

I! Cleaner 461

Chapter 461: Acquiring a Music Player

"Kill me!"

Lying in her sleeping bag, the Snow Woman gazed blankly at the chaotic night sky of the capital and said:

"The nightmare I created was destroyed by you, and the root of my existence as a nightmare was smashed by the King of Nightmares. Now I am no longer able to... What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

After taking off his thick gloves and poking the Snow Woman's face, Leon couldn't help but sigh with a bit of regret.

[Name: Damaged Nightmare (Nightmare, Element, ?)]

[Appearance: A beautiful woman in a white thin dress, indistinguishable from ordinary human females, except for her resistance to low temperatures. However, this state cannot be maintained for long. Once the overlapping parts of the dream realm and reality separate again, she will completely vanish under the true sunlight.]

[Abilities: Nightmare Messenger, Blizzard Summon, ?]

[Price: Convinced of her inevitable death, she inherently refuses to be used by you.]

[Archive: A powerful nightmare born from the folklore of the Ice Plains Nation, she has a unique snow mountain nightmare and once dominated a corner of the dream realm. After being defeated and captured by the King of Nightmares, she had to surrender the core of her snow mountain nightmare as a sign of submission.

Thereafter, along with the Sand Dune Giant Worm, Green Tide Sea Monster, Human-faced Forest Spirit, Plague Maiden, Blood Kabbalah, and Swamp King's Serpent, she was appointed as a Nightmare Messenger responsible for managing various affairs within the King of Nightmares' territory.

After the Demonic Soul Abyss reached the point of overlap, following the orders of the King of Nightmares, she actively sought out Leon Laine, a third-level cleaner from the Clean-up Bureau, attempting to eliminate him. But not only did she fail, she was instead captured and forcibly dragged out of the snow mountain nightmare.]

[Evaluation: A powerful and rare special nightmare, as a Nightmare Messenger personally appointed and bestowed with partial powers by the King of Nightmares, she could freely traverse any nightmare.

Furthermore, she could unfold a uniquely ruled nightmare world, and as long as the maximum contamination value was lower than hers, she could easily erase their memory. Anyone deceived into the depths of the snow mountain would be directly frozen to death, unless they were a True God or higher.

But after encountering Leon Laine, a third-level cleaner, being polluted by his chaotic memories and behavior, and having her nightmare core destroyed by the King of Nightmares, her nightmare world suffered severe damage.

She not only lost the ability to erase memories, but her ability to summon snowstorms was also greatly weakened. No longer able to unleash a blizzard, everyone entering the snow mountain nightmare would automatically hear an oddly joyous tune in their ears.]

[Contamination Value: 35]

It's a pity, the King of Nightmares acted so quickly. If her nightmare core hadn't been destroyed, handing her over to the bureau might have resulted in a very impressive nightmare-type anomaly item.

But after being injured her power greatly diminished, except for still being able to traverse through nightmares, her two most important abilities were abolished. Now, she can only be regarded as a humanoid music player, and it only plays that one tune...

Recalling the Snow King's brainwashing music that transcends two worlds, Leon shook his head helplessly, trying to shake the melody of "Tian Mi Mi" out of his mind temporarily, then looked around, eager to find that hard-working big dog.

Although the snow mountain nightmare was thrilling yet without danger, even managing to drag the Snow Woman out, the real MVP was that dog. If it hadn't suppressed the snowstorm, even if I didn't freeze to death deep in the mountains, I wouldn't have dared descend in a blizzard.

One must know, in the snow mountain nightmare, losing my memory about the Sheep Heart meant my Undying Body might not function properly. This dog truly saved me, and with the Life-Saving Dog not present, I must immediately show concern.

Not to mention, beyond saving lives, it also carries part of the Scorpio Bureau Chief's will, being my only channel to communicate with him.

While the Scorpio Bureau Chief is trapped by the other six nightmare messengers, unable to get out for a while, prioritizing finding the big dog to maintain contact is undoubtedly the most correct choice.

...

"Woof~"

As if knowing Leon was searching for it, the big dog, who had just run off somewhere, barked from afar.

After using the dog's bark to pinpoint its location, Leon pulled the rope again, dragging the Snow Woman full of despair in her eyes toward the direction of the bark.

"Woof woof!"

Seeing a "familiar face" approaching, the well-behaved big dog wagged its tail like a helicopter propeller, then sniffed at Leon's shoes while barking continuously.

"Woof woof woof~ Woof woof woof~ Woof woof woof woof woof woof woof~"

"..."

Oh my god!

Recognizing what the dog was "singing" in an instant, Leon's mouth couldn't help but twitch. He then left the suddenly crying Snow Woman in the song and crouched down to place the newly found thorn crown on the dog's head.

Back in the snow mountain nightmare, after losing memory, accidentally knocking off the crown meant that the Scorpio Bureau Chief was immediately silenced. Considering he was wearing a similar crown, this thing should be the "antenna" carrying his will.

"Woof woof woof~ Woof woof woof~ Woof woof... Damn it! There's finally some action!"

The situation matched Leon's guess, the thorn crown just properly placed on the dog's head, and the tune of the "Snow King March" stopped, replaced by the irritated voice of the Scorpio Bureau Chief.

"Didn't I tell you not to leave this dog?"

Seeing Leon through the dog's eyes, dressed in a strange outfit, the Scorpio Bureau Chief breathed a slight sigh of relief, then irritably scolded:

"I already told you! The Snow Woman's skill level is no less than a first-level cleaner! You're not her opponent yet! As long as your degree of being contaminated by anomalous objects doesn't exceed hers, there's still a possibility she might completely kill you!"

I didn't have the chance to tell you earlier; in the bureau's intelligence on dream realm creatures, she has records of killing cleaners carrying death immunity anomalous objects. Don't think having an Undying Body will... Hmm? You've already gotten out of the dream?"

Blinking its yellow dog eyes, after scanning the surroundings and realizing it had transformed from snow mountain back to reality, the Scorpio Bureau Chief couldn't help but be slightly embarrassed, using its dog face to clearly show a hint of awkwardness, then forcibly salvaging the situation by saying:

"You... escaped pretty quickly, but still, be careful, even if you managed to escape the dream, don't let your guard down, the Snow Woman herself is still very powerful."

"..."

"By the way, how did you escape? Where's the Snow Woman?"

"The Snow Woman's created realm wasn't large; I got out once I descended the snow mountain. As for the Snow Woman..."

At this point, Leon shifted slightly, revealing the sleeping bag and sled he was blocking, and gestured with his lips:

"There, the crying one lying on the ground."

"..."

Well... what exactly did you do to her?

Seeing the Snow Woman bound in the sleeping bag, quietly shedding tears, and seemingly suffering significant mental anguish, the Scorpio Bureau Chief's dog mouth opened and closed repeatedly, momentarily at a loss for words.

This was a nightmare that lived for at least several hundred years, existing longer than the Ice Plains Nation!

You little brat have only been encountering anomalous objects for just over two months, not even a fraction of her age! Managing to escape her grasp and not die in the nightmare would already be impressive enough, but you even freaking captured her alive?

Chapter 462: I Sell Myself

"You're... not too bad..."

Facing Leon, who not only successfully escaped the dreamscape despite being outnumbered three to one but even managed to bring the Snow Maiden out as well, the Scorpio Director dryly complimented him. However, seeming to feel a bit ashamed of being trapped by nightmares, he hesitated and explained:

"Well... I'm almost done here too, it's just a pity these six nightmares won't face me head-on.

Their task is probably to stall me, so they keep fleeing everywhere in the six layers of the dreamscape. Occasionally when I catch one and get rid of it, the other five nightmares will team up and revive it...

Anyway, you just wait outside for a bit; I'm struggling to move through the nightmares, not as fast as them. Let me think of a way to trap them all together first."

So your problem is that you can beat them, but you can't catch up with those nightmares, right?

After hearing the words from the Scorpio Director, Leon pondered slightly, then turned back to look at the Snow Maiden behind him.

Although the Snow Maiden now is a battle-damaged version, having lost her core ability to mask memories and even her ability to summon snowstorms is weakened, she was still empowered by the King of Nightmares as a nightmare envoy and possesses the ability to traverse nightmares freely.

