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The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 151

In the end, Annan wasn't clear why Amos wanted to steal Joseph's curse vessel.

“But since you survived, it probably means that Amos died in the end?”

Annan appeared curious and ignorant. Finally, he said in an innocent voice, “What happened back then?”

Judging by the look of Joseph he saw on the live broadcast, Joseph Buckel was not as peaceful as now.

When Joseph was young, he was a fierce hunk who could perfectly play Jason with a mask and roamed Travis County, Texas, with a chainsaw on his back.

Annan did not doubt that if Amos appeared before Joseph, this brave and righteous Brother Sledgehammer would smash his head with a sledgehammer without mercy.

No matter how tough Amos' head was, could it be tougher than a hammer?

“How Amos died, in the end, is ridiculous.”

Joseph's expression is more complicated, “I don't know if you have read the newspaper of the year. It was mentioned that the police arrested Amos.

“Have you heard about this? It was quite famous back then.”

“Yup,” Annan replied. This was what Salvatore showed him in the newspaper.

“Then I think you should know that at the time, the police station was 'seeking assistance from relevant industry insiders.'”

Joseph chuckled and pointed his finger at himself, “I'm ashamed to say that I'm the relevant person in the industry.”

You're indeed relevant and indeed in the industry.

So Annan was convinced and nodded.

He asked, “So, what happened?”

“The scene in that nightmare was distorted. I went along with the public security bureau. Indeed, we entered from the main entrance.

“Although I don't know where he got the information, he ambushed us.”

Joseph said in a deep voice, “We were in a group of 13 people and five professionally trained police dogs.

“Besides Sergeant Hiram and me, there are also former police chief Job Boro who was demoted later on because of the Elle disappearance case, five police officers with guns, and five police officers with shields.

“There are only two Transcended in the team, Sergeant Hiram and me. But we are both Silver Rank Transcended. I'm an Edict Wizard, and he is an Occult Bond Envoy. Our combination is powerful.”

Annan had read about the “Occult Bond Envoy” profession in Salvatore's books.

This was a Silver Rank's hidden profession.

Those in this profession would be most likely an officials.

Because to the average person, the Transcended ability of this profession was meaningless.

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Its value came from “bonds.” The Occult Bond Envoy could transfer the energy through the bonds as long as the targets were within his field of vision and held the special emblem made by them.

To put it simply, the Occult Bond Envoy could act as a transit point to connect the mana pools of nearby wizards, allowing them to borrow mana from other allies. He could even spread the injuries suffered by a certain friendly unit to nearby allies; Or transfer the injuries of everyone around them to an ally.

The Occult Bond Envoy could aid the front liners charging toward the enemy by borrowing the physical strength of the soldiers in the back. He could concentrate the self-regeneration of a large number of ordinary soldiers to heal a target's injury quickly and even allow someone to bear the fatigue of everyone. Of course, this applied to curses as well.

The cost of this ability did not need to be fully paid by “allies.”

The Occult Bond Envoy could forcibly tie his emblem on the conscious prisoner of war and used the prisoner either as a battery or a shield.

It was a relatively rare but powerful profession under some circumstances.

In a one-to-one fight, the Occult Bond Envoy would be pretty weak. Besides their Silver Rank stealth ability, they had no transcended abilities that could be utilized in combat. Moreover, their transcended abilities need to be “in field of vision” to use, so they certainly had to sneak at the team's backline.

However, the Occult Bond Envoy was efficient in teaming up with Edict Wizards, known for its comprehensive capabilities, strong control, and superior team buffing ability. By adding a bunch of cannon fodder police officers, the team could be effective in many situations.

Indeed, at least half of the ten police officers were positioned as cannon fodder to sustain Joseph's damage.

“However, shortly after entering the hall, the chandelier in the middle suddenly smashed down. One person was smashed to death before he could dodge away, and one person was seriously injured. However, after a police dog search, we found something strange about his paintings and the approximate location of the basement.

“However, although we knew the location, we could not enter the secret passage leading to the basement for the time being. So we sent a police officer and asked him to urgently call some Black Fire and explode the secret passage directly.”

“Later, we saw him between the second and third floors. After our warning shots went to no avail, we continued our pursuit. But considering his identity and reputation at the time, we didn't dare to shoot him directly. Hence, we decided to catch up and subdue him.”

At this point, regrets flooded Joseph.

He shook his head and sighed, “If the sheriff were more decisive and shot at that time, things would have gone better.”

“When we chased Amos down to the fourth floor, he activated an unknown curse vessel. Five bullets came from the future. The bullets were fired out of my sight.”

“I was shot together with four other police officers. Among them was the former police chief, Job Boro. Two of them were shot at the lethal spot and died immediately. Although the remaining two were shot in the shoulders and arms, they were also severely cursed. As you may have already known, ordinary people couldn't bear any curse.”

Unfortunately, three police officers died. The two police officers also went crazy on the spot because the scene was too cruel, and they suffered a substantial mental shock. They then died of injuries a few days later.

This news report came to Annan's mind.

Two of the three police officers should have been killed by “Time Stopper Eye's gramophone.” The chandelier should kill the remaining one.

As for the two remaining police officers who “went crazy on the spot,” the turbid blood bullets must have hit them.

“By then, three people among the team are already dead, right? But I remember the report said that there are five casualties.”

Annan asked, “Except for them, did anyone else get injured afterward? What is that 'colored flesh ball'? Is it that deity's son?”

Joseph was silent for a moment, and he nodded.

His expression was a little gloomy.

Joseph whispered. His voice became a little low, somewhat ironic, but also a little scared, “Of course, we have the Occult Bond Envoy.”

“Since there are two people who will die sooner or later already, how will the Occult Bond Envoy let the others further get hurt?”

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Why in the face of the Venerated Skeleton, only five people died?

Why did those two people who “suffered a huge mental shock and went crazy on the spot” die because of “fatal injuries” later?

Did it mean that their brain was too severely damaged? Or they knew too much and were secretly executed?

These were the questions that puzzled Annan for a long while.

At this moment, Annan finally had an idea of it.

It was because the two people who were hit by the turbid blood bullets suffered the injuries in everyone else's place.

“So, you were also...”

“Yes.”

Joseph nodded, “The bullet suddenly appeared in front of me. It penetrated my chest and went behind me. Then, as if time-reversed, the bullet was sucked out from my back.

“At that time, Amos stole my curse vessel. Then, two people who were hit in the shoulder passed out. Then, Amos appeared behind me and took my bracelet directly.

“But since he stole my bracelet, Hiram, who came later on, managed to hit his abdomen with a throwing knife. Then I fainted.

“In terms of the subsequent development, Amos called his 'painters' to cover him, and the police officers were stalled in place. Fortunately, Amos had no medical knowledge. He plugged out the flying knife before escaping. This resulted in heavy blood loss. He could no longer escape the police dog's pursuit, although he did not shake off the police's pursuit in the first place...”

The wizard sighed.

“I can survive now is all because Hiram arrived in time and saved me. A police officer who was also hit by a bullet in the abdomen was not saved, but he did not die immediately. With the delay in his death, Hiram managed to transfer my injury to him in time.”

I see. Annan came to a realization.

Turbid blood bullets hit Joseph's heart, but he was able to survive because of Hiram's emergency 'heal.'

Without this healing, Joseph must have faced his demise already.

“What happened later?” Annan asked.

Hearing that, Joseph's expression became a little strange.

“Later...”

He was silent for a moment and then replied, “When we get rid of the entanglement of those magical paintings, Amos has run out of sight.

“But for some reason, he ran up after trapping us. In this way, even if we were trapped for a long time, he would not be able to run away. Moreover, his internal organs were damaged. Worse still, he didn't have the ability to heal at all.

“To be on the safe side, we still maintained the formation and carefully searched upwards, floor by floor. However, we had not encountered other traps since then. Until we reached the top floor and went up to the roof...”

Having said that, Joseph paused slightly.

He spoke softly, “We saw Amos's corpse.”

...Corpse? Annan was also stunned.

“Because of the bleeding in the internal organ?”

“Surely not.”

Joseph replied positively, “From the time we launched our attack on the fourth floor until we found Amos's body, it was more than half an hour. But his body had stayed dead for a while.

“From what we investigated, Amos was already dead when we were still on the fourth floor.”

