

Menu 541

Chapter 541: The Obvious Answer (2)

"Jason, are you sure you're a writer?"

"Of course!"

"I wrote 'Cross Street Tracker'!"

"You even read it!"

Jason answered without looking up.

Hearing this, a surge of energy rose naturally from the depths of John's heart, wanting to burst forth.

"Do you know why you've only written one moderately okay book in a small scope for ten years and never reached bestseller level?"

"Why?"

Jason asked subconsciously.

"Because, you've never made yourself the protagonist!"

"Believe me, art comes from life!"

"When you make yourself the protagonist—that name 'Jason' will become an indelible symbol."

John said earnestly.

"Is that so?"

Jason muttered, and then his clenched fist smashed out again.

The scent in his nose grew even more decadent!

He was impatient!

Bang!

Another punch was thrown, and this time with the sound of crumbling cement, the door to the secret passage was smashed open.

Jason looked inside to make sure there was no danger, then reached out and grabbed the hole that had been smashed open, and then he exerted strength in his arm.

Instantly, a piece of cement as big as a round table was lifted by Jason.

Then, he tossed it aside casually.

Thud!

John felt the ground tremble several times.

Seeing the huge piece of cement, a twitch crossed John's eyes.

He was assessing Jason's strength.

And then, he made up his mind on the spot: never engage in close combat with Jason.

He must keep a distance and resolve the situation with firearms.

Then, he thought of Jason's fists that had been smashing the cement floor without any harm.

Immediately, he added another point: use armor-piercing bullets.

Thinking thus, John couldn't help but speak out.

"Have you heard of 'Tracker'?"

Tracker, a term circulated within some top-notch underground organizations.

But for the average person, they only knew another name: Punisher!

"No."

Jason shook his head.

He truly hadn't heard of it.

Moreover, his attention had already been drawn to the underground chamber.

A straight ladder stood in front of him.

Thick dust covered it, but some parts of the horizontal bars on either side were as clean as new.

Seeing this, Jason immediately imagined someone climbing the ladder and leaving this place not long ago!

The timing couldn't have been too long ago, no more than a day.

In fact, within just a few hours!

"Who could it be?"

Jason murmured, not taking the ladder but instead jumping down and landing steadily below.

The height was no more than 3 meters, which to Jason was about the same as stepping down a stair.

Using the light from above, Jason, with his acute senses, instantly took in the entire chamber below.

The chamber was about the size of a basketball court.

The surrounding walls were smooth with no extra furnishings, except for a tall statue positioned right in the middle!

The scales were clear, coiling serpentine, and it was, unmistakably, a snake.

Only...

This snake had two heads!

The two heads extended from the body arrayed like a formation, opposing each other, the snake heads slightly bowed, eyes gazing at the center of the coiling body, where a clear set of footprints extended from there to the ladder.

The dust once again proved this point.

Of course, more crucially, there was the Two-Headed Snake statue!

The 'food' smell came from there, but as Jason approached, he found that the 'food' scent not only faded rapidly, but also had a rotten, sour stench.

The latter had just appeared recently.

Suppressed by the residual scent of 'food', it was only discernible upon getting closer.

"Jason, Jason?"

John's voice came from above.

"Safe."

Jason replied and walked toward the Two-Headed Snake statue.

Behind him, John climbed down the ladder, a flashlight now in his hand.

After scanning the surroundings, John's flashlight locked onto the Two-Headed Snake statue.

Then, as he and Jason got close to the statue and saw clearly what the two snake heads in the middle of the snake body were looking at, he couldn't help but aim his gun at that spot.

Coffin!

In the middle of the Two-Headed Snake's body, right between the two staring heads, was unmistakably a coffin.

At this moment, the coffin lid had already been half-opened, and inside, a figure was faintly discernible.

Jason bent down, after checking his surroundings, he directly shifted the coffin lid completely aside.

Instantly, the 'figure' inside the coffin was fully revealed.

That 'figure' was not human at all!

It was a 'package' shaped like a human, sewn together from 'snake skin'.

On the snake skin, the scales were obvious, the patterns clear, and even though the 'package' was now split open, it still carried an inexplicable sense of 'freshness'.

From the protruding marks that were left, John could be sure that a 'person' had come out of it, and then, he subconsciously checked the thickness of the surrounding dust.

Considering the seal on this place, for dust to accumulate to this extent, it would take at least a year, or more.

And a living person couldn't possibly have been sealed within the snake skin for that long.

Moreover, the coffin!

A dead person!

Not long ago, a dead person had exited from here!

John caught his breath slightly, having reached this conclusion.

But he quickly regained composure, and an unprecedented brightness appeared in his eyes.

"Dead person resurrected?"

He murmured softly to himself.

"Dead person resurrected?"

"This is not resurrection."

"It's..."

"Reincarnation!"

Jason stared at the interior of the coffin, which was entirely inscribed with the special language made up of the Dufol Language.

With Proficiency Level knowledge of the Dufol Language, Jason was able to recognize some simple word combinations.

And inside the coffin, the words 'reincarnation' and 'snake' were prevalent.

Jason lifted his head to look at the statue of the Two-Headed Snake.

Just right, from this angle, the eyes of the two-headed snake statues were also staring at Jason, observing those lifelike, ferocious snake heads that exuded dread in the darkness underground.

Relying on his Proficiency Level knowledge of the Dufol Language, though Jason couldn't comprehend the entire ritual, he could roughly guess the 'mystery' and some fundamentals of the ceremony's construction.

For example, the Two-Headed Snake 'statue' in front of him was once alive.

It was indeed a real Two-Headed Snake!

It had just been turned into the statue they saw now, after being doused with molten bronze.

