

I! Cleaner 241

Chapter 241 Meeting? Usurp the throne! (Finale)_1

It seemed... was it really the case?

After hearing Leon's analysis and questioning, the Rebels, who had been somewhat muddled with their bows, uncertain whether they truly opposed the leader, finally became thoroughly "sober."

Yes! That's exactly it!

Although I wasn't as clear-headed as young Baskin, able to directly articulate why, I must have vaguely sensed something was off, which is why I felt Nathan was unfit to be the leader!

No wonder, no wonder I suddenly bowed to young Baskin earlier, it turns out that although I couldn't articulate the reason, I had already started to think this way in my heart...

"You... don't let him fool you!"

Noticing the gradually changing gaze of the people in the room and their subtly shifting attitude towards the opposing side, the middle-aged man, sensing that "the tide had turned," couldn't help but exclaim anxiously,

"Think carefully! How old is young Baskin this year? And apart from attending a public school for a few years when he was young, he hasn't studied since the age of thirteen or fourteen. How could he possibly know so much?

Use your brains! Those words just now, could someone who attended only a few years of public school say such things? I suspect he's not even young Baskin at all!"

?!!!

After hearing the middle-aged man's reminder, the group of Rebels in the room couldn't help but change their expressions, vaguely realizing that "young Baskin" indeed seemed off.

Several people who moved around the valley more, with some knowledge of young Baskin's family situation, immediately cast doubting glances.

Was Nathan... not wrong, after all?

Setting aside why the supposedly silent and withdrawn young Baskin suddenly became so eloquent, even his educational level from a community school couldn't possibly allow such an impromptu, clear-cut analysis, let alone the latter part, where he examined in layers with aggressive questioning.

...

I was indeed a bit too hasty... but it doesn't matter!

Feeling the suspicious eyes of the Rebels upon him, Leon couldn't help but squint slightly, then sighed with a look of disappointment,

"Mr. Nathan, you still didn't understand where exactly you went wrong.

You think questioning my identity, forcefully labeling me an impostor, eliminating me as someone who dares stand up to question you, would make you right as the leader again?

To be honest, I even find you a bit pathetic now, pitiful in that you can't even identify your true opponent!"

After deliberately obscuring the focus to divert attention, Leon sat back in his chair, in the gaze of all present, unhurriedly dragging out time as he said,

"Mr. Nathan, before I give you this answer, could you first tell me what the first textbook a six-year-old child receives from the community school upon enrollment is?"

"What are you trying to pull?"

Caught off guard by Leon's strange question, the middle-aged man quickly realized that he must not let the topic be diverted, and interrupted him straight away,

"We're discussing your identity right now! It has nothing to do with school textbooks at all! Don't try to use this method to evade my question!"

"I am answering your question!"

Having seized the initiative again, Leon spoke rapidly as he said,

"If you've forgotten, I'll tell you! The first set of textbooks in community school is about reading and phonetics, and the material used to teach children to recognize words is the nearly three-hundred-year history of the Kingdom!

The first sentence all the children in the Kingdom learn while grasping reading is about how the Kingdom came into existence! Do you remember what that sentence said?"

"Of course I remember!"

Striving to regain control of the conversation, the middle-aged man said,

"But that sentence has nothing to do with the current sit..."

"It has everything to do with it!"

Leaning on his excellent script skills brought by [Elite Performer], Leon gave a powerful shout, regaining control of the discussion, and solemnly recited,

"With the joint support of nobles, citizens, factory owners, and merchants, the royal family expelled the previous rulers, absorbed fragmented city-states that couldn't bear the plundering of other kingdoms, thus establishing the current Kingdom.

This is the first sentence a vast majority learn!"

"So what about that and the current sit..."

"So, it wasn't the royal family that established the Kingdom and then obtained the majority's support; it was after winning the support of most forces that the current royal family successfully established the Kingdom! This is something even children know!"

After interpreting this sentence, Leon looked at the somewhat dazed middle-aged man and shook his head,

"If you truly meant what you said about preparing to save this country, then you should showcase the change you can bring, garnering more support, rather than recklessly launching attacks that make everyone fear and even oppose you!"

"That's easy for you to say!"

Discomforted by Leon's words, the middle-aged man gritted his teeth and struggled to argue,

"We are the Rebels! Those who join us are either impoverished, injured veterans, desperate bankrupt civilians, or workers living under unbearable oppression.

What value can these people provide, and why would those forces support us? Instead of daydreaming about baseless hopes, we might as well do as I say, first, gather..."

"You see, that's our biggest disagreement."

Interjecting again to cut off the middle-aged man's argument, Leon shook his head, earnestly provoking,
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"Sir Nathan, I don't know your exact background, but I do understand one thing.

Even if you created the Rebels single-handedly, deep down, you still look down on us and don't believe we have any value!"

Damn it!

Hearing Leon's words, the middle-aged man, realizing his slip of the tongue, was startled and quickly tried to amend,

"This isn't about looking up to or down on anyone! I'm stating facts! Whether it's the nobility, merchants, or parliament, no one would support us!"

"Have you ever considered why those people wouldn't support us?"

Feeling the gentle vibration of the small mirror in his pocket, along with a tap on the belly from a dog's paw, Leon knew that Senior Emma was almost here. He calmly continued,

"Because under your leadership, we are just a wandering will-o'-the-wisp, burning wherever it goes, never even opening our mouths in daylight to ask for what we really want!

To put it plainly, precisely because you look down on us from the bottom of your heart and never tried to tap into our value, the Rebels in your hands are just weapons to launch attacks. Of course, they get no support!"

As Leon spoke, he discreetly touched the Black Goat's horn, peering into the souls of the Rebels.

Anger, resentment, doubt...

It's working!

After his deliberate provocation, the Rebels were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with middle-aged Joshua. By the time Senior Emma arrived, Joshua might not even be able to rally them!

...

"Sir Nathan!"

From the start of entering the meeting room, it took no more than a single meal to bring the Rebels to the brink of disbandment. Leon continued to fan the flames,

"For so many years, there have been thousands of old soldiers who retired due to injuries around the Capital City alone; workers risking losing limbs from machines, working high-intensity shifts for over ten hours a day, yet can't even earn enough to feed their families, numbering in the hundreds of thousands!

There are also small handcraft workshops going bankrupt under the impact of big factories; farmers having their land seized and grain prices driven down, forced to work on noble estates; and impoverished citizens struggling to find even one stable job...

Do you have any idea how many people there are in total?"

"I... I think..."

"You couldn't possibly know! Because you've never thought we were worth it, you haven't even bothered to pay attention, so how could you know such things?"

"..."

Facing the middle-aged man, choked into silence, Leon, who also didn't know the exact number, slowly stood up and said earnestly,

"There are so many people living in pain, longing for change. If you genuinely saw them, were willing to lend a hand, even if just one-tenth... or even one percent of them began to identify with us, no one would dare ignore our opinions!

If you did that, even if the royal family didn't support us, they wouldn't arrest us; even if the nobility didn't support us, they wouldn't dare to bully us; even if merchants and factory owners didn't support us, they wouldn't hate or even oppose us!"

"..."

"When we start trying to voice ourselves in the open, when citizens and workers see hope for change in us, this initial force will start gravitating towards us!

