

SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

Chapter 581: No Talking About Last Night!

Is the 'Chrysalis' and 'partner exchange' meant to give Trial Takers a chance to understand each other?

Yolan really wanted to scoff at this conclusion, but seeing Ashe's serious expression, she found herself unable to laugh.

After a moment of silence, she sat down on a chair farther away from Ashe and said, "What do you want to talk about?"

"Can you take off your Mask?"

"No," Yolan shook her head. "My name, appearance, and any key information that could point to me will not be revealed. Not just to avoid Miracles like the Prophecy Sect, but also for..."

"For what?"

“When Silver Lantern is willing to tell you her real name, she will also tell you the answer.”

“Alright,” Ashe didn’t expect to extract key Intelligence through conversation tactics, after all, he wasn’t Igor. “What outcome will this trial lead to?”

Yolan smiled, “You already have your own judgment, why are you asking me?”

Ashe was taken aback, staring suspiciously at Yolan, who pretended to be shy and lowered her head, “Don’t stare at me like that, I’m still wearing a Mask...”

“No, I just think your tone sounds a lot like the Observer,” Ashe said. “Whenever I ask a question, he always shuts me up with that line.”

Yolan blinked, “But we’re not wrong, are we? If our answers differ from your judgment, would you change your mind? If not, then what’s the point of our answers?”

“Indeed, there’s no point,” Ashe nodded readily. “But I’m used to starting with simpler topics and gradually delving deeper, so you might inadvertently reveal some important information...”

“Mental sorcerer conversation tactics?”

“Maybe, after all, proximity to Lala Fatty makes one fat, I’ve unconsciously picked up a lot of his bad habits,” Ashe said. “But it could also be that I enjoy chatting with friends.”

“Without any meaning or purpose, just aimless chatting, isn’t that already a meaningful thing?”

Yolan suddenly laughed, “You sound like a sorcerer who has never experienced loneliness.”

Ashe immediately became nervous, feeling as if the Mirror Master had seen through him.

But Yolan didn’t continue the topic, instead she said straightforwardly, “This is the Divine Fire Trial left over from the Gray Fox Divine Era, a subsystem of the divine fire system. Although it can’t directly determine the Demi-God who will rule the next Divine Era, it still has a crucial influence.”

“So it really is related to the divine fire...” Ashe wasn’t particularly surprised, nodding as he spoke. “So, your ultimate goal is to become a Demi-God?”

“Not exactly the ultimate goal, but becoming a Demi-God is indeed a phase in our plan.”

“Can you tell me what it is you’re really pursuing?”

“Silver Lantern has already hinted at it before, hasn’t she?” Yolan said. “We believe this world is just a Dream of the Divine Sovereign, a delusion of all living beings. What we seek is to pierce through this Dream, allowing everyone to return to an eternal future.”

“That’s actually what I find most puzzling,” Ashe said. “Assuming you’re right, and the world is indeed a Dream, this view only explains why you act so recklessly, destroying lives as easily as breathing, creating disasters as effortlessly as eating a meal, since in a Dream, consequences don’t matter.”

“But I can’t understand why you want to pierce the Dream. What’s wrong with letting people live, grow old, and die in the Dream before returning to the Virtual Realm? If you’re in a hurry to escape the Dream, why not just return to eternity directly?”

Yolan slowly shook her head.

“Have you met any heroic soul commanders on the Time Continent?”

Ashe was taken aback, then nodded. “I’ve met a few.”

“Then you should understand that death is not the end, and eternity is also enslavement,” Yolan said. “Only by piercing the reality of the Dream can we completely sever the shackles between the Divine Sovereign and us, to see freedom in eternity.”

“So, what you’re pursuing isn’t power, fame, status, or achievements in reality, but eternal freedom after death?”

“You could say that.”

Ashe realized that there was indeed an irreconcilable conflict between him and Silver Lantern. He cared about reality, while Silver Lantern had completely lost hope in reality, yet she also understood that the Virtual Realm wasn’t a peaceful utopia, so she sought to create a better future by destroying reality.

To use a game analogy, Silver Lantern was like a player who knew a special cheat code, believing that by completely destroying the first level, she could obtain a better identity or profession in the second level.

More importantly, she had no attachment to the first level.

Upon reflection, many people from Senlo had somewhat nihilistic traits, after all, ‘burning faith’ is another way of saying ‘die early, transcend early.’

Silver Lantern grew up in the Tribulation Fire Temple, and when she opened her eyes, she saw a Doomsday wasteland, sects waging constant wars against each other, the night strangling the green and mutilating the weak, as if the world had always been this bad.

However, everyone knows that many years ago, this world was once a peaceful and prosperous Gray Fox Divine Era, and even now, people can reminisce about that beautiful past through the gray fox heritage... Compared to living in perpetual darkness, these Senlo people, who occasionally catch glimpses of past glories, naturally despise the wasteland era even more.

For the Senlo people, reality is indeed a trash game.

Unless Ashe can make Silver Lantern immerse herself in delusion again, this world is doomed to be destroyed by Silver Lantern!

Seeing Ashe deep in thought, Yolan smiled and said, "See? It's not so easy for people to understand each other, is it?"

"No, you've been a great help," Ashe replied. "At least you've made me realize that Silver Lantern isn't some indescribable monster, but an ordinary person with vulnerabilities."

"Feels like I might have just doomed Silver Lantern," Yolan said. "As compensation, could you answer a question for me?"

"My dream is to grow old with the one I love!" Ashe answered immediately.

Yolan blinked. "So my question is, who is the one you love?"

Ashe's eyes flickered, and he shrugged. "Even if I told you, you wouldn't know them."

"But you hesitated," Yolan stood up. "Let me guess, you hesitated because you're not sure who the one you love is..."

"Or is it because there's more than one person on your mind?"

Ashe grabbed a nearby cushion and threw it at her. Yolan nimbly dodged to the side, drifting into her bedroom like a breeze, leaving behind a bell-like laugh. "Goodnight, Ashe."

"Goodnight, Mirror Master."

Ashe returned to his bedroom, locked the door, and after washing up, realized he was already late for the scheduled login time. He quickly lay down on the bed and opened Aurora's Sorcerer Handbook, selecting "Virtual Realm Exploration!"

Soon, Ashe opened his eyes in the dream phantom, seeing his three teammates nearby.

"Observer-!"

Deya instantly rushed over and hugged him, her eyes brimming with tears. “I didn’t mean to hit you yesterday!”

“It’s fine, I almost hit you too, didn’t I?” Ashe said. “It was all the fault of ‘Love and Hate Reversal.’ Ultimately, the reason we suddenly encountered this curse affix is because of my Half Tactile Sense identity. This time, I’ve dragged you all into it.”

“If we keep running into curse affixes, I might have to consider temporarily leaving the team, letting you three form a team until I resolve the curse of Half Tactile Sense and then come back...”

“No!” Deya hugged him tightly, shaking her head firmly. “You’ve helped us so much, now it’s our turn to help you! Right, everyone?”

“Right,” Vesser quickly chimed in. “Without the captain’s help, my exploration progress would’ve been crawling. If the price to pay is just helping out during curse affixes, it’s totally worth it.”

Two of the three operators had already voiced their support. When they turned their heads, they noticed the Red-Haired Sword Princess had quietly walked away. When they caught up to her, they heard her calm voice. “Stop slacking off, let’s start looking for affixes.”

The Witch walked beside her and said, “But we were talking about last night...”

“No talking about last night!” Sonya karate-chopped Deya’s forehead.

But when she looked up and saw Ashe’s expression-trying not to laugh-her face turned as red as fire, steam practically rising from her head. Then her right hand instinctively reached for her sword hilt-

“I hate small talk the most,” Ashe declared solemnly. “Let’s focus on exploring affixes. Today, we’re making up for yesterday’s missed quota. Target: ten phantoms!”

Chapter 582: The Sword Princess Has Run Away

Let’s revisit the emotional journey of the students at Galaxia University on this day-

Morning.

“Shocking! The Sword Saint of Stretch Paw Club is rumored to have a romantic interest!”

“I advise that lucky person to step forward honestly. Breaking 208 bones will settle the matter.”

Noon.

“Perhaps the pressure of dating a sanctuary sorcerer led to the rejection?”

“Urgent! Does anyone have a photo of that person? I’ll get plastic surgery to look like them-I’ll even be a substitute!”

Afternoon.

“Breaking news! It’s neither Negus nor Dimy! The other party is likely just a two-wings sorcerer, or even a one-winged sorcerer, and probably not from the nobility!”

“Would the Sword Princess mind having one more boyfriend?”

Evening.

Sonya kicked open the dorm room door, pulled out her wooden sword from the sword bag, and raised it high, ready to strike Adelle. Adelle quickly hid behind Engulite, shouting, “Why do you think it’s me who spilled the beans? What gives you that idea?”

“Even if it wasn’t you, you definitely used a fake account to stir the pot!”

Adelle was momentarily speechless, clinging tightly to Engulite, holding onto this shield for dear life: “But it really wasn’t me! I’m usually quite tight-lipped, and I want to grow the Stretch Paw Club-I’m counting on you to become a performer on the level of Delarose... How could I leak news about your relationship that would dampen fan enthusiasm!?”

Sonya’s anger subsided slightly, and she glanced suspiciously at Lois, who remained silent, simply meeting her gaze calmly.

But the village girl soon looked away, pondering, “Since it’s not Adelle, then it wasn’t someone from our dorm who leaked it...”

“I’m not convinced! Why am I the only suspect?”

“I think I know who it was.”

Everyone turned to Engulite in surprise. Engulite said, “Do you all remember Aisha?”

Aisha Maltz, a top contender for the Meteor Trial, known for her ‘perfect counterattack’ in prophecy shield combat, which crushed Leoni’s rhythm swordsmanship.

Engulite continued, “Being a battle sorcerer is just Aisha’s side gig. Her main focus is ‘information analysis.’ She’s not only a member of the ‘Strategy Group’ at Truth College but also a formal editor for the Galaxia Stars Newspaper.”

The Strategy Group, officially known as the Truth College Attached Strategy Group.

From manipulating celestial phenomena to strategizing against the Abyss, from the evolution of social sciences to the study of Miracles, the Strategy Group could provide answers to almost any question. However, most people's understanding of the Strategy Group came from the TV drama Blade of Shifting Time, starring Delarose. The show followed a female protagonist who believed her father had been framed by the Strategy Group and joined the group to uncover the truth—a workplace drama with a strong female lead.

Although the Strategy Group was primarily composed of prophecy sorcerers, it also employed many academic sorcerers who handled tedious tasks like intelligence organization. Since its main clients were the Government Affairs Department and the Royal Family, it could be considered an unofficial government agency—low in status but with significant influence.

After hearing about the Gospel system from the Observer, Sonya immediately thought of the Strategy Group. In a way, the Strategy Group was like a super low-budget, human-influenced, and scaled-down version of the Gospel system.

“Aisha has always had a ‘Six-Phase Information Theory,’ which suggests that when you try to hide a piece of intelligence, six people around you will vaguely sense your secret,” Engulite explained. “So, prophecy sorcerers don’t need to directly pry open your mouth; they can deduce the truth by gathering information from those six people. These days, the Strategy Group has never stopped investigating Sonya.”

As for why the village girl had caught the attention of the Strategy Group, it was almost unnecessary to ask. Before Sonya revealed how she had climbed from zero to the Distant Sky Domain in just three months, the prophecy sorcerers of the Stars Kingdom inevitably saw her as a century-defining mystery that had to be solved.

Honestly, it took Sonya a while to feel a sense of unease. If it weren't the Stars Kingdom but the Blood Moon Kingdom or the Gospel Kingdom, she would undoubtedly have faced pressure from the Sanctuary or even legendary figures, possibly forcing her to flee into the Abyss.

However, in the Stars Kingdom, all upper-tier sorcerers were without exception nobility, bound by the blessings of the Stars. Adhering to the laws of the Stars was a principle etched into their very souls. Therefore, the most these sorcerers could do was write letters offering various incentives to Sonya—they never dared to threaten her. After all, the Stars were watching.

