

# SORCERER'S HANDBOOK

## Chapter 651: No Lies

“No wonder, I remember not having that many sisters. Turns out they were personalities split from me...”

After Ash briefly explained the origin of the Witch sisters, the Little Witch surprisingly accepted it quickly. “When I grow up, I can split into sisters to play with myself. That’s amazing!”

“Yeah, yeah, witches are super amazing!” Ash agreed, trying to slip away, but the Little Witch caught him. “Wait, I want to know more about the person I like when I grow up.”

“No need to make it complicated. Once you regain your memory, you’ll remember me.”

“It’s not the same, not the same!” The Little Witch shook her head vigorously. “If you lost your memory and I appeared in front of you, telling you I’m the princess you’ll protect for a lifetime, wouldn’t you want to know more about me?”

Putting himself in her shoes, Ash had to admit she made a good point. But now wasn’t the time for a leisurely chat. Ash thought for a moment. “I’ll answer three questions at most. After that, you must finish your painting.”

“Okay.” The Little Witch said, “First question, when you met me, did I already have four personalities?”

“Yes, they were the Secret Princess, White Queen, Black Butler, and Scarlet Dead Apostles.”

“Second question, what do I like about you?”

“I actually asked you that once, but you didn’t answer me,” Ash paused. “I just spent many adventures and moments with you... Maybe your fondness for me is just like a playmate’s fondness.”

The Little Witch nodded, then turned to look at the whiteboard and suddenly said, “It seems I had a tough life when I grew up.”

Ash was taken aback.

“How lonely must one be to split into other personalities for companionship?” The Little Witch said, “I must have been very miserable and helpless, like a princess captured by a dragon, to become so desperate.”

“And then, you shone into my world like a light, protecting me like a knight, so that’s why I like you.” The Little Witch held up four fingers. “I split into four sisters, so my taste must have improved fourfold! Don’t worry, my grown-up affection for you is definitely serious, and four times as serious!”

Ash never expected to be comforted by the Little Witch. “I wasn’t worried!”

“Alright, alright, don’t be shy.” The Little Witch patted his shoulder with an air of maturity. “By the way, I saw a little girl in the painting. Have we had children already? Speaking of which, how do you have children?”

Ash quickly denied it. “No, we haven’t, and we don’t even live together!”

Little Witch: “So the painting I saw is actually my inner wish?”

Ash recalled his painting of everyone going on a picnic and camping, nodding slightly. “It could also be an imagination of happiness.”

“Happiness...” The Little Witch murmured softly, then suddenly said, “When I read fairy tales, they often end with the princess and knight living happily ever after. I was always curious about their life together afterward.”

“Then I flipped back to the beginning, saw the bad king’s lust and greed, the evil queen’s malice and jealousy, and realized a book can be read twice.”

She touched the whiteboard gently. “If we live together like in the painting, will we always be happy? Or will we turn into the bad king and queen?”

This question was too profound for Ash to answer. He figured only his mom might have a clue, and even his brother and sister-in-law, who had been married for years, might not have an answer.

But the Little Witch didn't need him to respond. She started drawing on the whiteboard. "No matter what, having someone to like and a life to look forward to, I'm already lucky as I grow up."

Cunning yet smart, calm yet passionate, mature yet profound, pessimistic inside but positive in thought... Ash realized the Little Witch was so different from the Witch's four sisters. Whether it was the Secret Princess, the White Queen, the Black Butler, or the Scarlet Dead Apostles, none completely matched the Little Witch, yet they all seemed to have a trace of her.

It was almost as if... there was another sister of the Witch that Ash had never met.

"One last question..."

Ash said, "I think I've answered more than three questions for you already, haven't I?"

The Little Witch looked at him. "Each of us gets to ask three questions, and since I'm four sisters, I should have twelve questions. But I just want to ask you one more..."

Ash surrendered. "What else do you want to ask?"

The Little Witch pointed at Little Sword Princess and Little Weiser.

“Do we all like you?”

Ash was silent for a few seconds before squeezing out a few words, “Not all of you.”

The Little Witch nodded knowingly, “So fairy tales are lies. There are actually male Bewitchers in this world...”

Stop, stop, if you keep talking, I can almost hear Igor’s laughter in my head.

Ash quickly moved over to Little Weiser. As soon as she saw him coming, she huddled in a corner, trembling with her back to him.

Though this child was also quite peculiar, she was much better than the Sword Princess Witch. Using his advanced experience from dealing with his nephew, Ash squatted beside her and asked, “Do you like drawing?”

“...Yes.”

“Then why don’t you go draw? You can just copy the picture.”

“...It’s scary.”

“Hmm? Is what you’re drawing scary?” Ash was puzzled. “What are you drawing?”

“I, I,” Little Weiser stammered, unable to articulate her thoughts. When Ash pressed her with more questions, her nose twitched, and her eyes welled up with tears. She whimpered, “Vionelle, Vionelle, come quickly...”

There were two options here: one was to spin her like a top, which would make kids behave, a method Ash had used on his nephew with great success; the other was to talk to her and slowly calm her down.

Obviously, the latter was the only choice here. After all, blocking memories was temporary, and if Weiser regained her memories and found out Ash had spun her, their Bond Level might drop. Besides, to be fair, Yolan Vesser had been diligent and never caused Ash any trouble since joining the team, so he was willing to be more patient with her.

So he asked, “Who is Vionelle?”

Little Weiser sniffled, “Vionelle is Vionelle.”

“Is she nice to you?”

“Yes.”

“Then you want to go back and see her, right?” Ash coaxed gently, “If you finish your drawing, you can go back to see her, okay?”

Little Weiser sniffed back her tears and turned to look at Ash. “Really?”

But she quickly shook her head. “You’re lying to me. Last time, they lied to me too, and there was no artifact to make Vionelle better.”

Ash asked, “How did they lie to you last time? What’s wrong with Vionelle?”

“Vionelle... Vionelle isn’t well. She’s been bedridden. She promised to take me shopping for clothes. I wanted her to get better, so I asked many people. They told me that at dusk, if I went to a certain place, I could find an artifact to make Vionelle well again.”

Ash frowned slightly. “Is Vionelle sick? Isn’t there a Healing Sorcerer to help her?”

Little Weiser shook her head. “I... I asked an elder sister who helps with pain, but she said there’s nothing she can do. Ordinary people at this age feel unwell. Only sorcerers can live a bit longer.”

A lifespan limit for ordinary people? Genetic disease? Environmental pollution?... Ash asked, “And then? Did you go looking for the artifact?”

Little Weiser nodded. “I went to that place at dusk, searched for a long time until it got dark, but found nothing. Then I got lost for a long, long time, saw many things, even some really scary ones... boo hoo...”

As she spoke, she seemed to recall those terrifying experiences and started crying. Ash helped wipe her tears and asked, “Did you leave afterward?”

She took a deep breath, choked a bit, coughed twice, and nodded. “It took me a long time to get out, then I ran back to find Vionelle. Vionelle realized I was missing, and when she saw me return, she asked where I went. She was angry that I was out at night and spanked me hard...”

“She told me she was dying, that she wouldn’t be around, and that I’d have to take care of myself.”

Little Weiser looked at Ash, her eyes brimming with tears, and asked, “When people die, where do they go?”

These kids keep asking deeper and deeper questions... Ash said, "They probably go to Celestium to enjoy happiness, right?"

Little Weiser shook her head. "No way, only the most powerful people can go to Celestium. Vionelle isn't a sorcerer; she can't go to Celestium."

If not Celestium, then it must be hell. But looking at the pitiful Little Weiser, Ash couldn't bring himself to say, 'Vionelle went to hell to suffer.'

He hesitated for a moment, then suddenly thought of another option. "You know the Virtual Realm, right? It's vast, and it's the final destination for everyone. When people die, they return to the Virtual Realm."

But Little Weiser was still unsatisfied and pressed on, "What do people do in the Virtual Realm after they die? Can they return to reality? Can Vionelle come back to see me sometimes? Can she write me letters?"

Seeing Little Weiser's eyes filled with hope, Ash almost instinctively told a lie. "When people die, they find eternal happiness in the Virtual Realm, so they can't return to reality."

At that moment, he saw a look of wonder in Little Weiser's eyes, and even the tears in her eyes seemed to sparkle.

"Really?!"

“Really.”

“That’s great! That’s great!” Little Weiser was so happy she jumped up and hugged Ash. “So it’s true, Vionelle wasn’t lying to me!”

“What?” Ash was taken aback. “Vionelle wasn’t lying to you?”

“I asked Vionelle where people go when they die, and she said exactly what you did!” Little Weiser said joyfully. “I thought she was lying to me again!”

## Chapter 652: Rebellion Against Authority

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Watching Little Weiser’s face smeared with tears and snot, Ash gently nodded and used his sleeve to wipe her face. “Vionelle didn’t lie to you. Sooner or later, everyone will reunite in the Virtual Realm.”

Ash understood perfectly why Vionelle had said such a thing.

Life, aging, sickness, and death are burdens too heavy to bear, both for oneself and for those around them.

Ash was also reaching the age where he had to face the departure of loved ones. His mother had always been frail, so thin that it was a wonder how she managed to raise him and his mischievous brother. And during his college years, his father had been hospitalized once due to a heart attack.

But it wasn't until the end of the semester when he returned home that his brother casually mentioned their parents' health. It was during that holiday that Ash gradually realized his parents were aging.

The phone was filled with memory-consuming junk apps, shopping required QR codes, community forms needed to be filled out on a phone, hospital appointments had to be made through a public account, and even selecting TV channels on the set-top box was a hassle. Some steps even Ash found annoying, especially when faced with network lag or phone memory issues. His parents asked many questions that Ash found simple, and he explained them repeatedly.

But it was only during the holidays; once school started, Ash returned to campus. After graduating from college, he chose to work in a big city, distancing himself from his hometown and his parents.

He was always grateful to his brother and sister-in-law. If parents are the buffer between children and death, then for Ash, his brother and sister-in-law were the buffer between him and bad news.

When Ash was job-hopping, he had several offers, including some from laid-back companies with regular hours. But he ultimately chose a mobile game company where "only one of the heart and performance can beat," all for the sake of making money.

Because money was the only thing he could give back to his parents.

However, ever since his nephew was born, his parents' health improved, and it was Ash who left first. His nephew would probably feel a bit regretful, as the "mysterious uncle from the big city with an unknown job" was strict but gave generous red envelopes.

His father probably wouldn't change much, having served in the military. Their home even had a "Glorious Family" plaque, showing no signs of superstition. But his mother was different; she started believing in Buddhism after his grandmother passed away. Now, she might be praying for him, hoping he'd be reborn into a good family in his next life.

Even in a world devoid of miracles, people seek spiritual solace in the intangible. How much more so in a world filled with miracles and sorcerers? Most people aren't strong enough to endure hardships, let alone a little girl who hasn't learned to take care of herself.

And who knows, maybe it's possible after all?

"So you need to keep painting. That would make Vionelle happy too."

Although Ash's words lacked logic, Little Weiser's intelligence wasn't particularly high at the moment. She cheerfully responded, "Okay!"

Feeling reassured, Ash returned to his whiteboard to paint. He found that painting with his soul was quite challenging. While he could control the depth of color and thickness of

strokes at will, any lapse in concentration would turn the painting into a mess. He had to remain completely focused without the slightest distraction.

He glanced at the others and noticed that everyone was diligently painting. Even Little Weiser, who had been crying earlier, was doing well. He thought to himself, “As expected, they are all talented sorcerers.”

After nearly an hour, everyone finished their work. Ash then took a look at their creations and was profoundly moved.

First up was Little Sword Princess’s piece. In theory, hers should have been the easiest since it only required drawing two people. However, if Ash hadn’t known beforehand that they were supposed to be two people, he might have thought they were two Blade Fish Dragons that had somehow become sentient-why were their faces so sharp!?

Yet, Little Sword Princess wore a confident expression, her cowlick almost standing upright, eagerly awaiting Ash’s critique. Ash could only muster, “Very spirited!”

Next was Little Witch’s drawing. Ash looked at the stick figures on the whiteboard and couldn’t even tell if they were male or female. Setting aside technique, her attitude was quite evident.

Seeing Ash’s skeptical gaze, Little Witch pondered for a moment and said, “Sorry, let me add something.”

She added a stroke to one of the stick figure's faces, crafting a wickedly charming stick figure, and said, "Doesn't this look more like you now?"

With no hope left, Ash moved on to Little Weiser's work, which surprisingly caught his attention. Although it was still mostly doodles, at least the details were discernible. On the left was a female sorcerer, while the right depicted chaos, darkness, ruins, and heavenly fire. With just a few strokes, the destructive aura of the world was vividly portrayed. Based on the composition, the theme seemed to be-

"So you want to save the world?" Ash asked in surprise.

Little Weiser looked a bit puzzled, sniffing, "Do I?"

"Hey!" Little Sword Princess called Ash over, pointing at her drawing, "Is this me?"

"What about me?" Little Witch was curious too, "Where am I?"

Compared to them, although Ash's drawing wasn't great either, at least he managed to capture the features and perspective, allowing Sword Princess and Witch to quickly find themselves in it. Little Weiser also approached curiously, "Am I in there?"

Ash pointed to a girl sitting on a tree stump reading a book, "You're here."

Little Weiser looked at it for a while and suddenly said, “Thank you!”

“Why are you thanking me?”

“Because when I draw Vionelle, she thanks me,” Little Weiser earnestly explained, “So I should thank you too.”

Before Ash could respond, the whiteboards around them began to tremble and then transformed into a mist of souls, merging into their spirits.

Pop, pop, pop-

Ash felt as if his soul was being filled with a bunch of popping candy. With each continuous pop, knowledge about the Soul Sect exploded in his mind.

