

I! Cleaner 441

Chapter 441: Dream Wandering Lantern (Part 1)

"That's right."

After looking up at the sun in the sky, the old Investigator nodded with satisfaction, then turned back with a smile and said:

"Although the main reason is still the strengthening effect brought by the Demonic Soul Abyss, reaching this point is still quite okay... How many people are in this dream approximately?"

"About... three hundred thousand or so?"

After checking the black fluorescence in the glass lantern, the female reporter wearing a wide-brimmed soft hat replied:

"Tonight, many people are dreaming, but not many dreams involve the capital. Most people's dreams did not happen in the capital, so the Dream Wandering Lantern only fused the dreams of these three hundred thousand together... Do we need to start again?"

"No need, this is already enough."

After listening to the female reporter, the old Investigator smiled confidently, then withdrew his gaze from the sun and began to overlook the dream capital below.

In this false city formed by the dreams of three hundred thousand people, most streets and alleys still maintain their original appearance, without significant changes.

The greenery surrounding the affluent area is still lush, the sewage river running through the old town remains foul and dirty, and the industrial park by the riverside, just like in reality, continuously emits billowing white smoke full of acidic air.

Although the dream world need not adhere to reality, the owners of the thirty thousand dreams that constitute the dream world all come from reality, and this capital, which resembles reality, is a common perception among them all...

Except for one place.

...

"What's going on over there?"

Looking at the center of the capital, at a strange building continuously twisting and transforming, yet never able to completely confirm its form, the old Investigator couldn't help but frown and asked, somewhat dissatisfied:

"Why hasn't the palace stabilized yet? Have these three hundred thousand people not reached a consensus on their perception of the palace?"

"Let me check..."

After observing the constantly twisting and transforming palace, which at times appeared dilapidated and seemed on the verge of collapse with just a puff of air, at other times appeared grand and splendid, looking noble and magnificent, the female reporter carefully examined the glass lantern in her hand and then shook her head with a frown:

"Dream Wandering Lantern is fine; it hasn't been influenced or invaded. It's likely that among these three hundred thousand dreaming of the capital, some have a perception of the palace different from others, which is particularly strong, causing the palace to remain unsettled."

"Quickly clear it out!"

After hearing the female reporter's explanation, the old Investigator showed no hesitation, directly stood up and walked to the edge of the clock tower, pointing to the palace's position, and said:

"Examine the dreams related to the palace, find the people whose impressions of the palace differ too much from others, and kick them out of this dream. Don't let them affect the situation of the palace within the dream.

When the Demonic Soul Abyss completely descends, I need to exchange the dream capital with the real capital, and if the differences between them are too great, the exchange will be very troublesome, and this part must not go wrong!"

"Understood."

After responding quietly, the lantern in the female reporter's hand flickered twice, a multitude of dark-colored light dots lit up within the glass lantern and then quickly extinguished.

As many starlit dots were removed, the palace that continuously twisted and transformed in the distance finally stabilized a bit, taking on a more fixed form.

However, unfortunately, before the old Investigator could nod with satisfaction, the palace that had just stabilized soon began to twist again.

Moreover, besides alternating between dilapidation and splendor, a third situation emerged, where most of the buildings were artificially flattened, turning into a lush landscape garden.

"Some people dreamt of the capital again and were added to this dream."

This time, before the old Investigator could inquire, the female reporter directly checked the Dream Wandering Lantern and then began to explain:

"The two now having a perception of the palace different from others are primarily two people. Their dreams of the capital vastly differ from everyone else's perceptions, and their situations are quite special, making it hard to drive them away."

Two people that can't be driven away?

The old Investigator frowned and asked:

"What did they dream of? Take me into their dream and let me see."

"Alright."

Glancing at the back of the old Investigator, the female reporter nodded slightly, then forcefully gripped the handle of the Dream Wandering Lantern, and shook the lantern in her hand.

Immediately afterward, the capital in front of them quivered slightly, then instantly transformed, from a reasonably lively bustling city to a scene of desolation endured by war.

The once bustling streets of the commercial district were now covered in rubble and ruin, street corners' buildings collapsed into piles of dilapidated remnants, and skyscrapers turned into heaps of worthless bricks.

The entire capital's air was filled with the scent of dust and scorched earth, with the remnants of buildings' walls still bearing marks of artillery fire, almost completely destroyed by war.

Even the clock tower beneath the two's feet had been bombed, with half of it collapsed, and a massive, unexploded shell was even embedded in the huge clock face behind the female reporter...

"This should be Joshua the Prince's dream."

Looking at the palace that wasn't completely destroyed but had been battered by war and seemed ready to collapse at any moment, the old Investigator pondered for a moment before confidently concluding:

"This is the curse of the King of Nightmares, where members of the royal family will continuously relive their greatest regret in their dreams, and Nathan... well... he is the future Joshua, so his nightmare was also synchronized over.

Moreover, I also understand why you can't drive him away."

Turning his head to glance at the lantern in the female reporter's hand and observing the densely packed black dots within the lampshade, the old Investigator said rather helplessly:

"The power of the Dream Street Lamp was enhanced by the Demonic Soul Abyss, equating to indirectly stealing the force of the Demonic Soul Abyss.

As the King of Nightmares is the true master of the Demonic Soul Abyss, the curse he personally placed on the members of the royal family has a very high priority, which would naturally affect the Dream Street Lamp you control.

His issue is beyond our ability to handle at this moment, but it is not overly troublesome. When the Demonic Soul Abyss truly descends, I'll think of a way to prevent him from sleeping...

Come on, take me into that other person's dream whom you can't drive away, let me see what kind of dream he is having."

The female reporter responded with an affirmative "hm" and found the faintly glowing red star point within the lantern, moved it to the center of the lampshade, and forcefully shook the lantern in her hand.

Whirling and spinning.

As if an ancient mural was painted with color, the dreary, ruined capital before the two's eyes instantly shed the yellow and ashen brought by war, transforming into a bright scene.

Chapter 442: Dream Wandering Lantern (Part 2)

Is this... is this still the Kingdom's capital?

With astonished expressions on their faces, centered around the Dream Wandering Lantern in the female reporter's hand, the war-torn capital quickly faded away, and a bizarre and strange world rapidly unfolded.

The original "skyline" of the capital was suddenly elevated by a significant margin. Towering buildings with no brick and stone joints stood like giants in the city's center. Large glass facades extended from the base of the skyscrapers all the way to their tops, reflecting an exceptionally dazzling brilliance under the sunlight.

Not only the buildings were "elevated," but the original streets of the capital were also significantly widened and raised. Some even directly rose from the ground, transforming into bridges that frequently crossed the bustling, wide streets...

What about the palace? What has the palace become?

Not forgetting his objective, after the initial shock, the old Investigator squinted and looked towards the location of the palace.

In contrast to these bizarre yet seemingly practical tall buildings, the palace, once one of the highest points in the capital, had become relatively low.

Except for the central main part which was retained, most of the low-lying auxiliary buildings were leveled, and evergreen trees were planted, with many tourists wandering among them. As for how he knew those people were tourists...

"It's too fake."

After glancing at the palace entrance, at the dozens of metal booths labeled "Ticket Office," the old Investigator couldn't help but shake his head, drawing his gaze back from the distance.

"The imagination is not bad, but how could a palace be open as a park, where anyone can enter as long as they buy a ticket? Even if the Kingdom were destroyed, such a ridiculous situation wouldn't happen.

Hurry up and take me to find the owner of this dream, kick him out of the Dream Wandering Lantern. In a few more hours, the Demonic Soul Abyss is going to descend. Don't delay the important business!"

"Okay, I'll look for it."

After responding, the female reporter held up the lantern and scanned around the two of them. As she did so, the tiny red dot at the center of the lantern's cover flickered on and off.

How strange...

