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You stand in a small, dimly lit room, with stone floor, stone walls, and a stone ceiling. Put simply, a basement made entirely of large blocks of carved stone. You’re currently in the center of a wide magic circle, perhaps three feet across and seemingly drawn in blood. Candelabra hang on the walls, giving the place what little illumination it has, and between them stand large bookshelves. Idly, you consider that storing books next to open flames and hot wax seems inadvisable. Hardly important; you put the matter out of your mind.

On the opposite end of the room is an out-of-place modern-looking stainless steel worktable, clashing with the archaism of the other items. A variety of stones, beakers, gems, and arcane tools are scattered over its surface as well as the racks below, but you can’t see the majority of them as they’re obscured by the presence of a man. From what you can see in the candlelight, this man is rather thin, of middling height, with black hair, parted and combed back over his skull, and elegant taste in clothing. He wears black slacks, tailored to fit; a charcoal vest, softly patterned in gray; and a white silk shirt. This, possibly, is Jean-Pierre Vaisset, the magus responsible for your presence. He’s hunched over the table, working at something obscured from your view by his back. Unbidden and without thought, a question springs to your lips.

“Magus, you who have summoned me. I ask of you; are you my Master?”

“Caster, what the devil are you—” Vaisset gets no farther than that, cutting himself off in mid-sentence as he turns to see you. As his eyes meet yours, his face goes
white. In the passage of a moment, no more than the time it takes to blink, you’ve replaced his Servant. Surely, it’s impossible.

“Just who are you,” he asks voice suddenly hoarse with shock. “Caster, that isn’t you, is it? The ritual can’t have changed you that much, can it?”

Now that he’s facing you, you can see that Vaisset is only a bit older than yourself, in his mid-twenties. He’s a handsome fellow, and plainly wealthy by his clothing and posture. From his appearance and name, and the fact that you’re in Tokyo, you’d guess he’s half French and half Japanese, but you aren’t certain.

You’re not certain of much, come to think of it. The question you asked came from nowhere, falling out of your mouth by some strange instinct. By the same instinctual feeling, you can tell that you are a Servant now; that you’re receiving a flow of mystic energy from Vaisset, taking the place of the Od you’ve cultivated an understanding of previously. As you consider your own circumstances, a flood of information about your nature as a Servant enters your mind; again seeming to come almost from nowhere, entering your mind like memories you’ve never had.

**Status Updated**

It takes you a moment to process the new information about your identity, but eventually you refocus on Vaisset. He’s looking expectant, still waiting for you to explain yourself.

[ ] “Caster is dead, and I seem to have taken his place in the Grail War,” you say. “Now I will ask again, magus, are you my Master? Or must I go looking?” (Duty)

[X] You push past the man. Whatever his role in this, it’s of secondary importance compared to your more pressing task. You need to find a mirror, and investigate the changes that have come since becoming a Servant. (Pride)

[ ] You do something else (Write in)

You step out of the circle, moving Vaisset from your path with a hand to his shoulder. At first you make straight for the exit, a set of stairs leading up through a corridor, but then you realize you’ve no idea where you can find anything in this building. You turn back to Vaisset.

“I am not Caster,” you declare. “Now, do you have a mirror anywhere? I’m in serious need of one.”

“A... mirror?” If possible, the magus looks to now be even more confused than he was before. “Certainly, there are any number of mirrors in my home. Just go up
those stairs, take the first right turn, and then the second room on the left is a restroom."

Apparently hospitality has been drilled into the man, no matter how confused he is by the situation. Such is the consequence of a wealthy upbringing. You nod your thanks and ascend the stairs, following Vaisset’s instructions to turn right when you reach the ground floor and then left to find the restroom. What you see of the corridors reinforces your previous impression of wealth. The house seems to be a beautifully kept Victorian or Edwardian mansion, perhaps not as densely ornamented as the Eighth Imperial University, but certainly something only the very rich could afford to occupy.

Vaisset’s restroom contains a large trifold mirror, allowing you to get a clear look at yourself. The first thing that strikes you is your height: you’ve grown another inch or two. Your other features all seem to be the same as before, mercifully. You don’t need to worry about becoming as unrecognizable to Circe and Adelheid as you are to your parents.

Your clothing, on the other hand, has completely transformed. The tasteful black suit and burgundy tie you were wearing during your confrontation with Judas has been replaced by what is apparently a requirement for a Saber, gleaming plate armor. It isn’t even simply steel, but white; as if the armor has been enameled! The cloth below the shining armor remains black, but the overall appearance still strikes you as rather gaudy.

Your cloak, previously too small to properly fit the title, has changed as well. It now fully surrounds your body and hangs to your ankles, and is fastened by a silver brooch just to the right of your neck. It’s only when you push it out of the way that the armor becomes visible. Narrow red vertical stripes run down the cloth, about six inches apart. When you wonder about the absence of a helmet, one appears in your hands. Apparently components of the armor can be summoned and dismissed, though you doubt you’ll be wanting to wear a leonine full-face helmet with gold ornamentation any time soon.

At your left hip hangs a longsword in a richly decorated black and silver sheath. You’re tempted to draw it and experiment with your newfound knowledge of swordsmanship, but you’re shocked out of your thoughts by the sound of a scream. It came from below, down in that stony chamber!

X] Run back downstairs to investigate the commotion. (Duty)
[ ] Get out of this mansion immediately! (Self-Preservation)
Drawing your sword, you rush back the way you came, rapidly descending back into Vaisset’s basement workshop. Although you may be uncertain of the Master-Servant relationship here, the fact that he’s your energy supply is clear. As you head down the stairs, the steep angle of the corridor blocking your view of the room, you call, “Magus, what’s going on?”

When the room does come into view what greets your eyes is not carnage, but a scene of minor domestic discord. Vaisset stands face to face with a furious teenage girl, with blue eyes and black shoulder-length hair. She’s wearing a school uniform with a navy sweater and orange ribbon, and there are several burned holes in both the sweater and the skirt.

“Nii-san, now I’ll have to have my uniform replaced again! Can’t you be more careful with your work?”

“Ayaka, I have told you repeatedly not to come in here when I’m working,” he replies, “If you ruin your clothing because you insist on bringing it somewhere dangerous, that’s really your responsibility. Just why are you wearing a school uniform at this time of night, anyway?”

“It’s a replacement for the last one you ruined! This just arrived today, and I wanted to make sure it fit!” She sighs heavily. “Honestly, Nii-san, I can’t believe you. How is it you never manage to ruin your own clothing, but my uniform gets burnt every time I come to see what you’re up to?”

Clearly the two siblings are too caught up in their own argument to have noticed your shout. A bit embarrassed, you sheathe your sword and take a look around. There’s a large burn mark on Vaisset’s worktable, which makes the course of events plain enough. Apparently after you left to examine your new form, Vaisset simply went back to working.

Turning to go, Vaisset’s sister finally notices you and stops in her tracks. She takes a half-step back, eyes widening in sudden alarm at the stranger in her home. “Nii-san, who is that?” she asks quietly, watching you for signs of aggression.

At the same time, you really notice her; more specifically, the details of her uniform. It’s the winter uniform for girls at your high school! You don’t recognize the girl personally, but she looks like a first or second year, so you wouldn’t know her.

“My apologies,” you say with a slight bow, “I would have introduced myself sooner, but you were preoccupied. You can call me Saber. I’m here to meet with your
brother about his work and potentially lend him my aid. You may be seeing a lot of me in the near future.”

“Sa-” Ayaka starts, before snapping her mouth shut and turning to her brother again. She whispers, too loudly to keep you from hearing, “I thought you said you’d summoned Caster, Nii-san! What’s going on? Did you actually manage to get the strongest Servant, Saber?”

With the burden of explaining a situation he doesn’t fully understand now shifted to him, Vaisset coughs into his fist. “Ahem. I... thought that I had summoned Caster, Ayaka, but it seems that there was a bit of a misunderstanding. It’s getting rather late; why don’t you go to bed, and I’ll explain the situation in the morning; once Saber and I have had a chance to discuss matters.”

Ayaka pouts, but doesn’t protest. “If you say so, Nii-san. I think this is a real improvement for you, though.”

The girl walks up to you, heading for the stairs, but stops again in front of you, examining you up close for the first time. Staring uncomfortably hard at your face, in fact, her glasses taking on the character of a different kind of lens. Under her breath, almost inaudibly, she mutters, “President Yumigawa...?” Then she shakes her head, blinking rapidly. Without looking again, she pushes past you ascends into the rest of the house.

“Well, now you’ve met my sister,” Vaisset says, once she’s gone. “Would you care to introduce yourself to me, Saber? And while you’re at it, to explain why you’re here in Caster’s place?”

You shake your head, cutting off any further questions. “I have to begin with a few questions of my own, Magus,” you say. “First, are you Jean-Pierre Vaisset, the Master of Caster? The man who ordered the use of the Noble Phantasm Akeldama?”

“I am indeed,” he replies indignantly, “but I should expect you’d know that before appearing here. Just what is this all about? How could another Servant have become involved with Caster’s ritual?”

Unmoved by his questions, you continue your own interrogation. “In that case, I suppose you are to be my Master. Now then, how much do you know about the workings of Akeldama?”

“From what Caster told me, it’s a ritual-based Noble Phantasm which allows him to instantaneously and surreptitiously drain the life force from a large number of people. The influx of power, he said, would allow him to win the war easily. Naturally, I had him activate it immediately. Now, I was prepared for some sort of spectacular transformation, but not for him to be replaced by an entirely different Servant. So who are you, and what’s going on?” From the sound of it, Vaisset is almost
completely ignorant of Judas’ true nature. This gives you a fair amount of leeway in terms of handling the situation.

[X] Explain the circumstances of the Akeldama Grail War. (Duty)

[ ] Keep the truth of the matter to yourself and give Vaisset a cover story. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else (write in)

“Akeldama was not simply a ritual to harvest energy, M. Vaisset,” you begin. “It created its own world, the private domain of Caster, cut off from space and time.” You keep your tone flat and authoritative as you explain, probing his face for any sign of deception or recognition.

“To that world, Caster summoned over a thousand humans and nine Servants, including himself. He held his own private Holy Grail War, lasting ten days, the object being to see every summoned being dead. That was how he intended to absorb our energy, M. Vaisset; by our sacrifice.”

“Well, that’s quite the strange ability,” Vaisset says, visibly energized by curiosity. “Most unusual indeed. From the sound of it, it wasn’t a Reality Marble, as they layer their effects over ordinary space-time, rather than being cut off. Could he truly have created an entirely separate world?” As he says this, Vaisset’s attention drifts from your face; he seems to be focused more on the inner world of magical theory.

Then his eyes snap back to yours. “Ah, but excuse me; I was becoming distracted. How did you manage to survive, Saber?” This is said in quite the conversational tone, as if the idea such a question might offend never crosses his mind.

“On the tenth day of the Grail War, I was able to discover Caster’s scheme and kill him inside his world. I wasn’t sent back, however. Instead, the effect of Akeldama bound me to his role in the true Holy Grail War, out here: the role of your Servant.”

You fold your arms over your chest and grin smugly down at him. “Frankly, you should be grateful for the upgrade. Caster wasn’t much of a fighter, you know.”

Vaisset pauses for a few breaths, staring off into space and muttering, “...and to think, all that happened in no more than a moment. I turned my back here, and for a thousand people ten days passed. Chronomancy on an unprecedented scale! Most incredible.” Then he finds his voice, and returns to decent eye contact. “I suppose I truly am your Master then, Saber. I hope ours will prove to be a truly productive partnership.”
The magus extends his hand, and you give it a firm shake. “As do I, Mr. Vaisset. As do I.”

With a flourish, you draw your sword, holding the black blade point-upward, the hilt at your chest. Again, the words of a Servant seem to come to you by instinct.

“Though I was not brought forth according to your summons, our contract is complete. From this time forward, my sword shall be with you and your fate shall be with me.”

“Wonderful, wonderful,” Vaisset says in a mild tone quite at odds with the superlative. “I’m sure we will achieve great things together. Now, er, what is your name, Saber? Which heroic spirit are you? The War may not be in full swing yet, but that doesn’t excuse us from making plans; I’ll need to know your abilities.”

You don’t answer. You remain silent, your lips tightly shut in a frown.

“Saber?” Vaisset gives you a confused look. “I’m asking you a question, you know. You just swore to our partnership, didn’t you? This is something rather important.”

You heave a sigh. “...that’s something I can’t tell you, Mr. Vaisset.”

“Huh?” Vaisset’s eyes widen in shock. “Now why on earth-”

“I can’t answer the question of who I am, because...” You trail off, putting on a troubled frown. Vaisset just waits, eying you expectantly.

“It’s... because I don’t know myself.”

“You don’t- what? Saber, is this some kind of joke? If you’re putting me on, I swear...” Though he’d been warming to you, Vaisset is now back to his former indignant fury.

“Oh, it’s no joke,” you say with a grave expression. “I’m afraid you can blame your Caster for the circumstances of my summoning. It seems my memory is confused. I know who I am as a Servant, but things like my name and origin are a bit vague...”

Shifting to a placating smile, you continue, “they’re trivial matters, in any case. You needn’t worry about it.”

“Needn’t worry? Of course I’m worried! Without knowing your identity, I can’t gauge your strength as a Servant or plan for your abilities! How do you expect me to do my job as a Master with your identity unknown?”

“Oh, that’s no problem,” you say, still smiling. “My strength is already proven, after all. I defeated Caster, the Servant you’d summoned previously, in a world of his own design. Whatever my identity may be, I can promise you that my power is beyond reproach.”

This rationale is apparently unsatisfying, as Vaisset sinks his head into his hands. “Ooh,” he groans, “I can’t take much more of this. In one day, my summoning
goes haywire, the Servant who appears fails his first task, my synthetic elemental conversion blows up in my face, and I get a replacement with no memories! This is the end for me tonight. I need some sleep.” Straightening up and turning on his heel, he quickly heads for the exit. At the last moment he stops, turning back to you. “My apologies for the outburst,” he says, “but I really am quite overstretched. Good night, Saber. Familiars don’t sleep, I know, so why don’t you just spend the night in your spirit form? We’ll discuss the war further in the morning.”

“Sleep well, M. Vaisset,” you reply, and he makes his exit. With his departure, you’re free for the remainder of the night; however long that is. You were summoned in your sleep, of course, and from the sound of things it is late, but without your watch you don’t have a clue about the specific hour.

[X] Follow Vaisset’s instructions and attempt to fade into spirit form. (Duty)
[X] Explore the mansion. (Write in any particular focus) (Curiosity)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You decide to begin by trying out what Vaisset asked you to do. You will yourself to dematerialize, for your physical body to vanish.

Nothing happens. You try closing your eyes and focusing on the composition of your body, visualizing the flesh and bone that make up your material form and compelling them to transform into ephemeral spirit.

Nothing happens. After a few more tries, you finally give up on the idea. However a Servant normally manages the transition between a physical body and a spirit form, it seems to be impossible for you to do so.

With the matter of your spirit form brought to a disappointing conclusion, you resolve to explore Vaisset’s mansion. As you make your way up and out of the basement workshop, you find yourself expecting the same meandering vastness you’d previously experienced while investigating the university. Vaisset’s home, however, fails to deliver. In fact, even the term “mansion” may be going too far. Rather than the sprawling palatial complex the word calls up in the mind, this place is really more of a very well-appointed house. It has three floors above ground as well as the basement, and across these four levels are spread eight bedrooms, three bathrooms, an office, a kitchen, a dining room, a living room, and a number of spare rooms used for storage. Although each room is luxuriously decorated, tastefully designed, and filled with antique furniture, the place as a whole still feels disappointingly compact when compared with the university.
As you tour the home’s layout, you also take note of the defenses that Vaisset has set up. There are multiple layers of bounded fields surrounding the property, each with its own effects. Given your amateur knowledge of magic you’re unable to determine the nature of those abilities, however. In addition, you discover a number of crystals scattered about the house, all of which use transference magic to send visual and audio data to some kind of receiving device in Vaisset’s workshop. If there are more defenses Vaisset has set up than these, you don’t notice them.

After your short exploration, there are still several hours of night remaining. You decide to spend the time by...

[] Finding a place to sleep. Servants may not need to, but you know from Adelheid and Circe that you can choose to sleep when you want to. (Pride)

[X] Standing guard over the house. As a Servant, the most effective thing you can do is take up a position to detect and receive any attacks that may come during the night. (Duty)

[] Investigating one of the house’s rooms in more detail. (Pick one) (Curiosity)

You decide to spend the night on guard. You may not be overly fond of Vaisset, but you’re his Servant one way or another. With your low knowledge of magic you have no way of knowing how effective Vaisset’s defensive measures are, but you do know Circe’s barrier did you little good in the Akeldama and you’re sure Vaisset is no Circe. After making your way down to the entryway, you let yourself out through the front door and nimbly hop up to the roof. You’d already surpassed humanity, but you find yourself pleasantly surprised all the same by the power in your new body.

Balancing on the peaked roof of the mansion, you watch the skyline. Sure enough, you’re back home in Tokyo, although the district is wealthier than the suburb where you grew up. It’s a clear, crisp November night, Wednesday, and you should be going back for another identical day of school tomorrow. Seeing the familiar city surroundings somehow brings it all into sharp clarity. The change that you’ve gone through in what to you was ten days and to the world was no time at all; the change that’s still to come, in your life and future; the destruction you saw fall on the lifeless Eighth City, soon to be reenacted here.

An indescribable emotion of loss, nostalgia, and apprehension wells up in you, and you find yourself looking for any reminder that you’re not alone in this new life. You dispel the gauntlet on your right hand, holding it up to see the command spell
there, the proof of your connection to those you met during your strange sojourn in Judas’ world. What greets your eyes is only smooth white skin, unmarked by the scarlet wing you’d grown so used to finding there. Horrified, you feel within yourself for the flow of mystic energy that supports Adelheid and Circe, but there is none. The energy that fills your system is only being taken in, received from Vaisset. If your Servants do survive, as Judas claimed they would, they are as alone as you are: utterly cut off from those you’d come to rely on for life and death.

As the realization of your solitude washes over you, the strength in your legs vanishes. You sink heavily to a seat, leaning against one of the home’s many peaks. No Circe and no Adelheid... for all you know, they may not exist at all anymore. It’s possible Judas was only spurring you on to kill him by removing your inhibitions; it was his goal, after all. And what’s become of Truvietianne, Kikuko, Matsuda, and Ogawara? Were they sent back to their homes, as you should have been, or did the collapsing Akeldama trap them in some unknown limbo cut off from time and space?

You pass the rest of the night in a daze, staring at the stars.
Thursday, November 14, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

At some point you must have dozed off, since you find yourself awakening amidst the morning birdsong, under the first rays of the dawning sun. The reason for your awakening becomes immediately clear, as you hear a girl’s voice from below calling up to you, “I said, wake up!”

It’s Vaissel’s sister, Ayaka. You get to your feet and look down at the girl, now wearing a black wool coat and navy scarf over her singed uniform. Her breath appears in small puffs, making its presence known amidst the wintry air.

“Saber-san,” she continues, in a chiding tone, “I really don’t think you should be sleeping there. Didn’t Nii-san find anywhere for you to spend the night?” Judging by the odd hybrid of expressions on her face, the girl can’t decide between amusement, compassion, and disapproval.

Jumping back down to ground level with a clang of armor, you give the girl a smile.

“Thank you for awakening me, Miss Ayaka,” you say. “Your brother wanted me to spend the night in the basement, but I thought I’d stand guard up there. It seems I was more tired than I’d realized though.” You let out an embarrassed chuckle at the admission.

“Are you off to school, Miss Ayaka? Isn’t it a bit early?”
“Yes, I’ll be going shortly. Nii-san says I should leave and come home as early as possible, since the Grail War is beginning soon. There’s only one more Servant still to be summoned after you, right?”

“The Grail doesn’t give me such knowledge, unfortunately,” you say, “So he’s sending you to school early out of concern, is he?”

[X] “In that case, why don’t I accompany you? It would only be proper to ensure my Master’s sister is kept quite safe.” (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] “How admirable of him. Where can I find your brother, by the way? We have a great deal to discuss.” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“In that case, why don’t I accompany you? It would only be proper to ensure my Master’s sister is kept quite safe.”

You give Ayaka your most charming smile, hoping she won’t insist on going alone. Frankly, you’re not sure you can face Vaisset right now after last night. Even if he was unaware of the true nature of Judas’ Noble Phantasm, the thought of trying to cooperate with the man who initiated the Akeldama’s use infuriates you. Hopefully you can reach a more measured state of mind after walking his sister to school; at least it will take your mind off of things.

Ayaka blushes faintly, looking away from your eyes. “Oh, thank you! I’d be happy to have you with me, but, um...” she trails off, before finishing hesitantly, “your clothes. You don’t really fit in with the modern world.”

“Of course,” you reply, “I wasn’t thinking. I suppose a knight’s armor is hardly appropriate here and now, in modern Tokyo. Unfortunately, this is my only set of clothing. I suppose that puts an end to the idea of escorting you.”

“Not necessarily,” Ayaka cuts in. “I mean, well, Nii-san really shouldn’t make you go around in that armor all the time anyway. I think I can find some of my father’s clothing that would fit you.”

“If you don’t mind taking the time...” you say, but she’s already walking by you to head back into the house.

“Not at all,” she calls back, “like I said, Nii-san is having me leave early anyway. Follow me, Saber-san.”

The girl leads you up to the third floor, to a large bedroom that seems unoccupied now. It’s dominated by a queen-sized four-poster bed, and has large picture windows that overlook the front yard, as well as a writing desk and a variety
of other furniture facilitating work or relaxation. Ayaka, however, makes straight for the closet. As she begins sorting through suits, you interject, “I hope your father won’t object to your giving me his clothing, now.”

Ayaka pauses for a moment, letting out a melancholy chuckle, and then goes back to looking through the clothing.

“He won’t mind, Saber-san. Our parents passed away several years ago, so it’s just Nii-san and I here now.”

“Oh, do excuse me,” you say, “I’m sorry for bringing up a tender subject.”

Ayaka brushes off the apology with the attitude of one whose heard the same matter apologized for a thousand times. “Don’t worry about it. Like I said, it was several years ago. Bringing it up now won’t hurt. Now,” she turns and lays two suits out on the bed. “Why don’t you pick one of these and put it on? I’ll be waiting outside.”

Sure enough, the senior Vaisset’s suits do seem to be in your size. From her choices, you surmise that your cloak made quite the impression on Ayaka; both outfits give a dark impression. One is a light gray suit, moderated by a black shirt and tie, while the other is a black suit with burgundy pinstripes paired with a white shirt and black tie. The girl even found socks and a pair of black brogue shoes for you. You have to admit, you find yourself impressed by her swift competence in finding you these outfits.

[ ] Wear the gray suit with black shirt and tie.
[X] Wear the black and burgundy suit with white shirt and black tie.

After some thorough consideration, you decide to opt for the black suit. After all, the last thing you were wearing in the Akeldama was a black suit with a wine-red tie; it’s a good combination for your eyes and complexion, and you may as well continue the style. Cream suits certainly aren’t an option in November, after all. After dispelling your armor and getting dressed, you find the suit is a bit of a tight fit after all. Clearly the senior Vaisset didn’t have the muscular frame of a knight. Still, it’s not too bad, and you can probably have the family get you a properly tailored suit at some point; they certainly have the money. After checking yourself in the mirror and making sure you’re back to your old look of sharp modernity, you head back out to meet Ayaka.
The girl’s eyes widen slightly as you walk through the door, and she exclaims, “I knew that was the perfect suit for you! Dad always said he wore black to match his hair, but the contrast suits you.”

“Thank you, Miss Ayaka,” you say with a courtly flourish and smile. “I’m touched by your concern for my appearance. Now, I think we really should be going.”

“Sure,” Ayaka says, taking her phone out of her bag to check the time. “Oh, you’re right! I’m almost running late. Come on, Saber-san.” With that, she turns and walks up to the street, turning left as she passes the wrought-iron fence marking the property line. You hasten to follow, walking up the street after her. As you look around, taking in the numerous luxuriant western-style mansions, you wonder just where exactly this neighborhood is. Hopefully the route to Kyoutenkan Academy will enlighten you as to the location of your new home.

As you’re looking around, Ayaka picks up the conversation. “This must all be new to you, right, Saber-san? I’m sure they didn’t have cities like Tokyo when you were alive...”

“I suppose it is new,” you say, nodding. It makes a better explanation than trying to see where you are in relation to your house. “I don’t know if your brother told you, but my memories are largely indeterminate; I can’t rightly say what sort of cities people lived in during my life. The Grail, however, does provide us Servants with academic knowledge of the time period we’re summoned to. It might be easiest to treat me like someone who’s read about Tokyo, but never visited.”

“So that’s how it is, huh...” Ayaka muses, sounding intrigued by the idea. “There’s not much to see on my walk to school, though. It’s just a residential area all around it.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that, Miss Ayaka,” you say with a chuckle. “I came along to protect you, not to see the sights.”

“R-right, thank you, Saber-san.” The girl is blushing again, looking away from you in embarrassment. After a bit of awkward silence, an idea strikes her. “I bet you’d, um, like to hear about my family, right? Our names are strange and all...”

“I don’t want to pry,” you begin, “but if you don’t mind telling me, I’d be happy to hear about your family’s circumstances.”

“Well, I guess you know about magi, right?”

“I have some general knowledge,” you say, “similarly to the rest of the modern world.”

“Good, that makes it easier to explain. My parents were both the heads of their families, the Shijou on my mother’s side and the Vaisset on my father’s. Of course, they couldn’t just combine the magic crests, right? So, when they had two
magically talented children they decided to split things between us.” Ayaka holds up her right arm, showing you a flowing pattern of minutely inscribed sigils and crests, glowing slightly while she sends energy through them. “Nii-san is dad’s heir, Jean-Pierre Vaisset; and I’m my mother’s, Shijou Ayaka.”

She gives you an unsatisfied look that you can’t quite place. Frustration, maybe, or something else. “I should be the one fighting for the Holy Grail, you know,” she says, seemingly irritated by the idea. “It’s the Shijou family’s land being used, not the Vaisset’s. The command spells came to me, too. But Nii-san says it’s too dangerous, that I’m not ready. So he had Father Antaglio transfer the spells over to him. I guess it’s better to be safe, but what do you think?” Rushing ahead of you, she turns to face you while moving walking to school backwards. “Would I really be useless as a Master?”

“I’m sure you’d be a lovely Master, Miss Ayaka,” you say reassuringly. “Your brother is probably just worried about the dangers of the Grail War, and trying to protect you.”

As you’re speaking, the two of you arrive at the outskirts of Kyoutenkan Academy, and you quickly cut off any further discussion of magic or the Grail War. You stop at the front gate as she makes her way in, and it seems you’ll go unseen as there are few students on the grounds right now. The two of you made much better time than you’d expected.

Before you can leave, however, a gaggle of girls seems to appear from nowhere and arrest Ayaka’s progress. You heave an inward sigh; gossiping groups of teenage girls have always been your least favorite aspect of school life. “Ayaka-chan, who’s this?” a brunette says, immediately followed up by a black-haired girl saying, “you have an escort now? How did that happen?” Then all five are talking over each other, and discerning words becomes impossible. Finally Ayaka manages to interject an explanation, though, despite her comparatively soft voice and timid manner. “Everyone,” she says, “this is Saber-san, a butler my brother hired. You know how protective Nii-san can be, of course. It seems like he’s finally had enough of letting me go around alone, and decided to have a servant attend me.” Then she’s buried in more feminine questions and excited squeals. “Saber? What kind of name is that?” “A butler, huh? I wish my family could hire me a hot foreign butler.” “Where’s he from?” and so on.

“Ojou-sama,” you cut in, warming to your role as attendant. “Shouldn’t you and your friends be getting to class? I’m sure you can answer all of their questions later. Please, young ladies, don’t let the trivial appearance of one such as myself prevent you from attending properly to your studies.”
Cowed by the air of humble authority you injected into your tone, the girls allow themselves to be led off by Ayaka, although you soon hear their conversation pick up again in the distance. Now you’re alone, standing outside of your old school.

[X] Go back to the manor. (Duty)

[ ] Look around the area. See if anything’s changed. (Curiosity)

[ ] Wait here for Ayaka to finish her classes. (Duty/Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You decide to head back to the manor before anyone else sees you. The commotion you’ve raised already was bad enough, after all. At this point, you feel you’ve calmed down enough to return and discuss the upcoming war with Vaisset. Retracing your steps to the mansion, you finally place this neighborhood. It’s in the direct opposite direction of your own home from the school, situated at the top of a hill that Kyoutenkan Academy is halfway up. Of course you’ve never been here; it being a purely residential neighborhood for some of Tokyo’s wealthiest families, you never had a reason to walk through it despite the place’s proximity to your home.

Other than your discovery of location, the walk back to the Shijou manor is uneventful. You climb the hill, enjoying the wan sunlight of the clear winter morning and admiring the homes and gardens you pass. You don’t see anyone on the street, and it isn’t long before you’ve arrived. Pushing open the front door, you reach out to Vaisset through the Master-Servant mental link, sending off, ‘M. Vaisset, are you in your basement workshop? I’d like to discuss plans for the War, if you’re ready.’

Vaisset’s response is the telepathic equivalent of an irritated shout. ‘Of course I’m ready to discuss the War! What else would there be? Where were you all morning, anyway, Saber? I thought you’d be waiting it my workshop.’

You explain yourself as you make your way down to the basement. ‘I escorted your sister to school this morning. She’d told me you were worried about her, so it seemed the natural thing to do.’

Vaisset’s irritation quickly fades at the news, and he looks up with a smile when you enter his workshop. “Ah, Saber. There you are! Thank you for looking after Ayaka. I’ve been quite worried one of the other Masters might target her, especially since she was the first choice for our family’s Master. Would you mind escorting her home as well?”
“Not at all,” you say, but don’t have time to get another word out before Vaisset is speaking again.

“And I see she’s found you some modern clothing to blend in, lovely! That’s one of my father’s suits, isn’t it? A bit small for you, we’ll have to have it fitted properly. Perhaps tomorrow...” As he trails off, considering his tailor’s schedule, you prompt, “What about the plans for the war, Mr. Vaisset?”

“Yes, of course,” he says, attention coming back to you. “I became sidetracked for a moment there. As for the war, well, I have to admit that I am a research magus first and foremost. I won’t flatter myself that I can swiftly plan a winning strategy. The only reason I’m fighting is because the Shijou line governs the leyline conflux here in Tokyo, and so must have a representative in the War. From your story, you have far more experience with this than I do. Do you have any questions or suggestions for me?”

[ ] Write in all questions and prospective plans for the Holy Grail War. With one victory under your belt, you should have some ideas.

“Questions or suggestions, hmm?” You consider the matter for a moment before bringing up the point that’s been nagging at you. “There is one question that’s been on my mind this morning,” you begin. “Your sister mentioned that there was ‘only one more Servant to be summoned’ after myself, but in the Akeldama all of the Servants were summoned at once. How does the process differ here? Are you already aware of the other Masters and their Servants?”

“How interesting,” Vaisset muses, tapping his chin. “You were all summoned at once, were you? I suppose Caster must have been handling everything himself, then. Well, in any case it is a bit different here. Each of the seven Masters must conduct his own ritual to summon a Servant, sometime between when the Grail is first ready to facilitate summoning and the final deadline, 33 days after the command spells appear. The Grail War begins when all seven Servants have been summoned, naturally.”

“I see. That is indeed quite different from my experience in the Akeldama. You haven’t explained, however, the source of your information regarding the Servants still to be summoned.”

Vaisset gives you a sheepish grin. “Of course, of course, I do tend to ramble. As for that, there are three parties with a knowledge of the state of the Holy Grail, including how many Servants have been summoned and of which class. The first party is its creators, the Einzbern clan. They, of course, are the principal orchestrators of this ritual. You might call them the showrunners, in fact.” He lets out a dry
chuckle, and continues, “Then there is my own family, the Shijou; ah, my mother was the inheritor of that line, if you’re wondering about the name. The Shijou house holds ancestral dominion over the magical domain in Tokyo, and since the Grail is summoned from the land, we are rather deeply connected as well. Previously the Makiri were heavily involved in arranging the Holy Grail War as well, but that line has become defunct. Finally, there’s the overseer dispatched by the Holy Church, Father Antaglio. As the arbitrator of the war, he holds the most complete knowledge of events.”

“If I’m understanding you correctly,” you say, “the Holy Grail is powered by the energy of your land, and because it facilitates our summoning, this connection through the land enables you to determine the nature of the Servants brought forth?”

“Heh heh heh,” another chuckle from Vaisset. “Not to determine the nature, no. I wouldn’t have had to ask for your True Name, if that were the case. I can tell from quantity and flow of the Grail’s energy how many Servants have been summoned, and of what class, but no more. To answer your next question, Rider is the Servant that has yet to make his appearance.”

“That tells us little,” you mutter irritably. “From the premise of the War, we already know that all seven Servants will appear in time. Your detection may have been useful for determining who you still had the chance to summon, but at this point it’s strategically worthless.”

“In any case, perhaps your personal knowledge can serve us more ably than your insight into the Grail,” you continue. “You’ve mentioned the House of Einzbern already. If they are the creators of the Holy Grail War, I suppose they will be sending a champion to fight. What can you tell me about him? What about this Father Antaglio, will he be a Master as well?”

“Father Antaglio?” Vaisset appears shocked by the idea. “Oh no, he’s purely an overseer. The Father has been sent by the Holy Church to arbitrate the War; to facilitate damage control, help to ensure that the Holy Grail War remains a secret, and provide a sanctuary for Masters who have lost their Servants. Antaglio himself has none. As for the Einzberns, I know they’ve sent one of their magi to Tokyo as a Master, but the representative has refused to meet me. I don’t know the first thing about the person, I’m afraid.”

You fix Vaisset with a disappointed gaze and wait. Surely he must know something useful about the enemy Masters. The magus completely ignores your glare, however, as he continues to speak.

“Ah, but I do have some information for you. From my contacts in London, I found out a week ago that there are two magi here on official orders from the Clock
Tower: William Harris and Giuliano di Lumenza.” No sooner has he brought forth some useful information then he dismisses it, saying with a shrug, “Of course, anyone would know about Harris; he’s a Sealing Designation Enforcer here to make sure the Grail is brought back to the Tower, and well-known for his brutal methods. Some in London have even taken to calling him the ‘Second Magus Killer,’ though he hasn’t surpassed old Emiya’s record yet.” Then Vaisset breaks into a conspiratorial grin as he continues, “Lumenza, though, was kept quiet. Supposed to be entering the war on his own authority, and with plenty of precautions taken to hide even that. The truth is, he’s a proxy for Lady Barthomeloi, the Queen of the Clocktower herself. He’s a fire-user, a magic gunner, and very dangerous; one of the elites in her brigade.”

“I see. I suppose, then, that you’d consider those two as the highest priority enemies?”

“The Einzbern magus is an unknown quantity,” Vaisset says, “but I think it’s safe to say we’ll have a hard time turning up more dangerous Masters than Harris and Lumenza. Of course, there are plenty of candidates. Just here in Tokyo, there are sixteen active lines of Magi within the jurisdiction of the Shijou. Formally they should have reported to me if they’d joined the Grail War, but that isn’t much of a guarantee they haven’t.”

“Fascinating,” you reply. “In that case, I would suggest that our first priority be to find another Master with whom we can create a temporary alliance. Even disregarding the danger posed by these professional magi, from my experience in the Akeldama I would deem it a necessity. In that War, those Masters who remained alone were the first to fall. Servants are potent fighters, but the nature of the War often leaves them evenly matched in one-on-one combat. When two Servants fight against one, however, the matter is quickly decided. In this free-for-all contest, the ability to make alliances is a greater asset than a powerful Servant or potent magic.”

“That certainly sounds prudent,” Vaisset says, “but-”

Not finished talking, you override him. “To that end,” you continue, “I would like to inquire about your information network, Mr. Vaisset. A clear view of the city will be essential in battle as well as diplomacy. Can you produce any sort of familiar capable of thorough reconnaissance?”

“Do let me speak, Saber,” Vaisset chides. “But yes, I can indeed. Observe.” At his word, the magic crest on his arm comes into life, and the air about it swirls and condenses. After a few moments, a tiny, transparent finch stands on his palm. It seems to be composed of rushing air, pressed into form by the magic. As you watch, it flaps its wings and lets out a hollow-sounding chirp. “This is a wind-based familiar, I have a number of them around the city, mixed in with the real birds and gathering
information,” Vaisset says. “I haven’t caught sight of any enemy Masters yet, but the capability is certainly there. Now, as I was saying, you shouldn’t be too eager to trust the enemy Masters. I can understand a knight like yourself seeking allies and honorable duels, but everyone in this War has come seeking the omnipotent power of the Holy Grail for himself. I very much doubt any Master can be relied on to uphold a partnership.”

“One needn’t trust an ally of convenience, Mr. Vaisset,” you say with a smirk. “One shouldn’t assume every knight is King Arthur, either. We are only men with swords, Mr. Vaisset, as prone to evil as any other men. Since we are on the subject, how would you like me to fight? I am capable of either chivalry or deception, according to your preference.”

Provoked by your condescending attitude, Vaisset’s expression darkens and his tone becomes dismissive. “Saber, It doesn’t mean a thing to me how you judge your actions. Whether you consider it honorable or otherwise, what I want from you is whatever method most effectively dispatches the enemy and keeps Ayaka and I safe. Now do you have any more questions?”

“I do, in fact,” you say, dragging out the situation half for the pleasure of frustrating the magus. “You’ve told me that you focus on research, but do you truly lack any capacity for magical combat? Often the best use for a Servant is to occupy another Servant while combat between the Masters truly settles the affair. Of course, if you cannot fight...”

“Be silent,” Vaisset snaps! The he sighs, and modulates his tone. “Excuse me, that was uncalled for. I am proficient in a wide range of combat-oriented mysteries utilizing wind. The Vaisset lineage has for centuries held magical dueling as its primary focus, and my lineal crest holds those tools. While I doubt whether I could match Harris or Lumenza, I am hardly incapable; my emphasis on research is a matter of choice. I abhor violence, Saber, and if possible would like to avoid the necessity of killing the enemy myself.” With those words, spoken softly, Vaisset turns away from you and sits down at his worktable, beginning the inscription of a magic circle on a plate of what seems to be lead. “You are dismissed, Saber. Guard the manor for the time being; I’ll call for you again when I have need of you.”

There were still a few more details you’d hoped to ask about, but you decide they’re not worth picking a fight over. Leaving Vaisset to his arcane work, you turn and ascend the stairs out of the basement. As you walk out into the manor’s front hall, you’re surprised to discover that you and Vaisset were talking right into the afternoon! Classes at Kyoutenkan will be over soon, but you have an hour or so before then. More, if Ayaka decides to stay for a club or to study.
[X] Go to the high school early to be sure you can collect Ayaka immediately when her classes end. (Compassion)

[ ] Stand guard outside the manor until it’s absolutely time to leave, as instructed. (Duty)

[ ] Look around the neighborhood some more. If you remember correctly, there should be a shopping district near here... (Pride/Curiosity)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You don’t have much to do here at the manor, and if one of the siblings is attacked Ayaka will be in more danger than her brother. That in mind, you decide to walk back to Kyoutenkan and wait for her there. As you go, however, you notice something odd. About halfway to the school, a limousine turns onto the road a short distance behind you and drives on by, easing down the road. This is a wealthy neighborhood, certainly, but a limousine strikes you as a rather strange car for daily use all the same; all the more so since it’s there are so few cars driving in this quiet neighborhood.

You finish the walk to Kyoutenkan Academy with no other unusual happenings, though. As you expected, the gate is shut and classes remain in session. In fact, as you scan the second-floor windows you can make out Ayaka’s face, studiously attentive. How convenient, for her to have a window seat. Taking up a position by the front gate, you resolve to stand waiting for classes to end. It’s an odd feeling, waiting outside your own school as a representative of the adult world. Though you were a student just a short time ago, that chapter of your life has been cleanly severed; cut off before its natural end. Your perfect attendance record, you muse, is being irrevocably broken right now. And what happened to the others? Did they make it back to their respective classrooms? Can they study, after the brutal events of the Akeldama Grail War?

You’re shocked out of your musings by the sudden sight of the limousine again; it’s the same one that passed you earlier, you’re sure of it. Now, though, it’s coming once again down the same road you’d walked. As if it had been behind you all along. As you watch, it cruises slowly along the length of the school, passing by you across the road, and then makes another turn and leaves your vision. Once again, it was the only car on the road.
After another half-hour of inaction, the mysterious limousine appears once again. Again, it’s coming from the direction of the manor; again the only car on the road; again driving quite slowly, barely above a walking pace. This time, you check the license plate and confirm, it really is the same vehicle. The driver must be doing circuits, but why? Despite sensing no mystic energy from the car, an strange chill settles over you as you watch it pass for the third time. Something about the silent way it moves, the perfect condition, and the reappearance from behind your course fills you with an irrational dread; a nameless unease that refuses to leave.

[ ] Go after the car. (Pride/Self-Preservation)
[X] Stay at the gate, waiting for Ayaka. (Duty)
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

Regardless of the discomfort the strange vehicle instills in you, you’re a Servant now, and resolve to behave like one. You remain quite still, following the car only with your eyes as it once more slides out of view. As you wait, it circles once more, before finally stopping in front of you, across the road. A window, tinted heavily enough to be opaque, opens just widely enough to allow a paper bird through. The bird floats up into the air, giving a few uncertain flaps before gliding down to land on your shoulder. Before it can land on you, you grab it out of the air, feeling the magic in it fade as you do so.

In your hand, the paper that made up the familiar slowly unfolds, smoothing itself out with the last of the energy stored within. It’s something like a greeting card: a small square of thick, expensive off-white stationary, and writing in an elegant script, still slightly wet, occupies the center.

**How did you escape?**

As you look up furiously, the limousine accelerates, vanishing this time around the opposite turn. Before you can make up your mind whether or not to follow it, Kyoutenkan’s bell rings, signaling the end of the school day. As excited students begin pouring out into the schoolyard, you stuff the card into your pocket. Whatever the sender wants with you, it’s plainly nothing to do with Ayaka.
It isn’t long before Vaisset’s sister makes her exit from the school building, surrounded once again by gossiping classmates. Even from across the yard you can hear that they’re pestering her with the same kind of questions as this morning. Where you’re from, what danger she’s in to need a bodyguard, what she thinks of you, your last name, and so-on. The poor girl looks tired to death of the questions, and wears a thoroughly gloomy expression. “Good afternoon, Saber-san,” she says as she reaches you. “Thank you for coming to escort me home.” She makes to leave with that, but her followers quickly haul her back, pressing for more information.

One girl grabs Ayaka by the shoulder, saying, “Hang on, Aya-chan, what’s the rush?”

“Yeah, school’s over now! You can tell us all about Saber-san now, right,” another insists.

A third girl goes straight for you, asking, “Saber-san, how long have you lived in Japan? Do you like it here?”

[X] Invent a story to satisfy the girls, and hopefully anyone else who hears about you.
[ ] Brush them off and just get Ayaka home.
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

“Young ladies,” you say, “please let Ojou-sama go. If you must know about me, I will tell you this. My family is German, but my father came to Japan as an investor when I was a small child. Due to a run of bad luck and unfortunate decisions, most of our money was lost some years ago, and he had me sent back home to train as a butler from the age of twelve until that of twenty. I now serve the Shijou family as Ayaka-ojiou-sama’s personal attendant. There is really nothing more to be said. Now, if you will excuse me,” leaning into the group of girls, you separate Ayaka from her classmates by picking her up bodily. She lets out a little cry of embarrassment, struggling in your arms, but you ignore her protestation and carry her away from the squealing girls. After setting her down outside the school gate, you say to the other girls, “I must see her home safely. Good afternoon, young ladies.”

With that, you walk off back towards the manor, Ayaka following red-faced at your side. Apparently a princess-carry was a bit too much stimulation for the girl, and silence falls over the two of you for a while. Eventually she says, “Um, Saber-san, you didn’t have to... you know, to carry me like that. You don’t need to go to so much trouble over me, I mean.”
“Come now,” you say, “a girl like you is as light as a feather! It was no trouble at all, Miss Ayaka.” You raise an eyebrow. “Or would you rather I continue to call you Ojou-sama?”

“Ooh! Now you’re just teasing me.” Although still blushing heavily, Ayaka musters up some indignation. “Some kind of knight you are, toying with a girl like that!” She quickens her pace to walk ahead of you, but you follow at her heels.

“Don’t be so angry, Ojou-sama,” you say wryly. “You were the one who came up with the idea after all, and your family is rather wealthy, is it not? You should be used to the name!”

“We never had servants,” Ayaka replies with a pout. “Magi value their privacy, you know.”

“If you’re so against the idea, I suppose I can return to calling you Miss Ayaka, then. I’m only trying to be of service.”

“Oh, call me what you like, Saber-san,” she says, mood cooling a bit. “Whatever you think is best for keeping...” she trails off, realizing the possibility of being overheard on the street. “Keeping the right things quiet.” Then you’re back at the manor, and Ayaka enters, pointedly closing the front door behind her to separate the two of you. Evidently she’d like to spend some time alone.

With no word from Vaisset, and the time about 16:00, you have some free time. How do you spend it?

[ ] Guard the manor and think. (Duty/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Go back inside and talk to one of the Shijou siblings. Who, and about what? (Trait dependent on subject)

[X] Kill time and get something to eat at the local shopping district. (Self-Preservation/Curiosity)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Vaisset told you he’d contact you if he needed anything, and the manor is warded. With the War not yet begun, you decide that you have the leeway to go for a walk on your own. There’s a shopping district not too far away where your mother buys groceries, and you have some moderately fond memories of going with her as a child. As you think back to the youthful pleasure of the taiyaki stand, your stomach suddenly growls. It comes to mind that you haven’t eaten anything since appearing in Vaisset’s basement, and apparently being a Servant doesn’t remove that need.
Leaving the Shijou mansion behind you, you head down the hill towards Heigon Market.

It hasn’t changed. That shouldn’t surprise you, since it’s only been a day here, but after the experiences you’ve had you can’t shake the expectation that everything should be different. The market street is a bustling, happy place populated by housewives and mothers shopping for dinner or other needs, students out of school and buying crepes or other snacks, and of course the merchants themselves.

Fishermen, butchers, grocers, bakers, and all the other owners of small shops catering to Tokyo’s residential outskirts line the covered street, hawking their wares. You yourself are the only fly in the ointment, as most people give a wary eye to the tall, pale stranger. After walking for a while, admiring the happiness on display, you give in to temptation and buy a taiyaki from one stand and a roasted sweet potato from another. As you bite into the potato, your mouth fills with the sweet, hot sensations of autumn and winter at home, and you have to stop yourself from scarfing the whole thing down in an instant. Instead, you look around and soon find a bench to sit at. You sit down to finish your food at a more gradual pace, and watch the happy shoppers at on the opposite side of the street as you do.

For a while your attention wanders, seeing a mother and daughter arguing over whether or not to buy a snack; a florist selling a young man on the idea that his crush will fall if he just gets the right bouquet; a child alone, giving up a handful of change for a cookie. After watching the crowd for a while, one man in particular catches your eye, in a khaki coat and black slacks. He looks to be in his early or middle thirties, and stands well above the people around him; in fact, you think he’s about your height. Also setting him apart is a messy shock of red hair above brown eyes. A foreigner, you suppose, or maybe half, but not looking out of place. He chats amiably with the grocer, though you can’t make out the words, and he’s clearly buying the ingredients for a home-cooked meal. As he turns to go, however, the man stops dead. As you watch, he seems to inhale deeply, as if carefully and attentively smelling the air. Then his eyes fix on you and widen in shock. Setting his jaw and assuming a look of determination, he strides across the street towards you.

As he approaches you realize that the man is a ball of mystic energy, more concentrated than in any human you’ve seen.

[X] Remain seated and see what he wants before doing anything. (Pride)

[ ] Whoever this man is, he clearly has something to do with the Grail War and this crowded street is no place for it. Get out of here! (Compassion/Humility)
Unmoved by the man’s determined aspect or energy density, you simply wait. You’re no longer inexperienced enough for the appearance of one strange figure to spoil a meal. Instead of getting up or reacting, you simply finish your sweet potato and start in on the taiyaki. Then he’s reached you.

For a few moments, the man simply stands over you, looking down into your face. You watch as, in turn and blending together, shock, horror, confusion, and barely suppressed rage appear in his expression. Since he isn’t starting the conversation, you decide to speak up. Gesturing to the open space beside you, you say sarcastically, “Feel free to sit down if you like. It isn’t taken.”

This finally seems to galvanize the man into action, as in a hoarse voice he asks, “Why are you here?” Then, in a more normal tone, “What are you doing back in Japan after fifteen years?”

“Sir,” you say coldly, “I don’t know you, and I don’t believe it’s any business of yours where I go or why.” Despite your composed reaction, however, you’re inwardly thrown. You were only three years old fifteen years ago, ruling out the idea that this man knows anything about you personally. Could he be another person mistaking you for an Einzbern homunculus?

“Sure, you don’t know me,” he admits, “but I know the Einzberns, at least one of them. I know you shouldn’t be here after what happened in Fuyuki. Now tell me, what are you here to do? For that matter, what are you?” Then it all clicks. Fifteen years ago, the year was 2004. The same year Judas set the Akeldama to replicate, saying that he was duplicating the last functional Grail War. If that statement held any truth, that would have been the year the it took place. Could this man be a survivor form that previous Grail War, able to recognize your nature as a Servants?

No, in that case why would he be asking what you are? For now, you try to lead him into giving out more information.

“If you know about the Einzberns,” you say, “you should know why they’re here; what their business is in Japan. But you have me at a disadvantage, sir. I don’t know a thing about you. Perhaps I’m the one who should be asking just what you are. Not human, I’m sure.”

The red-haired man grits his teeth, looking away with a furious expression. “So it’s true,” he mutters, half under his breath. “A Servant, and it’s all starting again. Here!” Then he snaps his eyes back to you. “You don’t know me, a man with your looks? Alright then, tell me, does the name Emiya mean anything to you?”
It does, in fact. “Emiya” was the name of the man Vaisset compared William Harris, the so-called “Second Magus Killer” to. Would that make this man the original? If he survived the Holy Grail War, it wouldn’t be surprising. Judging by his reactions, though, this “Magus Killer Emiya” is unaware of what’s going on at the moment. If you can handle him well, this man could become a valuable source of information lacking the bias of a Master. On the other hand, he could just be another risk, another factor in the already overcomplicated scheme of the Grail War. Perhaps it would be best to keep silent.

[X] Tell “Emiya” about your experiences and see what he can tell you about the Holy Grail War. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Shut him down and stay quiet. You don’t need to deal with this man, whatever he is. (Pride/Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“It means something to me, yes,” you say. “I’ve never met the man myself, but I’ve heard of him. A man known as the ‘Magus Killer.’ Known for his brutal methods, and high success rate. A man with a rival in this town, looking to surpass him. You have more than me to worry about, Emiya-san.”

Emiya heaves a sigh, and finally sits down beside you. The anger and suspicion on his face drops, and suddenly he looks more resigned than furious. “You know,” he says, “I don’t think you’re lying. If you were an Einzbern trying to play dumb, you’d do it better than that. Your magic is wrong anyway. I guess you really don’t know who I am.” He gives you one more appraising look before deciding to open up. “I’m Emiya Shirou. Not the magus killer; just a man, living quietly in Tokyo with his family. My father was the Emiya you’re talking about, and he’s been dead since I was a kid.”

“Rupert Jünter,” you say, inventing a name off the top of your head. “It’s a belated pleasure, Emiya-san. I suppose your father’s imitator wouldn’t be such a danger to you, in that case. Do you mind telling me why you’re so wary of the Einzbern, though?”

“Two reasons,” Emiya says, probing your expression. Despite his words, he’s still suspicious. “The Einzbern family has an old score to settle with my father, and they picked on me as the next best target. I won’t go into the detail, but there was a time when they came hunting for me. The other reason, we both know. The Holy Grail War. They’ve started it up again and moved it to Tokyo, haven’t they?”
“You have me there. The Einzbern are holding the Holy Grail War here, it’s true. But what do you care, Emiya-san? If you were a Master, you’d already know, and if you aren’t a part of the War it shouldn’t matter to you.”

“You may not believe me,” he answers, “but I’m the kind of person who wants to save everyone; I know that may not be possible, but if I can at least keep the people around me safe, I can be satisfied.” Emiya gets to his feet as he speaks, stirred by the emotion in his own words. “I lived through two Holy Grail Wars, one fifteen and one twenty-five years ago, and I can’t stand to see that kind of indiscriminate destruction repeated. The mass deaths, the violence, the brutality; even if the Grail really is waiting at the end of it all this time, it isn’t worth it!” Then he turns back to you, a new look of cold contempt in his eyes. “But I guess a magus like you wouldn’t care, would you? You came all the way here to kill for your wish, after all.”

All of a sudden, you can’t help but laugh. It all just strikes you as too funny. His self-righteous attitude, his condemnation, his assumptions. You burst into laughter, unrestrained guffaws spilling out of you.

“Fuhuhuhu~hahahaha~bwahahahahahaha~hahahahaha~!”

After you’ve run out of breath, you finally regain enough control to speak.

“Alright, Emiya. Let’s talk about collateral damage, and why I wound up in this War. Caster was summoned some time ago, and used his Noble Phantasm, Akeldama, to do something he and his Master thought would win him the War. It created some kind of an enclosed world, and summoned into its power a thousand and fifty people from around the world, including me. There, over the course of ten days that were only a moment to the outside world, he tricked his captives into killing one another. Our deaths were supposed to serve as a sacrifice, to enhance his power in this world. Only I and a few others survived, and that was by killing Caster. Unfortunately, when I escaped Caster’s world I was left here in Tokyo, rather than being sent home. Forced to participate in this Grail War that I want no part of. If you’re a magus, you should be able to sense the truth of that from the energy around me.”

Emiya stares at you, with a face like the world has come crashing down on his head. Words slip numbly from stunned lips. “Over... a thousand people dead? Already? Oh god, it’s worse.” But the weakness lasts no more than a few seconds before color, along with a look of steely resolve, comes back into his face. He puts a hand on your shoulder. “Alright Jünter,” he says. “I’ve been in your position. If what you’re telling me is true, I’m sure we can work together to save the people of Tokyo from the danger of a Holy Grail War. Now,” he gestures down the street, “you’re a stranger here, with no place to stay, right? From what you told me, probably no
money either. Why don’t you come back to my place and have some dinner? I can lend you a room, too.”

[X] Take Shirou up on his offer and follow him back to the Emiya residence. Vaisset has his command spells and telepathy in case something goes wrong, after all. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Make up an excuse for declining and return to the Shijou manor. You’re not sure about letting this Emiya character string you along. (Duty/Pride) (Write in your excuse)

[ ] Respond differently (Write in)

“Tha’t’s very kind of you, Emiya-san,” you say. “I’ll happily to take you up on the offer, though I am rather surprised. How can you trust me?”

Emiya gives you a smile, no doubt meant to assuage fear you don’t really feel. “Like I said, I want to save people. I couldn’t just leave you here to go through all this on your own.”

You stare at the man for a moment, trying to process what you’re seeing. A complete stranger, who recognizes you as having the hereditary look of his worst enemies, and he’s inviting you into his home this earnestly? He’s either the most good-hearted person you’ve ever met or he’s planning some kind of deception. Surely it should be the latter, but you can’t make out the faintest hint of malice or deceit in his eyes. Perhaps he truly is honest. In which case, you’ve just gained a very valuable pawn in this Holy Grail War.

“If that’s the way you feel, I certainly won’t turn my nose up at your hospitality,” you say. “Lead on, Emiya-san.”

You follow Emiya through the shopping district, and then out, returning to the suburbs. Here, though, the houses change. You’re not walking through tree-lined lanes flanked by splendid manor houses any longer, but a more ordinary residential zone of the same kind you grew up in. The homes are large enough for a family without being conspicuous, and taste, rather than luxury, seems to be the governing agent in their decoration.

Emiya doesn’t speak as you go, hurrying along towards your destination in silence. For all his hospitality, he’s evidently still uncomfortable with your appearance. He keeps glancing at your hair and, oddly, at your suit; peeking out of the corner of his eye as if he thinks you won’t notice. It’s an oddly childish gesture, one you can’t help finding a bit endearing.
Finally you arrive at a large house; not much different from its neighbors, it has a well-kept front garden, a predominantly gray color scheme, and a low front wall around the yard. The only thing that does set the building apart from its neighbors is its size. With two floors and a large footprint, the house certainly gives the impression that Emiya has something of a large family.

No, wait. Taking a closer look, you realize that there is something else setting the Emiya house apart after all: a bounded field. It’s very thin, almost undetectable and too weak to really function as a barrier, but it is there. An undeniable marker that this is the home of a magus.

“This is it,” Emiya says. “Not a mansion, but it’s home.” Then he leads you in, calling into the house as he opens the door, “Sakura, everyone, I’m home! We have a gu-

As Emiya is speaking, a massive magical presence surges towards you. The source is a tall woman with long pink hair and glasses, dressed casually in a turtleneck and jeans. She darts around the corner from the inner part of the house into the front hall, lunges towards you and materializes a pair of bizarre nail-like weapons to stab at your throat. In the sliver of a moment before she strikes home, you read the blow; slide your right foot back to avoid it, and catch her by the wrists, keeping the nails at arm’s length.

-est.” Emiya finishes lamely, carried by the forward momentum of his sentence.

There’s no doubt about it. This woman is a Servant, although you can’t guess her class from her weapons. Emiya’s been stringing you along, setting you up to die here. You manage a self-deprecating chuckle. “You really got me, Emiya. Even knowing your nickname, I still let you lead me into this trap. How many people have you fooled ‘hero’ act of yours?” The pink-haired Servant is struggling against you, and it takes all you have to hold her arms back; for such a slender woman, she’s phenomenally strong!

Emiya’s reaction shocks you, however. Rather than finishing you off, he snaps at the female Servant. “Rider, what are you doing? I’m trying to help this man, not kill him!” Rider? This is all getting more and more strange. According to Vaisset, Rider hadn’t been summoned yet this afternoon. Besides that, Emiya lacks the command spells of a Master. Just what is going on here?

Before you can get the explanation you want, however, Rider has one for Emiya. “Shirou,” she says, cold fury underlying an almost level tone, “have you lost your wits? This man is a Servant.”

“A Servant?” Emiya repeats her words, shocked. “Sure, he has one around, but...” he looks back at you. “Jünter, what’s going on here?” His surprise and
confusion is genuine enough that you find yourself believing him again. Or maybe this whole situation is just so bizarre that you’ve completely lost your convictions.

In any case, you decide advocate for a truce, at least for the moment. “You have me at a disadvantage here, really,” you say. “If you’ll stop trying to cut my throat for a moment, Rider, I’d be happy to explain, but we can hardly talk right now.”

During this interchange, another woman has come out into the hall. She’s a bit older looking, around Emiya’s age, with purple hair and eyes, a lavender skirt with a cream sweater, and a red ribbon in her hair. Before you can take notice of her appearance, however, what strikes you is the overwhelming mystic energy she carries with her. More than Emiya, more than the Servant who attacked you... more than anything you’ve seen! Whatever else it may be, this house you’ve entered is a den of monsters. Despite the absurd power she holds, however, this new addition looks more frightened than either Emiya or the Rider. She stares at you, standing perfectly still and wide-eyed, her face pale with fear. Your hair, your eyes, your clothing; she scrutinizes all of it from down the hall before finally working up the nerve to say, “Rider, come back here. Senpai chose to bring this man into our home, and we should hear him out.”

Without a word to you, Rider dispels her weapons and, once you’ve let go of her wrists, leaps backwards down the hall. In one bound, she’s standing protectively at the woman’s side. Looking at the three people: Emiya, Rider, and the unnamed woman, you heave a small sigh. They’re undoubtedly dangerous. If you leave now, you could probably get away from them, but you would be forfeiting your only link to the two Holy Grail Wars of the past. On the other hand, you have no idea how these people will react if you tell them the truth.

[X] Materialize your armor and admit to being Saber. (Pride)
[ ] Use the moment of peace to escape from the monster at the end of the hall. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Your thoughts race as, outside, winter rain begins to fall. You consider the idea of fleeing the scene briefly, but reject the notion. In the first place, you have too much to lose by cutting off your connection to these people. In the second, you’re honestly not sure whether your speed is sufficient for you to make an escape. Lastly, your pride won’t allow you to flee from a group of strangers inviting you into their
home. No, you decide, there’s only one way forward at this point: to tell your story in full.

“Thank you,” you say to Rider, “now that we aren’t fighting, things will be a bit easier to explain.” Then shifting your eyes to Emiya, you continue, “What Rider told you was right, Emiya. The name I gave you in the park, Rupert Jünter, isn’t my only one. It was only the most appropriate thing to use in public.” With a courtly bow, you continue, “In truth, it would be more proper to call me Saber; the Servant of the Sword.” Although tempted to press the point home by materializing your armor, you don’t do so. The other Servant, Rider, seems like the type to attack at the slightest sign of aggression.

Renewed shock appears on Emiya’s face, but it’s quickly chased off by a look of understanding and realization. “That’s what you meant by being forced to participate,” he says. “You’ve been made to take Caster’s place, haven’t you?” Then he hesitates, and abruptly shifts tone. “But we shouldn’t be having this conversation in the entryway. Please come in.” He has a point. You’re still standing immediately inside the front door, with your shoes on. It’s not the most convenient place to tell your story.

As you take off your shoes and follow Emiya and his family into the living room, the tension is palpable. The revelation about your identity hasn’t made Rider any less wary of you, nor has it diminished the fear you can see from the woman you assume is Emiya’s wife. It’s odd, the way she looks at you. You could understand her being frightened that a hostile Servant might attack, but with her you almost feel she’s frightened by your existence itself. It can’t be the revelation of a new Servant, since Rider is already present. You speculate, but no clear answer comes to you. Emiya, by contrast, is undaunted by the atmosphere. He waves you over to a low table in the middle of the room, saying, “Why don’t you sit down and tell Sakura and Rider your story? I’ll make some tea.”

The two women, one pink-haired and the other purple, sit first, side by side, and wait for you to speak. The burden of explanation certainly seems to be on you, so you take your seat opposite the duo and begin your story. “There is a Holy Grail War being conducted here, by the Einzbern family,” you begin. “But I suppose you knew that already, given the presence of Rider.” To her, you say, “You were the last to be summoned, correct?” Before she can answer, you raise a hand. “Wait, I’m digressing. I’ll tell my story and save the questions for when I’ve satisfied yours.”

“Please do,” the other woman, Sakura, says softly.
You begin with a denial of guilt. “The first thing I should tell you is that I didn’t come into the Holy Grail War by choice. I have not arrived here intending to kill for my wish; what I desire is only survival.”

Rider fixes you with a cold gaze. “Just how did you come to be summoned, then? Every Servant answers the call of the Grail.”

“I’ll get to that,” you say, a bit irritated, “as a part of my story. It does play a rather significant part.” You pause, take a breath, and continue in a more level tone.

“You see, one of the Servants summoned into this War, Caster, was in possession of a Noble Phantasm entitled Akeldama. Its nature was a realm under his control, cut off from the world, and it allowed him to bring human beings, heroic spirits, and perhaps other things into that world. Its purpose was to be a killing field, or sacrificial altar; as such, one could only leave when either Caster was dead or all those he’d summoned were. Although he could not kill those he summoned with his own hands, by orchestrating their deaths he could absorb their energy and receive a massive improvement to his capabilities as a Servant.”

At this point, Emiya returns with the tea. After serving the three of you, he sits down with a cup of his own. He takes a place at the table’s third side, between you and the two women. “Thank you, Emiya-san,” you say, before returning to the topic at hand. “With the Akeldama, Caster summoned one thousand and fifty humans and nine heroic spirits, including himself. He tricked the majority of those he summoned into killing one another; only I and the four people I protected survived. Together, we defeated Caster and escaped from Akeldama. I expected that to be the end, but Caster had one more favor left to do his Master. He channeled Akeldama’s power into me instead of himself, transforming me into a Servant and binding me to his Master. And so, as Emiya-san mentioned, I was forced to take Caster’s place in this Holy Grail War.”

Surprisingly, the first to react is Sakura, who bursts into a compassionate exclamation. “Oh, I’m so sorry! To have to take the lives of so many into yourself... I know just how you feel.” Carried away by excitement and sympathy, she reaches across the table to clasp your hand in hers as she reassures you. “I understand the pain and despair you must be feeling, but don’t worry. I’m sure senpai will be able to save you from this situation.” It’s hard to believe this woman could have experienced something similar, but her kindred feeling seems genuine, and the volume of mystic energy she carries is truly incredible. Perhaps she went through the previous Holy Grail War alongside Emiya, and one of the Servants attempted a similar scheme to the Akeldama ritual.

“Thank you,” you say, “your sympathy means a great deal to me.”
Emiya, finishing a sip of tea, leans forward to speak. “So you’re a Servant, but not a heroic spirit? Is that right?”

“Correct.” You nod. “I am quite alive, and have no legend to my name. I suppose you could call me a Servant with a living body.”

“Servant with a body, huh?” Emiya thinks for a moment. “I guess you can’t fade into spirit form, then, can you?” You shake your head, and he continues, “Saber was like that in Fuyuki, too. What a weird coincidence.”

As Emiya looks back on his memories, you address your three hosts. “Now, you’ve all heard my story. I wonder if you wouldn’t mind sharing yours. There are some things about this affair I find rather mystifying, you see.”

“Of course,” Sakura answers. “Ask us whatever you like.”

“Well then,” you say, “the first thing that’s been weighing on my mind is the presence of Rider. How is it that you were ignorant of the Holy Grail War going on, Emiya-san, when you have a Servant in your home?”

Emiya chuckles at the question, and the other two smile. “I guess I should’ve explained that earlier,” he says. “Rider’s been living with us for the last fifteen years, since the end of the Fifth Holy Grail War. She’s sustained by Sakura’s energy.”

There’s quite a bit of important information there, but what first hits you is that what Judas had told you was right! Sustaining Servants outside of Akeldama without the help of a Grail really is possible! Why, then, did Adelheid and Circe disappear? Why was your connection to them severed? Why-

But no, you won’t let yourself go down that depressive path. You need to focus on the present now. Moving on to the next subject, you say, “I see. That explains the situation, to be sure. The next detail I’m curious about is.”

You’re cut off by the sound of the doorbell, and Emiya says, “Oh, that’ll be the kids, home from cram school. Guess I should get started on dinner, then. Do you have any culinary preferences, Saber?” As he speaks Emiya gets up and walks into the kitchen, while Rider goes to get the door. A glance out the window tells you it’s beginning to get dark. Perhaps you should beg off and return to the Shijou manor. On the other hand, you’re starving hungry. If last night was any indication, Jean-Pierre Vaisset hasn’t considered the idea that Servants might have human needs.

[X] A twisting groan from your stomach decides you. You’ll stay here for the evening and discuss further details of what the Emiya family can tell you over dinner.

(Pride/Self-Preservation)
Cursing the lateness of the hour, you decide you’ll have to beg off. In the end, protecting your Master is the most important thing for you to do. (Duty)

You decide to do something else (Write in)

A groan from your stomach decides you. You’ll stay here for the evening and discuss further details of what the Emiya family can tell you over dinner. “I’m not particular about food,” you say jovially, “but please do make the portions large. I’m half-starved, to tell you the truth!”

Emiya laughs from the kitchen, and calls back, “Alright, I’ll make plenty!” Then he mutters something about “a Saber’s appetite,” but you can’t quite make it out.

Turning your eyes to the darkening sky again, you decide it would be prudent to contact Vaisset. The man may have been tired of speaking with you, but you doubt he intended for you to disappear entirely after all. Reaching out your mind for the mental contact between Master and Servant, you send a thought to him. ‘Master, you should know that I won’t be at the mansion for some time. After you seeing Miss Ayaka home, I took it upon myself to investigate the layout of this city and scout for potential Masters.’

Vaisset’s response sounds distracted and disinterested. Presumably you interrupted him in the midst of some other pursuit. ‘Very well, act at your discretion. I’ll bring you here by command spell if I have need of you.’ There’s a moment of silence before another, more alert question. ‘Just a moment, Saber. What did you find?’

‘While scanning the town, I discovered a huge source of mystic energy,’ you explain. It’s not technically a lie. ‘It may be a Servant, or possibly something else entirely. Whatever it is, it must be investigated. I’ll give you more information when I have it.’

‘Very well, Saber,’ Vaisset assents, sounding resigned. ‘Take as much time as you need, but be careful. The last thing I need is for my Servant to die without accomplishing anything because he rushed into the unknown.’

Vaisset is all heart. What a character.

‘I understand, Master,’ you return. ‘Good evening to you.’

As you return your attention to your surroundings, you realize that Emiya’s wife, Sakura, has been watching you closely. The telepathic conversation should be undetectable, of course, but she certainly noticed you staring off into space.
“You have to explain where you are to your Master, I suppose,” she says softly, and you have to hold the look of surprise from your face. What a moment of insight! “Don’t feel pressured to stay if it will get you in trouble. I know it’s easy to get caught up in Senpai’s mood, but we’ll still be here tomorrow.”

“You needn’t worry on my behalf,” you answer, subduing your disquiet at her strange understanding to give the woman a smile. “I won’t have any trouble from my Master, and I’d much rather spend the evening here. We don’t get on very well, he and I.”

Before you can say more, you hear the door opening and two young voices announcing their return home. Rider returns to the living room, and a boy and girl in middle-school uniforms follow, taking seats at the table. The boy immediately reaches out to take an orange from the bowl at the table’s center, and eyes you as with suspicion as he eats. The girl has better manners, sitting down beside her mother and saying, “Hello. Are you a guest of my father’s?”

Sakura favors both with warm smiles, saying, “Welcome home, you two. Saber-san, these are our children, Kaori and Seiji. They’re fourteen, and in middle-school. Seiji, Kaori, this is Saber. He’ll be working with your father for a while, so we’ll probably be seeing quite a bit of him in the next few weeks.”

The boy, Seiji, gives you a moody stare and says to his mother, “Hope he isn’t staying. It’s already bad enough with Aunt Rin coming.”

If his sister feels the same apprehension, it doesn’t show on her face. In fact, she’s had the same neutral expression since she came in. “I’m Emiya Kaori,” she says with a slight bow. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Saber-san.”

“I’m pleased to meet you both,” you reply. “My name is Saber, as your mother mentioned. And Seiji-kun, you can put your mind at rest. Barring some sudden catastrophe, I won’t be taking up a room in your home.”

After introducing yourself, you become something of a bystander as the two teens discuss their day with their mother. They are an odd pair, to be sure. They look no more related than their parents do, for one thing; it’s shocking to think they’re twins. As Sakura and her daughter sit side by side, you feel as if you’re looking at the same woman at different ages. Sakura is taller, has longer hair, and is plainly older, but there’s nothing in the comparison to suggest different parentage. They even share a matching red ribbon in their hair, completing the image. Seiji and Shirou are similarly alike, although not to the same extreme. The Emiya father’s red hair and brown eyes are replicated on his son, with the difference being one of style. Where Emiya’s hair is messy and jagged, Seiji has his combed straight and parted on the side. The son wears glasses, also, but could otherwise be a young Emiya Shirou.
The other notable contrast between the two is in their attitude, though you’ve heard that’s relatively common among siblings. As an only child, you wouldn’t know. Kaori is respectful, quiet, and restrained, with an emotionless quality that reminds you of yourself at her age. Seiji is just the opposite; despite his clean-cut appearance, he seems to be feeling the brunt of puberty. The boy has the disrespectful, quick-to-anger personality typical of the teenage male.

Finally Emiya brings out the food: udon soup with shiitake, konbu, green onions, and tempura. It’s a classic, simple recipe, ideal for warming you in the November chill. The broth is flavorful without being overpowering, the noodles are perfectly chewy, and the various toppings add flavor variety to each bite. Eating voraciously, you end up having four bowls without stopping to think. Evidently the change to a Servant’s body has enhanced your need for energy as well as your power. For some reason, this display of appetite amuses the Emiya couple to no end.

After dinner, Kaori and Seiji retreat to their respective rooms, leaving you to discuss matters with Rider and their parents.

“Sorry we couldn’t talk about the War over dinner,” Shirou says once they’re out of earshot. “We’ve kept the kids unaware of the Moonlit World, and I certainly don’t want this to be their introduction.”

You cock an eyebrow in surprise. “You mean you aren’t raising an heir?”

“I’m not really a magus,” Shirou explains. “Just a spellcaster; I don’t have a crest, don’t research new mysteries... there’s nothing to pass on.”

“I see.”

“But I’m getting us off topic,” Shirou says with a self-deprecating smile. “You want to know about the other Grail Wars, right?”

You nod. “If you don’t mind telling me. I may have an idea of what’s going on now, but as to the beginnings of the affair I’m quite ignorant.”

“Alright,” Shirou says. “To begin, I should tell you that there were five previous Grail Wars. All in Fuyuki City, in Kyushu: my hometown. The first four were every sixty years, but the fifth was only ten years after the fourth. I was a kid when the fourth war happened, in 1994, and went through the fifth war as a Master.” He pauses for a moment to reflect, before moving on.

“That’s how I’m related to this thing, anyway. Now I’ll give you some background. The Holy Grail War was originally conceived by the Einzbern family as a ritual to bring forth a massive supply of energy, the Holy Grail, and with it to complete the Third Sorcery and achieve perfect immortality. They took on two other houses, the Matou and the Tohsaka, to help design and conduct the ritual. The Matou created the command spells, and the Tohsaka oversaw the land whose mana powered
the ritual. These were known as the three founding families, and they had representatives in every War. The ritual needed seven magi and seven Servants, though, so outsiders like me ended up getting roped in. The Servants, and having them die, are essential; their spirits power the Grail. Originally the Masters were all supposed to use their command spells to order their Servants to commit suicide, but apparently it turned into a fight over the Grail back during the first War. After that, things gradually became the way they are now. The Grail’s been filled with blood and curses, and that’s all that will come of completing the ritual.”

[X] Write in your response and/or questions about the Holy Grail War.

“Hold on,” you say, “what do you mean by the Grail being ‘filled with blood and curses’? I could understand blood if this were the original Holy Grail we were discussing, but a moment ago you described it as a supply of energy. If the Holy Grail is pure energy, how could it be filled with anything?”

“Ah, right, I guess I glossed over that part,” Emiya says. “I can explain the ritual in a bit more detail; at least enough to explain how it’s been warped. To really understand the inner workings, you’d need a better expert than me, though.” He taps a finger on the table, considering his next words.

“The Holy Grail is essentially a two-part thing. There’s a mechanism to the ritual, called the Greater Grail, which is embedded in the land. It collects energy from leylines over time, and then uses that energy during the Grail War to facilitate the summoning of Servants, the power of the command spells, and so on. The things an ordinary magus would be unable to do. The other part is the Lesser Grail, a, er...”

Emiya looks uncomfortable for a moment, apparently searching for the perfect word.

Sakura gives his hand a squeeze and says with a faint smile, “a container, Senpai? I think that would be the right term.”

“Right,” he says hesitantly. “The Lesser Grail is a sort of container for magical energy, normally produced by the Einzberns. The Lesser Grail receives the spirits of the Servants as they die and converts them into energy. When all seven are killed, the Greater and Lesser Grails are supposed to create the real “Holy Grail” together: a path to the Origin, with an unlimited supply of energy cut off from time, enough for any magus to grant their wishes; as well as the key to the Third Sorcery.”

“I suppose I understand so far,” you say, “but how does such an energy supply become filled with curses? You aren’t going to say it harbors the resentment of the dead Servants, I hope.”
Shirou only frowns at your try for levity. “In a way, it does. For the first two wars the Grail was neutral, just like you thought. Pure and colorless energy that could be shaped to grant any wish. It was corrupted in the Third Holy Grail War. The Einzberns, who had failed to get their wish even though they created the ritual, had decided to break it. They altered the summoning process in such a way that they could summon the Zoroastrian devil. All the World’s Evils, Angra Manyu.”

“The devil?” You almost shout in surprise. “Just how could something like that be summoned as a ‘heroic spirit’?”

Shirou sighs. “It’s a long story, and the details aren’t worth getting into. The truth is that the hero summoned that way was just a scapegoat. A human who’d had all the evils of the world ascribed to him in order to allow the people in his society to see themselves as perfectly good. He wasn’t a fighter or a conqueror, or even a real villain; just a normal human, quickly defeated in the Third Grail War. But when his spirit entered the Holy Grail, he corrupted its energy and filled it with the curses he held for humanity.”

“The person you’re describing,” you say, “he was a wish himself, it sounds like. The wish for an enemy, a perfect devil. If the Holy Grail is a source of energy to grant wishes...”

It’s Sakura who completes your thought. “That’s right, Saber. The Holy Grail in Fuyuki granted the wish for Angra Manyu to be a demon capable of embodying all evil; if the ritual had been completed, he would have been born into this world to destroy humanity.”

“The last two Grail Wars,” Shirou continues, “were waged to build up the energy Angra Manyu needed to come into the world. My father, Emiya Kiritsugu, stopped the Fourth Grail War, and I worked together with other Masters to stop the Fifth. I can’t guess why the Einzberns would want to do this again, but we’ll just have to put an end to it this time. Now that you understand the true danger of the Holy Grail, I’m sure we can count on you as well, Saber.”

“Yes, of course,” you lie. Frankly, you’re not at all sure about Emiya’s story. He seems earnest enough, but there are issues with the story. The first being that the Einzberns, at least according to Vaisset, have a deep understanding of the Holy Grail’s composition. If that’s true, why would they begin the same ritual a sixth time after it had been effectively ruined? Then there’s the change of location. From Emiya’s story, this is a ritual deeply tied to the land where it’s held. Why would it suddenly be relocated to Tokyo? Most importantly, no part of Emiya’s story explains the abnormally high energy possessed by he and his wife. You’d like to press Emiya for details on these matters, but he obviously left out the details intentionally and
seems to view the Grail War as some kind of personal crusade. It be for the best, you
decide, to go along for the moment.

Shifting topics, you say, “I’m curious about this Third Sorcery the Einzberns
have been working to achieve. I’ve heard of the Sorcerers, of course, but I’m not
familiar with the specifics. Just what is the Third Sorcery?”

“It’s a path to immortality,” Shirou says. “The last time it was explained to
me was fifteen years ago, so I’m not too clear on the details, but it’s supposed to use
the Origin to materialize the soul by enhancing it in some way. The spirit itself
becomes a higher level of existence, able to affect the world without being affected by
it. For how it’s performed or the detail of the mechanics, your guess is as good as mine
though. Only the Einzberns understand it, and they keep the secret pretty well.”

“Fascinating,” you say. “I don’t suppose you can tell me anything about the
others, can you?”

“Not much,” Shirou replies. “Of the Five Sorceries, I only have any
information on the Second and Third; the others are kept secret pretty well. The
Second Sorcery has to do with observing and using parallel worlds, but you could
learn more from my sister-in-law, Rin.”

“And who might she be?” You lean forward, intrigued. Magic to do with
parallel worlds... could it shed more light on the function of your origin?

“Sakura’s sister, a magus studying at the Clock Tower as an apprentice of the
Second Sorcerer,” Shirou explains. “Normally she lives in London, but if you’re
interested in the Second Sorcery you may be in luck. She announced a week ago that
she’d be visiting us this weekend.” Shirou pauses as an idea strikes. “Now that I think
about it, I wonder if she’d heard about the Grail War. The timing certainly lines up.”

“Well then, I’ll look forward to speaking with her,” you say, “But right now I
have some more questions about the Holy Grail War, if you don’t mind.”

“Go ahead.”

“You’ve said that all seven Servants are meant to die for the ritual to be
completed, and the command spells are intended for that purpose. Is that something
all of the Masters have been aware of?”

“You’re wondering if the Master you’ve been tied to is planning to betray,”
Rider comments. It’s her first contribution to the discussion, and by the content you
get the impression she’s none too fond of you. You choose to ignore her.

“Not as far as I know,” Shirou says. “In the Fifth War, as far as I know only
the Einzbern and Matou Masters, as well as the organizer from the Church, were
aware of the real purpose. The Einzberns don’t want anyone else getting their hands
on the Third Sorcery, after all.”
“That is a relief,” you say. You consider asking further questions, but a glance at your watch reveals that it’s 11:00pm. You start. How did it get so late already? Hurriedly, you say, “Thank you both for your help. I’d love to talk further, but unfortunately I must be getting back to my Master. If Assassin were to attack in his sleep, I doubt he’d have the chance to summon me back with a command spell.”

Shirou nods. “I understand. Come back when you have the opportunity; hopefully by then I’ll have more information on how to stop this version of the Holy Grail War.” As he and Sakura stand to see you off, Sakura says, “Good night, Saber. Do be careful out there.”

“Of course,” you tell her with a nod. Then you exit the Emiya house, back out on the street in the night air. You walk back the way you came, alone on the damp sidewalk. The rain earlier has fortunately passed, leaving clear and chilly skies. The neighborhood goes to bed early, it seems. The houses are dark and no cars pass by as you walk. The only sound is the clicking of your shoes on the pavement, and for a moment you feel as if you’re back in the *Akeldama*, moving through a false and empty city.

Then you hear the low hum of a motor ahead, and the impression breaks. There is at least one person driving through the suburbs at night; you’re only walking through a quiet neighborhood, not a lifeless world. The reassurance only lasts a few moments, though, as the car idling two blocks ahead of you comes into view. It’s the same limousine you saw this afternoon, waiting at a corner. Waiting in your path.

[ ] Keep walking towards the limousine. (Pride/Curiosity)
[ ] Take an alternate route. (Self-Preservation/Duty)
[X] Do something else (Make the limo take the first move - Pride)

At first, you don’t react. You keep walking, resolved to stay your course and confront the enigmatic vehicle. Then, by the time you’ve covered half the distance, a new idea strikes you, and you stop dead. If they’re willing to sit and wait for you to approach, you can reciprocate the behavior. For five or ten minutes, you stand on the sidewalk, a block away from the idling limousine, your eyes trained on the window. Finally they get tired of waiting. The car turns the corner and smoothly pulls up beside you. As it comes to a stop, one of the middle doors opens to reveal empty leather seats, facing the rear of the car. As it does so, some kind of a seal is broken and you can feel the energy of those inside the car. There are four presences within, all stronger than humans; but perplexingly inferior to the level of a Servant.
While you’re considering the presences in the car, the voice of an old man calls out to you through the open door. It’s certainly old, but also vibrant and a little humorous. “Sit down, my boy,” he suggests. “After making us drive up to you like that, I’m sure you can do that much. You’re letting in cold air, you know.”

Hoping you won’t regret it, you sit down and shut the door behind you. It’s an old car, and well-kept, you observe as you look around. Dating from some time in the early 20th century, it oozes the elegance of a preserved antique, kept in excellent working order. What you find less appealing is the coloration. Everything, from the seats to the carpeting and even the siding, is done in muted shades of deep red. Oxblood leather predominates. On the right wall is a small bar, stocked with wine, whiskey, ice, and a variety of glasses.

Two of the car’s inhabitants are now behind you, in a driver’s compartment separated from your space by glass. The other two sit across from you, watching you with equal scrutiny colored by wildly differing emotions.

One is an old man, perhaps in his early sixties, dressed in a navy three-piece suit and antiquated cravat. The primary impression his features give you is of carved ivory, with extremely pale skin, white shoulder-length hair, a full beard, and ice-blue eyes. It is those eyes that belie his apparent age. They seem to glimmer with a font of hidden vital energy, as if the man might at any moment burst into laughter, or spring up and attack you. The same humor in his tone as he invited you in is plainly written on his face, and he seems to examine you like a man reading a finely crafted joke with too much restraint to laugh aloud.

His companion is a beautiful young girl, around the same age as the Emiyas’ children, or perhaps a bit younger. She wears an elaborate white and red Gothic dress, covered in ornamentation of lace and ribbons. Her white hair pools on the seat around her, and would fall past her waist if she were standing. Her most striking feature is a pair of red eyes, almost the same color as your own, or perhaps a bit brighter. As she gives you a pouty glare, those eyes shine in the car’s low lighting like finely carved rubies embedded in the porcelain features of a doll.

“Well?” The short demand, in the girl’s high, clear voice, puts you in mind you of the lovely tone of a bell; perhaps one of those small, ornate chimes used to call the servants in old mansions. “What are you doing here?”

It’s certainly an offputting question, but coming from a child you suppose you can understand. No doubt this old man has been dragging the girl around on his strange errands all day. “I, too, would love to find out, miss,” you answer in a gentle tone, hoping to placate the girl. Then you shift your focus back to the man. “Sir, why
have you called me in here, and why has your car been following me? For that matter, who are you?”

“My name,” the old man says, his irritating smile unchanging, “is Otto Niemand; but it won’t do you any good knowing it. Your business is with the young mistress, here.”

Baffled, you look back to the girl. Far from having the intended effect, you earlier words seem to have frustrated her even further. Rage now shapes her features. “Don’t you behave as if this were some sort of a game,” she hisses. “You answer me. What are you doing here? Are you another backup? On whose authority did you come, and when? And how much have you interfered already?”

[X] “I simply can’t answer questions I don’t understand, miss. Just who do you think I am, and who are you?” (Curiosity/Self-Preservation)

[] “I’m under no obligation to report the details of my goings-on to you, miss. Good evening.” With that, you open the door and exit the limousine. (Pride)

[] Say something else (Write in)

You’re fairly sure this girl is one of the infamous Einzberns. Why they would give any kind of power in the Grail War to a child eludes you, but her appearance is similar enough to yours to justify the confusion Emiya and Truvietianne experienced. Then there’s her incredible attitude of arrogant self-assuredness; it seems appropriate for the representative of those who orchestrated this ritual. Considering her probable identity, you decide to play dumb. It ought to be the best way of clearing up her misunderstanding and dragging more information out of her and this Niemand.

“I simply can’t answer questions I don’t understand, miss,” you say, acting the part of a calm, yet confused outsider. “Just who do you think I am, and for that matter, who are you?” You look at Niemand, hoping for some intercession, but he only smirks and waits for the “young mistress” to respond.

“Ridiculous!” the girl exclaims with an exasperated expression. “It’s true we haven’t met personally, but I know you understand what I mean!” She then heaves a sigh. “Fine, if you insist on pretending ignorance we’ll do this.” She leans forward, looking straight into your eyes, and something in her own changes slightly. You can’t put your finger on what it is, an odd shimmer or perhaps something just below your conscious observation, but there is something different. As she looks at you, you feel a vague impulse to follow her instructions. It’s not overwhelming, but the desire is there; a whimsical, instinctive thought that you should simply go along.
“Now,” the girl says, the previous irritation in her voice replaced by a sweet, pleasant tone, “When and how did you arrive in Tokyo?”

“I arrived just last night, in the small hours of the morning,” you answer. Between your earlier decision to plead ignorance and the strange impulse to answer honestly, the words fall out of your mouth almost without thought. “I have no memory of traveling here. It was simply where I came to be.”

Now the girl looks perturbed, and more than a little confused. It’s a bit cute; certainly a more flattering expression than her earlier fury at being ignored in favor of Niemand. “You don’t remember getting here? What about your instructions? Why were you sent here? Was it Grandfather?”

“I don’t remember being sent here by anyone,” you say. “Now, will you kindly explain what’s going on?”

The girl’s transition out of anger is completed by your last statement, and she lets out a short peal of laughter before regaining her voice and answering, “you mean you don’t remember anything?” Apparently the question is rhetorical, as she continues to herself, “So Grandfather sent a new servant, an older boy with no memories or orders.” She smiles and narrows her eyes, like a child delighted at getting a new toy. Then she returns her address to you, and says, “Let’s begin again, shall we?” With that, the girl hops off the seat to stand on the floor of the limousine and, in a bizarre shift of tone, dips elegantly into a formal curtsy.

“My name is Liliesviel von Einzbern,” the girl says with a gentle smile. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. What’s your name, onii-chan?”

As you look at the girl, Liliesviel, her figure seems to be overlaid by the memory of another girl under similar circumstances: Adelheid, telling you that you should take a new name for a new identity. You weren’t sure then, but it’s a certainty in your mind now that you aren’t Yumigawa Rushorou anymore. No aspect of that person still exists. You’re no longer a student; no longer emotionless or aimless; your face, body, and abilities have changed; you’re not even human. No, you ought to have another name now, but what is it? You’re tempted to simply put the problem off and give her a fake name, but there is that strange impulse within you to follow her instructions. Somehow you get the feeling that whatever name you give will be your true name, even if it isn’t intended to be. In this still and strangely charged moment, whatever name falls from your lips will seize hold of your identity. Then a name springs into your mind, not chosen by rational consideration but seeming to appear instinctively from deep within you.

“Likewise, it is a pleasure,” you say. “I am...”
“...Alberich,” you say, after a momentary pause. “There’s... no last name.” It’s true; you are Alberich now. As you say the words, you feel it within you, some essential mystic property that has up until now been in flux falling into place. The True Name of Saber is Alberich: A warrior not yet a hero, but one who will place himself among the ranks of Heroic Spirits in time.

Status Updated

“Ehehe~,” Liliesviel giggles at your introduction. “Of course you only have one name, being who you are. Alberich... It sounds good. Grandfather must have had interesting plans, giving you such a regal name.”

Niemand, too, lets out a chuckle on hearing your introduction. “Alberich, eh? I haven’t heard that in many a long year. You’re a bit tall for it though, aren’t you? Heh heh heh.” He sweeps his eyes between you and Liliesviel before continuing, “My, you two do make a pair though. With your looks and the oddity of your names, you two really ought to be siblings. How about it, missy? I’m sure you have a use for an older brother.” His eyes twinkle as he throws out the jest, no doubt hoping to prod the girl into more anger.

Surprisingly, Liliesviel actually considers the idea. “Alberich as an older brother, hmm?” She gives you an impish smile and looks you over one more time, before deciding, “No, I can’t take you home yet. Maybe Grandfather did send you with orders, and just made you unaware of them. I suppose I should leave you to whatever you were doing before. I can find out whether you’re something to be used or to be killed that way.”

For a little girl to suggest killing you so casually, and to your face... she’s definitely off-balance. What kind of child-rearing did this grandfather of hers do? You’re starting to understand the strange reactions people had when thinking you were an Einzbern. You can’t help feeling a pang of pity at Liliesviel’s warped outlook, and almost open your mouth to explain her misunderstanding.

At the last moment, you hold back. This is an enemy Master, you’re certain of that now. Even if her Servant isn’t here, she’s an opponent you’ll have to deal with at some point. Better to keep her in the dark, even if it does pain you to deceive her. Choking back your explanation, you instead continue to play the amnesiac.

“Liliesviel,” you say, “Let me tell you that I have no intention of being either used or
killed by you or your family. Have me observed, continue to follow me around if you
like, but whatever it is that you’re looking for from me, you won’t be getting it. Now
good night!” With that, you open the door and step back out onto the street.

As you begin walking away from the car, you hear two voices at the same time.
The first is Liliesviel’s, high, clear, and imperious. “Very well then! Stachel! Stengel!
Take us home!” The second voice is a low whisper from Niemand, which seems to
travel directly to your ear without passing through the surroundings. “Best of luck
with the deception, Saber. I look forward to your performance.” You whip your head
around to look back at the car, but it’s already speeding away. Letting out a low curse
under your breath, you turn to finish your own walk home. It is uneventful.

Your arrival at the Shijou manor is hardly as you’d expected, however. Rather
than being dark, as the previous night, lights shine in the manor despite the late hour.
When you enter, you find Jean-Pierre Vaisset waiting for your arrival in the living
room, sitting with a cup of tea.

“Saber,” he calls out amiably, “sit down, I have wonderful news!”

You take an opposite seat, facing Vaisset over the coffee table. “What might
that be?”

“Well, what do you think,” he asks rhetorically, “Rider has been summoned,
of course! Now we can begin to put this inconvenience behind us.”

Vaisset seems to regard this as a significant development, but you have
difficulty mustering up the same excitement after today’s events. Rider had to be
summoned sometime, after all. Instead, what intrigues you is his wording.

“That
seems an unusual way to refer to the Holy Grail War,” you remark. “Inconvenience?
Don’t you find the chance to have a wish granted appealing?”

“No, no, no,” Vaisset shakes his head. “I told you before, didn’t I? What I care
about is research. My grandfather may have jumped at the opportunity to host the
Einzberns’ game, but I’d sooner take up boxing than be saddled with this. Even if I do
win, and reach the Swirl of Origin with the power of the Holy Grail, what good could
come of it? It wouldn’t be my discovery, only knowledge handed to me by something
greater.” He sips his tea, then continues, “...but I digress. Rider has appeared, Saber!
The War is truly begun now. This is your moment, having won one before.” He sets
his cup down and looks you in the eye, gravity finally coming into his tone. “What
will your first move in this War be, my Servant?”

[ ] “If the War has truly begun, we can’t afford to lose any time. Vaisset, we should go
out into the city and seek the enemy.” (Pride)
[X] “I imagine the other Masters will be out prowling the city now that the War’s begun. For tonight we should stay here; I’ll guard you and your sister while your familiars collect information on the enemy, and we can discuss this further tomorrow.” (Duty)

[ ] “You mentioned a priest facilitating the War. Has he made any kind of announcement regarding the commencement of the Holy Grail War? Perhaps taking action immediately upon the summoning of the final Servant is too hasty.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)
Kajiwara Haruo was practicing batting. The ball came at him with a *Swish*, struck his bat with a *Crack!*, and hit home on the chain-link with a *Ching*. This was the routine; one of the many baseball routines that had filled Haruo’s afternoons and evenings for three years. He was staying late, and would stay much later, after all the other players had gone home, continuing to polish his skills. This wasn’t because he was a poor baseball player. He was, in fact, the best on the team; a teenage star, shining in the miniature firmament afforded to young people who excelled their peers. It wasn’t because he loved the game that he practiced late either; not exactly, anyway. Although it was the thing in his life which he was most devoted to, Haruo loved baseball only by comparison. The subject of that comparison was his family.

The Kajiwaras had been court nobles and onmyouji a long time ago, attendants of the emperor in the Heian era. When the imperial throne fell from power
and took the nobles with it, they had skillfully evaded this fall and entered the service of the Minamoto shogun instead. This, too, passed, but with each change of political regime in Japan the Kajiwara family had managed to retain most of its power. The nobles were replaced by the samurai, the samurai by the ministers, and finally the ministers by the capitalists, but no apocalyptic fall had come to the Kajiwara. Instead they had declined by slow degrees, and still lived today as a comfortably upper-middle-class family supported by the income of several properties scattered around Japan. Much as they had adapted to secular power-shifts, the Kajiwara house had quickly oriented themselves when the Mages’ Association first came to Japan.

While numerous other old onmyou houses took the attitude of staunch traditionalism and rejected the foreign magi, the Kajiwara joined the Tohsaka, the Shijou, and others in quickly entering into the international community. They had been members in good standing of the Association since the Meiji Restoration, and continued to quietly build on their own heritage of magic up until the present day. Up until this troublesome heir, at any rate.

The Kajiwara family was adaptable. It was dedicated. It had a long past, and would have a long future. All of that, Haruo thought bitterly as he smacked another ball, was bullshit. It was the iron rail his father had laid out for his life, and he’d rather die than go down it. He wanted the freedom to choose his life for himself, and he’d chosen baseball!

Of course, this was the emotional self-delusion common in young people. Haruo’s actual reasons for rejecting magic weren’t so high-minded as a spiritual lust for freedom. He simply couldn’t stand the exercise of learning magic. It was tiresome, difficult, confusing, and often painful, and by the age of eleven Haruo had had all he could take. So he’d set about finding some other purpose for his life. He’d tried being a diligent student, but fell asleep too often when he was intending to focus. He’d tried musical instruments, only to discover that he had no musical sense. Finally he tried sports, and in these he had excelled. In the end, Haruo settled on baseball, and he’d spent his entire time in high school using it to escape his responsibilities as the Kajiwara family heir. Now eighteen, he figured he was onto a pretty good thing, though his parents maintained that he’d see the light eventually.

Swish
Crack!
Chi~ng

Swish
Crack!
Chi~ng

That was why, as the sun sank lower and lower, Haruo continued endlessly batting. His parents wouldn’t simply give up now that he’d found a new passion. Oh no, they maintained that any time he didn’t spend doing anything else productive, he could spend learning the family trade. If he wanted to keep away from magic, he had to stay at school, practicing baseball until well-after dark, until it was too late not to return home for dinner. Even then he’d have to spend some time on the damned stuff before bed, but at least this way it was kept to a minimum.

Swish
Crack!
Chi~ng

Swish
Crack!
Chi~ng

Eventually, as was often the case, Haruo found it impossible to keep his mind on the exercise. His body shifted over completely to muscle memory, and rumors from school swirled through Haruo’s mind as he sought something interesting to occupy his thoughts. There was the strange story that one of the younger girls, an underclassman named Shijou Ayaka, had shown up to school with a butler. Of course, from Haruo’s perspective nothing Shijou did could truly be all that strange. After all, the Shijou family was the Second Owner of the area, the administrators of magic. Whether she had some foreign magus in town on Association business and playing a role for laughs or they’d thought up some weird new kind of man-shaped familiar, anything was possible with a Shijou.

Then there was the disappearance of Student Council President Yumigawa. Yumigawa was a third-year, like Haruo, and for a long time Haruo had entertained a feeling of distant rivalry with the other boy. They were the two most popular male students at Kyoutenkan, after all, and opposite types; one the withdrawn, disciplined politician and the other the hot-blooded athlete. Whatever their differences, Haruo and Yumigawa had taken on similar roles for the girls at school, and Haruo often heard whatever rumors surrounded Yumigawa. Now, for the first time anyone could remember (in his entire life, according to one girl who’d followed him through schools
since elementary) Yumigawa had been absent. What was trivial for anyone else, Haruo thought dryly, made the headlines when it was the star student. But even he had to wonder, just what had happened to Mr. Perfect Attendance? If he’d kept a record that long, why break it now?

He couldn’t think about other people forever. Inevitably, Haruo’s mind came around to worry at the same subject that had been freaking him out for weeks, like your tongue unconsciously probing a toothache. The red bruise on his right hand. It had shown up about two weeks ago, and at first Haruo had just assumed he’d smacked it on something. Since then, though, it had just kept getting worse. Brighter red, more defined, just plain strange. Worse, it was starting to look like some kind of magic symbol. Haruo couldn’t stand the thought of having to go to his parents about it, and he’d kept it hidden from them up until now. He was half-sure this was another ploy from Dad, trying to get Haruo into magic by subterfuge. It wasn’t going to happen, but all the same... the mark kept worrying him.

Swish
Crack!
Chi~ng

Swish
Crack!
Smack.

A flat, fleshy noise in the shadows. It had gotten dark, and Haruo was used to observing the ball’s impact by the sound of it hitting the chain-link. This time, it hadn’t done so. Haruo took a step forward towards the fence, and stopped. Something in him was holding him back, telling him not to go ahead.

Out of the shadows at the end of the ballfield stepped a man quite out of place in the schoolyard. He was a bronzed figure out of myth, six feet tall and incredibly broad, covered in steely muscle. The man wore some kind of ancient armor that outlined the exact shape of his body, with a metal skirt and sandals that laced up his legs. Black eyes framed by curly black hair and beard stared out of that bronze visage. A sense of animal dread took hold of Haruo, an overwhelming intuition that this wasn’t a man at all, holding up the ball he’d caught, but a monster in human shape. Haruo didn’t run, though. Those eyes seemed to pin him down, hold him like a rodent caught in the gaze of a snake. The man grinned, and a silky-smooth, cloyingly sweet female voice came from behind Haruo.
“You shouldn’t hit balls into the dark, young man,” the unseen woman chided warmly. “Imagine if you’d hit my friend, instead of him catching it. He could have been hurt.” The last syllable was dragged out into a croon, as if the woman savored the prospect of the warrior being harmed. The woman spoke with a soft kansai accent that put Haruo in mind of biwa players, producing subtle entertainment to fill slow hours for the idle court. Haruo’s mind spun uselessly, trying to think and come up with some answers as to these people, but he couldn’t think. Not with those terrible eyes boring into him, not with the dread that the man would spring forward and—

“Grab him, Archer,” the woman commanded. “Let us see if this is the one.”

Haruo couldn’t see the man move. He only blurred, the baseball falling from where his hand had been, and then the side of Haruo’s face was pressed down into the dirt. Haruo’s head was wrapped up in one corded bronze hand, his right arm held out in the other. The man held him in place, gripping so hard that Haruo feared his wrist would snap, but apparently without rancor as he leaned down and spoke into Haruo’s ear, in a friendly, level tone. “Boy, don’t try to fight me here. Neither one of us will like what happens if you struggle.” Haruo went limp.

With his head now pressed down on its side, Haruo finally saw the woman as she bent to examine his right hand. She had black hair that fell beside her face in gentle waves, a creamy complexion, and elegant, refined features. Her body too captured his gaze, as it was voluptuously curved and put on display by a clinging silk dress. Put simply, Haruo found himself captivated even as he was terrified; a shiver of two kinds ran through him as her long fingernails traced the mark on his hand. Then she turned to face him, and said softly, “You are very lucky, young man. Because of this mark, you have the wonderful opportunity to help me obtain the Holy Grail.”
Friday, November 15, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

You briefly consider advising Vaisset to make a prompt attack on the enemy, but decide there are just too many unknown factors. After all, the first one to look for foes in the Akeldama was that war’s Saber, and he was also the first to die. No, better to be cautious. “I imagine the other Masters will be out prowling the city if the war’s begun,” you say. “For tonight we should remain here. I’ll guard you and your sister, while your familiars survey the city and collect the information we need to make any real plans.”

“Well, that seems reasonable enough,” Vaisset muses. Then he sits up, struck by an idea. “Say, Saber,” he says, “You’ve just reminded me. On that subject of scouting, what did you find on your expedition tonight?”

“What did I find?” You pause for a moment, and put on a bashful smile. “I may have to disappoint you, M. Vaisset,” you confess, “my findings do not amount to much.”

Vaisset looks at you flatly, waiting for you to continue.

“As I told you before, I was scouting the layout of your city when I felt the presence of a large source of energy nearby; likely a Servant. Hoping to get an idea of one of our enemies, I tracked it at some distance, but was unable to actually catch sight of the source before it was joined by another significant presence. The two came together downtown, and remained in one place for over an hour. At this point I deemed it possible that it was a trap, laid by multiple enemy Servants, and returned.”

“Intriguing,” Vaisset says, “I think you had a point about finding an ally, Saber. Too bad, then, that other Masters have had the idea as well. If they’re already
coming together, setting ambushes and so-on, we should, I think, be very cautious.”
He takes a drink of tea before continuing, “You have the right idea, Saber. We’ll stay
here tonight, and I’ll send out my birds to scan as much of Tokyo as they can.
Hopefully they’ll observe some conflict, or some other suspicious behavior, and we
can plan from there.” He sets his cup down and stands. “With that, Saber, good night.
I will send forth my familiars from my workshop, and after that retire to bed. Take up
whatever position you suppose most appropriate for guarding the manor.”

“Good night, M. Vaisset,” you say, standing and giving a nod, “let us hope the
morning’s report brings plentiful news.”

As Vaisset leaves the living room, you consider where best to guard the
building. It isn’t particularly large, but the matter does warrant some thought
nonetheless. Last night the cold of the rooftop proved soporific, but you remain keen
to find someplace that can survey the front garden. Eventually you decide on a
hallway on the second floor with a large protruding picture-window from which you
can easily view the yard and street. The spot seems to have been used as a reading
nook, since it has a conveniently placed armchair. Materializing your cloak and armor,
with your sword at the ready, you sink into the chair and begin the night’s watch. As
you do, you see many faint presences streak across the sky; the birds of wind Vaisset
has dispatched to be your eyes and ears.

The hours of the night pass tranquilly as you sit at your post. No new foe
appears, either overtly or by stealth. There is only the silent neighborhood, under the
cold light of the moon and stars. That moon catches your eye, though; it’s nearly full,
but waning. Slightly less round tonight than last night, you observe with an odd
moment of pleasure. For ten nights in Judas’ Akeldama, the moon was perfectly full
and golden. There were ten clear days of high summer and ten clear nights of full
moon in that lifeless city; though the time you spent there was only a fraction of your
life, the unnerving state of the place will never leave you; simple things like the
changing phase of the moon and the shifting weather that you’ve experienced today
feel like a welcome return to normalcy, even if you yourself have become unnatural.

Thinking on the topic of that unnatural state, you come to the subject of your
new identity. Alberich, a name offered to you by Adelheid; she said it was the name of
an ancient mage-king, who sought power sufficient to rule over the earth. It certainly
feels right for you now, though the memory wasn’t consciously in your mind when
you gave that name to Liliesviel von Einzbern. But what of the other two things
requiring names? A sword and a cloak, both with the power of your origin,
Nothingness and Void. Within yourself, you can feel that they are your Noble
Phantasms; the most powerful tools at a Servant’s disposal, essential parts of his
legend that must have their names called to reveal their true power. Taking a handful of silk in your armored fist, you hold the material up, examining it in the starlight. Black, dark enough almost to absorb light rather than reflect it; shot through with the red of your own blood, spilled to create the item.

The image of Circe, your sweet and devoted Servant, bending down to create it, springs unbidden to your mind. In your memory, you watch her bring black threads from nothing, creating them out of mystic energy, and bind them together by soaking them in the pulp of your blood and bone. Then, with the cloth itself made, she painstakingly inscribes the strange and ancient arcane sigils that would, on the cloak’s completion, lose their shape and flow together to make the vertical lines that divide the cloak’s darkness. Outside the window of her workshop, the stars shine down as they shine on you now. You watch in your memory as, while you sleep in another room, Circe works through the night to complete this garment in time for the final struggle against Archer and Rider.

You blink rapidly, shaking your head to dispel the vision and the emotion it brings. You didn’t watch Circe make your cloak! You have no idea whether she worked through the night or not; it’s only a fantasy, the product of your imagination and the lack of stimulation from your duty as a guard. Still, out of your musings one concrete idea has emerged: a name for the cloak. In memory of Circe’s devotion, it will have a Greek name: Kenótis. The name of your sword remains uncertain, but it will come in time.

**Status Updated**

Soon enough, the sun rises and you breathe a sigh of relief. Your human impulses aren’t as gone as they should be for a Servant, and remaining awake through the night has been something of a trial. Now that dawn has come, however, things should become somewhat easier. It isn’t long after sunrise that you hear an alarm go off on the floor above, followed by the sound of Ayaka getting up and beginning her preparations for the day. After yesterday, she’ll probably be expecting you to accompany her to school again, you consider. Since she seems to rise before her brother, she’ll likely be making breakfast as well; the memory of eating only once yesterday isn’t a happy one. On the other hand, following a teenage girl around and mooching food from her isn’t exactly your primary goal in the Holy Grail War. Perhaps it would be better to stay here until you can have your promised morning meeting with Vaisset.

[X] Go downstairs and meet Ayaka for breakfast before escorting her to school.
(Compassion)
[ ] Remain at your post and wait for Vaisset to rise. Better to prioritize strategizing today. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You continue to think about what to do with your morning for a while, watching the brightening sunlight through the window as you hear Ayaka make her way downstairs. Eventually you decide to prioritize your breakfast and the girl’s protection by meeting her in the kitchen. You don’t know how late Vaisset sleeps, and after all he did tell you to keep both he and his sister safe. Decision made, you head downstairs and find the girl frying eggs in the kitchen.

“Good morning, miss Ayaka,” you say, sitting down at the kitchen table.

“Would you mind making enough for two?”

The girl turns in surprise to look at you. “Oh, sure,” she answers, sounding confused, “but I didn’t know Servants ate. Don’t you live on energy?”

It’s certainly true that you never saw Circe or Adelheid eat for more than the pleasure of it, so you suppose she has a point. You, however, don’t seem to share their freedom from need. Then again, you remember Perseus eating a great deal, and there was Emiya’s comment about Sabers and appetites. Perhaps it varies from Servant to Servant. “Mystic energy is essential,” you explain, “but that does not excuse the necessity of food. Anything alive must eat, I suppose.”

“Huh...” Ayaka still sounds offput by the idea, but she adds another two eggs to the pan anyway. It isn’t long before she’s serving them up with toast and sitting down across from you to eat. “You’re up earlier this morning, Saber-san,” the girl remarks. “Not sleeping on the roof last night?”

“Heh heh,” you give the jibe a resigned chuckle. “No, Miss Ayaka, I was able to find a better place from which to guard your home; and I did hear you awakening this morning. You’re an early riser.”

Ayaka shrugs. “It’s a habit, I guess,” she says with a look of reminiscence, “my mother always used to have me do a daily sacrifice before dawn for the Shijou magic. Since she and dad passed, I’ve been just keeping up with school, but I’ll probably always wake up early.”

“A daily sacrifice?” You echo her words, as the idea catches your interest. You hadn’t noticed Truvietianne or Circe doing anything like that, after all. “What purpose did that serve in your magical training?”

“It’s because of our specialty,” Ayaka says, putting down her fork for a moment to focus on explaining. “The Shijou are hereditarily aligned to Water, with a
specialty in blood, and we’ve cultivated a knowledge of Connection magic, as well as archaic black magic. This means we can get energy a lot more efficiently with something like animal sacrifice than when we use our own Od. That’s why all of the Shijou heirs learn sacrifice as one of the basic techniques.” Then Ayaka pauses, before blushing and laughing embarrassedly. “To tell you the truth, though, I could never work up the nerve to kill the doves. Mother got very angry with me over that eventually.”

Although she’s trying to laugh it off, you can see that her inability to please the now-dead woman eats at Ayaka. Before you can think of something comforting to say, however, she changes the subject.

“But why talk about me,” she says. “What did you and Nii-san figure out last night? Have a plan to win the war?”

Now it’s your turn to be on the bashful side. “Not as such,” you admit.

“Things are very much in the preliminary stages. For the time being, we intend to maintain a defensive position while gathering information on the enemy.”

Ayaka finishes the last bite of her breakfast and gets up to head for the door. “Oh,” she says, upturned tone turning the sound into a question. “Why were you out so late then, Saber-san? I thought you must’ve been out fighting.”

“No, I was merely doing some reconnaissance,” you say, following the girl out of the house. “M. Vaisset informed me last night that the final Servant was summoned, but prior to that I felt confident of being able to scout the city without finding myself engaged in battle.”

“So did you find anyone doing this scouting?” Ayaka looks at you interestedly as the two of you walk side-by-side. “I guess not, if you’re still planning to wait at home.”

“It was... inconclusive,” you say. “I did encounter someone who seemed to be an enemy Master, but I couldn’t be certain. She was with several people who seemed to be neither humans nor Servants. It was a very odd situation.” You think back to your encounter with Liliesviel von Einzbern as you speak. The girl was surely the Einzbern Master, but then what could explain the three other occupants of the car? They didn’t have the quality of mystic energy that marks a Servant, you don’t think. There was a strange feeling of kinship you felt when dealing with the Emiyas’ Rider that you can only explain as the connection between Servants, and that certainly wasn’t there with any member of the Einzbern party. But then, what could explain the mysterious nature of the three passengers with abnormal energy?
You’ve been quiet for a while, you realize. You clear your head and finish, “at any rate, I am now putting my hope in the capability of your brother’s familiars to gather more wide-ranging information than I can.”

Ayaka mutters something you can’t quite make out about her brother not deserving hope, but something else shocks you out of the consideration of her comment. You’re just outside the school now, and the two of you are moving through a scattered crowd of students to get Ayaka to the front gate. In this pedestrian atmosphere, however, something chills you: the unmistakable presence of a Servant. It seems to be somewhere down the street, at the opposite end of the group of students making their way into the school, but you can’t tell exactly where the thing is. Still, if you’ve noticed it the chances are that it’s noticed you as well. A battle may be unavoidable at this point, and in that case you need to draw the enemy away from Ayaka.

[ ] Part ways with Ayaka, pushing through the crowd towards the presence of the enemy Servant. (Pride)

[X] Shepherd Ayaka to the gate, then wait there and see if the enemy comes to you. (Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Keeping your cool, you feel for the distance between you and the enemy Servant. It’s at the opposite end of the school’s long walled entrance, moving towards the gate with the students from the less wealthy neighborhoods. You put a hand on Ayaka’s shoulder, steering her more firmly towards the gate.

The girl lets out a quiet sound of indignation, turning towards you and hissing, “Saber-san, what are you-”

You lean down and whisper in a grave tone, “Stay quiet and keep walking, Miss Ayaka. This could be a matter of life and death.”

The girl looks at you suspiciously, but the firmness in your tone convinces her. Then she scans the crowd with nervous eyes, looking for the danger. Not finding any, she allows you to walk her to the gate. You can feel her shaking slightly under your hand; although she does a praiseworthy job of projecting outward calm and casual morning friendliness, your warning is affecting her. As you walk, you focus on the enemy Servant’s energy, making sure it doesn’t draw too close. It keeps its distance until you get Ayaka to the gate.
As she passes through, you lean down once more and mutter into her ear, "Miss Ayaka, hurry to your classes. There is a Servant approaching." The girl blanches, but does manage to hold back from making any noise of surprise. Taking your advice, she quickly turns and walks quickly through the crowd of students towards the school building.

Your opposite number seems to be taking the encounter at a more relaxed pace, approaching amidst the crowd without exceeding their speed. All at once, however, the presence fades. It’s moving quickly away from the crowd of students, and no-one still there exudes an unusual presence or looks in any way out of place. With no physical body separating from the group, it’s plain that the enemy Master has sent their Servant away in spirit form. The students file past you, the Master indistinguishable from the ordinary schoolchildren. Your prey has slipped by you.

The Servant, however, might not be lost. You can still faintly feel its energy as it moves from rooftop to rooftop, quickly putting distance between you two. It may not be too late to chase after it now, but there’s no telling where it’s going or how long it will keep you from meeting with Vaisset to discuss his familiars’ findings last night.

[ ] Go after the enemy Servant. (Pride)
[X] Return to the manor. (Duty)
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

As the presence of the enemy Servant withdraws, your first instinct is to tense for a leap, following it over the rooftops. You hold back, though, taking a deep breath to relax. There’s no point in chasing an unknown enemy to an unknown location right now; it might be planning an ambush, and even if the enemy isn’t setting a trap chasing after it will certainly delay your strategy meeting with Vaisset. The most important thing you needed to accomplish, you decide, was keeping the enemy Master from bringing their Servant into the school. With that done, you can return to the Shijou Manor.

The walk back to the manor is fortunately uneventful, and when you enter you find Vaisset eating his own later breakfast in the kitchen: fried eggs and toast, like his sister. He looks up as you enter, swallowing a mouthful of food before greeting you. "Watching over my sister again this morning, Saber?"

"Correct," you say with a nod. "I saw her safely to school today, but it is not certain that the school will remain safe indefinitely. There seems to be another Master in the area."
Vaisset’s face darkens at your words. “What do you mean, Saber? You didn’t leave her alone with an enemy, surely.”

“No with the Servant, no,” you reply, “and I remain unsure about the Master. I felt the presence of an enemy Servant near the school gate when we arrived, but it fled in spirit form once I drew near. I believe the Master is one of the students, but that may not necessarily be true.”

“I see.” Vaisset lapses into silence for a few moments, eating thoughtfully. “There are other magus families in the area, as I’ve told you,” he says, “but I’m not certain if any have heirs attending Ayaka’s academy. How frustrating.” He thinks for a while longer, continuing to eat his breakfast, before seeming to come to a conclusion. “I suppose it isn’t a question that needs to be answered immediately. No magus under my jurisdiction would think of doing battle with mundane witnesses about. Be certain you’re there to collect Ayaka when her classes end, and we needn’t worry.”

“I will do so,” you say with a nod. “Now, what about your reconnaissance last night, M. Vaisset? Did your familiars discover anything of note?”

Vaisset shakes his head, wearing an expression of disappointment. “I’m afraid not,” he says. “It’s possible that we were overly enthusiastic in thinking the enemy would rush out to prowl the city that first night. Rider was only summoned around midnight, leaving precious little time to battle. We may need to fight the Holy Grail War under the cover of darkness, but that doesn’t excuse the requirement of sleep. Most likely, we’ll be better able to discover enemy action in the early evening, just after dark.”

“You could find no traces of the enemy at all?” Not wanting to believe the disappointing outcome, you prod Vaisset for further information.

“That isn’t precisely it,” Vaisset says. “I found no definite signs of the enemy, but there were some rather odd circumstances my familiars discovered.”

Now this is something that could potentially prove useful. “Odd circumstances? What do you mean by that?”

“The destroyed houses were the most apparently bizarre,” Vaisset begins. “There were three houses in a small area, all of which looked as if they’d burned down only recently. And yet, none were adjacent. How did contemporaneous fires occur in houses quite unconnected from one another? The work of an enemy magus seems likely to me, but his motive is uncertain.” It takes a few seconds, during which Vaisset appears to be carefully picking his words, before he continues.

“The second strange thing my familiars saw was misfortune.”

You can’t help but speak up here. “Misfortune? How can you consider that to be the work of a Master and Servant?”
“It was very strange,” Vaisset says pensively. “Perhaps I am simply too cut off from ordinary people to understand, but it seemed as if there was a wave of misfortune sweeping through the people. On the street there were erratic lights, failures to brake properly by drivers, jaywalking, and most of all stumbling. Everyone I saw was falling down continuously, seeming to trip over their own feet more often than not. It was as if every possible stroke of bad luck that could affect the streets broke out at once.”

“That does sound very strange,” you allow, “but I still doubt it was the work of an enemy Master. Faulty power and drunken pedestrians seem more likely to blame.”

“Perhaps you’re right, Saber,” says Vaisset. “Still, the affair seemed thoroughly unnatural. In any case, those two items were the only major disturbances I observed in the city. What are your thoughts, Saber?”

[ ] Investigate the burnt houses. (Pride)
[X] Investigate the bad luck downtown. (Duty)
[ ] Focus on the enemy Servant near Ayaka’s school. (Pride/Compassion)
[ ] Advise Vaisset to do something else (Write in)

“If it seems so unnatural to you, we’ll simply have to determine the truth of the matter in person,” you declare. You still have your own doubts that the chaotic scene Vaisset described was the product of anything more than the late hour in a crowded city, but there’s no harm in following up on it. Cultivating a good relationship with your Master, you reason, is more important than gratifying your own skepticism.

“Just a moment, Saber,” Vaisset’s words and disapproving tone cut through your train of thought. “What’s this ‘we,’ business? I believe we discussed the matter of your operating independently after you were summoned. If the matter warrants investigation, you shall seek the enemy without my presence.”

You sigh. There’s the rich man’s son, used to getting whatever he likes. “The point of ‘this we business’, as you put it, is efficacy, M. Vaisset,” you reply acidly. “Masters can detect other Masters, can you not? Servants can detect other Servants. Thus, if we would ferret out our foes we must do so in person and together. Whatever your preferences on the matter may be, this is the appropriate manner of prosecuting the Holy Grail War.” As Vaisset opens his mouth for an indignant response, you raise
a finger to cut him off. “Furthermore, I would remind you that you have agreed to
defere to my superior expertise regarding the planning of the War.”

“Alright, Saber, you’ve made your point,” Vaisset says with resignation. “We
shall have to go downtown tonight, after darkness falls, and inspect the area,” he
pauses to sigh, “on foot. I can only hope that my familiars will find something more
concrete today, and you can pursue that next lead without my presence.”

“It’s only the Holy Grail, don’t put yourself out,” you mutter under your
breath. Vaisset’s disinterest in the wish offered by the ritual may be to your
advantage, but it certainly has its downsides. The man seems to consider the entire
War to be a rather intrusive bother, and his attitude is getting on your last nerve.

“What was that, Saber?” Vaisset eyes you irritably. You may not have been
as quiet as you’d intended.

“I said, why wait ‘til evening to go out,” you lie, spinning an alternative. “We
shouldn’t be wasting time, M. Vaisset. Why not seize the moment and investigate
downtown right now?”

Vaisset gives you a condescending smirk. “Whatever sort of hero you were in
life,” he says, “you certainly were not a magus. There must be no witnesses to magic.
If we were to encounter the enemy in broad daylight, we would need to be prepared to
eliminate every bystander on the street. Just why did you think the War was fought
at night, Saber?”

“In my experience, it isn’t,” you return. “We were fighting twenty-four hours
a day in the Akeldama. I’ll bear your schedule in mind in the future.”

“Do,” Vaisset says dismissively. “Speaking of my schedule, I shall have to get
to work shortly. If I must be out traipsing around in search of the enemy tonight, I
really must devote my day to research. Why don’t you go and wait at the academy
for Ayaka? That mysterious Servant is weighing on my mind.”

“Very well, M. Vaisset.” With that, you turn and exit the manor without
pause. You’ve had quite enough of Vaisset’s attitude for one evening. It’s still
morning, however, even if it is getting towards lunchtime. If you simply stand guard
at the school, as Vaisset suggested, you’ll have quite a long wait ahead of you before
Ayaka is finished. Knowing that an enemy magus is unlikely to seek out a fight in the
daytime, perhaps you could find a better way to spend your time.

[X] Wait at the school for Ayaka to finish her classes.
[ ] Visit the Emiya house. (With what in mind?)
Go looking for something else. (Where in the city do you want to go, or what do you want to look for?)

Looking out at the street ahead of you, a few options come to mind. You could visit the Emiya family and see whether that unusual spellcaster has any new input for you regarding the Holy Grail War. Alternatively, you might spend the day practicing your magecraft. You may not have learned many techniques, but surely practicing the basics serves well in any pursuit. After some thought, however, you put aside both of these notions. The most important thing for you to do is stand guard at the school, with the mysterious presence of the enemy Servant. Vaissel may have any number of high-minded notions about how the War ought to be fought, but there’s ultimately nothing to guarantee that his view is the consensus. Whoever was giving that Servant its orders obviously wasn’t above moving around in the day accompanied by a superhuman fighter; the entire scheme of retreat may well have been a scheme to lull you into a false sense of security and then, under the false impression that she is your Master, kill Ayaka! Indeed, a crisis may be unfolding at this very moment!

As your thoughts run away with you, you pick up speed, fairly racing to Kyoutenkan Academy with visions of gory death flashing through your mind. How could you have been so foolish? The enemy Servant is probably stalking defenseless Ayaka right now, waiting for the perfect moment to kill her; or to save time they may be indiscriminately gutting the student body one by one, or even burning the school to the ground!

Or... doing nothing. You feel a bit foolish as you reach the school to find it just the same as you left it, with no impression of a Servant’s presence on the grounds. You’re not certain your perception extends to the entire property, of course. Nevertheless, there doesn’t seem to be anything amiss with the school. It’s the middle of the last morning class before the lunch break, and through the windows you can see students shiftingrestlessly in their seats, mentally urging teachers to hurry up and get it over with. One window is angles such that from your position you watch as a teacher reaches the end of her patience and angrily rebukes a student, although the class’ reaction is obscured from your view. In other words, things are running perfectly as normal at Kyoutenkan.

Moreover, you feel the same presence as this morning outside of the school. It seems the enemy Servant either had the same concern for a student that you did or is here for some other reason, as the presence of its spirit is quite apparent at the opposite end of the block. With studied calm, you approach the invisible presence.
This time it doesn’t retreat, but draws near to you at the same pace. Finally you meet, close enough to speak, in front of the school gate. The Servant materializes.

_Huh...?

Confusion is what first runs through your mind on seeing the enemy Servant. Looking at him, you’d believe he was the teenage student, and not his Master. Standing before you is a young blonde man, with blue eyes, tousled hair, and an impetuous, energetic expression. Though you know for a fact that you really are young, and this is a resurrected spirit of some long-dead figure, you still feel old looking at him! Like yourself, he’s adapted to modern garb, wearing a black cashmere overcoat, white shirt, and navy slacks. As soon as he’s materialized, he claps his hands together and starts rubbing them. “Fwough! Cold out here, isn’t it,” he exclaims.

“Don’t we get used to modern conveniences fast?”

When you return a blank stare to his comment, the young man gives you a lopsided grin, saying, “Hey, no need to be so standoffish. We’re in the same boat here, right? I’m Rider, by the way.” This eminently gregarious fellow actually sticks his hand out for you to shake. Feeling like a bit of a fool, you allow yourself to be carried along in his pace and shake the proffered hand.

“You may call me Saber,” you answer stiffly. You’re still not sure what to make of this new Rider, and wait for him to propel the conversation he’s dragged you into along.

“Oh, you’re suspicious of me,” he says wryly. “I get it, I get it. We’re meant to kill each other, so you don’t feel like a little chat. But really, Saber, we’re in a position to sympathize with one another. Look!” He gestures to the school, sweeping an arm out to encompass the grounds. “You showed up here escorting your Master this morning, right? It was the same for me! Then we noticed another Servant, bolted, and came back to check on them! Now I bet you’re planning on staying here ’til classes are done, so you can make sure your Master gets home safe, right?”

“You have the gist of it,” you allow.

“Well then,” Rider continues, good cheer veritably bursting out of him, “like I said, we’re in the same boat! Now, we both know there’s no fighting in the day, so we might as well be friendly while we wait. How’s the War been for you so far, Saber?”

[X] How do you respond to Rider? Write in as much or as little detail as you like.

You may as well play along with the other Servant, you decide. Whether he’s trying to deceive you or just foolishly friendly, there’s the potential for you to gain valuable information either way. So you put on an act of relaxing, opening up to him.
a bit in your posture and answering him in a friendlier tone than you’d used to introduce yourself.

“For me, the War has been uneventful,” you say. “In fact, you are the first Servant I’ve encountered thus far; and an unusual one at that. What has you so cheerful, Rider?”

Rider grins as he answers. “What has me so cheerful? You should know that as well as I do. A new life after all these years! A shot at the Holy Grail! Who wouldn’t be cheerful about this kind of circumstance? And besides, there’s the company. Think about it, Saber, this War is the only gathering in history where we have the chance to meet the world’s finest heroes, with a guarantee of no fakers, exaggerators, or other con men around. There’s no mortal social club that can make a boast like that!”

Given your nature, you suppose you’d fall under the definition of an exaggerator. Certainly you haven’t appeared in any legends, and your abilities as a Servant seem to be rather higher than those you had as a modified human. Clearly Rider isn’t in possession of all the facts regarding who can and cannot fill the role of Servant, but you don’t trouble yourself to correct him. If his friendliness is due to an impression of your nonexistent heroism, there’s no need to ruin that. Instead, you ask, “And have you availed yourself of the opportunity by meeting some of our august competitors?”

Rider shakes his head morosely. “No,” he says, “not so many as I’d hoped. I had in mind some kind of meeting of all seven Masters when the War began, but I guess these magi aren’t interested in that kind of thing. I’ve only gotten the chance to meet one other Servant, and with him I’ve been sworn to secrecy! It’s a real disappointment. You think you can sit down and discuss what it means to be a hero with the great examples from history, and instead it’s all secrets and false names, going around invisible and only fighting at night... don’t you think these magi are a pack of rogues, Saber? I mean, the attitude they’ve got in summoning up heroes and ordering them around like this almost offsets the favor of bringing us back in the first place!” Throughout this diatribe, Rider frequently gesticulates, conveying his attitude by vehement hand gestures as well as his widely ranging of tone of voice.

“It is a rather arrogant act, binding a hero,” you allow. If truth be told, it had always struck you as a bit presumptuous for contemporary people to act as Masters of legendary figures. Of course, for one of such obvious superiority as yourself it was perfectly acceptable, but the majority of humanity doesn’t deserve the same allowance. Rider has a point, if a very minor one. “However,” you continue, “there is another side to consider. As you’ve said, it is through them that we are given the opportunity to seize the Grail. Furthermore, they supply us with the energy necessary
to live. As a child dependent on its parents for sustenance must obey them, so we are bound to our Masters.”

Rider makes a dismissive wave of his hand. “Well, you know that’s not exactly true. There is the other way, getting energy from blood, if you don’t mind putting your principles aside to do it.”

“Surely a man who lightly sets aside his principles cannot be considered a great hero,” you counter. “The tragic death as a consequence of preferring principles to self-preservation is a classic element of a hero’s life.”

“Fair enough, Saber, you’ve got me there,” Rider says laughingly. “That’s why we’re both waiting here for our Masters to finish school instead of wreaking havoc and looking for the other Servants!” Then he pauses for a moment, his expression darkening, before continuing. “Listen, Saber,” he says seriously, “why don’t we put the scheming of the magi aside and have a proper duel? You and I, one-on-one, right here. We can come back tonight, after dark, and settle at least one Servant before our Masters have the chance to set up secret alliances, start killing each other, or any of that filth. Either you’ll be eliminated, or I will, and it’ll be that simple. What do you say?”

“Well, that’s quite a suggestion,” you say, momentarily taken aback. After collecting yourself, though, you decide to...

[ ] Take Rider up on his offer of a duel. It may not have been your method in the last Grail War, but Saber is a far more direct Servant than Caster. The idea of cleanly defeating the one Servant you’ve encountered and taking a clear step towards victory excites you. (Duty)

[X] Turn Rider’s idea down. As with the last Holy Grail War, you want to gather information and allies before any actual battle. You may not have Circe’s abilities at your disposal anymore, but that setback shouldn’t change your overall approach. A careful method will also minimize danger to Vaisset and Ayaka, the primary objective Vaisset had given you. (Compassion)

[ ] Challenge Rider to a fight here and now! You’ve had enough of waiting around, and the street is clear; the neighborhood is silent; there’s no need to be worried about the witness rule of the magi at the moment. If Rider has the courage to duel you, you’d rather not postpone it. (Pride)

[ ] Respond in some other way. (Write in)
“A very unique suggestion indeed,” you say, humor creeping into your tone. Finally you can’t hold it in any more, and let out a guffaw. “But I, fufu... I, hahaha, have to refuse!” You grin down at the strangely youthful spirit. “Rider, you seem to have developed a severe misconception about me,” you explain, getting a grip on yourself once more. “I’m not some martial-minded samurai or machismo-obsessed cowboy, ready to blindly accept and walk into a duel at such and such a time, in such and such a place, for honor’s sake alone!” Of course, the only gunslinger you’ve met personally was far from the dueling type himself. Still, it is an archetype and the comparison brings your point home.

“This is a war, Rider,” you continue gravely, “and I could no more set aside what you call ‘the scheming of the magi’ than I could give up the blade that dubs me Saber.” You shake your head in mock dismay at the foolish proposition. “I look forward to meeting you on the battlefield, Rider,” you continue, “but if you can’t understand why I’d be a fool to accept such a proposition, I expect you’ll be killed by another before I have my chance at your life.”

Anger flares up in Rider’s eyes, and he exclaims, “Developed a misconception? You’re the one who was talking about how a hero couldn’t bend on principle a minute ago! Now you laugh at the idea of a man-to-man fight, the most natural thing for any warrior worth the title! What kind of man are you, anyway?”

“One with a different idea of heroism from yours, plainly,” you answer coldly. “I do cleave to my principles, Rider. They may be different from your own, but I am certainly true to them.” Of course, now you’re feeding the Servant a wholesale lie. You’ve never clung to any ideological principle, before or after your change in the Akeldama. Still, if you’re going to represent yourself as a proper Servant; as a heroic spirit, however removed from the norm; you certainly can’t represent yourself as a ball of pride, seeking improvement of your own station for no particular reason beyond the desire for personal gratification. “I believe,” you declare, “in demonstrating fidelity by using the most certain methods to achieve my Master’s ends. Catering to a warrior’s pride by orchestrating a duel is far from the most efficient path to victory.”

Rider’s expression is now utterly transformed by rage. “A view of things fitter for a slave than a knight,” he spits. “You should be ashamed to call yourself Saber! In fact, maybe I’ll cut you down right now!” To your shock, the air around Rider is filled with the shimmering light of a Servant’s materializing equipment. He really is preparing to fight you, here in broad daylight!

Before Rider’s weaponry can coalesce, however, the mood is shattered by the tolling of the lunch bell at school. Interrupted by the chimes, Rider looks for a
moment as if he’s snapped out of a trance. The materialization of his armaments stops
as suddenly as it had begun, and calm returns to his features. “No,” he says, “it can’t
be done now, can it? But mark my words, Saber! I’ll be the one to put an end to you!”

With this parting sally, Rider fades into spirit form and disappears from view.
You feel his presence retreat to the opposite end of the street in front of Kyoutenkan
Academy, though he doesn’t actually leave. Given the discussion you’ve had, you
suppose he doesn’t trust you not to break into the school and attack his Master. After
Rider retreats, though, the afternoon passes uneventfully. When Ayaka leaves her
classes Rider remains at a safe distance as you meet her, and her gaggle of friends
make a minimal fuss over you. What’s new and exciting one day is ordinary and not
worth commenting on the next day, apparently. Rider still waits in the same place as
you and Ayaka depart. Either his Master is staying late at school, or he’s being very
careful to ensure you don’t discover his Master’s identity.

“Saber-san,” Ayaka whispers, keeping her voice low enough that only you can
hear as the two of you part ways with her schoolmates, “you seem worried. What
happened with the Servant you noticed this morning?”

Once you’re well out of earshot of the other homeward-bound students, you
answer. “It seems one of your schoolmates is a Master, Miss Ayaka. Like myself, the
Servant was there to protect the student. I would warn you to be on your guard with
another Master skulking about, but as you don’t have a set of command spells for this
person to detect, you should be safe.” You pause for a moment, considering the
matter. “Of course,” you continue, “if you do find yourself in danger, you have only
to call out for me. As long as that Master is there during your school hours, I’ll be
waiting by the gate to protect you. Remember that, Miss Ayaka.”

“Th-thank you, Saber-san,” Ayaka replies demurely, not meeting your eyes.
For a time, the two of you walk in silence after that, as you consider the ramifications
of Rider’s grudge against you and Ayaka turns in her mind whatever thoughts occupy
a young girl. When you’re about halfway back to the Shijou house, she speaks up
again. “Isn’t it a bit wasteful, though?”

“What do you mean,” you reply. “What is it you feel is being wasted, and by
what?”

“Well,” Ayaka begins hesitantly, “I’m happy you’re coming to Kyoutenkan to
protect me, of course, but wouldn’t it be better for you and Nii-san if you spent the
time with him? I know the fighting is only at night, but you could make plans for the
war or cooperate on deciding what magecraft could help you, and stuff like that,
right?”
You chuckle dryly. “Your brother doesn’t take a very active view of the War, Miss Ayaka,” you say, putting Vaisset’s acute disinterest as positively as you can. “He is not very fond of my presence either, and would very much rather have me guarding you than distracting him from his magical research with tedious details of the Holy Grail War. I too would hate to see a lovely young girl like you come to harm, so of course I have no qualms about the duty. We’ll manage the War at night, have no fear.”

“If you say so...” Ayaka assents reluctantly, but the worry doesn’t leave her voice. “Just be careful, alright Saber-san?”

“Of course,” you say. “I will devote the utmost care to bringing victory to you and your brother.”

Ayaka sighs and mutters something you can’t quite make out, before quickening her pace to accelerate ahead of you. During the conversation you’ve reached the Shijou house, and she hurriedly strides up the walkway and into the house, leaving you out in the yard. It’s about 16:00, and you have a few hours before dark with no orders from Vaisset. How do you want to spend them?

[ ] Guard the manor until sunset, so you can bring Vaisset out and head downtown as quickly as possible. (Duty)

[ ] Return to the school and see if Rider is still there. Maybe you can track down his Master, or make a surprise attack on the Servant once darkness falls. You may have rejected a scheduled duel, but that doesn’t rule out an impromptu battle. (Pride/Duty)

[X] Go inside and talk to one of the Shijou siblings. Who, and about what? (Trait dependent on subject)

[ ] Kill time and get something to eat at the local shopping district. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After considering guarding the manor from the garden for a moment, you decide to follow Ayaka inside. You can get some lunch in the kitchen, and tell Vaisset about your encounter with Rider. As you walk in, Ayaka disappears around a corner, presumably headed for her room. You make your own way to the kitchen, where you fear you’ll have to cook for yourself. Fortunately, this turns out not to be the case. The fridge contains several onigiri, presumably made and kept to serve as a between-
meal snack, either for Ayaka while studying, or for Vaisset. In any case, you doubt either will blame you for eating them. You take several and wolf them down quickly, mitigating your hunger. As it turns out, they’re filled with salt-baked salmon, powerfully flavored to contrast nicely with the unseasoned rice. All-in-all, an excellent snack.

With food taken care of, you move on to your other task and descend into Vaisset’s basement workshop. As you’re going down the stairs, you hear the excited cry of, “Aha! At last!” followed by the sound of crackling flames. A pillar of fire briefly flares on Vaisset’s worktable, you see as you enter the room. Just a moment later, though, the whirling cylinder vanishes, snuffed out all at once, and Vaisset lets fly with a flurry of cursing.

Smirking at his mishap, you ask, “Trouble with your magic, M. Vaisset? What are you attempting there?”

“Synthetic transmutation of the Five Great Elements,” he answers irritably. “It would revolutionize magecraft, if I could make it work. Hello, Saber. What are you doing down here, anyway?”

“I’ve come to report some valuable information to my Master,” you say. “Of course, if you’re too busy with your troubles, I don’t mind waiting.”

“No, no, now is as good a time as any,” he answers, gesturing for you to sit down somewhere. There are no seats in the workshop other than the one he’s occupying. “I assume you’ve brought Ayaka home,” he continues, “so what do you need to tell me? What is it that happened with that Servant at her school?”

“That is the subject, yes,” you begin. “Rider is the Servant who was there. He approached me to challenge me to a duel tonight, of all things. Apparently his Master attends Kyoutenkan Academy and the fellow is eager to remove the danger I represent. Naturally I refused, as he was likely preparing a trap. He was still there when I collected your sister, and I was unable to identify his Master.”

“That tells us little,” Vaisset says with dismay, “although you did do well to reject the duel. I’m sure it was an ambush. What about his appearance? Was there anything about him that gave you an impression of his identity?”

You shake your head. “He was wearing modern clothing, like myself, so I could gather nothing from his equipment. A fair youth with blonde hair and blue eyes; he seemed to be a Caucasian teenager, perhaps as old as twenty, but no older. He mentioned dueling as being appropriate for a knight, but I don’t know whether that was a product of his origins or his expectations regarding my being Saber.”

“An enigma, then,” Vaisset muses. “We shall have to hope for more information in the near future. Perhaps tomorrow you should stay at Kyoutenkan
late into the evening with Ayaka, and find his Master in that way. Whether they leave together after the end of the normal classes or the Master ends up the last student there, I’m sure you could determine his identity.”

Shocked to hear this coming from the usually overprotective Vaisset, you exclaim, “You would endanger your sister in such a way?”

“Of course I hate for her to be in danger,” he says dismissively, “but you’d be there with her, and she will surely remain in danger as long as a Master remains at the school. I want you to ferret out the enemy tomorrow, Saber. That is an order.”

“As you wish, M. Vaisset.”

“Now,” he says decisively, getting to his feet, “I somehow doubt I will reach my goal tonight with this innovation. It should be getting dark soon, yes? Let’s go and see if you can find the culprit for the strange events I observed downtown last night.”

Without waiting for a reply from you, Vaisset strides out of his workshop and up to the ground level. You follow him, and soon discover he’s headed for the garage, where he gets behind the wheel of an expensive-looking black sedan. “Get in,” he tells you through the window as he starts the car. “I assume the Holy Grail has made you aware of automobiles, yes?”

You take a seat beside him and answer. “I understand them perfectly well. That said, I also have the impression that public transportation is the norm in this country. I was a bit surprised at your choice to drive.”

Vaisset scoffs. “Public transportation, indeed,” he says derisively. “I love privacy in all my pursuits; there’s nothing I despise quite like the experience of sharing a train with hundreds of other passengers, crowded in at rush-hour. Besides that, I quite enjoy driving.”

“At any rate, I’m sure it is the more convenient option,” you reply, and Vaisset pulls out of the garage. The rest of the drive is silent, as the two of you cruise through Tokyo’s evening. Vaisset evidently doesn’t share his sister’s prying curiosity as to your experience seeing the modern world. He’s content to drive without making conversation.

After about a half-hour, Vaisset pulls into a space in a downtown parking garage. As the car shuts down, he says, “this ought to be close enough. I believe we can overlook the same intersection my familiars were surveying last night from the roof of this building. Follow me, Saber.”

He gets out of the car and you walk beside him, the two of you ascending the several remaining floors before roof access. Unfortunately, this building lacks an
elevator, which means the two of you spend a good ten or fifteen minutes climbing the spiraling ramp, passing between parked cars. Aside from the vehicles, the garage is deserted; you don’t see another living soul between your parking space and the roof. This is laid out identically to the floors below, with cars parked around the edge of the building. There’s a cement wall to mark off the edge, but it’s lower than waist-high. Nothing to impair your view, which is excellent. The high garage gives you a wide view of downtown Tokyo and the bustling crowd on the street below. Lights flicker in advertisement of all kinds of goods, services, and most frequently foods. People swarm down the sidewalk, looking for a moment of happiness on a Friday night. Cars move sluggishly down the street, momentum choked by the lights and the traffic.

What you don’t see is any sign of magical interference or conspicuous bad luck. Everything looks quite ordinary to you; pedestrians and vehicles alike. “Vaisset, there is nothing down there that suggests magical interference,” you announce.

“Just so,” he replies, looking up the street with you. “It’s utterly different from what I saw through my familiars. And yet, that’s the very same intersection there.” He points, signaling one junction of streets among many. It remains quite ordinary to your eyes. “Perhaps they were only experimenting with an ability,” he mutters, “or they intend to begin whatever they were up to only in the small hours of the morning.”

You don’t get a chance to address this point, as your attention is suddenly commandeered by a far more pressing matter. You can feel the powerful energy of a Servant at the base of this building. You peer down and see a tall, heavily-built man enter the parking garage. Once he’s in, the presence begins to quickly move towards you. However this man is climbing, it isn’t at the same walking pace you and Vaisset used. You likely only have a few minutes before the unknown foe reaches the roof.

[X] Tell Vaisset that a Servant is coming up towards you and wait for his appearance. (Pride)

[ ] Warn Vaisset that a Servant is on his way, and tell him to run. (Duty/Compassion)

[ ] Run away. You’re not ready to engage a Servant you know nothing about. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in.)

After considering the idea of having one or both of you flee the scene, you decide against it. It’s after dark, you’re in an isolated place, and only one foe is
approaching. This is the ideal moment to face them and test your power as a Servant. You open your mouth to warn Vaisset, but he speaks up first.

“Saber, there’s an enemy Master drawing near. Ascending the building, by the feel of it. Can you feel it too? Do they have a Servant with them?”

You nod gravely. “That’s right, M. Vaisset. I feel the Servant’s presence approaching us; it seems Master and Servant are coming to face us together.” You hold up a hand. “Don’t move, now. The best thing we can do is battle them two against two. I know you’re loath to fight, but I really must insist.”

Far from the cowardly response you expected, Vaisset actually lets out a dry chuckle. “I was thinking the same thing myself, Saber. I won’t run. All we can do now is rely on one another, and trust that each man can defeat the enemy set before him.”

“Well said,” you answer, and materialize your armament. The next few minutes are spent in tense silence as you wait, eyes trained on the slope that leads up to the roof from below, feeling the movement of energy as your foes make their rapid ascent up the garage’s ramp. At last the man appears, running inhumanly fast on reinforced legs. Despite the imposing quality of his magic-aided movement, he’s not particularly unusual to look at. The impression he gives is of a well-paid professional athlete, perhaps a middleweight boxer formally dressed for an interview. He’s taller than average, but still an inch or two shorter than yourself, and obviously fit without being enormously bulky. The main wears a navy three-piece suit with white pinstripes, but it does little to work with his tan complexion and brown hair and eyes. As expected, he bears a jagged set of command spells on his right hand.

As you’re taking in the man’s appearance, Vaisset hisses, “Harris! Damn!” In almost the same moment, the man sweeps out a hand and shouts, “Now!”

His Servant materializes already rushing towards you as if shot from a gun, a startling gleam of silver in the moonlight. An enormous force of magical energy slices down towards you, it’s only at the last moment that you can determine its precise location and parry. Even redirected, the force of the attack sends you sliding across the rooftop, your boots throwing up sparks as they scrape the pavement. There’s a half-moment of stillness after the blocked attack, and you can survey your foe.

Before you stands a slight, pale blonde girl, beautiful as a lily blooming in the moonlight, and clad in an azure gown reinforced with plates of shining steel armor. Though her diminutive stature and elfin features should project a sense of ephemeral weakness, the overwhelming force of her attack a moment ago dispels such illusions.

The enemy Servant looks at you out of eyes cold and hard as sapphires, probing for weakness, before raising her weapon to strike once more, cutting up from the left to bisect you at the ribs. You can only call it a “weapon,” or a “thing,”
because it’s quite invisible. A blade that can be observed only as concentrated energy distorting the air, of uncertain length and width. Again you’re able to block the strike just in time, by reading her movements, but this time she doesn’t let up, hammering your guard from every angle. She’s faster than you are, and every strike hits like an explosion, unleashing a burst of magical energy so concentrated that the clash of your weapons casts light on the surroundings.

From her posture and movements you can figure out that this girl-knight is wielding a two-handed sword. This, then, must be the other Saber, who was summoned before yourself. That knowledge doesn’t held you much now, though.

You’re being forced back without a chance to counterattack, forced onto the defensive by the uncertain nature of that invisible sword. Even though you can read and predict her movements accurately, you can’t keep up with her agility, and the force of her blows reverberates through your bones with every parried strike. At this rate, you won’t be able to last long; you take hold of your cloak with your off-hand, preparing to activate Kenôtis and absorb her blade. This will be all or nothing!

In that moment of consideration, though, the other Saber strikes with an upward slash still more powerful than before, cutting into the central gap between the cloak’s folds. Some victorious instinct must have given her an idea of its danger, damn it! Even if you activated it now it would be useless! You hastily block the attack and save yourself from being gutted, but the force is like an oncoming train. This is one attack you should have dodged.

The burst of power in the other Saber’s blow sends you flying backwards, crashing through the low cement wall, and dropping into the alley below, taking several levels of the next building’s fire escape with you. When you finally land, it’s on your back in a heap of crumpled iron that used to be a stairway. Fortunately you’re unharmed, and you get to your feet enormously glad of the endurance that comes with being a Servant. As you’re looking up to determine how you can climb the wall and return to the battlefield, you see the other Saber hop lightly over the side. She crashes into the cement on her feet, cracks spreading from her steel boots. Once again she levels her invisible blade at you, and with a dead end behind your back this is beginning to seem like the end of the line. Instead of attacking, however, she pauses for a moment, eying you, and then lowers it to speak.

“What manner of Servant are you, fighting me with that arming sword?” The tone of her question makes it feel more like a command than an invitation to discussion, an interrogative given from on high. “Give me your name, unknown knight, if you do not wish to be cut down as a nameless soldier.”
For a moment the humor of the question gets the better of you, and you have to suppress a smile. Your name and class... of course this other Saber must be confused. There shouldn’t be two Saber-class Servants in the same War, but she can’t point the fact out without revealing the nature of her hidden blade. You decide to play along with this regal girl's request. After all, perhaps something you can say will give you an opening.

“I am the Servant of the blade, Saber,” you announce. “Alberich is my name. As a knight, I do not fear to give it, whatever the circumstances of the Holy Grail War may impel. What of yourself, dear lady? That hidden weapon of yours hides your nature well. It could be a battleaxe, a spear... anything, really.”

The girl's eyes widen in visible shock and indignation. “Saber,” she echoes, “you call yourself Saber, and claim the honor of a knight with that shadow about you? Duplicitous trash!” She raises her sword again, preparing to charge in and strike from above.

[X] How do you respond?

Calling on a sense of besmirched honor you do not possess, you contort your features into a mask of fury. “Duplicitous,” you roar, “you would call me duplicitous? Girl, you shame your own tongue! I have given you not only my class but my name, despite the imperative to secrecy that lies on us!” You flourish your sword, leveling the point accusingly at her. “Yet you stand there, unnamed, of uncertain class, with even your weapon dishonorably hidden, and call me duplicitous! And what is this matter of a shadow, hmm? Surely one who fights with hidden blade is not unnerved by a battle in darkness.”

The other Saber maintains her glare, seemingly unmoved by your rhetoric. When she answers, it’s in an icy tone. “I have no need to give my name to one about to die. I will, however, tell you how it is that I see through your duplicity. I am the Servant Saber, impostor. Now, as you have forfeited the opportunity to leave a name behind you, die!”

Magical energy explodes from beneath the girl’s feet with a roar and she rushes toward you like artillery fire, bringing her sword up from the right to cut into your ribs. With no chance to dodge backwards, you block her strike with your own blade vertical, letting the force of the impact slam you into the parking garage wall to your left. You roll in the air, however, and splay out your cloak behind you. As you impact, you call, “Kenótis!”
There’s no impact. You pass through the wall as if through a fogbank, landing on your feet in the garage. Saber pauses for a moment, startled, but quickly regains her senses and leaps through the hole after you. You don’t wait for her to catch up, though, instead fleeing up the ramp toward the roof. It’s plain from your first battle against her that you can’t match this woman. Your only chance now is to make it back to Vaisset and Harris, and kill the enemy Master before she can defeat you.

‘M. Vaisset!’ You reach out to him frantically. ‘Use a command spell to return me to your side! Harris’ Servant is beyond me, but if I can kill the Master that should be the end of it.’

Vaisset’s answering thoughts are scattered and distracted. ‘Saber, you’re still... I’m not sure I can get the opportunity. Hold out as long as you can...’

There’s nothing more after that. For a short time, it seems as if you can keep the chase up, but with a burst of energy Saber closes the distance on the third floor of the parking garage. As you feel her presence approach from behind, you whirl and parry a cut coming for your neck, but lose your momentum in the process. The two of you are on level ground once again, and Saber brings the point of her sword level with the center of her body, ready to strike from any angle. You can feel the tension in the air. If you’re not perfect, the next strike will kill you.

“I will ask you one more time,” Saber says coldly. “Explain yourself, and the shadow that clings to you.”

“I tell you I don’t know what you’re talking about,” you insist furiously. This time your indignant tone isn’t feigned; this is the second time she’s brought up a shadow, and you have no idea what she’s trying to refer to!

Perhaps you’ve gotten through to her this time, as your words seem to startle the girl more than before. She makes a complicated expression, difficult to interpret, before finally replying. “That thing that hangs from your shoulders,” she says, eying it with visible disgust, “the consuming shadow you wrap about yourself. How do you bear it, and why do you claim the title of Saber?”

“There is nothing to explain,” you say with irritation. “my cloak is simply a magical ability of mine, a piece of my legend, as your invisible blade is a piece of yours. As for my being Saber, is it not clear from my weapon? You simply must accept that there are two Saber-class Servants fighting in the Holy Grail War.” For a moment you drop your guard, feigning contemplation. “In fact,” you mutter, then raise your voice. “Have you fought any other Servants before tonight, Saber?”

“I have not,” she answers, tone still laden with suspicion. “What is your point?”
“Perhaps we are in some modified Holy Grail War,” you suggest, “and all seven Servants are Sabers. After all, how much do we really know about the process? Very little, surely.”

Saber is having none of your disingenuous speculation. “Absurd,” she spits. “Whatever the secret of your nature may be, this is your end, False Saber.” She readies herself for a thrust that will pierce your throat and decapitate you, and with the grace of a pouncing lion-

Stops. She’s motionless for several seconds, then her eyes move back and forth several times. She nods. Finally, the presence of her invisible blade vanishes from her hands. “It seems you are not allowed that mercy,” the woman declares. “My Master has ordered me to let you die in your own way. Goodbye, False Saber.”

With that, the icily regal woman turns and leaps out the window, vanishing into back-alley darkness. A sinking weight settles on your heart. If you’re to be allowed to “die in your own way,” that can only mean one thing. With frantic urgency, you rush up to the parking garage rooftop, covering the ascent in leaps and bounds, wasting your diminishing energy supply in your urgent need for confirmation. No deliverance comes upon reaching the rooftop, unfortunately.

The first thing that greets your eyes is an unreasonable expanse of vivid red. The entire rooftop, from end to end and corner to corner, seems to have been painted with blood. As you look further, you can see that there is texture to the general carnage. Strewn about the area are unidentifiable chunks of flesh and varied fragments of bone. Scraps of cloth litter the scene as well, but nothing is whole or even in large parts. There is little doubt that your anchor in this world has been thoroughly destroyed.

As you stand, staring in shock at the carnage, you suddenly feel a connection, a strange metaphysical pulling at your soul, and without warning the world around you warps. A girl’s voice resounds in your ears; Ayaka’s voice, in fact, calling, “Nii-san, Saber-san, come back! What’s going on?”

Then your vision resolves again, and you’re standing in Ayaka’s bedroom. The lamp on her bedside table is still dark, and the only light is that of the moon, coming through a gap in the curtains behind her. She’s sitting up in bed, wearing a white silk nightgown that shimmers in the moonlight, and staring the back of her right hand with an expression of terror. Words pour out of her mouth in a rush as she asks, “Saber-san, what happened? I woke up and these were back on my hand, is Nii-san alright? What’s going on?”

[X] How do you respond?
“Vaisset is...” you stop to correct yourself. Calling him by his last name in this circumstance feels somehow wrong. “Your brother is gone. I’m sorry, Miss Ayaka.” Without knowing the two siblings better, there’s nothing more you can say to lessen the emotional impact.

Before your eyes, Ayaka’s expression collapses as her fear turns to despair. She drops her gaze, hanging her head in sorrow. “S-so that’s really it,” she says in a weak voice. “I th-thought it might be, but...” The girl trails off, and large teardrops well up in her eyes, before spilling out and running down her cheeks in silent weeping. You step closer, putting a hand on the girl’s quaking shoulder. She flinches away at the touch of steel, and you realize you’re still armored. You let your armaments fade into energy, and reach out again to offer comfort. She seems to unconsciously lean into your hand, seeking the warmth of human contact even while her mind is dominated by loss.

The two of you remain still for a while, until Ayaka’s tears begin to slacken off. When her composure has finally returned somewhat, she pulls away and gives you a resentful, hurt glare. “You were supposed to protect us,” she whispers. “Why did you let this happen?”

“I am truly sorry, Miss Ayaka,” you reiterate. “I couldn’t save him. When we encountered an enemy Master and Servant tonight, your brother ordered that we each face our own foe, and trust in one another’s victory. He battled against the enemy Master, and I dueled with the Servant. We were separated in the fighting, and when I was able to return to his side... things had come to an end.”

Something in your words spurs Ayaka to a renewed bout of crying, breaking off eye contact to weep once more. “You said,” she moans between sobs, “Nii-san, you said you wouldn’t be like Dad...”

Dissatisfied with simply watching the girl cry, you begin, “Miss Ayaka, is there anything...”

She cuts you off, snapping her reply with fury in her eyes. “No! Saber-san, just leave me alone!” Then her tone softens as she continues, “We’ll talk in the morning or something, I don’t know. Just leave me be now, okay?”

“As you wish,” you say with a bow, and exit. Outside Ayaka’s room, you can still faintly hear the sound of her sobbing. For a while you only stand in place, trying to think of what to do in the wake of this crushing night. Eventually it comes to you that Vaisset’s security measures will likely have been destroyed by his death, and you decide to take up your post of the previous night, overlooking the front yard from the second-floor hallway. Sure enough, the bounded fields you had been able to detect
outside have vanished, and the light in the surveillance crystals has faded. You’re the manor’s only defense now.

Easing into a chair by the window, you consider everything that’s happened this evening. That other Saber, the girl-knight, was a fearsome opponent; possibly more dangerous than any of the Servants summoned in Judas’ Akeldama Grail War, and certainly capable of killing you. A shiver runs down the nape of your neck as you recall the moment when she was stopped by Harris’ telepathic order. If she had struck, you wouldn’t have been able to escape. That blade would surely have pierced your throat.

Then there’s Harris himself. Vaisset described him as an apparently terrifying figure: an enforcer for the Mages’ Association, and a “magus killer,” who uses unspeakably brutal methods. That brutality was certainly put on display in his execution of your ex-Master, but you find yourself wondering just what his methods could have been. He seemingly had no weapons on his person, given the tight fit of his clothing, and although it’s true that you were focused on your battle with the enemy Saber you can’t help thinking you should have noticed if Harris had used some spectacular display of magical might against Vaisset. Could he have augmented his body with mystic energy, the way Circe had once suggested trying with you? Your mind runs in circles with no answer. Perhaps Harris was using the same energy bursts as the enemy Saber to empower himself. Perhaps he had some potent biological magecraft that destroyed Vaisset from within. Then again, perhaps he simply carried some kind of concealed explosive.

Finally you give up on the conundrum of Harris’ mode of attack and shift your thoughts back to your own foe. Clad in royal blue and shining steel, striking with overwhelming force and a hidden weapon, she seemed like an invincible opponent. You were unable to even strike at her, constantly fighting for your survival; an honest battle of the sword will be useless in defeating her, most likely. You resolve to use any underhanded method necessary to secure your victory upon your next encounter, and fortunately one comes to mind. There was something about your cloak that put her off, made her call it a shadow. She seemed frightened of it and filled with animosity towards it simultaneously. As you picture her expression in your memory, you see her eyes, focusing on it with such intensity that one might have surmised it was wearing you, rather than the reverse. Perhaps, then, using that mental vulnerability to your cloak could be the key to victory. Losing control of one’s emotions in battle can be fatal, after all. It isn’t as if Kenōtis’ primary ability is mental disturbance, either. You could potentially wield it like a net, entangling the enemy Saber before activating its power and dismembering her. You chuckle to yourself, imagining that cold, arrogant
woman screaming as the mutable portal severs her limbs, her body coming to pieces and collapsing into a pool of gore with no chance of retaliation.

But it’s not wise to let your fantasies run away with you. With an effort of will, you dispel the pleasing vision and return your focus to the yard, watching vigilantly for any enemies. Saber may think you dead, but it’s possible Rider’s master could have learned of your home’s location somehow, and of course there are four other unknown Servants to consider. The night passes slowly as you watch the road, with no movement violating the sanctity of the Shijou land. After an hour, or perhaps several, of keeping yourself focused on the stillness ahead of you, you find that you can no longer keep your mind from wandering.

The subject of the Shijou land is another thing again to consider. Vaisset had been the Mages’ Association representative in charge of administrating the local magi, the Second Owner of this area. With his death the duty will pass to Ayaka, but is the trembling girl sobbing in her bed capable of carrying out such a duty at the same time as she battles in a Holy Grail War? The prospect frankly worries you. What if a general power struggle should ensue on top of the existing battle for the Holy Grail? Though you’ve heard a fair amount now about Magus society from first Edelfelt and later Vaisset, you’re still uncertain whether the local magi would likely be inclined to such a revolt.

Then there is the matter of Ayaka’s mental constitution with regards to the Holy Grail War. From her earlier words, it would seem that the girl’s father also died in an incident of magical violence. With both father and brother perishing in such circumstances, will she be able to face the dangers of the coming battle? If not, perhaps it would be better to cut ties with her and seek a new Master through the War’s overseer, the priest she’d mentioned: Antaglio. On the other hand, there is the chance that the death of her brother might motivate the girl to seek revenge. In that case, she would make a fine Master for the aggressive prosecution of the War.
Saturday, November 16, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

As you turn the various aspects of your situation over in your mind, the first rays of sunlight at last begin touching the garden below. The disastrous night has ended with no further disturbances, and the sun rises on Saturday, November 16. Despite the weekend, it isn’t long before you hear the raucous sound of an alarm clock from Ayaka’s room. Even without school, it seems, the girl prefers to rise early. You decide to wait for her at the kitchen table, where the two of you shared breakfast yesterday. If she’s in the mood to talk, she can come to you at her convenience. Otherwise, you don’t intend to intrude.

Your concern that she might remain secluded in her bedroom is soon proven groundless, however, as you hear her first showering and then descending to the house’s ground floor. When she enters the kitchen, in a casual skirt and cardigan only slightly different from her uniform, she gives you a complicated expression. “Tired and determined” might be a good way to describe it, you consider, or perhaps simply “resigned.” Either way, it’s a curious mixture of determined energy and depressive burnout. “Good morning, Saber-san,” she says tonelessly. “Would you like some eggs?”

“Certainly, thank you,” you reply, “but if it would be pushing yourself, there’s no need.”

Ayaka shakes her head. “No, I’ll be making them for myself anyway. It’s no trouble.”
As the girl gets out a pan and starts getting ready to fry several eggs, you sit uncertainly, letting things fade into an awkward silence. You hadn’t expected her to begin the discussion with food, and find yourself strangely unable to think of how to shift the topic to the War without being insensitive. She’s obviously in an unstable emotional state, after all, so the matter warrants some consideration.

Fortunately, Ayaka saves you the trouble. With her back to you, looking down at the frying eggs, she starts to speak. “I did a lot of thinking last night, you know,” she says in the same toneless, soft voice, very unlike the emotional dynamism you’ve observed from her since your summoning. “At first I just cried, of course. You saw that. But a little while after that, I guess it faded out. The sadness, I mean. It was the same way with my parents. I was as hurt as you’d expect a child to be when it happened, but pretty soon their deaths stopped moving me. I remember Nii-san would keep breaking down when they came up in conversation for months after it happened, and even after that for years he’d suddenly go into a grief again thinking of them. It wasn’t like that for me. All the grief drained out in the first round of crying, and it seems like it’s the same with losing him. I guess that means I have a pretty terrible personality, huh?”