Buckel said slowly, “The pistol in his hand still had the last bullet. The cause of death was that he was hit in the heart by a turbid blood bullet. But the problem is that the shot came from the back. So, we can only infer that his accomplices killed him. My curse vessel disappeared at that time too.

“After that, we encountered the monster burning with colored flames. It was terrifying. When it did not attack, none of our attacks could hit it. When it attacked, those who got hit would have their consciousness eliminated. During the battle, the victims lost consciousness, lost memory, and could not struggle or resist.

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“Fortunately, we have many people. After a tough battle, we used those two companions to share any fatal damages to defeat it barely. But we couldn't kill it. We could only seal it.

“Fortunately, its desire to attack wasn't strong. Under our attacks, it was just crying. When it attacked us, it did not specifically attack the vital points. We learned that its name was 'Angelo.'

“We think it should be the unborn baby in Elle's belly.”

At this point, Joseph's voice was a little hoarse.

Joseph choked with emotion. He cleared his throat lightly before he could continue, “We sealed Angelo at Freezing Water Port. As for where... even I don't know. To prevent this from happening again, we have to stop Soul Snatch Wizard from searching our memory in our soul or revealing it in the nightmare after our death. Hence, the police chief and I were responsible for half of the seal each. I was responsible for shattering its soul and burying it in the ground. The police chief was responsible for hiding its body. “

“...So, the curse of the Freezing Water Port is the nightmare formed after Angelo's death?”

Annan couldn't help but ask.

“Yes, Angelo is the curse spreading on this land, but it has not completely died. The process of purifying this nightmare is the process of slowly eliminating it.”

Joseph grinned bitterly, “It's fine if you say I'm weak. Since then, I no longer have the decisiveness of my youth.

“I know that only by purifying the curse entangling Angelo can this matter be ended entirely, and Elle's resentment can return to the ground. But I...

“...I'm still a little reluctant. After all, it is the last proof that 'Elle' has survived.”

He sighed softly, “I can't say I don't care. I know that it's good for Elle, Angelo, and Freezing Water Port to purify the nightmare. I just... I hope I can take a glance at Elle in the nightmare when I want to drink.”

After listening to Joseph, there was a brief moment of silence in the room.

Annan stared at the man.

Feeling Annan's gaze, Joseph sighed and turned away without a trace.

On the one hand, Joseph wanted to let Elle rest in peace, killing the “Angelo” carrying his blood. He didn't want Elle to stay in the world like a ghost, full of resentment. He also knows that nightmares are nothing but remnants of past events, not real history, nor another world...

But on the one hand, he still had an obsession with this past and couldn't forget it.

Annan once asked Salvatore.

The police chief had already left Freezing Water Port. It seemed that he was promoted in the second year after the incident ended, but it wasn't clear where he went.

At Freezing Water Port, the last survivor who had experienced the events of that year should be Joseph.

If he wanted to, it must be easy for him to purify this nightmare by himself.

As for the nonsense that “the vessel wasn't with him, and couldn't get power after purifying the nightmare,” should be excuses for him to lie to himself.

The curse of 'can't travel far on him' and the sealed artifacts he lost were not completely unsolvable events. With his position as the wizard tower mentor, if Joseph utilized his connections, he wouldn't be trapped in the Freezing Water Port for forty-five years.

—Unless he didn't want to leave.

He wanted to watch the nightmare being purified, but he didn't want to do it himself.

He didn't prevent others from purifying nightmares, but he did not take the initiative to help others.

Because he wanted to end it all while he still couldn't forget it all.

Joseph didn't want to say goodbye to all of this.

Annan sighed.

Such a pathetic man.

Such a poor father.

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“I still have one thing which I want to confirm your opinion.”

Annan's tone was tender.

He asked solemnly and seriously, “You shouldn't mind us purifying this nightmare, right?”

Indeed, Annan was the absolute leader. To put it simply, Joseph was the “baker,” and Annan was the “feudal lord.” But, Joseph Buckel was undoubtedly Annan's senior despite Annan and Joseph both being Transcended wizards.

If Joseph didn't like that, then Annan would try his best to respect his opinion... at least leave with him a couple of times to purify the nightmare.

After all, this meager count wouldn't be able to nurture many players. But, for Joseph, it was the “photo album” he used to reminisce about the past in his later years.

Although this album was a bit cruel to him...

Hearing Annan's questions, Joseph glanced over in surprise.

Then, he smiled gently.

Annan noticed. This was the first time Joseph smiled from the heart bottom after he entered the house.

“Of course, I don't mind. On the contrary, I will be grateful to you.”

Joseph just shook his head and waved his hand weakly, “I just can't lift my spirit... Otherwise, as early as forty years ago, I would have purified it. Then, I will write a letter to Treasure Diamond Island to relieve the curse on my body and leave this place.

“But I don't know exactly what I've been busying for these years. I have seen too many partings from life and death. Either it is struggling in an infinite nightmare, or it is just watching the suffering of others in reality.

“Now, I don't want to continue anymore. I am a little tired, a little confused, and... I don't know what to do anymore.”

Joseph said, looking at Annan.

The dark green pupils were deep and tired.

“Feudal lord, I don't want to be a Transcended anymore. So if you find my vessel, please don't return it to me.

“Of course, feel free to ask me any questions you have, even if it's about magic. I will be here all the time, and I like the life of ordinary people quite a bit.

“And if you want to purify this nightmare completely... My suggestion for you is to find out the real cause of Amos's death. The cause of Amos's death and the whereabouts of my curse vessel are the remaining mysteries at the moment.”

The cause of Amos's death...?

Annan immediately had an idea after hearing Joseph's words. He thought of the Time Stopper Eye's gramophone curse vessel.

Neither the police nor Joseph knew the effects of the curse vessel, but Annan knew.

The gramophone allowed the user to enter the past and change what had happened. In addition to being unable to touch creatures, the user could do whatever he wanted.

Judging from Elle's words, it should be the second time Amos used the gramophone back on the fourth floor.

If Amos used the gramophone for the third time, he killed himself on the rooftop with the last bullet... then this would be reasonable.

But why did he want to do this?

As long as he nullified the impact after returning to the past, he would still die directly with Time Stopper Eye completely draining his life span.

His bullet should still be used to kill another person.

His actions were unreasonable.

It was like missing a piece in the middle...

Wait?

Annan's mind was struck with enlightenment.

If this is Amos's true purpose?

Amos's model and movement appeared in Annan's mind.

To die on the rooftop, he must have reached the rooftop.

Then, he returned to the fifth floor or a particular floor where the gramophone was stored. Then, he used the gramophone for the third time and entered the past.

After that, he went to the basement and released Angelo.

Later, for some reason, he returned to the rooftop. Then, with a shot from the back, he killed himself, who just arrived at the rooftop “via the time reversal.”

With that, since Amos was dead, he couldn't leave the rooftop and go down the stairs to activate the gramophone. That was why he died on the rooftop and was shot in the back and killed by turbid blood bullets with only one shot.

This could explain who released the Angelo sealed in the wine bottle and why turbid blood bullets killed Amos from behind.

But what is his motive?

Annan reached out and tapped the table rhythmically.

He thought for a moment, then slowly asked Joseph, "I have a question. Tell me now..."

"What exactly was your advanced curse back then? I want to know the taboo and the effect."

The curse obtained during the advancement was stored in the vessel.

Joseph, who had lost his vessel, didn't need to keep it a secret.

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Joseph didn't seem to be surprised that Annan asked this question.

"You're smart, dear feudal lord."

He chuckled, "It's fine for me to reveal my advanced Silver Rank curse. 'I can't kill with a knife,' and that's all. The effect is that when I use any blunt weapon, I can ignore 80% of its weight. For those who venture in the wizard path, it's a pretty useless curse.

"But the curse of my Bronze Rank is that if someone greets me within ten meters of my radius, I must respond within ten seconds.

"The effect is if someone says my name within a radius of one kilometer, I can vaguely see his specific location and his general figure."

Annan's eyes widened when he heard these words.

Soon, he realized something.

Could it be that I was discovered by calling "the Venerated Skeleton" at Freezing Water Port, not because the Venerated Skeleton was almighty, nor because he was in Freezing Water Port?

But because of the composition of this nightmare, was it related to Joseph's lost curse vessel?

The event forty-five years ago gradually became clear in Annan's mind.

