

I! Cleaner 351

Chapter 351: Life-saving Apple_1

Was I always unlucky?

Upon hearing the lazy young man's inquiry, Leon, who was previously excited, suddenly became serious and hurriedly asked,

"Yes! My luck had never been great. No matter how well I planned, something would always go wrong during missions, and I'd always encounter inexplicable dangers. I even once witnessed an Anomalous Object go berserk at a theater... Senior, do you have any insights?"

"Insights... rather than insights, it's more like experience..."

After tossing the sour apple in his hand, hitting and skewing the picture frame on the side of the staircase wall, the lazy young man said with a bitter expression,

"If I'm guessing correctly, our situations should be similar. We've both angered the world will by doing certain things and become disliked by this world."

"Disliked by the world? What does that mean?"

"To put it simply, it means inexplicable bad luck and misfortune."

Glancing at the picture frame that was slowly coming off the hook and falling toward the staircase, the lazy young man pulled Leon a step forward and sighed,

I don't know about your situation, but my situation was that I revealed too much of the future and erased some things that were supposed to happen, causing considerable changes in the course of the world, which made me despised by the world will.

"For instance... you know the Aquarius Director, right? Did the Director ever tell you that my core Anomalous Object, those probability-calculating dice, was something he helped create?"

"He did mention something like that..."

"If the Director told you about it, then it wasn't just 'something,' he'd have said a lot."

The lazy young man said somewhat helplessly,

"Did he also tell you to be cautious of me and not to trust me completely?"

"Uh..."

"That's fine, the Director was right."

With a loud crash of the heavy solid wood picture frame breaking and damaging the stair railing in the background, the lazy young man explained to a somewhat embarrassed Leon,

"The Aquarius Director's target was exposed by you, and now all the operational members of the department know that he intended to infiltrate the Watcher's Palace. But this target of his, I was actually the first to know, and I was practically in cahoots with him, so the Director was right to warn you about me."

"Huh?"

"Yeah, it was mostly my bad luck..."

After sighing quietly, the lazy young man grumbled with a difficult expression,

"When the Anomalous Objects were first created, the Aquarius Director asked about my Ability, and I told him. He got interested and said he wanted me to help him with a small favor."

The Aquarius Director's Abnormal Genesis Sorcery is quite proficient, and countless people in the Purification Bureau have used the Anomalous Objects he created. His connections with Taurus His Excellency are on par, and when such a bigshot asks nicely for your help, would you refuse?"

"..."

If it were me... Facing the request from a Director with high reputation and status, and who could create Anomalous Objects, I would probably also agree...

"Right?"

Seeing the agreement in Leon's eyes, the lazy young man couldn't help complaining,

"I was really unlucky. Who would've known that a Director could harbor malicious intentions? So I agreed without thinking, and only realized something was off when he put a word spirit on me to prevent leaking the secret. But by then it was too late."

Avoiding the railing that fell to the side after being broken, and giving Leon's back a push, he led him down before the suspended stone staircase collapsed, then Tom said grimly,

"The Aquarius Director had a ritual-kind of Anomalous Object that could temporarily boost the Leon Value. He force-fed me a lot of Divine Flesh, temporarily changed my race, and forced me to drink his blood, cut open my arm to insert his rotten flesh, and planted his fallen tooth in my forehead..."

Pointing to the strange scar on his forehead, the lazy young man gritted his teeth and said,

"After tormenting me like this, he temporarily raised my Leon Value to nearly 70 points, then forced me to use the dice to help him calculate how he could replace the next Ascension Palace Person, becoming the new Ascendant to take over the Watcher's Palace.

Out of sheer necessity, I helped him boost his mere 12% coup probability to 66%, but this also made me despised by the world. Now, I end up with bad luck whenever... Hey! Is anyone up there? The staircase just collapsed, we're stuck!"

Unaware that the person below asking was the culprit who destroyed nearly fifty meters of the staircase, upon hearing Senior Tom's question, someone above who rushed over to the commotion hurriedly responded,

"We are figuring out a way... How are you doing? If you're uncomfortable, please continue downward. Our family's head is also down there, he can get you back up. Also, this is the token needed to continue downward, catch!"

With that somewhat unclear shout from above, a bright silver cat emblem was tossed down. It bounced twice among the debris of the collapsed staircase before landing precisely in the lazy young man's outstretched hand.

"Alright, I've got my badge too, let's talk as we go."

Pinning the badge retrieved with the sour apple to his collar, the lazy young man led Leon downward while explaining,

"This world, it prefers humans. Compared to the Demons that want to turn the entire land into lava, the Evil Gods preparing to keep the sun from rising, the Moonchildren who want to hollow out the Earth Core like the moon, or the Ancient Ones hoping to freeze everything back to an ice age, we humans are the gentlest beings to her. We even consciously maintain her stability.

Therefore, anything that can pose a threat to humans and the world or possibly disrupt this stability, would be met with invisible rejection from the world will. As it can't directly kill us, it can only use unconventional means to endlessly jinx us, hoping to get rid of or drive us away."

"..."

No way... it could be like that?

"Don't worry, being despised by the world isn't entirely a bad thing."

Seeing Leon's somewhat dumbfounded expression, the lazy young man, somehow producing another apple, handed it over with a complex expression,

"The wheel of fate is equal for everyone. It can't always stay at a low point, so for us who are disliked by the world, if we can withstand the bad luck gifted by the world will, we'll eventually experience a surge of fate.

But after the surge, comes an even sharper decline.

Compared to the minor fluctuations in others' fate, ours, like a wave with increasingly intense amplitudes, will see rewards and crises grow bigger, until we either ascend as a god at a towering peak or are sent to the realm of the deceased by a sudden twist of bad luck in a fatal trough."

Become a "god," or become a "ghost," is it?

Feeling like Senior Tom wasn't lying, Leon pondered for a moment and couldn't resist asking,

"Then what about you, Senior? What's your current situation?"

"I can't become a god, but I usually can't die either."

Pointing to the apple in Leon's hand, the lazy young man earnestly suggested,

"If you trust me, just carry a few apples with you all the time. When you notice your luck turning bad, eat one, then throw away the apple core; this thing can be a lifesaver when needed."

Chapter 352: Rituals and Gatherings_1

"Apple? Salvation?"

Confused by the lazy young man's suggestion, Leon couldn't help but ask,

"Why an apple?"

"It doesn't have to be an apple. A four-leaf clover, a rabbit's foot, a clear amethyst, a coin minted on a specific date that you've carried for a long time, or any red items that symbolize good luck can work.

I chose an apple because it's the easiest to get, unlike a four-leaf clover that wilts easily, or a lucky coin that needs to be carried for a long time, plus it's extraordinarily cheap. You can buy dozens of carts full with just one amethyst.

As for why I said it could save your life... that's because eating the apple and then throwing away the core counts as the simplest mystical ritual to pray for good luck."

"Ritual?"

"Yes, it's a ritual."

Raising his hand to point at Leon's forehead, the lazy young man explained slowly,

"For instance, my pointing at you is a simple ritual in the context of mysticism, meaning 'guidance,' 'chosen,' or 'locking in,' and it could be amplified if it fits with your name.