While overt action was impossible, covert probing was inevitable. Sonya had mentally prepared herself to become a permanent target of the Strategy Group for the rest of her life.

"This 'Six-Phase Information Theory' is impressive," Adelle nodded. "It's true—once someone develops feelings of admiration, even if they don't say it out loud, others can see it in their eyes."

"Exactly."

"Well said."

Seeing Sonya reach for her wooden sword again, Adelle quickly interjected, “So, is it because all four of us know the secret, and according to the Six-Phase Information Theory, there will be 24 people around us who vaguely sense this secret, and then the Strategy Group will analyze this intelligence?”

“I think the theory could extend to sixty phases in your case,” Lois remarked. “Everyone on your way to the dining hall can vaguely sense that you have a secret you’re dying to spill.”

But Sonya turned her curiosity to Engulite instead. “Engul, are you close with Aisha?”

“She was an elder sister I played with when I was little,” Engulite explained, pausing before adding, “She protected me back then.”

“Wait, weren’t you the leader of the kids when you were young?”

“That was after I turned seven or eight. When I was four or five, I was skinny and small, always wearing dresses, and often bullied by other kids in the Family. One summer, Aisha stayed with us for a while, and I spent every day playing with her...”

Though Engulite didn’t seem particularly interested in reminiscing, everyone was clearly intrigued by her connections. “You’ve been in Galaxia for a year now. Why hasn’t Aisha come to see you?”

“She’s tried many times, but I was too busy practicing my swordsmanship and turned down all her invitations. It wasn’t until after the College League, during the school break, that I finally met up with her.”

Adelle was shocked. “Wait, why? She’s a genius from Truth College!”

“But she’s not a Swordmaster,” Engulite replied, looking genuinely puzzled. “What would I do with her?”

While Engulite sounded like a legendary figure with a single-minded devotion to the sword, her roommates couldn’t help but see her more as a super recluse who refused all social interactions because she was too immersed in her training...

“Hold on,” Sonya frowned. “Even if the Strategy Group analyzed this intelligence, why would they spread it around?”

“Because you’re panicking,” Lois said.

“I’m not!”

“But if you panic, you might reveal more information,” Lois continued. “They might think that your ridiculously fast advancement is connected to someone you care about. So, finding that person could lead them closer to uncovering your secret.”

Sonya was flustered. “I already said it’s someone my friend likes!”

“Though the Strategy Group is probably looking in the wrong direction,” Lois ignored Sonya and spoke to the others. “Sorcerers can’t receive help from others in the Virtual Realm. Even if Sonya’s lover were a legendary sorcerer, could they really accompany her in exploring the Virtual Realm?”

Adelle analyzed, “Is it possible that just by holding hands with her lover, Sonya’s spellforce absorption rate increases...”

Engulite actually considered this seriously. “Is love really that effective? Is there a way to personify my sword? If it’s a sword, I might be able to fall for it.”

“You... you all...”

Seeing Sonya on the verge of losing her temper, Lois quickly changed the subject. “By the way, isn’t your friend unsure whether the confession counted as a success or failure because it was interrupted midway?”

The Stretch Paw Club President’s bravado immediately deflated. “Yeah.”

“The solution is actually quite simple,” Adelle chimed in. “You’ve seen Inverted World, right?”

“Of course, it’s Delarose’s most famous romance TV drama-” Sonya trailed off mid-sentence.

“Just like the famous line in it,” Lois said, “If you didn’t hear it the first time, I’ll say it countless more times.”

“Sword Princess?”

Sonya suddenly snapped awake, stepping back and pointing her sword at the source of the voice. “What do you want!”

“This spirit, do you need it?” Ashe pushed her blade aside with his hand, sounding annoyed. “If not, it’s going to Vesser.”

Sonya quickly glanced at it. It was the ‘Sword Blood’ spirit, a composite spirit of the Physical Sect and Swordsmanship. Its passive effect enhanced physical combat strength, making it easier for fist-claw attacks to produce a ‘sharpness’ effect, but it wasn’t particularly useful for a sanctuary sorcerer. She shook her head. “No.”

After distributing the loot, Ashe frowned at Sonya. “Sword Princess.”

Sonya took a step back like a startled kitten. “Huh?”

“You’ve been distracted too much in battle today,” he said seriously. “This is the Distant Sky Domain, not the Time Continent or the Sea of Knowledge. A single affix effect could kill you instantly. If you’re not in the right state, stay back with Vesser and search for affixes. It’s better than treating combat like a game.”

Sonya lowered her head, embarrassed. “I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

Her mind had been preoccupied with whether last night’s confession had worked and whether she should try a second time. She had been fighting purely on instinct, swinging her long sword without thought, which explained why she’d been scolded.

Ashe’s attitude made it clear that the half-finished confession from last night had failed. As for confessing again... while she’d found the scene in the TV drama romantic, when it came to her own situation, she felt nothing but embarrassment!

How could she possibly muster the courage to do it again!

This wasn’t a normal attack!

She'd need at least three days... no, ten days... maybe even a month to recover!

While Sonya was deep in thought, they had already arrived at the next dream phantom. Ashe looked at the ubiquitous light pillars in the city and said, "This is the reward stage, the 'virtual-real phantom.' Just like before, we'll split up to gather virtual-real materials. Taking one virtual-real material consumes 10% of our soul energy, and we still have plenty left today... If the materials are truly suitable, each of us can take up to two. Once we're done, we'll meet back at the city center."

"Got it!"

Sonya quickly chose a direction and slipped away. Once separated from the others, the village girl felt much more at ease, even finding the leisure to admire the architecture and pedestrians in this phantom.

This was an underground city, but its urban planning was advanced and aesthetically pleasing. Skyscrapers were everywhere, and in the distance, there seemed to be a massive elevator leading to the upper levels. The pedestrians looked lively, and the shops on both sides of the street were bustling with activity...

"This is Nabistin's underground city."

Sonya turned her head and saw Ashe standing beside her, seemingly having appeared out of nowhere. "Is this where you ended up in the Gospel?" she asked.

“Yeah,” Ashe replied, his eyes tinged with nostalgia. “Let me show you around. I should still remember the way.”

“Sure!” Sonya’s voice was cheerful, but she quickly realized something. “But this isn’t the direction you were supposed to go, is it?”

“Nope,” Ashe said lightly. “That’s why I came looking for you specifically.”

Sonya stopped and locked eyes with Ashe for a moment. Suddenly, she pointed behind him with a look of surprise and said, “Look over there!”

Ashe turned to look, only to see an ice cream shop.

But when he turned back, he found that the Sword Princess had already run away.

Chapter 583: Fingers Intertwined

Chapter 583: Fingers Intertwined

Why was I running?

Sonya herself didn't know, but she had already disappeared into the vast sea of people, with no intention of turning back.

After running for a while, feeling that she had completely shaken him off, Sonya finally stopped and found herself in an unfamiliar place.

It didn't matter. She was a sanctuary sorcerer, after all. Spotting a beam of light from the rooftop of a nearby tall building, she unfurled her golden and silver Twin Wings and flew over to see what kind of virtual-real material it was.

But as the village girl stood on the rooftop, overlooking the magnificent underground city, a strange thought suddenly crossed her mind-

This was the city where he had lived.

Where the person he loved resided.

Yes, although Ashe hadn't shared the full story of his long Gospel journey, Sonya could tell from his fragmented words that Gospel was someone he couldn't let go of. His tone revealed a determination to return to Gospel, a determination that even his hometown, Blood Moon, hadn't evoked.

Was it the Young Lady Annan, who once held domination over him?

Or someone else?

The neon lights reflected in her ruby eyes as Sonya crouched at the edge of the rooftop, hugging her legs and staring at the ant-like pedestrians on the streets below.

Perhaps this was the reason she had run away.

She wasn't ready for a relationship that might lead nowhere.

Last night, the courage she had mustered wasn't just because of Vesser's encouragement, but also because the feelings she had bottled up had reached a point where they had to be released. In other words, it was more of an emotional, physiological reaction rather than a rational, thought-out decision.

If they couldn't meet in reality, everything would just be an elusive delusion. And how easy was it to meet in reality? Teleportation between Kingdoms was nothing short of a Miracle, something she had never even heard of.

Relationships were like flames; they required enough intimate contact as fuel. Right now, Sonya could lightly participate in his life, so their relationship was maintained at the level of a 'small flame.' But if she wanted the flame to illuminate all the darkness, the fuel had to keep up.

If it burned without substance, all that would remain was emptiness.

The anxiety of not being able to grasp her lover's feelings, the unease of not knowing if he was safe, the fear of not being able to face crises together... Without adequate preparation, stepping into the next stage would only exhaust her with constant trials.

After the confession was interrupted, Sonya felt a sense of loss, but more than that, she felt relieved.

She was afraid of being rejected, but even more afraid of being accepted.

Because she knew herself too well-she was someone who always wanted more, someone insatiable. When the time came, would Sonya really be able to endure hearing only secondhand news about him, touching a soul without warmth, and longing for each other across different Kingdoms?

A wolf that has starved for too long doesn't feel satisfied with just a bite of food; it remains forever hungry.

This relationship, as it is now, is fine.

She couldn't ask for more, so the relationship wouldn't break, yet there was still room for it to grow. The team could continue to exist harmoniously, and they could explore the Virtual Realm as usual, until an opportunity arose in reality...

Although the line from TV dramas, “If you don’t hear me the first time, I’ll say it countless times,” sounded cool, she didn’t have the courage, the determination, or the... conditions for that.

With her thoughts settled, Sonya stood up and looked at the beam of light, only to find that the virtual-real material on the rooftop was actually a branch. She had no idea how it had blown up there.

She walked over and picked it up, her expression immediately turning strange-

“The Unrememberable Wood.”

Although it was just a short branch, it was indeed the virtual-real material she had been desperately searching for to exchange for a spirit in the Virtual Realm!

What a coincidence...

“Why did you run so far...”

Just then, Ashe's voice came from the edge of the rooftop. Sonya immediately unfurled her golden and silver Twin Wings, ready to escape, but the former quickly uttered a phrase that would make the sword Princess stop in her tracks-

"I'm living with a beautiful girl today!"

Sonya's figure froze, but she quickly retorted, "Aren't you supposed to be with your other half?"

"It's a special mechanism of the Trial," Ashe explained, cautiously approaching as if trying to coax a stray cat. "I didn't want to, but I have no choice but to live with a beautiful girl."

Sonya stared at Ashe in disbelief, covering her mouth with her hand. "This Trial is too cruel..."

"Yeah..."

"It actually turned your other half into a woman!" Sonya's face was full of curiosity. "Is she pretty? How's her figure?"

"What kind of logic is that?" Ashe facepalmed. "I switched with Silver Lantern! Now her other half, the Mirror Master, is living with me!"

The sword Princess's smile froze. "But aren't you enemies? Won't you fight if you live together?"

"No, because there's a Sanctuary-like barrier protecting us. Even if she tries to do something to me in reality, she can't harm me."

"Oh..."

By now, Ashe had walked up to Sonya and explained, "But we have two separate bedrooms, so we're not sleeping together, just living together."

Sonya blinked and turned her head away. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I think you need to know," Ashe replied. "Since you're not interested, let's move on to the next topic. Last night-"

"Don't talk about last night!" Sonya immediately swung a karate chop at him, trying to brush it off.

But this time was different.

Ashe caught her hand, aligning his palm with hers. As her face turned red to the tips of her ears, Ashe carefully slid his fingers into the gaps between hers, then closed her hand until their fingers were tightly intertwined.

Dazed, Sonya let Ashe lead her to the edge of the rooftop and sit down. She heard him say, “Fine, we won’t talk about last night. Since we have time now, it’s time for you to fulfill your promise.”

“What promise?”

“Tell me about how you won the Meteor Trial,” Ashe said with a smile. “I’ve been looking forward to it for a long time.”

Sonya tried to move her hand, wanting to break free, but Ashe held on tightly, as if afraid she might run away again. Even though souls didn’t have body heat, she felt her palm sweating.

After a moment of silence, she finally spoke. “A few days before the Meteor Trial, I almost triggered the ‘Shared Life.’”

