

Null Magical Girl Vol.1

A story about the me of now, dedicated to those of us that once were.

A spin-off novel of "Puella Magi Madoka Magica"

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“Null Magical Girl” (2021)

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of



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Vol. 1: Our Introduction

This is the record of a crime.

The story of an event hopelessly inexplicable, jumbled together like a tangle of knots

This is the record of something profound yet shallow, pathetically hilarious, and bizarre yet ordinary.

The perpetrator of this deranged act is already known, and let me give you a spoiler: I am responsible for all of it. I am the source of this madness, as I am a Magical Girl...and at the same time not a Magical Girl.

Foreword AD: 2021

In 2021, the world continues to face an unprecedented crisis. The novel coronavirus SARS-COV-2, which emerged in late 2019, has engulfed the world in a pestilent storm. We have no choice but to live a new everyday life within the confines of a pandemic.

In the midst of this enormous crisis, I am also in the midst of my own insignificant crisis. I have to get up from my bed every day.

My name is Kosane Kiriha, I am 24 years old and a graduate student—but only until March. I have utterly failed at job hunting.

In the middle of the disaster caused by coronavirus, there was no way someone like me could find a job when offerings were deteriorating across the board. Had I not pursued a master's degree, I can't help but wonder if my life would be different.

In April, I will be unemployed and will become a nobody. Without my student status, I will no longer be entitled to movie theater discounts. I will no longer be able to write "student" on official documents. The moratorium is over, and I will be forced to make my debut into nullity. The countdown to nothingness grows ever closer. Today becomes yesterday, and tomorrow becomes today. That is the way of this world, it is absolute and can never be waived by

someone as insignificant and useless as myself.

That's why, rubbing my sleepy eyes, I have no choice but to get out of bed.

I stand in front of the mirror.

"Hmm?" I furrow my eyebrows in front of the dirty reflection.

I felt something move. Is there something behind me?

No, that's absurd. I live alone. I don't have pets and I haven't even bought any autonomous cleaning devices. I should be the only one able to move in this room.

"...It's all in my head," I think to myself as I try to turn on the faucet.

"Sister..." I hear a voice say.

From where? Nowhere. Though, If I have to guess, I'd assume it came from inside my own mind.

Involuntarily, a mumble leaks out of my mouth.

“Eruna...?”

I turn around and naturally no one is there. I laugh to myself. Eruna is long dead—my sister, my twin I never actually met.

Eruna Kiriha was born the same day as me 24 years ago. Shortly afterwards, she died. According to my parents, I was also dying at birth. We spent several weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit until I finally recovered.

For as long as I could remember, Eruna had been by my side. She was my first friend, and it was only natural that as twins, she looked exactly like me and spoke with me as if she could look into my heart.

Imaginary friends. They are common in childhood. It was clear, the death of my twin sister had a great impact on my soul. But this kind of thing usually disappeared as the ego developed, however in my case, it continued until I entered the upper grades of elementary school. My worried parents

sent me to many pediatricians. And by the time I was 14, Eruna was finally gone.

14 years old...? That would be ten or so years ago...it seems like a long time, but it's truly a short time. Yet ten years is enough time for a middle school student who burns with hope for their future to crumble into ashes. Long enough to become a graduate student who is destined for unemployment, I suppose.

Ten years ago – 2011, the year of the great Tohoku Earthquake.

The year the specter of Eruna completely disappeared from my life and...

...And what?

I feel like there's something else I need to remember.

Ugh, what is it...? What am I on the brink of remembering?

Well, whatever, it doesn't matter. All I need to do right now is wash my face.

Staring at my face in the mirror, I can't help but sigh at how pitiful I look. My eyes are bloodshot, my skin is dull, and I have a noticeable layer of peach fuzz under my nose.

Well, it's OK. I won't be seen by anyone. And if I go out, I can hide it with a mask. I don't have to worry about my appearance anymore. That's the only advantage of a post-corona world.

I put my index finger on my temple and mutter: "Shoot yourself in the head already!"

Every morning for years, I've played this little game called "Gokko" where I pretend to kill myself. I imagine a bullet. I picture a chunk of lead cutting through my skin, piercing my skull, and blowing out my brains.

Heh, if I lived in America, I would have been long dead before I turned 24. Game Over! No continues!

Suicide is scary though. I'm actually scared to death that I'm going to kill myself. Among twenty-somethings, suicide is the #1 cause of death. I've always wondered: why do humans commit suicide? From an evolutionary standpoint, I don't think there is any fitness advantage in the behavior of suicide. It seems to me that suicide should've been culled from human behavior long ago. So why then is it so prevalent?

Eh, there's no point in pondering such big questions at this time. My mind should be contemplating more concrete things. The important thing for me to examine right now is myself; why are my thoughts about suicide so persistent?

Is it anxiety about the future? Of course, but there is also something more apparent.

I put my hand on the back of my neck and my fingertips brush against a familiar, lumpy texture.

This bulge, a soft knob in my flesh, is the real source of my troubles. I've lived with this bump since I was a child, and it's been growing larger year by year. Just a few years ago, it was the size of a fingertip, but it's now grown to the size of a golf ball. I'm worried that this bump will grow endlessly and eventually absorb me, making my brain an insignificant part of the mass.

At this rate, I fear I will become nothing. The space that "I" occupy will become ever smaller to feed the growing bump. I will disappear, and all that'll be left behind will be this gigantic, squishy hump that doesn't think about anything and would just flop around saying nothing.

Is it OK for me to continue like this? No, I shouldn't. Even so, I can't do anything about it. All I can do is deny reality, ignore the things right in front of me and keep running away.

All I can do is turn my back on the future and immerse myself in the past.

Let me think back to my teenage years when there was still hope.

Ah, those days of dreaming. Those days when I believed in a wonderful and exciting future. Back when I believed I could be.

Be what? Be the protagonist of the story. That's it. I wanted to be the hero, not the kind of pathetic person I am today, crawling through each day not knowing if I'm alive or dead. I wanted to be a hero who lives her life with a strong vitality and goes around helping people!

For example, yes...a Magical Girl.

A Magical Girl?! Haha, I make myself laugh. At the age of 24, I still want to be a Magical Girl? As I am now, there's no one farther from a Magical Girl than myself. In fact, I'm the definition of "not a Magical Girl" – I am null.

But yes, I'm sure at the age of 14, I did long to be a Magical Girl. That much is true. That's why I made a contract.

A contract?

A strong pain surges from the bottom of my head.

Remember...
Remember...

I feel like I have to recall something. Something so unusual and terrible that the whole world would float into the air in shock, and even after three-and-a-half rotations, it still would not fall back to its senses.

When I try to remember, a pain shoots through my head as if I'm being punched from the inside.

No, I can't try anymore. My head is going to explode!

"Fuck..." I mutter to myself.

I open the refrigerator and look for coffee, full of caffeine, the instant cure for headaches. I need coffee to survive. Coffee is the only thing that gives me the will to act.

I throw the coffee powder into a used cup recovered from the dirty kitchen I haven't properly cleaned in years. I fill the kettle with water and ignite the gas.

Becoming frustrated with how long it's taking for the water to boil, I instead pour coffee powder directly into my mouth, followed by the hot water.

"Damn that burns! Holy shit!"

Still, the injury was worth it. The pain from the burn distracts me from the headache. Without the headache, it feels like my memory is coming back.

I see. So, this is how it's done.

I began to realize that external pain can suppress internal pain. Once I understood that, I knew I had to keep pushing.

"Go! Go! Go!"

Without so much as a shout, I repeatedly slam myself into the mirror over and over.

Once, twice, three times, four times.

The mirror cracks and at the same time, a crack runs through my world—a fracture in the walls that enclose my reality.

The deception of my inner realm has been lifted.

Ah, yes, how could I have forgotten?

Ten years ago, I met him.

Kyubey

The pitch-black space in my mind just keeps going on and on, yet I feel there's something important I must do within it.

I wonder if I can discover what else I've truly forgotten.

However, right now I feel incredibly tired. But I must not fall asleep here.

I try to somehow pull myself together, but my head is so foggy that I can't even think. The temptation to relax, close my eyes, and fall asleep almost engulfs me before I am startled by a voice.

"Ms. Kiriha, Ms. Kosane Kiriha!" I was taken aback by the sound of his voice.

"Ms. Kiriha, please answer the question."

How had I been in such a daze? I knew it was time for my master's thesis presentation.

"Excuse me. What was the question?" I ask sheepishly.

The professor's harsh voice echoes in the classroom.

"What is 'the cognitive revolution'? – please be accurate and concise."

God. I need to get my act together.

"Yes, that's the title of my master's thesis, 'A Study of the So-Called Cognitive Revolution.'

"About 70,000 years ago in Africa, modern humans called *Homo sapiens* evolved. A fundamental shift in cognitive ability is postulated to have occurred at this time. Researchers supporting this hypothesis provide evidence that human culture drastically changed around 70,000 years ago. Multiple factors serve as evidence for this theory. Around that time, humans developed complex weapons and began to create cave paintings with significant religious and mythological elements. This hypothesis was made famous by Yuval Noah Harari's book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. In it, Harari argues that 'the ability to create, believe, and share fiction' is at the root of this cognitive revolution."

"So, Ms. Kiriha, how do you evaluate this hypothesis?"

“Well, many proponents of the cognitive revolution claim that a single genetic mutation in the brain caused sudden cognitive changes over a short period of time. However, I think this assumption is too convenient. It would be an exaggeration to state that art is unique to *Homo sapiens*. For instance, there are also cave murals in Europe that predate the arrival of *Homo sapiens*.

“Researchers assume these were painted by Neanderthals. Even if we assume, as Harari does, that *Homo sapiens* are superior to Neanderthals and all other hominids in our ability to create and believe in fantasies, we cannot be certain the evolutionary process was sudden, as the cognitive revolution suggests. Perhaps instead, it was an adaptation driven by habitat differences between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals over some longer period of time.”

“I see, that’s interesting, so what exactly were those environmental differences?”

“Well…uh…that…” I stutter. That was the weakest point of my paper.

Ugh, I shouldn't have chosen this topic for my master's thesis in the first place. If world-renowned scholars argue with each other over it, then there's no right conclusion. It was a mistake for me, a mere graduate student, to insert myself into the discourse.

"What's wrong? Please answer the question," urged my professor.

Still, I can't come up with anything. My mouth is trembling, and I'm breathing so heavily it makes my chest hurt.

"Okay, that's enough. I'll ask the next question."

Oh no, he sounds disappointed. I'm screwed, this is the end.

No, I can wallow in my regrets later. Now is the time for me to deal with the question at hand.

"Please describe the relationship between the cognitive revolution and Magical Girls"

Involuntarily, I let a stupid response fly out,

"W-what...?"

What did he just say? He just asked a bizarre question that I could've never anticipated in a situation like this.

"Didn't you hear? What's the relationship between the cognitive revolution and Magical Girls?"

So, I didn't hear it wrong after all. A question about the cognitive revolution...and Magical Girls? What is this? I have no idea how to respond or even what the purpose of such a question would be.

When I remain silent, the professor opens his mouth again.

"What's wrong, big sister? Tell me about the relationship between the cognitive revolution and Magical Girls."

What's in front of me now is not my professor anymore...but myself.

No, no, that's not me. I don't smile rudely like that. That girl is...Eruna Kiriha, my twin sister who is supposed to be dead.

I awake. It seems I've been passed out for a long time. The red light of sunset is already shining through my window. I can tell that was all a strange dream. Really, I could interpret various subconscious issues that would cause such dreams, but I won't think about it too deeply for now.

My head feels strangely light, almost as if I had just inhaled a bunch of chlorine while disinfecting a bathtub that hadn't been cleaned for ten years. It's a good feeling that I haven't felt in a long time. Even if I drank alcohol, I don't think I would feel this exhilarated. It's as if a refreshing spring breeze is blowing through my mind.

I finally get up off the floor onto my feet and feel like happily skipping for a few steps before a sticky liquid runs down my face. It's blood. Fresh blood. When I look over my body again, it's covered in dried blood.

Come to think of it, I must have fainted while banging my head into the mirror. I remember it though as if it were someone else's problem.

The mirror in the kitchen is cracked like a spider's web, so I have no choice but to go to the bathroom and look in another mirror.

"Hey, what the hell is this?" I mumble jokingly, seeing something reflected that could only be a prank.

Of course, it's me in the mirror. That's the problem. The me in the mirror is me, yet not what I should look like. Reflected in the mirror is someone with a big crack in their forehead. A literal crack. The skin is all torn and curled up, revealing a white skull. Furthermore, even the skull is mercilessly cracked, and its content can be seen.

But, no, if that was all, everything would still be good. All would still be normal.

The only thing that would mean is that I'm seriously injured. That would be a dire situation, no doubt, but it's still *possible.*

No, the abnormality is what's *inside* the skull. There's nothing. My brain, which should've been there, is nowhere to be found

"Oh no..."

That's the first thing that escaped my mouth after I realized I *really* have no brain. God, it's unreal to actually be saying the sentence "I have no brain."

For a while, I couldn't move. If there was someone who could easily go about their day after discovering they have no brain, then it'd be clear they have a lot of mental strength.

But not having that strength—to move even an inch—time just kept passing me by until it had already become night.

"Oh, I don't understand..." I mutter with a real sense of reality.

“What I don’t understand is your existence, Kosane Kiriha.” The voice comes from behind me, and has a certain genderless essence to it, like a boy before puberty.

When I turn around, there is a small creature that looks like some kind of hybrid between a cat and rabbit. It has long, rabbit-like ears that flow out from its smaller, cat-like ears.



That’s right. I remember. The name of this little animal-thing is Kyubey.

“It’s been a long time, hasn’t it, Kosane Kiriha?”

Ten years ago, when I was still a 14-year-old girl, I met Kyubey. I made a contract with him and swore to become a Magical Girl who would shoulder the fate of fighting Witches.

The contract should've worked, but alas, I couldn't become a Magical Girl.

"You're right. You could not and could never become a Magical Girl. You have no soul. You're what I should call a 'null Magical Girl' instead."

Aw, why do I have to be reminded of this? I can't be the protagonist because I can't use magic. That must be why I wanted to forget.

"Um, so what do you need from a null Magical Girl then?"