And this Two-Headed Snake's creation dated back at least a hundred years.

That's why it gave off a faint odor of decaying food.

Of course, more importantly, the 'person' in the coffin drew upon the strength of the Two-Headed Snake through the ritual to 'reincarnate,' hastening the decay of the snake.

And because of this, Jason had missed a chance at an 'extra meal.'

Jason could tell from the residual scent of 'food' that this Two-Headed Snake must have been delicious!

Jason could almost see the grilled snake skewers, snake soup, and so on leaving one by one.

"Heh."

Jason let out a light chuckle.

This chuckle startled John, who had been pondering the meaning of 'resurrection' and 'reincarnation.'

He looked at Jason's half-visible profile in the flashlight's glow, and felt a chill down his spine.

It was as if he saw a hungry beast baring its maw.

"Jason?"

John asked tentatively.

"It's nothing."

"Just the loss of an 'extra meal' that should have been mine, makes me somewhat unwilling to let it go.
But..."

"I believe I will make up for it soon!"

Jason said with certainty.

Having said that, Jason walked outside.

There was nothing worth seeing here anymore.

As for that spoiled food?

Although he loved food greatly, Jason would definitely not eat something spoiled; he had his standards.

"Did the three people who encountered death before find this place?"

On the way back, John asked.

"I don't know."

"Maybe it was here."

"Or maybe it was something else."

Jason shook his head, unable to deduce from the current clues what exactly those three had discovered that led to their unfortunate ends. There was also one more thing that puzzled Jason.

Why had someone gone to such lengths to set all this up?

Getting into the car, Jason was pondering this question.

And John, sitting in the driver's seat, seemed hesitant to speak. After several moments, John finally spoke up and asked.

"Who was the person in the coffin?"

Faced with John's inquiry, Jason paused—

"The answer is quite apparent, don't you know?"

Chapter 542: Self-taught Edward

Should I be aware of this?

John looked at Jason, who seemed to take it for granted, with a perplexed expression.

The matter-of-fact demeanor of Jason made John subconsciously feel that he might have missed some vital clue, or maybe he hadn't heard something Jason said earlier.

But after reflecting seriously for a moment, John could not recall missing anything or failing to hear Jason's words.

After all, the incident had just occurred.

From getting out of the car to entering the underground chamber, and then back to the car, every detail was vividly emerging in his mind.

Watching the befuddled look on John's face, Jason sighed silently in his heart.

At this moment, he actually began to inexplicably miss those 'Cat Hole' external operatives.

At least, with a 'Cat Hole' operative around at such a time, he could easily and directly listen to a 'reasonable explanation'.

"Yesterday, Butler Findelter died," Jason stated.

"Today, the person in the coffin inside this chamber 'awakened'."

"The traces left inside the chamber are very 'fresh', definitely within a day."

"Who do you say is the person in the coffin?" Jason asked, spreading his hands.

"Findelter!" John blurted out.

Then, a moment of realization flashed across the face of this 'retired individual' with a most unusual career.

"It's precisely because of this trump card that Troys easily killed him!"

"It's also because of Findelter's involvement that the Edward Family experienced a rapid decline."

"He took advantage of everything the Edward Family had to achieve what he wanted and 'dealt with' those who sought to hinder him!"

Hearing John's explanation, Jason shook his head.

"Why couldn't it be Edward?"

"Why couldn't all this be a plot orchestrated by Edward?"

"Why do you assume the 'Findelter' you saw is indeed Findelter and not possibly Edward?" Jason questioned again.

John was momentarily stunned.

This time, without waiting for John to speak, Jason continued, "Don't forget, Findelter served the Edward Family for nearly thirty years!"

"Thirty years, such a long time, ensures that Findelter could not possibly betray the Edward Family. His loyalty can be verified."

"But what if that was just an act of his?" John retorted.

"Of course, it's possible!"

"But he was a butler, a butler who graduated from a butler academy, a butler who managed the entire Edward Family!" Jason reminded.

"What does that have to do with anything?" John asked, frowning in confusion.

"Time!"

"He didn't have the time to learn those mysterious knowledges!"

"Nor the ability to construct the ritual we just witnessed!"

"Believe me, learning those knowledges is far more difficult and time-consuming than you'd think!"
Jason provided the answer.

As a possessor of the Proficiency Level in the Dufol Language, Jason was well aware of the difficulty in learning this language. His quick mastery through his 'teacher's' notes and 'satiation' levels didn't mean others could do the same.

Moreover, the 'ritual' inside the underground chamber just now was not something that could be deciphered by mere proficiency.

That 'ritual' required a higher level.

So, a question arose!

Where did Findelter learn such knowledge?

How could a young man from a common family acquire such esoteric knowledge?

Every faction, every power has its own lineage.

This lineage ensures that there are clues to follow.

It also determines the existence of a mentor-student relationship, or perhaps a simple hierarchy.

But up to now, aside from the coffin surrounded by the Two-Headed Snake statue he had just faced, Jason had no actual interaction with such entities.

As for self-learning to proficiency?

A butler by profession, constantly accompanying his master, on call at any moment, accidentally finds a book of mysterious knowledge, and relies on his innate Talent to study it in the few hours he has left each day, achieving proficiency and even surpassing it?

Such Talent isn't just good.

It's exceptional!

Extraordinary beyond the average person!

Would someone with such exceptional Talent really stay at one family for thirty years?

Suppose!

Just suppose that Findelter truly had exceptional Talent, but he didn't care and only wished to stay with the Edward Family.

The biggest contradiction then arises: why would he destroy the Edward Family?

Or rather, why didn't he prevent it when Edward was bringing down the family?