And once we have this genuine pivot, there will be so many more things we can do next!"

"The royal family wants to balance the nobility, to control the increasingly massive group of merchants; parliament wants to limit the powers of the royal family and the nobility, to regulate business practices of the chambers of commerce; the nobility wants to gain more power, to truly have a share in commerce; merchants want to break free from binds, to establish favorable business laws, to prevent being strangled and squeezed by the other sides..."

After briefly outlining the basic demands of the Kingdom's various factions, Leon, while calculating Senior Emma's arrival time, sincerely painted a large vision,

"To gain support, we must first make ourselves valuable!

When we truly become a force, we become a crucial weight that can be thrown into the balance in these power struggles, influencing the swing. In exchange, the forces backed by us must also offer some benefits.

If factory owners want our support to avoid being squeezed by the royal family and the nobility, they must carve out salary space for ordinary people; if the royal family wants to crush the Old Nobility with the help of citizens and workers, they need to provide more legislative protection;

And if the parliament wants support from citizens, they must not only help push relevant legislation through but even offer seats in the parliament..."

At this point, Leon paused slightly, scrutinizing the captivated expressions of the Rebels within the room, and raised his tone slightly,

"Ladies and gentlemen! Once those who follow us truly savor the benefits we bring, letting more people see the significance of having someone to speak for them, more and more people will start leaning towards us!

And when we become truly powerful, competing with the royal family, the nobility, the parliament, and the chambers of commerce, we can even reverse the situation, actively forcing other forces to make concessions to us!"

"By that time, the nobility, fearing being completely crushed, must appease us! Merchants and factory owners, worried about boycotts and bankruptcies, will have no choice but to favor us!

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"As our seats in the Parliament increased, the Prime Minister had to take our opinions into account when issuing decrees! The royal family even needed to consult us before making important decisions! And this! This wasn't even the end!"

It wasn't over yet? We had already become so powerful, and there was still more to come?

Upon hearing that this was not the endpoint, the Rebels inside the room could hardly bear it any longer. Each one clenched their fists with rapid breaths, eyes tightly fixed on "Little Baskin" as if he was glowing, eager to hear how much more formidable the future Rebels could become.

Leon's hollow visions were detectable to those who were truly experienced in politics. Just a bit of tasting with their upper lips, and they could tell that the filling of this pie wasn't substantial.

Although the feasibility of these things wasn't entirely absent, and was certainly better than mere fantasies, the extent of its goodness was quite limited.

Just figuring out how to unite everyone wholeheartedly and avoid being co-opted and divided was a hurdle that couldn't be bypassed, not to mention how to deal with the counterattacks of other forces, or even being crushed by joint forces. If these issues couldn't be resolved, it might just lead to an endless quagmire.

But for the Rebels, who barely had average community college education, or had dropped out of their initial birth education, and couldn't write anything except their own names, these seemingly magnificent promises were enough to dizzy them with excitement.

As for co-opting and dividing, or counterattacking and crushing...

Laughable. Over the years, we've been chased by the military and secret police to the point where we dared not show our faces, only able to hide in this valley eight hundred miles away from the Capital City, living in mud houses. The worst was running into a big tiger baring its teeth while going out for a pee. Could things really get worse than they were now?

...

Finished! Completely finished!

Looking at how everyone in the room was staring fanatically at Leon, with not a single person glancing at him, the middle-aged man felt a chill run through his body.

The Aquarius Director's warning... was accurate word for word! This person, whether or not he's Little Baskin, was indeed incredibly dangerous.

After years of effort, he finally gathered enough strength to launch an attack on the Boarding Tower, but in less than thirty minutes, it was all ruined.

He not only destroyed the Rebels but also wrecked my plan to conceal the Kingdom's mineral resources through the Boarding Tower attack and thus avoid war.

It's over! From now on, everything is over!

Gritting his teeth fiercely, middle-aged Joshua glared at "Little Baskin" across the room. He regretted not going over to kill him straight away when he discovered the six pointers had moved last night, and even allowing him to attend the meeting!

I was truly foolish!

Watching "Little Baskin" stand up among the expectant gazes of the crowd, seemingly wanting to say more, the middle-aged man couldn't help but take a deep breath, then slowly stood up as well.

"Nathan, sir?"

Noticing his movement, Leon raised his eyebrows slightly, then paused his speech to gaze at him and took the initiative to ask,

"Do you have anything else to say?"

"Yes."

The middle-aged man slowly nodded, then opened his mouth and said,

"I was thinking, if I had... Nicole?"

Accompanied by his startled voice, the door behind Leon squeaked as if someone pushed it open, causing Leon's heart to jolt as well. He then turned back to look, and then...

"Bang!"

A spiraling silver-white nail suddenly drilled out of Leon's heart, disappearing into the empty doorway.

And this wasn't the end. Before the shot Leon could even turn his head back, the middle-aged man, who hated him to the core, continuously pulled the trigger, firing seven more shots in rapid succession, turning Leon's back into a bloody mess!

"Huh?"

"Little Baskin?!"

"Nathan!!!!!!"

"What I meant to say was, I wish I had done this back then!"

After emptying the magazine into "Little Baskin" from behind, effectively killing him, the middle-aged man, eyes still burning with hatred, threw the nail gun onto the ground. He pointed at the Rebels who had betrayed him and coldly laughed,

"Moreover, you fools! Do you really think following his plan would work? Do you think those nobles and merchants are here to do charity, and would honestly follow the Kingdom's laws to play that out in the open?"

"Heh, I don't deny that Little Baskin had the ability to accomplish what he claimed. After all, he made you betray me over a single meal, and in that aspect, he indeed had a terrifying talent. But do those nobles and merchants need to out-talk Little Baskin as I did? They only need to spend a little money to hire a desperate fool with a gun, like me... Bang!"

After making a shooting gesture, the middle-aged man coldly laughed,

"Wake up! The only one who can save the Kingdom is me! No matter how beautiful the path Little Baskin pointed out to you seemed, that worthless ability of his which merely makes people bow couldn't protect his safety! As soon as he, the leader, died, everything would just be a delus... You... you're not dead yet?"

"Sorry... pah!"

Spitting the bloody foam out of his mouth, Leon felt the hole in his chest heal, then adjusted his clothes before turning back. He faced the Rebels, who were nearly in shock, and offered an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry. I just found out that my ability seems to go beyond making people bow. It should also include an Undying Body."

Chapter 244: does not have second inversion and....._1

"..."

Watching Leon, who had just finished speaking and was now bouncing around, middle-aged Joshua truly felt a bit numb.

This "Little Baskin" of unknown origin seemed like someone sent down from the heavens specifically to disgust him; his years of hard work had been destroyed in just thirty minutes.

Now the rebels he'd personally established not only had nothing to do with him anymore, but judging by the look in their eyes, they were already considering whether to take him down. If he delayed any longer, it was questionable whether he could even get away.

...

"Phew... I admit you won!"

Glaring at "Little Baskin" across the table, the middle-aged man, who had lost miserably, gritted his teeth and said,

"But don't think it's over. When these fools following you hit a wall and realize how unrealistic your talk is, they'll betray you just like they betrayed me today!"

