vague words are going to convince me?"

"That's your problem, not mine."

Their eyes met, sending out invisible sparks. Lelouch turned away first. "Hmph," he snorted as he relaxed the aggressive stance he'd taken.

"Fine. I'll find out what happened on my own, while I'm figuring out just who you are and what you want."

"..."

"Either way, that whole incident was one miscalculation after another. I don't have time to process it all now. It gives me a headache thinking of the damage control I have to do to clean it up."

Nothing from Shikine Island had been resolved, especially not since Lelouch and the Black Knights had been dragged into the Sawasaki affair. However, not even C.C. knew that while the Black Knights considered their move against the Chinese Federation, Suzaku had given Euphemia his words of resignation.

Lelouch leaned his elbow on the desk, fingers on his temples.

"As I thought," C.C. pointed out. "You failed to convince Suzaku, didn't you?" Lelouch flinched and let his head hang. He didn't have the cold face of an interrogator or the regal visage of the leader of the Black Knights anymore. He wore the pained and frustrated face of a normal boy. Lelouch muttered, "Yeah... It turned out as you predicted..."

"..."

"I tried to pour salt in his wounds and it hurt him. That was dirty enough of me... Then I did something I should have never done to him..." Lelouch ground his teeth. C.C. understood exactly what Lelouch was upset about. He must have used his geass on Suzaku, though C.C. didn't know what the order had been.

Lelouch's geass was the absolute power to make anyone obey his orders. Nothing in the world designated the position of master and subordinate so clearly. It should have never been used on a friend. The moment one friend attempted to make another his subordinate, the friendship was broken.

"You predicted that I'd end up using my geass and you were right. Hmph. Go ahead and laugh at me C.C. Seeing into the future is a rare talent; you ought to be proud," Lelouch ridiculed himself.

Expressionless as ever, C.C. said, "I think you're misunderstanding something about what I said. My prediction was wrong."

"What?"

"My prediction was that Lelouch, not Zero, would talk to Suzaku and end up using geass. Given the circumstances, my prediction was wrong, but it's actually better this way. Your judgment was sound. The choice you made was right."

Lelouch eyed C.C. doubtfully. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you understand? Zero had a much better chance of convincing Suzaku to fight with him than Lelouch ever would.

He would have never listened to you as Lelouch, but he would listen to Zero."

"That isn't the first time I've heard that. But why do you say that?" Lelouch said, confusion swimming in his purple eyes.

"I told you before. That's something you need to figure out yourself," C.C. brushed him off but at the same time she didn't know what to say. This boy, Lelouch vi Britannia was clever and gifted. He obviously possessed an extraordinary intellect and the charisma to command the masses. Given these traits, his leadership abilities surpassed not only Princess Euphemia's, but also his older sister Cornelia's.

With more polishing and experience, it would be possible for him to surpass his father, Emperor Charles zi Britannia. However, C.C. was aware of his fatal flaw, a shortcoming that simply couldn't be overlooked. Once Lelouch became emotionally close to someone, he became extremely biased for their sake.

C.C. saw Lelouch's stance towards Suzaku as problematic. The boys were dear, childhood friends, but as far as their present interactions were concerned, C.C. saw the misunderstanding between them.

They'd shared a solid bond in the past. So Lelouch held an idealistic vision that Suzaku would never withhold his support. C.C. saw the simple difference that Lelouch didn't. The Suzaku he was dealing with was Suzaku of the present, not of the past. Things had changed over time. But Lelouch didn't see that. He clung to the happy memories of the past, and what Suzaku was doing now, as a soldier of Britannia, was beyond his comprehension.

In other words, he was too blinded by fond memories to even see, much less reject the new Suzaku. He placed his faith in the ghost of Suzaku, the one who inhabited his memories, instead of the one in front of him. The incident with Mao had reinforced Lelouch's faith in the power of the past when it came to light that Suzaku killed his father. In C.C.'s opinion, though, Suzaku would

never obey Lelouch. Or at least he would never give Lelouch the satisfaction of thinking he was being obeyed.

Some people would gladly live in the past, if it was full of pride and happy memories. For Suzaku, who killed his father, the past was something to erase rather than cherish. When Lelouch acted as if the old Suzaku was the real one, Suzaku felt again like he had when he murdered his father. A return to that state of mind would not move Suzaku, and that was what Lelouch failed to understand.

"That's how it is," C.C. mused. They were untouchable to each other because their shared memories bound them so tightly. *If words could make Lelouch understand, then I would try to tell him.*

But this was one problem he'd have to work through on his own...or rather, feel within his heart. Abstract understanding wasn't enough between people. If he really wanted to win Suzaku over to his side, Lelouch needed to see Suzaku for who he was now. *Don't forget what you know of Suzaku from the past, but embrace all of him, both past and present. Unless you can accept both, he will not turn to you. Could Lelouch do it?*

"What are you going to do about Suzaku Kururugi and the princess?"

"I told you I don't have time for that right now. I'll get to it after this issue is dealt with."

"You'll get back to it, will you...?" C.C. sighed to herself as the boy donned his Zero mask again. "I'm not sure you'll have time."

2

Martial law had yet to be declared in the Tokyo Settlement, or any other military district of Area 11, except for the Kyushu block. Partially that was because the Kyushu block was ground zero of the independence movement and partially because it was already conveniently isolated from most of Area 11 by water.

Viceroy Cornelia wanted to avoid as much chaos as possible, the result being that average citizens could enjoy life as usual, unless they happened to be in the ghetto, a hotbed of anti-government demonstrations.

Not to say that people weren't a bit on edge. It was easier for the people with power, such as Lelouch or Cornelia, to cope. Those without power to direct the situation were naturally fearful, as they were the ones who ended up paying the highest price when those with power took action. And so the people were afraid.

A gentle autumn sun shone into the student council room at Ashford Academy.

"After all our hard work preparing for it, I guess the school festival will be cancelled," said Shirley Fenette in a dull voice. She looked out the window.

"That's the least of our problem. We are at war!" A fellow student council member, Rivalz Cardemone responded boisterously as he checked off items on a supply list.

"A-a war...?" asked the girl sitting in front of the computer. She had long pigtails and big owl-eyed glasses. All three were top year students, but unlike her peers, Nina Einstein had consistently held Ashford Academy's top score in science and math, two years running. Rivalz tossed the pen he'd been using on the checklist and crossed his arms behind his tousle-haired head.

"Even though there is a refugee government in between, this is definitely a war between Britannia and the Chinese Federation by proxy; no matter how much the news and the papers claim that it's terrorism."

"Some people are saying that they're gonna go back to the homeland."

"Yeah, who'd come to a festival when there's heavy stuff like this in the air?" As serious as it sounded, their conversation wasn't constructive. The only person giving it any thought was the student council president, Milly Ashford. She'd propped her long

legs up on the table while pondering a few things. Suddenly, she exhaled and hit Rivalz on the head with a rolled up resume.

"Your hand isn't moving. Keeping track of incoming materials is your group's task. I wouldn't tell you not to talk but keep working."

"That's easy for you to say," Rivalz whined. "I'm doing the work of three people! Suzaku's back in the army, Kallen is hospitalized and the rest are hiding. Man, Lelouch sure has changed lately. He used to always take care of his work for the student council, even if he cut classes that same day."

"..."

Rivalz's words got Milly silent again. For some reason, Shirley jerked her head as if noticing something.

"Hmm? What's up Shirley?"

"Oh, it's nothing," Shirley said vaguely.

The floating airship Avalon, of the unified operations of the Holy Empire of Britannia, drifted above the cloud layer.

Unlike the propulsion systems of V-TOL jets, the Avalon used a new flight technology, called the Float System. The technology itself was brand new and still treated as top secret in Britannia. The Avalon's maneuverability far surpassed the V-TOL's. Not only could it stabilize itself in midair, it could rotate in place. It wasn't an exaggeration to describe the Avalon as a floating fortress.

The Avalon was built as a new flagship for Imperial Chancellor Schneizel. As such, Schneizel was its commanding officer, though he was nowhere to be seen on the bridge at the moment. Instead, Lloyd sat in the commander's chair. Unsurprisingly, Lloyd had developed the Float System of the Avalon. Lloyd surveyed the huge strategy panel in front of him from the commander's chair. His subordinate, Lieutenant Cecile Croomy, entered the room from a door behind him.

"And how's Suzaku doing?" Lloyd asked, not bothering to look at Cecile directly.

"Saying he'll do whatever the mission demands," Cecile answered softly, after a moment of hesitation.

"I see," Lloyd answered, rolling his reply into an impromptu stretch of his long arms and back.

"Then, we ought to get things ready, don't you suppose? As long as Prince Schneizel remains in the Tokyo Settlement, we're the ones operating this ship. I dare say we're not very good at it."

Cecile pressed the binder under her arm close to her side, troubled. She decided to voice her concern. "Are you sure?"

"About what?"

"Well, I mean..."