“The blessing we got in the Amnesia Cabin?” Ashe recalled thoughtfully. “At that time, I might have been turning into the First Gospel.”

“Yeah,” Sonya nodded. “Back then, I knew you were in danger. I had already given up on the Meteor Trial, especially since Dimy is a sanctuary sorcerer. But that night, I suddenly didn’t want to give up. I went to Sister Trelozan to learn her Invisible Hand’s Secret Blade...”

As the sword Princess recounted her story, Ashe felt as if he had been by her side throughout her journey to victory. Suddenly, another figure appeared beside him.

It was the Witch.

Deya didn’t interrupt them. She simply sat quietly on Ashe’s right, listening intently to Sonya’s tale.

But after a while, Ashe noticed that his right hand had been grasped.

Fingers slid into the gaps, and their hands intertwined tightly.

Ashe looked at Deya in surprise, and she met his gaze calmly, her grip firm, just like his own.

In the distance, Vesser watched the three of them sitting on the edge of the rooftop. She felt a strong urge to summon a gust of wind and blow them off. But in the end, she did nothing and walked away without looking back.

“Witch,” Sonya suddenly leaned over and asked, “Can you see the Observer’s face clearly?”

Deya nodded firmly. “Yes.”

The sword Princess seemed to have received the answer she had been waiting for. She let out a sigh of relief and smiled faintly.

“Then I understand.”

Chapter 584: Its Not You I Believe In, But the Observer

Even after exiting the Virtual Realm, Ashe was still in a daze, unable to comprehend what had just happened.

What exactly had the Sword Princess figured out?

This state of confusion persisted until the Trial began. When a knight clad in silver armor, wielding a double-headed sword, charged at him, Ashe instinctively drew his sword to

block, guided by his body's reflexes. However, the sword's trajectory erupted in flames, forcing him to dodge in a panic.

"Be careful," the voice behind the fox Mask remained crisp and pleasant. "He's the leader of the Silverfire Knight Order, a seasoned two-wings sorcerer, and an expert in killing and burning. The towns and caravans he's raided often end up in flames. If you keep this half-asleep attitude, he'll offer you a permanent sleep package."

Sensing Cut!

The moment the knight swung his double-headed sword down, Ashe drew his blade and struck the weak point of the sword, pinning it to the ground.

Yolan didn't waste the opportunity Ashe had created. She lunged from above, her chain-laden hands ready to strike the knight's pituitary gland through his helmet-

Whoosh!

With a roar of flames, the double-headed sword swung again, creating a curtain of fire that nearly enveloped the knight. Both Ashe and Yolan were forced to retreat, dodging the impending fiery explosion.

"I don't remember many disciples of the Tribulation Fire," Ashe said.

"It's a Copy extracted from my memories," Yolan replied cheerfully. "Frank, the leader of the Silverfire Knight Order. You wouldn't know him."

Funny enough, Ashe actually did know him. He had vaguely come across Frank's story in the Sorcerer's Handbook, which detailed the rise of Silver Lantern. "The guy who competed with you for the Tribulation Fire Seed? The one who lost his qualification because of an intimate relationship with a member of his order?"

"Huh?" Yolan blinked. "You actually know about that... but you're wrong about one thing."

"Oh?" Ashe knew he must have missed something. After all, he hadn't read Frank's or Silver Lantern's Sorcerer's Handbook, but rather that of an outsider, so there were bound to be subjective assumptions-

"Frank was framed," came the cheerful laughter from behind the fox Mask. "By me and Nobeta."

As if hearing their conversation, the phantom Frank's fiery curtain exploded, and he charged at them, his body Entangled in boiling flames!

"But wasn't there evidence of Frank's misconduct-"

"Humans can never grasp the Truth," Yolan said lightly, deftly dodging the phantom Frank's slash. Her chain-laden hands struck the side of his helmet. "Instead, they choose to believe in one layer of the truth, one facet of reality, and create a delusion they can accept."

“When you need a certain conclusion, you’ll naturally find evidence to support it, even if that evidence only accounts for 1% of the truth. But in your narrative, it can become 100%.”

Seizing the opportunity, Ashe lunged forward, his blade piercing through the gap in the flames, precisely stabbing the phantom Frank’s neck guard.

However, steam and fire erupted from within Frank’s armor, his body transforming into boiling molten lava-Frank was actually a berserker knight who had mastered Swordsmanship, fire spells, and Physical combat!

Ashe noticed something amiss: “Wait, the one who provided the clues wasn’t you or other interested parties, but someone else from the Tribulation Fire Temple-“

“Because of suffering, because of bias, because of delusion.”

Yolan dodged the phantom Frank’s fiery heavy strike and said, “The Tribulation Fire Temple demands abstinence from its disciples, and we do faithfully abstain. With external oppression and internal discipline, all the disciples’ thoughts naturally become fuel for the Demi-God. That’s why the Tribulation Fire Temple can sustain five Demi-Gods.”

“But it’s too harsh, Ashe. Do you understand? Such a life is too harsh.” She continued, “The Demi-Gods are vessels for the disciples to escape reality and entrust their souls. But

over time, people grow weary. So, once another vessel appears, they eagerly dive into it, collectively creating a delusion that offers fleeting joy.”

“Everyone gazes at the stars but forgets they’re standing in the gutter.”

“About Frank’s rumors, 10% were true, and 90% were artistic embellishments born of others’ imaginations. Nobeta gathered these rumors and turned them into seemingly irrefutable evidence.”

“So, rather than saying Frank was framed by Nobeta...”

Yolan grabbed the phantom Frank’s wrist and struck his pressure point until he released the double-headed sword.

“...it’s more accurate to say he was betrayed by the entire Tribulation Fire Temple.” Yolan said, “He became the ‘delusion.’”

Even after discarding his sword, the phantom Frank’s momentum didn’t wane. His armor suddenly exploded, and his entire body transformed into a molten lava beast, his fists slamming down in an attempt to crush Yolan-

Clang.

With a sharp sword hum, a wave of air burst from the phantom Frank's throat, and his head flew off, the severed neck spurting blood that seemed to burn.

Facing an enemy he didn't know, Ashe naturally felt no psychological burden.

Thud! The phantom Frank collapsed, extinguishing into a pile of blackened charcoal, from which two glowing flames flew toward them.

However, Ashe didn't pay attention to the improvement in his physical abilities. Instead, he gazed thoughtfully at Yolan.

"He was clearly killed by you," Ashe said seriously. "Silver Lantern, who views reality as a delusion, wouldn't shirk such responsibility."

"I'm not Silver Lantern, I'm the Mirror Master. It's not a good habit to bring up another lady in front of a woman," Yolan feigned anger. "But you still don't truly understand our philosophy."

"Reality is a fleeting delusion-not just that reality is a delusion, but more importantly, people are also chasing delusions," she explained. "No one really cares about the Truth. Everyone just wants to drown in the delusions they've created. The knight order leader who broke his vows, the lofty ideal, the Demi-God... they're all the same."

“But hope without results is a toxic delusion,” Yolan’s voice was soft. “The firmer the will, the deeper the poison. In the end, the delusion becomes a shackle, and eternity naturally turns into a cage.”

If Silver Lantern’s tone exuded a pure, boiling, intense darkness, then the Mirror Master’s words carried a murky, stagnant, almost imperceptible gloom. Though expressed differently, they ultimately led to the same conclusion.

Yet Ashe sensed that while the Mirror Master acknowledged Silver Lantern’s philosophy, she didn’t care about Silver Lantern’s pursuits. Silver Lantern was like a child still gazing at the stars, Entangled in the blazing light of a star, while the Mirror Master had already lowered her gaze to the path ahead. The faint starlight in her eyes seemed to emanate from stars that had long since burned out.

Seeming to notice Ashe’s unease, Yolan let out a bell-like laugh. “Are you just now realizing I’m also a dangerous individual? Would it be better if I stood in front of you during the next fight?”

Ashe snapped out of his thoughts, realizing this issue had reached a point where it could no longer be ignored.

Without the protection of the Chrysalis, the Mirror Master could strike him down at any moment. So, in the Trial, how much trust and how much caution should he extend toward her?

Could he really trust his own judgment completely?

After all, his life no longer belonged solely to him. He couldn't afford to gamble it recklessly.

Nightfall-Igor and the others were surely trying to rescue him.

The Gospel-he had promised to return to see Lise.

The Virtual Realm-someone was waiting for him.

"Mirror Master," Ashe pondered for a long time before finally speaking, "you refuse to remove your Mask, our values are too different, we've spent too little time together, and there's a direct conflict of interest between us... Honestly, I can't place my trust in you."

Yolan sighed, though there was a hint of relief in her expression. "I understand."

"But."

Ashe extended his hand to her. "I trust the Observer's judgment."

Yolan blinked. “What does he have to do with this?”

“The combat ability you just displayed, while slightly higher than mine, still isn’t a match for the Observer,” Ashe explained. “Therefore, when you said last night that you didn’t fight him, it must be true. If a fight had happened, you wouldn’t have come out unscathed.”

“The fact that you didn’t fight can only mean one thing: the Observer doesn’t see you as an enemy.”

Yolan shook her head. “What if we made a private deal? For example, what if we Copies agreed to replace the originals? Or what if he’s secretly a pervert, and I just used a little charm to-“

“I don’t like that way of thinking,” Ashe said with a smile. “Is anyone who likes me scheming something? Is anyone who gets close to me plotting my harm? If I approached every person and every situation like that, it would be exhausting and tedious.”

“If the whole world seems like a web of Schemes, it just means I’m arrogantly pitting myself against everyone.”

“Maybe you’re right, maybe everyone is drowning in their own delusions,” he winked at Yolan, “but the Observer and I are complementary Twins. It’s impossible for both of us to be deluded at the same time!”

In truth, Yolan had already prepared backup plans. For instance, they could divide the battlefield-one in the air and one on the ground against ranged enemies, or one in front and one behind against close combat foes-so they wouldn't have to worry about betrayal from their teammate. After a few battles, they could gradually improve their coordination within a safe range...

But looking at Ashe, she suddenly felt like she'd been outmaneuvered.

When they returned, she was sure to get scolded by the Observer. After all, if they had fought properly in the Cicada Hall, Ashe wouldn't have discovered this loophole...

"What if both you and the Observer are wrong?" Yolan said. "Or what if I suddenly change my mind and just decide I don't like you?"

Ashe didn't respond, but his eyes sparkled with amusement, as if he saw through her bluster.

"Hmph."

Yolan took his hand and said something honest,

“Everyone who’s ever worked with me has regretted it.”

Chapter 585: The Bewitching Girl Opens Her Eyes

Nightfall, Twinborn Palace.

Around the entrance of the Abyss, several long tables were placed, piled high with books. Igor sat among them, buried in his reading. When his eyes grew tired, he rubbed the corners and used a Hydrotherapy spirit to massage his retinas before diving back into the books.

These books were all moved from the ‘laboratory.’ In truth, with the technical power of the Gray Fox Divine Era, truly important data would surely be stored in cloud storage. It wasn’t that Nightfall lacked cloud storage, but accessing it required identity verification. Not only Igor, but even the Twinborn Cult only had pet-level permissions.

Paper records still existed, but they were extremely disorganized and filled with unannotated jargon. Even though Igor could understand every word individually, when strung together, they became blasphemous utterances of a Dark God. To him, every sentence was as nonsensical as “taking the Meteorite staff and the rock ball, then defeating the earth dragon outside Gael’s tunnel.”

For this reason, the Twinborn Cult didn’t mind Igor flipping through these records-after all, they couldn’t understand them either.

However, Igor could have read these materials in the laboratory; there was no need to move them to the entrance of the Abyss. But...

Igor rubbed the bridge of his nose, glanced at the Abyss entrance, then at Raven, who was meditating beside it, before lowering his head again to sift through the materials, trying to extract useful information.

The palace doors opened, and the Dark Serpent Twins walked in, covered in bloodstains, their clothes speckled with blood. Harvey followed behind them.

Igor put down the book in his hand, raised an eyebrow at the necromancer, and smirked, “Congratulations. When will you invite us to your new home?”

