

Righteous Ps 101

The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 101

Wandering Child was stupefied immediately.

Under the hollow eye sockets' stare, an indescribable, deep, and chilling fear overwhelmed him.

He suddenly felt that his back seemed to be itchy.

It was an itch, like having a wound healed.

It was like the bones had sprouted and were slowly growing.

“Elle” touched it lightly. She vaguely felt that there were some protrusions on her originally smooth back. Her spine seemed to be squirming and chafing as they sharpened.

Wandering Child was attentive and gently stroked his spine. He couldn't stop himself stroking. At the same time, he felt that his elbows and knees were beginning to become a little itchy as if something was about to break out of his body.

“What's wrong, Elle?”

At this moment, Amos asked again with some concerns.

Wandering Child was surprised.

He returned to reality at once.

He recovered, only to find that Amos's face was as usual.

His face didn't turn into a skeleton. It was the same as before. No white bones were piercing out from the skin on the back of the neck. The skin was smooth and even without wounds.

As if everything just now was just an illusion.

“No, I'm fine.”

Elle responded softly and began to change clothes.

She put on those three heavy cashmere dresses.

Amos felt that her gaze was a little creepy, but he didn't continue to pursue it, just scratched his face again and turned back.

But that is definitely not an illusion. Wandering Child was confident.

Not only because he still felt the itch deep in his body.

The rowdy bullet text that flashed in front of him also confirmed this in the first time moment:

“Fuck, I'm scared to death!”

“It's the ghost father.”

“Motherfucker, this terrifies me.”

“Be content. At least the face is clean and free of maggots.”

Just by looking at this chaotic bullet text, Wandering Child could be sure that the horrible scene was not his illusion.

So what is going on?

Wandering Child subconsciously opened the attribute panel.

Then he froze for a moment.

[Health: 95%]

[Erosion rate: 5%]

Wait, 5%?

Wasn't it 2% previously?

Obviously, it will only increase by 2% once I die. But the erosion rate has just increased by 3%.

Bullet text also saw this line of numbers:

“Is this sanity drop?”

“No, it should be a supernatural vision.”

“This seems to be more severe than the dying punishment!”

“Wait, will the erosion rate continue to increase? This is just preparation for the ritual, right?”

It turns out that there are ways of increasing the erosion rate directly in the nightmare. Annan frowned slightly.

Annan checked on himself immediately and confirmed that his erosion rate did not rise after seeing this scene through the live broadcast. He then breathed a sigh of relief.

“Is that the Venerated Skeleton?” Annan muttered.

But, it doesn't look like it.

According to the books, the Venerated Skeleton was a giant skeleton of two and a half meters tall:

“He should be wearing a ducal blue and white fur robe. It was said to be unicorn hair. He wore a sacred copper-nickel crown on his head and a golden mask akin to a human face. He had heavy steel boots with dragonhide gloves on each hand. The Venerated Skeleton was covered under clothing entirely. The standing collar of the robe would cover up even the back of the neck.

“The Venerated Skeleton is mainly identified by height, followed by his appearance. There are only bones underneath his clothes, so he must look skinny. The Venerated Skeleton is the ancient giant's deity. The height of modern giants is generally four meters. Only ancient giants had short statures of less than three meters but more than two meters.

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“Remember, when looking directly at the Venerated Skeleton, do not use any ability that helps in perceiving the essence. The ducal outfit he wears is a kind of protection for others. If one sees any bone of the Venerated Skeleton, they will be continuously eroded by the curse. At the same time, 'Ossification' will occur. Each bone will reject the body's will. They will actively swallow all flesh and blood around to grow frantically.”

The Ossification recorded in the book was somewhat similar to the situation of Wandering Child just now. The situation of increasing the erosion rate also coincided with it.

Annan remembered that the bones at the neck of “Elle” did start to become a bit sharp and protruding at the moment that illusion appeared.

But it was not quite right.

If it was the Venerated Skeleton, then “Elle” should not be alive at all.

It appeared that the brutal nightmare gave more than death threats. Even if you are in a dream, but you see something you shouldn't see, the erosion rate will still increase.

It related to why someone would go crazy after entering the nightmare when only a small amount of erosion rate was increased after the death in the nightmare.

This should indeed be a silver level nightmare.

Annan was in doubt why the nightmare was so simple.

Although it was only a level of “gallery,” it was the lowest difficulty of the silver level. But now, as long as the challenger failed to complete the portrait at the beginning, the difficulty would immediately rise to the silver level.

So, what is the mechanism that triggers this?

Is it painting? Basement? Ritual? Or Amos' mood? Annan pondered on it.

“It's all ready, Elle.”

Finally, Amos breathed a sigh of relief.

Elle, on the other hand, had already changed her clothes.

She wore a three-layer cashmere dress. She now bloated like a zongzi [1]. It was hard to move, let alone fighting. She felt a little breathless.

But, Wandering Child was relieved a lot.

Judging from this situation, at least there is no need to be 'stung.'

This is great.

Amos approached Elle and comforted her quietly,

“Don't be afraid. It won't hurt. It's just a simple ritual. Fortunately, it's June, so it won't be too troublesome.”

“Yes, father.”

Elle paused and said softly.

Seeing that there was no fear or even curiosity on her face, Amos smiled with satisfaction.

Under Elle's gaze, Amos respectfully lit three thick candles, placed in the direction of 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, and 4 o'clock of the bone bed.

Then, Amos motioned Elle to climb onto the bed from the 3 o'clock direction.

Amos proceeded to take out a protractor, three black male sheep horns, three black male goat horns, and three pairs of cow horns. He put them on both sides of the three candles, forming three inward angles of 120 degrees, engulfing Elle at the same time.

At the moment when the three angles were formed, the candle trembled at the same time.

The warm orange glow suddenly turned into ice blue.

Wandering Child suddenly felt a strange cold fall on him.

It was as if his whole body was immersed in ice water. His body couldn't feel the slightest heat, but he wouldn't be trembling hard.

Instead, Wandering Child found it quiet and peaceful. He didn't want to move at all and then slowly closed his eyes.

At the last moment, he tried to open his eyes.

But, he saw the flesh on Amos's face falling one by one. Amos's body began to decay, and his bones remained.

Wandering Child vaguely heard that Amos was chanting something in a low volume, but his consciousness was fading. His body seemed to be held down by something, and his limbs went immobile.

After that, Wandering Child lost consciousness altogether.

When he woke up again, he found himself still lying on the bone bed. Those three candles had utterly burned out.

Not only that, but Elle's weak body suddenly became strong.

Even more powerful than his body outside the dungeon instance.

It was as if he could jump to the ceiling without exerting much strength.

There was only one difference.

Wandering Child felt some discomfort in his left eye.

He reached out and touched it subconsciously.

But, he only touched something cold as if it had been dead for a long time-the eye socket of the corpse.

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(TN: The title is a Detective Conan reference.)

What's going on?

Wandering Child was startled.

He reached out and touched it again, only to find that everything was normal with his left eye. It was still warm.

This is creepy and really strange!

It's just like having the two states switch back and forth from time to time.

Is this an illusion or something within this world?

Did Elle's face also become a skull face similar to that of painter Amos just now?

“Elle, can you hear me?”

At this moment, Wandering Child heard Amos's call. He turned around subconsciously.

A skeleton was sitting on a chair next to Wandering Child, looking at him with concern.

There was no flesh on its body except for the left eye and back of the neck.

Its left eye was inlaid with a green eyeball. There was a piece of skin the size of two palms on the back of the neck. There was even some pale blond hair on it.

Wandering Child remembered clearly.

Amos was brown-haired and blue-eyed, while Elle was blond and green-eyed.

In other words, this was Elle's eyes and skin!

“How is your body doing?”

Skeleton slowly asked with a heavy, echoing voice, “Can you see it?”

Can you see it?

Why do you ask if I can see it?

Didn't I tell you at the beginning that I had a headache?

Wandering Child keenly sensed something was amiss.

“I...”

-Can.

Wandering Child was about to answer like this.

But when he was about to speak, he suddenly felt a trance.

When he woke up again, he found that the skeleton had changed back to Amos.

Those eyes were still blue instead of green.

Wait, what happened?

Wandering Child suddenly realized something.

"I can see. My vision is clear. I'm feeling alright now."

(TN: Wandering Child altered his reply from I can see it (the skeleton) to this reply.)

While Wandering Child answered slowly, he touched his eyes and back of his head, using the ingenious bluffing technique he had practiced in the examination room.

Sure enough, he felt a strange and cold sensation again this time.

Whether it was the eyeballs or the neck, they had turned cold. Wandering Child even felt his sharp and protruding cervical spine.

"I understand now. Among the streamer and his dad, one must be a dead person."

"Is Amos going to dismember Elle into pieces?"

"Wandering Child, how do you feel!? Are you alright!?" asked Amos.

"I'm feeling fine, father."

Elle asked softly, "But, I feel my body becoming light and powerful. What's wrong with me?"

"This is a gift from the Venerated Skeleton, Elle."

Until then, Amos finally revealed to Elle, "The Venerated Skeleton bestows my 'god-bestowed paint.'