Eating an apple is similar. This sweet fruit, whose skin is mostly red, bears the four meanings of 'luck,' 'safety,' 'temptation,' and 'enlightenment' in mysticism, being a classic prop for rituals.

By eating the flesh, you consume the temptation. By throwing away the apple, you lose safety. Not eating or planting the seeds means you forgo enlightenment. When three of the apple's meanings are gone, what's left is the fourfold pure luck."

After spewing a bunch of mystical mumbo jumbo, the lazy youth gestured a wave in the air, then continued explaining to the somewhat stunned Leon,

"I told you before, both of us are more unfortunate than the average person because the world's will dislikes us, but that doesn't mean we don't have luck. It's just that our luck is suppressed by the world's will.

So, when we hurl a symbol of luck towards this world with pride, it's like linking with the entity suppressing our luck and completing a simple lucky ritual.

In doing so, the vast amount of luck oppressed by it would blast out partially via the ritual's opening, bringing us sudden fortune, reducing the volatility of fate, and making our 'wavy line' relatively more stable to avoid overly perilous troughs.

Of course, once you've learned this ritual, it's best not to eat apples arbitrarily since this luck doesn't appear out of nowhere. We exchanged it for our accumulated misfortune, so the total amount is limited.

Moreover, unlike me, you don't possess anomalous objects that can directly see fate, so randomly altering your fate too often is dangerous. It's best used only when needed to ensure you don't die from misfortune."

...

So that's what it was about...

Understanding roughly why throwing an apple core could bring good luck, Leon nodded with sudden enlightenment but couldn't help glancing at the cat paw badge on his chest and asking confusedly again,

"But before, I only spat out a bite of flesh; why did it also bring good luck and get me the badge to enter the Scales Gold Sect gathering?"

"Because you took such a big bite that you even got the seeds out of the apple core. It can just barely count as having completed the ritual."

"Oh, I see..."

Leon nodded in understanding, then asked somewhat worriedly,

"Senior Tom, are there any other 'simple rituals' like this that I need to be cautious of? For instance, eating an orange or some black fruit won't suddenly bring misfortune, will it?"

"No worries, these things only take full effect when the practitioner is aware of the ritual's effects and consciously carries it out."

The lazy youth answered in a steady tone as he strode down the dim underground alley,

"You just managed to successfully activate the simple ritual, probably because you thought spitting out the apple like me would bring good luck, and subconsciously mimicked my stance, fulfilling the basic conditions for initiation. Otherwise, the ritual isn't so easy to succeed.

Moreover, our ritual's effect is so powerful because we're already despised by the world's will—a qualification not everyone has. For those who don't know, it's impossible to activate the ritual by doing anything.

Even if they somehow meet all the conditions and luckily activate a simple ritual, given the general person's soul strength and aptitude, they might only pick up a few Copper Wheels at most... Get ready, past this door is the gathering place of the Scales Gold Sect. Put away all the anomalous objects on you first!"

After reminding Leon, the lazy youth stopped in his tracks, standing before a heavy door studded with one hundred eleven Copper Wheels. He then rummaged in his pocket, pulling out a heap of strange items.

A small bottle of mercury, sulfur powder wrapped in moisture-proof paper, a packet of table salt with "Charl Department Store" printed on the packaging...

Two sets of pure copper weights, a tin balance with an iron plate, a small silver mirror, two large gold teeth from God knows where...

Amber, matches, clipped nails, bloodstained scraps of paper, curved horns resembling cattle or sheep, an unknown creature's tail...

All very bizarre.

Watching as if Doraemon pulling out a pile of oddities from a tiny pocket and setting up a "ritual altar" outside the door, even under the urgent circumstances, Leon couldn't help but ask,

"What are these things...?"

"This set of mercury constitutes the Holy Trinity of elements, representing the spirit and fire of the soul, the mutable water of adaptation, and the stable substance of reality, also signifying the body, the soul, and the bridge connecting them."

Knowing Leon would ask, the lazy youth fiddling with the ritual site answered without lifting his head,

"The last two sets are five symbolic metals and three pairs of oppositional materials: amber signifies solidification and eternity, matches represent transience and extinction; children's nails stand for growth, old folks' wills imply termination; horns and tails respectively hint at beginnings and ends... Alright, I'm almost ready, let's go!"

Pulling out an apple, he quickly gnawed it clean and tossed the core into the center of the ritual site. With large dark circles under his eyes, more like an internet-addicted youth than a 'Witch,' Tom directly pushed open the large door before him and entered the gathering hall of the Scales Gold Sect first.

"..."

So what did you actually prepare?

Looking at the jumbled mess of a ritual site on the ground, which could only be described as resembling a garbage heap, Leon paused in confusion but cautiously navigated around the meaningless items, following into the Scales Gold Sect gathering and then...

"Ding clang"

As he stepped over the threshold, the sound of precious metal coins clinking together echoed. Leon's cat paw badge on his chest trembled slightly before unexpectedly tossing out a somewhat heavy cloth coin bag, dropping it at Leon's feet.

What appeared before Leon wasn't a group of robed believers cupping their buttocks towards the central idol in a secretive scene, but instead, a bustling large plaza.

A large number of men and women in luxurious attire with indistinct faces wore badges made from three animals, moving back and forth in the plaza, occasionally pausing briefly by some 'booth,' purchasing goods of interest to them... Wait!

Glancing at the nearby booth's shelf, where a dozen howling fish-men were housed in sealed tanks and an entire miniature estate, only palm-sized but with fluttering flags and blaring horns, even the texture of the stone walls was clearly visible, Leon instantly widened his eyes in surprise.

The merchandise sold here... seems a bit off?

Chapter 353: Weighing Gold Gathering (Part 1)_1

"You didn't think wrong. Those things that look like dolls are actually living beings, and those miniature estates are, in fact, genuine estates."

After picking up the money pouch from the floor and tossing it to Leon, the lazy young man began to explain,

"The True God of the Scales Gold Sect is a rather pragmatic deity. Although he appreciates the faith offered by humans, he prefers his followers practicing his principles over their kneeling and bowing. In short, concepts like 'wealth,' 'exchange,' 'value,' and 'commercial activity.'"

So the gatherings of the Scales Gold Sect are less like congregations and more like unrestricted trade fairs.

Believers and devotees of the True God come here to buy and sell what they have to trade, as a form of alternative prayer. Each person invited to the gathering receives a temporary money pouch, filled with conceptual currency for shopping."

"Conceptual currency?"

"It's... well... explaining it is a bit complicated. Why don't you open the pouch, and I'll give you an example?"

"Ah, okay."

Following the method taught by Senior Tom, Leon touched the cat paw badge on his chest, then touched the similar emblem at the seam of the money pouch. The pouch in Leon's hand opened on its own, revealing a pile of colorful and strange currency inside.

"Wow, you've got quite a wealth of 'assets!'"

Peering at Leon's bulging money pouch, the lazy young man raised an eyebrow in surprise, then pointed at the shiny gold coin on top,

"Look here, the front of these conceptual currencies features designs like hearts, swords, holy grails, crosses, tarot cards, and so on, each representing valuable things such as emotions, strength, health, faith, secrets, and more.

For instance, this coin, with the scepter symbol on the front, represents a power that can be traded. The lion on the back should refer to the Ryan Family's Lionheart Crest.

