

I! Cleaner 231

Chapter 231 Question and Retest_1

"Baskin... I... I truly regret it..."

At night, in a small cabin within the rebel settlement, after drinking a glass of cheap wine with a gloomy expression, the red-faced chubby man held 'Little Baskin's' neck, tears flowing down his face, and said,

"If you hadn't come to save me back then, maybe the injuries on my body could have been less, I could drink less after being laid off, and your family wouldn't be in its current state..."

Boo hoo hoo... I... I really tried to scrape money together for you back then, not only the house and my wife's jewelry, but I even sold the reserved spot that wouldn't be cut by the military department, yet in the end, I couldn't even gather one-tenth of it.

I... I didn't not want to give you money, truly I didn't!

I really tried hard, even going to the relief bureau to beg... but your wife's illness was truly beyond saving, and if I had given you all the money to throw in, not only would your son not be taken care of, but you'd most likely starve, and so would my wife...

I... I wronged my wife, I wronged you, I wronged your wife, I wronged your son, I wronged your entire family!

I... I spent my whole life... I didn't do right by anyone!"

"..."

"I'm sorry... Owen mistook you for the old Baskin after drinking too much, making you watch a joke..."

Amidst the incoherent cries and howls of the drunken chubby man, a gentle-looking woman wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes, with a slightly pleading expression said to 'Little Baskin,'

"I know I'm not suitable to say this... but... but could you not blame your Uncle Owen, he really did his best back then... could you?"

"Mm..."

Looking at the woman in front of him, who was probably not even forty but appeared quite old, Leon couldn't help but nod, murmuring an "mm."

After understanding the past of these two families through the fragmented recollections after the chubby man drank, even though he didn't have the same experiences as the real Little Baskin, a heaviness seemed to settle in his chest, as if something was blocking it, and his breathing inexplicably became difficult, suddenly making him want to go out for some fresh air.

"Little Baskin..."

Seeing Leon, who hung his head silently, the gentle woman sighed and then said,

"You haven't been drinking, but it's already late, your home is still at the other end of the valley. Why don't you just stay and sleep in Owen's room today?"

"No."

Shaking his head to refuse the woman's kindness, Leon said softly,

"Aunt Fanny, I haven't tidied up at home yet, and... I want to go out for some fresh air."

"Fine... then button up your clothes, don't catch a cold."

"Mm."

After leaving through the door with the gentle reminder from the woman, Leon made his way quickly down the dark dirt road toward the other end of the valley.

...

As undercover missions went, this time's reconnaissance was rather a failure.

Apart from being a competent listener and hearing the chubby man talk about many past matters, he didn't gain much intelligence about the rebel higher-ups, nor did he even figure out where his own residence was.

But... it seemed it wasn't entirely fruitless.

At the very least, he confirmed that most of these rebels weren't power-hungry opportunists, but ordinary people who only wanted to live a peaceful life.

After finding a slightly elevated spot to sit, Leon observed the layout of the entire valley's buildings while seriously contemplating what he should do.

If he only considered it from the identity of a Purification Bureau Cleaner, he had already found the rebels' settlement, identified the rebel leader, and preliminarily secured a foothold.

Next, all he needed to do was showcase his "abnormal" and join those rebels who possessed anomalous objects to complete the mission, help the Princess regain her identity, and thoroughly destroy this organization.

But aside from those eight or nine anomalous object holders, the entire rebel group consisted of nearly a thousand people, and aside from their family members, quite a few even were under wanted and bounty lists.

They relied on that leader's strange 'door ability' to take refuge in this valley, and if they returned to the Capital City, they would likely be immediately captured and thrown into prison, and their families would once again lose the means to maintain their existence.

Although all of this seemed to have nothing to do with him, once he controlled those anomalous object holders, the rest would fall outside his work scope, but...

Looking at the coat that the gentle woman had draped over him before he went out, and the tear stains left by the chubby man crying on the lapel, Leon couldn't help but sigh deeply.

Replacing someone else's identity... didn't seem to be an easy task either...

"Little Baskin?"

As Leon let out a long sigh, a middle-aged man with graying hair silently emerged from the nearby shadows, frowned, and asked,

"What are you doing here?"

Finally willing to come out, huh? This man's guard was really up...

Having already detected his presence and deliberately approached him, Leon had equipped the Performer Badge in advance. Upon hearing the inquiry, he jolted his whole body and turned around with a look of surprise, feigning astonishment as he said,

"Leader Sir? What are you doing here?"

"This place isn't far from where I stay, I couldn't sleep and came out for a stroll."

Not minding Leon's counter-question, the middle-aged man first answered, his eyes flickering,

"What about you? Why are you not home so late?"

"Home..."

Leon fell silent for a moment upon hearing his words, then shook his head and said in a low voice,

"Where do I have a home?"

???

Hearing 'Little Baskin's' words, the middle-aged man couldn't help but frown, lifting his hand to point at a small dimly lit cabin in the distance.

Chapter 232 Question and Retest_2

""

"Little Baskin, what are you talking about? Isn't that your home?"

Oh, so that was "my" home.

Leon gazed wistfully at the small house, memorized its exact location, then shook his head indifferently, and said in a very light yet resolute voice, "That's not my home, it's just a house where I live."

"..."

Unaware that he had been baited, upon hearing "Little Baskin's" response, the middle-aged man's heart involuntarily quivered slightly, a wave of hollow pain surging up.

For Little Baskin, that was no longer his home... and the current Kingdom was also no longer his kingdom...

No matter how much change and effort I put in, what was meant to happen had already happened, he thought. *Wherever the world goes from here, whether the result is good or bad, it no longer concerns me.*

My family is long gone, my regrets doomed to remain unresolved, he reflected. *So for me, who no longer has a "home," is this Kingdom not just an empty house as well?*

"That's true..."

After Leon's phrase "that's not a home" left seven or eighty bloody holes on his heart, the middle-aged man sat down beside him and silently let the night wind blow.

...

After a short while, the "homeless youth" broke the silence first, gazing at the lights in the valley, he softly asked, "Leader... In the end, can we really change this country, so the tragedies that everyone suffers won't be repeated?"

"..."

"We can."

Though he didn't really believe this himself, the middle-aged man, who still needed the Rebels, nodded affirmatively, earnestly deceiving, "This country is beyond saving, as long as we keep trying, we will eventually sweep it into the trash heap and then on the ruins..."

"Leader."

Interrupting the middle-aged man's words somewhat impolitely, Leon said in a somewhat confused voice, "After you confirmed that I wasn't qualified, I thought seriously about how I could change the Kingdom without that kind of magical ability.

"But I found that I couldn't seem to do anything, even with you leading us, we couldn't do anything."

In the middle-aged man's somewhat shocked expression, "Little Baskin" spoke at a steady pace, "Although I haven't read much, looking at the situation in the upper and lower houses, I feel that the politics those big figures talk about is, in essence, convincing more people to believe in you, to agree with your judgment, to be willing to listen to you, and thus gather enough strength to change the status quo.

"Yet what we've done over these years is to make enemies everywhere... The nobles hate us, the merchants fear us, the royal family hunts us, even ordinary people are distancing themselves from us, only when forced by pain to the point of no return do they consider us a last resort.

"Leader, do you really believe that this can change the country? And even if you succeed in the end, how can you ensure that what rises from the ruins is the future you speak of, and not another doomed Kingdom heading towards decay from the start?"

"..."

After hearing these words that stabbed like knives into his heart, the middle-aged man abruptly stood up, scrutinizing "Little Baskin" in disbelief, then cautiously demanded, "Who taught you to say this? Or... are you not Little Baskin?"

"?"

"Leader? What are you talking about?"

Hearing his words, "Little Baskin" looked up in surprise, baffled, "If I'm not Little Baskin, then who am I? And these words weren't taught by anyone; I thought of them myself."

At this point, Leon sighed deeply and briefly mentioned listening to past stories at Uncle Owen's house. Following that, with a "confused look," he gazed at the middle-aged man, speaking with longing, "By the way, Leader, since you can be our leader, naturally you are the one who knows the most among us. There are some things I'd like to ask you.