"The Venerated Skeleton also bestows your healthy and powerful body. His divine power is stored in your body. Therefore, not only will you live healthily, but you will not get sick or age."

He chuckled and said, "Isn't this a good thing? This is a benefit that the upright deity can't give."

"Then, father."

"Elle" was silent for a while and asked seriously, "What is the price?"

"There is no price to be paid."

Amos replied without hesitation, "This is a one-way ritual to pray for blessing. My transaction with the Venerated Skeleton has not officially started. So you don't need to pay any price. He even promised me that he would give me paints that amounted to ten folds I got in the past. That's enough for me to use for a long time."

With no price to be paid? Do you believe it?

Elle's face was filled with doubt.

If you don't have to pay anything, where are Elle's left eye and the flesh at the back of the neck?

Since he asked me if I can see him clearly, that means he knew that my eyes had been stolen.

But why did Amos think that I didn't notice this? Did the Venerated Skeleton tell him that?

Annan stared at this scene, startled. Then, he managed to pick up some clues. "Wait a minute," lamented Annan as the audience.

If Annan wasn't mistaken, it was possible that Amos didn't kill Elle.

Or it could be that Amos didn't realize he had killed Elle!

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In that newspaper from forty-five years ago, Elle's body pieces were scattered all over each painting frame in the form of dismembered flesh. More than one hundred paintings were displayed in the first three levels of the nightmare "gallery" alone.

Isn't it quite laborious to dismember Elle and put the body pieces into each painting?

Is there such a deep hatred between them?

Elle's time of death should be after the gallery construction.

Would Amos visit the gallery to stuff the dismembered flesh into the picture frame piece by piece when there is no one at night?

That isn't logical.

Annan's deduction wasn't laid on the faith in the father-daughter relationship but Amos's inferiority in agility. It was an impossible feat for Amos to perform the laborious task without being noticed.

Then, only one possibility was left.

That was the time when Elle's body pieces entered the painting was earlier than her death.

Her body was separated into pieces before she died.

It could seem absurd at first...

"I think the paint bestowed by the Venerated Skeleton was crafted through Elle's flesh!" Annan's pupils shrank.

He suddenly felt a chill in his back.

It was a somewhat bold guess, but it could explain everything.

There was already a price to be paid at the Venerated Skeleton's first ritual. Worse still, the price had already been paid in advance!

In the third sacrifice, if you choose "half the life span," you will sacrifice the first part of your life. Hence, you will instantly become an old man.

Then, the “half of the conscience” and the “friendship from now on” sacrificed in the second ritual will not affect the ritual performer. If so, what are the commonalities?

It was the contempt for the lives of others.

Hence, the negative cycle was unstoppable at the second ritual already. Those who went for the second ritual would commit the third ritual because it would no longer cause them a psychological burden no matter which ritual they chose. For example, “eating a certain part of others.”

According to this logic, the content of the third ritual must have influenced the ritual performer to perform the fourth ritual.

The ritual that most pleased the Venerated Skeleton was “the creator killed by his work.” In light of the “sacrifice replacement ritual,” you need to cut off ties with your parents, wives, children, and friends.

Think about it, would a protector who loves arts like this kind of ritual?

Many pictures suddenly appeared in Annan's mind:

There is Elle's flesh in every painting at the gallery.

In the basement found on Yiyi's stream, there is a skeleton where Elle has lost all her flesh, as well as a container with a dead embryo.

Amos swallowed Elle's umbilical cord.

Amos's body showed the eyes and skin that Elle had lost.

“I understand it completely.”

Annan murmured in realization, “Amos just got it wrong.”

The Venerated Skeleton was not a shelter for artists and creators at all.

The reason Venerated Skeleton was hostile to the Elegant Elder was not that they competed for artists' resources.

Instead, the Venerated Skeleton hated all creators.

Therefore, he was the enemy of the artist's protector – the Elegant Elder.

The Venerated Skeleton mocked the artists' greed, satirized the artists trying to fulfill their work at all means, and made them pay the price for it. Unfortunately, the price was to become a demon.

From the very beginning, the Venerated Skeleton believed that those who summoned him would hold the ritual to the end.

So, the Venerated Skeleton had already taken away the price for the final ritual in advance – the life of the artists' “beloved.” He just allowed these sacrifices to go about as usual before the sacrifices realized that they were dead.

To be precise, the lives lost were these artists' “beloved” before the ritual.

Venerated Skeleton didn't have to wait after the artists sought fame and lost their conscience, eating the body parts of their loved ones or the replacement after cutting off ties.

It was because the artists no longer valued the beloved's life in the face of the final ritual.

What an irony.

The fourth sacrifice, the most painful price, was paid at the very beginning.

They had long been unable to look back. At the final ritual, there was no need to look back.

At that time, the sacrifice was already dead at the very beginning.

To completely cut off all contact with the past self, lose all the glory of the original self as if the original body died. Then, they put on the skin of the people they loved and harmed and died slowly in society.

[The creator was killed by his work.]

The ritual dramatically accentuated this theme.

“That's weird.”

Annan frowned slightly.

In this logic, Amos should have failed the ritual instead.

Otherwise, he should have become Elle's state. But in the end, Amos coughed up Elle's eyes instead.

Was this nightmare born when Amos coughed up Elle's eye? Only then, Annan got to enter the nightmare that “takes Elle's eyes away”!

Annan's eyes suddenly lit up.

He finally figured out all the rules of this nightmare!

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“Yes, I totally figured it out,” murmured Annan.

It was conclusive that the paint capable of imprisoning souls was made from Elle's body.

This meant that Elle might have died after the first ritual. It was just that her body was still operating, and she didn't realize her death.

So the question was, how did a corpse get pregnant?

The umbilical cord could only be available after the birth or death of the baby. Amos was able to swallow the umbilical cord, indicating that the baby was already dead at that time. Why did Amos soak the baby's body in wine instead of throwing it away or destroying it?

Does Amos not want to or dare not?

The colorful burning ball of flesh exuded a terrifying momentum. Annan was confident that he couldn't defeat the ball no matter the ball's gender.

In the real history, many people died in subduing the flesh ball despite involving multiple “industry insiders” and the official Transcended.

How did a stillborn child, who had been dead for six months and had not yet been born, become so strong?

There was an explanation for all of this.

The father was not Amos at all.

—But the Venerated Skeleton.

The newspaper stated that Elle Morrison's sudden disappearance was at the end of January 1458.

The stillbirth was conceived in the abdomen for almost six months.

The dungeon instance that Wandering Child was currently working on was on 12th June 1457, which was Elle's birthday.

The birthday probably had a special meaning in the ritual.

Even if Wandering Child did not pretend to be sick, Amos should have planned to let “Elle” go to the basement to hold this ritual. In the dungeon instance that Annan cleared, maybe he would be taken to the basement after eating the birthday cake.

In short, Amos would get Elle's left eye in this ritual.

Elle laid on the bone bed and suddenly lost consciousness completely.

Did she get pregnant with the Venerated Skeleton's child by this instance?

The critical problem was that every nightmare was born out of the curse remained after Transcended's death.

The main point of view of the nightmare was painter Amos's perspective. Then, the nightmare's owner should have a direct relationship with him.

The nightmare difficulty was twisted.

In other words, the highest-level battle in this nightmare required a Gold Rank to complete. It should be born from at least one Gold Rank Transcended, who died full of resentment, and no one collected the dead body.

So, who was that dead Transcended?

Is it Amos? Is it Elle?

Is it the sheriff? Is it a police officer?

Most likely, none of the above.

The owner of this nightmare is most likely the baby who Elle had conceived.

It was the Venerated Skeleton's child conceived in a dream via a mortal!

Annan came into a sudden realization, "This helps explain the first sentence after entering the nightmare."

In the first nightmare that Annan entered, although he played the role of the guard – John, the nightmare owner was Don Juan Geraint.

The reason was that John was not Transcended at all. The phrase that Annan heard, "All betrayers must die," might not be John's wish but Don Juan's obsession. It was just that Don Juan subconsciously put his obsession to John the guard, hoping that John could save him.

But in any case, both of them had the same stance.

In Nightmare: Gallery, the whisper heard when entering the dungeon instance was an old and weak voice.

"Don't look back. Never look back."

The voice said so.

But the question was since the nightmare owner was the stillborn child, why was his obsession not to look back?

If Amos dismembers Elle into pieces or sacrifices her, why does he have the courage to call Elle at Level - 1? Why does he think Elle can protect him?

Why does the Venerated Skeleton curse this land?

There was only one answer.

Although Annan couldn't peer into the nightmares on the later floors now, he had a rough idea.

Amos should realize the whole picture at the end of the last level. Although it didn't make any sense to look back with Elle dead, and he had taken many lives, he still regretted it.

At the last moment, Amos hesitated on having Venerated Skeleton's son(the dead baby) born. He gave up on becoming Elle, thus repenting his sin.

So on the third level, Amos coughed out Elle's eyes, which corresponded to the memory he regretted eating Elle's eyes.

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With this inference, he should cough up different parts at each next nightmare layer, each corresponding to the parts that Elle lost.

