

I! Cleaner 251

Chapter 251: The Secret of Aquarius (Part 2)_1

Could this thing... be trusted?

After hearing what this entity had to say, Leon couldn't help but ponder for a moment, then turned his head slightly to give Jerry a questioning look.

*'If we don't stop the Cunning Hand of Fate, could it escape?'

Impossible. Only an Anomalous Object with fate attributes can slip through the veil of destiny's pattern. But it's best not to take too long, or even if we haven't stolen the item out, it will still alert the Aquarius Director.'

Then let's ask more!

Thinking along the lines of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," at the very least someone with whom he could cooperate and communicate, Leon quickly spoke up:

"What exactly are you? Why have you been imprisoned by the Aquarius Director's line for two thousand years?"

"I'm not a thing; I'm a god! The God of Enlightenment!"

As it talked about its past, the self-proclaimed God of Enlightenment spoke through gritted teeth:

"That damn Aquarius Director coveted my authority to grant enlightenment. They actually found a way to entice me to descend and then imprisoned me, extracting my flesh and True Spirit to create seeds of anomaly, stuffing them into the souls of you insects, using my authority to activate your own abnormalities!"

?!!!

Flesh and True Spirit of a True God? So, this is how the Aquarius Director created his Seeds of Anomaly!

Upon learning this rather shocking truth, Leon and Jerry instantly understood why what was touched by the Cunning Hand of Fate wasn't the Beyond the Gate, but this imprisoned God of Enlightenment.

Although Beyond the Gate held significant influence over mid-aged Joshua's fate, so did the God of Enlightenment who provided the Seed of Anomaly. The weight was about equal, so either could potentially appear.

Moreover, although the name doesn't sound like an Evil God, considering the way it referred to humans, and the madness and hatred almost oozing from its words, after two thousand years of long torment, this God of Enlightenment's mental state might be more extreme than that of an average Evil God.

...

"Your Excellency, the God of Enlightenment."

Inwardly warning himself to only use what this mad god said as a reference, and never fully believe it, Leon cautiously replied,

"Within our Purification Bureau, someone has noticed the anomalies of the Aquarius Director and is currently initiating an inquiry. How much do you know about the current Aquarius Director?"

"Huh? You idiots at the Purification Bureau finally noticed something was off about him?"

Upon hearing that someone was preparing to initiate an inquiry against the Aquarius Director, the God of Enlightenment let out a burst of mad laughter, then half-joyfully and half-mockingly replied,

"That's good. I thought you would only realize something was wrong once his plan succeeded entirely, and he replaced Taurus, ascended to the Watcher's Palace. I didn't expect there are still smart people among your Purification Bureau."

The Watcher's Palace?!!!!

At this point, Leon's body shook involuntarily, while Jerry's eyes widened in disbelief as he exclaimed,

"What... what did you say?"

"I just said, your Purification Bureau's Aquarius Director wants to replace Taurus, and seat himself in the Watcher's Palace!"

Repeating what he said earlier, the God of Enlightenment smirked coldly,

"This generation's Aquarius is too distracted, and his combat skills are the weakest in two thousand years, but I must admit, his grasp of the Aquarius lineage's Creation Mystique is the most profound among the fifteen generations of Aquarius.

Even after I've been extracted for two thousand years, with less than ten percent of my authority left, he can still use my flesh to create a large number of Hierarchy-near-divine top-tier Anomalous Objects. His talent is not much different from the first-generation Aquarius."

After giving his enemy a somewhat positive evaluation, the God of Enlightenment laughed,

"The Aquarius lineage's Creation Mystique and the Taurus lineage's Anomaly Forge are the most complementary pair among the Purification Bureau's Thirteen Secret Techniques.

The former can create anomalies, while the latter can, through forging, stabilize many originally unmanifestable anomalies into usable stable Anomalous Objects, resulting in complementary effects.

And your Purification Bureau's Watcher's Palace is the ultimate masterpiece created by the first-generation Aquarius and Taurus by combining the two secret techniques."

Briefly explaining the origins of the Watcher's Palace, the God of Enlightenment continued speaking,

"Although this generation's Aquarius is talented, true gods find it challenging to descend under the protection of the Watcher's Palace. After two thousand years of depletion, the quantity of high-level 'materials' is exceptionally scarce, and coupled with his own inadequate strength, he could never reach the level of the first-generation Aquarius.

If I'm not mistaken, after realizing his own level's ceiling, obsessed with Creation Mystique, he was unwilling to muddle through like this and set his sights on the Watcher's Palace. He probably hoped to glimpse something at a higher level from this ultimate work of Creation Mystique.

But as for the most crucial card, your Purification Bureau protects the Watcher's Palace too securely even a Director can't approach it. The only way to get close to the Watcher's Palace is to become the Ascension Palace Person who guards it.

So, from about thirty years ago, he started planning to create a set of composite Anomalous Objects, hoping to use this set of anomalous objects to replace the identity of the next Ascension Palace Person and thereby go to the Watcher's Palace."

Wait a minute! Replace an identity?

Upon hearing this, Leon's breath involuntarily hitched. He suddenly recalled the photo in the small mirror and the wristwatch with six needles stuck to the photograph like a little wild cat smelling fishy.

Isn't this exactly describing Anna's "If Only"?

No wonder he was fixated on this item, even scheming to frame Senior Emma and giving middle-aged Joshua the wristwatch capable of finding "If Only" because this item could allow him... Uh... Wait!

At this point, it seemed like Leon discovered something he'd long overlooked; his pupils instantly contracted!

Something's wrong! Senior Emma's enemy wasn't just someone who recently died!

Considering the timeline, the Aquarius, upon realizing he would face an inquiry, probably had already planned her frame-up and arranged for middle-aged Joshua with the Beyond the Gate to steal the photo from the Bureau.

Someone about to face an inquiry within the Bureau, whose own security is uncertain, should prioritize their safety. Even if he was planning such a thing, it couldn't happen so quickly unless he had some trump card that made him nearly certain to pass the inquiry!

This is bad! The director's inquiry is likely to encounter trouble!

...

"Senior Jerry!"

Realizing something was amiss, Leon immediately turned to the short man beside him, looking stern as he said,

"Considering this during an inquiry, there's a chance the Aquarius Director has prepared other contingencies!

I feel what the director prepared might not be able to pin him down completely. We must immediately contact headquarters and deliver this news along with Joshua!"

"Huh?"

Prompted by Leon's reminder, Jerry also faintly sensed something was wrong and immediately nodded gravely,

"You're right. We must contact headquarters immediately!"

"..."

"..."

(O_O)?

After waiting for a while without seeing further action, Leon couldn't help but urge,

"Senior! Quickly contact headquarters, what are you waiting for?"

"Huh? So you don't know how to contact headquarters?"

"I just joined a month ago. I'm still the lowest Level Three incident handler. How could I have the contact details for headquarters?"

"I'm only Level Two. If you don't have it, I don't either..."

Exchanging a blank stare with Leon, Jerry, with a trace of hope, asked,

"Didn't the director leave you any contact information before going away?"

"No... But she said if there's a need, contact Senior Emma. Senior Emma can reach her..."

"Emma was taken away by headquarters' people yesterday..."

Seeing these idiots bicker outside for half the day without even having a contact number, the God of Enlightenment, thinking revenge was within reach, was thoroughly disappointed. It spat violently toward outside, disdainfully evaluating them,

"A couple of fools!"

Chapter 252: Because I have a big heart_1

"No... don't..."

The young prince with freckles on his face suddenly opened his eyes on the redwood bed draped in velvet curtains. With a swift motion, he kicked off the blanket covering him and sat up abruptly.

"No! No! No!!!"

Looking at the lavishly decorated familiar sleeping chamber and smelling the faint incense the maid had lit before he slept, Joshua, dressed in silk pajamas, couldn't help but let out a long sigh as he leaned slowly against the headboard amidst the crackling of burning wood in the fireplace.

It was just a dream...

After panting against the headboard for a while, calming his overly rapid heartbeat, the freckled prince, whose pajamas were soaked with cold sweat, rubbed his eyes, wearily got out of bed, and walked across the pure white wool carpet towards the armchair opposite the fireplace. He then slumped into it, staring blankly at the flickering flames inside.

Even if it was just a dream, this recurring dream felt too real, as if there really was a version of himself who had personally experienced an incredibly tragic future.

First, the Kingdom failed to resist the invasion of the Crolock Kingdom and lost two counties' worth of land. Then a neighboring country took advantage of the situation and invaded; the Capital City fell with rebellions rising everywhere. Afterwards, his mother was deposed, his father died of illness, his sister was killed, and the entire Kingdom reached the brink of destruction.

He survived but, without any talent, was completely unable to turn the tide. He could only sell everything he could sell, barely keeping the royal family from being completely annihilated, drowning his sorrows in alcohol amid endless regret and self-blame every day...

No! It won't happen! These are all dreams! All false! It's those damn Rebels trying to influence me through nightmares!

Grabbing a biography from the small table beside him and throwing it fiercely at the fireplace in front of him, a hint of scorching anger appeared on Prince Freckles' somewhat haggard face.