So if I'm not mistaken, this coin represents your identity as the Duke of Lionheart. If you wish, you could use it to purchase items at the gathering square.

Whoever obtains this coin could replace you as the Kingdom's Duke of Lionheart... That's what I mean by 'conceptual currency.'"

What?!

After hearing the lazy young man's words, Leon was immediately taken aback, then he asked incredulously,

"The Scales Gold Sect can even do something like this?"

"Of course, they can."

The lazy young man raised an eyebrow and said,

"Don't underestimate the power of wealth. The concept of wealth isn't just limited to humans. From an anthill to demons in the Abyss, for any society with a structural hierarchy, wealth is a significant concept.

So, even though the True God of the Scales Gold Sect isn't skilled in combat and can't win a solo fight against our director, his hierarchy is not low, and he's considered a very powerful True God. Doing something like this isn't difficult for him."

"But... wouldn't this be using 'abnormality' to interfere with the Kingdom? Doesn't the Purification Bureau care?"

"Of course, they care. Transactions at the level of a duke aren't allowed, but if it's a low-level identity trade with minimal impact and the royal family doesn't voice objections, most bureaus are reluctant to interfere in such matters."

After glancing inside his own money pouch, the lazy young man continued pulling Leon toward the center of the square, explaining,

"The Scales Gold Sect is considered a relatively mild faction. Even when they cause trouble, they rarely go overboard, and their abilities are quite special. They allow cleaners to conveniently acquire useful items or repair lost life spans and limbs from missions.

So most bureaus turn a blind eye to this faction, only taking strong actions when they clearly cross the line, warning them not to go too far.

For instance, if some fool took your coin and didn't exchange it at the Scales Gold Sect but tried to use it themselves to become the Duke of Lionheart, the Scales Gold Sect would suffer greatly...

Oh, by the way, is there anything you want? As long as it's not too expensive, I can help you buy it."

Something I want... Wait! Aren't we here to rescue someone? Why are you shopping?

...

"Senior Tom!"

Faced with the lazy young man's sudden shopping proposal, Leon, worried about Emma's safety, couldn't help but softly remind,

"Emma's danger hasn't been averted yet, and we don't know how long she can last under the Snake Spirit's grip. Shouldn't we look for her first?"

"Don't worry. We're looking for her right now."

Gesturing toward the Colosseum-like building in the square's center, the lazy young man explained without moving his lips as he browsed the goods on the shelves,

"See that hollow ring-shaped building? The place we're at now is just the outskirts of the Scales Gold Sect's gathering. That's the core area where Emma might be trapped.

The badges we got are just the basic believer badges. We need to complete enough 'purchases' on the outskirts to upgrade these badges before we gain the privilege to enter the core area. So buying things is tantamount to searching for her."

With a shopkeeper's delighted expression on the roadside, taking away most of the jumbled items on the stall, the lazy young man turned back to Leon with a smile, soothingly saying,

"I know you have a good relationship with Emma, and you're worried about her, but you'd better not rush.

Although I'm also a Level One Cleaner, I'm not the combat-heavy type like Emma. Most of the anomalous objects I possess are functional, with hardly any direct combat abilities, and I can't take on a Holy Spirit in head-to-head combat.

So it's best for us not to act rashly now. Instead, preserve this identity and infiltrate the core area of the gathering without alarming the Scales Gold Sect hierarchy... Come on, you go pick something, and I'll pay for it."

"Okay... But you should choose something, and I'll pay!"

After considering the significance of the currencies in the pouch, Leon suggested,

"To me, the duke identity isn't worth much. If you need to use currencies like health or strength to buy something here, it's better if I pay. Otherwise, it might affect your performance later on."

"No need, I can't run out of money!"

Surprised, the lazy young man glanced at Leon before shaking his head to refuse the offer. Then he opened his own money pouch to show Leon.

Damn, that's a lot!!!

"I was prepared before we came in."

Under Leon's astonished gaze, the lazy young man with a mountain of colorful coins in his pouch confidently said,

"Remember the ritual I performed before entering? Using a copper weight, a small silver mirror, and two gold teeth as the main materials? That's a wealth ritual called 'Balance Rite.'

From the moment the ritual fully took effect, the next person to give me money would have their wealth equally divided with mine, and coincidentally, the next one to give me money was the badge made by that Scales Gold Sect cat spirit.

So, during these three hours of the Balance Rite, I can tap into the wealth of the Scales Gold Sect cat spirit at will. If we weren't worried about taking too much and getting noticed, we could even buy everything here!"

Chapter 354: Weighing Gold Gathering (Part 2)_1

Sure, here's the translation:

"Welcome! Welcome, both of you!"

Seeing the flowing gloss on the badges of Leon and his companion and recognizing the unique golden cat paw of "major clients," the priests guarding the outside of the core area of the gathering place smiled like blooming trumpet flowers.

After actively opening the door for them and making way to the core area, the female priest guarding the door bent slightly, smiling as she asked Leon,

"The grain spirits who walk under the shade of rice spikes, the croakers hidden in the shadow of the bright moon, the sentinels who tread through the night... Whom would you like to pay your respects to?"

Grain spirits? Croakers? Sentinels?

Momentarily stunned by the female priest's question, Leon, who had no idea what she was talking about, didn't immediately inquire. Instead, adhering to the principle that not engaging would prevent exposure, he returned a gentle smile. Senior Tom next to him timely took over the conversation, smiling as he replied,

"We are all beings grown on harvested rice, brothers and sisters nurtured by sunlight and fields, so naturally there's only one choice... Please, guide us."

"You're too kind. As brothers and sisters of black scales with white spots, it's what I ought to do."

After exchanging "code words" with Tom, the female priest, whose neck bore patterns akin to snake scales, asked no more. She turned and stepped into the door, leading Leon and Tom into a sticky, cold, and slippery passageway.

'The question she asked just now was about which of the three Holy Spirits of the Scales Gold Sect we're followers of.'

With his hand resting on Leon's shoulder, the lazy young man explained without moving his lips,

"Before being taken in and transformed by the True God of the Scales Gold Sect, the three Holy Spirits of the Scales Gold Sect were envoys of the God of Agriculture and Pastoralism.

Originally, the Snake Spirit was born from a farmer's prayer, hoping the snake could prey on the rats and sparrows in the fields without harming their own crops, thus walking under the shade of rice spikes, the grain spirit;

The croaker in the shadow of the bright moon refers to a toad that gazes at the moon's reflection in water and croaks loudly, which is the one you used to make the Holy Spirit pendant after you killed it, symbolizing the wish to eradicate pests and let the rice yield a stable harvest;

As for the sentinels that tread through the night, it naturally refers to the cats that roam at night, guarding the granaries. They symbolize protecting grain from being stolen or wasted, perfectly matching the behavior of cats catching rats in the granary."

So that's how it is...

After roughly understanding the "code words" just now, Leon asked with some confusion,

"According to this origin, the three Holy Spirits of the Scales Gold Sect should be benevolent spirits carrying beautiful expectations.

But I saw that toad before, and it didn't seem like that at all. It actually seemed like quite a ferocious, evil spirit. What happened in between?"

"Indeed, quite a lot happened."

