

ABNORMALITY IN TYPE-MOON: MADNESS OF ANIMEVERSE

Chapter 61: Chapter 61: The Fall of Cu Chulainn



[👉 Shoutout to Justin_Avalos for joining patreon. Thank you very much. □]

The rune flared with a crimson glow, transforming into a wave of scorching flames that surged toward Cu Chulainn from behind.

Upon closer inspection, he realized it was the very same primordial rune symbolizing fire that he had previously inscribed to test Roy's Mystic Eyes.

During his relentless chase led by Okita Souji's blinding speed, he hadn't even noticed he'd been lured back to their original battleground.

A wave of flames surged from behind, activating the runic stone he wore. Instantly, it transformed into a barrier, standing firm between him and the encroaching fire.

"The power's multiplied several times over!"

Feeling the ferocity of the flames behind him, Cu Chulainn's expression shifted.

His rune had been taken over by his opponent, yet somehow, it was even more powerful than when he wielded it himself?

What kind of twisted sorcery was this?!

Was it because his opponent had more mana, or was it the Mystic Eyes enhancing the rune's potency—or perhaps both?

Whatever the reason, Cu Chulainn couldn't afford to underestimate his opponent.

Ahead of him, Okita Souji assumed her initial stance, her blade subtly lowered, its tip pointing straight at his heart. Her entire presence became a coiled storm, holding back the fury of a downpour ready to strike.

A deadly pincer attack, from both front and rear.

In that critical moment, Cu Chulainn seized the small gap created by the barrier rune, swiftly inscribing a fresh protection rune to shield his body.

Behind him, the fire rune continued to unleash waves of relentless flames.

Okita's gaze was sharp, like thorny brambles, piercing straight through him.

Then, with a sudden stomp, she lunged forward.

In that instant, an ominous feeling surged within Cu Chulainn.

"—Unnamed Triple Thrust!"

In this strike, Okita Souji had hidden her ultimate secret technique.

Okita's secret technique differed greatly from Kojiro Sasaki's demonic sword.

The key difference lay in the opening stance.

Kojiro Sasaki's Tsubame Gaeshi had a unique beginning. The moment he took that stance, his opponent would recognize that an extraordinary move was coming—a signature strike.

However, Okita's secret technique started with the standard Hirazukuri stance, a common stance for thrusts used by many Japanese swordsmen. Even if Okita took this position, anyone unfamiliar with her would merely be on guard against a thrust, not realizing she was concealing her ultimate attack—the Unnamed Triple Thrust.

In the clash that followed, the outcome had already been decided.

The masterpiece created by the genius Okita Souji was a demonic sword technique that contained the "Second Thrust" and "Third Thrust" within the "First Thrust." Not in sequence, but simultaneously, in a single instant, all three strikes pierced the same point.

This paradox created a "phenomenon collapse" at the tip of the blade, making the Unnamed Triple Thrust a superlative sword skill that was virtually indefensible!

Clang!

The rune barrier shattered on impact.

The blade sliced through flesh and bone, piercing straight into Cu Chulainn's heart.

"Gah!"

Cu Chulainn spat out a mouthful of thick blood.

Okita quickly withdrew her blade and leaped back.

"Well done. Cu Chulainn, famed for his undying spirit in myth, remains relentless to the end. Stay alert for his Battle Continuation."

Roy's voice echoed in Okita's mind.

The synergy between the betrayed flame rune and the sudden, concealed sword technique was flawless. This was the result of Roy's quiet coordination with Okita Souji while acting alongside Bazett.

During his exchange with Bazett, Roy hadn't even bothered to turn around.

What looked like arrogance was, in fact, a ploy to maintain control over the flame rune Cu Chulainn had inscribed from the very start with his Mystic Eyes.

"No mercy at all, huh?"

Cu Chulainn lowered his hand, which had been ready to inscribe a counter-attack rune. Seeing Okita's wary retreat, he could only give a bitter smile.

He had intended to launch a final, desperate strike even with his heart pierced, hoping to take Saber with him. Yet, his opponent hadn't given him the slightest opening.

With his spiritual core—his heart—destroyed, his strength rapidly faded, and Cu Chulainn sank to one knee.

"Caster!"

Bazett approached, her face pale, as she knelt beside Cu Chulainn.

"I'm sorry, Master. Looks like I dragged you down this time," Cu Chulainn said with a wry smile.

Summoned in the Caster class, he was severely disadvantaged. Not only was his power weakened, but his specialty in magic was countered by the enemy Master's Mystic Eyes.

Even the Command Spells—regarded as the trump card by the Association's elders—couldn't be used carelessly. They feared Roy might control even the Command Spells. If he seized them and ordered Cu Chulainn to self-destruct, it would be humiliating.

He'd been thoroughly outmatched at every turn.

If he'd been summoned in the Lancer class, he would never have lost in such a disgraceful manner.

"Master over there," Cu Chulainn called out to Roy, looking at him steadily.

"From what I gathered earlier, you don't seem to bear any grudges against my Master, right? How about letting her go?"

Despite his impending death, the man's expression was carefree, showing no hint of fear or desperation.

"I never intended to kill her," Roy replied, adjusting his glasses with a nonchalant shrug.

"This is my promise to a great hero. Rest easy."

"Haha, that's good to hear. But I sure didn't live up to the name of a great hero this time. If only I'd been summoned as a Lancer," Cu Chulainn chuckled, even as blood trickled from his chest.

"Well, I'm sorry you got stuck with a Servant like me, Master..."

"No, you're the best Servant I could ask for!"

Bazett shook her head, her eyes glistening with emotion.

"If that's how you feel, then I have no regrets..."

With those final words, Cu Chulainn's head drooped, his life slipping away.

"Is he going to spring back up and stab me one last time?"

Roy didn't let his guard down, remembering how Cu Chulainn would often make unexpected returns in the stories. He eyed Cu Chulainn's body with suspicion.

Miss Okita's expression grew complicated at his remark.

Only when Cu Chulainn's form gradually dissolved into pure mana particles did Roy finally relax. He turned his gaze to the two suspended runes left in mid-air.

These weren't modern runes like the ones Aozaki Touko had restored; they were true, original Runes crafted by the mighty god Odin himself. In the hands of a master, they could unleash near-divine power.

Although only two runes remained, symbolizing "Fire" and "Barrier," to Roy, each was a priceless treasure.

Activating his Mystic Eyes again, Roy's gaze penetrated into the core of the rune, like an invisible hand grasping its magical foundation.

"So this is how the primordial rune works..."

Roy nodded in satisfaction.

He was a quick learner when it came to magecraft.

It had taken him less than a month to master the entire set of modern runes while studying under Touko.

Ordinarily, magi needed the magical foundation of a spell to understand it fully, then replicate that foundation within themselves, infuse it with mana, and finally cast the spell.

However, Roy's Mystic Eyes allowed him to directly tap into any spell, connect with its magical foundation, and claim ownership. Simply put, he made it his own.

With the foundation as his own, he could study it briefly and then effortlessly reconstruct the same foundation within himself, wielding the spell with ease.

Even with the primordial runes, it was no different.

Given a bit of time to study, he would soon wield these two primordial runes as naturally as if they were extensions of his own body.

"It's over."

Bazett watched Cu Chulainn's fading form with a hint of melancholy.

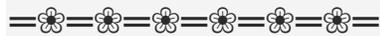
She had no wish for the Holy Grail; it wasn't even capable of granting wishes anymore.

Her participation in this Holy Grail War was solely because of her renowned combat prowess within the Mage's Association. The Association desired victory in the war and saw her as a powerful weapon to achieve it.

She didn't particularly agree with the Association's motives, and her attitude toward the war was indifferent; winning was fine, but losing was equally acceptable. As a descendant of the Red Branch Knights, she held Cu Chulainn in high regard, and being able to fight alongside him had been a source of immense satisfaction.

That said, to claim she had no hope of victory would be dishonest. Defeat did sting, though she quickly accepted it.

And with that, she conceded defeat.



