

Sorcerer's Handbook

Chapter 241: Poison Fog Surge and Refractive Barrier

“Run quickly, run!”

Within the confines of the racing car barrier, unlike Ashe who still had the energy to provoke their pursuers, Sonya and Deya gripped the front-row seated Ashe's shoulders, urging the driver in hushed tones to flee, their legs going weak with fear.

They had no choice but to be afraid!

Before them were more than twenty Growth Stage Serpent-Scorpion Dragons and eight Growth Stage Thousand-Feathered Dragons. These were not your ordinary Gregarious Creatures; they were Large Creatures on par with Two Wings sorcerers, each capable of taking on a Sonya on its own!

Particularly the Thousand-Feathered Dragons, capable of aerial maneuvers and excelling in long-range combat while in flight. They even used Reverse Golden Rain to obscure their forms, ranking them as dangerous foes to be highly cautious of on the Time Continent's Knowledge Creature Ranking List.

Sonya still remembered the strategies mentioned in “Time Continent Survival Tips” for dealing with Thousand-Feathered Dragons: “Kneel on the ground, stick your rear in the air, cover your head to protect your vitals, and curl up as much as possible.”

“This way, there's a high chance only your rear will take damage, and even in death, you'll only lose the soul of your buttocks. Aside from feeling a bit empty when going to the bathroom, it won't much affect your daily life.”

These annotations, left by Senior Brothers and Senior Sisters in the library book, were highly regarded by everyone. They even shared numerous tips on the proper way to stick one's rear out.

While it might have looked comical, Sonya did not laugh when reading them but committed them to memory instead. These shared notes were the crystallization of sorcerers' wisdom, and if the Seniors found out that their hard-earned experiences were being scorned and mocked by juniors, they would undoubtedly be pleased — any sorcerer who disrespected knowledge deserved to pay a hefty price.

If a Two Wings sorcerer couldn't defeat a Thousand-Feathered Dragon, then that was that; it was normal. All sorcerers had their strengths and weaknesses, just like a

Physical Sorcerer could counter any close-combat physical enemy but was also vulnerable to ranged enemies adept at inflicting negative curse damage. Even the most talented and versatile sorcerers could encounter Virtual Realm creatures beyond their ability to handle.

Even a Legendary sorcerer had vulnerabilities they couldn't cover.

As a sorcerer, it is essential to have the heart to compensate for weaknesses, but it is equally important to learn risk management. Even Ashe and Sonya, who played the system like cheats, couldn't escape death, much less others. Deya spent two years before she could step onto the Time Continent, not because of any restrictions by the Faction Realm.

If it could reduce the loss from death, no one would mind presenting their backsides, or even, if necessary, doing a handstand to relieve themselves.

Death in the Virtual Realm is just a part of life; no sorcerer would swear to eliminate every Slaying Fish-Dragon in existence just because they lost their First Blood, nor is there a 'Slaying Fish-Dragon Protection Association' out to hunt Ashe for specifically targeting Slaying Fish-Dragons to burst their Swordsmanship Orbs.

"The Virtual Realm is a mad place. Sorcerers against sorcerers, sorcerers against Knowledge Creatures, Knowledge Creatures against each other; all beings inside are killing one another, yet there is no hatred among them. Everyone is greedy for life yet also embracing death." — Forest Library Second Floor Virtual Realm Reading Room Famous Quotes.

That is why the Swordswoman and the Witch were so scared.

They were not cowards; just half an hour ago, they were braver than Ashe when killing a Giant Fierce Wolf Dragon. It wasn't death they feared, but the significant loss that came with it!

If they died here, the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons and the Thousand-Feathered Dragons would nibble away at their souls. In reality, their bodies would become paralyzed and clock out; it might take months before they could re-enter the Virtual Realm.

Even in death, one should aim to die far away, to be bitten by fewer Knowledge Creatures!

"Don't panic."

The roar of the giant beasts was already close at hand, and the protective barrier began to tick with crisp sounds; the energy slot of the barrier was rapidly depleting, and danger seemed to be about to chew them all up in the next second.

However, Ashe felt no fear, and of course, there was no excitement, only the calmness like that of watching a documentary.

During these two days of battle, he would occasionally enter this 'confused by homework' weird state, something that had never happened before. Ashe suspected that maybe the Time Continent was not quite in tune with him. S

But in this special observational state, Ashe could notice many details that he usually wouldn't pay attention to, and even like a seasoned movie-goer who had watched thousands of bad films, he could accurately estimate the enemy's next move in the plot.

The past two days of battle had not been smooth sailing. The trio, having just entered the new Map, were novices, and team coordination in battles required some polishing. It was precisely because Ashe had nearly every time entered this special state that he could protect them with the 'Sword Barrier' just in the nick of time, allowing everyone to get through the initial adjustment period without any mishaps.

The Swordsman and the Witch certainly noticed his exquisite maneuvers, but they themselves had plenty of perfect micro-operations in battle and naturally wouldn't pay extra attention to Ashe's dazzling skills. At most, they would nod in appreciation, even thinking that this was the level that an Observer should have; and Ashe himself thought it was just an occasional stroke of brilliance. He was past the age of getting excited over a pentakill in LoL and naturally wouldn't show off intentionally.

But this time, the stroke of brilliance... seemed to last a little too long?

"The show is about to begin," Ashe said calmly as he operated the virtual controls. The sports car performed a frenzied dance in place, spinning like a top and crashing into the group of Serpent-Scorpion Dragons to the left!

Deya let out a scream, her hair mostly turning red, obviously having Little Red take over; Sonya was almost biting her lip, suppressing the panic in her throat, her hands gripping tight to the Observer's trench coat... Huh?

Was it the reflection of the Witch's hair, or the distortion of vision caused by the spinning, or perhaps...

Did the Observer's deep red gradient trench coat really start to glow with a breathing light effect?

Boom!

The Evil Blade perfectly sliced the Serpent-Scorpion Dragon in half, the sports car exerted all its might to grip the ground and spin back, the tires drawing a crescent moon, perfectly avoiding the arrow rain that followed, and then roaring as it collided with the oncoming Serpent-Scorpion Dragon troops!

Boom! Crack! Boom! Crack!

The remnants of the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons flew over the protective barrier, and the dark red blood sprayed over the car like watering flowers. Due to the transparent barrier, the blood was suspended in mid-air, and only Sonya and Deya, looking up, could see the beautiful spectacle of blossoming blood flowers.

But behind the curtain of blood was a dark green poisonous fog thick enough to obscure vision!

Thud! Thud!

At that moment, the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons finally caught up with the sports car, their sharp stingers, stone-crushing claws, and dangerous serpentine kisses all striking at the sports car simultaneously. The barrier let out a sound of being overwhelmed, threatening to shatter like an eggshell at any moment!

But just then, a piercing scream echoed from above the cave!

“Chirp—”

The Thousand-Feathered Dragons screeched as they plummeted, becoming the first victims of the Poison Fog Surge!

With the tactical objective fully accomplished, Ashe maneuvered the sports car to speed away, escaping the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons and safely exiting the cave just before the barrier could shatter!

This was their trump card in daring to challenge the heroic soul legion—the “Poison Fog Surge” and “Refractive Barrier”!

“Refractive Barrier Level 6: The vehicle is enveloped in a barrier with 4000 health points, reducing all damage to the barrier by 32%.

Level 6 special effect: An additional reduction of 30% for long-range attacks (32+30=62%).

Next level requires 630 Ore Essence/630 Wood Essence/315 Mercury Essence.”

“Poison Fog Surge Level 4: The exhaust pipe releases a toxic fog dense enough to corrode souls, obscuring vision while Operators inside the vehicle remain unaffected.

Next level requires 600 Mercury Essence/300 Wood Essence.”

To upgrade these two car peripherals, nearly all the resources accumulated over the past two days had been exhausted, but it was all worth it—without the Refractive

Barrier, they would have been easy targets for the Thousand-Feathered Dragons, and without Poison Fog Surge, they would have had no way to deal with such a large group of Knowledge Creatures!

Why was Ashe insistent on taking this gamble? Because he realized that if they missed this opportunity, they might never get another chance to unveil the mysteries of the heroic soul legion—the legion had just entered a cave that greatly restricted spatial areas, and he just happened to have the resources to upgrade the barrier and the poison!

All elements were indispensable: it had to be in the cave, there had to be a barrier and poison fog, and both groups of Knowledge Creatures, the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons and the Thousand-Feathered Dragons, lacked the means to stop the movement. Then, everything unfolded according to Ashe's plan, fitting together as seamlessly as an original, perfect puzzle, creating a scene akin to a miracle.

—They had managed to trap and poison the heroic soul legion within the cave!

At that moment, Sonya, seemingly dislodged by the movement of the car or something else, found herself sitting in the front seat, tightly clutching Ashe's right arm and looking around the cave with a shaken expression, "Are they, are they all dead?"

"Not yet." Ashe glanced at the Virtual Realm map: "Thousand-Feathered Dragons should be all gone, but half of the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons are still there."

"Then we should run quickly! They're going to catch up!"

"No, we should block them in the cave and fight to the death!"

The Witch's voice seemed like a duet as both Ashe and Sonya turned their heads to see her inexplicably in the front row as well. Luckily, the car was spacious enough that even with Ashe in the middle, it didn't feel cramped.

The Witch's hair was particularly striking at the moment, a gradient from black to red.

Each Witch sister had her unique hair color: the Secret Princess had shiny black, the Black Butler had light purple, the White Queen had pure white, the Red Death Eater had blood red... When their hair showed a pure color, it indicated a single dominant personality; when it displayed multiple colors with clear separation, it signaled one primary personality with several sub-personalities assisting.

However, this gradient was something Ashe and his companion had never seen before.

It looked as if different pigments had been directly mixed together.

But with the urgency of the situation, no one was in the mood to ponder over what latest dyeing technology the Witch might have used. Ashe pressed a virtual button, and the sports car fiercely gripped the ground as it spun, emitting a heart-wrenching scream, its front end once again targeting the cave.

“We’re not running away, nor are we blocking the entrance.”

Buzz!

With a strong thrust, the sports car charged back into the cave, engaging in a French wet kiss with a Serpent-Scorpion Dragon that was just making its way out!

As the car’s blades bisected the Serpent-Scorpion Dragon, the others, shrouded in poison fog, struck back swiftly, causing the overworked Refractive Barrier, on its first day on the job, to tragically expire on the spot!

The protective screen shattered!

Sonya, while holding onto Ashe’s hand, also touched the hilt of her sword; Deya was tensed, her hands pulling out water thread, seemingly ready to leap out and face the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons head-on at any moment.

“Don’t leave the car.”

Ashe’s voice was calm, as the sports car was about to return to the cave shrouded in poison fog. He leaned against the leather backrest, looking up to the left.

At the same time, Demilo, driving a Serpent-Scorpion Dragon, emerged from the poisonous fog. He slightly tilted his head, locking eyes with Ashe.

One was the calm of pitch-black still water, the other a tranquil lake reflecting a myriad of scenes.

“The second round is about to begin.”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 242: The True Soldier

Thinking to use the poison fog’s advantage of the cave to whittle down my minions...

Demilo watched the steel monster burrow into the dark green manure pit, its buzzing roar as if urging him to hurry in.

To enter or not?

It seemed a no-brainer—venturing into tactical terrain laid out by others was foolish, and besides, there was no imperative to battle the sorcerers. Moreover, if he truly needed to engage in combat amidst the poison fog, he would have to use some of his precious ‘soldiers.’

The Divine Master had given no instructions regarding heroic souls; in fact, unless in times of war, heroic souls were free. But to accumulate enough merit for soul fragment exchanges, even during peaceful development, they would patrol their territory and transport materials actively. Like Demilo, who had mobilized this round specifically to transport resources from the surrounding areas back to the Main City.

Thus, Demilo could ignore these arrogant sorcerers and walk away; he was free to do as he pleased.

And that’s why he was somewhat perplexed.

In the past thousand years, he had never encountered a moment requiring his decision. During wartime, the Divine Master’s edicts were clear; in peace, he methodically managed the Main City, weighing the possibility of victory against enemy legions, deciding whether to fight or flee. When encountering ordinary sorcerers, it was a matter of simply crushing them and moving on.

He had encountered many sorcerers; some happened to be crushed by the Star Shepherds incidentally on their march, others fled swiftly. As long as they survived the first wave of long-range attacks from the legion, Demilo would not pursue them specifically.

But this situation was unprecedented.

He had encountered sorcerers, yet not only had he failed to crush them, but they had also significantly reduced his minions. The sorcerers were not fleeing; they roamed under his watchful eye, yet he could not easily squash them.

Though without evidence, Demilo believed that the cleanliness of the cave’s resource point suggested these sorcerers couldn’t be uninvolved.

Benefits, losses, battle, departure... various thoughts surged, but in the end, without any precedent to refer to, the decision was left to Demilo.

He had to follow his own heart.

For a Corpse without a heartbeat, it was indeed a cruel joke.

Yet, when Demilo turned back to gaze at the cave without immediately choosing to leave, he had already made his decision.

Anger? Jealousy? Curiosity? Demilo, devoid of even a fragment of a Soul, didn't believe he was capable of harboring such emotions. Nevertheless, the scales of thought had decidedly tipped in favor of confronting the Sorcerers.

If there had to be a reason, it would be the gaze of the male Sorcerer. That look had placed a significant weight on the balanced scales, enough to determine the outcome.

Although their appearances were entirely different, his gaze was reminiscent of the one who had killed Demilo.

"The sacred Stars connect us."

Murmuring the prayer internally, the power of the Stars infused through the void chains into the Knowledge Creature bodies. The surviving eight Serpent-Scorpion Dragons instantly took on a deep blue hue, including Demilo's remaining mount.

They yawned lazily as if just awakening, their bodies covered in a blue distortion. In a second, the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons vanished without trace, replaced by eight deep blue double swordsmen in full armor with no gaps to be seen. Behind the visor of their cross-shaped helmets were only deep blue pupils, and behind them, a scorpion tail, not with a stinger, but a blue-glowing Thrust Sword.

"Star Swordsman Serpent-Scorpion Dragon Specialization"!

Since the decision to engage in Battle was made, Demilo naturally spared no expense with his "soldiers."

He had been commanding Knowledge Creatures, but they couldn't truly be considered soldiers, merely followers.

Knowledge Creatures were, after all, monsters and could not be compared to Sorcerers capable of wielding tools. Even if a commander could control them with ease, as tactical executors, Knowledge Creatures were far too inferior to Humans.

The strength of the heroic soul legion lay in the commander's ability to transform followers into a much more powerful 'type of soldier,' preserving the original combat power of the Knowledge Creatures while also endowing them with more powerful combat skills.

And when followers became soldiers, they would undergo different mutations based on their physical characteristics. For example, the Serpent-Scorpion Dragons, with their

distinct pincers and scorpion tail, mutated into double swordsmen with tail swords, capable of executing three attacks at once, overwhelming any ordinary Sorcerer with a flurry of six eyes and three swords.

Although Serpent-Scorpion Star Swordsmen are merely a primary class of soldier within Star Hall, when assigned to the right Knowledge Creatures, they can form an impressive combat force. To Demilo and his fellow heroic souls, the Knowledge Creatures themselves are of lesser importance; what matters are the 'soldiers' they carry.

The Knowledge Creatures of the Virtual Realm are endless, but 'soldiers' are not born from the Virtual Realm; they hail from reality. For Star Hall, soldiers are the most crucial and rarest resource for warfare. It's of no consequence how many followers perish, but each soldier must be used with caution, preserved ideally for sieges and national wars.

Until just moments ago, Demilo believed that merely expending followers would suffice to kill the three Sorcerers, naturally unwilling to use his own soldiers. In truth, he didn't carry many soldiers with him, for this was but a resource transport mission to the hinterlands during a time of peace. Under normal circumstances, the vast majority of soldiers must remain in the Main City, under the Lord's custody and direction.

However, Star Hall had recently recruited a batch of soldiers in reality, an unexpected boon, allowing each heroic soul to receive a small reserve for emergencies, Demilo included.

It was a pity that the Thousand-Feathered Dragons were gone. Had they been available, Demilo could have enhanced them to the second-class "Star Archer" rank. Combined with their inherent Thousand-Feather mutation, they could have turned the steel behemoth into a sieve in the blink of an eye.

But the Serpent-Scorpion Star Swordsmen alone were enough.

With a light gesture from the Star Shepherd, the Star Swordsmen marched in formation into the poison fog cave, utterly fearless of the toxic miasma. Upon being granted their soldier class, the Star Swordsmen acquired an armor-like barrier. Unless an attack could penetrate the armor in a single strike, it would inflict no harm upon the Star Swordsmen.

Even if the attack could breach the armor, it would only deplete the energy of the armor, still not harming the true body of the Star Swordsman. Equipped with three layers of armor, the bone-corroding, soul-dissolving toxic fog was no more than a mild nuisance, slightly impairing their vision but nothing more to the Serpent-Scorpion Star Swordsmen.

Demilo stood outside the cave, harnessing the perception of the Star Swordsmen to pinpoint the direction of the enemy, and then—

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

The steel behemoth charged clumsily at one of the Star Swordsmen, playing right into the hands of the Star Shepherd.

Defend!

Facing the monster's charge, the Star Swordsman crossed his swords in an X formation to defend, directly countering the massive inertia of the Evil Blade!

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three layers of armor shattered one after the other, but the Star Swordsman still stood his ground, staunchly blocking the steel beast!

Clang—

A chorus of sword rings erupted as the remaining Star Swordsmen immediately launched an assault on the Sorcerers within the monster, sword light enveloping from all directions like a net cast across the sky!

“Ah!?”

“Why... who are they!?”

The poison fog could not hide the Sorcerers' voices of shock, which was expected by Demilo. Just as he wouldn't waste soldiers to kill Sorcerers, other heroic souls would certainly only let their followers expel these pests.

Just as no Sorcerer knew the secret of the heroic souls, naturally, no Sorcerer had ever witnessed these monster soldiers granted a military class.