“Of course not, Miss Ayaka,” you say reassuringly. “Your feelings about loss do not define you. I have lost two people very dear to me in my life, and didn’t shed a tear afterwards. For some people grief is a subtle thing, but that subtlety does not make you an unfeeling person.”

“Thank you, Saber-san,” Ayaka replies. “You’re very kind. But anyway, I was saying that I spent a lot of time thinking last night, about the future. I don’t think I have any choice but to participate in the Holy Grail War at this point, do I? Even if I went to Father Antaglio and gave up, the other Masters would probably still want to kill me as the heir to one of the founding families.” At this point, she pauses to serve the eggs. She puts two fried eggs each on two plates, with a salad on the side, then crosses the kitchen to sit down at the table across from you. “Here, enjoy.”

“Ah, thank you,” you say, taking the plate and beginning to eat. “I’m afraid I can’t make any guesses about the personalities of the other Masters.”

“Well, I don’t think It’s a very safe idea,” she says. “After all the changing of the Shijou Master already, they’d probably suspect me of planning some kind of trick. So it seems like I have to fight, but I don’t know anything about how you’d go about this War. Mom never told me about it before she died, even though I was her successor. Nii-san was only able to confirm it from her notes after the Einzberns contacted him, you know? Then you and Nii-san went out to fight straightforwardly
and he died. I don’t know what to do, Saber-san.” She gives you a pleading look, obviously hoping you’ll have some miracle plan to win the War.

[] Suggest she keep going to school normally to gather information on Rider’s Master and stay at home during the night. You can work out new magical defenses with her over the weekend. (Compassion)

[] Suggest that Ayaka completely focus on defense, staying here 24/7 and gathering information through magic (if possible) or otherwise by having you scout alone. (Duty)

[] Suggest that the two of you go looking for the enemy at night. It was the execution of the battle, not the overall strategy, that killed Vaisset. (Pride)

[] Tell Ayaka about the Emiya family and suggest meeting with them to discuss future strategies. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Tell Ayaka about the Emiya family and put forth the necessity of training, both master and servant, to be able to better prosecute the war. Stay home and reorganize the defenses of the manor as best as possible, but otherwise focus on becoming more able to defeat the foes set before you. (Write in)

[] Say something else (Write in)

“Well,” you say, considering carefully how best to put your advice to the girl. “The first thing I would advise is focus. For your brother, the Holy Grail War was not a priority; he preferred to spend his time immersed in research, and I had to prompt him to pursue the War. You must focus yourself entirely on the task ahead if we are to seize victory. I’m afraid your daily life will have to be set aside in favor of the Holy Grail War. Is that something you can accept, Miss Ayaka?”

“I’ll have to, won’t I?” The girl gives you a half-smile. “If staying home from school and spending all my time on the War is the only way to survive, I’m not going to argue with you about it.”

“I’m glad you understand,” you say with a firm nod. “Now, the second thing we must consider is information. Frankly, I still know very little about what your brother was capable of with regards to magecraft. If we are to be victorious, I must know the extent of your capabilities. I know well that my own power was insufficient, and intend to train heavily before we next go into battle.”

“You’ll probably be disappointed,” Ayaka says. “My ability as a magus is hopelessly average; I don’t think I can do much to help you.”
You shake your head, gallantly declaring, “whether you are average or superb doesn’t matter in the least. You are my Master now, and I will fight by your side regardless of your abilities. What is important is that I know, and can plan around them.”

“Alright then,” Ayaka replies, though it’s clear from her tone that she’s still hesitant. “My mother’s family cultivated old black magic. Curses and things like that, I mean, ritual magic focused on living things.”

“Go on,” you say.

Ayaka nods, and continues, “I don’t know how to perform a lot of it, actually. Although the whole crest was transplanted to me after Mom died, our arts are complicated and confusing even with its help. I can’t just power a mystery stored in the crest and have it work, I’d have to know how to use it properly. Mom would’ve taught me, but...” Ayaka trails off, looking down. After only a moment’s silence, though, she picks back up her narration. “Anyway, I’ve been learning from the Shijou library since, but it’s slow with nobody to help me along.”

It would probably be wisest to let the girl tell her story at her own pace, but against your better judgment you let your curiosity get the better of you, asking, “How is it that your lack of understanding inhibits you? I had believed that a magus’ hereditary crest completely facilitated the manifestation of an inherited mystery.”

“Huh...” Ayaka considers the question for a few moments, staring off into space and pursing her dainty lips in irritation as she tries to call to mind a clear explanation. Finally the answer dawns on her, and she speaks up again. “Here’s a good example. Mom once told me about a curse invented by our family that settles in and takes root in the cursed person’s magic circuits, running off of their Od until it finally kills them. She said nobody could remove it once it was used, and it was one of our best techniques, but that I wouldn’t be ready to learn it until I was 36 years old. So that curse, as a part of the Shijou inheritance, is part of my magic crest, right?”

She looks to you for confirmation before continuing.

“Yes,” you say, “I should think it would be.”

“It is,” Ayaka replies with a nod. “I can manifest the curse by activating the crest and doing a short chant, very easily, without ever having learned how it was originally done. The problem is, I can’t send it to someone. Apparently the target was assigned using a special ritual described somewhere in our family papers, but I can’t find it. So even though the magic crest does the hardest part of the magic, I still can’t use the curse. There are a bunch of other Shijou techniques like that, too.”

“I am beginning to understand your circumstances, Miss Ayaka,” you say. “Even magic is no substitute for a proper teacher, I suppose. But surely not all of
your hereditary powers are so complex. You must be able to use some of them on your own.”

“I’m not quite that useless, no,” she answers with a self-deprecating smile.

“Mom also performed a ritual sacrifice of a pigeon every morning, and took its energy in to supplement her own. That’s something I can do with only the crest, but I’ve never actually worked up the courage to kill one. Last year Nii-san finally got rid of the pigeons once he gave up on me being able to kill them. Ehehe…” She chuckles, embarrassed at the memory.

You give her a level stare. An ability the girl can’t bring herself to use isn’t any more use than one she doesn’t know how to. Anyway, what kind of family were the Shijou, you wonder. Are all their mysteries based wholly around bloodshed and the consumption of life force? You have to admit the aesthetics appeal to you, but putting abilities with that kind of focus in the hands of a soft girl like Ayaka... well, her discomfort’s not working in your favor. Kikuko would have been a much better heir for them, you reflect.

Interpreting your silence as disappointment, Ayaka hastens to move on. “I can also put up bounded fields, of course, that’s one of the basics. I guess I’ll need to raise one around the house now that Nii-san’s gone. And there’s the black wings, of course.”

That makes you sit up and take notice. Black wings? Does she have some kind of flight magic, of the kind Circe used? “And what would that be,” you ask leaning forward in anticipation.

“Here, I’ll show you,” she says, and gets to her feet with right arm outstretched. The magic crest on Ayaka’s arm comes to life, its complex patterns glowing through her sleeve, and she recites a sentence of something you can’t quite understand. From the sound, you guess it’s a form of archaic Japanese, but despite your perfect marks in classics you’re quite unable to comprehend the words. At the end of this short incantation, the air around Ayaka’s head and shoulders suddenly fills with ten black feathers, arrayed about her in motionless levitation.

Noticing your baffled expression (and enjoying it a bit, you suspect,) the girl explains. “They’re the feathers of birds we sacrificed over the centuries, brought back and empowered by magical energy. ‘Black wings’ is kind of a misnomer, I guess, but the name stuck a long time ago.”

“Of course they’re very pretty,” you say, “but what do you do with them?”

“Take a look,” Ayaka says, and without further warning one of the feathers shoots from out beside her head with the speed of a bullet, burying its point in the table. Then it slowly rises back to its former place; the feather is undamaged, while there’s a tiny, perfectly round hole dug into the table, like the scar left in cork after a
pin has been withdrawn. “The black wings are how the Shijou magi fight in person, when we have to. I can attack with them, like I just showed you, or make a shield out of them. Even if using the black wings is all I can really do, I hope it’ll be useful anyway...”

“Of course your abilities will be useful,” you answer reassuringly. “From appearances, these black wings are a very versatile tool, which should prove invaluable in protecting you from enemy attack. More precious still is the humility you hold regarding your powers. Since you hold such a low opinion of your own ability to fight, I know that you will allow me to protect you, and not attempt to face the foe in a duel. Let me fight for you, Miss Ayaka, and stay close by my side whenever we face an enemy Master. Devote yourself to improving your magical abilities when at home, and rely on me when we are in battle, and then we cannot fail.”

Giving her this kind of pep talk isn’t really in your nature, but you reason that the girl needs plenty of encouragement this morning if she’s going to serve as a decent Master for you. That being the case, you put plenty of energy into your tone and flash her a chivalrous smile as you describe your certainty of victory. Sure enough, your repeated encouragement over breakfast has its desired effect. Ayaka is in much higher spirits now as she blushingly mutters, “Th-thank you, Saber-san. I’ll put myself in your care.”

Then, all of a sudden, she seems to rally self-control by shifting her thoughts to a different subject, and moves the conversation at the same time. “Information goes both ways, though, you know,” the girl declares. “If we’re going to be fighting together, don’t you think I should know about your abilities too? You haven’t said anything about how you fight, or what your heroic powers are, or anything like that! I don’t even know what kind of hero you are. All you said before was that your ‘memories are indeterminate’.”

“I suppose I haven’t told you much,” you muse. “You won’t find it a long explanation, though. My abilities are without complexity and I have no arcane lineage to describe. I’ll be frank, Miss Ayaka. I was summoned with no memories of life as a hero, or of my true name as a heroic spirit.” For a dramatic flourish, you manifest your armor and cloak, and draw your sword as you continue, holding it and standing in the manner of a knight at attention. “I am Saber, an armored knight who wields this blade.”

As you’re speaking, that strange flash of instinct you felt when swearing your oath to Vaisset and again when introducing yourself to Liliesviel von Einzbern suddenly takes hold, and you continue almost without control over your tongue. “This sword’s name I do know, however. Its smith called it Lückeschwert, and I too
use that name for it; but if there is some famed tale of how a hero clad in white steel and black silk took it for his own, it is unknown to me. As for my powers, I can fight with sword or fist. I can plan a battle too, and perhaps ride out to fight on horseback, though I haven’t attempted it since being summoned here.”

**Status Updated**

At this point Ayaka actually breaks into laughter, quite unexpectedly interrupting your speech with a kind of mirth shocking so soon after her brother’s death. “We make a great pair, don’t we,” she manages to say once she’s gotten control of herself again. “I’m a magus who can’t use the powers she inherited, and you’re a legendary hero who can’t remember his story! Nii-san said that the Holy Grail would summon someone with a compatible personality for you if you didn’t have a catalyst, but I guess it ignored his catalyst and did it anyway!”

“Well, I’m glad you find the situation mirthful, Miss Ayaka,” you say with dry sarcasm, “but there is one more detail I ought to relate to you.”

“Oh, really? What’s that?”

“The Emiya family,” you declare. “While I was scouting the city for your brother, I happened to run across an extraordinary pair of magi: Emiya Shirou and his wife, Emiya Sakura. Survivors of the previous Holy Grail War, that set at a place called Fuyuki City, who are dedicated to preventing this one from being completed. They have both magical energy and experience in great supply, and even sustain the existence of a Servant, Rider, fifteen years after the end of the existence of the Holy Grail which facilitated her summoning.”

“What?” Ayaka leaps to her feet, her eyes wide in shock at your account of the Emiyas, but before she can make a further response you raise a hand to stop her, and finish your own explanation.

“I believe they could come to be our greatest enemies in the end,” you continue, “but could also be useful allies in the short term. Emiya and his wife are two very compassionate people, and it is my view that they’d like nothing more than to put an end to the Holy Grail War peacefully. That, we can make good use of.” You decide against mentioning either the conflicting account of your history which you provided them or the fact that it was from your lips they learned of the Tokyo Holy Grail War in the first place. Even now, you can hardly figure out just why you were so frank and honest in speaking with them. It’s as if there was some potent spell hovering about Emiya which made you feel as if you were his true friend.

“That means these people were living in secret from my brother, and plotting against the Second Owner all along,” Ayaka exclaims in indignant shock. “We never knew about any magus family called Emiya here! And then they have a Servant?”
She slumps down heavily in her chair, suddenly spent by the outburst. “Oh my god,” she moans, “just when I think I’ve come to terms with everything, it gets crazier.” Ayaka sits back up, focusing on you. “I need some time to think about these Emiya people, alright, Saber-san? Since I also need to set up a new bounded field around the house, I’ll be doing that now. You said you wanted to do some kind of training, right?”

“That’s right,” you answer placidly. One trick you’ve learned in your time as a student council president is that, when dealing with emotional teenagers, you should always project total calm yourself. It often has a stabilizing effect. “Please inform me when you are ready to discuss our next plans for the War.”

“Alright, Saber-san,” Ayaka says softly. “Thanks again for being so understanding.” With that, she gets up and heads out toward the front door. Although you have no experience with bounded fields yourself, you guess work has to be done on the perimeter to construct them, and she’s heading into the garden for that purpose.

[X] Go looking for the Shijou library to broaden your magical knowledge and improve on the fundamental energy control Circe taught you. (Duty)
[ ] Head out into the back yard and do some physical training to hopefully improve your raw power and speed. (Pride)
[ ] Go down to Vaisset’s workshop and see what you can make of his notes. That synthetic transmutation research he mentioned sounded quite interesting... (Curiosity)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After finishing your breakfast, left to go cold during your conversation with Ayaka, you decide to have a look through the library she mentioned. If she’s been able to use the texts there to learn how to be a magus in the absence of her parents, you can hopefully make use of it to improve your own abilities. That said, when you first went through the house after being summoned, there was nowhere in it that really fit the name of “library.” After some consideration, you decide she was referring to a second-floor room adjacent to the office, which you’d initially dubbed a storeroom, and go upstairs to investigate its contents.

Taking a look around, you see that it’s it’s quite a small area, perhaps the size of a bedroom, and windowless. All four walls are covered by bookshelves, with the only gap being for the door. In the center of the room four armchairs are arranged in semicircular fashion below an overhead light fixture. It’s a far cry from the literary cathedral present in the Eighth Imperial University, but then perhaps this is the...
norm for private household libraries. Your family didn’t have one, so you have no real frame of reference.

Enough musing on the room’s design. You walk the circle of shelves, scanning the books there. Many are unrelated to magic; there’s a complete set of Homer, the Divine Comedy, the Aeneid, the Tale of Genji, and other classics, as well as a wide variety of books on the mythology of different peoples across the globe. This last set must have been purchased at some point after the Shijou were brought into the plan to conduct the Holy Grail War, you conclude. Besides the mundane texts, however, there is a selection of books on magic, divided into two very distinct types. One type is ostentatious, expensively bound in thick leather, with gold leaf titling spelling out names like *Transcendental Principles of Elementalism* or *Introduction to Structural Energy Systems*. These, you imagine, are something along the lines of textbooks used at that College of Magi which Edelfelt mentioned. The second type is more subdued, bound in the traditional Japanese style, and have tiny inked titles, all in the form of *Records of Shijou no Tamanaga, Vol. 3*, *Journal of Shijou Reika, Book 7*, and so on. With such an opaque method of recording her family’s inheritance of knowledge, you’re not surprised Ayaka has had little success in teaching herself.

Still, ignoring the annals of the Shijou family and focusing on the general texts does yield some promising results. After taking several books down from the shelves and easing back into one of the chairs, you decide to read...

[X] *A Treatise on Conceptual-Material Ties*, which seems to be a book about the way magic defines the world.

[] *Forms of Power*, a catalog of various sigils and geometric formations instrumental in ritual magic.

[] *Transcendental Principles of Elementalism*, which deals with applications of pure element control.

[] *Introduction to Structural Energy Systems*, which deals with magic circuits, leylines, bounded energy fields, and related topics.

[] Look for something else (Write in what you seek, though I can’t guarantee it’s there)

On a whim, you select a book titled *A Treatise on Conceptual-Material Ties*. Although you came here hoping to improve your combat abilities, this text catches your fancy by provoking your curiosity. Circe told you you had become a “conceptual being” back in the *Akeldama*, but you never really understood what that meant.
Hopefully this book can enlighten you as to what conceptual really means in terms of magic. Although the book itself is full of confusing jargon, roundabout metaphor, accounts of tests and their results, and elaborate diagrams which are meaningless to you (they evidently refer to some other body of magical knowledge which you lack), you do manage to work out the essentials over the course of a few hours. What you learn is as follows:

Anything in the world can be divided into material and conceptual components. Something existing purely in nature is an exclusively material existence, with no concept relating to it. Once it is observed by a sentient being, however, it gains a conceptual nature pertaining to the definition applied to it. Moreover, different objects have a different proportion of material to conceptual existence. A naturally occurring stone, for example, is far less conceptual than a chair, which is created in accordance with a pre-existing concept. At the far material end of this spectrum would be an object that has never been observed or imagined, and thus has no conceptual existence; while at the far conceptual end of this spectrum are gods, spirits, and other beings which derive their existence from magic. Magic itself is entirely conceptual, and it is through the study of magic that the effect that concepts have on the world was discovered. Magic, after all, is the conceptual recreation of naturally occurring mysteries, and affects the world on a conceptual basis. It might be thought, then, that magic can only alter people’s perceptions of the world around them. That this is not the case proves that concepts affect their material base, just as materials affect the concepts derived from them. One popular example of the alteration of material by concept is the use of Reinforcement magic, whereby an object is altered in accordance with its conceptual purpose, rather than its material nature. Another is the use of Transference magic to shift a conceptual property of one object to another.

There are two schools of thought regarding this power of concept. The first is that the application of a conceptual nature induces an irrevocable change in the material object, and that once a concept becomes attached to an existence they become irrevocably intertwined, enabling the previously independent material nature to be altered by its concept. The other theory, which is something of a fringe idea, is that there is somewhere an omnipotent, omniscient sentience which constantly observes the entire universe, altering it in line with its own perception. Thus, when the concept of something is altered, it is this sentience’s perception of the object that is being changed first, and then it forcibly alters the material world in such a way that it conforms with the being’s perception. This idea is rejected by the majority of magi for obvious reasons.
This brings us to the subject of conceptual beings and conceptual weapons: that is, gods, spirits, and their works. These are creatures which did not form as a part of the natural processes of the world, but instead came into existence as Mana did, and sustained their own existence by will and magic. They had no material basis, and were defined completely by the concepts which described them. There is a disagreement among magi whether this conceptual nature gave them greater facility with magic and power over the world, or their great facility with magic enabled them to maintain a conceptual nature. In either case, and for an unknown reason, these purely conceptual beings faced greater and greater resistance from the world in their manifestation over time. Eventually it seems to have reached a point at which they could not sustain an Earthly existence and so retreated to the Reverse Side of the World, where it is theorized that everything is purely conceptual.

It’s late afternoon when you finish reading, satisfied with your new understanding of your own existence and that of the world around you. Still, it does raise one rather odd question. If a conceptual being is something that formed as a pure concept, where does that leave you? You certainly remember living life as a mortal human, and by the definition laid out in the book that shouldn’t be possible. No matter how much the Silver Grail changed you, it should only have been able to make you into a mostly conceptual entity with a material core, like a homunculus. And yet Circe, a former goddess herself, confirmed that you were an entirely conceptual entity. Although the question nags at you, the book makes no reference to a situation like yours; you’ll have to find your answer some other time. For now you return to the living room, confident that Ayaka should have finished reestablishing her brother’s bounded fields by now.

As expected, you find the girl sitting at the coffee table, drinking a cup of tea and looking contemplative. She looks up when you come in, but says nothing, so you take a seat opposite her and speak up. “So, Miss Ayaka, have you determined how you’d like to approach the Emiya subject? You seemed quite agitated by it this morning.”

“Not exactly, or, well, sort of,” she says hesitantly. “Really, Saber-san, can we just wait and see? Maybe some other Master will deal with them first. I mean, I don’t think we can get them to help us if they want to destroy the Holy Grail. It was my grandfather who established the Greater Grail in Tokyo, you know? But I don’t want to fight someone who survived the last Grail War, either…”

“I suppose inaction can be a kind of resolution,” you reply, “still.”

Ayaka cuts you off. “Great, that’s that then! Anyway, Saber-san, I thought of something much better while I was working on the bounded fields around the house;
something that can actually help us win.” Her mood seems to have bounced back
quite a bit since this morning, as she’s quite energetic all of a sudden. Whether it’s
honest excitement over her new idea or she’s just doing an excellent job of faking
cheer, you’re not certain, but either way it’s quite a change of pace from this morning.

“What would that be?”
“You remember the Shijou ritual sacrifices I was telling you about, right?”
“Yes,” you say, “what about them?”
“Well, Mom used to tell me that it wasn’t just to absorb the pigeons’ energy.
Augmenting our own Od with their life force is useful, but the enacted mystery also
binds some part of their existence to the Shijou magic crest. That’s why we can do
tings like call up the Black Wings, we’re taking the part of them that’s energy into
the Shijou inheritance.”

“Very well then,” you reply. “How can this be turned to our benefit?”
“Don’t you see?” Ayaka pouts for a moment. “Servants are all energy, right?
You’re heroic spirits, extremely powerful familiars, that’s why the command spells
can bind you. But that also means a Servant is way more susceptible to the Shijou
ritual sacrifice magic; both when taking power and being taken from. I’m saying that
I think, when you kill an enemy Servant, I can activate this magic and send some of
their powers to you!”

“Would it really be so simple as that,” you ask skeptically. The idea of taking
another Servant’s power upon their death seems far-fetched.

Ayaka considers for a moment, answering, “I’m not completely certain, but it
would be worth a try. It’s not like the pigeons were willing participants, and there was
no ritual set up, just the power Mom channeled through the crest.”

“In that case, you have my agreement,” you say with a nod. “Whether it is or
is not successful, we’d best make the attempt. The notion is too tempting a path of
empowerment to ignore.”

“Wonderful. But if we’re going to try this,” Ayaka says determinedly, “I think
we should probably go looking for an enemy Servant tonight once it gets dark. If we
wait on the defensive, the weak Servants will be defeated first, and we’ll lose chances
to power you up. What do you think, Saber-san?”

[ ] Write in your suggested plan of action.

What do you think, huh? You consider it for a long while, mulling over the
information at your disposal. There’s the strange spate of accidents that Vaisset
observed downtown still to be investigated, for a start. It could, of course, have been
no more than a ruse by Harris, bait for the trap that you sprung by your arrival with Vaisset, but that notion seems incongruous. In the first place, the timing seemed wrong. The phenomenon observed by Vaisset’s familiars was in the dead of night, whereas Harris’ attack on you was just after sunset. Then there’s the fact that if there was some phenomenon causing misfortune, it wasn’t in effect when he did strike. If Harris had used some wide-area curse to affect the luck of the populace and draw in enemy Masters with the commotion, it would make sense for him to use that same curse against you and Vaisset to weaken you before attacking. Yet you were the victim of no such curse. No, all things considered, the more likely explanation is that Harris and Vaisset both unobserved the phenomenon and independently chose to investigate it, running across one another by chance; then Harris, being a professional killer, quickly seized that chance to eliminate an enemy. This leaves the source of the accidents downtown unresolved.

Then there is the other strange phenomenon sighted by Vaisset’s familiars, an apparent outbreak of arson in residential homes. Although Vaisset died before he could give you more details on this subject, the emergence of a new violent trend coinciding with the beginning of the Holy Grail War paints a clear picture of interference by a Master. Perhaps one of this war’s Servants is empowered by destruction, as Rider was, or perhaps a Master is simply seeking to supplement his Servant’s mystic energy by means of hunting. Either way, you’re confident that an enemy lies at the end of that trail.

Then there are the others you’ve encountered thus far in the War: Liliesviel von Einzbern, with her strange attendants possessing mystic energy more than human and less than that of a Servant; and Rider, shepherding his student Master to and from Kyoutenkan Academy. Both of them offer paths to an improved War situation for you. Regarding Liliesviel, you’re confident that someone with the resources to construct a magic-suppressing limousine can surely conduct the necessary reconnaissance to locate the War’s weakest Servant and facilitate your eliminating them for power. If you were to pursue that road, it’s possible you could draw Liliesviel to you again by going out alone and, having done so, make use of her misconception about your identity to gain an ally.

Rider, on the other hand, seems to be a possible target. He’s certainly the most volatile of the participants in the War you’ve thus far encountered, and his mystic energy was less potent than that other Saber’s. The way he flew into a rage at your refusal of a deal sticks in your mind; it would no doubt be easy to use that emotional instability in a fight, but there is the question of finding him. Unless his Master is a
member of one of Kyoutenkan’s athletic clubs and present for weekend practice, or a member of the student council, you’re without a lead on Rider’s present location.

After considering all the options available, you decide to follow up on the chance of a fight with Rider, even if it is a slim one. There are too many unknown factors involved in courting Liliesviel’s affections, and even more in searching out the source of the arson or the downtown accidents. Of all these relative unknowns, Rider is the closest to a known quantity.

“I believe that our best course at the moment would be pursuing Rider, the Servant I encountered at your high school,” you say. “Is there any possibility for students to be present over the weekend, Miss Ayaka?”

“We~ll,” Ayaka draws out the syllable as she replies, considering her answer. “The student council comes in on the weekend to work, of course. And the athletic clubs have practice; some all weekend, some just on Saturdays. I think a couple cultural clubs have weekend events too, but I’m not sure about details.”

“There is a chance at least, then,” you declare. “We should visit now, before the clubs’ practice comes to an end, and see whether or not Rider is skulking about. If he is there, we’ll have our target. If not, we’ll have a clue to the identity of his Master.”

“What?” Ayaka raises her voice, incensed by the suggestion. “Saber-san, are you forgetting the rules of magi? There can’t be any witnesses, remember? We have to fight at night!”

“Of course I recall your laws,” you say in a placating tone. “We needn’t attack Rider as soon as we arrive. I would be happy to shadow the enemy until after sunset. The point is simply that your school is our only point of contact. If we want to eliminate Rider, at whatever time, we’ll need to find him there.”

Ayaka blushes in embarrassment as she realizes her mistake. “Oh, right, that’s what you meant,” she says haltingly. “That’s fine, then. But are you sure you can beat this Rider Servant, Saber-san?”

You can’t help but smile at her words, thinking of the way fights that seemed certain twisted before your eyes in the Akeldama. “Miss Ayaka, no fighter can be sure of victory unless he’s lying to himself,” you say. “That said, he is the weaker of the two Servants I’ve seen since being summoned, and I am confident in my skill with a blade. I promise you victory, Ojou-sama.”

Ayaka’s flush deepens at your teasing. “Hey, come on,” she protests, “I already told you not to call me that!”

“I’m not sure you were being honest,” you reply with a smirk. “According to the information on the modern era that I received from the Holy Grail, being waited on and lavished with titles or terms of endearment is a popular fantasy among young
ladies.” You lean across the table, catching her chin up in your hand. “Are you sure you wouldn’t like to be called Ojou-sama? If you ask me humbly, I wouldn’t mind acting the part of a model butler for you.”

“Hmph!” Ayaka pulls away from you and gets to her feet, beet red. “I can hardly believe my brother summoned a Servant as black-hearted as you!”

You fail to suppress a chuckle at her expression. After going through your experience in the Akeldama you’re relatively used to seeing beautiful girls, but Ayaka’s embarrassed expression is a combination of adorable and humorous that really works on you. Still, you can’t play around with her all afternoon, and if you push things too far you might actually run the risk of alienating your Master, which would be a shame. You stand up and stretch, reminded of the time by the dimming afternoon light. “Whatever you’d like to be called,” you say languidly, “we ought to be going now, if we want a chance of catching Rider at your school. I can’t imagine these athletic clubs practice into the night.”

“No, they don’t,” Ayaka says. “I guess we should get going.”

There is, however, the question of how you should make the trip. You decide to...

[X] Go on foot, the same way as before. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Go over the rooftops, prioritizing speed. (Pride)

“Well then,” you say, “let’s go,” and walk past Ayaka out of the house. As you pass her, you briefly entertain the notion of picking Ayaka up in a princess carry and going over the rooftops to get to Kyoutenkan Academy as quickly as possible, but soon dismiss the idea as ridiculous. Ayaka only just now reminded you of how seriously magi take their code of secrecy, after all. Instead, she hurries to follow and the two of you walk to her school side-by-side, much as you did yesterday morning.

At first you walk in silence, admiring the tree-lined street and manicured gardens of the rich houses as you pass, but after a few minutes Ayaka speaks up. “So, Saber-san,” she begins.

“Yes?”

“Well, what’s your plan for finding Rider and his Master, exactly? I get that you think they might be at school, but what then?”

You shrug casually. The answer, you feel, should really be obvious to her. “All we have to do,” you answer, “is pass by the school, Miss Ayaka. As my Master, you can feel the presence of other Masters in your command spell, and I can similarly
detect the presence of Servants. If they are at the school, we’ll feel them as we pass by. Otherwise, we’ll keep walking and return to the manor.”

“Oh,” she says, giving you a relieved smile. “So it’s that simple! I was worried you were going to try and infiltrate the school or some ridiculous thing like that.”

“Nothing so extreme,” you reassure her.

It isn’t long before the two of you have reached the front gate of Kyoutenkan. Sure enough, you can feel the presence of Rider farther back on the property, doubtless accompanying his Master on the field, in spirit form. At the same time as you detect his presence, Ayaka says, “I think this is the reaction you were talking about, Saber-san. My command spells started to sting when we got close to the school.”

“That’s it,” you say quietly. “The Servant is here too, and moving towards us. Get behind me.”

Ayaka retreats behind your back as you take a defensive posture, ready to react if Rider materializes in mid-attack. To your relief, however, when he appears it’s in the same casual clothing as before. He hails you with an open smile and a big, friendly wave.

“Hey, Saber, you’re back,” the blonde Servant exclaims. “Ready to take me up on that duel now?”

“As a matter of fact, yes,” you answer grimly. “I have come to dispatch you, Rider. That said, there’ll be no fighting in daylight, so at the moment I am here only to wait.”

“Just what I expected,” he says. The friendly grin doesn’t slip, in spite of your words. “Why don’t you and your Master, or maybe I should say Mistress, come and watch the practice? Not much for entertainment, but it’s better than standing here on the street. The sun’ll be setting inside an hour anyway.”

You’re struck dumb for a moment, baffled by the offer. “You don’t mind my seeing your Master, when you have his identity a secret now?”

Rider answers with a shrug. “You’ll see his face when we fight anyway, right? I’m not fool enough to take on a Servant and a magus together without my Master to step in with a command spell if need be. Since you have the ‘no witnesses’ rule, I know you’re not likely to jump out and kill him out of the blue.”

“I suppose you have a point,” you say. “Well then, Miss Ayaka? Shall we wait here, or inside Kyoutenkan?”

“It doesn’t really matter either way,” Ayaka says distantly, “but I guess we can go wait by the field, so we can sit down.”

“In that case, it seems we are decided.” You nod towards the gate. “Lead on, Rider.”
As he leads you around the school building and to the athletic fields, you pass the track, the soccer field, and other facilities without slowing. Finally he comes to a stop by the baseball field, fading from view as he says, “my Master is among the boys practicing there. Kindly wait in the bleachers, and once the rest have finished their practice we can have our duel.”

Sure enough, there are bleachers available for you to sit, and a few scattered groups of fans are already sitting and watching the practice sessions. For the baseball club’s true supporters, evidently, Saturday practice is as good as a match. You and Ayaka find a relatively isolated spot and sit down, watching the groups of boys running, pitching, and batting, and you scan the group for the student master. Unsurprisingly, it isn’t long before the telltale red mark catches your eye. What is surprising is the identity of the person bearing it. He’s Kajiwara Haruo, a hostile hothead you’ve had to tolerate for the last three years, and a more unlikely candidate to be a magus you can’t imagine. Kajiwara is one of those people who can’t keep his relationships off his face. He used to shoot you dirty looks every time he saw you, and campaigned with maniacal zeal for a raised budget and longer practicing hours for the baseball club at every chance he got. Whether his hatred for you stemmed from his disappointed ambitions for his club, or he intentionally fought you in the student council because he resented you for some other reason, you aren’t sure. Either way, though, his unpleasantness was sufficient for him to make a strong impression on you. To think that meathead was a magus all along... it’s enough to convince you that miracles really will never cease.

For miraculous reasons or otherwise, the sun sinks below the horizon as you watch the athletes practice. Not long after that, they’re clearing out; going inside to shower and change into street clothes, and coming back out as new men, refreshed and ready for home. The spectators scatter too, dispersing with the end of physical exertion to watch. Only you, Ayaka, and Kajiwara remain on or near the baseball field, and once he realizes that Kajiwara drops the pretense of batting practice. He looks at you hard as his Servant manifests behind him.

“Saber, huh? Why did you want to watch me practice, anyway?”

“It was the choice of my Master,” you say deferentially, and Kajiwara’s gaze snaps to her.

“And you are?” The question comes out curt and dismissive.

“A girl in my second year, senpai,” Ayaka says with a sarcastically perfect curtsy. “I can hardly blame you for not recognizing me, although I know you well enough.”
He shakes his head. “No, I know you. You’re Shijou. The Second Owner, or the daughter of the Second Owner, or however the politics in your family work you’re tied to managing the magi in Tokyo, right?”

“No, I know you. You’re Shijou. The Second Owner, or the daughter of the Second Owner, or however the politics in your family work you’re tied to managing the magi in Tokyo, right?”

“Only this area of Tokyo,” Ayaka says placatingly. “The entire metropolis is much too big for one family to overseer.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Kajiwara shoots back, sounding tired and resentful. “Doesn’t really matter anyway. Not like I ever wanted to be a magus and deal with that hierarchical crap. Alright, Rider, let’s see if you can beat this guy.”

“As you command, Master.” As a wave of shimmering energy washes over him, Rider’s casual clothing is replaced by the colorful silk and velvet suit of a medieval courtier. Not much of an improvement on his previous clothing in terms of practicality. The sword he carries is another thing altogether, though; it’s a long bastard sword, golden hilted with a large ruby set in the pommel. Even from yards away you can see the perfect edge on it, and the thickness of the blade speaks to durability as well. It’s a sword that seems to call out for ornately cast plate armor, lending incongruity to Rider’s appearance. In fitting with his casual attitude, Rider carries no sheath. Instead he rests the naked blade on his shoulder, holding the sword in his right hand alone.

Answering his readiness, you leap down from the bleachers to stand in the center of the baseball field with Rider, materializing your own armor and drawing your sword to match Rider. You even call out your helmet, though the ostentatious design (a white enameled steel lion’s head fully enclosing your own, with holes to see out of set at the lion’s eyes and golden ornaments encrusting all of the form’s highlights) still embarrasses you.

As the two of you stand face to face, five meters apart, you consider the path to victory. Reading his stance and judging from his character thus far, you decide to...

[X] Strike first!(Pride)
[ ] Exercise caution; let him attack first so you can counter the strike. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Whichever option you choose, add all the details of your battle strategy that come to mind.

A soft breeze sweeps across the ballfield, ruffling your cloak and making you grateful for the fur that lines your armor’s interior. It carries the icy bite you’d expect from January, not the softer cold of November, and foretells the coming winter. The grass between you and Rider, though, is clipped too short to sway in the chill wind.
You take a martial stance, left foot drawn back with your blade leveled at the enemy before you in your outstretched right hand. In your left hand you grip the inner lining of Kenōtis, ready to bring the cloak up as a shield.

“Where is your armor, Rider,” you call. “Surely you don’t intend to face me with only that blade for protection!”

Rider smiles at the question. Then, worse, he breaks into laughter! “I may need armor to face an army, Saber, but this isn’t such a chaotic situation,” he declares mirthfully. “Only cowards and fools hide behind armor in single combat!” He gives his sword an experimental swing, still grinning widely. “Of course, you’re welcome to prove me wrong. If you think this holy sword of mine is insufficient for defense, please! Try to pass it.”

You grind your teeth together, and rage begins to color your thoughts. First your humiliation at the hands of that girl-knight, and now this? Being openly mocked by this slight, boyish man? What is it with these sword-wielders and their attacks on your pride? This time, there will be no further humiliation!

Like a shot from a cannon, you spring forward, kicking off from your left foot and bringing your sword around in a horizontal splash to decapitate Rider. His blade needs only the slightest motion to be in place to block the cut, but that’s no barrier to your sword. As you strike, you call, “Sever, Lückeschwert!”

CLANG!

To your shock, Rider’s blade successfully blocks your killing strike, seeming almost to bend around Lückeschwert’s blade before stopping it. The force sends Rider hurtling backwards, but he keeps his feet and maintains his stance.

“That sword’s meant to destroy the enemy’s equipment, isn’t it?” Rider’s smug look doesn’t falter after taking your attack. In fact, he looks triumphant. “Bad luck for you to be facing me, then. This blade of mine will last ‘til the end of the world!”

[X] If you can’t destroy his sword, that only means you have to beat him the old-fashioned way! Keep on the offensive and get around his guard. (Pride)
[ ] Putting yourself at risk with further offense is too dangerous. Back off and wait for him to show weakness. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Faced with a setback of this kind, your rage cools, solidifying into an icy hate. Twice, now, Rider has insulted you, and you will tear him apart for it. If he wants to meet you on the defensive, fine! You’ll prove the depth of his inferiority by
slaughtering him like an animal in spite of the indestructible “holy sword” of which he’s so proud! But you can’t rush in without a plan, as you did a moment ago. Letting your emotions take hold was foolish. Instead, you take the moment while your passion has cooled and analyze Rider in detail.

In the space of a breath, time seems to slow to a crawl as you survey the potential outcomes of the battle with the mind’s eye. At first you’d expected Rider to have an inferior reach to yourself, as he’s a few inches shorter, but the longer blade more than makes up for it. Regardless of his abilities as a fighter or powers as a heroic spirit, if he can keep you at a distance Rider will have the advantage. With the use he can make of distance in mind, you realize he might have exaggerated the force of your last attack by leaping back with the impact. It’s a trick you’ll have to be wary of.

From his reaction time when defending against your slash, doubt he possesses either the precognitive instincts which warned that other Saber of the danger to be found in Kenóti or the ability to read attacks as you do. This is a for limited to reaction when defending. He is also an unarmored man, vulnerable to the kind of hand-to-hand fighting you made such fine use of in Judas’ Akeldama.

With these factors in mind, you decide to close the distance rapidly, getting inside the range of his unwieldy bastard sword and taking him down while he’s unable to defend himself properly. If he retreats, you can force him back against the school building to close him off.

You exhale, and the long moment comes to an end as your mental time resumes its normal flow. In the temporary stillness, Rider speaks up again, calling smugly, “Saber, I should tell you that if you’re standing there trying to go on the defensive, it’ll do you no good. You, who insulted my defense as insufficient without armor, will have to be the one to come and prove your claim.”

This time it’s your turn to grin back. “Oh, you misunderstand me, Rider,” you announce, spreading your arms expansively. “I was merely savoring the moment. You see, during our clash just now I gauged your strength and speed; and I must tell you: you are slow and you are weak. Your abilities are altogether lackluster! In fact, you may just be the weakest swordsman I’ve ever fought! But don’t let that discourage you, Rider. Take up arms all the same, and struggle for your life!”

Without giving him the chance to answer, you spring forward again in a carbon copy of your first attack. You repeat your movements with clockwork precision, ensuring that even without the necessary skill Rider can read your attack and move to counter it. Sure enough, he brings his blade down in a diagonal slash from the shoulder, timed to intercept you before your blade can reach him. Just before it strikes, you plant your right foot and stop dead, then reverse your forward
momentum into a pirouette, spinning left to evade his strike and convert your own
slash into its inverse, now coming in backhand and from the right. The moment when
your back is turned is the crux of the attack: a test of Rider’s agility. If he’s faster
than you are, he’ll be able to react and strike at your back, but if his speed is no
greater than your own he’ll be unable to do more than block.

It goes perfectly. Rider gets his sword, gripped in his right hand, into position
to block your slash at the last second, but the clash of blades breaks his guard wide
open, his right arm knocked back into parallel with his chest. You thrill at the sight,
as he’s now vulnerable. You grab his sword arm by the wrist, leveraging your superior
strength to keep the blade well away from you, and drive Lückeschwert through his
gut! Then, with a flick of your arm, you cut through his side to bring it out and,
adding insult to injury, plant an armored boot in his gut as you drop him. Rider goes
down like the proverbial sack of potatoes. He’ll be dead soon enough.

‘For all his bravado, he wasn’t much,’ you remark to Ayaka, communicating
through your mental link. ‘Do you need to do any kind of preparations for your power
absorption ritual?’

Her nervous voice resounds in your mind, the gentle tone helping draw you
back from the murderous high you tend to ride during battle. ‘No, er, yes, I mean. I
did the preparations already, while you were fighting. Once he dies, you just need to
say “I accept this sacrifice,” and his life energy should flow into you.’

That’s convenient, then. You step forward to watch the body, so you can be
ready at the moment he dies, when an irritating teenage voice interrupts your
moment of triumph. It’s Kajiwara, and he says in a furious tone, “Rider, you made
me a promise! I know that’s not enough to finish you off, so get up and kill him!” The
command spell on the back of his hand flashes, in the darkness, and to your shock the
dying Rider actually does move. Slamming his hand into the ground while lying face-
down in his own blood, he propels himself into the air as if jumping, and lands on his
feet beside his Master. Then, infuriatingly, he dusts himself off to reveal that his
wound has vanished.

“Fwough! That was seriously dangerous for a minute there!” Despite his near-
death at your hands, Rider sounds as cheery now as he did when he first greeted you.
“Nice work, Haruo,” he says, patting the youth on the shoulder. “Now,” he turns to
you, “let’s put a proper end to this.”

Realizing he’s about to unleash some new ability, you leap forward to attack
Rider, but before you can he grabs his Master and hops into the air, raising one foot
over the other as if mounting an invisible horse. As it turns out, that’s just what he’s
doing; a black destrier, wearing a bridle of solid gold, appears beneath the two in a
shimmer of silver light, just as your own armaments do, and in the next moment Rider and his Master blur into movement. The horse and its riders move almost too fast for you to see, their speed far surpassing what Rider was previously capable of, and they’re once more on the opposite side of the ballfield from you in a moment.

“Now then, Saber,” Rider calls from 20 meters away, “let’s finish this like knights, shall we? At least I will, though it seems you lack the proper mount!” He gently sets his Master back down on the ground once more before calling out, “old friend Brigliadoro, let us charge!”

**Status Updated**

No great mass of power moves toward you. In fact, the horse barely seems to have added to Rider’s presence. His speed, however, is now far beyond your own. You have the barest moment to observe that he’s coming in with sword outstretched to cut you down from above, and react. In the last moment before Rider’s blade strikes off your head, you...

[ ] Throw yourself to the ground, dodging to the side!
[ ] Attack Rider with your own sword, evading the attack to slice off his arm!
[X] Defend yourself with Kenōtis!

In the brief moments you have before Rider’s sword takes your head, you think, perhaps absurdly, of bullfighters. Given the situation of this charging mass of muscle attacking you, and the tools at your disposal, the comparison is perhaps apt, though. This thought in mind, you take three steps as Rider charges at you. First, you sheathe your sword, taking your cloak in your right hand instead. Then, you launch yourself to the left, going down on one knee to bring your head below the height at which Rider’s blade glides towards you. Finally, in the same instant as your movement, you flare Kenōtis out behind you.

“Go on then, Rider, and let your steed pass through Kenōtis,” you shout triumphantly, and add to the bravado a mirthful “toro!” Kenōtis, at last, does not disappoint. The fluttering edge of the cloak intercepted Rider’s charger at chest-height, and the carnage is brutal. As it passed over your cloak, the beast’s legs, bravely churning the grass in its battle charge, vanish, along with its lower body. Only a gruesomely severed head and spine, along with the spinal musculature and hide, remain above the smooth line of the portal’s demarcation, and these go hurtling past you, Rider and all, carried by the momentum of their charge. Shortly you hear Rider and what remains of his horse crashing into the ground with a familiar wet
noise, not dissimilar to that made by O’Mordha’s face after you dropped the unfortunate magus’ corpse.

Bringing your sword up again out of its sheath with practiced swiftness, you stand, turn to face Rider, and shift back into your earlier combat stance in one smooth motion. Of course you haven’t practiced such things, and for a moment the dissociative feeling of that contradiction imposes on your thoughts. You dispel it quickly; this isn’t the time. Rider is on his feet as well, and nearly evaded the splatter of horse blood that coats his immediate surroundings. Evidently he dismounted in the air and landed separately, or you suspect he’d be under the dismembered horse, which has rolled onto its back. All merriness is gone from Rider’s face now, and he glares at you with a pure, unfettered hatred. “You,” he hisses, “knight with the morality of a slave! You brazen dog! You would slay a man’s horse over him; would give preference of battle to a mount? You dare to strike, with hidden weapon, at my Brigliadoro! Bastard son of a thousand fathers! Death by the sword is too good for a rogue like you. I should tear you limb from limb!”

“Come now, Rider,” reply with mocking serenity, “It was only a horse, surely not the end of the world. You can always get another.”

“Faithless knave!” He’s roaring now, face contorted with fury to the point of barely being recognizable. “Bragliadoro was a comrade who carried me through all the great battles of my life! A finer, braver, smarter horse you could never find, save that magic thing that sometimes appeared to the emperor! If you would call my Bragliadoro ‘just a horse,’ you make it plainer than ever that you are no true knight!”

As Rider goes through this outburst, you observe to yourself that he’s dropped his casual, modern style of language. He wasn’t exactly littering his speech with slang before, but it had struck you as notable among Servants. Apparently, however, it was no more than an affectation; but why would a heroic spirit of bygone days feel the need to effect a modern style in such a way? It’s a subject worth pondering, but perhaps better for some other time.

By now, Rider has gotten himself up to the peak of fury, ranting and raving at you, and actually seems about to cry. Bizarrely, however, only one eye is filling with tears. The other is quite dry. As you watch, his right eye fills until it finally spills over, and a single, massive teardrop falls from his eye. It’s of bizarre proportions, at least a teaspoon in size. Even stranger, Rider whips out a glass vial and, in a deft motion, bottles the tear. Then, holding the full bottle up in the moonlight, roars out one final curse, drawing out its final syllable into a howl of rage: “Orlando Furioso~!”

All at once, the air around Rider changes, becoming heavier with his presence. Whatever mystical significance the act of bottling a tear held for the Servant, its
practical meaning is clear: a self-empowering Noble Phantasm, and judging by his words one based around rage. This time he leaps towards you, not the other way around, streaking across the battlefield with an inarticulate howl of fury and striking with a heavy overhand blow that sends you sliding back. He’s stronger now, much stronger than before; the weight of his strike was on par with your own, and his speed has improved to the same degree. This is a more dangerous swordsman than at the beginning of the fight, to be sure.

[ ] Match aggression with aggression. Slide past his attacks with your own blade and free hand to finish off Rider the same way as last time. (Pride)
[X] Retreat in the face of this new attack. Wait for him to overextend, and then counter. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Rider follows the blocked chop with a slash from your right, a thrust, and another vertical strike, all fast and strong enough to kill you easily. The shower of blows keeps you firmly on the defensive, and even pushes you back gradually as he hammers away with overpowering force. Earlier you had contemplated forcing Rider back against the edge of the field, where it comes up against the school building, but now you’re the one gradually closing distance towards the chain-link fence that forms its opposite border.

And yet, Rider’s attacks are not truly dangerous. Earlier, his swordplay had seemed more skillful. It was the fighting of a professional, albeit one inferior to you in skill. Now even that professionalism is gone, and Rider’s attacks, though empowered, are brutish and predictable. You may be on the defensive, but it’s easy to parry his blows and keep him exhausting himself while you remain fresh, minimizing your movements. Finally, after what seems like an age, his movements begin to slow and the moment comes for you to finish him.

Rider, stymied by your guard, chops down from overhead once more, in a strike more herculean than any prior. If blocked directly on the flat of Lückeschwert, it might snap right through the thinner blade. Instead, you step forward and to the right, into Rider’s off-hand side, with your sword up in vertical guard. As you do so, you spin your blade along Rider’s stroke to slide it back into a cutting position, bringing it to his throat as you step forward. Before he can pull back, you slash to the right with all your strength, cutting the head from his shoulders and knocking it away with the force of the motion. His body, suddenly bereft of control, seizes momentarily
and then falls backwards, thumping to the ground with weighty finality. This time, you’re certain he won’t be getting back up.

You breathe a momentary sigh of relief at the enemy’s final defeat. He was a tenacious foe, if not especially gifted otherwise. You have little time to contemplate, though, as Ayaka’s voice soon sounds in your mind. ‘Quick, Saber-san! He’s still in the ritual’s hold now, but the energy is fading! Accept the sacrifice!’

Ah, yes. The sacrifice; you’d momentarily forgotten. In a grave voice, you intone, “I, the Servant Saber, accept this sacrifice.” No sooner do the words leave your lips than you feel power, siphoned from Rider’s death, flowing into you. It carries with it a greater understanding of Rider’s existence, and you are suddenly aware of his true name, and the extent of his abilities.

**Status Updated**

This newfound power is not the whole energy of Rider’s existence; most of that seems to have disappeared elsewhere; but there is a significant amount, enough to alter a magical construct of your magnitude. As it flows into you, this energy demands to be channeled. Right now it’s foreign, opposed to your existence, but you seize hold of it with the technique you learned at Circe’s hands and...

[ ] Direct the energy into your body, enhancing your raw power.
[ ] Form the energy into a concept, reinforcing an aspect of your nature as a hero. (Which?)
[X] Attempt to replicate some property of Rider’s and apply it to yourself. *(Durandal)*
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Now that Rider’s lost power is under your control, you need only channel it, make it a part of you. You contemplate various uses for it, before settling on the empowerment of your blade. Perhaps it’s your nature as a Saber, but you feel Rider’s blade, *Durandal*, calling to you; stimulating a greed you hadn’t formerly possessed. You simply must make it yours!

You envision the blade and shape Rider’s energy into a replica. One not only of its outer appearance, but including the innermost secrets of its construction, revealed to you through the sacrifice of Rider. Then, holding that replica of energy within you, you overlay it on your own blade, *Lückeschwert*, merging the new construct with the existing Noble Phantasm.

As the energy sinks into it you hold *Lückeschwert* aloft in the moonlight, pointing to its bloody tip toward the stars, and watch as the power of Rider’s death
transforms it. Its blade is the first thing to change, extending by nearly a foot from its former 30-inch length and widening slightly at the base. The hilt, too, lengthens to permit the use of a second hand, though you doubt you’ll have more difficulty than Roland did in wielding it one-handed.

The general shape isn’t the only change in the sword, moreover, as it takes on a portion of Roland’s ostentation. From the base of the blade, a golden inscription is inlaid in the black material, reading on one side, *Ich bin der Schlüssel*, and on the other, *Ich bin das Tor*. The hilt guard, formerly an arc of plain steel, takes on the cruciform shape of *Durandal*’s own, and gains an inlay of ruby, polished smooth and flat, which traces an inner replica of the guard’s shape. The pommel, similarly, goes from an abstract lump of metal to the silver talon of a bird, gripping another ruby in the shape of an orb. Only the sword’s grip remains as it was, plain black leather molded to fit the hand.

The transformation of your sword goes deeper than its appearance, of course. Its power, too, has grown far beyond its former state. *Durandal*’s divine origin, and the miracles contained within it, have transformed your weapon into something immeasurably greater than *Lückeschwert*. The true nature of this blade is no longer a mere patch of Nothingness, a gap-sword. This, you realize, is something truly worthy of legend: the Key of God, *Heiligeröffnungsschwert*!

Suddenly a new presence calls your mind away from the admiration of your new Noble Phantasm: an arrow, hurtling at you out of the darkness! You cut it out of the air before it can strike, but the impact runs up your arm. That arrow had the destructive force of one of Blackbeard’s cannons, if not more. Now that you’re paying closer attention to your surroundings again, you can feel the presence of another Servant on the school’s rooftop; one with a much stronger presence than Roland.

Thinking fast, you dash back to the bleachers, to protect Ayaka from a second arrow targeting your Master. None comes, though. Instead, approaching in place of an attack is a beautiful woman, who walks out onto the ballfield from the school building’s back door. She’s obviously a magus, and the Master of this new Servant; only someone from the same kind of background as Truvietianne Edelfelt would walk out to a life and death fight wearing a silk evening gown and high-heels. She chuckles softly, perhaps finding amusement in your hasty move to defend Ayaka. Whatever her opinion of your actions, however, it is Ayaka who she addresses when she speaks, looking straight past you.
“Good evening, Master of Saber,” she says, in a gentle, Kyoto-accented voice that seems to radiate luxury and decadence by its very tones. “Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Akagata Kyouka, the Master of Archer.”

Totally taken aback by the sudden appearance of a new enemy combined with her strange courtesy it takes Ayaka a few moments to formulate her thoughts before she manages to respond, “I’m Shijou Ayaka. I-it’s a pleasure to meet you, Akagata-san,” and bow stiffly.

Akagata returns the bow with flowing grace, replying, “the pleasure is all mine, Shijou-han. I am told that you are in fact the Second Owner of this area; please accept my apology for not having paid my respects to you earlier. The business of the War has kept me extremely busy since my arrival in Tokyo.”

“Oh no, that’s fine,” Ayaka says, still clearly at a loss for how to deal with the strange woman.

Ignoring your Master’s confusion, Akagata continues with what she’s evidently come to say. “I must congratulate you on your victory. I had dearly hoped to arrive in time to save poor Haruo’s servant, but it seems that you got the better of him much too quickly. Still, I must beg you not to carry your victory any further. Will you not spare this boy’s life, at least? With his Servant gone, his role in the Holy Grail War is at an end, and killing him can be of no more use to you. I implore you, be satisfied with your victory and leave him in peace; do not force me to take your life in his defense.”

Ayaka calls out to you telepathically, saying, ‘Saber-san, what do you think we should do? I didn’t think we were going to kill Kajiwara-senpai, but if we fight another Servant here I can use the ritual of sacrifice again. I guess you probably shouldn’t fight two enemy Servants in a row though, should you?’

[X] Tell Ayaka the two of you should retreat for the night. It’s best not to push your stamina fighting multiple foes back-to-back if you can avoid it, and there’s no reason to kill Kajiwara. (Self-Preservation/Compassion)
[ ] Reassure Ayaka that you’re perfectly capable of another fight. If anything, you’re more capable now than before taking on Rider! Besides, with no solid leads on the enemy this is too good a chance to pass up. (Pride/Duty)
[ ] Address the enemy Master and Servant aloud. (What do you say?)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

‘Fighting here would be highly inadvisable,’ you answer Ayaka. ‘My stamina is not a matter for concern, but I have my doubts about the enemies before us. I can
sense that Archer is a stronger foe than Rider, and he has a great advantage in the range at which he can fight. Even worse, there is the possibility that he or his Master could target you. No, we should yield the Master of Rider to her and challenge Archer again under more favorable circumstances.

From the corner of your eye, you see Ayaka nod her assent before answering the Master of Archer, mustering up an impressive front of confidence for the scared girl. “Alright, Akagata-san. You can and Kajiwara-senpai can go. For tonight, we’ll say we aren’t enemies.”

“Your mercy does you credit, Shijou-han,” Akagata says silkily, making another bow before turning to go. “Come, Haruo,” she says to the student. “Let’s get you out of harm’s way. I hope you’ll...” her voice is cut off by the school door shutting behind them, and soon afterwards you feel Archer’s presence recede. They’re gone, and you’re left alone with Ayaka at the deserted school. With the danger finally behind you, you let out a sigh of relief and dematerialize your helmet. You also do away with one of your gauntlets, allowing you to check your watch. Though it feels like you’ve been here fighting all night, it turns out to be just a quarter after eight.

By your side, Ayaka visibly relaxes. Then she bounces back, full of excitement. “That was amazing, Saber-san,” she exclaims. “I’ve never seen anyone move that fast, not even when Dad showed us what he could do with reinforcement magic!”

“Such is the power of a Servant,” you say, not without a note of pride. “Always remember that no human can match a Servant in combat, Miss Ayaka, and be very careful in these battles. That’s the approach that can see you through.”

“I understand, Saber-san,” your Master says seriously. “Watching you fight drove it home to me just how outclassed we magi are by our Servants. I’ll do everything I can to support you and stay out of harm’s way.”

“Such understanding is a boon,” you say smiling, and without thinking you reach out and pat her head. “Thank you, Miss Ayaka. Your ritual has been of great help as well; my Noble Phantasm is stronger now by far than when I fought Rider; but come, let’s not stand in this schoolyard all night.”

[X] “We should be getting home to the manor.” (Self-Preservation)
[ ] “There are other Servants to pursue, and the night is still young.” (Duty)
[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“We should be getting home to the manor,” you declare. “You must be getting tired, Miss Ayaka. You’ve been up for a long time, haven’t you?”
“Yes,” she says with a sigh, “I guess I am pretty tired. Earlier I felt like I couldn’t fall asleep, not with things the way they were, but now... I guess going to bed would be a good idea.”

Now that you’ve brought the subject up, you realize sleep is putting some demands on your body as well. Though the need to rest is less urgent now than when you were wholly human, you haven’t been able to shake it completely. You haven’t slept since Thursday morning, you suddenly realize, and it’s getting to be a trial. Yet the manor must be defended at night. It’s a subject to ponder on...

As you and Ayaka walk towards home, an idea strikes you and you ask, “Miss Ayaka, would it be possible to link the bounded fields around the manor to my perception in some way?”

“Link them to your perception?” Ayaka echoes your words as a question. “Let me think... it should be possible, but why? Are you worried about someone breaking in while we’re out?”

“It isn’t that, though you raise a worthy point of concern,” you answer. “The fact of the matter is, I haven’t slept in three days and I’m beginning to feel the lack. My hope is that you may be able to modify the manor’s bounded fields so that they awaken me if they detect anything. Then I might get some rest tonight rather than sitting up on guard.”

“Wait.” Ayaka holds up a hand. “You mean you haven’t been sleeping at all since I woke you up on the roof the other day?”

“Well, no,” you say. “During the day, you had to be guarded, and at night it’s been essential that I stand watch over the manor. I could hardly compromise the safety of you and your brother just to snatch a bit of rest.”

“Are you an idiot?” Ayaka flares up, surprisingly angry. “You could have talked to Nii-san about sleeping during the day, or had him work something out to alert you at night, just like you’re doing now! You need to take better care of yourself, Saber-san! What if you’d been hurt or killed by Rider because you were too tired during the fight?”

“I see your point,” you concede. “At any rate, I do intend to sleep tonight provided we are not attacked. You can connect the bounded field to me, then?”

“I should be able to, yes. I’ll need you to stand at the boundary and- oh, here we are.” With convenient timing, the two of you arrive back at the manor just as Ayaka is beginning an explanation of what can be done with the bounded field. “Go ahead and stand in the middle of our front gate, please,” she says, gesturing to the invisible line through marking the edge of the Shijou land, where the field has its boundary.
“Very well.” You push open the wrought-iron gate and stand where Ayaka indicates, turning back to face her. She steps towards you and reached up to lay a fingertip on your forehead, just between your eyebrows, then closes her eyes as the magic crest on her forearm begins to glow. In a soft whisper, she chants, “Line of my boundary, marker of my domain, I command you by the name of Shijou. Let these eyes and this mind absorb your senses, and let them know all that you observe.”

True to her words, you feel an awareness of everything that goes on about the manor’s grounds appear in your mind, as if you’ve gained a new set of senses which view the bounded land simultaneously from an enormous height and an immediate proximity. Ayaka takes her hand from your face as the magic is completed, and says, “there. Now if some intruder violates the bounded field, you’ll feel it as if someone were shaking you awake. At least, I think that’s what it’s like. As far as I know, the Shijou haven’t tied a barrier to someone’s senses in hundreds of years; not since we had professional guards and house vassals.”

“For the moment,” you say with a gallant smile, “you have a professional guard and house vassal again, Ojou-sama.”

“And a very fine one, too,” she answers. “Now let’s go in, I am tired.”

So the two of you return to the Shijou manor and, saying good night, part ways. After some thought, you decide to sleep in that same chair in the second-floor hallway where you’ve sat guarding the manor on the previous nights. You may be sleeping tonight, but you’d still like to be in a position to respond quickly. As you drift off, your gaze remains fixed on the property’s entrance, visible through the window.

Your dreams tonight are a confused mess of scenes, evidently from a child’s perspective given the size of the adults. Many occur in the Shijou manor, though others are elsewhere. All quickly fade from the mind, save one.

It is the image of a woman, with straight black hair hanging far down her back and dressed in an ornate kimono, holding a dove pressed down on a lacquered surface. In her free hand, she lifts a golden knife and, with a single stroke, removes the head.

This done, the woman places a shallow china dish below the dove’s bleeding neck, letting blood pour into it. Once filled, she raises the dish to her lips and drinks deeply, before declaring, “I accept this sacrifice, by the name of Shijou.”
You awaken to the sound of birds, chirping in the early morning light. It must be about dawn, or slightly before, from the faint light outside. From the silence within the house, Ayaka hasn’t yet awoken. You stand up, stretch, and look around as you consider what to do with your morning. There are many more books on magecraft in the Shijou collection still to be read, and down in the basement Vaisset’s work remains unfinished. There’s also the matter of your new Noble Phantasm to consider. Perhaps it would be better to focus on increasing your understanding of its capabilities.

[ ] Go looking for more magical knowledge in the Shijou library. (Curiosity)
[ ] Descend into Vaisset’s workshop and attempt to decipher his notes. (Duty)
[X] Meditate on the nature and powers of Heiligöffnungschwert. (Pride)
[ ] Go down to the kitchen and make yourself some breakfast. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

The most important thing to do, you decide, is to improve your understanding of Heiligöffnungschwert. It’s obvious that it took on the properties of the “three miracles” contained in Durandal, but you’re still uncertain as to what exactly that entails. So, after sitting back down you materialize the sword, holding it out in your hands, feeling the leather grip in one and the strange, almost non-metallic material of the blade with the other. You close your eyes, going into the state of inward focus.
that Circe taught you. This time, though, you survey not the flow of energy within your body but the structure of Heiligöffnungschwert.

Its core is like Durandal, a metal blade of infinite durability, fated never to dull or break, and that core is coated in a thin layer of some strange otherworldly substance, perhaps a manifestation of the element of Nothingness. In any case, it is this material onto which a portal to Imaginary Numbers is projected when the sword is used to attack. Beyond these two elements, though, is some other magic, an enchantment inlaid with the inscription and woven into the portal, a connection which-

Then you find yourself in another place. Not your body, that remains seated in the armchair by the window, but your mind has appeared in a place of whirling color and streaming energy; a place you know now, and recognize. It is the borderland between the realms of Real and Imaginary Numbers, that indeterminate realm you traversed to reach and return from the Akeldama in which you received the power of the Silver Grail. Now, as ever, the infinite varieties of light pass you, streaming towards that point of darkness which is the horizon of the true Realm of Imaginary Numbers, the world which still houses the phantoms of old myth and still obeys the law of divinity. For the first time, you feel another presence here, reaching out from that darkness to touch your mind; and when it finds you there, it speaks.

The other presence speaks with a voice made up of a thousand distinct voices, all with their own differing cadences merged into a great composite tone radiating power and authority. So, it booms, THE NEWBORN HERO, WITH HIS ORIGIN IN OUR REALM AND HIS ASPIRATION TO OUR POWER, NOW TAKES ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS US. ALBERICH, OUR CHILD, YOU HAVE GIVEN THE STRUCTURE OF THAT DIVINITY WHICH IS DEAD TO THE UNFORMED SUBSTANCE OF THAT WHICH STILL LIVES. NOW YOU SEEK A REVELATION AS TO ITS USE.

You are a voiceless mind, unable to give assent, but it’s clear enough that this entity, which you hardly dare to hope is a representative of the gods, is already well aware of your thoughts. It continues speaking. WHAT YOU HOLD IS THE POWER OF MIRACLES, WHICH WAS OF OLD GIVEN TO OUR MOST DEVOTED SERVANTS. THIS IS THE POWER TO INVOKE OUR OWN AUTHORITY OVER THE WORLD, AND MANIFEST OUR POWER THROUGH YOU. DO NOT CONFUSE IT FOR YOUR OWN POWER, AS MANY FOOLS HAVE DONE OF OLD. THE POWER OF MIRACLES IS OF INVOCATION ONLY, AND THE TRUE AUTHORITY IS WITH US.

But how, you wonder, does divine authority manifest? It was Circe, a former goddess, who told you that the Divine Language no longer commands Mana, and that divine authority vanished with the Gods.
Indeed, the voice thunders in answer to your confusion, our power no longer commands the desolate world which you inhabit. Thus, your miracles are of this, our new world, which you call the Realm of Imaginary Numbers. The miracles borne by your Heiligöffnungschwert are the Three Miracles of the Gate and the Key.

The voice pauses for a moment, perhaps for dramatic effect, before listing off in jubilant tones, The power to cut through the boundaries between the worlds, to project from itself openings to our realm! To bring into your world and sustain there in spite of its vile physical laws the impossibilities which in our world, by our authority, are possible! To make real in your world the Nothingness and Void from which you were born, and which are there condemned to be Imaginary Elements!

As the voice finishes recounting the powers of Heiligöffnungschwert, the boundary point of darkness begins receding. No, you realize, the motion is yours. As you draw away from the Realm of Imaginary Numbers, moving with a force you did not invoke, the voice calls out to you one final proclamation. These are the three miracles given to you as marks of our favor. Use them well, Alberich!

Then you’re back in your own world, your mind having returned to its proper place, staring at the sword. The Key of God indeed, if what the voice told you is true. Even the first power, manifesting portals to Imaginary Numbers beyond the sword itself by cutting, is a great expansion of your previous capabilities. As for drawing things out from the Realm of Imaginary Numbers or manifesting Void and Nothingness in the world, the possibilities seem uncertain; but certainly great.

As you sit there, looking out at the morning sky, you consider how best to prosecute the war...

What do you want to do now, and what are your plans for the War going forward? This is the next major point to plan your priorities and approach.
Einzbern Tower, Penthouse ~ Morning

Nobody could claim that the penthouse was anything less than luxurious. Occupying the entirety of the Einzbern Tower’s top floor, it was a sprawling abode filled with antique furniture dating back to the best days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In size and style, the Einzberns’ workers had done everything they could to replicate the atmosphere of their mistress’ palatial home. Nevertheless, Liliesviel von Einzbern was furious.

She paced back and forth in front of the living room’s large picture window, passing heedlessly by a beautiful view of the city for which the girl had no eyes; long pearly hair and the voluminous frills of her dress bouncing in synchronized time with her steps. Finally, she stopped and whirled away from the window, asking “Isn’t this ridiculous, Stachel?”

The recipient of this comment was one of Liliesviel’s two personal maids, distinguished above the other servants by their status as high-grade homunculi, Stachel. She had no second name. Standing impassively motionless a few feet from her mistress, the maid answered in a toneless voice, “It is ridiculous, Lady Liliesviel.”

“Oh,” Liliesviel pouted irritably, “Can’t you at least try to act like a conversation partner? I haven’t even told you what it is yet!”

“Whatever you assert is ridiculous certainly is so,” the maid answered confidently. “An inferior one would never dissent. What is it that is ridiculous, Lady Liliesviel?”

The smaller girl sighed, casting a profoundly disappointed gaze on her more developed servant. An outside observer, looking at their faces and bodies, might have thought the pair were two bickering sisters, or an extremely indulgent mother and her daughter, but this impression was only an illusion created by the two girls’ peculiar
origins. Stachel would appear just about twenty years old regardless of her age, as would all the homunculus maids turned out by the House of Einzbern’s sophisticated manufacturing process. That Stachel was only a few years old showed in her reactions, however. No amount of Einzbern mental training and accelerated growth could do away with a tendency towards mental simplicity that obstinately appeared in the most intensely focused combat models.

“I’m talking about my living arrangements,” Liliesviel said with exasperation. “Onee-chan got a castle in that town where the fifth ritual took place! Why do I have to sit around in some tower room? Doesn’t Grandfather have any faith in me?”

While Liliesviel was explaining her complaint to the first, another maid entered the room, bearing a sealed letter. Liliesviel promptly rounded on her, continuing, “what do you think, Stengel? Isn’t it absurd, the difference between my treatment and Onee-chan’s?”

“If I may be allowed to express my humble views,” the second maid said, head bowed low.

“Yes, yes, go on,” Liliesviel answered, waving a dismissive hand.

With her head still bowed so as to keep her eyes from meeting her mistress’, Stengel continued, “I am certain that the Lord has the highest confidence in you, Lady Liliesviel. He knows that you are the final, truly perfect successor, here at last to complete the Heaven’s Feel, and that you therefore require less support than your predecessor.”

Her emotions ever volatile, Liliesviel whimsically shifted from an angry pout to a teasing smirk and raised an admonishing finger before her maid’s eyes. “Now now,” she chided, “you shouldn’t lie just to placate me.” Then in a more serious tone, continued, “I wish I could believe you. If Grandfather didn’t think I needed any support, why did he send that Alberich?”

At this point the first maid interjected again, speaking with the same emotionless voice as before. “Perhaps there was no space to construct a castle in this city.”

“Maybe you’re right, Stachel,” Liliesviel said with a sigh. “It’s not as if they could go out into the woods on the outskirts of town and build one. Still, it is infuriating having to spend my days in this horrid modern tower.”

“Ahem,” the other maid, Stengel, reminded her mistress of her presence.

“Go ahead, Stengel,” Liliesviel assented. “What is it?”

“On the subject of this... ‘Alberich’ character, I have a report to deliver.”

Stengel’s voice dripped suspicion as she mentioned Alberich’s name. Though her mistress had decided to put suspicion aside regarding the fellow and Stachel would go
along with whatever Lady Liliesviel said, Stengel still had her doubts. Why would Lord Acht have sent another homunculus, and one with such bizarre capabilities at that, into the Holy Grail War without informing Lady Liliesviel? Could such a homunculus have been created, not only without Lady Liliesviel knowing, but even kept a secret from the servants? It was a mystery, to be sure.

The innocent smile Liliesviel showed at her words gave Stengel pause, though, as the girl said, “A report, lovely! Maybe we can find out what Grandfather had in mind for him, then. Let’s hear it, don’t just hand over the paper.” Was it right to question the situation, and dash Liliesviel’s hopes of a new ally in the Heaven’s Feel? Was it proper to trust in this uncertain figure and become vulnerable to betrayal? Neither truly seemed appropriate.

Stengel quashed her wavering emotions and unsealed the letter, scanning over the report before summarizing it for her mistress. “Lady Liliesviel, you noble Servant here reports that he had no trouble overseeing the death of Rider, which you observed last night,” she began, “and that he witnessed something quite strange in the battle.”

“Oh? Go on,” Liliesviel prompted, “what sort of part did Alberich play?”

“Quite a prominent one, it would appear,” Stengel continued, “for he battled Rider as the Servant Saber. After a heated contest, described in detail here, he slew Rider and consumed a portion of his spirit’s energy, transforming and empowering his Noble Phantasm in the process. A singularly strange and enigmatic event, it would seem to this humble servant.”

Liliesviel, however, wasn’t sharing her maid’s emotions in the slightest. Instead an impish smirk adorned her face, and she said, “No, no, not at all, Stengel! Don’t you see? This is the key to figuring out what kind of homunculus Grandfather has sent for my older brother! I’ve no more doubts now, if that’s how it is!”

“And will you share with us your sagacious insight?” Though her words remain polite, sarcasm leaks into the maid’s tone. Liliesviel’s reaction is hardly what she might have hoped for, had she known in advance the contents of the letter.

“Of course!” Liliesviel was all smiles now, and she usually stays free with her favor as long as her mood is high. “See, if Alberich-nii-chan could absorb Rider’s power that shows us how he became a Servant in the first place! Grandfather must have made a new kind of combat homunculus, a cross between our Stachel’s type and a Lesser Holy Grail, with the ability to absorb a portion of a Servant’s power upon its death. Then, Grandfather sent him as an agent to assist me in case the Servant we summoned wasn’t good enough to complete the Heaven’s Feel for me. So then Alberich came to Japan and managed to defeat one Servant, the one who died on Wednesday night, and take its place, but lost his memories when he absorbed its
energy, like the early Lesser Holy Grails did. After that he ended up fighting as a Servant normally!"

Stengel remained unconvinced. “This seems like a strained and elaborate rationalization,” she declared. “Lady Liliesviel, do you not think it more likely that this Alberich is simply a Servant with a strange ability? One summoned in the normal fashion, and quite unrelated to the Einzbern family?”

“Oh, you be quiet!” Liliesviel snapped. “If you had my magical talent, and you’d had a look at him properly, you would know Alberich-nii-chan was an artificial creation. No artificial human looks so much like us without being an Einzbern homunculus, you do know that. Now I’ll hear no more argument from you. We’re going to restore Onii-chan’s memory and bring him back into the family properly! Now let me have a better look at that note.”

“As you say, Lady Liliesviel.” In harmonizing unison, the two maids affirmed their mistress’ intent.
You must take victory in the Holy Grail War if you’re to survive. You’re certain of that fact, and it is the premise on which all of your other plans must rest. It isn’t enough to dismantle the ritual, as the Emiyas want to, motivated by a fear of the evil which they say is sealed within the Grail. If it ceases to be, you’ll have nothing left to sustain your existence, and you’ll fade away without a trace. Such a fate is quite unacceptable for a man of your quality.

Even with that conflict of interest in mind, though, you find yourself drawn to the idea of working with the Emiya family, if only temporarily. They hold one potent tool in the form of their Servant, a heroic spirit outside of the seven summoned for the Holy Grail War; and another in whatever the true natures of Emiya Shirou and Sakura are. Each of the two has an incredible supply of mystic energy, making it clear they’ve reached some state beyond ordinary humanity as well. Perhaps it’s only your lust for control, but the idea of allowing such a powerful group to intervene in the Holy Grail War without your oversight feels repugnant. Thus, you resolve to raise the topic of an alliance with the Emiya family again in your next conversation with Ayaka. If all goes well, the two of you can use the Emiyas’ power to more easily destroy the five remaining enemy Servants and Ayaka can continue sacrificing them to you in the process; by the time the Emiyas have realized you don’t intend to dismantle the Holy Grail, you should be too powerful for them to overcome.

With your long-term plan for the War thus decided, your mind turns to immediate prospects, and the implications of the powers revealed in your trance. All three of the miraculous powers of Heiligöffnungschwert sound incredible, but what intrigues you most right now is the manifestation of your aligned elements, Nothingness and Void. If you want to take advantage of that, though, you’ll have to do some more reading in the Shijou library.

Finding your body a bit sluggish after the strange trance you entered to learn about Heiligöffnungschwert, you get up and stretch again before making your way
back to the library room. If Ayaka’s gotten up, you haven’t heard her, but she probably hasn’t. After 20 hours on her feet, you can’t blame the poor girl for sleeping past eight in the morning. So it’s in a silent house that you slip into the library and track down the magic texts you studied previously. Sinking into one of the room’s deeply padded armchairs, you begin to read...

[ ] *Forms of Power*, a catalog of various sigils and geometric formations instrumental in ritual magic.

[X] *Transcendental Principles of Elementalism*, which deals with applications of pure element control.

[ ] *Introduction to Structural Energy Systems*, which deals with magic circuits, leylines, bounded energy fields, and related topics.

[ ] Look for something else (Write in what sort of magic you’re looking for)

*Transcendental Principles of Elementalism* is what you settle on. It was *Heiligöffnungschwert’s* third miracle that provoked this return to the library, after all. If you hold in your possession an artifact that can manifest your Imaginary Elements, the only reasonable choice in magic study is to read the book on elemental control. Previously you were interested in general magic theory; supplementing your understanding of the way magi look at the world, since you had no direct path in mind when it came to your own magical pursuits. Now, however, the need arises for a more practical focus.

Unfortunately, the author confined himself to writing about the so-called Five Great Elements: those elements which manifest in this world, namely Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Sky. Although one of these *is* an alignment of yours, its nature makes it less than ideally useful for raw manipulation. Sky, the author explains, is an element that can only affect magical constructs and actualized mysteries, since it is the element of magic itself. You recall Circe telling you something similar during her own dissertation on the elements, back in the *Akeldama*, but she didn’t get into much detail regarding manifesting them directly. Her view of magic, you recall, was as spells created by a combination of element and attribute, where the primary focus is to produce a certain effect on the world by actualizing the mystery related to it through a foundation of element and a form defined by attribute. As you consider the subject, you realize this likely has to do with the origins of magic from a goddess’ perspective. If magic began as using the divine language to command the world to reshape itself, it would be natural to, when studying the composition of magic that
makes up these commands, prioritize the effect and regard the mystic substance as subsidiary.

Elementalism seems to be a very different sort of magic. It’s manifestly human in its outlook, to continue with the speculation regarding conceptual origins, as it studies magic beginning with substance. Both Circe and the elementalist magi recognize the world as being composed of five elements, but whereas her approach to magic focused on the manifestation of effects, the author of Transcendental Principles writes exclusively about the manifestation and control of elements in their pure material state. Since Sky has no function in a pure material state, it’s naturally glossed over. Still, you persevere despite the cold treatment given to your alignment. It’s the method that matters, after all, not the subject. With Heiligöffnungschwert’s power, you should be able to maintain the existence of Nothingness, which Circe called “the element of impossible materialization,” using the principles outlined here for the ordinary material elements.

The methods outlined in the text are, by and large, as much the object of Circe’s scorn as its subject. The book follows a chronological approach to the development of elemental control, beginning with the most rigid of formal craft by outlining such things as magic circles that can be inscribed on parchment and then burned to summon a gout of fire. After that, the author progresses to the autohypnotic method, using incantations to promote the subconscious shaping of Od. Less than a third of the book pertains to the information most useful to you, the actual forms which these indirect methods should induce mystic energy to take.

Nonetheless, after several hours of reading you arrive at a basic understanding of how to shape your energy into the elemental forms according to the internal method of control that Circe taught you. By focusing on the inner system of your magic circuits and channeling the mystic energy that flows through them to the boundary line between yourself and the world, you can compel it to manifest as materialized Nothingness; at least, that’s the theory. Now that you have a clear idea of what to do, you begin your first practical test, conjuring into the air before you...

[ ] A projectile, modeled on the classic fireball design. (Duty)
[ ] A barrier, like an oversized round shield. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] A sword, its shape replicating Heiligöffnungschwert. (Pride)
[X] A flat strip, like Kenótis’ shape when Circe first created it. (Compassion)
[ ] Something else (Write in)
Nothingness: the element that makes up all materials in the Realm of Imaginary Numbers. Although the world you dwell in is made up of Five Great Elements, only two exist in the gods’ newer realm. These are Nothingness, which fills the roles of Earth, Water, Wind, and Fire; and Void, which fills the role of Sky. With Heiligöffnungswert’s third miracle and basic knowledge of elemental magic, you’re now finally ready to make proper use of the fact that you are aligned to this multifaceted Imaginary Element.

You draw the mystic energy out of your magic circuits, transforming it at the edge of your existence, and introducing it into the world as Nothingness, physically materialized. You imbue the element with the soft flexibility of silk, interwoven with the resilience of steel. Then, carefully maintaining the force of will necessary to impose your control on the manifestation, you give it shape, flowing into the world from the energy gathered around your hand as a long ribbon three inches wide by six feet long, of the same color as your cloak. At first you only hold it in place, the difficulty of maintaining its existence gradually slackening as your mind grows accustomed to the task of governing an elemental manifestation.

You look at the strange thing floating in the air, for all the world an ordinary strip of black silk, with a feeling of great pride. You’ve changed a great deal since appearing in the Akeldama; all for the better, of course, but it’s never really been by your own power. Akeldama gave you power, first through the pseudo-grail and then through the completion of its ritual. Ayaka empowered you through her ritual, which allowed you to absorb Rider’s sacrifice. Circe gave you power in the form of the mystic codes she created for you, which later became your skills and Noble Phantasms. Even your fighting abilities, partially learned through your own effort, were aided by the first mystic code she gave you, the gloves which enhanced your muscle memory. Now, though, for the first time, you’ve truly improved your power exclusively by your own efforts and study. You’ve learned, on your own, to wield the power of your element!

**Status Updated**

Experimenting with your control over the manifestation, you will it to take on the red edging that marks the black areas of Kenōtis. It obligingly shifts, proving one of your hypotheses about the nature of your weaponry. You’d been wondering whether it was the other side of Kenōtis’ portal that was wholly dark, or if that were a property of the portal itself. The ability of this construct of Nothingness to hold color proves that the darkness of your portals comes from the fact that whatever light
strikes them is being transported to the Realm of Imaginary Numbers, rather than being a fundamental property of the Imaginary Elements.

Next, you experiment with the size and physical properties of the ribbon. By pouring more energy into it, you’re able to lengthen it as much as you like, and you make several circuits around the walls of the room before returning it to a more manageable size. You confirm your deftness with it by picking up and replacing several books; there are no problems using it as an extensible limb. You can harden it to greater rigidity, making a narrow shield out of the thing, or narrow the edges into a blade, with somewhat more effort than was required to change the color. Finally you try moving the ribbon’s entire length away from yourself, and find that it becomes more difficult to sustain the ribbons existence as it gets farther from you. Intriguingly, keeping one end tucked away in your cloak and extending the other across the room uses less energy than holding the entirety of a smaller ribbon at the same distance. You make a mental note to save energy by always keeping the ribbon’s ‘base’ on your person.

Satisfied with your control over a single mass of elemental magic, you try creating three ribbons at once. The first comes more easily than before, but trying to keep it in existence while creating a second is taxing, and the third proves too much for you; your concentration breaks, and all three dissipate. Still, you’re confident you can continue to improve with practice. Checking your watch, it’s about noon. You’ve spent four hours on magic practice, and it suddenly seems odd that Ayaka didn’t contact you to see what you were up to. Then again, perhaps she looked in on you during your reading and you were too absorbed in the book to notice.

[ ] Head to the kitchen for some lunch (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Go down into Vaisset’s workshop and start looking through his research notes. (Curiosity)
[ ] Contact Ayaka to discuss your next moves in the War (Duty)
[X] Contact Ayaka while making your way to the kitchen for lunch (Self-Preservation)

Although you do find it odd for Ayaka not to have asked about what you were doing, you decide it’s unlikely to be a pressing concern. Certainly if something dangerous had happened she would have alerted you by the mental link you share. What is pressing at the moment is the matter of food. It occurs to you as you finish
your elemental magic training that you haven’t eaten breakfast. Nor, in fact, did you
eat lunch or dinner yesterday. Even for a Servant, this is surely pushing yourself too
far.

So you make your way downstairs, heading for the kitchen and lunch. As you
walk, you reach out over your mental link to Ayaka, asking, ‘How has your morning
been, Miss Ayaka? I’ve been training since dawn, and seem to have lost track of the
time.’

‘I could tell.’ Ayaka sounds amused as she answers. ‘You didn’t show up for
breakfast, so I had a look around and saw you in the library, hunched over one of our
books. I figured you’d rather not be disturbed, but I bet you regret missing breakfast
now, right?’

‘Not only breakfast,’ you answer, ‘but yes, anyway. I’m on my way to the
kitchen now, to try my hand at making myself some lunch.’

‘You don’t need to do that, you know. I was about to eat on my own. Come
down and join me.’

‘Gladly.’

When you arrive, you find Ayaka by a cutting board, assembling meat,
vegetables, and bread. Lunch, it turns out, is western style. Roast beef sandwiches,
with lettuce, tomatoes, horseradish, and red onions. As she sets the assembled food on
plates for you two, Ayaka asks, “Have you had these before, Saber-san? I think
they’re pretty good, but they don’t sell sandwiches like this at the school cafeteria so
I’ve gotten used to making them myself.”

“No,” you answer truthfully. They’re not something you’ve eaten before, as
your experience eating has been almost exclusively Japanese dishes, but you soon find
that they make for a fine meal. Seeing you wolf down your sandwich, Ayaka is quick
to offer you another, and you find yourself eating several without pause. It’s lucky for
you that Ayaka doesn’t mind catering to your ravenous appetite.

“Well,” you say once you’re finally finished eating, “those really are lovely.
Thank you for the excellent meal, Miss Ayaka.”

“Oh, it was really nothing,” Ayaka answers with a wan smile. “After the way
you fought last night, I’d expected you to be starving. I wasn’t expecting you to take
an interest in our library, though. Are you a magus, Saber-san?”

“Not as such. I do possess magic circuits, and can physically channel mystic
energy, but up until I began reading from your family’s texts I had only the most
general knowledge regarding how to implement that capability.”
You give this self-deprecating answer with effected bashfulness, before continuing, “I have been making progress, however, and can hopefully show you a useful new technique when we meet our next foe.”

“Our next enemy, huh?” Ayaka sounds disheartened at the prospect. “I guess that would be those Emiya people you were talking about, right? If they want to prevent the Holy Grail War from finishing, it’s my responsibility as Second Owner to put a stop to them.”

“I wouldn’t be so certain of that,” you say cautiously. “As I told you before, I made a favorable impression on the Emiya family the last time we met. They believe the Einzbern family to be the primary masterminds directing the Holy Grail War. If we simply represent ourselves to them as having had a change of heart, and wanting to help them dismantle the Holy Grail, we can make use of their strength to defeat the other Masters.”

“And we’d be sacrificing the enemy Servants using my ritual, so you’d be powering up as we go, is that the idea?” Ayaka sounds more suspicious of your plan than you’d hoped. In fact, her tone suggests she thinks it’s extremely flawed. “After that,” she continues, “you’re thinking we’d betray them once we were strong enough, right?”

“That was my thought process, yes,” you answer, “but you sound concerned. Why?”

“Because you aren’t considering Father Antaglio, that’s why!” Ayaka jabs a finger at you to emphasize her point. “If we brought in outside magi, he’d be sure to put out a reward and tell all the other Masters to fight us all at once! We’d be a threat to the balance of the War, and that’s what he’s there to preserve! Part of the reason the Holy Church sends a priest to oversee the War is to prevent the Masters from bringing in outside help and turning this set of duels into a real war with armies involved, you know.”

“But the Emiya family is becoming involved in the Holy Grail War regardless of what we do,” you protest. “That man Emiya Shirou won’t stand by and wait. However misguided his conviction may be, he’s utterly certain in it. I could tell that from one meeting with the fellow. Surely we could simply conceal our cooperation with them from this priest of yours.”

“I guess so, maybe...” Ayaka assents hesitantly. She still sounds suspicious of the plan, but she’s at least beginning to come around.

Suddenly a new thought occurs to you, and you freeze. You were thinking of your time speaking with Emiya Shirou, and remembered what you’d said to him about your identity. That man knows you used to be human, and Ayaka still believes
you’re a Heroic Spirit! If the two of you go to meet the Emiya family with matters as they are, your identity may well come into question. Then, as you’re considering that subject, the matter of dreams comes to mind. Often, in the Akeldama, you dreamed of scenes that seemed to be from Circe’s life. If Ayaka is experiencing the same link, could she have witnessed some scene from your life as a student last night? Her demeanor doesn’t seem changed, but the uncertainty clings to you. You have to make a decision now, whether or not to maintain your persona as a Heroic Spirit!

[X] Tell Ayaka you were once Yumigawa Rushorou. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Keep quiet on the subject. (Pride)
[ ] Find another solution. (Write in)

There’s nothing for it, you decide. You have to tell Ayaka the truth. About your first identity, about what happened to you inside the Akeldama, all of it!

“Before we go on,” you say, “I have something to tell you, Miss Ayaka; something very important about my nature as a Servant.”

“Oh?” Ayaka perks up. “Have you remembered something about who you really are?”

“That’s just it, you see...” You trail off for a moment, hesitating, before steeling yourself to continue. “I never lost my memories, Miss Ayaka. I’ve been keeping my identity a secret, first from your brother and then from you, because I was worried that it might interfere with the War. Now, however, I feel I must tell you the truth.”

“You were-” Ayaka chokes off an indignant squeal as a flush of anger rushes into her face. “Fine,” she says, forcibly calming herself, “go on.”

“How much did your brother tell you about Caster?”

“I’m not sure what you mean.” Ayaka looks at you with confusion.

“Wednesday night, when he summoned you, at first he ran up out of his workshop to tell me he’d summoned Caster. Then he went back down, and later, when I went down to have a look, it turned out that he’d actually summoned you. He said you were really Saber and that he’d been confused, right? You were there, you must remember.”

“So that’s all you know,” you mutter gravely. “In that case, I must start from the beginning. Your brother did summon Caster; a vile spirit whose true name doesn’t bear mentioning, and a Servant with a truly diabolical Noble Phantasm: Akeldama. It held the power to create a pocket of space and time, with no time passing outside as long as events occurred within it, and to summon there numerous people. Caster used
it shortly after being summoned, drawing to himself over a thousand individuals. Some were magi, some, like myself, were not. There, he compelled us to fight one another with the promise of the Holy Grail. The true object of this conflict, and the purpose of Akeldama, was to absorb our spirits as sacrifices to Caster, empowering him greatly once we had all perished. I won’t bore you with the details of the fighting, but in the end only I and a few others survived. I slew Caster with my own hands, and by killing him was forced to absorb the collected energy of the dead and take his place as a Servant.”

Ayaka’s face goes white as you tell the story, but her expression stiffens as if to keep from betraying emotion. As you draw the story to a close, she finally says in a low, barely audible voice, “I guess he should have been the Shijou successor, not me. To plan a human sacrifice on that scale...”

Then she rallies, getting her voice back to a more normal tone, “Anyway, it makes sense for you at least. If you’d already been taking in that much energy, it explains why it was so easy for your spirit to process the new energy from Rider. But please, finish your story. What kind of person were you before you became a Servant? What’s your real name, anyway?”

“You should know what kind of person I was by my name,” you say, feeling a rogue urge to chuckle despite the serious mood. “Although I have been transformed utterly by the Akeldama’s power, I was born as Yumigawa Rushorou. I spent 17 years living in Tokyo, and was until recently a student at Kyoutenkan Academy. I confess I didn’t know you personally, but I dare say I was well-known enough at school that you knew me.” Now Ayaka freezes in shock once again, before a high, stuttering, disbelieving laugh falls from her lips.

“Ha- aha- heheha... That’s impossible, Saber-san. I just saw President Yumigawa on Friday.” Then the anger comes back into her expression. “How dare you lie to me like this? Why would you do that? Taking a name that’s so obviously someone else’s? I didn’t mind you not having memories; I could even forgive you if you said you had to keep your true name a secret from me for some practical reason! But this? You’d lie to me about who you are? Was everything else you just said a lie too?”

Now it’s your turn to be shocked into speechlessness. She saw you at school on Friday? That’s obviously impossible, but if so, what did she see? Has someone stolen your identity somehow? Is there some magus walking around in a replica of your body?

No matter. The steely mental discipline forged by the incessant combat you’ve faced since awakening in Akeldama takes hold, forcing you to face the needs of the
immediate future. Ayaka has to be calmed down, first and foremost. You need to prove to her that you are the person born Yumigawa Rushorou, and none other. Your mind races. No, perhaps it’s better to justify your deception before moving on to the proof of your identity. It was for victory that you hid the truth, after all, and that’s surely something Ayaka can sympathize with. You clear your throat, suddenly dry with suppressed anxiety.

“Someone once told me,” you begin, “that a man’s life depends upon his information. Suppose that when I was summoned, I spoke up to tell your brother that I was not a hero of legend who could easily see you and he through the War, but was rather a schoolboy who, by iron and blood, triumphed against impossible odds to get here. What then would follow? Would he have trusted me to gain victory? Nothing good would have come of it, I remain certain.”

“So you think you were justified in keeping secrets,” Ayaka snaps. “Fine! Maybe you were; I already said I wouldn’t mind if you were hiding your identity for some practical reason! But now I know you’re lying, and I want to know why! What’s the truth?”

“The truth,” you begin, carefully maintaining a level, pleasant tone, “is that my name was Yumigawa Rushorou. I’m 18 years old. My house was in the Yoyogi neighborhood, in the northern part of Shibuya, and I never experienced a ‘high school romance’ or ‘young love’. I was the Class President of Kyoutenkan Academy, where I worked hard to keep up the reputation a perfect honor student and spent my spare time devoted to maintaining the student government correctly. I got home every day around eight, since I stayed after classes to complete my duties as president. Arriving home that early was often difficult at the beginning of the year, when we had to process budget applications. I always had to pay very close attention to the secretary at those times, because she didn’t have a strong work ethic; but maintaining a schedule was important to me.” Casting your mind back to those times, you lean back in your chair and look skyward, tapping your right index finger on the table as you think. Your nail, slightly longer than the finger and filed into a soft edge, clicks rhythmically against the varnish.

“I didn’t smoke, and never tried it, although I have taken a drink before,” you continue. “As for my home life, I was in bed by eleven every night, and I made sure I got eight hours of sleep, no matter what. After having a glass of warm milk and doing about twenty minutes of stretches before going to bed, I would have no problems sleeping until morning. Just like a baby, I woke up without any fatigue or stress.” You smile thinly. “It’s not a habit that has followed me to the present day, as you know.”
“Just like fatigue and stress, excitement was something absent from my life,” you continue. “When I was younger, I tried sewing as a hobby, since my mother enjoyed it, but soon found that it gave me no pleasure. Equally boring were the comics that other boys were fond of. *One Piece*, and so on. I’m trying to explain that I used to be a person who lived a very quiet life. I had no enemies, no troubles, and no interests.”

Meeting Ayaka’s eyes once again, you point to your temple with your left hand. “That was the life of Yumigawa Rushorou, seen from the *inside,*” you say. “There’s one more detail, if you’re still not satisfied of my identity. When we first met—”

Finally your speech is put to an end, as Ayaka cuts you off. “No! I won’t hear another lie from you,” she shouts. “By my command, Servant Saber, tell me the truth about your identity!”

A command spell flares into red light on her outstretched hand, then disappears, and you feel yourself bound by its power. After all that, you couldn’t convince her! You curse mentally, and try to speak, to protest, but the muscles of your face are suddenly beyond your control. Your mouth opens without your intent, and a voice not your own issues from your throat. It’s a voice you recognize, however: the voice of Jean-Pierre Vaisset’s first servant, Judas Iscariot, better known to you as Cid Ajisartous.

“Ah, the truth,” Judas says with a smooth, satisfied voice. “The *real* truth! It is difficult to lay hands on, is it not? The first point of truth, if you must know, is that this young man hasn’t lied to you, as far as he is aware. Our poor Saber believes everything he just told you, and everything but the matter of his true name really was accurate. The *Akeldama*, my little mockup of a Grail War, and of course his transformation from Master into Servant. It all happened. The only thing he lied to you about, and unknowingly at that, was his past life before I summoned him.”

“Which brings us to the second point of truth,” Judas declares, and pauses for dramatic effect. “You see, the real Yumigawa Rushorou was never summoned, and this young man never existed before the *Akeldama.*”

“Who are you?” Ayaka demands, “and why do you know about this if he doesn’t?”

“A memory, if you will, or perhaps a ghost,” the voice of Judas answers from your mouth, “I am the core of the heroic spirit your honored brother first summoned, now a significant part of the spirit of this new Saber. I must admit, I had expected to be explaining matters to him in more of a private conference. Saber ought to have found me by careful introspection and examination of his own spirit; but it seems
events did not take that course, and those command spells of yours truly are potent things.”

“If he didn’t exist before appearing in your Noble Phantasm,” Ayaka says with disbelief, “Are you saying you created Saber-san somehow? Why? Did you want him to defeat you?”

“Oh, it’s not so complicated,” Judas answers with a chuckle. “I am a ‘man who facilitated heroism’. That was my role in life; to create the apotheosis of another hero, and elevate him to the height of his legend. With such a purpose ingrained in me, I could hardly fight in a straightforward manner. It was only natural for me to take up the same divinely ordained role as a heroic spirit that I did as a living man, and create a new hero. That was hardly a simple matter, however.” Judas pauses for a few moments, picking his words.

“Even while I lived,” he explains, “the heroic capacity of men was declining steadily; but by acting out a legend, we were able to create from the stuff of mankind a hero for the age, and slow the decline rather well. With modern humans, however, I had to take a far more radical course. Sacrificing one man to humanity couldn’t manage the task of making of him into a hero fit for the Age of Gods, as it once had. A thousand sacrifices were necessary, and to receive them I needed a spirit created out of whole cloth for the purpose. Of course, he had to do it by his own will. A thoughtless puppet could never be a hero, so I gave him a background; memories from which to build a personality and find his own goals.”

“Of course, the process wasn’t without a hitch or two,” Judas says with a dark chuckle. “Now that Saber is back in the world, that connection he has is creating some rather dangerous resonance. Nothing you two shouldn’t be able to handle, though.”

Ayaka slumps bonelessly back into her chair, no longer able to muster up a reply to the successive revelations. Judas laughs again and louder, saying, “You ought to be rejoicing, girl, not falling into despair! Just think of it! In this modern age, bereft of heroes, you have before you a living, breathing, man of legend. A true modern hero, endowed with divine favor!”

“Ah, well,” he continues in a contemplative tone, “I suppose there were also many who lamented at the last event I facilitated. You simply never understand how these things help you until later. In any case, I’ve said all I need to. Goodbye to the both of you, until you have need of me again.”

With that, the presence controlling your voice fades, and you find yourself able to speak once more. Nonetheless, you find yourself as dumbfounded as Ayaka.
Your memories were fake? Your past belonged to someone else? Were you always a conceptual being, then?

[ ] You need to think this through alone. Get up and walk away. (Pride)

[ ] Just sit there, trying to process. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Apologize to Ayaka for making her go through this situation with you. (Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

With the power that held you upright and compelled you to dramatically narrate your own origins gone, you slump into your own chair, mirroring Ayaka across the table from you. Against your better judgment, you let out a dry, mirthless chuckle.

“It seems I’m not what either of us supposed me to be,” you say wryly. “I’m neither the genuine Yumigawa Rushorou nor a liar, but an impostor deceived into my act. What a farce it is! To think I’ve spent my time this way, thinking I was that student; believing I’d lived those years of drudgery! I truly thought I had become something other than myself. That I had to change, to put my old nature as a modern human behind me and surpass it, when all along that nature was false; no more than an illusion! I-” You cut yourself off sharply. If you leave your tongue free, you’ll soon be raving, it seems.

“I’m sorry, Miss Ayaka,” you say with half-honest contrition. “The melodrama of my identity should be no concern of yours, particularly after the death of your brother. I don’t mean to burden you with my emotions.”

“It’s alright, Saber-san,” Ayaka responds listlessly. “This was out of your control too. I can see that you were just trying to be honest with me about who you really were, now that you felt like it wouldn’t be a problem. What happened after that was...” she gropes for a word. “Something out of our control, I guess. Who would think a Servant could do something like that? Making a new spirit, and sacrificing all those people to turn you into a Servant. Nii-san, maybe.”

“I doubt your brother knew the extent of Caster’s power,” you say. “Though I told him only a small amount about the Akeldama, it was enough to show me that he knew nothing on the subject. Caster probably told him no more than that it was a powerful supportive Noble Phantasm, to be activated well in advance.”
Ayaka doesn’t respond to your assertion, and an awkward silence settles over the two of you for several seconds. Finally you break it, saying, “At any rate, there are no more secrets between the two of us. If you do not find what Caster told you about my true nature too repellent, I hope we can continue to fight together.”

“You mean, you’re not angry at me? For doubting you, and for wasting a command spell like that?” Ayaka sounds honestly perplexed by the fact of your positivity.

“Your actions were justified in the moment,” you say. “Even if your doubt was proven wrong in the end, I can’t hold a grudge over such a thing.”

“I see”, she says. “That’s nice of you, Saber-san. Or, should I call you Yumigawa-senpai now?”

“No, that person isn’t me,” you reply softly. “You can go on calling me Saber-san as you have, Miss Ayaka. Or, if you’d prefer to use a name, call me Alberich. That’s the True Name I have as a Servant.”

“Well then, I’ll keep calling you Saber-san.”

There’s another long pause before either of you speaks. Then a look of resolution passes over Ayaka’s face, and just as you think she’s about to make some decision regarding your identity she changes the subject.

“Saber-san, why are you fighting in the Holy Grail War?”

The question takes you by surprise, and at first you can only echo, “Why am I fighting?”

“Yeah.” Ayaka nods in emphasis. “I mean, I don’t have a wish for the Holy Grail, but I still have reasons to fight. For one, I’m afraid of being killed if I don’t fight to defend myself. Then there’s my family. Mom didn’t talk much about it, but I know from her journals that the Holy Grail War meant the world to her; even if he didn’t think much of the wish, Nii-san was willing to fight and die for it, too. I feel like it’s my duty as a Shijou to win the Holy Grail War. But what about you, Saber-san? Nii-san said Servants could be summoned from the Throne of Heroes because they had a wish they wanted the Holy Grail to grant for them, but you weren’t summoned that way. Do you have a wish for the Grail?”

[] “If I am a living hero, as Caster said, it is only natural for me to continue proving myself in battle against Heroic Spirits of ages past; regardless of the wish provided by the Holy Grail.” (Pride)
[ ] “I only want to continue living. Unless we obtain the Holy Grail, I will fade into nonexistence after the War ends and it ceases to support my manifestation as a Servant.” (Self-Preservation)

[X] Some other reason. (Write in)

“A wish,” you say, and consider the subject for a few moments before continuing, “I don’t suppose I have a wish in the immediate sense. When we obtain the Holy Grail, I intend to use its power to incarnate myself, and go on living beyond the end of the War; but one couldn’t exactly call that a ‘wish’ in the same sense as wishing for wealth or fame, or to save the world. All the same, it seems a worthy reason to fight. If the life of Yumigawa Rushorou was not mine, then it becomes all the more important that I live on.”

“So you’re fighting to survive, huh? I guess we have more similar motivations than I thought,” Ayaka says with a faint smile.

“No,” you say softly, coming to a realization. “Not only to survive. You see, Caster says he created me; that he planned my life, orchestrated my growth so that I would become able to fill the role he planned for me. That idea rankles, Miss Ayaka. It eats at me, the thought of being a pawn in the scheme of another!”

“It seems I do have a wish at that,” you declare. Your voice is rising now, as you find the proper shape for the formless rage that had been swirling in you since Judas finished speaking. “I would be free to live and choose my own fate and its circumstances, not those planned by Caster! As you speak, you bring a fist down hard against the table in a moment of pique, and the impact makes you realize the extent to which you’d let your emotions take control. You force them down, bringing your voice back to your normal, better modulated tone.

“That’s it, Miss Ayaka,” you say. “I’m fighting to live on my own terms, unbound by Caster’s machinations. Of course it is difficult to say how difficult such a wish will be to grant, considering the extent to which he seems to have predicted my actions in the past. Nevertheless, that is my desire; my reason for fighting.”

“I see,” Ayaka says. “Well, I don’t think wanting to be free is a wish anyone could call wrong.” Then she leans forward, catching you by surprise as she takes your hand across the table and stares into your eyes. “This may sound strange now, after we’ve already been through fighting one Servant, but thank you for telling me. It makes it easier to be by your side, knowing what you want from the Holy Grail.”

There’s a long moment of silence, as you find yourself temporarily without words, looking into her eyes. You see your own red gaze reflected in her blue, and see
her as if for the first time. Clear, creamy skin framed by midnight-black hair; lips the color of cherry blossoms; those fine, soft features. You knew she was beautiful before now, of course, but it’s never affected you so. Indeed, it’s a reversal of the usual dynamic. Now you’re the one flustered, suddenly taken with Ayaka’s charms as you haven’t been before, while she stays serene.

“It’s,” you mutter, but leave the sentence unfinished. “Of course.”

You draw your hand away from hers. The moment fades, and you find your wits about you again. “I’m fortunate to have such a generous master,” you remark, and put on a wry smirk to recover the confidence you’d lost. “It’s a reasonable fear, you know, that one called a Master might take issue with a wish for freedom. You’re very understanding, Miss Ayaka.”

“Well, you’ve been making all the decisions about the War anyway,” the girl answers coolly. Either she’s as content as you are to leave emotional topics behind or she’s stung by the manner of your reply, and hiding it well. “It’d be pretty strange for me to get mad about it now. Speaking of which, what do we do next, Saber-san? It’s past three, now, and I’m sure the other Masters aren’t spending all day sitting at home.”

“You make a good point, Miss Ayaka,” you say. “We ought to make use of every spare minute if we are to seize victory.”

[ ] “To which end, I should be training. Once the sun sets we should go looking for our next enemy, but until then I must prepare.” (Pride)

[X] “This is a good time to coordinate with the Emiya family. I know you have your doubts, but if we can see what information they have and potentially make use of them in combat tonight, I’m sure it would be a great help.” (Compassion)

[+Einzbern]

[ ] “Right now, our highest priority should be reconnaissance. Your brother used familiars, but do you have any magical means of collecting information about our enemies?” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“Before we take action, however, I have one more piece of information to relate,” you say, raising a finger. It’s time to tell Ayaka about your encounter with the Einzbern girl and her mysteriously insightful attendant.
“There’s something else?” Ayaka’s voice is disbelieving. “You sure have gotten a lot of secrets together in the last few days, Saber-san.”

“I suppose so,” you answer. “But after this, you’ll know as much as I do.” You cast your mind back to the other night, looking into the middle distance as you call up the details of the encounter.

“On Thursday night, after I met with the Emiya family for the first time; the night Rider was summoned, you’ll recall; I had a very unusual encounter as I was returning to this house. There was a car, which had been monitoring me at other times as well; a limousine. As I walked, it rounded a corner and waited for me down the street. I would have to pass it to continue on my way. I’d had enough of it, and wanted to know who was following me, so I decided to wait; let it come to me.”

“As it happened,” you say, deciding to pick up the pace a bit, “the passengers in that limousine were the Einzbern master, a young girl named Liliesviel; and a man by the name of Otto Niemand. Both of them were something more than human, judging by the mystic energy they possessed, but I don’t believe Niemand was a Servant. Liliesviel, clearly, was a homunculus, and she seems to have believed that I was one as well; an agent sent by the Einzbern family head. I believe we may be able to make use of this misunderstanding.”

“Interesting,” Ayaka says. “I remember Nii-san telling me the Einzbern homunculi were all albinos. I guess you do look like one of them.” She pauses to think, resting her chin in her hand before continuing, “But why’d you bring this up now? I thought you wanted to ally with that outsider, Emiya.”

“Your point regarding the danger of interference by the Holy Grail War’s overseer was a valid one,” you say, “and I grew less confident of my earlier plan on considering it. The Einzbern Master represents another valid course of action. Although I do think this would be an ideal time to contact Emiya, it seems only fair that the final decision be yours as the Master of Saber. It would be disreputable of me to withhold further information from you.”

“Well, thank you,” Ayaka replies with a smile, “because I definitely prefer this second option. It was the Einzberns who planned the Holy Grail War with my grandfather, after all; I’m sure they’ll make good allies. So, how do we contact them?”

“I have no method of doing so,” you answer, keeping your face expressionless. A black eyebrow twitches. “O~kay,” Ayaka says, drawing out the word. “What about their home base? Do you know where they are?”

“I do not. Liliesviel told me very little about her approach to the War.”

“Then why did you—” Ayaka chokes off her shout after having jumped to her feet in anger. With a heavy sigh, she sinks back into her chair. “So,” she says in a
strained voice, “just to be certain that I’m understanding you correctly: you don’t have any way of contacting the Einzberns, don’t know where they’re staying in the city, and have no plan of action in case we do want to ally with them. Is that right?”

“I was simply sharing what information was at my disposal with you,” you reply. “As I said, I still feel that the most effective thing we can do this evening is meet with the Emiya family. Nonetheless, I felt that you might have some means of contacting the Einzberns at your disposal, given that your family and theirs cooperated to orchestrate the Holy Grail War; and, as I said, I didn’t want to keep any more secrets. Hence my report.”

“Oh well,” she says disappointedly. “I suppose all we can do then is go and meet with these Emiya people. I don’t know how my mother and grandfather kept in touch with the Einzberns. Probably they wrote letters to their castle in Europe. Hopefully we’ll run into this Liliesviel girl soon, and we can discuss working together then. I assume you do know how to contact Emiya.”

“Yes, I was thinking we might walk to their home and visit them. It’s not too far away.”

“Alright then,” Ayaka says. “Let’s go. If we’re lucky, nobody will pay attention to what we do while it’s still light out.”

So the two of you make your way to the Emiya home, passing out of the wealthy neighborhood where the Shijou live, through the shopping center, and finally into the more modest suburbs as you go. The two of you draw a few odd looks as you pass, forcing you to reflect on the strange pair you make: a schoolgirl walking beside a tall, albino foreigner in a suit. You never felt such a weight of suspicion from passing strangers before your time in the Akeldama; or rather, Yumigawa Rushorou never felt such suspicion from those he passed. Those memories, you remind yourself, are of another person.

There’s no discussion between the two of you as you walk through the town. You’re contemplating your identity, thoughts distant from your immediate surroundings. After the revelations of the past few hours, it’s easier not to speak. It won’t be long before you have to play the part of a diplomat, manipulating Emiya and his wife into playing the role you desire for them in your War; but during this walk, at least, you can rest your mind in silence.

Then you’ve arrived. You ring the doorbell and wait a minute or so, waiting for someone to come to the door. Just as you’re beginning to wonder if they might not be home Emiya’s wife, Sakura, opens the door.
“Saber-san, you’ve come back,” she says warmly, greeting you with a smile. “After we didn’t hear from you, I was beginning to worry. Please, come in and make yourself at home.”

“Thank you.” After taking your shoes off in the entryway, you and Ayaka follow Sakura down the long hall that leads to the Emiyas’ living room. When you arrive, you find that Sakura’s moved on to the kitchen. Please sit down, I’m just getting some tea ready,” she calls. Already seated at the coffee table are two people: Emiya Shirou and the fifth Holy Grail War’s Rider, both drinking tea. Now she eyes you warily, her hostile fuchsia gaze making Ayaka shrink.

‘They’re Emiya Shirou and their Servant,’ you tell Ayaka telepathically. ‘Try to relax. I’ll keep you safe if anything happens.’

‘Alright,’ Ayaka answers, gripping your arm for reassurance.

In sharp contrast with his companion, Emiya gives you a friendly grin. “Hey, Saber,” he says heartily, “I’m glad to see you’re alright! Sit down, please.” Then he turns to Ayaka. “I’m Emiya Shirou. And you?”

“My name is Shijou Ayaka,” the girl answers coldly, once you’ve taken your seats. “The Master of Saber, and Second Owner of Tokyo. It does seem odd that we haven’t met, doesn’t it? Saber tells me that you are a magus.”

“Heheh.” Emiya lets out a bashful chuckle. “Sorry about that, Shijou-san; if it makes you feel any better, I’m really only a spellcaster. This new Holy Grail War is the first magical thing I’ve gotten involved in since moving here.”

This qualifier does nothing to improve the girl’s mood. You knew that it would be a point of contention that Emiya had avoided revealing his presence to the Shijou family, but at this rate it’s threatening to immediately put an end to your hopes of cooperation! You have to intervene before the situation can worsen further.

“Speaking of which,” you say, “How have you fared in the War since our last meeting, Emiya-san?” you ask. “You seemed quite motivated to intervene when we last spoke; what has come of that?”

“We should ask you the same,” Rider interjects. “You described your Master as a ‘he’ on Thursday. Now you appear with this girl. How did that come to be, Saber?”

[ ] Explain that you were hiding information on your Master at the time. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Tell them that your Master died, and his command spells passed to his sister. No more. (Pride)

[X] Tell the whole story of your encounter with Saber and William Harris. (Compassion)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“Very well,” you say. “I’ll tell you about what happened the night after I visited you last, and why the Master of Saber is not the same person he was then.”

“So you’ve already lost your Master, and found a replacement,” Rider says with an odd half-smile. You ignore the provocation in her choice of words.

“That’s correct,” you say. “My first master was Miss Ayaka’s older brother, Jean-Pierre. He and I traveled on Friday night to a place downtown where his familiars had observed a strange phenomenon the night before. That phenomenon was a mysterious outbreak of bad luck, simultaneously affecting everyone in the area. We suspected it was the work of a Master or Servant, and went to investigate.”

“And the enemies were too strong for you,” says Emiya gravely, with sympathy in his eyes.

“We were defeated, yes,” you confess. “The enemy Master was a magus my Master recognized as William Harris, a man they call ‘The Second Magus Killer’ in the Mages’ Association, or so I’m told. He and his Servant were able to separate me from my Master, and while I was unable to help, Harris killed him. Then he and his Servant retreated, leaving me to fade away. It was by a scheme of Jean-Pierre’s that Miss Ayaka was able to inherit his command spells.”

At the reference to her brother’s death, Ayaka squeezes your hand under the table, though she doesn’t let the emotion show outwardly. Conversely, a shadow passes over Emiya’s face; a dark expression you haven’t seen from him before, some strange combination of anger and sadness. At that moment, though, his wife returns with a tray of tea and bowl of mandarins, and Emiya’s expression returns his normal good cheer at the sight of her.

“I’m sorry to make you wait,” she says, “but here it is.”

“Thank you. Now, as I was saying, I don’t know what sort of techniques Harris used,” you continue, “so I can tell you very little about how to deal with him. His Servant, however, is quite a different matter. I must confess that she overwhelmed me in direct combat. That other Saber.” As you speak, your voice fills unintentionally with rage. Just thinking of her is enough to make your blood boil. The way she humiliated you and left you to die!
“She is an armor-clad knight,” you say, the hand not in Ayaka’s clenching as you speak, “but of small stature. She appears to be a young blonde girl, and quite slender, so I surmise that the majority of her strength must come from some magical empowerment. It is that power which makes her such a fearsome opponent. Despite her size, she possesses incredible speed and strength, surpassing almost all of the Servants I have previously faced. Also dangerous is her sword, which is invisible. I was only able to surmise that she is a Saber by carefully analyzing its dimensions from her attacks. The weapon is a two-handed longsword, with a blade approximately 90 centimeters in length.”

The people around the table all display varying degrees of surprise at your description. Emiya has gone white. Sakura has her hand over her mouth, covering a shocked expression. Rider’s eyes are narrowed in an anger not dissimilar to your own, as if remembering an old grudge. After a few moments of shocked silence, Emiya finally manages to speak.

“This is very bad,” he says quietly. “That Saber you’re talking about: I know her. She was the same Saber who fought as my Servant in the Fifth Holy Grail War, fifteen years ago. To think, she’d wind up being summoned again by someone using my father’s moniker... It’s ridiculous.”

“Then you know how powerful she is,” you reply. “Perhaps you know her weakness also. Well, Emiya-san? What is the best way to defeat that girl?”

Emiya shakes his head. “Saber isn’t a Servant with an easily exploitable weak point. The only way to defeat her would be to overwhelm her in direct combat or to cut off her supply of energy. From your story, neither will be something done easily in this War.”

“You rate her too highly, Shirou,” Rider cuts in. “If it comes to it, we could defeat her the same way she was brought down fifteen years ago.”

“And how was that done?” you ask.

Rider gives you a cold look, and doesn’t deign to answer. Emiya, noting her hostility, just says, “It was a complicated plan. We can talk more about that if we end up needing to fight her.”

[ ] Pursue the topic of Saber further (Write in details)

[X] Change the subject and ask about Emiya’s experience in the Grail War since you last met.

[ ] Raise another subject (Write in)
“Very well then,” you say. “Now you know the story of my first battle of the Holy Grail War. What about yourself? Have you made any progress towards your goal of stopping it?”

“Not much,” Emiya says seriously. “Not enough. Several cases of arson in residential areas have happened in the last few days, and I thought from the timing that it was probably a Master and Servant hunting to bolster their energy supply. Rider and I went to investigate one of the burned out houses to look for traces of a Servant’s presence on Friday.”

“I’d heard about those homes as well,” you say. “Did you discover any new information?”

“The house we looked at on Friday didn’t tell us much, other than what I’d guessed already. There was magic used in the fire, but that’s all. We went to another house yesterday evening, though; one burned more recently. It had actually been attacked while we were investigating the other house on Friday,” Emiya says with a look of self-recriminating resentment.

“We found more to go on there. That house had more lingering magical energy, and I could learn more from it. It was a Servant, and I’d be able to recognize the same Servant’s energy again if we encountered them. While we were investigating, though, it got dark. One of the Masters must have been hanging around waiting, because he attacked us as soon as the sun set.”

“Who was it?” Last night; you consider the timeframe. This would have been while you were fighting Rider, which rules out both he and Archer. Emiya and his family were unaware of the other Saber, so you can be certain his foe wasn’t she. This leaves the possibility of Lancer, Assassin, or Berserker; but Assassin should be unlikely to attack directly.

“Berserker,” says Emiya with a bitter smile. “Berserker was the one to attack us. I didn’t see his Master; the magus must’ve been hiding somewhere, or commanding Berserker from range somehow. Anyway, we had our hands full. As expected of the class, he was absurdly powerful. None of our attacks could even scratch him, and in the end we had to retreat.”

“One to be careful of, then,” you say. “What can you tell me about him? Do you have any idea of his identity?”

“He was a bare-handed fighter, wearing a black robe,” Emiya says with a shrug. “It’s not much to go on. Offhand I’d guess he’s a hero with some kind of bodily protection from harm, but there are plenty of those throughout the world’s myths.”

“Interesting,” you say. “All the same, it’s not certain that we must identify him to triumph over Berserker. If the core of his Noble Phantasm is protection, I
ought to be able to defeat him. My Noble Phantasm is specialized in cutting through heavy defenses. But given your altruistic motives, I imagine that you prioritize finding the Servant responsible for this spate of arson. Is that correct?”

“Of course! It’s only natural to stop someone who’s indiscriminately attacking ordinary people as quickly as you can,” Emiya declares, clenching a fist in a pose of righteous conviction. “I just wish we had some way of tracking them down.”

“I may be able to help with that,” Ayaka interjects. “You said there was more of that Servant’s magical energy in the ruins you investigated last night, right? If we can find a particular object that has a very concentrated amount of that energy clinging to it, I can use one of my family’s arts to trace it and locate the Servant.” This takes you by surprise. Ayaka hadn’t mentioned a tracking spell when the two of you were discussing what magic she new, had she? You’ll need to find some time to have another talk with her about the subject of her abilities.

“Good,” Emiya says. “Then we have to go back there tonight. You two aren’t against that, are you?”

“No, but why tonight?” you ask. “We could return to that ruin now and not face the chance of an attack by an enemy Master.”

“We have plans this evening,” Sakura answers. “Senpai can’t go out at the drop of a hat, because Nee-san is arriving from London for a visit tonight.”

“Right,” Emiya says, looking faintly embarrassed. “Sorry to make you wait after I suggested it, but it’s like Sakura said. Her sister is coming here for a visit, and we have to be here to receive her. She should be arriving pretty soon, actually. Why don’t you two stay for dinner, and then we’ll search for the enemy Servant after that?”

[X] Accept Emiya’s invitation.
[ ] Decline Emiya’s invitation.

“We’d be happy to spend the evening here,” you say, “and I’m glad of the opportunity of meeting this woman Rin. It isn’t every day one has the chance to speak with a Sorcerer’s apprentice, to be sure.”

“That’s a pretty normal reaction,” Shirou says with a laugh. “Whatever she ends up doing, Rin stays the center of attention. You’ll have to hope she doesn’t charge you to answer your questions.”

“Senpai! You shouldn’t speak poorly of Nee-san like that,” Sakura scolds. “It’s hardly slander,” Rider observes, showing the first smile you’ve seen from her.
“You too, Rider?” Sakura turns a hurt gaze on the treacherous Servant. “Both of you, really! Even if it isn’t exactly wrong, you ought to be more respectful with guests here.”

If even her protective sister admits it, this Rin must be incredibly full of herself, you surmise privately. Nonetheless, you’d rather she not remain the conversation’s focus indefinitely.

“You interject, is there anything else you can tell us about the Berserker you fought? You said he was a barenhanded fighter, but perhaps we can guess at his identity from his fighting style. In any case, Miss Ayaka and I may find ourselves facing him alone in the future, so any information you can provide would be useful.”

Emiya shakes his head. “If he was a martial artist when he was alive, that skill was consumed by his Madness. He fought almost mindlessly, punching, kicking, and making grabs; just relying on raw power and speed. Besides that, I really don’t have more to tell. His body and face were hidden by that robe, and he didn’t have any distinguishing marks as a hero besides his power and toughness.”

“I see,” you say. “Not a complex enemy; simple and powerful. That’s frustrating, but I suppose there’s nothing to be done for it.”

At that point, you’re interrupted by the doorbell, and Sakura gets up to receive the visitor. You overhear the high, strident voice of another woman just after she opens the door, but you can’t make out the words; only that they’re excited to see each other again.

“Hello, Shirou,” says a black-haired woman as she walks into the room. A new face; this must be Rin. Her wavy hair cascades over shoulders clad in a red topcoat, under which she wears a white blouse, black knee-length skirt, and ankle boots. You can’t help but notice, looking at her face and figure, that the family resemblance between her and her sister is practically nonexistent; yet surely this must be the expected guest.

“Sakura says you have other guests. I hope I’m not interrupting,” Rin cuts herself off as she catches sight of you, her face going stiff as her friendly expression gives way to hostility. Her hand, raised in a wave, drops to her side.

“No, I don’t think I am interrupting,” she says in a lower, quite different tone, “and from the looks of your guest, I suppose you’ve already heard the news I’m here to bring.” Then it clicks for you. She’s a magus, and this is a variation on a reaction you’ve seen before. Best to head things off at the pass, then.

“I am not a member of the Einzbern house,” you say, getting to your feet to greet the woman. “You needn’t be concerned—”
“I believe you aren’t one of them,” she says, this time cutting you off rather than herself. “But you are a Servant.” Then, looking back to Emiya, she demands, “You’ve already involved? Are you a Master again?”

“You were coming to visit because of the Holy Grail War?” Emiya gives Rin a look of bland surprise, as he asks, “How did you know about it?”

“Yes, Shirou,” Rin says with a sigh, putting the palm of her hand to her forehead, “that’s why I’m here. Do you remember the Clock Tower Lord I worked with to dismantle the Fuyuki Grail? Well, he called in a favor with that old man and had me sent to put a stop to this War.”

“Oh your own?” Shirou cocks an eyebrow in disbelief.

“Kaleidoscope’s apprentices get no easy tasks,” Rin says wryly, as if quoting, “but no, I wasn’t supposed to be alone. Luviaelita was sent as well, but she’s been called home by some family crisis. I don’t know the details; but that’s enough about my situation. How did you get caught up in a Grail War again, Emiya-kun?”

“Geh.” Shirou frowns. “You haven’t called me that in years. Don’t start up again now.”

“I was the one who involved Emiya-san in the War,” you say, deciding to cut into the conversation before the pair gets too deep in banter about old times. “Emiya-san and I met by chance, and he recognized my nature at that time. After that we spoke at length, and he convinced me to aid him in his endeavor to prevent the Holy Grail War from taking any more lives.”

Seeing the impatience in Rin’s expression, you give her your best smile and, with a courtly bow, continue, “I am the Servant Saber, and she beside me is my Master.”

“Shijou Ayaka, Master of Saber,” Ayaka says at your prompt.

“What might your name be, miss?” you continue, completing your formal greeting to Rin.

“Tohsaka Rin,” the woman answers curtly. “And what sort of heroic spirit would agree to stop the Holy Grail War? You should have been summoned by the power of your wish for the Grail. Don’t you mind losing that?” If your knightly gesture made any impact on her, she isn’t showing it; but then, perhaps she’s been inured to such posturing by her time around the no-doubt eccentric denizens of the Clock Tower.

“New life,” you say, “is the wish common to most Servants, and Miss Rider there is living proof that one doesn’t need the Holy Grail to achieve it. With a sufficient supply of mystic energy, I can be sustained in the world without the need to participate in the chaotic bloodbath they call the Holy Grail War.”
“So you decided to help Shirou, just like that?” Rin looks at you with surprise.
“A personality like that is a rarity even among Heroic Spirits. Are you sure Shirou didn’t summon you?”
“No, it’s like he said,” Emiya interjects. “We just happened to meet in the shopping center.”
“What about you, then?” Rin rounds on Ayaka as her next target of interrogation. “How did you come to agree to stop the War? You said your name was Shijou; you’re a magus from the family who provided the land for the ritual.”
“Not only a member; I am the Second Owner of this area, the head of the Shijou house,” Ayaka answers, maintaining her composure admirably under the older woman’s scrutiny. “Nonetheless, it was my grandfather who, eighty-five years ago, agreed to host the Holy Grail War on our land: a man I have never met. Whatever his reasons for accepting the Einzberns’ offer were, they weren’t passed on to his children or to me. Perhaps we could use it to reach the Swirl of Origin, but doing so by means of another family’s technique would shame the Shijou lineage. I just want to keep the people of this city safe from the violence being brought here by the Holy Grail War.”
“In that case, it seems we can all cooperate for the time being,” Rin announces, finally taking a seat at the coffee table. “Now, it seems like the War is already underway, since you two had the chance to meet and discuss whether or not to intervene. What can you tell me about what’s happened so far?”

[X] Tell your side of the story (Pride) (Write in what to recount/omit)
[ ] Let Emiya do the talking (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“It’s horrible,” Emiya says in a low voice. “More people have died already than in the Fuyuki fire.”
“What?” Rin’s eyes widen in shock. “I haven’t heard about any kind of disaster on that scale. What happened?”
“I believe I ought to be the one to begin the story,” you say, “since I witnessed the first great killing of this Holy Grail War. It was nothing so easily observed as a fire, Miss Tohsaka.”
“Alright then, what happened?”
“Caster’s Noble Phantasm, Akeldama: an enclosed world, cut off from space and time, to which he summoned over a thousand people for a grand sacrificial ritual, meant to empower him immensely. I was one of these, brought into Akeldama as an
ordinary human. Through extraordinary circumstances, however, I and a small group of allies were able to slay Caster. In a final vindictive act of service to his Master, he transferred the accumulated power to me as he died, and bound me in his place as a Servant. Those unfortunate sacrifices constituted the first great loss of this War.” Emiya maintains his grave expression as you retell the story, but his wife gives you that same oddly commiserating look as before.

“...were any of them magi?” Rin asks. Her face has turned ashen at your explanation of the bloody event, and her voice is low, horrified.

“I don’t know the exact proportion,” you answer, keeping up a perhaps unwisely calm tone, “but some of us were magi, and Caster called his sacrifices from around the world. Has there been a notable disappearance since Wednesday night?”

“Several people at the Clock Tower vanished that night,” Rin says gravely, “but no-one thought to link that to the Holy Grail War. I’ll need to write to the investigators and tell them about this. Are there any material traces left of Caster’s ritual that I could analyze?”

“Being a Noble Phantasm, it vanished with Caster’s death,” you say quickly. The last thing you need is the Mages’ Association getting involved in an investigation of your creation, and you’re sure Ayaka wouldn’t appreciate the scrutiny either. Fortunately, Emiya steps in to bring the conversation back to the Holy Grail War.

“Things haven’t stopped with Caster’s death, either,” he says. “Another Servant is attacking people for energy, we think. There’s been a house burned down in the area every night since Wednesday, and in each case the family disappeared completely. Rider and I found traces of magical energy in one of the ruins, but we were forced to retreat by an attack from Berserker.”

“A Servant managed to chase the two of you away?” Rin sounds disbelieving. “Don’t tell me he’s as powerful as the last War’s Berserker.”

“Similar, yes,” Emiya says with a nod. “Berserker has some kind of powerful defense keeping him from being wounded, as well as ridiculous power and speed.”

“For my part,” you interject, “I have encountered three other Servants: the Rider of this Holy Grail War, whom I dispatched; Archer, who I did not see but who interceded to ensure that I did not harm Rider’s Master after the Servant was defeated; and this War’s other Saber, who apparently also fought in the previous Holy Grail War.” Rin’s eyes widen at this last mention, but she says nothing.

“She proved too much for me,” you continue, “but I did learn the identity of her Master: a magus from the Clock Tower by the name of William Harris. Are you familiar with the man?”
“Him,” Rin says with a sigh. “Yes, I know about Harris. He’s the most dangerous Sealing Designation Enforcer in the association today, supposedly, and well known for killing his targets in brutal ways. I’d heard he was sent to open the path to the Origin for the Clock Tower, but to think he wound up with Saber.” She trails off for a moment, considering the situation, then turns to Emiya. “You’re right, Shirou. This really is horrible.” A depressed silence settles over the table following her proclamation.

“Well,” Sakura says, not content to leave everyone languishing, “if you’re all finished discussing the War, why don’t we get started on dinner, Senpai?” Looking up at her words, you realize that it’s gotten later; it’s perhaps six, now. Emiya follows his wife, and the two begin preparing dinner together.

[X] Speak with Rin (Write in subject)
[ ] Speak with Rider (Write in subject)
[ ] Speak with Ayaka (Write in subject)
[ ] Wait in silence.

“Miss Tohsaka,” you say, “there is one more rather significant risk to our operation that has not yet been discussed. Miss Ayaka and I believe that there is a high risk of the War’s organizer, the Holy Church representative, finding out about our collaboration with outside forces and directing all five remaining masters to cooperate in defeating us.”

“That is a concern, yes,” Rin replies, “but do you have any ideas about how to deal with it?”

“The best way I can see would be to keep our communication with you and the Emiya family as distant and covert as possible. Of course we will be using cell phones to communicate once Miss Ayaka and I leave, but I had wondered if there might not be some magical method of powerful encryption with which you are familiar.”

“You want to use what to communicate?” Rin is giving you a blank stare, as if you’ve just lost all mental cohesion and are spilling out random words.

“As I said, I had thought we might encrypt cell phone communication in some way to make it more private.”

“Ugh!” Rin makes a disgusted sound, tossing her head in disdain. “No. I don’t use a cell phone. They’re completely ridiculous.”
“They’re... ridiculous?” You’re flabbergasted, almost speechless for a moment. You’ve certainly never heard someone take such an issue with communications technology before.

“That’s right,” Rin says smugly. “Incomprehensible little gizmos that mundanes walk around staring at all the time. I don’t understand how they managed to become so popular, when any reasonable person can live life perfectly well with a telephone at home; and as a magus, one doesn’t even need to use one of those! Magical communication techniques serve perfectly well.”

As you stare at Rin, dumbfounded by her sheer anachronism, Ayaka speaks up.

“Saber-san, how would you keep in touch by phone anyway? Do you have one yourself?”

“I do not,” you concede uncomfortably. “I... didn’t have one when I awoke in Caster’s Akeldama. All the same, they are surely common things; the most convenient and widespread mode of communication for modern people. You must have one, Miss Ayaka.”

“I do~,” she answers hesitantly, wavering on the vowel. “It’s kind of something I needed for school, you know? But I don’t really use it much.” It’s easier to talk to people in person.

You’re surrounded by people who don’t use cell phones. It’s a bizarre thing to consider, as you scan “your” memories of high school. Everyone used cell phones constantly: during breaks between classes, at lunch, after school; they would be on their phones at any chance they had. Even “you,” although “you” didn’t have a circle of friends in any real sense, made frequent use of a phone to communicate with your coworkers in the student council; and you know the vice president ran the council’s social media accounts through her phone. This, you must conclude, is just one more way in which the community of magi strangely differs from ordinary people.

“In that case,” you say, turning back to the judgmental magus with an appraising look, “how do you suggest we communicate, Miss Tohsaka? Perhaps you have your own method of communication that can be kept secret from the Organizer.”

“Magical transmission is probably out,” she muses, touching a slim finger to her chin as she considers, “and I’m guessing you don’t want to stay here with Shirou’s family. We could always use familiars disguised as normal animals. It’s a common method for Sealing Designation Enforcers in the field, I’ve heard, and I have a very believable rat simulacrum.”

“You aren’t worried the familiars would be detected?” Ayaka sounds frightened by the prospect, eying Rin nervously as she asks.
“You’re overestimating the Holy Church’s representative,” Rin says dismissively. “He’s just one man, Shijou-san; he can’t scan every rat in Tokyo for magical energy on the off-chance it’s being used as the messenger for a conspiracy against the Holy Grail War. Right now I’d imagine he’s busy enough trying to find a safe place for Rider’s Master to hide; you said you let him go, right?”

“The Master of Archer interceded for his life, yes,” you answer. “You believe she would have delivered him to the organizer for his safety?”

Rin smirks in the direction of the kitchen, before replying, “Unless he was some kind of idiot with no regard for his own safety, yes.”

“I suppose, then, that your familiars offer the most effective and unobtrusive means of communication for our alliance,” you declare, still feeling dissatisfied with the conclusion. There ought to be some way of keeping in touch with these magi that doesn’t use magic! Nothing comes to mind, however. That Einzbern girl was the same way, now that you think of it. She seemed to want you to help her family in the War, yet left you no way to contact her. Of course, that was partially your fault for storming off. You may have overreacted somewhat to her claims about your identity, but you had had quite enough of people mistaking you for an Einzbern homunculus. You can’t imagine yourself reacting differently, even knowing now that it might have been more practical to hear her out. The Einzberns seem to dog your steps; from your looks, to the War, to physically following you and claiming you’re an agent of theirs; you can’t seem to get away from them.

On reflection, though, it would be wise to learn more about the family that seems certain to involve you further in its affairs, one way or another. Whether in dealing with the Einzberns themselves or with other magi, appearing to be a member of so influential a house surely has its uses. The more you know about them, the better you can leverage your similarity. Truvietianne told you that she knew little about the Einzberns due to the distance they kept from the Mages’ Association as a body, but perhaps Rin knows more. After all, she holds a higher rank in the organization and has been sent here specifically to deal with a plan of theirs. Not only that; according to Emiya, the Tohsaka family was one of those that collaborated with the Einzberns to organize the first Holy Grail War. While Emiya and his wife are still in the kitchen, you decide to ask her about the enigmatic family.

“On another topic, I wonder what you can tell me about the people orchestrating this Holy Grail War: the Einzberns,” you say. “The similarity I seem to have taken on since becoming a Servant has provoked my curiosity. Who are they, exactly, and how did they come to seek the Third Sorcery with such tenacity?”
Rin gives you a level gaze, suddenly suspicious at your words. Presumably she didn’t expect a randomly selected sacrifice turned Servant to know about the true purpose behind the Holy Grail War, so you quickly amend your statement.

“Emiya-san told me about the reason for the Holy Grail War, and that there were five previously held.”

“I see,” Rin says with a sigh. “He’s quick to talk, as always. If you know about the Third Sorcery, there isn’t much more I can tell you about them. The Einzbern House is secretive. Even moreso than most families of magi. They don’t deal with the Mages’ Association more than they have to, and only deal with the world outside their castle through intermediaries.”

“Their homunculi,” you suggest.

“That’s what everyone knows them for,” Rin says, smirking, “but no, I was referring to hired humans. Other magi, mostly, that they use as go-betweens. But you bring up a good point. The Einzbern family is famous for homunculi, because no other magus family can create them. The alchemists at Atlas can do it, but they don’t share their techniques with the Clock Tower; and the Einzbern family can do it, but they’re just as secretive. I think the reason nobody’s been able to recreate the technique is because they’re focusing on the wrong aspect.” As she narrates, Rin becomes more animated, raising one finger in a comically academic gesture. “Everyone at the Clock Tower thinks that homunculi are a matter of bodies, but I think the Einzberns’ real magic focus is on the soul.”

“Interesting,” you say. “Where do you draw that conclusion from?”

“You mentioned it yourself,” Rin says triumphantly. “The Third Sorcery! A long time ago, they supposedly held the secret to eternal life, but they lost it a thousand years ago. Since then, they’ve been pursuing its rediscovery. The Holy Grail War, the ritual to create the Third Sorcery, is their latest attempt, and it’s gotten them the closest. The core of the Third Sorcery is the incarnation of the soul as a self-sustaining material lifeform; a mystic perpetual motion machine. If they’ve been researching immortality for a thousand years, and the result is a Sorcery based around the soul, it stands to reason that their other achievements during this time must also have been in soul-related magic.”

“I see,” you say, musing on the subject. “In that frame of reference, the homunculi would have been a natural byproduct of their research into the nature of the soul. Artificial souls, created when studying the original, and put to whatever use best suits the magi.”
“It must have been something like that, yes,” Rin says happily. “That was a good guess, Saber. Before you were pulled into Caster’s Noble Phantasm, what department were you studying in?”

Fortunately, Emiya returns at that moment to inform you that dinner is ready, saving you from having to either invent a narrative of your imagined life as a magus or admit to having formerly lived as an ordinary student. Sakura, meanwhile, is going upstairs to call the two children down from their studies, and you can soon hear the boisterous voice of Seiji intermingling with his sister’s quiet tones as they approach. This puts a definite end to discussion of magic.

Dinner is as delicious as before, consisting of minced bonito salad, octopus karaage with hot sauce, meat and potato stew, and a wide variety of tempura, including lots of shrimp. Once again you ate ravenously beyond human limits, but Emiya seems to have experience cooking for large amounts of people, so there’s plenty of food.

After dinner, the children are packed off to study, read, play videogames, or whatever it is that middle-school students do between dinner and bed, and once again the six of you sit around the table. Shirou gets to his feet with a look of righteous determination in his eyes, looking ready to make a speech.

“Everyone,” he begins, “we can’t let this unknown Master and Servant keep attacking bystanders. There’s no reason to wait. We’ll go to the house that was burned down last night now, and Shijou-san can use her family’s magic to trace the Servant’s energy. Are you ready?”

[ ] “Miss Ayaka and I are ready. Let us be on our way, to put an end to this monstrous depredation!” (Duty)

[X] “Certainly we are ready, but I’d object to all traipsing off together. Miss Ayaka and I ought to travel separately, and appear to meet you by coincidence.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] “After considering the matter, I think not. Although I’ve appreciated your company and food, Miss Ayaka and I will spend our night hunting Berserker.” (Pride)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

As you look around the table, you can see the occupants giving Emiya their various responses. Rider nods, a determined expression on her face.
“Promise me you’ll be careful, Senpai. Don’t fight if the enemy is too strong,” Sakura says, insisting on her husband’s safety with a worried gaze.

“I’m ready,” Rin says with a smile, “but this is the first I’ve heard of Shijou-san being able to track the Servant we’re looking for. That’s very good, Shijou-san.”

“Thank you,” Ayaka says, easily embarrassed by the praise. “My family is sort of specialized in spirits.” She looks at you; expecting, you realize, for you to give Emiya an answer for the both of you.

“Certainly we are ready,” you say, getting to your feet to face Emiya “but I’d object to all traipsing off together. Miss Ayaka and I ought to travel separately, and appear to meet you by coincidence. Do you have the address of this attacked building?”

“Well, yes,” Emiya answers, looking put off by your suggestion to split up. “Why not go together, though? It’s safer to stay together. There are enemy Servants around after dark, you know.”

Resisting the urge to point out the uselessness of such an obvious reminder, you just sigh. “Emiya-san,” you say, in a tone reflecting your exasperation, “as I was discussing with Miss Tohsaka while you were cooking, this War has an overseer dispatched by the Holy Church, who will likely alert the other Masters and set them all against us at once if he learns that Miss Ayaka and I are collaborating with an outside force against the War itself. We cannot afford to be seen working with you unless it appears to be by accident. We must go separately.”

“Alright, fine,” Emiya says irritably, conceding with bad grace. “Here.” He fishes a scrap of paper out of his pocket and writes an address down on it, passing it over the table to you. “Try not to go too far out of the way. We need to move fast to catch whoever’s doing this.”

“Of course,” you answer absently, looking at the paper rather than Emiya. Fortunately you can place the address as being relatively close by. It shouldn’t take long to get there, particularly now that you can carry Ayaka and move at your own pace, darkness having fallen. “We’ll see you shortly, then,” you say to Emiya, and turn to quickly leave. Ayaka trails behind you as you step out into the cool night air, enjoying the moment of silence and separation from Emiya’s vibrant home life.

“Saber-san,” Ayaka begins curiously, “why did you just walk out and leave them like that? It was a bit cold of you.”

“We mustn’t get too attached to the Emiya family, Miss Ayaka,” you answer. “Remember that everyone in that house wants to prevent the Holy Grail War from being completed. The very ritual that is your family legacy and my only opportunity to live past the end of this War, they intend to stop. We may be collaborating with
them for the time being, in order to gain an advantage against the other Masters, but
they will be our enemies eventually. On the subject of that temporary collaboration,
though, we should be on our way.” So saying, you scoop Ayaka up into your arms,
holding her with one arm supporting her legs and the other about her shoulders.

“Hey!” Ayaka protests with an indignant squeal at the sudden shift, but soon
quiets down as you hop lightly up to a rooftop and begin going from building to
building, hurrying along in the hopes of arriving at your destination before Emiya’s
group. As you pick up speed the wind begins to bite, and Ayaka clings to your jacket,
burying her face in your chest to protect it from the cold. You hold Ayaka close as
you move, your two silhouettes merging into a single shadow gliding over the
nighttime streets, hidden from the eyes of passersby.

After you’ve covered a bit of distance, Ayaka speaks up again.

“I see what you mean, about needing to fight the Emiyas eventually to stop
them from ruining the Grail War,” the girl says, “but are you really sure we have to?
I mean, they do all seem like good people. Maybe if you told them you only want to
survive, they’d agree to help us.”

“I doubt it,” you answer, a derisive tone giving more venom to your words
than they ought to carry. “That Emiya, he has a happy, ordinary life, a home, and a
family; he doesn’t want to be a magus or care about magical research, he said as
much; and he believes the Holy Grail contains enough unrestrained power to destroy
this land, or more. I don’t know whether to believe him, but what I am certain of is
his belief. Do you suppose someone in that situation will be willing to risk throwing
away what matters most to him in order to give me life?”

“I guess not,” Ayaka murmurs, disheartened. “But maybe you could convince
them that we’d be able to control the Holy Grail and use it properly.”

“Even if that were possible,” you answer, “which I doubt; there’s the Tohsaka
woman to consider. She’s been sent by some faction at the Clock Tower to stop the
Holy Grail War. Possibly this is because those behind her are opposed to either the
Barthomeloi or to whatever Clock Tower authority dispatched Harris, and she will be
more accepting of another victor. Possibly she has been sent by her Sorcerer master to
ensure than no new Sorcery enters the world to threaten his position. Then again, she
may have some other motive altogether. In any case we cannot rely on an appeal to
her sympathy. We must be prepared to face all of these outsiders, these interlopers
intruding on your family’s domain with no permission from the Shijou, as enemies
without remorse. To do so we must not become too close with them.”

“I see,” Ayaka says sadly. “But then, if you’ve thought all this out, why not
play up being their friend? It might make it easier to fight them if they’re reluctant.”
“They wouldn’t be the only ones reluctant,” you say, putting some warmth into your voice to draw back from the calculating impression you’ve been giving.
“Part of this is for your benefit, Miss Ayaka. I haven’t forgotten your sympathy for the doves your mother bade you sacrifice. I don’t want you to be hurt, when the time comes.”

Then you’re there, at the address Emiya gave you. It was once a medium-sized house, with two floors and a moderate footprint, nestled side-by-side with similar homes. Not very different from Emiya’s house, or the home Yumigawa Rushorou grew up in. Now it’s a charred skeleton, looming over a pile of ash and burned debris; a ragged black shadow standing out from the well-kept domiciles under suburban streetlights like a rotten tooth among the white. If you hadn’t seen so many similar sights in the First City of the Akeldama, you might find it shocking. As it is, the sight is simply a confirmation. As you land on the sidewalk a short distance from the ruin, you set Ayaka down on her feet. Emiya’s group is already there, having come by another road. Apparently Emiya and Tohsaka are the sort of magi who can enhance their bodies well, if they could keep up with Rider and beat you here. Of course, taking the direct route while you circled around surely helped their progress.

“Master of Rider! I see you continue to trail behind this hunter of the mundane, as I knew you would. How lovely, how lovely, that tonight you have brought with you additional sacrifices to our battle! Another Servant and two magi, I see; you really are generous, or perhaps it is simply my overwhelming fortune.”

While you’re approaching Emiya’s group, a voice suddenly resounds from the opposite direction, down the road. Following the sound to its origin, you see a man standing on the roof of the house adjacent to the ruin, wearing a tuxedo of all things. Beyond his absurd outfit, it’s difficult to make out much about his features in the dark, but his arrogant voice is prominent enough to make up for any visual lack. He isn’t so much speaking as proclaiming, as if he were a stage actor delivering a soliloquy to the audience.

“So you’re Berserker’s Master, huh? Why show yourself tonight, when you stayed hidden before?” As Emiya calls up to the arrogant-seeming magus he, Rin, and Rider get into a triangular formation with Emiya and Rider in front, positioned to defend Rin.

“At that time, I was still gauging your ability. Once I determined you were no threat alone, I knew that a duel against you would be no fitting stage for me. Now that you have come in greater numbers, however, the time is finally ripe for Giuliano di Lumenza, the Master of Berserker, to demonstrate his prowess! Now, my Servant, strike them down!”
Lumenza levels a hand at Emiya, and beside him magical energy coalesces into the form of a man, hidden by a voluminous shadowy robe. In a moment, he will no doubt leap down to attack Emiya.

[ ] Leap into the fray (Pride)
[X] Observe Berserker’s fighting style against Emiya and Rider (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

The idea of leaping forward to fight alongside Emiya and Rider occurs to you, but you make no move forward as Berserker takes form. Considering what Emiya has told you before, he and Rider can survive the enemy’s attacks for a time, and that’s time you intend to put to use observing Berserker’s power. Emiya’s group is focused on the enemy; with you behind them, they have no way of noticing your inaction. At di Lumenza’s command, Berserker springs toward Rider with a fluid grace, like a pouncing tiger. As he flies through the air from the roof, the wind blows back his cloak and you can see his the true form of his face and hands revealed in the artificial light of the streetlamp.

Berserker is a golden figure; not metaphorically so, but rather a man who seems literally to have been made out of gold. Only his eyes, black without iris or sclera; and the hair which hangs in short copper ringlets from his head, violate this gleaming monochrome. He’s not a big man, but the lithe stature that cloak clings to belies the power in his spring. As you learned in the Akeldama, a Berserker can draw power from unknown places. When Berserker’s fist slams into Rider’s crossed weapons, raised one over the other to protect her, the impact is like thunder, and Rider is sent sliding back.

Status Updated

Before Emiya can react, Berserker whips around and slams a kick straight through his gut. Blood spatters the scene in brilliant profusion as Emiya’s torso sails up from his body, split off by the impact. Rider leaps back towards Berserker, but he’s too fast for her as well. He slides around her outstretched weapon, closing the distance with a quicker step than hers and grabbing her by the hair to keep her in place. With that head immobilized, Berserker pounds his metal fist into it, three times in quick succession, ’til the form is lost. Rider is tossed aside like a rag doll. It all happened in the time it took you to charge towards Berserker, starting when he broke Emiya in two. You strike too late, attempting to cut through the Servants golden
hide and meeting only air. He’s sidestepped your field of view; you frantically turn, but that all-destroying fist comes down on your elbow, smashing through your armor and turning your sword-arm into a useless rag.

For the first time, you understand how O’Mordha must have felt facing you. Your mind races to analyze the possibilities of the fight, simulating attacks and defenses, but all end up in the same place: your death. You jump back, avoiding a punch that could take your head off, but even before your feet touch the ground again Berserker is on you. A chill sinks into your brain, and you seize up with the realization of your incoming doom.

Gold fingers close around your throat. You look up into the metal face, contorted in mindless rage, and Berserker screams triumph as he snaps your neck. Not long after that, you’re pulled away from your body with a sickening tearing noise, and as the last vital energy of your life expires you have the unique experience of looking down on your own bleeding corpse, from the elevation of Berserker’s arm.

DEAD END

*Tiger Dojo is a strange hint corner.*
*If you would like to beat the game by yourself, or if you would like to keep the characters’ images, please be warned.*

“Welcome back,” Taiga exclaims, “to the heart-pounding centerpiece of this story! The helping hand for those who were killed by hesitation! The true pillar supporting Fate/Awakening Mirror! It’s...”

“The Tiger Dojo!” Illya interjects.

As you blink into consciousness, you realize that you’ve returned to that training hall with the strange master and student. Here your body seems whole again, fortunately enough, and as you nervously confirm your condition the memories of your other time spent in the Tiger Dojo comes back to you. A shudder runs through you. You haven’t taken a direct path to success, that’s plain enough.

“It’s been so long, Ru-chan,” Taiga says, pouting at you with feigned affection. “You’ve gotten so durable since the last War! Sensei is all alone here, you know?”

“Hmph! Admit it: you’re not lonely,” Illya accuses. “You’re just bored, not having that bloodlust of your satisfied! You greedy tiger!”

Crack!

“Osu! No off-topic comments from a disciple!”
“O~su.” Illya echoes the cry listlessly, then recovers her energy to speak. “Well then, why did Onii-chan die here? Berserker is strong, so staying away and watching him was the correct choice, right?”

“Hmhm! You misunderstand, my disciple,” Taiga proclaims with a self-satisfied chuckle. “Pride! Guts! Passion! Those are the traits of a youthful protagonist! Whatever you do, commit to it 100%! Ru-chan, there are two correct options when facing Berserker. One is not to face him at all! You’ve already lost that opportunity. Two: Face him all at once, with your allies by your side! If you hang back and worry, he’ll strike while you’re thinking about your safety!”

“So in other words,” Illya says, “Berserker won because he could fight everyone one at a time?”

“Correct! Alright, Ru-chan, here’s your first Tiger Stamp of the new War. You missed out on lots of them last time, but if you can collect 40 of them in this War, Sensei will give you a special prize!”

With that, consciousness once again fades.

[X] Leap into the fray (Pride)
[ ] Observe Berserker’s fighting style against Emiya and Rider (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You know that last night, Emiya and Rider were beaten without being able to scratch the foe, and had to flee. If Lumenza says he was only gauging their power, he’s probably telling the truth; he let them go intentionally, and can kill them now if he pleases. If you want to keep these allies, you’ll have to intervene and fight by their side.

At Lumenza’s command, Berserker blurs as he springs forward to attack Rider. He’s a shadowed streak in the night, moving so quickly that you almost can’t follow him. With some enemies, however, you don’t need to follow their movements. Berserker is making a simple, direct charge: easier to predict than to track. Instantly materializing your armor, you charge forward to intercept Berserker at the same moment. He covers more space than you do, and faster, but he has farther to go.

Passing Rider just in time, you bring Heiligöffnungschwert down in a straight vertical slice, cutting through the path of the oncoming Servant. Moving too fast to change his course, the ragged black Shadow that is Berserker passes through the attack and around you on either side, perfectly bisected. It’s a convenient trait of your new Noble Phantasm, you realize, that its focus has shifted to the Three
Miracles. You no longer need to call its true name, as you did with Lückeschwert, to activate its portal edge.

Thus Berserker, for all his apparent power, is defeated by an superior Noble Phantasm. Once again, it seems your only truly worthy foe is that other Saber. And yet, the smile hasn’t fallen from Lumenza’s face.

“Fuhahahaha! Excellent, Saber,” he exclaims in bizarrely euphoric tones. “To circumvent the prevention of wounds by an attack that disconnects, rather than cutting! But you’d best turn and look again, for my Berserker’s immortal body will not fall so easily!”

Indeed, the magical presence that should be fading behind you remains. You whirl around, sword still at the ready, to see that where Berserker’s slashed remains should lie only the fragments of his cloak pool on the ground. Standing over that shadow is a golden man: slightly shorter than you, with a lanky, slender frame and tightly bound ropes of muscle that seem more cut into the body than built up. Berserker wears a Grecian cuirass similar to those worn by Perseus and Longinus in the Akeldama, and the accompanying skirt, but his head and limbs are unadorned. The metallic warrior grins at you out of black eyes and shining lips, and as you watch he passes his hands over a vertical line in his torso; smoothing out the seam where you cut him, you realize.

“What now, Saber,” Lumenza’s voice resounds from overhead. “How do you intend to defeat the invincible champion, Berserker?”

Behind Berserker’s back, Emiya has taken up a combat stance, wielding two short falchions. Rider, already armed, has stripped off a blindfold that had briefly appeared when the battle began, and stares intently at Berserker; searching for openings.

[ ] Continue attacking with Heiligöffnungschwert. Perhaps there’s a limit to his healing.

[ ] Try receiving Berserker’s attacks with Kenótis, to remove more of his body from the battlefield.

[X] Call on one of the miracles of Heiligöffnungschwert (Form a rift diagonally through Berserker’s body, bisecting his heart and brain and allowing the top half to fall through into INS)

[ ] Bind Berserker with the tendrils of Nothingness and flee with Ayaka. This isn’t an enemy you can defeat.
A shudder runs through you as you face your restored enemy. This thing, Berserker, is inhuman. Of course all Servants are, to a certain degree. A Heroic Spirit is a thing beyond all human capabilities. But this: to stand up and fight, none the worse for wear, after being cut in two? It’s something more fitting of a monster out of fairy tales than a hero of mankind’s past. For a moment, the impulse to run seizes you. Perhaps Lumenza is right, and his Servant truly is more powerful than any other. What warrior could hold up a sword in the face of that overwhelming strength, that immortal body?

But no, you think. This fear is ridiculous. You, too, are inhuman. You learned it only today, but it is nonetheless true. You’re less human, in fact, than the golden monster that stands before you, for you were never human. Never a soldier drawn up from the crowd; never a farm boy headed off to seek destiny; never a prince on a quest to prove himself. You have trodden on humanity; ripped them to pieces and destroyed their best. You have brutalized magi and slain the finest paladin of Charlemagne. Alberich is a life beyond humanity and human legendry, and to triumph over this monstrosity you need only approach the problem with the right frame of mind.

You tighten your grip on *Heiligöffnungschwert* and steel your mind, putting yourself into that mental state of analysis which enabled you to triumph over Rider. Your enemy is powerful, you know, and can heal as well, but all the same it did come as a surprise to Lumenza that you could cut him at all. This means that Berserker’s regenerative properties are a secondary tool; possibly a last resort. His primary defense, that which stopped Rider and Emiya, you have already bypassed. How, then, can you destroy an enemy who can freely reattach two separated halves of his body? The answer comes to you easily, surfacing in a mind now as cold and clear as an alpine stream. Any humanoid, however durable, must have two central points that direct his vital functions: the heart and the brain. If you can simultaneously destroy both, it’s possible that there will be no functioning will to direct Berserker’s regeneration, and he will simply die. Fortunately, you recall, *Heiligöffnungschwert* has the power to do just that.

You hold your sword up vertically before your eyes, taking the archetypal stance of a knight as you utter a brief internal prayer to the gods whom you know are watching. The gleaming inscription catches your eye. *Ich bin der Schlüssel*. Indeed, this blade must be the key now, or without its miracle you will die. Then, as Berserker
springs forward to attack, you cut the air in a diagonal strike that traces the line from his brain to his heart, and through the left side of his chest.

“Heiligöffnungschwert!”

As your shout resounds through the night, the black line traced by your blade remains still for a moment, hovering in the air like a bizarre afterimage. Then it explodes forward, launched at Berserker as a crescent hole in the fabric of reality, aimed to scoop out his vitals and leave him dead.

Berserker bends. He does so without slowing his forward momentum, roaring with what you could almost swear is derision as his body twists impossibly. You can almost hear the crunch of vertebrae destroyed by the pressure of that bow-like curve, but no part of the golden form touches your portal. Then he snaps back up, still charging, and too close now to avoid. You step back, but he catches you with a right hook that tears half your helm off you. The mangled steel cuts a deep gash above your right eye as it goes, and while your vision is obscured by the sudden outpouring of blood Berserker drives a knee into your chest. This time the sound of crushed bone you hear is real, along with the breaking of your armor.

The impact sends you flying backward, away from Berserker, but this time he doesn’t follow. A chain is wrapped around his arm with the other end connected to one of Rider’s strange weapons, and she’s hauling back on it with all her strength, stretching the arm out parallel to his torso. It occurs to you, as you regain your balance to spring towards Berserker again, that he moved slower than in his first charge during that attack. He’s still faster than you, but perhaps healing has a negative effect on his physical abilities. In that case, there’s a chance of victory yet.

Status Updated

“Heiligöffnungschwert!” Not wanting to let a chance go by, you cut the air vertically to send another portal at Berserker while he’s occupied struggling with Rider, and this one nearly strikes home. He sways back to put his head and torso out of the way, but the blade of darkness severs his arm just below the shoulder before collapsing the ruins behind the pair. The arm, you observe with disgust, is still struggling in its chain even after being cut away. As Rider leaps back with Berserker’s chained arm, the golden Servant bellows rage at you. In a moment, you two will clash once more.

‘Saber-san!’ In this moment, as you close toward Berserker, Ayaka’s voice resounds in your mind. ‘We should retreat! Tohsaka-san says she and Rider can delay Berserker so we can all get away. I don’t want you to keep fighting; that gold Servant is too strong!’
[X] ‘No.’ Ayaka’s worry is misplaced. You know you can chop Berserker’s limbs away now. If you can weaken him, you can kill him. Go in for the final blow. (Pride)

[ ] ‘Alright, Miss Ayaka. Let’s go.’ Missing an arm or not, Berserker is ridiculously powerful. You’ll find more advantageous circumstances to kill him; for now, saving your skin is most important. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Answer something else. (Write in)

‘No,’ you reply. ‘I can defeat him. Berserker has lost an arm already. Now it’s only a matter of finishing the job.’

You clash with Berserker again, and if Ayaka replies you lose the message in the focus of battle. You step in with your sword low, reading and sliding past a left straight from Berserker to cut at his midsection. Again, though, Berserker is damnably flexible, dodging sideways faster than your sword. You rotate as well to keep him in your sight, but he’s moving faster; staying out of your vision. He lands another hook, shattering the remaining half of your lion helm along with the cheekbone underneath.

You leap back to get some distance, cutting a portal into the air between you as you go to stymie his pursuit. Once you’ve backed off, you realize that the other presences in the area have left. Rider, Emiya, and Tohsaka are all gone, and must have taken Ayaka with them. They’ve made good on their claim of a clean escape, though it’s you doing the holding rather than Tohsaka. Now there are no more distractions for Berserker, and he blurs into motion as a streaming golden spark before your eyes.

‘Heiligöffnungschwert!’ Berserker is a straight attacker, you know. Even if you can’t see the oncoming strike, you can slice a wide enough portal to intercept it! Cutting in a wide arc, you create a semicircle of darkness to intercept Berserker’s legs and leave him a broken torso on the pavement. It’s the perfect tactic to defeat this enemy.

If Berserker were your only enemy, at least. But he has an ally, watching from above and giving telepathic orders. Even if Madness has stolen Berserker’s ability to make tactical decisions, Lumenza can do it for him. That, presumably, is why the mad warrior dives around your flying portal, coming in low to the ground and knocking the feet from under you. Then, before you can right yourself, the blows from that left arm hammer your skull into the pavement.
DEAD END

Tiger Dojo is a strange hint corner.
If you would like to beat the game by yourself,
or if you would like to keep the characters’ images, please be warned.

After being knocked to the pavement, you wake up on varnished wood. You’re back in that training hall again, and despite yourself you let out a disappointed groan. In front of you are the master and disciple who preside over your death.

“Welcome back again, in extremely rapid succession, to the marvelous reform school for the deceased, the Tiger Dojo! I’m your instructor, Fujimura Taiga.” As ever, Taiga is unreasonably chipper.

“And I’m the number one student, Illya,” her disciple chimes in, matching Taiga for energy.

“Hmmm,” Taiga says, putting a hand on her chin in a contemplative pose. “Confidence and passion sure are a mysterious things, aren’t they?”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, last time Ru-chanchan died, it was because he didn’t have enough self-confidence and wandered around at the edge of the battlefield, not sure when to join the fight. But this time, he died because he got too full of himself and tried to continue the fight even though the allies he relied on wanted to run away.”

“So in other words,” Illya says, “if you don’t have enough confidence, you die; and if you get too confident, you die. When you put it like that, it seems like Onii-chan has a pretty tough balancing act, huh!”

“Fumu! You understand well, my disciple,” Taiga answers smugly. “A hero must walk a tightrope.”

“Wasn’t there another piece of advice you wanted to give him, though?” Illya has a mischievous twinkle in her eye as she asks the question, and somehow you feel you’ll wish she hadn’t brought it up.

“Ah! That’s right!” Taiga’s face, usually relaxed and irresolute, takes on the aspect of an angry beast. “You forgot my advice! Ru-chan, just last time you were here I told you to either fight Berserker with your friends or not fight him at all! But when your friends wanted to run away, you kept fighting alone! What kind of lonely death is that to die?”

Crack!

With no warning, she hits you over the head with her shinai!
“Now then,” she says more calmly, “next time, take better care of your body. Don’t get overconfident. And listen to sensei! Here’s your Tiger Stamp.”

[ ] ‘No.’ Ayaka’s worry is misplaced. You know you can chop Berserker’s limbs away now. If you can weaken him, you can kill him. Go in for the final blow. (Pride)

[X] ‘Alright, Miss Ayaka. Let’s go.’ Even missing an arm, Berserker is ridiculously powerful. You’ll find more advantageous circumstances to kill him; for now, saving your skin is what’s most important. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Answer something else. (Write in)

‘Alright, Miss Ayaka. Let us go.’ You reply with ill humor, frustrated at the interruption. The battle against Berserker was just beginning to look up! Yet, you know it would be foolish to continue fighting alone if Rider and the others retreat. There would be no-one to distract Berserker, and that was an act that saved your life a few moments ago. ‘Where are you?’