Chapter 62: Chapter 62: The Ambush



[👁️ Shoutout to StrawHatD & Rogue_Demon for joining patreon. Thank you very much. □]

"Relax, I keep my promises. I won't harm you, especially after receiving such a generous gift."

Roy assured Bazett with a friendly smile, signaling his goodwill.

But in the next breath, he shifted his tone.

"That being said, your Servant is gone, and your Command Seals are no longer of any use to you, right? Mind giving them to me?"

"Don't you think you're being a bit thick-skinned?"

Bazett's eye twitched as she looked at him, almost in disbelief.

"You just killed my Servant and now you're asking me to hand over my Command Seals? What kind of nerve do you have to say something like that?"

Even though Bazett had lost, she held no hatred for Roy. Throughout their battle, Roy had fought honorably; she simply couldn't match his skill.

But asking for the Command Seals on the spot? It was like a widow being asked for her wedding ring right at the funeral—absolutely shameless!

"Haha, I admit I don't really have a good excuse."

Roy chuckled, flashing a bright, almost boyish smile.

Then, he activated his Mystic Eyes.

"But you know, I could just take them myself. Your call."

His gaze focused intently on Bazett's hand, tracing the line of Command Seals from the back of her hand up to her wrist—five in total.

If it had been just one or two, he wouldn't have bothered. But five Command Seals, sitting there for the taking? He couldn't pass that up.

After all, it wasn't like it would take much effort.

Command Seals, invented by Zouken Matou, were a form of mystic crest crystallized with magic, designed specifically to control Servants. They were powerful spells in their own right.

Seeing his Mystic Eyes activate, Bazett felt utterly speechless.

Really? Whipping out the Mystic Eyes just because of one disagreement?

"Fine, I'll do it myself!"

Bazett sighed in resignation.

If the outcome was going to be the same, she saw no point in resisting.

"Thank you for your understanding."

Roy smiled warmly at Bazett, nodding his thanks.

"If things don't work out for you at the Mage's Association, consider switching sides. On behalf of Rin Tohsaka, I'd be more than happy to welcome you. Besides, I doubt your family ties you that closely to the Association."

Bazett's loss likely meant facing punishment upon her return to the Mage's Association.

Though she hailed from a distinguished family with a history tracing back to the Age of Gods, Bazett had joined the Association to escape a life of quiet obscurity, defying her parents to carve her own path.

Come to think of it, that had been around the time of the Fourth Holy Grail War.

In the Association, her noble heritage brought only surface-level respect. In reality, she was little more than a pawn—summoned when needed, dismissed when convenient, constantly shunned by those in power.

The Mage's Association was a cesspool of political maneuvering and power plays, rotten to the core, repulsed by anyone who outshined them. Over her ten years there, Bazett had been treated as little more than a disposable tool.

She wasn't naïve; she was fully aware of her own situation.

"You'd really accept a transfer? What's the pay like? Could I negotiate a higher salary?"

Bazett's eyes lit up, genuinely considering the possibility.

"...Are you that short on cash?"

"To be honest, working for the Association barely covers my daily expenses and the cost of making mystic codes. For any mission, I have to file for full reimbursements just to make ends meet."

"Sounds tough."

Thinking of his own two money-eating monsters, Roy felt a pang of sympathy for Bazett. He couldn't help but look at her with a bit of pity.

Still, he was taking those Command Seals.

"If possible, I'd appreciate it if you could return my family's Mystic Crest. It's expensive and time-consuming to remake..."

Roy pretended not to hear.

The transfer matter could be discussed with Rin later.

He was certain Rin would be delighted to welcome a powerful and straightforward mage like Bazett to her ranks.

With this, both Illya and Bazett were out of the running.

Only a few Masters remained—himself, Rin, Kotomine Kirei, and the elusive Matou family Master. Although Heracles and Cu Chulainn were out of the picture, Dark Saber and Dark Berserker were still formidable foes.

Roy was deep in thought, planning his next move.

Just then—

"Boom—!"

A deafening explosion echoed from not far away.

A mushroom cloud rose in the distance, the shockwave rushing towards them, causing a gust that swept across the empty lot.

"A trap set by the Mage's Association?"

Roy snapped back to reality, his expression turning cold.

"Impossible! I chose this location personally, and I didn't let anyone touch my letters!"

Bazett was equally taken aback.

While she had wanted to win, she preferred a fair fight with Roy. She would never stoop to such underhanded tactics.

"That scale of explosion... It doesn't look like something a regular mage could manage. It might be a Servant."

"A Servant?"

Roy's gaze sharpened.

Come to think of it, wasn't Rin's home somewhere in that direction?

Could it be...?

In the villa district.

The usual tranquility had vanished, replaced by an atmosphere boiling like a pot on high heat.

A black shadow clashed furiously with a Servant in a red cloak, their every strike creating a mesmerizing spectacle.

Rin Tohsaka stood in her family's yard, protected by a magical barrier.

Across from her was a hunched old man in a traditional Japanese kimono.

Familiar.

Painfully familiar.

"The Matou family really has no one left but you, you decrepit fossil."

Rin glared at the old man, her gaze radiating pure, icy hatred.

"Did you come here to finally face the guilt of your countless sins? Ready to die at my hands for redemption?"

"Heh, brat, even if I had sins to atone for, you'd hardly be the one to judge."

The elderly man's voice was hoarse.

Dressed in a dark blue kimono, with shriveled limbs like a mummy, he clutched a cane. His face was gaunt, his skin stretched over his protruding bones, his whole being reeking of decay, like a walking corpse.

Despite looking as if he could keel over at any moment, his eyes sparkled with a sharp, calculating glint.

There was no mistaking it.

This old man was none other than Zouken Matou, the long-absent head of the Matou family.

"Figures."

Rin's gaze remained cold, her killing intent palpable.

"Still, to think you'd launch an attack on me with only the weakest Assassin. Have you gone senile in your old age?"

"Ha, mock me all you want, but tonight, you're as good as dead, Tohsaka brat!"

Zouken chuckled, his tone brimming with sinister confidence.

"This old corpse really thinks he can get the better of me?"

Rin's expression was filled with a seething hatred, but internally, she remained composed.

"His Servant is an Assassin, likely one of the Hassan lineage—hardly strong. That Assassin is clearly being overpowered by my Archer. Where does he get this confidence?"

Not far away, Red Archer launched an arrow that sent Assassin scrambling.

"I didn't crawl out of the shadows after all these years just to play a single card."

A twisted smile crept across Zouken's face.

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Chapter 63: Chapter 63: Exposed



In the villa district.

The dark night was silent, save for the faint sounds of clashing blades that echoed eerily, sending a chill down anyone's spine. High above, a swarm of familiars circled, casting an ominous shadow over the nightscape of Fuyuki City.

At the Tohsaka Residence.

Tohsaka Rin stood face to face with Matou Zouken.

He wasn't dead. Though this outcome was disappointing, Rin hadn't truly expected otherwise.

Yet, knowing that her family had been deceived by him for over a decade, with her younger sister suffering unimaginable torment, filled Rin with an intense desire to kill him on the spot.

Despite her hatred and the urge to tear him apart, Rin kept her composure. She was calm to a degree that even she found unsettling.

Hearing him speak of his supposed "trump card," Rin's instincts sharpened, and she was prepared to use her Command Seal at any moment to summon Archer back for protection.

Thankfully, Roy had given her an additional Command Seal, granting her the luxury of summoning her Servant in a crisis. Without that, her life might very well be in jeopardy tonight.

"If you truly have a trump card, why not show it now? Otherwise, your Assassin might pay the price for your empty threats!" Rin narrowed her eyes, glaring coldly at Matou Zouken with a twisted smile that didn't reach her eyes. She harbored another doubt in her heart.

Why had Matou Zouken, after a three-year disappearance, targeted her?

Admittedly, this was strange. It was Roy and Aoko Aozaki who had destroyed the Matou family three years ago, not her. Yet, Zouken hadn't sought revenge against Roy, choosing to focus on her instead. Could it be that he feared Aozaki's reputation as a true magician?

