

Sorcerer's Handbook

Chapter 21: Ashe's Little Lesson on Workplace Conduct

"If you want more people to come to you for treatment, shouldn't you make a bit more effort in your appearance?"

In the treatment room, Ashe looked at the medic wearing a crow mask with a bit of confusion. "Dressed like that, it's good enough if people don't suspect you of robbing preachers, yet they come to you for treatment? Or is this some meaningless tradition?"

"It's a tradition, and it's meaningful," the medic replied. "Think about it, if... just if... something went wrong with your treatment, and you woke up to find some parts missing, would you dare attack me after seeing my appearance?"

"Not really."

"That's the point."

The two looked at each other, and Ashe had an epiphany: "So the terrifying attire and the eerie environment of the treatment room are all tools to improve the doctor-patient relationship... Wait, does this mean there's a high chance of you messing up the treatment?"

"It's not a very high chance, just a little bit possible..." The medic spoke ambiguously, even avoiding Ashe's gaze, suggesting that 'a little bit possible' might be as likely as something happening in the Milky Way.

Ashe commented, "This kind of service attitude won't do. You probably don't have many patients on the outside, right? And you've even been criticized by patients for not providing adequate treatment, so you had no choice but to hide in the prison and farm experience on us prisoners who can't complain, correct?"

The medic hung her head in shame, clearly struck by Ashe's words, and defended herself in a low voice, "I clearly cured them, but they still complained everywhere, and some issues were not even related to me; they caused them themselves... I merely provided the most basic secure treatment, yet they had so many demands..."

The medic seemed to crumble before Ashe, venting her frustrations as if he were a trash can. To Ashe, her story seemed like she got what she deserved: in an era where most medics would charge a consultation fee, she didn't ask for any money and was even willing to make house calls, only to be criticized for not providing good enough

treatment, which led to her inability to make it in the city and forced her to seek out Experience Babies in prison.

After listening, Ashe thought for a moment and asked, “Do you know what your flaw is?”

“I know, it’s that my skills aren’t sharp enough...”

“It’s that you don’t speak forcefully enough!”

“Huh?” The medic lifted her head, confusion evident behind the crow mask.

“You speak timidly and without confidence; patients will definitely trouble you after any medical incident, and they’ll take advantage of you even if you don’t charge them,” Ashe instructed. “Let me teach you, when you say you may not be able to cure a disease, speak loudly and stand up straight, with an attitude of confidence and pride.”

“And that’s just the first step. The second step is that you need to find the patients’ faults. If a patient is good-looking, tell them they lead a too dissolute life. If a patient is ugly, tell them they lack a sex life. If a patient is thin, say they’re malnourished. If a patient is overweight, say they have an excess of nutrition. There’s always a criticism that fits. No one is perfect, and you can definitely find something to press the patients on.”

“As long as you follow these two steps, you’ll establish your authority and suppress the patients’ status, creating an atmosphere of ‘You should be grateful that I’m willing to treat you.’ Even if there are issues with the treatment, not only will the patients not blame you, they might even make excuses for you.”

The Medic asked, “Does this really work?”

“Absolutely!” Ashe nodded emphatically. “This is the result of my years of personal experience!”

Ashe was all too familiar with these workplace PUA tactics: first, finding faults like picking bones out of an egg to suppress the other party, then releasing one’s goodwill to make the other party as grateful as if they were suffering from Stockholm syndrome. Fresh college graduates were almost helpless against these maneuvers.

Using such forbidden tactics in the workplace should, of course, be condemned, but as the saying goes, weapons are neither inherently good nor evil; it depends on the intention behind their use. Considering that the Medic was willing to provide free medical services, even if there might be some side effects, Ashe felt that she deserved to have an easier path in her occupation.

“So you know what to do now?”

“What should I do?”

“From now on, after any surgery, you need to tell the patient: I’ve done my best!”

“I’ve done my best.”

“Louder, I can’t hear you!”

“I’VE DONE MY BEST!” The Medic said, clenching her fist.

Ashe nodded in satisfaction: “You’ll figure out the rest in time. I need to go eat now…”

The Medic pondered deeply. As Ashe got his shoes on and was ready to leave, she suddenly stopped him and asked, “Are you sure you don’t want plastic surgery? Look in the mirror; don’t you feel that by walking out in public like this, you’re actually being disrespectful to others?”

Ashe was taken aback, his eyes filled with the gratification of a teachable moment—good grief, she’s using the skill she just learned on her teacher already!?

If she joined our company, she would be at least team leader level!

“It’s not that I get hurt without comparison, but compared to your crow-ugly face, I suddenly feel rather handsome. Maybe next time, if I ever feel I’ve become ugly, I’ll come to you for plastic surgery,” Ashe replied noncommittally.

“I’m not ugly, you’re the ugly one!” The Medic was so angry she almost wanted to take off her Crow Mask, but as she touched it, footsteps were heard upstairs.

She suddenly remembered something, “Oh right, Ashe, take this.”

Ashe was handed a Nameplate with 【222】 inscribed on it.

“What’s this?”

The Medic explained, “It’s my ID card, remember to carry it with you at all times, even when you’re sleeping, so everyone knows you’re one of mine.”

Ashe blinked, “So what Race are you, GG or MM? Although I’m quite easy-going, if your terms exceed my limits, I’m going to ask for more money…”

“If you don’t get plastic surgery, you’re definitely going to scare people into challenging you to a Deathmatch several times. By carrying my ID card, if you get beaten to a pulp, I will have the priority to treat you. And if your face gets messed up, I can help you with plastic surgery on the side.” The Medic pushed him out the door: “Now off you go, the restaurant is about to close…”

Ashe thought for a moment, slipped the Nameplate into his pocket, then suddenly asked, "By the way, could you cut an apple for me next time I come?"

The Medic was taken aback: "Sure."

There, goal achieved.

Don't think Ashe is just being trivial; this is his Workplace networking secret—getting others to do a small, seemingly insignificant favor is a shortcut to building rapport. The feeling of being needed is a high-level emotional need, and it was by using this tactic that Ashe got the most votes in the 'Top Ten Employees' poll, earning an extra six months' worth of bonuses.

"Let's have a meal together when you're free. I'll be off now," Ashe said. "See you next time, [222]... almost forgot, thank you."

"If you really want to thank me, let me give you plastic surgery—"

"Next time, definitely next time!"

After Ashe left, the Medic continued organizing tools in the Treatment room.

Suddenly, another door opened, and a tall Medic walked in, looking sternly at the Medic and said, "Why are you still here?"

The Medic glanced at his badge, which read [176].

Indeed, not only did the Death row inmates not know who was who among the Medics, but the Medics themselves also didn't know each other's identities. Apart from in their own dormitory, Medics were required to wear the Crow Mask in all public settings, identified only by their Nameplate.

"A patient just woke up, which delayed me a little. I gave him my Nameplate, so I've booked his future treatments."

"You didn't chat with him, did you?"

The tall Medic's tone became more serious.

"You know that communicating with Prisoners is against the rules, and our identities must be kept strictly confidential. If news of our Rituals here gets out, the Human Rights Association will dismantle the council..."

"I know," the Medic under the Crow Mask stuck out her tongue playfully.

“Then hurry back to your room. The 11-inch Blood Magic Thesis is due before the weekend, don’t forget,” the tall Medic said seriously. “Don’t think that just because you have a little Talent, you can be lazy. Without the team leader’s permission, you wouldn’t even have the right to be here...”

In the past, the Medic would have been anxious and self-reflective in the face of criticism from a senior, but after talking with Ashe, the Medic suddenly had a thought.

‘Is the senior intentionally criticizing my imperfections to establish his authority and suppress my status? The fact that I got in here through the team leader’s care is something I can’t change, and it has nothing to do with my skills. He can always criticize me based on that.’

Listening to the tall Medic’s unconstructive speech, the Medic found herself increasingly missing Ashe’s pleasant talk.

Come to think of it, Ashe’s recovery ability seemed to be much stronger than that of an average Martial Sorcerer. The feeling during treatment was genuinely pleasant...

The Medic found herself wishing that Ashe would be beaten to near death soon.

Footnote:

1. **GG or MM:** It’s an old internet slang from 20 years ago. Nowadays, when it’s used, it almost doesn’t feel like internet slang anymore. It means “boy or girl”.

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Chapter 22: Deathmatch Invitation

Shattered Lake Prison, restaurant.

"I won 45 Contribution points, and I still have to participate in the Blood Moon Tribunal in a few days!?"

Ashe, who was in the middle of a meal, lifted his head in bewilderment, his face reflecting a sense of feeling cheated: "Isn't it said that the more Contribution points a person has, the later their Judgment sequence will be?"

"That's correct,"

Langna spoke while sipping milk: "But there is a premise—all Prisoners must not miss their first Blood Moon Tribunal. Only a very few can escape this fate due to special pardons and the like."

"And it's only after surviving their first Blood Moon Tribunal that a person's subsequent Judgment sequence will be arranged according to their amount of Contribution points."

"What if I die during my first Blood Moon Tribunal?"

"If that's your worry, how about we fix a match? You can lose all your Contribution points to me."

"In your dreams!" Ashe muttered, then after a thought, he said: "You mentioned before that only one person dies in the Blood Moon Tribunal?"

"Yes, there are eight participants, but only one will die," Langna explained. "There's just a 12.5% chance of death, which is actually quite low—that's the usual case."

"And am I usual?"

"Quite obviously, as the Leader of the Four Pillars Cult, you are not. Murder, kidnapping, imprisonment, bloody sacrifices... The number of victims because of you is at least in the thousands. Your notoriety has become household knowledge recently. If nothing unexpected happens, you will certainly be a key focus during the Blood Moon Tribunal."

Heath flies courageously, and the blame falls on Ashe... Ashe harbored an endless grudge against Heath in his heart. A lack of brains? Then drink Six walnuts

, what's with starting a Cult! And to make it so universally detested, even online loans don't attract as much hate!

"How about it, if you're considering giving up, why not give your Contribution points to me?" Lagna said. "I'll remember your sacrifice and live happily with my boyfriend..."

"Get lost!" Ashe snorted. "Who says I won't survive? I won't give up!"

"Alright then." Lagna seemed not to care about Ashe's 95 Contribution points, saying: "Someone wants to challenge you, do you accept?"

"So that's why you were waiting for me in the restaurant?"

"Exactly," Lagna admitted frankly. "As for the reason, just look at the amount of Contribution points they've staked—37 points."

Ashe narrowed his eyes: "Someone who has fought 36 Deathmatches is challenging me? You do know I only bet 2 points of Contribution, right?"

Lagna shrugged.

"That's precisely why I came to notify you."

"Usually, it's Deathmatch newcomers who challenge veterans because they can win big with a small stake. Veterans challenging newcomers isn't unheard of either; after all, even a small mosquito is meat, but it's usually after 5 matches, otherwise veterans don't even have the interest to earn Contribution points."

"So, it's surprising that a veteran is challenging you. I was curious if you had any history with them."

"Who is it?"

"Valcas Uhl."

Ashe shook his head: "Never heard of him."

Of course, he hadn't. After all, without even Heath's memories, there was no way Ashe could know if Valcas ever had any issues with Heath.

"Sylin Dole."

"Uh?" Ashe blinked his eyes. "Who?"

Lagna waved her hand dismissively. "It's nothing, I just remembered an acquaintance."

“So, are you willing to accept Valcas’ challenge?”

“What weapon does Valcas use?”

“Sword.”

A thought crossed Ashe’s mind. Out of the corner of his eye, he glanced to the side and saw the Swordsman sitting at the dining table with her legs crossed, arms folded across her chest, calmly watching him. The black silk of her legs was particularly eye-catching.

She gave Ashe a sidelong glance. “Is it fun to sneak peeks at me?”

“Sorry.” Ashe turned his head and stared at the black silk, a thought suddenly popping into his mind: “Speaking of which, since you can bump into me, does that mean I can also bump into you? Cough, Swordsman, make sure you’re clean when you go back...”

Cling! The Swordsman drew her ornate decorative sword, and Ashe immediately sat up straight, turning to Langna and declaring, “Tell Valcas to wash his neck and wait for me tomorrow!”

“Well then, come to the Deathmatch Society tomorrow morning. I won’t disturb your meal any longer; my boyfriend is waiting for me. Goodbye.” Langna said before leaving swiftly like the wind.

Ashe had thought Langna’s boyfriend was waiting in a Couples Room, but upon closer inspection, he realized that Langna wasn’t heading toward the Couples Room. Instead, she was heading toward the Deathmatch Society... Perhaps someone had a late-night Deathmatch that would cause the Medics to work overtime to the brink of death, Ashe mused.

“Let’s go back to the dormitory,” the Swordsman said, jumping down from the dining table. “You’ve got a busy night ahead; I’m going to take you to explore a world you’ve never understood.”

Ashe’s face turned red with anger—what does she mean by a world I’ve never understood!? Do I really look that much like a virgin!?

This woman’s words are too much; if she continues to act so arrogantly, will I not have any standing at all!?

“Why aren’t you coming over?”

“Coming~”

...

...

At 8:45 PM, inside the Deathmatch Society with no other spectators, a secret Deathmatch was underway.

“Ashe has agreed, but not because of the name you gave me. It’s because he’s looking forward to a challenge against someone with a sword—when I mentioned you use a sword, that’s when he made up his mind.”

“Thank you, this time I owe you a favor, Langna.”

“You can repay the favor right now, Valcas, just by telling me why you suddenly set your sights on our adorable Ashe. Does it have to do with that name—Sylin Dole?”

In the dimly lit spectator stands, a lean middle-aged man watched the activity on the Arena.

Yes, activity—there was no better word to describe it. Although the food moved, tried to escape, screamed, and begged for mercy, it was ultimately just food to be eaten.

“I don’t mind telling you, as long as you won’t regret it.”

“Then never mind, I’m very much in love with my boyfriend and satisfied with my life. I don’t want to get involved in the machinations of the powerful.” Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Langna tore off a warm strip of meat, placed it in her mouth, and chewed thoughtfully. “But is Ashe really the Leader of the Four Pillars Cult? I pride myself on my ability to judge character, and he seems more like a student who just started working. I thought he was innocent.”

The middle-aged man snorted coldly.

“Every person who steps into this manure pit is far from innocent. The only difference is whether they’ve only gotten their skin dirty or they’ve opened their mouths to willingly swallow the stench.”

“I’m eating, Valcas, can we not talk about feces, please?”

“Then I won’t disturb you any longer, enjoy your meal.”

As the doors of the Deathmatch Society thunderously closed, the faint cries vanished into the pitch-black darkness.

Valcas walked through the corridors of the prison, every prisoner and prison guard he encountered coldly kept their distance from him.

Occasionally, a new prisoner who hadn't been there long would look at Valcas's ears and a schadenfreude expression would naturally appear on their face.

Because Valcas had pointed ears.

When Valcas returned to his dormitory, he found a prison guard waiting at the door.

He had anticipated this, and as he opened the door, he whispered, "Ashe Heath has agreed to a deathmatch with me."

"Make sure to completely shatter his brain, heart, and spine, to a degree that not even a Two Wings Sorcerer could heal," the prison guard said.

"I will do as you ask. But what about what you promised me?" Valcas opened the door but did not enter, instead turning to look at the guard.

"As long as Ashe Heath dies tomorrow, you will disappear from this prison after the next Blood Moon Tribunal concludes," the guard said. "However, you and that child can no longer stay in Kaimon City, as per Mr. Sylin's request."

"I have no interest in breathing the same air as Sylin any longer," Valcas said with a look of disgust.

"Free time is almost over, don't stand outside, go into your cell."

Valcas's mouth twitched, he stepped into his room, allowing the automatic door to close behind him.

The prison guard turned and walked away, the corners of his mouth slightly curling into a cold smirk.

"A mere elven death row inmate, yet still carrying the pride of a born noble... Ha!"

Footnote:

1. Six walnuts (六个核桃):

It's a popular brain-nourishing beverage in China that has gained quite a reputation for its health benefits. Made from high-quality walnuts, this drink is believed to be rich in natural omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and other vital nutrients that support brain health.

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Chapter 23

“Ugh, I’m so exhausted, Engulite. Do you want to shower first, or should I?”

The voice reached the room before she did, and Lois, who was reading in the dormitory, instantly frowned.

The door swung open, and two girls with sword bags on their backs walked in, their cheeks flushed and little beads of sweat clinging to their soft skin. They burst into laughter, filling the dormitory with a refreshing vitality reminiscent of the earth awakening in spring.

“I’ll shower first,” Engulite said as she sat down. “I have to do laundry later, plus your legs are jelly. Sit and recover your strength for a bit.”

“That’s true,” Sonya stretched languidly, sprawling across the table like a slime. “Ugh, I’m starting to regret switching to the Swordsmanship Department. It’s so tiring. It’s bad enough that we have classes, but Professor Trozan insists on two more hours of advanced lessons, and I even have to spar with him... Then I have to continue Swordsmanship Training in the evening to master the spirit of the Vibration Sword. It feels like my whole day is jam-packed.”

“That’s great, though,” Engulite said enviously. “Professor Trozan is a Tri-wings Swordcerer, and last year he was even selected as one of the ‘Top ten outstanding sword saints of the stars’, known as the ‘Hidden Hand Sword Saint’. It’s rumored he

might break through to become a Quadruple wings Legend... Then, Sonya, you'll be the apprentice of a legendary Sorcerer!"

Lois's hands unconsciously crumpled the pages of her book.

Sonya waved her hand dismissively, "Professor Trozan hasn't agreed to take me as an apprentice yet. He just thinks I have talent..."

Engulite sighed, "I wanted to become Professor Trozan's apprentice from the start, but he never openly takes apprentices. You're one of his rare exceptions, Sonya!"

"Then I'll recommend you to Professor Trozan tomorrow. I can't guarantee anything, but I should be able to get you an interview—"

"No need," Engulite interrupted as she searched for clothes. "He's clearly focused on nurturing talent, and I'm just ordinary. Not only would he not accept me, but it would probably annoy him. Besides, I'm close to breaking into the second ring, and in a few months, I'll be able to summon my own spirit. The resources of the Swordsmanship Department will open up to me... Maybe by then, I'll have caught up to you!"

"I won't wait for you, you know," Sonya giggled. "It's a good thing you're here, Engulite. Otherwise, I wouldn't know how to turn down Felix's invitation."

Engulite asked curiously, "I heard he wanted to spar with you again. Don't you want to have another match with him?"

"No way!" Sonya declared emphatically. "He's not looking to spar. He just wants to get closer to me."

"What's wrong with getting closer to Felix?"

"Firstly, he's a playboy. Plus, it's obvious that I'll surpass him in Swordsmanship one day. I have no interest in a man who can't beat me at my best."

"Swordflower College is just too small for me. In the future, I'm definitely going to Truth College. As for love, I'll think about it once I've achieved something in Swordsmanship."

Lois's nails nearly pierced through the pages of her book.

Adelle, who had been half-watching a program on the Holographic Screen, asked with a mix of feigned interest and genuine curiosity, "Sonya, are you planning to transfer to Truth College?"

"No, but Professor Trozan can help me sign up for the Swordsmanship competition at Truth College, and I can use the facilities at Truth College. I might end up running back

and forth between Swordflower and Truth,” Sonya sighed. “The more I think about it, the more tired I get.”

Adelle exclaimed, “Then Sonya, you’ll be able to meet all the talented students from Truth College, right? If you come across any handsome guys, remember to introduce them to us!”

“No~ problem~,” Sonya drawled. “How could I forget my roommates when good things happen? We’re the best of roommates who’ve had a great year together, right, Lois?”

Lois was so irritated her mouth twisted, but she managed a strained smile. “Of course, I just worry that Sonya the Sword saint won’t recognize us lowly roommates anymore.”

“How could that be? I’m just a rustic girl from the countryside; I’ll still need Miss Lois to look after me in the future.” Sonya said sarcastically. “Ah, Miss, you’re studying Water Art? I’m so envious. I wish I could continue studying Water Art, it’s so relaxing and dignified, unlike the Swordsmanship Department, which is too tiring~”

Engulite realized by then that Sonya, although talking to her, was directing her words at Lois.

She couldn’t be bothered with their squabble and went straight into the bathroom to take a shower.

Sonya braced herself for Lois’s outburst, but Lois remained silent, as if resigned to mockery.

Sarcastic banter is all about a PVP interaction, and now that her opponent was just hunkering down in defense, Sonya found it boring and decided to pack her bags, saying, “Forget it. I’ll come back and shower in the morning. Now I have to go to the Meditation Room to prepare for my first journey into the Virtual Realm. Everyone, have a pleasant night.”

Engulite was in the shower, Lois didn’t speak, and only Adelle replied, “Goodbye, Sonya.”

As the footsteps faded away, only the sound of water remained in the dormitory.

Adelle looked at the silent Lois, thought for a moment, and went over to start a conversation: “Humph, that rustic girl Sonya is really full of herself just because she has some Talent in Swordsmanship. Lois, you don’t have to take it to heart. She’s so arrogant, she’ll run into a wall sooner or later... Hm?”

Adelle went over and saw that Lois was indeed studying, even pulling out a workbook to do exercises.

"I lost this time," Lois said. "That rustic girl Sonya has now climbed to a height where I need to look up to her. If this continues, when we meet again years after graduation, I'll have to bow my head to her."

Lois's lips twitched slightly as if she could already picture her own humble future: "I can't accept that... I refuse to believe I can't even surpass that rustic girl!"

Adelle didn't disturb her and returned to her seat to continue watching her program.

Although the program was still entertaining, Adelle's mind was not at peace.

She turned to look at Lois again and saw that she was not just a flash in the pan but was still studying intently. After a moment's thought, she too turned off the Holographic Screen and took out her books to study.

Engulite finished her shower and came out to find both roommates studying seriously, which slightly surprised her.

However, she didn't say anything and quietly went to the balcony to wash her clothes.

The Doorkeeper checked the Student information in the Bracelet, and Sonya entered a fully enclosed special building.

As soon as she crossed the threshold, Sonya felt as if she had passed through an invisible boundary line, her thinking speed suddenly increased, and her Vibration Sword spirit jumped out from her shoulder, seeming very excited.

"So, will you still be by my side after I enter the Virtual Realm?" Sonya asked.

"This actually counts as overtime," the Observer walking beside her said leisurely. "It's beyond the scope of my services."

"So you mean you're unwilling..."

"So, there should be overtime pay!" the Observer said, rubbing his fingers together. "If you go to a bar to find someone to chat with, you have to buy them a drink, right? If you find someone to accompany you to chat and travel in the Virtual Realm, you should at least show some appreciation, right?"

"I'm super broke!"

"Besides money, you have lots of other surplus value to offer."

