

Menu 1201

Chapter 1201: The Biggest Trump Card

As the 'serpent' retreated into the void, Jason immediately felt an immense pressure engulf him entirely.

Even his breathing became laborious.

It was as though an ordinary man, laden with hundreds of kilograms of weight, was struggling to walk through a room suffused with dense smoke.

Practically immobile!

"Pressure from the void?"

Jason muttered internally.

The void and the 'real world' are fundamentally different—that much Jason had anticipated.

He had also made plenty of conjectures about it.

The situation before him wasn't the worst he had imagined.

In fact, it was one of the better scenarios Jason had hoped for.

At least, he wasn't dead on the spot.

In the worst-case scenario Jason had envisioned, entering the void would mean instant death—his body unable to withstand the void's environment, collapsing entirely.

Thankfully!

With a trace of relief in his heart, Jason swiftly grabbed the short-handled broad blade cleaver embedded in the 'serpent's' body before him, along with the mask coiled around its hilt.

As his fingers touched the hilt and mask, Jason exhaled slightly in relief.

He had long grown accustomed to the presence of these two items.

If he were to lose them... it would be deeply distressing for him.

Then, his gaze shifted forward.

[Satiety: 2103]

[Excitement of Feast: 115]

...

The 'serpent's' other head, though not completely devoured, had still provided Jason with a considerable amount of satiety and Excitement of Feast.

Especially the Excitement of Feast, which had reached an unprecedented level of 115 points.

This brought Jason a sense of joy.

Of course, Jason hadn't forgotten about the precarious situation he was in.

[Main Mission: Survive for 1 hour amidst the 'serpent's' carnage; Remaining Time: 00:12:12]

...

Glancing at the remaining time, Jason didn't hesitate to play his last ace.

Jason had many aces up his sleeve.

These included, but weren't limited to: the Undying Talent, Chen Xi Sword, and more.

However, Jason's ultimate ace had always been just one.

Stealth!

The transcendence-level stealth granted by the core secret technique of [Dragon.Battle Pattern.Pluse.Griffin.Shadow-Fusion Body Forging Technique].

Having relied on transcendence-level stealth numerous times in the past, Jason was well aware of its immense power.

He believed that, even against the 'serpent,' it would still prove useful.

Especially now, inside the 'serpent's' body, where he was isolated from its true gaze.

With this ace in hand, Jason had dared to face the 'serpent' alone.

Otherwise, even if he had lost the short blade and mask, Jason wouldn't have taken any reckless actions.

As expected, just like Jason had anticipated.

Transcendence-level stealth truly worked.

As Jason stood there motionless, simultaneously adjusting to the void while silently waiting, a surge of potent will began sweeping back and forth.

One second, ten seconds, thirty seconds.

The potent will continuously scanned, sweeping hundreds of times in mere breaths.

Jason didn't move.

He stood there quietly.

Patiently waiting for the right moment.

...

"Where's that ant?"

"Why has it vanished?"

"Could it have returned to the real world?"

The 'serpent,' now left with only three heads, spoke in puzzled voices.

They had fled the 'real world,' quickly distancing themselves from it, and began relentlessly searching for the ant within their body—but to no avail.

The entity had simply vanished.

It was as though it had never appeared at all.

Even the signs of being gnawed upon within their body had vanished.

Could it truly have left?

The three remaining heads were bewildered.

However, this didn't stop them from simultaneously searching and conversing with each other.

"I think one of us should become the boss."

One of the snake heads suggested.

"Indeed, just like before."

Another snake head nodded in agreement.

"I think I'd be a good candidate to become the new boss."

The third snake head declared.

These words elicited disdainful laughter from the first two snake heads, their forked tongues flicking scornfully.

How could they ever acknowledge the other's self-proclaimed position as the boss?

Each of them was intent on becoming the true boss themselves.

After all, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The original boss was already dead.

By the time it resurrected from the chaos, who could say how many years or decades that would take?

And even then, its power would be far weaker than theirs.

If not for the fact that they had been born as a single entity, they wouldn't have even considered giving the resurrected boss a chance—they'd eliminate it in its infancy.

The resurrected entity would wisely acknowledge the reality.

Until circumstances shifted again.

But that was a matter for the future.

For now?

First, they needed to deal with the other two.

Each of the three snake heads thought this to themselves.

"Our power is nearly equal, but I'm the sharpest—I think I'm the most suitable to become the boss."

The first snake head tried to persuade the others.

"Sharp? Is that so?"

"You sure about that?"

"Not only is our power evenly matched, but we're indistinguishable in every other aspect too."

The second snake head contested.

"No!"

"We're not the same!"

"I'm better-looking!"

The last snake head stated bluntly.

This proclamation earned it yet another round of contempt from the other two snake heads.

Better-looking?

Even from the viewpoint of snakes, this one was ugly—an appearance entirely devoid of any redeeming qualities.

Of course, they themselves were equally hideous.

As for those ants' perspective?

Their appearance was downright terrifying.

There wasn't the slightest connection to anything remotely resembling beauty.

Yet, the last snake head paid no mind to this, lifting its head high and shamelessly declaring, "Look at me! Aren't my eyes bigger than yours? Aren't my scales denser? As for radiance—don't even talk about it! They're practically glowing! So, I'm obviously better-looking, and I should naturally be the boss!"

Chapter 1202: The Biggest Trump Card (2)

The shameless words infuriated the other two snakeheads, both furiously flicking their tongues.

It was as if they wanted to spit right in its face.

The third snakehead remained aloof, holding its head high and ignoring everything.

Of course, it knew it was lying through its fangs.

But in the struggle for dominance, it could afford to care little.

If shamelessness could secure the position of leader, then... why bother with dignity?

Soon, the other two snakeheads caught on.

Immediately, they collided against the lying snakehead.

They intended to knock some sense into it.

To make it realize its error.

And to vent a bit of their dissatisfaction.

So, the strikes landed harder.

Boom! Boom!

The successive impacts crashed onto the lying snakehead forcefully, causing its head to reel backward.

The pain spread instantly.

Hiss!

The snakehead let out a sharp hiss, then lunged decisively at the first snakehead that had spoken.

Boom!

The collision was mercilessly fierce.

The struck snakehead froze.

Why attack me?

It was clearly the two of us together!

Are you looking down on me by striking only me and not the other?

With such thoughts brewing, the snakehead launched an immediate counterattack.

Meanwhile, seeing the two snakeheads relentlessly clash, the remaining snakehead wisely shut its mouth.

Fight! Fight all you want!

In the end, I'll be the ultimate victor!

This snakehead understood perfectly the concept of "when clams fight, the fisherman profits."

Though the battling snakeheads wouldn't lead to actual death, as long as they were battered and scarred, it would be sufficient for it to snatch the final victory and claim leadership.