"Heh, losing my Assassin would indeed be... inconvenient," Matou Zouken said with a mock-respectful smile, his sycophantic expression nauseatingly transparent, enough to make anyone sick.

"Well then, Your Majesty, please make your appearance!"

From behind him, a black mist materialized, suffusing the air with a bone-chilling killing intent, so sharp it seemed to pierce straight to the soul.

From within the mist emerged a dark figure, the clanking of armor clear and jarring to the ear.

Fully clad in black armor, the figure stepped forward—an altered, corrupted version of Saber, none other than the legendary King Arthur, Artoria Pendragon, but now twisted into a Black Saber.

"Corrupted Saber?! What's she doing here?" Rin's face twisted in disbelief as she stared at Black Saber, caught completely off guard.

The exorcism barrier around Fuyuki City still stood, damaged but intact, and theoretically, it should prevent corrupted Servants from entering!

"Young Tohsaka girl, do you think I spent the last three years doing nothing?" Zouken's sinister, triumphant laughter echoed through the night.

"The exorcism barrier around Fuyuki City is indeed impressive, but it's far from the full potential of a true magician's work. The one who set it must have had his reasons, even going as far as using the city's ley lines as its power source. But I've lived in this city for centuries. My knowledge of its ley lines surpasses yours by far, little girl! Hahaha!"

Rin's expression soured as she anxiously called for Archer.

Meanwhile, her mind raced, piecing together Zouken's plan and intent.

She, Tohsaka Rin, was only a half-trained magus.

Her father, Tohsaka Tokiomi, had meticulously documented the family's magical heritage before his untimely death, but he'd passed too soon to teach her directly. For the past decade, she'd relied solely on herself, self-studying and gradually growing in strength.

She balanced her father's magic studies with dealing with the Mage's Association while carrying the guilt her family bore for the calamity they'd brought to the world.

Rin was a prodigy—her rapid progress in just a decade had proven that much. But the essence of magecraft lay in accumulated knowledge, and her youth, coupled with a lack of mentorship, left her with glaring weaknesses.

In a fair fight, the weakened Zouken might not stand a chance against her. But his extensive knowledge and experience had allowed him to exploit her vulnerabilities, manipulating the city's ley lines to breach the barrier and allow Black Saber's entrance.

No wonder they hadn't been able to find Black Saber after that night. Zouken had hidden her within the city's borders all along.

Now, thinking back, the first damage to the barrier had coincided with Black Saber's initial appearance. It must have been Zouken's doing, his entire plan set in motion from the very start.

His objective was clear: with her controlling the barrier, once she was eliminated, the defense would crumble, and it would be a trivial matter for Black Saber to storm the city.

At that point, no one would be able to stand against a Black Saber empowered by the Lesser Grail!

"To think the revered King of Britain would stoop to allying with a decrepit mage rotting to his very core," Rin sneered, hoping to stall for time while attempting to drive a wedge between them.

But Black Saber ignored her, silently raising her dark, twisted sword.

The mere act of lifting the blade filled the air with a chilling malice that made Rin's hair stand on end. A sense of impending doom crept from the base of her spine to the top of her head.

Without hesitation, she raised her hand.

Whoosh!

In the blink of an eye, a fierce gust swept over her.

In the next instant, Black Saber seemed to teleport, her figure flashing directly before Rin's eyes.

With a resounding clang, two blades crossed to block the incoming strike, forming a makeshift shield. The familiar red coat flashed in front of Rin.

She let out a sigh of relief.

The Command Seal on the back of her hand had diminished by one.

Though it was painful to use another precious seal, preserving her life was worth any cost.

Bang!

Her relief was short-lived.

Red Archer suddenly staggered, his knees bending as he struggled under the force of Black Saber's blade, his arms shaking from the sheer weight of it.

"Archer, give me something here!" Rin shouted, clutching a handful of colorful gemstones, charging at Zouken without a second thought.

"You... really know how to push a guy!" Archer's face flushed as he struggled, frustration bubbling within.

How was he, a mere Archer, supposed to face off against a Saber empowered by the Lesser Grail?

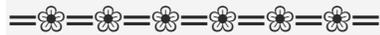
This was even worse than telling him to solo Hercules six times over!

But with no other choice, he swiftly retreated, creating some distance from Black Saber while preparing to engage in evasive combat. Black Saber seemed uninterested in pursuing, but the relentless arrows forced her to divert her attention.

"Oh, little girl, did you really think Black Saber was the only corrupted Servant I had?" Zouken chuckled darkly, his voice dripping with ominous intent.

Rin's instincts flared.

The next moment, a figure cloaked entirely in darkness—a Berserker—appeared, his sword slicing through the air as he charged toward her with blinding speed.



Chapter 64: Chapter 64: Am I Supposed to Fight a Servant?



The Corrupted Berserker!

Tohsaka Rin froze in her tracks, her heart pounding.

Are they serious?

Did they send three Servants just to kill me?!

"Just go on and die, little girl from the Tohsaka family!"

A malicious grin spread across Matou Zouken's face, his dark, soulless eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

The Corrupted Berserker stepped forward in long strides, swinging his massive sword down at Tohsaka Rin.

As the sword came crashing down, Rin felt a strange calm wash over her, as if in a trance.

Ah.

There's no escape.

With the Berserker's sword this close, even as a Master, she was no match for a knight of his caliber.

In that instant, she could see her own death vividly—her body split in two, left lifeless and broken on the ground.

The Holy Grail War hadn't ended yet; the debts owed by the three families remained unpaid.

And Roy's kindness as well...

Sorry, it looks like I won't be able to repay you in this life.

Maybe in the next, I'll work for you as a servant to atone—

"Stop!"

A commanding voice shattered her bleak thoughts.

A fierce gust swept past her as blades clashed, creating sparks that illuminated the night.

Miss Okita forced the Corrupted Berserker back with a single strike, pretending to wipe imaginary sweat from her forehead.

"Phew, that was close!"

If Miss Tohsaka had been split in two, her Master would've thought even less of her!

She needed to find a way to improve her standing with him somehow!

"...Saber?"

Tohsaka Rin blinked, finally snapping back to reality.

Cold sweat coated her skin, and her eyes gleamed with the relief of narrowly escaping death.

"Why are you here?"

"My Master saw the commotion and figured you might be in trouble, so she sent me to help!"

Okita Souji gripped her sword tightly, her piercing gaze fixed on the Corrupted Berserker as if it could cut him down on its own.

"AAAAAaaaaaaaaaaaaa—————!!"

The Corrupted Berserker let out a furious roar, lunging at Okita Souji with reckless abandon, like a rabid dog.

"Hurry to the outskirts! My Master is waiting there!"

Okita Souji quickly gave her instructions, her eyes flashing with resolve as she prepared to face the Berserker head-on.

"Thank you!"

Knowing there was no time for pride, Tohsaka Rin thanked her and immediately turned, sprinting towards the edge of the city.

There was no way she could take on Matou Zouken.

Perhaps the Corrupted Saber and Berserker wouldn't care about his fate, but he still had an Assassin. In this situation, reuniting with Roy was her best chance to survive!

"How did Saber get here?"

Matou Zouken was also thrown off by Okita's sudden interference, clicking his tongue in annoyance.

"Did Caster and her Master call off their duel with that artificial brat? I chose this time specifically to strike, only to have my plans ruined. How infuriating!"

He had been so close to killing Tohsaka Rin, but now his scheme was thwarted, leaving him in a foul mood.

Matou Zouken was aware of the alliance between Roy and Tohsaka Rin; of course, they would support each other.

That was why he had chosen this moment, hoping to eliminate Rin quickly while Roy was occupied with Bazett.

But now, Roy's Saber had intercepted them.

He didn't believe Roy and Saber could defeat Bazett and Caster in such a short time; they must have sensed something wrong, prompting Bazett and Roy to postpone their duel temporarily.

No matter. He still had three Servants on his side!

"Assassin, go kill that girl!"

"Understood, Magus."

A shadow flickered in the darkness.

A figure draped in a tattered black robe moved through the night like a ghost, his skeletal mask adding an unsettling chill to the air.