Damn the Purification Bureau!

Especially that bastard who got lucky and inherited the Duke of Lionheart's position!

According to the agreement with the royal family, these branches must send personnel to prioritize ensuring the safety of the royal families of each country, but the damn Virgin Branch takes the royal family's funding and does nothing! Not only do they fail to ensure his safety, but they even indulge that bastard in beating him!

Touching his face, slapped several times, Prince Freckles couldn't help but grit his teeth and clench his fists.

When I inherit the throne in a few years, I will definitely make them...

...

"Knock, knock-knock."

Just as Prince Freckles was secretly making a harsh vow in his heart, a gentle knocking sound came from outside the door.

"Your Highness."

The maid responsible for taking care of his daily life inquired softly from outside the door,

"Did you rest well?"

Taking a deep breath to calm the anger in his heart, Joshua responded,

"What is it?"

"Well, two guests have come to visit you. They have credentials from the Purification Bureau and say they're here to address the issue you mentioned last time."

Two people from the Purification Bureau... the issue from last time?

Upon hearing the maid's report, Joshua's heart suddenly sank, remembering the brutal mix-gender beating from a few days ago, and he nearly fell out of his chair.

"Are those two people... a man and a woman? Is the man black-haired, wearing an old coat, looking a bit thin?"

"No, it's two men."

Noting the slight tremor in the prince's voice and aware of what had happened a few days ago, the maid quickly said,

"Your Highness, I checked on purpose. The guests today are not those two from the other day, their faces and body types don't match."

That's good, that's good...

The hellish ordeal of being beaten and treated simultaneously a few days ago, fainting from the pain only to wake up in even more pain, had left a significant psychological shadow in Joshua's heart. Hearing that it wasn't those two disrespectful bastards from last time, he couldn't help but let out a long sigh and instructed,

"Let them wait in the drawing room first, I'll change and come over."

"Understood."

After the maid's footsteps faded, Joshua, with dark circles under his eyes, left the warmth of the fireplace and swiftly changed out of his sweat-soaked nightclothes, then immediately headed towards the drawing room.

Though the Virgin Branch of the Purification Bureau was despicable, the nightmares that had kept him from sleeping well these past few days were truly intolerable for even one more day!

Driven by the torment of nightmares, Joshua quickly reached the door of the drawing room, waved away the maid who wanted to open the door for him, and impatiently pushed open the door himself. Seeing two unfamiliar men of varying heights on the sofa, he nodded with satisfaction and asked with a slightly raised head,

"Can you solve my nightmares?"

"Yes."

Leon, bearing Baskin's face, nodded then stood up,

"Your Highness Joshua, may I ask you—"

"Such insolence!"

Seeing this person from the Purification Bureau not bow to him again, reminded of a man who also refused to bow, Prince Freckles' bad habit flared up immediately. He reprimanded coldly,

"Who gave you permission to call me by name? And your Virgin Branch's dereliction of duty this time, endangering my safety, you didn't even first... didn't even first... what?"

Stunned as he watched the man's appearance twist until it became that of the black-haired, black-eyed "Demon" he could never forget in his life, Joshua shuddered violently and then, without hesitation, turned to run.

Chapter 253: Because I have a big heart_2

Unfortunately, whether it was his reaction speed or physical fitness, Prince Freckles was far too lacking.

He had just turned his body around, not even having taken the first step, when someone grabbed him by the back of the neck and, using sheer force, dragged him back.

"Relax, I'm not going to hit you this time, I just need your help with something."

After flexing his twitchy right hand, Leon restrained the impulse to give him another slap and spoke up amidst the maid's screams outside the door,

"Tell me, does your royal family have a way to directly contact the headquarters of the Purification Bureau?"

...

Because the headquarters of the Purification Bureau was so hidden, even Senior Jerry, a Level Two crisis handler, didn't know how to find the headquarters. Thus, Leon naturally aimed his plans at the royal family.

As for the reason, after he and Senior Emma gave Prince Joshua a joint male-female combo, the King immediately sent a complaint letter to the headquarters that same day, and the director promptly received a reprimand request for the two.

So, the royal family definitely had the contact of the headquarters, and it was pretty fast!

Thinking about this, Leon, who was worried that the inquiry might change, immediately pulled Senior Jerry along for a second visit with Prince Freckles, intending to use the royal family's channels to report the Aquarius Director's plot to the headquarters.

It's just... it seemed that a certain prince was not very willing to cooperate.

"You... you let me go!"

After waiting a while with his eyes closed and shivering, but not feeling a slap land on his face, Prince Joshua, who for the first time faced Leon without getting hit, finally regained a little bit of his lost courage and defiantly warned,

"This time is different from last time, don't think you can use that excuse of helping me break free from control! If you dare to hit me again, I'll..."

"Enough, I already said I won't hit you!"

Seeing Prince Freckles suddenly become defiant, Leon, eager to report the news to the headquarters and pin down the Aquarius Director for good, had no mood to argue with him and urged him directly,

"I have urgent matters to notify the headquarters; you must take me through the royal family's contact method!"

"..."

So... this bastard needs something from me now?

Hearing Leon's words, Prince Freckles was slightly stunned, then a sudden gleam appeared in his eyes. Previously worn out by a nightmare, he suddenly perked up.

"Let go!"

Wrenching his collar back from Leon's hand and finally getting his feet on the ground, Prince Joshua straightened his crumpled collar while coldly sneering,

"You want my help? You are simply... um..."

Seeing Leon's slightly narrowed eyes and his right hand unconsciously lifting, having been beaten twice, Prince Freckles instinctively swallowed back the words "wishful thinking."

"Taking you through the royal family's channels to contact the Purification Bureau, isn't entirely impossible."

After rationally revising his statement, Joshua crossed his arms and looked up arrogantly at Leon, who was much taller, ordering with a haughty tone,

"But you must first apologize to me, bow, and then..."

"I'm sorry, it was my fault before."

Before Joshua could finish speaking, Leon, anxious to deal with the Aquarius Director, couldn't be bothered to bicker with him and directly offered a very insincere apology, then warned with narrowed eyes,

"Prince Joshua, don't push your luck."

Don't push my luck? Do you think I'm stupid?

Hearing Leon's warning, Prince Freckles couldn't help but let out a sneer.

It's hard enough to get a chance to hold something over you; if I don't take it all back this time, who knows when I'll get another chance.

"I'm not done speaking."

Seeing Leon for the first time humble and obsequious in front of him due to needing something, Joshua only felt an intense satisfaction and thus ordered haughtily,

"If you want my help, you must kneel and kowtow to me! Then smack yourself! At least fi..."

"Slap! Slap! Slap! Slap! Slap!"

I already told you not to push your luck.

Raising his hand in left-to-right punches and delivering five hard slaps to his out-of-line little brother-in-law, Leon coldly asked, as he looked at Joshua, who was slapped to the ground,

"As per your request, I've finished with the five slaps, is my apology accepted?"

"..."

Is this your attitude when you need someone?

Feeling the painfully familiar sensation on his face, Joshua's gaze instantly cleared up, and he started to feel relieved that he'd only said "five." If he had managed to extend it to "ten," with this brother-in-law's style, the slaps on his face might have increased tenfold...

Hm... wait? Brother-in-law?

Discovering something strange suddenly appeared in his head, Prince Freckles was at a loss and began to recall.

Wait a minute! Wasn't I an only child? I don't even have a sister, so how could I have a... um? I actually do have a sis... that woman... Veronica?!

...

"Mm?"

Right when Prince Freckles in the Royal Palace suddenly regained his lost memory, an elder with narrow eyes, and slightly downturned corners of his mouth and brows, couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in surprise.

The [Lost Past] was unlocked? Did Nathan suddenly have a change of heart? Or was it...

Thinking of this, the elder slightly lowered his head, glancing towards a brilliantly red-haired woman in the position left vacant by the Virgo Director, and received an exceptionally bright smile from her.

"..."

I see...

Seeing the smile on the Red-haired Director's face, the clarity appeared in the Aquarius Director's eyes.

He had been planning to have Nathan retrieve the photos when Olivia initiated the inquiry, intending to leave the Virgo Branch voluntarily. She likely had a similar plan.

She probably had the Purification Bureau's cleaner find the hidden locations of those Rebels while attending the inquiry, managing to break Phoebe's ability.

Huh, she had indeed thought along the same lines.

After slightly shaking his head, the Aquarius Director withdrew his gaze, sitting expressionlessly in his director seat while pondering.

The headquarters of the Purification Bureau was in a hollowed-out asteroid, over seventy thousand kilometers from the surface in a straight line. Even if he realized something was wrong and rushed back, it would certainly be too late, making her choice a great one.

Well... hopefully Nathan could evacuate in time; otherwise, he might be in trouble.

...

Nicely done!

Having also noticed the alteration of memories, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but give Leon a mental thumbs-up as she glanced at the Aquarius Director, who was quite taken aback.

I had given Little Leon two weeks' time, but he solved the princess problem in less than three days, completing a third of the task. Seems his undercover operation was quite smooth.