‘I’m behind you now, on the other side of the street,’ comes the reply. ‘I circled around through the ruin to stay out of the fighting.’

Slamming a heel into the pavement, you stop your charge towards Berserker and reverse. As you draw back, you see him still struggling with Rider. She’s tossed the writhing severed arm aside, and now has both chains wrapped around his remaining arm. Some kind of magic circle appears below him, but you turn to look for Ayaka rather than watching more. Hopefully she’s right, and whatever tactic Rider and Tohsaka have worked out will immobilize Berserker long enough for everyone to make their respective escapes.

You find your Master taking shelter in some family’s front garden, across the street from the ruins as promised. Amazing, you think, that the inhabitants; everyone in the area, in fact; have avoided being woken up by the fighting; but then, this was a battle planned by the magus Lumenza. Perhaps he used some sort of wide-range magic to ensure that all potential witnesses would remain asleep.

Landing on the front step, and inadvertently crushing a potted plant under a steel boot as you do so, you sweep Ayaka up into your arms again and leap from there to the roof. Without looking back, you continue your flight in the same direction, putting as much distance between you and Berserker as possible by wringing all the speed you can muster from your legs. At this point, there’s no option but to commit fully to the lone escape; Ayaka’s position was such that trying to regroup with the
Emiya party would force you to confront Berserker again, and you have no idea how reliable Tohsaka’s delaying scheme is. There seems to be no pursuit, however.

As you move from house to house and block to block, you reflect on how truly vast Tokyo is. Growing up, “you” had always taken public transit or been driven, or else walked around your own small neighborhood. That kind of childhood forms a mental image of the city as a set of nodes: small, well-understood areas linked by long stretches of metropolitan rail. Going on foot over these wide stretches of housing, occasionally punctuated by commercial centers, gives an entirely different impression. It’s as if you’re sailing over a great sea of humanity; a tiny mote of independent movement, borne aloft over peaked-roof-waves and seafoam chimneys.

How many souls there are here, you think, and something predatory stirs within you. The beings sleeping unaware in these fragile shelters are, in a sense, a great mass of energy waiting to be consumed. Yumigawa Rushorou once heard someone say over 36 million people live in the whole of the Tokyo metropolis. 9 million in the original city alone. If you became this much greater than humanity with only 1,050 sacrifices, how much power could you have taken had the whole of Tokyo been pulled into Akeldama? More than enough to destroy that savage Berserker, to be sure.

“Saber-san?” Ayaka’s voice pulls you out of your musing. She sounds concerned. “I haven’t felt anything from my command spell in a while now. I’m sure you can take a rest. You’re hurt, aren’t you?”

Now that you stop to pay attention, she’s right. You can no longer sense the strong presence of a Servant anywhere nearby. You come to a stop on an anonymous roof, sending a few tiles skittering away with the impact of your boots. Come to think of it, you should dematerialize your armor as well. With no enemies around, all it’s doing is weighing you down. You set Ayaka down on her feet beside you and let your equipment fade, staying dressed only in the tight-fitting black shirt and pants worn beneath the plate.

“Thank you, Miss Ayaka,” you say, “for pointing that out. You roused me from a moment of woolgathering.”

Rather than confirmation, the girl’s response is a sharp gasp. Ayaka is staring at you in wide-eyed horror. More specifically, her eyes are focused on your chest. Bewildered, you look down to see why, and suddenly realize how much you’ve been suppressing the pain. Your chest is a bloody mess, now it’s no longer hidden by the remnants of your cuirass. Most of the damage is internal, done by the blunt force of Berserker’s knee, but that isn’t what shows. What’s captured Ayaka’s horror is the carnage created by hundreds of steel fragments digging shallow, ragged holes and
gashes in your flesh. It’s a horrid sight, even if the damage is superficial, and it’s clearly hit the girl hard. She has a hand over her mouth in horror, and looks as if any moment she’ll drop into a faint.

You catch Ayaka by the shoulders to support her, and carefully guide the girl into a seated position, lest she fall from the roof. As you go, you murmur, “It’s alright, Miss Ayaka. I’ll be fine. A Servant’s wounds heal quickly,” in a quiet, reassuring tone. You aren’t lying to reassure her, either. Now that you’re no longer fighting or running, you can feel the mystic energy that supports your existence going to work closing your wounds and mending your broken bones. The long cut over your eye had even sealed up while you were fleeing. It’s a fortunate thing, to have a Servant’s vitality. Even with Circe’s restorative potion, healing was more difficult in the Akeldama.

“You mean you’ll really heal from that?” Ayaka sounds understandably doubtful.

“Servants possess a similar constitution to familiars,” you explain. “You can maintain a familiar’s form by expending mystic energy, correct?”

“That’s true,” Ayaka says hesitantly. She still can’t meet your eyes when speaking, her gaze focused on your bloody torso.

“There you have it,” you say. “Servants are the same way. I may not be able to get up after being cut in two, as Berserker can, but I would be a sorry excuse for a Saber if I couldn’t heal these wounds. We’ll sit here and wait, and I’ll quite unscathed in but a moment.”

That was hyperbole, of course, but not in the extreme. The two of you remain sitting, side by side on the rooftop, for a bit over a half-hour before you’re completely healed. Ayaka stays close to you as you wait, resting against your arm as if she’s worried you’ll disappear. Given that you’re responsible for her safety, you suppose she has good reason for such concerns.

Finally you feel the last fragments of bone slide back into place, the last patch of bruised tissue return to a pristine state, and the last of the pain vanish completely. You get to your feet, stretch briefly, and dematerialize your bloody shirt to demonstrate the lack of wounds beneath.

“Behold, Miss Ayaka,” you proclaim with a bit of humorous melodrama, “a knight untarnished by wounds!”

“Er, yes,” Ayaka says, blushing furiously. “I’m glad you could heal so well.” She trails off.

“Oh, that’s right!” As a memory suddenly occurs to her, Ayaka reaches into a pocket of her coat and pulls out some sort of charred fragment of porcelain. “While
you were fighting Berserker, and his Master was busy with Emiya-san and Tohsaka-san, I managed to go through those ruins and find this!"

“What is it,” you ask, scrutinizing the object bemusedly.

“A piece of a dinner plate,” Ayaka answers, “but that’s not what matters. It’s been suffused with the energy of the Servant that burned that house down! With this, I can track them down!”

[X] “Can you perform the necessary magic here and now? If we can confront that Servant tonight, the evening may yet hold triumph.” (Pride)

[ ] “That’s wonderful, Miss Ayaka. Once we return home you should perform the necessary magic, so we can confront that Servant tomorrow night.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

Your lips curl into a smile. This, now, is good news. The chance to defeat the rogue Servant before the Master of Berserker can stake out the next set of ruins, and to increase your cachet with Emiya’s party. To eliminate one of your competitors, hopefully while they’re either occupied in their feeding or sated, not expecting a battle. Ayaka has given you the perfect opportunity.

“That’s wonderful, Miss Ayaka,” you exclaim. “Can you perform the necessary magic here and now? If we can confront that Servant tonight, the evening may yet hold triumph.”

“Oh, sure,” she says, taken aback at your exuberance. “But, aren’t you tired from the fight with Berserker? Can you handle more fighting tonight, Saber-san?”

“I told you, didn’t I? I’m fully rejuvenated!” You pat the top of Ayaka’s head in a way that could be either comforting or patronizing. You hope it’s the former. “Thank you for worrying,” you continue in a more normal tone, “but I really am quite well now.”

“Alright then, Saber-san,” Ayaka concedes. “If you say so.”

Ayaka stretches her right hand out in front of her, holding the plate fragment in her palm, and the magic crest on her arm begins to glow. “Lost magic,” she chants, eyes shut to view an inner world, “that was once of something greater. I command you by the name of Shijou. Show me your origin, and lead me to your source.”

Then the magic fades, and Ayaka opens her eyes again. A faint glow, part of the light that shone from her crest, has taken up residence in her irises. “I know where
the Servant is,” she declares. “It isn’t moving. I think it might be attacking another family now. We need to hurry, Saber-san! That way!”

Without a moment’s pause, you pick Ayaka up once more and head off over the rooftops in the direction of her pointing finger. You’re heading nearly back the way you came, towards the neighborhood of the Emiya and Shijou houses, but not in exactly the same direction. You won’t pass the ruins where you fought Berserker, at any rate. After about a half-hour of travel, Ayaka motions for you to stop. Even if she hadn’t though, you’d have known. Even from blocks away, you can clearly feel the Servant’s presence as you approach; and when you alight on a roof across the street from the house, you can almost smell the stench of blood. The house where that Servant is feeding hasn’t started burning yet, but what’s being done in there is like a beacon of energy. There’s even a bounded field set around the house, no doubt doing the job of warding off mundane senses.

Of course, if you can detect the Servant in that house, it can surely sense your presence as well.

[X] Enter the house. (Pride)
[ ] Wait and watch. (Duty)
[ ] Launch a portal at the house to attack the Servant from range. (Self-Preservation)

There’s no point in simply waiting, you decide. To attack from above would likely give you an advantage, but would also certainly cause the deaths of any humans still living in the house, and that would disturb Ayaka. So there is only one thing to do: enter by the front door. You drop to the street below and materialize your armor before approaching the bounded field carefully. You haven’t enough knowledge of such things to guess at its effects.

“Miss Ayaka,” you say quietly, “what can you tell me about this bounded field?”

“Hmmm...” She scrutinizes it for a moment, before concluding, “it seems to only be a sensory barrier. It keeps people outside from hearing anything within, and alerts the user when it’s crossed.”

“Excellent.” If it lacks the dangerous effects of Circe’s barrier or the solid defense of Vaisset’s, it’s nothing to worry about. As you pass through it, you feel the membrane of mystic energy tingling on your skin, but nothing more. When Ayaka mentioned the auditory effects of the barrier you had been momentarily concerned that the property would be filled with screams and the bloody noise of its inhabitants’
deaths, but these suspicions were unfounded. The air within the bounded field is utterly silent. You try the door, and find it unlocked, the click of the knob resounding in the stillness.

As you advance into the house, your nose fills with the stench of blood. You’re certain now that there has been recent death here, but there’s no visual sign of it. In fact, the house seems pristine, though dark. The entryway is clear and tidy, with all the family’s shoes lined up in their proper places. There were children of four different ages in this family. The floors are polished. There is no clutter about, or any sign of a struggle.

As you move on you see that the living room is in the same condition. It could be a showplace for some modern interior decorating magazine. The house has a western-style layout, with its living room stocked with a sofa and entertainment equipment, and fully separated from the kitchen and dining room. The blood stench comes most strongly from the kitchen, and you doubt it’s in the same condition of cleanliness as the first two rooms you’ve covered. Fortunately for Ayaka’s eyes, there’s no need to examine it. It’s in the dining room that the presence of the Servant waits, as still as the rest of the house. Is it waiting for you with some trap, like a spider in its web? No matter. You clear the hesitation from your mind and advance toward the dining room, rounding the corner ready to materialize Heiligöffnungs Schwert at the slightest provocation.

No provocation comes as you stand on the threshold. In the dining room, seated at the head of the table with her back to you, is the Servant. You can see her only dimly, however. In the living room and entryway some light had entered through windows or the open front door, but it’s not so here in this windowless chamber. The darkness is complete here, and without a Servant’s vision you would be unable to see a thing. As it is, you can make out the general details. The predatory Servant is short, wears a richly decorated blue furisode and has long black hair that cascades down her back to cover the high back of the chair she sits in. On either side of that hair, a large ornament of some kind sits, perhaps of ivory. Then, as you’re trying to analyze the danger she presents, the Servant speaks.

“I’m so, so glad that you’ve come, Saber.” Her voice is soft, almost inaudible, as if she can barely stand the effort of speaking. “I’ve been hoping to, well, to see you. Please sit down, won’t you?” She gestures at the chair opposite her, at the other end of the narrow table, with a pair of long silver chopsticks. As the Servant speaks you notice that the rhythm of her words is odd as well. She speaks very slowly, as if carefully picking each word, and periodically pauses even longer in mid-sentence.
‘Stay well away from that room, Miss Ayaka,’ you order your Master telepathically. ‘It’s too dark for you to see, right? Just stay well back, and I’ll keep the Servant from approaching you.’

‘Alright,’ Ayaka answers nervously, and softly backs away into the living room as you approach the offered seat. You drop yourself heavily into it, armor clanking raucously, but if the violation of her silence disturbs the Servant she doesn’t show it. Now that you’re fully in the room, your eyes adjust and it’s easier to make out the details of your quarry. Her face reminds you of a doll’s: exquisitely beautiful, a contrast of china-white skin, black lashes, ruby-red lips, and iridescent, almost luminous eyes; but fixed with an emotionless, vacant expression. Adding to the artificial impression is the fact that the ornaments you’d previously noticed are in fact a pair of large, forward-pointing horns. Her clothing, too, is richly ornamental. She wears black silk gloves, tied at the wrists with white bows. White lace adorns the furisode’s long sleeves, and affixed to it are many more ornate bows of blue, red, and gold ribbons, which look almost like large flowers.

On the plate in front of her, though, is something quite unfitting for a doll’s diet: dark red meat, raw and thinly sliced as if for yakiniku, rising out of a shallow pool of blood like pasta out of a cream sauce.

“You have me at a disadvantage, miss. You have some familiarity with me, but it is not mutual,” you say, keeping your tone conversational. As if you’d met this girl by coincidence, instead of hunting her down over a string of murders.

“Fufufu,” the other Servant titters quietly, her small mouth managing the faintest of upward curves in suggestion of mirth. “I am Caster, but it would be, ah, hardly appropriate to say we are... unfamiliar. You have been the, ah, Master of Caster before, and you knew me at that time. But then, we did have different... names. And features.”

“You were in the Akeldama?” You can only ask in disbelief. But then something about her face suddenly does seem familiar. There’s a hint in the features of another face. An awkward, perpetually unhappy and nervous face, masked by glasses and long, greasy hair. “Don’t tell me...”

“P-p-perhaps it would, ah, h-help you to, er, remember,” the Servant says, still with that tiny, barely visible smile, “if I t-took on my former, um, mode of speech?” Now the words aren’t slowly chosen, but stuttered out quickly, with the pauses accompanied by placeholder sounds to make sure the other person doesn’t cut into the line during a moment of silence. It all clicks.

“Ogawara-kun,” you cry in shock, utterly taken aback, “But you-how-”
“Now, now,” Caster says, returning to ‘her’ soft, slow tone. “We have different names now, don’t we? I have not called you Yumigawa-san, have I?”

“No, but I would’ve expected you to,” you reply. “Why?”

“Different names,” Caster says, “for different people. There are... others entitled to those names. I know the term Caster has some... sentimental meaning for you, of course. If you would prefer, I shall call you Alberich and you may call me Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime; but it is a bit of a... mouthful.”

“Names aren’t so important,” you say firmly, now starting to grow angry. “What matters is that you explain something to me!”

[X] “How is it that you’ve become a Servant?” (Pride)

[ ] “Why are you traveling through Tokyo slaughtering families?” (Compassion)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

The emotion that fills you, more than the anger at Ogawara’s prevarication with the topic of names or the confusion at murder being committed by one who seemed too gentle for such acts, is shock. You thought you had come to understand just what it was that happened in the Akeldama. There were a thousand and forty-nine human souls and nine Servants, all summoned to be sacrificed in the creation of a single new hero; yourself. Now one of those human souls sits before you as a Servant who dines on human life. What the hell is going on?

“How is it that you’ve become a Servant,” you demand, your composure lost, slamming a fist on the table to punctuate your words. The impact shakes Kōrakuhime’s china plate and cut crystal glass, sending a droplet of blood over the plate’s rim and onto the table. Red lips purse in a tiny frown as Kōrakuhime eyes the spatter, rapidly staining the white tablecloth. There’s a moment of silence before she answers, and you can feel anger radiating from that almost-immobile face.

“You feel... betrayed, I suppose,” she finally replies, “I know how you value information, Alberich. And of course, one’s identity is always a very sensitive subject. My existence, as a Servant, challenges your conception of your own. Your anger is not unjustified. Nevertheless, I would... hope that a person of your calibre could remain civil in all circumstances.”

You let out a long sigh, forcing your heated temper to cool. It’s obvious that anger will get you nowhere with this bizarre Caster, Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime. The easily intimidated aspect of Ogawara is one that has been lost, apparently. In any
case, she does have a point; cold logic is what has kept you alive through your tribulations, not emotion.

“Very well,” you say, forcing a low, carefully modulated tone. “I’ll ask again. What has happened to make you a Servant?”

“When I awoke,” Kōrakuhi me begins slowly, “I was so, so confused. And afraid, as well. The Akeldama where we had dwelt was destroyed as I was unaware, and without my knowledge I came to be in an unfamiliar place, with unfamiliar clothing and a changed body. I had become something else, somewhere else, all at once. Would you... care to suppose what happened then?”

“I can’t imagine,” you answer shortly. “What?”

“I retreated within myself,” Kōrakuhi me continues. “My mind, reeling from the discontinuity of the outside world, fled into an inner realm; a dreamscape, one might call it. There I... encountered a wraith. A shade, a memory not mine, of the one who facilitated our creation. He recounted to me your confrontation and his death; he explained to me our nature, much as it was explained to you. We are... artificial spirits, who were created as part of Akeldama, then sustained and enabled to grow by our reception of sacrifice, given the memories of those who were never drawn into Akeldama. We are new souls, drawn out of the borderland between the Realm of the Imaginary Elements and the Realm of the Real Elements. We possess qualities of both worlds... but the totality of neither.”

“So there were more,” you say, half to yourself. She had implied it already, of course, with her comment about names, but it’s still a difficult revelation to come to grips with when stated clearly.

“Indeed, there were, and are,” Kōrakuhi me replies. “I must admit, I found some... humor... in it, watching as you heard from Judas’ voice... the incomplete truth. It was, amusing, that you should receive less information than I despite... a far greater portion of his spirit residing in you, than in myself.” She pauses for a moment, taking a thin slice of meat from her dish, curving it with the silver chopsticks to carry a pool of its ‘sauce’, and eating it with faintly visible delight. A tiny pink tongue darts out to lap the blood from her lips, wiping them clean without diminishing their color.

“I take it, then, that you know the entire story,” you say. “How many new heroes was Judas trying to create? How many Servants were released into the world by Akeldama?”

“Fufufu~.” Kōrakuhi me repeats her quiet, musical laugh, seeing a humor in your words that escapes you. “You are so eager,” she says. “You have a... gluttony of knowledge, Alberich. Four spirits were... born in Akeldama, but only three of us... survived the trial. Your friend Matsuda was the third. I know nothing of his fate.”
“And why was Judas trying to create four heroes? What purpose did he have?” (Duty)

“Fine, I understand how you came to be, but why are you now traveling through Tokyo and slaughtering its inhabitants?” (Duty/Compassion)

“How much do you know about the differences between us? What portion of the sacrifice did you receive, Kōrakuhime?” (Pride)

“So we were born in the same place, created by the same man... Does this make us a kind of siblings?” (Compassion)

“Siblings?” Kōrakuhime’s eyes widen in surprise, the hand that carries her chopsticks freezing halfway back to her plate. A faint blush seems to color her cheeks, though it may only be a trick your eyes are playing in the darkness. The loss of composure only lasts a moment, however. With a tiny “ahem,” the girl replaces her chopsticks on their holder and looks away from you for a moment, taking a breath.

“Siblings, indeed.” she echoes softly, her eyes returning to yours with renewed calm. “I believe you have... a point, although one would be hard-pressed to find a... brother and sister as dissimilar in appearance as we two. Still...” Kōrakuhime gives you a smile before continuing, “I do like the idea. Shall I call you Ani-ue, then? Or perhaps there’s another term you find more... appealing? You did seem to derive some... pleasure from little miss Einzbern’s attention...”

Now it’s your turn to flush and cough in surprise. Just how much of your life has Kōrakuhime been watching by magic? No, better not to dwell on that subject. “Ani-ue is fine,” you say, “or Alberich, or Saber. Call me what you like.”

“You’d keep your... preferences from me? That’s no fun.” Kōrakuhime pouts prettily, pursing her lips in a moue of dissatisfaction. “What shall we discuss, then? I’m... sure you haven’t come to me for... cooking advice.”
“I am here to discuss your diet, at any rate,” you answer. “The way you’ve been killing these families is drawing attention. Two Masters are hunting you already, and I came here for the same purpose: to kill a rogue Servant that was putting the secrecy of the Holy Grail War at risk. The only reason we are conversing right now instead of doing battle is your identity. Why are you doing it, Kōrakuhime?”

“I was not... summoned to a Master, as you were,” the girl answers, all mirth falling from her voice. “With no magus to provide me with magical energy, I was impelled to find it for myself, or to die. The most effective way for a Servant to take in magical energy is to consume the flesh and blood of humans, and with it the energy of their lives. I eat... to live.” As she speaks, you suddenly notice Kōrakuhime’s teeth. All of them are small, sharply pointed fangs, like those of a cat or fox. Indeed, they are suited to one who must hunt to survive.

“You needed mystic energy,” you repeat, “and Servants are best fed by hunting. Very well, it is an understandable motive. Why, then, attack entire families? Why not feed on the the street’s lonely stragglers, on the homeless, on the rebellious youth who wander downtown without speaking to their families? If you consumed the people who go missing without a trace already, they would draw no attention to you.”

“And what then?” This is a demand, a sudden burst of anger. Kōrakuhime raises her tone to an ordinary speaking volume, but compared with her usual voice it’s a furious shout. Now she is flushed, the color in her cheeks visible in any darkness, and speaking with none of her usual drawn out care. “I would remain starving, barely surviving from night to night; a withering Servant, a wraith doomed to haunt the unseen corners and prey on the weak until I fade away by some careless mistake! Is that what you’d have of me?” Then, like a sudden shower, the rage vanishes all at once. The tension animating Kōrakuhime’s body dissipates, and she relaxes back into her chair.

“I do not kill families,” she says quietly, “out of some... personal preference. I do not... search for the flesh of children, like a careful gourmand who prefers... veal to beef. I must move constantly, and have only... so much time per night. So I... select those houses with the most inhabitants, that I might derive more energy... rather than less.”

“So feeding on those who wouldn’t be missed isn’t enough,” you say, unmoved by the outburst. Even with sharp teeth and horns, Kōrakuhime hardly cuts an intimidating figure. “Then why not draw energy from the city’s leylines? In the Akeldama, Caster once told me that the most potent way she could gain energy was
by siphoning it from the land’s leylines. Being summoned as a Caster, could you not do the same?"

“The land is not... a font of power without limit... as you seem to imagine,” Kōrakuhime says. “Power flows through it, and that... is the energy of life itself. The vegetation, the animal life, and even the humans of the area, all derive their wellness from the... circulation... of Mana within the leylines. There is a... portion in places, of... excess energy that can be used by magi. I am sure that this... is what she referred to. Here, however, it is being consumed entirely... by the Holy Grail. To sustain myself by Mana would... poison by my existence... all the inhabitants of this city. Would that be a kinder thing than to... dine on such a... tiny fragment of their number?”

“Not the kinder thing,” you concede glumly, “but perhaps the more discreet method.”

[] No matter how justified she may be, the benefits of dispatching Kōrakuhime outweigh the benefits of leaving her alive. Strike without warning. (Self-Preservation)

[] “I will overlook your actions tonight,” you say, “out of respect for our friendship in the Akeldama and for your unfortunate circumstances. When we meet again, however, know that I must kill you.” (Duty)

[X] “No matter,” you announce, getting to your feet. “Whatever you have done, you remain a member of my family. Kōrakuhime, come to the Shijou manor with me and we shall find a way of sustaining you without the consumption of human life!” (Pride/Compassion)

[] Say something else (Write in)

“"No matter,” you announce, getting to your feet. “Whatever you have done, you remain a member of my family. Kōrakuhime, come to the Shijou manor with me and we shall find a way of sustaining you without the consumption of human life!”

“Oh,” Kōrakuhime sighs quietly. “I suppose you would not be... content, to simply depart? To... leave me to pursue my sustenance in my own... manner?”

“I would not,” you answer gravely. “You are a Servant, and regardless of your intentions this makes you a part of the Holy Grail War. You shall be either my ally or my enemy, Kōrakuhime. You, of all people, must understand what this entails.”

“I... do, yes,” Kōrakuhime says. “Shall we go once I have finished my meal, then, Ani-ue? You surely will not protest my finishing those... already prepared.”

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“Fine, but eat quickly,” you answer. “There are other magi hunting you, as I said. One may yet find you tonight.”

Kōrakuhime takes another slice of meat with her chopsticks, carefully picking it up in a shape edible without necessitating a wide opening of her lips. The careful etiquette and dainty motions she displays are a lovely sight, you have to admit; the proportion of movement in each gesture gracefully calculated, like the steps of a fine dancer. But where would Ogawara, an otaku unconcerned with appearances, have learned to put such care into his dining manners? Certainly it would be strange for them to have come with the class of Caster, as your skill with a sword came to you. It’s a mystery you ponder on as you silently watch Kōrakuhime savoring her dinner. Then the impression of grace is broken, as she licks blood from her lips again in a decidedly non-formal manner.

“I used to be such a... squeamish person,” Kōrakuhime says dreamily. “I did always... enjoy cooking, of course, but I always felt it was... a bit of a trial, preparing meat. It has such a way of... leaving traces behind. Flesh and blood truly... disgusted me. The things that change about us are... fascinating, wouldn’t you say? How have you changed, since becoming a Servant, Ani-ue?”

“I have grown stronger,” you answer. “And that is all. Now, let us go; if you are quite finished.”

“Yes,” she says as the two of you get up and depart the dining room, “we can be on our way. All that remains in this house now is... burnable waste. Oh, and your Master, of course.” This last comment is uttered as you catch sight of Ayaka, sprawled on the couch in the living room; unconscious.

“What have you done,” you demand of Kōrakuhime as you rush over to the prone form. She’s breathing steadily, at least, and your flow of mystic energy is being maintained without issue. As you look back to Kōrakuhime, you see that she has her hand over her mouth in a posture of shock. Her eyes, however, are mirthful.

“Now, don’t be angry with me, Ani-ue,” she softly protests, “I merely... put her to sleep, that we might converse uninterrupted. See now, she will awaken in a moment.” True to her claim, Ayaka’s eyes flutter open and she looks around goggily.

“Saber-san,” she says in confusion, still sounding half-asleep “what, uh, what happened? I don’t remember…”

“I met the Servant who’s been causing the fires,” you answer. “It transpired that she is my sister. We’ve decided to work together, and try to find a way to sustain her existence without her preying on humans.” As you explain, Kōrakuhime walks up beside you and gives Ayaka a little wave. The girl blinks several times, before collapsing back into a faint. Tonight, it seems, has been too much for her.
“I did nothing that time,” Kōrakuhime quickly says, precluding your accusation. “The girl seems to have fallen into a swoon.”

“Very well then,” you say with a sigh, and hoist Ayaka up in your arms. “We’d better be going.”

After the two of you walk out of the house, Kōrakuhime draws a paper talisman inscribed with cursive kanji from one of her long sleeves and presses it to the front door. You can barely tell that it’s in Japanese, looking at it; the calligraphy is in such archaic cursive that it may as well be another language. Such is the way of magic, you suppose. Kōrakuhime’s command to it, by contrast, is anything but unintelligible.

“Burn,” she intones, and at her word the entire building flares at once into a great blaze. You leap back to keep Ayaka away from the dangerous heat, then further to the top of a house across the street. Kōrakuhime remains at the fringe of the fire for a moment, staring into the crackling tongues of interspersed blue and red flame. Her furisode, despite its opulent silk construction and profusion of fragile lace and ribbon ornaments, remains unmarred by the searing heat of the inferno. After a long moment she turns, a red miniature hat shimmering into existence perched at a precarious angle on her head, and floats up to join you. She doesn’t jump, as you do, but seems to be wafted into the air, like a leaf born on the breeze.

“Please,” she says, “lead on.”

[X] Ask Kōrakuhime something as you travel back to the Shijou manor. (Write in)
[ ] Raise a topic, rather than asking a question. (Write in)
[ ] Make the trip in silence.

For a while, the three of you travel in silence. Ayaka lies unconscious in your arms; Kōrakuhime floats on the breeze sitting, like a witch on an invisible broomstick, with an emotionless expression fixed on that doll-like face; and you leap from roof to roof, leaving footprints in shattered tiles and wondering what to say.

Frankly, you’re not sure how to speak to this girl. Even knowing her identity, it’s difficult to think of her as being Ogawara. Interrogating her in the house where you found her was easy enough, but having now resolved to acknowledge her as your sister, your mind seems to have gone blank. Ten or fifteen minutes elapse unnoticed as you travel, mutely pondering the dynamics of a familial relationship that neither you nor the real Yumigawa has ever experienced. Eventually, though, an idea does come to mind. The lengthy, overwrought, archaic name that she surely chose for herself
isn’t the kind of thing you can imagine a brother addressing his younger sister by. It’s as good a topic as any to raise in the interest of getting to know your new sister better.

“Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime,” you say, “seems somewhat overly formal, for family members. Is there something else you’d prefer that I call you?”

Kōrakuhime ponders the question for a moment, floating through the air beside you. As your steel boot crushes the brickwork of another chimney, you can’t help but envy her ability.

“Overly formal?” She echoes your words confusedly. “I... suppose that it must seem so, given ‘your’... memories. ‘I’ would not think it strange... however. Ogawara Yatsuhide’s mother spoke to her child as Yatsuhide-sama, just as the servants did... and for ‘my’ father and elder brothers, ‘you there’ was sufficient to... address the youngest. It was not a... close family.”

She trails off again, and silence returns as the two of you cross another city block. Evidently Ogawara had an unusual and wealthy childhood, but you’re quite uncertain as to what Kōrakuhime expects you to say about that. Is it something to be sympathized with? Envied? Should you address it at all, considering how plainly different she is from her former self; or rather, from the source of the memories she was given? Before you can come to a decision, though, she speaks up again and cuts off your thoughts.

“My apologies,” she says, “that was not a... proper answer to your question. A more familiar name, yes?” Kōrakuhime’s lips twitch up into a tiny smile as she considers the notion. “There were... many sorts of ways for an older brother to address his sister that ‘I’ was familiar with. Perhaps you could... play the doting obsessive and call me ‘Hime-tan,’ with a gleam in your eye? Conversely, there is the brusque character to consider, who... hides his brotherly affection behind a coldly uttered ‘you’. Or... does the courtly style suit you better, you who took... the name of the elf-king? In that case, you might... address me matching title for title, as ‘sister mine,’ or ‘dearest sister,’ or in somesuch way. Truly, though, a pet-name should be... invented by the one to use it. If none appeals, then... Kōrakuhime is perfectly fine.”

“Very interesting,” you say hurriedly. “I’ll think on it.” You’re not sure what you were expecting, but it certainly wasn’t this bizarre suggestion of brotherly archetypes for you to play out. Better to change the subject while you work out how it is you want to address this newfound family member. “Earlier you mentioned change,” you say. “I have remained largely the same since becoming a Servant, but I see that isn’t true of yourself. How have you changed, in the time since we parted?”

“Completely,” she answers. Then, after a pause, continues, “I suppose that... such a statement can hardly serve as an answer. Nor is it... completely accurate.
Similarities remain; but it was... the change I have undergone you... asked about.”

Pressing a gloved hand flat against her chest, she begins, “the alterations to my... body are obvious, of course. With them has come the change in... diet. I used to despise raw foods, and meat especially. Sashimi and raw eggs never... touched my palate, and I have... spoken already of... the trial that was cooking with meat. That inhibition has been... quite thoroughly rooted out. I... delight in the taste of blood and the texture of meat, now... it is a pleasure difficult to describe.” She trails off, staring into space and thinking of food. That she’s facing you as she does so and flying backwards doesn’t seem to inhibit her ability to travel.

“And is that the whole of it?” you ask hesitantly. If all of Kōrakuhime’s revelations about her psyche are related to her hunting, you’re not sure you want to hear more.

“Ah... do excuse me,” she says apologetically, bobbing you a little bow in the air. “There is also... the matter of nature. I know, now, that... I am not Ogawara Yatsuhide; that I am a being beyond humanity, as ‘I’ had... always wished to be. It is so, so much easier to face the world... knowing that I am not one of those... creatures. ‘My’ dearest wish... to be free of the vile imperfections of human flesh... was granted, when I became Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime. I am free, now, to live beyond... human limitations, and the drudgery of the mundane world.”

[ ] “Indeed,” you say with a firm nod. “I was the same. Discovering my true nature filled me with an unparalleled sense of freedom. To be unbound by human nature is to be truly free to choose any path one cares to take in life!” (Pride)

[X] “You felt no pain at the revelation of your nature?” You ask, shocked. Learning that you had never been human had confirmed your superiority, yes, but the knowledge had come also with an understanding of the opportunity lost with that superiority. You are, after all, cut off from fellowship of billions whom you’d once taken for granted as members of the same species. (Compassion)

[ ] Still unsure of how you yourself feel regarding your inhuman nature, you shift the topic to another question. (Write in, can be a question about something she’s said or something new.) (Curiosity)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

Note: Please also tell me how you’d like Alberich to address Kōrakuhime going forward. She’s provided a few examples, but feel free to write in your own pet names as well.
“Did you truly feel nothing but happiness at the revelation of your nature?” You ask, shocked. Learning that you had never been human had confirmed your superiority, yes, but the knowledge had come also with an understanding of the opportunity lost with that superiority. You are, after all, cut off from fellowship of billions whom you’d once taken for granted as members of the same species. Even that had come after the trials of your experience in Judas’ Akeldama, and the dehumanizing effects of battling magi alongside Servants. How shocking would it have been to have learned of your nature after acting wholly as a human, as Ogawara had?

As you look at the figure of your sister beside you, gliding through the night sky with black hair streaming out behind her and horns gleaming in the moonlight, however, the point of just how outwardly inhuman Kōrakuhime appears is driven home to you. Perhaps that reflects her inner feelings towards her nature, for she betrays no hint of that sense of loss to which you allude. Instead, she lets out a quiet, scornful laugh.

“It’s shocking,” she says, still pausing between her words, “to hear... such a question from you, Ani-ue. Did you not... lose your own humanity in pursuit of power while you were the... Master of Caster? Even then, you had outwardly become... something more. I envied you then, to be able to escape the shackles of... human kinship. Now, there is no need for that envy. We two are both part of a superior... family of beings; spirits, outside of and above the human race.”

“But did you not feel some sense of loss,” you ask, your mouth working almost automatically now as your brain focuses on the strangeness of it all. Someone created as you were should surely have felt, as you did, that doubled emotion of gain and loss, of superiority and loneliness. How can it be that Kōrakuhime doesn’t share it? “To become suddenly not yourself, but a new being whose memories are those of another, outside the common weave of mankind; how can that have been a moment of joy?”

“How can the moment have been anything but joyous?” Kōrakuhime snaps back, uncharacteristically quickly. She sighs, then, and returns her speaking pace to its normal gradual flow. “There was never a... moment in ‘my’ life when ‘I’ was... happy to be human, Ani-ue. ‘I’ had always, in every memory that I can remember, wanted to escape ‘my’ identity, ‘my humanity, and... the company of those who were ‘my’ fellows. Such a future was... and still remains, impossible for Ogawara Yatsuhide... but I am not ‘myself’. I was born with ‘my’ wish granted, and if the price to be... paid for that happiness is to have the memories of another... it is a very cheap bargain indeed.”
Your mind is unsteady. Perhaps it’s the strain of too many revelations in one day, but everything feels too strange to be understood. Kōrakuhime’s eagerness to accept her humanity and the ease which that afforded her in preparing her monstrous repasts are bizarre, but perhaps stranger still is your own reaction. Kōrakuhime speaks of her motivations springing from the source of her memories, Ogawara Yatsuhide, but if one’s character can come from such a place you should surely not be shocked by her lack of empathy for humanity. Yumigawa Rushorou, after all, never felt the faintest shred of empathy or human connection to any person but his mother and father, the blood relations who gave him life. To that detached mind, all other humans were only puppets to be moved around that the ideal path to his future might be prepared.

Yet this outlook doesn’t seem to describe your own. In the Akeldama, you repeatedly put yourself in danger or sacrificed a tactical advantage to save one of your compatriots, or even a complete stranger. You felt your heart stir in reaction to the charms of Circe and Adelheid, and at other times even those of Kikuko or Truvietianne. Where did such human emotions spring from, if the cold mind of Yumigawa Rushorou lacked them while your own nature as Alberich is that of a fundamentally inhuman being? Could they have been implanted by Judas to make you more heroic? Conversely, were they the product of a subconscious rebellion against the memories of a person not yourself? The more you turn the question over in your mind, the more mysterious it seems to become. Fortunately, something happens just then which relieves you of the need to work your way through the subject and formulate a response to Kōrakuhime: you arrive at the Shijou Manor.

“Here we are,” you say, landing in the garden with a heavy thud. “It isn’t the Eighth Imperial University, but I’m sure the furnishings are at the least finer than what you’ve been used to these past few days. Follow me inside and make yourself at home.”

“I’m sure... it is a lovely home,” Kōrakuhime softly replies. Unfortunately you find yourself unable to immediately demonstrate the house’s hospitality, as you realize the front door is locked. After several seconds of awkwardly feeling around in Ayaka’s pockets for her keys (weathering Kōrakuhime’s raised eyebrow as you do so), however, you’re able to get the door open and enter. As you walk into the front hall, the drowsiness seems to hit you all at once. It’s just after three, you realize, and today has been anything but easy. The idea flashes through your mind that perhaps you should be getting further information out of your newfound sister before leaving her to sleep unsupervised in your home, but at the moment finding a nice, soft bed seems far wiser.
Kōrakuhime shares your sentiment, it seems. Rather than a comment on the house, the first words out of her mouth are, “where might I... find the bedrooms, Ani-ue?”

“Upstairs,” you answer, “and I need to be taking Miss Ayaka to hers. Good night,” colorful blossoms waver before your drowsy eyes, and the word falls from your mouth, “Tsubaki.”

Then you turn and retreat upstairs, and in no time you’ve carried Ayaka to her room and laid her on the bed. The girl is still sleeping soundly, having apparently passed from faint to slumber at some point during the journey back to her home. For a moment you consider leaving her there, but you’re still conscious enough to be worried about her safety with a new Servant in the house; even if that Servant is your sister. You pull up Ayaka’s desk chair up to her bedside and ease into that, soon falling asleep seated protectively by your Master’s side.

*Your dreams tonight are not visions from the life of a child. Nor are they the confused meanderings of ordinary human sleep.*

*Tonight you dream of a blackboard, and of your sister. You find yourself in a deserted classroom after school, with the orange light of sunset streaming in through westward-facing windows.*

*You’re in a school uniform, though it isn’t one belonging to Kyoutenkan Academy. The classroom, similarly, isn’t one you recognize. It’s more old-fashioned, with everything around you looking like an antique that could date back to the Taisho Era.*

*You’re the only student in the empty classroom, but your sister, Kōrakuhime, is at the blackboard. She’s exchanged her furisode for a teacher’s outfit, and is lecturing you animatedly on the subject of her own abilities, and how they might be of use.*

*As is the way of dreams, unfortunately, the detailed explanations she gives will soon fade, and you’ll be left with nothing but vague recollections. As the sun dips below the horizon, Kōrakuhime’s lecture comes to an end.*

Status Updated
Monday, November 18, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

You awaken with a start to the sight of sunlight coming in through Ayaka’s window and the sound of early-morning birdsong. It’s just after six in the morning, and it feels like three hours of sleep was quite sufficient for you. Beside you, Ayaka remains fast asleep in her bed. Whether the same is true of Kōrakuhime, you can’t say. Sitting in the pale morning light, you consider your priorities for the day. After some thinking, you conclude that...

[ ] You’ll have to return to the Emiya family and discuss how to defeat Berserker.

[ ] After last night, you’re not sure the benefits of fighting alongside the Emiyas outweigh the risks. With Kōrakuhime’s help, perhaps you can contact Liliesviel von Einzbern today.

[X] Rather than pursuing allies, what you need to prioritize is the pursuit of your own empowerment. You’ll stay at home and improve your capabilities as a Servant today.

[ ] Something else (Write in)

You sit up and stretch, yawning as you do so. It’s a bright, clear morning, and with the new day come many possible strategic developments for your course in the Holy Grail War. At the moment, however, you’re in no mood to consider the broader points of strategy. The thought of last night’s battle against Berserker sends a
shudder of rage through you; that thing completely outclassed you in strength and speed, and its ability to regenerate was fearsome. If you’d been alone, no doubt you would have been crushed even more thoroughly than in your duel against the blonde Saber. After last night, it’s imperative that you focus on improving your abilities as a hero.

There is hope for defeating Berserker, fortunately. You know that the portals *Heiligöffnungschwert* projects are capable of disassembling the foe, so it should be possible to put it down permanently with sufficient persistence. You can gather also that it lacks magic resistance. After all, wasn’t your escape facilitated by some spell of Tohsaka’s? With that in mind, one viable strategy should be to practice your elemental control and use that in concert with your blade to defeat Berserker.

As you’re considering the viability of this plan, it occurs to you that there are two other avenues of self-improvement available to you today. One of these is your noble phantasm, *Heiligöffnungschwert*. You’ve found its first and third miracle extremely useful already, but the second miracle remains untried. “To bring into your world and sustain there the impossibilities which in Our world are possible,” was the description you were given of its power. The explanation is certainly a vague one, but it’s clearly a power of summoning. Perhaps you could bring some kind of ally or familiar out of the Realm of Imaginary Numbers to assist you. The other possibility is in your sister, Kōrakuhime. Now that you have another Servant to cooperate with, it’s possible you could improve your fighting abilities by sparring. You certainly got a great deal of use out of training with Matsuda, after all, and the power-difference between you and Kōrakuhime should be similar. Alternatively, she might be able to help you with your training in magic. A live tutor is generally more useful than a book.

Thinking of Kōrakuhime, another notion bubbles up in your mind, and not a pleasant one: your nature. Yesterday you discovered first that you were created by Judas to become a new hero, and later that Ogawara and Matsuda had gone through the same process as yourself. At the time of the revelation, you decided to live on your own terms, and find direction in your life independently of Judas’ aims. This resolution doesn’t ease your curiosity, though. To what extent are you influenced by the fragment of his soul within you? What was his purpose in bringing new heroes to the world? In a more immediately pertinent vein, can Judas’ knowledge aid you in the Holy Grail War?

Fortunately, it doesn’t seem as if you’ll need Ayaka to waste her last command spell calling him forth again. Kōrakuhime and Judas himself have both told you that
he can be contacted through some sort of meditative process, so if you want to contact him you suppose you’ll just close your eyes and focus.

After considering your options for a while, you decide to...

[ ] Return to the Shijou library and study magic. (Which subject?)

[ ] Go out into the yard and try to summon something with Heiligöffnungschwert (Do you have anything in particular in mind, or will you let the sword draw forth whatever seems appropriate?)

[ ] Look for your sister, to discuss training with her.

[X] Try to reach within yourself and meet your maker. (Write in your questions for him)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After considering your options for a while, you decide the most important thing right now is to get to the bottom of all this mystery surrounding Judas’ scheme with the Akeldama, your siblings, and his status as a part of your spirit. At the moment you have too many unanswered questions to focus on any kind of training. Only once you really understand your situation can you move forward towards the future, and your eventual victory.

Leaning back in your chair, you shut your eyes and focus inward, as you do when visualizing the flow of power in your magic circuits. That, still, is more concrete. Although the circuits are a part of your soul, not of the body, they remain something conceptually material: a form of the soul rather than a property of its composition. If you are to reach the mind within yourself, that fragment of Judas’ spirit that awoke in answer to Ayaka’s command spell, you must delve beyond the surface-level formations of spirit.

As you plunge your mind further into contemplation of the self, you outer senses become faint, disconnected. The feeling of the chair, the sounds of the birds, the faint cottony smell of the sheets on Ayaka’s bed, all impressions fade away, and without being able to say exactly when or how the transition occurs, you find yourself in another place entirely. In fact, you’re sitting in a church, dimly lit by the filtered sunlight that shines through its stained-glass windows. Looking around, you realize that chapel may be a better term than church for the building; it’s exceedingly small, with only enough pews to sit around twenty or thirty people, and just four windows set in the high walls. Those walls themselves are made of great carved blocks of grey
stone, with thin layers of mortar between them. Each block is at least half the size of a grown man, quite rough-hewn, and you notice that the immensity of the materials contrasts strangely with the overall size of the building to make it feel even smaller than it truly is.

But the decor isn’t what you should be focusing on. Why are you in this church, anyway? Surely your interior mindscape doesn’t take the form of a Christian house of prayer. Have you been physically transported by some subtle means while attempting to meditate? You get to your feet to look around further, when you feel a hand on your arm. Whipping around, you see Judas, sitting beside you.

“So I haven’t been transported,” you sigh, relieved. “Is it some trick of yours, then, that this is the form my mind takes on within a trance?”

“It is my doing, indeed,” Judas answers with a dry chuckle, “but this is no meditative trance of yours; you overrate your spiritual abilities, young man. By attempting to contact me, you activated a hypnotic trigger which I placed in the minds of you and the other two heroes, that you might consult me if the need arose.”

“Well then,” you snap irritably, “I should say that the need has arisen now. I’m ready to hear some answers, ‘father’. In the first place, why did you lie to me before, when speaking through the command spell?”

“I did not lie,” Judas replies, all mirth gone from his tone. “I was compelled by Shijou Ayaka’s command spell to speak the truth, and I did so. I am no expert in that particular piece of binding magic, but it is plain even to me how powerful it is. I cannot, under ordinary circumstances, speak through you or subject your body to my will. It was only while following Shijou Ayaka’s order to ‘tell me the truth about your identity,’ that I was able to manifest through you, speaking of your identity and of my own. Information about the other heroes whom I created, it would seem, was irrelevant to the command, and left unspoken of. Now you understand, I hope, why I impressed on you the importance of the proper means of communicating with me.”

You heave a sigh and sit back down. At this point, you can’t tell whether Judas is lying to you completely, telling a partial truth while shifting the blame for his omission to the command spell, or telling you the truth. Unfortunately, you have no way of proving or disproving what he says; there’s nothing for it but to listen.

“Very well then,” you say, “you can tell me the whole story now, at any rate. Let’s begin at the end, shall we? What happened to Circe and Adelheid? And the others who were alive when your Akeldama collapsed?”

“It’s a bit of a misnomer to call those two ‘alive,’ wouldn’t you say,” Judas jokes. Despite the glare you send his way, he continues unruffled, “The Edelfelt and Munahara girls were returned to the positions from which they were summoned. You
took my place, as you know, and the others who had no source in the material world were scattered about your general area. I believe you’ll find your two Servants somewhere in Tokyo, but more than that I can’t say. I was dying at the time, you may recall.”

“You were dying, weren’t you,” you growl. It’s heartening to know that everyone escape Akeldama alive, but the lack of detail from Judas is infuriating. “How is it you’ve managed to cling to existence?”

“How best to explain...” Judas ponders your question for several seconds in silence before settling on an answer. “You understand, of course, that the spirits of those killed in the Akeldama were collected and processed into energy, which was then divided between you three heroes, yes?”

“Quite clearly,” you say. “Hence my question. It appears to me that you ought to be formless energy, and not than an overly self-satisfied wraith.”

“I, however,” he continues, ignoring your irritable jab, “was the last to die, and the orchestrator of the ritual; as such, I could direct the processing of my own soul. Rather than merging it with the mass of energy, I divided it into three unequal parts, each with the capacity to act as a lesser shade, and fused one fragment into the soul of each hero; to act as an advisor, a guide in the path to heroism, and in your case as a necessary identifier binding you to the Master-Servant contract with young Vaisset.”

“I see.” That is a sort of explanation, you suppose. You still don’t feel you can understand the reasoning behind Judas’ actions, but at least you’re getting a general idea of his methodology. “What can you do, then? You’ve already explained that you’re incapable of repeating the possession from before, but do you have any other abilities? Can I draw out the abilities you had as a Servant for my own use? Perhaps you can communicate with the third soul fragment and tell me what’s become of Matsuda, or what effects the power of Akeldama had on the other two.”

“I’m afraid you have no such good fortune, young man,” Judas says. “I can speak with you here, and I can view the world through your senses. To do any more would be quite beyond my power.”

“So you really are only a repository of memories,” you say with another sigh. “Very well, then. You can at least enlighten me as to your intention with this nonsensical scheme of yours. What is your purpose, Judas? Why did you try to create four heroes, and require that one kill you in order to manifest into the world? Why did you give us the memories of misanthropes, people not at home in human society? What kind of person do you mean by ‘hero,’ if a person like Ogawara had the potential to be one?” You began resigned, but by the last question you’re back on
your feet, almost shouting. The pointlessness, the nonsensical lack of reason you see in Judas’ actions drives you mad. How can someone responsible for your very existence have acted in such a meaningless, inconsistent way? How can Ogawara or Matsuda, who spent the entire war in the Akeldama lazing about the university, be worthy of the same empowerment you received?

“Four questions,” Judas says, “with very different answers. I will endeavor to set your mind at ease nonetheless.” Judas stands as well, now, and walks into the central aisle as he continues speaking. “To begin, a hero is one who exists between mankind and divinity. Whether that is to be half man and half god, as the ancient heroes were, or to be simultaneously wholly human and wholly divine, as He was, the principle of heroism is the same.” By now Judas has fully assumed the attitude of a preacher, standing at the head of the chapel, and it feels more as if he’s addressing a large crowd than speaking personally to you. “Heroes spur mankind to rise towards divinity, and draw the divine attention down towards their mortal charges. Heroes, by their nature, sustain the quality of mankind, the attitude of divinity, and the mystery of the earth.”

“In this way,” he continues, spreading his arms as if to embrace the subject of his explanation, “we can view equally as heroes the finest bastions of morality and the basest avatars of brutality!” Then his eyes focus on you once again. “Though none of you three reaches such extremity, to my knowledge,” he amends. “As for the matter of your memories and number, I must admit my disappointment that they were not obvious to you. One of your number, the fourth, died while the Akeldama still stood, and had I arranged for only one hero to be produced by the ritual I would thus have seen no results. Redundancy is the modern term, I believe; I created four hero candidates to mitigate risk. Your personalities were chosen as being those of humans who might adjust most easily to an existence outside of humanity; four people who would not move forward, rather than attempting to recapture the life they remembered.”

So this is it: the true form of Judas’ reasoning. Misanthropes to disconnect you from society, and four chosen to counteract the risk of death in the Akeldama. Your personalities as heroes are irrelevant. All that matters, apparently, is for you to exist. It’s staggering.

“But what is the purpose?” you shout. “Why are you doing this? The Age of the Gods is over! You didn’t bring it back by creating a hero two thousand years ago! Why repeat the same methods now?”

“I have not repeated the same methods,” Judas proclaims in a baritone that matches your volume, echoing off the stone walls. “Behold thyself, Alberich! I have,
by my ritual, brought forth into this world a hero who can return the Age of Gods. Though you do not yet possess the capability, the potential is there.” Excitement cooling, he returns to a more normal tone of voice. “Just as He chose the manner of His heroism, young man, it is your choice how you make use of that potential. Whether you let Age of Man run its course, open the gate for the return of divinity to the earth, or choose some other path which I have not foreseen, it makes no difference to me. I have already completed my role by the creation of this possibility. Now we have had enough talk of me, and of the past. Look to the future, young man. It is yours for the taking.”

All at once, you’re back in Ayaka’s bedchamber, leaning back in her desk chair beside her bed. Your Master is still sleeping soundly, and the birds outside continue to chirp. Glancing at your watch, though, you see that over two hours have gone by. It’s now half-past eight, and you still need to decide how you intend to train today. What Judas told you did a great deal to satisfy your curiosity, but nothing to improve your combat abilities.

[ ] Go to the Shijou library to research magic. (What kind?)
[X] Find Kōrakuhime. (What do you want to bring up first with her?)
[ ] Go out out to the yard and experiment with Heiligöffnungschwert.
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

If your battles in the Akeldama taught you anything, it was that one can derive greater combat strength from gaining comrades than from personal training. Without Circe, Adelheid, Matsuda, and Ogawara all contributing in their own fields of expertise, you could never have survived Judas’ Holy Grail War. With that fact in mind, you decide that your first priority of the day should be speaking with your new sister, Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime. It’s essential that you work out a method of maintaining her existence without drawing the ire of the other Masters the way she has been; and important to determine how her abilities can best contribute to your overall strategy in the War.

With that decision made, you get to your feet and exit Ayaka’s boudoir, careful not to wake her as you move. Before you make it much farther, though, you take a look at yourself and realize something is off. You’re still dressed in the tight black undergarments from your armor, rather than a decent outfit. Meeting your sister in armor may have been acceptable when you were expecting an enemy Servant,
but it’s hardly the same now; so you put your conference with Kōrakuhime on hold for a short while, ascending to the third floor to return to Ayaka’s father’s room and find yourself something to wear.

As you examine the contents of the dead man’s closet, you come to understand Ayaka’s motivation in choosing a pair of clothing options for you. Her father was an evidently flamboyant dresser, and his wardrobe seems to contain every style of men’s formal wear dating back to the early Nineteenth Century arrayed in a staggering profusion of brightly colored fabric. It’s some time before you finally settle on a choice that’s neither garishly loud nor comically archaic: a black wool suit with white pinstripes, single-breasted and cut close to the body-line, with a white shirt and paisley tie done in a wine-red base and silver patterning. Some part of you deep down says that not every suit you wear should have the same color scheme, but you quash that part. Cream doesn’t really work in the winter, and you’d have to be mad to put on one of the deceased Vaisset patriarch’s royal blue or lime-green silk monstrosities.

With your clothing picked out for the day, you head into the adjoining bathroom for a shower. It’s not a necessity, strictly speaking. A Servant’s body doesn’t produce sweat or other waste, and the grime that collects on your clothing over the day mostly disappears when you dematerialize your armor and its undergarments. Still, eighteen years of morning showers produce a strong habit, even when the memories belong to someone else; and you enjoy bathing. Going the past few days without a shower just hasn’t felt quite right.

Showered, dressed, and ready for the day, you check the watch Ayaka gave you. It’s just after nine. Hopefully, then, Kōrakuhime will already be up and about and you’ll be spared the trouble of waking up the misanthropic girl. You make your way downstairs in good spirits, thinking to check the kitchen for her presence first; no doubt she’ll be displaying the same zeal to cook that Ogawara did during your time at Judas’ University.

No such luck. The kitchen is empty, as is the living room, dining room, and all the other common areas of the house. After giving up on Kōrakuhime being awake and moving around, you turn your search back upstairs. There, at last, you find your sister fast asleep in one of the second-floor bedrooms, breathing softly as she lies still beneath several layers of blankets, her head and shoulders elevated by a heap of cushions. She seems to have dismissed her mass of ornamentation to sleep, however; the braids that separated two parts of her hair are undone, so that it pools in a unified silken mass of black and red covering the pillows; no lace or camellias dot her form; and one gracile arm peeks out unclothed from the covers to lie, palm-up, beside her head.
[X] Wake her up (In what manner?)

[ ] Let her sleep, and find something else to do with your morning. (What?)

You spend a few moments looking down at Kōrakuhime, observing her peaceful slumber; the way the blankets move, ever so slightly, in time with her breathing; the way her black lashes occasionally twitch in response to some action of a dream. It may be for the best to simply leave her here, to sleep as long as she likes. After all, Circe told you that a Servant possesses the ability to decide how long they’ll sleep before doing so, and you know from your time supporting Circe and Adelheid together that sleep lessens a Servant’s magical energy needs. That hasn’t been your experience with sleep, but it could be that each Servant differs in this manner. For a Masterless Servant such as Kōrakuhime to be sleeping in may in fact be a plan on her part to minimize the need for hunting.

“Mnya... Ani-ue...” Is she sleeptalking? You lean in closer, curious to hear what the world of dreams has in store for your sister. “Really?” she mumbles, “I can just... stay here and watch, and you’ll... -t everyone down and win for us? I was... ‘d come through, Ani-ue, you’re so...”

No, you were wrong to think of her as a respectable Servant. What comes out of her mouth is a jumbled mess of words, pauses, and the sound of breathing, but the general meaning is clear enough. This is a continuation of Ogawara, who spent the entirety of the Akeldama Grail War hiding away and doing research while listening to idol music. There’s no reason to leave this lazy creature to spend all morning in bed. The fact that her archaic dialect is gone from her sleeptalking is also telling.

You sit down beside the sleeping girl, pondering how best to wake her. The idea of dumping cold water appeals for a moment, after the ridiculous contents of her dream, but that impulse fades rapidly. You’d only be setting yourself up for conflict, and there’s no real reason to be so harsh with someone over the uncontrollable contents of a dream. The idea of teasing her by whispering into her ear is the next to cross your mind, but you have to dismiss it as impractical. You remember reading once (or rather, Yumigawa Rushorou remembers), that whispering to someone while they sleep can influence their dreams; that method might only send her deeper into her slumber, rather than taking her out of it.

Finally you decide to go the direct route. You lean over and poke her on the cheek. It’s quite soft, you notice, with a texture not unlike mochi. You wouldn’t expect such a thing, looking at her; her complexion, like your own, gives the
impression of hard sculpture. It’s polished china in her case and marble in yours, but
the inhumanity is equal. Touching that skin, though, it feels no less soft and warm
than Adelheid’s or Circe’s.

As you’re pondering on the contrast between appearance and texture, you
continue nudging your sister’s cheek to little effect. Her brows crease and the tranquil
expression on her face vanishes, but she doesn’t seem to be waking up. Eventually she
makes an incoherent, petulant sound and rolls onto her side, unconsciously turning
away from your hand. As she does so, the blankets shift to display her unclothed back,
shoulders, and the nape of her neck. You flush slightly at this demonstration of
Kōrakuhime’s nudity, but you’re determined not to waver. You will get some
productive discussion out of this girl.

Waking her up will apparently require a firmer touch, however. You take
Kōrakuhime by the shoulders and turn her back over, so she’s on her back and facing
you again. You prod her cheek a few more times, just to see if it will work any better
now, and finally say, “Kōrakuhime, wake up. It’s morning, and we need to talk,” in a
sort of stage whisper. You’re speaking loud enough to wake the girl here, but quietly
enough to make sure your voice doesn’t carry and disturb Ayaka’s sleep. This seems
to have finally done the trick. Kōrakuhime’s eyes flutter open and she looks at you
blearily for a few moments.

“Ani-ue...?” She still sounds half-asleep. Then, before you can respond, she
blinks a few more times, looks down, and suddenly goes beet red. “What are you
doing in here?!” she shouts, sitting up and gathering her blankets tighter about herself
to substitute for clothing. Her eyes dart terrifiedly about the room as if looking for
more intruders, but finding none she continues her interrogation of you. “D-d-don’t
you have any sense of shame? Don’t you know never to enter someone’s room while
they’re asleep? Are you a maid?” She really seems furious. The questions are coming
out rapid-fire, with none of the usual careful pauses that characterize Kōrakuhime’s
speech. You try to think of something to say that will calm down the situation, but
neither you nor Yumigawa has found yourself in a situation like this before.

[ ] “This isn’t the time to be getting emotional,” you snap. “I needed to speak with
you, and you were asleep! Now, what we ought to be discussing is (topic).” (Pride)

[X] “I am sorry to have intruded,” you say in a placating tone. “I just wanted to
speak with you about (topic). Would you like some time to get dressed?”
(Compassion)
“Right! Sorry! Come out when you’re ready to talk about (topic),” you manage, dodging thrown pillows as you beat a hasty retreat from the room. (Self-Preservation)

Say something else (Write in)

And, please tell me what it is you’d most like to discuss with Kōrakuhime now that she’s awake.

“I am sorry to have intruded,” you say, raising your hands in a placating gesture and ducking under a flying pillow, “but we need to discuss the issue of finding energy for you safely. Would you like some time to get dressed?”

“Of course!” Kōrakuhime doesn’t seem placated, and isn’t slowing her attack. Given the improbable quantity of cushions in the air, you suspect she may actually be manifesting the downy projectiles by magic. “Just get out!”

You dutifully retreat in the face of your sister’s embarrassment and exit the room, only to find another angry face waiting outside the door. You may have been scrupulously quiet, but it seems that Kōrakuhime’s shouting was too loud for Ayaka to sleep through.

“Saber-san,” she says suspiciously, “who is behind that door?”

“Miss Ayaka, perhaps we should find somewhere to sit down and discuss this properly,” you reply, gesturing down the hall towards the stairway.

“You know, it seems that I lost consciousness sometime last night, while we were investigating the house where that Servant was attacking people,” Ayaka says, ignoring your suggestion. “I had a bizarre dream, then, where you found some woman Servant and claimed she was your sister; and that she’d been the one killing people. Isn’t that weird, Saber-san?”

“Excellent,” you say cheerily. “It seems you have a grasp on the situation. The Servant causing the fires was my sister, a Caster. I brought her home with us to help her find a way to survive without needing to take her energy directly from the populace.”

“How do you have a sister?” Ayaka snaps. “Yumigawa-senpai doesn’t have any siblings. You were created by Caster’s ritual, right? So how can you have a sister?”

“It would seem that there were in fact three heroes created by Caster,” you explain in a firm tone, taking Ayaka by the shoulders and leaning down to look directly into her eyes. You’ve noticed that this kind of close eye-contact usually quiets her down. “I spoke with the fragment of his spirit that lies within mine this morning, and confirmed the situation. Akeldama brought three new Servants into the
world in exchange for the large-scale sacrifice that took place within it. Given the unusual nature of my existence, I regard the other two as something like my siblings. Behind that door is Caster, Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime, who was forced to feed on human lives because she lacked the good fortune to be summoned with a Master, as I was. I intend to help her.”

“Well, if you put it like that, I guess we don’t really have a choice,” Ayaka says, the hostility in her tone fading as she blushes and looks away from you. “I guess it was only mundanes, and it’s not like there were any witnesses,” she mutters. Then, regaining some of her confidence, she continues in a more normal tone, “I’m going down to get some breakfast ready. Be down in about a half-hour if you want to eat, alright?” With that, she turns and walks off without giving you time to respond. The emotions of a teenage girl are truly like a storm, you reflect. Then you turn back to Kōrakuhime’s door and knock.

“You may... enter now,” comes the soft voice. It seems your sister, too, has gotten her emotions and mode of speech back to normal. You enter to find Kōrakuhime, fully dressed in the same flowery outfit as last night, sitting on the side of her bed. The bed itself has been neatly made, and all traces of the earlier storm of cushions have vanished from the room as well. It’s returned to being the picture of well-kept luxury. She gestures to an armchair opposite her. “Please... sit.”

You take a seat, giving Kōrakuhime a level stare. “Last night, you told me that the only way for you to survive was by hunting the people of this city,” you declare. “This is unworkable. The Master of Berserker, a spellcaster by the name of Emiya, and my own Master all detected a pattern in your actions and undertook to track you down and eliminate you as a threat to the secrecy of magic. It was only by your good fortune that I, rather than a Servant willing to cut you down, was the one to find you. We need to find another way for you to get the energy that you need.”

“Only my... good fortune, you say?” Kōrakuhime gives you one of her tiny smiles. “You misunderstand, Ani-ue. I... chose your Master as the one to find me. I am sure you have... come to understand, by now, that I was observing your actions... by magic. Once I was... certain that she would not compel you to attack me, it was a simple matter to prepare a... ‘clue’ that would draw her to it and lead the two of you to me.”

“I see.” So the magic on that plate fragment wasn’t just a trace of Kōrakuhime’s work on the house, but an actual enchantment. Interesting. “All the same,” you continue, “one of the other Masters could have tracked you down in some other way. What would you have done if you’d been caught by Berserker or Rider?”
“I must then have... fled, and hidden away,” Kōrakuhime answers with a frown. “I... realize that my method was not perfect, but as we discussed last night, it was the most appropriate available to me. However,” she continues, brightening again, “now that we are... cooperating, things can be improved! With your help I can... hunt in a far more efficient and discreet manner.”

You heave a sigh. “Listen to me,” you say. “You cannot continue to survive by hunting and eating the people of Tokyo. Even if you change your method, those who have become aware of the pattern of burned houses will notice the continuing disappearances and keep looking for you. We have to find a different way.”

“What do... you have in mind, then, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime says, giving you a hurt look. “Do you plan to... share the mystic energy you receive from your own Master with me... and multiply the strain on her? Or perhaps you would rather... distribute the cost over all the city’s people, having me siphon power from the leylines here? Do you have... some other suggestion?”

It certainly is a tricky question. You realize now how fortunate you were in the Akeldama, having enough magic circuits to support two Servants without difficulty. The strain on Ayaka would certainly be greater. You ponder the subject for a while, before...

[ ] ...deciding there’s nothing for it but to divide the energy you receive from Ayaka between you two, the way you had Adelheid draw energy from you before you modified your command spell. (Compassion/Duty)

[ ] ...deciding to pursue the leyline concept in more detail. How much can nine million people be hurt by the energy burden of one Servant? (Self-Preservation)

[ ] ...asking if there isn’t some way to draw energy out of people without killing them or being bound to them by command spells. Emiya’s wife was able to support a Servant without a Holy Grail War for fifteen years, after all. (Pride)

[X] ...saying something else (Write in)

You ponder on the subject for a while, eventually realizing that you do in fact have another suggestion: Heiligöffnungschwert, and its ability to open portals between this world and the Realm of Imaginary Numbers. If the Imaginary Number Realm is able to sustain the existence of the gods, you reason, there must be a far higher concentration of Mana there than there is on earth. Given that the edge of the blade is
a constantly open portal to that Realm, perhaps it would be possible for Kōrakuhime to draw the energy she needs from there, rather than the leylines of Tokyo.

“I realize you’ve been observing me while I fight,” you say, “but how much exactly do you understand about the function of my sword?”

“Very little,” Kōrakuhime answers. “You have not exactly... stopped to explain it to someone. All that I have been able to surmise... is its general function as a weapon.”

“I see. My Noble Phantasm, Heiligöffnungschwert, has three properties,” you begin. “First, it has the power to open portals to the Realm of Imaginary Numbers, also known as the Reverse Side of the World. It’s that power that creates its cutting edge, as well as the projectiles I used against Berserker. The second power is to summon ‘impossibilities’ from that world, although I haven’t yet experimented with it. I assume it refers to the mythical creatures that left earth with the end of the Age of Gods. Finally, it’s able to render the elements of Void and Nothingness able to interact with the Five Great Elements, enabling me to make some use of elemental manipulation despite my affinity.”

“A highly... versatile tool,” Kōrakuhime replies, “but what can you be driving at?”

“Being a Caster, you must have acquired the magical knowledge necessary to understand the significance of the Reverse Side of the World,” you say. “There, impossibly magical creatures such as dragons, basilisks, and such are able to continue existing; the amount of magical energy that world’s Mana holds must vastly exceed that of earth! If you were to tap into that source through Heiligöffnungschwert’s portal, rather than the local Mana here, would it not resolve your concerns about energy?”

The perfect solution you’ve presented should excite your sister. You were fully prepared for her to leap to her feet, make some delighted exclamation, and throw her arms around you, or have somesuch display of emotion. This does not occur. Kōrakuhime looks levelly at you and sighs.

“You... do not have a full understanding of magic, Ani-ue” she says, sounding supremely disappointed. “It would be... foolish for me to blame you for this, or to be disappointed in you. I realize you’ve been working hard to learn, while I was simply given an understanding along with my class. You have no more... reason to understand why that is an impossible plan than I have to grasp the finer points of... swordsmanship. Simply know that it is... quite impossible.”

“I have no intention of simply sitting here and being dismissed,” you snap, incensed. Why should she speak to you this way without offering so much as a
reason? You deserve an explanation, at the very least. “Tell me why the energy of my blade will be of no use to you!”

“Because it is not... the energy of your blade,” Kōrakuhime answers, responding to your angry tone with irritation of her own. “But no, that is... not the proper manner...” she takes a deep breath, returning her expression to serenity. “There are three reasons why... your Noble Phantasm’s power cannot aid me, if I am correctly understanding its function. But first, let me examine the blade and determine... whether or not I am correct.”

You obediently hand over your sword, which seems comically large in the hands of the slight girl. She sets it flat on her lap, then draws a paper talisman from the sleeve of her furisode and presses it to Heiligöffnungschwert. A faint light transfuses the sword for several seconds, during which time Kōrakuhime stares intently at it. Once it fades, she returns your Noble Phantasm.

“It is... a truly bizarre construct,” she says. “Truly the product of Imaginary magic; it is neither real nor unreal, but a strange... transitional thing.” She blinks several times, then, and shakes her head as if to clear it. “Excuse me, Ani-ue, I was rambling,” she says. “I was correct in my initial guess at its function, however. There are three reasons this tool cannot... supply me with sustenance.”

“Very well then, explain,” you say.

“To begin with... there is the matter of acquisition,” Kōrakuhime says. “Generally, there are... three sources of energy we Servants can draw from. The first is the Od of our Master, through the connection... facilitated by the Holy Grail. I do not fully understand the details of this construct, as it is a... highly complex... artifact of European magic, but for the moment it is enough to say that... at the moment of summoning, a Servant has a direct... connection to the Holy Grail. The second source is the Od of other... humans, consumed directly with their... flesh and blood. This method, too, involves a direct connection. Finally, a Servant can draw energy from local Mana by enacting a formal ritual at some location on a leyline. In such a case, the ritual connects the Servant with the land. In all of these cases, you can see the... rule of connection. The Servant must... be in physical contact with the source of the energy in order to... establish a link.”

“You’re saying it would be impossible to draw energy through Heiligöffnungschwert without first traveling through its portal yourself,” you summarize.

Kōrakuhime nods. “And that doesn’t consider... the issue of the energy’s own travel; one cannot draw energy from a leyline here in Japan after having traveled to America; who can say... whether the link would persist through your portal?”
“I see; and that was only the first reason?” You ask the question wryly. At this point the hopelessness of the idea is fairly clear, and your anger at Kōrakuhime’s dismissal has faded; but you may as well hear out the full details.

“Indeed; the second reason... is that of the portal’s maintenance. From what I can... gather by examination of your Noble Phantasm, it requires more mystic energy from you... as the potency of its effects intensify. To continuously draw enough energy through a portal to support a Servant, even if such were entirely practical, might well... weigh as heavily upon your Master as if... she had tried simply to... support the two of us with her Od.”

“And the third,” you prompt, the humor gone from your tone. The thought of killing Ayaka with a method intended to remove her burden is a sobering one.

“It is... the most difficult of the three to explain,” Kōrakuhime says with a sigh. “I felt it intuitively, as I examined this blade. The power on the other side of its portal feels... alien. Opposed to the Real Elements. Were I to take that power into myself, in place of the energy of this world, I think Gaia would intensify its resistance to my manifestation.”

“A thoroughly dangerous concept, then,” you muse. Fortunately, though, another idea has come to you as Kōrakuhime has been speaking. Her discourse on methods of energetic connection brought to mind the other Servant manifestation you’ve seen, particularly the Rider who fights beside Emiya. If she’s been being sustained by Emiya’s wife for the last fifteen years, it must be by some method outside of the Holy Grail’s system; in other words, there must be a way of sustainably harvesting energy from a human while neither killing them nor creating a Master-Servant contract. And now it seems Kōrakuhime has shown you the method, as well.

“Let us put aside the idea of using Heiligöffnungschwert, then,” you say. “I have another idea. Would it be possible to adapt the leyline ritual to a human?”

“...pardon?” Kōrakuhime looks at you blankly.

“From what I understand,” you begin, “leylines are to the earth as magic circuits are to living humans; they channel Mana through the body of the planet in the same way that magic circuits channel Od, yes? In that case, it should be possible to use the same sort of magic ritual that you would use to draw Mana out of the land to draw mystic energy from a human’s body, without killing them.”

“Oh?” Kōrakuhime draws out her response as she considers the notion, as if tasting the idea through the sound. “That’s... very interesting, Ani-ue. You would need a number of them, but I think... yes, it would be possible. I couldn’t have done it before, but now, with this manor to use... We must go out and collect the specimens, forthwith!”
“Stop!” You grab her by the sleeve as she gets up to head out the door. “Not until after dark,” you say, holding her back by main force. “Those are the rules of magi, and unless you want the entire association coming after us you’ll obey them. Besides, there are other things to be done today. To begin with…”

[] “I want to hear more about your combat abilities. We need to plan out how to function as a team, if we’re to survive the Holy Grail War.” (Duty)

[X] “I have a job for you. Make use of the magic you’ve been watching me with to find Circe and Adelheid. You aren’t the only stray Servant to have come out of Judas’ ritual.” (Compassion)

[] “I need to spend some time training my abilities; I have to become stronger, if I’m to finish off Berserker.” (Pride)

[] Say something else (Write in)

“I need you to stay here and perform some magic for me,” you say. “I can’t have you gallivanting off on your own. You aren’t the only stray Servant to be dropped in Tokyo by the Akeldama, and it’s my first priority to find the others.”

“Let go of my... sleeve,” Kōrakuhime hisses, yanking on it in her frustration. “I’ll... wait, so just... stop, there’s no need to... grab me.”

Obliging, you release the silk, and your sister returns to her seat on the side of the bed in a huff. “Goodness,” she exclaims softly, “women are fragile creatures, Ani-ue. You ought not to be so... rough, hauling a girl about by the clothing.”

“I find it difficult to regard as fragile someone who was hunting families for her dinner up until last night,” you reply. “But that’s beside the point. Find Matsuda and my Servants from the Akeldama.”

“Did you... truly believe you were the first to... imagine such a course of action?” she asks, her expression shifting from an understated pout to a subtle smile. “I sought to divine their location on my first night... as a Servant, after having learned of yours.”

“And you told me you knew nothing about Matsuda,” you say, feeling a negative premonition.

“Correct. Neither the nymph Circe, the soldier Adelheid... nor the delinquent Matsuda Ryuuta appears... to the eye of my divination. Whether their true names have... changed in some way, they have left the city, or... there is some other means by which they are rendered invisible to me... I cannot say.”
“Damn!” You can’t hold back the expletive. Just when you think the chance to recover your comrades from the Akeldama Grail War has arrived, the trail goes cold once more. It’s an infuriating development, and it’s only with an effort of will that you keep yourself from flaring up further at Kōrakuhime. It may not be her fault, but she’s the most immediate target of your anger. Wait; did she say Circe? You think you introduced Adelheid by her name, but Ōgawara didn’t know your first Servant’s True Name, did he? What’s going on?

“How did you learn Circe’s name,” you ask. “If you’re keeping something from me...”

“You look as if... you believe I’m hiding her beneath my bed, simply to spite you,” she says tonelessly. “You ought to... trust me more, if we are to... be siblings. Judas told me all that I hadn’t already been... aware of, regarding our War in the Akeldama. He saw everything that... went on there, as you know.”

“I see.” So that’s all it was, another bit of aid she received from Judas. “Well, I suppose finding your fellow stray Servants is off the table for the moment.”

[ ] “Let’s talk about what else you can do. Have you given any thought to what part you’ll play in our battles to come?” Kōrakuhime may have explained her magic to you in last night’s dream, but by now that vision’s become a blur. (Duty)

[X] “Perhaps you can find someone else for me instead: Liliesviel von Einzbern.” If you intend to ally with that girl, it would be for the best to contact her while the sun is out. You haven’t forgotten her casual reference to killing you, but as an Einzbern she’s likely the most powerful ally you could have in this War. (Pride/Compassion)

[ ] “Why don’t we go down and have some breakfast? I’m getting hungry, and you can meet Miss Ayaka properly.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“Perhaps you can find someone else for me instead,” you say, your mind already shifting to the next potential development. “Liliesviel von Einzbern. I assume you’re aware of her little misconception about me.” That’s a girl you can put to use with none of the potential danger the Emiyas pose. She may be a bit off-kilter, but all the same you’re sure such a young, innocent girl wouldn’t have it in her to betray you. It’s simply a matter of getting close to her. For that, visiting her during the day would be best. There is her casual comment about killing you to remember, after all; a child’s innocent straightforwardness can go both ways.
“So you... want to work with that girl... after all,” Kōrakuhime says, rousing you from your musing. “The Emiya family did not... sway you with their righteous aims?”

“Ahem,” you cough awkwardly. “While Emiya certainly does have the best interests of the people in mind, I cannot simply put aside my own life.”

“Of course,” she replies. “I would expect nothing... less from you, Ani-ue. To be unmoved by moral concerns is... the mark of a true leader. But... to answer your question... yes, I can divine her location. Let us see... what she is doing at the moment.” With those words, she draws a paper flower from her sleeve and sets it in the air between the two of you. For a moment it simply hangs suspended there, until the construct suddenly catches fire. An improbable quantity of smoke rises, rapidly forming a white cloud that fills the center of the room, before an image appears in it. You can see clearly, as if the smoke had become a window, a downtown skyline; it’s one of the city’s many high-density neighborhoods.

“Hmmmm... so they’re in that building... it is relatively nearby,” Kōrakuhime comments. “Let us take a closer view.” At her words the image changes, zooming towards one of the skyscrapers like an approaching movie camera. Then it suddenly passes through the outer wall, and in the moment of darkness shifts to an overhead view of a bedroom that wouldn’t have looked out of place in the Akeldama’s palatial university. As the eye of the magic shifts again, so that it’s no longer looking down from directly above, the occupant of a large canopy bed comes into view: Liliesviel, a vision of snow-white purity, is fast asleep. By comparison with the large bed, she seems even tinier than when you met her in the limousine previously, that small body almost lost amidst the blankets and cushions that surround her.

“Your potential ally is... a late sleeper,” Kōrakuhime comments. “It’s... nearly ten.”

“She’s either a human magus or a homunculus, modeled on humans,” you say, feeling an impulse to defend the fragile-looking girl. “The Holy Grail War requires us to travel about at night. It’s hardly surprising she would want to make up for the lost sleep in the morning.”

“Perhaps,” Kōrakuhime replies noncommittally. “Let us look around... some more.”

As the eye of divination passes over the opulently decorated penthouse, Liliesviel’s living arrangements become clear. She seems to occupy the top floor of a skyscraper, while the lower floors are used as office space by various businesses. She’s served by two maids, one of whom stands at attention by her door while the other busies herself preparing breakfast. The maids seem to share a bedroom, while
Niemand has a room of his own. At the moment, he’s sitting by the window there and staring out at the city, a moody expression on his aged face. There’s no outwardly visible sign to indicate anything magical about the residence, intriguingly. If there is an Einzbern workshop in the city, then, it must be somewhere else. It’s equally possible, of course, that the foreign magi simply felt no need to prepare a workshop for the short duration of the War.

“Shall we... watch them further,” Kōrakuhime asks, “and observe the Einzbern girl’s morning... routine?”

[X] “No, I think it’s best we try some combat training. I’d like to gauge your abilities for myself, Tsubaki.” (Pride)

[ ] “No, let’s go downstairs and have breakfast. I’d like to introduce you to Miss Ayaka, and afterwards we’ll be on our way to Einzbern Tower.” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“No, I’ve seen enough,” you say. “And in any case, we have some sparring to do.”

“...sparring?” Kōrakuhime looks at you blankly.

“Of course,” you answer cheerfully, getting to your feet. “I need to gauge your combat abilities for myself if we’re to fight together. What better way could there be to do that than by combat?”

“There’s really no need for that,” she protests. “I sent you a... dream, informing you of my abilities... last night, did I not?”

“I’d guessed that was your work, yes,” you say, “but it quickly faded. You know how difficult dreams are to remember, surely. In any case, even if I had memorized everything you told me, that would be no substitute for a proper test.”

“But listen, I don’t have any abilities suited to close combat,” Kōrakuhime insists, becoming more distressed. “As a Caster, you should know that I... use magic, from a distance... an indirect battle would be my forte.”

“Nonsense. You have some sort of oni power that enhances your physical strength, don’t you?” You won’t be dissuaded. There’s simply no way you can rely on Kōrakuhime in a fight without first seeing how she fares against a live opponent.

“Don’t worry,” you continue in a reassuring tone. “I’m not forgetting what you said about being gentler; I’ll even use a blunt sword, so there’s no danger.”

Kōrakuhime looks at you as a condemned man looks at the guillotine, finally answering “Very well, it seems I have no choice. If you insist, I will... spar with you.”
With that, you lead her out of her bedroom and down to the Shijou family’s basement. Your first choice for a place to spar would have been an open location, such as the back garden, but even casual sparring would likely draw witnesses when the combatants are a pair of Servants. Unfortunately, you’ll have to compromise on optimal training if you want to enforce the magi’s rule of secrecy. With that in mind the two of you wind up facing each other in the late Jean-Pierre Vaisset’s workshop; or one part of it, at any rate. It’s an oblong stone chamber accessible through a side door from the room in which you were summoned, which you found during your first sweep for security and noted as an acceptable space for sparring.

The room is hardly as convenient as the University’s gymnasium, being closer in size to a dining room, but the numerous burn marks, craters, and other scars on the floor and walls bear testament to the fact that this was used as the testing ground for the more dangerous mysteries devised by the house’s inhabitants over the years. What it lacks in size, it makes up for in sturdiness and silence.

You stand the far end of the room from the entrance, and at your prompting Kōrakuhime comes to an awkward stop about fifteen feet away from you. She may feel it’s a comfortable distance for her magic, or perhaps has taken up a position at random; from her uncomfortable posture and total lack of a fighting stance, it’s hard to say. Whatever the reason for her positioning, though, it’s an easy space for you to close.

Drawing out your Od, you form a decent quantity of Nothingness into a bamboo practice-sword and take hold of it. In a fight like this, there’s no need for your usual armor and weapons; and besides, you did promise your sister to fight without a sharp blade. Oddly enough, a tiger-themed decorative strap that you hadn’t imagined dangles from the handle of the shinai. Perhaps the element has some character of its own, though, or draws decorative elements from your subconscious mind; you hadn’t planned out the red borders on your last elemental manifestation either.

“Want one?” You hold out your weapon, offering it to Kōrakuhime, but she silently shakes her head. You hadn’t expected her to pick up a sword, of course, but it wouldn’t have been appropriate not to make the offer. “Alright then,” you continue, keeping your stance relaxed and your tone casual. “Let’s test your reactions, to begin.” With no more warning you charge forward, kicking off the ground with your left foot and bringing your weapon down in a direct vertical strike from above your right shoulder. It’s the most clearly telegraphed attack you can begin with, short of actually leaping up into the air for a downward strike.
“Kyaa!” With a terrified squeak, Kōrakuhime crosses both arms over her face to protect it, completely obscuring her own vision in the process. You stop just short of slamming the weapon into her wrists when you see the fear on her face and in her posture. This isn’t just reluctance or laziness, you realize. Kōrakuhime is just utterly unsuited for melee combat.

“Alright,” you say tiredly, prompting Kōrakuhime to peek out from behind her hands. You’ve returned to a neutral posture. “I can’t try to make you learn to fight in close quarters if you have neither motivation nor talent, I suppose.”

“That is... what I have been attempting to tell you,” Kōrakuhime says, with sullen indignation. “I cannot... join the knight classes in their... mode of battle. If I am to... contribute to the Holy Grail War, it must be by... my own methods.”

“Very well then,” you say, backing off again to give her space. “We’ll see how you fight by your methods. Try attacking me.”

The first thing Kōrakuhime does in response to this is sigh, tempting you to charge back in and smack her with the practice-sword. It couldn’t be that harmful, could it? But no, you hold back and wait. She’ll have to try eventually. Sure enough, the girl finally works up the motivation to draw one of her rectangular talismans from her sleeve. For a moment you expect her to throw it at you, but instead the thing bursts into flames in her hand. At that moment she sweeps her arm to the side as if to toss the flames, and the paper’s small fire blossoms into a massive gout of flame that fills your vision, rolling towards you. Fortunately for you, the fire is still the product of magic. A slash from your shinai brings your magic resistance to bear, cleaving Kōrakuhime’s attack into two pieces that pass on either side of you; your suit isn’t even singed.

As the flames clear, however, you observe that Kōrakuhime hadn’t banked on a single attack finishing you. The fire was a distraction, hiding the creation of the three hulking familiars that now charge you: a trio of grotesque oni, looking like red-skinned 8-foot-tall bodybuilders with protruding fangs and a single horn on each of their heads. They’re armed with spiked clubs and wearing nothing but a tiger-skin loincloth apiece.

These, too, are dealt with easily enough. They’re certainly superhuman, but compared to a Servant the creatures are still pitifully slow and weak. In the space of a single breath, you pierce the center oni’s chest with the shinai, wrench it to the right to decapitate the second, rotate left and bounce off your right foot to reverse momentum, and chop straight down through the third. You’re not sure the creatures even reacted to the attacks before they were defeated and fading away, leaving tiny paper dolls bearing their scars.
“Is that all you have,” you say, turning back to face Kōrakuhiine. “If so, you’re not much better use in a fight than those flowers you wear. We discussed pet names last night; Tsubaki seems a fine one for you.” Then you stumble; your right foot suddenly isn’t bearing your weight properly. You try to recover your balance, but end up sinking to one knee. At the other end of the room, Kōrakuhiine smiles. It’s the same expression you’ve come to recognize: the smug look that says you’ve acted just as she expected you to.

“I see... it’s beginning to take effect,” she says distantly. Your arms are weakening now too; moments later, the shinai slips from your hand. You can barely hold yourself up, in fact. “Your magic resistance is so... troublesome. I wasn’t certain how long it would take.”

“What is this,” you growl, “the same ability you used to put Miss Ayaka to sleep?”

“Oh no, that was but a simple bit of compulsory unconsciousness... the same that I used to hunt,” Kōrakuhiine answers, sounding slightly happy for the first time since you suggested sparring. “Both use a bounded field to designate their targets, but this is... far more potent. I have used a... powerful curse of weakness to bring you down, Ani-ue; one that can only effect those... within a certain bounded field, which I placed over the room when I entered. Now... I can do with you whatever I like.” As she utters these words, the final dregs of power in your limbs vanish and you slump to the ground, limp. Only then does she approach you, looking down into your eyes like a predator about to feed. She pulls off one of her gloves, revealing a hand quite unlike those you saw as she slept. The polished nails are extended into long, knife-like talons.

“Well done,” you say, so weak you can only manage a hiss. “Waiting until we sparred was clever. But why kill me, Kōrakuhiine? Why couldn’t we have worked together? At least have the decency to explain this betrayal.”

“...betrayal?” A look of shock passes over her features, and she snaps her fingers. Suddenly the power flows back into your limbs, all at once. You leap to your feet to face an affronted Kōrakuhiine. “I was merely... sparring, as you did,” she protests. “My curse was as non-lethal as... that ‘training sword’ of yours.”

Now that she mentions it, she does have a point. “And what about those claws,” you ask, mounting a purely symbolic defense. “A bit of fun,” your sister answers. “After the way you called me... useless, I wanted to... scare you a bit.”

“A bit of fun, eh?” She’s intentionally provoking you, but you manage to keep a straight face. “At any rate, I see your point about indirect methods of attack, now,” you continue. “That curse could’ve been deadly; but remember, if this had been real
combat you would have been killed by my initial strike. Do you have any other techniques to show me?”

Kōrakuhime shakes her head. “There are... any number of curses available to me, but... there is no purpose in consuming magical energy in demonstrations, while I do not have a... reliable source. It is enough... for you to understand that my most potent magic... relies upon bounded fields.”

[X] “An understandable concern. Let’s go back upstairs and get some breakfast. Miss Ayaka should be done cooking by now.” (Compassion)

[ ] “Fine. You should go and introduce yourself to Miss Ayaka. I have other business that must be dealt with.” (Pride)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“An understandable concern,” you say with a shrug. You’ll simply have to learn more about her magic once the matter of energy is resolved. “Come with me, then, and let’s make our way to the dining room. Miss Ayaka should be finished preparing breakfast by now, and the two of you should be introduced.”

“As you... say, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime answers, and falls into step behind you as the two of you make your way out of Vaisset’s basement workshop. That magic of hers was a dangerous thing, you muse as you walk. Your magic resistance may guard against offensive magic quite well, but it’s still far from perfect if a slow-acting method like that was able to gradually pierce through it. A slow-acting curse... As you pass Vaisset’s abandoned worktable, the thought brings to mind another subject: Ayaka’s incomplete knowledge of her family’s techniques.

“Tsubaki,” you say suddenly, “it seems you use a method of magic in the eastern style, and your skill with curses is obvious. I wonder if you could help Miss Ayaka in improving her mastery of her family’s mysteries.”

“So you... intend to use that name?” The voice from behind you sounds put off, and the clicking of her footsteps on the stairs pauses for a moment.

“You did say that a pet name should be invented by the one to use it, no? In any case, it rolls off the tongue more easily than Kōrakuhime; and you do seem fond of the flowers. But about helping Miss Ayaka-”

“It is... your decision, I suppose,” Kōrakuhime interjects. “As to your question... I can give her no instruction.”
“There’s no help at all you can give her?” As you exit the stairway to the first floor, you stop in the hall, rounding on Kōrakuhime to ask the question. “This is an important matter in our battles to come. You use a similar method of magic to hers, and if you can aid he in mastering the Shijou family mysteries it could simplify things enormously. What reason could you have for refusing?”

Kōrakuhime looks up at you with a tiny frown. “Although you have... grown used to referring to magical techniques as ‘mysteries,’ it seems you do not... understand the principle behind that name,” she declares. “I will not... bore you with the details, but the simple matter of it is that... in all cases, to spread the knowledge of a mystery is to... diminish its power. Were I to... aid your Master in learning her family’s... lore, I would of necessity learn it myself, and compromise the lineage of the Shijou. I have no doubt... that this girl would decline any... offer on my part to aid her.”

“You may think so,” you reply, “but it’s hardly certain. We’ll find out from Miss Ayaka herself; for my part, I’d sooner see her with usable techniques of diminished power than none whatsoever.”

“To pursue a futile object is... your prerogative,” she says dismissively. You can feel a vein in your forehead throbbing. Kōrakuhime’s attitude is really starting to get to you. It may be true that you’ve curbed your pride somewhat since being bound as a Servant, but this girl’s manner really goes too far. Even if you are siblings, and so equal on some level, the way she needles you about the gaps in your magical knowledge is simply infuriating.

“Indeed,” you spit, and turn on your heel before your anger makes you do something foolish, “but you’ll have to meet her before we can follow the idea any further.” You walk off, not waiting for a response.

As you’d expected, Ayaka has breakfast ready when the two of you arrive: fried eggs, toast, and a side salad of lettuce, tomato, and vinaigrette. It only remains to be served. You compose your face as you enter the kitchen, wiping away the anger that had risen to the surface during your conversation with Kōrakuhime.

“Good morning, Miss Ayaka,” you say, injecting some cheer into your voice. “I didn’t greet you when we spoke earlier; my apologies for the lapse.”

“That’s fine, Saber-san. Good morning,” she answers, glancing over her shoulder at you. “Will your, um, ‘sister’ be having breakfast with us? I made enough, but then I thought maybe she only eats, well...”

“Ani-ue and I... are suited to the same variety of nourishment,” Kōrakuhime interjects, stepping around you to get into the kitchen and putting an end to Ayaka’s prevarication. “I would be happy to sample some of your cooking.”
“This,” you say, “is my sister, Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime. As a Caster, she specializes in onmyōdō. Kōrakuhime, this is Shijou Ayaka, my Master. I hope the two of you can get along.” Doubtful though that may be, you add privately. Ayaka is looking at Kōrakuhime nervously, radiating hostility and unease. Your sister, on the other hand, shows no emotion at all regarding the meeting.

“It is a... pleasure to make your acquaintance, Shijou-san,” she says. “You have... my gratitude, for everything you have done to aid Ani-ue in this Holy Grail War... and for extending to me the use of your home.”

“Oh, likewise,” says Ayaka, who still looks torn between sorrow and fear at Kōrakuhime’s intrusion into her life. “I’m glad to meet you. I hope we can work together well, from now on.” She gestures towards the dining room, adding, “feel free to sit, you two, it’ll just take me a minute to serve this.”

True to her words, you’ve hardly had time to sit down before Ayaka follows the two of you into the dining room, carrying three plates of breakfast and a pot of coffee on a silver tray. As she’s distributing the food, she asks, “would you two like coffee? How do you take it?”

“Yes, thank you. Just a bit of cream,” you say. Adelheid may have liked hers sweet, but for you it ruins the flavor.

“Please add... plenty of sugar to mine,” Kōrakuhime says from beside you, “though I’d rather you leave the... cream out of it.” You give her a sidelong glance. Is she being deliberately contrary? Her face remains expressionless, though.

The coffee itself is excellent, although not as good as what you make yourself. The rest of the food is neither great nor terrible; the salad is competently made, the toast is fine, and the eggs are acceptable. You’d have preferred them fried in a bit more oil, to develop a crispier edge, but it’s a decent meal.

“So, how is it that you two are siblings?” Ayaka asks as you eat. “From what we heard from Judas, you weren’t really born, and it’s not like you grew up together. I mean, you both have memories of other lives, right?” You haven’t given the subject much thought beyond the connected circumstances of your creation, and would say that; but with your mouth full, you can’t reply, so Kōrakuhime has the first chance to speak.

“Ah, but we do... share a parent,” your sister explains, “and were created of... the same material, so to speak. More important than that, however, is our shared experience as comrades in the Holy Grail War which... took place in the Akeldama. We were together almost from the... moment we came into existence, and worked together all that time to survive and escape. So, in a sense, we did... ’grow up together,’ in addition to our shared parentage.” She seems quite moved by the
subject; she certainly shows more pride as she recounts this tale than she did when speaking of Ōgawara’s family. It might be for the best to go along with what she says, although you don’t feel quite as strongly yourself. Demonstrating strong feelings of familial loyalty would be consistent with the image of a chivalrous knight you’ve been building in Ayaka’s eyes, in addition to the obvious benefits with regards to Kōrakuhime.

“As Kōrakuhime says,” you add, “we were born at the same moment, by the same ritual; it is the energy of the same sacrifice that gave us life outside the Akeldama; and we spent the first ten days of our lives working together as comrades. She may not have fought directly, but Kōrakuhime was still an invaluable support during the last War, and knowing what I now do about our origins, I couldn’t see her as anything but family.”

“So that’s it,” Ayaka says, giving the two of you an oddly dissatisfied look. “I think I understand now.”

[X] Suggest paying a visit to Liliesviel von Einzbern after breakfast. It’s time you found an ally who doesn’t want to dismantle the Holy Grail. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Finish your breakfast and leave Kōrakuhime and Ayaka to work out on their own how to spend their time. You need to be alone for a while, to come up with a plan for how to defeat that immortal Berserker. (Duty)

[ ] Inform Ayaka and Kōrakuhime that you’ll be returning to Vaisset’s workshop to train after breakfast. The rest of your morning should be spent testing Heiligöffnungschwert’s second miracle, although you’ll need to restrict yourself to summoning something small enough for the room. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“But,” you say hurriedly, “we must move on to more practical matters. I am dissatisfied with our only allies in this War being the Emiya family, who wish to destroy the Grail. For this reason, I’ve concluded that we must form a new alliance with the Einzbern Master as quickly as possible. What are your thoughts, Miss Ayaka?”

“We talked about this already, didn’t we?” she replies, a hint of irritation underlying her tone. “Of course I’m for that, but we don’t have any way of getting in touch with this girl you met. We don’t even know if they’re based somewhere in the
city, or if they’re traveling here from somewhere else at night.” As Ayaka voices her complaints, you gulp down the last few bites of your breakfast, finishing up before you make your reply.

“Indeed! However, all that has changed as of this morning,” you announce, gesturing to Kōrakuhime with a theatrical flourish. “My sister was able to divine her location for us. Liliesviel von Einzbern is living in a penthouse, and we can meet her there.”

“Ooh, that is convenient,” Ayaka comments excitedly. “How far is it, though? There aren’t any skyscrapers around here, and without Nii-san’s car, we don’t exactly have a convenient way of getting around quickly.”

“We can simply take the train, surely,” you answer. Ayaka may have had an upbringing free of public transit, but Yumigawa’s memories have familiarized you thoroughly with it. “It will require a bit of walking from here to the station, but after that travel should be rather swift; and we needn’t fear being attacked, since the sun is up.”

“If I may... interject,” Kōrakuhime says, “you mentioned your brother’s car, Shijou-san. I have observed that... the parking garage where it was lost is... between here and the Einzberns’ abode. Reclaiming it should be... possible during the errand.”

This sentence is punctuated by the plop of a sugar cube into her cup. Although your sister is finished with her breakfast, she’s still doctoring her coffee, which by now seems to be at least half sugar.

“Bringing Nii-san’s Mercedes home would be lovely, but who could drive it,” Ayaka asks without hope. “I don’t have a license, and I doubt you two do either.”

“Ani-ue is... a Servant of the Saber class,” comes the soft reply. “His... Riding skill should grant him facility with all manner of vehicles. I am sure that... he can operate your brother’s without difficulty.”

There’s an interesting idea, but one you’re not sure of. You certainly haven’t experimented with Riding, after all. “Perhaps so,” you say, “but Miss Ayaka had the right of it when she guessed I lack a license; I’ve never so much as touched a steering wheel.”

“Don’t worry, Ani-ue,” says Kōrakuhime with a tiny smile, “I... believe in you.”

“Well, maybe that would work and maybe it wouldn’t,” Ayaka cuts in, setting her cup on its saucer with an interruptive clink, “but we have a more pressing topic to discuss. Should the two of us be coming along? Saber-san, you said the Einzbern Master thought you were an agent of her family. In that case, maybe it would be smarter for you to go alone.”
“Interesting,” you mutter, considering the notion. It’s a hard thing to decide, and one that depends almost entirely on how much Liliesviel already knows; a factor, of course, which you cannot predict.

“If she supposes Ani-ue to be a homunculus,” Kōrakuhime begins, “perhaps he ought to... play the role of a Master. If the two of us... were to meet the Einzbern Master as... a pair, with him in the role of... Master of Caster, would that not... be consistent with her expectations, while also... giving us an advantage in the event of conflict?”

“I’m afraid that wouldn’t be possible,” you answer. “A Master can detect the presence of other Masters by a sensation in the command spell. Liliesviel should know already that I’m no Master, and would see through the lie to be sure.”

“Something else then... I suppose,” says Kōrakuhime with a disappointed expression.

[ ] Go alone. It’s how Liliesviel met you before, and she responded well then. Consistency is important for a working relationship. (Pride)

[X] Go with Ayaka, as the Master of Saber and her Servant. Whatever conclusion Liliesviel draws about you from this, there’s still the possibility of forming a straightforward alliance between the Shijou and Einzbern Masters. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Go with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime as a trio, and lay all your cards on the table. Perhaps the honest approach is the best. (Duty)

[ ] Suggest another plan (Write in)

“No,” you say, coming to a conclusion at last, “I don’t think it would be wise for me to meet the Einzbern Master alone. As you said, Miss Ayaka, she didn’t think I was a Servant when we last met; but at that time, the War had not yet begun. Since then, I have battled in public three times, first with your brother as my Master and then with you. As Kōrakuhime has been able to use magic to observe matters, so Liliesviel may have; or she may have learned of our battles by some other means. To attempt to deceive her would be too dangerous, as long as we have no way of knowing how far her knowledge extends.”

“Good thinking, Saber-san,” Ayaka comments with an appreciative nod. “It’d definitely be a problem if this Einzbern girl thought we were trying to trick her. I guess that settles that the two of us are going, but...” her gaze shifts to your right as
she pauses, so she’s eying Kōrakuhime rather than addressing you directly when she asks, “what about your ‘sister’? Bringing another Servant probably wouldn’t be a good idea, right?”

“No,” you agree, “I don’t think so. Tsubaki, I think you shall have to wait for us here.” Ayaka looks momentarily confused by the nickname, but doesn’t comment on it.

“That... suits me perfectly,” your sister replies between sips of her coffee-flavored sugar. “I have been... spending my days asleep, since being summoned... to conserve magical energy.”

“It seems we are decided then,” you proclaim. “Miss Ayaka, are you ready to leave? If there is nothing else keeping us here...”

“Not quite,” Ayaka says, looking flustered by the sudden shift. “Just let me take care of the dishes.” She gets up hurriedly, stacking the empty plates and silverware on the serving tray she’d used to bring them in. Loaded down with dishware, she returns to the kitchen and you can soon hear the sound of the faucet as she washes up.

“Your Master seems to be growing a bit... territorial,” Kōrakuhime comments, her lips curving in a faint hint of a smile.

“Territorial? I’m not sure I follow you,” you send back, truthfully. You have noticed Ayaka seems uncomfortable around your sister, but you’d attribute that more to natural unease regarding a potentially deadly being than concerns over sharing her home. “Do you think it means that much to her, giving you a room?”

Kōrakuhime gives you an incredulous look, peering at you over the edge of her coffee cup as she finishes the beverage. “...never mind,” she says as she returns it to the saucer. “Forget I brought it up; it’s not- that is, the point was trivial.”

“Well, that plainly isn’t so,” you reply. The point may or may not have been trivial, but something about your response clearly shocked your sister. She even slipped out of her archaic dialect for a moment, before correcting herself.

“Really, it was... quite unimportant. A... trifle,” Kōrakuhime protests. “Only a comment on her... attitude; if you did not follow... please put it from your mind.” With that, she gets to her feet. “Now, Ani-ue, I will be returning to... my room, to sleep. I wish you... good fortune with young Miss Einzbern.”

“Hold on a moment,” you say, stopping her before she leaves the dining room. “I’ve just remembered: I don’t actually know the address of the parking garage with M. Vaisset’s car, or of Liliesviel’s penthouse. You divined the locations; would you mind writing them down for me?”
“Certainly, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime says, “here you are.” She draws from her sleeve what at first looks like one of the talismans she uses, but when as she hands it to you, you can see it has the two addresses and districts written down. She didn’t need to write it before handing it to you.

“If you had predicted I would need this, why didn’t you bring it up?” The fact that she almost deliberately let you go off with no known destination somewhat sours the favor your sister is doing for you, and you give her a disapproving look as you ask the question.

Kōrakuhime gives you a shrug in response, quite unperturbed. “I wasn’t... certain you were unaware of the location,” she says. “I simply prepared for use in the... possible event of your having the need... of it. I certainly didn’t... memorize the address.”

“In that case, thank you,” you say, pocketing the note. “Very considerate of you to do so.” Turning on your heel, you head to the front door to wait for Ayaka. Your temper might be getting the better of you, you reflect. Anger isn’t a bad thing in and of itself, but to immediately assume Kōrakuhime was being intentionally malicious may have been going too far. On the other hand, you have always found your anger to be a useful element in battle. If you mitigated it in some way, would you be putting yourself at a disadvantage in a future struggle?

As you’re pondering the advantages and disadvantages of rage, Ayaka walks up and begins putting on her shoes. You notice she’s wearing her school uniform now, rather than casual clothing, although it’s long past the hour she should have been at school. Does she feel compelled by the fact that it’s a weekday?

“Ready to go, then?”

“Just a minute,” she answers, and then, “alright, let’s go, Saber-san. I hope you don’t mind leading me to the station, though. I’ve never been on a train in the city.”

“Not at all,” you say, walking out into the cold November morning. It’s overcast today, with low grey clouds hanging over the city. You have to hope it doesn’t rain. Other than your concerns about the weather, though, the trip is rather uneventful. Ayaka doesn’t seem particularly interested in riding the city train, despite it being a new experience for her. She simply follows your instructions smoothly, carefully selecting your destination and paying the fare through the machine. As you guide her through the process, you can hear some mutterings from the nearby people about “that strange foreigner,” and “a schoolgirl with him, at this hour,” but no-one actually confronts the two of you. In almost no time at all, you’ve arrived at your first destination.
As you walk up to the parking garage where you fought the other Saber, a chill runs down your spine. There’s a large broken space in the short wall on the rooftop that you can see even from the street level, and all sorts of damage has been done to the alley on one side. The area still bears the scars of your battle, in other words. Fortunately, however, there’s no presence of a Servant nearby this time.

“Is this where Nii-san died?” Ayaka asks pensively. She’s staring at the building as well, with an oddly neutral expression that you can’t quite place. It isn’t grief, exactly, or fear, or anger, but something different; a strange, subtle, contemplative look.

“On the roof, yes,” you answer. It’s probably for the best to keep to short statements on this subject.

Ayaka starts walking towards the entrance without warning. “Then let’s get his car quickly, Saber-san,” she says over her shoulder. “I don’t want to be here for very long.”

The car is just where it was left, on the third floor of the garage. You take a moment to examine it as you haven’t before, since you’ll have to drive it shortly. It’s a beautifully constructed Mercedes sedan, from some time in the last few years; although you don’t know enough about cars to determine the model, the quality and expense of the vehicle are quite clear. In fact, it’s a bit surprising that it wasn’t stolen. As you’re admiring it, Ayaka hands you a key. “Nii-san kept a spare at home,” she says by way of explanation. “You don’t have his, right?”

“Correct, thank you,” you reply. Now that she mentions it, you realize you don’t have Vaisset’s keys. You would’ve had no way into the car if Ayaka hadn’t thought to bring the spare key. Since she did, though, you unlock the car and open the passenger door for her to sit down. Once Ayaka is situated, you walk back around and slide in behind the wheel. You’re immediately confronted by the array of unfamiliar controls. No matter, you tell yourself. Even if you don’t know how to drive a car, you at least understand the first step. You know where to put the key...

Or perhaps not. There is no key, just a fob with buttons, and there’s no keyhole for the ignition either. For several moments, you stare dumbly at the wheel, willing yourself to know how to drive. Then, to your surprise, it suddenly works. It clicks for you that this car has a keyless ignition, and you need only press the right button; and all the other knowledge you need to drive suddenly slots into place as well. The Riding skill, it seems, really does work for vehicles. As you start the car, the sound of the engine tells you one other thing: there’s a lot more power to be had from this car than Vaisset was getting out of it with his relaxed driving.
[X] Draw out the Mercedes’ true potential (Specialty)

[ ] Don’t get cocky, just take it slow and make sure you really can drive. (Versatility)

Yes, this car is capable of a lot more than Vaisset was using it for. Listening to the rumble of the engine, you can gauge the power by intuition, as plainly as if it were written below the speedometer. This car, you realize, isn’t just a luxury sedan. It’s one of those high-priced cars designed to give the best in performance and luxury at the same time; not actually the equal of a top-of-the-line sports car in terms of speed, sure, but certainly capable of outperforming the vast majority of what’s on the road. An unexpected thrill of excitement run through you at the thought that this isn’t just going to be useful, but fun.

Status Updated

...or so you thought, anyway. Reality, as ever, is more limiting. You pulled out of the parking garage at a good clip, blindfolding the guard and severing the barrier with a tendril of Nothingness to escape without paying the ludicrous price parking for days on end would no-doubt incur, but once you got out on the road the facts came home. It simply isn’t possible to get any kind of real speed on the surface streets of Tokyo at noon on a Monday. Between the low speed limits and the high population of other cars and pedestrians, there’s no way get much more speed than the other drivers without running the risk of an encounter with the police. That’s certainly the last thing you need. So, despite the disappointment of not getting to really test the limits of your newfound skills, you make your way to the tower where you observed Liliesviel at a rather sedate pace. Fortunately for you, there was a map of Tokyo in the glove compartment, which Ayaka is now using to navigate.

“Ah, turn left here, Saber-san,” she says, then continues after you make the turn. “Did, or, I mean, did Yumigawa-senpai really never drive before? It’s really from a skill you gained as a Servant? You seem so used to it.” Her tone sounds halfway between suspicious and amazed; for once, you can’t get an easy read on what your Master is thinking.

“This is the first time I can remember driving,” you say, “but that’s nothing to be so shocked by, Miss Ayaka. Yumigawa has never used a sword, to my knowledge; yet here I am before you, Saber. I was changed in many ways when I became a Servant. As was Kōrakuhime; you don’t believe Judas convinced us that a girl with horns had been pulled into the ritual at random, do you?”

“Well, no,” she replies thoughtfully, “of course I knew you’d been changed, but, well, you don’t really think of driving a car as being a skill a knight would have.”
“Oh, I don’t think it’s so unusual,” you say wryly, “a knight certainly must be mounted, but how different is this Mercedes from a horse, really? I can feel the rumbling of its breath in the engine, it carries us where we wish to go while we sit, and like a horse it must be regularly fed. It is merely another sort of mount, for a more modern sort of knight.” You glance over to smile at the girl, but she still seems irritated by the idea.

“I mean, it doesn’t really make sense,” she insists, “a car is more like a chariot than a horse, isn’t it? But in history, charioteers and horsemen were very different, right?” For some reason, your ability to drive a car really seems to bother Ayaka. Can she possibly be that attached to the notion of a knight on horseback?

“Who knows how the Holy Grail determines these things when it creates the class containers,” you say reassuringly, “maybe it is as senseless as you say. But now if you’ll indulge me, there is something that I have been wondering about.” Hopefully if you change the subject quickly, she’ll drop the pointless topic of whether knights should drive.

“Oh? What’s that, Saber-san,” she asks, taking the bait.

“Why did you not go to school this morning?” This isn’t just to change the subject, either; you really have been wondering about it. The question first occurred to you after you came out of your trance with Judas and found Ayaka still asleep past her accustomed time, but you haven’t been able to find the right moment to bring it up until now. “Now that Rider has been slain, it should be safe for you to attend without concern.”

“Well, you know,” she prevaricates, “it’s not like I really decided to. After being out so late last night, I really overslept. Then once I did wake up, I didn’t know what had really happened and what hadn’t, or what was going on. Then we started discussing this plan, and, well,” she pauses, picking her words. “School just hasn’t seemed that important today. It’s not like my grades will be ruined by missing one day, anyway.”

[ ] “No, I suppose not,” you say, “but neither is it a good precedent. From tomorrow onward, you should return to school during the weekdays. Is maintaining the image of a normal life not part of a magus’ duty of secrecy?” (Duty)

[X] “Surely not,” you say, “and hopefully they will continue to forgive your absences. As a Master, you ought to use the daylight hours for planning and diplomacy, not playing the role of an ordinary girl. I’m glad you understand that.” (Self-Preservation)
“Surely not,” you say, “and hopefully they will continue to forgive your absences. As a Master, you ought to use the daylight hours for planning and diplomacy, not playing the role of an ordinary girl. I’m glad you understand that.”

“Right,” Ayaka assents, but still sounds questioning, uncertain. She’s staring out the window when you glance over, her expression hidden from your eyes. “It’s just, it’s hard to deal with normal things. I don’t know what’ll happen after this. Where my life will go. With Nii-san gone...” she bites off whatever she was going to say, and tries to sound more confident. “It’s better to just focus on the Grail War. Turn right at the next intersection, Saber-san.”

Then you’ve arrived, bringing the conversation to a halt. After finding a parking space and pulling to a stop, you reach over and squeeze Ayaka’s hand to reassure the girl. “It’ll be alright, Miss Ayaka,” you tell her softly, leaning over to gaze down into her eyes, “I don’t intend to vanish after this War. Whatever happens, I’ll be here to support you. I know that I cannot stand in for your family, but you won’t be alone.”

Ayaka gives you a shaky smile, and mutters, “thank you, Saber-san. I’m sorry about this; being so emotional, I mean, it’s-”

“Think nothing of it,” you say, cutting her off. “If you need some time to prepare yourself, we can wait here for a while before going in.”

“No, I’m fine,” she says with a shake of her head. “Thanks for being so considerate, Saber-san, but I’m ready now. Let’s go.”

The Einzbern Tower isn’t particularly imposing; something odd, you think, for a family which produces artificial humans, seeks immortality, and has their representative driven around in a limousine at all times. In this case, though, they appear to be trying to fit in. It’s one office building among many, a tall, mostly rectangular building covered in reflective glass. If not for the address you have written down, you’re not certain you would have recognized it at all. That normality is a solely visual thing, however. Your magical senses are alerted to the place’s nature immediately, as the tower is coated with a powerful bounded field. You can’t determine the effect just by looking at it, but the amount of magical energy poured into the barrier is obvious.

As you approach the field, however, the energy concentrated around the door fades; whatever effect it is meant to have, the barrier seems to be receding to allow you entry. Clearly, you’re already under observation. It’s a lucky thing, you consider,
that the Einzbern Servant cannot be Caster. After your experience with Kōrakuhime this morning, the idea of spending any significant amount of time inside a powerful magus’ bounded field puts you off. In this case, you don’t feel it’s something you can avoid, though. Keeping the trepidation you feel off of your face, you enter the building.

Walking in, the lobby too seems perfectly mundane, at least to the eye. It’s a sleek, modern facility where everything seems polished to a high gloss, teeming with professionals in corporate formalwear. What strikes you as odd, however, is their manner. With one another, the building’s inhabitants seem perfectly normal; they walk and discuss business meetings, stop to ask the receptionist for information, or stand in place, waiting to meet someone. Yet none of these ordinary people seems perturbed by the sight of you and Ayaka. Whereas everyone else you’ve encountered on your trip has sent odd looks towards the foreigner and schoolgirl, the inhabitants of the Einzbern tower go on as if they don’t see you at all. You don’t even exist to them.

At the other end of the lobby, there’s another individual receiving the same treatment (or lack thereof) from the office-dwellers. A maid, with the same white hair and red eyes as yourself and Liliesviel, stands at attention beside the elevators. Unlike her mistress, this woman seems to be in her late teens or early twenties, and her hair is cut to shoulder-length. You recognize, as you cross the lobby towards her, that this is the same maid who was making breakfast when you looked in on them earlier. The other, presumably, is still guarding Liliesviel.

‘I believe she’s the attendant here to receive us,’ you silently say to Ayaka. ‘Lead on, Miss Ayaka. You’re the Master here seeking an alliance; it wouldn’t do for me to be walking beside you before the eyes of an Einzbern maid.’ She nods briefly, then quickens her pace to walk ahead of you, with her head upright and her eyes locked on the maid.

“You are the Master of Saber, yes?” The maid bobs a curtsy to Ayaka, though the hospitable gesture is contradicted by her icy tone.

“I am Shijou Ayaka, the Second Owner of this land, and the Master of Saber,” Ayaka says, matching the maid’s hostility with cold arrogance. You can hardly believe this is the same girl who so needed your support in the car. “I am here to discuss the matter of our families’ agreement with the representative of Einzbern.”

“Please follow me,” the maid responds, unfazed by Ayaka’s confidence. “The mistress is waiting for you.” The doors beside her open as she speaks and she quickly walks to the controls, pressing an unlabeled button as you and Ayaka follow her into the elevator. It springs into life, silently gliding upwards as a chrome cube, only the
inertia telling you that you’re in motion. Then, with a mechanical chime, you arrive. The maid steps out ahead of you as the doors open, curtsying again as she announces, “Ojou-sama, the Master of Saber has arrived.”

The room before your eyes would fit nicely into the Eighth Imperial University. As you observed through Kōrakuhime’s divination, the decor is all in that same ostentatiously baroque style that sent your head spinning when you first saw it. After living in the University for ten days, you’re more used to it by now, though the impact is still high. Even Ayaka, who was raised amidst far more luxurious surroundings than Yumigawa Rushorou, is impressed. The center of the room is occupied by a pair of long couches on either side of a coffee table, and beyond that the entire wall is taken up by an enormous picture window that overlooks Tokyo. Liliesviel von Einzbern, wearing a sumptuous red and white gown bedecked with ribbons, lace, and other gothic decorative elements, reclines on the couch facing you. She’s flanked by two attendants: the second maid and Otto Niemand, who retains the amused spectator’s expression he wore when the two of you first met.

“My name is Shijou Ayaka,” your Master announces, stepping forward into the room. “I’ve come to discuss—”

“Onii-chan, you’ve come to see me!” Liliesviel cuts Ayaka off in mid-sentence, beaming at you without sparing a glance for the other girl. “I’m so glad. Come and sit with me, please.” Only then does she turn to regard Ayaka. “I’m afraid you’ll have to wait,” she continues. “Stengel, take our other guest to the tea room, would you?”

Standing behind Ayaka you can’t see her expression, but she says nothing in immediate response.

[X] Don’t speak up. How she wants to react to this is Ayaka’s decision. (Compassion)
[ ] Insist that you and Ayaka remain together. (Duty)
[ ] Demand some kind of proof from Liliesviel that your Master will be kept safe while she’s out of your sight. (Pride/Self-Preservation)
[ ] Respond in another way (Write in)

Even if she doesn’t speak up immediately, you trust Ayaka to make a decision. In any case, you can’t make her response for her. To take control of the situation here would be to destroy the facade you brought Ayaka here to reinforce, that you’re acting as nothing more than an obedient Servant. You keep your silence.
“Excuse me?” Ayaka finds her voice, and it’s not just confident but indignant. “It wasn’t my Servant who came to see you, but me. I came here to discuss an alliance with you out of respect for the relationship between our two families. I don’t know what sort of behavior you think is appropriate when dealing with another Master, but if you intend to treat me like some servant to be dismissed at your pleasure, there wasn’t much point!”

The look Liliesviel turns on Ayaka is one of utter indifference, a stark contrast to the happy smile she gave you a moment before. It’s as if she’s looking at something utterly below her notice. “The relationship between our families,” she says, “makes no difference to me. You agreed to let us use your land, and now that we have, I should really kill you right away. The only reason I let you in is that you’ve made Alberich into your Servant.”

“So callous,” Ayaka mutters, almost shrinking from Liliesviel’s monumental disregard. She stands her ground, though, continuing, “even so, how can you expect me to just walk away and leave you to talk things over with Saber-san? I am-”

“Irrelevant,” Liliesviel says, cutting her off once again. She levels a pointed glare at Ayaka, her indifference rapidly giving way to irritation. “I know how you two fight. Alberich does all the fighting and makes all the decisions. And you only have one command spell left. You even lost your first Servant before all seven were summoned, and had to have Alberich replace him, isn’t that right? You’re not a threat or a useful ally. You shouldn’t even be here, so you can at least wait in the tea room like a good girl. Don’t you think?”

Ayaka looks down, looking utterly cowed by Liliesviel’s speech. “Yes,” she mutters in a voice without energy, “I’ll wait. Enjoy your talk with Saber-san.” Then, without looking back at you, she allows herself to be led away into hall off to your left by the two maids. Only you, Liliesviel, and Niemand remain in the penthouse living room now.

“Now, Onii-chan, since that disturbance is gone, sit down,” Liliesviel says cheerily, a bright smile returning to her face as if with the flip of a switch. You walk in, keeping your guard up for unexpected attacks, but there’s no presence in the room aside from the three of you. As you sit down opposite Liliesviel, sinking slightly into the couch cushions, she speaks up again. “Would you like anything to eat or drink? Tea or cake, maybe? Stengel is a wonderful cook.”

“I’d like to know why you just berated my Master into waiting in another room, when we came here to seek an alliance with you,” you answer. Your tone doesn’t have a hint of friendliness, despite the positive intentions you’d come with. Right now you’re too on guard to be nice. You’d like to imagine it’s some strange
personal affection motivating her to want to get you alone, but that idea’s ridiculous. You’ve only met the girl once before, after all. This feels like a trap, and one you’ve walked straight into. If only you’d stepped forward to stop Ayaka!

“Oh, that’s how you feel,” Liliesviel says, looking crestfallen. “I really wanted to see you, you know? But I guess the you right now cares more about that girl.” Disappointment is painted on her features. It strikes you again how much her manner has changed since your last conversation. Before, she felt like a potential enemy, but now it’s as if she’s already decided that you’re an important ally; or something along those lines, at any rate.

“It’s only the advice of an old man,” Niemand suddenly interjects, “so feel free to ignore it if you like, but I think you’re looking at this all wrong, missy. From Alberich’s perspective, you’re some stranger who happens to look similar, and the Shijou girl’s his Master, who keeps him alive. Of course he’ll be worried if an enemy Master takes her off to some unknown place, alone and away from prying eyes.”

“Oh, is that all it is?” Liliesviel asks, looking relieved. “Of course I wouldn’t kill your Master, Onii-chan. That would be pointless, since you’re not one of the first seven Servants.”

“Suppose I trust you,” you say suspiciously, “that still doesn’t answer my question. Why were you so eager to get me alone, Liliesviel?”

“Because, I wanted to talk to you without that girl around,” she says, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “Last time we met I said I’d see what kind of person you were, right?”

“Something like that, yes,” you reply. She said she’d see whether it was better to use you or kill you, but given her attitude change it might not be wise to bring that detail up now.

“Well, I have,” she exclaims excitedly. “I know what kind of Servant you are and how you became one, now. And I know you’re not one of my enemies, too.” Her cheer fades a bit, though, as she continues, “You should really be my Servant, but for now you can stay with that girl, I suppose.”

Could this girl really have figured out your true nature? It seems doubtful at first, but of course the Einzberns do specialize in magic of the soul. Perhaps she’s somehow been able to analyze you as a magical construct. Yet, why would that convince her that you aren’t an enemy? It seems as if she still has some sort of misconception about you, but you can’t guess at just what it could be.

“If you know so much about me, then,” you say, “I suppose you know why we’ve come looking for an alliance with you.”
“You couldn’t finish off Achilles,” Niemand answers, “even with those remnants of the last War you had fighting with you; and I don’t imagine you’re eager to dismantle the Holy Grail, either. Are you, my boy?”

“Achilles?” Berserker’s true name is news to you. “I had suspected, given that he was an invulnerable Greek Hero, but how can you be certain?”

“Hah!” Niemand scoffs at the question. “How can I be certain? I may as well ask you how you kill, ‘Alberich’. Collecting information is a specialty of mine, and I’m always certain of its truth or falsehood. I know who Berserker is, I know how to kill him, and I know why your sword won’t do the job. But that’s enough from me. What about the answer to my other question?”

“You’re right,” you confess. “Now that I’ve become a Servant, I need the power of the Holy Grail to survive. Emiya and his family want to destroy it, and I couldn’t keep as my only allies those whom I would be forced to turn against in the end.”

[X] “But I have a question of my own, Niemand. If you know how to kill Berserker, why haven’t you done it already? You seem fairly confident, for someone who hasn’t done any fighting yet.” (Pride)

[X] “So I’ve come to you, Liliesviel. I realize that the Einzbern Master must know the inner workings of the Grail better than any other. I know also what your family seeks from the Grail; it is my intention for you and I to reach the Third together.” (Self-Preservation/Compassion)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

As you speak of your own death, the reality of it hits you uncomfortably. Two weeks of life, and perhaps two weeks more until the end of this Holy Grail War, and then the end. It’s an unendurably brief moment in which to live; even rats get more time to spin out their mindless existence. You lean back into the couch, not quite meeting Liliesviel’s eyes. You’re looking at a concept: your own death, inevitable if you cannot solve the puzzle of the Grail, floats before you; the incomprehensible eternity, the endless void of a universe seen through no perspective. If the gods are real, but trapped in the Realm of Imaginary Numbers, do their afterlives exist? For that matter, does it matter to an artificial being? Do you have a soul that persists after death, or are you only a fake?

Your mind is wandering, and this isn’t the time for that. You come back to the moment, pushing the thoughts from your mind. All that matters is that you survive,
and to do that you must complete this alliance and open the path to the Third Sorcery through Liliesviel.

“So I’ve come to you, Liliesviel,” you say, refocusing your eyes on hers. “I know well that the Einzbern Master must understand the inner workings of the Grail better than any other. I know also what it is that your family seeks from the Grail; it is my wish for you and I to reach the Third together.”

“Of course that’s your wish,” Liliesviel says with a delighted chuckle. “After all, you couldn’t ignore the reason for the Heaven’s Feel, even if you don’t have any memories, right?” A shadow falls over her expression, then, and she pauses for a moment before continuing. “I don’t know if it’s possible to make it work for two people, though,” she says pensively; but this, too, lasts only as long as a whim. Liliesviel’s emotions certainly seem to pass with astonishing speed. “Well, it doesn’t matter,” she says brightly. “I’m sure that together, Oni-chan and I can find a way to make it work, isn’t that right? We’ll prove Grandfather was a fool for relying on that human-born fake last time!”

“I’m glad to see you’re taking this so well,” you say. “I must confess, I had worried that you would find issue with my knowledge of the Holy Grail War’s original purpose.” You decide to ignore her comment about the Einzbern patriarch’s decisions. Whatever her family’s internal affairs are like, you certainly can’t comment on them.

“I was a little angry when Otto told me about your conversation with that Emiya,” she says casually; “but not at you, Alberich. You should know, since it’s so important to who you are. That man, though,” Liliesviel glares into space, ruby eyes gleaming with rage as her tone growing furious. “He shouldn’t know anything about our family. It’s all Oni-chan’s fault he’s even alive.” She looks back to you, rapidly shifting back to a smile. “I’m glad you found him, though. I might not even have known he was here if not for you. Now I can bring his Servant into the Holy Grail as well, and get back some of the power that we lost back then.”

“Then it’s a fortunate thing that I could help,” you reply. “A threat like Emiya and his family shouldn’t be ignored. Do you,” you pause for a moment, unsure how to continue. You started to ask without thinking, but is it really wise to bring this up with the girl? It doesn’t matter; there’s no point stopping after you’ve already begun to speak. “...know anything about his wife?” you finish.

“You noticed her energy, didn’t you,” Liliesviel says excitedly, shifting on the couch. “It’s as much as a Lesser Grail when it’s nearly full. She’s something truly wrong, I think,” she says conspiratorially, “she’s some kind of imitation of the Lesser Grail, and must have been what ruined the last Heaven’s Feel. If she took in the
power of the Servants instead with Emiya’s help, that’s why the ritual collapsed! They’re probably trying to do the same thing again now.”

“Interesting,” you say, “I wonder if that is their goal.” Could it be true? If so, it would certainly explain Emiya’s almost irrational urge to stop the Holy Grail War and defeat the Servants involved. Siphoning off the power of another’s ritual to fill his own “holy grail” with an endless supply of magical energy... it’s the kind of thing you might expect from a man who lies outside the community of magi and hides from the city’s Second Owner. And yet, Liliesviel is hardly an unbiased source of information. She’s clearly invested in keeping you on her side, and if it is true that the Einzberns have polluted the Holy Grail with evil as Emiya claimed she would have every reason for an attempt to discredit him.

“You seem to have drawn a very detailed conclusion, though,” you say. “Did you have the chance to analyze Emiya’s wife in such detail?”

“There’s no need for that,” Niemand cuts in. “The conclusion is plain, if you only give it a bit of thought. My boy, if you see a woman who survived the last War; the Holy Grail War in which something went wrong with the ritual, and the flow of energy was interrupted; and she carries about on her person enough magical energy for at least five Servants, what sort of conclusion can you draw?”

“When you put it that way, I suppose it does seem rather clear-cut,” you admit. All the same, you remain uncertain in your heart. You can’t bring yourself to trust Niemand; his whole manner is suspicious, and no matter how much sense what he says may make, that fact remains. You can’t bear the thought of being taken in again, the way Judas lead you on with his “Cid Ajisartous” act. On the other hand, you do remember something that seems to reinforce his theory: Sakura giving you that look of compassion, saying she knew how it felt to take the energy of someone’s life into herself. If she was absorbing the power of the Servants from the last Grail War, that would make sense.

“So, now you see why we need to kill Emiya before he can fight any more Servants,” Liliesviel says, snapping you out of your internal debate. “We’ve been lucky so far. You absorbed Caster, and aside from the little bit that went into strengthening you, Rider was processed properly. If that Emiya kills any of the Servants himself, though...”

“It would be testing your theory in the worst possible way,” you say, finishing the girl’s sentence. If that happened, and Liliesviel turned out to be right, your prospects of surviving the Holy Grail War would be eliminated at a stroke! It would be disastrous. “It’s not a chance we can take,” you muse. “Perhaps we should attack
them tonight; but how best to approach it? Emiya’s Servant is powerful, and his energy is like that of a Servant’s himself.”

“Don’t worry, Onii-chan,” Liliesviel says cheerily, “we can work that out tonight. Anyway, they won’t have a chance against us.” A mischievous grin suddenly lights up her features, as she continues, “Now, there’s something much more important we need to talk about right away.”

“What could that be?” you ask. You have no idea what could be urgent for her, given that the two seem utterly fearless regarding the most dangerous actors in the War.

“Do you have any luggage, Onii-chan?”

You give Liliesviel a blank stare. “Luggage?” You can only echo her last, questioning word. Luggage? Why would you need luggage? For that matter, why would you have luggage?

“Yes, luggage!” Liliesviel apparently expected you to understand, though. “Now that you’ve decided to fight by my side, of course you will be moving into this penthouse,” she explains exasperatedly. “It may be no castle,” she continues, “but taking up an entire floor there is still plenty of space for more people here.”

She wants you to move into the Einzbern Tower.

[ ] Maybe it would be for the best. You did bring all of your allies together in one building during the Akeldama Grail War, after all. You’ll move in. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] You can’t do it. You still don’t trust Niemand enough to sleep under the same roof, for one thing; but that’s far from a polite explanation. Make something up about the building not being defensible enough. (Pride)

[X] You can’t do it. Kōrakuhime is still living in the Shijou manor, and you need to maintain a place for her. You haven’t told Liliesviel about her yet, though, and you don’t intend to. Make something up about keeping the alliance secret from Emiya. (Compassion/Duty)

[ ] Respond differently (Write in)

There’s no way you can move into the Einzbern tower, and one reason leaps first and foremost into your mind: Kōrakuhime. You have no idea what exactly Liliesviel thinks about your origins, or how close to the truth she is; and until you know that, you must assume that revealing Kōrakuhime to her would be a disaster.
At the same time, however, you can hardly leave your sister at the Shijou manor alone and renege on your promise to help her solve her need for magical energy. You have to talk Liliesviel out of bringing you to the Einzbern Tower as a resident.

“I don’t think that would be wise,” you say cautiously. She seems pretty enthusiastic about the idea, and you don’t want to ruin the alliance now, but you have to nip this notion of moving in here in the bud. “A secret alliance would be more effective than a public one, I believe. If it were to become known to the other Masters that I had allied myself with you, they might create a counter-alliance. The Master of Saber seems particularly dangerous in that regard.” Remembering the way Harris smoothly separated you from Vaisset and executed him sends a shiver of rage through you. It was so cleanly planned, like a military operation; the mind that produced that battle hasn’t neglected the wider War, you’re certain. He must have some method for observing the other Masters in place, and that’s more than enough reason to hide an alliance on its own.

“There is also the matter of the Emiya family to consider,” you continue. “If they are to be our first priority, I would prefer we take advantage of my present alliance with them to lead them into an ambush. If we were to publicize our alliance, however, this would become quite impossible. My suggestion would be that after I leave, we act as if these negotiations left us even more at odds with one another than before, so that whoever might be observing will be taken by surprise when the truth is revealed.” It’s a rather well-assembled presentation of your perspective, you think. You clearly lined up your reasons, and even if they don’t represent your original motive for not moving in with Liliesviel they are nevertheless points that you earnestly believe prove it would be foolish to move into the Einzbern Tower. You’re confident you’ve put the ridiculous notion out of the girl’s head.

“Nonsense!” Liliesviel proclaims cheerfully. “Onii-chan, you’re being far too cautious. Between the two of us, there’s no way that Emiya, or any of the other Masters would stand a chance! All we need to do is go out and slaughter them. The only thing to be worried about is making sure the Heaven’s Feel is completed properly as a ritual.”

You let out a shocked chuckle. Either Liliesviel’s as-yet hidden Servant has truly incredible power, or her opinion of you is vastly out of touch with reality. “Your faith in my abilities is touching,” you say, “but we really must not grow overconfident. Often a powerful force is defeated by its own confidence in the face of an inferior, but clever foe. Think of—” You were about to launch into a comparison to the battle of Cannae, but as you’re speaking Liliesviel tilts her head in an adorable show of confusion, and you’re reminded of who it is that you’re speaking to. However
bizarre her upbringing, you can’t expect this girl to have a knowledge of military history. “No, never mind,” you finish lamely.

“Whatever his abortive comparison might have been,” Niemand cuts in, giving you a knowing smirk, “I must agree with Alberich in this case, missy. Information is power, and you’d do well to keep it from your enemies. There will be plenty of time to live together after the war, surely.”

Liliesviel bunches her fists in irritation, and for a moment it looks as if she’s going to override Niemand. The moment passes without her speaking, though. Instead she heaves a sigh, the tension draining from her body as the breath does. As an oddly mature, composed expression takes the place of her former moods, she says, “very well, then. If even you insist on it, Otto, I suppose I haven’t got another choice.”

It’s a strange sight you’re taking in as she speaks. Her entire demeanor has changed; before, Liliesviel seemed like a bundle of barely restrained energy, constantly shifting on the couch and demonstrating all the emotional intensity you’d expect of a young girl. Now, however, she’s motionless and poised, with only a hint of emotion betrayed by her face and voice. “Alberich,” she continues, turning to you, “I’m sorry for the way that the War is coming between us. After it’s all over things will be different.”

“I’m sure that they will,” you concur vaguely. “For the moment, however, we must focus on the War, if we are to survive its end.”

“You’re right,” Liliesviel says, “but maybe not right now.” Like a glimmer of light in a dark room, a Liliesviel’s mischievous smile begins returning to her face. “Onii-chan, you ignored my offer of food earlier, but I really can’t let you go without. It must have been a while since you ate, right? Let’s have some tea, Otto!” Before you can protest, the man has left the room, vanishing down the same hallway the maids used to lead Ayaka away. You tense, thinking of the mysterious man going off to kill her, but only for a moment. The friendliness and innocence in Liliesviel’s voice immediately dispels your suspicion as she begins to speak again. “Say, Onii-chan, how do you feel about Western-style teatime compared to Japanese? Or is that something you don’t remember?”

“I haven’t had tea in any kind of formal setting,” you confess, “in either part of the world.” Neither has Yumigawa, in fact. Your tea experience is limited to casual serving at home and drinking it in restaurants.

“Well, that’s a shame,” Liliesviel pouts. “I like black tea better, but I haven’t tried one of these people’s teatimes. I heard they don’t even serve any kind of food with the tea. Isn’t that just absurd?” As she makes this proclamation, Liliesviel casts her right arm out in a sweeping gesture to encompass the space around her, or perhaps the entire country of Japan.
“If you’re used to eating sandwiches or pastries with tea, I would imagine it seems strange,” you say, “but perhaps their tea is simply meant to be enjoyed without accompaniment.”

Before the conversation of tea can reach any greater depth, Niemand returns with one of Liliesviel’s two maids trailing after him, carrying a teakettle and several china cups. Otto holds a tiered serving tray, piled high with teatime snacks. As he sets it down, you see that the lowest tier contains a number of finger sandwiches with various fillings, the second tier is filled by miniature fruit tarts and chocolate confections, and the highest tier is piled with scones. All, you soon discover, are quite delicious. The tea, too, is lovely, having a strong fragrance that mixes the taste of fine black tea with a high floral note you don’t recognize. It’s a blend neither you nor Yumigawa has had, but quite enticing all the same.

Once you and Liliesviel have finished with the teatime snacks (Niemand abstained, while the maid retreated to the other room after delivering the food), the tiny girl gives you a broad, open smile and claps her hands together once in an emphatic gesture.

“So! Onii-chan,” she begins, “we need to kill Emiya tonight, to make sure his wife doesn’t get the chance to absorb the lives of any more Servants.”

“So you’ve said,” you answer, prompting her to continue.

“We ought to have a plan, right? I’ve got two ideas,” she continues. “First, you go looking for that arsonist Servant with them again and run into Berserker like last night, and then in the confusion, you can turn against Emiya. We’ll arrive during the fight to help, of course.” Liliesviel’s chest puffs up with pride as she explains her plan. The strangely mature air from earlier is quite gone now, and she’s back to seeming like a young girl. Liliesviel’s manner aside, it’s an interesting plan. The risk of attacking Emiya while Berserker is around does make you nervous, however. You’ll definitely to consider both ideas before you can come to any sort of conclusion.

“What about the second idea?” you ask.

“Well, you’re welcome at that Emiya’s house, right? So I thought, why wait for Berserker to appear?” Liliesviel beams as she says, “you can just go there tonight, get them talking, and then betray them once I make a surprise attack on the house. We’ll all slaughter them together, and they won’t be expecting a thing!” This is another possibly useful plan, but it does seem highly dependent on the Emiya family continuing to trust you. Are you certain they do?

[X] Favor the plan to betray Emiya during a fight with Berserker into action tonight.
[ ] Favor the plan to attack the Emiya family at home, while their guard is down.

[ ] On second thought, you’re not entirely sure about betraying the Emiya family yet. Put it off until you’ve come to a conclusion.

[ ] Something else (Write in)

You pause for a moment, before giving Liliesviel an answer. Now that you consider it, you’re not completely certain that betraying the Emiya family now is the right idea. Suppose that this is all a ploy. You can’t imagine that Liliesviel would betray you, but with Niemand you’re not so certain. Perhaps he’s only manipulating you into fighting the Einzberns’ battles. It seems as if he’s deceiving his Master, after all. Liliesviel referred to “that arsonist Servant,” but if Niemand had truly learned everything about you and told her, she would know the truth about Kōrakuhime, and that you have no reason to look for her other than deceiving the Emiya family. She seems ignorant of this fact, however. Could she have a similarly false notion of your own identity, some story told her by Niemand in order to make it easier for the girl to use and betray you?

But no, such worrying is ridiculous. Even if Niemand is planning your downfall, that fact is unimportant. What matters is Emiya, and his intentions towards the Holy Grail. Whether or not it’s truly cursed as he says, whether or not Niemand intends to betray you, the Holy Grail represents your only path to survival after the War and Emiya intends to destroy it. For the sake of your survival, then, he and his family must be wiped out. That still leaves you with the choice between Liliesviel’s two plans, though. She’s looking at you expectantly, her ruby eyes full of hope and seeking your approval. She really has grown astonishingly attached to you in such a short time.

“We should pursue the former plan,” you declare. “Emiya may be our first priority, but the fact remains that Berserker is a dangerous threat, and one that Emiya and his companions have proven effective in combating. If we destroy Berserker together, then turn on Emiya, we’ll have eliminated one of our most significant threats while at the same time weakening the enemy combatants in preparation for defeating them.”

“Heee~h?” Liliesviel sounds uncertain about your plan. “What if Emiya’s wife absorbs Berserker after he dies, though? We have to make sure she dies before any other Servants do. But she wasn’t there when you went out to fight together last time.”
“That’s a valid point,” you concede, “but isn’t there some way you can make sure that the Einzbern grail is the one to take in Berserker’s power? Perhaps if you were present for his defeat, you could use your family’s magic to ensure his power doesn’t escape.”

“Maybe,” Liliesviel says hesitantly. “I don’t know how Emiya’s wife’s power works, so I can’t be sure.” She pauses for a moment, absently touching a finger to her chin as she considers the idea. “But if you think it would be the best way, I’ll give it a try, Onii-chan.”

“Excellent,” you reply. “How should we stay in contact? I’ll need some way of informing you when and where Emiya and I are battling against Berserker.”

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about that,” Liliesviel says cheerily. “We’ll keep an eye on you tonight, so you can just focus on getting Emiya to go out hunting that rogue Servant again.” Without waiting for your reply, she suddenly claps her hands together. “Stachel, Stengel,” she calls, “you can bring our other guest back out now!” Then, to you, she continues, “I think that’s everything we need to talk about today, right?”

“Yes,” you say, and get to your feet as the maids lead Ayaka back into the room. “I suppose it is. I’ll look forward to seeing you again this evening, Liliesviel.”

Ayaka doesn’t say anything for a few moments, just looking at you and Liliesviel with an oddly vacant expression. You can’t help but wonder just how hard she took Liliesviel’s comments about her suitability as a Master. The poor girl looks as if she’s in shock.

“Our discussion is over, Miss Ayaka,” you tell her. “Let’s get back down to the car. I’ll explain our course of action while we’re on the way home.” Your Master nods, and soundlessly follows you out of the building. During the entire time you spend in the elevator and the walk out of the Einzbern Tower’s lobby, she stays silent, but animation does gradually return to her features and movements as you grow more distant from Liliesviel’s penthouse. Once you’re finally on the road, you ask, “How are you feeling, Miss Ayaka? Liliesviel spoke very harshly to you earlier.”

“I’m sorry, Saber-san,” she says, tone redolent with despair. “You shouldn’t have a Master like me. Everything that girl said was right. I can’t make decisions, I can’t fight. I’m no good as a person or a magus! I couldn’t even stand up to a little girl like that. When she said all those things about me... it was all so true, Saber-san! I couldn’t stand there and pretend I deserved to be with you. You should have a real magus like that girl for a Master instead. I just... I... I...” Large tears slip down her cheeks as Ayaka dissolves into incoherence, losing track of what she’s trying to convey.
“Miss Ayaka,” you say firmly, cutting off her uncertain speech. “You have nothing to apologize to me for. You are the ideal Master; I wouldn’t choose Liliesviel over you if I had a thousand opportunities to decide.”

“Wh-what do you mean?” Ayaka blinks her tear-filled eyes, looking confusedly at you through her haze of self-loathing and recrimination. “I can’t do any of the things a Master is supposed to,” she says, starting to launch back into her litany of negativity, but you don’t let her continue.

“You do exactly what my Master needs to do,” you tell the girl. “You provide me with the energy I need to survive and you’ve given me the ability to grow stronger. Miss Ayaka, do you believe that I would be alive after battling Berserker if I had not absorbed a portion of Rider’s energy; the energy your ritual allowed me to take in? I won’t salve my pride by ignoring the truth. My skills kept me alive in that fight, but so did Heiligöffnungschwert’s power. If anyone but you had been my Master, I wouldn’t have that power.”

Ayaka gives you an uncertain look, and after several seconds the girl manages to put a stop to her tears. “Yes,” she says, “I guess you did gain some power from the ritual, huh?” For a moment her spirits seem to be lifting, until her expression suddenly falls once more. “But still,” she says, “that doesn’t change anything about my incompetence. I’d be a better Master if I could fight, or make plans, wouldn’t I? Just admit that you hate being saddled with a burden like me.”

“You may find this difficult to believe,” you say, “but I truly don’t find you a burden. For me, you are the ideal Master. You cannot fight? So much the better; the important thing for a Master to do is remain alive, anchoring my existence. A combat-capable Master like your brother would feel compelled to take part in the battle, and possibly die as a result; you show more prudence. As for your decision-making, well,” you chuckle in spite of yourself at the idea of someone thinking you’d want them to make decisions for you. “I value my role in our partnership a great deal.”

“Really?” Ayaka still sounds distraught, unsure whether she can believe you. “You mean it’s, it’s okay for me to be like this? You wouldn’t rather go to that Liliesviel girl?”

“It’s alright, Miss Ayaka,” you insist, keeping your voice warm and reassuring. “You’re not a burden on me, and I will not abandon you. I told you this morning, didn’t I? No matter what happens, I won’t leave you to face the world alone. Not after your brother died on my behalf.”

Ayaka lays her hand over your free one, on the armrest between you. You can still feel her shaking slightly, but she seems to have mostly calmed down. After a long
silence, she says, “Thank you, Saber-san,” in a more controlled voice. It seems you’ve gotten through the worst.

The rest of the drive passes quickly as you explain the plan you and Liliesviel made to dispose of Emiya, and soon you’re back home at the Shijou manor. By your watch, it’s not about 3:00pm. You know what you’ll be doing tonight, but for now there’s the last of the afternoon to use in preparation.

[X] Go and discuss the new developments with Kōrakuhime. (Duty)

[ ] Return to the room you used to train with Kōrakuhime this morning and experiment with summoning. (Pride)

[ ] Head directly to the Emiya residence. After the last fight with Berserker, you want as much time as possible to discuss strategy with them. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

As you pull to a stop in the manor’s garage, Ayaka hurriedly gets up and leaves the car, rushing into the house. You thought you’d made it through her emotional crisis, but it seems she still wants to be alone for a while. You can’t exactly blame her, after all the stress she’s been through since you appeared, but it does get rather tiresome reassuring her over and over again. As you sit in the car, soaking in the garage’s silence, it occurs to you that this is practically the first moment you’ve had to yourself all day. You’ve been doing nothing but talking, planning, and discussing plans, you feel. You know you should go upstairs now, find Kōrakuhime, and explain what you’ve discussed with Liliesviel to her; and yet, you find yourself wanting to just put that off. You could study magic in the Shijou library, or experiment with Heiligöffnungschwert in Vaisset’s workshop; that would still be productive, and you’d be getting some time to yourself.

No, you shake the notion off. Your life depends on every part of the Holy Grail War being executed perfectly, and that includes communication with your sister as well as diplomacy and providing emotional support for your insecure Master. You’ll find time to be alone at some point, but now isn’t the right moment. So, resigning yourself to another discussion with a temperamental female, you get out of the car and make your way back into the manor. Hopefully Kōrakuhime has been watching your conference with Liliesviel by scrying; that would speed things up nicely.

No such luck. After looking around for a while, you find your sister in the same bed as this morning, fast asleep. Apparently, she decided that the best thing to do
with her day was nap. You take a seat beside the unconscious girl’s bed and take her by the shoulder, shaking her awake. At least she’s clothed this time, so there’s no need to fear a repeat of this morning’s embarrassed outburst. She sits up slowly, as if she has to make her way through some amorphous barrier to get to an upright posture, and then turns to blink blearily at you.

“Ani-ue,” she says, gradually coming back to consciousness as you watch. “How did... your meeting with... the Einzbern Master go?”

“Well, thank you,” you answer. If she didn’t see it, there’s no reason to inform Kōrakuhime of the unfortunate moment between Liliesviel and Ayaka. “We have decided to form an alliance and work together to obtain the Third Sorcery. To that end, we have decided to first eliminate Emiya, as he poses a threat to the Holy Grail War as a whole.”

“Fuwa~h” Kōrakuhime reaches her arms over her head, stretching like a cat as she lets out a languorous yawn. “That’s... sensible,” she says. “How are you... going to go about it?”

“Tonight, I’ll return to the Emiya residence with Miss Ayaka,” you begin. “We’ll propose that we all head out once more to hunt the rogue Servant that’s been slaughtering the innocent people of Tokyo.” In a sudden burst of irritation at the girl who’s been lazily sleeping the day away, you shoot out a hand and grab her tightly by the chin, pulling her face close to yours and grinning cruelly down at her. “That would be you, dear sister. Maybe I should tell them where you really are, to improve the verisimilitude!”

As her eyes widen in sudden shock and fear, you let the malice drop from your expression, turning it into a gentle smile. “Don’t worry, I don’t really intend to betray you,” you say with a chuckle. “We’re going to use the same method as last night, and presumably the Master of Berserker will once again appear to challenge us. That’s when Liliesviel and her Servant will join us; first we’ll do away with Berserker, and then with Emiya’s band.”

“Then what about... my energy supply,” Kōrakuhime says softly, and at this distance you can feel her hot breath on your face as she speaks. You can see every detail of her in perfect clarity: the total smoothness of her inhuman, skin, the shape of every midnight-black eyelash, the way her blood-red lips play over the sharp white teeth. You snap back into focus; she’s still talking. “I thought we would... find some humans for me tonight, together,” she’s saying. “If I don’t have something, I’ll... start to waste away... Ani-ue, you don’t... understand...”

[ ] “You’ll just have to capture them yourself,” you say. “I can’t delay this.” (Duty)
You’ll have to get your magical energy some other way tonight,” you say. “Siphon some off of the leylines or something, but this takes precedence and there’s a role I need you to play tonight.” (Pride/Compassion)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“You’ll have to get magical energy some other way tonight,” you say. “This battle takes precedence over finding you a new energy source. I can’t have you going out to hunt, either; there’s a role I need you to play later. Perhaps you should draw energy out of the leylines after all.”

Kōrakuhime’s eyes widen again; you can see a full circle of white around those iridescent irises. This time it isn’t terror that colors her shock, though, but excitement; a faint blush rises to her cheeks at the same time, and you can feel her breath quickening. “Do you... mean that, Ani-ue,” she asks, “you don’t... mind the impact it would have on the humans?”

“We have more important matters to occupy our attention right now,” you answer. “As far as I’m concerned, whatever side-effects your energy-drain creates are insignificant in the face of the immediate danger that’s before us, provided the ritual does not point our enemies to our location.”

“Oh... thank you, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime says, her quiet voice charged with restrained excitement. “I knew you wouldn’t... let your compassion for the humans lead you astray!” Now it’s her turn to surprise you, as she suddenly brings her face up out of your cupped hand to plant a soft kiss on your cheek. Before you can react, she’s slipped out of her bed and left the room. Apparently her energy-collection ritual is something that must be done elsewhere.

Still shocked by your sister’s unexpected show of affection, it takes you a moment to recover before you get to your feet and follow her out of the room. Although her exit would have been a great way to end the conversation and get some of the time alone you’ve been craving, unfortunately you still need to explain what it is you expect Kōrakuhime to do during the fighting tonight. When you enter the corridor outside her bedroom, however, the girl is nowhere to be found. She’s moving more quickly than you’d thought.

After taking another look around the manor, you find Kōrakuhime down in Vaissel’s old workshop, industriously placing talismans on the walls; each wall has four papers arranged in a diamond pattern, and apparently held in place by magic.

“Kōrakuhime,” you call out to get her attention as you enter. The girl doesn’t look away from her work, but she does reply.
“What is it, Ani-ue? I’m... still preparing to... connect myself to the leyline here, right now.”

“That’s excellent,” you say, “but you ran off before I could tell you what I need from you tonight; why you’re getting power this way right now instead of hunting on your own.”

Still not turning to look at you, she replies, “And what... is that, Ani-ue?”

“I need you to watch Emiya’s house for me,” you begin. “We’ve gained a general idea of what Emiya is capable of from the fact that he was unable to stand up to Berserker, but I’m worried about his wife; she’s an unknown quantity with an enormous store of magical energy. If she’s a skilled magus, she could be an extraordinarily dangerous foe.”

“What is it that... you would like me to do about her, then?” A talisman begins to glow with faint blue light as Kōrakuhime presses on it, tracing the archaic script with her black-gloved fingertip. She still isn’t turning to face you as she speaks.

“At first, you’re to do nothing,” you answer. “Follow at a distance when Miss Ayaka and I travel to the Emiya residence to discuss tonight’s battle-plan. Find somewhere inconspicuous to wait, and observe us by divination. If I give you a signal, or if the house’s occupants do anything suspicious, incapacitate them. Kill them if you absolutely need to, but try to just knock them out.”

“...Understood,” Kōrakuhime replies after a pause. “I hope... everything goes as you intend tonight, Ani-ue.”

“So do I,” you say. “I only hope I’m not putting too much faith in those two.” Even now, you’re not certain about Niemand. What sort of being is he, anyway? A Servant, masking his power somehow; another homunculus, not conforming to the typical appearance; or is he a magus employed by the Einzberns to aid Liliesviel? Knowing so little about someone who could be either an ally or an enemy is thoroughly frustrating. Before you can expand on your concerns to Kōrakuhime, however, the girl speaks up again.

“Ani-ue, would you mind letting me... perform this ritual alone? Having another Servant in the room... could disrupt the flow of energy.”

“Oh, of course,” you say. “I’ll see you in an hour or two, then.” With that, you turn and leave the basement.

It’s just after six, by your watch. You should probably leave to see Emiya by eight. Kōrakuhime is engaged with replenishing her magical energy, and Ayaka has sequestered herself in her bedroom, presumably still trying to sort out how she feels about what Liliesviel said to her. For the time being, you can finally take the break you’ve been looking for. In high spirits, you make your way to the Shijou library
(with the basement occupied, it’s the only available place to practice magic) and spend a productive hour improving the finesse of your elemental manipulation.

In addition to dexterously using two, then three, and finally five tendrils of Nothingness simultaneously, you practice shaping it into a few other objects: a steel sword with a leather hilt; a bow made of an uncertain black material, which shows excellent strength and flexibility; a replica of one of the library’s books; all seem to have their details filled in from some source other than your conscious conception of the object, responding to the simple impulse of “sword,” “bow,” or “book.” At this point, you’re fairly sure that what’s happening is somehow beyond the basic elementalism that creates fireballs as described in *Transcendental Principles of Elementalism*. You suppose this, too, is an aspect of *Heiligöffnungschwert*’s power.

Your watch chimes, notifying you that it’s 7:15pm. The sun is dipping below the horizon. Time to go find Ayaka and make sure she’s ready to see the Emiyas; at least they’re not likely to insult her, you think with a dry chuckle. You’ll try reaching out to her mentally first. ‘Miss Ayaka,’ you say, ‘we ought to be leaving shortly, to go to the Emiya residence. Are you prepared?’

‘Sure,’ comes the reply, sounding far more energetic than you’d expected. ‘Are you ready to go, Saber-san?’

‘Yes, I’ll meet you at the car in just a moment,’ you send back. ‘I just need to confirm things with Kōrakuhieme.’ Apparently Ayaka really has worked through her insecurity since getting home; or she’s at least resolved to put on a mask of determination so that this evening’s work can go well. Either way, it’s one less thing for you to be concerned with. An optimistic mood quickens your steps as you return to the basement and Vaisset’s workshop. If everything this evening goes as smoothly as your Master’s emotional recovery, you’ll have made an enormous step towards victory by tomorrow.

Kōrakuhieme meets you coming out of the basement as you move to descend, prompting you to stop and talk on the stairs, accentuating the already significant height difference between you. “I... felt your presence approaching,” she explains. “It’s... time to depart, is it... not?”

“That’s right,” you answer. “I trust your energy collection went without trouble?”

“Perfectly,” she answers with a tiny smile. “With this ritual, I am in... ideal condition.”

“Good,” you say. “Then let’s go. You’ll follow the car.”

Ayaka is waiting in the car when you arrive, looking as renewed as she sounded earlier. As you pull out of the garage and begin the short drive to the Emiya
residence, you decide to confirm things one more time. It’s as good a way of making conversation as any other.

“Are you feeling better now, Miss Ayaka?” You put some concern into your voice, keeping up the facade of gallantry you’ve been putting on for the girl since being summoned. If you ever meet Yumigawa Rushorou, you’ll have to remember to thank him for spending so much time faking emotions; the practice in your memories has been enormously useful.

“Somewhat,” she replies. “I thought about what you said, and decided to just try and face forward for now. Even if I’m not a great magus, and I don’t know what I’ll do after the War without Nii-san, that’s not what I have to think about right now. It’s enough to just focus on what could kill us right now, and make sure I don’t end up the way he did.”

“Good job,” you say, and this time the warmth in your tone is real. If Ayaka can put her personal concerns aside and focus on the War, it’s enormously heartening. “Focus is essential, Miss Ayaka. As long as you can go on surviving, the future will sort itself out.” Or you’ll sort out her future, at any rate. It’s advice calculated to increase her dependence on you, but that doesn’t make it completely disingenuous.

You park around the corner from Emiya’s house and walk the short distance there. By now you can no longer feel Kōrakuhime’s presence following you; she must be hiding it to prevent detection by Emiya or Tohsaka. When you ring the doorbell, it’s the Emiyas’ Rider who greets you.

“Saber,” she says coldly, looking at you with identical hostility to that of your previous meetings. “And Shijou-san. Come in. Sakura, Shirou, and Rin are waiting for you.” You follow the icy woman into Emiya’s cozy living room to see the three aforementioned people all sitting around the table. As expected, Emiya himself is a stark contrast to his Servant, greeting you with a wide smile.

“Saber, Shijou-san, come in and sit down,” he says cheerily. “You’re just in time!”

“Oh? What is it we’ve arrived for, then,” you ask as you take your seat at one of the empty places.

“We had dinner early tonight,” Emiya says, his tone quickly becoming serious, “and we’re planning to leave now for the latest burned house. I’m hoping Berserker’s Master won’t be there yet if we arrive just before dark.” He turns to Ayaka as he continues, “That way we can find a bit of evidence that you can use to lead us to the Servant that’s hunting families, instead of being delayed by Berserker.”

Of course. You hadn’t considered it earlier, but Emiya’s first priority is saving lives. If he wants to chase down Kōrakuhime, it would make sense for him to alter his
plans to avoid Berserker before developing a strategy to defeat him. Unfortunately for you, this throws the plan you and Liliesviel assembled this afternoon into disarray. By the time you get to the house where you met Kōrakuhime, it will surely be no later than nine. Too early for even suburban families to reliably be asleep. Even if you don’t beat him there, you doubt Lumenza will be willing to fight given the policy of secrecy maintained by Organization magi.

[ ] There’s nothing for it. You’ll just have to strike now. Attack the Emiyas when they’re not expecting it, and hope you can handle them without Liliesviel’s help. (Pride)

[ ] Even so, you’ve planned tonight out too much to change matters now. There’s no other option but to go with the Emiyas as planned, and hope Lumenza attacks despite the time. (Duty)

[X] Now that you think of it, you have another idea that may just resolve things. (Write in)

“That’s a very interesting notion,” you say, manifesting casual calm while you fill with tension internally. For a moment, you’re overcome with nerves and almost go for your sword. If the attack on Berserker is doomed, there’s nothing for it but to kill the Emiyas now! By force of will, however, you’re able to hold back. It isn’t like you to lose control and act on impulse; not when you aren’t already in a fight, at least. You have to calm down and think. Making a stalling comment is good, but you need to find something else to say, something that can stop Emiya from ruining the night’s plan. Then, mercifully, it comes to you: salvation in the form of an idea; a devious plan, not for you but for Lumenza.

“I’m not confident it can solve our problem, however,” you continue, steepling your fingers and making a show of seriously contemplating the gravity of the danger that Kōrakuhime poses to the people of Tokyo.

“Why’s that?” Emiya looks apprehensive. No doubt he was hoping this would be the end-all be-all solution.

“Lumenza said that when we fought him, he was lying in wait for you, Emiyan-san,” you begin. “He wanted to reliably ambush an enemy Master, one he was confident in his ability to defeat. His story holds up that far, at least; but why do you think he was waiting at the wreckage left behind by rogue Servant in the first place? Did Lumenza seem like the kind of magus to go hunting for a public menace to you?”
“No.” This time it’s Rin who answers. “He may be one of Barthomeloi’s soldiers, but they only go after dead apostles because they threaten to expose the Moonlit World. Killings like these, that look like the work of a mundane arsonist... he should be happy to ignore them.”

“Precisely,” you say. “I propose an alternate explanation for his presence at the wreckage. Lumenza, I believe, is working with the rogue Servant. Protecting it while it feeds. In this way, the rogue Servant acts as bait to draw strong enemies to Lumenza, and he provides it with the opportunity to sustain itself despite a weak or absent Master.”

“Good thinking, Saber,” Emiya says, “and you might be right, but why does that mean we can’t still chase down the rogue Servant ahead of Lumenza? If we get to the ruined house first, and we can find the rogue Servant before Lumenza is willing to fight, there should be no problem.”

“Because he won’t simply sit by and wait,” you almost snap. “If we try to attack his collaborator, Lumenza will almost certainly follow us back to their location, and we’ll have to deal with the both of them at once in that case. You don’t imagine they’re without a means of staying in contact, do you?”

“What’s your plan to deal with Berserker’s Master and the rogue Servant, then,” Tohsaka asks, just as Emiya is opening his mouth to speak. He leans back deflatedly, waiting for your response.

“I suggest we lay a trap for Lumenza, if we do arrive before he does,” you declare confidently. All of your concerns about whether or not you’d be able to convince Emiya and Tohsaka are gone at this point. They’ve obviously been taken in completely by your story. “We almost defeated Berserker last time,” you continue, “if we can catch him by surprise and immobilize him with the ritual you used to help us escape before, Miss Tohsaka, I’m confident that I can finish him off. After that, it should be a simple matter to capture and interrogate Lumenza as to the whereabouts of his collaborator.”

“I won’t do it,” says Emiya, with shocking determination. “I understand your reasoning, Saber. It’s a strong, well-thought-out plan; but I can’t focus on defeating Lumenza while there are people dying somewhere else. If we spend another night fighting him, we’ll be dooming another family to death at the hands of that Servant.”

“Do you think a rogue Servant that’s slaughtering mundane families is bound by the rules of magi,” you shoot back. Now you’re getting angry again; you thought you had this finished. “Emiya-san, that Servant could be killing people right now. It could have done so an hour ago, while you were eating, or even six hours ago. It could be Assassin, keeping itself hidden at any time of day. We don’t know anything about
its schedule, aside from the fact that it burns down a house every 24 hours. Are you willing to jeopardize your own life, and all of our lives, on the off-chance that we might be acting just in time to save those people? Need I remind you of what you told me would come of the Holy Grail’s completion, should we fail?”

Emiya looks at you with fury in his eyes, but for a long moment he remains silent. Then, with a sigh of resignation, he says, “Alright, Saber. You have a point. We’ll go after Berserker first.”

“Excellent,” you say, getting to your feet. “In that case, Miss Ayaka and I will meet you there.” You leave the house with quick strides, not wanting to spend any more time than necessary in the company of these people. Facing Emiya’s upright morality, and knowing you have to kill him, gives you pangs of a compassion that shouldn’t be there. Better, then, to rush out as quickly as possible. Indeed, maybe it’s for the best that you didn’t arrive in time to share another dinner with the Emiya family. The experience might have weakened your resolve.

