

## **Menu 1131**

Chapter 1131: Reunion Again! (2)

"Sato, what's wrong?"

Onodera asked with a surprised look.

Running is out of the question.

If he ran, his lies would be exposed completely.

Attacking first seemed risky, but it allowed him to take control.

Worth the gamble.

Onodera, although slippery and cowardly most of the time, always managed to unleash extraordinary energy when his life was at stake.

This was his obsession with survival.

Of course, it could also be called pure fear of death.

Whatever the case, Onodera's current performance was flawless.

At least that's how Onodera thought.

Besides, Sato didn't notice anything.

Yet, Sato's suspicions hadn't lessened even slightly.

He didn't believe such a coincidence that he'd meet Jason when secretly meeting Hanakaiin Itsuki here.

So...

Onodera was lying to him?

With such thoughts, Sato quickly snapped out of his shock upon hearing Jason's name.

He strode toward Onodera.

This was a probe.

Watching Onodera's surprised expression, Sato frowned.

Perfect timing.

Very in line with the current situation.

But Sato still held onto his suspicion deep down.

Thus, he grabbed Onodera's arm.

"Let's go, I want to see the Sword Saint!"

Sato said aggressively.

His eyes locked fiercely on Onodera.

Panic flickered in Onodera's eyes, even though he tried his best to conceal it, it still showed uncontrollably.

Onodera knew this perfectly well.

Thus, he quickly exclaimed—

"Do you want to die?"

"If you want to die, then go ahead!"

"Don't drag me into this!"

Saying these words, Onodera struggled violently.

Furthermore, his voice involuntarily rose.

It seemed like it was due to his agitation, but in reality, it was a survival tactic.

He hoped to draw attention with a louder voice, forcing Sato to back down.

Onodera was well aware, if he really returned to the restaurant, he was done for.

This was his final lifeline.

Someone had to notice him.

"Let go of me!"

Onodera shouted louder.

But as soon as the words left his mouth, Onodera found his voice becoming barely audible.

More importantly, his body began to go numb.

Unable to move, unable to speak.

Onodera was dragged toward the restaurant like a limp doll.

"I really want to trust you."

"But unfortunately, I believe in one principle even more—"

"Seeing is believing, hearing is deceiving!"

Sato stated, still glaring at Onodera.

As for Onodera?

At that moment, his eyes were filled with despair.

It's over!

I'm dead!

Onodera wailed internally.

Seeing Onodera's expression, Sato smirked coldly.

As expected!

You're lying to me!

You must've spotted Hanakaiin Itsuki and planned to run, only to be caught by me!

With this thought, Sato prepared to twist Onodera's neck.

But just as he was about to act, he suddenly stopped.

It wasn't out of mercy!

Nor was it a change of heart!

It was because Sato thought of a 'waste utilization' plan.

He needed to further demonstrate his value to Hanakaiin Itsuki.

The person you overlooked, I've caught.

With this 'bargaining chip,' he could definitely gain additional advantages in their upcoming cooperation.

With that thought, Sato made no further hesitation, grabbing Onodera and dragging him into the restaurant.

After walking through the narrow hallway, they appeared before the restaurant's entrance.

Then, Sato froze.

The already despairing Onodera widened his eyes in disbelief.

What did they see?

Jason!

Jason sitting right across from Hanakaiin Itsuki!

What's going on?

What happened?

Was he not lying?

It's real?

Sato stood rooted in place, his grip loosened, and the limp Onodera crashed to the floor.

Thud!

The peculiar sound drew the gaze of everyone in the restaurant.

And when Jason's eyes swept over, Sato trembled uncontrollably, his cold demeanor completely vanished, replaced by a fear born from his very core.

Sato's cold exterior was only for ordinary people.

But against true powerhouses?

He was nothing but an empty shell.

The strength he projected was all a front, nothing more.

As for Onodera?

As the numbness left his body, Onodera clambered toward Jason.

Grasping at Jason's shoe.

"Sir, do you still remember me?"

"I was about to treat you to a meal, Onodera here?"

"Your shoe is dirty, let me clean it for you."

With a sycophantic smile, Onodera used his sleeve to wipe Jason's shoe.

Jason looked at the groveling Onodera with barely concealed disgust, kicking him aside.

"Stand there. Don't move."

Jason ordered.

"Got it!"

"Should I stand on one foot or both feet?"

Onodera asked obsequiously.

Jason no longer paid any attention to Onodera.

If not for certain matters he needed to question Onodera about, he'd have sent him packing with no hesitation.

It had absolutely nothing to do with Onodera's offer of a meal.

Jason's indifference didn't faze Onodera in the slightest.

On the contrary, Onodera heaved a silent sigh of relief.

As long as Jason didn't immediately dismiss him, he still had a chance to survive.

Survival!

That's all that mattered!

Pride?

Someone like him didn't need pride.

Thus, Onodera beamed and promptly stood behind Jason, bowing deeply to Ryosuke nearby.

I may not be the strongest!

But I must form the best alliances!

That was Onodera's current mentality!

Anyway, 'Blossom Cherry' is a sinking ship!

Time to jump aboard the 'Sword Saint' ship!

He etched the lessons learned from 'Blossom Cherry' into his mind!

To stay honest and grounded!

Onodera warned himself.

But deep down, he was curious.

Why was Jason here?

Could it be fate?

...

"About half an hour ago, Onodera went into a restaurant and hasn't come out since."

Hanakaiin Haru informed Jason.

"Do you want me to send someone to bring him here?"

Hanakaiin continued.

"No need."

"We'll go find him ourselves."

"It has to do with those matters."

Jason said cryptically.

"Alright."

"Likewise, there are some things we need to sit down and discuss."

"From this morning."

Hanakaiin Haru replied equally cryptically.

"Understood."

Jason acknowledged and hung up the call.

Then, with Ryosuke driving, they headed toward the restaurant.

Urashima stayed behind to handle some cleanup operations.

The matters with the 'Uesugi Family' weren't fully resolved yet.

Both for the 'Sword Eater Group' and the authorities.

The vehicle sped along.

They quickly arrived at the restaurant.

As the car came to a stop, Jason furrowed his brow.

"What's wrong?"

Ryosuke noticed Jason's reaction.

"I spotted a... 'food transporter'!"

Jason's tone became increasingly obscure.

Before Ryosuke could say more, Jason shoved open the door and got out.

He strode toward the restaurant.

Slurp!

Sweet and refreshing!

Delicious!

Hanakaiin Itsuki narrowed his eyes in bliss.

Double sugar!

Double joy!

Hanakaiin Itsuki cradled his steaming milk tea, lounging on the sofa with complete relaxation.

The relaxation was deep-seated.

Drinking milk tea was one of Hanakaiin Itsuki's few indulgences.

He truly loved it!

Especially before getting down to business, enjoying a cup of milk tea brought unparalleled satisfaction.

Joy, relaxation...