So, if she could open a passage...

"Give up!"

Seeing through Leon's intentions at a glance, the Snow Maiden on the ground raised her slender neck, her eyes coldly and resentfully staring at Leon as she said:

"Damn human! Don't forget what you did to me! I will never help you!"

"..."

Ah, well, to be fair, I didn't really do anything excessive, did I? You were the one who troubled me first, so why are you making it seem like I was forcibly abducting a civilian girl?

Facing the Snow Maiden's deep-seated resentment behind him and the Scorpio Director's increasingly strange gaze in front, feeling like his reputation was being unjustly maligned, Leon couldn't help but argue:

"It's not like I destroyed your nightmare core, right? Other than dragging you out of the dream, I didn't do anything else, did I?"

"Now that it's come to this, what else do you want to do to me?"

Recalling the painful experience of being dragged out of the dream while crying and screaming, and her nightmare that was completely polluted by a strange melody, nearly as good as destroyed, the miserably unlucky Snow Maiden couldn't help but be overwhelmed with sadness.

...

Although nightmares are the masters of nightmares, they are not like humans who can have new dreams every night. Most nightmares have only one dreamscape they sustain — the one they were born in, grow in, and ultimately shall perish in.

For a nightmare, the importance of this symbiotic dreamscape is akin to a safe harbor for a ship, a hometown for a traveler, bearing unparalleled special significance, the bond between them tighter than the connection between plant roots and the earth.

Being forcibly dragged out of their symbiotic nightmare is akin to being rudely awakened from sleep, stripped naked, and left exposed on a busy street for a nightmare.

And this damned human, apart from dragging her out of her nightmare, has completely polluted her symbiotic nightmare. It's like not only stripping her bare on the street but also enthusiastically picking up a pen, drawing a row of wiggling turtles on her! It can be considered the ultimate humiliation for a nightmare!

"In any case, give up!"

Looking at the hateful human who destroyed everything of hers and indirectly led to her "excommunication from the nightmare realm," the red-eyed Snow Maiden defiantly vowed:

"Even if I wither under the sun tomorrow morning or get obliterated right now, I will never help you!"

"..."

Alright then...

Seeing the Snow Maiden's eyes, wishing she could devour him whole, Leon abandoned the idea of persuading her. Instead, he reached out, pointed at his cufflinks, and retrieved a roll of black snake skin, a demon skin scroll with vicious patterns, and a sharp knife.

Ding, Leon Laine used the [Unfair Snake Pact] to initiate a transaction.

Transaction Item: [Demon Register]

Transaction Target: The Snow Maiden in front of him.

Transaction Content: Herself.

"Mmm..."

After cutting a slice on his arm with the knife, Leon endured the pain and pressed the wound against the [Unfair Snake Pact], a large amount of dark red blood was forcibly extracted, quickly soaking into the snake skin scroll.

What... what is he doing?

Realizing something was amiss, the Snow Maiden on the ground was startled. Just as she was about to ask angrily, she felt a sudden weight on her chest; unbeknownst to her, the demon skin scroll Leon had taken out had been placed upon her.

"???"

Noticing that she inexplicably lost "ownership" of herself, and through the scroll that swallowed a large amount of blood, faintly linked to Leon, the Snow Maiden was instantly alarmed.

"You! What did you do to me?"

"Nothing."

Retrieving the [Plague-Infected Blood Band] and wrapping it around his arm, healing the wound he personally inflicted, a slightly pale Leon cut the rope tying the sleeping bag and then ordered:

"Get up, it's time to work."

"?!?"

As Leon's words fell, the Snow Maiden, in horror, found that no matter how much her heart resisted, her body honestly responded, quickly crawling out of the sleeping bag.

And as per Leon's instructions, she silently infiltrated the nightmare world maintained by the other six nightmares and began to locate the trapped Scorpio Director.

No! No! No!!!

...

Damn, such an anomaly exists?

Seeing the Snow Maiden, her face full of reluctance but forced to follow Leon's commands and search the nightmare world, the Scorpio Director opened his dog mouth wide in shock.

Even though the Snow Maiden in front of him seemed to have suffered serious injuries and had even left the nightmare world she maintained, appearing even weaker than an average person, her rank and weight hadn't changed, still at the level of a primary cleaner.

And Leon, a tertiary cleaner, just by consuming some blood, forcibly suppressed the Snow Maiden's will, overriding control of a being far superior to him... Isn't this snake skin scroll a bit too "unfair"?

After scrutinizing the snake skin scroll in Leon's hand, the Scorpio Director couldn't suppress his curiosity and, while the Snow Maiden was opening up the nightmare world, asked his question.

After hearing his question, Leon shook his head, his expression slightly complex as he replied:

"Actually, it's not that overpowered... I mean, the restrictions on this thing's effects are significant, not as outrageous as you think, even quite fair.

Dream Realm Creatures, strictly speaking, do not have souls; they are merely aggregates of memories and fantasies, closer to 'objects' than 'people' in our human definition, so they can be directly exchanged.

As for why I can override her control... it's because what I used to complete the 'transaction' wasn't just blood, but also the demon skin scroll that appeared on her chest."

"That thing is called the [Demon Register], an anomaly with a Leon Value of 42 points. In terms of value, it's even higher than the Snow Maiden herself, so the price I paid was actually quite steep too."

Chapter 463: Advent!

So this is how it is...

After hearing Leon's explanation, the Scorpio Chief nodded in sudden realization.

One not only needs to pay a lot of blood to weaken oneself, but also provide an abnormal object of the same level or stronger than the Snow Maiden to forcefully complete the exchange. Given this, the ability of that snake skin scroll is only decent, its tactical value far outweighing its practical value.

Hmm... I didn't notice earlier, but now on closer examination, the demon skin scroll exchanged with the Snow Maiden emits a frantic, mysterious, and dangerous aura, clearly marking it as a very powerful abnormal object.

Judging by the material and aura's strength, it's very likely that the soul of a great demon is sealed within, and the Leon Value of this demon during its lifetime could be over 50 points, making it a bit of a loss to exchange for the Snow Maiden with this thing.

"You sure have a lot of good stuff, even enough spare to use for exchanging strong abnormal objects; I doubt there's a more 'extravagant' level-three Cleaner than you."

With heartfelt admiration, the Scorpio Chief looked at the [Demon Register] in the Snow Maiden's hands and asked with interest:

"What are the abilities of this abnormal object? When infused with enough power, can it release the great demon's soul inside to help you attack enemies?"

"No..."

Upon hearing the Scorpio Chief's inquiry, Leon's face immediately turned a tad awkward.

You really are something... why do you always bring up the least convenient topics?

"It's okay, if it's inconvenient to explain, you don't have to."

Noticing Leon's slightly troubled expression, the Scorpio Chief grinned and generously laughed:

"For Cleaners, intelligence on abnormal objects is a matter of life and death, and with such a high Leon Value, it might be your ace in the hole. I was indeed a bit impetuous to ask, it's normal for you not to want to reveal it."

"..."

"Well, it's not that there's anything I can't say..."

Recalling the batch of "powerful abnormal objects" crafted under the earnest teachings of the third generation Chief, Leon awkwardly scratched the back of his head, then subconsciously turned aside, his gaze evasive as he replied:

"This thing... um... once you write your name on it, the great demon's soul sealed within will awaken and personally translate your name into demon script."

"..."

Translate names... what an odd effect.

Speechlessly smacking his lips, the Scorpio Chief couldn't resist asking:

"And then? Aside from that, what other abilities does this [Demon Register] have?"

"None..."

"..."

"None?!"

"Hmm... that's the only ability it has."

"..."

So, despite holding the soul of a great demon inside, it's only used for translating names? What kind of stupid abnormal object is this? No wonder it's used for exchanges... Wait! Used for exchanges?

Realizing what this object is meant for, the Scorpio Chief couldn't help but draw a sharp breath.

The [Wound-Transfer Puppet] he most frequently uses, although of high rank, only has a Leon Value of about thirty-something. So... if he were to confront this kid, he could directly exchange his most useful abnormal object with this ultimate piece of trash?

Damn! That's just too underhanded!