Absently, your mind still focused on Emiya and his family, you walk back to the car and start it up. You’re not going over the rooftops tonight for the same reason you can’t fight yet: there’s too much risk of being seen. As you drive, you think about the conversation and your ruse. You may have been too forceful, too focused on Berserker. They might suspect you of something. But then, does it really matter? Let them suspect you if they like; after tonight, what Emiya and his family think won’t matter. Tohsaka, too, will have to die; hopefully her superiors at the Clock Tower took into account the danger when they sent her, and won’t be inclined to dispatch further investigators in pursuit of her killer. And what about the children? The thought suddenly leaps into your mind. You don’t want to leave any loose ends, but the idea of killing them leaves a bad taste in your mouth. It comes to you that everyone you’ve killed before has been in some way a clear threat to you. Can you cut down Emiya’s daughter, an uninvolved young girl, just to complete the set?

You’ve arrived. It’s time to shake off these concerns. You park some distance down the street, and take a long look through the window at the house where you met Kōrakuhime last night. It’s nothing but a charred pile, now; not even the frame of the house remains. As you stare at the still and silent place of death, the emotion drains from your mind, leaving only cold reason. There’s something to be learned from Kōrakuhime’s example, you suppose. Your sister wasn’t held back by remorse when she killed children to protect her own life. She understood that anyone whose existence threatens one’s own is an enemy. It’s a lesson you need to get through your head.
Then you see motion behind the ashes: a human form, walking around the property to come towards you. It’s Lumenza, walking up from the other direction; he was hidden by the rubble before, but you can see him clearly as he rounds the corner. He seems to be pacing around the yard irritably. Your claims about him working with Kōrakuhime may have been a lie, but apparently what you’d implied about his modus operandi was accurate after all. He’s been waiting here for some time, most likely.

“There he is, Miss Ayaka,” you say, “the Master of Berserker. Now we need only wait for the others to arrive.”

That wait turns out to be another ten minutes or so, before you hear the sound of a knock on your window and look up to see Emiya, leaning down to face you. You roll down the window to let him speak.

“It looks like setting up an ambush is out of the question,” he says. “Has Lumenza been doing anything, or just waiting there?”

“Just waiting,” you answer. “Standing guard, I suppose. Now it seems both of our plans have become unworkable. Any ideas, Emiya-san?”

At this point, however, the opportunity to form a new plan is cut off by a hurtling golden fist. It’s Berserker, charging at Emiya with a titanic punch, parried just in time by the black and white falchions Emiya wields. Even so, the attack’s force sends the man sliding back along the pavement. Once he’s between you and the others, however, Berserker stills again. Lumenza is walking up, and apparently not interested in fighting without some conversation to precede matters. You take advantage of the moment to get out of the car, materializing your armor and sword.

“I’m so glad to see all of you again,” Lumenza calls with smug cheer, still closing the distance at a casual walk. “It doesn’t seem that you share the sentiment, however, keeping such a distance. Why, if I hadn’t seen that red hair gleaming in the darkness I might not have noticed you at all! A poor show for a Master, to be sure.”

“Do you intend to show this battle off to the whole neighborhood?” Tohsaka steps forward to indignantly interrogate the smug magus. “It’s too early to be fighting, especially with that tasteless gold Servant of yours, Lumenza!”

“I wouldn’t expect one of the Kaleidoscope’s apprentices to care so much about propriety,” Lumenza says, turning his smirk on the woman, “but rest assured, I’ve made certain that the area is blanketed by sleep. The only one witnessing your deaths will be me.”

“Fine words,” you say, “but your confidence was more appropriate before we’d crossed swords. I’ve chopped your Servant up once; what makes you believe you’ll do better tonight?”
“Your weapon is incapable of truly harming my Servant, you buffoon,” Lumenza rebuts. “Now...”

As he’s speaking, you make eye-contact with Tohsaka, who’s behind Berserker. A jewel she’s slipped from her pocket begins to glow with a faint light. Unless you miss your guess, she’s about to use the same technique that stopped Berserker last night. This is your chance!

[X] Spring forward and cut through Berserker’s heart and brain! He may have escaped last time, but he won’t be able to now. (Pride)

[ ] While Berserker’s immobilized by Tohsaka’s spell, attack Lumenza! No matter how powerful the Servant is, he can’t survive without a Master. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

A moment passes, and in the space of a breath, too many things happen, and too quickly, to be ordinarily observed. Everything changes, faster than the human eye can follow. As the only Servant here who can see everyone moving, you’re likely the only person to get a complete picture of what’s just occurred.

Tohsaka whips her hand up, throwing two glowing orbs in Berserker’s direction. You force Ayaka’s Od through your circuits and into the world, shaping three crimson-edged ribbons of Nothingness. Lumenza raises his right hand, palm outstretched and glowing with indecipherable symbols and ornate characters. You bring Heiligöffnungschwert down in a diagonal slash meant to destroy Berserker’s head and heart at a stroke. Tohsaka and Lumenza speak, and their words are lost in a noise like a clap of thunder. The air around Berserker reverberates, like ripples on water’s surface. Your tendrils strike at Berserker’s heels, while Tohsaka’s magic should be holding him in place. Instead, the rippling air disrupts the formation of light that appears. It’s form isn’t what you saw bind Berserker last night, but a garbled mess that casts out a wave of force, sending Tohsaka and Lumenza flying. Berserker is as absurdly agile as ever. Before either of your strikes can connect, he steps inside the arc of your tendrils, crouches below your slash, and hits you with a brutal uppercut that sends you flying bodily into the air.

All that happens in less than a second, but you have a few moments of peace in the air before you land. It’s a fortunate thing, you think, that you materialized your helmet before getting out of the car. Had you left your face uncovered for the sake of vanity, you’d be dead now.
You land a short distance down the street from the car, on your feet, and take in the scene. Berserker is locked in combat with Emiya and Rider, whose eyes glow with a strange purple radiance. The golden Servant is slowed once again, just as he was last night, despite the fact that you haven’t hurt him this time. Perhaps Emiya’s Servant has some sort of ability based around her gaze, you consider. On the opposite side of the battle from yourself, Lumenza and Tohsaka look on without engaging. They both appear equally battered by the strange interaction of their magics, and not eager to risk further harm by getting involved in the fighting.

Mercifully, none of the combatants is paying close attention to the car you arrived in. If Berserker had gone on to attack Ayaka while you were out of the way, you’d be doomed. Instead, the girl was able to make it out of the car by the other door, and is currently hiding in the shadows, crouched down to keep Berserker or Lumenza from catching sight of her over the vehicle.

[ ] Rush back into the fray, targeting Berserker’s heels while he’s distracted by Emiya and Rider. Between the three of you, you should be able to put an end to the Servant. (Duty)

[X] Try to restrain Berserker from a distance with tendrils of Nothingness. If you can do that, finishing him off will be simple. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Emiya and Rider seem to be holding their own. Take advantage of this moment to get Ayaka farther away from the fighting. (Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You don’t need to close distance to finish off Berserker. No, you’re confident you can do it from here. Staying carefully outside of the melee, you extend four black tendrils from your cloak and, taking advantage of an unguarded moment, send them at Berserker from behind. You smoothly wrap one around each of his limbs before he can react, ensuring that you can cut him down while he’s immobile.

That was the intended effect, at least. Unfortunately, Berserker manages to surprise you once again with his strength. He doesn’t even take notice of your attack, moving almost uninhibited under the weight of the bonds as he continues his battle with Emiya and Rider. In fact, he tears through one of the tendrils as he reaches for Emiya’s throat, an attack barely dodged by the agile magus. No matter. If Berserker is too strong to be restrained by these appendages, you need only match his power and turn it into a contest of energy. This will put some rather heavy strain on Ayaka,
but it has to be done. You quickly reattach the severed tendril, then begin
strengthening the four. You draw more and more magical energy through your
circuits, pouring it into the strips of darkness wrapped around Berserker’s limbs and
growing their size, as well as their strength.

Finally Berserker is feeling the pressure; he’s beginning to slow as the tendrils
cover more and more of his body. Finally, when all but his head is wrapped in the red
and black material of your element, and the tendrils that bind him to you cover the
ground between you like some grotesquely distorted shadow, Berserker’s fighting
grinds to a halt. In one hand, he holds Rider’s calf in an iron grip, preparing to slam
the lithe woman into the side of a nearby home, while the other reaches out towards
Emiya in a frozen punch. Golden muscles strain at the restraints, but as long as you
continue to power your magic, he’s immobile. Now, at last, you can put an end to this
tenacious foe.

You take *Heiligöffnungschwert* in hand, striding towards the enemy to finish
him, when out of the corner of your eye you see Lumenza open his mouth to speak.
You suddenly realize what he’s about to do. The man only has one option left, after
all: a command spell, and most likely one to give Berserker the power he needs to
reverse the situation and kill you. The only way to finish this is to destroy Berserker’s
vitals with a portal before Lumenza can finish speaking. Everything will be decided in
this moment. Whether Lumenza’s voice or your blade is faster, the first to complete
his action will live, and the other will die. There’s a moment of tension, as the lives of
everyone here hang in the balance of the exchange.

Then everything changes. The tension is shattered by an intruding sound; an
out-of-place noise, the unmistakable mark of someone not taking the situation as
seriously as everyone else involved: slow clapping, coming from up the road. With it
comes an overwhelming, oppressive magical energy. It’s the energy of a Servant,
you’re certain of that, but the way it permeates the air around you despite not
 carrying any magical effect is completely unlike anything you’ve encountered up until
now. Even in the case of Emiya’s wife, with her monstrous store of energy, that
energy clung to her body as you’d expect from a living thing. This is more like the
heat that pours off a furnace, an ambient offloading of radiant power. All eyes turn to
the new arrival, but even before you look, the apprehension in your gut tells you
know who it is.

Liliesviel von Einzbern and Otto Niemand, your newest allies, are walking
towards the scene of battle at a leisurely pace. The pair is dressed in their usual
anachronistic finery. Niemand wears a suit and cravat that would have looked at
home on a 19th Century aristocrat, to which he’s added a long winter coat and wide-
brimmed hat, all in navy. Liliesviel, an adorable red and white dress, so coated in frills, lace, and ribbons that the girl looks like she’d be more at home in a life-sized dollhouse than the city streets, even here in the suburbs. It’s Niemand doing the clapping, of course; and it’s from him that the oppressive cloud of magical energy emanates. Clearly, he’s been using some technique to hide his nature.

“Well done, my boy,” the old man calls jovially, his beard splitting into a wide grin. “Well done indeed! I must say, I didn’t think you’d really best Achilles on your own that way. Why, I could’ve stood back and watched, and I dare say you’d have finished him off on your own!”

“Hmph!” Liliesviel responds to Niemand’s compliments with a pout, saying, “You’re too pessimistic, Otto! I knew Onii-chan could do it all on his own. That’s why I said we should do this at that fake Master’s house.”

“Caution shouldn’t be thrown out, no matter how confident one is,” you interject once the duo is in convenient speaking distance. “We made the plan this way in case things went badly with Berserker. That they didn’t doesn’t necessarily invalidate our course of action.”

“Well spoken,” says Niemand, “and now we ought to finish things, yes?” He holds out his right hand, and an ornate spear appears in his grip. It’s about three meters long, all told, and from tip to butt the entire thing appears to be made of solid silver. You can tell that the handle is covered in some kind of engravings, but they’re too small for you to make out the detail from here.

“On that subject, why are you here now, Niemand? As you said, you could have waited for me to finish Berserker on my own.” If he’s been deceiving you up until now, you doubt Niemand will pick this moment to start telling the truth, but it’s worth a try at least. If he has some ulterior motive for wanting to kill Berserker, you’d like to know what it is.

“I suppose you’re thinking I have something to gain by putting Achilles down.” Niemand shakes his head, a look of mock hurt on his face. “Nothing could be further from the truth, my boy. In fact, by killing him I’m making my abilities known, and could well be putting myself at a major disadvantage in the future. Nonetheless, to not help you in this battle would be to renege on our agreement. I never break my word, Saber.”

With that, Niemand strides up to Berserker, gives his weapon a few experimental swishes through the air and, with one hand, impales him on the silver spear. It’s a swift, almost casual motion, and it’s only by listening closely that you’re able to hear as Niemand intones the weapon’s true name.

“Gungnir.”
After that low word, however, something happens that no-one present can possibly miss. A blinding white light spreads from the wound until it suffuses Berserker’s body. The bonds you’ve wrapped around him melt away, obliterated by the stark whiteness. Waves of uncontrolled heat begin to roll off Berserker, and a high wind picks up. It swirls away from the dying Servant in an inverted tornado, and the air crackles with electricity as it streams past you, carrying the ozone smell of lightning. The pavement beneath Berserker’s feet blackens, and deep cracks in it begin to spread outward.

You’re snapped out of the moment by Ayaka’s voice, resounding in your mind. ‘Saber-san, hurry! I managed to complete preparation for the sacrifice, but I think Berserker is being destroyed. Take his power, now!’

She’s right, of course. If the energy of Niemand’s weapon destroys Berserker, there’ll most likely be nothing left to empower you. You don’t intend to lose that opportunity. You open your mouth and roar into the wind, raising your voice to make yourself heard over the tempest as you call out, “I, the Servant Saber, accept this sacrifice!”

An arc of power splits off the dying Servant, piercing the whirlwind and flowing into you. With it comes an understanding of his nature, and the structure that shaped his existence: the wretched binding that forced a hero into the mindless entity known as Berserker.

**Status Updated**

You take hold of the mass of foreign power and subjugate it, bending it to your will as you did with Rider, and making it a part of yourself. Now you need only channel it, choosing a part of yourself to reshape with the newfound power.

[ ] Direct the energy into your body, enhancing your raw power.

[ ] Form the energy into a concept, reinforcing an aspect of your nature as a hero. (Which?)

[X] Attempt to replicate some property of Berserker’s and apply it to yourself. (Affections of the Goddess)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

As you examine search for a form to give the new energy, one aspect of Achilles’ legend sticks out to you: the power he received from his mother, Thetis. This wasn’t only his famous invincibility. The ritual she performed to purge his flesh of
mortality, as well as her frequent intercessions on his behalf with her divine relatives, empowered his body in all other ways as well. In fact, you could say that Achilles owed his superhuman strength and agility to his mother. It’s this ability, this empowerment from an outside source, that you seek to emulate.

Without the gods present in this world, of course, it’s impossible to directly replicate the aid that they granted Achilles. Instead, you direct that principle of empowerment towards the connection between Master and Servant, taking advantage of the nature of a Servant as an amplifier of magical energy. By augmenting this method of receiving power with Achilles’ method, you’re able to improve the efficiency with which you convert magical energy into physical force, improving your strength, agility, and endurance. The change is nowhere near so radical as when you first became a Servant, or your augmentation by the emulated grail in the Akeldama, but the feeling of new power flowing through you is nonetheless an invigorating one.

Status Updated

You can’t remain focused on your inner world forever, though. Once you’ve acclimated to the power gained from Achilles, you return your attention to your surroundings. As you do, the destruction of Berserker is completed. The blinding radiance shining from Gungnir suddenly fades, and when it does, there’s nothing left of the brutal golden warrior who came so close to killing you. The wind dies down, the heat that fills the air gradually diminishes, and all that’s left of Berserker is a great scorch mark on the ground below where he stood.

With the tempest gone, you can now see that another figure has vanished. There’s no sign of Lumenza. Plainly, he had the presence of mind to make his escape while all others were distracted by the shocking display of Gungnir’s power, and now he’s well away. Nobody else seems to have noticed, all eyes still being on Niemand. Of course, Niemand isn’t his name. You’d guessed it was a pseudonym before, but now you that you’ve heard the name of his spear you know the truth. You’ve read that name before, after all; in your search for the meaning of Adelheid’s song, back in the Akeldama, you had occasion to make an extensive study of Wagner. You wouldn’t be likely to forget the name of the spear wielded by the King of the Gods of Germany, Wotan, Odin, as he’s better known outside of opera. You can’t fathom how Liliesviel was able to make a god into a Servant, but his identity is undeniable.

Status Updated

Into the shocked stillness of the night comes Liliesviel’s high, bell-like voice once more, as she turns to Emiya and gives a curtsy to the rogue magus and his compatriots.
“Emiya Shirou and Tohsaka Rin,” she says in an incongruously pleasant tone, as if meeting these people at some formal event. “It is such a pleasure to make your acquaintances at last. My name is Liliesviel von Einzbern; the Master of Lancer. You already know my brother Alberich, of course.”

Emiya looks ill, his face an unhealthy color. His expression is a curious mixture of shock, frustration, and disappointment, as his eyes dart between the two of you. It’s Tohsaka who replies first, though, in a viciously derisive tone.

“Alberich von Einzbern, huh? You certainly played us nicely, didn’t you, with that ridiculous story about being made into a Servant by Caster’s noble phantasm. I suppose what you’re really doing is copying the way Sakura drew power out of Angra Manyu fifteen years ago, isn’t it?” The woman glares at you with hate-filled eyes. She looks ready to attack you, despite the fact that she’s propping herself up against a wall. Before you can respond to her words, though, Emiya opens his mouth to speak.

“I just have one question for you, Saber-san.” His voice sounds cold, as you’ve never heard it before. It occurs to you that Emiya isn’t as hurt as you first thought he was from his expression. Instead, there’s a controlled rage in his tone. “Why did you pretend to be on our side? It’s obvious that you didn’t need us to beat Berserker, not with Lancer there to help you. Why pretend you wanted to stop the Grail War and save people, huh? What did you get out of it?”

[ ] There’s no reason to change the plan now that you’ve reached the last step for tonight. Play along with their expectations, acting out the part of the Einzbern brother before you kill them. There’s no point in explaining your situation to a few soon-to-be corpses. (Pride)

[ ] Having seen the extent of Lancer’s power, you’re wary of killing anyone involved in the War who could potentially act as a counter to him. Maybe you don’t have to kill these people after all. Use Kōrakuhime’s presence at their home as a bargaining chip, threatening to kill Emiya’s wife and children if they don’t quit the city and give up on stopping the War. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[X] Doing away with the Emiyas now may have been the plan, but you’re no longer sure it’s a good one. Emiya claims that the Grail is corrupted and unusable, while Liliesviel hasn’t mentioned the issue at all. Perhaps you can get to the bottom of the question if you encourage a conversation between the two parties. (Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)
You should kill Emiya now. You know that, of course. You’ve been thinking about it all evening; but the righteous anger in his tone stops you. It’s not the voice of a man who’s been deceiving you and lying about a corrupted Grail to gain power. There’s Tohsaka’s comment to consider, as well. It hints at the wider picture of the last War, events they haven’t explained to you but that nevertheless support the story about Angra Manyu. You need some answers before you decide what to do about Emiya.

“Listen to me, Emiya,” you say. “The truth is, I don’t have any memories of my life before this Holy Grail War began. What I told you about becoming a Servant due to Caster is true, but my life before last Wednesday is a complete blank. Now, Liliesviel has some ideas about my being an Einzbern, and it is certainly true that I look the part; but I met you before I met her, and I didn’t lie to you.” You give a theatrical shrug before continuing, “as for my reasons for cooperating with you, I may have misled you a bit regarding their nobility. What matters to me first and foremost is survival. In a situation like the Holy Grail War, you need allies to survive, so I aligned myself with you; but if I followed your plans to the letter, I would vanish once the Holy Grail had been dismantled. Not a fate I relish the prospect of.”

“Do you expect us to believe that nonsense?” This time it’s Rider who steps forward to speak, glaring at you with those shining eyes of hers. For a moment, you can’t respond. A paralysis settles on your body, as if your flesh is hardening into the marble it resembles. Fortunately, the source of the effect is clear enough. Rider’s magical energy is invading your body through her gaze, but with some effort you’re able to marshall your own and force it out, negating the effect. Obviously she isn’t taking care to preserve you from her malicious gaze. At least you’ve been able to learn something about the nature of the attack she was using against Berserker.

Status Updated

“It’s your decision whether or not to believe me,” you reply, shaking your head, “but I’ve answered Emiya-san’s question about my motives. Now I have a question of my own for you three.”

“Fine.” Emiya still sounds angry, but the fire in his eyes has dimmed a bit. It seems your words have gotten through to him, at least partially. “I can’t blame you for wanting to live, if you’re telling the truth. Ask away.”

“You claim that the Holy Grail is corrupted by the presence of Angra Manyu, a demon summoned as a Servant during the Third Holy Grail War; that if the War goes as planned, the Grail will fill with the energy necessary for that evil to be born into the world, and cause unspeakable destruction. That’s so, isn’t it?”
“You shouldn’t need to ask that, Alberich-kun,” Tohsaka cuts in, as scornful as ever. If your explanation had an effect on Emiya, he’s the only one. “You’re wearing its shadow, after all.”

“I assure you, Miss Tohsaka, my cloak is a noble phantasm. It has nothing whatsoever to do with any ancient devil.” You give the woman a stern look. Between the ordinary people who think you’re a strange foreigner and the supernatural ones who accuse you of wearing a shadow, the number of people unnerved by your appearance really is growing to be infuriating. “Now, as I was saying,” you continue, “I find this assertion about the Holy Grail’s corruption odd, given that Liliesviel has mentioned no such thing to me. What do you have to say about Emiya-san’s claims, Liliesviel?”

It takes Liliesviel a moment to respond, as she’s giving Emiya a flabbergasted look. Then she lets out a burst of laughter, ringing through the night like the chime of silver bells. “That’s ridiculous, Onii-chan,” she manages, once she’s calmed down. “They’re obviously lying to you. Avenger corrupted the Greater Grail in Fuyuki. The one here is a completely separate ritual, which we put into place before the Third War even started, as something to fall back on if something went wrong with the altered ritual there.” The girl turns to Emiya next, ruby eyes sparkling with mixed fury and contempt. “That they’re separate should be obvious to anyone who knows enough about the Holy Grail to know about Avenger.”

“You’re the one lying,” Tohsaka flares up indignantly, “hoping we don’t know enough about your ritual to catch you out! Illya explained the whole thing fifteen years ago: what Avenger corrupted was the reservoir of power on the path to the Swirl of Origin, not just the Greater Grail! As long as you’re using the same ritual, you’ll be following the same path and giving Angra Manyu access to the world no matter where the Greater Grail is.”

“That’s just absurd! The Heaven’s Feel in Tokyo is a separate ritual with a separate power source!” Liliesviel stamps her foot in frustration as she snaps back at Tohsaka. Before the argument can go farther, though, Emiya speaks up again.

“It’s obviously something nobody’s really sure about,” he says flatly, “but that doesn’t change what we have to do. If there’s any chance of Avenger being born from the Grail, the Holy Grail War needs to be stopped. You’re putting the whole world at risk, doing this. If what you were saying about your life depending on the Grail is true, Saber-san, I’m sorry; but this is more important than any one person’s life.” His expression hardens as he speaks, taking on the emotionless stiffness of a steel mask.
“Look at this, Onii-chan,” Liliesviel exclaims furiously, her face flushed with anger. “They’ll make up any justification to steal the Servants’ energy and disrupt the ritual! It’s as clear as day, what they’re doing! Hurry up and slaughter them!”

You still don’t believe Emiya’s motivations are as base as Liliesviel claims, but the outcome is the same regardless. His conviction to stop the Holy Grail War and dismantle the Grail is obviously unshakable, which unfortunately means there’s no path open for you but to make good on your promise and remove Emiya from the War. Still, the conversation has given you ample time to think, and you’ve had a new idea. You may not actually have to kill Emiya, given that you have Kōrakuhime watching his home. He’s willing to sacrifice you to protect humanity against the risk of a corrupted Grail, but can he say the same of his wife and children?

[ ] Tell Emiya you have another ally, the Servant responsible for the arson, watching his home. If he doesn’t withdraw from the Holy Grail War and quit Tokyo, the rest of the Emiya family will meet the same fate as the mundanes she’s been hunting up until tonight. (Compassion)

[X] There’s no reason to take the unnecessary risk of making a threat. Just kill Emiya here and now, and have done with it. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Although the idea of giving Emiya a chance to live tempts you for a moment, you put it from your mind. There’s no guarantee that he would cave, and no tangible benefit to be derived from sending him away as a living enemy. Furthermore, using Kōrakuhime as a threat opens up the subject of her existence to Liliesviel, and could potentially jeopardize the alliance you’ve cultivated with the girl. No, there’s only one thing to be done now, and that’s kill Emiya. You look him in the eye, raise Heiligöffnungschwert, and proclaim, “It seems we’re at an impasse. I’m afraid this is the end, Emiya.”

Without further warning, you kick off the ground, propelling yourself straight at Emiya and bringing your blade around in a horizontal slash meant to decapitate him. Unfortunately, it doesn’t quite connect. You’re not moving with the lightning speed you expect of your Servant body; by comparison with your normal pace, you’re almost sluggish in fact. It’s as if there’s a weight pressing down on each of your limbs, dragging against the movement you’re trying to make. Obviously this is the other
aspect of Rider’s malignant gaze, that which was so helpful in defeating Berserker. A pity it’s working against you now.

Emiya is no ordinary human, either. His speed and skill are both impressive enough to be more appropriate for a Servant than a living man, and between his prowess and your weakened pace he can just barely keep up with you. He sways back out of the way of your first attack, shifting his feet to regain his balance as he comes back towards you to bring his white blade up in a vertical slash against your face while Heiligöffnungschwert is still off to his right, carried by the momentum of your strike. You rotate on your left foot, bringing your own body back to expose only a narrow opening and dodge his cut, at the same time bringing your left fist up in a hook. Emiya must have been expecting you to focus on your sword, as this armored punch slams into his cheek, sending the man skidding back away from you again, and moving him back into perfect range for your long blade. This time you don’t intend to miss, bringing it up to feint a vertical strike that you can easily divert into a real slash angled in either direction or a thrust, depending on how Emiya dodges.

Unfortunately, this attack too is blocked. In your rush to cut down Emiya, you lost sight of Rider, and that misstep comes back to bite you now as she strikes from outside your field of view to wrap one of her chains around your forearm, hauling back your blade with a shocking display of strength. In front of you, Emiya is muttering some kind of incantation in English. It’s something about a sword, but you can’t make out the details. You have a more immediate enemy to focus on, after all.

You spin to the right, moving with the momentum of Rider’s restraining pull and adding to that power with your own to create a sudden jerk that sends her off balance and brings her towards you. At the same time, you extend a pair of tendrils from your shadow and charge towards her. Taking advantage of the slack in the chain on your arm produced by the shortened distance, you bring Heiligöffnungschwert down from overhead, hoping to cut the agile woman in half. No such luck; she’s too fast for you again. You leave a gash in her chest, but no more. At the same time, she’s managed, by dexterously spinning her chain, to wrap another two layers around your sword arm and further shorten its range of movement.

There’s nothing for it but to give up the blade for now. You abandon your restrained arm, instead feinting a knee towards her gut. When she shifts to the side to evade that, you finally have her. Your magical appendages, unseen, wrap around her legs from below and hold the woman fast. You bring Heiligöffnungschwert around to cut her in two, and-

“Unlimited Blade Works!”
Everything changes as that shout interrupts you. The ground shifts beneath your feet, causing your strike to miss Rider, and suddenly the air around you is filled with swords. They’re plain, unpolished, practical hunks of steel, but sharp all the same, and the things are raining down on you seemingly from out of nowhere. It’s a mercy that you’re not without defense against large numbers of projectiles; in the split second before you’re turned into a pincushion, you draw *Kenōtis* around yourself and shield your body with its portal. A moment later, the barrage ceases and you open the cloak again to look for your adversaries. Before you see them, however, you’re shocked by the world around you. Rider is nowhere to be found, and neither is Tokyo. You’re on a desolate hill, all of bare earth, with swords everywhere sticking out of the ground. The sky is a fiery color, filled with gleaming sparks and grey smoke, and amidst the clouds enormous gears hang suspended by unknown forces, slowly turning.

At the peak of the hill stands Emiya, holding a longbow. Drawn back is a bizarre blade, something like an elongated drill crossed with an arming sword. It doesn’t seem to belong in the position of an arrow, but evidently that isn’t stopping Emiya from using it. Readyng your blade, you charge at Emiya once more. For you, deflecting a straight shot of an arrow from a visible archer is child’s play; you’ll let him make his shot and strike the head from his shoulders in the next breath.

Emiya looses the arrow. You cut it out of the air with *Heiligöffnungschwert*. Where the two connect, a blinding point of light appears. The world goes red. Then black.

*In your dreams tonight, you are once again with the black-haired woman who drank blood from a golden dish, once more seeing her from a child’s perspective. This time, however, you’re not looking on distantly, but immediately with her; and with the child’s mind. You recognize the woman, Mother, who is embracing you from behind; reaching around you to place her hands over yours, both pairs wrapped around the handle of a beautiful silver knife.*

*Before you is a table, of ornately carved dark stone, polished to a high gloss and inlaid with a silver geometric pattern of narrow troughs that form squares within stars within a great circle. On the table is a thing with four limbs, pale skin, and black hair growing from its head. It’s bound and gagged, but it struggles against the bonds and strange animal noises can still be heard through the muffling gag. It must be some sort of animal, of course, because it has no clothing; but you don’t recognize what sort.*

*That doesn’t matter, of course. All that matters about this thing is that it’s a new kind of magical tool Mother is showing you how to use. As you stand over the bound thing,*
your hands move with hers, and she guides you in piercing its flesh, first once; then a second time; and finally a third time, each time opening a new cut at a carefully chosen location. Soon the thing’s struggling ceases, as its blood pours out to fill the magic circle on the table’s surface and the color drains completely from its flesh.

“Now, remember how we did this today, honey,” Mother says in a tender, caring voice, “because one day you’ll have to be able to make use of trash like her on your own, without my help.” You open your mouth to reply, but before you can, the dream is fading, receding once more into the darkness of deeper unconsciousness.
When you awaken, it’s to the sight of elfin features, ivory locks, and ruby eyes reflecting the sight of your own red gaze. Liliesviel von Einzbern is leaning over you, and there’s an unfamiliar softness beneath your head that’s quite unlike any pillow you’ve ever used.

“Onii-chan, you’re awake!” Liliesviel sounds overjoyed at the prospect, though the reason is unclear to your groggy mind. It seems perfectly predictable that a sleeping person should wake up, after all. Then the memory of last night’s battle starts to come back, bits and pieces slamming into your mind like new cars in a pileup.

“Yeah, I’m awake,” you groan, “but just barely.” Your head is pounding as if Emiya’s still here, hammering on it with a dull chunk of iron.

[X] “What happened at the end of that fight? Where am I?” (Pride)

[ ] “What happened when I was fighting Emiya? Did Miss Ayaka make it out alright?” (Duty)

[ ] “What did Emiya do to me last night? What kind of magic was that?” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)
For a moment, you’re content simply to lie there, staring up into Liliesviel’s soft, caring eyes and taking in her beauty. She shares Kōrakuhime’s pale and flawless complexion, but not the sense of sculpted artificiality that haunts your sister. A faint flush colors her cheeks, and the mixed excitement and concern she feels at your awakening is writ plainly on fragile features that seem to cry out for a protector.

Your mind is wandering when you should be focused on the War. You feel groggy and tired, your body weighted down with somnolence in a way that’s new to you since becoming a Servant. It’s a deep, oppressive, human fatigue you’re inclined to associate with overwork and a deficiency of sleep. Yet surely your body shouldn’t be susceptible to either of these. Whatever Emiya did to you, recovering has obviously drained you significantly. Even the concern you should feel at that fact seems muted; buried under a layer of fatigue that threatens to drag you back into unconsciousness, as a long moment of silence passes between you and Liliesviel. Finally you manage with some effort to pierce through the haze, and put your mind to the matter at hand. You need to know what happened while you were unconscious, and hopefully Liliesviel can give you the full story.

“What happened at the end of that fight? Where am I?” As you speak, you start to sit up, looking to address Liliesviel on an equal level, but she presses a small hand against your shoulder.

“Please don’t get up, Onii-chan,” she says, in a worried tone. “I don’t think you’ve really recovered yet. You should rest.”

“I suppose I’ll rest, then.” You ease back down, and wait for her to answer your questions. As you tried to sit up, though, you got a bit of a look around and came to a conclusion about your surroundings based on the distinctively opulent decor: this is likely part of Liliesviel’s penthouse. Similarly taking stock of your own position, you find that you’re stretched out on a couch, with your head resting on Liliesviel’s lap. It’s undeniably kind of her to sit with you, but does seem odd nonetheless. Surely the girl could have made better use of the time you’ve spent unconscious by leaving you in a bed and attending to some other concern.

Liliesviel wears an uncertain expression as she contemplates your questions, and after thinking about them for a short time the girl admits, “I’m not exactly sure what happened when you fought Emiya, Onii-chan. He used a very powerful kind of magic called a Reality Marble to change the world around us, but everything happened too fast for me to really analyze the effects. Then there was that explosion, almost like he used a Noble Phantasm; but how he’d be able to do that doesn’t make any sense.” She pauses for a moment, looking perturbed, before continuing.
“Anyway, that explosion almost killed you, but it sent that Emiya flying as well, and his Reality Marble collapsed after that. I knew you’d die if I didn’t do anything, so I had Otto pick you up and bring you back here. This is the same tower you came to visit me in yesterday, by the by.”

“You say I would’ve died if not for your intervention?” It comes as a surprise to you. Even in your first battle against Berserker, he wasn’t able to inflict any wounds that couldn’t be quickly healed with the energy you receive from Ayaka. Mortal wounds, aside from the kind that kill instantly, simply aren’t something you’ve considered since becoming a Servant. Thinking back on it, you suppose the explosion Liliesviel refers to was created by the arrow you cut. It’s a mercy you hadn’t been hit by it, or there would likely be nothing left of you at all. Still, you’d like to know just how much it did to you from where it was. “Why wouldn’t I have healed normally,” you continue, “and how badly was I hurt, if it could’ve killed a Servant?”

“You were really hurt, Onii-chan,” Liliesviel says, her expression darkening. “Your arm was gone, most of your side was torn open, and there were cuts all over your body. It was horrible.” As she describes your wounds, her voice becomes more and more quiet, and her tone more and more pained. “You were healing, but it wasn’t fast enough to save you. You can only heal so quickly with the magical energy you’re receiving from your Master, you know.”

“Well, I’m clearly healed now. What did you do to save me?” This is interesting. Not having been conscious during the experience, you don’t share Liliesviel’s reaction to your wounds. Instead, you’re focused on the War potential that lies in whatever method she used to keep you alive.

“We~ll,” Liliesviel draws out the first syllable of her reply as if embarrassed and not sure how to continue, and a blush rises to her cheeks. Her hands fidget unconsciously, and it seems as if you can feel her pulse quickening through her legs, though that might only be your imagination. “Like I said, you weren’t healing fast enough because you weren’t getting enough magical energy,” she continues, her blush deepening. “So I just, um, had to give you some of mine, so you could heal faster.”

“Thank you, Liliesviel. It seems you saved my life,” you say, not as smoothly as you’d have liked. Realizing from the memory of giving Adelheid your magical energy what Liliesviel’s help entailed, you find yourself sharing her embarrassment at what happened while you were unconscious.

“A-anyway,” she says hurriedly, anxious to move on, “so far, only your body has healed, Onii-chan. You should still be very deprived of magical energy, and feeling sluggish and weak as a result. Be careful not to push yourself.”
“I understand; but while I’m resting, perhaps you can tell me more about what happened last night.” You need to put together a more complete picture of events as quickly as possible. As it is, things are simply too uncertain to formulate a plan of action for your next steps in the War.

[X] “What became of the others? Did your Lancer finish off Emiya, or were they able to escape?” (Duty)

[ ] “Did you bring Miss Ayaka back here with me? I can tell she’s alive, but is she unharmed?” (Compassion)

[X] “Why didn’t your Servant move to support me in the battle against Emiya and his Rider? Had we worked together, I’m sure we would’ve been able to cut those two down without difficulty.” (Pride)

[ ] Ask something else (Write in)

“Did you bring Miss Ayaka back here with me?” Your first concern, after how your fight with Emiya ended, is for your lifeline. The urgency of your need to get back on your feet depends in large part on whether or not Liliesviel kept her safe after you were knocked out. “I can tell she’s alive by the flow of energy coming to me,” you continue, “but did anything happen to her while I was unconscious?”

“I don’t know what happened to that girl,” Liliesviel answers in a casual tone, but her expression shifts to a look of irritation, and she pouts cutely at you as she continues, “I was in such a rush to get you out of harm’s way that I didn’t think about her. You wouldn’t want me to wait, would you?”

“Well,” you begin, not exactly sure how to answer the girl’s question while remaining diplomatic. You can appreciate her concern for you, but taking a moment to find Ayaka and remove her from the dangerous scene should surely have been doable. Fortunately you don’t have to come up with a diplomatic answer, as the question was apparently rhetorical. Liliesviel continues speaking after only a moment’s pause.

“Anyway, it doesn’t really matter. If anything happens to her, you can just become my Servant, Onii-chan. That would solve everything!” As she says this, Liliesviel gives you a bright, innocent smile. For a moment, you’re almost inclined to believe her. The sweetness and affection in her expression and voice are so pure that they take your breath away, and you feel like going along with whatever will make her happy. It only lasts a moment, though, before your reason reasserts itself and you
push the notion from your mind. There would be no purpose in your becoming Liliesviel’s Servant, after all. However charming she is, that doesn’t recommend her as a Master over someone as impressionable as Ayaka, who can easily be led to follow your intentions without protest. Not to mention the benefit you’ve had from Ayaka’s ability to sacrifice other Servants to empower you, there’s another issue with the notion, which you air promptly.

“Are you capable of supporting a second Servant, in addition to Lancer? He seems to use an enormous amount of energy.” You’ve been able to tell from the beginning that far more energy flows through Liliesviel than an ordinary human, no doubt as a result of a homunculus constitution tailored for magic, but even so the amount of power Lancer displayed was last night was absurd.

“Oh, there’s no problem with that,” Liliesviel replies, dismissing the concern with a wave of her hand. “Otto is a rather special kind of Servant. He generates his own magical energy, so the only time I have to use any is when I need to force him to obey.”

“How is that accomplished? I was under the impression all Servants required a Master to sustain their existence.” Your curiosity is piqued as the matter becomes more and more strange. Not only is her Servant a god, he can generate his own energy?

“You really have forgotten everything, haven’t you, Onii-chan? Maybe you never knew this, though.” Liliesviel strokes your hair affectionately as she considers your supposed amnesia regarding her family affairs. It’s something you’ve never experienced, and the feeling of her soft hand caressing you is strange, but not unwelcome. You can’t help feeling a pang of guilt at deceiving the girl, who’s grown so attached to you in such a short time. Her real family must have left her unspeakably lonely, you consider. “Otto couldn’t be summoned normally as a Servant, since he isn’t a heroic spirit; so he couldn’t inhabit a spiritual body prepared by the class container. Instead, we prepared a homunculus body for him to possess, aligned it to the class of Lancer, and bound him to the Holy Grail War through that.”

“I see.” At least, you partially understand. You still don’t feel you have a clear understanding of the precise workings of the Holy Grail or Servants, but at least the general idea makes sense. “All the same, Liliesviel, I can’t become your Servant just like that. Ayaka has faithfully worked to help me obtain the Grail despite not having a wish of her own, and the strange circumstances of our meeting; and whatever you may say about her aptitude as a magus, she has been useful to me. To abandon her now would be both foolish and wrong.” You’re trying to let Liliesviel down gently,
but you take a firmer tone as you finish, “I’ll ask once more, do you know anything about what happened to her after my battle with Emiya?”

“I really don’t,” Liliesviel insists, giving you another pouting look. “Like I said before, I was rushing to save you, and I didn’t see her. It looked like that Rider was doing the same for Emiya, though, so your Master probably hid and crept home after everyone had gone. Hmph!” The girl sniffs in irritation. Despite your careful reasoning, it’s plain to see that she would very much prefer if you simply forgot about Ayaka.

“I’ll bother you about it no more, then,” you reply. It’s plain that Liliesviel will say no more about Ayaka, but no matter; you can simply contact your Master yourself. You feign a return to sleep and, half-wondering why you didn’t think of this sooner, reach out to the girl via the telepathic connection between Master and Servant, asking if she’s alright.

‘Huh? Saber-san?’ Ayaka’s thoughts are groggy and confused, but definitely there. Then she suddenly snaps into wakeful alarm. ‘Saber-san! Are you alright? Did the Einzbern girl do anything to you? Should I use my last command spell to bring you back here?’

‘I’m fine,’ you return. ‘You needn’t worry about my safety, and definitely mustn’t waste your final command spell. Liliesviel’s kept me safe while I healed from last night’s wounds. I wanted to know what happened to you, however, and she didn’t know.’ You decide to leave out Liliesviel’s contribution of energy and her suggestion that you become her Servant. Those, you’re sure, are details Ayaka is better off not knowing.

‘Well, first Emiya-san did some kind of crazy magic, and you two were caught in an explosion,’ Ayaka begins, ‘then that Einzbern girl had her Servant pick you and her both up and run, and then Emiya-san’s Rider picked him up, and they went running back towards Emiya-san’s house. I stayed hiding behind the car until everyone was gone, though, so I don’t think anybody saw me. Then I walked home, which took pretty much all night, and I’ve been asleep since then.’

‘I’m glad you’re safe, then. My apologies for waking you. What about Kōrakuhime, have you seen her?’ You’re a bit surprised Ayaka made it home without being able to drive. The ruin of Kōrakuhime’s last victims’ home was quite a distance from the Shijou manor, and for a teenage girl to have walked it in a night is actually somewhat impressive. You should probably let her rest, but you’re anxious to know what became of your sister after the plan to kill Emiya fell through.
‘She’s fine. She was here when I got back, and she’s probably still in her room now. Now, if you don’t mind, Saber-san, I really need some sleep.’ With that, it seems, the conversation is over.

[ ] Get up. Liliesviel may think it’s a bad idea, but that’s unimportant. You need to get back to the Shijou manor as soon as possible to plan your next move with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime. (Duty)

[X] Continue to rest until you’ve recovered more. In the meantime you can devise a plan to deal with Emiya, or discuss other matters with Liliesviel. (Write in anything you want to ask her, and what you’re thinking in terms of a plan of action.) (Pride/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

With your concerns about Ayaka and Kōrakuhime put to rest, you’re content to let your fatigue overtake you for a time. You don’t quite slip fully into the sleep that you feigned in order to have your conversation with your Master, but linger on the boundary between sleeping and waking, enjoying the simple experience of conscious rest. It isn’t one you’ve had often, and the stress of the past days has been wearing on you more than you’d like to admit. To simply allow your mind to float aimlessly; to rest against another person and feel her warmth, without the need to discuss the future or craft some plan of action; to let the tense vigilance that has been your constant companion drain away, is a wonderful thing.

Nothing can last forever, though, and sloth least of all. After spending an uncertain amount of time in dreamy repose, you finally muster the energy to sit up. Liliesviel goes to stop you again, but this time you ignore the small hand pressing down on your shoulder, rising to a proper seated position and appreciating how much better you already feel than you did on waking. “Thank you for your concern, Liliesviel,” you tell the girl, who looks put out by your insistence on rising. “But I am feeling much recovered now, and couldn’t intrude on your hospitality forever. Surely your legs are getting sore by now.”

“Well, I guess I do feel a little stiff,” she allows, “but really, be careful, Onii-chan. You never know what kind of effects that explosion might have left.”

Her concern is touching, but all the same it’s so unwarranted that you have difficulty suppressing a chuckle. “That’s really going too far,” you insist. “I might expect that kind of worry from my Master, but I thought you had a better
understanding of a Servant’s biology. I may have depleted my magical energy, but surely that only takes time to fix.”

“Indeed,” a deep, rumbling voice cuts interjects, and you whip around to see Lancer, walking in from the hallway. “Now, the question is what sort of use that time should be put, isn’t it?” The old man has left his long coat and hat behind, but he still wears the deep blue, archaically cut suit that adorned his person last night. Equally unchanged is his perpetual smile, a malicious expression that seems to say, ‘I see the joke that you’re missing out on.’ After last night just looking at him is enough to put you on edge, though you don’t let it show in your face.

Instead you decide to play it cool and send his own casual attitude back at him, giving a lazy, well-rested smile and answering, “I’m sure we can think of something. In fact, I have some questions I’d quite like to hear you answer, Mr. Niemand; or perhaps you’d rather I call you Odin?”

“Heh heh heh. That’s the trouble with this Holy Grail War.” The old man lets out a dry chuckle, quite unruffled by your pointing out his name. “When I was around properly, it was enough to use a weapon. We gave them names, of course, but there was none of this business of calling them out. Now, as soon as I kill one man, everyone who can hear me knows who I am. Well, call me what you like, my boy. Perhaps I should’ve gone your route, and made new ones. Nobody learns a thing about you from the name of your sword, that’s plain enough. Something to drink, my boy?” As he’s been speaking, he’s also been fixing himself a drink from the antique liquor cabinet that sits in one corner of the room: whiskey on the rocks, the glass of which he now raises to you.

“No thank you; but surely a god such as yourself has no reason to hide his name,” you reply. “You don’t have any famous weaknesses for an enemy to take advantage of, after all, and your abilities are varied enough to make the formation of a battle plan against you based on your identity quite difficult. Why be concerned?”

“It’s nostalgia, more than anything.” In a surprising change, the mirth in Odin’s voice suddenly gives way to melancholy as he sits down across from you. “One of my favorite pastimes used to be going among the humans, taking on the guise of a wandering hunter and observing their society through their eyes. I had hoped to do the same during this Holy Grail War, but it seems that was not to be.”

This drives the smile from your face completely. While you’ve been putting the full measure of your abilities into fighting this War, Lancer has been primarily concerned with finding enjoyment by playing human? You had an idea of the fact by his manner, of course, but to have it thrown in your face so blatantly is really beyond
the pale. “This is a War,” you remind him, keeping your tone civil by sheer force of will. “We must all make concessions with regards to our pleasure, Lancer.”

“A fine standpoint,” Odin replies sarcastically, the damnable smirk still pinned to his face, “though it hasn’t stopped you from spending your morning reclining with the young miss.” Before you can speak up in your defense, he raises a hand in placating gesture. “You had an excuse, of course. So, on to these questions of yours: practical ones, I have no doubt. You’ll be wanting to know what’s happened while you were unconscious, yes?”

“Indeed. You mentioned your ability to gather information at our last meeting, so I trust you’ll know what the other Servants have been up to.” You keep your voice low and businesslike, taking care to hold back your rage. This man truly does know how to get under your skin, and from all evidence seems to enjoy it. “Archer, Saber, and Assassin. Where are they, were any of them defeated last night?”

“Assassin is an unknown quantity, I must confess,” the old man replies, with real regret on his face. “As for the other two, Archer and Saber have been locked in a stalemate for the past two nights. It really is rather amusing; Archer hasn’t the power to defeat Saber from a distance, while Saber has been unable to get close enough to attack Archer. I imagine those two will stay at one another’s throats until the end of the War.”

“And their locations?”

“The Masters’ respective workshops, naturally. I could lead you to them, but there isn’t much purpose in it. After all, your first priority at the moment is surely the magus who nearly killed you. Emiya certainly laid you low, didn’t he?”

“He is a priority,” you agree, “but not my first. I don’t intend that we should all move against him immediately, you see.”

“What about what we talked about yesterday?” Liliesviel returns to the conversation with an irritated question. From the sound of it, she’s set on killing Emiya as quickly as possible.

“Did Emiya’s wife absorb Berserker’s energy, or were you able to direct it to the proper Grail, Liliesviel?” You’re fairly sure it didn’t go against Liliesviel’s wishes, given how things went last night. Of course, if her answer isn’t what you’re expecting you’ll have to reevaluate your intentions.

“No, it went fine,” the girl concedes, “but that doesn’t mean they aren’t a threat.”

“They are indeed a threat, but that’s why I don’t want to rush back and attack Emiya tonight,” you answer, your expectations satisfied. “You must have noticed how last night I was able to empower myself by absorbing a portion of
Berserker’s energy. It is my intention to continue growing in power by defeating Archer, Saber, and Assassin, before returning to the matter of the Emiya family. Only then, when I am strong enough to crush the man and his Servant myself, will we have our reckoning!” As you speak, a savage grin rises unconsciously to your face.

Realizing you’ve become overexcited, you compose yourself and continue in a more normal tone, “so, as we’ve established there was no issue with Berserker’s soul last night, there should be nothing to be concerned about in the future. Provided you’re by my side, Liliesviel, I can battle against any of the other Servants and be assured that Emiya will be unable to interfere with the proper function of the Holy Grail War.”

“I suppose so,” Liliesviel replies, but she gives you an uncertain look.

Odin, by contrast, seems tickled by the idea. His smirk widens into a grin, as he exclaims, “A capital idea, my boy! Cut down your foes, one by one, until everything is perfect for your revenge! Then, when it’s all over, you can try your sword against me. Won’t that be a fine time?”

“It would certainly be a challenge,” you answer dryly, then return your attention to Liliesviel. “Now, I’ve spoken enough about my intentions, Liliesviel. Tell me, what do you intend to do? How does the Einzbern Master spend her days in the Holy Grail War?” Given that she has such a powerful Servant, it seems odd to you that Liliesviel hasn’t been more proactive. She could likely have won the War already, had she sought out enemy Servants and had Lancer deal with them as quickly as possible.

“I’ve mostly been staying here, you know. Can you believe that? I’ve never been to a city before, but now that I’m here Stengel says ‘such trivialities are beneath you,’ and wants me to stay locked up in this tower all the time. When we do go out, it’s only in the limousine, and I haven’t even walked on the street, except to fight last night.” Liliesviel sounds thoroughly put out by her circumstances, but more important to you is the way she’s misinterpreted your question. Before you can explain yourself, though, she continues excitedly, “now that you’re here, though, we can change that today. If I tell her you wanted to do it, even Stengel will have to give up! We can go to a café, and see a movie, and eat at a restaurant...”

Liliesviel’s eyes sparkle at the idea of getting to tour Tokyo with you, and you bite back your explanation of what you’d meant at the last minute. It’s not as if you don’t need to decide what to do during the day as well, after all.

[X] Take her up on the idea. One day of rest can’t hurt the War, and you have wanted to relax. Besides, Liliesviel’s so excited about the idea that you can hardly
bear to disappoint her. (Compassion) (If you have any ideas for places to go with Liliesviel, please write them in)

[ ] Turn down the idea. Staying with Liliesviel while you recover is all well and good, but you have more important things to spend your day on. Discussion of the Third Sorcery, for a start. (Duty/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Turn down the idea. It’s been a lovely morning, but you should really be getting back to the Shijou Manor; Liliesviel will have to decide how to spend her day on her own. (Duty)

Why not take her up on the idea? It’s certainly a change from how you’ve been spending your days up until now, but that doesn’t make it out of the question. If you continued your training with magic or Heiligöffnungschwert, you’d likely be exacerbating your energy-deprived condition, and though you’re loath to admit it you’ve been craving a break from the constant pressure of the War. More than those reasons, however, you find yourself moved by Liliesviel’s excitement. It’s the first time in your life, outside of Yumigawa’s memories, that someone has wanted to spend time with you for reasons other than the mortal peril of the Grail War, and when you look into the girl’s eyes your heart stirs; you simply can’t bring yourself to disappoint her.

“It sounds like a fine time,” you say with a smile, “but I hope you’ve found some local authority who can recommend us a good café for brunch. I’ve barely seen more of Tokyo than you have, after all.” It doesn’t seem like a good idea to make use of Yumigawa’s local memories at the moment, as bringing up that side of your existence would put quite a damper on Liliesviel’s pretense of family. Even if you did, though, the young man’s mind would have little to offer that might help plan an adventure. He’d explored youthful pursuits only sporadically, mostly keeping to home or school.

“A local authority?” Liliesviel gives you a quizzical look as she echoes your words, her head tilted slightly in confusion. “What do you mean? I simply had Stengel look for the best places.”

“The girl was glad to do it, too,” Lancer adds with a sardonic tone. “For all her airs about where the young miss can and can’t go, she was certainly eager to do her own ‘investigation’ of the town’s culinary offerings. Menials were just the same in my time.” He chuckles at the situation, though Liliesviel doesn’t share in his mirth.

Instead, she gives the old man a hard stare, narrowing her eyes and saying coolly, “You present her as a hypocrite, Otto. I hope you don’t mean to imply that
she and I are of the same social standing. Stengel is a faithful servant, and she has
been with me some time longer than you; only, a bit too strict in her judgment.”

She speaks now with a complete shift in her mannerisms. Gone is the childish,
innocent emotionality Liliesviel’s been displaying. This is a return to the icy,
contemptuous noble who cowed Ayaka when you came to discuss an alliance; and the
rapidity of her change is thoroughly startling. Lancer, though he must be more used
to this than you, looks a bit surprised himself. His ever-present smirk stiffens at the
girl’s rebuke.

Then, as suddenly as it had appeared, Liliesviel’s mask of high-handed,
ladylike wrath melts away. She returns her gaze to you, all warmth and affection once
more, and says, “Should I call her in so we can hear about where to go first, Onii-
chan?”

“Certainly,” you answer, and as soon as the word is out of your mouth,
Liliesviel gives two sharp claps of her hands. At once, the two maids enter from the
same hallway that they led Ayaka down on your last visit, and walk around to stand
facing you, one on either side of Lancer’s lounging form. You suppose their quarters
are back there, recalling the image of the tower that Kōrakuhime showed you in her
smoke. They’re as as stiffly in posture as soldiers at attention, and for the first time
you realize that the pair makes no sound as they walk. You suppose it’s one of those
skills that a noble family impresses on its servants, and make a mental note not to
look for Liliesviel’s maids by their sound.

“Lady Liliesviel, do you no longer desire privacy?” As the two maids come to a
stop, one of them speaks up. You’re uncertain whether it’s Stachel or Stengel, though;
standing beside one another this way, the two look almost identical. Of course, it’s
only a guess that one is name Stengel and the other Stachel; those were the two words
Liliesviel called when she had her driver take her away after your first meeting, but
since then she’s only referred to Stengel when speaking of the maids to you. As you
muse on the identity of the emotionless young women, though, Liliesviel is replying.

“No, I wanted you two now. Anyway, Otto came in to spoil my time alone
with Onii-chan ages ago, so you could have returned to your post then, Stachel.” That
solves that question for you then. The young woman with shoulder-length white hair
and a slim build is Stachel, whereas Stengel is the young woman with shoulder-length
white hair and a slim build. You’ll just have to pay attention and look for a difference
in their mannerisms, you suppose.

“I will bear it in mind, Lady Liliesviel,” Stachel replies with an odd toneless
acceptance, as if she were repeating words that meant nothing to her, learned by rote.
It doesn’t seem to bother Liliesviel, however, who takes the maid’s response without a blink and moves on to address her other servant.

“Now, Stengel, Alberich and I have decided to go out for brunch. What’s the best café you’ve found for it?”

“Lady Liliesviel, if you would only listen to me.” Now it’s the other maid, Stengel, and she certainly understands what she’s saying. This must be an argument they’ve had many times now, for she’s gone past respectful disagreement and straight into a ‘desperate, pleading voice of reason’ tone. “The city out there is positively teeming with a horde of common rabble: creatures of the gutter, unfit to be in your noble presence. You simply mustn’t go out and... mingle with them.” The word falls from her lips laden with disgust, almost seeming to linger in the air like some vile miasma.

“No! You won’t talk me around today, Stengel!” Liliesviel is having none of it, and stamps a dainty foot in irritation. “It’s not just about me today,” she continues, “Onii-chan is here as well, and he wants to see the city too. So where should we go? Where can we eat that comes closest to fitting my station, hmm?”

Stengel sends you a glare of concentrated resentment, but to Liliesviel she bows, and answers in a beaten, humble tone, “As you wish, Lady Liliesviel. I suggest you attend the Café Palmerston, in that case. Despite its unusual name, I believe you will find it better-suited to your taste than any other establishment in the city.” The maid pauses for a moment, glancing your way once again, before continuing, “Lady Liliesviel, might your humble servant be allowed a question?”

“Of course, Stengel, go ahead.” Liliesviel is all sweetness again, now that she has her way.

“If this... Saber is meant to be your brother, my lady, why is it that we continue to speak in the language of this country?” Then, addressing you directly, “Do you not speak German?”

“Until last night he didn’t.” Liliesviel answers in the tone of someone full of anticipation to see you open the gift they’ve brought you, simultaneously knowing and anticipatory. “But I really must thank you for reminding me of the wonderful news, Stengel.” Then she turns to face you on the couch beside her and takes one of your hands in hers, clasping it excitedly. “Last night, you know, while you were unconscious I had Otto see if he could give you your memories back,” she says, and your heart leaps into your mouth. You remember what Circe could do with access to a person’s mind. Odin may be a Lancer, but still it doesn’t bear thinking of; a horrid prospect. Liliesviel is unaware of your sudden dread, however, and continues, “He
couldn’t, unfortunately, but he said he did manage to do one thing: return your
memory of our language! *Verstehen Sie?*

To your surprise, you do. You nod, dumbfounded, and at her words it’s as if a
door opens in your mind on an entirely new mental region, previously unseen,
containing all the details of the German language, formal and informal styles, archaic
details contrasted with the modern, regional dialects, and as much other linguistic
information as you could care for. Shocked and at a loss for words, you glance over at
Lancer to find him grinning like a cat and giving you such a knowing look that you’re
certain beyond any shadow of a doubt he doesn’t share the slightest fragment of
Liliesviel’s delusion about your identity. “It was difficult,” he allows. “Your magic
resistance is made of stern stuff, my boy; I simply couldn’t get at those memories of
yours. Still, fortune always favors the diligent, and so I was at least able to return to
you the use of your mother tongue.”

It’s a wonder, you think, that the whole Einzbern household hasn’t denounced
Lancer as a liar and a rogue. The gloating is so thick in his voice that it’s practically
an accent, to your ear, yet none of the others seems to pay it any mind. Still, if he
wants to play the knowing conspirator before his Master, the object of his deception,
that’s his business alone. “I thank you for your gracious aid,” you reply in perfect
Austrian-accented German, and there isn’t a trace of humor in your tone. “The gift of
language is of inestimable value.”

“Wonderful,” Liliesviel exclaims in the same language. “Now that we can
speak properly, let’s go! Stengel, get the car ready.”

“As you say, Lady Liliesviel.” With that, Stengel exits the room, still looking
disappointed in her failure to prevent the outing. Stachel soon follows, trailing
protectively after her coworker. After a few minutes, Liliesviel judges that it’s been
long enough, gets up, and leads you to the elevator. It’s fortunate you’re in the habit
of dressing well, you reflect as the box descends. You’re still in a suit and tie. The
lowest available floor, it turns out, isn’t the lobby but a parking garage one floor
below street level, where Stengel has brought Liliesviel’s limousine directly to the
elevator door. There’s to be no walking through a parking garage for the Einzbern
princess, clearly.

The first part of the drive to Café Palmerston is made in silence. Liliesviel
stares out the windows, examining the various buildings with the glee that comes only
to children and those experiencing a city for the first time; you’re watching Liliesviel,
content to enjoy the visual feast of her faerie-beauty and innocent wonder; and
Niemand, an unwelcome presence to one side, is watching the both of you. Then, after
several minutes of driving, you finally think of something to say that can help you try
Tell me, Liliesviel, what is the Einzbern estate like? Very different from modern Tokyo, I must imagine.” It’s just an item of small talk, you think, the first convenient idea to come to mind, but it evidently catches Liliesviel’s interest quite nicely, for it draws her attention away from the window immediately.

“Oh, Alberich, you have to see it,” she says, and a dreamy, faraway look comes into her eye. “The way the castle towers up over the snowy plain in the winter; how it gleams in the summer sunlight, and the way that it broods under autumn storms... well, I can’t explain it. There’s nothing like it here.”

Intriguing. You wonder how she would have reacted to the palatial university you occupied during the Grail War in the Akeldama. A pity you can’t discuss the experience with her. “What about the interior,” you press on, “I know some magi are against modern conveniences, how is it there?”

“Modern conveniences.” Liliesviel waves a dismissive hand, as if time were a bothersome piece of lint clinging to her dress. “We have everything in the castle done with mystic codes, and live in a great deal more comfort than most people who use mundane things.”

“Very impressive,” you reply, “but it must have been extremely expensive as well, no?”

“No, it was quite trivial, Grandfather told me,” Liliesviel says. “I’m sure most families of magi-”

“-are not the House von Einzbern.” It’s Lancer, interjecting to cut off Liliesviel. “Missy, let me remind you that even among magi your family is on a different level. No-one but you and a few very highly placed lords of the Clock Tower could afford to replace all of the technology in their homes with mystic codes.”

Just then, the car comes to a stop as you arrive at your destination. The four of you, all except for Stengel, get out of the car and take a look at the café while she finds somewhere to park. Café Palmerston, from the look of it, really is one of the best places in the city. Fine decorations and a delicious smell of food fill it, but more significant is the line, extending out on to the street, of people waiting to sit down. A line which you have the privilege of strolling by, and being conducted directly to a table. Apparently Stengel managed to obtain a last-minute reservation for your party even while driving you to the café. Whatever the flaws in her attitude may be, you have to admit that the woman is a fine maid.
So it is that you’re just taking a look at the menu, deciding on how you want your coffee and what sort of brunch to have, when a high, feminine voice from the next table over lets out a cry of shock.

“Yumigawa-kun? Is that you?”

Glancing over towards the familiar voice, you see before your unbelieving eyes a very familiar face: fine-featured and aristocratic, pale-skinned and blue-eyed, framed by golden ringlets. The face, in other words, of Truvietianne Edelfelt. She’s sitting at the table immediately to your right, across from a woman who could be her twin, save an age difference of ten years or so. Surely this is a relation. Both are staring directly at you, Truvietianne with a look of absolute shock and her partner with an expression of mild interest.

[ ] Don’t get involved. Ignore them if you can, and if they press the issue play dumb. You don’t know her or recognize the name Yumigawa. (Self-Preservation/Compassion)

[X] Greet Truvietianne and see what she wants. You can probably come up with a new story for Liliesviel about another false identity if she wants an explanation. (Pride)

[ ] React some other way (Write in)

For a moment, you emulate the other patrons in staring, shocked and dumbfounded, at the girl whose cry has shattered Café Palmerston’s relaxed atmosphere. As you look, though, she catches your eye; and once she’s staring you full in the face her own questioning look turns into one of triumphant certainty. “I knew it, it is you,” she exclaims, all vindicated gladness. “Yumigawa-kun, what happened? How did you come to be here?”

Things are rapidly going from bad to worse, you surmise, and if you don’t manage to shut this girl up somehow she’ll say something that could ruin your burgeoning bond with Liliesviel permanently. The one fortunate thing about her continued speech is that there’s no doubt of who she’s referring to by “your” name. You won’t have to explain why you reacted to it, at least.

“I believe that girl has managed to mistake me for someone, though I can’t imagine how,” you declare in a tone of amused befuddlement, looking back to Liliesviel and keeping the recognition out of your face. “I’m sorry to interrupt our outing, but I think she’ll go on making a scene if I don’t do something. Hold on a
moment.” With that, you get up from your table and stroll over to Truvietianne’s, not giving Liliesviel the chance to protest.

“Miss, please restrain yourself,” you say, leaning over the table to address Truvietianne quietly. “I appreciate that you’re in some confusion, and that it involves me somehow, but, well; we are foreigners here, and this is a fine establishment. Surely there’s an image to be kept up.”

She opens her mouth to snap an angry retort at you, then closes it. Glancing around, she seems to catch your point: every customer in the place is staring at you. Some are more discreet than others, examining the odd situation out of the corners of their eyes, while others boggle at you directly, but there’s nobody who hasn’t noticed the scene. Of course, half of them were staring at you and Liliesviel already. It isn’t every day one sees people who look the way the Einzberns do, after all. All the same, Truvietianne’s shout did a fine job of hooking the rest of the rubber necks. So it is in a furious hiss, rather than an irate shout, that Truvietianne replies, “What are you playing at, calling me Miss and acting as if we’re strangers? Are you attempting to make a fool of me?”

“But we are strangers, Miss,” you reply levelly, playing the part of the rational man calming a hysteric. “I don’t recognize you, and I have never heard the name Yumigawa. Don’t imagine from my fluency with the language that I know the locals here.” With the calming done, you shift into a posture of incredulity to sell it, as you continue, “I mean, are you playing some kind of a joke on me? I can’t resemble this Japanese fellow that much, surely.”

Truvietianne looks at you hard, contemplating your appearance and muttering, half to you and half to yourself, “Well, your voice is different, and you’re taller, but your face is identical.” You can see she’s half convinced, and in that moment you have a change of heart. At first, you’d only intended to chase the girl off, but now a new idea comes to mind. If you can get her on your side once more, Truvietianne and her family’s resources could be quite useful to your cause.

“Identical? To my face?” You’re laying it on thick, but you imagine anyone in the position you’re pretending to be in really would be in an almost comical state of shock. “Well, you’ve certainly piqued my interest,” you continue. “Allow me to introduce myself; my name is Alberich von Einzbern.” It isn’t the name you’d like to give to a magus, but with Liliesviel watching you can hardly give another; so you introduce yourself as her brother and give a small, courtly bow. “I’d love to discuss this matter with you further, but I’m here in Japan on business and this is the only day I’ve been able to take off. My sister has a full one-day vacation planned out. Here’s my name and number, though; give me a call tonight, and perhaps you can tell
me more about this doppelganger of mine.” With that, you take one of their napkins, pull a pen from your coat pocket, and write down, “Truvietianne, (or Miss Edelfelt? Which did you prefer?) you have my identity right. I can’t speak now. At 9:00pm tonight, meet me at 645 Yasuoka Ave, near Yoyogi, and we’ll discuss.” Then, in much larger script, you add a random telephone number below the message.

Truvietianne just stares for a moment, glancing from you to the note and back again, and generally looking utterly taken aback. While she’s trying to decide how to react, though, her companion is more steady-minded. “What a marvelous coincidence,” she coos, addressing you in German. “To think we would run across you here. My name is Luviagelita Edelfelt. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Herr von Einzbern; particularly as I believe we are in this unfortunate country on the same business.”

“Indeed?” You cock an eyebrow at this. Come to think of it, didn’t Tohsaka mention another apprentice by the name of Luviagelita? If this is she, you may be in luck. “In that case, I believe we have much to discuss. Now, good day to the both of you.”

With that, you return to your own table. The Edelfelt pair, you notice, get up and leave a short time after you do, Luviagelita almost dragging Truvietianne from the place.

“Bizarre, don’t you think,” Lancer comments as soon as you’re back in your seat. “A man with your face and a Japanese name; it’s enough to make you wonder just how many amnesiac homunculi are wandering around the city!”

“Well, perhaps so,” you reply, “or perhaps not. It may have merely been a pretext to make contact with me. You saw how they perked up at the name Einzbern. Liliesviel, do you recognize the name Edelfelt as belonging to a clan of magi?”

“No,” she says offhandedly, “but that doesn’t mean they aren’t one. I don’t bother to learn about all the Association small fry, you know. They’re probably just some unimportant clan that missed their chance to join the War. More importantly, what are you going to eat? I think I’ll try their french toast.”

“The same, I think; although one can’t go wrong with a highly recommended restaurant you’ve never eaten at before. A café au lait, as well.” For the time being, you can put the Edelfelt’s from your mind. They’re more important than Liliesviel seems to think, but all the same they are a distraction. Today, you decided this morning, would be a day to rest; you intend to stick to that decision.

Brunch, when it arrives, lives up to the café’s reputation. The french toast is fried to perfection, managing to be simultaneously chewy and fluffy, and topped with an exquisite fruit compote. Liliesviel has whipped cream added to hers, but that level
of sweetness is too much for you. Lancer has an enormous helping of eggs, hash, and sausage, with which he seems thoroughly satisfied; and the maids enjoy identical orders of eggs benedict. Finally, when everyone’s sated themselves with Café Palmerston’s delectable cuisine, Liliesviel says to you, “Where shall we go next, Alberich?”

“Why don’t we go and see a film? Are you interested in the cinema, Liliesviel?”

“How about an arcade? Video games seem to be quite popular with young people in the city.”

“Have you ever been to an amusement park? I’ve heard they’re great fun.”

Say something else (Write in)

“Have you ever been to an amusement park? I’ve heard they’re great fun.” You’re not sure why the idea pops into your head; it just seems to fall out of your mouth in answer to her question. When you think about it, though, it does seem appropriate for a girl who’s been sheltered all her life. Haven’t there been girls at Yumigawa’s school talking about an amusement park that opened recently which they wanted to explore? You can’t recall the name, but you’re sure there was such a park.

“Oh, that’s a lovely idea,” Liliesviel exclaims. “I never have. Stengel, what can you tell us about amusement parks?”

“I can tell you that they are no place for the successor of the Einzbern to be spending her time,” the maid replies with a disdainful sniff. “Why, those places are worse than these public restaurants. Absolutely crowded with commoners, swarming about and packed into a too-small area. Lady Liliesviel, I implore you not to consider going to such a place. It is not befitting of your station.”

“Well, perhaps if grandfather had arranged a castle for me to live in, I would behave more appropriately for my station,” Liliesviel remarks, a note of irritation coming into her voice. “Anyway, if Alberich thinks it would be fun we’ll go. Let me rephrase my question: what can you tell us about the amusement parks here individually? Is there one which stands out?”

“If my lady insists.” Stengel inclines her head in a seated bow, and adopts a mask of passivity. You can see the anger in her eyes, though. It’s obvious that the longer this outing goes on, the more infuriated Liliesviel’s chief maid will become. Not that it’s any concern of yours, of course. She’s only a maid, after all; more like human
furniture than anything else. After taking a moment to consider, she continues, “Of these places of entertainment, the least horrid of them is...” she pauses for a sigh, a flicker of disgust passing over her face. “Magical Lunar Kingdom PhantasMoon. It is large, well-appointed with a variety of mechanical amusements, and because it was opened to the public less than a year ago, it is less encrusted with the filth of the masses than other parks.”

Magical Lunar Kingdom PhantasMoon! That’s the name of the new park that was the talk of the school, you finally remember it now that Stengel has brought it up. Given how popular it was among Yumigawa’s female schoolmates, you’re sure it’s the best place to take a young girl looking to enjoy Tokyo. “That sounds excellent,” you say. “What do you think, Liliesviel?”

“If Stengel says it’s the best, I’m sure it is.” Liliesviel gives you an enthusiastic nod. “Let’s go, then! Stengel, you can get us tickets on the way, right?” It strikes you as odd, how quick the girl is to agree with her maid on matters of individual preference, when she’s happy to crush opposition to the general course of action. It was the same way with the choice of café, after all. You can’t tell if Liliesviel genuinely puts that much trust in her servant’s preferences or she’s simply placating the woman’s pride.

In any case, despite Stengel’s resentment at the prospect the five of you soon pay for your meals and head on your way. This time it’s Stachel driving; as soon as you get in the car, Stengel gives her a quick set of directions and then gets on the phone to arrange your tickets. At least, that’s what you assume she’s doing. It’s difficult to tell through the tinted glass partition that separates the driver from the limousine’s passengers, but you can’t imagine any other reason she’d be on the telephone. In fact, that she’s using one even for this strikes you as odd. It is, of course, the most efficient way for her to do her job, but given the attitudes of the magi you’ve met so far towards technology you’d expect that one as obsessed with the nobility of a highborn magus lineage as Stengel would reject as many modern conveniences as possible. Apparently that’s not so.

“What’s on your mind, my boy?” Apparently Lancer notices your contemplation, as he speaks up.

“I was simply woolgathering.” You brush the topic aside, not wanting to discuss your uncertainty about the ways of magi with this arrogant old man. “What of you? You didn’t speak much at brunch; I can’t imagine that a pleasure-tour through a modern city holds much appeal for a war god.”

“Well, as I said, I do enjoy seeing the way mortals live.” Lancer gives you his condescending smile again. “The entertainment you make for yourselves is a part of
that, naturally. I don’t imagine the thrill rides will hold much appeal for me, but the peaceable people who come to enjoy the illusion of danger... well, they’re a subject I’ve had little opportunity to be around, since my summoning. As the little miss told you, we’ve been in her tower for the most part.”

“So you’re along for the people-watching, is that it? I’m surprised; I was under the impression that gathering information was your specialty.” If you have to tolerate Lancer’s infuriatingly superior attitude, you reason, you can at least prod him verbally. Unfortunately, the jab doesn’t make an impact. Lancer’s reply is unruffled and supremely condescending.

“Information is one thing, experience is another; perhaps one in your position in life hasn’t yet encountered that distinction. I’m going out to enjoy myself, as much as you are.” He raises an eyebrow for a moment, eyes gleaming with a ribald mirth, before continuing, “I hope my presence isn’t spoiling your courtship of our little princess, though.”

“Oh, not at all.” You keep your voice cool by force of will and return a smile as serene as Lancer’s is suggestive. “I’m sure Liliesviel and I can enjoy one another’s company with our without your observation.” Throughout this exchange, Liliesviel has been staring out the window, focusing on the passing scenery of the city. Now, though, she turns away to join the conversation.

“Of course you’re not spoiling anything, Otto,” she says with a sweet, open smile. “Nobody with a good relationship can have it spoiled just by someone watching.” She squeezes your hand, and you feel your pulse quicken at the contact. At the touch of her small, fragile palm, the comparison between porcelain and marble that crossed your mind regarding yourself and Kōrakuhime returns. Of course, Liliesviel is far more human than your sister, but the sense of fragility is there in both. “Anyway, if you’re my Servant you shouldn’t be away from my side for very long. It wouldn’t do.” Lancer looks mildly displeased with the fact that neither of you was flustered by his comment, and gives Liliesviel a nod.

For the remainder of the drive to the park, you join Liliesviel in watching the scenery. As you pass through Shinjuku, you get an odd feeling of disorientation, to see a city that you know yourself to be new to, yet have memories of living in. Even having made peace with your identity, moments like these drive home the unpleasant awareness of your own short lifespan. Perhaps you won’t be able to bring the Holy Grail War to a satisfactory conclusion, and you’ll wind up as an existence of a few weeks, and nothing more; a shadowy reflection of a person, greater in power but infinitely lesser in meaningful substance. To be created and sustained by magic is to be in conflict with the world itself, and as you reflect on this, the buildings outside
seem to take on an alien, defensive quality. The familiarity from your memories becomes academic, rather than instinctive, and the city begins to appear foreign.

You can’t dwell on these gloomy notions, though. They’ll only send you into a depression and work against you, you’re certain of that. Instead you resolve to put them out of your mind by focusing on Liliesviel’s enjoyment of the scenery. There’s no existential despair in her eyes. Instead she watches the shops and the passersby, enjoying the commercial displays and strange (to her, at least) people. She sees the city with a wonder that Yumigawa never felt, even as a child, and always envied. Perhaps you dote on those around you more than he, though; you’re content to enjoy the scenery vicariously through her.

Soon you arrive at Magical Lunar Kingdom PhantasMoon, located on the outskirts of Tokyo. The park takes up a truly enormous area of ground, with brightly colored tiling seeming to stretch away to the horizon behind the carefully brand-decorated wrought-iron fence that surrounds it. Where most fencing of the type would have spikes, this is tipped with crescent moons. Once parking has been found and you make your way to the main entrance, you arrive at an enormous archway decorated with the words “Magical Lunar Kingdom PhantasMoon” in gold. Four lines, for the four ticket classes, stretch out from the gate, but after Stengel has a word with one of the attendants your party is ushered through without difficulty. Whatever the Einzberns have paid, it’s obviously much higher than the average rate.

As you walk through the gateway, it’s as if you’re in a different part of the world entirely. None of the omnipresent skyscrapers of Tokyo are visible on the horizon; there are only the park buildings and the carefully placed landscaping to break the stretch of tiled walkway. Off ahead of you is an enormous ferris wheel, and between you and that huge structure are a number of brightly colored buildings housing indoor attractions. To your right, a range of lower buildings, likely shops and restaurants, extend towards a horizon dominated by a high-flying roller coaster. Most eye-catching of all, though, is the “Palace of the Moon,” a fairytale castle done all in white stone, blue rooftops, and gold ornamentation. As you’re taking in the sights, Liliesviel pushes a pamphlet with a map and list of attractions into your hand.

“Look at everything they have here,” the girl says excitedly. “Where should we go first, Alberich? A haunted house? That roller coaster? What do you think the Lunar Ascension is?”

Unfortunately, not everyone shares Liliesviel’s good cheer. Stengel is standing irritably and eyeing the crowd as if searching for potential assailants. Every time one of the park-goers comes too close to Liliesviel, the woman twitches as if tempted to attack. Stachel is by her side, but as still and emotionless as a statue. You’re not sure
if she’d enjoy this even if Liliesviel were to order it. Lancer has his ever-present smirk, but his eyes are constantly roving, taking in the crowd as if analyzing its members one-by-one. He wasn’t lying about lacking interest in the rides. Returning your attention to Liliesviel, you consider her question about the park’s attractions.

[ ] Suggest the roller coaster. You may be used to the speed, but that much vertical motion should provoke a reaction even in a Servant. (Thrill-Seeking)

[ ] Suggest the haunted house. It would be a treat to see the three girls frightened, and if Lancer manages to be startled you can poke fun at him from here to eternity. (Pride)

[X] You’re interested in what kind of a ride would be called the Lunar Ascension. Suggest you take a look at that. (Curiosity)

[ ] Look for something else in the pamphlet or another attraction you can see from here. (Write in)

“I wonder,” you reply, taking a look through the pamphlet. Unfortunately, there isn’t much detail about the rides there. There’s a list of names, with locations marked out on the fold-out map, but the only things the guide’s writers went into detail regarding are the restaurants and the story of the park’s mascot, a vampire princess turned magical girl. There’s plenty on those subjects, gushing reviews praising the no-doubt overpriced snacks and paragraph after paragraph explaining the princess’ struggle to restore the kingdom of the vampires by fighting earthly evil, but nothing in the way of telling you what the Lunar Ascension ride might be. It seems that if you want to satisfy Liliesviel’s curiosity, and your own mounting interest, you’ll just have to take a look.

“It doesn’t seem to say anything about it here. Let’s go and see what it is then, shall we?” You give Liliesviel a smile as you point out the mysterious ride’s location on the map.

“Sure! Stachel, Stengel, Otto, come on,” she says, pointing excitedly in the direction of the attraction. “We’re going to see what the Lunar Ascension is.”

So the five of you set off for the ride, making your way with relative ease, as it isn’t as crowded as Stengel had made it sound. Aside from occasionally having to jostle by a family or oblivious young couple, you don’t have much trouble with the other attendees. The park’s size and layout are more troublesome. It’s a huge place,
and the walkways seem to have been arranged almost at random, so that you’re frequently checking and re-checking the map to keep track of your location and goal.

Eventually you do arrive, though, and discover the nature of the Lunar Ascension. It’s an exceedingly tall white tower, with vertical rails attached to the side and a block of seats shaped like a cartoon rocket on the rails. From what you can see, about twelve people sit on these seats, hanging in the open air, as the rocket climbs the tower. From the name, you would have expected there to be a model of the moon at the top of the rocket’s ascent, but there isn’t any; just the metal pillar and the rocket. At the base of the ride is a small fence and gate, with an attendant letting people in one at a time from the line, which isn’t too long at the moment.

“Ah, I see you’ve found us a viewing platform,” Lancer remarks. “Lovely work, my boy. Once you’ve gotten up to the top of that and had a look at the scenery, I’m sure you’ll be able to find our destination.”

You send him an irritated look, but Stengel chuckles in spite of her usually formal demeanor. Perhaps her dislike of you takes precedence over her formality, or maybe the deadpan line caught her off guard. Either way, it’s a surprise to hear the stonefaced maid let out quiet laugh at your expense.

In spite of Lancer’s dry contempt for the attraction, the five of you line up and you’re soon on the ride. The thing slowly climbs the tower, and you have to admit as it rises that the view is rather nice. The grounds of the park are laid out in a great circle, with the lunar castle at the center, and the buildings, trees, and tile all form a pleasing pattern of curves spreading outward when seen from above. Of course, you’d need to rise to double the height of this tower to see the entire park properly, but all the same the view is pleasant. As it reaches the top, the stylized metal rocket comes to a halt, and you begin to wonder if Lancer was right. There really doesn’t seem to be any more to this ride than a viewing platform.

Suddenly the seats jerk, all at once, and sparks fly from hidden machinery against the rails. There’s a terrific din of grinding metal, and the sparks are followed by a plume of black smoke. Then the cartoon rocket is dropping like a stone, and Liliesviel lets out a shriek of terror. You have to move, or the impact will likely kill her! You bring your arm up, beginning to bend the steel restraining bar out of the way, and then-

Just before the seats impact the ground and, the rocket suddenly comes to a smooth halt. The steel bars locking you into your seats rise, and everyone is off the ride in a moment. The drop and mechanical failure, apparently, were all part of the show. All that’s there to show of what you were about to do is an oddly shaped dent in one of the steel bars.
“I was so frightened!” Liliesviel’s high, German voice rings out, and to your surprise she runs over and clings to you, as if for protection, as soon as you’re off the ride. The girl seems to be trying to contain tears, too, and there’s nothing for it but to stroke her hair and murmur reassurances to her.

“There, there,” you say, awkwardly trying to think of how one should go about comforting a frightened girl. “It was only part of the ride; and even if it weren’t, I would’ve made sure you were safe. Everything is just fine, Liliesviel.” She seems to take heart at this, and for a while longer you go on stroking her hair and feeling her small arms around your waist. At the same time, you watch bemusedly as Stengel gives the ride’s attendant a tongue-lashing fit to make any man pale. What were they doing, she asks, putting up such a psychologically dangerous contraption and luring innocent girls in with the appearance of safety? How can this man walk with his head high, she wonders, when he inflicts such emotional abuse on his customers? She continues in this vein for some time, and the attendant goes blue in the face. He seems to recede, as if trying to take shelter in his own clothing. Come to think of it, it seems as if there was another female voice screaming just beside Liliesviel. You wonder if Stengel doesn’t have another reason, besides her protective feelings towards her mistress, for her anger.

“Where would you like to go next, Liliesviel,” you ask, once she’s recovered from her sudden fright and gotten ahold of herself. “I’m sure not all of the rides here are as shocking as that one.”

“Thank you,” she says softly, smiling up at you as she straightens her dress and hair. “Let’s try the carousel. We went by it on the way here, remember?”

Accordingly, the next ride you visit is the carousel: going up and down and around in a circle while riding a statue of a horse mounted to a pole. It’s excruciatingly boring, but Liliesviel seems to enjoy it and that’s the main thing. Considering how sheltered her life seems to have been, that supposed failure was probably the first time she’s had to confront personal danger. Not exactly what one wants from a vacation, you’re sure. Still, there’s not much enjoyment for you in an attraction like this one. After the carousel ride comes to an end, you decide to...

[ ] Suggest another attraction to visit (Write in what you’re looking for) (Pride)
[X] Let Liliesviel decide. (Compassion)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)
There’s nowhere in particular that you’d like to visit at this park, so you decide to go along with whatever Liliesviel wants. For the rest of the afternoon, you, Lancer, and the two maids consent to follow along, trying out the various attractions. You visit a haunted house with actors that don’t frighten anyone half as much as the drop from the Lunar Ascension. Their idea of being frightening seems to have been developed no further than wearing a monster costume and leaping out of the shadows. Considering that this park is ostensibly vampire-themed, the failure of the haunted house is particularly surprising. After that, you have a whirl in an enormous spinning ride shaped like the bottom of a tin can, which assaults you with centrifugal force; and move on from there to a rollercoaster that draws screams during and queasiness afterwards from Liliesviel and Stengel. You even explore the food vendors a bit, where Liliesviel ignores Stengel’s entreaties against buying junk food and enjoys a large serving of cotton candy.

As the sun sinks in the sky and the afternoon turns towards evening, Liliesviel decides to conclude your trip to the park with a ride on the ferris wheel: an enormous white structure, designed to vaguely resemble a full moon by having its paint carefully marred in such a way as to suggest craters. If there’s any viewing platform in the Magical Lunar Kingdom, it’s this wheel; the thing dwarfs the lunar ascension ride at its full height, and if it were set next to the castle that occupies the center of the park, that too would appear small by comparison. The five of you queue up and get into the gondolas two to a cabin, so that you go up with Liliesviel, the two maids are together, and Lancer takes his ride by his lonesome; not that the lack of a companion seems to bother him. In fact, for all his smiling manner, you get the distinct impression that “Otto Niemand” isn’t at his ease in the crowded park. There’s a look of revulsion behind his eyes when he looks at the people around you, as if he can’t stand to see them, but doesn’t want to show it. It’s such a subtle thing that you hadn’t noticed it until now, but now that you’ve seen it you realize it’s been in his eyes from the beginning. Whatever he may say, Lancer isn’t happy to be in Tokyo.

Your moment of reflection is broken. With Stachel, Stengel, and Lancer all in their respective gondolas, the next one comes into place at the boarding step and the attendant opens the gate to let you and Liliesviel board. You take your seats in the gondola, there’s a creak of machinery, and then you’re off; the ferris wheel is in motion, and you’re slowly ascending over the park. As the gondola rises into the air, the golden light of sunset pours in through the windows to gleam on Liliesviel’s hair and skin, giving her the impression of pearl, seen through a lens of topaz or amber. The sun is reflected in her eyes as she gazes out the window, the orb of pure light becoming
a dusky red circle, an intermediate ring between pupil and iris. Then, after staring out
the window for a long moment, she turns to you and begins to speak.

“Thank you for coming here with me today, Alberich.” Her voice is soft, in
contrast with the energy she’s displayed since your arrival, and she gives you a gentle
smile as she speaks, “It probably would’ve been smarter for you to go home and rest
there, and make plans of what to do in the War; but you came with me instead.”

“I was happy to. It’s been a fine day, and we all need some time to relax,” you
reply, matching her honest gratitude with frank good cheer. “Besides, I couldn’t leave
you to waste away in that tower. You needed to see the city for yourself, to take a
breath of fresh air. It was obvious.”

“You know something, Alberich?” Liliesviel’s smile takes on a playful quality
as she asks the question.

“Go on.”

“I believe that was the first time anyone’s spent time with me because they
wanted to. You knew that it couldn’t mean anything to the War, but you spent your
day with me anyway. Everyone else has always had some other reason they had to be
with me; but you were different.” Liliesviel is smiling at you as she says it, but the
implied pain of the statement hits home all the same, as you realize how crushingly
lonely this girl’s life must have been.

To be a magus and Master at her age, she must have been being trained
constantly while growing up, and of course it was the callously obsessed Einzbern clan
that did that raising. After six Grail Wars, you have no doubt that they treat their
Master purely as a disposable tool, hopefully able to obtain the Third Sorcery for the
family at last. Then there are the maids, who are paid (or compelled, in the case of
homunculi) Servants and unlikely to truly care for their mistress, and Lancer, an
unpleasantly abrasive personality clearly uninterested in getting any closer to
Liliesviel than he is now. Everyone in her life has been merely doing a job, of which
she happens to be a part. It’s truly pitiful, when you consider the matter.

[X] Pull Liliesviel into an embrace, and reassure her that there is one person at least
who doesn’t need a practical reason to be around her. (Compassion)
[ ] Make some sympathetic comments, but otherwise retain your distance. (Pride)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)
As you look at Liliesviel’s smile, those angelic features so full of happiness over something that should be a trivial and ordinary part of life, you feel an odd mixture of emotions. Sympathy for her lonely existence mixes with a rush of desire for her, and almost without thinking about it you cross the gondola and pull her up to you, enfolding her in an embrace. Liliesviel lets out a little squeak of surprise, and the hanging cabin wobbles from your sudden movement, but you pay no heed as you wrap your arms around her, feeling the warmth of her small body against yours and the silken softness of the great mass of wavy hair that cascades down her back.

“You’ve been all alone, haven’t you?” you whisper, and there’s more genuine emotion in your voice than you would have believed, a few moments ago. At first, Liliesviel goes stiff at your unexpected touch, but as you speak she softens, and you can feel the heat of her flushed cheek against yours as she brings her own arms up to reciprocate. “You needn’t worry about that anymore, Liliesviel. I’m here for you. Not just as an ally, as—” you break off, feeling oddly bashful, before continuing, “well, as someone who cares about you.”

“Oh, Alberich,” she sighs, her warm breath tickling your ear, and that sweet voice so close sends a new thrill through you. “Thank you. You don’t know how happy it makes me, to hear that.”

Perhaps you do know, though, for the thought suddenly enters your mind that you’re in a rather similar situation yourself. Haven’t all of your acquaintances had their own ulterior motives as well? Matsuda and Ogawara were dependent on you for survival; as was Circe, in a different way. With Truvietianne, an alliance of convenience gave way to that same need for protection. Adelheid may have approved of you as a combatant, but she didn’t join you until it was a choice between that and death, and Kikuko was enchanted to follow you. Even after you escaped the Akeldama the pattern continued with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime. Yet Liliesviel, who commands a Servant powerful enough to have already won the Grail if she wished, has delayed the pursuit of that goal for your sake. It can only have been for your sake, considering how she abandoned the battle last night to heal you, and her behavior with you today.

You set her back down gently, that body so light that it feels almost as if she could break under your touch, and say, “I’m glad of that, Liliesviel; and I’ll say this. We will seize the Holy Grail together, and gain the Third Sorcery. You won’t be alone anymore, after this.”

“That’s right,” she says, still smiling up at you. “We will.” Before the two of you can say more, you discover how wise of you it was to set her down when you did, for the gondola comes to a sudden lurching halt and the doors pop open. You must
have been holding Liliesviel for much longer than it seemed, and you startle at the realization. Seeing your reaction, Liliesviel’s smile shifts to a wry smirk, and she says laughingly, “You’re lucky Stengel didn’t see you. She’d never let you hear the end of it.” With that, the two of you depart the Ferris wheel and walk out to rejoin your party, waiting by the side of the line.

After that, the five of you move on to dinner. As the sun falls below the horizon, Liliesviel’s interest in the amusement park disappears with it, and of course the rest of you are perfectly satisfied to leave the place. With Stengel’s guidance, you head to one of Tokyo’s better western-style restaurants, and enjoy a fine steak dinner. It’s a revelation to you, used as you are almost exclusively to Japanese food, but Liliesviel’s excitement is subdued by comparison to the rest of the day’s events. At one point, she remarks that Stengel has made better meals, vindicating the maid’s enormous pride in her household. Then the day is at an end, and as Stengel is driving back to the Einzbern Tower, you ask, “Would you mind dropping me off where we met Emiya last night?”

“He~h?” Liliesviel lets out a confused sound. “Why there?”

“As far as I know, my car is still there,” you explain, “and I’d like to bring it back to the manor rather than leaving it out another night.”

“Rather brazen of you,” Lancer comments. “You’re not afraid Emiya will return to the scene of the battle and lie in wait?”

“No, I don’t believe he would.” You make your answer in a cool, offhand way, not wanting to give the old man any satisfaction. “His first priority was that arsonist Servant, so he should be prowling around whatever house was being burned last night; or more likely he’ll have gone to ground, to heal from last night’s wounds.” Of course, you know that Kōrakuhihe didn’t do any hunting last night. It’s the latter notion you really have faith in, but it’s always good practice to provide multiple reasons for a point.

“If you say so,” Liliesviel says hesitantly, “but be careful, alright?” She gives you a nervous glance, no doubt remembering the carnage caused by that strange explosive that Emiya used.

“I’ll be the soul of caution.” You give her a reassuring smile, at which she seems to take heart. She opens the partition and tells Stengel where to go. Soon after, you’re dropped off before the same burned-out ruin where last night’s battle took place.

Sure enough, you observe as you step out into the chilly November night, there’s no-one here. The street is silent, save for the faint sounds of families going about their evening business in their cozy houses. Only the charred lot and the cracks
on the street where Berserker was slain betray that this street has ever been home to any activity but the mundane. It’s odd, now that you look at it again, that no local authorities have taken action regarding the ruined house or the damage to the street. You’re not sure of the protocol for these things, of course, but there must be some division of city government tasked with clearing away this sort of wreckage.

Well, it’s no concern of yours. Putting the matter from your mind, you quickly locate Vaissett’s car and get in. Fortunately you managed to hang on to your keys during last night’s battle and today’s outing, and the thing starts up with a smooth mechanical purr. As you drive back to the Shijou Manor, you consider your situation. There’s little about your day that’s truly worth discussing with Ayaka or Kōrakuhime, given that you didn’t spend it doing any sort of preparation for tonight’s fighting. All the same, the two will no-doubt both want details on what you’ve been doing since they lost sight of you in an explosion. Then again, it’s about eight in the evening right now, and your note instructed Truvietianne to come and see you at nine. Perhaps it would be better to simply wait for her, and make your next plans with your Master and sister after that conference is concluded.

[X] See Ayaka on returning. (Duty)
[ ] See Kōrakuhime on returning. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Wait for Truvietianne’s arrival first. (Pride)
[ ] Make other plans for your return. (Write in)

After giving the matter its due consideration, you conclude that the first person to see is your Master, the no-doubt worried Ayaka. After your last conversation ended with her telling you she needed more sleep, she was left somewhat in the dark as to your own circumstances beyond having healed overnight, and probably expected you to have already returned to the Shijou Manor. Now that you consider the matter, in fact, it strikes you as rather odd that she hasn’t attempted to contact you today. It seems to you that the course of action most like her would be to, upon waking and finding you still absent, promptly reach out via your mental connection and ask where you’ve been. Yet you’ve had no worried inquiries as to your condition, a fact which weighs on your mind as you drive home. You can’t help wondering what could have prevented her. After all, if she’d been in some danger she surely would have reached out to you for help, just as she would’ve asked what was delaying you under normal circumstances. Whatever caused the girl to behave in this
way must not have been urgent, then, or must have prevented her from communicating. In either case, you’d rather investigate on your return than reach out now. If it’s the former, you’d like to see her face and judge her emotions; if the latter, your mental link will be useless.

Those are the thoughts running through your mind as you pull in to the Shijou Manor’s garage and step out of the car, though the light shining from the first floor windows does diminish your concern somewhat. Fortunately, it doesn’t take you long to find Ayaka. She’s sitting at the coffee table in the living room and sipping tea, waiting in just the same way that her brother once waited for you.

“Good evening, Miss Ayaka,” you say, walking up and taking a seat across from her. “How was your rest? I do hope that you’re feeling restored after last night’s exertion.” It’s better to approach the matter obliquely, you think, than to ask directly why she wasn’t concerned over your absence.

“I’m much better, thank you,” comes the reply, but her tone is anything but. She sounds downright depressed, in fact. “What about you, Saber-san? Did you have plenty of fun with the Einzbern girl? Since you eventually came back, I guess you decided not to change Masters.” Well, that explains it. No doubt Ayaka has been wallowing in the same self-loathing that led her to break under Liliesviel’s insults during their first meeting. She’ll have been too wrapped up in her own inferiority and unworthiness to even try to contact you. Behind her glasses, she’s staring into her tea instead of meeting your eyes. This certainly calls for deft handling.

“One derives little enjoyment from convalescence, whatever the setting,” you answer stiffly, managing to sound faintly offended. “Miss Ayaka, you don’t believe I chose to spend my day without returning for pleasure, do you? If not for the enormous consumption of magical energy required to heal from last night’s wounds, I would have rushed back here posthaste.” This is the big gamble, of course. If Ayaka, by some shocking chance, convinced Kōrakuhime to show her your day by divination, you’ll be caught out; but you don’t believe the two girls could get over their dislike of one another quickly enough for that.

“Do you really mean that, Saber-san? You only stayed with that girl to rest?” Ayaka looks up finally, turning her dewy gaze on you, and you know you have her now. She isn’t sure whether or not she believes you, but the important thing is that you can see she wants to believe what you’re saying. There’s no way she saw you walking around an amusement park with Liliesviel.

“Of course,” you answer, reaching over the table to clasp her free hand in yours. “Haven’t I told you before that I’ll never betray you for another Master? I didn’t spend a moment away from you longer than I had to, if I was to be ready for
battle tonight.” You stare into her eyes as you speak, putting as much truth, gallantry, chivalry, and other convincing knightly qualities into your voice and gaze as you can, and Ayaka nearly swoons with relief.

“Oh, Saber-san, it’s so good of you to say that. I’m sorry I didn’t have more faith in you, I know I shouldn’t have worried.” She gives you a shaky smile, some color coming back into her cheeks. “After all, you need a Master who can perform the Shijou sacrifice, don’t you?”

“That’s right,” you say, giving her hand a reassuring squeeze. “I couldn’t do without you, Miss Ayaka. As for your concern, that’s nothing to apologize for. I ought to be the one begging your forgiveness, for making you worry.”

“No, no.” Ayaka shakes her head in vigorous denial. “You needed to get your energy back, like you said. I was the one in the wrong, for not being able to just believe in you or having the courage to ask if everything was alright.”

Well, if you continue on both trying to take the blame in this way, the conversation can stretch out indefinitely. Instead, you resolve to wrap the subject up by announcing, “It seems we both forgive one another, wherever the blame really is.” Then, before Ayaka can take issue with this statement, you move on and change the subject. “Now, Miss Ayaka, do tell me what you and Kōrakuhime have been doing with yourselves today. Have you made any plans for the War in my absence?”

Ayaka shakes her head, her expression becoming downcast once again. “No,” she says, “I haven’t even been able to get Kōrakuhime to speak to me. She locked herself in her room this morning, and doesn’t seem to have any intention of coming out.”

Certainly Kōrakuhime hasn’t lost the influence of Ogawara’s personality, you consider internally. All the same, whatever her reasons for it might be, her self-imposed incarceration will certainly cause you some difficulties tonight, when your sister isn’t there to be relied upon. You’ll need to speak to her. On the other hand, nine is fast approaching, and with it Truvietianne and her relative. Perhaps it would be wiser to focus on them in the immediate future and deal with Kōrakuhime after the Edelfelts have departed once more.

[X] Go and see why Kōrakuhime won’t come out of her bedroom. (Compassion)
[ ] Pass over the topic and tell Ayaka about Truvietianne’s visit. (Duty)
[ ] Find an excuse to be alone and receive Truvietianne on your own. Dealing with the Edelfelts will be important, and you don’t trust Ayaka’s presence to be more helpful than harmful. (Pride/Self-Preservation)
“I suppose I must see what’s keeping her, then,” you say, and get to your feet. Since you have no way of locating Saber, Archer, or Assassin tonight without Kōrakuhime’s help, it’s imperative that she be ready to act. You had considered putting her off until after your discussion with Truvietianne Edelfelt, but on second thought it’s likely that Kōrakuhime will be useful in that conversation; she’s another person who lived through the Akeldama, after all. In any case, it’s likely that her only reason for refusing to see Ayaka is a dislike for your Master, so drawing the girl out of her room hopefully won’t delay you too much.

Without waiting for Ayaka’s response, you walk out of the room and head up to the second floor, making for the room where Kōrakuhime’s been sleeping. There is a light under the door, you notice, so you won’t be waking her up. At your knock, a lazy, “...come in,” drifts out. She sounds astonishingly distant and disinterested, but at least it isn’t a refusal. You open the door to find your sister stretched out on her bed, lying atop the blankets fully dressed and staring at the canopy, an even more vacant expression than usual on that her doll-like face.

“I hope you’re in good health,” you say by way of greeting. “Didn’t find yourself faced with any trouble at the Emiya residence, did you?”

“Hello, Ani-ue,” she replies voice dreamy and emotionless. She doesn’t move to face you. Then, after a pause, “No... Emiya’s wife didn’t take any sort of... action. Only you were... in danger last night.”

“Are you sure nothing’s happened? You seem rather drained, you know; listless, in fact.” The concern in your voice is genuine. Looking at her, you can’t help wondering what’s induced your sister’s malaise. She’s been subdued since you met her, of course, but not to this degree. “I might have understood at first, but since last night you’ve been drawing as much energy as you need from the leylines, haven’t you?”

“I’m perfectly... fine, Ani-ue, only taking my ease,” comes the soft reply. “As a Servant... I can sleep as much as I please, and feel no... ill-effects. Had you discovered that, Ani-ue?”

“No, I’m afraid I haven’t had much time to sleep since we escaped the Akeldama,” you answer, with just a trace of irritation. “The War has rather been weighing on my mind, you see.”

“Oh?” Kōrakuhime draws the simple interrogative out into a lengthy sigh of curiosity. “It seemed as if you had... plenty of time for rest today, Ani-ue. I found
your... date with little miss Einzbern quite diverting, you know. You were so gallant... ready to bend steel to rescue her from a funfair ride... chivalrously groping at her when she spun out her little tale of woe...” Crimson lips curve into a lazy half-smile, and she sends you a sidelong glance as she speaks. “Yes, you two do make a... lovely pair.”

She was watching you? Damn that smug, mocking- You can feel the muscles in your face stiffen, as you suppress the rage that fills you and keep your expression an impassive mask. You can’t keep the acid from leaking into your tone, though. “I’m glad you found my day up to your standards of entertainment,” you reply, “but don’t you think it’s a tad impolite to look in uninvited?”

“No more... impolite... than vanishing unannounced, and leaving one’s comrades to go... playing tourist.” Now her tone carries a note of anger as well, and she pushes herself up on her hands to face you, turning on her side. “I was worried for you, Ani-ue. You can hardly blame me for... wanting to know the extent of your injuries. When I... discovered you at a café, of all places...” She pauses again, for a long few moments, before finishing, “as I have said, my intrusion was no worse than your neglect.” With that, the girl flops back down on her pillows.

After your initial flare of anger at Kōrakuhime’s nerve, you try to calm yourself enough to consider her statement. She does have a point, you can see that; if you’d insisted on having Ayaka inform her of your situation, she might not have felt compelled to observe you through divination. Probably you should forgive her, or perhaps there’s nothing to forgive; no just reason for your fury. Even so, you just can’t quite do it! The mental image of this girl sitting in bed and watching you as if you were some daytime TV drama, or one of the anime that Ogawara obsessed over, makes your blood boil; and the offhand manner she’s treating you in now only makes it worse. She doesn’t even feel it necessary to sit up straight and look at you!

Almost before you know what you’re doing, you’re striding across the room and leaning over Kōrakuhime, taking a limp wrist in one hand and her chin in the other and pulling her up to face you. “Look at me, damn you, you were doing it enough earlier,” you hiss. “You won’t speak to me that way, sister or no!”

Beyond a faint color in her cheeks, Kōrakuhime’s face doesn’t betray a hint of reaction. She doesn’t even twitch, just keeps that placid half-smile. Then she actually laughs, a soft, fluting sound that lasts only a moment. “You do rise to anger so easily, Ani-ue. I would dearly like... for your Liliesviel to see your face as it is now. Perhaps she would... take less comfort in ‘Onii-chan’ being at her side.” Her voice drops almost to a whisper as she continues, “Ah, but then... perhaps it is better... for this face to be one you show only to me...”
You drop her back onto the bed, recoiling as if stung; it’s either that or lose your temper completely. Nothing short of violence will make an impact on Kōrakuhime, it seems. Fortunately, you have enough self-control not to lose your temper far enough to let it come to that. Just enough. Better to change the subject, you think. “If you saw us in the café,” you say, forcing calm back into your voice, “I’m sure you saw who I met there, no?”

“Oh, that’s right... Edelfelt-san will be coming to see us, won’t she? Quite soon, at that. I certainly... look forward to seeing her again, after all that has occurred.” As you recall, Truvietianne did her best to completely ignore Ogawara, as one might disregard a particularly grotesque beggar. You don’t doubt Kōrakuhime is anticipating throwing her transformation in the haughty girl’s face. “What of your Master, though?” Kōrakuhime continues, “Do you intend to... bring her into your conversation with Edelfelt-san, considering the... circumstances of your reunion?”

That’s something worth considering. Although your first thought was to have Ayaka meet Truvietianne as your Master, she could contribute little to a conversation between survivors of the Akeldama, and she’s already shared the extent of her knowledge of the Tokyo Grail War with you. Besides that, if she were to find out about how you really spent your day, and your placating lies a short time ago, the consequences to her mental state could be horrible. Then there’s the simple fact that you’re not yet certain what you’ll say to Truvietianne, and matters can only be complicated by the addition of more people to the conversation. Ideally, you would discuss your experiences since escaping the Akeldama alone with one another, but even with that out of the question, you can at least limit the additions to two. Then again, it does seem improper to leave your primary partner in the Grail War entirely out of this kind of negotiation...

[ ] Leave Ayaka out of this. You’ll meet Truvietianne in your car, and discuss matters at another location. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Ayaka should be a part of the conversation. You’ll invite Truvietianne in and discuss matters over tea. (Duty)

[ ] Come to a different conclusion (Write in)

“Yes, I think Miss Ayaka will have to take part,” you say, finally making your decision. “I’m not certain whether Truvietianne will be our ally or our enemy, now that we’re no longer in the Akeldama, but I’m certain she won’t go away as an
uninvolved party. As my Master and your host, Ayaka deserves to be a part of that conversation.” As for just how you met Truvietianne today, you’ll just have to gloss over the subject. Hopefully it won’t be too difficult.

“In that case... you ought to be down in the living room, telling her.”

Kōrakuhime waves a languid hand towards the door. “If Edelfelt-san is to arrive at nine... you have little time to explain.” She’s right. You glance at your watch, and see that it’s less than a quarter ‘til the hour.

“A good point,” you reply as you head for the door. “Be down shortly, will you?” With that, you return to the living room, where Ayaka is still sitting. She’s moved on from drinking tea to reading a novel, you observe.

“There was nothing to worry about, it seems,” you announce, sitting down once more. “Kōrakuhime was conserving her energy, spending the day resting; much as I was, though not in service of healing.” Better to make that claim than to say your sister is too haughty to pay any mind to Ayaka, and most likely ignored her out of spite.

“Oh good,” says Ayaka, closing her book and laying it on the table. The spirit has come back into her voice, you observe. It seems your words earlier dispelled her depression well enough. “If we’re all recovered, then, what do you think we should do tonight, Saber-san? Go looking for one of the other Servants?”

“To be sure, although not just yet. Before we can set about coming to grips with the foe, I’m afraid you’ll have to play the hostess and receive a guest of mine.”

“A guest?” Ayaka gives you a confused look, tilting her head to one side. “Are they another Master?”

“Not a Master, but a magus: Truvietianne Edelfelt,” you answer. “She’s one of those who survived the Akeldama with me, and met Liliesviel while investigating the Tokyo Grail War. We recognized one another, and I asked her to meet me here, so that we might discuss matters without Einzbern eyes watching us.” You darken your expression just slightly as you mention ‘Einzbern eyes,’ for Ayaka’s benefit. “She had a relative with her by the name of Luviagelita. I expect they shall soon be here.”

At this, Ayaka’s eyes widen. “Luviagelita? Isn’t that the other apprentice of the Second Sorcerer?”

“I’m glad you remember,” you say with a grin. “Unless the name is far more common in Europe than I imagine, I expect this is the woman Tohsaka mentioned, yes.”

“Oh, that’s great!” Ayaka’s eyes gleam in excitement, before her expression suddenly shifts into a pout. “But you really have to give me more warning, Saber-san.
If you’d made this appointment an hour later, I’d have been meeting a visiting magus in my nightgown!”

“Then it’s a lucky thing I asked her to come when I did.” You give her another wry smile, before continuing more soberly, “I do apologize for the short notice of the thing; in the future, I will be more careful to give you the time you need to prepare.” Fortunately, Ayaka dresses well even when spending a day at home; she’s wearing a cream cardigan over a chocolate brown one-piece dress with black accents. As you’re looking her over, the doorbell rings. It’s 9:00pm exactly, by your watch. You get to your feet and make your way to the front hall to receive Truvietianne.

“How marvelously prompt,” you say, opening the door to the pair of blondes waiting on Ayaka’s step. “You’ve arrived just when I asked, thank you. Do come in.” They’re dressed in the characteristically ostentatious style that western magi seem to favor, both wearing colorful silk gowns. Truvietianne looks to be thoroughly impatient, while Luviagelita wears a more serene expression.

“It was only natural, after you so kindly invited us to your home, Herr von Einzbern.” Luviagelita answers in German as she follows you inside, speaking up before Truvietianne can get a word in. Then, switching to accented Japanese, “or is it Yumigawa after all?”

“That is a more difficult question to answer than you might expect, Miss Edelfelt” you reply, with humor in your tone. “Please sit down, and we shall discuss all that has gone on since the last time Truvietianne and I met.” As you return to the living room, you see that Kōrakuhime has descended from her boudoir, and even managed to set out tea, though how she accomplished it in the scant time you were in the front hall you can’t guess, unless it was by magic. She now sits beside Ayaka, though there’s a wide space between them. Taking that as your cue, rather than an indication of the girls’ mutual dislike, you sit down between them, while the Edelfelt party sits opposite.

[ ] What do you say to Truvietianne and Luviagelita?

“Thank you for inviting us into your home,” Luviagelita says, addressing the girls to your left and right and giving a shallow seated bow. “I am Luviagelita Edelfelt, and this is my sister, Truvietianne.” They were sisters? You suppress your surprise by main force, stiffening the muscles in your face to hold up a pleasant smile in place of the shock you should be wearing. Perhaps Yumigawa’s knowledge was limited, but up until now you’ve never heard of siblings with an age gap of over 10 years.
“My name is Shijou Ayaka. Thank you for visiting us.” Ayaka bows in turn, careful to maintain an amicable atmosphere.

“I am... called Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime. It is a... pleasure to make your acquaintance.” In stark contrast to your Master, Kōrakuhime moves only her eyes, and continues resting her body by leaning lazily against your side. It seemed as if she could sit up straight perfectly well when you were coming into the room, but as soon as you sat down, she slumped into you.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting for an answer, Truvietianne,” you say, a sardonic edge in your voice. “Now that the pleasantries are finished with, I suppose I ought to clear the one matter up now, before we get to the rest of it. I am the same Yumigawa Rushorou you knew, the Master of Caster in the Holy Grail War held in that bizarre Noble Phantasm, Akeldama.”

“I knew it!” Truvietianne exclaims over your admission, and by the emotion in her tone you gather she’s been holding herself back ever since you handed her your note. “Now, will you *please* explain the change that’s come over you, and why you were with the Einzberns?” For all her polite language and refinement of voice, Truvietianne’s haughty, demanding attitude hasn’t changed since you first met her.

“All in good time. Before I tell my story, I should like to hear your side of things. How was your experience leaving the Akeldama, Truvietianne?” You pay her back in kind, taking a fine, high-handed tone. You may have needed her help when you first met, but now you’re the one with more power, and you don’t intend to simply go along and answer however she pleases.

Truvietianne falls back a bit at your words, seeming to take new stock of the situation. Then she answers, in a more docile tone, “Very well. I suppose your experience likely differed from ours, so if you wish to hear my side of things I will tell it. After you,” she pauses a moment, picking her words carefully, “struck Ajisartous down, everything started changing very quickly. His Noble Phantasm collapsed, of course, but it began where the two of you were... connected.” Truvietianne looks squeamish for a moment, no doubt remembering the bloody scene as you gouged out Judas’ chest. “The air around you began to waver, as if a lens were being passed over you,” she continues, “then all at once it was stretched from the edges of you down to a single point; it looked as if you weren’t real bodies, but only images in a photograph being doctored. After the strange stretching blur warped you, you two vanished, and then my senses began to deteriorate. Everything became blurry and faded away, and suddenly I found myself waking up in my bed. I would have thought it was all a dream, but I awoke wearing the nightgown that I had found in that university, and not my own.”
“Very interesting; are you certain those memories are complete? There was no intermediate space, between the Akeldama and your return home?” This is rather odd. You’d assumed that the strange void of rampant swirling light which you traveled through on departing the Akeldama was the border of real space, but if that were so then everyone who escaped from Judas’ Noble Phantasm should have passed through it. If you were the only one, though, what could the meaning of that space be?

“What do you mean?” Truvietianne gives you a confused look, then flares up, pricked by your seeming accusation. “Of course they’re complete! Why would I withhold information from someone like you, anyway?”

“I only wanted to be certain that you weren’t passing over some small detail,” you say, tone relaxed and calming. As easy as you’ve been to provoke recently, Truvietianne’s pride and anger oddly don’t bother you. Perhaps it’s only that you became used to her behavior due to all the time you spent with her in the Akeldama, but seeing her get angry over some perceived affront is something you find mysteriously satisfying, despite the way she tends to slight you in the process.

“So, now you’ve told me your tale; I’ll tell you mine.” You raise a hand to your face, drawing attention to your red eyes as you continue, “when you guessed that I was an Einzbern homunculus, you were closer to the truth than you or I imagined. Although I believed that Yumigawa Rushorou was truly my name for the entirety of the Holy Grail War fought in the Akeldama, and some time afterwards, I later discovered that I was quite wrong.” You pause for a moment for dramatic effect, giving the Edelfelts a smile that could be interpreted as either self-deprecation or self-satisfaction, then go on. “I’ve since come to learn that the name and memories of Yumigawa Rushorou were mere copies, modeled on the original person and implanted in me. He’s here in Tokyo, though not a magus or aware of the Moonlit World.” Now you lean forward, put on a more serious expression, and enjoy the mounting tension in your audience. “Even after I slew Caster, a fragment of his soul remained with me. It was by speaking with his wraith, bound within my mind, that I learned of my own true nature: an artificial soul, created by Caster with the power he held over Akeldama’s contents and given a set of false memories to enable me to function.”

“You’re saying Ajsartous created you, and somehow brought you to life outside of his Akeldama? Why would he do something like that?” Truvietianne snaps out another demand for information. You’re not exactly sure what she’s thinking; the girl is obviously hanging on your words, but her line of inquiry gives you the impression that she doesn’t trust your story. Her relative is able to keep a cooler head, evidently; she’s remained silent since sitting down, and just eyes you as if weighing you up. You can tell she’s reserving judgment until you finish your tale.
“He wanted to create a hero worthy of the Age of Gods, here in the modern day,” you answer. “*Akeldama* was never a Noble Phantasm intended to empower an existing Servant, Caster, but to create a new Servant from an artificial soul. You see, that is the reason for my change in voice and body. I have been reshaped into a Servant by the energy that *Akeldama* gathered. My True Name is Alberich, although you may address me as Saber if you prefer.”

“So,” Luviagelita says softly, “the strange memories that appeared in my sister’s mind were true, and the traces of magic that clung to her were the residue of a ritual created by Caster; and you, the Master who fought by her side in that sham Holy Grail War, were really one of his creations: an artificial heroic spirit.” She thinks for a moment, before continuing, “Please accept my gratitude, and that of the Edelfelt house, for defying the will of your creator to protect Truvietianne.”

You shake your head. “What I did for Truvietianne was nothing impressive. I fought for those who were by my side in the *Akeldama*, and no more. I intend to do the same in this Holy Grail War.”

“Indeed?” Luviagelita’s expression darkens. “Unfortunately, I do not believe that fate is kind enough to place you and my sister as comrades once again. If I tell you that we came here to put an end to this Holy Grail War, in which you are a Servant, what will you do then? Will you still stand by Truvietianne’s side, Saber?”

“I can’t make that promise, Miss Edelfelt,” you answer, steepling your fingers over the table. “In fact, I regret to tell you that I cannot even entertain the notion. I am a Servant; a being reliant on the Holy Grail for existence. If I cannot seize victory here, I will cease to exist completely. For that reason, regardless of who stands in my way, or what the reason for my creation was, there is only one path before me. I will obtain the Holy Grail.”

[X] “Now you know the truth, Truvietianne. What do you think, now that you’ve heard it? Shall we resume our old alliance, and seek victory together?” (Duty)

[ ] “I do apologize for this hostility, Miss Edelfelt. I should have liked to meet you under more peaceful circumstances, but now I must be frank. Out of respect for the help I received from Truvietianne, I’ll give the two of you one chance to leave Tokyo and wash your hands of the Holy Grail War. If you become involved in this again, however, I will be forced to regard you as my enemies.” (Pride)

[ ] Wait for them to respond. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else (Write-in)
“Now you know the truth, Truvietianne,” you say, shifting your gaze from the elder Edelfelt sister to the younger. “What do you think, having heard it? Shall we resume our old alliance, and seek victory together?”

For a moment, the girl only looks at you, bewildered by the suggestion. Then she looks to her side, at her sister, and says something you can’t understand; presumably in their native language. Luviaigelta responds in the same language before turning to you and saying with a smile, “Your suggestion is quite intriguing, but also momentous. We cannot give you an answer without thoroughly considering the situation.”

“Besides, Yumigawa-kun,” Truvietianne cuts in, her strident energy contrasting with Luviaigelta’s cultivated serenity, “there are too many questions you must answer! Why were you with the Einzberns? Who is this Kōrakuhime girl? How can you plan to have me join you in the Holy Grail War again, when I cannot become a Master?”

You let slip an chuckle of undisguised mirth at Truvietianne’s fervent questioning, considering your answers for a moment before speaking. “I believe you’d be most satisfied if I recounted the full details of my experience since escaping the Akeldama,” you begin, “but we haven’t the time. I’ll limit myself to answering your questions. The Einzbern Master and I are cooperating, and it was for that reason that you met me in her company. I would like for you two to assist me in your capacity as magi of the illustrious Edelfelt house, without the need for either of you to be a Master. The aid of a potent magus is valuable in any circumstance, after all. Lastly, as for Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime, well, I’ll let her speak for herself.” As you mention Kōrakuhime, you find yourself nonchalantly patting her head with your left arm. You did it almost unconsciously, in fact. Of course you moved your arm behind her when she draped herself against you and would have pressed your hand between your side and hers; but you hadn’t even thought about bringing it up to pet her, like some affectionate cat. You simply did so, without thinking, when she came into the conversation. It’s a strange instinct, you suppose.

When Kōrakuhime makes no move to speak beyond flushing slightly at your touch, Truvietianne quickly rounds on her. “Well? Who are you then,” she demands, “and how do you fit into all of this?”

“I have given you my name... already.” Kōrakuhime’s voice is typically listless, but a suppressed smile faintly curves her dainty mouth. You can almost feel her excitement at the chance to continue her introduction, although none of the other
three seems to notice that she has any emotion regarding the subject. “If you must... know more about me, however,” Kōrakuhime continues, “I will say this. I am a second... artificial soul, created in the Akeldama and made into a Servant by the... energy which it held. When we knew one another before... I went by the name of Ogawara Yatsuhide.”

At this, Truvietianne looks as if she’s been turned to stone. You’ve never seen an expression stiffen so quickly. LuviaCelita, by her side, simply looks on in confusion, perhaps hoping for someone to explain to her the significance of the name. Obviously Truvietianne isn’t the girl for the job, though; once she finally manages to speak, it’s to choke out, “Ogawara? But you-

“Changed, just as Ani-ue did.” Kōrakuhime cuts her off with surprising force. “We have both taken on new... forms, new names... we are different people from those who... bore our identities before.”

“Why, it isn’t only your body,” Truvietianne says, sounding more energetic in her disbelief with each word. “You simply cannot be Ogawara. Your personality has changed, and you don’t stutter, and-” Before she can work herself into a proper rant about the nature of identity and personality, one of LuviaCelita’s hands moves, under the table, and suddenly Truvietianne goes quiet.

“Thank you for answering our questions, Sir Alberich,” Luvia says, getting to her feet. “Now, we must consider your proposal; we can intrude upon you no longer. Come, Truvietianne.” She practically drags Truvietianne away from the couch, the girl being in such a state of shock at Kōrakuhime’s identity. It isn’t long before she has her walking properly, however. Then, just as she’s about to step into the front hall and make her exit, LuviaCelita turns back to you one last time, and asks, “Incidentally, which of the enemy Servants do you intend to strike at tonight?”

[ ] You’ll prioritize the other Saber. (Pride/Duty)

[X] You’ll prioritize the dangerously long-range Archer. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] You’ll prioritize something else tonight (Write in)

“Archer,” you answer firmly, meeting her eyes. You remember the humiliation you were put through at the hands of the Archer summoned in the Akeldama quite well. Now that you have an ally who can divine the location of your foes, there’s only
one possible answer as to your highest priority. “An enemy that can move without a
Master and strike from a great distance is one I can no longer leave undisturbed.”

“A battle between a Saber and an Archer, hmm?” Luviagelita smiles
approvingly, like a patron looking forward to an excellent play. “That will certainly be
a sight worth seeing. I’ll be anticipating your duel, Sir Alberich.” With those words of
anticipation, she gives you a little wave and follows her sister out the door. In her
wake, you’re left with an odd, uncertain feeling. You can’t quite tell whether her
excitement at the prospect of watching you fight is real or sarcastic, and her general
motives are similarly uncertain. Tohsaka said that Luviagelita had been removed
from her mission due to a family emergency, didn’t she? In that case, the Edelfelt
sisters are here on their own authority; it’s impossible for a magus outside the
participants to become a Master at this point, though, so what they could want from
the Holy Grail you can’t guess.

“Was that true, Saber-san? You want to go after Archer tonight?” Ayaka’s
voice brings you suddenly out of your reverie. That’s right, now isn’t the time to be
lost in thought over the Edelfelts’ motivations. You need to make your plans with
Ayaka and Kōrakuhime quickly; before Saber and Archer can get into their nightly
duel, if possible.

“What I said to Luviagelita Edelfelt was true,” you answer. “We haven’t been
able to pursue our most dangerous foes up until now due first to a lack of information
and then to our plans with Emiya. Now, though, my sister can guide us by divination
with no further hindrances. Tonight we shall dispose of Archer, the Servant most
capable of interfering in future battles.”

“Well... said, Ani-ue.” Kōrakuhime, still draped over you, gives you her tiny
smile. “One would... expect you to seek out your revenge... by hunting that other
Saber... but you always examine the situation... rationally.”

“I’m glad you understand, Kōrakuhime,” you reply, moving your left arm
back around her shoulders and holding her. After so much insolence from the girl, it’s
an excellent feeling to finally have her respect. “Your time spent advising me during
the War in the Akeldama was not wasted. Now, show us where Archer is hiding.”

“Here, Ani-ue.” Kōrakuhime draws a white origami lotus out of her sleeve and
hangs it in the air, just as she did when showing you Liliesviel’s location. In a few
moments, the smoke that pours from the flower’s center forms into a thick cloud
hanging over the coffee table, and in that smoke the hazy form of the city skyline
begins to take shape. Then it grows more and more solid, and color fills in, until the
image is as clear as a film projection.
Two angular towers rise from a unified rectangular base, stretching up into the night sky high above the surrounding buildings. Pale cement lines the space between innumerable windows, and at the higher points numerous satellite dishes and antennae dot the surface of the building. It’s not a structure you can mistake for any other. “Tochō,” you murmur, “Archer is there?”

“Look,” is Kōrakuhime’s answer, and the image moves, the point of view drawing closer and closer to the roof of the southern tower, where you can clearly see your quarry: Akagata Kyouka, the Master of Archer, stands at the edge of a heliport that covers the roof, and looks out at the city below. Her black evening dress whips in the high wind that comes with the altitude, but it doesn’t seem to make an impact on the woman herself. She looks out over the city with a bored, impatient expression as she smokes from a lengthy kiseru. Beside her stands an enormous, musclebound warrior, easily the equal of Berserker in frame, with short, curly black hair and a beard to match. He’s dressed in similar armor to Berserker’s as well; another Greek, you suppose. This must be Archer, surveying the battlefield from above.

“I’ve allowed you to choose the location tonight, Archer,” she says, and Ayaka starts a little at the sound of her voice. Up until now, the smoke has shown only silent imagery; the sound of the city, the wind, and other ambient noise are all absent. “I hope you will not disappoint me again.”

“Don’t worry, Master,” Archer replies, and his voice is so casual and friendly that it shocks you. It’s completely at odds with his appearance as a grim-faced soldier, as well as Kyouka’s cultivated, elegant tone of command. “I can promise you, no Servant will set foot on this rooftop but me. With this location, I’ll be able to put Saber down without a doubt.”

“We’ve seen enough,” you cut in. “Dispel the magic.”

“Very well,” Kōrakuhime answers, and the smoke begins to dissipate as the image fades from view.

“Archer said they were waiting for Saber,” Ayaka says, giving you a nervous look. “How could they already know you were going to attack them, Saber-san?”

“Those two aren’t waiting for me,” you begin. “It’s the other Saber they intend to kill tonight. She who left me to die after her Master slew your brother. When I was recuperating with Liliesviel today, I spoke with her Lancer as well. He’s a self-proclaimed specialist in gathering information, and according to him Archer and Saber have been locked in a stalemate every night. Saber cannot close the distance to Archer, while Archer cannot break Saber’s guard with his arrows. By waiting at the top of a building that towers over its surroundings, I imagine he intends to force her to make the ascent without cover or maneuverability, and shoot her down then.”
“So what do you plan to do, then, Saber-san? Wouldn’t you be just as vulnerable as she is?”

You shake your head. “That ‘knight’ is a Saber in the truest sense of the word. She is nothing but a sword, without means of defense or ranged combat. I, on the other hand, have Kenőtis and Heiligöffnungschwert. I can strike from a distance, and defend more thoroughly while drawing closer. Tonight will mark my first victory over that accursed creature. I’ll defeat the foe she cannot!” Even when discussing a battle against another Servant, the thought of that bitch sends you into a rage. Your fists clench unconsciously, and you can’t help grinding your teeth. Tonight you must face Archer, but tomorrow... oh, tomorrow you will have your satisfaction. Perhaps you’ll begin by using your Nothingness to disarm her, so you can deal with her execution without the need of your own sword. Snapping the slim arms that raised a sword against you between your hands, crushing the throat that dared to call you a liar, using a thumb to gouge out the eyes that looked down on you, there are so many things you could do with her...

You’re snapped out of your reverie by a tiny, almost inaudible moan just by your ear. Suddenly you realize that there is flesh under your hand, and not that hated Saber’s. Your fingers are digging into Kôrakuhime’s shoulder! You let go with a snap, turning to the girl. “Are you alright, Kôrakuhime? My apologies, I lost myself for a moment.”

There are tears in the corners of her eyes, and her lips are slightly parted, her breaths coming heavily. She’s flushed again, as well, and you suppose she must be embarrassed at having been hurt so casually, because she quickly breaks away from your gaze, turning her eyes downward and saying, “It was... nothing, Ani-ue. I’ll heal... in a moment.” True to her words, she’s back to normal after a few deep breaths, although the small bloodstain on her furisode remains as testament to your loss of control.

“Very well then. If you’ve recovered, then we can leave the manor in your care.” You get to your feet. “Miss Ayaka, let us be off. Further delay could lead to Harris attacking Archer before we can.”

“Wait,” Kôrakuhime interjects. “I will not... remain here tonight. I wish to... test myself against this Archer. I cannot continue... hunting, only.”

“I see that so,” you say.

[X] “In that case, come with us. Between the two of us, Archer’s defeat will be ensured.” (Compassion/Self-Preservation)
“Nonetheless, you will not be accompanying us. A Masterless Servant shouldn’t be on the front lines, Kōrakuhime. Remain here and conserve your energy for a response in case of an attack on the manor.” (Duty/Pride)

Say something else (Write in)

You consider the matter for a moment. You’re not certain of Kōrakuhime’s aptitude in battle, after all, and it might be better to have her stay here and defend the manor against attack by those who might try to weaken you by destroying your base of operations. On the other hand, you must consider the danger that an enemy specialized in ranged combat can pose against your master. Eventually, you make up your mind that leaving Kōrakuhime at the manor would be an act of misplaced caution. She can be most helpful by your side. “In that case,” you say, “come with us. With you and I working together, Archer’s defeat will be assured.”

“Indeed,” Kōrakuhime answers, giving you her slight smile. “We will... butcher him, together.”

“Let us go, then.” You turn on your heel, making for the garage. “We can discuss tactics as we approach Tochō. We haven’t a moment to spare.”

The two girls catch up to you quickly enough, and the three of you hastily get into Vaisset’s Mercedes and pull out onto the road. Fortunately, you don’t need an address this time. Not only is the center of Tokyo’s metropolitan government a landmark, Yumigawa visited it several times as a teenager. Why he kept returning to the place, wandering the halls and examining as much of the building as was open to the public, you’re not certain; he didn’t know why even then, only that it was one of the few impulses to drive his generally emotionless mind. Perhaps even then he was fond of power, as you are now, and the trappings of it drew him despite their bland, bureaucratic facade. You remember the way ‘you’ stood between offices, watching the employees moving to and fro, carrying the documents that would determine all the little parts of human life for which government is required; the way ‘your’ eyes moved with them, tracking the documents, scanning their natures; the way ‘you’ were filled with a strange nervous tension that you couldn’t place.

You shake your head, blinking the reverie away. Now isn’t the time to lose yourself in Yumigawa Rushorou’s memories. You’re headed to a death match, after all, and it’s the roof of the building you’ll be making your way to tonight. You need to focus on something else, to keep your mind in the present. Then an idea strikes, for a subject both diverting and practical. Of course, why hadn’t you thought to ask earlier?
“Kōrakuhime, why don’t you tell me about your Noble Phantasms?” You glance over to your left as you ask, taking your eyes off the road for just a moment to meet your sister’s. “I realize that you attempted to give me information on all of your abilities the night that we met, but I’m afraid the memory of that dream hasn’t been very clear.”

“My... Noble Phantasms.” Kōrakuhime considers the question for a few moments, before continuing in a suddenly mirthful voice, “No, I don’t... believe I will tell you, Ani-ue. If you would... like to know what they can do, I’m afraid that you must... wait until they’re needed.”

You’re about to round angrily on the girl, when you turn a corner and suddenly see a dark-clothed figure standing in the middle of the road! You slam on the brakes, coming to a stop some distance away. Despite the near-accident, the man doesn’t move, however. He simply stands there, motionless in the middle of the road, staring up into the sky. As you look around, you realize that the street is deserted aside from your car and the man. What’s worse, you realize something else. It’s weak, so it didn’t make an impact on your senses immediately, but the presence of this man is unmistakably that of a Servant.

“You should stay in the car,” you hiss, “I’ll deal with this.”

You get out of the car, eyes focused and seeking the slightest sign of movement. If he makes a move to attack, you’ll have your blade materialized before he can close the distance. You slowly approach the unknown Servant, keeping your guard up. As you do so, though, you can’t help but gradually relax. This Servant doesn’t even seem to be aware of your presence. Even as you draw closer, and he should be able to clearly feel your presence, he remains motionless and goes on staring at the sky.

Finally, you’re close enough to get a good look at the strange figure. He wears a long silk robe, more Chinese than Japanese in design, all black save for cloth-of-gold stitching at the edges that gives the garment an oddly luminous quality. As for the man himself, he’s as tall as you are, but far more slender. Black hair falls below his shoulders, framing an androgynously beautiful pale face and black eyes. All-in-all, he presents a thoroughly non-threatening picture. This must be Assassin, you surmise; a specialist in stealth, caught off his guard. The notion almost saddens you. As you’re enjoying your cheerful thoughts of an easy victory, the man’s face suddenly snaps back down, and he looks straight at you. He blinks twice, and then his mouth splits into a wide grin.

“Kaichou,” he exclaims, in a rough voice totally at odds with his princely face. “Great ta see ya again! How’ve you been holdin’ up?”
“It couldn’t be,” you mutter under your breath. Your bewilderment at this encounter can only mount, as you stare at the strange Servant, looking for any sign of the young gangster you knew in the Akeldama. “Matsuda?”

“Got it in one!” Matsuda’s grin disappears as his tone becomes more serious. “I don’t blame ya for bein’ surprised. You haven’t changed as much as I have, have ya?”

“No, I suppose I haven’t,” you admit. “I appear almost as I did at the end of the War, but you... I can hardly believe you’re standing there before me, looking the way you do.”

“Yeah, seems like I saved all my changin’ for the end,” Matsuda says, and looks positively morose for a moment, before meets your eyes again with a friendly expression. “Not you though, huh, Kaichou? Ya never gave up that trainin’ no matter how many times I beat ya down, and every time ya came back, it was like ya were a whole new guy again.” He pauses for a moment, considering, then continues, “Speakin’ of which, why don’t ya answer a question of mine, Kaichou? D’ya think ya woulda survived the War without me? If I hadn’t taught ya ta fight, could ya have made it on your own?”

[ ] “No, I don’t think I could. The fighting techniques I learned from you saved my life, Matsuda.” (Compassion)

[X] “I can’t deny that your fighting techniques served me well, Matsuda, but I would have found a way to emerge as the victor of that War regardless. I had Caster, after all, and enough wit to make good use of her.” (Pride)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

You weigh up Matsuda’s question in your mind, carefully considering the answer. Would you have survived if Matsuda had not been there to teach you how to fight? You can’t deny that the fighting techniques he taught you saved your life, that’s true enough, but those circumstances were largely of your own design. If you hadn’t known how to fight, you wouldn’t have put yourself into positions in which you needed to. On the whole, you probably would have won the War regardless of Matsuda’s presence.

“I can’t deny that your fighting techniques served me well, Matsuda,” you say, “but I would have found a way to emerge as the victor of that War regardless. I had Caster, after all, and the wit to make good use of her. Still, to win without facing the enemy directly would have been a coward’s victory, unbefitting of me. Your techniques allowed me to grasp the only satisfactory victory.”
“So that’s the way it is.” Matsuda looks downcast once more at your answer. “I was hopin’ my debt to ya was squared, but if you don’t see me as havin’ saved your life, that’s a shame.” He heaves a sigh. “Guess I’ll have ta call it a-”

Suddenly Matsuda breaks off, and his eyes light up in excitement. There’s a gleam of light, a flicker of movement, and the gruesome sound of a blade smashing home in flesh and blood from behind you. In one swift motion, Matsuda materialized and thrust a spear, just over your left shoulder. The moonlight glimmers on steel a hair’s breadth from your cheek. Then Matsuda whips the weapon back to him with the same fluid swiftness, there’s another gory sound behind you, and a corpse slumps to the ground. It’s a young man in a priest’s cassock, with long knives clenched in his hands. Where one eye used to be is a cleanly sliced hole, from which blood oozes out to form a pool at your feet.

Matsuda is all smiles again as he swishes his spear through the air, flicking the blood from its shining surface. It has an unusual shape, with a crescent-shaped blade on either side just below the spearhead, a heavy weight wrapped in tiger skin between them, and a large orange tassel at the base of the blades. In all, the polearm is over 7 and a half feet long.

“Now there,” Matsuda says happily. “I’d say we’re square. You saved my life, now I’ve saved yours. You didn’t even notice tha guy creepin’ up on ya, did ya?”

[X] Ask Matsuda what he knows. If the Church is after you, you need as much information as possible. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] If there was a human trying to kill a Servant like yourself, he can’t have come alone. Leave Matsuda be for a moment while you look for the rest. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Startled at the sight of the corpse, you cast your eyes about the nighttime surroundings, looking for any other sign of the enemy. All around you, the suburban street is silent and empty. The houses are dark, their inhabitants asleep, and the only living souls to be found are you and Matsuda. It seems, then, that you have enough time to find out what Matsuda knows about the mysterious attacker: most likely an agent of the Church, by his uniform, although appearances can be deceiving. The example of “Cid Ajisartous” is worth remembering.

“Who was that, Matsuda? Are you being targeted by the Holy Church?”
Matsuda shakes his head. “I wouldn’t drop my guard that easy, if I was you,” he says. “Those guys’re wearin’ somethin’ that hides their presence. It’s in tha crucifix, I think. Anyway, it’s you they’re after.”

Before you can demand more information, an aged voice rings out in the darkness. “Lancer, in God’s name what are you playing at?” The sound has no origin that you can pinpoint, seeming to come from no fixed direction. As Matsuda’s pointed out, the presence of no-one but yourselves can be felt. At the sound of that voice, a chill runs down your spine. Things are suddenly clear. In a flash, you materialize your armor and Heiligöffnungschwert, leaping several steps backwards. At the same moment, Matsuda’s blade swings around in a gleaming arc to cleave the air where your neck had been.

Status Updated

“Sorry ‘bout that, y’old bastard,” Matsuda calls into the night. “Just had ta clear up some personal business.” Then, fixing his attention on you again, he says, “So you wound up turnin’ inta a Servant too, huh? Ya got a real knight in shinin’ armor look goin’ on, it suits ya.” He smirks at you, leveling the point of his spear at your throat. “Guess I was movin’ too slow, then? Which one isn’t with ya?”

“Matsuda,” you say icily, struggling to hold down your fury at this treachery. “I want an explanation from you this instant. What the hell are you doing attacking me?”

Matsuda looks you over his blade, considering. Eventually he comes to a decision, and turns the point skyward, resting his weapon casually against his shoulder. “Ya know,” he begins, in a contemplative tone, “a real badass doesn’t need much of a reason ta fight. Somebody looks at ya wrong, or bumps ya on tha street, or maybe ya just hear they’re strong and want ta see if ya measure up; so ya hunt ‘em down and find out whose fist is tougher. That’s tha kinda life I live, ya know?”

“That isn’t your reason, Matsuda, and we both know it,” you reply coldly. You’re not going to let him paper over this situation with macho delinquent nonsense. “Who was the man who called you Lancer? How do you know what sort of mystic code the man you killed was carrying?”

“Alright, alright.” Matsuda heaves a sigh. “It woulda been a lot simpler ta just call this a duel, ya know. But, fine, ya want tha whole story; I’ll give it to ya. Shouldn’t surprise ya much, if you’re a Servant too.” He pauses for a moment, ordering his thoughts, then goes on, “I went ta bed, the last night o’ that Grail War o’ yours, and woke up on the street. My whole outfit’d changed, and I had this spear. A fangtian ji, it’s called; great weapon, too, real adaptable. But anyway, I was wanderin’ around, tryin’ ta figure out what’d happened, and eventually I just sorta ran down. I
was more tired than I’d ever been, couldn’t even stand. When I started losin’ the feelin’ in my arms and legs, I figured that was th’end for me. You probably know what was happenin’ though, right?”

“You had no source of magical energy,” you say with a nod. “You must have exhausted yours and begun to fade away.”

“Yeah. Thing is, though, I didn’t go. I woke up in a church.” Matsuda shakes his head mournfully. “Funny thing about goin’ from a human ta this kinda magical creature. We’ve got so much more power now, but we can’t use it without somebody keepin’ us alive. Well, ta cut a long story short, th’ priest who found me was th’ overseer of the real Grail War, th’ one that’s goin’ on here in Tokyo. He rigged up a way for me ta stay alive, so long as I followed his orders, and gave me a crash course in th’ whole Grail War business.” Matsuda lets out a dry chuckle. “Learned more about that in th’ last week than I ever wanted to, that’s for sure.”

“So now you’re representing the overseer’s interests,” you say, your tone still cold. Matsuda may have faced his share of hardships, but that doesn’t excuse his assault on your person, or the light way he cast aside the debt of life that he swore to you. “Why has he sent you against me, then?”

“Church wants ta get rid of all th’ stray Servants,’ so th’ War can go on with only th’ original seven. Seein’ as me and you’re Servants, I figure that means th’ strays’re everyone who survived Cid’s War, plus your two girls.” Matsuda gives a shrug, continuing, “Sent me here ta wait for two Servants travellin’ together. I figured that’d be you with your two, but I guess you’re one of th’ Servants. So where’s th’girl, and which one is it?”

“Damn it, Matsuda!” Your anger flares up again at Matsuda’s combination of ignorance and resolute focus on his objective, to kill you. “Don’t you realize that you’re doomin’ yourself if you work with Antaglio? You’re one of the additional Servants as well! What do you think he’ll do if you succeed, send you out into the world to live on blood? Keep the Greater Grail functioning forever to sustain you?”

“I know I’ll die too,” Matsuda says, “but that doesn’t matter now. I’m already magically bound ta follow his orders. There’s nothin’ else I can do.” Then suddenly, as if his morose visage and hopeless words had never been there, Matsuda’s face is covered in a bloodthirsty grin. “So let’s at least have a good fight before we go, huh? No more sparrin’ now, Kaichou, and no more o’ you holdin’ your strength back for me! We’re on an even playin’ field now! Come and kill me, ya prissy bastard!”

[ ] Attack Matsuda head-on. You have faith in your abilities, and it would give Matsuda the end he deserves. (Pride/Compassion)
[ ] Take a defensive stance. Let Matsuda make the first move, and counter his attack. (Self-Preservation/Compassion)

[ ] Bind Matsuda from a distance with tendrils of Nothingness, then execute him. There’s no reason why you should oblige a treacherous dog with a proper duel. (Pride/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Contact Ayaka telepathically and have her send Kōrakuhime to help you. With the two of you working together, you can easily crush Matsuda by overwhelming force. (Duty/Self-Preservation)

[X] Contact Ayaka telepathically and have her take Tsubaki with her to incapacitate Antaglio while you work to restrain Matsuda with tendrils of Nothingness. (Write In)

“Oh no, Matsuda. I’ve taken too many of your counters to rush in at a little taunt like that.” You tamp down your rage at this betrayal and give Matsuda an easy, friendly smile; as if you’re just the same two friends sparring you were in the Akeldama. At the same time, you step back again, widening the distance between you and bringing Heiligöffnungschwert up in a diagonal guard to protect your face. As for your body, you keep your stance low so that Kenōtis hangs down and shrouds you in darkness. This way, you have the breathing room you’ll need to react to Matsuda’s nearly invisible strikes. “You’ll have to come to me.”

“Hou... Playin’ it safe, huh?” Matsuda chuckles. “Wonder which one a us has got more patience, though.” Down the road, he settles into a stance of his own, one foot forward and one behind, his spear held back while an empty left hand beckons before him. It’s an unpredictable, seemingly vague stance, but unnerving nonetheless. Matsuda isn’t one to break from his casual posture easily, you know, and the memory of all the times he’s overwhelmed you despite a massive difference in strength keeps you firmly on your guard.

As the two of you stare each other down, probing for that break in will or vigilance that will signal an attack, your temper cools and you begin to reevaluate your feelings. Matsuda hasn’t betrayed you out of any spirit of treachery or base resentment. He’s been forced to it by magic, and that only because he found himself alone and without aid. Indeed, this could be considered a failing on your part. Didn’t you resolve to lead Matsuda and Ogawara capably, when the three of you left that forest for the Eighth City? Yet, upon your arrival in Tokyo, you forgot them and focused only on your own situation, abandoning Ogawara to become the man-eating oni Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime, and Matsuda to become a tool of the War’s overseer.
The proper course now, you think, the duty of a true leader, is not to punish Matsuda with death, but to capture Antaglio and free Matsuda from his control. Since you’re occupied with Matsuda, however, the job of capturing his Master will have to fall to Kōrakuhime.

You stretch out your mind, contacting your own Master, back in the car. ‘Miss Ayaka, I need you and Kōrakuhime to get out of the car and look for this Servant’s Master, an old man. It seems he’s hiding somewhere nearby, masking his presence with a mystic code. If you two can incapacitate him, I believe we shall be able to turn this situation to our advantage.’

‘I’m sorry, Saber-san,’ comes the hesitant reply, ‘but your, um, sister isn’t actually here with me anymore. She was watching you and that guy in the road, then she suddenly said there were other enemies you hadn’t seen, and told me to just wait here and not distract you.’

‘What? Damn it all, you should have told me! Just stay there, then, and be careful. Hide, if you can.’ This situation has just become significantly worse. You return your attention to Matsuda, who’s still eying you hungrily. He’s eager for the battle to be joined, that at least is one clear aspect of this quagmire.

“How many Church agents came with you, Matsuda?” you growl. Even as you say it, it seems foolish. Why should he give such information up willingly to an enemy? He does respond, though, perhaps motivated by some feeling of remorse at having to fight you; or perhaps it’s only his confidence.

“There were six of ‘em, fighters from some kinda demon-huntin’ agency in tha Church. Five, now, ta take on that girly o’ yours.” He grins crookedly, a malicious expression. “Mind, I still wouldn’t put my bet on their side, whichever one o’ your girls it is. I’ll probably hafta take care o’ her after I’m done with you.”

Five humans, and the mysterious Antaglio, against Kōrakuhime? No, you don’t rate their chances any higher than Matsuda seems to. In that case, your course of action is simple. You need only make sure Matsuda is held fast, and you have the perfect method for it. You draw on the command spell that binds you, pouring Ayaka’s magical energy into your circuits, and project it out into the darkness. With a sweep of your left hand, you send four tendrils of Nothingness hurtling towards Matsuda, one to bind each limb. He’ll be caught by surprise at the magic, bound, and then it will remain only to wait for Kōrakuhime.

That was the hope, at least. The reality is different, as Matsuda smoothly reacts without so much as a change of expression. He slides back, pivoting around his right foot to bring his spear around to the fore and, with a flick of his wrist, twirls the weapon in a gleaming circle of light before him. In one motion, it slices through each
black and red tendril, seeming almost to dissolve them in the blade’s reflected light. 
No, it does dissolve them! Before your shocked eyes, your element recedes in ragged tatters, dissipating like fog in a hot wind.

“Guess ya learned some magic yourself,” Matsuda says, eying the vanishing shadows contemptuously as he returns the blade to his shoulder, relaxing his stance. “That ain’t all ya got, is it? How much time’ve ya spent trainin’ with that sword, Kaichou?”

“Training with the sword?” You give him a blank look, surprise at his comment and fury at his attitude warring within you. “Matsuda, I received skill with a blade upon becoming a Servant, and have been honing my skills since in battle. Why would I have trained with it as well, when when I could spend the time on more productive matters?”

“That’s not a good way ta think, Kaichou.” Matsuda shakes his head in disappointment. “Guys who only rely on their natural strength, and never try ta get stronger ‘cept by fightin’ always end up goin’ down hard when they hit their limit. I thought ya understood that when ya came ta me ta learn how ta fight. Guess I was wrong.”

“Oh? And how much good did your training do you in the University, Matsuda?” Damn his impudence, how dare he speak that way to you? “You had the luxury of spending all your time training your body, while I had to consider the War as a whole, and how did that serve you? How many of our enemies did you beat down, with those fists of yours?”

“I wasn’t strong enough then, yer right about that,” Matsuda snaps. He’s as angry as you are now, both of you glaring daggers at each other. “I’ll show you my method’s tha better one now, though, if ya’ve got tha courage ta face me! Come on, damn it!”

[ ] Attack Matsuda head-on with the sword! You won’t have him insulting your abilities any longer! (Pride)

[ ] If Matsuda thinks the time you spent learning to control Nothingness was wasted, you’ll prove him wrong. Keep attacking from a distance and bury him if you have to! (Pride/Self-Preservation)

[X] Keep up a defensive stance. He seems reluctant to attack you for some reason, and if you can draw the battle out Kōrakuhime will have time to finish with the dead man’s compatriots. (Self-Preservation)
“Come on and kill me, come at me if you’ve got the courage, you’re like a broken record, Matsuda.” You may be boiling mad, but you have the sense to tamp it down and put on a condescending smile instead. After seeing the way he dealt with your magic, the apprehension of a counterattack you felt before has become a certainty. “As I said, I don’t intend to rush at you. You’ll have to come at me, if you want to make this a melee. Otherwise, I don’t mind seeing how long it takes for my magic to break your guard.”

A vein pulses in Matsuda’s forehead, and he snarls, “Alright, ya brought this on yasell!” Then he takes off like a shot, going straight from a casual, formless posture to movement so fast you can barely keep up. The black robe and gold ornamentation blurs into a glittering streak in the shadowed street, preceded by that white blade that shines like an icy fragment of moonlight.

You can barely keep up with him, yes, but you can keep up with him. Matsuda is coming in straight, aiming for a thrust to skewer you at the neck, sliding his blade through the narrow gap between helmet and cuirass, where only fabric protects you. It’s a well-spotted opening, but the perfect vulnerability of the place also makes it easy to counter, and with the sword you wield one parry will relive Matsuda of his weapon. As he rushes in to meet you, you step forward and bring Heiligöffnungschwert down in a cut that will meet Matsuda’s spear-point and split the blade in two.

Then he’s gone. As your blade cleaves the open air, you realize in a split second that Matsuda read your parry and slid to your right, ducking under your field of view and smoothly changing course without losing momentum. You turn to follow him, but as you bring your right foot down to stop and pivot, Matsuda sweeps a low kick under the hem of Kenótis, knocking you off balance. It isn’t enough to make you stumble, but it delays your turn just long enough for Matsuda to get behind you.

There’s a line of fire across the back of your neck, and you realize too late that your helmet has a seam at the back as well. You’re feeling the death blow that parts head from body, but even as it hits home you don’t give up, still turning to catch your accursed attacker in your vision once again. In that moment, inspiration strikes: your cloak is flaring out behind you from the rotation!

“Kenótis!”

As you shout, you feel curious loss of weight that comes when the fabric becomes a portal, and at the same time Matsuda’s presence behind you, along with the blade in your neck, retreats. Finally, after what seems an eternity though you know it to have been no more than a fraction of a second, you complete your turn and catch sight of your own blood, crimson in the moonlight. Matsuda stands about five paces from you, back in an easygoing, arrogant delinquent’s slouch, his weapon
resting casually against his shoulder. One of the crescent blades is decorated with your blood, purely shining steel no longer. Matsuda’s legs, though, bear testament to the fact that it hasn’t gone all his way. There’s a pair of cleanly sliced slits in his black silk trousers, and through them you can see two shallow cuts in Matsuda’s shins, slowly oozing blood.

“Neat weapon ya got there,” he says cheerily. The animosity he was showing towards you seems to have faded strangely, after the first exchange of blows. “That’s that thing yer witch made for ya, isn’t it? Really took me by surprise!”

“I’ll be happy to give you more surprises than that if you persist in facing me, Matsuda,” you growl. Unlike his, your rage has only been inflamed by the wound on your neck, and it’s taking all the restraint you have not to charge the impudent bastard this instant. Still, you hold yourself back. You want to give him one more chance to abandon his course of treachery. “You needn’t go on serving the Church. Return to my side, Matsuda, and I’m certain we can find a way to free you from whatever magic is binding you; and find you another source of energy. Don’t you realize that there’s no purpose in this battle?”

Matsuda’s grin disappears, and he sighs irritably. “Ya just don’t get it, do ya, kaichou? You’re too damn focused on yer goals. Didn’t I tell ya why I was fightin’ back in that gym?”

“Because you enjoyed it,” you answer, “but you also told me that you didn’t enjoy it anymore; that you only kept going because your only path to a future lay in joining the yakuza. Don’t you realized that’s changed? With the power of Servants, with the Holy Grail, we can-”

“I’m enjoyin’ it now, asshole!” Matsuda cuts you off with a furious shout. “What I told ya was true, then. I wasn’t gettin’ any satisfaction outta fightin’ anymore, wasn’t gettin’ stronger; I’d hit my limit. But now, everythin’s changed. A fight ta tha death’s more thrillin’ than high-school brawlin’ ever was, and I’m finally gettin’ stronger again! I’ve been trainin’ 24/7 with these church bastards, without ever needin’ ta rest or sleep, and I’ve been pickin’ up new techniques as fast as you did with those gloves o’ yours! Now, we’re gonna have a real proper fight, and there’s nothin’ you can say ta talk me outta that. Get it?”

**Status Updated**

It’s certain now that there will be no resolution to this save by force, and given the wound Matsuda’s left you with, that suits you well enough. No-one could claim you haven’t done your duty as a leader to bring him back into the fold. There’s nothing for it now but to take him down, and relish in breaking the smug pride he takes in his skill.
[ ] Overwhelm Matsuda from a distance with magic. There must be a limit to how much of your Nothingness he can burn away, and you don’t want to risk your neck again. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Keep on the defensive, but lay a trap this time. Fill the shadows at your feet with tendrils of Nothingness, to immobilize Matsuda when he strikes. (Pride)

[X] If you want to beat Matsuda, you’ll have to do something he doesn’t expect. Take the initiative by attacking, and when he reads your swordplay strike with your fists. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“Oh, I understand, Matsuda,” you reply. “Very well. If you’re such a fool for battle that you’d sooner die than give up the chance to face me here, we’ll finish this properly.” Saying no more, you charge forward with blade drawn, bringing it up in a diagonal slash at Matsuda’s waist. No matter how well he reads the attack, it leaves him with only four possible responses. Matsuda can parry your blow, attack you before you close into range, dodge backwards, or leap over the blade. Even if he’s faster than you are, as long as you know what he can do you can counter it. You’ll take him by surprise, letting Heiligöffnungschwert dematerialize and shifting to hand-to-hand combat.

As expected, Matsuda begins by countering your charge with a spear-thrust aimed at your throat, but it’s easy enough to cant your body to the side and slide past. Even with the crescent blades expanding the weapon’s reach, Matsuda can’t pull reverse his thrust quickly enough to strike you while you’re still maintaining momentum. Instead, he skips back as you swing Heiligöffnungschwert, to let the blade harmlessly cut the air a hair’s breadth from his body and counterattack once you’ve overextended. Perfect.

Halfway through your slash, Heiligöffnungschwert dissolves into shining air, and your left hand comes forward in a straight punch. Matsuda’s dodge may diminish the impact, but he can’t jump back a second time as he’s landing from the first. If he ducks, your right is ready for an uppercut.

The punch doesn’t connect. Matsuda’s one step ahead of you again, bending back at the waist to evade your strike, and you realize that in the fatal moment when you’re open for a counter. A foot comes up beneath your chin, and as Matsuda completes a cartwheel, you’re thrown to the pavement, slammed down head-first by
your own forward momentum. The damage is light, though. The pavement beneath you is cracked, but your helmet is barely scratched and the worst you have inside is some slight bruising. It can’t compare to the force of what Berserker was throwing at you. If this is the worst Matsuda has to offer, taking him down in an unarmed battle will be simplicity itself.

No sooner does that thought run through your mind than a gleaming blade sings as Matsuda goes for your neck again, while you’re down and possibly immobilized. You roll towards him and pop up with an uppercut followed by a string of quick jabs. Matsuda, though, gracefully sways away from each strike, letting you tire yourself punching at the air.

“We seem to be at an impasse,” you say, grabbing ineffectually at one of Matsuda’s arms for a throw. “You can’t use that spear at this range, and I can’t seem to lay a hand on you. How long do you suppose it will take my companion to do away with your priests?” You drive a knee towards his gut, but the body slides just beyond the extent of your limb.

“You’re thinkin’ too well o’ yaself,” Matsuda says with a grin. “How ‘bout this?” Suddenly, as you send a low kick against Matsuda’s legs, the flat of his spearhead is against your shin. Matsuda rotates with the force of the strike, and before you can react the heavy iron ball at the back end of the weapon’s handle slams into your forehead with all the weight you’d hoped to use in crushing your enemy’s knee. “If ya think this thing’s only useful at range, yer dead wrong,” Matsuda gloats. “Told ya it was adaptable.” You stagger back, reeling from the impact against your temple, and Matsuda comes in for the kill. He blurs with speed, a deadly shadow in the night, and-

Matsuda stumbles, as one of the tendrils of Nothingness you’ve been spreading on the ground takes hold of his right foot. The stroke that was meant to part your head from your body is finished uselessly, and for the briefest moment Matsuda is at a loss. Then he rights himself, realizing what’s happened, and as he brings his blade down to destroy the binding tendril at his feet, you take the moment to drop your pretense of concussion and step in sharply. Whatever Matsuda’s abilities may be, he’s clearly underestimated the durability of a Servant. He’ll pay for it now, though. You finally sink a punch home, feeling the satisfying crunch as the nose is broken and lips split against teeth.

Matsuda staggers back, and you follow the right straight into his face with a left to the gut, then pull back for another blow to the head. Now it’s his turn to surprise you, though, as his spear suddenly moves as if alive, striking with lightning speed and shocking fluidity. First a slash at the inside of your elbow stops your punch, then the blade is biting into your right wrist, then it’s at your neck again as you dodge
back, barely avoiding the fatal cut, only to feel it bite into your right knee. Matsuda seems to know every gap in your armor, and he’s intent on bleeding you dry. Kenôtis is no help either; it’s been moving in the wind as you two fight. As you retreat, you pull the cloak around you, thinking desperately on how to turn the fight around again. The wounds Matsuda is inflicting are shallow enough to be shrugged off, but the damage is accumulating nonetheless, and what’s worse is Matsuda’s sudden increase in speed. It’s as if taking a hit from you actually strengthened Matsuda, rather than sending him to his defeat.

“Shit!” Matsuda’s voice, harsh and frustrated, cuts into your thoughts. “I can’t keep this up.” As you watch, Matsuda spits a stream of blood off to the side. He’s unsteady on his feet, too, for all that his attacks are still sharp. “Think ya broke somethin’ in there.” Suddenly he leaps to the roof of a small house, and from there speeds off over the rooftops, calling back as he disappears, “Tonight’s your win, Kaichou! See ya around!”

Status Updated

From behind, the sound of clapping meets your ears, and you whip around to face the new assailant, nervous tension surging through you at the thought of facing another Servant in this state. On the other hand, you’ll likely be able to take out your frustrations on this new enemy, as long as you can stall them long enough to fill your body with magical energy and heal.

To your relief, it’s only your sister. Kôrakuhiime is sitting on a garden wall by the roadside, swinging her feet idly as she dangles them over the pavement and smiling at you. From the state of her, you aren’t the only one to have brought things into a melee. The colorful silk of her furisode has been adorned with a generous blood spatter and her hands, bare of her usual gloves, are covered in gore halfway to the elbow.

“That was... marvelous, Ani-ue,” she murmurs, and you’re taken aback for a moment. The usual coldness and hostility are quite gone, and for once her voice is all sweetness and admiration. “I was quite... amazed by your gallant display, defeating a foe against whom you were at... such a disadvantage.”

“I appreciate the kind words,” you reply, propping yourself up against the same wall and finally relaxing, “but if you were here, why didn’t you do anything? You might have helped, you know.”

“Of course... I would have, but I was forced to concern myself with his... compatriots, so that they could not threaten your... Master, and deprive you of magical energy. I could devote only... half... of my attention to your battle at that time. I had hoped to... participate, once I was finished with... their disposal, but...
when I arrived here, our brother was already in flight.” All this comes out in a regretful murmur, even lower than Kōrakuhime usual soft voice, and you decide to let the issue of her helping you drop. She had her own hands full with Matsuda’s five comrades, that much is plain from her appearance.

“What about your battle, then? It was your first time fighting against armed foes. Did they give you any trouble?”

“No, you needn’t worry... for me,” Kōrakuhime answers with a shake of her head. “They were... more vigorous game, but... that is all.”

“What about the old man, their leader?” It suddenly occurs to you that Matsuda should’ve run out of magical energy if Kōrakuhime had killed Antaglio, or otherwise she should have brought him to you. Yet Matsuda seemed fine when escaping.

“I could find no such person... nearby. When I... encouraged one of the priests to speak, he would say only that... their leader would ‘never show his face in battle.’ I am... sorry, Ani-ue.” Kōrakuhime looks down morosely, face hidden by a curtain of black hair as she hangs her head in disappointment.

“As long as you dealt with those who could fight,” you say, “that’s enough. It isn’t as if I have grounds to criticize you, after letting Matsuda get away from me.”

“Thank you, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime says softly, and lapses into silence.

As you stand there, leaning against the wall and letting the pain fade from you as your wounds gradually close up and heal, you consider what’s to be done next. Is it worth carrying out your original plan and attacking Archer tonight? On the one hand, the fight against Matsuda was a difficult, tiring one. You’re sure the energy you’ve used, both in battle and in healing, has been enough for Ayaka to feel the effects. On the other hand, if you return home tonight, it’s likely that by tomorrow morning either Saber or Archer will have been eliminated, and you won’t have gained any power by their defeat. What’s worse, if Archer can make good on his prediction that it will be impossible for Saber to reach his position you’ll lose your chance at revenge against the object of your hatred. It’s a dilemma.

[X] Stick to the plan and attack Archer. (Pride)
[ ] Return home for the night, and plan anew tomorrow. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Formulate a new plan for tonight (Write in)
Tokyo Street ~ Night

Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime watched the confrontation from the passenger seat. Between the depth of night and the distance, it was certain that the one behind her, that trash that kept her brother in servitude, couldn’t see what was going on. Kōrakuhime’s senses were different, though. The eyes of an oni, a creature specialized in hunting human prey, could see as well in darkness as in daylight, and had excellent range. On second thought, maybe it was the power of a Servant that did that; Kōrakuhime wasn’t certain which part of her powers came from which source. Of course, she couldn’t hear what the two men were saying with the car sealed, but the Hitsuizen Rekishi was there to clear up such inconveniences.

The beautiful man spoke first, grinning at her brother like an old friend. “Kaichou! Great ta see ya again! How’ve you been holdin’ up?” Now, she supposed, she knew that her second brother was still alive. The third artificial soul to escape the Akeldama, the one who had been called “Matsuda Ryuuta,” and who according to the Hitsuizen Rekishi had no true name, was meeting “Yumigawa Rushorou” again, and judging from the troupe of hidden bodyguards he’d brought with him, not as an ally. A thrill of excitement ran through the watching girl. This would be a lovely scene to watch!

“Matsuda?” Fortunately her brother realized the man’s identity promptly as well. It would have been a great disappointment if he hadn’t guessed it.

“Got it in one! I don’t blame ya for bein’ surprised. You haven’t changed as much as I have, have ya?” That was certain, Kōrakuhime mused. If her brother had been gradually transforming since his first change upon becoming a Master, the process hadn’t been so easygoing with the other two. Kōrakuhime herself had
undergone the most violent change, of course, but still; Matsuda looked like a
different person entirely.