Looking at the flickering red dot within the lantern, the female reporter's brow couldn't help but furrow slightly.

Based on past experience with using the Dream Wandering Lantern, the lantern light would spontaneously point towards the dream's owner, and the closer to the owner's position, the brighter the "light" would become.

But this time was different. No matter which direction she pointed the lantern, the brightness of the light was roughly the same, and it jumped upwards subconsciously...

Wait! Upwards?!

Noticing the direction in which the "light" was jumping, the female reporter quickly walked to the edge of the clock tower and leaned forward to look at the sky blocked by the clock tower roof.

"What is this?!!!"

Hearing the female reporter's involuntary exclamation, the old Investigator frowned, also leaned forward, looked up, and was utterly shocked to discover a gigantic human face looking down at the capital from above, its two black eyes already locked firmly on him.

Is that... Leon?

...

It seems they're the ones spying on Joshua's dream!

Sweeping through his dream again and again and finally identifying the intruders, Leon narrowed his eyes and looked down at the two somewhat familiar figures.

Acting as Joshua's guard is out of the question, not in this lifetime. For his cheap brother-in-law, seeing him attacked without kicking him secretly can already be considered professional ethics.

As for why he wasn't planning to take care of Joshua yet still took the trouble to sleep in his room...

One reason was the overwhelming "warm invitation" from the princess. Ever since last time, the way she looked at him was as if they were an old couple. If he stayed any longer, he might really lose his virtue. The other reason was that Joshua's dream was extremely valuable.

The curse of the King of Nightmares on the royal bloodline would make an older Joshua constantly relive his life in his dreams and "synchronize" this nightmare to the present-day Joshua.

So, as long as he used the Lust Dream Invader to enter Joshua's dream, it was as if he were peering into part of the future. How could he miss such an opportunity?

With the intention of peeking into the future, after the Prince Freckles fell asleep, having patiently chatted with him for quite a while to set up the preconditions for the Lust Dream Invader, Leon easily infiltrated his nightmare.

However, before Leon could glimpse into the future, a power of the same origin connected with Joshua's dream, firmly fixing the ever-changing scenes in the capital.

Naturally, when faced with the sudden appearance of unknown observers, Leon became alert at once, trying to disguise his presence while observing what the other party intended to do.

But apart from "locking" Joshua's dream and forcefully fixing the scene in the capital to prevent any location change, the observers conducted no further interference. And, vaguely, it seemed there were countless similar scenes being forcibly pieced together by some power.

So, is the other party capturing dreams related to the "capital"?

After vaguely sensing the invaders' general intent, feeling that continuing to "watch" wouldn't reveal their true purpose, Leon withdrew from Joshua's dream.

Then, after setting out a black goat beside him and instructing it to forcibly wake him if it detected anything unusual with his soul, Leon targeted himself and activated the Lust Dream Invader, creating a dream also related to the "capital."

Sure enough, after fulfilling the "key words," the dream Leon created for himself was also summoned and stitched onto a huge combined dream.

And just as Leon wanted to use this as a springboard to see what exactly the other party was doing, he was surprised to discover a strange fluctuation penetrating Joshua's dream, wandering around, then astonishingly moving towards his dream...

This is my dream! How dare you come directly in?

Discovering that the other party had come knocking, Leon naturally wouldn't do nothing. He promptly revised the hastily constructed dream, added a series of "character settings" for himself, and patiently awaited the other's arrival.

Before long, the strange fluctuation bypassed the other dreams, circled around a few times, and cautiously burrowed into his dream, peeking around.

Once he followed the fluctuation and found the invader's location, seeing the two dim figures shrouded under the lantern's light below, Leon, who had been prepared, controlled his giant body, comparable to an Ultraman, and reached down towards the clock tower.

Since you're here, stay!

Chapter 443: Dream Wandering Lantern (Part 2)

So this is your dream.

Watching the gigantic hand falling from above, the old investigator couldn't help but squeeze his legs together instinctively, then regretfully glanced at the female reporter beside him.

"I can't act now, give me the lantern... Nicole, leave him to you!"

"Okay."

The female reporter nodded, handed the Dream Wandering Lantern to the old investigator, and then, to Leon's somewhat surprised gaze, she raised her hand to meet it.

"Bang!"

As the gigantic hand descended, the top of the bell tower exploded with a loud bang. Large chunks of bricks flew everywhere, sending up a large cloud of gray dust in mid-air.

According to the rule of no smoke, no damage, that slap was in vain.

Feeling that something was wrong, as if he had hit empty air, Leon immediately retracted his right hand, took a deep breath, while amidst the dust around the bell tower, he heard a somewhat familiar aged voice.

"Remember? I told you before..."

Twisting the handle of the Dream Wandering Lantern to dim the light surrounding him, the old investigator slowly walked out of the smoke and smiled:

"It won't be long before we meet again. You now... cough! Cough, cough, cough! What's that smell?!"

Uh... Dinner tonight was garlic penne, the smell seems quite strong indeed.

Exhaling a breath full of garlic fragrance, dispersing the dust at the top of the bell tower, watching the old investigator whose face turned a bit green from the odor, Leon couldn't help but frown.

"I knew it, you really are suspicious!"

"..."

Yes, I actually... forget it, suddenly don't feel like talking to you...

As Leon spoke, the intensity of the garlic scent around them increased by several notches, making the old investigator, who originally wanted to say a few harsh words, immediately cover his nose and mouth with a dark face and retreat half a step with the lantern.

"And you!"

After driving away the old investigator with a single sentence, Leon, who preemptively gave himself an Ultraman persona and now stood over forty meters tall, bent slightly, glaring at the female reporter:

"Miss Nicole, I never thought I'd meet you here."

"..."

"What do you two actually want?"

"..."

"Is the Aquarius Director not dead yet? What's your relationship with him?"

"..."

"Speak!"

"..."

Please shut up!

Facing the ever-intensifying pungent smell as Leon's size increased, the utterly exasperated female reporter jumped directly over thirty meters, pushing hard on Leon's chest with her hand!

"Lie down!"

With the female reporter's slightly annoyed shout, the Ultraman Leon, supposedly visiting the capital from Nebula M78, weighing tens of thousands of tons, unexpectedly fell, flattening the street behind him with a loud crash.

Is this the [Untouchable Hand]? Even able to topple an Ultraman?

Glancing at the female reporter's fair hands, Leon recalled some related information and couldn't help but frown again.

The strange lantern in her hand seemed to be able to fix the dream's setting, so even though he was the owner of the dream, he still couldn't make significant changes to the scene at will.

Being able to transform the palace into a paid park and add some skyscrapers or overpasses was already the limit of his ability. More sci-fi stuff couldn't fit into this dream.

So... I have to work on myself?

...

"Stop struggling."

Smashing something to dispel the dense garlic smell at the top of the bell tower, the old investigator carried the lantern to the edge of the building, looked down at the fallen giant Leon with a cold gaze, and said:

"If I'm not mistaken, you dared to ambush me here because you knew you were the master of this dream and thought you could use that, right?"

"..."

"You're too naive; dreams aren't so simple."

Taking a white strange rope from his pocket, tossing it to the female reporter, the old investigator sneered and said:

"Even in a fake dream, one can't construct something completely unfamiliar out of thin air. Saying 'I can rival the True God' doesn't truly impart equal power.

In a false dream, the strongest thing is reality instead."

"Though this dream you created is peculiar, neither the palace turned into a garden nor your seemingly powerful body can withstand scrutiny.

Your experience and understanding of power make it impossible to imagine what truly powerful beings are like, so naturally, you can't complete the corresponding construction in your dream...

So stop struggling, lie still, and before the Demonic Soul Abyss fully descends, I'll spare your life!"

"..."

Thank you for the explanation... But are you sure what I created in the dream isn't real enough?