Who would've thought—in the end, I'll be the one to triumph!

The snakehead thought happily.

Then—

The two combatant snakeheads abruptly turned and charged towards it simultaneously.

"You really think we're fools!"

The two snakeheads roared in unison.

The collision left the snakehead momentarily dumbfounded.

But as soon as it recovered, it retaliated without hesitation.

"Damn you!"

With an enraged snarl, it lunged at the snakehead closest to it.

This time, it wasn't just a collision.

There was biting involved.

The snakehead opened its mouth and sank its teeth into its rival.

Hiss!

The agonized cry rang out, far more piercing than before.

The bitten snakehead was now truly infuriated.

It turned its head and began biting back.

The remaining snakehead, without hesitation, joined in to assist the snakehead it had previously been clashing with, sinking its fangs into the other side.

This wasn't cooperation.

Nor was it vengeance.

It was simply escalating the conflict for its own gains.

Collisions and biting are entirely different.

The former brings pain.

But the latter?

It inflicts real wounds.

The chaotic battle between the three snakeheads began.

Amid their mutual biting and tearing, all semblance of earlier conversations or searching efforts was abandoned.

Only one motive remained—fighting! Fighting! Fighting again!

This was the moment Jason had been waiting for!

Confirming there were no longer any spiritual scans, Jason, now gradually acclimated to the oppressive void, began moving inch by inch.

He picked the neck that seemed to tremble the most and started ‘clearing his path.’

Everything progressed more smoothly than Jason had anticipated.

Surprisingly, it was even easier than in the ‘physical realm.’

Without encountering any obstacles, Jason arrived near one of the snakeheads’ brains.

The three snakeheads locked in their rabid biting match failed to notice him at all.

Engulfed by fury, they were entirely insensible.

As for the pain caused by being eaten?

The agony of their gnawing far outweighed Jason's consumption.

Thus—the outcome was inevitable!

The hulking, blood-soaked snakehead glared viciously at the other two.

It was gravely wounded.

It knew it had lost the fight for dominance.

If this continued, it would undoubtedly sustain worse injuries—or return to chaos itself.

Infighting among them was not unheard of.

It was simply rare.

But giving up like this? That was tough to swallow.

As the snakehead hesitated, the other two resumed their biting.

At this point, the two snakeheads clearly weren't planning to let it live.

They intended to finish this one off first.

And afterward?

They would settle who lived and died themselves.

After all, there could only be one leader.

And only one survivor.

The snakehead obviously perceived their intent and roared furiously on the spot.

"Want to eliminate me?"

"I'll make sure to drag one of you down with me!"

The ferocious roar brought the attacking snakeheads to a brief halt.

Relieved, the wounded snakehead's gaze turned cold and venomous as it scanned its aggressors.

"Think carefully."

"I may be seriously injured, but I'm far from actual death. If you really want me gone, I won't mind dragging one of you along—I promise I'm capable of it."

It spoke coldly.

Witnessing their hesitation, the snakehead felt smug.

Idiots!

You've just given me another chance!

It wanted to go further.

So, it spoke again.

"We can... Arghhhh!"

"You insignificant bug!"

"I will

Excruciating pain radiated from its skull, and the once-prideful snakehead began to shriek miserably as it swung its massive head to shake Jason out of its brain.

But how could that be possible?

Having secured his place at the proverbial banquet, Jason had no intention of leaving.

Quickly, the snakehead's voice fell silent.

[Devour Great Serpent (Brain)]

[Physical Strength, Energy, and Wounds Recovered Beyond Limits!]

[Satiation+1000]

[Satiation: 3103]

[Excitement of Feast+25]

[Excitement of Feast: 140]

...

Satiation and Excitement of Feast surged once more.

Jason casually brushed his mouth and knew the real danger was yet to come.

Without hesitation, he turned and fled down the same path he had come.

"Bug!"

The remaining two snakeheads roared in rage.

They never thought Jason would take down yet another one of theirs.

No insect had ever accomplished such a feat.

Especially here in the void!

This was unprecedented!

They would never forgive him!

Toxic gas and acidic liquid surged like tides across the 'path' Jason occupied.

Death came swift and unrelenting.

Just as before.

Yet the true peril had only just begun!

The two snakeheads locked eyes, then simultaneously bit down on the neck of the third snakehead, one on each side. With a brutal pull—

Crack, rip.

The sound of sinew and flesh tearing filled the void.

The third snakehead's neck split open, leaving Jason at the precise center of the rupture.

Amid the poison and acid, Jason's fragmented body was directly exposed to the void.

The regeneration that had begun faltered.

His body seemed splintered and torn.

Facing the void directly and merely sensing it from within the serpent were entirely different experiences.

The worst-case scenario Jason had anticipated was now unfolding.

Once.

Ten times.

A hundred times.

Death repeated like an endless cycle, playing out on Jason over and over again.

By the time Jason reappeared fully formed once more, death had occurred three hundred times.

Three hundred deaths did not shake Jason.

Or perhaps, more precisely, he had long grown accustomed to dying.

Like breathing—so routine it was second nature.

But Jason wasn't in good condition.

Three hundred deaths had only led him to barely adapt to the void.

Such adaptation, however, merely allowed him to stand still.

To move?

That required another round of acclimation.

More importantly, the two colossal snakeheads, with their eerie four eyes, were fixated on him intently.

Their gazes brimmed with rage, resentment, and malice.

These negative emotions nearly materialized into physical substance.

In the next instant—

Jason's body shattered.

Under the exhale of one snakehead.

Then, destruction became the theme.

Shattering and reforming.

Reforming and shattering.

Initially driven entirely by fury, the two snakeheads soon overcame their rage as Jason continued to die.
What remained was shock.

This bug seemed... different.

The snakeheads exchanged glances.

And deep within, a different kind of thought began to stir.

Chapter 1203: Being Missed

The ant before me is different!

‘The Serpent’ has started to regard Jason seriously.

Even back in the ‘Present World,’ ‘The Serpent’ had noticed Jason’s uniqueness, but in its arrogance, ‘The Serpent’ didn’t care—just like an elephant sizing up a slightly stronger ant.

Still an ant.

What’s so strange about that?

But then, far removed from the ‘Present World,’ upon entering the ‘Void.’

Jason’s actions caused ‘The Serpent’ to feel surprised.

The ‘Void’ is different from the ‘Present World.’

Not only in terms of the environment...

But also...

Strength!

The strength of the 'Present World' does not necessarily function in the 'Void.'

Therefore, when 'The Serpent' noticed Jason's immortality trait in the 'Present World,' it found it surprising but didn't regard it as significant.

But in the 'Void,' it's different.

This is a strength worth noticing.

Or rather, a strength worth 'coveting'!

The two massive serpent heads exchanged glances, and greed surfaced simultaneously.

They stared at the shattered Jason.