Except for a brief one or two-hour rest in the Virtual Realm, Igor had been working continuously for dozens of hours without bathing or grooming. His golden hair was disheveled, his face pale, and his mental state was in shambles. Yet, precisely because of this, he exuded a sickly, fragile beauty, like a thorny rose on the verge of wilting, which even stunned the Dark Serpent Twins momentarily.

Harvey raised a finger and calmly said, “I went with them to exterminate the Nature Cult.”

“Wow, so diligent,” Igor leaned back in his chair, spreading his hands with a laugh. “But as an outsider, you really need to make a big contribution to establish yourself in a new organization. What did the Twinborn Cult offer you? The head of the Mortuary Services Section, your dream job, or permission to scavenge under the meat grinder?”

Harvey pulled out a coffin from his Spatial Card. Alice rose from the coffin and also raised a finger at the Con Artist.

He continued, “In the Nature Cult, we found some texts on the Misty White Demi-God. Also, I’d advise you not to make me raise a third finger.”

Harvey had one finger raised, and Alice had one raised as well. So, who would raise the third finger?

The Con Artist and the necromancer exchanged glances. After a moment, Igor rubbed his hair, exhausted, and slumped onto the table, asking, “Who is the Misty White Demi-God?”

The Dark Serpent Twins finally spoke up, “The Nature Cult follows the Misty White Demi-God of the Gray Fox Divine Era, and the Misty White Demi-God follows the Circle Cicada Demi-God.”

“The Circle Cicada lineage truly runs deep, enduring through countless deaths,” Igor looked up at Harvey, “You thought the Nature Cult might have clues, so you...?”

Harvey placed a few books in front of Igor, then sat down next to Raven with Alice.

Igor flipped through the blood-stained books, and after a brief scan, he raised his eyebrows, “Interesting.”

The Dark Serpent Twins asked, “Any useful information?”

Igor turned slightly, glanced at Harvey and Raven not far away, cleared his throat, and said, “The Misty White Demi-God believes that humans have limits.”

“But so does the soul. All tangible things are destined to meet their end. Death is the only certain fate for all things in the world.”

“Although the Misty White Demi-God improved the Physical Sect, researched evolutionary paths, and allowed the human body and soul to evolve to an incredibly powerful state, it could only achieve longevity, far from true Immortality.”

“Thus, the Misty White Demi-God branched off into another path: Since humans can never achieve Immortality on their own, why not fuse with something that is Immortal? The Nature Cult are followers of this path, seeking to merge with nature, becoming eternal and indestructible, enduring through the ages.”

“However, the current practices of the Nature Cult are vastly different from their ideals. Merging with nature doesn’t mean becoming fire, lightning, or the ocean, because even the sun will burn out, lightning is fleeting, and oceans can dry up. ‘All tangible things are destined to meet their end’-this principle applies to non-living entities as well.”

“So, true Immortality lies in becoming intangible.”

“Then, what in this world is formless, intangible, yet capable of eternal existence?”

Though Igor’s question was somewhat convoluted, the sorcerers in the palace almost instantly thought of the same answer-

“Spirit,” Igor said, “the ultimate goal of the Nature Cult is to incarnate as nature itself and then become an intelligent spirit. However, in the Senlo wasteland, they have an even better option-“

“Become an intelligent Demi-God.”

After a brief silence, the Dark Serpent Twins suddenly spoke, “We’ve obtained the remnants of a Nature Cult Demi-God. Should we use it to stir up the Abyss?”

Boom!

Vesser slammed her palms against the phantom’s chest, transmitting a soft but potent force throughout its body, causing the phantom to be stunned for two whole seconds, even rendering it unable to use its spellforce!

This was a technique she learned from a note in Raven Annihilation, named “Dysfunction.” By precisely inducing ‘combat qi’ regardless of where the attack lands, it could target the pituitary gland, heart, or spine, thus completely disabling a sorcerer’s ability to counterattack!

Of course, when Vesser initially acquired the note, she merely considered it the wild musings of a madman. Only later did she discover that the note's previous owner was named Tamashi of Raven Annihilation.

But it was only in the Trials that she could barely manage to execute this move. Without the unimaginable limits to which her physical condition and senses had been elevated through the Trials, she would never be able to produce what they called 'combat qi,' just as ordinary people can't fathom how a sorcerer summons spirits.

This also showed just how outrageous Tamashi, the remnant of Raven Annihilation, truly was.

However, the term 'combat qi' was too long, perhaps it should be simply called...

As Vesser pondered this, two cold gleams flashed behind the phantom, and then a head soared high into the air, landing on the ground.

Two balls of flame burst forth from the phantom's corpse, flying into the bodies of the two onlookers.

The Observer wiped the blood from his sword with his elbow, sheathed his blade, and stepped back ten paces from Vesser.

Ten paces, the perfect distance ensuring that if one suddenly made a move, the other could react in time.

Although Vesser and the Observer had been through three combat Trials together, surprisingly, they had not spoken a single word.

There was no need for communication; their actions alone formed a perfect understanding. They maintained a ten-step distance when advancing and divided the battle area into 'front and back,' 'up and down,' ensuring they always had sight of each other.

With mutual wariness as a premise, they also achieved nearly perfect cooperation in battle. One would entangle, the other would strike; when one faced the phantom with a fierce attack, the other would make a significant move. Neither could exploit the other's actions to their detriment, nor would they find themselves overwhelmed.

Even when Vesser collaborated with Yolan, they never achieved such an unspoken understanding.

In a fleeting moment, Vesser felt that the Observer was the 'perfect ally' she had been searching for. So cold, so calm, sharing the same way of thinking as her-even more perfect and detached than she was.

It couldn't get any better, Vesser thought. Even the 'real Ashe' would probably be just like this.

So, should she find a way to kill Ashe and keep the Observer?

As this thought crossed her mind, Vesser recalled the scene from last night: the Sword Princess, Ashe, and the Witch sitting on the edge of the rooftop, their fingers tightly interlocked.

They listened to each other's pasts and contemplated their futures.

Suddenly, Vesser remembered something-could Ashe and Yolan really cooperate to survive the Trial?

But she quickly found her answer: Yes.

For some reason, Vesser was absolutely certain that Ashe could not only cooperate with Yolan but do so with complete openness and sincerity-unlike the wary synergy she shared with the Observer.

If it were Ashe, he would definitely persuade Yolan and trust her.

If it were Ashe, he wouldn't maintain a ten-step safety distance but would walk side by side with Yolan.

If it were Ashe, he wouldn't worry about losing sight of Yolan or hold back-he would work with her to defeat the Trial's phantoms with the fastest and most brutal efficiency.

If it were Ashe...

If it were me...

Seeing Vesser clutch her head and stop in her tracks, the Observer also halted and took five steps back.

Her head pounding, Vesser turned and saw this. Her thoughts felt torn in two-one half telling her the Observer was right, that she should step back and create more distance for safety; the other half screaming that if Ashe were here, he would at least pretend to care about her, wouldn't he?

Vesser shook her head, clenched her teeth, and pressed on.

Too weak.

When did I... become so weak?

Soon, before the next Trial began, a strange tremor suddenly rippled through the underground.

The Trial Takers looked up at the ceiling, and Vesser immediately realized it must be Ashe's companions trying to rescue him-it couldn't be the Twinborn Cult, who had made no progress in all these years. It had to be the mental sorcerers.

At that moment, the Trial countdown ended.

A figure Vesser didn't recognize slowly emerged from the passageway. The moment she appeared, Vesser sensed the oppressive aura she exuded-a sanctuary sorcerer!

The Trial had finally introduced sanctuary-level combatants!

Tap.

Vesser turned to see the Observer gripping his sword hilt tightly, his pupils contracting, his usually cold expression rippling for the first time.

Was it the appearance of a sanctuary-level opponent that made even him lose his composure?

Meanwhile, Ashe heard a noise behind him and saw Yolan sitting on the ground, dazed.

“What’s wrong?”

Ashe called out twice before Yolan snapped out of it, looking pitiful as she said, “I didn’t think we’d really have to fight a sanctuary sorcerer... My legs are shaking. Ashe, it’s up to you this time!”

Ashe naturally didn’t believe any show of weakness from the Mirror Master, but facing a sanctuary sorcerer, he couldn’t help but feel uneasy. “Against a sanctuary sorcerer, we’ll have to slowly drain her spellforce before we can attack her originals... Be prepared for a tough fight.”

“But... I know her. Back when I knew her, she wasn’t even a sorcerer. The Divine Fire Trial is truly incredible-it can actually recreate...”

“A sanctuary-level Freya from memories.”

At the end of the passageway, the Bewitching Girl slowly opened her eyes.

Chapter 586: The Blank Concept

While the Copy was overpowering the Trial Taker, the original was also enduring the brutal trials of the virtual realm.

“How much longer are they going to chase us?!”

In the Time Continent, a sports car leaped over a cliff. Suddenly, its four wheels turned 90 degrees sideways and spread out, transforming into propellers that provided upward lift, allowing the car to glide smoothly across a distance of several tens of meters and land safely on the ground.

The Level 11 special effect of the “Variable Wheel” allowed the wheels to transform into propellers for aerial movement!

However, the cliff couldn’t help the sorcerers shake off their pursuers. Hundreds of armed troop types descended from the cliff, and the sky was filled with flying troops, almost blocking the reverse-flowing Rain Curtain. The unrelenting despair surged like a flood!

Even from a great distance, hundreds of curses could still reach the car through mediums like sound and sight. The Refracting Wall rippled faintly, and the exhaust pipe suddenly spewed out purple Toxic Mist!

The Level 16 “Refracting Wall” combined with the Level 16 “Toxic Mist Surge” created the special effect ‘Misfortune Transfer.’ Any Miracle effect that wasn’t direct damage could be

completely blocked by the Refracting Wall, and then the curse would be transformed into Toxic Mist and expelled through the exhaust pipe!

However, against an army of thousands, the effect of the Toxic Mist Surge was hardly more powerful than a fart...

“There’s a Golden Flow river 500 meters ahead!” Sivirin had been keeping her eyes on the navigation system displayed on the windshield, and she spoke up to alert the others. The navigation system was divided into a large map and a small map. The large map remained unchanged, but the small map continuously scanned the surrounding environment, providing real-time previews and route suggestions. So when the golden hue of the Golden Flow appeared on the dynamic navigation, it was extremely noticeable.

“It’s coming!” Annan had been observing the situation behind them. When she saw the four wings of the Dark Hollow’s Sixth-level Troop Type, the “Shadow Evil Comet Dragon,” spewing out black flames like an engine, she tightly gripped the Bewitcher’s shoulders, her nails almost digging into the snow-white skin. “Three seconds left, 3, 2, 1!”

“Got it!”

As soon as Freya spoke, the Shadow Evil Comet Dragon crashed down like a comet. In an instant, the ground within a hundred meters shook violently, and the shockwave it unleashed crushed all the rocks and trees. The earth was smashed into a deep crater, and the landscape was altered!

The Dark Hollow’s troop types didn’t arm virtual realm creatures into humanoid forms; instead, they evolved these creatures into even more terrifying forms. Their Sixth-level Troop Type, the “Comet,” combined with the Shadow Evil Drake, which had somehow stowed away into the Time Continent, formed a nearly strategic-level individual combat force-the Shadow Evil Comet Dragon!

Among Sixth-level Troop Types, the Comet reigns supreme!

The Shadow Evil Drake, even in its juvenile stage, possesses the combat prowess of a sanctuary sorcerer! By maturity, it dares to patrol the Ruby Mountain as a noble of the Virtual Realm! The Shadow Evil Comet Dragon's charge was so devastating that even a sanctuary sorcerer would have their sanctuary shattered, and the Sports car's max-level Refracting Wall could hardly withstand it!

Yet, amidst the billowing dust, a Sports car bounced and leaped over the cracked earth, continuing its pursuit of the white bull.

Not only were the sorcerers inside unharmed, but the Sports car's Refracting Wall was still functioning perfectly!