After listening to the old investigator, Leon raised his eyebrows, decisively discarding his Ultraman persona, his fifty-meter-tall body quickly shrinking back to a human-like size.

Although there wasn't a countdown flashing on his chest, the fact that he sat down and flattened half the street after being pushed proves that his creation 'Ultraman Leon' wasn't that lacking in realism.

As for why Ultraman was pushed over, it probably boils down to the female reporter's hands.

Her [Untouchable Hand], if activated correctly, can forcibly resist all "contacts" below a True God. If no contact happens, then the strength of Ultraman Leon is useless, so...

I need to transform into a Super Saiyan!

...

Haha, have you already given up resisting?

Seeing Leon dispersing his massive form and returning to normal size, the old investigator couldn't help but smirk slightly.

Believing the enemy's words, this guy is still a bit naive.

The power of dreams, in the end, is just the power of belief, and the opponent, as the master of the dream, undoubtedly has the highest level of "authority," so if he believes he can definitely defeat me, the final result would still be uncertain.

Now that he has fear, all I need to do is keep undermining his confidence, make him doubt his own abilities so that he becomes gradually weaker and starts losing control over the dream.

Once the dream gets chaotic and his power is weakened to a certain extent, it'll be... Hmm? Why did his hair turn gold? And it's standing up like a hedgehog? What's that thing glowing blue in his hand?

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...

"Hehe~"

"Kid?!"

Seeing Leon suddenly laugh out loud in his sleep without knowing why, the Black Goat's expression tensed, and it shouted urgently:

"Wake up! Wake up!"

"..."

"Your soul's out of control! You're too excited! Be careful of getting tricked!"

"..."

"Stop sleeping, wake up! Don't laugh!"

"..."

"Wake up! What are you dreaming about? How can you be laughing so happily!"

Chapter 444: Copping a Feel

What... what on earth did he dream of?

Looking at the capital city which was blown up with a single shot by the golden-haired Leon, leaving not even ruins behind, the old investigator's mouth twitched hard twice.

And beside him, the female reporter who noticed something was wrong hurried back within the range covered by the Dream Wandering Lantern, avoiding the strike just now, was even more frightened, her face going pale.

Even if it was merely a fabricated dream, the destructive power capable of wiping out a city instantly was somewhat exaggerated, many numbered anomalies might not have such power, and going against him with one's head?

...

"Why are you guys hiding?"

After crazily bombing the two people retreating back within the lantern's range and finding that any attack would disappear once touching the light emitted by the lantern, Leon, understanding the area around the lantern is a "safe zone," stopped the meaningless bombardment and started sarcastically:

"You said you'd spare my life, is this how you do it?"

"..."

"Didn't you say I'm just a straw man? Then come out~"

"..."

"Don't be cowardly, come out, at worst I'll let you have one hand!"

"..."

What's the use of letting one hand? If it weren't for the safe zone marked out by the Dream Wandering Lantern, the two of us would have been blasted away along with the capital with that one strike!

Looking at Leon, whose whole body is shining golden light wildly, flying randomly in the sky at an extremely terrifying speed, mocking as he flew, the old investigator's face darkened, then, with a somber face, started to shake the Dream Wandering Lantern, preparing to withdraw from this absurd dream.

This damn guy, who knows what kind of bizarre setup he gave himself, not only destroyed the capital with one strike but even when flying, he brought along sonic boom clouds! And judging by his movements, if not for his own reaction speed lagging behind, he might be much faster than now.

Can't fight! This really cannot be fought!

"Don't go~"

Seeing the old investigator hiding in the "safe zone" shaking the lantern fiercely, Leon simply landed, inviting warmly through the lantern's light:

"Come out and play? Don't worry, this time I definitely won't kick your balls!"

???

Damn, you dare mention it?

Upon hearing the reporter's breath caught abruptly, the old investigator's face turned slightly red, gritting his teeth unable to resist:

"If this isn't your dream, how could a third-level Cleaner like you..."

"I am unworthy."

Without hesitation admitting he's no match, Leon raised a leg with a grin through the dim light:

"But I kicked your balls."

"..."

"That was because in the Virgo branch!"

Feeling the reporter's increasingly strange gaze beside him, the old investigator took a deep breath, then with eyes freezing over, said coldly:

"If it weren't for the Scarlet Hair Lady being not far from you, worrying it might expose your identity prematurely, I would have..."

"I kicked more than one time."

"..."

Damn it, I shouldn't have started bantering with him!

Seeing Leon outside the lantern kicking the air whimsically hinting at something, the old investigator closed his eyes directly, then shook the lantern in his hand hard, causing the capital city flattened by Leon to tremble slightly.

Keep calm, don't get provoked by him!

My soul is severely damaged, there aren't many means I can deploy, must reserve them to limit the troublesome Scarlet Hair Lady, definitely can't waste on him, nor use in this fake dream.

"We'll meet again!"

Coldly glancing at Leon, the old investigator turned the handle of the Dream Wandering Lantern, moving the flame representing Leon's dream away from the center of the lamp.

"Three days."

Before the golden hedgehog-haired version of Leon disappeared along with the capital, the old investigator said expressionlessly:

"Even if you tell the Scarlet Hair Lady about today's event, it doesn't matter, in three days, I will make everything... you?!"

"Let me touch!"

Stepping within the range covered by the lantern, Leon whose hair instantly reverted to black, under the old investigator's dumbfounded expression, slapped his wrinkled old forehead.

"Feels awful... bye-bye!"

As the old investigator's eyes widened, taking out a bright red Token intending to stop him, Leon having achieved his goal immediately relaxed the suppression on his self-consciousness, forcibly leaving the dream amidst the escalating anger of the black goat beside him.

...

"Wake the hell up!"

"Damn it! Sleeping like a dead pig!"

"I'm truly convinced! Bring the kettle over!"

"You're laughing! I'll make you laugh!"

"Anyway, you're the one who made us do it, you damn wait! We... cough cough cough, finally you're awake."

Seeing Leon lying on the carpet finally opened his eyes, the black goat breathed a sigh of relief, then secretly signaled young Ha to put away the already opened kettle lid, then asked with a concerned face:

"I just found your soul a bit too excited, worried you might've fallen into some ambush, luckily no accident... who on earth was snooping on Joshua's dream? Also, how do you feel now?"

"..."

I feel okay now, but if I hadn't woken up just now, were you planning to pour boiling water on me?

Glancing at it speechlessly, since it was his own instruction to wake him immediately upon detecting any abnormality, Leon didn't say much more, instead swiftly got up from the carpet and grabbed the goat's head in his hand.

"No time to explain... let's go! Get back to the bureau quickly!"

???

"What happened?"

Being dragged by Leon, hastily leaving Joshua's room, the confused goat head couldn't help but ask:

"What did you dream of just now? Why the rush?"

"No choice but to hurry! I just discovered the Aquarius Director is still alive! And it's actually that old investigator I kicked!"

"Ah?"

...

"It can't be!"

Upon hearing the news that the Aquarius Director is still alive, the red-haired director, awakened from a dream, shook his head, brows furrowing tightly:

"I saw it with my own eyes, Aquarius Director's soul went deep into the Realm of the Dead, even if not completely dead, he surely can't return in a short time... I even cut a part of his soul to make a pair of gloves for you."

"The Aquarius Director you saw is real, but he's only a part of the real Aquarius Director!"

Recalling the information he got from touching the Aquarius Director's forehead, Leon explained gravely:

"Aquarius Director's soul split into good and evil long ago. The one we encountered was just his part representing evil, obsession, recklessness.

While the part carrying his kindness and compassion, more positive traits, joined the Clean-up Bureau under another identity, that's the old investigator named Camus!"

Chapter 445: Purpose and Reason

Camus is half of the Aquarius Director?