"You're wrong. Today, in this room, nothing happened that had anything to do with betrayal."

Rubbing his heart that still throbbed with phantom pain, Leon resisted the urge to grimace.

He shook his head and, with a solemn expression, continued to speak piercingly,

"You couldn't bring them the results they wanted, nor could you make them agree with your ideas, and you couldn't give them a future worth expecting. Of course, they wouldn't choose to follow you.

Or, if you insist on using the word betrayal, it's not them who betrayed you; you betrayed them first."

"..."

"I won't talk to you about this!"

Knowing that his way with words wasn't even worthy to tie the shoes of the person across from him, the middle-aged man, who realized he had lost the upper hand, decisively abandoned debating with Leon. After taking a deep breath, he clenched his fists and rationally negotiated,

"Little Baskin... whether you really are Little Baskin or not, I'll just call you that for now.

If you really are, as you say, prepared to save this country, then you must follow my instructions, lead people to raid the Boarding Tower, kill those Crolock Kingdom scouts, and destroy all data concerning the Kingdom's mines!"

"..."

Not expecting that even at a time like this, middle-aged Joshua would still think about attacking the Boarding Tower, Leon, who knew he came from the future, couldn't help but frown and ask,

"Why?"

"I can't say!"

Upon hearing Leon's question, the middle-aged man couldn't help but scowl and replied darkly,

"The more I disclose about the future situation, the greater the impact, and the quicker I'll die! Understand? Also, since you're so smart, why not figure it out yourself?"

"..."

That insufferable attitude... confirmed, this guy was absolutely Joshua.

Looking at the middle-aged man before him who obviously needed a "favor" but insisted on putting on airs and talking down to him, Leon couldn't help but smack his lips in exasperation.

Since yesterday, he had felt a sense of familiarity, and the reason he didn't associate it with Joshua was because back then, "Sir Nathan" appeared to have decent emotional intelligence and seemed kind and courteous.

A person like that could never be connected to the Joshua in the Royal Palace, whose brain started spinning inside his skull at the slightest shake of the head.

But now it appeared that after personally experiencing the country's downfall and family breakup in the future, this guy seemed to have matured quite a bit. Even though he would reveal his true nature when irritated, he at least learned how to put on an act in normal times.

Hmm... his words needed to be carefully considered.

Following the train of thought suggested by middle-aged Joshua, and pondering the potential scenarios, Leon squinted slightly and said,

"You mean the scouts discovered a highly valuable mineral deposit, and that the Crolock Kingdom would go to war against the Kingdom in the future just to obtain those minerals?"

"That's not what I'm implying!"

The middle-aged man snorted at Leon's words, instantly denying his speculation, yet he subtly raised his hand to smooth his hair, showing Leon that his temples had turned a shade whiter.

Suddenly aged... so I guessed it right?

Faced with the intelligence Joshua provided at the cost of his life, Leon couldn't help but furrow his brow slightly, vaguely understanding why he suddenly wanted to attack the Boarding Tower.

...

If there were to be a ranking of the twelve countries in this world by overall strength, the Kingdom could only rank around seventh or eighth, whereas the Crolock Kingdom, known as the City of Machinery, was steadfastly aiming for first or second place.

That micro-nation with a population of only a few million and an area merely half the size of a Kingdom county boasted a level of mechanical capability that surpassed other kingdoms by at least a hundred years, with the vast majority of work already taken over by machines.

However, the intense mechanization induced an almost pathological craving for energy. In addition to the most basic coal and petroleum, there was Thunderstrike Mine, unique to Thunderstorm Country Vandastone, concentrated whale blubber processed from the whaling ships of Thousand Sails Maritime Country Sayo, and the feathers of the solar bird from The Refraction Kingdom Riviere...

Anything capable of providing energy would immediately catch their attention, and they would demand to purchase it by force. If it could not be obtained through conventional means, they wouldn't hesitate to start a war.

Even the Sky Clippers that traversed the skies, along with the Boarding Towers standing tall in the territories of various kingdoms, were technologies "shared" without charge by the Crolock Kingdom to achieve their goal of energy-seeking.

What they offered in exchange for bestowing the "power to conquer the skies" upon the major kingdoms was the guarantee that scouts sent by the Crolock Kingdom would move unimpeded, allowing them to obtain intelligence on various mineral and energy sources promptly. This demonstrated their enormous demand for energy.

Chapter 245: does not have second inversion and....._2

But... isn't this still not quite right?

After pondering the situation in his mind, Leon's brow furrowed slightly.

The Crolock Kingdom, though incredibly strong, was lightly populated and couldn't afford heavy casualties. It also held a lot of advanced technologies, making it extremely easy to profit from "international trade," so it usually acted reasonably.

This nation wasn't the kind that was uncooperatively aggressive, and it would not resort to force unless absolutely necessary. Especially concerning energy purchase transactions, it was so generous that it was almost frightening.

So if it were a typical energy resource, given the Kingdom's usual stance, it should have opted to hand over the mining rights in exchange for a large sum of money and technological support from the Crolock Kingdom. Why choose to go to war?

Or, to put it bluntly, the muscular capacity of the Kingdom and the Crolock Kingdom weren't even on the same level. The latter could likely just flex slightly, and given the Kingdom's traditionally weak foreign policy, it would probably surrender immediately. How could it escalate to the point of war?

"Are you sure?"

Secretly grabbing the Black Goat's horn, Leon seriously asked,

"In the future, will the Kingdom really escalate to necessary war with the Crolock Kingdom over those explorers' mining data?"

"I know nothing."

Though he said he didn't know, he raised his hand to point to his graying temples and said solemnly,

"I already told you, guess for yourself!"

"..."

No need to guess, your soul has already given me the answer...

After observing the middle-aged man's intense yet steady Soul Flame, confirming his truthfulness about witnessing a future Crolock Kingdom attack, Leon frowned and asked,

"So why?"

Noting that middle-aged Joshua wasn't bluffing—although disagreeing with his rash attack on the Boarding Tower and the ire it drew from the Crolock Kingdom—Leon still asked:

"What exactly did those explorers uncover? How could it lead to such chaos?"

"Do you want to know?"

Glancing at Leon's furrowed brow, the defeated middle-aged Joshua let out a cold laugh, gleefully saying,

"If you want to know, go ahead and lead a raid on the Boarding Tower and seize the mining records!"

Ha, little Baskin, even though you've thwarted me now, I believe that once you see those documents, no matter what you think, you'll eventually make the same choice as I did!"

As he spoke, the middle-aged man pointed remotely at Leon in challenge, full of resentment,

"Just wait! The facts will prove to you who is really right between us!"

"..."

"Besides, don't think you can capture me."

Eyed variously around the room, surrounded by faintly looming Rebels, the middle-aged man said with disdain,

"Don't waste your energy. As soon as there's any danger, I'll be teleported away immediately! You damned traitors, you'll forever..."

"Prince Joshua."

?!!!

Hearing his name from "little Baskin," the middle-aged man was taken aback, choking on his unfinished threats and looked with shock at Leon across the room.

The Rebels inside the room, initially unaware of the name's significance, quickly connected the dots upon seeing his expression, gazing in astonishment at their Predecessor leader.

...