"Uncle Owen and... my father, they were right to fight for the country, and the Kingdom gave a generous pension, so it's not wrong, my mother and I did nothing wrong either, so why did it end like this?

"My mother has to die in the hospital, my father became a worthless man, I have to endure the past of being beaten every day, and Uncle Owen, who tried his best to help my family, has to feel guilty for a lifetime... Can you tell me why these things happen?

"Also, under your leadership, apart from being able to break things everywhere, because we don't even dare to show our faces and are stuck in this small valley, do we really have the ability to change all this?"

"..."

...

Could Little Baskin be real?

Mumbling incoherently in response and hastily escaping the high cliffs after a barrage of soul-searching questions dispelled his doubts yet left his mind reeling, the middle-aged man wandered aimlessly back home in the night.

Why did I go out to talk with him? Wouldn't it have been better to just leave? What were those questions he asked? Why couldn't I answer even one of them?

And just from discovering he lacked the Talent to become something extraordinary, could Little Baskin think of so many things? I've obviously been through so much in my past life, he mused bitterly, *but why can't I figure anything out? Are differences between people really this big?*

Carrying a belly full of messy questions, he staggered to his home, ready to push the door open when suddenly his expression turned alert, and he looked towards the nearby large tree.

"Who's there?"

"Leader, it's me..."

Under his cold gaze, a man with a bloated figure and flushed cheeks, smelling strongly of alcohol, sheepishly stepped out from behind the tree, shooting him an awkward grin.

Old Owen?

After slightly furrowing his brows, the middle-aged man relaxed his guard a bit, asking curiously, "What are you doing here so late instead of resting? Do you have something urgent?"

"Actually... it's nothing urgent... I just wanted to ask if you could use that watch to test Little Baskin again."

Presenting a hair he retrieved from the drinking table with both hands, the fat uncle, now much soberer, explained with a slightly pleading expression, "Leader, Little Baskin carried a big barrel of oil all by himself during the day, he was already tired then, and he suffered beatings these past days, lacking proper sleep, maybe he wasn't in the best condition, and just barely missed meeting your standard.

"That kid didn't say much the whole day after failing your test, even tonight, although he hates when others drink, he took a couple of sips himself and has been distracted ever since. I'm a bit worried about him.

"Leader, could you possibly test him again? What if he passes this time?"

"..."

So it's because of this; you truly see him as your son...

Looking at the hair in the fat uncle's hand, the middle-aged man couldn't help but shake his head helplessly.

"Owen, this test isn't one of those where the results drop because you didn't get enough sleep or just exercised intensely... hmm..."

At this point, seeing the uncle's imploring gaze, the middle-aged man hesitated slightly, recalling Little Baskin's peculiar questions, showing a trace of uncertainty in his eyes.

"Alright."

After pondering for a bit, he, surprisingly to himself, nodded, taking the black hair from the uncle's hand and lightly rubbed it on the side of the wristwatch.

"Kr-chk~"

Under his operation, the noise of gears meshing sounded again, the watch soon "opened its mouth" and swallowed the hair, vigorously "chewing" it.

"Owen, though I'm willing to test again, you shouldn't hope too much."

As the watch began its evaluation, the middle-aged man gently reminded him, "This device measures not just the body but leans heavily on aspects of mind and will, and Little Baskin did fall short in these areas, so even retesting probably still..."

"Click, click, click, click, click, click."

Watching as the pointer, without even a slight wobble, hit right against the six crisp collisions, all moved to the far right, firmly locking in place, in fact, trying to move even further right, the middle-aged man's eyes instantly bulged, sharply inhaling a breath of cold air.

"What?????"

Chapter 233 Future and Notification_1

'What if all six watch hands started moving?'

The middle-aged man's body trembled uncontrollably after witnessing the wristwatch's six pointers violently spring up simultaneously, only to settle steadily at the far-right end of the dial.

'If the six pointers... then it's a painful past, a great future... destined to change the world!'

'For people like us... following them means a slim chance of survival... standing against them means certain death...'

'Don't do anything unnecessary! Stay as far away as you can!'

The few words exchanged with the Aquarius Director during the day rapidly replayed in his mind countless times, until they were stripped down, leaving only a final piece of advice.

Stay as far away as you can!

The middle-aged man knew very well his own limitations; even possessing a rare abnormal ability, the Aquarius Director of the Purification Bureau was still an untouchable force for him.

Someone like that, someone even he wasn't willing to provoke, the best choice was to heed the advice and leave immediately upon discovery.

But Young Baskin was, after all, "one of us," and might not necessarily conflict with him. Even during the day, he hadn't met the standard; he might have just completed his "shedding," perhaps not yet reaching a level that required immediate avoidance, and besides...

There really wasn't much time left for him and the Kingdom.

He glanced toward the northwest and saw the towering silhouette illuminated by countless lights, still guiding the approaching Sky Clippers, and his fists clenched involuntarily.

The scouts sent by the Crolock Kingdom should've already detected the Kingdom's special mineral deposits. If he couldn't destroy the Boarding Tower and kill those scouts carrying the mineral data, an invasion many times fiercer than six years ago would be inevitable!

And the thousand Rebel members in the valley, along with the weapons accumulated over these years, were his means to assault the Boarding Tower, kill the scouts, and thus secure the Kingdom's most critical card!

If he chose to withdraw immediately to avoid being implicated by Young Baskin, what could a lone person even do, despite knowing the future?

Would he sacrifice all his remaining life span to deliver a message to Joshua about the future? By that wretched existence, even with knowledge of the future, what good would it do?

Damn it! Why! Young Baskin! Why did you have to appear at this moment?

...

It worked! It actually worked!

Seeing all the pointers leap to the far right after swallowing Young Baskin's hair, the chubby uncle was overjoyed and looked excitedly at the Rebel leader, eager to seize the moment and speak a few good words for Young Baskin.

However, on the middle-aged man's face at this moment, there was no sign of joy. Instead, there was shock and a hint of struggling menace.

"Leader... sir?"

"Hmm?"

Snapped back to awareness by the chubby uncle's call, the middle-aged man's eyes cleared, and he once again displayed a friendly smile, gently patting the chubby uncle's shoulder and praising him,

"Very good! Owen, very good! Not only is Young Baskin's talent good, but you did well too! If it wasn't for you, I would have missed such a promising youngster!"

Upon seeing the middle-aged man return to normal, showering both him and Young Baskin with praise, the chubby uncle breathed a sigh of relief, his chubby red face revealing a simple smile.

"This is what I should do. Without your protection, most people in this valley would find it hard to live a normal life. Young Baskin surely thinks the same. Knowing he can help you, he should be very happy!"

"Haha, this time it's not just good news; once he gains a special ability, his burden will also increase significantly.

"Right, I'm planning to have a meeting to discuss our future actions. Bring him to see me directly tomorrow morning!"

"Yes, leader! I will definitely inform him by tomorrow!"

"Go on, go on."

With the middle-aged man smiling, the chubby uncle, still a bit tipsy, left with a joyous expression, staggering back toward his home.

But just reaching the end of the small path, out of the middle-aged man's sight, the chubby uncle, full of earlier joy, immediately stopped and slapped himself twice, then ran toward Young Baskin's house with gritted teeth!

Bad news!

Although the leader quickly regained his composure, his initial expression was definitely not right! This test is more likely a curse than a blessing! Bringing Young Baskin's hair might have put the child in danger instead!

"Bang!"

He kicked open the flimsy wooden door of Young Baskin's house, which was barred, and seeing Young Baskin at the table under an old oil lamp, drawing something, the chubby uncle, whom sweat had sobered, urged breathlessly,

"Quick! Pack your things! Something's wrong!"

Something's wrong?

Without any change in expression, Leon quietly put away his hand-drawn map of the valley and somewhat puzzled, asked,

"Uncle Owen... what happened? Why are you in such a hurry?"

How could I not be anxious? The leader might want to kill you!

After quickly explaining the situation and his recent discovery, the sweaty-faced chubby uncle stomped his foot in frustration,

"Young Baskin! It seems that the more the needle moves on the dial, the worse it is. Before taking you tomorrow morning, the leader's expression was very off; he probably means harm!