Cecile wasn't sure where to go next. She wanted to say something about Suzaku. Of course, Cecile had been informed of Suzaku's decision to resign as a knight. But honestly it was his attitude after his imprisonment that bothered her more. It wasn't any one particular thing like his speech or health. The tip-off was something more instinctive. The very fact that he could speak to her as if nothing had happened bothered her in a way that was difficult to express. Something was different. He'd always had an edge of danger to him, but now he was like a sword drawn from its scabbard. In another time, that could have been a positive association, attesting to his passion and drive, but she felt the opposite now.

A sword has a sharp edge, but it's so delicate.

Was it the best idea to put him in the Lancelot and assign him a mission...?

As Cecile struggled to express her apprehension in a logical manner, Lloyd grinned. He hadn't told Cecile anything of the discussion between him and Suzaku in jail. With a teasing smile, Lloyd said, "Cecile, I just want to ask you something."

"Y...yes?"

"Do you know what defines an excellent superior officer?"

"Pardon me...?"

Lloyd did love to hear himself talk and was answering before she could really respond. "The ability to not to waste their subordinates' lives in vain. But, you know, in other words, it means to have their subordinate die for good causes."

Cecile didn't like what she heard.

"...What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing really," Lloyd narrowed his eyes to indicate the exact opposite.

"You know what you meant," Cecile's expression hardened. She took a step toward him with tightly clenched hands.

"Suzaku is one of your subordinates. Should I take your words to mean that I shouldn't care too much about what happens to him?"

"If they did?"

"Then I respect you as my superior but I despise you as a human."

"Ouch..." Lloyd tapped his cheek exaggeratedly. "You're always ever so accurate. That's exactly what is so helpless about this business called the military. One's professional achievements and one's success as a person don't always match."

Cecile wasn't in the mood for his sarcasm. Her look passed beyond critical to severe disapproval. Lloyd noticed and toned down his language. With a tight smile, he said, "That's what they say at least. Cecile?"

"..."

"You don't look up to me as a military man, do you?"

A few moments later, after Cecile processed the meaning of Lloyd's words, her face brightened, like a flower blooming in the spring sun.

"You mean..."

Lloyd looked away and scratched behind his ears.

"You don't think I would throw away such an excellent part for Lancelot? No, you're right about everything. He's a bit of a

danger to himself and others right now," Lloyd shrugged. "Let's you and I do what we can. This isn't the first time we've been ordered on a dangerous mission. Let's show what we can do!"

"Yes sir!"

"Then will you contact Viceroy Cornelia's command ship?"

"Yes, right away."

Unlike above the clouds, the ocean wasn't calm.

The weather was improving from a few days ago at least. An out of season storm west of Area 11 had slowed down Cornelia's forces as soon as they had left the Tokyo Settlement. While she was fighting through a tempest, Sawasaki's group expanded their influence in the Kumamoto block. Cornelia wasn't purposefully delaying her arrival, but all the same, the delays were putting her in a better position to win. Cornelia hadn't been the one to put them in a more favorable position though.

"Princess," Guilford relayed a telegram to her. "They say the special forces have reached their position in the sky. As soon as we're ready, they say we can attack."

"I see," Cornelia answered quickly and tossed her wavy hair with ease.

"If this works out, I'll owe my big brother one."

The strategy was not designed by Cornelia or Guilford but by Schneizel. When Schneizel met Cornelia at the settlement, he'd agreed with her plans to quell Sawasaki's rebellion by removing Sawasaki and thereby the Chinese Federation's reasons for being there. He'd then requested she utilize the Avalon and Advanced Special Envoy Engineering Corps. The focus of the attack was the enemy's main base at Fukuoka because Sawasaki was there. Since the fighting would most likely be fierce and incur many casualties, the Avalon and its state-of-the-art Nightmare Lancelot would attack the base from the sky instead. Even if the irregular's

attack was not successful, it would serve its purpose of confusing the enemy. By exploiting the ensuing chaos, Cornelia would make a sudden landing and storm the enemy base, obliterating them entirely.

"Diversionary tactics. I think that makes sense as far as a war strategy, but should we have such high expectations for the Avalon, my brother? I know that Lancelot has enough strength to beat a midsize troop of Gun-Ru."

"If it's within a given time," Schneizel responded calmly, even smiling. "Although the Avalon's shield system is not complete, I imagine it would hold its own against enemy Knightmares for a while. The Avalon was developed with that purpose in mind after all. Not to mention that the Lancelot's been developing quite interestingly." Although his explanation didn't ease Cornelia's doubts, she had little recourse but to trust him.

Schneizel himself remained in the Tokyo Settlement to strengthen the Britannian army's diplomatic ties to neighboring colonies like Areas 10 and 12. He didn't ask for rescue forces but instead he was pressuring the Chinese Federation. He wanted to bark a little to match Cornelia's bite. If the Federation saw Britannia flexing a bit, they would think twice about sending reinforcements to support Sawasaki. Of course, neither Schneizel nor Cornelia wanted to actually attack the Chinese Federation; they just wanted to intimidate them to prevent future rash attacks. It seemed to be working thus far. The Chinese Federation navy had issued a mobilization order, but their fleet had yet to make any moves and remained in Federation waters. They seemed hesitant about irking Britannia. Schneizel's experience and broader view of the situation was Cornelia's greatest asset in the battle. Direct use of one's armed forces wasn't the only way to deter an enemy. Schneizel's preventative tactics worked very well since both Britannia and the Chinese Federation wanted to avoid a full conflict with each other.

For these reasons, Cornelia's situation had improved since leaving the Tokyo Settlement. Only one problem remained.

"You think ASEEC will be able to break through?" Cornelia asked her knight as she surveyed the gloomy sea in front of her.

"With Kururugi, it's possible," Guilford replied.

The mention of the Eleven's name caused Cornelia's eyebrow to twitch. The regal princess of the battlefield looked away, as if uncertain how to say what she thought.

"Using him may be trouble."

"What do you mean by trouble?"

"He's too talented to be ignored. However, using him flies in the face of all I believe in. That's what I meant." Cornelia didn't say another word on the matter and remained silent until the battle began.

"Incoming missiles! Apparent launch point: Fukuoka base!" The urgent voice of a crew member echoed across the bridge of the Avalon.

As Lloyd watched the estimated missile path indicated on the strategy panel, he talked to Cecile next to him. His was considerably less concerned than that of the nervous crew member.

"What do they say in the language of Area 11 when fireworks are up in the air? Was that *Okerya*?"

"I'd rather not engage in a silly conversation with you but I believe you meant *Tamaya*."

"Was that it? I thought that's what you called cat. The same way you'd called a dog 'Rover.' My fiancée was just talking about it the other day."

"More like... Wait, did you just say 'fiancée'?"

Meanwhile, Fukuoka base's missiles rapidly approached the Avalon like a handful of stars streaming into the night. It came

close to the fleet, right in front of the rail gun. However, before the gun could fire, all nine little stars splattered against a great green wall of light.

Lancelot was equipped with a Knightmare-size version of it but the Avalon possessed a rather massive energy shield. Large as it was, it didn't protect the whole ship, and didn't protect from attacks from above, but at the moment that wasn't a concern.

"Ta..."

"I'll be cross if you insist on yelling it out."

After Cecile prevented Lloyd from screaming like an idiot, she broadcast an open message to the whole ship.

"All battle personnel, the long-distance artillery battle has begun. The rail gun cannot be used while the energy shield is on. Prepare to fire missiles. Set the target at the enemy's anti-air missile battery."

"Vector calculations from the enemy's first missile to the battery complete. Set target. Missile launch preparation complete!"

"Fire!"

On Cecile's order, anti-surface missiles fired at once from the upper part of the Avalon, which was not covered by the energy shield. There was no holding back on missiles. In the first phase, they wanted to destroy as many enemy batteries as they could. It wasn't a move to directly protect the Avalon. As long as the airship maintained its current altitude and distance it wasn't threatened by anything on the ground. Instead, their concern was to protect the Lancelot as it forced its way into the base.

Some of the Avalon's missiles were intercepted before they reached the base below. But the remaining ones struck with force, destroying seven batteries.

"Prepare to fire a second round."

"Orbit modification complete. Set target to the enemy's second missile defense line."

"Take care of them at once. Fire!"

"My, aren't you getting into it."

Cecile ignored Lloyd's comment about her and continued issuing orders. The enemy base kept sending missiles toward the Avalon but all of them fizzled on the airship's strong shield. The missiles and their batteries had been built with only fighter jets in mind. They were no match for the Avalon's superior technology. The Fukuoka base's command center surely was in chaos. They'd suddenly been attacked by a flying battleship, and their only means of retaliation, the anti-air missiles, were failing. Even with a brilliant strategy, the ground forces were at a severe disadvantage.

More batteries were destroyed by the second round of fire. As Cecile prepared to order the third round, a crewperson shouted, "Enemy fighter plane launch confirmed!"

"Here they come..."

Cecile smiled and her fingers flew across her handheld console with all the grace of a pianist at the keys.