The obsession of the dead baby was to let Amos "don't look back" and firmly complete the final ritual, let Amos die and "rebirth" Elle.

Then, stuff the baby back in and let it rebirth.

In other words, the strategy that Priest Louis and Annan had was unexpectedly correct: "Don't look at the painting" and "Don't look back," respectively.

The dungeon's will was to continue on firmly.

Stopping in front of each painting to commemorate was equivalent to the remaining half of the conscience in Amos's heart, preventing him from completing the ritual.

If Amos finished the ritual without regrets and never looked back, then the dead baby would be reborn. Hence, the son of the Venerated Skeleton would be born successfully.

As for what would happen next, Annan wouldn't know.

Amos seemed hesitant in the end.

Was it because of his conscience or out of hatred for the Venerated Skeleton's son that he deliberately ruined the ritual and sealed the false deity's son? It could also be Amos taunting the Venerated Skeleton through his artwork. Annan didn't know the reason.

The reason was most likely hidden in the nightmare on the latter three levels.

Annan was dumbfounded.

Louis's strategy was right.

Annan knew that Priest Louis had absolutely no idea about the nightmare's mechanism. But instead, Priest Louis pondered upon the correct way to clear the dungeon instance accidentally.

However, this strategy was only limited to the standard ending (SE).

In this nightmare, the standard ending was a bad end.

Annan believed that if he went through Level -1 at basement level, the result he got could be even higher.

But no matter what. One thing could be certain.

If the challenger doesn't look at a single painting and walks to the end while enduring the fear, he would directly clear the dungeon.

However, it must be dangerous.

Though, the danger was the least important.

Thinking of this, Annan looked at the time.

It was almost dawn at 5:53 a.m. Wandering Child should not be able to finish the dungeon.

Looking at the flooding bullet texts, Wandering Child knew he couldn't pass the level normally. So it became a better option for him to fight with Amos directly. There could be a surprise reward.

Annan quietly mingled among the crowd and sent several bullet texts in succession:

“The mechanism of this dungeon instance looks a bit complicated.”

“Wandering Child, why don't you ask Don Juan? Maybe there is a hint.”

“Yes, you should ask. Since the young master told us that this dungeon instance would make us lose memory, it means that he knows this dungeon instance well.”

“I think this dungeon instance is already involved with the main mission. So it may be meaningless to ask.”

“But Wandering Child has the highest affection rate. Him asking bears the highest possibility to success.”

Annan posted these bullet texts.

Thankfully, the bullet text system was anonymous. There was no blocking function either.

Otherwise, it would be funny if someone blocked the message and the screen became empty.

“That seems to make sense.” Wandering Child nodded thoughtfully after seeing the texts.

“What makes sense?”

Amos asked curiously.

Wandering Child squinted at Amos, too lazy to bother explaining. He didn't plan to continue the act any further.

He was just waiting for the end of the dungeon instance.

At the dawn's arrival, the dazzling golden light coming from nowhere shredded the entire world Wandering Child was in, including himself.

His consciousness was immersed in the warm sunlight. He felt the coldness in his body, especially in his abdomen, gradually dissipated as if he was asleep.

When Wandering Child opened his eyes again, he found himself still lying on the bed.

Outside the window, the sun with three luxurious golden runes orbiting had risen.

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“It's already six in the morning.”

Annan looked at the sky outside, lost in thought.

He hadn't stayed up for a long time, let alone staying up all night without sleep.

It was a habit that would take an enormous toll on the body.

Moreover, Annan was made to realize yet another critical problem.

He didn't feel tired at all now.

Although he stayed up all night watching the stream, he was still in good condition. He didn't feel sleepy, nor did he feel unusually excited after staying up late, as if he was sleeping normally and waking up normally.

Annan simply found it dangerous because his body no longer showed early warnings to him.

“Let's wait for Salvatore.”

Annan sighed, put on his clothes, and got up from the bed to do some light exercise, to soothe his stiff body lying on the bed all night.

Viscount's bed is indeed quite comfortable. But it's still a little uncomfortable lying down all night. Annan lamented.

Since it was 6 a.m., Salvatore had only slept for three hours.

Knowing that this hard-working senior could only sleep for six hours a day, Annan found it inhumane to disturb him again.

Worse still, this place was not where he usually lived. It was hard to sleep if he could fall asleep immediately after 3 a.m.

Annan convinced himself so in his heart. What I'm doing now is to prevent this dumb rich guy from dying out of lethargy at a young age.

Fortunately, Annan's “moral sense” and “common sense” were still functioning normally.

Otherwise, Anna might do evil things for his pleasure.

“Hmph, maybe I should get some breakfast first.”

After twenty minutes of light exercises, Annan took a long breath.

Senior is only waking up at 9 a.m. So I should head out without waiting for him.

All of a sudden, there came a knock on viscount's house.

Who will that be? Annan thought.

“It's only half-past six in the morning.”

Annan frowned slightly and opened the door.

Standing at the door, there was a smiley bald priest. He had a chubby face and big ears.

The bald priest smiled and revealed two rows of golden teeth in the face of Annan, who opened the door alone. He took out his pocket watch a little exaggeratedly and bowed to Annan, “Good morning, our upright feudal lord, I wish Silver Sire blesses you today.

“I am so happy to see that it's you who opened the door.”

It's Bishop Daround.

Annan suddenly realized.

Oops, that's not right. It's Bishop Daryl.

Annan couldn't forget the glaring golden teeth.

This person appears erratic, as if he knows a lot.

Especially, the bishop first claimed to be familiar with the Gerant family's elder and the current family master. But he didn't recognize that Annan was not Don Juan Geraint at all.

Or it could be that he recognized it but didn't point it out.

Because he persuaded Annan, "This is not your hatred. You're not involved with either side."

Annan knew what the bald bishop said was right.

Regardless of whether it was Gerald or Viscount Barber, their target was "Don Juan Geraint," not "Annan Austere-Winter."

The reality had proved it.

After Annan revealed his true identity, they both temporarily gave up their hostility.

"Tribute to the silver coin, Grandpa Daryl."

Annan hesitated but chose a more familiar address and responded to the bishop.

"Since you came to me, is there something wrong?"

Annan's tone was tender and humble. Though, his attitude was direct with no cowardice, "If I can offer any help, please don't hesitate to voice it out."

"Oh no, no, no. There's no need to trouble you, my dear sir."

Bishop Daryl smiled and said, "I came to you in advance to get an alignment. How do you plan to disclose this matter to them today?"

The bald and fat bishop didn't point out "them."

But, Annan understood what the bishop meant.

What he said must be the group of people who were bewitched and controlled by the viscount.

As the spokesperson of Roseburg's Silver Sire Church, Bishop Daryl was obliged to align with Annan in advance.

He and Annan were the supreme rulers of Roseburg and even the entire North Sea Territory. If the two disagreed in public, it was equivalent to publicizing the fact that "Roseburg's was politically unstable." The underlings might bear ill intention with many clowns emerging.

Though, Annan felt that Bishop Daryl came for other reasons.

Annan was silent for a while, then responded, "I'm not sure what you are talking about."

He was asking Bishop Daryl in a tactful way – What you plan to do on your side?

Bishop Daryl smiled and said, "Naturally, the matter will be concluded as heathens ambushed and killed our viscount."

Can this be done?

Annan was a little surprised.

No doubt that this narration, which Bishop Daryl picked, was more beneficial to Annan.

It was like saying the entire Silver Sire Church endorsed Annan's reign.

"Do I need to do anything?" asked Annan tentatively.

Upon seeing this, Bishop Daryl couldn't help laughing.

"It's good to talk to smart people."

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He smiled and said, "You are a little like your grandfather."

Whose grandfather? Can you be clear about it?

Annan muttered in his heart.

But Annan couldn't speak it out bluntly. He could only nod humbly and said in a cold and childish voice, "Thank you for your praise."

Bishops just smiled meaningfully and didn't say much.

"Right, Grandpa Daryl."

Annan suddenly asked, "Do you know about the... at the beginning of every nightmare?"

As priesthood personnel and the vanguard to purify nightmares, they should have a better understanding of nightmares than ordinary Transcended.

Sure enough, Bishop Daryl thought for a moment and knew what Annan was referring to, "Are you talking about that whisper?"

"Yes."

Annan nodded.

Bishop Daryl smiled and said with a smile, "This, we generally call this "dictum." If you want to talk about the principles and exceptions, it becomes complicated. You only need to know at the application level. In most cases, "dictum" will not lie to you.

"It will always reveal the core rule of every nightmare. But remember not to be misled. After all, the dictum has only one sentence, and it is typically misunderstood.

"They're like a prophecy."

Bishop Daryl sighed softly at the end.

Annan was keenly aware of it. But there was too little info for him to infer something.

Bishop Daryl seemed to have thought of something and asked Annan, "Do you mean to ask me what kind of nightmare Gerald has hatched?"

"If you can tell me, that would be great." Annan nodded and said seriously.

Looking at Annan's ice-blue pupils, Bishop Daryl felt a little lost.

Upon seeing this, Annan was seemingly occupied with thoughts.