Sonya raised her eyebrows slightly and hooked a finger under her close-fitting shirt, revealing a deep ravine: "The most valuable thing I have is myself..."

“That’s what I was waiting for! You’ll be an employee working for me then,” the Observer snapped his fingers. “But since you haven’t graduated yet, you’re still on a probationary period. And since it’s a probationary period, there’s no labor contract, and as for the salary during the probationary period, the Energy Potion you drank earlier and the wooden sword you used have already covered it, so...”

“So you want me to work for you for free?”

“Tsk, you make it sound so negative. I provide various opportunities to nurture your growth, and as you grow, you do some work in return for me. Isn’t this a healthy employer-employee relationship where we both progress together?”

Sonya did not reject this unfair overbearing contract, but she did ask, “You’ve put so much effort into training me in the dreams, arranging my Training, and stimulating my Swordsmanship Talent, all to have me work for you? What exactly is my job?”

“To live.”

“To live?”

“Living is the rarest thing in this world.” The Observer seemed to be smiling. “Most people merely exist.”

“I still don’t understand,” Sonya said. “I believe every gift has its price. You’ve invested so much in training me; you must want to reap more from me. Unless you are my spiritual illusion, I can’t think of any reason for your selflessness.”

“I’m not being selfless; on the contrary, there’s no one in the world more selfish than me.” The Observer laughed. “I ask that you live according to my wishes. Could there be anything more selfish than that?”

“But...”

“Haha, I was just joking. How could I possibly be such a nice person who has your best interests at heart?” The Observer laughed. “I have a serious favor to ask of you—due to some reasons, I’ve become very weak, and I can’t explore the Virtual Realm on my own, so I need you to protect me.”

As they spoke, Sonya had already arrived in front of room 311. Using her Bracelet, she opened the door to a narrow and empty Meditation Room, which had only an orange carpet filling the floor and Lighting on the ceiling illuminating every corner.

Here is the best place for Sonya to find peace to enter the Virtual Realm: the Meditation Room of Swordflower College.

She closed the door, sat cross-legged on the carpet, and let her Vibration Sword spirit float above her palm. She poured her whole heart and mind into the spirit, searching for the Gate of Truth hidden in the Sea of Knowledge, attempting her first journey into the Virtual Realm.

Though Sonya had successfully summoned her first spirit, she could not yet be called a One Wing Sorcerer, for she had not formed her 'Silver Wings.'

Without arcane energy, without the coalescing of a virtual shadow, she was unable to fully activate her spirit and could not truly be considered a Sorcerer.

To form the Silver Wings, one must enter the Virtual Realm, traverse the Sea of Knowledge, attract knowledge with one's Soul, extract arcane energy from this knowledge, condense the arcane energy into virtual wings, and then leverage the Authority of Rules through these wings to become a Sorcerer!

The only way for ordinary people to enter the Virtual Realm is by finding the Gate of Truth within their own spirit. Allowing the Soul to pass through this Gate, they can reach the illusory world constructed by Rules and Knowledge—the Virtual Realm!

It is said that the Virtual Realm is dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of times larger than the real world.

Countless Sorcerers never encounter others in the Virtual Realm throughout their lives, so all Sorcerers can only rely on themselves to explore it.

The Meditation Tower is specifically used by Sorcerers to explore the Virtual Realm. Besides the peace and lack of disturbance, Swordflower College has also cast the Miracle 'Starchild Guiding Lights,' not only accelerating students' thinking speeds to more easily find the Gate of Truth but also drawing down countless rays of light from the Stars Sovereign, making students' Souls emit a fragrance that knowledge favors, to more quickly condense the Silver Wings!

Soon, Sonya found the Gate of Truth within the spirit of her Vibration Sword.

Being her first time, she couldn't help but feel as nervous as if she was going to a hotel room, and she asked in her mind: "Observer?"

"I'm here. Don't worry, a Bond exists between us, and sacred destiny connects you and me."

Sonya's heart and mind immediately quieted down. Her consciousness touched the Gate of Truth, and her vision was suddenly engulfed by darkness.

When she awoke, she found herself lying in a boat, floating on a lead-gray sea.

In front of her was a sky thick as heavy ink, surrounded by a misty fog.

She lay at the stern, and at the bow lay a familiar figure.

Sonya: “Observer?”

Ashe: “Swordswoman?”

The two exchanged glances and both sighed in relief.

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Chapter 24

“This is the Virtual Realm...”

Ashe scooped up a handful of seawater, sniffed it, and gave it a taste. To his surprise, it was a bit sweet.

He looked down at the water's surface, which was so blurry that he couldn't make out his own reflection.

Checking his attire, he found himself dressed in a Black Windbreaker identical to his Portrait, which looked quite handsome.

“It's exactly as described in the textbooks.”

Since there was no one else around, Sonya spoke up, "This must be the Sea of Knowledge, also known as the Silver Sea, the Initial Sea... Whether genius or mediocre, whether the legendary Six Wings Divine Master or a One Wing Sorcerer, their first stop upon entering the Virtual Realm is invariably this ocean."

"The only difference is this." Sonya tapped on the small boat and looked around to find a book symbol at the bow and a sword symbol at the stern.

"The textbooks say that Sorcerers should arrive here completely naked..."

"Naked?" Ashe glanced at Sonya's black slip dress.

Sonya's face lined with embarrassment as she instinctively covered her chest, "Our appearance in the Virtual Realm is a projection of our consciousness. 'Naked' means we can't have any help from external objects, like bringing items from reality... I've heard that newcomers to the Virtual Realm are supposed to swim directly in the seawater, not have a boat."

"I get it now!" Ashe exclaimed, clapping his hands together.

"What do you understand?"

"This boat is actually your essence; you're just a spirit projection!"

"What?" Sonya was taken aback.

"Your consciousness is split into two parts: one is your profound Soul, transformed into this boat to aid your voyage; the other is your agile mind, manifested in your current form," Ashe stated confidently. "The Soul is the boat, the consciousness is the person; the boat carries the person to the other shore, it must be!"

It sounded somewhat logical, but...

"How can you prove that?" Sonya challenged.

Without missing a beat, Ashe replied, "If you don't believe it, jump into the sea and see for yourself. If I'm right, you won't be able to leave this boat!"

Without hesitation, Sonya dove into the sea with a leap. Luckily, from her Dream Trial, even though Sonya hadn't learned to swim, she knew enough to not sink like a stone.

Quickly, Sonya climbed back onto the boat and scoffed, "You're wrong; I can leave the boat. It's not the embodiment of my Soul..."

To personally disprove the Observer's words felt like a victory to her. Sonya was initially pleased with herself, but when she turned around, she found the Observer looking at her.

Even though his features were still obscured by the dim light, Sonya could fully sense his gaze. She looked down to find her clothes soaked by the sea, clinging to her body and outlining her graceful curves.

"You—" Sonya, fuming with anger, raised her wooden sword, not caring about the disparity in their abilities, and summoned her Vibration Sword spirit, ready to strike down Ashe, who quickly retreated with hands up in surrender, "Wait, where did you get that wooden sword from?"

Huh?

Sonya glanced at the wooden sword in her hand, recalling that she hadn't brought any weapon with her just moments before. But seeing the Observer so infuriating, she subconsciously wanted to hit him with the wooden sword...

"You see, when you wanted a wooden sword, it appeared. It's obvious that the boat also appeared because you didn't want to swim," Ashe spread his hands: "I was just testing a theory, and now it's proven that the boat is indeed a creation of your mind."

"So, your peeping just now was part of the test too? Wrong, the wooden sword is the weapon I'm most familiar with, so I can easily manifest it, just like I can manifest clothes!"

"Don't slander me, I didn't peek, I was looking openly and honestly!"

This little episode helped dissipate the strangeness and fear they felt upon first arriving in the Virtual Realm.

And with each other's company, both felt a sense of security.

But just as Sonya didn't know the difference between this 'Observer' and that 'Observer', Ashe didn't know the difference between this 'Swordswoman' and that 'Swordswoman'.

One hour earlier.

After finishing their meal and returning to the Prison dormitory, the Swordswoman started discussing a very adult topic with Ashe.

"There are two pieces of news, the good news is, you've got free housing provided by the state for the rest of your life."

“Really? That’s good news?”

“The bad news is you could be dragged off to be beheaded at any moment.”

Ashe understood: “So, I can’t escape from prison?”

The Swordswoman sat on the bed, legs crossed and arms folded, looking at Ashe sideways: “You should know that Sorcerers are the most powerful group in this world, right? As a mere mortal, you can’t hope to contend with them.”

“Even that Physical Sorcerer who could transform his body into Diamond, once his connection to the Virtual Realm was cut, he could only become a Diamond rat rolling in a Manure pit.”

“And today’s experience should make it clear to you that as long as you’re wearing the neck chip, no matter where you are, you’re still bound by endless shackles.”

At this point, Ashe’s expression also changed slightly. He had originally thought the Miracle Chip was akin to an implanted computer, but he hadn’t realized that the Chip had turned him into a computer – with his admin privileges controlled remotely by someone else.

Whether he could hit someone, what content he could see, what words he could utter, all were under the administrator’s control. Today the administrator could make him a civilized young man who speaks politely and follows rules, tomorrow the administrator could make him eat filth.

Until the Chip was removed, all his plans were like a computer virus – the administrator could wipe them out with a system reboot. If the administrator deemed Ashe beyond repair, they could even recycle him as scrap, forcing Ashe to start his life over.

“Is there a way to remove the Chip?” Ashe asked through gritted teeth: “Like, directly cutting out the back of my neck...”

“If it were that simple, this Prison wouldn’t be so lively.”

The Swordswoman sneered: “Though it’s called a Chip, during your growth, the Miracle Chip has gradually integrated deeply into your marrow. Now every bone, every nerve, every muscle in you bears the mark of the Chip. To remove it, you might as well jump into molten steel at a steel mill – that might do the trick.”

“Which means that normal means are impossible for removing the Chip,” Ashe said. “What about a Sorcerer’s methods?”

“There are many methods that a Sorcerer could employ,” the Swordswoman replied. “And the most likely one you could obtain is the Swordsmanship Miracle ‘Slay Me’.”

“‘Slay Me’ is a defensive Miracle of a Swordcerer, specifically designed to Purify Abnormal Status. Although it’s just a Silver Miracle that a One Wing Sorcerer could use, it can directly Purify most Continuous Damage caused by a Two Wings spirit.”

“The Miracle Chip is aimed at mortals and One Wing Sorcerers, and cannot be immune to the ‘Slay Me’ Miracle with the power of Two Wings. As long as you execute ‘Slay Me,’ you can instantly clear all the Miracle Chips from your body, and then you’ll have the chance to escape from prison.”

“How can I obtain the ‘Slay Me’ Miracle?” Ashe asked.

“To perform Miracles, you first need to have a spirit. And there are four ways to acquire a spirit,” the Swordswoman said, raising four fingers:

“First, resonate with the Virtual Realm through learning, allowing Virtual Realm knowledge to manifest into a spirit in reality.”

“Second, find a Wild spirit within the Virtual Realm.”

“Third, slay a Sorcerer and plunder his spirit.”

“Fourth, trade spirits.”

“First off, the first option is not viable for you,” the Swordswoman glanced at Ashe. “The Miracle Chip has already severed your link with the Virtual Realm; no matter how much knowledge you absorb, you can’t trigger a resonance with the Virtual Realm.”

Ashe glanced at the Holographic Screen displaying his body’s information and indeed saw a ‘Virtual Realm Resonance Prohibited’ notice.

“The third option, slaying a Sorcerer with a mortal’s body, isn’t unheard of. Most occurrences involve concubines plotting to kill their master while in the act of love...”

The Swordswoman looked at Ashe’s face and shook her head: “That’s not a road you can travel either.”

“Do you have to be so absolute? Isn’t there a slight chance? I could have some potential to get by on my looks, right?!”

“As for the fourth option, you don’t have the means to trade with anyone.”

“In short,” the Swordswoman said, not wanting to entertain Ashe’s banter, “your only way to acquire a spirit is to go to the Virtual Realm and find a Wild one.”

Ashe asked, “Then how do I get to the Virtual Realm?”

“The only way to the Virtual Realm,” the Swordswoman explained, “is through triggering the Gate of Truth within a spirit’s body, allowing your consciousness to directly transmigrate to the Virtual Realm.”

Ashe blinked.

“So you mean, to go to the Virtual Realm, I need a spirit?”

“Exactly.”

“And the purpose of going to the Virtual Realm is to find a spirit?”

“You’ve got it right.”

“Wait a minute...”

Ashe stepped back, holding his forehead.

“Isn’t this just like the dilemma of recent college graduates discovering that every job position requires three years of experience?! I can’t go to the Virtual Realm without a spirit, and I need to go to the Virtual Realm to find a spirit. Isn’t this a vicious cycle?”

“Who told you that you must use your own spirit to travel to the Virtual Realm?”

“Huh?”

The Swordswoman pointed at herself: “Did you forget? I already have a Vibration Sword spirit, and I’m qualified to enter the Virtual Realm. Observer, through the Handbook, we have formed a Soul Bond, and we can even share experiences. Naturally, it’s not an issue for me to take you to the Virtual Realm with me.”

Is there really such a feature? Ashe opened the Sorcerer Handbook subconsciously, wanting to take another look at his Talent, but he found out that a new function module had been added to the game at some point:

“Exploration in Virtual Realm”: Organize an Operator Team to explore the Virtual Realm.

However, when Ashe clicked on “Exploration in Virtual Realm,” selected ‘Apocalypse Observer’ and ‘Death Maniac Swordswoman’ to act together, and hit “Ready,” nothing happened in reality—because the ‘Death Maniac Swordswoman’ was still “Preparing.”

“I’ve confirmed I’m ready; hurry up and confirm yours too,” Ashe urged.

“I’ll go back to get ready, you just wait,” she replied.

Ashe was dumbfounded: “What else do you need to prepare for?”

“A lot, a lot, something a virgin like you wouldn’t understand.”

“You have no evidence to call me a—”

Watching the Swordswoman purse her lips with a mocking smile and disappear into the air, Ashe could only lie in bed and wait. Perhaps it was the regeneration treatment that had drained too much of his energy, or perhaps it was the boredom of a night without scrolling through his phone, but Ashe soon fell asleep from exhaustion.

When he woke up again, he saw the Swordswoman sitting in the same boat as him, floating on a sea shrouded in white mist.

On the small boat in the Sea of Knowledge, Ashe suddenly remembered something and silently tried to summon the Holographic Screen.

He both failed and succeeded: The failure was that, although he summoned the Holographic Screen, most of its functions were disabled—indeed, the Virtual Realm doesn’t support physical cheats; the success was that the Sorcerer Handbook was still operational.

He opened the Sorcerer Handbook to “Exploration in Virtual Realm,” and suddenly a map popped up on the screen along with a message:

“You have entered Exploration in Virtual Realm mode, please read the beginner’s tutorial...”

On the other side, Sonya noticed Ashe’s silence and focused her attention on the Virtual Realm too. She leaned over and played with the water with her hand, trying to push the boat forward.

“Wait, Swordswoman, don’t be so hasty and move around like that, let me do it.”

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Chapter 25

“Are you coming?”

Sonya looked puzzled, her gaze at Ashe laden with doubt.

For sorcerers, exploration in the Virtual Realm is undoubtedly an essential part of their growth, even the most important part.

The majority of adventures, breakthroughs, and promotions in this world happen in the Virtual Realm, and many sorcerers are willing to spend their entire lives exploring it.

Compared to the Virtual Realm, reality is just a stage for sorcerers to show off during their leisure time.

Despite the importance of the Virtual Realm, there has never been a definitive guide to its exploration.

Perhaps such guides exist, but at her current status, Sonya hasn't had the chance to access them.

In her afternoon class, Sonya had specifically asked Professor Trozan for any handy tips about the Virtual Realm, but Professor Trozan could only spread his hands, indicating he had none to offer.

“The reason why sorcerers maintain an equal status is precisely because we are all equally ignorant in the Virtual Realm.”

Sonya knew that Professor Trozan held her in high regard and also realized that the professor was a typical swordsman who disdained lying or deceiving someone weaker like her.

Even Tri-Wings Sanctuary sorcerers lacked an effective guide, so Sonya didn't have much expectation for the Observer.

“The Virtual Realm can be dangerous,” Sonya warned. “If I die here, it will take three days to recuperate my spirit.”

Sorcerers can die in the Virtual Realm.

The most common cause of death, of course, is drowning.

When sorcerers attempt to explore the depths of the ocean or remain motionless in the water, they risk being overwhelmed by the Sea of Knowledge.

This is why Sonya was so surprised by the small boat—it meant they were spared from the risk of drowning.

Death in the Virtual Realm can cause great trauma to the soul. The stronger the sorcerer, the greater the trauma and the longer the recovery.

A newbie sorcerer like Sonya only needs three days to recover, while a formal Silver Sorcerer needs at least fifteen days, and a Golden Sorcerer measures their recovery in months. It is said that Sanctuary and Legendary sorcerers' recovery could even take years.

Being unable to explore the Virtual Realm means slowing down one's growth by 90%, which is why sorcerers have varying perspectives on exploration: some prefer to be conservative, aiming for stable growth, while others enjoy taking risks.

Sonya used to be a risk-taker, having nothing to lose, but now she leaned towards caution—after discovering her talent for swordsmanship, Professor Trozan had predicted, "Gold within twenty years is no issue, and Sanctuary is within reach in forty."

In the Stars Kingdom, even a Golden Two Wings sorcerer is a figure of some standing, fit to be a small noble, which could be said to fulfill Sonya's life goals.

If she could advance to a Tri-Wings Sanctuary, she could even establish her own family, making a name for herself.

Therefore, Sonya's petit bourgeois mentality was quite normal; she was aware of the brighter prospects she had, but the harsh reality forced her to cling tightly to what she had in hand.

The world is beautiful and worth striving for, she could only agree with the latter half of the sentiment.

But even with her conservative approach, Sonya had to explore the Virtual Realm; standing still was not an option. Countless schoolteachers, including Professor Trozan, had specifically warned her: never stay in one place for too long.

To this day, nobody knows what happens if you linger in the same spot for an extended period in the Virtual Realm, but those who enter and then halt in their tracks soon stop

breathing in reality, and not even Healing Sorcerers can save them, because their Souls are no longer in their bodies.

Hence, there's a saying: if you stop moving in the Virtual Realm, your body will think you're dead and you'll die on the spot.

"I've heard that the safest thing to do on your first trip into the Virtual Realm is to head towards the shallowest part of the white mist," Sonya said.

This wasn't so much a guide as a little tip summarized by the senior Sorcerers at Swordflower College, and even then, it had a success rate of less than 60%. The other 40% who followed this advice encountered danger.

But in this completely unknown ocean, a 60% chance was already worth taking a gamble on.

"No, we're going over there."

Ashe pointed towards the thickest part of the white mist, where the view was completely obscured, giving off a sense of fear. Sonya wanted to say something else, but to her surprise, the boat began to move on its own, and she quickly shifted her attention: "Can you control this boat? Did you bring this boat here?"

"Yeah."

"Then you tricked me into jumping into the sea just now!?"

Seeing Sonya grip her wooden sword tightly again, Ashe quickly explained: "I only just found out that I can control the boat. When I told you to jump into the sea, I meant it!"

"You meant to watch me make a fool of myself?"

"I meant... I wanted to see you... Hey, calm down, we're entering an unknown area, and danger could strike at any moment!"

As the white mist enveloped them, and the unknown could appear at any time, Sonya had no choice but to sit down, albeit grudgingly.

However, as they passed through layer upon layer of white mist, Sonya felt something flowing into her body, her consciousness becoming clearer, her skin glowing with a Silver hue, and her mind suddenly filled with a vast amount of knowledge about Swordsmanship.

This is why Sorcerers must explore the Virtual Realm—to automatically gain knowledge within the Virtual Realm just by moving and to condense their own knowledge into Silver Arcane Energy!

When a large amount of Silver Arcane Energy accumulates and solidifies, it forms the symbol of a Sorcerer's strength: Silver Wings!

Sonya suddenly understood why Sorcerers loved immersing themselves in the Virtual Realm.

The feeling of gaining knowledge every second and growing stronger every moment was as comfortable as stretching in the early morning.

While Sonya was enjoying the pleasure of gaining knowledge, Ashe was acting like a student who's up to mischief during class, constantly staring at the Holographic Screen's map.

In the center of the map was a small boat, surrounded by eight squares; the boat was currently entering the top-left square.

Indeed, this was the "Exploration in Virtual Realm" mode provided by the game. When Ashe moved the little boat in the game, the boat in the Virtual Realm moved accordingly.

Apart from moving, Ashe could also check the information of those eight squares:

"Waste of effort," "Seeking death," "Waste of effort," "Waste of effort," "Waste of effort," "Worth a visit," "A bit troublesome," "Better not go."

Among the eight prompts, "Waste of effort" clearly meant that there was nothing in the grid. "Seeking death" indicated danger, "Better not go" was something Ashe couldn't figure out, and "Worth a visit" was obviously a hint provided by the game.

Soon after passing through layers of white mist, a small island shrouded in thick fog appeared before them.

Seeing this scene, Sonya suddenly remembered the place where the Observer had taken her for the Dream Trial. Wasn't it identical to the Virtual Realm?

No wonder the Observer was so confident; he could use the Virtual Realm for Trials, so exploring the Virtual Realm was naturally easy for him!

The boat slowed to a stop, and the moment the two set foot on the island, the dense fog suddenly dispersed, revealing a Hunter wearing a wide-brimmed hat and carrying a long gun.

"Seven steps away, the gun is fast."

The Hunter lifted the gun and aimed at them: "Within seven steps, the gun is both accurate and fast!"

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Chapter 26

A gun rang out, and both dove in opposite directions to evade the Shot Bullets!

However, suddenly there was an explosion in the air, and the Shot Bullets fired by the Hunter burst into Scattered Bullets, inevitably grazing both Ashe and Sonya!

Ashe thought it would be painful, but as the Shot Bullets passed through his body, he only felt as if he had lost something, as tired as if he had just run a 400-meter race.

He then remembered that he was in a state of consciousness, not a real physical body, and being hit by the Shot Bullets only meant a loss of Soul Energy.

Unlike Ashe, who had an epiphany, Sonya, who had taken an advanced course in the Virtual Realm, had anticipated this.

After Evading, she immediately charged at the Hunter, raising her wooden sword and slashing from afar. The blade gathered a misty white light, transforming into a crescent wave with her swing, charging towards the Hunter!

“Vibration Sword!”

This was the Secret Spirit of the Vlozrada Family: the Vibration Sword! A rare Long-range Attack spirit in the Swordsmanship Faction, capable of deriving powerful Attack Miracles like 'Rupture Wave Slash' and 'Silver Wheel Burst'!