Moreover, removing this memory ability would certainly alarm that future Prince Joshua. With Leon's cautious character, he wouldn't act rashly unless he had discovered that prince's identity or confirmed he didn't possess the capturing ability.

Now that the memory ability had been removed, that future Prince Joshua might have already been captured. Even if he wasn't caught, likely a good amount had been discovered, suggesting Leon's operation was nearing its end.

More importantly, from undercover beginning to end took just over two days. In such a short time, Little Leon certainly couldn't make much of a mess. I no longer had to worry about him going undercover only to become the Rebel leader~

'Olivia?'

The moment she noticed the joy, a subtle spiritual fluctuation emanated from the Lion Sub-bureau's seat beside her.

Watching her smiling good friend, Beverly, the Director of the Lion Bureau, sneakily stuffed a small cookie into her mouth while inquiring with curiosity via thought,

'Your bureau ranked last in the year-end review, and the director scolded you so harshly. How come you can still laugh?'

Chapter 254: Early Started Inquiry_1

"..."

The smile on the Red-haired Director's face froze slightly when she heard her best friend's question, and she rolled her eyes in annoyance. *Could you not bring up such a bothersome question when I'm enjoying myself? Besides, do you think I want to be last? Considering we only have two and a half people left in our bureau, managing to clean up all the anomalies within the Kingdom every year is already as hardworking as one can get, right?*

What's more, our bureau's performance this year isn't bad at all. In the first half of the year, we wiped out over a dozen Bai Ye Sect hideouts and confiscated a large batch of anomalous objects. In the second half, we even took down a descending Holy Spirit.

With these achievements as a foundation, we should have been at least above average, if not at the top. Who knew so many issues would crop up at the end of the year?

...

"Negligence! Sloth! Shame!"

While the Red-haired Director was exchanging glances with her best friend, the virtual image of the Director of the Purification Bureau at the center of the venue continued to harshly criticize the few branches at the bottom of the performance list, slapping each mark with dismay, "As the last barrier between humans and anomalies, you carry the safety of the entire race on your shoulders! Just look at these shameful review results; I'm ashamed on your behalf! Especially the Virgin Branch, you actually had the audacity to laugh just a moment ago!"

After giving a heavy slap on the "Dung Beetle Lady" emblem of the Virgin Branch, the Director of the Purification Bureau angrily rebuked, "I'll excuse the Little Dog Bureau and the Harp Bureau. The old director of Little Dog just retired, and the new director is unfamiliar with the work, needing a few more years to train. Harp Bureau's main team is still frozen in a glacier after dealing with a polar remnant attack two years ago; their poor performance is unavoidable."

"But Olivia, what do you have to say? In the first half of the year, during your joint siege with the Long Snake Bureau, you only caught five Bai Ye Sect followers, while you somehow knocked out over eighty colleagues from the Long Snake Bureau! What exactly is the Virgin Branch up to?"

"Director, that was just an accident, and it wasn't even a joint siege. Our actions just happened to coincide."

At this point, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but stand up and express her grievance, "I took the situation with the Bai Ye Sect very seriously. After the headquarters issued the siege order, I immediately sent Emma, the strongest in our bureau, intending to complete the task assigned by headquarters as fast as possible."

"Emma was already at the Bai Ye Sect's gathering location, preparing to execute with the Execution Platform, when it turned out people from the Long Snake Bureau were also ambushed nearby, and their sins outweighed those of the cultists doing the rituals, causing them to get injured accidentally."

Under the cannibalistic stare from the Long Snake Bureau director, the Red-haired Director continued her defense fervently, "You know, Emma's Execution Platform targets based on 'crimes,' and it doesn't distinguish between friend or foe. As soon as she raised the platform, the people from the Long Snake Bureau were already lying down, and their cries were worse than the other, forcing Emma to stop, allowing those cultists to flee into a Dream."

"Director, if you ask me, instead of blaming Emma for being heavy-handed, you should check those cleaners from the Long Snake Bureau, see what crimes their bureau's recruits have committed, to fall faster under the Execution Platform than cultists."

"Fine, let's chalk up the Bai Ye Sect incident as a misunderstanding then."

Unwilling to argue further with the Red-haired Director, the Director of the Purification Bureau pounded the Dung Beetle Lady emblem again, continuing to question angrily, "What about the few incidents at the end of the year? An anomaly attack occurred right under your nose, causing the deaths of hundreds

of nobles despite cleaners being present, and paralyzing your Kingdom's logistics and military for almost two weeks. How do you explain this?"

"Well... the Ryan Family incident was purely accidental..."

After cursing Leon viciously in her heart, the Red-haired Director reluctantly defended, "Leon wasn't even officially admitted at the time, just a newcomer with less than a month in. The opponent was a near-god level Great Demon's heart... a sudden situation was beyond control."

"Moreover, the opponent locked the manor down, leaving him unable to seek support from the bureau. But in the end, not only did he ensure the safety of most people, he even successfully resolved the anomaly incident. I believe this can't be considered negligence, rather deserving commendation."

"Ha ha, you always have an excuse."

"Even not being able to clean up anomalies in time, causing over two hundred noble casualties, you spin it into averting disaster and ensuring the safety of most. The thickness of your skin is comparable to an anomalous object."

After a couple of sarcastic remarks, the Director of the Purification Bureau eased up a little, continuing, "Still, since that Leon is a newcomer and the situation was unique, the result is barely acceptable, just passing you through... but what's going on with the royal family?"

"According to our agreement with the royals from each nation, they must provide funding and supplies, and unconditionally support our Purification activities. The stationing branches are obliged to ensure the

safety of the royal family, preventing harassment by anomalous objects to royal family members and significant nobles."

"Yet in your case, the Princess was attacked by an anomalous object, forgotten by the whole Kingdom, then a cleaner from the Virgin Branch visited, only to have a dispute with the Prince, boxing him in the reception room for a while... and from the King's complaints, this is apparently not the first time?"

"Well... this can also be explained."

After marking another black entry on Leon's record in her heart, the Red-haired Director, under the odd glances of over eighty colleagues, continued reluctantly, "Though Leon did indeed have a small quarrel with the Prince, the Princess had already agreed to marry him before, thus, aside from being a cleaner from the Virgin Branch, he is also a Prince of the Kingdom."

"Considering he didn't use any anomalous objects, and his few blows on his wife's brother due to a verbal dispute were light, this should be regarded as an internal royal family conflict, which is not within the scope of our Purification Bureau's jurisdiction."

"As for the Princess being attacked, though part of it is due to our bureau's lack of vigilance, the main cause was someone's design in the background, even leveraging part of the Illusion Can's effects. I suspect a director's involved behind the scenes and have already submitted an inquiry request to the bureau."

"Oh?"

At this, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't help but pause slightly before frowning and asking, "You actually intend to question a director? Olivia, such an important matter, why wasn't I informed?"

"Well..."

Hearing this, the Red-haired Director said with some embarrassment, "You previously received a tip-off from the Watcher's Palace, hunting the Old King from the predecessors all these years, it's nearly been eight years since your last appearance, so we didn't expect you'd project back this year when we issued the inquiry to the directors..."

"Is it that you didn't expect me back, or didn't expect me alive?"

Upon hearing this, the virtual image of the Purification Bureau Director lowered his head, glanced at a few directors with embarrassed expressions on the directors' seats, and snorted coldly, "Rest assured, the time flow on the Old World's soil is only one-fiftieth of yours; even if you all age to death, I here would still live just fine!"

"Ha ha, I originally contacted you at the time of the annual review just to check on the bureau's situation. I didn't expect to even catch a director being questioned... So tell me, Olivia, which director did you catch red-handed?"

Chapter 255: Unprecedented Intensity_1

This time, it's secure!

After hearing the Director of the Purification Bureau's request, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but curl his lips slightly, secretly giving himself a nod of approval in his heart.

The reason he was so "stubbornly resisting," arguing with the Director despite his clear culpability, was solely to bring up the matter regarding Aquarius.

Previously, he hadn't chosen to raise questions during the year-end review but opted for a private inquiry afterward. Firstly, to give Leon a few more days of delay, allowing him ample time to go undercover.

Secondly, it's like Tom's dice, Aquarius Director had, over the years, used secret techniques to tailor numerous anomalous objects for many members of various branches, including several branch directors. Many people owed him favors, so he worried that raising questions during the year-end review could cause unforeseen complications.

After all, with Aquarius Director's capabilities, and several directors close to him, they wouldn't need to do much. As long as they reacted just a bit "slowly" when Aquarius failed the inquiry and tried to escape towards them, it would be enough to give Aquarius Director a way out.

But now that Leon had completed his undercover mission, there was no need for further delay on his behalf. Coupled with the presence of the General Bureau's Director, directors close to Aquarius would surely not dare to let him off easily. Therefore, advancing the inquiry to now was undoubtedly a more suitable choice.

...

"Then I'll speak up now!"