The bishop was silent for a while before showing the harmless smile again, "No problem, I have already cleansed the nightmare once. Of course, this nightmare is a bit more complicated, but it's still something you can handle.

"Do you want the key?"

"If you're fine with giving me that." Annan nodded.

In the meantime, Annan secretly memorized the term "key."

Bishop Daryl seemed to be prepared. He took out a hard object wrapped in layers of cloth from his waist.

Annan reached out to touch it and quickly realized that it seemed to be a broken bone.

"You can enter the nightmare by touching it for more than thirteen seconds."

Bishop Daryl was stern in this, "Although it is not difficult for you, it is best to enter after the early morning."

"Wait a minute, Grandpa Daryl."

Annan suddenly said, "If I enter the nightmare now, can you wake me up in three hours?"

"There are not many people whom I can trust here. I am afraid that apart from Salvatore, you are the only one who can be trusted."

Hearing that, Bishop Daryl was startled. Of course, he knew what this meant.

After Annan entered the nightmare, the body left in reality would become vulnerable. If Bishop Daryl chose to kidnap him or kill him directly at this time, Annan would be defenseless.

This was undoubtedly a gamble. Annan was using his life to bet on the trust of others.

But what is Annan betting on?

Bishop Daryl hesitated.

"I don't recommend this. It would be too dangerous for you."

Bishop Daryl became stern which was contradictory to his typical nature. He reprimanded Annan, "When you enter a nightmare, you can't even let outsiders know about it, let alone having others take care of your body, especially those you can't trust. This is equivalent to making yourself vulnerable."

"Then can I trust you?"

Annan looked at Bishop Daryl with pure and clear eyes, "Can you wake me up?"

Looking at the icy blue pupils, Bishop Daryl was in a daze again.

He was silent for a while, and sighed helplessly.

“Then, you may go to sleep. I will wake you up in three hours.”

Bishop Daryl walked in the door, closed and locked it.

Hmph, as predicted.

Annan got the clue he wanted, completely felt at ease.

Annan's action might look like a fanatic at the gaming table.

But in fact, he had secretly cheated.

—Although Annan made this request to Bishop Daryl, it did not mean that Annan had completely believed the bishop.

Annan had no power to fight back at all if Bishop Daryl had ill intention.

But if the bishops' response seemed off at even a slight, Annan would immediately comment, “Oh, I'm just kidding.” This would not hurt his reputation to the bishop too much while he assessed the bishop's bottom line.

It might seem like a gamble, but it was a cover-up. The other party was unprepared with the request being incidental. With that, Annan had control of the topic.

Though, Annan somehow found out a new clue in his attempt. He became more convinced now that Bishop Daryl knew 'Annan.'

(TN: The MC's real identity still seems fuzzy to me, even though we can be sure that MC isn't John nor Don Juan. Hence, I will refer him to the “name” the author had referred to.)

Moreover, Bishop Daryl should know someone from Annan's family and know the person quite well.

Bishop Daryl added abruptly, “After you enter this nightmare, don't be too nervous even if you meet an acquaintance. But, don't hesitate too much too.

“Always remember, this is just a remnant of history. You can't change anything, and they are just illusions. Kill if you need to. Don't trust people you shouldn't believe.”

Wait, what does this mean? Annan was startled.

This bald fatty. Are Gerald's nightmare, deepest obsession, and resentment not related to the incident in which Salvatore and I killed him?

The Righteous Player(s) Chapter 105

Annan didn't hesitate for too long.

Annan lay on the bed, holding Gerald's broken bones.

Annan felt a strange chill seeping into his blood. It brought an inexplicable comfort for it.

Four seconds, five seconds...Twelve seconds, thirteen seconds.

Finally, Annan's gaze began to drift away.

His surrounding gradually became quiet and dark, and a prompt appeared before his eyes:

[Detected unpurified Nightmare Fragment.]

[Rank requirement: Bronze Rank and above]

[Profession requirement: Wizard]

[Special requirement: Once killed someone]

[The requirements are met. You will fall into a nightmare after ten seconds, 10, 9...]

Suddenly, Annan felt his consciousness begin to fall rapidly.

Annan didn't know how long he had been falling. Until at a particular moment, he suddenly woke up.

It was pitch black before his eyes, and only the data stream flashed through quickly:

[Falling in a nightmare. A dungeon instance is being generated.]

[Dungeon instance difficulty is set as hard. You can enter up to ten times.]

[The current purification progress is 1/10.]

[The total erosion rate of the team is 8%. The dungeon instance difficulty rises by 8%. The nightmare's mutation probability increases by 8%.]

[This dungeon instance has no checkpoint. The erosion rate is increased by 5% for each death. You will be forced to exit the dungeon instance after one death.]

[This dungeon instance provides a plot and has decryption rewards.]

[Dungeon instance clearance reward: Wizard profession increases by 1 level.]

[Reward for 50% dungeon instance decryption: Obtain random Soul Snatch school spell (must be equipped)]

[Loading complete.]

After the "loading completed" texts gradually faded away, Gerald's sigh sounded in Annan's ear:

"Be skeptical on everything."

Gerald seemed to be standing beside Annan, staring in front, and sighed in a low voice, "Don't trust anyone."

As his voice sounded, the surrounding darkness was torn apart by the cold wind in an instant.

Annan immediately noticed that he was in the snowy area.

The sky was lead-grey, and the blizzard was coming.

Even the unusually dazzling sun had faded a bit at this place.

He was wearing heavy anti-skid boots, holding a long stick in his right hand, and wearing a wool hat on his head.

His boots were sunken in the snow. His face and hands were numb due to the cold. Even though his clothes were thick, Annan couldn't help but shiver.

"This is a little cold."

If I continue to stand here, I may be frozen to death.

I have to find a place to shelter from the wind and snow.

Annan realized this straight away.

He looked back and found that his footprints came from a distance beyond his sight, and the wind and snow covered the farthest footprints. This showed that his body had just walked over there. This snowfall should have lasted for a long time.

There's no way for me to turn back.

My only choice is to continue forward.

Annan made his decision and checked the items on him.

The result was less unexpected.

Annan wore Gerald's silver ring in his left hand, a pair of gold spectacles in his backpack, and a silver pocket watch that could be used as a mirror. There was also the...

A little white hammer?

"Isn't this-"

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The Venerated Skeleton's bone blood trigger.

Annan was startled but not too surprised.

He remembered Salvatore saying that this curse vessel should have been stolen not long ago, about four or five years ago. At least it was three years after Gerald had advanced to Silver, so it certainly wouldn't be too long ago.

Annan checked and found that six teeth were loaded in the bone hammer. He seemed well prepared for battles.

On the contrary, this body came to such a cold place without a backpack. There was no change of clothes, no food or water.

It was as if the original body host knew from the beginning that he wouldn't stay outside for too long.

No matter what, I got to first confirm my identity.

Annan thought so and faced the smooth surface of the pocket watch.

Reflected from the silver surface was a young man with a gentle smile and an ordinary appearance. His brown curly hair was covered with snow, and his dark blue pupils were unusually calm.

“Sure enough, it's you.”

Annan murmured.

The body he was using now was the man, David Gerald.

The wanted black wizard by the Swamp's Black Tower.

At the next moment, the plot introduction of this dungeon instance appeared in front of him:

[After being expelled by Swamp's Black Tower, David Gerald is homeless with nowhere to go.]

[If he is an Alteration Wizard, then he can at least find a job. But it's a pity no noble would believe him with his background as a wizard of the Soul Snatch school. Hence, no one hired him.]

[At least until he advances to gold, this situation will not improve.]

[Not long ago, Mr. Gerald caught wind of something.]

[Howling White Tower Master, Gold Rank's Wizard “Time Stopper Eye” Michelangelo, decided to recruit an heir for Howling White Tower among the Silver Rank Wizards all over the world.]

[No age limit.]

[No gender limitation.]

[Disregard origin and background.]

[The only requirement is that you have no teacher, no classmate, and no apprentice.]

[There are eight schools, namely Soul Snatch, Edict, Prophet, Alteration, Falteration, Destruction, Shaping, Idol. Each school's applicants, who meet the requirements and prove to be the best, will receive Master Michelangelo's invitation letter. They will be summoned to the Howling Wind White Tower. Finally, there will be a secret ritual to determine the ultimate successor.]

[Gerald signed up symbolically. But he never expected that he would be selected.]

[The moment he opened the invitation letter, he was teleported to the snowy field near the Howling Wind White Tower. Fortunately, he was prepared. He put on heavy clothes with trekking poles prepared in advance. Although it looked a little funny, he was not embarrassed.]

[But correspondingly, except for the curse vessel “the Venerated Skeleton's Bone and Blood Trigger,” he did not carry any other weapons or curse vessels.]

[You will come here for him to complete this ritual.]

[To use this curse vessel, tap anyone's bones with it, and it will allow you to apply “Cardioplegia,” “Forgotten Secret,” “I'm Not Here,” “Speak No Evil,” “Claustrophobia,” “Claustrophobia” and “Page Lock” to your target. Each curse can only be used once in this dungeon instance. If the power difference is too large, the effect may be exempted.]