"With three thousand skills, a Gun in hand, swiftiness is unbreakable, nothing is indestructible!"

The Hunter chanted while dodging, the barrel of his Long gun glowing faintly, and he fired another Shot Bullet! It looked like an ancient flintlock!

But prepared Ashe and Sonya were no longer flustered. Not to mention Ashe's evade, which was as clumsy as a rolling donkey, Sonya performed a Laido quick draw, stepping forward and unleashing a Cyclone Vibration Slash!

Clang!

Not only was the Shot Bullet directly deflected, but the Hunter a few steps away also took a fierce slash from the Cyclone Vibration Slash, even severing the barrel of his Long gun!

Without further ado, Ashe charged forward to bear-hug the Hunter. Sonya, recovering from the Stun of the Laido, took two steps in three and raised the wooden sword for a heavy slash!

Without a sound, the Hunter dissipated into a thick fog under the critical hit of the wooden sword, and a notebook bound in leather fell onto the rocky ground.

"Hey, hey, hey, you almost blew my head off!"

Ashe, seeing the wooden sword embedded in the rock, touched his head with a lingering fear.

"It was just a little bit off." Sonya's tone was full of regret as she bent down to pick up the leather notebook, flipped through a couple of pages, and then shook her head, handing it to Ashe.

Ashe took it and saw that it was a... well, Hunting Records?

The first page was information on a mouse, detailing the mouse's weight, size, fur color, cause of death, and even included a photo of the mouse pinned to the wall with an arrow.

The second page featured a spider, the third a rabbit, the fourth a roe deer... The tenth page finally offered some variety, not only because the prey was a ferocious carnivore, a wild wolf, but also because the notebook's owner had learned a new skill: he had killed the wolf with a trap.

By the twenty-third page, the entry recorded was an Orc Soldier clad in full armor, wielding a Long gun.

The following twenty pages were all about Orc Soldiers who were shot dead, but what attracted Ashe's attention more was that the owner of the notes seemed to have abandoned his past archery skills and taken up the Long guns brought by the Orc Soldiers, using traps in the jungle to single-handedly confront an entire Orc army.

The notes did not disclose any details about the owner himself, but Ashe could vaguely discern a story: a boy born into a family of Hunters in a jungle village, inheriting his forebears' hunting skills. However, the sudden appearance of an Orc army destroyed everything they had. Their bow and arrow techniques, once their pride, could not penetrate the armor of the Orcs, whereas the Orcs' firearms could easily shatter their bodies.

The boy abandoned his bow and arrow, quickly learned Gun Technique, and then hunted Orc Soldiers like the Grim Reaper in the jungle he could navigate with his eyes closed, seeking revenge for his villagers.

The expressions on the faces of the Orcs before they died revealed the horror of the boy: the first few Orcs died peacefully, likely taken by surprise during their private moments; the later ones died with faces increasingly filled with terror, clearly attempting to flee; the last of the Orcs had even discarded their weapons, hiding in the bushes, faces full of devotion as if praying to be overlooked by the Grim Reaper.

After the Orc Soldiers were all dead, the owner of the notes seemed to have gone through a period of confusion. The hunting targets in the notes included animals, Humans, Orcs, Goblins, Wealthy individuals, bandits, prostitutes, and ordinary people.

A hundred pages later, the note owner's hunting targets suddenly became fixed: Orcs.

For a full three hundred pages, all the data was about different Orcs hunted by the note owner.

Although not mentioned above, Ashe could infer a thing or two from the causes of death of the Orcs:

Firstly, the Orcs were all killed by the owner of the notes with a 'Devotee Model 5 Standard Rifle';

Secondly, there was more than one bullet hole on the bodies of the Orcs.

Thus, Ashe deduced that the note owner must have joined the military, killing Orcs in the war.

He killed not only Soldiers but also children, women, the elderly, and even his own comrades... No matter who the opponent was, he never changed his weapon, always using a Shot Bullet to end their lives.

Later on, the note owner seemed to have prospered and settled down, not only because his hunting targets were herbivores like rabbits and deer, but also because the people who died by his hand were no longer soldiers or bandits, but maids, servants, and Slaves.

It is worth mentioning that the frequency of the servants' deaths was not slow.

He probably had an estate, with many servants at his service, but due to the aftereffects of the war, he was always armed, and would shoot the servants without hesitation whenever he felt suspicious...

Suddenly, an old woman appeared in the hunting notes.

Ashe guessed she was probably the wife of the note owner, because the look in her eyes was not one of terror, fear, or confusion, but of pity.

Pity for the note owner.

When Ashe turned to the last page, he was sure that the deceased listed there was the note owner himself:

"Cabin Storley"

"Human Race Male 56 years old"

"Weight: 72 kilograms"

"Height: 1.76 meters"

"Features: Brown skin, abundant hair, body odor."

"Cause of Death: Killed by an arrow."

In the photo was a dignified, weathered old man, who had raised his handgun towards the enemy. However, he would never get the chance to pull the trigger, as an arrow pierced through his eyes and into his brain.

Ashe didn't know who killed him with the arrow—it could have been a past enemy, possibly the old woman's son, or maybe a thief breaking in to rob the place. Ashe also didn't know why the battle-hardened man was slower than the arrow this time—was it due to a sluggish body, or did he underestimate the bow and arrow?

Regardless, Cabin Storley's Hunting Records end here, though perhaps his name will appear in someone else's records.

Turning to the last page, Ashe found a medal made of iron tucked inside. Ashe didn't recognize the text on the medal, but since it was made of iron, it probably wasn't very valuable; it was likely the first medal Cabin earned in his life.

Perhaps this medal represented the golden moments of Cabin's life.

Ashe picked up the medal and felt a warm current flow into his hand, followed by a message popping up on the Holographic Screen:

"Rapid Fire"

"One Wing spirit"

"Restriction: Must possess a ranged shooting tool."

"Basic Effect: After making one shot, you can immediately make a second shot."

"Passive Effect: Increases accuracy of ranged shots."

"Sometimes a few seconds too slow can't be caught up with in a lifetime."

Simultaneously, an automatic message popped up in the game:

"Currency for recharge detected, would you like to exchange for Points?"

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Chapter 27

Ashe had almost forgotten about the possibility of recharging in “The Sorcerer Handbook” game.

He thought that the Source Crystals he got from the daily check-ins were his only means of card draw, but it turns out that there is an actual currency recognized by the game in this world.

No matter the value, this discovery gave Ashe a surge of enthusiasm—it was like your boss telling you, “Do well, and you’ll be the next one promoted.” Even if the hope was slim, there was still something to look forward to.

But he didn’t dare to just recharge using his medals, because he realized that these medals were actually the extraordinary foundation of this world, the source of power that all Sorcerers yearned for—the Spirits!

“Do you want this Spirit?” he asked.

“Do you?” To Ashe’s surprise, Sonya didn’t show much interest in the Spirit. “Then take it.”

Now it was Ashe who was curious. “It’s a Spirit, don’t you want it?”

“It’s neither a Swordsmanship Spirit nor a Universal Spirit. It’s useless to me and would just be a waste of my money.”

“What does it have to do with money?” Ashe asked, still not fully understanding.

Sonya felt like the Observer was subtly mocking her poverty. After all, Observers could control little ships sailing through the Virtual Realm; how could they not know such common Sorcerer knowledge?

Or was it that the Observer was simply a Noble who didn’t have to worry about feeding a Spirit? The kind you read about in novels, ‘the rich Noble who lacks common sense’—quite comical to think I’m actually encountering such an endangered species in reality.

With Sonya’s explanation, Ashe came to realize that the world of Spirits was far more complicated than he had imagined.

First of all, Spirits need to be fed, and they’re fed with circulating currency!

Silver Coins and Gold Coins are the main diet for Spirits. One Wing Spirits require Silver Coins, while Two Wings Spirits need Gold Coins. Spirits that aren't fed will dissipate, and some poor Sorcerers might actually starve their own Spirits to death!

Besides currency, Spirits can also be fed with other materials, but the specific materials required by each Spirit vary greatly, making the search quite cumbersome. Silver and Gold Coins, on the other hand, are the universal food for all Spirits. Over time, Sorcerers have forgotten what exactly their Spirits need and have resorted to simply stuffing their Spirits' mouths with money.

Additionally, just the existence of a Spirit consumes the mental energy of a Sorcerer. A Sorcerer with many Spirits is like a man with many girlfriends—not only will his wallet suffer, but his body will too.

Therefore, for Low-rank Sorcerers, especially those who uphold the excellent traditions of the working class, having more Spirits is not better. They must selectively choose Spirits that suit them, as 'quality over quantity' is the development strategy for most Low-rank Sorcerers.

Secondly, there are Restrictions on the use of Spirits.

Spirits are divided into different Factions based on their usage restrictions, such as the Swordsmanship Faction that requires the use of a sword, the Gun Technique Faction that uses guns, the Physical Faction that demands a strong physique, and the Fist Technique Faction that relies on overpowering with fists. Spirits that have high requirements for the Sorcerer are known as Specialized Spirits. For example, the "Vibration Sword" requires the Sorcerer to wield a sword to activate it.

For a Sorcerer, having a Spirit that doesn't have special requirements or one that most Sorcerers can easily meet is known as a Universal Spirit. For example, 'Hawkeye' just needs the Sorcerer to have eyes to be activated.

Generally speaking, the Spirits a Sorcerer possesses are composed of Specialized Spirits and Universal Spirits. It's best not to exceed two Factions with Specialized Spirits, and even with Universal Spirits, one must consider compatibility and try not to retain useless Spirits.

Even if Sonya took the 'Rapid Fire' Spirit, she would likely sell it rather than keep it and waste her money.

The reason Sonya had no interest in the 'Rapid Fire' Spirit is because it's not valuable.

"'Rapid Fire' is a relic from the flintlock Gun era hundreds of years ago. These days, it's the era of Automatic Rifles and Handguns. A Handgun can discharge seven Shot Bullets in a second, so there's no lack of rapid-firing capability," Sonya explained, spreading her hands, "Although 'Rapid Fire' could also be used on mortars and ship-

mounted guns, there are better Spirit options for those weapons too, so they wouldn't use 'Rapid Fire'."

"Spirits like this that have been phased out by time, the school's buyback price is at most one Silver Coin—that's also the lowest buyback price for a One Wing Spirit."

Ashe had known that the Swordswoman was studying, but he didn't pay it much attention, thinking it was just a game setting.

"Well, I'll take it then!"

"Go ahead, take it." Sonya didn't really care either.

Ashe muttered 'exchange' to himself, and the medal in his hand turned into white mist and dissipated. A message popped up in the game: 'Recharge successful! You have earned 10 Points.'

The lowest purchase option in the game is 6 Points for one Source Crystal. This means the 'Rapid Fire' Spirit is only enough to buy 1.5 Source Crystals, and a Card draw requires 3 Source Crystals. So, two One Wing Spirits are equivalent to one Card draw.

Spirits are, after all, Extraordinary Powers. Ashe clicked his tongue; the price was as cheap as a college graduate's... He looked down at the hunting notes in his hand: "Then what's this notebook?"

"It's a Sorcerer Handbook!" Sonya looked at Ashe with a strange expression.

"Sorcerer Handbook?" Ashe was taken aback.

Sonya nodded.

"A Sorcerer Handbook somehow summarizes a Sorcerer's life. For example, this Handbook records the hunting targets of the Gun Technique practitioner from their lifetime, showing that hunting was the most important part of this Sorcerer's life. Hmm, it's basically a Sorcerer's diary."

"But this isn't a diary that the Sorcerer writes voluntarily. Rather, after a Sorcerer dies, their Soul automatically returns to the Virtual Realm to become a Sorcerer projection, and then their life memories settle down into a book—just like the natural laws of life, aging, sickness, and death, it is an unavoidable natural rule."

"We collectively refer to this book as the Sorcerer Handbook."

"If the Virtual Realm is considered the graveyard of Sorcerers, then the Sorcerer Handbook is their tombstone."

It was only then that Ashe realized the Hunter he saw earlier was the projection of a deceased person. He had thought it was a living Sorcerer, wondering how he had encountered another Sorcerer so easily.

But even if it were a living person, he wouldn't have held back, because dying in the Virtual Realm isn't real death.

"Like the medal, the Sorcerer Handbook is also usable," Sonya said. "You can absorb the handbook directly with your consciousness. This way, you can gain a random skill from the handbook's owner that doesn't fall into any Magical Factions—completely at random."

Ashe asked, "Do you want it?"

"I don't want it; I felt tired just by glancing at it," Sonya shook her head. "But since you've read through the entire handbook, you definitely won't be contaminated when you absorb it."

"Contaminated?"

"The Sorcerer Handbook carries a risk of contamination. Generally, a Sorcerer can only read handbooks that align with their own worldview, values, and outlook on life. If you forcefully absorb an unsuitable Sorcerer Handbook, it can damage your Soul and might even lead to a mental breakdown."

"Is it that serious?"

"It is serious, but it's easy to prevent. As long as you don't feel discomfort while flipping through a Sorcerer Handbook, it means that absorbing it won't be a problem for you."

At this point, Sonya also became somewhat curious: "From what I've heard, it's considered good luck if a common Sorcerer finds two or three handbooks out of ten that they can absorb. There are even many Sorcerers who can't find a single absorbable Sorcerer Handbook in their entire life... How did you manage to pick up a Sorcerer Handbook and absorb it without any contamination?"

Ashe naturally couldn't answer this question. He followed Sonya's instructions and guided his consciousness to touch the hunting notes in his hand.

The hunting notes turned into a stream of light smoke and flowed into his body. After a short while, Ashe felt as if a block of ice in his consciousness had melted, suddenly filled with many indescribable bits of knowledge.

He opened the 'Operator Management' in the game and discovered that he had acquired a new skill.

‘Anti-Reconnaissance Mastery’

As a Jungle Hunter and a soldier in wars, Cabin Storley must have honed this survival skill even if he had never formally studied anti-reconnaissance. For Ashe, who intended to escape from prison, anti-reconnaissance could be considered a handy little skill.

After Ashe absorbed the hunting notes, they realized that the island was sinking. The two hurried back to the boat, and soon, the island completely disappeared, leaving the sea surface eerily quiet as if nothing had happened.

“This is the wonder of the Virtual Realm; encounters are unpredictable, all for the sake of Inheritance,” Sonya remarked. “The Sea of Knowledge is dotted with countless Inheritance Islands, quietly waiting for new Sorcerers to discover them. Once a Sorcerer takes the Inheritance, the island will naturally return to the sea... Some say that the islands are the evolution of a Sorcerer’s obsession, remnants of ancient Sorcerers who hoped that future generations would remember their traces, which is why they placed their Inheritance on the sea.”

“The life traces of all Sorcerers are deeply etched in the Virtual Realm. Here we encounter the legacies of countless predecessors, cross paths with Gun wielders from hundreds of years ago, and converse with sages from thousands of years past—anything is possible... And our own traces will also be etched in the Virtual Realm. When a Sorcerer tears through the white mist hundreds of years from now, they may face the challenges you and I have left behind.”

“It sounds quite romantic.”

“Really? Do you think your life can be passed down to future generations without any concealment, allowing posterity to admire your great deeds?”

Ashe suddenly felt less romantic: “Can a Sorcerer delete some life records before dying, like ‘Study Materials’ or ‘Art and Life’ for instance...”

“How to die with dignity and how to live on the edge are traditionally the two major research projects for Sorcerers.”

Even though she didn’t gain anything and Ashe seemed to have gotten all the benefits, Sonya was quite relaxed, stretching on the boat: “Where to next? You decide, I’ll follow your lead.”

The battle on the island was definitely not thrilling, but if Ashe could always find Inheritance Islands like this one, Sonya would be more than willing to take the risk.

If she encountered a spirit from the Swordsmanship Department or a suitable Sorcerer Handbook even once, then she would make a huge profit.

For many Sorcerers, their hope is simply to explore the Virtual Realm safely, let alone stumble upon an Inheritance. Avoiding danger is already enough to make them feel fortunate and grateful.

“Let me see...”

Ashe opened ‘Exploration in Virtual Realm’, checking the conditions of the surrounding grid:

‘Waste of effort’, ‘Waste of effort’, ‘Waste of effort’, ‘Waste of effort’, ‘Better not go’, ‘Waste of effort’, ‘Waste of effort’, ‘Waste of effort’.

“Uh, what?”

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Chapter 28

“Did it not catch up?”

“No, I don’t think so. It can’t swim, can it?”

“What kind of route did you lead us on? It’s downright dangerous.”

"I told you before we set off that it might be a bit risky. Who was it that just now, full of confidence like a student with a cheat sheet, said it would be no problem?"

"Is this what you call 'a bit risky'?"

In the white mist of the Sea of Knowledge, Ashe and Sonya lay gasping for air on a small boat, their forms as faint as the surrounding mist, as if they could dissipate at any moment, their argument weak and breathless.

Just moments ago, after nearly an hour of fruitless sailing, Ashe couldn't resist proposing to Sonya that they explore the area marked "Better not go" on the map. Sonya, new to the Virtual Realm, was brimming with confidence, and so they broke through the white mist into the Dangerous Zone.

However, instead of finding Inheritance Island in the Dangerous Zone, they encountered a giant fish with wings that capsized Ashe's boat and could spout Water Cannons, blasting jets of water dozens of meters high.

Ashe and Sonya were merely grazed by the Water Cannon, but their bodies felt as if they had been sandpapered hundreds of times.

Fortunately, the boat was incredibly sturdy, and even after capsizing, it resiliently floated on the water's surface. The two scrambled back aboard, paddling frantically to leave the Dangerous Zone.

The giant fish actually gave chase, even flying towards their boat. Luckily, Ashe had a stroke of genius and used "Exploration in Virtual Realm" to control the boat and accelerate away, narrowly avoiding the fish's charging head and sparing them from shedding their first drop of blood in the Virtual Realm.

Catching their breath, Sonya looked at the drenched Ashe with a hint of curiosity in her eyes, and asked casually, "Couldn't you have killed that Mud Fish Jiao?"

Ashe, unsuspecting, replied breathlessly, "If even you couldn't do it, how could I?"

Are Observers really that weak?

Many thoughts flickered through Sonya's mind, but in the end, they all settled into silence. Even if the apocalypse observer was weak, she could do nothing about it; she couldn't kill an Observer, and she had yet to find a way to resist their control, not even Professor Trozan had noticed their presence.

However, after witnessing the apocalypse observer's ability to navigate the Virtual Realm, Sonya's attitude began to subtly shift.

Even though she had only recently become a virtual wing Sorcerer, Sonya understood the importance of the Virtual Realm to virtual wing Sorcerers and realized the shockingly unconventional ability of the apocalypse observer to see through the mists of the Virtual Realm.

It is well-known that no one can see through the mists of the Virtual Realm, and this is why all Sorcerers are on Equal opportunity—facing the unknown risks and rewards, everyone is equal, the mighty can fall, and the weak may rise in a single bound!

This is what is called Equal opportunity!

And now, an existence capable of seeing the unknown risks, surpassing all Sorcerers, has appeared!

The elite among Sorcerers, the apocalypse observer!

If before, Sonya's obedience to the Observer's orders was somewhat reluctant, now her mindset had shifted slightly, won over by the Observer's abilities, and she even began to look forward to the wonderful life of being uplifted by the Observer, not unlike a fall from grace.

Originally, Sonya had wanted to ask the Observer why he had chosen her and what made her so special. But then it occurred to her, what if the Observer suddenly had an epiphany of "Oh right, what do I need you for?" and then turned around and abandoned Sonya? Wouldn't she have missed the chance to rise above others?

Moreover, if it wasn't for overwhelming strength, how could the Observer control her actions, see through the fog of the Virtual Realm, and pull her into the Dream Trial?

She must be wary of the Observer playing the underdog card!

If Sonya were to fall for this, perhaps the Observer would take the opportunity to impose even harsher punishments on her!

"By the way, what was that fish creature just now?"

Here it comes, even asking me this kind of common sense question, keep it up, just keep pretending!

Sonya played along: "The Mud Fish Jiao, one of the most common Knowledge Creatures in the Virtual Realm. Killing it can yield spirits from various Factions such as the Water Art Faction, the Earth Art Faction, and more. If that Mud Fish Jiao previously killed other Sorcerers, it might also contain the spirits of those Sorcerers."

There are only two types of Intelligent Creatures in the Virtual Realm: Sorcerers and Knowledge Creatures.

As the name suggests, as long as a Sorcerer kills a Knowledge Creature, they can acquire the knowledge it condensed—the spirit.

Unlike the Inheritance left by Sorcerers, the spirits released by Knowledge Creatures are not fixed. Although they generally come from the same Faction, for example, a Mud Fish Jiao will not release spirits from the Fire Art Faction.

Even within the same Faction, there are many different spirits, and the spoils of Knowledge Creatures also update with the Version.

For instance, if a Sorcerer in reality invents a new knowledge system and summons a new variety of spirits, then other Sorcerers who kill Knowledge Creatures in the Virtual Realm might directly obtain the newly invented Version of spirits.

If the new knowledge system is too innovative and crazy, it could even lead to the emergence of new varieties of Knowledge Creatures, expanding the diversity of creatures in the Virtual Realm.

Just like “Equal opportunity,” this is also one of the important premises of “Equal Knowledge” among Sorcerers.

No one can monopolize knowledge forever. No matter how you guard your new inventions, other Sorcerers can still obtain your results in the Virtual Realm. If you want to maintain an advantage, you need to keep innovating.

Those who cling to the past, hoping a single invention will give them a permanent lead, are no different from fools who stay in the same place in the Virtual Realm for too long.

If you don’t take risks, the Virtual Realm will swallow you; if you don’t innovate, reality will beat you down.

After explaining about Knowledge Creatures, Sonya couldn’t help but probe: “Since you knew there was danger in the fog, couldn’t you detect what kind of creature it was?”

“I couldn’t detect it; I only knew the level of danger the fog posed to us, not the specifics of the danger.”

Sonya was slightly disappointed: “Then you probably can’t find the Golden Fish either.”

“The Golden Fish?” Ashe seemed puzzled, “What’s that?”

It’s like hearing someone ask, “What’s 1 plus 1?” Sonya pulled at the corner of her mouth, suddenly having a thought: Is he asking me these simple questions to train my Loyalty? If I resist, will he think I’m not loyal enough and then treat me with severe punishment?

With this thought in mind, Sonya became alert and seriously answered the seemingly simple question, “The Golden Fish is a fish that floats on the surface of the Sea of Knowledge. On its back is the Time Continent, which is the destination of Two Wings Sorcerers...”

“Wait, a continent?” Ashe interrupted, “How big is this fish?”