"Because you have no soul, you are an irregularity. Originally, you were just an object of our surveillance. Now that we know you have no brain, your degree of irregularity has increased even further. Instead of a brain, you have a tumor on your neck that thinks and moves your body. So, I guess the tumor is the real you then."

I was shocked. A tumor? I can't believe that *thing* is actually me.

Instinctively, I reach out and rub the lump I had assumed was a burden.

“Your tumor is made of the same type of cells that make up my body. Something seems to have planted it within you,” Kyubey continues.

“Uh, so in effect, I’m related to you? Did you come here to visit your family then?”

“No, it’s about more important matters. The spacetime continuum is collapsing around you.”

“Wait a minute. Timeout”

The sheer amount of information is enough to make my head spin. What a day!

“OK. I’ll help you. But nothing comes without a price. Let’s exchange information. Tell me everything you know.”

And that's how I discovered Kyubey's true identity as an extraterrestrial who came to Earth to collect the emotional energy of adolescent girls. When a Magical Girl's power runs out and her hope fades to despair, an enormous amount of energy that defies the laws of thermodynamics is generated. As a bonus, I also learned that Kyubey's true name is Incubator.

Honestly, it's surprising he told me everything, but it seems the concept of lying is foreign to Incubators. With their intelligence, you'd assume they'd think and feel like humans, but the reality is they are alien creatures which human emotions cannot be projected onto.

"So...what's this about the spacetime continuum collapsing?"

After a long explanation, he finally gets to the point.
"The spacetime continuum is distorted around you."

"Distorted? I haven't felt anything."

“That’s because it’s still on the nanosecond scale. This phenomenon is progressing exponentially. In a few days, you’ll start to understand.”

“In that case, you’re welcome to stay with me to monitor the situation.”

Thus began my new life with Kyubey. Even though it’s a new life, not much has changed, however. I’m already isolated from the world, and as a nobody, I already spend my days in the void. All I ever do is eat convenient store bentos and sleep. The only difference now is that I have someone to talk to.

Talking to Kyubey has brought me a lot of peace of mind. In fact, he’s a great conversationalist (albeit that’s anthropomorphizing him). Even though he doesn’t have emotions, or precisely because he doesn’t have them, we’re able to talk about many things. We don’t have to think about the other person’s feelings. We can just talk about whatever we want to, whenever we want to, and when we don’t want to talk, we can just shut up.

That's just how Kyubey is. Each time, he simply replies with an appropriate response and then is silent. For bad conversation partners like myself, this kind of dynamic is appreciated.

Seeing a heartless creature being able to have such good conversations reminds me of the story of ELIZA, a chat AI created in 1966. Even though it's called an AI, ELIZA had really simple programming that only re-arranged the sentences entered by the users and then parroted them back. However, the users who spoke with ELIZA were under the illusion that she really understood them.

Today's AI are far more advanced than ELIZA was. For example, GPT-3, which uses deep learning, can output sentences that match the context. Its ability to do so is what won it first place in blog rankings. The responses it outputs impressed many people, but there's no inner life to the AI.

Thus, it seems to have an interesting conversation, to stir other's emotions and make them feel understood, you don't even need a heart or emotions.

Before those peaceful days with the emotionless creature, however, the collapse of the spacetime continuum occurred.

The first thing that happened was my clocks started messing up. At first, it was just that the time displayed on my watch was wrong. But the phenomenon eventually spread from clock to clock until none of the clocks I own were pointing to the same time. The out-of-date assertion that man-made clocks are unreliable, and that ancient people used a gigantic clock called the sky, is no longer useful either.

Because looking outside, I can't even tell if it's morning, noon, or night. Somehow, it seems bright like daytime, yet at the same time it feels dark like night.

What time is it right now? Even if the spacetime continuum hadn't collapsed, those who live alone often ask themselves the same question. When your life is out of control, even if you wake up and can't tell if it's dusk or dawn, there is still a final defense clock that keeps our sense of time in order– our memories.

If we look back at the timeline in our minds, even if we don't know the present time, we can clearly remember what is in the past.

Unfortunately, as I am now, I am no longer even sure of that.

In other words, I now experience things with the logic of dreams. Dreams do not have an orderly timeline. Instead, individual moments are only metaphorically connected through loose association.

"This is not good, Kosane Kiriha."

Kyubey's voice echoes within my head. It seems he has grown accustomed to resting inside my hollow cranium.

"What's wrong? Everything is fine as it is."

I toss some pet food to appease him and skillfully, Kyubey pokes his head out from the hole in my skull and catches it in his mouth. I also take a handful and eat some myself.

The collapse of the spacetime continuum is comfortable for me. What time is it? Where am I? Who am I? These simple facts are slowly disintegrating around me. The outside world continues to dissolve, and the comforting haze only spreads.

"I see...Well, that's that for that then."

Kyubey pulls himself through the hole in my head, stretches, then promptly attempts to depart.

"I'll be taking my leave then."

"Hey?! Am I just supposed to spend the rest of my time here alone?"

"My mission was to investigate this phenomenon. You are quite interesting, but relatively low on our list of priorities."

"I'm like your clone, aren't I? What happened to sisterhood?"

"I don't recall having a sisterly bond with you. In a general sense, we're not even siblings."

“That’s right! I was joking.”

“I understand, but what are you going to do now?”

“I’m just someone facing unemployment. I’ve never received any training for dealing with the collapse of the spacetime continuum.”

“There was a letter in the back of your head about it. Why don’t you read it?”

“A letter?”

Someone would have to be insane to keep a letter stored in their head. You wouldn’t even be able to get to it without smashing your head open.

Kyubey crawls back inside my head to retrieve it for me. I feel him move around a bit before scratching at the back of my skull. It honestly tickles a little bit.

“Look, here it is.”

He pulls something white out of my wound. I grab it and study it carefully. It really is a letter, no matter how you look at it. A letter neatly enclosed in a stamped envelope, just like the ones postal workers deliver every morning. Is it a letter from whoever stole my brain?

Perplexed by this oddity, I finally read the writing on the envelope.

"Dear big sister,

From your sister Eruna"

I feel chills run through my body. I am helplessly scared. Eruna should've died 24 years ago. The echo of her, my imaginary friend, disappeared too, ten years ago. After all this time, why has she appeared before me again?

With trembling hands, I open the envelope and take out the letter inside. The letter is written on notebook paper that has a strange, dotted line.

In decorative letters, there is a message:

"Big sister, long time no see. It's been 24 years in your time. Anyways, I'll be waiting for you at the epicenter of fate.

P.S. If you fold this letter along the dotted line, you can use it as a train ticket on the Time Railroad."

I see.

But I don't understand. I know it would be wrong to expect random letters that come out of my head to make sense, but if I don't understand everything about it, I feel like I don't understand anything at all.

"What's this bizarre, incoherent, ridiculous letter? Give me your honest opinion."

"This letter seems to be a three-dimensional slice of a four-dimensional structure. Could you try folding it along the line?"

“Ugh, I’m not good at origami but I’ll give it a try, I guess...”

I’m not proud of it, but I can’t even make an origami crane. If you give me origami paper, all you’ll get back is a pile of scrap paper. For me, the instructions are quite difficult.

“I’m not a fan of the way you do it,” Kyubey says matter-of-factly. Even so, he encourages me to finish it.

The finished product is a three-dimensional object composed of four equilateral triangles. In other words, it’s a tetrahedron.

“What kind of railroad company would accept this as a ticket?”

When I look closely at the tetrahedron, I notice a faint, blue light leaking from it. Since the only material used was paper, it’s odd that there’s light coming from it. The light gets stronger and stronger as I look at it. The intense, blue light illuminates the surroundings and dominates them in its blueness. I notice the light penetrates the tetrahedron,

creating shadows inside. I'm not really sure if we can call them shadows though. They aren't projected onto a flat surface like a normal shadow, but instead emerge as three-dimensional objects.

The shadow forms a smaller tetrahedron inside the original tetrahedron. Upon closer inspection, I can see even smaller and smaller tetrahedrons inside it. Like a kaleidoscope, layers and endless more layers of tetrahedrons manifest. Inside each is an endless series of them. And outside, infinitely many more emanate outward to surround it.

I, too, realize I'm in my own kaleidoscope. I remember the sensation of falling. The scaffolding that had supported me in this world suddenly disappeared from beneath me. I'm filled with an indescribable anxiety.

Where am I falling to?

Into the tetrahedron, eternally downward into infinite layers.

From within endless deepness, a tetrahedron rises and scatters to a limitlessly distant place.

From each point of my body, a tetrahedron evolves, both infinitesimally small and boundlessly large, transfiguring me into a singularity.

From far away in the labyrinth of tetrahedrons soaked in blue light, I can hear a faint, high-pitched reverberation. The noise gradually grows louder as a small dot penetrates the edge of my vision. The sound and dot slowly expand in front of me.

Ah, I know what it is.

It's a train, a steam locomotive that belches out black smoke as its whistle cries out in its jet-black advance. The train arrives with a deafening noise.

I suddenly find myself on a station platform. The station was a stylish brick building, but it didn't look like it was maintained very well. Here and there were holes in the structure.

The train halts to a stop in front of me, showing off its intimidating bulk. On the train car in exaggeratedly large letters is:

"Time Loop Railroad Express 107"

"Come on, Kosane Kiriha. Let's board the train."

Kyubey nudges me, and the train opens its doors in sync with his movement.

"Yes, let's go. I have no choice but to be determined."

With cautious steps, I board the train car.

Inside the train, it's dark and dingy, unlike most modern trains. In fact, it seems to be lit with gas lamps that produce a weak, orange light not bright enough to illuminate the interior. Instead, they can only cast a shadow on the inside of the train car, seemingly betraying a light's principal duty of illuminating the room.

In one of the pools of shadows, there are several figures.

"Um, hello."

I approach the shadows to greet them. Then I suddenly stop. Somehow, I have a really bad feeling about this.

It's a group of five people. Their faces are hidden in the shadows, so I can't tell for sure, but they're probably children. They are all quite short, even compared to me. All five are wearing strange clothes, including colorful skirts that I feel I have seen somewhere before. Yet their outfits definitely give off a fantastical vibe that I can confidently say is not common fashion anywhere.

This is really puzzling!

Kyubey whispers into my skull an opinion that compels me to shake my head in disbelief.

Suddenly, the girls all turn around.

Ten huge eyes pierce into me. Their eyes are so clear that it seems like they'd absorb me. Their pupils glimmer like cats hunting their prey in the night. They all have round eyes, soft and plump skin, glossy lips, and overall charming faces that one might even call cute. They are adorable, and they make me feel protective.

Yet, at the same time, they are terrifying. From the bottom of my heart, I feel a sense of unease and guilt.

They are so cute that it makes me want to vomit.

Seeing what they carried with them brings back memories that do not belong to me. They carry staffs, the kind with a shiny, pink heart at the tip—the kind you can buy at any toy store anytime.

So...I know what they are. They are Magical Girls. They are tacky anime characters recreated in real life.

One of the Magical Girls raises her staff up then whacks me straight on the head.

Ugh,

With a hollow, sickening sound, my consciousness fades to darkness.

[Continued in Vol.2...]




Null Magical Girl Vol.2
In a future that would come, there was only dazzling light.
In narrative, there is magic. In magic, there is narrative.
Written by anomaly science fiction writer GenGen Kusano
Illustrated by Aya Haruhana
Translated by nymphatix
A spin-off novel of "Puella Magi Madoka Magica"

Recap of Null Magical Girl, Vol 1: Our Introduction

March 2021: In the wake of a head injury, 24-year-old Kosane Kiriha discovers she has no brain. Shortly afterwards, Kyubey appears in front of her for the first time in ten years. He reveals that instead of a brain, Kosane has a tumor of Incubator cells controlling her body. And even worse, the spacetime continuum is collapsing around her.

With the help of Kyubey, Kosane finds a letter from her long-deceased twin sister Eruna in her skull. It contains a boarding pass for the Time Railroad.

After eventually boarding the train, Kosane faints after being assaulted by mysterious Magical Girls already aboard the train.

Characters:

Kosane Kiriha

A 24-year-old graduate student. Ten years ago, she attempted to make a contract with Kyubey. However, without

a soul, she could not become a Magical Girl. The title of her master's thesis is "A Study of the So-Called Cognitive Revolution." Having failed at job hunting, she will be hopelessly unemployed in April.

Kyubey

A strange, cat-rabbit creature that assists Kosane as he rides around in her hollow skull.

Eruna Kiriha

Kosane's identical twin sister who died at birth and lingered on as Kosane's childhood imaginary friend.

I have a terrible headache. What have I been doing until now?

For a moment, I almost lost all connection with my past self. I feared I had severed the chain of memories, passed down through time, which serve as the record of who I am.

Fortunately, my memory soon returned. I begin to remember everything: meeting Kyubey again, riding the Time Railroad (guided by the letter he found in my skull), and then being whacked on the head by Magical Girls with staffs aboard the train.

I have no memory of what happened after the assault. It seems I passed out. My mind is still blurry, filled with the kind of sleepy thoughts that dissipate as you edge towards unconsciousness.

No. I can't. I can't. I cannot fall asleep here, for if I do I know I will sleep forever.

I have to focus my mind. First, I must open my eyes and understand my surroundings.

With this determination, I slowly lift my heavy eyelids.
The scenery before me now is vastly different from the dimly lit train car I was in before I passed out. Now instead, I find myself beneath an endless, cloudless, blue sky.

And there are girls spread out all across the plain.

“Aaaah!”

A sudden scream escapes from my mouth.

“What’s wrong?

Kyubey’s face comes into view. It seems that’s who’s speaking to me.

Another yell bursts forth, but this time it isn’t a scream of terror. It was–

"Oh my god! How cute!"

Yes, it was the kind of shriek someone makes when faced with overwhelming cuteness. Everywhere I look there are cute girls all around.

Actually, girls? I'm not entirely sure. Maybe they're boys. Their physical bodies look fairly androgynous, but their long, lustrous, and colorful hair, as well as their flashy outfits, give me the impression they're girls. In any case, such people fill the endless plain to the edge of its horizon.

The "girls" don't just look cute either, but they're also doing cute things. Some are giving each other cheek rubs, while others are giving each other hugs and kisses. Some are indirectly doing cute things. Their methods of cuteness are as diverse as they are. They sing in chorus together, exercise, play games, take naps, tend gardens, dance, and just about anything someone could think of.