Imagining himself suddenly losing the [Wound-Transfer Puppet] in battle, forcibly swapped for an ultimate trash piece with no use other than translating names, he could only stand bewildered, clutching that object while being slammed in the face with the [Wound-Transfer Puppet]. The Scorpio Chief's scalp tingled slightly, rapidly elevating his estimate of Leon's combat prowess by a large margin.

As long as the intelligence is prepared in advance, with just the effect of this underhanded object, the chances of his branch's level two and three Cleaners winning in a skirmish with this kid reduce to zero; even a level one Cleaner might end up getting overturned!

"Well, this thing is rather... um... quite fitting..."

Grasping the concept of abandoning martial decorum across countless divides between worlds in an instant, the Scorpio Chief's mouth twitched slightly, then proactively shifted the topic:

"By the way, I've vaguely sensed your presence, currently I'm soaked in the sea. If she searches another layer lower, she should be able to... oh no!!!"

Mid-sentence, the Scorpio Chief seemed to detect something, his dog-face rising in astonishment.

Leon followed its gaze upward, discovering the Nightmare River suddenly swelling, weighing down his chief's scarlet realm until it descended.

Countless Nightmares continuously emerged from the Nightmare River, madly assaulting the defense set up by the Red-haired Chief, only to be instantly shattered into pieces, dyeing the entire night sky of the capital a vivid scarlet.

Yet, the frenzied assault of the Nightmares wasn't entirely without meaning; with their relentless rounds of fearless attacks, the sturdy crimson web rapidly deformed and sank.

The Nightmare River, blocked single-handedly by the Red-haired Chief, finally tore open the last defense before it and thoroughly poured unto the capital, along with a figure clad in a gray robe and a crown surging downward with the Nightmare River.

"Don't even think about crossing!"

Accompanied by a familiar shout, the blood-red web that had slain countless Nightmares suddenly reversed, instantly tearing the descending King of Nightmares apart, even shattering the crown on its head into fragments.

But even though the King of Nightmares was split and killed in the blink of an eye, wisps of gray mist continued to scatter from the countless Nightmares flowing in the Nightmare River, repeatedly coalescing into completeness.

And as the blood-red web reversed, millions of Nightmares previously held back outside had already seized the moment the Red-haired Chief found no time, flooding into reality en masse, madly pouncing toward the countless sleeping souls within the capital!

...

It's already unstoppable...

Watching the battle in the sky, Leon couldn't help but take a deep breath, then clenched his fist tightly.

After the Nightmare River seeped into reality, the Chief could no longer catch the King of Nightmares, and if she stopped intercepting, most likely millions of Nightmares would plunge down, causing harm seemingly worse than the King of Nightmares itself.

In such a situation, the Chief's impending choice was already easy to guess.

Sure enough, upon confirming it was impossible to obstruct the King of Nightmares any longer, the Red-haired Chief directly released her suppression of the Nightmare River, letting the gray mist giant slip bit by bit into reality, beginning to exert full force in exterminating the remaining Nightmares, while the red hairs on her shoulders started vibrating, issuing a signal to move.

According to the Chief's intention, next should be having the Scorpio Chief take over, find a way to block for a while, prevent the King of Nightmares from fully reaching reality, wait until she reduces the Nightmare count to a safe range, then come back for a rightful two-against-one duel.

Initially, there was nothing wrong with such a plan, but the Aquarius Director's [Extermination Thorn] broke the [Dream Eating Anomalous Carapace] prepared by the Scorpio Chief, following which six Nightmare Envoys collectively came down and directly trapped the Scorpio Chief himself.

Although he "bribed" the Snow Maiden to directly extract the Scorpio Chief, finding the Scorpio Chief amidst the six constantly rotating Nightmare worlds appears to require a short period, and during this time, the capital and even the whole Kingdom are defenseless, given the King of Nightmares' power, it's probably... wait?!

Watching the gray mist giant steadily advancing toward reality despite the obstruction of countless red hairs and completing an eye-level stare, Leon's spine chilled slightly, an odd notion sprouting unbidden in his mind.

Its primary target... wouldn't be me?

...

Chapter 464: Sorry, I'm Already Screwed

This strange thought, once emerged, seemed to plant itself directly, lingering in Leon's mind.

Through the increasingly thin red web, Leon strained to see the gaunt giant enveloped in gray haze, and seemingly in the shattered mirror on its crown, he vaguely saw his own bewildered face.

It's me! It came for me!

Even without any evidence to prove his guess, upon noticing the emaciated face faintly aimed at him, and the abyss relentlessly sinking in the King of Nightmares' eye sockets, Leon instinctively determined that the target was definitely himself!

"How much longer?"

Sensing the impending crisis, Leon took a deep breath, his expression tightening as he urged:

"Hurry up! Just tell me! How much longer before you bring him out!"

"..."

Upon hearing Leon's question, the Snow Woman, forced to sell herself, glared at him, then tightly pursed her thin lips, refusing to speak.

Although you have my body, you'll never have my heart!

"..."

Damn it! It seems the [Unfair Snake Pact] can only make her work, exhibit the abilities of an anomalous object, but cannot completely dominate her will and make her obedient.

Realizing the Snow Woman was unwilling to cooperate, Leon had no choice but to take another deep breath, forcibly calm himself, and desperately start analyzing the current situation.

The Scorpio Bureau chief won't emerge anytime soon, but the King of Nightmares will break free in a while.

If he stays in reality, even if he can use the [Immortal in Liquor] to save himself, he can't stop it from spreading nightmares to the sleeping ordinary people, and he might even be forcibly dragged into the dream realm and subjected to eternal enslavement.

After all, the [Immortal in Liquor] has limited duration and only ensures he isn't harmed, not necessarily exempting him from non-direct harm methods.

So there's only one way left!

...

"Stop searching!"

After slapping the back of the Snow Woman's head, Leon updated the previous command through bodily contact.

"Open the path to the nightmare and send me in first!"

"???"

"Hey! This is what you want, right?"

Under the shocked gaze of the Scorpio Bureau chief, Leon stood at the edge of the passage to the six-layered nightmare, took out the bottle filled with remaining [Dream Eating Anomalous Carapace] he had given before, shook it towards the gray haze giant in the night sky, and shouted loudly:

"If you want it, follow me, the mother worm of the [Dream Eating Anomalous Carapace] is in the dream!"

Fearing a misjudgment, that his "priority" in the King of Nightmares' heart is not as high as he assumed, to ensure it would follow, Leon decisively added:

"But you'd better hurry up, if you stay outside for more than a second after fully manifesting, I'll immediately start running, making it so you'll never find me again, and I'll toss a batch of sub-worms in the dream realm every day, then tell the other dream realm rulers who is to blame!

If you fail to clean them up even once, these worms will infinitely multiply, devouring nearly half of the dream realm in one go! As for whether I can do it or not, you can surely try!"

After provoking, under the gaze of the empty eyes of the King of Nightmares, Leon grabbed the unwilling Snow Woman and leaped down the passage leading to the six-layered nightmare!

To think of such a method... this kid is simply a born Cleaner!

Watching Leon hold the bottle containing the [Dream Eating Anomalous Carapace], threaten the King of Nightmares, then use himself as bait to jump into the six-layered nightmare, the dog-faced Scorpio Bureau chief immediately revealed a strong expression of approval.

If at the beginning, he mainly took a fancy to Leon's talent and potential, reluctantly taking a bit of interest, now he was entirely filled with admiration!

Even if the plan fails, remaining calm and rational without any rush; trapped in a deadlock, not giving up and striving to find a way to break the stalemate with a strong-willed nature; swiftly analyzing the situation, weighing pros and cons to find what might be the only answer with sharp insight and wisdom...

Apart from these already rare qualities, more importantly, he dares to provoke even when facing True Gods, and has the decisiveness and courage to use himself as bait to lure them in!

If we also consider the powerful anomalies at hand and that he's about to advance to level two in just two months, in the entire Scorpio Branch with over a hundred Cleaners, none can hold a candle to him!

Rare! Damn rare!

After thinking for 0.0001 seconds using the dog's mind, the Scorpio Bureau chief made a decision.

Damn Olivia! That lousy drunk isn't worthy of bowing to me?