Perfect timing for serious discussions.

Perfect timing for killing.

Hanakaiin Itsuki indulged in his pleasure.

Then, his pupils suddenly shrank.

He saw someone he'd remember for the rest of his life.

Jason!

That robber!

The formidable robber!

Almost instinctively, Hanakaiin Itsuki clenched his hand.

At that moment, his hand held the milk tea.

Upon tightening his grip—

Snap!

The milk tea splashed out, coating his hand.

"Ah!"

"My milk tea!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki shouted in anguish, without hesitation, opening his mouth and extending his tongue to lick the milk tea off his hand.

Chapter 1132: Milk Tea X Belief!

The milk tea dripped along the curve of his hand, and Hanakaiin Itsuki immediately stuck out his tongue to lick it.

In fact, he not only licked the milk tea on his hand, but also cleaned the cup.

Then, he glared angrily at Jason and Ryosuke.

"Do you realize you almost made me make an irreparable mistake?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki questioned them like this.

Jason frowned slightly, not answering.

Ryosuke was looking around the entire restaurant.

The middle-aged officer was searching for Onodera.

As for Hanakaiin Itsuki?

He really wasn't concerned about him at all.

Even though the other was from the Hanakaiin Family, their previous interactions were unpleasant, and could even be said to be enemies—Hanakaiin Haru's position meant he could never have any close contact with him.

Fighting head-on?

Even though he had strengthened twice, Ryosuke wouldn't be arrogant because of it.

He knew his own limits.

He wouldn't do such a thing.

This kind of thing, naturally, was Jason's to handle.

And he?

Would help out a little.

However, this posture only further infuriated Hanakaiin Itsuki.

"Are you looking down on this cup of milk tea?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki roared.

Then, to make his point more convincing, the young onmyoji lifted the milk tea above his head and said—

"Do you know, it is..."

"Double sugar, double red beans, and double coconut jelly milk tea."

However, before Hanakaiin Itsuki could finish, Jason interrupted him.

Jason spoke with a calm tone, voice steady, as if stating a fact.

But maybe he was just guessing?

Ryosuke thought this.

Even though he admitted Jason could really eat.

But being able to eat and knowing how to eat should be two different things.

Moreover, to deduce the ingredients of a cup of milk tea just by sniffing, without any contact, probably not even a real chef could achieve it?

Ryosuke thought this.

Hanakaiin Itsuki thought the same.

"Were you stalking me?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki's face turned frosty, with a chilling tone in his voice.

Besides stalking, Hanakaiin Itsuki couldn't think of anything else.

"If I was, do you think you could still be sitting here unharmed?"

Jason countered.

Immediately, Hanakaiin Itsuki's eyes narrowed.

Although he didn't want to admit it, if Jason really was tailing him and he hadn't noticed, he surely couldn't sit here calmly.

He had understood the other's strength.

The legacy of Tongshou Temple was fully apparent in him.

Only...

Relying solely on scent to determine the ingredients of milk tea, isn't that too difficult?

Even for him, it couldn't be guaranteed to be one hundred percent accurate.

He'd make mistakes one or two times out of ten.

So, it probably was a guess?

Thinking this, Hanakaiin Itsuki's eyes slightly opened.

You could lose everything else!

But not the milk tea!

This was a ritual in his life!

While all lives are bitter, only milk tea is sweet!

He definitely wouldn't acknowledge someone who looks like a wrestler surpassing him in milk tea!

"Do you dare to make a bet with me?"

"I'll go mix ten cups of milk tea later."

"You identify the ingredients without drinking them."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said, looking at Jason.

"Sure."

"What's in it for me?"

Jason asked candidly.

If there's no benefit, he wouldn't do it—his attitude when interacting with outsiders has been consistent.

The life in the Nightless City had long taught Jason that to live happily, beyond having strength, requires being 'frank', and even, when dealing with certain annoying types, being shameless.

Of course, this was also how Jason made others perceive him.

To be precise, he was establishing a persona.

When something unusual happened because of handling certain matters, this persona would be the most effective 'shield.'

"I will forfeit the 'Enter Main Family' trial!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki stated firmly.

Such words made Ryosuke look sideways.

He knew about the Hanakaiin Family's recent turmoil over the 'Enter Main Family' trial, and even, to some extent, he was one of the participants—every time, he needed to 'clean up.'

Therefore, out of curiosity, Ryosuke had privately delved deeply into the Hanakaiin Family's branch joining the main family events.

Not only did he inquire, but he also reviewed the documents.

So, Ryosuke knew what this represented.

Saying it was like reaching the skies in a single bound wouldn't be an exaggeration.

Compared to the branch's name and resources, the main family was truly one of the 'Inside World' four major onmyoji families.

Yet he's using it as leverage over a cup of milk tea?

This, this... is just too willful, right?

Ryosuke thought incredulously.

But what surprised Ryosuke even more happened—

"Not enough."

Jason shook his head with great certainty.

Not enough?

The 'Enter Main Family' trial isn't enough?

Ryosuke couldn't help but widen his eyes.

In his view, Jason should have agreed immediately at this moment.

Maybe Hanakaiin Itsuki was ruthless, but he had quite good 'credibility', and a promise made would not be broken.

Once he really won, the other would surely keep his word.

That moment would remove a major enemy for Hanakaiin Haru.

The anxious Ryosuke wanted to lightly tug on Jason's sleeve to make him agree, but just as he raised his hand, Hanakaiin Itsuki spoke again.

"What else do you want?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki looked serious.

It startled Ryosuke.

Can it really be negotiated?

Just how obsessed are you with milk tea?

Chapter 1133: Milk Tea X Belief! (2)

Ryosuke couldn't help but roll his eyes, grumbling inwardly.

But the two present completely ignored Ryosuke and continued their conversation as if nothing happened.

"I want the items on you."

Jason continued.

"Which one?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki asked.

"All of them!"

Jason said confidently.

"All of them?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki pondered.

Seeing Hanakaiin Itsuki's expression, Ryosuke was at a loss for words.

Are you really considering it?

Is milk tea that important to you?

Were you a milk tea spirit reincarnated in your past life?

No!

Wrong!

In this life, you are milk tea that has transformed into a human.

"Then what can you offer me?"

"I've put my stakes on the table, what about you?"

"Betting requires fairness."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said.

"Of course!"

"I'll bet with you on..."

"A life."

Jason said in an unprecedentedly serious tone.

He emphasized the pronunciation.

Especially on 'a life'!

He's actually betting a life!

Yes, a life!

He currently has about 923+ lives, so using one as a wager is reasonable.

He's not deceiving anyone.

He really would give Hanakaiin Itsuki 'a life'.

But Ryosuke, beside him, didn't know.

"Jason!"

The middle-aged officer exclaimed.

He wanted to stop Jason.

The current situation was beyond imagination.

How did it turn from a cup of milk tea to wagering lives?