This was the Level 16 special effect of the "Variable Wheel": Phase Drift. When Freya initiated a drift, the Sports car's space would be completely severed from the outside world for 0.1 seconds, rendering it entirely immune to external influences. Though Phase Drift had its limitations, it was perfectly suited for dodging instantaneous impact damage like the Shadow Evil Comet Dragon's "Cute Star Skyward Crash."

At first, Freya struggled to time it right, but after three days and nights of relentless pursuit, she had become incredibly adept at using the drift technique, avoiding countless deadly crises.

Yes, three days and nights. Their adventure began at least three days ago, but due to length constraints, we'll only briefly summarize what they did: while resisting the Spider Tower alliance at the Blood Tomb, they infiltrated the Blood Tomb's main city and stole the forming "Blank Concept."

"Unformed Blank Concept: If you can master the complete Blank Concept, you'll get to experience what it's like to be a creator deity..."

At first, Freya didn't fully grasp the significance of this, but after excited explanations from Sivirin and Annan, she realized they had seized something even greater than a deity—a flawed yet extraordinary creation.

The Blank Concept was a new concept waiting to be defined. Once defined, it would become an axiom of the world.

"For example, you could define that if a Bewitcher blinks three times, anyone would fall hopelessly in love with them," Sivirin explained. "Then this concept would become a rule even the Divine Sovereign must abide by—though sorcerers could use Miracles to circumvent it."

Hearing how powerful the Blank Concept was, Freya naturally got excited along with the others. But they soon realized several critical issues.

First, this Blank Concept was unformed, and they had no idea how to complete it.

Second, the recent outbreak of the heroic soul legion wars across the Time Continent seemed to be a struggle over the Blank Concept. However, something as significant as the Blank Concept was clearly not a treasure that heroic soul commanders could covet. The true entities eyeing the Blank Concept were the Divine Sovereigns behind the heroic souls of the Six Nations!

In the end, although they managed to escape the main city of Blood Tomb, the Spider Tower alliance was waiting right outside the city gates!

Thus began a chase that swept across the entire Time Continent, involving at least thousands of two-wings sorcerers who were caught in the crossfire and crushed into dust by the passing heroic soul legion.

While Blood Tomb and Star Shrine were still barely holding onto their main cities, Spider Tower had already allied with Oasis, Dark Hollow, and Garden to form a four-nation coalition. The orders of Danzel, the supreme commander of Spider Tower, were enough to dictate the fate of the Time Continent!

National borders? The static domain? None of that mattered. They would not retreat until they reclaimed the Blank Concept!

Even if Freya and her companions fled into the static domain to commit suicide, the virtual realm creatures within the Spider Tower alliance could still operate there. They would devour the three of them long before everything turned into a monochrome painting.

Faced with the overwhelming force of thousands, Freya and her companions quickly lost their nerve and considered discarding the Blank Concept in exchange for a slim chance of survival. But just then, the navigation system suddenly popped up a piece of Intelligence:

“Driving Log: The supreme commander of Spider Tower, the ‘Empress,’ is known for her vindictiveness, narrow-mindedness, and vengeful nature. Do not entertain the illusion of compromise with her. Appeasement will only invite more thorough retaliation.”

Coincidentally, the latest update in the diary copies included a chapter on Ashe’s confrontation with the Empress commander. Naturally, Freya trusted this Intelligence and abandoned all illusions, striving to find a glimmer of hope in their desperate escape!

But the heroic soul legion was relentless this time. Even when the Bewitcher and her companions fled into Virtual Realm Buildings, dozens of heroic soul commanders fearlessly stormed inside to continue the pursuit. Fate Questioning, Miracle Wonderland, Windmill House... Though the Time Continent was vast, there was no place for them to hide.

Generally, fleeing from virtual realm creatures was like drinking poison to quench thirst, as sorcerers consumed soul energy while moving in the virtual realm. Once their energy was depleted, they would have no choice but to stop and return to reality.

During the time it took to establish a stable connection with their physical bodies, the heroic soul legion would tear them to shreds.

But just as the Spider Tower alliance was closing in, Freya decided to exhaust all the resources they had gathered over the past few days to upgrade the “Refracting Wall” to its

maximum level of 30. To their surprise, this unlocked a near-divine special effect-damage conversion!

“Refracting Wall-Level 30 Special Effect: 5% of the damage absorbed by the wall is converted into soul energy for the passengers.”

The relentless bombardment from the Spider Tower alliance inadvertently provided them with a continuous supply of soul energy, allowing them to persist in the virtual realm for three days and three nights without being forced offline due to energy depletion!

Even Freya could see that this special effect was utterly outrageous, practically granting sorcerers infinite stamina. However, considering the materials they had stored-plundered from several heroic soul legion transport teams-were nearly depleted just to reach Level 30, she found the effect somewhat justified.

As for the other sports car accessories, unless the Bewitcher could dismantle a faction’s main city for materials, the Time Continent simply didn’t have enough resources to upgrade them to Level 30...

Annan asked, “How far are we from Star Main City?”

Sivirin pulled up the large map. “At least six more hours of driving.”

They weren't running blindly. The reason Freya and the others had held on for three days and nights without giving up was because they were certain that Star Main City was their ultimate destination.

Star Main City hadn't fallen yet. If it could engage in a fight with the Spider Tower alliance, that would be the best possible outcome.

But even if Star Main City only delayed the enemy, they could charge into the city, pick a lucky commander at random, and kill them. That would allow them to collect the soul summoning spirits of all six factions!

Over the past few weeks, Freya and the others, relying on the sports car's exceptional performance, had seized opportunities to infiltrate the battlefields of the Six Nations. They had killed dozens of commanders, unlocking the soul summoning spirits of five factions and, naturally, the 'Five-tone Anchor,' which provided immunity to external influences.

However, the 'Five-tone Anchor' only offered 80% anchoring, leaving a 20% chance of being hit. In the face of the heroic soul legion's near-total Spellcasting bombardment, that 20% chance was enough to reduce them to ashes.

So, if they could unlock the 'Six-tone Anchor,' which provided 100% anchoring, they could ignore the heroic soul legion's threats and leisurely return to reality right under their noses!

And yet...

Sivirin looked up at the colossal white foot that pierced the heavens and the earth, a bitter smile on her face. “We’re about to reach the end of time.”

Of course, time has no end, but the white bull’s domain does have boundaries.

No one knew exactly how fast the white bull moved, but under normal circumstances, sorcerers couldn’t outrun it. It wasn’t that there weren’t talented sorcerers, but the white bull’s speed existed in a peculiar dynamic equilibrium. If there were many sorcerers moving quickly, the white bull would speed up, and vice versa.

It was as if the white bull wasn’t moving on its own but was a massive vehicle powered by everyone’s collective effort. When sorcerers exerted kinetic energy, they could help it accelerate.

The reason Freya and the others had caught up to the white bull’s front foot wasn’t just because of the sports car’s speed or their three days and nights of running. It was also because so many other sorcerers had died.

They even suspected that various Kingdoms in the real world might have issued announcements like “Time Continent Red Alert,” warning two-wings sorcerers to avoid entering the Virtual Realm these days to prevent being crushed by the wheels of history.

After all, a single drop of rain in the Time Continent could feel like a flood crashing down on a sorcerer’s head!

The reduction in the number of sorcerers also slowed the white bull's progress, so although the heroic soul legion hadn't caught up to them yet, they had already caught up to the white bull.

Moving forward would mean plunging straight into the static domain.

Staying at the edge would mean being overtaken by the heroic soul legion.

"Is there really no way out?"

Annan, surprisingly, relaxed and touched her dull amethyst earring. "I never thought I'd die in the Virtual Realm."

"I won't die," Sivirin said. "My soul flows in my blood, and I will be reborn from it... though the next time I wake up, it might be decades in the future."

"We won't die."

Freya's eyes were bright, her voice still full of energy. "This will never be our end."

But Annan and Sivirin were exhausted. Three days and nights of pursuit could be summarized in a single sentence, but it contained hundreds of life-and-death crises, dozens of attempts, and the repeated shattering of hope.

Facing an army of thousands, not everyone dares to fight alone.

Even those with unwavering determination couldn't help but entertain the thought, "I'm tired, let it all end." So when they saw the Bewitcher maintaining such high spirits, they couldn't help but wonder-where did her confidence come from?

"Because Ashe is an incredibly amazing person."

Freya turned to look at them. "He left the floating boat, he left this car, and he shared his life with me through his journal... He will definitely become a truly extraordinary person in the future."

"If he's so amazing, why is it me who has such a close connection with him?" She spoke with absolute certainty. "There's only one possibility-"

"I will become someone even more amazing than him in the future!"

“My life will not be wasted here.”

Both of them blinked, stunned by the Bewitcher’s inexplicably confident train of thought. Weren’t Bewitchers supposed to be clever and skilled in the Mental Sect? Why did this one seem so... off? Was it just her, or had Ashe somehow corrupted her?

Sivirin calmly said, “If he really cared about you, why didn’t he take you with him?”

That one sentence from the little bat stung both of them.

“Ouch...”

Seeing the Bewitcher so downcast, Sivirin felt a little guilty and tried to comfort her, “Come on, it’s not like every time you give your heart away it gets trampled on. You’re still so young-there will definitely be a next time, and the time after that, and plenty more chances!”

“Is this how you comfort people in Blood Moon?” Annan chimed in. “But even though we’ve benefited a lot from Ashe’s gift, there are so many ways to repay him, Freya. You don’t have to pour your entire heart into him, do you?”

“Hmph, Ashe is the best!” the Bewitcher retorted, glaring at the two of them. “When we meet him again, don’t you dare fall for him!”

Sivirin just shrugged it off, but Annan instinctively looked away, touching her new earring-she wasn't sure if Ashe had written about the little moments they'd shared in his diary...

Just then, Annan spotted a building with a garden in the distance and asked, "What's that?"

Sivirin checked the navigation map and paused, "It's marked as a question mark building-no label."

A question mark building was a Virtual Realm Building that the heroic soul legion had encountered before but couldn't identify from its exterior. They had tried hiding in Virtual Realm Buildings before. While knowledge creatures couldn't enter, the heroic soul commanders, who shared the same biological template as sorcerers, could still pursue them inside.

This building was the last one before the end of time. Beyond it, they would surpass the white bull and crash into the static domain. But hiding in a Virtual Realm Building and facing a few dozen heroic soul commanders was still easier than confronting the heroic soul legion's vast army.

Without hesitation, Freya drove the Sports car straight into the garden and quickly got out to enter the small house.

The heroic soul legion immediately swarmed around the garden, but when a commander tried to enter, they were blocked by an invisible barrier.

Soon, the ‘Empress’ Danzel arrived at the garden on her Eight-eyed Weaver Spider. She dismounted, dismissing her armed troop type, and her appearance became indistinguishable from an ordinary sorcerer. However, when she reached out to push open the garden gate, her fingers met an invisible air barrier, rippling as if touching water.

Danzel’s expression turned grim. She turned to the commanders from other factions and shook her head, saying:

“There’s no way. It’s the Dramatic Poet.”

Chapter 587: The Princesss Wedding

Chapter 587: The Princesss Wedding

This was a very crowded yet not cramped little creation room.

The room was divided into many areas: an oil painting section with easels, canvases, and paints; a writing area for desk work; a playing area with various musical instruments; a dance area with mirrors and foam mats; and even a semi-open kitchen... Most of the creative methods you could imagine could find a place here.

On the counter to the right of the entrance, there were three booklets. Freya and the others picked them up and found that they were the rules of the building:

“Congratulations to every Sorcerer who steps into this creation room. Your luck is unparalleled, your works will be celebrated by thousands, you are light, you are electricity, you are the myth of the future!”

“This hall was built by the ‘Dramatic Poet’... Please remember this name, for... is the narrator of fate, the wielder of the power of contradictions, the director of countless joys and sorrows, the witness of the world’s separations and reunions.”

“Millions of Sorcerers in the Virtual Realm are not even half as great as...!”

“But... is a generous Sorcerer, so they specially built the Drama Creation Room for future generations, spreading their glory to any lucky one!”

“This creation room must adhere to the following rules-“

“① No matter how many people enter the creation room, no matter how many works are created, they must all revolve around the same theme. The central idea is very important.”