Such a talent being wasted in the Virgo Branch is like dumping gold into dog poop, never quite so wasteful, instead of having Olivia bow and apologize, it's better to change the conditions, and after everything's over, have her hand over this perfect subordinate!

Well... saying perfect might be inappropriate, this kid is outstanding but does have a few flaws... for instance, he's not meticulous enough.

"Woof!"

Seeing the completely closed passage before he entered, the Scorpio Bureau chief, inhabiting a dog, couldn't help but bark loudly.

"Woof woof woof! You went in alone? Should've thought of bringing me along too! Woof woof woof!"

...

"Glug glug glug... ptooeey!"

Spitting out the salty sea water inadvertently swallowed, the corpse of the Swamp King Serpent shuddered, then suddenly opened its eyes, fearfully lifting its head from the sea.

"No... is this guy mad?"

Looking up at the higher layer of the dream realm shattered everywhere, with half its tail chopped off by some sharp tool, the body still not fully healed, the Swamp King Serpent couldn't help but complain to others full of resentment:

"Before we took on this task, didn't that damn Aquarius Director say, once the opponent knows breaking free requires a heavy price, they'll give up and stay trapped by us? Why are they going all out now?"

"Exactly!"

Hearing the Swamp King Serpent's complaint, the other four nightmares who helped revive it couldn't help but vent their grievances.

"You believe his nonsense too?"

"We might've been duped."

"Damn humans, every single one is a liar!"

"He's burned through my desert three times!"

After writhing the enormous body covered with red blisters, the Dune Giant Worm opened its circular-toothed mouth, speaking apprehensively:

"Initially, I thought it'd be safe diving deep into the sand, instead he fired it, burning the sand a hundred meters deep into glass, roasting me inside!"

"It's similar on my end..."

Raising a giant whale fin and pointing to a large black rock in the distance, the Green Wave Scourge sighed:

"Last time he drew magma from the sea floor, created a small island, and boiled me alive... what about you? How's it in your dream realm?"

Upon hearing the Green Wave Scourge's inquiry, the Bark Giant whose entire left half was charred and below the chest carbonized, couldn't help but grimace.

"I'm a human-faced forest spirit! Forest spirit! Encountering a fire user is like serving as firewood! My Miasma Deep Forest is now practically renamed Miasma Pit of Fire!"

"Sigh..."

Listening to the colleagues' endless complaints, the Plague Maiden with her belly pierced by six daggers, utterly scarred, sighed softly:

"If I knew it'd be this awful, I should've swapped with the Snow Woman initially; her task might be easeful... a level three Cleaner who just joined the Clean-up Bureau, it should've been easier for her."

Chapter 465: Going Out of One's Way

It's actually right on the Swamp King's territory!

Glancing at the scenery of the first layer of the Nightmare World, after glimpsing an endless desolate swamp, the Zealous Miss Snow, who was genuinely envied by several other Nightmare Entities, couldn't help but be overjoyed.

Compared to the nightmares of the Miasma Deep Forest with human-faced ghosts, the Mirrored Empty Blue Sea with green tide sea monsters, and the Boundless Desert with giant sandworms, the Wasteland of Reeds extended by the Swamp King, although seemingly unremarkable, is definitely the most dangerous among the six layers of dreams.

The swamps in the Nightmare World are different from reality; they don't follow the rules of the real world and instead closely adhere to the swamp imagery in the dreams. Once a swamp appears in a nightmare, it mostly represents the irreversible "fall."

Therefore, in this boundless dark swamp, aside from the towering white reeds taller than an adult male human, nothing can set down upon it, and any force applied in any direction will be drawn downward.

To exaggerate, even a wisp of breeze passing by would be irresistibly drawn down by the black swamp, with nothing able to escape, and the faster it moves, the quicker it falls, with no exceptions.

Moving in any direction, he will be gradually engulfed by the devouring black swamp amidst the desolate, far-reaching wind of the Wasteland of Reeds, and slowly dragged into the deepest part of the swamp, entangled by countless aquatic reed grass.

Damn human, you're done for!

...

Strange, she seems suddenly excited?

Seeing the Zealous Miss Snow's fresh face, unable to hide her joy as she seemed renewed, Leon couldn't help but glance at her in surprise and then asked:

"Is this the nightmare world extended by the Swamp King? Is the Scorpio Chief on this level?"

"Humph!"

"..."

Oh right, she can refuse to respond.

Seeing the Zealous Miss Snow turn away, ignoring him, Leon simply reached out, patted her shoulder, and directly ordered:

"If you're not going to say anything, just take me to find him!"

"Can't find him."

Glancing at Leon's shoe already sinking into the swamp, the jubilant Miss Snow snorted, saying:

"Outside, I was an observer, barely able to sense anything; now that you've dragged me into the dream, it's no different from being in the Swamp King's belly; the scent all around belongs to the Swamp King. How am I supposed to help you find someone?"

So can't immediately rendezvous with the Scorpio Chief?

After hearing Miss Snow's words, Leon, dropped into the tall reeds and significantly hindered in vision, directly took out the sheep's head and gave it a pat.

Desolate...

For at least a radius of about two kilometers, there are no traces of soul fire. This black-and-white swamp, where a strange wind constantly blows, seems to have no living creatures.

It seems the Scorpio Chief may not be on this level. Even if he is, he is likely far from his current location, and finding him will probably take some time.

Thinking of this, Leon couldn't help but furrow his brows slightly.

After riling up so much hatred himself just now, should the King of Nightmares escape the Chief's jurisdiction to reality, he would most likely rush into the six layers of nightmares to hunt him down.

As the Lord of Nightmares, once inside a nightmare, it feels like he's returned home; finding his position is hardly challenging, and the Immortal of Liquor may not necessarily settle the matter.

On his side, the greatest support was the Scorpio Chief trapped in the six layers of nightmares; only by meeting with him before the King of Nightmares found him would he genuinely be safe.

It seems it's time to start racing against the clock.

Clarifying what he should currently do, as the white reeds taller than a person obstructed his view, Leon immediately brought out the Witch's Broom, riding astride it.

This Nightmare World stretch is quite extensive; the soul vision of the sheep's head cannot completely cover it, seeking traces of the Scorpio Chief's activity relied solely on his naked eyes.

Considering the constant strong winds in this swamp, visibility was relatively decent—relying purely on naked eyes, it probably could be over ten kilometers... hmm? What's going on?

Leon merely ascended to less than a meter high before unexpectedly descending at an uncontrollable angle due to a strange pulling force, crashing back into the reeds with a splat.

Confounded by this unexpected development, the unconvinced Leon tried once more, even employing the airflow shield blessing of the Witch's Broom.

But the outcome this time was worse; not even half a meter up, he was pulled down headfirst by whirlwind-like forces, landing in the swamp wholly covered in mud.

Strange... could there be no-fly zones or something similar here?

"Don't struggle; you can't fly up."

Looking at Leon, whose knees had already sunk into the swamp after falling twice, the tear-streaked face of the Zealous Miss Snow couldn't help but show a satisfied grin:

"Although you dragged me out of the snow mountain, that's just an ordinary level three Cleaner. You couldn't even resist my memory masking, and now in the Wasteland of Reeds after entry, you can only be bound by its rules.

And in the Swamp King's Wasteland of Reeds, apart from these white reeds, nothing can remain on the swamp, plus the faster you move, the quicker you sink; better stay quietly!"

Nothing can remain on the swamp besides reeds?

After hearing Miss Snow's words, Leon blinked and then opened his mouth to ask:

"So, if I weave a pair of shoes from these reeds, can I stand on the swamp?"

"Uh?"

Leon's question made Snow's head spin, and her icy blue eyes blinked in confusion, causing her smile to freeze.

Only reeds can stay on the swamp, so just use reeds to weave a pair of shoes? This... this...

"Don't just stand there, start working."

Failing to get an answer from Miss Snow, Leon didn't hesitate, directly took out a knife and cut down two bundles of reeds, stuffing one bundle into the bewildered Miss Snow's hands, and then asked:

"Can you weave shoes?"

"No..."

"Then follow my steps!"

"..."

