

I! Cleaner 381

Chapter 381: Guidance and Test_1

"Truly worthy of being the world's strongest blacksmith!"

Watching the pink trident floating up and down in the cauldron bubbling with a ghastly green foam, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but give a thumbs up, full of admiration as he said,

"Even with such rudimentary tools, you can craft the finest anomalous objects. It's truly remarkable!"

"Hmph, such a fuss over nothing!"

With an impatient curl of his lips, an elder with a boxy head and eyes full of pride spoke,

"Compared to when I was still alive, the tools for forging anomalies have become much better, but the skills of the blacksmiths have declined. Do you know why?"

"Why?"

"It's because they're too concerned with perfection! Too meticulous about the forging environment and materials!"

With a downward jab of the tool in his hand, knocking off a large piece of lacquer from the iron cauldron, the boxy-headed elder grumbled with discontent,

"The source of anomalies is emotion! It's obsession! It's anticipation! Ultimately, it's the power of the heart, and there is no 'standard answer' for the heart!"

Nowadays, this bunch of forge masters always thinks that using the best tools and pairing them with the best materials will definitely produce good items. When they fail to create something satisfactory, they blame the materials or the process, completely ignoring the importance of the heart. This is simply going astray!"

Completely unaware that his coffin lid had been stolen, the conversation-enthused Third Generation Director complained with a displeased look in his eyes,

"Let me tell you, a person's heart is the most complex yet simplest thing. As long as you can understand it, figure it out, and guide it appropriately, that's enough. The process and tools are superficial; they can only influence your success rate, but not the quality of the product.

If you don't believe me, watch me. Even with a furnace made of brick scraps and a pot casually picked up from the roadside, I can still forge True God-level anomalous objects. If it weren't for wanting the imagery of 'flame' and 'forging,' I wouldn't even need to use a pot. I could mold anomalies with my bare hands!"

"How could I not believe you?"

Glancing at the fork forming in the pot, the Red-haired Director, while secretly signaling Leon to return quickly, praised with a beaming smile,

"From the beginning till now, for so many years, whenever the Taurus Director's position was vacant, you have certainly been the world's best blacksmith. That alone is enough to prove your level. If I can't trust you, then whom can I trust?"

"Heh, you're only saying that."

After giving the flattering Red-haired Director a sidelong glance, the elder with the boxy head scoffed,

"If you believe me, why don't you come to me more often to make things?"

I know what's in your heart! You're a sly little girl, not a truthful word comes out of your mouth. If it weren't for the current Taurus sealing himself away, I probably wouldn't even see your face!"

"You're wronging me there."

Noticing out of the corner of his eye that Leon was carrying a coffin into the cemetery, the Red-haired Director exhaled slightly in relief. Squinting with fox-like eyes, he smiled and said,

"I also wish I could come to you more often to make things. But firstly, you live in the Realm of the Dead all year round, so coming here once is really troublesome. Secondly, there hasn't been much significant change in recent years, so there hasn't been any good material either. As for those ordinary things, they can be left for regular forge masters to practice with; they're really not worth troubling you.

Furthermore, even though they may not measure up to a fraction of your level in a lifetime, they are still inheritors of the secret smithing techniques. If I trouble you for slightly better things, those ordinary forge masters would never get a chance to practice. What happens then when the bureau's secret smithing techniques are lost to history?"

"Tsk, if you ask me, with your current level, there's no difference if it's lost to history... Alright, that kid, come over. The thing is done!"

"Okay!"

Seeing the elder with the boxy head had finished forging, Leon, who had already placed the coffin lid back in its original spot, quickly stepped forward, merging completely with the illusion created by the Red-haired Director, and then walked swiftly towards the two of them.

"Huh? What's with you, kid?"

Noticing the sweat beads on Leon's forehead, the elder with the boxy head frowned with a puzzled look and asked,

"This here furnace is colder than ice water, how did you end up sweating?"

Damn! I'm going to blow my cover!

Hearing the Third Generation Director's inquiry, sweat broke out on Leon's brow. He quickly raised the back of his hand to wipe it off and then, following the communication method taught by the Director beforehand, respectfully said,

"It must be that I'm excited... The contemporary Taurus His Excellency once guided me and imparted some entry-level techniques of the Secret Smithing Techniques, so I can be considered a forge master.

For a forge master, to witness firsthand the forging process of the undeniably greatest blacksmith in history, I'm really thrilled beyond control, hence a little sweaty."

"Tsk... another little brat whose mouth is full of lies!"

Although he could tell at a glance that Leon was just spouting nonsense, the elder with the boxy head couldn't help but twitch the corners of his mouth upwards upon hearing the wording "undeniably greatest blacksmith in history". He then dismissively waved his hand,

"Forget it if you don't want to say. I don't care to ask... You, come here. Since you're brought by Olivia, if there's anything you don't understand in the secret smithing techniques, I can offer you a little guidance."

Guided by me?

Hearing the elder with the boxy head's words, Leon couldn't help but feel a slight joy flash across his expression.

What the Director said was indeed true! The core logic in communicating with this Third Generation His Excellency was not to leave out "strongest blacksmith" from every three sentences. As long as you could manage to say that, it didn't matter what else you talked about.

"Thank you, Third Generation!"

Activating the badge panel, Leon simultaneously switched on the badges "Arcane Inheritor (Taurus)" and "Arcane Inheritor (Aquarius)," then bowed to the elder with the boxy head with gratitude and apology before inquiring,

"I wanted to ask you..."

"Wait, I haven't finished speaking yet!"

Raising a hand to signal for a moment, the Third Generation Director folded his arms and slightly tilted his head,

"While I don't mind guiding you a bit, not just anyone is worthy of my guidance. You need to let me first take a look at your level!"

Upon hearing this, Leon blinked slightly, glanced at the cauldron bubbling with green foam, and said with some difficulty,

"Are you saying... you want me to forge an anomalous object for you right here?"

"Forget about making stuff."

Hearing Leon's words, the elder with the boxy head responded with a hint of disdain,

"The current level of forge masters is too poor. Watching you all carve things like flowers is irritatingly bothersome, and I don't want to suffer that. Here's the deal, since you were standing nearby observing how I forge anomalies, let's use this as the test!"

Reaching into the cauldron and digging around, he tossed the item sunk at the bottom of the pot to Leon and noticed Leon's hesitant expression and obvious lack of confidence in the test. Then, the elder with the boxy head chuckled oddly and said,

"Go on, without pouring power into it to activate it, use what you've learned from the current Taurus and refer to my previous creation process, explain what kind of anomalous object I've crafted for you!"

Chapter 382: Open-book Test_1

"Ah, this... You want me to talk about what kind of anomalous object this is? How is this different from giving away points?"

After hearing the test project proposed by the Third Generation Director, Leon couldn't help but scratch the back of his head, a little shyly saying,

"Why don't... you choose another topic?"

This kind of open-book exam was naturally easy to pass, but the other party was, after all, the second-best anomaly forge master in the world. When Taurus His Excellency ascended, they would become the best forge master, and Leon knew he'd seek their expertise in forging many times in the future.

And this Third Generation Director had a peculiar temperament and held forging in high regard. If he tried to outsmart him in this area and left a bad impression, it might not be worth the risk.

After briefly weighing the pros and cons, Leon sincerely suggested,

"Third Generation, I actually have an anomalous object that can forcibly acquire intelligence, so this topic for me..."

"No need to change, just this one!"

Without hesitation, the square-headed old man impatiently waved his hand, rejecting Leon's good intention, saying,

"You hold yourself in too high esteem. The base materials of this object are the tail and weapon of a True God, and besides, it was forged personally by me, so its hierarchy is quite high! What can a Level Three Cleanser like you see?"

"Third Generation, the hierarchy of my anomalous object isn't low either, so it can probably..."

"Then use it! If it can directly see the intelligence, I'll count you as passing!"

"..."

This is what you said.

