

I! Cleaner 271

Chapter 271: Reward (Part 2)_1

"Alright..."

Seeing the Taurus Director's firm stance, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but sigh, abandoning her unrealistic idea completely and settling for a compromise as she said,

"Then could we alter our performance rankings for this year? If we count this, our Virgo division would almost be first, wouldn't it?"

"Well... how about we include it next year?"

Not expecting her to dwell on this, the Taurus Director hesitated for a moment before saying,

"The performance slate has already been issued, and the sole director with authority to adjust the rankings isn't present, making it exceptionally troublesome to change it now..."

"Then instead of changing the ranking, could I add a note?"

"Huh? How would you add a note?"

"Just temporarily change the name of our Virgo branch."

Unable to bear the shame of working diligently all year only to end up at the bottom in terms of performance, the Red-haired Director proposed quite hopefully,

"If we just change the name from 'Virgo Branch' to 'Virgo Branch (Actually First),' then on the performance slate, it would display as '87th, Virgo Branch (Actually First),' which means we wouldn't technically be last... Would that work?"

"..."

How did you come up with such a devious plan...

After opening his mouth in silence, the Taurus Director felt it would be unfair not to agree with this "contributor" and had to sigh, nodding to allow the temporary renaming of the Virgo branch as suggested.

As the Red-haired Director eagerly headed off with a chisel to alter the performance slate, the Taurus Director turned to look at the Lion Bureau's Director and asked,

"How about you, Beverly?"

"My request is the same as before."

Having already decided what she wanted, Beverly cheerfully made her request,

"I hope you can find someone to replace me as Director for a month and then send me to the God of Sweets' Divine Country to have it make desserts for me to feast on for a month."

"Alright, you can set out tomorrow."

Listening to the "duo of binge eaters" make their usual requests, the Taurus Director couldn't help but chuckle, nodding his approval as he turned his attention to Leon with a kindly look,

"And you, Leon? What do you want?"

Leon hesitated for a moment upon hearing this before tentatively asking,

"For me... could I make a few more requests?"

"Of course, you can."

Unlike the two directors with a Corrosion Value as high as seventy, who had no other desires than gastronomic indulgence, Leon, being a Level Three rookie, only aimed to quickly enhance his own abilities.

While he already possessed an abundance of powerful Anomalous Objects, to the point he couldn't make use of them all, increasing his Corrosion Value wasn't something that could be achieved overnight, leaving the only rapid advancement options to be his Badges and the newly acquired Mystique. So...

"My first request is... Could I borrow the God of Wine's bead for a bit?"

Seeing the Taurus Director's slightly furrowed brow, Leon quickly explained,

"I'm not asking for the bead on anyone else's behalf, but for myself, just to have a taste. I won't drink much, just a single sip from each kind of wine."

Just a single sip from each?

The Taurus Director asked rather confusedly,

"Why only a single sip?"

Because just one sip was enough to fulfill the requirement for filing and allow his [Martyr of the Wine Country] Badge to advance.

Gazing at the badge interface showcasing the brilliant golden shine of [Martyr of the Wine Country], Leon's heart filled with anticipation.

To advance from the Gold Level [Martyr of the Wine Country], he needed to taste a thousand "craft" level wines, a hundred "fine" level wines, ten "full-bodied" level wines, and one "intoxicated brew" level wine.

These requirements were incredibly demanding. Even after tagging along with the director on several drinking occasions, he hadn't achieved even a tenth of the goal. However, if the God of Wine's bead was as miraculous as rumored, perhaps he could fill up the [Martyr of the Wine Country] in one go, directly advancing to the Heterochromatic Badge, [Immortal in Liquor]!

That would be extraordinary!

Badges at the Heterochromatic stage were incredibly formidable, akin to the top-tier Anomalous Objects. The opportunity to obtain a second Heterochromatic Badge would put any other potential reward to shame!

...

"Actually, I quite enjoy drinking wine too, but I don't like getting drunk, just tasting the flavor. So just a sip from each kind will do!"

Eager to obtain a second Heterochromatic Badge and fearing being held back by his drunken Director, Leon straightforwardly promised,

"Taurus His Excellency! Rest assured, I guarantee I'll drink it myself. I won't share even a sip with our Director!"

"..."

Watching Leon willing to sell out Olivia without hesitation just to get a drink, the Taurus Director sighed helplessly.

Ah... He seemed like such a good kid before, but unfortunately, he fell into Olivia's influence and was led astray by her.

Now, with his average physique and low alcohol tolerance, once his physical strength improves, he's sure to become a heavy drinker not unlike Olivia...

"Alright..."

Rubbing his forehead with a bit of a headache, the Taurus Director reluctantly said,

"You really must stick to your word and not share with Olivia. She seriously needs to cut down on the drinking; if she keeps this up, it's bound to cause trouble sooner or later."

"Yes, yes! I promise I won't give her a drop!"

"Then I'll have someone deliver the bead to you in a few days... What's your next request?"

"For my second request... I'd like to touch the Aquarius Astropalace."

"???"

Seeing the sudden stern expression of the Taurus Director, Leon quickly explained,

"You know, my Ability involves gathering information through touch, and I just acquired knowledge about Abnormal Genesis Sorcery, so..."

"So you want to see if by touching it, you can figure out how to gain the Star Palace's approval and learn the Aquarius Secret Technique?"

Understanding Leon's idea more or less, the Taurus Director reluctantly said,

"This is a bit tricky... The Star Palaces that hold the Twelve Secret Techniques are enormously large, and they're all Zodiac Star Palaces, usually orbiting around the Sun, so you certainly can't reach them."

Although the Directors can temporarily summon a small part of the corresponding Star Palace using their own authority, this thing's Hierarchy is extremely high, not quite like the Watcher's Palace but still above most True Gods. Are you sure you'd be able to decipher anything?"

"Though I'm not certain, I would still like to try..."

Knowing that the Taurus Director was a true "Iron-hearted Good Person," a saint silently burning their own personality for the sake of all humanity, Leon disclosed a bit, testing his luck as he said,

"Taurus His Excellency, I suspect my Anomalous Object Hierarchy might be quite high; perhaps I could really glean some insights. Besides, I guess our bureau doesn't fully grasp intelligence on the Star Palaces either? If I could indeed uncover some intelligence, perhaps more people could master the Secret Techniques, which would be a good thing too."

"..."

In that case... it might indeed have its merits...

"Alright! I agree!"

After pondering with furrowed brows for a moment, the Taurus Director nodded slowly, persuaded by Leon's suggestion, and then spoke with a serious expression,

"Only the corresponding Director can summon the Star Palace; with Aquarius having defected and the Star Palace sealed by the Director, I can only summon parts of the Taurus Star Palace to let you try to touch. Leon, if you really find a method to learn the corresponding Secret Techniques directly without the Star Palace's approval, while I can't speak for the other Secret Techniques, I guarantee I'll personally teach you the Taurus lineage's 'Anomaly Forge' Secret Technique! As long as you can learn, I'll teach you whatever you can absorb!"

Chapter 272: Secrets of the Star Palace_1

So... the Aquarius Secret Technique was hopeless, but perhaps the Taurus Secret Arts could work?

Upon hearing the Taurus Director's promise, Leon couldn't help but feel a surge of joy. The Taurus Secret Arts seemed far more precious than the Aquarius Secret Technique.