Watching Leon genuinely start weaving straw shoes by crossing the white reeds horizontally and vertically, Miss Snow couldn't help but feel indignant, regretting she had spoken up.

There was nothing she could do, the words once spoken couldn't be taken back. Bound by the Unfair Serpent Pact, she could only grudgingly mimic Leon's method, awkwardly weaving the straw shoes.

Damn it! Making me make you shoes... I'm going to make the most prickly shoes! So painful you'll regret stepping on!

Filled with malice, Miss Snow viciously yanked the reeds in her hands, wishing they would instantly transform into cacti and prick the foot about to step on them into a sprinkler.

However, just when she was biting her teeth and toiling with the reeds, Leon's hand suddenly paused, looking at her with a hint of surprise.

"Didn't you say everything besides reeds has to sink?"

Looking down at the pale feet of Miss Snow standing on the black mud, Leon couldn't help but frown and asked:

"Why can you stand on the swamp without sinking?"

"Why should I sink?"

Miss Snow snorted upon hearing, saying:

"Even without the nightmare core, I'm on par with the Swamp King as a Nightmare Messenger, naturally unaffected by the Wasteland of Reeds... you... why did you throw away the straw shoes? Why are you looking at me? Don't come here!"

Chapter 466: A Wondrous Number

Alright.

After sticking his head out from the reeds, Leon couldn't help but nod in satisfaction at the white expanse of reeds before him.

Although the view wasn't as good as flying directly, it was decent enough. At least when it came to observing the environment, there were no major issues.

"Stand still!"

Leon patted the Snow Maiden's head, unconsciously running his hand through her cold and slick hair, and then he said:

"Stop swaying! Keep steady! And... turn half a circle to the left so I can see what's going on there!"

"..."

Despicable human!

Upon hearing the command from above, the Snow Maiden's face turned red with anger, and she had no choice but to clutch Leon's mud-covered legs as she laboriously turned half a circle backward.

Sitting on my head... damn pervert! Just wait until I get an opportunity!

Abandoning the redundant reed shoes and finding a more useful new ride, Leon rode on the gritting Snow Maiden's shoulders, starting to observe the state of the Wasteland of Reeds with his naked eye.

Within this boundless and desolate marsh, aside from the black mud and white reed grass, no third color could be found. The occasional small ponds scattered around were also mirrored in the purest black and white hues.

Still can't see anything...

After directing the Snow Maiden underneath to turn a full circle without finding any irregularities, Leon couldn't help but frown again.

It seems the range of this black and white marsh is much larger than I anticipated. Forget about finding the Scorpio Commissioner, just determining his location is an extremely difficult task... What should I do now?

While Leon was at his wits' end, the moist and cold wind of the Wasteland of Reeds, carrying the earthy scent and flying reed plumes, swiftly and subtly blew over the top of the reed bed and passed by him.

Having sensed something peculiar, Leon slightly wrinkled his nose and took a deep breath.

This wind... seems a bit off in terms of scent?

Thanks to the heightened senses brought by an 8-point Contamination Value, Leon detected the anomaly in the wind. He then reached for his cuff and called out to the puppy from the mirror world.

"You're somewhat a dog, right?"

"Woof?"

"Come, use your dog nose to sniff this wind and tell me what you can smell from it."

"Woof..."

After nodding his small dog head, the puppy sniffed hard against the breeze, twitching his tiny pink nose. As the reed plumes floated by on the wind, he sneezed several adorable little sneezes.

"Woof woof! Woof woof woof!"

Burnt smell? And a very faint trace of blood?

Understanding the meaning of the puppy's barks through the Poop Scooper badge, Leon narrowed his eyes slightly, discerned the direction from where the wind was coming, and then instructed the Snow Maiden beneath him:

"Head to the right, there's something over there."

To the right...

Following Leon's instructions, the Snow Maiden, full of resentment, turned to the right. Exhausted and dripping with sweat, she couldn't help but ask while panting:

"How much... farther do we have to go?"

"With this wind speed, the scent can't spread too far... so... about two to three kilometers?"

What? Two to three kilometers?!

Already dragged out of the Snow Mountain Nightmare by Leon, then having her nightmare core shattered, and losing her double enhancement, the Snow Maiden was even weaker than an average human. If it weren't for Leon being not so robust, she might not even be able to carry him.

Hearing that she'd have to carry him another two to three kilometers, the Snow Maiden, who had transitioned to being a mount after being expelled from the dream realm by the King of Nightmares, felt her legs go weak, nearly collapsing to the ground.

Please, just kill me already! You damn pervert! If I keep living, who knows how else you'll torment me!

"..."

This doesn't seem quite appropriate... She's walking too slowly!

Feeling the Snow Maiden's notably small steps and her stability, which wobbled three times per step, Leon briefly pondered and then nimbly dismounted from her slender shoulders. In her shocked gaze, he reached out and yanked at her skirt.

"You! What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

Despite the Snow Maiden's frantic resistance, Leon tore two strips from the hem of her white dress, wrapped them around his shoes, and then tested stepping on the marsh below.

He didn't sink.

As he thought, in stories, Snow Maidens always wore white, so her outfit should be part of the "Nightmare Messenger," and similarly possess the ability to resist the nightmare world rules.

Having confirmed the feasibility of his guess, Leon immediately turned around, squatted slightly, and with his back to the startled Snow Maiden, gave an order:

"Get on!"

"..."

"Hurry up! Don't dawdle! I'm in a rush!"

"..."

You lousy human!

First ride on my neck, then tear my skirt, and still fling your face at me! Absolutely inhumane!

After cursing in her heart with the most vicious insults she knew, the Snow Maiden, who had subtly let out a breath of relief,, had a cold, slightly mud-stained face and followed Leon's order to climb onto his back, viciously wrapping her smooth little legs around his waist.

I'll strangle you!

"Climb a bit higher!"

After adjusting the Snow Maiden into a position that wouldn't hinder his running, Leon bent his back slightly and ran swiftly in the direction the puppy had indicated.

And what unfolded was far better than Leon had anticipated. After running for not even 800 meters, an immense tunnel that seemed bottomless revealed itself from the cover of the tall reeds, slanting deep into the swamp.

Looks like... some sort of giant creature emerged from it?

Noticing the trail of marks on the "ground" of the tunnel resembling scales, Leon narrowed his eyes slightly, knowing that it was likely the trace of the Swamp King Snake burrowing through the marsh.

Indeed, being a giant serpent, the swamp wouldn't bear its weight, so most of the Swamp King Snake's activity range would be underground. If the Scorpio Commissioner had conflicts with it, their battle should also take place underground.

Checking the tunnel beside him, partially vitrified by high temperatures and still retaining some warmth, and smelling the pungent yet somewhat "fresh" scent of blood, Leon immediately made a judgment.

The Scorpio Commissioner should have been here not long ago, having a fierce encounter with the Swamp King Snake underground.

But since there's no noise at all now, and the Swamp King Snake, as the "landlord," hasn't appeared since the "invasion" of the Wasteland of Reeds, they've likely left here and gone to another dream.

"Let me ask you."

After patting the Snow Maiden's thigh, Leon inquired:

"How are the six layers of dreams distributed? Are they stacked from top to bottom, then connected end to end?"

"Hmph!"

"If you keep this up, you'll get off and let me ride you instead!"

"..."

Despicable human!

Faced with the terrible threat of becoming a human mount once again, the Snow Maiden couldn't help but grind her teeth, then coldly answered with a composed face:

"Yes! And the person you're looking for has likely already killed the Swamp King Snake and gone to the lower layer of the dream!"

Already gone down?

After hearing the Snow Maiden's answer, Leon pondered for a moment and then instructed:

"Alright, we're going up! Take me to the upper layer of the dream!"

"???"

Chapter 467: Successful Descent

No way, right?

After listening to Leon's bizarre request, which could be described as "going against the grain," the Snow Maiden couldn't help but wonder:

"That person is down there. Why do you want to run upwards to find him?"

"Because I might not catch up."

After checking the massive passageway where the Swamp King Serpent emerged, Leon estimated the volume of this giant snake while furrowing his brows:

"The Scorpio Bureau Director knows I've come in and will speed up to join me as soon as possible. But I'm unsure how fast he is. If we go layer by layer downward, we might not catch up with him."