The Red-haired Director hesitated slightly upon hearing this. The answer still felt somewhat far-fetched to her, but out of trust for Leon, she continued along this line of thought.

Indeed, according to the records of the headquarters' past use of the [Directives List], unless the range is specifically emphasized, it can only lock onto a single target.

So if the two souls that the Aquarius Director split off from were significantly different from each other, and the split had been completed long before the [Directives List] took effect, it indeed might evade the effects of the [Directives List].

But the soul is different from flesh and blood; once it's gone, it's gone. If slightly injured, it can still self-heal. Such a thorough split is almost impossible to restore.

And I saw with my own eyes the strongest part of the "Soul of Evil" enter the depths of the Realm of the Dead. Even if this half of the Aquarius Director still retains a True God level status, their own power would plummet.

According to typical calculations, his remaining Leon Value is estimated to be barely over 30, and at most won't reach 40 points. The average Leon Value of a Grade 1 Cleaner is roughly between 30-50 points, so the current Aquarius Director is considered weak among Grade 1 Cleaners.

As for my own strength, I'm among the top ranks of directors in the Zodiac Branch Office. Under the activation of the Star Palace's blessing, my Leon Value can even briefly break through to 70 points, nearly twice his.

The gap is so large that small tricks cannot bridge it, let alone I still have the enhancement of [Slaughter Blood Hair] No. 013. Where does Aquarius get the confidence to cause trouble right under my nose?

...

"Leon, I always feel like something is not quite right."

After thinking for half a day and still not understanding where Aquarius Director's confidence comes from, the Red-haired Director couldn't help but frown and say:

"This time he sacrificed more than half of his soul as a price, barely getting by and temporarily avoiding the headquarters' punishment. Logically, he should be lying low for a while.

But he not only didn't hide but also took the risk of being directly eliminated by me, came to the capital to collect a large number of dreams, and even after meeting you, made no attempt to conceal, claiming that he must do something within three days. This makes me find it very strange."

After drinking a sip of the now-cold tea, the Red-haired Director unconsciously tapped the table with her fingers and continued with knitted brows:

"The night three days from now is when the Demonic Soul Abyss and reality fully merge. By saying this, he's essentially telling us the specific time of action. But in his current state, he can't possibly be my opponent, where does he get the confidence to provoke me?

Also, according to my understanding of him, Aquarius is someone with strong objectives and rarely does meaningless things.

And whether it's the capital or our branch office, there doesn't seem to be anything worth coveting for him. The most valuable [Twelve Ant Nests] he can't open, and he can't steal my [Slaughter Blood Hair], so what exactly does he want?"

What exactly does Aquarius want...

After listening to the Red-haired Director's analysis, Leon's brow also furrowed.

If we talk about Aquarius Director's greatest obsession, it would naturally be replacing the Director of Taurus to enter the Watcher's Palace, but this path has essentially been blocked.

The six anomalous items used to usurp the identity of "Ascendant" are still in the hands of myself and the insurgents, and he simply can't gather them; as for the targeted Director of Taurus, they are self-sealing at headquarters, giving him no opportunity to approach;

Even if he somehow manages to gather similar items and sneaks into the secluded headquarters, he would not be a match for the three directors there and likely would be taken down immediately.

If he wants to fulfill that greatest obsession, he should first find a way to restore his strength, at least to the level of a branch director, to be able to...wait! Restore strength?

Seemingly catching a faint, unclear thread, Leon pondered a moment before hesitantly suggesting:

"Director, I think we might as well change our way of thinking, rather than continuing to consider what Aquarius wants to do in the capital, we should first consider what he 'needs' the most now."

What does Aquarius need the most?

Upon hearing Leon's words, the Red-haired Director's eyes narrowed slightly.

That's right, no matter what Aquarius Director ultimately wants, what he needs most right now is to restore the power he's lost due to losing more than half of his soul.

Only by raising his power back to a level not much different from the Director of Taurus can he possibly replace him in the Watcher's Palace through seizing the body.

And speaking of a way to heal his soul's injury and bring him back to peak condition... the Demonic Soul Abyss! King of Nightmares!!!

Thanks to Leon's hint, after figuring out the most crucial point, the Red-haired Director gasped for air.

Injuries caused by soul loss are mostly unsolvable, but just as the rules of the Realm of the Dead do not acknowledge the physical body, the rules of the dream realm do not acknowledge the existence of the soul either.

The foundation of the dream realm is memory and imagination, so as long as a person's memory is intact and cognitive abilities normal, even if the Aquarius Director's soul is fragmented, the dream realm will still recognize him as a "complete" person.

If the King of Nightmares successfully descends and is willing to help, he could completely exchange parts of dreams and reality permanently!

At that point, all that would be needed is to create a "complete" Aquarius Director in the dream realm, allow the real Aquarius Director to fall asleep, and have the King of Nightmares permanently swap the two.

The soul-deficient Aquarius Director would then become merely a fake "nightmare" under the influence of the dream realm's rules, while the complete director in the dream would awaken in the actual reality!

As for why the King of Nightmares would help Aquarius Director... that file supposedly from the Watcher's Palace, documenting thirty-five locations of Bai Ye Sect strongholds to prevent the Demonic Soul Abyss and King of Nightmares from descending, was personally delivered by the Aquarius Director!

...

It's too late now...

Taking a deep breath, the Red-haired Director leaned back in the chair, slightly bowed her head, and sighed:

"No wonder Aquarius wasn't afraid of me knowing he was still alive; it's been nearly two days since Emma and the others left. Now it's too late to realize it..."

Too late for what?

Upon hearing the Red-haired Director's sigh, Leon couldn't help but be slightly stunned, then hastily asked what exactly was going on.

The Red-haired Director rubbed her eyebrows and said succinctly:

"If I'm not mistaken, Aquarius Director should be collaborating with the King of Nightmares. The document he sent earlier has issues. What it marks may not be the locations of Bai Ye Sect strongholds, and the descent of the King of Nightmares is now unavoidable."

Chapter 446: The Makeshift Crew

Is the arrival of the King of Nightmares inevitable?

After hearing the red-haired director's judgment, Leon's eyes involuntarily widened.

Yes, the intelligence about the location of the Bai Ye Sect's base was sent by the Aquarius Director. The chance that he tampered with it isn't just very high; it's absolutely certain!

I remember Emma once told me that when the Demonic Soul Abyss overlaps with reality, the link between body and soul will be weakened. Dream realm creatures and related abilities will be greatly enhanced, and the King of Nightmares will try to invade reality.

If the King of Nightmares truly descends successfully, although ordinary people affected won't die directly, they will be entangled in nightmares for the rest of their lives. Cleaners like me are highly likely to be forcibly captured and brought into the dream realm, transformed into creatures under its control, permanently enslaved by it.

"Director! Quickly request aid from the Headquarters!"

Realizing what would happen in three days, Leon couldn't help but say anxiously:

"Emma told me that the King of Nightmares doesn't have a physical form and can travel through dreams at will, which isn't the type you are skilled at dealing with. So can we request a Director who specializes in dealing with it, or get help from other branch directors?"

"I have already requested aid, but it seems it will likely be too late."

Raising his hand to point at the cabinet beside the desk, letting Leon see the slightly flickering Celestial Globe Mirror within, the red-haired director rubbed his brow and said:

"The King of Nightmares' Leon Value is about 63 points, while the non-Zodiac branch directors have a Leon Value of only about 50-59, and can only perform at 60 points level with Star Palace's support.

Although the gap doesn't seem large, you know, a 60-point Leon Value is the dividing line between humans and gods. Facing a King of Nightmares enhanced by the Demonic Soul Abyss, even if the small branch directors came, they likely wouldn't be of much help."

"Then... what about directors from other Zodiac branches?"

"If some could come, they might help. If two or more could come, we might even try to take down the King of Nightmares, but none of them can come..."