"Damn it! It's all my fault! If I hadn't taken your hair to ask for another test, maybe nothing would have happened... Anyway, you have to go quickly! It might be too late if you delay any longer!"

So... you took my hair to test again? Did I just pluck out a whole bunch of dog fur for nothing?

Recalling Young Ha's bald patch on its butt, Leon, unexpectedly betrayed, could only shake his head helplessly, giving up all hope in his dogshit luck.

Fine, sudden misfortune or whatever, I've grown a bit used to it. Every time I plan to do something, unexpected events are almost certain.

"Uncle Owen, don't worry yet; maybe it's not as bad as you think."

After reassuring the chubby uncle for a bit, although the news indeed caught him off guard, Leon felt confident because of the Heart of Ambition to protect him. He calmly assessed the current situation, then asked,

"Then what about you? If I just leave now, what will you do? What about Aunt Fanny?"

"We can't leave."

On the way here, having already pondered over this issue, the chubby uncle replied with a face full of bitterness,

"Even if Fanny and I could get out, what about Nicole?"

Chapter 234 200 NIE YUAN_1

""

"..."

It seemed like my intelligence gathering was still not thorough enough.

Ryan had no idea who the "Nicole" mentioned by the fat uncle was, so his prepared persuasion got stuck and couldn't proceed.

The fat uncle clearly assumed Ryan knew this person called "Nicole," so he didn't explain further. Instead, he rolled up the bedding on the bed, stuffed some money and necessities inside, tied it up with a rope, and strapped it onto Ryan's back.

"Go! Hurry up!"

After dragging the reluctant Ryan out of the house, the fat uncle tore open his own coat, pulled out the stuffing used for warmth, and shoved it into the collar of "Little Baskin." Then he forced two wind-resistant thick coats onto him and pointed to the dim mountain path in the distance, urging,

"If you leave through the 'door,' the leader will definitely find out. You have to take the mountain path! Then head south to Laine County, and don't come back!"

"..."

Looking at the fat uncle in front of him, who whispered anxiously and urged him repeatedly, Leon, who was stuffed like a plump bear, couldn't help but try his best to resist,

"Actually... I think things might not have reached..."

"Go!"

After giving "Little Baskin" a hard shove, the fat uncle angrily urged,

"I know you're afraid of implicating me and Fanny, but even though the leader seems kind, he is actually a proud person. If only the two of us old folks are left, he might not do anything to us.

But if you stay and don't leave, he will definitely take action against you! I saw his expression clearly at the time, believe me! He won't tolerate you!"

"Uh... what if I go ask him and see..."

"Go! Do you have to drive me to death to be satisfied?"

"Alright..."

Seeing the fat uncle stomping his feet in the cold wind with anger, Ryan knew he couldn't stay with conventional means, so he sighed deeply, in line with "Little Baskin's" character, and then, wearing the "bear warmth suit" forced by the fat uncle, turned and walked up the mountain path out of the valley.

Finally sent him away....

Just as the fat uncle stood in the cold night wind, watching Ryan leave, another person stood on a high rock, squinting in the dark, watching the only road out of the valley.

As expected, things went as I thought.

Watching the distant "bear" trudging up the mountain path, the middle-aged man on the high rock let out a long breath.

Following him was not an option, nor was confronting him. The best way to deal with such a prickly situation, that couldn't be ignored, was to make a little noise and let him perceive the danger and leave on his own.

As for Little Baskin, Old Owen had always treated him like his own child, so as long as he showed a hint of hostility, it would be enough to alarm him, prompting him to actively seek out Little Baskin and scare away the troublesome prickly hedgehog, thereby achieving his goal of maintaining stability.

What would happen to Little Baskin in the future was not something to ponder now.

For himself and this kingdom, the most important thing at the moment was to disperse the police force's patrols, then launch a full-scale attack on the Boarding Tower before the Crolock Kingdom's agents left, destroy the data on mineral distribution, and kill all those who could bring destruction!

"Phew..."

After deciding what to do next, the middle-aged man once again exhaled, then turned and walked down the rock to his place, sitting at a table piled with various data.

"Barton... Sigh..."

Looking at the data from the police department on the desk, remembering the reliable subordinates that folded in the Secret Investigation Bureau, the middle-aged man couldn't help but sigh again.

The police department's patrol map... After Barton's rebel identity was exposed, the intelligence he desperately sent out was already of little significance.

However, it was because of looking at this defense map and noticing the signature in the lower right corner, remembering loyal Barton, that his mood turned heavy and he went for a walk, coincidentally encountering the transforming Little Baskin and sending away this hidden ticking bomb ahead of time.

Perhaps... this is Barton's blessing.

After sighing lightly, the middle-aged man put the defense map aside, then reached out to light the whale oil lamp on the table, and began reading through other materials.

The personnel situation of Ryan Armaments Company... might be useful.

After the new Duke of Lionheart took power, the veterans of Ryan Armaments began seeking their own paths and desperately selling assets. Perhaps, they could take the opportunity to acquire some powerful weapons, making it easier to attack the Boarding Tower with people.

The shipping company's schedule along with the special passenger list... very important!

Those agents mostly entered the Capital City by water, then took the Sky Clipper back to the Crolock Kingdom. Although it was unknown which agent discovered the mineral deposit, they were certainly on the passenger lists of these private ships.

The construction plan of the Boarding Tower... this would be the last resort!

Picking up the feather pen at hand, the middle-aged man's eyes revealed a hint of ruthlessness as he circled several main beams of the Boarding Tower.

If they could fight their way in, get the data recording the mineral deposits, but if they couldn't reach the top, for the sake of the kingdom's safety, they would have to find a way to blow up the entire Boarding Tower, costs be damned!

...

"Sizzle..."

As the whale oil lamp burned gently and the cotton-wick length shortened, the thick white grease in the brass lamp decreased.

Yet, as the lamp's light dimmed due to a lack of fuel, the darkness outside gradually turned clear.

Eventually, the morning sunlight streamed softly through the thin curtains, scattering into the room, lighting up the table piled with various data, as well as the middle-aged man who had stayed awake all night in front of it.

Phew... It's almost done!

Rubbing his bloodshot eyes, looking at the action files compiled through the entire night without sleep, the graying middle-aged man nodded in satisfaction, then stood up, took his coat from the hanger, and walked out of the room with the files.

Next, *it was the time for a "showdown!"*

After glancing at the meeting house in the center of the valley, the middle-aged man, who appeared aged, confidently walked toward his destination.

To save the kingdom, I have made all necessary preparations! Be it weapons, equipment, intelligence, manpower, everything is impeccable!

Even at the most critical moment, with Barton's blessing, I discovered and successfully defused a deadly hidden bomb, eliminating all potential disruptions.

Finally, just by setting a great fire in Louther Arcade to engage the Capital City's defense forces, then sending the remaining Anomalous Object holders to attack everywhere, diverting the already scarce Cleaners of the Virgin Branch, there would be no one left to stop me from attacking the Boarding Tower!

"My plan, infallible..."

As he turned a corner, seeing the "bear" curled up with two thick blankets, snoring at the "conference room" door, the middle-aged man's lips trembled, and his face suddenly turned a deep shade of iron blue.

"*Didn't you leave yesterday? Why did you come back?*"

Chapter 235 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 1)_1

"Leader?"

After scanning the middle-aged man's complexion, Leon, who had spent the night sleeping in the wild, sniffled and asked with a concerned expression,

"You don't look so well. Are you feeling unwell somewhere?"

"..."

Why don't you think a bit and guess why I might not look well after seeing someone?

The middle-aged man's answer to the clingy small Baskin came almost through gritted teeth.

"Not bad..."

To be fair, compared to a certain prince who was preoccupied with hierarchy and power struggles, the middle-aged man's emotional control had improved significantly after witnessing the country's downfall and the kingdom's destruction.

After taking a deep breath, he managed to regain some of his usual calm. He didn't lose his composure due to unexpected circumstances but instead smiled faintly and continued at an appropriate distance,

"As for my body, there's an important meeting today, so I stayed up late last night and may indeed be a bit tired... Oh right, didn't you go home last night, small Baskin? Why did you sleep here?"