If this moment of shock could dominate the enemy's thought process, then it was a tactical victory. If the enemy hesitated, even slightly, their Souls would be torn to shreds the next second...

However—

Hum!

The steel monster roared again, its fanged blade smashing the armor-broken Star Swordsman into two halves! At the same time, the male Sorcerer seemed to perform a Miracle, cloaking the entire vehicle in a warm yellow barrier, which, though shredded by the sword net the next second, managed to create a gap, allowing for a narrow escape from a certain onslaught!

How many more times can you perform such a protective Miracle? Next time I will leave two Star Swordsmen as a pursuit force; you won't get a second chance... Demilo quickly adjusted his battle plan inwardly, commanding the remaining seven Star Swordsmen to continue the siege.

Just one mistake, and death would cling on relentlessly.

The steel monster circled within the cave, and after multiple instances of accumulated damage, it finally seized an opportunity to crush a Star Swordsman.

Just one mistake.

The steel monster's continuous drifting and spinning dodged the Star Swordsman's pincer attack, incidentally slicing two Star Swordsmen to death.

Just...

As the last Star Swordsman was struck down by the steel beast, Demilo stepped aside at the entrance of the cavern. Seconds later, the steel monster roared as it emerged once more from the poison fog-filled cave, its claws that shredded the Star Swordsmen showing no signs of wear. Its four round wheels viciously carved cringe-inducing scratches into the earth!

The man emerged unscathed, his gaze fixed intently on Demilo as if to say—

You're next.

Watching the man clad in a deep red trench coat, Demilo knew he had been outmaneuvered.

Defeated thoroughly, without a sliver of excuse to offer.

Though the opponent had but one steel monster unit, to command a single unit was still to command. He managed to stay cool under Demilo's siege tactics, brutally tearing open a gap and picking off the Star Shepherd's soldiers with guerrilla tactics, a classic example of triumphing with fewer against many.

"Where did those deep blue soldiers come from? Which fairytale did they escape from?" the Female Sorcerer with black to red gradient hair asked curiously, seemingly anticipating a response from Demilo.

Demilo paid no heed to the other Female Sorcerers, silently invoking in his heart: "Stars, please twinkle for me."

Boom!

A deep blue armor materialized over his body, his left hand holding a fierce-looking giant bow firmly planted on the ground, his right hand drawing a dazzling large arrow from his quiver as if made of Diamond, aiming at the steel monster still polluting the environment with its farts.

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

As the steel monster charged, sensing danger, Ashe quickly grabbed Sonya and Deya, diving under their seats!

In contrast, the Star Shepherd stood his ground, not moving an inch, casually releasing an arrow.

The dazzling arrow, upon missing its mark, split into three, striking down like Thunder onto the sports car!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Snap!

The front windshield shattered instantly, the dazzling arrows grazing over the heads of Ashe and his companions, whisking away a few strands of hair. At the same time, the sports car's terrifying Evil Blade struck fiercely at Demilo, carrying the momentum of over sixty kilometers per hour, seemingly poised to cleave him in two!

Thud!

The Evil Blade, capable of slicing through stone as if it were butter, not only failed to cut down the Star Shepherd but also spun in place as if it had hit a pillar!

Demilo was merely pushed back a few steps by the impact, his deep blue armor showing almost no change as he casually drew a second dazzling arrow.

The Sorcerers, fighting off the dizziness from the collision and spin, peeked out to assess the situation. Sonya nearly screamed, "Those creatures were just hit and even if their armor wasn't breached, the color should have faded a bit... How can he seem completely unaffected!?"

"His armor is very high-grade," Deya said, her hair now a messy mix of black, red, and white—impure black, tainted red, and dim white, her voice a trio: "This must be the privilege of a heroic soul, but no matter, as long as we keep hitting him, surely—"

"It does matter."

Ashe interjected, "His last attack took out one-fifth of the car's remaining health."

“Four more hits like that, and the car will explode. Without this vehicle, we stand no chance, but the enemy only has the heroic soul commander left.”

“It’s either the car explodes first, or he dies first.”

“The final round begins.”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 243: The Invincible Heroic Soul

This must be my third time engaging in personal combat, Demilo thought.

Commanders are meant to lead from the rear, but when the troops are wiped out, it’s only natural for a commander to enter the battlefield to complete strategic objectives. Even if one dies in battle, the Divine Master will awaken you from memory once more, with all the Merit from past lives accumulating.

For the Divine Master, a suitable Legion commander is a scarce resource. Not all Sorcerer Projections qualify to become a heroic soul—most cannot unearth a talent for command. And even with such a talent, there’s no guarantee of alignment with the power’s interests. For example, a sorcerer with a talent for “commanding undead units” would be meaningless in Star Hall, which has no undead units to command.

Different Sorcerer Projections have varying command talents, but command is not yet a Magical Faction recognized by the Virtual Realm, and thus, it cannot receive assistance from it. It relies solely on the talent of the commander.

A commander like Demilo, who spent hundreds of years cultivating a talent for “logistics magic,” is someone the Divine Master would never give up. There are only a few logistics commanders in Star Hall, and each one can accelerate the pace of resource collection.

If he were to flee... There is no option to flee. When commanders realize that dying in battle is more cost-effective, none choose to escape. After all, they are just puppets with memories, with thought patterns that are straight, single-lane roads, executing only the commands given to them.

—But since meeting this group of sorcerers, he has been performing tasks beyond those commands.

Demilo looked at the massive bow in his left hand, a symbol of the 'Star Archer' unit type he had appropriated for himself. Like Knowledge Creatures, commanders undergo different mutations based on their own traits when they are assigned a unit type—because he mastered the “Fierce Tyrant’s Calamity Bow” and the “Diamond Splitting Arrow” Miracles, his Star Archer mutated accordingly. A normal Star Archer wouldn’t have such a large bow or such dazzling arrows.

And compared to Knowledge Creatures, commanders have one advantage that can’t be ignored.

They can overlay multiple soldiers of the same type onto themselves at once.

For example, right now, Demilo had equipped himself with the cumulative power of eight 'Star Archer' minions. This action didn’t increase his damage output, but the armor could indeed be stacked; while a single Star Archer’s armor might only have two layers, stacking it eight times resulted in a total of 16 layers.

The numerical increase didn’t merely boost the armor’s hit points; it also meant a significant surge in the armor’s damage reduction factor!

The higher the number of armor layers, the greater the damage mitigation of the outermost layer, and naturally, the more damage required to break through a layer.

Suppose each layer of armor has 100 hit points and a 10% damage reduction. Then, to shatter one layer of armor, one would need to inflict 112 points of damage. But with two layers of armor, the outermost second layer would have a 14% damage reduction, requiring 117 points of damage to break through!

Each layer of armor has a different damage reduction factor, and with each layer, the reduction increases!

Though the factor can’t rise indefinitely, Demilo, with his 16 layers, enjoyed nearly 50% damage reduction on his outermost armor. The steel beast’s blow, which could have penetrated three layers of armor, could only tear through the 16th layer, leaving the 15th, 14th, and so on untouched...

This is why soldiers are more important than minions—with enough soldiers, even if all minions are lost, a heroic soul can still be an army unto themselves!

In the last two “Six Countries’ Grand Seal Wars,” Demilo once wrapped himself with the power of 300 Star Archer units, standing at a tactical vantage point and single-handedly suppressing multiple enemy Legions. For this, he was awarded the “Invincible Heroic Soul” medal and was granted triple Merit by the Divine Master.

Before his armor could be shattered, he had all the time in the world to execute these Sorcerers slowly.

Drawing the bow fully, Demilo aimed at the charging steel beast.

Buzz!

Suddenly, a whining sound of tire friction—just as the sports car was about to crash, it braked sharply and drifted, drawing a doughnut-like skid mark, floating and sliding in front of Demilo.

Trying to disrupt my shooting accuracy, which means this steel monster can't withstand many of my shots either... Demilo instantly analyzed the opponent's intentions and weaknesses. However, at that moment, the opposing Sorcerer suddenly popped their head out to observe!

Clang!

Although Demilo's reaction was swift, the Sorcerer seemed to have lured him into firing prematurely, showing themselves only to duck back immediately. In that split second, the sports car fiercely struck Demilo, destroying his 15th layer of armor.

Cunning man.

Demilo revised his battle strategy once more, no longer attempting to shoot the Sorcerer but instead focusing on demolishing the steel beast. However, as the steel behemoth continued to run circles, the Star Shepherd realized he had been duped.

Even after leaving the cave, the steel beast's rear continuously expelled a poisonous fog. Although the poison dissipated quickly in the open air, after several rounds, the concentration of the dark green poison fog had thickened enough to obscure vision!

If he wanted to perform a long-range shot, even if he could split his arrow into three, most likely only one would hit its target. Given the steel beast's high speed, its unpredictable path, and the added complication of reduced visibility, it was uncertain whether Demilo could shatter their mount before his own armor failed.

This meant that to improve his shooting accuracy, Demilo was left with only one choice—

Hum!

As the sports car burst from the fog to crush its enemy, the long-awaited Demilo released his bowstring!

A direct, hard confrontation!

He would shoot only when the steel beast was up close to ensure every arrow achieved its purpose!

Demilo was utterly convinced that before his armor shattered, the adversary's mount would be torn into pieces by his arrows first!

Indeed, that would be the case in theory.

If no one interfered.

Just as Demilo was about to be struck by the blade, several threads shot out from the sports car like streams of water, wrapping gently yet firmly around his waist!

Then, with a fierce tug!

Demilo couldn't escape the entanglement of the threads, nor was he knocked away by the sports car. Instead, he was forced to keep close contact with the Evil Blade. He was not panicked, but rather curious—the terror of the steel behemoth did not lie in the segments of the blade that could easily slice through a Soul, but in the powerful inertia enhanced by its speed.

Now being pulled by the threads, he certainly faced Continuous Damage from the blade, but compared to the previous collision damage, the current hurt was as negligible as an attack with nail clippers.

However, being controlled like this was no solution. Just as Demilo thought to cut the threads, he found the steel beast had already pushed him clear of the poison fog.

Why would it willingly give up the advantage of reduced visibility? Out in the open, they had no capital to contend with him.

Could it be...

Feeling a sudden realization, Demilo looked back and discovered that behind him was the cave wall!

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

- Chapter 244: Slain Twice by the Vibration Sword

Chapter 244: Slain Twice by the Vibration Sword

Boom!

The Star Shepherd slammed into the wall, like a doll thrown against it. Yet Ashe and the others were relentless, their car speeding wildly, the Evil Blade savagely tearing at the

Star Shepherd's body armor. Forced against the wall, the Star Shepherd was pushed along for over ten meters, his deep blue armor scraped down to a pale hue!

He was like a dirty shirt on a washboard, his Star Archer armor scrubbed to bursting by the brutal force of the steel beast!

Yet, the Star Shepherd's expression remained unchanged. His left hand, holding the great bow, flicked, and the bow shrank into a compact short bow. Bracing his feet against the wall, he frantically searched for footholds, his fingers drawing a blue-glowing short arrow against the bowstring, firing wildly at the car's hood!

Like a torrential pear blossom rain, the dense barrage of arrows steadily drained the sports car's vitality. Demilo, ignoring his own peril, allowed his armor to shatter rapidly to keep up his assault on the steel monster!

Watching the sports car's health plummet, Ashe, hidden beneath the seat, said, "The car's about to blow, we must go all in. Just like the plan, Witch, keep control, I'll handle the rear attack, Swordswoman... it's all on you."

"Then watch closely," Sonya gripped the hilt tightly, "Sharpening for a Decade" had been silently activated—a spirit she'd spent a fortune on for such a moment when an Observer chose to court death.

The Blade glowed with an Edge Glow, indicating that every Slash from Sonya in the next minute would have miraculous cutting force!

Now, with only one opponent left, the Red-haired Swordswoman, who thrived on bullying the weak and feared the strong, was fearlessly focused. She concentrated all her senses, waiting for her teammates to create the perfect opportunity for her to strike.

Suddenly, the sports car swerved and smashed as if trying to embed itself in the wall, as though it wanted to cram the engine in too, brutally slamming Demilo against the wall!

The Star Shepherd was now pressed into the wall, unable to move, almost leaving an imprint of his figure. His armor had lightened considerably, but it still protected his whole body, not affecting his archery!

"Die!"

Witch leapt from the car and stood her ground, her hands pulling taut the water threads around Star Shepherd's waist. Despite the car's Evil Blade and the water threads' strength, capable of shattering gold and cleaving jade, they emitted a strained groan but failed to fully tear the Star Shepherd apart!

Instead, Witch found herself away from the safety of the car, fully exposed to Demilo's line of sight.

He coldly shifted his focus to the Female Sorcerer, his bow now aimed at a new target—

Zing!

With a resonant ring of Sword Light, a streak shot towards Demilo's eyes. The flight path of the Sword Light lingered in the air like heavy ink strokes, as if recoloring the world itself!

Miracle Sword Art!

Though it was called a Miracle, it was merely a simple combination of Heart Sword and Sword Scar, without much mystery. In Swordswoman's words, it was like a 'miracle' stew made from unwashed mushrooms and unbutchered live chicken—a patent application for it would surely get one chased out by staff wielding clubs.

Even with such a rudimentary combination, it was only thanks to the sharing of Swordsmanship within the Faction Realm that Ashe could barely apply both spirits to Combat. There was significant room for improvement in arcane energy consumption, Fusion, and destructive efficiency—or rather, no room left for regression.

If a theoretical Sword Art should possess the might of a fighter jet, then the current Sword Art was more akin to a pilot attacking with a slingshot while flying the plane.

Nevertheless, if it was just to disrupt the enemy, Sword Art was sufficient for the task!

Because his vision was hindered by the trails of Sword Light, Demilo had to tilt his head slightly. As for the destructive power of the Sword Light, it was less than that of the threads and not worth his concern.

However, Ashe's arrival caused Demilo to shift his target once again. Compared to the Female Sorcerer, this man was the highest priority target for Demilo, and nothing would change the trajectory of his arrows now.

Tap!

A figure dashed from the car, Swordswoman brandishing her blade toward Demilo!

Though only a single layer of armor remained on him, Demilo had never cared for his own life or death and was similarly indifferent to this imminent fatal blow.

He drew his short bow to its maximum potential, his pupils fixed only on the figure of Ashe—

—But out of the corner of his eye, Demilo caught a glimpse of a crimson Sword Qi Vibration from Sonya’s blade.

Vibration...

Vibration Sword?

The fragmented Soul trembled lightly, and memories buried deep stirred once again.

The heroic soul, which had never wavered in Battle, as relentless and steady as a war machine, had finally made a mistake.

This was the first mistake since he had opened his eyes on the Time Continent.

An instant of hesitation cost Demilo his last chance to counter. The Evil Light Slash fell like a guillotine, not only shattering the last layer of armor but also severing his hands.

Without his hands, Demilo could not strike back, and he was also pinned against the wall by the car, unable to move. Watching the red-haired Female Sorcerer’s Blade emit a strange yet familiar Sword Light of the Vibration Sword, it seemed as though those cold memories were also warming up.

I, Demilo, was actually...

Killed by the Vibration Sword twice.

Boom!

Sonya’s second Evil Light Slash completely decapitated Demilo’s head, with the Sword Light even cutting six inches into the wall before dissipating!

The headless heroic soul collapsed onto the car’s hood, fading away into little specks of light.

Sonya gripped her longsword, standing on the hood, while Ashe hid behind the car’s rear, and Deya held her breath.

Several seconds later, Ashe stepped out and said softly, “Is it over?”

“It should be... over.”

The Red-haired Swordswoman jumped down from the car’s hood. Although Souls aren’t supposed to feel fatigue, for some reason, she felt a strong desire to sit down. She plopped herself against the car door and slid down as if all her strength had left her.

Ashe, too, ended his lengthy state of calm observation. He didn't notice anything amiss, but he felt a profound tiredness emanating from deep within his Soul, akin to the weariness one feels after working late into the night, rushing to catch the last subway only to realize that they've forgotten their keys, missing the train because they went back for the keys, and then, being too economical to hail a cab, walking several kilometers home.

He walked over to the Swordsman with a sigh, sitting down beside her against the car door, matching her rhythm in deep breaths.

"Aren't you going to collect the spoils of war first?" Witch seemed to still be bursting with energy, unconsciously pulling out water threads and scrawling on the wall, making a grating sound. If one could overlook her matted hair color and the quartet of voices in her tone, she appeared quite normal.

Ashe gestured for her to come over, and when Witch approached, he pulled her down to sit, "Let's rest for a moment."

"We really did put in a lot of effort this time, so... we should enjoy the peace that comes after victory."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 245: The Sunk Cost of Striving to Become the Observer

The battle with the Heroic Soul Legion truly exhausted Ashe and his companions.

It wasn't just Ashe, who had been at the forefront of the battle from beginning to end, but also Sonya and Deya, who had spent most of their time as cheerleaders. They endured the constant threat of sudden death while hiding in the car, countering the dizziness and impact of speeding, with no moment of respite for their minds... like a tightly wound spring, the aftereffects of releasing their potential energy remained, and they hadn't yet recovered from the harrowing battle they had just experienced.

Even though Ashe and the others had faced dangerous battles in the past, those were merely 'dangerous', where the Sorcerers still had room to maneuver. However, this battle with the Heroic Soul Legion left no room for errors; a single car explosion, and they would have no capacity to contend with the Legion.

They had been skirting the edge of death the entire time.

Using the terrain to set traps, poisoning the Thousand-Feathered Dragon amidst a sea of enemies, grinding down the Serpent-Scorpion Star Swordsman, fighting the Heroic Souls to the last second... Compared to this battle, slaying the Slaying Fish-Dragon could almost be considered a leisure activity to relax one's mind.

However, after sitting for a while, Ashe and Sonya had mostly recovered. Yet, they still leaned against the car, with no intention of standing up, like employees who start their Restroom break with a 15-minute minimum of 'touch fish'.

They were not too lazy to get up; adventuring in the Virtual Realm was akin to being self-employed, and as motivated entrepreneurs, they were quite enthusiastic about their work. They remained seated because they were waiting for the Witch to Rest.