He suddenly had a realization-among the four of them, his gain might be the least.

The reward for this stage wasn’t related to the completion of the artwork. As long as the Trial Taker completed the act of “serious painting,” they could pass. This stage was meant to train the sorcerer’s “malleable soul” in the Rejuvenating Return, during their naive and ignorant state.

For someone like Ash, who retained his complete adult memories, the potential for change was minimal, rendering the effect negligible. However, for the sword Princess and her companions, who successfully underwent the Rejuvenating Return and reverted to their innocent, adorable selves, this trial significantly boosted their Soul Sect experience and Soul Talent!

Ash wasn't the least bit disappointed with this outcome; in fact, he was quite pleased. After all, he wasn't one to cultivate, and an increase in Soul Talent held little significance for him. Besides, he had been quite the mischievous child. If he had fully undergone the Rejuvenating Return, he might not have passed this trial at all.

Moments later, Ash opened his eyes to find that the sword Princess, Witch, and Vesser had all returned to their original forms, marking the end of their childhood experience.

Their expressions varied. Sonya tried hard to maintain a calm demeanor, though her eyes avoided Ash's gaze; Deya seemed lost in thought, possibly discussing the recent events with her Witch sisters; Vesser's expression was particularly odd, as she looked at Ash with an indescribable emotion in her eyes.

Their reactions were understandable, given that their childish, naive sides had been exposed, akin to a social death. Ash wisely refrained from teasing them and pointed to the light orb, saying, "This time, the reward seems a bit special."

After passing the 35th trial, the rewards were still three options, but each was unlike anything seen before.

The yellow light orb on the far left was actually a “chance for Rejuvenating Return.” In other words, if they didn’t choose this, the next time they reached the 35th trial, it would no longer be the Rejuvenating Return trial but something else.

Some might think this was better, but those who experienced the Rejuvenating Return knew the immense benefits they gained from the trial-they could clearly feel their Soul Sect talent had increased significantly.

This trial was a reward in itself.

The importance of talent needs no explanation. Not to mention the top-tier spellcasting talent of the sword Princess, Witch, and Vesser, an ordinary person without talent could at most reach the silver level.

However, to be precise, even the best talent can only bring a sorcerer to the Golden level. The Sanctuary realm tests not talent, but whether a sorcerer can extract extraordinary insights from life and the Virtual Realm to break through the bottleneck of spellcasting.

As for legends, they cannot be described merely by talent. Or rather, talent holds little meaning for legends. The term ‘legendary sorcerer’ describes not just power but the sorcerer themselves-to achieve legendary status in spellcasting, one must first achieve legendary status in life.

Only a life of legendary epic proportions can forge an understanding that transcends the ordinary.

However, Soul Sect spellcasting is a unique ability that only Elves have a talent for, not to mention the Specter's Inheritance tests the Soul Sect. If they could undergo the Rejuvenating Return a few more times to enhance their talent, it would be immensely beneficial!

Suddenly, Deya pointed to the white light orb in the middle, "I want this one!"

Ash and the others were a bit surprised.

In their memory, this was the first time the Witch had actively requested a reward, so Ash agreed without hesitation, "Alright!"

The sword Princess and Vesser had no objections either.

Among the three rewards, the "chance for Rejuvenating Return" was undoubtedly the most valuable. In theory, they could use it to infinitely enhance their Soul Talent, and if they didn't choose it now, they would never have the opportunity for Rejuvenating Return again unless it appeared in other trials.

But the thought of becoming children again was something they were reluctant to experience.

Vesser even secretly breathed a sigh of relief, having been worried about how to prevent choosing this reward-she was the one who could least afford to become a child again, almost revealing a secret earlier.

However, they weren't too surprised by the Witch's request, given that the white light orb in the middle contained a spellcasting Inheritance with a three wings spirit!

In fact, the light orb on the far right also contained a spellcasting Inheritance, but clearly, these two Inheritances were at most legendary level and couldn't compare to the Specter's Inheritance. These Inheritances were likely picked up by the Specter Seer during adventures, but since they couldn't integrate them into his spellcasting system, they were placed among the ordinary rewards.

The Specter Seer's approach was quite normal, akin to obtaining low-level equipment in a game that doesn't match one's level-useless and not worth selling, better given as rewards to the younger ones.

The spellcasting Inheritance chosen by the Witch was named "Rebellion against authority"!

## Chapter 653: Their Own Reasons

"A strange drawing, strange people."

A blond little boy stood puzzled in front of the whiteboard, staring at the digital drawing he had just created. In the picture, three figures were navigating a dense and intricate jungle, heading towards a distant, towering spire. The faint presence of beastly monsters and unknown mysterious lands painted a scene of a fantastical adventure.

At the back of the group was a dark-skinned, curly-haired young man wearing a trench coat and boots. He appeared unremarkable at first glance, but the faint outline of a beautiful specter clinging to him added an eerie yet vibrant allure, marking him as the ace of the team.

In the middle was a handsome blond young man, dressed impeccably in a suit with numerous pockets, despite trekking through the jungle. Holding a treasure map and gazing towards the towering spire, he was undoubtedly the soul of the team.

Leading the way was an unassuming black-haired young man, pointing ahead and turning back to the others with apparent excitement. However, he was about to trip over a tree root, his stumble suggesting he was the comedic relief of the group.

What caught the boy's attention was a black raven perched on a tree, watching them intently. Was this a harbinger of doom?

Yet...

The boy focused on the blond young man in the drawing. Though his expression was neutral, the light in his eyes, the relaxed shoulders, and the carefree way he entrusted his back to others all indicated a mind free of worries, thoroughly enjoying the journey.

The boy knew, of course, that this blond young man was his future self.

Which made it all the more puzzling-how could he be so at ease with others around? Were the dark-skinned and comedic characters merely mental slaves under his control?

Even if they were slaves, a degree of caution was warranted. In this world, how could there be others beyond suspicion? How could there be a self worthy of complete trust?

“But... an adventure?”

The boy’s eyes sparkled with longing as he looked at the spire in the jungle. Escaping the mundane society, exploring the unknown mysteries, and commanding two subservient slaves as cannon fodder... If this was the future, perhaps growing up wasn’t so bad after all.

I thought life would always be so arduous-

At that moment, the whiteboard dissolved into a wisp of soul mist, merging into his spirit.

Moments later, Igor opened his eyes and glanced at the three light orbs that appeared beside him.

Yes, he had lied to Ash and the others; his exploration of the Specter's Inheritance had actually progressed beyond the 30th level. With Chikara and Gwen around, he couldn't reveal everything, even if Chikara was a slave-caution was always necessary.

Trust or not, a Con Artist was accustomed to keeping something back from everyone.

Without hesitation, Igor chose the "Rejuvenating Return" reward. This wasn't his first time selecting this reward, so he knew that multiple Rejuvenating Returns carried risks.

This time, he returned to being 8 years old, but the last time it was 8.5, and the time before that, 9.

The more Igor engaged in Rejuvenating Return, the more he regressed, and once he crossed an age where he couldn't care for himself, he would become a sacrificial offering in this process.

But Igor had no other choice.

He desired the Specter's Inheritance more than anyone else because it was the only path forward for him.

Both he and Harvey had used the Cursed Rainbow Tail Feather to forcibly ascend to the Sanctuary level, a flawed shortcut that came at the cost of completely closing their spellforce channels to the fourth layer of the Virtual Realm. Simply put, even if they reached the legendary level in spellcasting, they couldn't summon the Four-winged Spirit through virtual realm resonance, nor could they open the Gate of Truth leading to Ruby Mountain.

Their paths were blocked.

Igor had once thought he could only stop at the Sanctuary level. For a Death Row Inmate who was undergoing transformation in Shattered Lake Prison months ago, this was an unimaginable achievement. Even before his imprisonment, Igor never dreamed of becoming a sanctuary sorcerer.

However, he was a Con Artist-a greedy one, a dissatisfied one, one who was never content.

With the appearance of the Specter's Inheritance, Igor knew it was his only chance. Even if he couldn't break through to the legendary level, he could still wield legendary power with the Specter's Inheritance!

Igor was different from Harvey.

He was merely a genius with some talent in the Mental Sect, while Harvey was a monster in the Necromancy Sect.

During his time in Shattered Lake Prison, Harvey might have been a slightly talented necromancer, but at some point, he unearthed a 'treasure' that completely transformed him, perhaps from the deepest part of the Virtual Realm or the darkest corner of his heart. Talent could no longer describe his potential; as he put it, he had become a complete lackey of Haagen-Dazs-he was no longer human.

If Harvey found a way to overcome the curse and ascend to the legendary level, Igor wouldn't be surprised.

Even if Harvey was stuck in the Sanctuary, once he unlocked the Blood Corpse King troop type, he would naturally possess legendary power, far beyond what a Con Artist could compare to.

Igor was also different from Ash.

Or rather, Ash was different from everyone.

Igor had long realized that the seemingly foolish guy would eventually reach the pinnacle of spellcasting, and Ruby Mountain might not even be his final destination.

But what about himself?

Igor didn't have Ash's secrets or Harvey's potential. His only skill was seizing opportunities.

And the Specter's Inheritance was precisely his best opportunity.

Not to mention that the Mental Sect and Soul Sect were inherently similar, but more importantly, during the Gospel, Igor had also acquired Belldate's Dominance Sect Inheritance!

The Dominance Sect was originally created by human sorcerers as a secondary spellcasting method to mimic the Soul Sect, which they couldn't awaken. However, despite being a secondary spellcasting method, the Dominance Sect had developed to rival the Mental and Soul Sects, much like how all Physical Sects originated from the Fist-Claw Sect, yet the Fist-Claw Sect's strength now ranks only in the second tier.

Igor, proficient in both Mental and Dominance, was like a fish in water within the Specter's Inheritance.

In just a few days, he had broken through to the thirtieth level, continuously selecting "Rejuvenating Return" to enhance his Soul Talent with every opportunity.

The Con Artist wasn't arrogant enough to think he was the fastest. There were far too many mental sorcerers in the world, not to mention the soul sorcerers-like Annan's mother, Qenna, who was a soul sanctuary!

He was ultimately just a stowaway mental sorcerer.

In terms of strength, talent, and experience, he couldn't compare to a true mental sanctuary.

And this Specter's Inheritance was a trial open to all sanctuaries, with only one victor. It was only natural that he didn't win.

But...

Igor glanced at the wall behind him. The whiteboard had vanished without a trace, yet the image seemed to linger in his eyes.

Life wouldn't always be so tough.

So, I must keep up with them.

Gospel Kingdom, Yisuo Royal Palace.

Lise opened her eyes, sat up, and glanced at Annan beside her. Then she jumped out of bed, ran barefoot to the bathroom.

Phew-

After finishing, Lise ran back to bed barefoot, snuggling into Annan's soft embrace for a little more sleep.

White Queen: "Lise, how many times have I told you, no going barefoot, wear your slippers!"

Lise: "Mm-hmm."

Black Butler: "You always agree, but never change."

Scarlet Dead Apostles: "Rebellion against authority, huh."

Lise: "Hmph, who said I could see Dad once every five days~"

White Queen: "We've been tackling the Specter's Inheritance these days, it's too dangerous to take you."

Lise: "I don't care, you all see Dad every day, and I don't even get once every five days! I don't like you anymore! I'm running away from home!"

Witch sisters: "...?"

The more Lise thought about it, the angrier she got. She jumped out of bed, walked barefoot out of the sleeping quarters, ignoring the maid calling 'Empress,' and ran to the small palace door, pushing it hard: "I'm leaving!"

White Queen: "Alright, go ahead."

Lise: "I'm really leaving!"

Black Butler: "Goodbye, not seeing you off."

Lise: "I, I can't push the door open."

Scarlet Dead Apostles: "I'll help you."

With a thud, the small palace door was forcibly pushed open. The guards noticed the situation and, seeing through the monitors that it was the Empress taking a night stroll, naturally didn't dare interfere.

Lise looked at the street outside the small palace door, blinked: “I, I have nowhere to stay.”

White Queen: “If you have nowhere to stay, why run away? Go back and wash your feet!”

Lise stubbornly: “I don’t like you anymore!”

Black Butler: “So, are you running away or not?”

Lise puffed up: “I, I don’t like you anymore!”

Deya: “But we like you, go back and wash your feet, and in a few days we’ll take you to see Dad, okay?”

Lise nodded, finally willing to go back obediently.

The White Queen originally wanted to use this opportunity to curb Lise’s rebellious streak; lately, Lise had been getting more and more unruly. But now that Deya had disrupted it, there was nothing to be done. Once Lise was asleep, they began to study the newly acquired spirits and test the Miracle-

Riot Spirit!

Target Spirit!

Linked Spirit!

Miracle: Rebellion against authority!

Though this was a Miracle from the Dominance Sect, it was quite peculiar because its casting target wasn't a living being, which was precisely why the witches wanted to acquire this spellcasting inheritance!

Because its casting target was-

Spirit!

The Miracle targeted the soul, causing most of the Witches' spirits to glow with a red light. Now, not only did these spirits appear more ferocious, but they could also withstand the pressure of upper-tier spirits and even launch attacks against them!

This was the wonder of Rebellion against authority. It allowed a sorcerer to arm lower-tier spirits and use them to beat upper-tier spirits into submission, forcing them to serve without consuming spellforce. Although an upper-tier spirit might only offer a few services a day, it ultimately enabled the sorcerer to utilize spirits beyond their level!

However, this Spellcasting Inheritance was incomplete because Rebellion against authority required another Miracle, “Seize the Monarch,” to forcibly integrate upper-tier spirits into the soul.