Of course, it was to attend the important meeting you mentioned.

Besides, without enough intelligence gathered, the grandparents with memory abilities unlocated, and another potential Prince Joshua undiscovered, how could I leave?

Moreover... Why do I feel like, compared to the killing intent the fat uncle mentioned, this rebel leader's look towards me holds even more dread?

...

Through the subtle change in the middle-aged man's demeanor, Leon inadvertently squinted his eyes, noticing some differences.

There was no way he could leave; definitely impossible!

Given a rare chance to confirm the Aquarius Director's whereabouts, if he didn't take advantage of this window to understand the rebels entirely, he courted death should the Director's inquiry fails and he returns to the Capital City, only for Leon to sneak into the rebels again.

And now, with the most formidable Aquarius Director partaking in the inquiry, the remaining rebels likely had no way to handle the Heart of Ambition, at most capturing him. Yet, he still had the Whale Oil Bomb that senior Jerry gave him.

According to senior Jerry, its power could obliterate an entire building instantaneously, so if he got caught due to exposure, he could always cry for Young Ha to throw the Whale Oil Bomb, blowing their faces directly!

From the few rebels he had encountered, the ability of these anomalous object holders seemed very singular, making them unlikely to have protective abilities. At close range, even a Nail Gun could be too much for them, let alone if they faced a Whale Oil Bomb head-on, potential total annihilation was possible.

Great! The advantage was mine!

After quickly assessing the enemy's strengths and weaknesses and confirming that not only would he be in no danger, but he also had the ability to "unfairly pass," Leon's heart settled completely. Then, playing the role of "small Baskin," he gave the middle-aged man a rather "aloof" smile.

"Didn't Uncle Owen ask me to come find you yesterday? I feared oversleeping would delay matters, so I simply came over last night to keep watch in advance. Looking at it now, the timing is just right."

"Heh, you are quite cautious."

After exchanging a few perfunctorily polite sentences, the middle-aged man opened the door and entered the "meeting room" first, heading to the head of the long table to sit down.

Speaking of which... Why does small Baskin feel a bit off?

Watching him consciously sit at the very end of the long table, directly opposite himself, a hint of doubt flashed through the middle-aged man's eyes.

Although he didn't know how Owen spoke to him, small Baskin must have already known he had shown hostility towards him yesterday.

However, not only did he not leave overnight, but he also came knocking on the door, even pretending nothing happened last night. These actions practically belonged to another person, not something the paranoid and cold small Baskin could do.

But if he was not the real small Baskin, then what about those lethal questions last night?

...

"Leader."

Although he noticed the suspicion in the middle-aged man's eyes, thinking he feared him more than wished to kill him, judging that he wouldn't strike first, Leon's actions became considerably more "unrestrained."

After surveying the rebels' "headquarters," "small Baskin," sitting with his back to the door, asked with some anticipation,

"Weren't you going to have a meeting? Why haven't the others arrived yet?"

"Soon."

With a knowing glance at "small Baskin," the middle-aged man checked his wristwatch, maintaining a calm demeanor as he replied,

"They'll be here shortly..."

"Bam!"

Before the middle-aged man had finished speaking, a rather rough noise of a door being opened echoed, accompanied by a peculiar exclamation.

"What a fragrance! It's the smell of yesterday's tiger!"

???

What fragrance? Tiger?

No way... Do the rebels' diets really have such variety? Eating even tigers?

Leon turned around in surprise to find that the previously solid wood door had, somehow, become a strange iron gate... or prison cell door.

And a man covered in extensive burns was striding through the cell door, his two vicious orange-yellow eyes brimming with interest as he studied him.

"His name is Teague."

After a succinct introduction, the middle-aged man, with a blank expression, said to the burned man,

"This is small Baskin, a soon-to-be member with an anomalous object..."

"Leader."

Upon hearing this, Leon timely interrupted,

"If by anomalous object, you mean the special power, then I think I already have it now."

?!!!

Upon hearing "small Baskin's" words, the middle-aged man's complexion changed slightly, and the dread in his eyes became several degrees more intense.

To awaken anomalously without even possessing the "Seed of Abnormality" —could a Level One Talent really be that terrifying?

"..."

"Uh-huh, I understand."

After several seconds of silence, the middle-aged man, having regained emotional stability, took a deep breath and, having no clue how to handle this hot potato, vaguely nodded, fudging his way through. He then instructed the burn-scarred man, who was fixated on "small Baskin,"

"Teague, take a seat first. I'll introduce small Baskin's situation once everyone arrives."

"Alright."

Usually indifferent to the "weakling" leader, this time, due to something occupying his attention, the burned man didn't object, directly sitting next to Leon, with those more beastly than human eyes fixated on him.

(◉_◉)

"Do you want to be the leader?"

"Huh?"

Lightly dilated nostrils, savoring the "强者芬芳" rushing from his nose straight to his lungs, the burned man grinned, revealing a set of dazzling white teeth, and beamed at Leon.

"You're much more reliable than him, and if you want to be the leader, I'll support you!"

Chapter 236 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 2)_1

This fool!

Watching the burned man who had just come in and started babbling nonsense before even warming his seat, the middle-aged man felt a throbbing pain in his temples.

He had stayed up all night to regain his confidence, only to have half of it ruined by a "hot potato" sleeping at the door. Now, the burned man was openly supporting that "hot potato" to become the new leader in front of him, the current leader. *The confidence he had left was once again cut in half.*

Damn it... everything was supposed to be moving toward the goal he had planned. So why was it all going awry all of a sudden?

...

"Heh heh, Teague... old man, you're joking..."

While the middle-aged man was rubbing his temples in frustration, Leon, who was being harassed by the burned man, could hardly keep his composure, his expression growing stiff.

Seriously, you're the Rebels who have made the Capital City restless. Can you at least be a bit more reliable in your actions? Why would you slap 'the imperial robe' on someone and force me to take the position as soon as we meet?

If I really became the leader while undercover, what would the director think of me when I return? How would Yisha view me, racing around with secret police, trying to capture rebels? What about the Princess, who's engaged to me and has been targeted by rebels several times?

Could we not do this? This job truly doesn't suit me!

"Heh heh, I don't joke."

After taking another deep breath and greedily sniffing the scent coming from "Little Baskin," the burned man, grinning like a perverse creep, said,

"Amazing! The smell is truly amazing!"

"Just sitting next to you, I feel like my head is in the tiger's mouth... Little Baskin! Be honest, do you have the capability to kill me instantly?"

"Uh... my name is Little Baskin..."

"That's not important!"

Patting Leon on the shoulder, the burned man said eagerly,

"My nose tells me you're a true powerhouse! Strong both in methods and in heart. And don't be fooled by your smiling face at me; deep down, you look down on me, and Nathan too!"

"Ahaha! By the way, your scent is exactly like Nathan's back in the day!"

"It's just a pity he's lost it now and turned into a pile of stinking dog shit while losing the fragrance you're carrying! Little Baskin! Make sure you hold onto it and not become as unbearable as he is!"

"Uh..."

I do look down on what you rebels do, and I certainly look down on that leader of yours who leads you in chaos, but is that something you could smell?

Reflecting on the burned man's words, Leon realized there might be some deeper meaning veiled as insane rants, and he became instantly wary.

This madman's Ability... could it possibly be some sort of beast-like instinct?

However, just as Leon was speculating about the burned man's problem and prepared to probe his Ability, he felt a slight rise of the hair on his back, and his right ear caught a sharp rushing sound.

"Snap!"

With a pop as the air displaced, the burned man, who had been laughing toward Leon, leaned back slightly to dodge something rushing toward his mouth. That peculiar object, shrouded in momentum, embedded itself into the wall with a thud, sending a large chunk of plaster bursting out in pieces.

Was that... a lead pellet from a slingshot?

Seeing what was embedded in the wall, Leon felt a slight itch on his shoulder, remembering another lead pellet that had been shot from three kilometers away and still managed to shatter his shoulder blade.

"Teague!"