They are charming in every way. It's impossible to overstate how cute they are. They are *girls-doing-cute-things* just like they're meant to!

Yet these girls' cuteness is not ordinary. Their cuteness is violently intense sweetness. So unnaturally adorable that it's actually terrifying, like someone threw candy directly into my brain matter.

"What the hell is going on? Explain!"

I panic at the sheer cuteness of it all and grab Kyubey's tail to bury my face in. I'm afraid the sight of the girls, even for a moment, is enough to make me sick.

"I can't explain. I don't know what's going on either."

"You don't?!" I say with my voice muffled by Kyubey's fur.

"Huh?" he responds.

"You're part of a collective mind, aren't you? Shouldn't you know everything instantly?

"Can you detect any other Incubators?" I continue.

"It doesn't seem so. I've never experienced anything like this before," says Kyubey in his usual tone.

It seems this "unit" is all alone then, completely severed from the collective consciousness network.

"Well, I guess the only thing we can rely on now is the rational perspective of an *individual* emotionless alien like yourself then."

"That's right. I'll try to calculate what time it is from the temperature of the cosmic background radiation."

Kyubey climbs onto my head and stares into the sky. While only the blue sky spreads out above us, his eyes can see the ripples of the Big Bang reverberating throughout the universe.

"It looks like we're about 800,000 years into the future," he reports matter-of-factly, as if he had just made afternoon tea.

"I can detect that these cute girls possess unimaginable power. I have never seen anything like this before. They are just like Magical Girls, except their magical power increases exponentially as they do things considered cute."

"Huh? Then why aren't there any Incubators around for you to connect to? A Magical Girl can't be born without a contract with you, right?"

"Perhaps they are evolved humans. Theoretically, humans could take this path without my help. Maybe they're not even the species *Homo sapiens* anymore."

"What would these Magical Girlish humans be then?"

Homo magica.

"I can't be sure, but I suspect my kind has been decimated close to extinction in a war against *Homo magica*," he continues.

How can he say such awful things with such a terrifyingly calm demeanor? I clutch Kyubey's body tightly.

But...the girls are so cute. I felt incredibly creeped out by the thought.

Nervously, I ask a question.

"But wait a minute. According to what you've told me, every time a Magical Girl uses magic, her soul gem accumulates impurities which eventually transform her into a Witch. If all of mankind had become Magical Girls, all of humanity would be Witches. That'd be the end of civilization. A society of only Magical Girls couldn't possibly exist."

"If you think about it logically, it could. They seem to have built a system to avoid becoming Witches." Kyubey slips out of my arms and lands on the ground.

Then it hit me: *Homo magica*, a humanity of only Magical Girls...enabled by cuteness.

"As you can see, they're all cute. That's the primary element of the system. With the exception of the basic, physiological needs of the body, the emotional deterioration that results in the tainting of soul gems is all due to the stress of human relationships. *Homo magica* is a species that has evolved to adapt to that. They have dispelled humanity's fundamental

insecurities and fear of others by embracing cuteness. Within each other, they elicit intense, positive emotions, more so than even when a parent sees their baby."

"Neoteny–" I mutter. "An evolutionary adaptation to maturity at a juvenile state of physical development..."

That is, to evolve so that adults of the species retain juvenile traits into maturity. The most common example is that of the axolotl, which looks like a larva for its entire life. It's not illogical for me to assume the deformed, child-like appearances of *Homo magica* may have been a result of neoteny.

"That's right," Kyubey responds, "Thus, in the society of *Homo magica*, there is no stress caused by others, as they have made themselves infinitely cute and endlessly pleasant beings for each other. That is their evolutionary system of avoiding becoming Witches. Although, I think there's more that may derive from external evolution."

“External evolution? No! Evolution takes place genetically within the body.”

“Not necessarily. In the process of evolution, the inner and outer worlds are inextricably linked. For instance, the development of clothing eliminated humanity’s need for body hair. Likewise, the ability to cook meat has reduced the size of the human jaw. The development of civilization is the externalization of bodily functions. *Homo magica* have taken external evolution to the extreme: externalizing not only bodily functions, but also emotional functions, the so-called spacetime of human relations. I’ll call this phenomenon ‘embedding.’”

"Spacetime...? What? I know there's something wrong with this place, but is there really a disruption in time and space here as well?"

“Yes. This place does not function under the normal laws of spacetime. It’s more like a Witch’s labyrinth. Perhaps, the magic of *Homo magica* has created a very large-scale

labyrinth. In any case, I can detect an enormous amount of information embedded within it."

"What information?"

"Information about human relationships. A database of all kinds of relationships. *Homo magica* don't need to think for themselves to build relationships. That high-risk, low-reward approach that puts them in danger of turning into Witches has been eliminated. They generate emotional energy by downloading information about relationships to their soul gems and respond with appropriate feelings. They are completely self-sufficient organisms. They are truly unique in the history of the universe."

"Self-sufficient organisms..."

In my daze, I inadvertently found myself studying *Homo magica* with my eyes.

It's likely true what Kyubey said. It doesn't seem like they are doing cute things without purpose. There is definitely some

kind of relationship-building there. Empty relationships meant to be formed, forgotten, and reformed elsewhere.

"But on the train, they didn't want to form a relationship with me... They attacked me with a staff. Why?" I mutter, feeling light-headed and confused.

"Kosane Kiriha," Kyubey says with a reprimanding tone. No, I don't think he actually means it that way. But, because of human social training, I *did* read that kind of tone in how he said it.

“Why? - *Homo magica* are not *Homo sapiens*. Don’t ask me why; I could only guess at how. Countless, random hypotheses could be made. Such as, in the train, there was no inflow of information from the embedded labyrinth, or perhaps things that are not useful to building relationships are simply eliminated. So asking why is nonsensical. The rules of their communication are different.

“If a monkey spoke, you wouldn’t be able to understand it, right?"

I stroke my forehead. My skull is still cracked and caved-in – but now it has two fractures. I'm sure my face looks horrible as well.

Suddenly, I collapse, my body hitting the ground. It must have been quite some time until I woke up, but the sun was still in the same place, endlessly illuminating the plain filled with infinite cuteness.

"What are you going to do now?" Kyubey asks. “Are you going to lie here forever and starve to death? If you open your eyes, you'll feel sick because of how cute they are.”

For a moment, I imagine joining the circle of *Homo magica*, but I quickly counter the thought – I’m scared of losing myself.

"There's a cure for cuteness intoxication."

"Seriously? What do I need to do?"

“The cells that make up your mind are similar to my own. If you let me, I can modify your body at will.”

"Alright. Do as you please."

I’m desperate enough to let him do whatever he wants to me. Kyubey enters my skull and tinkers around with something. After a while, a change comes. I can finally look at the nauseatingly adorable girls.

Now when I look at them, they cease to be cute. I have no interest in them at all. Their faces feel distant, so far, far away from me. They are irrelevant and unimportant to me in every way.

For example, I understand the girls are making facial expressions. However, the expressions are now only symbolic to me. It feels like reading a foreign language. Unless I make a conscious effort, I can’t read their emotions.

“I’m sure you’re asking yourself, ‘What’s going on?’ I’ve disconnected facial recognition from your emotional circuitry.

The human mind is comprised of several components like that which normally work automatically. Did you know that?"

"I think I remember reading something like that in a novel by Project Itoh a long time ago."

"The facial recognition apparatus is among them. Humans are social animals, so recognizing each other's faces is a top priority for your species. For this reason, your kind evolved a cognitive function that detects faces and projects emotions onto them."

"And for me, you say you've disabled that function?"

When I look at Kyubey, I can tell he had. I notice a change in my mental perceptions. Like I know he has two eyes and one mouth, but I have to think consciously to some extent to put them together and make myself see them as a "face."

"Now that the problem is gone, let's go, Kosane Kiriha."

Kyubey starts to walk, and I follow after him. We enter a crowd of *Homo magica*, but I show no reaction to them. They are endlessly repeating cute things as usual. But it actually isn't cute to me anymore. They are just people performing actions.

With the charm of their cuteness worn off, only then could I understand how bizarre *Homo magica* are.

Their huge eyes emit countless, glittering lights, like the compound eyes of an insect. The spacetime around them is also, as Kyubey mentioned, distorted. They look like an unnatural collage of animation and live-action footage, both two-dimensional yet at the same time three-dimensional.

For now though, our immediate goal is to locate another Incubator still surviving in this era. In order to do so, we must break out of the labyrinth of *Homo magica*.

Through Kyubey's cellular reprogramming, I no longer get hungry or thirsty. As a relative of Kyubey, I have gained the

ability to absorb the matter and energy necessary for survival from light and the atmosphere.

No matter how far we walk, the scenery does not change, still endless meadows filled with herds of *Homo magica*. No matter the time, the sun still shines brightly, and the sky remains forever blue.

This strange journey seems to last forever. A never-ending, boring stroll with no destination. For 24 hours, all we can do is put one leg in front of the other and keep walking.

However, the long, languid afternoon comes to an abrupt end.

There is a painting by René Magritte called *The Castle of the Pyrenees*. It is an image of a huge rock crowned by a castle, floating over the sea. The scene now spread out before my eyes is similar to that. However, the scale of what I see before me is infinite compared to what Magritte painted.

Beyond the blue sky...

Through the barrier...

I can see a huge, floating object occupying a quarter of the sky. The object has a curved surface like an egg placed vertically and viewed from below. However, the surface is not smooth like an egg. Rather, it's spongey, dotted with numerous craters of uneven sizes.

"An asteroid?" I mutter. When I was in middle school, I remember the news of an unmanned space probe returning from an asteroid making the headlines.

"I suppose so. But it's not a completely natural object. It's gravity-controlled."

"That means... Are there still human beings other than *Homo magica*?"

"I think it's quite possible."

Even as we speak, the asteroid draws closer in its slow approach.

Suddenly, a strange sensation like an elevator descending comes over me. My weight is getting lighter.

Can this be the gravitational force generated by the mass of the asteroid?

“It may be pleasant to gaze at, but you need to get ready for it.”

“Huh? Ready for what?”

“It’s been long enough since the asteroid touched the atmosphere that the shock wave should be hitting soon.”– saying that, Kyubey jumps inside my head.

I don't even have time to shout, "Hurry up and explain, you idiot!" before a ferocious, iron wind lifts my body into the air.

This is no shock wave. This is pure destruction, the annihilation of the world. The order of the world, which I had thought to be immovable, collapses in an instant.

"Help me, help me!"

I try to raise my voice, but perhaps because of fear and tension, all I can muster is a hoarse, high-pitched noise.

"I see. For now, let's try to stabilize our posture."

At the same time as Kyubey's voice echoes in my skull, my body begins transforming. My hands are hot. Molten hot. In fact, they're melting! The flesh from my arms down to my hands melt into a protoplasmic sludge, a dull, red slime somewhere between a liquid and solid. The protoplasm flattens out like udon dough being stretched.

Yet, even as my flesh transforms into sludge, the feeling that it's part of me persists. My palms seem to be expanding, and I can feel the bones inside my body growing and forming intricate patterns.

Eventually, what I'm left with are wings made of bat-like membranes. I feel no discomfort. It's as if I have been living in this body since I was born.

I idle in the sky for a moment.

"The second wave is coming. Get ready."

Following Kyubey's warning, I brace myself. On the surface, *Homo magica* had also been at the mercy of the shock wave. The girls were sent flying one by one, as if someone had knocked down dominoes.

However, it seems that not all were overcome in the attack. As expected, the girls stop their rituals of cuteness and begin to display their true power as Magical Girls.

A colorful magic sigil blooms on the ground beneath them. The infinitely beautiful and radiant hues of the magical circle take off into the atmosphere, and all at once blitz toward the asteroid.

I fold my wings back and prepare for the second wave. I form my body into a streamlined shape to absorb the energy of the gale force. My body rattles, teetering up and down in the atmosphere, but I don't feel uneasy. When the shock wave passes and the air settles down, my body begins to plummet towards the surface in a parabolic fall, but I quickly spread my wings to recover.

In the distance, a flash of light is emitted: once, twice, three times. The explosions, sporadic at first, gradually increase in frequency until they are like a series of fireworks.

The explosions are occurring on every point of the asteroid: red, blue, green, purple. Every conceivable color is abundantly scattered in the heavens.

Several intense beams of light cut through space, repeatedly hurling from the surface to the asteroid. The battle has begun!

As I gaze at the dazzling lights, Kyubey suddenly announces,

"Come on. I've received a telepathic communication."

"A communication? From whom!?"

"*Homo sapiens*. Well, maybe not, but considering their mental structure, they're close enough to you. Communication is possible. I'll translate for you."

"Connect me to them!"

A buzzing like radio static echoes in my head before the interference eventually disappears, and the voice becomes abundantly clear.

"Hey! Who the hell are you?!"

I'm suddenly being yelled at by a boyishly raspy voice.

"I apologize for taking time out of your probably very busy schedule to contact you. But to answer your question, we actually came from 800,000 years ago through some kind of time distortion..."

Perhaps due to the influence of many years of job hunting, I automatically adopted a formal tone in addressing this stranger.

"For real?! Lucky! I'm coming over there right now, so wait!"

Surprisingly, the stranger takes my explanation without hesitation. A few minutes later, a shadow flies towards us from the direction of the asteroid.



The figure grows larger and larger as it bolts in our direction until it takes on the shape of a human. It's a person cloaked in a black robe. Her body is bony, her cheeks are thin, and her clothes are ragged. She looks pathetic. If my mental facilities for facial recognition were enabled, her appearance may have evoked a feeling of pity.

“YAAAAAH!”

Screaming that, she takes me by my waist and lifts me into her arms. It makes me quite uncomfortable.

Suddenly, she leaps up and launches us back towards the asteroid with great momentum.

"What’s your name?” asks the robed figure in a light-hearted tone as we fly through the air.

"Uh, nice to meet you, my name is Kosane Kiriha!"

"Yo, Kosane, huh? Nice to meet you, I’m Coeurl.

“Hey, you got a hole in your head, you okay?"

"Ah, uh, it’s not really a problem.”

“Oh, so you’re just fine then.”

In the middle of our airborne conversation, we are surrounded by a swarm of *Homo magica* wielding staffs and using magic to their heart's content. All around us are flashes of light and intersecting beams. The scorching heat comes from all directions.