After a slight hesitation, not wanting Leon to be noticed by the directors close to Aquarius, the Red-haired Director refrained from mentioning his name and instead began speaking directly, unambiguously:

"Last month, our Virgin Branch reported an anomalous object named [Happiness Apartment]. Initially, we thought this object was born out of the kindness of an elderly couple who ran a charitable asylum, as well as the gratitude and longing of those they helped.

However, after subsequent investigations, our bureau's Cleaner discovered that this couple had contact with Aquarius Director before their deaths and were suspected of being maliciously influenced, although ultimately unsuccessfully.

At the time, we didn't suspect much, but later, while capturing suspected Rebels in possession of anomalous objects, we found they too had ties with Aquarius Director and had undergone similar deliberate guidance..."

After detailing Leon's findings, under the gaze of numerous directors and branch directors, the Red-haired Director looked up towards Aquarius Director in the board seats, his expression solemnly concluding:

"I believe, without reporting to the bureau, Aquarius Director privately manufactured a large number of anomalous objects and frequently maliciously influenced ordinary people to fulfill conditions!

Besides that, he nurtured Rebels in the kingdom guarded by our Virgin Branch, granting at least twelve individuals with abnormal abilities and allowing them to cause destruction everywhere!

In recent years, these individuals continuously attacked officials, nobles, and members of the royal family, causing significant casualties among ordinary people, and all this should be accounted for by him!"

"A similar situation was also discovered in the jurisdiction of the Lion Sub-bureau!"

Just as the Red-haired Director's words fell, the Lion Bureau Director, with cookie crumbs still on his lips, immediately stood up, speaking solemnly:

"Lovanna, a First Level Disaster Handler in the Lion Sub-bureau, while using the ability [Scene Reproduction] to investigate anomalous events in their jurisdiction, repeatedly discovered that anomalous object holders had contacted unknown individuals.

Although Lovanna couldn't fully restore the appearance of the unknown individuals due to their high hierarchy, with the ability to walk freely among humans, surpassing ordinary True Gods, and possessing the secret technique to create abnormalities, I believe the suspicion towards Aquarius Director is significant!"

"Gemini Bureau supports the motion."

After the Director of the Lion Bureau Beverly finished speaking, the director of a third Zodiac Branch Office stood up, expressionlessly echoing:

"After receiving notifications from the Virgin and Lion directors, I immediately contacted the King of Crolock Kingdom and retrieved observation records of mechanical eyes from the past thirty years in the kingdom.

Finally, it was found that in a total of sixty-three anomalous object attack events, an elderly person suspected of being Aquarius Director appeared and had brief interactions with the anomalous object holders.

Upon judgment, the probability of an issue with Aquarius Director is approximately ninety-eight point three six percent, indeed very suspicious."

"Compass Bureau supports the motion, we also found a similar situation."

"Southern Cross Sub-bureau supports the motion."

"Chisel Tool Sub-bureau also discovered similar issues."

"I also think there's a problem."

After a total of six branch directors, including three Zodiac directors, consecutively stood up, the Taurus Director, full of silver hair, in the second ranked director seat, unexpectedly stood up as well, frowning tightly:

"I am responsible for the bureau's anomalous object forgings, and for nearly twenty years, many branches, after completing cleaning tasks, handed over anomalous objects and materials that showed issues, with 'origins' clearly impure.

According to my understanding of anomalous objects, the hierarchy and efficacy of these objects obviously didn't match the creators' experiences and souls, and even contained traces of the God of Enlightenment's authority.

After reviewing the bureau's related records, I discovered that, as one of the most suitable materials for the secret technique 'Aberration Generation', the soul and flesh of the God of Enlightenment have always been kept by successive Aquarius Directors and never once reported an escape.

Therefore, I believe these anomalous objects indeed originated from the hands of Aquarius Director, the judgments led by Olivia and several branch directors are most likely correct."

It seemed... this inquiry was about to conclude.

When the Red-haired Director initially stood up, many directors of the branches present were still uncertain, those aligned with Aquarius Director even somewhat indifferent.

But after six directors successively rose to support, most people's expressions became solemn, and when Taurus Director also stood up, expressing agreement with the judgments, almost everyone at the venue had the same thought rise in their minds.

Aquarius was finished!

Not to mention anything else, just Taurus Director's status as a "Palace Occupant" was unmatched by others, and it could be said that before ascending to the Watcher's Palace next year, she was the highest-ranked in the Purification Bureau, and even if the Director of the General Bureau returned, they must indeed bow deeply upon seeing her.

In the face of Taurus Director's personal accusations, if Aquarius Director could not provide a convincing explanation, he was doomed today. Even as one of the Twelve Directors, he'd be forcibly taken for memory extraction, and with these pieces of evidence displayed, his chances of passing the memory extraction were infinitely close to zero.

...

"Thank you, Taurus His Excellency, for your testimony."

Politely bowing slightly to Taurus Director, expressing respect for the Human Watchman, the Director of the Purification Bureau turned and looked at Aquarius Director in the eleventh seat, asking with a cold gaze:

"Aquarius Director, do you have anything to explain?"

"Nothing."

Under the surprised gazes of numerous directors, Aquarius Director, who hadn't spoken from then until now, shook his head:

"They are right, these things were indeed done by me."

Chapter 256: Twin Mirrored Lakes_1

???

He didn't even bother to struggle, just confessed directly?

Faced with the Aquarius Director who simply laid down and admitted guilt, the six Branch Directors who stepped forward to accuse him were momentarily taken aback.

Even though they had gathered so much evidence with the goal of leaving the Aquarius Director with no defense and dragging him off for memory reading, his straightforward confession still took everyone by surprise.

"However~"

After glancing at the six Branch Directors, the Aquarius Director's lips curled slightly, and he said slowly and deliberately,

"Although 'I' did all these things, they can't be entirely attributed to me. While I am indeed guilty, it's not to the extent of being dragged off for memory reading."

"Aquarius Director, could you please make yourself clearer?"

Hearing this, the Purification Bureau's Director frowned and warned,

"Besides, my time is limited, so stop playing riddles.

If I haven't understood your point before the time flow in the Old Land restores, I'll have to assume you're trying to delay me from voting, and I'll cast my vote directly on the side that wishes to dismiss you."

"Sorry, as one gets older the brain slows down, and I like to speak a bit more carefully, haha."

Faced with the Director's relentless threat, the Aquarius Director chuckled and casually apologized, then leisurely continued,

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not as straightforward as Taurus His Excellency, nor am I used to being the focus of many people's attention, so I've never revealed my true identity.

But now that I'm forced to this point, it seems I can only unveil it myself... In addition to being the Aquarius Director, I am also the former Branch Director of the Gemini Sub-bureau."

...

The former Branch Director of the Gemini Sub-bureau?!

Upon hearing the Aquarius Director's words, the Branch Directors immediately turned their eyes to the current Gemini Sub-bureau's Director, hoping for his confirmation. After a moment of silence, the Gemini Sub-bureau's Director opened his mouth expressionlessly and retorted,

"According to the bureau's records, the former Branch Director was driven into the deep rift of Perambulate Sea's seabed during the mediation of the war between the Sea Race and the crustal creatures. He was supposed to have wandered into the depths of the Earth Core by accident and should be dead."

"I did die, but not thoroughly... However, that is unrelated to what I want to say. To avoid the Director voting to dismiss me, I'll leave that story for later."

After waving away the mist that obscured his face, revealing his features more clearly, the Aquarius Director calmly said,

"Just like the Virgo Sub-bureau's Director needs to guard the Thirteen Ant Nests, the Gemini Sub-bureau's Director is also responsible for guarding a Numbered Anomalous Object called Twin Mirrored Lakes, listed in the main bureau's file as 021.

As the former Branch Director of the Gemini Sub-bureau, I was the guardian of the Twin Mirrored Lakes, which you should be able to verify, right? My face should be familiar to you."

The Gemini Sub-bureau's Director was silent for a moment again, then nodded and said,

"That's right, there is indeed such a thing."

"It's good that you can verify it."

The Aquarius Director nodded slightly and then continued to explain,

"Every drop of water in the Twin Mirrored Lakes is a near-zero thickness double-sided crystal. Two hundred billion drops stacked together are only as thick as a human thumbnail, so they can be carried closely on the body. When I went to execute the mediation task, I took this item with me.

That mission was indeed extremely dangerous, and before escaping into the deep rift, I thought I was already doomed. If my body had fallen into the hands of the sea folks, once they opened the container holding the Twin Mirrored Lakes, the two hundred billion drops of water would merge with the ocean and gradually spread across the world with currents and evaporation."

As he spoke here, the Aquarius Director paused slightly, then looked around at the expressions of the people and said somewhat sadly,

"I mentioned earlier that every drop of the twin water in the Twin Mirrored Lakes is a natural mirror, but what I didn't say is that intelligent creatures reflected in these mirrors will immediately split into two identical individuals. If these two hundred billion drops of twin water were to merge into the ocean, the consequences would be unimaginable.

So, in desperation, I had no choice but to drink all the twin water, charge towards the deepest part of the trench, and head straight for the Earth's heart, hoping to disappear with this thing. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed in the end..."