"Prepare all systems for interception!"

"Yes, My Lord! All systems have been switched to anti-air interception mode. The Float System has been calibrated for maximum mobility! Shields are also at maximum!"

Cecile turned toward Lloyd, still sitting next to her. "My, what a frightening grin you have," he observed.

He may have been joking, but Cecile recognized the rare serious expression in his eyes, mostly concealed by his glasses. Cecile sobered as well and touched the communications panel, giving them a direct link to their "trump card."

"Suzaku, can you hear me?"

The communication reached the cockpit of the Lancelot and a pilot with his eyes closed.

"Suzaku, can you hear me?"

Eyes fluttered open, and the monitor of the Lancelot, which was powered up and standing by on the launch deck, displayed the face of Cecile Croomy, commanding officer of the Lancelot and the Avalon. When their eyes met, Cecile adopted a military pose.

"Major Kururugi, just to reconfirm the mission outline. This ship will breach the enemy's front line at high altitude. Lancelot will move to its launch point. The float-unit equipped advanced prototype weapon Z-01 will attack the enemy headquarters at the Fukuoka base."

Red wings adorned Lancelot's back, making it look like a fighter jet. The wings had been developed with the same engineering as the Avalon's Float System, only adapted to Knightmares. Of course, the Knightmare's version didn't pack the punch of the Avalon's, but they were more compact and lightweight.

"Z-01 Lancelot will break through the enemy's second force. Assault the enemy's command center in the middle of the Fukuoka base. Keep in mind that the float unit consumes energy at a high rate, so pay attention to your operational time limit."

It was a reckless strategy. She was ordering a single Knightmare to assault an enemy base from the middle of it. Even with the noble goal of diverting the enemy to give the main ground forces an opening to attack, it was dangerous to the point of being suicidal.

However, while he fully understood the meaning of his orders, the boy with brown hair responded politely. "Yes, My Lord."

Seeing his face, Cecile wanted to tell him not to feel obligated. She struggled to keep the words from coming out of her mouth. It was wrong for someone in her position to say something like that. Even if she did say it, she doubted Suzaku would listen. So all she could do was increase the probability of his safe return.

"Suzaku."

"Yes," Suzaku responded to her without betraying any emotion. As usual. So Cecile gave him her biggest smile.

"Show them what you got."

Suzaku's jaw dropped slightly. Before he could recover, Cecile was back in business mode. "Avalon will reach the target point in 30 seconds. Lancelot, prepare to launch."

Suzaku recovered and grabbed his control stick again.

"ME boost."

"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three..."

"Lancelot launch!"

"Launching!"

The blazing figure that jumped into the thick clouds was like a comet cutting through the night sky.

3

"ASEEC seems to have engaged the enemy."

Far from the battle in the Tokyo Settlement's government office, the chancellor of the Britannian Empire, Schneizel el Britannia nodded, "I see" to General Darlton's report.

"Right on time, aren't they? Darlton, we owe it to those on the battlefield to have reinforcements ready if needed. I got ahead of that institution."

"You mean... Toromo?"

While Schneizel reclined on the sofa of the administration room, Darlton frowned slightly.

"But Lord Chancellor, that's..."

"I'm going to use what I have. Call it a lack of confidence in my plans, but I have to be prepared in case they don't work."

"Yes, My Lord..." Darlton agreed, but more out of politeness than actual conviction. Schneizel was about to broach another subject when suddenly the door burst open and a young woman rushed inside.

"Schneizel!" called Euphemia.

Unlike Cornelia, Euphemia hadn't gone to the battlefield. Cornelia had ordered her to stay behind. It was obvious that there was no place in this military maneuver for Euphemia. Although Cornelia's order was sensible, the fact that the instructions she left read "to temporarily suspend all her official duties and not to leave the Tokyo Settlement" lacked some consideration for her younger sister and sub-vice-roy's feelings. Cornelia had her sister's safety in mind but the order was yet another wedge between the increasingly distant siblings. As a consequence, Euphemia had no intention of taking the slight. She did understand it was prudent for her to stay in the settlement as she would be useless on the battlefield, she really did, but the more Cornelia tried to push her away from politics and the military, the more Euphemia sought some way around it, even if her willfulness could lead to her making a mistake.

Euphemia was breathing hard when she came in to the administration room but she had a determined expression on her face.

"Euphy?"

Schneizel sensed something wrong in Euphemia's sudden resurrection from the despondent state she'd been wallowing in for the past few days. He noticed her hands clenched in front of her chest.

"Schneizel! Please let me send a private message!"

Schneizel looked puzzled. Euphemia's hands were clutching something. It was an object her former knight Suzaku had returned to her a few days prior—a badge of rank that resembled a beautiful white bird with open wings. It was the symbol of his knighthood, bestowed upon him at his knighting ceremony.



"The enemy ship seems to have launched a bomber but it's faster than a fighter plane," reported an officer.

"What?!" demanded Atushi Sawasaki. The man with the slightly gloomy eyes and black suit was an exiled politician and the catalyst of the current situation. The enemy's renewed air raid on their battleship was enough of an annoyance without—

"I have video!" chimed another officer. A telephoto lens caught an image high in the sky. It was a humanoid figure soaring on its wings. "It's a Nightmare!"

"But it's flying on its own!" gasped a portly man beside Sawasaki. Tsao Yuan Ming wore the traditional flowing robes of the Chinese Federation. He'd been sent in person to support the resistance effort.

Sawasaki, who hadn't taken his eyes off the image, added, "I've seen this unit before at the Information Department. But it didn't have wings."

Realization paralyzed Tsao's thick face, "You don't mean that fantastic weapon?!" Though Tsao looked ready to empty the contents of his stomach, Sawasaki grinned for some reason.

Dogfights were named after fights in which dogs circle around each other, trying to bite each others tails. Close combat in the air earned the name dogfight because pilots gained the upper hand by taking the opponent's tail. In a dogfight, the opponents have to be equally matched. If there's a big difference in the opponents' maneuverability, there will be no "fight."

This came into play in the contact between the Lancelot and the fighter jets from the enemy base. Lloyd had endowed the float unit with superb rotation capabilities and rapid high speed maneuverability. The float unit made a barrel roll look obsolete. Lancelot was faster than the fighter jets, as well as able to move rapidly in any direction—up, down, left and right. Regular fighter

jets didn't hold a candle to a machine with features never produced before. It was in a class all its own.

Even a machine with such fantastic capabilities needed a capable pilot to maximize its performance. In that regard, Suzaku was an exceptional piece of work. Although he'd trained on simulators earlier, this fight was his first time using the float unit in real combat. Despite his lack of experience, the pilot's operation was flawless. By the time the Lancelot's VARIS rifle had shot down its fifteenth fighter jet, twenty minutes after it took off, Lloyd was nearly beside himself with astonishment.

"I'm the one who feels defeated here," Lloyd, the unit's developer, muttered. "It's like he's telling me that the unit is not so great..."

Cecile thought it a rare moment of honesty.

In any case, the purpose of launching the Lancelot from the Avalon was not so it could swat down jets. That was just necessary for reaching the next stage. Bursting through the defense formation of enemy fighter jets, Suzaku descended toward the ten o'clock, leaving the remaining enemy jets behind. It was now visible to the naked eye below him—a huge fortress on the sea. There was a circular tower in the center.

"That's Fukuoka base..."

Thanks to the Avalon's successful destruction of the base's ranged weaponry, few anti-air cannons were left. Suzaku tilted the control stick to descend even further. At that moment, an electronic noise rang in the cockpit. A blue light flashed on the communication panel. He was receiving communications from the Fukuoka base.

"An open channel!"

After a brief hesitation, Suzaku opened communications. The blurry image of a thin man greeted his eyes.

"This is Sawasaki, is that Kururugi's son approaching here?"

"I"

Suzaku remembered the face in the monitor. Although his hair had thinned and his face had more wrinkles, Suzaku recognized the man from his father's mansion. Sawasaki didn't seem to remember Suzaku very well, but that was understandable. As a child, he'd avoided his father if it wasn't absolutely necessary to be near him.

"I see. So that's the sort of son he had." Sawasaki stared ahead, probably staring at Suzaku staring at him. He smiled meanly.

Suzaku blandly replied, "Mr. Sawasaki, your actions are against Area 11 regulations. If you want to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, please surrender right now. If not..."

"Surrender?" Sawasaki sneered. "That brings back memories. Are you asking me to surrender to bloody, violent Britannia? Me? You're just like your father."

"What?"

Suzaku gasped not because he was taken aback by Sawasaki's words, but by the flashing of a warning light in the cockpit. His sensors had picked up active energy signatures from a few remaining anti-air batteries around the command center. If he didn't halt his approach, he'd be greeted with a wall of fire. He found himself wishing that he'd approached from the ground. At least it would have saved more energy.

A split second later, Suzaku made the decision to land the Lancelot at once. He could see a large open asphalt area below him. Was it a training ground for the base? Who cares it didn't matter. Prepare to land.