After that, the two spoke for a bit, musing on whether or not Matsuda’s
martial tutelage had repaid the debt he owed to “Kaichou,” before Matsuda suddenly
lashed out and killed one of his companions in a strike so swift that Kōrakuhime
couldn’t begin to follow it. Obviously he wanted a clean conscience before killing his
brother, the strange fellow. Still, his new comrades bristled in the dark, and
Kōrakuhime decided it was time for her to make her appearance. She bade her
brother’s pet magus be silent and stepped out of the car, moving softly through the
chilly night air. It was still autumn now, but cold enough tonight that one might have
believed it January.

One of the priests who’d followed with Matsuda, content in his invisibility,
eyed Kōrakuhime lazily. He’d been posted to watch the car, and was considering
whether or not to call his friends, she could see. This would be her tool, then. She
looked him straight in the eye, smiled, and beckoned with a finger as she wandered,
adopting a posture of aimlessness, into a side street. The assassin started at being seen,
but soon gathered his wits and signaled his allies to come with him as he followed
Kōrakuhime. Her brother was interrogating Matsuda about his reasons for opposing
him now, and no doubt the assassins hoped they could deal as a group with one frail-
looking Servant, then return to assist Matsuda in disposing of the more significant
threat.

As the assassins rounded the corner, they began their attack, operating
smoothly as a five man team and fanning out their projectiles, thrown knives with
short handles and long blades. The aim was clear enough, three men attacking around
her to cut off her movement, while the other two attacked Kōrakuhime herself. She
could detect a powerful spiritual energy in the knives, designed to destroy spiritual
bodies like herself; no doubt that was the source of their confidence.

“How very... tiresome.” Kōrakuhime sighed as a wall of cement rose up before
her, springing from the talisman she’d dropped at her feet. Did they think that just
because their blades could hurt her and pierce bounded fields, she would have no
mode of defense? Curling her scarlet lips into a sneer, she let the wall crumble as she
announced, “Trivialities like you should keep to the same... Let these nameless things
have you, then!” As she said it, she flung out five more of her talismans, incantations
carefully inscribed to do away with the need for chanting.

The men were not as dumbfounded as Kōrakuhime had hoped, unfortunately.
As the talismans blossomed into vicious-looking oni brutes, the soldiers of Christ went
gamely to work, each facing his foe with daring and professionalism. Now that they
were kept busy, though, she could return to her book. Kōrakuhime took her ease on a cushion of wind, drew out the *Hitsuzen Rekishi*, and continued following her brother’s affairs. A blush rose to her face, as she discovered that he was thinking of her at that very moment, reaching out to his energy source in the car to ask what had become of her! Even if he acted coldly, Kōrakuhime knew he cared; and trusted her to dispose of this human trash without difficulty, it seemed.

She glanced up to confirm matters quickly. One of the church assassins had been killed, his head crushed by a spiked club, but one of the oni had been dissolved by holy light, so it seemed things were proceeding well enough. Back to the matter at hand, then. Matsuda’s weapon, it seemed, had the same sort of holy properties as the assassins’. When her brother tried to restrain him with a surge of elemental power, it was deftly cut and burned away. Well, Kōrakuhime had to give him points for style, but in the end his rough speech was too unpleasant. Besides, he lacked the cruel arrogance that someone who stood beyond humanity required.

Kōrakuhime’s brothers traded blows, and Alberich had the worst of it, taking a sharp cut to the back of his neck. There was no mistaking that Matsuda outdid him in speed and pure skill. Perhaps she should go and help him- but it was no good. The fight between the oni and the assassins was still raging energetically, and if Kōrakuhime left her familiars behind they would soon weaken. She’d have to trust her brother to make the fullest possible use of his abilities. One of which, apparently, was diplomacy, as he tried to convince Matsuda to lay down his arms and rejoin them. Kōrakuhime wasn’t sure how to feel about that. After all, shouldn’t one execute a person who turned their blade against you without delay? Then again, it was wise to avoid a battle against someone so dangerous, she supposed. In any case, it came to nothing. Like the delinquent he had been based on, Matsuda was dead-set on a battle. Alberich charged him with sword drawn, finally taking the initiative for the first time, and-

An oni’s disembodied arm, chopped off at the elbow, landed in Kōrakuhime’s lap, obscuring her reading. Furious at the interruption, she looked up to see the disappointing sight of three surviving assassins doing away with the last oni. They were all using various martial arts, combined with their long knives, to make short work of the brute.

Kōrakuhime heaved another sigh. These fellows just wouldn’t stop getting in her way. With their attention still on the familiar, she tossed out three more talismans to land at their feet, and as it fell, dissolving into the air, stone vines sprang up from the ground to wrap around and imprison the assassins. As expected, the knives that
served them so well against spiritual bodies could do nothing against bonds made of
the pavement that had been there already.

Full of cheer at the easy victory, Kōrakuhime strolled over to the three
immobile men, pulling off her gloves as she did so. It was rather unpleasant to expose
her bare skin to the chill air, but the fearful expressions on the men’s faces as they
fixed their eyes on her nails was worth it.

“Now,” she said, laying an edge along the throat of the leftmost man, “tell
me... all about the people who sent you. I’m sure Ani-ue will not get... much from his
foe, so... I must make do with you three.”

“You don’t deserve to hear a word, you demonic bitch,” the man hissed.
“We’ll-”

His protestations were cut short by a gurgle as Kōrakuhime opened his throat.
Moving on to the next man, she clapped her hands together, and the stone bonds that
wrapped his limbs began to slowly constrict, eliciting strange creaking and popping
sounds from his body, and a hideous grimace from his face.

“If you tell me what I want to know... I will stop,” Kōrakuhime said. “What
can you tell me about the... organization that dispatched you?”

This man, too, held his silence, keeping his lips pressed tightly together until,
after a particularly striking crunch, he could do so no longer, and let out a soft,
keening whine. Blood seeped from between his lips, and he slumped in his bonds. The
constriction continued, however, until only a gory paste remained to coat the cement
vines in a bright new coloration.

“I’ll talk, I’ll talk! Just let me go, I beg of you, I’ll tell you everything!” The
words fell from the third man’s lips in gibbering desperation, his face a mask of fear at
the prospect of meeting the same fate as either of his friends. This, Kōrakuhime
observed, was the same sentry who had followed her in the first place. Plainly the
mental weak link of the group.

“Go... ahead, then.”

“We’re from the Agency of the Eighth Sacrament, a division of the Holy
Church that looks for and secures relics! We’re here to oversee the Holy Grail War,
but Father Antaglio was worried about the additional Servant he found, and after
hearing his story he sent us to hunt down the rest!” It’s a terrified babble, words
almost running together in the man’s hurry to spill his guts, but Kōrakuhime follows
easily enough.

“What about this Father Antaglio? Is he... around here, somewhere?”
“I don’t know, please, I’m telling the truth, he never even met us in the same place twice!” The man really was the very model of a coward, Kōrakuhime considered. There he was preemptively begging just in case his answer had displeased her.

“He would not have... appeared here, then? Despite the fact that his... voice was heard?” Kōrakuhime dropped her tone to one of icy fury at this last question, just to see how far she could drive the quivering creature.

“No, he would never show his face in a battle,” the man almost wailed, “he’s much too cautious, he must have projected his voice somehow!”

“That is... enough,” Kōrakuhime said, “for the moment,” and returned to her seat, taking out the *Hitsuzen Rekishi* again to confirm the progress of her brother’s battle. Sure enough, he had properly closed the distance and driven a fist home, staggering the weaker Servant. It should be all over soon! Hurrying to see the end of the fighting in person, she rushed over to the still-bound man, who was now hanging limp with relief, and quickly ripped out his heart. Then she took to the air, making her lighthearted way back to her brother.
Matsuda Ryuuta, for the third time in his life, was running from a fight. That wasn’t to say he minded, particularly. Some delinquents liked to talk about honor, face, and things like that; they’d always answer when called out, always stand up in front of a group of enemies when outnumbered, and so-on. Ryuuta had beaten down guys like that by the dozen. The fact was, he knew that what you really needed to win a fight wasn’t a burning spirit, but an understanding of how, where, and when to apply force. He’d always fought where, when, and with the methods that would ensure he won, and as a result could boast that he’d never lost a fight. He’d had a hell of a time for a while, and built up a great reputation at the same time. Eventually, though, fighting grew tiresome, and Ryuuta could only look forward to life as a yakuza after graduation, hoping that would revitalize his interest. That was, until he’d woken up in the burning city.

There, Ryuuta had come face to face with plenty of enemies who could do away with him easily. One had even put himself in danger to save Ryuuta’s life, and at that time Ryuuta had been moved enough to swear he’d follow the guy and repay his debt (privately amending that he’d do so without risking his life again.) So, Ryuuta had ended up teaching the most unlikely sort of fighter, an honor student who prided himself on consistently being elected student council president, his own method of fighting: a brawl with no rules, no beginning, and no end. By all accounts, the techniques enabled Kaichou to survive the strange war that was going on in that fake world, and even get them all back to reality, while Ryuuta contented himself with training and keeping in shape.

Then there had been another strange awakening, and Matsuda Ryuuta found himself thrust even further into the strange world of magic and bloodshed he’d been
lingering on the edges of. He’d come to washed up on a riverside, face-down in the 
grass with his legs still floating in the water, for some unguessable reason. Worse was 
the change to his appearance. When Ryuuta washed off his face in the river water, 
he’d nearly gone into shock. Staring up at him was a face that belonged on a male idol, 
or some drama star: the kind of pretty boy girls were always squealing over, and that 
Ryuuta had once delighted in beating bloody. What’s more, he was wearing clothes 
right out of a hong kong kung fu movie (for some reason he knew the outfit was called 
a changpao) and had a weird spear (fangtian ji) lying next to him. His body felt 
strangely light, too, and-

Then it had hit Ryuuta, all at once. Bizarre costume, weapon, unusual looks, 
surpassing strength... somehow, he’d become one of those superhuman familiars that 
fought the war they’d been in: a Servant! If his course of action hadn’t been obvious 
before that revelation, it certainly was afterwards. Ryuuta had to find Kaichou and 
the rest, and see what was going on. From the look of things, the war wasn’t over, 
after all.

Things certainly had changed, though. Matsuda soon found out that he wasn’t 
in Ajisartous’ world anymore. This was a real city, full of people milling about and 
living their lives. Unfortunately, wherever it was, it wasn’t a part of the city he’d ever 
visited, and he soon found himself hopelessly lost. What’s more, nobody took him 
seriously when he asked for information. After a few hours of aimless wandering, 
Ryuuta had passed out on the street. When he woke up next, it was in the catacombs 
of a church, and his new life of training to execute Father Antaglio’s enemies began.

Now that life, like his life as a delinquent and his life as Kaichou’s advisor, 
seemed to be coming to an end. Though he’d gotten the showdown he’d been wanting, 
Ryuuta had been unable to best Kaichou, and found himself running away. Antaglio 
and the other executors would probably be found by Caster soon enough, so he 
couldn’t return to the church. The only thing he could do was put as much distance as 
possible between Kaichou and himself, and hope the source of energy Antaglio had 
given him didn’t fail before his wounds healed. From the feel of things, a rib was 
puncturing his right lung. It really was only thanks to a Servant’s constitution, 
Ryuuta supposed, that he could move at all.

Finally, Ryuuta figured he’d bought enough time running, and slumped down 
against a chimney. Achingly slowly, over what felt like hours, his bones returned to 
their proper places, burst veins restored themselves, the hole in his lung was sealed up, 
and the other internal damage was repaired. Even Ryuuta’s nose straightened back 
out.

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Now that he was healed, Ryuuta got to his feet to look around. He didn’t know a lot of the local geography, but something about this area looked strangely familiar. The rooftops, the way the streets were laid out, it all seemed to click with old memories. How far had he come, anyway, in his flight? Was this someplace he’d known in his old life, or just deja vu?

Ryuuta hopped down to the street, landing without a sound, to find a sign and take the measure of the place. Once he was on the ground, though, he didn’t need to. From a normal perspective, there was no question of this being familiar. It was the very street he’d grown up on! Unconsciously he’d somehow managed to find his way home, just when he was looking for a place to hide! Full of cheer, Ryuuta found his house, circled around to the backyard and up to the second floor, and opened his bedroom window. He’d used it when getting home late at night often enough that he never kept it locked. He’d try to explain what had happened in the morning. For now, though, all he wanted was to relish his first time sleeping in his own bed in weeks.

Ryuuta froze. There, sprawled out on his own bed and snoring loudly, was ‘himself’. Matsuda Ryuuta, in the flesh.
“That’s enough resting. I’ve made a full recovery, now. Let’s be on our way, Kōrakuhime.” You dust yourself off as you straighten up. It was a pleasant enough moment of rest after the harsh battle against Matsuda, but you can hardly lean on the wall all night with Archer waiting for you on the roof of Tochō’s southern tower.

“Do you still... intend to strike at Archer, Ani-ue? After your exertion, it might be best to, well...”

There’s a surprise. Kōrakuhime sounds honestly concerned for you. Did the sight of you bleeding stir some maidenly feeling in that impertinent mind of hers? If so, her concern is misplaced. “I’m perfectly well, I assure you,” you say, reaching up to pat her thigh reassuringly. “If anyone suffers from my exertion, it will be Miss Ayaka, and I’m confident she has enough magical energy to last another battle. More importantly, we must reach Archer before that other Saber can get to him.” You almost finish with, ‘I will not allow her to steal my prey!’ but hold off.

“Very well then, Ani-ue... if you are not concerned, neither am I.” Kōrakuhime nods, and the two of you head back to the car.

“Saber-san, you’re back! Who was that Servant? Are you okay? Can I do anything?” As soon as you sit down, Ayaka hits you with a barrage of questions and concern over your fight, unsurprisingly. From her tone it sounds as if she’s worried sick, and while that’s somewhat gratifying, you would prefer it if she didn’t let it get to her so much. She watched you heal after your first battle against Berserker, after all, and should understand your ability to recover by now.

“There’s no need for you to worry, Miss Ayaka,” you say, giving her your calculatedly gallant smile. “I’ve recovered completely, so we can now move on to our original foe for tonight, Archer. As for the identity of that Servant, he was the third and last of we siblings, who seems to have become a Lancer. Unfortunately, he is now
serving as a knight of the Church, aiming to destroy Kōrakuhime and I as stray Servants disrupting the proper Holy Grail War.”

“What?” Ayaka looks stricken. “But, Father Antaglio would never do something like that! I mean, you two were summoned ‘cause of Caster’s Noble Phantasm, right? So, he should know you’re part of it because of his power!” By the end of this, she’s gone from shocked to indignant.

“Perhaps you do not... know the overseer of the Holy Grail War... as well as you thought,” Kōrakuhime says, giving Ayaka a tiny smile.

“I guess not,” Ayaka answers morosely. “Even though he was so nice...” With that sad comment, she trails off, staring out at the passing city with an uncertain look on her face.

Kōrakuhime, too, seems content to let matters lie, and so the drive to the center of Tokyo’s government continues in silence. As you approach your destination, the residential areas gradually give way to commercial cityscape, and you find your car passing by more and more lively, still-lit streets full of bars and restaurants doing brisk trade, and late-night revelers wandering the town. You keep to the back streets yourself, avoiding the traffic of taxicabs that cater to drunks on their way home, but it’s a striking reminder all the same, that the people of Tokyo haven’t simply vanished to give you space for your battles. If the Mages’ Association and the Holy Church can really conceal this War, it must be an incredible feat of information management. Downtown is full of people looking for something interesting to do, and here you are driving to a duel on the Tochō heliport. Someone is going to have a truly heinous job to do, you’re sure of it.

“Ani-ue!” As you’re nearing your destination and beginning to look for parking within a few blocks of the tower, Kōrakuhime’s voice shocks you out of your thoughts. “Do you not feel this presence?”

Now that she points it out, you do. Off to your right, slowly being passed by, is a darkened office building from which the unmistakable presence of a powerful Servant can be felt. It’s set back enough from the road that you wouldn’t have noticed, if not for Kōrakuhime drawing your attention to it. More importantly, it’s within walking distance of Tochō. Whomever is within, they’re almost certainly here for the same reason you are: hunting Archer.

[X] Stop and investigate. Leaving this unattended could lead to an unwelcome surprise when battling Archer. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Go on to Tochō. Whatever may be going on here, you can’t afford any more delays. You’ll deal with this Servant after Archer has been finished off. (Duty)

[ ] Send Kōrakuhime to investigate the building, while you continue on your way. You don’t need her help to deal with Archer, and her magic should be able to keep this Servant occupied long enough to ensure they can’t intervene in your duel. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

As frustrating as it is to have another delay between you and Archer, you can hardly just ignore a Servant occupying a building with a view of Tochō. They’d be able to watch your entire fight, and intervene to their own advantage whenever they pleased. No, you’ve got to find out who it is that’s waiting in there before you can proceed. It isn’t only practical consideration that motivates you, though. The truth is, this encounter is more than a bit elating. This unknown Servant provides the opportunity to clear away the frustration of your incomplete battle with Matsuda, and unlike Archer they aren’t waiting in a fortified position, expecting an assault from a Saber. If all goes well, this should be an easy, satisfying victory. Luckily for you, there’s an empty space right in front of the building, so you can park immediately without having to travel too far on foot.

“Well done for noticing.” You pat Kōrakuhime’s hand, continuing with a grin, “Whomever is in there, I don’t doubt they’re near Tochō for the same reason we are. I believe we ought to go and pay our respects.”

“At this rate... I wonder just when we shall finally meet Archer,” Kōrakuhime says, returning your smile.

“Who can say?” You give a shrug, then turn to more serious matters. “Follow behind me, stay close to Miss Ayaka. I’ll trust you to keep her safe, Kōrakuhime.”

“Um, Saber-san,” Ayaka interjects. “Do you really think we should go in here? I mean, we don’t know what kind of defenses they could have. We’ve already scouted out Archer, so don’t you think...” She trails off on a worried note.

“I think we’re likely to find ourselves being ambushed, if we ignore this Servant. If we can feel them, they can feel our presences as well.” After this grim thought, you shift to a more reassuring tone, turning to smile back at Ayaka. “Besides, I only feel the presence of one in there. Whatever they have, we’ll be more than a match for them. You needn’t worry, just leave the planning to me.”

With that you get out of the car, not giving Ayaka the chance to complain further. As you do so, you materialize your armor, approaching the office building
ready for combat from the beginning. You won’t be making the same mistake now that you made with Matsuda.

Surprisingly, the automatic doors are still running, and smoothly open at your approach. By the darkened look of the place, you’d expected to have to break in, but that’s not so. Perhaps there’s something to Ayaka’s notion of the enemy having made an effort to set the place up to receive intruders after all, if they’re welcoming you in this way. Kōrakuhiime would surely notice magical traps, though, and she doesn’t comment on anything as you walk into the lobby.

As you look around and survey the ground floor, it strikes you as fairly similar to that of the Einzbern Tower. One wall faces the street, with glass doors and windows standing in for the wall; at the opposite end of the room is an information desk and a bank of elevators, with stairs to either side, in the corners. The floor is polished stone, likely marble, and the wide room is largely empty save for a few seats around low tables set up to receive those who are waiting for appointments. Where the Einzbern Tower’s lobby was full and bustling with its strangely oblivious mundane inhabitants, however, this place is utterly empty and lifeless. Moreover, the courtesy shown you by the sliding doors apparently doesn’t extend to the lights. The room remains unlit as you survey it.

Somewhere up above you, you can feel the other Servant’s presence. You’re still too far to have any distinct idea of location or movement, though. Whether this shadowy figure is steadfastly observing Archer while oblivious to your presence, standing vigilant guard over the entrances to the floor where they wait for your arrival, or nervously pacing back and forth as they try to decide whether to prioritize you or Archer, you can’t guess. All you can tell from here is that there’s something strangely familiar about this presence. The energy above you feels harsh, and somehow metallic; like an undisguised weapon, it’s a dangerous energy that can be put to no use but murder. But who exactly...

You shake your head, clearing your mind and focusing on the immediate. You must be overthinking this, focusing too hard on this Servant’s presence and fooling yourself into a delusion of recognition. All Servants are tools of destruction, after all; you really can’t make any conclusions about who it is up there based on that sort of vague feeling. Instead of musing on such things, you should be making a decision about how to proceed.

[X] Take the stairs up to the next floor. (Pride)
[ ] Try an elevator, see if you can go directly to the floor with the unknown Servant. (Duty)
[ ] Wait here, let the unknown Servant come to you. (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Split up the group, taking different routes (Write in details)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After giving the elevators a glance, you decide to proceed by the stairs. If you knew more about what waited for you up above, taking a faster option might be wise, but as it is there’s really no logical course of action but to go through the building one floor at a time. With your decision made, you stride across the lobby, steel boots clicking on the marble floor, and begin the ascent.

The stairwell is set up so that one can ascend a storey without turning, reach a pair of doors, and then the stairs double back after the landing to continue upwards. It’s a cramped area, and would be a bad place to meet an attacker coming from above, but fortunately none appears and you quickly ascend to the second floor. You would’ve known if the unknown Servant were close enough to be waiting on the first flight of stairs. This floor, according to the sign by the doors, is the home of “Betsujin Insurance”.

With Kōrakuhime and Ayaka following just behind, you push open the doors and take a look around the new area. As you might expect from an insurance agency, the place is a maze of cubicles, with a few doors to separated offices here and there. At the opposite end of the room is another set of double doors, presumably leading to another stairwell. The unknown Servant, it seems, is still somewhere above you.

As you’re considering this, one other detail catches your eye; or more accurately your toe. Walking in the dark, cramped office space, you stop short when something soft and meaty bumps up against your boot: the body of a fat, balding man in a black suit, lying face-up on the floor. Ayaka, peering past you at the thing, gasps in shock, but there’s no reaction from Kōrakuhime. After confirming that there’s no change in the presence above you, you crouch down for a closer look.

“Saber-san, is he dead?” Despite her usual disregard for non-magi, Ayaka sounds honestly worried about the stranger. You’re not sure whether to be touched by her compassion or disappointed in her innocence, particularly after everything she’s seen in the War so far.

“No,” you say, “this man is alive.” What you at first thought was a corpse is in fact merely unconscious; you can hear the man faintly breathing now that you’re
closer to his level. No wounds are immediately apparent, either. “He seems to have been knocked out; I suppose our hosts had a difficult time finding an office building that had emptied to their satisfaction.”

You pause to think for a moment. If unknown Servant was going through the building floor-by-floor and knocking out all of the remaining workers, you could probably learn something useful about their abilities by taking a closer look at the unconscious salaryman. On the other hand, that would lose you some time, and confronting them directly would be the most immediate way of discovering who it is that’s taken over this building.

[ ] Investigate the body further (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Go through the rest of Betsujin Insurance, and see if there’s anything else of note. (Curiosity)
[X] Disregard the second floor and move on. (Pride)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You stand up again, turning away from the unconscious man to face Ayaka and Kōrakuhime. The question of exactly how the unknown Servant went about clearing the building may be interesting, but it isn’t practical to go looking for an answer now.

“That other Servant is still above us, for the moment,” you say. “Let’s find them, before they decide to favor discretion and escape.”

“Yes, it... doesn’t seem as if they have put any effort into preparing this building.” Kōrakuhime nods agreement. “I doubt if investigating it or its inhabitants would... yield any boon.”

Ayaka nods as well, saying, “Alright, Saber-san, lead the way.” Her interest in the unconscious Betsujin employee seems to have vanished with your confirmation that he’s alive.

With that short confirmation of intent, the three of you head back to the stairwell, closing the doors on Betsujin Insurance and ascending to the third floor. As you climb the second flight of cement stairs (as separate in design from the building’s interior areas as if they’d been part of a different structure; testament to the architect’s expectations of the elevators’ popularity), though, the presence above you shifts. They’ve finally decided to make their move, it seems, and they’re descending as you climb.
Facing the door from the third floor landing, a thrill of tension runs through you. You can feel the other Servant’s magical energy much closer now. The presence must be on the same floor, no farther away than the opposite side; and it is someone you’ve met before, you’re sure of that now.

Before entering, you glance at the map by the side of the door. The third floor isn’t all one company’s office space, as the second was, but rather the home to a number of conference rooms, shared by the various businesses that lease offices in the building. The corridors are laid out in a large square, surrounding the edge of the floor, with two perpendicular corridors running through the middle, and the conference rooms laid out on either side of these.

You push open the double doors, and there she is: the origin of that unmistakable magic presence like a naked blade. She of the cold, regal, impassive countenance; hair like beaten gold, eyes like chips of ice; steel plate over an azure dress, and a blade clad in swirling wind. There stands a woman you could never fail to recognize, the perpetrator of your crowning humiliation: the other Saber, standing at the junction of the two corridors. As you enter, your eyes meet hers. If she can see any trace of the mask of hatred distorting your features behind your helm, she doesn’t show it.

“So you stand before me again,” she begins, in a voice as emotionless and stately as her expression, “you who call yourself Saber. Your survival of your Master’s death, and how battles since, however, have proved your identity beyond doubt.”

“Have you begun to see reason, then?” Your own voice comes out in an angry demand, equal parts mockery and fury. If passionless speech is a knightly skill, it’s one in which the girl down the hall surpasses you. “I have told you before, I am Saber.”

“Dispense with the charade, Avenger,” the other Saber replies, a hint of anger creeping into her tone. “I remember your methods well. Do not think that they will serve you as well now as they did fifteen years ago.”

Avenger? Your jaw almost drops at this. You were prepared for this girl to accuse you of being almost any of the different Servant classes, but not to call you Avenger. As far as you can recall, Avenger seemed to be another term for the demonic Servant that corrupted the Holy Grail in Fuyuki. If that’s the case, however, what could it have to do with you? Come to think of it, Tohsaka had claimed you were wearing Angra Mainyu’s shadow. What is it about your cloak that seems to remind people so steadfastly of that thing?

[X] Rebut her claim, insisting that you are in fact Saber. (Pride)
[ ] You’ve had enough of talking to this woman. Too much, in fact. Charge in and cut her down! (Duty)

[ ] There’s no point in letting her get to you. Take a defensive stance, and begin filling the shadows at your feet with Nothingness. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“Avenger, am I?” You grit your teeth, the nerve of the woman getting to you. “I have told you once before, miss. I am the Servant of the Sword, Saber; and my name is Alberich.” With Heiligöffnungschwert in your right hand, you lay your left against your breast in a theatrical gesture of indignation, continuing, “You accuse me of a charade, call me dishonorable, all while hiding your own weapon and skulking in darkness, watching others’ battle tactics and judging them. When last we met, I concluded that you were a second Saber, but perhaps I misjudged you. Assassin may be the more suitable title for you!”

“Protest all you like,” comes the cold reply. “You cannot dissuade me from the evidence of your own powers, Avenger. I will not be a tool in your schemes a second time.”

“You had few enough qualms about acting as a pawn at our last meeting,” you spit. “Where was this independent spirit when you left me to die on your Master’s orders, rather than giving me the honorable death a knight deserves?”

“A wretch who lies about his name and nature has no honor.” The other Saber doesn’t flinch in the face of your wrath, her expression of frigid contempt remaining static. “As a Servant, I am bound to act as my Master’s sword. Fifteen years ago you defiled that bond with your corruption, and now you insult it. I am not surprised.”

“I take it you’re once more bound by some cowardly plan of your Master’s, then?” Though you ache to be at her, you keep talking. Somehow, it feels like it would be a defeat if you were the only one roused to anger here. “Perhaps you’re forbidden from leaving that spot, or you’ve been ordered to draw me into some trap. How about it, rogue? Am I near the mark?”

“No, Avenger.” The blonde Servant shakes her head, in disappointment. “If you fear a repetition of our last battle, take heart. Tonight, I intend to cut you down without fail.” Without another word she springs into action, rocketing towards you with shocking speed and bringing her invisible blade up in a vertical slice fit to bisect you. It’s a perfect strike for you to destroy her weapon.

Heiligöffnungschwert has been at your side, but as the other Saber comes to strike you bring it up in a diagonal guard, hilt up and point down, to catch her slash.
At the last moment, though she sheers off, slamming her forward foot down and reversing direction with another burst of energy to complete the strike harmlessly. Now it’s your turn to close distance. With a flick of the wrist, you bring \textit{Heiligöffnungschwert} up and charge, striking at her with two quick slashes across the body. Your foe stays maddeningly out of reach, however, retreating down the corridor.

“What’s the matter, girl?” you roar, “Too frightened to meet my blade?”

Perhaps you’ve finally gotten to her. Saber’s face doesn’t twitch, but she plants her feet and stops in the face of your assault, rapidly closing distance by virtue of your own oncoming charge and slipping into your range behind the second strike with \textit{Heiligöffnungschwert}. As you loom over her, she suddenly brings her own sword up in a direct thrust, piercing up at your chin to slit your throat and go straight up through your jaw at a stroke!

Fortunately, though the other Saber may be a shade faster than you are, you can still read her movements. You stop your charge and plant your own feet, swaying back in time with her attack and letting the blade of wind pass in front of your face, rather than through it. Then you have your chance. You can see it perfectly: the girl’s arms are fully extended from the thrust that she expected to kill you, and she’ll be slower to react for a moment. You whip \textit{Heiligöffnungschwert} up and cut straight across to cleave Saber’s blade in two.

If her hands are slowed, though, her feet are not. As your blade comes up, Saber quickly hops back out of the way, almost getting completely clear of the strike, but not quite making it. The tip of \textit{Heiligöffnungschwert} grazes the edge of the invisible weapon before your foe can get clear. At that moment, you’re blinded and thrown back by a thunderous explosion of roaring wind, a hurricane gale that tosses you back down the hall like a blow from Berserker.

As the wind clears and you steady yourself, once more at the opposite end of the corridor from the other Saber, you catch sight of her weapon without its sheath of air. It is, as you guessed, a large broadsword, with a two-handed grip and a wide blade, a bit shorter than your \textit{Heiligöffnungschwert}. What catches your eye, though, is the quality of the blade itself. It shines golden, as if lit with an inner fire, or even forged out of light itself. The thing is the perfect opposite to your own midnight black armament, a blade that shines like a beacon. The light is no mere show, either; the magical energy you can feel pouring off of that weapon may not match \textit{Gungnir}, but it’s far beyond the power of anything else you’ve seen.

\textbf{Status Updated}

The revelation of her weapon’s hidden light doesn’t seem to make much of an impact on your foe, however. She holds it before her, waiting for your next attack,
and behind that burning light her eyes are as cold as ever. “I suppose it is fortunate,” she says, “that you were the one to see this. My blade ordinarily remains hidden to prevent foes from recognizing it, but you already know all that there is to know about me, don’t you, Avenger? Rest assured, I will not allow you to relay that knowledge.”

This confusion about your identity, you muse, is beginning to become truly troublesome. If she knew that you were a perfect stranger, even this icy woman might, in a moment of pique, let slip some essential detail about the nature of her suddenly revealed Noble Phantasm. Unfortunately, Avenger is apparently well aware of it already, so you have only the evidence of your eyes to work from. You suppose it’s likely a holy sword of some kind, from the ostentatious golden glow of the blade, but beyond that you’re at sea.

Now that there’s some space between you and your foe, you have a moment to contemplate your next move. You could simply charge back into the fray, of course. Between the two of you, you’re fairly confident that you are the more skilled with a sword. Her speed and bursts of power are dangerous, though, and there is the uncertain power of that Noble Phantasm to consider. On the other hand, you might take a defensive stance and let her come to you. If you can perfect the counter you attempted at her first attack, you could cut her down at a stroke. Then there are the doors: to the meeting rooms on your right and left, and to the stairwell behind you. If you were to retreat to another room, you could lay a trap or confer with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime.

[X] Go on the offensive, blade against blade. (Pride)
[ ] Prepare to defend yourself, with the aid of magic if need be. (Duty)
[ ] Dodge into a meeting room and prepare a trap with tendrils of Nothingness. (Pride/Self-Preservation)
[ ] Retreat into the stairwell to regroup with the other two. (Self-Preservation/Compassion)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After a moment’s consideration, you decide that there’s no purpose in changing your approach. You’ve had success in head-on combat so far, so you’ll continue in the same manner. As you charge forward, your blade at the ready and cloak streaming out behind you with speed, the other Saber remains still; waiting for your attack. Suddenly a chill runs down your spine, as the energy surrounding her
blade is amplified and condensed. The shining light, already glaring, becomes almost blinding.

Whatever she was planning to do, though, doesn’t happen before you can close the distance. You bring Heiligöffnungschwert up in a quick strike at her sword, hoping to put an end to the potent thing, but she hops back just in time, in a repetition of your exchange a few moments ago; this time her timing is better, though, and no part of her blade is damaged.

With an explosion of magical energy, she springs to life, following her backstep with a charge forward, circling around to your right while you’re still bringing your blade back from the left side. She’s behind you almost before you know it, and you whirl around just in time to dodge a furious cut at your knees. A moment ago you were pushing the bitch back against the windows, cutting off her escape, but now she’s got the full length of the building to dodge away and counter in. No matter. You’ll have to show her that you aren’t one to be put off by range.

“Let’s see you step away from this!” you snarl. “Heiligöffnungschwert!” You bring the sword down in a straight diagonal from the right shoulder, tracing a line across the corridor ahead, and cut a rift in reality as you do so. A portal flies from your blade, promising death to the other Saber if she persists in her usual approach of backing off and waiting to counterattack.

Naturally, she doesn’t. Far from retreating, your opponent drops her stance and charges, sliding below the strike as easily as if there were no possible other action. Now she’s the one on the offensive, and you swipe across at her, hoping to take her head as she comes up, but that attack too she slides by. Then she’s standing mere inches from you, energy surging in her blade, and you know you must shield yourself, bring Kenôsis up to defend yourself, but before you can react-

“EXCALIBUR!”

Saber calls the name of her weapon, and the world burns away in shining golden light.

**DEAD END**

*Tiger Dojo is a strange hint corner.*

*If you would like to beat the game by yourself,*

*or if you would like to keep the characters’ images, please be warned.*
You come to in a frustratingly familiar martial arts hall. It would be a lie to say you’d hoped never to return, since you don’t remember the place while alive, but now that you’re back you certainly regret having returned.

“Hi~! You did pretty well for a while, Ru-chan, but now you’re back here again! Welcome to the Tiger Dojo!” Taiga gives you a little wave, to go with her egregiously chipper greeting.

“Hi there, Onii-chan. You met my little sister since the last time we met, right? What did you think? We Einzberns are always the best heroines, you know.” Illya gives you a prideful look. Come to think of it, she does have the appearance, but is one of the people who handles your death really a member of the Einzbern family? If that’s the case, there’s really nothing out of their reach....

“Ei!”

Crack!

“No talking about matters unrelated to death!” Before she can expand on the matter, Taiga flies into a rage at Illya’s comment. “You’ll bring shame to the Dojo, a senior student acting like that!”

“He~h?” Illya lets out a piteous sound, nursing her wounded head. “You’ve done off-topic things lots of times, though, like when-” she cuts off, menaced with another attack from the shinaï.

“That’s better,” Taiga remarks, satisfaction in her voice. “Now, can you tell me why Saber-chan was able to kill Ru-chan this time?”

“Huh...” Illya puts a finger to her cheek, thinking. “Because he didn’t know about Excalibur?”

“Nope!” Rather than being disappointed or angry, Taiga looks happy about Illya’s wrong answer. These two sure have a twisted relationship. “It was because he underestimated her speed, and tried to fight her without using all of his abilities.” She wags a finger at you. “Remember, Ru-chan, never go into a fight holding back! You should use every advantage you can, or you might find yourself being taken by surprise by an enemy stronger than you thought.”

“I see,” you muse. “Even a lion uses his full strength when attacking a rabbit, right?”

“Correct! But in this example, it should be a tiger! Now, here’s your stamp. Good lu~ck!”

[ ] Go on the offensive, blade against blade. (Pride)

[ ] Prepare to defend yourself, with the aid of magic if need be. (Duty)
After a quick look around, you decide to change your tactics. The other Saber is a dangerous foe in a head-on fight, and there’s the possibility of her Noble Phantasm being more of an advantage now that it’s been revealed. You doubt it, as an invisible sword was something quite difficult to contend with, but still the possibility is there. Galling as it is to take an action even similar to retreat, victory is more important than its method. Instead of preparing to attack or defend, you dart through one of the numerous doors that line the corridor and elect to wait for your foe within.

Through the door is a fairly plain meeting room, with floor and walls all some shade of grey, save the white projection sheet hanging at one end. The center of the room is occupied by a large elliptical wooden table surrounded by comfortable-looking chairs. All in all, it’s a perfectly functional space in which to discuss corporate policy. For the purposes of a battle between Servants, however, it’s uncomfortably cramped. Just what you’d hoped for.

As you stand by the door, back pressed against the wall and sword at the ready, you begin preparing the second portion of your trap. The door opens within you, and you fill your magic circuits with Ayaka’s Od, before forcing it out in the form of Nothingness. Countless tendrils grow from your cloak and the shadows at your feet, snaking out to coat the floor and lower walls, while remaining hidden in darkness. Once she follows you in here, you’ll be able to bury your enemy in bonds before she can do a thing with that holy sword of hers. Now all that’s left is to wait.

For a while, wait is all you do, as Saber’s presence in the outer corridor remains still. Perhaps she’s hoping you’ll think better of your plan and come back out, or perhaps she’s calling on her Master to advise her what to do in this situation. You really can’t guess at that icy woman’s thought process, but whatever it is that she’s doing it keeps her still for a while. Finally, though, you feel her begin to move. She draws closer, closer, taking slow, methodical, guarded steps. Closer still, and then she’s through! Whirling around to face you with her blade, ready to fight in a moment, and then-
Going down, as the Nothingness swirls up to enfold her from below. In moments she’s covered from the waist down, and before she can go to hack at it you’ve got more tendrils whipping out of the shadows to take hold of her arms. In desperation, she lets out an aimless burst of magical energy, not powering her own movements but trying to dislodge the grasping element. The energy must be imbued with her own magic resistance, because for a moment your power over her weakens as your tendrils whither. You only need to pour more energy into them, though, and they come back stronger than ever. Saber is struggling like a mad thing, all composure gone, and then suddenly it all ends. She takes a long, shuddering gasp, her eyes roll back, and the Servant collapses.

You’re not certain it really happened for a moment. It couldn’t have been so simple to subdue your most hated enemy, could it? Yet there she lies, unconscious, with her armor and holy sword slowly dematerializing. She isn’t, though, so it’s not as if she’s suffering from a loss of magical energy. It isn’t as if you choked her or wounded her either, you were still only restraining her. For all the world, it seems as if the reason for her loss of consciousness was something quite unseen. With any ordinary woman, you would have supposed she’d just fainted out of fear and rage. Surely that can’t be the case for this stalwart creature, though.

Whatever the cause may be, when Saber’s weapon and armor have fully vanished, and she doesn’t stir after you prod her cheek with a boot, you’re sure she’s quite unconscious. As you’re making sure of that, another notion strikes. Now that you look at her while she isn’t trying to kill you, it suddenly occurs to you that this other Saber is really quite beautiful. Let her relax, the arrogant hostility fading from her face, and she becomes the very picture of maidenly purity.

You wonder if, instead of killing her now, it wouldn’t be wiser to take her back to the Shijou manor with you, confine her, and look for some way of turning her to your side. If Caster was able to do it with Kikuko, and the priest Antaglio managed to bind Matsuda to his service, it shouldn’t be impossible for you and Kōrakuhime to find some method of making this hateful, superior, high-handed creature into a subservient ally. Even if that fails, you would have the opportunity of stretching out your revenge over a far longer period than you would otherwise be able to.

[ ] Yes, it’s a fine idea. Leave Saber bound here and go find Kōrakuhime and Ayaka, out on the stairwell, to let them in and discuss the notion with them. (Pride)
[X] Reach out telepathically to Ayaka and tell her to come to you with Kōrakuhime. You can discuss the idea with them here, but for the moment you don’t want to let this other Saber out of your sight. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] No, such indulgence and optimism are pointless. You’ve already had enough of Saber’s resolve to last a lifetime, and don’t need it thrown in your face again when you’re trying to make a servant out of her. Just kill her now, and be satisfied with that. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Yes, you think, it would be good to bring the other Saber back to the Shijou manor with you. You’re not sure right now whether you’re motivated more by the chance to savor her death or that of making her into a subordinate, but you know you wouldn’t be satisfied just killing her now. There will be time enough to sort out exactly what you want to do with the unconscious girl once you’ve returned to the manor. With that decision made, it suddenly occurs to you that you haven’t seen your Master or Kōrakuhime since reaching this floor. They should have been following behind you, and Kōrakuhime could have aided you in the battle against the other Saber, yet they’ve disappeared. Harris, too, should be here, but he wasn’t with his Servant. A chill runs down your spine as the two facts come together in your mind. Could the infamous “Second Magus-Killer,” the Master who killed Jean-Pierre Vaisset, be putting Ayaka in danger even now? Kōrakuhime should be able to protect her, of course, but a strange feeling of dread clings to you nonetheless.

Tension mounting, you start through the door, heading for the stairwell where you left your two companions, but come up short. You can’t just leave your defeated foe here unconscious. What if she were to wake up, regain her senses and escape? It’s not as if you can keep her bonds manifested in perpetuity, after all. They’re draining energy from Ayaka even now, and your Master’s reserves aren’t unlimited. Instead, you decide to settle for contacting your Master by the mental bond you share. Reaching out to her, you find that the connection between the two of you is still there, at least, and she’s conscious. You can feel that as you send her your thoughts, saying, ‘Miss Ayaka, I’ve neutralized the enemy Servant. Where are you and Kōrakuhime?’ That resolves the most pressing of your concerns. The response you get is anything but heartening, though. ‘Saber-san?’ comes the confused reply, followed presently by, ‘That’s... good, we’re, um, fighting the Master, I think? Up on the roof?’ Her thoughts are scattered, disordered and unclear, as if
she’s on the edge of unconsciousness. It reminds you of the manner of her thoughts just after you awoke in the Einzbern Tower, when you had asked about the night before while she was half asleep. If anything, though, she’s more out of it now. What’s happening up there?

‘He’s pretty amazing, you know,’ Ayaka continues hazily, unaware of your concern. ‘He’s, like, beating up your, um, sister’s magic just with his fists! It’s really crazy.’ Unbelievable. You knew Harris was formidable, but this goes beyond anything you could have guessed at. As an ordinary human, he can actually fight on par with a Servant? Moreover, as a magus faced with a Caster? Then again, it’s likely that the personality of the combatants is affecting matters. You’ve only known her for a short while, but you’ve gotten a good idea of Kōrakuhime’s personality in the time since meeting her, and you know she’s ridiculously arrogant. She’s probably taking him lightly due to her pride as something beyond human, and if you let the fight go on it’s entirely possible she could make a fatal mistake! You can’t let this be a repetition of the battle between Harris and Vaisset...

[X] Get up to the roof and save them! You can’t just stay here while Kōrakuhime and Ayaka are in danger from Harris. He may be doing well enough against your sister, but after defeating the Servant you’re sure you can handle the Master. (Compassion)

[ ] Intervene remotely! Tell Ayaka to relay your order to Kōrakuhime that she should retreat back to where you are. You don’t care if she’s sure she’ll win, she’s to pull back and disengage. As for Harris, you’ll deal with him yourself. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Frustrating as it is to abandon your captured foe here, there’s nothing for it! You’ve got to get to the roof to save your sister and Master. ‘Just hang on,’ you tell Ayaka, ‘I’ll be there in a moment.’

With that, you give one last glance back at the other Saber, confirming that she’s unconscious and unarmed, and exit the meeting room. Your course from the corridor is obvious. Although there’s a stairwell on two sides of this building, the others have windows. One set looks out on a small park, while the other stares out on an alley. You’d like to question the design sense that went into that particular view, but at the moment it serves your purpose, as you can break through that and scale the side of the building far faster than if you’d tried to ascend by the stairs.
First, you shatter the pane with a kick, then reach up, grab hold above the window, and hurl yourself upwards with the strength of your arm! After that it’s just a matter of repeatedly leaping upwards between the two buildings. Your boots are leaving a string of craters behind you, but in the scale of things the Church will have to cover up about this building you suppose property damage is fairly unimportant.

As you climb you can hear a man, presumably Harris, shouting in an odd tone. He sounds excited and angry at the same time, so you can’t quite place the emotion. From the sound of it, he’s finishing a speech; though perhaps harangue would be the better term in this case. “...t power and technique is wasted on you, because you don’t know a thing about real combat!” As that proclamation comes to an end, you’re rising up over the lip of the roof to be presented with a bizarre sight.

Kōrakuhime is flying through the air with her back to you. Not by her own volition, but sprawled out parallel to the rooftop, hurtling towards you as if thrown with enormous force. Over her body, you can see the roof in shambles. Spread about it at random are numerous outcroppings of cement, as if all but the base of a statue has been broken off. Littered on the ground between them, you can see shards of metal blades, bits of wood, burn marks, and other incongruously placed signs of a battle of magic. At the center of it all stands Harris, in the posture of a discus thrower. Your sister isn’t just moving as if thrown, apparently. She really was thrown at you, and before you had even shown your face.

Kōrakuhime’s body slams into your chest with tremendous force, hitting you squarely while you’re in midair and unable to change trajectory. With the impact between the two fast-moving bodies, both of you stop for a moment, suspended in empty space between the two buildings. Then you plummet to the street below.

You land with a terrific crash, crushing a car beneath your steel-clad bulk. Fortunately you take the brunt of the damage, with Kōrakuhime landing on top of you. As you get to your feet on the roof of the totaled vehicle, you give your sister a quick looking over. She seems to be without serious injury, having gotten off with only a few bruises, a split lip, and the obvious fact that she’s unconscious. Even so, it’s unforgivable. For another man to have marred your Kōrakuhime, spreading purple bruises over that white skin and swelling on that perfectly formed doll’s face. To have even broken those lips, only ever adorned with the blood of others... you’ll tear him apart.

With greater speed than before, you leap upwards, kicking off the side of the building when your momentum flags and making the rapid ascent by moving back and forth across the alley, as before. This time, though, you prepare to cut through anything Harris can send at you as you leap over the edge onto the rooftop. Nothing
comes, though. The man stands before you foursquare, motionless and waiting. For a moment, so are you. Though you’re aching to be at him, you won’t underestimate the man who just defeated a Servant. As the two of you watch each other, a light breeze sweeps across the rooftop, stirring your cloak. Harris twitches. Perhaps something got in his eye, or it could just be that the wind bothered him, but it’s your opportunity to make a single, perfect strike; one impossible to counter.

You leap forward, striking like a shot from a gun, faster than the human eye can follow; fast enough that even you, during your time in the Akeldama, would see this strike only as a blur. Your blade whips out to take Harris’ left arm, and at that moment, as you close within a meter of him, you slow. Suddenly half of your speed, half of the power behind your movements, is gone. At the same time, Harris moves with impossible speed for a human, reacting perfectly to your attack. While you’re still shocked by the reversal of speed, he takes your sword-arm in one hand, gets the other behind your head, slides his left foot against yours, and smoothly rotates about it to slam you into the ground in a perfect throw.

You’re back on your feet in a moment, but Harris has already drawn back, putting the length of the rooftop between you with deceptive speed. He’s light on his feet, too, far more so than you’d have guessed from his bulky looks. “You rat,” you growl, “what did you do to me?”

“Maybe I’ll tell you someday, Alberich,” he says, and unbelievably he’s actually grinning! Not out of malice, either, but an open, friendly grin. “For now I’ll keep it to this,” he goes on. “You and your sister had better polish your skills in close quarters fighting, if you want to have a chance against me. Now, it’s my turn.” As his arm moves, you prepare to defend, but rather than attack he throws something at the ground.

When Harris’ projectile hits the ground, everything goes white, as the thing produces a blinding flash. Not to be deterred, you charge towards Harris’ last location, tracking him by the sound of footsteps. He’s circling around to attack you from the side! You close on the location of his steps and strike just as your vision clears!

Harris is gone. What your sword cut was only the air above a strange machine, a sort of speaker on wheels that produces the sound of footsteps as it moves around at random. Gritting your teeth in fury, you scan the skyline for Harris’ retreating form, but he’s nowhere to be found. In all of this infuriating situation, though, there is one reason to take heart. Ayaka is slumped against the door between the stairwell and the rooftop, sleeping peacefully. You don’t know why Harris didn’t attack your Master this time, but it is a point of good fortune. Still, the tower where Archer is waiting
looms above you, dominating the area. Taking in the ominous form, you contemplate where to go from here.

[X] Collect Ayaka, Kōrakuhime, and Saber and return to the Shijou manor. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Bind Saber and dump her in the trunk of the car, then see if you can rouse Ayaka and Kōrakuhime and go after Archer. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

It occurs to you, suddenly, that at this distance Archer should have been able to intervene in your encounter with Harris. A Servant’s eyes are superhuman, and if his power was anything to judge by that man’s range should be able to equal that of artillery. Why, then, has he done nothing? You look up at the split tower off to the north, straining your eyes to make out the form of the watchers on the rooftop, but it’s a futile gesture. You can’t make out so much as a silhouette on that unlit roof, with only the black sky for a background. Perhaps they’ve gone, then, Archer and his Master, or perhaps they’re allowing you to retreat. It would have to be an allowance, much as it galls you to admit it, because you’re in no condition to take them on. The battle against Saber and her Master has left you drained, and your comrades unconscious.

Speaking of your comrades, you would do well to get them back to the manor as soon as you can. They’re only a burden now, but if another Servant should find you with three unconscious girls in tow, your Master and sister will become a deadly liability. Putting Archer from your mind, you turn on your heel and walk back to the rooftop door. Not before crushing that infuriating machine underfoot, though.

“My apologies, Ayaka. Be glad you’re not awake.” With those muttered words of guilt, you pick the girl up and sling her unceremoniously over your shoulder. Then you kick the door open and make a quick descent of the building, passing the unexplored floors without heed. Only when you’re back at the third floor do you stop, heading in and returning to the meeting room where you left the female Saber unconscious. Fortunately for you she hasn’t stirred, though she is making occasional inarticulate sounds, like the edges of words uttered in dreams. Her faint must have transitioned into proper sleep for some reason. Looking down at the girl, you wonder idly whether what you were told before about Servants’ sleep was really true.
Adelheid, yourself, Kōrakuhime, and now this other Saber... it certainly seems as if most Servants sleep in the same uncontrolled way humans do.

That said, you have no time for idle wondering. You squat down, hook your left arm under the blonde girl’s waist, and sling her over that shoulder, opposite Ayaka. With that second cargo of flesh collected, you turn and head back out of the building the way you came. For a moment you consider just leaping out of the window to land beside Kōrakuhime, but you reject the idea put of concern that the impact might wake up the female Saber.

By the time you’ve returned to the totaled car in the alleyway, your sister is back on her feet. Her wounds have healed as well, at least those visible on the surface. The mentality, though, is plainly a different story. As you round the corner, you see for a moment her face contorted in a mask of rage and frustration, needle-sharp teeth gnawing her own lower lip as she wrings her hands and stares hatred up at the building above. Then she catches sight of you, and in an instant her features are composed into their normal impassivity.

“Ani-ue... please accept my apologies.” The first words out of her mouth are of regret, uttered in a mournful tone as she bows her head to you. “Despite being a superior being... I allowed myself to be defeated by a mere human. Words cannot express... the depth of my shame.”

“It’s alright, Kōrakuhime,” you say, and your own voice is gentle as you reach out and stroke her hair. “That man Harris isn’t just any human, he’s more like a Servant himself. He even countered my attack, after I came up to help you; you see? There isn’t any need to abase yourself before me. We were both shamed tonight, and we’ll have our revenge together.” You give Kōrakuhime an encouraging smile, which she returns nicely.

“Yes, Ani-ue!”

“Now then,” you say, turning back to the street, “I believe we’ve done enough tonight. Let’s get back to the manor.”

Once the two of you have loaded Ayaka and the blonde Saber into the backseat, taken your own seats, and gotten on the road, Kōrakuhime speaks up again. “Ani-ue, that blonde girl... is Harris’ Servant, the other Saber... is she not?”

“That’s correct. She was the enemy I faced while you were protecting Ayaka from Harris, the presence we felt in that building.”

“Why, then...” Kōrakuhime hesitates, dragging a pause out even longer than her norm. “…why did you not kill her, Ani-ue? Surely, as an enemy Servant, she is to be... executed, no?”
“Not this one,” you say, shaking your head. “In our battle, I bound her by magic to immobilize her before dealing the killing blow, but at that moment she suddenly fainted. After considering the matter, I decided to bring her back to the manor with us in that condition. Kōrakuhime, this is the woman who shamed me, giving me my first defeat in battle and leaving me to die. I intend to take my time with her.”

“I see...” Kōrakuhime nods, a look of understanding coming into her face. “If you intend to hold her for a... prolonged time, would you like me to create a... seal for her in the basement? I believe it would be possible to cut her off from contact by her Master as well as restricting... her movements.”

[X] “That sounds ideal, thank you.” (Compassion)

[ ] “No, I’ll deal with her myself.” (Pride)

“That sounds ideal, thank you. The bonds I use are rather energy-intensive, and as you can see, after all, and with Miss Ayaka in uncertain condition I would rather not strain her further.” Up until now, you’ve been ignoring the issue of what happened to your Master in order to focus on the pressing issue of getting home, but now that you’re out on the road it returns to your mind. Just as the mundanes in the office building were, she’s fallen unconscious. Could she have been the victim of some spell of Harris’? After a moment of thought, you continue, “Did you happen to see what Harris did to her? If there could be long-term effects, or this is some sort of curse...” You leave the consequences unsaid.

“Oh, that. You needn’t... be so concerned, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime replies with a shake of her head. “I... briefly examined her, while you were... conveying the two to our vehicle. Your... Master is only suffering from exhaustion, triggered... by overuse of her magic circuits. It could be... dangerous if you were to continue before... she has had a chance to recover, but at the moment... there will be no damage.”

“I see.” Without thinking you let out a sigh, one more source of worry removed from your shoulders. “That certainly is a relief. Thank you, Kōrakuhime.”

“Of course,” comes the soft answer. “It was... but a trifling thing to... do.”

For a while, you drive in silence, retracing the route you took on the way to your planned battle with Archer. As you pass the commercial avenues, you notice that the late-night pedestrians mostly seem to have gone home by now. It’s only eleven, but you suppose it would be strange for large groups of people to stay out later on a weeknight. Many of the brightly sparkling shops have dimmed their windows...
and closed their doors, while those who do cater to the later customers sit largely empty, waiting for the wanderers without morning obligations. Soon enough, though, you leave the commercial zone behind and return to the suburbs, where your drive comes to an end as you pull back into the welcoming enclosure of the manor’s garage.

“Can you carry that other Saber down to the basement?” You gesture to the unconscious blonde as you get out of the car, walking around to Ayaka’s side yourself and picking her up. “I’ll be putting Miss Ayaka to bed, and I assume you’d like to begin sealing that girl off as quickly as possible.”

“Certainly. We have no... idea how long she will remain conveniently sleeping, after... all,” Kōrakuhime says, and as she opens the rear door the other Saber slumps half out of the car, as if to punctuate the point. The sleeping girl shows no sign of noticing her plight, beyond a soft, “mnya...”

Looking at the girl as one might examine a particularly unpleasant bag of trash to be removed, your sister produces a talisman and conjures a cushion of wind to carry the other Servant and relieve her of the burden of manual labor. Once the sleeping girl has been wafted out of the car, Kōrakuhime stalks off out of the garage, your prisoner floating along behind her. You pick Ayaka up by more mundane means, slinging her over your shoulder as before and making your own way back to her room. She must be exhausted indeed, as neither your rough treatment in carrying her nor the shift of being dumped on top of her bed causes your Master to stir. For a moment you consider changing her into her nightgown, but upon the realization that you’d have to search through the girl’s closet to find it you dismiss the notion as too much trouble. You slip off her shoes, ensuring they haven’t touched anything indoors, and leave her to do the rest when she awakens.

With that, you turn and make your way down to the basement, the former workshop of Jean-Pierre Vaisset. As you descend the lowest flight of stairs, the stone ones disconnected from the others in the house, it occurs to you what a perfect prison the area is. It’s all stone down there, a set of impenetrable cubic rooms linked by narrow corridors and connected to the surface only by this single steep flight of steps. Perhaps, before the Vaisset and Shijou families merged to require two workshops, this house’s former owners did use the basement as a dungeon.

No point in speculating on that now, you think as you enter the main room, where you were first summoned. It will be a prison now, whatever it was once. Not this room, however; there’s no sign of your sister, only Vaisset’s abandoned books and tools. Moving on, then, you head right and begin going down the hallway connecting to the other basement rooms. The second room, the larger area you used for sparring practice accessible by a second right turn, is similarly empty; as is the third room, a
smaller chamber filled with unmarked crates whose entrance is across the hall from that of the second. Only in the fourth room, the second on the right in the basement hall, do you find Kōrakuhime. You almost run into her, in fact, as she opens the door in your face to make her exit.

“Oh!” She lets out a startled gasp, suddenly finding you there. “Ani-ue! I was just... going to look for you. I have finished placing a seal on that Servant.”

“You’re certain she won’t be able to escape?” With the magic resistance innate to a Saber, any kind of magical bond seems uncertain. On the other hand, Kōrakuhime’s abilities have impressed you enough so far that you don’t doubt she has a clear understanding of what will or won’t be effective.

“Quite.” Kōrakuhime gives you her slight smile. “I have created a... multilayered barrier about her that prevents her Master from supplying her with magical energy or acting on her through his command spell. She will receive... enough energy to survive, provided to her... by the leyline beneath this place... but only while she remains within the room behind me. Of course... there is a physical barrier as well.”

“Marvelous,” is the only word that springs to mind. Kōrakuhime’s seal sounds quite impenetrable. “I can rest easy, then, knowing our prisoner is secure,” you say with a smile.

“I believe that I did... tell you that bounded fields are my specialty,” Kōrakuhime answers, a hint of teasing in her voice. “I only hope... this can partially erase the shame of my defeat at the hands of that... human.” In her mouth, the word carries as much venom as one might expect from the blackest insult. Before you can reply, though, she goes on in a quite relaxed tone, “Now, Ani-ue, if you would excuse me... I am rather tired.” You’re still blocking her way out to the hall, you realize.

[ ] “Of course, go ahead. I think I’ll be getting some sleep soon myself. It has been a taxing night.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] “Not at all. Before you leave, though, tell me: it won’t interfere with your barrier if I go in and have a look, will it? I’d like to be there when she wakes up.” (Pride)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)
In Darkness

It was all happening again. Abandoned by her Master and outmaneuvered by an enemy, Saber was led into the maw of the shadow, surrounded by that loathsome darkness, and plunged into the abyss; soaked in gnawing, hollow need, every inch of her invaded by that desire, that hunger, that unreasoning, insatiable demand for obedience, and when she awoke she knew she would be-

Saber blinked into consciousness as herself, which came as some surprise. She was sitting up, in what felt like a straight-backed stone chair, with a back that extended past her head and armrests that included stone bonds. A particularly unpleasant detail, she observed, was that rather than shackles, the bonds were in fact intricately carved stone hands, tightly gripping her wrists. Worse than the grasping stone, though, for those she could have easily broken under ordinary circumstances, was a constriction of her magical energy supply that left Saber feeling as weak as a kitten. The meager energy Shirou had provided had been bad enough, but this was still worse; only the barest trickle of energy, enough to keep her alive and no more, reached the Servant.

Taking stock of her surroundings, Saber observed carved into the stone floor about half a meter away from her an odd formation, possibly a magic circle. Between two rings were a number of right angles set at even intervals, as if being the corners of numerous squares rotated about the central point of Saber’s position. In front of her and to either side, Saber could count sixteen points. Probably, then, there were thirty-two in all, made up of eight squares; but what did that mean?
No point in wondering about the details of the formation, though, if the purpose of the thing were clear enough, Saber supposed. If that thing was a magic circle, it must be a barrier to restrict her further. This notion was further reinforced by the odd ring of papers just outside the carved circle. A number of rectangular strips of paper, inscribed with an eastern script, floated in the air in another circle around Saber. As she watched, they bobbed up and down seemingly at random as, in unison, the ring turned about Saber.

Then her eyes had adjusted enough to the gloomy chamber that Saber could get a good look at the walls, at that moment she saw him. Pearly white hair, combed and styled into a businessman’s coif; a black suit, with deep red pinstripes; a pale face, handsome as a classical statue’s and quite as lively; and most striking of all, red eyes. Not the bright ruby-red of the Einzberns’ eyes, but a darker color. A red that Saber had seen far more often in her life than those bright jewels, for it appeared before her eyes at every duel and joust, and so much had pooled in the great battles that it seemed she had reached Camlann by wading through a sea of that heinous color. This was the red that marred Saber’s vision as she heard her would-be heir’s last words, and the red that had spread below her when she appealed to the World. It was also the red of her previous Master’s eyes. Not Emiya Shirou, but the last one to command Saber’s obedience: Matou Sakura, corrupted and led down the path of indulgence and destruction by Angra Mainyu.

He had traded his cape and armor for modern clothing, but there was no doubt in Saber’s mind about the man’s identity. This was Avenger, the Servant who had masqueraded as another Saber until finally abandoning the pretense and swallowing Saber up in his shadow. The only question, then, was why she now found herself here and sane, rather than next awakening as a puppet on some new battlefield.

There was no answer to be found in Avenger’s face. He eyed her lazily, lounging on a half sofa that Saber couldn’t help noticing looked like a far more comfortable seat than her own. It was constructed of heavy wood carved into floral patterns of vines, grapes, fruit, and the like, and lined with bulging red velvet cushions. As Avenger lolled on the couch, waiting for a reaction from his captive, one foot clad in a black sock hung off the edge, towards the ground. He was certainly at his ease.

“So, dear lady, you have finally awoken,” he began with a smile, that smooth baritone voice bespeaking refinement in its very timbre. “I trust you find the accommodations to your liking? Ah, but you must excuse me.” He feigns shame at a breach of etiquette, a sarcastic gleam in those bloody eyes. “I would call you Saber,
but it is a title we share. Perhaps, then, we can start once again with names. My name is Alberich; and you are?”

Why? The question echoed through Saber’s mind. Why must he keep up the charade of being this Alberich? It can hardly be to draw information out of Saber, for if he had simply done as he had fifteen years ago, swallowed her up and forced her to submit, then surely he could have any information he desired of her. So why this focus on rejecting the name of Avenger, and on learning her true name as if he were unfamiliar with her?

Then it hit her, at last; inspiration. Perhaps she had been ascribing too much intelligence to Avenger. It was, after all, an unborn thing waiting to be set free from the Greater Grail. Indeed, one could see its actions fifteen years ago entirely as a response to Sakura’s desires, warped and enhanced though they were by Avenger’s evil. The Servant itself could have been unconscious, then, moving only with the will of its Master. Perhaps, this Alberich was living the same way as Sakura; without the knowledge that Avenger should have access to, and perhaps without even the knowledge of what has made him its host. With that idea in mind, Saber could finally allow herself to answer the question.

“I am Arturia Pendragon,” she proclaimed, with as much dignity as she could muster under the humiliating circumstances. “King of Britain.”

“King Arthur, indeed,” Alberich mused, looking at her with renewed interest. “Yet hardly a king, by your appearance. But then, I suppose it is not surprising for the recorders of legends to make such errors, particularly with regards to heroes.”

With a malicious smile, he continued, “It would certainly be embarrassing, in the age of chivalry, for the great knights of the day to admit that their finest example out of legend was a mere slip of a girl; so Arturia becomes Arthur.” He paused again, his malevolent smile growing as a new thought struck. “Ah, but I’m jumping to conclusions,” he continued. “You called yourself king a moment ago. Can that be the title you desired, then? Were you using that boyish figure of yours to deceive the nobility into believing you were a man?”

A blush threatened to color Arturia’s cheeks at the easy discovery of her deception’s nature, but with great effort she suppressed it. It would not do to show weakness before this, the greatest of her enemies. Even so, she could not meet his eyes and keep her composure. She could only stare down at the polished stone floor, suppressing her rage, fear, and shame, and shutting out the hateful visage as best she could.

“So that’s it then,” Alberich continued, taking her silence for an affirmative. “It seems that I’ve gotten my hands on a very intriguing hero, doesn’t it? A
chivalrous knight who attacks by surprise and leaves her enemies for dead, a king who hides the truth of her sex, a person accustomed to rule reduced to abject servitude... you are full of contradictions, aren’t you?”

[ ] Write in what you’d like to ask or say to Arturia once the perspective returns to Alberich.

At this further prodding Arturia looks back up to fix you with a gaze of sullen hatred. She doesn’t address your comment, though, instead spitting, “Why do this? Avenger or Alberich, you gain nothing by keeping me prisoner. Kill me now, and have done with it!”

“Oh, I gain a great deal from keeping you here,” you reply, a smirk coming to your face. “I have here, helpless before me, the woman who served me my first defeat in battle; who insulted me, calling me ‘duplicitous trash’; who left me for dead, believing me so far beneath her that she need not even kill me. To end your life now would be an enormous waste, my dear.”

“Just the sort of answer to be expected from you,” Arturia says contemptuously. “Go on, then, and begin your torture. It will be meaningless in the end.”

You decide to let that pass unremarked-upon, and leave the torment to Arturia’s imagination for the moment. Instead, you pick the previous topic back up in a friendly tone. “Now we know one another’s names, and I know your story,” you say, “but you haven’t heard mine. I’m sure that ‘Alberich’ alone isn’t a satisfying answer as to my identity. You’ve made that amply clear. So why don’t I tell you the whole truth about who I am? I’m sure you’ll enjoy the story.”

“Say what you will,” Arturia answers, still glaring, “I cannot make you be silent.”

Clearly, if Arturia had her way you’d set her free, kill her, or at least leave her alone. She certainly isn’t interested in your story. That being the case, you begin immediately, starting the tale with Judas’ use of Akeldama. “One week ago,” you say, spreading your hands in a theatrical gesture somewhat spoiled by your reclining posture, “Caster, the Servant of Jean-Pierre Vaisset, activated his Noble Phantasm. He deceived his Master into believing it was a large scale ritual designed to drain power from the people of the area and empower himself at their expense. He told the truth only so far as the purpose of the ritual: empowerment. Its form and target, well...” You chuckle, recalling Vaisset’s shock at your appearance. “They were quite different.”
Your audience is unreceptive. Arturia looks dully at you, the same expression of frustrated resentment she’s had since awakening on her face.

Unperturbed, you continue your tale. “To capture and absorb the power of those targeted by it, Caster’s Noble Phantasm created a false reality, wherein he could create whatever he desired. The first of his creations was a set of four artificial souls, with memories stolen from the truly living, meant to receive the energy of the ritual.”

Lying a hand to your breast, you reveal, “I was one of these four.” After another pause with no reaction from Arturia, you explain, “Caster’s next creation was the core of the ritual, the method by which the lives of those drawn in were to be consumed: a Holy Grail War, meant to be fought to the death between all the thousand-and-fifty people summoned into the Noble Phantasm’s false world.”

Your eyes glaze over for a moment as you look past Arturia, to the rough stone behind her, and remember that other moment, that other surface; the feeling of lying on scattered chunks of gravel over the cement, the burning heat and choking smoke of that place, the crumbling enclosure that greeted you... it was a horrible way to enter the world, now that you consider the matter. Not that you thought of it that way at the time, of course.

Then you return to the moment, and the telling of the tale. “Of the many competitors for the Grail, seven of us were able to become Masters, while the rest had to survive without Servants. I was one of those fortunate seven, and incidentally believed myself to be an 18 year old high-school student at the time.” You let that hang in the air for a second or two, looking for any reaction to this next detail of your identity. Saber only waits coldly, so you move on to the conclusion of the Akeldama War. “The only way home, we were told, was to claim victory and the wish that came with it. In the end, only five of us survived that War: myself, two of the other artificial souls, a female magus, and a remarkably resourceful mundane girl. I was the only Master among us, but when I was ready to claim the Grail Caster revealed that there had never been any wish; that the only true way to leave was by death, and the choice was for it to be his or ours. I struck him down.”

“With that, I should have been sent home. That is what I believed, and it was true enough for the others. Such was the falsity of that world that none of those who battled there and escaped found that they had moved in space or time from the moment of their summoning.” You sweep an arm around to indicate your surroundings, “As you can see, that wasn’t to be my fate. I, like the two souls one might call my siblings, had no point of origin. We should have faded from existence. Instead we received the final effects of Caster’s Noble Phantasm. Energy collected from the deaths of over a thousand humans and seven Servants was used to alter us. I
became the Saber you see before you, my sister became a Caster and my brother became a Lancer. *That,* Arturia,” you conclude, getting to your feet to look down at your captive, “is my identity. A second Saber, produced through Caster’s machinations. I’m afraid this ‘Avenger’ of yours is not here.”

With your story finally over, Arturia stares at you in silence for a moments longer. You can’t tell from resentful frown, a constant since your conversation began, what her thoughts on your explanation might be. Finally, though, she asks, “Do you imagine that I would believe this?”

“It is the truth,” you say, cocking an eyebrow. “I did rather hope you would, yes.”

“The truth! To claim such a thing!” Arturia sounds shocked, now, as well as angry, snapping, “It may be true that I am ignorant of your identity, but do not assume I will simply believe any absurd tale you tell me!” She struggles against her bonds for a moment, as if unthinkingly trying to get to her feet to yell at you. “Whether you are yourself Avenger, or only its host, I do not know, but I am certain that this ridiculous tale of a false reality and artificial Servants is patently impossible! If you have nothing to say to me but absurd lies, then I would rather you leave me bound and alone, you vile wretch!”

She certainly hasn’t taken well to your story. It seems to have only strengthened her conviction that you’re a lying villain, trying to deceive her for some nefarious purpose. With the way she’s heaping abuse on you it wouldn’t be strange for you to get angry, but as you watch her struggling pitifully against the stone restraints you find yourself feeling more amusement than anger. Of course, it certainly is true that you’ve brought her here with a mind full of ill intentions, so she isn’t entirely wrong. The question of what to do with her in the immediate future, though, remains largely unanswered.

[X] Keep trying to convince Arturia of your identity. There must be something you can say to make the truth clear. (Pride) (Write in any details you’d like to add)

[ ] Leave her be for the night. It’s late and you’ve had a tiring day, perhaps you’ll come up with something in the morning. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Finally you can no longer suppress your amusement at Arturia’s helpless fury and let out a guffaw. For a few moments the two of you stay like that, you laughing down at the girl and her struggling as her insults fade back into a hateful stare.
Finally your composure returns, though, enough to say, “Yes, this has been well worth the effort of capturing you alive,” between subsiding chuckles.

“Very well then, I shall do as you ask,” you declare with affected casualness, once your burst of mirth has quite faded away. “It’s quite late, you know, and unlike you I haven’t had the benefit of a nice, long rest after our battle. I am under no obligation to give you the information you sorely lack, so if you’re going to sit there and call me a liar I may as well leave you to stew.” You pause, touching a finger to your chin as an idea comes to mind, then add, “Ah, but here is one final tidbit for you. The True Name of that Caster, who summoned up a false Holy Grail and orchestrated death on a grand scale to create new heroes, was Judas Iscariot. Now good night to you, Arturia.” With that, you get up, turn on your heel, and stalk out of the basement. If the revelation of Caster’s identity moves Arturia more than the rest of your story has, she doesn’t show it.

As you make your way upstairs, looking for an empty bedroom to sleep in, you glance at your watch to see how late you’ve been up, waiting for the captive girl to awaken and then speaking with her. It’s a quarter after four, to your chagrin. There’ll be little enough sleep to be had, if you want an early morning tomorrow. Then again, since Ayaka is no longer attending school perhaps you can simply sleep in. It’s not as if you need to worry about attacks from enemy Masters in the early morning, after all, and anything that violates the bounded field around the manor should wake you up.

So it’s with a mind full of restful thoughts that you finally collapse into the enormous canopy bed formerly belonging to the Vaisset family patriarch, drifting off to sleep after one more bizarre day in the madness that has been the Holy Grail War. The last thought your fading consciousness fixes on is the absurdity of it all. A battle royale between summoned ghosts of heroes past, commanded by wizards, and what this woman takes issue with is the notion that you could be an artificial soul?

*It’s the child’s perspective again, eyes lower than the top of a handrail, staring out between white-painted wood columns. You look down from the balcony and watch a man and boy sparring, practicing their fencing in the middle of a lush tropical garden. Overhead, the sun beats down with that particular intensity that you’ll come to associate with the summer villa, but this is your first visit and the change in climate is still new to you, sapping your energy and leaving you sullen, wishing you were back home.*

*Mother watches beside you, looking very different in a white sun dress and wide-brimmed hat. It’s one more change, another unfamiliarity making the place unpleasant for a child. Instead, you focus on the routine going on below. Your father teaches your brother how to fight just as he does every day, no matter where you are.*
“Mama,” you say, the child’s voice coming out without the dreamer’s input, “why do Papa and Onii-chan always fight for Onii-chan’s lesson, but we never fight when you give me my lesson?”

“Because your father is a man,” your mother answers, tender warmth in her voice, “and little Hirahide will be a man someday, and it is the way of men to fight. You and I are different; we must not fight if we can avoid it, my dear.”

“So girls never fight? Only boys?”

“Perhaps never is a bit too strong a word,” your mother says, reaching down absently to stroke your hair. “One day, Mama will have to fight, you know; you may also, when the time comes. When the holy ritual is ready, and the Einzbern return to us. Then…” She cuts herself off, coming back to the here and now, and turns to look at you instead of the garden. Mother smiles. “But that’s all back home, dear, and we’re on vacation! Let’s talk about something here. Have I shown you all the fish we have at this villa yet?”
“Bringing this kind of decor into the modern world... you sure have some tacky tastes.”

Not auspicious words on waking, most would agree, but Archer couldn’t help them falling from his mouth. After all, he had woken up bound hand and foot with a golden chain, and forced into a kneeling position before a luxurious golden throne. The floor he was kneeling on was gold as well, as were the walls, ceiling, and even the surrounding decorations, and the pillars that lined the center of the room were all of solid gold. Only the rug stretched out before the throne and the tropical plants (growing out of gold pots) that surrounded it lent any color to the place. One didn’t have to think twice to recognize the person who had designed this kind of room.

“He~h?” The irritable reply was immediate. She was as easy to read as ever.

“And what would you know about design, you vagrant? I doubt you took much of a hand in decorating that palace of yours.” The woman on the throne pouted, her long strawberry-blonde hair rustling against white robes as she crossed her arms over her slender frame.

“Let me tell you this,” Archer replied, looking her in the eye with deadpan seriousness. “I don’t think I ever said it when I was visiting before, and it’s something you deserve to hear. Gold is valuable and impressive because it’s scarce. If you have the power to change everything you want into gold, and you use it to cover your entire house in the stuff, then it’s no better than overly shiny, irritatingly bright.”

“Shut up! Shut up shut up shut up!”

In a flash, the witch was off her golden seat, striding up and standing in front of him, and grinding her platform heel into his cheek in a gesture halfway between kicking him and stepping on him. Even kneeling, Archer’s head was too high up for
her to trample on, a fact which only fueled her rage further. Her wings made tiny, ineffectual flapping motions as she vented her anger.

“You think you’re in any position to criticize me, letting yourself get ordered around by that amateur hedge-mage? What was her plan, even, anyway? Look at yourself! And here you are, telling me off over my tastes! This isn’t your kingdom, you know! You don’t have a ship to sail away! You can’t just say whatever you want and leave! This is why women hate you, you know!”

Eventually, she finally calmed down enough to set her foot down, although she was still breathing heavily and flushed with anger. The feeling of rage was mutual. Archer couldn’t simply sit there and let his Master, a comrade he’d come to respect over the past week, be slandered.

“You can insult her ability well enough,” he said, voice filled with quiet fury, “no modern magus could hope to equal you; but it’s the character that matters in a partner. I’d rather fight alongside that woman than a twisted witch like you, any day. Look at you. You’re angry enough now, but I bet before I woke up you were planning on saying things like, ‘I’ve crossed oceans of time to meet you,’ or ‘Fate has brought us together despite impossible odds,’ piling up romantic fantasies as tacky as this room. And that after bringing me here in chains. Isn’t that right, Circe?”

“No.” The denial came out as flat and cold as a slap in the face. All the emotion drained out of Circe’s face at Archer’s words, as if the energetic arguing of a moment before had been only a facade, and she now looked down on him with a soulless expression. “I’ve lost interest in you. I found someone better, anyway.”

It hit him like a lightning bolt, and for several seconds Archer was too stunned to react. He could only stare, goggle-eyed, at the impossibility before him. This wasn’t a matter of pure ego, however. It was a conclusion backed up by experience. In his life and extensive travels, Archer had met numerous women. Most of them fell in love with him. Some didn’t, but those were mostly the elderly, girls too young to understand romance, or women with warped preferences: those who chased after young boys, or loved other women, and the like. What had never happened, even once, was for a woman to set him aside having once fallen in love. Even when he spurned them, preferring to pursue his journey home and staying true to his wife, they remained devoted, pledging their undying love for him ad infinitum. Yet here, before his eyes, was the stark, impossible, reality of a woman who had ceased to pursue him.

“Wait, that doesn’t make any sense!” Once he finally got himself back in order, all he could do was protest the bizarre development. “This is your perfect opportunity to pursue your love. We’ve both been summoned here, and there’s no longer any family or kingdom tying me down! What do you mean, you’ve lost interest?”
Circe sighed, disappointment at this pathetic display of ego plain on her face. “Look, when people talk about a great love, they usually call it a ‘hundred year romance,’ or ‘love to last a thousand years,’ right? Well it’s been over between us for more than two thousand years! After how many times you turned me down, and all the time that’s passed since then, it doesn’t matter how devoted I was! My passion had to cool eventually.” Lips curving into a cruel smile, she went on, “Now you can feel what it’s like to be ignored, because you’re just a tool to help me get what I want. As for who you’d rather take orders from, your feelings about that girl don’t matter anymore. Have a look at this!”

As the witch held up a pale hand, almost luminous in the reflected light of that golden chamber, Archer could clearly see the five intricate markings inscribed on its back: twisting curves forming a gust of wind, picked out in blazing vermilion.
Wednesday, November 20, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

“Ani-ue..”

You begin returning to consciousness as you hear a soft, fluting voice quite at odds with your dreams and feel an odd weight on your chest.

“Ani-ue,” the voice repeats, resolving itself in your awakening mind into that of your sister, “Ani-ue, you will regret it if you... sleep all day.” You open your eyes to see the bright light of mid-morning streaming in through opened curtains, and below that Kōrakuhime, sitting on your chest with her feet dangling over the side of the bed. Only her face is pointed at you.

“Didn’t you think it was terribly impolite to come into someone’s room while they were awake?” Not quite sure how to address the fact that she’s decided to sit down on top of you as if you were a particularly large cushion, you settle for the speaking out regarding the oddity of her being here at all.

Kōrakuhime waves a dismissive hand. “That was... a man intruding into a lady’s room. An entirely... different affair. In addition, I see that you sleep in a black bodysuit. We do not all... do the same.”

“So why are you here, then? Paying me back for the intrusion?” Whatever her ideas about differing rules of etiquette may be, you can’t think why Kōrakuhime would take the trouble to come and wake you up.

“Could it not simply be... that I was concerned about you?” She feigns hurt, putting on an expression of tenderness rebuffed. “You are usually... the first of us to awaken.” Seeing your skeptical look, she goes on, “If you must know... that Master of yours asked me to wake you up when she... cooked breakfast; so here I am.”
“I see,” you reply. Ayaka’s up and about then, hopefully without any aftereffects of your magical overuse. That’s one thing to be relieved about. “In that case, you’ve done the job. Thank you for helping me to wake up, but please do get off of me now so I can get out of bed.”

As Kōrakuhime walks out, presumably to return downstairs and begin enjoying breakfast, you consider the day ahead. After yesterday, there are any number of things that could be considered pressing issues, and it’s frankly difficult to think of which is the most immediate.

[] The captive downstairs. First things first, you need to discuss with Kōrakuhime what can be done to make her useful. Circe could brainwash a prisoner, but is Kōrakuhime capable of such magic?

[] Your rediscovered brother. Finding Matsuda should be your first priority, and if you go looking during the day you’ll have a better chance of catching him unawares.

[] Coordination with your allies. It’s time for another visit to the Einzbern Tower, to discuss the defeat of Saber, find out whether they’ve learned anything about Assassin yet, and plan for the future.

[X] Your own capabilities. The world around you may be important, but no more so than training your ability to deal with it. Today, you’ll spend polishing your skills.

[] Focus on something else (Write in)

With your sister ejected from the bedroom, and the knowledge that the morning is dragging on pressing on your mind, you hop out of bed and make for the bathroom. There, you let the black undergarment you sleep in (originally the innermost layer of your armor’s lining) dematerialize and compose your mind under the hot running water.

After everything that happened yesterday: an outing with Liliesviel, your two meetings with the Edelfelt sisters, that infuriatingly inconclusive skirmish with Matsuda and the forces of the Holy Church, and last of all the capture of Arturia, there is certainly no lack of affairs to be pursued today. Going through them in your mind, though, each seems that it can be put off. Although you would love to visit Liliesviel again, there is little reason to do so beyond the pleasure of her company. The girl seems uninterested in actually fighting the Holy Grail War, preferring to take her ease and make use of Odin’s power only when absolutely necessary, so a strategic meeting would be rather pointless. Truvietianne and Luvia gelita are similarly of
uncertain worth, not being Masters or formally part of the Holy Grail War. After Kōrakuhime’s unsuccessful interrogation of the Church agents who attacked you last night you’re left with no leads as to the present whereabouts of Matsuda and Antaglio, so there can be no great purpose in setting about pursuing them without delay.

As for Arturia, you’re still not sure how you want to pay her back. If she could be turned to your side she would be enormously useful, but after your conversation last night that seems impossible. Torturing her would be gratifying in the immediate sense, but wouldn’t be a productive use of your time; besides that, repaying humiliation with physical torment lacks a certain style. Perhaps it’s better to keep her imprisoned, then, and let her suffer the same arrogant disregard she gave you after your first battle. That will do until you’ve decided on a more final resolution, at least.

With the most pressing concerns resolved not to be dealt with immediately, then, what remains? The answer, hanging unpleasantly at the back of your mind like a ragged messenger carrying bad news, is your combat prowess. The near-loss you suffered against Matsuda and easy way Harris handled you make your own deficiencies infuriatingly plain, in spite of your victory over Arturia. Indeed, you’re not totally sure you would have defeated her if she hadn’t suffered a timely attack of scotophobia, or whatever it was. Today, then, you’ll stay in and focus on self-improvement.

With your decision made, you get out of the shower, comb your hair into shape, dress, and head down to a thoroughly late breakfast at nearly eleven. When you arrive in the living room, Kōrakuhime is nowhere to be found. She must have eaten while you were bathing, then, and gone about her own business afterwards. Ayaka is still there, though, standing in the kitchen with an irritable expression and a set of plates covering dishes, presumably to keep breakfast warm for the latecomer.

“Good morning, Miss Ayaka,” you say, putting on a charming smile. “What do we have for breakfast today?” Perhaps, you hope, you can avoid dealing with Ayaka’s frustration at your late rising by simply being pleasant and not acknowledging it, bringing her into your pace.

No such luck, unfortunately. Although she serves your food compliantly enough, your Master gives you a thorough pout as she does so, frowning at you over the dishes with a stormy expression. “Saber-san,” she begins once you’ve sat down, “why were you asleep so late? You know how worried I was, waking up to find you still out of it after I didn’t see how your fight went in that building last night? You’ve never gotten up this late, even that first night when you were out on the roof! But then you’re just fine, and I was getting all worried about nothing!”
“Well, I am sorry to have concerned you. I had a rather late night, and didn’t see any pressing reason to be awake early this morning. In the future, I will endeavor to be more careful,” you say, showing contrition rather than the anger you’re more inclined to feel in the face of the girl’s selfishness. You needed that sleep, and she wants you to have gotten up for the sake of her mental state! There’s no point in getting in a fight with her over it, though. Instead you shift the topic to her own unconsciousness. “What about you, Miss Ayaka? Are you not feeling any ill-effects? It seems I drained you of rather too much magical energy in last night’s fighting.”

“Oh, I’m just fine,” Ayaka answers with a wan smile. “You don’t need to worry about me, just use as much energy as you need to win.”

“Now that won’t do,” you counter, “We’re a team, you and I, Master and Servant. We must work together. At the very least, you need to be able to keep yourself safe and attend to your sacrificial ritual.” Now you put on a look of gallant concern, concluding, “In the future, please be sure to warn me if I drain you of too much energy, won’t you?”

“Alright, Saber-san,” Ayaka says, much quieter now as she blushes and fails to meet your gaze. “I’ll be more careful from now on.” As you enjoy the maidenly appeal of the gesture, and the embarrassment playing over those demure features, you mentally thank Judas for having tied you to such an easily manipulated Master. There aren’t many better candidates you can conceive of to hold the power of the command spells over you. A pampered girl like Truvietianne would have been more troublesome than Ayaka, but still easy enough to deal with; on the other hand, a shudder almost runs through you as you consider the notion of having become the Servant of a magus like Lumenza, or that arrogant, self-assured woman Tohsaka. It doesn’t bear thinking of.

Having resolved your Master’s irritation at your late morning, you finish your breakfast quickly. Today it’s in the traditional style: grilled mackerel, a raw egg and bowl of rice, natto, miso soup, and pickled vegetables. It’s a breakfast that “you” ate many times growing up, and Ayaka’s preparation does nothing to surprise you. It’s neither delicious nor unpleasant, but it is filling. Having eaten, you turn your mind to what to do next.

[ ] Stay here for the time being, you want to talk to Ayaka about (write in subject).
[X] Go down to the basement workshop and find a room to experiment with Heiligöffnungschwert’s second miracle. Perhaps summoning could be the key to reversing your fortunes in battle.
[ ] Return to the Shijou library to further study magic.

[ ] Find your sister and convince her to do some sparring with you. She may not be an ideal combat partner, but she’ll be better than nothing.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

It’s finally time to experiment with the last of Heiligöffnungschwert’s miracles still untried, you think. The second power, to “bring into your world and sustain there impossibilities,” in the words of that strange chorus of seeming divinity that spoke to you at the boundary between here and the Realm of Imaginary Numbers. The power, you suppose, must be to summon up things from the Age of Gods: dragons, chimeras, and so-on, which according to Circe retreated with the Gods into their new world. The thing to do, then, is to find one of the larger rooms in the basement, reach out through the sword, and see what answers the call. After all, you can hardly bring a winged horse or goat-headed lion forth in the manor’s back garden without handing Ayaka a grave insult to her principles of magical secrecy. With these thoughts in mind you get up, wish your Master a good morning, and head for the basement stairs.

Down in the workshop you’re met with a surprising sight: Kōrakuhime occupies the seat Vaisset had formerly used when conducting his research, and seems to be going about magical studies of her own. She has, stretched out on the table before her, a strange parchment covered in illegibly flowing script and indecipherable geometric patterns based primarily around octagons and lines intersecting them in strange ways.

“Kōrakuhime,” you say, raising a hand in greeting as you come in, “I see you’ve made yourself at home in my former Master’s workshop. What do you have there?”

Your sister glances up at you only briefly before returning her gaze to the paper, evidently not wanting to miss a moment of the ever-changing contents. “I am... studying our captive, Ani-ue,” she explains. “Despite... being Servants ourselves, we know little about the magecraft which... shapes and governs us, do we not?”

“Would you say so?” You’re not so sure of the deficiency yourself. “I suppose I wouldn’t be able to create a Servant myself, but I do have a general understanding of what we are, and how the Command Spells and Holy Grail keep us here, and so-on.”

“No, that is only... an abstract notion,” Kōrakuhime says, shaking her head. “For a knight such as yourself... this may be sufficient, but... I am a Caster. Since we have a bound Servant here... at our disposal, I have... taken the liberty of
investigating the manner in which a heroic spirit can be made into a familiar, and... bound to this world, to the flow of time, despite residing ordinarily outside of it.”

“Indeed? Well then, best of luck with your studies,” you say, nodding. It makes sense, you suppose. Studying Servants was what Ogawara was best for in the *Akeldama*, after all; there’s no reason that interest shouldn’t continue now, after the transformation into a Servant. Indeed, Kōrakuhime’s research may even yield useful insights into Servants that could be used in the War. “Have you discovered anything yet?”

“I have not yet made great progress... no,” your sister says, shaking her head dispiritedly. “For some strange... reason, it appears as if this Saber you have captured is... a living body, as we are, and not... a heroic spirit brought from the Throne of Heroes. Until I can find a way to... properly understand her presence, I will be unable... to progress further.”

“What a strange problem to have,” you muse, “still, I’m sure that you’ll be able to overcome it.” You give her an encouraging pat on the shoulder before continuing, “Now if you will excuse me, I have some magical experimentation of my own to get to.”

With that, you move on to the first side chamber of the basement, the large room where you and Kōrakuhime had your brief practice spar and which appears to have formerly been used for target practice. It’s the largest of the subterranean chambers you’ve seen so far, and decently high-ceilinged. It’s no gymnasium, or cathedral, but the area is large enough that if you summon something like a big cat it will have enough space to move around. You walk to the center of the chamber, materializing your weapon and armor as you do so, and draw forth *Heiligöffnungschwert*. Then, with the weapon held point-downward at your breast in the classical knight’s posture, you shut your eyes and feel the magic of the thing.

The first of the powers to make itself clear to your mind is that which binds it most securely to you, the connection between your own magic circuits and the blade that enables you to manifest the impossible element of Nothingness. It’s a subtle enough effect that you might never have noticed if you didn’t know of the sword’s power already, but when you look for it you can clearly feel the way that it works on you, subtly altering your circuits as long as you bear it. You suppose that what it’s doing is making your body a bit more like the world of Imaginary Numbers, so that the imaginary elements can best manifest into the real world through it. That’s no more than conjecture, though; all that you can clearly feel is that there is a magical influence from *Heiligöffnungschwert* acting on your magic circuits.
Then, moving your perception outwards from your own body, you can feel the composition of the sword itself. There is the strange link to the universal Nothingness that renders Heiligöffnungschwert unbreakable. There, at the edge of the blade, is the portal that gives it its power: a hair-thin magical construct, fused with the body of the sword to give it a truly peerless cutting edge; but also capable of propagating itself, projecting more portals into the world at your command.

Finally, after what feels like hours, you can feel the magical structure of the blade as clearly as you felt your own magic circuits on your first usage of them. Only then, when you have complete awareness of Heiligöffnungschwert, do you detect the second influence that is passively projected from it; not on you, but on the general surroundings. This, you suppose, must be the power that will sustain the existence of beings from the Realm of Imaginary Numbers. There doesn’t seem to be any further information about the miracles you can gain from meditation. All that’s left to do now, then, is try it by commanding the blade.

“*Heiligöffnungschwert!*”

As you call your Noble Phantasm’s name, you bring the point down in a vertical slash, willing it to open a gateway and summon forth some creature that can help you find victory in the Holy Grail War. As you strike, however, nothing happens. There is no shadow tracery, leaving the trail of your attack hanging in the air. Instead, the effect of the final miracle begins after your blade comes to a rest. Darkness flows out from the point of the blade as if leaking from a fountain pen left to pool ink on a page, and in a few moments there’s what appears to be an empty hole in the world hanging in the air at about the level of your knee.

All at once, your eyes burn with streaming color. The vision you see at the edge of reality, of the streaming light pouring into the black endpoint, is overlaid on your vision here in the waking world, and the overstimulation of two simultaneous views drives into your eyes and head like an icepick. You start to bring a hand up to shield your eyes, and suddenly it’s over in no more than a moment. Reality met with the passage to the Imaginary for less time than it took for you to bring a hand up, but it *did* meet. The thing on the stone floor, where the hole was a moment ago, is evidence enough of that.

Like its peculiar entryway, the thing looks like nothing so much as a shadow, although this one is standing rather than floating. It’s vaguely animal in shape, with a cylindrical body, eight vertical limbs set along it in pairs of two, and two more at the rear, these hanging in the air like outstretched arms, rather than supporting legs as the other eight are. At the opposite end, which might tentatively be considered the front, is the only aspect of the thing that has any color: a set of three points of red
light, set in a triangle. The shock of its alien appearance is offset somewhat by its size. The thing is perhaps 30 centimeters tall, if not shorter, and no more than 115 centimeters long, including the rear two limbs which are on their own a third as long as the body. Somehow, you get the impression that the thing is as baffled as you are by the development, as it points those odd red lights at you. Are they eyes, then?

Suddenly, you feel the magical energy in Heiligöffnungschwert surge, and a bond is formed between you and the thing, it receiving magical energy from you much as you receive it from Ayaka. At the same moment, the thing seems to shimmer and then change enormously. The general shape and size remain constant but all at once the entire impression it gives off is turned on its head, for in that momentary shift, for all the world as if the light had changed or a distorting lens had been removed, the thing had become a cat.

It was a cat with sable-black fur and three red eyes, with eight legs and two tails, but a cat nonetheless. A phantasmal beast to be sure, but not alien. Then it opens its mouth, and in a low, rumbling voice says, “It seems you’re the one who’s brought me here. Why?”

[X] “Part of an experiment in summoning up phantasmal beasts. What can you tell me about yourself?” (Curiosity)

[ ] “It seems to have been a bit of a mistake. I was hoping to summon something that would be of use in battle, you see. Can you return on your own, or shall I facilitate?” (Pride)

[ ] “This sword has the ability of sustaining Phantasmals’ existence in this world, and I decided to test it.” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)

“Why, I summoned you as an experiment,” you answer, startled into the frank truth by the cat’s sudden speech. “I’d suspected for some time that this blade could call up and sustain phantasmal beasts, and looking at you now it’s plainly true. Care to tell me about yourself?”

“So you didn’t summon me in particular, eh?” The cat sounds bemused at the fact. “I’m not surprised that you drew me in, though, looking at you. Seems you’ve got some affinity for the type.”

For a moment you’re nonplussed, until you realize he’s referring to your helmet. You materialized your armor before performing the summoning, in case the
creature that appeared should turn out to be hostile. Now, as a result, you still have the visage of a snarling lion obscuring your own. Realizing how off-putting it must be for the cat to have suddenly appeared before an armored host, you dismiss the helmet with a thought.

“Sorry to have met you with my hat on, as it were,” you say with a chuckle. “I didn’t realize what might appear, you know. Thought I’d best be ready, in case some snarling chimera should come bursting forth.”

“Ah. Well, that’s good and prudent of you,” the cat replies. “But you’d asked about me, so I may as well tell you. I’m what you humans used to call a nekomata.”

“Nekomata?” You cock an eyebrow. He is a cat with two tails, true enough, but, “That’s a rather bizarre assertion. I don’t recall nekomata having additional limbs beyond a second tail.”

“Been to the Reverse Side recently, have you,” the cat asks sardonically. “Whatever we might’ve looked like when we still appeared in this world, that was centuries ago. In a place where the Gods take an active role, a species can change its looks pretty quick.”

“I see.” You hadn’t really considered the possibility of the inhabitants of the Realm of Imaginary Numbers changing over time up until now. If things are as volatile as the nekomata makes them sound, you probably can’t rely on legends very much; but on the subject of legends, what about a name? What should you call this thing, if you end up working with him? It would’ve been your first question, had you recognized his species. Best to get to it now, then. “Nekomata must have names, yes?” you ask. “Of course you must, you’re able to speak to me after all; any communicative species must have naming. What are you called, then?”

For a moment the nekomata doesn’t reply, but only looks at you out of those three eyes. He slowly blinks, once, and then finally speaks up. “I don’t believe,” he begins disdainfully, “you’d be able to pronounce it. Call me what you like,”

“I will consider the matter, then,” you say. It’s a bit off-putting, his not wanting to tell you his name; especially considering the stories about humans gaining power over supernatural creatures by means of a true name. Could he be plotting some scheme? No, you dismiss the idea. Binding by a name is probably no more than fantasy anyway, and you can hardly expect a cat’s native name to fit easily on a human tongue. Better to move on to the next question. “What about your capabilities? You’ve told me what you are, but I still don’t know what you can do.”

“Oh, this and that,” the nekomata answers vaguely. “Magic sight, a bit of illusion, transformation, moving in shadow... that sort of thing. I doubt it’s very different from what my ancestors could manage.” It’s certainly an uninformative
description, but it and the small amount of magical energy you need to supply the nekomata with tell you that he’s far from an enormously powerful phantasmal beast. If he can be of significant use to you, that use will have to be in some unconventional way. Perhaps he could make a useful advisor; you’re not exactly sure of his intelligence yet, or how much he knows. Then again, he might be best used in the way Harris used those gadgets of his, the flashing device and mobile speaker. A nekomata could surely make a useful tool for distraction.

On the other hand, the cat’s demeanor hardly endears you to him. He seems somehow untrustworthy, though it’s possible you’re only being moved by his appearance. Beyond that, though, you can’t help thinking that a phantasmal beast with immediate combat potential would be far more useful than this creature. What to do?

[X] You’ll make the best use of this creature you can, and start by coming up with something to call him. (Let your sister decide) (Duty)

[ ] You didn’t call a phantasmal beast out of the Realm of Imaginary Numbers because you wanted a housecat! Send him back and try to draw out something that can actually fight. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After a short period of consideration, you decide to take in the nekomata after all. You don’t know just what his magic sight entails, or exactly what he can do with illusion magic, but you are sure that a familiar can be useful; as a distraction, if nothing else. Having something underfoot that could have snatched away your foe’s attention might have made all the difference in your recent battles against Matsuda and Harris. As for a name for him, nothing comes to mind. Perhaps you can have Kōrakuhime come up with one. She does seem to delight in such things, if her excitement over pet names on meeting you was anything to go by.

“Very well then, cat,” you say, giving him a friendly smile. “I look forward to working with you, provided you don’t have anything urgently calling you back to the Reverse Side.”

“Nothing at all,” comes the reply. “If you can keep me fed, I’ll happily go along in your company, sir... ah, what was your name? Don’t believe you’ve told me,”

“Alberich,” you say. “There’s no last name, and you can dispense with the sir. I’m not a knight as decreed by any royalty.”
“No I guess you wouldn’t be, summoning up a yōkai to do your bidding,” the cat says, “and I might’ve known you were a westerner, from the look of you. But Alberich, eh? I could swear I’ve heard the name before, some old king, or some such...” He ponders for a short time, before bobbing his head in an odd, brief gesture with something unaccountably shrug-like about it. “Never mind, I’m sure it’s a common enough name,” he continues, “but now we’re through the introductions, I’m wondering about my first question again. Why’d you summon me? You must have some reason for wanting a yōkai working for you in the first place, even if you didn’t get me by particular request.”

“I’m in a contest,” you answer, “or perhaps it would be better called a death match, or battle royale. In any case, the point is that I have a number of enemies I must kill or be killed by, magi and heroes alike, and I thought the help of a phantasmal beast would be useful; but I’ll tell you more when the time comes. For the moment, come and meet my sister.”

“So you fight your battles with the family around, eh? Alright then. Lead on, Alberich.”

There’s something snide in the cat’s tone that you don’t like, and for a moment you wonder if you haven’t made a poor decision in keeping him after all; but there’s no use in pondering it. You’ll quash his insolence if he pushes it too far, and let it go for the moment. That thought in mind, you turn on your heel and head from the room, returning to the main chamber of Vaisset’s workshop. Kōrakuhime is still within, sitting on the dead magus’ chair and studying her parchment. If she’s moved at all since you left her, it doesn’t show.

“Was your... experiment successful, Ani-ue?” She asks it without turning, hearing your footsteps you suppose.

“Yes,” you answer, “it seems the Heiligöffnungschwert really is capable of summoning up phantasmals and keeping them sustained here. Kōrakuhime, let me introduce our newest compatriot: a nekomata, lately of the Realm of Imaginary Numbers.”

She hops to her feet, turning to face you now, and draws in a sharp breath at the sight of the creature silently padding over towards you. “What a... strange beast,” she says softly. “Are you certain... it is a nekomata, Ani-ue? It does not appear to resemble... their descriptions, very closely.”

“Gods, girl, I’ve just talked through this with your brother,” the cat says exasperatedly. “Do inflexible expectations run in your family? Are you always so surprised if a bit of centuries-old folklore turns out not to be quite right? You two don’t exactly match up to what I’ve heard of humans, you know.”
Kōrakuhime purses her lips in distaste. “Ani-ue,” she says, “I believe you ought to... return this creature from whence it came. It seems... that it lacks manners.”

“That may be, but I think we can let him go on for now,” you say. “He says he has all sorts of useful abilities. Illusion, transformation, and so-on. At any rate, I thought you might enjoy having a companion about the place other than Miss Ayaka.”

“Yes, well... perhaps so,” Kōrakuhime says uncertainly. “What is his name, Ani-ue?”

“He wouldn’t tell me,” you answer with a rueful chuckle. “Apparently our mouths simply can’t pronounce a cat’s name. Why don’t you name him, Kōrakuhime?”

“Hmm...” Kōrakuhime stares at the nekomata for a few moments, thinking on the subject of names. “Let us call him Futodoki, then.”

You let out an unintentional snort of laughter. “It certainly does fit him,” you say once you’ve gotten back under control. “A fine idea, really!”

“You don’t have a high opinion of me,” the cat comments, and his tone is so derisive that it drags further mirth from you, confirming as it does the name your sister offered.

Ignoring Futodoki’s dissatisfaction, Kōrakuhime leans down to face the cat directly, and launches into an explanation of your true natures. “If you are to be our ally,” she begins, “I must... enlighten you on one important... subject. A moment ago you said that we were not... identical to the humans of your traditions. This is because we are not... they. Ani-ue and I are... artificial spirits, given life by sacrifice and... bound to the world by the Holy Grail. I...”

So she goes on, repeating information for the cat’s benefit, and you consider what’s to be done next.

[ ] Wait here for a time, and speak with Kōrakuhime (What about?)
[ ] Return to the larger room and try summoning something else. (Pride)
[ ] Once Kōrakuhime has finished her explanation, take Futodoki upstairs to meet Ayaka. (Compassion)
[X] Leave Futodoki with Kōrakuhime and make your way to the Shijou library for some magic study. (Duty)

You decide to leave your new compatriot here with Kōrakuhime for a while. No doubt he’ll benefit from an explanation of the Holy Grail War, and you can spend
the time honing your magical skills instead. With your sister focused on explaining to the cat, you fade into the background and head for the stairs, passing back through the living room and on to the other stairwell, which connects the three aboveground floors of the house. Ayaka is no longer around, you note as you pass.

Soon you’re back in the small library that houses the Shijou family books, considering what will be most useful in your future battling. You’ve been through the most obviously useful of the entry level texts, but that’s hardly to say you’ve exhausted the library’s potential. There are two more elements left to attempt manifesting, in your studies of elementalism; both glossed over by the book you read on the subject, however, and of uncertain effectiveness. For that matter, you aren’t at all certain you’ve taken your expertise in the manifestation and control of Nothingness to its full potential.

You have been largely focused on elementalism for some time, though, and it strikes you that it may not always be as useful as you’d like to think. Matsuda’s blade dispelled your Nothingness with ease, you recall. The burst of resistance-charged magical energy that Arturia released while you were binding her would have done the same, if she hadn’t been so rapidly discouraged when you poured more energy into regenerating the tendrils that assailed her. Perhaps you should peruse the bookshelves, and see if a text with another method catches your eye.

On the other hand, it might be wiser to turn your mind to another’s magic. As you look around, you realize that this library could be an excellent research tool for probing the details of your enemies’ techniques. One infuriating ability in particular comes to mind, that by which Harris was momentarily able to match your speed.

Then, as you’re considering these possibilities, you suddenly recall one more thing worth researching: Vaisset’s mysterious research. If he left notes on his attempts at converting one element into another, they might well be here in the library with the journals of his ancestors.

[] Practice further forms of Nothingness manipulation.
[X] Experiment with manifesting Void and Emptiness.
[] Browse the shelves, looking for new magical knowledge and techniques.
[] Search for books on magic that could have accomplished Harris’ feat.
[] Go looking for Vaisset’s notes on elemental conversion.
[] Do something else (Write in)

After some consideration, you decide to remain focused on elementalism for the time being. Although the possibilities of branching out and learning more about
attribute-based magic or researching your enemy’s technique do appeal, it seems to you that branching out the aspect of magic you’re most familiar with to encompass the full breadth of its possible forms will be of more use in the long run.

You close your eyes, open the door within you, and let Ayaka’s Od fill your magic circuits. Then you hold it still, focusing on the expression. Here it would normally be transformed into Nothingness and take form outside of you, but that’s only the easiest course; just one possible form. You concentrate on the energy, feeling the potentialities that dwell within it: not one substance, but three elements. First is Nothingness, solid and real even as it denies the world around it. Second is Emptiness, the possible lack that is the element most closely bound to your soul. Finally there is Void, the Ether that is the raw form of magic in the world.

Shaping the Od in accordance with your spirit, you expel it as the element of Emptiness, beginning the experiment by shaping a simple ball of it, held above your hands. Even with your eyes closed, you can feel the magical presence of the construct, and no that it was done. When you open them, though, there’s nothing there!

No, that isn’t exactly true. You can see nothing there, and when you move your hand to grab it your fingers pass right through; but you know that the ball of Emptiness is present. You can feel the energy that makes it up, and tell from the quality of it that it is the pure element. This must simply be the nature of Emptiness, then. Invisible, untouchable, imperceptible except by sensing the energy of it. This must be what Circe meant when she called it “the element of possibilities outside the material.”

You sigh. This, frankly, is a bit of a disappointment. No doubt the immaterial element can be put to use in attribute-based magic, as Circe told you in the Akeldama, but you have no idea where you can find another teacher of her caliber to help you make it work. As for elementalism, there simply isn’t much you can think of to do with the pure form of an element that has no material presence. With a dismissive wave, you let the magic fade from existence. Then you return to your meditative state, searching for the third element you can work with.

Once again, you feel the three potential natures that Od can take when processed by your magic circuits; once again, you settle on one of these and attempt to materialize it. Void, though, is even more unruly than Emptiness! It simply won’t take shape in a pure form, obstinately remaining within your circuits no matter how much energy you expend trying to force it into the world. Eventually, when you feel your magic circuits beginning to suffer under the strain your will is putting on them, you give up. There must be some secret to using the Fifth Real Element, you think, because it certainly isn’t behaving as the others do.
As you consider the possible reasons for this failure, you soon find yourself pacing about irritably. The immaterial nature of Emptiness may be frustrating, but at least it’s understandable. What could be the reason for your inability to manifest Void, though? Has your connection to the Imaginary Elements become too strong, and eroded your affinity for it? Is there something about this place that inhibits the materialization of Void? Perhaps, like Emptiness, it can be properly used only when an attribute is applied to its manifestation; yet the manner of the failure was so dissimilar, that can’t be it. It’s a mystery...

A sharp sound interrupts your reflection on the subject, and you stop short; listening. There it is again, and this time you recognize it as the sound of a bell. Could it be the door? Casting your mind back over the past week, you realize that you haven’t heard the manor’s doorbell before, but the sound wouldn’t seem out of place as one. Perhaps you should go down and have a look.

[X] Go to the door and see who it is, or investigate the source of the noise if you were wrong. You don’t want anything going on in this manor that you’re unaware of. (Pride/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Wait here, and continue your magic studies. Whoever it is, they’ve surely come to see Ayaka. She can get the door. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After a moment’s consideration, you decide to go down and answer the door; or to find the origin of the noise, if you were wrong about that chime being the doorbell. If there’s anyone coming to the house looking for Ayaka, it behooves your cover identity as a hired butler to receive them. If, on the other hand, one of your own acquaintances has come looking for you regarding the Holy Grail War, then Ayaka can contribute little.

As you’re passing through the corridor to the living room, you run across behind Ayaka. She’s also making for the door, from the look of it, with her back to you. You draw up behind her quickly, laying a hand on her shoulder to stop her.

“Oh!” Ayaka lets out a little gasp of surprise, then turns to see you. “Saber-san, you surprised me!”

“My apologies, Miss Ayaka,” you say with a courtly smile. “Was that the doorbell I heard, a few moments ago?”

“Yes, it was. I was just going to see who was at the door.” She gives you a puzzled look.
“Why don’t you let me do it, then, and wait in the living room to receive them?” As you make the suggestion, you gently steer Ayaka in that direction. “I’m meant to be the butler, remember?”

“Sure,” Ayaka says, “that would probably be a good idea, yes.”

So she trots off to the living room and you continue towards the front door, to see who’s come calling at the Shijou manor in the early afternoon. It shouldn’t be any of Ayaka’s schoolmates, surely; classes are still in session. That seems to leave only the other magi of your acquaintance, unless some family connection has come in search of one or the other of the siblings. Surely they would have contacted Ayaka in advance, though. These thoughts in mind, you open the door with careful professionalism, give a polite smile, and-

You almost freeze in your tracks. The face looking in at you from the walkway, eyes widening in surprise at the sight of you, is your own. Or, “your” own at any rate. It’s the face you remember from a thousand memories of someone else looking in the mirror. The face that held an ever-fainter resemblance to your own as your metamorphosis into a hero progressed through the Grail War fought in Judas’ Akeldama. It’s the face of your original.

“Hello, young man,” you say, suppressing your shock in an instant. “May I ask what your business here might be?”

“My name is Yumigawa Rushorou,” he answers, matching your tone of formal civility, “I am the president of the student council at Kyoutenkan Academy, where Shijou Ayaka studies. I have an academic matter to discuss with her, or her guardian. Is she well enough to receive visitors?”

[ ] Bring Yumigawa in to see Ayaka. (Duty)
[ ] Take the role of guardian, as a family servant, and tell him she’s indisposed. Hear whatever he has to say yourself. (Pride)
[X] Inform Ayaka telepathically that Yumigawa Rushorou is here to see her, and ask what she’d like you to do. (Compassion)

As you look the young, unnervingly recognizable man in the face, you pause for just a moment, keeping him on the stoop. During that pause, you reach out to Ayaka. After all, Yumigawa may have quite a connection to you, but there’s no reason to assume he knows that. If he’s here to see your Master, as a fellow student,
it’s her decision whether to meet him or not. Why he’s come while afternoon classes are still going is a mystery to you though.

‘Miss Ayaka,’ you begin, ‘your student council president has come to see you about an academic matter. He asks if you’re well enough to receive visitors. Would you like me to show him in?’

‘Yumigawa-senpai? He’s here?’ The shocked reply is immediate. ‘Um, yes, sure, you can bring him in. I guess he thinks I’m sick, that’s no good. Let’s see...’ The message fades as Ayaka shifts from thoughts she means to share to those that are private.

Having spent the moment of conversation appearing to give Yumigawa the thorough looking-over of an officious and dutiful servant, you nod and give him an infinitesimal suggestion of a smile. “Yes,” you say, “I believe she will receive you. Please come in, Yumigawa-san.”

He thanks you, returning your thin smile too angle for angle, and it’s unnerving to see the muscles in his face quirking into the same false expression you’ve used so many times to put pleasantry on antipathy. Of course, most of those times were him, really; they’re only his memories placed in you; but everyone has their own particular manner of facial expression, and to see your habits replicated precisely is strangely chilling in a way that simply being told you were a replica never was.

You quickly turn away, not wanting to look at that eerie similarity any longer, and say, “Miss Ayaka will be waiting in the sitting room. Please follow me.” Without waiting for a reply, you stalk off down the entrance hall. He catches up soon enough though, for you hear the door shut behind you and his footsteps following briskly along behind. You can’t shake the feeling that he’s staring at you, adding to the discomfort of the situation. No doubt he’s wondering about Ayaka’s living circumstances, having a butler, and about your appearance. All the same, though, you find yourself wishing the doppelganger would take an interest in something else, if not obligingly disappear.

After what feels like an interminable walk through the front hall, you arrive at the living room, where Ayaka lounges on the couch, waiting for Yumigawa with that air of forced casualness that the unpracticed liar has when trying to suppress their nervousness.

“Ojou-sama,” you say, “you have a caller. Yumigawa Rushorou, who seems to be from your high school.” You introduce him with a courtly swirl of one flattened hand.

“Thank you, Saber-san,” Ayaka says, feigning calmness with her tone as well as expression. “Please sit down, Yumigawa-senpai. What brings you to my home? At
such an early hour, too.” As Yumigawa walks over to sit down across from her, you retreat to the kitchen to prepare tea like a proper manservant, observing their conversation through the manor’s bounded field as you do so.

“You have been,” Yumigawa pauses for a moment, seeking a correct word. “...absent for longer than many, so I don’t believe you will have heard; but we’ve had mounting absences at Kyoutenkan Academy. Today, nearly half of the student body was absent, enough to cause a cancellation. It seems to be due to the outbreak they’re discussing on the news; most students have had parents contact the academy, to explain the absence. There are those, however, who have been absent without contacting our faculty.” An outbreak? You haven’t heard anything about this. Is Tokyo hosting some new disease? You curse yourself inwardly for not paying attention to mundane news.

“My goodness! An outbreak? Of what?” Ayaka sounds as surprised as you feel, and promptly goes to pump Yumigawa for information.

“You haven’t heard?” Yumigawa raises an eyebrow at this, and dry surprise is in his level tone. “Why, it’s been all over the news. A mysterious new disease is sweeping through the city, with the only observable symptom being extreme fatigue. It seems to be quite the medical mystery.” For all that, Yumigawa doesn’t seem to be much moved. Of course he wouldn’t, knowing you. No doubt Yumigawa has simply observed the mysterious illness as one more event in his life to be experienced and observed, no more emotionally stirring than the weather.

“Oh, that’s awful,” Ayaka sighs, lamenting the condition of her classmates as you bring in the tea. “And I guess the school must have thought I had it; but why are you here, Yumigawa-senpai?”

“As you guessed, we were worried about your potential case,” Yumigawa says, “The student council has been assisting the faculty in going around to all of the homes of students absent without information and finding out their condition. In this kind of circumstance, with people potentially in a condition that leaves them unable to seek medical care, we felt it was the least we could do for our students.”

“Thank you for your concern,” Ayaka says, “but as you can see I’m just fine. You must have others you need to visit, no?”

“Just one moment.” A note of cold firmness creeps into Yumigawa’s voice. “What has been keeping you away from school, Shijou? In light of the health circumstances we had overlooked it, but it is unseemly for a class representative to have such a prolonged absence without notice.”

“I haven’t been able to come because I’ve been kept home with an urgent family matter,” Ayaka replies without a blink. That takes you by surprise; you hadn’t
thought the girl capable of lying well, but there she is playing it off as smooth as silk. “I’m afraid we’ve had some disputes over ownership. People have been challenging my brother’s claim to inherit, after all this time. Can you believe that? Oh, but I’m sorry, you don’t want to hear about that business. Anyway, I’m sure I’ll be back in a week or two.”

“I see,” Yumigawa says, still eying Ayaka suspiciously. “In that case, I’ll be on my way. Before I go, though, a suggestion: be careful about rumors. People tend to suspect things, when a young girl lives with an unrelated man.”

Ayaka goes pale at the comment and in a moment you’ve stepped between them, sliding up like a ghost. “I believe that will be all, Yumigawa-san,” you say, putting steel into your tone. “Let me show you out.”

“Of course, thank you,” he replies, giving you a damnably civil smile. As if he hadn’t just been blackening your name! Still, in the scheme of things it’s nothing to lose your temper over. Probably he’s even well-intentioned, where the reputation of one of his fellow students is concerned. You decide to let the matter go there, and say nothing more as you walk him out to the front door. Just as you arrive, though, he turns back to face you for a moment before leaving and says softly, “Have a care. I don’t believe being a servant suits a man like you.” Then he’s off, striding towards the front gate and off to the home of his next sickly student.

[X] Go back in and return to your studies of magic. There’s still plenty of time to pursue another subject before dark. (Duty)
[ ] Shut the door and head back inside to discuss something with one of your compatriots. (Ayaka, Kōrakuhime, Futodoki, or Arturia? About what?) (Trait dependent)
[ ] You didn’t like that at all. Surreptitiously follow Yumigawa, and see if you can discover whether he’s really what he seemed. (Pride)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After seeing the intruding student out, you turn and return to the living room, where Ayaka sits drinking tea. She looks a bit tired, after her conversation with Yumigawa, as if it put a great emotional strain on her which she’d kept hidden until now. Of course, you realize, she must be feeling concern for her fellow citizens. No doubt this “mysterious epidemic” has counted among its victims any number of her teenage friends. Perhaps you should lend an ear to her troubles.

That will be for later, though. At the moment a more pressing matter weighs on your mind, so you smile and nod as you pass through the living room without a
word. Any comment could drag you into small talk, after all, and time is of the essence. You head down to the basement at a brisk pace, looking for your new comrade. You hadn’t guessed you’d have a use for Futodoki so quickly, but now you’re glad to have him. You need someone to shadow Yumigawa Rushorou, and who could be better for that sort of task than a cat yōkai?

Yumigawa’s attitude didn’t sit right with you, and the more you think about it the more suspicious it seems. There was the surprise at your appearance, for a start. You’ve appeared with Ayaka at school, so rumors about her having a foreign butler should have been circulating. Yumigawa may not be a gossip, but you don’t remember him as deaf enough to miss such a strange occurrence; and if rumors about you were going around at all they surely mentioned your albino looks, so that couldn’t have come as such a shock either. Then there was the speed with which he accepted Ayaka’s claimed excuse, and the emphasis he put on the word “servant”. None of these alone is certain evidence that he knows more than he should, but all the same they are odd. Judas’ mention of “resonance” echoes in your mind...

These thoughts are put from your mind as you arrive in the basement. Scanning the room, you find the one you’re looking for curled up on Vaisset’s desk, at his ease beside a hardworking Kōrakuhime. She’s still deep in examination of mysterious geometric shapes, though the shape of the paper stacks around her seems to have been altered since you were last down here.

“Pardon me, Kōrakuhime,” you say, reaching past her shoulder to slide an arm under the lazy feline and scoop him up off the desk. “I need to set our new friend about his first task.”

“Go ahead, Ani-ue... best of luck,” comes the distant reply. Kōrakuhime doesn’t even look up. The girl is truly buried in her work, you suppose.

Futodoki comes awake as you drop him to the floor, eight legs scrambling into order as he falls. So the saying about cats’ composure when landing applies to those with extra limbs too, you think wryly. He doesn’t seem to find any humor in the situation, though, for he gives you a look you can almost be sure is an angry glare. Those three slit-pupils somehow convey enough emotion to make up for the expressionless remainder of the cat’s face.

“What’d you do that for,” he snarls, “can’t you wake somebody up more comfortably?”

“Not someone who makes his bed on a worktable,” you shoot back. “Follow me, if you’re serious about helping us. I have your first task.”

“Damn it, you arrogant-” The cat seems to think better of it at the last moment, and starts over. “Listen, you may be sustaining me here, but it’d be no
hardship for me to be sent home. That isn’t a threat. I don’t mind helping you win this War of yours, but you ought to treat me decently if we’re going to work together. I’m not your pet, Alberich.”

“I’ll bear that in mind,” you say, “but do try to sleep at more appropriate times.” Despite his outburst, Futodoki follows you without further complaint up to the living room, and then the second flight of stairs as you continue upwards. Once you’ve brought him to a second-floor window overlooking the front yard and street, you explain. “Now then, Futodoki,” you begin, “I need you to follow a young man, go unnoticed while doing so, and report his doings to me.”

“That isn’t difficult,” the cat replies smugly, “you do a good job fitting the task to the person. Who, when, and where?”

“The young man in question is Yumigawa Rushorou. He’s an 18-year-old human with black eyes and hair, glasses, and slightly androgynous features; definitely either handsome or pretty. He’s wearing a dark school uniform, and just after leaving this house turned left up the street. He shouldn’t have gone far. Return around midnight if you observe nothing unusual, but if there’s something I need to be made aware of earlier or that you must remain later to observe, do so.”

“Good, that’s just about all the information I could want. I’ll see you later, then.” With that, the cat slips out of the window and drops silently to the shrubs below, seeming to blend into the shadows cast by the vegetation. You don’t even see him emerge onto the street, just feel his presence fade away.

With the suspicious mystery of Yumigawa’s behavior hopefully to be resolved, you can return to the important matter of your studies. You know now that attempting to manifest Void or Emptiness through pure elementalism is relatively useless, so your studies will have to be on other matters. As you return to the Shijou library, you cast your mind back to the conversations you had with Circe about magic, back in Judas’ Akeldama. She told you then that she would teach you how to apply three useful attributes to your energy: Transference, Rejection, and Absorption. Perhaps it’s this attribute-based magic that you should study now, if you want to make Emptiness useful.

Which of the three should you focus on, though? You ponder the question as you walk. Transference enabled you to fine-tune the transmission of energy from yourself to your Servants, so presumably its more general applications all have to do with the charging of objects or individuals with magical energy. Since you don’t produce your own energy, though, and all of your other abilities already drain Ayaka’s, pursuing magic that will further swell your energy consumption is likely unwise. Rejection, next, seems to be primarily concerned with constructing barriers.
You don’t doubt it would be a useful ability to have, but you do already have an ally highly specialized in bounded fields. You don’t doubt Kōrakuhime’s facility with those extends to the creation of barriers, so studying Rejection at the moment would likely be redundant. All that remains to be considered is Absorption, the attribute which enables one to create magic that binds by taking the power of another into one’s own.

Decision made, you comb through the shelves of the Shijou library, looking for any books on the execution of that attribute. Your hopes aren’t particularly high, given that the knowledge is more specific than the basic elementalism you’ve studied before, and so more likely to be the private province of certain magus lineages. Worse, the generalized books all seem to have been the property of the Vaisset family, if the extreme opacity of the Shijou journals is anything to go by, and being a dueling family you can’t imagine they had much use for binding magic.

Still, you search, and after poring over almost the whole of the collection your dedication is rewarded with a boon in the form of An Encyclopedia of Formations for the Binding of Spirits, an aging tome that appears to be a Meiji-era translation of a far older French grimoire. The illustrations are detailed down to the cracks in the original’s parchment, and the text is often broken by [indecipherable], but nevertheless you apply yourself with a will to the only information on binding magic in the library that doesn’t lie within the sacrosanct pages of the Shijou family’s personal chronicles.

After a few hours dedicated study, you come away weary but enlightened. Magic circles, it seems, are essentially tools to draw in and direct magical energy that exists in the world into certain formations, which are conducive to the demonstration of attributes that have been applied to the energy within the mind of the magus by means of the self-hypnosis of incantation. Thus, highly complex magical circles are created to draw in the world’s Mana and enact potent ritual magic with it. You can infer, then, that magi who formulate mysteries using their own Od and short incantations are shaping the magic into the forms that a magic circle would dictate within themselves, and applying simpler configurations of attributes appropriate to the simpler shape taken by the energy.

With this in mind, you then proceeded to analyze the various magic circles in the Encyclopedia for their points of commonality, and you’re fairly certain that you were able to isolate the particular structure that lends the attribute of Absorption to a particular manifestation of magical energy. By holding the Od within yourself in that structure and manifesting it as Emptiness, then, you should be able to apply the soul-
binding Emptiness magic that Circe once described to you! Of course, without a test subject this remains theoretical.

Coming out of the trance-like state of reading, memorization, analysis, and formulation of new technique, you blink groggily to clear your vision as you set aside the book. There’s no outside light in the windowless library, but you don’t doubt that the deep golden of sunset would be the light’s tone if there were. Joints popping, you pry yourself out of the chair you’ve been ensconced in, stretch, and make your way out to the corridor.

[X] Go and see Ayaka to discuss the visit from your other self. (Compassion)
[ ] Head down to the basement to chat with Kōrakuhime about her work on Arturia and your most recent studies. (Duty/Pride)
[ ] Pay your prisoner a visit in her magically formulated cell. Perhaps she’s ready to be more cooperative now. (Write in anything in particular you’d like to say.) (Pride)
[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After nearly a full day of intense magical study, the last thing you want to do now is discuss your sister’s magical research with her, though you’re sure it would be useful. More appealing is the notion of visiting Arturia, but though you’ve enjoyed the verbal sparring with her previously at the moment the prospect seems draining. No, you think, you need something to do to rest, something that won’t necessitate much thought; and the most productive way of resting is no doubt to lend a sympathetic ear to your Master. You can’t have her too emotionally compromised to properly attend to her duties during your next confrontation with a Servant, after all, and no doubt all you’ll need to do if she’s worrying about her mundane classmates is murmur a few platitudes and let her pour her heart out.

Unsure of where Ayaka might be, you reach out to the girl mentally. ‘Miss Ayaka,’ you begin, ‘I noticed you appeared rather out of sorts after your conversation with Yumigawa. My apologies for brushing past you just then, I had to attend to an issue of magic which required my immediate attention. Would you like to discuss matters?’

‘Sure, thanks. I’m in my room.’ Ayaka’s voice in your mind is glum as you’d expected, and from the curtness of her answer you gather this is definitely something to be discussed in person, if at all. That makes it all the more important that you hear
out her troubles, though, so you lose no time in walking to the girl’s bedroom. What greets you there is a sight of near-lifelessness.

Ayaka is splayed out half on and half off of her bed, lying on her side in a fetching outfit of cream cardigan, white blouse, and charcoal skirt that’s quite ruined by her boneless posture, staring blankly at a space somewhere above and to the right of her door. At your entrance, she says, “Hi, Saber-san. Thanks for worrying about me,” and gestures limply at a chair for you to be seated. If you were expecting more of a greeting you don’t get it; her only further move is to roll fully onto her back.

“I see you’re feeling yet more dejected than I had feared,” you say in the most caring, gentlemanly voice you can summon up. “Why not share your concerns? Worried about your classmates, are you?”

“My classmates?” Ayaka sounds vaguely confused, so it seems that guess was off. “Oh, you mean about the epidemic, huh? No, that’s probably just from too much Mana being used around here. It isn’t a very big conflux here, you know, and the Holy Grail ritual is probably already taking up almost everything, so when people keep using ritual magic, people will start dropping off, right? And Yumigawa-senpai didn’t say anything about fatalities, so they’ll probably all be fine after the War is over.”

“I see,” you say, nodding and showing understanding while inwardly surprised at the girl’s cavalier attitude. It’s one thing for you or Kōrakuhime to be unconcerned with human life, but you did expect Ayaka to be more worried. Is she truly that optimistic, or does she simply not care? It must be the former, she’s such an ordinary girl. You can’t imagine her dismissing the idea of her classmates dying out of indifference. If that’s not the core of her mood, though, then you must ask, “in that case, what is it that has brought your spirits so low, Miss Ayaka?”

“It’s just that,” Ayaka begins, then pauses to sigh and start over. “Well, seeing Yumigawa-senpai like that, and making up an excuse for being absent, it made me think about the normal world. The life I left behind, you know? Then he left, and I just... sat there, without anything to do. I’m supposed to have stopped going to school so I could fight in the Holy Grail War, right? So why am I just sitting around with no purpose? The last few hours have just been a big empty space, just waiting around for something to happen, and I feel like, what am I doing with my life? Before, I was always moving forward towards something. Even if it was just a normal school life, I always had something to do and a reason for it. But now I’m just like baggage, dragging you down when we go out to fight and spending the rest of the time sitting here, waiting for you to need me. You and your ‘sister’ always have something to do,
but I don’t. I’m just... here.” The whole complaint is addressed to the ceiling and delivered in a listless, dejected tone, finishing on a long sigh.

So that’s it. Another one of her crises of direction and self-esteem. You’d hoped this problem of hers might have been resolved when you comforted the girl after meeting Lilisviel, but here it is to trouble you again. Nothing to be done, then, but to try and comfort her once more.

“I’m sorry, Miss Ayaka,” you begin gently, getting to your feet and walking over to take her hand with a concerned expression, “I had no idea you were so troubled by not taking a more active role in our War preparation. As I’ve said before, you do play a vital role in battle, but if you’re troubled by the time we spend here...”

You trail off, biting your lip and doing your best to look put-upon by worry for her mental state, rather than frustration at it. Then an idea strikes.

“Why don’t you spend your free hours in your family library, reading the annals of your predecessors?” You fill your voice with excitement, hoping her spirits will be lifted in emulation. “I’m certain you haven’t had time to read them all from the beginning, and familiarizing yourself would surely be an excellent way of improving your capabilities as a magus,” you continue. “If you would step into the Moonlit World after this War, then to learn in full the lives of your ancestors and the knowledge they learned must surely be a more effective subject of study than the mundane arts taught at the school you once attended!”

“Would that really help you, Saber-san?” Finally Ayaka sits up and faces you, some light coming back into her countenance even as she remains uncertain.

“It would be impossible for me not to be heartened at my Master broadening her knowledge of magic,” you answer, keeping up your gleaming smile and pressing her hand in yours. “The important thing, however, is that it will help you, Miss Ayaka. If you deepen your connection to your family’s heritage and improve yourself as a magus, you will be working towards your future once again.”

“Yeah,” she says, managing a faint smile, “I guess you’re right.” For a moment you two remain that way, until her eyes drop and she seem to notice her hand in yours for the first time. With a start she yanks it out of your grip as a red blush spreads across her cheeks. “A-anyway,” she says, eyes wobbling back and forth, “it’s getting dark, isn’t it? What do you think we should do for the War tonight?”

Ayaka has a point. Behind the gauzy curtains that hang over her window, you can see the sun rapidly dipping below the horizon. In a few hours the city will be asleep, and the surviving contestants in the Holy Grail War will be taking to the streets, seeking bloodshed. Assassin is somewhere out there, still a faceless unknown. Archer will be prowling in search of the captured Saber, and no doubt more active
with the matched partner who’s been his fetter removed. Matsuda and Antaglio will surely be hunting you again, trying to restore order to the bizarre thing that the War has become. Emiya may be looking for you as well, or he may still be injured; you can’t be sure.

Harris, now, what will he try? Will he think his War lost, and flee to the shelter of the Church? Surely not, by his confidence when you last fought. Will he attempt to track you down, then, and rescue his Servant? Again the idea seems improbable. Who would attempt to attack a pair of Servants, one of them a Caster, in their own base of operations? Perhaps he has some other scheme that you can’t guess at; the man certainly seems to be full of surprises. Then there are Odin and Liliesviel. Like as not, they’ll spend tonight as they have most of those previous, watching the War from their tower and waiting for the last survivor to challenge them. What, then, are you to do?

[ ] Continue with the last night’s plan, and chase down Archer with the help of Kōrakuime’s divination.

[ ] The last of your siblings is the most pressing danger to you, and you mean to do away with him tonight. Kōrakuime may not be able to find Matsuda by scrying, but she can surely locate Antaglio.

[ ] Head for the Einzbern tower, to meet your allies and see if Odin has made any headway in locating Assassin. The idea of a completely unknown Servant lurking in the city unnerves you.

[ ] Make no offensive tonight. With Arturia taken prisoner, it behooves you to remain on the defensive and focus on breaking her instead of foraying out into the city. Besides, you ought to be here at midnight to receive Futodoki’s report.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“I’m not certain of just what we should do yet, Miss Ayaka,” you answer. “Last night’s events served as a potent reminder that one should not rush out without proper reconnaissance. We would do best, I think, to have Kōrakuime determine for us what the positions of all our foes are before making any foray into the city to battle. If you’re feeling up to it, shall we go down to the basement and discuss the matter with her?”
“Sounds good,” Ayaka says, and from the sound of it she has pulled herself together now. As the two of you get to your feet and head out into the hall, she continues, “While we walk, tell me what you were working on earlier.”

“I’ve spent most of the day researching the improvement of my magical abilities, and I believe I’ve successfully managed to manifest a mystery of Absorption. Without a test subject, I can’t be sure of exactly what it will do, however, considering the way that the same attribute can have such varying effects depending upon the magus.” You stop there, hastily shifting topic to explain, “That wasn’t the task that prevented me from asking after you just after Yumigawa left, however. There was something in his behavior that struck me as suspicious, so I had to have him followed before he got too far from this manor.”

“Have him followed?” Ayaka sounds confused. “How did you do that?”

“I summoned a familiar this morning, you see. He’s a rather unusual creature: a nekomata,” you explain. “Just when I was looking for a way to make him useful, I found that there was Yumigawa, needing to be followed. Fortunate timing, was it not?”

“Oh, definitely. That was a great time for you to get a familiar.” Ayaka titters, covering her mouth with a hand and trying to suppress the noise. “Sorry, it’s just kind of weirdly funny. A Servant with a familiar, you know?”

“Do you find it amusing that I should summon a familiar, when I am a sort of overlarge familiar myself?” You grin wryly at Ayaka, raising an eyebrow. “Perhaps you’re imagining my familiar calling forth a still lesser spirit, so we would come to resemble a matryoshka doll? A most unkind way to think of your poor Servant, Miss Ayaka. Why, next you’ll be calling it absurd that I should pursue magic at all.”

“No, it’s just, I mean,” but Ayaka is getting nowhere. She collapses into another fit of giggling under your deadpan gaze and mock offense, before finally getting herself under control enough to say, “oh, Saber-san, you’re too much. But anyway, you were saying you learned how to use absorption? That’s great! I know it’s one of the main attributes of the Shijou family mysteries in my crest, so I’m sure it’s very effective. Do you think it will be useful against dangerous enemies like your brother? It seemed like he gave you a hard time last night.”

“I certainly hope so.” At the thought of Matsuda, you suddenly find that your smile becomes strained. “He did seem to have an armament effective against magical constructs, but perhaps more subtle magic will prove the key to dealing with him. At any rate, I believe pursuing greater magical knowledge cannot fail to be a boon in combat. One doesn’t expect a knight to strike with a curse, after all.”
With that statement you take the last step down into the basement and find Kōrakuhime still at her desk as before, bent over in diligent candlelit study. Again, only the papers that surround her have moved since your last visit.

“Still trying to understand how a Servant is created? Are you making much progress?” you ask, walking up to look over her shoulder. Despite your earlier study of magical formations, though, the figures she’s analyzing remain inscrutable.

“Good evening, Ani-ue... I certainly... am,” Kōrakuhime answers, in a tone as close to jubilant as you’ve ever heard from her. “What I had originally believed was... an illusion created by my own insufficient understanding of... the Servant container... was in fact reality. The Servant you took prisoner truly [i]is[/i] in possession of... a living body, as you and I are!” At this announcement, Kōrakuhime’s eyes gleam, and her lips curve into a tiny, close-mouthed smile of triumph.

“What?! It’s the only word you can think of, for a moment. You’re taken flat aback at the statement. Arturia, a living body? How can that be, when Servants are the spirits of the dead? A condition of life as a Servant should be unique to you, Kōrakuhime, and Matsuda. Even more plainly than that, you already know of the girl’s identity, and King Arthur is can hardly still be alive. Not wanting to leave your contribution to the conversation as only an exclamation, you splutter, “Are you quite certain?”

“Entirely,” declares Kōrakuhime with satisfaction. “I have analyzed her... condition in full detail. That woman is bound to the Holy Grail, but not as you and I are. Nor, I believe, as other Servants are. Where you and I are entirely anchored in the... present, your prisoner is bound... to the past. There is a... connection to suggest that she has been pulled from... the distant past, her point of origin, and transplanted to various... points in history, before... arriving now.”

“...and I’ve heard from both she and Emiya that she was a Servant in the last War,” you mutter. “The other points must be other Grail Wars she’s been summoned to. Why should you suppose that this is unique to her, though? Surely other historical Servants must be summoned in a similar manner.”

“No,” Kōrakuhime says, shaking her head, “I am certain that it is... not so. This Saber has a living body, as we do, but I have... analyzed other Servants, albeit from a... greater distance, and confirmed that they... differ essentially. They are... spirit bodies, which suggests that... rather than being summoned directly from the past, they come from another... point of origin.”

“Intriguing,” you say, “so she’s another special case. Tell me, though, have you found anything to use against her?”
Kōrakuhime presses a slim finger to her cheek, thinking. “Not... yet,” she says, “but there are... possibilities. I am in the process of... researching the underlying construction of the Command Spells, which would certainly bring her into... our power if we could manufacture them. In addition... there are traces in her spirit of another method of subjugation, some sort of... transformative magical enslavement. If I could induce that state once again, it is... possible that we might be able to control her without the aid of... her Command Spell.”

So there was a time when Arturia was subjected to some kind of outside magical power. That makes sense as well, with what Emiya had told you about having to kill her and her own comments about becoming a pawn in Avenger’s scheme. Perhaps your own newly acquired Absorption magic could help in taking advantage of this state as well, you consider.

“Excuse me...” Ayaka’s voice cuts into your thoughts, as the girl takes advantage of the momentary break in your conversation with Kōrakuhime to enter the discussion. “Who is it you two are talking about? When did you take a Servant prisoner?”

[X] This is a perfect moment for a sought-after meeting. Introduce Ayaka to Arturia, the woman who ensured the death of Jean-Pierre Vaisset. (Compassion)

[] Ayaka should know, but you’d rather keep up your conversation with Kōrakuhime than discuss what happened last night at length. Explain briefly, then return to the subject of breaking Arturia. (Pride)

[] While this has been an encouraging discussion, and Ayaka should know who the prisoner in her basement is, there are more important things to be done at night. Briefly explain, then turn to the topic of reconnaissance by divination. (Duty)

[] React in some other way. (Write in)

“Ah, of course! You were asleep when last night’s fighting ended, so you haven’t heard of our prisoner yet,” you say, a smile playing across your lips at the thought of bringing Ayaka face-to-face with one of the pair who orchestrated Vaisset’s death. “Rather than killing Harris’ Servant last night, I captured her. Kōrakuhime has been holding her here, in the basement.”

“Is that safe?” Ayaka furrows her brows, looking concerned. “I mean, couldn’t her Master use a command spell to get her out? How do you restrain a Servant, anyway?”

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“My restraints are absolutely... safe, girl,” Kōrakuhime answers for you, smirking. “That Saber is surrounded by... a multilayered bounded field that completely... cuts her off from the world beyond, not permitting her to receive... energy, contact, or even the compulsion of her Master’s Command Spell.”

“Quite so. In fact,” you continue, “she’s bound so securely that you can go in and meet her without having a thing to fear. Why don’t you do so, Miss Ayaka? I’m sure you must have been hoping for the chance to face those who killed your brother.”

“I guess,” Ayaka says hesitantly. “If she’s going to be staying here, I should probably meet her. It’s not like I expect her to apologize or anything, though.”

There’s a surprise. Ayaka is less excited by the prospect than you’d thought; but then, she didn’t behave as if animated by the desire for revenge just after Vaisset died, either. Perhaps she just isn’t the type to hold a grudge.

“I believe... I shall come along as well,” Kōrakuhime interjects. “After... spending so much time in examination of her... magical composition, I would like to see her... in person, as it were.”

“You haven’t spoken to her today?” You cock an eyebrow, surprised at this. “I would have thought you’d be in there interrogating her in support of your analytical efforts.”

“No... I felt that to do so would compromise my... information,” Kōrakuhime explains. “I wanted to... consider her from a purely magical perspective... before meeting her myself.”

“Well then, it seems you’ll both be meeting our recalcitrant prisoner for the first time,” you say. “Perhaps the experience will help her to become a bit more conscious of her own position. Follow me, then.”

So Kōrakuhime steps down from her chair at the desk (which you now notice was tall enough to keep her feet off the ground) and the three of you head into the corridor that branches off from Vaisset’s old workshop. From there it’s a short walk to the room where Arturia is kept. You’d hoped to hear some sound of her presence and consternation as you approached. Wailing, perhaps, or the sound of the girl struggling to free herself from her stone seat. Even mere angry grumbling would have given some satisfaction, as evidence that you’re inflicting similar humiliation on her to what you’ve felt. As you do approach, however, there’s only silence from the small chamber converted into a makeshift cell.

The three of you enter the room to find Arturia slumped limply in her bonds, head sagging down to rest her chin on her chest. Listening closely, you can hear the girl’s soft breathing at slow, regular intervals. She’s asleep again. Not quite the tableau you were expecting, for a confrontation with a rebellious prisoner of War.
“What an easygoing girl,” you sigh, walking around the couch outside of the barrier to take a seat. “It hardly bears thinking of, does it, Miss Ayaka? That this is the merciless knight who drew me away from your brother, so her Master could kill him.” You glance over at your Master as you say it, wondering if this will sting her into a greater fury at the bound Servant, but she seems almost not to hear. She only looks fixedly at Saber, examining the sleeping form without a trace of emotion on her usually animated face.

“On the contrary,” Kōrakuhime says, “I believe... it demonstrates a sharp mind, and nerve... to sleep in such a condition. She knows that we... deny her power by restricting the energy available to her, so she... conserves that energy by sleeping. Most would be too worried... to sleep in an enemy dungeon, but this Saber must have... already concluded that if we intended to kill her we would not have taken her prisoner.”

“Saving her energy for an escape, eh?” You suppose it is a bit of good thinking, at that. You can’t have it going on unimpeded, though, especially when you’ve come to see her. “Can you wake her up through the bounded fields?”

“Of course.” At your suggestion, Kōrakuhime takes one of the talismans floating about the barrier between two fingers and stops it in its drifting course. She mutters something below your hearing, and as she releases the talisman to let it retake its place in the circle, Arturia starts awake as if struck. She looks around, betraying just a moment of confusion, before settling into her old resentful glare at you.

“Alberich,” she hisses. “It is my second time awakening to your face. Do you take some pleasure in watching me sleep?”

“Oh, that stings,” you chuckle, “but no, Arturia. You simply sleep too much. I had worried, you know, that our accommodations here would be unsatisfactory to one used to a royal palace. From the ease with which you find rest here, though, I see that worry was in vain.”

“What have you returned for?” she sighs, tone laced with resignation. “Are you keeping me here only to taunt me?”

“Why, of course not,” you say, putting on a posture of mock affront. “I hope to convince you to become my ally, in time. But that is by the way. As for why I’ve come just now, look behind me. I’ve brought you more visitors, Arturia: my Master and my sister, both of whom were eager to meet you.”

“My name is Shijou Ayaka; Master of Saber, and Second Owner of this area,” Ayaka says, as if on cue. “Saber-san tells me that you planned to draw him off so your master could kill my brother. Why?”
Arturia looks at Ayaka with an expression of blank disbelief. “Why? What do you mean, why?”

“You could’ve tried to only defeat the Servant, and leave the Master alive,” Ayaka answers, indignation rising in her voice. “That’s what Saber-san and I have been doing. We’ve already eliminated Rider and Berserker, and no-one’s died! Why did you kill Nii-san?”

“All four of us fought according to our positions,” Saber declares, stiff-necked and looking Ayaka straight in the eye. For the first time since capturing her, you can see again that icy, untouchable, regal dignity that so infuriated you on your first meeting. “The Holy Grail War is not merely a battle between Servants, but between Masters. That the former Master of this wretch died is due only to his ineptitude as a Servant, and your brother’s weakness as a magus.”

“Be silent!” It’s Kōrakuhime who loses her composure first, hissing a furious reprimand and seizing another of her talismans out of the air, crushing it in her grip. Suddenly Arturia goes rigid with pain, straining at her bonds and biting her lip hard enough to draw blood. “You will not speak ill of Ani-ue again,” Kōrakuhime continues in a blazing, barely controlled whisper, her eyes flashing with rage. Arturia matches her, though, staring mute hatred at the newcomer without showing sign of surrender.

At the sight of your sister leaping to defend your honor, your own rage at Arturia’s insult fades, so it’s with courtly grace that you can say, “and here is my sister, the Caster of whom I previously spoke: Yōjinshi-no-Kōrakuhime.”

As if those words break the spell of her fury, Kōrakuhime releases the talisman, letting it slowly drift back to its place in the circle. She takes a few moments to compose herself while the tension goes visibly out of Arturia, before saying icily, “Good evening, Arturia.”

[X] Now that you’ve established to her (hopeful) satisfaction that you aren’t Avenger, interrogate Arturia as to why she believes you to be this individual, and the details of its manifestation in the last War. You’ve heard only vagaries about it from the Emiyas. (Curiosity)

[ ] Ask Arturia about her being a living Servant, as Kōrakuhime had discovered. You can’t be certain, but perhaps she’ll be willing to explain the mechanics behind it, and in the process reveal something you can use against her. (Pride)

[ ] Interrogate Arturia about Harris’ superhuman abilities. (Self-Preservation)
Now that you’ve made the introductions, and Ayaka is no longer in the dark about what you’re using the basement for, it’s time to get back to other matters. Ask Ayaka and Kōrakuhime if they have anything more to say to the prisoner before you return to discussion of tonight’s prosecution of the War. (Duty)

Do something else (Write in)

“Now,” you begin, smiling lazily, “why don’t we pick up the conversation where we left off last night? I believe it’s time for you to start satisfying my curiosity.”

“Satisfying your curiosity? What do you want from me, now that I have spoken of my true name?” Arturia’s voice is hard, and she favors you with a glare. Despite it, though, you can see she’s weakened by her ordeal at Kōrakuhime’s hands. There’s a previously unseen trace of worry in the set of her brows, and her head is held a few degrees less high than before. A trickle of blood runs from the corner of her mouth down to her chin, the red rivulet standing out against white skin to mark the pressure that was needed to keep from crying out. Whatever sort of pain that bounded field can administer, it must be truly agonizing.

“Oh, that’s hardly all. Why, you’ve told me only of your life before becoming a Servant, and very little of that,” you say, “but it isn’t the life of Arturia Pendragon I wish to know of. No, I want you to tell me about the last War. You plainly remember it, even going so far as to confuse me for one of its participants. Now I want an explanation. Who is Avenger, Arturia, and why do you persist in this belief that I am he?”

For a few moments she just stares at you, unknown thoughts working behind her cold eyes. Then she sighs heavily, and begins to speak.

“I cannot understand you, Alberich. Do you truly lack any understanding of what it is that is bound to you?” Then she shakes her head and continues, “No matter. If you are lying, and already understand the situation, then telling you can make no difference; and if you are telling the truth, it may do some good. Avenger is the corruption that lives at the heart of the Holy Grail. It is a mass of curses, animated by the will to do evil, and seeking manifestation into this world through the power of the Grail. Fifteen years ago it partially manifested through a magus who had become an imitation of the Einzberns’ Lesser Grail, and fed off of the magical energy it enabled her to harvest from the death and consumption of humans and Servants alike, corrupting her will as it gave her ever-greater power. When in the power of Avenger, that girl looked just as you do now. Her hair became white; her eyes, red; and the agent of her power was a shadow, red and black, which consumed all it touched.”
That certainly provides one interesting detail that Emiya had left out in his account of the previous Grail Wars. From his story, it had sounded as if the evil were sealed in the Holy Grail after dying as a Servant back in the Third Holy Grail War. For it to have partially manifested through a Lesser Holy Grail changes things significantly, and explains why those familiar with the previous Holy Grail War have been so nervous about your appearance. Then it hits you. Emiya’s reluctance to speak about it, the unspoken words that passed between he and his wife, her enormous magical energy, Liliesviel saying she seemed to be an imitation Grail, it all leads to one answer. She must have the one who became the channel for Angra Manyu! That explains one mystery at last, if it is true. There are still more questions to be answered, though, and you press on.

“How was this danger dealt with, then?” you ask, energy rising in your voice. “You make it seem as if Avenger is quite invincible, being able to manifest as it pleased while keeping its core beyond the boundaries of this world.”

“Not perfectly invincible, no.” Saber shakes her head. “I died before seeing the end of the War, but the Masters who still lived must have found a way to stop it. What they did plainly wasn’t enough, however. The fact of your presence is evidence that Avenger has not been truly eliminated, and the Holy Grail must surely still be corrupt.” Clearly, Arturia remains convinced of your identity as a host of Avenger. At this point, you’re beginning to wonder if it’s possible to sway her at all. Better, then, just to move on.

“Putting aside my resemblance to this other host,” you say, “there’s another detail I’d like to hear about. You mentioned becoming a tool of Avenger’s during our last battle, and proclaimed you wouldn’t let it happen to you again. How did that occur, exactly?”

Saber sniffs derisively. “You must think me an utter fool,” she snaps in defiance, “if you expect me to supply you with a guide to the subversion of my own independent will! I will not speak of that!”

At this, Kōrakuhi me interjects, frigid calm having returned to her voice. “You will do...” as she pauses, carefully deliberating over her choice of words as is her habit, she takes another of the rotating talismans in her hand and sends a jolt of pain through Arturia. “What we bid you to do!”

Despite her continued torment, Arturia only sits mute, glaring at the two of you in stern and defiant reproach. Physical pain shows diminishing returns when dealing with her, it seems. As you’re contemplating how best to resolve Arturia’s obstinacy, though, a new thought suddenly strikes you. Ayaka must be horrified, watching you torment the woman! This is the girl whose compassion does not permit
her to sacrifice doves, after all; and you’re doing this just after her most recent emotional crisis. Internally berating yourself for the mistake and thinking quickly on how best to put a more positive face on it, you look to Ayaka.

There’s no trace of emotion on your Master’s face as she watches Arturia suffer. Just as when she first entered, her eyes are passive and analytical behind their lenses, and her face is relaxed and unemotional. She betrays no more sympathy for the captured Servant than you do, and rather less investment. For the second time, you find yourself wondering just what is going on in her mind. The girl seems to possess neither vindictive interest in nor compassion for the imprisonment of one of her brother’s killers. It’s as if Arturia means nothing at all to her.

Returning to the subject of the prisoner’s own attitude, you scrutinize her as she sits, rigid with pain. She betrays no sign of mental torment to accompany the physical, or of weakening resolve, as the seconds drag by. Perhaps pain will be totally useless in extracting information from her. Perhaps, on the other hand, you simply haven’t yet reached her threshold. You’re hardly a trained torturer, and at this point you haven’t much idea of the answer.

[ ] Continue the torture until Futodoki arrives with your report on Yumigawa. Hours of pain should push anyone past the point of willpower, surely. (Pride)

[X] Abandon this subject of conversation as well as the present torture, and discuss something else with Arturia (Write in subject/questions) (Compassion)

[ ] Put an end to the night’s interrogation and return to discussing the War with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After a few more moments, though, you settle on an answer. Pain doesn’t seem to be doing any good, and you aren’t free enough to wait endlessly for it to yield results that may never come. “This is doing no good, Kōrakuhime,” you say, raising a restraining hand. “Let her be.”

Your sister looks at our uncertainly, with an expression you can’t quite place between disappointment and worry. Wordlessly, though, she releases the talisman, letting it bob back into the air and drift over to rejoin its circle. This time, Arturia’s relaxation is more pronounced. She slumps in her stone chair almost as limply as when she was asleep, letting out a great breath, before seeming to become conscious again of your eyes on her and straightening to meet your eyes again.
“That may have been going too far,” you allow, smiling at the sight of Arturia’s heavy breathing and struggle to regain composure. “My apologies, Arturia. I did not realize you were so committed to remaining silent on that particular subject. Why don’t we discuss something else?” There is one thing you still don’t understand about Arturia’s story, after all: her motivation. What does she intend for the Grail she believes to be, in Emiya’s words, “filled with blood and curses”? Did she intend to destroy it? To use Avenger for her own ends? Something else?

“What?” It comes out as half word and half sigh, a last exhalation of weariness as Arturia steels herself for your next round of questioning.

“Why do you pursue the Holy Grail, if you believe it to house Avenger? The wish granted by a corrupted Grail could surely yield no happiness.”

“I do not know the Grail to be corrupt,” Arturia says, but there’s an almost pleading note in her voice that makes it plain that she doesn’t really believe it isn’t. “I have a wish that must be granted at any cost. I cannot allow any chance at the Holy Grail to slip by me. You could be Avenger itself, fully incarnated after the last Holy Grail War, and not connected to this Holy Grail; or you could be a remnant of that other Grail, seeking to lay hold of the still-pure power of this one because you had been cut off from incarnation through the other. I had to try to win the Grail, despite the fear that my effort was in vain.”

“I see.” Optimism, then, lies at the root of her actions. “Well, you will be happy to know that I am not Avenger in any form, and you can rest assured that the Holy Grail is pure.” You raise a hand to restrain the coming outburst. “Yes, I know, you refuse to believe me. All the same, I would be remiss not to say my piece. Now, I believe we shall leave you to rest. Miss Ayaka, Kōrakuhime, let us go. Unless either of you would like to discuss something with Arturia.”

You glance at each of your two companions in turn, but neither is interested. Ayaka wordlessly shakes her head, while Kōrakuhime simply turns away; she’s happy to have the prisoner out of her sight, it seems.

As the three of you make your way back to the main room of the underground workshop, you turn to Ayaka. “I am sorry, Miss Ayaka, that you had to witness such a thing. I understand that your compassionate nature must have found the sight of such pain uncomfortable. Since it appeared ineffective, however, I believe we will not have cause to repeat the event.”

“No,” Ayaka shakes her head and gives you a reassuring smile. “That’s just an enemy Servant, I don’t mind what you do. As long as you’re fighting for my sake, it’d be pretty ungrateful of me to complain over something that trivial.” That confirms the sentiment she showed before Arturia herself, then, surprising though it may be.
“Thank you for your understanding,” you reply, dipping your head in the suggestion of a bow. Then you turn to Kōrakuhime. “Although I was touched by the way you leaped to the defense of my honor,” you begin, “I do not believe pain to be a very effective motivator for our prisoner. We shall have to focus on your proposed methods of magical control.”

“It was not... on your behalf that I grew angry,” your sister protests, pouting slightly. “As we are a family... our reputation is shared, and by insulting you... she was also insulting me.” Huh. It’s a bit disappointing, but you suppose that does make more sense, considering Kōrakuhime’s egotistical personality. “As for controlling her,” she continues, “I have already... devoted the entire day to researching the method, and intend... to continue. Unless you have some... method of enhancing the process, I can hardly see... how we might focus more on magical... control.”

“As a matter of fact, I believe I may be able to assist,” you reply with a smile. “I spent a some time researching magic myself today, and I believe I’ve learned to use Absorption, at least in one form. If we were to work together, wouldn’t that make controlling her more feasible?”

At your mention of Absorption, Kōrakuhime perks up. “have you? That is... excellent. Yes, if you can apply Absorption magic while I return her to a receptive state... I must continue my research tomorrow, but I think this may be the key to... bringing her under our control,” she declares, eyes gleaming.

“Hey, Saber-san,” Ayaka cuts in, “you were calling that Servant Arturia earlier, and you mentioned a castle. Doesn’t that kind of make it sound like she’s a woman version of King Arthur? Who is she, anyway?”

“Why, Miss Ayaka, I see I needn’t tell you,” you reply wryly. “You’ve already guessed her identity. That is King Arthur in there. As you could see, she has a rather boyish figure, and apparently hid her gender while alive. An intriguing revelation, is it not?”

“Wow,” Ayaka says dreamily, “if you beat King Arthur, doesn’t that make you history’s greatest knight? That’s amazing, Saber-san!”

“You do me too much honor,” you say, feigning modesty, although it certainly is true enough. Not that you’ll ever tell Ayaka how you really defeated Arturia. If she wants to believe in a knightly duel, let her. “Thank you, Miss Ayaka.”

While you and Ayaka were talking, the three of you returned to the main workshop room and Kōrakuhime quickened her pace, walking out ahead of you to lift herself up onto the chair at Vaisset’s worktable and rotate it to face you and Ayaka. Now, she cuts into your exchange of pleasantries, clearing her throat sharply. “Ani-ue,” she says, “although I have no doubt that it was a... worthwhile exercise to probe
our prisoner’s mind, the hour is beginning to grow... late. No doubt the other Masters... will be joining battle soon enough. I would like to hear your... plans for this evening.”

“My plans are simple, at the moment,” you explain. “I must have more knowledge of my enemies’ locations and intent. Reconnaissance, Kōrakuhime, is what we must have first. To that end, why don’t you begin by showing us...”

[ ] “...Father Antaglio, the overseer of this War. I must know whether or not he and Matsuda intend to attack us again tonight.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] “...the Emiya household. I wonder if they’ve recovered enough yet to pose a threat once more.” (Pride)

[ ] “...how Liliesviel is spending her evening. I’d like to know whether she and Odin intend to take the field yet.” (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[X] “...what Archer is doing now that he’s no longer tied down by his battles with Arturia.” (Duty)

[ ] “...Harris’ location. If he intends to make a rescue attempt, I must know in advance.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Something else (Write in)

“Why don’t you begin by showing us what Archer is doing now that he’s no longer tied down by his battles with Arturia?”

Archer: the Servant who stopped you from executing Rider’s Master along with his Servant, and who’s fought Arturia to a standstill each night since. He was your target last night, and you don’t intend to lose sight of him now. Next to the unknown Assassin, there’s no Servant who poses a greater danger to your Master than Archer. You learned that in the Akeldama, and it’s only a mercy that this one hasn’t imitated his predecessor and intervened in your battles up until now.

“Reconnaissance... and Archer... how very like you, Ani-ue.” Kōrakuhime gives you a knowing smile, and you suspect you’re not the only one remembering The Man With No Name when you prioritize this Archer. “Let us see, then...” she continues, “what tower he has set himself to guard... tonight.”

Your sister draws the now-familiar origami lotus from her sleeve, setting it in the air and letting the smoke grow from its burning center to fill the space between you. Then, once sufficient space has been filled with the airy canvas to hide your
Kōrakuhime completely from view, the image begins to form through shreds of haze. Like evaporating fog, the smoke disappears bit-by-bit at its center, until it is no more than a border around the sight of another place.

There he is, the titanic frame clad in tight-fitting bronze and leather, the roughly handsome face framed by black hair and beard, and the golden eyes that seem to glimmer strangely out of that darkly tanned form. Archer stands in an ostentatiously decorated room, with his hands down at a wide table that you can’t see much of, covered as it is by the enormous map of Tokyo that Archer is scrutinizing. As usual, he’s beside his Master, a woman who-

Your mind stops. You blink, clearing the illusion from your vision. No, the sight remains. Something that cannot be. The woman beside Archer is not Akagata Kyouka; far from it, she’s someone you know well. Archer’s Master is a diminutive woman clad in an extravagant off-the-shoulder gown of white silk fringed with cloth-of-gold, and a tiara of feathers with a weighty gold centerpiece in the form of a miniature mask. Her long strawberry-blonde hair falls below her waist, passing over lengthy, pointed ears and a pair of feathered wings that sprout from her shoulders. Two-toned eyes gleam with haughty intelligence over fine, elfin features as she speaks animatedly to Archer of her plans. There can be no doubt about it. Archer’s Master, plainly recognizable by the command spells that adorn her left hand, is Circe.

The realization hits you like a hammer-blow, and you almost stagger back from the image. Here, at last, is proof of Circe’s survival and location, and she’s one of your enemies? It can’t be! After the devotion she showed as your Servant, it’s impossible that she could have abandoned you; could have stood before you, in the guise of that human magus, deceiving you by transformative magic, and threatened battle with a Servant of her own. Yet this sight can hardly be interpreted any other way!

Marshalling your will, you return your focus to the matter at hand, paying attention to the words being spoken, rather than just the presence of your former Servant.

“You’ll go and handle the overseer of the War tonight,” Circe is saying, poking a spot on the map with the golden needle she sometimes uses as a wand. “I want him taken out of the situation before he makes a move against us. Also, if we’re lucky that attack will draw out Assassin. I never had the chance to deal with either of them in the other War, and I don’t want to miss this one.”

“You planning to come along as well?” Oddly, Archer sounds somewhat hostile. You certainly wouldn’t guess by his voice that he’s as loyal to his Master as he was during the last conversation you overheard between the two. You muse on it,
considering whether Saber’s failure to appear after Archer’s tower gambit has perhaps strained their relationship.

“No, I won’t be there to spoil your fun,” Circe says indulgently. “I’ll be watching, and I’ll step in if you need my help, but I’m sure that you of all people won’t have any trouble with a few priests.”

“Of course not,” Archer snaps. Without another word, he turns on his heel and strides out of frame. As he does so, Kōrakuhime abruptly dispels the image.

“My goodness,” she says, with characteristic passivity, “to think... your old Caster would appear... in such a place, as an enemy Master... You must be... shocked.”

“I never would have expected it of her,” you reply, nodding, “but if she intends to make me her enemy, there’s nothing we can do but accept it and move forward.” You manage to sound stern, businesslike, and calm only through supreme effort. Inside, there’s a boiling rage threatening to burst out of you if you don’t maintain a vice-grip on it. You can’t decide whether you want to rush to Circe and demand an explanation or never see her again. No doubt your face is going livid with fury, even if you do manage to keep your expression in order.

“Saber-san,” Ayaka asks, “who was that with Archer? Can you explain, for me?”

“My Servant,” you choke out. “From the fake Grail War.”

[ ] Better not to dwell on Circe’s betrayal. Archer is your target, and now that you know his destination time is of the essence. Have Kōrakuhime find Antaglio, and go to intercept him. (Duty)

[ ] There’s nothing more to be said. You’ve got to know why Circe has set herself against you, and immediately! Ask Kōrakuhime where Archer just was, and travel there to confront your former Servant. (Pride)

[X] Circe, Archer, you don’t want to think of either one right now. Just move on to the next enemy to be observed. (Choose one from the prior list) (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Your answer must have carried more of your emotion than you’d intended, because Ayaka goes doesn’t pursue the matter any further. Kōrakuhime, likewise, remains silent as you get a handle on your reaction to Circe’s disorienting reappearance. Gradually, as you hold yourself in check, the rage and despair within
you subside until you’re left feeling drained and distantly unemotional. You don’t want to think about Archer or Circe any longer.