Stooping as she walked out from a small rainbow-painted door, the bald, slingshot-wielding woman said furiously,

"If I hear you speak of Lord Nathan that way again, the next pellet will definitely aim for your temple!"

"Heh heh, as you wish."

"You!"

"Never mind, sit down first!"

Raising his hand downward to make a calming gesture, just as he was about to introduce someone, he saw the door behind "Little Baskin" twist and shift continuously as five people—three men and two women—successively came in through the door.

Turning to look at the arriving members, Leon couldn't help but mull things over and notice these Rebel Anomalous Object holders were rather evenly distributed.

...

In the Secret Investigation Bureau, there was the tall scarred face director, a short man who snatched bodies at Ryan Manor, a pot-bellied middle-aged man resembling a wealthy merchant, and a lean young man, covering all height, body types, and ages.

Then, there were the beast-like burned man, the bald woman with a slingshot, an old lady with orange peel-bumpy skin and gray hair, and a bewildered young girl, rounding out the spectrum of gender, age, and physique.

There were twelve known Rebel Anomalous Object holders, apart from these eight "tall, short, fat, and thin, male, female, young, and old" people. The others known were the bandaged woman whose bandages he had taken, the heartbeat man caught and sent to headquarters, and the leader who could open doors anywhere...

So, was there still one person missing?

But strangely, just as Leon was looking at the main door to see who the twelfth rebel might be, he heard the middle-aged man in the main seat clap his hands and announce,

"Everyone, since we're all here, let's begin."

Was everyone here already?

Hearing the middle-aged man's words, Leon's brow slightly raised.

Although from the perspective of personnel, I'd like to know what this last Anomalous Object holder looks like to facilitate the arrest by the Bureau later.

But due to the lack of Intelligence now, I worry that asking 'why is one person missing' might result in 'how could you not know XXX does such and such' and thus prematurely expose my identity. So Leon simply turned around honestly and looked up at the middle-aged man in the main seat, however...

"Little Baskin, can you answer a question for me?"

Watching Leon, who had been staring at the door until he said "everyone was here" and only then turned around, the middle-aged man narrowed his eyes slightly and asked calmly,

"You seemed to think... someone else was coming in?"

"..."

Hell! I just turned back a bit late and I'm already suspected? Could it be that you're paranoid?

"No."

After secretly cursing the overly cautious Rebel leader twice, Leon shook his head and said with a normal expression,

"I was just curious about your Ability, Leader. It's just so magical how you can fold space to let us travel from such a far distance just by opening and closing a door."

"I see."

After hearing "Little Baskin's" explanation, the middle-aged man nodded ambiguously and continued staring at Leon as he asked,

"I thought you wanted to see her... By the way, it's been so long since she's come to attend a meeting that I can hardly remember her name. Could you remind me of it?"

"..."

Is this... him starting to suspect me?

Hearing what essentially was an "I suspect you're an imposter" question, Leon's heart skipped a beat.

"Leader, are you joking with me?"

Sensing the changing gazes of the rebels in the room, Leon slightly frowned, desperately trying to devise a strategy while attempting to delay with evasive small talk,

"Yesterday, Uncle Owen told me it seemed you held some hostility towards me, and I thought he'd just had too much to drink. But now it seems you really..."

"Stop, we can discuss that later."

Interrupting "Little Baskin's" ramble, the middle-aged man said slowly and clearly,

"I just want to know, what is her name?"

"..."

How the hell would I know that person's name?

Feeling the less-than-friendly gazes directed at him, Leon sighed and was just about to give a "I don't know" answer to enjoy the Rebels' binding package when a thought suddenly struck his mind, recalling what the middle-aged man said earlier.

"I thought you wanted to see her..."

So this last Anomalous Object holder is someone I... or rather Little Baskin knows?

Given Little Baskin's solitary nature, likely having a social circle not even filling one hand, the person's identity could probably be deduced from Uncle Fatty's family.

Last night, Uncle Fatty knew staying might be dangerous, yet he claimed they couldn't leave, that even if he and Aunt Fanny could go, but...

"Nicole."

Holding an approach of always filling in the answer card regardless of whether the answer was correct or not, Leon looked up to meet the skeptical gaze of the middle-aged man, boldly making up,

"Her name is Nicole."

Chapter 237 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 2-2)_1

"..."

After hearing the answer Leon provided, although no one spoke up, the previously tense atmosphere noticeably relaxed.

As for the middle-aged man who had already started to doubt Leon's identity, even though the suspicion in his eyes had not completely disappeared, his expression softened a bit as he smiled and said, "Correct answer... Young Baskin, I hope you won't blame me for being overly cautious. After all, I am the leader and responsible for the safety of many people.

"And you were just an ordinary person yesterday, but after a little night breeze, you suddenly awakened an abnormal ability. This transformation is indeed a bit too quick, so just in case, the necessary tests can't be skipped."

"You are right."

Knowing there was no way to argue with the middle-aged man on such matters, Leon nodded calmly and replied casually, then directly asked as if nothing had happened, "Leader, as you just said, until yesterday, I was just a regular member and not familiar with everyone. Could you please introduce them to me?"

"Of course."

The middle-aged man nodded, then looked at the burn-scarred man beside Leon and said at a steady pace, "Sitting next to you is Teague, whom you already know, then there's Luke, Oliver, Phoebe, and Lucy..."

After simply reporting everyone's names and completing an introduction that couldn't have been more basic, the middle-aged man smiled and said, "As for everyone's abilities and so on, explaining them one by one is indeed a bit troublesome, and since there's a very important matter to discuss later, let's skip it for now. You can find them later on your own to learn more."

"..."

Later, go learn on my own...

Most of these people didn't seem to be in the valley; they each had other hidden identities. Where am I supposed to learn? So after all this, the only thing I get is a bunch of possibly fake names?

With an expression of slight speechlessness, Leon watched as the middle-aged man shifted his focus, introducing him to the others:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Young Baskin, originally responsible for resource procurement in the organization, but awakened his abnormal ability yesterday and thus joined us.

"By the way, Young Baskin, what is your ability like? Mind sharing?"

...

So, I went through all this trouble to infiltrate, not only to gain no intelligence but also to be probed for information?

Leon squinted slightly as he looked at the middle-aged man, who clearly had already begun to be wary of him, then nodded amid the curious gazes of the rebels and revealed, "Of course, I can. My ability is quite simple, really. As long as the conditions are met, I can make anyone bow to me."

Make anyone bow to you? What kind of crazy ability is that?

Upon hearing Leon's words, everyone, including the inquisitive middle-aged man, was momentarily stunned. After not hearing further explanation, the middle-aged man couldn't help but ask, "And then?"

"That's it."

Leon shook his head slightly, saying with an honest expression, "That's all... or at least that's all I've discovered so far."

"..."

This...

Seeing the honest expression of "Young Baskin," and confirming he wasn't joking around, all the rebels inside the room exchanged glances, not knowing what to say for a moment.

"Your ability... is quite unique..."

The middle-aged man gave "Young Baskin" a skeptical look, pondered briefly, then continued to ask, "So, how long can your ability last? How far can it take effect? How long between each use?"

Oh, right! These, too!

Upon hearing the middle-aged man's questions, the disappointed rebels inside the room suddenly regained interest.

Forcing others to bow sounded useless, but if it could compel someone to bow from several kilometers away all day, or continuously, it might not be entirely without merit.

As long as the conditions were right and used properly, such a seemingly useless anomalous object might have miraculous effects at critical moments!

"In terms of duration..."

Under the expectant eyes of the rebels, Leon thought for a moment and then answered, "It's about one bow; once bowed, it ends."

"..."

"The range must be face-to-face, about the size of a slightly larger room; further than that, it doesn't work."

"..."

"There aren't any intervals, but the ability requires persuading the other with words; if they don't let me finish speaking, they don't have to bow to me."

"..."

Well, that's rather useless...

Even though they had mentally prepared themselves, the rebels couldn't help but show extremely speechless expressions after hearing about this seemingly useless yet thoroughly futile ability.

To be honest, Young Baskin's lousy ability seemed less effective than a nail gun.

Not only did it have to be face-to-face, and its effect was just one bow. With that time, you might as well pull out a gun and shoot them outright, wouldn't it be faster?