Sonya, usually a chatterbox, was now silent, her legs clad in black stockings lazily crossed, her nose emitting a gentle snore as if she were lying in bed.

Yet, she kept using her peripheral vision to observe Deya's clown-like, colorful attire, with a hint of concern in her eyes.

Ashe's acting skills were not as good as Sonya's; he sat with a very stiff posture, trying to observe Deya's chaotic hair, which looked as if it had been doused with a palette of spilled paint. His left hand still held Deya's wrist, ready for any unexpected events.

After defeating the Heroic Souls, Ashe and Sonya had communicated through eye contact and reached a consensus—the Witch's condition was far from good.

They were acutely aware that as the battle grew more perilous, the Witch's hair color became increasingly muddled, and even her voice began to shift. At one point, she spoke with the resonance of a quartet, as if four different individuals were speaking at once, while her hair continued to change into a chaotic mix of colors—a very ominous sign indeed.

Rest was not only a post-battle relaxation but also a means to facilitate the Witch's recovery. They could all deduce that the Witch's strange condition was undoubtedly linked to her 'sisters'. Yet, issues of the mind were completely beyond their capabilities; their spirit miracles were of no use here.

Fortunately, both Ashe and Sonya were of Silver Rank in the Mind Faction Realm. Even though they hadn't read many psychology texts, when confronted with such special events involving changes of the mind, they could intuit the correct course of action—do not disturb the Witch and let her gradually calm down.

Had it been the old Sonya, she would have certainly tried to indirectly inquire about how the Witch felt. As for Ashe, he might have blurted out something like, "Have you considered shaving your head?"

But thanks to their intuitive knowledge from the Mind Faction Realm, they were able to nip those potentially irredeemable thoughts in the bud.

Only the ignorant are fearless; knowledge teaches reverence.

Perhaps it was the atmosphere they had created, but the Witch also lazily sat down next to the sports car and closed her eyes. Her clothes slowly shifted back to black, and the cheap illusionary colors in her hair faded, soon returning to the Secret Princess's pure shade.

She fell asleep.

This was the first time Ashe and Sonya had seen someone fall asleep in the Virtual Realm. They quietly gathered on either side of the Witch, studying her eyebrows, lips, nose, eyelashes, and glasses for a while. Unaware until they took a closer look, they were startled to find that, although the Witch was always beautiful, she looked even more serene in her sleep, like a timid deer, so much so that they were tempted to pinch her cheeks.

When Ashe's gaze began to wander beyond her neck, curious about the curves beneath her clothing, Sonya reached out and grabbed his chin, twisting his line of sight to meet her own.

You wake her up.

Why should I? You do it.

I've just met her recently; you're more suitable.

You're a woman; you're more appropriate.

Women are not more appropriate.

Why not?

Are you a woman or am I? Don't women understand women?

You... damn, that actually makes some sense.

Ashe lost the silent argument and begrudgingly took on the loathsome task of acting as an alarm clock. But since Swordswoman was so unwilling, he didn't hold back!

Pinch~

Ashe reached out and pinched the Witch's chubby cheek, enjoying the pleasant feel of it. It was said that bodies in the Virtual Realm were true reflections of their real counterparts, hence the softness could be felt. Setting everything else aside, this touch alone was enough to heal Ashe of the fatigue from the previous Battle... Who knew a girl's cheek was so soft!

"Hey!"

Sonya swiftly chopped Ashe's hand away: "Isn't that harassment?"

"I'm trying to wake her up! According to the relevant surveys, attacking the face is the most effective way to wake someone, like a slap certainly does the trick."

"Then slap her!"

Good grief, not even the dumbest and most iron-willed college roommates I knew were as ruthless as you; only my brother could have done something like this.

"Huh?"

Deya, awakened by the pinch, rubbed her eyes in confusion and looked around at them: "Huh? You guys... this place... how did I... am I dreaming?"

Sonya didn't hesitate to pinch her face hard, turning it into a pancake face: "You just fell asleep! Snap out of it, we're still in the Virtual Realm!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" Deya nodded vigorously: "Right, I remember now, we beat the heroic soul legion... We actually won, yay, yay!"

The Witch immediately burst into excitement, hugging the Swordsman in celebration. Ashe, moved by the scene, also extended his arms, trying to join the celebratory embrace of the girls, but he was pushed away by the Swordsman. However, the Witch, noticing Ashe's gesture, came over and hugged him as well: "Observer, your driving skills are amazing! So awesome! You're even cooler than the villains in fairy tales! Swordsman is super amazing too, delivering the final blow, and of course, I'm also great, I held onto that heroic soul!"

"Yes, yes, yes, Witch, you did a great job this time, thank you for your hard work."

Ashe gently rubbed Deya's head with his right hand, smoothing down her proud, spiky hair while raising his left hand high to show that all of his actions were in line with the standards suitable for children's TV channels. Sonya snorted and stood up, saying, "Well, we should go collect the spoils of war that we've earned—hopefully they haven't thought themselves unwanted and run off."

By this time, the poisonous fog in the cave had dissipated, and as they looked around, they found few spoils to speak of. It was unclear if the manner of their victory was the issue or if it was because the Knowledge Creatures were part of the heroic soul legion, but their defeat had not resulted in the dropping of Experience Orbs, nor even any spirits.

There were only three pieces of loot on the battlefield, all dropped by the heroic souls.

The first was a manual, but when Ashe picked it up, he realized it wasn't the Sorcerer Handbook they had expected—

“Demilo’s Commander’s Handbook”

“Read to obtain a choice of one reward—”

“Sword Command Technique – Basic: You know how to coordinate swordsmanship Faction troops and gain a large amount of Swordsmanship Faction experience.”

“Archery Command Technique – Intermediate: You excel at using ranged troops to achieve tactical intentions and gain an enormous amount of Archery Faction experience.”

“Offensive Technique – Basic: You become more threatening when commanding an attack and gain a small amount of experience for all Factions.”

“Logistics Technique – Intermediate: Your troops move more swiftly during marches and gain a moderate amount of experience for all Factions.”

How to describe the shock that the Commander’s Handbook gave to the sorcerers? Look at Swordswoman’s reaction to understand—upon learning of the reward options inside, the word ‘Small horn’ slipped out of her mouth, her composure completely shattered by the shock.

If the Sorcerer Handbook was like a nutritious but difficult-to-eat vegetable, then the Commander’s Handbook was akin to a high-nutrition ice cream cake that defied the laws of matter with zero calories, zero sugar, and zero protein. First, its rewards were not random, but could be chosen; second, in addition to commanding skills, it also provided Faction experience, essentially giving away extra Experience Orbs.

Of course, the most important aspect was—it had no reading prerequisites!

Not every vegetable suits the palate of a sorcerer, but who can resist a zero-calorie ice cream cake? Ashe and his companions didn’t even need to open the Commander’s Handbook to read the command experience within; they could simply use it and receive the rewards. Therefore, even Sonya, whose moral baseline was rather rigid, could use it!

Although the Commander's Handbook might not seem particularly valuable—after all, it was just “a command skill that might not be used” plus an Experience Orb—the loot they obtained from slaying the Fish-Dragon wasn't much different.

The appearance of the Commander's Handbook broadened their horizons, showing them that not all Sorcerer Handbooks were tough vegetables to chew. In the Virtual Realm, there might exist other flavors of Sorcerer Handbooks that were even more nutritious.

If they encountered similar heroic soul sorcerer projections like before, Swordswoman would definitely not stop Ashe from venturing into danger. They bravely took a step into the unknown, and the Commander's Handbook was the positive feedback reward for doing so. Therefore, their first reaction to encountering the unknown and facing danger in the future would not be to flee, but to probe and gather intelligence.

A sorcerer who has tasted sweetness will readily lick any unknown secret, even if it might contain bitterness or even poison.

Silently, the success shaped their way of thinking. Just as the River of Flowing Gold nurtured their ambition, hunting heroic souls also grew their greed.

Without a doubt, the Commander's Handbook was naturally for Sonya. After all, among the three of them, no one required the Archery Faction, and the urgent task at hand was to feed Sonya's Swordsmanship Faction up to the Gold Tier.

Sonya also deeply felt her own powerlessness in the recent battle. Although she delivered the final fatal blow, 99% of the credit for the entire battle had to go to Ashe and his nearly exhausted sports car.

The real MVP deserving of praise and embrace was the car!

But the sports car was a manifestation of Ashe's power, which by itself far surpassed her own; and the Witch had a Gold Tier Magical Faction, with her water thread possessing both offensive and control capabilities. Moreover, the Witch could read most Sorcerer Handbooks... Sonya realized after some reflection that she was unwittingly on the verge of becoming the one who lagged behind in the team.

The Observer had made it clear that if one couldn't keep up with the team, they wouldn't receive a tilt in resources or favoritism. If the team needed to optimize its member structure, naturally, the ones lagging behind would be the first to be optimized...

So, Sonya didn't hesitate this time; she reached out and took the Commander's Handbook.

She wasn't the type to admit defeat easily. If she truly couldn't keep pace with the team's progress, her plan was to drain the Observer of resources, consume all the

resources the Observer had, to the point where the Observer would be forced to invest even more to avoid wasting previous investments!

As long as she owed enough to the Observer, then the one in panic wouldn't be her, but the Observer!

What was that called again...? Right, sunk cost, a term the Observer once explained while complaining about work. Sonya really liked this term.

The more one invests, the harder it is to let go.

Time, effort, emotions, experiences, everything becomes a shackle affecting current decisions. Search the novelFire.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

She set a small goal in her mind—to become the sunk cost the Observer couldn't afford to abandon!

Before using the Commander's Handbook, Sonya quickly skimmed its contents and, as expected, found it exceedingly dull. It was all about command experience and battle examples, without a single bit of intelligence on 'Demilo.'

No wonder the Commander's Handbook could be used by anyone; it bore no imprint of a sorcerer's values or opinions, no output of viewpoints, just like any ordinary reference book. Of course, there'd be no reading barrier.

But isn't the Sorcerer Handbook the culmination of a sorcerer's life's work? How could it contain not even a hint of Demilo's privacy?

The thought flickered through the rustic girl's mind and then disappeared—probably a special mechanism of the Virtual Realm. If there's nothing to see, then there's nothing to see.

Turning to the last page, Sonya saw a somewhat familiar photograph.

It was a star chart, the profound night sky, twinkling Stars, with three stars connected by lines. The lowest one was labeled "Demilo," but the other two were nameless.

She showed this page to the others, and Ashe made an accurate assessment:

"It looks like the information a victim gives about their murderer right before dying."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 246: Spoils of War

The second piece of loot plummeted in value.

“Demilo’s Hand-Drawn Map”

“It seems foolish to record everything that’s subject to change, but heroic souls usually don’t have much else to do.”

Just as it sounds, this is a map, its material feels like parchment. When Ashe unfolds it, detailed annotations covering its surface become visible.

Glowing points: Current location, Main City of Star Hall.

Terrain: Swamp, mud, forest, cave, mountain range...

Resource Points: Lumber mill, ore pit, crystal mine, mercury factory, gold mine...

Special Areas: Dragon’s nest, River of Flowing Gold, Destiny’s Inquiry House, Miracle Park, Tree of Wisdom...

“No Rainbow Tail.” Ashe and companions meticulously examine the map, shaking their heads in disappointment. They had hoped the heroic soul’s map would contain information on Rainbow Tail, considering that heroic souls, in theory, are part of the Virtual Realm establishment, and thus, such insider information could potentially be known.

However, aside from the absence of Rainbow Tail, the map was as comprehensive as they come. Leaving aside the Resource Points, just “Destiny’s Inquiry House” and “Miracle Park” alone were worth a visit. The former offered opportunities to ask questions about the Virtual Realm through answers, while the latter allowed one to freeload spirit companions.

The “Tree of Wisdom” was even more formidable. The Swordswoman mentioned that one could pay a certain price to directly elevate one’s standing within a Faction Realm—an equivalent to a Sanctuary pass, a Sorcerer’s wishing machine, a life-altering tree.

This sounded more reliable than Rainbow Tail, but the issue lay in the “certain price”—though there were cases where one could advance by paying a trivial price, many more records told of Sorcerers paying a grim price and ultimately resorting to suicide.

For instance, the price demanded by the Tree of Wisdom might be the Sorcerer's loss of the ability to speak (including listening, reading, and writing) for three days. Coincidentally, the Sorcerer becomes entangled in a murder case. Unable to communicate, the Sorcerer mistakenly believes that other criminal facts have been exposed, and in desperation, commits murder; likewise, without means of communication, the Sorcerer suspects that their spouse and child are planning to betray them and ends up killing their entire family.

Once the Sorcerer returns to normal, the real murderer is apprehended, but the Sorcerer, upon learning the truth, also succumbs to a mental breakdown and their soul retreats to the Virtual Realm.

Despite its notorious reputation, the Tree of Wisdom still attracted many Sorcerers because they knew they lacked sufficient wisdom. However, compared to seeking Rainbow Tail, Sorcerers were more inclined to do so, as failing to find Rainbow Tail at most meant losing Soul Energy, while confronting the Tree of Wisdom meant selling one's soul.

Logically, this Map, filled with important intelligence, should have been the top prize among the spoils of war, but Ashe and the others were less enthusiastic—because it was, indeed, just a Map.

It was not a spirit.

Experience Orbs could be absorbed, spirits could be commanded, but they couldn't take the Map out of the Virtual Realm, nor could they keep it for their next entry. Even if they memorized the Map's information, they didn't know where they would appear upon their next venture into the Virtual Realm. Trying to find reference coordinates would only lead to getting lost in the Curtain Maze of the Reverse Golden Rain.

A Map without reference points is like falling in love with a Paper person—no matter how much you invest, you only harvest emptiness.

As for using the Map tonight to indulge in the thrill of discovering special Areas, not to mention their car was about to explode, the key point was—the high-value special Areas were not close by.

There was a scale on the Map, and they estimated that even the nearest Miracle Park was 10 kilometers away. If the sports car was still operational, it might have been fine, but on foot, just the journey through thorns and underbrush could deplete all their Soul Energy.

Distance was not the only issue; they had engaged in battles with the Fierce Wolf Dragon clan and the heroic soul legion in this Area, and then they had just rested for a while. Even though they had previously traveled by car, staying in the same Area for such a long time meant that the White Bull had already traveled quite a distance.

If they didn't want to be caught by the stillness of time, they had to either move forward quickly or log off and exit the Virtual Realm right there—they simply didn't have time to search for Miracle Park.

However, compared to Resource Points, the several glowing important annotations on the Map were even more attractive to the Sorcerers.

The glowing points on the Map indicated their current location and four distant Star Halls within the Main Cities, which were very far away and seemingly within the Static Domain. Although there was no additional information, the mere name "Star Hall Main Cities" gave Ashe and the others a glimpse into the iceberg that was the Time Continent—these heroic soul legions were not naturally occurring special ecologies, but rather agents backed by Virtual Realm powers!

So, in this world, who could establish hidden forces within the Virtual Realm, enslaving Sorcerer Projections and Knowledge Creatures for their own use?

"Could the Star Halls be a force created by the Divine Master?" Sonya asked in a hushed tone, as if afraid of drawing the attention of a great entity.

"Possibly, or possibly not," Ashe shook his head. "The intelligence we've gathered is too scarce to make any meaningful guesses. These Main Cities could also be relics of an ancient era, any Sorcerer Projection that enters might be transformed into a heroic soul, awakened with spiritual intelligence, and then they prepare to assemble a Virtual Realm army to counterattack the real world—"

"Isn't that just the fairy tale story I was just talking about!" Deya pointed out sharply, noticing Ashe's impromptu use of the tale.

"In any case, if we want to uncover the secrets of the heroic soul legion, we need to take a look at what exactly these so-called Main Cities have to offer," Ashe said with a hint of regret. "Too bad we can't take this Map with us..."

"Don't you, the Observer, have a Virtual Realm Map?" Sonya raised her hands and then clapped them together with a snap: "Can't you invoke some kind of Fusion Miracle to combine them?"

Sonya's words sparked an epiphany in Ashe. He opened the Virtual Realm Map, and sure enough, a prompt popped up: "Map information has been updated."

The "Zoom" button on the right side of the Virtual Realm Map was now marked with a red exclamation point. Ashe had used the "Zoom" feature at the very beginning, but after enlarging, the other Areas remained unknown, so he hadn't used this skill since, keeping the Map at the smallest scale.

Now, clicking on “Zoom,” the Map expanded to its largest state, and Ashe saw what appeared to be a pizza pie cut into eight slices—most of the Map was still unknown territory, but roughly one-eighth of the Area was now revealed with various terrains, Resource Points, special Areas, and even the four Star Hall Main Cities were marked on it.

Looking at this expansive Map, there was an irresistible urge to uncover every dark and unknown Area.

In addition to that, Ashe noticed a small, distinct, known Area amidst the unknown. After closely examining landmarks like “Stone Mine Caves” and “River of Flowing Gold,” he confirmed this was the place they had explored the night before.

It turns out the Virtual Realm Map has the ability to automatically record and create maps!

And he had been oblivious to it all along!

Although Ashe didn’t know how useful this map-recording feature would be—since each entry into the Virtual Realm landed them in different locations, and they had managed to navigate successfully without a map before—he still felt a sense of loss. It was akin to the regret one might feel after confessing to a childhood friend, only to discover that the friend had harbored feelings for three years already. Why had he hesitated for so long?

While the truth would have been apparent had he simply opened the Map, Ashe was still filled with gratitude towards Sonya, who reminded him: “Swordswoman, I am so moved right now, I feel like kissing you.”

“No problem.”

Sonya extended her hand, gesturing for Ashe to kiss it. Ashe glanced at it: “You’ve been swinging your sword with that hand; it’s not sweaty, is it...?”

Sonya made a fist: “Stand still, I can kiss you with my fist, and French kissing is also an option—as long as your mouth can fit my fist.”

“Why only kiss the Swordswoman? What about me?” Deya exclaimed in shock. “Observer, are you implying I haven’t done well enough?”