Feeling a bit ignored despite his kind-hearted reminder, Leon couldn't help but furrow his brow slightly. He then reached into his pocket, touching a palm-sized crimson fork that looked more like a tuning fork than a trident, and read from the panel that appeared:

"What you crafted for me should be called the 'Lust Dream Invader,' akin to a 'Holy Spirit Pendant' I once owned, possessing three traits: holy, interference, and whisper.

"The corresponding abilities include causing additional damage to targets like evil and chaos; briefly interfering with reality using the power of the Dreamrealm; and causing the target's soul to tremble through contact."

"Hmm?"

Upon hearing Leon's words, the square-headed old man raised his brows slightly, looking quite astonished as he remarked,

"You saw this quite accurately, even recognizing the soul tremor effect... It seems Taurus His Excellency has taught you well!"

"..."

What does this have to do with being taught well? I was just reading it word for word!

Unable to resist an eye-roll in his mind, Leon quickened his pace and continued reading,

"To minimize the impact of switching the main battle anomalous object, you deliberately allowed the 'Lust Dream Invader' to retain traits similar to the 'Holy Spirit Pendant' during the forging process. However, due to material differences, the 'Lust Dream Invader' is more directed towards the soul rather than the body.

"Once the 'Lust Dream Invader' identifies a target, any form of contact—whether it's physical touch, verbal exchange, or even eye contact—will cause the soul to tremble to some extent; and the more frequent the contact, the stronger the tremor.

"At that point, the 'Lust Dream Invader' can leverage the power of the Dreamrealm, using the target's soul tremor as a springboard to actively corrode the target and the surrounding real world, achieving scenes that can only exist in dreams.

"If the contact with me is frequent enough, or I pay enough power, it can even summon the power of the Lord of Lustful Dreams, forcibly dragging the target into a dream created by their own desires..."

...

Isn't this a bit too detailed?

When Leon first started reading the panel, the square-headed old man was just a little surprised; but as Leon described the 'Lust Dream Invader' abilities precisely, his mouth gradually widened in disbelief.

As Leon accelerated his speech and explained the 'Lust Dream Invader' effects perfectly, in ways even more accurate than the forger himself, the square-headed man's jaw dropped further in awe.

This is crazy! I've seen this generation's Taurus, and, in terms of level, she's just mediocre. Even if she came to the Realm of the Dead herself, without infusing power to activate the anomalous object, relying solely on experience to guess wouldn't yield such accurate results. So what's going on with this kid? Could he really evaluate True God-level anomalous objects?

In the shocked gaze of the square-headed old man, Leon finished detailing the 'Lust Dream Invader's' abilities. He wasn't done yet; he raised his hand again, pointing to the bubbling cauldron, and said,

"Also, you actually crafted two anomalous objects this time. The 'Lust Dream Invader' you just gave me was created using the weapon of the Lord of Lustful Dreams. As for the anomalous object crafted from the tail of the Goddess of Fortune, it should still be hiding at the bottom of the cauldron."

"..."

"And, you've noticed that I wasn't present earlier and knew I didn't watch your forging process, so you chose this question because you actually dislike current forge masters and look down on their forging techniques, thus not intending to genuinely guide successors."

"You mentioned guiding me mainly because you heard I was once guided by the Taurus Director, intending to use my inability to answer this question to mock the Taurus Director's level, proving you are the truly best forge master, and that Taurus His Excellency surpasses you only by the power bestowed by the Star Palace..."

"Uh... cough, cough, cough..."

Afraid Leon would continue talking and even reveal the color of his underpants during forging, the square-headed old man coughed loudly twice, quickly interrupting him and saying,

"That's enough, that's enough, no need to continue, you've passed the test!"

The blushing Third Generation Director hurriedly turned around, fetched a roll of black snakeskin from the cauldron, and handed it to Leon, then, in an effort to explain himself, said,

"Well... actually, I wasn't planning to keep anything from you, it was just... just..."

"It was just a joke on us."

The red-haired Director chimed in just in time, smiling as he said,

"With a forge master as perceptive as you, you must have noticed our little moves long ago. Likely, you guessed what we were up to the moment I deliberately kept Leon from speaking with you.

"You must have been annoyed with our lack of trust in you, borrowing your coffin in secret without telling you, so you withheld an anomalous object to play a little joke on us, right?"

"Yes, yes, yes! That's exactly what I meant!"

Eagerly stepping down from the red-haired Director's offered platform, the square-headed old man, now relieved, confessed with embarrassment,

"Actually, I am quite willing to guide the next generation; it's just that these last seven or eight years, I've been in a bit of a mood.

"This generation's Taurus' forging level isn't that impressive either. Originally, I planned to wait for her to die of old age, stripped of the Star Palace's blessings, to compare our souls and prove I am the best forge master.

"Unexpectedly, she ascended to the Star Palace, not even giving me a chance to compete, so I... uh... have been feeling uncomfortable, wanting to make things a bit difficult for you all... ahem... let's not talk about this anymore."

After awkwardly glossing over the topic, the square-headed old man, his face still flushed, said to Leon,

"Well... it just so happens I have a furnace here. Why don't you forge an anomalous object right away, and I'll guide you properly?"

Compared to his casual remarks earlier, the Third Generation Director's attitude seemed to be a lot more sincere this time...

Observing the expression on the square-headed old man, Leon couldn't help but raise an eyebrow thoughtfully. Then he subconsciously glanced behind the square-headed old man.

The gaze that met his was none other than that of the Red-haired Director, with a mysterious smile and fox-like eyes.

"..."

Hiss... Could it be that from stealing the coffin earlier to seeking guidance just now, all of this was part of your plan? But how did you know I would mention the Taurus Director, thus provoking the Third Generation Director's competitive spirit?

...

Whether or not it was the director's arrangement, the guidance of a Forge Master was not something to miss.

In the arrangement of the square-headed old man... no, the Third Generation Director who liked guiding juniors, the perplexed Leon stood in front of the black, pitchy cauldron, picked up the rusty ladle, and took up a smithing stance. Then he looked at the Third Generation Director standing across the cauldron with his hands behind his back.

"..."

"?"

After waiting a while without seeing Leon start smithing, the square-headed old man silently asked in an exasperated voice, "You don't even have any practice materials? Do I have to prepare those for you too?"

"I'm sorry..."

Leon nodded in response, somewhat sheepishly explaining, "Third Generation Sir, I've only been with the Purification Bureau for two months, so I really don't have much on hand, so..."

"Huh?"

Hearing Leon's words, the square-headed old man's eyes widened in disbelief, "Olivia said you joined the Purification Bureau last year, so... so you're not more than a year in, but only joined for just over two months?"

"..."

Actually, it hasn't even been two months...

Watching the Third Generation Director's face twitch repeatedly, seemingly about to lose it, Leon, worried that upsetting this big shot might result in him not teaching anymore, had no choice but to nod and accept the "just over two months" explanation, replying awkwardly, "I did join the Virgin Branch last year, but it was right at the year's end when I joined, so..."

So you're just a beginner? And if you've only been with the Purification Bureau for over two months, how long could you have been practicing Anomaly Forge? Sixty days? So you just started learning Anomaly Forge and came to seek advice from me, the strongest Forge Master in history? What's the difference between that and teaching an idiot to calculate the sun's angle?

Not willing to take on such an impossible task, but unable to back out after having made a promise, the Third Generation Director scratched his scalp in frustration, shedding dandruff as he asked with faint hope, "Then... how long has it been since you started with Anomaly Forge?"

Leon, upon hearing this, recalled for a moment, and then blushed slightly as he held up five fingers.

"Fifty days?"

"Last Friday..."

"..."

Are you two here to mess with me?

The psychological defense, already on edge, was shattered by Leon's "last Friday," prompting the Third Generation Director of the Purification Bureau to take a deep breath. He stomped the ground forcefully, pointing towards the cemetery entrance while yelling angrily, "Go! You go! All of you go!!!"

...