But Deya didn’t need this step, as the spirits she wanted for Rebellion against authority were already nestled in her soul, refusing to leave.

She looked at the spirit occupying the most space in her soul, as if it contained a small world within-the Fairy Spirit. Within the Fairy Spirit’s small world lay the Gospel Deity and the soul summoning spirit.

With a thought, Deya’s spirits surrounded the Fairy Spirit, no longer unable to approach it as before. At this moment, the Gospel Deity seemed to sense something, lifting its head slightly. Deya’s soul rippled, causing the spirits influenced by Rebellion against authority to halt their actions, unable to continue their uprising.

Though Rebellion against authority failed, the Witch sisters were not disheartened; instead, they were invigorated!

The Gospel Deity’s reaction indicated that Rebellion against authority indeed posed a threat to it; otherwise, it wouldn’t have bothered to release its aura to intimidate the other spirits!

Moreover, this was Deya’s first attempt at using Rebellion against authority, and there were many areas for improvement.

Once she perfected Rebellion against authority and successfully subdued the Gospel Deity, even if she revealed her true identity as Lise Deya and lost the protection of secrecy power, she could still restrain the Gospel Deity and prevent it from corrupting her soul!

Although Deya had no experience in the Dominance Sect, she didn't need to research on her own.

She summoned the Gospel Book, spending a significant amount of points to inquire, "How can I utilize my resources to improve Rebellion against authority and have my spirits overpower and seize the Gospel Deity?"

The pages of the Gospel Book rippled, as if hesitating. But eventually, it provided a plan: "Invoke the Wrath Spirit, Grudge Spirit, and Death-defying Spirit... to construct a new Miracle, 'Mutiny Rebellion against authority,' effective against the Gospel Deity."

It could work!

Deya couldn't help but feel excited.

She finally saw a glimmer of hope in overcoming the Gospel Deity's mortal threat!

The reason she could harbor the Gospel Deity without having her personality altered was due to the protection of secrecy power. But to maintain this power, she couldn't reveal to Ash that she was Lise Deya and had to rebuild a new intimate relationship with him from scratch.

But once she conquered the Gospel Deity, she could openly confess that Lise Deya was the Witch! When Ash returned to the Gospel, she could rightfully keep him by her side!

She might even confine him, preventing him from leaving for the Stars!

White Queen: "So, the next goal, besides perfecting Rebellion against authority, is..."

Black Butler: "To seize the Blank Concept at the end of the Specter's Inheritance, creating a rule for Ash to return from Senlo to the Gospel."

Scarlet Dead Apostles: "Seizing the Specter's Inheritance won't be easy."

Deya: "But it's easier than snatching something from the Sword Princess."

The Witch sisters all agreed: "Indeed."

In the Senlo wasteland, amidst the wilderness of the grand night, a Flaming White Tiger prowled slowly, its flames scorching the darkness into retreat.

Vesser slowly opened her eyes.

She sat up, covering her face, the Choking Green collar around her neck trembling slightly. Squirrels, lizards, snakes, and Demi-Gods emerged from various places to express their concern, even the Square Cicada appeared, fluttering before her.

“I’m fine,” Vesser waved them off. “Just a bit embarrassed.”

“I never thought I’d expose my childhood side, nor did I expect him to be like Vionelle... as expected of him.”

“But, the Specter’s Inheritance...”

She looked up into the pitch-black night.

“If I could obtain the Blank Concept...” she murmured softly, “would my painting be different?”

## Chapter 654: Senior Sister

Stars Kingdom.

On the morning of September 2nd, the self-improvement training holiday ended, and Galaxia's various colleges officially began the new academic year, welcoming a fresh batch of bewildered freshmen.

Technically, classes started yesterday, but second-year students didn't have any classes on the first day. Their weekly class hours were reduced to 20 hours, averaging ten classes per week.

For third-year students, this is further reduced to three classes per week. As long as you become a silver sorcerer by the end of the third year, you can skip classes for the entire year without any issues. Fourth-year students have no classes at all; the school merely provides affordable training facilities and collaborative clubs, and conducts career planning surveys to directly recommend students to corresponding departments for job placements-limited to silver sorcerers and above.

Simply put, if you haven't become a sorcerer before graduation, you might as well not graduate. Don't go around claiming to be a Swordflower student after leaving.

Conversely, if you become a sorcerer before graduation, then starting from the second year, it's mostly irrelevant whether you attend classes or not. The school encourages third and fourth-year students to step out into the world. Having Abyss Adventure experience can significantly enhance your resume, and Swordflower College will recommend you as an outstanding student to the House of Nobles, Throne Hall, or Watch Fortress.

So when students entered the lecture hall and saw that crimson figure sitting in the front row, almost without exception, they paused for a moment. Even if they didn't notice, they would be reminded by their peers, though no one dared to speak loudly, only whispering in hushed tones, filling the classroom with suppressed excitement.

"Could it really be her? How is that possible? Isn't this class 'Overview of the Sea of Knowledge'?"

"It definitely is. I've watched the Meteor Trial footage countless times; it's definitely her!"

"She looks so much prettier in person than on the Holographic Screen!"

"I heard she's starring in Delarose's new drama. How does she have time to attend class?"

"Oh no, I think I'm betraying Delarose. Is this what true love feels like?"

"Why are you so drunk so early in the morning? Do you need to soak in the toilet for a while?"

"Therave senior sister!"

Even though Sonya already had people sitting beside her, Swordflower College never lacked youthful students. The stirrings of springtime affection and reckless admiration are essential parts of youth. An attractive silver-haired boy approached her with a large bouquet of tulips, smiling, "A gift for your beauty."

A small wave of surprise rippled through the crowd, as nearly all the freshmen recognized the silver-haired boy. He was Li Jiaduo, the outstanding student who delivered the welcome speech at yesterday's opening ceremony. Not only was he a silver sorcerer, but he was also a Swordmaster. Rumor had it that Truth College had already sent him an acceptance letter, yet he ultimately chose Swordflower College. Many speculated he came for the sword Princess, and it seemed this rumor was confirmed the very next day.

Sonya was a bit surprised but accepted the bouquet. "Thanks, but I'm not planning to join any clubs, I don't take endorsement deals, I don't accept students or disciples, I don't offer any tutoring, and I don't take on any challenges. My friend list is full, so you might be wasting these tulips, you know?"

"No problem," Li Jiaduo replied, gently brushing his bangs aside with a smile. "Tulips can't compare to the fragrance of the Sword Princess's towel. It's an honor for these tulips to be given to you."

Pfft!

Adelle almost burst out laughing, Lois's eyes widened, and Engulite was stunned for a moment before she reacted. Although Sonya's expression remained unchanged, the twitching corners of her mouth betrayed her inner turmoil.

Even the onlooking students were bewildered.

Was this really the same aloof and handsome top student, Li Jiaduo, from yesterday? How could he utter such cheesy lines? He was from a Viscount family, after all. Had the education in Viscount families declined so much, or was this just the extent of Li Jiaduo's taste?

However, Li Jiaduo noticed the Stretch Paw Club President's eyes crinkling with amusement, and he felt his heart melt. He immediately thought his strategy was spot on. He had anticipated that by the time he enrolled two months after the Meteor Trial, the Sword Princess would have been pestered by countless admirers. Yet, there hadn't been any rumors, so ordinary methods of flirting wouldn't work.

After much deliberation, he decided to take a different approach and use cheesy pickup lines to launch his offensive! The Sword Princess had likely encountered many refined noble gentlemen, much like someone who eats gourmet meals every day and is tired of them. Perhaps a rustic dish could evoke a sense of nostalgia?

Moreover, as long as the Sword Princess smiled, it was a victory! Li Jiaduo felt he was already a step ahead of other suitors, at least she would remember him!

So he struck while the iron was hot. "This class might be too elementary for you, senior sister. If you have some free time, why not join me for a drink in the secret garden and we can chat about my family's inherited Sensing Swordsmanship?"

"Sensing Swordsmanship? Are you from the Seya Family?" Sonya was a bit surprised. In the Swordmaster circle, Sensing Swordsmanship was as renowned as Vibration Swordsmanship, both being unique family Inheritances. She was indeed interested.

But she smiled and said, “But you’re a first-year student, right? This class is a required course. Is it really okay for you to skip it?”

“The professor isn’t here yet,” Li Jiaduo joked. “I’m not exactly a model student.”

“But that puts me in a tough spot,” Sonya said, feigning distress. “Because I really want to attend this class.”

“Senior sister, you’re already exploring the Distant Sky Domain, why are you still interested in the Sea of Knowledge?” Li Jiaduo asked. “Why not discuss Sensing Swordsmanship with me? It might be more rewarding.”

“You make a good point, but...” Sonya slowly stood up, smiling. “I’m here to substitute for the professor.”

Ding-dong-

The class bell rang, but it couldn’t snap Li Jiaduo out of his shock.

“I’m a sanctuary sorcerer, so I don’t need to focus on the Sea of Knowledge, but you’re still just a silver sorcerer, so it’s best to pay attention in class,” Sonya said with a gentle smile, placing the bouquet of tulips down. “I’ll pass on your kind gesture to Professor Trozan, and I’ll make sure to relay the message about ‘tulips not being as fragrant as the sword Princess’s towel’... Now, take your seat and attend the class.”

She then walked to the lectern and addressed the excited freshmen, “Quiet, please. Due to certain reasons, Professor Trozan won’t be able to teach today, so I’ll be taking over. I’m Sonya Therave, a second-year student from the Swords Sect. If you have any complaints, feel free to email the principal.”

“No complaints!” The freshmen almost shouted in unison. Although Professor Trozan was also a sanctuary sorcerer, the sword Princess was a renowned figure in Galaxia, a legendary senior sister only a year older than them, and her words were so captivating. Naturally, they preferred her teaching!

“Though I say this, some of you might not know that I’m already a sanctuary sorcerer exploring the Distant Sky Domain. With my experience and materials, I could easily teach this course. However, what you’re more eager to learn about now should be the Lake Angel Inheritance from the Sea of Knowledge, right?”

“And also the Specter’s Inheritance and the Inheritance of Time!” a student exclaimed excitedly.

Sonya chuckled, “But by the time you become two-wings sorcerers or sanctuary sorcerers, those two inheritances will likely have concluded. As for the Lake Inheritance, if you put in some effort, you might still have a chance.”

Adelle, sitting below, chimed in earnestly, “Yes, as long as you can summon a spirit on your first day of sword practice, you’ll definitely make it.”

“Students aren’t allowed to interrupt the professor!” Sonya tossed a piece of chalk down, which Adelle managed to dodge.

“Is it true and not just a rumor?” a freshman asked in surprise. “Did you really summon a spirit on your first day of swordsmanship, breaking through to the silver realm?”

“Impossible, right? Maybe she had some prior exposure to swordsmanship? Didn’t the forum say she practiced for a month before?”

“But considering she went from sorcerer to sanctuary in just a hundred days, advancing to silver in one day doesn’t seem too strange.”

Seeing the class turning into her personal press conference, Sonya snapped her fingers, and a sharp sword energy whistled through the room, instantly silencing everyone.

“In any case, this class will be taught by Lois, who broke through 300 meters in the Lake Inheritance,” Sonya gestured towards Lois with a smile. “The current record in Stars is 410 meters, and Lois reached 310 meters, placing her in the top tier of Trial Takers.”

Feeling the expectant and astonished gazes of the freshmen, Lois found her steps heavier. As she passed Sonya, she couldn’t help but say, “You call someone else to teach when you could do it yourself...”

“Well, what can I say? I’m a sanctuary sorcerer,” the village girl shrugged, flashing a sweet smile that shattered many young hearts.

Truth be told, Sonya wasn't intentionally putting her roommate on the spot. As a newly minted silver sorcerer in the Virtual Realm, Lois's ability to lead in the Lake Inheritance demonstrated her talent and insight into the inheritance, making her more than qualified to teach.

Facing hundreds of freshmen, Lois naturally relaxed, showing no signs of stage fright. After a brief introduction, she dove straight into the topic, "The primary condition for entering the Lake Inheritance is possessing a water spell spirit. Then, dive into the Sea of Knowledge and grasp the golden chains within to reach the Great Road..."

"The difficulty of the Lake Inheritance increases as you walk further. If you encounter danger and can't continue, immediately jump into the sea on either side. The water will automatically carry you out of the Great Road, but you'll be unable to re-enter the Lake Inheritance for 24 hours."

"There are several common challenges in the Lake Inheritance..."

This lecture was engaging not only for the freshmen but also for Sonya. After all, she couldn't enter the Lake Inheritance herself, and Lois used her own experiences as examples during the lecture. Watching her roommate teach was inherently interesting, especially with Adelle constantly causing mischief below-they were there to stir things up.

Next came the free question session, where everyone eagerly asked various questions about the Lake Inheritance until someone suddenly asked, "We might not make it to the Lake Inheritance, but could senior sister Therave share some insights from her Sea of Knowledge experiences regarding virtual realm exploration?"

Sonya paused, thought for a moment, then stood up and said, “The most important thing is definitely not to stay in one place too long. This action is very dangerous; don’t ask me why.”

“As for other advice, my suggestions are similar to what’s in your textbooks. If I must share some personal insights, or perhaps regrets when I look back...”

“First, find the soft spot of your target.”

Freshmen: “Uh-huh!”

“Second, seize the opportunity.”

Freshmen: “Uh-huh.”

“Third, when it’s time to act, do so decisively, or you’ll face competition!”

The freshmen didn’t notice the odd expressions on Lois and the others’ faces; they were diligently taking notes-surely this was advice on handling the Blade Fish Dragon, right?

When the bell rang, although Sonya wanted to make a quick escape, the juniors wouldn't miss the chance to surround the sword Princess. They crowded around her, asking for autographs, photos, and hugs.