Considering the six layers of interconnected nightmare worlds, if our speed is similar to his, we might never catch up. But if we head upward instead, we'd be advancing in opposite directions, moving along this route traversing six nightmares.

Even in the worst-case scenario, where he's waiting for me in the next layer of nightmare, we'd only need to pass through five more nightmares to definitely meet him."

Two people advancing in opposite directions... a total of six nightmares...

After using her fingers to calculate, the Snow Maiden wondered:

"Why is it five? This nightmare world has six layers, doesn't it?"

"..."

Because we're currently in the first layer... it's like planting a tree every meter from the first to the sixth tree; the total distance to walk is. My younger sister who just started school wouldn't even ask such a dumb question.

The question posed by the Snow Maiden struck Leon hard. Seeing her eyes untainted by knowledge, he momentarily decided to give up on communicating with her.

Forget it, for a nightmare born from nightmares, not understanding math can be understood. Anyone, no matter how twisted, wouldn't dream of a Snow Maiden giving them a math lesson in the windswept snow-covered mountains.

And for the dream world, if there are no corresponding memories and fantasies, it's essentially non-existent. Can't figure it out? So be it. I don't have time to explain math problems to her now.

"Smack!"

"Ah!"

"Stop asking questions and hurry up with the work!"

After slapping her thigh, teacher Leon abandoned the idea of on-the-spot teaching. Swigging from a bottle snatched from the mirror world to activate the [Immortal in Liquor] for survival at any time, he sternly urged:

"Take me up to the next layer of nightmare! Quick action!"

"..."

Damn human!!!

...

"Olivia, are you still trying to stop me?"

As Leon carried the Snow Maiden through the six-layer nightmare world in reverse, the confrontation in the royal night's sky reached its conclusion.

The red net formed by [Slaughter Blood Hair] was once again shredded. Relying on the countless nightmares flowing through the Nightmare River, reconstituting a form, the Grey Mist Giant extended a withered hand and pointed at the royal city below, reminding coldly:

"From earlier until now, you've let tens of thousands of nightmares pass. Even if they are harmless low-level nightmares, it's enough for half of the royal city to experience a nightmare."

"..."

Upon hearing the King of Nightmares' reminder, the red-haired director at the heart of the scarlet domain couldn't help but press her lips tightly.

While tearing the Grey Mist Giant to shreds once more, she couldn't resist looking upwards... The pitch-black night sky had turned sieve-like, with nightmares passing through nearly every moment, descending upon the dreaming royal city.

"Listen, if you let me go now, these people only need to stay bedridden for half a month and can recover afterward."

Sensing the red-haired director's hesitation, the King of Nightmares' chilling and piercing tone echoed into her ears as he reformed his body.

"But if you continue to tangle with me and let higher-tier nightmares pass, a significant number of humans might experience mental collapse or even have their souls devoured, becoming complete empty shells... Is that really what you want?"

"..."

Indeed, it can't be delayed any longer.

Once more splitting part of the Slaughter Blood Hair, shredding high-tier nightmares attempting to make their way into reality, the red-haired director observed the nightmares above, seemingly endless and took a deep breath. Then she slowly stopped her assault on the Grey Mist Giant.

"That's more like it."

Seeing the red-haired director heed his "advice," conceding the path to reality, the Grey Mist Giant's dry lips subtly curled up, then, riding the massive, nightmare-laden Grey River, plunged into reality.

...

"Hiss..."

After departing the dream realm and entering reality, feeling the newly solidified flesh and blood under the altered world rules, the King of Nightmares took an exceptionally satisfied deep breath. His slightly hunched back began to stretch, withered chest slightly inflating.

Flesh and souls... are truly a wonderful experience...

No matter how powerful the rules of other worlds are, enabling them to house great beings, on this aspect, they cannot compare to the world humans inhabit.

A world where existence is clear and complete, material rules are stable and heavy, yet allowing extraordinary existence, acknowledging souls and spirits, is an unparalleled treasure for beings like him.

With newly formed eyes, surveying the world under the night's veil, the King of Nightmares sighed with immense delight.

The only slight disappointment is that this treasure has an owner, whose strength is amazing and unusually stingy, never allowing others to share.

Seizing the fleeting overlap of the dream and reality, just brushing against it is fine. If he actually tried to covet this treasure, the Clean-up Bureau would recall all directors within two months and directly send the sun into the dream realm, drying the entire Nightmare River along with him.

Such a pity... If humans could be just a bit weaker...

Regretfully gazing at the myriad dreams below in the royal city, the King of Nightmares withdrew his gaze tinged with longing, locking onto his primary target for this expedition.

That Leon, the level-three Cleaner, is currently in the nightmare world opened by his emissary!

With a sharp and stern look, he fixed his gaze at the dock near the royal canal. Without lingering a second longer, he urged the pitch-black Nightmare River, rushing towards the six-layered nightmare unfolded layer upon layer.

Whether it's that odd memory capable of polluting nightmares or the [Dream Eating Anomalous Carapace] that once devoured countless dreams, they pose a great threat to him.

Eliminating even one of these would justify the risk of entering the real world and clashing with the Zodiac Bureau's director. With a chance to eradicate both threats, he certainly couldn't pass it up!

Carrying intense murderous intent, the King of Nightmares extended his emaciated arm and embraced the violently shaking six-layer nightmare.

Then, the Grey Mist surrounding him silently dispersed, sheltering his immense body, slowly and irresistibly pressing into the nightmares he cradled.

Chapter 468: The Dead City and the Desert

It's here!

When the giant of gray mist hugged the six-layer nightmare and tried to squeeze in, even without any obvious omens, everyone in the nightmare world almost simultaneously sensed the presence of the King of Nightmares.

If one had to describe this sudden peculiar feeling, it's like a rabbit grazing noticing the shadow of an eagle cast on the ground, or like drifting in a small boat on the sea and seeing a massive shadow approaching from beneath the waters.

Even though there was no real crisis yet, just the sense of impending danger was enough to make one's heart sink suddenly.

If the King of Nightmares arrives first, it might be too late to rescue anyone...

Feeling the sudden liveliness around, as if something was being welcomed, the director of the Scorpio Bureau standing atop a dust-filled tower slightly frowned, and directly raised a hand to snap the neck of a pale puppet beside him.

"Crack!"

Along with the crisp sound of bone cracking, a scream emerged from a frail woman in the crowd trying to flee the gate below the tower. Her scarred, thin neck tilted to one side simultaneously with the puppet's pale neck.

Strangely though, even with her neck suddenly broken, the frail woman didn't die. Instead, hunching her shoulders to support her head, she sprinted towards another group of sickly-looking people.

But before she could take two steps, a blood-dripping slender sword brutally pierced through her chest, knocking her to the ground and nailing her down permanently.

With her death, the tower beneath the Scorpio Bureau director began to twist eerily.)

Next followed the scattered and terrified retreat of the crowd; doctors in black robes wearing bizarre bird-beaked masks, shouting loudly; soldiers behind wooden barricades poking at the escapees with long poles;

The filthy streets, strewn everywhere with the dead bodies; and outside the city, the ever-burning cremation ground with billows of white smoke, burning countless bodies of the plague victims...

This city being dragged into death by the plague, along with the death of the frail woman, started to twist on its own like a reflection on a lake distorted by a stone thrown in.

The next layer of nightmare should be the desert of the sandworms, right?

After killing the epidemic girl responsible for "guarding" this nightmare layer and temporarily breaking the nightmare called "City of Plagues," the Scorpio Bureau director, with a weary expression, squinted at

the yellowish, scorching layer below the dead city, and sighed regretfully, stepping into the Boundless Desert below with a last glimmer of hope.

Knowing that Leon had jumped into the dream proactively, he had immediately plunged downwards with all his strength, crossing three nightmare layers in an attempt to meet up with him as quickly as possible, but ultimately was a step too late.

Unlike him, who needed to slay the corresponding world's nightmares to escape, the King of Nightmares, as the Lord of Nightmares, could freely traverse all nightmares without hindrance.

Thus, the moment it touched the six-layer nightmare, it had already found Leon's position, able to move directly without obstruction and reach the nightmare he was in almost instantly.