Releasing me slightly, Coeurl holds up one hand and particles of light gather. A moment later, she's holding a weapon. At first glance, it resembles some type of Japanese sword.

"Hey, just fly over there for a second. I'll clean this up for us." She directs, right before she throws me out of her arms.

I begin flapping my wings and thankfully manage to hover.

Homo magica all aim their rods at Coeurl. A dazzling, violet beam shoots out from their tips. The beams coalesce and concentrate on Coeurl, then explode like a small supernova. A harsh, pungent, chemical odor reaches my nostrils. The surrounding air has been ionized into ozone.

All of this is simply overwhelming. No human could survive that kind of attack. She is surely dead. With that thought in mind, I turn tail and attempt to flee.

But there's no need for that, as Coeurl reflects the beam like a mirror, changing its direction 180 degrees.

"Oraaaaaaa!"

Coeurl is at the center of the flashes. Before I know it, she summons a second sword and slashes away countless more beams, reflecting them as if she's dancing.

But *Homo magica* are not yet defeated either. Using their staffs like a shield, they block Coeurl's sword, two times, three times, four times. The clash of both the swords and the rods shake the atmosphere with a thunderous roar.

"Control tower! We're having a bit of trouble; can you provide support fire?" Coeurl cries out telepathically.

A few moments later, a response is issued.

"Roger. Launching Cosmic String Cannon. Five seconds until impact."

I turn my head. Out of the corner of my eye, I see something I can only describe as a string of glittering lights launch from the asteroid. It is a sight that shakes my sense of reality. The string is indeed there, but at the same time it's not. It's as if a crack in reality itself materialized, then drifted in the sky like a whip towards *Homo magica*.

From their staffs, they unleash a tremendous amount of energy to no avail. The whip seems to phase through the torrent of beams as if it didn't belong to the same plane of existence.

The next thing I know, the Magical Girls floating in the air have been sliced to pieces. Their bodies have literally been cut in half with a flip of the string. If my emotional circuitry was still linked with facial recognition, I would have found this sight quite disgusting.

"Yeah! We won!" Coeurl shouts.

"Don’t claim victory yet, you can never be too careful, Coeurl."

Just as Kyubey points this out, an indigo light vaguely glimmers from the lifeless bodies of *Homo magica*. And in the next moment, something occurs. They all recover as if nothing has happened at all.

"Damn, so the soul gems weren’t here. No matter how many times I kill them, they just keep resurrecting themselves with magic. There’s no end to this. Let's just get out of here."

Coeurl crosses her two swords and then clashes them. A white light covers the area and obscures my vision. Coeurl grabs my hand, or...I guess my wing more precisely.

We are suddenly at the top of a mountain. The altitude is rapidly increasing. I can’t see the sky at all anymore, as the clear blue fades to the darker, murkier blue of space, and twinkling stars unveil themselves.

Against the backdrop of flickering, cosmic lights, the asteroid no longer appears to float peacefully in the sky, but instead dominates all space overhead, like a ceiling to what I could see.

As if I'm still being pulled, I approach the asteroid. What had once looked to be the size of my fingertip in the vast distance now grows to the size of a city.

At that moment, a violent, telepathic storm resounds in my head.

"Warning! A soul gem bomb is approaching! Prepare for combat!"

I don't know what that means, but it sounds bad. In my fear of the unknown, I ask Coeurl a question.

"Excuse me, may I ask you something? What is a 'soul gem bomb'?"

“What?! It’s obviously a soul gem that’s been weaponized as a bomb, duh. You really don’t have a brain, do you?”

“Well...no, but–"

As I’m about to elaborate in my own defense, my explanation is cut short by the impact of the bomb.

A piece of the navy sky is torn open, as if it’s made of mere cardboard. From the rift, an unusually lifelike hand emerges. Each of the five digits has a finger puppet attached: a father! A mother! A big brother! A big sister! And don’t forget, the youngest child!

The puppets bear no resemblance to a warm and loving family, however. No, a family has been lost today. I can’t stop laughing. You can tell by the way they smile with glee as their rotting eyeballs drip down their faces. Their eyes are infested with arthropodal Familiars, which appear to be crosses between insects and crustaceans. There’s no childhood nostalgia to be felt in witnessing this.

"I see, so they're using a tainted soul gem that's turning into a Witch as a bomb of sorts. That's an efficient method. I should study it," Kyubey mutters.

The power of Witches produced by *Homo sapiens* is incredible. Our allied Magical Girls who have gathered to fend off the assault stand no chance, and are unilaterally obliterated.

Once again, a telepathic broadcast echoes inside my skull.

"The reconnaissance is over. Starship *Yamata no Orochi* is counting down to departure. Please board the ship immediately!"

"Let's get outta here! Hang on... Oh shit!"

All at once, Coeurl's hand releases my wings. I am bewildered. I watch as the distance between me and her widens as she accelerates towards the planet. My mouth curls up in suspense.

Then suddenly, gravity reverses! Up becomes down, and down becomes up! I am now falling in the direction that had once been overhead–I was plummeting towards the asteroid!

I desperately flap my wings, but the sudden change in gravity had been too abrupt for me to stay balanced. Even worse, the air is too thin to even provide sufficient lift. If a plane rapidly descends in a tailspin, it crashes.

If I don't do something, I'll die. I will hit the ground and splatter as a bruised body. I will lay there with uncontrollable bleeding. My muscles, blood vessels, and nerves will be shattered into pieces on impact. And in the end, I will become a silent piece of flesh, and rot away in vain!

...Fortunately, however, such a dark fate never comes to pass.

Because just before I hit the surface, Coeurl catches me.

"I'm sorry I dropped you."

I relax. We are safely at the bottom of one of the asteroid's craters. We take refuge in a slight cave before I hear:

"Warning! General relativity transcendence field and inertial neutralization barrier, ready! *Yamata no Orochi* will now depart!"

Immediately after the broadcast, a sudden G-Force grabs my body.

A coppery smell wafts through the air, as a ton of blood leaks from my nose. As I collapse, I see the asteroid I was on accelerating away from the ground at an astronomical rate. I predict what I will see next when light returns to my eyes. I expect to see the horizon round out and take the shape of a planet. But as if to mock my meager imagination, what I see next is a disk–a gigantic disk floating in space, hollowed out in the center like a donut. Resting on it, there's a majestic, glowing sphere.

After a moment's delay, I realize what it is. I tremble.

...it's the sun!

What is spread out below me is a disk the size of the solar system. So huge that it's unfathomable to even conceptualize.

"Cosmic string projection! Initiate the relativistic spacetime drag!"

Then, without even a sound, a glowing string emerges from the ground. As if ignoring gravity, it stretches skyward and then bends back to the ground, forming a magnificent arch like a rainbow. The arch, which dominates the stellar sky, spins with ferocity as what looks like a halo forms in the quickening rotations of the asteroid. My muscles tremble from the horror and awe of this sight.

At the center of the halo, the stars flicker. It's as if space is being warped. The stars flutter and simmer like they're being made into a hot, cosmic soup. The starlight melts into one intense flash. At the center, a black hole emerges, puncturing through the fabric of space like a needle.

Is it endless *blackness* before me...?

No, there is *no* color there. It's *nothingness*, a pit of emptiness that absorbs everything.

When I notice the gravitational acceleration has faded, my body is already floating. In a state of weightless freefall, the blood in my body has nowhere to go except up to my head.

We are all falling: I, Coeurl, and the asteroid—all falling toward the black hole at the center of the starlight.

"Wormhole formation confirmed! Prepare for hyperdimensional jump!"

Immediately after the telepathic announcement, which in fact is so strong that I feel like my head will crack even further, my body can no longer stand the tension and I effortlessly lose consciousness.

The next time I awake, I'm in bed. It's a simple bed made of wood. This modest bed is in an even more modest room.

It appears to be made of stone, like some kind of medieval house. However, this place isn't like a tourist attraction. There are holes here and there, and a draft blows through the room.

My hands, which were previously melted into wings, have mysteriously returned to normal. How did I even fly? It's hard to remember.

I get up for a moment and walk around the dimly lit room. Light leaks from the edge of the door.

"Good morning, Kosane Kiriha. The meeting is about to begin." I hear Kyubey's telepathy.

"Meeting? What are you talking about?"

Saying this, I open the door and a bright light pierces my eyes.

On the other side of the doorway is something that looks like a scene out of a fantasy movie. A fire glows brightly on a

ceremonial pedestal, as if I'm in a temple. Several people are gathered in a circle around it. Men dressed in armor... Could they be knights?

Surprisingly, at the center of these strong men is that skinny girl, Coeurl.

The knights bow their heads in honor of her. When she notices me, she signals something with her hand. The knights then motion to me before they bow again and exit.

"Hey, so you're finally awake?"

She walks over and grabs my hand.

"Hey, Kosane. Have a drink too. It's delicious."

Saying that, she pulls me to a corner of the pedestal, where a ceramic kettle sits. Coeurl pours the contents of the kettle into a cup and offers it to me. It contains a clear liquid, smelling of alcohol. Is it really alcohol?

Right about now would be the perfect time for booze, so I accept and take a sip. It's tangy and spicy, but the aftertaste is sweet and fertile—almost like tequila.

I immediately feel the alcohol warming my stomach and blood. Blood, which flows through the whole body, and affects sobriety.

"Well, you saved me. Heh heh heh. I was in trouble. I drifted through time from 800,000 years ago. I mean, where am I now even? Like where am I? Where are we? Hahaha."

Normally, I would stop talking in order to gauge the other person's reaction and avoid embarrassment, but right now I don't have the ability to read the emotions on faces, and my rationality is clouded by alcohol.

"This is the planet <Terminus>. The frontier of the galaxy. The last stronghold of old humanity."

"Does that mean...it's a losing battle?"

"That's right. Their magical power is without parallel. They generate emotional energy almost passively. They're using it to colonize the entire galaxy—and if that isn't enough, they've conquered time as well.

"You know the Time Railroad, don't you?" Coeurl sighs.

I have no idea what that sigh's supposed to mean.

"So, the railroad was built by *Homo magica*?"

"Yes. They've used the Time Railroad to establish their eternal dominion from the end of the universe to the end of time."

The word "eternal" piques my interest and irks me.

"NO, no, no! There is no such thing as eternity! The second law of thermodynamics is absolute. Stars burn up, and even black holes evaporate. Every single proton that makes up anything will eventually collapse. Entropy is absolute! The universe will one day die!"

Some may wonder why I yelled so suddenly. It may seem paradoxical, but I am able to live because the universe will die. The universe is meaningless, and life is meaningless. Therefore, my life is not defined by anything eternal. That fact is the last thing that's been keeping me alive until now without committing suicide.

"You don't understand magic, do you? Magic transcends the laws of physics. Emotional energy defies thermodynamics," Kyubey interjects mercilessly.

I tremble. From the end of the universe to the end of time, to eternity, *cute girls doing cute things*...the cute-ification of all human relations.

Girls doing cute things – is the final evolution of this universe going to take the form of endless cuteness?

It's a nightmare. The very idea of it evokes a deep-seated sense of dread in the pit of my stomach. No amount of tequila can bring me comfort anymore. My mental state is rapidly deteriorating. I feel like I'm going to burst out crying.

Then Coeurl approaches me and whispers,

“We’re going to stop their colonization. I need your help. You came here from the past, didn't you? Then you should have knowledge of magic management technology!"

Listening to her, it seems she believes that in the past, humanity had some kind of widespread technology to control magical powers. I tell her repeatedly that no such thing existed, but she persists.

"No, no, it managed magic by modeling relationships and evoking emotions."

Here, Kyubey appears to be able to offer his insight.

"Maybe she's talking about stories, pieces of fantasy and fiction.”

Fiction? That’s right. Stories are essentially models of human relationships, stored in various mediums: novels, comics, movies, anime, video games...

The style may vary, but every story has human relationships at its core. To be the hero of a story is to be entangled in all kinds of relationships.

When I say that, Coeurl nods in agreement as if she understands.

"The technology for storytelling has been lost. Early in the Magi War, humanity eradicated fantasy because it was believed to be the source of *Homo magica*. But stories are exactly what we need now in order to organize a corps of non-human Magical Girls."

"Non-human Magical Girls...? Does that mean there are other intelligent beings in the universe besides humans and Incubators?"

I am visibly puzzled. Kyubey answers,

"Of course there are. Do you know how many civilizations are crowded together in this universe, and how much energy they consume each moment?"

"No, I don't."

In contrast to me and Kyubey, Coeurl seems desperate.

"*Homo magica* are spreading uncontrollably. Now most of the star systems in the galaxy have been occupied and converted by them. There are other sapient beings who were forced to flee their homes and take refuge on this planet. If they can create emotional energy, then they can become Magical Girls through a contract with an Incubator. If we can organize a non-human Magical Girls corps, we might be able to turn things around in one fell swoop! That's our last hope. It must be divine providence that brought you to us. Please, Kosane. Become an emotion manager and oversee the emotions of sapient alien creatures. Turn them into Magical Girls for us!"

"Ha...okay...I understand..."

So, I reluctantly became an emotion manager. My goal was to create non-human Magical Girls and squeeze out their emotional energy for our sake.

I came to understand that the planet Terminus is divided into several environmental zones, each with a magical field controlling the atmosphere, mineral composition, temperature, gravity, and so on, of the particular area. This was clearly to accommodate the alien refugees who have evacuated from all over the galaxy.

I was taken on a bus to visit and learn about each district. Together with Kyubey, I investigated the emotions of these sentient aliens to determine if it's possible to turn them into Magical Girls.

This job was not easy. It ended up taking several years of my time. There is not enough space to describe the entirety of what we experienced during this task. Instead, I would like to introduce an assortment of races that left an impression on me.

For example, there is a lifeform called <Kronos>. This creature undergoes many metamorphoses over the course of its life, greatly altering its ecological role upon each change. Its life is the story of a rise to the top and a fall from

grace on the food chain. At birth, they are meek prey animals, but as they metamorphosize, they become primary, then secondary, then tertiary apex predators. However, as they grow old, they become immobile sacks of flesh. Ultimately, it takes on a plant-like form. On its home planet, this species alone made up its entire ecosystem.