While he was going about the business of landing, Suzaku continued speaking to Sawasaki. "This has nothing to do with my father. I came to end this fighting. If you'll surrender."

"You intend to rob Japan of its dream of independence?"

Closer, closer, the dark blue ground was getting closer...

"This has nothing to do with the legitimacy of what you are doing. You are..."

Lancelot's land spinners touched the ground.

"You think doing that excuses your selfishness? Is that your idea of justice without ideology?"

"You're wrong!"

Justice... Maybe Suzaku had reacted to the word justice since he'd already had it lobbed at him by Zero on Kamine Island. Justifications for what he'd done, and continued to do, were beyond his power to comprehend.

Lancelot wobbled a bit upon landing, the first indication that the pilot was a person after all and not a perfect machine. But it wasn't a navigational error it was the fact that the Nightmare had landed on a landmine. A mistake. He must have missed the warning light. To make matters worse, squat machines poured out of the surrounding buildings. They'd been prepared for him. Overcompensating from the explosion, Lancelot lost its balance again. It dropped its right arm and the barrel of the VARIS in its right hand touched the ground. That allowed him to correct his balance but he lost hold of the VARIS. The machines were approaching to attack him from behind. The VARIS fired on its own.

"My VARIS!"

The figures coming at him opened fire. Compared to Britannia's Knightmares, these were rather short, with squat legs and egg-shaped bodies.

"Chinese Federation Gun-Ru?"

"He was distracted just from my talking to him. He still has much to learn!" Sawasaki laughed with contempt.

Losing the VARIS was a fatal mistake.

Lancelot had three main weapons. They were the *Maze* Vibration Sword (MVS) for close combat, the slash harkens for close-to mid-range combat, and the Variable Ammunition Repulsion Impact Spitfire (VARIS) for long-range combat.

Suzaku felt vulnerable.

If this were a one-on-one training battle between Knightmares, Suzaku could have had a good fight even without the VARIS. Using Lancelot's superb maneuverability, he could pull off a competent close-range battle instead of a long-range one. However, this wasn't training. He had more than one enemy and they were all aiming their guns at him. Even a child could understand that without the VARIS Suzaku was at a loss to deal with distanced enemies.

Fortunately, the real strength of the Nightmare called Lancelot was its versatility and power at all ranges. Whether or not he was victorious, Suzaku would be able to inflict damage on his enemies, and that was all he'd been sent to do in the first place.

The enemy would definitely notice the loss of his all-range weapon but Suzaku didn't have any way of fixing the problem. His base was thousands of feet in the sky above him.

Lancelot held on.

The Lancelot was a superb unit, unrivaled by the Sutherlands, which tended to outperform Gun-Ru like he currently faced. Even though the VARIS had been destroyed, Lancelot still had the upper hand when it came to moving around the battlefield. Slicing with another of its main weapon, the MVS, and firing the slash harkens on his chest, he disabled about a dozen units. But the longer the battle wore on, the more vulnerable Suzaku became. Knowing that their enemy had lost his long-range weaponry, the fighter jets joined the fray, even as enemy units on the ground sprayed him with a barrage of fire. He zipped around the battlefield on his land spinners, using hangers and warehouses as shields, but he was becoming overwhelmed.

Eventually, a shot penetrated the winged float unit on his back. A warning sound beeped when Suzaku pulled the release lever to jettison the burning unit. A red light to the side of the cockpit indicating the Lancelot's remaining energy blinked frantically.

"Damn! I don't have too much energy left...!"

"Suzaku!" Cecile shouted through his communication panel.
 "Suzaku! Reroute all power to combat and comm systems!"

"Right!"

But what was the point in doing that? His dependable VARIS had been destroyed and with the destruction of the float unit, he'd lost his means to return to the Avalon. Saving energy only meant delaying his inevitable defeat.

"Give up Suzaku," Sawasaki's image blinked on in the cockpit. "As you're Prime Minister Kururugi's son, I guarantee you'll be well-treated."

My name... Suzaku's eyes twitched.

"Forget it! If you use my father's name for this, I'll never be able to forgive myself!"

Even with his death...

"I see. You're very much your father's son. You're just as stubborn as he was."

As Sawasaki grinned, the sixteen remaining Gun-Ru completed their encirclement of the building the Lancelot was using at its shield. There were fighter jets in the sky as well. He had no energy left. Even if Suzaku destroyed one unit per minute, he didn't have enough energy left to continue. The operation would be cut short by his death.

Was this really the end?

Suzaku exhaled. Even if it was, he'd accomplished his mission. The enemy had expended a lot of military strength on him. It must have made Cornelia's landing from the sea easier. He could only hope her plan would be successful. Besides, he reminded himself, he'd never expected to return alive. He should be happy that he was able to last as long as he had.

But...Suzaku thought. If he'd truly wanted to die, he could have committed suicide long ago. Maybe he could have done it right after he returned his knight's badge to Euphemia. There was no reason for him to even have participated in this fight. Did he

want to prove he was a man who could follow orders that badly? Or maybe he just didn't know when to give up. Even though he was a broken weapon and shouldn't exist anymore, he couldn't get himself to accept it. Well, whether he accepted it or not, he was going to die anyway.

If so...

Lancelot jumped out of the shadow of the warehouse, wielding his MVS into a sea of Knightmares.

Let's end this! Suzaku told himself as he charged toward his enemies.

But at that moment, the communication panel that had been showing Sawasaki's face flickered of its own volition.

"Suzaku Kururugi!"

A private line overrode his existing communications, displaying the face of the Britannian princess Suzaku had once pledged his loyalty to.

"Princess Euphemia?"

He'd last seen her just a few days prior but seeing her face unleashed a swarm of memories.

4

"...I'm not worthy of being your knight," Suzaku had said as he returned the knight's badge. When he left her that day, Euphemia almost cried. Why was she so sad? Because he had declined to be her knight? No, probably not. Before returning the badge, Suzaku told her everything. He told her what he had done before, the guilt he lived with and who he was now.

Euphemia couldn't dissuade him.

She could tell from his eyes. She didn't need his words. He was begging her. He was asking her not to be involved with him again. He wanted her to forget about him...to forget all the memories she had of him.

Not worthy... Then I'm not either.

She had promised to protect Suzaku as he protected her but at that moment when he needed her the most, there was nothing she could do to help him. Why had she thought she could protect him? All she could do was watch him leave. She couldn't even stop him.

I'm helpless...

How very helpless she was. What happened to wanting to reform Area 11 and Britannia using the right methods? What happened to helping out her sister? What happened to restoring the loving relationship that she, Lelouch and Nunnally had shared before? Her intentions were good, but what was she doing to achieve them? She couldn't even protect the single person she'd sworn to protect above all others. If she couldn't even save him, how could she hope to protect anyone else? Could she save them even though she couldn't save him? Frustrated and sad, Euphemia fell into a heartbroken melancholy, where she was dogged by regret.

She blamed herself entirely.

The circling thoughts cemented into one line of interrogation.

Why was she attracted to Suzaku Kururugi? Why wasn't she able to take her eyes off of him?

Because he was like her.

Just like her, he couldn't accept who he was, but couldn't do anything to change it. He blamed himself too. Accepting his helplessness wouldn't have made him feel better, but struggling with it didn't make him feel better either. His internal conflicts bled out to infect those around him, just the way that Euphemia's failures hurt her sister, Lelouch, Nunnally and all the people in Area 11 who had no hope of a better future.

Is it okay for things to stay the way they are?

No. It's not. Things have to change.

Euphemia saw that Suzaku was trying to give up the struggle. He was sick and tired of not being able to accept who he was and had pushed Euphemia away in order to wallow in his own misery. If Euphemia gave up as well, then both of them would be defeated. She couldn't do that. She didn't want to. It had nothing to do with right or wrong, she just didn't want things to happen that way. Her convictions weren't based on principle, just pure feeling. She really didn't want to. She didn't need a reason, because reason had nothing to do with the screaming welling up from the bottom of her heart that said she didn't want to.

Cornelia told her, "When you become Empress, feel free."

That wasn't it. That wasn't what she wanted.

Lelouch told her, "We both have certain things that we can't back down on."

No. That wasn't what she was trying to pursue.

Suzaku told her, "I can't forgive myself."

No. He didn't need to forgive himself.

Suzaku said he killed his father. If he couldn't forgive himself for it, that was understandable. He could look at his rotten past with regret. He'd done something unforgivable, that was true, and shouldn't forget the fact. But he didn't need to forgive himself for what he did in the past. Because...

The pain was a part of who he was now. He might not have noticed, but that pain must have generated the kindness and warmth he now possessed. He wasn't the worthless person he thought he was. If he was, no one would care about his fate. But

Lelouch, Lloyd, Cecile and Special Envoy staff...no one gave up on saving him.

So, who I want you to forgive is...

Me.

He lived every day struggling with the past and pain he couldn't let go.

I'm trying to forgive you because of my own selfishness, just because I want to. Please forgive me for that.