Faced with the adoration and pursuit of the juniors, Sonya, as a vain college girl, felt a mix of annoyance and a touch of pride. She knew this was an opportunity to develop the Stretch Paw Club, so she selectively fulfilled some fans' requests. As she pondered how to slip away, she suddenly spotted a junior sister outside the crowd.

Typically, fashion-conscious Swordflower students either didn't wear uniforms or customized them to suit themselves. But this junior sister's uniform was original, and she wore very old-fashioned glasses, had a short haircut for easy maintenance that suited her, and stood outside the crowd, timidly not daring to squeeze in. From head to toe, she exuded the aura of a country girl newly arrived in the city.

Sonya focused her gaze and saw her name on the junior sister's book: Nolin.

A name as ordinary as Linda...

It seemed familiar, the village girl thought.

"Nolin!"

The crowd fell silent as they watched senior sister Therave walk through them to the inconspicuous Nolin. Then, the senior sister adjusted her collar, gently removed her glasses, and smiled, “Isn’t this cute?”

“When you have time, go to ‘Perfect Starlight’ for a vision correction surgery. Swordflower students can get a 32% discount with their student ID; it’s not expensive. Then grow your hair to medium length and tie it in a ponytail for easy maintenance. You’ll look even better. Are you listening?”

Nolin was stunned for a moment before nodding vigorously.

“Open your mouth.”

“Ah.”

Sonya unwrapped a lollipop and popped it into her mouth. “If you don’t like using lip balm, sucking on a lollipop can make your lips moist, and one can last you the whole morning, while also helping with weight control. I used to do this often-though if you want to build your physique, it’s best to eat well.”

“Keep it up; you’ll embrace a rosy college life.”

Then Sonya turned and waved, “Goodbye, everyone. Study hard, and don’t skip the next class!”

Once Sonya and the others left the classroom, the freshmen surrounded Nolin. Despite the unprecedented attention, Nolin remained silent, sucking on the lollipop and staring blankly at the classroom door.

## Chapter 655: The Curse of Celestium

“More tulips again?”

In the office, Trozan noticed Sonya entering with a bouquet of tulips and reached out to take them. Sonya smiled, “Your students asked me to pass these on to you.”

“It’s quite remarkable. For years, no student has sent me tulips, but ever since you made an appearance during the Meteor Trial, someone has been sending flowers to me through you every few days.” As a sword saint, Trozan preferred to speak plainly with a touch of sarcasm, much like her mastery of ‘The Invisible Hand’s Secret Blade.’

“Oh, Sister Trozan~” Sonya hugged Trozan from behind, playfully whining, “Can’t I be the one sending them to you as your student?”

Trozan had been researching a new swordsmanship miracle this year, which conveniently required petals as material. Sonya, during her studies with Trozan months ago, noticed that Trozan changed her tulips every few days, thus learning her professor's favorite flower.

When Adelle tried to trade Sonya's preferences for some pocket money, Sonya claimed she liked tulips and then passed them on to Trozan. This way, the flower senders didn't lose face, Trozan got what she liked, and no one was hurt in this little world Sonya created.

Trozan was aware of this but didn't refuse; she genuinely liked tulips. Perhaps because of the stark contrast between her appearance and personality, only Sonya knew this little secret.

As for the village girl herself, Sonya's fondness for flowers was clearly a city-dweller's indulgence. She had grown tired of the vibrant blooms she saw every spring in the woods outside her town. Unless the Observer could conjure a bouquet from the Virtual Realm, she felt indifferent towards them.

Trozan, unable to resist Sonya's antics, changed the subject, "Do you know where I was called to this morning?"

Sonya sat down, intrigued, "Where did you go?"

Trozan wasn't the type of professor who exploited her students. This was the first time she had asked Sonya to cover a class, indicating an urgent matter. From her tone, it seemed like an arrangement from higher up.

"Kilian was seriously injured," Trozan said with a hint of schadenfreude in her voice. "The Church convened a Stars healing array for him, and I was summoned to supply spellforce. If you weren't just a sword peerage, you would have been called too."

Sonya hesitated for a moment before finally recalling the name from her memory: "The principal of Truth College, honorary advisor of Griffin Squad, lifelong honorary sorcerer of Astral Hall, Viscount of Callia, Alchemist King Kilian Morgan?"

"Do you always list a string of titles before saying someone's name? Swordflower College sophomore, Meteor Trial champion, most-voted campus goddess at this year's Masquerade Ball, stretching paw sword saint Sonya Therave?" Trozan mocked.

Sonya couldn't help but be surprised. The Alchemist King was the most renowned sorcerer of the past century, his life story a true legend. In her remote hometown, the villagers knew of only two famous figures: Delarose and the Alchemist King Kilian!

The Alchemist King's legendary tales are endless, and his spellcasting sect is a testament to his prowess. Although his primary focus was the Alchemic Sect, known for creation rather than combat, in his hands, it became a formidable weapon. His iconic Miracle, "Transmute Stone to Gold," is both revered and feared. With this technique, he once sealed a five-layer Abyss, turning all monsters and even the ground into gold. To this day, people still find remnants of his Miracle in the Abyss.

As for Trozan's disdain towards Kilian, it's not due to any personal grudge; it's simply her nature to be a sharp-tongued cynic, reveling in schadenfreude without bothering with emotional intelligence. Even if she offends a legendary sorcerer, what can they do? Beat her up? They can't, so why should she care?

Don't be fooled by her friendliness towards Sonya. If Sonya hadn't become a sanctuary sorcerer, matching her in power, Trozan wouldn't have allowed her into her personal space, treating her merely as a disciple. It's precisely

because Sonya is now a sanctuary sorcerer that Trozan willingly shares gossip about legendary sorcerers.

The village girl doesn't find Professor Sister's personality problematic. Everyone has their flaws, and Trozan's sharp tongue, which doesn't negatively impact society, is quite tolerable. In fact, she finds it easy to get along with straightforward and pure-hearted "bad girls" like Trozan, Lois, and Adelle.

"How did he get injured?" Sonya asked curiously. "Not to mention the Sanctuary, I've read in the 'Sorcerer Gazette' that his vitality and defense rank among the top five in all Star sorcerers!"

"The editor of the Sorcerer Gazette is merely a golden sorcerer, which should tell you how unreliable that paper is," Trozan replied. "However, Kilian's Defensive Miracle, 'Dark Gold Giant,' indeed ranks in the top five among the Stars, capable of withstanding legendary assaults... if they're only at the legendary level."

Sonya was taken aback. "Could it be at the demigod level?"

“It’s at the Divine Sovereign level!” Trozan chuckled. “When he was only 50 meters from the summit of Ruby Mountain, he was corroded by a curse flowing from the Wishflux Celestium, with most of his soul dissolved, leaving only his eyelids able to move upon returning to reality!”

50 meters!

Sonya was stunned. They had just broken through the 50th level in the Virtual Realm yesterday, yet the Divine Lord Inheritance at Ruby Mountain was already in the final 50-meter sprint?

But another term caught her attention even more.

“A curse from the Wishflux Celestium?”

Trozan placed the tulips in a vase and said, “Every Celestium has its own curse. The longer a Celestium exists, the stronger and more varied the curses it endures. Kilian’s curse is said to be a mere fragment of the ‘Bloodfly Seethe,’ yet it’s enough to leave him in agony, with recovery taking years—legendary sorcerers’ souls are notoriously difficult to heal.”

“A curse?” Sonya was bewildered. “Why would a Celestium have curses?”

“This relates to the very nature of Celestium,” Trozan explained. “Simply put, Divine Sovereigns must steal something from the Virtual Realm to sustain the Celestium’s existence.”

“But when the Virtual Realm gets robbed, it’s obviously not pleased, so it curses those thieves unless they return what they stole.”

Divine Sovereigns, Celestiums, Virtual Realms, thieves?

Moreover, this mechanism of stealing from the Virtual Realm and thus being cursed by it gave Sonya a strong sense of déjà vu.

“Why would a Celestium-“

“My dear student,” Trozan interrupted her, “have you forgotten that your professor is also just a humble and ignorant sanctuary sorcerer?”

“I’m a sanctuary sorcerer too, but compared to Sister Trozan, I feel like a complete illiterate!” Sonya shook Trozan’s arm pitifully. “Tell me, please~”

“I don’t know much more, so I can’t tell you, you little genius who uses humility to annoy others.” Trozan poked Sonya’s forehead.

“But how do you know these things?”

“Because this world has more than just you having adventures.” Trozan said casually, “Don’t underestimate any sanctuary sorcerer; every Sanctuary Legend has had their time as the protagonist.”

Sonya asked, “You seem quite familiar with ‘Bloodfly Seethe’?”

“I just happen to know a bit,” Trozan replied. “I encountered a Blood Moon sorcerer in the Distant Sky Domain who attacked me with a simplified version

of this curse. While attacking, he claimed that this miracle originated from the Blood Moon Sovereign's divine intervention, 'Bloodfly Seethe,' which could rapidly devour the soul and continue to grow... After he finished talking, I simply sliced off his head with a sword."

Sonya found it odd, "Why would the Blood Moon Sovereign's divine intervention turn into a Celestium curse?"

"Now we're entering the realm of speculation without any evidence," Trozan explained. "If we say sorcerers are the most powerful beings, and Divine Sovereigns are the most powerful sorcerers, then the divine interventions they unleash..."

"Aren't they just the most terrifying curses the Virtual Realm can find?"

## **Chapter 656: Search for the Wandering Soul Theft Event**

"73 Source Crystals, 232 points..."

In the inn at Black Robe Town, Ash opened Aurora's Sorcerer Handbook to tally up his inventory. Source Crystals were accumulated through daily sign-ins, while points were earned by channeling spirits into the game.

It's worth mentioning that after his Rainbow virtual wings were more than halfway formed, a three-winged spirit could only be exchanged for 12 points, a two-winged for 5 points, and a one-winged for 2 points-Ash was baffled. A three-winged spirit was worth only 12 points, equivalent to 2 Source Crystals, not even enough for a single card draw.

However, Ash understood that the handbook dynamically reduced his earning efficiency. Initially, when he was still a novice, a one-winged spirit could be exchanged for 10 points. With Ash's current prowess, acquiring hundreds of one-winged spirits would be a breeze. If the handbook didn't adjust the exchange rates, Ash would have overwhelmed its in-game purchase system long ago.

In theory, he should have been able to save more points, especially since the Distant Sky Domain, despite its higher combat intensity, offered greater rewards, yielding two or three three-winged spirits almost every night.

More importantly, the sword Princess no longer needed spirits to supplement her household expenses.

In fact, ever since the Witch joined the team, the sword Princess only picked the higher-priced spirits to sell. After Vesser joined, she didn't even take the valuable spirits, only those she could use herself. This was not just because she no longer needed money in reality, but also because she had to consider others' perceptions.

To put it simply, when they were still in the tug-of-war phase, the sword Princess wanted more care and resource allocation to feel secure, subtly probing, “Do you like me?” But now that they occasionally found opportunities for secret office romances, the sword Princess naturally wanted to distance herself from Ash, signaling to everyone, “I don’t actually like him.”

Besides, mixing emotions with interests always felt a bit off.

It’s not that the sword Princess believed emotions had to be pure and untainted, but accepting a few spirits from him felt like being kept, which seemed too cheap-she felt shortchanged!

Now that she’s a sanctuary sorcerer, a few spirits can’t satisfy her appetite!

So, it’s better not to take them, so she can argue with Ash more confidently in the future!

However, after some discussion, everyone realized that selling spirits through the sword Princess was still the most fair and efficient method. The Witch didn’t need money, and Ash and Vesser were in places where trading wasn’t very developed. Only the sword Princess had access to a highly developed spirit trading platform, where she could sell to the school or auction them on the platform. A rare three-winged spirit, if put through a few days of auction, could often sell for thousands of gold coins.

Ash didn’t say he was giving them to the sword Princess, but rather, “You’re in charge of managing the team’s assets. When we find a way to trade in the Virtual Realm, we’ll come to you for money.” Reluctantly, the sword Princess took on this role, and every night before exiting the Virtual Realm, she would find time to report to him, “The team has saved this much money, invested in these stable funds, and I invested our shares in some high-risk financial products.”

So, even though the sword Princess no longer needed spirits for subsidies, most spirits were still handed over to her to plan for the future household finances.

However, after participating in the Specter's Inheritance, their efficiency in acquiring spirits plummeted. The Inheritance rarely rewarded spirits, but when it did, they were usually Soul Spirits that were immediately useful, so there was no question of selling them.

Ash himself had a small stockpile of spirits, mostly those he could use to some extent. These backup spirits weren't fully sustained, receiving just one gold coin every three days to keep them going.

He had considered converting these spirits into points through the Aurora's Sorcerer Handbook, but in recent days, all his surplus spirits were sold off in Black Robe Town.

It wasn't just him; Igor, Harvey, Chikara, and Gwen-all the sorcerers sold whatever spirits they could.

The reason was simple: to stockpile gold coins.

Back when they were rampaging through the wasteland, they had financial support from the Mercury Trojan Horse, allowing them to treat money like dirt, feeding their spirits six meals of it a day if they wished. But now, having severed ties with the Mercury Trojan Horse and not having joined a new cult, they had to fend for themselves.

Although they had previously raided several warehouses of the Four Pillars Cult, their Spatial Cards had limited storage capacity and had to accommodate other survival supplies, so they managed to take away just over ten thousand gold coins in total.

A three-wing spirit consumes 3 gold coins daily, totaling 90 a month. With 14 three-wing spirits in the group, the monthly cost is 1,260 gold coins. Not counting daily living expenses, ten thousand gold coins would last only ten months!