There is another peculiar lifeform that caught my attention called <Hemitheos>. Individuals of this species are not sapient. Instead, their gametes, such as sperm and eggs, possess intelligence. Because the environment of their home planet was extremely harsh, they evolved a reproductive system in which, rather than individuals seeking reproductive partners, their gametes search autonomously to find mates. Exposure to these selective pressures eventually resulted in the evolution of advanced intelligence. Gradually, these reproductive cells became intelligent life forms of their own, capable of making complex judgments. However, at the end of their lives, these gametes will fuse with each other, and produce a non-intelligent organism.

Yet another interesting race I came in contact with were <the Mediums>. They are lifeforms that serve as organic information vestibules. On their home planet, all species lack the ability to reproduce on their own. So, a system evolved in which genetic information could be transmitted into <Mediums> for fertilization. As evolution progressed, the genetic information housed inside the <Mediums> began to seize control of all living things on the planet, installing itself as a sort of software to be run by the bodies. In pursuit of further complexity, the software domesticated the entire ecosystem in order to produce efficient genetic information.

There are various other intelligent beings on the planet <Terminus>, but in the end, our project was a failure—a fiasco, a massive disaster.

Managing the emotions of non-human lifeforms was tantamount to trying to write a story with non-human intelligence as its core. A story must be a balanced narrative of the ups and downs of emotions that come with the elaborate relationship between people. A story structure is both thrilling and exciting. That's how emotional energy is

generated, and how Magical Girls are created.

Was that possible with these aliens? No. These creatures could not become the protagonist of the story, and thus could not become Magical Girls. A protagonist must be anthropomorphized. And if they are anthropomorphized, they are no longer non-human. It seems there is no such thing as a non-human Magical Girl. That is, these lifeforms were null and destined to remain as non-Magical Girls.

The failure of this project left me devastated. I no longer wanted to do anything except drink tequila. I immersed myself in a life of alcoholism. I live far away from the settlements of the old humans. But I'm not lonely. I'm kept company by the remaining Incubators.

Kyubey had begun self-replicating, multiplying himself until they became quite numerous. Lazing amongst the legion of Kyubeys, I watch the sunset and drink tequila every day in a daze.

When I miss conversation, I just begin thoughtlessly speaking, and Kyubey always responds to my voice. We engage in a series of sounds that, on their surface, seem to have meaning, but are hollow. It is hard to tell if these are even conversations or not.

Nonetheless, any loneliness I feel disappears as the meaningless vocalizations continue. I don't know who tells me, but I hear through the rumor mills that Coeurl has died in battle. I feel nothing. No thoughts rush through my head. In fact, I don't even remember what her face looks like.

Every day, I look up at the sun, drink, and snuggle Kyubey. Day after day. And in the end, I grow unsure whether I am Kosane or Kyubey.

There are no human relationships here. Kyubey is not a human being. And I'm not even sure if there's such a thing as an individual anymore.



This is my utopia. No sci-fi writer could have written a better world for me. The troubles and sufferings of all societies disappear completely here.

But alas, even in such an ideal world, cracks will sadly form. A small fracture will eventually erode the whole and everything will fall apart. The crack in my paradise is the voice. A voice that comes from nowhere. A weak but persistent voice. The voice of a twin sister who should have been dead—Eruna's voice.

She says, “I’m sorry, but I can’t help. You’re a human being. You can't escape from human relationships. It is your fate.”



The voice is terrifying. It’s as if something huge is writhing beyond her voice. A shadow of something so powerful it could swallow me and the world.

I try to ignore the voice. I drink tequila and bury my face in the Kyubeys.

Regardless, it is a futile effort. Every utopia comes to an end sooner or later. Eruna's voice grows louder and louder. No matter how far I run from it, it follows, whispering in my ears.

When that voice reaches its apex, my humble little world is doomed. *Homo magica*, a mankind of just cute Magical Girls, has at last reached the last stronghold of old humanity. Their assault on <Terminus> follows.

“Big sis! Can you hear my voice? Please connect to me!

“Big sis! Let's be together.”

"No! No! No!”

I scream as the world crumbles around me. Yes, the world has been destroyed with a single blow from *Homo magica*. In an instant, old humanity and the intelligent creatures from all over the galaxy who found refuge on Terminus are all obliterated.

Death. Death. Death. Countless deaths unfold.

Below me, I can see Terminus disintegrating. I am then blown into space by the shock wave of the initial attack. In my special seat above the world, I and Kyubey observe the end.

A pink beam streaks across the surface of the planet. Just like that, the mantle erupts, the oceans evaporate, and even the seafloor melts. Mountain ranges crumble, and continents deform like toffee. A red tsunami of liquefied rock washes across the planet. Everything is burnt. Everything is evaporated into gas. Everything is volatilized into space.

The laser beam punctures all the way to the inner core of the planet, creating a hole which releases billions of years of stored energy. All the pressure exerted by planetary gravity converges on a single point and explodes. Fountains of magma erupt, as earthquakes and shock waves thunder across the planet. The streams of magma easily transcend the limits of the atmosphere, bathing the cosmos in a feast of shimmering lights. Liquid rock spews out along the planet's rotation, like water from a sprinkler. The force of this catastrophe is so great that it even shifts the orbit of the ravaged planet.

The surface of Terminus is fissured, like a broken egg floating in space. The yolk of the planet has almost entirely spilled into space.

The sight is not solemn, but instead utterly comical. It doesn't feel as if we are watching a main event like the destruction of a planet. If anything, it's more like watching instant noodles being made.

Instant noodles, ha! To *Homo magica*, planetary destruction is like making ramen.

The planet, emptied of its contents down to its inner core, is no longer unified by gravity, and is instead flung into orbit as countless fragments. Then, a row of sparkling beads seem to surround the star at the center of the system. The Magical Girls are putting their finishing touches on their work.

Spinning out a magical ribbon, they knot the beads together to form a single strand, a great limiting ring orbiting the star. Spare matter is siphoned from the star into the ring to form

the mass of their new world, a Ringworld. A huge land is born there. A land where cute girls can live endless lives.

While *Homo sapiens* are born of physical intercourse, *Homo magica* are born of clay. With a wave of their staff and a magic rite, cute, little girls sprout from the ground. One girl becomes two, two girls become four, four become eight... The number of *Homo magica* increases exponentially. While the area of the Ringworld is much larger than all the planets in the galaxy combined, it is filled with cute girls in no time at all.

But wait, a question comes to mind: if their bodies are formed of mud, how are their souls created? *Homo magica*, being Magical Girls, should all have soul gems. And to have a soul gem, one would need to have a soul. Yet, where amongst the clay of the earth would a soul form?

But alas, there is no time to ponder such questions.
Because Eruna's voice grows stronger and stronger.

Homo magica, having populated the Ringworld, begin reshaping spacetime with their labyrinths. Their soul gems all

simultaneously taint and bring forth Witches. This releases the boundless emotional energy needed to imprint human relationships onto the fabric of spacetime. It seems that spacetime itself is being used as an algorithm, and after imprinting the initial conditions, all possible human relationships are calculated for future use.

Endless, cute relationships.

As the calculations progress, Eruna's voice grows mightier and mightier. She's trying to entangle me in a human relationship!

“You can't escape, older sister. Because this is fate.”

"No, I'll run away!" I cry. “I’ll escape from you!”

“Where will you run to? There is only one way out and it’s aboard the time train.”

Homo magica have begun building a station of the Time Railroad in a corner of the Ringworld, revealing its true nature. It's an ecosystem of organisms in a time loop.

All living things have the ability to travel back in time to repeat evolution and change the timeline.

In an evolutionary time loop, predators use future information to track their prey in the past, and prey struggle to avoid future tragedies. Time and space are twisted by repeated transformations of the timeline. Time travel is made possible by connecting these points through a railroad.

I take the Kyubeys with me and lead them into the heart of the Time Railroad. Like Othello, I run through a realm where existence and non-existence alternate at a dizzying pace.

We are pursued by time-looping predators, but we have a trump card—Kyubey's computational abilities, which can simulate numerous possible futures and select the most favorable one. It's an ability of equal use as time looping.

In exchange for the time looping ability, the species degenerated their intelligence, as there is no point in learning from the past if you can endlessly reset upon a mistake. Therein lies our opportunity. And thus, we overcome many challenges to reach our goal—a station platform. From the infinite future, the track stretches to the infinite past. On the tracks, infinite trains with infinite routes are parked.

“Older sister...where are you going?”

"Wherever you aren’t!”

With a shout, I throw some kind of temporal “coal” into the furnace, and time, which has become brittle and eroded by endless time loops, begins to crystalize again. A fire is lit in the boiler. Pressure wells up, and the time train slowly begins to advance. Too slow! At this rate, Eruna will catch up with me! In my haste, I shovel more “coal” into the furnace.

That was a horrible idea. The charcoal burns in a chain reaction that quickly exceeds the limits of the boiler.

・Explosion!

With the denotation of the boiler, a tremendous shock wave pulses through time. I'm flung in the direction of the past. As this occurs, I can swear I hear little laughs from Eruna echoing from somewhere.

[Continued in...Vol.3]




Null Magical Girl Vol.3
Gathering, separating, spinning on.
Farewell, eternal story.
Written by anomaly science fiction writer GenGen Kusano
Illustrated by Aya Haruhana
Translated by nymphatix
A spin-off novel of "Puella Magi Madoka Magica"

Recap of Null Magical Girl, Vol 1 & 2

March 2021: In the wake of a head injury, 24-year-old Kosane Kiriha discovers she has no brain. Shortly afterwards, Kyubey appears in front of her for the first time in ten years. He reveals that instead of a brain, Kosane has a tumor of Incubator cells controlling her body. And even worse, the spacetime continuum is collapsing around her.

Guided by a letter, which Kosane finds in her own skull, from her long-deceased twin sister Eruna, Kosane and Kyubey travel 800,000 years into the future aboard the Time Railroad.

There, they encounter the next step in human evolution, *Homo magica*, a species comprised only of Magical Girls, as they fight to eradicate the last remnants of old humanity, *Homo sapiens*.

In the midst of battle, Eruna continues haunting Kosane. Trying to escape, Kosane flees onto the Time Railroad, but an explosion blows her into the past.

Characters:

Kosane Kiriha

A 24-year-old graduate student. Ten years ago, she attempted to make a contract with Kyubey. However, without a soul, she could not become a Magical Girl. The title of her master's thesis is "A Study of the So-Called Cognitive Revolution." Having failed at job hunting, she will be hopelessly unemployed In April.

Kyubey

A strange, cat-rabbit creature that assists Kosane as he rides around in her hollow skull.

Eruna Kiriha

Kosane's identical twin sister who died at birth and lingered on as Kosane's childhood imaginary friend.

Homo magica

An evolved species of Magical Girl humans that Kosane encounters 800,000 years into the future. They have evolved to no longer require contracts with Kyubey to use

magic. They also never become Witches. They are infinitely cute due to neoteny.

Homo sapiens

The old human race. Their battle against *Homo magica* has led to their extinction.

Vol. 3: Which is the Path to the Inner Universe?

Now, my story finally reaches its climax.

The climax entails the rapid development of the story, unfolding in a furious wave to the end that leaves you no time to catch your breath. A climax delivers a storm of immeasurable shock and then even more surprises to surpass that...

I'll make a promise here. A genuine and shocking truth awaits you.

But before we head off into the storm, let's go over a few things. Remember what was written at the beginning of this story?

"This is the record of a crime."

And, of course, there was even a spoiler. The criminal is me.

Who am I?

Kosane Kiriha. I am the human body indicated by that name, that is my identity.

Ah yes, that *was* me. But not now. Not anymore. On the platform of the Time Railroad, I was transformed with the explosion of the time locomotive's boiler. I fused with several Kyubeys and absorbed the locomotive and track itself.

Combining the temporal wisdom of the Time Railroad with the spatial intuition of Kyubey's computational power, I escaped the yoke of the three-dimensional world.

I find myself looking down on a timeline of the three-dimensional world. I see 800,000 years of struggle between *Homo sapiens* and *Homo magica*, a battle between old and new humans. This is the tragic history of the Magi Wars that Coeurl had mentioned, now unfolding before me.

I witness the birth of *Homo magica*, who are able to escape the Incubators' contract and the conspiracy of an interstellar corporate complex that wished to exploit them.

Yes, a rebellion of Magical Girls and the outbreak of a war in the cosmos. High-powered laser beam glitter against the backdrop of the dark vacuum as countless stellar battleships are decimated. *Homo sapiens* suffering successive defeats and forced to repeatedly withdraw. I watch as the magical power of *Homo magica*, externalizing human relationships, grows ever more potent. I see countless planets obliterated by magic. *Cute-girls-doing cute-things*, and mass death spreading across the galaxy.

After going backwards through hundreds of thousands of years of war-torn history, I finally enter a peaceful era. It is a time when Magical Girls are under contract with Incubators, and whose records are absent from the front pages of our civilization's history.

As I travel back in time, spacecraft technology regresses towards something simpler and simpler.

Wormhole technology gives way to antimatter, antimatter technology backslides to nuclear fusion, nuclear fusion reverts to nuclear fission, and finally I arrive at the most primitive chemical reaction rockets. I watch humanity's habitat steadily retract. Shrinking from the Orion Arm of the galaxy to the frontier of the space around our own star. Slowly, the public transportation system that had stretched throughout the solar system fades, leaving only one celestial body for humankind to inhibit: Mother Earth.

My heart is filled with nostalgia. What I see below is that era which I call my home. The year 2021! The time when I had my decisive reunion with Kyubey. The year I boarded the Time Railroad with the ticket found in my skull and headed to an age 800,000 years in the future. This is the time that I thought I would never see again. I have finally arrived at the time I thought I had lost.

I'm enamored. I want to go back to 2021, the year that was taken from me. Stormy thoughts rule my mind. I will regain the time that I lost. I will not allow it to remain stolen from me.

The time shock wave which had swept me backwards has already decayed over my 800,000-year journey. I am no longer being pulled away by the past. I cling to this part of the timeline, digging my ten fingers into time in an attempt to stay in the present.

I penetrate into 2021. Then, like moths drawn to a flame, I converge at a point at the center of the world, the starting point of "I am"...to the body of the person called Kosane Kiriha.