"No need to continue. I already understand your point."

Interrupting the Aquarius Director's narrative, the Purification Bureau's Director frowned and said,

"You're trying to tell us that after drinking the twin water, another you was created and did all those things?"

"Even though it sounds like an excuse, that is indeed the fact."

Nodding in recognition of the Director's statement, the Aquarius Director said with a face of resignation,

"After all, it was my negligence and a personal disgrace, so I never reported it to the bureau but chased it privately, hoping to remedy the mistake with my methods.

Regrettably, the other me replicated by the twin water has the same abilities as me, and despite chasing him for so many years, I've never succeeded.

But seeing as he acted covertly, and the damage caused over the years wasn't significant, and even some Anomalous Objects he created added extra 'income' for the bureau, I selfishly covered it up.

I'm sorry, I indeed violated the bureau's rules, and as atonement, I am willing to resign voluntarily, step down as Aquarius Director, and continue leading the pursuit of the other me. Is this punishment sufficient?"

"..."

...

Enough of this nonsense! Isn't this just playing tricks?

Having listened to the Aquarius Director's given reasoning, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but darken his expression, while the Lion Bureau's Director Beverly was so angry she could almost explode, and couldn't help but stand up and shout angrily,

"If this counts as an explanation, wouldn't that mean anyone can commit any crime and simply say they have a duplicate, and it was the duplicate who did the bad deed?

Also, you were the only one present during these incidences, how are we supposed to know whether you're telling the truth? If I were to come to your house and kill you, could I claim that it was my duplicate?"

"It's not impossible."

Patiently waiting for Beverly to finish, the Aquarius Director, with a tear-streaked face, replied with a chuckle,

"As long as you can come up with a second Twin Mirrored Lakes and replicate a duplicate capable of killing me, then even if I'm killed by someone named Beverly, I would firmly believe that the culprit must be the duplicate, not you. Does that answer satisfy you?"

"You!!!"

"Besides, there are other ways to prove what I said."

The Aquarius Director smiled and said:

"You can open the sealing instruments under the Gemini Sub-bureau to see if the Twin Mirrored Lakes have disappeared.

Additionally, those Directors who led the charge against me might cross-check their own records to see if there's any time discrepancy.

Is it possible that when you identified 'me,' the real me was actually doing something else in a different location?"

"No need to check."

After dismissing the Aquarius Director's suggestion and stopping Beverly from saying any more, and seeing the smiling Aquarius Director looking at him, filled with self-assurance, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

Checking won't help, since if the Aquarius Director had the guts to mention these, he must have an "alibi," and if even two or three instances among those hundreds of appearances of the Aquarius Director confirming the position of the other Aquarius, the remaining records become worthless.

If I'm not mistaken, the Aquarius Director probably planned how to respond if discovered long before creating Anomalous Objects on a large scale, and perhaps even prepared this excuse twenty or thirty years ago.

In these twenty or thirty years, as long as he appeared deliberately in two places at the same time a few times, that would be enough to prove the reality of the "duplicate."

And given the Director's status in the bureau, without concrete evidence, it's impossible to drag him in for memory reading. As for the consequences created by the so-called duplicate, he's already volunteered to resign, so what else can be done?

It seems we're losing this inquiry, losing to our lack of preparation.

Beverly and I only gathered a month's worth of evidence for this inquiry, whereas the Aquarius Director prepared for at least twenty years for today, how could we possibly compete with that?

Chapter 257: News with Star Palace_1

"Olivia!"

Seeing the red-haired director seem ready to give up, Beverly couldn't help but glare and said,

"He's clearly talking nonsense! Besides him, there's no one else who could..."

'Stop it, it's useless.'

After giving her a look to stay calm, the red-haired director communicated mentally,

'I know you're unwilling, but our Purification Bureau is a relatively loose organization. Although the rules are very strict, the enforcement power is insufficient. Ultimately, whether we can drag Aquarius to read his memory isn't about who's right or wrong, but about how many people are willing to stand on our side.'

Over the years, Aquarius has befriended many branch directors, and he has quite a few supporters. Previously, no one spoke out for him because Taurus His Excellency, who's about to be promoted, is on our side, and Aquarius's suspicion is indeed significant. They don't want to get burned.'

After glancing at the branch directors with varied expressions in the meeting hall, the red-haired director sneered,

'But now it's different. Although those with discerning eyes know Aquarius is likely talking nonsense, he indeed provided an explanation that can be justified. Among the other branch directors, those who value his ability to create anomalous objects are evidently more than those who care about the casualties he caused over the years.

Furthermore, Aquarius has met many people in the past two days and most likely privately promised numerous benefits. Faced with tangible interests, even if they know in their hearts that Aquarius most likely broke the rules, if a vote is initiated, there will indeed be quite a few standing on his side.'

'If we could take Aquarius down in one fell swoop, these people wouldn't say anything. But now that Aquarius has provided an excuse that can be justified, it's equivalent to giving them room to maneuver. Even if we persist, it will merely result in endless arguments.

As for the director, if his true form were here, he would most likely forcibly take down Aquarius to uphold the bureau's rules. But now, he's stranded on Old Soil and can't return. Rather than upholding the bureau's rules, he would prioritize the stability of the current situation.

Based on my understanding of him, the director will likely first step out to smooth things over to ensure there's no chaos in the bureau, record this matter, and deal with Aquarius when he returns... Let's endure this first. Regardless of what happens to Aquarius in the future, today we've indeed lost.'

...

"In my opinion... this matter needs careful consideration."

The subsequent development indeed didn't differ much from the red-haired director's prediction. After glancing at the expressions of the branch directors, the director, who had a good understanding of the situation, gave Aquarius a meaningful look and then took the initiative to smooth things over,

"The duplicate' of Aquarius Director, though it caused many problems, ultimately aimed to prevent greater damage from the Twin Mirrored Lakes. The merits offset the demerits, so let's not mention stepping down.

However, although the Twelve Directors have the authority to handle abnormal events independently, they should report them when unable to resolve them. Those who conceal must be punished... Aquarius Director, do you have any objections?"

Hearing the Director of the Purification Bureau's words, Beverly couldn't help but clench her fists, glaring furiously at Aquarius Director on the opposite side.

Objections... what objections could he have? Compared to being forced to read memories and having a God Tier Brain-Eating Demon lick one's brain groove with its Tongue, this punishment was nothing!

"I have no objections."

After smiling at the Lion Bureau Director who was glaring at him, Aquarius Director slightly bowed to the hologram in the center,

"Your judgment is very appropriate, and also, please don't be too harsh on the branch directors.

Though their direct inquiry of me without knowing the truth was reckless, it wasn't entirely without reason, so they shouldn't be punished by the bureau, right?"

"..."

Leaning on past arrangements, Aquarius Director casually dismantled the foundation of the entire inquiry. After forcefully reversing black and white, he even seemingly generously interceded for the opposition, proposing to waive the punishment that was unlikely to happen in the first place.

Faced with this plea, which could be considered a top-level humiliation, except for the Gemini Sub-bureau Director remaining unmoved, the other five branch directors who stood out couldn't help but burst out in anger. Even the red-haired director squinted his eyes.

Unfortunately, while Olivia's mind was clear, her methods were slightly immature, giving Aquarius an opening.

After giving the red-haired director a regretful glance and to keep the peace, the Director of the Purification Bureau nodded,

"Alright, let's put this matter... uh... on hold."

Just as he was about to announce the end of the inquiry, allowing Aquarius Director to pass safely, the slate beside the Purification Bureau Director slightly trembled, revealing a row of wriggling strange symbols.

After rubbing the symbols with his fingers and interpreting their meaning, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't help but frown.

It was a complaint message delivered via Syllabic Stele, with ninety percent of the content complaining about the Virgin Branch cleaner's disregard for hierarchy and trespassing into the Royal Palace to assault the Prince, demanding punishment from the Purification Bureau.

However, after accusing the cleaner named Leon of repeated assaults, the prince who was beaten seemed to have been coerced, thus having to convey some messages to the headquarters on his behalf...

...

"Aquarius Director!"

After interpreting all the symbols, the Director of the Purification Bureau suddenly turned around, his eyes fixed on Aquarius Director in the eleventh seat, asking almost word by word,

"Nathan... do you know this person?"

Noticing the subtle change in the director's expression, Aquarius Director's eyebrows slightly arched, then he nodded,

"I know, he's the leader of the rebels, and he seems to have had contact with another me."

"Yes, he had contact with 'another you'."

Emphasizing 'another you,' he repeated this phrase with ambiguous meaning and said, the Director of the Purification Bureau squinted slightly,

"Aquarius Director, during the end-of-year review you attended, a cleaner from the Virgin Branch successfully captured the rebel leader and obtained some interesting information.

After reading the message he conveyed, I believe these details could significantly help in capturing 'another you'. I wonder if you'd be willing to pitch in and gather the Twelve Star Palaces to shift Nathan and those two cleaners over here?"

So... did Nathan fail to escape and get caught by a Virgin Branch cleaner? And did he expose some unfavorable information about me?