Findelter, while a butler with extraordinary Strength, if he wanted to stop Edward without hurting him, it shouldn't be too difficult.

It just doesn't add up!

Although Findelter was loyal to Edward, keep in mind, he had worked for and served the Edward Family for thirty years!

Thirty years of habits aren't so easily changed!

Habits are not about intelligence.

In some ways, they are more formidable than anything else.

To maintain this 'habit', Findelter would definitely do something extraordinary to protect the Edward Family when it faced real destruction.

Even if he didn't want to harm Edward.

But what about others?

This isn't about good or evil.

It's just human nature.

But none of this happened.

The Edward Family fell.

Edward disappeared.

Findelter lost his profession.

However, upon hearing that his former employer was in 'abnormal' circumstances, the concerned Findelter came in search of his old employer.

Chapter 543: Self-Taught Edward (2)

And then?

The old employer showed him some magical 'strengths.'

He opened a door for him.

And let him experience things he had never experienced before.

Moreover, he asked him if he was willing to assist with his 'comeback'?

Facing thirty years of service, and the 'teaching' of these magical strengths as a bargaining chip, Findelter had no reason to refuse.

And then...

Edward 'disappeared.'

Everything thereafter unfolded just as Edward had 'taught.'

When facing an assassin, the ruthless gesture and the sorrow behind it, he chose to bury the opponent's body. Continue your journey on

When facing Troys's 'relaxation,' it was easy to be killed.

All of this had a reasonable explanation.

Findelter was just a puppet in advance, Edward was the real mastermind behind the scenes.

Even, Edward must have performed the 'resurrection' act for Findelter, convincing Findelter that his own death was only temporary.

The next moment, Edward would resurrect him.

But in reality?

The one truly 'resurrected' was only Edward!

Or rather, 'reincarnated'!

Edward, who met the various conditions of the ritual, had finally succeeded in 'reincarnation'!

Born into a wealthy family, Edward must have occasionally obtained somewhere an incomplete legacy of a mysterious organization, or even, a certain notebook.

Then, the head of this family unconsciously became so obsessed with it that he made several misjudgments, and in an attempt to recover his losses, Edward began using 'mystical' strengths.

However, he was unfamiliar with all of this.

He made mistakes.

He faced the threat of death.

Therefore, he began purchasing a large number of strange items, seeking to ward off the approach of death, which first accelerated the downfall of the entire Edward Family and eventually led to its demise.

But Edward had left behind the possibility of 'reincarnation.'

And now, Edward had already succeeded.

Jason did not conceal these speculations from John.

Lacking an explanation from the 'Cat Hole' people, he explained it himself.

"So you mean the old butler Findelter and Emod were all part of the 'ritual'?"

John astutely pinpointed the key issue.

"Hmm."

"Snakes have too many meanings in the occult."

"Their shedding is seen by people as eternal life, immortality."

"Their fangs are considered incitement, slaughter."

"Their venom is regarded as deception, betrayal."

"And we just saw a statue of a two-headed snake gazing at the coffin—Edward 'persuading' Findelter can be seen as incitement, deception; Findelter's subsequent 'betrayal' of Emod, Emod's 'death' brought slaughter, which gave rise to 'immortality,' and Edward achieved a 'shedding' in a special way."

Jason used the knowledge he gained while studying Dufol Language to explain to John.

"It's terrifying that this guy took advantage of Findelter's loyalty to accomplish all this!"

"Findelter... alas."

John felt pity for the deceased old butler.

"Terrifying?"

"This is just the tip of the iceberg of the other side's 'ritual'!"

Jason whispered.

"The 'ritual' isn't over yet?"

John was shocked.

"Of course not!"

"You haven't forgotten what Cherry City's situation is now, right?"

"Those angry parents have arrived!"

Jason stated with certainty.

"If I were Edward, having orchestrated for so long, how could I let the 'ritual' end so simply?"

"I've already 'reincarnated,' of course I'm going to take back everything I've lost."

"And... "

"I want more strength!"

He was all too familiar with what a guy who had lost everything, hovered on the edge of death, and was 'revived' would want to do.

In Nightless City, such guys were a dime a dozen.

Each one like gamblers with crazed eyes.

Not just mad, but also... greedy!

"Believe me, among the 'parents' who came to Cherry City this time, there will definitely be some extraordinary guys—they will be the ones pushing Edward's plan for the second half."

"And us?"

Jason spoke with a solemn look in his eyes.

"What will happen to us?"

John asked involuntarily.

"How did we come together?"

Jason countered.

John's expression changed.

"This is also part of that guy's scheme?"

He asked in a grave voice.

"Of course!"

"And it's an important part!"

"Who wants any disruption when they're on the verge of success?"

"So, it's best to eliminate 'accidents' altogether—with the mystical strengths he's most skilled in!"

Jason said, taking a deep breath before continuing:

"Contact Brian, McCaul."

"Tell them to rush to 222 Potato Street."

"We'll head there directly."

"I hope we're not too late."

John didn't speak; he pressed the accelerator down with one foot.

The whole car shot away like an arrow released from its bow.

...

The night sky of Cherry City, under the glow of neon lights, was extremely beautiful.

But tonight, no one appreciated such beauty.

Just now!

Just a moment ago, someone barged into a Councilor's home and beat everyone to death with bare hands, including six bodyguards and the Councilor himself.

Then, before people could react, continuous gunfire erupted in the house of a wealthy businessman.

Some saw an automatic tracked vehicle with a heavy machine gun drive in, spewing flames more than a foot long.

The businessman was shot dead on the spot.

The bodyguards along with him suffered heavy casualties.

Then came the explosions!