A life and death incident sparked by a cup of milk tea?

This is too absurd.

Ryosuke wanted to stop Jason, but Hanakaiin Itsuki's gaze at Jason changed.

No longer cold.

But a warm gaze emerged.

With a faint warmth.

"I thought I was the only one who considered milk tea to be as vital as life, but I didn't expect you to too—you're even willing to bet your life with me, then I'll accompany you to the end."

"I swear by the name of Hanakaiin Itsuki, I'll bet all the items on me!"

"If I lose, they're all yours."

"If I win, your life belongs to me."

Saying that, Hanakaiin Itsuki formed the 'Kikkō-in'.

"Hmm."

"However, it's not just milk tea; I feel that way about all food."

"In this world, only food and time cannot be let down."

Jason corrected him.

Hanakaiin Itsuki thought about it for a moment, then nodded.

Then, the young Onmyoji headed to the counter, ready to personally make milk tea.

Would the milk tea shop owner or staff try to stop him?

No, they wouldn't.

Just a while ago, when Hanakaiin Itsuki proposed the wager, the young Onmyoji had already bought the milk tea shop.

Simply put, this place now belonged to Hanakaiin Itsuki.

Jason cooperatively turned his back, no longer looking in the direction of the counter.

"Jason, you're too impulsive!"

"How can you..."

"It's worth it."

Ryosuke tried to persuade Jason, but Jason's single response left him speechless.

Then, the middle-aged officer walked to the counter.

He needed to keep an eye on Hanakaiin Itsuki.

He was worried that Hanakaiin Itsuki would play some trick.

Hanakaiin Itsuki looked at the approaching Ryosuke and coldly snorted in his heart.

In other matters, he didn't mind playing little tricks.

But with milk tea, he wouldn't disgrace the only warm place in his heart.

Unconsciously, Hanakaiin Itsuki glanced at the man with his back to him.

This kind of trust and attitude was something he was seeing for the first time.

If only this person could be his partner, how great would that be?

Why can't he become my partner?

As long as I win this bet, Jason can become my partner!

As for Sunny?

What is that anyway.

What does it have to do with him?

This guy who can't even tell the different kinds of milk tea, how does he deserve such a good partner?

Thinking of this, Hanakaiin Itsuki was filled with motivation and started working.

With a dazzling and artistic flair, Hanakaiin Itsuki began making the milk teas.

And it wasn't one-by-one.

It was ten at a time.

Standing aside, Ryosuke couldn't figure out how it was completed in the end.

When ten cups of milk tea were placed on the table in front of Jason, he turned around.

"After the bet, can I have them?"

Jason asked.

If the wager meant wasting ten cups of milk tea, Jason would feel a bit regretful.

Hanakaiin Itsuki shared a similar sentiment.

Understanding Jason's intention from his words, Hanakaiin Itsuki laughed.

"Of course."

"Shall we start?"

"Start!"

"Half sugar pearls, full sugar red beans, double sugar coconut jelly, triple sugar mixed fruits, no sugar extra milk, black and white milk tea, jasmine milk tea, caramel pudding milk tea, lemon sago milk tea with... a bit of strawberry juice, quite a creative idea, and lastly, black tea milk tea also with mixed fruits and coconut juice, should be quite tasty."

Jason began describing the milk teas from left to right.

A look of surprise flashed in Hanakaiin Itsuki's eyes.

Not a single mistake

Especially he managed to identify two specially crafted cups.

Was he peeking?

Hanakaiin Itsuki wondered, but then shook his head.

Although he was making milk tea, he was constantly watching Jason.

Jason didn't turn around, nor did he use any Onmyoji techniques.

Did he really identify them just by smell?

In the end, Hanakaiin Itsuki came to this conclusion.

Quite unbelievable.

But the fact remained.

"Whew."

"I concede."

Hanakaiin Itsuki admitted defeat gracefully.

Having faced reality, handling it with arguments and sophistry was not Hanakaiin Itsuki's style, and moreover, when it came to something as significant as milk tea, he wouldn't let his actions disgrace the faith he held in his heart.

Chapter 1134: Milk Tea X Belief! (3)

"Can I drink it now?"

Jason asked.

"Of course you can."

Hanakaiin Itsuki replied with a smile, watching as Jason eagerly picked up the two specially crafted cups of milk tea. The smile at the corner of his lips deepened.

He wasn't even paying attention to the stakes, only focusing on the milk tea itself.

Losing to someone like this...

He oddly felt at peace with it.

There wasn't a trace of regret.

Only a sense of meeting a kindred spirit.

Should I just get rid of Haru?

A person like Jason, partnering with someone who doesn't understand milk tea, is truly a waste.

He should be with me instead.

But would this make Jason dislike me?

As Hanakaiin Itsuki pondered this, Jason was busy sipping his milk tea.

Ryosuke, on the other hand, found it unbelievable.

He won just like that?

Is Jason some kind of milk tea bloodhound?

As these thoughts swirled in Ryosuke's mind, he watched Jason gulp down the milk tea. Suppressing the urge brought on by his salivating mouth, he averted his gaze to the window outside.

He wanted milk tea too!

But... he had no money!

What about grabbing a cup off the table?

He looked at Jason, then at Hanakaiin Itsuki.

Ryosuke wisely chose to give up.

Jason sipped the milk tea, Itsuki watched, and Ryosuke struggled to hold back his drool. Before long, the atmosphere in the restaurant turned into something strange, until the liveliness of Onodera storming inside changed everything.

Onodera stood behind Jason. When Jason finished the last bit of his milk tea, Onodera immediately grabbed a tissue from the side and handed it to Jason.

At the same time, he turned to look at Sato standing not far away.

At this moment, Sato was completely at a loss.

Onodera actually told the truth?

He wasn't lying to me?

Then why did he have that expression just now?

Could it be...

To set me up?

Dammit! Bastard!

Though cursing Onodera in his mind, Sato's face betrayed nothing.

He offered a very amicable smile.

Gone was his usual stern demeanor.

He bent slightly at the waist, bowing to Hanakaiin Itsuki.

"Young Master Itsuki, good afternoon."

"Hmm."

Hanakaiin Itsuki responded indifferently.

At first, he had come here because of Sato.

After Yamashita's death, he needed a collaborator within "Blossom Cherry."

Sato's position made him the first candidate.

But, after meeting Jason, Hanakaiin Itsuki inexplicably hoped Jason could become his partner instead.

As for "Blossom Cherry?"

Didn't you see Onodera and Ryosuke?

Since these two stood behind Jason, their relationship was clearly close. That meant they could be collaborators too.

Additionally, compared to Sato's price tag, the two were undoubtedly much cheaper.

And worth cultivating.

Hanakaiin Itsuki believed that with his guidance, both of them could rise swiftly through the ranks, reaching high positions within "Blossom Cherry" in no time.

Compared to Sato, this was definitely the more cost-effective choice.