“② Please ring the ‘Work Bell’ in the center of the room, and then work will begin until it ends. Creators cannot be lazy.”

“③ The theme and content of the creation do not need to be conceived by the Sorcerer. This creation room has a strategic cooperation with Fate Questioning and will automatically find the most unforgettable moment in the Sorcerer’s life to arrange the drama. Life is like a play.”

“④ One cannot leave without creating. Those who do not work must die.”

“After the creation is completed, the future Sorcerer can obtain special rewards from their own works!”

“Can’t you contain your creative mood? Then, please unleash your talents here and leave wonderful works for future generations!”

“It seems the commander of the heroic soul legion can’t come in,” Annan suddenly said.

The other two also nodded. They had all finished reading this verbose booklet, but still, no one had entered the little room, which was enough to show that they had successfully escaped the threat of the heroic soul legion.

“But we can’t leave without creating, so we can’t go back now,” said the Bewitcher, seemingly relaxed now that they were out of danger, her thoughts starting to wander. “I haven’t been back for three days... I wonder if I’ve wet the bed...”

Sivirin: “You’d better think about how much salary you’ll lose for skipping work for three days.”

“Sis Sivirin!” Freya widened her eyes, pitifully shaking the little bat’s shoulders.

Back then, in order to witness the secret toxin of the Golden Fish and to quickly ascend to the Time Continent, Sivirin finally confessed her identity to the Bewitcher, and then they flew over the Golden Fish hand in hand.

But this made their relationship quite awkward. Sivirin had disguised herself as a pet for so long, and Freya couldn’t help but think about how she had hugged and touched the little bat before. So, they tacitly agreed not to mention what happened in the Sea of Knowledge.

However, Freya soon got a new job-as a psychologist, assisting Sivirin, with the main task of focusing on the mental health of patients.

Of course, one could also say that the Bewitcher was being supported by the bat.

Annan, on the other hand, didn’t have many worries. Recently, in order to investigate the real influence of various Families in the Gospel Kingdom, she had already entrusted Little Banjeet to the care of the royal family and was traveling alone for work. Not showing up for a few days would only make others think that the Purple Moth was weaving some Scheme again.

Finally free from the crisis that had entangled them for three days and nights, everyone couldn’t help but relax, while a sense of urgency to return home welled up in their hearts.

Even if reality was a bit harsh, it was still their reality.

Even if they stayed in the Virtual Realm for a long time, they were ultimately just passersby.

After a short rest, they turned their attention to the ‘Work Bell’ in the center of the room. Since the theme and content of the creation could not be decided, discussion became meaningless. After exchanging glances, the Bewitcher went over and rang the Work Bell.

Soon, Freya sat at the desk, Sivirin walked to the easel, and Annan lifted the piano lid.

As the Purple Moth played a light and cheerful melody, the little bat mixed her favorite colors, and the Bewitcher saw herself writing lines of text:

“The princess lived in the Monster Village since she was a child. Because she was surrounded by monsters, she thought she was a monster too. Until she met the prince, and after kissing him, she transformed from a monster into a princess!”

Is this a fairy tale... Freya had never read fairy tales. She was born in a middle-tier human Orphanage where fairy tales were not popular, and extracurricular readings were all about success and biographies of famous people.

“The princess fled the Monster Village with the prince and came to a town ruled by spiders. Unfortunately, they were both caught by a small spider. They were tied up in a spiderweb, ready to be offered as a sacrificial offering to the big spider!”

“In the nest, the princess met her younger sister, the little Sorceress!”

Why is the princess’s sister a Sorceress...

“The princess took great care of the little Sorceress, and they soon became inseparable friends. The Sorceress told the princess that she had a way to deal with the giant spider, but she needed everyone’s help. The princess agreed and even convinced the prince to join them in aiding the Sorceress!”

“They succeeded, but after the giant spider died, an orb filled with dark energy flew toward the Sorceress. At that moment, the prince stepped in front of the orb, triggering its evil magic. Fortunately, the princess grabbed his hand just in time, and the two of them weren’t separated.”

“Though they managed to escape Spider Town, they were transported to an unfamiliar jungle. Luckily, a local flame tribe warmly welcomed them. To repay the tribe’s kindness, the prince helped them fend off invaders, saving many lives! In gratitude, the tribe’s sacred beast willingly became the prince’s companion.”

“But the flame tribe turned on them, repaying their kindness with persecution. The princess and prince fled through the jungle for a long time until the prince suddenly caught sight of the Sorceress. He parted ways with the princess, urging her to reunite with the Sorceress.”

“Though not much time had passed, the little Sorceress had grown into a beautiful Sorceress. The princess was overjoyed, but they were soon discovered by the evil flame tribe and hunted down.”

“Just then, the princess’s guardian spirit, the Death Raven, appeared!”

“The Death Raven drove back the flame tribe, protecting the princess and the Sorceress as they made their escape. But the Death Raven had its own mission-it was pursuing a Mirror Demon, a creature born from a mirror. However, the Raven couldn’t read and couldn’t gather the necessary Intelligence. The princess and the Sorceress volunteered to help the Raven track down the Mirror Demon.”

“They discovered that the prince was actually with the Mirror Demon. The prince told them that the Mirror Demon was too powerful to confront directly; they had to outwit it. So, they all went into hiding, waiting for the right opportunity.”

Annan’s music began to pick up tempo, like the tense prelude to a storm.

“But the Mirror Demon found the treasure hidden in the jungle and transformed into the Demon King! The Demon King found a way to leave the jungle through an underground passage, and his legion of monsters marched on Spider Town, Monster Village, and Star City. During this time, more and more monsters gathered around the prince, including the Sword Demon, whom the princess despised the most, and others... But for the sake of defeating the Demon King, the princess endured it.”

“However, the prince’s plan was exposed. The Sorceress nearly died, the Sword Demon disappeared, and almost everyone else was on the brink of death. Most importantly, the prince was captured.”

The piano’s melody grew sorrowful, like the dark currents of an underground river, flowing into the unknown depths.

“The princess was terrified, absolutely terrified. She couldn’t bear to lose the prince, so she sought out the Sword Demon to save him. But the Sword Demon shook his head and even tried to stop her.”

“Then she turned to the Sorceress for help, but the Sorceress also shook her head and attempted to dissuade her.”

“The Sorceress sought out many people, but no one was willing to offend the Demon King. Even the Death Raven flew away. Hmph, then she would go herself!”

“At that moment, news spread that the prince was to marry the Demon King.”

“The prince must have been forced into it, the princess thought. So on the day of the wedding, she stormed into the ceremony, determined to save the poor prince!”

Just then, Annan’s music shifted to a sorrowful tone tinged with anger, like a stormy night filled with thunder and weeping.

“The prince was overjoyed to see the princess coming to his rescue. He reached out his hand to her, and how could the princess refuse such an invitation? She spread her arms, ready to embrace him, to respond to this touching reunion-“

“And then, a long sword pierced through the princess’s back.”

“The princess’s blood splattered onto the prince’s ceremonial robes. White mist rose from her body, like snow-white ribbons, resembling the most beautiful wedding dress. She almost fell into the prince’s arms.”

Clang!

Annan’s music had ended, but Freya’s pen still had two more lines to write.

“At night, the Death Raven arrived at the prince’s bedroom. The prince said he had no choice.”

“The Death Raven replied that his killing intent was also beyond his control.”

Freya set down her pen. Though her soul wouldn’t feel the strain, she instinctively rubbed her wrist.

By then, Sivirin had also finished her painting. When Freya went to look, she immediately recognized which scene it depicted-

On the far right was a faint, barely discernible female figure.

In the center stood the prince, dressed in splendor and holding a long sword.

And on the left was the princess, lunging forward, her body enveloped in snow-white ribbons of mist, as if wearing a wedding dress.

It was the scene from the wedding in the fairy tale.

However, after they finished viewing Sivirin and Freya's works, everyone wore puzzled expressions.

"Whose story is this, really?"

In the Underground Hall.

The Observer sheathed his long sword and silently wiped away the bloodstains with his elbow.

Vesser noticed that this was the first time the Observer hadn't beheaded the Trial phantom but instead pierced its heart. While it might have been due to the nature of the sanctuary phantom, given the Observer's usual style, a beheading would have been safer-

Suddenly, Vesser felt a chill and quickly stepped back.

She turned to look at the Observer, only to find him standing in front of the phantom's corpse, silently staring at her.

'Not even letting me take a look...' Vesser thought to herself, deliberately maintaining a distance of ten steps from the Observer.

Slash!

Ashe's sword pierced through the Mirror Master's back!

Thus, the Trial phantom she was embracing was also pierced through the heart by his blade! The phantom collapsed with a crash, releasing two bursts of flame that flew toward them.

“Finally, it’s over.”

Ashe let out a long exhale. Even though his stamina had recovered, he was utterly exhausted.

Fighting a sanctuary-level opponent as a mortal was something he never wanted to experience again.

Every step was a brush with death, with no room for error. Moreover, until they had drained the opponent’s spellforce, their attacks couldn’t inflict any damage on the sanctuary sorcerer.

This wasn’t a battle-it was pure torture.

Seeing the Mirror Master still lying on the ground, he went over and helped her up. “What’s wrong? Haven’t your injuries healed?”

“They’ve healed, I’m just a bit tired,” came a weary voice from behind the fox mask.

“You fought too recklessly this time,” Ashe remarked. “To create a sure-kill opportunity, you actually risked your life to grapple with the sanctuary phantom. Even I wouldn’t dare do that... Are you atoning for something?”

“Atoning?” The Mirror Master sharply turned her head.

“Yeah, atoning for Silver Lantern,” Ashe said. “As her other half, do you feel remorse for what she’s done?”

The Mirror Master fell silent for a moment, then stepped over the phantom’s corpse and said:

“Maybe so.”

Chapter 588: Protecting My Brother Is My Duty as an Elder Brother

Seeing the light gate at the end of the passage, Ashe didn’t feel relieved-instead, he grew even more tense.

The first day had been a chaotic melee at Cicada Lurk Hall, and the second day brought a scattered battle at Cicada Hall. Who knew what kind of tricks Chrysalis Hall would throw at them today?

Perhaps the hall would turn into a narrow passageway, forcing them to squeeze past each other shoulder to shoulder. Or maybe the hall would plunge into complete darkness, with a few Trial phantoms thrown in, forcing them to fight blindly. Or worse, the hall could become a confinement room where they couldn't leave without... mating.

But nothing happened.

When Ashe and Yolan entered the hall, they saw Observer and Vesser already waiting inside. Then, a light gate appeared on each side of the hall. The Trial didn't force them to stay here-anyone who was in a hurry to use the restroom could leave early.

Of course, there was still danger. From this moment on, Ashe and Yolan, Observer and Vesser were no longer teammates but had returned to their roles as competitors and enemies. And with them standing so close, the teammates who had once trusted each other with their backs could turn into assassins in the blink of an eye.

Yet, not only did Ashe and Yolan refrain from attacking, but even Observer and Vesser seemed to have lost the will to fight. They exchanged a silent glance, as if they could see each other's exhaustion.

Without any unnecessary words, Observer stepped forward toward Ashe, while Yolan left Ashe's side and walked toward Vesser.

The mismatched team pairings were finally returning to normal.

Just as Observer and Yolan passed each other, Yolan instinctively glanced at the man beside her. However, he kept his gaze straight ahead, his right hand resting on the hilt of

his sword the entire time, not even sparing a second to glance at her fox Mask.

Then, Observer saw the corners of Ashe's lips curve upward, revealing a sincere smile as he spread his arms wide. This scene once again reminded Observer of his nightmares, causing him to hesitate for half a second before Ashe embraced him.

"Welcome back, brother!"

Observer's grip on the hilt of his sword tightened slightly.

"I thought you'd either been killed by Silver Lantern or had taken the chance to stab her in the back," Ashe said. "I'm glad you're both okay."

For a moment, Observer didn't follow his train of thought and calmly asked, "Why is it a good thing that Silver Lantern is okay too?"

"Because Silver Lantern must be killed by me," Ashe said seriously. "It has to be me."