Tom nodded and said,

"Since the Crolock Kingdom started selling steam farm machinery, many people, originally bound to farms and land working for food, lost their identity as farmers. The power of the God of Agriculture and Pastoralism weakened significantly.

And rice, in a sense, symbolizes wealth. So, the snake protecting rice production is like safeguarding wealth; the toad aiding in harvest success is akin to nurturing wealth; and the cat guarding granaries equates to guarding wealth.

Hence, the three envoys of the God of Agriculture and Pastoralism have a great affinity with the 'wealth' authority of the True God of the Scales Gold Sect. He took the opportunity of the God of Agriculture and Pastoralism being weak to bring them over and transform them into his Holy Spirits.

As to why three 'benevolent spirits' born from good wishes turned into such vicious and extreme forms now... perhaps because wealth drives people mad?"

[Through the narrative of Tom Raines, the Level One Cleaner from the Purification Bureau's Virgin Branch, you gained a significant amount of intelligence about the "Wealth-Exchanging Golden Toad,"

the "Life-Exchanging Black Snake," and the "Luck-Exchanging Flower Cat," activating the Abnormal Badge "Materialist Soul (Crimson)."

Since you understood the efficacy rules of the abilities of the "Wealth-Exchanging Golden Toad," "Life-Exchanging Black Snake," and "Luck-Exchanging Flower Cat," your resistance to these anomalous objects has substantially increased, and you are now able to block deeper effects.]

...

"Both of you, we've arrived."

As the system's mechanized prompt ended, the dark passage also reached its end.

Opening the small door at the passage's end, making a gesture of invitation, the female priest leading the way smiled and said,

"Once you both pass through here, you'll enter the secret shrine of the Snake Spirit Master, where other brothers and sisters waiting to pay respects are already gathered.

However, your timing is unfortunate, as the Snake Spirit Master is currently away, delayed by some matters. But according to the oracle left by the master, he will be back to receive everyone's respect in at most half a day after dealing with these matters."

Half a day more?

Hearing the female priest's words, Leon couldn't help but slightly turn his head and exchanged a glance with the equally looking-over lazy young man.

If he understood correctly, the "some matters" referred to were about the trapped Senior Emma, and the half-day time limit most likely indicated the remaining time before all her Undying Body's chances were completely "bought out," and this was a conservative estimate. In reality, it might be even shorter!

Must speed up!

Either find Senior Emma within half a day, or cause enough commotion within half a day to force that snake to come back on its own!

Reaching mutual agreement through their eyes, Leon and his companion politely bid farewell to the guiding female priest. They then both crouched down and squeezed through the tight, narrow door at the end of the passage.

"Hiss?!!!"

Looking at his slender, crimson body and then at the tall golden plants around him like towering trees, Leon couldn't help but widen his eyes... or rather his vertical pupils tinged with a touch of coolness.

"Hiss~"

As a hiss resembling a snake's tongue flickering sounded, a spotted snake with white base covered in red and blue spots approached. It coiled its tail gently around the little red snake, and the familiar voice of the lazy young man echoed in Leon's mind.

*'No need to panic; we haven't actually turned into snakes. This is just a form of spiritual manifestation to facilitate the worship ceremony.

After all, the Holy Spirits are not yet True Gods and can't link so many chaotic souls at once. Therefore it requires the effect of the secret shrine to temporarily align the spirits of the followers with itself. Once you leave, you'll return to normal.

Also, don't answer me out loud.

The spirits of everyone entering the secret shrine temporarily link together, and you can't yet hide your spiritual fluctuations. Speaking out loud would be like shouting your thoughts to everyone here, which would expose you.'*

Senior Tom?

Looking at the spotted snake with a color pattern uncannily like a dice with white base and red and blue spots, the calmed-down Leon nodded, indicating he more or less understood the current situation, and then exerted control over his tail, forming an imperfect "?"

*'Are you asking what we should do next?'

Leon nodded.

*'Next, we need to go to where there are more snakes and find the Bishop of the Snake Spirit lineage. Only those chosen who have received blessings can actively connect with the Holy Spirits in the secret shrine.'

Peeking out from the shade formed by the ears of grain and surveying the situation in the field, the lazy young man transformed into a spotted snake said,

"You can help me look too. The bishops of the Snake Spirit lineage have received blessings, so there should be a black-bottomed, white-patterned scale on their tail. Once we find that reverse-growing black and white scale, we've found our..."

Watching the little red snake stretch out its tail in front of him, with a reverse-growing black and white scale, the spotted snake's head tilted slightly and flicked its tongue in bewilderment.

Not... Whose side are you on?

Chapter 355: Weighing Gold Gathering (Part 2)_1

"*Hiss.*"

"*Hiss hiss?*"

"*Hiss hiss hiss!*"

As the sun slowly set on the horizon, the soft and dense hissing of snakes began to rustle across the endless rice fields, moving in unison toward a certain direction.

By the time the sun had completely disappeared beyond the horizon, and the cold moonlight spilled over the land, a small altar in the middle of the rice field had become a paradise for snakes. Snakes of various thicknesses and colors coiled around the thin pillars surrounding the altar, staring eagerly at the black statue at the center.

"*That purple-black Poison Sphere Python must be the Bishop presiding over this ceremony.*"

Raising his snake tail and pointing at the Poison Sphere Python, the only one that could wind around the serpentine sculpture, a speckled snake with six small blue dots on its forehead and a large red dot beneath its jaw turned to the small, red snake beside him and said,

"*Is this divine selection of yours real? Are you sure that as soon as the position of the snake's Bishop becomes vacant, you can unconditionally take over?*"

Hearing Senior Tom's inquiry, Leon glanced at the slot where the [Weighing Gold Divine Selection (Devouring Wealth)] gleamed brightly, then nodded firmly.

"*Alright then.*"

Casting him a skeptical glance, the speckled snake spoke,

"*If you're really confident, then it makes our actions much easier... In a bit, I'll do some tricks and try to get rid of that Bishop. During the chaos, you go straight up and coil around the Snake Spirit statue, and you will be able to send a signal of danger to draw it back.*"

As for the position, the best spot is at the tail end, or the further away from the snake's head, the better. Just touch it briefly and then let go. After all, the divine selection you carry came unexpectedly. A short contact is fine, but a long one could expose you.*"

He nodded.

"*Alright, inch forward and be ready!*"

After giving these instructions, the speckled snake that Senior Tom had become wriggled backward, silently slipping through the gaps between the rice ears, while Leon followed his directions, squeezing into the densely packed group of snakes, inching towards the sculpture at the center of the altar.

...

"*Hiss~*"

Accompanied by a somewhat aged hissing sound, the purple-black Poison Sphere Python coiled around the Snake Spirit statue slightly raised its triangular head. Looking down at the venomous snakes below the altar, it spoke in an eerie human voice,

"Shed the scales of old life, ring the endless tail, hunt the beast coveting wealth, lure the forbidden fruit...

Brothers and sisters who come to worship Lord Snake Spirit, I am a servant of Lord Snake Spirit and also a messenger carrying out the Lord's decree, shepherding lambs on earth. You can call me Belos."

After introducing its identity, the purple-black Poison Sphere Python flicked its tongue and, with a hoarse and slow old man's voice, leisurely addressed the snakes below the altar,

"When the guide brought you here, they must have already revealed to you that this time, Lord Snake Spirit will descend in flesh.