Sato was dumbfounded by Hanakaiin Itsuki's indifference.

This wasn't supposed to happen!

Why was it like this?

Shouldn't he be desperate to recruit talent?

Why was he so cold?

Sato, dazed, raised his head only to see Jason sitting across from Hanakaiin Itsuki. In an instant, he understood.

It must be because, in his earlier encounter with Jason, he'd shown too much hesitation.

It didn't align with his usual tough demeanor.

This had displeased Hanakaiin Itsuki.

And caused him to lose favor.

What's more, Jason and Hanakaiin Itsuki had once been at odds due to the trial of the "Branch Family Joining the Main Family." Now, sitting across from each other, they must have engaged in a verbal skirmish before I arrived.

Though I didn't know the outcome of their exchange, it was clear Hanakaiin Itsuki needed someone to "cheer him on."

Someone who could give him the upper hand.

With that in mind, Sato straightened his posture.

Then, slamming the table forcefully, he addressed Jason with his usual cold tone—

"Stand up! What right do you have to sit here!"

Chapter 1135: The Iron-Willed Onodera!

Bam!

The sound of a palm slamming on the table echoed, accompanied by Sato's forceful shout.

Immediately, the restaurant fell into total silence.

All eyes turned to the head of the "Zero Course" action division, known for his cold and strict demeanor.

Especially Ryosuke.

The middle-aged detective stared at his newly acquainted colleague with a "you've got issues" look.

Although he didn't understand why this colleague was behaving so "irrationally."

What he did know was that this guy was doomed.

Ryosuke wasn't familiar with everyone, but he knew Jason well enough.

Jason was the type of person you'd consider completely harmless.

Simply put, as long as you didn't provoke him, you were safe.

If you did provoke him?

Sorry.

You'd better hope for the best.

This kind of outright hostile table-slamming behavior—Ryosuke could already picture what would happen next.

However, to Ryosuke's surprise, Hanakaiin Itsuki acted even faster than Jason.

"Get out! What gives you the right to boss people around here?!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki said, his face dark and stormy.

One was a dispensable collaborator.

The other was a partner in the sacred bond of milk tea devotion.

The priorities were obvious, no need to say more.

Sato, who had been waiting for Hanakaiin Itsuki to praise him, froze on the spot.

Get out?

Was that directed at me?

No way, right?

Impossible!

It definitely wasn't meant for me!

That only leaves—

"Get out!"

"Young Master Itsuki has already issued the order to leave!"

"Hurry up and get out!"

Sato shouted at Jason.

He didn't think Hanakaiin Itsuki was yelling at him, so naturally, the only one left was Jason.

That's what he thought.

After all, he was on the same team as Hanakaiin Itsuki.

But just as Sato's words fell, he saw Hanakaiin Itsuki wave his hand.

Wooosh!

A strong gust of wind rose from beneath Sato's feet, lifting him up and literally sending him "flying" out the door.

Thud!

The people in the restaurant could clearly hear the heavy sound of him landing.

Onodera retracted his neck and muttered,

"His bones must've snapped."

To this, Ryosuke nodded in agreement.

Not just because he concurred with Onodera's assessment, but also because he really did hear the sound of bones breaking.

Thanks to two rounds of reinforcement training by the "Blossom Cherry" organization, Ryosuke had already surpassed the physical limits of a normal human. Even without corresponding secret techniques or skills, his raw senses were far beyond ordinary.

"Serves him right."

Ryosuke muttered softly.

The thought of how Sato had deliberately manipulated "information asymmetry" to set him up left Ryosuke without an ounce of sympathy.

If it weren't for his moral principles, he wouldn't have minded stepping outside to add a couple more bullets.

"Yeah."

"That guy's nothing but a paper tiger."

"At least Yamashita is an honest scoundrel."

"Him?"

"Pffft!"

Onodera chimed in, fully agreeing.

"Sorry, Jason."

"This was my mistake; I invited an idiot who's not exactly the brightest."

Sitting across from Jason, Hanakaiin Itsuki offered a straightforward apology.

The fault was his to begin with, so apologizing was no problem.

Especially to someone who shared the same devotion and passion for milk tea. He didn't find it the least bit embarrassing to apologize.

"Then, as compensation... could you make me a few more cups of milk tea?"

Jason asked.

He didn't take Sato's words to heart.

Or rather, the moment Sato was thrown out by Hanakaiin Itsuki, Jason stopped paying him any mind.

Although he initially came because of Sato, by this point, Jason realized there was no need to complicate matters.

Why had Sato come here?

Hanakaiin Itsuki's presence explained it all.

Moreover, judging by Sato's attitude toward Hanakaiin Itsuki, it was clear that Sato was the passive party in this deal.

So, none of that mattered anymore.

What mattered was that Hanakaiin Itsuki had just glanced at Onodera and Ryosuke.

Jason already guessed what Hanakaiin Itsuki wanted to do.

It was nothing more than replacing Sato with Onodera and Ryosuke.

Which, frankly, was favorable for him.

Compared to an unfamiliar and cunning person, he'd much rather deal with acquaintances.

Ryosuke was someone he could trust.

Onodera?

In some ways, Jason trusted him even more.

Because Onodera was a smart man.

Of course, this cooperation would inevitably come with some conditions.

But that wasn't something Jason needed to worry about.

What he cared more about was the milk tea he'd just enjoyed.

To be honest, Hanakaiin Itsuki's craftsmanship was remarkable.

He was eager to have more.

When Hanakaiin Itsuki heard Jason's request, he was momentarily stunned. Then, the young Onmyoji smiled.

What could bring more joy than genuine praise?

Especially when the praise was directed at something the person took pride in!

Hanakaiin Itsuki had been praised for his talent, his looks, and his strength.

But none of those were what he truly valued.

What he genuinely prided himself on was—

His ability to make milk tea!

"Wait for a moment!"

"It'll be ready in no time!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki said as he returned to the counter, tied on his apron, and started a new round of preparation.

Quick as always.

And as delicious as ever.

Watching Jason finish every last drop, Hanakaiin Itsuki grew even more delighted.

"Would you like more?"

"I can make as much as you want!"

In his excitement, Hanakaiin Itsuki said something he would later remember deeply.

"Really?"

"Thank you so much."

"Please, keep it coming!"

Jason's eyes lit up.

Being treated was already a pleasant surprise.

Being treated with no limits? That was pure ecstasy.

Chapter 1136: The Iron-Willed Onodera! (2)

Inside the restaurant, the scene had changed to—

"Do you need more?"

"Keep going!"

"Do you need more?"

"Keep going!"

...

Again and again, round after round.

Even with Hanakaiin Itsuki's physical strength, beads of sweat began to form on his forehead.

How many cups have I made?

A hundred cups? Two hundred cups?

Or three hundred cups?

Has Jason still not had enough?

This is... amazing!