“Kōrakuhime,” you say quietly, “show me what William Harris is doing. We need to ensure he isn’t readying some plan to free Arturia.”

“Certainly.”

At a nod and esoteric gesture from your sister, the floating lotus once again begins spewing smoke into the room. This time, the image that forms is of a grassy slope, leading down to a river softly flowing through the city night. Two men are on the slope, one standing and one sitting. You recognize them both.

“So you need a Master,” Harris says. “That priest sure works quickly, huh?”

Matsuda doesn’t turn or rise to greet his visitor. Staring morosely at the water, he curtly replies, “Whaddya want?”

“Heh. You’re a friendly one,” Harris remarks sarcastically. “It’s like this. You don’t have a Master, and I don’t have a Servant. Right now, we could both die pretty soon. Why don’t we work together instead?”

“Why should I care about dyin’, huh?” Matsuda’s despair-laden voice rings out across the vacant scene, reverberating off the water. “I just found out I’m not even real, and you wanta talk ta me about keepin’ alive! I don’t even know if I’m alive now!”

“Not even real, huh?” Harris gives the younger man an appraising look. “I don’t know about your problems, but you’ll never get an answer if you fade away in the next day or two. You can’t make it with no Master forever, not even with this setup the priest’s done for you.”

“Why not?” Finally Matsuda does get to his feet, rounding on Harris to demand angrily from the man, “Why can’t I make it, ya smug bastard? I’ve been doin’ just fine with Antaglio’s energy ‘til now, and without bein’ tied up by a command spell. All Antaglio can do is cut off that power for a bit. What’s tha good o’ throwin’ in with you?”

“You get it through a crucifix,” Harris answers contemptuously, not giving an inch before Matsuda’s intimidation. “What happens to you when somebody breaks that thing, huh? It’s the end for you, that’s what. A Master, now, that’s someone who won’t get put out of commission as easily as a bit of jewelry. As for being bound, that priest’s got a far tighter hold on you by cutting you off whenever he feels like it than a Master would have with three absolute orders.”

Matsuda considers this for a few moments, before grudgingly conceding, “Fine, so maybe ya are tha better option. That still doesn’t say why I should care about
stickin’ around for tha war in tha first place. I got no home ta go back to, no family, no future, no nothin’!”

“Maybe that’s true,” Harris says, “but it doesn’t bear here. You could find those things and get yourself a future if you live past the end of this War. Pass on my offer, though, and well,” Harris sets a comforting hand on Matsuda’s shoulder. “Your priest handed you off to me. Whether you take me up or not, I don’t think that crucifix of yours will be supplying you with energy much longer. So what’ll it be, Lancer? Live or die?”

“Shit! Goddamn that bastard, why’d he hafta... ah, shit! Hell,-” As the realization that he has no choice sinks in, Matsuda gives in to his frustration and vents for a while. Once he’s calmed down, though, he puts out a hand to shake Harris’. “Alright,” he says. “Ya got a deal. Who’re we gonna attack tonight, then?”

“Assassin,” Harris answers with a smile. “I’ve been wandering around enough as a Master without a Servant that they should be looking to tie up loose ends, if how Lumenza went out means what I think it does. So now we’ll go for a walk, Lancer.”

Waving your hand through the smoke, you shred the image and tell Kōrakuhime, “I’ve seen enough. Remove this smoke, can’t you?” As you wait for a reply, you consider the implications of a Matsuda-Harris team. For one thing, Arturia is now completely dependent on you. The new alliance of your enemies, however, could be even more dangerous than she was when with Harris. The best thing to do, you think, is to...

[] Get out there and attack Harris and Matsuda now, while they haven’t yet worked out their coordination as a pair. (Duty)

[X] Find out what one of the other participants in the War is doing. You can deal with Harris and Matsuda later, when the proper time comes. (Pick the next target of reconnaissance.) (Pride)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

For a moment, you’re tempted to act on what you’ve just seen. Matsuda and Harris could form a powerful team, and your best chance of defeating them will likely be before they’ve had the opportunity to discuss their tactics. You suppress the hasty impulse, though; the prudent side of you still wants to have a complete picture of tonight’s events before taking any action, and you’re confident there’s no enemy so powerful that you have no choice but to attack them while they’re unready.
There’s one more party you need to check on in order to complete your night’s reconnaissance: Emiya Shirou and his compatriots. You haven’t heard from them since you and Emiya were wounded by the collision of your weapons the night before last, and with a human constitution you expect Emiya will still be incapable of fighting. All the same, it’s worth checking on them. Although his wife, with the power of a Lesser Grail, was the center of your attention, you haven’t forgotten that Emiya himself also has a bizarrely heavy magical presence. After seeing him warp reality around you, there’s nothing you can rule out when dealing with Emiya.

“Stop, stop.” As Kōrakuhime’s smoke fades, you promptly contradict yourself. “Don’t remove it, actually. I’m not yet finished with your divination. Next I want you to show me Emiya Shirou.”

Kōrakuhime gives you a quizzical look, and the smoke stops in mid-motion, pausing in the act of being sucked back into the flower that disgorged it, so that it now forms the shape of a hazy white funnel in the center of the room. If she has an issue with your sudden shift, though, she doesn’t mention it; but only waves a hand, reversing the smoke’s movement to once again form a cloud large enough to survey its divinations.

“Emiya? Shouldn’t he be out of the fight now, though? There was that explosion.” Your Master isn’t as restrained as Kōrakuhime, or perhaps her confusion is greater. Whichever the reason is, she gives you a confused look, tilting her head to the side as she asks for your reason.

“Emiya Shirou is not an enemy we can afford to make any assumptions about,” you answer gravely, wagging a finger as you caution the girl. “He has survived one Holy Grail War, as I have, and has powerful allies as well. After his lackluster performance against Berserker I never would have expected him to be so powerful, but,” you shake your head. “At any rate, there are too many unknowns where he’s concerned.”

“I guess it can’t hurt to check,” Ayaka admits. She still sounds doubtful, however. “I hope we can get that family out of town in the War somehow. It really bothers me that they set up here without contacting us, you know? I don’t even know if it was while our parents were alive or during Nii-san’s time that they came here.”

“Don’t worry, Miss Ayaka.” You lay a reassuring hand on the girl’s shoulder. “Whether during the War or after, we’ll make certain that there are no magi in Tokyo who ignore the Second Owner from now on.”

You cut off the conversation there, as the image of Emiya’s living room begins to take form within Kōrakuhime’s smoke. The sight before you is more shocking than anything you could have guessed at from Emiya. The only reason it doesn’t stagger
you completely is the fact that you’ve already weathered the storm of simultaneously discovering Circe’s survival and her betrayal. Emiya and his family are sitting around the table and enjoying a lively, completely peaceful-looking dinner at home. There’s no trace of any wounds on Emiya, and no sign in their trivial conversation or cheery expressions that there’s anything more going on than a happy family gathering with a visiting relative.

From the other side of the cloud of smoke comes the sigh of an utterly shocked, totally disappointed girl. “Are they... sane?” Kōrakuhime asks nobody in particular. It’s a question you’re inclined to wonder about yourself.

“I don’t understand it,” you say. Your head slumps down into the cradle of your hand as you find yourself unable to keep looking at that bizarre sight. “It would be one thing if Emiya were too weak to move, but with him healthy, why? They should have fled, surely; found somewhere to hide in the city. They’ve made an enemy of someone who knows where they live, and they’re just waiting there?”

“Maybe they gave up after fighting you, and decided not to interfere with the Grail War anymore,” Ayaka suggests brightly. “It sure looks like they’d prefer peace, doesn’t it?”

“I don’t think that’s it, Miss Ayaka,” you quickly reply, quashing the notion as gently as possible. Even in a situation as bizarre as this, that’s a height of optimism you can’t credit.

“Perhaps they are... maintaining a facade of normalcy... for the sake of their children,” says Kōrakuhime. “If they are confident... that they can fight you off at their home, perhaps... they place more importance on preserving their mundane lives than... on improved security.”

“That could be. Now that I think of it, Emiya did tell me he was raising his son and daughter without knowledge of magic.” You nod, recalling the conversation and trying to understand the choice to preserve that ignorance over practical safety. It seems completely insane at first, but as you ponder more and more deeply on it, the idea does begin to make an odd kind of sense. Your last battle probably did give Emiya some confidence about dealing with you, and it’s possible that he’ll be able to draw on his wife’s mysterious abilities as well by staying close to her. Perhaps this is a way of closing ranks while doing the best they can to care for the children’s mental states as well as their physical situation.

Then a new idea strikes. Suppose Emiya is doing more than just bringing his family together for defense. Maybe, by staying in a place you’re familiar with, he’s actually daring you to attack and hoping to finish you off on his home territory. You didn’t notice any real magical fortification when you visited his house before, but as a
magus he no doubt has access to all manner of subtle techniques for defending his home. There’s the strange manner of his recovery to consider as well, and the bizarre magic that Liliesviel called a Reality Marble. There are simply too many unknowns to consider, and you find your thoughts running in circles as you stare at the prosaic dinner scene, trying to intuit the intentions of your adversary.

After a prolonged silence, staring at the Emiya family as they dine, you find that there’s another thought intruding on your musing; the realization that you haven’t eaten since breakfast. They’re not discussing anything significant right now, with the children at the table restricting them to mundane topics. Perhaps you could rest your mind for a while and have some dinner; see if anything new occurs to you after eating. By then, the Emiyas may be discussing their plans to dismantle the War again.

[ ] That would be for the best. Even if a Servant doesn’t need to eat, physically, meals remain important to your mental health. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] No, you don’t want to miss anything. As long as you have a supply of magical energy, meals are only a matter of taste; a frivolity. Keep watching the Emiyas until they give you some information regarding their plans for the War. (Duty)

[X] Dinner would be a waste of time, but so would watching the Emiyas. There’s something else more important right now. (Write in details. Attack Archer, attack Harris, return to interrogating Arturia, or etc.)

“Whatever Emiya’s reasoning is,” you finally declare, “that family is not an immediate threat. Kōrakuhime, you can clear away your divination. I believe I’ve reached a conclusion regarding our course of action for tonight.”

“Really, now?” As the smoke drains away, you can see Kōrakuhime’s expressionless face again, regarding you with blank expectation. “What would... that be?”

Before you can answer Kōrakuhime; almost at the same time as she speaks, in fact; your Master says, “That’s great, Saber-san? What do you think we should do?” Kōrakuhime shoots the girl a glare, pursing her lips in a moue of displeasure, but Ayaka firmly ignores her. You decide to follow her example, and let the awkward moment pass.

“This is a golden opportunity to deal with Archer,” you say. “Last night he was firmly ensconced on a tower, able to leverage his advantage at range to the fullest.
Even had we not been distracted by other foes, reaching him would have been a
difficult task. Tonight is different. Right now he is in transit, making his way towards
the home of an enemy. If I attack him promptly, closing within his range should be a
simple matter.”

“You aren’t... worried about intervention by his Master?” Kōrakuhime asks.
You shake your head. “I remember how well she fought against Servants with
Magic Resistance in the Akeldama. She doesn’t pose a significant threat to me.”

“I see...” Kōrakuhime thinks for a moment, setting her chin in her hand. “Do I... have a role in this battle plan of... yours? Or... shall I remain here?”

[ ] “You’ll be coming with me, of course. I expect your aid to be of particular use
against Archer if he should be able to keep his distance.” (Duty)

[X] “You’ll remain here, of course. I need you to keep the house well defended, and to
be here to receive Futodoki’s report.” (Pride)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“You’ll remain here, of course,” you say. “I need you to keep the house well
defended, to keep a watch over our prisoner, and to be here to receive Futodoki’s
report.” She might be useful in battle, but there are enough risks to leaving the house
empty that you can’t justify inviting your sister along to face an enemy you’re
confident in your ability to defeat alone.

“You... don’t want me with you... after my failure against that human magus,”
Kōrakuhime says, looking crestfallen. It doesn’t sound like a question.

“No,” you say, walking over to her to reassure the downcast girl, “that’s not it
at all. I’ve seen your magic at work, I understand how powerful it is; but suppose
Harris were to try an attack while we were all away, and succeed in freeing Arturia. It
would be a disaster. Tonight we must have someone to guard the manor, and there’s
no-one who can do that but you.”

“Is that really... true?” Kōrakuhime still looks set on falling into a depression.
“Are you not only... using kind words for my sake?”

“Of course it’s true!” Getting a bit angry now, you take her by the shoulders,
feeling the slim frame quail at your touch beneath her silk furisode. For once, though,
you aren’t lying when reassuring someone. You really do need a guard here, or you’ll
have no peace of mind. “I need you to stay here and make certain that there are no
problems with the prisoner. It’s your bounded field that’s restraining her, and of the three of us you’re the best suited to defense!”

After a long pause, during which she looks down and refuses to meet your eyes, Kōrakuhime finally says, “Very well, Ani-ue,” and looks up to give you a tiny smile. “Thank you for being... so understanding of my failure. I will do my... utmost to keep the manor entirely secure tonight.”

“There’s a good girl,” you say, stroking her hair without thinking. Fortunately, she doesn’t complain. “Now, where is this church we’ll be protecting from Archer?”

“Ah, here, Ani-ue.” Kōrakuhime startles slightly at the return to the topic at hand, then draws one of her talismans out of her sleeve. This one, though, has an address written on it rather than illegibly archaic script. “I divined the... priest’s location separately, while you were watching... the Emiyas’ dinner. If you... go there, you will most likely find Archer... attacking him.”

“Excellent, thank you,” you say, and turn to go. “Miss Ayaka, let’s be on our way.”

“Alright.” Despite that assent being her only input on the night’s plan of action, Ayaka gives you a smile as the two of you walk to the car. Despite the setbacks you’ve faced, your Master still seems content to follow your lead. Without exchanging another word, the two of you walk to the car, you walk around to get the door for her and let her in, then take your own place as the driver. Once you’re behind the wheel, though, it gives you pause: how naturally you carried that out. Acting as Ayaka’s butler was originally only a cover story for her mundane students, but you’ve settled into the role of chauffeur quite unconsciously. You’ll have to be more careful not to pick up any other servile habits in the future.

As you pull out of the garage and drive through the suburbs, things seem normal enough. Once you get downtown, though, the change that’s come over Tokyo becomes more obvious. You noticed last night that the streets weren’t as full as you’d expect, but tonight a shadow seems to have fallen over the city. It’s not very late, yet, only nine, but the city streets are empty. Very few cars are on the road; shops, restaurants, and even bars are more often closed up than open; pedestrians are almost nonexistent. It’s one thing to hear rumors about illness from an officious student, and quite another to see for yourself what this “epidemic” has done to Tokyo’s night life.

Soon your drive takes you out of the city’s commercial zones, though, and back into a suburb. In fact, as you draw closer and closer to the address Kōrakuhime gave you, the surroundings begin to seem quite odd. You’ve always pictured churches as being in high-class districts, or separated from the populace on hilltops as shrines often are, and the church in the [i]Akeldama[/i] where you summoned Circe held true
to that expectation. This area, however, is not just a suburb, but a distinctly lower-middle-class one. Not poor, exactly, but certainly a step down the socioeconomic ladder from the environment in which Yumigawa Rushorou was raised.

You must have made better time than you thought, because you’re quite near the church now and still feel no trace of an enemy Servant’s presence. There’s still no church in sight, though, so although the addresses of the homes on either side of you make it seem you’re almost there, you continue in the car; unafraid of a long-distance attack. Judging from the addresses, it shouldn’t be farther than-

Wait, now that you look again it seems you’ve overshot it! There are only houses on the street, though. Craning your head around to look behind, you confirm your memory’s accuracy. It’s nothing but cheaply built two-story houses on tiny plots of land for blocks around. You reverse back up the street, keeping careful track of the addresses as you pass, and finally it’s in front of you. Not a church.

The address written on the paper Kōrakuhime gave you points to a grey house in a state of poor repair. Neither abandoned nor well-maintained, it exudes the impression of housing a family too harried and busy to keep up the place any better. If you stared at the building for a thousand years, the notion of an Italian priest living there would never come to your mind. Yet this, according to Kōrakuhime, is where Antaglio is. Not only that, you’ve arrived in advance of Archer.

“Saber-san, why are we stopped? This isn’t the place, right?” Ayaka sounds as confused and dismayed at the location as you feel.

“This is where Kōrakuhime suggested we’d find Antaglio,” you answer with a shrug. “There’s no mistake about the address. This, it would seem, is the place.”

[ ] While you have the extra time, go in and confront Antaglio about sending Matsuda after you. Demand an apology. (Pride)

[X] Wait outside the house until you sense the approaching presence of a Servant, then attack Archer the moment he arrives. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Although you’re interested in what sort of environment the priest might have as his living space in this odd place, you eventually decide against entering. Better to remain focused on your aim here than to be distracted by the same bait that’s drawing Archer to you. You scan your eyes over the skyline around you, looking for
any sign of motion, any trace of a presence. There’s nothing. You still have some time, then.

You drive a short distance farther, parking the car three blocks from the house and getting out to make the return trip on foot. Better to have your vehicle well out of the potential area of destruction. You briefly consider leaving Ayaka with the car, to keep her safe as well, but dismiss the notion. You’ll need her present to conduct the sacrificial ritual, after all. In fact, the thought occurs to you as you conduct her out of the car that you don’t actually know the details of the ritual. Considering the importance it plays in your battle strategy, it’s not something you should leave unknown. As the two of you walk through the darkened neighborhood, you decide to ask.

“Miss Ayaka, how is it that you go about preparing the sacrifice of our enemies?”

“Huh?” Ayaka had evidently been lost in thought, for she now looks up at you startled. “Oh, well, there are two ways of doing it, actually. Why do you ask, Saber-san?”

“Your sacrificial ritual is a crucial part of our combat strategy, as I have said before. If there are any logistical elements of its success that can be provided for, I must be aware of them. Frankly,” you continue, raising an eyebrow in suggestion of humor, “I’m rather surprised at myself for not having asked you before.”

“I see.” Ayaka thinks for a moment, composing her words. “Well, like I said there are two ways. First is the traditional way of doing it. For that, I would prepare a surface with a magic circle and formulae inscribed on it to capture the spirit of the sacrificed creature. Anything that died within that circle would be sacrificed, and you could use it as many times as you want, with no incantation necessary; only the Shijou crest. That’s how we generally did the animal sacrifice at home that I told you about before.”

“Interesting. And the second way?” Certainly Ayaka hasn’t been inscribing circles in the ground below your foes up until now.

“It’s something my mother, actually. She didn’t like to use it much, because she didn’t have a lot of confidence in her own ability to add to the family legacy, but I think it’s really amazing!” Ayaka breaks into a smile, and her tone brightens noticeably as she mentions this. It’s an odd change from the girl who’s usually been subdued when talking about her parents, but you suppose that the memory of learning this ritual must be a particularly happy one. “If I only need to sacrifice one thing, and it isn’t in a prepared circle, I can use only my crest and a short incantation. So long as I focus my eyes on the target for the duration of the chant, a kind of one-
party version of the circle’s binding will be set up. Then, as long as it dies in the next hour or so, part of the target’s spirit will be drawn in!”

“So that’s how it is,” you muse. “I suppose, then, that the most significant challenge for you is in dealing with high-mobility foes.”

“That’s right. So far they’ve always stopped long enough for me to focus on them and chant at some point, but if you cut up a Servant that had been moving too fast for me to see the whole time, I couldn’t do it.”

“I’ll bear it in mind.” That resolves the question of how best to orchestrate Ayaka’s sacrifice, at least for the most part. One thing does stick out to you, though. “Why would your mother dislike that iteration of the ritual?” you ask. “It seems entirely superior to me.”

“She said the efficiency was lower than the original version, and that because it didn’t use the traditional tools it was disrespectful to our ancestors.” She pauses for a moment, then shrugs. “Honestly, though, I think she just wasn’t very confident. Even though she was an amazing magus, my mother was very negative about her own abilities, and said it was all she could do to follow in my grandfather’s footsteps.”

By now you’ve arrived in front of the house that apparently contains Antaglio again. There’s still no sign of an enemy presence, though, so you don’t see any harm in making conversation while keeping an eye out for Archer. As a precaution, though, you manifest your armor before replying, “Is that so? What was your opinion of the man?”

Ayaka’s grandfather should be the one who arranged for the Shijou to host the Holy Grail War, you recall. Learning more about him would be interesting. Your Master’s answer disappoints you, however. “He died before I was born,” she says, “so I really don’t know. Mother said he was one of the greatest magi in the family’s history, but she’s the only one I ever heard about him from.”

“You never tried to learn more about him from the records of his time as head of the family?” From the way Ayaka speaks about him, you’d have expected her to want to know more.

“I didn’t have time,” she says, dismissing the idea. “I always had something more important to do than read in the family archives. Once I stopped practicing magic, I didn’t really ever go near the library. I guess that’s changed now, though. Maybe tomorrow I’ll start by trying to find his journals…” The conversation lapses into silence for a moment as Ayaka considers the idea, and in the absence of speech you hear a strange noise break the night’s stillness: a hum of reverberating air, only there for a moment, but drawing closer, and-
Your arm is already moving even as *Heiligöffnungschwert* materializes, and you cut the arrow out of the air just in time to save Ayaka’s life. It hammers into the blade with the same intensity you remember from that other night, and even the cloven halves of the projectile put craters into the pavement where they land, but you find that it’s easier to bear now. You’ve grown much stronger since the night you battled Rider. Enough, you think, that you could face Blackbeard’s fusillade of cannon yourself if you had the chance again, instead of sending Servants to do it for you. A man who strikes with the same power as those shots, and only one arrow at a time, is no longer an enemy you have to fear.

“Hyaa!” Ayaka lets out a little shriek at the sudden attack, and take her shoulder in your free hand, guiding her back.

“Miss Ayaka,” you say quietly, reassuring her with a calm, level tone, “Get behind me.”

Another arrow comes humming through the darkness, this time aimed at your eye, but again you can read the trajectory and cut it down before it does its work. The timing between the shots is strange, though; it seems too slow, somehow. Is Archer moving between his attacks, or perhaps slowing himself intentionally to mislead you about his capabilities? Of course, you’ve never fought a man with a bow before. Perhaps you’re overestimating what his speed should be.

What’s more important for the moment is determining his location. There’s still no trace of a Servant’s presence anywhere nearby. Archer’s range of attack is apparently greater than the distance at which you can detect magic. Fortunately the direction from which the arrows came can function as a guide. Following them to the horizon with your eyes, you can faintly make out the distant gleam of bronze on a rooftop. He’s almost too far away for you to see at all, nothing more than an indistinct shape, but you don’t doubt it’s Archer. He must have been making his way here when he saw you and stopped to make his assault from the greatest possible distance.

[] Leap up to the rooftops yourself and go on the attack, closing range while deflecting his shots with your blade and cloak.

[] Approach Archer on the street, using the buildings for cover and staying out of sight when possible.

[] Pit ranged attacks against each other by sending a portal at Archer from here with *Heiligöffnungschwert*. 
“Miss Ayaka,” you say, “take shelter under my cloak, and hold on to my shoulders. I need to close in on Archer faster than you can move, so I’ll have to carry you.”

“O-on your back?” Ayaka sounds highly nervous about the idea. “Are you sure? Maybe I could just stay here, or hide in the house there.”

“Are you mad?” you snap. “Archer would kill you as soon as we separated! Furthermore, you told me only a short time ago that you had to be looking at the target in order to prepare your sacrificial magic! Just grab on.”

“Alright…” She still sounds reluctant, but after a few moments you feel her arms going around your neck and the light weight of her body clinging to your back. With only her arms, though, Ayaka’s hold on you is tenuous; and you can hardly reach behind yourself to support her. Then inspiration strikes. You open the door within you, pouring magical energy into your circuits and materializing it as a tendril of Nothingness, softer than the bladed appendages you’ve manifested up until now. You slip it around Ayaka’s legs and torso, to hold her firmly in place under your cloak.

“Kyan!” Ayaka lets out an odd cry as the silky ribbon wraps around her.

“Saber-san, what are you-”

“It’s only magic to hold you in place, nothing to be worried about,” you reassure her. “Now, let’s go. Hold on!”

With that, you dart off to the right, moving into the darkness under the eaves of houses to cut off Archer’s vision of you. No further arrows pursue you as you go; perhaps he’s reluctant to damage the houses? After you’ve gone three blocks that way, you turn left again, moving as quickly as you can while keeping yourself out of sight from above. From your original position, you’d estimated it was about 20 blocks straight to Archer, so you have some range to cover yet.

You’ve made four more blocks this way, frequently hopping over garden walls, shrubs, and fences to stay under cover and in the residents’ yards, when an arrow suddenly shoots out of the darkness straight before you. You don’t miss a beat, cutting it out of the air and looking for the enemy. He can’t be on the roofs now, from the shot’s angle, but there’s still no presence to be found, only an empty garden in front of you. Before you can find a solution, though, you hear more arrows from behind! You spin on your heel to stop three attacks with quick cuts. Like the first,
these came as if shot from your eye-level, but there’s only a wall and small stretch of lawn behind. There’s nowhere he could have shot from, even if Archer could have gotten behind you so quickly. As a chill breeze stirs your cloak, your mind races.

[X] However it is that Archer’s moving his arrows, they’re still attacks you can handle easily. Keep going according to your initial plan, heading for his last seen position. (Pride)

[ ] It’s possible that your initial premises were wrong. Maybe you’re under attack from multiple enemies, agents of the Church such as the hidden figure that Matsuda dispatched. It could even be Assassin attacking you, rather than Archer. Get up to the rooftop and try to get a better idea of what’s going on. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] If Archer can outmaneuver you this easily, he’s probably already heading for Antaglio. Head back to the address Kōrakuhime gave you and intercept him. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Archer, you decide, is trying to confuse you. Whatever means he has of striking at you from various angles, the seemingly inexplicable origin of the shots combined with their ineffectiveness as attacks leads you to the sole conclusion that his purpose is to stop your progress by rendering you indecisive, and causing you to worry about his position. The best thing to do, then, is to keep on as you have been going and close in on the place where you last saw Archer.

You’ve hardly gone another step, though, when your progress is arrested by a further hail of arrows. First one from above, aimed straight at your head; then from before you, striking for your knee; then an arrow from behind, and low; then two more from the front, coming for your eyes; an arrow from your right, going for your heel; on and on, they come from all directions, so that you’re forced to advance gradually, a step at a time, constantly watching your surroundings and cutting down the oncoming projectiles.

As you vault over the next garden wall, raising your blade as you do so to stop an arrow intended for your throat, the arduousness of closing the distance against Archer becomes clear. Even with perfect accuracy in deflecting his arrows, you’re being run ragged by keeping up the defense! Just crossing this yard has taken as long as it previously took you to cover an entire city block, and there’s still plenty of distance for Archer to continue draining your stamina as you make the approach. It’s clear to see why Arturia was unable to do more than fight Archer to a stalemate.
Fortunately, you have more abilities at your disposal than Arturia. You draw your cloak close about you, to cover every part of your body below the neck, and materialize your helmet. Thus garbed you need only worry about arrows aimed at your eyes. You quickly dart back out into the middle of the street, prepare to run, and, call, “Kenótis!”

You sprint down the street at full speed as arrows rain down on you from all sides. A few miss entirely due to your heightened speed, gouging out craters like shell-holes in the blacktop behind you. Most vanish helplessly into your cloak, aimed more accurately but countered by your defense. Those that are aimed at your head, which increase in number as Archer apparently recognizes the Kenótis’ power, can be escaped simply by rolling your head on your shoulders, or swaying to the left or to the right. You don’t avoid them entirely, of course, but only move as much as is necessary to ensure the arrows strike glancing blows against your helmet and leave no more than a scratch behind them.

In this way you sprint down another fifteen blocks of road, drawing near enough to feel Archer’s unmoving presence as you do so. There are only three blocks left between you now, and you can sense his location clearly enough, on the roof of one of the homes to your left and down the road. Line of sight, however, remains obscured as ever by the buildings.

[X] Get on the rooftop and close the final stretch directly before bringing the fight into close combat. (Pride)

[ ] Maintain your current strategy of closing distance while on the street, until you’ve reached the house where Archer is waiting. (Duty)

[ ] Give Archer a taste of his own medicine by using a portal to strike at the location where you can feel his presence. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“I’ve had enough of dealing with an invisible foe,” you mutter irritably. “Ayaka, hold tightly to me. I’m going to face him on his own ground.”

With that, you leap up to the roof of the first house on your left, shattering roofing tiles as your armored bulk slams into the building. The sudden movement evidently catches Archer off guard, as six arrows slam near-simultaneously into the street where you’d been a moment before, putting another ragged pit into the war-torn street.
A moment after you reach the roof, though, everything changes. Without warning, the ever-present cool autumn breeze accelerates into a howling gale that slams into your chest like one of Berserker’s fists, sending you sliding back off the roof, your heels mangling the gutter as you go down. It’s only by last-minute reflex that you turn a somersault in the air to land on your feet, rather than crushing Ayaka under your back.

“Saber-san, what just happened?” Ayaka asks fearfully, her voice muffled by your armor. Buried as she is under Kenôtis, she of course wouldn’t be able to see what’s been going on.

“It seems we’re beginning to discover what else Archer is capable of,” you explain. “I was knocked off that roof by a wind out of a hurricane.”

Not to be discouraged, you make a second attempt to gain the rooftop, this time grabbing the edge and swinging yourself up while crouched, rather than jumping and giving the air maximal power over your momentum. It goes better. With the peak of the roof before you, and your own body lowered, the screaming tempest that crapes over the neighborhood can only inhibit you, rather than throwing you back down. Up here, though, the storm of projectiles has, if anything, worsened. Archer’s arrows are all coming from ahead now, but what he lacks in variety of direction he’s making up for in number, and with your enforced posture you find yourself having to fend them off with Heiligöffnungschwert once again. Each arrow hammers into the sword, sending reverberations up your arm that make your muscles begin to feel the strain. Worse still, the projectiles’ fragments are tearing away at the roof below you, potentially jeopardizing your position rather than leaving behind harmless craters as they did when you were on the street.

There are still three city blocks between you and Archer, but at this level it seems you’ll never make it. Just moving forward atop this roof is a trial, and you fear that once you crest the peak of it and actually manage to catch sight of your foe you’ll be thrown back again, caught by a renewed blast of frigid air. Even if you are able to cover this roof, what follows would be a leap to the next building: surely a doomed enterprise. You must think of another way to approach Archer.

[ ] Give up on the rooftop and return to the street to follow more effective methods.
[ ] If Archer won’t permit you to approach, you have no choice but to face him at his own range. Unleash your own counter-bombardment by attacking him with a portal.
[ ] Closing distance against Archer seems impossible, but the distance remains too great for a ranged battle to be feasible. You still have one more ability at your
disposal, however. Call on Heiligöffnungswert’s second miracle and summon a phantasmal beast to aid you.

[X] Perhaps this gale isn’t an insurmountable foe after all. Hang Kenótis before you like a curtain as you charge, so that the force is channeled into its portal and no part of your body is exposed.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

You raise your head above the peak of the roof, searching for your enemy, and the wind howls at you like some enormous dying beast, screaming its resentment at that which dealt it a mortal blow. It freezes the night as it does so; November nights are never warm, but in the chill of this blast you seem to have been transported to some frozen northern clime. Winter in Russia, perhaps, or the arctic. Frost creeps across the steel of your armor and the tile rooftop alike, and the steam of your breath forms a cloud of ice crystals that are tossed back to scrape and sting at your face the moment you exhale. Nor is vapor the only projectile carried by this tempest: Archer’s shots move in concert with the air, as if they and the wind are components of some bizarre warlike weather, a rain of blows from on high. Their accuracy is reduced, you note dryly as one arrow gouges out a great chuck of rooftop a foot to your left, but the power they transmit up your blade when you are called to cut them out of the air is far greater than that which you felt at ground level.

Dismayed, you lower yourself again to crouch there, pressed into the lee of the roof so that you may avoid the wind; still fending off the unceasing barrage of arrows with an blade that seems to grow heavier with each deflected strike. As things are now, pressing your attack via the rooftops seems hopeless. It’s taking all you have to maintain your current position; how can you cover three more blocks in the face of this pressure?

Then an idea strikes. The assault Archer levels at you comes only from the fore; if you remove your cloak and drape it in front of you, it could serve as mobile cover, shielding you from the gale and guiding both it and Archer’s devastating arrows into the oblivion of Imaginary Number Space. You’d be moving blind, but it could work; better still, it’s a completely unorthodox method, well-suited to catch Archer by surprise.

Your mind is called away from the contemplation of your new plan, though, as you take note of the shivering presence against your back. Ayaka is tolerating the cold well, remaining silent in spite of conditions far harsher on her than you, but between the inhuman force of Archer’s barrage and the freezing teeth of the wind, the
danger to her only seems to be increasing as you draw closer to Archer. If you’re still carrying her with you when you finally do close the distance, she’ll almost certainly be killed. You’ll have to leave her behind if you hope to get any closer to Archer.

Not losing any time, you slip back from the roof’s peak and drop to the yard below, quickly sidling around to the back door before Archer’s next cluster of arrows can follow you to your new location. Fortunately for you, the inhabitants of this house are apparently either extremely trusting of their neighbors or totally incapacitated by the epidemic; there’s a large sliding glass door that opens from the house into the yard, which is completely unlocked.

After stepping into the family’s living room and darting a quick look around to confirm that the place is dark and seemingly empty, you say, “Miss Ayaka, I’ll need you to wait here.” With that, you carry her off your back, wrapping each limb carefully in ribbons of Nothingness to spare her any weight, before pulling them back into your shadow as you set her down in a nearby chair.

“Huh? Hy- Nh?! W-why’s that, S-saber-san?” Chattering teeth put a stutter into Ayaka’s voice, and she has a few false starts as she speaks, even though you’ve gotten her out of the wind now. Her face is flushed, too. The cold must have affected her more than you thought; you’ll have to hope there’s no serious harm done.

“Come now, Miss Ayaka,” you chide, “I can see you shaking like a leaf. If I’d carried you any farther into that gale, I believe you would have frozen.”

“I-I guess you’re right.” The girl smiles weakly. “Sorry I’m not stronger, Saber-san.”

You shake your head. “For the umpteenth time, Miss Ayaka, it isn’t something to be apologized for. Just leave the fighting to me; and be certain to call me if anything dangerous approaches you!”

Then you’re back out the door, leaping up to the roof again. You undo the wing-shaped pin, now an unwelcome reminder of Circe’s betrayal, that holds Kenóitis fast at your shoulder and whip the cloak out before you, taking a corner of the garment in each hand to spread it out, a great rectangle of darkness obscuring your vision of what lies ahead. Even blind, though, with this shield before you you’re confident of closing the distance to Archer.

“Kenóitis!”

As the cloak activates, you spring forward at your full speed, no longer hampered by consideration of the arrows, the wind, or Ayaka’s safety. The ground and buildings blur below you as you shoot forward like an arrow yourself, shattering whatever foothold you find in the mad dash to keep up your momentum and reach Archer before he can realize what you’re doing and counter it. Then it’s over. After a
sprint that seems compressed almost down to one insane instant of hurtling speed, destroyed homes, and wind all around the pocket of stillness you carry, Archer’s presence is right in front of you, motionless. The wind all around you has died down and returned to the faint breeze that stirred the air on the street below. You toss Kenōtis around your shoulders and pin it once more its ordinary position, fastened about your neck.

Before you stands Archer, the adversary who fought so hard to keep you at bay until now, standing without any sign of animosity. In one hand, a bow the length of a man is lowered and without an arrow, and his other hand is empty at his side. Beneath one sandaled foot, Archer holds down the neck of a large leather bag, tied shut with heavy rope but not wholly secure. You can hear a low whistle as air rushes out of it in a thin stream which flows into the breeze stirring your cloak and Archer’s hair. For a moment, he only stares at you in mute astonishment. Then the black mass of hair that surrounds the craggy face breaks open, cracked by a wide, pearly grin, and Archer lets out a hearty guffaw.

“Amazing!” he exclaims, once his laughter has subsided. “And I thought any Servant tied to a magus would be more careful about the surroundings! That’s great. I couldn’t have done much better if I’d been trying to ruin these houses. Take a look at what your sprint did to those stepping stones you used!” He sweeps his free hand out in a gesture to indicate the area behind you.

“I’ll keep my eyes on the armed man, thank you,” you answer coldly. If he’s trying to catch you off guard with guilt, it won’t be effective.

“Alright, fine,” Archer says with a shrug and a smile that seem to call you a fool for missing the fun to be had. “So what was so important about keeping the overseer alive, that it was worth attracting all this attention, huh? You’re not his Servant, he’s only supposed to have a handful of fighting clergymen with him.”

[ ] “I’m here for you, Archer. You gave me the opportunity to kill you, so I took it. The priest doesn’t matter.” (Pride)

[ ] “If Antaglio dies, the Church could decide this whole War needs to be shut down and flood the city with their men. Harming the overseer is a bad idea, Archer.” (Self-Preservation)

[X] Say something else, or ask a question of your own (Write in the details)

[ ] Dispense with conversation and cut him down. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)
“I could ask you the same,” you riposte, “what’s so important about killing Antaglio? Is there any meaning in it, or is it only a whim of Circe’s?”

Shock ripples briefly across the ancient warrior’s face, but it’s only a moment before he composes himself. “So, you know that bitch?” he spits derisively. “You were lucky to get away. If you know her, though, you ought to know her reason already. A Servant like her, with no Master of her own, controlling other Servants and trying to take the Grail for herself, is totally outside the rules for this little War the magi have set up. Seems she decided to cut the oversight problem off at the root.”

“You say it seems so?” you echo, prodding at the improbable statement with a disbeliefing tone. “Shouldn’t you know so? Didn’t you ask? In any case, this plan has no foresight. It would only draw more attention to the priest’s killer, particularly when his replacement arrives.”

Archer shrugs his massive shoulders, grinning at you bemusedly. “I didn’t ask, no,” he says. “She has a command spell, you know; doesn’t mind using it, either. I’ve got to do what she wants, and no questions about the motivation, or future plans. She doesn’t want a wily strategist; just a good, obedient soldier.”

“You seem to take this all fairly easily, for a man subdued by hostile magic,” you reply doubtfully. “Suppose I believe this is all nonsense?”

“Believe what you like,” Archer answers, dismissing your qualms with another shrug. “Having died, it’s our privilege as spirits to take everything with an even hand. I lived a satisfying life. Whatever happens now doesn’t weigh in the balance.” He raises a hand, as if to stop you answering. “Now I know you’re going to ask for more, but before we talk about me and my attitude, I’ve got a question for you, Saber.”

“And what would that be?” you cautiously answer.

“What the hell’s going on in this War, huh?” Suddenly the grin is gone, the voice is hard and flat, and there’s a gleam of rage in Archer’s eyes. “Two Sabers, two Lancers, a rogue Caster going around with no Master... and you know her. It’s all quite a bit different from what I was expecting; so maybe you can satisfy my curiosity, since I’ve kindly answered your questions.”

[X] Answer his question. (Write in details, and if you demand further information in return, what.) (Compassion)

[ ] “I’ve heard enough from you, Archer, and have no reason to explain matters that are beyond you. If you have any last words, speak. Otherwise, this is the end of our conversation.” (Pride)
“Satisfy your curiosity, eh?” You give Archer a hard look, appraising the man. They’re playful words, but the furrowed brows, flat line of his mouth, and the whole set of his countenance indicates he’s in deadly earnest. “Very well then, I suppose I can oblige you as much. It is a rather long story, though. Are you certain you have the time to spare, to hear me out?” You nod back over your shoulder, indicating the direction of Antaglio’s hideaway.

“I’ve got all night,” Archer answers flatly, the words coming out like products of a machine, all previous emotion gone from the curt answer. “Believe me, learning what I’ve gotten into is more important than that old man.”

“I see. Well, let me think,” you say, drawing out your words in a contemplative tone. “How best to explain it…”

As you playact reminiscence, you reach out through your telepathic link to Ayaka and quickly tell her, ‘I need you to prepare the sacrificial ritual. Archer and I are on the roof of another house, three blocks in the same direction I was carrying you before. You should be able to follow a trail of destruction.’ Without waiting for a response, you return your attention to Archer. His stare is suddenly uncomfortable, somehow to canny, too analytical; it feels for a moment as if he’s seeing through your armor to read your face, and through even that; as if his eyes are boring straight into your mind. Nerve-wracking as the feeling is, though, you dismiss it and begin to speak.

“Best to begin, I think, with-”

“No, I think you can stop right there.” Just as you’re launching into your tale, Archer sighs heavily and shakes his head. “Sorry to cut you off, but you’ve killed your credibility. ‘Let me think,’ ‘How to explain it,’” he parrots, cheer coming back into his tone as he mocks you. “Classic stalling phrases for someone playing for time while he invents a story. I don’t know whether you’re ignorant of what’s really going on here or just don’t want me to know, but either way it’s plain to see you were about to lie to me.”

“How dare you!” you bluster, “After you were the one to insist I recite this ridiculous tale!” Rage fills you at this groundless accusation. Of course, you really were playing for time, but you weren’t going to lie to him!

“No, it’s all up with you,” Archer sighs, exasperated. “I’m only debating whether to put an end to you now or let you live.”
“Put an end to me now?” Between outrage and shock, the words come out almost as a shout. “Fine arrogance, for an Archer within the reach of my blade!”

“Gods, you don’t know a thing, do you?” Archer grins at you again, now maliciously rather than in his earlier personable way. “If you know Circe, you should know how fond she is of putting her clairvoyance to use. She’s been watching our fight, and keeping in touch with me. One of her familiars is in the house you left your little Master to hide in now, waiting in the shadows to kill her, and finish you off in the bargain. All she’s waiting for is my word, as the man on the spot.”

Listening to Archer’s words, cold fear washes over you as if carried on the breeze ceaselessly issuing from that bag at his feet. It’s true that Circe said she’d be watching the fighting here while you looked in on her, and of course targeting the Master while the Servant was occupied always was the trick you two used. It’s gut-wrenching to have it turned on you, but there’s nothing for it but to keep pushing. After all, there’s one aspect of Archer’s story that doesn’t make sense.

“Why let me live, then?” you demand, willing your voice to stay flat and unconcerned. “If you’ve had her in the palm of your hand all along, and you were so certain of my perfidy, why didn’t you kill her while I considered my words?”

“I guess I’m just soft-hearted.” Archer says, gleeful eyes seeming to punctuate his words with derisive laughter. “See, you know Circe, and by the tone in your voice when you said her name, you’re not any more fond of that witch than I am. I just can’t bring myself to kill someone who hates her without at least giving you one more chance.” He shrugs one more time, then goes on in a more serious tone, “Here’s what we’ll do. You back down. Hop off this house and wait on the street there until I’ve finished off the Overseer. Then, when I give you the go-ahead, we’ll go our separate ways for the night. We can finish each other off some other time. Preferably one when I’m in full possession of the facts of this Grail War. What do you say, Saber?”

[ ] Back down. You don’t have a choice (Self-Preservation)

[X] You’re not going to give Archer what he wants, even if he’s got you backed into a corner! Maybe he’s bluffing. Call him on it! (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

This is a bluff. You’re certain of it. If Circe had a familiar there to kill Ayaka, she wouldn’t be waiting on the word of someone she was ordering around in your vision of the two. Archer must be trying to manipulate you into giving up your advantage, giving him the distance he needs to escape from the reach of your sword.
Even if it isn’t a bluff, though, you can’t accept the notion of giving in to his demands. Your pride won’t allow you to buckle before this kind of threat. No, you think as you begin to smile behind your mask, this is the time to enjoy dispelling Archer’s illusions about the weakness of your will.

“So you’ll really let me go if I don’t interfere with your execution of Antaglio?” you ask, making your voice sound resigned and frustrated. “Just step away and leave my Master unharmed?”

“That’s right,” Archer answers, his grin widening. “you give up, and you can go home tonight without a scratch.”

“I suppose I have no choice,” you concede, shaking your head ruefully. “It seems you have me thoroughly trapped, with this scheme of yours. I’m afraid there’s no course I can follow but to refuse.”

Archer blinks, looking at you for a moment without a word. “What did you just say? I think I must have misheard,” he finally says.

“Oh no, you heard me correctly,” you reply, dropping all pretense of defeat from your tone. “I refuse your offer. I wouldn’t take it if you had a blade to my throat, and I certainly won’t give you the satisfaction of a victory earned by threats hidden in shadow!”

“Do you hear yourself right now?” Archer sounds incredulous; it’s as if he doesn’t believe you. “After all the precautions you’ve taken up until now to keep yourself and your Master unharmed, you’re just choosing to die? Are you insane?”

“Fuhahahahaha!” You let out an enormous guffaw at Archer’s unbelieving reaction. Once you’ve settled down, you reply, “I really must thank you, Archer. You’ve given me the opportunity to do that which I love most. I don’t blame you for not understanding, though; that look of utter shock and incredulity is precisely what I look for! But here, let me explain. I’ll tell you what I told Judas Iscariot.”

“You’ll... tell me what you told Judas Iscariot?” Archer gives you another look of mixed disbelief and disappointment. “This only gets stranger, huh? Fine, go ahead.”

“You see, there is one thing in this world that I, Alberich, enjoy more than any other,” you declare, laying a hand theatrically on your breast. “It is to find a person who believes they have the situation completely in their control; someone totally confident, who thinks ‘there’s only one answer he could give, and it’s just what I want,’ and saying no straight to his face. I couldn’t care less about your threat, Archer, I just wanted to shoot you down! To toss that meaningless confidence back at you! Go on and kill me, if you can!”
“Guess I’ll have to do this the old fashioned way, then,” Archer says, exasperated. At the same moment, he eases up the foot that holds down the neck of the leather bag, and as the aperture widens almost imperceptibly the wind explodes out in a renewed explosion of force! It takes you full in the face, launching you backwards over the lip of the roof, and as you’re going down you see Archer knock an arrow and draw back his bow. He must be aiming at Ayaka!

You turn in the air to land on your feet in the yard below, and as soon as you’re on the ground shout “Heiligöffnungschwert,” bringing the blade up in a cut that traces Archer’s position. A black crescent flies out from the line traced in the air by the blade’s tip, shearing up through cement wall and tile roof alike to decapitate the house you’ve been dropped beside in its path to your adversary. Before Archer’s shot is loosed, you hear a colossal roar from above and his presence, hidden from your eyes by the house, is diminished significantly.

In the fraction of a second after the deafening roar comes the titanic force and loss of sight as the sound of an explosion on the roof is followed by a blinding tempest, an enormous whirlwind. All around you is screaming air too choked with debris for you to see a thing. Fragments of cement or tile pack into every crevice of your armor, only to be washed out again by the omnipresent gale. Dimly, through the wind trying to drag you aloft and the screaming of your muscles as you cling obstinately to the earth, you can feel some of that debris pounding your armor as it hurtles through the tempest. After a few interminable moments, though, the wind gradually fades away. You’re left standing in a flattened yard, on the edge of a massive house-sized crater, as minuscule fragments of the building, its contents, and its inhabitants come sprinkling down from on high.

Archer lands beside you as you’re admiring this multicolored rain of gore and building materials. He hits the ground with a meaty crunch, as thighs cut off at the knee are crushed by the impact. The work of your portal, you don’t doubt. Despite the brutal injury, though, he’s still trying to get up and crawl away with his arms. A Servant’s constitution is a truly marvelous thing, you think dryly.

“Did this all go according to your plan, Archer?” you mock, squatting down beside the crawling half-man as he drags himself along the yard, leaving a trail of blood in his wake. “Have you put an end to me?”

“Shut up,” comes the groaned response. “I certainly put an end to you, if you don’t kill me now.”

“Well, we can’t have that,” you say. “Still, you’ll have to see my Master before you can die.” With that, you produce a pair of tendrils of Nothingness from your cloak and bind up his legs, cutting off the bleeding. Now all you’ve left to do is drag
him to Ayaka, so that she can prepare his sacrifice. ‘Miss Ayaka, where are you?’ you ask, reaching out over your mental link.

“Actually, Saber-san, I’m just right over here,” answers her soft voice, off to your right. You whip around to see your Master stepping daintily over the property’s mangled front gate, walking into the yard with careful glances at the soiled grass and raining debris. The disgust on her face couldn’t be plainer.

“Excellent,” you say, dematerializing your helmet and smiling kindly at her to offset the unpleasant surroundings. “Were you able to prepare Archer’s sacrifice?”

“No,” she answers apologetically. “I’m just now seeing him for the first time. Give me a minute.” With that, her expression suddenly shifts. The emotion drains out of it and she stares intently at Archer, eyes tracking every detail of his form while betraying no reaction whatsoever. Her mouth moves rapidly, but the words she’s chanting are muttered so quietly as to be nearly inaudible. After almost a minute of this, life comes back into her face and she ceases to chant. She looks up at you, gives you a smile, and says, “All done, Saber-san.”

“I suppose this is good-bye then, Archer,” you say, smirking down at the bound Servant with sardonic satisfaction.

He favors you with a glare, retorting, “Hurry up and finish me off already. If you were under my command, I’d have you whipped for laziness,” with the last of his breath. You’ll never know if he had more to say, because at that point your blade stabs down to part head from body.

“I, Alberich, accept your sacrifice,” you intone, and feel the familiar thrill as Archer’s power flows into you.

**Status Updated**

[ ] Direct the energy into your body, enhancing your raw power.

[X] Form the energy into a concept, reinforcing an aspect of your nature as a hero.
(Conceptual Biology)

[ ] Attempt to replicate some property of Archer’s and apply it to yourself. (What?)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

As you peruse the history of the consumed soul, the legend embedded in the foreign energy now bound to your will, you discover the name of your adversary: Odysseus! To think that your adversary was Circe’s own most maligned former lover! That certainly explains the dislike that ran between them, palpable as live current.
You find little at his disposal, however, to draw your interest. Plundering his legendary wits might, under other circumstances, benefit you greatly; but that boon has been cut off from the rest of his essence by Circe’s magic, along with his moral compass. Odysseus’ mind, you discover, has been warped by the enchantress’ power in a thoroughly detrimental manner, leaving his renowned strategies as far out of your reach they were beyond his during your battle.

The other characteristics of the spirit that might be replicated, too, are undesirable. Physically he was your inferior in all aspects save endurance, and neither his remarkable eyesight nor his difficult-to-manage Noble Phantasm entice you overmuch. No, you think, the best thing to be done with the portion of Odysseus’ spirit that Ayaka has given you is do purge it of all traces of the hero, and use it to reinforce the core of your own legend: your conceptual impact on the world, that which sets immortal heroic spirit apart from the mass of short-lived human lives.

To reinforce your spirit directly with the energy is a strange feeling; as your conceptual existence is furthered, your physicality recedes. Your own enlarged soul courses through your magic circuits like a cleansing flame, and in its wake you feel as if you have simultaneously utterly empty and vastly more substantial. Your material self is eroded, diminished from within, while your notional existence, the abstract idea of “The Hero Alberich,” is enhanced, impressed further upon the world.

Status Updated

You’re not certain when you took leave of your senses, only that you return to them now, standing in the desolate yard beside your Master and the empty place where Archer vanished from the world. The rain of debris has come to an end, and the wind that ceaselessly stirred the night has vanished with your adversary. Silence and stillness reign all around you; despite the enormous impact of your battle, with Archer, there isn’t a light on or sound of movement to be heard.

As you look around, it becomes plain just how great that impact was. Archer evidently wasn’t putting you on when he remarked on the havoc you wrought on the houses you covered in your sprint towards him. Beginning with the right-hand next-door neighbor to the house that is now a crater, you can see a clearly carved out line of destruction stretching across three blocks. Each house you landed on as you surged forwards has had its roof smashed in as if by an enormous hammer, and Archer’s arrows have torn numerous massive holes in the buildings and ground all around your course of movement. Here and there you can see fires burning where gas or electrical lines have ignited, and randomly mixed in with the inanimate debris are bits of human detritus: a raggedly severed arm here, a shapeless chunk of flesh there, a ragged dress soaked with pulpy gore somewhere else.
One memorable example, in a mostly complete living room missing only one wall and the house above it, is a man in a night-shirt and flannel pants stretched out on the sofa as if to sleep. A few feet in front of his relaxed form a television sits perched atop a stereo and shelves of input devices, all untouched and likely in working order. Only the man’s head and the arm of the couch are missing; the domestic tableau is cut off by the edge of a massive pile of broken plaster, roofing beams, and scattered tile. Blood oozes from the base of the heap.

“Saber-san, are you alright?” At the sound of her voice, your eyes snap back to Ayaka. She looks at you up at questioningly, concern for you in her eyes. “Saber-san?” she repeats. “Did something go wrong with the sacrifice?”

“No, I’m perfectly well.” You blink away your distraction as you answer her, focusing on your Master rather than the surroundings. “I’m sorry to have made you worry. I believe we’re finished here, Miss Ayaka, wouldn’t you say? Doubtless we should be getting back to the manor.”

“Alright,” she says, hesitating over the word. “It’s just, you went silent for a while after you took in that sacrifice. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Quite sure.” As you step out into the road, looking back over the twenty blocks to Antaglio’s hideout and your car, you explain, “I was merely distracted by the effects of channeling the power into my direct composition, rather than an ability with a more discrete nature, as I have previously. In fact,” you continue, a mischievous smile coming to your face, “why don’t I show you how well I am?” Without waiting for a response, you swiftly close in on Ayaka before she can react and scoop the girl up into your arms, holding her at the knees and shoulders in a bridal carry.

“He- Saber-san!” Ayaka’s surprised exclamation turns into a squeal of outrage as you pick her up, and she hammers futilely on your cuirass with bunched fists as a blush spreads across her face. “You have to warn me before doing something like that! What do you need to carry me for, anyway?”

“It’s a long walk back to the car,” you answer, deadpan. “I can cover the distance much faster than you can, and I’ve made you walk too far already tonight. We wouldn’t want you tiring yourself out the way you did after my battle with Berserker.”

Ayaka still looks frustrated and embarrassed at the imposition, but doesn’t offer any further protest, so you quickly sprint back to the car with her in your arms. Only when you’ve set her down in the passenger seat, dispelled your armor, gotten in yourself, and begun to drive that she speaks up again.
“...You could’ve carried me on your back again,” she says quietly, staring out the window and away from you.

“I suppose you’re right,” you answer wryly. “I wonder why that didn’t occur to me at the time.”

“Your armor was cold.” Now she sounds more petulant than embarrassed.

“My apologies, Miss Ayaka; I’ll take that into consideration in the future.”

For a few minutes, the two of you subside into silence as you drive back to the manor, leaving the cheap suburb and its scene of carnage behind. Downtown seems just as dead, though. Everything is shut down and the streets are empty of other drivers despite the relatively early hour of the night. It’s almost as if the whole city has been emptied out for the benefit of the Holy Grail War. The real reason isn’t so convenient, though, and you find yourself wondering what the chances of Ayaka being brought down by this “epidemic” might be. It may be harming mundanes first, but should you take that to mean magi are wholly immune to the exhaustion of leylines? There simply isn’t enough you know about the subject.

As you return to Ayaka’s own neighborhood another thought comes to mind: the disgust Ayaka felt at approaching that destroyed house where you defeated Archer. Now that you consider it, this is the same girl who felt too strongly for doves to conduct her own daily sacrifices. Could mundane casualties drive a wedge between you? You steal a glance at her from the corner of your eyes, but Ayaka is still staring out the window, her expression hidden from sight. Still, it’s no-doubt best to address it immediately.

“Miss Ayaka, if the homes that were destroyed during my battle are concerning you,” you begin, but Ayaka answers before you can finish your justification.

“Don’t worry about it, Saber-san,” she says brightly, turning to smile at you and take your free hand in hers. “Everything you did was what you needed to so you could win, right? I trust you.”

Taken aback, you turn to look at her as you pull to a stop at an intersection, searching for any sign of suppressing an inner turmoil in her expression. There’s none there; she doesn’t seem to mind a bit.

“Thank you, Miss Ayaka.” Your reply is somewhat stiff, as you’re a bit rather confused at seeing your concern for her feelings over the collateral damage resolved so simply. “I appreciate the trust you place in me.”

She gives you another smile, squeezes your hand as if to reassure you, and sweetly says, “Saber-san, you probably shouldn’t stop here forever, even if there aren’t any other cars on the road.”
“Ah! Yes, of course.” Returning your eyes to the road, you complete the drive back to the manor without further discussion. Ayaka’s neighborhood is as still and silent as the rest of the city, and your car is the only thing moving in the night. Only one thing catches your eye as you pass: one of Ayaka’s neighbors has a limousine parked on the street, out in front of the house. Odd, you think, in this neighborhood where all cars are usually out of sight. Like its neighbor, Ayaka’s house also has one detail to separate it from the surrounding homes. It’s the only one with lighted windows. You pass both unusual points without comment, though, and as you pull into the garage and kill the engine, Ayaka stretches in her seat, stifling a yawn.

“I think I’ll go right to bed,” she says as you conduct her out of the car. “Good night, Saber-san. Let’s talk more in the morning, okay?”

“Of course, Miss Ayaka. Good night,” you reply, and the two of you part ways in the hall leading back into the house as she makes for the stairs. You have other things to do, though. Futodoki will be returning soon enough, and you should probably discuss the battle with Kōrakuhime. Perhaps she has some insight into why Circe didn’t interfere, despite claiming she’d be watching over Odysseus. Where Ayaka turns right, therefore, you turn left, to head down a corridor that opens into the living room and branches off into the basement workshop’s descending stairway entrance. Before you can make it that far, though, you stop to wonder. It was the living room window that you saw lit from outside, and light is shining around the corner into the corridor from that room now. You can also hear the soft clink of china. You’d expected Kōrakuhime to be downstairs, but apparently she’s here instead. Why, though? Surely your sister isn’t receiving guests.

You pass the stairs and continue into the living room, where a bizarre sight greets you. Seated on one side of the coffee table is Kōrakuhime, without either her hat or her horns and wearing a black silk one-piece dress with thigh-high socks of the same color. Compared with her usual profusion of lace, ribbons, and patterning, it’s remarkably restrained; more like something Ayaka might wear, you think. Only slightly ruffled, and with one large bow at the collar, in royal blue. She has an unusual expression on her face as she daintily sips from a teacup, welcoming with a hint of concealed strain.

Across from Kōrakuhime, sitting all in a group, is an even more shocking collection of individuals, who no-doubt present the origin of both the limousine and your misanthropic sister’s strain: Liliesviel and Odin, flanked by her two maids. Everyone in the room looks up at the sound of your entry, looking to identify the newcomer. Seeing you, Liliesviel and Kōrakuhime both brighten, though the light of the former’s excitement far outshines the latter.
“Onii-chan, you’re home!” she exclaims, looking delighted. “Thank goodness! Can we stay here? We’ve lost our home.”

[X] “Of course you can stay with me, Liliesviel. What’s happened?” (Compassion)

[ ] “What? No, that’s quite impossible.” (Self-Preservation)

[ ] “Excuse me? Just hold on a moment. Why do you want to live here? What’s happened to your tower? I need you to tell me from the beginning, before I can make a decision.” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“Of course you can stay with me, Liliesviel.” Taken aback at the sudden development you answer while without thinking, the words falling out of your mouth automatically. Then, realizing what you’ve just agreed to, you reach out to Ayaka over the link that bridges your two minds. ‘We have new guests,’ you say, ‘you may wish to come down and see them, Miss Ayaka.’

‘Oh, do I have to? Saber-san, I’m really tired,’ Ayaka’s reply is anything but enthusiastic. ‘I’d really like to get some sleep.’

‘I suppose that is what you had best do, then,’ you reply. ‘We’ll discuss this further in the morning.’ Not wanting to seem too blatantly surprised, you stop in the doorway for only a moment before walking in to sit down beside Kôrakuhime. Before you can cross the room, though, you’re stopped by a small form cannoning into you. At your acceptance, Liliesviel had jumped to her feet and run over to leap up and throw her arms about you in an embrace of exuberant gratitude.

For a moment you freeze, unable to react as your senses are dominated by the girl pressed against you; the flowery perfume of her hair; the soft, smooth warmth of her cheek against yours; the phenomenal lightness of her body, so full of life despite its nymphic delicacy; the sensation of her small hands on your back, slim fingers twining in your jacket for a hold, not quite gripping-

Your mind starts into activity again as you realize Liliesviel is slipping, and hurriedly move to return her embrace, wrapping one arm around her lower back and bringing the other up under her legs to support the girl.

“Thank you so much, Alberich,” she breathes, reverting to German, and that high, sweet voice sends a shiver through you as her breath tickles your ear. “It was so frightening, losing the tower, but I knew you’d help us.”
"Of course," you answer, reassuring her in the same language. "Didn't I say I'd be here for you when we were on the ferris wheel? But what could have happened to put you out of your home?"

"Why don't you sit down before discussing matters further, Saber-san?"

Kōrakuhime’s cold voice cuts through and dispels the rosy atmosphere between you and Liliesviel like one of Archer’s freezing winds, suddenly rendering you conscious of your surroundings once more. Although personally you’d be happy enough to carry out the conversation with Liliesviel in your arms, it’s plain that the context isn’t appropriate. Outside the circle of your embrace, the atmosphere in the room has become quite frigid. Conversation has died, and the stormy expressions and uncomfortable stares of Stengel and Kōrakuhime are boring into you, each representing her own sort of disapproval of the situation. To make matters worse, Lancer is smirking irritatingly. Only Stachel remains impassive, looking on with no apparent emotion.

"Yes, I suppose I can hardly stand here all evening," you reply, mustering your dignity. "Would you pour me a cup of tea as well?" Thus reminded, you finish crossing the room to the couch. Your first thought is to set Liliesviel back down between her maid and Lancer, but as she seems thoroughly disinclined to be separated from you, you instead take your seat beside Kōrakuhime with the girl on your lap. As you do, she turns around to face her own servants, shifting back against you to get comfortable and resting her head on your chest. Position changed, you become more conscious again of the feeling of her body’s softness against you. Your heartbeat becomes erratic, and you find yourself momentarily short of breath. With an effort of will, though, you remain calm and keep your expression sober.

"Ahem. So, Liliesviel," you say, in Japanese again now to keep Kōrakuhime abreast of the conversation. "What happened to your home, that you should find yourself in need of our help?"

"It was terrible, Onii-chan," she answers, the sound of irritation displacing the affection that filled her voice a few moments ago. "We were attacked by this absurd flying Servant, and Otto couldn’t even drive her off properly! Isn’t that ridiculous?"

You raise an eyebrow, looking at Lancer as the ghost of a smirk twitches the corners of your mouth upward. The idea of a Servant that can match Odin certainly is a nerve-wracking one, but at the same time you can’t help finding something to savor in the humbling of someone so infuriatingly superior.

"Perhaps it'd be better if I did the explaining," the old Servant cuts in, meeting your smirk with uncharacteristic gravity. "It’s as our young miss says so far,
my boy, but she didn’t have a very clear view of what happened. Had to take shelter, you understand.”

“I see.” You nod, composing yourself and dispelling your mirth. Irritating or not, Lancer is your ally for the time being, and if there’s an enemy he regards as worth taking seriously you need to face the matter with the same attitude. “What can you tell me about your battle with this flying Servant?”

Odin steepls his fingers over the table, looking into the middle distance and remembering the battle. “She was just a slip of a girl,” he begins, “not much bigger than your Master’s sister there.” He nods towards Kōrakuhime. “She had wings to fly, though, and a staff she used to channel some impressive magic. To begin with, she had a handle on spatial transmission; appeared outside the tower with no warning, and called down a blast with enough power to level it right then and there, if I hadn’t stopped it with my own barrier. From the look of her, I’d have called her a Vanir, but judging by her magic...” he pauses for a moment, thinking, then concludes, “she must’ve been Olympian.”

A Greek goddess in the form of a slender girl, with large wings that enable her to fly, an ostentatious staff, and showy magic including spatial transmission? The image that forms in your mind could hardly be more clear. Evidently when Circe promised to watch over Archer’s battle she either lied or changed her mind after sending him on his way. Still, it does seem strange. Was she powerful enough to face off against Odin during your time together in the Akeldama? Though you’ve only seen him unleash his power once, you can’t help finding the idea doubtful. Perhaps the reach of his spear represents a more severe limitation than you’d previously expected. In any case, it’s important to learn how the battle ended.

“Clearly she was unsuccessful,” you comment. “All four of you have reached us unharmed. How did you dispatch this mysterious Servant?”

“I’m getting to that,” Odin irritably replies. “Don’t rush me, boy. An enemy’s identity is an important thing to consider!” He gives you a hard look for a few moments, challenging you to interject again. When you hold your tongue, though, he continues. “Anyway, after I’d deflected that first pillar of light, I had to get up to the roof to send her on her way. Things became a magical duel pretty quickly after that. She and I traded blasts for a while, until she finally beat a retreat. In the end, we both made it out mostly unscathed; that Einzbern Tower, though,” he shrugs unconcernedly. “Well, it got caught in the crossfire and just went down. Nothing left to live in there now.”

“Listen to him!” Liliesviel snaps furiously, point an accusing finger at her Servant and irritably swinging her feet back and forth as if to stamp on the floor she
can’t reach. “He accidentally blew up our only place to live, and he doesn’t even care! Can you believe there would be such a terrible Servant, Onii-chan?”

“I have no doubt that Lancer’s conduct leaves much to be desired,” you concur, smirking at Odin. Hopefully this encounter will diminish his condescending attitude a bit.

“It isn’t all bad though,” Liliesviel continues, brightening. “Now Onii-chan and I can finally live together as a proper family! So, why don’t you show me my room?” She turns back to regard you with a mischievous expression and faint blush. “Unless you’d like to share one,” she continues, switching to German to keep Kōrakuhime from understanding.

“Lady Liliesviel!” Stengel jumps to her feet, slamming her palms down on the table as she snaps at her mistress in their native tongue. “That is unbecoming of a maiden of your stature!”

“Be silent!” Ice floods Liliesviel’s tone as she turns back away from you to reprimand her maid. “I didn’t ask for your opinion, Stengel. We have discussed this before! Alberich is one of the family, and now our host! Your attitude towards him is unacceptable! From now on, you’ll treat Alberich with the same respect you give me! I command it! Do you understand?”

For a few moments, Stengel chews her lip in fury and looks as if she’ll refuse. Eventually her discipline wins over her resistance, though, and she sinks back down to the couch, seeming to wilt. “As you command, my lady,” she answers dejectedly.

“Good! Then apologize to Alberich!” Despite her maid’s surrender, the anger hasn’t faded from Liliesviel’s tone.

At this, the maid gives her mistress a look of desperate appeal. Whatever expression Liliesviel is wearing must have killed it, though, because Stengel’s face promptly falls into despair. Staring down at the table, Stengel chokes out, “Please accept my humblest apologies... Lord... Alberich,” in a barely audible mutter. This seems to be enough for Liliesviel, though, who says nothing further.

“I accept your apology,” you answer graciously, “but there was no need to speak up so vigorously. I agree that Liliesviel and I should sleep in separate rooms. This manor has enough to bedrooms to accommodate each of us individually.”

“I see,” she says, and life seems to come back into the maid as she looks up to give you a brief smile of gratitude before returning to her professionally impassive expression. “Thank you for your understanding, Lord Alberich. We do not all require separate chambers, however. Stachel and I would prefer to share our quarters. It is how we Servants of the Einzbern house have always slept in the past.”
With that, things seem to be settled regarding sleeping arrangements. You show the four newcomers to the stairs leading up to the second and third floors and take them around, pointing out the occupied rooms and finding three empty ones to situate your guests. The maids and Odin take two adjacent rooms on the second floor, while Liliesviel insists on the room neighboring your own, on the third floor. Once Stachel has carried up their enormous quantity of luggage, refusing your help and insisting on “a maid’s duty,” the four settle in to sleep, and you and Kōrakuhime are left out in the hall. It’s just after eleven.

[ ] Go to bed yourself. It’s been a long night, and you want nothing more than to sleep after everything that’s happened. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Talk to Kōrakuhime. (about what?)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

“Come with me, Kōrakuhime,” you say. “Let’s return to the living room, and talk this all over at the table, shall we?”

“Yes, Ani-ue,” she softly replies, “I suppose we... should.”

With that, you put an arm around her shoulders and gently steer the girl back to the stairs and down to the living room. After the experience of fielding visitors, she looks too mentally exhausted to really direct her own actions, other than collapsing. You knew Ogawara had been a loner, of course, but the strain that dealing with the Einzbern party has put on Kōrakuhime is really shocking to see.

“So,” you begin, once the two of you are sitting down again. “You were able to disguise yourself as a human, eh? Well done, Kōrakuhime.”

“I... didn’t have another choice,” she answers bashfully, blushing and not meeting your eyes. “I had to tell them that I was your Master’s younger sister... Shijou... Tsubaki. They appeared... all of a sudden, and I was sure... you wouldn’t want me to turn them away, so...” she gestures wordlessly at her appearance: the modern dress, the lack of horns, the hands uncovered by gloves, the black hair bereft of its usual inner layer of red. She seems thoroughly ashamed of her human appearance.

“That was quick thinking,” you reassure her. Perhaps some praise will soften the unpleasantness for her. “It’s a very fetching outfit, as well; you could look this way all the time, and no-one would think any the less of you.” She looks up at you, meeting your eyes finally, but with a flash of anger. You can tell she’s about to say...
something against it, most likely disparaging humans, so you cut her off. “You will go on looking this way, in fact,” you continue. “As long as Liliesviel and her servants are with us, I need you to keep up the charade of being Ayaka’s sister, and a second Shijou heir. We’ll have to pretend that Futodoki is your familiar as well.”

“Very well, Ani-ue,” she says, dropping her eyes again. “I suppose it... is important that we not admit my true nature to them.”

“That’s right. Speaking of Futodoki,” the idea suddenly occurs to you. “Has he returned yet with his report?” You did tell him to return at midnight, but that’s no guarantee he hasn’t come back earlier for some reason.

“No, I haven’t... seen him.” She shakes her head.

“I see. I suppose we’ll have to wait for him to return, then,” you conclude.

“While we wait, why don’t you tell me what you spoke with Liliesviel about before I returned?”

“Very little,” she says. “I received them, and they said that they had something... urgent to speak with you about... so I gave them my fake identity, and told them that... you and Ayaka were out, but... they could wait if they liked for you to return. I thought they would... leave, but they came in. So I brought... tea for them, and then you returned... home.”

“Not much of a conversation then,” you muse. “What else did you do while we were out, Kôrakuhime? Have you made any progress with our captive?”

“Just... a little. I’ve been studying her... past domination, and working to determine how it might be...” she taps a long fingernail on the table absently as she thinks, “...induced once again. I believe we will... eventually be able to bind her to our will, but... right now the necessary magic remains far from... complete.”

“So, there has been no major shift since this afternoon, then.” You lean back against the sofa, running everything that’s happened this evening through your mind. First discovering that Circe had betrayed you at the beginning of this Holy Grail War, then killing her Servant, and finally returning home to discover that she had spent the night destroying your allies’ home. A few hours ago you weren’t sure whether she still existed, and now all at once she seems to have returned to the center stage of your life; though now as an enemy, rather than your Servant. If possible, you’d like to resolve the situation before having to fight her yourself; to learn what it was that drove her to turn against you, and whether she can be brought back to your service.

“Would it be possible for you to prepare a method for me to speak with Circe?” you ask, acting on your thoughts with sudden decisiveness. “I want to discuss what’s happened with her, and find out why she’s become my enemy. If she’s as powerful as Odin now, we can ill afford to ignore the potential for diplomacy.”
“Indeed,” Kōrakuhime says hesitantly, “but she remains... in her temple most of the time. It is... warded against hostile magic. I was only able to perform divination there... with great difficulty, and because I was not... pursuing Circe herself with the technique. To create a line of communication there from the outside... would be impossible for me.”

“That is unfortunate.” You shake your head. “I suppose the only way for me to contact Circe would be to march over there and meet her in person, then. A dangerous notion, given her enmity. I’ll have to consider our next moves with regards to her carefully.”

Just then, your conversation with Kōrakuhime is cut short by the sound of Futodoki’s voice. “Good evening,” he says as he pads out of the shadows, a haughty look in his three eyes. “How’s life treated the pair of you since I saw you last, then?”

“Just fine, Futodoki.” You answer a bit shortly, disturbed by the sudden appearance. “How did you get in here without my seeing you through the manor’s bounded field?”

“After the security at the place you just sent me, I slipped in here undetected without even thinking about it,” Futodoki explains in a cavalier tone, then grows more serious. “You ought to have told me you were sending me into that much danger, Alberich. I was thinking that boy you had me follow was nothing.”

“So was I,” you shoot back, raising an eyebrow. “What sort of place did he lead you to?”

“At first he went to another human building, smaller than this one, but similar in appearance,” the cat begins. “Its barrier was something else altogether, though, like I said. It wasn’t easy, getting in. Eventually I did, though, and caught up to the boy just in time for him to go down some stairs to a lower level. That, now, was a real change. Everything down there was gold, and the ceilings in that room were carved higher than the ceiling in the building above ground! Can you believe that? It was like they’d put a palace underground!”

“Go on,” you say. A sense of apprehension fills you as the location he describes grows familiar.

“After that,” he says, “the boy met with a woman waiting in that hall. She wasn’t human, I could tell by her presence; and by the wings on her, of course. Told her that she was right, and the other him was ‘there after all,’ but whatever they said after that I didn’t hear. She found me out just a bit, you see; didn’t really see me, just felt a shred of foreign presence. The kind most people would ignore. Well, she called up wolves to track me down and catch me! I spend half the night running around the
city trying to get away from those beasts before I finally lost them and came back here.”

So the other Yumigawa Rushorou is well acquainted with Circe. Perhaps her temple is even under his home. Not only that, she knows where you are, and he recognizes you. It’s another confirmation of her perfidy, and shouldn’t surprise you, but somehow it still does. You’d never guessed that your old Servant would become directly involved with the other Rushorou; as people you’re simply too different. What can you do, though? What can Circe’s goal be, or Yumigawa’s? To use the Grail to give Circe life, perhaps, as you plan to supply it to yourself? Why would she need the cooperation of a non-magus student for that? The more you contemplate the matter, the more obscured in mystery it seems to become.

[ ] You can’t handle any more tonight. Go to bed. (Self-Preservation)
[X] There are still some details you’d like to ask Futodoki about his scouting. (What?)
[ ] There’s something else you’d like to discuss with Kōrakuhime (What?)
[ ] Before you retire, you think you’ll pay one more visit to your captive. (And do what?)
[ ] Do something else entirely (Write in)

Still, the import of the news that Futodoki has brought you isn’t the only thing to consider. You can hardly agonize over Circe’s intentions forever, nor can you afford to simply give in to the stress and retreat to your bed, finding comfort in sleep. There are always the concerns of the immediate moment, superseding the emotion you feel at greater considerations; so you tamp down those emotions, restrain them within yourself, and return your attention to those around you.

Futodoki, now that you consider it, has far surpassed your hopes for him. When you set him to follow Yumigawa Rushorou you had expected the nekomata to be doing no more than tracking the movements of a mundane young man; yet here he is, unharmed after successfully infiltrating a bounded field set by Circe and escaping a pack of her wolf familiars. It’s an impressive feat, one you’d be more likely to expect from a Servant of the Assassin class than a mere phantasmal beast summoned by your Noble Phantasm. To say nothing of wounds, his fur doesn’t even look ruffled as he sits there beside the coffee table, elegantly grooming a paw.
“Well done, Futodoki,” you say. “What you achieved to bring back that information for us went far beyond what I had expected would be required of you. If there’s some reward you’d like for your contributions, I’d be happy to grant it.”

“Hmmm...” A sound of contemplation not unlike a purr rolls out of of the cat’s throat as he sets his paw back down and gives you a calculating look. “How about a human infant to eat?” he finally asks, after spending some time considering the offer. “I’ve always heard they were a delicacy for my ancestors, before we came to the Reverse Side.”

“We don’t have one on hand, just at the moment,” you answer dryly. “You’ll have to ask for something a bit more conveniently supplied, I’m afraid.”

“Well, I guess that’s alright.” Futodoki gives a rolling feline shrug. “I mostly filled up on one of those wolves that I managed to get alone while I was on the way back, anyway. For now, why don’t you let me think on it, and say you owe me one? I’m pretty new to the human world, after all; don’t really know what kind of favor you could offer me.”

“I see. In that case, I suppose that is what we’ll have to do. Do try to make your decision soon, though; we wouldn’t want to forget. Ah!” Another idea strikes you regarding Futodoki. It’s the perfect time to bring up the subject, with he and Kōrakuhime both in the room. “That reminds me,” you continue, “on that subject, there’s something I mustn’t forget to inform you of. We have a group of guests here, who will be staying for the foreseeable future. As long as they remain, I’ll need you to pretend to be Kōrakuhime’s familiar, and an ordinary cat. You shall have to hide your additional body parts and refrain from speaking.”

Futodoki gives you a long, moody stare, and then slowly blinks. “I don’t imagine,” he says, “you know how much of an insult that is to a nekomata? Looking like an ordinary cat?”

“No more of a disgrace than for me... to keep up the pretense of humanity,” Kōrakuhime hisses in an angry retort. “You... are living up to your name! We must all... make sacrifices.”

The two lock eyes for a moment, staring irritably at each other in a clear contest of wills between the high-handed girl and the proud feline. In the end it’s Futodoki who breaks off the stare, returning his gaze to you and giving a short nod. All at once, his four intermediate legs and one of his tails seem to melt into shadow and fade away, while his central eye closes without leaving a seam. “Will this do, then?” he asks resignedly.
“Excellent. Thank you for your understanding, Futodoki. Now, if you’ll both excuse me,” you say, nodding to the pair as you get to your feet, “I really must be getting to bed. I suggest you two get some sleep as well.”

With that, you make your exit, returning up the stairs to your bedroom, the former abode of the Vaisset patriarch. As you strip down to retire, you find your thoughts running restlessly over the changes that have occurred today once again. Yumigawa Rushorou, bound to your former Servant, Circe, and aware of your identity. The Archer, Odysseus, slain at the cost of all those sleeping bystanders. Adelheid, your other lost companion; what can have happened to her? Is she with Circe, sullenly cooperating with the enchantress’ plans in spite of the resentment between them, or did the two quarrel and go their separate ways? Has she perished, starved of magical energy? At the mental image of that small form that seemed to cry out for a protector despite the power she wielded, fading away as she almost did after you slew Ambrose, a knot of bitter rage and regret forms in your gut. You hope she still lives, even if survival means cooperation with Yumigawa and Circe. Anything is preferable to that sorry death, fading away with no way to fight on, no struggle to make for survival.

Then there are Odin and Liliesviel, brought from their tower into your own home. The one is an unpleasant threat: the smugly superior, infuriatingly knowing Servant nearly unruffled even by his semi-defeat at the hands of one he must surely consider an inferior; the man who will surely be your final mortal enemy in this contest for survival. The other, a tantalizing intoxicant of a girl who seems to strip away all the cares and worries that burden you by her mere presence, contracting your perception down to a sole focus, just as when the high, sweet sound of Adelheid’s song stole away your thoughts of the War to pull you beyond the barrier of the garden walls. Even now, as you lie down knowing she’s just beyond the bedroom wall, it seems you can almost smell her perfumed scent wafting through to reach you and soothe the pain of your worries; that you can almost see her, the vision of her sleeping form arising out of the darkness before your eyes.

At some point, you can’t say just when, fantasy gives way to dream, and you slip into oblivion.

You’re behind the eyes of a child once again, though a little older now. You look on from a darkened hall, peering through a cracked door into Father’s office, watching as the man argues with his son.
“Father, must you do this?” your brother pleads. Through the slot of vision the door affords, you can see only his hand, gesturing in desperation. The rest is hidden in darkness. “You know what it means to make an enemy of the Clock Tower!”

“How haven’t I taught you the value of honor by now, Jean?” The rebuke is not merely spoken but roared, as if your father, his own figure also hidden by the door, hopes to send the son away by volume alone. “Do you expect a man of the Vaisset to stand by and do nothing while a cabal of English dogs tells me what mysteries my wife may or may not pursue? I would be a disgrace to every man who came before me!”

“But father, this is not merely a duel,” Jean-Pierre protests. “Even if you should triumph over this enforcer, we would become the enemies of all the Mages’ Association! We would be hunted forever!”

“Even if I should triumph; even if! Listen to yourself,” the older man laughs. “Do you know what sort of man they have sent to cow me? A worthless wretch from a no-account family. Harris! What power does the name of Harris command, eh? I won’t merely triumph, my boy; I’ll crush him so thoroughly that no man of the Association will dare protest at your mother’s work again!”

Before you can hear more, a hand settles on your collar, pulling you away from the crack. It’s your mother, smiling down at you and pressing a finger to her lips in an imperative to silence. As she pulls you away from your spying, however, the vision fades into darkness...
Thursday, November 21, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

...pierced by pale shafts of morning light as your eyes flicker open. There’s no-one here to wake you today, and the birdsong isn’t loud enough to interrupt your slumber as it was in the Akeldama. Perhaps it’s the anxiety that’s been with you since last night’s discovery that woke you today, then. You’re sure you haven’t had more than four hours of sleep, and as you walk over to take a look out the window you can see it’s only just after dawn. The lowest edge of the sun is still barely hidden behind the rooftops, though the rest of it shines straight in through your window.

Despite your short night, you have plenty of energy. Time to begin the day, then, even if you’re the only one to have risen yet. As you walk into the attached bathroom to shower, you consider how best to begin.

[ ] First things first. You need to eat something. With the others all asleep, head down to the kitchen and try your hand at cooking for the second time. (Self-Preservation)

[X] You’ve got to get in touch with Circe or Yumigawa, and although Kōrakuhiime informed you that a magical solution is unworkable, there is always the mundane to rely on. Make a phone call after you get out of the shower. (Pride)

[ ] Maybe everyone else is asleep, but there’s one person you imagine is awake as often as she can be. Pay a visit to Arturia, and have a chat about her former Master. (Sadism)
As you stand there, letting the water run over you and contemplating your plans for the day, you find your mind returning to the revelation of Circe’s involvement with Yumigawa, and the more you picture them together, the more a black rage kindles within you. The seed of the fury at her betrayal was planted when you saw her making her plans with Odysseus, you suppose, but until now it has remained overlaid by repeated shock and confusion. Now, however, as you look at the whole situation with fresh morning eyes, things seem to clarify. After you escaped the Akeldama, she must have seen the two of you with her divinations; must have, surely. She couldn’t have been unaware of your identity, you think; even if you had concealed it from those around you, Adelheid or Circe must have known, if they’d seen you, who you were.

Then, casting her eyes between the two variations on her former Master, she chose him in deference to some twisted, unguessable preference; some mysterious impulse hidden from your inference by the cruel, opaque mind that once transformed spurned lovers into beasts and was untroubled as she repeatedly slew and resurrected the father of her child. Perhaps, you think, her loyalty to you was not as strong as you once imagined. It could be that she chose to stand beside the weaker of the two of you out of a desire to control matters herself; that she relishes the opportunity to subject one who shares the name and memories of the man she once called Master to her own will.

Whatever her reasoning, however, the essential fact of the matter is plain enough. Circe, who once committed to serve you, to stand by your side, and to deliver the Holy Grail into your hands, has betrayed you and now seeks her own power. Were that her only offense, it would still be enough that you would hate her for it, but it is hardly so. She must have done away with Adelheid as well, though it pains you to think of the idea, for the girl would surely have protested against Circe’s betrayal and would have come to you if she were not stopped and could not turn Circe away from her perfidious course. Not satisfied even with that, the witch then went on to attempt to wipe away the life of Liliesviel; to erase that existence which you’ve come to cherish in the short time you’ve known her, and to whom you swore you’d give the true companionship her family denied her. Three times, then, Circe has betrayed you. Blood seeps from your clenched fist as you think of it, nails cutting into your palm unheeded in your rage.
By rights, you should kill her. You have enough reason, surely. Yet, there is a thought that gives you pause; a seed of doubt in your heart. Could this possibly be a misunderstanding on your part? Could there be some unknown piece of information that would recontextualize what you have seen enough to reverse your conclusions? It seems impossible, and yet... yet there is that nagging doubt. You would also have thought it impossible for one of your Servants to betray you, until last night. You cannot allow conviction to obscure the truth.

Your hand shoots out to cut off the heat, letting the water pour over you now in a frigid spray. With the loss of the physical heat, you find yourself better able to chain the heat of your soul and quiet the rage that calls for retaliation with no further discussion. Last night you sought to speak with Yumigawa and Circe, to confront them and hear in her own words your Servant’s reason for betraying you. Today, that’s what you will do; before making a decision about Circe’s betrayal.

How to do it, though? You step out of the shower and towel off, then stand before the mirror to comb your hair into its accustomed shape, mixing pomade into the locks as you contemplate the problem of communication. Up until now, whether in or out of the Akeldama, you’ve done all your communicating either in person or by magic. Kōrakuhime has already told you that a magical solution is impossible, though, and to travel to the Yumigawa residence in person would surely be to either leave yourself open to attack or to appear as an enemy. Either way, you can’t imagine a successful conversation arising from such a beginning.

Then a brilliant idea strikes you: the phone! You’re so much a part of the Moonlit World now that you’ve almost begun to forget the memories of Yumigawa Rushorou, to see them as views of another world, another type of life altogether; but the technological conveniences that filled his mundane life do still exist, despite the magi’s preference to disregard them. You can simply call the Yumigawa household from the manor’s land-line phone and speak to them that way.

With a conclusion come to at last, and your hair done, you step back into the bedroom and take a look through the departed Vaisset’s closet for today’s clothing. After some consideration, you settle on an ensemble of charcoal-grey three-piece suit, cream shirt, and your wine-red tie with a silver and onyx tack. Once dressed, you make your way out into the sleeping manor, the only moving occupant as you head for the telephone. Passing by the other bedrooms, you can just hear the girls’ soft breathing in the morning stillness.

There is a telephone in the living room, but closer to you now is the one in the study on the second floor. It’s a room you haven’t visited since your first exploration of the manor, and as you enter you reflect on which of the Vaisset men ordained its
decor. With its odd juxtaposition of bookshelves and glass-fronted cases filled with carefully filed business documents below numerous mounted animal heads, trophies of long-past hunting excursions, you suppose there are traces of more than one generation here. To your right is an old-fashioned rolltop writing desk, but there’s no phone on it. Another scan of the room picks out what you’re looking for, though, on a low end table beside the armchair in room’s opposite corner: a rotary phone, designed to fit in with the general Regency style of the manor’s decor.

Filled with purpose, you stride across the room, sit down in the armchair, pick up the receiver, and dial the familiar number of ‘your’ home. After three rings, a voice answers. Yumigawa Rushorou’s.

“Hello, Yumigawa Residence,” he answers coolly. If the early hour bothers him, he doesn’t show it. “May I ask who is calling?”

“You ought to recognize me by the sound of my voice,” you tell him flatly. “You certainly seem to think you know me, considering that you told Circe I was another you. Frankly, though, I have little and less to say to you. Why don’t you hand the phone over to her?”

The response is perhaps the last thing you’re expecting: a short, merry laugh. “So,” Yumigawa says once he has his voice in order again, “that spy she found was yours, was it? And you remember everything too, there’s a surprise! Well, Saber, you may not have much to say to me, but I certainly relish the prospect of a conversation with you in light of that revelation. After all, you were with me all through the Akeldama. Why shouldn’t I have some affection for you?”

“The Akeldama?” you echo, shocked. “You don’t mean to say that you believe you experienced that, do you?”

“Believe I experienced it?” There’s the mirthful sound in his voice again, now mixed with suspicion. “What are you saying, Saber, I know I experienced it. We did, one in body and mind! It was only at the end that we split. Up until now, though, I thought you were only power, with none of my memories or personality. This does bring things into a new light, I have to admit.”

“Yet I doubt you’re contemplating the formation of an alliance.”

“No, the idea does hold some appeal, but I doubt it would be possible,” your double says regretfully. “The main enemies I would be hoping to ally against are the Einzberns, you see, and it seems you’ve aligned yourself with them quite thoroughly. Besides, even if we did work together for a time, it could only be temporary.” His voice takes on a hard, determined edge that you recognize from your own cadence. “You remember our dream, don’t you, Saber?”
“To stand above all humanity,” you answer. “To have the power necessary to hold truly justified authority. I’ll never forget the intention I declared to Adelheid that day; the wish that I would have from the Holy Grail.”

“That’s right. I knew you’d be staying true to it, if you had my memories,” Yumigawa says. “Of course, I haven’t abandoned that dream either. You, Saber, are the power that I earned in that War; the power that Judas collected, and that should have gone to me. I don’t know just how you split off from me, but mark my words, Saber; or ‘Alberich von Einzbern,’ if that’s what you prefer to be called now. I will take you back before this War is over.”

With that, he hangs up without giving you the chance to reply, and the line goes dead in your ear. You’re left alone in the study, to process the idea that Yumigawa Rushorou has all the memories of the Akeldama, and that Circe’s betrayal, from her perspective, might only have been staying true to her Master. You’ve received the recontextualizing piece of information, the key to this bizarre puzzle. You almost wish you hadn’t.

In the end, though, whatever this may say about Circe’s motivations, it does make at least Yumigawa’s status wholly clear. He’s a concerted enemy, planning your death with all the guile you used to take victory in Judas’ Grail War. You can’t credit his story, of course. After all, you’ve heard the truth about your origins from Judas himself; wherever Yumigawa has gotten his notions, they must be false. Their effect on his mind is certainly real, though. Although he isn’t one of the formal Masters of this War, you now know that his death is as much a requirement of your survival as the filling of the Holy Grail.

You get to your feet. There’s no point in spending more time sitting here and thinking. Yumigawa is an enemy, the same as any of the other Masters. As for Circe, you’ve learned as much as you can without speaking to her yourself.

Better to move on, to keep making progress toward your goals, than to allow yourself to become lost in thought. No doubt the others will be rising soon enough. It’s time to put the news of last night behind you and begin your day properly.

[ ] First things first, you need to eat something. Head down to the kitchen and try your hand at cooking for the second time. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Maybe everyone else is asleep, but there’s one person you imagine is awake as often as she can be. Pay a visit to Arturia, and have a chat about her former Master. (Sadism)
It would be wise to discuss developments with your new guest, particularly after her encounter with Circe last night. Go and wake up Liliesviel. (Compassion) (Write in details to talk about.)

After her abrupt retreat to bed last night, you should speak with Ayaka. Go and wake her up to talk. (What about?)

Although she was the last person you spoke with last night, you have more to say to Kōrakuhime. Go and wake her up to talk. (What about?)

Do something else. (Write in)

At the moment, you suppose, the most immediate piece of business to be dealt with is informing Ayaka more about your guests before she awakens and has the chance to meet them unprepared. You haven’t forgotten the dressing down Liliesviel gave your Master on their first meeting, after all, and she surely still harbors some complex feeling towards the girl. With that in mind, you depart the Vaisset study and make your way to Ayaka’s bedroom on the second floor.

You almost walk straight in to wake her, but at the last moment you’re stopped by the recollection of Kōrakuhime’s violent reaction to your unannounced intrusion into her room while she was asleep the other day. You doubt Ayaka would be quite so explosive about it, but all the same you’d rather not repeat the error. Instead, you knock thrice, sharply enough that the sound should wake her.

“Hm?” A hazy voice drifts out in answer. “Go away,” your Master groans indistinctly, “‘m sleeping...”

Apparently Ayaka is not interested in being woken up this early. Still, you aren’t one to be put off so simply. You knock again, and call, “Miss Ayaka, it’s time you should be preparing for the day. If you don’t wake up on your own, I shall have no choice but to go in there and awaken you myself.”

In reply, you receive only another sleepy moan, followed by, “Leave me alone, Saber-san,” muffled by blankets or pillows.

Left with no choice, you open the door and stride into the room. Ayaka, evidently more conscious of her furniture’s aids to privacy than Kōrakuhime, is hidden from your view by the curtains on her bed. You notice she hasn’t moved the desk chair away from her bedside since you left it there, though. How little she misses the academic pursuits of her old life, for someone who laments the changes that have come to her, you think with a smile. You cross the room to part the drapes covering her window and let in the morning light, then return to her bedside. As you sit down,
you twitch aside her bed’s curtain to reveal a pile of blankets and small area of black hair which you can surmise to be your Master, bundled up as much as possible and face-down against her pillows.

“Now now, Miss Ayaka,” you chide, holding back the urge to chuckle at her appearance, “that’s no way for a lovely young girl like yourself to rest. Why don’t you sit up and face me, hmm? Come on, you can’t stay in bed all morning.”

Finally she rolls over to look up at you, her face still masked by a curtain of hair until she extracts a limp hand from the nest of blankets enfolding her and brushes it out of her eyes. “Hi, Saber-san,” she says, still sounding groggy, “I’m sorry to make you wake me up, but I’ve been sleeping terribly lately. I’ve had such dreams, ever since the War began.” She frowns at the thought, blinking at you with unfocused eyes as she tries to take in her surroundings without her glasses.

“Oh? I hope you haven’t been suffering due to the connection between you and I,” you say with some concern. Considering the content of your own recent dreams, and the dreams you had when you were a Master, you can guess at what sort of visions are plaguing her. “Why don’t you tell me about these dreams of yours, Miss Ayaka?”

“Sure,” she says, and then does something that surprises you. She suddenly turns, on the bed, to bring her face closer to you while her legs shift under the blankets towards the far corner. At the same time, she rolls over to prop herself up on her elbows, so that in a moment you find her eyes looking up at you from just inches away. “Ah, that’s better now,” she says casually, seemingly unfazed by your sudden closeness. “I’m very nearsighted without my glasses, you know,” she continues. “When I don’t have them, I can’t really see anything unless I’m this close.”

“I see,” you hastily reply, a bit flustered. She really is quite close. As she speaks, her breath brushes across your face, and you find your eyes following her soft, pink lips brushing over white teeth as they form the words. You look away, focusing your attention on her eyes. Only her eyes. “So,” you continue, sounding perfectly calm in spite of yourself, “now that you can see me properly, what about these dreams you’ve been suffering from?”

“I guess it’s actually appropriate that you brought up the connection between us,” she begins. “The truth is, the dreams that I’ve been having have all been about you. You’ve been fighting, but-” she purses her lips, reflecting on the mental image. “It’s not the same as when you fight. You were different; shorter, I think, and fighting people with your bare hands. It was all very brutal, and sometimes terrible things happened to you. In the dream I had last night, an American-looking man shot you in the leg! Where can an image like that have come from, I wonder...” As you
listen to her, your guess that Ayaka has been seeing your memories in her dreams becomes a certainty. What’s bizarre, though, is her reaction. She seems about to tear up, remembering it; it’s as if this dream violence affects her more than the real battles she’s been witnessing since you became her Servant.

“It’s as I thought, then,” you say, giving Ayaka an expression full of sympathy. “I’m afraid this is my fault, in a manner of speaking. What you’re seeing are my memories, shared via the energetic connection between the spirits of a Master and Servant.”

“Wow,” she breathes, drawing out the syllable as her lips form into an ‘o’ of shock. “So all that was the fighting in Caster’s Grail War? My goodness.” She thinks on this silently for a moment or two, before she suddenly appears to become startled by some thought that crosses her mind. As a light blush forms on her cheeks, she asks in a tremulous voice, “That memory sharing, thing; that doesn’t go both ways, does it?”

“It does, yes,” you answer. Spurred on by Ayaka’s crestfallen expression and deepening blush, you hastily add, “I would of course prefer to leave you your privacy, but if it is any consolation to you, I haven’t seen anything that you would find embarrassing.”

“Really?” She gives you a suspicious look, although through her blush it looks more cute than threatening. “What have you dreamed about, then, Saber-san?” she demands.

“To begin with last night, then,” you say, “I dreamed of you as a younger girl, listening in on your father and brother as they discussed making an enemy of the Mages’ Association. How did you come to make peace with them, incidentally? Considering that you remain the Second Owner here today, things must not have become as dire as your brother feared.”

“Oh, that night.” A faraway look comes into Ayaka’s eyes, and she breaks off from looking at you as the lively embarrassment falls from her countenance, leaving her cold and subdued. “I don’t really know what happened after that. It was almost the last time I saw my father, though; he left the next morning, saying he’d be on a short business. I remember how he picked me up to hug me, and mother said he shouldn’t, that I was too old for him to be doing that, but daddy just laughed and said I’d never get old enough that he couldn’t pick up his little girl. Then he stroked my hair, and told me to be a good girl while he was gone, and that was the last time I ever saw him.” She breaks off for a moment, looking wistful, then seems to come back to the here and now, and looks back to you. “Mother left us too, not long after, and
the two of them were buried together. Nii-san never brought up any problems with
the Association after that.”

For a moment, almost by reflex, you think to apologize for raising the tender
subject. Looking at Ayaka’s impassive expression, though, and remembering her
words of a few days ago about how quickly she’d moved past her parents death, it
doesn’t seem the right thing to do. Instead, you give voice to your real thoughts on
the subject. “I suppose, then, that since the matter concerned your mother’s research,
the Clock Tower must have considered it brought to an end with the death of the two
parents. Do you know what it was that she was working on, to draw their ire?”

“No,” she answers with a slow shake of her head. “Mother never told me, she
said I wasn’t ready to learn about her research yet, and then after they died Nii-san
never wanted to talk about what happened.” Then a light seems to dawn on her, and
Ayaka sits up, slides over, and gets off the other side of the bed and onto her feet,
snatching her glasses off the bedside table as she does so. “Saber-san, could you give
me a minute?” she asks. “I’d like to get dressed.”

“Of course,” you reply, nodding as you get to your feet, “but what is it that’s
inspired you so abruptly?”

“I’ll tell you after I’m dressed, just please get out for now, would you?” With
that, you leave her to her clothing. After an astonishingly short time for a young girl
to dress, no more than a minut[e, she steps out again in a hastily assembled outfit of
skirt, blouse, and cardigan in colors that almost match her school uniform.

“So?” You raise an eyebrow. “What has you in such a rush, Miss Ayaka?”

“My mother,” she says, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “I’m
going to start reading the family chronicle, just like you suggested, and I’m going to
start with her volumes. Just wait, Saber-san, soon I’ll be able to properly help you
win the Grail War!” All this is said as she rapidly walks down the hall to the Shijou
library, exuding more determination than you ever would have expected from her.
It’s almost as much of a departure from her normal behavior as when she used her
command spell to pull Judas’ explanation from you.

“Hold on a moment, Miss Ayaka,” you say as she opens the library door. “I
wanted to tell you about our guests. They’re-”

“It’s fine, whoever they are, I trust you haven’t brought anyone who’d be a
problem into the house.” She cuts you off, turning on the threshold to stop you
following her. “Besides,” she says with a smile, “I’m sure they’re here to see you
anyway, so you can be their host; and it isn’t like you need my advice for the War. I’ll
just be reading in here today.” With that, Ayaka closes the library door on you,
leaving you alone in the hallway. To your surprise, you hear the clicking of a lock just
after she does so.

[] That’s the end of your conversation with Ayaka, you suppose. Now, perhaps it’s
time for some breakfast. Head down to the kitchen and try your hand at cooking for
the second time. (Self-Preservation)

[] You’re not going to let Ayaka just shut the door on you and hide! Demand that she
come out and welcome the guests with breakfast. (Pride)

[] If you’re the one who’ll be acting as host to the Einzberns, it would be wise to
speak with your new guest. Go and see if Liliesviel is awake yet. (Compassion) (Write
in details to talk about.)

[X] Ayaka may not be acting the hostess, but there is still another “Shijou” in the
house. Go and wake up Kōrakuhime to tell her what happened and discuss your
phone call with Yumigawa. (Anything else you want to talk about?)

[] In the shock of Yumigawa’s news, you almost forgot about him, but Harris is still
a significant concern. Pay a visit to Arturia, and have a chat about her former Master.
(Curiosity/Sadism)

[] Do something else. (Write in)

You suppose, then, that Ayaka won’t be hosting the Einzberns after all. In
that case, it will have to fall to her self-appointed sister, Kōrakuhime, to do so.
Turning from the library door, you walk up the hall to her bedroom to find out
whether she’s awakened yet. Unlike when you knocked at Ayaka’s door, though, you
receive a proper response this time.

“Is that you, Ani-ue?” comes the soft response. “You may... enter.”

You open the door to find your Kōrakuhime sitting up in bed, leaning back
against the headboard with blankets piled up to her waist. Her horns and the red
layer in her hair are back, but you find your eyes lingering somewhere lower. You
can’t help but notice the black camisole she wears, and the way it clings to her modest
chest; how the narrow straps contrast with the milky curves of shoulder and
collarbone; as well as with Ayaka’s seeming preference for white nightwear. You
break your eyes away, not wishing to stare, and begin to explain your presence.

“Good morning, Kōrakuhime,” you say, “I came to inform you, it seems you
shall have to continue representing the Shijou family as you did last night.”
“Is that so?” She takes the news with greater calm than you’d have expected, after how unpleasant receiving the Einzbern party seemed to be for her last night. “I did... hear you and that girl passing in the hall. I suppose that this... is the result of that conversation?”

“That’s correct. Miss Ayaka has shut herself up in her library, taken with a sudden whim to study her mother’s journal and learn more about her family’s magic.” You shrug your shoulders, turning palms up. “A good idea, but the timing is unfortunate; so you’ll be our hostess, Miss Shijou Tsubaki.”

“I... see.” Kōrakuhime nods thoughtfully. “And... did you have anything else... you wished to discuss with me; or did you only come... to inform me of that? If so... then I ought to descend to the kitchen... to begin preparing breakfast.”

“No need to rush off. I did have more to talk with you about,” you explain. “That was only the most immediately pressing piece of news.”

“In that case... sit down.” Kōrakuhime waves a hand at the extra space on the bed, past where you can see the shapes of her legs beneath the blankets. There is plenty of space for you to sit. “I wouldn’t want... to make you stand in the doorway there... all morning,” she says, looking slightly embarrassed at the statement for some reason.

“I’ll take you up on the offer, then,” you reply, walking over to take a seat on the side of the bed, putting Kōrakuhime on your right. “Now, the first thing that I wanted to tell you about is this: I spoke with that Yumigawa this morning over the phone. He remembers the Akeldama.”

Kōrakuhime’s eyes go wide with shock, and she sucks in a sharp breath in a high, soft gasp. “How can that... be? The humans who formed our basis should... be only that, disconnected originals... with no relation to us.”

“That’s what I had thought as well,” you agree, “but it seems we were wrong. After I thought more about the subject, I remembered something else. When Judas first explained to me that I was an artificial soul, he made a vague comment about ‘resonance’ being caused by my presence, but I let it go with that because he said it was nothing I couldn’t handle. I suppose this must be what he meant.”

“Intriguing. I suppose... this does explain why Circe was serving him, however,” Kōrakuhime says, laying a fingertip just below her lower lip in a gesture of thought. “She must have... scried for the person named... Yumigawa Rushoru, and found him to be... a person with all of her Master’s memories. The natural reaction is... obvious.” It’s no more than what you were thinking after your conversation with Yumigawa, but even so; to hear the explanation uttered so calmly by another seems to rekindle your rage, and that sense of possessive loss that twisted in your gut while you bathed
this morning and almost motivated you to depart alone, not wishing to waste a moment in the killing of Yumigawa. Whatever Circe’s motivations, whether or not she can be blamed, the fact is that Yumigawa has stolen from you. He deserves death, the most painful you can arrange. Nothing else will do for-

But you tamp the emotion down again, keeping the grimace from your face and remaining outwardly calm. Even so, Kōrakuhime must have seen the reaction in your eyes, for she hastily moves on. “Was there anything else, then, that you... discussed with Yumigawa?”

“He doesn’t just have my memories academically,” you answer. “He believes that he went through that Grail War himself, and that I’m a manifestation of the power he gained, which split off from him for some reason. Apparently, he thinks he can consume me in some way to regain that power. There won’t be any making peace with him.”

“I... suppose that this sort of situation can give rise to all sorts of... theories,” Kōrakuhime comments noncommittally. “It must be a very... unpleasant notion for you to contemplate.”

“Of course it is,” you snap, letting your anger at Yumigawa get the better of you for a moment. “His presence alone was distasteful enough, but for that thief to believe he can consume my power...” You grind your teeth unconsciously. “How would you feel, if you were to encounter Ogawara?” Not wanting to linger on the topic of your own human counterpart, you change the subject. It’s something you’re curious about in any case, though; with her obvious hatred of humans, how does Kōrakuhime think of the person from whom her memories came?

The object of your inquiry purses her lips in distaste at the idea, taking a long moment to think before answering, “I believe that... I would kill him. The existence of Ogawara Yatsuhide... is a pitiable one, and it would... be a mercy to end it swiftly.”

“Was his life truly so awful?” you’re compelled to ask, finding it hard to believe. “Surely if it were terrible enough to be worth dying to escape, he would already have.”

“Please!” Kōrakuhime cuts you off, an unusual, desperate force in her tone. Then, restraining herself, she continues, “I would prefer not to... dwell on that life, Ani-ue.” She’s trembling slightly, and although Kōrakuhime’s complexion is such that she can’t go pale, but you have the impression she would be right now if she could. One hand clenches the blanket’s hem in a vice-grip, and her lips are pressed flatly together, while her eyes are wide. She looks as if she could begin to cry at any moment, almost frightened of the prospect of remembering Ogawara’s life in greater detail.
“Very well then, we don’t have to,” you reassure her in a gentle tone. At the same time, you give her one of the kind smiles you usually reserve for keeping Ayaka happy, and reach over to pat her hand. “Let’s talk about the War, then. I’d like to know what kind of situation the former Master of Rider is in. He was one of Circe’s puppets, after all, and could be put to use against us once more. Also, the Edelfelt sisters. We haven’t heard from them since our recent discussion. Can you find that out for me by divination?”

“Oh, yes,” she says, relaxing. “In fact, I... investigated them last night, after you retired. The Edelfelt sisters have taken up... residence in a local hotel, although they were asleep when I looked in... on them, so that I... could not determine what their intentions may be. The Master of Rider, Kajiwara Haruo, seems to have... ceased to be. Neither could I discover the location of Akagata Kyouka, the Master of Archer... although, if she were only Circe disguising herself by magic, that inability to find her could merely be the expression of the same... obstruction which Circe is accustomed to use to make her location.”

“Of course she was Circe.” You curtly dismiss the notion of the Master of Archer being a separate person. “Given Archer’s level of Magic Resistance, I doubt a Caster could have overcome him and brought him to her side. Kajiwara, on the other hand... I suppose she’s disposed of him. Another casualty, unable to find his path or stand on his own in the War. As for the Edelfelt sisters, perhaps they’re still undecided as to whether or not becoming involved in the War is worthwhile.”

“No doubt it is... a difficult thing to choose to do,” Kōrakuhime muses. “Were I not compelled to act, I should like nothing more than to remain on the sidelines myself... and yet that woman has her duty to her master to consider. Perhaps she will use the excuse of... reporting the harm that is befalling the populace... to flee.”

“It’s not impossible.” You nod. “On that subject, what about your magical energy? With the mundanes being so heavily affected by the drain you and Circe are putting on the leylines, are you worried you’ll need to make the shift to another source of energy?”

“Ah... I see you are misunderstanding something... again, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime says with a slight smile. “The death of the humans... living in Tokyo will not affect the leylines. Think of the relationship between... living things in an area and the Mana in that region as similar to... that between riverside plants and the river. The plants subsist on the... flowing water of the river, and if you pick and crush one, you will find moisture within. If one establishes a small pump... upstream from the plants, and reduces the level of the river slightly... the plants will be unaffected. If, however, one were... to pump enough water from the river that it became dry below
the pumps... the plants would wither and die. The flow of the river would not change with the deaths of... the plants, however, and the water could continue to be pumped... without interruption.”

With that, she breaks off to give a pointed look at the clock, noticing that it’s half-past eight, then says, “My apologies, Ani-ue, but we shall have to... continue this discussion later. If I am to... play the part of the Shijou hostess, I must start preparing breakfast for... our guests soon. Please wait in the hall while I dress... ‘Saber-san’. After that, breakfast will be ready at perhaps... nine, of nine-thirty.”

“Thank you, ‘Miss Tsubaki’,” you reply. “I’m sure it will be delicious.” As you step back out into the hall, you contemplate what to do next.

[ ] Wait for Kōrakuhime to finish dressing, then follow her down to the kitchen to help with breakfast and continue your conversation. (Curiosity) (Write in particular topics you’d like to ask about.)

[ ] While Kōrakuhime prepares breakfast, look in on your guest. Have a talk with Liliesviel about her plans for the War, now that she’s been forcibly relocated and made aware of a new enemy. (Compassion) (Note how much you’d like to tell her, or any other particular details.)

[X] Descend to the basement, to check on your prisoner. Discuss the matter of Harris’ new contract with Arturia, to see if she isn’t more amenable with no Master to potentially save her. (Sadism/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Although you do briefly consider simply going along with Kōrakuhime down to the dining room, the thought of waiting around while she cooks for a half-hour or an hour doesn’t particularly appeal, and you do feel there are more profitable ways to spend your morning. What, then, to do, though? What would be the most useful way to use the time until breakfast, you consider. You could, of course, go and wake up your guest, but what you might discuss with Liliesviel is uncertain. You can hardly explain your position regarding Yumigawa to her, after all, and although you would like the opinion of another magus on how best to derive some use from your capture of Saber, Liliesviel seems more likely to demand that you promptly execute the captured Servant than to help you bring about the kind of poetic revenge you desire.

There’s an idea, though. You can while away the time with Arturia. The knowledge that Harris has deserted her completely and found a new Servant is certain
to plunge the woman into new and delicious depth of despair. Perhaps, in the absence of her last hope of escape, she may even become cooperative. Surely, if you are to learn the method behind the mysterious magical technique which Harris used to match your speed and escape, there can be no better source than his former Servant.

In this way, your mind happily filling with anticipation of Arturia’s crushed expression upon the discovery of her Master’s abandonment, you descend into the basement workshop, pass by Kōrakuhime’s paper-strewn worktable, and continue on to the stone cell housing your prisoner. As you turn the corner into the room you take in a surprising detail. Although most things in the room, the luxurious couch, the circle of bobbing talismans, and the carven barrier, are just as you found them the last time you paid a call to your prisoner, one detail is different. This time, she’s awake and vigilantly watching the door. Although she remains straight-faced, you can detect a hint of dismay in her eyes when she recognizes you as the person entering.

“Hoping for a visit from someone else?” You smile at her as you walk around the couch to drop down into a lounging seat, crossing one leg lazily over the other.

“Why should I hope for anything here?” Arturia’s voice is cold and hard, her will broken by neither her energy-starvation nor her stiff, solitary conditions of confinement. “Everyone in this house is an enemy to me. Demonstrating that was the reason for your visit last night, I am sure. What sort of torment is it to be today, then? Not pain, I suppose, as you have not brought your ‘sister’ with you.”

“Oh, Arturia,” you sigh in mock hurt. “You hold such a low opinion of me. It is a painful thing for a man, you know: to be hated by a beautiful woman. Why don’t you smile, and behave in a more friendly manner? Perhaps by appealing to my softer nature, you might arouse compassion in me, and make good your escape.”

Arturia clicks her tongue at this in evident frustration. “So it’s to be mockery today, then,” she concludes. “Do you have nothing better to do with your time than to goad me?”

“No,” you reply, “I haven’t come only to make small talk with you, much as I enjoy it. I’ve come to give you a rather significant piece of news, which I think you’ll be grateful to have heard.”

“Speak, then,” she answers wearily. “If you have come only to gloat over some victory you have won, then do it quickly and begone.”

“Not at all.” You restrain a chuckle at Saber’s misinterpretation of the nature of your news. “What I have to tell you is intimately important to you, Arturia. You see, we have watched over your Master since you were captured, to ensure that if he attempted to recapture you he would be unsuccessful. What I discovered last night;
just a short time after our previous conversation, in fact; was that he has made a new contract. Your Master, Arturia, has found a new Servant.”

For a few moments, Arturia doesn’t reply. Her lips go white as she presses them together in a tight, flat line, and she looks down, not meeting your eyes. Finally, though, anger overcomes restraint and she looks at you with rage in her eyes, snapping, “Why should I believe that from you, liar? You have me here only to torment me, as a balm for the wound I dealt your pride when we first did battle! This is no more than a ruse, calculated to enable you to savor my reaction! You contemptible wretch!”

Now it’s your turn to hold back anger. Only the knowledge of her powerlessness enables you to blunt the edge of the anger that surges up at her accusation with mirth. Nevertheless, your voice and eyes go hard as you reply, “You are fortunate Kōrakuhime is not here; she would already be sending agony through you for that sort of language.” You shrug your shoulders then, and allow a gentle, almost friendly smile to rise to your face. “I, however, am more restrained. As I told you before, it is my hope that you will eventually become an ally of ours. As to your points, I do not ask you to trust me; only that you not allow indignation to blind you to natural reason.”

“And what do you mean by that?” Arturia spits.

“Consider the barrier that surrounds you,” you begin in a reasonable tone, like a teacher leading a student towards the truth. “You have felt that you are cut off from your Master since your arrival here, haven’t you?”

“I have,” she concedes, still guarded.

“Well then, the conclusion is plain to see,” you say, turning a hand palm-up as if to hand her the notion. “Your Master will have felt the same sensation that you have. In his case, however, the one ‘cut off’ is his Servant, last seen battling an enemy who lived through the altercation. It would be only natural for him to assume that the reason for your severed connection is not capture, but death. Hence, he has found a new Servant.”

As Arturia takes in your words, the despair you’ve been waiting to see at last washes over her features. Losing control, she slumps in her bonds, hanging her head in defeat.

“You believe me now, then?” You can’t resist the urge to gloat a bit.

“I don’t believe you,” Arturia sighs, “but I cannot deny the logic of what you say. If Harris has not found a new Servant already, that man surely will do so soon.”

“Oh, well,” you remark. “I suppose I shall have to earn your trust in time. Since you understand, however, that Harris is no longer your Master, I wonder if you
might humor me by telling me about him. It has been difficult to gather concrete information on the man’s abilities, and I believe you can help me in that regard.”

“I have no reason to aid you,” Arturia retorts, the steely resolve already coming back into her voice. “If there is no alternative but death, I implorew you to kill me.”

“You would go so far for a man who has abandoned you?” you ask in disbelief. “Don’t you wish to live on, when all you need do is something that cannot harm you? Don’t you care for self-preservation at all?”

Arturia scoffs at your incredulity. “From the way you speak,” she says, “I am tempted to believe your words about being a living Servant. Death in this time holds no meaning for those of us with our own lives and legends. To have failed to attain the Grail, and been captured, is already the same as death; hastening my demise now will only hasten my opportunity to return and seize the Holy Grail in the next War.”

You give Arturia a long look, but she doesn’t seem to be bluffing. Once you’re certain, you nod, commenting, “What heroic stoicism. Very well then, Arturia; you give me no choice. Although it is a shame to lose you, I will give you the death you desire if you answer my questions about your former Master.”

She returns your calculation, staring into your face and probing for lies. Evidently what she sees there satisfies her, however, because she eventually acquiesces in a drained, defeated voice. “If what you say is true, and that man is no longer my Master, then I no longer owe him my loyalty. I accept your proposal, Alberich. What is it that you wish to know?”

“Excellent,” you exclaim. “To begin with, then, I would like to hear what you know about the details of his magic. You must have seen it, that strange ability to move at speeds beyond human limits and slow his enemies. How does he accomplish it? Is there a way to overcome it?”

“I know very little about magic,” Arturia says, “so I cannot tell you the method behind it, but I am familiar with the power you refer to. He was even able to defeat me with it for a time, in our sparring. It is a strange magical technique that creates an area around him in which anything which moves faster than he is slowed, and his own speed and power are enhanced to exceed the slowed enemy. However powerful you may be, within the effect of his magic that man has the advantage.”

“And yet you say he defeated you only ‘for a time,’” you interject. “How did you overcome the magic?”

“Simple,” Arturia replies. “He can only use it for a short time. I believe it is more taxing on him to slow a faster enemy, but in any case, if you can remain close to
him until he is forced to break the spell, he will be as helpless as any other human faced with a Servant.”

“So that’s what it is,” you muse. “It must require an enormous amount of magical energy to sustain the magic.” Returning your attention to Arturia, you continue, “Is there anything else I should be aware of regarding his techniques?”

“Only that he is a master of personal combat, and capable of imbuing his strikes with a property that destroys other mages’ techniques,” Arturia says, “but if you have already seen his power over force, I doubt you are unaware of these details.”

“Excellent,” you say. “Thank you, Arturia. Good morning to you.” With that, you get up and walk out, heedless of her protestations.

As you make the ascent to the living room, it strikes you that there is no tantalizing smell of breakfast reaching your nose. Odd, as Kōrakuhime should have been cooking by now. Wondering idly about the unusual detail, you walk to the kitchen to check in on her. Within, you perceive a scene of carnage. Two women stand on opposite sides of the kitchen, facing one another with masks of politeness that do nothing to hide the burning resentment motivating their dialogue.

“I insist,” Stengel is saying as you look in, icy tone complimenting her strained smile. “Lady Liliesviel has ordered me to treat Lord Alberich as her equal, and this means that I really must prepare the morning meal for the two of them. You must simply rest, and allow yourself to compromise your sense of hospitality on this occasion.”

“You really mustn’t... put yourself to the trouble,” Kōrakuhime replies, plainly every bit as determined not to give in, if somewhat less visually expressive. “You are just as much our... guest as Einzbern-san is, and should not feel... compelled to do any sort of work in our home. I will prepare breakfast for everyone.” While speaking she must have seen you out of her peripheral vision, for just then she looks over to see you, smiles in triumph, and says, “Ah, Saber-san, I see you’re up and... about. Perhaps you can help me convince Einzbern-san’s maid that she need not... attend her normal duties while a guest here.”

Kōrakuhime isn’t the only one relying on your appearance, though. Stengel, too, in a reversal of her usual attitude towards you, looks at you as if seeing her deliverer. Upon your entrance into the room, she curtsies deferentially and, keeping her eyes lowered so as not to meet your gaze directly, says, “Lord Alberich, I apologize for troubling you, but I would be immensely grateful if you might do me the kindness of explaining the requirements of my position to Miss Shijou.”
[ ] Take Kōrakuhime’s side and have her prepare breakfast. Familiar flavors are best, after all.

[ ] Take Stengel’s side and have her prepare breakfast. You’d like to taste the sort of breakfast Liliesviel is accustomed to.

[ ] Intervene directly and make breakfast yourself. You’re sure it’ll go better now that you have two hands.

[X] Do something else (All cook together)

This, you think, could be troublesome. The argument playing out in front of you is all too reminiscent of the spats that broke out between Circe, Adelheid, Kikuko, and Truvietianne during your last few days in the Akeldama. While you took no action in those cases, you don’t think it wise to remain so passive now. What seemed amusing at the time could easily have grown into a serious problem for your War effort. Now you have enough reason to worry over the divide between Ayaka and Liliesviel, without adding a conflict between Kōrakuhime and Stengel to the mix. If possible you’d like to resolve this quarrel peacefully, but you’re sure that choosing either’s cooking over the other’s will exacerbate matters. That being the case, perhaps the best way to settle things would be for the two to collaborate on breakfast.

“Why don’t we all cook together?” you suggest, smiling as openly at the two rival cooks as if you’ve been taken in by their own strained facades of pleasantries and believe they have no resentment for one another. Unfortunately, your suggestion does not have quite the mollifying effect you’d hoped it might. Kōrakuhime breaks off eye contact at your words, her gaze wavering towards a point somewhere in the space near your right elbow, while Stengel appears taken aback at the suggestion.

“Lord Alberich, please, you really mustn’t do such a thing,” the maid insists, sounding affronted by the notion. “You were present when Lady Liliesviel expressly ordered me to treat you as her equal; I cannot have you taking a hand in menial work.”

“That’s right, Saber-san,” Kōrakuhime interjects, agreeing with Stengel for the first time. “Cooking really... isn’t something you need to involve yourself with. If you’ll just... wait for breakfast to be ready, we can have this discussion... sorted out soon enough.”

“Nonsense!” You heartily overrule the pair’s objections, taking some satisfaction in seeing their discomfort no longer focused on one another. “Stengel, if your mistress has ordered you to treat me with as much respect as you owe her, you’ll
obey my orders as well and let me help you prepare breakfast if I please. As for you, Miss Tsubaki, there’s no need to worry on my behalf. Now, what shall we cook?”

The two exchange an uneasy glance before seeming to come to a silent agreement and acquiescing to your forcible interjection into the kitchen. After deliberating for a few moments over the dish, Kōrakuhime speaks up first.

“A... traditional breakfast would be best,” she declares. “Grilled mackerel, rice, miso soup, and pickled vegetables; there is... no need for anything else in the morning.”

“Absurd!” Stengel promptly flares up at this suggestion. “Lady Liliesviel always requires sweet foods at breakfast. Today she will have pancakes topped with a persimmon compote, served with black tea.”

“Really. That is... no sort of meal to live on,” Kōrakuhime pronounces derisively. “What... nutritional value is there in beginning one’s day with... dessert? We must have a traditional, balanced meal for... breakfast.”

“Any amount of nutrition is meaningless if the meal is so unsuitable for its recipient’s palate that it goes uneaten,” Stengel counters. “Whatever your views on the matter may be, Lady Liliesviel always has a sweet breakfast.”

As it is, it seems there will be no resolution in the near future. The pair has come to yet another deadlock, and there’s nothing for it but for you to step in and resolve their quarrel once again if you want to see breakfast completed.

[ ] Argue in favor of a savory Japanese breakfast.
[ ] Argue in favor of a sweet Western breakfast.
[X] Suggest something else (Nutritious sweet compromise)

“Why don’t we make something sweet, with a bit more variety in ingredients,” you suggest, interposing yourself between the debating parties. “If we could prepare a nutritionally balanced meal that would suit Liliesviel’s taste, everyone would be satisfied, no?”

“I suppose that would... be acceptable,” Kōrakuhime concedes, nodding. “I suppose you have... something in mind?”

“If that is what you deem best,” Stengel chimes in with a gleam in her eye, “I will be certain to inform Lady Liliesviel that you planned her breakfast, Lord Alberich. What do you suggest we prepare?”

On the spot, you consider the breakfast items you’re familiar with. Growing up, Yumigawa always had traditional Japanese meals at home, so a sweet breakfast from
his memories is unlikely. When you think of what you’ve had, though... there’s Circe’s kykeon when you were in the Akeldama, and since leaving you’ve had only fried eggs or more traditional meals from Ayaka, supplemented by French toast from Café Palmerston. Nothing that suits the requirements of the present moment. Then an idea does strike, though, something you remember Yumigawa’s female schoolmates often talking about eating.

“Why don’t we have crêpes?” you suggest. “We could fill them with a mild cheese like ricotta, and hazelnuts, in addition to the persimmon compote you had mentioned, Stengel. I think Liliesviel would enjoy that, don’t you?”

“Yes, that should-”

Before Stengel can go on, Kōrakuhime cuts in, retorting, “That is... still a dessert, no more suitable than... her first suggestion for breakfast,” in a cold tone.

“Come now, Miss Tsubaki,” you chide gently. “There may not be any meat, but hazelnuts are a good source of energy. Why don’t you let our guests enjoy the type of cuisine they’re used to?”

At your insistence, the girl finally gives you a defeated look and mutters, “Very well.”

So the three of you set about your collaborative meal, mostly taking instruction from Stengel as Kōrakuhime specializes in Japanese cooking and you’re an amateur. With Stengel preparing the compote, Kōrakuhime the crêpes themselves, and you splitting the hazelnuts and whipping air into the cheese to render it appropriately fluffy for the dish, though, things progress fairly quickly. In what seems like no time at all, you and Kōrakuhime are left to stand back as Stengel puts the finishing touches on six servings of persimmon and hazelnut crêpes. Once the crêpes are prepared, Kōrakuhime sets the table as Stengel goes back upstairs to awaken her mistress and collect the rest of the Einzbern party, and five of you are soon seated at the long table in the dining room that has hitherto gone unused during your stay here. Odin, apparently, declined to join you for the meal.

All in all, you think as you begin to eat, the meal turned out quite well. The crêpe holds together well while remaining pleasingly soft, and the flavors of the sweet and autumnally spiced persimmon compote, hazelnuts, and ricotta all combine perfectly in a rich, warm flavor. Your guests, too, seem appreciative. Liliesviel wears a rapturous expression as she eats, taking obvious pleasure in the meal. Stachel eats with zest, devouring her breakfast faster than anyone else at the table. Stengel takes clear satisfaction in her work, eating happily, though with far more restraint than her fellow maid. Only Kōrakuhime seems put off by the breakfast, looking pensive and dissatisfied as she eats.
“Delicious as always, Stengel,” Liliesviel remarks cheerily after she’s finished eating, “but you haven’t made me crêpes in a long time. What made you want to cook them again now?”

“Thank you for your generous praise, Lady Liliesviel,” the maid replies, “but the credit is not mine. This meal was Lord Alberich’s suggestion. He insisted on helping to prepare the food, as well.”

“Really?” Liliesviel gives you a wide-eyed, confused look. “Why did you do that, Onii-chan? Servants are supposed to deal with things like cooking, not us.”

“Ah, but I am a Servant,” you say with a wry smile. “It was only a whim. I have no doubt Stengel could have prepared us all a lovely meal on her own, but I thought I might enjoy taking a hand in the cooking.”

“Is that so?” Liliesviel seems nonplussed by your explanation, looking at you blankly, but her lapse into silence lasts only a few moments. Then she seems to remember herself, and says, “Well, anyway, Onii-chan, I wanted to talk to you about that thing we discussed at my tower before, but,” for a moment her eyes dart in Kōrakuhime’s direction, “do you mind if we talk in German? It would be easier to explaining that way.”

“By all means, if it makes you more comfortable,” you reply, in that language. Her meaning is obvious, and there’s no harm in humoring her; you can always tell Kōrakuhime what you spoke of later if the need arises.

“Thank you, Alberich,” Liliesviel says, smiling. “When you suggested using the Heaven’s Feel for two people to me, before, I wasn’t certain it could be done, remember?”

“Of course,” you nod. “Have you made a discovery in that direction?”

“I think so,” Liliesviel says hesitantly, “It should be possible to use the Heaven’s Feel to materialize your soul at the same time as mine, before the Holy Grail collapses, but in order to do so, you need to be connected to the Greater Grail more firmly, the way I am.”

“To connect to the Grail in the same way you have,” you echo, thinking, “Do you have a method of imparting the qualities of the Lesser Grail on another, Liliesviel? I would have thought such a thing almost impossible.”

“No,” she shakes her head. “I can’t make you into a Lesser Grail. Only Grandfather knows how to prepare one, and even if I could we might end up splitting the Servants’ energy and ruining the whole War!” She looks horrified by the prospect; an emotion you share, considering it would mean the end of your hopes for survival. “It should be possible to for me to link you to it if we visit the Greater Grail together at the right point in the Heaven’s Feel, though,” she concludes.
“Why, that’s wonderful!” you exclaim. “If that’s so, then matters are practically resolved!”

Raising a finger as if to reprimand your jubilation, Liliesviel reminds you in a stern tone, “It has to be at the right time, though, just like summoning a Servant! We can’t just go and do this whenever we want, and if we don’t do it at the right we could lose our chance to link you to the Greater Grail!”

“I see. In that case, I suppose it would mean the end for my chances of surviving via the Third Sorcery,” you concur, excitement rapidly drained from your tone. Of course, it isn’t as if you’ve already lost your chance, but even so; it isn’t a pleasant prospect to imagine.

“Actually, there is one other ritual, if the first one fails,” Liliesviel says hesitantly. “If we can’t link you to the Greater Grail, linking you to the Lesser Grail would also make it possible.” At this, she seems embarrassed for some reason; her blushing cheeks are died in rosy hue, and she lapses into an awkward silence, no longer meeting your eyes. One finger taps the table in an unconscious nervous tic. “But there’s no reason to discuss that other method now,” she says, speaking up again as if coming to a sudden decision and rushing her words. “We still have the first method open now, and you probably wouldn’t want to perform that other ritual with me, anyway.”

“I see,” you reply in a neutral tone. For a moment you’re tempted to probe further after information about the secondary ritual, but there’s obviously some mysterious detail about it that makes it a sensitive topic for her, so you leave it be. “When should we visit the Greater Grail, then; and where is it?” you ask instead.

“Well, I realize I’m not giving you much notice, Alberich, but you don’t do any fighting during the day anyway, right?” Liliesviel seems much more at ease again now, with the subject of the second ritual left behind. “We’ve got to go this afternoon, right after breakfast if you don’t mind leaving right away. The Greater Grail is in a catacomb constructed below our Tower; Otto made sure it would be protected from that Caster who attacked us, but we’d still need to go there to reach it.”

That’s one more piece of the puzzle of Circe’s behavior filled in, then, her motivation for attacking Liliesviel. Odysseus already told you that she was trying to take the Grail for herself, rather than Yumigawa, and presumably whatever she intends to do with it requires that she perform some sort of magic on the Greater Grail. Hence, after discovering its location and that it was housed below a Servant’s abode, she set about trying to destroy Liliesviel and Odin. As for the time, you had hoped to address the Yumigawa situation at some point today, while he would be unsuspecting
of an attack. It’s difficult to deny the importance of Liliesviel’s proposed errand, however.

[X] Go to the Greater Grail with Liliesviel immediately. (Self-Preservation/Compassion)

[ ] Decline. You should be able to work out some other way to survive, and she did mention that second ritual. Right now, dealing with Yumigawa is all-important. (Pride)

[ ] Answer in some other way (Write in)

Although you consider the two alternatives for a few moments, between hurrying along the resolution of your imitator and addressing what is possibly your only opportunity to secure your existence after the Holy Grail War, you have to conclude that visiting the Greater Grail with Liliesviel is the more important.

“That certainly is short notice,” you agree with a smile, “but not problematically so. I don’t mind leaving directly, if time is of the essence with regards to this ritual. I do have one question, though; you say this is similar to the summoning of a Servant, but all of the War’s Masters certainly didn’t do that at the same time. Are there really no other chances to create this link between myself and the Grail?”

“Hmmm...” Liliesviel deliberates for a few moments, putting a fingertip to her cheek as she considers. “You’re right about the Grail working in cycles,” she finally says, “but it isn’t like the timing is all the same, you know. The Grail War can only last for a few weeks every 85 years, and even though the cycle of it being accessible for a connection with a living soul is much shorter, it’s still not really convenient. The next day when we could harmonize your spirit with the Greater Grail would be about three months from now.”

“But the Holy Grail War will be long over by then.” You finish Liliesviel’s point for her. “I see what you mean, then. Haste is certainly a necessity. I assume that the other ritual you mentioned is similarly tied to a cycle of availability. What sort of timing does it depend on?” In case something does go wrong with today’s ritual at the Greater Grail, you want to make certain you’re aware of what will be required by its alternative.

“There’s not really any specific timing for that one,” Liliesviel replies hesitantly, reddening again at the subject. Then, in a still smaller voice, she bashfully mutters, “If we did that ritual, I would want it to be nighttime though.”
More and more intriguing, you think. Perhaps this secondary ritual needs to occur outdoors, and Liliesviel is referring to the ever-present magus’ need for secrecy in her preference to conduct it under the moonlight. Your curiosity piqued, you’re about to ask further details when she perks up again and continues, “Anyway! That doesn’t matter if we complete today’s plan. Come, Stachel. Let’s go, Alberich.” With that, she gets up from the table, hurrying to leave for the site of her former home.

“Just a moment,” you interject, spreading one hand in a gesture of restraint. “Shouldn’t you inform Lancer of this errand? You can hardly leave without your Servant, even if we aren’t expecting an attack in daylight. I must inform my Master where we’ll be going, as well.”

“Certainly not!” Liliesviel shows surprising vehemence in her willful rejection of bringing Odin along. “I don’t know what it is, but Otto has some plan of his own for the Holy Grail. I haven’t let him see the Greater Grail so far, and I’m not having him come with us now. He can just stay here and guard this place,” she concludes with a flippant wave of a limp hand.

[X] Liliesviel knows her own Servant best, you suppose. Your presence will be quite sufficient to keep her safe, in any case. Leave Odin behind. (Pride)

[ ] Insist on bringing Odin along. Whatever nefarious intentions he may have towards the Greater Grail, you doubt they can be worse than the consequences of finding yourself unequal to the task of defending Liliesviel from a hostile Servant. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Make another suggestion (Write in)

Liliesviel knows her own Servant best, you suppose. If she believes he can work some mischief with access to the Greater Grail, it’s doubtless unwise to give him the chance. Your presence will be quite sufficient to keep her safe, in any case. Although you do feel a slight twinge of concern at the thought of leaving such a powerful Servant here with your Master and Kōrakuhime, you brush it aside, reminding yourself that that he’s shown no outright hostility toward you so far. Rather, he seems almost passive in his attitude towards the Holy Grail War, a view that, given his excitement at the prospect of your growing strength, can only be motivated by the thought that his competitors are utterly beneath him. You’re confident he shall remain content to wait for you to be worthy of a battle, rather than making any move against you or Ayaka now.
“Very well, Liliesviel,” you say. “If you would prefer that Odin remain here, so he shall. I’ll be ready to depart in a moment, after I’ve explained my departure to my Master. Would you mind waiting here a moment?”

“Thank you for understanding,” she replies with a bright smile. “Of course I don’t mind waiting a bit!”

At that, you get to your feet, curtly nodding, “Excuse me, Miss Tsubaki,” in Japanese. You’ve gone a few steps towards the door when you hear her chair scrape back, and her voice raised in a remarkably ordinary tone of indignant confusion, considering her usual inhuman posturing.

“Hey- Wait up, Saber-san!” she demands at your retreating back. “What was all that about?”

Heedless of Kōrakuime’s protestations, you continue hurrying towards the hallway and the ascending stairs to the second floor, so she’s compelled to follow you. This, of course, is the point of the exercise. You don’t want to depart without the benefit of a divination regarding the disposition of your enemies, but can hardly have Kōrakuime perform such in Liliesviel’s presence. At the same time, composing a truncated explanation worthy of a semi-outsider such as “my Master’s younger sister” which conveys that intent would be tiresome. The simplest thing, then, is just to have her follow you while playing her role, and Kōrakuime has fulfilled your expectations there admirably.

“So?” Once you’ve stopped outside the library door, you hear Kōrakuime’s voice from behind you, back in its normal impassive tone. “What was it that... our guest didn’t want me to hear, and you couldn’t explain in her presence to Shijou Tsubaki?”

“A ritual at the Greater Grail, necessary for enabling me to take hold of the Third Sorcery when this War comes to an end,” you explain briefly. “If Miss Ayaka asks after me while I’m out, you may tell her the same. That isn’t the primary matter I wanted to discuss with you, however. Given that I’ll be going out, I’d like to know what our enemies are doing.”

“I... see.” Kōrakuime’s face remains blank as she takes this in. “William Harris, Emiya Shirou, and Yumigawa Rushorou, then, as the Master of Assassin remains... shrouded in mystery. Let us... have a look.”

Unlike her usual outfit, the red and white dress Kōrakuime is now wearing is sleeveless, so you’re able to observe with amusement as she makes a strange motion of her right hand as if to subtly draw something from her sleeve only to realize her error and color with embarrassment. At the sight of her habitual manner of prestidigitation failing her here you smirk, and prod her ego with a raised eyebrow.
“E-excuse me,” she says, poorly maintaining a pretense of composure. “I had... forgotten this disguise. My talismans are in my... ordinary clothing.” No sooner are the words out of her mouth than she’s encompassed by a moment of shimmering light, and when it fades Kōrakuhime has returned to her ordinary clothing and inhuman appearance. This time she makes no mistake as she produces the white flower, which soon begins to emanate its revelatory smoke.

The first image which appears in the cloud is unmistakably that of William Harris, though his surroundings are not so easily recognized. He’s sitting, both eyes shut and stripped to the waist, in an ornate and high-backed chair of what appears to be solid silver, platinum, or some very bright metal. The chair hangs suspended in the center of a large, spherical concrete chamber by innumerable strands of the same metal, each as thin as a hair and all reaching out at even intervals to connect with every angle of the chamber walls, spaced from one another on that outer surface at even intervals of perhaps a fifth of a meter. Only the area directly in front of Harris is spared, as wires there would have to travel through his body, so that there exists a narrow corridor between the shining strands. The whole room, you note, is lit only by an odd blue-white light which shines from an ornate crest of unidentifiable shape, etched in the skin over Harris’ heart and clearly visible due to his state of undress.

This, you conclude, must be the magic crest of the Harris family, demonstrating that your enemy is engaged in some unknown arcane ritual.

Leaning against the lone bare section of the concrete wall is the room’s other occupant, and a stark contrast in visible emotion despite the pair’s mutual inaction. Where Harris appears serene, Matsuda Ryuuta radiates impatience and boredom. You find yourself sympathizing as you watch the Master and Servant doing precisely nothing, and taking a long time about it.

“What do you suppose Harris is doing?” you finally ask, unable any longer to wait in silence for some action to develop.

“Aside... from the fact that it is a kind of ritual... magic, and that the metal object is a mystic code... I really can’t say,” comes the disappointing answer. “My understanding of... Western magic is extremely... limited, due to the nature of the skills I was... endowed with, upon my transformation.”

“That’s a shame,” you sigh, looking on without understanding as Harris continues with... whatever it is he’s doing. “If we can’t gather any information from Harris, however, then we may as well move on.”

As you’re speaking, however, some motion does occur within the image. Matsuda heaves an audible sigh, stands away from the wall, and turns on his heel. Apparently he’s as disappointed in Harris’ opaque ritual as you are. As you watch,
the Servant presses a subtly inlaid panel into the wall and the concrete before him splits open like the doors of an elevator. Where Matsuda goes when he passes through the doorway remains hidden from you due to the perspective from which you view the chamber, though.

“Can you follow him?” you hurriedly ask. Matsuda, at least, may be about to do something enlightening.

“Yes... just a moment,” Kōrakuhime answers, and traces a sign in the smoke with her fingertip, muttering an incantation under her breath as she does so. As her words come to an end, the image in the smoke shifts as if transmitted by a camera now in motion. The point of view glides down from its lofty perch near the chamber’s ceiling and follows Matsuda through the exit, matching his pace once firmly settled on its new subject. The hall Matsuda walks down now appears to be the corridor of a bunker. The walls and floor, are all of concrete, while the numerous doors Matsuda passes on either side of the hall are steel. Above each door is a small plaque, though you can’t read them from your viewpoint. The whole place is lit by white banks of LEDs set into rectangular steel and glass fixtures in the ceiling.

After passing four pairs of doors, Matsuda turns right and enters a room of immediately apparent purpose. It’s a gym, you realize with mounting disappointment. The floor is covered in some kind of rubber or silicone padding, one half of the room is dominated by weights, sandbags, and exercise machines, and it’s the place Matsuda chose to go when he had nothing else to do. Of course it’s a gym. As you watch, Matsuda takes the spear off of his shoulder and drops into a combat stance; then promptly begins a blisteringly fast, tightly controlled routine of thrusts, sweeps, and esoteric acrobatic maneuvers.

“I do not believe... the two of them will be likely to bother you on your... outing,” Kōrakuhime says dryly. “Shall we... continue to Emiya’s observation?”

“Yes, I think that would be for the best,” you say with a nod.

Again, Kōrakuhime reaches out a hand to interact with the cloud of smoke briefly and the image changes, this time fading to its natural white before taking on the colors of a new scene. This time, Emiya Shirou and his Servant, Rider, sit side-by-side in a small room full of disordered bookshelves, each one reading their own book. At first you worry that this, too, will yield no useful information, but Rider is clearly dissatisfied with something. Her eyes dart to Emiya and back to her book several times, though, before she finally speaks up.

“Shirou,” she says in a soft, silky voice containing only a hint of emotion, “should you be doing this now? With matters as they are, do you have the time for leisure?”
“We’ve got time.” Emiya gives the Servant a guileless, open smile, reassuring her in the that strangely heartening voice of his. “If Saber were going to come after me, he’d have done it right after our last fight. Since he didn’t, I think he’s content to live and let live. Whatever Tohsaka’s theories about that shadow might be, I don’t think he was really a bad person.”

“Only you and Sakura could say such things about that sort of man,” Rider says in soft rebuke. “Even if you do not intend to pursue him, what of putting an end the lack of magical energy that plagues the city?”

Shirou’s bright expression falls at this subject, and he answers in a more resigned tone, “Much as I’d like to, there’s nothing I can do now. We still aren’t sure where the heaviest drain on the leylines is coming from. Until Tohsaka’s finished figuring out where the Greater Grail or the magus who’s behind this ‘fatigue’ is, all I can do is sit around.”

“If that is how you feel,” Rider says, trailing off, and the conversation fades back into silence as she returns to her book.

“So that’s the reason for Emiya’s indolence: he’s waiting to learn where the Greater Grail lies,” you mutter, more thinking aloud than speaking to Kōrakuhime, “or where Circe makes her abode, perhaps; and that woman, the Second Sorcerer’s apprentice, can find them for him. From the sound of things, though, there’s no need to worry about interference from them today.” You raise your voice to a more normal speaking volume, continuing, “Very well then, let’s move on to Yumigawa.”

“Yes, the double,” Kōrakuhime murmurs with an unpleasant smile. “Let us see what sort of... intriguing daily life your... counterpart leads.” For the third time, she shifts the cloud of smoke according to her will, and the image reforms to show a sight thoroughly familiar from your stolen memories: Yumigawa’s classroom. He’s actually attending class normally in the midst of all this, even after learning of your memories! A staggering number of seats are indeed empty, testifying to the “mounting absences” he told Ayaka of yesterday; the fact that classes are being conducted at all is odd, however, in light of the fact that they were apparently canceled yesterday. Surely the effect of Tokyo’s drained leylines cannot have diminished, so why would classes be canceled one day and return to schedule the next? The image before you offers no explanation to this trivial conundrum, though, and you rapidly put it aside as being of little importance.

“That is everyone, then,” you conclude. “Unless you’ve found a way to focus directly on Circe after all, I ought to be going.”

“No, her protection against divination remains... constant,” Kōrakuhime says with a shake of her head.
“I expected as much.” Turning to go, you leave as parting comment, “Thank you for your help this morning, Kōrakuhime. I’ll return in a few hours.”

After showing Liliesviel and Stachel to the garage and pulling out to the street, you begin making the rather long drive to what must now be the ruins of the Einzbern Tower. It is a strikingly beautiful morning, you think as you go, with that sharp, stark clarity of light and air peculiar to cold, clear days in winter and late autumn. Though the sun is bright enough to give brilliant color to the autumn foliage, it seems to illuminate without warming, and you don’t doubt that in a month or so there will be snow. The chill even seeps through the car, and it’s with obvious relief that Liliesviel enjoys the warmth produced by the heating vents and seats now that you’re driving.

“This car isn’t warm enough, Alberich,” the girl says with a pout. “We should’ve taken my limousine. It heats up much faster, and then you wouldn’t have to drive.”

“I enjoy driving,” you reply, “I don’t see it as a burden. Besides, you didn’t ask Stengel to come with us.” You doubt the temperature difference is very great between the two cars, anyway. Thinking of the limousine, the mental image of Liliesviel clinging to you for warmth the way she’s stretching out to the heater now flickers across your mind. This, though, you leave unmentioned, turning instead to a question. “Do you hate the cold, Liliesviel?”

“Not exactly,” the girl answers with some hesitation. After thinking for a moment, she continues, “It depends on the circumstances. Outside, on a snowy day, with thick clouds overhead, I love the cold. That’s the way it’s meant to be, after all. When it’s cold indoors or in a car, though, that’s because something’s gone wrong; and I hate days like today, when it’s sunny and cold. It’s a contradiction!”

“I see.” Rather than directly finding the cold unpleasant, you suppose Liliesviel is angry with the car for going against her sense of how things ought to be. You’re thinking about how to respond to this as you pull up to an intersection downtown, where there are still some taxis circulating in search of fares and trucks laden down with goods to be transported. At least, pulling up is what you should be doing. The brake, out of nowhere, is having no effect! It was working just a moment ago, but suddenly seems to be completely disconnected as you barrel unrestrained through a red light into an intersection. The thing couldn’t have failed at a worse time; you’re heading directly for a collision with a large truck coming from the right. You might survive, but the thing would mean death for Liliesviel!

The situation isn’t insoluble, though. There isn’t enough space between you and the massive bumper bearing down to pull ahead out of the way, but you do have
the time to react. Moving almost before you think, you set about escaping by turning left and coming down hard on the gas. For a moment, it seems you hear the sound of metal and fiberglass raising a horrible shattering cacophony, feel the impact of the car’s destruction, but it’s no more than the product of your nerves. The truck is so close in your rear view mirror that it seems about to drive over you at any moment, but after the turn it falls back quickly. It really wasn’t moving very fast, you think. You’ve made it away from that deadly moment in one piece.

Unfortunately you’re now moving even faster than before and still unable to break; you’re far over the speed limit and the cars ahead of you come on as if they were standing still. You’re forced to weave back and forth on the road, dodging past the slower vehicles by little more than a hair’s breadth. Finally, though, you see what you’re looking for: a blind alley coming up on your left. Still unable to slow into the turn, you accelerate still further, making a mad drifting turn into the dark hole between two towering office buildings. As soon as you’re hidden from public view, you take action to put a stop to the mad dash by materializing heavy tendrils of Nothingness and holding the car in place with as much magical strength as you can muster. Finally, you’re brought to a halt.

Only the brake is malfunctioning, it seems. The accelerator you tested on the road, and once you have the car stopped, you have no further problems getting it into park and shut down. Still, what could have gone wrong with the perfectly functional brakes in the space of a moment while driving? Could they be only intermittently failing, and capable of function again if you start the car anew? Not being a mechanic, you really don’t have a clue how such things work. All things considered, your situation has certainly taken a frustrating turn. You find yourself now lost, in an unknown part of the city after a blind drive at top speed, and unsure of how to progress.

[X] Try starting the car again and making your way to the Greater Grail by driving, as planned. You’re confident you can drive without brakes if the lack doesn’t come as a surprise, and there’s always magic if the need arises. (Pride)

[ ] You can’t risk Liliesviel in an unsafe vehicle. Go on foot from here, carrying her over the rooftops. Hopefully the population is subdued enough by the ‘epidemic’ for such things to go unnoticed in daylight. (Compassion)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)
Even with the brakes in their state of mysterious failure, you can’t think of your car in its entirety as having been similarly rendered useless. After all, you were able to stop the car in this alleyway with magic. Although you were forced this time to hide before doing so, that isn’t to say that you need do the same in future. If you can imagine a form for your Nothingness to take that would enable the car to stop without the magically created element being visible, you should be able to use it as a substitute for brakes without difficulty. Before you can go much further down this line of thought, however, you’re jolted out of your contemplation by the nervous voice of Liliesviel.

“Alberich,” she begins with trepidation, in a strained and quiet voice, “what just happened?”

It’s a remarkably restrained question, far from the sort of emotional outburst you might have expected from a pampered young girl who’s just barely survived several brushes with death, partially at your hands. Come to think of it, although you were paying more attention to events outside the car than to her it seems that Liliesviel was silent and composed during the danger that’s just passed as well. When you glance over at her, the extent of Liliesviel’s restraint becomes clear. The girl’s expression is complex, almost composed but betraying an undercurrent of nervous tension.

“Just a bit of trouble with the car,” you say, hoping to reassure her with an easygoing tone and a smile. “Perhaps you were right, and we should have taken yours after all. I believe I have it dealt with now, though, and we can get back on course.”

“I knew it!” Liliesviel’s voice fills with vindication, as her fears are evidently dispersed by your reassurance. Holding her head high and laying the fingertips of one hand to her chest in an almost cartoonish gesture of pride, she continues, “There’s just no depending on inferior vehicles like this. I could tell it from the moment I felt its lackluster heating system!”

“I’m not sure about that,” you say with a chuckle. Liliesviel, though, doesn’t share in your mirth. Instead, she drops the prideful facade and turns to you with worried, vulnerable eyes, letting you see the frightened girl hiding behind her efforts at composure.

“Would you promise me you’ll travel in my car from now on, Alberich?” she asks, now sounding quite both serious and concerned. “If something goes wrong and you get hurt again, I—” she breaks off. “Just promise me, alright?”

“Of course,” you concede. “Given the state of this car, I doubt if I’d be able to keep driving it after today even if it weren’t your request. After this trip is over I
would very much appreciate the use of your limousine, if you don’t mind sharing it with me.”

“Great!” Liliesviel smiles again, her usual energy returning, and with that you feel you can get back to driving.

Fortunately, it seems your mind was turning over the problem of braking by magic unconsciously while you spoke with the girl, and the idea now occurs to you to create a clamp on each wheel to stop them. It will be somewhat difficult to finely control small elemental constructs invisible to you, of course, but you feel confident you can manage. Having produced the necessary equipment to restore your full control over the vehicle, you reverse out of the alleyway and pull back into the street, looking around to see if you recognize your location and how to get from here to the Einzbern Tower. As you do, you realize with a start that not only are your supplemental elemental brakes working, the car’s original equipment has been restored to functionality!

You ponder on the mystery for a few moments, considering the ramifications of the change. You know that there are computer components in cars now, although you remain ignorant of the details of such things. Could the brake failure be some sort of digital error, resolved by shutting the car down and restarting it? An alternative theory would be sabotage, some sort of outside manipulation of your car. If someone were able to inhibit the vehicle’s functions, they might have caused the brake failure, then released it when it became clear that you were capable of counteracting it. Right now, though, you haven’t enough information at your disposal to be certain.

With your location unknown, working that out is your first priority. If you had the sort of convenient cellular telephone you remember from Yumigawa’s memories, this would be a simple matter, but of course you have no possessions of your own and you’re sharing the car with a magus aristocrat and her maidservant, almost certainly both technophobes. Fortunately, though, given that the car’s previous owner was another magus, you have little doubt that he too preferred to do things in an old-fashioned way. You pop open the glove compartment with your left hand, steering with your right, and feel around to find - there it is: a map.

Pulling over to the side of the road, you unfold a laminated street map of metropolitan Tokyo before you and start looking for the streets around you and the intersections you’ve passed. It shouldn’t take too long, given that you have a general idea of the part of town you’re in based on the route you were originally following and the fact that you’re still in a high-density business district crowded with office towers. Maddeningly, though, you can find neither the street in front of nor behind you anywhere on the map. Have they changed the street names since it was printed?
There is a new look about the signs, as if they were recently cleaned or replaced, so it could be possible.

With the map still spread out on your lap, you begin driving again, circling around aimlessly to check intersections and street names against what’s shown on the map. As you progress it becomes increasingly clear that the perfectly sensible-looking map of Tokyo you have is quite out of touch with reality. You’ve passed the intersections of streets labeled on the map as parallel, streets adjacent to one another that should according to the map be separated by intervening streets, and even numerous streets that do not appear at all. You would think the thing ridiculously out of date, but according to a small text box in one corner it was printed just four months ago by the Tokyo metropolitan government itself. Bizarre, to be sure.

Finally you put the map aside in disgust and find a place to park for a few minutes. No matter how accurate it should be, given the circumstances of its publication, it’s plain that the thing is doing you no good. You’ll just have to get up to the roof of one of these offices and work out from above how to reach the Einzbern Tower. You’re sure it should be easy enough to see the ruins from above.

“My apologies for the delay, Liliesviel,” you say as you bring the car to a halt and move to get out. “I seem to have gotten us lost. I’ll just be a moment, I’m going to go up the side of one of these buildings and plan our route anew.”

“Really?” At your words, the girl’s eyes gleam in sudden excitement. “Carry me up with you, then! I’d like to see the rooftop view as well.”

“If you prefer that to waiting in the car, I would be happy to,” you say. It’s not empty politeness, either; given your suspicion about sabotage, you’d rather have Liliesviel where you can see her than separated from you. With that in mind, you get out of the car, walk around to the passenger side, and open the door for Liliesviel.

Stachel, you note, follows her mistress with neither discussion nor the expectation of service that marks Liliesviel’s behavior. Does the silent maid imagine she can keep pace with you in ascending a building, or is she just stretching her legs? The woman’s emotionless face gives you no answer.

As you conduct Liliesviel to the sidewalk and begin looking around at which building might be ideally suited to be your vantage point, a sudden powerful gust of wind tears up the street. In its wake, you hear a strange, high, slight noise, like breaking ice far above you. You look up for the source of the noise, and time seems to slow as you catch sight of the thing. The sunlight glints off of an enormous square window pane, invisible save for that reflection, as it plummets toward its target like the weighty guillotine blade it could easily emulate.
You move with superhuman speed, picking up Liliesviel despite her cry of shock as you grab her with the force of a Servant’s movement and turning on your heel just in time to remove her from the path of the great glass blade. Holding her close, you shield her body with yours as the pane crashes to the ground with the cacophonous chimes that are unique to the complete shattering of a colossal piece or ornament of glass. Several slivers drive into your back, scattered like shrapnel by the force of the impact, but thankfully the girl cradled in your arms is unharmed.

New suspicion colors your vision as you look around for the next source of attack. Brake failure alone might be an isolated misfortune, but for this string of events to all be coincidence would strain the credulity of even a guileless fool. Yet there is that seed of doubt. The failure of the brakes, the oddity of the street signs and map, and the falling glass are all attacks by disconnected objects, all with mundane explanations. Could this be no more than a strange chain of bad luck after all? No surely not! There must be some malevolent will behind these acts! And yet...

You can’t let your mind spin in circles forever, wasting time in idle speculation. Whether what’s going on is the work of one of your enemies or only bad luck, action must be taken if you’re ever going to reach the ruins of the Einzbern Tower.

[] The falling of a pane of window glass in a high wind changes nothing. Climb a nearby building, work out where you are, and return to the car to drive there. (Pride)

[] If there is the possibility that you’re under attack by some enemy, it’s better to err on the side of caution, and moving in a car limits your capabilities. Go on foot, over the rooftops. (Compassion)

[X] Perhaps there’s something else to be done about this... (Write in)

Right now, you think, the two most important things are to gain information and seize control of the situation. To continue moving towards your initial goal of the Einzbern Tower would be predictable behavior, and if you’re right in thinking that there’s an enemy hunting you who’s capable of completely hiding his presence and triggering malevolent accidents on command then acting predictable is the very last thing you ought to be doing. Still, even if you have come to a new decision about your enemy your immediate next step remains unchanged. The first thing to do when gathering information and taking control of the situation is of necessity the information-gathering, and there’s one clear way of finding out where you are.

With that in mind you make sure you’re holding Liliesviel securely and start looking for the best place to make your ascent. It seems the way you had to swiftly
pull her out of danger gave the girl quite a fright, as she’s now clinging to your lapels, one in each dainty hand, and burying her face in your chest. You’d pulled Liliesviel up into a hug before, not thinking as you moved at top speed to protect her, but that won’t do to carry her up a building with you; so you now bring her up into your arms more properly, cradling her with your left arm supporting her thighs and your right around her shoulders. As you do so, though, you receive a shock: during the swift motion of your picking Liliesviel up, her dress slipped slightly out of place, so that rather than the silk and lace of her skirt you now find that your left hand grips her bare leg. Still, you couldn’t conveniently withdraw your hand and get her dress under it without leaving Liliesviel to hand painfully from her shoulders for a moment, so you silently hope she won’t protest. The softness of her skin on your fingertips and the sweet scent of her tickling your nose threaten to distract you again, but with a small effort of discipline you keep your mind on the immediate matter of addressing your attack.

Startled by the movement, and no doubt by the untoward location of your hand, Liliesviel withdraws her face from your shirt and tie to look up at you. “Alberich,” she asks, “is this still only a ‘minor problem,’ or are we in danger?”

Perhaps she hasn’t really noticed your hand, somehow? Your experiences with women up until now, particularly the vocal tendencies of Ayaka and Kōrakuhime, definitely suggest that she should have cried out and possibly slapped you, but no such reaction has appeared. In any case, if Liliesviel is content to overlook your hand’s accidental infringement you certainly won’t bring it up. You put your thoughts on the subject aside to answer her.

“I believe we’re under an attack by a hidden enemy, most likely Assassin,” you explain, feeling yourself become more certain of the conclusion as you put it into words. “Don’t worry, Liliesviel,” you reassure her. “Just hold on to me for the time being, and follow my lead later. I won’t let you come to harm.”

Liliesviel gives you a beatific smile, the trust she has in you showing in her expression as she says, “I know you’ll protect me, Alberich. Thank you.”

With Liliesviel informed of your new conclusion, you look around once more, and your eyes settle on a nearby alley between two tall office buildings, one of which is outfitted with a large, old-fashioned fire escape that can easily be used to scale the thing. Without wasting any more time, you dart into the alley and begin a rapid ascent of the metallic stairwell. You haven’t gotten more than a story up, though, when an ominous creaking reaches your ears. All at once, the bolts that secure the fire-escape to the building slide free, and the entire thing folds up like an accordion and comes crashing down on top of you.
Would come crashing down on you, at least, were you still a human. You’re fast enough as it is to crouch and leap out between two landings while the stairwell is beginning to fall and get well clear of the wreckage by the time it’s worthy of the term. Another ‘accident’ to add to the tally of attempts on your life by this unknown assailant. Fortunately for you, even with your stairs removed the buildings are close enough to one another that you can easily climb by jumping between the two. Not wanting to give your enemy time to think of a new means of attack, you begin the ascent the moment you’ve concluded it’s possible. With your modern clothing still on, you can’t help noticing that you aren’t leaving behind as much property damage this time as during your last few experiences with rapid movement; even with your momentum, leather shoes just don’t make the kind of impact that enameled steel boots do.

In a few moments you’ve vaulted onto the roof of the taller of the two buildings. It doesn’t seem as if you were seen during your superhuman climb, due to your heavily shadowed choice of location, so you can still consider the magus code that Ayaka cares for so much to be more or less unbroken. A moment later, you’re surprised to see Stachel emulating your rapid leaps and summiting the tower just as you did, swinging gracefully over the short wall on the rooftop with one hand before her uniform high heels click down on the concrete. Apparently this maid has rather greater physical abilities than you’d given her credit for. You give the young woman a searching glance, but she remains expressionless and silent; if she sees the desire for an explanation in your eyes, she doesn’t act on it.

From your new vantage point, you’re finally able to get your bearings and scan the horizon. From up here, it seems as if the map you had in the car really was accurate, and it was the street signs that were misleading you. Whatever the source of your driving confusion, though, you’re able to chart out a new path to the ruins of the Einzbern Tower that should take only a half-hour or forty five minutes, given the extremely light traffic you’ve been seeing so far today. You’re not planning to go to the Einzbern Tower immediately, though. What you want is some way to wrong-foot your enemy and take back the advantage, and as you look around the city a plan to do so gradually takes shape in your mind.

If you can get to a wide-open area, one where there’s nothing that could feasibly malfunction in such a way that it could endanger Liliesviel, you’ll be able to force your enemy’s hand and draw them out of hiding. There’s just such a place nearby, too. About three blocks away, you can see among the slim, towering forms of the offices the broader expanse of a parking garage, with an empty rooftop parking area that’s as wide-open as you could hope for. Whispering, “Hold on tight, Liliesviel,
I’ll be moving quickly again,” to your passenger, you sprint off over the adjacent rooftops towards the parking garage as soon as you’re sure of your plan.

Surprisingly, you find that nothing threatens Liliesviel or bars your path as you approach the intended location of your showdown with the unseen attacker. In fact, it’s no more difficult to make it to the parking garage than it was to carry Ayaka to the house in which you first met Kōrakuhime, that night when the two of you seemed to float over the suburbs together between the sea of sleeping humanity and the empty sky above. Now, as you pass above the half-dead city, below the great void of the clear blue sky, you find that you can’t help thinking of the two situations as parallel, and wondering if this unknown attacker might not be carrying some new revelation about your identity.

You touch down on the roof of the parking garage and materialize your armor immediately. The smooth expanse of concrete takes up nearly an entire city block, and is completely empty. If your attacker intends to continue their campaign of harassment, they’ll have no choice but to confront you. At the same time, you set Liliesviel down on her feet, leaving yourself free to move and fight without endangering her. *Heiligöffnungschwert* appears in your hand, its black blade piercing the sunlight like a fresh shadow cast by some bizarrely shaped aircraft high above. Then you wait, looking for the foe.

Almost ten minutes pass without event. You’re almost tempted to conclude that the enemy has departed, and move on towards your goal, but the prudent, rational voice at the back of your mind cautions that to do so would likely be to walk into a trap. Finally something does happen, though, to the sound of a roaring engine. A massive van suddenly comes barreling up the ramp connecting this parking area to the lower levels. It’s almost too large to fit through the aperture, but not quite. It makes it, and once the thing is out on your level it immediately fixes on you and Liliesviel, accelerating towards the two of you at full power.

[ ] Grab Liliesviel and dodge out of the way! (Self-Preservation)
[ ] Step forward and cut the thing in half! (Duty)
[ ] Bind and immobilize the attacker with tendrils of Nothingness! (Pride)
[X] Do something else. (Write in)

A van. You’ve faced and slain some of the greatest heroes of legend; bound Achilles, seen through Odysseus, and crossed swords with King Arthur; and your
latest enemy strikes at you with a rampaging automobile. After the tense wait on the rooftop up until now, you find that the anticlimax is simply too much for you. All the serious consideration you’ve given this enemy in the last hour or so suddenly seems utterly absurd, and your tension melts into hilarity. As you watch the absurdly mundane danger coming towards you, it seems there’s nothing to be done but laugh in its face, giving free voice to the derision boiling up from within as your guffaws mix with the sound of the engine.