Instinctively, they wanted to devour Jason.

There's no better way to acquire such power than simply consuming it.

But just as they opened their mouths, the two serpent heads closed them shut immediately.

They remembered Jason's earlier behavior.

If they swallowed him, would there be consequences?

Would they end up being devoured in turn?

After some thought, the probability seemed high.

Based on Jason's demonstrated immortality, even their stomach acid might fail to dissolve him entirely; instead, it might let him infiltrate their bodies once again, just as it had happened before.

Then...

Wear him down!

Weaken him!

Wait until he is powerless to resist, and then devour him!

In an instant, the two serpent heads reached a decision.

Although they couldn't 'see clearly' the source of Jason's immortality, they could sense that Jason's immortality was not infinite; it was consuming some form of energy they had yet to understand.

"Once we possess such strength, we will grow even more powerful!"

"Even if we perish, we can swiftly recover from the chaos!"

The two serpent heads flicked their tongues excitedly.

In a certain sense, they were also immortal.

But their immortality was different from Jason's.

Theirs relied on a trace of essence.

Once they died, it required a long period of accumulation to recover.

Moreover, a portion of their consciousness would dissipate.

Even a partial loss was something they were unwilling to accept.

After all, no one wants to inexplicably lose pieces of their memory...

Or...

Intelligence!

Among the eight serpent heads, one or two were noticeably dim-witted.

For example, the one that charged into the 'Present World' first.

They enjoyed seeing other heads reduced to such a state.

But themselves?

Never!

Now, they saw an opportunity before them.

Devour Jason!

Bolster their strength!

Not their essence!

Themselves!

Time ticked by second by second.

It appeared that Jason was dying repeatedly, and joy emerged in the eyes of the two serpent heads.

Just as they predicted, Jason began to show signs of weakness.

Soon, they would grow even stronger.

Soon, they... huh?!

Where did he go?!

Just as the two serpent heads brimmed with glee, suddenly, Jason vanished from their sight.

Vanished into thin air!

Without a single warning!

Hiss!

The two serpent heads hissed furiously, their mountain-like forms rising as their four eyes began scanning the surroundings.

Was he rescued?

Impossible!

No way!

This Void was their marked territory!

No creature would dare step into this place!

No creature would rescue Jason!

Then that means... he escaped by himself?

Even more impossible!

Shattered to such an extent—reduced to barely meat paste—how could he still escape?

If he could move in such a state, he wouldn't have been so easily at their mercy.

Although only a brief encounter, as their enemy, Jason had left a deeply lasting impression on 'The Serpent.'

What in the world happened?

'The Serpent' pondered.

And then, suddenly sensing something, 'The Serpent' turned sharply around.

Crack!

The Void trembled abruptly, accompanied by a crisp sound.

As if struck porcelain, layers of spider-web cracks spread across space.

The four enormous eyes of the two serpent heads flickered frantically.

Their mountain-range-like bodies recoiled swiftly.

A shiver from the depths of their souls warned them of the emergence of something horrifying.

Crack!

The shattering sound rang out once more.

Then, fingers—an eerie pair of fingernails—poked out from the densest part of the cracks, squeezing through as if prying something open. The fingers pushed firmly, gradually forcing their way through.

When most of the hand had pushed its way through—

"Open!"

A low voice commanded.

Like thunder.

The sound left 'The Serpent' trembling uncontrollably, their raised bodies nearly bowing down.

But 'The Serpent' couldn't afford to consider much else.

Their four eyes were fixed solemnly on that location.

The Void was torn open!

Just like the 'Present World,' a rend had been forcefully made.

From the breach emerged a figure.

Clad in a deep-black martial arts robe, with a mane of dense, chaotic reddish-brown hair tied high into a ponytail atop their head, a string of massive prayer beads encircled their neck, and their hands were adorned with rope-like knuckle guards.

They resembled an ant.

But 'The Serpent' retreated further.

Although the figure before them bore a similar appearance to the ants they knew, they were assured—this was no mere ant.

Chapter 1204: Being Missed (2)

Just from the prayer beads and gauntlets alone, let alone the figure itself, it felt a chill in its core.

"Who is it?"

"Who could this possibly be?"

"How could there be such a powerful presence here?"

The 'Serpent' was utterly bewildered.

This void, a place it had occupied for over a millennium, had never witnessed such a formidable existence.

Or rather...

This void should never have housed a being of such overwhelming power.

Such an entity should belong to a deeper realm.

Wait!

A deeper realm?

From the deeper realms?

In an instant, the 'Serpent' realized something.

But before it could think further, the figure stepped into the void.

"Jason's presence lingers here?"

"It's thick."

"Jason was just here."

Aras flared her nostrils, muttering softly, an indescribable joy spreading across her face.

Two hundred years!

At long last, she had found another clue of Jason!

And this time, it wasn't fleeting or ambiguous!

This time!

It was genuine!

Jason had been right here moments ago!

Then, Aras raised her head and noticed the 'Serpent', her brow furrowing slightly.

A creature of this void?

So weak.

Compared to the beasts she had encountered before, this one didn't even come close.

Without hesitation.

Aras raised her hand and waved.

A violet ripple immediately struck the 'Serpent's' immense form.

Boom!

The 'Serpent' was torn apart.

Aras didn't spare it another glance.

Creatures like this—she had slain at least eighty to a hundred thousand over the past two centuries. They weren't even worth mentioning.

The only thing she cared about was Jason.

She had to bring Jason home.

In the next moment, after determining her direction, Aras shot into the sky.

Whoosh!

The entire void dimmed.

As though sinking into chaos.

Aras vanished, leaving behind a colossal burning character: 'Sky.'

Gradually, the flames extinguished.

The void didn't return to normal; instead, it became darker and more unfathomable.

Because enormous figures now filled this space, their presence extinguishing all traces of 'light' in every sense.

A Bone Dragon, so massive its bounds were infinite, hauled a completely pitch-black palace built from shadows into view.

The palace floated in the void, as vast as an entire city.

Ten thousand Bone Dragons circled around it.

On the backs of the dragons, Black Armored Knights stood vigilantly.

Behind them, an endless legion of the Undead appeared silently, without a sound.

Thousands of Liches hovered in precise formations around the palace, the crystals in their hands emitting ghastly glimmers of light.

Then, a dazzling radiance emerged.

Seeing this radiance, all the Liches erupted in excitement.

They swiftly spread the word throughout the Shadow Hall.

Lederma received the message and strode briskly toward the depths of the palace.

On a plush sofa, Dennise clutched a portrait, staring at it silently.

It was a portrait of Jason.

So lifelike.

As though he were truly there.

This was a masterpiece Dennise had created after mastering the art of painting through countless ages.

"Where are you?"

"Do you know I'm looking for you?"