And facing the King of Nightmares, intensified by both the dream world and the Demonic Soul Abyss, and fighting on its own turf in the nightmare, even he, without the Star Palace's blessing, would face a grim battle.

As for Leon, with his level three Cleaner capabilities, no matter how many strategies he had left, he would probably shatter upon contact; for the King of Nightmares to snuff him out would be easier than squashing a bug.

Such a promising talent... sigh... this is indeed the fate of a Cleaner.

The more stubborn and risk-taking a Cleaner's personality is, often the greater their potential, and the faster they grow stronger. There was even a record of someone being promoted all the way to bureau chief in just five years.

Sadly, the more outstanding such talents are, the more easily they act imprudently due to excessive emotions, prematurely perishing during a task incompatible with their anomalous items, with few surviving in the end.

Someone like Leon, who, even with intense emotions, could maintain calm and rationality, only needed steady progress, patiently honing his skills for another ten to twenty years. His future would be limitless.

Yet Olivia, that damned woman, failed to fulfill the responsibilities of a bureau chief, allowing a level three Cleaner to get involved in such a True God-level task, it's really...

Shaking his head with displeasure, the regret-filled Scorpio Bureau director wielded the slender sword in his hand, slicing open the exterior of the yellowish dream below, actively entering the Boundless Desert belonging to the sandworms.

"Boom!"

After leaving the damp and cold, rain-shrouded City of Plagues and entering the desert under the blazing sun, the scorching waves hit like a sauna, instantly evaporating any remaining moisture on him.

Once he adapted to the temperature change, through the heat waves that distorted the horizon, a familiar figure from afar quickly captured his attention.

Is that... Leon?!

Observing Leon carrying a snow woman on his back desperately fleeing on the dunes miles away, along with the gray mist giant appearing behind him, the Scorpio Bureau director's eyes widened suddenly.

Damn it! Why, of all places, in the vast Boundless Desert? It's too far away!

Upon spotting Leon and the King of Nightmares, the Scorpio Bureau director activated some anomalous item, letting his slender body fall backward as his shadow elongated infinitely, stretching over a thousand meters in an instant until halted by a huge sunken sandpit.

Then, the elongated shadow shot back, and when the director stood up again, he had already crossed thousands of meters, directly standing by the massive sandpit.

Got to catch up! Maybe it's not too late yet!

No time to brush off the sand on his body, the rising Scorpio Bureau director was about to activate the anomalous item again to move towards Leon but suddenly realized neither the gray mist giant nor Leon was visible, nothing was on the distant dune.

So, it was a mirage...

Gazing at the deserted dunes afar, the director's face sank completely.

This mirage-like phenomenon, just like the plague zones in the City of Plagues or the deep mountains of the snowy mountain range, is a "feature" of the Boundless Desert nightmare.

Its origin lies in the scales shed from the sandworms, refracting an illusory light through the dream, letting people see what they most desire to see at present, luring them to move towards that seemingly reachable goal.

However, once enticed by the mirage, they would continually dehydrate on the move, eventually collapsing in the vast endless sand sea, becoming a dry corpse buried by yellow sand, experiencing the reality they see but never reaching it.

"Phew..."

Exhaling a breath of disappointment, the director turned back to the path, activating the anomaly used for traveling again.

Mirage is a mirage...

Judging by Leon's surroundings in the mirage, he should also be in the Boundless Desert, but with such an enormous area, spanning all six nightmares and more, there's no time to reach him.

Since he couldn't save him, he might as well use the dune mirage to witness his end, which would be his tribute as a Cleaner to a brave fellow Cleaner.

With such thoughts, he elongated his shadow, returning to the position he entered the Boundless Desert from, and solemnly watched the location where the dune mirage appeared, yet...

"Huh?"

Watching the mirage, where Leon punched the King of Nightmares' toe, causing both him and the gray mist giant to twist their faces and scream in pain, the Scorpio Bureau director's eyes opened to their limits, almost bulging out.

"Huh??????"

Chapter 469: Forced... to...

"Ah!!!"

Unaware that someone was watching his live broadcast, Leon suddenly fell to the ground with a thud. His forehead throbbed with veins, and sweat poured profusely from his body.

It's killing me!!!

Seeing the gray mist giant stagger after being punched by Leon, Leon, who usually liked to press his advantage, held back from throwing another punch for the first time. Instead, he staggered to his feet, grabbed the stunned Snow Maiden, and ran.

"You... you..."

After staggering a few steps, the Snow Maiden, who thought Leon would be immediately taken down, looked back bewildered at the King of Nightmares whose face was twisted in pain, then couldn't help but turn back, stammering:

"It... you... just that punch? And it just?"

What do you mean "just" that punch? That punch almost took my life, okay? It only stunned him for barely two seconds!

Watching the [Hand of Screams], its surface covered in hair-thin barbs glistening in the sunlight, Leon's cheeks twitched fiercely.

This strange item, crafted by the third generation director using Aquarius Director's dual soul, not only suppressed the True God's divine flesh, inflicting damage.

But also instantaneously injected soul poison into both Leon and his opponent, keeping their souls and wills clear, inducing unparalleled, terrifying pain, claiming to briefly resurrect the soul of the dead.

Leon originally thought, thanks to the invincible state given by the [Immortal of Liquor], he could exempt himself from this dreadful pain. So he wore it and gave it a try, intending to block the King of Nightmares.

It turned out that because the soul poison didn't cause physical harm, but instead helped maintain clarity, it was considered a "self-benefit", not being exempted by the invincible state of the [Immortal of Liquor].

This poison-laced punch almost took half of his life. If not for the soul poison's ability to maintain clarity, he might've fainted from pain right on the spot!

...

Damn... what on earth was that punch?

Even Leon, who was prepared mentally, felt his scalp prick with the venom of the [Hand of Screams]. The King of Nightmares, without any psychological preparation and having just gained a physical form, suddenly suffered this excruciating punch, feeling his soul falter.

If his True God level soul wasn't weighty enough, along with the clarity-inducing aspect of Thoroughwort Nettle's poison, he would've been separated from his physical form, his soul ejecting in pain.

Actually... having both a body and soul might not necessarily be a great thing...

The King of Nightmares, having just acquired the coveted flesh and soul and been dealt a severe blow, absurdly entertained such thoughts. His newly acquired body flickered.

No, no, no! I can't think like this! I mustn't think this way!

Noticing his thoughts going a bit haywire and his physical stability wavering, the King of Nightmares steadied himself. His eyes, concealed in gray mist, narrowed slightly.

Can't fully trust the words of Aquarius Director!

Following his advice, the King decided against fancy tactics, revealed himself, and launched a direct attack, wanting to rely on pure physical strength to crush this dangerous Cleaner with a single blow.

But after a few blows, the opponent was still lively, even donning strange gloves emitting the aura of Aquarius Director, giving him a nasty hit, suppressing his divinity for a moment.

Conspiracy! There must be a conspiracy!

Though Aquarius Director wished for this Cleaner to die, he also didn't want someone who could control the cleaner, alive. For him, both the King and the Cleaner being mutually destroyed was the most perfect outcome, with killing the King perhaps an even higher priority than killing the Cleaner!

Must play it safe...

Recalling the outrageous pain he suffered just now, the gray mist giant, not wanting to experience it again, decisively ruled out bodily pursuit, choosing instead to remain still, extending his hand towards the fleeing figure in the distance.

Next moment, blood ran as spears and swords filled the scene.

As a small piece of skin peeled off the King of Nightmares' arm, Leon's winter coat twisted and morphed into a set of ancient armor, while the scorching sands underfoot bizarrely turned into a battlefield littered with corpses, echoing with tumultuous cries.

Dozens of robust armored soldiers formed an array in front of Leon, raising spear-like weapons under the commanding shouts, stabbing towards his face, chest, and abdomen.

"Puff, puff, puff, puff!"

Faced with the sudden change in scene, Leon instinctively dodged, but it was too sudden. As the bloodied spear tips drew closer, the sound of blades cutting through flesh rang out, causing Leon to pause slightly...

Then there was nothing.