If he forgives me, I will be able to love myself a little bit more. There are parts of me that I still hate, but I will be able to love the part of myself that recognizes those parts are no good and try to do something to fix myself. All it takes is for him to forgive me.

Suzaku.

What about him? I forgive him, his present self, will he still loathe who his is? He doesn't ever have to accept his past, but can he admire himself as a person who struggles with the pain and vows to move forward?

"Suzaku Kururugi!" Euphemia called to the boy in the monitor with all her heart.

"Princess Euphemia?" Suzaku seemed confused. Not as confused as Euphemia, who couldn't recall a single one of the words she'd planned to say now that she was actually speaking to him.

"Suzaku! The truth is, I'm..."

She didn't know what to say next anymore. She couldn't remember how she was going to put it. What should she do? What should she say to him?

"Um, you..."

"Pardon me, but right now..."

An explosion briefly disrupted communications, hardly surprising as Suzaku was in the middle of a fierce battle. But even the moment of lost content shocked Euphemia into action.

No! We won't repeat what happened last time, when I let him return his badge without a word.

And so, Euphemia opened her mouth and shouted.

"I demand that you love me!"

"Right!"

It must have been a complete reflex. A moment after he replied, Suzaku gasped. "What?!"

"What?!"

Cecile, who was monitoring their communications in the Avalon gave the same reaction.

"What?! Now what?!" Lloyd, who'd been busy taking care of the worsening battle conditions, rushed to her side, anticipating a further emergency. Cecile mumbled to him, "Um sorry, this is private..."

Euphemia didn't seem to know what to say next. Suzaku looked more lost. As she looked at his face, it hit her. She'd said the right words. What she'd said represented how she felt. So she continued.

"And in return, I will love you."

Suzaku didn't say anything to that. She couldn't stop now. *Tell him! Forget about shame or what other people might think. Tell him! Tell him everything!*

"Suzaku, I love your stubbornness and your kindness. Your sad eyes, your clumsiness, the way you have trouble with cats...I love everything about you!"

...Should I really be saying everything? Why not? It's okay. There isn't time! I'll just say what I feel and be myself!

"So please..."

...I want you to...
 "Don't hate yourself!"



Euphemia's declaration was timed precisely with an incoming enemy shot. Whichever rocked him, Suzaku came to himself and moved the control stick. Actually, he might not have been all there just yet, but he was in motion. Lancelot flew and he dodged the gunfire. He returned fire with the slash harkens on his chest and destroyed both the Gun-Ru's legs. By the time he landed, he was in his right mind again.

"I see."

Euphemia's face in the monitor looked teary.

"I only made you worry more, didn't I?"

He was being selfish again. He was betraying her again.

What kind of girl was she? Whenever she got involved, he ended up facing parts of himself he'd rather bury forever. She made him look at the part of himself he didn't want to accept. He knew that his selfish pain allowed him to be callous towards others' feelings. He was so wrapped up in his tiny world of guilt and atonement that he shut most of the world out. It was painful to admit just how ugly he could be. He wanted to run away.

That's what he should be allowed to do.

"You really are..." Suzaku grabbed his control stick again and increased Lancelot's speed. He leaped toward a Gun-Ru taking aim at him and sliced off its arm with his MVS.

He wanted to run away. He didn't want to be in pain. But then...why did his voice sound so cheerful?

"Everything you do is spur of the moment! When we first met, when you announced you were a princess, when you decided on my school, when you made me a knight...Always!"

"Yes, all so sudden." Euphemia blushed, carefully choosing her next words. "Because...I suddenly realized..."



Such was the nature of Euphemia li Britannia. She may have been spontaneous but she always followed through on her whims. Even if the answers didn't come to her right away, she would keep thinking about a question until she figured it out. She was genuine and positive, and those qualities refreshed Suzaku. Her personality glowed with vivacity.

She was like a blessed rain pouring onto the windswept desert of his heart. The rain washed away pieces of black soil and revealed hidden ugliness. Yet, because it was her, the invasion was smooth and warm, like a summer rain. His heart felt warm.

"But, it's that unpredictability that's opened doors for me."

Even if the person standing behind the door that he was about to open was a part of him he'd rather disinherit, the light shining through the opened door and the hands she extended to him were very gentle.

"Thank you."

...I want to live.

Suzaku surprised himself with that thought. He hadn't felt something like that in seven years. Nothing of the sort had crossed his mind. Maybe this, too, was another door she'd opened for him.

He thought there'd be nothing to find in his heart but horrible feelings. Was this another feeling he'd meant to keep hidden from himself? He thought he knew everything. Wishing to live, having a human emotion like that, meant he would have to bear "that feeling." He drew his sword by mistake and the sword would always come back to cut him. He'd tried to live for others in order to escape it. But if he had to live as a human, would he be able to endure the excruciatingly pain he knew awaited him?

But, there was a girl who wanted to love him.

She doesn't mind who I am.

A future with her was the most pleasant thing he could imagine. The edge of guilt might cut him down someday; he might

be able to face it if she was by his side. If only she lent him her light, he might be able to accept his pain and atone for his sin, instead of running away. Zero told him that in killing his father, he was responsible for creating the Area 11 of today. He would turn it into something better. If anyone had the power to make such a dream come true, it was her. He recalled a line from the knightly ceremony just weeks before.

"Dost thou wish to abandon thyself and be sword and shield for the sake of justice?"

A sword...

A man with a bloodstained sword had no right to talk about justice. But if she didn't mind...then he wanted to help her anyway he could. He would bear stabs of guilt to live for the sake of this vivacious woman. He wanted to take another oath, from the bottom of his heart this time. Not because he'd been ordered to, but because he desired to.

"May I ask one final request?" Suzaku said. The meter indicating Lancelot's remaining energy was on its last bar.

"Final?"

"Even if something happens to me, please don't hate yourself."

The Lancelot skidded to a halt, a group of enemy units bearing down on him.

"I don't want my friends to be sad. Just tell them I transferred or something."

"Suzaku, don't tell me you are..."

"I've run out of energy."

What a fool I am...

It was a ridiculous irony. After seven years, he finally regained an interest in living because of this amazing woman, but he hadn't realized it until right before he would meet his death. If it was due to his own foolishness, he doubted he had control over it.

"Oh, sorry. Say goodbye to Miss Cecile and Mr. Lloyd and Prince Schneizel for me. Selfish to the very end, huh?"

A Gun-Ru took aim at Lancelot. Suzaku closed his eyes. Euphemia screamed, even knowing Suzaku couldn't hear her.

"Suzaku! Don't die! You must live!"

At that moment, something inside of Suzaku woke up. He felt it rising up from the bottom of his stomach even as his body tried to push it back down. Reflexes triggered, his eyes snapped open to reveal glittering red pupils.

"Wh-What the...?"

Live. That was the absolute order his friend gave him before. His friend wished for him to live. Suzaku grabbed the control stick as if driven by an invisible hand. But it was too late. The group of Gun-Ru were ready to fire. Sparks ignited in the barrels of their guns and...

A hail of heavy fire suddenly struck from above.

5

"Wh-what's going on!?" Sawasaki demanded of the wide strategy panel in the command center. His consternation was understandable as his Knightmare units had all been burnt down by one barrage.

A frantic control operator yelled out, "Something just appeared on radar!"

"A stealth system?!"

"We've got video!"

The monitor displayed the unmistakable image of a Knightmare high in the sky. From his cockpit, Suzaku saw it too. He recognized it from somewhere. "That...That's the Knightmare from Kamine Island!" That meant the person operating it was none other than...

"We barely made it, didn't we?"

"Yeah." Lelouch curtly answered C.C.'s voice as it curled up towards him. The two were in the cockpit of a prototype Knightmare, the Gawain. Due to the difficulty of operating the Druid System and Hadron Cannon the Gawain carried, it was meant to be operated by two people. Hence, its cockpit had two seats, though, in a pinch, one person could operate the entire system.

Lelouch squeezed his shoulders and added, "Certainly, this is an excellent unit for an electronic battle. It exceeded my expectations in analyzing Britannia's communication frequencies."

Because of its powerful capability to intercept communications, Lelouch had learned the status of the battle and come flying to the rescue at an impressive clip. Not to mention they'd been able to do it basically off the radar due to the unit's stealth capabilities. The only disadvantage so far seemed to be the machine's maneuverability, as a result of its massive size. But Lelouch certainly wasn't looking the gift horse in the mouth.

"Anyway..." C.C. seemed surprised at Suzaku's recklessness, "the white helmet's name is Lancelot? It fights as recklessly as ever, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but this time he seems to have some backup."

It didn't seem like one of Cornelia's plans. She preferred straightforward attacks. Schneizel was supposed to be staying in Area 11, might it have been his plan?

A proximity alert interrupted Lelouch's thoughts. Some of Sawasaki's units were headed his way. Lelouch shifted the control stick in irritation.

"You people are just getting in my way!"

As he pulled the trigger, Gawain's shoulder gunports gleamed red. Seconds later, two massive red beams cut through all of the enemy's remaining assault units headed at Gawain.