When did he develop such a boring and foolish sense of responsibility and mission... Just as Observer was reconstructing Ashe's personality model in his mind, he heard Ashe continue, "You've only been alive for a few days. Trial phantoms are one thing, but real lives... they must be taken by me."

“How could I let you carry the burden of life’s debt for me?” Ashe said. “Blood Moon, Gospel, Senlo... so many people have died, directly or indirectly, because of me. I don’t feel guilty about it, but still, my hands are no longer clean. After I die, I might have to wander hell with Igor and Harvey for ten thousand years. Ten thousand years... can you imagine?”

“But you’re pure and untainted,” Ashe patted Observer’s shoulder. “Though you probably don’t care about such trivial things as moral purity...”

“But I do care.”

Ashe gave himself a thumbs-up, half-joking and half-serious. “As an older brother, of course, I have to protect my younger brother as much as possible.”

Hearing these words, even the usually unshakable Observer couldn’t help but feel a ripple in his heart. There was a mix of mockery, scorn, pity, and even disgust, but... the heaviness that had been lingering in his mind moments ago quietly dissipated.

On the other side, Yolan returned to Vesser’s side, but Vesser seemed not to notice her. Her eyes, hidden behind the fox Mask, were fixed intently on Ashe’s figure.

Seeing this, Yolan felt an inexplicable impulse and reached out to gently pat Vesser’s head.

Vesser instantly took two steps back, her gaze sharp and wary.

Yolan spread her hands and smiled. “What, not welcoming me back? Or do you want to switch teammates again?”

Vesser, as if unwilling to answer or tacitly agreeing, turned and walked toward the closing gate. Just then, Ashe called out loudly, “Silver Lantern!”

“The next Cicada Transformation Hall will be the end of this chapter of our story,” he said.

The Chrysalis Hall had two passages, but the next Cicada Transformation Hall would obviously have only one. Even if there were no mechanisms in the hall, they would have to fight to the death. Only the victor could continue the Trial, while the loser would remain underground-forever.

Vesser turned to look at him, and from behind the fox Mask, her voice carried a hint of vulnerability. “Is that so?”

“I spoke with the Mirror Master for a long time last night,” Ashe said. “I know your ideals, and I understand your situation. Silver Lantern, you truly are an extraordinary person. Your willpower, your determination, your talent, your luck, and even your almost unrealistic dreams-no one I’ve ever met can compare to you.”

Vesser glanced at Yolan, then turned back to Ashe. She instinctively took a step forward, her light tone tinged with surprise and excitement. “Is that so?”

“So,” Ashe tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword, his voice resolute, “I must stop you here. I can’t let you succeed in the Divine Fire Trial and return to the surface. Even if we set aside our past entanglements, the competition at this moment, and even the disasters you’ve caused, I can’t stand by and watch you succeed!”

“This isn’t about good or evil. I don’t need righteousness to justify my actions. My resolve comes solely because you stand on the opposite side of me,” he declared. “The next time we meet, I will completely shatter your dreams!”

Vesser exhaled deeply, feeling as though her body had become lighter, almost as if she were about to float away. She opened her eyes, her voice calm once more. “Is that so?”

With that, she didn’t spare Ashe another glance. She walked with Yolan into the light gate and disappeared from the hall.

Ashe and Observer followed suit. This time, there was no chaotic mechanism swapping teammates, and they arrived normally at the rest area. However, since the teams hadn’t changed, the rest area reverted to its one-room setup, no longer offering separate bedrooms.

Observer naturally had no need for specific living conditions, but when Ashe slung an arm over his shoulder, he strongly realized that separate bedrooms were indeed a great invention—at least they could physically prevent all forms of conversation.

“Observer, I have a friend...”

Seeing Observer’s expression gradually turn cold and disdainful, Ashe quickly corrected himself, “Alright, fine, since there’s no one else here, it’s me. Last night, when I entered the Virtual Realm, although the Sword Princess seemed to act like nothing had happened, I felt that if I didn’t respond to her feelings, I’d be a real jerk...”

Observer raised an eyebrow, continuing to listen to Ashe’s recount of last night’s stormy events.

“...After the Witch took my hand, I didn’t understand what they were saying, and they didn’t make any further statements,” Ashe said, his arms crossed, his expression deeply conflicted. “I mean, is there any possibility, any chance at all, that the Witch might, perhaps, even a tiny bit, like me too?”

Impossible. Absolutely impossible.

Though Observer wanted to say this outright, he realized his attitude wasn’t appropriate. This wasn’t the time to tease Ashe and fuel his desire to talk.

But watching Ashe so troubled by his love life, Observer couldn’t help but let the corners of his mouth curl upward. He calmly said, “You already have a judgment in your heart. Why are you asking for my answer?”

“Don’t brush me off with that line! I’m scared right now!” Ashe scratched his head. “What if they start fighting? What if, after cooling off for a day, they realize they don’t actually like me that much? And right now, I like the Sword Princess, but I also have this inexplicable fondness for the Witch, and I don’t want to hurt her. Plus, they’re both teammates who’ve fought alongside me. If they end up...”

Listening to Ashe’s rambling, Observer suddenly thought that maybe having no separate bedrooms wasn’t so bad after all.

Chapter 589: The Special Affix Lover Without Benefits

Ashe’s worries did not come true.

After entering the Virtual Realm, the team explored the Dream Phantoms as usual. The Sword Princess dealt damage normally, the Witch controlled the battlefield normally, they conversed normally, distributed the spoils normally, and Ashe also normally questioned whether he had been dreaming the previous night.

However, tonight’s initial collection item was the “Colorful Collection: Midas Gloves,” whose effect was incredibly absurd-every time a sorcerer’s spirit miracle took effect, they would gain varying amounts of spellcasting experience!

No comprehension, no thinking, no Meditation required; just by fighting monsters, one could directly increase their spellcasting experience!

This collection item was naturally handed over to the Sword Princess to equip, as her Swordsmanship Sect was already on the verge of reaching the Sanctuary Realm, and her attack frequency was the highest in the team. A single move like “Blood Moon Blossoms” could even count as dozens of effective hits, making her the most suitable candidate for grinding experience.

The Sword Princess did not disappoint. In the third phantom, after Vesser ended the battle by identifying all the affixes, Sonya suddenly rushed over and hugged Ashe, summoning her Vibration Sword spirit, and excitedly jumped up and down: “Look, look, the Vibration Sword has reached three wings!”

After the Vibration Sword spirit reached three wings, a splendid white light battle armor appeared on its body, the white light sword at its waist became even more dazzling, and three wings emerged on its back. It stood on Sonya’s shoulder, flapped its wings, and flew around Ashe and Sonya, leaving a trail of light points.

The autonomous advancement of a spirit to three wings is the best indicator of a Sect Realm advancement, signifying that Sonya’s Swordsmanship Sect had fully ascended to the Sanctuary Realm, making her a true Sanctuary Sorcerer! Ashe was also happy for the Sword Princess and excitedly spun her around in a hug, but soon the two shyly let go and nervously glanced at the others.

Vesser very consciously turned her head to look elsewhere, while the Witch stared directly at the two of them, her mouth pouting as if it could hang a kettle. However, she didn’t say anything, just kicked the stones on the ground in a sullen mood.

By the fifth phantom, they triggered the affix bubble reward, which allowed them to obtain a spirit condensed from affixes or collection items. It seemed that Sonya had exhausted her luck for the night, as she didn’t get the corresponding spirit for the Midas Gloves, only obtaining an ordinary spirit; on the other hand, Deya had good luck and acquired the corresponding spirit ‘String’ for the “Golden Collection: String Puppet”!

The effect of the “String Puppet” is to negate all kinetic energy transfer, making it seem like physical immunity. However, due to its activation delay, it’s almost useless against bullets or instant-kill attacks. But when it comes to kinetic confrontations lasting more than a second, it works wonders! After equipping this collection piece, Deya’s threads become impossible for enemies to break through brute force alone. Even powerful dragon species like the Raging Slashing Dragon would be helplessly restrained by her threads until they perished!

However, the effect of the ‘String’ spirit is much weaker. It only ensures that the sorcerer always has a slight edge in any kinetic confrontation. Still, as a three-wing rare spirit, it’s quite valuable. Deya ran up to Ashe, holding the spirit in her hands, her bright eyes wide with excitement.

Ashe hesitated for a moment before reaching out to ruffle the Witch’s head. But the Witch wasn’t satisfied with just that level of reward. She took matters into her own hands, hugging Ashe tightly and rubbing her cheek against his.

Though she couldn’t feel his body temperature, Deya had a history of intimacy with Ashe. Just this was enough to evoke the warmth of their past memories.

At that moment, Ashe was plunged into deep self-doubt. He had never harbored any special feelings for the Witch before, so why did her affection feel so natural and pleasant? Why did it stir such a strong protective instinct in him, as if they had known each other for ages? What was going on? Was he somehow genetically predisposed to being a scoundrel?

When Deya finally let go, Ashe snapped out of his thoughts and quickly glanced at the Sword Princess. To his surprise, she seemed to be examining a Lala Fatty-themed canteen by the roadside, as if deeply curious about the food inside. It almost seemed like she hadn't noticed Ashe and the Witch's interaction.

That is, until Ashe noticed her hand tightly gripping her sword hilt. His heart sank, and he almost couldn't calm down.

What on earth was going on? Ashe was utterly confused. It felt like there was some hidden Special Affix rule within the team that he wasn't aware of. But he didn't dare ask, and he didn't dare speak up.

Compared to the bewildered Ashe, the bystander Vesser saw everything with crystal clarity.

If anyone thought the Sword Princess and the Witch would willingly accept a "shared" status, that was pure fantasy. Their behavior made it clear that they couldn't tolerate Ashe being intimate with someone else.

But a sorcerer's life isn't just about love; it's also about survival.

Before being lovers, their most important identity was that of trusted teammates-companions who could work together even in the face of cursed affixes.

So far, no one was willing to leave the team. The benefits the team provided were, in a way, equivalent to the value of love itself.

Having come all the way to the Distant Sky Domain, could it be that they didn't want to witness the grandeur of Ruby Mountain, to push the limits of mortals and touch the realm of deities? Even if emotions held a deep place in their hearts, they were still sorcerers-sorcerers who thirsted for power, scholars who greedily pursued knowledge!

Unless they completely didn't need each other's help, as long as they wanted to keep the team functioning, they wouldn't force a confrontation.

Moreover, Ashe was currently in the midst of a dangerous Trial. If they truly cared about him, they wouldn't stir up conflict at such a critical moment.

However, it was clear that they couldn't (and didn't want to) remain stuck in the past state of "more than friends." Instead, they tacitly took half a step forward, pushing their relationship into the realm of "lover without benefits," as if adding a new affix to the team-

"Lover without benefits: Unlocks intimate permissions such as 'hugging,' 'hand-holding,' and 'kissing,' but does not disrupt the team's harmonious atmosphere."

"Vesser."

Vesser turned her head and saw Ashe approaching. "Have you decided where the next Phantom will be?" she asked.

"Yeah," Ashe nodded, then paused and added, "Sorry."

Vesser naturally understood the subtext of his words and smiled. "It's fine. I actually anticipated the progress in your relationships. But have you figured out what to do?"

Ashe scratched his head, crossed his arms, and thought for a moment before replying seriously, "Even though I don't have a solution right now, I definitely won't hurt them."

"Relax. What you should do is accept their goodwill, not burden yourself unnecessarily," Vesser said. "Perhaps fate will solve the problem for you. Maybe letting things take their natural course will lead to a beautiful ending... like them both being willing to marry you?"

"But wouldn't that already hurt them?" Ashe asked.

"You're really demanding," Vesser mused. "Let me think about it..."

"Alright, alright, let's go to the next Phantom," Ashe said, feeling a bit awkward as he turned to leave. "Maybe once they've advanced their Spellcasting Sect to the sanctuary level and their intelligence increases, they won't like me anymore..."

Vesser watched his retreating figure and said softly, “Hard to say. Sanctuary Sorcerers might still like you.”

“But there is a perfect ending, like...”

“What if you died tomorrow?”