"Third Generation Sir, there's no need to rush~"

As if he'd anticipated this outcome, the Red-haired Director smiled and said, "Even though Leon hasn't been with Anomaly Forge for long, his talent with the secret techniques is excellent. Besides the Taurus lineage's Abnormal Forging Secret Technique, he's also dabbled in the Aquarius lineage's Abnormal Genesis Sorcery."

"What? He's learned two secret techniques?"

"It might even be three. This generation's Pisces Director seems to have taken an interest in Leon as well."

"..."

"In any case, Leon definitely has a talent for secret techniques."

Seeing the square-headed old man's apparent interest, the Red-haired Director continued with a smile, "Plus, Taurus His Excellency once said that once she had ascended, Leon could attempt to succeed her as the next Taurus Director. If she weren't currently in self-imposed isolation, she might have personally taught Leon."

You, being the world's greatest in smithing, lack only the Taurus Star Palace's recognition. As a result, you have always missed being the top Forge Master, becoming merely the second best. Don't you regret it?

Third Generation Sir, just think about it; although you can't become the first among the living, if you could train a Forge Master who becomes the next Taurus, then..."

"Stop, stop, stop! Don't play tricks on me!"

Shaking his head vigorously, the Third Generation Director barely broke free from the brainwashing pitch and pouted, "You said all this just to persuade me to teach him, right? No way! Even if I wanted to train a Taurus, I wouldn't choose leftovers!

This kid's already been guided by Taurus, and if he does become the new Taurus, that credit might not even go to me... So I won't teach! I definitely won't teach!"

"Really not going to teach?"

"Absolutely not!"

"Third Generation Sir, could it be that you're afraid?"

"???"

Glancing at the suspicion-filled face of the Red-haired Director, the square-headed old man burst into laughter, raising a hand to point at Leon, "Afraid of him? What's there to be afraid of?"

"Afraid he might surpass you~"

The Red-haired Director slightly tilted her head, thoughtfully saying, "Leon, with two secret techniques under his belt, and favored by this generation's Taurus, could push the limits of Secret Smithing Techniques further if he learned your smithing methods.

If that ever happened, you wouldn't be the strongest Forge Master in history anymore. And if he were to die, and you ended up losing a match against Leon's soul, then..."

"You're talking nonsense!"

The square-headed old man retorted angrily, "Damn it, you're deliberately trying to use words to provoke me, to make me teach him with all my might! Do you think I can't see through this?"

"Yep, that's exactly what I'm thinking."

Unashamedly admitting to his plan, the Red-haired Director mischievously asked, "So, will you teach him or not?"

"I..."

"You know, Leon's exceptionally talented. Taurus His Excellency even once said that if she were to teach him, Leon's future would at least..."

"Shut up! I'll teach! Isn't it enough if I teach him?!"

Exasperated, huffing and puffing, the Third Generation Director stomped his foot hard, then rushed back to his recently dug-up grave, scooped out a pile of stuff buried there, and casually tossed it at Leon's feet.

"Take it! Use whichever one you want! Damn it, I'd really like to see what you can forge!"

"..."

Got it, the Director brought me here to loot.

Glancing down at the materials, which were piled like trash at his feet, exuding an aura almost as strong as Snake Tail, all of them at least of Holy Spirit level, and noting the Red-haired Director's persistent winks at him, Leon quietly picked one up and tossed it into the cauldron, mimicking the movements of the square-headed old man before, stirring with the large ladle.

Although it feels a bit wrong to mess with the old man... since the Director isn't drunk right now, there must be a good reason for what she's doing, so I can only choose to trust her!

Chapter 384: Root_1

[Name: The Foot of Fitness (Sacred, Flesh and Blood)]

[Appearance: A human right foot sculpture with smooth muscles and clear joints, resembling marble]

[Ability: Sacred Aura, Sturdy Flesh and Blood]

[Cost: The body would become as heavy as marble, slightly reducing movement speed]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine crafted this Special Anomalous Object using two secret techniques from the Purification Bureau, with fragments of the Baiyan Holy Spirit's right foot toe, to make the user's right foot as beautiful as a god's statue in a temple, while slightly enhancing movement speed]

[Evaluation: The least valuable sacred creation in history, bar none]

[Contamination Value: 0.1 (Maximum Contamination Value 49)]

"..."

The effect was to slightly increase movement speed, but the cost was to slightly decrease it? I sped up only to slow down again?

After touching the marble right foot floating in the pot, even though he was prepared for the creation of a useless anomalous object, Leon still fell into silence.

This situation... somehow felt slightly familiar...

After touching the cufflinks in his pocket, he took out the [Egg of Sharpness] crafted in front of the Taurus Pavilion, and upon seeing the evaluation "the least valuable demon creation in history," Leon's mouth twitched violently.

Maybe I should just give up. I really don't seem to have any talent in this area...

...

Is it over?

Watching Leon stop, no longer stirring the green concoction in the pot, the third generation director standing beside him grabbed the ladle, fished out the marble right foot from the pot, and took a sharp intake of breath.

"You... this is what you created with Holy Spirit level materials?"

Hearing this, Leon couldn't help but blush, nodding shamefully...

"Um..."

"No, no, no! This can't be!"

Holding the pristine marble right foot, the third generation director gestured with it for a while, infused his own power, and attempted to activate it multiple times, finally exclaiming with bewilderment, "This can't be right! These are Holy Spirit level materials after all... how could it possibly... *Darn... hey, you!

Can't you tell the function of an anomalous object by just touching it? After touching it, what was the result? What exactly is this thing's ability?*

"This can make a person slightly faster, but it also slightly slows them down by making their body heavier..."

"And then what?"

"Then... uh... it can make a person's right foot a bit prettier."

"I could see that already. So what then? What's its core ability?"

"Uh... that's it."

"..."

"This can't be!!!"

After several attempts with [The Foot of Fitness], the third generation director found it was indeed as Leon said; aside from making the right foot seem divine, it had no other abilities, leading him to squat beside the pot and painfully tear at his hair.

Damn it! These are Holy Spirit level materials! Holy Spirit! Even if you just tossed the materials in the pot and did nothing, it wouldn't end up like this, would it? How the hell did you accomplish this?

"Come on! Craft another one! Let me see!"

Unable to fathom how Leon could manage this, the red-eyed old man with the square head got up with a start, rifled through the pile of materials, tossed two items into the large iron pot, and grit his teeth while commanding, "Quick, craft! Let me see how exactly you're doing this!"

...

[Name: Demon Registry (Corruption, Record)]

[Appearance: A scroll with ferocious, bright red patterns, emitting a faint sulfurous scent; when touched, one might occasionally hear an enraged roar of a great demon]

[Ability: Names of Demons, Name Recording]

[Cost: It might startle people with sudden roars]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine crafted this Special Anomalous Object using two secret techniques from the Purification Bureau, with Hell Redstone powder and the toughest small piece of skin from the Cursed Pattern Devil's back. Writing one's name on it awakens the great demon's soul sealed inside, which personally translates the user's name into demon script, giving them a stylish, demonic name]

[Evaluation: This anomalous object successfully dethroned Leon Laine's first creation, [Egg of Sharpness], as the least valuable demon creation in history, bar none]

[Contamination Value: 0.1 (Maximum Contamination Value 42)]

"..."

With trembling hands, he wrote down his name, and seeing that the Demon Skin Scroll only translated the name into demon script without any change, the third generation director of the Purification Bureau felt the world spinning, then turned around to glare at Leon, eyes aflame with frustration:

"Where's the Redstone? Where's the Redstone?"

"I obviously tossed in two materials! So why is it only the skin of the Cursed Pattern Devil? Where's the Redstone powder?"

"Uh... the Redstone powder you tossed in should be on the back of this thing."

Receiving the [Demon Registry] from the trembling hands of the square-headed old man, Leon pointed to the bright red ferocious patterns on the back, saying somewhat apologetically, "Look, these dyed red areas should be the Redstone powder."

"..."