So this time, not only can you connect spiritually with Lord Snake Spirit, but you also have the chance to witness the holy body of Lord Snake Spirit with your own eyes, to personally touch the magnificent scales of Lord Snake Spirit. You are the luckiest batch of believers!"

"*Hiss!*"

"*Hiss hiss hiss!*"

After hearing the words of the Poison Sphere Python, the snakes coiling around below the altar immediately began to hiss chaotically, one by one raising their heads, eyes full of excitement, looking up at the stage, eager to witness the descent of the Holy Spirit as described. Some were so excited that they left the thin pillars and surged directly towards the altar.

"Quiet!"

Raising its head slightly, and hissing toward the crowd below to intimidate the overly excited believers, the purple-black python coiled on the black snake statue opened its giant mouth, two rows of fine and sharp teeth snapping out from its mouth, revealing a strange expression as if smiling.

"Do not be impatient, no matter how brilliantly the wildflowers on the roadside bloom, they can never be planted in a pure gold flowerpot. Only the rare is precious.

This supreme gift of gazing upon the Holy Spirit, if bestowed indiscriminately upon everyone, would neither showcase the benevolence of our Lord Snake Spirit nor align with the creed of our master. So come! Show your devotion to our master!"

Accompanied by the fervent speech, atop the head of the purple-black giant python, a small black and white crown quietly emerged... or perhaps a three-headed pearl serpent with black scales and white spots, hissing black and white forked tongues towards the eager crowd of snakes below.

"Offer your wealth, and health shall be granted.'

The white little snakehead on the left spoke solemnly, slowly opening its mouth to the crowd below.

"Offer your true love, and a position shall be given.'

The black little snakehead on the right grinned, then opened its mouth with teasing eyes.

"Offer your soul, and peace shall be traded.'

The gray snakehead in the center, its eyes indifferent, opened its mouth, revealing lots of backward-grown sharp teeth.

"Come!"

After the three-headed Serpent Crown on its head stated the rules and opened its mouths one by one, the purple-black Poison Sphere Python also grinned and said smilingly,

"Three ways to show your loyalty to our master, you can choose any one for offering. Go in the direction they face and present your sacrifice, and our master will give you a corresponding reward.

After everyone completes the offering, the one with the highest value item in each method will gain a spot to come up on the stage to worship, getting to face the divine body of Lord Snake Spirit and receive its grace!"

Chapter 356: Weighing Gold Gathering (Part 3)_2

...

Was this an auction of sorts? Would the top three bidders in this strange trade get the honor to pay tribute to the Snake Spirit?

Watching as the serpents around him surged forward enthusiastically, each clutching a coin in their mouths and respectfully flinging them onto the altar, Leon reluctantly mimicked their actions, aligning himself in front of the white Wealth Serpent's head to avoid standing out too much.

"Ding!"

With a slightly muddled chime, a violent gale fiercely targeting the soul swept through, and a black iron coin suddenly appeared in Leon's mouth. The meaning it represented also surfaced in Leon's mind.

Gold Wheels, 5 Silver Wheels, 7 Copper Wheels.

This was all he had left after paying the rent for Happiness Apartment, covering William and Melanie's tuition fees, buying supplements for Anna's health, and stocking up on supplies in the Mirror World. This was the only offering he could afford to present to the Wealth Serpent.

"..."

He glanced at the other serpents who had chosen the Wealth Serpent, noticing the shimmering gold and silver coins they threw out. Looking back at the dull iron coin in his mouth, Leon silently swallowed it back, searching again for other coins to offer.

Maybe I should choose something else.

It's not that I'm stingy; it's just that when others give so much and I give so little, it makes me stick out even more... Hmm, it's really not about being stingy, definitely not!

Carefully stashing away his remaining wealth, Leon twisted his crimson serpent body and switched his offering target. As the soul-piercing wind blew past again, several brand-new coins appeared in his mouth.

Unlike the previous dark iron coins, these new coins shimmered with a brilliant silver glow, and there was even a hint of gold mixed in. The largest coin was dazzlingly bright, shining like the noonday sun.

William, Melanie, and Anna...

After recognizing the significance of these three coins, Leon tipped his head back without hesitation and swallowed the coins, moving away from the second Beloved Serpent's head, attempting to swim towards the third Soul Serpent.

However, as if a gentle breeze brushed against a mountain, Leon stood before the third serpent head, his soul as steadfast as an iron mountain welded to the ground. No matter how the wind blew, he remained unmoved. No coins appeared in his mouth.

What?

Noticing the sluggishness transmitted from the Tri-headed Serpent Crown, the Poison Sphere Python curled around the black giant serpent sculpture slightly twisted its body, looking towards a small red serpent scrambling back and forth in three directions.

Not able to extract any soul fragments at all... Is he neither reliant nor hopeful on my master's greatness, or perhaps he doesn't even believe in any god?

After casting a dissatisfied glance, the Poison Sphere Python's emerald eyes blinked slightly, observing the little red serpent retreat hastily upon noticing its gaze. It didn't say anything further.

After all, neither the Snake Spirit nor my God would force followers to offer faith. As long as one possessed enough wealth and was willing to make a transaction, they would be allowed entry into the secret shrine. Although this little red serpent was not reverent, according to the Scales Gold Sect's teachings, this wasn't considered a fault, so there was no reason for me to punish him.

Yet, even the staunchest unbelievers, upon witnessing the mighty power of the True God after entering the assembly I preside over, would feel some degree of reverence despite still refusing to offer faith.

This little red serpent's soul, however, seemed devoid of any reverence whatsoever. The Tri-headed Serpent Crown circled his soul several times, but couldn't even gather a single cheap tin foil fragment. Such an ignorant and shallow soul was somewhat irritating.

...

Had he been noticed?

Feeling the gaze of the "Bishop Serpent" on the altar, Leon's heart tightened slightly, and he instinctively retreated into the throng of serpents.

Senior Tom said to take down that bishop and then disappeared without a trace. To avoid ruining the plan, it was best for him to remain concealed and not attract any attention.

The three heads of the "Bishop Serpent" seemed to demand wealth, devotion, or life. Upon careful consideration, only the price demanded by the head representing wealth was somewhat bearable.

No choice, it seemed he would have to part with his wealth this time!

So decided, Leon, disregarding the pain of losing his money, quickly changed position and swam toward the white Wealth Serpent's head.

Yet, during the time he took to switch between the three serpent heads and make his way back to the first, the majority of the "follower serpents" had already completed their offerings. They eagerly gazed at the sculpture in the center of the altar, making the only horizontally swimming little red serpent exceptionally conspicuous.

Seeing the little red serpent showing no respect to the deities, and brazenly tossing a pathetic iron coin toward the Wealth Serpent's head, the "Bishop Serpent," already full of displeasure, finally couldn't hold back.

Descending from the Snake Spirit's sculpture, the Bishop Serpent transformed into the Poison Sphere Python, used its purple-black tongue to pick up the inferior coin, and addressed the little red serpent coldly:

"Generosity is a virtue, and the Snake Spirit is not a stingy deity. After you generously offer your wealth, he will only generously give you more."