Your mirth isn’t enough to inhibit your reaction, however. Even if this ludicrous thing can bear no threat to you, it can harm Liliesviel if you treat it too lightly; so, though you’re tempted to simply let it slam pointlessly into you, you move to protect yourself together with her. With time to spare as the vehicle barrels forward, you reach down and clutch Liliesviel to your chest, pulling her within the encircling shroud of your cloak. With your other hand you flick one edge aloft, so that in the moment when the van is to make its impact your vision is wholly covered by darkness.

“Kenōtis!” At your command, you feel energy flowing into the Noble Phantasm and moments later see the cleanly severed right wall of the van flying past you, carried onward by the momentum of its vanished core, with fragments of partially consumed wheel spinning off in various directions below. Though you should be used to it by now, the complete lack of an impact as the force of an object clashing with your Noble Phantasm is consumed never ceases to startle you when it happens. There was simply one moment in which the sound of the engine filled your ears as the van was pushed to its mechanical limits, and silence the next.

That silence is shortly broken, however, as the fragments of the vehicle come crashing down on the concrete around you in a cacophony of jumbled metal and rubber. At the same time, your cloak drifts back to its accustomed position, leaving you, Liliesviel, and Stachel standing between two fallen van walls, gently swaying on their convex surfaces. If there was any driver, they’ve vanished along with the rest of the vehicle.

You hold Liliesviel to you for a few seconds more, watching alertly for any further sign of attack, but none materializes. There’s only the wind, blowing evenly across the roof and keeping the last motion in the van’s shattered frame. Once you’re satisfied that the meaningless attack will have no immediate sequel, you withdraw your arm, letting her step away and give you a little curtsy.

“Thank you again for protecting me,” the girl says with a gentle smile, before turning away to take a curious look at the fragments of vehicle. As she does so, Stachel quietly walks up from behind you and begins smoothing out the new wrinkles
that have appeared in Liliesviel’s dress due to her rough treatment. It’s that sort of constant attention to maintenance that forms the foundation of a maid’s training, you suppose.

“If it’s a Servant trying to kill us, I doubt they were driving that,” Liliesviel declares thoughtfully. “I haven’t felt a Servant die.”

“Thank you, Liliesviel,” you answer, nodding agreement. “From the pattern of the attacks we’ve received up until now, I’m sure the enemy has either the ability to affect us in such a way that we attract harm from our surroundings or to manipulate inanimate objects remotely. During my first phase of reconnaissance in this War, my Master and I observed a similar effect being practiced on the people of the city.”

“Is that so?” Looking pensive, Liliesviel kicks idly at the severed van wall with an ornate shoe, and for a time the low clanging of her heel on its metal makes the only sound on the rooftop. Finally she seems to come to a decision and spins around to give you another dazzling smile, lacing her hands behind her back. “I don’t think it matters,” she announces cheerfully. “You’ve had no problem defending me against their attacks so far, right? Let’s just go on to the Greater Grail like this, and let whoever wants to come between us grind their teeth when they see how useless it is to challenge you!”

“That may be for the best,” you tentatively agree, considering the situation with care. You sweep your gaze along the empty rooftops, willing your attacker to give some sign of physical presence: a distant silhouette, a shadow in a window, a door swinging shut, anything; but there’s nothing to suggest anyone around save you, your companions, and the mundanes.

[ ] Decide to go on, as Liliesviel suggests. It doesn’t seem likely that you’ll draw the enemy out this way. Return to the car and follow the route you planned from above. (Pride)

[X] Decide to go on, but follow the rooftops. Within the enclosed space of a car, it will be more difficult to protect Liliesviel if interference persists. (Compassion/Duty)

[ ] Remain where you are until either your enemy makes an appearance or night falls. You absolutely refuse to continue while exposing yourself and those around you to an unknown threat. (Compassion/Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)
“Yes,” you say, coming to a decision. “We’ll make our way to the Greater Grail with no further delay. There’s no sense in waiting for a foe who insists on stalking us from the shadows, in any case.”

“Great! I’m glad you agree.” Liliesviel turns away from the wreckage, walking back over to you and raising her arms as if to embrace you, demonstrating her expectation to once again be carried. “Are you going to take me back to your car, then?”

“No, I don’t relish the thought of driving with more of our enemy’s interference,” you answer, shaking your head. You briefly lower yourself to scoop up the expectant girl, slipping one arm under her legs and the other around her shoulders in the accustomed princess-carry. As she lets out a satisfied sigh, wrapping her arms around your neck to steady her posture, you can’t help contrasting in your mind’s eye this reaction with Ayaka’s manifest dissatisfaction with being carried on your back. It is amusing, the effect that as simple a thing as posture has on the two girls. Returning your mind to its proper course, however, you continue speaking. “We’ll go over the rooftops to the Greater Grail. You’ll have to suffer the wind, I’m afraid, but this method of travel will be more direct, as well as more easily defended.”

“I’ll be alright,” Liliesviel replies, pulling herself up into a half-seated posture to speak softly into your ear. “The wind won’t trouble me, as long as I can snuggle up to you for warmth, Alberich.”

Something in her tone, and the hot breath against your skin, sends a tingle right down your spine. Whatever happens, you just can’t seem to get used to this girl. Stifling your reaction, you focus on the practical, acknowledging her statement with a stiff, “Excellent,” before turning to the girl’s maid. “Stachel, you seem to have speed somewhat beyond human limits,” you say. “Do you think you’ll be able to keep up?”

“That is uncertain,” she answers in a flat, toneless voice. “However, I will try to the best of my abilities to serve Lady Liliesviel and yourself, Lord Alberich.” Although you keep your gaze on the maid for a few moments more, there’s no clue in her expression or body language to suggest whether she expects to succeed or fail. You suppose you’ll have to be satisfied with her vow to do her best.

“Very well then,” you say. “Follow me.”

With that, you set off to the northeast. It’s easy going, as the office towers have flat roofs and tend to be of similar enough height that you have no difficulty leaping from one to another. As you had feared, though, you have to make periodic stops to allow Stachel to catch up. For a non-Servant her speed and power are admirable, but ultimately she’s far from matching your capabilities. Even with
Stachel slowing you, though, the trip goes without difficulty. It seems as if your hidden assailant may truly have given up the attack.

“Liliesviel,” you begin, speaking up in the midst of a leap between two high-rise apartment buildings, “you mentioned that this ritual will link me to the Greater Grail. Would you mind answering a question about that?” Although you’re keeping your eyes on your surroundings, with things having calmed down it doesn’t seem like it would do any harm to make some small talk; it’s a long trip, after all, and leaving Liliesviel in silence seems callous.

“No,” comes the soft reply at your ear. “Go ahead; what would you like to know?”

“I’ve heard the Greater Grail spoken of as an enormous mass of magical energy, all that’s been collected from the leylines over the years to facilitate the War,” you explain. “If this ritual will be to connect me with the Greater Grail, will that render me capable of drawing from that energy supply for my own magic?”

Before you’ve even finished speaking you can feel Liliesviel’s head shaking against your shoulder, vigorously denying the notion. “You can’t!” she protests, sounding suddenly frightened. “Don’t even consider that kind of thing! If you took energy from the Greater Grail, the whole War could fall apart, and dispel you and the other Servants!” For a moment there’s only silence between you as you process this; then Liliesviel continues, evidently having calmed down. “This ritual wouldn’t make that possible, anyway. It’s meant to establish a conceptual link for Transference of effects, to make sure you’re included in the final stage of the Heaven’s Feel ritual. It wouldn’t create a channel magical energy could flow through. The other ritual would create a deeper connection, of course, but...” she trails off.

“I see,” you reply. “I had thought it might be useful in cases of emergency, but if it’s as you say I’ll have to put the notion from my mind.”

“Alberich, are you having trouble with magical energy?” Liliesviel perks up again as she asks the question. “You can always leave that Shijou girl behind and become my Servant if that’s so; I could give you much more, and it would be so much easier to cooperate without her coming between us,” she coos in your ear, seeming to relish the notion. It’s the not the first time Liliesviel has raised the topic, but you have to admit it’s a more desirable concept now than it was when first she made the suggestion. Ayaka seems to be having increasing difficulty with the amount of magical energy you use; if you could fight without limitations, it would surely make dangerous foes like Harris more easily managed. There is the matter of Ayaka’s sacrificial ritual to be considered, however. You wonder if she might be convinced to
use it on your behalf were she not your Master. Certainly the question of which Master is preferable isn’t as easily answered as it once was.

[ ] “Is there some method you know of, for me to become your Servant without Miss Ayaka’s death?” (Self-Preservation)

[X] “No, I haven’t had difficulties with magical energy. As I said, I was only considering the matter for cases of emergency.” (Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“No,” you reply, “I have not had difficulties with my energy supply. As I said, I was considering the matter only for cases of emergency; not to supplement my everyday needs. In any case, as I told you once before, it would be wrong of me to abandon Ayaka. I made a promise to see her safely through the War, you know; I don’t intend to break my word.”

“Oh,” Liliesviel seems to sag in your arms at the blunt answer, but after a pause she continues in a tone laden with suppressed disappointment and forced cheer, as if trying to bolster her own spirits, “I guess I’ll just have to wait a little longer, then, before I can have you all to myself. After all, you made a promise to me too.”

It’s true, of course, and as you picture the melancholic smile communicated by her voice you can feel again the heartbreaking empathy that moved you to swear you’d put an end to her loneliness in that ferris wheel on Tuesday. Whatever you may feel for Liliesviel, though, it is a fact that you’ve taken responsibility for Ayaka’s life in her brother’s absence. If you intend to keep your word to both, you’ll have to find a way to make both Ayaka and Liliesviel happy after the War. How is it, you wonder, that you’ve drawn girls in conflict with one another to yourself with such consistency? First there was the mutual loathing between Circe, Adelheid, Kikuko, and Truvietianne, and now you face a similar scenario with Ayaka, Liliesviel, and Kōrakuhime.

That is a problem for another day, you decide. For the moment it’s enough to focus on the girl in front of you. You pull Liliesviel tighter to you, and declare, “I intend to keep it, even as the Servant of another. You won’t be alone any longer.”

“Thank you, Alberich,” she murmurs, and the two of you pass the remainder of the trip to the ruins of the Einzbern tower in a comfortable silence, shielded from the autumnal chill by the warmth of your mutual feelings, and the closeness of your bodies. As you leap from rooftop to rooftop over the still and somnolent city, with Liliesviel’s head nestled against your chest and all else but her cut off by the speed of
your transit, it is in a way like being returned to that ferris wheel, the pair of you spending a brief moment alone above the world, suspended at a distance from all material concerns, with no thought save of one another.

Then the moment ends, and the world returns, as you come to a halt on the rooftop of a low office: once the equal neighbor of the Einzbern Tower, now with one exposed side looming over a great expanse of mangled rubble of mixed glass, steel, and concrete piled half a story high. Looking down at the lot where the tower’s detritus lies heaped in shapeless ruins, the immediate challenge of your task becomes clear. Though you sweep your eye over the rubble, you can see no point at odds with its surroundings, no spot where some significant detail indicates that there might be some hidden entrance.

“The entrance to your catacomb seems to have been buried,” you say, nodding down at the formless mass. “I can destroy the rubble, but it will take some time. Do you know where the entrance is, so I can make quicker work of the excavation?”

Liliesviel sighs dejectedly as she looks down at the wreckage of her former home, and you suppose that even though it was a temporary abode for the duration of the War she must have been rather fond of it. After a moment, though, her melancholy passes and she answers, “That shouldn’t be much of a problem. Otto constructed a barrier over the entrance, so that cement and such shouldn’t be as thick over it. Carry me down, and I’ll show you where it is.”

“How prudent of him,” you mutter, and leap down from the rooftop. As you land, the shattered building materials crackle, shift, and make suspicious noises of structural uncertainty. Obviously the ruins of the Einzbern Tower are far from sturdy, and as a shard of glass half-hidden in concrete dust pierces your leather shoe to be halted by the sole of your foot, you conclude, “I think it would be best if I continued to carry you for the time being, Liliesviel. The surface here isn’t safe for you to walk on.” Stachel, you notice, is moving with a series of light, acrobatic jumps, eschewing the dustier or more uncertain places and setting her feet only on clearly harmless outcroppings of concrete.

“Oh, you’re right! That’s an excellent idea,” she says, nodding, “but I do need to touch the ground to find the entrance. Please kneel down so I can reach.”

Wondering what exactly it is she intends to do, you go ahead and comply, squatting and lowering Liliesviel towards the ground so she can reach out and press her palm to a bare patch of concrete. For a few moments she only holds it there, nothing seeming to happen, until her skin is suddenly illuminated. Faint, curling traceries of red appear on her, glowing vividly against white skin; they spring from
her wrist and seem to flow down her hand and into the ruins, fading as they touch the inorganic matter.

“Do you see an area of the ground glowing?” Liliesviel asks. “That will be the rubble above Otto’s shield, and the entrance.”

Sure enough, as you look around again you see a circle of rubble perhaps two meters across, with faint red light shining up from below, penetrating the barrier of dust, concrete, and metal as if it shines through no more than thick glass, with an efficacy that thoroughly proves its magical nature. “Yes, it’s over to the right,” you answer. “I’ve made certain of the location, you can stop illuminating it now.” At your words, Liliesviel withdraws her hand and you return to your full height, walking over to the edge of the indicated area. With your hands otherwise occupied, you decide to manifest tendrils of Nothingness to do the work of excavation, as you’ve seen no-one on the street in front of this location. If Liliesviel didn’t concern herself with who might see her light, you see no reason to hide your magic at a time when it can be useful.

“What sort of magic was that?” you ask, as you pull free larger chunks of concrete and metal bars with two tendrils while a third widens to scoop dust and smaller chunks out of the rapidly forming pit. “I haven’t seen a magus perform that sort of technique to find something before.”

“Oh, it’s a very convenient bit of Transference,” Liliesviel explains offhandedly, “I disperse my own magical energy while illuminating it, and transfer it to any nearby gatherings of magical energy. It’s an excellent tool for finding hidden bounded fields, and that sort of thing. It can be warded against, of course; normally, Otto said, he would have prepared a barrier that couldn’t be detected this way, but he left it more easily found so that I could return.”

As she explains this, you finish clearing the rubble over the shielded area, revealing a tube of open air running down through the wreckage to a spiral staircase that winds down into the earth below. From the look of the staircase’s carved stone walls, and the depth of the tube, it was at some point located several floors below ground in the conventional manner and modeled on medieval architecture. You haven’t much time to examine it from above, though, as Liliesviel spurs you on, exclaiming, “Finally! Let’s go, Alberich!”

You leap down to the steps below, passing through Odin’s vaunted barrier with only a hint of feeling, and set Liliesviel gently on her feet beside you. Stachel follows shortly after, landing behind the two of you as the stairs are only wide enough for two to walk abreast. As you begin the descent, something else springs to mind.
[ ] Ask Liliesviel about what she suspects Odin of plotting with the Greater Grail.
[X] Ask Liliesviel about what she intends to do after the War comes to an end.
[ ] Say something else (Write in a comment or topic of question)
[ ] Try to strike up conversation with Stachel.

For a moment, as your feet touch down on that first step into the hidden abyss, you turn your eyes up to regard the pit of destruction above you; by the combination of your magic and that of Odin, the region of what ought to be uniform wreckage has been transformed, first into a hidden dome of empty space and now into a yawning funnel, an open slope ringing a vertical tunnel that could have been carved out by some titan drill, itself mimicking the proportions of the stone shaft which opens below you; though here and there an encroaching piece of rebar or displaced chunk of rocky foundation, dusted with the powder of annihilated plaster, mars the shape of the great excavation, by and large it is a remarkably smooth and uniform surface, for one hewn from shifting debris; and for a moment, with the sun directly overhead, in the center of its ring of cloudless azure hemmed in by the grey of the shattered abode, the world takes on the still quality of a pair of mirrors. Heaven above reflects the inverse of the black maw at the stairwell’s center, ringed about with ashen stone and so deep that the direct rays of noon cannot penetrate to its base.

Then Stachel’s blandly pretty face peeks over the ring of wreckage, and the moment of silent tranquility is shattered even by the muted click of her heels as she hops lightly down into the pit with you. At once you become conscious again of the passage of time and the need to reach your goal. With reluctant movements you part from the girl in your arms, straightening Liliesviel with a subtly caressing gesture and setting her on her feet by your right side, so that you stand between her and the yawning central opening into darkness.

Rather than dashing off down the steps with voluminous curls bobbing, as you might have expected from her eagerness to descend, Liliesviel pauses for a moment to gaze downward and inspect the place where the tunnel opens, and ground becomes wall. She takes a few hesitant steps down, small body moving uncomfortably on the enormous slabs that are these stairs, evidently constructed with adult use in mind. As she begins her hesitant descent, with you following at her side, the girl says, “Just a moment; let me light it up, we won’t have any sun after the first level.”

Once the stone wall is above her head, Liliesviel begins tracing her fingers along it at about the height of your chest, groping for some unseen variation in the
carven stonework; finally she discovers it, as her fingers come to a stop on a unique tracery of five curling strands in a shape vaguely suggestive of serpentine coils. Her face brightens at the vindication of her searching, and you feel the telltale brushing at that sixth sense of magical energy, like wind over the hair at the back of your neck, as she pours hers into it and illuminates the candelabra, hitherto hidden, which hang precisely two meters above each third step.

These, you observe, do not produce fire, or even electric bulbs at the tip of the single alabaster-white candle which stands in the brass fixture of each, but a crystal carved in vivid likeness of living flame which glows with simulated flickering. Where you stand now, still touched by the sun’s rays, their golden light lends only a tinge of color to its wan beaming, but as you continue your descent the necessity of the row of frozen flames’ replicated dimness becomes obvious. No sooner do you loop around to step below the first stair than the sun seems wholly shut out in spite of the open shaft at the stairwell’s center, so that it is only by wavering candlelight that you make out the steep descent of the stairs before you. Without the magical lighting you might have found your way, aided by a Servant’s supernatural vision, but Liliesviel and Stachel would surely be lost to some horrible accident of misstep, plunged by a sliding foot or breaking heel into gulls of nighted stone brutality.

One other detail becomes clear to you as you descend the first few levels of the spiral stairway: the steps and walls, which you had at first mistaken for some imported gothic masonry, enormous slabs of limestone, granite, or some equally stolid fragments of mountain, are in fact composed entirely of molded concrete. They are the of a piece with the foundation of the tower, seemingly all constructed at once and by the same manufacturers, and you cannot help but find secret mirth in the realization. Even the enormously wealthy and noble Einzberns, with their demonstration of the resources at their disposal, must sometimes make concessions to economy of construction.

As your descent stretches on, and your surroundings’ monotony fails to abate, you find your mind turning once more to practical matters. What if your unseen assailant should pursue you from above, or if Circe or indeed some wholly other, unsuspected agent should take advantage of the stairwell’s revelation to assault Odin’s barrier? With the Greater Grail deep below ground, you would have little chance to become aware of and react to the unwelcome disturbance; and the circumstances of this ritual, details of which remain unknown to you, might further compound this immobility. All that in mind, you pose a question to your diminutive companion.
“Is Stachel a necessary participant in the ritual we’ll be conducting down there, Liliesviel?” you begin, nodding back over your shoulder towards the silently following maid. “If not, I think it might be wise for her to remain on the surface as a sentry. If we all go together into your family’s catacombs, we run the risk of being taken quite unawares should some pursuer manage to penetrate Odin’s barrier.”

Liliesviel touches a finger to her lip as she considers the question, before replying, “No, I don’t suppose I’ll need the heavenly garment for this. I thought it might be useful as a supplement, but I mostly brought Stachel along so Stengel wouldn’t make a fuss about us going off alone together. I’m sure you’ve noticed how horribly insolent she is, I really must do something about it.” She stops after hopping down to the step below you, then pirouettes lightly about to face Stachel, the layered frills of her dress dancing up with the vigor of the motion to reveal a delectable glimpse of bare white skin above the silken embrace of her kneesocks. “Stachel,” she chirps, “run along back up to the surface, would you? If anyone tries to get in, kill them if you can, or come down and warn us if they’re too strong.”

“As you wish, Lady Liliesviel,” the maid answers, with a curtsy of clockwork precision; then makes her own about-face, proceeding up the stairs with marked rapidity as she leaps up four steps at a time to vanish from sight and hearing in mere instants.

Returning to Liliesviel’s side and continuing your descent, you find yourself wondering about a detail of her explanation. “You mentioned the heavenly garment,” you note. “What is that, exactly? It’s the first time I’ve heard you speak of it.”

“Of course, I should’ve explained,” Liliesviel answers with a bashful, blushing smile. “It’s so easy to forget you don’t know everything about our family, Alberich. The heavenly garment is a special mystic code that only the Lesser Grail may wear, which empowers my magical abilities quite significantly; it’s necessary for the final moments of the Heaven’s Feel, of course, but it would be useful all the time if it weren’t for the design. I don’t really like wearing it because of the way it looks, though.”

“I see,” you reply, musing. Of course you had intuited some time before that Liliesviel must be the Einzberns’ Lesser Grail, but it is gratifying to have her acknowledge and confirm your suspicion. What troubles your mind, though, is her comment about appearance. What sort of garment would be in keeping with the Einzbern aesthetic, yet against Liliesviel’s own, when she seems such an embodiment of the kind of fanciful outward demonstration of antiquated nobility that you have until now assumed to be their general preference?
Unbidden, a parade of Liliesviels appears in the theater of your mind, dressed in ridiculous costumes: Liliesviel in the blazer of a middle-schoolgirl, Liliesviel in the shapely bronze armor of one of Wagner’s Valkyries, Liliesviel as a tiny nurse, Liliesviel in the cartoonish Halloween caricature of a witch’s robe and hat, Liliesviel in a clinging satin gown that shows off the body’s subtle curves where her present dress masks them, Liliesviel in the short pants, T-shirt, and pigtails of a little tomboy, and so-on...

With a violent effort of pragmatic will, you chase the obtrusive images from your mind. Whatever this “heavenly garment” may be, it is a mystic code, and more likely to resemble a voluminous robe embroidered with runes than any absurd notions of pedestrian costume. You focus your thoughts once more on the conversation at hand, and ask, “In that case, what does Stachel’s presence have to do with it?”

Liliesviel waves a fluttering hand as if to dismiss the recurring thought of her maid. “I need her to prepare the heavenly garment before I can put it on; it’s her other purpose.” With a rueful smile she continues, voice now subdued “We all have our roles in the great miracle of the Einzbern, of course; the reason why we were created. That’s part of why I was so happy when I first saw you, Alberich. You’re one of us, but not one of us; an Einzbern with no memory of Grandfather’s instructions for you, not knowing your part to play; and you still came to me!” Her face brightens again, ruby eyes gleaming over a smile with all the radiance of the crescent moon emerging from a chill fog. “Without Grandfather’s orders, without any reason, you still wanted to be with me enough to spend the whole day with me, taking me around the city to eat at a café and go to an amusement park, just like normal people! I’ll never forget that, Alberich,” she continues softly, “it was the most happiest moment of my life, being there with you on the ferris wheel, knowing that I’d finally found you.”

“Don’t speak too soon,” you answer with a wry grin, suppressing behind the mask of levity the rush of sweet passion her words evoke in you. “I may yet outdo myself, and give you such thrilling days that they’ll drive that little amusement park from your mind.”

Her sweet laughter, so like the chiming of tiny bells, echoes through the stairwell for a few moments before Liliesviel can reply, “That’s right! We’ll always be together from now on, so you’ll have lots of chances. I promise I won’t forget though, no matter how happy you make me.”

In the darkness, you clasp her soft, smooth hand in your rougher one and ask, “What would make you happiest, Liliesviel? What do you want from life, after the War is over; not just in fulfillment of the duty of your family, but for yourself?”
“That’s a silly question, Alberich,” the girl replies, her expression and voice suddenly rueful again. “If you’re asking about my fantasies, I’ve got lots of those; but none of them matter, because I have my memories. I know all I need to do is focus on the Heaven’s Feel, and not think about the time after. I’ll have a new role then. Happiness is for the time between coming here and the end; the time now, when I can still move around and make decisions away from Grandfather.”

“Just suppose, then,” you plead, suddenly finding yourself desperate to cheer her, to see what desires lie beyond the need for affection and the duty to her family. “Suppose that you were free after the War, that you became the head of the Einzbern family. What would you want to do?”

“Alright, Alberich,” she answers, “If you really want to know, we’ll play pretend. If Liliesviel could have anything she wanted, what would it be?”

Evidently it’s something she’s considered more than her previous comment suggests, because she doesn’t take a moment to consider, but answers immediately.

“I want society! I’d bring us out of that stupid isolation, and back into the Mages’ Association, the way we were at the start. Do you know,” she demands indignantly, “that the Grail War is my first time outside of the castle back home? In twenty years, I’ve only left our land once! Grandfather says that associating with inferior magi will only lower our station, but I think he just doesn’t know how to do anything but plan and plot for the Heaven’s Feel. Why should we have all this money and power if we don’t show it off and do things with it? I want to go to the balls they have for magus debutantes in Vienna, and dance, and talk with the other girls from old families; I want to see lectures at the Clock Tower, and have magus duels, and prove to those ‘lords’ that the Einzberns deserve their respect! I want to go back with you, and do all of that together, and show everyone that the Einzberns are more than an old man and a castle!”

By now Liliesviel has stopped walking, and only stands there ranting, overtaken by a violence of emotion you haven’t seen in her even when she grew angry with her servants. Tears fill her eyes, spilling out in little rivulets and dotting her long lashes like beads of gleaming crystal. Her dainty hands, usually composed and elegant, clutch at her dress in an effort not to ball into ugly fists. Unable to let her suffer the pain of her denied dreams alone you pull her to you, pressing the small body close and caressing her head over silky locks with one hand, feeling the shiver against you of silent tears as Liliesviel gives vent to her emotions within your embrace. It’s almost enough to make you forget the shock you had at her age, but you file that away for questioning at another time.
“There, there,” you murmur as you pet her, words less important than the tone, of reassurance, sympathy, and affection. After a few moments, though, you continue with a more considered reassurance. “Who’s to say you can’t do all that?” you ask. “Aren’t we taking hold of the Third Sorcery together? What can the patriarch of the Einzberns have against that power, to compel you to do his will?”

“You don’t understand,” she sighs, pulling back from you to speak and blinking back her abating tears. “It’s not about power. I was made for that reason, to fulfill my role and do what Grandfather wants. It’s my purpose for existing. Having forgotten, you can’t know what kind of power that knowledge has.”

“It’s you who doesn’t understand, Liliesviel,” you shoot back, voice growing heated with the passion of your rebuke. “I know the reason for my creation; the intended purpose of my existence. It doesn’t matter to me. Our emotions, our thoughts, and our desires from moment to moment are far more real, more immediate, than any intent felt by a creator! Those are what decide your purpose, not your grandfather! Haven’t you already been acting outside of that purpose you speak of by offering to share the Third Sorcery with me at all?”

There are a few more tears, and then Liliesviel sniffs (a sound like a minuscule snare drum, or the sneeze of a kitten), dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief, and composes herself. “Maybe you’re right,” she admits. “Grandfather never said anything about you. Maybe I’m already disobeying, and there’s no reason to go back. For now, let’s just go on.” With that she turns from you and continues down the stairwell. You, unsure of just how to respond to this indecision with the air of finality, follow at her side.

At last the stairwell comes to an end, at a point of unknown, but surely colossal, depth. All track of time and distance left you in that endless descent and emotional discussion, and certainly neither sound nor light of the surface world reaches down to this final base. An enormous arch, built of the sort of heavy masonry which calls to mind remembered photographs of Roman aqueducts seen in Yumigawa’s classes, opens from the stairwell into a massive room, an underground chamber large enough to fit the Tokyo Dome comfortably within. The cavernous vault of the high-arching ceiling and the gently curving walls both fade into invisible darkness in the distance. The ground before you, by contrast, comes to an abrupt end as it slopes downwards into black water lapping gently at the blocks. A narrow promontory extends out from this artificial coast, with a small, ornate boat tied up at its end. Although it’s entirely of varnished wood, and no larger than a canoe, the thing is decorated with numerous carvings depicting highly stylized scenes of battle and magical ritual, and its prow ends with a figurehead in the shape of a snarling
wolf’s face, immobilized by the artist in the moment before its strike. The impression, all things considered, is rather like a Viking longship in miniature, though lacking a sail.

“Here we are,” Liliesviel declares. “Now all we need to do is row across to the center.” She points out across the underground lake to a dimly visible pedestal, a circular platform of stone several meters across rising out of the water.

[X] Sensible enough. You’ve never operated a rowboat before, but it can’t be too difficult. Get in. (Pride)

[ ] Actually, you’re not too sure about your rowing ability. Suggest another method of crossing the lake. (Write in what) (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)

“Indeed,” you murmur, mind more focused on the strangeness of the sight before you than her words, “just row across.”

You walk out towards the rowboat, noting as you step from the meter-wide uniform stone walk that rings the room onto the promontory the odd shape of that bizarre wharf. Whereas the floor immediately beyond the entrance arch sloped in gentle decline towards the water, this stretch of rock (and it is rock, no longer formed concrete but the living stone of the deep earth, with this chamber carved out of it) rises slightly as it narrows, so that when striding out towards the final point to which the boat is moored you have the feeling of walking down the head of some titanic spear, mostly buried but jutting up at its extremity out of invisible depths.

Standing at the tip of the outcropping, you examine the boat quizzically. Despite its ornate design, the structure seems to be fairly ordinary; a small rowboat with two benches, large enough to carry between one and four persons, with two oars seated symmetrically in rowlocks; it’s the type of boat that can be found at any park containing a lake, free for the use of day-trippers, couples, and every kind of amateur. Not something that you should find any difficulty in piloting, despite your lack of experience with vehicles other than cars.

With the accustomed grace of movement characteristic of a Servant’s martially focused existence, you swing a leg over the boat’s side and sit down at the oars, the impact of your weight setting it to slight rocking in the water. Liliesviel follows once you’re seated and, after carefully brushing the dust from her seat and daintily gathering her skirts, sits down to face you. With a whip of your hand you send a tendril of Nothingness slicing through the thick rope that ties the boat to its
iron hoop on the promontory and, taking hold of the oars, you set off into the black water. As the promontory recedes you are rapidly surrounded by darkness on all sides; empty air above and about you, and low onyx waves surrounding your boat. In your ears only the rhythmic churning of the oars resounds, and your nostrils fill only with the cavern’s musty, salty, slightly chemical odor: the scent of a lifeless, buried sea tinged with an unrecognizable foreign element.

With your hands on the oars and the boat moving under your power, you rapidly become conscious of the depth of your inexperience. The motion of rowing is an unfamiliar one, imitated based on Yumigawa’s memories of seeing others, and something in your stroke must be somewhat out of sync, for the boat wobbles back and forth, left and right, in a swerving course as you veer one way and overcorrect the other. Still you do seem to be moving towards the central island in spite of your fumbling. Inwardly you thank the Einzbern planners who chose this and not some stranger boat, a poled gondola or one-oared canoe, requiring more esoteric motions, for had it been so you’d have been quite unable to make use of the craft.

Seeking some topic of conversation to distract from your ineptitude as a sailor, such a contrast from your expert driving, you settle on what has been bothering you from your first sight of the chamber: the presence of this stygian lagoon. "Liliesviel," you begin, "Do you know why this room is filled with water? It seems like an odd choice, but must have been deliberate, considering the careful construction that’s obviously gone into the housing of the Greater Grail."

"Of course I do!" Liliesviel brightens at the chance to explain this detail. Perhaps the lack of conversation has been weighing on her as well, or more likely you suppose she’s happy to be distracted from the painful earlier topic of rebellion against her family. "I told you before that we arranged the Heaven’s Feel in Tokyo as a backup for the Fuyuki ritual. That was because there are only a few places around the world with a powerful enough leyline conflux to support the Holy Grail. Fuyuki is one of those, and Tokyo isn’t."

"And you were able to solve this problem with water?" Your knowledge of the magical elements is admittedly rather sparse, but you can’t imagine how simply filling the chamber would make up for insufficient regional Mana.

"Not exactly water," your companion hedges, tilting her head cutely to one side. "It was originally sea water that was brought in, but it’s had all sorts of components and treatments since. The entire pool is a mystic code that accelerates the flow of Mana through the conflux here. That’s how the Heaven’s Feel can be held here even though it wasn’t originally a site we’d considered for the ritual. Apparently
Grandfather invented it after the Second Heaven’s Feel in Fuyuki, so he could prepare other locations for the ritual without the Matou or Tohsaka interfering."

“I see,” you reply softly, looking at the pool around you with new eyes. “A mystic code of this size, and all of water; how fascinating.” Despite all you’ve seen, the Moonlit World of magi always seems to have new and strange things to delight your curiosity.

“Oh, that’s not all it does, either,” Liliesviel goes on, pride in her family’s work filling her voice. “The other Greater Grail, in Fuyuki, could only take in Mana in a static way, but this lake allows the Greater Grail here to vary its intake. It can pull in more mana from the surrounding leylines to compensate for additional demands on the Holy Grail War, like summoning a Divine Spirit masquerading as a Heroic Spirit, or,” she gives you a pointed smile, “making homunculi into additional Servants.”

“How intriguing,” you reply, blithely ignoring her implication that your appearance in the War has been planned since the chamber’s construction. “Perhaps I might take a closer look.” You pause in your rowing for a moment to reach a hand over the side, intending to scoop up a handful of the enchanted fluid and examine it.

“Wait, stop!” Liliesviel cries out at full volume, terror contorting her face as she jumps to her feet and reaches for your arm, nearly overturning the boat in the process. At this hysterical reaction you quickly withdraw your hand and take hold of your companion by the shoulders, steadying both her and the boat with care.

“I take it the water is somewhat dangerous?” you ask, reassuring her with a wry grin and calm tone.

“That’s right.” As Liliesviel sinks back down to her bench, she sighs with relief at the sight of your hand both securely before you, inside the boat and unharmed. “I suppose I wasn’t very clear. That mystic code is imbued with an extremely powerful, constantly active Transference effect. I don’t know what it would do to a human, but if a homunculus or something with a spiritual body like a Servant were to be immersed in that water...” A shudder visibly runs through her body as Liliesviel gazes at you with eyes moistened by her moment of fear.

“It would be the end of them,” you conclude, finishing her train of thought. “All magical energy would by siphoned away to the Greater Grail. That’s what you’re getting at, isn’t it?”

Liliesviel nods again. Your conversation is cut short, however, by the scraping impact of the boat’s prow against the smooth, curved edge of the platform at the center of the chamber: the destination of your trip, at last. Turning around to look at the platform, you can see that there’s no place for the boat to be moored, so you’ll have to jump directly over its prow and cross a narrow stretch of the deadly lake in
the process; no challenge to you, but surely dangerous for Liliesviel to attempt. With an eye to her safety, then, you slowly rise to your feet, keeping your movement steady to prevent the boat from rolling; step forward; and in one swift motion you pluck the girl up into your arms, whirl around, and vault over the canine figurehead to stand upon the Grail.

There must be some quality in this chamber of visual distortion at a distance, for having arrived at the central platform you discover it to be not a paltry few meters, as you had guessed from the rocky pier, but a circle well over fifteen meters in diameter. Perhaps, you speculate, it is the almost tangible density and vast quantity of magical energy that swirls through the air here at the center of this massive chamber which distorts vision from afar. This is an incidental matter, however, for it is its surface that really catches your eye; indeed your breath, too, catches in your throat as you take in its stunning opulence.

Every inch of the platform is covered with the engraved traceries of a magic circle; but the term doesn’t do it justice. It is a work of art, a piece of magic ritual like nothing you’ve ever seen before. The core structure of the thing is made up of a set of concentric rings, spaced evenly fifteen centimeters apart from one another, and each inner ring slightly less deeply carved than its outer predecessor; intersecting these rings are numerous straight or twisting lines, coming together in a profusion of acute and obtuse angles suggesting flower petals, weaponry, architecture, the teeth of mountains, and many other shapes, but forming nothing so pedestrian as a pentacle or polygon; in sum they come together as a hazy web of impossible intersections, bewildering the eye with the madness of dream. Spaced about at intervals between these lines and rings are lesser circles, smaller magic diagrams that have their own impressions of unique and ordered beauty, like stars of varying color, within and without the great constellation of the primary formation. Last of all, wrapping around all of these are endless runes, sigils, and lines of script in at least five different alphabets and inscribed in such a microscopic hand that it is impossible to make out their meaning, though there must be enough varied text spread across the platform to fill an epic, if one were to transcribe it into a book.

Each channel of carven stone is filled, moreover, with a profuse variety of precious inlay. In the rings you spy the various treasured metals: copper, bronze, gold, silver, and platinum all make their appearance, ordered each in their own ring and repeating the cycle as the rings continue inward. The formulae and angular strokes, by contrast, contain an even greater variety of stone: ruby, sapphire, emerald, topaz, onyx, diamond, jade, and other, more obscure examples of mineral beauty unidentifiable by your limited knowledge crowd the engravings, cunningly cut to
resemble flowing water of brilliant colors. The entire vast structure thus takes on the appearance of some mythic dragon’s hoard of scattered treasure that has been compressed into two dimensions, squeezed into the rock below your feet to be seen only from above, where thieving hands cannot easily lift some trifle without destroying the whole of the great work.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Liliesviel breathes, as spellbound as you are by the beautiful sight. “This is the key to our miracle, the culmination of a thousand years of work.” Then, matter-of-factly she continues, “Set me down, please.” At her request you lower the girl to the ground, whereupon she hops out of your arms and walks lightly over just past the center of the Grail, then turns to face you from the edge of the innermost ring, of shining platinum. “Thank you. Now I just need you to lie down in the center of the Grail and sleep for a while.”

“You want me to sleep there?” you echo, surprised. “There’s no active part for me to take in the ritual?”

“No,” she chirps, the shadow of a laugh behind the word. “All you need to do is be here. You can stand and wait if you like, but I think what I’m going to do will be more effective if you synchronize your mind with the Greater Grail by being unconscious. I’d offer to help you sleep, but with your magic resistance it would be quite difficult.”

“Thank you for the explanation,” you reply.

[X] “In that case, I’ll take your advice.” It isn’t as though this will be the first time you’ve slept in Liliesviel’s presence, and to refuse to now would make it seem you don’t trust her. (Compassion)

[ ] “I believe I’ll stand, if you don’t find my sleeping essential.” Something about this chamber, the throbbing magic of the Greater Grail, and the circumstances of your approach make you loath to surrender your consciousness even to make certain of the success of this ritual. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)

You look around, contemplating the location. Sleep is, after all, a period of helplessness. There is, however, nothing to arouse your concern here. You are quite alone here with Liliesviel, and at the surface Stachel waits as a sentry. Aside from that, you can’t help but feel the apparent mistrust in not wanting to sleep beside Liliesviel would sting her all the more after your tender conversation on the stairs.
“In that case, I’ll take your advice,” you reply, crossing the platform with quick strides to stand before your companion. “Is there any particular way I should lie down?”

“...On your back?” Liliesviel furrows her brows to give you a confused look, as if not expecting a question on such a detail. “Just try to lie so your stomach is over the very center of the Grail.”

According to her instructions, you stretch your body out on the stone at her feet, lining your own core up carefully with that of the innermost circle. You lace your hands over your chest, and for a few breaths simply lie there, absorbing the scenery and driving thought and tension from your mind. All around you, beyond the treasure-encrusted platform, water stretches off into the dark reaches of the enormous room. From here, the room’s actual walls are invisible, so that only a dome of amorphous darkness seems to surround the pool. Vision, once enabled by the candelabra on the walls, now makes do with the faint illumination that springs from the jeweled engravings below you. You close your eyes, and the only sound is of the softly lapping waves, punctuated occasionally by the scraping of the boat you’ve left behind against the platform’s sharp edge.

With your other senses shut out or dulled by the absence of stimulus, the sixth sense of magic overwhelms them and dominates your impression of the scene with its perception of the monstrously vast energy contained in this chamber. Greater even than that held by Odin is the power that can be felt from the platform on which you lie, and its excess washes over you like the heat from a great bonfire, roiling and shifting, twisting and writhing, the barely contained power alive below you. It is the power of the earth, its very lifeblood, opened and exposed for you and Liliesviel to drink from and make permanent your ephemeral natures, the creations of man returning to man’s creator for sustenance, and in that madly boiling, churning mass is another, greater motion, the rhythmic pulse of the heart of Gaia, overtaking all else once it is detected and sweeping up to enfold you, deafen you, swallow you up, and...

Light creeps back into your vision in narrow lines of searing blue-white flame, running inwards from the edges of the expanse of blackness before your eyes. The other senses, too, receive new input. Gone is the stone beneath your back, and the feeling of lying heavily in the bowels of the earth. Instead you hang suspended, facing downwards, in vast gulf of empty night. The throbbing that deafened you is no longer an assault, though its power has not diminished; rather it can be sensed through, as the great underlying background to all other senses in this strange new realm.

As you hang immobile, eyes fixed on the sight below, the runnels of ethereal flame multiply and congregate, forming first bands, then ropes, and finally great
rivers of energy. Four meet below you, each with its own unique course. One twists in the serpentine parody of directness imposed on so many waterways by the interdiction of hills; another swings wide in the great arc of a bow, or the crescent moon; the third is straight and true; while the fourth swerves crazily in jagged formation, flame resembling more the cracks in rock than a waterway. All of them, however, throb in unison with the beating that suffuses you as they flow in their fixed channels to the meeting place below. There, though, resemblance to the course of water ends, for rather than pooling in colorful emulation of a serene lake they dwindle, growing narrower and narrower as they approach their point of conflux until at last the meeting place itself contains no more than a tiny point of light nearly lost amidst the titanic emptiness which surrounds it.

No sooner is this image completed than it shifts, yanked towards you by the cessation of your own stillness. As if suspended by a wire suddenly cut by some cruelly snickering prankster you plunge downward, hurtling through space towards the flames and the point of meeting, and all of it growing enormously until the point is no point at all and the darkness is chased from your eyes by the great swirling disc of flame which fills your vision. Only at its center does the searing light abate, for there, still rushing towards you, is a beautiful structure: a work of sublime artistry etched in flame rather than stone, a tracery which suggests no pedestrian shape but a hazy web of impossible intersection ordained in the madness of dream and only there perceptible. Here, in other words. Indeed, what could be seen only as indecipherable beauty is here laid bare for your understanding, perfectly sensible and comprehensible. And you do understand. Now, at last, you are free to satisfy your curiosity and read in those lines all the ancient knowledge and cultivated technique of the families which constructed it, to clearly see precisely how-

it vanishes. On the cusp of revelation you are plunged into darkness. Then you are awake. The soft lapping of waves and harsh grating of the rowboat’s prow return to your ears. The musty chemical-ocean smell of the water returns to your nostrils. An artistically shaped point of stone jabs uncomfortably into your back. You open your eyes, and see Liliesviel’s beautiful, innocent, sweetly worried face peering down at you.

“It should be complete,” she says, once satisfied that you’re awake. Her tone, you note, is far less certain than you’d like. “How do you feel, Alberich?”

“Just fine.” As you sit up and get to your feet you find that you feel no different from when you laid down. Slightly stiff from the passage of time, perhaps, but certainly not as if harmed by some ritual error. “Should I feel a change of some kind?”
“No.” Liliesviel shakes her head and gives you a smile, her mind seemingly cleared of worry. “I just wanted to be sure. We can go now, unless,” she raises a playful eyebrow “you have some other business here.”

You return her smile, and in lieu of answer reach down and sweep the girl up into your arms, eliciting a startled squeak and burst of high laughter. “My only business here is to carry you off,” you growl in mock threat. “You shouldn’t have been fool enough to let another’s Servant get you alone. Now I’ll pitch you into that deadly lake of yours!” Amidst peals of girlish laughter, you stride back to the edge of the platform and jump back into the rowboat, sitting down between the oars with Liliesviel on your lap and setting the craft to wavering dangerously with your impact. After reaching out a hand to steady it, you give a hearty push that sends the boat spinning around to face the promontory from whence you came and set off, rowing back with steadier strokes than on your first trip.

For a while, you seem to have snatched another moment of happy peace from this War. You’ve come and achieved your goal unmolested, passed through an emotional storm with the renewed trust of your companion, and now that same girl leans contentedly back against you, smiling up at you as she swings her feet idly below the bench on which you sit.

You’ve come perhaps halfway through your return crossing when your moment of peace is brought to a blunt end by the insidious sound of trickling water. Somehow a hole has been sprung in the thick, wood of the rowboat’s hull, and it’s rapidly filling and sinking. To compound the infuriating quality of the moment, you’re distracted from looking for a solution to your problem by the intervention of a cultivated baritone voice resounding from an uncertain point in the darkness around you.

“Saber,” he proclaims, “you have reached your end.”

This, then, must be the unseen assailant who’s doggedly followed you today. From his utter lack of presence, his unfamiliar voice, and his ability to pass Stachel, he must be Assassin.

[ ] “Are you mad? Do you realize that she’s the Lesser Grail? If we plunge into this lake, the Holy Grail War will be ruined!” (Duty)

[ ] Ignore the man’s words and focus on action. Stretch out a tendril of Nothingness to pull yourself and Liliesviel back to the Greater Grail before the boat can sink. (Self-Preservation)
[X] Ignore the man’s words and reach for the ceiling of the chamber with a tendril of Nothingness, to carry yourself and Liliesviel back to the promontory. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

In circumstances like these, there’s no time to lose. With the deadly energy-draining liquid of the Greater Grail’s surroundings surging up below your feet, you haven’t time to take the bait of your assailant’s words or retreat towards the Greater Grail; the only thing to do keep advancing towards your goal, while putting as much distance between you and that abyss below as possible.

No sooner have you made that conclusion than the method presents itself to your racing mind. Within yourself you open the door that faces into the void and let the Nothingness pour through, impressing the substance of impossibility on the material world in the form of the tendrils that have become in these past few days as reliable to you as secondary limbs. You stretch five of them out from the shadows of your cloak, proportioned to prioritize speed; each is narrow enough to pass for an ordinary gift-wrapping ribbon. With all the rapidity you can draw from Ayaka’s supply of magical energy, you send the five tendrils flying up into the darkness above, questing blindly for your salvation.

After tense moments that seem to drag like hours, in which you are acutely aware of each millimeter by which the elixir of death creeps closer to Liliesviel’s precious skin, your searching is rewarded. The ceiling is there, made invisible by the darkness of this cavernous chamber but nevertheless within the reach of your tendrils at their full extent. Certain now of their contact, you turn the finesse of control you’ve cultivated to reshaping them, forming the ends into threaded cones like the points of great screws and driving them into the stone at five points spread evenly outward from that directly above you. Once they’re firmly anchored, you wind the tendrils together so that in a short time the ribbons stretch down through the darkness to you as a single thick length of rope.

With one hand gripping the rope of Nothingness and the other clutching Liliesviel to you, you haul yourself up and away from the sinking boat at the last moment as, with a sucking gurgle, the wood formerly occupied by your feet sinks beneath the inky surface of the stygian pool. Hanging motionless, you sweep your eyes about you, probing the darkness in vain for any sign of your foe. No doubt he thinks you trapped and immobile. Perhaps, you consider, he simply intends to wait for your magical energy to run dry, whereupon you’ll be forced to plummet into the water. More fool him, if that is his plan.
Assassin demonstrates that you’re rating him a tad too low, however, as the rock above your head begins to give way with ominous scraping and cracking. One of your five anchors falls entirely free of its socket amidst a hail of tiny chunks and flakes of stone, and the imbalance sends you swinging crazily off into the lightless subterranean emptiness like a maddened pendulum until, with an invisible smile, you decide to show Assassin what he hasn’t seen.

With a force that could only have been produced by magic, your tendrils of Nothingness tighten, retract, and turn upwards in defiance of all physical laws to send you hurtling towards your goal, the place where you know the carved and tapering promontory to be. At the point of your own greatest momentum you release your hold on the ribbons, materializing your armor as you do so to depart your mooring like a bizarre jagged projectile, some strangely weaponized bit of statuary flung by an inverted trebuchet. Then there are a few moments of tension and even fear as, with no visible sign of your course and no tangible hold on your surroundings, you sail through the gulf of black uncertainty on wings fashioned only of your confidence in your memory. If your calculation of your own position should be a few meters off, or your memory of the promontory inaccurate by a negligible degree...

But the fear lasts only a moment before your boots hammer into the expected masonry and the dim, magically powered candelabra that line the walls appear once more before your eyes. You’re standing before the archway by which you entered, your back to the Greater Grail. No hostile presence can be felt behind or before you, but the knowledge of Assassin’s presence is enough. It seems you can feel his malevolence with your mind, as if another sense of presence beyond that which feels magical energy has suddenly been awoken to warn you, beyond all shadow of a doubt, that Assassin will not allow you to escape. But where is he? Back behind you, floating amorphously in the darkness over the water? or has he rushed past you already to set his next trap somewhere on the stairs, where a cleverly timed misstep could send Liliesviel falling to her death? Perhaps, though, both conjectures are wrong, and he hangs above you even now, clinging insect-like to the inside of the arch which looms before you.

You clamp your teeth down on your tongue, forcing your mind back into clarity and chasing the creeping dread from it with tangible pain. The Assassin’s ability of Presence Concealment may be a weakness of yours, and it’s true that of all the classes of Servant it is this sort of foe which you’re least well-acustomed to facing, but that’s no reason to let your emotions overmaster you. Assassin’s attacks up until now have been uniformly lackluster; from all appearances, he’s a subpar Heroic Spirit
and quite likely to be the weakest Servant of the War. You need only choose how to proceed, and meet whatever foolish effort he makes to oppose you directly.

[ ] Spare no more thought to the failed Assassin. With your goal at the Greater Grail completed, make your way back to the surface and from there home. (Pride)

[X] Resolve to finish Assassin here. Block the archway up with Nothingness, and force your enemy to show himself if he wishes to leave. (Duty)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

A black flame of rage kindles and swells within you at this amorphous foe’s presumption, his aimless flailings and fruitless attempts on your life. You refuse to give him the satisfaction of seeing you hounded out of here by his tricks, fleeing before him like some pathetic creature! No, you’ll put an end to him here and damn whatever power you might gain by killing him with Ayaka in tow!

First, though, you’ll have to lay eyes on the slinking vermin. As long as he’s free to move undetected in the dark you’ll remain unable to put an end to him. Very well then, you’ll test his patience and wait; not in the open, with your foe free to come and go as he pleases, as you did above the parking garage, though. This is a much better place for it, for here you have the opportunity to seal yourself in with Assassin by cutting off the sole exit.

With a tremendous outpouring of magical energy you summon up a great sheet of Nothingness, stretching out into a ruby and onyx wall that fills up the great arch with a smooth and flawless surface impenetrable to any foe who cannot either muster a greater energy and mystery in attacking it or dispel it by the snuffing out of your will which sustains it there. Now, with a new barrier hemming him in, Assassin will be forced to make his next move. Heiligöffnungschwert takes form in your hand as your eyes scan the darkness for any sign of motion. None appears. You step protectively in front of Liliesviel, keeping her in the shadow of your cloak so that a judicious activation of Kenōtis can shield her from an unforeseen attack. After what seems ages of tense waiting, your patience snaps and you roar a challenge into the darkness, words retaining an ingrained civility that both tone and emotion lack.

“Would you care to explain just what it was that made you think to sabotage the Holy Grail itself?” you demand. “If not for my intervention you’d have sunk the Lesser Grail into that lake!”

In reply, a mordant chuckle resounds into your ear, as if from a mouth mere millimeters from you. You swing around to cleave the hated figure in two, but there is
nothing by your side save air and Assassin’s next words seem to come from a great
distance, somewhere off above and before you, in the empty space over the Grail’s
deadly pool. “My reasons are my own,” he says, barely containing his mirth at
rebuffing your inquiry. “Know only this, that my Master would see you tormented by
the child’s loss; and so you shall soon be!”

As this last word’s echoes fade into the chamber’s abyssal darkness, the air is
rent by a cataclysmic rumble of grinding stone. Everything around you seems to be
vibrating and shifting at once, and a single conclusion rises to the forefront of your
mind: earthquake. Indeed, the stone beneath your feet and the water beyond it are
rolling as one fluid, and you know it will be scant moments before the promontory is
shattered. Moving lightly you hop back and with your empty hand snatch up
Liliesviel before she can lose her footing. In the next moment you’re forced to make a
leap for safety as a black wave crashes over the spot on which you stand. Remain here
much longer, and you’ll be dead in short order.

[ ] Get above the rolling stone and deadly water; get Liliesviel and yourself aloft with
a suspended platform of Nothingness and wait for the tremor to cease.

[X] Dispel your barrier on the exit and rush with all haste up the stairwell. Better to
get above ground entirely under such dire circumstances.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Thinking quickly, you decide there’s nothing to be gained by staying in this
place of churning stone and water. Even if it is possible for you to keep yourself and
Liliesviel safe from the surging waves, Assassin may well be able to collapse the
chamber entirely. You’ll have to abandon your plan of sealing him down here in order
to secure your escape. Obviously you’re playing into his hands, giving him the exit he
requires in exchange for your own survival, but there simply isn’t any alternative.

As the stone below your feet splinters into jagged shards and gives way to the
water, you leap back again onto surer ground and tighten your grip on Liliesviel,
clutching her to your chest. The girl is trembling against you, a part of your brain
separate from that which focuses on the danger observes, so you lean down and assure
her, “Don’t worry, Liliesviel; I’ll be sure not to jostle you too roughly,” hoping humor
will raise her spirits a bit.

Indeed she does seem to calm slightly at your words, although your
observation of this is limited to your sense of touch, with your other senses focused on
more vital input.
Sidestepping a towering black wave you turn on your heel and fly, speed ever-increasing, towards the still-unmarred wall of Nothingness which you raised a few minutes before. You cut off the energy which sustains it as you move, so that the solid barrier melts into a foggy illusion as you cut through it before vanishing entirely.

The moment you pass under the Roman arch, the ground seems to steady below your feet. Whatever seismic activity is going on is certainly at its worst in the chamber of the Greater Grail. Still, you don’t slacken your pace. You take the first few steps of the spiral stairwell at a run before deciding to hasten your progress still further by leaping across the stairwell, devouring height in ravenous gulps by crossing the shaft and ascending by half a rotation with each step.

As you ascend, the colossal rumbling and grinding below you fades, and it strikes you that there seems to be no earthquake damage at all in this outer shaft. Everything appears quite as sturdy and heavily built as you left it, despite being of concrete and generally less reliable than the solid stone of the inner chamber. Perhaps in triggering that earthquake Assassin was in fact making use of a more localized ability, you muse. In fact, when you replay the sights of that chamber in your mind, it does begin to seem that all of the damage was localized about your person; as if the earthquake had emanated from your own feet, and resounded exclusively through the promontory. If that were so, however, and Assassin were indeed causing you by some uncertain method to emanate seismic activity, it should surely have followed you out of the chamber. Manifestly it hasn’t, and neither has your assailant’s mocking voice. Despite his confrontational attitude he seemed content to let you escape.

Assassin’s power and motives remain something of an enigma, unfortunately. You’re confident in stating that he has some ability to cause the inanimate environment around his targets to become hostile, either through or resembling extremely bad luck; and that his Master is someone who bears you a strong grudge, likely relating to your relationship with Liliesviel. Is he tied to Yumigawa, then? Certainly if what Odysseus had to say about Circe’s ambitions was true, your basis would lack a concrete need for the Lesser Grail. At the same time, it’s difficult to justify someone who believes you hold a piece of his power which can be reclaimed in some way attempting to kill you in such an isolated place, without his own presence.

You’re shocked out of these thoughts by bright afternoon sunlight cresting the ridge of debris in emulated sunrise as you reach the final, surface level of the stairwell and scale the conical pit surrounding it. A few feet away from you, Stachel stands at the rim, looking concerned over the hasty manner of your exit. By your watch it’s four in the afternoon; in another hour, the sun will set. You ought to get back to the Shijou manor soon, you suppose.
[ ] Go back to the manor on foot, directly from here. (Duty)
[ ] Go looking for your car, and drive back to the manor. (Pride)
[X] Before leaving the area, interrogate Stachel about how Assassin could have passed by her and through the barrier. (Curiosity)
[ ] Say/Do something else. (Write in)

As you gaze across the pit carved out of Einzbern Tower’s shattered remains at Stachel, taking in her expression of bland surprise and vague concern, a seed of suspicion plants itself in your heart. How can Assassin have passed by her, and through Odin’s barrier, when Liliesviel set the maid out here for the express purpose of keeping watch over that barrier? You probe her expression with your eyes, seeking any hint of duplicity, any grounding for your suspicion to be found in a twitch of her lips’ curve or slant of an eyebrow; but there’s nothing there. The only emotion you can read in the maid’s face is concern for her mistress, peppered with surprise at your rapid leap up from the stairwell. You doubt the woman could be a traitor. All the same, even if her loyalty is unimpeachable there’s much to be gained from hearing her side of events. Perhaps she saw some sign of Assassin’s entry which didn’t alarm her, but could prove useful in your own endeavor to learn the secret of his abilities. Still carrying Liliesviel in your arms and well away from potential sharp edges in the ruins beneath your feet, you dismiss your armor and walk around the rim of the pit to stand within speaking distance of Stachel.

“We were attacked in the chamber of the Greater Grail,” you begin, in explanation of your flight. “I believe our assailant was the same as he who orchestrated the earlier attacks on us, and was the Servant Assassin. How is it that he was able to slip through the barrier and past you, Stachel? Did you observe nothing out of the ordinary while Liliesviel and I were down below?”

With your explanation resolving her confusion and the evidence of her eyes to assuage her concern for Liliesviel, Stachel returns to her customary expression of mechanical neutrality as she replies, “Several birds passed overhead, but none approached the catacombs’ entrance. Nothing else drew near while I waited for your return, Lord Alberich.”

“What about Otto’s barrier?” Liliesviel interjects. “Of course Alberich and I know you couldn’t have noticed Assassin,” she notes, dismissing the maid’s prior
report in a contemptuous tone. “You must have seen something happen to the barrier when he went through it, though.”

“Of course, my lady,” Stachel replies deferentially, lowering her eyes. “I am at fault for not detecting the focus of Lord Alberich’s question. The barrier’s energy remained constant at all times after you temporarily lowered it to allow us entry.”

So whatever Assassin’s means of entry was, it didn’t disrupt the barrier. How strange; if that’s the case, he can only have either followed directly on your heels or passed through the barrier by some means which would not interfere with its ordinary functions; yet the former implies he waited for quite some time while Liliesviel performed her ritual without interfering, while the latter would suggest mastery over a magical construct raised by a God. Neither seems plausible.

As you contemplate Assassin’s powers of infiltration, you turn your eyes back to the catacombs’ entrance. With the buildings on either side of the lot obstructing the afternoon sun, the pit sloping down to the stairwell has become an inky circle of shadow. As far as you can tell, the darkness being what it is, nothing is moving down there. Perhaps Assassin is still down in the chamber of the Greater Grail, or perhaps this is no more than a continuation of his thus-far perfect ability to conceal himself. In either case, it seems there’s little to be gained from remaining here.

[X] Travel back to the manor directly, covering the rooftops as you did on the way here. (Duty)

[ ] Locate your car and drive back. There’s nothing pressing you to rush to excess, after all. (Pride)

[ ] Say something more to Liliesviel and/or Stachel before departing the area. (Write in specifics)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

*If there’s any particular action or person you’d like to focus on taking when you return home, please note it.*

“We have no more reason to linger here,” you declare. “Let’s return to the Shijou manor. Liliesviel, do you mind if I carry you on foot? It will be rather cold, of course, but I’d rather not bother with the car when we know it’s been compromised by Assassin’s machinations.”
“Hmm-mm, that’s fine,” she replies without hesitation. “Just hold me tight, and I don’t mind the cold.”

“Excellent. Stachel, follow me.” With that, you begin scaling one of the neighboring buildings, using the protruding ventilation equipment that would formerly have been hidden by the side of the Einzbern Tower for your footholds. In short order you’ve made the rooftop, and can begin retracing your earlier route to return to the manor. Liliesviel seems deep in thought as you travel, and makes no effort at a conversation, so you’re left with your own contemplation.

Your mind has been working at the issue of Assassin’s mysterious nature up until now, but having gotten some distance from him with no further interference your thoughts turn to other subjects. Can you really trust Odin to have waited at the manor without taking action, when Liliesviel believes he has some nefarious plan in mind for the Holy Grail? What if he’s used some subtle, ancient magic of the northern Gods to influence Ayaka or Kōrakuhime in ways you’ll be unable to detect? In that case, though, it’s pointless to speculate, you decide; a hypothetical you can neither influence nor confirm is meaningless.

What about Circe, then? What could she be planning? Yumigawa spoke over the phone of his belief that you were a fragment of his own lost power, and certainly implied that Circe would help him to take that power back; yet her course of action so far seems strange given that as her goal. You would have expected the two of them to seek you out as quickly as possible, and strike without giving you a chance to retaliate: the same tactics you often used in the Grail War Judas hosted in his Akeldama. Circe’s tactics have been just the opposite, however. She’s been biding her time, acting indirectly, and now that she has finally entered the fray it’s been to target Liliesviel, seemingly with the aim of removing the Lesser Grail in order to presumably facilitate some sort of magic she intends to work on the Greater Grail.

How can these conflicting courses of action be justified? Is Yumigawa no longer in control, but merely a figurehead for some more shadowy scheme of Circe’s? The idea is difficult to credit, considering the significant deference and devotion to your cause that she demonstrated during your prior association. On the other hand, suppose everything Circe has done up until now has been part of a plan to somehow consume your power and give it to Yumigawa. If she’s been targeting the Greater Grail, is it possible that by linking yourself to it you’ve been playing into their hands? There’s a chilling notion. In the end, though, you conclude that there simply isn’t enough information at your disposal yet to formulate any certain idea of the intention behind Circe’s actions.
As you’re considering this, you leap over one alley and casually glance down to catch a glimpse of a man passed out on the street far below, half-in and half-out of the dying afternoon light. Faced with the incongruous unconsciousness, you suddenly think of Ayaka and the way she passed out after your overuse of her magical energy during your battle with Saber. Is she alright now, you wonder? With worry stealing into your heart, you reach out over the connection between Master and Servant.

‘I thought I might let you know that we’re en route, returning to the manor,’ you inform her with forced casualness, hiding your sudden concern. ‘What have you been spending your day at, Miss Ayaka?’

Drowsy but comfortable thoughts greet you in reply. ‘Oh, you know,’ Ayaka begins. ‘Just reading our old family journals. This stuff is really interesting, but a lot of it’s way too high level for me yet. I’ll need to do so much more studying before I can even understand enough to explain, I’m really making up for lost time now. It is pretty dry, though, so I guess I ended up drifting off while I was reading.’

‘I’m glad to hear you’ve found a fulfilling way of spending your time, Miss Ayaka,’ you reply. ‘Don’t let me take you away from your books. I’ll be back at about five, and we can discuss our plans for the evening then.’

‘Alright, Saber-san, see you then,’ comes the answer, and the connection between your minds fades into silence. It seems Ayaka was drained enough to pass out, but not harmed by your expenditure of magic. A fortunate thing, then, that you left when you did rather than staying down there and protecting yourself with Nothingness as you’d briefly considered. You’re not sure exactly what would happen if you pulled magical energy from Ayaka beyond the limits of her consciousness, but from your own memories of a sensation like veins filling with molten metal, you have little doubt the consequences would be dire.

“Alberich,” Liliesviel begins, startling you out of your thoughts, “Who do you want to kill tonight? I want to get back at that witch who attacked me, but cornering Assassin would also be good. Saber is still around somewhere too…” She trails off, looking questioningly at you.

[X] “Finding and cutting down the second Caster should be our first priority. Anyone who can face your Lancer on his own terms cannot be left to her own devices.” You want to have your own confrontation with Yumigawa as well, but now isn’t the time to discuss that. (Pride/Self-Preservation)

[ ] “I don’t want to let this Assassin business fester. One way or another, we ought to track him down as quickly as possible.” After the slinking vermin tried so many times
to kill Liliesviel, you intend to put him through particularly excruciating torment. (Pride/Compassion)

[ ] “On the subject of Saber, I believe you should know...” There’s no reason to keep the truth of your having captured Saber from Liliesviel, is there? You’re sure she’ll understand wanting to take advantage of the research ‘Shijou Tsubaki’ has done into controlling hostile Servants. (Compassion/Duty)

[ ] Say something else (Write in)

“Finding and cutting down the second Caster should be our first priority,” you declare. “Anyone who can face your Lancer on his own terms cannot be left to her own devices. Once we’ve returned to the manor, I intend to begin planning our attack on her posthaste.”

“Of course!” Liliesviel replies, her tone full of satisfied vindication. “In the end, doing away with her is the most important thing! I’ll have Otto find out where she is when we get back, and then we can all get revenge for my penthouse together! With you and Otto working together, there’s no way you could lose to anyone!”

“Yes, I’m sure that our cooperation will smooth things considerably,” you agree, thinking just the opposite. Not that her idea lacks merit entirely; if Circe is powerful enough to stand on even footing with Odin, you’d certainly want him by your side when attempting to kill her. The problem, of course, is with your intent. It isn’t to kill her; or at least not immediately, not without an exchange of words. The more you consider Circe’s actions, the less certain of your previous conclusions you become, wandering in a fog of motive uncertainty. You’ve got to have it out with the woman face to face, to hear just what it is she’s really after from her own mouth! Indeed, if you make your true nature clear to her she may well leave Yumigawa and return to your service. There’s the as-yet unknown fate of Adelheid to consider as well, an enigma the answer to which you certainly must find.

All of these aims, however possible they may be in and of themselves, are certain to be made nigh-unreachable if you go to the Yumigawa residence flanked by Odin and Liliesviel. Trying to engage in reasonable conversation with Circe while a god is bent on her destruction would be a fool’s errand; and what if you should stick to your role and attack her wordlessly? Your former Servant might well make some statement in the heat of combat that could seriously jeopardize your relationship with Liliesviel later.

Lost in pensive consideration, you sail from skyscraper to skyscraper through downtown, transformed by the setting sun from a mundane city into a network of
crystal spires shot through with gilded rays, all thrusting up from deep shadow with their lowest floors lost in darkness. You realize you’ve let the conversation lapse into silence when you feel Liliesviel’s small hand tightening her hold on your lapel. You glance away from your course to look at the girl and find her prior brightness fled; she looks up at you now with only worry in her expression.

“...Be careful, okay, Alberich?” The words come out in a small voice, a barely audible confession of fear for your safety. “I know you won’t lose, but... just be careful fighting that witch, alright?”

“Don’t you worry,” you reply, giving her a confident smile. “Wait and see. I won’t be so much as scratched.”

After about 45 minutes’ travel, you return to the Shijou Manor. By now the last rays of the setting sun barely touch the tips of the roof’s peaks and cones, giving the red building an impression of flame. When you enter and set Liliesviel down, she turns and informs you, “I’m going to find Otto; do excuse me.” With that, the girl and her maid head off down the hall, leaving you alone in the Shijous’ luxurious entryway. You should definitely discuss your next moves with either Ayaka or Kōrakuhime, but which to prioritize?

[ ] Find Ayaka, so you can tell her about the ritual at the Greater Grail and make a plan to confront Yumigawa and Circe. (Duty)

[ ] Find Kōrakuhime, and discuss what consult with her regarding tonight’s plans and Liliesviel’s intervention. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Get Ayaka and Kōrakuhime together, so you can tell them about the ritual at the Greater Grail and make a plan for your confrontation with Yumigawa and Circe. (Duty/Self-Preservation)

The best thing to do, you decide, is to gather Ayaka and Kōrakuhime together and discuss the matter of your plans for the night with both of them. Based on your last conversation you’re fairly sure Ayaka will still be in the library, so you’ll begin by looking for Kōrakuhime. Odds are even, you suppose, whether she’ll be in her bedroom or downstairs in Vaisset’s laboratory working on her attempts to control Arturia, so you set off for the basement; it’s a shorter trip.

As you’d hoped, Kōrakuhime is hard at work once again, sitting behind her appropriated desk and scrutinizing a baffling set of magical diagrams; no less diligent
for her human disguise. She looks up at the sound of your entrance, setting down the papers and turning to face you.

“Ah, Ani-ue... you’ve returned,” she says, giving you a slim smile. “How are the results of your... new connection? Do you feel any change?”

“The ritual seems to have gone well, though the circumstances surrounding it were far from ideal,” you answer shortly. “Follow me upstairs, and I’ll tell you and Ayaka all about it. We have a great deal to discuss.” Without waiting for her reply, you turn on your heel and begin ascending the stairs again.

“Very well, then... no need to rush,” follows you up the stairs, along with the click of Kōrakuhime’s shoes across the stone floor as she hurries after you. You don’t say anymore as the two of you make your way up to the library; no reason to tell Kōrakuhime anything now when you’ll just have to repeat it for Ayaka’s benefit.

Striding up to the library door, you try the knob, but find it still locked. This morning’s uncharacteristic preference for solitude on Ayaka’s part is still in force, evidently. All the same, you can hardly leave your Master out of things. You knock sharply, three times.

“I’m... fuwa~h... I’ll be there in a minute,” you hear Ayaka reply drowsily, interrupting herself with a yawn. A few seconds later the lock slides out of place and she opens the door to let you in, still dressed in the (now in slight disarray) cardigan ensemble you recall from this morning. “Hi, Saber-san,” she says, stifling another yawn. “Come in. What’s up?” As you and Kōrakuhime pass by her into the room, Ayaka’s eyes flick past you before widening in shock. The drowsiness quickly disappears from her tone and countenance as she lays eyes on Kōrakuhime’s human form. “And who’s this? Don’t tell me...”

“Ah, yes,” you say, reminded of the fact that Ayaka hasn’t seen her ‘sister’ yet. “Allow me to introduce you to your younger sister. Miss Shijou Ayaka, this is Miss Shijou Tsubaki. As you’ve been secluded here in your library, she’s played the part of hostess to our guests.”

“It is a pleasure to... finally ‘meet’ you, Onee-san,” Kōrakuhime says with a smirk, curtseyng to Ayaka with sarcastic politeness.

“Tsubaki,” the girl echoes dully. “So that’s your ‘sister’ in disguise, huh, Saber-san?” At your confirming nod, she flicks her eyes back to Kōrakuhime and adds “Neat trick,” with undisguised hostility. Even Ayaka’s constantly maintained pleasantness isn’t capable of withstanding Kōrakuhime’s provocations, you suppose. Then again, thinking back to their first meeting it could be that she didn’t need any prompting. What was it Kōrakuhime said about “getting territorial”? 
Enough musing on the relationship between the two girls. You settle into an armchair; the same, you realize, as that which you had first sat in when learning how to begin your elemental manifestation. Ayaka and Kōrakuhime take their seats on either side of you, facing one another while leaving the chair opposite you empty. Not that either girl actually is facing forward. Each of them is turned in her seat to regard you while studiously ignoring her ‘sister’.

“So,” Ayaka begins, tone carefully bright, “where did you go today, Saber-san? You didn’t even tell me you were going out.”

“As far as we have discussed the matter,” you begin, “I am working with Liliesviel because the power of her Servant makes her a useful ally in battle. That was my original reason for visiting her with you, of course, but during our cooperation it’s come to my attention that she can help me in another way. Once the Holy Grail War is completed, and all Servants but myself have perished, Liliesviel will be able to conduct a ritual with the Holy Grail to stabilize my existence, so that I might persist after the end of the War. Today I worked with her to complete a preliminary ritual necessary to the function of that later ritual.”

As you explain, the pleasant expression falls from Ayaka’s face. Her eyebrows droop, then twitch slightly. Her lower lip quivers. “You didn’t tell me about this?” she asks, voice receding to a choked whisper. “You didn’t think I’d want to know you’d found a way to survive?”

“I understand how you feel about Liliesviel,” you explain, making your tone as calming as possible and privately thanking the absent Gods that Ayaka isn’t seeing Kōrakuhime’s repressed mirth. “It wasn’t essential that you know, and I thought you might be hurt to find out that I was relying on her for anything more than her Servant. This doesn’t change what I told you before about your superiority as a Master, I want you to understand.”

“Oh, Saber-san,” Ayaka gushes. “Don’t you get it?” She pulls off her glasses to dab furiously at her eyes with a handkerchief before continuing, “I was worried about you! I’m so glad you don’t have to be afraid of disappearing at the end of the War; I mean, you talked about incarnating yourself with the Grail, but we didn’t even really know if it was possible. Now... now...” she lapses into tears for a moment, then composes herself enough to finish, “I’m happy for you, Saber-san; but I really wish you would have told me. Here I was, going through my mother’s papers and hoping she’d written anything concrete about what the Grail could do, and you knew all along how you’d make it through!”
“Please accept my apologies, Miss Ayaka,” you say, giving her a gallant smile to encourage her tears to dry. “I had no idea you’d take the news so well. You’ve truly become much stronger since your first conversation with Liliesviel, I see.”

“If the melodrama is quite finished...” Kōrakuhime interjects acidly, “I believe you had some reason for bringing me away from my work, no, Ani-ue? What was it you had to tell me, that required the three of us to be together?”

Ayaka, still a little damp, looks affronted at Kōrakuhime’s comment, and you shoot her a glare of reprimand that washes over her impassive expression without impact. “If we must rush on, very well,” you reply. “I would like to discuss future plans with the pair of you. To begin with, there is the matter of...”

[ ] “...our captive, in the basement. Kōrakuhime, how is your work into controlling her progressing?” (Add any other details, such as her potential Master or concerns about methods of control.) (Pride)

[X] “...Circe and Yumigawa. We’ll be making our attack on them tonight, and I’d like your opinions on a plan.” (Add any details of the plan, such as whether or not you intend to leave Liliesviel behind, and how if so.) (Duty)

[ ] Something else (Write in)

“To begin with, there is the matter of Circe and Yumigawa,” you explain. “We’ll be making our attack on them tonight, and I’d like your opinions on what our plan ought to be.”

“Um...”

At Ayaka’s query, you turn from Kōrakuhime to face her again. She’s giving you a blank, unclear look. “Ah.” You realize she doesn’t know Circe’s name, or what she’d have to do with Yumigawa; you didn’t tell her last night, of course. “Circe is the true name of my Servant from Caster’s imitation Grail War,” you explain, “and of course you’ll recall that my identity in that War was that of your schoolmate Yumigawa; it seems the two of them are still working together now.” You can’t help clamping your hand down on the arm of your chair as you explain the unpleasant fact, using it in lieu of clenching your fist. You are able to keep your tone and expression level, though.

“Oh, thanks for filling me in,” Ayaka says, nodding with the kind of eager enthusiasm that tells you she’s still making a conscious effort to compose herself after
the emotional shock of a few moments ago, and hasn’t quite finished. “I guess you have to defeat them to win the Grail War too, huh? What do you want to do?”

“I would like to know that... as well,” Kōrakuhime adds. “Even for a Saber with your Magic Resistance, attacking a powerful Caster in her territory is... a dangerous prospect.”

“If all goes well, my plan will eliminate that particular source of difficulty,” you say, smiling as you prepare to reveal the results of your contemplation during the trip home. “To begin with, we will leave in two parties. The first party, Kōrakuhime and Futodoki, will depart here concealed, traveling incognito to a rendezvous point near Circe’s abode. At the same time, Liliesviel, Ayaka, Lancer, and I will leave here with the obvious purpose of making our attack on Circe. Now, can you see what is wrong with this basic plan?”

“It doesn’t really seem like your ‘sister’ is doing anything useful,” Ayaka says, almost looking innocent enough to make the slight appear accidental.

“More importantly,” Kōrakuhime cuts in, “a raiding party such as... that which you describe would never... see your foe. Circe has been cautious until now; she would hide or flee, rather than face... the Servant who fought her to a standstill last night with... the aid of a dangerous Saber.”

“Both of you are correct,” you reply. “Excellent. It is true that I have no role for Kōrakuhime in the plan, and it is also true that for Lancer and I to actually attack Circe together would be pointless. That’s why we’re going to stage a falling out partway there. This squabble will lead to an armed battle which will end in a draw, and I will retreat towards you with an appearance of having been weakened suitably to represent easy prey. That should be sufficient to draw Circe out of her hiding place, if I am any judge of their intentions.”

“So how is it that... I play a part in this stratagem of... yours?” Kōrakuhime asks. “Lancer also seems... to have no role save to squabble with you.”

“Your role will be to protect Miss Ayaka and support me against any particularly problematic magic Circe might employ,” you explain. “As for Lancer, perhaps he can work at undoing the magic Circe has worked on her home; or simply wait in the wings to intervene should the worst come to pass in my own battle. Unless I’m pushed into a truly dire predicament, I would rather not see him involved in this battle. There is the possibility that Yumigawa will have gathered allies, as well.”

“You must be hoping you can talk your old Servant out of fighting because you know her from before, right?” Ayaka says, focusing almost exactly on your true goal in a surprising show of clarity. “And you’re worried that Einzbern girl will have her Servant kill her right away, like Berserker. I’m not sure if that’s a good idea.”
“That’s nearly right, Miss Ayaka,” you answer. “I do hope to find out just why it is she betrayed me, and whether or not I can bring her back to our side. What are your concerns about the notion?”

“Well, if she was your Servant in the other War, but decided to become your enemy anyway, how can you trust her?” Ayaka begins, explaining her reservations with some hesitance. “Besides, she sent her Servant to try and kill Father Antaglio, so she’s definitely an enemy of the Holy Grail War. I just don’t think it seems safe to try and work with someone like that. Wouldn’t it be better for you to just attack her instead?” This is quite the unexpected shift from the girl, you think. Her manner is still the same quiet, shrinking violet persona she’s had since you became her Servant, but this kind of bloodthirsty call to put violence before diplomacy is a first.

“You do have a point in saying that it wouldn’t be wise to trust her,” you admit, “but all the same, I would like to have some sort of conversation with the woman before cutting her down.”

“Putting aside... whether you prefer to recapture the nymph’s... allegiance, or take her heart in a more... literal sense,” Kōrakuhime interjects, “I would like to know... just what the purpose Lancer plays in your plan is. His primary function seems to be... as an obstacle to be removed. Why include him... at all?”

“Aside from the fact that he would be enormously useful should tonight end in a battle to the death?” you ask rhetorically, raising an eyebrow. “I promised Liliesviel that we would make this attack together, and I don’t intend to break my word to her.”

“Indeed.” Kōrakuhime gives you a flat stare, pausing for a few moments before moving on to her next question. “Now, this stratagem of yours depends on the notion that Circe will... leave her territory to attack you. Up until now, however, she has indirectly... struck at the overseer and... directly assaulted the Lesser Grail. What makes you think... she will attack you after your dispute, and not... the Einzbern Master?”

“My conversation with Yumigawa over the phone, as well as the fact that I’ll be injured,” you answer. “From what he told me this morning, the two of them hope to transfer my abilities as a Servant to Yumigawa somehow. With that goal, they can hardly ignore such a tempting opportunity.”

“Perhaps,” Kōrakuhime says, but purses her lips in dissatisfaction despite her acceptance. “It does seem to rely rather heavily on the notion that Yumigawa... was telling you the truth... but I suppose it should be efficacious, generally speaking. Ah, one other detail,” she adds, raising a gloved index finger.

“Yes?” You nod permission for her to go ask.
“For your plan... all of us would... be leaving the manor at the same time,” she begins. “This would leave our captive... unguarded. Do you think that’s wise?”

[ ] That’s not something you can worry about now, when you need everyone possible taking action in tonight’s battle. Tell Kōrakuhime to make the barrier around Arturia as strong as possible, then leave the captive alone for the night. (Self-Preservation)

[ ] You suppose she has a point. Last night you left Kōrakuhime behind to guard Arturia, and tonight should be the same. Who knows what could happen while you’re away otherwise? (Duty)

[X] It’s true that you don’t want to leave Arturia here unguarded, but you also don’t want to compromise your plan by leaving Kōrakuhime behind. Suggest that perhaps your absorption magic will be enough to put Kōrakuhime’s control research into play tonight, before the battle. (Pride)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“No,” you say, nodding pensively as you think on the subject. “I don’t suppose it would be quite prudent to leave Arturia alone here. On the other hand, to leave one of our combatants here would compromise our fighting strength against Circe tonight. I don’t suppose,” you say, raising an eyebrow at Kōrakuhime, “we might be able to put your research on controlling Arturia into practice tonight, with the help of my Absorption?”

Kōrakuhime’s eyes widen for a moment in a tiny display of shock. She considers it, though, laying a finger against her lips and thinking for several seconds. Finally she says, “Yes... I suppose we... could. I would like to continue researching the process for... a few more days, but we could attempt to convert her by a reversion to... her prior state of control suggestibility imposed... by the Eightfold Barrier, with your Absorption taking the place... of the force she experienced in the past... yes, I think it could be done.”

“Hold on a moment,” you cut in. “About this receptive state; when you first suggested it to me, you called is a transformative state of magical slavery, and Arturia herself has spoken of being under the power of Avenger at some point in the past. Isn’t it likely that those states are the same? If you return her to that state, are you sure you won’t be bringing Avenger’s influence back into the world?”

Kōrakuhime sniffs disdainfully. “Of course... not, Ani-ue,” she says. “To put her... in Avenger’s power, I would need... to first bring her into contact with that
being; as it is, there is some... debate over whether or not it... exists in the world at all, at present. Assuming that the state I have detected recorded... in her soul is indeed the period during which she was... a tool of its will, that would have been a... two-part system. Arturia, brought into a state proper to be controlled, and Avenger, the controlling influence. If we reproduce her state now... your magic would be taking the place of Avenger’s power. That was... the missing piece that seemed to make it impossible when I first... encountered the concept in my analysis of her spiritual... composition.”

“Excellent,” you say with a smile, “In that case, it seems my worries have been assuaged. Are there any preparations you’ll need to make, or can we perform the ritual immediately?”

“No,” Kōrakuhime replies, shaking her head as she gets up from her chair. “All of the external components have... already been worked into the talismans that form the outermost layer of Arturia’s barrier.”

“Well then, let’s waste no time,” you say brightly, and get to your own feet. As you make for the door, though, you realize Ayaka has stayed seated, and is wearing the same oddly neutral expression that was on her face when she looked through the barrier at Arturia. “Come along, Ayaka,” you say, beckoning. “Wouldn’t you like to be there for our final victory over that woman?”

“No thanks, Saber-san,” she answers, in a colorless tone. “I think I’ll stay here and read. You just let me know when you’re done, alright?”

“Very well then, Miss Ayaka,” you say, giving your Master a gallant, if slight, bow as you exit. “I’ll be back shortly.” If that’s the way she feels about it, you can hardly compel her to come down and watch; and it isn’t as if you need her there for the ritual anyway. Still, as you make your way downstairs you can’t help wondering what she feels behind that flat, opaque expression. It would be sensible for her to hate Arturia for the death of her brother; at the same time, you can easily imagine a girl with Ayaka’s gentle personality pitying the imprisoned knight. Whatever she feels, though, you wouldn’t expect her to be able to keep it so well-concealed given her usual transparency. It’s strange.

Still, you can’t dwell on your Master’s maiden heart forever. You return your focus to your immediate surroundings as you enter the chamber where Arturia is held. The slim girl looks, to your eyes, more drained than when you met with her this morning. There’s a despair in her expression, where only defiance appeared entry. She’s beginning to break, you think with a shiver of sordid delight. What a lamentable missed opportunity; to think you haven’t the time to see her reach her mental nadir on her own, without the aid of magic!
Arturia makes no motion in reaction to your entrance. Propped up as she is by her chair, she already has little choice but to face you. Only from a slight movement of her eyes can you see she’s paying any heed to the world around her at all.

“Good evening, Arturia,” you say, filling your voice with false friendliness and authentic cheer. “Tell me, how has your stay here been today? Everything to your satisfaction? Have you had any fascinating new experiences you’d like to share with me?”

The woman stares silently for several seconds, leveling the force of her dull, despondent hatred at you with her gaze. Finally she answers, “No, Alberich, I have not. Are you here to execute me at last, or is there something more you believe you can obtain from me?”

“No, no, no,” you say, shaking your head in mock disappointment. “You’re far from the mark, I must say. No, the subject of tonight’s visit is far more exciting than this morning’s. I’ll give you a hint, and see if you can guess. Tonight I’m here to do something that you’ve been expecting me to from the moment I captured you.” You raise an eyebrow and add in a tone suggestive of absurd self-confidence, “Perhaps you’ve even been hoping for it, hmm?”

That gets a rise out of your resigned captive. She struggles gratifyingly in her bonds for a moment as she hisses, “I would never hope for anything that I might expect from a monster such as you!” Then the meaning of her words seems to hit her. She goes pale, and says in an almost inaudible voice, “You could not mean... you really are...”

“For the last time, Arturia, I am not Avenger,” you say, in the weary, indulgent tone of a father correcting a child’s persistent but harmless mistake. “I do intend to borrow his methods, however. Kōrakuhime, if you would begin the ritual.”

Your sister steps forward to stand beside you, her human disguise discarded in favor of her Servant costume. Her lips are moving rapidly, you can see, but her words are barely audible and indecipherable. As she continues the whispered chant, Kōrakuhime presses a finger to one of the bobbing talismans, tracing a pattern that follows one of the intricate brush strokes. When she removes her finger, the line that has felt her touch begins to glow with a bizarre purplish hue. The quality is soon replicated by the other talismans, and the circle of papers ceases to bob gently up and down, stabilizing at the level of your waist. Then their motion about the circle increases its pace, gradually going from a slow drift to a consistent rotation, and then speeding up further to a hectic whirling that almost blurs the papers together.

Within the circle, you can see the effect the magic is having on Arturia. She’s sitting rigidly up, pressed against the chair’s stone back, but her eyes are unfocused.
They look ahead at nothing, staring without direction from her mind. Her fingers
twitch periodically, and you can feel that a change is happening to the magical energy
that makes up her presence. The quantity and location remain the same, but
something in the quality of it is shifting. This feeling, you suppose, must be a
simplistic, intuitive version of the inspection Kōrakuhime has been performing on
Arturia’s spirit these past few days.

All at once, the talismans cease to spin. Within the circle, Arturia has passed
out, slumping down in her chair, and at the same time undergone a striking change.
The clothing she wears, a royal blue dress ordinarily manifested under her armor, has
become black and undergone a design shift. Her bright golden hair seems to have
become slightly paler as well, though that may be no more than a trick of your eyes,
created by the contrast with her dress. Her eyes have certainly change, irises
transformed from blue to golden. Strangest of all, however, is the fact that her
cowl, which remained persistently aloft throughout battle, confinement, and sleep,
has vanished.

“Quickly, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime urges, shocking you out of your
contemplative state. “Step through both circles and use your Absorption to bind her
will to yours, while she remains in a receptive state!”

Following her instructions, you step over the intricately carved barrier circle
and brush past the floating talismans. Once you’re within arm’s reach of Arturia, you
turn your attention inward and begin your part of the ritual. The door into Emptiness
within you opens, and through it flows Ayaka’s Od, becoming yours as it enters your
magic circuits. You take hold and shape it, focusing on giving it the form of the
attribute you desire, imbuing your energy with the property of Absorption through
pure conception, neither chanting nor relying on external tools but only focusing on
the pure, ineffable form which anchors the concept of Absorption into the
consciousness of the universe.

You reach out, press the palm of your hand against the Arturia’s forehead, and
let the magical energy flow out of you and into her, manifesting the Absorption as
Emptiness, that element best suited to seep into the structure of her existence and
poison it with your influence. As the link is established, and you feel the key portion
of her independence momentarily absorbed into your own spirit, you focus your will
on it. In your mind’s eye you take hold of the drifting spirit of Saber and carve into
her the impulse to serve you and work to achieve your goals as an iron rule that can
never be broken. From this moment onward, in the wake of your magic, she will no
longer be a king but a retainer, a knight more perfectly bound to your service than
ever she was to that of chivalry or Britain.
You let the magic fade, and the link between you dwindles. It does not fully disappear with your magic, however. Instead, you continue to feel, though you drop your hand and step back, an energetic connection that you recognize well from your time in the Akeldama. It’s the link between Master and Servant, the same flow of energy you once felt traveling from your Od to Circe and Adelheid, and which you’ve spent the past week experiencing the other side of.

Status Updated

Despite this clear sensation, no command spell has appeared on your hand. Neither does an answer reveal itself in Arturia’s appearance; to outside eyes the unconscious girl looks no different from her appearance prior to the use of your Absorption. When you look a question at your sister, though, she can obviously see something which you can’t, something which confirms the situation for her.

Kōrakuhime wears a triumphant, almost joyful grin; an energetic expression that contrasts utterly with her usual subdued manner. Evidently right now she’s too pleased with herself to care, though.

“Marvelous!” she exclaims. “We’ve done it, Ani-ue! Controlling a Servant without a command spell! You should be feeling the connection between a Master and Servant now, no?”

“That’s correct,” you say, “it does feel as if she’s become my Servant, but-”

“Wonderful!” You’re cut off by another exclamation of glee from the successful researcher. “That’s it then! An enemy made into an ally! A will reshaped! A-”

“Listen!” you snap, grabbing her roughly, pulling her face to yours and instantly silencing her. “Is Arturia drawing her energy from me now? Ayaka can barely produce enough magical energy to supply me as it is. We cannot have another draw on her magic circuits!”

“We~ll.” Kōrakuhime says, drawing out the syllable as she regards you with oddly unfocused eyes, “that is... the arrangement, I am... afraid. If you want her... bound by your magic, you must... keep her linked to you. But it isn’t... as though you need her to fight. Perhaps you can... keep her in her present condition, with just... enough energy to live like a human... and make her into a housemaid. Or... you could supplement her from the leylines here... provided you don’t mind what becomes of the cattle, of course.” She lets out a giggle, plainly relishing the thought, and licks her lips.

“So? What will you do... Ani-ue?”

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[ ] There’s nothing for it. Until you can find some other energy source, Arturia will remain only human. At least now she’ll be a willing prisoner, and having the woman who humiliated you work as your maid does have a certain charm. (Compassion)

[ ] At this point, one more Servant drawing energy from the leylines of Tokyo can hardly cause greater harm. In any case, the burden will be reduced again once you’ve dealt with Circe. Have Kōrakuhime supplement Arturia’s energy that way. (Pride)

[X] Suggest another plan. (Keep Arturia as a maid most of the time, but supplement her power from the leylines if you need)

Now that you have her attention on the proper subject and she’s no longer boiling over with excitement at the subjugation of Arturia, you let Kōrakuhime go and step back to speak at a more comfortable distance. The look she gave you when you grabbed her, with those two-toned eyes half-lidded and carmine lips slightly parted, hardly gave the impression she was able to focus on the conversation. Your sister, you muse, has the strangest reactions to pain.

Contemplating the dilemma Kōrakuhime has put before you, the idea of an attempted compromise between the two ways of providing for Arturia seems most appealing. If you could find a way of supplying her with energy from the city’s leylines only in moments of crisis, and keeping her cut off and in a state equivalent to a human at all other times, that would be ideal. Is such a thing possible, though? Up until now you’ve only observed Servants with a single source of power: Kōrakuhime draws her energy entirely from the local Mana, you draw yours from Ayaka’s Od, Odin generates his own, and so on in this manner.

“Would it be possible,” you begin, “for you to create some sort of arrangement enabling Arturia to draw energy from Tokyo’s leylines only in short bursts, when I need her to fight; with her remaining in her present, nearly human state and drawing from my energy supply at other times?”

Kōrakuhime, now returned to her normal impassive appearance, gives you a slow, thoughtful nod as she replies, “My, you are full of... adventurous notions today, Ani-ue. Yes, I believe that... with the aid of a mystic code... we could supplement her magical energy in the manner you... describe. Take... a look!” With a sudden flourish, she reaches into her sleeve and withdraws a French maid uniform! The design is striking, particularly since Kōrakuhime has anticipated the type of humiliation you had in mind for Arturia, but more even notable is its location. For Kōrakuhime to
have lined her sleeves with talismans for use in her magic is simple enough to believe, given their small size, but additional clothing? Surely they aren’t that large.

“Kōrakuhime,” you say, eying her sleeve suspiciously, “did you...”

Before you can finish your question, though, she’s answering it; or rather, answering the question she assumes you’re asking. “That’s correct,” she says, brimming with barely restrained self-satisfaction. “I created this... costume myself, using my... Tool Creation skill! It’s a mystic code which enables its wearer... to more easily draw power from nearby leylines, without the constant need... to use one’s own magic for the purpose. Of course... you’ll be able to order her to stop whenever you like... due to the alterations we’ve made to her spirit.”

“You prepared that magic and tailored this to fit her, all in advance?” you ask, impressed enough to put aside her bizarre storage methods for the moment. “Well done anticipating me, Kōrakuhime! This is exactly the sort of thing I was hoping you might be able to prepare. It even has the perfect element of humiliation!”

For some reason, a faint blush colors your sister’s pallid cheeks at this praise. “It may... be slightly small for her, actually,” she says, very quietly, “but I should... have no difficulty adjusting it to fit.” She seems to recover, though, as she has another idea. “Oh, and why don’t we... make her go through a... transformation sequence when she needs to fight?”

“Transformation sequence?” You give the girl a blank look.

“Come now, Ani-ue, you know,” she says, pouting. “A transformation sequence... like a magical girl... You remember the mascot at that... theme park you attended with the Einzbern... girl, don’t you?”

“Ah, yes.” You do remember, now that she’s brought it up. There was an illustration in the park’s guidebook of the Lunar Princess going through all sorts of absurd poses and prancing dance steps as her ordinary clothing was replaced piece-by-piece with her costume as a magical girl. Yes, the idea of the dignified, ice-cold Arturia blushing furiously as she is forced to gradually dance her way through the materialization of her armor is a tantalizing one. “Excellent notion,” you say, nodding. “I’ll remember it.”

“I’m very glad you agree. Now... get out,” Kōrakuhime says, pointing to the door with a smile.

“Excuse me?” You’re almost too surprised to be angry at the sudden command from the girl.

Observing your boggle-eyed indignation, Kōrakuhime sighs. “Please get out, Ani-ue,” she amends. “I must... dress Arturia before she awakens, and would prefer not to do so in front of you.”
“Ah, yes. Of course,” you say, recalling Kōrakuhime’s flustered reaction to your surprising her in a state of undress before. “I’ll wait in the laboratory, then. You can bring her out when she’s awoken.”

With that, you walk out of the room, retreating to Vaisset’s old laboratory to allow your sister to dress your new maid in privacy. As you wait, you soak in the delicious anticipatory satisfaction of what you’ve achieved and what you have to look forward to. At last, the Servant who humbled you with such disgustingly self-righteous words and disdainful acts upon your first meeting is truly, completely in your power. Not only defeated, not only imprisoned, but reduced to a state even less capable of resisting your orders than a Servant ordinarily bound by a command spell.

What would be the most satisfying way to humble Arturia, you wonder. Having her cook for you, perhaps, and ridiculing her for her inferiority as a maid if her cuisine doesn’t measure up to Stengel’s cooking? Forcing the former King, accustomed to ignoring the trivial aspects of daily maintenance, to clean the Shijou manor from top to bottom? Perhaps you’ll have her be the one to kill Harris, allowing the pair of them to lament their errors together. Whatever you do, you hope she’ll retain enough of her old mind to appreciate the humiliation.

You’re surprised out of these contemplations by the sound of an enormously loud, dull smacking noise from down the hall, followed by a muffled thump. Things are apparently not so ideal as you’d hoped. You jump to your feet from the chair where you’d sat down to rest and rush back to Arturia’s cell. There, you observe a scene of disaster. Kōrakuhime is stretched out unconscious on the ground, a spreading purple bruise on her cheek. Arturia, by contrast, is on her feet outside of the former barrier, clad in a short, clinging maid uniform that thoroughly shows off her almost fay beauty. The impression is spoiled somewhat by the glare on her face and the fact that she has one arm still outstretched, her hand clenched in a fist in the immediate aftermath of knocking out your sister.

“Arturia!” you snap, rage filling you. At the shout, she twitches as if stung. “How dare you strike Kōrakuhime? I forbid you from raising your hand against her again! Cease taking in Mana this instant!”

“Kh!” She clicks her tongue, giving you a poisonous stare, but drops her fist to her side and reluctantly uncurls her fingers. “Don’t believe I’ll be loyal to you, simply because you’ve managed to take control of my actions,” Arturia hisses, sneering at you as she lowers herself back into the stone chair where she’s spent the last several days, crossing her legs and regarding you with scorn. “Now that I’ve felt your magic, I know just what sort of being you really are, Alberich. Nothing more than a false monster, an imitation of Avenger.”
“My, my, what a temper,” you remark, strolling lazily around the sofa to sit down across from her. “To think I was worried that you’d have lost your spirit. Tell me, Arturia, how does it feel to know that you’ll be spending your days slaving to accomplish the goals of one you think so lowly?” You give her a malevolent smirk. “To think you once left me for dead. Now, whatever you may say about me, you’re bound as my retainer, wholly in my power.”

[ ] “In fact, let’s see how far that power goes. I order you to cease your insolence, Arturia. Henceforth you’ll behave as an obedient, respectful maid.” (Pride)

[X] “Now, follow me. I have more important matters to address than your attitude.” After rousing Kōrakuhime, return to Ayaka. (Duty)

[ ] Say/do something else. (Write in)

“Now, follow me upstairs,” you order Arturia with a peremptory nod. “To your good fortune, I have more important matters to address tonight than your insolent manner.” With that you get up again, turning to leave. As you head for the door, though, your eyes fall again on the unconscious form of Kōrakuhime. “Wait there a moment,” you tell the maid, now at your heels. Then you crouch down to examine your sister. The bruise, though the result of an impact felt no more than a minute ago, is already beginning to fade; spurred on by the rapid healing of a Servant, unmarred white flesh pushes back the ugly purple blotch. Nothing serious, then.

You loop an arm around Kōrakuhime’s shoulders and prop her up, then shake her softly with the other. “Kōrakuhime,” you say into her ear, “are you alright?”

Drowsily, her eyes flutter open. She remains unfocused for only a moment, though, before her attention snaps to Arturia and she’s out of your arms, back on her feet and striding past you to face Arturia. “You!” she shouts, half-choked with rage. “You struck me! How dare you, you... you... dog! Worthless serving girl! Worm, alive only by Ani-ue’s grace!” In a paroxysm of fury, Kōrakuhime rips the silk glove from her right hand to reveal the talons with which she once threatened you. She draws back to slash at Arturia with her nails, hand poised to tear the girl’s throat out, but in the moment before she strikes your hand snakes out to catch her wrist from behind.

“Forget her insolence, Kōrakuhime,” you whisper into the girl’s ear, pulling her against your chest with one arm around her waist and the other holding her unveiled claw up, immobile. “Arturia craves death; she’d like nothing more than to have you lose your head and kill her, that her spirit might return to some future Grail
War for another chance at seeing her wish granted. I’ll punish her suitably, have no fear.”

Kōrakuhime goes limp in your arms, evidently swayed by your calming words and obvious ability to keep her restrained. “Very well, Ani-ue,” she sighs, and when you release the girl she pulls her glove back on without a glance at Arturia. Finally she storms out in a huff, calling back, “I will... await you in the library,” as she leaves. Through all this, Arturia has stood stiffly in place, not twitching a muscle save to glare at you and smirk at Kōrakuhime: bound, it seems, by your order to wait.

Once your sister’s footsteps fade out of earshot you step into the doorway yourself, to follow her up to the library. For a moment you consider simply leaving Arturia there, kept immobile by a new restraint in place of the old. You put the idea aside, though; you really ought to make your success clear to Ayaka, and there is Arturia’s potential as a combatant to consider. You’ve witnessed her power firsthand, and have high expectations of her as your retainer. “Now you may follow me,” you say, and make your exit.

“That woman has no sense of proportion,” Arturia remarks in a tone of cold rage as she catches up to follow at your side down the stone corridor. “First torturing me to no purpose, and now an attempt on my life after receiving no more than a fraction of the pain from me that I suffered at her hands. Alberich, I doubt she’s sane.”

“You have no sense of propriety,” you retort. “I would hope that you might have realized by the outfit you now wear what sort of role you now occupy. You have ceased to be a king, Arturia, and from now on you’ll serve me; and by extension my sister. A fact which reminds me,” you add, lips curving into a grin. “I can hardly have you calling me Alberich, with things as they are now. Henceforth you’ll address me as Master.”

At first you hear no reply, only the clicking of shoes as you and Arturia ascend the stairs out of the basement. After a silence of several seconds, however, she finally replies, in a tone of pure modulated resentment, “Understood.”

As you push open the door and step into the ground-floor corridor, you notice movement in the corner of your eye. Turning right to see what it might be, you lock eyes with Liliesviel. She, along with either Stachel or Stengel (at a glance, the two maids seem identical to your eyes), is headed down the corridor towards the stairs to the upper floors, and as you exited the basement you stepped directly into their path.

“Oh, Alberich!” she exclaims. “Perfect, I was just going to-” The excited smile vanishes from Liliesviel’s face at the same moment that her words cut off, as her eyes shift to the person behind and to one side of you, following in a mirror image of
“Who,” she says icily, eyes narrowed in suspicion, “are you?”

Arturia does not reply. Evidently your new maid has chosen this moment to take her first servile action, and defer to her master for explanation of her identity and reason for being here. Alternatively, she may simply be unable to speak German. In any case, you’ll have to supply Liliesviel with the information she wants.

[ ] Tell her the woman is a maid of the Shijou family’s. In her current state, Liliesviel should be unable to tell that she’s a Servant by her energy, and you’re loath to explain how it is you could dominate the mind of a Servant without a Caster making the ritual possible. (Self-Preservation)

[X] Tell her you she’s the Servant Saber, who you succeeded in capturing and turning to your side. It may be a bit implausible, but it isn’t as if Liliesviel will doubt your words. (Pride)

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)

“Why don’t I explain,” you begin, hoping to smooth things over with a smile. Liliesviel’s focus shifts back to you, and as she does so something slightly playful comes into her suspicious glare. She laces her hands behind her back and bends slightly forward, as if to hasten understanding by drawing physically closer to your explanation.

“Oh? Are you going to explain this woman to me, Alberich?” Liliesviel asks, open hostility toward Saber still filling her voice. “Can’t she speak? You aren’t defending her, are you?”

“Nothing of the kind,” you say, meeting Liliesviel’s sudden and mysterious anger with obstinate cheer, “but I do believe your feelings towards her will reverse once I’ve revealed her identity. This, Liliesviel, is my new maid; thought perhaps the general term of servant suits her better: the original Saber of this Holy Grail War! I captured her in battle a few days ago, and with some help from the Shijou sisters succeeded in wearing down her Magic Resistance and taking control of her mind.”

Liliesviel blinks slowly, three times, as she takes in the shocking news. Finally, she utters in a stunned tone, “...what about her Master?”

“He’s still out there,” you answer dismissively, “but he no longer has any power over her. She receives just enough energy to manifest from me, and she’ll draw additional power from local mana for a short time when she’s required to do battle.”
“That’s amazing!” Liliesviel lets out an exclamatory of delight, brightening as quickly as moments ago she grew angry and clasping your left hand in both of hers. “You stole a Servant without a command spell? I didn’t know magic like that was even possible! You’ve really been doing your best for me! Although...” Excitement gives way again to a slightly menacing softness as her eyes shift back from you to Arturia. “Why did you give her a costume like that, Alberich?”

“Hm? What do you mean?” you ask. “It’s a maid uniform, as a reminder of her servitude.”

Liliesviel’s maid reacts to this statement with a sniff of disdain. It’s Stengel, then. “Allow me to elaborate, Lord Alberich, if you do not follow Lady Liliesviel’s question,” she says, sounding more than ever like an angry schoolteacher. “A maid’s uniform is a thing of this type.” She brings one hand up to draw your attention to her collar, while gesturing with the other to her skirt and apron. “Revealing no skin below the neck, modestly reaching the ankles, a black and white uniform that enables the servant to move unobtrusively through the shadows while protecting her from the dirt, dust, and grime she encounters while going about her household duties. *That* is a maid’s uniform. What that woman is wearing is a ridiculous costume! A parody, rather than a uniform!”

It’s a rather startling tirade, but you suppose that the woman does have rather conservative views on clothing. Moreover, her statements are evidently in line with the thrust of Liliesviel’s question; the girl nods with a satisfied expression as Stengel contrasts the two uniforms. Obviously you can’t explain Kōrakuhime’s design sensibilities, but you’re not entirely sure what else to say. You haven’t given the uniform much thought until now, beyond the fact that it is a maid uniform, and ought to be rather embarrassing for the former king wearing it.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to direct that question to Miss Tsubaki,” you answer blandly, shrugging at the irate pair. “I received the uniform from her; I would imagine that at some point the Shijou family had maids, and this was the uniform they wore.” Liliesviel looks dissatisfied with your answer, but there’s nothing for it; it’s the only one you have for her. “Now,” you continue, turning to Arturia. “Introduce yourself properly to Liliesviel.”

Arturia steps forward and, with a curtsy rendered somewhat absurd by her miniskirt and evident dissatisfaction, says in a voice devoid of emotion, “I am the Servant Saber, Arturia Pendragon. I am honored to make you acquaintance, Lady Liliesviel.”

“Hmm? Arturia...” Liliesviel considers for a few moments, before realization dawns in her eyes. “You’re the same Saber the Einzbern summoned in the Fourth
Heaven’s Feel, when we were betrayed by the magus killer! And Emiya said you were his Servant last time, too. It’s too bad you don’t remember,” she pouts, “having a Servant who’d been in three Grail Wars would be so useful.”

“Indeed,” Arturia replies tonelessly. Does she think you’re going to ignore her memories?

“As a matter of fact,” you interject, “while I had Arturia imprisoned, I discovered that there is a rather unique property to her existence as a Servant. For some reason, she retains memories of her past experiences being summoned.”

“Really?” Liliesviel beams up at the woman. “How interesting! How was it that Alberich managed to capture a veteran like you, then?”

[X] Allow Arturia to explain your battle. (Duty)
[ ] Interject with your own version of the story. (Pride) (Write in details)
[ ] Say something else (Write in)

Without so much as a twitch, Arturia coolly replies, “Being a coward, and unable to pose a threat to me in direct combat, Alberich turned to underhanded methods. He laid a trap for me, hiding in a tiny room which he filled with his arcane limbs. Taking advantage of the shock I would feel due to my past experience facing Avenger, upon whose limbs he doubtless modeled his own magic, he succeeded in immobilizing me, rendering me unconscious, and bringing me to this house, where I have been kept a prisoner for the past several days.”

“He~h?” Liliesviel smirks at Arturia’s story, then turns back to you. Interestingly, she doesn’t seem to feel the same vehement anger at Arturia’s insolence that her own maids’ former manner towards you prompted. Perhaps the girl feels it’s your duty to keep your own servants in line. “You really like to use that magic, huh, Alberich? You beat Berserker by tying him up, too. Rather than Saber, maybe your Master should be calling you ‘Captor-san’.”

“My elementalism does have a great deal of utility,” you say, defending yourself calmly. By now you’re used enough to Arturia’s constant insults that even in this circumstance you can save your anger for a more opportune moment. “I’ll remind you that we might have been killed by Assassin without it. In any case, there’s only so much one can do with a blade. Berserker had astounding regenerative capabilities, while Arturia was a Servant I particularly hoped to capture alive; you’ll recall that she and her Master were responsible for the death of my first Master, Ayaka’s elder
brother. I wanted to give my Master the chance to face her enemy, and as it happened was able to gain an additional benefit.”

“Doubtless your motives were wholly unrelated to the fact that I left you on the ground, helpless and with the point of my sword at your throat, the first time we did battle,” Arturia interjects sarcastically, “Master.”

Now your smile is becoming a bit strained, although the fact that you’re not actually facing Arturia helps. “I’d developed my powers significantly by the time of our second battle,” you point out, lacing your tone with a hint of menace. “If we were to have a rematch, armed only with swords; putting aside your trick of invisibility as well as my magical techniques, I believe you would find yourself losing your confidence.”

Arturia scoffs under her breath, but gives no further reply, while Liliesviel claps her hands together with a smile and air of finality. “Well!” she says brightly, “I think I understand the situation between you two quite well now! Thank you so much for bringing another Servant over to our side, Alberich; I’m sure she’ll be very useful. The reason I was looking for you was to talk about our plans for the night, though.”

“Indeed,” you reply, nodding. “What did Odin have to say about our enemy’s location? Did he have any other new information?”

“To begin with, he didn’t have any trouble finding this witch’s base. Apparently she’s built some kind of temple underground, below a little suburban house.” Liliesviel wrinkles her nose at the thought, apparently put off by some detail of Odin’s report. “Anyway, we can go and attack her whenever we like now he’s found her. There were other details that seemed strange, though,” she adds pensively.

“Oh?” You raise an eyebrow. “And who might those be?”

“More Servants that shouldn’t be here, as well as a Master,” Liliesviel says, eying you with that same worried expression she bore during your return trip to the manor. “At least one, anyway. Besides that Caster he calls ‘the Olympian girl’, Otto said there was a human magus and another young girl with the energy of a Servant, but not one he recognized and from a different time period. There are also a lot of things that he said were similar to Servants, but of inferior quality. They sound like the early experiments we did into turning Heroic Spirits into familiars to me.”

Now affectionate concern gives way to an angry pout, and the girl stamps a dainty foot as she continues, “That man must be trying to use his Caster to summon even more Servants, with no connection to the Holy Grail; stealing our family’s magic! If he manages to bring a real understanding of Servant creation outside our family, it would be even more awful than the imitation Lesser Grail fifteen years ago!”
Her expression shifts again, to a predatory smile of anticipation. “Alberich,” she says, in a voice of such sweet affection that it sends a shiver down your spine, “let’s kill that man together, okay? I can make sure he’ll stay conscious no matter how much it hurts, or how much of him gets destroyed, until we crush his head, so we can really make sure he understands what he’s done. Okay?”

“What a remarkable ability,” you reply, grinning at the new vistas of torment the notion opens for you to visit on Yumigawa; for that is the only possible identity of the human magus Odin found in Circe’s lair. “I’m not the only one of us with a surprise to offer today, I see! Here, now.” Reaching out, you pull Liliesviel up into your arms so the two ‘siblings’ can exchange an excited embrace despite your height difference. “We’ll be certain to have our revenge on that fellow at our leisure,” you croon into her ear, “for sending his Servant after your life, attempting to sabotage the Heaven’s Feel... for all that he’s done.”

With Liliesviel again assured of your sortie’s positive outcome and happy in your arms, you now turn your mind to how to secure that outcome. Regardless of what it may entail about Circe and Yumigawa’s magical pursuits, the confirmation of Adelheid’s survival and mysterious presence of these semi-Servant entities are significant strategic factors affecting the success of your plan of attack. As for what Adelheid’s survival might tell you about her loyalty, you push the unpleasant thought from your mind. There will be time enough to consider it later.

[ ] There’s no need for further considerations. Explain the plan as discussed with Ayaka and Kōrakuhime to Liliesviel. (Pride)

[X] Perhaps you should reconsider some details before explaining your intentions to Liliesviel. (Same plan as before, but have Saber at the ready to destroy Yumigawa’s house and the temple underneath with Excalibur Morgan as soon as we give the order. Which will hopefully be when Circe, Adelheid and Yumigawa come to confront the wounded Alberich. As a back-up plan, have her readied to Excalibur Morgan close to our own position on our order. This is only should they attempt to swarm us with Shadow Servants though, in which case we will activate Kenotis and dodge the direct strike to survive the Excaliblast, but this is only if the Shadow Servants do overwhelm us) (Self-Preservation)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

After some consideration, you decide that your plan of attack could use some alteration in light of the enemy’s increased numbers. With Adelheid confirmed to be
among your foes, as well as these mysterious Servant-like beings, you’ll have to adapt to the potential for being outnumbered by combatants more dangerous than Circe’s ordinary familiars. In fact, protecting Ayaka while feigning a wound will likely be impossible. You’ll have to send her off along with Kōrakuhime and Futodoki, masked by illusions. Fortunately that’s one aspect of the plan unlikely to draw too much suspicion; you’ve traveled alone with Liliesviel rather frequently over the course of the War, after all.

Now that you consider enlarging the hidden group, it strikes you that it would be wiser to send Arturia with them as well; from a remote position, she’ll be able to bombard Yumigawa’s home with her Noble Phantasm to disrupt Circe’s territory, hopefully cutting off her magical energy and putting an end to whatever ritual she’s using to sustain the Servant-like beings. The core of your plan remains the same as that you suggested to Ayaka and Kōrakuhime, however; now, all that remains is to put it to Liliesviel and hope she doesn’t take issue with the minimal role that she and Odin will play if all goes well.

“Before we can deal with the man in that house,” you begin, “We’ll need to do away with his Servants. Now, Liliesviel, do you feel we’re likely to be victorious if we make a direct attack on this Olympian woman’s territory, Lancer and I?”

“Of course!” she says with a beatific smile, and shifts delightfully against you as she turns in your arms to address you more easily. “I was worrying about it before, but I’ve just been thinking, here on your shoulder,” illustrating her remark, you feel a slender fingertip softly tracing a spiral at the point Liliesviel’s chin occupied a few moments ago. “and there’s no way she can win! That witch could only face Otto because she could fly around and avoid his magic. Since she’s hiding underground, he can observe the start of her magic and you two can be ready to attack her the moment she transports herself out! I bet you’ll cut her right in half; there’s simply no way a Caster like that could react to your sword, right, Alberich?”

“Yes, that would be the ideal situation, I suppose,” you concede, “although I do have another plan in mind for that Caster; but we’ll come to that in a moment. Now, the question is whether or not your situation would be achievable. I would say, no.” You raise a finger between her face and yours, preempting an immediate protest. “Consider the caution this woman has shown until now. For much of the War she has carefully remained hidden, and upon her first sortie she beat an effective retreat when victory became impossible; thus we know that she is both willing and able to escape from a disadvantageous situation. Now, considering the fact that she is a sufficiently potent magus to match Odin in a battle of magic, at least temporarily, and to master spatial transmission, I’m certain she has access to some sort of magic that might
enable her to keep her rivals under observation. What foe could be more requiring of
such observation than your Lancer, who fought her off before?"

“You don’t think they’ll be there when we arrive,” Liliesviel concludes.

“No,” you say, “I do not. I expect that Caster will observe our approach and
beat a hasty retreat as soon as she is certain we intend to attack her. This is not to say
that we would be making a complete waste of our evening; I’m sure we could find
some benefit in ransacking her workshop, but…” you pause for effect, as if seeking the
appropriate words to deliver bad news as gently as possible. “It wouldn’t be an ideal
outcome.”

“No, it wouldn’t,” Liliesviel agrees. Her eyes slide away from yours as she
looks into the middle distance, contemplating outcomes with a thoughtful expression.
“What do you think we should do, then?”

Perfect; her response is exactly what you’ve been hoping for, and considering
the touchier aspects of your plan it’s certainly of paramount importance that she be
as open to suggestion as possible. “Not to worry,” you declare, “I’ve devised a
strategy that will bring that Caster out to face us without fail. We simply divide our
forces. To begin with, at the same time that you, Lancer, and I leave the manor,
Ayaka, Tsubaki, and Arturia will depart along a different route, shrouded by the best
illusions the Shijou sisters can muster. If the enemy Caster ignores them, so much the
better; if she sniffs them out, she’ll believe them to be an intended ambush or
reinforcement group caught out while isolated, and attack; at which time, Arturia will
reveal herself as a Servant and hold the enemy off until we arrive.”

“That kind of trap could work,” Liliesviel says, an uncertain note still in her
voice, “but what do we do in your plan if that witch ignores your Master?”

“Ah, yes,” you nod. “That is the main thrust of the strategy. We three will
depart for our enemies’ home, but partway through the trip, we shall stage an
argument which leads to a battle between Lancer and I. The premise of our falling out
will be the idea that I am not an Einzbern homunculus but the creation of another
magus, having assumed the pretense to gain your trust and persisted out of affection.
You’ll discover my true nature and be horrified, believing me only to be using you to
obtain the Third Sorcery. At the proper point in our battle, I’ll be wounded and put
to flight. With one of the Servants who intended on cutting them down isolated and
wounded, our foes will naturally take advantage of the situation and strike. When
they do, I’ll reveal that my wound was only pretense, and we’ll spring our trap on
them!”

At this, Liliesviel gives you a long, pensive look, with a complex emotion in
her eyes you can’t quite place. Perhaps it’s simply that the idea of your betrayal, even
as a ruse, hurts her to consider, but there’s none of the theatrical extremity that usually characterizes the girl’s emotions. After a few moments, though, she softly asks, “How would I ‘discover’ your deception? You kept it a secret until now, so why would I suddenly see through it?”

“Why don’t we have Lancer tell you? He does seem to have excellent faculties for gathering information,” you say. “Don’t look so glum. We’ll only be playing out a fight for a short time, and this way we’ll be sure not to let the woman who attacked you slip away.”

“Alright,” Liliesviel says. “You don’t need to comfort me, I’m only considering what to do. Put me down, would you? I’m going to go and explain things to Otto. Come out to my limousine when you’re ready.” Once free of your arms, Liliesviel turns and retreats the way she’d come, her maid following at her heels.

“Now,” you say to Arturia, turning your own about-face, “let’s go and explain things to Ayaka and Kōrakuhime.”

“What a convoluted scheme,” the Servant sighs as the two of you ascend the stairs leading back toward the library. “You truly have no concept of chivalry, do you not?”

“Chivalry?” You scoff. “How far has that gotten you, Arturia? In life your kingdom fell with your death, and as a Servant you foolishly charged directly into a trap that led to your present state. Besides, you haven’t met the woman we’re to face; weren’t there Casters in your Holy Grail Wars? You should know that a straightforward approach is a death sentence against a foe with such variable abilities.”

“A class both despicable and worthless,” Arturia says, flatly dismissing your claim in a tone of cold fury. “One could do nothing but summon useless creatures easily destroyed by my blade, while the other could do no more than flail helplessly in the face of assured death. No Caster could pose a threat to a Saber’s Magic Resistance. Master, your scheme is driven not by caution but fear of wasting time.”

“Intriguing notion,” you reply with a smirk. “I’ll stay true to it, then, and cut this conversation off in the same interest. We’ve arrived, so hold your tongue while I explain our plan.” With that, you turn and enter the library. Within are the two ‘Shijou sisters,’ obviously waiting impatiently. The silence between them that’s preceded your arrival is almost palpable. On one side of the room sits Ayaka, her eyes flicking between the door and the aged book she holds. Futodoki sits comfortably on the chair-back behind her head. Across from your Master, Kōrakuhime sits with her hands folded in her lap, looking as still and composed as a porcelain doll.
“Hello, you two,” you say. “My apologies for keeping you waiting. Liliesviel intercepted me in the corridor, and I took the opportunity to explain our plan to her. That said, there have been some alterations in light of new information.”

“Hang on a second, Saber-san,” Ayaka interjects. “Behind you, um, is that... the other Saber?”

“Arturia, yes,” you reply. “The procedure Kōrakuhime and I discussed earlier was successful, and she’s become my Servant.”

“Okay,” Ayaka says hesitantly, “but why is she dressed like that?” She points at Arturia’s miniskirt and exposed cleavage with a trembling finger and indignant, blushing expression. “She had on some blue dress when I saw her last time, didn’t she? Why do you have her in a maid costume all of a sudden?”

“Kōrakuhime created her uniform,” you reflexively say, feeling oddly embarrassed. It was one thing for Stengel to react this way, but now even Ayaka is treating you like some kind of pervert over Arturia’s clothing! “It doubles as a mystic code which allows her to function as a Servant when required, despite her lack of a Master.” Not wanting to give Ayaka the chance to find question your explanation and drag out the discussion of clothing, you rapidly continue, “That’s beside the point, however. I must tell you how our strategy has changed, so we can be on our way. Time is of the essence.”

“Very well, Ani-ue,” Kōrakuhime interjects. “Why don’t we begin... with her? How does Arturia factor into... your plan?”

“Arturia will be traveling with you, Kōrakuhime,” you begin, “as will you, Miss Ayaka. Lancer has discovered that the enemy are apparently more numerous than we’d expected. A second Servant, most likely Adelheid, is there, and so are a number of creatures he described as being similar to inferior Servants. If they attack en masse, I can’t be entirely confident of protecting you.”

“Sorry, but Adelheid is...” Ayaka gives you a questioning glance.

“Another Servant from the Grail War that took place within the Akeldama,” you explain briefly. “If you’d like more details, Kōrakuhime can tell you while you four are traveling.” With that out of the way, and settling back into the domineering mode you occupied when planning battles in the Akeldama, you begin rattling off orders. “Futodoki, I need you to show these three the location of the house you followed Yumigawa to and keep the four of you hidden from magical surveillance. I trust you can hide the presence of magic as well as ordinary traces. You’ll travel by concealed flight, using Kōrakuhime’s power over the wind to make a swift, direct trip and be in the area well in advance of Liliesviel, Lancer, and I. Kōrakuhime, Arturia, you two are to find a vantage point from which you can see Yumigawa’s house,
inform me of its location, and wait for my word there while protecting Miss Ayaka. Arturia, under no circumstances are you to harm or cause harm to befal Ayaka, Kōrakuhime, Futodoki, or myself. Try to be certain you don’t kill either of the enemy Servants, also. Now, I know that you’ll be able to outpace our car using flight, but you still ought to leave immediately. Good luck, all of you.”

Leaving the room’s four occupants in a moment of silence as they process your words, you turn on your heel and exit, heading back downstairs for the front door and the limousine you know will be waiting outside. Sure enough, as you step out into the yard you see a pair of headlights shearing through the darkness, and behind them, idling at the front gate, the same limousine in which you first met Liliesviel. As ever, no trace of the potent magical presence of its occupants can be felt from outside the vehicle. You walk up, pull a door open, and sit down to a familiarly luxurious deep red interior of oxblood leather, velvet, and varnished mahogany. With slightly misplaced satisfaction, you note that the car is not significantly warmer inside than your abandoned Mercedes was. The moment you close the door behind you, the car sets off down the road, no doubt following instructions from Odin.

Across from you, Liliesviel and her Servant sit on opposite ends of the wide seat. Liliesviel, apparently in subdued contemplation, looks out the window with a distant expression as she rests her chin in a cupped hand. Odin, by contrast, gives you a grandfatherly smile as he fills a snifter from the miniature liquor cabinet beside him with smooth motions that show no sign of the disruption a moving vehicle ought to cause.

“Something to fortify you, my boy?” he asks warmly, offering you a glass.

“Thank you,” you say, “but I’d prefer to keep my wits firmly about me for the coming battle. I might join you for a drink once the fighting is done, but I doubt if ‘liquid courage’ is something that would do me much good.”

“Suit yourself.” Smile unbroken, Odin takes a sip of his drink. “It is excellent, though,” he remarks. “For all your failings, I have been enjoying some of the products of the Age of Man.” There’s little you can say to that, so you let the comment pass unremarked-upon, and the drive fades into a period of silence.

[X] Ask Odin something about his reconnaissance. (Write in details) (Duty/Self-Preservation)

[X] Suggest the idea of capturing the enemy Servants rather than killing them to Liliesviel. (Compassion/Pride)

[ ] Remain silent, and wait for one of them to speak. (Pride)
“Lancer,” you begin, “While we’re traveling, why don’t you tell me a bit more about these Servant-like entities you observed among the enemy. How many were there, and could you distinguish and notable individual details?”

“Individual details, eh?” Odin slowly replies, drawing out the words as he considers his answer. “You could say there were, and you could say there weren’t. They were all burly fellows, built about the same and armored in Hellenic style; I suppose that Olympian girl prefers her own for comrades. None of them were bearing weapons, but that says little about a Servant; or something like one, anyway. As for the men themselves, they were indistinct. It’s hard to say anything about them beyond a general outline.”

“Indistinct?” You raise an eyebrow. “What do you mean by that?”

“Their features weren’t well-defined,” he says. “Picture looking at a man’s face from a distance, through heat haze or thin mist. That’s something like the impression they had. It’s common enough in incomplete or poorly worked magic, but odd to see from such a skilled Caster.” Odin pauses to take another sip of brandy, a thoughtful expression on his face. “As for their numbers,” he adds, “there were twelve this afternoon, but considering how little we know of their nature and origin, that’s nothing to say there won’t be more when the battle joins.”

“Intriguing,” you murmur, “but as you say, not overly helpful. We’ll have to learn what sort of beings they are once the battle is won, in that case. If we’re to do that, though...” Your gaze shifts to Liliesviel, still picturesquely staring out the window, a melancholic beauty brooding on the battle to come. “Liliesviel, there is one more aspect of my plan that I ought to share with you before we put it into action.”

“Oh? What is it?” Her response is in a surprisingly bright tone, given the apparent mood she’s been in. As she turns to you, though, her expression warms.

“I intend to capture this magus’ Servants alive,” you declare. “Now that I’ve verified the effectiveness of my control technique on Arturia, the best course of action is to bring as many enemy Servants to our side as possible in order to secure our victory and the completion of the Heaven’s Feel.”

“He~h?” Liliesviel touches a finger to her lips, considering the notion for a few moments. “Alright!” she decides. “Having that witch join my maids could be fun. You have to give them to me, though.”

“Give them to you?” you echo, surprised.
“That’s right!” Liliesviel answers, as if it were the world’s most obvious fact. “You already have that Saber as your maid, so we’ll bind these two to my command spell. We really shouldn’t have as much of a drain on the local Mana as we do right now, anyway; if it keeps up, the Greater Grail might even start to have trouble. So, since Otto doesn’t need my magical energy, and you want to stay with that Shijou girl, I’ll make these two my Servants.” She gives you a bright smile. “You can’t keep all the spoils to yourself, you know.”

[] Accept the idea. Whether Circe and Adelheid are technically bound to you or Liliesviel makes no real difference to their effectiveness as Servants, and you want to make Liliesviel happy. Besides, she has a point about their energy needs. (Compassion)

[] Reject the idea. Adelheid and Circe are your Servants, and no-one else’s. Hopefully Liliesviel will back down if you remain firm. (Pride)

[X] Do something else (Write in)

“I can certainly see your point regarding local Mana,” you reply, casting your eyes out at the desolate city beyond the window. Cars, even taxis, are few and far between, and as you sweep your eyes along the once-crowded night streets downtown you find them empty of life even just after dark. “At this rate, Tokyo seems likely enough to wither, dry up, and blow away in the wind.” As if to punctuate your observation, the night wind spins the wheel of an overturned bicycle, abandoned on the sidewalk by its absent owner.

“That prompts another question, though.” You return your gaze to Liliesviel’s eyes, shifting tone from melancholic observation to alert consideration. “On the subject of magical energy, I can’t help but wonder how Tokyo’s Servant population might affect the conclusion of the Holy Grail War. You need seven Servants dead to fill the Grail and perform the Heaven’s Feel, don’t you? Even putting aside the original Caster, we’ve seen Rider, Berserker, and Archer dead; and present in this city are the War’s original Saber, Lancer, and Assassin, as well as an additional Rider supported by the Emiya family and these two Servants of unknown origin; not to mention the Servant-like beings Lancer observed, and of course myself. It seems to me that with all of the energy from these participants swirling about, it should be possible for the War to be brought to a close with some Servants still alive; wouldn’t you agree, Liliesviel?”
“Hm?” Liliesviel tilts her head to one side, looking at you with an expression of wide-eyed confusion. “That’s true,” she says, “we only need the energy of the original seven to perform the Heaven’s Feel. Why do you ask, Alberich?”

“I simply thought it would behoove us, if we’re taking Servants into our employ, to keep as many of them as possible with us after the War” you answer offhandedly. “One can never say when such an arsenal might become useful to a magus.”

“That’s right,” Liliesviel says, a contemplative look in her eyes. “If we can freely take control of the Servants other magi summon, the Holy Grail War becomes useful in an entirely different way.” Her eyes narrow, and she turns to Odin with a hostile smirk. “In fact,” she adds, “we could’ve filled the Grail up with just one Servant, if Otto hadn’t been so clever.”

“If you expect me to apologize, Missy, you’re sorely mistaken,” he replies, turning a canny smile on the girl. “My, my, but you do have low expectations of us, don’t you? What sort of God would allow himself to be summoned only to promptly become a sacrifice for another’s gain?” As he shakes his head in mock reproof, Odin lets out a dry, croaking laugh.

“I had wondered about that,” you say, answering Liliesviel without acknowledging her Servant, “how a God’s energy compares to a hero’s. How did Lancer keep you from using your command spell to bring the War to a premature end?”

Liliesviel puffs her cheek out in a pout, irritated by the mere act of remembering the moment. “This insolent old man,” she says indignantly, “despite permitting his summoning and pledging himself as a Servant, enchanted that body with a primordial rune of destruction! If he dies, unless it’s an ‘honorable duel,’ the entire energy of his spirit will go into an explosive blast!”

“I… see,” you sigh, a bit flabbergasted. You knew Odin wasn’t exactly loyal to his Master to the same degree as some Servants, but you hadn’t expected him to dictate his own terms to that degree. There is one apparent solution you have to ask about, though. “Why didn’t you compel him to remove the rune with your command spell?”

At your question, Liliesviel shoots Odin another furious glare, and after finishing his glass of brandy the Servant suggests, “Why don’t I explain that? It’s really a rather simple solution, but she does seem to be having a bit of trouble putting it into words. I put myself under a geas, you see. If I were to attempt to remove the rune of destruction I set into this body, I would die; that death would be one outside
of battle, and so the rune would activate. Thus,” he concludes smugly, “do we put an end to the schemes of magi.”

“All that, just to be sure you’d have a fine battle before your death?” You give Odin a grin. “Well, Lancer, you can keep enjoying the products of humanity for the moment; when I’ve finished with the rest I need to put down, I’ll give you a fight worthy of a God. You can return to Asgard satisfied; if that is still what you call your home, now that it’s in the Realm of Imaginary Numbers.” You return your focus to Liliesviel. “Now,” you say, “I believe we were discussing what ought to be done with the ‘spoils’ of our coming battle. Why don’t we work out the best way to divide them after we’ve had our victory? Perhaps you could take the Servant who requires more energy to add to your maids, and I might manage the other alongside Arturia; or there might be some more effective method still, known only to that witch Caster. I’ve little doubt that any magus able to hold her own against Lancer has her share of arcane secrets.”

“Hmmm...” Liliesviel puts a finger to her lips in her habitual pose of thought, eying you through narrowed eyes as if seeking to divine within your countenance the advisability of your suggestion. Finally though, her expression clears and she gives you a bright smile and nod. “Alright! We’ll figure it all out after we kill that magus and take his Servant prisoner. By the way, what do you think the best way to-”

“I believe we ought to have our little spat now,” Odin cuts in. “We’re at a distance from our goal that you ought to be able to cover on foot, my boy.”

“Otto!” Liliesviel snaps, furious. “How dare you cut me off? I was in the middle of speaking!”

“My apologies,” he replies sarcastically, unmoved by her anger, “but we ought not waste more time. If we stop our travel before the decisive moment, it may give the impression of artificiality. This stratagem must be perfect if it is to capture the enemy’s belief.” For your benefit, he turns and explains, “Runes protect this vehicle from any magical surveillance of its interior, but once the surface is broken the protection will cease. My suggestion would be that we leave the source of our disagreement to their imaginations, and let them see the beginning of our fight only now!”

As suggestions go, it’s one of the stiffer ones you’ve encountered. Frankly, Odin doesn’t seem open to an alternative concept in the slightest. No sooner has the word left his lips than he whips out a hand, and a rune traced in white light appears in the air before his palm. In a moment you’re hammered by a titanic force and sent flying out of the limousine. Even the door beside you is wrenched off its hinges by your momentum, and goes flying out over the street in parallel with your body.
If things continue as they are, you’re not certain how far you’ll fly before finally coming to rest, and more likely than not you’ll wind up crashing through the wall of some building. After a brief consideration of the possible benefits of taking cover within the crater generated by your impact, you decide to put an end to your involuntary flight. Within you, the door that looks out on boundless Emptiness swings open, and as you throwing an arm out towards a nearby streetlamp, the power that flows into you through that door pours through your magic circuits and out into the air, a ribbon gripped in your left fist at one end and wrapped around the steel lamppost at the other.

With a wrenching impact that bends the streetlamp and sends fire into the muscle of your shoulder, the ribbon pulls taught and you come to a stop. You land on your feet, your ribbon fading from existence at the same moment your armor and blade appear to replace your suit. You can see clearly now that Odin threw you out of the car at an intersection, sending you flying two blocks down the middle of a side street. Ahead of you, Odin steps gracefully out of the stopped limousine, his silver spear the only armament he cares to materialize.

“You’ve deceived my Master long enough, varlet!” he booms at shocking volume. It’s not a roar or yell, but a simple proclamation, made loud enough by divinely enhanced lungs to seem the product of massive speakers. The God’s face, however, is contorted in a wholly convincing mask of righteous fury and judgment that even at this distance sets the blood to coursing more rapidly through your veins. “Witness my spear well,” he continues, “for it shall be the last sight of beauty to grace your eyes in this world! Now that the victim of your foul pretense has seen through you, the time has come to collect the final wage of your liar’s trade! Behold, the reward I have decreed for you!”

With this final announcement, Odin holds his spear aloft, in one hand as if it were a staff. The tip weaves through the air, and as you follow it with your eyes you can see that it leaves a hairline-thin tracery of silver floating behind it. He’s tracing a rune!

You dash forward, lowering Heiligöffnungschwert to cut Odin in two the moment you’re close enough. Whatever spell he’s preparing, no Servant with your mind would allow him to complete it; the thing is certain to mean death. Pushing yourself to your limit, you cover the first block in the barest fraction of a second, and still you strain forward, yearning to close the gap faster, to beat the casting of the God of Magic with your charge!
Odin’s casting is the work of less than a moment. He has the speed of a Servant, after all, and needs to move his hand only slightly to trace the runes with his spearpoint. The width of a suburban home still remains between the two of you when he brings the butt of *Gungnir* slamming down into the pavement, marking and triggering the completion of his spell. The sound of silver on cement is the crack of thunder, and with that sound a titanic burst of searing white comes streaming down from the sky. Lightning, faster than any hero ever was, lances down from the heavens to strike Odin’s spearpoint; and from there to you.

The blast of light and heat takes you in the chest with impossible force, reversing your charge and sending you flying back the way you came. That, of course, is the least of it. The armor meant to defend you melts instantly, becoming a prison of agony as it fuses with your skin to produces the hideous bacon-smell of sizzling flesh, even as the electricity courses ever deeper, roasting each organ with an individual touch of infernal artistry before it chars your bones and sends marrow boiling out of blackened and brittle casing into the monstrous soup of your destroyed body. At last your skull is shattered by the expanding steam of your boiling brain, and as the wreckage of eyes drips from last the gaps in the tormented monstrosity that your helmet has become, the vapor of a mind destroyed forms a momentary mist about you.

This, at any rate, is what you suppose ought to have happened. In reality, the lightning does indeed strike and hurl you back away from Odin, and it is indeed quite painful, but there’s no further damage; a fact you credit primarily to your Magic Resistance, as the amount of magical energy in the blast tells you it would have been more than sufficient to kill you in the past. You feign death, though, and let your body go limp as for the second time Odin’s magic sends you flying away from the limousine. Odin takes a few moments to satisfy himself that you’ve suffered a mortal blow and will soon perish, then returns to the limousine, reattaching its door by magic.

Only once Liliesviel and her Servant have sped off do you move, cautiously getting to your feet and walking gingerly, leaning against the garden walls of the homes you pass for support. Odin was right. This really is close enough to make it to Yumigawa’s house on foot, even while feigning heavy injuries. It’s close enough, in fact, that the houses are all familiar. You can find your way ‘home’ by memory without the necessity of checking addresses or street signs. As you’re contemplating this stroke of convenience, your attention is seized by the rapidly approaching presence of a Servant. *Rapidly* approaching. In fact, you barely have time to bring your arm up in a guard before-

*SPAAAAAAAAAAAAANG!*
For the third time tonight you’re sent hurtling backwards. This time, with the addition of your armor reverberating like a gong from the metallic impact. At least you keep your feet; you’re merely sliding back from the impact, steel boots raising fountains of sparks from the pavement as you do so.

“That’s fine armor you have, young man,” says the arrogant voice of a young girl, taunting you out of the darkness. “Better than anything the Russians could put into the field; that punch would’ve gone right through their best work.”

You lower the arm protecting your head to clear your vision, and reveal the long-awaited sight. Standing in a streetlamp’s pool of illumination as if awaiting her dance partner under a spotlight, she seems to take form in your vision piecemeal. Silver buttons, decorations, and a winged skull; sapphire-blue eyes gleaming out of the shadow of a peaked cap; a mane of shining golden hair cascading down her back; pale pink lips curved into a sardonic smile; a narrow strip of alabaster thigh between tall leather boots and a black pleated skirt. The well-remembered face, as beautiful and inspiring as it is cruel and brutal.

“Adelheid,” you say. “It’s good to see you again. Your strike is as sharp as I remember it.”

“Kuhahahaha!” Adelheid lets out a peal of laughter at your greeting. “Is that what you have to say to me? All this time, and you compliment my punch? Haha! Oh, but you are the same, aren’t you?” Settling down, she takes a more serious tone. “But I wonder if it is you,” she says. “You don’t have the voice, and you’re taller; why don’t you take off that helmet, and let me take a proper look at you?” For a moment, you feel it’s better to keep up the materialization of your complete armor; but no, you think. This is one of your old Servants, reunited with you at last. If you can’t trust her at least enough to remove your helmet, what purpose is there in speaking at all?

“You know I remember the Akeldama?” you ask as you allow the helmet to vanish. “Yumigawa was surprised by the revelation.”

“There you are, Rushorou,” she says happily, ignoring your question for a moment as she admires you. “It’s wonderful to see you again. Only a week, but it has been rather trying. Oh yes,” she adds, “I know you remember everything. I overheard your telephone conversation with the other Rushorou, after all. So now there are two of you: one with your face and one with your voice. Both of you have your memories, and each believes he is the real man. I wonder which of the two of you I met in the Akeldama, and which I should help now. What do you think, Alberich? Can you convince me?”
Explain that you’ve learned the true nature of the Akeldama, and that Yumigawa’s memories are only the product of resonance. The truth should convince her.

“I’m afraid I don’t have a coffee machine with me at the moment, sorry.” A joke about your past ought to contrast well with the humorless Yumigawa.

Prove your identity with the distinctive element and origin of your magical energy (via a kiss).

Tell Adelheid that you can’t prove which of you is the true version of the Yumigawa she met then, but that it doesn’t matter as you’re the superior Master now. The past is irrelevant.

You don’t have time to play games with Adelheid. You couldn’t subdue her by force in the Akeldama without first killing her Master, but you have no such restrictions now.

“Convince you that I’m the same man you met in the Akeldama?” you ask, raising an eyebrow. “No, Adelheid, I’m afraid you’re looking at this all wrong. Do you remember what I told you when we discussed your identity? You need only look forward, and exist as you are, for the past is unimportant. Well, now that advice applies to me, as much as it does to you. I face a false reflection of myself, who stole the memories I made in the Akeldama and believes himself to be me; yet is fundamentally not the man you knew before Judas’ death. I could explain the magical intricacies behind Judas’ Noble Phantasm, and how this came to be, but as I said: the past is not important. Rather, hear this: While one of us found himself compelled to remain in the house of his childhood, shying away from battle to plot in the shadows and resume the identity of a mundane high-school student while Circe directed his affairs, the other is responsible for the death of every perished Servant in this War.”

As you rant, you find yourself progressively growing more and more furious with your double, your voice rising in volume and your hands moving in gesticulation of your wroth. “Yumigawa Rushorou shames me by his actions!” you thunder. “He plays the role of a worthless coward despite the memories granted to him and the power of two... no, not two, but three Servants to further his ends! Where he could have gone forth and conquered, sweeping the scattered combatants of the War before his concentrated force, he has hidden away and squandered his opportunities! Tell me,
is that a leader worthy of your allegiance, Adelheid? Is that a man who can give you the victory you crave?"

At your words, Adelheid’s lips part in a wide, satisfied smile. Fortunately, it seems you won’t be required to offer to prove your identity by the flavor of your magical energy. “Well done, Alberich!” she exclaims, voice rising in girlish excitement despite her formal choice of words. “You see to the heart of the matter as I do! The other young man has tried so often to rely on our shared memories to win my loyalty, and Caster is obsessed with reviving the precise individual you were in when we parted; but to me, which of you is the true continuation of your old self is immaterial; what matters is the substance of character, the will to seize power that moved me when we first met.” She holds her head high and points a dramatic finger at you in an imperious gesture the effect of which is somewhat diminished by the girl’s diminutive stature. “Very well!” she continues. “I’ll accompany you for the time being, Alberich; but only as an observer! Don’t think that I’ll fight against Caster and Rushorou for you. If you wish to win my allegiance, you’ll prove to me that you’re worthier of it than they in combat!”

“I would have expected nothing else,” you say with a smile, masking the wave of irritation that runs through you at your Servant’s continued hesitation to return to your service. “Observe to your heart’s content, Adelheid; I have no doubt you’ll find the evening’s battle an excellent show.”

With that, you continue down the road towards ‘your’ remembered home, Adelheid falling in at your side as you pass her. Now that you’ve weathered an attack from the girl in your supposedly wounded state, your condition will be obvious enough to any observers, so there’s no point in continuing the ruse. You allow the scratches, dents, and burns that your armor sustained during your battle with Odin to be repaired by your magical energy, and leave behind your pretense of a requirement for support to walk with a direct, purposeful stride.

After a few paces made in silence, Adelheid looks up at you with a smirk and, in a playful tone, asks, “So, you took my advice and settled on Alberich? What drove you to set aside the name of Yumigawa?”

“As you can see, I’ve become a Servant; a Saber, clad in the armor of a knight and with the capacity for magic. I could hardly keep my old name, when no trace of the human born with it remains in my appearance; even my voice has changed. I recalled your description of Alberich, and it...” you hesitate for a moment, trying to pin the feeling of that decision down in words. “I suppose it simply felt right; the true name of the man I’ve become.”
“It’s difficult to explain, isn’t it?” Adelheid replies, a knowing smile on her face. “I had the same experience when Volksgemeinschaft took hold, and I was summoned into this existence. One can’t continue to go by an old name, but must feel the name true to a new self. I’m glad you’ve settled on yours. Still,” she presses her lips together and furrows her brows in disapproval. “I’m not so sure about that second half; von Einzbern, you’ve taken on? Are you really so fond of that girl?”

“Well,” you begin, a faint blush coming unbidden to your cheeks as you defensively explain your original reason for making contact with Liliesviel, “being by her side has significant benefits, now and in the future. The Third Sorcery is a path to enormous power, and her Servant is the most dangerous enemy in the War. Besides, it is appropriate for this appearance.”

“Oh, stop that,” Adelheid interjects, her mock disapproval dissolving into a smile of wry indulgence. “You can be truthful with me. ‘I’ loved and put aside any number of girls during ‘my’ life, you know; I understand how a man’s eyes wander. At any rate, Caster and I both saw your romantic moments at the funfair, so there’s no use in making excuses.”

“I... see,” you say, momentarily stunned by the revelation of yet more outside observation during your trip to Magical Lunar Kingdom PhantasMoon. To have had Kōrakuhime watching you was indignity enough, but the realization that Circe and Adelheid were also watching your private conversation in the ferris wheel stings somewhat; it’s a distasteful feeling of having been intruded upon. Still, at least it obviates the necessity of maintaining a facade. “If you insist, then, I’ll tell you,” you sigh. “You’re correct. I’ve found myself growing infatuated with Liliesviel despite the short time I’ve known her. Her looks, her mannerisms, her behavior... she fascinates me.” As you recount your infatuation to Adelheid you reflect that it’s more than that, of course. The truth is that you feel a depth of compassion for her that you’ve never felt for another. You understand the pain she finds in the emptiness of a tool prepared by unfeeling manipulators and sent into the world conscious of her own artificiality and isolation, and you want to give her the love she’s never received, to let her smile as she does for you all the time. You can hardly tell Adelheid all that, though; the way her expression inexplicably darkens at your words is enough for you to decide it’s better to leave your explanation at material benefits and surface-level infatuation.

“Oh? And you’ve felt no such fascination in the past?” Adelheid replies in a tone laden with menace. “I suppose that a girl with the mannerisms of an old man only engenders distaste, is that it?”
“Of course not,” you protest. “If I felt nothing for you, do you suppose I’d have attempted to win you over by diplomacy? You and Circe are my important comrades from the Holy Grail War waged in the *Akeldama*; it’s an entirely different—”

You cut off your words as the air around you warps with a harmonic thrumming, and a mass of magical presences suddenly appears on all sides. It’s Spatial Transmission on a grand scale; as you track your surroundings, taking in your enemies’ numbers while moving only your eyes, you count more than twenty figures crouched on the nearby rooftops, hiding in the darkness beyond the streetlamps. A few moments later, Circe appears out of a bubble of visual distortion reminiscent of rapidly shifting lenses, directly in front of you and about ten meters above the street. Her outstretched wings illumine the night, glowing as the tip of her staff does with patterns of interwoven gold and fuchsia. She’s traded the scanty clothing she wore in the *Akeldama*, you observe, for a flowing imperial gown of white silk which clings to her upper body and waist, but flares out below her hips to mask her golden footwear and give the impression of greater height.

“Hi there, Alberich,” she says, a smug look of good cheer on her face. “It’s such a shame about your falling out with your ‘sister’, isn’t it? I bet you’re feeling pretty confused, huh? Would you like me to explain who and what you really are?”

[X] “Go ahead. I’d like to know just what it is you believe about me.”

[ ] “I already know what I am, Circe: the same man who was your Master before we were separated. If Yumigawa hasn’t told you about my memories, he’s playing you for a fool.”

[ ] There’s no point in discussing matters with her in this situation. Order Arturia to strike Yumigawa’s home, then attack Circe while she’s suffering from the shock. You can explain once you have her restrained.

[ ] React some other way. (Write in)

“Go ahead, Caster of Olympus,” you say, matching her smug smile with a grin of your own. “I’d like to know just what it is you believe about me.”

“We~ll,” she begins, drawing out the vowel into a sound of almost sensual anticipation, “for a start, you *certainly* aren’t any product of the Einzberns. You can forget about calling that girl your family right now. To get to what you are, though, let’s start with what you used to be: part of a young man, Yumigawa Rushorou. He fought his way through a Holy Grail War rather like this one, as a Master. My Master,
in fact; and became something more than human in the process. He gained power, first from an artificial version of the Holy Grail and then from the spirit of the Servant conducting the War. At least, that’s how it should’ve gone.”

“Oh?” You really ought to suppress the humor in your tone to keep her talking, you suppose, but you just can’t quite manage it. Seeing her carry on in ignorance is too entertaining for you to wipe the smirk from your face or speak without a note of irony. “What went wrong, exactly?”

“There was a problem with the way that Servant, Judas’ power merged with you,” Circe explains, raising an index finger in a professorial gesture. Fortunately she seems too focused on her own supposed moment of triumph to observe your failure to play along. “Instead of coming together in one person when he died, the remainder of his spirit merged only with the conceptual power Rushorou had gained from the artificial Grail, and split off from the original person to become an existence of its own: a new Servant, Saber. That, Alberich, would be you! A nameless, cobbled-together wraith, the power that belongs to Rushorou walking around, fighting with no reason! Now that you’ve come to us, though, we can put an end to that; you’ll go back to Rushorou, and he’ll become who he was meant to be!”

You can’t hold it in anymore. You break eye contact with Circe, dipping your eyes as a low chuckle escapes your throat. After a moment, though, you throw your head back to let out a great baritone laugh that boils up out of your gut.

“Fuhahahahahahahaha! Haha-hoho-ufufu-hahahaha! Oh... my... you really are too much,” you finally manage to say, once you’ve gotten control of your mirth. “So Yumigawa wasn’t lying! That really is what you believe about me. Incredible. Truly it is incredible.”

At a stroke, your laughter replaces Circe’s victorious smirk with a frown of petulant irritation. “You don’t believe me?” she asks furiously. “You’d rather think of yourself as the creation of those Einzberns? You must have realized you’re different from a homunculus! What do you mean about Rushorou not lying to you, anyway? Have you two been speaking?”

“Never mind, we’ll address that later,” you say, sweeping the subject away with a dismissive wave of your hand. “Now, I wonder just where your victorious Master is at the moment. Surely one who’s been through a Holy Grail War ought to be standing beside his Servant, on the front lines, rather than hiding away somewhere. What’s become of this would-be hero, Caster?”

“You must think I’m as much of an idiot as that little Einzbern girl,” Circe replies, some of her smug manner returning with the change of subject. “No Servant who can think properly should allow their Master near the battlefield! There are far
too many chances for an ordinary human to be hurt in a battle between Servants, even one as one-sided as this. I don’t want Rushorou anywhere near you until I’ve rendered you thoroughly harmless.”

[ ] “What an interesting approach. Still, there are more important matters to consider. Now that you’ve told me what you believe about me, let me tell you the truth, Circe.”

[X] “Intriguing. Let me show you just why it’s to one’s advantage to have a clear idea of what might happen to one’s Master, then.” Order Arturia to destroy Yumigawa’s house and Circe’s temple with Excalibur.

[ ] “Indeed. I had planned to deal with Yumigawa first, you know, but with things as they are I suppose I’ll simply have to focus on you!” Attack Circe with tendrils of Nothingness, dragging her down toward the ground.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

“Such an intriguing philosophy,” you comment with dry contempt. “In that case, let me show you just why it’s to one’s advantage to have a clear idea of what may befall one’s Master. I’ll give you five seconds to save Yumigawa’s wretched life, Circe.”

“Cir-” Gleaming in accord with the patterns on her wings, Circe’s iridescent eyes widen in shock at your use of her true name. “You know my name? And, wait, what do you mean you’ll give me five seconds to save him?”

“One second has passed already, Circe,” you say, grinning up at her as you raise a finger to mark the time and admonish her tardy reaction. “Should you be asking questions right now?”

From your side, you hear Adelheid giggle at the enchantress’ increasing distress. “Oh dear, Caster,” she says in a mocking parody of sympathy. “What do you suppose he’ll do? It seems now is the time to find out whether your strong words about ‘protecting’ that poor young man from the world are worth the effort you’ve put into enforcing them.” Now that’s an interesting note, you think; apparently Circe’s policy of keeping Yumigawa distanced from the War hasn’t been unanimously agreed-upon. Whether it’s only Adelheid who disputed it, though, or Yumigawa himself attempted to show some courage, you can’t guess.

“Two seconds have passed,” you continue, raising a second finger. “You only have three remaining. I really would take action soon, if I were you.”
“Oooh!” Circe lets out an incoherent, high-pitched sound of rage as she wavers between compromising her plan and giving in or calling your bluff and suffering the potential consequences. “What are you even doing over there, anyway, Berserker?” she says angrily, her eyes flicking over to Adelheid. “I thought you wanted to help Rushorou achieve his dream! Don’t think I’ll forget this betrayal!”

“You have just two seconds left, Circe,” you warn, injecting some more menace into your voice. “Three have elapsed.” You then shift your attention to Arturia, stretching your mind out over the energetic connection between you, similar enough to that between a Master and Servant that it even contains the potential for the same telepathic link. ‘Arturia, reply if you can understand me,’ you order.

‘I can,’ comes her curt, resentful answer. Evidently the little time you’ve spent apart has done nothing to change Arturia’s attitude towards you.

‘Excellent. In that case, be ready to use Excalibur to destroy Yumigawa’s house, and the temple below it, the moment I give you the order. Has Futodoki made it clear to you just where that is?’

‘Very well, Master,’ she replies, for a moment sounding almost like a properly respectful maid; before the continuation of her reply destroys that impression. ‘I am aware of which house you refer to. Simply inform me when fighting your own battles becomes too much for you, and I shall defeat your enemies.’ You really are going to have to find some way to punish her further for her insolence, you think.

In the time you took to explain to Arturia, Circe seems to have decided that the best way to deal with your threat is to eliminate the source. “I’m sorry to do this,” she says, “but... Odysseus! Shoot him down!”

In unison, the Servants on the rooftops around you stand, bows materializing in their hands. Now that you can see them better, it is clear who they were based on; their armor and frames are identical to Archer’s, although smaller details seem to fade away. Odin was right in choosing to refer to them as ‘indistinct’. They look almost blurred, as if there’s an unfocused lens between each one’s face and the world. This doesn’t hamper their fighting ability, though. It takes far less than a second for the entire group to draw their bows, aim, and fire a rain of arrows at you.

You remain unfazed. This, after all, is no more dangerous than Emiya’s omnidirectional rain of swords. Less, in fact, as you know these imitation Servants will have to ready a new arrow instead of being able to pour projectiles at you endlessly. Keeping your right hand outstretched to remind Circe of her diminishing time, you seize Kenótis in your left hand, unfasten the brooch with your thumb, and sweep it around yourself as you invoke its name, intercepting each arrow with a rapid circuit of the obliterating cloth.
“One second remains, Circe!” you announce. “Four of your five seconds have already vanished! Take any longer, and Yumigawa shall go with them!”

“Oh, fine!” Circe snaps, looking furious as she does so. “You win! \( \text{T} \rho \omega \text{y} \alpha! \)” Despite the spike in magical energy around her you feel at the word, there’s no visible sign of Circe’s space-warping nearby. Disappointingly, she seems to have transported Yumigawa from one hiding place to another. Still, you maintain your grin; there’s no reason to let her see you were hoping for more.

“Very well! Zero! Five seconds have elapsed!” you announce. “Let us hope you’ve made a wise choice.” Then, to Arturia, ‘Now.’ On a rooftop several blocks away, a tiny spike of black energy rimmed in violet is suddenly visible, a near, concrete darkness against the ephemeral distance of the night sky. At the same time, you feel the burst of energy hit you from afar, like the thundering wave of force thrown off by a sufficiently huge explosion.

“\textit{Excalibur}!”

The distant shout rings through the night, and in the next moment the spot of visible energy becomes a torrent, pouring down into the earth like an inverted attenuation of the sun’s pure flame, a black phosphorescence obliterating all in its path and leaving only charred remnants of even that which escapes the direct blast. The shockwave, now, is not merely of magical energy, but a real physical blast of wind that tears tiles from rooftops and forces their occupants to crouch or lose their balance; cracks walls and shatters windows; and sets cars rocking on their tires and, in some cases, flipping onto their sides. All this, at this distance from the blast; the destruction at the point of impact must be a sight to behold.

“Kyaaaah!” Circe lets out a tormented scream the moment Arturia’s blade of darkness makes its impact, whipping around in the air to examine the destruction. “My temple,” she cries. “I don’t believe it; you destroyed... do you know how hard I worked on that? It was supposed to be my new home in this world!”

[ ] Now, while she’s reeling from the shock of her temple’s destruction, is the perfect time to attack Circe. Seize the opportunity to bind her with tendrils of Nothingness.

[X] Now that you’ve proved you’re the one with the power in this situation, you can explain matters properly. Wait until Circe’s calmed down a bit, then tell her about your memories and true nature. (Write in any particular details you want to say.)

[ ] With Circe distracted, you can bypass her to focus on your primary target: Yumigawa Rushorou. Have Kōrakuhiime find his location and give you directions through Ayaka.
“Fuhahahahaha!” Taking your sadistic pleasure in the moment, you laugh cruelly at Circe’s expression of despair upon the destruction of her temple. In a paroxysm of rage, she whirls on you and with an arcane command screamed into the maelstrom that surrounds her, a plethora of magic circles appear in the air behind her. You recognize the attack as one she used in the Akeldama to produce a sort of rain of light. Sure enough, moments later each circle gives rise to a beam of searing radiance focused on your position. Unfortunately for Circe, their localized source makes these beams even less of a threat to you than the arrows fired at you by her degraded copies of Odysseus.

“Kenōtis!” As you activate it, you spread the cloak before you, letting it absorb the bombardment until Circe gives up her useless attack after nearly a minute of tireless bombardment. Then, at last, you return it to your shoulders without so much as a wisp of ash marring your armor. You grin up at Circe as she reddens with fury and embarrassment at the futility of her magic.

“You feel a sense of loss, do you?” you taunt, a heavy layer of rage underlying your humor. “Anger at what I’ve done? Hardly surprising. You ought to feel that way, when being deprived of something you put labor into cultivating! I wonder, though, if that sense of loss is comparable to that which I felt upon entering this world. The loss of you and Adelheid, the two companions I worked so hard to cultivate as my Servants and compatriots. All of my scheming, my battling, my leadership through the Akeldama, Circe, was for the purpose of bringing the three of us out of the Holy Grail War alive and together, working see our wishes granted as one!”

As you begin the recitation of your grievance, your voice gradually rises in volume until you’re shouting, drowning out the howling of the wind from Arturia’s bombardment with the force of your declaration, seizing Circe’s attention and wrenching her eyes away from the ruins of Yumigawa’s home with your words of former devotion. Her eyes widen, attention arrested from her anger and sorrow at the revelation of your memories.

“Imagine, then,” you continue, “the sense of loss I felt when, at my moment of triumph, when I cut out Judas’ heart with my own hand, I arose into the outer world not as a Master, but as a Servant: with no command spell, cut off from the two of you utterly. Oh, but we weren’t truly cut off, were we?” you reverse, shifting once again to sardonic spite. “After all, you found Yumigawa Rushorou well enough, didn’t you?
You went to him, to that powerless wretch, that deluded impostor who masquerades, ignorant and heedless of his own deception, as me!”

You calm down a bit, lowering your voice from a furious roar to a level merely loud enough to be heard as you continue, “But I anticipate myself. Let us return to the moment of loss, which does harmonize so well with your present experience. I, my subordinates and you, your temple. It is because of that loss that I am punishing you now, for you never expended the barest fraction of effort to address your own mistake, did you? Yumigawa and I were both confused, uncertain of our own natures, but you were hardly in a state to rely on our judgment; you could at any time have reached out, have brought us together and found out what had really transpired, but you did not!” You’re shouting again, but you don’t care. You’re bringing all your grievances out to air before Circe, however you might look doing it. “That is the core of your treachery, Circe,” you roar, pointing an accusatory finger. “a refusal to acknowledge the flaws in your own conclusion that he was your true Master; and for that I will see you humbled!”

“Humbled?” Circe lets out an indignant squeak. “How dare you—”

“But I anticipate myself again,” you continue, speaking over her protestation and lowering your tone to one of cold rage once more. “I really must speak of my experience as a Servant. I did serve well, you know. At that time I still believed myself to be Yumigawa, and dreaded to retrace my steps to my old home, to see my parents’ grief at my disappearance or their disgust at this stranger asking after their son. How different things might have been, had I cared less for them; but I remained in the house of my Master, serving well as a mysterious, unnamed Saber, until the moment came when used the power of her command spell to force me to speak the truth about my name.”

“Yes, my name!” you say, reacting to the look of confusion with which Circe now regards you. She must be wondering what it is you getting at and why you haven’t moved to continue your battle yet, you suppose. “It isn’t Yumigawa Rushorou, you ought to realize by now; but it was dragged out of me surely enough. The experience was hardly what any of us might have expected, for at that moment the voice of Judas emanated from my throat. The truth, he explained, was that I had no name at all,” you say softly, as the last of the shockwave from Excalibur disappears, allowing even quiet words to be heard clearly in the dying city’s night. You smile at the reaction your words provoke, further curiosity written plainly on the faces of Circe and Adelheid both.

“Akeldama was never truly intended as a ritual to empower Judas,” you announce with the air of a showman revealing a shocking sight, “but for another
purpose entirely: to create new heroes in an age incapable of producing them naturally! These four were to be reared from four artificial souls that had been specially constructed to receive the power of its sacrifice and hidden within the imprisoned competitors with artificial memories stolen from real parallels. I was one of these: a successful product of his magic, believing wholeheartedly that I was Yumigawa while all along what I was truly undergoing in that War was the final stage of my birth! As a consequence of my entrance into this world, however, it seems that there has been some sort of magical resonance between myself and the original Yumigawa which caused him to receive my memories, in the process losing his own ego and perception of self in favor of that which I developed in the Akeldama.”

Circe looks at you intently, the high emotion on her face temporarily suspicious thoughtfulness as her mind turns to thorough contemplation of magical possibilities, probing your explanation for the holes she assumes must be there.

“Now, Circe,” you call, giving her no more time to contemplate as you shock her out of her thoughts, “you know what it really is that transpired at the moment of Judas’ death. Take another look at that man you serve, the spineless, cringing whelp who blindly imitates memories he did not create without the power to replicate my successes; who allows you to protect him and keep him from the battlefield; who you don’t even call Master! Can you say that he is the one who fought beside you in the Akeldama?” No sooner have you posed the question than you push the idea of the original Yumigawa aside with a dismissive sweep of your arm. “Cast your eyes upon me,” you continue, “the warrior responsible for the death of every defeated Servant in this War. Hear my words; behold my face and my Noble Phantasm: an evolution of the mystic code you wove for me from the flesh and bone of my own severed hand! Do you still believe that I am no more than aimless power cut off from its origins? I’ll give you one more chance to salvage your allegiance, Circe. Return to me now, and you may yet earn my forgiveness!”