Matou Zouken chuckled, remaining where he was with a self-assured expression.

Among the remaining Servants, they were either corrupted or opposed by Lancer and Caster, while Assassin was under his control. As long as Rider, who had yet to make an appearance, didn't intervene, Tohsaka Rin wouldn't escape Assassin's pursuit—her death was almost certain.

Especially with the Corrupted Saber relentlessly beating down the red Archer and Saber barely holding her own against the Corrupted Berserker, he was more convinced than ever.

"Tohsaka brat, my time is running out. Blame yourself for standing in my way!"

Matou Zouken lowered his gaze, studying his gnarled, wrinkled gray-brown hand exposed beyond his sleeve, his expression darkening momentarily.

This Holy Grail War would be his last chance; he had to secure immortality soon...

On the other side.

"Huff... Huff..."

Roy and Tohsaka Rin finally met up, both panting heavily.

The city outskirts were less than a mile from the Tohsaka residence, and as Rin looked at the breathless Roy, she couldn't help feeling a mix of emotions.

But now wasn't the time to dwell on that.

"You and Bazett called a truce, right? Can you hire her and Caster to help deal with Matou Zouken and Assassin?"

"But... Caster... is gone... Ha, ah!"

Roy glared at Tohsaka Rin, his chest heaving like a bellows.

"Caster is gone?!"

Tohsaka Rin's voice rose several octaves in shock.

Although she hadn't been there herself, Rin knew about the duel between Roy and Bazett.

She had stayed home, not due to any quarrel with Roy, but to guard against potential traps from the Mage's Association. Less than a mile was perfect sniping range for Archer.

But hadn't the duel only just started?

How was Caster already gone?

Together with Bazett, they should have been as strong as two Servants!

"They were powerful, but I managed to gain the upper hand."

Roy took a couple of deep breaths, steadying himself as he spoke earnestly.

So, he'd already defeated Bazett's team?

You're even more capable than I imagined.

But could you maybe ease up just a little bit right now?

"Miss Magus."

A low, emotionless voice interrupted them from behind.

The ghostly figure with the skeletal mask leapt across the rooftops, landing directly behind Tohsaka Rin.

He stood atop a slender branch, balanced as if weightless, gazing down at the pair below.

"When faced with the threat of death, leading your enemies to your allies is unwise—it only endangers them as well."

Roy looked up, locking eyes with Assassin.

The Assassin class was different from the other classes, as its origins lay in the order of assassins led by the Old Man of the Mountain. No relic could match the power of this concept's origin, so in a standard Holy Grail War, the summoned Assassin would always hail from the lineage of the Old Man of the Mountain.

From his appearance, it was clear that Matou Zouken had summoned none other than Hassan of the Cursed Arm.

Tohsaka Rin was no match for him.

So...

Am I supposed to fight a Servant?

"Please, prepare to offer your heads!"

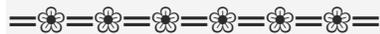
The Cursed Arm Hassan's voice was a low growl as he brandished his dagger, lunging at them with swift, lethal intent.

Even before he closed the distance, the sharp whistle of his blade cut through the air.

Tohsaka Rin's face twisted with tension, her expression laced with a touch of bitterness.

If Caster's group were still around, they might have stood a chance.

But now, they were down to just two magi. How could they possibly take on a Servant? Even the weakest Servant was beyond their ability to handle!



Chapter 65: Chapter 65: In a Split Second



[🎉 Shoutout to TheDawnBeforeEve for joining patreon. Thank you very much.☐]

In a one-on-one with a top-tier magus, a Servant might just find some challenge. But even the most skilled magus would barely scrape by against a lower-tier Servant, lucky if they manage to survive.

Even someone as strong as Aozaki Touko could only hold her ground to this extent.

Tohsaka Rin gripped her gem tightly, ready to throw it.

No matter what kind of enemy she faced, she refused to back down without a fight. Even if death was inevitable, she'd face it only after giving it her all.

That was Tohsaka Rin.

Just as she prepared for a final stand, a flurry of white paper cascaded down from above, rustling like rainfall.

Startled, Rin looked up as each piece of paper shimmered with magical energy, forming translucent barriers around them, buzzing with protective energy.

"What?"

The charging Hassan of the Cursed Arm faltered for a moment.

His hollow, skull-masked eyes shifted from Rin to the red-eyed, white-haired homunculus beside her, holding another stack of rune papers, seemingly ready to throw.

Hassan's figure lowered as he descended to the ground. With a quick flick of his wrist, he hurled a dagger at the closest barrier, the blade ricocheting off with a sharp clang as it shattered a single layer.

But that was only one layer out of many.

The barriers formed a dense wall around Rin and Roy, layers upon layers in all directions, with at least a dozen for each angle. Altogether, there were probably over seventy or eighty.

"How many rune sheets has this magus stockpiled?"

Hassan's hollow eyes narrowed in disbelief.

Ordinary magi were limited by their magical energy; there was a daily cap on the number of rune sheets they could produce. To accumulate this many

would require years of dedication, with each powerful rune draining significant reserves.

"Such a formidable defensive rune paper stockpile should be nearly impossible to amass!"

Without hesitation, Hassan spread his fingers, holding seven or eight daggers between them.

He aimed at one spot in the barrier, flinging each dagger in rapid succession, forming a relentless chain of strikes. Precision was irrelevant—only speed and power mattered!

In a matter of seconds, he had already shattered half the barriers in front of Rin and Roy.

Just one more round of attacks, and their defenses would collapse completely.

Tohsaka Rin braced herself, tense and clutching her gems.

Hassan produced another set of daggers, throwing them in a relentless stream, each knife colliding with the next as they tore through the remaining barriers.

Cracks and shatters echoed as the last layer dissolved into fragments.

Without hesitation, Rin hurled one of her gems forward.

Each gem was something she had nurtured from a young age, pouring ten years' worth of magical energy into them. She only had ten such gems in total, each capable of releasing devastating A-rank attacks—powerful enough to even take out a life from Heracles himself.

"Foolish!"

Hassan flicked his hand again.

A barrage of daggers spun through the air, colliding in a chain reaction that knocked each gem out of the sky before they could even explode.

Watching her precious gems shatter, Rin's eyes widened with frustration and disbelief.

Yes, these could have taken a life from Heracles—but only if he stood there like a target, unmoving.

Gritting her teeth, Rin reached into her pocket and pulled out a ruby necklace.

It was her father's keepsake, stored alongside the snakeskin in their family's treasure chest. The magical energy within it was vast, far surpassing her own gems. If she could detonate it, its power would be even greater.

But before she could act, Roy tossed another handful of rune papers into the air.

The sheets scattered around them like flower petals, seemingly about to reform the barrier once more.

"Not this time!"

Hassan had anticipated this move.

With a flash, he lunged forward, closing the gap in the blink of an eye.

His keen eyes tracked the sheets, identifying those that were first pulsing with magical energy. He threw daggers with pinpoint accuracy, shattering those runes before they could activate.

As the blades took out the runes, his right arm extended, clawed fingers reaching straight for Roy's heart.

"Roy!"

Rin's face paled as she instinctively threw the ruby necklace toward him, hoping to form a shield in time to block Assassin's attack—

But to her surprise, Roy's expression remained calm, almost smug.

"You've fallen for it!"

The moment Roy's expression registered, a sense of foreboding washed over Hassan.

Roy had thrown the runes with his right hand—but his left hand had been hidden behind him, performing a more subtle action masked by the flourish of his rune-casting.

With a flick of his left wrist, a rune for barrier creation appeared mid-air, rapidly expanding, multiplying, and solidifying into a protective wall around both Roy and Rin.

This new barrier was not only several times stronger than the previous one but was also under Roy's direct control, continuously fed with magical energy. It wouldn't be easily broken.

"Tch!"

Blocked in his advance, Hassan took a step back, unable to reach Roy's heart.

The barrier in front was now a daunting obstacle, but the other angles had fewer layers. If he changed his position, he might be able to breach the defenses within seconds.

"Hm?"

Hassan hesitated, feeling a strange resistance at his back.