The red-haired director sighed and said:

"Headquarters is currently in a self-locking state, except for the three Directors, everyone else is temporarily blocked from using Star Palace Shift. The only ones who could arrive within two days are people from the Lion Sub-bureau and Scorpio Branch.

Among them, the director of the Scorpio Branch has a grudge against me, so there's no way they'd come to help. And although Beverly from the Lion Bureau is on good terms with me, after you exposed the Aquarius conspiracy, the reward she asked from the Headquarters was to spend a month eating sweets in the God of Sweets' divine kingdom. She's currently not in this world at all, so she couldn't possibly come over."

"Then..."

"I'm asking the Board of Directors."

Pointing at the top of the Celestial Sphere Mirror, the red-haired director spoke after the two fish-shaped emblems surrounded the orb in orbit:

"The Pisces Director is very skilled in dream and soul matters. If he is willing to step in, the two of us could go deep into the Demonic Soul Abyss and forcibly trap the King of Nightmares in the dream realm, but I guess he might be currently..."

"Sizzle..."

As if to agree with the red-haired director's words, the two fish emblems above the Celestial Sphere Mirror stabilized, and a delighted little girl appeared in the mirror.

"Olivia~ are you coming to play with me?"

"He should be in a state unable to assist right now."

After finishing the second half of the sentence, seeing Leon's somewhat bewildered expression, the red-haired director ruffled his messy hair with a look of helplessness and said:

"Let's play another time, Pisces Your Excellency; I have other matters to attend to now... Are the Taurus Director and Sagittarius Director beside you?"

"Alright then..."

After being declined by the red-haired director, the disappointed little girl puffed her cheeks but nodded obediently, scampering away in her squeaky shoes from the mirror.

"I'll go call them for you!"

"Thank you."

"..."

"That child just now is called Mimi, she's roughly a quarter of the Pisces Director."

After the little girl disappeared on the other side of the Celestial Sphere Mirror, the red-haired director turned his head to explain to the surprised Leon:

"The Pisces Director's case is special. His soul was divided by an anomalous object into four parts: male, female, old, and young, respectively a six or seven-year-old girl, a twenty-three or twenty-four-year-old young man, a forty-five or forty-six-year-old middle-aged woman, and an eighty-something-year-old elder.

And his body is alternately controlled by these four souls from young to old. Although all four souls, which come from the same origin, have been recognized by the Pisces Star Palace, only that eighty-something-year-old elder holds true director-level power."

"..."

Does this mean the Pisces Director only has director-level combat power about a quarter of the time?

Looking at the six-year-old Pisces Director leaving, the pink rocking horse placed in front of the mirror, Leon who was barely able to hold it together couldn't help but ask:

"Given the plethora of anomalous objects at the Headquarters, isn't there any way to bring out the eighty-year-old Pisces Director ahead of time?"

"It's not possible."

The red-haired director shook his head and said:

"About twenty or thirty years ago, when the Aquarius Director hadn't defected yet, he and the Taurus Director worked together to create an anomaly item targeting souls, attempting to solve the Pisces Director's soul division problem.

But even with the combination of two secret techniques, they didn't succeed. All they achieved was stabilizing the previously disorderly appearances of the Pisces Director's soul into a sequence from young to old.

And that eighty-something-year-old Pisces Director, came out when you exposed the Aquarius conspiracy at the Headquarters. It'll have to cycle from old to young again before it's his turn to appear... It'll probably be over a month more."

Waiting over a month... By then even the mustard greens will have cooled eight times!

Having gained a deeper understanding of how unreliable the Clean-up Bureau is, Leon was about to ask another question when he heard footsteps from the other side of the Celestial Sphere Mirror. The six-year-old version of Pisces, who had just run off, came back excitedly pulling along someone.

"Olivia! I brought them for you! Next time when you come..."

"Next time when she comes, I'll make sure she brings you lots of interesting toys."

Interrupting her, the Taurus Director, slightly weary, tenderly patted the girl's head and said gently:

"Mimi, we have matters to discuss, go play over there for a bit, alright?"

"Oh..."

Seemingly sensing the odd expressions of the Taurus Director and the red-haired director, the girl blinked, puffed her cheeks in response, and ran off in her squeaky shoes. The Taurus Director then took her place at the other side of the Celestial Sphere Mirror.

"Olivia, I have something to tell you."

Before the red-haired director could mention the news about the Aquarius Director still being alive, the grave-looking Taurus Director spoke first:

"The Watcher's Palace might be in trouble."

Chapter 447: It's All Aquarius's Fault!

What the hell?!

Upon hearing the opening remarks of the Director of Taurus, Leon and Olivia, both filled with bad news and ready to ask for assistance, were suddenly stunned.

Director Taurus! I have bad news to tell you!

Isn't that a coincidence? I have even worse news here!

"What's going on?!!!"

The request for help was directly swallowed back, and the red-haired chief quickly asked:

"The Watcher's Palace has been operating smoothly for years, never had any problems. So why... wait! Could it be the Aquarius Director? Was he able to manipulate the Watcher's Palace?"

"Aquarius Director? Isn't he dead?"

"He... forget it, we'll talk about him later!"

Upon hearing the strongest trump card of the Clean-up Bureau had gone awry, the red-haired chief couldn't help but grit his teeth:

"Director Taurus! What exactly went wrong with the Watcher's Palace?"

"The Watcher's Palace... it seems to have been affected by something."

Suppressing his shock, Director of Taurus explained with a furrowed brow:

"You know, once seated on the throne of the Watcher's Palace, one can review all the past and preview parts of possible futures.

If the throne sitter finds an anomaly in the future, anything that could endanger the Clean-up Bureau or even affect humanity, they will send an early warning, providing vague information to let us eliminate dangers before they occur."

"What? Has that ability failed?"

"Overall, it's not a complete failure, but there are indeed some issues."

Taking out a pile of moon-white small notes from his pocket, he shook them in front of the Celestial Globe Mirror, then remarked with confusion:

"At the beginning of each year, the Watcher's Palace sends down many notes at once, telling us the things to be most mindful of that year... such as warning against the waking Ancient Ones in the polar regions, or the extent the Moonfolk have hollowed out the moon.

This year, the Watcher's Palace also sent quite a few notes, most were normal, but one was problematic, with many critical pieces of information missing, completely unreadable... Look, it's this one!"

Upon hearing Director of Taurus, the tense red-haired chief immediately looked at the note held up to the mirror.

'A soul named... from an unknown world has, after three years of dormancy, joined... and established a foothold at..., after contact with the Clean-up Bureau's..., suddenly gained the strange ability to block my observation.

According to the parts of the future I once saw, he will become..., launch... against the entire Clean-up Bureau, and act to destroy..., completely disrupting..., it is imperative to deal with him in advance!'

"Seems like a powerful, scheming soul?"

After seeing a note with seven or eight sections missing, containing almost no critical information, the red-haired chief couldn't help but furrow his brows tightly.

"According to the description, he seems to be set for a conflict with the Clean-up Bureau and has already had contact with them, possibly even collaborating with some insiders in the Bureau... Leon, what do you think?"

"..."

What do I think... I can only think that this is talking about me!

Reading the note repeatedly, Leon's eyes kept focusing on keywords like "from an unknown world" and "three years", making his scalp tingle.

After contact with the Clean-up Bureau's..., suddenly gained the strange ability to block my observation; if my guess is correct, the "..." stands for Director of Taurus.

After all, it was after contact with her that I learned about the existence of the Watcher's Palace, and the activation of [Materialism] by the information I acquired blocked the influence from the Watcher's Palace; everything matches perfectly.

...

"I'm shocked..."

After answering the red-haired chief honestly, Leon, slightly twitching at the cheeks, pointed at the part "after contact with..." on the note, a little guilty:

"Do you think the person colluding with him could be the Aquarius Director?"