[You need to bear Gerald's curse – “Break the Declaration” temporarily.]

[Before launching an attack on others, you must issue a warning three to ten seconds in advance and reveal the target of the attack. The closer to ten seconds, the greater the output. But if the attack is not followed up within ten seconds, the state will be reset.]

[In this dungeon instance, only Soul Snatch school spells below the Silver Rank can be used. Your mana pool ratio is temporarily regarded as 15/34 (chaotic power is twice the order power).]

[At sunrise, you can restore all Order Power.]

[At sunset, you can restore all Chaotic Power.]

[Warning: After the mana pool ratio is reversed to 2:1 ratio or higher, you will enter the Lost Control (frenzy) state, losing 20% of the maximum health per second.]

After these words dissipated, a line of words appeared in front of Annan again:

[Main mission: Stay alive.]

Immediately, small texts appeared under this line:

[Do not fight with anyone.]

[Get everyone's real name.]

[At least survive till only four people remain.]

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It's the ritual to pick an heir.

But why is the main mission “stay alive”?

Annan raised his eyebrows slightly.

He noticed some hints through this info.

The other side missions related to this main mission brought him into deeper thoughts.

[Do not fight with anyone.]

[Get everyone's real name.]

[At least survive till only four people remain.]

Side missions were detailed explanations of main missions.

—In other words, I won't be able to survive if I'm involved in a fight with others and if I don't get everyone's real name.

What's the deal with Gerald's whisper not to trust anyone in the beginning?

“This is becoming interesting.”

Annan murmured with more resolution in his eyes.

He felt a little excitement and a strong pleasure.

Although Annan did not know Soul Snatch spells at all, and this body wouldn't allow him to use his original Falteration spells, it didn't matter.

It was because Annan had a hunch that this dungeon instance might be his home ground.

Annan no longer hesitated and put away the Venerated Skeleton's blood trigger. Instead, he raised his trekking pole and moved forward.

Before Annan moved forward for long, he paused with his pupils shrank slightly.

He noticed an inexplicable sense of danger without seeing any warning signs as if he would be killed if he continued to take a step forward.

After all, Wizards had exceptional perception.

So, he chose to trust his instincts without any hesitation.

“Hello there?”

At the same time, Annan showed a gentle smile on Gerald's face and asked tentatively, “Is there anything I can help?”

“If you are willing to turn around and go back, that would be the best.”

The one who answered had a clear and tactful voice of a girl. She seemed to be about nineteen years old.

She had short umber hair and azure blue pupils. She wore a white woolen shawl and a long-sleeved sweater with cuffs covering half of her palm. She appeared gorgeous and tender.

The snow under her feet accentuated her beauty.

She didn't wear heavy anti-skid boots like Annan, but little red leather boots like a noble lady. The long, slender khaki [1] trouser spread out like French horns when it came close to the boots.

Strange fluctuations continued to spread from her ankle.

The snow under her feet condensed into the flagstone walkway.

Beside her stood a taciturn red-haired youth.

He had beautiful and smooth red short hair, but a white bandage was thickly wrapped around his eyes. There were traces of stitches on the sides of his mouth.

He wore a pure white straitjacket usually dedicated to mental health patients. Even his cloth shoes were white. On his forearms, upper arms, chest, thighs, and between his calves, there were densely packed, fixed straps akin to black belts. But the buttons on the straitjacket were temporarily unbuttoned halfway so that he could at least walk normally.

The red-haired youth followed the girl. Hot steam fumed around him. The snowflakes melted before they got in contact with him.

Even though Annan had a harmless face and a gentle voice, the girl with short umber hair still looked at Annan vigilantly.

“But I don't think you would want to do that. Are you David Gerald?”

“There is no need to be so nervous, miss.”

Annan sighed, with a calm tone and a soft voice, “Even if there is a competitive relationship between us, I am just a poor bereaved dog whom everyone detests. I'm nothing but a prop to bring out the greater brilliance of others. You didn't really think I can succeed, right?”

With that, Annan laughed mockingly. He showed his embarrassing state with his face showing a pitiful look like a stray dog, “Can I get closer? It's so cold. I was sent over before I was ready. Miss, your side seems to be warmer.”

Hearing that, the umber-haired girl subconsciously began to assess Annan.

Although Annan's clothes were neat, they seemed a bit shabby. Naturally, he had messy hair that portrayed his sorry state. His body was covered with snowflakes as he trembled due to the cold.

He does look pitiful.

The girl's gaze grew a little tender.

Annan acted humbly and said with a silly smile, “I'm Gerald, now I'm just a useless person. No matter which of you wins in the end, I'm happy if you can take me in and provide food for me.

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“If you don't mind, can we introduce ourselves formally?”

With that, Annan bowed to the girl, “Your humble servant is David Gerald. I should be a candidate for the Soul Snatch school.

“Everyone says that I am not a good person, but I am just an ordinary person who is useless and has no talent.”

With that, Annan smiled wryly.

Under Annan's repeated praise, if this umber-haired girl still did not give up her vigilance on Annan, then Annan would begin to doubt her identity.

This was the most common chat technique – the seesaw principle.

Lowering one's worth and raising the other's worth would incite the other party's reciprocity. It was especially suitable for situations where the opponent held vigilance, but the fight had not broken out. It could effectively delay the conflict.

As the saying goes, don't slap those extending a welcoming hand to you.

Seeing Annan showing such weakness, she stared at Annan's pupils and slowly nodded, although she still didn't let go of her vigilance against the Soul Snatch wizard.

"My name is Claire, a candidate from the Shaping school. He is a candidate from the Destruction school. You can call him Kim."

She introduced the red-haired boy following her to Annan.

Immediately, she issued a polite invitation to Annan, "If it's too cold, it's okay for you to get closer. With Kim, we can keep warm."

"Ah! Thank you so much!"

Annan looked at her gratefully and then ran over quickly, frightening Claire.

But as soon as she became vigilant, she realized that "Gerald" really rushed to her side- or Jin's side. Annan breathed heavily with a happy smile. Claire could not help but show a self-deprecating smile.

Such a funny poor bug. What on earth was I afraid of just now?

It's not bad to have a temporary ally.

Maybe that will give me a better edge.

She thought of the request of her friend before leaving and sighed silently.

Even if you say it's dangerous here, I can't just change the itinerary that I have prepared for several months for such an absurd prophecy.

Claire and Kim?

On the other hand, Annan secretly noted down the two names.

Annan had a hunch that at least one of these two names was a pseudonym, or it could be that both names were pseudonyms.

The purpose was nothing more than to deviate the spell that homed targets through name.

But Annan didn't care less.

After all, he knew no Soul Snatch spell.

The only power he had was with his words.

At least, he had successfully established regular communication.

For Annan, this was no different from knowing the other party's real name.

The power of "communication" became an option.

Anna could utilize comical ways to reduce the other's guard. After all, everyone had limited energy. Being vigilant in all aspects at the same time would render one much more vulnerable. With moderate clumsiness, it could often make the other party ignore oneself.

Annan was soon aware that he was the weakest among the contenders.

Seven of the most outstanding Silver Rank Wizards of all schools. Although they had the limiting label of "orphan," they were beyond Annan, who couldn't even use a Soul Snatch spell.

Annan followed the duo for thirty minutes.

It didn't feel so exhausting walking on the floor, which Claire manifested.

Under Annan's unremitting efforts, the trio became familiar with each other temporarily.

Annan finally learned from Claire that Kim was not by nature taciturn, but because his words, actions, and even his eyes had Destruction power that he could not control. So he could only be assisted and protected by Claire in the journey to White Tower.

Indeed, the two of them knew each other before they came here.

After walking forward for more than ten minutes, the Howling White Tower appeared in front of them.

The person waiting in front of the tower caused Annan's pupils to shrink suddenly.

It was because the person looked exactly the same as Annan.

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No, she is not Annan Austere-Winter.

Annan realized this immediately.

She seemed to be almost identical in age, height, and appearance.

But the length of the hair was different. It wasn't shoulder-length, but the hair reached the waist. Judging from the figure and skeleton, her gender was barely distinguishable.

What was more unique about her was her temperament.

It could be said to be the opposite of Annan.

There seemed to be no emotion in her icy blue pupils, and the half-open eyes were filled with the indifference of a deity. There was no trace of joy on her face. She crossed her hands and placed them in front of her; her eyes were full of vigilance and alienation.

She was wearing a pure white, heavy robe with a hollow silver crown on her head. The slender and long neck was reminiscent of a swan. Her delicate collar bone was hidden under the robe.

No doubt that she was Annan Austere-Winter's sister.

Unlike Annan, there didn't seem to be a Reverse Inscription etched on her soul. Those icy blue pupils without emotions reminded Annan, the man in his memory who taught him the Frost Sword.

Such a powerful and lingering aura could make people temporarily ignore the fact that she was still a young lady.

Speaking of which, Annan was theoretically fourteen years old. But his height and appearance were more believable to be at the age of eleven or twelve. So how old is this sister of mine?

When she saw Annan's trio, she frowned slightly.