It was Rakshata who'd perfected those shoulder-mounted Hadron Cannons. Lelouch had stolen the unit before its engineering had been perfected, but the Black Knights' scientific genius had

completed the Nightmare with her own finishing touches. Needless to say, the Hadron Cannon was quite operational, as Lelouch knocked out the remaining anti-air batteries as well as any enemies still left in his airspace. C.C. wasn't done talking.

"What's your plan here? Do you want to continue where you left off on Shikine Island? He's an easy target for capture again." Of course, C.C. knew Lelouch's motives as well as he did himself, and was just showing off by throwing them in his face. Lelouch mentally noted that one of the design flaws of the Gawain was the fact that he could only see the back of C.C.'s sarcastic head while she was piloting and talking to him.

"Capturing him is meaningless now."

They'd intercepted most of the communication buzz from the battlefield. That meant both Lelouch and C.C. heard the conversations of the Britannian army, Sawasaki's conversations... and the conversation between Suzaku and Euphy.

After hearing that exchange, Lelouch knew it would be impossible to convince Suzaku to quit being Euphy's knight and support Zero, even if they did capture him. It was time to come up with a different plan.

C.C. laughed. "Anyway, what strange people they are! Especially that princess. She was talking about love while people died around here on the battlefield. They seem shy but they act so bold."

"I think you're even stranger to make fun of them. Don't worry about that. Land the Gawain C.C. I need to talk to him."

"What a fool. You'd willing stand behind a horse to get kicked?"

In the operating of the Gawain, Lelouch was responsible for the Hadron Cannon and information analysis. C.C. was responsible for piloting the unit. Gawain slowly kneeled on the ground it had just razed. Even kneeling, the Gawain still dwarfed the Lancelot. Lelouch opened a communication channel to the Lancelot.

"Kururugi, is Lancelot still operational?"

Lelouch wasn't asking if Lancelot could still fight. He already knew Lancelot didn't have enough energy left to fight. He meant what he said literally.

If it couldn't move, even a little bit, they'd have to do everything for him.

"Zero. I thought so," Suzaku whispered through the communication line. As she listened, C.C. moved her control stick. Gawain's huge hand reached out to Lancelot. It held a rectangular energy filler, the Nightmare's source of power. Suzaku seemed to hold his breath on the other side of the communication line.

"What are you trying to do?"

"That's not a nice thing for you to say," Lelouch responded flippantly to Suzaku's suspicious tone. "We came all the way here to bring you this extra baggage since we heard your Nightmare was running out of energy. Sorry, that was a joke. This is the spare energy for my Nightmare. I believe it has the same specification as yours."

Since Lloyd was in charge of the development of both units, they shared many similar design traits, including the same energy component.

There was a long break in communications. Then Suzaku answered in a low and dignified voice, "Then, in return, are you asking for the same thing you did on Shikine Island? For me to join you? L..."

Lelouch quickly interrupted Suzaku.

"Don't disappoint me Suzaku Kururugi."

"What did you say?"

"What are you trying to do here? Are you going to die for your stubbornness? If so, you aren't valuable enough to be my ally. You should finish yourself here if you can't meet your lord's expectations. I'll just remember a foolish man who died in a foolish way."

"..."

"And I have something else to tell you. Don't insult me like that. I have my own reasons for being here. I came to attack that stupid exile and his fake Japan. Don't be conceited, Suzaku Kururugi. He's not a strong enough enemy that I can't defeat him without your help."

The communication line went silent again. Suzaku's voice was quiet when he responded.

"If you don't need my help, why are you doing this?"

"That's an issue of probability. If your Knightmare starts to fight again, I can at least use it as my shield. The probability of winning this battle increases. That's all."

Suzaku seemed about to smile. "Say what you like."

"I'm being frank. Now that you know my intentions, what will you do?"

The pause was short but it seemed to stretch on forever.

"I'm not going to thank you Zero."

"I didn't expect you to do so."

"But I'll repay everything to you in this battle."

Hearing Suzaku's response, Lelouch smiled. Lancelot took the energy filler from Gawain and replaced his old one.

Lelouch couldn't help smiling as he spoke to Suzaku through the communication panel.

"As usual, your words irritate me a lot. But...well, I don't care to deny it anymore. I don't want to die. That's the only reason why I'll help you."

"Sorry Zero, but you're not getting your wish," Suzaku said spiritedly.

"Go ahead and do it."

Lelouch smiled one more time, but this time it was accompanied by a loud laugh. Then he turned off their communication and kicked the floor of the control room. C.C. took that as her cue to pilot Gawain into the sky again.

"That guy lost a lot of stubbornness," C.C. commented. "He used to refuse your proposals without a thought. Love isn't so bad."

"Shut up. If you have time to be talking nonsense, you should be concentrating more on piloting. You're the one who told me he might obey me as Zero, C.C."

"That's not exactly what I meant."

"Forget it. You're more stubborn than Suzaku."

Having recovered, Lancelot ran on the ground, following Gawain's path in the sky.

The white body seemed to pierce through the darkness as the black body seemed to swallow it.



"Stop them! Stop Kururugi and Zero!"

Atsushi Sawasaki, Interim President of the new Japanese government, yelled at his subordinates in the base's command center. The situation had grown considerably more challenging for them. They now faced both the Lancelot and the Gawain. Lancelot's superb maneuverability against enemies in short-to-mid distance battles complemented the long-range firepower of the Hadron Cannon. Sawasaki's force was about to show its formerly hidden weakness.

Many of the soldiers in the battle were not Japanese, but Chinese. The common soldiers had different feelings than their high ranking officers. In particular, it became obvious that the soldiers did not share their commanding officers' desire to win the battle at whatever cost. They would have fought to the death if their native country, the Chinese Federation, had been directly invaded by the Britannian army. But they had no stake in a battle between Britannia and Japan. They were simply allies. The battle couldn't be taken seriously enough that they would die for Japan.

As long as they were winning, the soldiers were willing to fight. With heavy losses came a drop in their will and the realization

that they disliked fighting someone else's war. The Hadron Cannon presented a sobering reality. They feared losing to the Gawain's powerful destructive capabilities as well as the prowess of Avalon and Lancelot.

Of course, Lelouch had known how they would feel and had earlier exaggerated the power of Gawain to instill enough fear in the soldiers to win this battle's psychological war.

The largest stronghold in Kyushu, the Fukuoka base, had lost its capability to defend itself during the attacks. Though it had some batteries and tanks, the people needed to operate them were preparing to run from the onslaught. Their supplies were useless without someone to handle them.

"The third tank troop has been wiped out!"

"The assault fighter jets engaging with the enemy's air ship seem to be destroyed!"

"The enemy's two new weapons are breaking through the final defense line and approaching toward us!"

Sawasaki ground his teeth together as he listened to the scattered reports from around the control room. The control operators had obviously lost their ability to speak rationally or control themselves. Sawasaki reached his hand to the communication panel in front of him where the open channel remained. His enemies, two Knightmares, Lancelot and Gawain, were moving toward him as though they were demons.

"Zero! Don't you fight for those who grieve for Japan?!"

Lelouch responded with an insulting smile and a sigh as Sawasaki's voice reached him in the cockpit of Gawain.

"I'm not happy being called a collaborator by someone like you, but I'll tell you one thing. We Black Knights stand against anyone who uses violence unjustly!"

"Unjust?! I'm doing this for Japan!"

However, Suzaku's Lancelot interrupted his words.

"Sawasaki! If this is for Japan, why did you run away to the Chinese Federation?! You needed to stay for everyone's sake!"

"I don't mean to completely agree with him," began Lelouch, "but you should have looked at yourself in the mirror first, Sawasaki. Even though you led the nation during the war, you didn't even take any responsibility for the war after it was over and you ran to the Chinese Federation in the fear that you would be accused by Britannia. For seven years after the war, you let Japanese people suffer under the control of Britannia and lived comfortably in the Chinese Federation. You are trying to save Japan? By bringing the Chinese Federation into a war with both countries? Even worse than that, you're using the military force of the Chinese Federation when it intends to effectively control Japan when Britannia is overthrown. Don't make me laugh. The people of Japan won't support someone like you willingly. You're a third class politician and a worse strategist."

For being third-class, he'd given the Black Knights a first-class opportunity to voice their principles.

Lelouch sneered. He broke through the wall of command center with Gawain's Hadron Cannon and then fired again to finish demolishing it.

"Japan will gain independence on its own. They don't need a false messiah like you who can't do anything. Get lost. You're a ghost of the old era."

"Y-you...!" Sawasaki's angered cry pierced the cockpits of Gawain and Lancelot. "You traitors!"

"You're wrong!"

"I'll take that as a compliment."

Two different answers echoed from the separate cockpits.

In the Tokyo Settlement far away from the battlefield, Euphemia was absorbed in monitoring the communication lines, trying to catch every word from them.

Suzaku and Lelouch are...