And... what does it mean by persuading with words?

...

"That's literally what it means."

After the middle-aged man, on behalf of the rebels inside the room, asked this question, Leon "honestly" BS'd, "For instance, if I wanted to make everyone bow to me, I have to first find a way to convince you, make you sincerely agree with my viewpoint, then you would enter the range of my ability and bow to me according to my demand."

Chapter 238 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 2-2)_2

""

"..."

Ah, really... are you serious?

Hearing this utterly ridiculous condition for activation, even the burnt man beside Leon, who had always believed Leon was "unusual," couldn't hold it in.

Seriously, bowing only face-to-face is already useless, but you have to persuade the other person first to get them to bow to you? Are you sure this can be called an abnormal ability?

"Are you bullshitting us?"

After rubbing her bald head, the straightforward bald woman stood up first, questioning with a face full of disbelief,

"The effect is weak enough as it is, but the restriction is so big? You have to persuade the other person first? You call this an abnormal ability? I could point a nail gun at someone's head and force them to bow faster than you can!"

"Maybe... the effect isn't very useful, but I can guarantee that this ability's manifestation is certainly not something achieved by normal means; it's definitely a kind of abnormal ability. If you don't believe me..."

Blinking with some difficulty, Leon suggested,

"How about we try it out a bit?"

"Give it a try and..."

"Hold on!"

Stopping the bald woman who wanted to experience it firsthand, a middle-aged man squinted, scrutinizing Leon, and then slowly asked,

"Little Baskin, don't blame me for overthinking, but everything about your bowing ability comes from your words; we don't know what it's really like.

Want me to hypothesize that the true nature of your ability might not be bowing, but rather controlling after cooperation, spying on inner secrets, or even having people obey your every command in the future?"

!!!

Hearing the middle-aged man's words, the rebels in the room stiffened, their expressions suddenly becoming dangerous as they looked at Leon.

Right! How could there be such a boring ability to make someone bow? He probably said this to lower our guard and induce curiosity, causing us to actively cooperate within the range of his ability!

If things are really as Nathan guessed, then everyone might end up as this kid's puppets!

"Leader, you've misunderstood."

Sensing the unfriendly gazes from the rebels, Leon sensibly raised both hands in a gesture of surrender, trying hard to explain,

"The situation is not what you think; my ability really is just to make people bow, and as for the test just proposed, it doesn't require you to cooperate; just listening to me speak a sentence is enough.

If listening to my words would get you controlled, you've already heard so much from me; wouldn't you have already been controlled by now?"

...

Fair enough...

Hearing "Little Baskin's" defense, the rebels pondered privately and soon felt Leon had a point. The burnt man beside Leon impatiently stood up, waving his hand in a shooing gesture,

"Those willing to try, stay and listen; those who aren't, plug your ears or roll out and wait outside! What's with all the fuss over such a simple thing?"

After blasting at the rebels, the burnt man sniffed and then turned to Leon,

"Come! Try it on me first! I want to see how one sentence can make me bow to you!"

"Alright."

Hearing the burnt man's words, Leon didn't speak immediately. Instead, he looked around, seriously reminding everyone,

"Everyone, a final reminder: my ability is triggered by language, so if you're worried about being controlled, please cover your ears tightly or, better yet, leave temporarily."

"..."

Hearing "Little Baskin's" reminder, the rebels fell into silence again, but none chose to leave, not even the middle-aged man in the main seat, who hesitated for a moment but remained.

After all, if it were as simple as just hearing a sentence, "Little Baskin" would have had countless opportunities to activate the anomalous object before stating the rules...

"Since everyone is ready, let's begin."

Leon, noticing no one leaving or blocking their ears, nodded in satisfaction, raising two fingers.

"I believe one plus one equals two; those who agree, please stand and bow to me now."

"Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!"

The moment Leon finished speaking, a multitude of chairs scraping against the floor resounded simultaneously, and the rebels were horrified to find themselves genuinely losing control over their bodies.

Everyone in the room stood up from their chairs simultaneously and gave a rather standard bow towards "Little Baskin," as two shorter individuals even bonked their heads on the table.

"Holy crap! It's real!"

Rubbing her forehead, which had turned red from bumping into the table, the bald woman exclaimed in surprise,

"I just thought for a moment that what you said was right, and I actually couldn't control my own body and bowed to you!"

Wow! You really weren't lying! There is such a useless abnormal ability that as long as one agrees with you... uh... leader?"

Looking at the only one still seated, the middle-aged man not bowing to "Little Baskin," the bald woman asked in confusion,

"This isn't one plus one? Why didn't you..."

"It's because I didn't use my ability on him."

Just as the bald woman was questioning the leader's math skills, Leon interrupted her,

"Since Nathan is recognized as the leader by everyone, I felt it wasn't right to have him bow to me, so I deliberately didn't target him when activating my ability."

"Oh, I see!"

Confirming that "Little Baskin" hadn't lied and had been truthful from the start, the bald woman's demeanor turned friendlier, even chuckling as she complained,

"Really... you should've said something; I thought the leader didn't even know how to add one plus one!"

Whether he knows one plus one, I don't know, but I now know exactly who he is!

Giving the bald woman a warm smile, Leon glanced at the [Prince of Traveling Thrush] where a golden light flowed, and then turned to look at the middle-aged man on the main seat, a smile involuntarily appearing on his lips.

So it was you!

...

Not using the ability on the leader was, of course, nonsense. As per the [Prince of Traveling Thrush]'s ability, everyone with a "status" lower than my prince status should immediately stand and bow under the badge's compulsion.

The only possible exception is someone with a status equal to my "prince" status, which means that unknown "prince," Prince Joshua, who somehow traveled from the future back to the present!

I never expected the troublemaking leader of the rebels to be a prince of the Kingdom... No matter how old he gets, he still deserves a good beating!

After casting a meaningful glance at the middle-aged man, discovering the concealer on his cheeks and vaguely recognizing some facial features, Leon finally understood where the sense of familiarity when he first met him came from.

Don't ask why; it's because he'd been slapped, and not just once—a classic old acquaintance!

"Everyone!"

Flexing his right wrist, which suddenly felt itchy, Leon, having proved himself honest, sat back down with a smile,

"I remember there was supposed to be a very important meeting today? Can we continue now?"

Right! We were supposed to have a meeting!

Hearing Leon's reminder, the others, still pondering the bow, quickly snapped back, chiming in one after another,

"Yes! There's something important!"

"Indeed, we should continue!"

"Absolutely, it's been delayed long enough!"

"..."

Why does it feel... like things are a bit off?

Looking at "Little Baskin" at the end of the long table, hands crossed and eyes fixed on him meaningfully, the middle-aged man in the main seat felt a wave of discomfort, his chair becoming more uncomfortable by the second.

Both the members' echoing and the meeting prompt that was supposed to come from him seemed to hint at something, as if with that strange bow earlier, something supposedly tightly within his grasp had suddenly started "flowing."

That strange, intangible yet crucial something was steadily, yet unstoppably, seeping along the length of this old council table, draining away from him and flowing slowly towards the other end...

Chapter 239 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 3)_1

Strange, why hadn't it started yet?

The people in the room had already prepared for the meeting, but after waiting for a while, they didn't hear the leader who was supposed to host the meeting start speaking. They all cast strange looks over.

Then everyone noticed that the leader, who had just been menacingly questioning "Little Baskin," was now, for some reason, staring blankly at Little Baskin with a dazed expression.

In his bloodshot and cloudy eyes, which had been up all night, there were signs of fear, doubt, panic, confusion... various weak and chaotic emotions, paired with his slightly greying temples, making him look unusually...

Old.

Yes! Old!

With this strange thought arising in their minds, the rebels in the room were unconsciously startled.

The true age of their leader should not yet be fifty. While his features were somewhat aged and his eyes often carried an inexplicable fatigue, he was still considered to be in his prime.

Therefore, among these rebels in the room, although some were dissatisfied with his autocracy, some questioned his decisions, and some wanted to pull him down and take his place, none of them really thought he was already old.

But now...

"Leader?"