“Massive. No one has ever seen the full extent of the Golden Fish. It is said that even the smallest scales on its body are comparable to a large city that can accommodate a million people.”

“Such a huge fish should be easy to spot, shouldn’t it?”

“On the contrary, only a few lucky individuals have ever found the Golden Fish in the Sea of Knowledge, and without exception, those individuals have become renowned legendary Sorcerers.”

Ashe let out a sound of understanding, “So what’s the benefit of finding the Golden Fish?”

“By stepping onto the Time Continent, one becomes a Two Wings Sorcerer directly.”

“What?”

“You become a Two Wings Sorcerer directly.” Sonya suppressed her impatience, thinking to herself that even the children she tutored were not this clueless, “The biggest difference between a One Wing and a Two Wings Sorcerer is that One Wings are in the Sea of Knowledge, while Two Wings are on the Time Continent.”

“When a One Wing Sorcerer concentrates arcane energy to the extreme in the Sea of Knowledge and unfolds the Silver Wings, they can no longer gain more arcane energy while navigating. If they want to reach a higher realm, they must be promoted to Two Wings.”

“The normal way of promotion involves the Sorcerer delving into knowledge, summoning a high-rank spirit of Two Wings, and then finding the Gate of Truth within that spirit to transmigrate through the Virtual Realm. Then they will reach the second layer of the Virtual Realm—the Time Continent. Only on the Time Continent can a Sorcerer absorb more arcane energy and condense the second virtual wing: the Golden Wings.”

A One Wing Sorcerer navigates the Sea of Knowledge and forms the Silver Wings, while a Two Wings Sorcerer walks on the Time Continent and forms the Golden Wings... Ashe began to grasp the power system of Sorcerers, but he had a question, “Can a One Wing Sorcerer obtain a Two Wings spirit from someone else and directly reach the Time Continent?”

“Absolutely not,” Sonya shook her head, “Unless it’s a spirit summoned by oneself, the Sorcerer cannot find the Gate of Truth within it, and it’s even difficult to search within the spirit—since spirits are made of knowledge, if you don’t understand the construction of the spirit, how can you explore its secrets?”

Now Ashe understood the Sorcerers’ method of promotion: summoning a higher-rank spirit, using the spirit to transmigrate to a higher level of the Virtual Realm, then continuing to summon higher-rank spirits as one grows stronger, creating a cycle.

Due to the premises of ‘Equal Opportunity’ and ‘Equal Knowledge,’ the life of a Sorcerer is always intertwined with risk and research. No one can retire comfortably; as long as you are unwilling to give up your current benefits, you must continue to take risks and create new ones.

This process not only ensures the healthy development of the Sorcerer system but also continuously optimizes those ‘Old White Rabbits’ among the Sorcerers who stop and refuse to struggle... It sounds a bit like the KPI system! Throw in a year-end elimination, and it’s perfect!

Realizing that a Sorcerer is just another kind of worker, Ashe suddenly gained confidence: when it comes to working and facing internal competition, he has never lost to anyone!

“Wait a second, if we can find the Golden Fish in the Sea of Knowledge and land on the Time Continent, isn’t that like taking a shortcut to Promotion?”

“We prefer to call those who sneak from the lower levels to the higher levels ‘Trespassers’... That’s why all Sorcerers want to find the Golden Fish,” Sonya shrugged. “Who can resist the temptation of gaining without toiling?... So, can you find the Golden Fish?”

“I wish I could.”

“Then why are you asking me all these questions? Keep sailing,” Sonya said as she glanced at her somewhat translucent hands. “Better not go where a Battle might occur, I’m a bit tired. After sailing through one or two more regions, I’ll probably have to leave the Virtual Realm.”

Ashe nodded, feeling the onset of fatigue himself.

Sailing through the Virtual Realm is not without cost. As they pass through the white mist, it not only gathers arcane energy for them but also tempers their Souls, depleting their Soul Energy. When the Soul Energy drops to a certain level, they must exit the Virtual Realm to Rest.

Each ordinary voyage contains countless precious Miracles.

Ashe opened the 'Exploration in Virtual Realm' tablet, and as usual, he saw many notes of 'waste of effort' and 'Better not go'.

But this time, he saw something different: a golden light was emanating from the bottom right area of the map!

The message underneath the area was startlingly clear:

"Welcome!"

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Chapter 29

"This is... a spirit."

In the solitary dormitory of Shattered Lake Prison, Ashe looked at the spirit lying sound asleep in his palm, wearing blue-striped pajamas and resembling a Human child, feeling a sense of bloodline connection.

In their last Adventure in the Virtual Realm tonight, Ashe and his companion headed to the white mist area marked "Welcome," where they discovered an Adventure Island.

Unlike Inheritance Island, Adventure Island was completely safe, with no Trials, just wild spirits frolicking on the island.

As they stepped onto the island, the spirits scattered, and despite their keen eyes and quick hands, they only managed to catch two spirits. The captured spirits, resigning to their bad luck, were willing to acknowledge them as their masters.

One spirit for each person, Ashe received the spirit now dozing in his palm, the Human child-like 'Substitute.'

"Substitute"

"One Wing spirit"

"Restriction: The Sorcerer must be a Primate Intelligent Creature."

"Basic Effect: Creates a perfect illusion of the target, which shatters upon impact. If the target is an Intelligent Creature, it will obey the Sorcerer's commands."

"Passive Effect: Slightly reduces sensitivity to pain."

"If it hurts, imagine yourself as someone else, and then it won't hurt."

The Swordswoman, on the other hand, obtained a spirit from the Water Art Faction, 'Rapids.'

"Rapids"

"One Wing spirit"

"Restriction: There must be unclaimed liquid nearby."

"Basic Effect: Shoots a jet of water with kinetic force."

"Passive Effect: Increases control over liquids."

"Gentle flow is life, turbulent flow is revolution. Nothing is constant except for the flow itself."

According to the Swordswoman, the Rapids spirit could fetch a high price at her school because it was a rare high-burst attack spirit within the Water Art Faction, capable of generating many powerful Miracles, but summoning it was quite difficult. Therefore, its price was extremely high, even surpassing some Two Wings spirits.

Although Ashe wanted to say what does a Paper person need money for, he reconsidered that it might be part of the game's automatic leveling mechanism, and he

was currently reliant on the Swordswoman's support. This was definitely not the time to have a conflict with the Swordswoman—the key phase of the project, one cannot afford to offend the only technical person who gets things done!

Therefore, the two of them happily completed the spoils distribution, the Swordswoman was satisfied, and Ashe was even more satisfied: because the Substitute spirit was exactly one of the Main Spirits needed for the 'Slay Me' Miracle!

Ashe's top priority was to gather the spirits for the 'Slay Me' Miracle, to completely shatter the dominion of the neck chip, otherwise, he wouldn't even qualify to escape from prison!

He gazed intently at the Substitute spirit in his palm, subtly mobilizing that inexplicable Mental Energy in his mind.

After returning from the Virtual Realm, Ashe discovered that his mental consciousness had solidified from virtual to real, a sensation like his imagination truly turned into a physical force, akin to having an invisible phantom limb. He could drive his Mental Power to touch everything in reality.

Ashe didn't need to ask to know that this Mental Energy was the arcane energy that the Swordswoman had mentioned many times before. Arcane energy is the universal power source for Sorcerers, as well as the fundamental force for activating spirits. A Sorcerer without arcane energy is no different from an ordinary person.

Conversely, as long as you have arcane energy, you are a Sorcerer, even if you're the least skilled one.

But Ashe remembered that before he entered the Virtual Realm, he didn't possess any arcane energy at all.

The source of this arcane energy was clear to Ashe because he had navigated the Virtual Realm with the Swordswoman. Breaking through each layer of white mist not only tempered his spirit but also gathered the scattered knowledge, creating the universal power source—arcane energy.

Therefore, after returning from the Virtual Realm, Ashe not only owned a spirit but also possessed arcane energy.

In other words, he had become a pure and highly concentrated Sorcerer.

However...

Ashe tried to use his mental tendrils to explore the body of the Substitute spirit, but the feedback he received was like the listening part of a level six foreign language exam—completely incomprehensible, not even a single sentence made sense.

This aligned perfectly with what the Swordswoman said, “If the spirit wasn’t summoned by you personally, you wouldn’t even be able to parse its structure.”

Since he couldn’t parse it, it was impossible for Ashe to find the Gate of Truth inside the Substitute spirit.

That is to say, Ashe was a Sorcerer who couldn’t enter the Virtual Realm on his own!

This was completely contrary to the Sorcerer system described by the Swordswoman—every Sorcerer, no matter how talented or dull, no matter the noble birth or an orphan’s start, invariably summons a spirit through study and training before entering the Virtual Realm.

From ancient times until now, there has never been a Sorcerer without learning!

Every Sorcerer can be a teacher of a skill!

Yet now, an exception had occurred!

Ashe Heath, an unlearned spirit from another world, had crossed the threshold of knowledge to become an Official Sorcerer!

He suddenly recalled the legend of the Golden Fish and the Trespasser that the Swordswoman had just mentioned.

“Silver Sorcerers who find the Golden Fish can trespass to the Time Continent and become Golden Sorcerers, and here I am, having hitched a ride on the Swordswoman’s vessel, trespassing into the Sea of Knowledge to become a Silver Sorcerer...”

Others trespass as a form of upward or downward mobility within the Sorcerer hierarchy, akin to the internal migration of people within different regions of the same country; but Ashe’s trespass was like jumping from a primitive tribe over the wall into a developed country, a sort of species invasion.

This was a secret that absolutely could not be exposed, Ashe thought.

If other Sorcerers discovered that he was a Trespasser, they would certainly not let him off for the sake of protecting biodiversity.

Substitute!

Ashe mentally called out, but nothing happened. The Substitute spirit continued to sleep soundly in his palm.

The next second, a Holographic Screen suddenly popped up, and a stream of information flashed before his eyes.

“Warning: You are attempting to output arcane energy! This is a prohibited action!”

Ashe slapped his forehead—of course, if the Chip restricted his access to the Virtual Realm, it would definitely also restrict his use of arcane energy!

To activate a spirit and Cast Miracle, one must bypass the Chip; to bypass the Chip, one must activate a spirit and Cast Miracle to Purify the Chip... Damn, it's a vicious cycle again!

“Swordswoman, save me—” Search the NôveFire.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

“Swordswoman?”

Ashe called out twice, but the dormitory was still eerily quiet; the Swordswoman, who usually appeared out of nowhere, did not show up this time.

Upon further thought, Ashe realized that the Swordswoman had spent the entire night with him in the Virtual Realm and was likely exhausted. Even a Paper person needs to Rest, so he decided not to disturb her today.

“If hurt enough, use both hands, joyfully sever, yesterday's curse. Await the daylight as night falls, leaving only scars behind...”

Ashe lifted his head, only to discover that it was already 8 o'clock in the morning of the next day. The prison's wake-up song, played punctually, was echoing through the air.

It was time for breakfast, and there was a Deathmatch waiting for him at the Deathmatch Society.

In the Meditation Room of Swordflower College, Sonya slowly opened her eyes.

She extended her hand, and a spirit of a young girl in a white dress materialized above her palm.

Revealing this spirit would surely attract a lot of attention— it was extremely rare for someone to gain such a trophy on their first day in the Virtual Realm, not to mention that Sonya had acquired such a valuable prize.

She hadn't lied to the Observer; the Rapids spirit was indeed very popular on the Swordflower College's spirit trading platform, and even across the entire world of Gales, it was considered a top-tier One Wing spirit.

But she hadn't told the whole truth: the Substitute spirit was also valuable.

In fact, the price of a Universal Spirit was generally higher than that of a Specialized Spirit, unless it was too narrow in use; a One Wing Universal Spirit could fetch the price of a Two Wings Specialized Spirit.

After all, only Sorcerers of a particular Faction have a demand for Specialized Spirits, while Universal Spirits are in high demand by all Sorcerers, hence their lofty prices.

So, why did she conceal this piece of information?

She wanted the Observer to notice this 'small thought' of hers.

Back in the Virtual Realm, Sonya had realized that the Observer could no longer read her Inner Voice.

Perhaps this was due to the Restrictions of the Virtual Realm, but it didn't really matter—after all, the Observer could listen to her Inner Voice again once back in reality.

When they obtained the Substitute and Rapids spirits, even though Sonya couldn't see the Observer's face, she could tell from his body language that he really wanted the Substitute spirit. Thus, Sonya went with the flow and gave the Substitute spirit to the Observer.

Once back in reality, the Observer would be able to know from Sonya's Inner Voice: she was aware of the value of the Substitute spirit, but she only told half-truths, pretending as if acquiring the Rapids spirit was the bigger win. This was so the Observer could comfortably accept the Substitute spirit.

This kind of cunning, where the scheming is all for your benefit and is so transparent that you're meant to see through it, might not be a critical hit to the Observer, but at least it would greatly increase his fondness for her.

I thought you were on the first level, I was on the second, but you were on the third seeing through me. However, the fact is I was on the fourth level all along, just waiting for you to see through me.

But all of this was predicated on the fact that Sonya had to conceal that she was actually on the fourth level. This wasn't difficult for her—after two days of mental training, Sonya had already learned to control her thoughts to some extent, allowing herself to only consider what she intended to think about.

Sonya retracted the Rapids spirit and stepped out of the Meditation Room.

"Observer, I'm going to take a shower, please remember to give me some privacy."

"Observer?"

As Sonya left the Meditation Tower, she looked around to make sure the Observer really wasn't there.

In the past two days, whenever Sonya called out, the Observer would appear from an unseen corner without fail; this time, several minutes passed without a sign, which could only mean one thing—

After the Exploration in the Virtual Realm, the Observer also had to Rest, suspending his round-the-clock surveillance of Sonya.

However, Sonya felt no joy in regaining her freedom. Instead, it was as frustrating as bringing a cake back to the dormitory to enjoy, only to find out the dormitory bathroom had exploded!

I finally found the opportunity to prepare a sugar-coated bomb for you, and you just eat the coating and run away!?

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Chapter 30

“Good morning, Sonya.”

Sonya turned her head and saw Sylvia emerging from the Meditation Tower, her eyebrows lifting slightly in response.

Despite her reluctance to get involved with Felix, it was difficult for Sonya to avoid him, as he was also a student of Professor Trozan.

Only a swordsmanship prodigy could catch the eye of the Hidden Hand Sword Saint.

The more Sonya interacted with Felix, the more she got to know Sylvia. Just a few encounters were enough for Sonya to recognize that Sylvia was cut from the same cloth: a woman hunter who would stop at nothing to climb to the top.

Thus, Sylvia naturally harbored animosity towards Sonya. After all, Felix was her prey, and Sonya's arrival was like finally trapping a rare animal, only to find a fully equipped pet training master appearing next to your trap—vigilance was the natural reaction.

Although Sonya verbally dismissed Felix, if the young master of the Vlozrada Family was willing to be her lapdog, she wasn't opposed to giving him a chance. So she was somewhat indecisive, planning to 'feed the fish' and see how things developed.

Sylvia gave Sonya a once-over and took a half step back while covering her nose, "You seem quite excited about your first foray into the Virtual Realm."

Are you serious about that half-step back?

Sonya had trained the night before and, although she hadn't bathed, she had wiped down with a towel and changed clothes—she couldn't possibly smell. But having just come out of the Meditation Room, unwashed and unmade-up, she looked disheveled compared to Sylvia's 'fully armed' natural state, like a street dog by comparison.

One glance told Sonya that Sylvia's 'natural face' would have taken no less than an hour to perfect.

"Sylvia," Sonya nodded slightly, "Are you here to use the restroom in the Meditation Tower?"

Sonya wasn't one to take a hit without hitting back. Her insinuation that Sylvia was there not for meditation but for makeup was flawlessly sarcastic, a way to insult without using profanity.

"I'm naturally here to meditate and enter the Virtual Realm," Sylvia forced a smile and extended her hand, "This is the Inheritance spirit I found last night. What do you think?"

A young boy spirit holding a sheath materialized above Sylvia's palm. Sonya glanced at it, her eyebrows rising instantly as she recalled information about this spirit.

'Sheath'

'One Wing spirit'

‘Restriction: The Sorcerer must wield a sword’

‘Basic Effect: When used in tandem with other Swordcerer spirits, the first activation every ten seconds produces 150% effect.’

For a Swordcerer, the Sheath was an extremely practical spirit, even capable of evolving into a specialty branch of swordsmanship: the Assassin Swordcerer.

With Explosive Miracles like ‘Sheath’s Gathered Light,’ ‘Primed for the Strike,’ and ‘Piercing Sword Qi,’ a Swordcerer could unleash a singular, defense-shattering Sword Qi attack that could penetrate all defenses at the same rank, ensuring supremacy over all other Faction Sorcerers, with fatal consequences for the target.

For a moment, Sonya even considered offering her Rapids spirit to exchange with Sylvia.

Although the Rapids spirit is more expensive than the Sheath spirit on the trading platform, spirits are mostly priceless, and a suitable Swordsmanship spirit is very hard to come by. Even if you find one, you might not be able to secure it.

But when Sonya saw Sylvia’s mocking gaze, she understood everything—the lady was showing off on purpose.

“Well, do you think Felix would like it?”

Suddenly, Sonya felt a twinge of guilt—her appearance in the dormitory last night must have been as punch-worthy as Sylvia’s expression right now. She was indeed thankful for her roommates’ grace in not slaughtering her.

“I’m really envious of your boyfriend,” Sonya managed a grimace of a smile: “For a Swordcerer, that’s a very precious spirit.”

“Is that so? Since you said so, I’ll believe it.”

Sylvia chuckled behind her hand, still on guard.

After the Swordplay Competition the night before, Sylvia had thought Felix might abandon her to pursue Sonya, but to her surprise, Felix didn’t seem interested. He was still good to her, only wishing to have another match with Sonya.

Sylvia didn’t think Felix was the type to play two ends against the middle; he wasn’t one to hide his emotions. If he wanted to cheat, he would just break up, not string Sylvia along. Therefore, Sylvia believed that Felix truly had no interest in Sonya, it was just an obsession with winning and losing.

But even so, Sonya was still a formidable rival in Sylvia's heart. After all, sparks between men and women are often struck through friction. Right now, Felix might not have any ideas, but what about the next second? Tomorrow? Next week?

As long as Felix breathes, there's a possibility he might change his heart.

Thus, Sylvia could only keep a tight watch on her boyfriend, preventing him from having private contact with Sonya, like now.

Moreover, she had to increase her own stakes, trying to intimidate Sonya into submission to prevent future issues.

"You have to work hard too," Sylvia encouraged: "I heard your family isn't well-off. Compared to us locals from Gales, your ability to get into Swordflower College through the national exam shows you are much stronger than us. In the future, you'll surely be able to stay in Gales and bring your family to live in the big city."

There it was, the disdain and motivation filled with a sense of superiority that the wealthy had towards the poor... Sonya smiled kindly: "Thanks for your concern."

"Ah, you were a bird that could have soared higher, but your family held you back."

Sylvia's words were half-feigned, half-genuine; she did feel a bit of pity for Sonya. If Sonya had been born into a Noble family, or even a middle-class family in Gales, she would have had much better prospects. Unfortunately, she was just a rustic girl from a poor agricultural town on the border.

She didn't notice that Sonya's expression had changed.

"You're right."

Sonya paused for a moment, her smile tinged with helplessness: "Often, where someone starts in life also determines where they end up. Birth is our first lottery ticket, and I just drew a consolation prize."

Sylvia wondered if she had been too harsh, almost breaking Sonya's defenses, and thought about what to say to offer some comfort.

"I guess as someone from a poor area, I can't ever really change my commonness. See, after talking to you for so long, I forgot I hadn't even washed my face. Chatting with you with this untidy appearance, I'm truly being impolite."

"There's no need to be so hard on yourself..."

Just as Sylvia was about to offer Sonya some comforting words, she saw Sonya summon a spirit and a burst of water emerged in her hand, splashing directly onto her face.

“Washing my face, I feel much fresher now.”

Sylvia stared at the spirit in Sonya’s hand: “That is...”

“Ah?” Sonya looked slightly startled, her eyes wandering as she stuttered: “This, this is the Adventure I encountered last night in the Virtual Realm! Yes, this is the Rapids spirit I got from Adventure Island! You see I’m quite lucky, right?”

Sylvia just ‘oh’-ed, with three big words written on her forehead: !! Don’t! Believe!

How could someone encounter Adventure Island on their first day in the Virtual Realm?

And to even obtain one of the most precious spirits of the Water Art Faction, the Rapids spirit!?

Are you treating me like a fool to deceive?

Could she have bought it? But how could a rustic girl afford such a precious spirit, and besides, the Rapids spirit is priceless, Sylvia had been wanting to buy one for a long time and couldn’t find a seller!

If it wasn’t bought, then it must have been given to her.

At Swordflower College, there aren’t many who could casually hand out a Rapids spirit...

Sylvia managed to compose her facial expression and forced a smile, “That’s a very important spirit in the Water Art Faction, junior. Are you thinking about switching to the Water Art Faction?”

“Um, although I have a talent for Swordsmanship, I’m also interested in the Water Art Faction...” Sonya saw Felix coming out of the Meditation Tower and quickly waved goodbye: “I have something else to do, see you later!”

Sylvia was puzzled by Sonya’s haste when she turned her head and saw Felix just leaving the tower.

“Are you waiting for me?” Felix smiled: “The Virtual Realm is really an interesting place... I want to go to the library and read more about the Virtual Realm, do you want to come with me?”

Sylvia glanced in the direction where Sonya had left, then back at Felix, feeling as if she had understood something, her jealousy making her teeth itch.

But a thousand words rushed to her throat, only turning into a sweet response.

“Sure.” She smiled and reached out her hand: “This is the Sheath spirit I got from the Virtual Realm last night, but I don’t study Swordsmanship... What do you think I should do with this spirit?”

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Chapter 31

Shattered Lake Prison Restaurant.

Perhaps because he had arrived unusually early today, Ashe discovered that the restaurant was filled with prisoners having breakfast. Upon closer observation, he was astonished: besides Humans, Orcs, and Goblins, the prison was a melting pot of various species—there were creatures crawling on the floor, some with a pair of horns, and others with four arms...

Ashe even spotted a particularly seductive female with hooves and fuzzy ears, her species unknown to him. This piqued his interest in the healthcare industry of this world and sparked wild fantasies.

“Do you want some food?”

The soulful inquiry of the cafeteria lady snapped Ashe’s attention back to the present.

He carelessly ordered a few things to fill his stomach and noticed a unique food labeled ‘one serving per person’ at the window that looked particularly tempting.

“What’s this, ma’am?”