“David Gerald.”

There was a cold and tender voice coming from her mouth. The ice-blue pupils locked onto Annan immediately, “I didn't expect you to come too.”

Is this Gerald famous?

Such a thought emerged in Annan's mind for an instant.

Annan noticed that when Maria saw the other two, her gazes seemed a little distant. But when her gaze fell on him(Gerald), her gaze immediately became vigilant.

This is probably because notoriety tends to spread further.

What exactly did Gerald do that made so many big shots know about him?

“Salute, Your Excellency Austere-Winter.”

Annan saw this and immediately saluted Maria respectfully.

The two people beside him seemed to know of the Grand Duke's daughter.

The trio greeted Maria as per the standard wizard address at the same time. Then, they introduced themselves to her.

Maria nodded slightly.

“You can call me Maria,” she said directly.

This should be the real name.

For such big shots, they didn't need to use pseudonyms to divert the curse away. Their family would raise someone of the same name; the person's only function was to block possible “living idols” that might curse them through the name.

So there was no need for her to report a false name to the three of them.

Annan's situation was different. Gerald seems to be unexpectedly famous.

There was no possibility of him giving a false name.

He vaguely grasped the key. In this dungeon instance, the name seems to be the key to solving the problem.

Afterward, Maria explained to the trio, “The invitation letter should be delayed. I arrived here first. But obviously, the door hasn't opened yet.

“I think Michelangelo will only let us in when everyone involved comes.”

Annan whispered in his heart too. I think so too.

He looked up at the gray-white giant tower. It was not so much a “tower” since it was a vast castle. It presented a bizarre, symmetrical structure. There were circles on both sides with a bridge in the middle.

If one were to look down directly above the sky, it would resemble a colossal dumbbell.

“This is basically the Twin Tower.” Claire couldn't help but exclaim.

Annan thought so too.

Aside from anything else, which door do we get in from?

Or is any door fine?

The group did not need to wait long.

The other four guests came in three groups.

The first to arrive was an old man with a skinny and haggard face, sunken cheeks, and deep eye sockets. His hair was sparse. Since coming here, he had been silent and avoided the crowd.

After that, there came a middle-aged man with black hair, dark eyes, well-defined features, a kind, and cheerful smile. After he arrived, he approached Annan and the others to introduce himself.

His name was Ghirlandaio, a wizard of the Prophet school.

He was a student of Master Michelangelo.

Master Michelangelo himself was best at the spells of the Prophet school, followed by Shaping school and Idol school. Hence, after the enthusiastic middle-aged Gilandaio said his school, Annan and the others couldn't help but assess him more.

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As for the two who arrived last, they came together at the same time.

One of them was a handsome youth with a face with slight divinity to it.

His eyes closed tightly. One side of his hair was shaved, and the remaining white hair was braided into three braids of different lengths. Two braids hung in front of him, and the longest braid was towards his back.

Claire called him “Eugene Melvin.” He was the Idol school wizard. It was said that he was also a famous person. This should also be his real name.

Annan was familiar with that remaining person.

His beard was gray; his gazes were firm. His skin was slightly wrinkled due to his old age. Yet, there seemed to be colorful brilliance roaming in the muddy pupils.

“Master Benjamin.”

Annan bowed his head respectfully and greeted him.

Benjamin cast a complicated gaze on Annan. He opened his mouth but spoke nothing.

In the end, he silently nodded to Annan as a form of returning a greeting.

Indeed, the last heir candidate to appear in Gerald's nightmare was the Alteration School wizard who was cursed on the ship – Benjamin.

At the moment when all the candidates arrived, everyone's consciousness disappeared suddenly and briefly.

When they woke up again, they found themselves in a broad and highly luxurious hall.

“Oh.”

Annan couldn't help but sigh.

Claire's eyes widened.

Maria frowned.

It was just because of what had appeared in front of everyone.

There were all kinds of statues arranged in a specific pattern like a starry sky.

Giant statue. Centaur statue. Fairy statue. Old man statue. Child statue. Warrior statue. Maiden statue. Angel statue. Giant snake statue.

The place was so magnificent and so spectacular.

Lifelike was only the standard.

“As if there is a soul” was the statues' level.

It was like countless frozen historical fragments, superimposed on each other.

The most incredible thing was that almost every statue could be combined with one or several neighboring statues to form a picture scroll. It would form a new picture scroll and a new story with different combinations.

At the same time, the arrangement of the statues on the ground seemed to contain a certain number of rules.

“They're like chess pieces in the deities' hands,” said Maria quietly.

The mood suddenly cooled down.

This was not a polite comment.

But because it was too accurate, everyone didn't know how to respond to it.

After all, His Royal Highness Mary was a child, and her status was the noblest here.

When the child told the truth, people wouldn't know how to answer them.

In the end, Benjamin clapped his hands and broke the awkward silence, “As expected of Master Michelangelo.

“This is nothing short of a miracle. No, it can almost be called a divine wonder!”

“It's just like a miracle, right?”

At this moment, the laugh of an old man sounded.

In front of the eight people, the old man statue suddenly made a noise.

The strange thing was that it was clearly in the middle of the hall, in the middle of the whole stage, the whole canvas. But until it opened its mouth, everyone only realized its existence.

Talking stone statue was not strange in Transcended's world view.

Especially since it was Master Michelangelo's work. This seemed even more acceptable.

Therefore, everyone was not surprised but continued to look at the old man stone statue.

The crowd did not point it out.

But there was still a bit of grudge in their hearts because Master Michelangelo didn't show up personally.

However, this ill-feeling disappeared instantly when the stone statue's following sentence was spoken:

“Then.” The old man stone statue said slowly, “I will reveal it to you...”

“[Time Stopper Eye] His Excellency Michelangelo Buonaro's last words.”

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“En.”

Annan almost couldn't control his expression just now.

He almost laughed out loud.

This is so similar. It's so alike.

The plot of this nightmare was like the opening scene of a particular detective novel.

Judging from the pattern, the murderer should be among the crowd now.

“The murderer who killed me is among you all.”

A low voice came from the stone statue of the old man sitting in the wheelchair.

As the voice echoed, the surrounding environment changed.

In the initially bright and splendid hall, there were faint laughter and murmurs everywhere.

Annan could sense that the stone statues had surrounded the candidates in all directions, as if looking down at them from another world, whispering in a voice they couldn't hear.

“Ahem!”

At the next moment, an old man's strong cough sounded.

Those whispers all disappeared.

At the same time, the quietly burning lights in the hall elongated. The flame became slender and began to tremble at a higher frequency.

The color also changed from a warm, bright yellow to a cold white flame with a blue outer layer.

Those white statues seemed to become gloomy under the cold flames.

The atmosphere in the hall changed instantly.

The eight people were initially in the light. After the flames elongated, the stone statues' shadow engulfed everyone, hiding their figures and expression from each other's sight. The ground between them was also divided by the newly appeared shadows.

It was as if Master Michelangelo had already expected where these eight people would stand after they heard his last word.

At the next moment, a somewhat illusory old man's voice overlapped with the pre-existing voice in the stone statue.

“From now on, you all are my students. So, you can kill the murderer for me. This is an act of revenge that the world has permitted.

“If one of you succeeds in killing the murderer. Then everyone else can get a part of my legacy, and the one who killed him will inherit the Howling White Tower.

“But you should also be wary. I only grant you the right to revenge on killing the murderer. If you accidentally kill someone other than the murderer, there will be no reward or punishment, but you must bear the murdering crime. “

As the old man spoke, his echoey voice became clearer and louder.

The recordings in the stone statues were synchronized and gradually faded.

By now, it was as if the old man was sitting there in a wheelchair, looking at the eight candidates calmly with his head tilted.

Although only the voice could be heard, Annan seemed to see an old man with a calm and distant gaze, looking at him. At the same time, the old man was also looking behind him.

This feeling emerged suddenly in Annan's heart. He believed that other people should feel the same as him.

But because the shadow was too heavy, he couldn't see the expressions of other people at all.

I think other people should not be able to see my expression too. Annan thought to himself.

But so far, the old man's last words were understandable.

But the subsequent words made the eight people a little confused, “However, I was going to die anyway. The child who killed me is also the candidate I am most optimistic about.

“So, I decided to give him a chance.

“If the number is halved and the real murderer is still alive, then the murderer will inherit my Howling White Tower.”

“In addition, Bone Burying Grandma's curse has engulfed the Howling White Tower. Everyone in the White Tower is [only allowed to kill one person]. You will be cursed as long as you murder the second person; this curse is also effective for the murderer who killed me.

“Grandma once said that the journey of everything is to reach the end. So you don't need to miss me. I have created too many eternal things in my life. But I haven't tried to make a ritual dedicated to deities.

“My curse has entangled the White Tower. You can't escape, and you can't get away. The eight people in this tower will be the first batch of executors of this Gold Ritual. Your name will stay with me in history.”

In the end, the old man's voice became weaker, and the echo became stronger.

The recording in the stone statue had finally ended.

“You will know the ritual's name at the end.

“My students. Please use your brains and think about this question. If the future is uncertain, does what has happened must exist?