Accompanied by a slightly rising intonation inquiry, the attention of the rebels was pulled from the head of the long table and fell on Little Baskin seated at the lowest position.

This young man, not yet twenty, although slightly slender, looked very upright. Even sitting on a low chair without a backrest, his spine remained straight without the slightest hunch.

He likely hadn't slept well last night either, with his black hair slightly disheveled, bits of frost clinging to his collar, and his eyes harboring considerable bloodshot, yet those dark, shiny eyes remained lively and keen, as if pouring out boundless energy.

Especially when looking at the leader at the head of the table, those eyes emitted a focused gaze, faintly carrying a scorching heat that could capture a soul, like a young predator who had spotted an old weak antelope, baring its sharp claws and fangs at the prey with nowhere to escape...

Was this the "tiger" that Teague referred to? It indeed seemed so...

Witnessing this stark contrast, aside from Phoebe, who was sitting in a chair with a candy in her mouth, all the others in the room had almost the same thought surge through their minds.

The leader... seemed to be really old.

...

Unaware that his "intent to capture" on middle-aged Joshua had already been misinterpreted by the rebels as ambitious intent, Leon, anxious to gather intelligence after waiting so long without the meeting starting, frowned slightly and couldn't help but voice a reminder:

"Sir Nathan!"

"Just now, you first doubted my true identity and then questioned my actual ability, wasting a lot of unnecessary time. Now it's time to proceed with the meeting!"

Hearing the loud reminder from Little Baskin, the middle-aged man couldn't help but tremble slightly, finally struggling out of that strange sense of loss. However, facing the gazes from everyone, the topics he had prepared all night became abnormally stagnant, and he couldn't express them no matter what.

" ... "

I seem to know what it was that just "slipped away" from me.

Feeling this indescribable "sense of domination" and seeing the gradually strange gazes of the rebels, the middle-aged man finally understood what he had lost after the two rounds of confrontation.

It was the "power of speech" to actively control the situation, the "trust" granted as a leader, and even the "blind faith" gradually cultivated through past correct judgments!

And these things were the most basic form of power!

'Although I haven't read much, politics is essentially about making more people believe in you, recognize your judgment, and be willing to listen to you, thereby gathering enough power to change the status quo.'

Recalling what Little Baskin mentioned last night, and comparing it to the scene before him, the middle-aged man couldn't help but feel a wave of powerlessness.

So... Did Little Baskin just show me those two flaws to make me make two wrong judgments in front of everyone, thereby shaking the credibility of my words, and then seize some of the power of speech?

Could it be that he had already begun to plot to seize the leader's position from my hands even before entering this meeting room? Or... perhaps even the questions from last night were a form of test for me?

...

Carrying a belly full of doubts and a colossal sense of crisis, like sitting on pins and needles, the middle-aged man had no choice but to take a deep breath and, following Leon's "instructions," started hosting the meeting:

"Today... we need to determine our next actions for the coming period, starting with Teague."

Pulling out a few pre-marked maps from the materials he had prepared the night before and pushing them across the long table, the middle-aged man stared intently at Little Baskin and said expressionlessly,

"Your task remains the same as before: continue leading people to set fires at Louther Arcade and the surrounding affluent areas, but the intensity and scope must continually expand!"

Start fires in Louther Arcade?

Hearing the words of middle-aged Joshua, Leon couldn't help but raise his brow slightly, recalling the task previously assigned by the Red-haired Director to investigate the arsonist haunting Louther Arcade.

So the director indeed pinpointed the right target. If I hadn't gone to Rose Manor to rescue someone earlier, I might have encountered an Anomalous Object holder among the rebels even sooner... Speaking of which, the rebels have been setting fires for so long without really starting a massive fire; their purpose probably isn't just to attack the affluent areas, right?

"Great! This is a good job!"

While Leon was frowning and thinking, the burn-scarred man took the map, glanced at it, and exposed a grin full of cold intent.

"When I used to work in the smelting plant, I almost got scalded to death by the molten material that came tumbling down. Those bastard factory owners insisted they had no money to compensate, but privately, they had money to live in such good houses. I've been dying to set a big one on fire for a long time!"

"Watch the scale."

After casting a glance at Leon, who hadn't objected, the middle-aged man turned to look at the burn-scarred man and reminded him with a frown,

"Your goal isn't to injure more people but to cause widespread arson-induced panic, forcing those rich folks to pressure the police department and try to redirect all of the Capital City's patrol power there to facilitate other actions!"

"Yeah, yeah, isn't it just being a decoy?"

The burn-scarred man waved his hand impatiently,

"I'm very familiar with this job, definitely won't mess it up. Just tell me the next task already!"

"..."

Having no way to deal with this reckless guy, the middle-aged man once again took a deep breath and started sequentially assigning tasks to the rebels.

"Oliver will continue handling the transactions, but this time, apart from buying weapons from Ryan Family's munitions company, you should focus on using arms transactions to scout out several armory locations.

Taking advantage of the chaos during the military's power transition, we need to seize the opportunity to raid armories and try to acquire some high-powered weapons and bombs..."

"Next is Lucy and Luke, your tasks have changed. Lucy, you are to infiltrate the 'Gear' Shipping Company as a priority and investigate the situation of those private ships that do not accommodate regular passengers.

Meanwhile, Luke is to infiltrate the Boarding Tower, check the Sky Clipper schedules bound for Crolock Kingdom, and also plant bombs on crucial support structures in the Boarding Tower with those members recently retired from the military!"

"What?!!!"

Upon hearing the task assignments given by the middle-aged man, not only did Leon, seated at the end, have his pupils contract, but the entire room of rebels erupted in astonishment.

The portly Oliver was the first to stand up, asking in a daze,

"Sir Nathan! You want us to attack the Boarding Tower?"

"Precisely speaking, it's an attack on a Sky Clipper headed for Crolock Kingdom."

After correcting Oliver's words, the middle-aged man said with a steady gaze,

"Blowing up the Boarding Tower is only the last resort. What I truly hope for is to kill the Crolock Kingdom sniffers and retrieve the data on the kingdom's county minerals they possess."

Crolock Kingdom sniffers? County mineral data of the Kingdom?

"What's the point of retrieving those?"

The short Luke couldn't help but stand up, voicing his doubts,

"We can't even use that information, and that is Crolock Kingdom, the City of Machinery! The most powerful country in the western world! The kingdom hasn't even finished paying back the debt to them from six years ago!

Never mind whether this attack will succeed. If we really end up blowing up the Boarding Tower, killing those sniffers, under pressure from Crolock Kingdom, the entire kingdom would desperately hunt us down! Even if we succeeded in assassinating the King, the consequences might not be this severe!"

"I know, but this task still has to be done."

Facing the doubts from the rebels, the middle-aged man said,

"The reason I still can't explain to you, but just like the countless correct judgments I've made in key moments in the past, if we don't carry out this task, the outcome that awaits us and this country will only be worse!"

"But..."

"No buts."

The middle-aged man tapped the table, announcing calmly,

"Regarding my true ability, all of you should have some suspicions. Now I can tell you directly that being able to shuttle between all the doors in the Capital City is indeed only part of my ability. My true ability is... Little Baskin? What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

Getting up from his chair at the end of the long table, Leon walked to the door of the meeting room. Reaching out to touch the plaque on the door frame, he replied without looking back,

"Go ahead and say what you want, I'm just touching something."

Chapter 240 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Part 3-2)_1

[Name: Beyond the Gate (Gate, Space, Escape)]

[Appearance: No physical form, manifests as a strange door with an indefinite width and height, unknown thickness, and material and style not easily determined. The only feature that can be confirmed about this anomalous object is the softwood plaque with strange nail-carved words "I really want to escape" that always appears on the door frame it parasitizes.]

[Ability: Parasitic door frame, space traversal, crisis diversion]

[Cost: Before the placed "door" disappears, a part of your power will be permanently occupied, or you will lose everything, becoming a wanderer seeking the Other World's arrival]

[File: The anomalous object of the rebel leader "Nathan," Eerily crafted by the Aquarius Director of the Purification Bureau to fulfill desires, it is one of many utility-type anomalous objects tentatively numbered 0001.