Annan nodded slowly, "Thank you very much, Mr. Buckel. You have provided crucial information."

Having said this, Annan suddenly remembered something.

"Right," he asked anxiously, "What is the two-handed hammer-shaped curse vessel you used back then?"

Annan wanted to know its specific attributes.

This was useful information, no matter for Annan's use or sold it to players.

Joseph shrugged.

He had a bright but childish and triumphant smile on his face.

“It looks scary, right?”

Mr. Joseph Buckel shrugged and stood up, “Wait a moment. I will take it out for you to have a look.”

As Joseph spoke, he walked to the back.

About ten minutes later, he took a sledgehammer tightly wrapped in cotton cloth. It was covered with dust and even had a weird smell like old clothes stored for more than ten years in the wardrobe.

Joseph handed it to Annan.

This hammer was whimsically as tall as Annan.

Sledgehammer Beyond Eyebrow's Height.jpg

Annan lay it on the floor horizontally in silence.

A list of attributes appeared before Annan's eyes:

[Barrier Destroyer's Right Arm]

[Type: Weapon/Tool (Light Blue)]

[Description: It can exert greater power when facing objects with an “obstacle” attribute.]

[Effect: When attacking “walls,” “road barriers,” “shields,” and other objects, you get a temporary +10 Strength bonus; its shock-resistant property is graded as “superior.” The weapon is capable of reducing a certain degree of recoil.]

[Cost: It can only be held with the right hand. If it is held by the left hand, the user will be more vulnerable to fractures when attacking.]

The effect was great, and the cost was low.

The temporary 10 bonus points in Strength equated to twice the strength of an ordinary person.

Annan's Strength attribute was 10 points. Therefore, if he held this hammer, it was equivalent to doubling the strength when he struck the wall.

What is this called?

80 Sledgehammer? [1]

“I'm gifting it to you.”

Joseph smiled and said, “Anyway, I'm just an ordinary baker now, and it's useless to keep it with me.”

Annan went silent for a while. Then, he stood up, and bowed to Joseph, sending his gratitude.

Then he whispered, “Actually, I prefer your book collection.”

“What? Book collection?”

Joseph nodded and got up again, "Yes, of course, I keep them. I won't throw them away. Feudal lord, just a minute, I'll get it—"

Annan was dumbfounded.

Brother! I really didn't mean it that way!

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After following Joseph into the basement, Annan finally saw the books that Joseph had kept well.

The books received different treatment from that sledgehammer.

These books were placed carefully in metal boxes, and each box contains only one book.

There were a total of sixteen boxes of different sizes and colors. What they had in common was that each box was inlaid with a small blue gem on the top.

"This gem is used for dust removal. I have made a simple modification to it. It can continuously keep the box dry and clean while eliminating insects and ants."

Joseph noticed Annan's gaze, so he explained carefully, "After divorcing Clara that year, I didn't take many items away with me. I just took away these sixteen books."

As he said, he caressed the boxes lightly.

His expression seemed a bit complicated.

Until now, Annan finally saw a trace of loneliness that belonged to the old man on Joseph's face.

So, Annan didn't disturb Joseph reminiscing on his past.

Annan held the hammer as tall as him with both hands horizontally as he stood silently and obediently at the side.

After a while, Joseph recovered from his deep thoughts.

"Sorry, feudal lord. I have embarrassed myself in front of you."

"It's fine. Don't worry about it."

Annan smiled gently, "This is probably life."

Annan turned out to be a little... envious.

But even Annan himself didn't know what he was envious of.

Joseph just smiled and said nothing.

He opened the boxes one by one. He confirmed the contents in it before closing it and moving on to the next box.

Finally, he selected six boxes and found a bag to put them together.

“They are all the only ones in this world, very precious. I can't let them be destroyed or lost in my hands, so I have been taking care of them all these years.”

Joseph explained carefully, “Feudal lord, after you finish reading those six books, you may come back to me and request for other books. The rest of the books are probably of no use to you until you advance to silver.

“As we often say, 'what's hidden is poisonous.' The reason I didn't leave them to Clara... It's also because Clara doesn't have the talent to be a wizard. If she looked directly at the knowledge, her soul couldn't bear it.

“For example, what I told you before, about that person's story. They are recorded in those six books. The person's real name is even recorded in them. But this knowledge can only be obtained by reading this book.

“After all, whether it is a true deity or false deity, as long as the soul is promoted to deity, their names can't be spoken,” Joseph whispered.

Annan nodded.

He also learned about this previously.

Just the name of a deity, it also had a mysterious power. If a mortal spoke it out, he would die immediately; for Transcended, their real name itself was a powerful and uncontrollable spell.

In addition to the deities' names, there were also some advanced rituals, secrets, etc., which couldn't be expressed in human language.

Those who got to hear it once would never forget this knowledge. But once the knowledge was used—which meant being “read out” once, they would realize they couldn't say it a second time until they refilled the knowledge once more.

Annan opened his eyes slightly, “You mean...”

“Yes, there is genuine mysterious knowledge in it.”

Joseph nodded.

He opened six boxes one by one and showed them to Annan:

“A Comprehensive Study on the New Deity the Venerated Skeleton,” “A Comprehensive Study on the New Deity the Rotten Man,” “Black Widow's Spider Ritual (January to March),” “Old Grandmother's Frost Ceremony,” “Entry Level Edict Spells,” “How to Detect and Resist the Curse of Unknown Origin.”

“In these four books, there is a certain degree of mysterious knowledge hidden, so it can't be copied. For the latter two books are the first editions of the spellbook and the reference book, which offer great value. Therefore, feudal lord, you should keep the two books in your collection after you finish reading them.”

Joseph introduced the books to Annan.

Annan nodded repeatedly. What a generous gift.

Of course, since Joseph took the initiative to give them out, Annan won't shy away hypocritically.

Annan had always been disdainful of being vain.

Annan raised the sledgehammer, spoke in a childish and well-behaved voice, and asked respectfully, kindly, and humbly,

“Do you have anything else, Teacher Buckel?”

“Yes! Wait a minute-“

Joseph Buckel also nodded readily.

He opened the drawer under the books.

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It was a wooden tube.

After opening it, there was a pair of pure white slender gloves seemingly made of rubber.

Annan got it in his hands, and its attributes emerged in his eyes:

[Elves' Hand]

[Type: Armor (Purple)]

[Description: Gloves made of elf skin imbued with curse and resentment.]

[Effect: You can guide two Guided Spells at the same time when your hands are clasped together.]

[Cost: You can't equip it for more than an hour. Otherwise, the gloves will grow on your hands.]

[Description: It seems that there are some other effects, but you can't see it for the time being (Your Advanced Mysticism has failed the assessment).]

“This is the gift that my instructor gave me when I graduated from the Diamond Tower after advancing into silver.”

Joseph Buckel said nostalgically, “But to me, this item is no longer useful. It isn't more valuable than a bag of flour to me.”

With that, Joseph looked at Annan.

“My Transcended journey is over, feudal lord. Silver rank... Many people in this world struggle their entire life but still can't reach the rank of silver or even bronze. But on the transcendence journey, this attainment is only half the journey.”

There was no mockery in Joseph's eyes, no expectations, no regrets.

Only calm and relief.

Joseph whispered, “The Transcended journey is the path of endurance, the path of curse, the path of oath. The Transcended path is the road to the truth...”

“—The path of transcendence is the path of becoming a deity.

“I gave up. But your path has just begun.”

“I understand.”

Annan nodded slowly with a stern expression, “I will remember today's conversation, Teacher Joseph.”

After that, the atmosphere fell into a wonderful silence.

The two stood in place. Annan could see that Joseph still had something to say, but he didn't in the end.

Annan quickly understood what Joseph intended.

So Annan thanked Mr. Joseph again. Then, he notified Joseph in advance that some people might come to him with questions later on. Annan carried a heavy package, a wooden tube around his waist, and a sledgehammer wrapped in cotton in his hands when he left the bakery.

Annan's expression was a bit complicated.

Although he told the players that he would “go out and get something” as an excuse...

He didn't expect to get so many things in the end.

Joseph was seemingly pushing these items to Annan.

This reminded Annan of the time when he was on Earth. When the seniors in online games wanted to be away from the keyboard (AFK), they also enthusiastically gave him pieces of precious and memory-laden “legacy.”