He remembered that the Director had said that the Purification Bureau's Twelve Secret Techniques were ranked, with the Aries Secret Technique, known as "Anomaly Obliteration," ranked first, and the Taurus Director's "Anomaly Forge" ranked second. As for the Aquarius Director's "Aberration Generation," it was only ranked eleventh.

However, it seemed that this ranking was not based on combat power, but on the significance to the entire Purification Bureau. The Aquarius Secret Technique was ranked so low mainly because its methods were extreme, the material requirements were too high, plus it somewhat relied on luck, and the controllability was low, potentially resulting in no gains after massive material investments.

In contrast, the Taurus Secret Arts were not only stable and controllable but, after ten generations of simplification and weakening, could even be used to train craftsmen for forging anomalous objects. This resulted in the production of a large number of stable anomalous objects that could be used by mid to low-level cleaners, making it immensely significant for the entire Purification Bureau. This was why it was ranked second.

Even if the ranking was somewhat inflated, it was still genuinely the second secret technique!

Not to mention the ability to forge anomalous objects, if he could truly learn this secret technique and become a so-called "Reserve Taurus Director," his status in the entire Purification Bureau would rise significantly. Even if he still held the position of a Level Three incident handler, he would likely have a say in many matters!

Indeed, wealth still required taking risks! By facing off with the Aquarius Director and taking the risk of being eliminated directly, was it time to reap the rewards now?

...

As Leon's face showed his excitement, the Taurus Director, seated among the board's members, slightly closed her eyes. Then, just like when the Solar Wheel appeared before, the headquarters of the Purification Bureau dimmed once more, and the external walls became transparent again.

However, this time the top of the headquarters did not split open again. The area that changed was the "rolling wave" section where the Taurus seat was located. A virtual image of a bull, based on more than a hundred stars and connected by meteor-like arcs, rapidly materialized from nothing.

"This is the full view of the Taurus Star Palace."

Looking back at the star palace apparition behind her, the Taurus Director, staring at the massive bull poised to charge with its head bowed, nostalgically recounted,

"The Taurus constellation lies between Aries and Gemini. It's the one with the most stars among the Zodiac constellations, composed of a total of 125 stars. However, there aren't many bright stars, only one first-magnitude star and two fourth-magnitude stars, making the remaining stars rather dim and difficult to distinguish.

So, when the previous Taurus Director was teaching me how to sense the Star Palace, he specifically told me that if you can't find the location of Taurus, look for the constellation penetrated by the Ecliptic, the Celestial Equator, and the Silver Path lines together... I'm passing on this piece of advice to you in hopes that you'll find it useful in the future."

After briefly explaining how to locate the Taurus constellation, hinting at his expectations for Leon, the Taurus Director slightly beckoned behind her. The mighty giant bull apparition then "leapt" from the wall of the headquarters, transforming into an ancient compass nearly as tall as a person.

"Just touch this section here."

After pointing to the angle between one o'clock and two o'clock of the compass part extending outward from the center, the Taurus Director, with eyes filled with expectation, said,

"I can only summon a part of the Star Palace here; the other positions belong to apparitions of other Star Palaces, and you can't touch them... Come on, Leon, I hope you can surprise me and everyone else.

But don't feel too pressured, even if there's no significant outcome, it's no big deal. I can still offer you some other reward... Go ahead, feel it!"

"..."

The Taurus His Excellency was indeed affable, resembling a kind-hearted elder. No wonder even the usually rebellious Director of my office was always respectful and behaved in front of her... It appeared she had no arrogance of an authoritative figure, patiently explaining without complaint and kindly encouraging him. Leon felt a warmth in his heart, letting go of minor tricks, and nodded before reaching out to touch the Taurus Star Palace.

[Name: Star Vault Compass Fragment-Zodiac-Taurus (Star Palace, Solar Wheel, Law Bestowal)]

[Appearance: An ancient compass crafted from semi-transparent obsidian, with hand-drawn star chart images of the eighty-eight constellations on the front, while the back is covered with minor damage such as chisel and axe marks, weathering, burial stains, freezing, and fusion, with even bizarre marks from sharp teeth bites present]

[Ability: Star Palace Shift, Radiance of the Ecliptic, Law Bestowal]

[Cost: The user's divinity will continuously erode]

[File: A secret treasure relied upon by the initial members of the Purification Bureau during their escape from the Old Soil. Shattered by one of the Supreme Four Pillar Gods, the fragment of the Star Dome Compass was later gathered by the first Taurus Director and reforged into eighty-eight Star Palaces. These were placed on the solar trajectory, nurtured and refined using the power of the Solar Wheel, with hopes of restoring it to its original form, continuing until now]

[Evaluation: One of the most crucial backups of the Purification Bureau, a doomsday ark usable only by humans of Old Soil origin. If an apocalypse-level crisis occurs someday and even the protection of the Watcher's Palace is destroyed, then it serves as the last hope for humanity]

[Contamination Value: Indeterminate, increases with the user's level]

"..."

Damn!

Even though he knew before reaching out that this object was undoubtedly extraordinary, as both the Eighty-Eight Divisions and Twelve Directors were named after Star Palaces, which must be incredibly significant to the Purification Bureau.

But after seeing... experiencing the true "face" of the Star Palace, Leon's mind buzzed, overwhelmed with the information he had just received.

Guardian of human progeny... escaping from Old Soil... a hidden card of the Purification Bureau... a doomsday ark usable only by humans...

When all these pieces of information pieced together, the Star Palace seemed less like an anomalous object and more like a spaceship, and perhaps a solar-powered one at that!

Humans are the outsiders in this world, fleeing from someplace called Old Soil, possibly having their spaceship—the Star Palace—destroyed by those Supreme Four Pillar Gods. That's why they crash-landed in the current world... Truly...

Absurd!

I just wanted to touch the Star Palace and see if I could sneak in and learn the Anomalous Smithing Secret Techniques. How did the plot suddenly turn into science fiction?

...

"Hmm?"

Seeing Leon's unbelievably shocked expression, the Taurus Director glanced over in surprise and asked with some puzzlement,

"Leon, what did you sense? Why does your expression look so odd?"

Chapter 273: Rescuing the world also follows a first-come, first-served basis_1

"I'm..."

I really stumbled upon something incredible...

After composing himself slightly, Leon looked at the Taurus Director in front of him and asked somewhat incredulously,

"I just found out that humans... escaped from the Old Soil?"

You just touched it, and you managed to uncover such a secret?

Upon hearing Leon's words, the Taurus Director was quite surprised and then nodded,

"That's right, our human ancestors didn't live in this world but were a branch of descendants that fled from the Old Soil. The predecessor of the Star Palace was the transportation tool selected by our ancestors during their migration. Back then, they planned to continue their journey, but the Star Palace was shattered, so they had to stay in this world."

Whoa, it's actually true!

After smacking his lips in slight confusion, Leon continued to ask,

"Speaking of shattered... the information I touched revealed that the one who shattered the Star Palace was one of the Supreme Four Pillar Gods. They now..."

"Have all been taken care of."

"Huh?"