Dennise murmured softly, raising a hand to caress Jason's image, as though stroking his face. Alas, the rough texture of the paper cruelly reminded her of the harsh reality.

But Dennise didn't despair.

She laughed boldly.

"Don't worry. I'll find you."

"I definitely will!"

With that, Dennise raised her left hand, as though making an oath, a gesture filled with determination.

Except...

No Deity dared to pry into such a vow.

And no entity dared to hear of such an oath.

In truth, as Dennise swore, numerous beings—whether renowned or hidden—fled as fast as possible.

They, it, and even He wished to avoid facing the endless ‘Undead Calamity.’

Yet Dennise remained blissfully unaware.

Just as she had been then.

Dennise had never changed.

From a distance, Lederma gazed upon his queen with the utmost reverence. This was the sovereign he would follow for lifetimes upon lifetimes—unchanging from beginning to end, for them and for the Prince as well.

And it was precisely for this reason that such a ruler was worthy of eternal allegiance.

"Your Majesty."

"There's news of the Prince."

Lederma knelt on one knee.

"Where?"

Dennise set down the portrait and sprang to her feet in delight.

"He was nearby earlier."

"Although he disappeared, we are now closer to the Prince than ever before."

"If we continue the pursuit, we'll find him soon."

Lederma reported truthfully.

"Amazing!"

Dennise twirled in excitement, practically jumping for joy.

Then, with a commanding wave, she declared:

"Onward!"

"We're going to find Jason!"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Lederma nodded and bowed as he exited the palace.

As the kingdom's Prime Minister, it fell to him to execute Her Majesty's will and command.

Of course, he also had to perfect it.

The queen provided the grand strategy, but he needed to refine her directives to flawless execution.

Standing in the void, Lederma raised a finger.

Hiss!

The 'Serpent' emerged.

Its colossal form resembled the surrounding Bone Dragons, except for the eight skull-like heads, which gave it an eerie quality. Yet all were bones.

"Its strength is somewhat lacking."

"But Her Majesty needs a beast to pull the carriage."

"Aesthetically, it'll do. You're the one."

Lederma nodded in satisfaction at the 'Serpent's' appearance.

With another wave of his hand.

The entire kingdom began to move once more.

As the 'Undead Calamity' departed, the surrounding entities collectively breathed a sigh of relief.

Chapter 1205: Longed for by Someone (3)

Their, its, their most dreaded appearance is the 'Queen of Catastrophe.'

That seemingly innocent and pure entity, yet terrifying to the extreme.

Especially her warriors.

Unfathomable terror.

Because, they cannot die.

And, as long as you die, you'll join their ranks.

Then, unfaltering loyalty to the 'Queen of Catastrophe.'

At first, there were figures who dared to challenge this queen.

Then, she gathered her Prime Minister, the Four Generals, and the Octagonal Guard Army.

Along with...

Hundreds of millions of undead warriors.

All were once the most devout believers of various divine realms.

Now?

The Queen's most loyal warriors.

Such a fate caused all beings to avoid the 'Queen of Catastrophe' at all costs.

Simultaneously marking her advancing path with the label 'Forbidden Land.'

The Undead Dynasty departed.

The great serpent's body followed suit.

However, a shred of the serpent's divine consciousness began to stir within the chaos of the origin.

This was its talent.

Thankfully!

Sensing the power within the origin, the surviving serpent took a deep, relieved breath.

Then came the fatigue.

An overwhelming fatigue.

Unconsciously, it fell into slumber.

When it awoke, it saw a nervous, uneasy woman.

"Jason won't be harmed, right?"

"He won't."

"How could Jason be harmed?"

"But, this bastard will be—I've suddenly got a craving for snake stew."

The previously timid voice abruptly turned bold, and the woman looked straight at the serpent.

The great serpent panicked and tried to escape.

But the woman caught it with one hand.

Impossible!

Where was its strength?

Where was its origin?

"This is 'Dream!'"

"Everything here obeys me!"

"Including you, you scoundrel!"

Evelyn said, borrowing the body of the pastry chef.

Then, she casually tossed the great serpent into the pot.

Attempting to eat Jason.

She decided to stew it first.

"Adjust the fleet's direction; we need to pick up the pace."

"Those gaudy fools are speeding up as well."

Evelyn told the pastry chef.

The pastry chef nodded immediately.

Instantly, the fleet within the dream accelerated.

The last trace of the great serpent's divine consciousness began dispersing at the origin.

But a hand scooped up this origin.

This hand moved slowly backward.

Eventually...

It withdrew from a mirror.

"You should be gentler."

"This is my first time in thousands of years."

"Lubricate first; it won't hurt as much."

The magic mirror grumbled.

"Do you need me to send you to cool off in the toilet?"

Emily asked.

"Emily, you're so cruel. You used to be so sweet to me, calling me 'Your Highness' and 'Master.'

The magic mirror protested loudly.

"That was me in my naive youth."

Emily, clad in a witch's robe, examined the origin in her hand, frowning in thought.

"Are you sure this won't go wrong?"

"Can this find Lord Jason and recover Lady Sister's memories?"

Emily asked.

"Of course!"

The magic mirror answered emphatically.

"Let's hope this time it succeeds."

"Otherwise, Lady Sister might just soak you in the sewer."

Emily gestured toward the distant large bed.

The witch lay there in deep sleep, her belly noticeably larger.

For the sake of the child's growth, Jennifer chose slumber.

Unless the matter was critical, Emily wouldn't wake her sister.

Finding Jason while restoring Lady Sister's memory was surely crucial.

Still, Emily glanced at the magic mirror and decided to wait for a real 'glimmer of hope' before committing.

After all, this was the twelfth time the mirror had promised.

The previous eleven?

Undoubtedly failures.

Emily didn't want her sister's hopes dashed again.

Especially since her sister was with child.

"I hope this time it's accurate."

"Otherwise

"I'll personally toss you into the sewer for Lady Sister."

Emily remarked.

"So unlovable."

"You were so cute before."

The magic mirror muttered, then began tapping into this origin power to peer into 'destiny.'

Then...

Nothing.

How could this be?

How could it happen?

Was someone concealing Jason's fate?

No!

Not merely concealed—completely veiled!

Who besides me could achieve this?

The magic mirror froze in shock.

"Another failure?"

Emily asked.

She knew the mirror too well; even without asking, she could tell by the look.

"Impossible!"

"I succeeded!"

"But I need a moment to organize my findings from the divination."

The magic mirror tried to bluff.

It had no intention of visiting the sewer.

In truth, it had lied numerous times to avoid that fate before.

Proclaiming destinies intertwined with Jason's, that only by finding him could memories truly return, making recovery possible, and so on.

It had no other recourse.

While it suspected Jennifer's past was extraordinary, it hadn't anticipated such an incredible past had exceeded imagination.