“Actually, if we were to distribute based on merit, it should be you kissing me,” Ashe said with his arms crossed. “But if we start using kisses to reward the most valuable player after each Battle, it would be awkward... Even if I don’t mind, you certainly would.”

“Let’s take this opportunity to establish some everyday etiquette. The most intimate actions between the three of us shall be limited to hugs and holding hands. Acts like

kissing and caressing are too intimate and should be prohibited, as they might make another person uncomfortable.”

Ashe paused: “But what’s done in private is a different matter.”

Sonya: “What are you thinking?”

Deya: “I think I know what the Observer is thinking... And it’s not happening! The White Queen wouldn’t, the Red Death Eater wouldn’t, the Black Butler wouldn’t, and neither would I!”

“The information on this Map has already been recorded onto my Virtual Realm Map,” Ashe said, steering the conversation back to the main topic as if he hadn’t heard their banter. “If we happen to land in an Area on the Map next time, we can explore nearby Resource Points and special Areas.”

If the Commander’s Handbook was a sweet taste of success for Ashe and his companions, then this Resource Map was like a feast. However, its utility was quite limited; if it weren’t for Ashe’s ability to import external records into the Virtual Realm Map, he wouldn’t be able to enjoy this banquet at all.

The Virtual Realm wouldn’t just generate a Map specifically for Ashe, so there was only one possibility—a Sorcerer proficient in a certain Faction could ‘absorb’ this Map.

A term almost subconsciously surfaced in Ashe’s mind: Prophecy Faction.

Coincidentally, the Gospel Kingdom was a place where the Prophecy Faction reigned supreme, unchallenged. Was it possible...? Ashe quickly snuffed out this ambitious thought. Rather than practicing the Prophecy Faction himself, it would be more efficient and comfortable to hope for drawing an Operator from the Prophecy Faction.

Ashe, oh Ashe, when faced with a challenge, remember not to first think about how to do it yourself, but how to delegate the work to the right person. The skill of delegating, learned in the Workplace, should not be forgotten in a different world.

Ashe quietly reflected on this oversight and then guiltlessly picked up the third piece of spoils.

The third trophy was peculiar; although Ashe could tell it was a spirit by touch, it didn’t look anything like a spirit—it had no wings.

At first glance, it appeared to be a hexagonal bipyramid, resembling an ornament that could be worn as an earring, completely transparent but with one side emitting a blue glow.

However, the information emanating from within it was eye-opening for any Sorcerer:

“Soul Summoning”

“Zero Wing Spirit”

“Restriction: Can only appear within the Virtual Realm, can only be used within the Virtual Realm.”

“Effect ① Soul Summoning: You can absorb the residual soul power of soldiers.”

“Effect ② Command: You can bestow troop types upon yourself and your followers, but bestowing troop types requires the consumption of soul power. A Sorcerer can grant the same troop type to multiple units, but only the armor can stack.”

“Below are the currently summonable troop types”

“Star Hall Star Swordsman: Swords deal +15% Soul Damage. Comes with 3 layers of armor, humanoid form, and is equipped with a longsword. Each unit consumes 1 point of soul power.”

“Star Hall Star Archer: Shots deal +20% Soul Damage, and include precision locking aim that does not reduce damage with distance. Comes with 2 layers of armor, humanoid form, and is equipped with a bow and arrows. Each unit consumes 2 points of soul power.”

“This spirit cannot evolve.”

“This spirit can unlock different troop types by absorbing spirits of the same name.”

“Only one of the same spirit can be owned.”

“Congratulations on becoming a player in this never-ending game, although you don’t even qualify to be a pawn.”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 247: Who Are You To Me?

“Star Swordsman...” Sonya mulled over the term. “Is that what the soldiers transformed from the Serpent-Scorpion Dragon just now?”

The concept of a Soul Summoning Spirit was not difficult to grasp because they had just ruthlessly run over its creation with a sports car. In simple terms, this type of spirit

accumulates soul power by hunting other soldiers, then uses that power to bestow troop types upon itself or its followers.

If one could hunt other heroic souls, they could seize their Soul Summoning Spirits for absorption and upgrades, unlocking more troop types.

A single Sorcerer with a 'collect-exchange-upgrade' system would cause a technical revolution in the world of Sorcerers if it were to spread.

But it could not be disseminated.

Firstly, it was impossible for it to appear in reality, meaning Sorcerers couldn't take this spirit out for research in the real world. Furthermore...

"What does Zero Wing Spirit mean?" Ashe was somewhat puzzled. "Can a spirit have zero wings?"

The only rustic girl present, who had received a formal education, shook her head. "A spirit cannot be without wings. Just like us Sorcerers, a spirit's wings represent its volume of knowledge, only without the arcane energy. A Quadruple Wings spirit symbolizes a legendary level of knowledge, while a Zero Wing Spirit means..."

"It has no knowledge whatsoever," Deya interjected. "It's not made of knowledge."

A knowledge-less spirit seemed absurd, even to Ashe, a Mudblood Sorcerer. By definition, a spirit is a Virtual Realm creature condensed from knowledge. A spirit without knowledge is like a Lala Fatty without flesh, fundamentally negating the definition.

"Do you know?" Sonya suddenly spoke up. "Some spirits have more than one evolutionary path. For example, a Two Wings 'Sword Qi' spirit can evolve into a Tri-wings 'Sword Qi' spirit, but with special Training and nourishment, it can also evolve into a Tri-wings 'Sword Light' spirit."

Many Low-rank Spirits can undergo mutations during evolution, sometimes transforming into rarer and more powerful spirits. Sorcerers have recorded these phenomena, and later discovered that they could de-evolve High-rank Spirits into Low-rank Spirits using certain methods. These Low-rank Spirits, with their 'experience,' can more easily evolve into High-rank Spirits.

A special summoning technique was born from this understanding: Sorcerers would de-evolve an easily obtained High-rank Spirit into a Low-rank Spirit, then through targeted training, elevate and mutate the Low-rank Spirit back into the desired High-rank Spirit.

Some Noble Sorcerers would even intentionally de-evolve powerful spirits to One Wing, specifically for their Descendants to use.

In other words, it's not impossible for a Sorcerer to devolve a Quadruple Wings Spirit into a One Wing Spirit if they so choose.

Sonya glanced at the Triangular Dipyramid in Ashe's hand. "Perhaps the Soul Summoning Spirit is a devolved spirit. It's too perfect. It's not without knowledge; on the contrary, its knowledge is vast. I don't believe it's a native spirit of the Time Continent. I wouldn't doubt it if it was a Quadruple Wings Spirit."

"It's likely a Legend Spirit created from the Fusion of multiple spirits, and Zero Wing is a type of seal that brings it down to a level that a heroic soul can use."

Ashe nodded in agreement. After all, the heroic souls of the Time Continent were only Two Wings Sorcerers. For them to use a Quadruple Wings Spirit would be like using a toothpick to stir a cauldron – completely beyond their capabilities.

However, Sonya mentioned a new term, prompting Ashe to ask, "Fusion?"

"Fusion is a special summoning method that only advanced Sorcerers can attempt," explained Sonya. "Simply put, it involves merging multiple spirits into a new one. For example, I could combine Moon Silk, Rapids, and Vibration Sword into a new spirit, 'Water Moon Rapids.' This way, I can invoke the Miracle of Water Moon by activating just one spirit."

"But wouldn't that mean your three spirits are gone?"

"Correct, they're gone," Sonya nodded. "A Fusion spirit is actually designed to invoke specific Miracles, but it can only invoke Miracles, which is a significant limitation. Only Sorcerers above the Sanctuary level would deal with Fusion spirits, because they might encounter situations that require invoking multiple Miracles at once. In those cases, Fusion spirits can greatly reduce the mental effort required."

"The power of Soul Summoning spirits is formidable but also highly specialized, and it's very likely that they have devolved from high-level Fusion spirits to Zero Wing. Such a spirit might not mean much in the higher echelons of the Virtual Realm, where the soldiers we fear could easily be subdued by a Legend Sorcerer. But on the Time Continent, it becomes the cornerstone for the heroic soul legion to sweep away all before them."

Deya understood as well: "It sounds like the story of an imperial Princess who sneaks off to the frontier to punch above her weight starting from zero."

Ashe glanced at the Witch—her description was notably detailed.

Although they could roughly guess the origin of the Soul Summoning spirit, it was clear that this was not something they could research at their level. It would be best to simply be consumers.

So, who should control this spirit?

Since the troop type includes 'Star Swordsman', in theory, Sonya would be the most appropriate choice to use it. However, she had already taken the Commander's Handbook, and to take the Soul Summoning spirit as well might even make a rustic girl a bit embarrassed.

But Ashe had a different idea: "Speaking of which, what exactly are you to me?"

Sonya and Deya blinked, exchanged glances, and then looked at Ashe.

"Family?" Deya asked. "But it's weird to say that. Why would you want strangers to be your family... Don't you have any family, Observer?"

"Retainers!" Ashe said loudly, seeing that they didn't get it. "The Exploration in Virtual Realm is my team, and you're my team members, theoretically my retainers."

Sonya got it: "You mean, if you take the Soul Summoning spirit, you could assign the troop type to us?"

"That's a possibility." Ashe held the Soul Summoning spirit. "So, I'll take it?"

"I sort of want it..." Deya eyed the new spirit with a touch of eagerness. "You can have this one, but next time there's something fun, you have to let me have it!"

Sonya also spoke up, "You take it. Even if it can't be bestowed upon us, the troop armor can at least increase your safety coefficient. As you said, you're the Captain, and the most important thing about the team is you. Without you, we can't be driving a sports car while looking at the Map and Exploring the Virtual Realm... You need to take better care of yourself."

"But without you guys, I wouldn't be able to explore the Virtual Realm so easily either," Ashe tightened his grip on the Soul Summoning spirit. "If it can't be bestowed upon you, then we'll each take one, consider it a small team benefit—"

S

As Ashe gained complete control over the Soul Summoning spirit, fog-like energy suddenly rose around the cave and surged towards him like swallows returning to their nest. The Sorcerers couldn't react in time, and Sonya anxiously asked, "Observer, what's happening to you?"

"I'm fine, put your sword down first, I'm scared."

“But it seemed like an evil soul had devoured your Soul just now. I need to verify it’s really you: ‘I feel as light as a balloon, yet only a thin string ties me down to the ground’...”

Ashe pounced to knock Sonya over, straddling her waist in an attempt to cover her mouth.

Sonya pried his hands away with force, and spoke seriously, “See, you’re possessed by an evil spirit, I need to continue quoting your famous sayings to awaken your memory. Swordsman, to me, you... if you dare spit, we’re through!”

As Ashe was about to make a spitting gesture, Sonya surrendered immediately. Deya, curious, squatted beside them and asked, “Why is the Observer so agitated? Is this some kind of spell?”

“I’ll tell you privately when we have time later,” Sonya said cheerfully.

“Then you’re done for, you’ll never have free time again, not in your entire life,” Ashe said coldly.

“That was the Soul Summoning spirit’s first effect: Soul Summoning. The residual Soul power of the Star Swordsmen we killed was automatically absorbed into the spirit, and now I have 3 points of Soul power, just enough to try to bestow the troop type on you.”

Without waiting for Sonya to refuse, Ashe pointed at Deya and declared, “Witch Evolution—Star Sword Witch!”

Suddenly, deep blue flames erupted from Deya’s body, sweeping along her form and transforming into exquisite body-hugging armor. In each hand, she wielded a slender Thrust Sword and donned a full-coverage helmet, with only her eyes visible to Ashe and Sonya through the helmet’s breathing holes.

“How does it feel?”

“My body seems a little lighter.” The newly transformed Star Witch swung her Thrust Swords: “The armor and weapons are weightless, making movement very comfortable. Wait a moment...”

She discarded the Thrust Swords, touched her fists together, and pulled apart, drawing out three water threads: “I can still use my spirit normally, which means treating the troop type as additional defensive armor is no issue.”

“Good,” Ashe said. “The trial is complete. If we have a chance, let’s test the Combat effectiveness tomorrow night.”

Sonya poked Ashe in the waist and then pointed at herself.

“What?”

“What about me?”

“What about you?”

“Why didn’t you let me try? The Star Swordsman would have suited me better.”

“Anyone could have tried, and having the Witch test it also allows us to see if she can use abilities like water thread and Fist and Claw attacks while in troop status.”

“Hmm, good reasoning. Anything else?”

“Also, you annoyed me just now, so I had to get back at you.” Ashe poked Sonya’s forehead with his finger. “Otherwise, I would have calmed down in a bit.”

“It was just a joke...” Sonya muttered, rubbing her forehead.

“Witch, come here!” Ashe called out to Deya, who was doing somersaults. “No other issues?”

“None!” Deya gave a thumbs up. “The experience is great; let’s fight in this gear from now on!”

“I’d like that too.” Ashe shrugged and exchanged a glance with Sonya. “The sports car is about to explode, and everyone’s tired, so let’s call it a night for Exploration in Virtual Realm.”

“Okay.”

“Alrighty!”

Deya crisply nodded her head, ready to disengage from the Virtual Realm. However, she looked down to see her left hand grasped by the Observer and her right by the Swordsman.

“Exploration in Virtual Realm is over, but we still have half an hour before the Static Domain arrives, so we have half an hour for the tea party.”

Ashe and Sonya pulled Deya aside to sit down.

“Witch, your hair color was mixed during the Battle, and your voice turned into a strange polyphony,” Sonya said. “Even though you’ve calmed down, we can’t pretend nothing happened.”

“We’ve only known each other for a few days, so it might not seem appropriate to say we’re ‘worried’ or offer ‘help,’ but it would be too hard to just ignore this,” Ashe tilted his head. “Actually, we were waiting for you to speak up first, but since you didn’t, we had to bring it up ourselves.”

“Of course, if you don’t want to talk about it, I can understand. After all, we might not be able to help.”

“But if you’re willing to talk, we’ll listen attentively.”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 250: Harveys New Companion

“Really, an online friend you met in the game?”

“What else? I don’t have any other way to meet people besides through the game. It’s not like I could be socializing with other women in the Virtual Realm, right?”

Can you not consider that you’re lying to the face of the second-ranked Genius Con Artist on the ‘Two Wings Mind Ranking Azura Sub-Ranking’? Your eyes instinctively shift right, avoiding eye contact, fidgeting with your fingers unconsciously, and most importantly, your infant-level facial expression management totally gives you away!

But the woman isn’t the point. The point is that Ashe is still able to make contact with the outside world right under my nose... No wonder he doesn’t seem to care about the Contract with Annan. It seems he has some cards yet to be revealed.

That’s to be expected, after all, he is a Cult Leader on the same level as Eternal Calamity.

And Eternal Calamity is capable of directly confronting the Tri-wings Sorcerers of the Sanctuary. Ashe couldn’t possibly be that useless – useless is tolerable, but naive too?

Igor has been pondering how Ashe got to the position of Cult Leader in the first place. Maybe this is the answer.

He used to think that without him, Ashe and Harvey might have become Banjeet’s successors, glowing and heating for Annan for a lifetime; or perhaps Ashe would be forced to become a doting father, tending to Lise for life...

But now, it seems he might have been too full of himself...

“Hey.”

Ashe notices Igor zoning out and snaps his fingers, “Didn’t take a shower? Why do you look so out of it this morning?”

Igor blinks, “A shower?”

“Don’t you shower every morning? You just came out of the Audio-visual Room, so you must have been watching videos since leaving the Virtual Realm last night, right? Remember to keep it in moderation, Bewitcher.” Ashe wags his finger seriously, indicating that such behavior won’t do.

“You knew?”

“I’ve looked for you in the Prison several times in the morning, and each time I could smell the shampoo. My nose isn’t broken,” Ashe said with crossed arms. “Well, everyone has their own morning routine. I have to let out a big yawn to wake up, even if I’m not sleepy... By the way, since we have a pool and a steam bath here, how about we go for a soak later?”

Igor glanced at him, surprised, and swept his fringe behind his ear with his left hand, “I’ve already showered... Huh, you’re only trying to bond with me now?”

Ashe, not embarrassed at having his motive exposed, retorted, “What else can I do? Pee with you?”

“Even middle-schoolers don’t make friends like you do,” Igor shook his head. “Because I haven’t met you in person, I can only tell you the more common ways to soothe. If I use this method, I can generally calm women under the age of 20. But in your case...”

“I can do it too!”

“You can’t.”

“I can!”

“Your looks don’t guarantee such a high success rate.”

As they chatted, they made their way to the living room where Banjeet, as always, had prepared breakfast, and Lise was already sitting at the table, eating her breakfast with proper etiquette.

“Is Annan not here?” “Did Harvey oversleep?”

Banjeet shushed them with a finger to his ear, "Listen."

As Ashe and Igor listened carefully, they heard a buzzing sound approaching from the balcony, as if some machine was flying towards the sun!

Buzz—

A hovercar floated outside the balcony. Banjeet went to open the balcony's rail, allowing the hovercar to dock—so the balcony was actually a parking spot!?

The car door opened, and Annan, dressed in a purple mini skirt, thigh-high boots, a small vest, and a fisherman's hat, jumped down. Although she still predominantly wore purple, she styled it differently every day, not because purple gave her beauty, but because she gave life to the color purple.

Harvey got out carrying a suitcase, seemingly changed into a more fashionable outfit, wearing a cap, which, along with his dark skin, suddenly made him look like a sporty young person.

After they got out, the hovercar automatically detached from the balcony and descended, while the balcony rail closed back up.

"Take your time eating, I'll pass on breakfast," Annan yawned. "I need to catch up on some sleep in the Virtual Realm... It's been a while since I've stayed up this long."

"Why not start with a cup of coffee for a pick-me-up?" Banjeet suggested. "Coffee beans from Rhode Island, three sugars, two scoops of milk..."

"Alright, since you're offering so hospitably, Banjeet."

Harvey nodded at them and pushed his suitcase towards his room. As he passed by, Ashe took Lise's hand until Harvey's figure disappeared down the corridor.

Then they looked at Annan, who shook her head, "It's what you're thinking."