"The Supreme Four Pillar Gods who pursued us from the Old Soil were the Old King, Omnia Cicada, Crimson Overlord, and Azure Sleep. They were mortal enemies of humanity. Since we humans have not been destroyed yet, they certainly have perished. Although most of their divinity and authority have been inherited by other True Gods, they are no longer the same as those original Pillar Gods."

After recalling slightly, the Taurus Director spread his hands and said,

"That all happened unknown ages ago. The Supreme Four Pillar Gods, after all, were just four gods who mastered powerful laws. If you use your Leon Value, they probably were around seventy points. Perhaps slightly stronger than Olivia, but only by a little.

After many generations of peace under the protection of the Watcher's Palace, the overall strength of the Purification Bureau has declined significantly. Still, there are seven or eight members roughly at Olivia's level, and probably more than thirty who can cross the sixty-point True God threshold stably.

There are also some who haven't surpassed sixty points but can repel True Gods with the use of anomalous objects, including some elite Branch Directors and Level One Cleaners. Altogether, there are over a hundred people capable of harming True Gods, and this is after generations of stability.

The generations of predecessors who rapidly grew under the protection of the Watcher's Palace were much stronger than now. The Four Pillar Gods didn't last more than a few hundred years before being

taken down. Now, the Brain of the Evil God being soaked in the Illusion Can is the brain of Azure Sleep, one of the Four Pillar Gods."

"..."

Impressive, my heroic ancestors...

Leon had initially thought that the ever-encircling external enemies of the Purification Bureau were actually overlooked by four formidable behind-the-scenes manipulators, ready to wipe out the world at any moment, and that he had luckily discovered this, soon to open a new heroic epic.

But little did he know that these so-called behind-the-scenes manipulators had been defeated by the Purification Bureau eight hundred years ago, and even their ashes had been repurposed as waste to be fed to dogs. All he saw was the impressive history of human predecessors, holding a script for the post-heroic era in which one could live almost peacefully, as the most troublesome enemies had long been slain by the great ancestors.

Hmm... come to think of it, in such a prosperous world, with a large crowd of True Gods, Demon Gods, Outer Gods, and Evil Gods all sharpening their wits to get in, if the predecessors of the Purification Bureau weren't formidable, how could they have settled for so long?

Even if the Purification Bureau's strength was insufficient to block all the True Gods eyeing this world, it had to be the undisputed strongest of all 'forces,' capable of holding its own against a group. Otherwise, they'd have been chased out to continue wandering eight hundred years ago.

...

"The predecessors were truly incredible (fiercely formidable)..."

After sincerely admiring the fierceness of the Purification Bureau predecessors, Leon, somewhat puzzled, said,

"Taurus His Excellency, since you know all this, why didn't you oppose when I said earlier that the Bureau seems unaware of the Star Palace?"

"Because what you mentioned is history, not the current state of the Star Palace. The Bureau indeed doesn't know much about the specific condition of the Star Palace right now."

The Taurus Director replied helplessly,

"I told you before, the actual size of the Star Palace is enormous. Bringing them back from near the Sun just once is extremely troublesome; a round trip might take over ten years and consume countless precious materials.

So, after the initial Virgo Director made a trip and delivered the eighty-eight Star Palaces, the Bureau never retrieved them for inspection again, and no one knows if they've been fully nurtured.

Besides, even if they aren't retrieved and continue to be placed near the Sun, that won't hinder people from using the abilities of the Star Palace as long as there's no world-ending crisis necessitating escape.

The summoning of the Star Palace has always responded, so nobody wanted to bring them back for checks...

By the way, how's the condition of the Star Palace? Is it fully nurtured?"

"..."

Indeed... given human nature, such a doomsday ark wouldn't be urgently dealt with until the last minute. Moreover, the high levels of the Purification Bureau are notoriously lax. If they were diligent enough to test every three years and inspect every five, that would indeed be something unusual.

As for the state of the Star Palace...

Considering the words in the evaluation like "one of the most important trump cards of the Purification Bureau" and "the last hope of the human race," Leon confidently said,

"Although it hasn't fully recovered, with still many scars on its back, the current Star Palace is no longer 'fragments.' It should be considered fully nurtured."

"That's great news."

The Taurus Director said happily,

"Even if it might not be used, having such a thing is better than not. By the way, Leon, did you finally find a way to learn secret techniques bypassing the Star Palace?"

"Well... I'm not sure if it's found... Right! Besides those historical details, I discovered something very important!"

Suddenly recalling something, Leon furrowed his brows and reminded,

"Taurus His Excellency, my ability tells me that anyone holding the Star Palace will have their divinity continuously drained!"

"That's no problem, it's intentional."

"Huh?"

"What I mean is, during the forging of the Star Palace, this condition for usage was deliberately designed by the first Taurus Director."

The Taurus Director explained with a smile,

"The Star Palace is so valuable and so far away around the Sun. If we can't get to it in time, what if it's taken by other True Gods? So we simply designed it so that anyone who touched it would have their divinity continuously drained, ensuring that no True God would want to seize it."

"But those affected... wouldn't Cleaners with a Leon Value over sixty, touching the True God threshold, also lose their divinity?"

"Let it drain!"

The Taurus Director spread his hands and said,

"To drain the lowest-grade divinity completely would take three to four hundred years or even longer, but humans don't have eternal life. At most, we can live about a hundred and fifty years. Why concern ourselves with things so far off?"

Chapter 274: Learning and Examinations_1

After hearing about this anti-theft measure, which sounded absurd yet undeniably effective, Leon couldn't help but curl his lips in speechless amazement.

Those with insufficient skills couldn't touch the Star Palace, and those proficient enough didn't dare. If this was the logic, then even if they threw the Star Palace directly in front of a True God's doorstep, it likely wouldn't get lost.

After giving a heartfelt thumbs up to the elder members of the Purification Bureau, knowing there was no danger in this regard, Leon didn't bring up the issue of divine leakage again. Instead, he looked at the last of the three abilities of the Taurus Star Palace, "Law Bestowal."

Without a doubt, this thing should be the true face of the Twelve Secret Techniques.

The twelve secret techniques of the Purification Bureau should actually be twelve corresponding laws. Aries's "Anomaly Annihilation" might be a law of destruction, while Taurus's "Anomaly Forge" was clearly a forging law, and so on.

And the so-called "receiving Star Palace recognition to learn the Twelve Secret Techniques" was essentially being bestowed a law by the Star Palace, after which one could learn the twelve techniques circulated within the Purification Bureau that utilized the corresponding laws.

To simplify further, the Star Palace's [Law Bestowal] was like a car key, the qualification to start the car, while the Twelve Secret Techniques were the manual, the skill of driving. The mastery of the secret techniques was actually the level of adaptation to the laws.

Similarly, having obtained the key and finished learning to drive, a person with average driving skills might still be practicing how to reverse into a parking space without markers. But a talent like the Aquarius Director might have already started trying to drift around corners.

...

"Although your analogy is somewhat strange, it seems to make sense..."

After hearing Leon's summary and speculations, the Taurus Director nodded thoughtfully,

"Throughout so many generations in the past, there seems to indeed be no precedent of two people mastering the same secret technique simultaneously. Although I was chosen by the Star Palace back then and practiced the secret techniques in advance, the practical effect was just so-so. But after the previous Taurus Director passed away, my study of the Abnormal Forging Secret Technique began to progress rapidly.