These three-wing spirits were distributed as follows: Ash had 4, Igor 2, Harvey 2, and Chikara 6!

Chikara, after all, was a seasoned Sanctuary sorcerer for nearly ten years, so having such a foundation was quite normal. However, the fact that a slave's daily gold consumption exceeded that of his master made Igor want to sell off all of the orc's three-wing spirits.

Yet Chikara argued confidently that his spirits were top-notch, specializing in fire spells or Spatial abilities. His six three-wing spirits could perform a variety of powerful Miracles, including attack, defense, healing, reconnaissance, and mobility, making them worth keeping.

This reminded Igor of Chikara's strengths, leading him to order Chikara to create spatial artifacts.

Party A, Igor, requested three spatial rings with a capacity of 10 cubic meters each. Party B, Chikara, stated that the workload was too great; even working nonstop for a month, he could only produce one ring with a 5-cubic-meter capacity. Party A expressed great understanding of Party B's difficulties and generously extended the deadline to six months.

After discussion, they decided to sell off excess spirits as quickly as possible to stockpile gold coins, and to reduce the daily ration for the three-wing spirits from 3 coins to 2.

The consequence of underfeeding spirits is similar to humans not having enough to eat-their performance drops by 50%. If left unfed for too long, the spirits wouldn't die but would gradually consume the sorcerer's soul, which is why Death Row Inmates in Shattered Lake Prison could still sustain their spirits.

Although they had enough gold coins to last ten months, they still followed Igor's orders.

Because the War of Faith was far from over.

As the war dragged on, the already fragile economic system of the wasteland would completely collapse. First of all, gold coins are refined from gold mines, which are prime resource points contested by the Qinyi Alliance and the Four Pillars Cult. When the fighting starts, the efficiency of gold mine production will naturally be affected.

More importantly, the Four Pillars Cult and the Qinyi Alliance are also tightening the circulation of gold coins!

Earlier, we discussed the difference between feeding spirits adequately and inadequately, but there's another scenario-what if you overfeed the spirits?

Take the three wings spirit, for instance. If you feed it 6 gold coins a day, its performance can be enhanced to 120%!

In normal times, sorcerers wouldn't double their spending for a mere 20% boost, but during wartime, when you could be wiped out by an AOE attack at any moment, who would skimp on expenses?

With gold coin production rates decreasing and consumption rates increasing, coupled with major powers actively hoarding strategic resources, it's foreseeable that the market's gold coin circulation will sharply decline in the near future, possibly extending into the post-war period. Saving money now is preparation for the future.

Of course, Ash and his companions have another option: robbery.

With four Sanctuaries, one two-wings, and a Raven, they constitute a top-tier criminal gang anywhere. But they've already antagonized the Four Pillars Cult, and if they were to target the Qinyi Alliance, they'd have no place to hide in all of Senlo; they could venture into the Four Pillars Cult's territory to raid logistics units, but the Mercury Trojan Horse is waiting for them.

Let's not forget that the Mercury Trojan Horse can now dominate a legendary sorcerer. If she seizes the opportunity, they could face total annihilation.

For safety's sake, they have to endure some hardship.

Although Ash can't afford the 648 points "Box of Source Crystals," he can't bring himself to close the game. Instead, he opens the "Operator Search" interface.

A screen of dim gray, filled with despairing souls, appears before him!

"Wandering Soul Theft' Event Search"

"Limited Items 'Soul Theft Handbook,' 'Wandering Spirit Ring,' 'Annihilation Eye' probability ↑↑"

"Limited Outfits 'Killing Demon Soul: Observer,' 'Secret Hunter: Observer,' 'Bloodstained Bridal: Observer' probability ↑↑"

"Ends on September 3rd at 00:00"

Yes, a new event search!

But the system didn't notify him, not a single hint. Ash only discovered this search yesterday; otherwise, he would have found a way to scrape together money for in-game purchases!

Ash suspected it might be related to the Specter's Inheritance, but he couldn't verify it.

Now is the final chance for the search. Logically, Ash should hurry to spend money on in-game purchases, but he's hesitating.

Firstly, the only in-game purchase option left that can trigger the first-time double reward is the 648 points "Box of Source Crystals." Ash wanted to save points to buy this, but he's far from having enough, leaving him with the option to buy the 198 points "Bag of Source Crystals" at full price, which he's reluctant to do.

Secondly, this event search hasn't increased the operator acquisition probability!

If there were new operators, Ash wouldn't hesitate to spend every penny!

Even if there were outfits like "Bridal: Sword Princess," Ash wouldn't be stingy with his savings.

But without new operators, and the outfits being exclusively for his own Observer-who wants to draw their own outfits?

The only valuable items are the three limited artifacts, and it's the first time Ash has seen a search event focused on artifacts.

But is it really worth spending all his savings on a few artifacts?

After much contemplation, Ash washed his hands and decided to use 72 Source Crystals for 24 searches.

Yes, he plans to use up his Source Crystals and stop there, without making additional in-game purchases. If he doesn't get anything, so be it. The limited artifacts have no intelligence available, and they don't hold much appeal for him.

If he spends money and ends up with all Observer outfits, he's afraid he'll need to seek psychological counseling from Igor.

First came 18 white lights polluting the pool, all energy potions, experience potions, and career potions, which he'll refine later.

Then, 4 purple lights, consisting of 2 bottles of "lightless sanctuary potion," 1 bottle of "Pure Luminescence Elixir," and a new artifact "soul sigil."

Finally, 2 golden lights!

"Killing Demon Soul: Observer!"

"Soul Theft Handbook!"

He actually drew the limited items!

## Chapter 657: Divine Sovereigns Intervention

Although Ash managed to obtain a Limited Item, his expression turned peculiar as he examined the effects of the new artifact.

“Soul Theft Handbook”

“Effect – Soul Theft Chart: Creates a Soul Theft Domain with a 50-meter radius, lasting 600 seconds. All life forms that perish within this domain will have their souls stolen; virtual realm creatures cannot return to the Virtual Realm, and sorcerers’ souls cannot return to reality. Activation requires the consumption of 1 Source Crystal.”

“Effect – Soul Refining Chart: The Soul Theft Handbook contains a page mimicking the World Secret Domain’s ‘Soul Refining Pool’ pattern, with a maximum capacity of 100,000 points. Current points: 0/100,000.”

“Effect – Strengthening Soul Chart: The Strengthening Soul Chart continuously enhances the sorcerer’s soul, with effects proportional to the points in the Soul Refining Chart. For every 100 points, the Strengthening Soul Chart can enhance the sorcerer’s soul by 0.01 of an adult’s soul volume daily.”

“Effect – Death Soul Chart: By knowing the target’s real name and appearance, one can consume 1,000 Soul Refining points to cast a Death Soul Curse, ignoring spatial distance. The curse will continuously strengthen by devouring souls and constantly affect the target’s mental functions.”

“Effect – Soul Ignite Chart: Burns 1,000 Soul Refining points or consumes 1 Source Crystal to significantly enhance the target’s soul for 72 hours.”

[‘Even if I die, I’ll crawl back from hell to seek revenge!’

‘Good, I also think dying just once is a waste.’]

Undoubtedly, the Soul Theft Handbook lives up to its status as a Limited Item-it is a growth artifact that combines cultivation, attack, and enhancement!

If Ash could fill the Soul Refining Chart, he could increase his soul volume by 10 adult souls daily without doing anything.

Through Specter’s Inheritance, Ash deeply understands the difficulty of enhancing one’s soul.

Generally, sorcerers strengthen their souls as they ascend the Virtual Realm. Using an adult human as a basic unit, a silver sorcerer has the soul volume of two people, a golden sorcerer five, and a sanctuary sorcerer ten.

Without specifically cultivating the Soul Sect, sorcerers' automatic growth is limited to this level. Even with active enhancement through 'Soul Refining,' 'Soul Grinding,' or 'Physical Soul,' the path to soul enhancement is extremely arduous-painful and exhausting.

Any cultivation path that permanently enhances a sorcerer is accompanied by endless suffering; the Physical Sect is the best example. The Physical Sect can permanently strengthen the body, and physical sorcerers are powerful even without spirits, but if one can live comfortably, they would never choose this path.

Most sorcerers only dabble in the Physical Sect; the sword Princess once used the Sword Body Miracle to enhance her potential, leaving her exhausted both physically and mentally.

Similarly, the Soul Sect permanently enhances the soul, but it's never easy or pleasant.

This highlights the power of the Soul Theft Handbook's Soul Refining Chart and Strengthening Soul Chart-no extra arduous cultivation required, yet it can enhance the soul by 10 adult souls daily! Although the effect of these 10 souls will rapidly diminish as the soul strengthens, compared to traditional soul cultivation methods, it's far more effortless.

As for the Death Soul Chart, it's even more terrifying. This is the first time Ash has seen an artifact capable of attacking beyond visual range just by knowing a name and appearance. Unfortunately, he doesn't know Mercury Trojan Horse's real appearance, otherwise...

However, compared to the three charts, Ash was actually more intrigued by the activation method of the Soul Theft Chart and the Soul Ignite Chart-consuming Source Crystals!

It was the first time he realized that Source Crystals had uses beyond just the Search!

Was it that only Limited Items could unlock the use of Source Crystals, or did Source Crystals inherently have uses Ash was unaware of?

Ash flipped through the Sorcerer's Handbook interface but found no further clues, so he shelved the thought for now. He returned his attention to the Soul Theft Handbook's effect description, his mind filled with speculation.

Undoubtedly, the correct use of this Soul Theft Handbook was to slaughter beings, rapidly fill the Soul Refining Pool, and if pursued, retaliate with the Death Soul Chart, then continue killing to replenish soul points.

The creator of this artifact was undoubtedly an Evil Sorcerer who thrived on slaughter.

Thus, Ash found himself rather uninterested. The only useful aspect of this artifact for him was the Soul Ignite Chart, which could temporarily enhance the soul. Although it required consuming a Source Crystal, they were still exploring the Specter's Inheritance, and strengthening the soul was very beneficial for exploration.

It felt like a loss...

Ash looked at the newly drawn outfits-Swimsuit, Doomsday Afternoon, Killing Demon Soul. He realized he had more outfits than the female operators.

“Killing Demon Soul: Observer: Increases the effect of soul sect attacks initiated by the wearer by 10% (limited to the Virtual Realm, but if worn in reality, the same outfit can also provide enhancement).”

The portrait of this outfit was quite appealing. In it, the Observer wore a black trench coat and hat, with silver-scaled gloves on his hands and a chain at his waist. As he walked, there seemed to be a special effect of howling specters. Behind him was an endless sea of lost souls, as if he had just completed a massacre.

But a 10% increase in soul sect attack effect...

Ash's role in the Specter's Inheritance was that of a Guardian!

He didn't think a 10% increase in attack effect would make him comparable to the Sword Princess and the others, who had been immersed in the Inheritance for days!

Better to honestly wear the “Doomsday Afternoon” outfit...

Ash thought this was a major loss; the two golden lights he drew were either unusable or only partially functional. It would have been better not to draw them at all.

However, among the purple artifacts, there was one that caught his eye.

“Soul Sigil: Increases the soul enhancement effect received by the bearer by 15%.”

This artifact was perfect for Ash!

Yesterday, after painstakingly clearing the 50th level, three Inheritance rewards appeared, and it was decided that Ash would choose a Specter’s Appendix-“Soul Merge”!

The Soul Merge Miracle included three Soul Spirits, and once Ash obtained them, he could directly use these three spirits the next time he entered the Specter’s Inheritance. This was the advantage of the Specter’s Appendix. Besides the Appendix, there were the Canon and the Codex, and every Inheritance was one less once taken, with the Codex being the reward for completing the Specter’s Inheritance.

The effect of the Soul Merge Miracle was straightforward-temporary soul fusion with the target!

Frankly, this Miracle wasn’t highly practical, but Ash and his team chose this Appendix entirely for strategic purposes in the Inheritance. As a Guardian, Ash having the Soul Merge Miracle meant that in special stages, he could merge souls with everyone, helping them resist soul-targeting negative effects.

If they had the Soul Merge Miracle earlier, not only could they have easily overcome ‘Soul’s Obsession’, but even during ‘Rejuvenating Return’, Ash could have helped others retain their memories!

Now, with the soul sigil enhancing their powers, combined with the Soul Merge Miracle, Ash could effectively act as a shield and healer for all souls!

Additionally, there are two bottles of lightless sanctuary potion. Although they all possess a Sanctuary, the potion further enhances their understanding of it.

In truth, a Sanctuary can be further developed and strengthened, even evolving into various unique abilities. For instance, Qenna’s soul sanctuary can suppress souls, and Chikara’s flame sanctuary can incinerate objects within its domain. However, such enhancements require a long period of cultivation, clearly beyond the reach of Ash and his novice companions.

“Ash, it’s time for dinner.”

“Coming.”

Ash stepped out, only to see the dark-skinned girl and the blonde beauty, and curiously asked, “Where are the others?”

“I sent them ahead,” Igor replied, pulling out two bags of gold coins from a Spatial Card. “Here, take these.”

“Huh?” Ash asked, “Is it your birthday today? But shouldn’t I be the one giving you money?”

“Stop babbling, take it and make sure they don’t find out. At least on the surface, we’re all in this together,” Igor said.

Ash quickly grasped the situation: “We’re feeding our spirits normally, just cutting their gold coin supply?”

Every day, they had to collect their quota of gold and silver from Igor to feed their spirits, only giving them a half-full meal. Now, Igor was secretly giving them extra, clearly keeping up appearances while doing something different behind the scenes.

Igor didn’t really need to go through all this trouble, since Gwen was merely a follower and Chikara a slave. Ignoring their feelings wouldn’t cause any issues.