Something far beyond the scope of 'destiny.'

Even a mere glimpse filled it with a crushing dread of shattering.

Thus, lies became necessary.

Moreover, upon learning Jennifer dearly cherished her child, the mirror instantly found a convenient excuse.

Using Jason as its pretext.

Buying time first.

That was its initial plan.

But who could've known—Jason's troubles rivaled Jennifer's.

Even Jason's destiny remained elusive.

What a terrifying 'couple'!

Jason, hurry up and act. Stir up some waves!

Let me locate you!

Otherwise, I really will end up in the sewer!

The magic mirror silently prayed.

It realized even procrastination couldn't hold off indefinitely.

At that moment—

A heap of shredded flesh began slowly coalescing on a high-backed chair.

Two breaths later, Jason was seated upon the chair.

Then...

Achoo! Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!

Chapter 1206: Crispy Pastry Box!

I caught a cold again?

Sitting at the dining table, feeling the constraint pressing against his upper back, Jason was startled.

Then he shook his head.

With his physique, catching a cold was simply impossible.

The only plausible explanation was the brutal fight with the ‘Great Serpent’ had left his freshly recovered body feeling unsettled.

Thinking back to the final moments of the battle, the overwhelming strength of the 'Great Serpent,' Jason couldn't help but take a deep breath.

"I'm still too weak."

He was utterly powerless to fight back.

And the 'Great Serpent' hadn't even unleashed its full power.

It was just relentless crushing.

If it weren't for his extraordinary talent and meticulously calculated timing, he would have truly died by now.

That said, the end result was clear.

[Satiety Level: 103]

[Excitement of Feast: 140]

...

Previously, his Satiety Level had been as high as 3103 points.

Now, only 103 points remained.

"Died a thousand times, huh?"

Jason quietly calculated, his face devoid of any expression.

For Jason, death had become a habit.

From the initial gunshots, knife stabs, decapitations, dismemberments, all the way to the current utter annihilation, he had grown used to it.

At this rate, his gravestone would probably be long enough to circle his hometown's equator multiple times.

But it didn't matter.

Wasn't he still alive now?

To be alive was to possess endless possibilities.

Whether it was getting stronger, or hunting for food, the principle remained the same.

Rustle!

The black notebook on the dining table flipped its pages on its own, without a gust of wind.

Its pages turned rapidly.

[Consumed 'Rare Ingredient,' Predator's Talent upgrade assessment...]

[Assessment passed!]

[Predator II → Predator III]

[Predator III: Certain 'foods' would absolutely never exist on a normal person's menu, but you're different. Your otherworldly soul makes you so unique. To you, there's no such thing as inedible 'food invasive species? Sorry, here they're just endangered species eaten into multiple classifications! And as you progress farther along your predation path, you'll become increasingly adept at maximizing your

talent's potential; Effect: When you consume 'abnormal food,' you not only gain corresponding Satiety Level, but you can also use Satiety Level to accomplish extraordinary feats, with a significant boost to the Satiety Level obtained.]

...

"Rare Ingredient?"

"The 'Great Serpent'!"

Looking at the text in front of him, Jason instantly found the answer.

The shift in description from 'slightly' to 'significant' left him thrilled.

Clearly, with the same 'food,' he could now obtain even more Satiety Level— this was undoubtedly good news.

Moreover, from a long-term perspective, this would be his ultimate foundation.

Quantity changes could trigger quality changes.

An extra 1-2 points of Satiety Level per instance might seem trivial.

But what about ten times?

A hundred times?

Or even... ten thousand times?

Over time, it would accumulate into a terrifyingly high value.

However, Jason's gaze now fell on the description for 'Rare Ingredient.'

Rare' grade ingredients can evolve my [Predator] Talent."

"Before it was II, now it's III. If it continues upgrading further in the future

"Could it trigger other special effects?"

Jason pondered.

He didn't know the answer.

But he felt it was worth trying.

Still, to hunt 'Rare Ingredients,' he'd need a little bit of luck right now.

It's not just about lacking strength.

In a dungeon world, figuring out how to lure out 'Rare Ingredients' was also key.

It wouldn't be easy.

Fortunately, Jason had done reasonably well previously.

Next?

He would continue striving.

Rustle.

The black notebook's pages flipped once more.

This time, the assessment appeared on it—

[Main Quest: Perfect!]

[Predation Performance: Perfect!]

[Cooking Performance: Mediocre!]

[Combat Performance: Perfect!]

[Search Performance: Mediocre!]

[Overall Evaluation: Excellent!]

(Note: Are your utensils ready?)

...

"Changed the original Main Quest, so now it's perfect?"

"Cooking... hmm."

Jason looked at the 'Cooking' column, his expression turning complicated.

It wasn't that he didn't want to showcase his skills.

His love for food dictated his passion for cooking as well, but his culinary skills were truly atrocious! It wasn't like he could actually prepare stir-fried dumbbells, right?

Besides, the most important reason was the constant urgency during battles— he simply didn't have the time to cook properly.

For no particular reason, Jason found himself missing the days in 'Lorde.'

Although equally dangerous, at least he had some breathing room there to showcase his culinary skills.

"Sigh, forget it, not worth dwelling on."

"There will always be chances later."

Jason thought to himself and then turned his gaze to the 'Search' column.

Immediately, his heart ached.

He hadn't searched within the island at all.

The 'Flourish Moon,' 'Oni River,' and the 'Dragon Palace' near the Urashima family— just hearing the names, Jason knew what he had missed.

A feast!

A truly magnificent feast!

But he had truly been stretched too thin.

The sudden appearance of the 'Great Serpent' had made everything infinitely more abrupt.

"Compared to direct combat, better time allocation could net me more Satiety Level, huh?"

Jason muttered to himself deep in his heart.

However, this was easier said than done.

More difficult than hunting 'Rare Ingredients' by far.

After all, in the dungeon world, he had no foundation— everything had to start from scratch. To achieve a 'perfect adjustment' once and make everything turn out ideally would require the mobilization of unimaginable manpower and resources, an effort beyond his capacity.

Unless he could obtain abilities or items that allowed him to directly capture others as his subordinates.

Chapter 1207: Crispy Pastry! (2)

However...

How could such abilities and tools exist?

Even if they did, they would certainly be kept secret.

Jason pondered as two bronze-colored cards with silver streaks floated up from the black notebook.

One card had the image of a stomach on the front. However, unlike the previous digestive system illustration, the stomach contained liquid.

The other card's image resembled... saliva?

[Stomach Acid Enhancement!]

[Stomach Acid Enhancement: Your digestive organs have undergone further improvement, enabling your stomach acid to digest food more rapidly. Of course, if you spit it out, it can also corrode enemies.]

(Note: Your stomach acid is no longer the same as that of an ordinary person. It has undergone a qualitative transformation. Please refrain from using it against non-enemies.)