"Hmm... saying it like this, maybe the situation is really as you said. The twelve secret techniques spread within the Bureau are merely the usage skills corresponding to the 'laws.' Only after obtaining a law bestowal from the Star Palace does one qualify to exercise the corresponding authority."

This also meant that as long as I, the Director, am alive, others' mastery of the Taurus Secret Arts would only remain superficial. It is unlikely to cultivate many secret technique practitioners.

Not saying this out loud, the Taurus Director regretfully shook her head, then looked up at Leon and said,

"It seems you can't learn my secret technique, at least not this year... How about changing to a different request?"

"Taurus His Excellency, I still want to give it another try."

Looking at the prompt that appeared after touching and some exchanges, indicating "due to understanding the ability and operation rules of the 'Star Vault Compass Fragment-Zodiac-Taurus,' your resistance to this Anomalous Object has greatly increased, and you can already block extremely deep levels of influence," Leon persisted somewhat stubbornly,

"Although receiving a law bestowal from the Star Palace is necessary to learn the complete secret technique, besides you, there are others in the Bureau capable of forging Anomalous Objects.

So I still want to try again, even if I can't master the complete Anomaly Forge Secret Technique, learning a little something would be good."

"Since you insist... then okay."

Seeing the slightly "stubborn" Leon, the Taurus Director thought for a moment and did not persuade further, instead directly nodding in agreement, beckoning Leon to come before her. She then spoke gently and kindly,

"Leon, I know you're not just looking to learn a little; you're hiding some secrets, hoping you might use this secret to learn the complete Taurus Secret Arts."

Having exposed Leon's little secret, she watched his expression become slightly solemn and then smiled gently,

"Don't worry, I don't blame you.

We humans are like this, everyone secretly holds things in their heart that they don't want to share with others. I have things I don't want to tell others, and that's not a mistake.

I'm telling you this to remind you that no matter what method you're planning to use, trying to learn the secret techniques without the Star Palace's recognition is tantamount to going against the Star Palace, and you might face suppression from the Taurus Star Palace.

So I hope you'll be cautious, stop immediately if something feels off, and don't push yourself. If you end up hurting yourself, that would be bad. With your talent and ability, even without learning the secret techniques, your future will certainly not be lacking... Now, when you're ready, lean your head over."

"..."

Taurus His Excellency really was... It felt like in her eyes, everyone was her child, always giving a sense of being embraced...

Looking at the elderly lady who didn't fuss over his little secret but patiently waited for him to prepare, Leon felt a slight warmth on his face, muttering a response as he leaned forward somewhat sheepishly.

"Then I'll begin."

After greeting Leon, the Taurus Director's slightly aged fingers caught a trace of dark brown radiance, slowly pressing it towards Leon's forehead.

Then, as if pressed by a flashlight, Leon's forehead began to slightly glow, the dark brown luminescence gently dispersing upon contact, like raindrops nourishing the soil, seeped drop by drop into Leon's mind.

Chapter 275: Learning and Examinations_2

...

"Our Taurus lineage's Abnormal Forging Secret Technique, to be honest, is not that difficult, and is somewhat similar to the craft of metal forging."

Accompanied by the leisurely narrative, an old man with a slightly hunched back popped into Leon's mind. He raised his hand, pointed to a blazing hot furnace, and with a chuckle, explained to the apprentices behind him,

"Find the right anomaly or material, heat it just like you would iron ore, using your strength to 'heat it up.' Once it's heated to a point where it loses stable form and rules, the preparation work is done.

The next steps are quite similar as well. Forging iron requires hammering to shape it, removing impurities, and increasing its strength. Forging anomalies is no different.

Use your willpower and mind as your hammer, let the anomaly's form and rules shift towards the direction you desire, then carefully sort them out, removing unnecessary chaotic rules, and distribute the limited strength towards the most appropriate directions... Understand?"

"Understood!"

While the group of apprentices looked troubled, a young man with a square head stood out confidently and summarized,

"So you first blast it with heat! Then, when it's done heating, smash it with all your might! Once it's all smashed, the anomaly will be forged!"

"Exactly! It's just that simple!"

The old man, hearing this, was overjoyed. He took a deep breath through the gap where a tooth was missing and cheerfully waved his hand, conjuring dozens of grotesque creatures as tall as three stories, with blood flames spewing from their nostrils.

"Come on! These are all offspring of the Bloodflame Demon God. I grabbed them from its haven while I was chasing it in the abyss last month. Everyone take one back to burn! Once you understand, come back to learn the next steps!"

"..."

Seeing the apprentices attempting to "burn," but chaotically chased by materials and even getting burnt with blisters from the blood flames, Leon clicked his tongue in speechless dismay.

The Purification Bureau's seniors really had quite the rough teaching methods... Speaking of which, Taurus His Excellency's way of teaching him the secret technique was directly by giving him a piece of memory? So, was this a Taurus Director learning the secret technique?

The long stretch of memories continued. Under Leon's curious gaze, the unlucky secret technique apprentices faced numerous hardships, being chased by various "materials" until they cried out in despair, with people frequently absent or sobbing in retreat.

Only that square-headed young man persisted unwaveringly, never giving up despite the overwhelming challenges and showing excellence in both willpower and talent. In the end... he became the next Director of the Purification Bureau.

????

Watching the square-headed man reluctantly take his seat as Director, and someone who inexplicably became the Taurus Director after enduring countless torments from the materials, Leon, after viewing the entire set of teaching memories, was dumbfounded.

Isn't there something off about this plot's development?

*Shouldn't the most outstanding apprentice gain the Taurus Director's and Taurus Star Palace's recognition, successfully inheriting the director's position? How did they end up becoming the Director instead? And what about the Taurus Secret Arts...?

"It was precisely because he was too excellent."

When Leon awakened from the third generation Taurus Director's memories and asked his question, the Taurus Director smiled and countered,

"The square-headed youth you saw is likely the third generation Director of the Purification Bureau. Since he was already so outstanding, why should he inherit the Taurus Secret Arts to become a Director? Isn't it better to directly become the Purification Bureau's Director?"

"..."

No problem, in that case, indeed, the most talented should directly become Director... But still, there's a slight sense of disappointment...

Leon clicked his tongue in speechlessness and wanted to ask more when he saw the Taurus Director smilingly say,

"Don't mind him for now, how about you? How is your secret technique going? How much have you mastered?"

"As for me..."

Hearing the Taurus Director's question, Leon looked at his badge panel and replied uncertainly,

"Though I haven't learned the full version, I guess I've grasped the basics?"

[After receiving the memory gifted by the Taurus Director, you successfully acquired the practicing method of the Taurus Secret Technique "Anomaly Forge," and through observing in the memory space, you've gained a large amount of precious related experience, activating the Silver-Level Badge "Arcane Inheritor (Taurus)."]

[Arcane Inheritor (Taurus): The inheritor of the Purification Bureau's Taurus Secret Arts, possesses the skills to use the corresponding rules, yet due to the fact that the corresponding rules have been occupied by the Taurus Star Palace, it is nearly impossible to summon them without the grantor's endowment, thus only counting as a "skill in slaying dragons."]