Annan had never been willing to consume these items.

His popularity was great, being friendly with many seniors.

In the end, Annan's warehouse would always store a lot of legacy from the predecessors when they retired from the game. He kept these as a collection.

“I didn't expect to encounter such a situation in this world.”

Annan sighed somewhat complicatedly.

He walked on the deserted streets with many items, like a homeless man who had left his hometown and a child who had run away from home.

Suddenly, Annan felt a strange chill engulfing him.

As he passed an alley, the tension he had before resurfaced suddenly.

Annan was startled, his whole body stiffened, and his back was instantly drenched in cold sweat.

At this time, Annan finally saw it.

He saw what on earth he was being stared at.

A tall figure stood in the alley.

He appeared to be approximately three meters tall.

He wore a duke's robe, a sacred white crown on his head, a golden mask like a crying human face, heavy white metal boots, and heavy white thick leather gloves on his hands. The being was entirely shrouded in clothing.

But after Annan looked closely, he realized that being was "too thin."

It was like there were only bones under the clothes.

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Just staring at the being, Annan found himself short of breath.

Annan felt that his body shuddered. A sense of laziness was injected into his brain through his eyes. There was seemingly a tangible fear that locked his limbs like shackles. A sense of despair permeated the surrounding air.

—Shudders, fear, laziness, despair.

But unfortunately...

These things happened to be ineffective to Annan.

Even so, Annan could sense them through common sense.

This weird man of tall stature should be the Venerated Skeleton that the players and I talk about every day.

If it wasn't Annan who appeared in front of him, but anyone else, the best ending now was to run away in a sorry manner.

Those with sharper Perception stats might go crazy in an instant.

That was in the situation of no direct eye contact.

The golden mask completely blocked the Venerated Skeleton's gaze. Annan only roughly saw his existence in reality and was immediately affected by multiple negative auras.

Annan doubted that his soul could survive direct eye contact with the Venerated Skeleton, albeit his talent to resist negative emotions.

After a short silence, Annan saluted respectfully.

"Can I help you, sir?"

What Annan feared most now was to have the Venerated Skeleton replied indifferently, "No, go to hell."

Then, the being granted him instant death.

But fortunately, the Venerated Skeleton wasn't so ruthless...

"You seem to be the [Regret]'s Frostborn."

A low, reverberating old voice sounded in Annan's ear, "But are you a descendant she recognized and acknowledged?"

It was the moment Annan heard the name [Regret].

He suddenly felt that his body could no longer move.

The creaking sound of freezing sounded in his ears.

Annan noticed that a large area of surrounding buildings began to freeze.

Lines of frost traces formed. They were like ice flowers on windows, appearing on the ground and the walls around the alleys.

"Hu..."

Annan slowly exhaled a visible breath and felt his spine start to become rigid, rendering him immobile.

My breath isn't hot, but frigid cold...

Annan realized his blood boiling after the name was called. The blood was so active, with a bone-seeping chill running rampant.

Annan looked down and saw that his skin swelled up. The swelling would move for a distance before sinking into his skin again. Its path left frost traces. It was like countless beetles traveled through the skin at great speed and then melted like ice.

Although Annan's pain sensation was duller, he couldn't shake off the vague and uncomfortable sensation of glacial cold.

After that, a line of prompt suddenly appeared in front of Annan:

[Health: 1%]

Annan's pupils shrank immediately.

But the strange reaction in him was still intensifying.

A strong cold air leached on him, and the ground was frozen. Annan's skin turned paler, approaching transparency. If an intense light struck him at this time, it might even penetrate him to the other end.

His body soon showed crystalized frost traces, covering him like scale armor.

Indeed, it was like scales.

At this moment, a low, indistinct, cold female voice sounded finely in Annan's ears.

"... Annan... Maria... Annan..."

She seemed to have said a lot.

Hearing this sound, the Venerated Skeleton stopped talking.

The Venerated Skeleton just stood silently and looked at Annan without saying a word.

But Annan didn't understand that language at all.

He could barely discern two names out from the voices—

Two Annans and one Maria.

Finally, the voice faded away.

Once again, data streamers invaded Annan's vision:

[Activated: Path of Archaic Bloodline]

[The talent “Winter Heart” is evolving—]

[After meeting “Old Grandmother — Regret's” needs, “Winter Heart (Reverse)” would evolve to the next stage: Winter's Harvest (Reverse)]

[Frosty of Winter (Reverse): You will not feel all negative emotions; the damage of your “frost” element will be permanently increased by 50%; you will be completely immune to all harm coming from “frost” elements below the truth level.]

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[Acquired mysterious knowledge: the real name of Frost and Tradition Deity “Old Grandmother.”]

[This mysterious knowledge can be used as “Deity Summon Ritual: 'Old Grandmother,’” “Gold Incantation (Energy Falteration School): Blitz Frost,” “Legendary Material: Frost Core,” “Advanced Influence: Remains of the Frost Deity.”]

[This mysterious knowledge will be forgotten after using “1” times, and it can only be obtained again after “hearing 'Old Grandmother's' voice.”]

—and many more!

I have guessed it. The cold voice seems to come from the upright deity “Old Grandmother.”

But what do Old Grandmother needs?!

Annan was dumbfounded.

It's not a dialect or Austere-Winter Dukedom language... It's not a human language at all!

Annan could be 100% certain that human vocal cords could never make such a weird and deep voice.

Damn it, wait... It looks like something went wrong!

Although Annan bore the blood of Austere-Winter and became Deity Old Grandmother's Frostborn, he didn't acquire the language knowledge needed to talk to Old Grandmother.

Then, Old Grandmother seemed to utter his name at the Venerated Skeleton, using it as a medium to give Annan a mission.

But the problem was... Annan didn't understand at all. So what mission did she give Annan?

This stupid system didn't display the mission. Probably it couldn't decode the language either. Anyway, Annan now only knew what the mission rewards were, but he didn't know what she wanted to do.

This is hard. Forget it; it's impossible to understand it anyway.

It is better to find a way to study some ancient knowledge in the future, mainly in linguistics, but also in Old Grandmother and Austere-Winter Dukedom.

Anna needed emergency tutoring on this foreign language to a level whereby he would have a rough understanding of it when he summoned Old Grandmother next time.

When Annan felt his body with the chill fading, three minutes had passed.

At this time, Annan was still at 1% of health. Therefore, any injury would result in his death.

Worse still, he didn't understand what Old Grandmother said to him.

—But Annan still had the courage in his heart.

He looked at the Venerated Skeleton again without fear and said neither humbly nor arrogantly, “Excuse me... Is there anything else?”

But the Venerated Skeleton suddenly laughed.

Indeed— Annan was certain. He heard the Venerated Skeleton chuckle slightly!

“Alright, Frostborn. Since you chose this path, we will see you again.”

After Annan woke up from the trance, the Venerated Skeleton spoke more.

The Venerated Skeleton's tone wasn't as cold and alienated as at first. Instead, he became a little more friendly, “Your name is... Annan, right? Annan Frost Tongue...”

What's with this surname that sounds like a certain lich?

Annan paused slightly.

He suddenly realized that the Venerated Skeleton seemed to understand the Old Grandmother's words.

No way, this trash skeleton is too realistic...

He came over to trouble me in the first place.

But knowing that I have the Old Grandmother's blood, he changed his mind on the spot...

Annan was a little uncomfortable with that trash skeleton being so decisive.

So he decided to probe, “My name is...Annan Austere-Winter.”

“Sooner or later, it will be Frost-Tongue...”

The Venerated Skeleton just smiled. Then, a deep, hoarse, echoing voice sounded in Annan's heart, “If you are not afraid... When you advance to the truth level, you can also try to use my ritual... If you face a problem, you can also hold my ritual... I know that you know the ritual about me...”

As the Venerated Skeleton spoke, he reached out his right hand wrapped in steel and pointed at the package behind Annan, "But that book, I took it away..."

With that said, the Venerated Skeleton pointed to Annan's package.

Annan immediately understood which book the Venerated Skeleton wanted.

It must be the one that records the Venerated Skeleton's real name!

"I'm—"

Annan was kind enough to take down the package immediately, planning to take it out to see the guests off.

"No need..." The Venerated Skeleton's deep voice sounded.

When Annan looked up again, the Venerated Skeleton had disappeared.

In his package, the book disappeared at some point. The box was completely gone as well.