Chapter 357: Weighing Gold Gathering (Part 3)_3

Swallowing the iron coin, worth 8 gold, 5 silver, and 7 copper, which contained all of Leon's savings, and biting it into pieces with a click, the purple-black python raised its head slightly. Looking down at the trembling little red snake, it coldly said,

"In the teachings of the Scales Gold Sect, we do not advocate forcing others to make deals, but using such worthless items as offerings is an insult to the Snake Spirit.

Foolish blasphemer, I hope you'll think carefully and make a wiser judgment to present more valuable items to the Snake Spirit, like your beloved..."

"Pft!"

A large swath of silvery liquid metal exploded between the two... two snakes, tearing the trunk-thick purple-black python to shreds with needle-like liquid metal, even the three-headed Serpent Crown it wore wasn't spared, sliced in two by a suddenly solidified cursed silver blade!

You filthy dog... If you didn't want it, give it back to me! Why did you bite it into pieces?!

Seeing the mottled snake quietly appearing in the center of the altar and knowing Senior Tom was ready, the furious Leon, who had lost all his savings, struck out, controlling the cursed silver from the butt of Senior Pioni to instantly tear apart the damned Poison Sphere Python before him!

"This isn't right! You're not a follower!"

Reviving from the altar's center using its stored life span, the suspicious Bishop Serpent shouted sharply, the restored three-headed Serpent Crown on its head hissing coldly. A formless soul storm suddenly whipped up.

"Help!"

"No! I'm not!"

"Bishop!"

The storm swept through directly to the souls, and the snake followers standing between Leon and the Bishop Serpent fell like wheat under a scythe.

Separated from the snake bodies granted by the hidden temple, the original human souls of the snake followers were directly wrenched from their bodies, enduring a thousand cuts—like tearing within the fierce, sharp storm, letting out heart-wrenching screams from their souls.

Yet just as the soul storm from the Serpent Crown hit Leon, about to rip his soul from his body, a rooster's crow sounded from above the altar, instantly dissipating the fearsome storm that carried hundreds of souls!

What's going on... what is that?!

The Bishop Serpent, in disbelief, watched a Serpent Eagle suddenly appear amidst the rooster crow, biting the white snake head on the Serpent Crown.

No sooner had it reacted than a gray-brown honey badger agilely climbed onto its head, biting the black snake head accurately. A small, sharp-nosed, short-haired yellow weasel crept up from behind it, tore at the last gray snake head savagely!

"Crack!"

Under the predation of these inexplicably appearing predators, the divine three-headed Serpent Crown on the Bishop Serpent was shredded without a sound, neatly devoured by the three predators, leaving not a trace.

"Damn it!"

The Bishop Serpent roared in anger, forcibly shedding the snake form bestowed by the hidden temple, growing human arms, and reached for the slowest-hiding Serpent Eagle, intending to reclaim the swallowed Serpent Crown.

But the Serpent Eagle, with a wingspan of more than a meter, disappeared instantly, leaving only a few broken gray feathers. A gigantic rooster's beak, over thirty meters wide, pierced the false clouds at the temple's top, pecking directly at the monster python below with human arms!

Chapter 358: I'm not good at fighting_1

"Cluck, cluck, cluck!"

Looking at the hen excitedly pecking at the "earthworm" in Senior Tom's arms, and then glancing up at the giant beak repeatedly tearing through the clouds, driving back the Serpent Bishop, Leon shook his head slightly, a confused look in his eyes as if time had taken him to a different era.

What the hell is going on?

"This is the chicken I bought outside earlier, from that stand at the gate with the fishmonger and the estate. In the miniature estate he sells, there's a small chicken coop behind the kitchen, housing dozens of hens for eggs, perfect for dealing with these followers of the Snake Spirit. I just used one."

Glancing at Leon, whose soul and body seemed a bit separated and still hadn't completely escaped from the Snake Spirit's secret shrine, the lazy young man explained,

"That secret shrine of the Snake Spirit is actually a snake egg. The narrow passageway we went through before entering the shrine was equivalent to passing through its reproductive cavity, undergoing a simple nurturing, so the soul was temporarily 'incubated' as a snake. As for the effect of that snake egg shrine, it roughly magnifies our souls but shrinks our bodies to an extreme, swapping the positions of soul and body, turning us from people with snake souls into snakes with human souls."

"..."

"Didn't understand?"

Seeing the still somewhat dazed look on Leon's face, Senior Tom thought for a moment and then made an analogy,

"It's like the difference between babies and adults. Adults perceive the world primarily through the eyes on their bodies, then through thought and cognition, with the body first, then the soul. Unborn babies have not been born yet, so their bodies still do not truly exist; thus, it's the soul first, then the body. So, entering the snake egg shrine makes us like unborn young snakes, from the body first to the soul, to the soul first to the body, swapping the priorities between body and soul, approximately becoming a snake with a human soul."

Pausing slightly at this point, the lazy young man took out half a bag of leftover salt, waved it in front of Leon's eyes, and reminded him,

"Remember? Before entering, I prepared three groups of secret rituals in advance. The second group, composed of five metals, was to steal money from the Cat Spirit, while the first group, made of mercury, sulfur, and salt, was to control the soul and body. The materials represent the soul, body, and the bridge between them, respectively, which can counteract the effects of the snake egg shrine. As long as I lock the ratio of the three in advance, I won't be affected by the shrine's effects."

"..."

In Leon's silence, Senior Tom continued to explain,

"This way, while I can't directly interfere with the ritual situation, my body won't be infinitely shrunk, but your bodies were oppressed by the shrine, so sending a chicken in is enough to take down the bishop. The only troublesome aspect was the three-headed serpent crown granted by the Snake Spirit, but you drew his attention directly, so I found a way to invite three Holy Spirits whose real forms feed on snakes, simulating their imprints with some materials to forcibly dismantle the serpent crown. Without that life-saving crown, the bishop, whose body was suppressed to the extreme by the shrine and soul strength was also oppressed by me, couldn't even defeat a chicken... Did you get that?"

"..."

Kind of got it... maybe?

Listening, feeling seven orifices connected to six, Leon stiffly nodded slightly, then asked,

"Senior Tom, are these... uh... secret rituals your main combat method?"

"Sort of..."

The lazy young man nodded in response, then shook his head after thinking for a moment,

"But, rather than calling it a combat method, it's more accurate to say it's my 'way of doing things.' I actually don't engage in fighting. Unlike you all, my core Anomalous Object is quite unique, allowing me to merge more closely with the world and enhance the effects of these mystical rituals but lacks direct harm and defense capabilities. So, if it's a 'skirmish,' Emma could easily defeat ten thousand of me, but in a scenario where the enemy is seen and I'm not, she probably wouldn't have the chance to even meet me."

"..."

Got it, a weirdo with peculiar methods.

...

After making a judgment in his heart about the lazy young man, Leon couldn't help but curiously ask,

"Senior Tom, before entering the assembly, you prepared a total of three rituals. What was the third one for? To deal with that Snake Spirit?"

"No."

The lazy young man shook his head,

"The Snake Spirit was manageable. As long as you could replace and ascend to become the bishop, successfully tricking it back, dealing with it would be fairly easy if you have a plan for the situation... Hmm... Wait!"