[Badge Effect: Even though you are missing the support of the corresponding rules, having witnessed the entire process of the third generation Director of the Purification Bureau and the third generation Taurus Director practicing the Taurus Secret Arts, you still earn the qualification to use a degraded version of the Taurus Secret Arts, enabling you to utilize the traits of anomalous materials in your hands, forging anomalies far below your Corrosion Value level.]

[Advancement Route: Upon the current Taurus Director's death, if the "Star Vault Compass Fragment-Zodiac-Taurus" comes under your control, this badge will automatically advance to a Golden Badge "Taurus Director."]

[Hidden Traits (no wearing required): Due to your ability to shield parts of the influence from the Taurus Star Palace, during your anomalous forging, you are able to forcibly steal a small amount of relevant rules under the suppression of the Taurus Star Palace, enhancing the effects of the Anomaly Forge Secret Technique.]

Chapter 276: Learning and Examinations_3

Apart from being an [Arcane Inheritor (Taurus)], after observing the training process of the Taurus Secret Arts, to some extent, he applied what he learned to another, and the Aquarius Secret Technique unexpectedly provided a badge as well.

[Having accepted the weights of the "Scale of Truth" and observed the training methods of the Purification Bureau's secret techniques, you have comprehended the practice methods of the secret technique "Aberration Generation" and activated the Silver-Level Badge "Arcane Inheritor (Aquarius)"]

[Arcane Inheritor (Aquarius):...]

[Wearing effects: Even without the support of the corresponding laws, you can create certain anomalous objects at a level vastly inferior to your own Contamination Value, given suitable materials.]

[Advancement Route:...]

[Hidden Traits (need not be worn): None]

...

So... just by looking at the memories of the former Taurus directors, *without any practical experience*, he thought he had already gotten started?

Seeing Leon's eyes somewhat "wandering" (looking at the badge panel), the Taurus Director couldn't help but frown slightly, worried that he might be overestimating his abilities. After thinking it over, he took out a blood-red bird egg and handed it over.

"This is the Egg of the Hell Carnal Bird. When used in the forging of body-enhancing anomalous objects, just adding one of these can significantly improve the user's perception of their body, preventing direct loss of control due to the rapidly increasing physical qualities."

After explaining the origin of this bird egg, with the intention of giving Leon a small comeuppance and discouraging any thoughts of just theoretical talk, the Taurus Director demanded,

"If I remember correctly, the first lesson of Abnormal Forging Secret Techniques should be melting materials, making them lose their solid form and rules to facilitate subsequent forging.

"So since you claim to have already gotten the hang of it, why not 'burn' this Carnal Flesh Egg and show me your skills?"

Is this... a test for me?

After hearing the Taurus Director's words, though he didn't fully understand how the Taurus Secret Arts worked, looking at his newly gained two Silver Badges, Leon still nodded, put on his two new badges, and accepted this "pop quiz."

'Forging anomaly means burn hard first! After burning, hammer hard! Once hammered properly, the anomalous object is forged.'

Recalling the commissioner's confident summary in his mind, Leon took a deep breath, mobilized all his "Contamination Value," first frying the egg on high heat, then hammered it vigorously, imitating the apprentices' methods as he went along.

Even due to worrying about not applying enough force, by the time it came to the "sauce collection" stage, he added a little tweek from the Aquarius Secret Technique, picking out the thickest rule from this [Carnal Flesh Egg], then boldly thickened, darkened, and enlarged it, like changing the font size, highlighting one noticeable feature!

Done and dusted!

Watching as the originally hard and unusual bird egg gradually became soft and pliable, carrying with it a peculiar sensation unique to an anomalous object, Leon couldn't help but nod with satisfaction before reaching out to poke at his first creation.

[Name: Egg of Sharpness (Flesh, Corruption)]

[Appearance: An ellipsoidal object with a black-red hue, slightly lax. Although it doesn't have a good appearance, it exudes a thick evil aura.]

[Ability: Sharp flesh sensitivity, demonic temperament]

[Cost: Slight loss of stamina]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine, combining two secret techniques from the Purification Bureau with his own demon-filled will, specifically created this special anomalous object, capable of making the targeted male creature look more evil, and slightly sensitizing its left bird egg.]

[Evaluation: The most worthless demon creation in history, bar none]

[Contamination Value: 0.1]

"..."

What the hell???

Could it be that the material the Taurus Director just took out wasn't actually a bird's egg, but a... bird's 'egg'?"

Chapter 277: Director's request and..._1

"Huh?"

Just as Leon was shocked by the difference between the bird eggs, he saw the Taurus Director, who, after a flurry of actions out of thin air, not only completed the material processing but also directly created an anomalous object, making him widen his eyes in astonishment.

Although the methods were clumsy beyond measure, and the material handling was abysmal to watch, the general approach was correct. Leon surprisingly wasn't all talk, but indeed had already begun to master it.

Even more astonishing, he seemed to have mastered not only the Abnormal Forging Secret Technique of the Taurus lineage but also exhibited a clear taste of Aquarius's "Aberration Generation" when selecting the rules at the end.

Without any prior practice, relying only on fragmented observational memory, he had spontaneously mastered two secret techniques and successfully created an anomalous object on his first attempt...

Could it be... this kid wasn't just talk, but had enough confidence in his abilities, perhaps even akin to the traitorous Aquarius Director, a super genius in secret techniques?

...

With eyes full of expectation, he beckoned, taking the bird egg that had turned into an anomalous object to inspect its quality closely. The smile on the Taurus Director's face immediately deepened by several degrees.

"Not bad, I underestimated you."

Looking at the newly crafted anomalous object in his hand, although roughly and crudely made, the internal rules were balanced, flowing smoothly without any glaring errors, the delighted Taurus Director couldn't help but praise:

"I initially thought that since you hadn't been exposed to secret techniques before, just successfully processing the materials would be commendable. Who knew you'd actually create a complete anomalous object!

Let me see... hmm... this feels like the cost of use has been greatly minimized, seemingly belonging to the most basic physical exhaustion type, but also the most stable type for beginners, a rather wise choice.

As for abilities, primarily flesh-and-blood rules with supportive demon rules, it seems to be a dual-ability anomalous object, and the release process is quite secretive... not bad! Really very good!"

Familiar with anomalous objects, the Taurus Director needed only a glance to almost completely analyze the [Egg of Sharpness].

Having completed the inspection, she returned the item to Leon, her kind-hearted face full of smiles, and asked extraordinarily happily:

"I won't speculate further, just tell me directly, what are the two abilities of this object?"

"Uh..."

After hesitating slightly, Leon, with a somewhat drifting gaze, answered:

"The first ability is the corruption attribute, which causes a person's aura to become more evil, making them appear more like a demon."

"I see..."

The Taurus Director pondered for a moment, then nodded and said:

"Though a bit niche, having this as an additional 'secondary ability' is better than none. And the primary ability derived from flesh-and-blood rules? What's the effect?"

In front of a kindly "elderly female," Leon felt too embarrassed to speak frankly, so he evasively explained:

"As for the primary ability... as you said, it's a flesh-enhancing type, making certain organs more sensitive..."

"Be more specific."

Hearing this, the Taurus Director frowned and then solemnly advised:

"Leon, not everyone can obtain anomalous object intelligence like you by just touching it. If you eventually intend to become an anomalous object craftsman and forge objects for others, remember that your descriptions must be as precise as possible... exactly what organ does this strengthen?"