"Hmm? Why do you think so?"

"Uh... I'm guessing."

Facing the confused gaze of the two directors, Leon toughened up and made up nonsense:

"You see, the Aquarius Director is a genius in Abnormal Genesis Sorcery; he's always intended to research the Watcher's Palace, and in preparation to ascend the throne, he's been preparing for years.

With his talent, after so many years of research, perhaps he really figured out a way to block the Watcher's Palace's observation and passed this method on to the soul from the unknown world after contact.

Mmm... I'm not saying it's definitely the Aquarius Director's doing, but reasoning by common sense, his suspicion is indeed very high, right?"

"Indeed."

After hearing Leon's bold assumption, on the other end of the Celestial Globe Mirror, the Sagittarius Director, who had been silent the whole time, nodded.

After acknowledging Leon's speculation, this middle-aged man with a square face, exuding a solid and straightforward air, furrowed his thick brows:

"If we must say someone in the bureau controls the ability to block the Watcher's Palace's observation, apart from the Aquarius Director, I really can't think of anyone else. This matter probably can't be disconnected from him... Oh, you were saying earlier, the Aquarius Director is still alive?"

"Yes! The Aquarius Director is not dead!"

Upon hearing the Sagittarius Director's inquiry, the red-haired chief nodded with a grave expression:

"Many years ago, he already split his soul, doing it even more thoroughly than Director Pisces, apart from sharing memories and having the same goals, they're practically two different people.

And the soul sent to the Realm of the Dead via [Directive List] and [Netherworld Streetlight] was only half of the Aquarius Director's soul; he's hidden the other half and is scheming with the King of Nightmares to help him descend, using the forces of the dream realm to complete his missing soul."

The King of Nightmares?

Upon hearing the red-haired chief, Director of Taurus's expression shifted, he then rummaged through the notes and handed one over.

"Olivia, is this what you mean?"

'The Demonic Soul Abyss is about to overlap with reality, the King of Nightmares has a small chance of descending from this, it's critical to expel Bai Ye Sect followers ahead of time, destroy the directing ritual for the King of Nightmares' descent to ensure...'

"Exactly this one!"

After hurriedly reading the contents of the note, the red-haired chief took a deep breath and clenched his fist in frustration:

"Though my side received the message, that document was sent by the Aquarius Director, the marked location and time were likely altered by him.

Director Taurus, the King of Nightmares' descent is inevitable, can you or Director Sagittarius use the Star Palace Shift to come help me stop the King of Nightmares?"

"I fear I can't..."

Director of Taurus hesitated slightly and then shook his head in resignation:

"The King of Nightmares' power is nightmare, and when it intrudes into reality, it can easily taint human souls, my soul has been nurturing for almost ten years, reaching the final stage of ascension, if it gets tainted, then the past ten years would have to be redone.

Though enduring another ten years wouldn't be much, pushing through it would be fine, but I'm concerned about the Watcher's Palace, I want to inspect it ahead of time, have already begun the palace ascent ahead of time, couldn't face the King of Nightmares..."

Pulling the collar slightly apart, revealing to Leon and Olivia the blazing white soul starting to overflow from the flesh, Director of Taurus looked at the square-faced middle-aged man beside him and said somewhat apologetically:

"Andrew, could I ask you to go over for me?"

Chapter 448: Dispute and Decision

"I'm afraid that's not possible..."

Upon hearing the request from the Director of Taurus, the square-faced middle-aged man hesitated for a moment, then furrowed his brows and refused:

"Even if the headquarters is secured, absolute safety is not guaranteed, and you are about to ascend, so you cannot be disturbed. I cannot leave right now!"

"It should be fine, it's less than a week anyway."

The Director of Taurus thought for a moment, then spoke again, trying to persuade:

"The location of the headquarters is very secure, and it's impossible for ordinary people to get in. Besides, Mimi and I, as directors, are here. Even if we are targeted by many True Gods together, we can hold out until you return to help."

"This... still can't work. You know the importance of the Watcher's Palace; we can't afford to gamble on it."

The square-faced middle-aged man was slightly tempted, but ultimately shook his head and said:

"Your combat abilities aren't outstanding, and the true soul of the Pisces Director is still asleep. Mimi's mental state is around six years old and, aside from being able to unfold the Star Palace normally, can't truly bring out the effects of the Pisces secret technique."

"If I leave the headquarters and leave you two alone, if any unexpected situation arises, everything will be lost. I can't take that risk!"

"But it's very urgent on Olivia's side too!"

The Director of Taurus closed his collar, his face full of worry, and said:

"Although her abilities are strong, she's at a disadvantage against the King of Nightmares. Even if she bravely ventures into the Demonic Soul Abyss, she can't capture the King of Nightmares who can freely shuttle through the dreams of living beings."

If we just stand by and do nothing, once the King of Nightmares successfully descends, even if we can help remotely by burning a quarter of the sun to reduce the harms in the Dreamscape, the number of affected people would still be in the millions!"

"Although the impact scope is large, those people will only have nightmares for a lifetime; they will not die!"

The Sagittarius Director insisted:

"After this attack, we can increase the effects of the Illusion Can. In doing so, even if affected people have nightmares, they will forget them upon waking up, minimizing effects on their lifespan and soul!"

"But there will still be an impact!"

The Director of Taurus said urgently:

"When these nightmare-tormented people grow old, their souls will detach from their bodies earlier than normal people. Many years before their actual death, they will gradually lose memory, or even directly become soulless husks!

Furthermore, what about the Cleaners from the Virgo Branch? Once the King of Nightmares descends, he will surely collect their souls first! Those little ones are still on a mission, if..."

"The people from the Virgo Branch can evacuate in advance!"

The Sagittarius Director's face tightened slightly, resolutely saying:

"Have they not all been dispatched already? Let's have the people from the Scorpio Bureau and the Lion Bureau dispatched now to find them according to the addresses, and notify them to evacuate the Kingdom within three days!

The King of Nightmares is always cautious and never easily leaves the Demonic Soul Abyss. As long as the Cleaners from the Virgo Branch evacuate quickly, there is a great chance they can escape, and even return when the Demonic Soul Abyss leaves, with nothing changed..."

"How can nothing change?"

Faced with the square-faced middle-aged man's repeated refusal, the Director of Taurus, usually good-tempered, rarely got angry. The gentle and kind face spread a white glow, no longer appearing soft, with a strong bloody hue stretching from her cheekbones to her brows.

"Andrew! That's millions of people! And the work of the Clean-up Bureau is to protect..."

"The work of the Clean-up Bureau is to ensure the survival of humanity; only under that premise do we protect ordinary people from being affected!"

Under the fury of the Taurus Director, the square-faced middle-aged man frowned tightly, meeting her gaze unwaveringly and declared with determination:

"Since Aquarius can cooperate with the King of Nightmares for soul repair, he might cooperate with others as well. If any problems arise on your side, far more than just those millions of people will be affected, so I will definitely not leave!"

"But it's just one week! I can..."

"Faced with an opponent who can glimpse the future and possesses more than one time-related anomalous item, even a week's gap—or even a minute's—cannot be allowed!"

...

"You two, please stop arguing."

Faced with the dispute between the two current directors, the red-haired chief finally found an opportunity to interject.

After glancing at the persistent square-faced middle-aged man, she sighed inwardly, knowing it was unlikely they could persuade him no matter what, then took the initiative to say:

"Sir Taurus, let's follow Sagittarius Director's proposal for now... Please help me contact people from surrounding branches, find Emma and the others, and have them evacuate the Kingdom ahead of time."

"Olivia?! How could you..."

"Sir Taurus, please listen to me first."