As the spear tips pierced the armor and touched Leon's skin, the soldiers wielding them dissolved into nothing in the [Immortal of Liquor]'s Drunken Life, Dreamy Death state, along with the battle cries and the battlefield, returning once more to the rolling sands.

Even forgetting he possessed the strange item, this bizarre invincible state wasn't interrupted?

Chapter 470: Forced...to..._2

Staring at Leon, who had changed into armor, the gray mist giant noticed he still hadn't sustained any damage. It pondered briefly, then raised its right hand and forcefully grabbed its left arm, which extended out of the mist.

"Crack!"

With a sound like shattering glass, the sharp nails with hooks at the end sliced through the shriveled flesh of the King of Nightmares' left arm. An immense amount of murky, frenzied nightmares peeled off like flesh, worming into the gray mist beneath the giant's feet like swimming fish, shaking their heads and tails as they pursued Leon.

Facing this "physically robust" Cleaner, the best solution was to directly consume him, using the countless nightmares within its body to erode his spirit, bring about the collapse of his will and the dispersal of his soul, leaving him an empty shell devoid of knowledge and awareness.

But considering his memory full of strange contamination, directly consuming him might carry the risk of being polluted by him, so it was necessary to move this process of erosion "outside," thus even if contaminated, it could be discarded directly!

...

The nightmare descends again.

The armor on Leon twisted and transformed, turning into a lightweight hunting outfit. The desert in front turned into a dark forest, and a giant bear with a pale white crescent on its chest stood up, swinging claws seven or eight inches long at him.

It was a warrior's nightmare earlier, and now it's the hunter's nightmare?

Listening to the giant bear's fierce roar, smelling the beast's stench surging with the night wind through the forest, Leon knew this thing couldn't break the Immortal in Wine, so he simply took the bear's claw to his face, crashing into the giant bear and shattering it into countless bubbles. He then turned his head and shouted to the Snow Woman behind him:

"Can you still use your ability? If so, keep going quickly!"

"Huh? I can still use it..."

Also now in hunting gear, the Snow Woman asked somewhat bewildered upon hearing this:

"But my ability was given by it, using it in front of him will definitely be interrupted, and you just got to this level, won't you look for the Scorpio Bureau Chief?"

"Not looking!"

Having changed into a miner's clothes, Leon slammed through a collapsed mine passage, dragging the Snow Woman, face covered in coal dust, continuing to run forward, urging:

"This desert is too vast! Even if he's on this level, there's no way to find him! Quickly take me to the next level!"

"..."

Ugh... seems like he can still struggle a bit longer.

During the conversation, they switched into sailor outfits, and after Leon dragged her through the illusion of a submerged ship nightmare, the Snow Woman, unable to resist the snaky scroll, listlessly exhaled a small breath of icy air filled with ice crystals, quietly surrounding the two of them.

"Snow Woman?"

Noticing this scene as the two were about to separate from the Boundless Desert, the King of Nightmares in the distance furrowed his brows, and in the next moment, a hoarse, low voice eerily reached them.

"You intend to betray me?"

?!!!

No... my shirking has been quite obvious, right? Why are you getting anxious?

Faced with the stern questioning of her former boss, the Snow Woman's figure halted slightly, a hint of panic emerged in her ice-blue eyes.

"I..."

"Although I crushed your nightmare core, I let you go through the previous dozens of nightmares, which can be considered sufficiently lenient."

The sandstorm-filled world slightly "folded," transporting the gray mist giant in front of them, and the King of Nightmares looked down on Leon and the Snow Woman, squinting coldly, saying:

"Having snatched a life thanks to my mercy, you actually plan to release my target right in front of me? Is this how you intend to repay my kindness?"

"..."

Ah, this, is there not a possibility that I am not doing this of my own volition?

As the King of Nightmares slowly raised its finger, understanding that her former boss was indeed about to strike her down, the Snow Woman hurriedly opened her mouth and explained somewhat frantically:

"Are you pretending to be your mom?"

"?"

"?!!"

No, that's not what I meant to say!

Realizing that the words coming out of her mouth were completely contrary to what she was thinking, the Snow Maiden's mind buzzed, and she hurriedly explained:

"I've had enough of you for a long time!"

"You always act so high and mighty, as if you're something special, but in reality, you're just trash, you know that?"

"???"

"You do nothing all day, just hiding in that damn black sewer of yours, not daring to take a single step outside. I've never seen anyone as cowardly as you! You're the disgrace of the dream realm!"

"All the dirty, hard, and tiring work is thrown to us nightmare messengers, while you hide at the back, making us stall the Zodiac Bureau's Director of the Clean-up Bureau... where's your face?"

"!!!"

"Today, I'll go against you! Can't I? If you're angry, hold it back!"

"If you're so capable, go ahead and capture me back and torture me for ten thousand years! If you can do that, if I so much as utter a word during those ten thousand years, I'll be your granny!"

"..."

After arrogantly finishing these words, looking at her former boss's face as dark as the bottom of a pot, the Snow Maiden awkwardly turned her neck, her face turning pale as she glanced in Leon's direction.

As expected, that damned thing was holding that damned serpent-skin scroll, giving her an exceptionally friendly smile. Even though he said nothing, not even mouthing a single word, the Snow Maiden instinctively understood the meaning behind that smile.

'Work hard, after all, you wouldn't want the King of Nightmares to capture you back and torture you for ten thousand years, right?'

"..."

Great, the spot for the [Unfair Serpent Pact] might free up, and the new employee seems to be infused with adrenaline, working much harder than before.

Looking at the Snow Maiden, who used to put in the bare minimum and stall as much as possible, now puffing her cheeks in anger and blowing cold air desperately, Leon's lips slightly curved up, giving her an encouraging smile, which was only met with her angry glare of despair.

Glare all you want, as long as you work diligently, you can glare as much as you like! Whether or not we can escape from this desert depends on you!

With a careless smile, Leon picked up the unfortunate Snow Maiden sideways and continued to flee rapidly through various nightmares.

The effect of the [Unfair Serpent Pact] is quite limited, allowing only for the "use" of the Snow Maiden, but it doesn't make her genuinely acknowledge him, nor can it compel her to betray the King of Nightmares' information and weaknesses.

But the King of Nightmares can!

As long as the Snow Maiden can't explain, confirming the "betrayal" and "switching sides" facts, and with hatred maxed out, blocking her retreat, as long as she doesn't want to be captured and tortured for ten thousand years, she'll have no choice but to demonstrate her subjective initiative and work doubly hard.

...

"Don't tell me you really think you can escape?"

The King of Nightmares, unaware that Leon was silently coercing the Snow Maiden to fully side with him, either didn't notice or didn't care.

Watching Leon traverse through various nightmares, having changed over a hundred sets of clothes, the gray mist giant continued to spill new nightmares, trying to wear down Leon's spirit, all the while speaking coldly:

"The nightmare is my domain. No matter how far you run, it's just a single step for me. You can't escape."

That I know, after all, you've already demonstrated it once. I'm not an idiot.

Without responding to the King of Nightmares' provocation, Leon, using the Immortal of Liquor's ability, shielded the Snow Maiden, allowing her to "print tickets" without disturbance, while glancing at the long trail of footprints he left during his escape.

It should be about enough...

After calculating the number of footprints, Leon raised his right hand, grasping the [Dream Intruder] on his chest, then, to the Snow Maiden's astonishment, turned back to charge toward the gray mist giant.

Hmm? What does he intend to do?

Not understanding Leon's purpose in charging back, but knowing it would hurt immensely if his fists connected, the King of Nightmares frowned and immediately prepared to withdraw.

However, at this moment, the archer mark on the back of Leon's right hand slightly glowed, and one of the three small arrows suddenly shot out from his hand, stabbing into the [Dream Intruder].

In the King of Nightmares' astonished gaze, the footsteps Leon left during his escape began to shine with the same red glow as the [Dream Intruder].

Following this, from the footprint closest to the King of Nightmares, a faintly visible Leon stood up, raising his right hand adorned with the [Hand of Screams], mirroring the real Leon from a distance with a punching motion, striking the giant's toe before disappearing on the spot.

Then the second, third, fourth... Over a hundred dreamscape Leons, fortified by secret techniques, emerged from his previous footprints, one after another swinging punches.