"Egg... and only the left one..."

Egg? What egg?

Initially not understanding Leon's meaning, the Taurus Director was about to ask again. But after seeing his hesitant demeanor, she immediately grasped the specific implication of this "egg," and the kind smile stiffened on her face.

"Just... that?"

"Just that..."

"..."

"..."

The old and the young exchanged glances in silence for quite a while, until the Taurus Director finally broke the silence. She turned her head slightly awkwardly, her expression strange, and said:

"Well... it's alright. Although the outcome is... a bit too original, when I watched your operation, it was indeed under the Taurus Secret Arts.

Hmm... so your talent in secret arts is indeed exceptional. Even if you never gain recognition from the Taurus Star Palace, you should be able to become a top-tier forging craftsman.

Keep it up! We, the older generation, have reached the time to gradually step down. The future of the Purification Bureau depends on young people like you."

"Thank you for your great kindness. I will certainly do my best."

...

Leaving the Taurus Director's seat with the bird egg, Leon returned to his own director's seat, where the red-haired director had just finished updating the performance monument. Curious, she asked:

"Leon, what reward did Taurus His Excellency give you?"

"Since I wasn't chosen by the Star Palace, they made an exception to teach me the complete version of the Taurus Secret Arts."

Feeling somewhat guilty for not bringing her when asking the Taurus Director for a drink, Leon hurriedly tried to change the subject:

"Director, how about Aquarius compared to my reward? Has he discovered the strand of hair I secretly placed on him?"

"Not yet."

Hearing Leon's words, the red-haired director couldn't help but glance at him appreciatively, then softly replied:

"Although the spatial distance is too great, causing me to lose control over that strand of hair, I can still vaguely sense that it's moving in the direction of the Crolock Kingdom."

Chapter 278: Director's request and..._2

"By the time the Bureau completes its self-check and decides who should be sent to capture the Aquarius, this hair you secretly placed will definitely give him a big surprise."

"That's fantastic!"

Leon couldn't help but feel a surge of happiness at these words.

In the Aquarius's eyes, his past self was just an insignificant character, but after a fierce debate, he had almost been drained by the Scale of Truth. Now, he was undoubtedly marked in the Aquarius Director's mind. The sooner the Aquarius Director was caught, the safer his family would be.

"Hey, Leon."

As Leon tried to recall the scenes from back then, pondering if there was any way to hasten the demise of the Aquarius Director, the Red-haired Director suddenly remembered something and instructed,

"The sun is almost setting. You, Jerry, and Prince Joshua will likely be sent back to the Capital City the moment the sun sets.

I need two to three days to wrap things up here. Although Emma has been cleared of suspicion, it will still take a day or two for her to return. Which means, only you and Jerry will be here at the Bureau tomorrow..."

"I understand, Director."

Leon immediately straightened up and promised,

"I will cooperate with Senior Jerry and work hard to maintain the situation at the Bureau to ensure nothing goes wrong before you return."

"Uh... Your determination is really commendable, but actually, that wasn't what I was trying to say..."

Seeing Leon's somewhat perplexed expression, the Red-haired Director embarrassedly added,

"I have some newspaper and magazine subscriptions that are bi-weekly, and tomorrow is the last renewal day. So... could you drop by the post office across from The Sun News and help me fill out the subscription forms?"

"Alright..."

Defeated by this overly down-to-earth request, Leon, the hero who had just thwarted the Aquarius Director's conspiracy and successfully protected the world, nodded speechlessly and agreed to run the errand for his Director.

Shortly afterward, as the sun set, the Purge Bureau Headquarters faded into the world's dark side. Lacking sunlight's support, the figures of Leon and his companions briefly distorted, and then transformed into countless tiny specks of light, disappearing from the Bureau's Headquarters.

Meanwhile, in the Royal Palace's secret chamber housing the Syllabic Stele, the three individuals who had been missing for half a day reappeared, landing head over heels onto the wool carpet.

...

"We're finally back..."

With genuine relief, Jerry, the fittest of them, rose first, then helped the still-dizzy Leon up and gave him a thumbs-up.

"Impressive, Leon, not only did you deliver crucial evidence, forcing the Aquarius Director to accept memory reading, but you also managed to escape unscathed after being targeted by him! Honestly, I have a feeling you'll become an extraordinary figure in the future. Perhaps within my lifetime, I might even see you take a Director's seat!"

"Ugh... Just luck..."

Closing his eyes for a moment, Leon shook off the disorientation and replied,

"The one who truly seized the crucial evidence was you, Senior Jerry, with your Cunning Hand of Fate. I merely caught Prince Joshua who came back from the future. As for managing to escape unscathed from the Aquarius, that was pure luck. If I'd been off just a little bit, I'd be nothing but dust... By the way, what's up with that dumb prince? Why hasn't he said a word?"

"Let me check..."

Upon hearing Leon's question, Senior Jerry released the now steady Leon and examined Prince Freckles on the carpet. Although everything seemed normal, his gaze was inexplicably despondent, as if he had suffered an indescribable blow.

Could it be... I'm really just a useless person?

While Leon had briefed the Director, he hadn't deliberately hidden anything from Prince Freckles. Though Joshua didn't entirely grasp what had happened—especially regarding some palace and god stuff—he got the gist of it.

The things in my dreams really happened in another future, where I was a clown who lost almost everything. Lured by the Purge Bureau's Aquarius Director, I used some gate to return to the past, created a rebellion to try to change the future, and became nothing but a pawn manipulated by the Aquarius Director. Meanwhile, this villain who repeatedly beat me to a pulp was entrusted by my sister Veronica, not only capturing my future self but also restoring everyone's erased memories and thwarting the Aquarius's scheme. He's like the nemesis to both of my selves. What's worse is he seems to be my de facto brother-in-law and might even marry Veronica, truly becoming part of the royal family in the future... Damn it! Why him?

Suddenly sitting up from the ground, Prince Freckles struggled out of his self-doubt and glared angrily at Leon.

"You damn... uh..."

Seeing Leon's right hand twitch slightly, Joshua, already familiar with the starting posture for a powerful move, instinctively bit back the curse he was about to hurl. He propped himself up with his hands and scooted back, threatening with not much conviction,

"The Purge Bureau and the kingdoms have an agreement not to interfere with royal affairs. So, your proposal to Veronica doesn't count! If I complain a few more times, they'll definitely stop you!"

"..."

You've improved; you're already learning to be cautious.

Mulling over Prince Freckles' words, Leon found the tone rude but not affronting enough to warrant a beating. Regretfully clicking his tongue, he decided to ignore him and turned to leave the chamber.

Just then, Prince Freckles called out from behind,

"Hey! Have you ever considered working with me?"

???

Wow, is Joshua really saying this? Did someone else take over in just a short while?

...

Stay calm, make judgments rationally, try to win over talented individuals, engage in beneficial exchanges targeted at what matters most to each person, and even dealing with enemies if necessary...

Watching Leon turn back in surprise, the matured Prince Freckles, recalling past advice he'd once scoffed at, forced down his old grievances and promised calmly,

"The reasons you side with Veronica are either for power, wealth, or beauty, all of which I can offer you—perhaps even more than she can! What's more, compared to Veronica, I have a clear advantage she absolutely doesn't... I know what happens in the future!"