But Ash understood why Igor was going the extra mile—he didn’t want Chikara and Gwen to become dissatisfied, nor did he want Ash and the others to weaken their own strength.

Wanting everything naturally leads to deception.

Rather than being stingy, the Con Artist simply didn't trust Gwen and Chikara, so he aimed to weaken and deceive them.

"I thought you'd only give it to Ash," Harvey said, stowing the gold bag in his Spatial Card.

"I actually didn't want to give it to any of you," Igor said coldly. "But you've probably already assumed I'd secretly align with you. If I didn't give it, you'd resent me, so I'm considering this as paying to avoid trouble."

Ash suddenly had a thought: "By the way, when are your birthdays? Should we throw a birthday party?"

Harvey and Igor glanced at him, their eyes filled with the confusion typical of Blood Moon people-Blood Moon folks don't have birthdays!

However, they lost the desire to argue. As they walked, Igor said, "The Four Pillars Cult has suddenly withdrawn its defenses and abandoned several resource points over the past few days. There's no detailed intelligence, but Gwen suspects there's a major issue within the cult."

"Is the Mercury Trojan Horse dead?"

“The death of the Mercury Trojan Horse wouldn’t cause them to abandon territory,” Igor replied. “But your thinking is correct—at least many people have died, leaving them without enough troops to defend so much territory, forcing them to pull back.”

Ash asked, “But haven’t they been in a standoff recently? How could there suddenly be so many deaths?”

Igor: “There could be many possibilities. Perhaps a meteorite fell and punished the Four Pillars Cult? But Gwen mentioned a small incident from the past. She once gathered all the cult members aged 25 to 28 from a small town and reported them to the Mercury Trojan Horse. The next morning, none of them woke up.”

Ash frowned slightly. “Did the Mercury Trojan Horse kill them? Why?”

“At least it wasn’t a spur-of-the-moment decision. It was for some kind of gain, and she has the ability to carry out such large-scale slaughter of cult members,” Igor shrugged. “Maybe she used them as expendable resources.”

Ash noticed something odd. “If that’s the case, why choose young people aged 25 to 28? If she needed expendable resources, why not choose older individuals?”

“Because there are no older people in the wasteland,” Harvey said leisurely as he walked out of the inn.

“What?” Ash was a bit surprised, but Igor seemed to have expected it.

“When we passed by several graveyards and burial sites, I noticed,” Harvey said. “Most of the bones were from individuals under 28 years old. Occasionally, there were bones older than 28, but they were mostly sorcerers.”

“Is it because wars are too frequent, and most people die young?”

“That’s the main reason, but there’s another secondary cause.”

Harvey continued, “I’ve studied the bones of ordinary people and found something interesting. Starting at age 25, the bones begin to show gray-white decay. The closer they get to 28, the more widespread the decay becomes. Even without war, ordinary people can’t live past 28.”

Ash was taken aback.

“Gene Collapse,” Igor said calmly. “Senlo people start experiencing Gene Collapse at 25, leading to full-body failure and death by 28. It’s not a secret, as all ordinary people don’t live past 28, and the Senlo people have long discovered the cause.”

“Why...?”

“The side effect of the Infant Incubator,” Igor explained. “I don’t know if the Gray Fox sorcerers couldn’t invent a perfect Infant Incubator or if they did it intentionally. But every child born from an Infant Incubator faces the threat of Gene Collapse. Curing Gene Collapse is very simple-become a sorcerer.”

“The strengthening of the soul will nourish the body. A sorcerer’s soul, trained in the Sea of Knowledge, will automatically heal the Gene Collapse within. Therefore, ordinary people can’t live past 28, but sorcerers don’t have this obstacle.”

Ash immediately understood why Igor said the Gray Fox sorcerers did it intentionally-how could sorcerers capable of creating so many fantasy creations fail to make a proper Infant Incubator? They deliberately created Gene Collapse to place a death sentence on every new life!

If you don’t become a sorcerer, you die!

Ordinary people aren’t qualified to enjoy the divine era’s prosperity created by the great ones!

But undoubtedly, the Gray Fox Divine Era must have provided many conveniences for ordinary people to become sorcerers. Their sorcerer rate probably reached 95% or higher, making the side effect of the Infant Incubator bearable. However, in the Senlo wasteland, without the Gray Fox educational system, most ordinary people can’t become sorcerers!

Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate, the high-intensity wars overshadowed this phenomenon, and most people simply didn’t live past 28. Those unfortunate enough to reach that age found that not even Healing Sorcerers could save them; they could only watch as they approached death.

All the major cults were aware of the drawbacks of the Infant Incubator, yet none chose natural birth. It wasn't just because they needed women for reproduction, but also because they didn't need low-level laborers over 28.

"This is really..." Ash couldn't help but scoff, "even worse than the Blood Moon."

"I actually think the Blood Moon is more advanced," Harvey shrugged. "Even the useless can be burned; people over 28 can still be squeezed for some value. Killing them all at once is such a waste."

They arrived at the Foxlamp Ice Room, where Raven and his companions had already secured their spots. As usual, there was no food in front of Raven, and Ash only had half a portion. After finishing half, Ash would take Raven for a second round.

But tonight, after Ash finished his half, he just sat there, lost in thought.

Even the orc could tell that the leader was in a bad mood tonight. "Ash, just tell us who to cut down, and I'll get it done!" Chikara's shout made Ash feel like he had become a mountain bandit leader.

"Is it because Silver Lantern took the Bronze Law Demi-God?" Gwen asked.

Igor shot her a look, and she immediately lowered her head to sip her milk tea. Ash was a bit surprised, realizing he hadn't heard about Silver Lantern in a while.

"It's nothing really..." Ash said softly. "I just suddenly feel that, no matter the Kingdom or the time, sorcerers are a pretty nasty bunch."

This sweeping statement left only Raven unscathed in the entire Foxlamp Ice Room.

"It's not necessarily malice. They must have started with good intentions. They have the ability and the will, so they have the right to graffiti the world. Some graffiti remains beautifully radiant, while others become bloody and ugly. Their only common flaw..."

"Is that the wall never had a choice."

"But if you want the power to choose, you must become strong enough to do the graffiti."

Harvey wasn't interested in Ash's musings and continued devouring his cake.

Igor seemed to have something to say but remained silent.

Chikara was deep in thought, Gwen was quiet, and Raven watched Ash silently.

Ash wasn't suddenly overcome with sentimentality; the story of the Gray Fox sorcerers was just a trigger. He was already worried about his future. From the sword Princess's description of the Stars, he knew that whether he entered the Stars or tried to take the sword Princess away, it wouldn't be easy. Not to mention whether the sword Princess would even want to leave the Stars.

The Blood Moon was out of the question, and the only slightly safer place was the Gospel. But the Gospel was still under the strong influence of the Omniscient Weaver. The methods of control were endless, and whether the Gospel was a stable place depended solely on the Omniscient Weaver's whim.

He was genuinely afraid that by the time he returned to the Gospel, Lise would have already become Her Majesty Gosdeya.

Ash had always had a favorable impression of the now-lost Gray Fox Divine Era, naively believing it to be a beautiful time. So tonight, he was also naively disillusioned.

From the Shattered Lake, it was clear to him that if one wished for stability in this world, they must be stronger than all others who sought the same.

Because the stability they all longed for was not the same illusion.

But just how powerful must one become to grasp happiness in their hands? Is reaching the Sanctuary enough, or does one need to become a legend?

Just like Yisuo's Royal Palace on that rainy night, even he faced moments of helplessness.

However, Ash knew well that the main reason for his sudden emotional turmoil tonight was the appearance of another path before him.

"If, and I mean if," Ash said, "if I were to become an Evil Sorcerer who grows stronger through killing in the future, what would you do?"

"Do you even need to ask?" Harvey replied immediately. "Of course, we'd stop you."

"Indeed," Igor said calmly. "I've already prepared several contingency plans to deal with you."

Ash was a bit surprised. "I thought you guys would help me."

"I'd like to join you, but didn't you say before that if you turned bad, we should stop you?" Harvey said. "You'd become an Evil Sorcerer either by becoming the Tactile Sense of the Four Pillars or being controlled by some Pact."

"If you're not yourself, I'd definitely stop you," the Con Artist said. "If you are still you, you'd surely ask me to stop you."

“That makes sense.” Ash nodded, then looked at Raven, preemptively answering, “I get it, you’d kill me, right?”

“No,” Raven shook his head. “If I find it’s not your own will, I will stop you.”

“And... if it is my will?” Ash blinked, swallowing hard.

“I’d help you.”

Not only Ash and the others, but even Gwen, who had been silent, couldn’t help but look over.

“If you want to grow stronger through killing, I can help you,” Raven said. “There are so many bad people in this world; kill one batch, and another grows. I am the best killing tool of Raven Annihilation. I can help you find them. They all deserve to die anyway, so they might as well become your stepping stones.”

Igor couldn’t help but counter, “What if there aren’t that many bad people?”

“If even he has to choose the path of killing,” Raven said, “I think we shouldn’t worry about that.”

“But, Ash, why did you suddenly bring up this hypothetical?” Harvey asked, munching on fries. “Are you planning a massacre?”

“Honestly, hearing you all talk so seriously, I’m embarrassed to say I was just bored after eating,” Ash admitted. “But I also realized that this kind of thinking is quite childish.”

“While I agree with your point,” Igor said, “I feel like you have even more childish thoughts you want to express.”

Ash spread his hands and smiled. “Compared to finding ways to make myself stronger when trouble arises, it’s better to cause trouble for you all, urging you to become stronger to help me. After all...”

“I’m used to giving you guys a hard time.”

Without a word, Igor tossed a piece of medium-rare ribeye over, which Ash caught in his mouth, chewing as he stood up and said, “Tamashi, let’s go, round two!”

“Didn’t you say you were full?”

“The main course is done, now it’s time for some snacks,” Ash suddenly remembered something. “By the way, Tamashi, next time don’t say you’re Raven Annihilation’s best killing tool. You have an even more prestigious title, don’t you?”

Raven paused.

“The best chef of Raven Annihilation!” Ash turned to Igor and said, “You know, Tamashi once told me that the dishes from the Foxlamp Ice Room aren’t as delicious as his cooking! We’ve already made plans; when the opportunity arises, he’ll show us his culinary skills that have reached the pinnacle of Raven Annihilation...”

Raven quickly dragged Ash out to prevent him from revealing more secrets.

Igor watched the two disappear at the door, and after a moment of silence, suddenly asked Harvey, “You can deduce various physical information about a target from their everyday actions, right?”

“Basic ability of a necromancer,” Harvey replied.

“Then-“

“I can’t say.”

“I haven’t even asked yet.”

Virtual Realm, Distant Sky Domain.

Ash and the others opened their eyes in the initial Phantom, distributed the initial collection, and then flew away from the Phantom, searching for the giant Phantom where the Specter’s Inheritance was located.

But as they flew away from the Phantom, the first thing that caught their eyes wasn’t the Specter’s Inheritance, but a blood-red lightning.

A blood-red lightning as thick as a mountain range fiercely pierced into the golden Phantom of the Specter’s Inheritance, continuously unleashing a soul-shaking destructive power, relentlessly damaging the golden Phantom!

Witnessing this scene, the sanctuary sorcerers all had the same thought-

Divine intervention!

The Divine Sovereigns were finally stepping in to interfere!

## Chapter 658: A Step Away

Ruby Mountain, the final fifty meters of the path to the summit, is covered with a layer of strawberry-colored glow. Upon closer inspection, this blood-hued shimmer trembles with instability, countless black dots flickering through, giving the illusion of life despite being mere light.

It resembles a swarm of flies buzzing beneath a sea of blood.

Yet, the Mercury Trojan Horse proceeds without hesitation, reaching out through the blood-colored glow. The shimmer writhes like maggots on her palm, threatening to devour her soul, but halts at her wrist.

She climbs slowly through the blood-hued glow, gradually closing the fifty-meter chasm.

This is the greatest trial within the Divine Lord Inheritance, the Bloodfly Benediction.

The curse of Bloodfly Seethe merges with the Benediction, and any sorcerer seeking the Wishflux Inheritance must traverse these fifty meters of Bloodfly Benediction.

Sanctuary is meaningless here; attempting to expand it results in the Benediction swiftly draining one's spellforce. Flying is futile as well; Ruby Mountain's gravity is as oppressive as a prison, doubling with every meter above ground, as if something immense weighs upon them.

Of course, if it were true Bloodfly Seethe, no legendary sorcerer could pass. This curse, emanating from the Wishflux Celestium, is a calamity even Divine Sovereigns cannot completely eradicate, only barely suppress-a force beyond the resistance of legendary sorcerers.

However, the fusion of Bloodfly Seethe with Benediction not only weakens the curse's power but also offers ordinary sorcerers a lifeline amidst danger.

After the long ascent through Benediction, sorcerers generally become initiated into the Fate Sect, allowing them to influence the Benediction to some extent.

If they can control the Benediction and suppress the curse within, they can avoid its harm.

The most intriguing aspect is that the Benediction and curse mutually diminish each other, acting as counterparts. For instance, the curse suppresses the Benediction, making it easier for sorcerers to control, but if they aid the Benediction in overpowering the curse, they remain safe, yet their mental exertion skyrockets.

Thus, they must find a balance, minimizing mental strain while maintaining maximum safety.

However, should sorcerers make a significant error in controlling the Benediction, allowing even a trace of the curse to escape, their souls will be instantly devoured by Bloodflies, obliterating their essence.

In recent days, countless legendary sorcerers have been gravely injured, teetering on the brink of death.

Yet, none have likely perished; after all, they are legendary sorcerers, possessing at least one life-saving Miracle.