Annan didn't even feel when did the weight had drop.

...Perhaps when I was frozen, he had already secretly taken the book?

Annan hesitated to say something and stopped, "Brother..."

You're pretty frank...

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After the Venerated Skeleton disappeared, Annan noticed an extra item on the ground.

It was a small piece of pure white bone bit with an irregular shape.

Although Annan knew it was dangerous, he couldn't control himself but pick it up.

Fortunately, it did not seem to be a trap.

Annan felt a bit of warmth as soon as he grabbed it. The tactile sensation was like a jade pendant that had been worn for many years.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the item had attributes, although it was strange:

[The Venerated Skeleton's Temporary Asylum]

[Type: Accessory (Gold)]

[Description: Deity of Bones and Betrayal "the Venerated Skeleton" temporarily has no intention of being your enemy.]

[Effect: When entering the nightmare left by any "believer of the Venerated Skeleton," the failure of the dungeon will not increase the erosion rate. "Believer of the Venerated Skeleton" cannot kill you.]

"...Hey."

Did you cower just like that?

Annan was speechless.

Although the Venerated Skeleton claimed that he only took one book...

Annan was not quite sure whether this sentence was true with how trash the Venerated Skeleton appeared.

Annan checked the books and the items in his bag again, then brought out the attribute panel and took a look. He then fumbled around his whole body, only to be able to temporarily confirm that the Venerated Skeleton had indeed only taken one book.

It was the book: "A Comprehensive Study on the New Deity the Venerated Skeleton."

"He... What is he hiding?" Annan murmured.

Could it be that I could discover his secret through this book?

But if the existence of this book threatened him, wouldn't he take it away from Joseph earlier?

Or, perhaps...

Annan's gaze turned to the "A Comprehensive Study on the New Deity the Rotten Man," which made a complete set when coupled with the Venerated Skeleton's Study.

"Are you hinting something to me?" Annan squinted slightly. Then, he came into deep thoughts.

If I'm truly the "Annan Austere-Winter," what should I do now?

After being threatened by the Venerated Skeleton, the study was forcibly taken away from Annan before he even had the chance to read it. As a result, he would be curious about what was recorded in the book that the Venerated Skeleton took away.

So, where could Annan find out more about it?

Mysterious knowledge couldn't be communicated through language. Joseph had now lost his curse vessel, so he couldn't teach Annan directly.

So Annan could only study the book about Rotten Man carefully and find the corresponding "knowledge that he should have acquired" from it.

"Is he suggesting to me to find out more about the Rotten Man immediately?" Annan raised his brow slightly.

Indeed, if the Venerated Skeleton didn't approach Annan, Annan might read the book on the Rotten Man later or even last.

Obviously, Anna would read the study on the Venerated Skeleton first. Only the Rotten Man study didn't seem to be useful to Annan for the time being.

No matter if it were a person or a deity, as long as they were conscious and had a clear goal, their actions would reveal their goal to some extent.

Everything would leave a trace.

The same went for the Venerated Skeleton.

For Annan, the traces the Venerated Skeleton left, and the intelligence exposed were quite apparent.

Annan deduced it through simple reasoning:

First of all, the fundamental question would be what was the Venerated Skeleton's goal.

Was he trying to kill Annan?

If so, why didn't he do it himself? But, instead, he deliberately came over to pronounce the Old Grandmother's name and made a dedicated trip to provide Annan with the mysterious knowledge.

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As a matter of fact, the Venerated Skeleton knew Annan's name. Then, he should naturally know that Austere-Winter Dukedom now had only two healthy direct descendants left. Old Grandmother would take him seriously.

But at the moment of meeting, the Venerated Skeleton directly pronounced Old Grandmother's name, leaving Annan with only 1% of Health. But after that, he didn't take the last hit.

(TN: Last hit is a game terminology which meant dealing the killing blow)

Yes, this was the reason Winter Heart was triggered.

Annan did not get killed because of frost damage. But this special effect came from Reverse Inscription. Ordinary Austerian, or according to the Venerated Skeleton's words — Frostborn, wouldn't have Reverse Inscription. After Annan reached 1% of Health, he should have died.

After Annan's health was fixed at 1% of health, the Venerated Skeleton did not rush over to take the last hit but stood by.

This had revealed that the Venerated Skeleton knew from the beginning that Annan had Reverse Inscription.

The Venerated Skeleton goal wasn't to kill Annan. Adding on to that, he even presented an amulet to ensure that Annan wouldn't turn hostile to him for the time being.

So, was the Venerated Skeleton's goal to befriend Annan? Or did he come here to pass Old Grandmother's message?

But no matter which possibility, there was no need to reduce Annan to critical health.

If the Venerated Skeleton didn't want Annan to learn about him, he would have taken the Rotten Man book as well. Worse still, he might even kill Joseph, take the book, or destroy it before that event.

In summary, the Venerated Skeleton's actions should only have one goal.

He wanted Annan to notice the Rotten Man immediately and gather information about the Rotten Man.

But why so?

Is there some kind of conflict between the two?

“I still have to read this book.” Annan sighed.

This was an overt plot that Annan was forced into.

If Annan did not see the Venerated Skeleton's intention, he would first read the book of Rotten Man to confirm “what the Venerated Skeleton tried to hide.” But, even if Annan noticed the Venerated Skeleton's intention, he still had to read the book to validate his inference.

—Because Annan did offend Rotten Man as well.

There were many reasons. Klaus, the guard captain who killed Don Juan, was the Rotten Man's man. Viscount Barber, who Annan killed, was also under the Rotten Man. Klaus was looking for Don Juan's Book of Divine Transporter, while Viscount Barber had an inactive Book of Divine Transporter with him.

In the end, the two Book of Divine Transporter pages in Annan's possession were related to Rotten Man. So it was fair to say that Annan had grabbed food from the tiger's mouth.

Does this mean that the Rotten Man Church is looking for the Book of Divine Transporter?

With that in Annan's consideration, it became an urgent task for Annan to understand the Rotten Man better.

Because Annan obviously couldn't give up this power.

No one knew the horror of “players” better than him.

If the Rotten Man's church wanted the Book of Divine Transporter, then he and Annan would become mortal enemies sooner or later.

Annan might not be able to escape the Noah Kingdom's Royalty conspiracy.

“With this in mind, I kinda feel like I'm duped.”

Annan looked at the starry sky, holding a sledgehammer, and sighed slightly.

Although he got many valuable items, it gave off the Déjà vu of him working for money with his life.

Fortunately, although Annan was somewhat passive in the first confrontation, Annan still had some idea about the situation.

The matter was already evident. “Annan Austere-Winter” seemed to be entering the game as a deities' pawn. Although Annan's influence was marginal, it was more so because of his shortcomings in power.

Annan didn't dislike this feeling.

In some cases, having a value in being used by others seemed to be a kind of luck.

But the problem was...

“Boss, where do I come from? Who is my teammate? Who am I going to fight now?”

Annan Austere-Winter, who unfortunately lost his memory, was filled with three core questions: "I'm a cute newbie who bought a new account. Anyone there? Is there anyone in charge? Does anyone care about me?"

Annan held the hammer at a loss.

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The two players acting as guards knew that Annan was "going out to get something."

But they obviously didn't expect that Annan had gotten so many items in just a simple trip.

"Do you want my help to grab those items?"

Seeing Annan slowly moving towards the city lord's residence like a snail, they rushed over and asked enthusiastically.

Annan was carrying a heavy and square backpack like a high school student. He had a wooden tube around his waist that reached his knees. Sometimes when Annan walked, he would kick the wooden tube accidentally. There was a blanket in his hand. It was an unknown object wrapped in cotton cloth that was taller than Annan himself and looked like a giant lollipop. At first glance, it was heavy.

Annan glanced at the two players.

Are you greedy for my affection rate?

Mainly, the reaction of these two players felt like Déjà vu.

It was like those seniors who enthusiastically came to carry bags for younger juniors at the beginning of school every year.

Oh, wait, thinking myself a junior may be too far-fetched.

Those seniors are weird.

"Thanks a lot."

Although Annan had been complaining about it, he showed a reserved and implicitly happy smile.

He nodded gently and quickly agreed, "Thanks for taking the trouble to help me."