As part of the Aquarius Director's proudest creation, to ensure its safety, it was forcibly fused with another anomalous object called "Escape Plaque," granting the holder an exceptionally strong escape ability.

Due to the powerful effect of "Beyond the Gate," which can transfer regardless of distance, even after several years of strict royal kingdom pursuits, the rebels, numbering over a thousand, had never been truly exposed, until they caught the attention of Virgin Branch cleaner Leon Laine during an attack...]

[Evaluation: Possesses a potent ability to freely traverse all doors in the Capital City and can unconditionally activate in a crisis to instantly take the holder away, making it nearly uncatchable.

Additionally, when initiated by the first user, Joshua Robine, this anomalous object will reveal its true form, becoming the "Gate of the Other World" capable of temporarily connecting to the future.]

[Contamination Value: 0.1]

Damn, it's watertight...

Looking at the item description laden with terms like "escape," "crisis transfer," and "uncatchable," Leon clicked his tongue in his heart at the thought of this "Any Door," temporarily dismissing the idea of snagging it.

All he could say was that, whether it was his own director who wasn't drunk or that old silver coin of an Aquarius Director, those who climbed high in the Purification Bureau seemed to handle things with heads and tails well-protected, unwilling to leave even a needle-thin loophole for others.

Thinking about it carefully, it was indeed reasonable. After all, if they were truly careless in handling matters, without enough contingencies, let alone rising to a high rank in the Purification Bureau, they likely would have fallen within their first few months of joining with its ten percent annual death rate. Among these people, the incautious were the exceptions.

Well... even if he probably wouldn't end up with this extremely useful anomalous object, this trip had led to finding another hidden prince, meeting that "grandfather and granddaughter" pair with memory abilities, and obtaining plenty of intelligence. With three lurking targets nearly completed, it seemed the net could finally be drawn.

Reluctantly withdrawing his hand from Beyond the Gate, Leon reached into his bosom to tap on the small mirror, signaling for Young Ha to hold onto the valley terrain map he had sketched yesterday, or rather the location map of the rebel base, and to rush back to the bureau to gather reinforcements. Then, amidst the surprised gazes of everyone, he turned back to his position.

"Nathan, your ability, should be foresight of the future, right?"

After voicing his "deduction," Leon glanced at the middle-aged man with a grim face above the main seat while secretly switching out the Elite Performer badge, revealing an expression of extreme disappointment.

"It's unfortunate; no matter what you saw in the future, I still think that your command over us has led to a series of serious mistakes."*

...

If yesterday he had called for reinforcements, it should have been the director himself to reel in the net. But the director had now likely headed to the main bureau to question the Aquarius, so senior Emma should be holding the fort at the bureau.

And because the rebel's base wasn't in the Capital City, but in this remote valley far from the Capital City, senior Emma would need some time to arrive. Accounting for Young Ha's time to run back to report through the Mirror World, it would likely take about forty to fifty minutes.

What Leon needed to do now was to find a way to hold everyone present, especially the middle-aged man leader and that grandparent pair with memory ability, for these forty to fifty minutes for senior Emma to apprehend them, thereby fully completing the set infiltration targets.

Having confirmed his task was to buy time, Leon, not waiting for the middle-aged man to retort, shockingly declared, "I don't know what kind of future you saw or why you attacked the Boarding Tower, but I clearly know one thing: if we continue to act on your command, it will only lead us into another failure!"

"..."

"What do you know?"

Hearing "Little Baskin's" very assertive assessment, the middle-aged man, who had been holding back for long, couldn't help but feel a surge of anger, stood up, glaring at Leon, and spoke, "You don't have the slightest idea of the kind of future I've seen! If you don't do as I say, then Crolock... oof..."

Mid-sentence, the middle-aged man paused slightly, then stroked his temples before slumping back into his seat, angrily reprimanding, "You understand nothing at all!"

"I do understand."

Catching the anger he successfully provoked and sneaking it back into the small mirror, Leon, having played his hand, observed the rather flustered middle-aged man, first eyeing the areas where his hair had turned significantly whiter, then calmly inquired, "Nathan, if I'm not mistaken, it seems you can't directly tell us about the future, or you'll rapidly age, or even die... Am I correct?"

"Correct!"

Affected by the Black Goat's violent anger aura, which temporarily lowered his intelligence by thirty percent, the middle-aged Joshua admitted the guess directly. At this moment, his heart was only set ablaze with rage, forcibly suppressing the urge to curse, and instead, with eyes full of malice, questioned, "Since you believe I can see the future, why do you still doubt my decisions?"

"Simple, I'm not questioning the future you see, but questioning your judgment about the future, or to put it more bluntly, I'm questioning you as a person."

In the bewilderment of the rebels, "Little Baskin," who had just joined the core rebel team, actually stood up, gazing at the middle-aged man leader with utmost sincerity, and said, "Nathan, I'm sorry, but I don't think you have the talent of a leader. Even if you can see the future, you can't make the best judgment based on the information... and I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who thinks so."

After saying this, Leon looked around, slightly bowed, and said, "Everyone, I apologize... Those who think I'm right and believe Nathan doesn't have the talent to be a leader, please bow to me."

?!!!

Completely unprepared for "Little Baskin's" dispute with the leader to involve themselves, caught off guard, the rebels, under the influence of Prince of Lutung's power, stood up unanimously, performing a standard bow to Leon.

The only two who didn't bow in the entire room were the sleeping little Phoebe, who had dozed off at some point on the table, and the bald woman as a staunch "leader faction."

But the more crucial point was, upon seeing everyone "agree" with Little Baskin's words that Nathan wasn't a competent leader, the bald woman, with a face full of shock, hesitated for a moment, then also due to "internal turmoil," bent her waist.

"You... impossible! You're lying!"

Seeing one after another acknowledging Leon's statement and indeed bowing to him, the rebels couldn't help exhibiting intense eye-shaking, but quickly realized, glaring at Leon, saying, "The conditions for your power's activation are surely not convincing others! I have always been correct in the past! Even when movements didn't succeed, they ended without losses! I'm a superb... at least a competent leader! They... they shouldn't think this way!"

"Alright then..."

Upon hearing this, Leon didn't argue but rather looked at him with slight pity, then nodded compliantly, "If thinking like that makes you feel a bit better... then let's say I lied to you."

"..."

After being collectively "betrayed" before his face, surely even if he escaped from senior Emma's hands later, he wouldn't think of taking others with him to flee, right?

Seeing the middle-aged man's self-confidence being severely battered, stymied by an unprecedented "betrayal," and in case he still clung to any hope of taking others to escape, Leon decided to add more fuel to the fire.

"I can actually grasp why everyone thinks this way."

In the bewildered expressions of the rebels, Leon sighed, directly voicing what they wanted to express, "Nathan, you don't understand that we who willingly joined the rebels don't want to succeed in every attack. Instead, we want to see a truly better future!

Here, future doesn't mean the kind of future you see, but everything is truly changing! It's everyone's future, even the whole kingdom's future moving towards a better direction, but what have you given us?"

Pausing a bit here, Leon allowed everyone to align their thoughts with his, but without giving much time, immediately asserted, "Attack! Attack! And more attacks!"

"Attacking merchants, attacking officials, attacking nobles, attacking the royal family... you don't understand how to lead progress better; all you know is to initiate one meaningless destruction after another!

In the years you've led the rebels... sorry, I tried not to use a derogatory term, but thought long and hard that 'rebels' best suits our absolutely meaningless actions over these years."

A thorough questioning regarding the "rationality" of the rebel's existence turned the middle-aged Joshua's face blue, and the habitually incisive Leon, leveraging the effectiveness of the Elite Performer, dolefully jabbed further, "After all these years of diligent assaults, are those greedy factory owners more charitable? Are the corrupt lethargic officials more efficient? Have the arrogant nobles restrained themselves? Has the ineffectual royal family changed?

If none of these happened, then what did you attack? Only capable of leading us to 'successful' destruction everywhere, but failing in all other aspects—how do you dare to claim to be a competent leader?

Nathan, do you understand now why people are reluctant to keep following you?"