Interrupting the Taurus Director, the red-haired chief looked towards the square-faced middle-aged man in the Celestial Sphere Mirror, her expression calm, and said:

"Sagittarius's points are not unreasonable. It's just my personal speculation that Aquarius wants to repair his soul with the King of Nightmares' power. Maybe his true objective is to lure you away from headquarters."

After all, the anomalous item that helps stabilize Mimi's soul was initially obtained with his help, and Aquarius is well aware of the Pisces Director's four soul-alternating cycles.

Given that Aquarius knows the headquarters is essentially quite empty, we can't rule out the possibility of him intending to take advantage of the situation to attack the headquarters. We indeed should be more cautious."

Seeing the red-haired chief also acknowledging this possibility, the Taurus Director couldn't help but pause, furrowing her brows tightly before asking:

"Then what about your side? Are you really going to ignore the King of Nightmares?"

"Of course, that's not an option."

The red-haired chief shook her head and said:

"Though it's difficult, what needs to be done must still be done... Please, prepare yourself along with the Pisces and Sagittarius Directors, mobilize three Zodiac Star Palaces to preemptively burn the Dreamscape, lessening our burden before and after the Demonic Soul Abyss descends."

As she said this, she hesitated slightly but still took a deep breath and requested:

"Moreover, please also assist me by contacting the director of the Scorpio Branch. Using your three esteemed identities, forcibly summon him to come and help immediately. On my side... If he can come and help, I would be willing to apologize to him publicly before everyone at the headquarters during this year's end inspection!"

"Olivia..."

Looking at the red-haired chief who had her fists clenched tightly, the Taurus Director's lips moved slightly, then she sighed and said:

"I will talk to him; you have been really wronged this time."

Wronged indeed... But being a little wronged is better than large-scale deaths, at least it offers some inner comfort.

The red-haired chief smiled slightly upon hearing this, not speaking, while on the other end of the Celestial Globe Mirror, the square-faced middle-aged man, after looking at her, hesitated for a moment, then extended his finger onto the mirror's surface and drew the emblem of a centaur holding a bow.

Chapter 449: Secret Technique Mark

"Sorry..."

With the sigh of the middle-aged man with a square face, the golden archer centaur emblem surprisingly emerged directly from the mirror and floated in front of Leon and the red-haired director.

"It's not that I don't want to help, but the Watcher's Palace can't afford any mistakes, so..."

"I understand."

Surprised to see the archer emblem in the air, a smile appeared on the red-haired director's face. She then grabbed Leon's wrist and slightly nodded, saying:

"You have no choice either. Compared to us, ensuring the safety of the Watcher's Palace is more important."

"I... sigh... I'm sorry for you."

Somewhat guilty towards the red-haired director, the Archer Director sighed, turned around preparing to leave, but upon noticing the action on the other side of the Celestial Globe Mirror, he suddenly turned back, full of surprise.

"Wait! What are you doing?"

Seeing the red-haired director holding Leon's hand, ready to imprint on the archer's emblem, the middle-aged man with a square face hastily exclaimed:

"Stop! That's meant for you! What use does my secret art seal have for a level three Cleaner?"

"Don't worry, Lord Archer."

After pressing Leon's hand to the golden pattern, the red-haired director shook her head and said:

"Leon is much more exceptional than you think. Even if I had your secret art seal, I couldn't catch up to the King of Nightmares, but if Leon has it, it might even have some miraculous effect!"

"..."

"Fine, do as you please!"

Glancing at Leon, who has remained silent and showed no "aura of a strong person," the disappointed middle-aged man with a square face shook his head, then left the range of the Celestial Globe Mirror, dragging along the curious Director of Pisces.

Similarly surprised, the Director of Taurus, after noticing the little red cross on Leon's collar, revealed a knowing look and then returned to a kind expression, smiling as he encouraged:

"Good luck, young one. If you can really help Olivia through this crisis, I'll make sure to give you a great gift!"

"..."

"Ah!"

After someone pinched the soft flesh on his arm, Leon snapped back to reality with a shiver, and hurriedly thanked:

"Thank you, Lord Taurus, I'll do my best!"

"Yes, but also remember to be careful. If it's really impossible, don't force yourself, and Olivia, you as well..."

After reminding Leon and the others to be safe, the Director of Taurus seemed to remember something, glanced at Leon's face, and then hesitated a bit before saying:

"Also... if you still want to drink, once this matter is resolved, I can send over a batch of wine without Word Spirit added. This time you..."

"Cough cough cough!"

Not expecting her to suddenly bring this up, Leon, who was examining the secret art seal, remembered the extremely spicy wine from the Realm of the Dead. Instantly, his expression became awkward, his face flushed, and he waved his hand nervously:

"I quit! We've quit drinking! No need to..."

"Drink! We want to drink!"

"Alright, just wait for it!"

Seeing Leon's mouth forcibly covered, the Director of Taurus couldn't help but smile and shake his head, then proactively shut off the Celestial Globe Mirror.

...

It's great, I didn't expect an unexpected gain.

Retracting her hand after covering Leon's mouth, the red-haired director rubbed her shoulder against him, then gleefully put away the Celestial Globe Mirror, smilingly asked:

"Have you figured out the secret art seal of the Archer Director?"

Upon hearing her words, Leon subconsciously looked at the panel.

[Name: Sagittarius Secret Art Seal (Secret Art, Temporary)]

[Appearance: A golden centaur holding a longbow, when exposed to direct sunlight, a coronal-like brilliant glow appears, revealing three bright golden arrow patterns]

[Ability: Can temporarily use the "Abnormal Strengthening" secret art of the Sagittarius Palace]

[Cost: Each time targeting an abnormal object, using the archer's secret art will consume one arrow. After using all three arrows, this temporary abnormal object will disappear on its own]

[Archive: Inspired by the conviction of Olivia, the Virgo branch director, combined with the guilt of being unable to help, the current Archer Director of the Clean-up Bureau condensed this secret art seal at the cost of three years of his life, which can be used a total of three times.

The abnormal object locked by this seal, upon its next activation, will have its effects greatly enhanced, lasting until the end of that use. The specific degree of enhancement is equivalent to the "Abnormal Strengthening" secret art personally released by the Archer Director]

[Evaluation: These are the three strands of life-saving fur that the Archer Bodhisattva got by burning lives, make sure to treasure them and never use them to enhance your forged abnormal objects]

[Contamination Value: 0.1]

"I've pretty much figured it out..."

After reading the note "at the cost of three years of life" in the archive, Leon said with a somewhat complex expression:

"Actually, although the Archer Director is a bit stubborn and his words sound a bit indifferent, he seems to be quite a good person."

"Yes."

Hearing Leon's words, the red-haired director nodded and said:

"The Archer Director is upright and serious, emphasizing rules greatly. Though not as amiable as Lord Taurus, he's certainly not a bad person. The Director of Pisces is a bit quirky, but also can be trusted.

Or one could say, aside from Aquarius, among the remaining eleven directors, although they each have some small issues, most of them are still quite good."

"..."

Most of them are quite good... does that imply there are one or several that are not so good, maybe even terribly bad?

Understanding the implication of the red-haired director's words, Leon couldn't help but ask:

"Not even directors are necessarily good people... Director, has the Clean-up Bureau always been this disorganized over the years?

For instance, right now, with such a major issue of the King of Nightmares invading, just because the Scorpio Bureau director doesn't get along with you, they don't have to come over to help? Haven't any of the past directors thought about managing this better?"

"It's not that no one wants to manage it, but how do you manage it?"

The red-haired director sighed and spread her hands helplessly, saying:

"The directors don't need to be mentioned, whether they can inherit the secret arts depends on their aptitude. In the past, there were many times we couldn't even gather twelve directors, and the star palace and secret arts represented by the directors are some of the most important trump cards of the bureau.

Even if a qualified person is a rotten person, having a director is better than not having one. After all, no matter how rotten, they are still a person who won't wholly turn to the Evil Gods or similar existences that want to destroy humanity. At critical moments, they usually can step up."