A few seconds of silence pass as Circe considers your words, weighing them in her mind. Finally, though, she gives you an answer you find thoroughly startling: she breaks into a peal of high-pitched, cackling laughter.

“Kyahahahahahahahahaha! So that’s your explanation! You know, I think I’ll believe you,” she says, once she’s gotten ahold of herself, condescension lacing her tone. “It would be possible to accomplish something like what you’ve described with that Noble Phantasm, and it does explain some of the discrepancies. I guess that means there isn’t much point in keeping Rushorou around. Still,” she says, hesitating with a thoughtful expression, “I do like being the one in control of things. I really had my fill of being a servile Servant in Akeldama; so why don’t we have a fun
little game?” She claps her hands together with a gleeful expression, though the look in her eyes seems utterly detached from rationality. “I’ll leave you here to play with Odysseus and and Rushorou, and from now on the War can be our way of settling things. If you manage to capture me, I’ll go back to serving you like a good, meek little nymph; but if I can get the better of you, I’ll turn you into an ideal partner for a goddess.” Before you can reply, she blows you a kiss and incants, “Τροψα!”

With a distortion like the shifting of lenses, Circe vanishes from the air. Below where she had been flying, Yumigawa appears in the middle of the road. On the houses around you, the massed copies of Odysseus get to their feet and prepare to attack.

[ ] Speak to Yumigawa. (Write in what you’d like to say.)
[ ] Rush forward and kill Yumigawa immediately.
[X] Capture Yumigawa, then defend yourself from the imitation Servants.
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)
The plans of Yumigawa Rushorou had at last been drawn cruelly, prematurely to their end. Perhaps, he considered, it was the result of his overconfidence. After his victory in the Akeldama, he’d believed nothing to be beyond his reach, provided Circe and Adelheid were by his side. Yet in the very moment of that triumph, things had begun to go wrong. First the power he’d gained had vanished, taking on a life of its own thanks to Judas’ machinations; then there had been the strange fever, and the confusion on waking in his old body and home; Caster’s murder of his parents while he was unconscious; Adelheid’s refusal to recognize him as the man she’d known in the Akeldama, and the brutal methods Caster had used to assert her control.

Caster had changed too, no longer respecting his orders or calling him Master, after the disappearance of his command spell. She still wanted to help achieve his goals, and spoke of turning him into a modern hero, but had become controlling and self-directed. At one point she had informed him smirkingly that she would call him Master again only when he had become worthy, and that set the tone for their interactions. She took him infuriatingly lightly, but having been reduced to the state of an ordinary human there was little that Rushorou had been able to do to impose his will on the woman. Even the romantic gestures that had once flustered her so were now received with a reaction that spoke more of indulgence than embarrassment. The woman had come into her own, as the character he remembered from dreams of her original life, casting off the trappings of subservience. It had rankled.

Despite his rage, Rushorou had persevered. He had adjusted his behavior to cater to Circe’s new attitude with the same careful analysis of human feeling that had led him smoothly through a life filled with people whose emotions and motivations he could not share. He had gone along with her plans, believing that in the end he would
reclaim his power and the esteem of his Servants. When he had seen Alberich with his
own eyes, and had the opportunity to exchange words with his other self over the
phone, the old thrill of excitement he’d enjoyed during the Akeldama War had finally
begun to come back.

Now it had all come to this. Caster had abandoned him to the nonexistent
mercy of his counterpart, who didn’t even believe in his own nature. Very well. At
least he could face death with pride. Rushorou stood his ground, facing the
triumphant knight in alabaster panoply where he’d been placed, showing no sign of
fear or thought of flight.

“You’d like to kill me, right? That’s why you came, to take back ‘your’
Servants. Well, I’m no Ambrose, to be taken by surprise,” he said, infusing his voice
with dry bravado. “I know what chance I have of surviving; but I’ll face it with
dignity. Put an end to it now, Alberich, so you can chase after her.”

Alberich regarded Rushorou silently for a few moments, red eyes cold and hard
in that carven statue’s face. “You understand your own chances of success, do you?”
he asked, his voice seeming to echo through a night with no other sound. How strange
it was, Rushorou mused, to hear his own habits of inflection reflected in a voice so
different, so obviously the voice of a man and not a teenager. Was that the sound his
own voice would have in another few years, or had it been produced by some strange
merging of Judas’ voice with his own? But there was no time for idle thought.
Alberich had more to say, and Rushorou supposed he ought not to miss any of his
final conversation.

“That is one thing you ought to have grasped earlier, Yumigawa,” he
continued in a tone of low, menacing condemnation. “If you had known what chance
you had of victory, we might not be here; I would have my Servants without the need
to prove myself to them, and you would retain a home; retain a family. Your bravado
does you no good now; and if you believe I’ll make your death quick out of some
foolish sympathy, you’re deluding yourself. I’m not the only one who bears you ill
will; but you can meet Liliesviel later. For the moment, you need only wait.”

The knight snapped his fingers with a metallic click, and darkness shifted
almost too quickly to see. Alberich’s cape, normally stretching only as far as his calves,
extended suddenly down to pool on the ground at his feet, and from that pool of
shadow several ribbons, extensions of the cloak’s pattern, shot out with superhuman
rapidity. Far too quickly for him to react, Rushorou found himself bound at risk and
ankle, gagged and pulled roughly down to sit on the street; a powerless observer to the
fight that began with that snap of the fingers, as if it had been a starting shot.
A blurred rain of gleaming steel fell on Alberich with the drumroll hammering thunder of an artillery barrage, riddling the street with craters and by rights shattering his armor; but the knight was too quick for the Archers, guarding with his cloak upraised above his head as he dove out of the space they bombarded, helm taking shape on his head as the black bastard sword appeared in his empty right hand. Gleaming like a comet, the white-armored form blurred as he leapt from the street to a rooftop, cleaving three foes in two with a single sweep of that overlong blade. In another moment the arrows from his other foes had reduced that house to ashes, but Alberich was faster again, darting under the barrage to return to the street as he sent a crescent blade of darkness flying from his sword to dismember another five of Caster’s resurrected minions. At this point, the remaining twelve Odyssei seemed to despair of ranged weaponry meeting with success, and exchanged their bows for shortswords, leaping down to street level and rushing to surround their foe, hacking at the knight from all sides.

Alberich merely continued his impossible precision and superhuman pace, outdoing the speed with which his foes could move to an almost absurd degree. While Rushorou could still barely track the movements of Circe’s soldiers with human vision, his own counterpart had become no more than a blur among the shadows, his motions recognizable only by the cuts he left on his dispatched enemies. One was split from right shoulder to left hip; another decapitated; a third had both legs removed at mid-thigh; a fourth was split vertically in two; a fifth, victim to the reverse side of the strike that killed the former, was simply disemboweled. A seventh combatant had a shoulder, arm, and most of his torso removed in a crescent cut that flowed into the severing of the eighth’s spine at the waist. The ninth Odysseus was stabbed through the forehead, and had the blade ripped up from that wound to strike the sword-hand from the tenth’s arm, before that foe discovered his lungs split neatly into halves.

When only two enemies remained, and he stood in a pool of flowing gore with his armor utterly repainted, Alberich dismissed his sword, facing the remaining pair empty-handed as they weighed his posture for openings. Finally, the Odysseus on the left struck, charging Alberich with the sword in his right hand acting as feint for a hidden blade in his left, picked up from the corpse of one of his allies. That hidden blade never had its chance to strike. The moment Odysseus entered his range, Alberich stepped in, seized the feinting arm in his left hand with enough force to crush the wrist and plucked the blade from it with his right. Flipping the sword in his hand with practiced ease, he punched it through the throat of the immobilized Odysseus, whipped it back out, pivoted on his rear foot, and plunged it into his final enemy’s chest, interrupting the copied Servant’s attempt to strike him from behind. Odysseus
twitched a few times, and then the life went out of him and he went limp. As Alberich disinterestedly released the handle of the blade planted in his chest, he collapsed bonelessly into the mire of his fellows’ remains with a grisly splatter.

“Now,” Alberich said thoughtfully, regarding Rushorou with those same cold eyes, no longer a contrast with his armor, “what to prioritize next...”

[ ] Take Adelheid and Yumigawa back to the manor, where you can regroup with everyone and discuss your next plans.

[X] Regroup with Ayaka’s group in the field and hand Yumigawa off to them, then pursue Circe with Adelheid.

[ ] Regroup with Liliesviel and Odin, to hand Yumigawa over to her and discuss what to do about his Servants.

[ ] Do something else (Write in)

Alberich strode out of the gore, leaving a trail of red footprints behind him as he approached Rushorou’s bound form to look down on his origin directly. The Servant had claimed he wouldn’t make Rushorou’s death quick, but still it was plain that something was about to be done. Rushorou tensed himself, waiting for the blow to fall as he stared mute defiance up at his rebellious power; then he felt a steel boot planted in his chest. Not in a kick, but simply a firm placement, letting the blood that coated the boot’s sole soak into Rushorou’s shirt as Alberich held his foot there for a brief moment before shoving Rushorou onto his back.

“You’ve seen enough. I’m afraid I don’t have the benefit of my sister’s convenient sleeping magic,” he said coldly, in a baffling explanation for his actions, “so this will have to do for you.” With that, the knight pressed his right foot down on Rushorou’s neck, choking the air from him as he constricted the windpipe a millimeter at a time. After an uncertain period of seconds that seemed to drag infinitely, darkness began to close in on Rushorou. His vision became blurred, and as consciousness started to fade he seemed to see the grin on Alberich’s leonine helmet widen and then, impossibly, to open. The enameled steel fangs actually parted from one another, allowing a garnet tongue of inhuman size to flick out and lap up the blood coating the teeth of that metallic beast’s maw before disappearing with its macabre treat back within the helmet; but perhaps it was no more than an illusion, for moments later Rushorou’s mind plunged fully into oblivion.
Tokyo Street ~ Night

It takes far longer for Yumigawa to pass out than it did for you to dispose of those twenty pseudo-Archers, irritatingly. How much faster it is to take a life than to capture a living foe, you think; so much easier to simply break a body beyond repair; but you can’t hurry. You did promise to let Liliesviel do what she liked with the supposed magus, and torturing him ought to be a pleasant way to work out your frustration over Circe’s absurd insolence in the face of undeniable defeat. At the moment, though, the delay necessary to squeeze the consciousness out of your would-be rival is infuriating; you find yourself obsessively checking your watch as you press down on his windpipe. Eventually, though, once it’s ticked around to 7:18 pm, he finally lets go of consciousness and you sling him over your shoulder.

Carrying the unconscious Yumigawa, you leap up to the roof of one of the few houses on this street not destroyed by either Circe or the pseudo-Archers and head for the place from which you saw Arturia launch Excalibur’s blade of dark energy. Following your usual habit, you cross the rooftops for a direct approach, not wanting to lose time when any one of your enemies could have been drawn your location by the sight of Excalibur. Pleasingly, Adelheid has no difficulty keeping pace with you. This course takes you through areas closer to Yumigawa’s home, however, and as you obliquely approach the blast’s target, the damage from the shockwave sent out by the impact of Excalibur with the earth becomes more and more extreme. For a short time you’re only leaping from peak to peak amidst shattered ruins rather than any coherent structures.

Unlike the houses destroyed by the aerially-inflicted destruction from your battle with Archer, these ruins aren’t composed primarily of standing walls and broken or collapsed roofs, but the inverse. Peaked roofs with no more severe damage
than the loss of their tiles sit crazily propped up by heaps of walls’ shattered remnants amidst streets strewn with overturned cars and wind-scattered fragments of every kind of construction material. Underneath it all you can smell the blood pooling from innumerable crushed bodies of sleepy suburban families formerly living hazy, ordinary lives. One home, only half destroyed, presents for your review the absurd, gruesome juxtaposition of a bed, a young man, and a rain gutter. The shifting carmine runnel produced by their intersection glimmers in the moonlight, still flowing despite the time elapsed since the blast. He’ll dry up eventually. In a few places fires have been started by the conflict between broken gas pipes and flying sparks, but the depth of the damage they’re capable of inflicting on an area already devastated so heavily seems limited.

The direction of Arturia’s vantage point, however, means that you only cross briefly over the area hit hardest by Excalibur. By the time you make your heavy landing on the rooftop where she, Ayaka, Kōrakuhime, and Futodoki rest, the worst damage done to the surrounding houses is broken window glass.

“Saber-san!” Ayaka lets out a choked cry as she lays eyes on you, going white, and you suddenly realize how much of the pseudo-Archer’s blood was sprayed onto your armor during the battle. You must be quite a gruesome vision.

“You needn’t worry, Miss Ayaka,” you say, letting your armor dematerialize to be replaced by a still-pristine suit, “it isn’t mine. Only the remains of Caster’s pawns.” Turning to the source of the glare you can feel boring into your cheek, you continue, “Arturia, take this, would you? I’ve had enough of carrying him.” With that, you toss Yumigawa’s limp form into her arms. The female Saber, you note, has traded her maid costume for an entirely black, slightly sharper-edged version of the armor she wore into battle before her capture. Her blade, too, is neither invisible nor composed of light, but a heavy black broadsword inlaid with red tracery and radiating a dark aura not unlike your own magical energy.

Kōrakuhime, smiling at your arrival, comments, “Well done, Ani-ue… I observed your battle. It was very… gallant, the way you dispatched all those… Greek fighters.”

“Hm?” Adelheid makes an inquisitive noise as she sweeps her eyes across your assembled companions. “And who are these young ladies?” she wonders aloud, “I don’t see your Einzbern girl around, Alberich.”

“My Master, my sister, my Servant, and if the term does not offend, my familiar,” you briefly explain, nodding to each in turn. “I can make more complete introductions later; for the moment, we have pressing matters to attend to.”
“All of your matters are pressing,” Futodoki interjects sardonically, with a feline yawn that has no effect on his voice. “This is a War, isn’t it? I’d think keeping your own faction in the know is a rather immediate concern, myself.”

“Marvelous insight, Futodoki,” you reply, sarcastically matching his tone of irritating humor, “but I believe we can agree that some matters are more pressing than others.” You raise your voice, continuing more seriously, “Now, everyone, listen well, as we have little time. I expect the Emiya family, the Master of Lancer, the Master of Assassin, or some combination of the three parties to be making their way to this position as we speak, given the visibility of Arturia’s Noble Phantasm and the widespread destruction it’s caused. However, although I was successfully able to capture Yumigawa and bring Adelheid back to my allegiance, Circe has escaped me. I intend to capture her myself; now that she’s lost her temple and imitation Servants she ought to be a trivial threat. You four, please return to the manor with Yumigawa, hidden by the same illusions you used to make it here undetected. Kōrakuhime, I’ll need you to divine Circe’s location for me and direct me to it via Ayaka. What do you think? Do any of you have any reservations?”

Arturia perks up at your mention of the Emiyas, but holds her tongue. Whatever she might have to say about her connection with them, she isn’t bringing it up now.

Ayaka just shakes her head, replying with a slightly sad expression, “No, I guess you won’t need me there if you’re trying to capture her.”

“Easy enough,” says Futodoki, the confidence in his tone compensating thoroughly for the inexpressiveness of a cat’s face.

“There is one... detail I cannot help but wonder about,” Kōrakuhime answers softly. “Are you not concerned regarding... the actions of Liliesviel von Einzbern? She and her Servant... were not with you when you faced Circe. What could have delayed her?”

“Our original plan called for her to rendezvous with me at Yumigawa’s home, not the place where Circe challenged me,” you say dismissively. “No doubt she and Lancer continued there after we parted ways, and may well be on their way here now in pursuit of the source of the blast. No matter. Whatever they encounter, I do not doubt Lancer’s ability to keep Liliesviel safe. Now tell me, Kōrakuhime: can you divine Circe’s location for me now, or is your magic yet unable to reach her?”

“Let us find out,” Kōrakuhime says thoughtfully. “The destruction of her temple may have... removed her wards.” With that, she draws a talisman from her sleeve and, after a whispered command, incinerates it. Kōrakuhime closes her eyes, turning her vision inward for a moment, then opens them to say, “I’ve found her.
Indeed, the loss of energy must have... disrupted her magic heavily. In the interest of your... hurry, I sought only her location, but I can lead you... to it; a luxury hotel. To begin with, travel northeast.”

“Very well then,” you reply. “I’ll count on your instructions. Now, let us go.” With that, you set off to the northeast, following Kōrakuhime’s pointing finger. A few moments later you feel the presence of your compatriots vanish behind you as they’re masked by Futodoki’s techniques. For a while no further message comes from Ayaka and Kōrakuhime; it’s only you and Adelheid, leaping from rooftop to rooftop as you make your way from the suburbs into more densely populated regions.

“Quite an interesting story you told Caster,” Adelheid comments bemusedly. “Was it true? I’ve been considering the matter since you told her, and I haven’t yet made up my mind.”

“Of course it was true,” you answer. “I told you that if I thought it would move you I could explain the mechanics behind what separated Yumigawa and I, didn’t I? Circe seemed more likely to put stock in it, so now you’ve heard the truth as well. The ‘sister’ I mentioned, Kōrakuhime, is another one like myself. She was Ogawara Yatsuhide in the Akeldama. I don’t believe the two of you spoke much.”

“How intriguing,” Adelheid murmurs. “I suppose I ought to get to know her better, now. We have something in common, after all; but on the subject of Caster, what do you suppose you’ll do when we reach her new hiding place? I doubt she’ll be expecting you to have followed her so quickly, and I’m sure you weren’t expecting that sort of reaction from her. You must have been rather shaken; but I imagine you’ve come to a decision by now.”

[ ] “I made it clear when I offered her a final chance to return to her proper allegiance. Now, all that’s left to be done is to make good on my word and kill her.”

[X] “I’ll do just what I promised her I’d do before she fled. I intend to see Circe humbled, and made a proper Servant once more.”

[ ] Say something else. (Write in)

For a time you consider how best to Adelheid’s question in silence, listening with only half a mind to Kōrakuhime’s instructions for your travel, telepathically relayed by Ayaka. You let your feet move as they’re ordered, adjusting your course as needed to follow the path described by the diviner, but for the most part you’re only thinking of how best to put your thoughts regarding Circe into words. At last, though,
at a moment that coincides strangely with your leap out of the suburbs and climb to the higher roofs of office towers and high-rise residential complexes, you reply.

“Frustrating though it may be,” you begin, “I cannot say that Circe’s defiance has truly changed my mind. In fact, it’s accomplished the reverse and hardened my resolve; before her suggestion of this ‘little game’, there remained in my mind the possibility that Circe was only being misled; betraying me through no fault of her own save ignorance. Now,” you continue, a note of rage coming into your voice, “it’s been made plain to me that the source of all her treachery is overweening pride. I’ll do just what I promised her before I gave her the chance to surrender. I’ll humble her, and see her repent her defiance properly before I allow her to return to my service.”

“My, how forgiving,” Adelheid comments with a wry grin. “My old self would have had any subordinates guilty of the kind of treachery she’s shown you shot; even my own behavior must seem rather dubious from your perspective, to be quite frank.”

“Yes, well.” You wave a dismissive hand. “I doubt if that dictator ever had any subordinates quite as unique, or as close in his regard, as the two of you. One cannot simply do away with such fine comrades when there are better ways of securing loyalty. As for your behavior, Adelheid, you’ve been exemplary: willing to return to my side, while appropriately prudent in reserving judgment. I only regret that Circe is not so deserving of my esteem.”

“Ehehe.” Adelheid chuckles, looking away from you with an uncharacteristic blush. “That’s kind of you to say,” she mutters, then seems to regain her train of thought and amends, “Ah, I’d almost forgotten for a moment. I wanted to ask you, young man: just what was that weapon you used to destroy Circe’s temple? I believe you called it ‘Arturia’s noble phantasm’ back there. The effective destruction was quite praiseworthy!”

“Wasn’t it just?” you ask sardonically. “That’s correct, that beam of energy was the attack unleashed by the noble phantasm of the other Saber in this war, Arturia. She’s another subordinate of mine, now, though we were initially at odds with one another. It’s the fairy-forged sword, Excalibur.”

“Excalibur?” Adelheid echoes in stunned disbelief. “And Arturia- then that armored woman was King Arthur? With an appearance like that?”

“She was indeed,” you answer, unable to suppress the grin that arises at her the girl’s undisguised shock, “but I don’t believe you’re one with much leeway to comment on the appearance of other heroic spirits.”

“Bah!” Adelheid scoffs at your claim. “I may have an unusual countenance,” she concedes, “but one can hardly expect every Servant to be transformed by their
noble phantasm, unless the war is filled solely with Berserkers. How, in God’s name, did King Arthur come to be a woman?"

“By being born, as most do,” you answer deadpan, still having too much fun with the situation to pass up the potential for a joke. “She always was a woman; merely one very skilled at hiding her gender, and became a king while maintaining the illusion. It does throw the question of Guinevere into a new light, though, doesn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” Adelheid says, but you give no more response on the subject.

You’ve reached your destination.

As you come to a stop on a rooftop across from the hotel you’ve been guided to, you take up a place to stand and overlook the building, probing for useful information. It’s open for business, you see, despite a marked lack of mobile clients. The ‘pandemic,’ it seems, has for all its success in silencing the city’s night life been ineffective in compelling these representatives of the Tokyo hospitality industry to close their doors to possible visitors. More to the point, however, you can detect no trace of magical energy within the building. Circe, as far as you can tell from out here, is not present inside.

‘Miss Ayaka, would you ask Kōrakuhime if she’s exactly sure of the address she gave me, then repeat the address to me once more?’ you ask, thinking that if the location has no secrets to divulge you may have simply found your way to the wrong destination. No such luck, unfortunately.

‘She says she’s completely certain the Servant is there,’ Ayaka says, ‘and here’s the address, in case it got confused earlier.’ The address is the same as that which you see across the street below. There’s no mistaking it; you’re in the right place and the right time, but haven’t a clue how to refine either of those into narrower categories.

[ ] Attack the hotel from a distance. If you collapse the building Circe is hiding in, she’ll be certain to come crawling out.

[X] Trade your armor for a suit and go in as a patron yourself, then search the place for Circe.

[ ] Return to the manor. You know Circe’s been able to befuddle Kōrakuhime’s divination before, and it’s a fact that there’s no Servant here besides you and Adelheid. You’ll have to locate the witch some other way.

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)
You look hard at the hotel, staring down at it from your lower vantage point: an office building across the street, just half as tall as the tower of temporary residences. You scrutinize it irritably, as if by force of will you can compel some facet of its sleek, twisting design to divulge Circe’s location; but nowhere in the steel and glass semi-polygonal spire rising from its wider lobby building, in the slightly curved windows that wrap between obtuse angles, or in the glass elevator that crawls up one side do you see any clue to Circe’s presence or lack thereof. All you get is its name: Shinjuku Metropole.

Still, you think, better to try and be disappointed than to overlook her hiding place out of reservation; and it is likely your rebellious Servant is here. If Odin and Kōrakuhime can use magic to hide their nature as Servants, Circe must be capable of it as well. It makes sense for her to try hiding in a crowded place like this after being caught out at Yumigawa’s home, too. Besides, as you look down at your apparel you can’t help but find some satisfaction in entering a building where your foreign looks and expensive suit won’t seem quite as out of place as they have during most of your interactions with the mundane people of Tokyo.

“I imagine Circe has decided to disguise herself as a human, masking her magical energy and hiding among the hotel’s occupants,” you say, explaining your thought process to Adelheid. “Kōrakuhime has divined her location to be that hotel, but...” you sweep a hand about you in a gesture that encompasses the surrounding area. “You can feel as well as I do the lack of a Servant’s presence here.”

“How do you intend to flush her out?” Adelheid asks, with a challenging smile. “Collapse the building, perhaps? I’m sure a Servant would be the only one to survive, but she might keep up her disguise and play the part of a corpse.”

“I considered it briefly,” you say, “but the notion has too many complications. She could be buried, feign death, or even transmit herself out of the building during the blast. No, I think what I’ll do instead is return her gambit in kind; I’ll go into that hotel as a human, and find her myself.” You glance over at the girl, taking in again her ostentatious uniform: the gleaming buttons and ornaments, silver polished to a high gloss; the high, stiff collar; the perfectly pressed pleats in her skirt; the arrogant jut of her peaked cap; the perfectly kept shine of knee-high leather boots. There’s no way she’ll fit in anywhere but the parade ground of some army out of some bizarre alternate past. “I think you ought to observe in spirit form, however,” you add. “Unless you have a set of more modern clothing with you, that is.”

“I don’t mind sitting back and watching, Alberich,” Adelheid replies. “You’re still in the process of proving I should lend you my assistance, you’ll recall. In fact,
I’d be more put out if you’d asked me to participate in your deception. So with that, I wish you good fortune!” She gives you a little wave, then fades from view.

Alone now, you make your way to the most heavily shadowed corner of the building before leaping down to ground level. Fortunately the lack of people on the street makes it unlikely for the superhuman movements of Servants to be witnessed, but all the same; a dash of caution can hardly hurt. As you step out of the alleyway where you landed, you survey the street once more from ground level. As it happens, the place is not entirely desolate after all. There’s a man in an ill-fitting suit lying passed out on the sidewalk a few paces away. Further down the road, a group of young men with bleached and heavily styled hair leans against a bicycle rack in front of a convenience store, loudly joking with each other. A lone taxi drives up the street at a slow pace, cruising for a fare that he’s not likely to find. Lights shine in two floors halfway up an office building, where salarymen work overtime even as their city dies around them. Over it all, the moon hangs ambivalent, its shape a melting chip of ice in the clear, cold sky.

Woolgathering. You shake off the strange sense of melancholic observation that had begun to settle on you, walk up to the nearest intersection, and cross the street to loop around and stride confidently through the front entrance of Circe’s hiding place, just as if you belong.

In here, at least, there’s no great sense of desolation or emptiness. A smiling receptionist behind a desk tolerates an irate customer’s ranting about some incomprehensible detail of his schedule thrown into chaos, while a second receptionist works at a computer; a bellhop pushes a cart loaded with luggage industriously across the lobby floor; a few security guards watch the room nonchalantly from unobtrusive locations. The whole place radiates a feeling of expensive, modern luxury as different from the antiquated atmosphere of the Shijou manor as seems possible. Naturally, you observe, the elevators are of the type that requires a keycard. There’ll be no making your way upstairs by confidence alone.

[ ] Approach the unoccupied receptionist and ask after Circe, impersonating a concerned acquaintance.

[X] The bellhop should have a way of accessing all the floors. Approach the man and intimidate him into conducting you upstairs, then knock him out and throw the fire alarm.

[ ] You may not be destroying the building, but that hardly requires you to find Circe by diplomatic means. Force your way upstairs and go through the rooms one by one.
The bellhop, you decide, is your best bet. He’ll have to carry a card that allows him to access every floor in order to do his job, so if you can secure his help you ought to be able to move freely. After that, you can head up to the floors with rooms, throw the fire alarm to send the mundanes out of the place, and make your way to the top floor. Somehow, you can’t picture a woman with Circe’s arrogance staying anywhere but the penthouse suite. Course of action settled, you cross the lobby with quick strides, addressing the young man in the enthusiastic, heavily accented tones of an overconfident tourist.

“Hey!” you begin. “You there, boy! You helped me out with my things last time I was visiting! Great to see you’re still working! How’ve you been?”

Before he can respond you’ve closed the distance and thrown an unwelcome, chummy arm around his shoulders. At the same time, however, the door within you opens, and the energy that flows through your circuits forms into a dagger concealed in your palm. Masking the weapon with your fingers, you press it to the bellhop’s neck and, still smiling like an overly friendly moron, whisper, “If you don’t want to die, we’re going to walk over to those elevators in a nice, friendly, casual way. Understand me?”

The bellhop’s eyes widen and flick up to your face, then down to the steel at his throat and back up to you again. He gives you a tiny, terrified nod, and the two of you begin to cross the lobby in lockstep.

“I’ve been well, sir, thank you for asking,” he says, in a pitiful excuse for a response to your small talk that goes nowhere. Fortunately you needn’t keep up the facade of casual friendliness for long. It takes only a few minutes for you to cross the lobby and step into an elevator after the bellhop presses his plastic pass to the electronic panel. “Um, w-what floor did you want to go to?” he asks, still trying miserably to shrink away from your hand and the blade in it.

“The second will do for now,” you say, “assuming that’s the lowest floor with hotel rooms, at least.”

“Er, no, that would be the fourth floor,” the bellhop explains nervously. “We have other facilities on the second and third; I’ll just take you there.”

He presses the silver “4” button, inciting the elevator to demand a second confirmation of his card’s approval to be there. Once security has been bypassed, though, the chamber slides smoothly up to the lowest floor of rooms and opens with a pleasant chime.
The corridor of the hotel’s upper floors, you observe, has a pleasantly residential feeling to it. Rather dimly lit, with walls the color of black tea with a heavy dose of cream, thick dark-grey carpeting on the floor, and an alcove set into the wall every few doors with a lamp or some little piece of sculpture mounted on an end table. The modernity and comfort of the place reminds you of Yumigawa’s childhood home, and it gives you an odd moment of pause to think now of that place destroyed. Affected by the thought, you feel somehow glad you didn’t take the same approach here. At an intersection on the other end of the corridor, a large picture window looks out on the city below, although you doubt there are too many of those; from outside it appeared that all of the hotel’s windows looked in on customers’ rooms.

“Thank you for your assistance,” you say, letting your knife vanish and grabbing the bellhop by the back of his head as you step forward into the corridor. “I don’t believe I’ll require any further help from you, though.”

“Hey!” he yells, struggling vainly against your grip. “What are you-”

You swing your arm around and slam his face into the wall, compelling silence after the crack of impact. You’re not entirely sure you only left the young man unconscious; when you release him he leaves a trail of blood on the wall as he sinks limply to the floor. Whether dead or only knocked out, though, he’s no longer a concern for you. With the tip of your shoe you turn him over onto his back, then reach down and take the keycard from his chest pocket. With your access to the hotel secured, you turn your focus to finding Circe.

You’d guessed the fire alarm would be in the immediate vicinity of the elevator, but as it turns out that isn’t so. You have to cover most of the corridors on this floor before you can find it, and when you finally do you discover that in a striking example of poor design it’s equidistant from all exits. What can have motivated the building’s architect to put the thing as far as possible from anywhere one might want to be when setting it off you can’t guess, but at least now you’ve found it. Hoping it’s the right decision to isolate Circe, you throw the switch.

The hotel is plunged immediately into a cacophony of shrieking electric bells. It isn’t long before doors begin to be slammed open and customers to rush for the exits, forming that aimless, frightened mass common to emergency situations in densely filled buildings. Shouldering your way through the crowd you head for the bare metal stairs of the fire escape, then begin your ascent against a tide of hotel patrons fleeing their heights for the safety of the ground. Somehow you doubt the elevator will be a good place to be at the moment.

As you climb the fleeing people pushing against you gradually thin out until by the time you reach the top floor you’re alone. In fact, unlike the open doors you’ve
passed on each level up until now, the fire-escape entrance at this highest height remains firmly closed. Whoever is sleeping up here hasn’t been moved by your alarm. The door is constructed in such a way as to be usable only from within, irritatingly, but at this point you’re not worried about being noticed. You cut it into several pieces with two quick swipes of *Heiligöffnungschwert* and push your way into the penthouse suite.

The fire escape opens (once again) on a corridor. This time, there are three immediate exits: a pair of double doors across the hall from you, a single door on one end of it off to your right, and a doorway into a larger room on your left. You start with the double doors, pulling them open to reveal a closet full of dresses. Nothing there, then. For a moment you’re uncertain, trying to decide whether Circe is more likely to be hiding in the bedroom you expect on your right or the living room on your left. Then you hear movement, and that settles the matter. You walk through the empty doorway to find, just as you’d imagined, a living room. Circe, standing against an enormous picture window on the opposite side of the room, looks at you with an expression like a startled rabbit.

“How did you get here so quickly?” she demands, projecting haughty control into her voice despite her dire situation.

[ ] “I have another Caster, of course. I simply had her divine your location, as you did so often during the War in the Akeldama.”

[ ] “That’s unimportant, Circe. I’ve found you; now your little ‘game’ is at an end. You may return to being my Servant, or you may die.”

[X] Say nothing; simply charge across the room and seize her.

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

Circe’s question is meaningless: at best an instinctive reaction demanding information secondary to your priorities and hers, more likely a half-considered bid for time. To answer it without first capturing her would be equally foolish. Instead you ignore her voice, and focus on the action necessary to effect that capture. A physical strike should do it. Your strength is sufficient to overpower Circe easily; but then, she knows that as well. Better to prepare a magical fallback to activate if she should escape your hands. A door opens within you, and at the command of your will tendrils of Nothingness spread from the soles of your shoes, running into the shadows at your feet in the doorway, and in the hidden corners around the room.
To keep Circe from observing your magic, you spring forward at the moment of your its manifestation, taking in the room she’s been waiting in as you enter it. Deep, luxurious carpeting in muted grey; walls, painted in a paler, smoky color; two armchairs designed in spare Scandinavian style, and across the room from them a large flat-screen television; the picture window across from you, between chairs and entertainment; Circe pinned nervously against it; and you, dashing across the room to seize your rebellious Servant by the throat and-

“Ατλάς!”

The moment you began to move, Circe spoke. Despite this, you nearly reach her before the word has time to pass her lips. You’re just a few inches away when its power takes hold and the air around you changes. For a moment it thickens gradually, taking on the consistency of honey that resists your progress while yielding to force. Another fraction of a second and the spell is complete, granting the air a barrier solidity. You’re held as if trapped within a block of resin, unable to move your slightest extremities. As you remain there, frozen as if by a photograph in the act of charging forward with one hand outstretched, you watch Circe’s frightened expression fade. Her lips curve into a smile and her tense, outstretched wings relax as her confidence returns and she haughtily asks, “Did you think I’d have no method of restraining a Servant with Magic Resistance? You may resist my power, but that immunity doesn’t protect the air around you. Really, Alberich, I’m a little disappointed. I suppose that’s just the drawback that comes with such speed, though.”

As she smirks at you, enjoying her moment of triumph, you make your next move. You had planned for her to use this spell, of course, or something like it, if she didn’t attempt simply to flee. Now your freed tendrils spring up from the shadows at her feet, wrapping countless times around her body and gagging her mouth to ensure no further spells can be uttered. Each limb is held precisely immobile, kept in place by its own spiraling ribbon, and of course you haven’t neglected her torso. The tendrils criss-crossing her chest and stomach are tight enough to painfully compress her ribs and lungs, giving Circe a first taste of your vindictive pleasure. The fact that she apparently exchanged her showy gown for the smaller robes she wore during the War in the Akeldama prior to your arrival is a convenience she must now be regretting, for it lets you clearly see what you’re doing, rather than having to work around an obstructive outfit.

With Circe dealt with and struggling futilely against her unyielding bindings, you turn to your own restraints. Again, you open the door within yourself and fill your magic circuits with Ayaka’s Od, giving it the stuff of Emptiness and shaping it now into the form of Absorption. Now you let it pour from your outstretched right
hand into the air, corrupting Circe’s spell of binding and taking her power over the space around you into yourself, making it of you and subject to you, gradually spreading your power over the barrier until at last you reach air untreated by magic. With the whole of the thing in your power, you dismiss the rigidity commanded by Circe and can finally take a more comfortable posture. You were restrained only for a few minutes, but total immobility, you’ve discovered, is quite taxing.

Freed, you stride over to Circe, who stares terrified daggers at you over her gag. It’s only her eyes you can guess from, but the woman seems utterly torn between fury and fright. Still silent, you reach out a hand and gently take hold of the one place not yet seized by your ribbons: her throat. Then you squeeze, and with hateful force slam her up and back into the window, holding the woman’s struggling form aloft by your grip on her neck alone. Fright takes the lead in her expression, and as you keep constricting her throat, taking the breath from her by infinitesimal degrees, tears form at the corners of those jewel-like, iridescent orbs that are at present her only means of communication.

“Are you still enjoying your ‘game’, Circe?” you ask, cold rage filling every word. “Perhaps I ought to bring it to a proper end. The Grail needs seven Servants dead to function and at the moment it seems that a woman like you, who treats treachery as a game, would be better served to it than serving me.” You shake her like a rag doll, slamming her head again back into the glass behind her. “Do you know how it felt?” you rage. “To be without word from my Servants for days; to discover you serving that impostor; to convince you of the truth at last, and still have you laugh and run away from me, citing your pride? You’d rather be in charge, Circe? Look at the mess you’ve made of your attempt here! Look at the nightmare your life became! You’re good for nothing but serving me, damn you!”

You shrink the tendril that gags Circe to the size of a wire, holding her tongue immobile but otherwise not hiding her mouth. Then, still holding her by the throat with your right hand, you smack Circe hard across the face with your left. “I’ve finished playing your game, Circe,” you hiss. “I won’t kill you now, but I do intend to see you properly punished; and if you ever think of treachery again,” you tighten your grip on Circe’s neck, reminding her just how easy it would be for you to snap it. “I’ll send you to something you can’t betray.”

For a few moments more you stare into her eyes. She’s crying freely now, silently weeping, but there’s still a spark of energy under the fear and despair. Whether that spark will kindle a new fire of treachery or fade into submission and renewed loyalty is something you can’t yet be certain of. Perhaps it would be better to keep her bound until you’ve returned to the manor, you think, and to then consult
with Kūrakuhime and Liliesviel regarding how best to compel her loyalty. After a few moments of toying with the idea, though, you put it aside. Prudent as it might be to keep the woman incapable of further treachery, the strain that maintaining her bonds for so long could put on Ayaka’s magical energy is something you want to avoid.

Finally you drop Circe, dismissing as you do so the Nothingness that binds her, save only those straps which keep her gagged and bound at wrist and ankle. Her supports removed, the woman falls limply to the floor, sinking to her knees without the strength to stand properly.

“Now, by the rules of that ‘game’ you devised, you’ll return to my loyal service,” you say flatly, your burning rage faded to leave only cold ashes of contempt. “I wonder, are you worthy enough of trust that I can dismiss your bonds? Perhaps you won’t honor even your word, and you’ll fly from me the moment you can speak.”

Circe shakes her head, rapidly blinking away her tears. Already her expression is calming down as she sees the ray of hope you’ve offered her.

“You’ll keep your word, then, and not think of betraying me again?” you ask.

Circe nods, looking up at you in mute hope. With a wave of your hand, you allow the last bonds on her to dissolve. Then you reach out and pull her to her feet, dragging her into a half-embrace with one arm wrapped around her waist as the other hand wipes the blood and tears from her face with your handkerchief. “That’s good, Circe,” you say softly, infusing your voice with some kindness to create positive reinforcement for her compliance in addition to the punishment you’ve already given her. “I would like you to remember that this needn’t have happened. I’m not some brute, assaulting you for my own enjoyment, but was driven to this as a consequence of that absurd notion of a ‘game’ that you decided to act out. What you must understand, Circe, is that you belong to me. From the moment you were summoned in the Akeldama, you have been sworn to remain by my side, serve me, and devote yourself to my goals. Because you let your pride cloud that truth, I had to remind you of it by force. I won’t be able to give you the same freedom you enjoyed in the Akeldama either, after this.”

With her face clean now, you pull Circe tighter into an embrace, enfolding her in your arms and pressing her against your chest; comforting and protecting her after her trauma, though you were the source of that pain. “Even so,” you continue, “throw away your meaningless pride, return to the role of my Servant, and I promise you that you can find happiness with me.” You only hold her silently for a short time after that; feeling the small body of the woman who fought by your side throughout the Akeldama War against yours; smelling the slight aroma of fruit and strange flowers that her hair and feathers carry; if only she were not so false, how much
sweeter this moment might be! You break away, settling your disordered thoughts by force and leaving the woman to stand on her own feet while you sink into one of the suite’s armchairs.

“I understand, Master,” she answers sullenly, giving you a morose, conflicted look. “You’ve won our game, and now you have me bound just the way Odysseus did the night we met. So? What are you going to do with me now? Are you being kind now, or is your ‘proper punishment’ not done yet?”

“I suppose that’s still to come,” you say with a chuckle, “although that does depend on whether one considers properly humble living conditions to be a punishment. I have to make sure that goddess’ pride you haven’t quite forgotten never gets the better of you again, you understand. You can rest easy for the moment, though. I don’t intend to hurt you anymore; but let’s not dwell on such topics. Now that we’re no longer enemies, why don’t you start with an explanation? What were those indistinct spirits that you sent to fight me, and what is it you’ve been trying to accomplish in this War? Lacking a Lesser Grail of your own, you surely couldn’t have accomplished the Einzberns’ purpose.”

“Oh? You’re interested in my plans now, after calling them a mess?” she retorts, putting on a sardonic smile in defiance of the tracks her tears show on her face and the red mark of your hand on her throat. “As I’m sure you’ve heard from the little Einzbern girl, the Holy Grail has all sorts of interesting functions. It summons Servants, keeps them in the world, facilitates the command spells, and even amplifies the effectiveness of the magical energy that Masters give their Servants. Although the magic that modern humans have created is generally weak and sloppy, this particular ritual is a bit impressive! I’m not really sure at this point if the ‘wish-granting’ idea is actually true, but I doubt I’d be eligible for that anyway, since I’m not one of the Servants this Grail summoned for the War. So what I wanted to do was eliminate every participant and keep the War from ending. With the Holy Grail underground functioning indefinitely, I would be able to study it properly until I’d discerned all of the details of its construction.”

“I see,” you say, nodding. “What was it you intended to do with the Holy Grail once you’d come to understand how to replicate it?”

“Oh, that’s not important,” Circe replies dismissively. “I’m bound to serve your goals now, right? You wanted to hear about what those Archers you fought were. Well, you know my Noble Phantasm has transformation as its primary purpose, don’t you? It’s a very convenient way of keeping a man alive. Take a drop of blood before he’s killed, and you can transform it into a new warrior; take a drop of the new man’s blood, and you can make another from that. Repeat, and just like that you have a
whole troop of Servants!” She claps her hands with the theatrical smile of one presenting a marvelous trick.

“Not quite,” you interject, your flat tone cutting into Circe’s excitement. “Those things were hardly replicas of Odysseus; I killed the both, and I saw their differences well enough.”

“Well, no,” Circe concedes, looking dejected. “It’s not a perfect replication, when the subject of the magic is a spirit body. They lost a bit of detail every time, and the end result was what you saw. Still, those soldiers are a step above my ordinary familiars in fighting ability, I think you’ll agree.” With a malicious smirk, she adds, “I sent over a hundred of them to intercept your Einzbern darling; I wonder what she and her magical Lancer thought of that, don’t you?”

“What?” The word comes out in a roar, fury rekindled within you in an instant as you spring to your feet and grab her roughly by the shoulders. Even Odin should have had difficulty dealing with so many foes with the physical abilities of a Servant. “What became of them?” you demand, choking back your anger to return to a level tone. “I’ll hear what it was you were trying to accomplish later, so don’t think you’ve had me forget it; for the moment, however, I must know what you did to my allies? What happened to those pseudo-Archers, Circe?”

“I really don’t know,” she says with a shrug and a cruel smile. “Someone distracted me just after I sent them off, you see.”

Without bothering to reply further, you push her away in irritation and rush out of the of the living room, then stride back out the way you came to step over the remains of the fire-escape door and out into the cold night. For a moment you stand there, still on the uppermost landing of the fire escape, considering what to do next with the chill November air cooling your heated emotions. The steel stairwell is empty now, you notice, as the evacuation of the hotel is long-since over. In fact, you imagine most of the patrons have returned to their rooms by now, comforted by the staff about the nonexistent fire. Whatever’s become of Odin and Liliesviel, that’s probably over by now as well, for good or ill; surely there’s little point in rushing off worrying over her. Besides, the girl has Odin to protect her, you remind yourself; she couldn’t have been harmed. You ought not to worry.

Yet there in your mind, the horrible images conjured up by Circe’s words parade: a rain of arrows, too many for Odin to block, and one sending her limousine into an explosion; a lone soldier, isolated from the group of his brethren battling Odin, creeping up to the limousine and pulling Liliesviel roughly from it, shortsword brandished to cut her throat; Liliesviel crushed by debris from a destroyed building; Liliesviel decapitated by a stray arrow; Liliesviel betrayed by Odin in her moment of
need. Your stomach lurches. Your heart palpitates. No, you can’t talk yourself into waiting longer after all. You glance about, considering taking the stairs, before deciding to simply jump down. You put a hand on the fence, vault over, and thirty storeys whip by with the air as you plummet to street level. Circe’s presence follows, you note in the air; good, it seems she’s keeping to her word after all, and following you as an attendant ought to.

Then your feet slam into concrete, and you’re on the ground in an alley beside the Shinjuku Metropole. Moving hastily you stride out to the sidewalk, looking around at the same time as you reach your mind out to contact Ayaka and have Kōrakuhime search for Liliesviel by divination. All at once, you stop. Your foot comes down halfway through a step. Your mind retracts into the present space from an indefinite point outside of yourself. Their limousine is idling by the curb in front of the hotel, with Odin leaning against it.

“Good evening, my boy,” he says cheerfully, raising a hand in greeting. “Your endeavor met with success, I see. Why not sit down and discuss the matter with the little Miss? It’s unfortunate we were unable to meet you at your nemesis’ home, but then it doesn’t seem you managed to get there either.”

“You never made it to the magus’ house? Is Liliesviel unharmed?” you ask, closing rapidly to face Odin. “I’ve heard what Caster sent against the two of you, and frankly it concerns me.”

“Why don’t you find out?” he asks with a smirk, sweeping his hand along the limousine door in an ‘after you’ gesture. “Well or injured, she’s in there waiting for you.”

“Kh!” you let out an incoherent sound of anger, knowing you’re letting Odin have the entertainment he wants from you but unable to keep your anger back in spite of the knowledge. You slam the car door open, bursting in to find Liliesviel-

Unharmed. You breathe a sigh of relief, then sit down and pull her onto your lap, bringing her into an embrace despite her squeak of momentary fright, comforting yourself with her safety. For a few moments you’re silent, content to sit there and feel her; warm, whole, and unharmed. Your heart settles at the reassurance of it. None of your imaginings held any meaning; your promise is unbroken; Liliesviel’s life hasn’t been cut short before experiencing the love she needs.

“Ehehe~” She giggles sweetly, wrapping small arms around your neck in return of your embrace. “Alberich, you brute! You gave me such a fright!”

“I heard how that Olympian Caster tried to stop you from reaching her temple,” you explain. “I had to be certain you were unharmed. I admit, I may have been a bit overzealous.”
“Oh, that’s so sweet,” she sighs, hot breath tickling your ear. “I’m just fine, though, so you needn’t worry. Otto didn’t have any trouble sweeping away those sloppy prototypes. I’m sure you had a harder time of things, facing two Servants all by yourself. Are you alright, Alberich?” She pulls back a bit to look up into your face, pressing her hands to your cheeks as she gives you a worried inspection.

“I’m quite well,” you answer, smiling down at her. “Both Servants have been brought to heel, and the magus who was cooperating with them is back at the Shijou manor, in Arturia’s custody.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful!” she cries with ecstatic, childlike glee. “Do you have that woman who attacked me with you? Can I have her now?”

[ ] “Of course. She’s just outside, let me introduce the two of you.”

[ ] Suggest that Liliesviel take Adelheid instead.

[X] Say something else (“Why don’t we talk about this at the manor? We have other things to talk about, and it might be for the best if we both had some time to loosen up before we discussed this.”)

“Perhaps not just now,” you say, with a conciliatory smile. “Why don’t we talk about this at the manor? We have other things to discuss, and it might be for the best if we both had some time to think before making deciding just what to do with the prisoners.”

“He~h?” Liliesviel pretends playfully to pout, prettily pursing her lips and puffing out a cheek as she moves her hands to your shoulders and shifts on your lap to draw away from you. “Don’t tell me you’re thinking about keeping them both for yourself after all.”

“No,” you say, “as I said before, we ought to take our time in deciding which of the two each of us will manage; and frankly, I’d rather do that at the manor. One can never be certain when one’s enemies might be watching, or what they might be able to glean from observation of a Servant’s contract being formed in a place like this.”

“Oh, alright,” Liliesviel concedes with a discouraged expression. “You do have a point, I suppose. I only wanted to have some fun to make up for not getting the chance to be with you when we found that magus trying to learn our family’s secrets.” With that, the girl picks herself up off of you, skirts rustling as they fall back into place, and walks over to roll down a window and poke her head out. “Otto,” she says, “we’re ready to go home. Come in and sit down, would you?” His reply is inaudible.
from inside the car, but it must be in the affirmative, for Liliesviel rushes back over to retake her place on your lap, this time plopping herself down to nestle her back against your chest, just before the door opens.

As Odin steps in and eases himself down into the leather seat across from you, you call out, “Caster, Berserker, you come in as well. It’s time to be on our way.” in a voice of authority. At your command, Circe and Adelheid file in and take seats on either side of you, leaving Odin to enjoy his row alone. They aren’t making much of a show of being prisoners, you note with mild irritation. Both walk with confidence, not showing any sign of nervousness at their ‘capture’ by a supposedly lethal foe. As the two plainly unrestrained Servants enter, you feel Liliesviel’s body go rigid in your lap; even with her face turned away from you the wide-eyed expression of shock she must be wearing is easy enough to picture.

“Alberich!” she snaps, twisting around again to face you. “What are they doing here and not restrained at all! When you said they’d been brought to heel, I thought they’d be unconscious, or you’d sent them back to the Shijou house with that Servant maid of yours, or something!”

“You needn’t worry, Liliesviel,” you reply, stroking her hair reassuringly. “Each of these Servants knows that I would strike the head from her shoulders the moment she made any attempt to escape.”

“So, you speak German as well, do you, Saber?” Adelheid interjects, raising an eyebrow. “What a convenience; I suppose Caster is the only one left out of our communication, then. Of course, that’s hardly the only field in which she lags.”

“You know perfectly well that we both received knowledge of all modern languages when we were summoned!” Circe snaps. “I’ve only been speaking the local language for Rushorou’s sake; or did you think I was a hero from this ridiculous country?”

“Of course not,” Adelheid answers with a smirk. “This island is far too populous to be your home. Tell me, though, what about your utter uselessness in combat? I suppose you’ll claim it was merely a ruse?”

Circe’s cheeks redden, and she furiously retorts, “At least I stood my ground at all, rather than being swayed by pure diplomacy!”

“Be silent!” Liliesviel shouts over the rapidly rising volume of the two Servants’ argument. Surprisingly, the command is effective; Circe and Adelheid cease their arguing for a moment, more shocked than anything, and into the silence Liliesviel coldly orders, “Have your petty argument about who’s at fault for your defeat somewhere we needn’t listen to this inanity! Right now, I want to hear both of your true names, so that Alberich and I can discuss what to do with you.”
For a few moments, the two Servants seem unsure of how to respond. They turn to look at Liliesviel, then at you, and then back at her, eyes lingering for some reason on the way your arms naturally rest wrapped protectively around the girl on your lap. Finally, Circe says, “If you insist,” with acid hostility in her voice despite the compliant words. “I am the enchantress Circe of Aeaea. I regret that we couldn’t have met under more appropriate circumstances, for I should have dearly liked to give you the greeting you deserve.”

From your other side, Adelheid answers coldly, “My name is Adelheid, though you’ll find it tells you little.”

“Hmph!” Liliesviel huffs irritably at the two. “You two really don’t seem to have learned anything from Alberich defeating you.” Then, to you she continues, “Don’t you think it’s absurd how free they act after you went to all that trouble to capture them alive?”

“Not necessarily,” you answer. “One can hardly expect them to fear you to the same degree as the one who defeated them, after all. Don’t worry, though; such is the way of things with captured Servants. Arturia still resists me, as you observed. With time, I’m sure we’ll find plenty of ways to bring all of our Servants into line.”

“I suppose so,” Liliesviel says, leaning back against you and fading into a pensive silence. She’s clearly dissatisfied with the situation for the moment, while Circe and Adelheid are on edge despite their posturing. Only Odin is at his ease, watching the four of you with laughing eyes over a serious expression. Still, no-one seems to have anything to say for the moment.

[ ] Say something to Odin (What?)
[X] Say something to Liliesviel (What?)
[ ] Say something to Adelheid (What?)
[ ] Say something to Circe (What?)
[ ] Let the drive back to the manor finish in silence.

“On a related note,” you say, rousing Liliesviel from her pensive contemplation, “Liliesviel, you had mentioned the primary use of the Holy Grail War becoming the creation of Servants, if we’re able to sustain them after the fact. I wonder, do you have any idea how that might be done? I understand that in the present situation, the Greater Grail facilitates the Servants’ existence to a significant degree, but after the War that would presumably cease to be the case.”
“Yes,” Liliesviel says, with audible reservations, “but the help it provides is only in multiplying the amount of energy a Master gives their Servant. If you have enough energy, you can even sustain a Servant without the Holy Grail; and after we’ve completed the Heaven’s Feel, you and I won’t have any lack, will we?” She gives you a radiant smile, beaming at the prospect.

“No, I suppose not,” you agree. “If we can simply provide all of the energy needed, there’s little purpose in considering means of replicating the Grail’s effects.” Although this is the first time you’ve heard of magical energy production mentioned in relation to the Third Sorcery, it’s better to simply play along than to question Liliesviel’s ideas about it. Besides, the notion isn’t difficult to explain in light of what you have heard. It only stands to reason that a “mystic perpetual motion machine” would produce more energy than the ordinary life of a human being does. Still, that does leave you with little else to say on the subject. Not wanting the drive to fall into silence again, you raise another topic that’s been concerning you: Assassin.

“Now that we’ve resolved that,” you begin, “let us move on to more pressing matters. Does any of you have any information regarding our final enemy, Assassin? Locating him seems to be maddeningly difficult,” you add, a tempestuous expression coming to your face as you recall Assassin’s galling attacks and consider the prospect of being unable to have your revenge on him.

“Not yet,” Liliesviel says, “I haven’t had a spare moment for Otto to look for him since we talked about this earlier today.”

You glance to Odin, who gives you an expressive shrug. “Assassin continues to elude me,” he says, without showing the slightest hint of a personal failure in his tone, expression, or posture.

“I believe you might be interested in what I’ve observed,” Circe answers smugly. She casts an arrogant grin on all four of the car’s other occupants, puffed up with self-satisfaction at this moment to outshine her magical rival, Odin.

“Go ahead.” You nod to the recaptured Servant, although you do your best to inject some sternness into your reply. You can’t have her feeling too superior in the wake of her recent treachery, after all. “What might that have been?”

“To begin with, I didn’t have any more success than he did,” she begins, “but earlier today something changed completely. For the first time, Assassin’s presence appeared in my divination for a moment!” Her wings twitch excitedly as she makes the announcement, looking around the car for awed reactions. Deflated slightly by the flat impatience she receives, she continues, “For some reason, Assassin’s presence appeared to be in two places at once. It was skulking around that garbage heap that
used to be the Einzberns’ tower, but it was also at the house where that magus family trying to stop the Grail War lives.”

“How strange,” you muse. “Were you able to observe Assassin’s actions at the Emiya house?”

“I couldn’t,” Circe says disappointedly. “Like I said, Assassin appeared for just a moment. When I went to scry and examine what Assassin was doing, there was no Servant in either place. The presence vanished from my divination after that, too.

So rather than some significant breakthrough on Circe’s part or major failure of Assassin’s presence concealment, you think, it seems more likely that the detection was due to a momentary slip-up on Assassin’s part. Even so, the information does seem like it could be useful. How would a Servant be in two places at once? What business does Assassin have with Emiya? You’re considering these questions when the car pulls to a stop, and the glass partition between the driver’s compartment and that of the passengers opens to allow Stengel to inform you that you’ve arrived back at the Shijou manor. Still, what to address first upon your return?

[] Now that you’re back home you can finish ‘dividing the spoils’ and have Circe form a contract with Liliesviel.

[X] After your mock falling out, you’ve come to the realization that you can’t hide the truth from Liliesviel any longer. Find a place where the two of you can speak alone, then tell her who you really are and how you really feel.

[] Leave these four to themselves for a time, and look for Ayaka’s group (To discuss what?)

[] Do something else (Write in)

As you sit there, with Liliesviel on your lap and the two Servants beside you as the limousine rolls to a stop, you experience what feels like a moment of clarity. You perceive the situation between you and Liliesviel fully formed: the way you’ve been lying to her, leading her on without quite stating the false belief you’ve been encouraging her to hold; the way your feelings for her have grown into a deep, genuine affection with an intensity unique not only in your life, but in Yumigawa’s memories as well; the way that things between the two of you will soon be shattered if you do nothing to change them. Liliesviel wants Circe for her Servant and there can hardly be any chance of her not interrogating the enchantress as to her origins and plans, with the compulsion of her command spell if need be. Were that to happen,
Circe would reveal your deception and quite possibly make Liliesviel into your enemy. Could you bear to raise your sword to this sweet girl, so alone without you; so in need of familial love and guidance? The mere thought of it pains you. No, you know what you need to do. You’ll have to explain the whole thing, now; to put it as well as you can, and hope for the best.

You’ve arrived at the manor, Stengel is saying. You reach across Adelheid to open the door, and hear simultaneous sharp intakes of breath from Liliesviel and Circe as it swings open and chill air rushes into the car. As the five of you pour out onto the walk up to the front door, you step ahead of the rest. With a sweep of your arm, and the same cruel grin you often showed Arturia during her confinement, you announce, “Here, ladies, is the Shijou manor. Caster, Berserker, welcome to your new home. It’s no golden palace, I’ll admit, but I’m sure you’d rather live here than in the pit that has been reduced to.”

“The place is ordinary enough,” Adelheid replies, undercutting your show of sarcastic welcome with a level tone. “There’s no need to be so grandiose.”

Circe, on the other hand, is properly put out for the first time since entering the car, averting her eyes from you and pouting. “I’m not going to forgive you for destroying that place, you know,” she says irritably.

With the presentation of the building complete, you lead everyone up through the garden and hold the front door for the group to pass by you into the entrance hall. As she passes, you take Liliesviel aside and softly say, “There’s a rather pressing matter I’d like to discuss with you inside; alone. Do you mind?”

“Is that so?” Liliesviel gives you a calculating look, then turns to Odin and, all cold authority, says, “Otto, take our prisoners down into the basement; find the room where Alberich was keeping his new Saber, and keep an eye on them there.”

“If you like,” Odin replies with a nod. Then, turning a grin as hard and bright as polished marble on your Servants, says, “Come along, girls. I’m sure you’re reluctant to leave your captor, but I’ll have to insist; and I’m sure you’d rather not force me to get rough.” With that, he shepherds the two off towards the basement, leaving you and Liliesviel alone in the entryway.

“So? What is it you want to tell me, Alberich?” Liliesviel asks, looking up at you with a sweet, trusting expression that sends a shocking pang of guilt through you for the way you’ve brought this situation about.

“Why don’t we go up to the library?” you suggest, nodding your head towards the inner area of the manor. “This isn’t a matter that ought to be discussed here.” Somehow confessing the deception you’ve maintained since meeting Liliesviel here, beside an umbrella stand, just doesn’t seem appropriate.
“Okay,” she replies, still keeping up that smile as she follows you upstairs. “Still, for you to have something so important to tell me now, I wonder what it could be,” she ponders aloud, and for a moment there’s something in her tone, a hint of overly sincere ignorance, that doesn’t seem quite right.

The thought flashes through your mind that she already knows; that she’s toying with you, and has been aware of your deception all along! But that’s impossible. You dismiss the notion and push open the library door, striding across the room to sit down in your accustomed armchair while Liliesviel takes that opposite you. Fortunately the room is empty; wherever Arturia, Ayaka, Futodoki, and Kōrakuhime are, it isn’t surprising that they wouldn’t choose to spend their time together here.

Liliesviel, you notice, is fidgeting in her seat. She doesn’t seem to know where to put her hands, and plays unconsciously with the frills of her dress rather than folding them in her lap as she ordinarily does. Of course, you aren’t precisely calm yourself, you reflect. No matter. You steel yourself, assume a grave expression, and begin to speak.

“I must tell you a story, Liliesviel,” you explain. “You could call it a confession, of sorts; though I was not responsible for many of the events. Still, it is an essential aspect of this Holy Grail War; one of which you have been ignorant, and which I have kept from you: the explanation for the two Servants we captured tonight, as well as other things. For remaining silent until now, I owe you an apology.”

“A story, is it?” Liliesviel asks, looking intrigued despite her trepidation. “Alright. I accept your apology, Alberich. Go ahead.”

“On the night of November 13, Jean-Pierre Vaisset, the heir to the Vaisset and Shijou magus lineages, summoned his Servant: Caster,” you begin. “That same night, Caster activated his Noble Phantasm, Akeldama, for the first and last time. It was a potent magical ritual which had three effects: first, to create an artificial world, cut off from the space and time of reality, over which Caster had complete power; second, to summon to that world 1,046 people from around the globe; and third, to direct the energy of these individuals’ souls to certain receptacles upon their deaths; provided that Caster did not kill them himself. The energy had to be gathered from a ‘sacrifice’. Vaisset believed that Caster would be the recipient of this power, and thus empowered would be able to easily take victory in the Holy Grail War. Caster had other intentions.”

“He didn’t want to take the sacrifice’s power himself?” Liliesviel tilts her head, giving you a confused look.
“No.” You shake your head, recalling Judas’ bizarre, seemingly purposeless plan, and where it’s brought you. “He didn’t. Caster used the control he had over his artificial world to create four artificial human souls, and to give them the personalities and memories of people from the outside world. These four would be the recipients of the power *Akeldama* collected, if his plan was successful. It was only in the event of a failure that he would carry out his Master’s wishes.”

“So?” The nervousness has faded from Liliesviel’s expression, to be replaced by acute interest in the bizarre ritual that was the *Akeldama*. She leans forward slightly in her seat as she asks, “What was Caster’s plan?”

“With his power over the artificial reality of the *Akeldama*, Caster could do almost anything within that realm,” you continue, “including the replication of an incredibly energy-intensive ritual which would ordinarily require years of preparation. He held his own Holy Grail War, with seven Servants called to it by the true promise of an omnipotent wish-granter: him, within the limits of the *Akeldama*. These seven Servants were distributed between the 1,050 competitors, and one of the four artificial souls was meant to become the victor and sole survivor of the War; to face and kill Caster in a final showdown, and thus to receive the power of the *Akeldama* when the realm collapsed upon his death. This power would enable the artificial soul to persist outside of the *Akeldama* in spite of its vanished origin, and would make it far more than it had once been. The artificial human would become a living Servant; a new hero, capable of feats not seen since the Age of Gods.” You shrug your shoulders, as you conclude in a far less dramatic tone, “In reality three of us survived, and had to divide the power, so the ritual wasn’t a complete success. No plan is perfect.”

“Three of us?” Liliesviel echoes in a choked voice. The excited expression she wore through most of your tale is vanished, and her face has gone stiff and emotionless; a desperate poker face restraining a roiling tide of emotions.

“That’s correct,” you answer gravely. “That story was the tale of my creation. I’ve never been an Einzbern homunculus, Liliesviel; I was—”

“So it’s true after all,” comes her miserable reply, in a low moan. Liliesviel hangs her head in despair, a curtain of hair hiding her face from you. You can see her emotions well enough, though, from the hands that clench with desperate tightness at her skirts and the tears that drip silently down to produce dark spots on her white lace.

“I should—” she breaks off, swallowing a sob, not allowing herself to cry aloud. “I should not feel this way. I should not be hurt. I suspected it couldn’t be true, almost from the first moment I decided you were my brother; then there was the ritual to link you with the Greater Grail, and your story about a false discovery, and I
knew; but somehow, hearing it from you; that you were simply *using* me!” She breaks off again, subsiding into silent weeping.

“No!” you shout, jumping to your feet and rushing over to take Liliesviel by the shoulders and pull her close. “It’s true that I deceived you, nothing can undo that, but you can’t believe that I was only using you! Listen to me, Liliesviel! At first it was purely utilitarian, that’s true enough. I saw you as a useful ally to cultivate, and one who could give me the power to live beyond the end of the War; but then,” You give her a pained smile, happy memories warring within you against the pain of the moment. “Then everything changed. You captivated me, Liliesviel; and the longer I spent with you, the more deeply I came to care for you. I truly want to be with you, now and after the War, not out of utility but out of affection; I want to help you make the dreams you told me about while we descended to the Greater Grail a reality! Accuse me of anything you like,” you implore, “but understand this at least: that I am *not* only using you.”

Liliesviel slowly raises her face to look up at you, staring into your eyes imploringly. “Can I trust your word?” she asks in a tiny voice. “Is that really true?”

“Of course,” you insist.

“Then... then...” she trails off uncertainly; for the first time since you’ve met the girl she seems truly lost, uncertain how to find a guarantee of truth from a confessed liar she’s allowed into her heart. So you prove your feelings in the best way you can. You take her head in your hands, brush the tears from her cheeks, and kiss her.

For a moment Liliesviel is stiff with shock, but she soon draws herself close to you, hands clutching at your lapels and lips pressed against yours. Despite her show of willing, it’s a chaste kiss; utterly different from the sloppy, consuming experiences of sharing magical energy with Adelheid. Liliesviel’s lips remain firmly closed, pressed tight against one another to protect against any lecherous incursions; her hands against you are trembling along with the rest of her body, and the silent weeping that began with your confession continues unabated despite your embrace. Though you hold her and try to comfort her, your kiss soon takes on the bitter salt-tang of her tears.

Finally, after a hazy stretch of time, her shivering fades and her crying ceases. A few moments more and you break away, leaving Liliesviel flushed, and with a confused, uncertain expression on her face. Before you can say anything more, she says softly, “Thank you, Alberich; I’m sorry, but I need to think by myself for a while. Would you leave me here?”
“I understand,” you say, clasping her hand and smiling comfortingly through the pain of not having done more. “I’ll hope to see you at dinner.”

With that, you draw away and exit through the library door, stepping out into the corridor and leaving Liliesviel alone with her thoughts. You’re tempted to replicate her choice of solitude, distancing yourself from the ache you feel after that exchange by focusing on magical theory, but of course you would need the library for that. You’ll have to find something else to occupy your time instead.

[ ] Descend to the basement to check on Odin, Circe, and Adelheid. (What do you intend to say to them or ask them about?)

[X] Find Arturia, and relax your mind by sparring with her.

[ ] Go looking for Kōrakuhime, to discuss the ritual the two of you used to take control of Arturia and its future applications.

[ ] Look for Ayaka. (What do you intend to tell her or ask her about?)

[ ] Do something else (Write in)
In the Silver Chamber

Guided along hair-thin antennae of silver, William Harris projects his truest self, the Od magnified and dissipated a thousand times over until it has become no more than an invisible, undetectable energetic mist, across the city. He seeks by repulsion the locations of all his foes, even that creeping thing of faceless enmity which masks its presence so well. He sees the gathering of presences in the house of Shijou, at first glance a mountain of energy; but with more thorough consideration it resembles a house of cards, all relying on the leylines and on the unique individual who ties them together. Press a finger in the right place, and the whole band will lose their cohesion and drift apart to die singly. He sees too the rogue magi guided by his employer’s rival, set on bringing an end to this Holy Grail War as they did the previous, too frightened of their own trauma to grasp the misguided nature of their goal. He sees how Assassin lurks in their shadow, and ponders on the nature of this strange, possibly parasitic relationship. Last, he sees the almost powerless, grave-cold form of the priest, and wonders how it can be that such a pitiful, weak-willed person can have been chosen as the War’s overseer; or indeed, how he can have reached his age and rank within his organization in the first place. Is there something in that craven old man that Harris is missing. For long hours he feels the priest’s movements carefully, observing him as closely as is possible through the man’s thorough attempts at hiding himself, but no second face appears to his form even when he believes himself truly alone and unobserved. The enigma persists.

With the exception of the reason for the priest’s occupation, however, Harris now holds a complete view of matters in all areas. How best, then, to bring about the end of this job? Harris turns all the actors in his mind, searching for the perfect point from which to strike first. Archer had been a mistake, the product of rash haste. He
doesn’t intend to repeat the error. All this observation, this stretching of himself, is a heavy burden even on a man as close to superhuman as William Harris, however. In time he succumbs to exhaustion, and allows sleep to claim him there in the center of his metallic web.

Hammering on the door. The first blow and Harris was awake, by the second he was on his feet, threadbare blankets tossed to the floor, and with fists ready to kill the intruder once they’d broken through. It wouldn’t be long, from the way the flimsy thing was shaking. In the moment between the third and fourth blows, he steadied himself. This was his London flat, between missions, not a real danger zone. Whoever was on the other side of that door might be rude, but the chances that they were here to kill him were slim. He let them keep hammering for another second or two as he looked around. The clock informed him that it was two in the morning, and the cold air reminded him that he’d been sleeping in the nude. Not a comfortable choice at this time of year, particularly in a room as poorly insulated as his. Irritation continuing to mount at his rude houseguest, Harris threw on a shirt and slacks before wrenching open the door and snarling, “What the hell do you want?”

At the sight of the six black-suited men, their foremost frozen in the act of another pounding knock, Harris heaved an inward sigh. Despite their halfhearted attempt at anonymity, it wasn’t hard to recognize the trash that called themselves “soldiers” from the energy of the mystic codes buried in their clothing. These were the lowest kind of magus, too poor and dumb to make it as research magi and too weak to become enforcers on their own, they pooled together as thugs for the Faculty of Law and the Wizard Marshalls. Some of them even had the gall to claim it was an honor to be “chosen” for the Marshalls’ regiments, but if that had ever been the case it must’ve been in days long over. With three competing Marshalls, these days they were taking anyone they could get and Harris couldn’t see these soldiers as anything but the dregs of the Clock Tower.

Unaware of the contempt filling the mind of his opposite, the foremost soldier lowered his fist, assumed a ramrod-stiff posture and officious countenance, and arrogantly announced, “William Harris, we have been ordered to bring you to our commander. If you don’t comply we will transport you by force.”

“Force,” Harris echoed, narrowing his eyes and reaching into his pocket for a cigarette, only to be disappointed. The pack was still on his nightstand, of course. “You’re dreaming if you think the pack of you can take me out of here that way. Just lucky for you we work for the same people, so I don’t mind coming with you lot.” At this one of the soldiers in the back, a kid who didn’t look a day over sixteen, smirked at his neighbor, evidently reading Harris as bluffing and frightened. The kid got an
elbow in the ribs for his humor from the older thug. Good to see some of them got the picture, Harris thought. “I’ll have you wait for me to get dressed, though,” he added, then shut the door in the officious leader’s face.

So one of the Marshalls wanted him in the middle of the night, Harris considered as he splashed some water over his face, then pulled a tie and jacket to match his slacks out of the closet and collected his phone, wallet, keys and smokes. He thought about shaving, but a thumb run over his chin told him the stubble wasn’t too bad yet. It couldn’t be the Faculty of Law proper, they’d just put a job out to the enforcers as a body and trust him to take it if it was too tough or dirty for anyone else. This was a personal thing, then, and probably tied in with the damned factional politics plaguing the Clock Tower. Harris sighed and lit a cigarette. This was going to be a dirty, delicate, tough job. He already knew it. In fact, maybe a cigarette wasn’t just the thing right now; he pulled open the top drawer of his nightstand and got out the bottle of scotch he kept for emergencies. Empty. A cigarette would have to do.

Once Harris stepped out of his flat, his escort squad moved to surround him, all but frog-marching Harris down the dingy hall as their leader instructed him again to follow. It was a ridiculous show of intimidation, when Harris as well as anyone in that group with sense knew he wouldn’t have to work hard to kill the half dozen of them, surrounded or otherwise. Then again, you take what precautions you can. He couldn’t fault the soldiers for being as prudent as possible even when outmatched. Luckily none of them, even the arrogant kid, felt like making conversation. Harris could use the walk out to finish shaking off the remnants of sleep and finish his cigarette. Technically it was a no-smoking building, but Harris had an understanding with his landlord. He doubted the soldiers’ car would be so accommodating.

Then they were on the street, cold air hitting Harris like a slap in the face. Even a building as full of leaks as his still kept a bit warmer than outside, and he’d only been back from Haiti two days. London in fall at two was no pleasant place to be. Evidently Harris wasn’t the only one feeling that way; he heard the soldiers’ squad leader let out a stifled curse as they stepped out into the night air. The car they brought him to turned out to be more of an SUV, shaped a bit like a civilian version of a military troop transport and probably built with as much of the same protection as they could hide under the casual exterior. Inside he was again surrounded, and noted with amusement that the windows were tinted from within, to keep passengers from observing the route. “You’re really giving me the red carpet treatment, huh?” he asked his head guard. “Guess it’s Lorelei you’re taking me to then?”

“We don’t take orders from that woman,” the soldier snapped. “If you want to know more, you’ll find out when we arrive. Right now you can sit there and wait.”
Harris gave the man a shrug and a look that said, “If you don’t want to make conversation, at least I tried.” Then, wait he did. The drive wasn’t long at any rate; for all their secrecy, the destination was painfully obvious from the first: the Clock Tower, and considering that he wasn’t being brought before Lorelei it would be a basement office. Indeed, once Harris was let out of the SUV both suspicions were confirmed, and after descending an irritatingly long set of stairs he found himself alone with the man who’d called him there, who sat between a conference table and a massive sheet of parchment that covered one of the walls. Harris recognized it as a mystic code for the display of information, something like a mundane projector in function.

“It’s been a long time, William,” the third Wizard Marshall said. “Take a seat, and let’s talk business.”

“Marshall,” Harris growled. “First time I’ve called you that. I should have known you were behind this. Flexing your new muscle for a plan you can’t have done through an official sealing designation?” He stayed on his feet.

The Marshall chuckled, shaking his head ruefully. “That’s no way to greet an old combat buddy, Harris. I would’ve done this more pleasantly if I could’ve, but it had to look like you were being brought in by someone hostile.”

“As far as I’m concerned, I was,” Harris shot back. “You giving me orders from the field instead of your chair a time or two doesn’t make us buddies. What do you want?”

“There’s no need to be so hostile,” said the Marshall. “I think we line up on this. I know you aren’t an Enforcer for the money, Harris; it’s about the good of the Association for you, isn’t it? Well, if you complete this mission properly, we could open up a permanent path to the Root for the Clock Tower. On the other hand, if nothing’s done someone will end up with a weapon that could throw the Moonlit World into chaos: the Holy Grail.” The Marshall paused for a breath, then added. “We need you to travel to Japan, Harris.” To illustrate his point, the parchment behind him sprang into motion, scribbling out a detailed map of the city of Tokyo.

“The Holy Grail?” Harris raised an eyebrow. This was a tough idea to swallow, considering who it meant had made a mistake. “I thought that all got cleared up years ago.”

“So did we,” the Marshall said with a regretful nod, “but the Einzberns never were exactly forthcoming. It seems they’d created a backup, in case of something like what happened fifteen years ago.”

“The Einzberns, huh? Never run up against them before.” Harris blew a stream of smoke out in a sigh. When a family that powerful went so long without
making an enemy of the Clock Tower, then had an enforcer thrown at them for the first time, it was certain to be the most deadly kind of job. “So what’s the target, exactly? What am I doing there?”

“You’re to eliminate the other six Masters and retrieve the Grail.” The Marshall tossed a thick manila envelope to the table, laden with a novella’s worth of papers. “Your top priority, Harris, is to bring the secret of that ritual here to the Clock Tower at any cost,” the Marshall continued gravely. “If, and only if, you find that it’s completely impossible to achieve that objective, there’s an alternative plan in that dossier.”

“Bringing a ritual the old man wants destroyed back here is a high ask,” Harris commented, “and six magi to kill. Not the worst odds I’ve fought on a designation, but not easy either. You sending anyone with me?”

“As usual, this is a one-man covert elimination mission,” the Marshall said, shaking his head. “In that way, it’s no different from your usual jobs. You’ll be our only agent in Tokyo.”

“Huh. What about weapons and equipment?” Harris asked, already sure of the answer. This job was shaping up to exceed even his premonition of dread from earlier.

“Only what you can procure on-site, I’m afraid.” Another shake of the head from the ever-regretful Marshall who wouldn’t be risking a hair under the conditions he was consigning Harris to. “You’ll have to go in as a civilian, and blend in with the crowd.”

“I see.” Harris said flatly. “Any other information you’ve got for me?”

“We’ve prepared dossiers on the other magi we know will be participating, but several slots are still uncertain,” the Marshall replied, tapping the envelope on the table with an index finger. “There’s background information on the War in there, too. Good reading material for the plane ride.”

“I’ll bet. When does the mission begin?” Harris asked. He’d planned to take at least a week off after the last job, but with how things had begun this time he somehow didn’t get the impression that plan would reach a happy conclusion.

“You’d better pack your bags,” the Marshall said with a grin. “You’re leaving tomorrow; and remember, Harris. This is a stealth mission in a major city, not some isolated rural spot. Even if the other Masters don’t keep things as secret as they could, given the nature of the War, I want you to keep magic out of the mundanes’ sight. Eliminating witnesses may be protocol, but try to keep it to a minimum.”

Harris gave a flat bark of laughter. Whatever he might say about being a combat buddy, the man across the table obviously thought of him as a rabid dog
who’d take any opportunity to kill, like most of Harris’ colleagues. There was no
helping it, when you did the things the rest were afraid to. “I’ll keep it in mind,” he
said, then turned on his heel. “If we’re done here, it sounds like I’ve got packing to do.”

“Of course,” the Marshall said. “My men will drive you home. The flight
information is in that envelope along with your intel. Good luck, Harris.”
So, you’ve done it now: revealed the truth of your deception and confessed your feelings for Liliesviel anew, all at once. Now it remains only for you to wait until she’s made up her mind about whether or not she can go on trusting you. Thus cut adrift, waiting for an uncertain verdict, you find yourself leaning against the library door, staring blankly at the opposite wall. Deep in your chest, a dull ache throbs: the psychosomatic product of an anguish you can’t escape as the image of Liliesviel’s tear-strewn face recurs insistently in your mind’s eye.

You need something to take your mind off of the conversation, you decide: something to do which would occupy your mind fully. You can’t use the library to continue your magical studies, however, and the idea of visiting one of your allies hardly appeals. To speak with Circe or Adelheid you’d need to first pass Odin, and no doubt to explain your conversation with Liliesviel to him. On the other hand, Ayaka or Kōrakuhime would require an explanation of the events after you parted ways: another matter you feel too drained and preoccupied to explain properly at the moment. No, there’s only one person you can use to distract yourself, you conclude. You’ll have to find Arturia. She’s the first person you’ve had around you strong enough to act as a sparring partner since you became a Servant, and focusing on the visceral, immediate reality of combat ought to do a wonderful job of driving the concerns from your mind.

Decision made, you reach out for Arturia over the mental link between the two of you, asking her location. Then, almost immediately, you change your mind. To save yourself the time of walking to whatever part of the house she’s currently occupying, you amend, ‘Never mind. Meet me in the basement, Arturia.’

‘Understood,’ comes the curt reply, and you stand up from the wall, turning to make for the stairs. Before you go, you strain your ears one last time for any sign from behind the library door of what Liliesviel might be thinking. No informative signal
reaches your ears before you depart, however; only the faint creaking of floorboards as Liliesviel moves. The sound is soon mirrored by your own departing footsteps. As you pass down the hall and make your descent, first to the ground floor and then to the basement, you note the muted voices of Stachel and Stengel speaking from behind the door of their shared bedroom, and the presence of Kōrakuhime in the living room. She sits, looking bored, at the coffee table, facing away from you as she watches over the unconscious form of Yumigawa stretched out on the sofa. You refrain from interfering with either party.

Arturia you find waiting for you in the first room of the basement, Vaisset’s former laboratory. She’s standing, straight-backed and martial in posture as always, beside the desk where Kōrakuhime devised the method of her control and giving the doorway a resentful, impatient glare. Her expression doesn’t soften when you make your entrance. “What is it you called me here for, Master?” she asks irritably.

“What is it you called me here for, Master?” you answer, putting an amiable smile on your face. “You do recall our discussion earlier, don’t you? The one we had about our respective abilities with a blade? I intend to prove to you that in a match with no magic or Noble Phantasms, I am your better.”

“Indeed?” Arturia gives you a cold stare. “Very well. If you insist, I will demonstrate the folly of your ego.”

“I wonder how long that confidence of yours will last,” you say, forming a pair of bamboo practice-swords out of Nothingness and tossing one to her. Only yours, you note with amusement, has the distinctive tiger-themed strap that you last observed on the sword you used to spar with Kōrakuhime. “Now, follow me; we can’t have much of a match in here,” you add, and head down the hall. True to Liliesviel’s order you can feel the three presences of Odin, Adelheid, and Circe in the room where Arturia was kept prisoner, but fortunately they don’t have a chance to see you and drag you into conversation as Odin doubtless would; the magic-testing room you’ve repurposed as your sparring chamber is an earlier door off the hall.

The two of you square off, Arturia’s weapon held in front of her with both hands in a balanced stance while she eyes you, waiting defensively for you to make the first move. Sensible enough, you suppose, considering your superior agility and her superior strength. You hold your blade lazily at your side, leaving your left hand empty and your stance carefully casual as you examine her. You needn’t worry about your own openings; the difference in speed between the two of you makes it impossible that she could take advantage of your open stance before you could bring your sword into play. How to most effectively attack her is the question. With her blade centered she can react quickly to a strike from any angle with minimal
movement, and although your casual facade might give you a moment’s advantage from unpredictability, the circumstances are such to ensure that it’s insufficient. If you want to truly get the drop on her, you’ll need a technique that takes advantage of those instincts of hers.

Then the idea hits you and without hesitating you dart in, blade low on the right. The moment you’re within range you bring your sword up, slashing to cut Arturia open from stomach to throat as your empty left hand darts out to intercept the hilt of her weapon and prevent her from blocking. Your foe senses the ploy, stepping in to your left and striking a sharp blow against your wrist to punish the failed attempt. Your wrist, however, isn’t there. You’re faster than she is, of course, and thought further ahead; now you have the reaction you were looking for. You whip your left hand back, turn on the heel of your right foot, and bring your sword around in a sweep that flows out of the first strike Arturia dodged to slam down on her wrists before she can react.

Then, with her sword extended uselessly off to your side and your own on her wrists, all it takes is a push of your left foot to send you forward and bring the point of your weapon up along her arms and driving into her throat. “That’s two points for me,” you say with a grin. “You see, Arturia? I’ve grown faster since our first battle, while you’ve slowed down. You ought to remember that, when next you consider making rude remarks about your master.”

“There is something you ought to remember as well,” Arturia replies, cold and calm despite the weapon prodding at her throat.

“Oh really?” You ask, “And what might that be?”

“These blades are not real,” she answers, “and you are the weaker of the two of us!” This statement is punctuated by Arturia sweeping her sword back and up to hammer up at your own blade with enough force to send it and your right arm out of the space between you. The strike would continue up to deal you a crack on the chin, but you sidestep it just in time. Still, at the close range you entered in order to taunt Arturia, it’s difficult to leverage your advantage in mobility; a fact you have plenty of time to consider as she hammers away at your shakily reestablished guard, keeping you a prisoner in her range with the necessity of defense and getting several good hits in against your shoulders and arms in the process before you finally manage to stop her sword for a moment and use the gap in her onslaught to back off.

“Well done,” you say, a bit shaken by the reversal, but stirred to excitement by the heat of combat. “I’ll bear it in mind, from now on; it seems this match won’t be ending until one of us is unconscious or surrenders.” With that, you charge back in to settle the matter.
After an hour and a half, though, it’s become clear that there won’t be any end to the match. The slight damage from these practice blades isn’t enough to knock either one of you out, and is quickly regenerated by magical energy in any case. As for surrender, Arturia and you are both far too stubborn to admit defeat, particularly when the advantage shifts back and forth between you. Whether you like it or not, the two of you seem to be evenly matched in terms of raw ability with a blade at this point. So, in the interest of time and energy, your spar draws to an inconclusive finish and you find yourself standing in the main room of the basement, the chamber to which you were first summoned, wondering what to do next.

[X] Find Ayaka and tell her about your capture of Circe and your discussion with Liliesviel.

[ ] Go looking for Kōrakuhime, to discuss future applications of the ritual she used to help you bring Arturia under your control.

[ ] Look in on Odin, Adelheid, and Circe. (Who do you primarily want to speak to, and what about?)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

With your head cleared by the sweat and exertion of combat, it seems now that the best thing to do is discuss matters with your Master. You’ve largely kept her out of tonight’s affairs, but that can hardly continue forever. The girl deserves to hear about what transpired during your discussions with Adelheid, Circe, and Liliesviel, and to have some idea of the outlook of the War. Where to find her, though? You consider for a few moments where Ayaka might have gone upon her return to the manor. From her recent behavior your first guess would be that she might return to the library, but she obviously hasn’t done that; you know she wasn’t in the living room watching over your human prisoner with Kōrakuhime as well. The next place to look, then, would be her room.

Decision made, you cross Vaisset’s former laboratory, climb the stairs to the manor’s central ground-floor corridor, and turn left to make for the second floor. Halfway through your ascent from ground floor to bedrooms, though, you’re interrupted by Stachel and Stengel, coming out of their shared room and on their way downstairs. You step aside to pass by them, but Stengel gives you an arresting look and stops before you.
“Lord Alberich,” she says pleasantly, putting on an expression of professional courtesy. “What a perfect moment to encounter you. I’ll begin preparing dinner shortly, and I wanted to ask: shall I expect our hostess to impose herself on me again while I cook?”

“A fortunate question,” you remark warmly. “Truth be told, it would gratify me enormously if you would prepare for us a dinner from your mistress’ homeland. I want her to enjoy the meal as much as possible, and German cooking would also be a fine show of recognition for the more... reasonable of the two Servants we captured this evening: a German herself. If Tsubaki feels the need to interject, I will rely on you to defend the kitchen from her; hopefully my word in this matter will be effective.”

“Well!” Stengel looks at you with pleased surprise on her face. “You may be sure that I am glad to receive your support, Lord Alberich, but I’m certain that it would be more effective for you to speak to the girl yourself.”

“My apologies,” you say, shaking your head, “but I must speak to the other Shijou about something at the moment.” You pass the two maids to continue down the hall, adding as you go, “Please, avail yourself of the kitchen and do the best that you can to weather Tsubaki’s attempts to impose Japanese fare on us.”

The maid, seemingly mollified by her partial victory in spite of your refusal to offer more tangible assistance, allows you to go without further comment, so you soon continue to Ayaka’s bedroom. Sure enough, you can hear within the faint sound of her breathing and the occasional rustling of a page being turned. Not wanting to surprise her, though, you rapidly knock three times at the door.


As you enter, you bow obsequiously, replying, “It is I, Ojou-sama. Your lowly Servant, Saber; here, and at your command.”

“Hey!” For your trouble, you receive a thrown pillow along with the exclamation. You dodge the projectile with a tilt of your head, but the malicious thought is there all the same. Ayaka sits, legs folded, on the middle of her bed, blushing at your overacting with a complex expression of mixed embarrassment, mirth, and exaggerated anger. “Didn’t I say not to call me that?” she demands. “What did you do that for?”

“I thought it might bring a smile to your face,” you say, shrugging innocently. “You’ve been in a bit of a funk lately, but you seemed to enjoy my playing the role of butler well enough before.”
“Hmph!” She turns away from you, pouting. “Enjoy it! As if! It’s so embarrassing when you do that, Saber-san, you just don’t understand.” The pretended anger fades quickly, though, and although her blush remains it’s in a more casual tone that she asks, “What did you want to see me about?” as you take a seat on her desk chair.

You notice as you do so a slightly odd collection of items on her desk: a solid silver fountain pen, a small fruit knife, and several vials and other arcane implements which you’re almost certain you last saw on her brother’s worktable. That does make them her property now, though, so you suppose it’s to be expected.

You turn your eyes back to Ayaka as you reply, “I believe you ought to know what’s happened this evening. Tell me, were you watching with Kōrakuhime as I confronted Circe and Adelheid for the first time?”

“No,” she says uncertainly, “I thought that was a bit weird, how she said she’d been watching you. All she was doing that I could see was reading from that book she carries around, and she was very careful to keep the two of us from seeing inside it. I wonder if she makes it into a screen, like that smoke she used before.”

“Intriguing,” you say, noting the fact for future reference. You suppose the book Ayaka mentions is the same that is one of Kōrakuhime’s Noble Phantasms, but you’ve never seen her actually open it yourself. You’ll have to ask her about it at some point. For the moment, though, you turn your thoughts back to the girl in front of you. “I suppose I’ll start from the beginning, then. Circe and Adelheid are the two Servants who were mine at the end of the War fought in Judas’ Akeldama, and were working to forward Yumigawa’s cause because they were convinced that I was no more than disembodied power, and that I could be ‘returned’ to him. That much, I believe you already understand.”

“You hadn’t mentioned that they didn’t think you were a person before, actually,” Ayaka replies, looking a bit confused, “or that this Adelheid person was your Servant as well. Is it possible for one Master to have two Servants?”

“Under ordinary circumstances it should not be,” you answer with a smile, “but then, it shouldn’t be possible for a man to be a living Servant, either; as we have observed, I seem to be something of a peculiarity. This unique nature is what confused my Servants as well. You see, when I came out of the Akeldama and into this world, it seems that some strange aspect of my existence, something Judas called ‘resonance’, resulted in the original Yumigawa Rushorou gaining my memories. When my Servants sought out the man they served, they found him first, and only later learned of me. There couldn’t be two Yumigawa Rushorous, and unfortunately neither of them leapt to the conclusion that was the bizarre truth. Instead, they
supposed that the appearance and power he had gained had been stripped from him; that I was some sort of disembodied mass of power, meant to return to Yumigawa Rushorou. Fortunately I was able to convince Adelheid of my true nature and bring her back to my service. With Circe, it wasn’t so simple.”

“I knew it!” Ayaka exclaims, brightening. “There’s no way you could discuss things reasonably with someone who would try to kill the overseer of the War. Did you find her at the hotel your ‘sister’ said she was hiding in?”

“Yes, she was there,” you say with a pensive nod. “You were right about being unable to bring a woman who chose to abandon her Master back to my service by words alone. I suppose my optimism hid that fact from me, so I must give you credit for seeing it plain when I could not. I had to hunt her down, capture her by force, and compel her to obey. Now she’s in the basement, under guard by Lancer, and I’m not yet certain what I’ll do with her. Perhaps I’ll give her to Liliesviel, as the girl wants. Certainly she has the magical energy necessary to sustain her, and it would reduce the strain on the Mana in the region.”

“Oh?” Ayaka gives you a smirk. “Didn’t you just say it wasn’t normally possible for one Master to have more than one Servant? Is she another one of your peculiarities?”

“She is,” you answer, “but more to the point in this instance, Lancer is a peculiarity among peculiarities. That fellow has the body of a homunculus and generates his own magical energy with no drain on his Master at all! Consequently, Liliesviel can easily support a second Servant.”

“How strange,” Ayaka says, wide-eyed. “I’d never have thought something like that was possible... a self-sustaining familiar... the Einzberns sure are something else. Still,” she adds, calming again, “it’s our good fortune, so long as she stays dedicated to being your ally. Seems like tonight’s expedition was a complete success, Saber-san! We don’t have many enemies left in the War, do we?”

“Yes, well, there is one other event that occurred tonight I ought to inform you of,” you say hesitantly. “It may be that Liliesviel will not remain a dedicated ally, after tonight. This is the reason I haven’t already turned Circe over to her.”

“Why is that?” Ayaka asks, looking suddenly nervous. Not surprising, considering that she saw Odin destroy Achilles almost as clearly as you did. She’s well acquainted with the danger of making an enemy out of the Einzbern Master.

“When I first told you about my meeting with her, you’ll recall that I told you of a notion that Liliesviel had developed that I was a fellow Einzbern,” you begin. “Up until tonight I have persisted in encouraging this notion. At this point, however,
I could no longer bear to continue deceiving the girl. I disabused her of the notion, and explained my true origin to her, upon our return to the manor.”

“Oh my goodness,” Ayaka gasps, going white. “I can’t believe you’d do something like that, Saber-san! Doesn’t everything for you depend on keeping her on your side, so she can keep you alive after the War? And... and... I mean...” she breaks off the statement, changing course to ask, “How did she react?”

“Liliesviel was saddened by the revelation,” you say, minimizing the impact and keeping your voice unemotional in an attempt to shield yourself from the memory of those tears, and the pain they send through you with each droplet falling to darken her skirt in your mind’s eye. “But not angry, I don’t think. I believe she will remain our ally.”

“I see,” Ayaka says, calming a bit. Color starts to come back into her face as she continue, “I suppose there’s nothing to do but wait, then, and stay on guard.” With a strained smile she adds, “I hope you don’t have any other surprises for me, Saber-san.”

[X] As a matter of fact, you aren’t quite finished speaking with Ayaka. (Write in topic, question, or statement.)

[ ] You don’t have any more surprises for her. Look in on Liliesviel before dinner, to see how she’s feeling now.

[ ] You’re finished speaking with Ayaka, but there is someone else you’d like to see alone before dinner. (Who, and what about?)

[ ] For the moment, you have nothing else to say. Go down to the kitchen and dining room, to check on Stengel and wait for dinner.

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

“No,” you reply, returning the girl’s smile and patting her reassuringly on the shoulder, “but I do have a point of inquiry. As you know, Jean-Pierre Vaisset was dedicating himself to a method of transmuting the magical elements before he passed away; I believe he referred to is as ‘synthetic elemental conversion’. Since you seem to be delving into his possessions, I would like to take a look at his work on it; assuming you aren’t investigating it yourself, of course.”

“Heh?” Ayaka starts at your suggestion of her pilfering her brother’s effects, then gives you a confused look. “Nii-san’s - I don’t know what you mean. I don’t
mind you looking over his notes, but where did you get the idea I’ve been going through his things?”

“Oh, come now,” you reply, smile widening at the ridiculous lie. “Just look at your desk! I’ve seen most of these tools in your brother’s laboratory.” You furrow your brows, and in a sterner tone continue, “There’s no reason to keep secrets from me. Why lie about the fact that you’ve brought tools up from the basement?”

As Ayaka’s eyes settle on the strange magical tools that mix with ordinary school supplies to occupy the surface of her desk, her face brightens in understanding. “Oh, those!” she exclaims, audibly relieved. “I’m sorry for the misunderstanding, Saber-san. Those weren’t Nii-san’s in the first place; they were some of my mother’s old things, and he had them down in the basement for some reason. I’ve been using them a bit to help me understand the things written in these old books, but they don’t have anything to do with his research, so I was confused.”

“I see,” you say, eying her for a moment before bowing your head and saying in a carefully chosen tone of regret, “In that case, please accept my apology, Miss Ayaka. I should not have been so quick to accuse you over a simple contradiction.”

“No, no, no!” she exclaims, shaking her head and bringing her hands up in flustered protests. “I definitely see how what I was saying seemed weird, you don’t have to apologize, Saber-san! Raise your head, please!”

Good, it seems she isn’t hurt by your accusation. You really can’t stand the idea of emotionally wounding another of your companions tonight. Ayaka may not shine as brightly in your eyes as Liliesviel, but all the same, to have a falling out with her over such a triviality would leave a lasting sting. “In that case,” you reply, sitting up straight once more to look at your Master directly, “I’ll return to my former question. Are you familiar with the project your brother was engaged in before his untimely death, and would you be able to help me investigate?”

“We~ll,” Ayaka says, dragging out the word for a few seconds as she considers, “I don’t know all that much about Nii-san’s big project, really. He said that it was very important to the Moonlit World, and that it could change everything, and things like that, but he didn’t like to give me any specific information about anything related to the Vaisset family magic; and I mostly stayed out of magic in general, after my mother passed. This is the first time I’ve heard that name you called it. ‘Synthetic elemental conversion,’ huh?” Her eyes take on a faraway expression as she slowly repeats the term to herself, rolling each syllable across her tongue as if tasting it. “I wonder, would that mean anyone could use any of the Five Great Elements, like an Average One? That really would be revolutionary.” Then she frowns, continuing, “No,
that couldn’t work; if you popularized the technique, it would become useless because its mystery would be lost, right? What was he trying to do, then?”

“Miss Ayaka,” you interject. “You seem to be floating away into contemplation. If I may…”

“Oh! Sorry about that,” Ayaka says, blushing furiously as her focus snaps back to you. “What else did you want to know?”

“The location of M. Vaisset’s notes would answer the second part of my earlier question,” you answer, smiling at her embarrassment, “but now that you’ve raised the subject, there is one other thing I would like to ask of you.” You sweep a hand vertically before yourself, guiding Ayaka’s eyes to your body from top to bottom as you continue, “As you can see, I am primarily a warrior, and unfamiliar with the subtle terms of magi despite my facility with certain forms of magic. I’ve heard the term ‘mystery’ used in several circumstances before, but I remain unclear regarding its precise meaning in a magical context. Would you mind explaining for me why it is that your brother’s technique would lose its potency if it were to become widely known?”

“Oh, sure,” Ayaka says, having had the chance to compose herself during your question. “Terminology was one of the things that I had a lot of difficulty with when I was learning as well; and then now, reading the old family chronicles and having to get used to the older terms in archaic dialect, and that kind of thing, is just a nightmare; so I understand why you’d be confused.” The girl pauses for a moment, taking a breath and composing herself once more, then pushes her glasses up on her nose and raises an index finger as she begins to explain in the manner of an educator. “A mystery, in magic, is the combination of an effect and the process of achieving it. So, when a magus does what an old story might call ‘casting a spell,’ the proper term is ‘actualizing a mystery’, that is, taking the hypothetical, recorded mystery within the mind and magic crest, and making it an actual part of the world. However, it also refers to a property of magic, which is where the secrecy of magi comes from.” She smiles bashfully as she adds, “I don’t really understand the underlying principles of how it functions myself, so I can only explain what it does in general; I hope you don’t mind.”

“Go ahead,” you say. “As much as you can tell me is perfectly fine; I’ll do my own research later.”

“Alright then,” Ayaka replies, and takes a moment to regain her professorial poise before continuing, “We talk about the mystery in certain magic, and the mystery in the world, as general measures of effectiveness. The reason why the term is mystery is that it’s tied to understanding. The more people understand the inner
workings of a certain magical technique, the less effective it becomes. That’s why magus lineages only have one heir, and carefully safeguard their knowledge, passing it from one generation to the next without letting their techniques be learned by outsiders. To give an example, at the moment I’m the only person capable of performing the sacrificial ritual passed down in the Shijou family, and it’s capable of capturing a very large amount of magical energy. If I were to teach it to you or someone else, however, when either of us performed the ritual it would be far less effective; it might perhaps capture as little as half the energy it’s capable of storing at the moment. As knowledge spread further, it would become weaker and weaker, until eventually you could sacrifice any number of beings and gather no energy at all. That’s why I’m sure that Nii-san’s method would also have to be kept within the family. Something like a new technique that changes magic as a whole just isn’t possible.”

“That does explain a great deal,” you say. “Thank you for answering my question, Miss Ayaka. What of the books in the Shijou library, though? Some deal only with generalities, true enough, but there are others there that seem to have complete rituals and methods of actualizing mysteries recorded within. Wouldn’t this sort of printed documentation of magic be against the proper conduct of magi, if it weakens the content?”

“Oh, that’s a good question,” Ayaka says with a smile. “I’m glad you noticed that! There are four kinds of books in our library, generally. First, the personal records, like what I’ve been reading. These are only to be read by members of the family, so there’s little risk of weakening mysteries unless the family is unable to protect them. Second, there are books of general principles; these are the texts dealing with aspects of magic that can be taught, things so general that they’re unaffected by widespread knowledge among magi. Third, there are certain ‘last will’ grimoires, written by magi with no heirs, and of which only one copy exists. These are a way for a magus to pass on his knowledge after his death despite lacking a proper lineage, and the Vaisset family went to great lengths to collect them. Finally, there are books dealing with ritual magic, the formal craft. I don’t know why, but for some reason it seems that some rituals which rely on Mana aren’t significantly affected by proliferation, so there are certain grimoires which contain information on them. Proliferating it is still frowned on by the Mages’ Association, though, so they still tend to be rare books.”

“Fascinating,” you muse, thinking again of the small room containing all of the Shijou and Vaisset families’ written knowledge. “I see now why a magus’ private library might be limited,” you continue, before getting to your feet. With that you
conclude, “I believe you’ve answered all of my questions about mystery; thank you again. Now, would you mind showing me your brother’s notes? Even if his project is unable to be proliferated, I find myself intrigued by it all the same.”

Ayaka makes no move to follow your example in standing. Instead, she looks up at you with a bashful expression and says, “I... can’t, actually. Sorry, but like I said, he didn’t want me seeing information about his side of the family’s magic, so definitely didn’t show me his notes or where he kept them. I imagine they’re in his workshop, but beyond that I don’t think I can help you, Saber-san. You’ll have to look for them on your own.”

[X] Investigate Vaisset’s research alone.
[ ] Insist that Ayaka come with you anyway. Despite her claims, she must be of some use in the investigation of her brother’s notes.
[ ] Enlist Kōrakuhime’s assistance in looking for traces of the mysterious project. As the person who’s spent the most time in Vaisset’s workshop since his death, she ought to be well equipped to help you.
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

“Ah. I suppose that does make sense,” you reply with a rueful smile. “That being the case, I’ll leave you to your own devices for the time being and have a look at what your brother left behind in his workshop.” As you turn to go, though, you add, “I should inform you; Stengel, one of Liliesviel’s maids, has begun preparing dinner. I don’t know just how long she’ll be at it, but I suggest you go down to the dining room at some point in the near future; particularly as you didn’t have any breakfast.”

At your mention of an Einzbern using her kitchen, Ayaka gives you a slightly strained look, but responds, “Thank you, Saber-san. It’s not like I didn’t eat today, though; I had some lunch from the kitchen earlier, while you were out. I’ll be down for dinner, though.”

“Excellent,” you say; and with that you step back out of her bedroom, smoothly drawing the door shut behind you.

As you cross the house yet again to make your descent back into the basement, you ponder on the subject of Vaisset’s project, and his notes. He claimed that it would “revolutionize magic” if successful, but in light of what Ayaka’s told you about the properties of mystery, that really doesn’t make sense. It isn’t only a matter of this particular project, either; how can any one technique revolutionize the practice of
magic, when mystery demands that they cannot be spread as new technologies are, but must remain limited to the family that discovered them? It must be, then, that his own use of the technique was to be such as would achieve the revolution he spoke of. Yet how?

You turn the matter over and over in your mind, but seem to arrive no closer to the truth. From whichever angle you examine it, the notion seems only to be what Ayaka said of it: an aid to versatility, enabling a magus to make use of elements the affinity for which he was not born with. This mystery of mystery, the seeming secret of Vaisset’s project, stokes your curiosity ever higher, and as that passion rises you quicken your steps, hastening to the man’s workshop and the hoped-for revelation.

That excitement is dampened swiftly. Once you do arrive again in the room where you were summoned the troublesome nature of the task you’ve set yourself becomes all the more plain. Lately you’ve more often passed through this room than stopped in it, so haven’t looked too carefully at its contents, but now that you cast an analytical eye on it once more the place seems a mess. There, at the back of the room, is the magic circle in which you were summoned; never removed, for some reason, but still there and glistening like a crimson veneer on the stone blocks of the floor. Parts of it have flaked away in the last week, though, and about it are scattered sundry mundane and arcane tools which you aren’t certain were there before: wide candles stood upon the floor and partially melted into waxen mounds; a magnifying glass with two handles, like the lid of a cooking pot; a pointed steel tool of uncertain use, resembling one of a dentist’s hooks and probes; a little pile of oddly sparkling powder, mixed red and dark grey.

Moving on from the odd remnants of your summoning ritual, you look over the rest of the room. As you noted on your first arrival, there are several tall mahogany bookshelves covering much of the walls, separated by the doorway you’ve just entered through, the entrance of the corridor exiting from the left wall to the basement’s other rooms, and numerous small spaces for the candelabra that illuminate the workshop. The contents of the shelves don’t stand out as being significantly different from those contained in the upstairs library, and you consider them most likely runoff: additional books of the same general sort, but too numerous to be contained in their primary storeroom, likely with a few books most pertinent to Vaisset’s work brought down among them for ease of access. His personal notes are unlikely to be on the shelves, then.

The final item of furniture in the room is that which most likely contains the object of your search: Vaisset’s worktable, recently appropriated by your sister; the sole item of modern design you’ve yet observed in the house. It’s a tall thing, and very
wide, its surface above your waist despite your not-inconsiderable height, made usable by a mobile chair (though a chair without armrests is, in your view, only dubiously deserving of the name) of adjustable elevation and rotation: also mostly steel, with cushions of some polymer added to the seat and backrest for minimal support. On the surface of the worktable, where during his life you saw Vaisset keep various vials, gems, and tools currently in use, you now see only the scattered papers prepared by Kōrakuhime in her examination of Arturia, endless pages of loose parchment each covered in the indecipherable geometric forms and archaic script that seem to be the key to her magic. You’ll have better luck finding Vaisset’s notes below, where the height of the chair and table are justified by the numerous layers of drawers and wireframe racks below the work-surface, containing all manner of tools Vaisset must have used in his daily experiments.

With some laid flat and others hanging, some mixed and some sorted, a bizarre array of implements greets your eyes from the uncovered racks: a wide array of knives, the largest just smaller than a butcher’s knife and the smallest with a blade barely visible at all, useful for no purpose that springs to your mind; a slate and accompanying chalk hanging beside a wooden cutting board, plastic sheet, and thick steel plate, all of the same height and width; a basket of assorted pens and mechanical pencils of all manner of brands, seemingly dropped there over the years at random; heavy fabric shears and tiny culinary scissors; several varieties of saw; a hammer and chisel, of a size more appropriate for a jeweler’s work than a sculptor’s; a mechanical scale, with accompanying weights and measures in both imperial and metric systems; three glass syringes differing in the metal of their needles: one gold, one silver, and one steel; and many other tools, of types too diverse and purposes too uncertain to be worth mentioning. In any case, none of the racks carries a notebook. Moving on, then, you turn your attention to the drawers.

Most of these, the smaller, square-faced variety, are locked, resisting your attempts at investigation. You could simply break them open, of course, but it’s easier at least to look through the unlocked drawers before moving on to destructive methods. The first unlocked drawer, a wide, shallow bin stretching the length of the table, contains yet more tools: some are larger equivalents of those on the racks below, such as an incongruously mundane claw-hammer, while others are harder to identify. One such is what you can best describe as a sort of ornate golden sickle, rendered bizarre by the fact that its blade continues beyond the shape of a crescent to form an almost complete circle. This drawer seems to be a repository of things casually left behind rather than any real categorization, as among the tools are such things as a box of nails, at least five matchbooks, numerous loose tacks, several tubes of oil paint,
and a roll of beaten copper the approximate size and shape of an ordinary roll of household tape. The second unlocked drawer is similarly disappointing, being entirely filled with small glass vials of various liquids, some colorful and others transparent, some dull and others shining, but all unlabeled and mounted in a rack built into the drawer to prevent breakage.

In the third unlocked drawer, the smallest of the three not sealed, you at last discover the items you’ve been looking for: a stack of four small notebooks, bound in unmarked black leather. You hastily open the uppermost, and discover written on the inside cover in a fine copperplate hand, Recherche, and below that, Jean-Pierre Vaisset. With a sinking feeling at your lack of understanding of the first word, you flip through the subsequent pages. Sure enough, although the format does seem to suggest a mixture of diary and experimental log, the text is entirely written in French: a language of which you are wholly ignorant. Furthermore, in some places the letters themselves seem strangely altered, so that they are indecipherable; although this may be no more than the usage of an alphabet unfamiliar to you.

[ ] Abandon the project for the night and go up to dinner.
[X] Enlist someone’s help in deciphering the notebook. (Who?)
[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

This first volume, at least, is utterly illegible, useless to you without the aid of its author. Still, there is one other course to pursue while you remain here. Hope’s spring is ever-renewing, and the outwardly identical nature of the notebooks suggests to you the cheering idea that Vaisset might have kept multiple copies of the same notebook, written in different languages. Pursuing that desired outcome, you draw each from the drawer and flip through it, scanning the text. Here you’re disappointed yet again. These conform to your original, rather than secondary, expectations: two appear to be continuations of the first notebook, while the final volume is mostly blank. All are written in the same mix of French and unknown characters as the first. With a hand weighed down by perfected disappointment, you return the four notebooks to their drawer and lean back in Vaisset’s chair to think.

How can you make use of these illegible books? Doubtless the full tale of Vaisset’s research into his strange project is detailed within, containing in its course the secret means by which he intended to “revolutionize” the world of magic, yet all approaches to understanding that secret seem cut off. The author, dead; his father and predecessor in his family’s secrets, long dead; his sister and last remaining relative,
kept ignorant of his studies; even the Servant once summoned to aid him, tenuous a connection as that may be, is dead by your own hand.

Wait, though, for the thought of Vaisset’s original Servant does bring another memory to mind: Circe, irritably reminding Adelheid of their shared fluency in all modern languages, courtesy of the Holy Grail. Circe’s linguistic facility might be as much a detriment as a boon in this case, however, for if she comprehends Vaisset’s technique and teaches it to you the mystery will be weakened according to the principle explained to you by Ayaka. Rather, Adelheid seems an ideal candidate: able hopefully to understand the text of the notebooks without understanding the magical knowledge contained within. There’s nothing to do, then, but to enlist her help!

Mind made up, you get to your feet and start down the corridor, heading for the chamber where Odin guards Circe and Adelheid as prisoners. As you walk, you have a few moments to consider how best to separate Adelheid from the other two. Once, of course, you could simply have called to her over your mental bond; but that connection has been lost now, together with the time you spent absent from those you still think of as your Servants despite the magical severance. Ah, well. You’ll just have to speak with the three of them and find some opportune moment to draw Adelheid away.

Entering the former cell, you find the three Servants spread through the room and speaking amiably. Odin, surprisingly, appears to be relaxing despite having chosen as his seat the uncomfortable, high-backed stone chair in which you kept Arturia bound, while Circe and Adelheid sit on opposite ends of the sofa. Their gazes seem focused on an unnaturally large raven which perches on one of Odin’s shoulders and preens itself while the two women watch. What exactly the subject of their conversation was, however, remains unknown to you as the discussion ceases abruptly upon your entrance. Just as you round the corner and take in the tableau, Odin catches sight of you and greets you with enthusiasm.

“My boy,” he rumbles, in a warm, hospitable tone, “you’ve finally found your way down here to meet us! We’ve been wondering just when you or the little miss would decide to free us from this chamber, you know.”

“Have you indeed?” you ask, returning his smile. “You hardly seem to be suffering from your confinement, passing the time as cheerfully as I see you have been. Why, you’ve even managed to bring a pet down here!”

“Yes, a beautiful creature, isn’t he?” Odin asks rhetorically. “Seeing that your Caster was a fellow lover of animals, I knew she would enjoy meeting one of my familiars; but really, my boy,” he continues, expression and tone darkening, “I think we’ve cooled our heels long enough down here. When my host and the magus I’ve
sworn to serve both ask me to remain here to watch prisoners I won’t simply disobey, but at this point you really ought to retract the request. You and I know, Alberich, just what sort of threat these girls pose to you, and there’s no purpose in continuing the theater of keeping them imprisoned. Have you settled matters with the little miss as to how you’re dividing them?”

Irritated at Odin’s demanding tone, you find your own mood souring to match his tone, and brusquely reply, “Nothing has yet been settled with Liliesviel, I’m afraid; and until she sees fit to change her order to you, I have no reason to contravene it simply because affairs in this house tend to follow my will. I am not your Master, Lancer, but only a fellow Servant.”

“Ah! See how he scorns me!” Odin exclaims, standing and throwing a hand out upraised to heaven in a sudden shift from sincere irritation to comically theatrical overreaction. “This fellow Servant, this youthful knight who ought to respect his elders; see, you ladies, how he disdains and mocks me, for no better reason than that his Master affords him greater freedom than I receive from mine! Woe, to think that there is no sympathy left in the world, and in the hearts of men!”

With that, he collapses back into the chair and, dispelling the mask of emotion that contorted his face, casually appends the question, “In that case, my boy, what have you come to see us for? Only to warn that we are to remain prisoners and guard here for the foreseeable future?”

[X] “No, I’m not such a poor host as that. Dinner will be served soon enough, and you three ought to come up and eat with us. You can’t wait down here in perpetuity, after all. Before that, however, I need Adelheid’s help with a certain matter; if you’ll excuse us.”

[] “No, I came only to request that Adelheid assist me with a certain investigation I’m conducting. If you’ll excuse us; good evening, Caster; Lancer.”

[] Say something else. (Write in)

“No,” you say, “I’m not such a poor host as that. Dinner will be served soon enough, and you three ought to come up and eat with us. You can’t wait down here in perpetuity, after all. Before that, however, I need Adelheid’s help with a certain matter.” Relying on Adelheid’s curiosity to move her, you turn to go without giving Odin the time to request details. As you step back out the door, you add, “If you’ll excuse us.” As expected, Adelheid trots into the hall after you. You’ve gone only a few paces from the door, in fact, when she begins to speak.
“Well then?” the girl asks, tone intrigued. “What is this ‘certain matter’ of yours, eh, Alberich? And just what has compelled you to keep us waiting down here all evening? To be quite frank, the place calls to mind some rather unpleasant memories for me.”

“My apologies for that,” you reply, “but matters are a bit confused at the moment. Liliesviel and I have had something of a falling out, and until it’s been resolved I’m uncertain as to what degree of my past with you two can be revealed. Aside from that, there’s Circe’s pride and treachery to consider. Without a certain method of controlling her, I’m disinclined to leave her unsupervised. Given that Liliesviel had instructed Lancer to keep watch over you already, I thought it best to leave the three of you for the time being.”

“I see,” responds Adelheid coolly. “No matter, I suppose, if you don’t intend to pursue this course from now on. Now, what is it you need my help with?”

“Translation.” You find your cheeks coloring slightly at the admission, but continue, “Unlike Servants summoned by the Holy Grail, I haven’t been given the gift of languages. Despite this, I’ve encountered the journal of a magus which I must read, and which is written in French. I hope you won’t mind assisting me.”

“Huh?” Adelheid stares wide-eyed at you for a moment. “You called me away to help with that? You really have no sense of scale, do you?” she asks incredulously. “Ah, well. Let’s see the book, then.”

“We don’t all have national resources at our disposal,” you shoot back. “I have a rather limited pool to draw from, and no reason to elevate you above matters I need you for simply because you consider them trivial.” By now you’ve returned to the workshop, and as you finish your rebuke you sit down at Vaissset’s worktable, pull open the drawer with his journals, and hand the first volume to Adelheid. “Here you are,” you say as you do so.

Adelheid spends several minutes looking through the book, reading the first few pages in-depth and then leafing through the rest, before looking up and saying, “It’s a journal, you were right about that. It begins this way:

“4 September, 2015 A.D.
Today I begin a fresh project, being research of my own devising for the purpose of advancing the heritage of the illustrious house of Vaissset and altering our direction from the violent course that led my father to his death. I do this partly to settle my mind, for though I have not yet absorbed the whole of my father’s learning and the heritage of our family that was passed down to him, I can no longer concentrate on those arts without finding myself
overcome by despair. I must have my own course if I am to maintain my own mind, and can thus return at some later date, with firmer will, to learning that which was left to me. Beyond this settling of my own thoughts, however, I hope also to alter the course of our family’s pursuits to come. If I am able to turn our expertise in dominating the magic circuits of others to enhancement of our own versatility rather than pure destruction, I hope that our tradition of violence can be brought to a close. If fortune favors me, no descendant of mine will have to mourn in such an untimely way as I have. Father, if you watch over me still, I beg your forgiveness for this breach of obedience, and hope that the love for you which motivates it mitigates the betrayal of filial piety which it constitutes.”

At this point, Adelheid breaks off her reading and translation for a moment, before flipping over several pages and explaining, “He goes on for quite some time after this lamenting his father’s untimely death, praising his noble features, and vilifying the Clock Tower for ‘giving such false blame to a man so upright and purely righteous’. I would imagine, though, that it’s the research that draws your interest rather than his melodrama. No?”

“Yes, feel free to pass over all that,” you say, nodding. “What I’ve sought out these books for is a detailed explanation of his new project.”

“In that case, you may be disappointed,” Adelheid replies. “All of the actual research notes seem to be encoded in some sort of a cypher. The alphabet is replaced with a mixture of Greek, Cyrillic, and Zodiacal letters, and I think reordered as well. What’s worse, he’s adapted all of these alphabets into his own cursive script, and destroyed many of their letters’ distinguishing features in the process.”

“It’s impossible for you to translate, then?” you ask, your spirits plunging,

“I wouldn’t say that.” Adelheid gives you a reassuring grin. “Do recall, Alberich, that I have the resources of the greatest military in the history of the world contained within my Noble Phantasm. There’s no code on Earth that I cannot break!” she exclaims with a flourish. Cooling, the girl adds, “That said, it will take some time to work my way through this bizarre cipher. For the time being, shall I read you some of the journal after this first section of research, so that you can have a better idea of the situation, or just set about deciphering the research notes immediately?”

[X] You’d rather not delay any longer, particularly considering the somewhat inane nature of Vaisset’s ramblings. Ask Adelheid to begin deciphering immediately.
[ ] Your curiosity outweighs time constraints at the moment. Have Adelheid continue reading Vaisset’s story.

[ ] Give her a different answer. (Write in)

“There’s little point in rushing ahead,” you answer. “I’m sure I’ll get more out of reading and understanding the whole of Vaisset’s research from the beginning than trying to pass over four years of work and attempting to go directly to the conclusion of his project.” With that, you stand and pull the chair out, stepping aside and adding, “Here, take a seat. I’m sure you’ll be able to work more comfortably at deciphering this while sitting at the desk than standing there behind me.”

“Thank you,” Adelheid says, and steps forward to hop up into your vacated chair, her sapphire eyes already returning to the notebook at your reply. “It really is a strange system he’s using here,” she murmurs. “I can’t say how long it will take to decipher, particularly as I don’t know the Zodiacal alphabet by heart...”

As Adelheid is musing on this subject, your attention is distracted by the appearance of Circe and Odin’s presences in the room. You turn to greet them, expecting the pair to be at the door, only to be doubly surprised as you discover that Circe is immediately behind you; so close that you almost bump into her as you turn. Only Odin is where you expected him to be, leaning against the doorframe, while Circe peers past you to inspect the book Adelheid is industriously working to decode.

“So,” she says with a smile, “what do we have here? You wanted Berserker’s help to read someone’s diary?”

“The journal of a dead magus,” you explain, interposing yourself between Circe and Odin’s presences in the room. “The original Master of Caster in this War, in fact. His research provoked my curiosity, and I resolved to learn how to continue his final project from his notes. Unfortunately, they’re written both in French and in code, so that I needed Adelheid’s help to understand them.”

“Learning from a human mage, after you had my help?” Circe asks, pouting and twitching her wings in annoyance. “Just how can the sloppy constructions of modern human magic possibly outdo what you can learn from me, hmmm?”

“You might be surprised,” you retort with a smile. “I think you overrate yourself as a teacher somewhat, Circe. In the time I’ve been absent from you, I’ve had to develop my own magical abilities from the grimoires of modern magi in this household, and I’ve found them quite satisfactory; potent enough to break through the binding enchantment you placed on the air around me in the hotel, you’ll recall.” Your smile widens as you remember the moment of triumph, and you quirk a
provocative eyebrow as you continue, “Perhaps someone who began her magical career with the unlimited power of divine authority isn’t so well-suited to educate those who must make use of a mortal’s limited resources as you like to think. The Age of Gods is, after all, long over.”

“Wha- how dare you- I mean-” Circe lets out several furious beginnings to sentences, each aborted by incoherent anger that sends her wings stretching to their full extent, before she finally snaps, “The foundation of that technique you used was what I taught you, you ingrate! Controlling magic by your will! I can’t believe you! Even if you have learned other things from modern teachers, how can you just act like I didn’t do anything?”

“That’s fair enough,” you concede. “Whatever the degree to which I’ve developed my magic since our parting, the fundamental method of controlling my magical energy is from you. Still, you shouldn’t completely ignore the value of modern magic. There’s much to be gained from these magi.”

“Nonsense!” Circe retorts, her voice taking on a tone of self-satisfied arrogance as it sheds indignation. “No mortal magus could ever equal me! If you think you can learn things from them I couldn’t teach you, it’s only because you didn’t have enough time to learn.”

“Now, now,” Odin says, surprising you by interjecting himself into the conversation rather than simply watching things unfold. “The boy makes a good point. The greatest enchanter is not necessarily the greatest teacher; I say that from experience. Though I have a charm for every circumstance, and can do more with magic than anyone else ever could, there’s never been a soul I could teach the whole of my learning to. The only one who ever equaled it was Mimir, and I certainly didn’t get my knowledge from him by being lectured! It could be that developing his own power with the writing of those less capable is a method better suited to young Alberich than listening to an old witch talk.”

“Old witch?” Circe squeaks, her face going crimson as she whirls to confront Odin. “Just what do you mean by that?”

“Well, not to look at, perhaps,” responds Odin with a conciliatory smile belied by mischievously twinkling eyes, “and you certainly are younger than I, but consider the age difference between the pair of you. On the one hand, a bit over a week, and on the other... how many millennia?”

“Lancer, you’re incorrigible,” you say. “It hardly bears imagining, that the brooding god you’re supposed to be could have such a blackhearted sense of humor.”

“Shocking, isn’t it?” Adelheid adds dryly, glancing up from the notebook for a moment. “One would expect Odin to look over the world with a stern and somber eye,
and yet here he is as cheerful as his blood-brother. It’s affront enough to make me doubt the providence in which I placed my faith while alive.”

At this comment, Odin does assume something of the stern countenance you’d expect from one called the gallows-god. As he turns an unsmiling face on the three of you it seems that the air in the basement grows a trifle chilled; the candle-flames must gutter, for there’s no other explanation of the way the light dims. It’s in a sonorous voice bereft of humor that he replies, “Midgard has changed more than I, in my absence; the Age of Man has twisted your world until it has become quite unrecognizable. If I take my pleasure wherever I can find it, it is only to pass the time as I wait for a battle worthy of my summoning.”

For a few moments all in the room stand motionless, pinned by his thunderous glower. Then the God smiles again, and the oppressive moment is brought to an end as he continues, “Fortunately it seems that young Alberich will provide me with such a battle! So, if you find my jokes a bit grating, I hope you’ll humor them as the entertainment of an old man with no better way of spending his time.”

In the moment as you collect your thoughts and consider how best to reply to this unveiling of Odin’s degree of contempt for the modern world, you find that yet another fresh matter demands your attention: Ayaka’s voice in your mind, reaching across the mental bond between Master and Servant to announce, ‘Saber-san, dinner is ready. I’m sure Nii-san’s papers must be very interesting, but I think you should come up and join us.’

Ah, dinner. You’d almost forgotten, what with the discovery of Vaisset’s notes, the beginning of Adelheid’s translation, and the strange discussion with the Servants, but it has been quite some time since you spoke to Stengel in the hall about cooking.

[X] Ayaka is right. Vaisset’s notebooks can wait; for the moment, you’ll all go up to dinner.

[ ] Dinner can wait a while longer. Before that, see whether Adelheid can tell you about Vaisset’s first block of research notes yet.

[ ] Rather than changing the subject to dinner, address Odin’s statement about the modern world. (Write in at least your main point.)

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)

‘Of course,’ you reply. ‘We’ll be upstairs in a moment. Odin, Circe, and Adelheid will be joining us for dinner, by the way.’
‘Is that so?’ comes the surprised reply. Then, with surprising bitterness, Ayaka adds, ‘well it isn’t like any uninvited guest could top the Einzberns anyway. Bring whoever you like, Saber-san.’

‘Miss Ayaka, I apologize if our guests are causing you trouble,’ you tell her, ‘but I did try to inform you of them when they arrived. You didn’t seem to want to pay attention, so I’ve been doing what seems best.’

‘Oh, no trouble at all,’ she responds shortly. ‘Just come up to dinner, Saber-san. We can discuss this some other time.’

You suppose there’s nothing for it but to let her have her way. After all, you’ve already done everything in your power to make the Einzbern party’s stay here a harmonious one. If Ayaka still feels resentful over the dressing down she received from Liliesviel on their first meeting, there’s nothing to be done at this point. With that, you return your attention to your immediate surroundings and announce with a smile, “I’ve been informed that dinner is served. I’m sure that after all the night’s exercise you three are as famished as I am. Follow me, and we can all enjoy some Stengel’s cuisine.”

“Excellent,” Adelheid says as she gets to her feet. “I’ve been looking forward to the chance to eat again. This woman had me on a diet of mystic energy alone, with nothing to supplement it.”

“Really now?” Circe gives Adelheid a provocative smirk. “After the relish you showed for Rushorou’s energy when you two first met, I imagined you’d be overjoyed to subsist on the leylines. You should’ve made your preferences more clear, I’d never have guessed you wanted ordinary food.” Then turning to you she adds, “Having the Einzbern girl’s maid cook for you? Well, we’ll see. I don’t think she’ll be any peer of mine when it comes to cooking, though. Be honest, wasn’t the food I made at the University just the best you’ve ever had, Alberich?”

“It was quite good,” you answer noncommittally and trail off, canting your head slightly as if uncertain. If truth be told, Circe’s cooking really is the best you’ve ever had, including Yumigawa’s memories, but after her recent treachery you’re inclined to be miserly in doling out praise to the woman. Besides, you haven’t had any of Stengel’s cooking aside from that prepared while you and Kōrakuhime interfered, and even so that breakfast was delicious enough to place less confidence in Circe’s superiority than she does.

“Only ‘quite good’?” Circe’s wings droop, and she takes on a surprisingly disheartened expression at your halfhearted praise. She doesn’t say anything more, however, so with no more being spoken you turn and lead your future enemy and two captives up the stairs to dinner.
Passing through the living room, you note with some interest that not only is Kōrakuhime gone, but Yumigawa as well. Someone must have moved him to another room for safekeeping, you suppose, but it is a bit irritating that no-one thought to consult you before doing so. Not that you need to micromanage everything, you say to yourself, but not knowing the location of your basis is a fairly significant point. Ah, well; you’ll find out what became of Yumigawa later, and your attention is soon distracted in any case by the sight of what waits for you in the dining room.

Places have been set for each of you, and waiting already seated are Ayaka, Kōrakuhime (in the guise of Shijou Tsubaki), and Liliesviel, while Stengel waits a few paces from the table with a serving cart, Stachel stands deferentially behind her mistress’ chair, and Arturia waits with similar posture behind an empty seat between Ayaka and Liliesviel. This, you assume, is the place reserved for you. As you make your way over to it, Arturia courteously draws the chair out from the table for you to sit down, all grace and humility in her movements and posture. The effect is somewhat spoiled by her perpetual expression of resentful insolence, but even so it’s clear that someone, presumably Stengel, has taken it upon herself to drill a maid’s proper behavior into Arturia. You’ll have to ask her about the matter later, you decide.

Following you, Odin, Adelheid, and Circe sit down as well, Stengel serves dinner, the three maids take their seats toward the foot of the table, and at last dining can get underway. True to your request, Stengel has prepared a meal from the Einzberns’ homeland, and a thoroughly delicious one at that. Dinner is wiener schnitzel: tenderized veal cutlets, battered and fried, sprinkled lightly with lemon juice and served with parsley potatoes. The succulence of the meat is more than a match for the best of Circe’s cooking, and although the flavor isn’t quite as strong owing to the lesser use of herbs, the rich warmth of the complementary taste of butter, batter, and veal is enough. All things considered, it’s hard to say whether Circe or Stengel is the better cook in your estimation, despite the assuredly massive difference in experience.

Glancing across the table, you observe that Circe has evidently reached a similar conclusion. The nymph heaves a sigh, gazing morosely at her plate, and murmurs to herself, “Human cooking certainly has advanced, hasn’t it?”

“Don’t worry, girl,” Odin says, patting her hand in a fatherly gesture. “These things can be disheartening, I know, but you’ll catch up with time. They’re only mortal, after all.” The reassurance she gains from his words is probably diminished a bit, though, by the gusto with which he eats Stengel’s dinner. Odin seems to be enjoying it as well as you are. One person the schnitzel isn’t a hit with, though, is
Adelheid; unfortunate and surprising, considering she was part of your motivation in having Stengel cook. Despite your expectations, though, the girl picks listlessly at her dinner with a perturbed expression.

“What’s the matter, Adelheid?” you ask. “Is dinner not to your liking?”

“I’m afraid it isn’t exactly my sort of meal, no,” Adelheid answers, setting her fork down in evident surrender. “The fact of the matter is, I’m not much of a one for meat eating. It disagrees with my digestion, you see. The potatoes are delicious, but as for this veal... I’ll just have to leave it here, I think.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” you reply, giving her a look of sympathy. “We’ll have to see about preparing meals without meat for you in the future.”

Continuing your eyes’ circuit of the table, you observe that Kōrakuhime’s earlier doldrums have been banished, as she savors each bite with visible enjoyment despite her customary slowness; Stengel seems more concerned with observing your and her mistress’ reactions than eating her own dinner; Stachel eats rapidly and expressionlessly, keeping herself fed with mechanical precision; and Arturia, in a particularly noteworthy turn, has already devoured her dinner by the time your eyes reach her! As you watch, she quietly demands a second helping from Stengel, but the other maid ignores her. Considering why she should show such enthusiasm, you suppose that Arturia’s long imprisonment has contributed to her gluttony now. Being deprived of food for so long can hardly fail to make one rush to devour it, especially when one is a Servant with a living body as you and she are, rather than a pure spirit.

Finally you turn your attention to your immediate neighbors. To your left, Ayaka eats with subdued disinterest, obviously more concerned with her discomfort around Liliesviel than the food itself. For all her positivity regarding your alliance with Liliesviel earlier, it’s plain that the girl’s mere presence still weighs heavily on Ayaka. On your right hand, the source of Ayaka’s woes is herself in an only slightly better state. She eats with careful etiquette and graceful motions, and it’s plain from her expression that she’s enjoying her maid’s cooking, but Liliesviel hasn’t said a word. She’s a far cry from her usual energetic self, even if she has decided she’s had enough ‘time to think’ and come down to eat.

[ ] Subdued she may still be, but if she’s come out of the library she must have reached a decision. Ask Liliesviel how she’s feeling. (Write in any details of your approach)
Liliesviel has a good reason, but if even your Master is in such a low emotional state that’s something to be more worried about. Try to bring Ayaka out of her shell. (How?)

[X] Say something to someone else. (A toast!)

“To the gift of life!” you exclaim, raising your glass high. “It is truly the gift from which all else springs, and must be appreciated first and foremost; and I, more than many, have someone’s intent to thank for mine. So a toast also to Judas Iscariot, that famous scoundrel responsible for my creation! Without him, I would not be here now and neither, at least with respect to this precise spot, would any of you.”

You grin at the assembled diners, taking a moment to enjoy your own minor witticism, and then continue in a calmer tone, “Of course, it isn’t life alone that I would speak of now, but the happiness that comes of it. Though I’ve lived for a short time, ten days in the Akeldama and just over a week here in reality, I’ve had the pleasure of meeting in you far more fascinating and pleasant company than could have been hoped for in the full course of an ordinary life.” So saying, you sweep your eyes around the table once more, to turn to each diner as you speak of them.

“Circe,” you begin, turning a gentle smile on the winged nymph. “You were my first true support, the first to help me toward the achievement of my goals. Though your treachery and pride have brought you low today, I’ll never forget that you were an invaluable teacher and Servant, and that without you I would not have the power I have now. Thank you for that; it is my hope that you serve me as well in the future as you did then, for I’m sure that no Servant could set a higher example of devotion than you did during the War in the Akeldama.”

At these words Circe flushes in embarrassment and nods, although the way her eyes remain downcast leaves you uncertain whether she’s agreeing or simply averting her eyes.

From Circe you turn to Adelheid, your second Servant.

“Adelheid, the first to see me for who I truly was,” you say, introducing her in a warm tone. “Your words on our first meeting helped steel my resolve to push forward on my own path towards the future; in your voice I first heard music, and was drawn out of considerations of War to enjoy its beauty; later, you helped me to stand apart from the past of Yumigawa Rushorou and take on my own personality, though I didn’t know then that I had truly been born separate from him; finally, it was by your power that the War in the Akeldama was brought to a close. For all this, Adelheid, thank you.”
Adelheid colors slightly as well, but unlike Circe takes a defiant attitude to her embarrassment, putting on a self-satisfied expression and crossing her arms.

Next you turn your gratitude to Ayaka, who looks more insecure than ever after listening to the praise heaped on your two Servants from the War in the Akeldama. Hopefully you can diminish that insecurity, though, as you say, “Miss Ayaka, you’ve been more reliable than I could have hoped for. Despite all that’s happened you’ve never ceased to be steadfast in supporting me, putting your life in my hands and using your magical capabilities to the fullest to empower me. You’ve been everything a Master should be, and for that I thank you.”

Ayaka looks up to return your smile for a brief moment before you continue on to the next subject of your impromptu speech.

Turning from your neighbor to the girl across from her, you say to Kōrakuhime, “Miss Tsubaki, though not my Master you too have been reliable and devoted in the support you give your sister and I, and your own magical abilities have been essential to our success on more than one occasion. In the fullness of your commitment to this Holy Grail War despite the freedom you have to leave, you have been a paragon of sibling devotion. Thank you.”

As you dip your head in thanks for the fourth time Kōrakuhime doesn’t flush as the others have, but only returns your nod and quirks her lips in that small smile of hers that signals the inexpressive girl’s delight.

Finally you turn to the girl at your left hand, and smile tenderly down at her. The girl who awakened in you such hitherto unknown feelings of affection. The girl you wounded so cruelly with your deception. Liliesviel, so vulnerable as she waits, wide-eyed and nervous for the words you’ll direct at her; but perhaps the words of love you’ve said tonight and the praise you will say now can go some way toward healing the wound you dealt that maiden heart.

“Liliesviel,” you say, not hiding the affection in your tone, “in you I found the first person I’d met who had a hope of understanding my situation; the experience of being a tool, not born but made for a purpose, and then set free in the world with an independent will seemingly at odds with that programmed identity. In you I found hope for the future, a path to life beyond the end of the Holy Grail War. Most importantly, in your sweetness; in the readiness with which you opened your heart to me and took me in as your brother; in the need I felt in you for a family that would feel true affection for you, and not only for the Einzbern Master; in all these things, I discovered my own need for someone to stand with, and to truly care for. Thank you, Liliesviel.”
As you speak, you lay your hand on her shoulder. The height difference between you is too great to clasp her hand at the moment, but hopefully this small act of physical closeness helps to illustrate your point even so. As you gaze into her eyes, and she into yours, a moment of silence and uncertainty passes before she finally gives you a smile. It’s a wan thing, not so bright as her usual expressions and with a deal of reservation about it; she clearly hasn’t yet returned yet to being the girl she was before your revelation. All the same, it’s something positive.

Next, you turn to Odin, jovially saying, “Lancer, I thank you for all that you have brought to our alliance, and done to bring us to this moment of victorious peace; you’ve generously lent us the strength of your arm, the potency of your wit, and most of all the pleasure of your company. It is a marvelous thing to have an ally as amiably disposed and cooperative as you are. For this, more than anything else, you have my gratitude.”

Odin doesn’t take offense at your backhanded comment, provocative though the sarcasm may be. In fact, from the look of it he seems to be stifling a laugh! Moderately satisfied not to have sown discord, then, if not fully satisfied by the sting your words ought to have dealt him, you’ll move on from the mercurial deity. With your gratitude for the leading members of your group thus expressed, you turn to the serving staff.

“Arturia,” you begin, with a smile as disingenuous as that you gave to Odin, “for the excellent spar we had earlier this evening, and for the diligence you’ve shown to learning your new duties as a maid, I thank you.

“Lastly, though only because the two of you have chosen seats so distant from my own,” you add, giving an honest smile to Stachel and Stengel, “Stengel and Stachel, devoted maids of my Liliesviel, thank you for your continued service; for adapting as well as you have to my appearance in your mistress’ life; for showing my own maid a fine example of proper behavior; and most enthusiastically of all, for a wonderful meal!”

With that, you sweep your eyes around the table once more, pausing to compose your thoughts and prepare the end of your toast. Already, you can see, spirits are raised; although there is some impatience visible in Adelheid and Arturia over the wait you’re forcing them to endure before beginning their desserts.

“You see then, how important everyone at this table is to me; how much you are all part and parcel of the gift of life,” you say, lowering your voice a bit and letting the festivity fall from it for a more sober proclamation than that in praise of Stengel’s cooking. “There are those who might regard such sentimental words as
foolish; even disingenuous; but I say them from the bottom of my heart, in all truth. I am happy that we could all be here together for this meal.”

You raise your voice again as you continue, “The wearisome work of this War is almost done; the long, hard road almost traveled to its end! We would not be have this moment of peace without everyone here doing their utmost to play their part in bringing that work to its conclusion. Our every collective breath is a step towards ultimate victory; our every moment together an opportunity to grow to ever greater strength, and approach ever greater certainty of more moments like this one.”

You take a deep breath, pausing for effect, then look pointedly at Odin and say, “One cannot grow without rivals.” From that statement, though, you continue by addressing the entire table. “One cannot thrive without growth. One cannot enjoy small moments like this without the ability to thrive. It is for this reason, as well as the happiness of the moment itself, that I wish for us to enjoy this meal and take the opportunity for be merriment in the knowledge that such moments are forever fleeting and their appreciation rare indeed. I would like to take this one night to truly appreciate how far we’ve all come and how far we can go in the future. I dedicate this toast to that future! That time, beyond the end of the War, when moments like these are not so few and far between. To our fellowship of Masters and Servants!”

For a moment you consider adding, ‘to our family,’ but consideration of the unique and certain ways the comment would offend Liliesviel, Ayaka, and Kōrakuhime stays your tongue. So with that, you finally bring your lengthy toast to an end, raise your glass, and sit down as everyone enjoys their port and dessert.

Although not everyone reacted as ecstatically as you might have hoped, the toast seems to have gone over well and dinner is brought to a close in a rather cheerier mood than it began. As everyone finishes their food, and people begin to get up from the table, you glance down at your watch and realize how late it’s gotten: it’s after midnight. Hardly surprising that some of those here are rather listless; you’re beginning to fade yourself. As you get up from your seat, you decide to...

[ ] Go right to bed. After the whirlwind that tonight’s been, all further matters can be resolved in the morning.

[X] Take Liliesviel aside and ask how she’s feeling after the thought she gave your confession.

[ ] Take Circe and Adelheid aside to ask about something that happened while they were away from you. (Write in specific points you’d like to know about).

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)
With the meal at an end, you stand to depart from the table much as the others do, the diners naturally drifting apart and milling about in the after-dinner haze of tired minds’ late-night weariness accentuated by the relaxation that comes of hunger well satisfied with good food and wine. As you stand, though, you tap Liliesviel subtly on the shoulder, in a gesture not to be seen by the others but only felt by the girl, and murmur, “May we speak in private?”

The girl nods, a gesture as minute as your own signal and easily to be missed if you were not looking for it, and the two of you thus depart, passing as you go the maids cleaning up the table, Circe and Odin once more in avid discussion of the modern world’s peculiarities, Adelheid thoughtfully sketching out cryptographic notes on a pad drawn from her uniform pocket, and Kōrakuhime sitting contemplatively with Futodoki on her lap. From the dining room, the two of you pass through the kitchen and then into the living room which, having been vacated by your prisoner and his guard, is private enough for the moment; at least Liliesviel seems to believe so, since it’s she who chooses to stop there and address you in her mother tongue, the childishness in her manner as much gone as when she commands her subordinates.

“I hoped to speak with you as well, Alberich,” she says, giving you the same bittersweet smile that played over her lips at the table. “It was a beautiful speech that you gave at dinner. So touching, and so sweet. I would like to believe everything that you said; that you meant it then, and that you meant what you told me when you kissed me.”

A small fist clutches at her skirts, and her lip quivers as she falls into a moment of silence. Before you can speak, though, the moment of hesitation passes and she continues, eyes beginning again to moisten, “I want to believe you; I do! But when I let my emotions control me before, I believed in a fantasy, and you used that belief to lie to me! Even Stengel could see that what I decided couldn’t be so, but I believed it all the same!”

“Why should I lie to you now,” you protest, “when it was by my own confession that I revealed my earlier deception? It was my depth of feeling for you that drove me tell you the truth tonight!” Rushing forward, you place your hands on her shoulders; taking hold of the girl without embracing her for fear that such a gesture now might worsen things. “Liliesviel, you must believe me,” you repeat. “If I hadn’t cared for you, and what I’ve said about my motivations tonight was a lie, I could have just continued as we were, leading you on without a care.”
“That makes sense,” she sniffs. “Alberich, my own feelings for you make me want that. I- But you already know how I feel about you, or you couldn’t have deceived me so.” Liliesviel draws in a sharp breath, not quite a sob, and bites her lip in anguish. “How can I trust you now, if you’ve lied to me that way once?” she entreats, staring up at you for answers which you no longer have to offer, having already poured out your feelings so completely.

Then, all of a sudden, your hands are empty. Liliesviel slips out of your grip, taking a graceful step back to regard you from beyond the reach of your arms. She shuts her eyes and takes a single deep breath, and as it comes out in a sigh the pain too seems to flow out of her. When she opens her eyes again, the expression on that alabaster face is a strange one, with such mixed and subtle elements of happiness and remorse in the set of brow, eye, and lip, that it produces a countenance almost serene.

With a tone incongruously cheerful, reflective of that strangely mercurial volatility that always seems to affect Liliesviel’s emotions, she announces, “I’ve made up my mind, Alberich. I think I can believe you, and forgive the way you lied to me. Thank you for being so patient with me. You must have thought I’d already decided when I came down to eat, I’m sure.”

“No, no,” you say, shaking your head “I ought to be the one thanking you, for trusting in my feelings and looking past my deception.”

“You’ve done enough thanking for one night, Alberich,” Liliesviel ripostes with an impish smile. “Any more, and your gratitude might run out! Ehehehe~” After a few moments of shared laughter, which truthfully owes more to the delight of having the central issue hanging between the two of you resolved at last than to her joke, Liliesviel more calmly asks, “What did you want to speak with me about? We’ve only discussed the topic that I brought up so far; I won’t put you off any longer.”

“I was going to ask about how you were feeling, since I left you in such a state,” you answer, with a caring tone and expression. “Is there anything still troubling you?”

“Nothing serious,” Liliesviel answers, amused at your gratuitous display of concern in resuming the question so obviously answered by your discussion thus far, “but there is something I’d like to know, Alberich.” As you’ve been speaking, the two of you have drawn gradually closer once again, so that as she airs this new topic Liliesviel looks up into your face rather than across the room at you.

“And what is that?” you ask, already guessing the answer. There are, after all, two primary matters of your expedition tonight left unfinished, and one significantly more likely to prompt Liliesviel’s hurry than the other.

Sure enough, with an expression not unlike that of a little girl requesting of an indulgent father some particularly desired and expensive birthday present, Liliesviel
asks, “What are you doing with those Servants we captured? I know they were your acquaintances from the other War that you told me about, but you still promised to give me one of them. It’s unsafe to let them go around without a Master, and we can’t have them sustained by the regional Mana forever. I’d like to make a contract with the Caster who dueled Odin tonight. You don’t mind, do you?”

[ ] No, let Liliesviel take Circe as her Servant. You have, after all, made a promise to turn one of the two over to Liliesviel. Since she’s so attached to the idea of holding power over the Caster who attempted to kill her, there’s no reason not to let her have her way.

[ ] Yes, you do mind. Though you did promise Liliesviel a Servant, you never promised that it would be Circe. Suggest that she take Adelheid instead, as one more easily managed.

[X] Reply differently. (Write in)

“Of course,” you reply, smiling down at her, “I don’t mind. Take whichever of the two Servants you prefer; but I ought to tell you a bit about them before you decide. I wouldn’t want you to regret your decision after having made it with a lack of information, after all.”

“That would be troublesome,” Liliesviel agrees, then nods with interest. “Go ahead,” she continues. “Tell me all about them.”

“Perhaps not all,” you reply, “but enough to help you choose. Here, then, are the two Servants: Adelheid and Circe, a Berserker and a Caster, of vastly differing temperaments, abilities, and origins. Circe,” you begin, raising a finger to illustrate the first of the duo, “was the Servant I summoned for the War in the Akeldama, the enchantress Circe of Aeaea, who appears in the Odyssey and other legends. Her temperament is rather strange, and seems to me difficult to fully understand. As my Servant she seemed quite devoted and pleasant to me, but bore all of my other comrades some mysterious animosity. Then, after we separated, she sought out Yumigawa Rushorou, treated him quite disrespectfully, and finally continued her rebellion even in the face of her discovering my identity; and this for no other reason than her pride. I would call her quite unpredictable, and so one to be wary of. Her magical abilities, however, are prodigious and broad, some requiring enormous supplies of mystic energy and others very little. She seems to have great facility in drawing Mana out of the earth and otherwise managing mystic energy.”
At this point you stop in your explanation and draw your attention out from the inward gaze of memory back to Liliesviel, looking to see if she has any question or point of confusion. She shows no sign of such, however, but only listens with interest to your narration. “That’s Circe, then,” you conclude. “Powerful, versatile, but unpredictable.” Now you raise a second finger, shifting the subject to your other Servant. “Adelheid, now, is as I’ve said quite different. Her Madness and Noble Phantasm have completely transformed her beyond recognition of her original heroic spirit, but that person was an Austrian, like yourself, and lived long after the Age of Gods during which most legends were formed. Her personality is straightforward: powerfully attached to her principles, and with a real love of battle. Adelheid is a direct fighter. In spite of that appearance of hers, her most powerful abilities are like those of most Berserkers; they all deal with close-range combat. As for her energy requirements, I’m frankly surprised that Circe could keep her alive with only the use of Mana. In the Akeldama, when Adelheid was without a Master to sustain her for only a few minutes she nearly vanished.”

“Hmmmmmmmm...” Liliesviel draws out a long hum of contemplation as you complete your explanation of the two Servants’ major points of significance. As is her constant habit when in thought, she touches her index finger to her cheek, and her ruby eyes dim, staring into the middle distance as the advantages and disadvantages of the respective Servants are weighed behind them. At length, she seems to come to a conclusion, for animation returns to her face and she claps her hands together in a display of cheer. “That’s it!” she exclaims.

“What is?” you ask, uncertain what revelation could have so excited her in contemplation of these two choices.

“I can solve everything,” the girl says cheerfully, “because they work together so well already! Listen, Alberich. Here is what we should do: I’ll make a contract with Circe, and as my Servant she’ll be able to use as much energy as she wants to. Then she’ll continue supplying her energy to Adelheid without a command spell however she has been so far, and neither one of them will have to drain the regional Mana!”

“That certainly sounds like an excellent idea,” you agree, nodding thoughtfully, “assuming Circe’s method of sharing energy with Adelheid really is a direct transfer between the two of them, and doesn’t work in some other way.”

Liliesviel waves a dismissive hand. “I’m sure it is,” she says. “After all, it is not as if Adelheid is well-acquainted with magic herself, is it? She isn’t carrying around a mystic code that I could see; so Circe must be using her magic to supply Adelheid. Anyway, I’ve decided. It’s definitely Circe I want for my Servant.”
“If you’re so certain,” you reply, “I’ll call her in.” So saying, you reach your mind out to Arturia, ordering the maid to find Circe and convey her to the living room. After the typical curt reply of ‘Understood’, you have a few minutes to wait before the pair makes their appearance, but nevertheless they do so. Wordlessly, Arturia pushes Circe through the door into the room with you and Liliesviel, then fades back into the outer corridor.

“Alberich?” Circe says, looking around her in confusion once she’s regained the balance lost by Arturia’s shove. “That Servant of yours didn’t say anything, just dragged me in here. What do you need?”

“To test your word,” you answer. “If you intend to keep it, you’ll become Liliesviel’s Servant now, and obey her faithfully.”

“What?” Circe’s eyes go wide at the unexpected proclamation, a gesture of surprise mirrored by her wings, which twitch and extend as if preparing, without their owner’s active knowledge, to flee. “You want me to become someone else’s Servant, Alberich? I know it’s true that you can’t be a Master anymore, but I thought you’d want to wait...”

“You were mistaken, then,” you tell her in a voice without emotion. “I promised to Liliesviel that she would have one of the two Servants we ‘captured’ tonight, and she’s chosen you. So, if you truly intend to reenter my service, you can prove it by entering hers now. Our goals are, after all, the same, and she lives here at the moment.” Then smirking, you add in jest, “It’s hardly as though I’m sending you off to Harris.”

“I see,” Circe replies, looking decidedly downcast. After a moment, though, she draws herself up and with a tolerable impression of willing, says, “Alright, Alberich. If that’s really what you want me to do.” Then she turns to Liliesviel, and after looking the girl up and down declares disparagingly, “You haven’t prepared the ritual.”

“We don’t need one,” Liliesviel replies with an impetuous smile. “Not people like you and I.” Then, in a sudden burst of light and mystic energy, vermilion traceries appear on every visible area of her skin, and the radiance they cast off makes them even somewhat visible beneath her dress and socks. This, then, is the Einzbern command spell. Unmoved by the activation of her own possession, Liliesviel continues, “It is enough for you to kneel and kiss my hand.”

At this pronouncement of humiliation, Circe sends you one more look of mixed pleading and frustration. Perceiving your determination in your expression, though, she kneels, takes in hers Liliesviel’s outstretched hand, and with bowed head brushes her lips against it. At the contact, there’s another surge of magic, and then Liliesviel’s command spell fades into invisibility once more. With an expression of completely
triumphant satisfaction, the girl declares, “That’s it! Now you’re my Servant, Circe. Follow me; we have a lot to discuss if we’re going to get to know each other!”

With this statement of amicable intent, the two girls make their exit and leave you alone in the deserted living room. Standing alone and silent, it finally seems to make an impact. You’ve passed through the storm of your confession unscathed, with Liliesviel still a devoted and affectionate ally, and what to do about your growing feelings for the girl still to be sorted out. You sink into a chair, the accumulated fatigue of the night’s numerous battles emotional and physical overtaking you, and nearly drift off then and there. You stop yourself, though, and sit up straight to remain wakeful, checking your watch. Well after midnight now, and growing nearer to one. The noise from the dining room and kitchen has died down, and it seems from the sound of things that most of the manor’s other inhabitants have retired. Time for you to do the same.

Walking alone through the house, you ascend to the bedroom you’ve claimed for yourself, the former abode of the Vaisset patriarch, and allow yourself to collapse into the great bed without restraint, for a few hours at least to shut out the world with its curtains and rest until dawn; or until some malevolent presence should activate the bounded fields around the house and awaken you, at least. Hardly a moment passes, it seems, from the impact of your head against the silk pillow until your descent into welcome oblivion.

You awaken in the dark from confused and uncertain dreams, too hazy to remember or understand clearly. No morning light penetrates the room from outside the windows; indeed, when you spare a glance for the clock on your nightstand you find it only half past three. You can see and hear nothing out of the ordinary in the bounded fields. What, then, awoke you? You lie still in the darkness for several seconds, looking, listening, and straining your memory to determine what it was that startled you out of rest. Then it comes again: a hesitant knocking at your bedroom door. At the realization, you let out a breath you didn’t know you’d been holding. You aren’t under attack by Assassin or some other nigh-undetectable foe after all, but only being visited by one of your housemates. You sit up in bed, turn on the lamp at your bedside table, and call softly, “Enter.”

What passes through your door is a vision almost indescribable; an apparition of unearthly beauty, all in white: Liliesviel, clothed in a bizarre costume which you instinctively know must be the heavenly garment of which Liliesviel spoke during your trip to the Greater Grail.

The garment can best be described in terms of its pieces, for as a whole it fits no clear term for an article of clothing of which you are aware. Liliesviel’s shoulders
and chest are covered by a sort of topcoat or mantle of gilt-edged white silk with a
neru collar, though this hangs no further than her midriff. Below this uppermost
garment is a tightly fitted white dress or skirt which seems to connect to a pair of
voluminous, lengthy sleeves that hide Liliesviel’s hands and arms completely. While
the garment goes to great length to hide the arms, however, other areas are less
protected. A vertical row of gilt-edged circular openings runs down the front of the
garment’s upper part, leaving visible a small area of Liliesviel’s chest and midriff,
where four large, perfectly spherical rubies can be seen, although whether these are
part of the garment or an aspect of a homunculus’ anatomy is impossible for you to
determine. Her thighs, likewise, are left partially exposed between the hem of her
skirt and the thigh-high socks (also of white silk) which cover her legs. Both of these
edges are decorated with a strange pattern of golden shapes which have something in
common with both the crucifix and the fleur de lis, but are neither. Over all this, a
brilliant red silk stole hangs from Liliesviel’s shoulders almost to the ground,
somewhat resembling that of a priest.

The most striking aspect of all those in this bizarre ensemble, however, is
Liliesviel’s crown. Tall, cylindrical, and with a ring of points, it seems to have been
carved all out of a single enormous pearl, or some hitherto unknown white jade, in
intricate bas relief floral patterns which coat its surface, before having had its edges
covered with gold. In the center of this singular headpiece, just over Liliesviel’s
forehead, it too has a gilt circular opening, like those below, but through this no flesh
can be seen. Instead there is only a strange white glow there, as if the opening looked
out upon some other world composed wholly of illuminated mist.

You’re still staring, speechless at the ethereal beauty of the garment, and
Liliesviel wearing it, when the girl, having now finished walking up to your bed and
seated herself beside your legs, speaks to you in a tone rather at odds with her
ceremonial garb. Its only departure from normalcy is that she seems a bit
embarrassed.

“You remember,” Liliesviel begins, “that I said I partly knew you were
deceiving me because of the ritual with the Greater Grail, don’t you, Alberich?”

You swallow dryly, attempting to gather your thoughts and focus your gaze
only on Liliesviel’s eyes. After a moment, though, you’re able to master your shock
and answer, “Yes. I confess I didn’t give it much thought earlier, but I remember you
saying so.”

“Well,” she replies, “I was worried about that because the ritual wasn’t fully
completed. At the last moment the Greater Grail rejected you, because you aren’t
truly an Einzbern. I couldn’t be sure about it right then because of Assassin, and then I was too distracted afterwards, but after you went to bed I was able to confirm it.”

“Then— you mean—” You break off, panic suddenly giving disorder again to your thoughts. “My connection to the Greater Grail was not made? The Third Sorcery can’t be applied to me?”

“We~ll,” she says, drawing out the syllable uncertainly, “we could try to complete the ritual again, and hope that since it was already partly finished you could be fully linked to the Grail even though it wouldn’t be the perfect day. But...”

She pauses, growing more flushed, and as the pause stretches on interminably you’re finally about to conclude that she’ll say nothing more and open your own mouth to reply, when she at last says, “there is still the other ritual, which isn’t tied to a schedule. That’s... um...” Another pause, and Liliesviel takes a deep breath, laying her hand on her heart to steady herself.

“The ritual to... to become one with the Lesser Grail.” Blushing furiously, she’s unable to look you in the eye. “Alberich,” she says, in a tone barely above a whisper, “would you like to try that ritual? I know the Lesser Grail... wouldn’t reject you.”

[X] Conduct the second ritual.
[ ] Refuse, and send Liliesviel out.
[ ] Answer differently. (Write in)

Saying such a thing with those crimson cheeks, and her previous comment about wanting it to be conducted at night... Liliesviel’s visiting you alone, in your bedroom, to ‘become one’... The pieces fall into place in your mind, and heat rises to your cheeks as you find yourself suddenly sharing a portion of Liliesviel’s embarrassment. Does she mean what you believe she does? Could an act of such a nature truly be a magical ritual? Yet, there is what you know of the transmission of magical energy through bodily fluids, and the significance of blood and death in magic of the soul. If that sort of intimacy should be so potent, it seems sensible for the other variety to have an equal, if not greater, capacity to affect the soul, when properly ritualized.

At the thought, thus rationalized and made believable, immodest passion ignites within you and quickens your pulse. Almost unconsciously you sit up straighter, rising from the headboard to lean forward and bring yourself closer to Liliesviel. The detached, ever-observant portion of your mind notes as you do so that
the sheets fall from your torso and your visitor’s eyes are momentarily drawn to your nudity, her flush deepening. The majority of your attention, however, is given over to drinking in her modest, nervous beauty with the renewed sensitivity of desire.

Trembling lips pressed together in apprehension, now of a shade with her flushed cheeks; ruby eyes, so lately glossy with tears of a despair now happily behind you; pearlescent hair, cascading over her garment in broad waves unrestrained by her ordinary ribbons; flawless skin, glimpsed so tantalizingly through her bizarre costume. The whole portrait before you is of such astonishing purity and sweetness that you are almost overcome, and seize her, drawing her into a rough embrace and devouring kiss without another word.

But no. With a masterful effort of will, you rein in your desire and, in a tone not ravenous but gentle and tender, answer, “I’d like that a great deal, Liliesviel. I’ve told you already that I love you, haven’t I?”

Smiling, you add, “Even if there weren’t any ritual involved, I’d accept your proposition with joy as a confirmation that you return my feelings. If,” you amend, “I understand you correctly.”

“...you do,” Liliesviel murmurs almost inaudibly, staring into her lap and looking, if possible, even more embarrassed than before. You’re not too blind to observe, though, that her expression includes joy as well as modesty.

“I’ve made all of the preparations already, so... even if I am, um... distracted, the heavenly garment will make sure the ritual is completed. Once I... give myself to you, our souls will be linked, and you really will become an Einzbern; to receive as I do the complete miracle of the Heaven’s Feel.”

Explaining the purely magical side of the ritual seems to have a calming effect on Liliesviel, for her voice steadies and she’s able to look you in the eye again as she does so.

“Wonderful,” you say. “In that case, how shall we begin?” With Liliesviel before you this way, and your own desire so great, you feel as if you might pounce on her at any moment; but after the anguish she’s already suffered as a result of your selfishness, you don’t want even to frighten her momentarily, and so continue to hold yourself back, making absolutely certain that she is as prepared as possible. It isn’t an easy task, and the moment between your question and your Liliesviel’s reply seems to stretch into an eternity as you listen to the pounding of your own heart, longing against your better self to push her down and slake your passion without restraint.

Seemingly unaware of your internal war between desire and affection, Liliesviel takes a deep breath, one hand pressed over her heart, to steady herself and achieve some mastery over her nerves. Then, at last, looking at you with that nervous,
maidenly expression that so inflames your desire, stretches her arms out, and says, “Just hold me for a while, until I’ve calmed down. Please?”

You don’t speak in reply, but only reach out and pull her to you, embracing the girl as chastely as you can manage despite the fresh waves of lust prompted by the sensation of her body, the heat of her cheek against yours, and even the feeling of her rapid heartbeat. For a long moment the two of you cling together in silence this way, as you comfort her, stroking her hair and wordlessly reassuring the wounded girl once more of the solidity of your presence and feelings for her.

Gradually you begin to feel the rapid pounding of her heart slow, until finally she breathes a heated sigh into your ear before pulling away just enough to face you, and whisper slowly, “Thank you, Alberich. I think I’m ready now. You can kiss me, and after that... I’ve learned from Stachel and Stengel what to do, in case a moment like this came.”

“Gladly,” comes your murmured reply, and so saying you press your lips to hers. This time, however, you do not stop at her lips, but plunge into her mouth and, in time, give full expression to your love and satisfaction to your lust. Thus, as the night stretches on, the two artificial souls cast aside the purity with which they were endowed upon their creation and forge between them a new link, forever cementing their two spirits as one.

Status Updated
Friday, November 22, 2019
Shijou Manor, Tokyo

Out of a sleep both short and dreamless you rise suddenly to consciousness. Your eyes open to take in the now-familiar sight of your bed’s canopy, richly festooned with embroidered silk, velvet, and lace. Your ears discover only a few notes of birdsong, and as you sit up and examine the minimal light your initial guess is confirmed. It’s dawn, and you’ve had only a few hours’ sleep. Despite this, after last night’s ecstatic events you feel energized enough to slaughter every remaining foe in the War without resting another moment.

No, no, you tell yourself. Calm down. However reasonable a certain degree of good cheer may be on the morning after such a night of military and romantic triumph, this hyperbole is too much. All the same, you don’t feel any desire to go back to sleep. Beside you, Liliesviel lies unconscious against your pillow, a picture of tranquil rest as she makes no more motion than to softly breathe. Most likely the rest of the manor is similarly asleep, for you hear no sounds of action from below the floor or outside the walls of your bedroom, and in a house as old as this every action is typically accompanied by some subtle creak, groan, or other sundry protestation of the aging wood.

[ ] Rouse Liliesviel, to discuss a matter from last night. (Which topic? Her ‘getting to know’ Circe? The results of your ritual? Something else?)
[ ] Go and take a shower, then visit some other part of the mansion. (Write in where you want to go and what for. Talk to one of your other companions? Study in the library? Summon a new beast from the Reverse Side in the basement?)

[ ] Meditate on your bodily condition. Try to determine whether you can feel any change due to the ritual.

[ ] Do something else. (Write in)