Ashe and the Observer left the restroom and embarked on the final day of the Trial.

“Yesterday, we faced a Sanctuary Sorcerer. Could it be that today we’ll encounter a Legendary Sorcerer?” Ashe’s expression turned serious. “But I’ve never met a Legendary Sorcerer before. Will the Trial randomly pick someone from my memory and enhance them to a legendary level?”

“Who would be easier to deal with if they became legendary? Harvey would be fine-he can’t summon an army of Necromancy here, can he? Igor would also work; Mental Miracles aren’t too destructive. Please don’t let it be Annan-I don’t want to face a legendary Gun Sorcerer. And definitely not Gerard-the thought of a legendary Blood Hunter makes my scalp tingle... How about [222]? A legendary Healer-it feels like it’d be similar to a legendary Lala Fatty!”

As Ashe worried about which legendary enemy might appear, time ticked by, and soon, the moment of the Trial arrived.

Footsteps echoed from the end of the corridor.

Along with a young, clear voice.

“Ashe, I didn’t expect to see you again.”

Ashe looked up sharply and saw the blue-haired butler in the distance.

“In the final battle at the Yisuo Royal Palace, I fully unleashed the ‘Melt’ Miracle. I thought I would simply dissipate, but instead, I survived as a baby...” The phantom Banjeet sighed. “I spent my life taking care of the young lady, but in the end, it was she who had to take care of me.”

Ashe’s pupils constricted. “You-“

“I’m a Copy, a Copy from your memories.” He pulled out the Frost Twin Guns and said, “But I’m also Banjeet Dolan. You must kill me to move forward; I must kill you to leave this place and see the young lady in the Gospel.”

“I must thank you, Ashe Heath.” The phantom Banjeet smiled, a smile Ashe knew all too well. “If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t exist. Even though I’m just a Copy, my feelings for the young lady are real, and I’m deeply grateful that you saved her in the end.”

“So, come on.” He raised the twin guns and smiled. “Don’t hold back. I’ve always wanted to face you, not in a game, but as a sorcerer, to see who’s stronger.”

“For our respective wishes, let’s fight to the death.”

Seeing the determination in the phantom Banjeet’s eyes, Ashe clenched his teeth so hard they almost cracked, his shoulders trembling uncontrollably.

From the moment he first saw the Copy, he had feared this situation. Even if the Copy exhibited the combat power of a sorcerer, even if the Copy was enhanced to the sanctuary level, or even the legendary level, none of that terrified and enraged Ashe as much as this moment!

Killing a Copy, killing a Copy that looks like someone you know, killing a Copy that is identical to someone you know and possesses complete emotions-these are three entirely different concepts!

How dare the Gray Fox sorcerers... How dare they...

After a few seconds of struggle with his eyes closed, Ashe suddenly opened them, reached for his sword hilt, and a look of furious determination crossed his face-

Clang!

The sword blade Ashe had partially drawn was struck hard by the Observer's blade.

Ashe turned his head, stunned, to look at the Observer. The Observer slightly raised his sword, pressing it against Ashe's hand, signaling him to sheathe his weapon.

"Next," the Observer lowered his eyelids and drew a second blade, "you don't need to draw your sword."

Chapter 590: The Inevitability of Harm

"You're sweating. Here, let me wipe it for you."

"Tired? Want me to carry you for a bit? Here, have a candy to boost your energy!"

"Need a massage? I learned a muscle relaxation technique from Harvey. It should work on the living too!"

After a brief internal struggle, Ashe finally accepted the Observer's kindness.

Deep down, Ashe knew that the phantom Banjeet was just a hastily created Copy, and he was prepared to eliminate him without hesitation, refusing to let past memories soften his resolve.

Perhaps it was because he had been thrust into the dire situation of Shattered Lake Prison upon his time travel, or perhaps it was because his companions had always been societal outcasts like Igor and Harvey, but Ashe had unwittingly adapted to the rules of this world—or rather, he had flexibly adjusted his moral boundaries.

He had come to accept the necessity of killing, for fate was more unpredictable than any drama. Even a sorcerer blessed with Miracles would sometimes face the choice of “either harm others or perish.”

What stood before them now was merely a Copy. Ashe was not so weak that he couldn't wield his sword.

Yet, it was like having a Lala Fatty you've raised for a long time. You know its purpose in life is to be turned into a delicious meal, and you desperately need it to satisfy your hunger. But if possible, you'd rather not be the one to do the deed.

So this is what it means to keep a gentleman away from the kitchen, Ashe thought, gaining a new understanding of the saying.

The Trial Copies were even more troubling because they possessed intelligence, desires, and the ability to communicate-indistinguishable from normal people. Yet, they were also people Ashe knew, making it impossible for him to treat them as strangers. He couldn't even deceive himself into doing so.

He could have fought his way through, but Ashe would likely need to book a psychological therapy session with Igor afterward.

A mental sorcerer is truly an essential companion for both home and travel...

Now that the Observer had volunteered to handle this dilemma alone, how could Ashe refuse? However, when the battle began, he actively distanced himself, crouching against a wall with his ears covered, only catching up when he saw the Trial count on his wristband change.

But the entire journey had been the Observer doing the work while Ashe touched fish. Even Ashe felt a bit embarrassed, so he went out of his way to offer thoughtful gestures, practically waving a cheerleading baton to boost his contribution to the team.

Even someone as composed and inscrutable as the Observer was visibly irritated by him, and with a swift chop to the forehead, the passageway finally fell silent.

When the Trial countdown reached its final minute, Ashe spoke up, "Remember, the people who appear next are merely Copies of those we know, created temporarily for the

Trial. They might not even last a day or an hour, like summer cicadas, mayflies in the water, or clouds in the sky... But since you've never met the real them, just treat them as phantoms."

Ashe had been repeating this speech before every Trial today. It was unclear whether he was trying to comfort the Observer or himself. His words were filled with assumptions, offering various justifications for killing the Copies, as if they were in a courtroom trying to convince the judge of fate to absolve them of guilt.

The Observer, of course, had no need for such weak and foolish self-reassurance, but he didn't stop Ashe from repeating it over and over.

Long ago, he had often heard similar words, always from someone trying hard to find reasons to prove he was right, that those he killed deserved it, that the bad things he did were actually good, that his enemies were despicable scoundrels, as if he were an absolutely righteous and blameless person... Though he still found such arguments meaningless, perhaps out of habit, he didn't dislike them.

At that moment, the Observer suddenly froze.

That's right.

Someone without guilt wouldn't need such excuses. Death Maniac, Mirror Master, and Black Mage-they would never utter such weak words.

So, was she comforting me, or herself?

Seeing the Trial count increase by one, Ashe quickly caught up to the Observer, glancing at the corpse on the ground out of the corner of his eye. Like the previous Trial Copies, the body was intact, with no visible wounds, and it lay face down, making it impossible to identify.

“When we get to the Cicada Transformation Hall, remember to leave the final strike to me. I want to secure the kill,” Ashe declared confidently. “My sword blade is thirsting for action!”

“Alright.”

“But it’s going to be a tough fight,” Ashe said, looking at his hands. “The rewards from the Trials in this final stretch are getting more terrifying. Not only is my physical condition improving, but my senses have become so sharp that I can detect traces of things beyond reality. Sometimes, I can even see your afterimage, almost like...”

“Foreseeing the future.”

“Exactly,” Ashe nodded emphatically. “You must have felt it during the battle too, right? Time seemed to transform into an observable axis, and I could even faintly smell the scent of Golden Flow Water... it was like the aroma of a Red Flame Lala Fatty.”

That's probably just because you're hungry... The Observer quickened his pace in silence.

"Silver Lantern and her group are definitely strong too. It might come down to a brutal fight to determine the winner," Ashe said. "But once Silver Lantern is dead, our journey in Senlo will come to an end."

"Hey, what are your plans after we get out of here?" Ashe asked. "I'm thinking of finding a way back to Gospel first. I promised them I'd return, after all. And then... no matter what, I'll visit the Stars Kingdom."

"If I'm lucky, maybe I'll be able to settle down in reality. If not, I'll strive to become a legend and keep searching until I find a..." He opened his palm and then clenched it, "...Miracle that can reunite us in reality."

"Though it sounds simple, just traveling between kingdoms is a hassle," Ashe scratched his head. "Getting from Gospel to the Stars Kingdom might be easier, since Lise is now the Empress of Yisuo. Asking Gospel to let me travel once shouldn't be a problem, right?"

"But how do we get from Senlo back to Gospel? Through a virtual realm passage? Or using the gray fox heritage?"

Ashe pondered for a while, then shook off these worries and turned to the Observer. "That's my plan. Do you want to stick with me, or do you have other ideas?"

“I’ll stick with you,” the Observer replied perfunctorily.

“Great!” Ashe exclaimed, happily slinging an arm around the Observer’s shoulders. “I can’t wait to see Igor’s reaction when he meets you-it’s going to be hilarious!”

“Igor will probably try to distinguish us by asking a bunch of questions, then pull me aside to warn me about you. It’ll take him a while to accept you. As for Harvey, he’ll probably tell us apart at a glance. I always feel like he can see things that aren’t quite... clean.”

“Then we’ll search Senlo for any gray fox heritage that can help us travel between kingdoms. If we can, we might as well take down the Four Pillars Cult. The best way to avoid becoming a regional dealer like Tactile Sense is to shut down the branch office...”

“Seems like there’s no rest for us,” Ashe sighed. “I really want to go home soon.”

Hearing this word that didn’t belong to a time traveler, the Observer raised an eyebrow. “Home?”

“Yeah, the Yisuo Royal Palace?” Ashe blinked. “Even if I can’t live in the palace, I should at least be able to stay in Nabistin, right?”

“Have you ever thought-“

“That Lise, now the Empress, might turn her back on the hardships we shared, and I’d be treated like a poor relative showing up uninvited, chased away with sticks? Of course, I’ve thought about it,” Ashe chuckled. “But home isn’t just about the other person missing you—it’s also about you missing them.”

“At least for now, I miss Lise deeply. So wherever she is, that’s the home I want to return to.”

Ashe glanced at the Observer. “It’s the same for you. You’re nothing like me in personality. You’ll definitely have your own path and goals, not like me, who’s always thinking about how to make my Substitute work harder... But no matter when, as long as you miss me, you can always come home.”

As he said this, a smile crept onto Ashe’s face. “It’s like how my older brother stayed back home to take care of our parents. If I ever get fired, I’ll have a place to return to.”

The Observer didn’t respond. He simply brushed off Ashe’s hand from his shoulder and walked ahead in silence. Ashe was used to his aloofness and continued walking, pondering his life plans after the Trial ended.

After several Trials, they arrived at the light gate earlier than before. Ashe drew his Honey Sword in advance, while the Observer merely rested his hand on the hilt of his sword. Without another word, they stepped through the light gate together.

In the Cicada Transformation Hall, Vesser and Yolan had been waiting for some time.

This wasn't surprising, since they were a team of two, while Ashe only had the Observer fighting solo, which naturally made them slightly less efficient.

The moment all the Trial Takers gathered, the hall's lighting flickered, and circular patterns on both sides of the hall began to emit steam, revealing strange, individual lift chambers.

At the same time, detailed Trial information popped up on their wrist devices:

“Hibernation: Trial Takers must enter the divine fire abyss by riding individual Cicada Transformation Chambers. Once a chamber is activated, both chambers will fully close and descend within 30 seconds.”

“Cicada Transformation: Trial Takers will undergo the final stage of cicada evolution within the chambers. However, the hall must retain Trial bodies of equivalent evolution levels as the final consumables for the transformation process.”

As Ashe processed this information, his face turned pale as he realized the true nature of the cicada transformation. But when he looked up, he saw Silver Lantern had already entered the chamber closest to her and pressed the close button. The chamber door sealed shut, and a red light lit up.

Even through the glass window, he could see the cold pupils behind her fox mask.

Sometimes, you can't keep living without hurting others.

She had already made her choice.

Ashe felt as if he could hear Silver Lantern's whisper: 'Now, it's your turn to choose.'

His wrist device displayed a countdown: 29 seconds remaining.