“Premium Seafood Lala Fatty, a seasonal delicacy, with a very limited supply,” she explained. “You’d miss out if you were any later.”

“Alright, I’ll take...”

“Give me five servings!”

A booming voice interrupted Ashe, and he turned to see a green-skinned orc getting his meal. The cafeteria lady, hearing the orc’s demand, took the remaining five servings of the Seafood Lala Fatty and dumped them all into his enormous bowl.

“Huh? Why does he get five servings?”

Ashe was dumbfounded.

“He’s an Orc,” the lady said matter-of-factly.

“Why does an Orc get five servings?”

“That’s just the way it is with Orcs, always has been.”

“But if he takes five servings, there won’t be any left for me. How is that fair—”

Ashe’s words suddenly choked in his throat as a Holographic Screen popped up with a series of red warnings that filled his vision:

“WARNING: You are attempting to make a racially discriminatory statement! This is prohibited! In the Blood Moon Kingdom, racial equality is the first principle! Please be advised!”

Complaining about an Orc eating too much is considered racial discrimination?

Frustrated, Ashe carried his tray in search of a seat, only to find every spot taken. Finally, he spotted an open seat next to a blue-skinned creature with an exceptionally large rear, looking even more formidable than the Orc and taking up two seats.

In his past life, Ashe would have turned on his heel and left, but this was Shattered Lake Prison, and the creature couldn't lay a finger on him. So Ashe strode over with newfound bravado.

"Hey, you're taking up two seats, make some room."

The blue-skinned creature, busily scooping food with his hands, glanced at him and then resumed eating.

"I'm an Ogre."

"Oh, and? Just because you're an Ogre doesn't mean you can take up two seats—"

"WARNING: You are attempting to make a racially discriminatory statement! This is prohibited! In the Blood Moon Kingdom, racial equality is the first principle! Please be advised!"

Claiming your rear is taking up two seats is racial discrimination too?

Ashe felt like cursing out loud but couldn't; his words were stuck in his throat. He wanted to dump his tray over the creature but couldn't manage it; his hands were frozen.

Under the control of their neck chips, every prisoner was the most loyal follower of the law. They had the greatest freedom as long as they didn't violate any laws or morals. But the moment they even approached the legal or moral boundaries, whether it was a word or a glance, invisible shackles would bind them tightly.

Suddenly, Ashe felt a pat on his shoulder. A burly man beside him got up with his tray and gestured for Ashe to take his seat.

"Thanks," Ashe said, recognizing the man who seemed familiar, as if he had seen him yesterday at the Deathmatch Society.

"Desmond," the man introduced himself, casting a disdainful glance at the Ogre and Goblins at the table, "I'm heading to the Deathmatch Society. Maybe you'll join me for a fight someday."

Hearing they were from the Deathmatch Society, others looked up and shifted away slightly. Ashe sat down, listening to the Ogre beside him chew like a tractor and watching the Goblins across from him squatting on the chairs, scattering crumbs everywhere. A strong desire to flee welled up inside him.

This urge wasn't like the desire to escape from prison because he knew that staying would mean death. This was a revulsion to the environment.

The last time he felt this way was during an internship when he had a stupid boss. If it was a colleague, he could fight back or play tricks; but with a stupid boss, there was nothing he could do but endure, not even voice his resistance.

He could suffer and endure because endurance was for a future without suffering.

But enduring a stupid boss meant enduring forever. Why work at all? Why not just say goodbye and find a new, more reasonable boss?

Now the situation was far worse than having a stupid boss—the entire environment was stupid.

You're furious, but you can't say anything; you want to resist, but your body won't cooperate.

Suddenly, Ashe had an epiphany.

He had thought that Shattered Lake Prison was actually treating prisoners well.

But in reality, locking up such a despicable group of death row inmates together, not allowing any overstepping actions among them, and having them desperately create value for the prison to avoid the Blood Moon Tribunal was a form of mental torture.

Extinguishing their anger.

Shattering their hopes.

Eliminating their courage.

Destroying their backbone.

Planting seeds of despair, frustration, regret, and fear within them to take root and grow until they were reduced to mere shadows of themselves, driven to madness, and appeared before the Blood Moon Tribunal as 'perfect victims,' facing the tragic end they deserved.

Ashe could also understand why there were so many people in the Deathmatch Society.

It was the only place where death row inmates could vent, the only spot in the prison resembling a dog's hole where one could breathe a bit of fresh air for a moment.

It was akin to a garbage recycling center.

Interestingly, it was Ashe, who couldn't stand the environment, who was the real garbage, while those death row inmates who could sit back and enjoy were the model prisoners of the prison.

Ashe quickly finished his meal and hurried off to where the garbage belonged.

In the Deathmatch Society, there wasn't an ongoing Deathmatch. The place was well-lit, and Ashe could see Langna lying in his boyfriend's arms from a distance.

Ashe couldn't help but wonder if it was an illusion that Langna's boyfriend seemed a little thinner than yesterday.

Could it be that Langna was originally one of those who drained others dry?

"Ashe," Langna raised his hand in greeting, "you're here early. Have you just finished breakfast? Why not take a moment to digest? Valcas hasn't arrived yet anyway."

Ashe nodded and found a place to sit down, and someone immediately took the seat next to him.

"Sylin Dole."

"Who?"

Ashe looked toward Igor with a hint of wariness in his eyes.

"You don't need to be tense," Igor raised an eyebrow. "I'm not interested in inviting you to a Deathmatch—I don't participate in battles I'm not sure of, nor do I waste time for something as worthless as pride. I admit when I've lost, fair and square."

"Your heart's too dirty with tactics, I can't trust you."

"Then let's skip the pointless prelude and get right to the oldest interaction between humans—"

"Mating?"

"Trading, trading!" Igor enunciated so clearly it was as if he wanted to bite the words until they bled, "You answer one of my questions, and I'll answer one of yours."

"I don't have any questions to ask you."

"Really? Wouldn't you like to know why that Elf Valcas challenged you?"

Elf?

Ashe was surprised internally, but his face didn't show it.

"Okay, I am a bit curious, but how do I know you won't lie?"

"I don't know if you'll lie to me either," Igor chuckled. "We both take the same risk."

"What's the point of the trade then?"

"Because I'm confident that I can tell if you're lying and even if you do lie, I can guess the truth. Similarly, you can—"

"I can't." Ashe shook his head. "I haven't read much; you'll definitely deceive me."

Igor was taken aback, seemingly encountering someone with such self-awareness for the first time.

After a silent moment, he said reluctantly, "Then I'll just tell you the information. You decide if it's valuable. If it is, then answer my question, okay?"

His tone was as if he was a Sichuanese agreeing to a mandarin duck hot pot... Ashe thought about it, feeling he probably wouldn't be taken advantage of, so he nodded.

"Valcas Uhl used to be a Researcher at Kaimon Comprehensive College. He was imprisoned for allegedly stealing important patent technology, raising a child privately, and killing a colleague. Because of his Elf race, he is the only Death row inmate who hasn't attended the Blood Moon Tribunal in the month he was incarcerated. It's been five years in prison, and he has never been to the Blood Moon Tribunal."

Ashe sighed, recalling Langna mentioning that every Death row inmate must attend the first Blood Moon Tribunal. In the Prison, this was known as 'going through the motions.' Passing through was a qualification to create value in Shattered Lake Prison; failing meant only qualifying to become fertilizer.

"Why could he escape the Blood Moon Tribunal? Because of his Elf race? Isn't Racial equality the first principle in the Blood Moon Kingdom?"

"Racial equality is certainly the first principle."

Igor wore a mysterious smile on his face.

"But some races are more equal than others."

Equality, it seems, is a horizon – always present but forever out of reach... Ashe had no grand lamentations about this; after all, he had only just arrived and didn't have a deep understanding of how 'racial equality' was actually implemented here.

“So why did he challenge me?”

“To understand that, we need to start with the crimes he committed. Although stealing patent technology and killing a colleague are serious offenses, they are not enough to land him in Shattered Lake Prison. His truly egregious crime that enraged the higher-ups was that he raised a child in secret!”

Ashe was completely baffled.

What?

“Why is raising a child in secret considered the most serious offense?”

“Because it’s forbidden, no one is allowed to raise children on their own.”

Ashe grew even more confused.

“If no one raises children, then you... then how did we grow up?”

“We all grew up in Nurseries,” Igor said, furrowing his brows tightly. “Socialized Rearing is a fundamental national policy of the Blood Moon Kingdom. Are you asking this question to provoke me?”

Socialized Rearing?

Ashe tried his best to understand this unfamiliar term, “You mean, we’re all raised by the state, and everyone is...”

He wanted to say ‘orphaned without a mother or father,’ but the words stuck in his throat.

This time it wasn’t the chip that stopped him.

It was that Ashe simply couldn’t find the words.

He struggled to search through Heath’s mind but found that in Heath’s native language dictionary, there were simply no words like ‘father’ or ‘mother’! The only term that came remotely close was ‘guardian’!

There could be no stronger evidence than this.

The absence of the words ‘parents’ was enough to prove that in the social relationships of the Blood Moon Kingdom, these roles simply didn’t exist!

Wait, orphans raised through socialized rearing, the neck chip that controls everyone’s speech and actions...

Ashe suddenly felt a twinge of fear about the world outside the Prison.

What kind of world have I transmigrated into!

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Chapter 32

Igor was puzzled.

After asking him a question so foolish it couldn't be any more foolish, Ashe Heath suddenly fell into deep contemplation.

But of course, Ashe was not foolish; Igor would never admit to being bested by a fool.

"Have you guessed why Valcas challenged you?"

Ashe snapped back to reality, tentatively asking, "Because of that child?"

Igor nodded.

"That's what I thought."

“Valcas has been behaving himself in prison for five years, hardly ever challenging anyone. He’s been living comfortably just harvesting contribution points from those he didn’t see eye to eye with.”

“This time he suddenly steps up, and there’s no other reason than that child. The fact that he risked his reputation to take care of the child, even at the risk of imprisonment, proves how much he values that child.”

“The child has been educated in the nursery for a long time, and many have had access to him, but the ‘key figure’ that connects that child, Valcas, and you, there’s only one.”

“That would be Sylin Dole.”

Meeting Igor’s confident gaze, Ashe had a feeling that this was a name he should know.

But he didn’t.

“Who is Sylin?”

Igor looked into Ashe’s eyes and suddenly said, “Don’t move.”

He poked Ashe’s face with a finger, “Ask me again.”

“Who is Sylin?”

Igor paused for a moment, sighed, and withdrew his hand.

“Sylin Dole is a professor in the History Department at Kaimon Comprehensive College, and also the Chairman of the Elven Rights Association. He holds many titles, but those are irrelevant to you. What matters most to you is that he is the Consultant Teacher of the Ancient Artifacts Research Society at Kaimon Comprehensive College.”

Ancient Artifacts Research Society?

Ashe blinked, realizing a possibility.

“Was I once a member of the Ancient Artifacts Research Society?”

“More precisely, you are still the Chairman of the Ancient Artifacts Research Society. Although I have no evidence, there must be a relationship between Sylin and you that goes beyond the typical student-teacher relationship.”

The Cult of the Four Pillars!

Could Heath have possibly swayed so many heretics by himself, establishing the Cult of the Four Pillars, a criminal organization with the nature of the underworld, through his personal charisma and leadership?

Indeed, that was possible, but it was more likely that Heath had accepted gifts and help from others!

Sylin Dole is very likely one of the helpers behind Heath!

"I've shown my sincerity, so are you willing to answer my question? Although I think I've guessed the answer."

Igor interrupted Ashe's thoughts.

"If you've already guessed it, why ask me... Go ahead."

"How did you manage to deceive me with your Inner Voice? Last night in the Arena, I foresaw your attack direction by listening to the Inner Voice. I have almost never failed with this technique, because no one can deceive themselves."

Ashe was slightly taken aback.

"What, you can listen to my Inner Voice?"

"Only in the Arena can I hear the whispers of your soul through your surging emotions."

Igor explained, generally speaking, he wouldn't say something that showed weakness; he even hoped others would fear and suspect him because of it.

But for some reason, he felt that bluster wouldn't work on Ashe, so he didn't bother to pretend.

"I didn't deceive you with my Inner Voice," said Ashe, scratching his head. "I just found out now that you can cheat like that. No wonder I couldn't land a single punch on you earlier."

"Then how did you manage to think 'you're quite good-looking' in your mind while throwing a punch at my face?"

"Thinking you're good-looking and wanting to hit you aren't contradictory!"

Igor had to elaborate, "Generally speaking, I can hear the deepest desires in people's hearts, so those superficial false thoughts can't deceive me. If you wanted to hit me, I would surely hear the thought 'I want to punch your face,' not 'you're quite good-looking.'"

“Oh, I think I get what you mean now.”

Ashe tilted his head.

“I must have been distracted at that time.”

“Distracted?”

“Yeah, when I get distracted, I tend to daydream, looking for something colorful to please my eyes, so I genuinely thought you looked good.”

“Then why did you suddenly hit me?”

“Because after I got distracted, I perked up, naturally ready to get back to work,” Ashe shrugged. “Colorful images only affect the speed of my work.”

It sounded reasonable, because Ashe was distracted, Igor heard the Inner Voice wrong — who would believe that!

A Cult Leader of the Four Pillars, a genius warrior who could grow rapidly in battle, would such a person get distracted during a fight?

Plus, when Sylin Dole was mentioned earlier, Ashe pretended not to know him, making Igor more inclined to believe that Ashe had mastered the technique of perfectly disguising himself!

“It’s impossible, even if you were distracted, I would still hear your true Inner Voice!”

“Don’t be so sure, maybe your ability is limited...”

“Since you say so, let me test it!”

Igor reached out and touched Ashe’s face, “I can tell if you’re lying by the temperature changes in your face. Say something true or false at random! If it’s an issue with my ability, I will certainly distinguish the truth from your words!”

Ashe blinked.

“The statement I’m making is a lie.”

Igor was taken aback.

Wait, was his statement true or false? If his statement was true, but he said he was lying, then it would be a lie; if it was false, then the opposite meaning is true, the statement is true...

The Matryoshka logic left Igor in a confused mess, sitting in the spectator seats like a broken toy, muttering about truth and lies.

Ashe spread his hands, he had encountered too many of these brain teasers in interviews. It seems the children of this world have not seen such puzzle questions.

Just then, a commotion erupted at the entrance of the Deathmatch Society.

“Oh, isn’t that our esteemed Elf?”

“Lord Uhl, the humble Orc offers you the most precious blessing, do you need me to lick your boots?”

“Make way, make way, don’t dirty the clothes of the Elves’ young master. You lower Race aren’t worthy of coming within five steps of an Elf!”

Although the Chip forbids Prisoners from verbally abusing others, that’s only limited to direct insults. The Chip isn’t yet smart enough to recognize what’s known as ‘passive-aggressive’ comments.

Ashe was quite surprised to see this group of people cooperating so well to tease a single target.

It’s not that he had any expectations for the intelligence or morals of Death row inmates, but in this place where you can’t engage in physical conflicts or verbal bullying, and you can’t even harm a hair on the other person’s head, a few passive-aggressive remarks are about as far as one can go.

But in the adult world, this level of bullying, akin to a girlfriend playfully punching your chest, is both embarrassing and uninteresting, and ordinary people would quickly tire of it.

Since they haven’t tired of it, that could only mean...

“Thank you all for your concern,” Valcas bowed slightly, making a very appropriate gesture: “You all speak so nicely, you must have wiped your mouths properly before leaving the Restroom, right?”

“Valcas, are you calling us shit-eaters?”

“No, I’m just praising those who know how to wipe their mouths after eating shit. Why do you jump out on your own? Could it be you also eat shit?”

“Val! Cas!”

“Hey, I’m here, you’re sounding a bit strong there, and there’s a smell of urine about you, seems like you have a varied diet.”

“Val-cas-“

“Hey, why are you so agitated? I’m not insulting you. Speaking of which, it reminds me of a joke. I once accidentally hit a dog when I was throwing out the trash downstairs, and naturally, the dog started barking, right? So, when you’re throwing out trash and hear a dog bark, it must’ve been hit.”

“Valcas!”

“I never realized there were so many people who wiped their mouths after using the restroom. I once heard a rumor that Prisoners in Shattered Lake Prison eat shit for meals. I’ll definitely clarify for you in the future that this isn’t true.”

Igor couldn’t help but laugh.

“You can only see such a wonderful war of words in Shattered Lake Prison.”

Ashe nodded; he fully understood why Valcas could silence a dozen people with just his mouth—because you can’t swear. Once you try to swear, the Chip automatically blocks your throat, making all your vulgar words ferment inside your belly, effectively muting you instantly.

So those people couldn’t speak after yelling Valcas’s name.

Then Valcas would turn his head to taunt them, looking as if they were asking to be insulted.

To circumvent the Chip’s Restrictions, mastering the art of insulting without swearing and making the insulted lose their cool to the point of being muted by the Chip are two essential elements of prison disputes.

Clearly, Valcas’s mouth was as effective as a glycerin

1

; the other Death row inmates were no match for him. They were insulted into a loss of reason and were automatically muted.

Some even thought about getting physical, but the Chip took direct control of their jurisdiction, stiffening their bodies and making them fall to the ground with a thud.

“Dispense with the formalities, stand down.”

Valcas raised his chin with elegance, as if effortlessly gliding past the crowd. The losers of the verbal skirmish were fuming, eyes blazing as they watched Valcas, but they were rendered powerless—unable to curse or to fight—perfectly embodying the phrase “impotent rage.”

No wonder these Prisoners aren’t bored with their sarcastic teasing. With Valcas, a master of venomous wit among them, their interactions were too intense to ignore. They probably would lie in bed tonight, pondering over how to craft their comebacks.

“Ashe Heath?”

“Valcas Uhl?”

From a distance, Valcas looked towards Ashe, his lean face returning to its usual indifference.

He pointed towards the Arena, “If there are no objections, let’s get started.”

All eyes from the Deathmatch Society were on them—some expectant, some mocking, others curious, and a few downright manic.

Igor glanced at Ashe.

Now that Ashe knew of Valcas’s connection to Professor Sylin, this Deathmatch was bound to be problematic. If he were Ashe, he would certainly refuse this Battle—he never engaged in fights that weren’t a sure win.

“Swordswoman?”

Igor was slightly taken aback; he heard Ashe whisper a name. But there was no one called Swordswoman here, and Ashe’s gaze wasn’t fixed on anyone in particular.

“It’s a bit lonely...”

Ashe muttered softly, turning to look at Valcas.

For some reason, Igor couldn’t help but interject, “Valcas is much stronger than me; he’s not an opponent you can overcome with mere cunning. And the destructive power of his sword is immense; it might only take one strike to decide the outcome.”

“Thank you,” Ashe said with a smile. “This time, I’m not planning to rely on clever tricks.”

“Then what will you use?”

“My life. I’m betting my life that he can’t kill me with his first stroke.”

Watching Valcas stride towards the Arena, Ashe also stood up.

“As long as the first stroke doesn’t kill me, the second stroke will be my opportunity.”

Footnote:

1. Mouth was as effective as a glycerin(跟抹了开塞露似的):

Kaisailu(开塞露) is a commonly used medicine in China to help relieve constipation by facilitating bowel movements, and because the main ingredient is glycerin, I directly used “glycerin” as a substitute. This slang is often used to describe someone who uses foul language uncontrollably (spews faeces from their mouth).

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Chapter 33

“Valcas Uhl wagers 37 Contribution points.”

“VS”

“Ashe Heath wagers 2 Contribution points.”

It was already quite rare for a newcomer to participate in Deathmatches two days in a row upon arriving at the ‘Manure Pit’—the endearing nickname death row inmates gave

to the prison—let alone facing a ‘Noble’ like Valcas. Naturally, it attracted the attention of countless individuals.

Many who were not part of the Deathmatch Society came to watch, packing the spectator stands to the brim, with even more people standing at the entrance.

“Both are using swords... A Swordsmanship Duel? It’s been a while since I’ve seen Swordcerers clash, and after every duel, the whole Arena is filled with the fragrant Bloody Scent...”

“Human, slay that Elf!”

“What kind of sword grip is that? He hasn’t learned swordsmanship, right? Could it be that he picked up a sword out of fear upon seeing the Noble with one?”

“If you can’t handle a sword, don’t use it! Why not a spear? It’s simple and easier to master.”

“An axe would be better, a single swing and no matter the weapon, everything turns to mush.”

“What are you blabbering about? The spear is clearly more suitable for beginners!”

“I’m not blabbering! The axe is the best weapon for a newbie!”

Ashe had one more reason to escape from prison: he would rather listen to others curse than to endure two grown men, who clearly had the voices of black whirlwinds, argue with the delicate phrasing of tsundere girls. It was as discordant as a Sichuan hot and sour soup with tofu brains.

“They are so noisy.”

“That’s the Manure Pit for you, buzzing with flies everywhere.”

Valcas glanced at the iron sword in his hand, flicking it with his finger to produce a clear, ringing sound.

“Maggots will never turn into butterflies. Even a real butterfly, in the Manure Pit, is just a larger fly.”

Ashe laughed, “It seems you have strong feelings about prison life. Interested in writing a book?”

Valcas’s fingers gently swept along the blade as he assumed a standard Swordsmanship stance.

“Ashe Heath, I apologize.”

The moment the barriers around the Arena rose, Valcas transformed into a swift shadow. His longsword seemed to stretch out to several meters, piercing the air in an instant!

Despite Ashe’s vigilant caution, he was still too late to block with his sword and could only dodge to the right, narrowly avoiding a vital strike. His shoulder was sliced, losing a small piece of flesh to Valcas’s blade!

The intense pain made Ashe involuntarily inhale sharply, but he had no time to rest, for Valcas was already upon him!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Ashe didn’t run away. Instead, he did the opposite, charging into Valcas’s embrace to pull the battle into the most dangerous proximity!

His reasoning was not drowned out by the pain—Valcas was taller by ten centimeters, with longer arms and legs. His reach and attack distance were too great, leaving Ashe virtually no chance to counter at a mid-to-close range. The only way to turn Valcas’s advantage into a disadvantage was to close the distance between them so much that Valcas would not be able to swing his sword!

“Have you not learned any swordsmanship at all?”

Ashe suddenly felt a chill run through his body and caught a glimpse from the corner of his eye of Valcas twisting his wrist, shifting his grip from the standard sword hold to a reverse grip!

Clang!

Valcas’s sword blocked Ashe’s thrust, and the Elf, taking advantage of his height, elbowed Ashe directly in the forehead with a powerful strike!

Back! Back! Back!

The force of the elbow nearly knocked Ashe out, but the slow stirring of arcane energy in his mind emitted a cool sensation that quickly brought him back to consciousness, and he instinctively retreated, maintaining his battle instincts!