"Judging by your expression, I must have guessed correctly."

Seeing that the middle-aged version of Prince Joshua seemed ready to flee, Leon, lacking the means to hold him back, had to reveal his identity.

Having successfully achieved his goal, stalling the withdrawal of Prince Joshua once more, Leon discreetly tapped a small mirror, signaling Young Ha to urge Senior Emma, then calmly inquired,

"Prince Joshua, I'm curious—what exactly have you experienced in the future to change from an arrogant, naive prince into your current self?"

"..."

"Little Baskin... you truly are a terrifying person..."

Silent in contemplation for a while, middle-aged Joshua drew a silk cloth from his pocket and wiped the thin powder off his cheekbone, revealing the two iconic irregular freckles in the Rebels' bewildered eyes.

"That's right, I am Joshua... but not the foolish prince of now, rather the Joshua of the future: the last King of the Kingdom!"

"This... this..."

"How is that possible!!!"

"A prince? The Rebel leader is a prince!"

Facing the middle-aged Joshua, who calmly confessed his identity, all the Rebels faltered, the bald woman in the staunch leader's faction grasping her head in utter Pain.

If the Rebel leader was a prince and the entire group he built by hand, then what exactly had they been opposing all this time?

A bunch of fools!

He cast a disdainful glance at these former subordinates, then turned his eyes back to "little Baskin" across the room, perplexed,

"Tell me, how did you discover me?"

"..."

Actually, it wasn't me. Another you had a Nightmare, and after Senior Emma conferred with the director, they deduced your existence after ruling out other possibilities. I merely piggybacked on their conclusion.

Chapter 246: does not have second inversion and....._3

Certainly, here's the translated passage:

Of course, those blunt truths were not something he could tell the middle-aged Joshua.

With a slight curl of his lips, Leon gave a profound smile to the perplexed middle-aged man in front of him and improvised,

"Well, that's because you've shown too many flaws."

"Flaws?"

"Yes, flaws."

Sneaking a glance at the middle-aged man's wristwatch, Leon estimated how much more time Senior Emma would need and then slowed his speech to continue stalling for time,

"Even though you've changed a lot, even to the extent of treating an ordinary person like me with such gentle words, that inherent pride in your bones just can't be altered.

Aside from that, your obsession with saving the Kingdom and that inexplicable hatred for the parasites of the Kingdom set you apart from others."

With a gesture toward others, Leon continued his serious nonsense,

"Others might also want to save the Kingdom, but they aim for change, striving for a better future, whereas the hope you express seems more like trying to make up for regrets;

Others' hatred towards those parasites stems from empathy for the victims' plight, but your anger appears more like someone is ruining what belongs to you.

Perhaps it's not obvious when looked at individually, but when you display such emotions of hope and anger while with others, you seem out of place."

"..."

Just such small differences, and I've given myself away?

Completely unaware of the other version of himself having nightmares, the middle-aged man, having been thoroughly hoodwinked by Leon's nonsense, couldn't help but take a deep breath and gazed at Leon with complicated eyes, saying,

"So in your eyes, I have a family environment that could foster a proud personality, regard the entire Kingdom as my property, know what has happened in the future, and am desperately trying to save the Kingdom... these aren't enough!

Little Baskin, it's one thing you could see through the Kingdom's situation at a glance and propose feasible plans, but with just these details, I don't believe you could deduce my identity!"

"..."

Indeed, because it's not something I deduced.

I only sneaked in yesterday, how would I know any details? These words were crafted to fit an answer, purely to stall for time and fool you. It's supposed to sound unreasonable!

"Of course, relying solely on these isn't enough, I do have other pieces of information."

Narrowing his eyes while assessing the middle-aged man's expression, the successful trap-setter Leon smiled and retorted under the amazed gaze of the rebels,

"Prince Joshua, now we both have things we want to know. Are you willing to make a trade with me? You tell me what those mines truly are, and I'll tell you how I guessed your identity. What do you think of this deal?"

"I..."

Unaware of Leon's intention to pull a fast one, faced with the offered exchange, the middle-aged man, filled with questions craving answers, unconsciously clenched his fist, engaging in a fierce psychological struggle.

After a moment, he slightly loosened his tightly clenched fist and shook his head with gritted teeth,

"You devil... I won't trade! If you want to know what it is, go see for yourself!"

Relying on immense willpower, he refused the deal with "Little Baskin," seemingly afraid he might relent, the middle-aged man immediately drew a handgun, aimed it at his own head, preparing to activate the fallback left by the Aquarius Director under crisis.

However, what the middle-aged man never expected was that just as he pulled the trigger, the "Little Baskin," who was only supposed to make people bow, merely raised his hand and, with a mime of squeezing air, crushed the gun into a scrap of metal!

?!!!

Upon seeing the golden sparking toad pendant within "Little Baskin's" collar, the middle-aged man couldn't help but shudder, nearly widening his eyes to the limit!

"You... you are!!!"

Chapter 247: Comfortable and Unanimously Passed_1

Ryan Laine?!

After recognizing his true identity through the toad pendant on his chest that flickered brightly and then dimmed, middle-aged Joshua's mind felt like it had been struck with a broken gong. His eardrums hummed loudly. He even heard the sound of his angry blood rushing into the blood vessels in his ears with a swoosh.

What the hell is going on with this little Baskin? The guy who completely destroyed my years of hard work is a Cleaner from the Purification Bureau pretending to be someone else! And he's that Ryan Laine, who has repeatedly opposed me and in the future even personally ended the Kingdom!

I won't let him go! I absolutely won't let him go!!!

"Aaaah! I'll kill you!!!"

...

Huh? The hatred was actually held back!

Watching the middle-aged man, whose eyes instantly turned completely red, climbing onto the long table with both hands and feet and pouncing towards him in fury, Ryan, who unexpectedly "retained" him successfully, couldn't help but feel a bit of joy in his eyes.

Considering the many aspects of the instructions for "Beyond the Gate" that seemed impossible to capture, he had originally given up hope of capturing the middle-aged version of Joshua.

However, seeing that Joshua was about to run, and unable to wait for Senior Emma's support, he decided to gamble on the chance, using the Black Goat's intersections to intensify Joshua's anger to the maximum.

Somehow, because Ryan didn't plan to kill him, or maybe Joshua, whose mind was filled with anger, couldn't perceive danger, the crisis-shifting ability of "Beyond the Gate" didn't activate. Instead, Joshua was allowed to rush at him barehanded.

Perfect! I just learned some fighting techniques a couple of days ago!

Watching Joshua, full of openings after his reckless charge, Ryan, delighted by the opportunity, quickly released his grip on the Yang Jiao, stepped on the long table, focused his breathing, pulled back his stance, wound up his arm...

And delivered a swift and clean big slap!

"Smack!"

With a resounding slap that echoed throughout the conference room, middle-aged Joshua's left cheek and Ryan's right hand made an incredibly close-up intimate contact. Joshua's body, which had rushed forward like an arrow, spun horizontally with the same speed, crashing into a chair on Ryan's left with a loud bang.

Even before his body hit the ground, Joshua, with his jaw suffering a heavy blow and his brain shaken, rolled his eyes in midair. His consciousness and half a mouthful of teeth nearly left his body simultaneously, and he fainted on the spot without even managing to make a sound.