He turned and was shocked to find the sheets of rune paper from Roy's second throw had linked up, forming a grand barrier that encircled the entire area, trapping all three of them within.

Inside this outer barrier, Roy's personal defenses formed an inner shield, enclosing himself and Rin.

Effectively, Hassan was now sandwiched between two protective walls.

An unsettling smile spread across Roy's face.

With a wave of his right hand, the barrier runes he had secretly created with his left began to split and expand, forming even more layers.

"Too bad for you—it's over. Time to die!"

Roy flicked his wrist, and from his palm, countless runes shot out like chains, threading through the gaps in the barriers.

In two breaths, hundreds of runes filled the sky above, fusing into a massive rune sphere as tall as a person.

"Damn it!"

Hassan's eyes widened as he realized the trap too late.

With a roar, the rune sphere exploded between the two barriers.

"BOOM—!!!"

A deafening explosion echoed through the night, flames erupting like a miniature sun, consuming everything in its path.

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Chapter 66: Chapter 66: Explosion



The outermost barrier lasted only a second before it shattered completely. Scorching flames erupted in all directions, unleashing waves of unbearable heat.

"Arrrggghh—!"

Hassan of the Cursed Arm let out a blood-curdling scream as the flames engulfed him.

In mere moments, his body began to char and disintegrate under the intense agony.

"In this era... such a mage...!"

These were his final words of disbelief before his consciousness faded. His body continued to burn until it was reduced to nothing—no ashes, no remains, only emptiness.

As the flames subsided, they revealed a blackened expanse of scorched earth, the acrid stench of burnt asphalt filling the air. Smoke billowed around them, and the sizzling of molten ground echoed faintly.

The outer barrier had disintegrated entirely, leaving only a thin layer of protection around the two survivors.

"Hah..."

Roy exhaled heavily, fatigue etched on his face.

He rubbed his eyes, a hint of exhaustion showing. After back-to-back battles with Cú Chulainn and Hassan, his mana reserves were nearly drained, leaving less than a tenth of his energy.

More pressing, however, was his mental strain. Using his Mystic Eyes repeatedly had taken its toll, leaving him mentally drained.

Beside him, Tohsaka Rin stared at the scene in stunned silence.

What had she just witnessed?

A Servant—actually killed by a mage?

Even a weaker Servant would never lose to a modern mage, no matter the circumstance. The best a mage could hope for was to escape with their life.

Yet Roy had managed the impossible, using only his magic.

"I always thought you were impressive... but now I'm convinced you're some kind of monster."

Rin retrieved the ruby necklace she had yet to use, looking at Roy with an expression bordering on horror.

Even Aozaki Touko, a mage of supreme skill, couldn't defeat a Servant head-on. At best, she could survive the encounter.

But here, Roy had single-handedly taken down a Servant with his own magic. It was something unthinkable.

She'd always known that the homunculi from the Einzbern family were exceptional, possessing mental and physical abilities closely resembling those of a human, with circuits optimized for magical research.

Their only true flaw was a limited lifespan. Even the most carefully crafted homunculi barely lasted beyond twenty years.

Yet Roy's abilities had gone beyond exceptional—his talents weren't just a matter of efficiency. It was as if he was some kind of genetic anomaly among homunculi.

"Is it because of those Mystic Eyes?"

Rin looked at him with a mix of curiosity and suspicion.

"No, it's more than that. The Mystic Eyes are part of it, but so is his tactical calculation."

Reviewing the battle in her mind, she realized that Roy had used his larger movements to conceal smaller actions, baited Hassan with precision, and trapped him between layers of barriers to finally secure victory.

It took a cool-headed mind, rapid calculations, and the courage to use himself as bait, along with those powerful Mystic Eyes. All of these elements were crucial.

Roy might not embody the essence of a traditional mage, but as a fighter, he outclassed ninety-nine percent of them.

"Well, a monster's not the worst thing to be."

Roy massaged his temples, trying to maintain his focus.

"Sounds more... human than 'mage,' anyway."

Rin let out a sigh, at a loss for words.

She'd known Roy for three years and understood that deep down, he harbored a deep loathing for mages.

That likely had something to do with his past. She had long suspected that his Mystic Eyes were no natural gift. Normal homunculi weren't born with gem-level Mystic Eyes; those were a natural rarity, granted only to certain humans.

It made sense that his Mystic Eyes had been surgically altered. And from what that mage called Chikage had said, it was clear he had gone through hellish experiments.

"Roy, what exactly happened on your end?"

"What happened...?"

Rin shook off her thoughts, quickly recounting everything that had transpired with her.

"Both Black Saber and Black Berserker snuck into the city?"

Roy's expression turned grim.

This situation was far more severe than he'd anticipated.

Those two Blackened Servants were formidable enough on their own, a challenge even one-on-one. Now both were loose in the city simultaneously.

What a blunder—Matou Zouken, that ancient fiend, had done it this time.

What now? The remaining allied Servants were few, and while they could assist, there was no guarantee they could overcome the Blackened Saber. And revealing Taigong Wang's power was not an option.

Black Saber was a deadly opponent, but if Blackened Rider Iskandar or Gilgamesh decided to join, even Taigong Wang would struggle to stay hidden.

And who knew if the Grail War still had more surprises up its sleeve?

"Master, I have an idea..."

Just then, a dignified voice sounded in Roy's mind.

It was Rider, Taigong Wang.

Since Roy had ordered him to remain hidden, Rider hadn't appeared. Now, he had reached out through their connection with a proposal.

At the same moment, however—

"Master, Black Berserker is headed your way!"

Another voice sounded urgently in Roy's mind, this one unmistakably laced with worry.

"I'm sorry, Archer has fallen, and Black Saber... she's after me now—!"

"AAAARRRGHH!"

Chaos erupted in an instant.

A bestial roar thundered through the air like a bolt of lightning.

A shadow of pure darkness closed the distance with blinding speed, appearing right in front of them.

Ignoring Roy entirely, Black Berserker's blood-red eyes locked onto Rin. He raised his massive sword, the blade gleaming like the scythe of the Grim Reaper as it swung toward her.

Rin's body moved on instinct.

She raised her ruby necklace, desperate to conjure a barrier.

But her speed was no match for a Servant's.

Berserker's sword was already descending, and her hand hadn't even risen fully.

It was too late.

No matter what, she wasn't going to make it.

But at that critical moment, someone else reacted a beat faster than her.

Thanks to Okita's warning, Roy had anticipated Black Berserker's arrival and quickly deduced that Rin, who controlled the city's protective barrier, was his primary target.

There was no time to deploy rune sheets or inscribe a protective spell.

So without a second thought, Roy reached out, shoving Rin aside with all his strength.

The sword cut down.

Rin stumbled back, narrowly avoiding the fatal strike.

But in that same instant, a different splash of red filled her vision.





Bright red blood sprayed into the night, drawing a sinister arc through the air before it splattered onto the scorched ground, only to evaporate almost instantly. A severed arm flew into the darkness.

Roy's face twisted in pain as a searing agony shot through his shoulder. His eyes widened, nearly popping out of their sockets, as every muscle in his body seized up, his breaths coming in rapid, shallow gasps. His complexion was deathly pale.

In the past, this pain would have thrown him into complete disarray, writhing on the ground in agony.

But now, he merely gritted his teeth and forced a grunt, quickly regaining his composure.

"Master!"

Taigong Wang's urgent voice echoed in his mind, urging him to act.

"Go ahead, as planned!"

Roy gave his command without a moment's hesitation.

On the battlefield, Black Berserker looked slightly puzzled, as though surprised that his strike had only severed Roy's arm rather than slaying him outright. But his momentary distraction quickly faded, his gaze once again locking onto Tohsaka Rin.

His king's command was clear: kill this girl. Everything else was irrelevant.

Closing the distance in a few long strides, Black Berserker raised his sword once more, slashing toward Rin with a downward swing.

Rin staggered from Roy's desperate shove, only to turn and see his severed arm. But just as she struggled to process what she saw, Black Berserker's gaze landed on her again, sending a cold wave of terror through her. At such close range and with his terrifying speed, she knew resistance was impossible.