After hearing the Purification Bureau Director's request, Aquarius Director couldn't help but frown, feeling that something seemed off.

To maximize protection for the dangerous items stored inside, apart from rejecting most anomalies, the core part of the Purification Bureau's headquarters was purposely placed on an asteroid more than seventy thousand kilometers from the surface, orbiting the world like the moon throughout the year.

Even the most advanced Sky Clipper from Croak, the City of Machinery, could only fly up to eight or nine thousand meters, and the highest unmanned probes wouldn't exceed 400 kilometers. Compared to the 70,000 km distance, it was insignificant.

Hence, it could be said that apart from the higher-ups of the Purification Bureau, who could use the Star Palace Shift, and the very few holding Special Anomalous Objects, no one could quickly reach here.

The only exception was to gather the twelve directors or branch directors of the Zodiac Branch Office, using the partial solar power patched together by the Zodiac Star Palace to forcibly reflect people up from 70,000 kilometers away via sunlight.

Even so, the people who came up could only stay for one day. When the Purification Bureau Headquarters rotated to the other side of the world, weakening the solar power's influence, they would instantaneously be expelled back by the headquarters' repulsive force...

So what exactly was written in the message just now? Enough to make the director propose gathering the twelve Star Palaces to bring people up here to confront me directly?"

Chapter 258: The Real Inquiry (Part 1)_1

"Well done!"

Just as the Aquarius Director began to feel uncertain, wondering how to respond, the opposite red-haired Director also caught the scent of something amiss. Her beautiful fox-like eyes were filled with intense joy, and she could hardly refrain from embracing someone fiercely and giving them a kiss.

Two days! Only two days!

From the start of the undercover operation to now, not even two days had passed. Little Lyon had not only resolved the Princess's issue and captured the Prince lurking within the Rebels, but had also unearthed evidence sufficient to change the Director's attitude, potentially reversing the outcome of the failed inquiry and becoming the ultimate trump card!

He was truly a genius of undercover work!

"It was really timely..."

Having previously communicated with the red-haired Director and knowing what she had arranged, Beverly, the Director of the Lion Bureau, exhaled with some relief and said, "Thanks to your department's competence, within just two days, they unearthed new evidence. Otherwise, it would have been challenging to catch the Aquarius afterward, and we're lucky."

Not only that! Apart from luck, it was also my excellent command and top-notch ability to choose the right people!

After giving a self-satisfied glance to her close friend, the red-haired Director took a deep breath to calm her excited emotions and then stood up to seize the advantage, saying, "Aquarius Director, haven't you been working hard for many years to catch your duplicate? Now that you finally have information, why are you hesitating?"

"..."

"I'm not hesitating, just worried that the Director might be deceived by you."

While contemplating the content of that message, the Aquarius Director, expressionless, subtly added eye drops and said, "As you're well aware, the average quality of the members of the Virgin Branch, including the newcomers who've just joined for a month, during internal reviews, nearly every Cleaner receives evaluations as either extremely dangerous or recommended for strict surveillance. Therefore, I suggest, regardless of what information the Director has obtained, please remain rational and don't easily believe their words... Open the Star Palace!"

After trying to discredit the news to reduce its credibility, the Aquarius Director sat back in her seat, expressionlessly extended her hand, and substituted for the absent Aquarius Branch Director, pressing the Aquarius insignia which depicted a Dung Beetle pushing a bottle.

Following this, mysterious and splendid yet full of ridicule insignias like Dung Beetle Lady pushing the dung ball, Lion Rolling Dung Balls, and Dung Beetle with two huge pincers lit up one by one along the 'waistline' of the spherical meeting room.

When the last insignia, Pisces Chasing Dung Balls, was illuminated, the previously dim asteroid instantly shone brightly and emitted a scorching light comparable to the sun.

As the light gradually faded, under the watchful, grave, disdainful, or hostile eyes of the higher-ups of the Purification Bureau, the figures of four men instantly crossed 70,000 kilometers to appear at the center of the asteroid.

Faced with this sudden teleportation, these people had not even had time to notice anything unusual, with one of them still continuing his original action, slapping another person on the head.

...

"480 of the 500 words in the message are complaints against me? You need to redo... uh..."

Seeing the surroundings change in an instant, Leon, who vaguely guessed what happened, suddenly held back the second half of his sentence, while the red-haired Director's expression froze, her fox-like eyes glaring with a murderous glare.

Damn it! Why did you have to hit him at this time? You couldn't have waited?

I thought sending the message would be the end of it, how was I to know we'd be brought over here!

Feeling the angry gaze of his Director, Leon, having slapped Prince Freckles in front of all the higher-ups of the Purification Bureau, couldn't help but silently curse his bad luck. He immediately spoke to divert attention, saying, "Well... due to the urgency of the situation, I worried the message might not be conveyed accurately, so it was a bit harsh... Everyone! After a thorough investigation, our Virgin Branch

just discovered that, apart from privately manufacturing a large number of Anomalous Objects, the Aquarius Director also intends to target the Watcher's Palace!"

What?!!!

Hearing Leon's words, whether they supported the Aquarius Director or opposed him, except for the Director who had already seen the report beforehand, everyone present was taken aback.

The regulations of the Purification Bureau are strict, but the structure is loose, with low control from the top to the middle and lower levels. Many people have, to varying degrees, violated some rules, and there might even be those who've done worse than the Aquarius Director.

So if just turning a blind eye could bring them the powerful Anomalous Objects produced by the Aquarius Director, at least one-third of the Branch Directors would not refuse and might even be pleased to see it happen.

But the Watcher's Palace was different. As the most crucial, and not one of, frontlines of the Purification Bureau and all of humanity, any matter even slightly involving the Watcher's Palace leaves no room for compromise; it must be immediately and thoroughly investigated until the truth is uncovered!

"Aquarius Director."

After a number of Branch Directors preliminarily accepted this dreadful news and everyone's attitude turned serious, the Director of the Purification Bureau finally spoke up, asking, "What do you have to say in response to this accusation from the Virgin Branch Cleanser?"

"Of course, I do."

Surprised that his plans had indeed been unveiled, the Aquarius Director felt a tightness in his heart, yet still maintained a composed demeanor as he questioned, "Firstly, the evidence—no matter the importance of the Watcher's Palace, you can't convict me as a Director based solely on the word of a Level Three Cleanser, can you?"

You want evidence, do you?

Seeing him still resist stubbornly, Leon squinted slightly and responded, "There is indeed evidence... Jerry, senior!"

"Coming!"

Carrying the unconscious middle-aged Joshua, Jerry walked to the center of the meeting hall, first bowing to the various Branch Directors, then rolled up his sleeves, revealing a right hand with the middle and index fingers almost the same length.

"My Ability is the [Cunning Hand of Fate], which allows me to... stealthily derive the thing that most significantly impacts a person's fate."

After briefly explaining his Ability, Jerry took a deep breath, extended his right hand, and probed forcefully at the heart of middle-aged Joshua, causing two familiar phantasmal shadows to reappear.

"Ha! You didn't expect it to be me, did you?"

Through the heart of middle-aged Joshua, seeing his frowning old rival on the opposite side, the God of Enlightenment couldn't help but laugh heartily, then shouted with gritted teeth, "Aquarius! I am perfectly aware of all the things you did in the past!

It's not just about your secret production of Anomalous Objects, but also your scheme to use those six part-set Anomalous Objects to seize this generation's Taurus Ascension Palace Person identity—every single detail, I know it all!

Accept it, Aquarius! It's over for you!"

Chapter 259: The Real Inquiry (Part 2)_1

To think one could use the Cunning Hand of Fate and go so far as to steal from the God of Enlightenment... *Had I known this would happen, I should have left Nathan with a few more life-saving anomalous objects back then.*

Staring at the "old friend" who had served his lineage for fifteen generations, the Aquarius Director couldn't help but shake his head. He then ignored both Leon and Jerry, raising his head to sincerely gaze at the Director of the Purification Bureau and said,

"Director, the God of Enlightenment has been imprisoned by our Aquarius lineage for two thousand years, and I've alone extracted its flesh and True Spirit over a thousand times.

No matter how deep-seated a hatred might be, it couldn't compare to even a fraction of its hatred towards me. Are you truly going to suspect a director who has served in the Bureau for nearly a hundred years because of the testimony of an Outer God?"

"I'm sorry, it's not a matter of what I believe or not."

After the light purple eyes flickered slightly, the Director of the Purification Bureau replied calmly,

"Unlike the private creation of anomalies earlier, this time involves the safety of the Watcher's Palace, leaving no room for negotiation.

Whether it's you, other directors, or even myself as the Director, if accused and if the accuser presents valid evidence, one must immediately prove one's innocence.

If unable to prove innocence, one must directly undergo memory reading... Aquarius Director, do you have anything more to defend against this accusation?"

"No more."

Glancing at Leon standing beside the Director of the Purification Bureau, the Aquarius Director stated calmly,

"Bring the Brain-Eating Demon over; I choose to directly undergo memory reading... Also, I'm quite curious why the Virgo Branch is so focused on me.