The businessman's house was blown sky-high.

Chapter 544: Self-Taught Edward (3)

Why the attackers struck, no one knew.

But as they finally left, they all, without exception, carried a girl in their arms.

This led everyone to the same thought, a piece of news they'd heard earlier: someone was auctioning off 'girls' as 'goods'.

The very idea sent shivers down the spine of the locals in Cherry City.

Yet for the parents who arrived from other cities as quickly as possible, it was different.

They gathered together.

They had been discussing.

They had been rational.

But when they heard that someone had rescued their own daughter, the familial affection buried within them erupted completely.

They became reckless.

They pulled out weapons from their vehicles.

They stormed towards the locations where their daughters might be.

Their weapons, mostly purchased after the disappearance of their daughters.

Even the most peaceful person couldn't help but buy a small self-defense pistol after such an event, just like its name: self-defense.

They needed to protect their family.

They didn't know if they would ever use these weapons.

But they carried them.

And at that moment...

They used them!

Bang, bang, bang!

Ratatat!

Boom, boom, boom!

The sounds of pistols and submachine guns intertwined.

Explosions followed one after another.

The once quiet, peaceful Cherry City turned into a battlefield at that time.

The people on this battlefield were not soldiers.

But they were more terrifying than any soldier.

Because!

They fought with reckless abandon!

To find their daughters, they had already forgotten everything else!

The guards for the wealthy and the Councilors were completely dumbfounded, never having imagined a skinny middle-aged man with thick glasses could sweep through with an AK, or that a chubby middle-aged woman could endlessly fire a shotgun at them.

The most exaggerated was an old man, trembling with age, who walked up to them, then took off his coat to reveal a tactical vest loaded with grenades underneath.

Anger filled their eyes.

Hate was written all over their faces.

From their mouths came a unified chant—

"Give me back my child!"

Voices were loud and forceful!

The stunned bodyguards shuddered.

As employees of the employers, they were aware of some of the employers' affairs.

They quickly realized who these people were.

A sense of guilt emerged.

And this made them hesitate.

Which caused them to lose their last chance.

The simple defenses of the mansions were breached one by one, and the parents burst into the houses, calling out their children's names.

Some received answers.

They cried tears of extreme joy.

Others...

Could no longer respond.

They were helplessly sorrowful.

They became even angrier.

They began to go... mad.

The gunfire intensified.

The explosions grew louder.

The streets of Cherry City had cleared at the onset of the gunfight.

At that moment, people were hiding in their homes, trembling.

However, at that time, a figure appeared on the streets.

He was dressed in a black, proper suit, his left hand holding a cane, which tapped against the ground, making a distinctive sound with each step.

On the occasionally raised right index finger, a ring set with a ruby glistened brilliantly.

He walked neither fast nor slow, as if strolling through the street, seemingly enjoying it.

He hummed softly to himself.

Then, suddenly, the humming came to an abrupt halt.

It turned into a chilling monologue—

"Not enough!"

"Not enough!"

"Make it more tragic!"

"I need more lives!"

"You shall greet your... King with such lives!"

"Cherry City, your King has returned!"

Chapter 545: I am the Protagonist!

Has there ever been a king in the history of Cherry City?

There has!

The former Edward Family was the uncrowned king of Cherry City.

That family not only owned the only bank in Cherry City but also had businesses throughout the entire city and relied on mineral trades to acquire essential resources from other cities.

They controlled the economic lifeline of the entire city.

They provided countless job opportunities for the city.

You would never have imagined a family could achieve such a level.

At that time, even the so-called Speaker was nothing more than a lapdog taking orders from the Edward Family.

But, that was all in the past.

An unexpected incident made all the glory vanish into thin air.

Edward had thought about resisting.

But he knew, faced with "that incident," resistance was utterly futile.

So, he chose another way.

A way that only existed in legends.

The world never had the chance to see it.

Only to hear about it.

From generation to generation, it was heard.

As if it was nothing more than a bedtime story.

No!

It was a bedtime story!

How wondrous the affairs of the world are, the truth is often hidden in these bedtime stories beloved by children.

Edward had discovered clues within them.

And he had unearthed those clues.

Because...

He had money!

He used plenty of money to excavate the clues hidden in these stories.

And then, he succeeded.

As for his predecessors who failed?

Most of them did not have his wealth.

Nor his madness.

After all, not everyone is driven into a dead end like him.

But, that was in the past tense.

Now!

He has returned!

He wants to take control of Cherry City!

He wants the name Edward to be forever etched into the history of Cherry City!

With brilliance and glory!

And now, at the most crucial step,

Edward's face showed not a trace of anxiety; he walked the streets with the aid of his cane.

Gunshots and explosions rang out continuously.

Edward squinted his eyes with a hint of reminiscence.

Cherry City used to be like this.

He followed in his forefathers' footsteps, gun and cannon in hand, carving out his territory bit by bit.

Now!

It was finally going to return to normal.

To welcome my return!

To sound the salute for their own king!

Indeed.

It was what I had been looking forward to.

Edward smiled as he walked towards his destination.

...

Troys heard the gunshots and explosions outside, a dark shadow passing across his already somber face.

This was not how he and his elder brother planned it.

After the men sent out in the afternoon to ambush Davide and Hunter were killed, everything spiraled out of his control.

The package sent to the police chief Davide was, of course, mailed under Findelter's name by him.

He wanted to ensure Dodd's downfall.

Although Emod was dead, Emod's assets were still there, and Dodd's butler Pang'er had taken over those assets overnight just the night before.

Troys was not surprised.

Dodd had been coveting Emod's extravagant profits for more than a day or two.