"But it's not scavenged, it's purchased. Even though it's a gray area transaction, at least it won't result in a demerit from the Gospel."

Ashe covered Lise's ears, "I thought you randomly picked a fortunate vagrant."

"No need for that. Although not many people buy, the industry is well-regulated. Spending a bit of money gets you the materials you want, which is much more convenient than looking for a suitable vagrant."

"But didn't Harvey lose yesterday?" Igor inquired. "What did our Necromancer do to win your favor? How about me?"

“Yes, he lost, so I took him on a small mission last night,” Annan explained. “When we came back, I fulfilled my promise and also bought him a gift.”

“A gift!”

Lise broke free from Ashe’s grip, “What gift?”

“Uncle Harvey got a 1:1 scale horror doll. Dare to enter his room, and I guarantee you won’t want to go to the Restroom alone at night,” Ashe said.

“I’m not afraid of dolls!”

“Really... are you sure?”

“Waaah!”

On one side, Ashe scared Lise with his uncanny ability to make ghastly faces, and on the other, Igor was somewhat taken aback, “You took Harvey on a mission last night? What kind of mission?”

“You’ll find out when it’s your turn,” Annan replied, taking the coffee from Banjeet with a smile. “Isn’t it nice to keep a little mystery between us?”

So, last night Harvey was taken by Annan for a secret talk?

Igor’s first thought was that Annan was attempting to break their ranks by winning them over one by one, but he sensed it wasn’t that simple. Annan was like an unfathomably deep pool of water; one might only intend to drink from the surface, yet a careless move could drag one into its depths, drowning them.

Maybe it would be a good idea to ask Harvey later... But even that might be part of a scheme, especially if there was something Harvey wasn’t keen on sharing. Igor’s inquiry could easily create a rift.

While Annan leisurely sipped her coffee, Igor was lost in thought, and sensing the odd atmosphere, Ashe turned to Lise, “Did you really like that hover car earlier? Why keep staring at the balcony?”

“I’m waiting.”

“Waiting for what?”

“Here it comes!”

A drone carrying cargo passed through the balcony and into the living room, deposited its load, and buzzed away. Ashe had an epiphany, “You’ve been shopping on the Curtain, haven’t you?”

“Yes!”

“What did you buy?”

“Something pretty, fun, interesting, cute, beautiful, and glowing...”

“What kind of item packs all these features at once?”

“I didn’t buy just one thing.”

Buzz—

A hair-raising drone of multiple drones filled the air as they swarmed in. They looked to see a fleet of drones, each carrying goods, staging a surprise assault on the living room!

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 253: The Virtual Realm Must Yield to Reality

Stars twinkled above the Swordsmanship Department at Swordflower College, within the professor’s office.

“What was that supposed to mean?”

“It means I forgot to tell you. Just happened a couple of days ago. Two team members died in the Virtual Realm.”

“Were they badly injured?”

“Not severely. But one suffered an eye injury and the other an ear injury. It affected their combat capabilities too much, so they were replaced. Then Leoni recommended you, and naturally, you became part of the team. I’m leading the team for the mixer with Orbit College. I didn’t want you to compete so soon, but this batch of students in the Swordsmanship Department is the worst I’ve ever seen. We had no choice but to rely on a newcomer like you, who has been learning swordsmanship for less than a month.”

“Why didn’t you ask me?”

“I figured you’d agree, so I didn’t bother asking, and then I forgot to tell you.”

“But why the Chief Battle?” Sonya complained while holding her forehead. “I enter the Virtual Realm every night at exactly 11 PM, Professor, as you well know. The Chief Battle doesn’t start until midnight, completely throwing off my schedule—not to mention the two hours of swordsmanship training I do every night.”

“And if someone hadn’t mentioned it, I wouldn’t have known I was supposed to attend the Mixer Party tonight! The whole college knows I’m in the Chief Battle, everyone but me!”

“Professor, this really makes me—”

Thud!

A pair of boots landed on the desk as Trozan leaned back in the chair, arms crossed over the chest, an expression of clear impatience. “Are you done yet? So, I forgot to tell you. Do you have to nag me about it? Next time I’ll bombard your Curtain with ten messages about anything concerning you, okay?”

Despite the harsh words, Sonya knew the professor was listening.

After half a month of working together, Sonya had already figured out Trozan’s personality. Though the Swordsmanship Professor was as prickly as a hedgehog in conversation, domineering and autocratic in teaching style—always a stance of ‘are you strong or am I strong? If I’m strong, then listen to me’—it was because from a young age her exceptional talent had breezed her through to becoming a Sanctuary Sorcerer, her gifts completely overshadowing any lack of emotional intelligence, hence she never needed to learn how to interact with others.

In other people’s eyes, dealing with Professor Trozan must be an ordeal, but Sonya didn’t see it that way at all. In her hometown, there were plenty of villagers with even lower emotional intelligence than Professor Trozan, who relied solely on Shadow Drama for their knowledge and prenatal influence for social interactions. Sonya had ample experience dealing with such disagreeable people.

Or rather, Sonya was quite pleased that Professor Trozan was a genius with low emotional intelligence, which allowed her to quickly grasp his personality traits and even know how to make him ‘obey’.

Sonya spoke so sternly this time because she knew Professor Trozan wouldn’t blame her, and only by doing so could she make him listen—honestly, Trozan was the kind of person who wouldn’t remember unless you snapped at him.

“I get the impression that you’re not too keen on attending the mixer or participating in the Chief Battle,” Professor Trozan tilted his head. “If you’re really eager to enter the

Virtual Realm, I can change the order, let you fight in the vanguard battle first, then hurry back to school, or even pull you out altogether... How about that?"

"But even during my most intense period of addiction to the Virtual Realm, I wasn't as obsessed as you are. Missing the Virtual Realm for a day or two, would you really miss anything?"

Miss anything? Miss the crucial moments of the emotional escalation between the Observer and the Witch.

Although that was her internal complaint, Sonya knew nothing significant would happen in just one night. If progress could truly be made overnight, it would only show how inadequate the rustic girl was—she hadn't been able to counter-manipulate the Observer for the past half month, could the Witch really win him over in just one night?

Is having a girlfriend with multiple personalities really that appealing? Isn't it just being able to simultaneously interact with a confidante, a dark humorist, an energetic young girl, and a cold-hearted killer? What's so great about that?

Well, actually, the Witch did have quite a few advantages.

Upon analysis, Sonya realized that besides showing up early, she didn't seem to have much more competitive edge.

Even in the battle prowess debate that the Observer favored most, the future of the Witch, who could cultivate the Time Faction, surpassed her own—the Time Faction in the Time Continent grows automatically, meaning the Witch would always have one more specialty faction than her.

Although Sonya's position in the team seemed precarious, she wasn't too worried about being neglected. Even when the Observer spoke sternly about 'status,' 'struggle,' 'survival of the fittest,' 'wolf spirit,' and 'the capable take the lead,' she knew these were just motivational tactics to encourage her to train harder.

It was like before every quiz, the Professor would say, "This test is crucial for your overall grade" to make students feel the pressure and motivate them to study on their own.

Sonya's half-month lead was not insignificant; she had already subtly understood the Observer's character. This seemingly resurrected Legend was a delicate person; his absurd jokes contained undercurrents, and his silent actions were wrapped in good intentions.

Without the Observer's initiative, Sonya would never discuss the Witch's personality disorder in Battle, and even if she did, it would only be after several more incidents and

further development of their relationship. However, the Observer seemed impatient, as if holding back would affect his very being.

It was unclear whether his actions were driven by a sense of responsibility, concern for the team, or simply out of kindness.

Such a sensitive person would take much longer to accept someone than usual. And not just the Witch—Sonya felt that she hadn't truly been accepted by the Observer either, even though he claimed she was the pillar of his life. Occasionally, the way he looked at her hinted at an indescribable distance.

It was as if he was looking at something unattainable.

This sense of distance was deeply hidden, perhaps because they were not in the same Kingdom, and the physical space between them translated into emotional distance.

If Sonya couldn't break through this barrier, she doubted the Witch could either.

Moreover, if the Observer was truly reckless and lustful, choosing Operators as if selecting a consort, then why was Sonya still perfectly fine? Could it really be because the Observer couldn't defeat her?

Sonya could come up with a thousand reasons to prove that there was no issue with the Observer and the Witch conducting Exploration in the Virtual Realm alone.

But she just couldn't convince herself.

Sometimes, rationality isn't very useful; emotional thoughts occupy every inch of the mind, and the army of reason retreats in defeat.

The thought of the Observer and the Witch traveling through the Virtual Realm without her caused Sonya a pain as if she were being torn apart.

She couldn't know what they would do or say there. Perhaps they would speak ill of her? Perhaps the Observer would share his past? Perhaps they would encounter Virtual Realm Adventures, like Miracle Park, Hall of Magic, or even Destiny's Inquiry...

Those treatments that once belonged solely to her, the attention she used to receive exclusively, the privileges that were once hers alone, were gradually being handed over to someone else.

If she hadn't declined the Chief Battle or skipped the Mixer Party, then the Observer and the Witch would have their own memories, exclusive experiences, and secrets shared with a smile.

She despised this feeling of being out of control and feared being marginalized.

She knew her suspicions were irrational and dwelling on these emotions was pointless, but she couldn't help herself.

Sonya Therave was just that incapable rustic girl, unable to pick up, put down, let go, or hold on. Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

All the reason in the world couldn't outweigh a moment of heartfelt impulse.

"So what are you suggesting?"

Professor Trozan asked, "Are we changing the order of seats for the battle, or are we cancelling the mixer altogether? Well, I can understand prioritizing Virtual Realm Adventures over real-life events..."

"No."

Sonya's answer surprised not only the Professor but herself as well.

The rustic girl stared intently at the Professor, her fists clenched tightly, shaking her head stiffly: "Let's stick to the Professor's plan. I will take responsibility for the final Chief Battle, and I will stay until the end of the university-level Mixer Party."

"The Virtual Realm should yield to reality."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 254: How Pitiful I Must Be, Having My Heart Stolen by You

"Whew."

Sonya exhaled a breath as sharp as a sword, pausing her weary hands, waiting for the armor stand with a gaping hole to slowly recover. Other apprentices in the Training Hall curiously watched the Red-haired Swordswoman; it was their first time seeing her train in the afternoon—though the thought of the evening's Mixer Party soon filled them with admiration.

Training early because of the evening event, truly fitting for our Swordswoman!

"Sonya!" Adelle rushed in, calling out: "Lois and the others are waiting for you, aren't you coming?"

“Just a few more minutes.” Sonya leveled her wooden sword, assuming a thrusting stance. “Wait for me.”

Adelle, frantic, had no choice but to honestly stay by her side, squatting and rubbing her calves—she had run all the way from the dorms, and even that short distance had left her feeling exhausted.

She watched Sonya repeatedly practice her thrusts, bored. Today, Sonya had her striking red hair tied up in a bun to facilitate movement, exposing her proud, smooth neck. Drops of sweat traced her forehead, rolled over her nose, streamed down her neck, and disappeared into her dark training vest.

With every thrust Sonya made, the vest emitted a heavy swaying sound—her hands, legs, and torso all weighted down.

“It looks so tiring,” Adelle remarked, propping her chin with her hands. “Do you actually find training enjoyable, Sonya?”

“How could I.” Between breaths, Sonya let out a plume of white air and smiled. “Even Engulite wouldn’t find training fun. Engaging in such monotonous repetition goes against human nature. If it were pleasurable, the Training Hall would be packed every day.”

“Isn’t that so?” Adelle was surprised. “Everyone says you must love Swordsmanship Training; that’s why you persist and come to the Training Hall daily. The stories always mention how a Faction’s Genius often finds joy in practice, and those without Talent only harvest misery...”

“Perhaps there are such people,” Sonya lunged fiercely, her wooden sword piercing through the armor stand, leaving only a Sword Scar without any other cracks. “But I am not one of them.”

“Swordsmanship Training is just so boring for me!”

“If it weren’t for being forced, I’d never practice swordsmanship in my whole life!”

Curious, Adelle asked, “Who’s forcing you?”

She waited a while, but Sonya didn’t answer, just fiercely thrusting her wooden sword at the armor stand as if it had personally wronged her.

Adelle asked again, “Even though you don’t want to practice, you seem to really like swordsmanship.”

“I don’t like swordsmanship,” Sonya said. “I just appreciate the perks that come with it. Honor, fame, attention, and a future.”

“I love being in the spotlight, I crave attention, I want to be a Noble, I want to stay in Gales.”

“Even though I don’t like swordsmanship, as long as it fulfills my wishes, I’ll pretend to love it. By your standards, Adelle, I’m definitely not a Genius.”

“But if everyone expects me to be one, then I’ll act the part.”

“Whew.”

Sonya retracted her wooden sword and picked up a towel next to her to wipe off her sweat. Adelle, meanwhile, unscrewed the cap of a rustic girl’s water bottle, took a deep gulp herself, and then handed it to Sonya. “You’re lying, aren’t you?”

The rustic girl took a small sip of water, looking at the naive and rich local girl.

“Even though I neither love studying nor sports, I’m not stupid,” Adelle said, folding her arms. “Whether someone truly likes something or not, even I can tell.”

“Every night, you carry your Sword bag to train, to fight Felix, to challenge Senior Sister Leoni. I don’t see reluctance, only anticipation. You enjoy this life, constantly sharpening yourself, advancing, getting stronger.” She glanced at the weights Sonya wore: “If you really didn’t like it, you wouldn’t make it harder on yourself. It’s like me searching for plot analyses and fan fiction after watching a show; it’s a craving that comes from deep love.”

“And, I just realized this now, watching you train up close.”

Adelle spoke earnestly, “When you hold the sword, when you sweat, when you swing, you look incredibly beautiful, just slightly less than me.”

“Beauty is right, so Sonya, you must be a Genius of swordsmanship.”

Suddenly, Sonya felt she couldn’t quite follow Adelle’s line of thinking, “Just because I look beautiful with a sword, I should become a Swordcerer?”

“What else?” Adelle retorted, “Beauty is the only reason for existence. Are you going to let down the favor of the Stars?”

“Indeed.” Sonya couldn’t help but nod, “That makes sense. Is it a famous quotation?”

“From episode 17 of ‘How Pitiful I Must Be to Have My Heart Stolen by You.’”

“A Shadow Drama... I don’t watch dramas that Delarose isn’t in.”

“Then you’ve missed many classic masterpieces.” Adelle spoke as if she were an expert, “It’s precisely because I’ve seen so many joys and sorrows that I can see through the vanity of words and the deceit of looks.”

Do joys and sorrows in a Shadow Drama count?

“Like you, Sonya, you clearly love swordsmanship, but you always go on and on, using so many excuses to prove you only practice for the benefits, as if admitting you like swordsmanship would make you lose in some competition.”

Sonya was taken aback.

“And the same goes for your Sound Magic and performance classes.” Adelle seemed a bit thirsty from talking too much, smacking her lips and grabbing the water bottle from Sonya’s hand to drink, “You say you want to be a performer or Songstress in the future because it can make a lot of money. That sounds right, but there are so many lucrative Occupations, why specifically a Songstress or performer?”

“You always come up with many complex reasons, but actually, the motives for many things should be quite simple.”

Adelle reflected, “I’ve watched so many dramas, and the biggest takeaway is that many plans, though perfect, are often twisted by spontaneous motives. This world is just full of such unreasonable spontaneity.”

Sonya: “...Have you ever thought that maybe the screenwriter got lazy and just went with it?”

“That makes sense.” Adelle pointed to her vibrating Bracelet, “Are we done Resting? Let’s go, look, Lois is hurrying us again.”

Sonya and Adelle quickly returned to their dormitory, only to find a crowd of female students bustling inside, with various clothes and accessories strewn about the tables.

Upon seeing Sonya drenched in sweat, Lois couldn’t help but pinch her nose, exclaiming, “Go take a shower, now! Really, suddenly calling us to prepare your Battle Garment and then taking off to train by yourself... Do you think becoming a Swordflower will make everyone revolve around you? Not to mention, you’re not even a Swordflower yet!”

Sonya apologized, “I’m sorry.”

“Just go and shower,” Lois waved her off. “You reek. I’ll let you use my shampoo and body wash this time; otherwise, you might just knock me out with that smell.”

After Sonya headed into the bathroom, Lois tapped on her Bracelet, “Has Borris Senior Sister not arrived yet? Is there anyone who can replace her?”

“Wind Department students are few as it is, let alone those specializing in Mystic Fragrance,” another girl complained. “Most of us focus on meteorology. Borris only started studying Mystic Fragrance because she occasionally obtained the Fragrant Wind spirit from the Virtual Realm. Real Mystic Fragrance Sorcerers are mostly affiliated with those perfume companies. Unless you become their apprentice, you can’t access their centuries-old fragrance formulas.”

“Being short one Borris shouldn’t be an issue,” Adelle said. “Besides, during the Battle, no one is going to be focused on Sonya’s scent—”

“Don’t forget, spirit enhancements that amplify the senses are everywhere,” Lois interrupted. “A perfect performance can’t have any flaws... Oh!”

She opened her own cabinet, rummaging through to pull out a glass bottle inlaid with star diamonds.

Adelle was immediately astonished, “Isn’t that Tears of the Meteor? Lois, you’ve been hiding such treasures and not sharing with your best friends!”

“If I shared it, you’d use it all up sooner or later,” Lois said, looking at the perfume bottle with a conflicted expression. The other girls crowded around her, begging Lois to let them try the perfume or to book a session to use it.

Engulite looked puzzled, “Is that perfume really expensive?”

“It’s not about the cost; it’s a limited edition that money can’t buy,” explained Adelle. “It’s a special blend by a Mystic Fragrance Sorcerer, containing the power of Miracle. You see, the perfumes we usually wear are quite enchanting already, but they are just mass-produced by Mystic Fragrance Sorcerers and contain only a bit of Miracle’s power. They can’t compare to ‘Tears of the Meteor.’”

“So, this perfume is stronger?”