At that crucial instant—

"Hold it right there!"

A lance appeared out of nowhere, stabbing forward to intercept Berserker's blade.

The commanding voice rang out as a man clad in resplendent golden armor materialized in the air, his long spear blocking Black Berserker's weapon as if dividing heaven and earth.

The man's armor was distinctly ancient Chinese, adorned with red tassels on the spear. His stern, chiseled features held the sharpness of a warrior, giving him the air of a hero from an old epic.

Black Berserker seemed startled by the newcomer, unable to place this armored man. But it didn't stop him from unleashing a brutal barrage of attacks, his massive sword slashing wildly in a storm of fury.

The spear-wielding man met each blow with unwavering determination, his movements sharp and precise, his spear forming a shield of steel that thwarted Black Berserker's every strike.

Rin, though bewildered, quickly backed away from the ferocious clash.

"That man... who is he?" she murmured, watching the newcomer intently.

"He must be the Rider we haven't seen until now," Roy replied, retreating to her side.

Though pale with pain, Roy's voice was calm and clear. With his left hand, he hastily drew a rune to staunch the blood flow from his severed shoulder.

Once he stopped the bleeding, he layered more rune-formed barriers around them, a lattice of protection reinforced with the power of his Mystic Eyes.

His mana reserves, however, were on their last legs.

Rin turned to him, glancing at his injury. Seeing the bloody stump where his arm had been severed to save her, she felt a flurry of conflicting emotions—gratitude, frustration, and something more elusive.

She wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't come.

"It's just an arm," Roy said, shaking his head dismissively. His voice was weak, but his tone was remarkably composed, as if it were a minor inconvenience.

"The danger isn't over yet."

Rin bit her lip, suppressing the tangle of emotions. She forced herself to refocus, assessing the situation with a clear mind.

The risk was far from eliminated. The armored man, likely Rider, seemed to be holding off Black Berserker for now. She didn't know why he'd stepped in to save her, but he was barely keeping Berserker at bay.

"Archer, what's your status?" Rin called out mentally, her voice laced with urgency.

There was only silence.

"Archer?" she repeated, her tone growing desperate.

No response.

Her face darkened, and her heart sank.

Though she could confirm through her Command Spells that Archer was still alive, he was likely in critical condition, barely clinging to consciousness.

"Roy, where's your Saber?"

"Locked in battle with Black Saber..."

Her spirits plummeted even further. In this scenario, their only active ally was Roy's Saber.

But facing off against Black Saber was a daunting task, even for her. Could she even hope to hold her own, let alone stall for time?

Suddenly, a figure crashed down from above, creating a shallow crater in the earth. As the dust cleared, the blackened form of Saber stepped into view.

Rin forced a hollow laugh. "Well, speak of the devil..."

It was now clear that Saber hadn't managed to hold Black Saber at bay. With the power of the Lesser Grail, Black Saber had likely discarded her opponent with ease.

For the first time, Rin felt the chill of hopelessness settle over her.

Black Saber ignored Roy entirely, her gaze fixed solely on Rin—the one she had been ordered to eliminate.

With a single swing, she unleashed a crimson arc of energy from her sword, a deadly wave of magic that tore through the earth as it hurtled toward them.

The ground split open, leaving a deep scar, the air whistling through the temporary vacuum left in its wake. The oppressive pressure was suffocating.

The rune barrier formed by hundreds of symbols crumbled, nearly half of it annihilated in one blow.

Rin's face paled.

And Roy, his complexion already ashen from blood loss, looked even more like he was at death's door.

Two Blackened Servants—Saber and Berserker. Either one was formidable enough on their own, but now both were focused on taking them down.

Meanwhile, Archer was incapacitated, and Roy's Saber could barely keep Black Saber distracted.

What could they possibly do now?

Roy's gaze landed on the Chinese-styled Rider, still clashing with Black Berserker.

That Servant was none other than Taigong Wang in disguise.

He'd assumed the guise of an ancient acquaintance from his own era—the legendary general, Huang Feihu. Using the principles of Chinese mysticism, distinct from Western magic, it was unlikely anyone would see through the ruse.

Roy had insisted on keeping Taigong Wang's true identity concealed, so Taigong had proposed this elaborate disguise.

But at this point, exposing Rider's true form was their only option.

"Master!"

Okita's voice rang out through their connection.

Sensing that Black Saber was about to shatter the weakened barriers with a second strike, she rushed forward at top speed, swinging her blade at Black Saber in an effort to interrupt her attack.

"You're becoming a nuisance."

Black Saber deflected Okita with a single stroke, her face finally showing a flicker of annoyance.

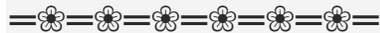
This Saber had thwarted her efforts more than once, slipping through her strikes like an eel.

"I'll deal with all of you in one stroke!"

A chilling glint appeared in Black Saber's eyes as she reached the limits of her patience.

In a flash, she poured vast reserves of mana into her sword. A black aurora, like an inky sun, began to form around the blade, swelling with ominous power.

In that moment, everyone present felt their hearts sink.



Chapter 68: Chapter 68: The Return of Aozaki Aoko



She was going to use her Noble Phantasm here!

This was still within the city limits. Although the population density in the villa district wasn't as high as the city center, releasing that cursed sword here would still tear apart the entire area!

If that Noble Phantasm were unleashed, the magi of Fuyuki City would suffer heavy casualties. Sure, most of those magi had the morals of animals, but at this point, the city couldn't do without them.

And more importantly, if she unleashed that power... Roy and Tohsaka Rin were as good as dead!

"I can't let her do this!"

With mounting urgency, Okita dashed toward Blackened Saber without a second thought.

But Blackened Saber's mana surged explosively, forming a storm of tangible energy that swept Okita away, making it impossible to approach.

"Damn it!"

Okita felt utterly helpless. Blackened Saber was now drawing on the Lesser Grail's mana without restraint, determined to wipe them all out. The same force had thrown her off before.

Stopping her seemed impossible.

Out of options, Okita turned and dashed toward Roy's location. Right now, the only thing she could do was try to help her Master escape.

"Roy, you should go on alone," Rin said, sighing heavily, her expression resolute.

She was prepared to die here.

"Master," Taigong Wang's voice resonated in Roy's mind. "Just this once, I can use my Earth Shifting Technique to get you all out. What do you choose?"

If he made a move, escape was possible. But using the technique would come dangerously close to exposing his true identity.

Taigong Wang wanted to help them escape, but he remembered Roy's strict instructions about staying hidden. So he deferred the choice to Roy.

Was it better to die here, knowing he had a chance to fulfill his ideals? Or to flee, leaving his mission incomplete?

"No, don't use it!" Roy commanded firmly.

"Even with Miss Tohsaka here?"

"Well..." Roy hesitated, struggling with his own resolve.

While he was ready to sacrifice himself if it meant achieving his goal, he didn't want Rin to die alongside him.

But at that moment, Blackened Saber raised her towering, dark blade, brimming with lethal energy.

"—Swallow the light... Excalibur Morgan!"

The black aurora surged forward, consuming everything in its path, sweeping toward Roy and Rin in a torrent of destructive force. The sheer heat would vaporize flesh and blood upon contact.

Rin instinctively closed her eyes, bracing herself for death.

Okita, determination etched on her face, stepped between Roy and the oncoming wave, resolved to perish before her Master did.

Just then, Taigong Wang, disguised as Huang Feihu, abandoned his clash with Blackened Berserker and, in the blink of an eye, appeared in front of the three of them. With a wave of his hand, a protective array inscribed with ancient characters unfolded before them.

The array exuded an aura as ancient as the tides themselves, and it held strong against the relentless flood of dark energy, standing resilient like a rock in the sea.

"Well, well... It took me quite a while to craft this array. Aren't I clever?"

Taigong Wang chuckled with calm confidence, as if even facing Blackened Saber's Noble Phantasm was no great challenge.