Dyed... dyed areas? Hidden in the depths of the Crimson Lotus Hell, only twenty kilograms of Hell Redstone could be mined from a mountain, and you only managed to dye something with it?!!!

"How about... we call it a day?"

Seeing the third generation director standing still with both hands holding the [Demon Registry], like a statue, motionless and even stopping his breath, Leon couldn't bear to continue inflicting misfortune on this unfortunate old man, speaking up uncontrollably, "Third Generation Director, I really haven't been involved in secret smithing techniques for long, hardly just started. Using the materials you provide right now is such a waste, so why not..."

"No! This isn't a matter of waste, nor is it about being a beginner! It's a matter of incompetence, astonishing incompetence!"

After hearing Leon's words, the third generation director dully lifted his head, looking at Leon as if he were a monster, and enunciated almost word by word:

"Given the materials I provided, even if it were a pig standing where you are, stirring its hooves in the pot, it wouldn't produce something this incompetent!"

Damn it! Did this generation's Taurus really teach you? You weren't just tricking me, were you?"

"No, no, Taurus His Excellency really did teach me... oh right!"

Recalling his learning experience, Leon said with a peculiar expression, "At that time, she showed me a piece of history, the situation when the predecessors of the Purification Bureau learned the Taurus Secret Arts, and I learned secret smithing techniques from the people in that memory."

Learned from people of the past? Does that mean this generation's Taurus didn't teach him but directly showed him the memory projection of some previous Taurus?

Hearing this, the third generation director frowned in confusion, then disgustedly asked, "Whose memory of the Taurus Director did you see? Who taught you that crap of a secret smithing technique? Was it the worst-performing sixth generation Taurus?"

"Uh... no, I saw the memory of the third generation Taurus Director."

The third generation's memory?

Hearing Leon's words, the square-headed old man instinctively frowned. The third generation Taurus was quite capable, perhaps not equal to himself but still among the better ones, and there was no way he'd teach something this incompetent, right?

He remembered when he learned secret techniques alongside the Taurus, the Taurus often stood behind him, learning from him, somewhat managing to grasp eighty to ninety percent of his skills...

Wait, learning from me?!?!

"..."

"..."

"..."

Seeing the evasive eyes and embarrassment of Leon, the square-headed old man suddenly awakened, lifting his hand, pointing shakily at his own nose, lips trembling as he inquired, "Me?"

"Yes."

Chapter 385: March 27th There are no abnormal items in the trash, only the trash... (Part 1)_1

"So, you mean to tell me that this Earth-piercing blacksmithing is something you learned from me?!!!"

After receiving an affirmative answer from Leon, the Third Generation Director felt his head buzzing, as if a thousand bells were struck hard from inside to out, making his soul tremble with madness.

How many years have my actual body been dead, and yet there's someone who can tarnish my reputation? If other blacksmiths see this blacksmithing technique, do I still have the face to call myself the strongest blacksmith?

No! Absolutely not!

Looking at the scroll that should hold a powerful great demon but was only useful for translating names, the square-headed old man gritted his teeth, stomped his foot, and threw two more items into the pot, angrily shouting,

"Continue! Follow my movements! Do exactly as I do! Not a single deviation!"

"Third Generation Sir... maybe let's forget about the guidance?"

Looking at the [Foot of Fitness] and the [Demon Registry] in his hand, Leon really didn't want to waste these precious materials any further. From the bottom of his heart, he suggested,

"I might really not have the talent for secret smithing techniques. Gathering all these things wasn't easy for you, continuing to let me use them is a waste, and since I'm the one giving up, you don't have to feel like you're breaking a promise..."

"Shut your mouth! Get to work!"

The square-headed old man stomped his foot again, the veins on his forehead bulging as he roared,

"It's not about the promise! The most important thing now is my reputation!

Dammit! Even if I have to throw all the materials in today, I have to teach you, at the very least, to be better than a pig! Otherwise, my reputation in the smithing world is gone for good!"

"But..."

"No buts!"

The square-headed old man, face twisted with fury, menacingly threatened,

"If the news that I taught you can't be kept secret, I might as well destroy your heart! Get moving! Follow the steps I taught you! Not a single step wrong! If your wrist trembles even a bit, I'll fight you for it!"

"But... the memory of the third generation Taurus mentions, you once concluded that anomalies are born from the power of the mind, which doesn't have a 'right answer,' and a good blacksmith shouldn't get too hung up on technique and environment, just follow the heart's guidance..."

"Screw the guidance!"

Directly denying the smithing philosophy he had followed all his life, the square-headed old man bellowed in rage,

"That's for pursuing the upper limit! Right now, you stabilize the lower limit for me! Quickly! Before the Whispering Wolf's mane breaks apart, stir clockwise fifty times for me! Exactly fifty turns! Not one more, not one less!"

"..."

Alright then...

Though heartbroken over the wasted precious materials, seeing the Third Generation Director's expression as if he could swallow him whole, Leon had to give up persuading him to change his mind. Under the square-headed old man's scolding, he began the smithing process, step by precise step.

First, fifty clockwise turns, then smash the white stone at the bottom of the pot with force, rotate counterclockwise for fifty turns, and wait until the pot...

Oh no! Wait! When the mixture achieved a moonlike luster, then pour in his thoughts, imagining a full moon diving into the pot, solidifying the crushed stones again, forming a small container, to incorporate the rotating gray wolf hairs inside...

...

[Name: Wolf Witch Magic Potion Bottle (Witchcraft, Flesh)]

[Appearance: A palm-sized moon-white potion bottle that automatically fills when placed under the moonlight of a full moon]

[Ability: Witch's Curse, Flesh Mutation]

[Cost: The potion tastes terrible, similar to a wash for wolves and dogs]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine, combining two secret techniques of the Purification Bureau, using Moon River Fluorite and Whispering Wolf mane as materials, meticulously following the "Sorcerer's Secret Text" process, and a bit of imagination to create this special anomalous object. After drinking the potion in the bottle, the user will grow a large circle of fluffy dark gray wolf mane around the neck, and their voice will become deep and charming when speaking]

[Evaluation: The most worthless witchcraft creation in history, without exception]

[Contamination Value: 0.1 (maximum contamination value 32)]

"..."

"Maybe... let's call it a day?"

"Shut your mouth! Continue! This time I'll mold the base for you! You just add the supplementary ingredients!"

"Oh..."

[Name: Noontime Mirror (Memory, Reflection)]

[Appearance: A strangely misted mirror, with a frame edge stained with strange broth]

[Ability: Memory Reflection, Historical Image]

[Cost: You might feel hungry after using it]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine, using two secret techniques of the Purification Bureau, and utilizing a pre-polished "Afterlife Bronze Mirror" as a base, added a slight amount of Sun-obscuring Mist collected near the sun's orbit, crafted when distracted by an empty stomach, creating this special anomalous object. When sitting in front of the mirror during lunchtime, the mist on the "Noontime Mirror" clears, showing the reflection of what the user ate at their last lunch]

[Evaluation: The most worthless memory-type anomalous object in history, without exception]

[Contamination Value: 0.1 (maximum contamination value 41)]

"..."

"Maybe..."

"Shut up! This time I'll complete all the processes for you in advance! You just need to sign your name on it!"

"Damn it! If even this turns out trash, then I'll accept it!"

"I'll try then..."

[Name: Leon Laine's Album of Gastronomic Memory (Knowledge, Memory)]

[Appearance: A stack of edible blank paper rolls, with a sizable living root system at the end. Once the paper rolls are all used, bury the roots in soil and water them for regrowth]

[Ability: Knowledge Infusion, Memory Writing]

[Cost: The rough fibers cause severe abdominal pain and indigestion when eaten, and are expelled quickly from the body]

[File: Arcane Inheritor Leon Laine, used Taurus Secret Arts to slightly modify the completed "Album of Gastronomic Memory" cover, signed his name, forging this special anomalous object. When valuable knowledge is written on the paper roll and consumed, the knowledge on the roll is inscribed directly into your memory, never forgotten until naturally expelled]

[Evaluation: Although the anomalies forged still don't justify the Dead Marsh Dispersing Spirit Devil Reed used as forging material, this is, by far, the most useful piece created by Anomaly Forge Master Leon Laine]

[Contamination Value: 0.1 (maximum contamination value 51)]

"..."