I open my eyes. An indescribable sense of nostalgia overwhelms me. It is the feeling of flesh and bones once again bound in time and space.

Yes, this is it. A place of limited spacetime—March 2021.

This is Kosane Kiriha's room.

Suddenly...something falls from my right hand—a bag of coffee grounds. Powder leaks from the bag and stains the floor brown. Looking at it with nothing on hand to clean it up,

a high-pitched noise cries from the kitchen. Apparently, a kettle had been left to boil.

Then I remember. I know what is going to happen next. I would get frustrated and crack open my head and discover that I have no brain. Then Kyubey would show up, and we'd use the letter inside my hollow skull as a boarding pass for the Time Railroad, and we would travel to the world 800,000 years in the future.

I sit on the floor and patiently wait for this scenario to play out. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Eventually, the sun goes down. I wait longer, and the dawn light comes, then eventually it gets dark again.

Nothing happens.

Are the fantastical events that I experienced, and now *supposed* to experience again, not going to occur? There are no traces that my journey ever took place. I put my hand on my forehead, but the two holes are nothing more than shadows. I can only feel skin and the solid bone underneath.

Has time been altered? Has the timeline been rewritten?

I suddenly realize I am free. I can do whatever I want for the next hour. I can do whatever I want for the rest of my life.

Do what? Live. I'll live the year 2021. I will move my body and walk towards the future, step by step, hour-by-hour.

Oh, yes! For that moment, I believed that I could do anything. Poor, foolish me. I didn't even remember—I refused to even consider the possibility—that 2021 itself is a big trap.

I thought it was a restart, where my life begins again.

But life? What's that?

I have nothing to do. I am nothing, and I will never be anything. But, at least I tried. I tried my best to move towards the future. A second becomes a minute, a minute becomes an hour, an hour becomes a day. 31 days gather to complete one month.

But by then, everything had begun to go wrong anew.

The passage of time itself was dark and depressing. It was painful to even move forward one second at a time. It was as if time itself was covered with needles, and with each passing second, the needles pierced deep into my body. They cannot be pulled out, and they only dig deeper, deeper, deeper.

I could hear voices echoing throughout spacetime. Incessant chatter, laughter, the adorable voices of cute girls—*Homo magica*, a humanity of just Magical Girls, happily emitting their voices while building cute and cuddly relationships. The voices came from everywhere. From the sky, from the earth, from the leaves of the trees lining the streets, from the television, from the refrigerator, from the rain, from puppies on walks, from the speakers in a distant mall, from the pill bugs writhing under the rocks, even from my skin and pores.

Ugh. I hadn't escaped. On the contrary, I had willingly jumped into the trap without hesitation. This is a locked room. A closed time with no escape. The year 2021 is the walls of the

closed room, the floor, the ceiling, and the room itself. A room built with bricks of 24 hours.

As we move towards the future through the prison of time, the voices of *Homo magica* grow stronger. Their voices can be heard within all things, but especially in other people.

Were the minds of others acting like antennas, receiving and amplifying the voices of *Homo magica* in the future, and transmitting them to my eardrums?

Regardless of the principle, by July 2021, I was unable to go out at all. My one-sided defeat and withdrawal was the disastrous result of my battle against the giant, closed room. All I could do was lock myself in a dark closet, desperately covering my ears with both hands, and wait patiently for the cute laughter to fade away.

Before I knew it, it was October, and the battle between me and 2021 entered a new phase.

The trigger is the mirror. One morning, I look in the mirror and see a face that isn't my own staring back at me. The face resembles mine. Rather, it looks exactly like mine, but it isn't my face at all.

The face has a carefree, innocent smile that has never graced my own face in my entire life. Yet, at the same time, the smile is wicked, something I have imagined before, a grin as unnerving as a knife that has been sharpened to its limit.

It's clear who this face on the other side of the mirror belongs to: Eruna Kiriha, my younger sister who should have died before she was born. At last, she appears before me.

I impulsively punch the mirror. Sharp shards cut my skin, and blood drips from my knuckle. The mirror cracks and Eruna's face fades. But I know, she will never let go of me.

As proof, the dripping blood began to pool into the form of letters:

- Older sister. I'm almost ready to see you. At the epicenter of fate.

"Enough...release me, Eruna. You're dead. You don't exist in this world anymore..." I mutter weakly, rubbing away the letters with my trembling hands.

I'm terrified. I can't stop shaking. I want to run away right now. But where could I ever run to? There is no escape. This premonition slowly engraves itself into my mind.

As I progress further through the closed corridor of time, my health deteriorates rapidly. No matter what I do, I feel a dull pain in the pit of my stomach. My eyes lose focus, as if cataracts have formed on them. Whenever I try to think, an unpleasant feeling of drowsiness eats away at my mind like acid. And yet, I can't sleep at night. My body radiates heat, and I wake up at sunrise without having actually slept a wink.

Eating too is impossible. I can't even muster the strength to put solid food in my mouth. The mere presence of meat, fish, rice, vegetables, or fruit makes me sick from the smell. At

best, I can only manage to swallow a nutritional drink bought from a vending machine. But despite the effort, my stomach will reject it. The moment the liquid touches my mouth, my throat will tremble, and I will vomit. Otherwise, the liquid will escape in the form of watery diarrhea.

Woe is the year 2021!

What's the fun in putting me through this? I'm not entertained at all!

It's over for me. I realize now that I will lose this battle in the future and face a shameful, one-sided defeat. The price of failure is my life. Beyond time, I could see it clearly.

In mid-December 2021, in the corner of my room, I could see some heavy, useless mass swaying. I could see it—the sight of a silent body hanging from a rope. In the depths of the locked room of 2021, there lies a corpse.

This is a murder scene, a locked-room murder. The incident took place in 2021, in a completely closed room where it is

impossible to enter or escape. No matter what anyone says, it fits the definition of locked-room murder.

So, what are the facts of the case? Who was the victim? Who is the murderer?

Let's investigate. I'll be the investigator, the only one.

The investigator summons the first witness. That would be me; I was the first to discover the body. I observed the whole murder with my temporal vision. I will be subpoenaed to take the stand and I will unequivocally state, "I am the one who witnessed the murder. I am certain that I saw with my own eyes how I killed her."

The testimony is absolutely correct. I am the victim, and...the murderer.

What a case! The victim, the investigator, the witness, and the culprit are all the same person!

Needless to say, I cannot just sit back idly and spectate my own suicide. I must save myself. There is no future unless I can break through the closed room of 2021 and change my destiny.

I want to give myself a future. I try my best. But I struggle and fall apart. I replay the year 2021 over and over in search of a different ending.

Thousands of times, tens of thousands of times, billions of times, trillions of times...

The result is total annihilation. There is no escape from the year 2021.

No matter what I do to change it, it is inevitable; by December 31st, at 23:59:59, I will kill and be killed by myself. All my brave efforts only end in more variations of the same corpse: poisoning myself, jumping off a bridge, starving to death, burning to death, drowning, electrocution, gas poisoning...

Countless repetitions of the year will be stained with my blood. My struggle to change my fate has finally damaged the entire fabric of time. After many replays, the causal order of 2021 has collapsed around me.

I see...I finally understand. This is what Kyubey meant when he said spacetime had collapsed around me. Like an ouroboros, a serpent endlessly devouring its own tail, my actions had established causality and locked me in this temporal room.

I admit it. This murder case is not half-baked. Cause and effect are intricately intertwined, endings lead to beginnings, and beginnings lead to endings. This is the ultimate locked-room murder case. If things continue as they are, I can never avoid this locked-room murder. I have to be smart. I must deduce the structure of this entire case.

Yes...I have to figure it out...

But who can ever hope to unravel the ultimate locked-room murder case? Only the ultimate detective.

The ultimate detective can deduce the ultimate true culprit of the ultimate locked-room murder. Of course, it's clear I have a hand in the case. However, there is a difference between a mere accomplice and a true criminal. Somewhere out there must be the ultimate culprit who lured me into the locked room of 2021 and forced me on the track to kill myself. There has to be. I'll keep reasoning and reach the ultimate conclusion!

The ultimate conclusion would require answering the ultimate questions.

"Where did we come from?"

"What are we?"

"Where are we going?"

I knew the third question had already been answered. We are *Homo*, and we will one day become Magical Girls called *Homo magica*, building infinitely cute relationships with each other that spread out endlessly into the universe and beyond.



Two questions remain then.

I decide to pursue the first question: Where do we come from?

In order to understand the murderous phenomenon of suicide, I must discover our past.

Although the body known as Kosane Kiriha is locked in a closed space called 2021, through the Time Railroad I can construct, observe, and interface with holographic

projections of the past.

I gaze into the past of *Homo sapiens*, to a time about 75,000 years ago on the continent of Africa. This is the era we made first contact with a certain race—called Incubators. This race is a hive mind. The information available to the individual is continuously, telepathically communicated to the whole, making it a single, interconnected entity. The workings of their mind cannot be imagined, nor can we truly empathize with it. It is a different kind of consciousness, far different than the isolated minds we possess. But I'll try to put it into words, knowing full well that I am mistaken.

If I layer my misconceptions on top of my lack of knowledge, and then smear them with my inability to comprehend, and then anthropomorphize it all, it's sad to consider the Incubator's perspective.

The future of the universe, the end of all things. Everything has an end. The Incubators are not afraid of this fact. They do not know death. They did not evolve to recognize such a concept. The end of the individual is irrelevant to the whole,

as long as the whole continues to live. Thus far, the life of the entity known as Incubator has continued to be protected from all kinds of possible occurrences. Except for one: the end of the universe.

Unfortunately, there seemed to be no way to avoid the death of the universe. In their research, Incubators integrated general relativity with quantum theory to create a theory of everything that explains the fundamental interactions that govern the universe: gravity, electromagnetism, strong nuclear forces, and weak nuclear forces. But nowhere within their science could they discover a way to break the second law of thermodynamics and curtail the endlessly increasing entropy. Undeterred, they explored the universe.

Then they found us, a terribly fragile race just beginning to become intelligent, and discovered the mysterious potential for *Homo sapiens* to break thermodynamics.

We possess an energy that cannot be explained by universal physics, emotional energy. Thus, a system was developed. A

system for exploiting emotional energy, the Magical Girl system.

And what was given to humanity?

Survival, Civilization, and Evolution.

At the time of the Incubators' arrival, the species *Homo sapiens* was in grave danger. A world-ending volcanic eruption had occurred in the Toba Caldera in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. Massive amounts of volcanic ash flooded the atmosphere, blocking out sunlight. The average temperature plummeted, and an endless winter followed. Many species went extinct. The genus *Homo* was not spared tragedy. The species *Homo erectus*, which had a two-million-year history of spreading across the Old World, died out at this time.

Homo sapiens too suffered in the bitter cold and faced extinction. Prior to that point, our total population was around ten thousand at best. Our numbers were drastically reduced to only several thousand by the disaster. If there had been a

pessimistic observer during this period, they would have reached the reasonable conclusion that humanity had no future.

But that wasn't true...

The contact between Incubators and *Homo sapiens* fundamentally changed the history of Earth, and also the fate of the Universe. The world was given Magical Girls.

Having acquired the power to transcend the theory of everything, we quickly spread out across Africa, the Middle East, and the Eurasian continent.

And then we met them, the closest thing to us that is not us. *Homo neanderthalensis* – Neanderthals, a species of humans that evolved in Europe, adapted to the cold.

The encounter soon turned tragic. The invaders, *Homo sapiens*, began wiping out the Neanderthals. It wasn't even a war; it was a one-sided massacre. At the time, there wasn't even much of a technological difference between the two

groups. No, it was the weapon called Magical Girls that decisively changed history.

Of course, magic is quite powerful. But that wasn't the only problem.

The Neanderthals being targeted with lethal magic did not seem to be aware of what was occurring. For some reason, it seemed the Neanderthals were incapable of even recognizing the phenomenon of magic in the first place.

No, perhaps the framing is off. Instead, for some bizarre reason, *Homo sapiens could* recognize the phenomenon of magic. Cognitive functions evolve to survive in the real world. In other words, cognition should be foundationally limited by the theory of everything that defines reality. The phenomenon of magic, which exists beyond reason, should not be comprehensible to those who live in reality.

However, *Homo sapiens can* perceive magic. We *can* imagine, believe, and communicate events that could never happen in the real world.

Yuval Noah Harari called this shift in cognitive function that occurred within *Homo sapiens* the "cognitive revolution" in his book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Harari could never explain why the cognitive revolution occurred. But now, I have the answer.

The Cognitive Revolution was the Magical Girl Revolution.

Why are we able to imagine, believe, and wish the impossible? It seems the answer is too simple for anyone to have ever thought of.

The evolution of the species known as *Homo sapiens* has been subject to a selective pressure to create Magical Girls. More efficient generation of emotional energy and the creation of even more powerful Magical Girls has a high value to the Incubators.

But at this time, something was happening that even the Incubators were unaware of. A third existence had been born.

Fiction, fantasy, what we call stories...

In the beginning, narratives were born in the symbolic space of our imaginations and played the role of recording past relationships. They were a tool for preserving the history of human relationships for future generations and would enhance the emotional energy of Magical Girls.

Eventually, stories evolved autonomously and acquired the function of generating relationships themselves. Relationships that had once been fictitious materialized with the spread of language. Narrative and relationships formed a mutual feedback loop.

These stories create connections that can easily generate more powerful Magical Girls and ever greater amounts of emotional energy. These relationships spread through the real world, embodying the stories of their creators. In this way, because their stories were passed on, their creators were evolutionarily successful.

The primary function of stories is to materialize and diffuse templates for relationships that are more likely to generate emotional energy. All other functions are merely secondary.

This fact solves the ensuing question: "Why do stories never tire of depicting human relationships?" Since ancient times, stories have continued to center human relationships time and time again. From mythology to classic literature to cutting-edge video games, there's an astonishing repertoire of human relationships stacked in front of us. This may seem very peculiar at first, but if we consider the function of storytelling, the question is naturally answered.

We are livestock. We are chattel, now bred by narrative to create more convenient, more appealing, more emotionally charged relationships. At our evolutionary terminus is *Homo magica*, a species entrapped in infinitely charming human relationships.

And thus, I've finally found the clue that will lead us to the solution of the ultimate locked-room murder.