Therefore, as long as he handed over that notebook to police chief Davide, the upstanding police chief was certain to take action.

Moreover, the other party was no fool and would surely use a more secure method to reveal the crimes recorded in the notebook.

Everything proceeded precisely as Troys had conjectured.

At least, the first half did.

Police chief Davide notified the parents of the "missing girls," and then these parents flooded into Cherry City.

Next, according to his plan, it was supposed to be his and his brother's turn to "administer justice"!

To take Dodd, the "possessor" of these assets, to court.

Of course, the charges weren't just these.

There was also the murder of police chief Davide and Hunter.

But after the ambush and framing failed, everything went out of his control.

Who could tell him why among those parents, there were those who could kill several fully armed bodyguards with their bare hands, why there were those capable of modifying killing machines?

Why did those seemingly ordinary parents carry various firearms with them?

And moreover, they dared to directly attack the residences of big shots?

Weren't they afraid of dying?

The ever-scheming Troys could never understand what children meant to their parents,

Nor could he grasp what parents facing the potential to get their children back might be willing to give.

It didn't take much, just tell those parents who had lost their children that your child is in hell, I know the path there, I will only show you.

Then?

Those parents would rush in.

They wouldn't hesitate.

Because, to a parent who has lost a child, that is already living in hell.

Going to hell now to search for their child, what would it count for?

They might as well stir up hell.

For they had long ceased to fear death.

They only hoped their child could return to their side.

Even if the hope was just a glimmer.

Troys didn't understand these things.

But he understood that when a plan ran into unexpected complications, it had to be rectified.

Otherwise, the councilor position he was about to secure would disappear.

"What should I do now?"

Troys frowned in thought, a glass of red wine beside him.

Wine tasting was Troys's habit while pondering.

This time was no exception; he reached for his wine glass.

But his hand grasped air.

Troys was startled, but his reaction was extremely swift.

His whole body lunged forward, and a gun appeared in his hand.

Troys didn't know how the other person had sneaked into his home, but he knew that anyone who could infiltrate his room without a sound under numerous surveillances was definitely not someone to be taken lightly.

Chapter 546: I am the Protagonist! (2)

Therefore, Troys, with his gun in hand, turned and fired two shots directly toward the direction of the wine glass.

Bang, bang!

He couldn't confirm the other person's location and was only instinctively shooting at the last known position.

Of course, firing his gun was also a signal.

A signal to the residents of houses 221 and 223 that he was in danger.

On Potato Street, houses numbered 221, 222, and 223, excluding 222 which was officially registered, 221 and 223 were registered under names unrelated to him but were in fact his properties.

Moreover, in houses 221 and 223, three disguised bodyguards lived respectively.

If there was the slightest abnormality here, six bodyguards would swiftly come to his aid and resolve his troubles.

This was Troys's design.

He knew very well that being Todini's brother, it was natural that he would be targeted by some people. There was no telling what means these people would employ.

Instead of waiting for them to come knocking, it was better to "take initiative."

The bullets were lodged in the wall.

No one was there!

Troys looked at the position that was behind him and then, hurriedly turned around again.

Still no one!

Troys furrowed his brows.

He believed that someone had to be there; he just hadn't seen them.

And what's more, why hadn't his bodyguards arrived yet?

"Are you waiting for those bodyguards?"

A voice came from behind him.

Troys immediately turned around, raising his gun and aiming at the spot behind him.

In the sofa chair that he had just vacated, a well-dressed man in a black suit was sitting there.

The man's cane stood to one side, leaning against the arm of the sofa, and on the index finger of his right hand, which was holding a wine glass, was a Ruby ring.

Upon seeing the man, Troys felt a sense of familiarity but couldn't recall when he had seen him before; however, that didn't stop Troys from pulling the trigger.

As for answering the man's question?

Dead men didn't need to hear responses.

Bang, bang, bang!

This time, having seen the target, Troys repeatedly pulled the trigger.

Then, his eyes involuntarily widened in shock.

The bullets... disappeared!

The bullets that were shot out slowed down abruptly as they closed in on the man in front of him, became visible to Troys's eyes, and then, after ripples appeared in the air, the bullets vanished one by one.

The gun in his hand was ineffective, causing Troys to involuntarily gulp down a lump in his throat.

He nervously tried to swallow, but found his throat to be inexplicably parched, devoid of any moisture.

"Is this how gentlemen behave nowadays?"

After sipping his wine lightly, Edward set down his glass and looked at Troys in front of him.

At that moment, Troys finally remembered who the person in front of him was, when he heard the word "gentleman."

Edward!

Findelter's former employer!

Findelter often used one word to describe his former employer: gentleman.

"You, how are you here?"

"Weren't you supposed to be dead?"

Troys asked with a slight twitch in his cheeks.

He wasn't genuinely concerned about the other's well-being; he only cared about his own.

After all, he had killed the man's Butler.

Although their agreement had ended, the two had nearly thirty years of friendship, a well-known fact in the high society of Cherry City.

And now, the man had come seeking him, but why?

Almost subconsciously, Troys started to back away.

Despite not being sure of the man's methods, keeping a distance was undoubtedly the right move.

But Troys had barely retreated when he found his vision spinning wildly.

He saw the ceiling, then the carpet, and then... his body.

A headless body!

My head?

Am I dead?

Troys's eyes bulged, and his mouth hung open, as though he couldn't accept the reality, but the breath of life dissipated, and his soul faded silently into nothingness.

Edward held the severed head in his hands.

Bizarrely, not a single drop of blood was shed.

Neither from the head nor from the body that lost the head was there any blood spillage.

"The second one."

Speaking so, Edward placed Troys's head on a side table, then, he opened his palm towards the still-standing body.