“No, no, no, the focus of Mystic Fragrance isn’t the ‘fragrance’ per se, but the ‘mystique’. It’s said that ladies who use this perfume can become the sole focus of attention with just a subtle body scent, even causing others to secrete pleasure hormones, making them feel a fondness for the wearer.” Adelle’s face was full of longing, “If I could wear this perfume at the school gala, I’d shine brighter than the Stars.”

“However, this miraculous perfume isn’t sold because it requires a lot of spirit to produce. It’s only given as a gift. Looks like Lois has some strong connections at home...”

Just then, Sonya came out of the shower, and Lois immediately said, “Alright, we have 95 minutes until six o’clock. In these 95 minutes, we must turn Sonya into a work of art!”

The rustic girl hadn’t even reacted before she was pulled over, arms raised, as the girls quickly stripped her of her clothes — not sparing even her underwear — and then dressed her in new undergarments, followed by a shirt, leggings, then riding pants, a jacket, gloves, boots, accessories, and a skirt...

Sonya was astonished, “Lois, I just asked you to help me find a suitable Battle Garment, isn’t this a bit much with so many people?”

“What do you think a real Battle Garment is? A nightgown that you can just slip into?” Lois said irritably. “And if you really wanted to wear a Battle Garment, you should have told me a few days in advance. You only told me this afternoon, giving me just a few hours. It’s crazier than rushing a homework assignment.”

“The dazzling Battle Garments you see on the Holographic Screen all require several people to put on, even needing spirit for tailoring—these Senior Sisters are all people I asked through my connections, so you better thank them properly later.”

“No need,” one Senior Sister said with a smile, “it’s our honor to serve a new Swordflower. If you really want to thank someone, Lois, thank us — and please, I have a very important date next week, may I borrow some ‘Tears of the Meteor’ perfume?”

“I’m meeting my fiancé in a few days!”

“I have an important dinner to attend!”

Sonya chuckled, “Thank you for your generous help, Senior Sisters. Lois, I didn’t mean to trouble you, but I only found out this morning that I’m in charge of the Chief Battle at the Mixer Party. The professor wouldn’t have told me if I hadn’t asked...”

“Professor Trozan really should have...”

Lois muttered as she pushed Sonya down onto a stool, “Are you confident you won’t hurt your face? Blood mixed with makeup looks awful... or maybe just trim the eyebrows?”

Sonya summoned a spirit, “I have a ‘Fixed Day’ spirit; please help me with the makeup that best suits the spotlight.”

Lois’s expression softened slightly, “You even got a ‘Fixed Day’ spirit; at least you’re somewhat prepared.” search the novelFire.net website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

She took out a headband and tied up the rustic girl's red hair, carefully examining her eyes, "Your eyes seem a bit dry... Adelle, bring me my eye wash."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 255: No Romance

Sonya let them fuss over her as she spoke softly, "Lois, you've really gone out of your way this time. I don't even know how to thank you."

"Hmm?" Lois, while meticulously drawing on Sonya's eyebrows, replied, "Aren't you aware that my family deals in Battle Garments, and that's why you asked for my help?"

"Ah? I had no idea."

"Well, you really did something, asking a roommate to find a Battle Garment—wait, did you actually just want me to help you rent one?"

Sonya didn't respond, just looked at Lois with her innocent yet somewhat dry eyes.

Lois sighed, "It seems I was just being presumptuous and busy for nothing..."

"No, you've given me a 120% surprise," Sonya said with a smile. "I truly appreciate your gesture."

"Don't get ahead of yourself," Lois retorted as she held Sonya's face to apply eye drops, "I was just using your reputation to promote our family's Battle Garments—if you manage to win impressively tonight, maybe Swordflower College will choose us as their supplier. So if you really want to thank me, you know what to do, right?"

"I understand." Sonya, uncomfortable with the eye drops, abruptly closed her eyes, letting the liquid slowly seep in, "Then just watch me closely—though you might be disappointed because everyone will be looking at me, not your family's Battle Garments."

"Hmph," Lois chuckled, "We'll see if you can still say that later."

The Battle Garments they mentioned are actually a special kind of attire in the Stars. Sorcerer battles can easily damage clothes, so during high-profile battles, it's essential to wear garments that are resistant to tearing—at least they shouldn't burst open easily,

as it would be quite embarrassing for the Sorcerer, especially since many are of Noble origin. Losing face for them is akin to social suicide.

In the past, there were numerous incidents with nicknames like 'Count Exposed' and 'Marquess Derrière' who took their own lives due to the spread of scandalous rumors.

Therefore, Battle Garments with better defensive capabilities emerged. Initially, these garments were merely the armor of Noble Sorcerers, but as alchemy and materials science advanced, the cumbersome steel armor gradually faded from history. It was replaced by tough fabrics with various resistances.

Although this fabric still couldn't withstand a Sorcerer's attacks, it at least wouldn't tear apart. If it got damaged, it would break exactly where it was hit, without causing the clothes to unravel.

However, as times evolved, Battle Garments became increasingly ornate and extravagant, even turning into a fashion statement for Nobles. Particularly in the Intercollegiate League, it was essentially a grand display of fashionable Battle Garments among students, with the addition of a 'battle capability' index—only the victor's garment earned the right to be admired, while the aesthetics of the losers' garments were defeated along with them.

Obviously, anything related to Sorcerers doesn't come cheap, not to mention that Battle Garments are positioned as high-end luxury items. At least Sonya, a rustic girl, couldn't afford them—or rather, buying a Battle Garment that she wouldn't wear regularly would be too extravagant.

However, Swordflower College has a facility called Flower Room that specializes in renting out Battle Garments. Any student qualified to participate in a battle can rent an appropriate Battle Garment at a low price there, and if it gets damaged, Flower Room will repair it free of charge.

In fact, Sonya had lied.

She knew that Lois's family was in the Battle Garment business, given their deep interactions before, Sonya definitely needed to know her enemies well—had Lois been someone Sonya couldn't afford to provoke, she would have backed down long ago.

But she really didn't expect that Lois would urgently summon a family Battle Garment for her to use. Her intention was only that Lois, having a good eye, could help her pick out a suitable Battle Garment. After all, Sonya needed to finish her Swordsmanship Training in the afternoon for the evening—she had tested before that finishing the training projects early meant not being forced to train at night—she didn't have much time to prepare her own outfit for the evening, so she had to rely on Lois.

"All set."

After a full half-hour, Lois finally finished Sonya's makeup and set it with a 'Fixed Day' spirit. The Senior Sisters also helped Sonya put on the Battle Garment, fastening every button and attaching each accessory.

Everyone stepped back in unison, and Lois pulled Sonya up, turning her body to face the only full-length mirror in the dormitory: "Tell me, which is more beautiful—you or my Battle Garment?"

Seeing her reflection in the mirror, Sonya instinctively held her breath.

She had thought she had already tapped into all her beauty potential and couldn't possibly look any prettier, but Lois showed her that she had underestimated herself—she had never worn such expensive clothes before, clothes that truly suited her, so there was still much room for improvement!

There are many things in this world that don't make sense, but the expensive always have their reasons.

The base of the Battle Garment was still the blue and white uniform of Swordflower College, but it had been tailored to better accentuate Sonya's slender waist; the shoulders were adorned with double-breasted buttons connected by cords, draping a white-edged red velvet coat over her body, bringing a richly layered visual impact; gloves, short boots, and the hem of the skirt all featured silver accessories, making the outfit not only highlight Sonya's youthful vivacity but also her dignified and elegant demeanor.

Sonya could only describe herself in one way—she felt her beauty now rivaled that of Delarose.

Lois let down Sonya's rustic red hair and combed it, then picked up the perfume "Tears of the Meteor" and, under the pained gaze of everyone, sprayed it on the outer side of Sonya's arms, her neck, and waist.

"All done," Lois said, looking at Sonya in the mirror as if she were admiring a freshly created piece of art, shaking her head wistfully: "It's such a waste, just for a Mixer Party... It would be more fitting for a championship final."

"There will be a chance," Sonya said. "Tonight is my first time competing against Sorcerer Students from other colleges, and it's the first step towards making my name known across the stars."

"Making your name known across the stars, you really can talk," Lois said, not hiding her irritation. "You should first make your name known across Gales."

"I think it's close," Engulite said. "As long as Sonya wins impressively tonight, she will immediately become the top seed in the league."

“I see,” Adelle understood. “No wonder Sonya asked Lois to find a Battle Garment, she wanted to use the outfit to boost her presence and make a lasting impression on the Audience...”

“No.”

Sonya gently shook her head, looking at herself in the mirror and adjusting the details of her attire. “I just like wearing beautiful clothes.”

“I actually like swordsmanship too, and I like many other things. I like singing, acting, and winning. Moreover, I like...”

She paused, “to let the townspeople of Gales watch as I, a country girl, live a life more splendid than legends, more dazzling than the stars, and happier than anyone else!”

The Red-haired Swordswoman then turned around, playfully placing a finger on her lips and winking at the stunned crowd. “Don’t tell anyone, okay?”

Indeed, Sonya Therave is such an irredeemable, vulgar, and vain girl.

She needs to feed on the admiration of aspirants, digest the envy of the incapable, and relish the attention of the masses to truly feel happy.

She desires lots of money, to live in the best houses, eat the finest food, wear the most expensive clothes, and even hold the most prestigious noble title. Only when she is better than everyone else can she feel that life has meaning.

Therefore, Sonya cannot afford to miss the opportunity of the Chief Battle at the Mixer Party. On the contrary, she must use this chance to take the most important step towards her vulgar and vain dreams.

Moreover, she knows that most Sorcerer activities take place at night, such as the Intercollegiate League, which is also held under the watch of the stars. As long as she continues down this path, her absence from the Exploration in Virtual Realm is inevitable.

Are the Observers in the virtual realm more important, or are the opportunities in the real world?

This isn’t a multiple-choice question, or at least Sonya will try to make it one. She indeed hates it when unknown changes happen in her team without her knowledge, but she despises her current weak and suspicious self even more!

The right choice, from beginning to end, has only ever been one.

That is to trust the Observers, and...

Trust herself.

To believe that even without the Observers, she can still bloom proudly!

Sonya Therave lives only for herself!

Neither her mother nor the Observers can dictate her life or influence her decisions!

Why did she work so hard to study and leave that small town? Why did she strive to earn scholarships? Why did she learn makeup and even spend money on minor cosmetic adjustments?

She is here to enjoy the best things in life, and no one can stop her!

“Although there’s still time, you should head over early to gather,” Lois said. “We aren’t qualified to participate in the social event, but there should be a live Curtain broadcast. You’re wearing my dress, so remember to win beautifully.”

“Mm.” Sonya waved to everyone. “See you all tomorrow then. I’m off to make Orbit College my first stepping stone in the battle.”

“Good luck!”

“I’ve already drafted your victory announcement. I’ll post it on the School Forum the moment you win!”

With everyone’s blessings, the Red-haired Swordswoman briskly walked out the door and then suddenly came back to Lois: “Oh, almost forgot to answer your question.”

“What?” Lois instinctively stepped back as Sonya’s face came close.

“Your pupils are focused on my face,” Sonya said proudly, tilting her chin up. “See, even you admit that I look better than the dress.”

“Of course, I’d look at your face if you suddenly lean in!”

“Mm, mm, you’re right,” Sonya nodded agreeably. “Hehe, that’s what I like about you, Lois. You’re quite adorable.”

“What did you say!” Lois bristled, feeling like the Sonya from a month ago had returned.

Amidst the laughter, Sonya took the Sword bag handed to her by Engulite, glancing unconsciously at the spot where the Observer first appeared.

“Hey, I’m taking the night off.”

“Good luck.”

Sonya paused, rubbing her eyes, but Lois quickly slapped her hand away. “Don’t smudge my makeup!”

“I used a Fixed Day spirit; it’s fine.”

After taking another careful look and confirming there was no one in the corner, Sonya huffed and strode out of the dormitory.

However, after only a few steps, she suddenly dashed back, causing everyone to look at the Red-haired Swordswoman in confusion. “What’s wrong? Did you forget something?”

“No...” Sonya’s gaze swept across every corner of the dormitory, a hint of confusion on her face. This time, she really left.

Listening to the fading footsteps of Sonya, the Observer lying on the bed yawned, “This is an unexpected incident. Do you think we need to intervene?”

“But it’s a logical progression,” the Swordswoman sitting up on another bed responded. “Let them handle it themselves. We’ll just take care of her leave arrangements. Besides, we can’t really intervene. Sonya has made up her mind, and unless Ashe shows up in the Stars Kingdom right now, nobody can sway her rational decision.”

“Not to mention, I’m actually pleased Sonya made this choice, as it shows that our attitudes towards love are still aligned.”

“What attitude?”

“Not to engage in romance.”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 256: Youve Received the Swords womans Leave Request

“I’m getting a bit tired of this. Let’s switch games.”

After facing his tenth consecutive defeat in “Sorcerer Duel 14” tonight, Ashe made a suggestion that Deya had anticipated.

Tonight, Ashe had forsaken his usual practice of the Wandering Sword Saint to play popular characters like the Alchemical Overlord and Earth Empress, even including unique characters like the Enemy Sorcerer and the Scythe of Sorrow. They all shared one common feature—a simple and effective looping suppression routine.

In simple terms, this is known as ‘Spear Technique’—a term from the “Sorcerer Duel” series, referring to moves as straightforward and unstoppable as a spear thrust. These moves significantly affect the aesthetics of gameplay, hence they are usually banned by players by default.

Don’t think that Ashe was the only one who had read the “Complete Guide to the Sorcerer Duel Series”; Deya had also made time for Lise to go through it, so naturally, they were both aware of the various Spear Techniques.

Unfortunately, Ashe only learned this superficial aspect and didn’t grasp the real keys to Sorcerer Duel—‘Counterplay’, ‘Timing’, ‘Focus’, and ‘Reset’. Or perhaps, these were too difficult, and he simply gave up.

The more Deya played, the more she realized that “Sorcerer Duel” contained vast knowledge about sorcerer combat, much of which could be directly integrated into real combat. For instance, ‘Focus’ involves observing to determine how much stun your attack will impose on an enemy, perfectly connecting subsequent attacks to form an unstoppable sequence, thereby inflicting significant damage.

The skills of game characters are just like different ingredients; once you master the keys, you can handle anything smoothly.

The same principle applies to Miracles. Randomly unleashing all Miracles leaves one with only the production value, typical of a novice. Someone slightly more proficient, like Ashe, knows how to use Miracles to deliver combo critical strikes, but that’s about it. The true masters, like Deya, not only know how to produce bursts of damage but also how to exploit every tiny flaw in their opponent, or even create flaws where none existed.

At first, Ashe did manage to corner Deya using Spear Technique, but once Deya figured out the characteristics of the technique, she easily dodged by ducking and making high jumps. When Ashe tried the same moves again, Deya would catch the flaws and break through directly.

So, when Ashe suggested switching games, Deya wasn’t surprised at all. Tonight’s feast of Spear Technique was merely Ashe’s final act of defiance.

He had fallen, choosing to abandon the dignity of a player for the power to defeat his opponent, yet still found himself easily crushed by Deya. In a fairy tale, this would be akin to the dark villain effortlessly squashed by the righteous protagonist.

Knowing he couldn't win against himself in this game, Ashe naturally wouldn't continue playing against Deya. On this point, Deya agreed—they would never play a game they couldn't win.

"Alright," Deya set down the controller. "So, what shall we play?"

"Let me check..."

Ashe pulled open the drawer beneath the Holographic Screen, which held various game cartridges neatly labeled: "To play with the kids later", "Cult masterpieces", "Always fresh", "Only when Annan is not around"...

After searching for a while, he suddenly pulled out a cartridge: "This is it!"

Deya thought to herself that if the game turned out to be dull, she could just let Lise play with him, as defeating Ashe would suffice to complete the Observer's task. But when the game image appeared on the Holographic Screen, she couldn't take her eyes off it, not even when Lise was knocking loudly on the mirror beside her.

Sorcerer Karting 5

"A spin-off from the Sorcerer Duel series. The game characters race in various Virtual Realm settings in karts, attacking other competitors with Miracles," Ashe said. "Let's play this!"

"Great!"

This game might just teach me how to attack others on the road!

Both thought simultaneously.

An hour and a half later, the disheveled pair exited the game room—Deya's hair was a mess and Ashe's clothes were torn. They glanced at each other, snorted coldly, and walked away in opposite directions—Ashe to his room, Deya to the kitchen for a snack.

"I'm not surprised at all, but did you really have a falling out with Lise?"

Igor had just stepped out of his room and couldn't help but chuckle at their current state.

"Don't make it sound like it was my fault," Ashe responded irritably. "That little brat can't handle losing and throws a tantrum. Am I supposed to just put up with it?"

"While I don't have parenting experience, from what I remember about life in the Nursery, a Guardian is supposed to indulge the kids a bit. Looking back, it was a wonderful time. I managed to control the entire Nursery with the 'Child Protection Act', and even the adults didn't dare to oppose me..."

Ashe was no longer surprised by Igor's sinister and outrageous past and retorted, "We were just playing a racing game. It's part of the game for everyone to hold each other back, but Lise throws a fit after being pulled from first place three times in a row... Ah, kids these days care too much about winning and losing."

"Ashe, I really suggest you wear a mask, because your face management is worse than the new resident Harvey brought in. You couldn't even hide your schadenfreude."

"Ah?" Ashe subconsciously touched his mouth. "Then can you pick up a stylish mask for me while you're out?"

"How did you know I was going..." Igor started to say but then caught himself. He looked down at his trench coat and boots, which clearly indicated he was going out—normally, they wore slippers around here.

"Have you talked to Harvey?" Ashe inquired.

Igor knew what he was asking and shook his head, "I asked, but Harvey didn't say what mission he was on with Annan last night. Just that..."

"Just what?"

"The cold stream of fire inside him that was fading seems like it might really start to burn again," Igor said, leaning against the wall. "If before Harvey was digging his own grave, now it seems he's making that grave bigger, but who it's for, I don't know."

"Does that mean Annan has completely activated Harvey?" Ashe said. "Could Annan be using the Beacon of Hope?"