Watching Jason drink every last drop of the milk tea he had crafted, Hanakaiin Itsuki felt exhausted, but more than that, he was exhilarated—a peerless, unmatched exhilaration.

Keep going! Keep going! Keep going!

Until Jason is completely satisfied!

With this belief driving him, Hanakaiin Itsuki's speed at crafting milk tea grew faster and faster.

And yet, the quality did not diminish.

It seemed there was even a subtle improvement.

He... had broken through!

Hanakaiin Itsuki instantly felt the changes within himself.

Indeed!

Only a true kindred spirit could allow me to advance further in the "milk tea artistry."

Realizing that the breakthrough he had longed for was now unfolding, Hanakaiin Itsuki grew even happier.

Meanwhile, the onlookers were already dumbstruck.

Amazed not only by Hanakaiin Itsuki's speed of crafting, but also by Jason's phenomenal ability to drink milk tea.

Especially Jason!

Is his stomach a bottomless pit?

Why has drinking so much not had any effect?

Doesn't he even need to go to the restroom?

And amidst the collective astonishment of the crowd, Hanakaiin Itsuki finally stopped crafting.

It wasn't due to fatigue.

Nor was it due to any unforeseen circumstance.

It was simply... they had run out of ingredients.

You can't make bricks without straw.

Even a "milk tea master" like Hanakaiin Itsuki couldn't conjure something out of thin air.

This left Hanakaiin Itsuki feeling dissatisfied.

A kind of discomfort stuck between wanting to do more and being unable to proceed.

Wiping his hands with a slight frown, Hanakaiin Itsuki walked over to Jason without removing his apron.

"Sorry, Jason,"

"It was too rushed today, and I couldn't prepare better and more materials."

"Next time, I'll be fully prepared and invite you again."

Hanakaiin Itsuki promised sincerely.

"Deal!"

Jason replied, extending his hand.

Hanakaiin Itsuki froze for a moment before reaching out and shaking Jason's hand firmly.

"Deal!"

The young onmyoji declared.

Then, his gaze shifted toward Ryosuke and Onodera.

"I brought Sato here—you should be able to guess what that implies, right?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki spoke directly.

Onodera nodded repeatedly without hesitation.

Ryosuke, however, paused thoughtfully before nodding.

The first response was purely instinctual—with Hanakaiin Itsuki, whatever he said, Onodera would nod and agree.

As for what came afterwards?

That was a problem for later—for now, agreeing was the safest bet.

Ryosuke, however, was different.

His agreement only came after true consideration.

Both responses didn't go unnoticed by Hanakaiin Itsuki, who greeted them with a faint smile.

It was an indifferent smile.

With his backing, even pigs could find footing in "Blossom Cherry."

Let alone the two standing before him, who were no pigs.

"Yamashita is dead—I need a new collaborator to keep an eye on 'Blossom Cherry.'"

"Of course, two collaborators are fine as well."

"You can choose to cooperate—or compete."

Hanakaiin Itsuki said casually.

"Cooperate! Cooperate!"

"Of course we'll cooperate!"

"After all, more people means more strength!"

Before Ryosuke could respond, Onodera rushed to answer, flashing a fawning smile toward Jason before shooting Ryosuke an ingratiating grin as well.

Onodera wasn't foolish.

He knew very well he was a newcomer who had only just pledged allegiance.

Blending in for now was the most prudent choice.

Compete?

What a joke.

He, the steadfast Onodera, had never survived by fighting against his peers for personal gain.

Mutual cooperation and collective benefit were his ultimate goals.

Jason, however, ignored Onodera's sycophantic smile.

Ryosuke simply furrowed his brow at the sight of Onodera's attempts to ingratiate himself.

He wanted to suggest competition.

But thinking of past experiences and recent encounters, this middle-aged police officer finally nodded.

"Excellent."

"Since the most crucial matter is decided..."

"Let me share what I know."

Hanakaiin Itsuki seemed to be addressing Onodera and Ryosuke, but his eyes were fixed on Jason as he spoke slowly—

"Some people have started showing discontent toward 'Blossom Cherry.'"

"'Blossom Cherry's development has already threatened certain individuals.'"

"And, of course, some are simply jealous of 'Blossom Cherry.'"

"Therefore... some have already made a move."

Ryosuke's body stiffened.

He thought of Miyamoto, the officer he had intended to target but who had been killed before he could act.

Onodera, meanwhile, kept his head down.

Unlike Ryosuke's partial grasp, he knew more.

In fact, he had sensed this possibility long ago.

He had simply avoided thinking in this direction.

Or perhaps, he had considered it yet chosen not to accept it.

Now, with Hanakaiin Itsuki's words laid bare, Onodera couldn't help but take a sharp breath.

If he had previously seen "Blossom Cherry" as a precarious vessel...

Then presently, its path was clear—a storm loomed ahead.

Thankfully! Thankfully!

I've already jumped ship onto another vessel!

Otherwise, I'd have gone down with it!

Onodera exhaled deeply with relief and glanced at Jason, his expression growing increasingly sycophantic.

"Can you identify who's behind this?"

Jason asked.

"I can," Hanakaiin Itsuki replied.

"The Hanakaiin Family, the Tsuchimikado Family, the Kusakabe Family, the Kojiyu Family—the four great onmyoji clans are all involved."

"And then there's..."

"'Flourishing Moon.'"

Hanakaiin Itsuki mentioned a term Jason was very familiar with.

"Are they involved too?"

Jason frowned.

Jason's understanding of "Flourishing Moon" primarily came from the elderly monk at Tongshou Temple.

According to the old monk, it was a true "Inside World," disconnected from the "surface world."

Not only did it harbor genuine transcendents...

It also held numerous legendary demons, plants, and more.

In summary, it was a realm removed from the ordinary world—a place inaccessible to commoners.

Naturally, Jason's biggest interest lay in "River of Ghosts!"

Not its projected form.

But the real "River of Ghosts!"

He was determined to venture there.

The invitation given to him by the Tongshou Temple monk was still safely tucked away in his backpack.

"What else?"

"There's a deep connection between here and there, you know."

"In fact, in many ways, our world has always influenced theirs—recently, that new gaming console is even popular over there."

Hanakaiin Itsuki provided an example.

A bunch of ancient transcendents playing video games?

Jason pictured the scene.

Surprisingly, it didn't seem bad at all.

So, he instinctively asked.

"What kind of games are they playing?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki hesitated, clearly not expecting Jason to ask that.

"One seems to be about a plumber fighting turtles to save his girlfriend."

"Another involves two men—one in blue pants and the other in red—shooting guns."

"And the other? A giant mouth endlessly eating dots."

After some serious consideration, Hanakaiin Itsuki answered.

"Sounds pretty good."

Jason commented.

"Maybe," Hanakaiin Itsuki shrugged. "I'm not much of a gamer."

"Every day, it's endless training—I barely even have time to craft milk tea. Though now, there'll certainly be much more time."