As Annan said, he handed over the wooden tube he used to store Elves' Hand and the backpack with books to the two of them. The reason for not giving the sledgehammer to them was because Annan didn't want them to know that this was the curse vessel he had newly acquired.

Otherwise, Annan would splurge the players with too much information.

Moreover, the players might be able to carry this hammer.

The sledgehammer was too heavy.

As a matter of fact, the players now have their Strength attributes at 6 points. Some of them had 5 points in Strength, and none of them had 7 points in Strength.

Although Annan appeared weak and short, his Strength attribute was at 10 points.

Indeed, Annan's strength was much greater than these noobs.

But, Annan still did not refuse the players' eager request for a mission.

It wasn't because Annan was looking for an opportunity to give out the "only designated currency" like affection rate to players.

Annan deeply knew that the way to farm the affection rate quickly wasn't to "help others" but to "ask for help."

Asking for appropriate favors would foster closer relationships.

The more the other party committed, the greater your likability to that person. This phenomenon was often addressed as "effort justification [1]." In summary, humans consistently tended to find reasons to justify their efforts.

The greater the cost of achieving a goal, the higher the evaluation ratings of this goal in actors' minds. Otherwise, it would cause a disorder between behavior, cognition, and attitude.

To put it simply, when Annan asked the players for help, the players would convince themselves that they believed that Annan should be helped and that they liked Annan to justify their behavior.

In childhood, many skater boys instinctively used this trick to strike up a conversation with their crush. For example, they would ask to borrow their crush's books, ask for an eraser, ask the other party to share the textbooks, and make the relationship closer. The efficiency was far greater than "lending the book to the other party," "helping the other party," and so on.

For example, after the senior helped the junior girl carry the weight, the junior girl wouldn't necessarily have any favorable impression of the senior.

However, when the junior girl helped the senior, the senior could easily earn a favorable impression. With that, the junior girl would ask for a favor another time.

In a sense, this was why simping [2] wouldn't earn you anything.

As long as this small request was simple enough and wouldn't trouble the target nor annoy the target, it would quickly establish trust in the relationship with more favors asked.

If Annan could give back a sufficient amount of "benefits" in time, this trust would quickly earn him a favorable impression of the players.

In RPG games, the feelings of the player to the NPC that issued the mission, and the player's sense of participation in the game world, were developed through this technique. Even players' joy and love for some challenging and frustrating hardcore games were built in this way.

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These players still think that they were farming for Annan's affection rate.

But that wasn't the fact.

The fact was, Annan had been earning their affection and favorability.

Moreover, the process was efficient.

“Thank you both.”

In his room, Annan gestured to the two players seriously and invited them to sit.

Then, he sent 100 affection rates to both the players.

Even though the players didn't help much. Annan had traveled so far with these items on his back. The players only took the things from the door into the room.

But in the face of Annan's gratitude, the two of them just smiled and responded, “It's fine. They aren't heavy.”

“You're too courteous!”

“You two work all night. I have already felt guilty of it.”

Annan nodded, “I will find a way to compensate you later.”

Hearing this, the two players looked a little embarrassed.

Because they knew in their hearts that they didn't guard the place seriously at all.

Instead, they stood at the door and went AFK to watch the live broadcast forum.

“It's okay. It's all trivial matters.”

The player named “Anderson” subconsciously glanced at his companion “Leek” and coughed lightly, “Let's go back to guard the door first. If we leave for too long, it won't be good for someone to break in.”

“Thank you two.” Annan nodded and said gratefully.

Anderson and Leek left quickly.

When they left Annan's door, they were happy to see their affection rate increase again.

“Don Juan is such a good boy.”

Anderson sighed, “He's so likable.”

“That's true,” Leek sighed, “In this dark world, he is still so pure and polite. It's hard for him.”

“Yup, I will be a Don Juan fan for ten years from now.”

Anderson agreed, “No matter what new forces appear in the future, my heart is with the Freezing Water Port. With Don Juan's amiable manners, it's comfortable to work for him. Isn't that enough?”

“It's just there is no good-looking young lady for you to simp now.”

Leek saw through Anderson's thoughts, “If there is a new force, I think you will betray on the spot if the villain leader is good-looking.”

Anderson was irritated, “Shut up, isn't Don Juan good-looking?! You won't get a date anyway, is there a difference? Don't you just think of Don Juan as a beautiful girl?”

“If there is a pretty girl leader, she must be spoiled, or she is independent and vigilant. Either way, do you think she will have such a good attitude towards us?”

“It's like silly friends boasting to each other! If there's an opposite sex, do you dare to approach and talk to her?”

“...You are such a...genius.”

Leek swallowed the word “pervert” and replaced it with “genius.”

Because he suddenly fell into deep thoughts halfway through...

If I think about it carefully, it seems that is indeed the truth?

The Righteous Player(s) C158– Bread Daryl... Oops, Respectable Grandpa Daryl

Chapter 158: Bread Daryl... Oops, Respectable Grandpa Daryl

He couldn't feel the exhaustion of staying up late, and his body would be resting during nightmares.

But Annan's common sense told him that proper sleep time was necessary.

He was still a mortal, after all.

Annan, for some reason, couldn't wake up from a nightmare at 6 a.m. like the dwellers or players in this world.

He had to clear the nightmare before he could wake up.

So for Annan, there was no need to enter a nightmare in the wee hours.

With great self-control, Annan woke up on time at 8 a.m.

After eating breakfast and equipping Don Juan's sword, Annan proceeded to practice his swordsmanship. Then, Annan checked on his backend interface.

“Well, 80% of players went up by 1 level last night.”

Annan murmured, “It seems that either Jiu Er or Old Goose has found a stable way to defeat the dungeon and summarize a strategy about it. Otherwise, with the players' uneven capabilities, it is impossible to have most of the players succeed in the dungeon in just a couple of hours.”

While Annan commented on the situation, he realized something.

“...Hey, the four of them are already at Level 9.”

After the players completed the main mission — “The Disaster of Roseburg,” all the players had reached Level 7. Several more active players, such as Yiyi, Jiu Er, Delicious Wind Goose, and Wandering Child, had a separate mission and contributed a lot more. They had been promoted to Level 8 after killing Gerald. Then, they reached Level 9 after clearing the nightmare at least once.

The players who died once when besieging Gerald were at Level 7 as well. Their level dropped from 6 to 5 as a result of their death. However, Annan compensated these players with experience in the disguise of a mission reward.

Annan had calculated and planned the amount of experience already.

The purpose was to unify the players' level.

With that, he would avoid having Level 6 players while having the majority in Level 7.

Annan would be concerned if the Level 6 players would be dissatisfied.

This dissatisfaction would persist and snowball no matter how Annan compensated them with affection rating.

It stood out a lot for having their level lags behind the others. Every time they noticed this, they would harbor some bitter feelings. Eventually, the bitter feelings would accumulate in the long run and turn into resentment.

Besides the noticeable "level difference," there would be a couple of problems just because the level threshold to ascend to the next level would have a significant difference.

Annan implemented a "unified level across players" with "a couple of special individuals having elevated levels" to combat disputes between players. At the same time, it allowed several capable and manageable high-level players to have more say in the player group.

This effect of this technique would become more evident after the four elites had advanced to become Transcendeds.

Suddenly, Annan was startled.

"Wait, since the four of them were already Level 9."

He and Salvatore still had four days left for preparations. Four days later, they would return to Roseburg to wait in advance for the birth of the baby suspected to be Michelangelo's reincarnation.

After clearing the nightmare, the cooldown time to enter would be precisely 72 hours. In other words, three days.

That was to say... For these four players, if they only utilized "Nightmare: Gallery" to grow, they could only reach swordsman Level 10 (Max) after ten days. They would not be able to advance further. The most critical advancement dungeon was missing.

But what if they could ascend to the next level? Did they earn their rights to enter the advancement dungeon at that time?

Annan was lost in thought.

Should I give them some experience?

Or give the players a batch of experience so that they can do what they want after they advance?

Hmph! That won't end up well!

Annan quickly denied this idea.

If fewer players joined together as one squad, Annan could control their actions as a captain.

But once the players formed an army group, they would be wild dogs escaping from the leash, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and unstoppable.

They were like swarms of pests.

Annan still wasn't sure whether Michelangelo was an ally or an enemy and what kind of people he would encounter this time. But, compared to robust and uncontrollable power, Annan was more inclined only to let elite players compliment his plan.