...

[Saliva Enhancement!]

[Saliva Enhancement: Your saliva has been fortified to soften food, improve digestion, and provide exceptional antibacterial properties.]

(Note: You can technically use your saliva to disinfect food.)

...

"Stomach acid? Saliva?"

Jason stared at the two passive enhancements, momentarily stunned.

Especially after seeing the accompanying notes.

Stomach acid as an attack?

It might have some use, but it's unlikely to have decisive effects.

After all, not even my stomach acid could compare to aqua regia.

As for saliva as a disinfectant?

That's definitely not going to happen.

I prefer methods that align with my own sense of tradition.

Jason thought silently.

Meanwhile, he carefully sensed the changes in his body.

As he swallowed saliva, the stomach subtly squirmed.

It felt more vigorous and resilient than before.

And then—

Gurgle!

His stomach gave a loud rumble of hunger.

His gaze shifted to the dining table, his heart filled with anticipation for the upcoming meal.

After all, this was top-quality food.

On the long table, a white oval porcelain plate appeared.

The plate wasn't large, reminiscent of hotel dining plates, pure white in color, one side slightly raised to form a slanted design. In the center of the plate was a golden-brown pastry.

The pastry was about half the size of a fist.

Though it was sealed shut, Jason could already smell the faint fragrance of freshness.

As soon as the sense of constraint vanished, Jason immediately picked up a small spoon and lifted the top layer of the pastry crust.

Like a lid being lifted, the rich "sea aroma" burst forth the moment the crust was peeled away.

Chopped prawns, scallops, cod, and mussels—all distinct in color—shimmered with their unique flavors.

Jason promptly scooped up a spoonful and placed it in his mouth.

Springy, fresh, tender.

The texture exploded immediately.

When bites of asparagus, carrot, onion, celery, and broccoli joined the mix, there was an added crunch.

It was a crunch Jason had eagerly anticipated.

Every chew produced crisp, satisfying sounds of crunchiness.

Black pepper and salt provided the perfect complement to this texture.

Cream and white wine made the flavors even purer.

The sweet cream carried faint notes of wine—not overpowering, but with subtle undertones of spice that perfectly removed any fishiness from the prawns, scallops, cod, and mussels while preserving their original meaty taste.

Spoonful after spoonful, Jason devoured the meal.

Finally, he picked up the pastry and tossed it into his mouth.

Crunch!

The pastry's unique crispiness emerged.

In that instant, everything elevated to new heights.

Sigh!

Jason leaned back in the high-backed chair, eyes half-closed, and let out a long breath.

"Delicious."

That was his evaluation.

[Tasted 'excellent' level 'Seafood Puff Pastry'!]

[Physical strength, energy, and injuries fully recovered!]

[Attribute points +0.2]

...

With familiarity growing, Jason's attributes had now reached the following:

[Strength: 9.2, Agility: 8.4, Constitution: 9.5, Spirit: 7.2, Perception: 10.8]

...

What could be more thrilling than tasting delicious food?

Of course, it's eating while growing stronger.

Jason keenly felt his body strengthening once again, prompting him to sit up slightly straighter.

"It's not enough!"

"Next time, I must become even stronger!"

"Keep going!"

Jason silently cheered himself on, but his gaze had already shifted back to the black notebook.

The words on it began to shift in his mind.

[Hunting is exhilarating.]

[But it also brings change.]

[Unable to return to the 'Seafood Puff Pastry' world.]

...

Jason wasn't surprised by this message.

When the "Serpent" entered the "real world," Jason had anticipated such a possibility.

He began flipping through the black notebook.

Upon seeing that the 'Table Etiquette' world was still lit, he let out a deep breath.

For Jason, as long as the Lorde world remained unaffected, it was fine.

After all, there were far too many things he needed to accomplish in the Lorde world.

After briefly scanning the other secondary dish worlds, [Cheese Ham] and [Tomato Parmesan Chicken], Jason realized that with the completion of the [Seafood Puff Pastry] world, he could choose between the other two.

As for which one to choose?

Jason had already made up his mind.

[Cheese Ham]!

Compared to the higher difficulty of [Tomato Parmesan Chicken], Jason preferred the slightly less challenging [Cheese Ham].

Although the latter world might yield greater rewards, Jason's heightened caution toward changes in the black notebook made him unwilling to choose a more dangerous or aggressive path.

Such an approach? Impossible.

Jason could only opt for the more prudent route.

Then, he would plan carefully.

After all—

Survive by being cautious; win by surviving!

This was the correct strategy.

Taking a deep breath, Jason felt the binding force once again enveloping his body. In the next moment, he reappeared at Ter Street No. 19.

A mask on his face, a short-handled broad blade cleaver in his hand.

Just like before.

Not a single change.

Or perhaps, there were changes Jason couldn't yet discern.

But Jason was determined not to lose his two most cherished items this time.

Previously, after returning to Ter Street No. 19, they had been returned to him.

This was fortunate.

But Jason couldn't guarantee this would happen every time.

Nor could he be certain if this "lost and found" process had any impact on him.

So this time, he chose to retrieve them himself.

Running his fingers along the knife handle, the masked Jason closed his eyes, allowing the temporary +0.3 perception boost from [Blind Fighting] to amplify his perception to over 11 times that of a normal person.

The intricate “threads” covering Ter Street No. 19 instantly became visible to Jason’s senses.

Differing from before, where they appeared dim.

This time, Jason was certain these web-like “threads” originated from the entrance of Ter Street.

Based on his previously memorized map, the location should be...

Ter Street No. 3.

A building even shorter than Ter Street No. 19, with one fewer floor.

What was once a three-story structure was now reduced to a single floor, its courtyard walls collapsed, with signs of fire and explosion nearby. The doorplate was nowhere to be seen.

Jason recognized it because of information in the records.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to identify it.

"Is it at Ter Street No. 3?"

Jason wondered, rising to walk around Ter Street No. 19 as before.

It seemed like a casual stroll, though also akin to patrolling.

Whenever he brushed against the "threads," he didn't hesitate or flinch.

Then, after finishing his survey of Ter Street No. 19, he walked outside.

Carefully staying within the shadows, ensuring he would not expose himself to any line of sight, while avoiding open spaces.

Just like the other residents of the Nightless City.

His guarded gaze mirrored theirs perfectly.

About three minutes later, Jason returned to Ter Street No. 19.

After resetting the traps he had set earlier, he sat down on a wooden crate once again.

Seemingly calm, Jason's mind raced with thoughts.

"No signs of activity."

"Did they enter ahead of time?"

"Or

"Is it actually an underground stronghold?"

Jason leaned toward the latter possibility.

The layout before him made it clear the others had planned extensively. An underground base might seem difficult for ordinary Nightless City residents, but for the opposition, it was a necessity.