"..."

"..."

In the deathly silent stillness, watching the square-headed old man holding the [Album of Gastronomic Memory], slightly trembling, Leon scratched the back of his head awkwardly, softly saying,

"Seems like I... made a bit of progress, huh?"

"..."

"Get out! Take this trash and get out! Don't ever let me see you again this lifetime!!!!!!!"

Chapter 386: March 28th There are no abnormal items in the trash, only the trash... (Part 2)_1

"Ah hahaha!"

As soon as they were kicked out of the cemetery, the red-haired director, whose face was flushed crimson, couldn't help but burst into laughter. While laughing, he vigorously patted Leon on the back.

"Good grief! That old Third Generation's expression when watching your forging was as if you were cooking something foul in his rice pot, his face turned blue!"

"..."

"Ah hahaha, oh no, I can't take it anymore, I really can't!"

Putting an arm around Leon's shoulder, the red-haired director leaned against him, trying to mimic the square-headed old man's face. He gasped for breath between fits of laughter, saying,

"That old Third Generation... haha... although... although he's not a bad guy, that mouth of his is really annoying!

Taurus His Excellency is such a nice person, but every time that old guy sees her, his first question is always when she might die. I've long wanted to teach him a lesson! Ah hahaha!"

After finishing his tale of petty grievances with the square-headed old man, the red-haired director laughed and said,

"Leon! Do you know what he said to me before you came back? He said he looks down on the current Forge Masters, thinks they focus too much on the process, they're just a bunch of hopeless trash.

But when it came to teaching you, he couldn't help but want to stand right behind you, guiding your hands step by step. Every time your hand trembled, his face twitched along with it...

Oh no, I'm about to die of laughter!"

"..."

If he were merely an onlooker, Leon would probably laugh along with him. But being the person who had personally 'cooked the foul dish' in the joke, he just couldn't bring himself to laugh.

Watching the red-haired director laugh so hard he was nearly sprawled against him, Leon couldn't help but say helplessly,

"Director, with you like this, I can't walk. We've been kicked out for a while now, and we haven't even walked ten meters..."

"Okay, okay, then I'll... haha... I'll hold it in!"

Pursing his lips tightly, the red-haired director finally managed to stifle his laughter. Then he hummed softly with a bitten lower lip,

"Just as well, you've probably held back for quite a while. Whatever questions you have, just ask!"

"Then let me ask... Did you do all this on purpose just now?"

"I did, but not entirely~"

The red-haired director said with a sly smile,

"The reason I brought you over was actually to ask him to help you make a new primary anomalous object and to teach you some Secret Smithing Techniques, maybe even trick him out of a few good materials.

You saw how many things he's hoarded; some have lost much of their power because they've been buried for so long. Instead of letting them waste away completely, it's better to use them to make anomalous objects for you."

"But... I didn't manage to create anything."

Recalling what he had forged, Leon's mouth twitched slightly before he sighed and said,

"Leaving them buried in his coffin might've been better than letting me waste them."

"That might not be the case."

Hearing this, the red-haired director shook his head and then reminded him with a grin,

"Did you forget? Besides the [Lust Dream Invader], Third Generation His Excellency made you another anomalous object. Don't you want to look at it first?"

Another anomalous object? The black snake skin? Could its ability change the anomalous objects I create? But how do you know?

Hearing the red-haired director's reminder, Leon asked in surprise,

"Director, you understand forging? You can tell the function of that snake skin?"

"I don't understand forging, but I understand luck."

The red-haired director said with a grin,

"Today is my birthday. Every Cleaner gets a blessing from the Master of Starry Skies on their birthday, granting luck akin to having wishes come true. As long as the wish isn't utterly impossible, there's a chance it will happen.

So far today, I've made two wishes, and the second one was to help you get the most suitable anomalous object. My intuition tells me that snake skin is definitely what suits you best."

A birthday wish?

Hearing the red-haired director's words, Leon couldn't help but be slightly taken aback.

*Last year, on my birthday, I inadvertently triggered this blessing. But according to the Black Goat, the blessing comes with a curse: after the stroke of good luck, there comes misfortune, and with each wish fulfilled, bad luck follows.

A wish so precious, available only once a year and with a cost, was used to help me get an anomalous object? How could I ever repay this kindness?*

"Thank you..."

Looking at the smiling red-haired woman in front of him, Leon said with grateful eyes,

"Director, I..."

"Alright, no need for thanks—just take care of my first wish later."

After securing a promise from Leon, the red-haired director eagerly urged him,

"Quick, just touch that snake skin. I'm super curious to know what abilities the most suitable anomalous object for you will have!"

"Alright!"

Hearing this, Leon nodded, then carefully took out the black snake skin, gently caressing it with great care.

...

[Name: Unfair Snake Pact (Trade, Contract)]

[Appearance: A roll of smooth black snake skin, which unfolds into a black contract that can be rewritten repeatedly.]

[Ability: Equitable exchange, forced contract-making.]

[Cost: Cannot be signed through ordinary means, requires a substantial consumption of the user's blood to inscribe text onto the contract.]

[File: An anomalous object personally forged by the anomalous "Spirit of Forging," made from the black snake tail that mutated from the body after the Goddess of Fortune swallowed the Snake Spirit. Contains a special authority called "Everything Can be Exchanged" along with part of the Goddess of

Fortune's "Contract" authority. When the user uses their own blood as a catalyst and writes their name and their trading target's name on the "Unfair Snake Pact," a one-sided trading contract will be forcibly established. Any item currently possessed by the other party can be written for a fair equivalent exchange.]

[Evaluation: Please do not use your ability to obtain intelligence on the opponent's anomalous objects, nor should you write any evidence gathered onto the contract as a target for forced exchange. Moreover, do not use those high-Contamination Value garbage objects you yourself have created to forcibly exchange for other people's valuable core anomalous objects. Methods such as these are far too despicable, and even if you win the battle, you won't be happy!]

[Contamination Value: 59 (6.5)]

"Hiss..."

Having read the description of the [Unfair Snake Pact] and understood the effects of this "most suitable" anomalous object, Leon gasped in surprise.

Just by touching the opponent's anomalous object and writing it on the [Unfair Snake Pact], an equitable exchange can be forced?

Thus, when the other party loses a powerful core anomalous object, they receive an equivalent value of a new anomalous object that possibly makes the right foot look better, can suggest a stylish demon name, can grow a cool wolf-neck scarf, can transform the voice into a sexy bass, can reveal what was eaten for the last lunch, or even can serve as a digestive aid?

Despicable! Truly too despicable!

Chapter 387: Director's Conspiracy_1

"What's wrong?"

Seeing Leon standing in a daze after touching the Serpent Skin Scroll without saying a word for quite a while, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but curiously ask,

"What ability does this serpent skin have exactly? Why did you fall silent after just one glance?"

"This serpent skin..."

Leon snapped back to reality, smacking his lips and speaking with a complicated look in his eyes,

"It's called the [Unfair Snake Pact]. Once I write both my name and another person's name on it, we can forcibly engage in a contract to exchange whatever we are currently holding, including any anomalous objects. If the value of the exchanged items is not completely equal, I'll need to use my power to make up the difference."

A forced exchange?

After hearing Leon's explanation, the Red-haired Director pondered for a moment, then asked with a puzzled expression,

"I can understand why it's called a 'Snake Pact,' given its power derives from the [Trading] authority of that snake and the [Contract] authority of the Goddess of Fortune. The name makes sense. But why is the prefix 'unfair'? Based on your description, the transaction process sounds quite fair, doesn't it?"

"..."