"Harvey doesn't have Immortality Syndrome, the Beacon of Hope can't cure that," Igor shook his head. "But what he cares about really boils down to two things—one is his deceased lover, and the other... the affairs of the Necromancy Faction."

"Hmph, that's unlike me. I wish I was the only one in the world versed in the Mind Faction, while Harvey desires a world where everyone practices the Necromancy Faction."

"It's you who's not quite normal, Igor," Ashe said. "Don't you look forward to a friend who is your equal, someone who can keep up with your thoughts and spar intellectually with you?"

The Con Artist glanced at the Cult Leader.

"Cowards need friends," he said. "That's the kind of person Harvey is, can't live without leaning on something, clinging to life just to go all out... I've seen too many patients like him, many clients like him—strong, persistent, yet more fragile than glass. But among

the psychological cases I've encountered, Harvey is quite significant. Do you know why he's so fond of the Necromancy Faction? Because he's so lonely he needs the dead for company—"

"Hey," Ashe interrupted him, his expression half mocking, half serious. "It only makes sense to talk bad about someone to their face. Talking behind their back is like holding a shield while detonating a bomb—it's not thrilling at all."

"You still care about others, Ashe Heath?" Igor raised his head, his face full of scorn. "You should have realized when Harvey didn't come to us that he already had other plans. In this house, you have no friends; the alliance no longer exists."

Ashe looked at him and suddenly laughed.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I'm just thinking... when you want to use me, you say things to please me. So what exactly are you trying to do when you speak to me with such hostility?"

Ashe patted Igor on the shoulder. "I'm off to the Virtual Realm. I hope your work goes smoothly tonight."

"Hope you get rammed by a White Bull in the Virtual Realm," Igor responded gruffly.

Ashe returned to his room for a bath, and with some time to spare, decided to soak in the tub and boot up the game system to do some research.

Had it not been for acquiring the map last night, Ashe wouldn't even have known that his Virtual Realm map had a recording function. This made him think there might be other useful features in the game system he hadn't yet discovered—such as possibly automating Exploration in Virtual Realm...

However, as soon as Ashe opened the game, he noticed a red notification under "Operator Management". Clicking on it, he saw that the Portrait of the Swordswoman had an envelope icon.

"Notification: You have received a 'Swordswoman's Leave Request'."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 257: A Private Date (?) Between the Observer and the Witch

“Swordswoman’s Leave Request”

“I have an important match tonight, so I need to take a leave. I hope you won’t be unreasonable.”

“Effect Paid Leave (1/15) (Bond Level 1): 30% of the arcane energy you obtain during Exploration in Virtual Realm will be shared with the team member on leave.”

“Effect Bonus Sharing (1/10) (Bond Level 2): 30% of the Faction Realm you achieve during Exploration in Virtual Realm will be shared with the team member on leave.”

“Effect Common Prosperity (1/5) (Bond Level 3): There’s a chance that special mechanisms encountered during Exploration in Virtual Realm will be shared with the team member on leave.”

Can Operators even take leave?!

Daring to take leave now, what will they dare to do next? It’s unimaginable!

Taking leave and still sharing my commission?! Sharing my project experience?!

Is this really a game produced by my company? Shouldn’t it be more like annual leave being virtually nonexistent, sick leave counted as absence, and personal time off deducting from bonuses? And what does this (1/15) mean? Does it imply that the Swordswoman can take 15 days of paid leave?

15 days of paid leave a year, is this exploitation?!

...Wait, is this quota refreshed annually or monthly?

Ashe dared not continue this train of thought, or he would be dragged back into the mire of memories from his years of working life, falling into a state of inescapable depression, just like a reformed young man who can’t reminisce about his cringeworthy past days.

However, Ashe wasn’t surprised by the Swordswoman triggering her personal story arc. He had heard her mention something about an Intercollegiate League at school. Clearly, this was the path of glory set out for the Swordswoman, a chosen storyline, likely starting with her dominating the Intercollegiate League, followed by classic fantasy plot elements like trials in the Abyss, Noble intrigues, eventually rising to become a legendary Sorcerer.

Thinking about it, the Swordswoman's story arc is much more fantastical than Ashe's. Starting off at an academy, then competing in tournaments, and if she gets involved in some sort of national conspiracy, eventually becoming a member of a team that saves the world, that would indeed be a complete, traditional fantasy narrative. Unlike Ashe, whose story began with the drama of Prison, a rather uncommon type in crime films.

I really want to see the Swordswoman in her element...

Speaking of which, while the Swordswoman always talks about her daily trivialities, Ashe actually lacks a real sense of her life, knowing it only through the pale stories conveyed in words.

When the Death Maniac Swordswoman suddenly submitted a Leave Request to participate in a match, Ashe realized that she indeed had a life outside their virtual encounters—a reality that belonged solely to her, complete with family, friends, mentors, distant dreams, and small joys close at hand.

But Ashe was not a part of that world.

The relationship between the Apocalypse Observer and the Death Maniac Swordswoman was confined to the Virtual Realm, just as the Swordswoman was unable to touch his life, he could not witness her match.

Thinking about this, Ashe felt a twinge of loneliness. It was like those moments in the game where you perfectly coordinate with an online friend, only to hear they can't join because they have plans with their girlfriend tonight—it felt almost like a betrayal.

However, he quickly composed himself and silently cheered for the Swordswoman.

If she won, she would gain more resources and opportunities, which could further advance her personal storyline...

...But if she lost, would that mean she wouldn't proceed with her storyline and have more time to spend Exploring the Virtual Realm with him?

Pfft~

Ashe submerged himself in the bathtub, holding his breath for nearly a minute before surfacing to clear the silly thoughts from his mind. He brushed his teeth, changed into his pajamas, and prepared for tonight's Exploration in Virtual Realm.

Since the Swordswoman couldn't join, it would be just Ashe and the Witch tonight.

In the "Exploration in Virtual Realm" – "Team Composition" section, Ashe added himself and the Witch.

“White Queen, help me wash my hair!”

White Queen: “No, it’s been three days. You need to learn to bathe yourself. You can’t rely on us for things you don’t like!”

“Ow... the soap got in my eyes! It hurts!”

Lise reached to turn off the shower, but her foot slipped. Just as she was about to fall disastrously, she swiftly placed a hand on the ground, flipped herself over, and landed steadily on the wet wooden floor.

Her white hair turned half red, and with a notably colder expression, she continued washing her hair while seated on a small stool.

In the mirror, the White Queen spoke irritably, “Little Red, you’re just spoiling her! What child doesn’t know how to wash their own hair—and look, she even bought herself new shampoo.”

Black Butler responded, “Knowing how to wash hair isn’t that big of a deal. If she doesn’t know, she doesn’t know. We didn’t know how to wash ours in the past either.”

“You know that was in the past,” the White Queen retorted. “All this is to foster her independence. She can’t always run to us with every problem she faces. How is she any different from Deya if she does? She needs to handle small matters like this on her own.”

Deya interjected, “What does this have to do with me?”

Meanwhile, the Red Death Eater had efficiently finished washing her hair and returned control over the body to Lise. Aware that her sisters were upset, Lise obediently completed the remaining steps of her bath, dried herself thoroughly with a towel, dressed in her pajamas, and even brushed her teeth ahead of time, which finally eased the White Queen’s expression.

Back in her bedroom, as Lise sat at the vanity drying her hair, she noticed her reflection licking a finger and writing on the mirror:

“Tonight you open the Gate of Truth.”

Lise paused, “A message from the Observer?”

“Hmm?” Her sisters looked puzzled. “What happened?”

Lise shared the incident with them. The White Queen pondered, “I almost forgot that entering the Virtual Realm requires transmigration through the Gate of Truth. I thought

the Observer had other means... So, was it them who opened the Gate the last two nights?"

Black Butler asked, "Why do they want us to open it tonight? Could it be a trap?"

Deya suggested, "Maybe it's taking turns. Tonight us, tomorrow the Swordsman, the day after the Observer..."

After some discussion that led to no definite conclusion, Lise, having finished drying her hair, couldn't help but yawn. Then Deya took over, summoned the Mask spirit, captured the Gate of Truth, sank into consciousness, and connected to the Virtual Realm.

When Deya opened her eyes, she found herself sitting in the front seat of a sports car. The vehicle, which last night seemed ready to be junked and transformed into a Restroom, was now completely restored to its original state.

In the car restored to its pristine condition, Deya was actually the most concerned about whether it could be fully repaired. After all, the other two had never endured the hardships of trekking through the Virtual Realm on foot, unlike her, who had once trekked across it for over a month. She knew firsthand that driving across the Time Continent was akin to receiving royal treatment.

Comfortably stretching in the seat, she bent her head back in an angle that could cure neck pain. "Swordsman, I—"

Suddenly, Deya cut herself off, standing up on the seat and looking around. "Where's the Swordsman? Where did she go? Did she get lost in the Reverse Golden Rain?"

"She's got a match tonight and took the day off," Ashe replied. "It's just the two of us Exploring the Virtual Realm tonight."

"What kind of match?"

"I'm not sure, but it's probably a Sorcerer battle."

"Oh, I'd love to see that!"

"Me too."

After their brief exchange, Deya sat back down properly, gazing at her knees and fiddling with her fingers. Ashe opened the Virtual Realm Map, shaking his head. "Bad luck. We haven't landed in an area marked on the map, like Star Hall. We'll have to keep exploring unknown areas."

"Right!"

The sports car plunged into the Reverse Golden Rain, trampling over grass and crashing through trees in a wild sprint. Inside, it was quiet, with both occupants acting like a driver and passenger adhering to traffic laws—no chatting from the passenger to the driver, and the driver not engaging the passenger in conversation.

Somehow, they both felt a bit awkward.

Though they had previously spent time alone with the Observer and the Witch, those encounters were always straightforward—discuss business and leave without dragging things out. But now, during the downtime of their exploration, they had no serious topics to discuss and needed trivial banter to fill the silence.

However, Ashe and Deya rarely engaged in such trivial banter.

Previously, it was either Ashe chatting with Sonya or Deya playfully clinging to Sonya. As the most emotionally intelligent member of their trio, Sonya subtly acted as the team's core. She would encourage Deya to speak when chatting with Ashe, and when Deya clung to her, Sonya would pretend to be annoyed and start talking about Ashe, always ensuring everyone was included and no one felt left out.

This effortless charm in Sonya was not intentional; instead, it was the result of a year's practice in social skills that had become second nature to her. Every glance, every word was a natural Miracle, making her a true master of social interactions.

However, the moment Sonya was absent, the lack of emotional intelligence in the other two became glaringly obvious. Deya aside, Ashe's emotional intelligence was somewhat limited to interactions with men. With men, he could easily blend in and make friends quickly, but with women... he often didn't know what topics to bring up.

If Igor had been there, Ashe would have started with questions like, "Are you dating anyone? Planning to have kids in the future? If you could transform into a beautiful girl, would you prefer to be a voluptuous lady or a delicate and slender loli?" and so forth, engaging in trivial banter that could last until dawn.

Deya was in a similar situation. Having plenty of experience as a younger sister, she naturally sought Sonya's affection. She had previously dared to cozy up to Ashe only because Sonya was present, much like a child who behaves more boldly when under parental supervision.

Darn it, she thought. If only they hadn't revealed the truth about her sisters yesterday, then they could have brought in the White Queen today. But since the Observer now knew about her sisters, switching roles would seem impolite and only make things more awkward.

"There's a Sorcerer Projection up ahead," Ashe suddenly said.

“Oh, just run it over.”

“Okay.”

And so, a rather uneventful evening began.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 258: We Cannot Be Without the Swordswoman

Orbit College, Flash Track Auditorium.

Like the Starfall Auditorium at Swordflower College, the Flash Track Auditorium also had its ceiling open. The difference, however, was that while Starfall Auditorium used mirrors to reflect the starlight into the hall, the Flash Track Auditorium utilized a series of glass tracks. As the night sky emerged, the starlight would entangle along the glass tracks on the ceiling, circulating around the entire auditorium. This manipulation of starlight turned the interior as bright as day, adding an extra layer of solemnity.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

On stage, two young students were engaged in an intense battle. The slightly shorter male student, a Swordcerer from Swordflower College, faced off against a taller female student, a Spear Sorcerer from Orbit College.

The spear, once the undisputed sovereign of the age of cold weapons, had always flourished even before the invention of firearms. Swords, axes, and hammers all had to bow before it.

However, with the rise of firearms, the more agile bladed weapons gradually took over the position held by spears, and consequentially, the sword technique factions became the most powerful weapon factions in the Stars Kingdom.

Yet, no ancient sovereign would willingly fade into obscurity. Through generations of improvements and optimizations by Spear Sorcerers, the standard spear evolved into a three-segment mechanized staff spear. This new form was more flexible, more portable, and incorporated a broader range of lethal techniques. Today's modern Spear Sorcerers not only retained the ancient might of the spear but also skillfully utilized the

mechanized staff's cunning capabilities, holding their own even against Gun Technique factions.

In contrast, the axe and hammer technique factions had completely fallen from grace. Such was the brutal world of sorcerers; those unable to keep up with the times were mercilessly swept into the trash heap of the Virtual Realm, only to resurface when future sorcerers sifted through the past to revive and refine them.

Spear technique had always been Orbit College's ace faction. The team leader for this inter-college fellowship from Orbit College, known as the Spiral Cherry Saint, Belger, was a renowned Sanctuary Sorcerer for her mastery of spear techniques.

The very thought of the final exhibition match against Belger made Sonya's heart race—this was a rare opportunity to legitimately challenge a Sanctuary Sorcerer!

Clang!

The female student's spear suddenly transformed into a mechanized staff, slithering like a slick serpent to lock the male student's longsword. With a pull and a lift, she not only sent the longsword flying but also swiftly morphed it back into a spear, now aimed directly at the male student's throat!

"The match is decided!" the host announced loudly. "The winner is Cathy McIntosh from Orbit College! Now, let's hear from the Professor for some comments!"

Sonya watched the host, who controlled the entire event with such grace and poise, and couldn't help but feel a bit dazed—she was supposed to be in that position, initially hosting for her school and then for the league, earning the audience's affection before transitioning into a career as a Songstress or a performer, embarking on a path sustained by her popularity.

However, she found herself sitting in the guest section, as the Chief representative for the Friendly Match, under the watchful, important, and sometimes hostile eyes of other students from Orbit College.

Orbit College and Swordflower College were both top contenders in Gales, competing fiercely with one another. Moreover, following last year's narrow victory by Swordflower College in the Intercollegiate League, the students from Orbit College were eager to reclaim their lead this year, making this Friendly Match a critical prelude.

This time, Sonya might not have the chance to be the brightest supporting character, but she did have the opportunity to be the sole protagonist.

"Cathy's use of the 'Disengage' spirit was too rudimentary, failing to utilize the features of the Mechanized Staff and focusing too heavily on the Spear's thrusting capabilities..."

Spiral Cherry Saint Belger meticulously critiqued the female student's performance in battle, indicating that Cathy must be a student well-known to Belger.

This was not unusual, as theoretically, the team for the Friendly Match should be chosen fairly from among the best students, but often, the best students were the Professors' favorites, just like Sonya became the Chief due to Leoni's recommendation and because the team-leading Professor was Hidden Hand Sword Saint Trozan.

If the team-leading Professor had been Rhythm Sword Saint Nidhogg, Sonya might have made the team, but the Chief position would undoubtedly have gone to Leoni, who was Nidhogg's Apprentice.

The so-called Friendly Match was like a battle of pets for the Professors, who naturally preferred to use their familiar fighters.

After Belger finished her critique, the pressure shifted to Trozan. The renowned Hidden Hand Sword Saint seemed a bit impatient, scratching her unruly, tangled hair. Suddenly, she turned to the Chief from Swordflower College next to her, "Did you get that?"

"What?" Sonya was confused.

"If you understood, then you explain it," Trozan said assertively. "I don't feel like repeating the critique."

The rustic girl was baffled—how could you talk as if you've just explained the critique to me!?

Sonya rose to her feet, feeling the eyes of everyone on her, especially the eager vanguard from her own school, waiting for her to speak. Internally, she cursed Professor Trozan for putting her in such a position, but with no choice, she stood up.

Professor Trozan rarely taught swordplay theory, often saying that "pain is a better teacher than words." Her approach to teaching Sonya and Felix involved real Combat, not just sparring with controlled strength, but overwhelming them with the full force of a Sanctuary Sorcerer.

It was like pouring a swimming pool's worth of water into their wooden barrels, making them acutely aware of every shortcoming, every Loophole. This harsh method of teaching was tough, and Sonya and Felix had barely managed to adapt. Anyone else might have developed a psychological trauma, not just identifying weaknesses, but having their barrel burst altogether.

Previously, Sonya thought this was tailored education, but now that Professor Trozan had suddenly pushed the task of critiquing onto her, a thought struck her—could it be that Professor Trozan was actually incapable of theoretical instruction?

But she wasn't equipped to instruct either!

She was just a novice Swordcerer with less than a month of training!

Nevertheless, seeing Professor Trozan shift her gaze away guiltily, Sonya felt compelled to maintain her professor's dignity as much as possible. She recalled the recent Battle, attempting to offer suggestions from the perspective of swordplay factions. However, what came to mind were simple and direct commands:

"In the 8th round, aim for the chest with an upward strike."

"In the 13th round, retreat and thrust at the throat."

"In the 15th round, break through the abdomen with your sword's energy."

"In the 19th round..."

Amidst the puzzled looks of the audience, Sonya announced eight commands, "These were eight opportunities you had during the fight. Seizing even one of them could have easily led you to victory against your opponent."

"That's impossible!" Cathy, who had just won, immediately objected: "The entire Battle was under my control; he didn't stand a chance!"

The male student looked frustrated but couldn't refute, for weakness is the original sin, and losers are blamed even for breathing. Moreover, he had lost in the vanguard battle, and now, the School Forum at Swordflower College was likely filled with criticisms, accusing him of disgracing the college.