She felt the knowledge warm inside her. *This is actually happening. It's real. They're normally on opposite sides, fighting against one another, but now they're fighting together.*

I must not forget this moment, Euphemia told herself firmly. It was something almost impossible to believe. Would it be just this one time? No, it didn't have to be. If it happened once, it could happen twice. She didn't need to give up on the possibility of it happening again. There had to be a way to make it happen. There had to be.

Euphemia decided something at that moment.

It was something she had tried to achieve when she talked to Lelouch on Shikine Island. It had only been the kernel of an idea then, but now it sprouted.

Yes, there must be a way.

If there was a way, then she could...



The V-TOL launch pad at the Fukuoka base command center overlooked the ocean. It wasn't very large. Humiliated and angry, Sawasaki ran toward a V-TOL with Tsao urging him to go faster. But before they reached it, the V-TOL exploded under fire from the Lancelot's slash harkens. Lancelot jumped over the hunks of burning jet to join Gawain and face down their targets.

"Sawasaki!"

"That's as far as you go," the two Knightmares announced separately through their external speakers. Sawasaki was flat on his ass.

"Impossible! The largest fortress in Kyushu with hardly any effort....!"

Lelouch shook his head and snorted. The words he said were only for himself. "Unfortunately, there has never been anything we couldn't achieve together."

The Chinese Federation soldiers abandoned their posts and began to flee the base, having completely lost the will to fight against this enemy.

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

Promise

October 2017, Area 11

“...I’m reporting breaking news on the capture of terrorists in the Kyushu block. The terrorist attack, which Viceroy Cornelia put an end to with her lightning attack, was led by four members of the former Japanese government, including ringleader Atsushi Sawazaki. Over half the Chinese Federation troops assisting them were captured as well. In response to this incident, Chinese Federation leaders claim the operation was an unauthorized action by the Lougang military district commander General Tsao. They are requesting the return of P.O.W.s under articles of the Tibet Convention. In regards to this request, Prince Schneizel, Chancellor of the Holy Britannian Empire, who is visiting Area 11, made an announcement that he would like to communicate with the Chinese Federation through the Foreign Ministry of the Britannian Empire with the possibility of bringing a lawsuit to the International Court.”



Behind thick bamboo blinds, a girl listened to the news report for details of the attack.

She had a mysterious smile on her lips, the expression suggesting she was enjoying herself. Her long black hair and pale skin were reminiscent of a traditional Japanese doll. Her look lent itself to making her appear ageless. She could look like a child in one situation and like an adult in another. It was a rather perplexing quality.

Outside of the blind that hid her, the adults continued their discussion.

"After all, they'll play down the fact that Zero and his Black Knights were involved in the attack, wouldn't they?"

"Of course not! There's no reason for Britannia to volunteer that information in their official announcement."

"I see. They get to enjoy the honor of capturing terrorists. That sounds about right for those greedy Britannians."

"The information itself has already been leaked through the internet."

"How have people been reacting to that? Among the Japanese."

"Their reactions vary. Some support the attack while others don't. It's the same as our position."

"Sawazaki is at fault for attacking recklessly without our permission, but Zero, what was he thinking? He openly collaborated with the Britannian army."

"He had no reason to take part in Sawasaki's battle, and surely there were better ways to sow chaos for Britannia that didn't involve helping them."

"I knew he was not to be trusted. If we continue to allow him to do what he wishes, he may trample us sooner than you think."

"I might have to teach him a lesson now...."

The girl kept the same pleased expression as she listened to the conversation. It seemed important to the adults but she thought it was all rather unsubstantial. Suddenly, she opened her mouth made up lips.

"You can trust him."

Her voice sounded just like a gently ringing bell. The adults' conversation stopped. One of them spoke to the girl, his voice mirroring the frown on his face.

"Princess Kaguya, you've always been a fan of his. Could you share with us the reason you why you trust him?"

"Reason?" She kept smiling.

"I'm simply stating the truth. It can't be changed. I don't need any reason for it. Aren't I right?"

She glanced sideways through the blind that concealed her from the view of everyone else.

"Lord Kirihara."

They couldn't have seen each other's faces. At the sound of her voice, the old man who had kept his silence among adults began to view things in a different way.



Vibrant conversations filled the warehouse.

"Everyone, I'm going to start checkups now! I'll start with the electric equipment group."

As soon as Rakshata Chawla, the white-uniformed leader of technological development of the Black Knights, gave an order, the workers started their tasks at their stations. The black Nightmare Gawain was the center of all the activity. After the incident in Kyushu, the Nightmare was carried in a heavily disguised container past the Britannian army's probes and finally returned to the Black Knights' hideout in the Shinjuku Ghetto. Simple maintenance had to be done during the transport. Because the unit had experienced its first battle post-reconstruction, it could have had any type of problem. It needed to be brought back to base to be serviced with the right equipment and more knowledgeable technicians.

"The Hadron Cannon is going to be dismantled. The gunfire was a success but it didn't achieve the energy conversion efficiency that I wanted. Give me the dispersed data on the backpack layers and the vibration frequency of the response valve."

"What about an analysis of a cannon barrel?"

"Of course, I need that too. That's what we are most interested in. Hey C.C., don't run away."

"I wasn't in charge of the Hadron Cannon. It was that idiot who was blasting it without a thought in the world."

"I wanted to ask your opinion on the feedback to the unit when the cannons are fired. You weren't probably paying any attention in there."

"What are you talking about?"

"Here, this is a checklist. Fill it out and submit it right away."

C.C. moved away, looking unhappy that Rakshata had shoved the pieces of paper onto her.

"I've always thought her a forceful woman," C.C. muttered. Lelouch, who had been observing the scene from afar, chuckled under his mask.

"It's surprising that there's someone even you can't handle C.C."

"It's not that I can't handle her. I just can't get along with her. What's so funny?"

"Nothing really. For some reason, it's very appealing to see you being pushed around by someone. That's all."

In fact, Lelouch himself was also working on a stack of checklists like the ones Rakshata had given C.C. He considered it his duty as the operator of the Nightmare to provide the development team with feedback that would keep the precious machine functioning.

Not to mention Rakshata's insistent request that he do so. Rakshata also gave them their medical clearance. Even Lelouch, the leader of Black Knights, couldn't refuse her request after being told that he would have to take a gastroscopy exam every time he left for a fight if he didn't fill out this paperwork. Kallen and Tohdoh were also struggling through the checklist to avoid such a fate.

"Why do I have to do this?" C.C. was still complaining, having a worse attitude about it than any of the others.

"I accepted the contract only to operate the Nightmare. I'd rather be called your mistress! I could probably start a protest with Kallen and other pilots."

"I don't care what you are planning to do but just don't do anything to trouble Ohgi, C.C. His work as deputy commander seems to have exhausted him recently."

"Hmm, he asked for that position. If he was so busy, he shouldn't have picked something else up on the side. That's why he's so tired."

"What are you talking about?"

"What you don't know can't hurt you."

"Hey, over there. No talking. I can't concentrate," Rakshata warned them, never pausing in her typing. She was an even faster typist than Cecile. They stopped talking and turned their attention back to the papers.

Lelouch finished the paperwork first.

"Well, I'll be leaving now."

"You're fast with things like this."

"I've always been good at cramming. As long as I understand the flow of questions, I have no problem answering them."

With a quiet laugh, Lelouch stood and pushed his chair back. He put the checked paper in a binder and took it to Rakshata, who was preoccupied with data analysis in the middle of the warehouse. As Lelouch passed by, C.C. said,

"Did you find answers?"

"What?"

Lelouch looked back at her curiously. C.C. was still staring at her checklist. The pen was still in her hand, making marks. Her expression was still displeased. Lelouch studied her for a little while then turned around again and kept going.

"Well..." He tilted his head upward to look at Gawain, the black Nightmare, and sat on the special seat in the warehouse. Under the mask, his glare was foreboding.

"I don't know if I got the answer I was looking for but I found out about one thing."

"You did?"

"Failures and regrets are different things. Successes and

joy are different too. It's easier to keep moving toward the next obstacle if I have time to celebrate one victory or to mourn one mistake..."

Lelouch offered a confident smile, "At least, for the one called Zero."

C.C. glanced at his angular frame. She closed her eyes and smiled a bit. "I see."

It was acceptable for the time being.

The ship gradually drifted toward the ground, away from the sunny sky.

The strong wind generated by the landing violently shook the trees and flowers. In the midst of it stood a girl, her long hair blowing in the wind as she waited for the ship to return.

Finally, the ship touched down, quietly shaking the ground. A few minutes passed before it was secure and the hatch slowly opened.

The first person to exit the ship was a boy in a white pilot suit. The white suit seemed to glow in the abundant sunlight, making him almost too bright to look at. The girl didn't run toward him, even after recognizing him. He walked toward her, giving her no reason to move at all.

He walked straight toward her, having seen her from the ship and already mapped out the best way to get to her upon the ship's landing. He strode toward her with firm, confident steps, not giving in to the indignity of running.