Serves you right for secretly attacking me!

Feeling the familiar touch on his uncle-in-law's face, Ryan, finally delivering the slap, felt as if he was placing the last piece in a puzzle. A tingly itch traveled from his spine straight to the top of his head, filling him with an inexplicable sense of relief.

Hmm... I just forgot to use the newly learned fighting techniques.

After diligently studying combat with the female police officer for two days, Ryan was eager to try it in practice. But as Joshua's face came within range, somehow, his right hand seemed to have a mind of its own, instinctively swinging over with a smack.

Perhaps the previous few slaps created some kind of strange muscle memory, causing my hand to move faster than my brain... what a pity.

Though he didn't get to showcase his hard-earned new skills, a slight flaw in what would have otherwise been perfect, Ryan still managed a satisfied smile as he watched Joshua's face swelling rapidly amidst the pile of broken wood.

You know, with the handprint I left on his face, the two Joshuas finally look the same... Hmm... That face seems most pleasant to look at when it's swollen from a slap.

...

"What... what the hell is going on here?"

Watching Joshua, who had been preparing to escape one moment and then rushed furiously the next, only to be slapped and sprawled out the next, the rebels in the room had been bewildered by the startling turn of events.

"It's nothing, just that the conditions for the ability to activate weren't met."

Covering the Holy Spirit pendant on his neck, Ryan subtly shifted his footing, kicking the broken nail gun in Joshua's hand under the table. Maintaining a calm exterior, he explained,

"Nathan just... hmm... let's call him that! He just explained that if any danger approaches, he'll be relocated immediately.

But I didn't intend to harm him, just gave him a light slap, so his life-saving Anomalous Object may not have considered him to be in real danger, and thus didn't relocate him."

Briefly explaining why Joshua didn't escape, and after putting the Yang Jiao that incited Joshua's anger back into the mirror, Ryan, still waiting for Senior Emma to appear, tried to avoid the attention on the flaws he just exposed. He tapped lightly on the small mirror and continued to urge, shifting the topic,

"Everyone, although Nathan's identity has issues and his previous directives had personal motives, I still believe that the intelligence he just provided on the Crolock Kingdom's scent agent is worth our serious consideration. What do you all think?"

We... we wouldn't know that?

Hearing the inquiry from "Little Baskin" and recalling the formidable Crolock Kingdom, the rebels looked at each other, momentarily unsure whether to speak.

To say the least, compared to the former leader "Nathan," the new leader Little Baskin is clearly more... hmm... he seems to be Little Baskin, but just from what he's said, whether he's Little Baskin isn't important anymore.

All these years of effort, though many things have been done, upon careful thought, nothing seems to have been accomplished. Everything has been muddled, and in recent years, we've even lost track of whether what we've been doing is right or wrong.

And today, just sitting here listening to Little Baskin speak for ten minutes felt like a streetlight suddenly lighting the way on a dark path, or like someone forcefully opening the door to a dark room, making our minds suddenly clear, finally knowing which direction to step in. This feeling should be called...

Reliable!

Yes! Following him feels reliable!

Seeing the nearly identical meaning in each other's eyes, the rebels finally relaxed their expressions.

Though we don't know much else, this new leader is evidently much more reliable than the last one, also clearly a lot smarter.

While we might not be as smart as Nathan, compared to Little Baskin, we're probably miles behind. Knowing nothing about the Crolock agents, there's no need to voice opinions on such crucial issues, just follow the smart guy and call it a day!

...

"I'll listen to you!"

The short man, whose ability temporarily took over physical control, spoke up first,

"Little Ba... Leader! I don't know much about the Crolock Kingdom, but I trust what you say is right! I'll follow you!"

"Yes!"

After the short man spoke, apparently motivated by some force, more voices of agreement followed.

A small-framed man stood up and said,

"I think so too! Although attacking the Boarding Tower is risky and may provoke the Crolock Kingdom, I believe in you! Leader, I'm sure you have a plan!"

The elderly woman, holding a sleeping little girl, nodded slightly.

"I follow the Leader's decision!"

The man's burned nose expanded slightly.

"Doesn't matter, I could smell that you're reliable!"

"..."

Seeing the "favorable situation" of having passed four votes in front of him, and hearing the continuous chorus of "Leader," Ryan's smile froze...

Don't mess this up! I wanted you to discuss whether to attack the Boarding Tower to delay time for Senior Emma to arrive and capture everyone. When did I say I was going to be the leader of the rebels?

Also, setting aside my intention to arrest you all, if we talk about true identity, I'm currently the Duke of Lionheart within the Old Nobility! A Prince of the Royal Family of Traveling Thrush! I hold positions in both nobility and royalty!

Even if you count my position in the Ryan Family, I have hundreds of large and small factories and the largest arms company in the entire Kingdom under my name! If you elect me as the leader of the rebels, how is that any different from electing a Jewish person as the German leader?

"Um... why don't we first discuss the Boarding Tower issue."

Unable to explain his true identity and afraid of overachieving the Red-haired Director's "expectations," Ryan awkwardly added,

"Everyone, I'm still young and haven't dealt with much actual business. If you expect me to lead, it's impossible."

So let's discuss the Boarding Tower plan first. I haven't done much of this before, and if I were to take charge of attacking the Boarding Tower, I wouldn't even know where to start... hmm... do you have any suggestions?"

"Leader, you're being modest."

Observing a "Little Baskin" who didn't come across as overbearing this time, not presumptuously accepting a leadership position but rather relinquishing part of his speaking rights, the plump middle-aged man's eyes showed satisfaction as he stood up with a cheerful grin,

"Age is not an issue, lack of experience can be slowly compensated for, but long-term vision is innate!

Leader! Please don't decline any further, you're the only suitable one for this position. Additionally, should you need experience in the future, I, Oliver, would be more than willing to offer any support needed!"

"I... I have no objection..."

Discussing the Boarding Tower plan wasn't on anyone's mind anymore. Among the remaining seven rebels, the bald woman, the sole "former leader supporter," touched her head and sighed,

"Though Nathan saved me, but... but his true identity was actually the Prince, and he's been using us as tools. I can no longer believe in him.

Little Baskin... no! Leader! As long as you continue to lead us forward, I will always recognize you as the leader!"

"Hoo..."

As if to match the mood, little Phoebe, who was fast asleep, shivered slightly, showing a sweet and adorable smile in her sleep.

"Wow... it's so sweet!"

"Zzz..."

[Through cunningly devised plans, you completely shattered the trust that the rebel members had in their original leader and gained unanimous recognition from the seven current core members. You have earned the Silver Level Hidden Badge, "Usurper."]

Chapter 248: Second Hand and Second Hand and Second Hand_1

[Usurper: Driven by immense ambition, an aspirant seeks to completely overthrow a legitimate regime or organization using improper or unethical means to fundamentally alter the existing order.]

[Wearing Effect: Your stealth and efficiency will be greatly enhanced when engaging in illegal or unethical activities.]

[Advancement Route: After completely usurping a national-level organization or ten regional-level organizations, this badge will automatically advance to the Gold Level Hidden Badge "Unrighteous Pretender King".]