Not only did they coordinate with six Branch Directors to question me, a Director, but they also risked releasing the imprisoned Evil God by forcibly contacting the materials used for the Abnormal Genesis Sorcery..."

"I am the God of Enlightenment! You damned human, you are the material! Just let me out..."

Interlocking his fingers and applying slight pressure, using some unknown method to silence the God of Enlightenment, the Aquarius Director gazed meaningfully at the Red-haired Director,

"Olivia, if after the memory reading it turns out that I did nothing, could you also undergo memory reading? And besides you..."

"On what grounds?"

Hearing the Aquarius Director's request, before he could finish, Beverly, the Director of the Lion Bureau, couldn't help but stand up and angrily refute,

"Even if you didn't do the first investigation today, you're still implicated, and the second involves the Watcher's Palace. Olivia has shown no suspicious behavior; why should she undergo memory reading?"

"Speaking of suspicious actions, she certainly has done some, and not just one."

Glancing at Beverly, the Aquarius Director stated nonchalantly,

"The Bauhinia Family, which once attempted to overthrow the royal family, should have been entirely executed according to the laws of the Kingdom. Yet, Emma Alman, who originally didn't meet the standard, was admitted to the Virgo Branch by her, allowing her to secretly plot revenge and covering for her several times.

Furthermore, last month, she brought Leon Laine, who also didn't meet the Purification Bureau's employment standards but had a right to noble inheritance, into the Virgo Branch and dispatched him to Ryan Manor to conduct an investigation.

The outcome of that investigation was the occurrence of an event called the Ryan Blood Night, wherein the top members of the Lionheart Family were nearly wiped out, with no one to inherit the duke's title. Through a series of coincidences, this position was then filled by a Third-Class Cleaner, whom she had hired exceptionally."

Pausing slightly here, the Aquarius Director continued with an insinuating tone amidst the contemplative expressions of several Branch Directors,

"Additionally, Tom Raines, a First-Level Catastrophe Handler from the Virgo Branch, who has a record of single-handedly expelling a True God, briefly disappeared from the main bureau's surveillance after completing the clearing task of the Blood Pine Ridge incident.

Coincidentally, his strongest abnormal ability is a pair of dice that can create coincidences, granting a 60% chance for all impossible things to become possible, and the time he went off the main bureau's radar coincides perfectly with when Leon Laine obtained the duke's position."

After finishing these statements, the Aquarius Director continued, gazing meaningfully at the frowning Red-haired Director,

"These issues were all discovered during my investigation of my own replicants. In recent years, my replicants have frequently appeared in the Capital City, cultivating a force named the Rebels to completely overthrow the royal family, while you seem to be deliberately gathering the heirs of the Old Nobility.

Therefore, I have reason to suspect that you have previously contacted my replicants and obtained certain benefits from them, or simply made some extremely dangerous cooperation, which is why you are so resolute in questioning me and can always present evidence that I find difficult to refute."

Under the suddenly sharp gaze of the Director of the Purification Bureau, the Aquarius Director leisurely stated,

"Olivia, are the doubts I've raised enough for you to also undergo memory reading?"

"..."

...

Strange... why would the Aquarius Director still bring these up? Is he in his 'death throes,' or does he actually have some trump card that gives him the confidence to withstand the memory reading?

Glancing towards the Director of the Purification Bureau and noticing the change in the director's expression, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but rub her furrowed brow. Though she was still uncertain of the Aquarius's intent, she could only nod slightly and agree,

"Yes, I agree to undergo memory reading.

However, the order must be after you. If it's proven that no replicants exist or that you are indeed plotting against the Watcher's Palace, then my memory reading must be canceled!"

"It's not just you; this Third-Class Incident Handler also needs to undergo memory reading."

Raising his hand in Leon's direction, the Aquarius Director, smiling at this troublesome fellow who had been overlooked but managed to capture Nathan within two days and promptly delivered key evidence, said,

"Considering the close relationship between him and you, if it proves that I'm not at fault, then he must also undergo memory reading."

"I object, this issue has nothing to do with Leon!"

At these words, the Red-haired Director's expression tightened as she voiced her opposition,

"He's only been with the Virgo Branch for a month. If a memory reading is truly necessary, let it be me.

Additionally, besides the Ryan Blood Night, Leon has been diligent and fielded outstanding results during every mission, even having a record of defeating a Holy Spirit.

Being subjected to memory reading by the Brain-Eating Demon equates to a forced True God level Corrosion, which would inevitably affect his mental stability. For such a promising Cleaner, it would undoubtedly be a..."

"His mind doesn't need Corrosion; it's already extremely unstable."

Interrupting the Red-haired Director, the Aquarius Director replied indifferently,

"I seriously reviewed his dossier. After the Ryan Blood Night, the two investigators sent by the main bureau gave him an interesting assessment.

They unanimously believed that this Third-Class Cleaner is extremely dangerous, possessing beliefs so rigid they border on madness, harboring numerous dangerous secrets in his heart, recommending tight main bureau surveillance.

Additionally, he had contact with the God of Enlightenment while searching for evidence against me, and there's the possibility of him being controlled or even parasitized by the God of Enlightenment. Undergoing memory reading with you might even be considered a form of protection..."

Protect you, my dear!

Gazing at the massive cage emerging from beneath the center of the venue and the Brain-Eating Demon within, which looked even more revolting than a hagfish, Leon couldn't help but shiver.

The mere thought of being subjected to memory reading meant having that thing's tongue slither across his brain's grooves made his scalp tingle uncontrollably.

If this could be considered protection, then I sincerely hope the Purification Bureau protects you for a lifetime!

...

Worse still, even though the Red-haired Director argued consistently and logically, the Director of the Purification Bureau showed signs of being persuaded after hearing the Aquarius Director's proposal, particularly squinting inadvertently when he heard the possibility of Leon being controlled by the God of Enlightenment.

One situation posed the risk of the God of Enlightenment escaping, while the other concerned a "supposedly" promising Third-Class Cleaner.

To a director hoping the Purification Bureau would remain as stable as possible, these two matters couldn't be weighed equally at all.

If the one voicing opposition wasn't Olivia, who possesses two Numbered Anomalous Objects and ranks among the top in combat strength among Directors, but some other Branch Director, he might have already resolutely made up his mind.

"Taurus His Excellency!"

Seeing that the Director of the Purification Bureau seemed swayed, the Red-haired Director could only look towards the hesitant Taurus Director, seeking some form of assistance and saying,

"You have met Leon and even personally helped craft an Anomalous Object for him; you should understand his potential. Receiving the Corrosion of a True God level entity so early would undoubtedly harm his psyche. If memory reading truly needs to be conducted, I should be the one to undergo it!"

"Indeed..."

After some hesitation, the Taurus Director nodded,

"The child's potential is remarkably excellent, with a steady disposition and intelligent mind. He is most likely to become a Level One Cleaner in the future and might even take over a Branch Director's position and become a force that protects humanity. Undergoing memory reading prematurely would be such a pity.

Setting aside other considerations, after suffering pollution from a True God level demon, the [Holy Spirit Pendant] I crafted for him would inevitably be affected, and its effectiveness might be reduced by more than half, effectively severing his future in advance."

"Yet what does it matter if his future is severed in advance?"

Once the Taurus Director finished speaking, the Aquarius Director's brows slightly drooped, speaking indifferently,

"Taurus His Excellency, one side poses the risk of the God of Enlightenment escaping, while the other is merely a Third-Class Cleaner whose potential hasn't even been realized. I don't see how this holds any comparison."

"But..."

"Alright, everyone stop talking."

With a slight distortion in his form, the Director of the Purification Bureau spoke slowly,

"The time flow on my side is beginning to slow, leaving us with little time to communicate, and the most important matter currently is the safety of the Watcher's Palace, so I will make the decision directly.

Next, let the Aquarius Director undergo memory reading first. If any issues arise, naturally, there is nothing more to say. If the reading shows no problem, then Olivia must undergo reading.

And if after Olivia undergoes reading and no issues come to light, then this Cleaner named Leon may skip the memory reading... Aquarius Director, please proceed!"

Chapter 260: The Real Inquiry (Part 3)_1

"Wise decision."

After slightly bowing to the Director of the Purification Bureau, the Aquarius Director left his seat and slowly walked toward the massive cage in the center of the venue.

As he approached, the icosahedral prison composed of thirty blazing golden beams gradually opened, revealing the true form of the colossal creature within.

"Hiss..."

Accompanied by a peculiar hiss that resonated within everyone's soul, the hideous demon, resembling a gigantic octopus-like mollusk, rapidly "spread out," instantly covering nearly a quarter of the venue.

Next, its mouth, similar in shape to a nautilus's beak, slowly opened. Hundreds of slender tongues, dotted with purple-red fleshy tumors, writhed like clusters of bizarre sea serpents, lunging toward everyone.

"Settle down!"

Along with a shout, the Aquarius Director interlaced his fingers and pressed forcefully downward towards the spread-out Brain-Eating Demon.