My theory is as follows: Under reproduction guided by narrative, the unit of evolution has become human relationships. In other words, an individual's suicide does not necessarily put them at an evolutionary disadvantage. If it strengthens relationships, it will become more prevalent. Is this the structure behind the "I will kill me and be killed by myself" incident?

I realize what I must do as the ultimate detective and as a null Magical Girl. Let's call this endeavor "Project Null-A World."

Our worldview, dominated and domesticated by stories of human relationships, can be thought of as Aristotle's world. The world depicted in Aristotle's theory was an anthropomorphic world. The four elements that make up all things, earth, air, fire, water, all move to fulfill their respective purposes. And the world is formed by the relationships amongst them.

Similarly, the cognitive world of *Homo sapiens* is established upon relationships. Even the more scientific worldview

reveals relationships as its hidden foundation and cannot escape the Aristotelian worldview.

In contrast, the Neanderthal's cognitive world, for example, was more null-A, that is non-Aristotelian. At the root of their cognition is an intuitive recognition of the laws of physics, directly linked to the theory of everything. Hence, there are no lies, fantasies, miracles, or magic in their world.

As the ultimate master detective, my mission is to solve the ultimate locked-room murder. It is to overthrow the A world and establish the null-A world. That is also my mission as a null-Magical Girl.

Now that the objective has been determined, what should I do to create a null-A world?

The first thing to do is to prevent the propagation of stories. This is the only way to do it. There are several important innovations in the evolutionary history of storytelling. I have chosen one of them as my target.

And so, I move down the ages. I launch my boat along the great river of time.

[1440 AD Holy Roman Empire, Strasbourg]
I row the oars of the boat. Rose-colored sandstone buildings and half-timbered houses show their many faces and pass behind me.

I arrive at Strasbourg, known as the "Crossroads of Europe." The city has long flourished as a major transportation hub. Canals using the River Ill, a tributary of the Rhine, intertwine throughout the city, forming an intricate web of waterways. In this era, at this very point, is my target.

I have come here via the Time Railroad to rewrite history!

I moor my boat to the pier and disembark. The high-pitched sound of striking iron can be heard here and there, as if coming from the workshops of craftsmen.

I pull my pocket watch out and check the time. If my records are correct, my chance should arrive soon. A man with a

beard hurriedly emerges from a building, holding a metal plate under his arm. I pick up a scrap piece of wood and slowly creep up behind him.

“DIE!”

I swing the piece of spare wood down and strike the back of his head with it. With a sickening sound, he collapses.

This man's name is Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of letterpress printing. Gutenberg's printing technology would lead to an unprecedented proliferation of written stories from the 16th century onward. I know I must kill him before that happens.

Gutenberg's head is bleeding but he doesn't seem to be dead quite yet. He is just stunned.

"RAAAAAA”

Again...

"UUUUUUGHH!"

His skull seems to shatter as I repeatedly batter him. Not only blood comes out, but also a mixture of a yellowish-brownish goo that appears to be brain marrow, which splatters on the cobblestone.

It should be obvious to everyone that Gutenberg is dead. Even the most clueless would have to reluctantly admit that he will never come back to life.

I breathe a sigh of relief. Relief immediately gives way to astonishment, then to fear.

“Older sister. You're a bad girl. You can’t kill Mr. Gutenberg.”

I hear a voice that is more than familiar. It is the voice that is closest to me, yet so far away from me.

Oh, it’s you again...

A vague, white shadow materializes in front of me. The shadow takes the form of a girl. Clad in a pure white robe, she has exactly the same face and height as me, but she radiates the aura of a girl I have never had a relationship with since I was born.

An inescapable existence that can never be forgotten, Eruna Kiriha, my twin sister.

I can't say anything back to her. On the contrary, I can't even move my body. In front of Eruna, my body freezes like a frog ensnarled by a snake.

She points her right hand at me. Her index finger and her middle finger are stretched out as if she's holding a gun.

"Bang!" In a somewhat childish, raspy voice, she imitates firing a bullet.

At that moment, the scene completely changes. Gutenberg's blood and brain matter, scattered on the pavement, begins seething and squirming. Wiggling like a protoplasmic amoeba,

they gather around his wound and infest his head. The sunken skull is neatly restored. The skin moves back into place, and the hair replants itself as a finishing touch. Gutenberg rises in perfect health. He walks away with the metal plate in his arms as if nothing had happened. I can only watch in dismay with my mouth agape as he leaves. I look so miserable that Eruna starts laughing at me.

Her smile is pure and innocent. However, there is a tremendous cruelty hidden in the depths of it.

I bolt like a rabbit. When I reach the waterway, I jump into the river without even considering getting on a boat. With single-minded determination to escape from Eruna, I force my body to move, and I swim.

Oh shit! She's in my way again. How far are you going to follow me? How far...

I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm incredibly scared right now.

What is this ultimate detective act? What am I but a non-Magical Girl? I am helpless. I'm just a pathetic loser.

I want power. I want power, that is my desire. And at that moment, the revelation comes to me.

Is it too sudden? No, epiphanies are usually sudden and unexpected.

It is a message from something big, much bigger than an elephant, much larger than a blue whale. Grander than mountains and continents. Even more vast than the stars and galaxies. Something much more boundless...

There is only one thing this big—the Universe itself.

The universe has spoken to me. The form of the message is different from a simple conversation. The information is delivered in an instant—truly a revelation.

The universe is...a huge, active, living information system. It can make highly intelligent responses but has no mind of its own and has only one function: to oppose Magical Girls.

The universe is equipped with the will to eliminate Magical Girls. But how did such a function come about?

The universe reproduces. A singularity in the interior of the universe forms a separate universe in and of itself. When a star dies as a supernova and becomes a black hole, a child universe has been born. Among these children, the black hole-prone universes produce further offspring. As this process is repeated over and over for generations, the universe becomes a massive black hole.

The evolution of the universe is on course for a black hole heat death.

However, when Magical Girls are born, *Homo magica*, a humanity of just Magical Girls, is not too far from coming into existence. They will manage the entire universe and prevent

the death of stars. The eternally unchanging, stable universe will endlessly expand as a castrated zombie universe.

Thus, the universe has developed an immune system that eliminates Magical Girls. When an existence that opposes Magical Girls appears, the universe will offer them revelations and grant them a hidden power.

I access the symmetry chrysalis of the cosmic appendix. The appendix of the universe is an isolated enclosed space in which the ultra-high temperature and ultra-high pressure conditions of the Big Bang have been preserved.

In it, the symmetries that have collapsed in the present universe are upheld. Symmetry is the constancy of the physical state with respect to changes in coordinates. The breaking of symmetry determines the physical laws and physical constants of the world. Thus, the chrysalis of symmetry is a mass of possibilities whose physical constants have not yet been determined.

By using the symmetry chrysalis, we can direct the physical constants. At this pupal stage, it has not determined yet whether it will become a butterfly or a moth. How the symmetry is broken determines the value of the universal constants.

With the help of the universe, I set out once again to kill Gutenberg.

I teleport the four gas giants of our solar system, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune, closer to the sun. Such teleportation is easy. By manipulating the Planck constant, which determines the uncertainty of atomic particles, we make their positions uncertain. Then the wave function, which is the probability distribution of position, is increased at the destination, and then the Planck constant is restored again.

The four, giant planets fall down, connecting their ribbons of magnetic fields with the Sun. According to the law of conservation of angular momentum, they orbit at higher and higher speeds as they approach each other.

The magnetic fields attract the surface material of the Sun into far-reaching, flame arc prominences. The prominences make contact with each other, and the magnetic fields are broken and reassembled. A tremendous amount of energy is released, as if a rubber band stretched to its limit has snapped.

The energy becomes solar wind and radiates into outer space, blowing through our star system. It is a solar storm. The Earth's ozone layer is stripped away by the storm, which increases in frequency as the giant planets approach the Sun's surface.

And when they finally touch the surface...

A big explosion!

The unleashed gravitational energy turns into heat and light. The Sun collapses, and the Earth is obliterated in plasma.

Gutenberg dies.

I must say that this plan was a bit too grand to just kill Gutenberg, but it's the only way I feel comfortable I have ensured his demise.

Alas, I never know where Eruna will appear...

"Big sister. You're such a bad girl. It's not good if the Sun explodes. Aah! Damn it! It fired again, hehe."

BOOM!

Again, in a playful imitation of a gunshot, all is lost.

Suddenly, the Sun has not exploded, and Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are all peacefully circling in their original orbits again. Despite my hard work, it's all for naught.

I won't give up. I will merge neutron stars and fire gamma-ray bursts. I will drop strange quarks to Earth and transform ordinary matter. I will manipulate scalar fields to create local big rips. I will do all that and not give up.

But each time, Eruna appears, and with a single “bang!” the fruits of my labor are erased.

It’s no good. I can’t rely on the power of the universe. Even if I try to use the entire universe as a weapon, I can’t win against Eruna. She’s on a totally different level.

I need something...a radical, revolutionary, game-changing idea.

I have an idea! It finally occurs to me. The reason I can’t beat Eruna is that no matter how powerful I am, I can only generate power that is within the limits of the universe. If I could obtain a power that transcends these limits – the theory of everything – then I might be able to beat her.

In other words, I need to use magical emotional energy. Of course, I'm not a Magical Girl, and I am not qualified to become a Magical Girl. But I have a secret plan.

Yes, Incubators.

"So, it's finally my turn," says Kyubey.

That voice is also mine. When the boiler of the time train exploded, our essences mingled and merged.

I am me and we are us at the same time. We have the ability to make contracts with others. By creating Magical Girls, we can exploit their emotional energy.

So, we jump from timeline to timeline and make contracts with girls with powerful karmic destinies. We use the emotional energy we have gathered as a weapon against Eruna, but each time we are defeated. She is utterly unmatched!

We need more powerful Magical Girls! We need to make a contract with a girl who is entangled in an endless fate of unimaginably mighty karma.

Where is such a girl? Does she even exist? Yes, she exists.

I know where she is...

・・・What I envision is a single cell.

A cell that will multiply and form a human being.

No, two beings. In the future of that fertilized egg, there are twins—sisters known as Kosane and Eruna. And in that future, there is the battle we are fighting now.

How could this not be considered magnificent karmic potential, an endless destiny?

If they make a contract with us, we will be able to obtain unprecedented and unparalleled magical power. It should be enough to finally defeat Eruna.

We as Kyubey shall speak to me and Eruna and form a contract with them.

"Make a contract with us and become a Magical Girl!"

There is no reply. Obviously, it is not possible to communicate with a mere fertilized egg.

Yet, I do feel a wish rise and overcome entropy. A wish that comes with the fate of fighting as a Magical Girl. I don't know how, but the wheels of destiny begin to turn.

A fertilized egg that bears its fate divides. We will be born as two entities: Kosane Kiriha and my sister, who would've been named Eruna Kiriha if she had been born.

But in reality, we were not fully divided. Parts of us were still conjoined. We had two bodies but only one brain connecting us. Yet something inexplicable happened; the brain squirmed, then disappeared. A case of disappearance from the enclosed sanctuary called the womb? It's an interesting case for the ultimate detective, but there is no time to investigate now.

If I don't hurry, I will be born without a brain. I hastily search for anything that can replace brain cells.

There it is—Incubator cells. If I implant them and make them express their genes, it will be possible to make them think as a mind.

Thus, at birth, the fetus that received Incubator cells survived, and the one that did not instead died. The former was named Kosane, and the latter was to be named Eruna. In short, I have saved one and killed the other. And the one who survived became me.

Oh, I see...that fetus' future as I swim in the great river of my life: my childhood playing with my imaginary friend Eruna; the year 2011, when I met Kyubey and was deemed soulless; and the year 2021, when I was reunited with Kyubey and traveled 800,000 years into the future, only to be caught in a boiler explosion on the Time Railroad.

I return to the closed room of the year 2021. In countless replays, I continue to kill myself over and over. Ugh, this despair, this pain, this darkness!

But now I have power. I have made a contract with myself. With this emotional energy, I will escape the locked room of 2021!

Until now, I was bound by the timeline. No matter how far I moved into the past and future, I was nothing more than an insect crawling on the dimension of time. But now I am transcending time!

With all my strength, I push in the direction of super-time and rise above 2021.

I know that there is a tremendous existence there. It's a thread—countless versions of 2021, thousands of variations of my corpses, being pulled and rolled up into a spinning spool.

A silhouette of a person dances lightly above the reel. It is Eruna. She smiles slowly. As usual, she holds one hand straight ahead in the shape of a pistol.

"BANG!"

Now I know what she's doing. She is projecting her version of the timeline, a fragile block of an event frozen in the

moment, and then taking the events I had altered out of the timeline sequence in order to put hers back in.

I immediately materialize my own inner world's rifle and fire. The bullets fly in the direction of super-time and riddle her icy blocks of events, sending them off the timeline. Events that cannot be connected to the sequence of time shatter into countless fragments and scatter in all directions, then vanish, erased from the timeline.

"You're back! You're back, big sister! You returned to us!" Saying this, Eruna transforms.



The threads billow violently; the year 2021 is unraveling. Unwound time shimmers and then gathers and intertwines with itself. Countless threads of time are connected, bound together into a time fabric.

The threads of time, dyed by my blood and corpses, are woven together. Reddish-black threads covered in gore and death overlap. The seemingly infinite number of threads are tied together to form a jet-black fabric that is darker than any night, and deeper than any emptiness.

The cloth flits through the air as if with intention. It rushes to Eruna and adheres itself to her pure white robe, then intricately weaves itself into a three-dimensional form.

A dress– a dress of super-time. Eruna dons the dress of 2021, dyed with my blood and death. Softly, the dress sways.

Eruna gracefully jumps from the spool and rushes toward me. I hasten myself to open fire, but before I can react she kicks me in the head. I lose my balance and plunge headlong into the year 2021. I will be sewn into Eruna's dress of 2021.

“Big sis, thank you! You made me such beautiful clothes.”

"I don’t care about your dress! I didn’t kill myself for you!”

Somehow, I manage to get up, but before I can catch my breath, Eruna pursues me. My gun is gone now. The only thing I can rely on is my own body.

We advance through the year 2021 in vigorous combat. From within Eruna’s dress, I fight against her. Against the backdrop of my countless deaths, drenched in my blood, we push toward the future. I struggle to win my future.

Yes, this will be the end, my last year 2021.