“My students, witness the miracle with me.”

In the end, the old man's illusory voice wholly dissipated.

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The blue flames returned to their original place again.

The light once again flooded the White Tower's hall.

The shadow receded.

But the original atmosphere among the eight people had changed.

“The rules aren't restricting the murderer.”

There was a long silence. Maria Austere-Winter was still the first to speak.

Her voice was cold and immature. There was a little ridicule hidden in it, “It's like rewarding the murderer.”

Everyone knew that she was right.

The Grand Duke's daughter fancied telling the truth that no one else wanted to admit.

Michelangelo's curse restrained the murderer from killing.

But the difficulty of picking out the murderer from eight people. On the other hand, the murderer's goal to live to the ritual's end was at an easier level. There would be opportune moments for the murderer.

If one could kill at will, it would be simple.

Everyone would have the battle royale directly. Once you kill everyone else with only our surviving, then the murderer is naturally killed.

But now, as long as half of the people die, the ritual would end. Then the candidates naturally dared not to kill at will, let alone there was the curse of “killing two people will result in death.” Hence, no one would dare to use spells of mass destruction.

This is simply a tactical game [1].

Annan realized the essence of this ritual in the first moment.

It was a mechanically imbalanced “tactical game!” But unlike what Maria Austere-Winter said, Annan was keenly aware that the “murderer” was disadvantageous in this game.

Because of the curse of Master Michelangelo, the person who had murdered once could not kill again.

So in this situation, whoever did not agree to “find out the murderer and commit the kill” was the most suspicious person. “A murderer simply can't kill another person again.” This was a strong consensus among the eight people. Everyone knew and knew that everyone else knew.

—This is why the ritual ends when only four people are left to survive.

Because every time a wrongful elimination was made, it could at least verify that the two were innocent – the murderer and the slain, even though the slain could no longer speak.

In other words, if everything went well and everyone sought to prioritize better to be safe than sorry (being satisfied by sharing a quarter of the inheritance), the murderer would be exposed when there were five people left.

(Tips: Imagine there are 4 duos out of the eight candidates.)

In the end, the person who was unwilling to kill or the person who was cursed after the killing would be the murderer.

There was a sure-fire way to win this game.

However, Annan narrowed his eyes slightly.

The mission he received was, “Do not fight with anyone.”

Is he the one who killed Master Michelangelo?

But this is impossible.

Gerald was still alive after this ritual was over. He didn't inherit the White Tower. Otherwise, Gerald would not stay in the Silver Rank, let alone be easily killed by Annan in Roseburg.

So, Gerald must not be the murderer.

That's strange.

The mission given to Annan was almost like deliberately making Annan stir up trouble in the crowd.

This would attract other people's attention. The further the ritual progressed, the more people would suspect Annan, who was unwilling to kill.

So, no matter what the reason was.

Annan must prevent this "one vs. one" idea from being detected by others or implemented.

But he felt that the difficulty should not be too great. He looked at the other seven people.

"The detective game..."

Annan murmured with a gentle and friendly smile on his lips.

This will be interesting.

[1] The author referenced it to Confrontation—a tactical role-playing game.

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Annan sighed, "It seems that we can't leave for the time being."

He looked around and asked, "Should we find a place first, sit down and talk?"

With that, he looked at Ghirlandaio along the way.

His intention was simple.

This cheerful, dark-haired, dark-eyed uncle should be the only one among them who recognized the path in this place.

After all, he was originally a student of Master Michelangelo.

"Wait a minute, everyone. Don't be in a hurry."

Upon receiving Annan's hint, Miss Claire was the first to react.

She looked at Ghirlandaio suspiciously and pressed her lips together.

"I was a little skeptical, and I felt embarrassed to voice out before I walked in.

"Should we candidates be people who have 'no teacher, no classmate, no apprentice'?"

"But when you were outside, you once said that your teacher is Master Michelangelo.

"We all sent the letter here after we got the letter. There is no doubt that your suspicion is the biggest."

Hearing Claire's words, the others who hadn't listened to these words previously also reacted one after another.

They also looked at Ghirlandaio.

Ghirlandaio didn't panic either.

He just shrugged and said in a deep voice, "I did know that the teacher is dead. But I didn't kill the teacher."

With that said, he took out a letter he was carrying with him and showed it for everyone else to see.

The letter read: "I will die soon, and I will dismiss all the disciples here."

Below the letter, there was Michelangelo's signature.

"This is an Edict letter."

When Maria saw the letter, she explained to everyone, "This is the Edict spell used by the high-level wizards and the high-level military forces of various countries. The words written in the Edict letter will be preserved after death and regarded as official."

While speaking, she cautiously pressed her hand on the letter's signature.

"Answer: Your name."

She reprimanded with a cold and tender voice.

Soon, the embossed head of an old man appeared on the letter, and he answered, "Michelangelo Buonaro."

"Answer: Written time."

"June 30, 1498."

The voice was the same as the old man.

Subsequently, the head was submerged back into the letter again.

Maria nodded and confirmed, "It's true. Master Michelangelo wrote this. The time of student dismissal was five months ago."

"This letter is indeed legally valid. Therefore, all his students have been dismissed."

Annan blinked.

Wait...

Isn't Maria Austere-Winter the wizard of Energy Falteration School? Now, she is in Edict school?

He realized that he might have made a preconceived judgment.

Fortunately, it was not too late for him to realize.

But his guidance was still effective.

At least everyone realizes that Ghirlandaio is Master Michelangelo's disciple. That's enough for me.

So, Annan had a gentle look on his face again.

He smiled bitterly and persuaded softly from the side, "Okay, okay. It's all my fault. I shouldn't mention it at this time."

"Let's find a place to sit down and talk?"

“Speaking of,” Maria said suddenly, “You should be the most dangerous among us, right?”

Maria was referring to Annan. Or, more accurately, David Gerald.

As a wizard of the Soul Snatch school, he was almost always invincible in one-on-one battles.

While no one could wake the controlled person, Gerald even carried a powerful curse vessel stolen from Swamp's Black Tower.

To say that among the Silver Rank wizards, who were most likely to kill Master Michelangelo approaching the Truth level, it could only be Gerald.

This guess was naturally also in Annan's expectation.

Rather, this was the reason Annan was the first to speak. The purpose was to make others doubt him and address the doubt.

“I understand what you mean, Your Highness.”

Annan smiled bitterly, his expression gradually becoming serious.

He raised his left hand and turned the ring around.

In the vigilant gaze of everyone, Annan solemnly swore,

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“I'm here to establish a curse.”

He chanted in a low voice, “I will give up using all spells before this incident is over!”

When the voice fell, an illusory rune appeared in front of him and then disappeared.

Annan felt his heart entangled in something.

Because of this, his heart pumped faster. Thus, Gerald, the weak wizard physique, could finally be regarded to keep up with Annan's plan.

After that, Annan smiled apologetically to everyone, “Is this alright? I just want to get a share of the inheritance and live on. I don't intend to fight with you.

“I know that being in the same room with a Soul Snatch wizard will make you uneasy. You just can't think calmly, so I banned my spell usage. That way, you can rest assured, right?”

“You don't have to do that.”

Maria looked at Annan with a complicated expression.

She also didn't expect her probing word to make “Gerald” give up his spell directly.

Soul Snatch wizard was unlike the Destruction wizard and Edict wizard. No spells were required, and the body or words alone was enough to be lethal.

The Soul Snatch wizards also unlike the Falteration wizard with some perks in the melee profession.

They were not even as good as the Prophet wizard – not being sharp enough to sense danger.

Soul Snatch wizard banned his spellcasting ability, which almost meant utterly giving up resistance. He couldn't check the emotions and thoughts of others. It was hard even to deceive others.

As a matter of fact, the rules said, “murderers can't kill.” But the Soul Snatch wizard could easily control the situation without committing the murder.

This curse was an advantage for the four wizards, Gerald, Ghirlandaio, Maria, and Eugene Melvin, who were not good at attacks, but was proficient in control.

Even if they committed a murder in the White Tower, they could still control the next enemy with spells.

Anyway, the curse only said that no subsequent killing was allowed.

But it didn't say not to “attack” others.

Of course, let's not ignore the fact that Gerald had a powerful curse vessel.

But, if Gerald had it, won't the others too?

In short, “Gerald” was equivalent to voluntarily giving up this battle for inheritance rights.

After Annan set the temporary curse, the other people's vigilance toward him gradually disappeared.

This was precisely Annan's plan.

As the Soul Snatch wizard, he must be the one that everyone was most wary of.

No one would let go of a dangerous person who could control their mind with one sentence. Once someone decided to kill, especially in the beginning with the least meaningful clues, dangerous people like Annan were usually the first to sacrifice.

There was the mentality where since you don't know who to kill, let's rule out the most dangerous one first.

After all, a person can only kill one person at a time.

What if he lives to the end?

This was just better to be safe than sorry.

A typical train of thoughts would go on like this.

Annan had roughly guessed Maria's character.

She was the kind of person who would say what she thinks and did what she thinks. Annan led the flow of events with words, which would inevitably arouse people's suspicion. Maria would voice out the doubt.