Suddenly, he squeezed hard.

Crunch, crunch.

With the sound of flesh and bone tearing apart, Troys's body was crushed to pieces.

Then, these shattered remains were stuffed into a box.

This was a box Edward had prepared in advance, a perfect fit for the purpose. Having sealed the box with Troys's head at the very top, Edward carried the box with the head out to the street before he attached a note to Troys's forehead.

On the note was written: Boring, not fun.

The night breeze whisked past the note.

Rustle, rustle.

The note made a crisp sound.

As if a starting pistol had been fired, blood suddenly burst forth from the wounds of Troys's head and the chunks of his body in the box.

In a few breaths' time, the middle of the road was bathed in crimson.

After glancing at his handiwork, Edward pulled out a white handkerchief and wiped his palms, which were completely clean.

"Findelter was a good man."

"So, I should avenge him."

Edward spoke such words, his face showing a trace of sorrow.

"Is this what you call crocodile tears?"

A voice came from not too far away.

McCaul coldly stared at Edward; having just gleaned the general details of the incident from his phone, this principled and upright private detective was already burning with rage.

Chapter 547: I am the Protagonist! (3)

He wished he could just shoot Edward dead with a single shot.

But he chose to follow Jason's advice, to stall for time.

"Why would you do this?"

"Why reenact the scene of the second case of the "Cross Street Stalker"?"

McCaul asked.

If at first it could have been explained away as imitation, it had long since surpassed that scope.

Could the person who incited the entire city's chaos be a mere imitator?

Or more precisely, the fact that Edward, who'd thrown Cherry City into disarray, was now recreating the second case of the "Cross Street Stalker" was in itself astounding.

Facing McCaul's questioning, Edward didn't make a move but looked him over seriously instead.

"Quicker than I imagined."

"Worthy of the person I carefully selected."

"How did you guess I would target Troys?"

Instead of answering, Edward countered with a question.

"Since you've researched us and carefully arranged all this, why don't you guess why I knew?"

McCaul, remembering Jason's instruction to stall for time, likewise countered with a question.

A trace of a smile appeared on Edward's face.

With a light chuckle, he began.

"You? John? Brian? Jason?"

One name after another came from Edward's mouth.

Jason was the last one.

And when he said this name, Edward couldn't help shaking his head with a sigh.

"I didn't expect it to be Jason."

"I may have underestimated him."

"I only saw him as an insignificant pawn, focusing on the three of you instead. Could it be Jason found me because Findelter inadvertently revealed something?"

"He is always like that; otherwise, I wouldn't have needed so many covers before."

Edward spoke with a sigh.

At this moment, Edward was likely referring to the first three people who died in his 'disappearance case.' McCaul had investigated these and was looking at Edward with even greater animosity.

But Edward still maintained his smile.

"You cannot die!"

"So, sleep!"

Edward said softly.

The next moment, McCaul stood sleeping like that, even his fall to the ground didn't wake him.

At this time, Jason, John, and Brian almost simultaneously arrived.

Brian grabbed McCaul and vigorously slapped his cheeks, but no matter how hard Brian tried, McCaul just wouldn't wake up.

"It's useless."

"Without my permission, he will not wake up."

"My knight."

Edward swept his gaze with a smile over Brian, John, and the unconscious McCaul.

Then, his eyes fell on Jason.

Suddenly, the smile was gone.

Only dense malice and murderous intent remained.

Edward said with an extremely hateful tone, "You, the writer who didn't take writing seriously, who lacked logic, whose story was full of plot holes yet was self-righteous and added unnecessary complications, truly deserve to die a thousand deaths!"

Jason was stunned.

It wasn't strange that the other party had read his books.

But this hatred?

Could it be that his book was serialized, and he had interrupted the updates at some point?

He didn't have the memory of that time.

He couldn't remember clearly.

However, that didn't prevent Jason from making deductions based on the situation at hand.

"So, you're planning to correct the inconsistencies?"

"To make it perfect?"

Jason asked tentatively.

"Of course!"

"My world must be... perfect!"

Edward nodded without hesitation, and then his figure began to grow, his muscles to expand.

More importantly, Edward's face was morphing to look exactly like Jason's.

Clad in a bursting suit, he took large strides towards Jason.

His gait was identical to Jason's too.

Then, standing in front of Jason, he declared, word by word.

"Now—"

"I am the Protagonist!"

Chapter 548: 'Protagonist's Abilities!

Jason watched calmly as the Edward in front of him, who looked exactly like himself, then glanced at the box in the middle of the road, his eyes pensive.

The night breeze blew softly.

The scent of blood from inside the box drifted with the wind, spreading across the street, while Troys' decapitated head on top of the box still had its eyes wide open, pupils full of intense shock and disbelief.

And the piece of paper on the forehead fluttered back and forth with the night wind.

The words 'boring, not fun' on the note became distorted.

Suddenly, under the night sky, this blood-drenched head illuminated by the streetlight took on an additional sense of the bizarre.

Ritual!

The other party was completing a 'transformation' ritual.

This 'ritual' was different from the previous 'reincarnation'; it was a transformation of one person into another.

The two rituals must have some kind of connection.

Or to be precise, a 'brand new' Edward would be the true fulfillment of the 'reincarnation' ritual.

But why choose him?

Or more accurately, why did they choose his 'book'?

You see, his book was quite ordinary compared to the real masterpieces, hardly worth mentioning.

Not only was it less famous, but it also contained quite a lot of loopholes.

Wait a minute!

Loopholes?

Could it be?

Jason instantly thought of the words Edward had just said, 'My world must be... perfect!'

"Patch up!"