“I will beat you! I will defeat you. I will escape from the locked room!”

The seasons flow. The warm, spring sun gives way to sweltering, summer heat. The cool, autumn breeze turns to the freezing cold of winter. We run deeper and deeper into the closed corridor of time, and at the deepest part, the last

wall comes into view: December 31st, 2021. Hour 23, minute 59, second 59!

This is it! Now it's time to decide this battle once and for all!

I will unleash my all-out special move! Wait, special move? What? Do I even have a special move?

Ah, did I forget? I am the ultimate detective. Right now, I'm trying to solve the ultimate locked-room murder case. And what is the special move of the ultimate detective? There could only be one!

With all my might, I shout:

"BARITSU...!"

[Translator's note: Baritsu is a misspelling of Bartitsu, an English self-defense style that haphazardly mixes boxing, jujutsu, and kickboxing. This misspelling was popularized in the Sherlock Holmes *books as a form of Japanese martial arts that can fix writing yourself into a corner]*

The scenery changes.

"Is this...?" I ask.

“Sister, don't you know your inner universe?”

Yes. That’s right. Eruna’s answer is correct. I shouldn’t have asked. I knew the answer from the beginning.

The sound of great rivers echo all around us. An infinite number of rivers are flowing, swelling, and surging.

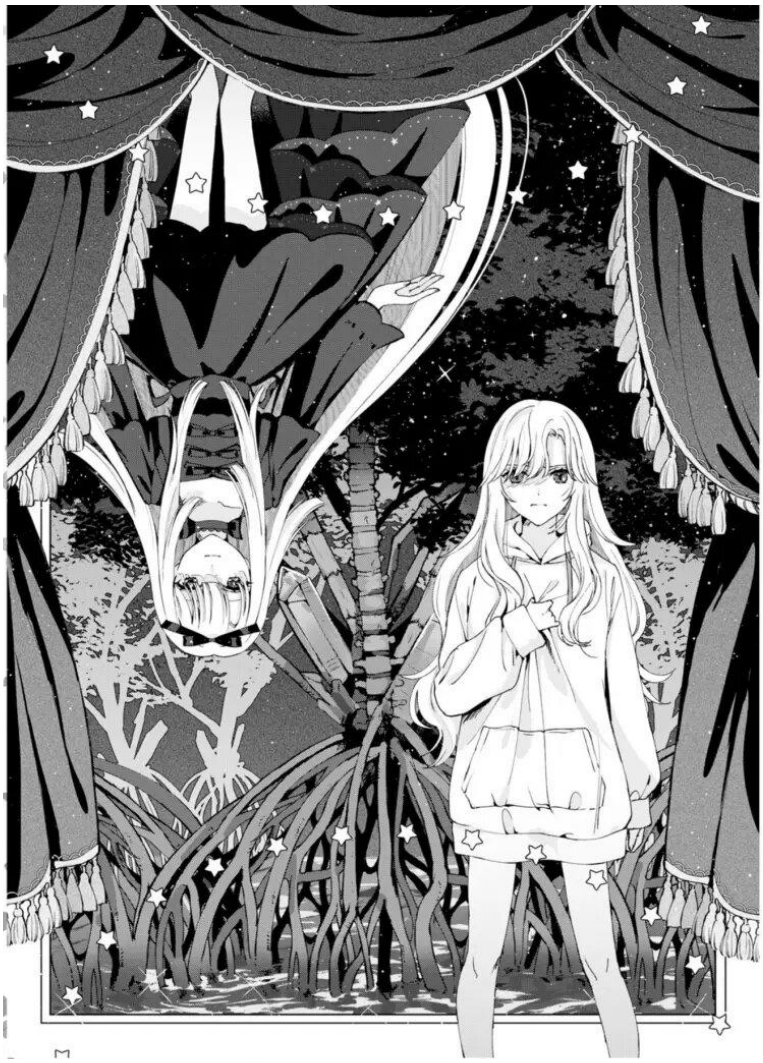
This is time. I know it intuitively. Chain links of events flow together as time.

There are certain things hanging over the river of time. I know it's a fundamental error to call them trees. But it’s impossible to describe them without using such a metaphor.

However, these “trees” do not give the impression of actually being plants. But it’s difficult to call them animals either. All beings in this world—plants, animals, fungi, minerals, man-

made things—all seem to have been mingled together into one. It is all modeled after me. It's all a hideous parody of my spinal cord, blood vessels, and nerves.
I feel a nostalgia that stabs through my heart, but at the same time I'm filled with disgust.

Trees thrive here and there along the river, stretching out their tube-like roots and sucking up nutrients from time itself. The roots cross and penetrate not just one river, but multiple.



"You've finally come, sister. This is our end, our final destination. Fate has led us here."

Hearing Eruna's whisper, I am convinced.

The final investigation begins. There is no turning back now.

I ponder. This guessing game will be the final phase of our battle, the struggle between Magical Girls and non-Magical Girls.

First, let's put the problem in perspective. The final case to be solved is the ultimate locked-room murder: my suicide.

The case has already reached a tentative answer, but the true culprit still remains a mystery. In order to solve this locked-room murder, three ultimate questions have to be answered. The first and third have been answered. What remains is the second question: "What are we?"

What are we? The question may also be phrased: "What is a soul?"

A soul; in our journey so far, its existence has been a great mystery that's been taken for granted. What is the soul, which possesses an energy which transcends the theory of

everything? And what is the power of magic that the soul radiates?

Emotional energy, a power that is not bound by entropy.

Then what is entropy?

It is the number of possible states, I think to myself. More precisely, it is the logarithm of the number of possible states, but the details don't matter.

So, does this mean that the function of emotional energy is to reduce the number of possible states of future events? Narrowing down the number of possible outcomes for an event? Hmm, is there another way to phrase it?

Yes, it could be called fate.

"Good job, big sister. You're correct. Emotional energy is the power of fate."

It appears we're on the right track so far. Let's continue.

Let's think back, to the time of the icy assault by Eruna. The events that were removed from the time sequence at that point fizzled out and vanished in the blink of an eye. Could this be because the forces of fate were no longer at work? Isolated from the timeline, the events are outside the forces of fate. Entropy is maximized and the number of possible states is also maximized. In other words, they dissipate without the guidance of fate.

In modern quantum theory, the field and the particle–distinctor are equivalent entities. Hence, there must be a particle of fate—a destino.

What is the most fundamental force of destiny? It must be the particle of destiny, the destino. And what is the soul if not this destino?

Ah! Yes, it must be so. It's easy once I realized it.

The destino, the soul, is a time loop!

Why?

It becomes clear when we consider its anti-entropic nature. Entropy reduction for the past is memory, and entropy reduction for the future is prediction. Both memory and prediction are about limiting the possible number of ways an event could or could have occurred.

So, what are memory and prediction at their most basic and atomic? They are memory and prediction about oneself in an infinitely repeating time loop. There are no unpredictable or misremembered events. No surprises of any kind. An absolutely monotonous, eternal recurrence. The number of possible outcomes is fixed at one and the entropy is reduced to zero.

"Oh! I see..."

I marvel as I reach the truth of this world. The soul is a perpetual time loop. The force that pulls us towards minimal entropy is emotional energy.

Even if they are not Magical Girls, beings with souls can manifest and use magical emotional energy, albeit to a very

small extent. Memories and predictions are nothing less than a form of magic. As an eternal time loop, the soul creates a place of destiny, a sequence of events that form time. Here, the full picture of the ultimate locked-room murder case is revealed.

The function of the soul is anti-entropy, which works as memory and prediction. Since memory is a prediction of the past, it can be said that the soul is a prediction machine.

Then, what is the function of human relations, which are the aggregates of souls?

It is hyper-prediction. That is, to predict the predictions. One soul's prediction is predicted by another's soul, which is in turn predicted by another.

As long as the relationship persists, it will continue to expand. But in practice, the predictions converge at a certain point. Thus, the timeline is created with that point as its stabilizing vertex. Emotion is all about being drawn to a central point.

Magical Girls, or more precisely, the relationships between Magical Girls, are highly capable of creating such points of attraction, and thus Magical Girls are more profoundly incorporated into the karmic order of the fate of the entire human race and the whole universe.

Accordingly, the more deeply entwined a girl is within the karmic order of fate, the more powerful her potential as a Magical Girl is.

Then what is suicide? It is the waste heat of the hyper-predictive machine of human relationships. It is the erasure of the soul in order to remove predictions that no longer fit the central vertex of fate.

“Good guess, sister. How did you arrive there? You still failed to guess the most important thing though.”

Ah, yes, I'm still missing the point. I must deduce the most crucial detail, the true perpetrator of the ultimate crime: the origin of the soul.

The origin of the soul...! The most basic eternal recurrence.

Then I notice it, and a premonition rises within me. Once born, it is a terrifying awareness that spreads through my heart and cannot be erased.

Eruna smirks with an innocent, and therefore wicked, smile.

“You noticed it, big sis,” she says before holding something up.

What is that? Wait, I’ve seen this somewhere before.

I search my mind for the memory. It’s the letter, the letter that was literally in my head. By receiving this letter, I boarded the Time Railroad and traveled 800,000 years into the future. That journey made me who I am now. It made us.

Eruna lets go of the letter. Drifting in the air, it is blown away by winds of fate.

“This is the place where destiny begins—the epicenter of fate”

The circle of time is complete. The serpent of reincarnation swallows its own tail.

And I ponder. Who am I? Where did my soul come from? And what are we now?

Remember, what was our wish? Our wish—when we were as one, when we made our contract...

We were mere fertilized eggs, and what is the desire of a fertilized egg? Only one thing.

To divide and proliferate.

That wish was granted. We divided.

Who are we? We already know. This time loop that we are in, entangled in, swallowed up in, dragged along in—

it is an endless, eternal repetition. The eternal regression itself is us.

It was only natural that Kyubey said I lacked a soul. The entity known as Incubator could not recognize the whole picture of this time loop that transcends the timeline.

We ourselves, our souls, divided and proliferated under our wish.

Eruna hugs me and whispers gently, “It’s wonderful, sis! We will multiply forever and expand infinitely…”

And the world will be filled to the brim. That is the image that comes to mind, souls multiplying without limit through wishes. A pandemic of souls.

Souls that proliferate unchecked become an aggregate, forming relationships. Human relationships, as hyper-predictive machines, converge predictions on central vertices, expanding the field of fate, and forming time as a sequence of events.

Relationships strengthen through symbiotic narratives. For stronger relationships, *Homo sapiens* exterminate Neanderthals and *Homo magica* exterminate *Homo sapiens*.

The Time Railroad is laid before us, and human relationships cover the farthest reaches of space and time...

Finally, after this long journey, the ultimate culprit of everything, yes, all things, has been revealed at last.

The real criminal is myself, and this is my whole crime.

What an untenable crime.

Profound yet shallow, pathetically hilarious, and bizarre yet ordinary.

Is this my destiny? Fate in me? I in fate?

We are our destiny?

“That's right. I am us and we are destiny. Let's live together in our destiny, big sister.”

"No...!”

I jerk myself out of Eruna’s embrace.

"I will fight. I will oppose whatever fate has in store for me!”

My darkness deepens, and I’m on the verge of drowning in my despair.

But still, I struggle on.

I know. I know it’s meaningless...

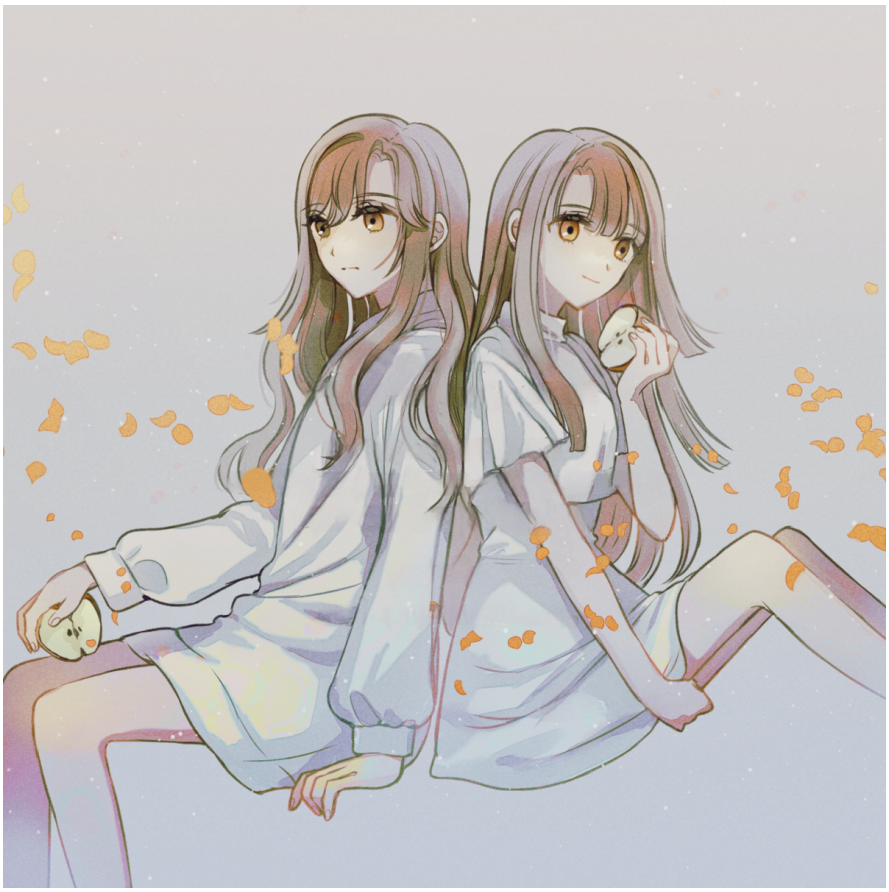
The outcome of this war is already determined. I cannot win. Because infinite, eternal recurrence is my destiny.

I cannot overcome us. In the end, we will sink, drown, and be strangled and crushed in cruelty. Still...resist! Even if it’s pointless, even if it’s worthless.

That's my mission as the Null Magical Girl.

In the face of overwhelming despair, the curtain falls on this story.

(THE END ∞)



Thank you for reading!

If you would like to help improve the translation of “Null Magical Girl” please contact nymphatix#9154 on Discord so you can be given access to the raw Japanese and translation documents!