At that time, Annan could borrow the opportune moment to inhibit his spell casting in front of everyone.

Anyway, he had no spellcasting ability.

In this way, even if someone still suspected that he was the murderer, they would also tend to wait for the “most dangerous person” to be killed before they set their target on those who “can be killed anytime.”

After all, Gerald was already the helpless livestock in their eyes. If he was the murderer, then he, who was forbidden to kill and unable to cast spells, couldn't fend for himself and couldn't escape at all.

Gerald could be killed at any time. There was no need to rush.

This rhythm allowed Annan to be safe from dying on the “first night.” [1]

Annan had everything planned out.

No matter who the murderer was or whether or not to kill the murderer, Annan needed to drag the ritual into the “only four people” situation.

Then, his tackling method was to mix in the crowd and secretly help the murderer. It was the “traitor [2]” in the werewolf game.

If Annan wanted to clear this dungeon at perfect grade, he would need to back-stab the real murderer when five people were left.

Because of the need to avoid conflicts.

So Annan could only use the curse imbued in the hammer to murder the murderer without anyone knowing it.

Under this circumstance, Annan's positioning was the “traitor” in the Legends of the Three Kingdom [3].

No matter what, Annan needed to make his “teammate” (murderer) first realize his existence.

[1] Reference to the party game “Werewolf.”

[2] In the Werewolf party game, the traitor role knows who the killer is and needs to assist the killer in winning the game. More info here.

[3] Another social deduction game like Werewolf. More info here.

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After Annan sealed his spellcasting ability, the mood eased.

After the mood eased a little, everyone subconsciously chose to agree with Annan's previous proposition: It's better to sit down and talk calmly.

After all, Annan took the initiative to suffer a bitter end in front of everyone.

Although no one acquired benefits, they would feel guilty at this time.

However, the level of guilt was not deep. If Annan harmed their interests, they would probably refuse it immediately.

But Annan just made a proposal that was beneficial for everyone at this moment; at least it wouldn't bring direct harm to anyone.

Hence, they would subconsciously follow Annan's harmless lead.

Of course, this was an opportunity for Annan.

If Annan could grasp the initiative in the following conversation, Annan's words would still weigh in the next plan.

“Gerald” had no combat prowess, not high in status, had a poor background and average looks. But people would still subconsciously follow his instructions.

This was because of human instinctual laziness. No one would notice it unless specifically pointed out.

It was because it took a lot of energy to analyze “whether a new leader was trustworthy.” Moreover, standing up against authority would take a lot of energy and risk being isolated.

Especially when the leader did not have too much power to shake their fundamental interests, it became not worth it.

This model was somewhat similar to the election of class committees during school time.

Adjustments were allowed in principle in the election of most class committees. But often, students would not choose the best candidate but continue with the first choice.

Therefore, before encountering setbacks and temptations and before shaking the authority of the temporary leader, people would tend to obey the temporary leader's instructions. This applied even if everyone was convinced that this person was not the best choice.

What Annan had to do was to be this “useless temporary leader” and let the crowd succumb to cognitive inertia [1].

If the crowd grew accustomed to following Annan's instructions, they would subconsciously think about whether it was beneficial or not instead of questioning feasibility when they heard an instruction that was harmless to them.

Then, Annan could mix in some private tasks beneficial to him into the public decision. The crowd would not be aware of it.

Under Uncle Ghirlandaio's decision, everyone came to a tea room.

Although the disciples were dismissed, the tea leaves remained in the tea room. No one looted it away. They had not fallen to that petty level.

With the help of Benjamin, the alteration wizard, they quickly prepared the black tea. As per Annan's suggestion, they sat down and decided to have a peaceful conversation.

Slurp!

Claire took a sip of warm black tea, and she was relieved.

She lay on the table lazily, as if melting into a mushy ball.

Maria's icy blue pupils were assessing the crowd quickly.

“Speaking of it.” Maria suddenly faced Benjamin and asked, “I remember you are a famous mentor in Swamp's Black Tower.”

“Are you questioning why I can be selected?”

Benjamin easily saw through Maria's intention and directly confronted her.

He looked at Gerald with a complex expression and was silent for a while as if he was organizing his words.

On the side, the Idol wizard, Eugene Melvin, spoke for the first time after entering the White Tower:

“That's because all his four students have died.

“Black Wizard David Gerald killed all of them.”

His voice was far away and ethereal as if divinity contained in it.

But his words made the crowd assess Annan again.

Many wizards knew this. But there were still some who had never heard of it.

Annan also touched his nose, thinking about what expression he should put up at this time.

In the end, Annan lowered his head with a wry smile and didn't say much.

I see.

Annan muttered in his heart.

Is this the reason which Salvatore mentioned previously that it is necessary to kill Gerald?

According to time, Salvatore should have entered Swamp's Black Tower by that time, but he had not yet become Benjamin's disciple. It was because Gerald killed Benjamin's disciple that the Black Tower put up a wanted notice on Gerald and expelled him.

But judging on Benjamin's mannerism, it seemed that there were other stories here.

Looking at the look, the faces of the other wizards showed a little interest.

—Spill some tea for us.

—But, asking directly is too uncourteous.

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“By the way,” Claire raised her head from the table, looking at the thin old man with sunken cheeks, deep eye sockets, and lack of energy. “If Her Royal Highness Mary is an Edict school's wizard, then why has this one always been silent?”

“His name is Merlin Manning.”

Maria glanced at him and introduced softly, “It was our country's 'Winter's Hand'.”

Winter's Hand!

Hearing this title, everyone's eyes shrank.

Legend had it that the Falteration Wizard, who froze his inner feelings, was an unsentimental watcher. He was from the Austere-Winter Dukedom's secret intelligence department – the elite of the spy agency.

Hearing Mary introducing himself, the old man raised his head and stood up slowly. He got up and bowed deeply to the crowd a little awkwardly.

He pointed to his mouth and shook his hand.

Maria added, “Of course, he retired five years ago because of a leg injury. He has no tongue, so he can't speak.”

Without a tongue, it was equivalent to not leaking secrets easily.

After all, the elderly Winter's Hand knew too many secrets.

Even if the new generation of Winter's Hand could stay guard on the documents and envelopes passed around, it was impossible to seal off potential verbal leaks.

Information could be encrypted, forbidden to be written down, and limited to number count on the information could be passed via verbal communications. However, there were Soul Snatch wizards in this world. With threats that a wizard could gain direct control of another person's mind at close range, cutting off your tongue would prove to be a simple, convenient, and cheap solution.

Of course, they could resort not to cut off the tongue, but in this way, the involved personnel could only live in a designated area.

However, the Old Winter's Hand cut off the tongue to reduce the work pressure of one's younger generation. With lesser watchers monitoring him, it made his retirement life brisker.

But, no one dared to underestimate him even though he was the retired Winter's Hand.

This was a wizard that specialized in hunting down wizards.

Worse still, many spies were Soul Snatch wizards. As a matter of fact, it was not easy to defeat the Soul Snatch wizard in a one-on-one battle. In addition to wizards being extremely resistant to mind control, Winter's Hand's capability in freezing minds made him proficient in hunting down and killing the formidable Soul Snatch wizards.

Since Winter Hand's able to work until retirement without any obvious disability, this evidence was enough to demonstrate the terrifying fighting ability of this mute old man named Merlin.

“Since everyone knows each other.”

The white-haired youth, Eugene Melvin, with a divine voice, said, “I just had an idea, and I want to share it with you all.

“I think you may not have noticed it before. There's a detail in the master's suicide note about 'the murderer cannot kill.'

“Do you think that the place of death of Master Michelangelo might not be inside the White Tower? If this is the case, then the murderer should be able to kill because he did not trigger the curse.

“But if Master Michelangelo died in the tower, then there are only two possibilities. The first is that the murderer has taken the master's curse, then he should have advanced gold; the second is...”

When he said this, he paused slightly.

Everyone had understood what he meant.

After a brief silence, Annan was the first to speak.

He looked directly at this person with white hair and white eyes having a peculiar divinity, “We are in Master Michelangelo's nightmare...”

No one could stay unfazed after Annan spoke.

“That's possible,” said Miss Claire slowly.

The red-haired youth Kim also nodded silently.

Maria's brows frowned in deep thoughts; her hands crossed in front of her chest.

Ghirlandaio scratched his hair troublingly.

Benjamin looked sad and sighed deeply.

The muted old man – Merlin suddenly raised his head, first looking at Annan, then at Eugene Melvin.

Melvin's words gave everyone two directions for thinking.

As we all know, the dead Transcended would turn into a nightmare if no one collected the body.

Well, if Master Michelangelo had become a nightmare, how do they make sure they were not in a nightmare now?

If Master Michelangelo did not become a nightmare in the tower, then there was a flaw in the validity of the murderer being innocent.

If Master Michelangelo died outside the tower, the murderer was not entangled in the curse.

If they were indeed in a nightmare, then dying shouldn't pose a problem, right?

Annan frowned slightly.

These two thinking directions lead to the same result: The candidates had no way to win.

They were forced to think about who might be the murderer and killed him.