Few dare to challenge the final fifty meters now; the leading legendary sorcerers cautiously probe and practice, as each failed attempt signifies severe injury or even death.

But the Mercury Trojan Horse harbors no such concerns, not merely due to possessing a life-saving Miracle, but because she can transfer soul damage through the 'Trojan Horse Tower.'

Her learning ability is at best on par with legendary sorcerers, yet her progress far exceeds theirs, naturally due to having more practice opportunities. Legendary sorcerers have only one life to expend, requiring utmost caution, but she has millions of followers' lives to practice with.

Even if this life is truly lost, it is only the 'Pope of Annihilation,' Oreyva, who perishes.

The overwhelming amount of practice gained through sacrificing lives, along with the luxury of having a fallback, was Mercury Trojan Horse's absolute advantage.

Although every legendary sorcerer was stronger than her, within the Divine Lord Inheritance, others were like paupers without any retreat, while she was like a wealthy heiress with countless opportunities for trial and error. Her success seemed almost inevitable.

40 meters.

Mercury Trojan Horse lifted her head, and she could clearly see the Heart of Wishes suspended at the mountain's peak. Just by looking at it up close, she felt her understanding of the Fate Sect rapidly increasing, as if the intertwined desires of countless people were extending a path toward the future.

Oh no!

She quickly reined in her thoughts, barely maintaining the stability of the Benediction. If she had looked for just one more second, the curse would have completely overwhelmed the Benediction, and in a single breath, everything below her neck would have been devoured by the Bloodflies-just like how she was severely injured yesterday.

30 meters.

This was the furthest Mercury Trojan Horse had reached last night, marking the second threshold. Beyond this point, the Bloodfly Benediction became even more unpredictable. She not only had to maintain the balance between the curse and the Benediction, but she was also being influenced by the emotions within the Benediction, like walking on a razor-thin wire with an abyss below and beasts chasing from behind, where any misstep could lead to eternal doom.

Yet, Mercury Trojan Horse remained calm, managing the Benediction and climbing Ruby Mountain. As a consequence, thousands of Four Pillars Cult followers in the wasteland were engulfed in various emotions, crying, laughing, jumping, and causing chaos.

20 meters.

The end was so close now, so close that it seemed she only needed to reach out to grasp the shining Heart of Wishes and inherit the Wishflux Celestium. However, the closer she got, the more she dared not look up, fearing her thoughts would be overwhelmed by the knowledge of the Heart of Wishes.

15 meters!

Everything was going smoothly, without any surprises, just as she had anticipated. Mercury Trojan Horse could hardly believe she was so close to the Divine Lord Inheritance.

10 meters!

Countless thoughts clashed and surged in her mind. She only needed a second to cross the ten-meter path and seize the Heart of Wishes. Just by rushing forward, she could inherit the heritage of the Lord of Wishflux! Demigod, Divine Sovereign, eternal life, ruling the world-these were no longer distant dreams!

9 meters!

Raven Annihilation, Raven, Ash, Silver Lantern, Four Pillars, Qinyi Alliance, Chasm Sovereign of Senlo... If she could obtain the Celestium, these issues would no longer be problems!

8 meters!

I've had enough of Raven Annihilation, enough of the wasteland, and enough of the Four Pillars. I'm not naive enough to think I can do whatever I want; I just want the right to choose my life.

I don't want to face moments of helplessness anymore.

7 meters!

Mercury Trojan Horse suddenly straightened up, ready to make a final dash!

But at that moment, Ruby Mountain suddenly lit up with countless stars. Mercury Trojan Horse watched as they passed through her body, then gathered into beams, piercing through her soul!

She sprinted forward, but the starlight broke the balance between the Benediction and the curse as it passed through her soul. Her hastily raised Sanctuary only lasted for 0.34 seconds!

3 meters!

The Bloodfly curse had already spread throughout her soul, yet she managed to hold on. Meanwhile, countless followers of the Four Pillars Cult in the wasteland fell like fields of straw, dying silently and in excruciating pain.

Two meters!

She practically lunged forward, her arm outstretched, every fiber of her soul and even her fingertips screaming. Engulfed by the Bloodflies, she reached for the shining Heart of Wishes like a demon desperate for redemption!

She was just one step away from the Heart of Wishes!

Hiss.

A sticky, resilient spiderweb emerged from the ground, binding the Mercury Trojan Horse, preventing her from advancing even an inch further.

Swoosh!

With the sound of the web tightening, the Mercury Trojan Horse was dragged directly to the foot of the mountain. She rolled several times across the gemstone ground, looking up to see that the summit area of Ruby Mountain was nearly empty.

It wasn't just her; all the sorcerers participating in the Divine Lord Inheritance had been indiscriminately attacked. First came the starlight rain, then the entangling webs, pulling everyone out of the Inheritance zone.

The absolute gravity of Ruby Mountain didn't just affect the souls of sorcerers; any Miracle they performed would also be impacted. The attack range of a legendary sorcerer on Ruby Mountain wouldn't exceed ten meters.

Therefore, an attack that affected all sorcerers on Ruby Mountain could only be...

Smack!

The Mercury Trojan Horse slammed a fist onto the gemstone ground, collapsing to her knees, clutching her head as her shoulders shook. Finally, she couldn't hold back any longer and broke down in hysterical sobs, hiccupping, her vision blurred, her cries heart-wrenching.

She always ended up crying, and Tamashi always advised her not to, since crying wouldn't solve anything. She knew it wouldn't solve anything, but she felt so wronged.

Why was she always so powerless?

Why was everything always so difficult?

With tear-filled eyes, the Mercury Trojan Horse gazed at the sky, gritting her teeth as she spat out two venomous words:

“Divine Sovereign!”

## Chapter 659: Nightmare Inheritance

“So, they’re finally stepping in...”

In the Distant Sky Domain, Ash and his companions watched the crimson lightning devouring the golden Phantoms in the distance. Though surprised, they weren’t caught off guard.

They had anticipated this moment.

Among the four Inheritances, the Lake Inheritance might hold less allure for the Divine Sovereigns, but the Eternal City within the Inheritance of Time, the Shattered Oneiria of the Specter's Inheritance, and the Wishflux Celestium of the Wishflux Inheritance-each was enough to captivate the Divine Sovereigns.

What, you think the Divine Sovereigns wouldn't compete with mere sorcerers for the Inheritances? After all, they are Divine Sovereigns, and should possess the magnanimity of the strong, right?

It's understandable for ordinary people to think this way, but Ash and his group, being sanctuary sorcerers themselves, had long abandoned such naive notions-they themselves lacked that so-called magnanimity!

To forsake significant gains for the sake of magnanimity?

If Ash dared to do that, the sword Princess would surely bash his head in.

As the saying goes, touching one's interests is harder than touching one's soul. If benefits that could stir the hearts of the Divine Sovereigns truly appeared, they would undoubtedly intervene! The Appointment War of the Six Nations on the Time Continent had already demonstrated that the Divine Sovereigns had both the ability and the will to meddle in the lower Virtual Realm.

If one were to think cynically, perhaps the Lake Angel, King of Time, Specter Seer, and Lord of Wishflux chose to place their Inheritances in the lower Virtual Realm precisely to avoid having them seized by the Divine Sovereigns.

Ash had vaguely realized that although the Divine Sovereigns were powerful individuals with immense strength, they were also the decision-makers of their own factions.

Each of them was a Kingdom unto themselves, a force of their own. When every action involved countless interests, they couldn't possibly act freely and whimsically; they had to weigh benefits and risks.

The so-called magnanimity of the strong is about trading benefits for emotional value. If one were an unburdened individual, with no responsibilities, then personal happiness would suffice; but if one were a leader responsible for the rise and fall of an entire organization, would they sacrifice tangible benefits for a bit of emotional satisfaction?

More importantly, although they were in a state of peaceful development, at their core, they were still competitors.

These Inheritances, if not seized by oneself, would be taken by other Divine Sovereigns, leading to a shift in power. Just like between nations, if a new resource point isn't claimed, and another country takes it, it results in an increase in their national power and a decrease in one's own.

So Ash and his companions knew that the Divine Sovereigns' intervention was only a matter of time.

However...

"Isn't this a bit too much?" Ash remarked, watching the lightning that seemed capable of tearing the sky apart. "I thought they'd be more discreet..."

“There are definitely more covert attacks,” Vesser noted. “Perhaps from the very first day, there have been divine interventions infiltrating and eroding the Specter’s Inheritance. Tonight’s blatant assault likely means someone crossed the line.”

Deya asked, “What line?”

“The boundary of the Specter’s Inheritance,” Sonya explained. “Someone’s nearing the end. To prevent the victor from monopolizing all the Inheritance’s benefits, they probably intend to dismantle the Specter’s Inheritance and then let everyone scramble for the pieces.”

“What? How can this be!” Deya exclaimed in shock. “Does this mean we have no chance to inherit the Specter’s Inheritance?”

“The situation in the Distant Sky Domain is still manageable, but Ruby Mountain is likely far worse,” Sonya remarked. “The Specter’s Inheritance is protected by the Shattered Oneiria, so the Divine Sovereigns would have to dismantle it first to interfere. But at Ruby Mountain, everyone is exposed. If someone crosses the line...”

“The Wishflux Inheritance concerns the ownership of the Celestium, and it will inevitably involve a clash among the Divine Sovereigns before a victor is decided,” Vesser analyzed. “Without strong backing, or if one’s backing isn’t powerful enough, a legendary sorcerer can’t simply rely on effort to seize the Celestium.”

Deya was visibly upset. “Will the Lake Inheritance and the Inheritance of Time also be snatched by the Divine Sovereigns? That’s just too much...”

“The Lake Inheritance and the Inheritance of Time might actually be safe,” Ash said. “The King of Time has a strong grip on the Eternal City, and even the heroic soul legion can’t breach it. Unless something unexpected happens, the heroic soul legion is the strongest force the Divine Sovereigns can deploy on the Time Continent.”

“The Lake Inheritance is the safest- the power level of the Sea of Knowledge is too low, normally only allowing One-Winged Sorcerers to enter. One-Winged Sorcerers are like children; no matter how powerful a weapon you give them, they can’t wield much strength. The Divine Sovereigns’ interference in the Sea of Knowledge likely won’t exceed the level of two-wings, and in the Angelic Heritage at the Demigod level, they can’t stir up much trouble.”

“Compared to One-Winged Sorcerers, sanctuary sorcerers and legendary sorcerers are already considered adults. If the Divine Sovereigns arm them with enough weapons, they can exert power far beyond their own. Thus, the Divine Sovereigns’ interference in the Distant Sky Domain and Ruby Mountain can reach the level of divine intervention!”

Although Ash and the others understood the situation, there was nothing they could do.

If One-Winged Sorcerers are children and sanctuary sorcerers are adults, then the Divine Sovereigns are akin to aircraft carriers. Whatever they intend to do, Ash and the others can only watch, and they must be careful not to get caught in the crossfire.

The question now was whether to continue participating in the Specter’s Inheritance. After some discussion, they unanimously decided- to keep pushing forward!

The Specter's Inheritance wasn't collapsing just yet, and even if it did, they could open up a Sanctuary to escape, or even seize the opportunity to grab some freebies!

More importantly, they had already surpassed 60 levels, and were close to the next Specter's Appendix or Canon! Abandoning the potential gains due to some worries would be too cowardly- this is the Virtual Realm, after all. Even if they die, they can start over. When it's time to take risks, they must do so!

"Observer, your new outfit looks great!"

Deya finally noticed Ash's new attire, a menacing soul reaper look with chain accessories, in black and silver, with effects that seemed to echo the wails of lost souls as he moved. Since it was hard-earned, even if he wasn't entirely satisfied with the effect, he had to show it off, lest the Source Crystal be truly wasted!

"Right?" Ash chuckled. "Thanks!"

Vesser had naturally noticed earlier, but waited for the Witch to mention it before she added, "It suits you well."

"Thanks." Ash glanced at the sword Princess, confirming she wasn't planning to comment, then said, "Let's go."

The group stared at the golden Phantom, and in the next moment, they entered the Specter's Inheritance.

Despite the chaos outside, the Inheritance seemed unaffected, continuing to function normally.

They advanced to the 15th level, where the Underground Hall was filled with countless light points and a pattern formed by these points. Ash and the others stepped back, allowing Vesser to take the lead.

This level had appeared multiple times before, and the method to clear it was straightforward: connect all the light points in one stroke to match the given pattern exactly. Though it resembled a simple game, the sheer number of densely packed light points in a three-dimensional structure proved challenging. Ash and the others had attempted it but always ended up wasting too much time and spirit energy.

Only Vesser navigated this level effortlessly, clearing it with ease. Hence, similar levels were always left to her.

This was the advantage of their teamwork: the sword Princess excelled in combat levels, the Witch often worked wonders in movement challenges, and Vesser dominated the intellectual puzzles. With them around, Ash only needed to stick close and play the role of the Guardian, ready to take hits.

As Vesser completed the level, Ash stood beside the sword Princess, lightly brushing his fingers against her hand.

No reaction. The sword Princess remained focused on the rapidly forming pattern.

He tickled her palm.

Still no response; she didn't even glance at Ash.

(¯ ^ ¯) Ash scoffed, stepping back to distance himself from her.

Vesser soon finished the level, and three reward options appeared in the hall. She glanced at them and said, "Witch, you take this 'Flowing Soul' spirit."

They had already established a routine for which spirits to claim from previous levels, so there was no need for extra discussion; they simply took what was available.

As the Witch went to claim the reward, Sonya approached Ash and whispered, "You look quite dashing tonight, satisfied?"

Ash: "(¯ ^ ¯) You're so dismissive."