As Ashe’s vision cleared, he was met with a flash of cold light!

Boom!

Ashe rolled to his feet, not daring to let his back touch the ground. He looked at the wall, now shattered by Valcas's sword, his face full of after-fear, followed by terror.

Their swords weren't supposed to be sharp!

The Prison wasn't crazy enough to give sharpened blades to Death row inmates to fight to the death!

Valcas having sliced off a piece of Ashe's shoulder with an unsharpened blade was already outrageous. Ashe had assumed it was because Valcas's sword moved fast enough that his flesh couldn't react in time.

But that was a stone wall!

Made of stone!

Stop it, this isn't Swordsmanship!

This has gone beyond the scope of Swordsmanship!

"Are you using a spirit?"

"How come you look a bit surprised?"

Valcas smiled.

"Isn't it natural for a Sorcerer to use spirits in Battle?"

"But the Prison hasn't lifted the arcane energy Restriction—"

"Some things cannot be locked away; even if you bind them, they will grow wings and fly. The spirits born from the knowledge I have mastered, even without the supply of arcane energy, are still my strength. They still turn every ordinary action of mine into a moment of Miracle."

Ashe exhaled deeply, feeling the heaviness in his clothes from the blood that had soaked through from his shoulder wound. His strength seemed to be leaking away as the blood left his body, taking his vitality with it.

Unlike a bare-knuckle boxing match, a Swordsmanship Deathmatch with cold weapons didn't have many fancy rounds of exchange—only the instant breath of life and death: the strong live, the weak die.

But for some reason, he felt refreshed, and the arcane energy in his mind even seemed more active, making his shoulder pain fade away.

“If I were hit in a vital spot by such an attack, I wouldn’t be able to recover, right?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never gone all out against anyone in a Deathmatch.”

“Am I the first?”

“And the last.”

Boom!

With a light flick, the ground as hard as refined steel began to crack and burst open, like a giant serpent rushing underground towards Ashe!

“The Elven Swordsmanship Miracle, Earth-Shattering!?”

“He actually used a Miracle!”

“How is that possible!”

A tumult of voices rose from the spectator stands, the Death row inmates almost pressing their faces against the invisible barrier, eager to catch every detail of Valcas’s technique.

Igor was no exception; having seen Valcas’s Deathmatches before, he had anticipated Valcas’s use of spirits.

Using spirits and casting Miracles are two entirely different concepts!

Each Miracle requires the combined cooperation of several Composite Spirits to be cast. However, having multiple Composite Spirits doesn’t necessarily mean one can cast Miracles. It’s like how ordinary people and stunningly attractive individuals all have a mouth, a nose, and two eyes, but when combined, the results differ—one has the face of an Angel, while the other also has an Angel’s face—just that they landed face-first at birth.

The difficulty of casting a Miracle is so high that ‘Casting a Miracle’ is a part of the Miracle itself.

One must remember that becoming a Sorcerer is a feat for those with extraordinary talent; otherwise, it’s impossible to advance a skill to the realm of ‘Art’ and summon spirits.

Yet, among these chosen few, most only aspire to master one or two Miracles in their lifetime, and that’s considered the average level for a Sorcerer. Those below average may not even master a single Miracle.

Miracles are so rare that their benefits are directly proportional to their difficulty. Compared to the straightforward effects of spirits, the power of Miracles is more complex, grand, and challenging to decipher, sometimes even producing incredible effects that cross Faction divides.

For example, a Miracle from a Swordcerer might have healing effects, a Water Art Sorcerer's Miracle could evaporate an enemy, and a Gun Technique Sorcerer's Miracle might make an enemy willingly catch Shot Bullets...

There's a popular saying among Sorcerers—'Spirits are merely an extension of our skills; Miracles are the true wonders!'

Igor has also mastered a Miracle and fully grasped the necessary spirits to cast it, theoretically qualifying him to Cast Miracles.

But he has never been able to cast a Miracle in the Prison.

Not even once!

If stirring spirits in Prison is like using your feet to pick your nose—tricky but doable with practice;

Then casting a Miracle in Prison is like using your feet to apply makeup! And it has to look great, or else it wouldn't count as a Miracle!

Ashe is done for.

Igor watched the earth-shattering phenomena in the Arena of the Deathmatch, feeling pity for Ashe.

Valcas was obviously out to kill, and under the overwhelming force of a Miracle, Ashe's intact corpse was out of the question. It was even doubtful whether they could find all of his remains in the rubble. The Medics in the Prison's Treatment Room wouldn't be able to handle such severe injuries. Ultimately, Ashe's body would inevitably be left for the Ogres to deal with.

This is the grim reality of the Blood Moon Kingdom, where beneath the tablecloth of 'Racial equality,' 'Supremacy of Law,' and 'Harmonious Coexistence,' carnivores still abide by the most brutal law of survival of the fittest.

Once interests are touched, even hiding in Shattered Lake Prison won't save one from being crushed under the fingers of those above.

What a shame for a man who was quite interesting...

As the Arena reverberated with the sounds of the earth-shattering Miracle for a while, someone finally became restless.

“How is he not dead yet?”

“Even if the Miracle’s power is reduced to less than ten percent, it should still be enough to kill a weakling who can’t even hold a sword properly, right?”

Yeah, how is Ashe still alive?

The Death row inmates, whose attention had been completely captivated by the Miracle, now started to observe Ashe more closely.

The Deathmatch Arena was in ruins, and in the face of Valcas’s seemingly effortless Earth-shattering Miracles, Ashe dodged like a frantic hamster, embarrassingly covered in dirt and grime, narrowly avoiding being crushed into a pulp by the Earth-Shattering forces time and time again.

But he evaded them! Every single time!

Even though his movements seemed clumsy, to the Death row inmates watching, they were becoming more efficient, with not a single ounce of wasted energy!

Even Ashe’s swordplay was getting steadier, even managing to block Valcas’s strikes!

It was just like, just like...

“It’s like the Battle with the Beautiful Beast yesterday.”

Someone murmured under their breath.

As the first victim, Igor felt this deeply. He had watched in the Battle as Ashe grew stronger step by step, his skills improving from a greenhouse flower that couldn’t even roll properly to a creature full of combat instincts in just a few minutes.

And now, a second victim had emerged.

This creature, Ashe, had actually learned Swordsmanship in the midst of Battle!?

This is a Prison, not some damn talent cultivation center!

But there were also many who recalled Ashe’s crimes and began to connect his genius performance at this moment to his past.

“Four Pillars...”

In the dim spectator stands, Langna hooked her boyfriend's neck, her eyes fixed intently on the two people in the Deathmatch Arena, with a strange light flickering in her pupils.

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Chapter 34

"Why don't you just kill yourself?"

When Valcas uttered these words, it didn't signal his confidence in victory; on the contrary, it was a sign of his concession. Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Suicide was an option in the Deathmatch Arena.

Once one committed suicide, the Deathmatch would end, the chip restrictions would reactivate, and Valcas would have no chance to desecrate the corpse.

As long as Ashe left his body intact, the Medics could communicate with his soul through the spirit in the Virtual Realm, and pull it back from the foggy mists of that realm into his body.

Ashe had dodged his first Earth-Shattering Miracle, and with that, Valcas had already lost. The subsequent attacks were nothing more than desperate struggles fueled by a slim hope. Even if he could win this Deathmatch, he couldn't fulfill his mission to completely annihilate Ashe Heath.

More disheartening than the mission failure was the scene unfolding before Valcas.

Nothing was more painful than watching a genius rise, except perhaps being the stepping stone for that genius.

Even as a middle-aged elf with over a century of life behind him, Valcas felt a sense of aggrieved frustration—how could it be, with so many unlucky souls in the world, that he was the one to suffer this fate?

To be honest, Valcas was mentally breaking down, which is why he blurted out the quick solution, hoping Ashe would swiftly end this nightmare.

“Why should I kill myself? I haven’t lost yet.”

“Do you think you stand a chance against me?” Valcas sneered in anger, “Oh yes, centuries from now, Bards will sing of your glory in the streets, ‘Ashe Heath, who never learned Swordsmanship, faced off against a foolish elf swordsman in a Battle, and miraculously triumphed, marking the beginning of his undefeated, illustrious life.’”

“Ah, merciful Mr. Ashe, the humble Valcas beseeches you to mention my name in your future autobiography, may I live on infamously as a jest, yes?”

“So, when are you publishing your book, Valcas?”

Ashe struggled to lift his left hand, wiping the blood from his forehead to prevent it from sticking to his eyelashes and obstructing his vision, still smiling.

“I just have reasons why I must win against you.”

“What reasons?”

“I want to ask you, is it Sylin Dole who sent you to kill me? Is there a conspiracy behind my imprisonment?”

Valcas flicked the blood and debris off his sword blade with a light tap.

“What does that have to do with you needing to win?”

“If I don’t win against you, would you answer me?”

“Maybe I would, maybe I wouldn’t. And even if I did answer, could you discern the truth?”

“That question, I just asked someone else.” Ashe exhaled deeply, “He came to me to resolve a doubt, and I asked, ‘If I lie, can you tell?’ He said he really could tell.”

“So you can too?”

“No, I can’t. But I figured, the answer I get after beating you up is likely closer to the truth than one I would get by simply asking you.”

“It’s been a long time since I left the Nursery, and I haven’t heard such an innocent reason in a while.”

Valcas cracked a vicious smile for the first time since he had entered the arena, his elegant demeanor breaking in the heat of the Battle: “But if you don’t kill yourself, you very well might die, you know.”

“It all comes down to whether your sword is faster or mine is.”

“To kill you before you can kill yourself? Interesting, I accept that challenge.”

“Ah, that’s not really what I meant...”

Ashe gripped his sword tighter, his muscles tensed for action.

“After all, I have no plans of retiring here. If I can’t even step over a stepping stone like you, what right do I have to leave this Prison?”

“Such big talk!”

The already shattered ground split again, the invisible Sword Qi outlined by the flying debris, like a giant sword thrusting from the earth towards Ashe!

Ashe didn’t even blink as he dodged the Sword Qi and the exploding stones, prolonging the Battle to absorb as much Swordsmanship experience as possible!

The Swordsman’s experience was truly formidable. From the start where Ashe couldn’t even see Valcas’s sword clearly, to now where he could anticipate Valcas’s moves just by watching his shoulder, Ashe may not have truly mastered the sword, but at least he had become adept at dodging.

He wasn’t simply courting death; he genuinely had the confidence to defeat Valcas.

With the added boost from the Swordsman’s experience, the Miracle Earth-Shattering technique was no longer an unsolvable fog. On the contrary, with Valcas unable to exert his full power, Earth-Shattering was beginning to show a sliver of vulnerability!

It was like encountering a challenging math problem on a college entrance exam and suddenly discovering a helpful auxiliary line; Ashe felt he had a chance to conquer this difficult task!

Just a little more time, and Ashe believed he could even find a flaw in the Earth-Shattering's attack pattern, slip through the gap, and counterattack Valcas!

If only he had a bit more time—

Boom!

Ashe grunted as the arcane energy in his mind circulated again, bringing a cooling sensation that forced his rationality to suppress the intense pain in his thigh. He barely managed to dodge another Earth-Shattering attack!

He glanced at his thigh with his peripheral vision, then dared not look any further down.

"Your growth rate is indeed admirable, but unfortunately, you're tired," Valcas said, unable to hide his pity. "From the beginning, you've been bleeding, and after such an intense Battle, you've lost too much blood, so much so that your brain is starting to lack oxygen and your strength is waning. You're getting slower and slower."

"Even if you can suppress the pain and continue to fight, your body can no longer battle. I've gouged out a chunk of flesh from your thigh, and with all the blood you've lost before, it's surprising you haven't passed out from shock already."

"Do you know why I'm telling you all this? Because the longer the time drags on, the more strength you lose, and now your sword can no longer be faster than mine. Before you can kill yourself, my sword will crush your remains first."

"Thank you, Ashe. Sorry, Ashe."

With that, Valcas charged forward, his sword unleashing fierce Sword Qi once again, Earth-Shattering tearing through the ground!

Is this the limit of my strength...

Ashe sighed inwardly.

Long before Igor told him about Valcas, Ashe had anticipated the dangers of the Deathmatch. After all, without any grievances, why would someone challenge him, a rookie who had only fought in one Deathmatch?

If a colleague suddenly makes life difficult for you, it must be due to conflicting interests.

So why did Ashe accept the Deathmatch?

Even before entering the Arena, Ashe could have simply declined. No one would be able to insult or look down on him for it; Ashe had that freedom.

But Ashe did not want to back down.

Firstly, he needed an opponent to assimilate the Swordsmanship experience shared by the Swordswoman, and there was no place more fitting than the peril yet secure setting of the Deathmatch Arena.

Secondly, you can run for a while, but not forever. Even if Ashe avoided this Deathmatch, troubles would eventually find him.

Most importantly, as he said himself, he was planning an escape from prison. If he couldn't even overcome a stepping stone like Valcas, what kind of escape could he possibly make? It would be better to just lie down and retire!

However, life is not full of Miracles, and even if they exist, they belong to others...

Just as Ashe was preparing to draw his longsword across his throat and commit suicide, he suddenly heard a familiar voice from the stands.

It was the Swordswoman.

"If it hurts, imagine that it's happening to someone else. Then it won't hurt anymore."

In that instant, Ashe felt as if ice was melting in his mind. Arcane energy was running wild, but it was tightly bound by an invisible cage, unable to touch reality!

Arcane energy can be locked away, but knowledge cannot. Even if their hands and feet are bound, they will still grow wings and fly.

The Substitute spirit, which had been dormant, suddenly began to dance in Ashe's consciousness.

Without any hesitation, Ashe did not dodge or retreat but chose to brandish his longsword and charge towards Valcas!

"It's over."

Valcas watched as 'Ashe' was engulfed by the Earth-Shattering Sword Qi, feeling a tinge of sorrow. As a Swordcerer, he had not seen an Apprentice with a greater Talent for Swordsmanship than Ashe in over a hundred years.

If it were a different time, a different place, a different identity, Valcas felt that even being a stepping stone for Ashe... might not be so bad...

There is nothing more painful than watching a genius rise before your eyes, and nothing more exhilarating than witnessing a genius ascend from up close.

Snap.

Hearing a sound like bubbles bursting, Valcas immediately sensed something was amiss. He focused his gaze and saw that 'Ashe' had dissipated under the impact of the Sword Qi without leaving any flesh or blood behind—

It was a Substitute!

“It’s over!”

Valcas slightly turned his head, only to discover that the area in his blind spot was covered in dust and debris from the Earth-Shattering slash, enough to conceal the charge of a gravely injured person!

As Valcas’s sword fell to the ground, Ashe’s sword penetrated his throat.

A blade without an edge, passing through the throat!

Ding, ding, ding!

“The battle is decided, the winner is Ashe Heath!”

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Chapter 35

Shattered Lake Prison, Treatment Room.

“Are you going to pretend I’m still unconscious as long as I keep quiet?”

Ashe opened his eyes, staring intently at the medic who was fiddling with his face.

The medic had a badge marked “222” on her clothing, clearly the same one from last time.

“If you don’t want a rotten face, close your eyes!”

“Alright.”

After a few more minutes of tinkering, she finally let go of his face. “There, you can get up now. Here, the apple you asked for last time.”

Ashe quickly sat up and touched his face, relieved. Next to the bedside table was a plate of apples cut into rabbit shapes, with toothpicks inserted in them. Ashe picked them up and ate them one by one.

“Not bad, not bad. Two eyes, a nose, a mouth, not a single one missing. I thought I was going to contribute to species diversity for a moment.”

“How can you doubt me when I’m performing surgery on you?”

The medic crossed her arms over her chest, trying to look angry, but wearing a Crow Mask and with her voice altered by the mask, Ashe was not frightened in the slightest; he even reached out his hand.

“What for?”

“Didn’t you say that if you did cosmetic surgery on me, I’d have to pay you?”

“Oh.” The medic obediently pulled out her wallet but then realized something: “I did say that yesterday, but you never agreed!”

“So, did you or did you not perform cosmetic surgery on me?”

“Cosmetic surgery is complicated, not as simple as you think—”

“So, you did do it?”

“Just a tiny bit, actually a very small procedure... How much do you want?”

“Give me a Silver Coin.”

The medic clearly breathed a sigh of relief, rifling through her wallet before looking up to ask, "Would a Gold Coin be okay? I don't have any change."

Ashe, who had always been fed by the state, had no concept of the world's economic system and was surprised: Are Silver Coins considered spare change to give to beggars in this world?

One daring to give, and the other daring to take, Ashe accepted the Gold Coin and felt a surge of excitement deep within his consciousness.

As his palm warmed, he seemed to see a human child in pajamas patting his round belly and then lying back to fall into a deep sleep.

He glanced down at the Gold Coin and had the vague feeling it was a little smaller than before. At this rate of consumption, it would probably last a year.

What the heck, feeding a spirit seemed pretty simple.

Although Ashe was someone who would not hesitate to take advantage when he could, there was a reason he asked for money this time.

After all, the Swordswoman had told him that spirits needed to be fed with money, and without any, he had to find a way to scrounge some from those less intellectually endowed.

Ashe contentedly put the Gold Coin into his pouch and casually asked, "So, what kind of cosmetic surgery did you actually do?"

"The forehead skin extension and wrinkle-removal procedure of Drew, to put it simply, it's like getting rid of frown lines."

The Medic paused, slowly stood up straight, and looked down at Ashe with her crow-like mask: "I was willing to perform the surgery for you, you should be bowing down in gratitude. You should know that forehead lines can really affect a person's looks, and out there, a Drew Procedure can cost a lot of money to—"

"What? You actually removed my most handsome and manly forehead lines?"

Ashe was outraged: "Unethical Medic, taking advantage of a patient while they're asleep to disfigure them, robbing them of their most brilliant and beautiful features! Is there no law and order here? Is there no reason anymore? This is medical malpractice, this is scheming for money and murder!"

The Medic was taken aback by Ashe's rebuttal, confused for a moment before opening her wallet again.

“How much do you want?”

“Hey, don’t be like that, I’m not that kind of person.” Ashe refused righteously: “I’m not the kind of criminal who would use leverage to force others into servitude.”

The Medic pondered for a moment.

“Just sit here for a while, I’m going to go look up some news reports about you...”

“In any case!” Ashe quickly pulled the Medic back: “I just want to ask you a few questions.”

“Don’t ask my name, don’t try to take off my mask, and don’t touch my skin!”

The Medic was startled, quickly knocking Ashe’s hand away and crossing her arms defensively, which made Ashe finally feel the dignity of being a death row inmate.

But Ashe was also curious: “Why not?”

“It’s the rule of Shattered Lake Prison, Medics are not allowed to have private conversations with prisoners. If discovered, a Medic could be dismissed from their position, and in severe cases, even imprisoned!”

“So you’re saying... we might soon become fellow inmates?”

“If you have questions, ask them quickly and then get out of here.”

The Medic didn’t seem to care much about the rule, and Ashe got the impression she might be looking forward to an unpaid long vacation.

“That Elf I fought to the death with, is he still alive?”

“His injuries were lighter than yours; he left a while ago.”

“Lighter injuries?”

“He just had his throat cut, that’s nothing. Someone healed him in a few minutes. It took me over an hour to help you grow back your flesh.”

The Medic spread her hands, looking like she wasn’t lying.

Ashe looked at his intact thigh and shoulder, wondering if the treatment costs here were calculated by weight.

The more flesh lost, the harder to heal. Throat cuts and headshots are no big deal?

So, does that mean the buttocks are the high-risk organ here? Are buttocks more important than the head?

"Any more questions? Hurry up."

"I also wanted to ask if there's a place inside the prison to trade spirits. A solitary man gets lonely, and I was thinking of getting a pet..."

The Medic stared at Ashe intently.

"I'm going to report you for plotting misconduct and attempting to escape from prison."

"I'm already on death row, even if you report me, what more could you do, give me another sentence?"

"Sure, after you die once, we could revive you and let you die again."

"What, that's a thing?!"

"Of course not, that would be a waste of taxpayers' money, and it's also inhumane. They stopped that kind of repeated execution a hundred years ago."

"So you're saying a hundred years ago, death row inmates might have had to die several times..."

"Anyway, I won't answer that question," the Medic said with crossed arms. "You, as a death row inmate, should obediently serve as our medical material. When you're no longer useful, just quietly go and die."

"You surprisingly have quite the moral compass..."

"How did you figure that my morals are twisted?"

"Well, you've been chatting with a death row inmate like me for so long, I thought you were one of those rebellious kids who get curious about criminals."

"I, I'm not curious at all. If I were, I'd just look at the news reports."

As the Medic was packing up the medical equipment, Ashe hopped off the bed, swinging his leg and shoulder around.

The surgery was a success. Aside from the skin on certain parts of the thigh and shoulder being a shade whiter than the surrounding areas, there were no major issues.

"If I said I was innocent, would you believe me?"

“Don’t think you can fool me that easily,” the Medic scoffed. “Ever since the introduction of the memory evidence system, there haven’t been any wrongful convictions. The Sin Hunter’s Hall would have only convicted you after finding the proof of your crimes in your memories—”

“Nope, the Sin Hunter’s Hall didn’t take any memory evidence from my brain.”

“How is that possible—”

“You can check the reports, but the Sin Hunter’s Hall really didn’t take my memories, and I truly am innocent.”

Ashe spoke with conviction. Putting aside the fact that it was Heath, not Ashe, who was the criminal, what was more important was that Ashe didn’t even possess Heath’s memories, so he felt no guilt in saying this.

The Medic looked at Ashe with suspicion.

“You’re not lying to me?”

“Lying to you would cost me overtime pay I’ve never received in my life.”

“If you dare to lie to me, you’re dead for sure. You’d better pray you don’t get injured again because if you do and end up in my hands, I’ll change your Race and gender!”

The Medic’s words had a profound impact on Ashe’s young soul—he had wanted to experience the healthcare industry of a multi-Race world, not realizing that medical technology in this world had advanced to the point where even Race and gender could be changed!

Could he still trust the pretty girls he saw on the streets? Was there any trust left between people?

“But even so, I can’t answer you,” the Medic spread her hands.

“Your arcane energy as death row inmates is restricted. The first step in trading spirits is for the seller to release the spirit using arcane energy, and for the buyer to reactivate the spirit with their own arcane energy. Without the ability to use arcane energy, you can’t release a spirit, nor can you activate one.”

Arcane energy even had a sort of key authentication function. Ashe was starting to believe that arcane energy was indeed a universal energy source; he wouldn’t be surprised if he heard one day that arcane energy had Bluetooth capabilities.