In fact, at critical moments, that location might also serve as "bait."

Just like No. 19 where he resided.

Jason speculated as his fingers hidden in his sleeve shifted slightly, tapping the knife handle.

A dozen seconds later—

Knock, knock knock.

The sound of knocking echoed.

Chapter 1208: Testing. Cooperation.

One long, two short.

A rhythmic knock echoed through the altered and somewhat desolate No. 19 Ter Street.

Without needing to check the surveillance, Jason's sharp perception could already confirm the identity of the visitor through the vaguely familiar footsteps.

The trader.

The trader who came with “sincerity.”

Although, for Jason now, the satiety brought by [Touch of Swagnu (Egg)] and [Egg of Aike] no longer meant much, not too long ago...

About six hours ago, it was still a rare commodity that helped him navigate through a crisis.

It could even be called his first pot of gold.

Of course, the taste wasn't bad either.

The low-grade version of Meat Hook Egg was one of the rare delicacies Jason had encountered since arriving in the Nightless City.

Now the other party had returned.

Undoubtedly, they were here for the map.

Jason stood up and picked up the map from a nearby wooden crate.

He had already memorized the routes on it.

But he had no idea where they led.

Though he was a courier, his familiarity with the Nightless City was still limited to areas like Zones 16, 17, and 18.

Anything before Zone 15 or after Zone 25, he wasn't familiar with.

Like Zone 26, for example.

Before today, he had never set foot there.

Even if he had, Jason suspected it would be hard for him to recognize the place.

Because...

The map was most likely fake.

Not the kind of fake you could tell at a glance, but rather a map falsified in specific areas.

Simply put, nine truths, one lie.

Except for the most critical location, the rest was genuine.

And that was deadly.

Jason could already imagine what would happen after the trader took this map.

The monitors over at No. 3 Ter Street would undoubtedly report everything.

Then, it would just be a matter of waiting.

Waiting for the prey to fall into the trap.

As for him?

The usefulness of this pawn would have come to an end, and naturally, he'd be discarded.

And that was something Jason absolutely did not want to see.

Not out of fear.

But because the timing wasn't right.

That "big shot" and their "collaborator" probably didn't care much about a pawn like him and would most likely send a squad of gunmen to deal with him once the trader left with the map.

With his current strength, he could easily escape or wipe out that squad of gunmen.

But after that?

The "big shot" and their "collaborator," realizing they had failed, certainly wouldn't let it go. More gunmen, even Transcendents, would follow.

He would find himself in deep trouble in a very short time.

Wave after wave of attackers.

Day and night, relentless.

How could that compare to quietly developing his strength here at No. 19 Ter Street?

Moreover, there was another crucial point!

To this day, he still had no idea who that “big shot” and their “collaborator” were.

Not a single shred of information.

He couldn’t determine the scope of their influence.

Nor could he launch any targeted countermeasures.

This was highly disadvantageous.

Thus, Jason quickly scribbled a few words in the palm of his hand.

When he opened the door, the trader, dressed as a “courier,” was already waiting there. Upon seeing the piece of paper in Jason’s hand, their expression didn’t change in the slightest, but their breathing quickened ever so slightly.

Jason's sharp senses picked up on that clearly.

It seemed this map was even more important than he had imagined!

With this deduction in mind, Jason felt even more confident about his next move.

He raised his hand and handed the map over.

At the same time, he revealed his palm.

Clearly written on it were the words—

Trap.

The trader, dressed as a “courier,” saw the two words clearly. Then, without any outward reaction, they reached for the paper in Jason's hand.

But Jason suddenly raised his hand, and the trader's fingers merely brushed past the edge of the paper.

"Not enough!"

"Your offer isn't enough!"

"I need more!"

Jason said this, his voice tinged with a greedy malice.

The trader, dressed as a "courier," froze for a moment.

Then, indignantly, they spoke.

"You're hiking the price on the spot!"

"You're breaking your promise!"

As the trader protested, they tried to snatch the paper from Jason's hand. But a short-handled Broad Blade Cleaver was immediately placed against their neck. The trader's body stiffened on the spot.

"Hiking the price on the spot? Breaking promises?"

"Isn't that the basic moral code of everyone in the Nightless City?"

"Don't act shy, like some little girl."

"Now go back, and come find me with a better offer."

As Jason spoke, he withdrew the Broad Blade Cleaver and appeared to kick the trader hard in the abdomen.

Bang!

The trader clutched their stomach and staggered backward repeatedly as the door slammed shut behind them.

"Bastard!"

"You won't die a good death!"

The trader, dressed as a "courier," cursed and groaned as they moved to the side, clearly showing they hadn't escaped unscathed from the blow.

The district scavengers spying on No. 19 Ter Street witnessed the entire scene.

They burst into laughter.

Mocking the trader for their naivety.

And then, all of them revealed malicious glints in their eyes.

After all, the trader, dressed as a “courier,” really did look like a fat sheep.

An exceptionally naive fat sheep at that.

A perfect prey.

The trader clearly noticed this. Clutching their stomach, their expression shifted, and they quickly darted into an alleyway.

And then—

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A series of gunshots rang out in the alleyway.

At first, they were sporadic, but within seconds, they turned into an intense barrage.

Clearly, the district scavengers had run into trouble.

Chapter 1209: Testing. Cooperation (2)

Or rather, they've changed their target.

From the fat sheep at the beginning, to each other.

This isn't surprising.

In the 'Nightless City,' hunters are often prey.

Behind the door, Jason listened to the commotion on the street, a faint smile curling beneath the mask.

Clearly, the seemingly 'Postman' trader is adaptive and resourceful.

But that's to be expected.

If they lacked such adaptability, they wouldn't have become the liaison.

"Without the 'map,' the plan is temporarily stalled. That 'big shot' and their 'collaborator' will undoubtedly warn me, their temporary pawn, but not excessively—because I now align perfectly with the tradition of the 'Nightless City,' and I've already had contact with that trader. If they swap me rashly, it might expose flaws."

"So, what form will the warning take?"

Jason sat back on the crate, a flicker of anticipation in his heart.

At the moment, he not only needed to buy himself more time but also understand the 'big shot' and their 'collaborator' better, in order to prepare for the next move.

And the 'warning method' from the 'big shot' or the 'collaborator' was a breakthrough point.

According to Jason's predictions, these two... or more precisely the latter, would issue a severe punishment, showcasing an irresistible strength to make him obey.

Most people in the 'Nightless City' operate this way.

They wouldn't be any exception.

So, the most likely move would be sending a reliable subordinate.

After all, threats delivered from afar would lack weight.

As Jason pondered, he pulled out two cans of meat.

The alcohol stove in the corner quickly ignited with a faint blue flame, and bottled water poured into the pot began to boil rapidly. He emptied the cans into the pot, and the meat juices blended seamlessly with the water, while the chunks of meat rolled and released wafts of tantalizing aroma.