Looking at the Poison Sphere Python being trampled underfoot by the hen, then pecked on the head, Senior Tom hastily urged,

"He's almost done for. Go around from the direction of the chicken's backside, get ready to cling to the Snake Spirit's statue, and replace him as the bishop presiding over the secret ritual. I'll help you disguise a bit... Hurry, hurry! Time's running out!"

"Okay!"

Taking a glance in the direction of the "chicken vs. snake battle," noticing it was indeed nearing its end, Leon disregarded his curiosity and quickly followed Senior Tom's instructions, circumventing from the chicken's backside, climbing up the hundred-meter-high black and white altar, and coiling onto the Snake Spirit sculpture's tail.

"Sizzle..."

Accompanied by a sizzling sound, like frying pancakes on an iron plate, Leon, turned into a small red snake, couldn't help but reveal a look of pain on his face.

There seemed to be some kind of restriction on this altar. For someone like him, not yet a bishop, each step forward felt like rolling over a mountain of knives, the pain reaching from the body deep into the soul. In the moment of contact with the Snake Spirit sculpture, there was a confusing feeling as if the soul was about to leave the body.

However, before long, the situation changed.

As the hen enthusiastically pecked out a pit over ten meters deep, clucking gleefully, and flung the defenseless Poison Sphere Python into the sky, the Snake Spirit sculpture, which had been resisting Leon's contact and trying to push him away, suddenly became friendly and allowed him to coil onto its tail.

With the coiling action completed thoroughly, as if just having completed some mysterious ritual, Leon's consciousness blurred slightly, connecting to an immensely vast soul.

Hmm? My bishop?

Somewhat surprised by the anomaly noticed, the Snake Spirit coiled outside an area of Emerald Jungle turned its head and looked at the indistinct small snake on its tail, its demeanor dignified as it inquired,

"Aren't you presiding over the ritual? Why did you suddenly come to see me?"

Chapter 359: Fatal Rooster Cry_1

"Of course, it's to take you down, what else could it be for?"

Leon glanced toward the Emerald Jungle in front of the Snake Spirit, guessing that Senior Emma was trapped there. He tried hard to restrain the malice within his soul and bowed slightly, saying submissively,

"Master Snake Spirit, it seems a Cleaner has infiltrated the gathering and is making large purchases with a suspicious amount of currency. I'm worried he might be up to something, so I thought I'd come to the Dreamrealm to report to you."

Having provided intelligence that was both true and false, as per his agreement with Senior Tom, Leon tried to open the system panel, noticing that the Holy Spirit Badge had shed its silver glow and was now shining with golden light.

[After collaborating with Level One Cleaner Tom Raines from the Virgin Branch, you have successfully assassinated the Bishop of the Scales Gold Sect and have been promoted to one of the bishops of the Wealth-Consuming Lineage, thanks to the status granted by the Snake Spirit.

Having met the advancement conditions, your Silver-Level Badge "Practitioner" has successfully advanced to the Gold-Level Badge "Deputy."]

[Deputy (Gold): The highest-ranking clergy acting on behalf of God, whose understanding of doctrine is extremely profound and can rely on force to expel heretics, equivalent in status to bishops in most sects.]

[Wearing effect: When in contact with "sacred" labeled Anomalous Objects, as a Deputy, you gain direct authority to use them, greatly enhancing their effects and reducing the cost of use.]

[Advancement Route: Once your Contamination Value reaches 60 points and you have acquired a True God's Power, this badge will automatically advance to a Heterochromatic Badge "God of Order."

If you haven't gained power through enlightenment but have defeated a True God and forcibly taken their power, this badge will automatically advance to a Heterochromatic Badge "Evil God of Chaos."

Since you did not obtain the Deputy status through orthodox routes, a corresponding special advancement route has been provided. If, without your Contamination Value reaching 60 points and not mastering any powers, you prematurely slay a True God, this badge will automatically advance to a Hidden Heterochromatic Badge "God Slayer."]

[Hidden Trait (does not require wearing): As the highest-ranking clergy acting on behalf of God, your piety and determination purify your soul immensely, naturally earning you the favor of orderly beings.]

...

Someone from the Purification Bureau has infiltrated?

After hearing his "bishop's" report, the Snake Spirit, as large as a statue, couldn't help but tremble slightly, hurriedly asking,

"Is that suspected Cleaner a man or a woman? What color is the hair? Is it red?"

"..."

Is this Snake Spirit not very bright? If it were some red-haired woman who came, would she really need to 'blend in'? She would probably charge right in!

"No, it's a man who came, and his hair isn't red."

Leon shook his head slightly and answered as truthfully as possible,

"The man always seemed sleepy, not very spirited, seemed unlikely to be dangerous."

"Not dangerous? If he's not dangerous, there aren't many dangerous people in the entire Purification Bureau!"

Hearing the overly foolish judgment from his bishop, the Snake Spirit glanced at the little snake disdainfully and said with a sneer,

"If I'm not mistaken, the man you claim isn't dangerous should be the Dice Emperor from the Virgin Branch of the Purification Bureau, with a record of expelling a True God all by himself, and his methods are extremely elusive, impossible to defend against!"

The Virgin Branch of the Purification Bureau has so few people yet still maintains a position within The Twelve Zodiac Divisions. Besides that red-haired woman, it's all thanks to him and the woman held captive in the Emerald Jungle.

These two Level One Cleaners are elite among elites, their skills rivaling the chiefs of the Non-Zodiac Branch of the Purification Bureau. If that 'not dangerous' man genuinely wants to deal with you, someone like you wouldn't even know how you died!"

After ridiculing Leon's foolish judgment, the black-and-white-spotted giant Snake Spirit pondered for a moment and squinted its eyes slightly, asking,

"What's the Dice Emperor been up to? Just buying things on the outskirts of the gathering?"

"He did buy a lot of things."

Leon's eyes flickered, then he said somewhat painfully,

"Master Snake Spirit, that man somehow seems to have an inexhaustible amount of money, buying up nearly half the street. Shouldn't we think of a way to stop him?"

"Let him be."

Hearing this, the Snake Spirit also looked pained, but still shrugged its tail, eyes full of helplessness, and said,

"This guy might be here to pick up bargains. He managed to infiltrate the Saio Kingdom gathering before and bought a heap of things with money from who knows where. This time... well... let me think."

Looking back at the tens of miles of Emerald Jungle in front, and the continuous bursts of blood light within it, the Snake Spirit hesitated slightly before musing aloud,

"The person sent by the Aquarius Director of the Purification Bureau said the red-haired woman from the Virgin Branch definitely wouldn't come to cause me trouble. It seems he wasn't lying.

But the specific situation is hard to say. If the Dice Emperor isn't here to pick up bargains but is here for the trapped woman, that could be trouble... Oh, how's the secret shrine doing?"

"Everything at the secret shrine is normal."

Leon, having switched to the [Master Performer] badge beforehand, calmly lied,

"Upon hearing the opportunity to visit your True Form, the followers are frantically competing for those three spots. The final candidates were already decided before I came to report to you, and their offerings have all been piled up in the secret shrine."

"I see..."

The Snake Spirit hesitated for a moment before sighing,

"You should head back first. I still don't know what the Dice Emperor is really here for, and to be safe, I can't leave. Go refund the offerings and tell them the visit is canceled."