The transaction process is indeed fair at first glance, but considering the 'goods' I have for the trade, it seems quite unfair...

"Do you mean that the items you've crafted can also be used to exchange someone else's anomalous objects?"

Directly interpreting the answer from Leon's expression, the Red-haired Director asked, her eyes filled with a hint of surprise,

"Leon, how do you calculate the value of the items you've crafted? How many Leon Value anomalous objects can they exchange for?"

"The value of the anomalous objects I forged should be calculated according to the materials and the power they contain. The [Foot of Fitness] made from Baiyan Holy Spirit is 49, the [Demon Register] containing a Great Demon is 42, the [Wolf Witch Magic Potion Bottle] is 32, the [Noontime Mirror] is 41, and the [Album of Gastronomic Memory] is 51."

"..."

So someone's anomalous object with a Leon Value of thirty to fifty can be traded for by you just writing its name on the [Unfair Snake Pact], swapping it for these... leftovers... these anomalous items with quite subtle effects?

"Then the name is indeed aptly chosen."

Nodding in considerable agreement, the Red-haired Director excitedly asked,

"How many? How many people can you sign a contract with at most? How many times can each person sign?"

"Well... although you can erase and rewrite it, there is only one contract, so it should only be signed once."

"Ah, I see..."

The Red-haired Director replied somewhat disappointedly,

"If there's only one chance, it can't be used as a routine measure and must be reserved as a key trump card. It's a pity—if you were able to contract freely, just the two of us together might have been enough to capture the Aquarius Director outright with your forced exchange. It's just too... ugh... wait a moment!"

Suddenly remembering something, the Red-haired Director's expression turned a bit excited as she suggested,

"Isn't the Goddess of Fortune interested in collaborating with you? Once she's recovered from her injuries, arrange a meeting and let's take another piece of her tail!"

"Huh?"

"What do you mean 'huh'? She not only ambushed you but nearly killed Senior Emma!"

Thinking of her unconscious best friend and those nearly completely emerald arms, the Red-haired Director's charming fox-like eyes slightly narrowed, her tone tinged with a chill,

"The Scales Gold Sect... heh, if it weren't for the business with Aquarius and Watcher's Palace forcing Taurus His Excellency to seal himself at headquarters, I'd go file a report right now requesting permission for a joint operation with the Lion Bureau to take down the Goddess of Fortune directly!"

Such a commanding presence, my Director~

Observing the normally witty and sly Director, who always wore a smiling expression, become truly angry for once and reveal a commanding aura befitting the position of Director of Zodiac, Leon couldn't help but give her a thumbs-up.

"Exactly! We definitely need to settle this score! Also, we can call Senior Emma to join us then, let her vent her anger too!"

"Of course!"

Casting an approving glance at Leon, who shared her determination for revenge, the Red-haired Director softened her gaze and said with a cheerful smile,

"After we settle the score, if we manage to create a second [Unfair Snake Pact], then it's yours to use again. This object demands a great deal of intelligence, matching perfectly with your ability."

A second one for me to use?

Hearing the Red-haired Director's promise, Leon blinked slightly, feeling somewhat touched,

"Director, I... "

"No need for thanks! Mainly because this item suits you best. Likely only you can collect so many 'special' anomalous objects."

Making a hand gesture to say 'stop,' the Red-haired Director somehow produced a small bottle from nowhere and said with a sly smile,

"If you really want to thank me, just fulfill my birthday wish as we agreed before, all right?"

"Sure!"

Hearing the Red-haired Director's request, Leon, full of gratitude, nodded without hesitation, then curiously asked,

"Director, your second wish was to help me acquire suitable anomalous objects. What was your first wish? Is it difficult to achieve?"

"Not difficult at all, very simple."

Handing over the small bottle in her hand, the Red-haired Director said with a face full of anticipation,

"Just take a big sip of this and close your eyes!"

"???"

What kind of strange wish is this?

Glancing at the familiar small bottle in his hand and then at the Director, who was smiling like a little fox, Leon's brows furrowed slightly. He unscrewed the bottle but didn't immediately comply, instead cautiously sniffing it.

The scent of blackberry, cedar, spices, and blood orange—a complex and rich aroma, yet unmistakably fresh and invigorating—rushed into his nose, subtly spicy, flowing seamlessly and inextricably into his lungs.

It mixed with his breath, mingled with his blood, sending that mysterious fragrance flowing throughout his body, making Leon's mind slightly light-headed, as if lying on a velvet cushion, invoking a sensation akin to a mild intoxication.

"..."

Wine?

Moreover, this taste... isn't it the only bottle of 'Intoxicating Brew' grade wine from the ones sent by the Taurus Director? Didn't I store it in the warehouse on the first floor of the Virgo Bureau? How did it end up in your hands?

Shaking his head vigorously to dismiss the peculiar sense of intoxication, Leon asked, puzzled,

"Director? Isn't this that bottle..."

"Oh, never mind what it is! Just drink a big sip already. I wouldn't harm you!"

"..."

While you may not intend to harm me, something's clearly off with this request!

Watching the Red-haired Director, full of expectation and urging him to drink, Leon's eyes instinctively narrowed.

For a Director who loves wine to the point of obsession, seeing him drink the only bottle of good wine right before her eyes was akin to an act of provocation—something she surely wouldn't tolerate.

Yet, this batch of wine had been enchanted by the Taurus Director with a Word Spirit secret technique, tasting like wine only in his mouth, while to others it tasted merely like... wait, only in his mouth?

Suddenly realizing a possibility, Leon looked at the Red-haired Director, whose eyes slightly evaded him, and exclaimed, full of shock,

"Director, are you planning... to snatch the wine directly from my mouth?"

Chapter 388: The Cost of Losing Principles_1

"..."

Damn it! If only this little brat were a bit dumber!

Watching Leon's expression of fifty percent shock, forty percent speechlessness, and ten percent deep disdain, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but click her tongue in her heart. She then blinked her charming fox eyes and, blushing, pinched the corner of her clothes, saying,

"What nonsense are you spouting? How could I possibly get that from your mouth..."

"That's definitely what you were thinking!"

Easily seeing through the Red-haired Director's poor act, Leon gasped and quickly pressed his lips together, taking two steps back.

Goodness! No wonder you've been so nice to me today! You'd even sacrifice such a precious birthday wish just to help me get a usable anomalous object. So this is what you were waiting for!

Tch! Looks like I can't fool you anymore!

Watching Leon, who was retreating several steps with his mouth shut and defensive as if against a thief, the Red-haired Director blinked her eyes and then said sadly,

"Leon, today is my birthday. I only have one birthday a year, and I just want to drink something nice today. Can't you..."

"This isn't about it being your birthday!"

Watching the Red-haired Director use emotional tactics, Leon shook his head decisively and refused,

"If you want to drink, I can treat you after we go back. At worst, I'll borrow money from the Princess and buy whatever you want, but this..."

"But this really isn't something you can drink casually!"

Looking at the small bottle of wine in Leon's hand, the Red-haired Director said pitifully,

"That was steeped with the God of Wine's bead and has a trace of the 'Fine Wine' authority in it. All the wine in the world combined can't match it, not even slightly less. The wine you can buy in the Capital City is at least two levels below this.

Leon, dear Leon, I just want a taste of this on my birthday. I won't do anything else. And you already promised me before, how can you suddenly go back on your word?"

"I... I did promise you, but I didn't know you..."

"Don't worry, just one sip!"

Seeing Leon's attitude somewhat wavering, the Red-haired Director was overjoyed. She quietly moved a bit closer while raising her hand to swear,

"I promise, as long as you let me take a sip, I won't cling to you later! And I swear I won't tell anyone about this!"

"..."

"Dear Leon, today is my birthday. I fulfilled one of your wishes, so why can't you fulfill one of mine?"

"..."

"As you know, I left my parents at a young age to join the Purification Bureau. I've always spent my birthdays alone..."

"Enough already, enough... I... I agree..."