Seeing Leon didn't leave but rather started scrutinizing him, Joshua, for the first time feeling like he was leading the conversation, couldn't help but curl his lips into a confident smile.

I've got this! Even if in the original future, I was an incompetent clown, nothing's happened yet! With the future's memories, from now on, if I try hard, I can definitely change it! As for this guy in front of me, aside from the Bureau's background, he's just a Duke who lucked out. In the past, I just tried to kick him away, of course he bit me back hard, but if I threw a few bone scraps smeared with grease his way, he'd wag his tail at me, like a...

"If you hadn't said anything, I might have almost forgotten."

Looking at the confident Prince Freckles before him, Leon couldn't help but flash a kind smile. He then took out paper and pen from the small mirror he always carried and handed them over, speaking with a smile,

"Come on, write down everything you know about the future! Especially intelligence on the Crolock Kingdom, don't leave anything out! For instance, what mineral resources do Crolock Kingdom's agents know about; why are they invading the kingdom, when did they invade, and what has the Aquarius Director been up to in the future... jot down everything you know, don't miss a single piece!"

"You?!!!"

"You what?"

Having checked Joshua's soul and confirmed no switch, Leon immediately put on a stern face. In the midst of Prince Freckles' shock and anger, he first pointed at the paper and pen in his hands, then shook his right hand,

"Either write that, or take this beating, your choice!"

Chapter 279: Future Uncertainties_1

Facing the two choices presented by Leon, Prince Freckles uncharacteristically stood his ground.

He didn't choose to directly hand over the intelligence, nor did he choose to take Leon's slap hard; instead, he bravely carved out a third path...

First, he took a beating, then tearfully handed over the intelligence about the future.

What were you even thinking?

Seeing Joshua, with snot and tears mingled into a mess, still covering his swollen cheek while glaring at him indignantly, Leon couldn't help but sigh, feeling that he might have overdone it a bit this time.

Even though he carried the title of Prince and was causing trouble everywhere, Prince Freckles was actually younger than his sister Anna. He hadn't even grown a beard yet and was still essentially a half-grown child. Not only did Leon rely on force to beat him up, but he also snatched his "things," which was somewhat immoral.

But since this intelligence concerned the future of many people in the Kingdom, and possibly the safety of the Watcher's Palace, even the safety of all humanity, it absolutely could not be overlooked... Maybe the next time Joshua has an episode, Leon could hold back and hit him one less time, considering this as an advance payment!

As Prince Freckles sniffled and began to dictate from memory, Senior Jerry had already returned to the bureau ahead of time. Having decided on "advancing the payment," Leon took out a head of lamb, asked Prince Freckles a few questions to confirm the intelligence's authenticity, then directly took out the [Plague-Infected Blood Band] and wrapped it around his face to reduce the swelling. He then quickly left the Royal Palace and called a carriage to head to the Purification Bureau.

...

So that's how it is...

After unfolding Joshua's dictated intelligence about the future on the carriage and quickly skimming through it, Leon finally understood why the future Kingdom did not choose to cooperate with the Crolock Kingdom. Instead, they refused the proposal for joint "mining" development, eventually leading to an invasion by the Crolock Kingdom.

Because the so-called "energy minerals" discovered by the utopians of the Crolock Kingdom weren't minerals at all, but rather dozens of underground rivers of lava stretching over hundreds of kilometers, and eleven dormant volcanoes distributed across the two counties of the Kingdom!

Laine County, where he "originated," and Merino County, known for its wool production, were both situated atop a unique "hotspot" in the Earth's crust. The almost endless thermal energy underground, if harvested, would fulfill over eighty percent of the Crolock Kingdom's energy needs.

But the fatal issue was that the mining method proposed by the Crolock Kingdom was unimaginably crude, not only requiring the reopening of these eleven dormant volcanoes but also multiple deliberate detonations!

If the Kingdom really collaborated with the Crolock Kingdom, not only would the residents of both counties need to be massively relocated, but the ash and smoke from the erupting eleven volcanoes would also spread westward due to the monsoon, pervading much of the Kingdom.

Consequently, not only would Laine County and Merino County become uninhabitable for humans, but the countless large farms and ranches across the Kingdom would suffer from terrifyingly reduced yields or even total crop failures due to the volcanic impact, causing years of massive famine.

In addition, the crustal shifts from the detonations and the subsequent mining activities could also trigger intermittent earthquakes and large-scale ground collapses. Faced with such consequences, no matter how much the Crolock Kingdom offered, the Kingdom would never agree to it.

So... while one side was determined to obtain these underground energy sources at any cost, the other side was entirely unwilling to accept the consequences of mining. With such a core interest conflict, the only choice left was to resort to force and communicate directly with fists.

Although the Crolock Kingdom had a sparse population, the toughness of its fists was something the Kingdom could not match. Once the two sides started to "communicate," the situation would inevitably be one-sided, leaving the Kingdom with almost no ability to retaliate on a large-scale battlefield. The staunchest opposition leader, the Princess, would be killed, leading the Kingdom to near-total collapse and the brink of destruction.

Having finished reading the invasion-related intelligence from the Crolock Kingdom, Leon found that some of his doubts about the future were slightly resolved.

No wonder middle-aged Joshua chose not to flee at that time. Instead, he stubbornly negotiated with himself amid the rebels, hoping to persuade Leon to attack the Boarding Tower and kill the Crolock Kingdom's scouts. This was because it was the best possible way he could think of to potentially avoid that future.

And now it seemed, Leon really needed to pay a visit to the Boarding Tower himself. Even if he didn't want to kill those Crolock Kingdom scouts directly, as middle-aged Joshua suggested, he had to bring along the Phoebe sisters, who could alter memories, to prevent the "mineral" intelligence from being returned to the Crolock Kingdom, thereby averting the subsequent invasion war.

In addition...

Looking at the grim future recorded by Prince Freckles, where thick smoke filled the skies, ash covered the ground, the population of the entire Kingdom halved, and nearly sixty percent of the people suffered from lung diseases, Leon's brow furrowed deeply.

Since this future had indeed occurred, it meant that the Purification Bureau had not intervened at all, truly following the agreements between the Kingdoms, only dealing with anomalous situations and not interfering in non-anomalous issues.

From what he saw with his own eyes today, the state of affairs in the Purification Bureau, with each branch acting independently and nearly scattered in the absence of a large-scale operation, such a result was indeed possible.

Not to mention those Branch Directors who were deeply tainted by anomalies and whose behavior seemed to have started departing from the realm of "human," even the few present Directors were rather indifferent to the massive casualties privately caused by the Aquarius Director.

The only one who might care, the Taurus Director, was set to ascend to the palace next year. So, when the Crolock Kingdom invades, the only ones who might take interest would probably be the Virgo and Gemini Sub-bureaus.

And judging by the Aquarius Director's brain replacement surgery, the Gemini Sub-bureau's relationship with the Crolock Kingdom seemed "extremely close," likely making them reluctant to intervene, so...

Where was the Director? What was he doing?

Pondering his own Director's style, Leon's brow furrowed even deeper.

Though the Director wasn't particularly reliable, loved to tease people when there was no wine, and his brain would go offline after drinking too much, he was definitely a good man on the "benevolent side."