Hanakaiin Itsuki grinned as he spoke.

Jason understood what he was referring to.

By stepping away from the "Battle of King Fighters," his time was naturally freed up.

"Be careful," Hanakaiin Itsuki cautioned. "Those bastards from the main clan won't mean well."

"Haru is gone and that's that—but Jason, you must watch out for your own safety."

"Plus, I suspect this 'King Fighters Tournament' may be connected to 'Blossom Cherry.'"

Hanakaiin Itsuki warned Jason sincerely.

"Thanks for the heads-up."

Jason nodded and began to ponder.

"Counterattack?"

"Or perhaps..."

"A trap?"

Organizations like 'Blossom Cherry' weren't the type to sit idle.

Retaliation was inevitable.

Even leveraging the "King Fighters Tournament" to set up a trap seemed entirely plausible.

Then...

Just as Jason was about to continue questioning, Ryosuke's radio suddenly crackled to life, delivering Urashima's panicked voice—

"Chief, something terrible has happened!"

"Chief Sato is dead!"

Chapter 1137: Evening Snack!

Sato is dead.

He died in a dim alleyway, less than three blocks away from the restaurant.

The ground was stained, with dirty water streaming across.

His clean suit trousers were already soaked in filth.

One of his shoes remained on his foot, while the other lay several meters away.

The corpse sat slumped against the filthy wall.

His wide, open eyes and gaping mouth seemed as though he had something to say, but his throat had been slashed.

His trachea, along with his neck, was entirely severed.

However, the true fatal wound was the sword strike to his chest.

The long sword had pierced his heart, with the Sword Bearer twisting the blade, completely shredding Sato's heart.

And just in case, the killer inflicted another stab to Sato's right chest.

The perpetrator was an expert swordsman.

Not only skilled in ambushes, but also incredibly swift with their blade.

Resolute, with no intention of giving Sato even the slightest chance to survive.

So much so that Sato didn't have time to react before being killed.

But...

Why was Sato here?

Jason crouched by Sato's corpse, examining it while pondering.

Then, Jason looked toward the alley entrance.

By now, it was already dusk. The last rays of the setting sun cast their fleeting glow upon the street, where passersby stood at a distance, staring at the alley, whispering to one another—some fearful, others excited.

Not far away lay the bustling mall, teeming with traffic and shoppers.

In fact, this mall was the reason for the heavy foot traffic here.

Especially during the evening rush hour, streams of people were endless.

Sato had been thrown out of the restaurant.

He must have felt indignant.

Most likely, he'd be cursing inwardly as he stomped forward.

If he followed the crowd, he might have unconsciously wandered here.

Upon realizing his location, he'd have halted.

Perhaps turned around and left.

Or entered the mall.

He shouldn't have entered such a secluded alleyway.

Unless...

"Someone asked to meet him here."

"Or perhaps he was drawn here by someone."

Jason swiftly reached an initial conclusion and stood to walk toward Ryosuke and Urashima.

The veteran detective was, as per experience, meticulously 'revisiting the crime scene.'

The young officer had just finished questioning nearby pedestrians with his team.

"Did you find anything?"

Jason asked.

"Nothing."

"Sato walked here on his own and was killed."

"No one saw anything during the entire process."

The young officer replied anxiously.

In cases of murder like this, a lack of eyewitnesses made solving it exceedingly difficult.

Although there were street surveillance cameras, their angles couldn't cover everything—this alley in particular was a blind spot.

"Ryosuke, what about you?"

Jason continued asking.

"Sato must have been lured here by someone!"

Ryosuke said with great certainty.

"How do you know?"

Onodera, who had followed along, curiously looked at Ryosuke.

Nearby, Hanakaiin Itsuki also cast a curious glance toward him.

"The timing!"

"The time it takes to get here from the restaurant!"

"From when Sato left to when Urashima reported, it was a total of 25 minutes. I just retraced the path—a healthy adult could only get here within that time by walking briskly without taking any detours."

"So, after leaving the restaurant, Sato came straight here intentionally."

Ryosuke raised a finger, explaining his reasoning.

"I see."

Onodera muttered to himself.

Then, he noticed the surrounding stares, filled with an unusual look.

Immediately, he guessed why.

Ryosuke was an experienced and skilled officer.

He was too—or at least, that's what his resume claimed.

However, his performance at the scene was far inferior to Ryosuke's.

This made Onodera feel uneasy inside.

After all, it was a critical period: he had just aligned himself with Jason's team, right at a time when he desperately needed to prove himself. If he showed incompetence now, the consequences would be dire.

Becoming sidelined would be the best-case scenario.

More likely, he'd be abandoned.

After all, there's no need to keep someone without value.

Onodera had learned that well in his past life experiences.

He instinctively believed the same applied here.

So, a thin layer of sweat formed on Onodera's forehead.

But suddenly, a flash of inspiration struck him.

The panic faded.

What remained was a confident smile.

Onodera first scanned the faces around him, then directed his gaze at Jason and began speaking steadily.

"People have flaws and strengths."

"Where there are areas of expertise, there are areas of ineptitude."

"Ryosuke excels in crime scene examination, while I shine in... gathering intelligence!"

At this point, Onodera deliberately paused.

Then, he gestured to suggest having a private conversation with Jason.

Jason didn't reject the offer.

He wanted to see what information Onodera had.

Of course, Jason didn't walk over alone.

Ryosuke followed as well.

Jason knew that his understanding of this world was shallow. In terms of hidden information or even basic common knowledge, Ryosuke and Hanakaiin Itsuki far surpassed him.

He needed someone to give him counsel.

As for Hanakaiin Itsuki?

The young Onmyoji sensibly stayed where he was.

Everyone has their private space.

He did.

Jason did.

Even good friends often struggle to share everything.

Besides, he didn't want to make Jason feel uncomfortable.

After all, during their first encounter, they had misunderstandings.

Thinking about this, Hanakaiin Itsuki couldn't stop lamenting inwardly.

Damn it, Haru.

Why do you have such good luck?

To have encountered someone like Jason as a partner.

Chapter 1138: Evening Snack! (2)

Seeing Hanakaiin Itsuki voluntarily stay in place, Jason couldn't help but silently nod in approval.

Indeed, someone who likes milk tea—how bad could they really be?

Instantly, Jason's impression of Hanakaiin Itsuki improved yet again.

His earlier good impression?

It was definitely not because the guy had invited him for milk tea, or the fact that he willingly handed over three decent-tasting "foods" and one particularly tantalizing "food" after betting and losing.

Onodera walked ahead while Jason and Ryosuke followed behind.

When they reached the depths of the alley, Onodera suddenly pulled a crumpled note out from his pocket with an air of mystery.

"Sir, take a look."

Onodera lowered his voice in explanation.

A phone number?

Jason frowned and looked at Onodera.

"Someone contacted me ahead of time!"

Immediately, Onodera began explaining the prior occurrence.