Belger was somewhat surprised. He turned to Professor Trozan: "Hidden Hand Sword Saint, was this your guidance?"

Professor Trozan glanced at him, then turned her eyes towards the somewhat panicked Sonya, nodding heavily: "Yes, that was indeed my intention. So you see why I couldn't be bothered to comment myself. There were so many opportunities for victory, yet my student missed every single one. It's not that your student was particularly strong, but rather that our students are too weak."

As a popular professor at Swordflower College, Professor Trozan had a knack for provoking others, and the students from Orbit College were nearly brought to tears. Seeing this, Belger stopped playing nice and snorted: "Play the Battle replay, let's appreciate Professor Trozan's expert guidance!"

Belger didn't doubt that Professor Trozan could provide such precise, surgical-like guidance, but she had been staring into space just moments ago, clearly distracted by Curtain. She hadn't been focusing on the match at all! Moreover, by deliberately letting

her student comment, it was obvious that these critiques didn't originate from Professor Trozan, but from the Chief of Swordflower!

Although the Spear Sorcerer faction became much more flexible after incorporating the Mechanized Staff, it remained a straightforward and stern Magical Faction. Belger, known as the 'Spiral Cherry Saint,' was a typical representative of this group.

What he despised the most were those who were not serious about their work, like Professor Trozan, a Genius who was distracted and neglected proper decorum. Even without any personal grudge, he found it irritating just to look at her. Now that Professor Trozan had given him an opening, Belger didn't mind putting her in an awkward position.

As for whether the Chief could provide accurate critiques... Belger had already investigated her. A month ago, she was just a first-year student in the Water Department, but likely had many years of Swordsmanship training earlier. This allowed her to summon a Sword spirit during the Battle and, by a stroke of luck in the Virtual Realm, she encountered a Whirlpool and gained the Silver Full-Wing.

However, these lucky ones often had one obvious issue: a shallow foundation. Her level of Swordsmanship was probably far below her level of arcane energy. Not to mention guiding others, she might not even know how to guide herself.

This was also one of the reasons Belger was displeased with Trozan: promoting a student who had become a Sorcerer less than a month ago to the position of Chief Battle could only be attributed to Trozan's personal motives.

Belger had little respect for school professors who manipulated power in such a way.

Not to mention that Trozan didn't do the work herself, but instead used her students as shields, which was truly a disgrace for a professor!

However, as the Holographic Screen in the auditorium played the freshly made Battle replay, the auditorium gradually quieted down, and even Belger showed a look of astonishment.

Aim for the chest with an upward strike, retreat and thrust at the throat... Every point directed by Sonya was a critical juncture that could have turned the Battle around! If the vanguard from Swordflower College had followed Sonya's guidance, they could have easily broken through Cathy's Spear blockade! [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

Cathy watched with a pale face, unable to believe that her victory had been such a fluke; but her opponent was also distressed, stomping their feet in frustration at having missed so many opportunities and ultimately losing in such an embarrassing manner.

After the replay ended, the auditorium remained silent until the host's voice, seemingly imbued with vitality, rang out: "Thank you very much to both professors for their meticulous guidance. Next, please welcome the students from the vanguard battle..."

As the second Friendly Match began, Trozan rubbed her temples, looking like a woman who had just woken up from a hangover: "It seems I really can't take it easy... I'll handle the commentary from here on out, Sonya. Your comments would make everyone unhappy."

Sonya instinctively wanted to thank the professor for her mercy— but she quickly realized that commentary was actually the professor's job. Why should she be thankful when Trozan was merely fulfilling her responsibilities?

She should be questioning why the professor had suddenly Passed the Buck!

Damn, this is the terrifying aspect of power. When Upper-tier Persons capriciously torment Down-tier Persons, not only can the latter not resist, but they might even feel grateful when the former decides to spare them... Such enviable power!

I too wish to become one of those Upper-tier Persons whose every word and action are as impactful as Thunder!

Sonya was still puzzled as to why Trozan said her comments could make people unhappy. Upon closer inspection, she noticed the Swordflower vanguard looking dejected, while the victorious opponents also had haggard expressions, clearly affected by her words.

It wasn't Sonya's intention to hurt them; her guidance wasn't derived from Faction Realm politics but from "Sword Command Techniques."

"Sword Command Techniques" didn't significantly enhance individual strength, but when used to direct others, it had an almost miraculous effect.

Sonya began to realize how lucky last night's victory had been—if Demilo had been commanding his troops in a proper battle, even if the Observer's car was robust and fast, it would have been reduced to scrap metal under the precise surgical command.

Unfortunately, the Observer dragged the battlefield into a Manure pit, allowing Demilo to use less than a tenth of his capabilities. Coupled with the cooperation of their three Sorcerers, they barely managed to defeat the unfortunate heroic soul.

As she pondered, the second front guard battle began, and Sonya glanced at it only to lose interest quickly—frankly, even the Observer's combat skills were more refined.

Though both vanguards likely possessed the arcane energy of Silver Half-Wings, their lack of real Combat experience was evident. They fought without enough ruthlessness

or ferocity, leading Sonya to think in the Observer's terms: "Fighting like this won't kill anyone."

Sonya even doubted they had killed many Slaying Fish-Dragons.

Disinterested in the match, Sonya looked for Leoni to chat but saw her engrossed in something.

The rustic girl moved her chair closer, and Leoni glanced up, "Want to join me?"

"What are you looking at?"

"Astrology." Leoni raised the book in her hand, its cover titled "1668 The Seventy-Two Constellations Life Book."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 259: Like a Child Without a Mother

Sonya laughed, "Senior Sister, you actually believe in this?"

The Orange-haired Dancer pursed her lips. "I believe it if it's something good; if it's bad, then I don't."

Astrology is quite popular in the Stars Kingdom, but it's just that—popular, without any real authority. After all, the seventy-two constellations are divided by birth dates. If one could truly discern Destiny this way, it might as well be done based on looks or family background, which would likely be far more accurate.

Astrology, rather than being a book of Prophecy, is better described as a book on psychology. People seek these readings not for their literal truth but for a sense of resonance and peace of mind. Many, after all, go through life without receiving a single blessing, praise, or word of comfort. When they see phrases like "Your hardships are over, happiness awaits tomorrow" in their horoscope, it might just save them, giving them the courage to face another day.

"I'm from the Pegasus constellation, what about you, Sonya?"

"I'm from the Moth Constellation."

"The Moth Constellation, May..." Leoni flipped to a page in the middle. "May is a complex and changeable month for the Moth. Your romantic relationships will face

challenges, as endless temptations test your lover; but your career will take off, with countless opportunities helping you to start anew...”

Leoni nodded as she read, “At least it’s half right. You’ll definitely come across many opportunities this month, Junior Sister. Hehe, good thing you’re not in a relationship, or your lover might just get stolen away... What’s with that expression, Junior Sister?”

“Nothing.” Sonya quickly managed her expression, putting on a professional smile. “Let me take a look at that book.”

The rustic girl closely examined the Moth Constellation’s astrology page, growing more astonished by the moment. Not only did many details match, but April’s reading was “This month will bring you a change”... Wasn’t this referring to the appearance of the Observer?

So accurate!

After carefully reading through the Moth Constellation section, Sonya pondered for a moment and decided to look up the Observer’s astrology...

...Ah? What constellation is the Observer again?

Had the Observer ever told me his birthday?

Thinking it over, the Observer didn’t know my birthday either.

We really don’t know much about each other... Realizing this, Sonya couldn’t help but sigh softly, gazing at her own Moth Constellation star chart.

As she looked through the pages, Sonya suddenly felt a sense of familiarity with the Moth Constellation.

This star arrangement, wasn’t it the same one from the Commander’s Handbook by Demilo?!

The astrology book listed each star with a name and number. Sonya flipped to the star name directory at the back and quickly found the names of the other two stars marked by Demilo—“Loda” and “Vos.”

Vlozrada?

Did Demilo know someone from the Vlozrada Family? Could it mean that Demilo was from the Stars Kingdom?

Stars Kingdom... Star Hall...

If it were just one coincidence, Sonya might not have jumped to conclusions, but multiple factors subtly pointed to the celestial dome above, making it hard for Sonya not to suspect that the Star Hall was an affiliate of the Stars Sovereign.

Wait, does that mean I killed an employee of the Stars Sovereign last night? I hope the Sovereign won't hold it against me.

I need to discuss this issue with the Observer and the Witch tomorrow night...

Just thinking about those two made Sonya feel a bit sour inside. Even though she had already made her decision, when things actually happened, it still upset her enough to want to destroy something.

What would they be doing in the Virtual Realm later?

Would they talk about their hobbies?

Would they discuss how to better coordinate in battle?

Would they speak ill of me?

The Observer surely wouldn't miss this chance to get closer to the Witch, and the Witch definitely wouldn't miss this opportunity to win over the Observer... Humph, despicable pair!

Virtual Realm, Time Continent.

When the last White Velocidragon was pierced through the snout by a Heart Sword, the battle at the timber Resource Point also came to an end. The two selected the materials they needed, and the rest were turned into reserve essence by Ashe.

Back in the vehicle, Ashe sat in the front while Deya consciously took a seat in the back, and they positioned themselves at the farthest diagonal corners, as if a sad, thick barrier had risen between them.

Silence.

Silence was the theme of tonight in the Virtual Realm.

Even though they worked seamlessly together in battle, with Witch Deya upfront handling the defense and output, and Observer Ashe in the back using the Heart Sword and Substitute for finishing moves, once they were out of their work roles, they still couldn't find the right topics to bridge their conversation.

Originally, Ashe had wanted to mimic the Swordsman by gently touching the Witch's cowlick as a sign of encouragement after the battle. However, tonight the Witch's usual cowlick wasn't sticking up! Had she washed her hair this evening?

Moreover, as soon as Ashe raised his hand, the Witch looked at him nervously, causing Ashe to awkwardly change his gesture to scratching his own head.

"There's a special place up ahead."

"Okay."

That was the extent of their conversation tonight, their atmosphere akin to that of a father returning from a work trip and his daughter who had been looked after by her grandparents—familiar yet distant.

However, after breaking through several Reverse Golden Rains, the two Sorcerers quickly set aside the tedious emotions weighing on their minds.

For the grandeur before them now occupied all their thoughts.

It was a three-story building that stood out from the other ruins and wastelands of the Time Continent with its meticulous ebony double doors and interlocking white brick walls. Colorful stained glass windows shimmered enchantingly under the golden rain, making it impossible to glimpse the interior from outside. Monstrous stone sculptures sat atop the roof, overlooking any visitors from a commanding height.

Although it wasn't a battle phase, Ashe and Deya felt even more tense than during actual combat.

It was as if they weren't just exploring the Time Continent, but visiting an ancient seer.

The two exchanged glances, and Ashe, gathering his courage, pushed open the grand doors. The creaking and dragging sound echoed like ripples, awakening remnants long sealed by time.

It was a library.

What met their eyes was a peculiar maze of bookshelves—tall shelves served as walls, and the hanging lamps warmed the knowledge within.

The styles of the bookshelves varied greatly: there were shelves carved from rock, standard wooden shelves, and even fully transparent glass shelves that emitted a faint, technologically advanced glow from pure white shelves; they held not only bound books but also parchment rolls, scrolls, stone tablets, and even small devices resembling USB drives.

Both ancient and advanced—this was their first impression of the library.

“Where is this place?”

“Where is this place?”

Ashe and Deya both instinctively asked each other, then paused momentarily in surprise.

Both simultaneously realized a critical issue—among those who had received formal Sorcerer education, only the Swordswoman was truly knowledgeable!

Without the Swordswoman, they didn’t even know what this new, special building was!

Swordswoman!

Please come back!

The team can’t function without the Swordswoman, just like a child can’t function without a mother!

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 260: The Legendary Library

Though the Swordswoman, known for her immense wisdom, was absent, the two Sorcerers quickly figured out how to use the library. Right before them, on the first bookshelf, there was a book emitting a brilliant green glow as if it were saying, “Look at me, look at me.”

Guide to the Legendary Library

“Congratulations to every Sorcerer who steps into this library, your luck is unparalleled, your story will be told by thousands, you are the light, you are the electricity, you are the myth of the future!”

“This library was built by the ‘Dramatic Poet’... Remember this name, for... is the narrator of Destiny, holding the scepter of contradictions, directing countless joys and sorrows, witnessing the world’s unions and separations.”

“Among the billions in the Virtual Realm, none can compare to... even by half!”

“But... is a generous Sorcerer, and thus built the Legendary Library especially for the successors, scattering their own glory to any fortunate one!”

“The following reading rules must be adhered to in this library—”

“① Aside from this guide, each person may only read one book. Rarity brings value.”

“② The path you walk must not be retraced. There are no do-overs in life.”

“③ The library has four floors, each higher level contains books of better quality than the one below. Always aim higher.”

“④ Books may deceive you. It’s better to be skeptical than to believe everything.”

“⑤ As a price for acquiring knowledge, every Sorcerer must leave behind a memory. You may choose which memory to leave. This is an equivalent exchange.”

“While reading any book, you have a chance to receive any reward, including but not limited to spirits mentioned in the books, Miracles, treasures, special abilities, etc. For instance, if the book mentions a deity, gaining a deity isn’t out of the question!”

“Although there are no specific requirements for the memories left behind, this library spans countless golden years. Even the most significant memories you leave might remain undiscovered by successors for thousands of years. So, try to leave your most thrilling memories; after all, if everyone were selfish, then you’re likely to only encounter dull memories.”

“Method to leave memories: Simply press any gap in the bookshelf.”

“Method to leave: Once you finish reading a book and have left a memory, you will automatically be transported to the entrance.”

Legendary Library!

Never heard of it before.

However, the guide has already detailed how to use this library. In simple terms, pick a book to read, and upon finishing, you might gain anything that appeared in the book. Then, leave behind a memory to complete your transaction with the Legendary Library.

“Why have the builder’s names turned into dots? Is their name actually ‘.....’?” Deya exclaimed in surprise.

“It could be that the builder thought it undignified to leave a name in the guide, so they erased their own name; or perhaps the builder didn’t erase their name, but someone

else did it for them—'Dramatic Poet's' real name has been completely obliterated, so even the guide's mentions have disappeared."

"The power to erase a name..." Deya murmured. "Did they offend some Divine Master?"

"Perhaps they offended them all." Ashe looked at the phrase "Among the billions in the Virtual Realm, none can compare to... even by half," feeling that although the Dramatic Poet might not deserve death, they were certainly seeking death.

Being so arrogant, if I were a Divine Master, I'd be annoyed with you just for not wearing a hat.

However, the fate of the builder clearly wasn't a concern for the two junior Sorcerers. They turned their gaze to the bookshelves and then looked at each other.

"Together?"

"Let's go!"

Entering the exploration phase, Ashe and Deya were both very excited. A structure in the Virtual Realm like this, previously unencountered yet safe, was as irresistible to Sorcerers as dung to flies.

Walking through the Maze, they quickly understood what the guide meant by "Books may deceive you"—each book on the shelves emitted a variety of 'impressive but inexplicable' auras. A scroll glowed with rune brilliance, a piece of parchment exuded an air of history, and even a suspicious data storage USB stick showed off electric Pattern Lines. Everything was tightly controlled in terms of aura.

As for the bound books, they were even more impressive—one looked like the notebook of a Death Monarch, another like the spellbook of a Time Lord, and there was even one with a cover featuring a beauty—daring to tempt me without even featuring silk stockings, how disrespectful!

However, since the guide mentioned that the quality of the books would improve with each ascending level, Ashe and Deya were not fooled by the first level's offerings. They quickly moved past the shelves of the first floor and reached the second level.

The variety of books on the second level was even greater: crystal balls, tapestries, cards, human skin books... Nearly everything capable of recording information was collected as books by the Legendary Library. Now, the journey for Ashe and Deya became even more challenging — not only had the allure of the books increased, but their very essence seemed to twist reality itself!

For instance, a book that appeared to be made from Bewitcher human skin (judged by the hair) emitted a pink, seductive fragrance. Even from a distance, the faint, enticing

scent filled their minds with strange thoughts, making it impossible for them to walk directly past it.

On another side, a crystal skull was emitting a glowing green light, and the smell of decay hit them full in the face, walking past it would feel almost like bathing in the River of Flowing Gold, prematurely experiencing what retirement feels like.

Since retreating was not an option in the library, they had to carefully find a safe path to the third level. However, as they were making their way, Deya noticed that Ashe had stopped.

“What’s wrong?”

“I found the book I want to read,” Ashe said. “You go on to the third floor.”

“But we’re only on the second floor!” Deya was puzzled. “The best books are on the fourth floor!”

“But I want to read this book.” Ashe reached out and pulled a book from a nearby shelf, his actions clearly showing his resolve. Deya wanted to persuade him further, but seeing his determination, she had no choice but to continue alone towards the staircase to the third floor.

Ashe leaned against the bookshelf, flipping through the book in his hands. He didn’t choose any of those that seemed to tell tales of thunderous devastation or the rise and fall of worlds, but rather a seemingly mundane book, for a very simple reason — he heard the sound of hammering coming from within, as familiar and comforting as the noise his father made every Saturday morning at seven-thirty.

Ashe has never considered himself a sentimental person, at least that’s what he believes.

It’s been almost a month since he transmigrated to this world, yet for him, his past life feels as distant as if it belonged to someone else—even though it indeed was his previous life.

He has always avoided dwelling on what his transmigration means for his family because that road leads only to a morass of despair. To even ponder it is to risk being suffocated by sadness, drowning in a sea of unreal misery.

However, upon hearing the clanging of steel, Ashe couldn’t help but feel a surge of warmth and longing. Just that alone made it worthwhile for him to read the book as a way to honor this nostalgia that blossomed in a foreign land.

More importantly, Ashe was indifferent about which book he chose to read. According to the guide, what a Sorcerer gains from reading is entirely random—good luck might bring

a rare spirit, while bad luck could yield something as trivial as the nail clippers mentioned in the text. And if the author was particularly uninspired, virtually anything could be in the offing.

As for his own luck, Ashe has always maintained a pessimistic attitude.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.