Even if he felt it was inappropriate to intervene directly in such matters, he wouldn't do absolutely nothing.

However, in the future written by Joshua, there was almost no trace of the Virgo Sub-bureau, not even the Aquarius Director, who failed to succeed the Taurus Director to the palace, appeared a few times. Yet, his own Director seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth, as if he had never existed, and even the entire Virgo Sub-bureau was silent.

With what he knew of the Director, such a situation was absolutely impossible, so... in the future where he didn't show up, could the Kingdom have encountered some extremely serious large-scale event, leading to heavy casualties in the entire Virgo Sub-bureau, or even...

"Woof! Woof woof!"

Just as Leon was pondering over the information written by Prince Freckles, thinking about what could have gone wrong, a sharp bark suddenly rang in his ear.

Leon turned his head in surprise and saw it was Senior Jerry's beloved dog... partner, Lady Lisa. This... this adult golden retriever was poking its head through the glass of the carriage compartment, stuffing a hastily scribbled note into his hand.

'Come back quickly, something happened at the bureau!'

Chapter 280: Suffered from thieves and renewed_1

"So it was just something that went missing... What a scare!"

Looking at the director's office, which seemed to have been ransacked by someone unknown, Leon, who had been momentarily frightened, let out a sigh of relief. He then looked somewhat speechlessly at Senior Jerry, who had "falsely reported a military situation."

After receiving a note from Senior Jerry, Leon, worried that something serious had really happened, stopped the carriage halfway and didn't even ask for the remaining fare. He then hurriedly entered a small alley, mounted the Witch's Broom, and flew back to the bureau under the cover of night.

As a result, after rushing back, he found that it was just a false alarm. Except for the director's office, which seemed to have been burgled, nothing unusual had happened.

Come to think of it...

When Senior Jerry and I left, there was no one else at the bureau. The Princess and Anna, who were temporarily staying there, had already returned early to the Happiness Apartment. Besides the missing items, nothing else could possibly be wrong.

"Leon, this time it's not just about missing items."

Noticing that Leon seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, Senior Jerry shook his head slightly, then pointed to the pile of empty wine bottles in the office with a solemn expression,

"Look there. The thief who sneaked in when the bureau was empty definitely isn't ordinary!"

Hearing Senior Jerry's words, Leon was slightly taken aback. As he followed the direction indicated by Jerry, he found the "target" and his expression instantly turned serious.

There lay a few striking long red hairs in the pile of wine bottles, trying hard to float upward but resembling someone without bones. No matter how hard they tried, they could only twist slightly and couldn't "stand" up from the ground...

Damn, that was the director's hair!

As a powerful anomalous object numbered 013, these few strands of [Slaughter Blood Hair] were a bit weak. They weren't like the reinforced ones on himself, which could block the God of Enlightenment from escaping with just one strand.

But even if they weren't reinforced, they were part of a numbered anomalous object. No matter how strong they were, their hierarchy definitely surpassed the threshold of the True God. At the very least, Level Two and Three Cleaners absolutely couldn't handle them.

Anyone capable of taking care of these strands of hair likely had a skill level similar to Senior Emma. They should be at the First Level Cleaner level and, if caught off guard, could also easily deal with Jerry and him!

And this meant that if he and Senior Jerry hadn't gone to see Prince Freckles and been shifted to the headquarters by Star Palace, they would have run into this incredibly skilled thief! If the reinforced hair on himself couldn't withstand the thief's ability...

Then they would be dead!

...

"Honestly, I owe you one this time."

Looking at the fluttering red hair on the ground, Senior Jerry took a deep breath and, with lingering fear, said to Leon,

"If you hadn't suggested going to see that prince and insisted that I go with you, I would definitely have stayed at the bureau myself. If this thief were one of those ruthless types, I'd probably be dead by now."

It wasn't just you who almost died...

Entering the director's office, Leon cautiously checked around. After finding half a bloody handprint on the windowsill, he let out a long sigh of relief with his eyes full of gratitude.

If he hadn't been careful enough, letting the Princess and Anna return to the Happiness Apartment when leaving the Purification Bureau, who knew if they would have been in danger?

And because of his "overcautiousness," not only was there no loss of life, but he also received another piece of good news.

Looking in the direction of the bloody handprint, Leon found a large amount of sprayed blood on the outer wall of the office building and the grass outside the window, which slightly relieved his tense expression.

Although this thief was strong enough to subdue the director's hair, they weren't unscathed. They seemed to have been fiercely cut several times by the [Slaughter Blood Hair]. Judging by the terrifying amount of blood, they were probably half-dead, so there was no worry about them returning anytime soon.

As for the thief's origins and purpose...

Standing two meters away, using the power of the [Holy Spirit Pendant], Leon cautiously rummaged through the director's drawers and couldn't help but show a knowing look on his face.

Just as he expected, the "fake photo" the director replicated had already been taken.

It seemed that the Aquarius Director, who was accustomed to multiple layers of security, not only arranged for middle-aged Joshua as a backup but also sent another wave of people to retrieve the photo after finding a way to send Senior Emma away.

Originally, the Aquarius Director's plan might have been to let this thief temporarily deal with the director's possible backup, then have middle-aged Joshua retrieve the photo, and both would use the Beyond the Gate for a quick escape, completing the theft without a hitch.

However, Leon caught middle-aged Joshua in advance, letting down the thief. After waiting in vain for Joshua, noticing the Purification Bureau was not guarded and boldly broke into the director's office, rummaging through the drawer for the photo, barely escaping being killed by those strands of hair, exceeding the Aquarius Director's orders.

Yet, unfortunately, all he took was the director's prepared fake photo. The thief's efforts were utterly in vain.

Using the hand formed by the [Holy Spirit Pendant] to pick up a few blood hair strands in the grass outside the window and placing them with the ones on the wine bottle pile, Leon turned to Senior Jerry and cautiously asked,

"Senior Jerry, do you think your friends can...?"

"No, they can't."

Knowing what Leon wanted to ask, Senior Jerry shook his head helplessly,

"This person likely has an anomalous object capable of handling their aura. Anything leaving the body loses its scent, even the blood. The ants followed the blood trail for two streets but couldn't track him any further."

Indeed... I didn't smell anything upon entering, or I wouldn't have missed the hair on the ground.

Moving to the window, Leon slightly sniffed and found that even with such a terrifying amount of blood outside, there wasn't any lingering blood smell. He sighed, abandoning the thought of capturing the thief while they were injured.

Since the thief was so well-prepared, he could only wait for the director to return and hope things would stay calm in the coming days, without any more mishaps... Oh, right, he still had to visit the post office across from The Sun News tomorrow to renew her newspaper subscriptions.

Shaking his head helplessly, Leon opened the side drawer of the director's desk, searched the document area, and took out all the newspapers and magazines inside.

The Sun News, Daily News, Royal Mail News...

Charming Focus, Weapon Industry, Wine Traveler, Boys' Little Thoughts...

The newspapers and magazines the director asked him to renew should be these... Hmm... wait!

Flipping through the thick stack of newspapers, Leon couldn't help but show a suspicious look when he found only a few pages of The Sun News had been clipped.

If I remember correctly, the positions clipped on these newspapers happened to be where my published photos appeared those two times.