Of course, he concealed his assistance to Ryosuke.

No particular reason.

He simply didn't want to talk about it.

Helping Ryosuke was purely repayment of a favor, nothing more.

Repaying a favor is repaying a favor—bringing it up felt unnecessarily pretentious.

Hmph, that's not his style.

"You suspect it was them?"

After hearing Onodera's explanation, Jason directly asked.

"Highly likely!"

"The Blossom Cherry organization isn't exactly harmless little lambs. Even if they're making a move, there are only specific individuals they'd target."

"And 'limited options' narrows the possibilities."

"Simply put, even if it's not this group, once we confirm them, what's left will be our answer."

Onodera spoke with absolute certainty.

Jason didn't object.

Ryosuke also nodded in agreement.

The situation with Blossom Cherry had already been detailed by Hanakaiin Itsuki, leaving them well informed.

According to Hanakaiin Itsuki's account, Onodera's analysis of the current situation was the most plausible conclusion.

"Should I call now?"

Onodera asked Jason.

"No rush."

"Find someone to investigate first."

"Use your usual methods."

Jason emphasized.

Onodera's eyes immediately lit up; he'd caught onto Jason's intent.

Compared to the "waiting for the rabbit at the tree" scenario of meeting post-call, letting the target fall into their trap might be much more effective!

"Understood."

"I'll make the arrangements right away."

"Sir, I'll report to you as soon as there's any update!"

Saying this, Onodera hurriedly left.

"What should we do?"

Only after Onodera disappeared from sight did Ryosuke finally ask.

"Focus on your own tasks—try your best to 'earn' merit."

Jason advised Ryosuke.

"You're saying?"

Ryosuke looked at Jason with uncertainty.

"Your mission is to get close to me. Naturally, you'll gain access to some things that ordinary people wouldn't know—though for the higher-ups in Blossom Cherry, these matters are not really secrets."

"But they're still solid contributions."

"These contributions can help you continue to grow stronger."

"And me?"

"I'm also quite intrigued by those body-enhancing potions."

Jason grinned, speaking candidly.

He didn't hide his interest in the potions.

Or rather, Jason was particularly fascinated by the combination of technology and secret techniques.

If he could get a taste of it, that would be ideal.

"Got it."

"Delivering such reports would make me more trusted by Blossom Cherry's higher-ups."

"Securing another potion wouldn't be a stretch."

Ryosuke nodded in agreement.

"Alright, this task is yours."

"Onodera still needs support."

"I'll go help him."

Jason said decisively as he strode out.

Unlike the increasingly self-sufficient Ryosuke,

Onodera was an entirely unpredictable variable.

Someone needed to periodically 'keep an eye' on him.

Of course, Jason wasn't the right choice for that role.

Compared to him, Hanakaiin Haru was far more suitable.

Not only because of their numbers but also their professionalism.

However, before all that, Jason first bid farewell to Hanakaiin Itsuki—

"Thanks for the milk tea."

Jason expressed his gratitude sincerely.

Compared to other kinds of food, Hanakaiin Itsuki may not seem particularly notable.

But when it came to milk tea, the blend cooked up by Hanakaiin Itsuki was the best Jason had ever tasted.

"Next time, shall we continue?"

Hanakaiin Itsuki asked with a smile.

"Of course!"

"You know where to find me!"

Jason nodded immediately.

"Alright, see you then!"

Hanakaiin Itsuki waved in goodbye.

"See you."

Jason also waved.

Then the two quickly parted ways from the scene.

Hanakaiin Itsuki returned to the restaurant he had just purchased, the place where he first met Jason. He found it meaningful and decided to renovate it.

At the very least, it had to feel "sweet."

Of course, the spot where he and Jason sat would be reserved exclusively for them.

No other guests would be welcomed there.

Jason, on the other hand, made his way back to "Mask X Machete X Meat."

The "Polar Bear Café" downstairs had once again hung up its "Closed for Business" sign.

Clearly, Hui Lijing was still at the Uesugi Family.

Jason wasn't worried about this.

The Uesugi Family's conduct was something he'd seen firsthand.

It was an extremely upright lineage.

So Jason went straight upstairs, dropped his backpack, and dialed Hanakaiin Haru's number—

"I need your help with something."

Jason got directly to the point about what he needed from Hanakaiin Haru.

"No problem, leave it to me."

"Blossom Cherry?"

"Heh."

Hanakaiin Haru agreed without hesitation, but when it came to Blossom Cherry, this mild-mannered young Onmyoji let out a chilly laugh.

"What's the matter?"

Jason asked.

"The 'King of Fighters Tournament.'"

Chapter 1139: Evening Snack! (3)

"Although I don't have definitive proof yet."

"I can vaguely sense the traces of 'Blossom Cherry' in this."

Hanakaiin Haru didn't hold back and informed Jason about the information he managed to uncover in a short period.

"Is that so?"

Jason murmured in thought.

Previously, he had already speculated that 'Blossom Cherry' wouldn't sit idly by and would certainly strike back.

He had also guessed about the 'King of Fighters Tournament.'

But he lacked definitive evidence.

Now, Hanakaiin Haru's statement confirmed his hypothesis.

With this confirmation, Jason's mind began working rapidly.

If 'Blossom Cherry' joined the 'King of Fighters Tournament' as an act of rebellion, then the entire tournament is a trap.

A trap designed to overturn the unfavorable situation for 'Blossom Cherry.'

Therefore, the current participants are far from sufficient.

It's necessary to draw more people into it.

Perhaps even... drag the entire 'Inside World' into this.

This isn't an easy feat.

However, it's not entirely impossible.

It simply requires a suitable 'bait.'

Jason held the phone, standing there, quietly thinking for a few seconds, and then he had the answer in his mind.

The legendary treasure, the Awe Banner!

The supposed treasure of Tongshou Temple, the Awe Banner!

A treasure even the senior monks of Tongshou Temple have never laid eyes on!

It exists only in legends, yet it's been the talk of the town recently!

"So, this is it!"

Jason thought to himself.

But he didn't say anything out loud.

Although he had inspected his surroundings and found no surveillance, the 'phone' was still unreliable.

Thus, he simply said—

"Got it."

"Alright, that's good."

Someone as sharp as Hanakaiin Haru naturally wouldn't ask more questions.

Or perhaps, Hanakaiin Haru already had the answer.

After hanging up, the two tacitly stopped discussing further. Jason sat down to ponder for a moment.

The Awe Banner.

Blossom Cherry.

The trap.

The counterattack.

The Prosperous Moon.

He began connecting all the current dots of information.

Gradually, a thread started weaving everything together.

Still, there was one detail Jason couldn't work out.

The outside islands!

Or rather, his 'original origin.'

"Does it have to do with 'Blossom Cherry'?"

"Or is it..."

"The Prosperous Moon?"

Once again missing crucial information, Jason furrowed his brows deeply.

Finally, he shook his head.