[Hidden Trait (no need to wear): Upon successfully usurping a regime or organization, you will forcibly acquire a high-value item from the usurped party.]

...

Receiving "official certification" from the Badge System, Leon, who had secured his identity as the leader of the Rebels, couldn't help but sigh deeply in his heart.

Damn... the director was right, he thought. *I really went undercover all the way to becoming the leader... but this badge seems quite powerful?*

Leon glanced at the new badge on his panel, flickering with a dim silver light and seemingly ready to emit an evil laugh at any moment. He couldn't help but turn his gaze to the middle-aged Joshua beside him.

Unfortunately, Leon had acquired the Usurper badge only after completing the usurpation. If he had received it earlier, he might have had the chance to "take" the "Beyond the Gate" from middle-aged Joshua.

But now, according to the behavior of the Aquarius Director, if he really attempted to act against "Beyond the Gate," that thing would probably activate immediately and escape with Joshua...

Wait a minute!

As he pondered this, a sudden realization struck Leon, and his eyebrow twitched slightly before he spoke to the group of Rebels, "Since everyone trusts me, I won't decline..."

"Additionally, attacking the Boarding Tower involves the Crolock Kingdom, and I don't know enough about it to ensure the right decisions, so the attack is temporarily shelved. However, the investigation can start first. Does anyone have any objections?"

"No objections."

"I agree!"

"Alright... I was looking forward to a good burn."

"..."

"Since nobody objects, let's conclude today's meeting here!"

Not having figured out exactly how to manage these Rebel members and considering a way to remove "Beyond the Gate," Leon decided not to wait for the long-overdue Senior Emma and instead made a direct decision to dismiss the meeting, saying, "If there's nothing else to discuss, since the 'gate' opened by Joshua hasn't closed yet, let's head back. Once there's progress on the Boarding Tower investigation, we can reconvene... Additionally, Phoebe and Lucy, please stay behind."

Us?

Hearing the new leader's request, the elderly woman looking quite aged paused slightly, then nodded while holding her still-sleeping sister, not moving. The other five members of the Rebels, filled with anticipation, left the meeting room one after another, passing through the 'gate' as Leon instructed.

Sigh... troublesome...

Watching the expectant figures leaving, Leon couldn't help but rub his temples.

Although these core members of the Rebels weren't truly bad people, under Joshua's misguided leadership, they had still committed many wrongdoings. Leon wasn't in a position to forgive them on behalf of the victims but couldn't justify disposing of them according to the Kingdom's laws either.

After all, they were also victims. Besides Joshua's misguided leadership, they had been manipulated into nurturing Anomalous Objects under the Aquarius Director's influence. Their increasing Contamination Values had magnified the extremism and hatred in their hearts, making it difficult to control their actions.

Maybe... after the director finishes the questioning, I should ask if these people meet the standards for recruitment by the Purification Bureau? If, for the sake of guarding a normal world, they risk a nearly ten percent mortality rate to fight against Abnormals, perhaps it could also count as atonement?

"Leader?"

Watching Leon's ever-changing expression and the complex look in his eyes, the elderly Lucy couldn't help but ask, "Did you have something difficult you needed us sisters to do?"

"Indeed, there's something I need your help with."

Leon nodded, "Your grand... uh... your sister Phoebe used an Anomalous Object at Nathan's request recently, erasing many people's memories. Can you have her lift that effect?"

"I can do that; it's not difficult."

Hearing Leon's request, Lucy readily agreed, but looking at the sleeping Phoebe in her arms, she couldn't help but ask, "Leader, if possible, could we wait until my sister wakes up? You don't know, last time she overused her ability, and her sleepiness is actually restoring her spirit and stabilizing her soul. If she doesn't get enough rest, I'm worried she'll..."

"No rush. It's fine to lift it when she wakes. Additionally..."

Already aware of the sisters' soul status through the Black Goat's soul vision, Leon pondered for a moment before reminding them, "Your abilities are quite unique and can produce effects far exceeding your Contamination Value... um... far beyond your level's limits by paying extra Costs. That's why you've ended up like this due to excessive usage."

"During this period, unless absolutely necessary, try to use your Abnormal Abilities as little as possible. Let me think of a way; maybe there's a chance to revert."

What?!

Hearing Leon's words, the incredibly aged Lucy was overwhelmingly ecstatic.

At this moment, she couldn't care less about the surprisingly detailed knowledge of Abnormal Ability operations that clearly didn't belong to "Little Baskin." Filled with disbelief, she asked, trembling, "Leader, are you serious? Can my sister and I really return to our original appearance?"

"Yes, you can."

Having consulted the Black Goat, Leon nodded, answering with confidence, "The process should be reversible, but the recovery will take a very long time and can never be entirely complete. In the end, there will always be some lingering issues.

"For example, your physical state will still be somewhat older than your peers, and your sister's mental age will remain much younger than her peers, but your appearances should be restorable."

"Enough, enough! That's enough!"

Touching her wrinkle-filled face, Lucy, overwhelmed with joy, couldn't help but cry tears of happiness. Large droplets of tears fell into the neat braids on Phoebe's head.

"We... don't need to be exactly like normal people. Being able to revert even a little is already plenty! Leader! Thank you! Thank you!"

"You're welcome; it's what I should do."

...

Smiling as he sent the grateful Lucy on her way, Leon watched the meeting room, now empty again, and silently walked over to Joshua, who lay amidst a pile of shattered wood. He couldn't resist giving him a firm kick in the butt.

You certainly caused a lot of trouble!

Clearly holding the script of a reborn hero protagonist from a sensational novel where the country is saved after falling into ruin, you wound up carrying out petty attacks and caused destruction, doing nothing but causing trouble like a third-rate villain. You really are...

Well... never mind. Not having personally experienced the things he went through, my criticism might be unfair. But this kick was necessary.

Resisting the urge to spit on him, Leon pulled out a rope and tied him up, then removed the watch capable of detecting "aptitude" and tossed it into the small mirror. He then knocked on the mirror's surface, calling out Young Ha.

"What's going on? Why hasn't Senior Emma arrived yet?"

"Woof! Woof woof woof!"

("She's not here! She isn't at the Purification Bureau!")

Senior Emma isn't here?

Hearing Young Ha's report, Leon frowned.

Before heading to the questioning, the director had promised him that Senior Emma would be stationed at the bureau, ensuring she could assist at any time.

And with the responsible nature of Senior Emma, an ordinary situation couldn't possibly lead to her "abandoning her post." So... was there an "Abnormal" launching a large-scale assault in the Capital City? Or was there an issue with her daughter?

"Woof woof woof, woof woof woof!"

("She's not here, but there's a letter for you on her desk!")

If she still left a letter, then the situation shouldn't be too dangerous, right?

Hearing Young Ha's words, Leon felt a bit relieved. He then accepted the envelope, still bearing Young Ha's tooth marks, tore it open, and read through it swiftly.

'Leon, about an hour after you and the director left, investigators from headquarters came, claiming that a few high nobles who had betrayed the Bauhinia Family were dead, with traces similar to those left by my "Execution Platform" on their bodies. They requested my presence at headquarters for investigation.