Oh ya, elite players.

“It's time to arrange a trial for them.”

Annan murmured, “If they can pass the trial, I will find a way to get them into advancement.”

Annan recalled that he had an examination paper in his hand.

A dungeon instance enough to test their resilience—

Indeed, it was the nightmare created after the death of the hunter “Justin” at Viscount Barber's side!

Bread Daryl [1] probably hadn't purified the nightmare yet. How many entries are left?

If Annan asked for it, he should be able to get the key.

By that time, he would have these four players enter the dungeon instance.

Annan remembered that the death count of a simple dungeon instance should not be much. As long as the death count reached a threshold, the dungeon challenger would be kicked out, rendering the nightmare dungeon into a cooldown. This would be different from the gallery dungeon instance that could be tackled with many restarts and lives through brute force.

As a matter of fact, the players had been grinding “Nightmare: Gallery,” which was at “distorted” difficulty.

A difficulty in which Gold Rank professionals might suffer casualties in it.

In other words, even though the players were only level five, they had challenged the dungeon instance 30 levels ahead for several days under Annan's malice.

On the contrary, the nightmare gave birth after Bronze Rank – Justin's death must be easy.

It was like the “find the betrayer” nightmare that Annan entered at the beginning of entering this world. As long as he collected the clues, he would overcome the level in one shot.

With this simple dungeon instance, Annan could test the four elites' cautiousness, how much they cherished their lives, and their ability to gather information.

If they could overcome this dungeon instance, Annan would bring them over to the Freezing Water Port. With the dungeon cooldown ended, Annan could let them all complete the bronze advancement dungeon instance immediately.

By then, Annan would have a group consisting of six Bronze Rank at his disposal.

With that, Annan's team lineup would have four fearless frontiers with unlimited respawn. More importantly, Salvatore could efficiently provide logistics and serve as the damage output for the team, while Annan would bring control to the battlefield. It would be a stable lineup that brought Annan a sense of security.

In the previous battle, there had been no reliable front liners, forcing Annan to participate as well with a kitchen knife. This time, Annan had the Elves' Hand. This plug-and-play dual-core CPU allowed Annan to guide two spells at the same time. With that, Annan could switch his role into Karthus, the deathsinger. First, he would erect a deceleration wall. Then, he would blast frost nova over—what an incredible scene.

But, there was still one problem.

Annan didn't know what profession a swordsman could advance into in the Bronze Rank, the advancement conditions, and how to advance.

After all, his swordsman profession hadn't advanced yet.

He couldn't just reset his attribute points in this world.

Even if Annan needed the players' immediate help now, he didn't want the players to adopt professions with a bleak future.

After all, everything was just at the beginning.

Annan thought he shouldn't disturb Salvatore, so he decided to visit Bread Daryl at Roseburg... No, Grandpa Daryl.

Of course, before that, Annan wanted to speed run the gallery dungeon. Since the cooldown was done for him, he didn't want to waste the opportunity.

Isn't it nice to level up by one consistently every three days?

If it weren't for Roseburg's mess and the Royal Capital's imminent Rotten Man problem, the safest way was to ignore everything. Then, Annan would have the players grind in the Freezing Water Port for fifty days and wait for everyone to average at the Level 20 Bronze Rank before embarking on his adventure in this world.

The players had to reach the pinnacle of Bronze Rank because players still lacked the technology to clear the nightmare level above Level 3 stably.

“This time, I will tackle the second level.”

Annan murmured, “If I guess correctly, it should be able to speed-run through it in half an hour.”

With that, Annan removed his extra clothing, closed the door, and lay on the bed.

Annan whispered, "The Venerated Skeleton..."

At the next moment, something unexpected happened to Annan.

"I'm listening."

A low, hoarse, echoing voice sounded in Annan's heart.

But Annan didn't immediately fall into a nightmare.

He was stunned for a moment but quickly reacted.

So Annan added, "Let me enter the gallery nightmare."

For the first time, the Venerated Skeleton finally came up with a second sentence.

"As you wish—"

At the next moment, rows of data streams began to emerge in front of Annan:

[Detected unpurified Nightmare Fragment.]

[Rank requirement: Below Gold Rank]

[Profession requirement: None]

[Special requirement: None]

But suddenly, Annan saw a line that had never appeared before:

[This dungeon instance has 6 checkpoints and the erosion rate increases by 2% per death.]

[Checkpoint has been obtained: Elle Morrison (Level 3)]

[Please select the nightmare entrance—]

[Level 1]

[Level 3]

The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 159

After clearing "Gallery: Elle Morrison," Annan had the option to start directly from the third level.

This was indeed good news for Annan.

At least when Annan tackles this dungeon instance in the future, it would save him a lot of time. He wouldn't have to go by one level after another.

Annan noticed this save feature when he first entered "Nightmare: Gallery." But he didn't reveal it to the players. By just looking at the prompts when the players entered the dungeon instance, it was evident that Annan limited the system's functions.

With this development, Annan could unlock the functions to the players as if they were rewards.

As long as the players didn't know about this feature at first, they wouldn't be dissatisfied. On the contrary, they thought that the game planner cared, listened to the players' feedback, and sent out patches quickly.

It was like a particular game company that liked to split half of the game content into DLC.

After noticing the save feature, Annan realized there was a save point even in his very first nightmare, "Nightmare: The Betrayer."

But before that, Annan had never found "the save point."

What is the save point for?

Is it possible to respawn in that position after death?

Then, why not just call it a respawn point?

Soon, Annan had an idea.

Save points could only be revealed after clearing the nightmare dungeon and entering the nightmare for the second time.

This was undoubtedly good news since there was a special requirement to enter "Nightmare: Betrayer" – "Being unable to cast spells."

Annan was now a Bronze Rank Falteration Wizard.

Annan's previous idea was to find something that could temporarily seal his spell casting ability or to have a curse and temporarily restrict his spell casting ability.

But now, it seemed that he could perhaps load into the save and head to where he cleared the dungeon.

Or perhaps an earlier location?

"What is this?" Annan was dumbfounded.

After waking up from the nightmare, I get a toilet break before continuing? Is that it?

In the end, Annan decided to enter the first level.

This time, he intended to clear the nightmare on the second level first and reserved the nightmare at the fourth level for the next time.

Annan wanted to try if he could unlock the secret ending by clearing all the sub-nightmares.

After all, this nightmare update gave Annan confidence to do so.

(Author note: Let's skip the repeated parts.)

But, when Annan walked into the last corridor of the first level, he saw a diary on the display cabinet that should have been empty.

It was the diary that should have appeared on the third level!

"...I understand it now," Annan murmured.

The dungeon instance which he had cleared before would leave consequences.

The “trophy item” on that level where he cleared would exist thereafter.

“...Tsk.”

Annan thought of a cheat to clear the dungeon.

If he cleared the nightmare on the fourth level first, wouldn't Annan be equipped with a weapon on the first level?

Though, this wasn't really a cheat.

Delicious Wind Goose's thinking direction suddenly appeared in Annan's mind.

The initial strategy was to acquire the coat on the first level, acquire the knife on the second level, and then successfully kill the Brother Sledgehammer, Joseph, on the third level.

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After reaching the end of the fourth level, Brother Sledgehammer wouldn't retaliate by the door.

Whether the door led to the fifth level or not, the dungeon challenger must kill Joseph before the third level.

Otherwise, the dungeon challenger would be murdered at the fourth level due to the plot.

At that time, Delicious Wind Goose couldn't control his body at all.

In other words...

Starting from the fifth level, the enemy that “Amos” faced wasn't “Brother Sledgehammer” anymore.

Hence, if the player acquired the gun at the fourth level, they could easily kill Joseph, who broke through the wall on the second level.

Joseph was incapable of performing the kill immediately with the sledgehammer. He only had robust strength. Of course, him smashing the wall was just a special effect. He was still a physically weak wizard. He had to speak to invoke his edict spells.

In the end, the players could shoot Joseph with a gun after he broke through the wall.

In this way, there was no need to run for the second and third levels.

There was no need to run on the fourth level either.

In this way, players would have the maximum plausible health when they reach the fifth level.

“So on the fifth or sixth level, there shall be a mechanism that detects health points,” Annan murmured.

For example, it would be impossible to clear the level if the health points were below a certain threshold.