"This..."

"What do you mean 'this'?"

Sighing in frustration, the Snake Spirit glared angrily and said,

"Do you think I don't want the offerings? But right now, the most important thing is to deal with the trapped Level One Cleaner!

Once her Undying Body is worn down, my power will be almost depleted, and if that damned man has any bad intentions, I might not be his match!

Stop dawdling and get to work!"

"Alright, I'll head back right away!"

Giving the Snake Spirit a reluctant glance, knowing any further persistence might expose him, the unsuccessful Leon had to bow and retreat, loosening the coil on the statue and disappearing from the Snake Spirit's tail.

And as his soul "disconnected," the Snake Spirit, who was showing a face of pained loss a moment ago, suddenly turned grim.

...

To actually refund the offerings... he certainly isn't one of my bishops!

If my guess is right, regardless of whether the Cleaner who came is the Dice Emperor or not, the secret shrine's already doomed. The enemies who've infiltrated the gathering must have set some trap, planning to lure me back to take me out directly!

For safety's sake, I shouldn't stay here either.

After contemplating with a sharp gaze, the Snake Spirit looked at the Emerald Forest before it, extended its black and white tail, and swept it through the air twice over the sprawling jungle.

Accompanied by a strange buzzing sound, the tens of miles of Emerald Jungle quickly shrank, transforming into a verdant transparent bead. Inside, a woman shackled by vine-like manacles suddenly opened her eyes, glowering at it through the bead.

"Stop glaring," it mocked the Emma inside the bead, "The [Dream of Verdant Green] was bestowed by my God to deal with you. Even if the Dice Emperor comes, there's no way he can break you out."

After taunting the Emma within the bead, the hundred-meter-tall black snake abruptly opened its mouth, swallowing the emerald bead named [Dream of Verdant Green.] It then identified a space between reality and the Dreamrealm, slipped into the gap, and prepared to escape before the Dice Emperor could react.

But before it could get far, a massive apple core, composed entirely of mist and standing seventy to eighty meters tall, mysteriously appeared ahead, flickering ethereal and uncertain.

Immediately after, seventeen or eighteen enormous chicken beaks inexplicably pierced through the barrier between the Dreamrealm and reality, pecking fiercely at its head, followed by the strangely excited clucks due to the unexpected extra meal.

"Bawk, bawk, buck-buck-bawk!"

Chapter 360: Solved?_1

Oh no! We've been tricked!

After being viciously pecked by a dozen giant hens, the Snake Spirit instantly realized it had fallen into a trap within a trap and hurriedly tried to withdraw and escape.

However, even though its reaction was swift, it still wasn't quicker than those old hens eager for a snack.

Seeing the delicious "Black and White Earthworm" trying to wriggle back, three or four gigantic chicken feet simultaneously pierced through the barrier between the Dreamrealm and reality, thudding down and forcibly pinned half of the Snake Spirit's body into the ground.

Immediately after, more than a dozen hens clucked and crowded up, attacking the terrified Snake Spirit in a storm of furious pecks!

"Wait!"

"Cluck cluck!"

"Damn beast! Get lost!"

"Cluck cluck!"

"Wait! Let's talk! I can give you... Ah!"

"Cluck cluck cluck cluck!"

"Spare... Spare me! Have mercy!"

...

Was it over just like that?

Watching the Snake Spirit, pecked bloody by a dozen hens, desperately plead for mercy without a shred of dignity, Leon couldn't help but smack his lips, feeling a bellyful of complaints and having no idea where to start venting.

He, who was in the Dreamrealm just moments ago, had seen the true form of the Snake Spirit.

That massive snake—nearly a hundred meters tall even when slightly coiled, resembling a small mountain range—had been caught in the ritual set by Senior Tom, ending up pecked all over by a flock of nesting hens, and was visibly on the brink of collapse.

The degree of weakening was truly... utterly unreasonable, perhaps even a bit cheating.

"You better not think about negotiating with it."

Noticing Leon's complex expression and somewhat misunderstanding his thoughts, the lazy young man promptly reminded him,

"The reason I can subdue it now is half because we planned it with smarts and half because it acted foolishly, not even checking once before trying to escape through the rift between the Dreamrealm and reality.

And the vibrant Dreamrealm, although a thousand times easier to escape than reality, is also a thousand times more fragile compared to the heavy, monotonous reality.

As long as we could catch it at the moment it squeezed into the rift and forcibly drag it into the ritual ground suppressing the Holy Spirit, it was like using the real existing power to crush the false and elusive Dream. At that point, it was just an earthworm that could be pecked to death by chickens.

But if we were to let it out and allow it to cross that threshold, then it would still be that giant snake you saw, capable of smashing a small hill with mere physical strength. We would be the ones needing to run."

"Ah, I know."

Coming back to his senses, Leon nodded, indicating he wasn't foolish enough to heed the enemy's pleas and then seriously responded,

"Senior Emma said that only after the enemy has completely lost the ability to resist is it time to negotiate. I wasn't trying to negotiate with it, just... uh... it just felt a bit too fast..."

"Are you saying I prepared too fast, or it lost too quickly?"

"A bit of both..."

Looking at the chaotic chicken coop in front of him, Leon couldn't help but scratch the back of his head, bewildered,

"I originally thought that even if you, Senior, could solve the Snake Spirit, it would be evenly matched, at least going back and forth for a few rounds first.

But you, Senior, merely broke a piece off its statue, then crushed the snake eggs that built the secret shrine and casually created a chicken coop with these materials, yet you subdued it so quickly. It's just a bit too fast."

"Heh, you want to say it wasn't just fast, but also hasty, right?"

"It is a bit... Although it was hasty, I have to say the result is impressive. A Holy Spirit almost at the hierarchy of a True God couldn't even fight back in front of you, Senior. That's truly remarkable!"

...

This guy's got a keen eye... Ahem, this future True God is actually quite easy to get along with.

Seeing the look of astonishment on Leon's face and feeling a bit tickled in just the right spot, the lazy young man couldn't help but let the corners of his mouth lift slightly.

Even though he might be a bit annoying in the future, pushing me across the timeline to lend a hand, right now he's just an honest newcomer, quick-witted and steady in his work, doing exactly what's asked of him with high execution capability, and he speaks well; no wonder the Director favors him so much.

"The gap between me and this Snake Spirit isn't actually that big."

After slightly revising his view of "Leon-the-annoying-future," the lazy young man coughed and waved it off, responding,

"The back-and-forth scenario you're describing would be Emma and the Director's fighting style. Their style is more like arm wrestling; the bigger, more skilled person usually wins, but the loser, as long as the gap isn't too vast, doesn't typically get too hurt.

What I'm doing is more about playing tricks. Although it doesn't guarantee hitting the right weak spot and requires presetting the trap, once it succeeds, the person tricked directly falls into the trap, losing all ability to resist, which makes the gap appear larger than it is. But if someone else did it, it would be the same."

"You're being modest, Senior."

Watching the Snake Spirit in the chicken coop, clearly with more out than in and already pecked to its last breath by the hens, Leon shook his head, sincerely remarking,

"Playing tricks might not be that hard, but to know where to lay the tricks, and what kind of trick can bring down a Holy Spirit, that's not something everyone can do—only you can, Senior."