'The situation caught me off guard, and I had no choice but to try evading the investigators and leave a message for Jerry's "friends," asking him to sit in at the bureau in my stead and take on the responsibility of supporting you. However, his previous task hasn't ended, so it's unlikely they received the message in time.

'If you're seeing this letter, it means you are likely in a dangerous situation, so please hold out for two days! He will definitely arrive in two days!'

...

Damn Aquarius Director!

After reading the letter left by Senior Emma, Leon's face darkened, realizing it was probably another move by the Aquarius Director.

Leon and the director had planned to take advantage of the Aquarius Director's absence to directly raid the Rebels' base, but the Aquarius Director hadn't been idle either. If Leon deduced correctly, he had likely used methods similar to Senior Emma ahead of time, eliminating her enemies.

His objective was most likely to strike the Purification Bureau while the director was away and Senior Emma was under investigation, aiming to seize the photos in the director's drawer. As for the person tasked with attacking the Purification Bureau...

Tch...

Looking over at the Mirror World, where the watch with six pins clung unwaveringly to the "photos," Leo couldn't help but click his tongue.

There was no need to guess; it was certainly Joshua, and this watch was the tool intended to find the 'photos.' Lucky for Leon, his usurpation was swift, allowing him to capture Joshua beforehand. Otherwise...

Well... otherwise, he'd have only managed to steal fake photos.

Confirming this incident had turned out to be a close call, Leon couldn't help but laugh, his foot once again involuntarily kicking the conniving old brother-in-law involved with the Aquarius Director.

It could be said that when it came to cunning, his director wasn't any less crafty than the Aquarius Director and could even be considered a step ahead. Not only did they prepare fake photos in advance, but they also sent Leon ahead to wipe out the Rebels' stronghold preemptively.

Besides, capturing Joshua was an unexpected bonus. Conventionally, touching the "Beyond the Gate" would cause it to disappear instantly, but with Senior Jerry, the "Master Thief," around, the Aquarius Director was likely to lose it.

Thinking of the "Cunning Hand of Fate" that could steal the object most influencing a person's destiny, Leon couldn't help but look up, gazing at the "Beyond the Gate" left open after the sisters had left, showing a confident smile.

When it comes to the thing that most influences Joshua's destiny... apart from it, there probably isn't anything else.

Chapter 249: What has had the biggest impact on Joshua_1?

"So... you want me to help you "steal" from him to see if we can pilfer that anomalous object called the "Beyond the Gate"?"

Returning to the bureau after completing the task and hearing Leon's request, Jerry hesitated as he looked at the middle-aged man tied up on the sofa in his office,

'This might be slightly difficult. It's not that it can't be done, but... we might be in a bit of danger...'

'?

Facing Leon's somewhat puzzled expression, Jerry organized his thoughts and explained,

'My "Cunning Hand of Fate" has a very high hierarchy, but overall, it still falls within the realm of "human." To use the analogy of the "Leon Value" you summarized, it can effectively work on targets with a Leon Value below sixty points.

According to our director's estimates, sixty points in Leon Value is roughly the boundary between human and god. Once this line is crossed, intelligent life forms more resemble some kind of humanoid anomaly compared to humans. Not only can they resist part of the effects, but if the power gap is too large, they can trace back along the source of the anomalous effects.

And the Aquarius Director's Leon Value has surely exceeded sixty points. So, if that "Beyond the Gate" is truly from the Aquarius Director given to this person, then when I use the "Cunning Hand of Fate" on him, he'll most likely be able to locate us, and might come directly.'

So that's how it is...

After listening to Jerry's explanation, Leon pondered for a moment, then said,

'We're not afraid of alerting the Aquarius Director. Before leaving, the director promised Senior Emma and me that regardless of whether or not the questioning succeeds, he will definitely keep the Aquarius Director tied up at the main bureau, to facilitate our actions here.

We can't guarantee too much time, but for at least a week or two, even if he knows what we're doing, he definitely won't be able to come back... Jerry, what's your success rate of stealing the "Beyond the Gate"?'

'That, actually, is quite high.'

Jerry thought for a moment before responding,

'If I directly used it on the Aquarius Director, I reckon I could only steal a few fragments. But since this person's anomalous object was given by the Aquarius Director, an intermediary's in between, the "Cunning Hand of Fate" should still work normally.'

'Then let's steal it!'

After hearing Jerry's words, Leon weighed the pros and cons and the potential outcomes, then decisively made the call,

'Even though our director initiated the questioning, its success rate isn't actually high. He just wants to catch a slip-up by the Aquarius Director to force him to accept memory reading by the bureau.

If we can get the "Beyond the Gate" out as evidence and present it to the main bureau— even if the person who created this thing is the future Aquarius Director and not his current self— it would still be enough to trouble him immensely!'

That's a valid point...

After hearing Leon's analysis, Jerry thought for a bit, and nodded in agreement.

If they could prove the future Aquarius Director dared to target the royal family, it would indirectly increase the suspicion that the current Aquarius Director is also breaking the rules, helping the director confirm his accusation of privately mass-producing anomalous objects.

As for offending the Aquarius Director over this...

The director had long since made an enemy of the Aquarius Director, and if it weren't for the director's protection over the years, his life wouldn't be nearly as comfortable as it is now. So both emotionally and rationally, he couldn't stand by and do nothing.

Moreover, with such hard evidence thrown into his face and with several directors and bureau chiefs surrounding him, even if the Aquarius Director had an Undying Body, he might be pummeled to death by those fierce individuals. And, really, what is there to fear from offending a director who was about to be dealt with?

Do it!

...

Having dispelled his doubts through the discussion with Leon, Jerry first took a deep breath and flexed the fingers of his right hand. Then he extended his hand toward the midriff of the unconscious middle-aged Joshua, gently flicking at his heart.

The surface rippled.

As if the whole person turned into a clear lake, the fabric near mid-aged Joshua's heart slightly swayed, silently rippling out in concentric circles. And as the ripples quickly spread, two blurred shadows gradually emerged from beneath the waves.

Strange, why are there two things that impact his fate the most?

Seeing the shadows under the lines of fate, Jerry couldn't help but frown slightly and turned to look at Leon.

"Leon, could you take a look, which of these two things seems more like the "Beyond the Gate" given to him by the Aquarius Director?"

"I'll take a look."

Moving closer to Jerry, Leon tried to discern the two emerged shadows, and his brow furrowed as well.

The two colorless shadows, with the one on the left having an extremely irregular shape, and pulsating slightly as if sentient, were completely unrecognizable as any particular object.

The one on the right was slightly more regular, with a faintly discernible outline, resembling a hand with fingers slightly spread, but nothing else was visible.

Neither of these things seemed related to a "gate," did they?

"Can it be any clearer?"

Having a hard time determining what the two things were, Leon couldn't help but ask,

'At least have a more distinct outline, or perhaps some color, or can't you just take both?'

'That's not possible.'

Jerry shook his head at these words,

'This matter, after all, involves a director. Achieving this level is already extremely difficult. As for taking both, it's even less possible. The super-high hierarchy of "Cunning Hand of Fate" comes at the cost of the fewest possible actions. It's effective only on the first use for the same target.'

"Then, Senior, just pick one!"