Standing before the girl, he placed his hand to his chest and bowed slightly in a gesture of respect.

"Suzaku Kururugi, reporting for duty."

The girl nodded to him, trying to hide her awkwardness.

"Welcome back Suzaku."

Silence followed, with neither of them knowing exactly what

to say to the other. Their eyes met as they both attempted to look at one another and they hastily looked away from each other with embarrassment.

The girl called Euphemia was the first to look up, peering at him from beneath her eyelashes. Suzaku lifted his head as well and their gazes met once more.

They both burst out laughing, their earlier awkwardness dissipating. It was difficult for them to stop, both relieved at this meeting and glad to see one another. When they finally calmed down, Euphemia smiled brightly at him.

"Suzaku, I finally understand."

Suzaku calmly nodded.

"Yes."

"It's not that I want an ideal country or great justice or anything complicated like that."

As she continued, she pulled something from the bosom of her dress. In her hand was a badge with a beautiful swan in flight on it. It was a badge of honor. It was the symbol of a knight.

"I just want to see people smiling. The smiles of the people I love now and those of the ones I loved before."

Euphemia extended her hand, holding the badge flat in her palm. It was the proof that the boy standing in front of her was now connected to her.

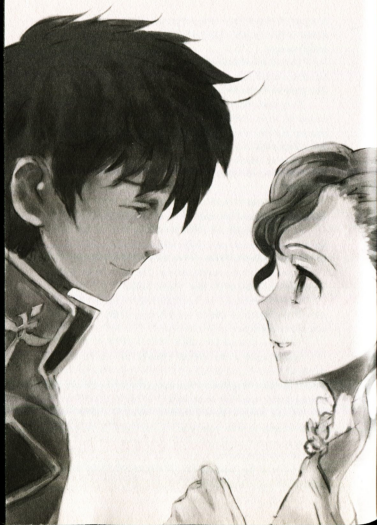
"Will you help me with this?"

Suzaku stared at the princess's hand. This was his second chance. It was a second ceremony. Everything had changed from the first one. This badge meant something different now, to the girl offering it and to the boy receiving it.

Suzaku stopped himself halfway through another bow. Instead he put his hand over hers, holding it gently. He nodded, looking at her with clear eyes.

"Yes, Your Highness."

It seemed like nothing else existed but the clear autumn sunlight filtering around them.



CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

Afterword

I seem to be running out of time to write heartwarming school scenes... That's understandable, as the story is reaching its climax. But still, I wanted to write a whole volume devoted to school episodes. Of course, the protagonist of those stories would be the President, and it would co-star the blueberry one!

I emphasized the character of Suzaku in this volume. Even I felt that I put too much emphasis on him, but the concept for the novel version is to put an emphasis on Suzaku. I think I did pretty well. By the way, this concept applies only to the storyline up through episode 25 of the anime. The concept may change after that. Coming up, I feel there's another character I need to concentrate on even more than Suzaku.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who helped me with completing this volume and the fans who supported me through this. I wish to see all of you in the next volume, STAGE - 4.

December 2007

Mamoru Iwasa

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

Commentary by Takahiro Sakurai, voice of Suzaku Kururugi

First of all, would you please describe how you felt when you first heard about *Code Geass*?

Well, when I first got the script, I had no idea the story would develop so much. Looking back, it feels like the story was developed very painstakingly. The story is so rich that you would think it had been thought up over years and years. As an actor, I'm honored to be involved in this project. It was the right work for the right time. I have a feeling that this work will be remembered as a pioneer in ten or even twenty years.

- What attributes do you think attract people to this work?

I think the realism of the story. War is the main theme and all the protagonists are kids. I think that even though the story seems to be set somewhere far away, touchstones like the existence of "Tokyo" and the "EU," bring us back to reality. Also, I think the way that the story doesn't rely on geass as a *deus ex machina* is pretty appealing.

Geass comes with consequences and restrictions. I think the difficulty of controlling geass is one of the reasons why the story attracts so many. I also think it adds depth to the story that there's someone who can bestow such a mysterious power. I was surprised when Lelouch used geass on himself without any hesitation! It was like...Hey, are you going to use it so soon?

- The story itself prevents you from guessing what happens next...

Exactly! The director wouldn't tell us anything. Everyone on the set was ordered not to speak about it. It was such a strict order that we believed we would be fired if we said anything. So, even we actors on the set didn't know how what was going to happen in the story. People who knew how the story was going to go just grinned and didn't tell us anything.

- What was it like in the voiceover recording sessions?

I think partly because we didn't know how the story was going to go, all the actors focused pretty intently on their work. There wasn't room for error. I had to concentrate completely on the material to avoid making any mistakes. In another words, it was a very professional atmosphere. The director wanted a lot from me, so I was happy whenever he thought I was able to give him what he wanted. He made me want to give him what he wanted. I loved to work there.

Sometimes our recording sessions ran twice the length of normal ones, but because everyone was so focused on their work, they felt short. When I got out of the studio, I'd usually wonder, "What happened to the time?"

- Did the director give you any explanations or requests for playing Suzaku?

In the very beginning, he explained that Suzaku was opposite of Lelouch. Lelouch is all about the brain and Suzaku is all about the body. He didn't tell me then, but I noticed Suzaku was a very primitive person. And he doesn't have any grasp on real life! I think Lelouch is much more aware of how to live his life. There was a rumor that Suzaku lived in his Lancelot.

- What's your impression of the novel?

Although I'm familiar with the story from doing voice acting, I learned a lot from the novels. The novels seem more vivid. Maybe "vivid" is too strong a word, but I thought that the novels made each character's personality stronger. Scenes that are very short in the anime get complete mental descriptions in the novels. In many cases, I felt like I gained a deeper understanding of things. In terms of Suzaku, the novel describes Suzaku's emotions through Lloyd and Cecile's viewpoints. The novel explains nicely that unlike Lelouch, who's willing to get caught up in childhood memories, Suzaku wants to deny the past. Since we're about to start recordings for the Second Stage, reading the novels was a good opportunity for me to rethink Suzaku's character.

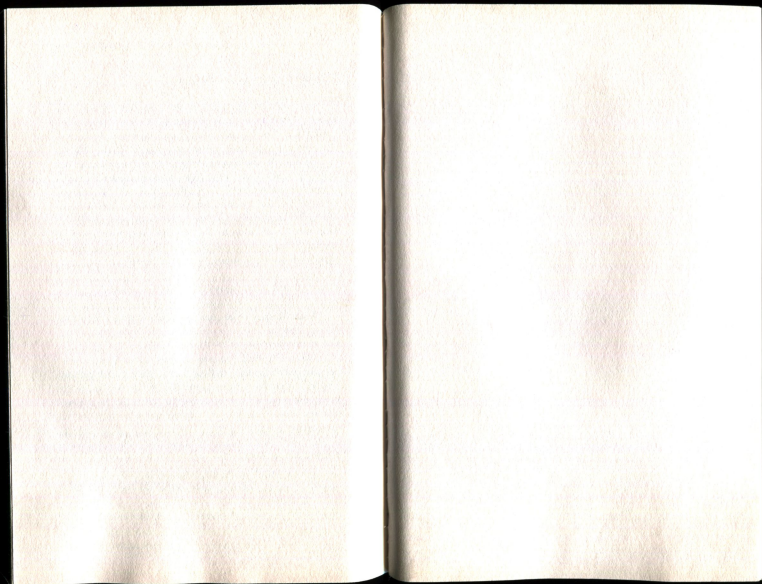
- Could you tell us your ambitions for the second season?

I mentioned it before, but they don't tell us anything! The director ordering us to keep quiet is like he's using geass on us! During recording sessions, the director is Lelouch.

None of the characters in this story are wasted. They all come into play sooner or later, and you cannot predict what happens next, so I think this is a great series. We get the script so we do know what happens a little bit before the viewers, but the way we view this series is just like how a viewer sees it. We can't wait to see what happens next.

Thank you very much.

(In Tokyo, November 2007)



US \$8.99
CAN 11.99

CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

STAGE -3 - SWORD

The Black Knights have succeeded in recapturing Tohdoh, and are increasing in number and power. At Shikine Island, they are attacked by the Britannian Forces. Lelouch strays from the Black Knights on an unknown island and bumps into Princess Euphemia. The ideals they are trying to achieve are similar, but their different positions make the siblings enemies. Can they not return to the happy days they spent as children? Can Lelouch only now continue to live as Zero by following the path of blood?

THE NOVELIZATION OF THE HIT
ANIME SERIES CONTINUES!



BANDAI
entertainment®



CODE GEASS
—Stage—
—Lelouch—
of the Rebellion

STAGE -3 -
SWORD

Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI
Written by
MAMORU IWASA

BANDAI
entertainment®

CODE GEASS

コードギアス
反逆のルージュ

Lelouch

of the Rebellion

STAGE -3 - SWORD



Original Story by
ICHIROU OHKOUCHI / GORO TANIGUCHI

Written by
MAMORU IWASA

BANDAI
entertainment®