A loud, dull thud was heard. The enormous demon, nearly thirty meters in size, seemed to be weighed down by something incredibly heavy, collapsing in the center of the venue with a pained wail.

God-Suppressing Forked Fingers... a secret technique specifically developed by the Aquarius lineage to suppress imprisoned True Gods.

Watching the Aquarius Director forcibly subdue a God Tier Brain-Eating Demon with a simple hand gesture, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't help but narrow his eyes, a hint of admiration showing.

The secret technique developed by the original Aquarius was indeed formidable. Once a True God's authority was sealed, no matter how strong its physical power, it could be effortlessly subdued with a single gesture.

The only regret was the slightly high threshold, resulting in no one besides this generation's Aquarius being able to master it... Such a pity.

After seeing the Aquarius Director release the Brain-Eating Demon's tongues and willingly expose his face for licking, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't help but shake his head.

If it were merely to create anomalies privately, there probably would be room for maneuvering. But concerning the safety of the Watcher's Palace, regardless of this generation's Aquarius's talent, if the extracted memories proved problematic, then what awaited him would only be...

Hmm?

Noticing something amiss, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't help but frown.

When the Brain-Eating Demon first "spread out," to prevent the four people moved there from being crushed, he directly shifted the podium back and shielded them at his rear.

However, instead of staying safely behind him, they peeked and pried about. One of them, named Leon, even stealthily extended his hand to touch the rear of the God Tier Brain-Eating Demon.

...

"Zzz..."

[Encounter... Materialism... Information]

[Name: The Rumination of the Memory Eater (Memory, Corruption)]

[Appearance: Approximately thirty meters in size, a gigantic demon resembling a mollusk cuttlefish, identical to that of a normal living adult God Tier Brain-Eating Demon]

[Ability: Memory Reading]

[Cost: None]

[File: A God Tier demon that descended through a accidentally opened Abyss Rift nine hundred years ago at Saio in the Thousand Sails Maritime Country, causing unimaginable casualties, nearly annihilating Saio Kingdom's 0137 numbering unanchored ship. After ravaging Saio for three months and devouring the memories of nearly a hundred thousand people, this God Tier Brain-Eating Demon was finally captured by the joint efforts of Pisces and Aquarius divisions of the Purification Bureau and given to the contemporary Taurus Director for modification, removing... After a series of treatments, the demon's authority was stripped, its emotions and intelligence were cleansed, leaving only the instinct to devour memories, and it was kept as a special anomalous object for memory reading in the Purification Bureau Headquarters' basement till now.]

[Evaluation: An extremely powerful anomalous object, tendril-like tongues somewhere between flesh and spirit, can easily penetrate the brain of any sentient creature, capturing their memories through licking their cerebral grooves, and due to its high hierarchy, even a True God cannot resist its reading...]

[Contamination Value: 59.9]

This thing... is truly disgusting... and truly deadly!

After secretly touching the rear of the God Tier Brain-Eating Demon and gaining intelligence on it through [Materialism], Leon felt a chill run down his spine.

Not to mention whether its reading would extract memories about his "transmigration," just letting its disgusting slimy tongue into one's brain was enough to make one want to die.

Watching as the clusters of tongues penetrated into the Aquarius Director's head, scraping out something with those purple-red fleshy tumors, Leon couldn't help but shudder.

If the Aquarius Director wasn't bluffing and actually had a plan to pass through safely, the one being licked inside out would have to be himself and the Director! Judging by the Aquarius Director's bulging veins and twitching body, the experience of having one's memory read seemed far from pleasant...

No! Absolutely not! He must quickly come up with a plan, ensuring that the Aquarius Director couldn't execute any trick!

...

Looking at the "Corruption" tag in the name [The Rumination of the Memory Eater], and recalling the ability to forcibly manipulate [Corruption] anomalous objects with [I Am the Demon], Leon clenched his fist tightly and then extended his guilty right hand again to provide the Aquarius Director with an extra layer of insurance.

However, at this moment, a somewhat cold voice came from ahead.

"Stop."

Seeing that touching the rear of the Brain-Eating Demon once wasn't enough and Leon was even about to touch it a second time, the Director of the Purification Bureau couldn't suppress his frown as he inquired,

"Why do you keep touching her rear?"

"..."

Goodness, after this thing spread out, it looks like a cut-open giant octopus. How could you tell which end was the head and which was the rear?

Unable to withhold an internal complaint, Leon had to retract his right hand under the scrutinizing gaze of the Purification Bureau Director and then awkwardly replied "truthfully":

"My ability is through touch, to forcibly obtain part of the intelligence of the anomalous object being touched. After listening to the Aquarius Director's words, I worried he'd play tricks while undergoing memory reading, so I wanted to check if there were any loopholes in this thing..."

You want to find this thing's loophole? Just you?

Unaware that Leon's purpose in finding loopholes was actually to exploit them himself, after staring into Leon's eyes for a moment and somehow verifying the truth of his statement, the Purification Bureau Director turned his head back and warned coolly:

"Don't bother trying; when this thing was at its peak, it was on par with Olivia in power. Now its authority has been drained, but its hierarchy remains near True God level, not something a Third-Class Cleanser like you can shake."

"Well... I've actually already figured out some things."

In an effort to touch the Brain-Eating Demon's rear once more to employ [I Am the Demon] as a hindrance to the Aquarius Director, Leon tried to demonstrate his value and began to articulate:

"This thing is called [The Rumination of the Memory Eater]. Its former identity was that of a God Tier Brain-Eating Demon that descended upon the Thousand Sails Maritime Country and was ultimately captured by the joint efforts of the Pisces and Aquarius Bureaus.

Nine hundred years ago, the Taurus Director of that time washed away its emotions and memories, removed its memory-digesting organs, and replaced them with the [Dream Memory Furnace], capable of converting memories into dreams.

The memories it consumed wouldn't be digested but would circle through the [Dream Memory Furnace], leaving a batch of replicated dreams before being spat back out..."

...

When Leon started to narrate, the Director of the Purification Bureau was initially dismissive, even casting a glance towards the Red-haired Director, quite dissatisfied with her unauthorized disclosure of important intelligence.

But as Leon spoke more, even describing how the Taurus Director of nine hundred years ago processed that God Tier Brain-Eating Demon, the expression of the Purification Bureau Director began to change.

If it were something documented within the bureau, that would be one thing, but Leon revealed many details that had no written record whatsoever, not even known to himself as Director, let alone Olivia.

So... he only touched it briefly and figured out so much?

Staring at Leon with eyes filled with shock, after sensing his aura, the Director of the Purification Bureau's eyes gleamed with the light of understanding.

Judging from his contamination level, he's only about average for a Third-Class Cleanser. Such a weak individual could forcibly obtain intelligence on a True God-level anomalous object while ensuring his own safety!

No wonder Olivia and the Taurus Director were both protecting him, this kid truly was a treasure!

The Director sure had a penchant for "utilitarianism"!

Leon noticed the Director's eager gaze, sensed an underlying fervency, and decisively stopped his narration, not revealing everything he knew.

But the Purification Bureau Director, having taken the bait, couldn't help but ask:

"Why did you stop? What's next?"

Leon replied with some difficulty:

"The rest... I honestly feel a bit weak, and I'm also afraid of contamination, so I only grazed it lightly earlier, but you stopped me the second time..."

"Then keep going!"

Taking a look at the Aquarius Director to ensure the memory read process wasn't disturbed and continued properly, the Purification Bureau Director decided immediately:

"Touch as much as you need, as long as you can! See how much intelligence you can eventually figure out! Besides, don't worry about contamination. With me here to hold it off for you, there won't be any problems!"

All right then! You told me to touch it! If the Aquarius Director ends up in trouble because of it, you can't blame me!

Giving his cheek a discreet bite to suppress a budding smile, Leon nodded firmly. He then switched to [I Am the Demon] and extended his guilty right hand towards the Brain-Eating Demon's rear, carefully adding a warning:

"Please, do hold it off well..."

"Rest assured, go ahead and touch!"

...

Finally, it was over...

As wave after wave of memory flowed back into his mind through those sticky purple-red tongues, the Aquarius Director gradually regained consciousness and shakily stood up.

After thoroughly checking the backup plan he had prepared and confirming it wouldn't be detected, the Aquarius Director, whose brain was nearly boiled by the Brain-Eating Demon's licking, raised his head with the smile exclusive to a victor, looking towards the Purification Bureau Director.

This is stable! All those years of preparation weren't in vain! This time, it's absolutely foolproof!

"Apologies... there was a slight issue, and the recent read doesn't count."

"???"

Receiving a bewildered look from the Aquarius Director, the Purification Bureau Director awkwardly explained:

"This thing's been crafted for over nine hundred years. While the core Dream Memory Furnace hasn't broken, it's been somewhat severely corroded by the Brain-Eating Demon's gastric acid. The memory reading wasn't entirely successful.

I've just reviewed the dreams expelled by the Dream Memory Furnace and found only a small portion of your memories were replicated, which isn't enough to prove your innocence, so... could you please do it once more?"