No wonder the Prison doesn't block their spirits; on the one hand, spirits might be unbindable, and on the other, as long as their arcane energy is restricted, they can't stir up any trouble.

Ashe was still not giving up: "Is there really no hope? Isn't there a place like the Deathmatch Society where we can lift the arcane energy restrictions?"

After going through an Exploration in the Virtual Realm, Ashe realized that finding all the spirits he needed in the Virtual Realm was as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack. If he had enough time, it wouldn't be impossible to find that needle, but time was not on Ashe's side.

Although Ashe didn't shy away from risk and was willing to bet on the odds, he didn't want to do so without a hedge. Just like how companies made their employees work overtime under a 996

1

schedule and still bought them health insurance – no matter if an employee suddenly passed away, the company was still "winning". As an outstanding employee of the year, Ashe naturally grasped such an excellent corporate culture and was always prepared with a backup plan.

If he could find a spirit trading platform, even if all Ashe picked up in the Virtual Realm was junk, he would still have the chance to sell it off and recoup some losses. Search* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Yes, of course, don't you know?" the Medic replied, catching Ashe off guard, "Why would I know?"

"Because that's an experience all Death row inmates go through at least once... Oh right, you've only been in Prison for a few days and haven't had the chance yet."

Ashe immediately understood the implicit meaning of her words.

"The Blood Moon Tribunal?"

Footnote:

1. 996:

996 is a common work schedule found in many Chinese internet companies, referring to a workday that starts at 9 AM and ends at 9 PM, with employees working 6 days a week.

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Chapter 36

Ever since arriving in this world, Ashe had heard the term “Blood Moon Tribunal” more than once.

Initially, he thought it was a firing squad program.

Then, he thought it was a live broadcast of a firing squad.

After that, he thought it was an online guessing game where they randomly executed a lucky viewer.

Now, Ashe had come to think of the Blood Moon Tribunal as a variety show featuring unrestricted combat live.

“Yes, when death row inmates participate in the Blood Moon Tribunal, the prison will lift all restrictions, and you’ll be able to harness arcane energy to animate spirits.”

The Medic extended her hand, and a spirit resembling a kind-hearted old grandmother materialized in her palm.

“If you’re wondering whether there’s a chance to make deals during the Blood Moon Tribunal, theoretically, yes, there is. But in reality, no one can do it. And I don’t need to tell you why, do I? You’ve watched the Blood Moon Tribunal, haven’t you?”

“I haven’t seen it!”

“Don’t think I’m that easy to fool!” the Medic almost roared, “I won’t believe such a stupid lie!”

At this point, the Medic refused to divulge any more information, feeling that her dignity was insulted by Ashe’s poor lie. It was bad enough to deceive, but to do so with a lie that not even a child would believe was downright disrespectful!

Ashe felt wronged; he genuinely hadn’t seen the Blood Moon Tribunal, but everyone here assumed it was common knowledge, something that didn’t require explanation.

Since he couldn’t deceive any information out of her, Ashe was ready to go eat, but then the Medic stopped him from leaving.

“Why did you ask about that elf’s condition? Are you worried about him?”

“To say I’m worried would be a bit embarrassing; I’m just a little concerned.”

Ashe scratched the newly healed tender skin on his shoulder: “After all, he was the first person I killed. Isn’t there a saying that murderers will return to the crime scene to watch? I guess I’m kind of in that mindset.”

“Really? He was your first?”

“The way you put it really leads to misunderstandings...”

“You’re a death row inmate who could afford a luxury suite at Shattered Lake Prison! Shouldn’t destroying a life be as simple for you as dressing or eating, and tormenting a soul as habitual as breathing?”

“I may not be a good person, but I really am wronged!”

“I’ll believe the first part of that for now.”

The Medic looked down at the spirit in her hand, seemingly weighing her words.

“Alright, I’ll believe it’s your first time killing someone. So why do you care about the elf’s life or death? Do you hope he doesn’t survive, or do you wish he doesn’t die?”

“Both.”

“Both?” The Medic couldn’t help but laugh: “Do you want him to be dead and alive?”

“To be honest, my grudge against him isn’t to the extent that I absolutely want him dead. If possible, I’d rather give him a good thrashing with a geoduck-shaped soft stick to vent my anger, and since I have questions for him, I don’t really want him to die.”

Ashe shrugged, “But if he really died, I might just reflect tonight before sleep that life is like the ocean, and only those with strong will can reach the other side... So even if he dies, I won’t care too much.”

“I’m starting to believe it was your first time killing someone,” the Medic remarked. “Your stance doesn’t win favors from either side. In the case of public disclosure, you’d get sympathy from Human Rights Organizations for showing mercy, or support from extremist groups for being thorough. But this indecisive, wishy-washy approach you’re taking is despised by all.”

“It seems that the outside world isn’t easy to navigate either,” Ashe sighed. “But aren’t most people indecisive like me?”

The Medic was momentarily taken aback, then shrugged, “It’s not that there aren’t indecisive people, but you need to have the capital to afford indecision—like being good-looking, for instance!”

The Medic pulled out a photo album and started flipping through it in front of Ashe: “Look, these are the popular handsome templates from the past five years. Do you want to pick a new face for yourself? I particularly recommend this Face #1. It’s very trendy, almost a dead ringer for the latest pop star. You’d definitely like this one...”

“It seems like you’re the one who likes that face!”

“So what if I like it? If you get that face, you’re the one who benefits!”

“Who says that? I’m not the one who’ll be looking in the mirror all day. I usually can’t even see my own face. What good does being handsome do for me? Instead, it’s others who get to stare at me all day. Do you think I’d willingly accept their creepy gazes just to be selfless?”

Ashe made a lot of sense, so much so that the Medic was convinced. Her Crow Mask sagged as she looked dejected, “Alright, you’re right...”

“But,” Ashe quickly changed his tone, “your willingness to listen to my grievances and talk with me for so long is the only warmth I’ve felt in this cold Prison. Since it’s a friend’s request, I’m not entirely against it...”

“What? Are we friends?”

“If not, then I’m leaving...”

“Okay, okay, so you’re willing to let me do the surgery?”

"I'm actually not that keen..." Ashe displayed a hesitant expression. "I've grown quite fond of my current face. After all, I've been looking at it for many years; I've become somewhat attached..."

"So...?"

"You'll have to pay me more."

"No problem!"

The Medic breathed a sigh of relief: "When do you want to start the surgery? Wait, I'm still not very familiar with some Procedures. Give me a couple of nights to review... Don't worry, it's very safe. My spirits can effectively prevent severe issues like flesh decay!"

Ashe tugged at the corner of his mouth, "I, I'm very reassured. I'll be going now then, take your time and don't rush!"

Arcane energy is the Sorcerer's universal power source, just like money is society's. Although he still hadn't seen a glimmer of hope for escape from prison, Ashe realized he needed to start making some money just in case. Death row inmates, needless to say, were all poor and living off the state. After much thought, Ashe felt his only option was to cash in on his looks.

But now, it seemed like a hefty price to pay. The chances of ending up with a messed-up face were quite high, and Ashe was feeling the Cowardice.

No wonder the Medics don't allow their names to be disclosed; maybe it's to prepare for a quick anonymous getaway—after causing many medical mishaps in Prison and honing their skills, they can just dust off and leave. The Death row inmates can't even curse someone because they don't know who to blame.

Ashe walked to the door, then suddenly turned back and surveyed the Treatment room.

"I've been meaning to ask for a while now—are you being ostracized by your colleagues?"

"Huh?"

"How come both times I've woken up, I only see you? Where are the other Medics?" Ashe speculated. "Did they leave the most difficult jobs to you and then just call it a day?"

"No—well, you being the most difficult job is true."

"Really? If your colleagues are shunning or boycotting you, remember to tell me."

The Medic looked at Ashe and snorted with laughter.

“Why should I tell you?”

“Aren’t we friends? Friends are the ones who can gloat at the other’s misfortune.”

“Get lost, get lost, get lost!”

Ashe waved goodbye: “Then, Doctor [222], see you next time. The apple was delicious, thanks.”

The Treatment room returned to silence as the Medic packed up her toolbox and pushed open the door leading to the common Rest area—the Medics’ activity zone doesn’t overlap with that of the Death row inmates—at which point she saw a group of Medics wearing Crow Masks waiting outside.

The Medic was startled, almost thinking they had come to make a scene.

But upon closer inspection, she realized that among the group of Medics, one person wasn’t wearing a Crow Mask. Judging by the figure and the work badge, it was the tall Medic, [176], who always scolded her. His appearance was that of a Blue Scale Merfolk, but his eyes were a blood-red, gleaming like rubies.

[176] was not only without a mask, his hands were clasped behind his back in a reverse grip, his face clearly showed signs of cleansing, and around his neck was a dark green Vein Foam necklace.

The Medic knew exactly what that was.

Miracle Vein Foam.

This was one of the most commonly used offensive Miracles by Blood Sorcerers, combining entrapment and killing in one. For as long as the spell lasted, the veins of those caught by Vein Foam would be linked to the foam. Once the foam shattered, it meant that all the veins in the body would burst simultaneously, and the heart would rapidly fail due to loss of blood supply.

Every Sorcerer, even the weakest, has the ability to instantly annihilate a living being.

Being fitted with Vein Foam was the treatment of a criminal.

“What did he do?”

“He peeked at your Healing Procedures.”

A Medic with the badge [201] bowed in reporting, his respect unmistakable even through the voice-altering Crow Mask.

“Attempting to steal the intellectual achievements of the Blood Cry Research Institute without permission violates the constitutional principle of ‘the inviolability of personal and collective property’—there’s no doubt it’s a crime.”

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Chapter 37

Inside the passageway from the Treatment Room to the communal Rest area, a trial was in progress.

Other Medics looked at the slightly shorter figure of [222], their eyes behind the Crow Masks filled with a myriad of complex emotions.

There was no doubt among them about the accusation leveled against [176] for ‘stealing Procedures’; in fact, they found it quite reasonable.

Healing Procedures were not just a set of operations, but also a method of learning Miracles.

Unlike Battle Sorcerers, Healing Sorcerers and Creator Sorcerers didn't need to engage in PVP, so they could reduce the difficulty of casting by extending the casting time. Battle Sorcerers didn't have that luxury—the enemy would obliterate them while they were still charging their spells.

Therefore, Healing and Creator Sorcerers would break down Miracles into many steps, combining them in sequence to form a Miracle.

These steps were known as Procedures.

Thus, mastering the Procedures was a sure path to learning Miracles.

Procedures were naturally considered vital intellectual property. A Sorcerer who created a new Procedure, no matter how limited its application or unmarketable it might be, could earn enough in royalties from licensing it to other Sorcerers to order a life-extension package from any of the four Grand Research Institutes that added ten years to their lifespan.

This explained why Ashe always found only one Medic in the Treatment Room upon awakening—Medics were not allowed observers during treatments to prevent the theft of their Healing Procedures.

The Medic turned to [201], “Are you sent by the teacher?”

“I am a graduate student learning under your senior; she's my boss.”

[201] chose their words carefully, revealing no names: “The Warden of Shattered Lake Prison is a friend of the boss... But the boss instructed me not to disturb you on normal occasions. If it weren't for this scum going too far, actually stealing property from the Research Institute, I wouldn't have shown up.”

The Medic asked, “Now that my identity is exposed, does that mean I have to leave this place?”

[201] chuckled, “Miss, you jest. The ones who come to Shattered Lake Prison to perform the ‘Blood Embrace Ritual’ are all Preparatory Racial Descendants from institutions under the Grand Research Institutes. How could we betray you? How would we dare to?”

The other Medics bowed in unison, showing their respect.

They had no choice but to bow. The Blood Moon Kingdom's Research Institutes totaled thirty-six, with twenty-four Small Research Institutes, eight Medium Research Institutes, and four Grand Research Institutes.

Most of them were merely 'Preparatory Bloodline' from Small Research Institutes, but the young lady before them was a New Racial Descendant from the 'Blood Cry' faction of the Grand Research Institutes, a status vastly superior to theirs.

Frankly, the best outcome for them after completing the Blood Embrace Ritual and leaving the Prison would be to become Gold Bloodline, gaining a two-hundred-year lifespan increase, peaking at Two Wings.

However, for the New Racial Descendants from the Grand Research Institutes, almost all were Sanctuary Bloodline with five hundred years added to their lifespans, or even the legendary Bloodline with a millennium!

Tri-wings was the minimum they had to achieve, Quadruple wings were not uncommon, and some might even touch the realm of the divine and ascend as Demi-God Saints of the Blood Moon Kingdom!

"Miss, how should we deal with this scum?" [201] inquired.

The Medic paused for a moment, then turned to look at [176].

"Do you have anything to say?"

[176] lifted his fish-head to glance at the Medic, his large eyes revealing the crimson glow she knew all too well.

"How dare you!"

With a cold huff, [201] popped a Vein Foam.

[176]'s body trembled, his already pale fish-face turning as white as a sheet of paper.

"I don't accept this."

"What don't you accept?"

"I can't accept that you became a New Racial Descendant of the Blood Cry Research Institute, while I have to struggle and fight in a Small Research Institute."

[176] was almost grinding his sharp teeth: "I am clearly among the elite of the Merfolk, I could also become a supreme Bloodline, but why is there such a huge gap in the resources between you and me?"

"I don't accept that you get Blood Embrace opportunities so easily, which I've exhausted my wits to obtain; I don't accept that the Procedures I desperately seek are mere knowledge you can easily grasp; I don't accept why the best Prisoner materials are processed by you, while I only get tasteless scraps..."

“What I can’t accept the most, is why your Talent is also so great!”

[176] became increasingly hysterical: “I can’t just watch you surpass me... I can’t!”

“Such trash without any sign of repentance.”

[201] punctured another Vein Foam, causing [176] to nearly pass out.

“His garbage talk is not worth listening to... Miss, how do you wish to dispose of him?”

[201] paused for a moment, “Typically, the punishment would be execution on the spot.”

The Medic silently watched [176], who was almost collapsing to the ground, thinking for a long time.

“He hasn’t made me hate him enough to want him dead, but if he died, I wouldn’t care much either.”

“So you mean...”

“Find a soft stick shaped like a geoduck clam, beat him until he is covered in wounds, do not allow him to be treated, and then kick him out. Right, he is a Blue Scale Merfolk, isn’t he? Finger sharks should not kill him. Toss him into the sea tonight, and let him swim back on his own.”

[201] was taken aback, “But Miss—”

“That’s my decision.” The Medic looked at [201], “If you disagree, do as you please, I don’t mind.”

“I meant no disrespect.” [201] bowed deeply, “Your will shall be carried out.”

“Then, I’m going back to Rest.”

The Medic quickly walked away, passing through the crowd as if eager to escape the stifling atmosphere. But soon, slow, heavy footsteps hurried to catch up with her pace.

The Medic stopped in front of her dormitory door, turning to face [201] who had caught up.

“Is there anything else?”

“Since I’ve already disturbed you, I thought I might as well take this opportunity to speak a few words... a reminder,” [201] chose his words carefully, “just a few reminders.”

“Go ahead.”

"I've noticed that you've been spending a bit more time than usual with the Prisoners in the Treatment Room... Not that it's a problem, of course. I assure you nobody will use that rule to offend you, and I'm not here to warn you."

"If it weren't for avoiding trouble with the Human Rights Association and the Racial Rights Association, we wouldn't need to pretend to be Medics to perform the Ritual here. Those rules are just to reduce the likelihood of us encountering problems, but you, Miss, don't need to worry about such troubles."

[201] emphasized his humility with every sentence.

"I'm just concerned that during your play, you might develop unnecessary feelings for those materials, delaying the Blood Embrace Ritual. If there's an issue with your Blood Embrace progress, the boss will hold me accountable."

The Medic shook her head. "I haven't forgotten the Blood Embrace Ritual, rest assured."

She paused for a moment, "All the Prisoners I've treated have been implanted with the blood embrace seed. As soon as they die in their trials, the blood embrace seeds will naturally coalesce their knowledge and arcane energy, all transforming into my source blood."

The Medic walked into her dormitory, reached up to remove her Crow Mask, revealing a pair of eyes as red as a predator's, filled with ferocity, staring at [201], sending a shiver down his spine.

"We of the sacred bloodline have never developed feelings for mere bread."

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Chapter 38

By the time Ashe arrived at the restaurant, it was already close to 8 p.m., so naturally, he missed the chance to order the special Lala Fatty delicacy and casually grabbed some meat dishes to eat.

“Does the food taste better after a victory?”

Ashe looked up to see Valcas holding a cup of water, sitting down across from him.

“Honestly, these leftovers are a bit cold, and the Lala Fatty... you guys ordered it all.”

“You could order some food, you know. You won 37 Contribution points from me, it wouldn’t be too much to treat yourself with one or two of those points, right?”

“Huh? Order food? Spend Contribution points?”

“Don’t you know? Well, that’s right, you’ve just been here for a few days.” Valcas pointed to the menu board next to the restaurant. “You can order food at any time, regardless of the day’s menu restrictions. If it’s outside of the free activity hours, the restaurant will even deliver to your dormitory—as long as you spend Contribution points.”

Only then did Ashe notice that the menu board was for ordering food. He had previously thought it was just for show—See, leader, we provide so many dishes here! They really haven’t been skimping on the prisoners’ rations!

Suddenly, the menu seemed incredibly affordable. Any combination of three dishes only cost 1 Contribution point, such as ‘Seafood Lala Fatty’ + ‘Creamy Chicken Noodle’ + ‘Misty Spinach Egg Pancake’, which could make for a really good meal.

However, each death row inmate only started with 50 initial Contribution points. Not only were 10 points automatically deducted every month, but they were also necessary for applying for a Deathmatch. The lower your Contribution points, the sooner you appear in the Judgment sequence and the more likely you are to be called for the variety live show ‘Blood Moon Tribunal’.

Thus, in the prison, Contribution points represent not just a form of Currency but also the life quota of a prisoner. Spending Contribution points isn’t much different from a slow suicide... well, maybe there is one difference. With a slow suicide, you at least

don't know when you're going to die, but with Contribution points, you can watch your life quota decrease more and more.

"There's not much to do in prison, but if you want to spend Contribution points, you definitely can," Valcas said. "Hair care, custom prison uniforms, specific hygiene products... You can even spend Contribution points for a better dormitory room. A three-bedroom suite with windows costs 1 Contribution point per day."

"1 Contribution point a day? Are you insane? Who would live there?"

"Some do. 'Diamond' Taig has been living in that VIP Suite for years. His Contribution points are so plentiful he can't spend them all. There's always some fool newbies giving him their points. If we consider 1 Contribution point as equivalent to 1 Gold Coin, Taig inside the prison might be richer than he ever was outside."

Ashe raised an eyebrow, "So you're saying... we prisoners are worth just 50 Gold Coins in the prison's evaluation system?"

"You think that's too little?"

"Is it a lot?"

"For most people without a higher education, they couldn't earn 50 Gold Coins in a lifetime, and even some less successful Sorcerers don't make that much. If someone had an annual salary of 1 Gold Coin, they could live quite comfortably in Kaimon City."

Ashe finally understood the real value of the Gold Coin in his possession, and he realized just how grim the Prison was—three meat dishes cost a person's annual salary! Was the Lala Fatty made by someone with a Ph.D.?

"I'm suddenly finding the leftovers more appetizing."

Valcas snorted and just watched Ashe in silence.

After eating for a while, Ashe couldn't help but say, "Mr. Elf, I'm the type who can't pee when someone's watching."

"Shh~ Shh~"

"I was just making a metaphor; you don't have to whistle along with me!"

"I thought the youth of today enjoyed eating and peeing at the same time," Valcas said with a smile, before his expression returned to one of indifference. "What I'm about to say is mostly to myself, mostly gibberish. If you overhear it, it's best to act as if you didn't."

Ashe was taken aback.

“Professor Sylin Dole is not only the Chairman of the Kaimon City Elven Rights Association, a councilor of the Kaimon council, and a Professor, but he also has a hidden identity—one of the backers of the Woodpecker Gang. Publicly, he fights for the rights of other Races against the councilors of the sacred bloodline and Moonshadow Race, but in secret, he has already made many under-the-table deals with the Blood Moon Race councilors. The Woodpecker Gang is his black glove, and the mayor of Kaimon City, Fernand Snow, owes his position to him.”

“The Four Pillars Cult has been silent for many years, almost disappearing, except for an unsubstantiated rumor—that during the excavation of the Eastern Ruins eight years ago, there were whispers that important liturgical books of the Cult were uncovered. That same year, the Eastern Ruins were hit by a Virtual Realm storm, and most archaeological achievements were lost.”

“Professor Sylin Dole was the main advising consultant for the archaeological team that oversaw the Eastern Ruins excavation that year.”

“Sylin is a very patient Elf; at least, I’ve never seen any creature who can surpass him in endurance. If he wants someone dead, it means that person holds information crucial to him, information that could cause him significant damage if leaked.”

Valcas took a sip of water to moisten his throat and glanced at Ashe.

“Theoretically, the memories of most Death row inmates who enter Prison have been searched once, and if there were any information, it would definitely have been uncovered by the Sin Hunter’s Hall... unless someone’s memories weren’t searched.”

So that was it.

Although Ashe still didn’t know his relation to Professor Sylin, he fully understood why Sylin would go to such lengths to have him killed—he thought Ashe held a secret that had not yet been revealed!

Because of the Four Pillars Cult, the Sin Hunter’s Hall dared not search his memories, making Ashe Heath the only Prisoner in the Prison still in possession of secrets!

This was Sylin’s luck, for Heath hadn’t leaked his information;

But also Sylin’s misfortune, because Heath could report him at any time!

To tell the truth, if Ashe really knew such secrets, he would definitely report them to the Sin Hunter’s Hall immediately.

It's not that he is a bad egg who harms others without benefiting himself; he's just curious about Sylin and would like to become close 'Prison buddies' with him. And if there was a chance to clash passionately in the Arena during a Deathmatch, that would be even better.

But the problem is—Ashe genuinely doesn't know any of Sylin's secrets!

He hasn't absorbed even a drop of the original owner Heath's memories!

It's frustrating—Ashe also wanted to use Heath's memories to help the Sin Hunter's Hall bring the bad guys to justice.

After all, there are so many lawbreakers out there, why should he be the only one caught?

Unfortunately, he knows nothing.

What's even more infuriating is that others fear he'll spill secrets, so they go out of their way to eliminate him!

Yet, he knows nothing!

This feeling is like being a kid who, despite not having stolen anything, gets wrongly accused by a teacher of stealing a classmate's stationery.

"Hey, aren't you leaving? You didn't hear me talking to myself, did you?" Valcas stood up and said, "Let's call it a day. I'll look you up for a brainstorming session when I have time."

"Really?"