"To completely 'patch up' the loopholes in my book!"

"Is making it perfect also a part of this 'ritual'?"

Jason asked looking at Edward.

Clap, clap, clap.

Edward, donning Jason's appearance, clapped his hands, his face revealing a touch of admiration.

"Worthy of being my chosen replacement. Although your writing really is mediocre, your mind responds quite well."

"Being able to replace you in this world might be the right choice, the only pity is..."

"You're quite average-looking."

"No."

"To put it plainly, you're ugly."

"This clumsy body, these coarse features, utterly devoid of any aesthetic sensibility."

"And besides, you have no sense of dress."

"As a man, you truly are a failure."

Edward, with a condescending tone, evaluated Jason's physique and face, the contempt unmasked on his face.

While saying this, the orchestrator of everything lifted a hand, touching his own coarse cheeks with a somewhat mournful air, sighing.

Such an action would not be strange for a normal person.

But at this moment, what Edward possessed was... Jason's face.

What would a disdainful and mournful 'Jason' look like?

Jason himself did not know.

He habitually hid his emotions.

But now, he knew.

Not only did he know, but he could also see it clearly.

Jason's contemptuous frown gave rise to an impulse to smash this 'impostor' before him to pieces.

The conscious John and Brian also saw it.

The corners of their mouths involuntarily curled up, but they both knew that now was not the time for such expression, so they needed to contain themselves, and their smiles returned to normal. ~~ranôBÊŠ~~

However, as they looked at 'Edward' again, the just-returned-to-normal corners of their mouths curled up once more.

Then again, they controlled themselves.

After just two or three cycles, John and Brian began to twitch at the mouth.

Pfft!

Finally, laughter broke out.

John and Brian almost laughed in unison.

"Sorry, I know I shouldn't have, but I couldn't help it," they said to Jason, full of apology, but they had to cover their mouths, trying to control their laughter.

In response, Jason remained silent.

Only the coldness in his gaze, directed at Edward, grew sharper and sharper.

"No matter,"

"My knights."

"Your smiles bring me joy,"

'Edward' did not seem to mind at all, waving his hand dismissively, and then commanded, "John, could you find me a proper suit later? Not a modern suit, I need traditional nobility attire, with white lace trim, a wig, a coat that's mainly red and black, and also white trousers."

"Oh, and can you fetch me a pair of leather shoes as well? Preferably black calf leather with heels, to complement my white trousers."

John would not even consider 'Edward's' request.

His eyes mocking, he watched silently.

Then, the next moment—

"Yes, Your Highness," John said.

As he spoke, John placed a hand on his chest and bowed slightly.

When he finished this gesture, John suddenly paused, confused.

What was happening?

How could he have saluted the enemy?

"Don't be puzzled, my knight,"

"These are what you are supposed to do," 'Edward' continued.

"Yes, Your Highness," John responded.

After his words fell, John returned to his senses, staring at 'Edward' as if seeing a ghost.

Brian quite decisively drew his gun and pointed it at 'Edward'.

"My knight, this isn't how you should behave," 'Edward' frowned.

"Sorry, Your Highness," Brian immediately apologized and holstered the gun.

And as the gun went back into its holster, Brian, like John, widened his eyes in disbelief at 'Edward'.

However, at this point, 'Edward' turned his attention to Jason.

"How about it?"

"This is the power of the 'Protagonist'."

"Without doing anything, you gain the most loyal subordinates."

Chapter 549: 'Protagonist's Abilities! (2)

"Even if these people were once underlings of the 'antagonist', it's all the same, and in fact, the effect will be even better!"

"Moreover, this is just the beginning."

"When the 'ritual' is truly complete, they will be one hundred percent loyal to me, then, more people will join this queue, seeing it as an honor."

'Edward' explained to Jason, his tone full of self-satisfaction.

Jason frowned.

The 'Edward' before him was behaving abnormally.

Considering the other party's arrangement, he was a meticulous person. Would such a person kindly explain to him?

And with a sense of bragging?

Absolutely not!

This was not characteristic of the other party.

Unless...

"You're explaining this to me as part of the 'ritual'?"

Jason asked.

"Of course."

"I must say I'm surprised by your intelligence once again."

"Too bad I am the 'protagonist', and you are the 'antagonist'. As the 'ritual' continues to proceed, you will certainly become brainless, impulsive."

'Edward' nodded, smiling as he spoke.

Then, he took a step forward.

The two were already very close to each other.

As 'Edward' stepped forward, their noses were nearly touching.

"Do you really want to hit me?"

"Let me remind you."

"No matter what kind of attack I encounter from you, I will not die!"

"At most, I will come back from the brink of death!"

"And every time I come back, I will become even stronger!"

No sooner had 'Edward' finished speaking—

Thud!

A broad-bladed, short-handled cutlass bifurcated him at the waist.

As blood sprayed, 'Edward's' body split in two, crashing to the ground.

However, 'Edward' showed no sign of pain, nor did he scream in agony.

On the contrary, he looked at Jason with a grin.

"I told you, I won't die from any attack of yours!"

With those words, 'Edward's' bisected body self-healed.

He dusted off his clothes and stood up crisply.

Then...

A broad-bladed, short-handled cutlass appeared in 'Edward's' hand.

It was Jason's weapon.

Just a second ago, it had been in Jason's hand.

Now, it was held by 'Edward'.

The entire process happened in an instant; John and Brian couldn't even see what happened. The weapon had already changed hands.

Even Jason himself had no time to react.

He only felt a lightness in his right hand, and then his weapon appeared in the other's hand.

Jason's eyes narrowed, staring intently at his own weapon in 'Edward's' hand.