"Too bad there are no potatoes."

"If there were, I could add them in, stew them until tender."

"Then, serve them over a bowl of rice."

"Pour the potato and meat broth over it... Ahh."

Jason held the pot, sipping the meat broth and thinking.

Occasionally, he smacked his lips exaggeratedly.

He was doing it on purpose.

He knew, with those web-like ‘threads’ around, his every move was visible to the ‘big shot’s collaborator.’

He needed to project an aura of ‘at the end of my rope, so I’ll gamble it all.’

And before risking it all, consuming his precious resources for a brief indulgence—wasn’t that perfectly reasonable?

Most residents of the ‘Nightless City,’ struggling just to survive, were like this.

Jason had seen too many of them.

Picking it up was naturally a flawless performance.

'Eat and drink your fill,' Jason wrapped himself in a blanket and leaned against the crate to rest.

He closed his eyes, appearing to have fallen asleep.

But Jason distinctly heard movement from the second floor leading to the third floor—he had previously used wooden boards and furniture debris from the room to barricade this area.

Now, someone was slowly moving these obstructions away bit by bit.

Their actions were light.

To some extent, almost silent.

For ordinary people, detecting such movements would be nearly impossible.

But Jason heard it all clearly.

He could even deduce the general posture of the person from the sounds.

Jason felt a rare flicker of delight.

Not just satisfaction with his own strength at the moment, but delight towards this visitor.

It was evident that the 'big shot's collaborator' hadn't detected his change and was still treating him like a mere ordinary 'Postman.'

This couldn't be better!

As long as this judgment held steady.

Jason could deliver a surprise to them.

And to ensure they maintained this judgment, his performance now mattered greatly.

Five minutes later, the barricade between the second and third floor had been cleared just enough for a single person to pass.

In the next moment, a figure slipped into 19 Ter Street.

That figure stood nimbly on the original first-floor beam, gazing down at Jason.

Upon confirming Jason wasn't reacting at all, the figure sneered and leapt downward.

But they didn't pounce directly on Jason.

Instead, they circled the basement — the space Jason was in — before finally approaching Jason. However, upon spotting the alcohol stove and the empty cans on the ground, their footsteps noticeably paused.

Then, their breath carried a more palpable malice.

"It seems that the web-like 'threads' can't truly monitor the interior of 19 Ter Street — likely a vague perception, able to hear things clearly but not see. Thus, they had to inspect the room's interior."

"And regarding the cans of meat... it's obvious that such items are precious even to them."

"That 'big shot's collaborator' doesn't appear very wealthy."

Jason, still with closed eyes, analyzed each of their movements through sound, meticulously breaking them down.

After all, his employer, the 'Old Man,' ate canned meat almost daily, smoked cigars, and occasionally had some wine.

Was this 'big shot's collaborator' worse off than the 'Old Man'?

Impossible!

Jason immediately shook his head internally.

Judging by the gravity of the 'Old Man's' demeanor when he departed, coupled with the current setup, the 'big shot' was undoubtedly someone truly influential!

And the 'collaborator' of someone influential couldn't possibly be inferior!

Chapter 1210: Testing and Cooperation (3)

Leaning against the wooden crate, Jason began to recall everything that had happened before.

Suddenly, a flash of inspiration struck Jason's mind.

Was this 'mastermind's collaborator' really the 'mastermind's collaborator' all along?

Could they have been just a pawn?

Perhaps a stroke of luck had made them the 'collaborator'?

Instinctively, the black notebook surfaced in Jason's mind.

Transcendent Strength!

The 'mastermind' handed over the black notebook—or rather, used it as a bargaining chip—because the 'collaborator' had suddenly gained Transcendent Strength, even though they were still unfamiliar with it!

Precisely because of this, the 'mastermind' dared to use the obviously bizarre black notebook as leverage.

Meanwhile, the 'collaborator,' who might themselves have been a pawn or an ordinary person, utilized their Transcendent Strength and managed to establish their own small power base in a short time.

Simply because the time was too brief, their foundation was still somewhat thin.

This was why their subordinates showed visible anguish at losing a can of meat.

Gradually, Jason untangled the general thread of events.

Although he still didn't know who the 'mastermind' was.

Nor who the 'collaborator' was.

But once Jason grasped the relationship between the two, some things became simpler.

After all, the recent trader definitely knew who the 'collaborator' was, even if it was just a fake identity. From this, deducing the 'mastermind' would also be possible.

The next time they appeared, Jason could ask them.

Jason thought this to himself.

Just then, the uninvited guest finally appeared before him.

There was no sudden attack, no harsh measures—just a gun aimed right at the eye slot of Jason's mask.

Undoubtedly, the 'collaborator' was worried that any physical anomaly in Jason would expose the flaws.

Moreover, the 'collaborator' believed that this was sufficient.

In fact, any resident of Nightless City with a gun to their head would likely comply.

Jason was no exception.

Even if he was pretending.

Jason acted as though startled by foreign contact on his eyelids, and when he saw the person in front of him, he instinctively reached for his gun. But as soon as the barrel pressed against his eye socket shifted slightly, he immediately raised his hands high.

"Don't shoot!"

Jason shouted hoarsely, his voice carrying the tone of someone who had just woken up, a touch weary.

"Hey!"

"Of course I won't shoot, you lucky bastard!"

"If it weren't for the boss's orders, I would've sliced off your damn XXX and shoved it into your mouth by now!"

The uninvited guest sneered coldly.

"Tell me what you want me to do."

Jason gave no resistance, adopting a cooperative demeanor.

Seeing Jason's attitude, the uninvited guest truly wanted to pull the trigger, but now, at this critical juncture, switching people was out of the question.

Naturally, this was something Jason couldn't be allowed to find out.

Who knew what would happen once this greedy bastard learned the truth?

Even someone as greedy as Jason, the uninvited guest naturally understood what needed to be done at this moment.

"Count yourself lucky."

"The boss isn't bloodthirsty."

"Stay here obediently, and when that fool returns, hand over the map you've got to him."

"But know this—it's your last chance. If you dare try any tricks again

"Trust me, next time it won't be a gun barrel kissing you, but a bullet!"

Leaving these words, the uninvited guest leaped onto the beam and disappeared in a flash.

It was, without doubt, an act of showmanship.

And definitely a form of intimidation.

Jason cooperated perfectly, staring blankly at the beam and the breached obstruction for a good four or five seconds before suddenly standing up and delivering a powerful kick to an empty tin can beside him.

Clang.

The tin can clashed against the wall, spun, and then rolled back.

The once-sturdy can body now lay crumpled.

Jason, as though drained of all vitality, slumped back onto the wooden crate.

His fingers, almost imperceptibly, landed on the black notebook.