"..."

In that case, that's true as well...

"As for the branch offices, they are even more troublesome."

Patting Leon's shoulder, the red-haired director continued:

"Each branch's Cleaners are basically recruited and trained little by little by the branch director personally. Most Cleaners below the branch director have never even been to the headquarters in their lifetime.

They basically have no way to contact the headquarters, and orders received are all conveyed by the branch director, so they're not familiar with the situation of the headquarters... for instance, you and I, if orders from the headquarters conflict with mine, whose would you follow?"

"That's simple."

Without any hesitation, Leon immediately replied:

"If you haven't been drinking, I'll follow yours; if you have, I'll follow the headquarters."

"..."

Ugh, should have used another example...

Seeing Leon give an answer without even a moment's hesitation, the red-haired director rolled her eyes and said in exasperation:

"In short, the directors of the branches hold considerable power and autonomy.

Among them, the Non-Zodiac Branch directors are weaker, only able to suppress ordinary True Gods with the help of the star palaces, and are relatively obedient. However, the directors of the Zodiac Branch and the directors are the same, with Leon Values between 60 and 70, and without considering secret techniques, their powers are basically equal.

And someone like me, whose max Leon Value with the star palace's blessing can break 70 points, making me slightly stronger than many directors at the Zodiac Bureau. As long as we don't openly break with the bureau rules, the headquarters can't do much, you understand?"

"I mostly understand."

"If you understand, then let's get to work."

Leaving several strands of vibrant red hair on Leon's shoulder, the red-haired director retracted her hand, stood up, and left, saying:

"Let's get going, Leon. We might need this when dealing with the King of Nightmares!"

Chapter 450: I'm Very Curious

"Take this."

Just as Leon followed the red-haired director up the stairs, entering the vault at the Virgo sub-bureau where anomalous items were stored, at a certain location in the middle of a pitch-black river flowing with countless shattered dreams, a giant crowned with a mirror-like crown and enveloped entirely in deep gray mist reached out its right hand to the elder in front of it.

"This is a pass for traveling in the Demonic Soul Abyss, allowing you to move freely in nightmares. You'll need it when dealing with the Scarlet Hair Lady."

With a peculiar, ear-piercing voice, the giant extended its slender gray palm over the river, slowly unfurling five knife-like fingers, revealing a small wooden boat as the dark nightmare swiftly dissipated from its grasp.

"Since it's a pass personally issued by the King of Nightmares..."

After observing the softly contoured, exquisitely carved little wooden boat floating slightly in the palm of the gray mist giant in sync with his breathing, the old Investigator—or rather, the Aquarius Director—smiled, then with a tense-faced female reporter, took the initiative to step on board.

"Then I'll take it with peace of mind."

After the two boarded the small boat, the gray mist giant's hand gradually dissipated, and the wooden boat lightly settled on the pitch-black river, creating dark ripple rings.

However, as if triggered by some mysterious switch, the moment the dark ripples spread, the river flowing with countless nightmares trembled violently.

Numerous human arms, adorned in various attires and forms, sprang forth like fish attracted to bait, pointing straight upward like reeds, scrambling to grab hold of the small wooden boat's edge.

"?!!"

Witnessing the eerie and horrifying scene before her, the female reporter's expression involuntarily tightened. She instinctively stepped forward, reaching out to sweep away the hands clutching the boat's edge, but the Aquarius Director caught her wrist first.

"Don't be nervous."

Gesturing for the female reporter to stay calm, the Aquarius Director straightened his slightly hunched back, and gently tapped his foot on the small wooden boat.

Immediately, a chorus of agonized cries echoed from the pitch-black lake as if touched by a red-hot brand. Those hands scrambling aboard frantically let go, fleeing back into the river's dreams.

"They're merely people trying to escape their nightmares. As long as you stand firmly on the boat, they can't come up."

After using the boat's inherent power to disperse the arms emerging from the black river, the Aquarius Director looked up at the towering giant filled with gray mist, smilingly said to the female reporter behind him:

"The King of Nightmares still has a decent reputation. At least until our cooperation is completely successful, there's no need to worry about it turning against us..."

However, once I wake up in the real world, this boat won't be as stable, so make sure to get off promptly, otherwise, who knows what might happen."

"Cackle cackle cackle~"

Upon hearing the Aquarius Director's words, the gray mist giant cackled as if hearing a particularly amusing joke. The tall gray figure twisted slightly, parting a corner of its robe-like mist, revealing countless interlinked skeletal arms inside.

"You, when you were in the Clean-up Bureau, were truly disagreeable, ruining many of my plans."

Lowering its mist-shrouded face slightly, aligning seeming eye positions on the two of them, the King of Nightmares laughed aloud:

"However, after you defected from the Clean-up Bureau, I suddenly found you more agreeable. Whether speaking or acting, it aligns well with my tastes... Hmm... how about it, are you interested in settling in the dream realm and becoming my Angel Envoy from now on?"

"I think I'll pass."

Facing the sincere invitation from the King of Nightmares, the Aquarius Director chuckled and shook his head:

"I don't mind becoming a Dream Realm Creature, but do you really dare let me become your Angel Envoy?"

"Um... you're right, indeed I dare not."

After pondering for a moment at the Aquarius Director's counterquestion, the gray mist giant slightly nodded:

"Your ambitions are too large; even the Clean-up Bureau couldn't contain you. If you became my Angel Envoy in the dream realm, I'd constantly worry about any ulterior motives you might have, and I'd never sleep well.

Forget it, consider what I just said retracted; it's better we remain partners."

"As it should be."

Nodding serenely, the Aquarius Director gazed into the giant's mist-wreathed face, calmly stated:

"Furthermore, even though I've arranged for the Virgo sub-bureau Cleaners to be redeployed, the Scarlet Hair Lady doesn't lack assistance.

The one named Leon beside her, a third-level Cleaner with black hair and eyes, remember to keep an eye on him and it's best to deal with him early, to prevent any trouble."

"A third-level Cleaner?"

Upon hearing the Aquarius Director's instructions, the gray mist giant's form flickered slightly, somehow appearing in the black river below the small boat.

The enormous head, drenched by the black river, lay silently on the stern, with the King of Nightmares' mist-covered eyes fixedly staring at the Aquarius Director's back. It curiously asked:

"He didn't lie... I'm intrigued, is such a mere third-level Cleaner really worth such emphasis?"

"Absolutely worth it."

Slowly turning around, positioning the female reporter behind him, the Aquarius Director earnestly advised:

"The reason I've fallen to collaborating with someone like you is all thanks to him. Although Leon's power isn't worth mentioning, there's something peculiar about him.

My advice is, when encountering him, never take him lightly, but don't be curious either.

If you don't want to end up in some bizarre, unexpected predicament, then act swiftly with pure force to take him out immediately, never giving him a chance to speak or manipulate!"

"Is that so? Interesting~"

After hearing the Aquarius Director's repeated emphasis, at what seemed to be the mouth area on the gray mist giant's face, an inverted crescent appeared; two rows of shark teeth, stained with thick black droplets, ground against each other with a clang, revealing a somewhat sinister, bizarre smile.

"That's not quite right, is it?"

"If you truly wish for me not to communicate with him and take severe measures to kill him, then you shouldn't be saying such things."

The enormous head drifted eerily around the boat, observing everything about the two on board, then the King of Nightmares, with a somewhat icy tone, said:

"The origin of dreams stems from one's own ignorance paired with curiosity of the world, giving birth to unfettered fantasies beyond conscious control. Curiosity is an inherent trait of all Dream Realm Creatures.

Yet, knowing full well that I can't control my curiosity, you insist on giving this advice... Now, may I assume that you actually wish for me not to kill him immediately, giving him instead a chance to turn the tables and kill me?"