"But my mana can't compare to the Lesser Grail," he warned. "If you intend to escape, you'll need to decide before my mana runs out. So, Master, do you wish to change your answer?"

They could try escaping now. Of course, Blackened Saber would most likely pursue them.

Or, even worse, she might go directly to the Greater Grail, claim it for herself, or unleash her wrath on Fuyuki City, killing thousands.

But fleeing now would give them a brief reprieve, time to think of a countermeasure.

Alternatively, they could stay and die here, leaving Taigong Wang alone to carry out Roy's will.

The black light raged beyond the barrier, like a predator stalking its prey, hungry to devour all in its path.

Blackened Saber, relentless, poured the Lesser Grail's mana into her sword, feeding the darkness, and the storm of energy grew even more ferocious.

The ancient Eastern magic circle began to tremble under the constant pressure of the light's torrent, cracks appearing in the shield.

"So, my first time back here in a while... and it's in a situation like this, huh?"

Amidst the roaring light, a figure slowly approached.

Tall and slender, the woman's figure was wrapped in a simple T-shirt and pants. Her long, blood-red hair danced wildly in the turbulent air, exuding an aura of absolute confidence.

"!"

Blackened Saber suddenly sensed a powerful threat. She whipped around, her gaze zeroing in on the red-haired figure.

The woman extended her hand, gathering a sphere of magical energy in her palm.

In an instant, four layers of magical energy compressed into a single, pure force.

"Boom!"

With a resounding explosion, the woman fired a magic blast that tore through the air like a laser.

Without hesitation, Blackened Saber abandoned her attack and leapt to the side, retreating from the advancing force.

"Buzz, buzz, buzz!"

With a flick of her wrist, the red-haired woman conjured a dozen magical blasts, stacking their power to the limit. For a brief moment, the night sky was filled with complex, interlocking geometric shapes.

"Arthur!" Blackened Berserker lunged toward Blackened Saber like a mad dog.

With an impatient scowl, Blackened Saber kicked him aside.

Just then, the red-haired woman flicked her fingers, and the conjured blasts fired in a simultaneous volley.

Sensing immediate danger, Blackened Saber crouched low and darted away, weaving through the blasts with agile precision.

On the ground, Blackened Berserker lay stunned, staring at her with confusion, as if unable to understand why his king had kicked him.

In the next instant, two of the magical blasts pivoted mid-air, veering sharply toward him. Caught off guard, Blackened Berserker was struck directly by the searing magic.

With armor and body alike dissolving under the assault, he disappeared as quickly as spring snow in a downpour.

After a single round, no trace of Blackened Berserker remained.

"You've layered basic magical blasts to near-ritual-level devastation... and with limitless mana..."

Blackened Saber's face remained impassive, though her eyes were wary as they fixed on the red-haired woman.

"Unlike me, borrowing mana from the Lesser Grail, your power is wholly your own. It's not just enormous; it's truly endless... Are you... a modern-day Magician?"

"That's right. My mana is borrowed from versions of myself across other timelines, allowing me to draw on a fundamentally different level of output than you."

The red-haired woman casually tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, her expression slightly taunting.

"If you want a challenge, why not let me bring out a version of myself from ten years—or even a hundred years—into the future?"

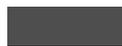
"The Magician of the End," Blackened Saber murmured under her breath, as if she had already deduced her opponent's magic.

But she wasn't one to back down so easily.

"By the rules," Blackened Saber said coldly, "a being of your level shouldn't interfere in this world's affairs."

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Chapter 69: Chapter 69: The Death of the Old Worm



[👉 Shoutout to Mandy_G & Hunter_Waldo for joining patreon. Thank you very much. □]

"Of course, I know that," Aozaki Aoko replied with a careless smile.

"But how can you be so sure that what I'm doing now actually breaks any rules?"

...What did she mean?

Blackened Saber narrowed her eyes, her mind racing. But no matter how she pondered, she couldn't fathom the deeper meaning behind Aoko's words.

"Leave now, King Arthur," Aoko continued, her tone severe as she looked Blackened Saber in the eye. "Just this once, I'll let things slide. If you want to make a move, do it another time."

Blackened Saber fell silent for a long moment, her brows furrowing as if trying to make sense of the Magician standing before her. Eventually, she retracted her weapon and withdrew her stance.

"I hope you keep your word. Don't interfere again."

With those words, her figure gradually faded from sight.

Though she held the Lesser Grail, even she held a deep fear of magic's mysterious power.

And although this Magician was still young, Saber preferred not to test her limits against her.

"Phew, I'm glad she backed down!" Aoko sighed in relief. "If we had actually fought, it would've been a huge headache!"

Magic was powerful, that much was true. But a Magician's true strength grew with time. Aoko had only held her magic for a little over twenty years. While she could summon future versions of herself to aid in battle, she'd then have to spend ages untangling the disruptions to time, leaving her unable to rest for a long while.

For Aoko, that was a price she wasn't willing to pay.

"Aoko, you returned just in time..." Roy staggered toward her, his steps unsteady.

It couldn't have been more timely. Thanks to her return, Taigong Wang's true identity had managed to stay hidden.

Taigong Wang, seeing that the crisis was resolved and everyone was safe, vanished without a sound, leaving no chance for anyone to get too close to him.

"If I hadn't come back, what would you have done?" Aoko turned to face him, a pleasant smile on her face.

Then she slapped him on the shoulder—hard.

Roy could feel his shoulder blade groaning under the impact.

"Stop, stop! You'll break my bones!"

"So, you do know pain," Aoko huffed, her voice cold as she watched him struggle.

She seemed genuinely displeased.

Roy wasn't quite sure what she was so upset about. Joining the Holy Grail War was something he had long ago set his mind on, and Aoko had known about it.

And truthfully, Roy and Aoko weren't that close. In the three years he'd known her, they'd only met a handful of times, with their encounters adding up to barely an hour in total.

It was odd, really—Aoko was the one who had found him, yet he felt more of a connection with Touko.

"I have a lot of issues with you," Aoko muttered, "but I'll save them for later."

She turned around, her face showing undisguised disgust and annoyance.

"I smell something rotten in the air. Is that revolting old worm still alive?"

Suddenly, a rustling sound came from the bushes nearby.

They all turned to see a hunched, tiny figure scurrying away, fleeing like a stray dog.

"Damn it! Why do I always end up being targeted by a Magician?" Zouken Matou had come to observe the situation, but the moment he saw Aozaki Aoko, he was terrified and immediately turned to run.

"For three years, I haven't dared to even think of revenge. I didn't even dare to go after that homunculus. And yet, I still end up crossing paths with these two! Does fate really despise me this much?"

"Matou Zouken!" Without a second thought, Tohsaka Rin hurled a gem infused with reinforced magic at him.

The gem left a comet-like trail and burst above Zouken's head, transforming into a cage of radiant spikes that locked him in place.

Zouken's expression grew even darker, though he managed a cold smirk.

"Hmph. Fine. Let this body be destroyed. But don't get too smug. I'm not one to give up so easily. You'd best be prepared for my inevitable return!"

"That wretched old fossil!" Rin gritted her teeth, glaring at him with undisguised hatred. She wished she could throw his soul into the flames of purgatory and roast it for an eternity.

She looked at Aoko, hesitated for a moment, then spoke with conviction.

"Miss Aoko, forgive my forwardness, but do you have a way to put him down for good?"

"I'm not particularly skilled in this area." Aoko shrugged, displaying a rare casualness for someone of her rank. She despised Zouken too, but dealing with him wasn't her specialty.

Sure, using magic could end him without much trouble. But tampering with time magic wasn't something she could do on a whim.

The slightest change in the timeline could disrupt the balance of entropy, like pulling a thread that could unravel reality itself. To take something from one moment meant putting something back of equal mass to maintain temporal stability.

Ignoring the balance and taking without giving would eventually lead to chaos. A small butterfly could cause a storm, and even the slightest tampering could push the world off course. She wasn't about to risk the world just to kill Matou Zouken.

"Aoko's only good at blowing things up," Roy chuckled weakly, despite his pain. "When it comes to other skills, she's practically a dead weight. Why else do you think they call her the 'Human Rocket Launcher' at the Mage's Association?"