Fully aware that his own luck was mostly terrible, Leon simply delegated the choice back, saying to Jerry,

'I have a vague notion of the "Beyond the Gate," but neither of these things seems quite a fit to me, so I can't tell which one is right. Just pick any one, Senior.

If you choose correctly, all the better, but if not, no matter; we can find a way to the main bureau and deliver this unconscious Joshua ourselves. The effect should be the same.'

"Alright, I'll make a selection and see."

Thinking that Leon's argument made sense, Jerry nodded and accepted the responsibility of choosing. After contemplating the two shadows for a bit, perhaps finding the indistinct substance on the left somewhat unsettling, he reached toward the safer-looking "hand" on the right.

"Hmm?"

When Jerry's hand touched the shadow of the hand, apart from Joshua, who was still unconscious, the other two in the room both shivered in unison.

Jerry was surprised to find that he seemed to actually grasp a living person's hand, even faintly perceiving that warm touch, while Leon, on the other hand, was shocked to feel as if his right hand had just been tugged by someone.

Chapter 250: The Secret of Aquarius (Part 1)_1

"I think I understand why you grabbed my hand..."

After trying to pull away three times and finding his right hand tugged three times by an inexplicable force, Leon recalled "Young Joshua's" premonitory dream and suddenly understood, saying,

"Just like how the King of Nightmares makes the two Joshuas have nightmares together, in the judgment of the Cunning Hand of Fate, these two Joshuas should be one person with two fateful paths, so there appear two 'items' that have the greatest influence on him.

And if I'm not mistaken, the shadow on the left should be the thing that most influences Middle-aged Joshua, while my right hand is probably the thing that most deeply impacts Young Joshua's fate, which is why it appeared among the options as well."

"..."

In that case, it barely makes sense?

After hearing Leon's guess, Jerry nodded slightly in agreement, then asked with some puzzlement,

"Leon, what's with your hand? Why does it have such a significant impact on Prince Joshua's fate?"

"Uh... it's really nothing, just slapped him a couple of times..."

After briefly recounting the big brawl during the inheritance ritual and the incident when he and Senior Emma investigated and gave his real brother-in-law a thorough beating, Leon explained with rightful confidence in the short man's horrified eyes,

"I didn't use an Anomalous Object; it was just a pure hand slap. In the agreements of the main bureau and various royal families, it only states that you can't use an Anomalous Object to influence or harm Royal Family Members; it doesn't say you can't directly beat them up, right?"

"..."

The agreement indeed doesn't include that clause, but that's because for a normal person, the likelihood of attacking a prince and killing him is higher than the likelihood of slapping him in the face, right?

You sure are... I thought stealing from the royal family was outrageous enough, yet there's someone like you. No wonder you're part of our Virgin Branch; you're certainly not one to be trifled with!

After giving Leon a wordless thumbs up, the short man changed the target of the Cunning Hand of Fate, reaching toward the vaguely trembling unknown entity on the left.

Although they couldn't determine which was the Beyond the Gate before, now that they knew the one on the right was Leon's hand, the real Beyond the Gate was naturally on the left. Next, as long as he stole it out... huh?

The anomaly reappeared.

Accompanied by a soft popping noise, the shadowy entity on the left burst forcefully the instant Jerry grabbed it, then, like a beast that caught the scent of fresh flesh or a ghost finding a thread to escape purgatory, it crawled madly along Jerry's right hand!

?!!!

Witnessing this bizarre scene, the two immediately realized that something was wrong. Jerry didn't immediately pull back his right hand; instead, he reached his left hand toward the office window glass and let out an urgent dog bark.

"Woof!"

With a crisp and clear response, the golden retriever's head flashed across the window glass, instantly placing an unsharpened short dagger into Jerry's left hand.

Grabbing the short dagger etched with strange patterns, he vigorously pulled back his captured right hand while tightly placing the blade against the skin on the back of it, slicing off a small piece. Meanwhile, Leon tore the red hair tied around his neck and threw it at Joshua's heart.

"*Mabu Bu!"*

Accompanied by a bizarre roar half-furious and half-despairing, the arm that was grabbed by the shadowy entity suddenly turned into the small piece of skin Jerry had voluntarily cut off.

Following his pulling motion, a small part chasing out from Joshua's heart was instantly sliced into countless bits of flesh emanating black gas by the blood-scented red hair from the director, smeared all over the carpet.

Where's the Beyond the Gate that was promised? What the heck is this thing?!

...

"Don't go!"

Just when Leon and Jerry were still recovering from the scare, seemingly having recognized their race, the shadowy entity spoke human words in an unknown language.

"Take me out! Take me out!"

Following the fluctuations of the Cunning Hand of Fate that hadn't yet dissipated, the entity pursued all the way to Joshua's heart, hammering desperately from the inside, creating intense ripples on Joshua's heart, while furiously howling,

"Wealth! Power! Youth! Even eternal life! As long as you can get me out, I can give you anything!"

"Go to hell!"

Forced to use a dull knife to cut off a large piece of his own flesh to escape this unidentified entity, Jerry couldn't help but angrily curse, preparing to stop the Cunning Hand of Fate immediately, letting this clearly dangerous entity roll as far away as possible.

But just as he was about to stop, Leon reached out to hold him back.

'Wait, let me ask it a few questions!'

Using soul transmission to halt Jerry, Leon first took out a bandage to wrap around Senior Jerry's hand, helping him heal the wound, then stared intently at the now clearer shadowy entity, asking rapidly,

"What exactly are you? And what is your relation to the Aquarius Director of the Purification Bureau?"

"Aquarius!!"

At the mention of the Aquarius Director, the strange entity suddenly got agitated, howling,

"It was him who imprisoned me!

He grinds my bones! He cuts my flesh! He drains my blood! Damned Aquarius! If I get out of here, I'll make sure he personally experiences the torment I have endured for over two thousand years!"

Two thousand years?

Hearing the howls from the unknown entity, Leon and Jerry were shocked and exchanged glances, then Leon continued to ask,

"Are you saying... the current Aquarius Director has already lived for over two thousand years?"

"Live two thousand years? As if!"

After angrily cursing the Aquarius Director a few times, the entity seemed to regain some sanity, understanding that the two humans in front of it couldn't possibly release it, likely just probing for intelligence. The entity sneered mockingly,

"You wretched short-lived species, no matter how powerful you become, you can't transcend the binds of the body. Unless you replace your body, a hundred and fifty years is your human limit!

The Aquarius who imprisoned me wasn't this current loser; it was the Aquarius Director fifteen generations ago! These damned bastards made me their family's property, passing me down for fifteen generations!"

Remembering the endless torment it had suffered over two thousand years, the entity unleashed another bout of hysterical cursing, mixing in some incomprehensible ancient languages, accompanied by a strange, harsh sound like a knife scraping glass, stabbing Leon and Jerry's ears with pain.

After a thorough and satisfying vent of curses, seeing that the two humans "outside" were clearly uncomfortable but not leaving, the mysterious entity nodded approvingly, then sneered,

"Enough with the nonsense. I can tell, no matter what benefits I promise, neither of you bastards would take me out.

But you're obviously not on Aquarius's side, and the reason you found me is probably to get a hold on him... so hurry up! Ask whatever questions you have before Aquarius notices someone contacting me!"