"Haha, just kidding. When do I have the time, and where's your brain?"

"Wait a moment, Valcas." Ashe called out to him, "Why are you helping me?"

Although Ashe felt that Valcas, having lost to him, would provide some information out of spite, the manner of giving was not at all what Ashe expected—he thought Valcas would approach him with a harsh remark, something like 'I'm the weakest of the Dark Quartet, defeating me is useless, our people will soon be after you.'

Ashe didn't expect Valcas to defect so cleanly; was there a moral compass guiding him even when he was fighting?

"I'm not helping you."

Valcas shook his head.

“I just want to cause some trouble for that bastard Sylin.”

Hurting others without benefiting oneself is indeed a very valid reason. Ashe, seizing the moment, asked: “Do you know if there’s a way to trade spirit in the Prison? If I can get a few Swordsmanship spirits, I might be able to cause serious trouble for Sylin—”

“That’s none of my business.”

Ashe was taken aback, deciding to take a more caring approach: “By the way, Valcas, you failed to kill me and lost to me, won’t you be in trouble—”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Then at least you should tell me how Sylin will deal with me next?”

Valcas glanced at him, leaving behind a remark before he walked away.

“You’ll know Sylin’s moves when we meet next.”

Ashe felt that Valcas’s fall to the point of imprisonment had something to do with his sharp tongue and Riddler-like nature.

But now, at least, he could be certain of one thing: the mastermind behind all this was definitely Heath’s former Professor, the Elven scholar, Sylin Dole!

After dinner, Ashe didn’t linger in the Prison but hurried back to his dormitory and directly called out.

“Swordswoman? Are you there?”

“Here, but not entirely.”

The Swordswoman sat on the bed, legs crossed, her deep black stockings outlining a graceful curve, propping her chin with her palm and looking at Ashe sideways.

“Something up?”

“It was you who reminded me during the Deathmatch, wasn’t it?”

Ashe extended his hand, and in his palm appeared the Substitute spirit, dozing off and rubbing its belly.

“The Chip is still Restricting my output of arcane energy, but why was I able to summon the Substitute spirit?”

“Isn’t it obvious? You grasped the knowledge of the Substitute spirit, and with the right conditions, you directly triggered a resonance with the spirit, which then automatically exerted its influence on reality. Other Death row inmates in the Prison use this method to activate their spirits as well.”

Although Ashe had heard this many times, he couldn’t help but marvel at the phenomenon: mature spirits could indeed cast spells on their own.

“But how did I understand the ‘Substitute’ spirit?” Ashe was still puzzled. “I’ve never learned anything about the Substitute spirit.”

“You did learn, and you understood.”

Ashe was taken aback, suddenly recalling the words the Swordswoman reminded him of.

“Is it because of this sentence? ‘If you feel pain, think of yourself as someone else, and then it won’t hurt’?”

“That’s right.” The Swordswoman nodded. “Once you understood that sentence, you naturally understood the spirit. Essentially, a spirit is a collection of knowledge. When you possess a spirit, even if you don’t actively study, the knowledge of the spirit will still seek you out.”

“Is it that simple?”

“It’s not simple.” The Swordswoman shook her head. “Understanding knowledge and comprehending knowledge are two different things... If you weren’t in extreme danger just now, covered in wounds, nearly dissipating, you wouldn’t have been able to resonate with the Substitute spirit. Merely learning is not enough; empathizing is a necessary condition for understanding a spirit.”

Ashe looked at the Substitute spirit in his palm, trying to delve into the spirit with his consciousness.

This time was a bit better than the last; Ashe could understand the stream of information fed back by the spirit, but he still couldn’t comprehend its structure. If a spirit is a dish, last time Ashe didn’t have a sense of taste and couldn’t discern the flavor of the spirit; this time, he could taste the spirit but didn’t know how it was made.

“You’ve reached the limit of understanding the spirit. Unless it’s a Lifeline Spirit you’ve summoned yourself, you can’t find its hidden Gate of Truth.”

The Swordswoman saw right through his intentions: “Only a spirit born from your own knowledge can lead you to its Gate of Truth. Spirits you acquire from other sources, no matter how deeply you understand them, are ultimately not yours.”

“The Truth must be pure and perfect, without a single flaw.”

Truth is really strict.

Ashe withdrew the spirit and looked towards the Swordswoman.

“Where have you been all this time?”

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Chapter 39

“What do you take me for? A call girl at your beck and call?”

The Swordswoman crossed her arms, pushing forward her chest, and lifted her chin in defiance. “Do I need to report my whereabouts to you now? What’s next, should I write you an application every time I use the restroom?”

“I don’t mind, really, but do you even need to use the restroom? Do you prefer squatting or sitting?”

“I’m not talking about restrooms with you!”

Suddenly, the Swordswoman stood up and closed in on Ashe, whose retreat was halted by the wall as her piercing gaze bore down on him. She stared intensely at him, pressing a finger against his collarbone.

“Even though you promised to respect me, it seems you don’t truly think that way. You still regard me as an illusion made of data streams, a Paper Person created for you, existing to serve you... despite our long conversations, despite our adventures together in the Virtual Realm, you still haven’t changed your condescending view of me.”

Ashe had no rebuttal, nor could he offer one.

The Swordswoman wasn’t asking; she was stating a fact.

Under the premise that she could hear his Inner Voice, all lies were pointless.

“What you think in your heart, I cannot change. But remember this—I am a person too.”

She said each word deliberately: “I have my own life, my hobbies, my aspirations, and I have my own world... You are not my everything, just an unexpected part of my life. Even without you, I can still live well in places unknown to you. Do you understand?”

“If I help you, you should be grateful. If I don’t, you can’t blame me. Do you understand?”

“I understand, thank you, Swordswoman Mom, for all your help!”

“Don’t call me that!” The Swordswoman jabbed a finger at Ashe’s forehead, “Who wants to be called ‘mom’ at such a young age!”

“Who says? I don’t mind if you call me ‘dad’...”

As Ashe felt another finger poke coming, he quickly changed the subject. “So, Swordswoman, can you tell me something interesting that happened today?”

The Swordswoman sat back on the bed, gazing at the glass of water on the table beside her, falling into a long silence.

Just when Ashe thought she didn’t want to share her whereabouts with a “stinky man,” she spoke again.

“This morning, I showed off my Rapids spirit at the entrance of the Meditation Tower, and by the afternoon, the whole school knew I got a Rapids spirit from the Virtual Realm. Even my roommate, who thinks she’s so superior, had the nerve to ask if I was selling it...”

“So, you had a pretty good day then?”

“Boring!” The Swordswoman gave him a disdainful look. “What’s there to be happy about with such superficial vanity? What do I care about the praise and jealousy of strangers? Only teenage girls would revel in that.”

But I remember you’re just a teenage girl... Ashe thought, only to receive a fierce glare from the Swordswoman.

Wow, can’t even mention youth, Swordswoman is really strict.

“The air in a single man’s dormitory is so foul and rank, I’m leaving.”

“Apologize to that air purifier hanging from the ceiling! Immediately! Right now!” Ashe was almost roaring: “And I haven’t done anything these past two days; I’ve been with you, exploring the Virtual Realm every night, so where would any foul smell come from?”

“It might be because you’re breathing, or maybe your heartbeat is too strong.”

Ashe decided not to stoop to her level: “So, are we continuing our Exploration in the Virtual Realm tonight?”

“Of course,” the Swordswoman paused, “unless there’s a special situation, I usually wouldn’t show up. If you have something you want to discuss, save it for the Virtual Realm. The nights in the Virtual Realm are our common leisure time.”

Naturally, Ashe had no objections, or rather, when the Swordswoman had just reiterated her personal freedom, he had vaguely anticipated that she would no longer offer a 24-hour personal service.

“What if something urgent happens and I need to find you, will you show up?”

“Didn’t I say it already? You are not everything in my life.”

Ashe nodded, indicating that he understood, and turned his head to look elsewhere.

“But you are an unexpected part of my life,” the Swordswoman glanced at him, “if something truly unexpected happens to you, I will appear as soon as possible—and then arrive to mock you at the scene.”

“So don’t expect me to show up when you’re panicking in loneliness to chat with you; I don’t offer that kind of service.”

“I’m a mature member of society; I don’t get lonely.”

Ashe patted his chest in retort, but the joy in his pupils was almost impossible to hide.

How amusing...

At this moment, the apocalypse observer is actually afraid of loneliness, afraid of the unfamiliar Prison, even treating me as a lifeline; panicking if he doesn't see me for a day, like a child...

It turns out; he isn't naturally that...

But fortunately, his mind isn't quite there right now, or I thought it would be difficult to deceive him...

Many thoughts flashed through the Swordsman's mind, and then she disappeared from the dormitory, back to where she belonged.

The Stars Kingdom, Training Hall.

"Sonya, can you still walk?"

Engulite looked at Sonya, who was almost melting onto the ground, and couldn't lift her up with all her strength—she herself was exhausted from increasing the intensity of Training.

"No, my legs have no strength left; let's rest, rest a bit..."

The two girls sat directly on the grass by the roadside, leaning on the Sword bag and gasping for air.

"Achoo!"

"What's wrong?"

"My underwear is soaked." Sonya fiddled with her collar to cool down: "It gets a bit chilly with the breeze..."

"Hehe, I recommend you buy a Phiesta brand sports bra; it's quick-drying and breathable."

"Really? Let me check it out."

After discussing underwear shopping for a while, Engulite let out a puff of warm breath, twisted open her water bottle, and found it empty, then turned to Sonya: "Where's your water bottle, Sonya?"

"What water bottle?"

"You come to Training without a water bottle?"

"I... I just came with my Sword bag; I forgot to bring water."

Prompted by Engulite, Sonya couldn't help but swallow hard, feeling her lips were parched, "Do you have any water left?"

"None left! ... Maybe just a drop or two?"

Engulite tilted her head back, and after a few seconds, a single droplet of liquid fell from her water bottle. She licked her lips and remarked, "Why is this water so sweet?"

"Let me have some!"

Sonya imitated Engulite and managed to get a drop into her mouth, letting out a prolonged sigh, "This isn't water, this is a rare brew that even a royal feast couldn't match!"

"Have you ever had a drink from a royal feast?"

"No, but doesn't it sound impressive if I say it like that?"

"I have!" Engulite giggled, "My father has a bottle in the cellar he never opens. He told me it was a fine wine given to him by the Empress herself when he attended a royal banquet... As a kid, I was so curious that I sneaked into the cellar and took a sip. To avoid getting caught by my father, I even added water to the bottle. But I still got found out, and that was the worst beating I ever got from him."

"How were you discovered?"

"My footprints were too small. As soon as my father entered the cellar, he saw my footprints leading straight to the wine."

"What did it taste like?"

"I can't remember, but it must have been awful. Because if it tasted good, I wouldn't have watered it down; the whole bottle would have turned into water."

"Ha ha ha, you were such a mischievous kid."

"Of course, I used to beat all the boys in town." Engulite proudly lifted her chin, patting her Sword bag, "And I still could."

Above them was a dazzling starry sky, beneath them was lush green grass, and in front of them were students passing by the Training grounds. Yet, the two girls sat there hugging their knees, chatting and laughing carelessly, letting the sweat from their Training session drip down their faces onto the earth.

A rumbling engine sound approached, and a silver luxury sedan slowly made its way through the campus road, stopping in front of the two.

“Need a lift?” Felix leaned out, calmly offering, “It’s no trouble for me.”

Engulite shook her head, “No need, walking back helps ease the fatigue in our legs, and we’re all sweaty, wouldn’t want to dirty your car.”

“Sylvia didn’t come to pick you up tonight?” Sonya asked in return.

“We broke up.”

“Oh~” Both girls weren’t sure how to react, so they just uttered an “oh.”

Felix didn’t say anything further and drove off.

Watching the silver sedan disappear into the distance, Engulite patted her behind and stood up, “Rest enough? We should head back. Lately, the water pressure in the showers is low after 10 pm, and we won’t have water to bathe if we go back late.”

“You go back, I’m heading to the Meditation Tower.”

Engulite wasn’t too surprised, “Trying to avoid Lois? Haven’t figured out what to do with the Rapids spirit yet?”

“Yeah.” Sonya also sighed, “It’s not that I haven’t figured it out... I just would rather trade it for a Swordsmanship spirit.”

When the news about Sonya having a Rapids spirit got out, her roommate Lois immediately approached her to inquire if it could be purchased. Lois had no intention of taking advantage, even offering a price 120% of the market value—an amount Sonya could never fetch on the school’s trading platform. Selling to her would certainly not result in a loss.

If this had been the Sonya of the past, she would have eagerly sold it and then spent the night giggling under her covers, counting her money and musing over how to invest this ‘windfall’ to generate more.

However, under the tutelage of Professor Trozan, Sonya’s perspective had broadened. She came to understand deeply that a spirit is the fundamental source of a Sorcerer’s strength, while money is just a secondary resource, a nice addition but not essential.

Therefore, she was more interested in a ‘Spirit Exchange’, trading her Rapids spirit for a Swordsmanship spirit she desired, to increase her strength and better explore the Virtual Realm.

However, 'Spirit Exchanges' are not always available, and while common spirits are one thing, a rare one like the Rapids requires an equally rare Swordsmanship spirit in exchange. Even though Professor Trozan had agreed to keep an eye out for her, finding a buyer was not going to be immediate.

On one hand, there was Lois, ready with a significant sum of money, and on the other, a seller that had yet to appear. Sonya felt somewhat undecided and planned to hide away for a couple of days to think over her options.

"You know, there's a third option—you could use it yourself."

Sonya turned her head and found the Observer sitting next to her.

Suppressing a flicker of joy in her heart, she casually asked, "When did you get back?"

"Just when you guys were discussing underwear."

"..."

"Don't buy Phiesta brand underwear; they cater specifically to women with small to medium builds. With your figure, I recommend Dariuslin—it shapes very well."

"Enough, I'm not going to discuss that with you."

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Chapter 40

After parting ways with Engulite, Sonya walked alone to the Meditation Tower, and asked in her mind, “You just said that I could use the Rapids spirit on my own?”

“Yes,” the Observer walked alongside her, “Don’t you have a bit of a foundation in the Water Art Faction? I remember that the core spirit of one Swordsmanship Miracle is the Vibration Sword combined with the Rapids.”

“Do you know the specific trick to that Miracle!?”

Sonya immediately became excited. If she could master a Swordsmanship Miracle, not only could she gain the appreciation of Professor Trozan, but she might also qualify to participate in the Intercollegiate League of Gales, and use her solid abilities to knock on the door to high society—

“I don’t know.”

“ ... ”

“But since you have these two spirits, you can invent this Miracle on your own.” The Observer spoke with ease, “Isn’t the wonder of being a Sorcerer the ability to combine any number of spirits into incredible, dazzling Miracles?”

“I’ve also asked Professor Trozan, but even for him, creating a Water Sword Miracle based on the Vibration Sword and Rapids would take several months...”

“How can he compare to you? You are the Swordswoman I’ve found.”

Sonya pursed her lips. She wasn’t a three-year-old child; she wouldn’t believe such flattery that came without cost—If you really thought so highly of me, why not just tell me the Procedure for the Miracle?

I would remember your great kindness, and once I rise to the top, wouldn’t I repay you?

Even if you die before I reach my zenith, I would surely prepare a grand funeral for you!

Her eyes shifted, controlling her mental fluctuations as much as possible, and she continued the conversation, “So, Observer, you took the Substitute spirit because you intended to give me the Rapids spirit? You’re so kind to me~”

The Observer suddenly shivered and moved a step aside, seemingly uncertain and wary, as his dim face watched Sonya.

Sonya maintained her sweet smile, exerting all her effort to control her thoughts, desperately trying not to let the Observer hear her true Inner Voice.

“...Enough, stop probing. I took the Substitute spirit because I need it.”

“With your level, you would need a One Wing spirit?”

“First of all, there are no weak spirits, only weak Sorcerers. That’s a principle that should be taught in every Sorcerer’s textbook.”

The Observer continued, “Secondly, I am now just a weakling, weaker than you, and also in danger. My body is imprisoned in the Prison. I am not only weak but also lost many memories during the awakening process, so I need to learn the common knowledge of Sorcerers through you.”

He is weak now... does that mean he was strong before?

Lost memories... could it be a Miracle that erodes memory?

No wonder he asked so many foolish questions; he was really foolish.

But even Sonya, who didn’t read much fantasy literature, could immediately conjure up a plethora of plots like ‘Return of the Strong’, ‘Fall of the Legendary Sorcerer’, ‘Awakening of a Great Being’ in her mind, and couldn’t help but get excited—

Isn’t this the potential stock she had always been looking for!?

Although the Observer’s current situation isn’t great, given enough time to grow, he’s sure to become an unparalleled powerhouse, a towering figure who will reign over his own domain, basking in glory and wealth!

With ordinary potential stocks, one has to consider the odds, but with the Observer, it’s a return to the peak. As long as there’s enough time, success is almost guaranteed!

Sonya has always been indifferent towards Felix simply because she hopes to find a potential stock herself. After all, the benefits of being a Noble aren’t easy to come by. Even if Felix, the Noble’s son, is a fool, his parents are not. To rely on the power of a great Noble family, one would have to make significant sacrifices—real flesh and blood sacrifices, with no hope of escape unless a child is born.

If she could marry a potential stock, not only could Sonya enjoy wealth and honor, but she could also maintain her autonomy and not be voiceless in her family.

Although the Observer is her superior, the principle of choosing a marriage partner is similar to choosing a superior.

Rather than join a large organization later and become just a cog in the machine, it's better to be a founding member of a startup with a potential stock superior!

"Observer, what dangers do you face? Do you need my help? Speak freely! To protect your safety, I am bound by honor!"

"... During our next Exploration in the Virtual Realm, if we come across the spirit needed for the Slay Me Miracle, let it be mine."

"The Slay Me Miracle?"

"Oh right, I haven't told you yet. I'm currently imprisoned in a Prison, and I need the Slay Me Miracle to escape."

After the Observer explained the Slay Me Miracle in detail, Sonya was astounded—if she remembered correctly, this was a Miracle not yet registered in the Stars Miracle Catalog!

A Miracle that has never appeared in the Stars Kingdom!

And it's an extremely practical one that a Silver Sorcerer could use, a Swordsmanship Miracle for self-healing!

Although Sonya couldn't sell this Miracle—she couldn't reveal its origin nor did she meet the conditions to create one (she didn't even have all the spirits), and selling it would only get her accused of stealing someone else's patent by the Sorcerer Association—if she could license and sell the Miracle Technique, the money she'd make could turn her into a wealthy woman in Gales!

That's why Sonya, with her small-town mindset, is just that—small-town. Being discovered by the Observer for her Swordsmanship Talent and taken on Virtual Realm Adventures only made her 'grateful.'

However, when the Observer gave her a Miracle Technique, one that she couldn't currently use or sell, Sonya was so thrilled she could hardly contain herself, simply because it held more value in the Stars Kingdom.

This is called the future's promises not outweighing the present's paycheck, spiritual satisfaction cannot replace material satisfaction.

"This, this is a Swordsmanship Miracle you invented?"

"Not at all."

The Observer glanced at Sonya.

“This is a Swordsmanship Miracle I stole from an enemy.”

Sonya blinked, “Will there be trouble if I use this Miracle?”

“You can rest assured, my enemy will definitely not appear before you.”

He paused, “Definitely not.”

Does that mean the original inventor of the patent is already dead?

Sonya’s heart raced with excitement. Once she fully deployed her Silver Wings and gathered all the spirits for the Slay Me Miracle, couldn’t she claim the Miracle as her own and license it for sale? Such a small perk, a minor benefit, surely wouldn’t matter to someone as important as the Observer, right?

“Okay, I will definitely put extra effort into the Exploration in the Virtual Realm, to help you collect all the spirits for the Slay Me Miracle. By the way, there’s something else I’ve been wanting to discuss with you...”

“Let’s talk about it in the Virtual Realm,” the Observer stepped into the Meditation Tower. “There’s plenty of time in there, you can discuss whatever you want. By the way, didn’t you hate that I could hear your Inner Voice? I’ve decided to respect your wishes.”

A smile spread across Sonya’s face. “Are you going to stop monitoring my thoughts?”

“No, I’ve decided to stop seeking you out,” the Observer shrugged. “You won’t have to shout ‘Observer’ in your mind before you go to the bathroom or take a shower anymore; I’m not toilet paper or a towel.”

“How did you know that I shout your name in my mind before I go to the bathroom and take showers?”

“That’s not important!”

The Observer waved his hand dismissively. “From now on, if you have anything to say, save it for the Virtual Realm. I won’t appear in your normal life anymore.”

“If... if you’re not listening to my Inner Voice, I still welcome you. Even if you insist on listening, I think I’m almost getting used to it...”

Sonya’s response was hesitant, clearly conflicted. She undoubtedly detested the Observer for invading her privacy, but it was precisely because of this that she could reveal her true self in front of him without wearing any masks.

That’s why Sonya seemed so pleased when she previously suspected that the Observer was a shadow of her own mental split.

An intelligent existence that knows everything about her, yet can't affect her social relationships, is that not the ideal confidant?

"You talk as if your daily life is so exciting, as if I desperately want to see it." The Observer crossed his arms. "I have my own things to do; I don't have the time to watch a college student's campus life every day."

"In short, the few hours in the Virtual Realm are our time to communicate. Other than that, I won't bother you. Even if you call for me, I won't appear."

"What if I have something very urgent to tell you?"

"Then it's no use looking for me," the Observer spread his hands. "The me that appears before you is just an illusion; I can't even pick up a hair. I can't offer any substantial help. If you call for me, all I can do is laugh at you."

"Laughing is fine," Sonya insisted stubbornly. "Will you appear when I call for you?"

"It's a request that's hard to refuse. But I'm curious, do you need me so much because I fill the void of the fatherly love you missed out on as a child?"

"Do you want me to call you 'Daddy Observer'?"

"Forget it, just call me Observer," he backed off quickly. "Otherwise, I'll have nightmares."

As they spoke, they arrived at the Meditation Room. Sonya sat cross-legged, glanced at the Observer beside her, took out the Vibration Sword spirit, and sought the Gate of Truth to enter the Virtual Realm.

Watching Sonya close her eyes and establish a connection with the distant Virtual Realm, the Observer suddenly let out a sigh.

How terrifying...

In just two days, she had actually found a way to conceal her Inner Voice, even capable of deceiving me in her mind...

Truly worthy of the Swordswoman bearing the name 'Death Maniac'...

This Talent, this flair, allowing her to uncover her own potential ahead of time, is it a good or a bad thing...

But that's no longer my concern.

The Observer shrugged his shoulders, his figure disappearing from the Meditation Room.

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