Jason decided to temporarily let it go. Without sufficient information, overthinking would lead nowhere.

Then, he grabbed his backpack and began inspecting the recent gains.

Three pieces of tasty 'food' and one especially tempting piece of 'food.'

All of which came from Hanakaiin Itsuki.

The three tasty pieces of 'food' resembled prayer beads.

Wooden, round, engraved with intricate patterns.

While the especially tempting 'food' was a piece of talisman paper.

[Vajra Beads (Seal): Prayer beads originating from a century-old Zen temple, inherently imbued with the powers of warding off evil and blessing. After being discovered by a Hanakaiin Onmyoji, an Onmyodo ritual was added to enhance their mystical abilities. Effect: The wearer can resist partial assaults from malicious entities and actively unleash one purification strike equivalent to explosives-level damage.]

(Note: After actively unleashing the purification strike, the Vajra Beads will lose their protective effects.)

...

[Replacement Talisman Paper: In a certain part of Oni River, an ancestor of the Hanakaiin Family found a post-battle relic, within which they discovered this mystical talisman paper; Effect: Switches the bearer's location with that of a marked spot. Remaining uses: 1/5]

(Note: Once its uses are fully expended, the talisman paper will automatically disintegrate.)

...

"Looks like some amazing food!"

Jason swallowed some saliva.

Then, he rolled up his sleeves and grabbed some strong liquor from the side.

Meals must have their own sense of ritual.

After carefully cleaning everything, Jason opened his mouth—

And began to eat!

Chapter 1140: Another Fusion!

Crunch!

Snap!

The outer shell of the [King Kong Prayer Bead (Enhanced)] was soft and glutinous with a sweet flavor, but its insides were astonishingly crispy with a rich, creamy taste.

Chocolate!

Jason's eyes lit up.

Being a food lover, he would never turn down a snack.

Though most of the time, he preferred to eat proper meals.

Primarily because proper meals gave him a greater sense of satisfaction.

After all, biting into a roasted leg of lamb, with your mouth wide open, tearing into the skin and crunching on the bone, was just unbeatable.

And snacks?

Unless it came in a large bag you could tear open and pour directly into your mouth...

It rarely delivered that kind of satisfaction.

Still, snacks were food too.

And they were lovely all the same.

[Devour King Kong Prayer Bead (Enhanced)]

[Physical Strength, Energy, and Injuries greatly restored!]

[Satiety +50]

[Satiety: 2821]

...

Jason popped another [King Kong Prayer Bead (Enhanced)] into his mouth. As soon as he swallowed it, he tossed the remaining two into his mouth as well.

This was true double the joy!

Watching his Satiety rise to 2921, almost reaching the 3000 mark again, Jason felt a distinct sense of satisfaction welling up from within. With a pleased smirk, he picked up a [Replacement Talisman Paper].

Soft to the bite.

It felt a bit like the flaky crust of a cake.

Then, a stream of warm liquid gushed out from the inside.

Like hot cocoa.

But even sweeter.

Molten chocolate lava cake!

Jason's eyes gleamed as he started chewing eagerly.

Although Jason wished the flavor would linger longer, within just two or three bites, the food automatically slipped down into his stomach.

[Devour Replacement Talisman Paper]

[Physical Strength, Energy, and Injuries overwhelmingly restored!]

[Satiety +500]

[Satiety: 3421]

[Excitement of Feast +1]

[Excitement of Feast: 15]

...

"As expected!"

"Excitement of Feast isn't limited to direct combat; it can be gained through other methods as well!"

Jason's lips curled into a grin as he noted the increased value for Excitement of Feast.

The bet he made with Hanakaiin Itsuki wasn't just about the food itself; it was also to test how Excitement of Feast could be obtained.

From the current results, apart from direct combat...

Situations adjacent to combat counted, too.

For instance: acquiring items during a fight.

Or perhaps, gambling.

"If that's the case..."

Jason pondered deeply for a moment.

But soon, his thoughts shifted back.

Looking at his Satiety of 3421, he felt as though his talent was returning!

Faster than he had imagined!

Yet...

Should he first elevate [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique] to a Transcendent level?

Or should he first integrate [Great Majestic Heavenly Dragon Technique] into [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique]?

Sitting on the couch, Jason contemplated for a while, eventually opting for the latter.

Based on his past experience, when his core secret technique merged with additional techniques, not only did the added techniques fully manifest their effects, but his core technique also received a significant enhancement.

Thus, integrating first before upgrading was the wisest choice.

However, one thing needed particular attention.

The stronger the integrated secret technique, the more talent it required.

Simply put, it demanded higher Satiety.

"With the attributes of the [Great Majestic Heavenly Dragon Technique], integrating it into [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique] will undoubtedly require an enormous expenditure. Afterward, elevating [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique] will require even more accumulation. But compared to spending 'Excitement of Feast,' it's relatively nothing."

In the current dungeon world, while it had become much easier to gain Satiety, acquiring 'Excitement of Feast' remained considerably challenging.

If not for running into the 'Sword Eater Group' earlier, he wouldn't have been able to save up this much 'Excitement of Feast' at all.

Encountering the 'Sword Eater Group' was purely luck.

A second time?

Jason didn't dare hold his breath.

So, continuing to save up 'Excitement of Feast,' using it to enhance [Evil-Slaying Slash], and showcasing talent through high Satiety as he integrated it into [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique], remained Jason's ultimate plan.

Compared to before, nothing had really changed.

Only [Protection Against Evil] had been replaced by [Evil-Slaying Slash].

Standing up from the couch, Jason carefully put away his backpack and coat.

Once again, he used the [Kaya Seal] to cover the entire room, followed by activating the [Silence Technique].

As soon as he employed the latter, Jason immediately felt pleased with his decision.

Because just as he executed the [Great Majestic Heavenly Dragon Technique]—

Roar!

A dragon's roar reverberated directly within the 'silenced' area.

Then, an illusory, faintly translucent dragon silhouette emerged from Jason's chest, thin as an arm, coiling around his body as it rotated, imbuing him with a unique power.

Feeling the subtle shift in attributes, Jason began to adjust his breathing.

He initiated the integration with [Battle Tattoo: Puce Griffin Shadow-Stealth Body Forging Technique].

Boom!

The moment the change commenced, Jason's body immediately exploded.

Into fragmented pieces.

Blood sprayed, organs scattered.

The dragon silhouette shattered instantly.

Jason wasn't surprised.

This always happened each time he progressed.

He understood it as part of the adaptation process for his body.

As long as he endured it, everything would fall into place.

Though the process was lengthy, gritting his teeth, enduring the pain, and toughing it out would get him through.

Thus, as his talent reactivated and he reappeared within the room, he began the second round.

Boom!

Just like the first time, no change whatsoever.

The third time, the fourth, the fifth... the tenth, the hundredth!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The sound of bodies exploding continuously echoed within the room.