'Edward' continued with a smile.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you."

"After each of my near-death experiences, not only do I become stronger, but also, with great luck, I obtain corresponding items and abilities from you, and furthermore..."

"The items and abilities I acquire will reveal the 'potential' you buried, showing their true faces."

As 'Edward' spoke, he toyed with the short-handled cutlass with the broad blade.

Then, he waved it several times in succession.

Suddenly, the ordinary-looking blade quivered.

Hum!

The blade hummed, emitting a strange sound.

A layer of gray mist appeared on the blade, and within the mist, phantom figures and monstrous shapes began to emerge.

They wailed, they pleaded.

But, in the end, they were extinguished.

Hum!

An even louder hum ensued.

Afterwards, everything returned to normal.

Except the broad-bladed, short-handled cutlass now emitted an unusual glow.

It had not changed in shape, but the first impression of the person seeing the blade was its sharpness, its sturdiness.

"Look at it..."

Bang!

'Edward' hadn't finished speaking when Jason kicked him in the throat.

Imbued with skills of expert-level Barehanded Combat and Proficiency Level Griffin Combat Technique, the kick was not only swift and incomparably fierce.

Crack!

'Edward's' neck was snapped by the kick.

Moreover, not a trace of force was wasted; 'Edward' stood motionless on the spot, taking the full brunt of the impact.

As a result, the sound of breaking bones began to spread.

Crack, crack.

The spine, the legs shattered outright.

'Edward' collapsed to the ground like a lump of mud.

However, 'Edward' quickly stood up again.

Not only had the broken neck, the crushed vertebrae, and leg bones recovered, but 'Edward's' stature seemed even more robust, more powerful.

More importantly...

A hockey mask appeared in his hands.

"As ugly as your own mask."

"Is this one of your precious collection too?"

"Though now, it is mine."

'Edward' looked over the hockey mask in his hand, critiquing it with his own sense of aesthetics.

Even though his spoken evaluation was not high, as soon as he finished speaking, he still placed it on his face.

The moment 'Edward' properly positioned the mask on his face,

John and Brian, watching from afar, saw the hockey mask flash with an eerie glow.

Despite seeming like an ordinary hockey mask, both men felt an inexplicable fear.

This was impossible for John and Brian.

After all, both had experienced countless life-and-death missions; fear had long been discarded, and staying cool was their usual state of mind.

But now, fear overwhelmed their calm, resurfacing once again.

John and Brian exchanged glances.

Both could see the surprise and wariness in each other's eyes.

They knew all too well what things could instill fear in them and the terrifying degree it could have on ordinary people.

Chapter 550: The Protagonist's Ability! (3)

I'm afraid that just one glance would scare you stiff!

If you stared for too long, you might suffer some irreversible mental damage!

Of course, what's more important is that the 'Edward' in front of them was too bizarre.

Somehow, he was 'undying'!

Or rather...

He was undying when facing Jason!

Moreover, he would grow stronger with each attack from Jason!

Jason can't do it!

Nor can they!

The enemy can control one of them!

What if the two of them attacked at the same time?

At that thought, almost simultaneously!

John and Brian made their move, both raising their guns and aiming at 'Edward'.

However, just as they were about to pull the trigger, they found their index fingers couldn't move, as if some mysterious force was stopping them, preventing them from firing.

"My knights,"

"you cannot harm me, neither one alone nor both together."

"Just as Jason can't truly kill me."

"All of this is 'ritual'!"

'Edward' watched as the two tried to shoot but couldn't pull the trigger, the smirk in his eyes growing more intense.

Even though their faces were obscured by masks, John and Brian could feel such a smile.

A sense of powerlessness welled up inside them.

Neither of them could act against 'Edward'.

And Jason couldn't really kill 'Edward'.

How could the battle continue?

Just as the two were feeling powerless, Jason made another move.

Still pairing Barehanded Combat with the Griffin Combat Technique.

This time, after a kick to 'Edward's' knee made him fall to his knees, Jason stepped down on 'Edward's' head, pressing it against the ground.

Bang!

The immense force caused cracks to appear on the asphalt road.

Under Jason's foot, flesh, bones, and fragments were everywhere, and the brain matter was spread out like a smashed watermelon, forming a radial pattern.

But as soon as Jason's foot lifted, those things reverted to their original state.

'Edward's' head appeared unscathed.

Then, he leapt up.

Different from his earlier 'clumsiness,' this time 'Edward' was quite swift and skillful, even graceful.

"The ability of Barehanded Combat?"

"A remarkable ability."

"Now it is mine!"

Proclaimed 'Edward'.

Then, 'Edward' advanced toward Jason once more.

As he moved, his words continued —

"When the 'Protagonist' has grown to a certain extent, he naturally takes action against the 'antagonist,' and unlike the dragging feet of the 'antagonist,' the Protagonist will deliver a fatal blow to the 'antagonist'!"

As the words fell, 'Edward' swung his blade.

Thwack!

The blade sliced across Jason's neck.

'Edward' passed by Jason, brushing shoulders with him.

The smiling 'Edward' didn't look back at the decapitated Jason.

Because he knew.

He had succeeded.

Jason was dead.

He was about to truly replace 'Jason'.

Just look at the shock in the eyes of John and Brian, the two Knights.

How surprised they are.

How incredulous they are.

Why do they always look behind me? Continue your saga on

'Edward,' walking step by step toward John and Brian, finally noticed the difference in their eyes as he drew closer.

What was behind him?

It was just a corpse!

'Edward' thought as he was about to turn back to look.

But at that moment, a pair of broad, strong hands were placed on his head.

Then, those hands twisted forcefully —

Crack.