Sonya couldn't help but laugh. She brushed her finger across her lips and then quickly tapped Ash's lips, chuckling softly, "Can you stop being so adorable?"

Boom!

Suddenly, the entire Inheritance space shook violently!

The four immediately went on high alert, a shared thought crossing their minds-had the Specter's Inheritance been breached so soon!?

Yet, in the next moment, they were all transported to a golden hall.

Unlike the crude and dark Underground Hall, the golden hall was luxurious and solemn, bright and warm, with marble-tiled floors polished to a mirror-like shine.

The four stood back-to-back, surveying their surroundings, quickly noticing a large black leather book on the floor in the center of the hall.

Before they could investigate, the book opened on its own, and a sharp, sinister black arm extended from its pages.

As more of it emerged, the book shrank proportionately, until the black mist-like form was fully revealed before them, and the book vanished entirely.

It had no lower body; its upper body was composed of black mist, clad in black and silver armor. Its head bore no features, only a snake-like white line where the eyes should be, emitting a chilling glow as it gazed at Ash and the others.

“I am the Sorcerer’s Handbook of the Nightmare Angel, the Devil... Nightmare.” The voice of the Nightmare echoed throughout the grand hall. “Sorcerers, if you complete my trial, not only will you inherit all the heritage of the Nightmare Angel, but you might also gain control over the Dreaming Celestium—a complete Dreaming Celestium!”

Nightmare Angel!?

Ash and the others immediately recalled the contents of the Specter Handbook—the original master of the Dreaming Celestium was indeed the Nightmare Angel! Back when the Specter Seer was still a sorcerer, the Dreaming Celestium hadn’t shattered yet, but it was already the exclusive domain of the Nightmare Angel, barring ordinary sorcerers from entry.

“You’re the Sorcerer’s Handbook of the Nightmare Angel?” Ash was incredulous. “Can a Sorcerer’s Handbook actually speak?”

“A Sorcerer’s Handbook is the culmination of a sorcerer’s lifetime. For ordinary sorcerers, their handbook can only project an Inheritance Trial. But once a sorcerer steps into the Divine Dominion, their handbook can manifest angels and devils.” The Nightmare explained, though it left more questions than answers, and it seemed disinclined to clarify further. “So, are you willing to accept the Nightmare Angel’s trial?”

The group exchanged glances. Judging by reputation and name, the Nightmare Angel didn't seem like a benevolent predecessor. Recklessly refusing might not end well.

"We've entered the Dreaming Celestium multiple times before," Vesser cautiously inquired, "Why are you only bringing us here now?"

"Because part of the seal placed by the Specter Seer on the Dreaming Celestium has been broken," the Nightmare surprisingly did not conceal. "The original, in life, was almost one with the Dreaming Celestium and secretly left an inheritance. Even though the Specter Seer obtained the remnants of the Celestium, as long as I hid, he couldn't deal with me."

"He placed multiple seals on me to ensure his inheritance proceeded smoothly. But now that the seals are broken, my power has extended through the gaps, regaining partial control over the Dreaming Celestium, and thus I brought qualifying sorcerers here."

Ash and the others suddenly understood.

The Dreaming Celestium actually had two layers of inheritance: the outer inheritance of the Specter Seer and the inner inheritance of the Nightmare Angel! But the Nightmare Inheritance had remained hidden, not exposed through the ten-plus owners of the Dreaming Celestium, until the recent divine intervention disrupted the Specter's Inheritance, prompting the Nightmare Inheritance to activate!

Deya curiously asked, “Hasn’t the Dreaming Celestium changed hands among many Demigods? Among so many sorcerers, was there not one qualified to inherit the Nightmare Inheritance?”

The Nightmare shook its head. “If a Demigod wished to seize it by force, I would be powerless to resist. The original foresaw this and stipulated that only mortal sorcerers could qualify for the inheritance.”

Vesser asked, “And what is the trial for the Nightmare Angel’s inheritance?”

“To condense a Divinity and create a deity.”

## Chapter 66o: The Secret of Deities

To condense a Divinity and create a deity!?

Ash and his companions’ eyes widened in shock.

They realized they were on the brink of unraveling one of the greatest mysteries of the sorcerer world: the birth of deities!

Logically, spirits are special life forms nurtured by sorcerers through virtual realm resonance within their knowledge. Deities should be similar.

Yet, whether Deya consulted the Gospel Book or Sonya investigated within the Stars, the conclusion was always the same: mortals simply cannot nurture deities.

Sonya had a lot to say on this matter. She had researched all legendary sorcerers in the Stars Kingdom over the past 1668 years. Except for three whose whereabouts were unknown, all other legendary sorcerers had stopped at Ruby Mountain, never summoning a deity or reaching the demigod realm.

Even when Sonya made a Pact with Trozan, Professor Sister shook her head, indicating she didn't know. Trozan also believed that deities and spirits were almost entirely different life forms, and that sorcerers couldn't nurture deities through virtual realm resonance.

Unlike Sonya, who was new to the Sanctuary social circle, Trozan had been part of it for years. Despite her sharp tongue, she had heard many legendary secrets.

In the legends of the past within the Stars, there must have been those whose Spellcasting Sect realm broke through to the demigod level, but they still couldn't summon deities. They could only stand atop Ruby Mountain, gazing at the sky, living out their days in solitude.

If virtual realm resonance could summon deities, no matter how difficult, in a nation like the Stars, filled with problem solvers, at least one or two legends would have forcefully cracked the deity mystery. Yet, there were no such records. Everyone had to admit that the legendary level was the end for sorcerers.

Ordinary sorcerers couldn't even fathom the chasm between mortals and deities. Only a small handful of legendary sorcerers at the pinnacle understood the depth of despair they faced.

This is why the Alchemist King suffered a major setback in the Divine Lord Inheritance.

Was the renowned legend of the Stars, the Alchemist King, who had battled through the Abyss multiple times, a reckless fool? Of course not. The virtual realm's elimination process was robust. Sorcerers with significant survival flaws were eliminated in the earlier layers. Those who reached the legendary level, no matter how reckless, were taught caution by fate.

But the Alchemist King knew this might be his only chance in life.

Having found no path forward, if he missed this opportunity, he would never reach the Divine Dominion.

With competitors around, he had no choice but to be reckless, to take risks. Only then did he have a chance to win!

He was simply unlucky.

The answer Deya got from the Gospel Book was even more intriguing-only sorcerers who step into the Divine Dominion can uncover the truth about deities.

This was bizarre.

It was well-known that the most straightforward way for a sorcerer to open the Gate of Truth to a higher level was to independently summon a more advanced spirit.

Like Ash, who still couldn't open the Gate of Truth because he hadn't summoned a single spirit on his own.

To create a deity, one must first achieve demigod status. But without a deity to open the Gate of Truth to a higher level, how could a sorcerer become a demigod?

When the Witch brought up this intelligence, Ash's first reaction was-if you need to become a demigod sorcerer to create a deity, but to become a demigod sorcerer you must first create a deity, isn't this a deadlock?

Not only did Ash and his companions find it odd, but all legendary sorcerers knew something was amiss.

Their only hope lay in the "Angel of Ruby Mountain"-once you gather the colorless wing and find the Angel of Ruby Mountain, it will open the trial to enter the Divine Dominion for you.

But like the Golden Fish, Rainbow Tail, and faded dream, the Angel of Ruby Mountain is also an untouchable, distant legend.

Ash and his companions thought they would have to reach Ruby Mountain before they could unravel the mystery of deity creation.

Unexpectedly, in the Distant Sky Domain, this secret sought them out.

“To create a deity, one must first condense a divinity, and there are two schools for condensing divinity.”

The nightmare generously shared the information that legendary sorcerers craved: “These are the Virtual Divinity School and the Soul Divinity School.”

“The Soul Divinity School is the oldest method of Godsmithing, where sorcerers use their own soul as the base for the divinity, integrating concepts into it. This school is divided into two paths. The first path involves sorcerers performing actions related to certain concepts, infusing them with ideas, beliefs, and will, until the concept breaks through its shell and hatches into a deity.”

“But this path cannot be completed in one or two generations; it may take dozens of generations, hundreds, or even thousands of years to hatch a deity. The advantage is that even ordinary sorcerers can participate in this Godsmithing plan, with no requirement on sorcerer strength.”

Ash and Vesser both thought of the four divine eras of Senlo's past.

"The second path is where sorcerers possess a complete Godsmithing Ritual Track. As long as they prepare the necessary materials and execute the ritual according to the steps, they can create the corresponding deity. This path also has no requirement on sorcerer strength."

The nightmare continued, "However, both paths of the Soul Divinity School, whether it's the hatching method or the ritual method, will ultimately encounter the Virtual Realm curse. In fact, the Virtual Realm curse is the final step of the Soul Divinity School."

"In the past, many sorcerers who attempted Godsmithing failed because they couldn't withstand the final step of the Virtual Realm curse, leading to their efforts being in vain, concepts shattering, and even death and soul annihilation. Moreover, the first step of the Soul Divinity School is to integrate the concept into the soul, which alone can take sorcerers years."

Upon hearing this, Ash and the others understood that the nightmare did not intend for them to pursue the Soul Divinity School. After all, the Specter's Inheritance was about to explode, and they had at most a few days left, not months.

"Thus, sorcerers invented the safer, more ingenious, yet more complex Virtual Divinity School," the nightmare explained. "As long as the necessary materials are prepared, a virtual divinity can be constructed using procedures, and finally, the concept is filled in. The concept will then fuse with the materials, transforming into a new deity!"

Ash pondered, "Whether it's the Virtual Divinity School or the Soul Divinity School, both require the use of concepts... What exactly is a concept?"

Even Sonya and Deya, not to mention Vesser, had heard of their adventures on the Time Continent, and naturally knew that Ash had once acquired a secret concept. They all thought to themselves that this man was quite adept at lying.

Nightmare wasn't surprised at all by Ash's question. It replied earnestly, "A concept is simply a concept. You mustn't know too much, or you'll be infected by the secret toxin. All you need to know is that a concept is the primary material for deities; all deities are born from concepts."

Ah, so that's it!

Ash and the others exchanged glances, realizing this was the secret of the deities!

No wonder legendary sorcerers couldn't create deities, and no wonder the heroic soul legion valued concepts so much!

Spirits are born from knowledge, while deities are born from concepts! Sorcerers can acquire the former from reality, but the latter can only be obtained in the Virtual Realm!

The problem is, it seems all the concepts in the Virtual Realm are concentrated on the Time Continent, and the concepts of the Time Continent are all in the hands of the heroic soul legion!

Even if a sorcerer reaches Ruby Mountain and finally understands the relationship between deities and concepts, they can't return to the Time Continent to seize the concepts!

Moreover, the Divine Sovereigns seem to have modified the concepts, embedding them into the soul summoning spirits. Even if Ash hadn't given the soul summoning spirit to Lise, he probably wouldn't know how to separate the secret concept from the soul summoning spirit.

From Nightmare's words, it's clear that in the past, concepts weren't exactly abundant, but they could at least be obtained by sorcerers. That's why sorcerers invented the Virtual Divinity School and Soul Divinity School to nurture deities. But now, sorcerers can't even get their hands on concepts, and the methods to condense divinity are nearly lost in the Virtual Realm.

As for why this situation has occurred, one term leaps into their minds-Divine Sovereign!

Honestly, Ash isn't one for conspiracy theories, but given the current 'desolate' and 'bare' state of the Virtual Realm, even if it's not the work of the Divine Sovereigns, it's certainly what they wanted!

Ash even thinks, what wasteland is Senlo? The Virtual Realm is the real wasteland!

At least Senlo can still find divine era heritage, while the Virtual Realm has had its heritage dug up by the Divine Sovereigns! Now that an Angel heritage has appeared, the Divine Sovereigns are eager to intervene and seize it!

“What kind of deity do you want us to create?” Vesser asked, though she already had a suspicion.

Nightmare raised a hand, and the floor of the hall suddenly rose, revealing a hidden crystal wall beneath.

Inside the crystal wall, a pink little fox was curled up, looking incredibly cute.

“This is a concept the originals have mastered for hundreds of years, and it’s the foundation of the Dreaming Celestium-the Into Dreams concept,” Nightmare explained. “I want you to use the Into Dreams concept as material to create a deity-Nightmare!”

“The biggest difference between a concept and a deity is that a concept can only influence related matters, while a deity can control related laws. Therefore, even though the originals mastered the Into Dreams concept, they couldn’t control the Dreaming Celestium, and were attacked and annihilated, leaving only the Nightmare Inheritance.”

“But if you can create the Nightmare deity, besides the deity itself, you can also reconstruct the Dreaming Celestium and even control the Celestium.”

“What benefits do we get from controlling the Celestium?” Ash realized this seemed to be the biggest temptation Nightmare offered, but they were clueless about its value.

Nightmare explained, “The originals were attacked because they leaked the news of creating the Nightmare deity. Several Demigods forcibly invaded the Distant Sky Domain to attack the Dreaming Celestium, and even multiple Divine Sovereigns intervened.”

“The originals controlled part of the Dreaming Celestium, which they could barely tolerate, but creating the Nightmare deity meant taking the Celestium entirely, which no Angel Divine Sovereign could accept.”

“Why?” Vesser asked. “The Dreaming Celestium already belongs to you in name. Is there really such a big difference between that and actually taking it?”

Nightmare replied, “The biggest difference between a Demigod and a Divine Sovereign is whether they hold the Celestium high.”

Deya’s eyes widened. “Then if we reconstruct the Dreaming Celestium, doesn’t that mean-”

Nightmare nodded. “Exactly. Once you create the Nightmare deity and reconstruct the Dreaming Celestium, you’ll already be Divine Sovereign Candidates.”