Unable to resist the Red-haired Director's persistent pleas, and worried she'd resort to force if "unfulfilled," Leon reluctantly agreed to this strange request that threw dignity out the window.

"Haha, I knew you'd agree! Relax! It'll be quick. Just close your eyes, it'll be over in a moment!"

Seeing Leon finally choose to give in, a hint of triumph flashed across the Red-haired Director's eyes. She eagerly urged,

"Drink quickly, drink! Yes, yes, take more! Keep going, take a bigger gulp!"

"Mmm!!!"

Hearing the Red-haired Director's urging, Leon took a large gulp of wine, his cheeks puffing, and glared at her angrily.

That's all! If you don't stop, I'll swallow it myself!

"Alright, alright! That's enough."

Realizing Leon's intent from his gaze, the Red-haired Director regretfully sighed. She carefully closed the cap, tucked away the remaining half-bottle of wine, and gently wrapped an arm around Leon's neck, rising slightly on her tiptoes.

"..."

Actually... despite her outrageous personality, the Director is quite a beauty, even on par with the Princess, who's famed as the most beautiful.

Bowing his head slightly, guided by the hand hooked around his neck, Leon's gaze traveled from her fox-like eyes down past her delicate nose, finally settling on her slightly puckered pink lips. His heart skipped a beat, and his throat involuntarily moved.

Honestly, I might have just a little bit of a heart...

"Ah! Stop!"

Seeing Leon's Adam's apple move slightly, the Red-haired Director instinctively pinched it, forcing him to swallow the slipping wine, leaving Leon staring at her in shock.

?!!

A bit of a heart cramp...

"Uh... sorry..."

Realizing what she had done, the Red-haired Director awkwardly smiled at Leon. She quickly pressed her soft lips to his, while Leon, whose heart hadn't fully processed before it metaphorically died, opened his mouth slightly with a darkened expression.

Mmm...

Despite the absurd process and cause, because of the fine wine, this not-so-pure kiss still felt fragrant and...

Spicy!

Feeling the heat surge straight to his core, Leon's eyes widened as he instinctively tried to pull away. However, the quicker-reacting Red-haired Director had already pushed him away, turning her head to try to spit out the wine.

Unfortunately, just before they parted, the small bottle she gripped tightly revealed a rose-colored bullhorn sigil, turning the unfinished half-bottle of fine wine into bright red chili oil!

"Peh! Peh peh peh!"

Hastily spitting out the chili oil, Leon's tongue was numb from the spice, and the Red-haired Director fared no better. Her once pale pink lips turned a fiery red, swollen from the heat.

"Humph!"

With a familiar huff from both of them, the sigil on the small bottle vanished, and the almost visibly hot chili oil inside reverted back to clear, fragrant wine, as if nothing had happened.

The chili oil they spat on the ground quickly pooled together, leaving a vivid red, angry message on the Realm of the Dead's pale soil:

'You two, you've really opened my eyes!'

"..."

"..."

...

"You're back."

Hearing footsteps behind her, Emma, sitting on a round stone by the lakeside stroking a Crow of Death Report, turned around. Just as she was about to ask how things went, she paused briefly.

The reason was simple: Although Leon and the Red-haired Director walked side by side, their gazes were cast in opposite directions and never met.

One wore a look of awkwardness and shame, like being caught stealing chickens. The other showed frustration and regret, like a failed chicken theft attempt...

Judging by their appearances... could they have been caught stealing a coffin?

With this thought, Emma's heart tightened. She quickly set down the Crow of Death Report and went to them with a face full of concern,

"What happened? Was it the third generation... Hmm? Why are both of your mouths swollen?"

Chapter 389: The Mute and the Promise_1

We both tried to circumvent the Word Spirit of the Taurus Director, wanting the Red-haired Director to taste the good wine soaked with the God of Wine's Bead, but we were caught by the Taurus Director on the spot. He turned the wine into chili oil, leaving our mouths swollen and burning...

How could we admit to that?

After hearing Emma's inquiry, Leon's first instinct was to look at the Red-haired Director beside him, hoping she would take on the responsibility of the director and blur over the issue of their swollen mouths. At the very least, he didn't want Senior Emma to know that he had agreed to such a ridiculous request.

Unfortunately, he wasn't the only one hoping for this outcome.

Upon receiving Leon's "shouldn't you say something" look, the Red-haired Director unhesitatingly glared back, her fox-like eyes still wet with tears, clearly displaying her intention to shirk responsibility.

According to the customary practices of Kingdom officials, the merits of subordinates belong to their superiors, and the responsibility of superiors falls on subordinates! Now is the time for you, the subordinate, to play your part, so hurry up and shoulder this burden for me!

No way! If I take this blame, and Senior Emma finds out I'm ditching my dignity with you, how will she see me in the future?

You can't face her, but can I? If she finds out about this, do you know how long I'll be scolded?

"What on earth is going on here?"

After waiting a while and seeing Leon and the Red-haired Director exchanging looks without answering her question, Emma couldn't help but urge them, "Are you going to speak or not? How did you end up with swollen mouths while returning a coffin?"

"..."

"..."

Director, say something! Senior Emma is getting anxious!

I won't! If you force me to speak, I'll claim you forcibly kissed me!

????

Speak up! If you don't, I'll start talking!

Noticing the determination in the Director's eyes, Leon realized he had no choice. He braced himself and opened his mouth, desperately trying to come up with an explanation, but even after racking his brain, he couldn't think of a good excuse.

After mumbling incoherently for a while, when he saw suspicion gradually replace concern in Senior Emma's eyes, Leon suddenly had a flash of inspiration. He first pointed to his throat, then shook his head vigorously while waving his hands.

"Mmm! Mmm! Waa! Waa!"

My throat is hoarse, I cannot speak, so don't question me! Go ask the Director!

????

Wait... you can actually do that?

Surprised by Leon's temporary act of being mute, the Red-haired Director instinctively opened her mouth, trying to learn from his bold move, but Emma, noticing something amiss, had already narrowed her eyes and blocked her: "Olivia! Don't tell me your throat is hoarse too!"

It is! It really is! Both of us can't speak! So...

"If you've lost your voice too, then use your soul to speak!"

"..."

"What exactly happened? Speak up quickly!"

"I'll say... I'll say it's all Leon's fault!"

To Leon's shock, the Red-haired Director, deciding to leave no stone unturned, actually lifted her hand to point at him, her face playing the victim as she exaggerated, "He forcibly kissed me, making my lips swell!"

"Nonsense! I didn't—"

"Weren't you mute just now? Mutes don't speak! Shut your mouth!"

"..."

...

"The two of you... you've truly broadened my horizons!"

Accompanied by the evaluation of content strikingly similar to the Taurus Director's, Emma, standing on the Crocodile God's head, complained with annoyance, "For a bottle of wine, you've even resorted to this! Olivia, really... couldn't you have survived without that sip?"

"Well... dear Emma, today is my birthday after all, can you ease up just a little with the scolding?"

"Don't say it's just your birthday; even if today were your death anniversary, I'd still say it!"

Usually gentle and mild, Senior Emma seemed genuinely upset, and after a rare reproach to the Red-haired Director, she turned to look at Leon, who was almost humiliated by guilt, and said in a tone of bitter steel, "And you too! Olivia misbehaving doesn't surprise me, but I didn't expect you to join in the nonsense alongside her! Do you remember what you promised Taurus His Excellency?"

Leon, Olivia has no issues with her brains or abilities, only the flaw of drinking. If she doesn't change, sooner or later, something will go wrong with this. Instead of helping Olivia correct her problem with drinking, you actually... accompanied her... did you two really?"

"Uh... I just thought since it was the Director's birthday, and her only wish was for a sip, I went soft..."

After weakly explaining a few words, Leon recalled his promise to Taurus Director when requesting alcohol, and he couldn't help but lower his head in shame, then solemnly assured, "Senior Emma, I promise this is the last time. I definitely won't indulge in the Director's antics in the future!"

"What do you mean by indulging in my antics?"