That was why Priest Louis could clear the level so easily.

Amos had silver coins with him. There was silverware on the chandelier. The following few levels had great accessibility to replenish silver.

After entering the door, Louis might find that he didn't have enough health points, so he just filled it up with silver. (Translator's reminder: Priest Louis is from Silver Sire Church)

Then, he could run at full speed without worrying about internal damage.

On the second level, he could escape the chase at full speed.

In the third level, he ran to the end at full speed. Before Amos appeared, he would go directly to the next floor.

On the fourth level, he could utilize divine art "Sharp Object" to get weapons. With that, he killed the demons, hounds, and Amos directly.

He had skipped all the challenges imposed at the four levels.

But ordinary players were unable to do this.

If they ran like this, they would have died many times.

"So he doesn't understand the mechanism behind the dungeon levels at all. He just brute-forced his way through." Annan was annoyed.

If it weren't that Annan lacked information on how priests tackled the nightmare, he wouldn't have believed the strategy written by such a guy.

Upright deity priests were all designed to tackle the nightmare.

It was like those strategy authors who wrote, "This boss is simple. Remember to dodge away from the upcoming abilities and not be greedy to deal more damage. Just don't die, lol."

The real problem was how!

However, if Priest Louis didn't understand the dungeon's mechanism, it meant that the Silver Sire Church certainly didn't know the true ending of this dungeon instance.

In other words, they did not know the Venerated Skeleton's conspiracy.

Then, Annan could only rely on himself.

All the sub-nightmares here must be cleared.

Then when Annan re-entered the first level, the trophy items from the first level to the sixth level would be in the display cabinet here.

Though, that would include things like tomatoes and diary.

The good news was that pistols and rifles on the fourth floor would be available!

There could be "collectibles" on the fifth or sixth level that Annan hadn't seen yet!

These collectibles might be the essential items to overcome Level -1!

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Indeed, Annan had realized the stake in “Nightmare: Gallery” was much deeper than he initially thought.

Annan just learned that the reason why “the Venerated Skeleton” in Freezing Water Port answered “I’m listening” was because the Venerated Skeleton was listening!

Having a deity staying in such a remote place for decades, it was evident how unusual this nightmare was.

Rather than fleeing, it was better to confront the enemy head-on now.

Since Annan had Old Grandmother’s real name at his disposal, the Venerated Skeleton did not dare to kill him for the time being. With that, Annan had to quickly collect the “criminal evidence” of the Venerated Skeleton. With that done, he would at least have some chips for negotiation.

—Let’s clear the second level first.

By following Jiu Er’s strategy, Annan bypassed Joseph efficiently. Then, he got a knife and tomato, activating “Gallery: Feast For The Hungry.”

Amos, dressed in a decent manner and with a gentle smile, politely extended a clean and fair right hand to Annan and warmly invited,

“Hello, sir. Can I hire you to become my model?”

Annan raised his head and met Amos’s gaze for a second.

At that moment, Amos suddenly felt an inexplicable panic in his heart.

Annan also temporarily confirmed that this was indeed not the “human Amos” encountered on the third level.

Did he sacrifice his conscience? Annan wondered.

He immediately expressed the wince, alert, and distrust that belonged to a homeless man. His eyes were dim and hopeless.

The mission debriefs appeared before his eyes:

[You have entered Gallery: Feast For The Hungry (Second Level).]

[Main mission: Act as the homeless man “Amis.”]

Immediately, a large number of texts appeared below this line of words:

[Complete the portrait.]

[Meet the other three homeless men.]

[Having at least one person survive until dark.]

Let’s start with him painting me first. Annan thought to himself.

Fortunately, when Amos drew, time was skipped directly. What happened was Annan's vision turned black, and the painting was finished straight. The situation was completely different from the third level.

Or maybe this was because there were indeed completed homeless men portraits in the original history, but Elle's portrait wasn't done.

Judging from the Wandering Child's situation, Elle should have been taken to the basement in real history. The diary should have been obtained at the end of the third level, not in the dungeon instance.

Looking at Annan, whose eyes were dim and indistinguishable from other homeless men, Amos smiled gracefully and calmly.

Although Amos was self-aware of his murder intention, he smiled without any psychological pressure and reached out his hand to Annan, "If you help me to finish a portrait, I will get you to a hot bath and clean clothes. Moreover, I will grant you food for three days. How's that sound?"

Annan's eyes flickered with hope.

He hesitated for a while, muttering in a low voice, "I don't want it."

"Then, what do you want?" Amos replied.

Annan wasn't the first homeless man to reject Amos.

Amos just asked patiently, "Money? Food? A job?"

"I want money!" Annan said with his hoarse throat, "I want two... no, six silver coins!"

"Well..." Amos pondered.

Annan looked at Amos cautiously, proving hesitantly. Finally, he reached out his wrinkled fingers, "No, I mean... five will do. Five will do. Yes, we can go with four too."

"It's fine. I can't grant you six silver coins." Amos interrupted him.

He said with a gentle expression, "Besides, I will treat you to a meal. Do you need a bath?"

"I don't want to take a bath! By the way, I want a deposit!"

Annan reached out his hand eagerly, glanced at Amos with some suspicion, and said rudely, "Give me half of the silver coins first, and I will go with you!"

"Sure."

Seeing that Annan was asking for silver coins, Amos hesitated for a moment.

But he quickly laughed at himself for his suspicion. How could the bossy people in Silver Sire Church end up in dire straits?

The desolation and depression of this homeless man are authentic.

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So, Amos took out his wallet from the painting and gave Annan three silver coins.

If Annan only wanted a silver coin, Amos might have given him copper at equivalent value. But for three silver coins, he won't be able to find so much loose change in a while.

It's just a homeless man anyway. So Amos comforted himself in his heart.

Annan got a lot of silver coins and became quieter.

He put the silver coin in his sleeve and hid it tightly.

He confirmed the divine art he had:

—Clanging Object: A low-consumption divine art triggered with silver coins. It has the same power as a gunshot.

—Sharp Object: A divine art that can turn silver coins into sharp daggers.

—Eternal Youth: A divine art that consumes silver coins to heal injuries.

Annan had three silver coins at his disposal at this moment.

Looking at Amos's back, Annan crouched and showed a weird smile.

He didn't act as "naive" as Jiu Er. Instead, Annan's way of acting like a homeless man had his personal touch.

Amos didn't have that interest in chatting with Annan on the road.

They walked to the living room on the fourth floor without a single word uttered.

Annan saw the three homeless men in white robes and pajamas whispering among themselves.

They looked happy when they saw Annan.

The younger one and soon-to-be homeless man paste waved to Annan enthusiastically.

[Meeting the other three homeless men completed.]

Seeing the reminder of the side mission's completion, Annan glanced at them with disgust, turning his head away with indifference.

At this time, Amos was still aside, explaining warmly, "They are also friends who come to assist with my portrait painting. They have lived here for several days. How about you stay as well?"

"No."

Annan glanced at Amos somewhat indifferently, with apparent alertness on his face.

He replied hurriedly, "Get your painting done quickly. I will leave when the painting is done."

"En... okay." Amos agreed reluctantly.

Annan saw a murderous intent on Amos's face.

He should be planning to kill me when he finishes the painting and sends me out. Annan sneered in his heart.

Perhaps because Annan killed his hype, Amos did not show him the “Feast of the Hungry.”

Amos kept a stern expression, opened a corner of the curtain, ordered Annan to stand in front, and began to paint.

I get it now! Enlightenment rose in Annan's heart.

The reason why Jiu Er saw the painting here with his erosion rate increased was that she “was not acting like a homeless man.” So, was that a punishment?

You can't be elegant playing as a clown.

You need to act like one!

Moreover, Amos had a tighter grip on his painting as compared to back then when he painted for Jiu Er. It was like the bold and wild Chinese calligraphy.

It was also different from the “drowsy” feeling Jiu Er mentioned on the forum.

Annan felt the intense pain.

It was like being squeezed from all directions by something.

It felt like being tied up with hands and feet and slowly sinking to the sea bottom.

Annan's consciousness gradually blurred. Everything in front of him was stretched.

At this moment, Annan heard Amos' voice.

It was an indifferent, deep interrogation,

“Think carefully...

“Are you not hungry at all?”

Hungry my ass—

With an intense hunger in his belly, Annan suddenly lost consciousness.