Aoko smiled, and with a snap, her hand came down on Roy's shoulder again.

"That nickname really gets on my nerves."

"Wait, stop, please! I'm sorry—I'm already in enough pain as it is..."

Roy pleaded until Aoko finally let him go.

"Let me handle him," Roy said, stepping forward. "I learned a ritual over these last three years, specifically for dealing with souls like his."

"This time, you're not coming back!"

With that, he stepped past the magical barrier. From his storage pouch, he retrieved several black keys, each blade sharp as a wolf's fang, and plunged them into Zouken's head.

"W-Wait... Could it be—?"

Zouken's face contorted as he saw the black keys, his expression shifting to horror.

"The Rite of Exorcism? A man like you... has faith?"

"I don't need faith to use these."

Roy's face bore a faint smile, though beads of cold sweat dotted his brow.

It wasn't just the pain. He was pushing his body to the limit, draining his life force to fuel his remaining mana.

Activating his Mystic Eyes, he summoned holy light into his hands.

The purifying power of the exorcism ritual, usually limited by the user's level of faith, surged under Roy's Mystic Eye, amplifying its strength from that of a believer to a devout fanatic, and then to the level of a saint.

Zouken could feel it.

His already rotting soul was now being scorched as if under the sun's merciless rays.

This attack bypassed his body, targeting the very essence of his corrupted soul, cleansing it with ruthless purity.

"S-Stop...! I beg you, stop! I haven't—I haven't achieved immortality yet—"

This level of exorcism would burn away all his body doubles, obliterating his soul.

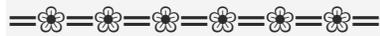
Filled with terror, Zouken screamed for mercy.

But Roy remained unmoved.

"Just looking at you disgusts me. Hurry up and die, so the world can finally be rid of you."

"Arghhhh—!"

Like filth under the cleansing rays of the sun, Zouken's body and soul dissolved into black smoke. He was completely purified, leaving nothing behind.



Chapter 70: Chapter 70: Spiral of Contradiction



The Aozaki residence had a basement.

It was a forbidden place, serving as the Aozaki family's magical workshop. Unless Aoko allowed it, neither Utaha Kasumigaoka nor Ai Hayasaka were permitted to enter. When Touko was away, only Roy had access to it.

The basement stored an array of magical items, including stacks of grimoires, enchanted tools Roy had crafted, rune papers, and other mystical objects that littered every corner of the room.

This was where Roy regularly practiced his magic.

The room was pitch-black, with no trace of sunlight. The only illumination came from a few dim wall lamps, their dull glow lending the place an air of an ancient crypt, barely illuminating the surroundings.

Upon closer inspection, several bodies lay scattered across the floor.

Their limbs and torsos looked unmistakably human, every detail exactly as it should be—except for the faces, which were blank, like the featureless masks of puppets, sending chills down one's spine.

The atmosphere was so eerie that anyone with a weaker resolve might have fainted on the spot.

And it wasn't just one body. The basement was littered with them, each sprawled out under the dim lights, giving the space a haunting, morgue-like stillness.

Touko Aozaki opened the door to the basement.

Without a second glance at the ominous scene, she stepped inside, scanning the corpses strewn across the floor. Selecting one, she leaned down and detached an arm from the lifeless body.

A moment later, she returned to the mansion's living room, carrying the severed limb.

It was the dead of night, yet everyone in the house was gathered here, faces painted with unease.

And for good reason.

Roy, the heart of the household, sat at the table with his right arm severed clean from the shoulder. The smooth stump showed his exposed muscle fibers and marrow, a sight that would make anyone wince.

Even Hayasaka looked pale. The Nakano sisters were so shaken that they couldn't speak. Only Illya remained expressionless.

Utaha sat beside Roy, her hands trembling as she carefully applied medicine to the gaping wound.

"This is from one of your backup bodies," Touko said, placing the severed arm on the table.

She gestured for Utaha to step aside so she could take over the procedure.

"It should be an exact fit. The muscle fibers in this arm are more refined than your original right arm, so you might need some time to adjust to the extra strength."

Touko began the transplant operation on the spot.

"If anyone's feeling squeamish, now's the time to leave."

Ichika Nakano shot a glance at Miku, who was visibly trembling, and helped her out of the room.

Hayasaka headed to the kitchen, leaving only Utaha and Illya to stay behind.

"Master, do you have a moment to talk?"

"Taigong Wang? What is it?"

Through a mental link, Taigong Wang addressed Roy directly.

"Miss Touko mentioned your backup bodies—are they a failsafe for you? Even if you died out there, could you revive using a spare?"

"No, that's a skill only Touko can use, not applicable to anyone else. The backup body she prepared for me was meant to be swapped in after the Holy Grail War."

"I see."

Taigong Wang's voice fell silent for a moment. But it wasn't the end of the conversation; it was more as though he was carefully considering his next words.

"Today's battle was quite a success in the end. We took down several Servants."

"But that's only looking at the results. You were fortunate. The Magician returned unexpectedly, forcing King Arthur to retreat. If she hadn't come back and you couldn't rely on a backup body, what choice would you have made?"

"Master, I'll be direct—you embody a great contradiction."

"In you, there is both love and hatred for humanity. I suspect you're aware of this contradiction yourself, which is why you use those glasses to divide these sides of yourself. When you wear them, you're exceptionally civil, as if you've gathered all your goodwill into that version of you. When you take them off, it's as though all your malice surfaces, clouding your view of everyone around you. My guess isn't wrong, is it?"

"...No, you're right."

Roy admitted Taigong Wang's observation in silence.

With the glasses on, Roy was almost too easygoing.

Even facing magi he despised, he could greet them with a sincere smile.

Without the glasses, however, a corrosive malice filled his heart, and he could barely stop himself from feeling a murderous impulse toward anyone.

Perhaps part of this was due to the curses building within him over the past three years without release. But at its core, it stemmed from a dark desire for destruction lurking in the depths of his heart.

"When you faced Chiyoemon, you took off your glasses. In that state, you should have been completely unrestrained, yet Miss Tohsaka managed to calm you down and make you put them back on. Have you noticed this conflict?"

"..."

"Master, good and evil are two sides of the same coin. Both are facets of human emotion and cannot be completely separated. The opposing forces within you—much like a spiral—are the very essence of human nature."

"The fact that you allowed Miss Tohsaka to guide you, and even hesitated tonight over her safety, shows that you haven't fully split your two sides. And I must say, that is a great relief to me. It means you're aware of your contradiction. If you had become like a machine, driven only by the roles of the glasses, embracing sin with them on and harboring no qualms about killing loved ones without them, I would have pitied your fate and left it at that."

There was a tone of profound relief in Taigong Wang's voice.

He genuinely worried about Roy's state of mind.

And for good reason. This world of magi was filled with people who wore the shells of humanity, yet whose spirits had long since become monstrous.

Taigong Wang admired Roy's noble aspirations and was deeply averse to seeing him become a mental abomination.

"My purpose in saying all this is simple."

"If you're brave enough to risk your life for your ideals, perhaps you could also have the courage to evolve—to become a person who doesn't need to sever good and evil but can instead unify them."

"When this Holy Grail War ends, if you're still alive, that will only be the first step toward your dream. By then, you'll need help from many. If you remain as you are, you'll only drive those closest to you further away."

"So, after all that, are you saying I should have let you take Tohsaka and me out of there together?"

"Hahaha, I'd be inclined toward that option, yes!"

Taigong Wang's hearty laugh filled the mental link.

"Come on, if you'd died, it'd be up to me to realize your dream, and I can't even guarantee I'd succeed. Plus, that would be an immense bother for me, you know? It could easily cost me hundreds or even thousands of years of effort!"

Roy was left speechless.

So you were just worried about the hassle!

"Thanks, though. What you said makes a lot of sense. I'll give it some thought."

"I'm glad if it's given you some insight."

Taigong Wang let out a subtle sigh of relief.

Inwardly, he nodded, feeling deeply reassured.