Hearing Leon's words, the Red-haired Director, sitting on the Crocodile God's head, turned around and argued discontentedly, "Besides Emma, this is my first time kissing someone else's lips. Why do you make it sound like you were defiled? Be it looks or figure, wouldn't you say you didn't lose out from my kiss?"

"..."

Honestly, by that measure, I really didn't lose out, but only if during the kiss you didn't lock hold of my neck! That sudden grip was too much; it almost made the wine spray out of my nose!

Also, what do you mean 'besides Emma, this is the first time kissing someone else's lips'? From what I hear, it sounds like you two...

"What nonsense are you spouting!"

Feeling a bit embarrassed under Leon's surprised and doubtful gaze, Emma glared at the Red-haired Director and then turned back to explain to Leon, "At that time Olivia was drunk, and I was dragging her to the second floor. She was muttering something like 'Emma, you're so great' and trying to hug and kiss my face. Just as I was about to turn my head to scold her, I accidentally brushed against her lips... It was just a touch, nothing else!"

"Oh..."

Nodding tentatively, Leon wisely refrained from pursuing more about the kissing incident as he noticed Emma's slightly embarrassed demeanor and looked instead at her not-yet-fully-recovered right hand, expressing some concern, "Senior Emma, how much longer until your hand recovers? The day after is your daughter's birthday."

After going through so much in recent days, you still remember Ellie's birthday?

After casting Leon a surprised look, Emma's expression warmed a bit, and then she smiled, "It's fine, even though it won't fully recover the day after, as long as I wrap it with a Serpent Bandage and avoid bumping into anything hard, it'll be okay. It won't stop me from celebrating Ellie's birthday."

Oh, and Leon, about what I asked you to do..."

"Don't worry, I've got it all noted down. On the 6th, 8 a.m., beneath the big tree at the entrance of Treasure Flower Manor on Redwood Avenue, I'll definitely be there!"

"Thank you..."

Chapter 390: Tom the elder, forever remembered_1

Leon didn't know why, but after hearing the conversation between himself and Emma, the red-haired director, who initially seemed defiant and as if he wanted to say more, suddenly fell silent and sat motionless on the Crocodile God's forehead.

After chatting with Leon for a few moments about his daughter's situation, Emma also seemed touched by the memory, gazing up at the circling Crows of Death Report above her without continuing to speak. The three of them remained silent atop the Crocodile God's back, returning to the vicinity of the Realm of the Dead's entrance.

"You two go back now."

The red-haired director waved a hand at Leon and Emma, his face calm as he said,

"The three directors have already sent out the [Directive List]. With a three-to-one situation, the Aquarius Director won't be able to resist for long and could be pulled into the Realm of the Dead by the [Netherworld Streetlight] at any moment. I have to wait here for him to ascend the No Return Path, so I won't be able to send you back myself.

"Afterwards, just follow the No Return Path back. After you pass the 'Black and White Bridge' and the 'Nest of the Crows of Death Report' and keep walking for a while, you'll see the Canine Deity guarding the entrance to the Realm of the Dead. Just let it shout once to send you back... Remember to always move forward on the road, and don't look back!"

"Alright, I got it."

Because Senior Emma was a "frequent visitor" to the Realm of the Dead, seemingly having traversed back and forth multiple times, and since this was Leon's first time in the Realm of the Dead, he was very aware that these instructions were likely especially for him from the red-haired director, so he responded. Curiosity got the better of him, and he couldn't help but ask,

"Director, why can't we look back? If we look back, will it mean we can never leave the Realm of the Dead?"

"Pretty much."

Patting the big head of the Crocodile God, the red-haired director pointed to the beach chairs by the Yellow Springs River, signaling it to take him over there. With his back to Leon and Emma, he waved without turning his head,

"For the dead, the No Return Path is a road that can only move forward, with no option to turn back.

"As for the living who accidentally fall into the Realm of the Dead and step onto the No Return Path, although they can still turn back, this road hates such incidents and will do everything to keep those who try to return remaining here.

"Occasionally looking back wouldn't be much of an issue, just causing you to see some illusions, but if you look back too often and see too many things you can't let go of, getting your soul confused by the road, then you might not make it out."

It sounded kind of dangerous...

After listening to the red-haired director, Leon's throat moved slightly, and he quickly chose the safer option without hesitation.

"Director, how about you actually send us off..."

"I'm busy, no time to escort you."

After jumping down from the Crocodile God's head, the red-haired director comfortably lay on the beach chair by the Yellow Springs River. Picking up a magazine from the small table beside him, he waved dismissively without looking up and said,

"Don't worry, Emma has been to the Realm of the Dead many times; with her walking with you, nothing will go wrong... Right, Emma?"

That makes sense... Senior Emma has been back so many times, it shouldn't be a problem... right?

Staring at Senior Emma beside him, biting her lips as her arms, faintly tinged green, started to tremble unconsciously, Leon blinked in bewilderment and spoke somewhat confusedly,

"Senior Emma? What's going on with you..."

"I'm fine!"

After giving Leon a somewhat forced smile, Emma looked up at the red-haired director reading the magazine, questioning with a slightly pale face,

"Olivia! Did you bring all this up just to make me give up?"

"No."

Without even lifting her head, the red-haired director turned a page of the magazine and said,

"I'm just busy and unable to take you guys back.

"But rest assured, I'll be waiting by this river, not going anywhere. If either of you can't bear the pain in your heart and get led back by the No Return Path, I'll pull you back."

"You... I won't look back! I've already made up my mind!"

"Mmm, I believe you. So when are you starting to head back?"

"..."

...

It always feels like they're implying something...

After looking at the red-haired director saying she's busy while lying leisurely on a beach chair, and then looking at Senior Emma, who said she's made up her mind but wouldn't budge, rooted in place.

Leon smacked his lips and, sensing the awkward atmosphere, tentatively suggested,

"How about... Senior Tom is still in the crocodile's mouth, Director, why not let him out so the three of us can get back together?"

"Can't let him out."

"Why not?"

"Because he's already dead."

With a loud shuffle of turning a magazine page, the red-haired director glanced at Leon expressionlessly and said,

"When I went with you to find the Third Generation Director to forge an Anomalous Object, Tom had already been digested by the crocodile, turned into excrement in the previous lake, and then eaten by a big fish. You don't need to worry about taking him back."

"Huh?"

"Huh, what? Do you want to go back and join him?"

"..."

Got it, the director and Senior Emma indeed seem to be at odds with each other over something.

Since Senior Emma appeared to be afraid of walking the "No Return Path," the director purposely didn't send her, forcing her to return through the path, hoping it would make her change her mind.

As for Senior Tom, turned into crocodile dung, either he had a way to help her, or he had some way to traverse the realms of life and death directly, and thus was forcibly banned by the director, not allowing him to exit the Crocodile God's mouth.

Considering the director's style of planning ten steps ahead, she likely had this in mind when they first entered the Realm of the Dead, which is why she didn't mend Senior Tom's bone or bring him to the Third Generation Director...

But why was I placed beside Senior Emma?

And director, what's your plan? Although I trust your sober mind when not drinking, could you at least give me a heads-up when you pull such stunts, so I can be somewhat prepared?

"What's wrong? Why aren't you going yet?"

After an unsettling silence that discomforted Leon, the red-haired director finished flipping through the "Four-wheel Carriage Structure Disassembly," seemingly learning wagon repair skills, and looked at him with mild surprise, asking,

"Leon? Why haven't you moved yet? Do you claim you've made up your mind, but your heart is still riddled with regrets, so you don't dare to step onto the No Return Path, fearing the exposure of your inner fragility and hesitation?"

"..."

Oh yes, that's it, it's me indeed, yes that's right!

Leon, baffled by an avalanche of reasons and labeled as "afraid to proceed because of lingering regrets," was about to speak when a force suddenly yanked him, causing him to stumble.

"Senior Emma? What are you doing... hey... slow down! Slow down!"